

Analysing the Use of Lexical and Functional Words in EFL Students' Written Sentences

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Abstract—This research is an attempt to investigate how lexical and functional terms are employed by EFL MA students. In order to accomplish this, a qualitative method was used to identify certain lexical and functional gaps in the students' formation of sentences. The main source of the research data was essays that were written by EFL MA students. The examination of students' sentences revealed both functional and lexical errors; the students' lexical errors included incorrect word choices, the inability to use homophones, the frequent use of unusual forms, and the absence of essential sentence components. With regard to the functional categories, the students' sentences exhibited the omission of some auxiliary verbs, prepositions, and determiners, as well as the incorrect use of pronouns. Serious problems in the use of lexical and functional words generally decreased the quality of the sentences. To decrease these errors, a significant amount of instruction, supported by a variety of exercises to reinforce understanding of such words, should be provided in classrooms where English as a foreign language (EFL) is taught.

Index Terms—lexical categories, functional categories, grammar, word classes

I. INTRODUCTION

Forming a correct sentence is considered one of the cornerstones of academic writing (Rogers, 2007) because daily written academic tasks and activities are assigned to people who pursue different academic disciplines. College students are continuously assessed on the basis of these written tasks and activities (see Abdalla, 2023). This is substantiated by the fact that written academic papers are the form in which examiners evaluate students' work based on their use of grammatical features (Imani & Habil, 2012). Therefore, these day-to-day activities are expected to develop students' grammatical and expressive skills to improve their written performances. Accordingly, knowing and understanding the basic sentence components are important because constructing a correct sentence is one of the factors in forming a cohesive paragraph.

The investigation of numerous papers revealed that the way in which sentences are composed is a significant concern. Although the students have the required linguistic knowledge to enable them to construct sentences, the analysis of their individual sentences showed that many students struggled to form correct sentences. Taking into account that the students who wrote these essays were enrolled in different courses, including both linguistics and literature courses, analysing them is essential for understanding the nature of these errors and for providing ways to avoid them.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. Introduction

It is generally known that the primary function of using language is to communicate a certain message (Newmeyer, 2000). The message to be communicated should have at least the basic linguistic components and should have the correct word order and the correct word choice. Therefore, transferring what is being said or written is gauged solely by the knowledge of how to form meaningful sentences (Arlawka et al., 2020). In the context of English as a foreign language (EFL), it is crucial to comprehend the errors made in sentence component selection, as any incorrect choice can result in problematic sentences and hinder comprehension.

B. The Importance of Grammar

According to Radford (2009), grammar concerns two distinct yet interrelated domains of study, namely morphology and syntax. The first examines how words are constructed from smaller units known as morphemes, and the second focuses on how words are combined to form phrases and sentences. Grammar is seen as the basis of knowing a language (see Sari et al., 2019). Knowledge of grammar includes the use of tenses, word order, modals, sentence types, and clauses, in addition to other structural items. The production of acceptable written outcomes is based on understanding the rules and standards that govern composition; the sentence is a key factor when writing paragraphs and texts (Silfia & Riyan, 2021).

Similarly, Imani and Habil (2012) stated that the grammatical quality of a text was governed by grammatical accuracy and further stated that one of the basic requirements for constructing high-quality academic language was

grammatical accuracy. According to these authors, grammatical accuracy could be measured by investigating the correct use of subject-verb-agreement, tenses, articles, and prepositions.

Based on the above, a crucial element when writing a correct sentence is understanding both the category and the use of each word prior to sentence formation because the words that should be used are governed by certain morphological, syntactic, and semantic processes (see Stageberg & Goodman, 1965). Therefore, EFL learners are required to understand the words in the language and their categorisation in order to express coherent ideas.

