

# Grammatical and Lexical Errors in Students' English Composition Writing: The Case of Three Senior High Schools (SHS) in the Central Region of Ghana

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This is a qualitative study aimed at finding the lexical and grammatical errors students of three Senior High Schools in the Central Region of Ghana commit in their essay writing. The study also sought to examine the frequency of the errors and what can be done to improve the teaching of L2 (English) writing in the Senior High School. The study used a corpus of essay writings of 150 second year students. The schools and the participants were purposively selected. The data were analyzed using the content analysis approach. The study identified that the lexical errors in the students' writing were due to homophone problems and semantic lexical errors. The grammatical errors identified were agreement errors, tense errors, singular-plural (number) errors, prepositional errors, and article errors. The study also found that the most frequently committed grammatical error was tense errors followed by agreement errors. The implications of these findings to the teaching of English writing are that teachers where possible should have understanding of both the L1 and L2 of the students and teachers should explicitly teach for transfer, have adequate knowledge of how to identify students' writing errors, and use effective teaching strategies to improve students' English writing. Additionally, teachers should serve as models of using appropriate English for students to emulate and also create a conducive classroom environment for students to participate in class activities. Lastly, teachers should create more opportunities for students to write.

*Keywords:* grammatical error, lexical error, error analysis, Senior High School (SHS), Ghana

## Introduction

The development of students' writing in second or foreign language has always occupied the attention of many second language teachers. The reason is that such students always make errors. The occurrence of errors in the writing of L2 students is painful and frustrating to both L2 teachers and students (Reid, 1998; Maniam, 2010). Efforts are put in by teachers to help their students overcome the errors but it is not a simple task which comes readily to many second language teachers even the experienced ones. Though correcting students' writing errors has been the preoccupation of many L2 teachers, the situation has not improved as expected. As a result, some

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researchers do not see error correction as crucial in L2 writing (Zamel, 1985; Truscott, 1996). It must be noted that errors in L2 writing is indispensable. It is a difficult and complicated task and skill to develop in language learning. It is harder to write in L2 and it takes a considerable time and effort to become skillful in it (TAN, 2001). The difficult and complex nature of writing in L2 has given rise to growing research interest in the analysis of the sources, types, effects, and correction of such errors associated with writing. The writing of students in a language indicates their proficiency in the language (HONG, 2007). Good writing competence is recognized as an important skill in language learning so it must be nurtured by both teachers and learners. Though there have been efforts to improve English writing among Ghanaian students at all levels of the education system, little achievement has been made. Studies by Gbeze (1997), Edu-Boandoh (1997), Mahama (2012), and Mireku-Gyimah (2008) indicates that university students' English writings are saddled with grammatical and lexical errors. These studies imply that the situation is not better at the pre-tertiary level, especially at the SHS. The Chief Examiner's Reports of the West African Examination Council on Senior High Schools (SHS) English performance of 2012, 2013, 2014, and 2015 attested to the fact that students' writings are below expectations and plagued with both grammatical and lexical errors among others. The reports noted that most sentences written by students are unreadable and unintelligible. Data available indicated that students' performance in English writing in the West African Senior Secondary Certificate Examination (WASSCE) has deteriorated over the years. For example, in 2013, 31,356 students got F9 (fail) in English; in 2014, as many as 50,398 had F9; and in 2015, 50,774 students had F9 (Yankah, 2016). This phenomenon calls for English language teachers in Ghana to have a better understanding of the types of errors students make in their writing and implications for improving writing at the SHS level. It is against this background that this study is conducted to identify the grammatical and lexical errors students at the SHS make in their L2 writing. This study will therefore aid English language teachers at the Senior High School level to identify the grammatical and lexical errors of their students, their frequency and adopt appropriate strategies to help such students overcome the situation.

### **Literature Review**

The literature review, which is the theoretical foundation for the study is thematically structured under the following sub-headings: the distinction between error and mistake, approaches to the study of errors, and studies in grammatical and lexical errors.

#### **Error and Mistake**

According to Brown (2000), a "mistake" (in performance) refers to a performance error in that it is the learner's failure to utilize a known system correctly, while an "error" (in competence) is a noticeable deviation from the adult grammar of a native speaker, reflecting the interlanguage competence of the learner. Corder (1967; cited in Karra, 2006) referred to *mistakes* as unsystematic errors and systematic ones as *errors*. Unsystematic errors occur in one's native language and are not significant to the process of language learning. As is often said, "a slip of tongue" is a mistake in speech (Boomer & Laver, 1968; Bears, 1992), in the same way, a mistake in writing can be referred to as "slip of pen". Systematic ones, on the other hand, occur in a second language. Errors are systematic deviation from the norm or set of norms. An error cannot be self-corrected when pointed out to the speaker/writer but a mistake if is pointed out to the speaker/writer can be corrected. As Bears (1992) indicates, a mistake is an action that is quickly recognized and corrected. Another way of identifying the difference between

an error and a mistake is looking at the frequency of a deviation (Brown, 1994). The identification of an error by observing, analyzing, and classifying to reveal something of the system operating within the learner leads to error analysis (Sampong, 2014). A learner's error is a reflection of lack of understanding of the underlying competence in the language that he/she is learning (Mezrag, 2013). This distinction is very crucial because it helped the researcher to establish the threshold of what an error and a mistake were.

