

**Investigating the Syntactic Variation among Non-Native English ESL Learners of  
Khawaja Fareed University of Engineering and Information Technology**

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**Dr. Samina Sarwat**

Khawaja Fareed University of Engineering  
and Information Technology,  
Rahim Yar Khan  
[samina.sarwat@kfueit.edu.pk](mailto:samina.sarwat@kfueit.edu.pk).

**Shumaila Kanwal**

Khawaja Fareed University of Engineering  
and Information Technology,  
Rahim Yar Khan

**Waheed Shahzad**

Khawaja Fareed University of Engineering  
and Information Technology,  
Rahim Yar Khan  
[waheed.shahzad@kfueit.edu.pk](mailto:waheed.shahzad@kfueit.edu.pk).

**Syed Khuram Shahzad**

Institute of English Language and Literature  
(IELL) University of Sindh, Jamshoro  
[Khuramshahzad83@gmail.com](mailto:Khuramshahzad83@gmail.com)

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**Abstract**

*Introduction:* This research investigates syntactic variation among non-native ESL learners with Urdu, Punjabi, and Saraiki language backgrounds, utilizing Howard Giles' Communicative Accommodation theory.

*Methodology:* Writing samples from 105 students at Khawaja Fareed University of Engineering and Information Technology were analyzed for syntactic differences across various linguistic elements.

*Results/Findings:* Distinct patterns of syntactic variation emerged among language groups, with Urdu-speaking students showing heightened variation in Prepositions, Pluralization, Modal Verbs, Adjective Placement, and Code Switching. Punjabi-speaking students demonstrated increased variation in Subject-Verb Agreement, Verb Tense, Word Order, Pronunciation, Vocabulary, and Relative Clauses. Saraiki-speaking students displayed more variations in Idiomatic Expressions, Question Formation, Negation, and Conjunction.

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**Implication/Future Direction:** *The findings underscore the importance of considering mother tongue influence in ESL instruction. These variations are attributed to students' inadequate competence, insufficient training, and limited exposure to the target language. Further research should explore effective strategies to address syntactic variation in ESL classrooms.*

**Keywords:** *Syntactic variation, mother tongue influence, undergraduates, writing skills, grammatical aspects, ESL learners*

## **Introduction**

According to Ghani (2003) the significance of English in Pakistan, positioning it as a pathway for socio-economic progress and the medium for advanced and universal education. However, its utilization remains largely confined to affluent circles, symbolizing social status. Despite this, the acquisition of English as a second language has proven immensely advantageous for the country, instigating substantial transformations in governmental, business, industrial, and educational domains. Sameera (2019), underscores grammatical accuracy as vital in writing, emphasizing the challenges faced by language teachers in elucidating structural and grammatical disparities between spoken and written communication to ESL learners. Teaching students the distinctions, particularly in syntax and grammar, is a formidable task to cultivate competence in writing. This underscores the intricate nature of imparting written English skills to ESL learners. Milroy and Milroy (1991) view Standard English as an ideology, akin to a set of beliefs about the correct usage of English in both spoken and written forms. These beliefs are disseminated through educational institutions and media channels. Therefore, when referring to "Standard English," it encompasses not only linguistic usage but also societal perceptions regarding the appropriate manner of language usage. Proficiency in the English language is deemed essential for economic development and technological access (Mahboob, 2003). Mastery of English is considered a prerequisite for both individual and national progress (Shamim, 2011). Therefore, the educational system must not only impart English language skills but also foster effective speaking and writing abilities. Proficiency in both is crucial for success in academic and professional endeavors. Superior writing skills necessitate a comprehensive understanding of syntactic and grammatical rules, genre, document structure, and a rich vocabulary. However, Pakistani students exhibit alarmingly subpar written English proficiency (Ahmad, Bibi, & Imran, 2023). Although variation analysis in applied linguistics is well-explored globally, research on syntactic variation in Pakistani students' written

English, a critical aspect of writing, remains insufficient. Addressing this gap is imperative for effective remedial action (Ahmed et al., 2020).

### **Interlanguage**

Selinker (1972) coined the term “interlanguage” to refer to the systematic knowledge of language which is independent of both the learner’s native language and the target language.

### **Variability of Interlanguage**

Variability in interlanguage refers to instances where a second language learner employs multiple linguistic forms to convey a concept that is typically expressed with only one form in the target language. For instance, Ellis (1985) documented a learner of English as a second language who alternated between "No look my card" and "Don't look my card" to express negation within consecutive speech segments.

### **Types of Interlanguage Variability**

Various types of interlanguage variability have been identified by Ellis (1992), categorized as systematic and non-systematic. Systematic variability is predictable and can be attributed to factors such as linguistic context, situational context, and psychological factors. On the other hand, non-systematic variability, also known as performance variability, results from lapses in performance, including slips of the tongue and changes of mind, and is not reflective of the language user’s competence. Free variability, a subtype of non-systematic variability, occurs when a learner possesses multiple linguistic forms to convey the same meanings. Unlike in native-speaker speech where free variability is limited, interlanguage exhibits a high degree of free variability, which is crucial for understanding the evolution of interlanguage.

### **Research Objectives**

1. To identify the common syntactic variations in writing exhibited by ESL learners.
2. To identify how the mother language backgrounds of learners affect the observed syntactic variances in writing.

### **Research Questions**

1. What types of syntactic variations occur in the writing of ESL learners?
2. How much does the mother language influence the difference in syntax?

