

**An Investigation into the Article System (definite, indefinite, zero articles)
of Graduate/Master ESL Learners of Pakistan**

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Abstract

To investigate the nature of the writing skill problems of graduate learners, two fifty graduate male and female learners randomly selected from five universities were asked to complete two writing skill tasks: Rational deletion and open composition test. The English article system is considered very complicated for second language learners. The study is related to the research question: What is the frequency of errors of ESL graduate learners in their writing skills? (a) Articles. It is investigated that article overuse and article omission are the common problems for ESL. Besides, students deem article system quite tricky to use in their writing. It is observed that errors are because of the interference of L1 in L2. Besides, the final results of the two tests showed that articles (definite, indefinite, zero article) are quite problematic for ESL learners. This study also explores the unnecessary insertion of zero articles. The learners usually overgeneralize the definite article and they try to put articles on the same patterns of L1 which ultimately leads them towards errors. The aim of this study is to pinpoint the reasons of learner's

committing errors. The study tends to suggest changes in the existing pedagogical methods, curriculum and syllabus designing.

Keywords: definite articles, indefinite articles, zero articles, interference of L1 in L2

Introduction

In second language writing, proficiency requires mastery in various areas such as grammar, vocabulary and function words (articles) which are widely used as standard criteria to evaluate any piece of writing task. ESL learners often lack ability to perform in an effective way. They repeatedly commit errors in various writing skill tasks. In Pakistan, this is hundred percent true in the case of L2 learners studying in public sector colleges. For instance, the study conducted by Hussain, Hanif, Asif, Rehman (2013) regarding the writing skill errors of Pakistani ESL undergraduate learners of public sector colleges specified that the learners make many types of errors such as verb, word choice, subject omission, articles, passive voice etc. in their writing skill. The crucial role played by errors cannot be disregarded because errors reflect the learner's journey towards amelioration. On the other hand, most teachers are unacquainted of the importance of errors and behave negatively towards them. In the writing skills of ESL learners, many research studies such as (Ferris, 1995) made a stress on a wide range of features such as grammar, word choice, idea, orthography rhetoric and organization. These studies suggest that teachers can impede the learners' error occurrence if they become conscious and operate upon them. As a result, this can be effective for teachers, test constructors, syllabus designers and many others. Particularly in Pakistani context, this is indispensable where studies in second language writing skill difficulties of ESL learners are comparatively very few.

English language has great significance; it has close relation with all fields such as science, humanities and social science, trade, commerce, diplomacy etc. (Mueen, 1992). In Pakistan, it has acquired a privileged status as a second compulsory language on account of its international significance. Moreover, it is taught as a compulsory subject in our institutions from school to college levels. Among the four skills of English language, reading, writing, speaking and listening, the skill of writing is more complicated than those of reading, listening and speaking as it requires much concentration on the part of the ESL learners. It is an improvised activity; therefore, explicit instruction is necessary to learn this skill. It requires conscious toil and practice from ESL learners to secure better grades in examination. Reading and writing skills go hand in hand in our schools and colleges but speaking skill is not given as much attention because it does not have any major

role in the examination. The students especially at intermediate level face problems in English language writing skill.

For the researchers, second language learning has been very interesting vast and fertile field. Several research studies were conducted to focus on the various kinds of grammatical errors in ESL learners' writing skill studying at college level (Belhaj, 1997) scrutinized the errors of Malay students in a corpus of seventy two written essays by using Corder's (1967) error analysis model. The errors are in the area of prepositions, verb tense, word choice, and singular/plural and subject-verb agreement. Moreover, Ridha (2012) has conducted the study on eighty EFL college students and the results of this study showed that a number of learners rely on L1 to express their ideas but she also explained that the rating of these samples reported various types of errors. But the most frequent errors among these were related to grammar and mechanics. In the recent study of Hassan and Swalmeh (2013) regarding with the errors of thirty two ESL undergraduate male students studying at the university of Ha'il; the analysis of written essays of these learners indicated that they committed ten frequent errors in the process of the writing for example prepositions, word order, verb tense, articles and subject-verb agreement, Pakistani ESL learners also make a lot of errors in their writing skill. In order to develop English language writing skill in ESL learners and make them proficient is very important so that they may write essays or anything proficiently. In the present era, learning English language writing skill has become the academic and social need of the students. At international level, effective communication has become essential in the present epoch because the world is varying quickly into a global village. Communities of the world are coming closer to one another and they also exchange their concepts and ideas. To Brown (2000), each and every way of our life is influenced when we go beyond the limits of our L1 and plunge into a new language and we see there a new culture, new thinking, feeling and acting. In the current situation, Brown has emphasized the significance of second language. Writing skill is not limited to the shackles of time and place rather the writer is dependent on formal rules to convey his intended meaning. If the writer does not have capability to use these formal features in an exact way, he has to face various complexities. To be proficient in second language, it is necessary to have knowledge of formal rules. According to Richards (1974), it is generally surveyed that even the most motivated and competent learners commit errors even if they learn by the most experienced teachers in appropriate conditions. To make errors is an inevitable fact of learning and to improve the performance, grades and final results of

ESL learners, it is obligatory for the teachers to investigate and evaluate the errors of ESL learners, so that they can write flawlessly.

Problem Statement

In Pakistan, English language occupies a privileged position because of its being an effective medium of communication both at local levels and international circles. The learners still have serious problems in articles. Moreover, the lecturers and professors instead of inculcating creative potential, they force the ESL learners to mug up ready-made material from the substandard help books e.g. essays and other questions. But we cannot replace a teacher with books and internet. In this way, this study is conducted to investigate this problem in the domain of one of the functional words.

Purpose of the study

The researcher's aim is also to find out which linguistic feature is more problematic to the learners in their writing skill. To provide implications for the improvement of ESL learners' performance is the ultimate object of the researcher. In order to have an access towards the problematic area of the ESL learners; two performance-based tests were conducted.

Methodology

This section briefly discusses the methodology used in the present study: nature of study, research design, population and sample and instrument used in data collection procedure.

Research Design

The researches use descriptive research design, without any manipulation of the subjects and the related factors. It is a contextualized and problem solving research study.

Population and Sample

The population of the present study comprises the students doing their Bachelor and Masters studies in both public/private sectors universities of Punjab, Pakistan. The sample comprised two hundred and fifty male and female students from medical and non-medical both arts and science groups were selected following quasi- random sampling technique.

