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Error treatment in students' written assignments in Discourse Analysis

ABSTRACT

In an attempt to highlight the need for lecturers to adopt clear strategies for treating language usage errors in written assignments, the writer of this article analysed selected students' essays to determine some of the error handling strategies that can be used at tertiary level. The suggestions made at the end of the study were based on the analysis of data collected from student's written work in Discourse Analysis. Although there is generally no consensus on how lecturers should treat students' errors in written assignments, observations in this study enabled the researcher to provide certain strategies that lecturers can adopt.

Key words: Error treatment; error handling; corrective feedback, positive cognitive feedback; negative cognitive feedback; global errors; local errors; Terminable Units (T-Units)

Rationale

Brown (1987: 102) claims that one of the most important pedagogical activities that teachers of English as a second language need to attend to is "error correction". Some researchers such as Ellis (1995) prefer the term "corrective feedback" to "error correction". The use of the former term is more acceptable in that it refers to different ways in which the learner is made aware of shortcomings in his/her use of the target language rather than be made to feel that his/her use of it is so *faulty* that it needs to be *corrected*. Skinner (2000: 80) echoes this view when she writes: "In teaching writing to second language learners, it is hoped that the use of *feedback* has an effect beyond the immediate composition by attempting to improve the learner's long term writing ability."

Reference to correct language usage should, in fact, be understood to be a relative concept since measures of linguistic *correctness* or *accuracy* vary from place to place, or, from situation to situation even within monolingual communities. As much as possible, value judgements about the accuracy or inaccuracy of the spoken or written language of users should be sparingly made. In academic situations, this should not be interpreted to mean that lecturers should let errors go uncorrected. Brown (op.cit.: 193) refers to such a laisez-faire attitude as providing too much "positive cognitive feedback", that is, giving learners too much freedom to use sentences/ utterances that deviate from the norm. He however also warns against the tendency to over-correct

student's errors, that is to provide "too much negative feedback". The message we get from this is that "error correction" should be "optimal". Vigil and Oller (1976) suggest that too much or too little correction may not benefit the student.

Corrective feedback in language learning is necessary. It is natural, in interactive behaviour, to expect or even to demand feedback. In learning situations, learners expect teachers to say something about the way they respond to questions or perform in given learning tasks. Studies in classroom language have shown that language teachers provide feedback on almost every response that pupils give in class. Sinclair and Brazil (1982) discuss utterances in classroom discourse as *moves* that constitute *exchanges*. They suggest that *initiations,* are normally followed by *responses* which in turn are followed by *feedback* which can be corrective of the language used in the response, or of the ideas expressed. They further point out that feedback is an important component of theories of learning.

> The learner needs to be told or shown how he is learning, to receive a judgement from the teacher on his performance. It allows early correction, stops bad habits forming, and allows particular difficulties to be isolated (Sinclair et al. 1982: 44).

We observe from this claim that feedback is an important component of the teaching/learning process. We also note that error correction of students' conceptual grasp and language usage are important pedagogical activities.

In 1979, Cathcart and Olsen carried out a study which reveals that generally, students welcome teacher correction provided it is, as suggested above, optimal. Other studies have revealed that certain types of error treatment are more preferred than others. For instance, self-correction, according to Van Lier (1988), is more preferred than correction by other people. Other researchers such as Krashen (1982) in Ellis (op. cit.: 584) claim that "correction is both useless for (language) acquisition and dangerous in that it may lead to a negative affective response". Despite some such differences of opinion on this topic, researchers generally agree that *corrective feedback* is necessary in language learning and that teachers need to determine how they can *effectively* and *optimally* offer it. But, we need to be clear what we mean by an "error" in language learning if our correction of it is to be effective.

Meaning of error

Defining an error has not been easy for linguists. This is partly due to what we may refer to as the relative notions of accuracy. Acceptable usage, accuracy and or grammaticality are notions that are sociolinguistically determined (see Kachru; 1982; Trudgill, 1984; Crystal, 1985 and Ellis 1995). In a monolingual community such as the United Kingdom, one finds a lot of variations in pronunciation and even meaning. For instance, does one use a [bus] or [bʌs] to travel from London to Manchester? The use of the sounds [u] and [ʌ] can be said to be free variants of the morpheme /u/. This would make the use of any of the variants correct or acceptable depending on the speaker's choice of which pronunciation to use in different speech communities or situations.

