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**A STUDY OF THE SYNTACTIC ERRORS IN ENGLISH COMMITTED  
BY THE STUDENTS OF VERNACULAR MEDIUM SECONDARY  
SCHOOLS OF DIBRUGARH DISTRICT, ASSAM**

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**ABSTRACT**

Language is a creation of man's social needs. It is the ability to acquire and use complex systems of communication to express our thoughts, desires, ideas and experiences to other persons. Learning a language involves the establishment of the links between the language forms and their meanings. As English is a foreign language used in the classrooms as second language, learners do not acquire the forms and meanings overnight; they proceed with conscious efforts and by step-by-step process, where errors and mistakes are very commonly expected. In this present paper, it is tried by the investigator to identify the syntactic errors committed by Vernacular Medium Secondary students of Class IX of Dibrugarh District. The methodology for the study was descriptive survey method and the required information was collected from both primary and secondary sources. The respondents comprised of 400 students of Class IX of Assamese and Bengali Medium Secondary Schools under S.E.B.A. of Dibrugarh district. For collection of data, a Grammar Diagnostic Test Booklet was prepared and standardised. The reliability value was found as 0.96 by adopting test –retest procedure and the validity of the test was found to be 0.71. The study reveals almost same number of students from Vernacular Medium committed errors in Word –order, formation of Wh-sentence, use of Articles, use of Verbal phrase, use of Prepositions, use of Lexical items, use of Punctuation marks and Spellings.

**Key words:** Second language, Syntactic errors, Vernacular Medium, Secondary School.

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**INTRODUCTION**

Language enables people to express their thoughts, desires, ideas and experiences to other persons. As language is a skilled subject, to learn a language means to get a mastery over the four basic skills, i.e. listening, speaking, reading and writing.

As English is a foreign language learnt by step-by-step process, errors and mistakes are very commonly expected. But it is a fact to be observed

that negligence of students' difficulties in lower grade develops into a chronic weakness in the subject later on, which ultimately leads to hatred or monotony towards that subject. If the difficulties are found out, right kind of help given in the early stages can prevent weakness and failure in the later stages. If competency in English from Class IX is enhanced, students can concentrate on their study of different subjects efficiently.

### Objective of the Study

The basic objective of the study is to find out the syntactic errors committed by Vernacular Medium Secondary students of Class IX of Dibrugarh District.

### Delimitation of the study

- I. The present study was restricted to Secondary School students of Dibrugarh district under SEBA.
- II. Class IX Assamese and Bengali Medium students, both boys and girls were included in the study.

### Methods and procedures

**Method:** Descriptive survey method was used for collection of data.

**Population:** The population of the present study comprised of all the students studying in Class IX in Vernacular Secondary Schools of Dibrugarh district in the year 2014.

**Sample:** The sample consists of 400 students, studying in class IX in the year 2014 selected from 16 secondary Assamese and Bengali Medium schools under S.E.B.A. of Dibrugarh district.

**Tool used: A Grammar Diagnostic Test Booklet** to find out the syntactic errors of the Vernacular Medium Secondary School students.

**Standardization of the Tool:** A Grammar Diagnostic Test Booklet was prepared and standardized by the investigator for collection of data and administered upon a small sample of students to check the suitability of the questions. After calculating the difficulty value and discriminating power of the test items, total 31 items had been kept with total marks 37. The reliability value was found as .96 by adopting test –retest procedure and the validity of the test was found to be .71. The different aspects of the test booklet are shown as hereunder:

### i) Different Aspects of Grammar Diagnostic Test Booklet

Table- 1: Details of Different Aspects and Weightage of Questions of the Test Booklet

Sl. No.	Aspects	Weightage in marks	No. of Items
1	Reading comprehension	11 ( iii, iv, v –(a),(b),(c),(d),(e) – 1 mark for each) (i, ii – 2 marks for each)	9
2	Construction of meaningful sentences from jumbled words	9	9
3	Formation of sentence from sentence patterns	2	2
4	Construction of wh – questions	5	5
5	Composition	5	1
6	Translation	5	5
	<b>Total</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>31</b>

### Data collection

For collection of data from the respondents, the selected schools were personally visited by the investigator and before undertaking the study permission was sought from the Heads of the concerned schools. All the students were thoroughly briefed about the purpose of the study and the procedure of completing the test booklet. They were requested to read the instructions carefully and whenever necessary, oral instruction was also given. It required approximately one hour to complete the whole administration.

