



Error Analysis of Generating Compound Sentences in Undergraduate Students' Writing

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Abstract

This study analyzed errors in generating compound sentences in the writing of 26 university English students. A qualitative-descriptive methodology was employed, collecting data through a writing task where participants had to form five compound sentences based on a provided image. The analysis focused on sentence fragments and run-on sentences, following the steps proposed by Corder (1975). Results revealed that out of 128 written sentences, 60 contained errors. The most frequent error was fused sentences (75%), followed by subject omission (18,33%). Other errors included verb omission, lack of subject and verb, and comma splices. These errors were mainly attributed to mother tongue interference and lack of understanding of English grammatical structures. The study concludes that students have significant difficulties with punctuation and compound sentence structure, suggesting the need for pedagogical strategies focused on improving these areas. The findings can contribute to the development of more effective teaching plans to strengthen grammatical and writing skills in English.

Keywords: error analysis; compound sentences; English writing; linguistic interference; pedagogical strategies.

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Análisis de Errores en la Generación de Oraciones Compuestas en la Escritura de Estudiantes Universitarios

Resumen

Este estudio analizó los errores en la generación de oraciones compuestas en la escritura de 26 estudiantes universitarios de inglés. Se empleó una metodología cualitativa-descriptiva, recolectando datos a través de una tarea de escritura donde los participantes debían formar cinco oraciones compuestas basadas en una imagen proporcionada. El análisis se centró en fragmentos de oraciones y oraciones corridas, siguiendo los pasos propuestos por Corder (1975). Los resultados revelaron que, de 128 oraciones escritas, 60 contenían errores. El error más frecuente fue la oración fusionada (75%), seguido por la omisión de sujeto (18,33%). Otros errores incluyeron la omisión de verbos, la falta de sujeto y verbo, y el empalme de comas. Estos errores se atribuyeron principalmente a la interferencia del idioma materno y la falta de comprensión de las estructuras gramaticales en inglés. El estudio concluye que los estudiantes tienen dificultades significativas con la puntuación y la estructura de oraciones compuestas, sugiriendo la necesidad de estrategias pedagógicas enfocadas en mejorar estas áreas. Los hallazgos pueden contribuir al desarrollo de planes de enseñanza más efectivos para fortalecer las habilidades gramaticales y de escritura en inglés.

Palabras clave: análisis de errores; oraciones compuestas; escritura en inglés; interferencia lingüística; estrategias pedagógicas.

Código de clasificación internacional: 5801.07 - Métodos pedagógicos.

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1. Introduction

In recent years, there has been growing interest in understanding the writing skills of higher education students, especially in linguistic studies. The construction of compound sentences is crucial for expressing complex ideas and linking elements in a text, but students often need support with grammar. Grammatical knowledge influences written production in real contexts. According to Sudhakar and Farheen (2015): grammar is a system of rules that organizes words to form meaningful sentences.

Therefore, writing is a strategy that helps students develop grammar. According to Sattayatham and Ratanapinyowong (2008): writing reinforces the grammatical structures, idioms, and vocabulary taught to students. They can expand language by writing and learning new words autonomously. It provides the effort to express ideas, and the constant use of the brain is a unique way to reinforce learning and become critical.

Previous studies show that errors in compound sentences stem from problems with conjunctions, parallelism, punctuation, and omission. Understanding these errors is crucial for educators to develop effective educational strategies. In this regard, Astrini, Ratminingsih, and Utami (2020): studied teaching strategies for sentence structures, such as mind mapping, the PLEASE strategy, guided writing, and creative writing.

Citing Sari, Syarif, and Amri (2019a): they described that students' writing problems are omission, malformation, and punctuation when combining two independent clauses. The author suggested that understanding these recurring errors is crucial for educators to adapt effective instructional strategies that address learners' specific needs.

