

The Rhythm of Omission of Articles and Verbs by Bengali EFL Students

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ABSTRACT

English language plays an important role as an effective communication medium. It is used in schools, colleges and universities. The aim of this study is to explore writing difficulties in the English language faced by second language learners particularly by Bengalis. A survey was conducted for this purpose. Majority of students with rural and urban backgrounds cannot communicate properly in English and perceive it as a very difficult subject. This paper reports on a small scale study which examined ten Bengali learners with a vernacular background. Data was collected from them in the form of essay writing. The main focus of the study has been on usage of articles and verbs in the written form. Seven of the students essays were studied in details. Results of the study indicated that students were facing a lot of difficulties in writing English language due to lack of vocabulary, poor spelling, L1 interference and a poor understanding of grammatical structure. Primary data was collected from the students of Shantiniketan and the secondary data was collected from other websites.

KEYWORD: English language, writing difficulties, vernacular background, communication, Bengalis, medium, interference

I. INTRODUCTION

Background-Bangla or Bengali is an Indo-Aryan language of the eastern Indian subcontinent, evolved from the Magadhi Prakrit, Pāli and Sanskrit languages. Bangla is native to the people residing in eastern South Asia known as Bengal, that is broadly occupied by Bangladesh and the Indian state of West Bengal. With nearly 250 million total speakers, Bangla is one of the most spoken languages in the world. The Bengali alphabet is derived from the Brahmi alphabet. It is also closely related to the Devanagari alphabet, from which it started to diverge in the 11th Century AD. The current printed form of Bengali alphabet first appeared in 1778 when Charles Wilkins developed printing in Bengali. A few archaic letters were modernised during the 19th century. Bengali has two literary styles: one is called *Sadhubhasa* (elegant language) and the other *Chaltibhasa* (current language). The former is the traditional literary style based on Middle Bengali of the sixteenth century, while the later is a 20th century creation and is based on the speech of educated people in Calcutta. The differences between the two styles are not huge and involve mainly forms of pronouns and verb conjugations. Some people prefer to call this alphabet the Eastern Nagari script or Eastern Neo-Brahmic script. Notable features-The Bengali alphabet is a syllabic alphabet in which consonants all have an inherent vowel which has two different pronunciations, the choice of which is not always easy to determine and which is sometimes not pronounced at all. Vowels can be written as independent letters, or by using a variety of diacritical marks which are written above, below, before or after the consonant they belong to. When consonants occur together in clusters, special conjunct letters are used. The letters for the consonants other than the final one in the group are reduced. The inherent vowel only applies to the final consonant. Origin of the English language dates back from 1757 to 1947 in India.

By modern standards, British rule in India lasted a long time: nearly 200 years. Prior to English colonisation, India was a fragmented nation and was essentially multilingual, with 15 major languages and approximately 720 dialects. English language had served as a common ground for Indians and had granted separate cultural and ethnic groups to come nearer to each other. Although it was primarily the educated Indians from the fortunate caste who verbalised and mouthed in English, these were in fact the most influential people in terms of acting as `facilitators` for nationalistic ideas to be propagated throughout the populace. The spread of English language as the most redefining expression of the mass natives, was a key guiding factor and impetus to have had exercised a tremendous British influence on contemporary Indian literature, both in regional as well as in English.

What counts as Standard English will depend on both the locality and the particular varieties that Standard English is being contrasted with. A form that is considered standard in one region may be nonstandard in another, and a form that is standard by contrast with one variety (for example the language of inner-city African Americans) may be considered nonstandard by contrast with the usage of middle-class professionals. No matter how it is interpreted, however, Standard English in this sense shouldn't be regarded as being necessarily correct or unexceptionable, since it will include many kinds of language that could be faulted on various grounds, like the language of corporate memos and television advertisements or the conversations of middle-class high-school students. Thus while the term can serve a useful descriptive purpose providing the context makes its meaning clear, it shouldn't be construed as conferring any absolute positive evaluation. (*The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language*, fourth edition, 2000).

"What Is 'Standard English'?" *RELC Journal*, Singapore, 1981) Written English and Spoken English- There are many grammar books, dictionaries and guides to English usage which describe and give advice on the standard English that appears in writing. . . . These books are widely used for guidance on what constitutes standard English. However, there is often also a tendency to apply these judgments, which are about written English, to spoken English. But the norms of spoken and written language are not the same; people don't talk like books even in the most formal of situations or contexts. If you can't refer to a written norm to describe spoken language, then, as we have seen, you base your judgments on the speech of the "best people," the "educated" or higher social classes. But basing your judgments on the usage of the educated is not without its difficulties. Speakers, even educated ones, use a variety of different forms. . . . (Linda Thomas, Ishita Singh, Jean Stilwell Peccei, and Jason Jones, *Language, Society and Power: An Introduction*, Routledge, 2004). *Standard British English* is sometimes used as a synonym for Received Pronunciation (RP). Fossilization, in linguistics and second language acquisition (SLA), refers to the often-observed loss of progress in the acquisition of a second language (L2), following a period where learning occurred, despite regular exposure to and interaction with the L2 and regardless of any learner motivation to continue.