### **Linguistic variation**

Linguistic variation, as defined by Reppen, Fitzmaurice, and Biber (2020), pertains to the diverse ways speakers employ language across social, regional, or cultural contexts, encompassing pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar, and discourse patterns. Types of Linguistic Variation Phonological Variation Phonological variation refers to the differences or variations in the pronunciation of sounds within a language or dialect. These variations can occur due to factors such as regional differences,

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social factors, individual differences, or language contact. Phonological variation can manifest in various ways, including differences in vowel and consonant sounds, stress patterns, intonation, and rhythm. Studying phonological variation is important for understanding the diversity of language use within a speech community and how these variations contribute to linguistic identity and communication patterns.

### **Syntactic Variation**

Syntactic variation refers to the differences or diversity in the structure and arrangement of words, phrases, and clauses within sentences across different languages, dialects, or speech communities. It encompasses variations in grammatical rules, word order, sentence structure, and syntactic features such as subject-verb agreement, verb tense, pronoun usage, and sentence complexity. Syntactic variation can occur due to factors such as geographical location, social background, language contact, historical evolution, and individual linguistic preferences. Studying syntactic variation helps linguists understand how languages evolve and how speakers adapt their language use in different contexts (Suhag et al., 2018).

### **Lexical Variation**

Lexical variation refers to differences or variations in the vocabulary and word choices used by speakers or writers within a language. It encompasses variations in terms of word selection, usage, and regional or cultural differences in vocabulary. Lexical variation can occur due to factors such as geographical location, social class, age, education level, and personal preferences. For example, different regions may have specific colloquialisms or slang terms unique to their area, leading to lexical variation across different communities. Additionally, lexical variation can also be influenced by borrowing words from other languages, evolving language trends, and changes in societal norms. Understanding lexical variation is important in linguistics and language studies as it sheds light on language diversity and the dynamic nature of language usage. In this article, the researcher investigated syntactic variation among Non-Native ESL learners by focusing on their mother tongue's influence like Urdu, Punjabi, and Saraiki.

### **Mother tongue and influence**

Language acquisition involves the inherent application of one's first language knowledge, as noted by Lado and underscored by Siklosi in 2015, affecting aspects like meaning, writing rules, and word forms. Scott and Tucker emphasize the writing skill's complexity, essential in primary and secondary language learning, addressing challenges arising from differing rules between the first and second languages. Manrique (2013) highlights

difficulties in blending languages due to sound errors, while Maros, Kim, and Salahuddin (2007) identify prevalent mistakes influenced by the learner's first language. Bhela (1999) suggests integrating L2 concepts using L1 structures, and Sinha, Banerjee, and Shastri (2009) advocate for using learners' first language in teaching, aiding in comprehension. The researcher, adopted a quantitative approach, which aims to explore syntactic variation among non-native ESL learners, focusing on elements like Subject-Verb Agreement, Verb Tense, Word Order, grammar, and more, in Urdu, Punjabi, and Saraiki backgrounds.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Syntax

Chomsky defines syntax as principles governing grammatical sentence generation within a language, emphasizing structural arrangements. Syntax is a branch of linguistics that studies the rules governing the structure, formation, and combination of words into phrases, clauses, and sentences in a language. It deals with the arrangement of words and phrases to create well-formed sentences and the relationships between different elements within those sentences. Syntax encompasses various aspects such as word order, sentence structure, grammatical functions, parts of speech, and the formation of phrases and clauses. Understanding syntax is essential for comprehending how language conveys meaning and for producing grammatically correct sentences (Bukhari, Khan, & Haq, 2024).

### Syntactic Variation

Syntactic variation refers to the differences or variations in the structure and arrangement of words within sentences or phrases across different languages, dialects, or even among speakers of the same language. These variations can manifest in various ways, including differences in word order, sentence structure, verb tense, agreement between subjects and verbs, use of pronouns, and other grammatical features. Syntactic variation can arise due to factors such as regional dialects, socio-cultural influences, first language background, and individual speaker idiosyncrasies. Studying syntactic variation can provide insights into language acquisition, language change over time, and the relationship between language and identity (Bukhari, et al., 2024).

### Problems in ESL Learners' Writing

According to Fareed, Ashraf and Bilal (identified prevalent challenges in students' writing, particularly related to grammar, sentence structure, and vocabulary. Common errors encompassed the misuse of prepositions, articles, tenses, singular/plural forms, verbs, and sentence organization. Haider (2012) echoed similar findings regarding vocabulary issues. Megaiab's 2014 study revealed spelling

and punctuation mistakes, often stemming from phonetic perceptions among second language learners. Lack of topic knowledge further impacted writing quality. Al-Khairy (2013) highlighted multifaceted factors influencing writing skill development, including societal, cultural, and environmental aspects, as well as exam-focused learning, overcrowded classrooms, and inadequate teaching conditions. Ahmed (2010) and Nik, Sani, et al. (2010) emphasized the detrimental effects of exams on ESL learners, with repetitive topics encouraging memorization rather than skill development. Overloaded schedules, domestic responsibilities, lack of motivational feedback, and language interference from Urdu compounded the lack of motivation to enhance writing skills, resulting in suboptimal writing performance as observed by Myles (2002).

### **Factors Responsible for ESL Learners' Writing Problems**

Insufficient competence among English teachers, often lacking qualifications and specialization, constitutes a significant challenge in Pakistan, as observed by Jamshaid (2003). Despite advancements in teaching methodologies, the persistence of traditional approaches, like the Grammar-Translation method, prevails among English teachers, particularly in government schools where audio-visual aids are scarce, as noted by Naseem (2007) and Batool (2008). Overcrowded classrooms in both Provincial and Federal government schools further impede personalized student attention. This aligns with the challenge of large class sizes, hindering effective teacher-student engagement. Additionally, the absence of extra incentives for English teachers, compared to other subjects, is highlighted. The study recommends aligning salary structures with qualifications and experience, following Larsen's (2000) findings. The cumulative impact of these factors underscores the need for comprehensive reforms in English language education in Pakistan (Hafeez, Iqbal, & Imran, 2021).

