INVESTIGATING PROOFREADING STRATEGIES IN ENGLISH ACADEMIC WRITING FOR PUBLICATION

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Abstract

This study explores the proofreading strategies employed in English Academic Writing (EAW) from the perspective of professional proofreaders in international journals. Conducted at a public university in Indonesia, it involved a purposive sampling of 21 journals and 10 proofreaders from a pool of 164 potential journals. Through surveys, interviews, and Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), the research reveals that cultural differences significantly influence text presentation, while individual cultural practices—such as reading habits and academic experiences—are crucial to the writing abilities of non-native English-speaking (NNES) authors. Notably, many NNES authors demonstrate strong EAW skills, challenging the idea that an author's country of origin is the primary determinant of EAW difficulties. The findings show thatNNES authors often rely on translation technology, which leads to issues due to literal translations. This reliance underscores the inadequacy of such technology compared to the nuanced understanding provided by human proofreaders. The study recommends using specialized dictionaries and collocation resources to avoid common errors in machine translations. Additionally, it highlights both textual and non-textual strategies that authors should adopt. Ultimately, the research suggests that enhancing proofreading skills in NNES authors begins with regular reading to familiarize them with proper academic writing conventions. While technology plays a beneficial role, human oversight is essential for ensuring comprehension and maintaining the integrity of the author's message.

Keywords: proofreading strategy, English academic writing, non-native English speaking

A. INTRODUCTION

At the university level, mastering English Academic Writing (EAW) is critical for students as it enhances their academic performance and prepares them for various professional and personal contexts. Success in academic courses is closely linked to the ability to express ideas through writing, particularly when it

comes to completing theses or dissertations and publishing in reputable journals. Writing in an international journal is a way for students to demonstrate their expertise, research skills, and the quality of their contributions to the academic community. English has become the dominant language in the international scientific and academic communities, giving it significant decision-making power in international publications (Doerr, 2023). However, students from non-native English-speaking (NNES) backgrounds often face significant challenges related to scholarly writing in English (Hamamah et al., 2023; Phyo et al., 2024).

English dominates scientific dissemination, and most high-quality journals are published in English (Curry & Lillis, 2024) NNES students face additional challenges when publishing in reputable journals, especially regarding language proficiency (Kaur Mehar Singh, 2019; Langum & Sullivan, 2017). The language barrier is often a significant obstacle to academic success, particularly for Middle Eastern students (Kaur Mehar Singh, 2019). Overcoming cultural differences is another challenge, as these differences can affect how ideas and arguments are presented in writing (Kaur Mehar Singh, 2019; Magnucz, 2008). NNES students often struggle to convey their ideas in clear and understandable English and face difficulties with grammar, syntax, and vocabulary (Deng et al., 2024; Kaur Mehar Singh, 2019). They also encounter challenges during the literature review process, particularly in navigating and synthesizing extensive English-language literature (Shaw, 2016). Limited resources and language proficiency can lead to a fear of rejection and a reluctance to engage in writing for publication, further disadvantaging NNES students (Hamamah et al., 2023; Huang, 2010).

To succeed in publication, NNES authors must not only master English proficiency but also meet the standards required by journals. This includes following journal guidelines and ensuring that their articles are free from major and minor mistakes to avoid misunderstandings. Common errors in academic writing, particularly among NNES authors, include issues related to language skills, writing skills, and source management skills (AlMarwani, 2020). The fear of facing the rigorous peer review process and the high competition for limited

publication slots can intensify the challenges NNES students face (Curry & Lillis, 2024; Hamamah et al., 2023; Langum & Sullivan, 2017).

In response to these challenges, NNES students require institutional language support services. Many non-native English-speaking countries are implementing strategies to improve students' language proficiency and increase international publications. These strategies include individual and group consultations, workshops, courses, and language exchange programs (Ma, 2019). Collaboration with native English writers or experienced researchers can also provide valuable insights into cultural nuances and help familiarize students with diverse writing practices (Johnson et al., 2017; Woodward-Kron, 2007). However, while these external supports are beneficial, they are often costly and resource-intensive (Johnson et al., 2017; Woodward-Kron, 2007). Therefore, it is essential to improve students' writing skills, particularly in the EAW process, so they can write independently.