C. The Importance of Words

Words play a crucial role in the construction of English sentences. A word is defined as "...any segment of a sentence bounded by successive points at which pausing is possible" (Charles F. Hockett, 1958; as quoted in Stageberg & Goodman, 1965). Words in English are categorised according to three groups based on the morphemes on which they are formed: simple words with only one free morpheme, such as 'long' and 'flea'; complex words with two bound forms or a bound and a free form as immediate constituents, such as 'exclude' and 'telephone'; and compound words with two or more free forms as immediate constituents, such as 'greenhouse' and 'happy-go-lucky' (Stageberg & Goodman, 1965).

Moreover, Haegeman (1994) proposed that words were categorically specified in the speaker's mental lexicon; thus, words are selected or used in accordance with the information or the message that the speaker/writer wants to impart. The successful choice of a word depends on the function that the writer needs it to accomplish within a sentence.

D. Word Classes

Because words are considered an effective instrument in language analysis, Stageberg and Goodman (1965) classified the traditional parts of speech according to the three categories of form classes, positional classes, and structure classes. The first category, form classes, encompasses nouns because the morphological process influences their form. The category of nouns is extensive and contributes to a language's lexicon through borrowing and coining new forms. The next category is that of verbs; this category includes five inflectional forms as well as verb-forming suffixes and comprises adjectives, including comparables and adjective-forming suffixes. The last word group is adverbs; this group includes four suffixes, '-ly', '-wise', '-ward', and '-s', as well as the free form 'like'. Uninflected words include nouns, adverbs, adjectives, and most of the words in the structure classes.

The second category, known as positional classes, categorizes nominals, verbals, adjectivals, and adverbials based on their specific positions within a sentence. For instance, we classify a word as nominal if it holds a specific position within a sentence.

Finally, there are structural classes consist of a limited number of words. They include qualifiers, prepositions, determiners, auxiliaries (the two main auxiliaries, "have" and "be," and the periphrastic auxiliary "do"), pronouns (personal, interrogative, and relative), and relative, expletive, and restrictive conjunctions. We categorize the words in these classes as fixed and closed because they rarely admit new members (Stageberg & Goodman, 1965).

Radford (2009) stated that words could be grouped into grammatical categories according to their semantic meaning, morphological properties (meaning that they can take on various forms), and syntactic properties, meaning that they have word-order properties that determine the positions that they can occupy within sentences. A group of words that falls into the same category has many semantic, morphological, and syntactic characteristics (Radford, 2009). Consequently, scholars have proposed two distinct types of grammatical categories: lexical/substantive categories, which comprise content words, and functional categories.

(a). The Lexical/Substantive Categories

According to Radford (2009), the first classification concerns the primary lexical/substantive categories. Such categories in English include nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs, and prepositions (Radford, 2009). The category of nouns (= N) indicates the attribute of entities in a semantic way. There are three types of nouns: countable, which have singular and plural morphological forms; uncountable, and proper (like 'Andrew', which cannot be used in the same way as countable and uncountable nouns in English). Determiners such as 'the' can pre-modify common nouns like 'boy'. Syntactically, we can use verbs (=V) to complete sentences and to semantically indicate actions or events like eating, singing, pulling, or resigning. Verbs also have four distinct morphological forms; for example, the regular verb 'cry' has the following forms: present tense, perfect participle, passive participle, and progressive participle. Syntactically, we use an adjective (= A) to describe a state or attribute, either to complete a sentence (e.g., 'They may be tired') or to indicate a gradable property and modify it with a degree word (e.g., 'She is very happy'). In addition, many adjectives have morphological forms, with comparative forms ending in '-er' and superlative forms ending in '-est'. Syntactically, we can use adverbs (= ADV) to end sentences (e.g., 'badly'); morphologically, regular adverbs end in '-ly' (e.g., 'sadly'); and semantically, adverbs (= ADV) indicate the performance of an action (e.g., 'She sings well'). Syntactically, we can modify a preposition by making it 'right' or 'straight' (as in 'He fell right down the stairs'); morphologically, we can give it invariable or uninflected forms (e.g., no past tense forms or superlative forms). Many prepositions (= P) mark semantic locations (e.g., 'in', 'on', 'off').