Research Instruments

Two types of tests were used as instruments to collect data from the graduate ESL learners. The first test was a controlled discussion question that was to be answered in an essay form entitled "The Blast in Peshawar"; the second test was rational deletion test in which students were asked

to put necessary articles. Besides, they were asked to point out carefully definite, indefinite and zero articles.

Literature review

Functional problems for ESL learners

The area of L2 has been a productive field for many researchers. Error analysis is an important part of it, (Makoni, 1993, pp97-107). In L2, the writing has grammatical and rhetorical errors. Myles' (2002:10) exact analysis is that it depends on proficiency level, if the text is creative and rich in contents, there is greater possibility for errors at the morpho-syntactic level. Function words do not carry complete lexical meaning and they are actually a closed class of words that do not carry complete lexical meaning. Moreover, they have linguistically a grammatical as well as functional role. This class comprises on pronouns, articles, prepositions, conjunctions and auxiliary verbs. In both English and German, they set an enormous frequency words which are short (predominantly monosyllabic). Principally in childhood, the words on which lack of fluency is observed are function words (Bloodstein & Grossman, 1981). In English, the function words are unstressed words and they have a high frequency. They are simpler phonologically than content words. (Conture, 1990). At the outset, it was the widespread conviction about language errors which are occurred by the transformation from one language to another, some considerable studies have been conducted by Richard (1971) in the sphere of learner's errors. Richard was the pioneer to break new grounds in this framework who robustly refuted this certainty that L1 interference is accountable for learner's errors. The miscellaneous types of errors have been put forward, for instance, prepositions, articles, distribution and production of verb groups and the use of questions. He is of the view that a number of learner's errors are because of the process of language acquisition and the mutual interference of the items of their target language. According to Sattayatham and Honsa (2007), on native language, there is a moderate influence related to L2. Approximately, it is 3.25% when the errors are committed by the learners. In this study, Honsa and Sattayatham concentrated on the intermediate students who belong to four medical schools at Mahidol University. In this research, there were 237 enrolled students focused to translate Thai sentences into English. Ten most frequent errors were found out of these participants: question tag, order of adjectives, there is/are, direct/indirect speech, passive voice, verb of feelings, reported speech, past tense, past perfect and subject-verb agreement. Kim (1987) conducted a research on twelfth grade students and pointed out 2455

errors in different domains. The data analysis pointed out 287 errors in preposition and 491 errors in “be” auxiliaries. In addition, preposition as a functional category poses difficulties in the writing skill of ESL learners because they are highly confusing in their use of correct prepositions. English has 60 to 70 prepositions (Koffi, 2010, p, 297). Usually, L2 learners face problems in writing text when they get confuse to put an accurate preposition. El-Sayed (1982) analyzed that students committed 1140 errors in grammatical domain. For instance, 159 errors were related to the pronouns, 640 errors to verbs, 143 to the articles and rest of the errors fall into the category of nouns, prepositions and adjectives.

Principles and Parameters

In the foreground, it is (2008, 1999) related to second language acquisition, the implication of universal grammar is a consequence of its impact, because every language is governed by rules called “principals” and language-specific rules are often considered “parameters”. Children learn the parameters of their language and internalize them because the ability to learn language is innate. So, an adult attempts to “reset” these parameters to learn a second language (Fromkin, Rodman, & Hyams, 2007). However, students consciously or unconsciously overgeneralize the rules when they learn another language. During this process, the students mostly form what is considered an ‘interlanguage grammar’. Lydia White (2003) observed that while learning a second language, students commit many errors which are rule-governed but not random as well as do not appear in the L1 and L2. According to this theory, they have to access UG to ‘reset’ the parameters of first language to learn the new language. Although they commit errors but their errors are governed according to UG. However, they are accessing UG in order to learn a new language but they have to apply certain rules from L1 into the L2 (target language) which is called phenomenon of learning transfer (James, 2007). To Jie (2008) it can be helpful and harmful. Moreover the transfer leads towards interference or negative transfer. In relation to prepositions, students make various mistakes due to their language background. Moreover, such errors clarify the roots of their mistakes. As a teacher and educator, it is our duty to analyze the student’s errors. In this way, we can present prepositions and any grammatical unit accurately and successfully (Jie, 2008).

Corder (1973) attempted to categorize errors into four main classifications: (1) disordering (2) omission (3) substitution (4) addition. According to James (1998), the causes of errors can be the mother tongue (L1 influence). Moreover, prepositional system of Urdu and English languages

and a moderate version of contrastive analysis hypothesis are used by both Fries (1995) and Lado (1957). This hypothesis consists of a comparison between language to be learned and system of the native language which predicts about the possible difficulties in learning. Along with this, preposition offers sentence and spice in order to convey complete message and make sense. English has 60 to 70 prepositions that are of high frequency (Koffi, 2010, p, 297). In English, most of prepositions are monosyllabic half of them have two syllables. Furthermore, over 90 percent of prepositions usage is estimated to involve nine most frequently used prepositions: with, to, from, at, in, of, by, for and on. However, on the basis of their functions, prepositions can be categorized in this way, for example preposition of time (They will arrive at nine o' clock) instrument (He opened the drawer with key) direction (Ali has gone to market) and agent (The house was furnished by him). In English, prepositions occupy a large variety of meaning which depends upon the context as sometimes selection of specific preposition can change the actual meaning. Generally, prepositional errors can be found in both speech and writing on non-native learners which are called a major grammatical errors. Largely, the language learning process contains many errors which seem like other processes of acquiring any skill. In the process of discovering the language, a learner's errors are considered crucial as they unfold many procedures and strategies which are employed by the learner (Corder, 1981). It is observed that proper structure of Urdu in English is quite uncommon to find. A difference lies in the system of prepositions of Urdu and English. On the other hand, one preposition can reveal a many translations which seem to depend on context. Finally, when students try to speak or write anything; they consciously make an endeavor to find similar structures to Urdu in English. In this way, the prepositional knowledge of their L1 cannot be avoided. The learners cannot set an assumption of semantic equivalence is not possible between the L1 and L2 because it is ultimately push towards prepositional errors (Lam, 2009, P.3).

