

MIND YOUR LANGUAGE: COMMON GRAMMATICAL MISTAKES (AND HOW TO FIX THEM)

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Annotation: This article investigates the phenomenon of common grammatical mistakes that occur in both native and non-native English usage. It highlights how errors in subject-verb agreement, tense usage, prepositions and punctuation can affect clarity and accuracy in communication. By analyzing examples from academic writing and everyday speech the article identifies the main causes of these mistakes. The findings show the importance of understanding grammar rules and practicing consistent language use to improve both written and spoken English proficiency.

Key words:

Grammatical mistakes, subject-verb agreement, tense usage, prepositions, punctuation

Introduction

Learning the complexity of grammar through writing has continuously remained a problem to many students especially the second and foreign users of English. Commonly even minor errors in grammar cripple the meaning of the communication being engaged into. When errors persist, misunderstanding comes in, causing delays in comprehension, further results to failure in the part of the sender as he/she sends the intended message to the receiver. As a result, the teacher's effectiveness and efficiency are being doubted. Though intelligibility and comprehensibility of what is written are to be primarily observed over grammatically accurate phrases and sentences the need of mastering the complexity that English has been globally used in almost all transactions. Consequently the ability to use English correctly and acceptably has now become an edge over others. Actually, many of the common grammar mistakes made by EFL students arise due to the contrasting characteristics of by addressing these

areas EFL instructors and academic writers can help them better prepare students for grammatical issues present in academic writing.

Mastering grammar is a critical skill for university students to ensure clear and professional academic communication. Various studies and university guidelines highlight that grammatical errors can significantly impede a reader's understanding and a student's academic performance.

Common Error Categories and Structural Issues According to Roberto Rivera (1), identifying and revising common errors is essential for clarity. He highlights 20 frequent mistakes, with a focus on sentence-level issues like fused sentences and comma splices, which occur when independent clauses are incorrectly joined. These structural pitfalls are also a primary focus for the University of Wisconsin-Madison (5), which identifies "twelve common errors" such as sentence fragments and misplaced modifiers that often disrupt the logical flow of student writing.

Subject-Verb Agreement and Mechanics Institutional resources from the College of Vocational Studies (3) and the University of Technology Sydney (4) emphasize the high frequency of subject-verb agreement errors and incorrect article usage. These guides point out that even small mechanical mistakes, such as the misuse of apostrophes (e.g., confusing "its" vs. "it's") or vague pronoun references, can undermine a student's authority as a writer.

Linguistic Challenges for EFL Learners A significant portion of grammatical errors, particularly among Iraqi EFL (English as a Foreign Language) learners, stems from L1 interference (2, 6). Research indicates that these students often struggle with verb tenses, prepositions, and article omission because the grammatical rules of Arabic differ substantially from English. Studies found on [ResearchGate](#) (6) suggest that these errors are not merely signs of carelessness but are often systematic reflections of the student's native language structure being transferred to their English writing.

Strategies for Identification and Correction The reviewed literature consistently recommends systematic proofreading and self-correction as the primary ways to fix these errors. Key strategies include:

- Reading Aloud: This helps students "hear" missing words or awkward pauses that indicate a need for punctuation (1, 5).
- Using Active Voice: University guides (4, 5) suggest prioritizing the active voice to create more direct and concise arguments.

- Guided Analysis: Students are encouraged to use step-by-step checklists to verify that every pronoun has a clear antecedent and that every verb matches its subject (3, 4).

Methods

This article is written by using various methods, primarily a combination of a research and data collection, gathering information from believable sources. Collected data which is connected with the topic and accurate to provide logical flow and coherence. Writer's personal knowledge, observation and experience were included to make understanding clearly and more detailed

Review

Crafting any piece of academic or professional writing calls for clarity, which can pose many challenges novice and seasoned writers alike. One area that many writers find difficult is correct grammar usage. Most writers are familiar with basic grammar, however, many types of writing errors can be difficult to detect. Despite peer review and word processing tools some errors can persist due to incomplete knowledge of grammatical norms, punctuation and vocabulary. This article will review eight (8) common grammatical mistakes and some strategies for addressing them.