The number of second language learners who are considered to develop native like fluency in an L2 is generally assumed to be small. At some point in the learner's path of development, no further learning appears possible, with their performance apparently impervious to both further exposure to the L2 and explicit correction of errors. Because the L2 now appears 'set in stone', the term *fossilization* was used to describe this point. There is no particular level that can be identified at which learners appear to fossilize, though it is more often observed in intermediate proficiency levels and above. Whether fossilization is inevitable, very likely or avoidable has long been discussed in SLA. While some scholars have argued that native like fluency in an L2 is not possible beyond a certain age (the *critical period hypothesis*), others argue that fossilization is a result of a learning environment that is far from ideal, or a mind that has reached subconscious conclusions that are difficult to unlearn, meaning that a native like level of *ultimate attainment* is possible in the right conditions. The estimated proportion of learners able to master an L2 in such a way as to be indistinguishable from a native speaker appears to have increased over the years. Second language acquisition (SLA) refers to both the process and study of developing the ability to use a language other than the native tongue. Research focuses on the extent to which people coming to a second or subsequent language (L2, L3 and so on) develop competence in the language like that of a native speaker, and how similar the acquisition process is to first language acquisition. Where differences are identified, researchers seek to explain what is responsible - for example, whether there is a biologically-based 'critical period' that prevents acquisition after a certain age, or what social or psychological factors, such as exposure to written language, may account for non-native like attainment. Though the study of SLA is often viewed as part of applied linguistics, it is typically concerned with the language system and learning processes themselves, whereas applied linguistics may focus more on the experiences of the learner, particularly in the classroom. Additionally, SLA has mostly examined *naturalistic* acquisition, where learners acquire a language with little formal training or teaching.

The acquisition and use of a second language is essential to the everyday lives of people around the world. The trend for acquisition of second language affects the careers and life styles of people (Cook, 2001). English enjoys a status of second language in India as it is used extensively for many purposes in society. For acquiring and using any language effectively and efficiently, it is essential to master four basic skills, namely listening, speaking, reading and writing. Writing is not a natural activity, so explicit instructions are required for learning this skill (Aronoff & Rees- Miller, 2007) L1 interference has important implications in the learning of written expression. L1 learning is different from L2 learning, as the person already knows about meaning and use of one language. First language helps learners when it has elements in common with L2, but hinders the learning process when both language systems differ (Cook, 2001).

A person who speaks two languages has gone through the acquisition process twice, but second language learning takes many forms and occurs in many situations other than natural circumstances which cause problems (Cook, 1993). Grammar is the most difficult area for L2 writers. Students face difficulties in the use of correct sentence structure and paragraph development, and in creating a coherent form. Grammar skills include run-on sentences, fragments and verbiage, inclusion of necessary information, use of different type of sentences, subject-verb agreement, and placement of modifiers, tense agreement and parallel construction (Leisak, 1989). Grammar is more than just a set of rules; it is an ever evolving structure of a language (Kleisar, 2005). On the other hand, learning grammar can be pretty dull, as no one likes rules; and the memorization of rules is worse than applying them. Students usually know how to build tenses, but when they use them in written expression they are confused.

The effect of literacy on language acquisition has become a focal point of research, particularly since the 1990s. Literacy usually helps learning, such as by providing greater access to new vocabulary through written information,^[1] and learners who read a lot do better on judging the grammaticality of sentences.^[2] Literacy is gradually being identified as a key factor in language processing skills, i.e. literacy positively and negatively affects how well people interpret grammatical patterns, acquire the accent of another language, or perform in tasks involving the manipulation of linguistic utterances. This may account for some of the effects of the critical period hypothesis, for example. Modern research on L2 acquisition is rooted in *contrastive analysis*, a viewpoint popular in the 1950s and which sought to explain and predict errors in language learning based on a comparison of the grammar and phonology of the learner's L1 versus the 'target' L2. Though contrastive analysis mostly gave way to theories of L2 acquisition that better-reflected new insights from modern linguistics, psychology and education, it continues to be a tool for spotting potential problems for teaching in the classroom, and as a potential explanation for errors in naturalistic performance - i.e. the understanding and production of spontaneous language by English language learning in Japan

English is a compulsory subject in Japanese schools from the age of 11; students who enter university are also obliged to take an English course in their first year, assessed through the TOEIC exam.^[3] However, although the Japanese government has issued guidelines requiring a focus on real-life communication skills,^[4] most teaching is still very 'traditional': a focus on learning grammar rules and on reading the language, with Japanese as the medium of instruction used by almost exclusively Japanese native-speaking teachers. This means that exposure to native English can be limited for many learners, who may have few opportunities to practice listening and speaking learners.

II. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A sample survey was conducted using quantitative method from a size of seven respondents from Shantiniketan, Birbhum, West Bengal, India. An investigative approach was observed for an in-depth study of the written essays of seven respondents. All the seven respondents have a vernacular background and are 12th standard students. Primary data was collected from them in the form of written essays.

2.1. Method of Analysis

All the respondents were asked to write three essays of 100 words each in present tense, future tense and past tense. The topic given to them-

Past tense - My favorite teacher in primary.

Present tense- Why am I studying Arts /commerce /science? or One day in my life.

Future tense- What do you want to become...?

Error analysis

The purpose of the exercise was to observe the frequency with which errors relating to the following were being made by the respondents.

- [1] Checking error for Articles and Verbs
- [2] Rhythm of omission
- [3] Recurring mistakes

2.2. Problems

Factors taken into consideration-As far as possible care was taken to take the sample group having similar features.

All of them are from Rural background and have vernacular background

- [1] Economic factors- Lower middle class
- [2] Age factor-Between 16-18 yrs of age
- [3] All respondents studying in the 12th standard

2.3 Data analysis

I. Checking error for Articles and Verbs

Errors in usage of Articles

Given below is the table which shows the errors made by the respondents in use of Articles.

