

## PRESERVICE TEACHERS' ESSAY WRITING: AN ANALYSIS OF THEIR GRAMMATICAL AND LEXICAL ERRORS

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**ABSTRACT:** The objective of this investigation was to analyze the academic essays of fourth-year pre-service teachers of English of four Chilean universities. A linguistic taxonomy was elaborated in order to categorize the types of errors found under the grammatical and lexical dimensions, considering different studies on language error analysis. Errors were counted and classified by three judges, after which statistical analyses were applied using the Krippendorff's Alpha coefficient to determine whether the level of agreement among judges validated the final results. Representative examples taken from the essays for each type of error were analyzed according to their possible sources of error, and assumptions were made to determine their likely causes. Results showed that the grammatical dimension presented more errors than the lexical one.

**KEYWORDS:** Error analysis, academic writing, sources of errors, taxonomy, prescriptive grammar, linguistics

### *ESCRITURA DE ENSAYOS DE FUTUROS DOCENTES: UN ANÁLISIS DE SUS ERRORES GRAMATICALES Y LÉXICOS*

*RESUMEN:* El objetivo de esta investigación fue analizar los ensayos académicos de futuros docentes de inglés de cuarto año en cuatro universidades chilenas. Se elaboró una taxonomía lingüística para categorizar los tipos de errores encontrados bajo dos dimensiones: gramatical y léxica, y se consideró una variedad de estudios sobre

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*análisis de errores. Los errores fueron contados y clasificados por tres jueces, luego se aplicó el análisis estadístico mediante el coeficiente de Alpha de Krippendorff para determinar si el nivel de acuerdo entre los jueces validaba los resultados finales. Los ejemplos representativos tomados de los ensayos para cada tipo de error se analizaron según las posibles fuentes de error, y se establecieron algunos supuestos sobre sus posibles causas. Los resultados mostraron que la dimensión gramatical presentó más errores que la dimensión léxica.*

*PALABRAS CLAVE: Análisis de errores, escritura académica, fuente de errores, taxonomía, gramática prescriptiva, lingüística.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Errors are important in the area of Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) because they are a reliable and accurate source of information about the development of language learning. Scholars have enriched this idea through advancing on different approaches in the linguistic area, trying to theorize and systematize the process in which errors are evaluated. The main method to achieve this has been *Error analysis*, which is a type of linguistic analysis that focuses on the errors learners make (Fahmida, 2010). By detecting and analyzing errors produced by learners, teachers become aware of the necessary reinforcement learners need. Thus, this kind of analysis helps teachers to create, modify and develop language contents. At the same time, learners can improve their performance by following teachers' advice and guidance.

The Chilean foreign language policy recognizes English as a compulsory subject from 5<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> grade in the school system and aims at making learners achieve an intermediate language mastery by the end of the schooling process. This implies teachers and researchers have to be fully aware of the learning processes students go through when working with a language that is not theirs, particularly, because learners experience a great deal of difficulties when trying to communicate with others in English. According to a survey conducted by the British Council (2015) in Chile, out of the four language skills required to master English (listening, writing, speaking and reading), writing is perceived by learners as one of their least proficient abilities (almost 50% of respondents position themselves at an intermediate level, and 30% as poor/basic). Hence, it is of high relevance that this skill is further developed to improve learners' writing performance.

The following research addresses errors made by pre-service teachers of TEFL programs, offered by four Chilean universities, when writing an academic essay in two different, but close in time instances. Errors were collected, identified, described, and explained following the error analysis theory proposed by Corder (1974), because it provides researchers with evidence of how English is learned, and what strategies learners may be employing in their discovery of the language. The main objective of this study is to identify the frequency and types of errors committed, and to determine their sources, by considering the level of agreement between judges when assessing the errors involved in the research. This investigation was carried out within the context of the research grant FONDECYT 1191021 *Estudio correlacional y propuesta de*

*intervención en evaluación del aprendizaje del inglés: las dimensiones cognitiva, afectiva y social del proceso evaluativo del idioma extranjero.*

## 2. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Writing in English has been perceived as the most difficult ability among the four skills of English because even native speakers fail to write a good piece of writing (Sermsook *et al.*, 2017). Important and necessary linguistic elements must be taken into consideration to develop clear ideas in a written composition. On the one hand, non-academic writing lacks of formality and, on the other hand, academic writing requires thorough development of the language, organization, appropriate vocabulary, structure, mechanics, and the like (Navas, 2017). Since writing is viewed as a challenging and complex activity for many students, teachers should focus on the essential grammatical and lexical aspects for the clear communication of meaning (Chin, 2000). Academic writing assignments should then be seen as an opportunity for students to explore their interests and express their own ideas.

Mastering writing skills is an important area in the development of EFL learning even though it is considered to be a complex and difficult task for learners because it does not only require a highly proficient level of the target language, but also a high-end reading ability in the first language, and a suitable level of synthesis when exposing ideas. However, it can not be ignored that learners of a foreign language will undoubtedly encounter frustration when learning to write in English and this will certainly be accompanied by error making.

### 2.1. Language errors

Fahmida (2010) defines errors in English Language Teaching (ELT) as a deviation form of the language which is inaccurate. However, despite all the negative connotations attached to errors, Corder (1967) remarks that they are significant in three different ways:

1. For teachers, because they show the learner's progression.
2. For researchers, because they evidence how language is acquired and the strategies employed by the learner.
3. For learners, because they can be regarded as a learning device.

### 2.2. Error analysis

Fahmida (2010) states that "Error Analysis (EA) is a type of linguistic analysis that focuses on the errors learners make" (p. 1). That is why, this branch of linguistics enables teachers to determine the source of errors, and helps to realize what pedagogical changes must be taken into consideration to fit in and design better syllabi based on the learners' needs. Fahmida (2010) emphasizes the importance of doing EA in writing

because focusing on grammar, vocabulary and spelling error arrays helps learners into working with them by analyzing the causes and possible solutions to their most common error patterns. EA is of a great need at the moment of giving feedback and helping learners outdo their written performances.