### **Approaches to Error Studies**

There are four approaches to the study of errors. These are Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis (CAH) which is the traditional approach; Error Analysis (EA); the contemporary approach, Interlanguage Analysis (IA), and Contrastive Rhetoric (CR) as the modern approaches (Latiff & Bakar, 2007). Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis (CAH) is the study and comparison of any two languages (Lado, 1957). CA holds the view that the structure of the first language affects the acquisition of the second language (Lado, 1957 cited in Brown, 2000). Contrastive Analysis, which is the primary approach to the study of L1 interference, focuses on the comparison of the linguistic systems of two languages, especially the sound and grammar systems of L1 and L2 to find solutions to L2 instruction problems (Richards & Schmidt, 2002). On the other hand, Contrastive Rhetoric is the study of how a person's first language and culture influence the person's writing in a second language (Kaplan, 1966). The term was first coined by the American applied linguist Robert Kaplan in 1966 and widely expanded from 1996 by applied linguist Ulla Connor (Connor, 1996). Interlanguage is the type of language produced by second language learners in the process of learning a target language (Latiff & Bakar, 2007). The term refers to interim grammars constructed by second language learners on their way to achieving proficiency in the target language (McLaughlin, 1987). According to McLaughlin, interlanguage can mean two things: the learner's system at a single point in time in learning the L2 and the range of interlocking systems that characterizes the development of learners L2 over time. Error Analysis (EA) as an approach to error studies however is used to demonstrate that the errors L2 learners make are not always due to the learners' native language but due to other complex factors. Ellis (2005, p. 54) viewed Error Analysis as being based on emergence of Interlanguage theory, which is known to be used to explain effectively the errors committed in second language acquisition processes. The model holds the view that factors like communicative strategies and the quality of second language instruction result in L2 errors (Hashim, 1992).

In this study, Error Analysis is used as the analysis framework because it can be used to analyze any type of error students make in their writing irrespective of their source. According to Corder (1975), EA is reserved for the study of erroneous utterances produced by learners of a language. Keshavars (1997) suggested that there are two branches of error analysis: theoretical and applied. According to Keshavars, theoretical error analysis is concerned with process and strategies of second language learning and the similarities with first language acquisition. Applied error analysis, on the other hand, deals with organizing remedial courses and devising appropriate materials and teaching strategies based on the findings of theoretical error analysis. In this study, theoretical Error Analysis is more relevant and is therefore used. Though Error Analysis has some limitations (Dulay, Burt, & Krashen, 1982; James, 1998; Schachter & Celce-Murcia, 1977), it has added a layer to the analysis and classification of L2 learners errors.

### Studies in Grammatical and Lexical Errors

The grammatical and lexical error studies discussed in this section involves both intralingual and interlingual. Kim (1988), in a study to investigate grammatical errors in English with reference to verb tense, mood, and voice, found out that mood were most frequently committed errors followed by errors in voice and tense. This study was conducted among 120 Korean EFL (English as a Foreign Language) students who were asked to translate Korean sentences to English. Kim noted that most of the errors originated from overgeneralization (intralingual), while L1 transfer and simplification were the least. Again, Kim (2001) conducted a study to examine the sources and nature of learners' errors among 30 Korean college freshmen who were registered for TOEIC (Test of English for International Communication) class. Kim found that most of the learners' errors were grammatical: verb tenses, prepositions, articles, plural/singular agreement, adjectives, and conjunctions. He then classified the errors into their sources and realized that the errors were both intralingual and interlingual. The study also showed that most of the learners' errors were intralingual and that only a few cases could be attributed to L1 interference (interlingual).

Another study worthy of reviewing in this research is the work of Bataineh (2005). Bataineh, in a study to identify the kinds of errors committed by Jordanian first, second, third, and fourth year minority EFL students, identified nine types of errors in relation to the use of the indefinite articles. This is a grammatical error study. The nine types of errors identified were deletion of the indefinite article, writing *a* as part of the noun/adjective following it, substitution of the indefinite for the definite article, and substitution of the definite for the indefinite article. Others were substitution of *a* for *an*, use of the indefinite article with unmarked plurals, use of the indefinite article with marked plurals, use of the indefinite article with uncountable nouns, and use of the indefinite article with adjectives. Similar intralingual grammatical errors in L2 learners' writings are found in studies by Ghadessey (1980), Sattayatham and Honsa (2007), Collins (2007), and Ahmadvand (2008).

Besides the above studies, other research works in error studies have shown that L2 writers employ their L1 skills in their writing. They adopt L1 composing strategies to compensate for possible deficiencies in their L2 proficiency and as a tool to facilitate their writing process (Karim & Nassaji, 2013). For instance, Kubota (1998) in a study among Japanese ESL students found that L2 students used similar patterns from L1 in their essay writings. He found that L2 writers transfer organization and rhetorical patterns from the L1. Similarly, Kim (2002) and Maniam (2010) have also identified that there is frequency of occurrence of grammar transference in the L1 to the L2. In the same instance, Barto, Nicol, J. Witzel, and N. Witzel (2009) discovered in a study of Spanish students learning English that transferability of native language grammar and structure exists when acquiring a second language (English). It is also realized that there is L1 lexical interference in L2 writing concerning collocation, plural words, general-meaning, and literal word translation (Nattama, 2002). These research works have been supported by Hung (2000) in a study of Thai ESL (English as a Second Language) students. He found that written English assignments of students were influenced by their L1 grammar structures which include subject-verb agreement, auxiliaries, noun, determiners, and clause/sentence structure.

In another development, Yin and Ung (2001), in a study of Bahasa Melayu EFL students with low language proficiency in English, identified that about fifty percent (50%) of the errors committed by the students have their source from their L1. The researchers used 50 written essays and analyzed, described, and explained the cross-linguistic influence of these students. The study also determined how the native language or mother tongue

influences the students' acquisition of English. The analysis indicated that lack of proficiency in English made the students rely heavily on their L1. The study noted that approximation, coined words and slang, language switch, medium transfer, inappropriate use of tenses, omission of articles, omission or wrong usage of articles, adjective morphology errors, prefabricated patterns, and literal translation were some of the L1 interference errors. These errors are both grammatical and lexical.