In a discussion of errors in students' written assignments, we should define the term *error* with reference to its effect on the clarity or lack of clarity of the message intended by the writer. A somewhat traditional definition of error is given by Dulay et al. (1982: 138) as follows: "Errors are the flawed side of learner speech or writing. They are those parts of conversation or composition that deviate from some selected norm of mature language performance".

The determination of what constitutes an error, according to this definition, is normative: that is, a sentence or language form becomes an error if it fails to comply with the sentences or

language forms that are normally produced by mature proficient users of the language in specified communities or situations. Usually, these proficient users are native users who in some studies in Error Analysis (EA) are referred to as research informants. They assess the accuracy levels or acceptability of given sentences or use of certain forms in given situations. Ten years after Dulay and Burt offered this definition, Richards et al. (1992: 127) agreed with them when they said an error, "(in the speech or writing of a second language or foreign language learner), is the use of a linguistic item (e.g. a word, a grammatical item, a SPEECH ACT, etc) in a way which a fluent or native speaker of the language regards as showing faulty or incomplete learning." The two definitions suggest that the term 'error' is used to refer to a language learner's language. When viewed as features of a language learner's language, they are defined as *developmental* rather than *performance* errors. It is precisely because they are developmental errors that teachers should systematically correct them. We should refer to the correction strategies used as teacher intervention activities that are intended to facilitate the learning of a second language.

The preceding definitions differ from the ones provided by Corder (1981) and Burt and Kiparsky who define error in contexts of the effectiveness of the sentences/utterances made by language users. Corder identified what he called "covertly idiosyncratic" and "overtly idiosyncratic" errors. The former referred to flaws in communication in sentences whose word orders conform to the rules of the grammar of the target language but do not clearly convey the speaker's intended meaning. Overtly idiosyncratic errors, on the other hand, occur in sentences that appear to be ill-formed but whose meaning is transparent to the listener.

Corder's provision of these broad error categories was preceded by that of Burt and Kiparsky (1972). They classified errors in terms of whether they were "global" or "local". Global errors can be perceived as synonymous with what Corder referred to as covertly idiosyncratic errors. Local errors, on the other hand, are synonymous with overtly idiosyncratic ones. Although the latter violate rules that operate within phrases and clauses, they do not result in the miscommunication of messages as global errors do. It should be noted that in the preceding definition of the concept 'error', no reference is made to 'mistakes'. These are deviations that are not reflective of the speaker's inadequate mastery of language rules but, what we frequently refer to as 'slips of the tongue' or 'slips of the pen'. Unlike competence errors which are due to inadequate mastery of language or discourse rules, these can be easily corrected by the speaker soon after their occurrence in speech or during text revision after writing.

Review of studies in error treatment

Useful information on error treatment is provided by Ellis (1995: 583). He refers to the sources he discusses as constituting "considerable literature" that deals "with error treatment." Some applied linguists might consider the sources he refers to as dated but they are important in discussion of error treatment since they focus on "whether, when, and how errors should be corrected and who should correct them." (Ellis op. cit.: 583). The major findings of some of these studies are briefly discussed below.

The importance of corrective feedback in language teaching is illustrated by the number of studies that have been carried out to assess the importance or effect of correction in language teaching. Some of these will be discussed below. Gaeis (1983: 211) observes that teachers seem to "have abandoned an "all out" global approach to error correction in the classroom and have sought a basis on which errors might be *selectively* treated."

A study by Fanselow (1977), who pioneered research into error treatment, shows that 22% of the errors committed by learners in an oral drill lesson went uncorrected or were ignored. In his

review, Gaeis (op. cit) also observes that error treatment studies by Cathcart and Olsen (1976), Fanselow (1977), Ramirez and Strongquist (1979) and Nystrom (1983) have shown that errors are treated differently depending on whether they are phonological, lexical or syntactic.