(b). Function Words

This is the second category that Radford (2009) presented. Function words include articles, pronouns, and conjunctions, which are mainly or only used for grammatical purposes. These categories convey most of the semantic content (Crystal, 2008). Similarly, determiners, quantifiers, pronouns, and subordinating conjunctions are among the words that Radford (2009) classified as belonging to functional categories. According to Radford, a determiner (= D) is a semantic determiner for the particular noun that it introduces. Examples of these include demonstrative determiners and the definite article. Expressions of quantity, such as 'some/all/no/any/each/every/most/much/many', are indicated by the quantifier (=Q). English uses a pronoun (= PRN) to replace or allude to noun phrases; it comes in various types. An antecedent determines the lexical and semantic content of a pronoun. Semantically, an auxiliary (verb) designates grammatical features such as voice, aspect, tense, or mood. In syntax, one can also substitute auxiliary words for subjects to form questions. Radford (2009) defines a word as a (subordinating) conjunction when it serves as the complement of a preceding word, such as 'that', 'if', or 'for'.

E. Previous Studies

An investigation of 24 postgraduate proposals written by Nepali students and educators involving a textual analysis using both the quantitative and qualitative data and an unstructured interview revealed that the students' errors were listed and categorised according to four parameters, namely grammatical errors, lexical semantic errors, mechanical errors, and syntactic errors (Paudel, 2022).

It was found that second language learners at the University of Taif had difficulties in acquiring English for technical communication; the learners made intralingual errors associated with the developmental sequence of learning English for technical communication in the form of speaking, listening, reading, and writing due to interference from the first language (Alamin & Ahmed, 2012). Abdalla's (2023) qualitative research, in addition, concluded that EFL undergraduate students' grammatical and mechanical problems affected the readability and comprehension of paragraphs.

Students' ability to write compound sentences was found to be moderate. This is what Sari et al.'s (2019) descriptive research finalised. The undergraduate students made errors in the use of punctuation, connectors, and grammatical structures. Learners of English as a second language (ESL) also have difficulty constructing complete sentences, as their written sentences revealed the omission of essential sentential components, such as the lack of a subject or verb and subject-verb agreement errors, as well as a lack of the required syntactic knowledge to construct more complex, compound sentences (Qamariah, 2015).

The above examples were substantiated by Gustira and Artika (2020), who stated that students in the English Department made many relative clause errors in their writing; such errors included omission errors, addition errors, regularisation errors, and misordering.

Similarly, Arlawka et al. (2020) examined students' responses and concluded that the difficulties in writing English sentences occurred as a result of students' weaknesses in the use of phrases, clauses, commas, and conjunctions. EFL learners' written sentences have been analysed to determine whether students could construct comprehensible and meaningful sentences that had consistent tenses and aspects.

Sabarniati et al.'s (2023) quantitative and qualitative syntactic analysis concluded that stage 2 learners used more simple sentences with inconsistent tenses and aspects, whereas those at stage 4 used more complex sentences with consistent tenses and aspects. The authors' analysis also indicated that clearer meanings were communicated via shorter sentences rather than by longer ones. Furthermore, neither group of learners lacked consistency in their use of tenses and aspects (Sabarniati et al., 2023).

Another study that investigated errors that were committed by Indonesian students in translation texts (Retnowati et al., 2022) and found that some lexical errors, such as misspelling and inappropriate word choice, were due to the students' lack of knowledge of spelling, word formation, and word equivalence; there were also grammatical errors in the use of affixes, verbs, word order, and auxiliaries, combined with difficulties in using the correct words in constructions.

Riadi et al. (2023) claimed that findings or arguments that contributed to academic aspects were the primary outcome of academic writing. We can identify research gaps due to the importance of analysing writing as a means of conveying information (Collins, 2020) and the complexity of written texts (Imani & Habil, 2012). Overall, there is a need to understand English sentences in terms of the arrangement of words in a sequence that is understandable to the audience (Stageberg & Goodman, 1965). The current study investigated sentences written by EFL MA students with BA degrees from different universities to analyse some of the lexical and functional categories that the students used to construct sentences and suggest methods to remedy their shortcomings.