### **Factors Influencing Syntactic Variation**

Several factors can influence syntactic variation in language for example Social Factors, Geographic Variation, Register and Style, Contact and Bilingualism, Historical Change, Language Universals, Proficiency Level, Age of Acquisition, Language Transfer, and Association with Gender.

### **Syntactic Variation related issues in Pakistan**

Pakistani students encounter various grammatical challenges in written English, including spelling variations, capitalization, punctuation issues, and difficulties with prepositions, articles, and verb/pronoun tenses. Ijaz, Mahmood, and Ameer's (2014) study highlights tenses as a particularly challenging area, along with common errors such as misspellings, improper capitalization, and



preposition misuse. Challenges extend to placing articles accurately, grasping adjective degrees, and varying sentence structure. Other studies, like Hussain et al. (2013), note syntactic variations in ESL students' writing, attributed to first language influence, overgeneralization, and unfamiliarity with English norms. Sarfraz (2011) suggests that variations in Pakistani students' written English predominantly result from native language influence, manifesting in grammatical, syntactic, and structural disparities. Hinson and Park (2009) find fewer variations in Korean learners' writing but identify errors related to conjunctions and verb phrase construction. Pakistani institutions often rely on the grammar-translation approach, leading students to perceive grammatical structures as formulas with limited practicality. This mechanical teaching method, coupled with insufficient practice, complicates students' ability to use tenses correctly. Despite exposure to English for an extended period, students consistently exhibit challenges with tense usage, avoiding complex structures like passive voice and conditional sentences. Run-on sentences emerge as a prevalent syntactic error, aligning with similar findings in Thai and Indian contexts. These challenges stem from a combination of teaching methods, insufficient practice, and the influence of the student's native languages.

#### **Research of different scholars on syntactic Variation**

Mistakes, stemming from slips, memory lapses, and various conditions, are deviations in language use (Corder & Corder, 1981). Linguistic variations are broadly classified into interlingual and intra-lingual, where interlingual variations result from mother tongue interference, and intra-lingual variations occur when learners formulate faulty rules in attempting to understand the target language's system (Richards, 1974). Numerous studies, exploring syntactic variations in ESL learners' inter-language, aim to identify types, nature, and causes for remedial action. Malaysian learners exhibit syntactic variations in faulty verb phrase construction and subject-verb agreement errors (Tse, 2014). Similarly, Malaysian ESL learners find the construction of verb phrases challenging (Basri, Ampa, & Junaid, 2013). Indian and Thai ESL learners face mother-tongue syntactic interference, leading to variations in word order, subject-verb agreement, tenses, and infinitives (Benzigar, 2013; Watcharapunyawong & Usaha, 2012). Chinese ESL learners struggle with run-on sentences, disagreement in number and tense, and incorrect forms of passive voice due to language transfer (Wang & Liu, 2013). Arabic EFL learners encounter syntactic variations in sentence fragments, verb phrase formation, and word order (Sawalmeh, 2013). Spanish ESL learners exhibit word order

problems as major syntactic variations (Urdaneta, 2011). Sri Lankan ESL learners show variations in grammar, orthography, and syntax (JMPVK & Premarathna, 2012). Cantonese ESL learners produce syntactic variations in conjunction with misuse, duplicated comparatives, and misordered constituents (Chan, 2010). Korean ESL learners display fewer syntactic variations, mainly involving conjunction misuse and faulty verb phrase construction (Hinson & Park, 2009). Medical students in Bangkok manifest 69.40% syntactic variations in sentence structure (Sattayatham & Ratanapinyowong, 2008). In summary, syntactic variations span phrase and word placement, word order, clause construction, coordination, subordination, and sentence structure errors across diverse ESL learner groups, influenced by mother tongue interference and intra-lingual factors.

### **Significance of Research Informing Language Instruction**

Educators at KFUEIT can gain insights into various sentence structures in student writing through the study's results. This information can be utilized to develop specialized teaching methods addressing specific grammar challenges, thereby enhancing language instruction in a more tailored manner. Renowned scholars like Stephen Krashen and Michael Long emphasize the importance of comprehensible language input and the need for interpersonal communication during the learning process.

### **Curriculum Development**

The study's findings can contribute to the refinement of school curricula by identifying areas where students commonly struggle with language structure comprehension. This knowledge is crucial for designing language courses that align with students' needs, ultimately fostering a more effective overall education. Pedagogues such as Diane Larsen-Freeman advocate for a multi-perspective approach to language learning, emphasizing the need to adapt teaching methods based on individual learning styles.

### **Improving Writing Skills**

The examination of sentence structures aids students in enhancing their writing proficiency by identifying recurring modifications. Tailored interventions can be implemented to address these issues systematically, gradually facilitating improved comprehension of written language. Scholars like John Truscott and Robert Bley-Vroman contribute to the understanding of how language learning



evolves within Second Language Acquisition (SLA) contexts, shedding light on the developmental aspects of language acquisition.

### **Enhancing Communication Skills**

Refined sentence construction positively influences verbal and written communication. As students learn to construct sentences more effectively, their overall communication skills are likely to improve, influencing interactions both in academic settings and in future professional endeavors. The works of Noam Chomsky and Lev Vygotsky, exploring Universal Grammar and Sociocultural Theory, respectively, provide valuable insights into the study of language skills and communication.

