

Grammatical Errors in French Writing among Beginner Students at the University of Dhaka

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ABSTRACT

Keywords: Error Analysis, French Language, Grammatical Errors, Bengali Learners

Despite the expansion of French-language teaching in Bangladesh, error-analysis research on Bangladeshi learners remains underexplored. This mixed-methods study investigates this area by identifying common grammatical errors among 47 Bengali-speaking French beginners at the University of Dhaka. A written corpus of 53 essays, comprising 425 sentences, was analyzed using Corder's (1974) Error Analysis framework and Dulay et al.'s (1982) Surface Strategy Taxonomy, with focus group discussions involving 25 participants. Results revealed 136 grammatical errors (averaging 32 errors per 100 sentences), with noun-related errors the most frequent (36.76%), closely followed by verb-related errors (33.82%). Misinformation and omissions dominated, and participants reported negative transfer from English (L2), overgeneralization, and simplification strategies as reasons for errors. The study showed how a cross-linguistic background shapes interlanguage, indicating that teaching should include contrastive, form-focused instruction to reduce errors.

Introduction

French-language teaching in Bangladesh formally began at the University of Dhaka in 1948. At that time, the Department of International Relations included French in its curriculum alongside other languages. In 1974, the University of Dhaka established the Institute of Modern Languages (IML). Since then, foreign language teaching in Bangladesh has entered a new phase. Over the years, IML has offered several French-language programs, including a 60-hour Short Course, an Elementary Program, a Pre-Intermediate Certificate Program, a Diploma, and a Higher Diploma. In the 2015–2016 undergraduate admission cycle, the University of Dhaka also introduced a Bachelor of Arts program in French Language and Culture, followed later by a Master of Arts program in the same field. This growing expansion of the French-language field in Bangladesh highlights the need for new research areas, particularly to understand the difficulties beginner learners face in French grammar and writing. Such research can contribute

to the development of more effective teaching methods and learning materials for Bangladeshi learners.

In Bangladesh, French is considered a foreign language (L3). While English is the second language (L2), the mother tongue is Bengali. This cross-linguistic context heavily influences the French-language learning process, especially in French grammar. Ringbom (2006) emphasized the importance of learners' prior language knowledge, stating, "When you learn something new, such as a foreign language, you try to connect the new elements to whatever linguistic and other knowledge you may have." He also pointed out that if a learner is acquiring a new language closely related to their prior language, that prior knowledge will be consistently useful. However, if the languages are very distant from each other, not much of the prior language will be relevant.

In this context, beginner-level students in Bangladesh often seem to rely more on English (L2) than on Bengali (L1) when learning French; perhaps this is because English and French share historical and grammatical similarities. Ringbom (2006) supported this statement, noting that "many previous studies, especially of Asian or African learners learning English or French, have shown that learners rely on their knowledge of an L2 related to the TL much more than on their unrelated L1".

Many Bengali learners often find French grammar challenging due to their English background. When they learn new French rules, they tend to compare them with English, which can be beneficial but can also lead to errors due to grammatical differences. Additionally, errors are not solely due to English influence; learners may also overapply French rules, leading to further errors. Moreover, there are other reasons behind grammatical errors in French.

Grammar is an essential part of language that shows how different units are organized and work together to create meaning. As Wang (2010) stated, "Grammar, as a set of rules for choosing words and putting words together to make sense, plays a significant role in language teaching. Without grammar, language does not exist." Rao (2019) notes that "grammar is needed for all languages in order to frame correct sentences. When grammar is proper, the sentences of the language make sense." Therefore, by examining grammatical skill, a learner's progress can be understood, and the barriers or obstacles can also be identified.

In the context of Bengali-French learners, Sarker & Islam (2020) stated that Bengali and English influence French learners' learning processes: English influences learners' morphology (word form), while Bengali influences learners' syntax (sentence structure). They also highlight that analyzing learners' errors and understanding their interlanguage can be a useful tool for improving teaching and learning methods for Bengali-French learners.

Although several studies have examined learners' errors in French across different countries, no studies on Bangladeshi learners have been found. This gap is important because Bangladeshi learners acquire French in a multilingual context where Bengali (L1) and English (L2) may influence learning in different ways. As a result, their grammatical error patterns may differ from those reported in other learning contexts.

The goal of this study is to identify the most common grammatical errors among two groups of students at the Institute of Modern Languages of the University of Dhaka. The results are expected to help teachers identify students' main challenges and support learners in improving their French grammar skills. The study analyzes these errors from a grammatical perspective to ensure the findings remain accessible to teachers and learners without extensive linguistic knowledge.