This study focuses on efforts to improve the quality of students' writing, particularly by examining the patterns of article improvements made by journal editorial boards. Understanding the strategies and methods used by editorial boards can help identify the skills and competencies that authors need to develop to pass the review process and publish in reputable journals.

NNES students' academic writing is significantly impacted by their sociocultural literacy practices, which can lead to more problematic writing (Kumar & Aitchison, 2018). Sociocultural factors influence not only the topics and styles of writing but also the construction of sentences. For example, students from Egyptian universities may write English in a style influenced by Arabic composition, making their English writing difficult to understand (Ahmed & Myhill, 2016). These differences in sociocultural perspectives can lead to challenges in cross-cultural communication, as the language use, sentence structure, and communication norms may differ from those of native speakers. While sociocultural factors contribute to the richness and diversity of communication styles, they can also create challenges in academic writing and publication.

Feedback plays a crucial role in the writing process, helping ensure the relevance and accuracy of research and protecting the scientific community from unsubstantiated claims and erroneous conclusions (Lim & Bowman, 2024). The peer review process is central to academic publishing, involving a collaborative relationship between authors, editors, reviewers, and proofreaders. However, NNES students often have low proofreading skills, leading to common mistakes and errors in their writing. For example, a study by Chen (2002) found that Taiwanese university students frequently made errors related to word usage, tense, definite articles, prepositions, and verbs. Similar findings were observed in research conducted at the Catholic University of Saint Thomas, where punctuation, preposition, and agreement errors were the most common (Prima Sari & Jusat Pangaribuan, 2018). Another study by Amiri et al. (2021) found that grammatical errors were the most frequent errors in publications by non-native writers at Goanabad University.

Source management skills are also crucial in academic writing to ensure accuracy, credibility, and proper citation of sources. Technological developments have provided various writing assistance tools, such as spell checking, grammar checking, and style checking, which can help improve writing quality (Dale & Viethen, 2021). However, not all writers are aware of or effectively use these tools. A study by Alordiah et al. (2023) involving 180 lecturers in developing countries found that awareness, knowledge, and utilization of Free Online Digital Tools (FODT) for literature search, managing references, editing, and plagiarism checking were still low.

While extensive research has been conducted on the challenges faced by NNES authors, there has been limited focus on translating these findings into practical strategies for professional publication. This study aims to explore how professional proofreaders respond to these challenges, providing insights that NNES writers can use to improve the quality of their work. The research focuses on actual proofreading practices within the international journal publication process, involving both native and non-native English speakers as authors. It is important to explore the problems encountered during the proofreading process

and the strategies employed to maintain the quality of articles, ultimately aiding NNES authors in overcoming the challenges they face in academic writing and publication.

B. METHODOLOGY

This study utilizes Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) to explore the experiences of proofreaders, focusing on their subjective understanding rather than an objective interpretation of their experiences (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). IPA, which emphasizes participants' subjective experiences, is particularly effective in understanding the proofreading process by capturing the meanings proofreaders assign to their work. The researcher aimed to understand proofreaders' experiences free from personal preconceptions, striving to see the world through their eyes (Denscombe, 2014; Lodico et al., 2006).

The research was conducted at a public university in Indonesia, using purposive sampling to select participants. From 164 potential journals, 21 were chosen, and out of 23 proofreaders, 10 were selected based on their academic background, experience, and survey participation ((Ritchie & Lewis, 2003). These proofreaders were interviewed to gather detailed insights into their proofreading experiences, challenges, and strategies. The data collection methods included open-ended questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, and document analysis, focusing on the proofreading strategies used by professionals in journal article publication. The questionnaire, developed with expert input and piloted for reliability, explored common mistakes, strategies, and the use of technology in proofreading. Interviews allowed the researcher to delve deeper into proofreaders' perspectives, capturing nuanced information that might not be accessible through other means (Patton, 1990). The interviews were conducted with 10 participants, chosen based on their questionnaire responses, and were recorded with their consent.