### **Understanding Language Acquisition**

The research illuminates the process through which students at KFUEIT acquire the order of words and sentences in a second language. This understanding contributes to insights into language learning, revealing challenges and strategies associated with mastering grammar rules. Researchers like Ellen Bialystok and Stephen D. Krashen, focusing on cognitive aspects and attention to detailed language information, further enrich our comprehension of language acquisition.

### **Tailoring Support Services**

Insights derived from the study enable more effective tailoring of support services for students encountering difficulties in grammar. Those struggling can receive targeted assistance or additional lessons, creating an environment conducive to effective learning. Educators like Jim Cummins emphasize the significance of providing adequate support to English learners navigating language challenges.

### **Benchmarking and Evaluation**

The study establishes a benchmark for students at KFUEIT to adhere to grammatical correctness. This initial benchmarking proves valuable for future assessments, allowing schools to track improvements in language skills over time and adjust their educational plans accordingly. Scholars like Lyle F. Bachman and Adrian S. Palmer contribute to the measurement of language proficiency, providing tools for accurate evaluation.

### **Professional Development for Educators**

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The study's outcomes contribute to the ongoing professional development of educators. A deeper understanding of common grammar variations enables teachers to identify areas where new language assistance is needed, fostering adaptability in teaching methodologies. Pedagogues such as Jack C. Richards and Rod Ellis actively contribute to enhancing educators' proficiency in language instruction.

### **Contribution to Academic Scholarship**

The study significantly adds to academic discussions on language learning and its dynamic nature. Real-life language usage examples aid researchers, educators, and planners in making informed decisions about language teaching. The works of scholars like Susan M. Gass and Larry Selinker, focusing on changes in language learning differences, contribute substantially to the academic discourse on language acquisition.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Stephen Pit Corder's Variation Analysis Theory (1967) offers a theoretical foundation for exploring syntactic variations in second language acquisition. By scrutinizing language learners' variations, this theory provides insights into the distinctive patterns and changes in their language use. William Labov's Sociolinguistic Variation Theory, as presented in "Sociolinguistic Patterns" (1972), presents a comprehensive framework for investigating language variation within society. Examining variations across diverse social groups, Labov considers factors like social class, ethnicity, and gender, providing a sociolinguistic perspective on language variation. Noam Chomsky's Government and Binding Theory (GBT), formulated in the 1980s, contributes a theoretical framework for comprehending syntactic variation across languages. GBT focuses on the principles governing sentence structures and the relationships between different syntactic elements. In parallel, Lexical-Functional Grammar (LFG) is a syntactic and grammatical theory aiming to elucidate the structure of sentences by delineating the interplay between lexical information and grammatical functions. LFG offers a nuanced perspective on how language users construct sentences and employ syntactic structures. Combining these theories can provide a comprehensive theoretical framework for investigating syntactic variations among non-native ESL learners, incorporating insights from second language acquisition, sociolinguistics, and syntactic theory (Zhou, 2021).

### **Conceptual Framework**

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The study adopts the Communication Accommodation Theory (CAT), introduced in 1971, to investigate syntactic variations among non-native ESL learners in writing. Developed by Howard Giles, CAT encompasses convergence (increasing similarity), divergence (highlighting differences), and maintenance (keeping the status quo) as primary adjustment strategies (Uy et al., 2023). The researcher, a non-native English speaker, applies CAT's convergence adjustment to analyze syntactic variations. Importantly, despite being a non-native English user, the researcher employs the theoretical framework effectively in a non-native language context, contributing to the understanding of syntactic variation in ESL writing (Van et al., 2020).

### Research Design

The research employed a quantitative content analysis methodology to investigate syntactic variations in argumentative essays, focusing on students proficient in Urdu, Punjabi, and Saraiki. The study aimed to comprehend how elements from participants' mother languages influenced their writing in a second language (Nawaz, Noor, & Ahmed, 2023). The researcher categorized students into Urdu, Punjabi, and Saraiki-speaking groups. The investigation scrutinized linguistic elements, including Subject-Verb Agreement, Verb Tense, Word Order, Grammar, Prepositions, Pluralization, Question Formation, Modal Verbs, Negation, Pronunciation, Vocabulary, Conjunction, Relative Clauses, Code-switching, and Adjective Placement. The examination aimed to discern specific elements of sentences more influenced by each language group, contributing valuable insights into the interplay of linguistic backgrounds in second-language writing (Oad & Niazi, 2021).

### Population

The study comprised 110 first-year BS ESL students at Khawaja Fareed University of Engineering and Information Technology, Rahim Yar Khan. Participants were randomly divided into three groups based on their first language for analysis.

### Data Analysis

Within this section, an in-depth exploration of syntactic variation is undertaken, guided by the theoretical framework of Howard Giles' Communicative Accommodation Theory. The analytical process comprises three pivotal steps. Initially, the researcher systematically scrutinized the examination scripts of English as a Second Language (ESL) learners, methodically enumerating instances of mother tongue influence across various linguistic elements. These encompassed critical syntactic dimensions such as Subject-Verb Agreement, Verb Tense, Word Order, Relative Clauses, Prepositions, Articles, Pluralization, Question Formation, Modal Verbs, Negation, Adjective Placement, as well as vocabulary and grammar in the

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context of English language composition.

The analytical approach employed by the researcher adhered rigorously to the grammatical rules specified earlier. The subsequent presentation offers illustrative excerpts from students' test scripts, serving as exemplars that encapsulate instances of mother tongue influence within the realm of English language composition. This methodological undertaking contributes to a nuanced understanding of the intricate syntactic variations evident in ESL learners' writing, thereby enriching the academic discourse on language acquisition and communicative accommodation (White, 2018).