A Ghanaian study crucial to the current study is the work of Owu-Ewie and Lomotey (2016) on L1 interference in the L2 writing of Akan Junior High School Students. Data were collected by the use of documents (students' written essays). The researcher used content analysis approach to analyze 90 written essays of the students to find out the writing errors of students in their essays having to do with L1 interference. The study found both grammatical and lexical errors which include transliteration, omissions, wrong word use, L1 induced spelling errors, and wrong pronoun uses. It was also identified that transliteration and omission errors were the most frequently committed L1 interference errors in the writings of Akan speakers learning English in the Junior High School. The study noted that some grammatical and lexical errors in students' L2 writing emanated from their L1. Similar studies have indicated that L1 lexical and grammatical structures are transferred to L2 writing of students (LIU, Sung, & Chien, 1998; Fang, 1999; CHEN, 2000; Sauter, 2001; Lee, 2001; ZHANG, 2007; Koosha & Jafarpour, 2006).

In addition to these, other studies conducted in Ghanaian universities indicated that grammatical and lexical errors do exist in students' writing (Dako, 1997; Gogovi, 1997; Gbeze, 1997; Awuah-Boateng, 1998; Edu-Boandoh, 1997; Mahama, 2012; Mireku-Gyimah, 2008; 2014). These studies noted the following as grammatical and lexical errors university students make in their L2 writings: concord errors, wrong register, wrong tense, wrong word use, wrong collocation, ambiguity, punctuation errors, and wrong idiomatic expression use. Though these studies do exist, it is crucial to look at errors among students who are a step below the university level which lays the foundation for university education. A study of grammatical and lexical errors at the SHS level has implications for the laying of a solid foundation for good writing before the students are enrolled in tertiary institutions.

### **Purpose of the Study and Research Questions**

The purpose of the study was to:

- (1) Find out the grammatical and lexical errors students in the SHS make in their writing;
- (2) Find out the frequency of these errors in SHS students' English writing;
- (3) Make recommendations for improving the grammatical and lexical errors in the English writing of SHS students.

As a result of the above purposes, the study sought to find answers to the following main research questions:

- (1) What grammatical and lexical errors do SHS students in the selected schools make in their L2 (English) writing?
- (2) Which grammatical and lexical errors are most frequently made by students in the selected schools?
- (3) What can be done to improve the grammatical and lexical errors in the English writing of SHS students in the selected schools?

## Methodology

This section of the paper looks at the research design and data collection strategy which involves the use of documents/content. It also discusses the research sites and students characteristics and ethical issues.

### Research Design and Data Collection Strategy

This study employed a qualitative design. It is a multi-site case study which involved three Senior High Schools in the Central Region of Ghana. The three schools selected are in Category C (see the research site). The study used 150 students made up of 88 females and 62 males. The schools and the participants were purposively selected because they possess the information the researcher needed. The main data collection strategy used was documents. The corpus for the study involved two essays written by the selected students. The students were given three essay topics and each was expected to write between 200 and 250 words on two of the topics. The topics were

*A football game my school recently had with another school.*

*Discuss four things you will do to improve sanitation in your school.*

*What are the advantages and disadvantages of using computers in schools?*

In all, 300 essays were analysed. To ensure inter-rater reliability and credibility, each essay was analyzed or evaluated by two persons. The raters were final year students in their MPhil English program. Later, their ratings were reconciled by the researchers. The documents (essays) were analysed using content approach. The frequencies of the errors were analyzed using simple percentage and then presented on a bar chart. In this study, the researchers considered a deviant writing as an error when it occurred more than once. In addition, every student was given enough time to read over his/her work and correct all errors before submission. So the students' inability to correct a deviant form during the reading over period meant they did not know the correct form.

### Research Sites and Students' Characteristics

The three Senior High Schools selected for the study are all situated in rural communities in the Ajumako-Enyan-Essiam District in the Central Region of Ghana. The schools are public and have both day and boarding facilities. They are ranked as Category C schools. In Ghana, Senior High Schools are categorized based on the facilities available, geographical location, gender and cut-off-mark of selecting Junior High School (JHS) students for the Senior High School. This gives three categories: Category A (also referred to as 1st Class) schools are mainly located in urban areas, which are well-endowed and organized, have more well-trained and qualified teachers and better facilities, and are recognized nationwide as good schools. Category B (2nd Class) schools are relatively less endowed and perform marginally below the standard of first class schools. Although they are mostly located in peri-urban environments, these schools tend to receive JHS applicants with good Basic Education Certificate Examination (BECE) grades, with many of them generally performing well in the West African Senior Secondary Certificate Examination (WASSCE). Category C and D (3rd Class) schools are predominantly located in rural communities, which are poorly resourced and patronised mainly by applicants resident in those areas. The performances of students in these schools are relatively below average especially in English language. The selected schools are in rural settings and are classified as Category C schools because of unavailability of certain facilities/resources and are not well-endowed. It is for this reason that these schools were selected to bring to the fore the errors students in these schools commit in their English writing. The students

selected were in the second year of the Senior High School (SHS). This group of students were selected because they had at least a year to complete their SHS program, so identifying their errors will help teachers have remediation for them to improve their English performance before the final year. The students in these schools have studied English as a subject from Primary four. At the SHS, they are studying English as a core subject. Forty-five percent (45%) of them had English as their elective subject. This means that they have studied English for at least 14 years, from Primary One to their current level. In addition, they have been instructed in English for at least 11 years.

### **Ethical Issues**

To ensure that ethical issues were adhered to in the study, the researchers first had discussions with the headmasters of the selected schools. This was followed with consent letters to heads of the institutions to officially ask for permission to use their schools for the study. After consent has been given, the researchers went to the schools and met the English language teachers. We explained the purpose of the research to them. After they had asked a few questions for clarification, they agreed to assist the researchers. The teachers agreed to supervise the writing of the essays by the students as class assignment. This arrangement was done because the researchers did not want to disturb structures in the school and wanted the students to write the essays under a relaxed environment. Lastly, the researchers met the students and explained to them what he wanted them to do. After the essays were written, the researchers purposefully selected the sample size needed. This same strategy was used in all the schools by the researchers to collect the data. The name of every student was concealed to ensure confidentiality; the researchers used code numbers for the individual participants.