Literature review

Error analysis

In the field of language teaching, error analysis refers to the examination of learners' errors. This type of study aims to identify learners' misconceptions in writing and speaking. It helps teachers predict learners' errors and adjust teaching methods and materials accordingly. Corder (1982) provides two justifications for error analysis. The theoretical justification discusses how learners process the target language in their minds. The pedagogical justification focuses on adjusting teaching strategies, including methods, techniques, and syllabus design. Error analysis is also defined by Richards & Schmidt (2013) as the study of errors made by second-language learners and serves several purposes. Including (a) identifying the strategies learners use in language learning, (b) determining the causes of learner errors, and (c) obtaining information about common difficulties to improve teaching and prepare teaching materials. According to Brown (2007), error analysis involves observing, analyzing, and classifying learners' errors to understand their learning development. James (2001, as cited in Dinh, 2023) marked error analysis as the study of linguistic ignorance, examining what learners do not know and how they deal with it. Error analysis is the study of unacceptable forms produced by learners (Crystal, 2008).

Corder's Error Analysis Framework

Corder (1974), also cited in Ellis (1994), proposed a five-step framework for analyzing learners' errors.

1. **Collection of a sample of learner language:** In this step, data are collected for the study. First, researchers must determine what type of learner language data to collect and how to gather it. The sample size can be large, specific, or incidental. Researchers must also consider several factors during data collection. Language-centered factors include the learner's medium of production (oral or written), the genre of the sample (e.g., conversation, lecture, essay, or letter), and the topic the learner is discussing. Learner-centered factors include the learner's proficiency level in the target language, which can be elementary, intermediate, or advanced. Another learner-centered factor is the learner's mother tongue and language learning experience. Where language learning experience refers to language learning in the classroom, in naturalistic environments, or both.
2. **Identification of Errors:** After collecting data, researchers analyze the collected data to identify inappropriate forms of production. Here, researchers must distinguish between mistakes and errors. In error analysis, errors and mistakes are treated as two distinct phenomena. An error occurs due to a lack of knowledge or misconceptions about the target language's rules. Because an error indicates learners' incompetence, it cannot be corrected on its own without proper instruction. By contrast, a mistake concerns performance rather than competence. It is usually caused by inattention, fatigue, or a slip of the tongue, and it can be self-corrected when the learner pays attention.
3. **Description of Errors:** Errors are classified into various categories, such as a linguistic taxonomy based on morphology, syntax, or vocabulary, or a surface strategy taxonomy based on omissions, additions, misinformation, or misordering.
4. **Explanation of Errors:** In this step, researchers try to determine why the errors occur. These errors are usually linked to two main sources: interlingual transfer and intralingual or developmental factors. Interlingual transfer refers to the influence of a learner's previous languages, which can lead to errors in the new language. Intralingual or developmental

errors occur when learners overapply the rules of the target language or fail to fully learn the correct rules.

5. **Evaluation of Errors:** The final step is to evaluate the significance of errors. This involves examining how much a produced error interferes with the listener's or reader's comprehension and how serious it is (i.e., whether it is a global or local error). This evaluation can directly contribute to improving language teaching pedagogy.

Surface Strategy Taxonomy

To categorize learner errors effectively, Dulay et al. (1982), also cited in Ellis (1994), proposed the Surface Strategy Taxonomy. This taxonomy focuses on how the learner altered the target language's surface structures. It is an alternative to a linguistic classification of errors. Ellis (1994) states that, according to Dulay et al. (1982), this approach is promising because it provides insight into the cognitive processes underlying the learner's reconstruction of the target language. In this taxonomy, learner errors are classified into four primary descriptive categories based on how surface structures are altered. Addition happens when an extra, unnecessary grammatical element appears in a sentence. Omission occurs when a required grammatical component is missing. Misordering takes place when sentence elements are arranged incorrectly. Misinformation occurs when an incorrect form of a morpheme or grammatical structure is used.

The reasons resulted in language errors.

Various reasons contribute to learners' errors in language acquisition. According to major scholars, including Brown (2007), James (1998), Ellis (2015) and Richards (1971) and Keshavarz (2023) some main causes include: (a) interlanguage transfer, which happens when learners apply rules from their first language to the target language; (b) intralingual transfer, errors caused by misunderstanding or incomplete learning of the target language itself; (c) learning context, errors resulting from classroom instruction, teaching materials, or learning environment; (d) overgeneralization, when learners apply a rule of the language too broadly; (e) simplification, when learners reduce complex language structures to make communication easier; (f) false concepts hypothesized, when learners misunderstand certain distinctions or meanings in the target language; (g) lack of knowledge of the rules, when learners do not know the correct grammatical rules; (h) interference, when elements of one language disrupt the correct use of another; (i) fossilization, when incorrect language forms become permanent despite further learning; and (j) underuse, when learners avoid using certain forms or structures due to uncertainty or lack of confidence.