Research has also focused on the types of "corrective feedback" teachers provide in classrooms. According to Chaudron (1977b: 31) it is "any creation of the teacher which clearly transforms, disapprovingly refers to, or demands improvement of a learner's utterance." Two types of feedback have been identified. These are *explicit* and *implicit* feedback. In explicit corrective feedback, the teacher's response to a learner's utterance provides the correct form whereas implicit feedback merely informs the learner that he has committed an error which needs correcting. According to Allwright (1975), Chaudron (1977a) and Long (1977) there is a wide variety of implicit error treatments such as repeating the wrong response without correcting it. On the same topic, Nystrom (1983) observes that in explicit feedback, teachers tend to rephrase pupils' utterances in order to model the current response and, in implicit feedback, they may initiate drill practice aimed at enabling pupils to correct their own errors.

Referring to a study by Fanselow (1977), Nystrom also observes that teachers do not always locate the source of error, that is, whether an error committed is grammatical or conceptual. But Chaudron (op. cit.) observes that teachers usually stress and give immediate feedback for content errors and not for lexical or phonological ones. In the same study, Chaudron discusses teachers' corrective styles. He notes that a teacher's correction of errors does not involve a single utterance but a series or cycles of verbal responses. Allwright (1975) provides a more detailed description of what he calls a "corrective exchange." It consists of moves similar to those discussed by Sinclair et al. (1982). When a learner gives an erroneous response, the teacher comments on it. He either rejects and improves it or tells the learner that his response is wrong without improving it. He then proceeds to ask the same student or other students to give an improved response which he again evaluates by accepting or rejecting it. According to Allwright (op.cit), a series of such "corrective exchanges" constitute a "corrective transaction". From these studies we can conclude, as Sinclair et al. (op. cit.) suggest, that corrective feedback is a necessary feature of language teaching. Hence, the researcher's motivation to carry out a study in this area.

Research aim

The aim of the study was to investigate corrective feedback or error handling strategies that could be effectively used in marking written students' essays in Pragmatics and Discourse Analysis.

Research methodology

Sample

The research sample for this study comprised twenty-five students: 15 female and 10 male. They were sampled as a class unit. All the students were studying Pragmatics and Discourse Analysis in their fourth year Bachelor of Arts Humanities degree in 1999. Students generally regarded it a difficult course. There were no special requirements stipulated for opting to study for the course. Any student who registered to study English could take the course as an option. The students registered to study for this course were generally assumed to have high competence and performance levels in English. In addition to that, they were assumed to be above average achievers who were strongly motivated and had positive attitudes towards the study of English, a second language to all of them.

Data collection

The data for the study was obtained from students' written responses to a question answered under examination conditions. The aim for collecting data provided under controlled examination conditions was to get spontaneous samples of student's written language. Samples that reveal their idiosyncratic ways of using English as a second language in *academic writing*. Previous take-home assignments had been suspected of plagiarisations from books or from assignments written by former students. In some cases, students had even asked friends who had passed the course to do the work for them. The question set for this study required students to discuss some cohesive devices using examples of their own. The test was preceded by class lectures, and group discussion on the types and uses of different cohesive markers. The question was worded as follows: *using examples of your own, explain the use of any five cohesive devices that can be used in spoken and or, written discourse.*

Data analysis

Students' essays were carefully marked for

- Content, that is, understanding and comprehension of key concepts;
- Providing examples that illustrate correct use of selected cohesive devices.
- Language usage, that is, accuracy of written language. In the analysis of this aspect, Straw's ideas on criteria for judging the quality of essay writing were used. These include:

"…. vocabulary features, syntactic features … sentence sense … (and) grammar and usage …". Straw (1981: 170; 183). The analysis of these features inevitably includes the accurate use of punctuation marks.

The following steps were followed in the analysis of data

Step I: identifying all types of error, that is, "local" and "global" types from students' written responses.
Step II: selecting and quantifying "global" errors from students' responses.
Step III: selecting and classifying representative error types and offering brief explanations of these (see Appendix A)

Observations

The observations made in this study were discussed under the following sub-headings:
- error types and their frequencies in the data;
- effect of error types on information processing;
- effect of errors on clarity of meaning/messages conveyed.