### **Data Analysis and Findings**

The analysis of the data and discussion of the findings is thematically done based on the research questions posed earlier in the study. The analysis was done by broadly categorizing the errors into grammatical and lexical errors. The grammatical errors were then subcategorized into agreement errors, tense errors, number errors (plural-singular), prepositional errors, articles errors, and conjunction errors. The lexical errors were also subdivided into homophone induced errors and semantic lexical errors. The frequency of every error was converted into percentage and then presented on a bar graph. The following are the discussions and responses to the research questions asked earlier:

Research question 1: *What grammatical and lexical errors do SHS students in the selected schools make in their L2 (English) writing?*

This question was posed to find out the various errors learners in the study committed in their writing. Based on the identification and description of errors in the literature, I categorized the errors based on the data I collected. There were difficulties in making these categories because sometimes some of the errors cut across one category. In response to this question, grammatical errors were categorized into agreement errors, tense errors (past/present, aspect, etc.), singular-plural errors, prepositional errors, article errors, and conjunctions errors. The lexical errors were also dichotomized into homophone induced errors, orthographic errors, and semantic lexical errors.

### Grammatical Errors

Grammatical error is a term used in prescriptive grammar to describe an instance of faulty, unconventional, or controversial usage, such as a misplaced modifier or an inappropriate verb tense (Garner, 2012). According to Hernandez (2011), grammatical errors involve faulty structures which may include wrong verbal tense, incorrect verbal forms, and syntax problems. It is also called usage error. In this study, the following were identified as grammatical errors: agreement errors (subject-verb agreement and noun-pronoun agreement), tense errors (past/present, aspect, etc.), number (singular/plural) errors, prepositional errors, article errors, and conjunctions errors.

**Agreement errors (subject-verb and noun-pronoun agreement):** Subject-verb agreement is the correspondence of a verb with its subject in person (first, second, or third) and number (singular or plural) (Greenbaum & Nelson, 2002). The principle of subject-verb agreement applies to finite verbs in the present tense and, in a limited way, to the past forms of the verb *to be* (*was* and *were*). Noun-pronoun agreement, on the other hand, is the correspondence of a pronoun with its antecedent in number (singular, plural), person (first, second, third), and gender (masculine, feminine, neuter) (Sorenson, 2010). One basic principle of pronoun agreement is that a singular pronoun refers to a singular noun while a plural pronoun refers to a plural noun but it is sometimes complicated when the pronoun is indefinite. Sometimes their proper use is violated (Bock & Miller, 1991).

In the sentences below, the subject-verb agreement principle and the noun-pronoun agreements are violated. The suggested correct forms of the sentences below are in parenthesis. The following are a few examples of the errors from the data:

(1) Politics **are** one of my father's interests apart from soccer. (Politics **is** one of my father's interest apart from soccer).

(2) Our headmaster said that every **students** in the class were important. (Our headmaster remarked that every **student** in the class is important).

(3) The foliage of the trees **provide** shades. (The **foliage** of the trees provides shades).

(4) Uriana, together with her friends **goes** to the clean up every month. (Uriana, together with her friends **go** to the clean up every month).

(5) The news the class heard about their cleanup **were** good. (The news the class heard about their cleanup **was** good).

(6) The Environmental Protection Council in my district **are** doing less to help the community. (The Environmental Protection Council in my district **is** doing less to help the community).

(7) Surprisingly, some big men who ply ^road **throws** parcels of rubbish on the roadside as they drive. (Surprisingly, some big men who ply (the) road **throw** parcels of rubbish on the roadside as they drive).

(8) Our computer class prefect **do** not know how to use the computer himself. (Our computer class prefect **does** not know how to use the computer himself).

(9) Everyone must bring **their** own swimming costume. (Everyone must bring **his/her** own swimming costume).

(10) Johnson and Mark went for the cleanup but **he** did not work. (Johnson and Mark went for the cleanup but **they** did not work).



(11) Millicent did not attend the cleanup because **he** was sick. (Millicent did not attend the cleanup because **she** was sick).

(12) The computers in our school **is** very good because **it** helps us to use the internet. (The computers in our school **are** very good because they help us to use the internet).

**Tense errors (present, past, progressive, perfect, future):** Verb tense refers to the way a verb is formed to communicate when an action or occurrence takes place. Verb tense errors occur when you use the wrong verb tense. They are common grammar mistakes among second language learners of English. The verb tense makes the reader aware of when the action expressed in the sentence is taking place—in the past, the present, or the future. There must be consistency between when the action occurred and the type of verb used. It was realized from the study that most students violated this fundamental tense rule. The following are extracts of such errors from the data:

(13) The school authorities did not **gave** us tools to work with. (The school authorities did not **give** us tools to work with).

(14) Our school team **beated** (the) Mando school team one nil. (Our school team **beat** Mando school team one nil).

(15) The containers they **bring** for the refuse **was** bad. (The containers they **brought** for the refuse were bad).

(16) There **was** so many students **involve** in the games. (There **were** so many students involved in the games).

(17) We **has plan** to **collected** the refuse from the gutter but it **rain**. (We **had planned** to **collect** the refuse from the gutter but it **rained**).

(18) Most students came to the place but did not **worked** hard. (Most students came to the place but did not **work** hard).

(19) During the cleanup, one student **cutted** his leg. (During the cleanup, one student **cut** his leg).

(20) We **will swept** the weeds after we clear it. (We **will sweep** the weeds after we clear it).

(21) We really **want** to go to the stadium. (We really **wanted** to go to the stadium).