Different research studies on error analysis have focused on defining taxonomies that attempt to classify errors by source and dimension. On this line, and based on the works of Chan (2010), Fahmida (2010), Hariri (2012), Andre (2014), Agustin-Llach (2007), Wu and Garza (2014), Mahan (2013), Wells (2013) and Basir *et al.* (2015), this current study, after a detailed consideration of the existing taxonomies, offers an informed synthesis of the sources and dimensions of errors that can best explain the findings of this group of Chilean preservice teachers. These sources and dimensions are explained below:

### 2.3. Sources of errors

#### 2.3.1. Interlingual errors

Brown (1980) affirms that *Interlingual errors* (also referred as L1-influence, interference, language or negative transfer and cross-linguistic interference) result from the learners' assumption that the second language forms are similar to the native language. Ratnah (2013) states that "Interlingual errors may occur at different levels such as transfer of phonological, morphological, grammatical and lexical and semantic elements of the native language into the target language" (p. 161).

#### 2.3.2. Intralingual errors

Brown (1980) defines *Intralingual errors* as those errors occurring due to the negative transfer of items within the target language. Prompsupa, Varasarin, and Brudhiprabha (2017) mention the four causes of the intralingual and developmental errors under its main source: Over-generalization, Ignorance of rule restrictions, Incomplete application of rules and False concepts hypothesized.

#### 2.3.3. Lack of proficiency

Another source of error based on the study of Sermsook, Liamnimitr and Pochakorn (2017) was the writers' limited knowledge of grammar and vocabulary. Lack of proficiency can be identified because writers do not have the required knowledge of the target language to approach writing tasks that can be beyond their written language development either for lack of self-confidence or expertise.

### 2.3.4. Carelessness

Sermsook *et al.* (2017) considered carelessness as a source of errors based on the interviews conducted on EFL learners. In their study, the learners seemed not to be aware of the errors committed in their writing. This source of error is based on the assumptions that the participants lack of sufficient attention and were negligent at the moment of writing and checking thoroughly their academic essays.

On a different level, Hartshorn and Evans (2012) organized the most commonly observed errors into the name of *error families*. The three families included grammatical, lexical, and mechanical errors.

## 2.4. Dimensions of errors

### 2.4.1. Grammatical dimension

Başöz and Aydın (2011) mention that grammar is defined as the area of knowledge that includes the body of the rules and regulations that govern the use of a language, and that it constitutes a significant knowledge area in writing as it is directly related to fluent and accurate writing in EFL. While grammatical complexity is acquired, the most basic structures of the target language remain, making the proficient learner able to choose one or the other according to different contexts (Lahuerta, 2017). According to this, students might be committing errors when choosing an appropriate set of rules rather than not knowing the rules, which could be fixed by creating more instances for the development of confidence towards written and spoken output. Hariri (2012) included the following linguistic items in his grammatical taxonomy: Articles, prepositions, wrong word order, lack of concord, conditional sentences, tenses, adverbs, verb group, relative clauses and relative pronouns.

### 2.4.2. Lexical dimension

Lexical errors refer to how second language learner speakers misuse and misunderstand vocabulary. Andre (2014) emphasizes that lexical errors refer to the particular error which is affecting the form or meaning of one word. To Agustin-Llach (2007) lexical errors, being an observable interlanguage phenomenon, are an important source of information about L2 vocabulary acquisition. In an academic context, lexical errors are useful as quality indicators of learners' written work, as well as being predictors of lexical progress, proficiency, and of learners' general academic achievement. Research findings (Andre, 2014) show that the more lexical errors occur in written compositions, the worse quality of the writer's skill will be regarded by the reader; in addition to this, the production of learners' poorly written compositions will affect the readers directly in understanding the content. Basir, Abdullah and Zaiyadi (2015) proposed a lexical taxonomy classifying word choice, literal translation, redundancy,

collocation and word formation as lexical types of errors. On the same line, in the taxonomy used by Agustin-Llach (2007), some subcategories considered as lexical errors are borrowings, coinage and calque. Researchers such as Hemchua and Schmitt (2006), and Andre (2014) mentioned in their studies on lexical errors, the taxonomy proposed by James (1998) that consists of *Formal* and *Semantic errors*. Formal errors include the misuse of suffixes and prefixes, borrowing, coinage and calque, and omission, overinclusion, misselection and misordering. Semantic errors are classified into two sub-types: the first one is confusion of sense relation, including the use of superonyms for hyponyms, hyponyms for superonyms, co-hyponyms and wrong near synonyms. The second subtype is collocation, which specifically follows three degrees of misuse: semantically determined word selection; statistically weighted preferences; and arbitrary combinations and irreversible binomials.

### 3. RESEARCH DESIGN

#### 3.1. *Type of study*

This research is a non-experimental, descriptive and cross-sectional quantitative study involving data collected at a defined time, including a statistical analysis.

#### 3.2. *Research question*

What are the most frequent type of errors committed by pre-service teachers when writing an academic essay?

#### 3.3. *Research objective*

-To identify the types and frequency of errors that pre-service teachers make when writing an academic essay, highlighting the likely sources of these errors.

#### 3.4. *Participants and essay corpus*

The corpus was constituted by academic essays written by 56 pre-service teachers of Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) programs offered by four Chilean universities, three of which are private state-funded, and one of them is a state university. These pre-service teachers were native speakers of Spanish. The sample was composed by 112 academic essays, two halves divided into first and second essay writing instances.

#### 3.5. *Instrument and procedure*

In the first and second essay writing instances, pre-service teachers had to write a three-hundred word argumentative essay in which they stated, explained, and supported

their opinions about a specific issue, using details and examples according to the TOEFL exam, which includes an *independent writing task* that requires learners to create a written composition based on a prompt and using only personal experiences and knowledge.

The data collection took place in the participants' universities. Participants were asked to write an academic essay in two different, but close in time instances, because two rounds of essay writing over the course of two weeks would provide enough corpus to conduct the data analysis. No intervention to the participants was introduced in between because the research aim was to have an X-ray of their types and frequency of written errors before starting a language development course. The final corpus of essays was 112.