The study by Hendrawati (2018a): indicates that the most common errors among students are: malformations (57,6%), omissions (27,47%), additions (8,8%), and disorder (6,13%). Greater difficulties are highlighted in writing compound-complex sentences, especially in verb tenses and grammar.



In this sense, Sari, Syarif, and Amri (2019b): found that, although most can write compound sentences well, they face problems of omission and malformation, particularly with missing commas when joining two independent clauses.

It is also demonstrated that students have an average level when writing compound sentences. Authors like Sundari, Hidayah, Edy, and Esmianti (2021): revealed four types of errors in sentence structure: omission, addition, malformation, and disorder. These errors were found in words, phrases, and clauses. The causes of these errors were mother tongue interference, overgeneralization of rules, and the delivery of material and methods used by the teacher in classes.

In this aspect, Hendrawati (2018b): states that analyzing errors in compound sentences is crucial for improving students' writing competence. This gives educators key information about linguistic difficulties, allowing them to design effective strategies. In this way, teachers can create interventions to improve sentence structure and coherence, raising the quality of written communication.

Identifying common errors in compound sentence construction facilitates curriculum updates, focusing on essential grammatical strategies. This creates a better learning environment and reinforces students' linguistic skills, preparing them for academic and professional success. Interpreting Erdoğan (2005): maintains that error analysis allows teachers to select appropriate pedagogical material to effectively teach compound sentences.

Addressing this problem improves the teaching and learning of grammar in educational institutions, as error correction is essential for success in second or foreign language learning (Wahyana, 2020).

The research attempts to answer these research questions: What type of errors do students make when writing compound sentences?; What is the most frequent error made by students in compound sentences?.



Therefore, the objective is to analyze students' errors when writing compound sentences in the Fourth Semester at the Technical University of Cotopaxi during the academic period October 2022 - February 2023.

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1. Grammar

English grammar has a specific order to follow and includes the study of syntax (word order), clause and phrase structure, and the classification of parts of speech (for example, noun, verb, predicate, clause, etc.) (Andrews, et al., 2006). Additionally, grammar is defined as a system of language rules that allows combining individual words to create coherent meanings. When applying grammatical rules to writing, it can become clearer and more effective.

2.2. Writing

According to Sapkota (2012): writing is defined as a system of symbols that represents sounds, syllables, or words. In this same line of thought, Carroll (1990): describes it as a lasting tool for recording information, opinions, and theories, among others. Writing makes it possible to share communication with contemporaries and future generations. Similarly, Shweba and Mujiyanto (2017): emphasize that good spelling, capitalization, and punctuation are essential for quality written language.

2.3. Grammar Mastery

To write well, students need to communicate their ideas and master grammar. Grammar is key to good writing (Murtiningsih, Kurniawati, and Putri, 2022). In this regard, Sacal and Potane (2023): affirm that good grammar mastery is essential for writing and speaking competently. Students must actively practice to develop these skills.



2.4. Punctuation

For their part, Kuiper and Luke (1992), cited by Krahn (2014): state that punctuation unites and separates words, phrases, clauses, and sentences to avoid confusion. Regarding this, Suliman, Ben-Ahmeida, and Mahalla (2019): report that punctuation marks such as commas, colons, and dashes help clarify meaning and provide interpretative cues, indicating emphasis, pauses, and relationships between text elements.

2.5. Sentence

We use sentences to communicate with others. A sentence is a group of words that expresses a complete thought. To make sense, it needs at least a subject (who or what is being talked about) and a predicate (what is said about the subject). For example, in “The dog barks”, “the dog” is the subject and “barks” is the predicate.

2.6. Compound Sentences

The compound sentence represents a sophisticated linguistic structure that links two or more complete and autonomous ideas through specific connectors, where each segment has the ability to express a complete thought by itself, without syntactically depending on the other components. Unlike other types of grammatical constructions, these sentences are characterized by the absence of subordination between their elements, maintaining a coordinating relationship that allows for the transmission of more elaborate and complex messages (Fadhilah, 2022).