Previous studies on grammatical errors in French

Abdul Karim et al. (2024) carried out an error analysis of simple French sentence writing among 50 students at Universiti Kuala Lumpur Malaysia France Institute (UniKL MFI). Using the Surface Strategy Taxonomy proposed by Dulay et al. (1982), the study identified and classified 110 grammatical errors in descriptive essays from the final examination into four categories: addition, omission, misordering, and misinformation. The quantitative results showed that most errors occurred with prepositions (50%), followed by verbs (28%), nouns (19%), and adjectives (3%). According to the authors, many errors result from learners' prior languages, including English and Malay.

In a long-term study, Adebayo (2022) examined how writing errors developed among 14 English-speaking learners of French. The participants, who were students at Obafemi Awolowo University, participated over three years, from 2015 to 2018. The study finds that students had difficulties with spelling, determiners, prepositions, and word choice. Adebayo explained the

possible reasons for these errors. Many errors stemmed from overgeneralizing and the misuse of grammatical rules. Most of the other errors resulted from interlingual interference.

In another study, Chachu (2016) examined the influence of English on students' French language skills at the University of Ghana. The participants were first- and second-year French students. The study focused on both oral and written French. It found a strong influence of English on the students' French. Many errors resulted from transpositions and transliterations. Participants tend to translate expressions word-for-word from English. The author explains the errors as a common problem in language learning and considers them part of the natural process of interlanguage development.

Pramesti et al. (2019) conducted a study on grammatical errors in translation work. The study used a qualitative descriptive approach. Translating news articles from Indonesian into French was its tool. The researchers analyzed 87 texts translated by seventh-semester students at Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia. They found that the most common errors involved verb conjugation, tenses, and moods. The study also identified many errors in the use of articles and prepositions. Additionally, errors in noun–adjective agreement, especially regarding gender and number, were frequent. The authors state that weak grammatical skills cause these errors. They also point out that structural differences between Indonesian and French are another major source of errors.

Another descriptive qualitative study was carried out by Samudra & Mutiarsih (2022). The study investigated grammatical errors students made when translating a short story. The story was titled *Moi et la danse de Semarang*, a French translation from Indonesian. The researchers used the Error Analysis method. The most common error type was misinformation, meaning students used an incorrect form of a grammatical structure. The study finds that learners often struggle to use verbs, nouns, adjectives, and prepositions correctly. The authors explained that these errors mainly result from a lack of knowledge of the rules.

The lack of error-analysis studies on Bangladeshi learners highlights a notable gap that warrants further research.

Research Questions

The study aims to answer the following questions.

1. What are the common features of grammatical errors in learners' French writing?
2. What kind of grammatical errors are most frequently made by students?
3. According to learners, what are the possible reasons behind these errors?

Methods

Participants

This study was conducted at the Institute of Modern Languages (IML) at the University of Dhaka. It involved 47 French learners, all native Bengali speakers who also spoke English as a second language. Participants comprised two groups: students enrolled in the Pre-Intermediate French course and first-year, second-semester students pursuing a Bachelor of Arts (Honors) in French Language and Culture. The sample included 29 students from the Pre-Intermediate French course and 18 from the BA program.

The participation of learners was based on their availability in two groups. The researchers selected these two groups due to their comparable proficiency levels. Students from both the

BA (Honors) and Pre-Intermediate programs were included to provide a comprehensive overview of grammatical errors among students at the Institute of Modern Languages, University of Dhaka, thereby ensuring representation from both Honors and other certificate programs.

Their current curriculum indicates that they are operating at the elementary or beginning proficiency level, corresponding to the A1–A2 levels of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). Both groups utilized *Vite et Bien A1–A2* by Claire Miquel as their primary textbook for grammar and language practice at their respective levels. After reviewing their instructional materials, the researchers determined that the students had acquired fundamental grammatical structures.