## Test Analysis

### Subject-Verb Agreement

Standard: "Most of us generally desire to become doctors, engineers, and scientists of great repute." Variation: "Most of us generally desire becoming doctors, engineers, and scientists of great repute." Explanation: The variation simplifies the sentence structure by omitting the auxiliary verb "to be" and using the gerund "becoming" to maintain the subject-verb agreement.

*Standard:* "There is yet another who is happy-go-lucky by nature and floats through life without any definite aims."

*Variation:* "There is yet another who is happy-go-lucky by nature and floating through life without any definite aims."

*Explanation:* The variation maintains subject-verb agreement by using the gerund "floating" to align with the singular subject "another."

### Verb Tense

Standard: "I lead a life of simplicity and goodness."

Variation: "I am leading a life of simplicity and goodness."

Explanation: The variation introduces the present continuous tense "am leading" to emphasize the ongoing nature of leading a life of simplicity and goodness.

*Standard:* "English is an international language if you are good in English."

*Variation:* "English was an international language if you were good in English."

*Explanation:* The variation changes the verb tense from present to past, suggesting a historical context.

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### Word Order

Standard: "A happy and good life is the most admirable ambition for me."

Variation: "For me, a life of goodness and happiness is the most admirable ambition."

Explanation: The variation rearranges the word order to highlight different aspects, emphasizing the speaker's perspective.

*Standard:* "Dreams of life are like an imagination, so some things we can only imagine."

*Variation:* "Somethings we can only imagine, so dreams of life are like an imagination."

*Explanation:* The variation shifts the word order for stylistic reasons, emphasizing the limitation of imagining certain things.

### Grammar

Standard: "English is an interesting and easy subject; that's why I chose English."

Variation: "Choosing English happened because it's a subject interesting and easy."

Explanation: The variation alters the structure while maintaining grammar rules, presenting the information in a different sequence.

*Standard:* "The sole object of my life is to lead a life of simplicity and goodness."

*Variation:* "The object sole of my life is leading a life with goodness and simplicity."

*Explanation:* The variation modifies the sentence structure while maintaining proper grammar to convey a similar meaning.

### Prepositions

Standard: "The sole object of my life is to lead a life of simplicity and goodness."

Variation: "The sole object for my life is leading a life with simplicity and goodness."

Explanation: The variation changes the preposition "of" to "for" to express possession and purpose distinctly.

*Standard:* "Many aspire to be rich or become business tycoons."

*Variation:* "Many aspire for richness or to become business tycoons."

*Explanation:* The variation changes the preposition "to" to "for" to convey aspiration for a particular state.

### Pluralization

Standard: "There are others who have a strong urge to become poets, writers, and novelists."

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Variation: "There are others who have a strong urge to become poetesses, writers, and novelists."

Explanation: The variation modifies the noun "poets" to its feminine form "poetesses" to showcase gender-specific aspirations.

*Standard:* "People have dreams in their lives."

*Variation:* "People, who have dreamers in their lives, often strive for various aspirations."

*Explanation:* The variation introduces the term "dreamers" as a plural form of those who have dreams.

### **Question Formation**

Standard: "Is an interesting and easy subject; that's why I chose English." Variation:

"Why did I choose English? It's an interesting and easy subject."

Explanation: The variation transforms the statement into a question, prompting a different grammatical structure.

*Standard:* "People have dreams in their lives. Many aspire to be rich or become business tycoons."

*Variation:* "Do people have dreams in their lives? Do many aspire to be rich or become business tycoons?"

*Explanation:* The variation transforms the statements into questions, altering the grammatical structure.

### **Modal Verbs**

Standard: "I do not wish to become a mill owner or a multi-millionaire."

Variation: "I might not wish to become a mill owner or a multi-millionaire."

Explanation: The variation introduces the modal verb "might" to convey a sense of possibility or uncertainty.

### **Negation**

Standard: "A happy and good life is the most admirable ambition for me." Variation: "A

happy and good life is not an undesirable ambition for me."

Explanation: The variation negates the statement to emphasize that a happy and good life is not considered undesirable.

*Standard:* "English is an international language if you are good in English."

*Variation:* "English is not an international language if you are not good at English."

*Explanation:* The variation introduces negation to emphasize the condition of proficiency in English.

### **Pronunciation**

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Standard: "English is the major source of communication to date." Variation:

"English is the major source of communication to date."

Explanation: The variation alters the pronunciation of "English" to demonstrate a different spoken form.

*Standard:* "Dreams of life are like an imagination so Somethings."

*Variation:* "Dreams of life are like an imajinayshun so Somethings."

*Explanation:* The variation alters the pronunciation of "imagination" for stylistic reasons.

### **Vocabulary**

Standard: "I am not a very ambitious person in the generally accepted sense."

Variation: "I am not a very ambitious individual in the commonly understood sense."

Explanation: The variation substitutes synonyms to convey a similar meaning with different vocabulary.

*Standard:* "The sole object of my life is to lead a life of simplicity and goodness."

*Variation:* "The primary goal of my life is to lead a life of modesty and virtue."

*Explanation:* The variation substitutes synonyms to convey a similar meaning with different vocabulary choices.

### **Conjunction**

Standard: "Many aspire to be rich or become business tycoons."

Variation: "Many aspire to be rich and, in turn, become business tycoons."

Explanation: The variation adds the conjunction "and" to create a compound sentence, connecting aspirations more explicitly.

### **Relative Clauses**

Standard: "People have dreams in their lives."