S. No	Name	Error of Article	Recurring Mistake	Missing Article	Not Required Article	Total Errors
1	Paripurna Bose	2	0	0	1	3
2	Rik Majumdar	1	2	0	1	4
3	Sudipta Pal	0	0	0	0	0
4	Deepanjan Mitra	0	4	0	0	4
5	Suchetna Chakravarty	0	0	2	0	2
6	Paramita Ghosh	0	0	0	0	0
7	Camellia Mandal	3	0	0	1	4
	Total	5	6	2	3	

Table No: 1

2.4. Observations:

- The scores indicate that 5 respondents out of 7 have made errors in usage of Articles.
- Maximum errors were observed two areas: Error of Articles and Recurring mistakes.
- Least mistakes were made in 'Missing Article' that too by only one respondent.
- Three of seven respondents have made a single error each in using 'Not required Article'
- Respondent numbers 3 and 6 have not made any mistakes in usage of Articles.

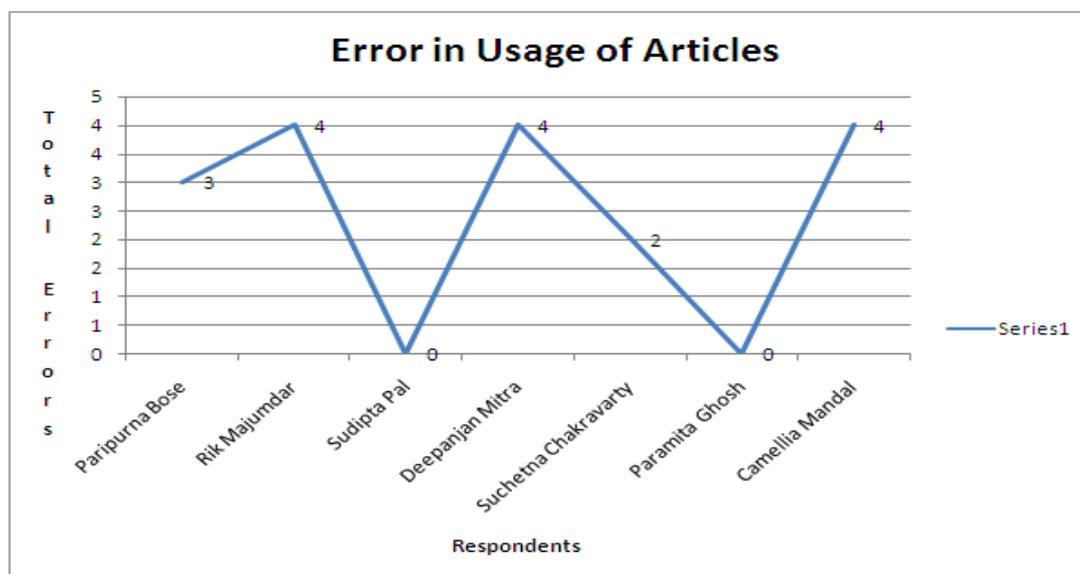
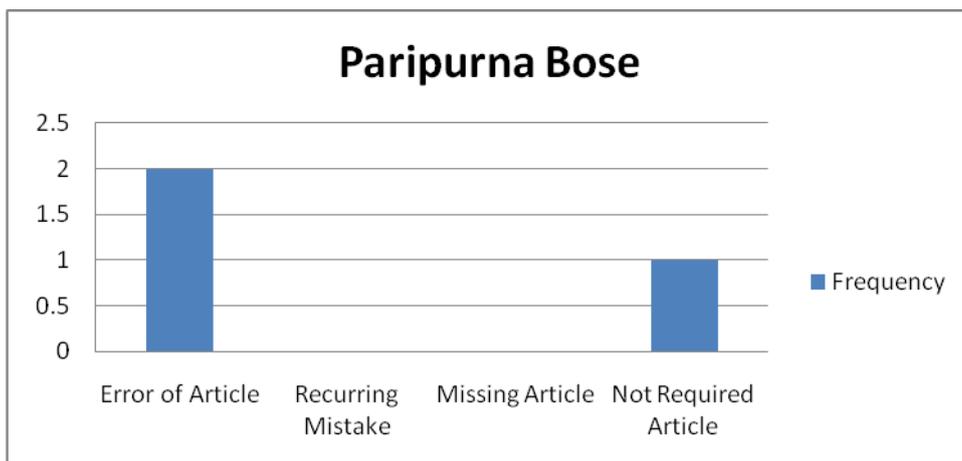


Chart No 1

Rhythm of omission in Articles

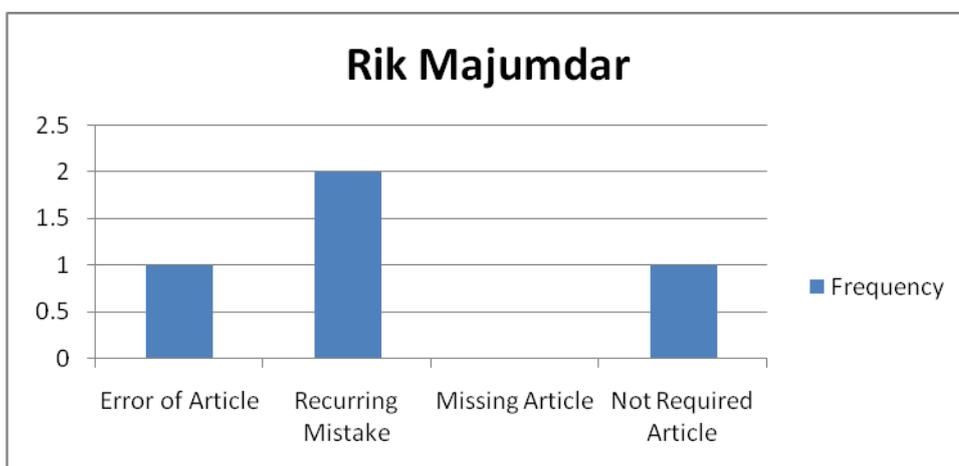
Given below is the graphical representation of each respondent in the frequency of errors of Articles:

1. Paripurna Bose:



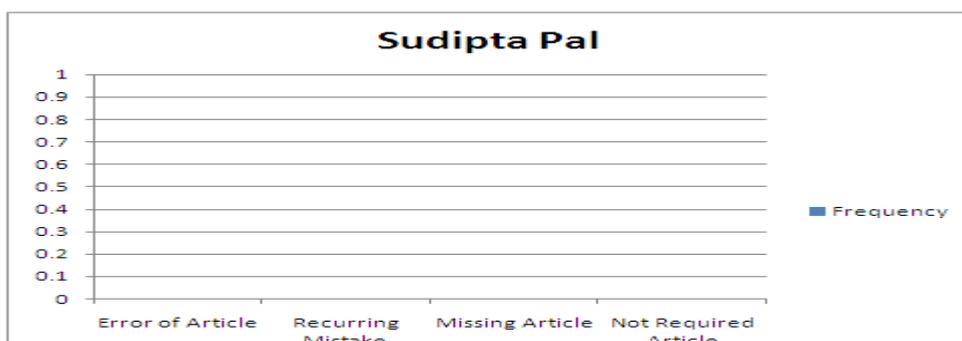
This Respondent has not made any mistakes in 'Recurring Mistakes' and 'Missing Articles'.

2. Rik Majumdar:



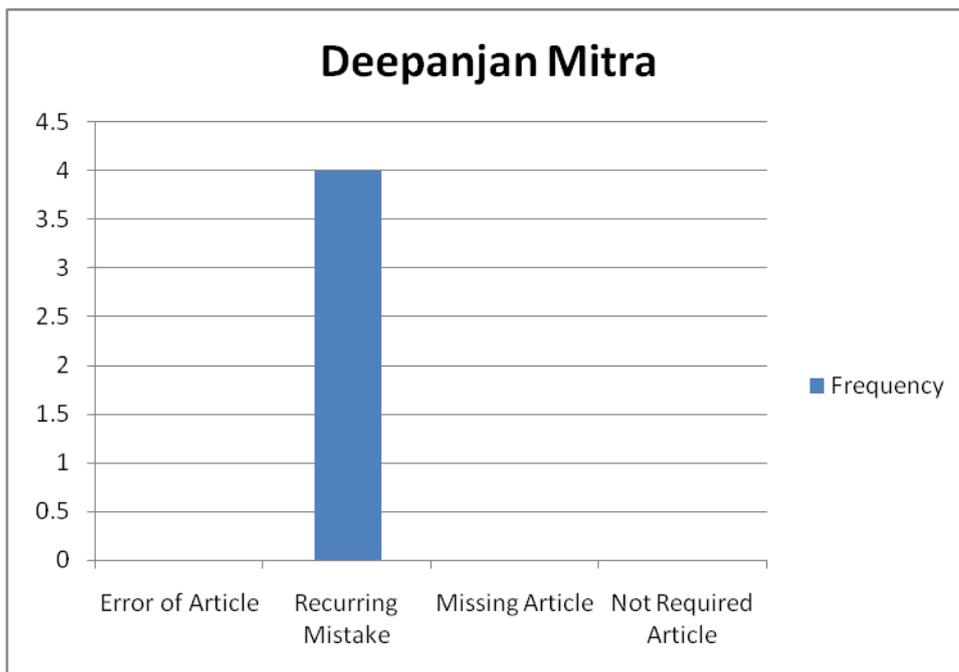
This respondent has not made any mistakes in 'Missing Articles'

3. Sudipta Pal



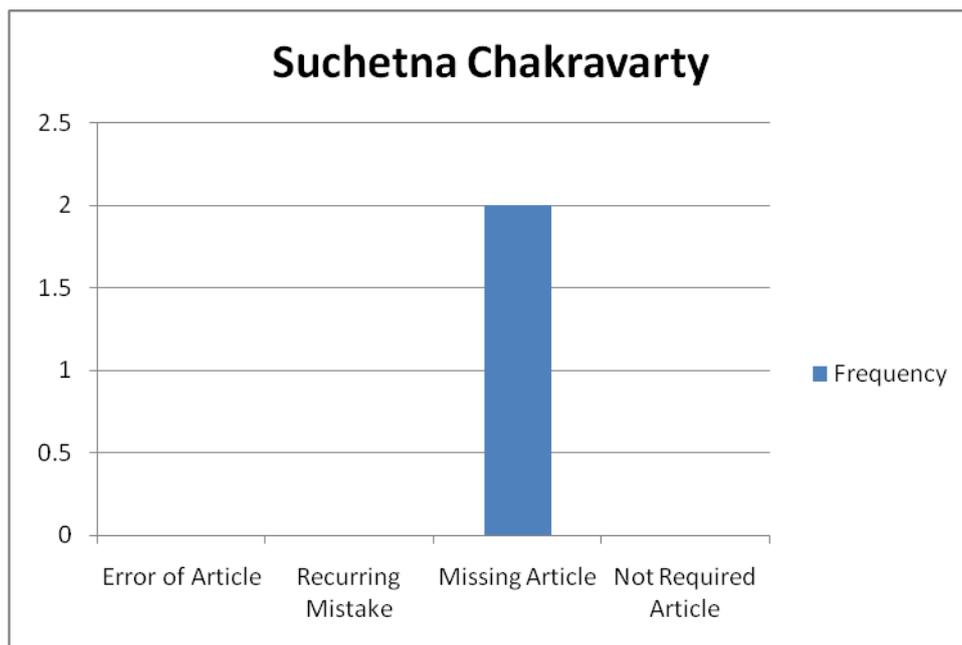
This respondent has performed well and has not made any error in Articles.