The above studies reveal gaps in the use of lexical words in written sentences and the inability to use functional words, both crucial for comprehending written essays. As a result, the current research aimed to fill this gap by investigating how these categories were used, with the goal of providing a more in-depth understanding of EFL students' use of lexical and functional words in their written sentences.

III. METHODOLOGY

A qualitative method was used as the primary instrument to analyse the students' written sentences, as this approach made it easier to pinpoint the knowledge gaps that would be revealed by the incorrect use of both lexical and functional words.

A. The research participants were 24 female Saudi students who were full-time students studying for their master's in literature at the Department of Foreign Languages, Faculty of Arts and Humanities, Al-Baha University, during academic year 2021.

B. The primary data under investigation consisted of 48 written essays.

C. Data analysis: We identified and described issues related to the use of lexical and functional words (see Alzamil, 2020; Abdalla, 2023). To do this, an asterisk (*) is used to show the errors, whereas brackets '[]' are used to show the missing elements, explain, or correct a certain issue. Note that the analysis ignored students' spelling and grammatical errors.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. *The Use of Lexical Words in EFL Students' Sentences*

Words generally represent a focal point in expressions and are mainly used to convey the intended message. In this regard, different functional and structural words contribute to the construction of meaningful sentences. Therefore, in this section, the focus is on analysing some selected sentences to determine the extent to which lexical words were used and the linguistic deviations that occurred in the written samples. The investigation revealed the following linguistic problems:

(a). *Incorrect Use of Some Lexical Words*

According to the analysis, some sentences lacked meaning due to the incorrect choice of certain lexical words (Zughoul, 1991). For example, many students did not distinguish between the use of a noun and an adjective. This confusion was exemplified when selecting the name of a certain country. The example below, which was extracted from paper No. 1, demonstrates this:

The first '*Germany' colony was founded in Pennsylvania....They took their '*inspirational' from the '*France' Revolution 1987.

In the above extract, it can be seen that the words 'Germany', 'inspirational' and 'France' were incorrect choices. With regard to the first word, the writer should have used the adjective form 'German'; for the second word, the noun 'inspiration' should have been selected, whereas the adjectival form 'French' should have been used before the word 'Revolution'. This erroneous use indicates that some students did not know how to use an adjective to modify a noun or how to select the appropriate lexical category to fill a particular slot. This indicates an urgent need to teach knowledge about the use of lexical words as practical parts of grammar.

The incorrect lexical choices included other forms, such as the choice between using the base form of a verb or its past form, as shown in the example below:

France '*stand' by side with America that is made it the first enemy of '*British'. ...The revolution war was '*end' in 1781...Finally in 1776 American '*become' '*independence' and free...

The above example, as extracted from paper No. 1, shows that the writer used the present verb forms 'stand' and 'end' incorrectly. Since the dates given express past ideas, the use of past tense verb forms was required; therefore, the words 'stood' and 'ended' are the correct past tense forms that should have been used in the above text. This clearly demonstrates that some students lacked knowledge about verb conjugation because a verb is considered to be the nucleus of a sentence.

The use of nouns was another form of lexical error. Correct noun usage is crucial as it establishes a connection between the spoken words and specific pronouns, other nouns, or concepts. In other words, it is essential to refer to a noun by using pronouns or quantifiers that reflect the same form. The extracts (No. 1 and No. 2) below demonstrate this:

They faced a lot of '*hardship' as pilgrims...small cities and '*town' were established...

The middle colonies were known for '*it's' vraity of tribes... the colony needed slaves to work in all this farming.