### Analysis

It is generally not possible to find out and analyze all the syntactic errors as the time span is limited. The investigator, therefore, found out the specific syntactic errors which are very essential in the syntax of English language. An attempt has been made by the investigator through the analysis part to explain how and why the students made the errors. A few of the erroneous sentences along with their nature and source of errors are presented with the correct forms within the brackets. The sub – categories of errors themselves are the nature of the errors committed by the Vernacular Medium students. The errors were analyzed as hereunder:

### Errors in Sentence Structure

Table3. Percentage (%) of Errors committed by the Students of Different Medium

Sl.No.	Errors	Assamese Medium	Bengali Medium
1	Word –order	175(87.50%)	166(83%)
2	Use of wh –sentence	177(88.50%)	189(94.50%)

Sentence Structure or Sentence Formation is the most important aspect in developing proficiency of students in composition. With regard to Word –Order, 87.50% respondents from Assamese and 83% respondents from Bengali medium committed errors by inserting wrong Word –Order in sentence formation.

Again in the formation of Wh-sentence, errors were committed by 88.50% Assamese Medium and 94.50% Bengali Medium respondents of Class IX.

**a) Errors in Word order:** From the answer scripts of the Students of Class IX, the errors committed by them in word –order can be listed under the following sub- categories:

**i) Verb before the Subject**

For eg: a) *Saw I hotel the you.*

(*I saw you in the hotel.*)

b) *Like I TV to watch everyday.*

(*I like to watch TV everyday.*)

**ii) Object before the Verb**

For eg: a) *I in class IX study.*

(*I study in class IX.*)

b) *Ram Saturday in the road fainted.* (*Ram fainted on the road Saturday.*)

**iii) Object before the Subject**

For eg. a) *The hotel in I you saw.*

(*I saw you in the hotel.*)

b) *Story he a told me.*

(*He told me a story.*)

c) *There you what are doing*

(*What are you doing there?*)

From the study of wrong insertion of Word Order, errors in Concord have also been found between different elements in a sentence. The errors are:

**i) Wrong concord between Subject and Verb ‘to be’ as Auxiliary**

For eg. a) *There are a library in our school.*  
(*There is a library in our school.*)

b) *He is fainted due to fever.*

(*He fainted due to fever.*)

**ii) Wrong concord between Subject and Verb ‘to have’ as an Auxiliary**

For eg. a) *My school is having a big garden.*

(*My school has a big garden.*)

b) *My school is a library.*

(*My school has a library.*)

**iii) Wrong concord between Subject and ‘do’**

For eg. a) *She do not want to talk about the incident.*

(*She does not want to talk about the incident.*)

**iv) Wrong concord between Third person Singular Subject and the main Verb in Simple Present Tense.**

For eg. a) *His father live in Guwahati.*

(*His father lives in Guwahati.*)

b) *My school start at 9.15 a.m.*

(*My school starts at 9.15 a.m.*)

**v) Errors due to lack of agreement between the plural Subject and the Verb, i. e., the students added the ending –s, to the root form even when the Subject is plural. For eg.**

a) *They goes to Guwahati next month.*

(*They will go to Guwahati next month.*)

b) *They will goes to Guwahati next month.*

(*They will go to Guwahati next month.*)

**vi) Errors due to lack of agreement between the main Verb and the dummy ‘do’**

For eg: a) *Where did Shila went?*

(*Where did Shila go?*)

b) *She did not wanted it.*

(*She did not want it.*)

It was found from the analysis of the students’ answer scripts that the students had internalized a wrong rule that both ‘do’ and the main verb carry tense.