4. Deepanjan Mitra



This respondent has not made any mistakes in 'Error of Article', 'Missing Article', 'Not Required Article' but has made errors in 'Recurring Mistakes'.

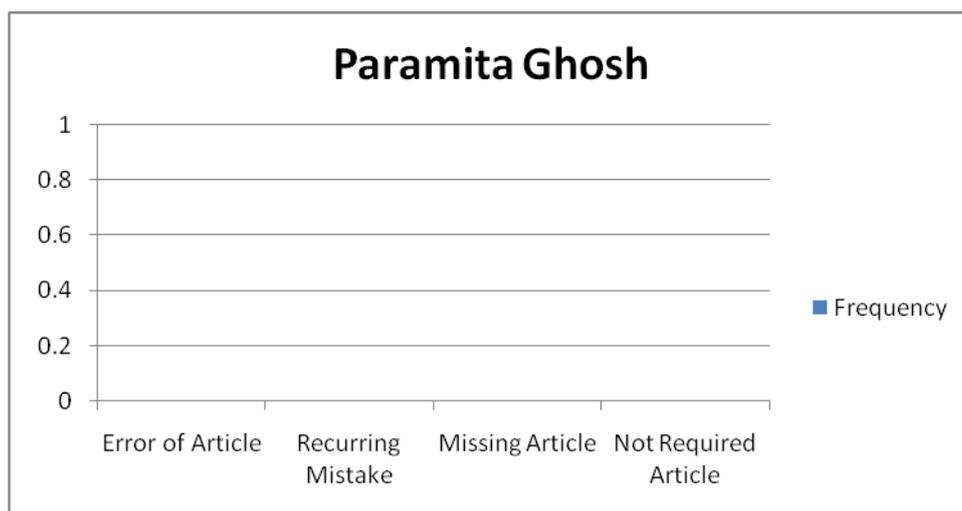
5. Suchetna Chakravarty



This respondent has not made any mistakes in 'Error of article', 'Recurring mistakes', and 'Not Required Article'.

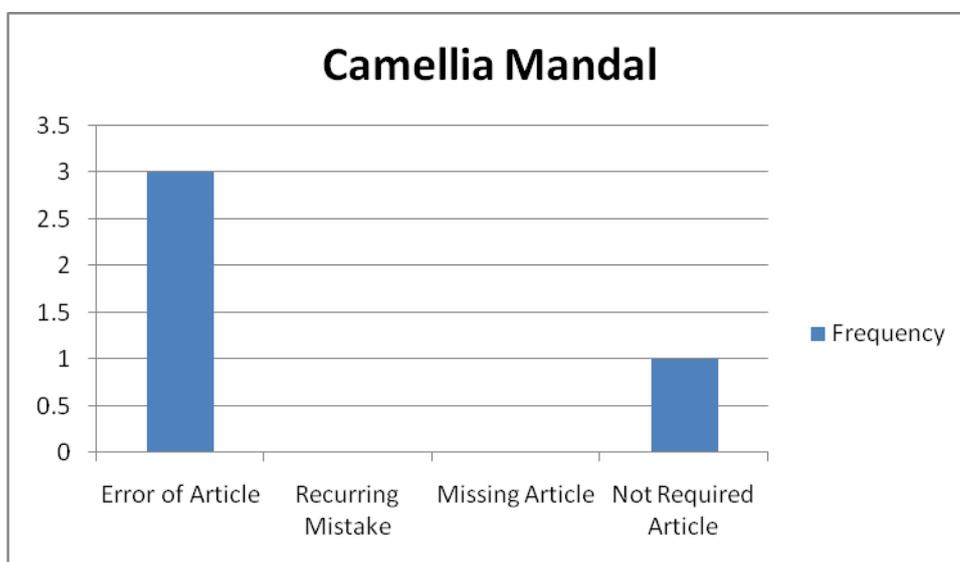
The respondent has made mistakes in 'Missing Articles'.