Agreement errors

The analysis of data showed that the research subjects tended to commit identical errors. There seemed to be a carry-over of certain types of errors probably from previous classes in primary, secondary schools and from previous university classes. The most prominent error type observed was in the area of agreement. According to Rosen et al. (1992: 258), agreement refers to "two significant relationships in a sentence; the relationship between a subject and verb and that between a pronoun and its antecedent". Samples in Appendix A indicate certain ways in which such errors were committed by the research subjects. A good example of this is:

'Here the adjective[1] black[2] have been recovered and adverbial[3] sadly[4] have been omitted'.

In this example, item 2 'have', a verb in the plural form does not agree with (1) 'adjective' a noun in singular form. Similarly, item 4 'have' a verb in the plural form does not agree with its antecedent 3 'adverbial' a noun in the singular form. In such cases

A singular item ⟶ (followed) by a plural item, that is related to a preceding item, is unacceptable. Instead,
A singular item ⟶ (followed) by a singular item, related to its antecedent, is acceptable.

This is what O'Grady et al. (1996: 168) mean when they claim that normally, the verb is "marked for both the person and number of the subject". The frequency of occurrence of errors in this category poses a great problem to teachers at tertiary level because although the errors might be classified as *local* or types that do not lead to serious communication breakdowns, they are likely to get fossilised. If, on the other hand, lecturers attempt to correct every mistake in this category, students might get discouraged. Also, lectures and exercises in analytical grammar might be resented by students at this level. A strategy, used by some teachers, is to set aside a time when students are required to go through their marked essays to correct all mistakes in language usage. For such exercises to be effective, lecturers should not provide the correct language forms in students' texts. Instead, they should only underline or indicate expressions that need to be revised. This is referred to as *implicit* marking in the literature on error handling (see Chaudron 1976). In addition to encouraging students to edit their own work, such a strategy develops students' critical thinking skills in language usage. It also helps them use their grammar textbooks to correct and to improve their usage of the language. Swenson (1996) and Cotrell (1999) discuss these activities as aspects of proof-reading skills. They include "correcting errors, re-writing sentences and clarifying ideas…" (Swenson op.cit.: 1).

Punctuation errors

Besides violating agreement rules, the example given above illustrates another type of error – failure to use punctuation marks correctly. What the student is required to do in the sentence below is to specify items which illustrate the student's ideas. The specification process is, in fact a citation system where certain words/phrases are cited or quoted. There is, therefore, a need for the student to use quotation marks as follows:

Here, the adjective "black" has been recovered and the adverbial "sadly" has been omitted.

The two error categories discussed above - agreement and use of citation marks - affect the readers' speed in processing or decoding the information conveyed. Because errors in this category are usually of the *local* type, they can be corrected by the reader after reading and re-reading the sentence to identify the source of error.

Errors in Word choice

In many instances, wrong or inappropriate word choices can cause ambiguity of or obscurity in the intended message. The repair process/correction strategy in such cases might simply require that the inappropriate word be replaced by the appropriate item as in the following examples:

The following examples will illustrate that mostly it is the pronoun that is used.

The use of the word 'mostly' in this sentence is an example of wrong word choice. The sentence can be corrected or improved by replacing the word "*mostly*" with either "*generally*" or "*usually*" as follows:

The following examples will illustrate that, generally, it is the pronoun that is used.

Problems related to word choice may be due to a student's lack of familiarity with the way words, phrases and clauses are used to communicate ideas in specialised academic domains. Mastery of such knowledge would demonstrate students' competence in the use of English for Specific purposes (ESP) which, in this case would be the way English is used in descriptive linguistics. This is also illustrated in Appendix A in the following expression:

In B's sentence part of a sentence has been elipted and that part ellipted is (I am going to…)

Choice of the word 'sentence' is inappropriate in this context. The appropriate word to use is 'utterance' because in the analysis of interactive discourse, the terminology used to refer to units of speech is *utterance.* On the other hand, when discussing units of communication in written discourse, the use of the word "*sentence*" becomes appropriate. Huntley and Burkart (2000: 76) allude to similar problems they observed in their study on **Approaches to Mastering Vocabulary…** and suggested that second language students should be taught to select appropriate

> "*academic words (vocabulary)… the learning strategies for dealing with technical and low frequency vocabulary; and the individualisation of instruction to respond to the needs of students in different fields of study*".