The data analysis involved transcribing the interviews, which were then analyzed using IPA to uncover how proofreaders make sense of their practices and challenges. This approach facilitated a deep exploration of the participants' experiences, revealing variations in proofreading strategies and common errors

identified by proofreaders, especially those faced by non-native English speakers. The IPA method highlighted both the cognitive and emotional dimensions of proofreading, providing rich insights into professional practices and the impact of cultural and linguistic backgrounds.

C. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

1. Findings

a. Common Mistakes or Errors in Articles

The research identified various common mistakes in the draft articles reviewed by the proofreaders. These errors ranged from minor to major and were categorized into different types, including issues with singular/plural forms, sentence structure, parts of speech, literal translation, tense usage, redundancy, word usage, relative clauses, punctuation, and capitalization (see Table 1). Errors were particularly prevalent in articles written by non-native English speakers, with significant challenges arising from direct translations that did not reflect natural English usage. The study highlights how these errors are often linked to the difficulty of translating thoughts coherently from the original language into English, which can result in unnatural phrasing and ineffective sentences.

Table 1. Common mistakes and errors in draft article written by NNES

| No | Common Mistakes in Article | Micro | Meso | Major |
		Percentage (%)		
1.	Parts of Speech	55	36	9
2.	Literal Translation	9	45	45
3.	Number, Singular/Plural Form	64	18	18
4.	Sentence Structure	0	36	64
5.	Punctuation	64	36	0
6.	Capitalization	82	18	0
7.	Word usage	18	64	18
8.	Tense	27	55	18
9.	Article	73	18	9
10.	Relative clauses	55	45	0
11.	Redundancy	9	55	36

b. Employed Proofreading Strategies

The study outlined various strategies employed by professional proofreaders. These strategies were divided into textual proofreading strategies and non-textual

elements such as time and stress management, both of which are critical to ensuring the quality of the final text.

Textual Proofreading Strategies. Proofreaders employed several strategies, including reading texts forwardly, comparing original texts with proofread versions, skimming and scanning, and reading texts aloud versus silently. The preference for using technology in proofreading was also evident, with most proofreaders opting to use digital tools like Microsoft Word with track changes and comment features. Some proofreaders relied on automated tools to address minor errors while manual corrections were necessary for major revisions, particularly when dealing with issues like literal translations and redundancy (see Table 2).

Non-Textual Proofreading Strategies. Strategies for enhancing the quality of an article extend beyond the article itself to include other supporting factors outside the text. Proofreading often involves dealing with time constraints, the stress arising from limited time, and the text's complexity. Novice proofreaders need to study how professional proofreaders manage these challenges.

Strategies, tips, and techniques for proofreading vary depending on the situation, conditions, workload, and the professional background of the proofreader. What may be effective for one individual might not be suitable for another. In this study, professional proofreaders are those actively engaged in academia as educators or teaching staff committed to working 8 hours daily. Their free time is limited, and their primary duties may dominate their schedules. Therefore, their tips, tricks, and strategies are worth emulating.

Table 2. Prooferading strategies employed by the professional proofreaders

No	Proofreading Strategy	TOTAL
1.	On-screen	11
	On paper	0
	Both	2
2.	Individual	11
	In peer	2
	In group	0
3.	Forwardly	10
	Backwardly	0
	Both	3
4.	Direct comment on the original text	8
	Compare two pieces of copy	6
5.	Word by word	8
	Skim and Scan	6
6.	Read aloud the text	2
	Do it in a silent way	11
7.	Aids by the computer software	11
	Not aided by the computer software	2

Various strategies presented may offer the best solutions; however, understanding one's capacity is often preferable to forcing a particular approach. Non-textual strategies address critical factors such as time and stress management, directly impacting proofreading performance. Effective time management and coping with stress are essential for maintaining the quality of work, especially when dealing with complex texts under tight deadlines. Proofreaders often adopt personal techniques and strategies, such as efficiently using technology, managing workloads, and employing stress-reduction methods. Understanding one's capacity and seeking assistance when needed is also integral to managing proofreading tasks effectively.

In conclusion, effective proofreading requires a blend of textual strategies and adept management of non-textual factors. Proofreaders must navigate various methods and tools, adapting their approaches to their specific needs and circumstances. Integrating technological advancements with traditional techniques offers a comprehensive approach to improving text quality and efficiently managing the proofreading process.