A compound sentence has two or more independent clauses joined by coordinating conjunctions such as “and”, “but”, “or”, “nor”, “for”, “yet”, and “so”. “And” introduces a similar idea, “but” a contrasting idea, “or” an alternative, “nor” an equivalent negative idea, “for” a reason, “yet” an unexpected continuation, and “so” an anticipated result (Sari, Syarif, and Amri, 2019c).



According to Deviyana (2017a): compound sentences often share the same subject. Clauses can be joined with conjunctions or punctuation.

2.7. Conjunctions

For Knapp and Watkins (2013): conjunctions are words that coordinate elements of equal status, essential for forming coherent sentences. There are three types: coordinating, subordinating, and correlative. Regarding this, Frank (1972), cited by Deviyana (2017b): explains that coordinating conjunctions join equal units, while subordinating conjunctions are part of the clause they introduce. According to Deviyana (2017c): correlative conjunctions emphasize both parts of a parallel structure.

2.8. Independent Clause

The independent clause, as noted by Craiker (2022a): constitutes the fundamental core of compound sentences by containing the essential elements to convey a complete meaning: subject and predicate. This grammatical structure, according to The Albert Team (2022): is distinguished by its syntactic autonomy, which allows it to function as an individual sentence without requiring support from other linguistic elements, thus differing from dependent clauses that require additional complements to make complete sense.

2.9. Connecting Independent Clauses

Coordinating conjunctions, as explained by Grammarly (2023): act as fundamental connecting elements that link grammatical components of equal hierarchy, from basic elements such as verbs and nouns to more complex structures such as independent clauses. Along the same lines, MasterClass (2021a): highlights an important aspect of their use: these conjunctions are usually placed after a comma that separates the first independent clause, thus establishing a logical pause that facilitates the comprehension and fluency of



the compound sentence.

To remember coordinating conjunctions in English, Craiker (2022b): suggests the acronym FANBOYS. This represents “for”, “and”, “nor”, “but”, “or”, “yet”, and “so”. A semicolon joins two related independent clauses without using a coordinating conjunction or comma (MasterClass, 2021b).

In the grammatical field, conjunctive adverbs, as indicated by MacArthur (2013a), are grammatical elements that establish logical connections between clauses, expressing relationships of causality, sequence, contrast, or comparison. Moreover, MacArthur (2013b) establishes a specific rule for their punctuation: a comma should be placed after the first independent clause, followed by the conjunctive adverb between commas, before introducing the second independent clause, which ensures a clear and coherent structure in the sentence.

2.10. Sentence Error Analysis

Sentence error analysis consists of identifying and classifying grammatical errors in written language. When designing the grammar section of a course, this analysis is useful for selecting appropriate grammatical elements and determining their correct order (Sari, Gustiani, Yusri, and Simanjuntak, 2022). It focuses on students' frequent errors, comparing them with the target language and highlighting the importance of these errors in second language learning. It's important to note that mother tongue interference is not the only cause of errors in the new language (Khansir, 2012).

2.11. Sentence Fragment

In the field of syntax, sentence fragments represent incomplete linguistic constructions that, despite their appearance, do not achieve sentence status due to lacking fundamental components such as the subject or main verb. These incomplete structures fail to convey a complete and coherent message,



which distinguishes them from grammatically correct sentences that do possess all the necessary elements to express a complete thought.

2.12. Types of Sentence Fragments

2.12.1. Missing Subject

In this sentence, the subject is missing, which creates ambiguity: Went to dinner after the graduation ceremony. It's unclear who attended the graduation ceremony. A correct way to express it would be: Kiley went to dinner after the graduation ceremony (Johns Hopkins, 2021a).

2.12.2. Missing Verb

Incorrect due to missing verb: They lunch after business class. What action did they perform with lunch after business class? Correct: They ate lunch after business class (Johns Hopkins, 2021b).