6. Paramita Ghosh



This respondent has made no mistakes

7 Camellia Mandal



The respondent has not made any mistakes in Recurring Mistake and Missing Article.
The respondent has made mistakes in Error of Article and Not Required Article.

a. Errors in usage of Verbs

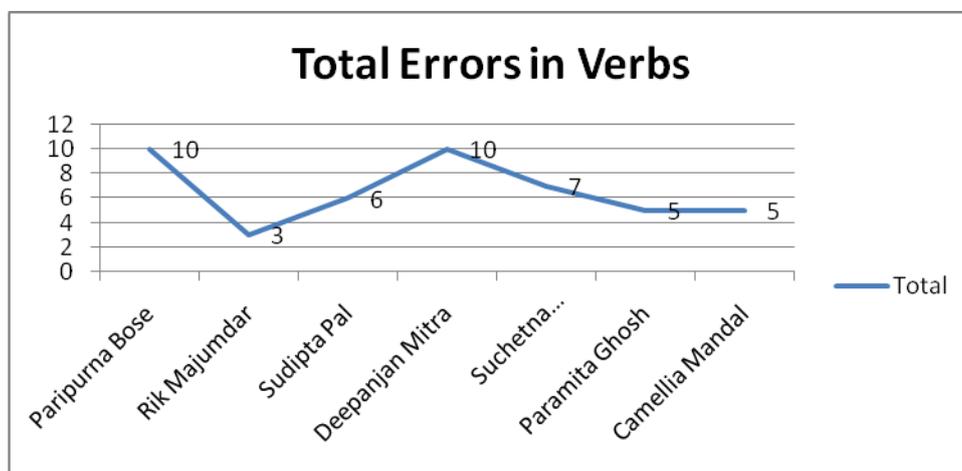
Given below is the table which shows the errors made by the Respondents in use of Verbs.

S. No	Name	mistake of verbs	recurring mistakes	missing verbs	not required verbs	Total
1	Paripurna Bose	7	1	2	0	10
2	Rik Majumdar	3	0	0	0	3
3	Sudipta Pal	6	0	0	0	6
4	Deepanjan Mitra	6	4	0	0	10
5	Suchetna Chakravarty	5	0	1	1	7
6	Paramita Ghosh	5	0	0	0	5
7	Camellia Mandal	4	0	0	1	5
	Total	36	5	3	2	

Table no.2

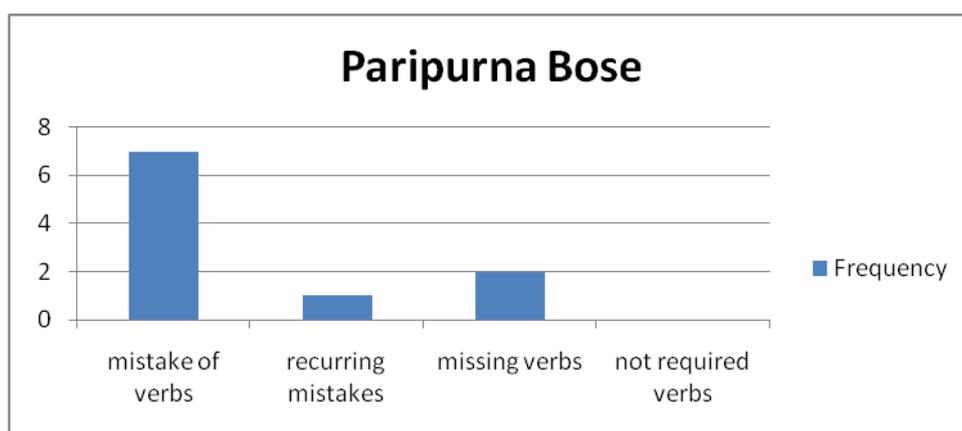
Observations:

- The scores indicate that all the 7 respondents have made errors in usage of verbs.
- Maximum error was observed in the area of: Mistakes of Verbs.
- Least mistakes were made in Not required verbs
- In Recurring mistakes respondent no 1.and respondent no.4 have made errors.
- In missing verbs respondent no 1.and respondent no.5 have made errors.
- In Not Required verbs respondent no 5.and respondent no.7 have made errors.



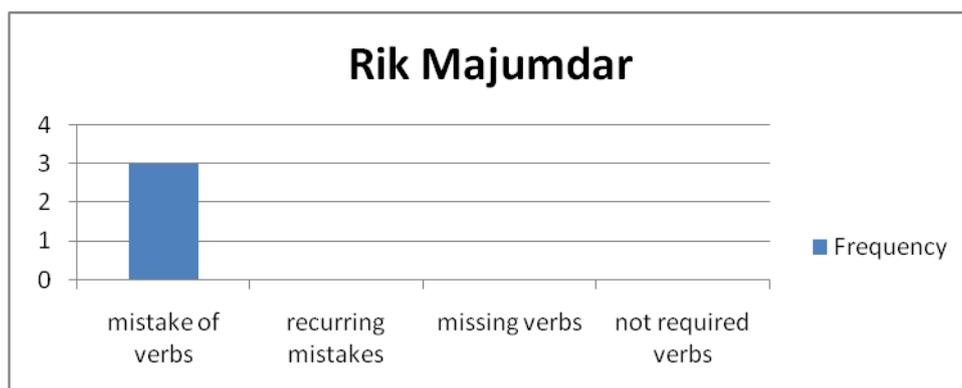
Rhythm of omission in Verbs

1.