Content Words and Function Words

Fromkin, Rodman and Hyams (2007) define usage of content and function words very effectively. Initially, UG divides any language into five parts syntax, phonetics, phonology, semantics and morphology. The two main categories in syntax are function words and content words. Content words have adverbs, verbs, adjectives and nouns and also have semantic value and meaning. On the other hand, function words exist to create and define structural relations and grammatical links in which the content words may fit. Comparatively, they are much fewer in

number and have little meaning on their own than content word. Function words have conjunctions, pronouns and articles. Numerous linguists declare prepositions as function words (Fromkin, Rodman, & Hyams, 2007). Precisely, while doing categorization of prepositions as function words seems somewhat controversial this is dependent on research oriented agrammatic aphasia. Aphasia is normally the consequent of injury and disease just like a stroke which influences the specific domain of the brain that largely controls language according to A Dictionary of Psychology. The most renowned part of the brain is Wernicke's and Broca's. Particularly, the person's ability affected by agrammatic aphasia regarding the usage of function words as well as the organization of words in an accurate order (Aphasia , 2009). Karen Froud (2001) hypothesises supposedly that since preposition is categorized into function words, aphasia affects their usage. So prepositions are not considerably content words. After all she summed up, the difference between content and function words must be re-assessed (2001). Yosef Grodzinsky (1988) drew a similar result on agrammatic aphasia in his research. The sheer purpose of this debate is to highlight that even for linguists, prepositions are a tricky subject.

Description and Definition of Interlanguage

The term 'interlanguage' was invented by Selinker (1972). He pointed out many errors of second language learners might not be enumerated just looking at the structures of L1 and L2. Language rules of interlanguage system can be outcome of the transfer from the learner's L1. So Selinker targets the strategies employed by ESL learners to learn the second language. He is of the view that a group of speakers may have the same interlanguage and there can be a reciprocal intelligibility among such speakers who share the same interlanguage. So, it is the property of interlanguage that it is unstable and dynamic and it has constant element of change because when a learner approaches the target language, he reviews his language and his system of rules is subjected to change. Rutherford (1984) opines that the most unstable aspect of interlanguage is syntax. Interlanguage is a kind of language that is produced by the learners of foreign or second language. According to the researchers and teachers of L2, the language produced by the second language learners is different from their mother tongue and the target language; they deem this language to be ungrammatical and bad on account of its proliferation of errors. To stem (1983, p. 125), there was paid no heed to the features of the learner's language and the term interlanguage refers to the learner's second language at a particular time with its developmental aspects.

Nemser (1971) refers to interlanguage as “approximate’ system. Corder (1981, p. 116) calls it as ‘idiosyncratic’ or the learner’s ‘transitional competence’ or ‘transitional dialect’. He is of the view that the language of the learner is a kind of dialect that refers to the shared behavior of social groups and it has its own variability. These terms allude to the rule shared behavior of social groups and it has its own variability. These terms allude to the rule-governed system of interlanguage that the learner produced in the process of their development from mother tongue to the target language. Ellis (1985a, p. 229) considers interlanguage as a “series of interlocking system”. It can be inferred from what Selinker and Ellis say that interlanguage is an amalgam of the learner’s native and target language. Ellis (1985b, p.47) opines that interlanguage, ‘approximate systems’ allude to the structured system that is constructed by the learner himself; he refers to it as a series of interlocking systems. According to Bernard (1995, p. 85) interlanguage is the outcome of the internal creative efforts of the learner to produce the second language; it refers to the learner’s cognitive strategies and hypothesis with its variability. The interlanguage of the learner is systematic; it is rule governed and all learners go through the developing process of their interlanguage. He is of the opinion that mutual intelligibility cannot be deemed to be one of the characteristics that make a difference between interlanguages and other languages. Tarone (ibidi) describes interlanguage as a chameleon to reflect the variability of interlanguage. To Tarone (1979, 1982), the systematic variability of interlanguage system is reflected in different linguistic contexts which affect the learners’ use of syntactic, phonological and morphological structures.

Contrastive Analysis and Error Analysis

Lado mentioned in his book that the learner’s patterns of difficulty can be pointed out by making a relevant comparison between language and culture, culture and the native language. Such sort of exciting claims are an unequivocal reflection of student’s informal observation regarding errors. In the prediction of problems regarding foreign language, the differences between the structures of two languages (Target and Native language) can be helpful in this process. This type of comparison is called contrastive analysis. For the most part, CA emerged from Behaviorist psychology and structural linguistics. B.F Skinner (1957) along with other behaviorists agreed upon the repetition, habit formation, reinforcement and response. Skinner (1957) like other behaviorists observed language as stimulus, response and reinforcement. The principal such as negative and positive transfer, imitation, habit formation and reinforcement is

largely borrowed from psychology of learning. Kashavarz (2008) described that both structural linguists and behaviorists mutually agreed that the L1 interference with L2 was different from the native language. He further opines that during early childhood L1 habit is acquired which is largely deemed a maturation period. These schools of thought claimed that on the basis of CA some complex ways and patterns were prognosticated and they seemed to prefer drills.

CA contains numerous pedagogical values. In teaching foreign language after the world war second, it occupied a central position. At that time, to commit errors was considered a symbol of evil and for that reason the language instructors adopted the reversal approach towards learner's part. To Brooks (1960), we can make a try to avoid errors but their existence cannot be disregarded completely. The unpopularity of CA has a number of reasons. Keshavarz (2008) first of all stated that in L2 learning, numerous researchers have robustly refuted to substantiate interference and it cannot play a vital role at all. On the other hand, numerous errors have noticed which seem unable to play an attributive part towards the L1 of a learner. (Buteau, 1970). There are two prominent supporters Hakuta and Cancino (1977) described that a perilous cause is that CA fared poorly as well as anecdotal impressions from classrooms are not an apt method, therefore, it is supposed to collect data in a quite systematic and smooth way. On strong footings, CA analysis cannot be built as to its shortcomings (Wardhaugh, 1970), because it is unable to account for each error. And this is the main reason. Moreover, it presents an incomplete representation of the L2 which is not enough for ESL learners. Towards the study of errors, EA approach is considered as a reliable approach, because towards the student's preference, it is quite relevant. It cannot exclusively be restricted to linguistic interference. The researchers mutually approved EA that both languages have identical errors. So it is apparent that such type of errors cannot be accounted for as far as the CA is concerned. According to Keshavarz (2008), both researchers and teachers have minutely dealt with EA as a procedure by data collection detecting the errors, categorizing and classifying their nature. CA has the following assumptions: First, to commit errors is an unavoidable fact on the part of every learner. Secondly, for all errors mother tongue is not responsible for eternity. Corder (1967) stated that the researchers, learners and teachers can get possibly an enormous advantage from errors. Richard (1971) illustrated that errors have secured a great deal of significance not only for teachers but also for psycholinguists and linguists. EA focuses on the following pedagogical implications: a compositional class, hierarchy difficulty, contrastive observations, essential remedial program which carry an error

based teaching syllabus, preparation of the useful strategies for learning, enforcement for implication individually and the best implication for teaching methods.