#### 4. RESULTS

All the essays were revised separately, and then, in order to identify the different types of errors found, the results were gathered and compared. As an outcome of the latter, two linguistic dimensions were set: *Grammatical*, and *Lexical* dimension. These dimensions were explained in the conceptual framework and are based on the works developed by Chin (2000), Fahmida (2010), Hariri (2012), Andre (2014), Agustin-Llach (2007), Wu and Garza (2014), Mahan (2013), Wells (2013), Londoño (2008) and Basir *et al.* (2015). Afterwards, errors were described and further explained, illustrated by examples taken from the corpus.

A descriptive statistical analysis concerning the central tendency and dispersion measures for the frequency of errors per subcategory, category and dimension was applied. In addition, the Krippendorff's alpha coefficient in its multiple-observers' interval data version was used to prove the level of agreement achieved among researchers.

##### *4.1. Judges concordance analysis through Krippendorff's alpha (2004)*

The Alpha coefficient of Krippendorff was applied to measure concordance among the judges' evaluation. It is a useful indicator because it generalizes the concept of *agreement* among *evaluators*. This indicator fluctuates between 0,000 (in complete disagreement) and 1,000 (in complete agreement). There is no value to be taken as a reference to indicate the minimum degree of agreement, but the same author indicates that a value of 0,800 and above can come to good conclusions (Krippendorff, 2004). The application of the Alpha coefficient of Krippendorff was carried out through the evaluation of the three researchers of this study. Table 1 shows the results:

University	First essay writing instance	Second essay writing instance
University 1 (n = 17)	0,989	0,989
University 2 (n = 6)	0,982	0,979
University 3 (n = 14)	0.989	0,996
University 4 (n = 19)	0,978	0,990

Table 1: *Degree of concordance among judges*

Table 1 shows that the level of agreement among the three judges regarding frequency of errors is close to 1, which means that the concordance is at a high level. In order to organize the data collected, the following concepts were used to clarify and subcategorize the errors:

- Omission: Absence of a required item to form a correct utterance.
- Misuse: Inappropriate use of an item in an utterance.
- Overuse: Inclusion or repetition of an item that is not necessary in the utterance.

After a careful analysis of the collected data on frequency of errors, and the conscious revision of the literature compiled, four main sources of errors were considered: *Interlingual errors*, *Intralingual errors* (Brown, 1980), *Lack of proficiency* and *Carelessness* (Sermsook *et al.*, 2017). This analysis presents examples taken from the corpus, each one identified under a source of error in order to illustrate the findings of the study.

#### 4.2. Grammatical dimension

Table 2 shows the categorization provided for the *Grammatical dimension*. The subcategories will be presented below.

Categories			
1.1	Subject	1.9	Wrong word order
1.2	Lack of concord	1.10	Prepositions
1.3	Verb group	1.11	Adverbs
1.4	Modals or auxiliaries	1.12	Adjectives
1.5	Articles	1.13	Pronouns
1.6	Relative pronouns	1.14	Omission of conditional
1.7	Conjunctions	1.15	Genitive case
1.8	Comparatives and superlatives		

Table 2: *Grammatical dimension: Categories*



Table 3 shows the frequencies and percentages found for each main category of the *Grammatical dimension*. These data correspond to the total errors of all the corpus.

Dimension	Category	Frequency	Percentage
1. Grammatical	1.1 Subject	302	3,6%
	1.2 Concord problems	366	4,4%
	1.3 Verb group	458	5,5%
	1.4 Modals or auxiliaries	205	2,4%
	1.5 Articles	346	4,1%
	1.6 Relative pronouns	107	1,3%
	1.7 Conjunctions	21	0,3%
	1.8 Comparatives or superlatives	50	0,6%
	1.9 Wrong word order	175	2,1%
	1.10 Prepositions	549	6,5%
	1.11 Adverbs	46	0,5%
	1.12 Adjectives	79	0,9%
	1.13 Pronouns	255	3,0%
	1.14 Omission of conditional	11	0,1%
	1.15 Genitive case	61	0,7%
	<b>Total</b>	3031	36,1%

Table 3: *Frequency and percentages of grammatical errors*

As shown in Table 3, a total frequency of 3031 errors (36,1%) was identified and classified under the 15 categories of this dimension and their subcategories. The grammatical dimension shows that the most frequent linguistic errors committed by pre-service teachers when writing argumentative essays are: 1. *Prepositions*, 2. *Verb group*, 3. *Concord problems* and 4. *Articles*.

#### 4.2.1. Category 1.1: Subject

It is an obligatory element in a sentence (except in imperative ones). It refers to the performer of the action that comes after the auxiliary in declarative utterances, and before the operator in interrogative sentences. A total frequency of 302 errors (3,6%) was found under this category. Table 4 displays errors and the frequency in which the subcategories were found.

Subcategories	Examples	Sources of error	Frequency
1.1.1 Omission of the subject	<i>Young children were taught that [ it ] was important to share and help others</i> (Participant 13-University 4)	Interlingual error	224 errors (2,7%)
1.1.2: Overuse of subject	<i>There are some teenagers that they prefer to give up</i> (Participant 11-University 1)	Intralingual error	78 errors (0,9%)

Table 4: *Subcategories, examples, sources of error and frequency for category 1.1*

#### 4.2.2. Category 1.2: Lack of concord

It occurs when the subject and verb construction does not agree in both number and person; a singular subject must take a singular verb, while a plural subject takes a plural verb. 366 (4,4%) errors were associated with this category. Table 5 illustrates errors in subject-verb agreement made by the participants.

Example	Sources of error
<i>People is able to see when a person is happy</i> (Participant 6-University 4)	Lack of proficiency

Table 5: *Examples, their sources of error and frequency in category 1.2*

#### 4.2.3. Category 1.3: Verb group

Verbs are considered to be the only words that can express action (McCaskill, 1990). They change form to indicate person, number, tense, aspect, voice, mood and modality. The category of *Verb group* showed a total frequency of 458 errors (5,5%). Table 6 displays errors found and the frequency in which they were encountered.