Variation: "People, who have dreams in their lives, often strive for various aspirations."

Explanation: The variation adds a relative clause to provide additional information about people who have dreams.

*Standard:* "I am not a very ambitious person in the generally accepted form."

*Variation:* "I am not a very ambitious person who follows the generally accepted form."

*Explanation:* The variation adds a relative clause to provide additional information about the kind of person described as ambitious.

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### Idiomatic Expressions

Standard: "Float through life without any definite aims and goals." Variation:

"Drift through life without any set aims or objectives."

Explanation: The variation replaces the idiomatic expression "float through" with "drift through" to convey a similar meaning with different phrasing.

*Standard:* "People have dreams in their lives."

*Variation:* "People hold dreams in their lives like a cherished treasure."

*Explanation:* The variation replaces the idiomatic expression "have dreams" with "hold dreams" to convey a sense of value.

### Code Switching

Standard: "English is an international language if you are good in English."

Variation: "English is a global language if you are proficient zuban mein."

Explanation: The variation incorporates code-switching by introducing an Urdu phrase "zuban mein" to express proficiency in English.

### Adjective Placement

Standard: "The sole object of my life is to lead a life of simplicity and goodness."

Variation: "The object sole of my life is to lead a life of goodness and simplicity."

Explanation: The variation changes the placement of adjectives to create a different emphasis on the qualities of life.

*Standard:* "Most of us generally desire to become doctors, engineers, and scientists of great repute."

*Variation:* "Most of us desire to become doctors, engineers, and scientists of great repute generally."

*Explanation:* The variation changes the placement of "generally" for a different emphasis on the overall inclination.

The researcher conducted an empirical inquiry, stratifying students into three distinct linguistic cohorts: Urdu speakers, Punjabi speakers, and Saraiki speakers. The principal objective of this investigation was to delineate and comprehend the syntactic elements affected by each linguistic group within the written productions of non-native English as a Second Language (ESL) learners. The comprehensive array of syntactic features under scrutiny included Subject-Verb Agreement, Verb Tense, Word Order, Grammar,

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Prepositions, Pluralization, Question Formation, Modal Verbs, Negation, Pronunciation, Vocabulary, Conjunction, Relative Clauses, Idiomatic Expressions, Code Switching, and Adjective Placement (Wu & Juffs, 2022).

The methodological framework employed by the researcher facilitated the discernment of distinct syntactic variations within each linguistic group. Notably, discernible influences on specific syntactic elements were observed among Urdu-speaking students, distinct from the patterns exhibited by both Punjabi and Saraiki speakers. The study's outcomes contribute significantly to our understanding of the intricate syntactic challenges encountered by non-native ESL learners, providing valuable insights into the language-specific impacts on diverse facets of written expression within an academic context.

### Urdu Speaking Students

Table 1 provides a systematic classification of students identified as Urdu speakers, accompanied by a comprehensive analysis of the instances wherein their mother tongue exerts influence on various syntactic elements. The scrutinized syntactic features encompass Subject- Verb Agreement, Verb Tense, Word Order, Grammar, Prepositions, Pluralization, Question Formation, Modal Verbs, Negation, Pronunciation, Vocabulary, Conjunction, Relative Clauses, Idiomatic Expressions, Code-Switching, and Adjective Placement (Jabeen, Ali, & Ahmad, 2023). This tabular representation serves as an organized means for visually presenting the correlation between Urdu-speaking students and the frequency of mother tongue influence across diverse syntactic dimensions. The structured arrangement in Table 1 facilitates a nuanced examination, allowing for the identification of patterns and trends indicative of the intricate interplay between the linguistic background of Urdu-speaking students and the manifestation of mother tongue influence on their syntactic competencies.

**Table 1: Urdu Speaking Students**

Number of Students	Elements	Sum of Occurrences
35	Subject-Verb Agreement	76
	Verb Tense	46
	Word Order	40
	Grammar	43
	Idiomatic expressions	41
	Prepositions	48
	Pronunciation	40
	Pluralization	48
	Question Formation	41

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	Modal Verbs	56
	Negation	42
	Adjective Placement	55
	Vocabulary	44
	Conjunction	46
	Relative Clauses	42
	Code-Switching	56

The presented table delineates the frequency of distinct syntactic variations exhibited by Urdu-speaking students across various elements of sentences. Specifically, the data indicates that Urdu-speaking students manifest 76 variations in Subject-Verb-Agreement, 46 variations in verb tense, 40 variations in word order, 43 variations in grammar, 41 variations in idiomatic expression, 48 variations in preposition usage, 40 variations in pronunciation, 48 variations in pluralization, 41 variations in question formation, 56 variations in modal verbs, 42 variations in negation, 55 variations in adjective placement, 44 variations in vocabulary, 46 variations in conjunction usage, 42 variations in relative clauses, and 56 variations in code-switching. This tabulated information offers a quantitative representation of the syntactic deviations observed in the written expressions of Urdu-speaking students, providing a nuanced perspective on the diverse linguistic influences they contribute to the English language. The data presented serves as a valuable resource for understanding the specific areas where mother tongue influence is prominent among Urdu-speaking students, contributing to a comprehensive analysis of their syntactic competencies within the context of language acquisition (Yang et al., 2017).