Xie and Jiang (2007) argued that both in language teaching and learning, there are four related and fruitful aspects of error analysis. First of all, an overall knowledge of a teacher is obligatory about the errors of the learners in so far as the error analysis is concerned. Foreign language learning consists of hypothesis that the occurrence of errors is a fact. A teacher should ignore the students' local errors and tolerate them calmly. It is actually the hierarchy of errors which can make a teacher familiar about the progress of students towards their goal and what remains for them to learn. For teachers, their fruitful feedback is completely valuable; to perk up errors, however, a few remedial teaching programs can help to a great extent. Thirdly, occurrence of errors can be utilized to learn because it is considered a useful device towards learning. Last of all, errors must be handled to refute fossilization.

Keshavarz (2008) stated that regarding error analysis, there can be dependable outcomes of the remedial material. L2 errors can help to point out the grey areas of the students and their linguistic problems. The syllabus should be constructed in an apt organism which can deal all the errors. Therefore, errors can put forward some related and suitable clues to syllabus designers for what is proper for the learners. During a study, Ashton (2005) argues that regarding CA the raw nature of results can never be completely implemented to classroom to provide a useful insight for designing a material and give the linguistic background of the students. Apparently, such results of CA are not sufficient but they are aimed at monolingual issues for EFL teaching domain. Without the feedback of CA the whole data seems unreliable and unauthentic. Empirical errors revealed the precise and accurate details which assist to choose exercising sequencing material, remedial lesson, a pertinent prominence on particular linguistic component and achievement test with proficiency regarding content (Fisiak, 1981 & Richard, 1974).

As to the learners of English, a number of studies about language pairs have been conducted. In Russian English users, Light and Warshawsky (1974) observed the errors; Guildford (1998) published an article named 'English learner Interlanguage and Muhamed, Goh and Wan-Rose (2004) conducted research on English errors and on Chinese learners. On syntactic errors, along with these studies a devoted surveillance is made on it which is most usually committed by non-native learners. Such mistakes include the agreement and disagreement of subject-verb and the mishandling of determiners. Primarily, numerous studies about interlanguage confined their

scope to particular grammatical issues of English which have an influence of L1. To convinced examples, Vessileva (1998) viewed in certain languages such as German, French, Russian and Bulgarian an authorial presence of CA and Slabakova (2000) in English language investigated the telicity marking of L2 acquisition which has Bulgarian and Spanish native speakers. Yaung and Haung (2004) illustrated in L1 the impact of grammatical tense and in L2 the tense aspect system. Vigliocco, Butterworth and Garret (1996) study of errors in French and English were principally related to subject-verb agreement. Richards (1971) described the four basic reasons of intralingual errors: (a) teacher induce errors (b) overgeneralization (c) interference (d) strategies of communication and assimilation (e) marker of transitional competence (f) performance of errors. Keshavarz (2008) made a stress on: (1) intralingua and developmental errors (2) interlingual error (3) language learning strategies (4) transfer of training (5) communication strategies.

Importance of English Articles

For ESL learners, the English article system causes numerous problems because their first language does not have an equivalent article structure. As far as Pakistani ESL learners are concerned, their first language is Urdu which is article less language and this is why they frequently commit errors in this domain. A variety of techniques and approaches are used to overcome this difficulty: countability and identification of the specific usages of articles in English etc. Though the errors taking place in the use of articles in their communication process do not put any obstacle, a lot of learners have the feeling that the endeavors they have to do during this process of learning is greater than the benefits they can achieve. On the part of ESL learners, a high degree of accuracy is required in their academic writing. An accurate usage of article system indicates the writer's language competence, mastery and the exactness of thought and expression. In writing, the imperfect control of the writer on articles may lead towards imperfect knowledge and this impression shows that the writer does not have sufficient grip on his subject (Master, 1997, p. 216). To Hewson (1972, P. 131), in English discourse, there are ten most frequent words including definite and indefinite articles. Learners almost use articles in a random way (Yamada & Matsuura, 1982). A few teachers observed that English article system is too intricate to acquire for the learners; no formal rules can be taught to ESL learners. (Master, 1997, p.216) is of the view that formal instruction may put a positive influence as well as many teachers make available certain rules to the learners about the accurate usage of articles so that

they can comprehend in a better way. The use of articles is frequently engaged with academic writing but it seems to be complex to formulate certain rules.

Definite and Indefinite Articles

Articles are actually the determiners that not only have an effect on the actual meaning of the noun but also make it coherent by showing which thing is being pointed at (Alexander, 1998, p. 55). Thomson and Martinet (1986, pp. 15-22) categorize English articles into two categories, *definite* and *indefinite*. However, Quirk and Greenbaum (1987) add one more category: *zero* article. The English article system is difficult to ESL learners; one of the most appropriate ways to teach articles is the notion of countability. In English, nouns can be divided in English in two categories, *countable* and *uncountable*. But the problem still lies with the fact that a few of English nouns can be either countable or uncountable in accordance with their meaning such as *experience* (Quirk & Greenbaum, 1973, p. 61). Thus the perception of countability is deep-seated; it is not simple to overcome the problem in a straight way. Having identified a noun being countable or uncountable, its user should come to a decision if an article is required in a sentence or a phrase; it follows that the second criterion to determine the article usage is definiteness. Though there are languages that hold the concept of definiteness yet they do not have article system e.g. Chinese, Japanese, Urdu etc. (Ramsey, 1987, p. 66). The study of Liu and Gleason (2002, p. 16) specified the fact that the students at the outset perhaps overuse the article in spite of the instructions being given to them and eventually this overuse is overcome. Liu and Gleason (2002, p.5) is of the view that there may be generic and non-generic use of *the* and non-generic use that is also called as “cultural use” which is considered the most tedious for the learners. The indefinite articles, *a*, *an* being restricted to singular and countable nouns seem to be less complicated than definite article *the*. Bickerton (1981, p. 147) affirms that indefinite means unknown to the listener. So, indefinite articles are used with generic nouns. They may also be used with uncountable nouns (Master, 1997, p. 225) for a “boundary-creating effect” as for instance, “high-grade steel” that refers to steel of good quality. The identification issue is a problem whether a noun belongs to the countable or uncountable category for ESL (Master, 1997, p. 218).