These included nouns (gender distinctions and the use of definite articles *le, la, les* and indefinite articles *un, une, des*), verbs (present tense of regular and irregular verbs such as *faire, aller, prendre, comprendre, mettre, partir, venir, voir*; semi-auxiliary verbs *pouvoir, vouloir, devoir*; reflexive verbs; the near future *futur proche*; imperative forms; and the basic past tense *passé composé*, including agreement of past participles), adjectives (agreement rules, placement, and some irregular forms), tenses (the present *le présent*, the past *le passé composé*, the near future *le futur proche*, and conditional structures such as *si + présent / présent*), the formation of simple questions, and prepositions (common locative and relational forms such as *chez, en/au, and sur*, including prepositions used with cities and countries).

Research Design

In this study, the researchers followed the first three stages of Corder's (1974) error analysis framework, namely: the collection of a learner language sample, the identification of errors, and the description of errors. The fourth stage, which involves explaining errors, was partially implemented through a focus group discussion with the participants to explore possible causes of the identified errors. The fifth stage, error evaluation, was not incorporated because the study's primary objective was to identify and classify grammatical errors, whereas evaluating their effects on communication was of secondary importance. Therefore, the study employed both quantitative and qualitative approaches, utilizing a written task and a focus group discussion.

Data Collection

To collect language samples, the researchers asked participants to write a short essay in French on topics such as “myself,” “my friend,” “my country,” and “my daily routine.” Although different topics may have influenced the distribution of grammatical features, the researchers allowed a range of topics to ensure inclusivity and accommodate participants' varying writing abilities.

Participants were instructed to use simple sentences and basic grammatical structures to facilitate the identification of common grammatical errors. This approach aligned with the study's objective of detecting grammatical errors among beginner-level learners. Participants were encouraged to produce at least ten sentences.

Participants were given 20 minutes to complete the writing task in a classroom environment. The two groups participated on different days. The researchers were present and provided minimal supervision during the task. Participants were instructed not to use external resources such as books or translation tools.

Upon completion, the researchers collected all scripts. A total of 53 essays were obtained from the 47 participants. Most participants wrote about themselves, while two described their daily

routines and one wrote about a friend. Two participants submitted four essays each, and all essays were included in the analysis. Since the primary objective of the study was to identify and catalog grammatical errors rather than to compare individual student performance, the total volume of learner language data was prioritized over maintaining an equal number of essays per participant.

Data Analysis

All scripts were analyzed for grammatical errors using token-based identification. Because errors were counted on a token basis, repeated occurrences of the same error type were included, and multiple errors within a single sentence were counted separately.

Table 1

Quantitative Overview of the Corpus and Error Identification

Metrics	Count
Total Number of Participants	47
Total Number of Essays Collected	53
Total Number of Sentences Analyzed	425
Total Errors Identified by Coder 1	133 (C_1)
Total Errors Identified by Coder 2	139 (C_2)
Agreed Errors	130 (M)
Inter-Coder Agreement Rate	95.59 % (Agreement Rate = $\frac{2 \times M}{C_1 + C_2} \times 100$)
Final Reconciled Errors for Analysis	136

To ensure the reliability of the error identification process, two authors of this study independently analyzed the collected scripts. As shown in Table 1, the dataset comprised 425 sentences extracted from 53 essays written by 47 participants.

In the initial coding phase, Coder 1 identified 133 grammatical errors, while Coder 2 identified 139 errors. An initial review of their coding found 130 errors that were common to both coders, indicating strong agreement. Inter-coder agreement was calculated at 95.59%.

Following the independent coding phase, the two coders engaged in a thorough reconciliation discussion to resolve borderline and discrepant cases. During this process, cases that were previously ambiguous or classified differently were reviewed together using the coding criteria. This led to a refined, mutually agreed final dataset of 136 grammatical errors, which was then used for further qualitative and quantitative analyses. In the final dataset, each error is recorded using an Error ID.

No ambiguous sentences were identified in the scripts, but nine sentences were excluded for incompleteness. Errors were then quantified and categorized in Microsoft Excel by both the targeted grammatical unit and the Surface Strategy Taxonomy.

Table 2

Example of errors coding

Error ID	Error Sentence	Correct Sentence	Error in Grammar Unit	Class of Error
1001	J'aime lire des livre différents.	J'aime lire des livres différents.	Noun	Misinformation
1005	J'aime photographie.	J'aime la photographie.	Noun	Omission
1059	Je suis bavarde avec des amis.	Je bavarde avec des amis.	Verb	Addition

Focus Group Discussion

After all errors were coded, a Focus Group Discussion (FGD) was conducted with 25 participants who had taken the written test. The discussion was held in a classroom setting, and participants attended voluntarily based on their availability. During the session, the learners shared their views on the possible causes of the grammatical errors they had made on the written test.