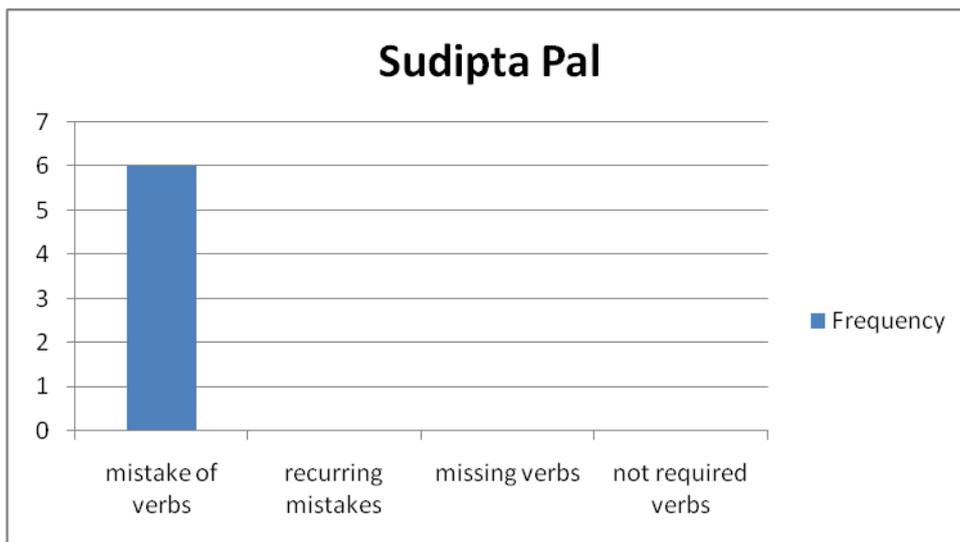
This respondent has not made any mistakes in Not Required verbs. The respondent has made mistakes in Mistake of Verbs, Recurring verbs and Missing verbs.

2.

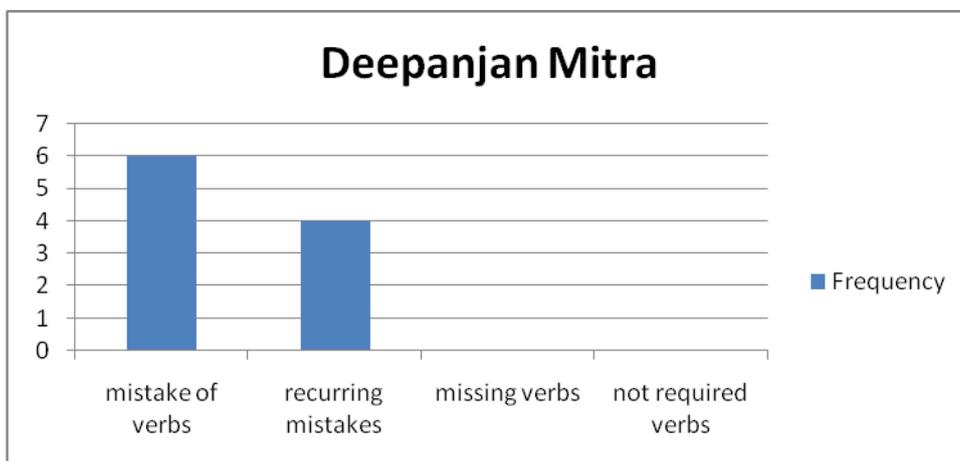


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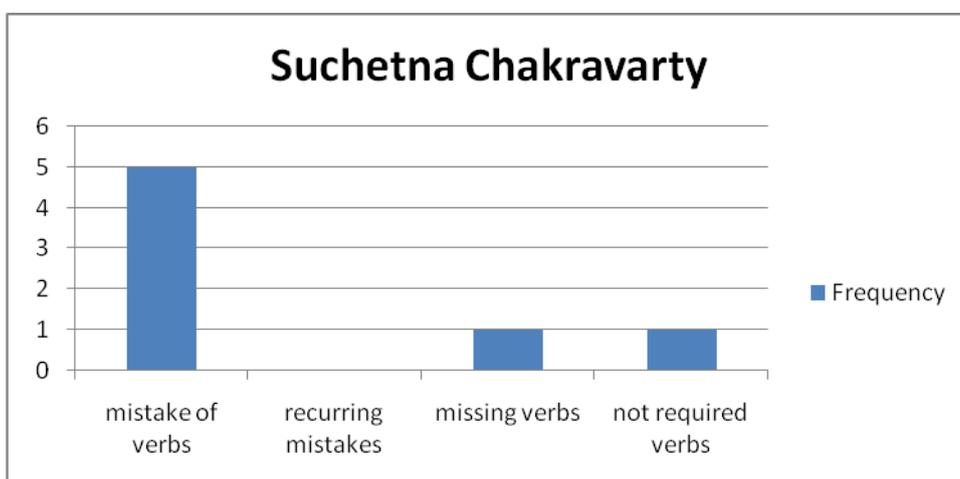
The respondent has made errors only in Mistakes of verbs.



The respondent has made error only in Mistake of verbs.

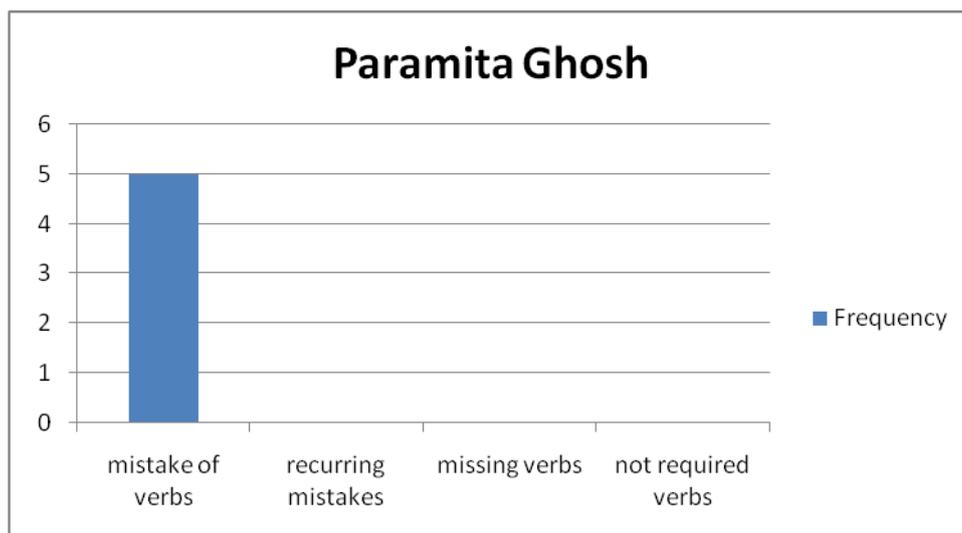


The respondent has made error in Mistake of verbs and Recurring Mistakes.