**b) Errors in the formation of Wh-questions**  
The students committed errors in Wh – questions by omitting the dummy ‘do’ and misplaced auxiliaries in wh- questions and thus produced the following sentences:

**b) Errors in the formation of Wh-questions**

The students committed errors in Wh – questions by omitting the dummy ‘do’ and misplaced auxiliaries in wh- questions and thus produced the following sentences:

a) *Where Shila went yesterday?*

(*Where did Shila go yesterday?*)

b) *Why the baby is crying?*

(*Why is the baby crying?*)

These type of question forms are 'fossilized' (Selinker 1972) in the interlanguage of the students

of the Vernacular Medium.

#### Errors in Use of Articles

**Table4. Percentage (%) of Errors committed by the Students of Different Medium**

Sl.No.	Errors	Assamese Medium	Bengali Medium
1	Omission of Articles	132(66%)	160(80%)
2	Insertion of Articles	164(82%)	150(75%)

Table 4 shows 66% Assamese Medium students committed errors in writing by omitting articles and 82% students inserted wrong articles and 80% Bengali medium students committed errors of article by omission and 75% students by inserting wrong articles.

There are two major categories of errors made in the use of Articles:

**a) Omission of Articles:** The omission of *a (n)* and *the* accounts for a large number of errors committed such as:

*a) Sachi is best student of class IX.*

*(Shachi is the best student of class IX.)*

*b) I saw you in hotel.*

*(I saw you in the hotel.)*

**b) Errors by using inappropriate Articles:** Students committed errors by inserting inappropriate Articles such as:

*a) You shall a go to the zoo.*

*(You will go to see the zoo.)*

*b) I am a play daily.*

*(I play daily.)*

These errors are also due to the learners' failure to observe restrictions in article usage. They ignored the grammatical restrictions and over generalised the use of articles. (French 1949 cited in Paresher p.29) mentions these errors are due to 'analogy'.

#### Errors in Verbal Group

**Table5. Percentage (%) of Errors committed by the Students of Different Medium**

Sl.No.	Errors	Assamese Medium	Bengali Medium
1	Use of Verbs in tense	181(90.50%)	182(91%)
2	Use of Auxiliaries	177(88.50%)	177(88.50%)

Again, 90.50% Assamese Medium students committed errors in the use of Verbs in Tense and 88.50% students in the use of Auxiliaries; 91% Bengali Medium students in use of Verbs in Tense and 88.50% students in the use of Auxiliary verbs.

Here the errors were divided as given hereunder:

#### a) Errors in use of Verbs in Tense

The errors committed by the vernacular medium students are listed under the following sub-categories:

i) Be V+ main V for main V.

ii) Be V + main V + -s for main V

iii) Be V + past form of main V (strong/weak form)

The errors under these three categories are due to intra-language interference. (Brooks1964 cited in D'Souza 1978 p. 47) calls them 'anomalies in the new language'. The typical errors are –

*a) Next month they are go to Guwahati.*  
*(Next month they will go to Guwahati.)*

*b) My school is starts at 9.00 am.*  
*(My school starts at 9.00a.m.)*

*c) They are went there to see the zoo.*  
*(They will go there to see the zoo.)*

Students' errors regarding the use of Verb in Tense were found in the section of free composition and translation.

#### b) Errors in the use of Auxiliaries

The errors may be listed under three sub-categories:

i) Overuse of Auxiliaries.

ii) Wrong insertion of Auxiliaries in simple sentence.

iii) Use of wrong Auxiliaries/ omission of auxiliaries in Wh-questions.

It was found that students made more errors in the sections of free composition and translation.