Zero Articles

The zero articles may also be problematic for the ESL learners. For example, Master (1997, p. 221) divides the zero articles into two: the null article. It is phonetically null and it is used before

uncountable and plural nouns such as “sand” (There was sand on the beach everywhere). In this way, the use of Null articles is connected with singular countable nouns as well as with proper nouns. For the learners, another additional problem caused by the null article is its recurrent use in scientific writing (as in “use of this experiment implies...”). But the use of zero article lies in the situation where *a* and *the* is not used. There are situations where the probability of their usage lies. To Hewson (1972, p. 73), for instances: ‘A ring is a valuable ornament of gold’ and ‘The ring is a valuable ornament of gold’. The first one is the typical one and the second instance is general and universal. The construction Article + Noun + of with reference to definite or indefinite is used where something has already been mentioned as a singular amount or part of a whole. The zero articles were totally disregarded in the research of articles for several years. Because it was considered to require some prejudiced judgment to apprehend its occurrence. In the English language, the zero articles are the most recurrently occurring free morpheme (Master, 1997). A study of the zero article exploration has a prevailing methodological limitation in interlanguage which can determine whether the usage of zero articles is used intentionally or by mistake an overt article is simply left out. Master (1987) examined the English article system in connection with spoken acquisition.

Error Frequency Rate in English Article System

The article system is complex and context-dependent which sometimes cannot be summarized as simple rules. In English, the article system only consists of the following simple article words: *a/an* and *the* but an ample information lies in them. The frequent use of article makes them important in English. In a corpus of 20 million English words, the COBUILD performs a frequency count (Sinclair, 1991). The definite article *the* is the most frequent word with a frequent rate of 25%.¹, the indefinite article *a* is the fifth most frequent word with frequency rate of 10.5%. Some of researches investigate the studies regarding frequencies of *the*, *a* and the *zero* article in five written genres in a corpus consisting of a total of 197, 644 words. The result expose that the frequency order is *the*, *a* and *null* (48.0%, 36.3%, 15.7%). So, in English, null articles are the most frequently occurred article.

Challenges towards Articles

In L2 area, three points are focused: (1) the choice of tense and aspect, (2) the subject and verb agreement, and (3) the use of articles (*the*, *a*, *an*). The mistakes in agreement can be improved by proofreading and verb problems can be overcome but the problems with articles cannot be

handled like others. Articles rank among the five most common words in English language. In multilingual environments, learning L2 can be more challenging than language learning in other contexts. Articles in English are one of the key indicators of native speaker competence. The learners often remain unaware of their importance to English syntax (Lipski, 1978, p.13). Hewson (1972, p.132). The English article system is a *psycho-mechanism*, through which native speakers use articles. Since errors in the use of articles usually do not obstruct communication, many learners may consider that the attempt involved in learning the system is not proportionate to the benefits accrued (Master, 1997, p.216). Accuracy is required for academic writing, and the correct article becomes an indication not only of exactness in expression and thought but the mastery of language. As Master (1997, p. 216) points out that imperfect control may put forward an inadequate knowledge which leads towards the perception that the scholastic paper or the writer of a university essay does not have a sufficient grasp of their subject.

Contrastive analysis of article errors

Contrastive analysis (CA) is called a method of linguistic analysis which is concerned with a pair of languages and its foremost assumption is founded on the comparison of different languages. CA also includes contrastive grammar which identifies particular sphere of influence. In the classroom environment, inspecting the pedagogical role of CA explains that it is beneficial for presenting language materials and method of teaching and communication. There is a complexity in the usage of these articles in the classroom environment. In English, definite and indefinite articles are the most commonly used words. Through investigating definite and indefinite articles in both English and Persian languages, contrast lies in application and translation.

Acquisition of the English Article system in SLA

The acquisition of English article system has been studied comprehensively as it investigates learners from various [-ART] languages; Chinese (Zobal, 1982) Japanese, Korean and Polish. Linguists observed that the learners of [+ART] languages (e.g. Spanish and Greek) and of [-ART] languages and make obvious that the acquisition of articles is more challenging and problematic for learners of [-ART] languages (Zobal 1982). A number of previous studies have conducted regarding English grammar whether the learner's use of article is right or wrong. This type of interpretation is called the *comparative fallacy* (Bley- Vroman 1983. P. 4). For the students whose primary aim is to teach the English article still to non-native speakers, they investigate where learners make errors. The teachers' goal is to make them able to use articles in

an exact way. Such type of studies across L2 learners of various [-ART] languages report the overuse of the null article. (Master, 1997). It is difficult to detect where the problems lie such as definiteness and count/mass distinctions or the surface forms. There can be two possibilities regarding this issue one possibility is that the knowledge comes directly from UG (universal grammar) or in another possibility from learners' L1 if their L1 does not encode these features linguistically. English has become the preferred option as a second language. For instance, children start learning English from the age 5 and in some cases even earlier. With respect to the article system, however, it is typically difficult for the L2 learners to achieve a native-like competence. Articles look like simple morphemes superficially but they are problematic to master even at a late stage of L2 development. There has been an exhaustive discussion among the researchers of second language that article choice still occurs in more skilled and proficient learners as well (Master 1997). Learners have a tendency to omit articles and construct them in the erroneous semantic context (Ionin, Ko, & Wexler, 2004). L2 learners who have been exposed to English have in constant complication with article use. Article overuse is reported in Master (1987). Article omission has been monitored in mandatory contexts (Huebner 1983). For L2 learners whose native language is article-less language it seems quite a challenging issue for them such as (Urdu, Chinese, and Korean etc) (Master 1987). To Master (1997), second language learners with an article system of their native language tend to achieve native-like supply more competently than learners without an article system.

Writing skill difficulties of Pakistan ESL learners

In productive skills of writing, there are generally two major areas which enhance the difficulties all over the place for ESL learners. Firstly, the learners face linguistic difficulties. Secondly, they have to primarily face non-linguistic difficulties which take account of cognitive and psychological challenges. On the other hand, the recent research comes to a decision to focus on the linguistic difficulties of Pakistan ESL graduate learners studying in public sector colleges.

L1 in L2 effects writing skill of ESL

According to James (1998) the very first stage of error analysis consists of what is termed as 'wide probe' which enables the researcher to have a first impression of the learner's ability which helps to detect their area of L2 competence. James (1998) describes three reasons for the description of data:

- (1) The need for labels for the comparison of intuitions with other people;

- (2) The need regarding the counting of errors; and
- (3) The need to categorize the errors that may be compared intralingually and crosslingually.