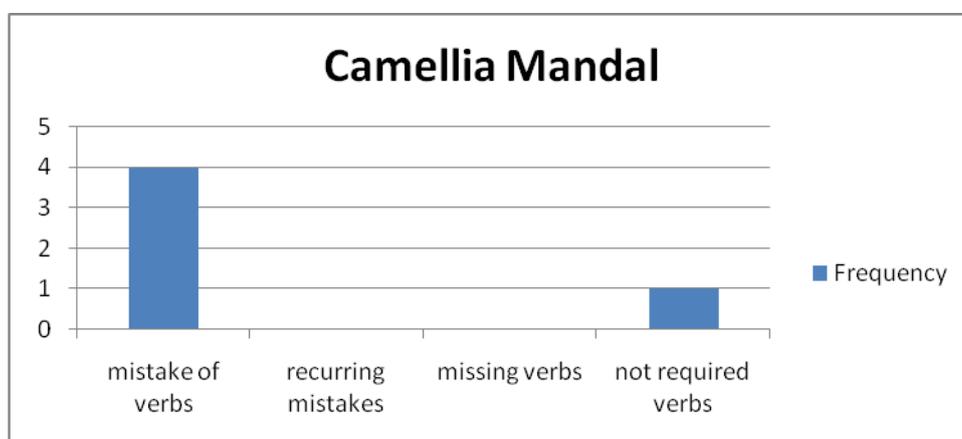


The respondent has made maximum errors in Mistake of verbs.
The respondent has not made any errors in Recurring mistakes.

The respondent has made equal number of errors in Missing verbs and Not required Verbs.



The respondent has not made any mistakes in Recurring Mistakes ,Missing verbs ,Not required verbs.
The respondent has made mistakes only in mistake of verbs.



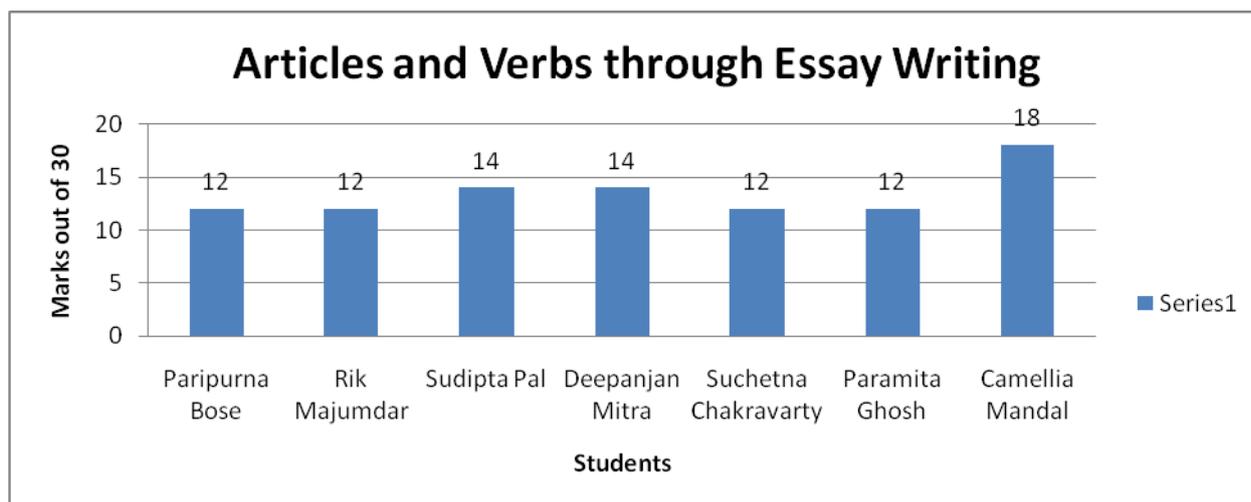
The respondent has not made any errors in recurring mistakes and Missing verbs.
The respondent has made maximum number of errors in Mistake of verbs and least in Not required verbs.

Results

Total Number of Errors:

Evaluation of use of Articles and Verbs through Essay Writing:

S. No	Name	Mark out of 30
1	Paripurna Bose	12
2	Rik Majumdar	12
3	Sudipta Pal	14
4	Deepanjan Mitra	14
5	Suchetna Chakravarty	12
6	Paramita Ghosh	12
7	Camellia Mandal	18



Rating scale

1-5	Very poor
6-10	poor
11-15	average
16-20	good
21-25	Very good
26-30	excellent

Six respondents have scored between 11-15 therefore their performance is average.

The last respondent has scored 18 out of 30 and his performance is good.

Findings

Articles -Five respondents made mistakes out of seven.

Verbs -All the seven respondents made mistakes in usage of verbs.

From the survey it became evident that a majority (71%) of the sample respondents are very weak in the use of articles and all the respondents are poor in the usage of verbs .

L1 influence can be seen.Six out of seven candidates made sentence construction mistakes and all the seven respondents made spelling mistakes.

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