(22) After the students **have broking** the glass, one of them **enter** the room. (After the students **have broken** the glass, one of them **entered** the room).

(23) Technology has **do** some good things for us. (Technology has **done** some good things for us).

(24) Some students **was eaten** when we were cleaning up. (Some students **were eating** when we were cleaning up).

(25) Computers are good but many of them **have breaking** down. (Computers are good but many of them have **broken down**).

**Number (singular-plural) errors:** Like in many languages, English has singular and plural phenomenon. In English, only count-nouns actually have plural forms, while non-count nouns represent items existing as a mass and rarely take plurals. In the writing of the students used for the study, most of them had difficulty in dealing with singular and plurals. Students used plurals where they were not necessary and vis-versa. The following are some examples identified from the data:

(26) Sometimes, they beat the gong-gong for every **citizens** to join in the clean-up exercise. (Sometimes, they beat the gong-gong for every **citizen** to join in the clean-up exercise).

(27) We should always clean areas where we have our **properties**. (We should always clean areas where we have our **property**).

(28) ... a carpenter has piled up old **furnitures** behind his workshop which **have** become a breeding place for **rodent**. (... a carpenter has piled up old **furniture** behind his workshop which **has** become a breeding place for **rodents**).

(29) The **congregations** of the Methodist Church came with their members to help with the cleanup. (The **congregation** of Methodist Church came with their members to help with the cleanup).

(30) During the cleanup, it was announced that everybody should put his/her **sheeps** in a pen. (During the cleanup, it was announced that everybody should put his/her **sheep** in a pen).

(31) The **mens** in the group were happy that we have internet to use to study. (The **men** in the group were happy that we have internet to use to study).

(32) The **peoples** in our team played very well. (The **people** in our team played very well).

(33) We were advised that if we do not clean ourselves well we will have **bacterias**. (We were advised that if we do not clean ourselves well we will have **bacteria**).

(34) In the cleanup, we saw many **mouses**. (In the cleanup, we saw many **mice**).

(35) Many students use the computer to collect **many informations**. (Many students use the computer to collect **much information**).

(36) The chief and his elders gave us a lot of **item**. (The chief and his elders gave us a lot of **items**).

(37) One of my **brother** use computer for bad things. (One of my **brothers** use computer for bad things).

Errors in examples 27-35 reflect the students' thinking that every noun should have the suffix—*s* in its plural form as any regular noun. This is a typical instance of overgeneralization.

**Prepositional errors:** A preposition tells a reader when and where something occurred as well as how it occurred. A preposition introduces a prepositional phrase in a sentence. In most cases, it co-occurs with the noun phrase. It must be noted that some constructions require preposition while others do not. Using Samatle's (2001) model, I discussed the errors in this category under missing preposition, wrong preposition use, and redundant preposition. The following are selected examples from the data:

**Missing preposition:** This means that the student failed to use the preposition when in actual sense it was necessary. Examples from the data include the following:

(38) In advising us, the headmaster said we should not boast ^ our success but be humble and study hard. (In advising us, the headmaster said we should not boast **of** our success but be humble and study hard).

(39) The cutlass was ^ no use during the cleanup because ..... (The cutlass was **of** no use during the cleanup because .....).

(40) As we cleared the rubbish, some students also disposed ^ the rubbish. (As we cleared the rubbish, some students also disposed **off** the rubbish).

(41) The students did not listen ^ the request... (The students did not listen **to** the request...).

**Redundant use of preposition:** This implies that a preposition was used when it was not required. Extracts from the data are as follows:

(42) After the cleaning exercise, the housemaster advised us not to violate **against** the rules. (After the cleaning exercise, the housemaster advised us not to violate the rules).

(43) The school prefect said he will inform **to** the senior housemaster ..... (The school prefect said he will inform the Senior Housemaster).

(44) Each student was made to sign **on** the contract that he will not destroy the computers in the school. (Each student was made to sign the contract that he will not destroy the computers in the school).

(45) The exercise we did has benefitted **to** me very much. (The exercise we did has benefitted me very much).

**Wrong use of prepositions:** This category of errors means that a preposition was required in the sentence but the wrong one was used. This phenomenon occurred in the students' writings. Examples from the data are as follows:

(46) Our football captain was over confident **of win** the game but we were beaten. (Our football captain was over confident **of winning** the game but we were beaten).

(47) Our teachers were concerned **on** the dirty environment ..... (Our teachers were concerned **with** the dirty environment .....).

(48) Students were advised to move away **of** the gutter before they fall **in** ..... (Students were advised to move away from the gutter before they fall **into** .....).

(49) In the computer lab, John sits **besides** me .... (In the computer lab, John sits **beside** me ...).

(50) The computers we have are different **than** the other ones. (This computers we have are different **from** the other ones).

(51) When we were going for the games some students rode **in** a bicycle. (When we were going for the games some students rode **on** a bicycle).

**Articles errors:** There are some basic rules in the use of articles in English. In English, a singular common noun must have an article. In addition, a plural common noun can be used with or without an article. Also, the definite article the is used with superlative adjectives, while a proper noun does not normally take an article. However, these basic rules regarding the use of articles were overlooked by students I used in the study. Using the model of Samatle (2001), I divided the article errors into three. These are missing articles, wrong article use, and redundant article errors. The following are some articles errors extracted from the data based on the three categories:

**Missing articles:** In the following sentences, the articles were left out by the students. This was the most frequently committed in this category of errors. Examples culled from the data are:

(52) All students were made to clear ^ area very well. (All students were made to clear **the** area very well).

(53) In our school we have ^ big gutter which breeds mosquitoes.... (In our school we have **a** big gutter which breeds mosquitoes....).

(54) ^ Computers we use do not work well so we always fight over ^ few good ones left. (**The** computers we use do not work well so we always fight over **the** few good ones left).

(55) I do not see ^ importance of computers in my school because we are not allowed to use them ..... (I do not see **any** importance of computers in my school because we are not allowed to use them .....).