The second stage of error analysis deals with the counting of the obligatory contexts and then it calculates the correct suppliance of morpheme ESL et al. According to Tarone (1987), the problems with this approach lie in the instances where the learner avoids the structure. This is problematic particularly in the comparison of learners; if one learner uses the form and the other learner avoids it. The use of the target language labels is problematic on interlanguage data, as pointed out by Pienemann (1992), specifically when it deemed that interlanguage is in itself a system. Hobson (1999) is of the view; there is no study that has reinvented terminology to account for the IL data. So Hobson (ibid) says that error analysis has numerous drawbacks as an analysis procedure. To James (1998), it is still useful in the description of data. Uriel Weinreich has made a contribution book '*Language in contact*' (1953). A speaker who has more than two languages will tend to mix the structures and sounds of them. The learners try to make interlanguage identifications to find out possible similarities. (Weinreich, 1953, p .7). Corder (1973) mentioned De Saussure's words that language is a system in which every system is interrelated with each other. Long (1990) mentioned that social input and cognitive process is quite significant in acquisition which depends on critical hypothesis. To Richards and Schmidt (2002, p .186) learners generally borrow words and patterns from L1, expand the patterns of L2 and express the meanings which they already familiar ultimately leads them towards errors. Corder highlighted that (1974), reinforcement in teaching is essential to find out the learners 'errors and it can also locate the areas of their errors. To Carson (2001, pp .191-200) and Kutz et al. (1993, pp .879-903) learners remain unconscious about what they want to express and what they want to write; this ambiguity causes to commit errors. Ilomaki (2005, p. 12) tends to say that learners cannot commit the same errors in both written and oral process; learners with one native language can never commit errors like learners with different native language. To Ilomaki, (2005, p. 12), age factor is not necessarily the reason of errors in cross-linguistic influence.

Methodology

The central focus of this chapter is to explain and describe research methods which were used during data collection. Together with data collection and data analysis procedures, it minutely describes the population, the research design of the study and sample. To ensure the reliability,

the data was collected by the researcher herself. Maree (2007) viewed that reliability primarily refers to the consistency of an instrument.

Objectives

- The present study focuses on the investigation of errors in Articles (definite, indefinite and zero articles) of graduate/masters ESL learners.
- Necessary, unnecessary and zero articles are examined in this study.

Research Question

(1) What is the frequency of errors of ESL graduate/masters learners in their writing skills?

(a) What is the frequency of errors in Articles?

Nature of Current Research

The present study opts for quantitative analysis for two sets of data in order to investigate the frequency and type of errors found in articles of Pakistani graduate/masters ESL learners. For this study, the quantitative approach is opted purposely as it can statistically be reliable. This study not only allows the outcomes to be analyzed, but also makes a clear comparison with other parallel studies. In the first set of data, the researcher analyzed the errors in articles and tried to assess their grammatical accuracy of ESL learners respectively through rational deletion. This test marked out the errors in these domains and counted correct answers. In the second test of data, topic-based analysis of articles and grammatical accuracy was mainly focused. The numbers of accurate marked order of sentences were calculated.

Research Design

Design deals fundamentally with the plans, intentions, aims and uses. The quantitative method was used in this study. Muree (2007) observed that in order to generalize the findings, quantitative research is considered an objective and systematic process using numerical data taken from a selected population. The primary focus of this definition lies on generalizability, numerical data and objectivity as three crucial components for quantitative research. As far as the descriptive mode of this study is concerned, the researcher tends to find out the errors of the learners, describe and analyze them in a systematic way.

Population and sample

The population of the present study comprises the students doing their Bachelor/master studies in both public/private sector universities of Punjab, Pakistan. Fifty participants were taken from

each institution. In this study, the researcher followed the sample size with a minimum number of 250 for the generalizability of her findings.

Data Collection Procedure

The researcher collected data from two hundred and fifty graduate/masters ESL learners to make an investigation into the English language compositional problems. collected the data in collaboration with the lecturers and professors in a congenial atmosphere. The participants were told that their performance in each test would not certainly affect their classroom performance and the information provided by them would be kept off the record and used for research purposes. As far as the topic-based activity is concerned, the participants might get an opportunity to write on their own. A number of learners were able to write in accordance with the required length of the topic that was maximally 250-300 words.

Data Analysis

The data were carefully analyzed and presented in tables and frequency bar graphs by using Microsoft Excel and the software Antconc. The data were read, analyzed and classified carefully into various error categories of the learners. The researcher preferred the descriptive statistics analysis for this paper.

Validity and Reliability

In research, validity refers to how far the interpretations of the data may be rationalized and justified. The researcher gave an ample justification for the interpretation of the scores assigned to the linguistic feature for this. The higher score reflects writing skill competence of ESL learners in a particular linguistic feature and this is what I actually wanted to measure. To do this in details, the researcher defined all the constructs which were to be measured (Bachman & Palmer, 1996) such as articles: zero articles definite and indefinite articles and grammatical accuracy.

Data Presentation and Analysis

It intends to the presentation as well as analysis of the gathered data. In a systematic way, the technique of analysis of ESL learner's errors refers to the process by which the unacceptable forms of languages are identified, classified and interpreted in writing skill. As a sample of written work, the analysis of the collected data from two hundred and fifty graduate/masters ESL learners seems primarily involve five significant steps to analyze the errors in writing skill of ESL learners. These steps include data gathering, identification and coding of errors and a

statement of errors frequency followed by percentage and error classification. Three hundred and fifty writing tasks completed by two hundred and fifty ESL learners were encoded with numbers in order to keep the identity of the participants confidential. Besides, in connection with articles the researcher identified and classified various errors.

In statistical studies, graphical presentation of the information is of enormous significance which seems to perform two functions: (1) presents the gathered information (2) and the way learners perform in each grammatical category. Moreover, frequency classifies which type of error occurs how many times and shows how many learners committed the same type of errors.

Category	Error Frequency
Definite article	250
Indefinite Articles	300
Zero Articles	450

Rational Deletion Test (Errors in Articles)

Table: 01

The table 01 is related to the performance of ESL learners in the performance based test, rational deletion. The column 01 is related to the errors of the learners in definite, indefinite and zero articles. The column 02 is related to the error frequency of the learners in this test. The error frequency recorded in the definite article is (N=250), in indefinite article it is (N=300) and in zero article it is (N=450). The same information has been presented in the figure I given below.