2.12.3. Fused Sentence

A fused sentence is an ungrammatical sentence that contains two or more poorly connected independent clauses. These sentences, a type of run-on sentence, often lack or incorrectly use prepositions, conjunctions, or punctuation marks between clauses (MasterClass, 2021c).

2.12.4. Comma Splice

According to Kwiatkowski (2024): comma splices, also known as comma faults, represent a type of run-on sentence and a grammatical error that occurs when a comma connects two independent clauses without the presence of a coordinating conjunction.

2.13. Strategies for Teaching Compound Sentences

In English language teaching, there are various strategies for teaching



the four language skills. The strategies presented in this section can be adapted according to the context, genre, and level of students. Some of the suggested strategies are: first, define what compound sentences are and the use of coordinating conjunctions, noting that the comma is placed before the conjunction. Then, provide examples and ask students to join simple sentences with commas and conjunctions. Finally, during independent practice, ask students to write compound sentences using different coordinating conjunctions.

3. Methodology

The methodology employed for this project was qualitative-descriptive (Hernández-Sampieri and Mendoza, 2018). It focused on analyzing errors in compound sentences made by university students when writing a text. The study involved 26 students from the Technical University of Cotopaxi, Ecuador, enrolled in the fourth cycle of English language courses. The selection of participants was convenience sampling because the students were accessible and predisposed to help in the study. Data was collected from a written text.

Each student was instructed to write a short text forming five compound sentences according to a provided graphic. The writing tasks were carried out in a controlled environment. Participants were given clear instructions about the task and provided with necessary materials. Students were given 20 minutes to complete the writing tasks. Written responses were collected and anonymized for analysis.

The analysis was conducted following the five steps suggested by Corder (1975): focusing on aspects such as sentence fragments and run-on sentences. The first step was data collection, where learners created a written text based on an image. The second step consisted of error identification, classifying them into categories of sentence fragments and run-on sentences. The third step was error description, using percentages to know the frequency

of common errors. The fourth step involved error explanation, analyzing their possible causes. Finally, the fifth step was error evaluation, determining their severity and their impact on text comprehension.

4. Results

Of the 128 sentences written by students, approximately 60 contained errors. These were divided into different types, such as fragments and run-on sentences. The analysis identified cases of missing subjects and verbs, as well as the absence of both in sentence fragments. Fused sentences and comma splices were also detected in run-on sentences. table 1 shows that the most frequent error is fused sentences at 75%, while the least common are missing subject and verb, and comma splices. The specific details of each error are explained in the following section:

Table 1. Student Writing Errors in Compound Sentences.

No.	Types of error	Frequency	%
1	Sentence Fragment		
	- Missing Subject	11	18,33
	- Missing Verb	2	3,33
	- Missing Subject and Verb	1	1,67
2	Run On Sentences		
	- Fused Sentence	45	75
	- Comma Splice	1	1,67
Total Error		60	100

Source: The Authors (2024).

Missing Subject: Based on table 1, it was found that there are eleven missing subject errors, representing 18,33% of total errors. Students generally omit the subject in one of the independent clauses in a sentence. For example, “My father checks my homework, but never helps”. This sentence doesn't qualify as a compound sentence because it lacks a subject. The clause “but never helps” has no subject to be considered an independent clause.



Therefore, the correct sentence is “My father checks my homework, but he never helps me”. This type of error occurs because students lack knowledge about compound sentence rules.

Missing Verb: According to table 1, two sentence errors were found in the missing verb category, constituting 3,33% of total errors. Students made this error in the form of omitting the To-Be verb. For example, “Parents help their children, but this not good”. Look at the clause “but this not good”, this clause needs the To-Be verb 'is' to make the sentence correct. The correct sentence could be “Parents help their children, but this is not good”. This type of error occurs because in Spanish we don't frequently use the To-Be verb, and this could show that the cause of this error is interference error.