Subcategories	Examples	Sources of error	Frequency
1.3.1: Verb form selection	<i>When I was a child I hate math</i> (Participant 2-University 1)	Carelessness	364 errors (4,3%)
1.3.2: Overuse of verb	<i>You are refuse to work</i> (Participant 2-University 1)	Interlingual error	25 errors (0,3%)
1.3.3: Omission of verb	<i>There [ are ] always more options to consider</i> (Participant 9-University 4)	Carelessness	69 errors (0,8%)

Table 6: *Subcategories, examples and sources of error for the category 1.3*

#### 4.2.4. Category 1.4: Modals or auxiliaries

Sokeng (2014) considers that auxiliary verbs help the main verb. They are also called helping verbs, and with their use, it is possible to write sentences in different tenses, moods, or voices (Sokeng, 2014). A total of 205 (2,4%) errors belonged to this category. Table 7 illustrates errors of misuse, omission and overuse of modal or auxiliaries committed by the participants and their frequency.

Sub-Categories	Examples	Sources of error	Frequency
1.4.1: Misuse of modals or auxiliaries	<i>Women were the ones that taught children their language, how to prepare meals, how to make their clothing, and also women must teach children about their own history so as not to be lost by the time</i> (Participant 19-University 4)	Intralingual error	86 errors (1,0%)
1.4.2: Omission of modals or auxiliaries	<i>Maybe a few years ago I would [ have ] answered this question differently</i> (Participant 9-University 1)	Lack of proficiency	92 errors (1,1%)
1.4.3: Overuse of modals or auxiliaries	<i>There are many people who have been questioned our own abilities</i> (Participant 5-University 4)	Intralingual error	27 errors (0,3%)

Table 7: Subcategories, examples, sources of error and frequency for the category 1.4

#### 4.2.5. Category 1.5: Articles

According to Sokeng (2014), articles are a subclass of determiners. There are two types of them: Definite (D.A) and indefinite articles (I.A.). A definite article is used when our hearer or reader knows exactly what was meant and indefinite articles refer to a thing which is not specific. The category of *Articles* exhibited a total frequency of 346 errors (4,1%). Table 8 demonstrates errors found in this category and their frequency.

Sub-categories	Examples	Sources of error	Frequency
1.5.1: Omission of the D.A	<i>We feel pleasure at [ the ] moment of studying</i> (Participant 8-University 4)	Intralingual error	88 errors (1,0%)
1.5.2: Misuse of the D.A	<i>Other important factor that plays an important role in this option is the happiness</i> (Participant 8-University 4)	Lack of proficiency	8 errors (0,1%)
1.5.3: Overuse of the D.A	<i>As a conclusion, the cooperation was a must in the past</i> (Participant 6-University 1)	Interlingual error	133 errors (1,6%)

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1.5.4: Omission of the I.A	<i>It provides [ a ] healthy environment for working</i> (Participant 1-University 4)	Intralingual error	55 errors (0,7%)
1.5.5: Misuse of the I.A	<i>Choosing what to do with our lives is not a easy task at all</i> (Participant 5-University 3)	Carelessness	46 errors (0,5%)
1.5.6: Overuse of the I.A	<i>All activities can be shared by a women and men</i> (Participant 8-University 3)	Lack of proficiency	16 errors (0,2%)

Table 8: Subcategories, examples, sources of error and frequency for the category 1.5

#### 4.2.6. Category 1.6: Relative pronouns

McCaskill (1990), states that in dependent clauses, relative pronouns replace nouns and connect the clause to the rest of the sentence. These are: *who, whose, whom, which, that, when, where, and wherever*. 107 errors (1,3%) were associated with *Relative pronouns*. Table 9 shows examples in which errors of omission, overuse and misuse of relative pronouns (R.P.), and their frequency were found.

Sub-categories	Examples	Sources of error	Frequency
1.6.1: Omission of the R.P.	<i>There is nothing [ that ] really matters</i> (Participant 12-University 3)	Intralingual error	69 errors (0,8%)
1.6.2: Overuse of the R.P.	<i>The ability to cooperate with others was more important in the past than what it is now</i> (Participant 1-University 1)	Interlingual error	17 errors (0,2%)
1.6.3: Misuse of the R.P	<i>Making students aware of that they are capable to do</i> (Participant 10-University 3)	Interlingual error	21 errors (0,3%)

Table 9: Subcategories, examples, sources of error and frequency for category 1.6

#### 4.2.7. Category 1.7: Conjunctions

Celce-Murcia and Larsen-Freeman (1999) regard conjunctions to be joining sentence elements. The category of *Conjunctions* revealed a frequency of 21 errors (0,3%), which are split into two subcategories: Misuse with 4 errors (0,0%), and overuse with 17 (0,2%). Table 10 exhibits the participants' errors of misuse and overuse of conjunctions occurring in the academic essays.

Sub-categories	Examples	Sources of error	Frequency
1.7.1: Misuse of conjunction	<i>I cannot avoid a practicum subject, even though I like it or not</i> (Participant 3-University 1)	Lack of proficiency	4 errors (0,0%)
1.7.2: Overuse of conjunction	<i>We need of others in order to develop in a proper way</i> (Participant 3-University 2)	Interlingual error	17 errors (0,2%)

Table 10: Subcategories, examples, sources of error and frequency for category 1.7

#### 4.2.8. Category 1.8: Comparative and superlative

To express the notion that a person, thing or situation has more or less of a quality, a gradable adjective for comparative or superlative degree can be marked. This is done grammatically in one of two ways: by inflection, adding *-er* and *-est* to the base form, or analytically by the adverbs *more* and *most* (Downing and Locke, 2006). A total of 50 errors (0,6%) belonged to this category. Table 11 illustrates misuses and omissions of comparatives and superlatives found and their frequency.

Sub-categories	Examples	Sources of error	Frequency
1.8.1: Misuse of comparative	<i>You will be more happy</i> (Participant 9-University 3)	Lack of proficiency	24 errors (0,3%),
1.8.2: Misuse of superlative	<i>We don't help others to get that job because we think we are most important than them</i> (Participant 17-University 1)	Intralingual error	12 errors (0,1%)
1.8.3: Omission of comparative particle	<i>Not just today but as well [ as ] in the past</i> (Participant 3-University 2)	Lack of proficiency	14 errors (0,2%).

Table 11: Subcategories, examples, sources of error and frequency for category 1.8

#### 4.2.9. Category 1.9: Wrong word order

It is the incorrect placement of words in the utterance. Some English learners often make errors in ordering the words, most of the times they are confused with the placement of the different types of speech in the utterance (Hevny, 2013). This category showed a total frequency of 175 errors (2,1%). Table 12 demonstrates an error in the placement of words.