Henning and van Rensburg (2002: 87) also observed problems related to the acquisition of vocabulary and its use in writing. They concluded that a number of students writing in a course on **Academic Development in Writing Composition** "had not improved except for the addition of some *lexical items* that were typical to the discipline".

Errors in Word choice (word class problem)

In this study, instances of inappropriate word choices in students' written essays were also observed in expressions where inappropriate choices revealed students' inability to use words in their correct functional classes. The problem led to the use of an *adjective* where a *verb* was required as in the following example:

> *Ellipsis is a grammatical process whereby elements of a sentence which can be predictable from the context …*

In this linguistic context, the appropriate functional class of the word to use is 'predicted', a verb, instead of 'predictable', an adjective. Alternatively, the adjective 'predictable' can be used but the sentence would need to be re-constructed as follows:

> *Ellipsis is a grammatical process in which elements of a sentence are predictable from the context.*

In order to develop a disciplined approach to the study of language in descriptive linguistics, students' use of appropriate terms in specialised contexts should be emphasised. One way of doing so is by encouraging students to identify and to correct inappropriate word selections. It cannot be left to the whims of teachers and students to decide which errors to attend to, when to attend to them or whether such errors should be attended to or not. Such a laissez-faire approach to the teaching and learning of any foreign language is not likely to produce the required results.

Syntactic complexity

The use of syntactic complexity as an index of development in students' written essays has been discussed by a number of researchers. These include, O'Domell (1976) Smith, (1974); Bradford et al. (1980), and Gass et al. (1994). Syntactic complexity refers to the way in which a writer shows his/her ability to organise words into clear meaningful constructions. Studies in composition writing have used a variety of indices to measure development in writers' or learners' sentence structures. Such indices include

- competence in the use of vocabulary
- competence in the use of a variety of syntactic structures and
- the average number of words in each sentence, that is, "Mean Sentence Length".

Researchers subsequently discovered that these measures had a lot of shortcomings. They lacked specificity in what actually constitutes good writing. As a result, Hunt (1965) introduced a different measurer of syntactic maturity in students' writing. It involved the study of minimal "Terminable Units" – (T-Units) in written discourse. A T-Unit was technically defined as "an independent clause and any associated dependent clauses, that is, clauses that are attached to or embedded within it" (Gass et al. 1994: 4).

In the analysis of research data for the study reported in this article, it was observed that a variety of expressions, some of which met the defining characteristics of T-Units were used by students. Examples of the expressions used by some research subjects include the following:

i) Substitution is a referencing system which writers use.
ii) Ellipsis is used to omit words.
iii) Cohesion devices constitute.

According to the definition of T-Units provided by Hunt, constructions i) and ii) above are T-Units and construction iii) is not because it is not an independent clause: it is not attached to nor embedded within an independent clause. Discussion in error treatment, according to Gass and Selinker (1994), redefined the term, T-Unit, as follows: A T-Unit "incorporate(s) error-free T-Units rather than just T-Units". It follows from this re-definition of a T-Unit that studies that focus on discourse – based errors should focus on T-Units more than on isolated language errors. This is despite the fact that some isolated errors, as indicated above, do influence sentential, paragraphic or textual meaning. It was observed in this study that the major problem that students encounter in written discourse, is using clear T-Units in their communication. The example given below illustrates this type of error.

> *Ellipsis is a grammatical process whereby elements of a sentence which can be predictable from the context can be omitted and the omission unlike in substitution which is another form of omission, the elipted parts are not replaced or we can say are replaced by zero.*

Before a lecturer identifies any errors such as those of spelling, word choice and punctuation, he/she observes that the sentence given above is too long. In other words, something should be done about the Mean Sentence Length (MLS) or the mean length of utterances (MLU) in students' written work. What is more problematic in the construction cited above is that it combines too many T-Units that should be separated to function as separate sentences. Van Wyk (2002: 226) made a similar observation in his study on the **Bridging Course** offered at the University of the Free State. He states one of his sub-objectives as follows:

Firstly, sentence control is critical. Students' writing can be difficult or impossible to

understand because the sentences in which they express themselves are simply "out of control in the sense of not adhering to any standard sentence structure".