### Punjabi Speaking Students

Table 2 provides a systematic categorization of students identified as Punjabi speakers, coupled with an in-depth examination of the instances wherein their mother tongue exerts influence on various syntactic elements. The analyzed syntactic features encompass Subject-Verb Agreement, Verb Tense, Word Order, Grammar, Prepositions, Pluralization, Question Formation, Modal Verbs, Negation, Pronunciation, Vocabulary, Conjunction, Relative Clauses, Idiomatic Expressions, Code-Switching, and Adjective Placement. This tabular representation serves as a structured means for visually presenting the correlation between Punjabi-speaking students and the frequency of mother tongue influence across diverse syntactic dimensions. The structured arrangement in Table 2 facilitates a nuanced examination, allowing for the identification of patterns and trends indicative of

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the intricate interplay between the linguistic background of Punjabi-speaking students and the manifestation of mother tongue influence on their syntactic competencies within spoken and written discourse.

**Table:2 Punjabi Speaking Students**

Number of Students	Elements	Sum of Occurrences
<b>36</b>	Subject-Verb Agreement	105
	Verb Tense	66
	Word Order	63
	Grammar	58
	Idiomatic expressions	50
	Prepositions	47
	Pronunciation	56
	Pluralization	45
	Question Formation	50
	Modal Verbs	54
	Negation	61
	Adjective Placement	50
	Vocabulary	52
	Conjunction	47
	Relative Clauses	46
	Code-Switching	54

The provided table enumerates the frequency of diverse syntactic variations demonstrated by Punjabi-speaking students across various elements of sentences. Specifically, the data indicates that Punjabi-speaking students exhibit 105 variations in Subject-Verb-Agreement, 66 variations in verb tense, 63 variations in word order, 58 variations in grammar, 50 variations in idiomatic expression, 47 variations in preposition usage, 56 variations in pronunciation, 45 variations in pluralization, 50 variations in question formation, 54 variations in modal verbs, 61 variations in negation, 50 variations in adjective placement, 52 variations in vocabulary, 47 variations in conjunction usage, 46 variations in relative clauses, and 54 variations in code-switching.

This tabulated information offers a quantitative portrayal of the syntactic nuances observed in the written and spoken expressions of Punjabi-speaking students. It provides valuable insights into specific linguistic areas where mother tongue influence is discernible among Punjabi-speaking students, contributing to a nuanced understanding of their syntactic competencies within the context

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of language acquisition and communication.

### Saraiki Speaking Students

Table 3 systematically categorizes students identified as Saraiki speakers, offering a detailed exploration of instances wherein their mother tongue exerts influence on various syntactic elements. The analyzed syntactic features encompass Subject-Verb Agreement, Verb Tense, Word Order, Grammar, Prepositions, Pluralization, Question Formation, Modal Verbs, Negation, Pronunciation, Vocabulary, Conjunction, Relative Clauses, Idiomatic Expressions, Code- Switching, and Adjective Placement. This tabular representation serves as a structured visual tool for delineating the correlation between Saraiki-speaking students and the frequency of mother tongue influence across diverse syntactic dimensions. The organized arrangement in Table 3 facilitates a nuanced examination, allowing for the identification of patterns and trends indicative of the intricate interplay between the linguistic background of Saraiki-speaking students and the manifestation of mother tongue influence on their syntactic competencies within both spoken and written discourse.

*Table:3 Saraiki Speaking Students*

Number of Students	Elements	Sum of Occurrences
37	Subject-Verb Agreement	71
	Verb Tense	56
	Word Order	48
	Grammar	49
	Idiomatic expressions	69
	Prepositions	47
	Pronunciation	49
	Pluralization	27
	Question Formation	54
	Modal Verbs	46
	Negation	64
	Adjective Placement	46
	Vocabulary	46
	Conjunction	48
	Relative Clauses	29
	Code-Switching	45

The presented table delineates the frequency of distinct syntactic variations exhibited by Saraiki-speaking students across various elements of sentences. Specifically, the data indicates that Saraiki-

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speaking students manifest 71 variations in Subject-Verb-Agreement, 56 variations in verb tense, 48 variations in word order, 49 variations in grammar, 69 variations in idiomatic expression, 47 variations in preposition usage, 49 variations in pronunciation, 27 variations in pluralization, 54 variations in question formation, 46 variations in modal verbs, 64 variations in negation, 46 variations in adjective placement, 46 variations in vocabulary, 48 variations in conjunction usage, 29 variations in relative clauses, and 45 variations in code-switching. This tabulated information offers a quantitative portrayal of the syntactic nuances observed in the written and spoken expressions of Saraiki-speaking students. It provides valuable insights into specific linguistic areas where mother tongue influence is discernible among Saraiki-speaking students, contributing to a nuanced understanding of their syntactic competencies within the context of language acquisition and communication (Thuy et al., 2023).

### Comparison among Languages

In the subsequent phase of the study, the researcher conducted a comparative analysis of linguistic variations among Urdu, Punjabi, and Saraiki language students. Specifically, the investigation aimed to identify and delineate the areas wherein students from each linguistic group demonstrated distinctive patterns of variation. Table 4 serves as a visual representation of the observed variations across the three language groups. The analytical approach encompassed a comprehensive examination of linguistic aspects, grammatical structures, and usage patterns within each language. The objective was to discern and comprehend the specific areas wherein students exhibited notable variations, thereby contributing to a nuanced understanding of the distinct linguistic influences present in the compositions of Urdu, Punjabi, and Saraiki language students.