Examples	Sources of error
<i>You have to be clear about what are you going to study</i> (Participant 6-University 1)	Intralingual error

Table 12: Example and source of error for category 1.9

## 4.2.10. Category 1.10: Prepositions

According to Greenbaum and Nelson (2002), prepositions introduce a prepositional phrase (Prep.Phr.), and are followed by a prepositional complement. The preposition links the complement, which is usually a noun, to some other expression. A total frequency of 549 errors (6,5%) showed the category of *Prepositions*. Table 13 evidences the participants' errors found in this category and their frequency.

Sub-Categories	Examples	Sources of error	Frequency
1.10.1: Misuse in Prep. Phr.	<i>Cooperation between participants</i> (Participant 4-University 1)	Intralingual error	102 errors (1,2%)
1.10.2: Misuse in collocations	<i>What you do is not reducing the stress of thinking in the future</i> (Participant 2-University 3)	Interlingual error	123 errors (1,5%)
1.10.3: Omission of Prep. in the Prep.Phr.	<i>[ In ] today's world, slavery is no longer accepted</i> (Participant 7-University 1)	Carelessness	75 errors (0,9%)
1.10.4: Overuse of preposition	<i>You have to study in a career that you like</i> (Participant 11-University 3)	Lack of proficiency	79 errors (0,9%)
1.10.5: Omission of preposition in phrasal verb	<i>Companies look [ for ] the ability</i> (Participant 3-University 1)	Carelessness	12 errors (0,1%)
1.10.6: Omission of preposition in collocation	<i>We all cooperate [ with ] each other</i> (Participant 4-University 1)	Lack of proficiency	45 errors (0,5%)
1.10.7: Omission of preposition in to-infinitive	<i>They have to spend a big part of their time studying something they do not want [ to ]</i> (Participant 11-University 3)	Interlingual error	71 errors (0,8%)
1.10.8: Overuse of preposition in to-infinitive	<i>All these factors make students to be more demotivated and stressed</i> (Participant 10-University 3)	Intralingual error	42 errors (0,5%)

Table 13: Subcategories, examples, sources of error and frequency for category 1.10

#### 4.2.11 Category 1.11: Adverbs

Straus, Kaufman and Stern (2014) state that an adverb answers how, when, where, or to what extent—how often or how much (e.g., *daily, completely*) by means of the use of adverbs of direction, location, manner, time, and frequency. A total of 46 errors (0,5%) were associated with this category. Table 14 exhibits errors and their frequency associated with the category of Adverbs.

Sub-categories	Examples	Sources of error	Frequency
1.11.1: Misuse of adverb	<i>They did not help others where there was a problem</i> (Participant 12-University 3)	Lack of proficiency	14 errors (0,2%)
1.11.2: Omission of adverb	<i>In the past, the most important skills looked for [ when ] getting a job</i> (Participant 1-University 4)	Lack of proficiency	21 errors (0,3%)
1.11.3: Overuse of adverb	<i>Society, whether you believe it or not, is a big factor when you want to choose something. As a good example of society as a big factor: our fashion...</i> (Participant 18-University 1)	Lack of proficiency	11 errors (0,1%)

Table 14: Subcategories, examples, sources of errors and frequency for category 1.11

#### 4.2.12. Category 1.12: Adjectives

An adjective describes or denotes the qualities of something. Their function is to modify or complement nouns (Celce-Murcia and Larsen-Freeman, 1999). 79 errors were identified as adjectival ones (0,9%), and 3 as *misuse of adjective* (0,0%). Table 15 illustrates errors of this category and their frequency.

Sub-categories	Examples	Sources of error	Frequency
1.12.1: Misuse of adjective	<i>We feel inspired everyday of our life</i> (Participant 5-University 3)	Lack of proficiency	3 errors (0,0%)
1.12.2: Misuse of possessive adjective	<i>It encloses the person on his/her own</i> (Participant 13-University 4)	Lack of proficiency	51 errors (0,6%)
1.12.3: Misuse of demonstrative Adjective	<i>But for me these reason is not important</i> (Participant 7-University 3)	Carelessness	21 errors (0,3%)
1.12.4: Omission of adjective	<i>Every sacrifice will be worth if we can make the [ right ] decision</i> (Participant 14-University 4)	Carelessness	4 errors (0,0%)

Table 15: Subcategories, examples, sources of error and frequency for category 1.12

## 4.2.13. Category 1.13: Pronouns

Pronouns are words that refer to nouns previously mentioned in order to avoid redundancy or repetition, also they must agree in both number and person to their antecedents. The grammatical category of *Pronouns* exhibited a total frequency of 255 errors (3,0%). Table 16 depicts errors of omission and overuse of object pronoun, misuse and overuse of subject pronoun, misuse and omission of reflexive pronoun, omission and misuse of demonstrative pronouns and finally overuse and misuse of indefinite pronoun found along the academic essays.

Sub-categories	Examples	Sources of error	Frequency
1.13.1: Omission of object pronoun	<i>Society, whether you believe [ it ] or not</i> (Participant 18-University 1)	Interlingual error	38 errors (0,5%)
1.13.2: Misuse of subject pron.	<i>Because every job has it difficulties</i> (Participant 7-University 1)	Carelessness	91 errors (1,1%)
1.13.3: Overuse of subject pron.	<i>We can realize that demotivation it is a big factor</i> (Participant 10-University 3)	Intralingual error	11 errors (0,1%)
1.13.4: Misuse of reflexive pronoun	<i>Working in a career they do not like will stress themselves</i> (Participant 1-University 3)	Intralingual error	10 errors (0,1%)
1.13.5: Misuse of object pronoun	<i>Their decision will not affect him/her or others in a negative way</i> (Participant 13-University 4)	Lack of proficiency	43 errors (0,5%)
1.13.6: Overuse of object pronoun	<i>Every sacrifice will be worth it</i> (Participant 14-University 4)	Intralingual error	10 errors (0,1%)
1.13.7: Omission of reflexive pron.	<i>You do not motivate [ yourself ] to study</i> (Participant 6-University 3)	Interlingual error	4 errors (0,0%)
1.13.8: Omission of demonstrative pronoun	<i>People who say that choosing subjects you are interested in instead of [ those ] that can prepare you do not think that you...</i> (Participant 1-University 4)	Lack of proficiency	5 errors (0,1%)
1.13.9: Misuse of demonstrative pronoun	<i>When people share their ideas, they can complement them through feedback or modifying this with ideas from other colleagues</i> (Participant 8-University 4)	Lack of proficiency	14 errors (0,2%)