Two lexical problems can be identified in the above extract. Firstly, the quantifier 'a lot of' needs to be followed by the plural noun 'hardships'; that is, the plural form should have been used instead of the singular one. Similarly, in the second example, the plural form is required because the word is used to join two parallel forms, as suggested by the construction; thus, 'towns' would be the correct form in tandem with 'small cities' (Rogers, 2007). Secondly, as can be observed, the plural noun 'colonies' as an antecedent does not match the construction 'it's'. In other words, the pair 'colonies...it's' does not agree in number. This obviously indicates a problem in the use of referential expressions when writing essays, as there is no logic in the use of a noun or pronoun that does not have antecedents. Moreover, the contracted form 'it's', which has a subject 'it' and a verb 'is', has been used incorrectly. This use has a negative impact on sentence readability and affects the understanding of the sentence. In this case, the students should have used either 'colonies...their' or 'colony...its' as correct pairs.

It was also found that many students were unable to identify which lexical form to use, mainly when encountering homophones, as shown in the following extract from paper No. 3:

*The' life in the early colonial [the noun 'period' is missing] concentret on family, the father considered the head of the heldhouse, he make money by working outside the house, ...and preparing *safe [meaning 'to save', the correct form] food for winter.

It is noticeable that some lexical words were problematic for students with moderate English proficiency. This is evident in the example above, where the choice between the words "safe" and "save" presented a semantic challenge for the students. The writer should have used the correct lexical form 'save', which refers to keeping and storing something for future use, to convey the father's diligent efforts to save food for his family during the winter. As was also seen in Paper No. 1 above, some students had problems differentiating between 'Britain/British' and 'independence/independent'.

One final comment is that some students tended to use unusual forms. As seen in Paper No. 4, a word like "prosses" was frequently repeated as a keyword across various contexts. To exemplify: '...Many people came from England running away from the church... *were' [where] everything was *stric' [strict] and hard for people to *prosses' [possess]. Despite keywords being central to the understanding of sentences, many sentences showed lexical deviations; these deviations included the incorrect use of a specific word class in the correct position. For example, in the given context, the two lexical forms that are possible are 'process' or 'possess', which would resolve the problem.

(b). *Absence of Some Lexical Words*

The ultimate objective is to communicate an idea, which begins with putting words together in a sequence (Fish, 2011). However, in the essays, it could be seen that some lexical words were not included in their respective positions. Some of these instances (extracted from papers No. 3 and No. 4) are shown below:

The early colonial period in America during the 17th century [missing of a verb 'be' and its complement]. America in the 16th century was called "The 13 Colonies" *were' [where] people were coming to the "The New land" from everywhere...Many [the noun 'people' is missing] came from England..., on the other hand Some [the noun 'people' is missing] came to make money...

Americans were dreaming about independence...Their culture, literature even the style of their life is controlled by Great Britain, basically. They had enough [a noun form is missing]...

As can be seen in the instances above, some basic nouns were not included at all. In the first example, the quantifiers 'many' and 'some' have been used without subsequent nouns. These gaps indicate that some lexical elements are missing. Accordingly, in the first example, the plural noun 'people' is missing or has been ignored, as it should be positioned after the word 'many'; the same phenomenon can be observed in the second sentence, in which the noun is missing after the word 'some'. Based on these examples, it appears that some students ignored the fact that quantifiers should be used with nouns, irrespective of whether they are singular or plural (see Azar, 2002). Therefore, the underuse of nouns has a negative impact on understanding a large portion of what is attempting to be expressed or disrupts the flow when reading a specific sentence.

With regard to the above, a simple sentence should include a subject and a predicate (Rothstein, 2012). The mention of these, together with their respective adjectives, is frequently repeated throughout paragraphs in order to connect and intensify what is being expressed. The absence of some lexical words detracts from the understanding of the sentences, and the entire paragraph will be affected as a result (Zulfariati, 2021).