(56) In our school we have ^ small room where our generator is kept so .... (In our school we have **a** small room where our generator is kept so ....).

(57) I am not ^ Englishman so If I cannot use ^ computer ..... (I am not **an** Englishman so If I cannot use **the** computer .....).

(58) We found ^ fish and foodstuff market very filthy so we cleaned the place. (We found **the** fish and foodstuff market very filthy so we cleaned the place).

(59) Our school has ^ best footballers in Western region ..... (Our school has **the** best footballers in Western region .....).

(60) My school is in ^ Western region of Ghana and ..... (My school is in **the** Western region of Ghana and .....).

(61) Being ^ prefect in our school is ^ prestigious position in our school. (Being **a** prefect in our school is **a** prestigious position in our school).

**Wrong article use:** In this category, the students used an article but it was wrongly used. They used the inappropriate article. This type of article error was the least in the group. The following are examples from the data collected:

(62) In my community we have **a** farmers, teachers and doctors who help... (In my community we have **the** farmers, teachers and doctors who help...).

(63) Shoes and shirts are sold at **a** "Yes" supermarket but the place was very dirty. (Shoes and shirts are sold at **the** "Yes" Supermarket but the place was very dirty).

(64) When we were cleaning ^ bushes we saw **a** antelope near the water tank. (When we were cleaning the bushes we saw **an** antelope near the water tank).

(65) Where we cleaned is in the west **at** the school. (Where we cleaned is **in** the west of the school).

(66) We have **a** hour to use the computer as part of our technology class.... (We have **an** hour to use the computer as part of our technology class).

**Redundant article use:** In this category of article errors, students used articles when it was not necessary. This implies that an article was not to be used in the construction. The following were examples from the data:

(67) My friend has failed **an** English because he was always using his cell phone without learning. (My friend has failed English because he was always using his cell phone without learning).

(68) **The** most people in the community are not clean. (Most people in the community are not clean).

(69) People die of **the** malaria because they are dirty. (People die of malaria because they are dirty).

(70) Our teacher warned that if we do not clean our rooms, we will be in **a** trouble. (Our teacher warned that if we do not clean our rooms, we will be in trouble).

(71) We have many things in technology. For **an** example ..... (We have many things in technology. For example .....).

(72) There was **a** huge garbage just behind the village community centre.... (There was huge garbage just behind the community centre...).

### Lexical Errors

According to Hernandez (2011), lexical errors are mistakes at the word level, which include, for example,

choosing the wrong word for the meaning the writer wants to express. Llach (2015) indicated that “when inappropriate lexical choices are made they can lead directly to misunderstanding of the message, or at least to an increase in the burden of interpreting the text” (p. 109). In the data analysis, there was the problem of whether some of the errors were as a result of misspelling or because the students did not know the meaning of the word and how to use them appropriately. In this section, attention was placed on the semantic aspect (meaning) rather than on spelling. Some of these problems occurred because of homophone problems. In this analysis, the lexical errors were discussed under two categories: those errors caused by homophone problems and those caused by inappropriate or misuse of the word (semantic lexical errors). The following were some examples from the data:

**Lexical errors due to homophone problems:** These are words that have different spellings but have almost the same pronunciation. These errors might have come about as a result of poor pronunciation. The students could not pronounce such words to bring about the subtle differences that exist between them. Examples from the data are as follows:

(73) My father **tend** fifty years last June so we had to clean the compound. (My father **turned** fifty years last June).

(74) .... every student should promote **piece** during sports competitions. (...every student should promote **peace** during sports competitions).

(75) The **march** ended with our school winning so we were happy. (The **match** ended with our school winning so we were happy).

(76) The **hole** village come to support in the sanitation every week. (The **whole** village come to support in the sanitation every week).

(77) As a student, I have the **rite** to use the school computer.... (As a student, I have the **right** to use the school computer).

(78) After the match, a police detective visited the school in **plane** attire.... (The Police detective visited the school in **plain** attire).

(79) We had snack **brake** is at 10 am before we continued with the sanitation. (We had snack **break** is at 10 am before we continued with the sanitation).

(80) When we were going for the match we saw I saw my teacher who **thought** me at primary six. (When we were going for the match we saw I saw my teacher who **taught** me at primary six).

(81) Our school won a **price** for the cleanup campaign. (Our school won a **prize** for the cleanup campaign).

(82) The teacher took the lead to the field while I and the **orders** followed. (The teacher took the lead while I and the **others** followed).

(83) I **parched** my boots for the football match. (I **patched up** my boots for the football match).

(84) If **waist** is not properly disposed it breeds pets. (If **waste** is not properly disposed it breeds pests).

(85) We saw so many bad **tins** when we were cleaning up the compound. (We saw so many bad **things** when we were cleaning up the compound).

(86) People throw away human **waist** in the river. (People throw away human **waste** in the river).

(87) People **damp** refuse **rite** in the gutters. (People **dump** refuse **right** in the gutters).

**Semantic lexical error:** Errors which come about as a result of wrong word use. Examples from the data are found below:

(88) The computers in our school are very **low** so we all do not have the chance to use them. (The computers in our school are very **few** so we all do not have the chance to use them).

(89) During the Sanitation Day we cleared a large area but I do not know the **length**. (During the Sanitation Day we cleared a large area but I do not know the **size**).

(90) When you come to my school the first thing you will **meet** is the Senior Housemaster's Bungalow. (When you come to my school the first thing you will **come across/see** is the Senior Housemaster's Bungalow).

(91) We went to another school which was very **long** from the town to play the match .... (We went to another school which is very **far away** from the town to play the match).

(92) Our school has **grown** well in two years. (Our school has **developed** well in two years).

(93) When we got to the school for the match we **jumped from** the vehicle. (When we got to the school for the match we **got off** the vehicle).