Van Wyk's observation strongly supports the claim made above that sentences that are generally used by students combine too many T-Units.

To resolve this problem, students should be taught to break up sentences into shorter T-Units. The example given above can be broken up as follows:

T-Unit 1: Ellipsis is a grammatical concept whereby elements of a sentence which can be predicted from the context can be omitted.

T-Unit 2: Omission, unlike substitution, which is another form of omission, does not replace the omitted parts.

T-Unit 3   We can say these are replaced by zero.

The result of combining these T-Units together, as in the student's sentence, is that meaning becomes difficult to process since ideas get muddled. The major observation made in connection with the analysis of such sentences is that "error handling" in written linguistics assignments and, probably in other subjects as well, should focus on the construction of clear T-Units, that is, relatively short communicative T-Units or sentences.

Implications of the study

The aim of the study reported in this article was to focus on the major error categories that students studying Pragmatics and Discourse Analysis at the University of Botswana are likely to commit and, on the basis of research findings, to decide what error handling strategies can be adopted over and above those strategies that teachers generally use. Brief suggestions were made in the context of the analysis of different error categories above. It is necessary that at this stage, a summary of the suggestions derived from the study should be provided.

a) *Corrective feedback should be selective*. We cannot nor should we attempt to correct all the errors that students commit in written essays. It is therefore suggested that at all times, global errors should be indicated as requiring correction. This can be done in different ways. One of these could simply be to ask a student to revise the erroneous constructions implicitly marked by the lecturer. This strategy is supported in suggestions provided by the **University Writing Program at Virginia Tech** (2003: 1) in which the writers state that research shows that "students can correct more than 60% of their own errors if they are taught to proofread and held to appropriate standards of correctness. By marking every error, we are actually training our students to rely on us as copy-editors"

b) *Local errors should be selectively corrected* by the teacher depending on the degree to which they affect the speaker's or writer's intended message. Such a corrective strategy is necessary when marking written texts because the occurrence of too many local errors makes it difficult for the reader to retrieve the required information. To avoid such errors, students should be taught how to carefully edit their work. They should also be given time to correct the language in their written assignments after these have been corrected.

c) When both local and global errors occur in written texts, it becomes difficult for readers to understand the writer's message. They get compelled to edit the texts as they read them and, at the same time, to decode the writer's ideas. To encourage students to carefully edit their written language, *the award of marks in content subjects should reflect students' proficiency levels in the use of English*. A mark should be given for effective communication of ideas in content subjects.

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d) There is a danger, in ESL situations, for teachers to quickly regard certain errors as having fossilised, that is, to conclude that certain expressions are features of local varieties of English which should be accepted rather than get treated as errors. Our attitude should be that *students' competence and performance in a second language at tertiary level are developmental phenomena*. It is therefore necessary that we provide corrective feedback to help students raise their proficiency levels during the developmental process.

e) The study of the written work of the research subjects in this study suggests the need to teach students how to express their ideas in clear sentences made up of easily decodable T-Units, that is complete communicative sentences. The teaching of such units should be extensive covering a wide variety of communicative sentences. These should include: the use of *single* T-Units; T-Units *joined to other T-Units;* T-Units *embedded* into other T-Units, that is, simple, double and complex sentences respectively. In addition to these, other sentence types and transformations should be analysed for their communicative transparency and decodability.

f) Students who opt to study English as a major or minor degree subject should be seen to be proficient in communicating through the language, in both the spoken and the written medium. *We cannot achieve this major objective if, when marking students' essays in linguistics, we focus on content at the expense of their written proficiency levels. We should insist on proficiency in the correct use of all aspects of grammar from word choice/vocabulary to punctuation*.

Conclusion

Despite variations in the error treatment strategies adopted by different teachers in different situations, the findings of the study described in this article suggest that, at all times, teachers should define the corrective strategies they apply in the marking of different essays. Such strategies should reflect the teacher's concern with students' *clarity* in the use of the language that is used as the medium of teaching and learning: especially in second language teaching and learning situations. Teachers are also advised to insist on 'self' rather than on 'other-correction'. We should, however, not lose sight of the fact that because of the relativity of what may be considered accurate or effective communication in different situations, our major objective should be to teach ESL students communicate messages in simple clear acceptable language.