B. *The Use of Functional Words in EFL Students' Sentences*

Functional words integrate with lexical words to form complete sentences. This means that any categorical gap in a sentence results in problems in sentence structure. Some samples of students' writings in the following section are investigated to show the use of functional words:

(a). *Incorrect Use of Some Functional Words*

Although correct sentence formation necessitates understanding the correct position of certain words, some words co-occur to contribute to a sentence's syntax. We observed incorrect use of some functional words in sentences, such as determiners, prepositions, pronouns, auxiliary verbs, and question words, as demonstrated in the following examples:

A colony is a place *were' [where] a group of people settle *in' *outside' their home country ...The Americans refused this tax and rebelled *about' it...they faced the *Britain' in Boston when *the' Boston masscare happened [.]. In 1770 *were [where] five colonists got killed...The *Britain' then closed *the' Boston Harbor (paper No. 2).

The above extracts show that some students had problems with selecting the correct determiners. To provide evidence, look at the first example above, where the students mistakenly substituted the auxiliary verb 'were' for the clausal modifier 'where'. The use of 'were' in this position affects the sentence's grammar. A poor use of the definite article 'the' was also observed. For instance, we repeatedly observed the placement of 'the' before some proper nouns, such as 'the Boston'. The same phenomenon was observed in paper No. 10: '...*the' George III the king has failed in doing this...colonies to seek independence from *the' Great Britain...' These examples show that the use of articles posed problems for many EFL learners.

Not only was the misuse of question words observed, but the use of prepositions also posed problems for many students, as shown in the extracts from paper No. 2 above. Prepositions typically occupy specific positions within a sentence as part of a functional norm, and certain verbs frequently co-occur with certain prepositions to maintain structural correctness. However, paper No. 2 mistakenly adds the preposition 'in', which precedes the word 'outside'. To rectify this issue, we need to use only one preposition. In the second example, the verb 'rebelled' structurally co-occurs with 'against' instead of with 'about'. We found similar instances of incorrect prepositional usage. For example, '...with the assistance *of' [from'] France, as extracted from paper No. 5, ...succeeded ['in' missing preposition] every war, as extracted from paper No. 9, and '...They also believed *of ['in' is the correct preposition form] the power of the person...', as extracted from paper No. 10. On one hand, these examples reveal the existence of structural problems due to the incorrect use of prepositions (see Abadalla, 2023), and reflect the students' lack of knowledge about collocations on the other.

Functional words were misused, as were some auxiliary verbs. The analysis showed that the most frequently used auxiliary verb was 'be'. The choice between a singular and a plural form, or between the present and the past form, was problematic for some students. This is exemplified in '...although the children life *were not ['was not' is the correct verb form] easy they find time to have fun...' as extracted from paper No. 3; and '...The Americans were dreaming about independence, they *are ['were' was the correct verb form] strong from people who *are' looking for democracy...' as extracted from paper No. 4. In the first example, the singular word 'life' necessitates the use of the correct past form 'was' instead of the plural form 'were'; in the second example, the topic of past events warrants the use of the past form 'be' throughout the sentences.

In addition to the above issue, the choice of which pronoun to use was observed to be difficult for many of the MA students; for example, '...when George III, the king of Great Britain, had failed to protect *their' [his] people, as extracted from paper No. 7, ...colonists know how to adapt with the new world...They developed *them self' [themselves] and build a success a society...' as extracted from paper No. 8. In these examples, some possessive and reflexive pronouns posed problems for the students. In the first example, the student mistakenly selected the possessive pronoun 'their' to refer to 'George III', the subject of the sentence. In the second example, the correct word for 'colonists', the sentence's subject, is 'themselves', not 'them self'.

(b). *Absence of Some Functional Words*

There appeared to be some errors concerning the use of certain functional words in the EFL students' written sentences; these included the absence of prepositions, auxiliary verbs, and determiners, as well as the use of question words (Gulö & Rahmawelly, 2019). The following paragraph, extracted from Paper No. 11, exemplifies this case:

*The' life in the early colonial period was not easy. The early settlers faced a lot of hardships, such as living in the wilderness. They did not know how to live in [missing of an article] wilderness that the play mouth settlers spent most of their first winter in mayflower. By the early 18th century, they began [missing of a preposition] feel [missing of a preposition] home in New England which was named New England referring to England.