(94) After the cleanup, we saw that a friend has **loss** his cutlass. (After the cleanup we saw that a friend has **lost** his cutlass).

(95) The main road to Mando Senior High where we played the game is **shared** into two. (The main road to Mando Senior High where we played the game is **divided** into two).

(96) I asked my friend to **borrow** me his phone to make a call. (I asked my friend to **lend** me his phone to make a call).

(97) Our sport prefect **has got** 16 years old. (Our sport prefect **is** 16 years old).

(98) Our technology teacher is **greatly** educated. (Our technology teacher is **highly** educated).

(99) Our technology teacher is **much** brilliant so we all like him. (Our technology teacher is **very** brilliant so we all like him).

(100) After we have cleaned the place we will **wait** that the mosquitoes do not come back. (After we have cleaned the place we will **hope** that the mosquitoes do not come back).

(101) When the teachers wanted to see those who participated in the sanitation day they asked as to **raise** up. (When the teachers wanted to see those who participated in the sanitation day they asked as to **rise** up).

(102) Our computer laboratory **consist of** old computers. (Our computer laboratory **has** old computers).

Research question 2: *Which grammatical and lexical errors were most frequently made by students in the selected schools?*

This section of the paper looks at which grammatical or lexical errors were frequently committed by the students under discussion. As a reminder, the errors collected from the data are broadly categorized under the following: grammatical errors and lexical errors. The grammatical errors were further sub-categorized into agreement errors, article errors, tense errors, preposition errors, and number errors. The lexical errors were also divided into semantic errors/wrong word use and homophone induced errors. In all, 2,247 errors were identified from the 300 essays from the 150 students used in the study. This implies that averagely there were 7.5 (approximately 8 errors) errors in each essay of 250 words. This may seem insignificant but it must be noted that there are other errors like coherence, conjunctions, punctuations, organization, etc., committed by the students, which were not the focus of this study. It was identified from the study that 1,379 (61.4%) grammatical errors (an average of 4.6 errors per essay) and 868 (38.6%) lexical errors (an average of 2.9 errors per essay) were found. This implies that the most frequently committed errors were in the grammatical category. This is envisaged

because the grammatical categories are more than the lexical ones. The following is the diagrammatic representation of the frequency of the type of errors committed (see Table 1 & Figure 1):

Table 1

*Error Frequency*

ERROR TYPE	FREQUENCY	PERCENTAGE
Grammatical	1379	61.4
Lexical	868	38.6
Total	2247	100

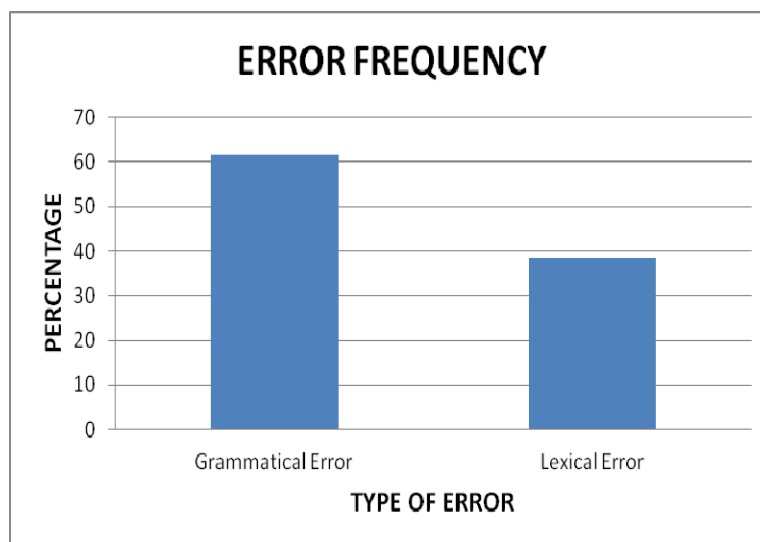


Figure 1. Error frequency bar-chart.

**Grammatical Error Frequency Analysis**

As indicated in the methodology section, the grammatical errors were categorized under the following: agreement errors, article errors, tense error, prepositional errors, and number errors. The analysis of the grammatical errors indicated that 411 (29.8%) were agreements errors, 182 (13.2%) were article errors, 441 (32.0%) were tense errors, 161 (11.7%) were preposition errors, and 184 (13.3%) were number errors. This shows that tense errors were the most frequently committed, followed by agreement errors, number errors, article errors, and preposition error in that order. This is represented in the table and bar chart below (see Table 2 & Figure 2):

Table 2

*Frequency of Grammatical Errors*

Type of Grammatical Error	Frequency	Percentage
Agreement	411	29.8
Article	182	13.2
Tense	441	32.0
Preposition	161	11.7
Number	184	13.3
Total	1379	100

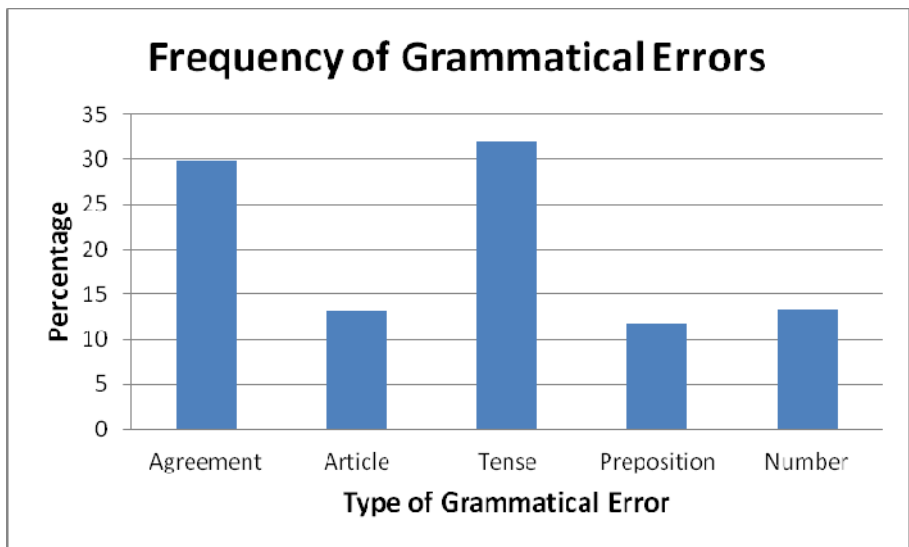


Figure 2. Frequency of grammatical errors bar-chart.