Discussion

Subject-verb agreement It is one of the most frequent error that most of academic writers where learners fail to match singular and plural subject with the correct form of verb.

For instance: She go to the hospital

Instead of saying "She goes to the hospital" ESL learners mostly forget to match the verb with the subject especially with the third person singular in present tense.

- To improve subject-verb agreement, identify the subject first and then match it with the correct singular or plural verb by eliminating intervening phrases. Consistent practice such as reading, writing and checking sentences, is also crucial for mastering this skill.

Word order The way the elements are arranged in a sentence is called word order. Word order affects the meaning of a sentence. It can show who acts and to whom the action is done.

Example: I read often books

Instead it should be: I often read books

The basic word order of an English sentence is (Subject + predicate + object)
Predicate always contains a verb that says something about the subject

- To improve word order, focus on basic sentence structure and practice assembling a sentence's components in the correct sequence: manner, place and then time.

Wrong word There might be times during which writers may want to use vocabulary without a full understanding of specific words. And also writers may sometimes use words that have the wrong meaning or the wrong shade of meaning.

For example: Many drugs in this class have adverse affects (wrong)

Many drugs in this class have adverse effects (correct)

- To avoid such wrong word usage in sentences use grammar rules properly and pay attention to word choice and sentence structure if unsure look up the correct usage in a dictionary

Articles (a\an) Another common error which can be seen in use of articles. Most of the English language learners omit articles and even use incorrect articles.

Example: Cat chased insect in the garden

Instead of saying "A cat chased an insect in the garden"

Or: Children must be accompanied by adult (wrong)

Children must be accompanied by an adult (correct)

- In order to improve the correct usage of articles first learners should understand basic rules; A\An-used with singular countable nouns when talking about something non-specific or mentioned for the first time. However "The" is used when talking about something accurate or already known.

Prepositions Mistakes with prepositions are also major widespread error among learners and majorly misused prepositions are "in, on, at, for"

For instance: I go to office with bus (wrong)

I go to office by bus (correct)

Or it may be: I walk 10kms with one hour every day (wrong)

I walk 10kms in one hour every day (correct)

•To use prepositions correctly, understand their function to show relationships like time, location or direction and place them before a noun or pronoun.

Tense usage This is one of the most common errors between ESL learners where they get confused which differentiating between past, present and future tense.

Such as: She go to the supermarket every Friday

Instead of saying “She goes to the supermarket every Friday” We are using Present Simple because this action is repeated each Friday.

•To gain proper usage tenses learners should choose the correct time frame (past, present or future) and aspect (simple, continuous, perfect or others) for the verb to match the timing of an action.

Unnecessary commas Some commas may appear in incorrect places. Commas are not needed before prepositions conjunctions in sentences with compound subjects or verbs. Additionally, commas don’t need to surround restrictive elements of a sentence. A restrictive element is a part of a sentence that is necessary to keep the meaning of the sentence.

For example: The student opened her book, and drank her coffee (wrong)

The correct one is: The student opened her book and drank her coffee.

Or: The professor, who made the presentation, gave fluent speech. (wrong)

The professor who made the presentation gave fluent speech. (correct)

Unnecessary or missing apostrophe Apostrophes are used to indicate possession and contractions. A problematic contraction is “it is” which is commonly confused with “it’s”. This contraction stands for “it is” while “its” is a possessive pronoun like “his” or “her”. It might be helpful to avoid contraction while writing.

For example: My dog brings me it’s leash before a walk (wrong)

My dog brings me its leash before a walk (correct)

Or : Both shoes’ laces had broken (wrong)

Both shoes' laces had broken (correct)

Conclusion

Common grammar mistakes remain a serious issue in both spoken and written communication. These errors such as using the wrong verb tense or forgetting subject-verb agreement can make ideas unclear and reduce the quality of one's writing. Understanding and correcting such mistakes is an important part of language learning. By paying more attention to grammar rules and practicing regularly learners can improve their accuracy and express their thoughts more clearly. In this way, avoiding common grammar mistakes helps achieving better communication and stronger academic performance.

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