Ethical Considerations

To ensure ethical compliance, several procedures were followed throughout the study. Permission to collect data was obtained from the University of Dhaka's Institute of Modern Languages (IML). Before the writing tasks and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs), participants were informed of the study's purpose and nature. Participation was voluntary, and informed consent was obtained from all students. Participants were also informed that they could withdraw from the study at any time. To ensure confidentiality, no personal identifiers, such as names or registration numbers, were collected. Instead, each script was assigned a unique code for analysis. All data were used strictly for research purposes.

Findings

This section presents the main findings of the study. It shows the total number of grammatical errors found in students' essays and their normalized rates. The errors are grouped using grammatical units and surface strategy taxonomy. It also includes information from the focus group discussion (FGD) to explain possible reasons for the errors as reported by learners.

As shown in Table 3, these normalized error rates indicate that Noun Errors are the most common error, occurring at 11.76 per 100 sentences and accounting for 36.76% of all errors. Verb Errors are the second most common, with a rate of 10.82 errors per 100 sentences (33.82%). Together, nouns and verbs account for more than 70% of the total errors, showing that these two areas are the hardest for beginner Bengali students learning French.

In contrast, other parts of grammar show much lower error rates. Preposition Errors stand at 4.00 errors per 100 sentences, while Adjective (2.12), Adverb (1.88), and Pronoun (1.41) errors are the least frequent.

Table 3

Normalized Error Rates by Grammatical Units (Total Sentences = 425)

Grammatical Unit	Raw Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)	Normalized Error Rate (per 100 Sentences) $\left(\frac{\text{Number of Errors in a Category}}{\text{Total Sentences in the Corpus (425)}} \right) \times 100$
Noun	50	36.76	11.76
Verb	46	33.82	10.82
Preposition	17	12.50	4.00
Adjective	9	6.62	2.12
Adverb	8	5.88	1.88
Pronoun	6	4.41	1.41
Total	136	100	32

Overall, the total normalized error rate is 32.00 errors per 100 sentences. This means that, on average, for every 100 sentences written by the students, about 32 grammatical errors were made.

Figure 1

Error Frequency by Surface Strategy Taxonomy Category

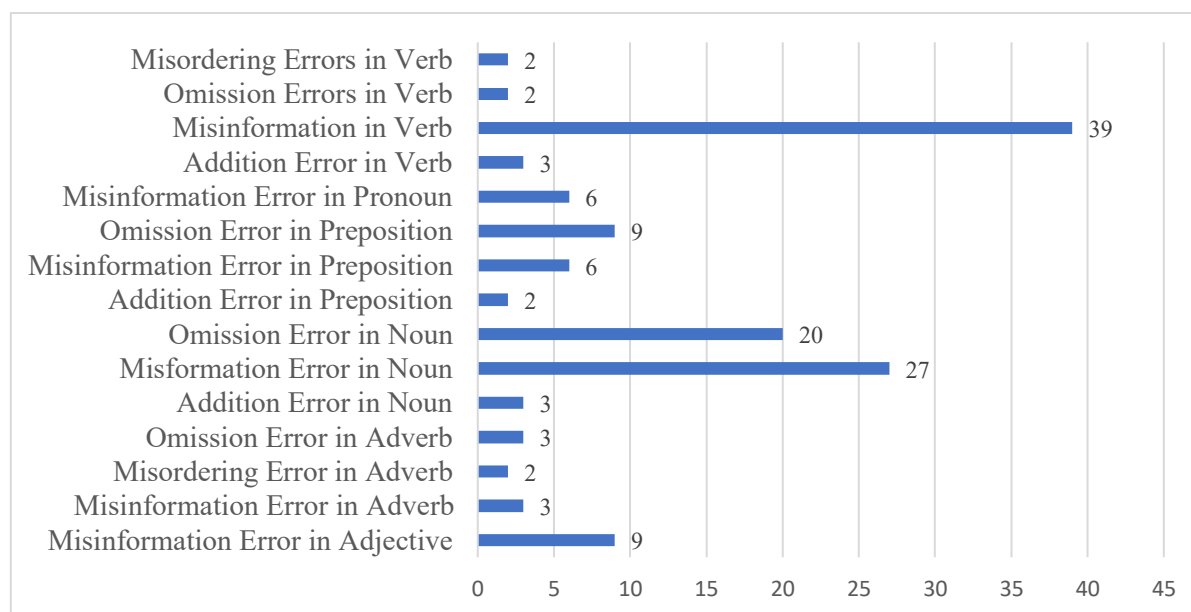


Figure 1 shows that, out of 136 errors, misinformation errors in verbs are the most frequent category in the surface strategy taxonomy, with 39, followed by misinformation errors in nouns with 27, and omission errors in nouns with 20.