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1.13.10: Misuse of indefinite pron.	<i>One cannot force ourselves to be something we are not</i> (Participant 18-University 4)	Carelessness	23 errors (0,3%)
1.13.11: Overuse of indefinite pron.	<i>People prefer their own success rather than other's one</i> (Participant 11-University 3)	Lack of proficiency	5 errors (0,1%)

Table 16: Subcategories, examples, sources of error and frequency for category 1.13

#### 4.2.14. Category 1.14: Omission of conditional

A conditional sentence is a complex sentence that consists of a main clause and a subordinate clause; the latter typically begins with the adverbial subordinator *if*. The *if*-clause sets up the condition, and the main clause gives the result (Celce-Murcia and Larsen-Freeman, 1999). 11 errors (0,1%) were associated with *Omission of conditional*. Table 17 shows an error of *omission of conditional* found in the samples.

Examples	Sources of error
<i>Others prefer to keep strong and continue their studies even [ if ] they failed many times</i> (Participant 11-University 1)	Lack of proficiency

Table 17: Example and source of error for category 1.14

#### 4.2.15. Category 1.15: Genitive case

The genitive case is normally used for people, some living creatures, and things. The category of *Genitive case* exhibited a frequency of 61 errors (0,7%). Table 18 depicts errors of omission, misuse and overuse of genitive case and their frequency occurring in the academic essays.

Sub-categories	Examples	Sources of error	Frequency
1.15.1: Omission of genitive case.	<i>If you take someone[ ' ]s advice, it may affect your future very negatively</i> (Participant 13-University 4)	Lack of proficiency	46 errors (0,5%)
1.15.2: Misuse of genitive case.	<i>In addition to this, encouraging empathy and recognising other's [others'] strengths and weaknesses is the mainstream posture in the present days</i> (Participant 2-University 3)	Carelessness	4 errors (0,0%)
1.15.3: Overuse of genitive case.	<i>Your own opinion is more important than other's people advices</i> (Participant 13-University 4)	Lack of proficiency	11 errors (0,1%)

Table 18: Subcategories, examples, sources of error and frequency for category 1.15

#### 4.3. Dimension two: Lexical dimension

Table 19 shows the categorization, and their resultant frequencies and percentages, provided for the *Lexical dimension*. These data correspond to the total errors of all the samples. Overall, the *Lexical dimension* shows that the most frequent errors committed by pre-service teachers are: 1. *Wrong word form*, 2. *Wrong word choice*, 3. *Number inconsistency* and 4. *Redundancy*.

Dimension	Category		Frequency	Percentage
2. Lexical	2.1	Misselection of prefix	4	0,0%
	2.2	Borrowing	11	0,1%
	2.3	Coinage	110	1,3%
	2.4	Calque or Literal Translation	48	0,6%
	2.5	Wrong word form	434	5,2%
	2.6	Wrong word choice	353	4,2%
	2.7	Redundancy	262	3,1%
	2.8	Collocation	5	0,1%
	2.9	Word does not exist	3	0,0%
	2.10	Number inconsistency	265	3,2%
	Total		1495	17,8%

Table 19: *Lexical Dimension. Categories, frequencies and percentages*

##### 4.3.1. Category 2.1: Misselection of prefix

Straus *et al.* (2014) mention that a prefix (*a-, un-, de-, sub-, post-, etc.*) is a letter or set of letters placed before a root word. Prefixes expand or change a word's meaning. A total of 4 errors (0,0%) belonged to this category. Table 20 illustrates an error of *misselection of prefix* found in one of the participants' academic essay.

Examples	Sources of error
<i>desmotivate</i> [instead of <i>demotivate</i> ] (Participant 6-University 3)	Interlingual error

Table 20: *Example and sources of error for category 2.1*

##### 4.3.2. Category 2.2: Borrowing

In *borrowing* (loanwords), L1 words are borrowed to the target language, but there is no significant change (Andre, 2014; Hemchua and Schmitt, 2006). 11 errors (0,1%) were associated with *Borrowing*. Table 21 demonstrates an error of *borrowing*.

Examples	Sources of error
<i>enfasis</i> [instead of <i>emphasis</i> ] (Participant 7-University 1)	Interlingual error

Table 21: *Example and source of error for category 2.2*

#### 4.3.3. Category 2.3: Coinage

When *coinage* happens the learner creates non-existent words in the target language, which are adapted from L1 words (Andre, 2014). *Coinage* exhibited a frequency of 110 errors (1,3%). Table 22 displays an error of *coinage* committed by a participant.

Examples	Sources of error
<i>especific</i> [instead of <i>specific</i> ] (Participant 1-University 3)	Interlingual error

Table 22: *Example and source of error for category 2.3*

#### 4.3.4. Category 2.4: Calque or literal translation

In *calque*, the words in the target language are the result of literal translation from the first language (Andre, 2014). This category reported a frequency of 48 errors (0,6%). Table 23 illustrates an error of *calque or literal translation*.

Examples	Sources of error
<i>cold mind</i> [instead of <i>cool head</i> ] (Participant 6-University 1)	Interlingual error

Table 23: *Example and source of error for category 2.4*

#### 4.3.5. Category 2.5: Wrong word form

It is an inappropriate choice of inflectional form where its base form is correct (Mahan, 2013). 434 errors (5,2%) were found in this category. Table 24 presents an error of word form.

Examples	Sources of error
<i>Returning to the subject of study subjects</i> [instead of <i>studying</i> ] (Participant 16-University 1)	Interlingual error

Table 24: *Example and source of error for category 2.5*

#### 4.3.6. Category 2.6: Wrong word choice

The writer chooses a wrong word to express his or her ideas, thus the sentence is perceived as illogical (Basir *et al.*, 2015). 553 errors (4,2%) were classified as *wrong word choice*. Table 25 depicts an error of *wrong word choice* made by the participants.