For eg:

*a) He is shall gone to Guwahati next month. (He will go to Guwahati next month.)*

*b) They shall see the zoo.*

(They will see the zoo.)

c) Where are you going yesterday?

(Where did you go yesterday?)

From the errors observed in the answer scripts, some of the learners have come to regard *is/was* and *was/were* as the only markers of the present and the past tense in a great many contexts.

#### Errors in Use of Preposition

**Table 6. Percentage (%) of Errors committed by the Students of Different Medium**

Sl.No.	Errors	Assamese Medium	Bengali Medium
1	Use of Preposition	148(74%)	161(80.50%)

Table 6 shows, 74% Assamese Medium and 80.50% Bengali Medium Students committed errors in the use of prepositions.

Deviant use of or omission of preposition has been observed in the following sentences:

a) I wake up from bed 6 o'clock.

(I wake up from bed at 6 o'clock.)

b) Rahul's wife arise up to 6.a.m.

(Rahul's wife wakes up at 6 a.m.)

All these errors provide evidence of insufficient mastery of different prepositions and their functions.

#### Errors in Use of Lexical Item

**Table 7. Percentage (%) of Errors committed by the Students of Different Medium**

Sl.No.	Errors	Assamese Medium	Bengali Medium
1	Lexical errors	190(95%)	173(86.50%)

While putting Lexical items in sentences, 95% of the Assamese Medium and 86.50% Bengali Medium students committed errors.

After examining the errors in the use of Lexical items from the answer scripts, the investigator has sub-categorised these errors as follows:

i) Errors due to use of wrong words

ii) Errors due to misuse of words

iii) Errors due to unnecessary insertion of words

From the errors analysed, it was found that as English language contains certain phonetically

similar sounds, the students might be confused and used words wrongly for one another, such as

a) His father leave in Guwahati.

(His father lives in Guwahati.)

There was use of non existent words by the students which were seemingly English but completely unEnglish, such as:

a) I now how doing swing.

(I know how to swing.)

These errors may be ascribed to students' negligence or due to the weak English competence in them.

With regard to the errors due to unnecessary insertion of words, the following sentences may be cited as example of such errors:

a)(what) anil is my best friend.

(Anil is my best friend.)

b) We (are)celebrate (in the)Christmas (some) every year.

In the above examples it is evident that the insertion of words (the bracketed words) was not systematic. The students did not seem to have acquired the basic word order of the language.

#### Errors in the Use of Punctuation marks

**Table 8. Percentage (%) of Errors Committed by the Students of Different Medium**

Sl.No.	Errors	Assamese Medium	Bengali Medium
1	Use of punctuation marks	189(94.50%)	183(91.50%)

Regarding errors in use of Punctuation marks, 94.50% Assamese Medium and 91.50% Bengali Medium students of Class IX committed errors.

In the following sentences students used wrong punctuation marks:

a)what is he doing

(What is he doing?)

b)his father lives in guwahati

(His father lives in Guwahati.)

#### Errors in Spellings

**Table 9. Percentage (%) of Errors Committed by the Students of Different Medium**

Sl.No.	Errors	Assamese Medium	Bengali Medium
1	Spelling mistakes	187(93.50%)	183(91.50%)

Table 9 shows that 93.50% Assamese Medium Students and 91.50% Bengali Medium Students committed spelling mistakes in writing. Due to non-discrimination of sound, inconsistencies of English spelling system and over generalisation, students committed errors in spelling.

#### Conclusion

The present study entitled "A Study of the Syntactic Errors in English Committed by the Vernacular Medium Secondary Schools of Assam, with Special reference to Dibrugarh District" was undertaken basically to find out the syntactic errors committed by the Vernacular Medium Secondary Students of Class IX and how they committed errors while writing in English. The study reveals almost same number of students from Vernacular Medium committed errors in Word –order, formation of Wh-sentence, use of Articles, use of Verbal phrase, use of Prepositions, use of Lexical items, use of Punctuation marks and Spellings.

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