Table 4

Representative Errors

No	Grammar Unit	Class of Error	Erroneous Form	Corrected Form
1.	Noun	Addition	J'ai âge 20 ans.	J'ai 20 ans.
2.	Noun	Addition	Je parle un peu le français.	Je parle un peu français.
3.	Noun	Omission	Il aime football.	Il aime le football.
4.	Noun	Omission	Je lis livre.	Je lis un livre.
5.	Noun	Omission	Je regarde television.	Je regarde la television.
6.	Noun	Misinformation	J'aime écouter le musique.	J'aime écouter la musique.
7.	Noun	Misinformation	J'aime la danser.	J'aime la danse.
8.	Noun	Misinformation	J'aime lire des livre différents.	J'aime lire des livres différents.
9.	Noun	Misinformation	La capitale de pays est Dhaka.	La capitale du pays est Dhaka.
10.	Noun	Misinformation	Nous allons ensemble de le café.	Nous allons ensemble au café.
11.	Verb	Addition	Je suis bavarde avec des amis.	Je bavarde avec des amis.
12.	Verb	Omission	Mon amie Suriya.	Mon amie s'appelle Suriya.
13.	Verb	Misordering	Je ne pas joue au football.	Je ne joue pas au football.
14.	Verb	Misinformation	Elle est les cheveux noirs.	Elle a les cheveux noirs.
15.	Verb	Misinformation	Je ne sais pas nage.	Je ne sais pas nager.
16.	Verb	Misinformation	Je vais de Gazipur.	Je viens de Gazipur.
17.	Verb	Misinformation	Mon père a journaliste.	Mon père est journaliste.
18.	Verb	Misinformation	Nous parlez longtemps	Nous parlons longtemps.
19.	Preposition	Addition	J'ai à 20 ans.	J'ai 20 ans.
20.	Preposition	Omission	J'ai beaucoup amies.	J'ai beaucoup d'amies.
21.	Preposition	Omission	Je joue le football.	Je joue au football.
22.	Preposition	Omission	J'étudie l'Université de Dhaka.	J'étudie à l'Université de Dhaka.
23.	Preposition	Addition	J'aime de la café.	J'aime le café.
24.	Noun	Misinformation	J'aime de la café.	J'aime le café.
25.	Preposition	Misinformation	Je fais de vélo.	Je fais du vélo.
26.	Preposition	Misinformation	Je n'ai pas une question.	Je n'ai pas de question.
27.	Preposition	Misinformation	Je me suis engagé dans la police de 2017.	Je me suis engagé dans la police en 2017.
28.	Adjective	Misinformation	Elle est bangladeshe.	Elle est bangladaise.
29.	Adjective	Misinformation	J'adore mon amis.	J'adore mes amis.
30.	Adjective	Misinformation	Nous sommes de bon amis.	Nous sommes de bons amis.
31.	Adjective	Misinformation	J'aime lire des livres différence.	J'aime lire des livres différents.
32.	Adverb	Misordering	Je parle français un peu.	Je parle un peu français.
33.	Adverb	Misinformation	Je parle à peu français.	Je parle un peu français.
34.	Adverb	Misinformation	Nous bavardons a peu.	Nous bavardons un peu.

35.	Pronoun	Misinformation	Cette est un beau pays.	C'est un beau pays.
36.	Pronoun	Misinformation	Je adore les beaux vêtements.	J'adore les beaux vêtements.
37.	Pronoun	Misinformation	Le week-end, Je sors avec mes amis.	Le week-end, je sors avec mes amis.

Learners' Perspectives on the Causes of Grammatical Errors

In Focus Group Discussions (FGDs), participants discuss several perspectives that may have contributed to their errors in French grammar.

The most frequently reported cause was the influence of English. Learners often reported relying on English sentence structures when writing in French. This negative transfer led to errors such as *J'ai âge 20 ans* instead of *J'ai 20 ans* and *Je suis bavarde avec des amis* instead of *Je bavarde avec des amis*. Participants also reported difficulties with grammatical features that are absent or less prominent in English, particularly articles and contractions. Errors such as *Il aime football* instead of *Il aime le football*, *Je lis livre* instead of *Je lis un livre*, and *La capitale de pays est Dhaka* instead of *La capitale du pays est Dhaka* illustrate these difficulties.