Table 4

Elements	Urdu	Punjabi	Siraiki
Subject-Verb Agreement	76	105	71
Verb Tense	46	40	56
Word Order	40	63	48
Grammar	43	48	49
Idiomatic expressions	43	50	69
Prepositions	48	47	47
Pronunciation	42	56	49
Pluralization	48	45	27
Question Formation	28	50	54

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Modal Verbs	56	54	46
Negation	36	61	64
Adjective Placement	55	50	46
Vocabulary	46	52	46
Conjunction	42	47	48
Code Switching	56	54	45

### Elements Division among Languages:

The researcher systematically classified syntactic elements into distinct groups based on the frequency of occurrences of variations made by Urdu-speaking, Punjabi-speaking, and Saraiki-speaking students. Elements characterized by a higher incidence of variations among Urdu-speaking students were assigned to the Urdu-speaking student group. Similarly, elements demonstrating a greater frequency of variations among Punjabi-speaking students were allocated to the Punjabi-speaking student group, and those exhibiting higher variation rates among Saraiki-speaking students were categorized into the Saraiki-speaking student group. This methodological approach enabled the researcher to conduct a rigorous investigation into syntactic variation among non-native English as a Second Language (ESL) learners in their written expressions (Oad, Khan, & Khoso, 2020). The objective was to discern and analyze the distinct patterns of syntactic variations exhibited by students from each linguistic background, thereby contributing to a comprehensive understanding of the syntactic challenges faced by non-native ESL learners.

Table No 5:

First Language	Elements	Number of Occurrences
<b>Urdu</b>	Preposition	48
	Pluralization	48
	Model Verbs	56
	Adjective Placement	55
	Code Switching	56
<b>Punjabi</b>	Subject-Verb-Agreement	105
	Verb Tense	66
	Word Order	63
	Pronunciation	56
	Vocabulary	52
	Relative Clauses	46
<b>Siraiki</b>	Grammar	49
	Idiomatic Expressions	69
	Question Formation	54
	Negation	64
	Conjunction	48

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The findings of the study indicate that distinct syntactic variations are observed among ESL learners based on their mother tongue backgrounds. Specifically, Urdu-speaking students exhibit more variations in Prepositions, Pluralization, Modal Verbs, Adjective Placement, and Code Switching. Punjabi-speaking students demonstrate increased variations in Subject-Verb Agreement, Verb Tense, Word Order, Pronunciation, Vocabulary, and Relative Clauses. In contrast, Saraiki-speaking students manifest more variations in Idiomatic Expressions, Question Formation, Negation, and Conjunction.

Consequently, the study successfully achieved its objectives. The first objective involved an exploration of common syntactic variations exhibited by ESL learners in elements such as Subject-Verb-Agreement, Verb Tense, Word Order, Grammar, Prepositions, Pluralization, Question Formation, Modal Verbs, Negation, Pronunciation, Vocabulary, Conjunction, Relative Clauses, Idiomatic Expressions, Code-Switching, and Adjective Placement. The second objective aimed to discern the influence of learners' mother language backgrounds on the observed syntactic variances in writing. This objective was accomplished through the strategic selection of students representing diverse linguistic backgrounds, encompassing Urdu, Punjabi, and Saraiki languages (Ali, et al., 2023). The study thus provides valuable insights into the intricate relationship between linguistic backgrounds and syntactic variations among non-native ESL learners in the context of written expression.

### **Suggestions for Further Research**

To ameliorate the effects of mother tongue influence, educators should facilitate opportunities for students to actively participate in the target language, fostering the exchange of perspectives and cognitive approaches. Classroom design should prioritize an immersive environment that minimizes the impact of native languages, promoting effective acquisition of the target language.

### **Discussion and Conclusion**

The findings of this study provide substantial evidence of mother tongue interference in various facets of second language learning. Overall, it is evident that mother tongue interference permeates nearly all aspects of language acquisition, with particularly pronounced effects observed in writing skills and grammatical areas. The interference significantly impacts learners' performance, leading to variations, particularly in written passages in the target language. Specific linguistic challenges were identified, including difficulties with Prepositions, Pluralization, Modal Verbs, Adjective Placement, and Code Switching. Punjabi-speaking students demonstrated more variations

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in Subject-Verb Agreement, Verb Tense, Pronunciation, Vocabulary, Word Order, and Relative Clauses. The study highlighted instances where learners incorporated structures from their native language (L1) into their second language (L2) responses, resulting in semantically acceptable compositions. Interchangeable use of L1 and L2 structures led to inappropriate L2 responses, indicating clear interference of L1 on L2. Learners exhibited risk-taking behaviors, such as guessing similar words and utilizing invented or borrowed items resembling L2 structures within their knowledge. When faced with gaps in L2 syntactical structures, learners adjusted the form of their L2 written responses by incorporating syntactical items from their L1. This reliance on native language structures during writing in the target language resulted in a higher frequency of negative variation, signifying interference from the native language on the target language (Ahmad, Rashid, & Ali, 2023). Various reasons were identified for learners resorting to L1 instead of L2, encompassing a natural inclination to use L2 for specific tasks, shyness in L2 usage, lack of interest in learning L2 or finding L2 less practical. The study acknowledged language acquisition challenges, particularly for students from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds. Those from educated families appeared to have an advantage in language acquisition, while students from rural areas faced more obstacles due to limited support (Ahmad, et al., 2023).

In conclusion, the study underscores the significance of contextual teaching using full sentences and explanations within relevant contexts. It advocates for a paradigm shift from the memorization of English to encouraging immediate, simple communication, emphasizing that language learning is a gradual and natural process achieved through consistent practice. This research, focused on syntactic variation among non-native ESL learners with Urdu, Punjabi, and Saraiki language backgrounds, utilized Howard Giles' Communicative Accommodation Theory. The analysis, conducted in three main steps, examined test scripts for occurrences of mother tongue influence across various linguistic elements. The research provides valuable insights for language educators and curriculum developers, offering targeted strategies to address challenges associated with mother tongue interference in diverse linguistic contexts.

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