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APPENDIX A

SAMPLES OF MAJOR ERRONEOUS EXPRESSIONSIN STUDENTS' ESSAYS

ERRONEOUS EXPRESSIONS	*ERROR CATEGORIES*	*DESCRIPTIONS OF ERROR CATEGORIES*
1. Here the adjective black have been recovered and adverbial sadly have omitted.	1. Subject-verb agreement: the subject (adjective) does not agree in number with the auxiliary in the verb phrase (have). The same is true of the lack of concord between (adverbial) the subject and (have) the auxiliary verb. 2. Punctuation marks – absence of a comma after the word 'Here' and, failure to use quotation marks to specify the words "black" and" sadly".	The errors specified in this category do not blur the meaning completely. But they make it difficult for the reader to process the writer's meaning. The reader having to analyse and to edit the Surface structure of the sentence before getting into its deep structure lengthens the time taken to process the information.
2. The following examples will illustrate that mostly it is the pronoun that are used.	1. **Word choice** The word "mostly" is used instead of "generally" or "usually". 2. **Punctuation** Failure to use "citation" marks to specify words used in the text. 3. Subject-verb agreement in the use of the words "pronoun" and "are".	Selection of appropriate words is a common problem for students at this level: the word "mostly" is used instead of "generally" or "usually". Failure to use citation marks in the examples given delays information processing. Note again another instance of error in subject-verb agreement.
3. For us to be able to say ellipsis have occurred in a certain sentence there is a certain criteria which should be met.	**Subject-verb agreement** in the use of the words "ellipsis" and "have"	The use of the verb "is" in the singular, anticipates the use of a singular noun phrase used to function as a complement. Instead, the NP complement "criteria" is in the plural form.
4. In B's sentence part of a sentence has been ellipted.	**Word choice**. The word "sentence" is used instead of "utterance".	In discourse analysis, it is necessary that appropriate words are used. The word "sentence" is normally used to refer to units of written language. Units of spoken language are usually referred to as "utterances".

5. Ellipsis is a grammatical process whereby elements of a sentence which can be predictable from the context can be omitted and this omission unlike in substitution which is another form of omission the elipted parts are not replaced or we can say are replaced by zero.	1. **Word choice** "predictable" instead of "predicted". 2. **Punctuation** - use of commas - use of full stops to reduce sentence length.	The sentence is too long. There are too many ideas packed into one long sentence. It is advisable that the sentence be divided into shorter meaningful sentences.
6. Show Ellipsis how words are recoverable.	1. **Number agreement** Noun phrase (NP singular) ➤ verb phrase (VP plural). 2. **Word choice**: "how" used instead of "which".	Inadequate background knowledge or inadequate skills in the use of language in discourse analysis might have led to the inaccurate word choice of "how" instead of "which". The word "How" suggests a process through which ellipted items can be recovered whereas the meaning intended involved identifying the words that could be recovered from the context after a speaker had used ellipsis as a cohesive marker.
7. have Ellipsis also the importance of emphasising ideas.	1. Subject –verb agree ment Ellipsis …… have	The word ellipsis is used in the singular form in the example given. It should therefore be followed by a singular verb "has" instead of "have".
8. Cohesion devices con-stitute.	1. **Incomplete sentence**; it requires a subject com-plement to function as a meaningful utterance. 2. **Use of the noun phrase** "cohesion" **is errone ous**. The student should use an adjective "cohesive".	The use of the word "cohesion" instead of "cohesive" might be due to inadequate mastery or limited knowledge of use of specialised terminology in discourse analysis. The use of 'dangling' clauses instead of an independent clause is a serious problem with most students. It actually reveals a major weakness in students' essay writing.
9 The other functions of substitution are that it is used to replace nouns.	1. **Lack of agreement** in the relationship between the use of "functions", a plural subject, and "it" a singular pronoun. This gives rise to thematic confusion. It is not clear what the pronoun "it" refers to.	As indicated for other examples above, concord or subject-verb or noun-pronoun agreement is a common problem with students at this level.

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