Learners also believed that some errors stemmed from overgeneralizing French grammatical rules. For instance, some said *Je ne sais pas nage* instead of *Je ne sais pas nager*, showing uncertainty about using infinitives after specific expressions. Similarly, some learners occasionally used familiar grammatical patterns even when different structures were appropriate.

Another factor identified by participants was confusion about French prepositions and contracted forms. Many learners had difficulty remembering combinations such as *à + le = au* and *de + le = du*. This difficulty appeared in errors such as *Je joue le football* instead of *Je joue au football*, *Je fais de vélo* instead of *Je fais du vélo*, and *Nous allons ensemble de le café* instead of *Nous allons ensemble au café*.

Participants also acknowledged that limited vocabulary and insufficient grammatical knowledge contributed to several errors. For example, some learners used *Je vais de Gazipur* instead of *Je viens de Gazipur* and *Mon père a journaliste* instead of *Mon père est journaliste*, indicating uncertainty about verb selection and usage. Similarly, errors like *Je n'ai pas une question* instead of *Je n'ai pas de question* indicate a limited understanding of French negative structures.

Regarding adjective agreement, learners often simplify grammatical forms when unsure of the correct agreement rules. This tendency led to errors such as *Nous sommes de bon amis* instead of *Nous sommes de bons amis* and *Elle est bangladeshe* instead of *Elle est bangladaise*. Participants mentioned that they occasionally focus on conveying meaning rather than using every grammatical marker correctly.

Finally, learners reported that insufficient practice and limited exposure to French outside the classroom made it difficult to internalize grammatical structures. As a result, they frequently misplaced adverbs and omitted required grammatical elements, producing sentences such as *Je parle français un peu* instead of *Je parle un peu français* and *J'étudie l'Université de Dhaka* instead of *J'étudie à l'Université de Dhaka*.

Discussion

The findings of this study showed a clear, structured pattern in the grammatical errors made by beginner students in the Institute of Modern Languages at the University of Dhaka.

Regarding grammatical unit errors, the study found errors in nouns, verbs, prepositions, adjectives, adverbs, and pronouns. Nouns were the most frequent, followed by verbs. According to the surface strategy taxonomy, misinformation errors in verbs were the most frequent category, followed by misinformation errors in nouns, while omission errors in nouns were the third highest.

The main features of these errors include using wrong word forms, missing articles, and failing to contract prepositions.

The Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) show that the errors are not random. They occur because students transfer English rules to French, overgeneralize French grammar, and try to simplify complex structures, among other reasons.

Dominating Noun Errors

Noun-related errors are the most common in essay writing, accounting for 36.76% of errors, at 11.76 per 100 sentences. Below are some probable reasons discussed.

Grammatical Gender Confusion: The French language assigns an arbitrary masculine or feminine gender to every noun, including inanimate objects such as tables, chairs, cars, and pens. FGD feedback showed that students face a heavy cognitive load when trying to guess the gender of words like *la musique* or *la capitale* because they cannot find any equivalent structural baseline in English. This confusion leads directly to misinformation, such as writing *le musique* instead of *la musique*.

Noun-Article Relationship: In French, every noun must be used together with a gendered article (such as *un*, *une*, *le*, or *la*), and this combination functions as a fixed grammatical unit. Beginner learners often take time to fully understand this rule. As a result, they sometimes omit articles and treat French nouns like English bare nouns, for example, writing *Je lis livre* instead of *Je lis un/le livre*.

Failure to Contract Articles: In French, prepositions like *à* (to) and *de* (of/from) combine with the definite articles *le* and *les* to form contracted words such as *au* (*à* + *le*) and *du* (*de* + *le*). Many learners find this rule difficult. Instead of using the correct contracted forms, they often write the words separately, for example, *de le café* instead of *au café*. This happens because they translate directly from English and use a word-for-word approach, which prevents them from using the correct French contractions.

Partitive Article Confusions: Partitive articles (*du*, *de la*, *de l'*, *des*) are used in French to talk about an unspecified amount of something, especially uncountable nouns. In English, this idea is often shown without an article or with words like “some” (e.g., “I drink water” or “I want some bread”). Beginner learners often make errors when using partitive articles in French. They either leave them out completely or confuse them with definite articles.

Adjective-Noun Agreement: In French, adjectives must agree with the nouns they describe in both gender and number. Beginner learners often struggle with this rule and instead apply English patterns. As a result, they may omit the plural -s on adjectives, producing errors such as *de bon amis* instead of *de bons amis*.