Figure 01

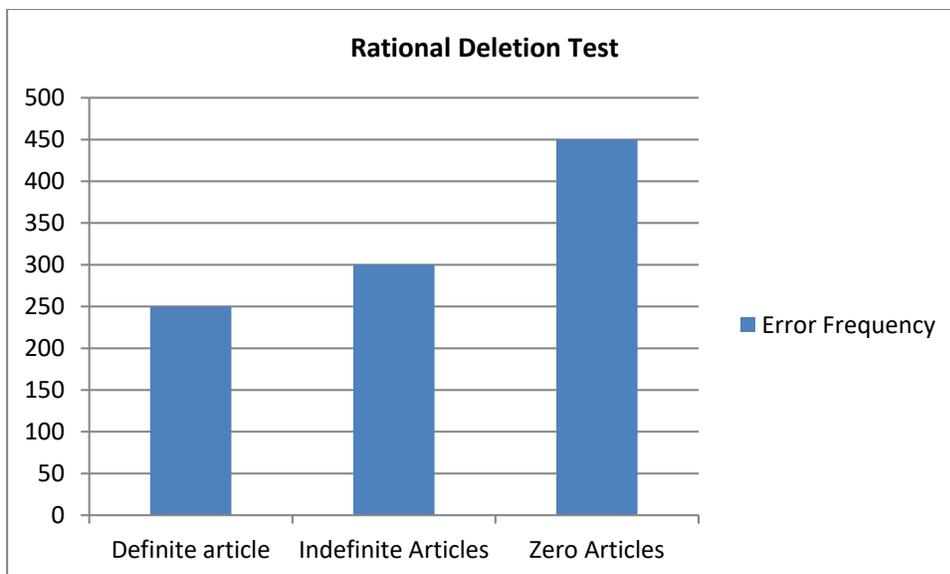
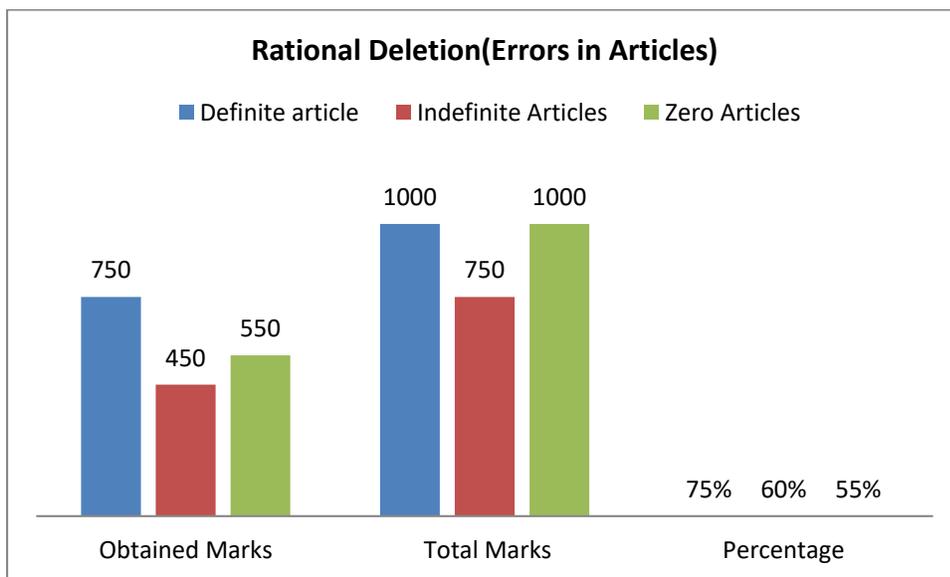


Figure 02



Composition Test

Table: 02

Category	Error Frequency
Definite article	150
Indefinite Articles	120
Zero Articles	152
Preposition	182

Tense	116
Auxiliary	172
Conjunction	105

The table 04 is related to the performance of ESL learners in the performance based test, an open composition. The column 01 is related to the errors of the learners in definite, indefinite, zero article, prepositions, tense, auxiliary and conjunction. The column 02 is related to the error frequency of the learners in this test. The error frequency in definite article is (N=150), in indefinite article it is (N=120), in zero article it is (N=152), in prepositions it is (N=182), in tenses it is (N=116), in auxiliary it is (N=172) and in conjunctions it is (N=105).

The above analysis shows that in this test if we accumulate the definite, indefinite and zero article errors (N=150+N=120+N=152) they are (N=422) in total. In this way, the learners have committed more errors in the domain of articles. The second most frequently committed errors are in the domain of prepositions (N=182). The third most frequently committed errors are in the domain of auxiliaries (N=172). The forth most frequently committed errors are in the domain of tenses (N=116). The fifth most frequently committed errors are in the domain of conjunctions (N=105). The same information has been presented in the figure 07 given below.