The paragraph above shows the absence of articles and prepositions (Hikmah, 2020). For example, the functional words 'the', 'to', and 'at' should have been used to bridge the sentential gap. The same was seen in '...they escaped [the preposition 'from' is missing] their home to get a new life', as extracted from paper No. 7. The omission of these functional aspects in a sentence creates problems for readers; at the same time, a written paragraph will be lacking in rigour due to the absence of essential functional words (Gulö & Rahmawelly, 2019). The students' written sentences showed that either they did not pay much attention to the essential use of such words or lacked knowledge about when and how to use them.

The analysis also revealed that some clausal modifiers and auxiliary verbs were not used. An example of such a case was extracted from paper No. 3, as shown below:

*The life in the early colonial period in *American [missing of 'was' as an auxiliary verb] concentrate on family.

They settled into 13 colonies *state [the interrogative determiner 'which' or 'that' is missing] known as now... the father [the auxiliary verb 'was' is missing] considered the head of the heldhouse, he make money by working outside the house.

The primary goal of writing a paragraph is to construct meaningful sentences; Gulö and Rahmawelly (2019) noted the absence of the verbs 'be' and clausal modifiers like 'which or that' in this context. Arlawka et al. (2020) noted that many EFL students struggled with sentence structure. The above examples appear to contradict Imani and Habil's (2012) study, which postulated that postgraduate non-native speaker (NNS) students preferred to form sentences with the 'be' verb depending on their level of mastery. The analysis revealed that long sentences that included dependent clauses were difficult to read due to the absence of some auxiliary verbs, as well as clausal modifiers such as 'where', 'when', and 'which' (also see Princess & Syarif, 2021). Students encountered problems at both the sentence and paragraph levels due to the absence or incorrect use of basic sentence formation elements in the functional gaps. Therefore, EFL classrooms require explicit teaching of these aspects.

A thorough reading of these essays revealed that a lot of work is needed regarding the importance of word classes. The paragraph below, extracted from paper No. 8, is an example of what needs to be taught:

In [the definite article ‘the’ is missing] eighteenth century, [the definite article ‘the’ is missing] American colonies intend [the past form ‘intended’ is required] to get their independence from Great Britain. The main cause [determiners such as ‘which’ and ‘that’ are missing] led [the definite article ‘the’ is missing] American colonies to independence from Great Britain [missing an auxiliary verb] the fact that they [missing of the verb ‘to be’] taxed without represented [the noun form ‘representation’ is needed] in [the definite article ‘the’ is missing] Britain [the adjective form ‘British’ is needed] Parliament.

The above extract exhibits the omission of determiners and auxiliary verbs, along with incorrect lexical choices. The extracts from papers No. 3 and No. 4 above demonstrate the use of the quantifiers “many” and “some” in the absence of subsequent nouns. The omission of the required word in its precise position causes a sentential problem (see Gustira & Artika, 2020). Uncertain sentences produced by errors in the use of functional words lower the quality of written paragraphs (Zulfariati, 2021).

V. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

The analysis of the MA students’ essays showed errors in the use of lexical and functional words. To begin with, the lexical mistakes included the selection of the incorrect word due to difficulty in deciding whether to use a noun or an adjective, the use of incorrect verb forms, the inability to use homophones, the frequent use of unusual forms, and a lack of sufficient nouns and verbs.

Secondly, the students had problems using functional words. Such problems included the incorrect use of relative determiners, the use of articles before proper nouns, quantifiers, prepositions, auxiliary verbs, and the use of possessive and reflexive pronouns. The analysis also revealed the absence of auxiliary verbs, prepositions, and determiners. These categories are considered to be essential and inseparable aspects of sentence formation. Therefore, we need to pay more attention to these aspects and combine them with a range of exercises to guarantee their comprehension during the students’ initial years of university.

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