Understanding Verb Errors Patterns

Verb-related errors were the second most frequent category. These errors occurred for three main reasons. First, learners had difficulty using auxiliaries correctly. For example, they used *être* instead of *avoir* when expressing age (e.g., *Je suis 20 ans*). Second, in two-verb constructions, students often simplified the rule and failed to use the infinitive form correctly, producing errors such as *Je ne sais pas nager* instead of *nager*. Third, learners sometimes struggled with subject–verb agreement in present-tense conjugation, leading to errors such as *Nous parlez longtemps* instead of *Nous parlons longtemps*.

Comparison with Previous Studies

The findings of this study differ from previous research on French learner errors. For example, Abdul Karim et al. (2024) found that Malaysian learners made the most errors with prepositions (50%), while noun errors were much lower (19%). Similarly, Pramesti et al. (2019) and Samudra & Mutiarsih (2022) reported that verb errors, especially in conjugation, tense, and mood, were the most common among their learners. However, this study found that noun errors were the most frequent, followed by verb errors and then preposition errors. This difference may reflect the specific language background and proficiency level of Bangladeshi university students.

Although the learners were at the beginner level (A1–A2) and mainly used simple present-tense patterns such as *Je parle* and *Je sors*, they still struggled with basic French verb rules. Their errors were not about complex grammar, such as the subjunctive or conditional forms, but about simpler issues such as subject-verb agreement, irregular verbs, and spelling rules like elision (e.g., *Je adore*).

While noun-article rules took most of their attention, verb conjugation was the next major difficulty. Finally, differences between English and French also caused problems with prepositions. Students often wrote full forms like *de le café* instead of the correct contracted form *au café*, because they translated step by step from English expressions like “of the”.

Pedagogical Implications

This study suggests the following practical strategies for French classrooms in Bangladesh:

Vocabulary with Articles: Teachers should never introduce French nouns in isolation. Nouns must always be taught with their articles (e.g., teaching *la capitale* rather than *capitale*) to help students internalize the correct grammatical gender from day one.

Verb-and-Article Structural Drills: Teachers should design targeted worksheets to practice specific verbs that change sentence structure. For example: *Aimer / Adorer* + Definite Article (*le, la, les*) to fix errors like *Il aime football*. *Parler* + Language Name directly (e.g., *Je parle français*) to avoid adding extra articles. *Jouer au* (for sports) versus *Faire du* (for activities) to clear up preposition confusion.

Visual Math for Contractions and Elisions: Since students struggle with combined forms, teachers can use simple visual formulas on the board, such as: (*à + le = au*), (*de + le = du*), (*Je + verb with vowel = J'*). This gives beginning students a clear rule for checking their work before writing.

Infinitive Use: The findings showed that students often struggled with two-verb constructions. Errors such as *Je ne sais pas nager* indicate that learners were not familiar with the use of infinitive verbs in French. To address this problem, teachers should provide explicit instruction on verb + infinitive structures. Students should learn that in constructions with verbs such as

vouloir, pouvoir, savoir, and aimer, only the first verb is conjugated, while the second remains in the infinitive (*Je ne sais pas nager, Je veux apprendre le français*). Regular practice with these structures can help learners develop a better understanding of French sentence structure and reduce verb-sequencing errors.

Cross-Linguistic Contrastive Awareness: The findings suggest that many observed errors are strongly influenced by negative transfer from English (L2). To address this issue, teachers should implement Contrastive Awareness Tasks in the classroom. Rather than avoiding English entirely, instructors can use structured activities that compare English and French sentence patterns. Through guided translation and comparison exercises, students can clearly identify differences between the two languages.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study examined the written grammatical errors of beginner French learners at the University of Dhaka. It revealed that errors in nouns, verbs, and prepositions were the most common. The main features of these errors include using incorrect word forms, omitting articles, and failing to contract prepositions. The findings highlight that traditional communicative teaching methods in Bangladesh should be combined with targeted, contrastive form-focused instruction.

Limitation

There are some limitations in the study, such as a small, localized sample, a single writing task, limited topic variation, and a lack of learner process data. The study involved only 47 participants from a single institution, meaning the findings may reflect local teaching styles and cannot represent all French learners in Bangladesh. The data consisted of short essays on four predictable descriptive topics (myself, my friend, my country, and my daily routine). Error patterns might change with different writing or tasks. Limitations also include a lack of statistical reliability metrics. The two authors of the study coded the data; including additional outside experts as coders would make the coding more reliable.

Future Directions: Future research should expand the sample size by including multiple institutes across Bangladesh to establish a broader baseline. Longitudinal studies are needed to track how errors change over multiple semesters.

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