Figure 03

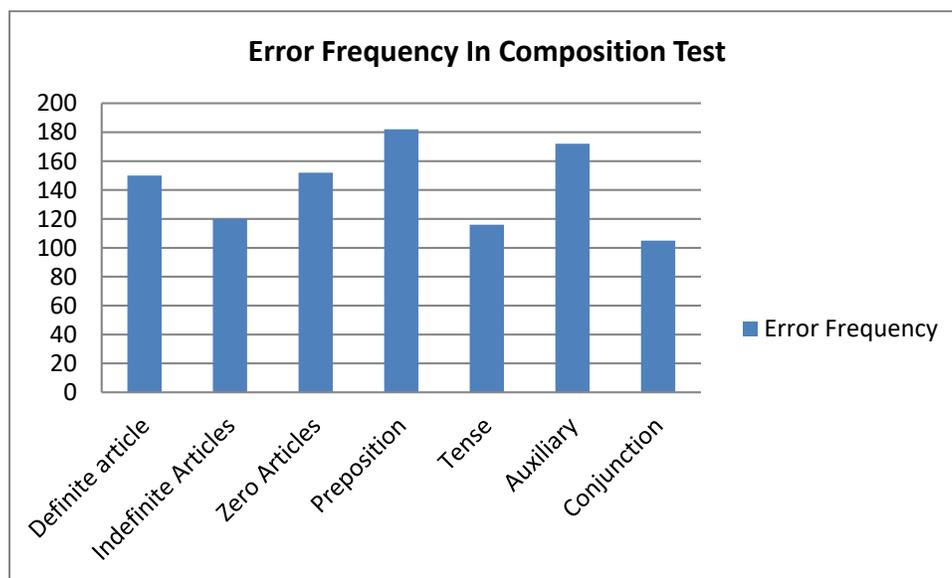
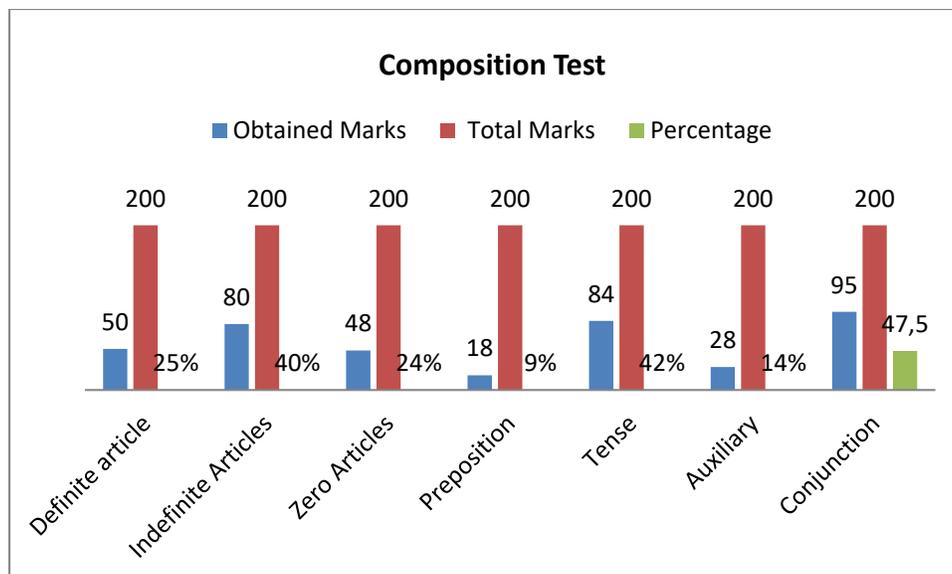


Figure 04



Findings

In order to address research question, the researcher gathered data by two performance based tests: (1) Rational Deletion (2) Composition.

- In composition, the learners committed more errors in the use of articles when they overgeneralized definite article, they used zero articles unnecessarily and they often omitted the necessary insertion of indefinite article. So the errors were (N=422) in total.
- In rational deletion, the learners committed frequent errors in the use of Gerund and less errors in the zero articles (N=450) and in adverbs. Side by side multiple errors were observed. For example, the learners have problems in verb forms, subject -verb agreement, definite article, and complementizer.

Discussion and Conclusion

Keeping in view the purpose to conduct this quantitative study was to assess the nature of writing skill problems of ESL graduate/masters learners. The data was collected from five universities. If we analyze the overall performance of the learners in the linguistic feature under investigation, it is quite understandable that in their writing skills, the graduate learners had more problems in *articles*. One of the reasons is that they consider article system very tricky to comprehend. In contrast, the students of master degree program have a maximum command in this area. However, some students were also there who performed excellently because they contextualize the topic in a logical way and developed their ideas in an effective manner and this is the actual demand of the academic writing. There are many ways to think about errors. Linguists described

that context; text and the writing process are interrelated with one another. It has truly been said that vocabulary development is a time taking process (Blachowicz, Fisher, Ogle, Watts-Taffe, 2006).). The learners are even not clear about the basic points to write an essay which shows their incompetency towards English grammar. It depends upon the syllabus designers and teachers to facilitate the learners so that they can write anything flawlessly. The students' grip on grammar must be strong to comprehend the English rules The result of the study of Kim (1987) with regard to English compositions of undergraduate Korean ESL learners pointed out that the frequent errors related to "Be" and "Auxiliaries" were (419) and prepositional errors were (287). In short, it would seem reasonable to conclude, there is a strong likelihood that transfers from L1 is a major factor in causing most of the article errors found in the learners 'tests. Unfortunately, however, the students also tend to use *the* in contexts where it is not required. To Sinclair (1991, in Master, 2002, p. 332) definite and indefinite articles are recurrently used in writing. Learners almost use articles in a random way (Yamada & Matsuura, 1982, in Butler, 2002, p.216). The learner's frequent errors give a clear clue that their first language is article-less (Article -) language so it seems quite difficult for them to adjust correct usage of article in second language. This is because when students write or speak anything, they make a try to find similar structures to Urdu in English which leads them towards committing errors in articles. James, (1998, p .204) assessed that learners have the tendency to commit language errors as well as they can judge the errors committed by others. In other words, written process is considered a gradual process in which errors are part and parcel; we cannot avoid errors. Thus, errors should be dealt positively. There cannot be any learning without errors. In addition, teachers can provide good guidance to their learners in order to make a strong command on second language.

Appendix A

Rational Deletion

Inflation adversely affects overall growth, financial sector development and an vulnerable poor segment population. There is clear consensus that even moderate level inflation a damage real growth. The Inflation is..... dangerous poor because it decreases real income and also induces uncertainty. Considering such adverse impacts inflation economy, there is consensus among world's leading central banks that price stability is prime objective monetary policy and central banks are committed

low inflation. It has adverse effect different sections society. This problem..... assumes acute form Developing a countries like Pakistan. Pakistan is an facing high rates all fundamental accessories. For instance, school, colleges, universities and hospitals are primarily facing high rates Their an domains. Hence central banks have adopted inflation as main focus monitory policy which seems target inflation when it is required. Maintaining price stability is responsibility central banks and it is responsible achieving it. It is argued that sufficiently a tight monetary policy maintained sufficiently long time could stop even most deeply rooted inflation. price stability is obtained when economic agents such as households and business stop take inflation time decision-making. other words, prices are stable when ordinary people their ordinary course business stop talking inflation. There is important harmony between money growth and inflation. important policy implication is that inflation Pakistan can be cured sufficient tight monetary policy. formulation monetary must consider development real and financial sector and treat them as constraints policy. However it has reached over highest peak our country.)

..... present situation our country is certainly critical regarding inflation. indispensable accessories have become a drug the market. Our public is like a duck a thunderstorm. Unfortunately, our president has so many men that he can get almost anything done. Moreover, truth politics seems at his beck and call a cry. Gvt makes numerous policies which are practically nothing and ultimately it backs this way, inflation has broken this country and it has been chopping at poor region since many years. common man cannot even get with these circumstances when it is extremely difficult to get this rapid inflation. Resultantly, he goes in his life bitterly. So we are required this stage to keep together this problematic situation.

..... real income changes time. factor that determines real income is largely unrelated demand money. major factors that affect

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