The analysis above agrees with earlier studies by Noor (1985), Tin (2000), and Sonmez and Griffiths (2015) that tense errors are the most frequently committed grammatical error among second language learners of English. Additionally, the findings of the study about agreement as problematic to L2 learners of English is consistent with Leech (1994), Tin (2000), and Chele (2015) when they indicated that subject-verb agreement poses serious problems to L2 learners of English, especially the 3rd person. Additionally, a second look at the study revealed that among the prepositional errors, wrong use of preposition was the most frequently committed error. This agrees with findings by Saturnina (2015) in a study of prepositional errors of college students of University of the Philippines.

**Lexical Error Frequency Analysis**

The lexical errors were subcategorized under homophone induced errors and semantic lexical errors. In all there were 868 lexical errors made up 521 (60.0%) homophone induced errors and 347 (40.0%) semantic lexical errors. This indicates that homophone induced errors are the most frequently committed. The following is a representation of the frequency table and bar chart of the lexical errors (see Table 3 & Figure 3):

Table 3

*Frequency of Lexical Errors*

Type of Lexical Error	Frequency	Percentage
Homophone induced	521	60.0
Semantic	347	40.0
Total	868	100



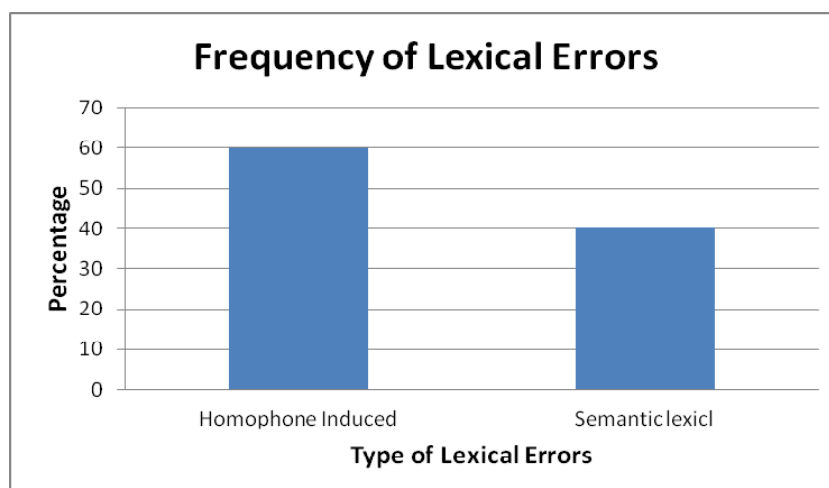


Figure 3. Frequency of lexical errors bar-chart.

### Recommendations for Improving the Teaching of English and Students' Writing

The findings of the study have implications for the teaching of English writing with reference to grammatical and lexical errors in the SHS. The study implies that the teaching of English writing at the SHS level needs to be stepped up. The following are some recommendations:

English language teachers should employ better and modern approaches and methods to teaching of writing to improve their students' writing skills.

Since some of the above errors were as a result of students' transferring their grammatical or lexical knowledge from their L1, therefore English language teachers at the SHS level, where possible, should have an understanding of both the L1 and L2 of the students and explicitly teach for transfer.

Additionally, English teachers should be trained to have adequate knowledge of how to identify students' writing errors and use effective teaching strategies to treat them.

Second language learning thrives in an environment where students can take risks without fear of intimidation. This behoves on English teachers to create conducive classroom environment for students to participate in class writing activities to improve their grammatical and lexical competence.

Error study, which involves identification of errors, their sources, and treatment, should be an integral part of the English language teacher's training.

English language teachers should be trained adequately in the content and pedagogic knowledge of the L2 for them to be effective in the classroom.

English teachers should serve as models by using appropriate English in their speech and writing for students to emulate.

Second language teachers of English must also help their students to raise their awareness of how to organize English writing and how units of sentences and paragraphs are connected with one another to form meaningful text.

English writing teachers should provide students with ample amounts of language input and instruction as well as create more opportunities for students to write.

L2 writing teachers should expose their students to authentic writing that will help them expand their vocabulary and write well-organized, reasonably cohesive essays.

L2 (English) students should be made to cultivate their writing skills by consciously listening or reading extensively outside the class and reflect on their writing before, during, and after.

L2 teachers should emphasize on the process approach to writing to help students do self-editing of their writings.

In the L2 teaching process, students should be provided with substantial input and examples to help them understand grammatical and lexical concepts taught.

Training of English language teachers in Ghana for the Senior High School level should put more emphasis on helping them to cope with the time consuming and painstaking task of error correction.

### Conclusion

The study sought to identify the grammatical and lexical errors that occur in the English writing of 2nd year students in three Senior High rural schools in the Central Region of Ghana. The study found that grammatical errors were more frequently committed than lexical errors. It was also discovered that the grammatical errors committed frequently by the students were in this order: tense errors, agreement errors, number errors (singular/plural errors), article errors, and prepositional errors. The study also observed that the lexical errors committed frequently were homophone induced followed by semantic lexical errors. An effective and appropriate writing is teachable and learnable, but before this can be achieved, both teachers and students have a major role to play in improving the students' writing skills in relation to grammatical and lexical errors.

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