Missing Subject and Verb: As shown in table 1, there was only one error made by the student in the form of subject and verb omission, representing 1,67% of total errors. An example of a compound sentence lacking both subject and verb is “My parents never helped me with my homework, so all the time low grades”. This example doesn't have a compound structure. If a sentence doesn't have a subject and a verb, it cannot be considered a sentence, as it doesn't have a complete thought. If we focus on the words “so all the time” it is not an example of a sentence because it doesn't contain a subject and a verb.

Therefore, the correct form could be “My parents never helped me with my homework, so I got low grades all the time”. To correct the sentence, we added the subject 'I' and the verb 'got'. This error occurs because students tend to fossilize the error for a long time and believe the sentence makes sense when people read it.

4.1. Run-on Sentence

Fused Sentence: based on table 1, we found that there are forty-five Fused Sentence errors. Students generally forget to place a comma before the coordinating conjunction, put commas in the wrong place, or, if they're not using



a coordinating conjunction, forget to place a semicolon between each clause. For example, “The father is helping to do his son's homework but, he doesn't have to write”. In that case, the student put the comma after the coordinating conjunction, and the correct form is “The father is helping to do his son's homework, but he doesn't have to write”. This type of error occurs because students don't have enough knowledge about correct punctuation in each type of sentence, specifically in compound sentences.

Comma Splice: this run-on sentence results from two independent clauses joined with a comma. Based on the data, there was one comma splice error. The example sentence is “We actually love them for that. But, sometimes there were too many things to do”. This sentence joined two independent clauses with the comma in the wrong place.

To correct this comma splice error, we can put the comma before the coordinating conjunction “but”. Also, we can omit the period “.” that joins the sentence to give the essential meaning. The suggested revision of the sentence is “We actually love them for that, but sometimes there were too many things to do”.

5. Discussion

The sentence fragment error due to missing subject is caused by mother tongue (L1) interference, as in Spanish it is not always necessary to write the subject. Students tend to translate literally between English and Spanish, which generates omissions. Similarly, Puspa (2019) observed that students need a clearer understanding of compound sentence structure, as they make errors such as subject and verb omission due to their weak knowledge of these structures.

According to Rahma and Noor (2021): they found only one error in their study, similar to what was obtained in this study. For this reason, teachers and students must work together to improve their writing ability, especially in writing



compound sentences.

The run-on sentence error is due to poor use of punctuation, which hinders comprehension. Participants do not use punctuation marks well in complex sentences, believing they are clear when they are not for readers. This agrees with Ramdhianti, Kurniasih, Somba, and Akmaliah (2022), who found that students do not pay enough attention to commas in long sentences. Their study detected 16 errors, 35,6%. The results are similar to this study, where 75% of errors were of this type. To improve, teachers should provide regular practice and feedback on correct comma usage.

This study reveals that most students make errors by omitting elements and joining independent clauses with incorrect punctuation, due to interference from their native language. This coincides with Sari, Syarif, and Amri (2019d): who emphasized that students have difficulties with punctuation and the correct use of connectors and grammar, affecting the proper connection of clauses. Teachers should employ strategies that improve these skills, offering clear patterns for sentence writing.

6. Conclusions

The types of errors that students made when writing compound sentences are missing subject 18,33%, missing verb 3,33%, missing subject and verb 1,67%, and comma splices 1,67%. The study revealed that the most dominant error is fused sentences at 75%. This means (45 sentences). Students forget to place a comma before the conjunction; they put it after, or they don't place a comma at all. Fused sentence errors occur due to mother tongue interference.

In the Spanish language, the comma is not necessary before the conjunction, and this interferes with the development of English writing skills. These results can be used in the design of teaching plans to contribute to the improvement of grammatical and writing skills, especially in sentence



structures.

The limitations of this study lie in the number of written tasks that students did to collect the information. It was only one to analyze the errors.

However, the obtained results indicated that students do not have a clear understanding of sentence structures. It is hoped that this study can contribute to strengthening the development of pedagogical strategies as new research for teaching grammar, especially for compound sentences in the English teaching and learning process.

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