Examples	Sources of error
<i>they were more joined than now</i> [instead of <i>close-knit</i> ] (Participant 11-University 3)	Interlingual error

Table 25: Example and source of error for category 2.6

#### 4.3.7. Category 2.7: Redundancy

According to Basir *et al.* (2015), *redundancy* occurs when the lexical item in the sentence is repeated, used or paraphrased unnecessarily. *Redundancy* revealed a frequency of 262 (3,1%). Table 26 depicts an error of *redundancy* committed.

Example	Sources of error
<i>due to the fact that that we are inserted in a society</i> (Participant 18-University 4)	Carelessness

Table 26: Example and source of error for category 2.7

#### 4.3.8. Category 2.8: Collocation

Mahan (2013) states that a collocation consists of a node word (*tea*) and its collocate (*strong*). The node word and collocate are so inter-dependent that if two words which cannot collocate with each other are combined, dissonance is created between the node word and its collocate (*muscular/ sturdy/ tough tea\**). 5 errors are declared as belonging to *collocation* types (0,1%). Table 27 shows an error in the use of *collocation*.

Example	Sources of error
<i>It will be present in every step you make to accomplish all the objectives that you want to achieve</i> [instead of <i>take</i> ] (Participant 6-University 1)	Lack of proficiency

Table 27: Example and source of error for category 2.8

#### 4.3.9. Category 2.9: Word does not exist

This refers to the invention of a word that does not exist in the EFL nor in the L1. Table 28 illustrates one error of a word invented identified in one of the academic writing essays. 3 words that do not exist were listed (0,0%).

Examples	Sources of error
<i>Worthing</i> (Participant 15-University 4)	Lack of proficiency

Table 28: *Example and source of error for category 2.9*

#### 4.3.10. Category 2.10: Number inconsistency

It addresses lack of number agreement and usually occurs when singular, plural or collective words are used with the wrong number inflection in relation to their context. Table 29 presents an error of *number inconsistency*. 265 number inconsistencies were noted (3,2%).

Examples	Sources of error
<i>Men used to be more respectful when addressing a women</i> (Participant 14-University 4)	Carelessness

Table 29: *Example and source of error for category 2.10*

### 5. DISCUSSION

Based on the collected data and by reviewing the study findings, it is shown that the participants had the greatest difficulty and highest frequency of errors in the *Grammatical dimension*, in which the pre-service teachers' proficiency in applying the grammar rules was deficient due to the misuse, overuse and omissions of the correct English structures. The *Lexical dimension* was the one with the lowest frequency of errors, attributing the majority of errors mainly to the mother tongue interference and lack of proficiency in English.

In the *Grammatical dimension*, the following linguistic categories are mentioned in decreasing order of frequency: *Prepositions, Verb group, Lack of concord, Articles, Subjects, Pronouns, Modal/auxiliaries, Wrong word order, Relative pronouns, Adjectives, Genitive case, Comparative and superlative, Adverbs, Conjunctions* and *Omission of conditional*.

*Prepositions* had the most frequent errors, and they were attributed to the wrong use, omission, and the possible confusion that some of the participants could have in choosing the correct item to build an accurate utterance. Hariri (2012), in his study of *Taxonomy of Morpho-Syntactic Errors and Error Analysis* with Iranian ESL learners, found out that prepositions were the most frequent errors as well. In the case

of the *Verb group*, the errors found consisted of the wrong selection of some verbs; this means that the participants had difficulty in using the correct inflection of verbs in some of the cases, making tenses awkward. Singh, Singh, Razak, and Ravinthar (2017) explain that: “it is well understood that students with adequate understanding of grammar rules in writing will use the correct tenses to explain facts and other details of the stimuli” (p. 22).

The linguistic categories of *Adjectives, Genitive case, Comparatives and superlatives, Adverbs, Conjunctions* and *Omission of conditional* showed the lowest frequency of errors per category; less than 80. From the examples analyzed in these categories, almost all the errors found were attributed to a *Lack of proficiency* and *Carelessness*. *Intralingual* and *Interlingual sources* were attached to the misuse of *Comparatives and superlatives* as the exceptions, and, in one example, the use of the wrong conjunction was attributed to the *Interlingual source*. Most of the categories and their corresponding errors found in the examples chosen, denoted that despite the difficulty that participants had in applying grammatical rules correctly, most errors could be avoided with a more exhaustive revision of the writings.

Regarding the *Lexical dimension*, it is shown that the participants made most of the errors in the categories of *Wrong word form* and *Wrong word choice*. This finding implies that the writers' English vocabulary was weak, choosing wrong words when trying to convey meaning. A wrong word choice happened when writers used a wrong word to express an idea, producing meaningless sentences. The following categories are, in decreasing order of frequency: *Number inconsistency, Redundancy, Coinage, Calque or literal translation, Borrowing, Collocation, Misselection of prefix* and *Word does not exist*.

According to the researchers' assumptions, the lexical types of errors found in this research could be attributed mostly to *Interlingual interference* and *Lack of English proficiency*, as they denote an underdeveloped body of knowledge about vocabulary on the part of the participants. Wells (2013) states that “an important part of knowing a word is when, where, and how to use it” (p. 69). In these cases, participants failed on using an accurate word when trying to express an idea, relying on their mother tongue by translating items or using words whose meanings were not completely known by them and by writing words that were phonologically similar, but not in significance. All of these are strategies used by writers to cope with their insufficient knowledge of the target language, as well as fossilized errors.

## 6. CONCLUSION

This study has been held in order to identify which are the most frequent types of error committed by Chilean pre-service teachers of English, along with acknowledging which the sources of these errors are. The corpus of this research is based on participants' argumentative essays.

According to the results of the study, the highest frequency of errors was found in the *Grammatical* (36,1%; F = 3031) dimension, this considering the total of 8393

errors found. The categories with the highest recurrence of errors in this dimension were: *Prepositions* (F = 549); *Verb group* (F = 458); and *Concord problems* (F = 366). It is also important to notice that a frequency of 302 errors was found in the *Subject* category, the majority being omissions of subjects. Specifically, learners were more likely to have issues with the selection of verb tenses, subject-verb agreement, misuse of prepositions in prepositional phrases and collocations, and the omission of the subject.

On the same line, Hariri (2012), in his study of Taxonomy of Morpho-Syntactic Errors and Error Analysis with Iranian ESL learners, found out that prepositions were also the most frequent errors among participants. In the case of the *Verb group*, the errors found consisted of the wrong selection of some verbs. This means that the participants had difficulty in using the correct inflection of verbs in some instances, making the use of tenses awkward. Singh, *et al.* (2017) explain that “it is well understood that students with adequate understanding of grammar rules in writing will use the correct tenses to explain facts and other details of the stimuli” (p. 22). Lack of concord refers to the errors committed by the students due to the inability to choose the suitable subject-verb agreement. One of the examples selected from the Chilean corpus showed that some of the participants lacked linguistic knowledge by confusing the plural noun people with a collective noun, and consequently, they used *is* instead of *are*. This type of confusion is more frequent than expected; other participants committed an error because they failed at mastering indefinite pronouns, resulting in confusion at the moment of choosing the appropriate verb. Articles were also considered as one of the most frequent errors committed by the participants; it is noteworthy that many of the examples showed clear evidence of carelessness when omitting and misusing the indefinite and definite articles, given the fact that other sentences along the same essay were well-written.

Other errors were attributed to the Interlingual source, especially when participants placed the definite article *the* before an abstract noun. According to Lahuerta (2017), the use of an article in Spanish is compulsory; that is why some learners keep facing problems in this area. Errors in the subject part were made in terms of omission and overuse, they were attached to the Intralingual and Interlingual sources because, based on the examples and their contexts, participants failed to apply the accurate structure by repeating the subject where it should not be; Another example related to the this category demonstrated L1 interference because the participant deleted a necessary subject in the sentence, probably thinking about the structure in his mother tongue, resulting in omission of the subject. According to L1 interference in writing, Company (2017) affirms that “native speakers of Spanish often use subjectless sentences because in Spanish the pronoun can be omitted” (p. 7).

Another category that showed a frequency of errors higher than 100 was *Word order*. Empirical evidence reveals that Spanish native speakers tend to confuse the positions of some words when translating into English due to the syntactic rules of their own language. This fact is supported by Williams (2003), who affirms that sentences are usually translated word by word. He stated that, when misplacing a word, it can be attributed to the *Interlingual interference*; however, the examples in



our study are associated with the *Intralingual source* and pre-service teachers' lack of proficiency. Regarding the category of *Relative pronouns*, it can be said that despite the proficiency level required from the participants, sometimes the construction of a relative clause may be difficult. Alotaibi (2016) affirms this idea by stating that "processing English sentences, especially those which contain embedded clauses is particularly difficult to ESL/EFL learners around the globe" (p. 57). The participants had difficulty when using the word *that* and *what*, as they failed at differentiating how both words functioned in the sentences.

The lexical types of errors found in this research could be attributed mostly to Interlingual interference and Lack of English proficiency, as they denote an underdeveloped body of knowledge about vocabulary on the part of the participants. Wells (2013) highlighted that "an important part of knowing a word is when, where, and how to use it" (p. 69). In these cases, participants failed to use an accurate word when trying to express an idea, relying on their mother tongue by translating items or using words whose meanings were not completely known by them and by writing words that were phonologically similar, but not in meaning. All of these are strategies used by writers to cope with their insufficient knowledge of the target language, and fossilized errors.

All of this analysis exhibits that preservice teachers of English in Chile have more problems when it comes to actually putting in practice what they have learnt, rather than having a low language proficiency level; probably this occurs due to a lack of usage of the communicative functions in a context where they will be more accurate, such as the essays evaluated. In addition, the most recurrent lexical errors were those related to wrong word forms (F = 434), showing the poor ability to develop word families, area which could be easily improved through the constant practice in constructing the patterns involved. Moreover, the wrong word choice category (F = 353) results demonstrated that learners do not master the knowledge of vocabulary that they should as future teachers of English, since most of the errors were due to a lack of word knowledge, that is to say that the learners do not understand the boundaries for the usage of certain meanings and position them in any context. This point may be strongly related to a poor existing corpus of vocabulary in the mother tongue. According to the *Centro de Microdatos de la Universidad de Chile* (2011), Chileans have not proven to be avid readers in their own language, so it is reasonable to assume that this might be the case in their target language. The association of reading with the abilities needed to create a proficient written composition is often thoroughly researched, and educationally speaking there is a constant need for improving reading and writing among learners.

One of the first considerations for EFL teacher preparation is that preservice teachers may not have received sufficient feedback, which, according to Ur (1996), is information that is given to the learner about his or her performance of a learning task, usually with the objective of improving this performance. Some typical ways of giving feedback in written works are: Commenting, underlying, indicating by means of code and correcting. Wu and Garza (2014) state that teachers should consider that overemphasis on errors can frustrate students; that is why, it is recommended



that teachers reinforce contents identified as deficient in a non-threatening way. Undoubtedly, appropriate feedback is essential for both teachers and learners when it comes to progression, as it provides key information to improve academic written compositions. Therefore, it is important to promote revising, editing and proofreading when regarding written compositions.

Policies on improving writing skills in English among preservice teachers should not be excluded from the ones related to reading because writing is improved along with the reading competence. Furthermore, these policies should be complemented by vocabulary comprehension because learners clearly displayed a lack of sufficient word knowledge to be able to express coherent and cohesive ideas. Besides discursive abilities, there is another element quite important to the creation of sound argumentative essays, that is critical thinking.

Another pedagogical implication of this study links to how teachers and educational communities regard errors and their treatment. Error analysis should be definitely implemented among all schooling levels because it promotes metacognitive skills. Students exposed to meaningful feedback provided by error analysis would more likely become aware of how their linguistic development occurs. This would call for contextualized language syllabi according to the learners' essential needs. Finally, when analyzing errors in pre-service teachers' written compositions, it is necessary to develop teaching practices that promote a thorough analysis of the different types of errors produced in writing, and provide better understanding of the errors and how and why they occur.

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