Handling Revisions. Minor revisions were often addressed immediately by the proofreaders, who made corrections directly in the text. In contrast, major revisions required more in-depth strategies, including reconstructing sentences and improving coherence and cohesion manually. The study notes that while AI tools can assist with structural corrections, they often fail to enhance the fluency and naturalness of the language, underscoring the need for human intervention in these cases.

Almost all participants share the same strategy for handling minor revisions. Various online and offline word processing applications offer automatic revisions or suggestions. The proofreader must review and decide whether to accept or reject these suggestions. Most proofreaders make immediate corrections directly in the text. It is either due to their proficient proofreading skills that allow them to detect errors easily or with tools such as grammar checkers.

Technology used in Proofreading Strategies. The interviews reveal that using technology and AI significantly aids in proofreading, particularly in time savings. Proofreaders recommend various AI tools frequently employed in the proofreading process. Instead of listing specific technologies that should be avoided or are not recommended, international proofreaders advise against over-reliance on AI and technology. In this study, data on technology recommendations were obtained through surveys and interviews. The respondents shared their experiences and insights regarding using technology and AI tools in proofreading. In this context, the researcher examined the types of technology and the frequency of its use.

The findings show that Grammarly and Quillbot dominate the technologies used in proofreading. This is due to their multifunctional capabilities, including spell checking, grammar checking, punctuation checking, and style checking. Regarding reference management, Mendeley is the predominant tool, while Turnitin is the leading choice for similarity checking.Some software and applications are not recognized or utilized by proofreaders. In addition to traditional software, several AI technologies are recommended, such as OpenAI, DeepL, ChatGPT, and Gemini AI.

2. Discussion

a. Common Mistakes or Errors in Draft Articles

Non-native English speakers (NNES) often make frequent errors at the microstructural level, particularly in singular/plural forms and articles. Ellis & Yuan (2021) and Ionin et al. (2019) emphasize that NNES struggle with English articles due to their non-existence in many native languages. Cenoz (2003) and Bardovi-Harlig & Stringer (2018) further note that structural differences and transfer from native languages lead to frequent grammatical errors. Misuse of articles and prepositions stems from linguistic and cultural differences, and translating from a native language can introduce errors (Kojima & Popiel, 2023). Grammar mistakes disrupt clarity, coherence, and flow, impacting readers' understanding and the effectiveness of communication (Johnson et al., 2017),

However, some research challenges the perceived impact of grammar errors. Truscott (1996) and Ferris (2004) argue that intensive grammar correction may not significantly enhance writing proficiency and could detract from developing higher-order writing skills. Hamp-Lyons (1990) suggests that focusing on content may sometimes lead to more engaging writing despite grammatical errors.

Literal translations are another issue, often resulting from reliance on machine translation tools. Bowker and Barlow (2008) report that machine translations frequently produce unnatural and awkward phrasing. Yvon (2022) acknowledges improvements in translation technology but notes limitations in capturing linguistic nuances (Alordiah et al., 2023). This highlights the need for comprehensive training in academic writing beyond automated tools.

The influence of an author's L1 structure on writing style and error potential is significant. While ideas and arguments are crucial, adherence to writing conventions is necessary to avoid reader misconceptions. Effective revisions require specific strategies, considering both common errors and cultural factors impacting writing style.

b. Proofreading Strategies for Textual and Non-textual Issues

This study introduces a novel perspective on proofreading, emphasizing both textual and non-textual elements. While previous research focused on textual

aspects like grammar and coherence (McDowell & Liardét, 2020), this study highlights the importance of non-textual factors such as stress management and time allocation. Ganobcsik-Williams et al. (2022) argue that managing proofreading time and environment is crucial for efficiency, supported by Golinitskiy (2021) who suggests structured breaks and organizational tools for effective proofreading.

Effective proofreading integrates both textual precision and non-textual considerations. Balancing detailed textual analysis with practical strategies for managing external factors enhances the quality and coherence of academic articles. The evolving role of technology in proofreading is also addressed. AI tools, while enhancing efficiency, can produce unnatural language and require manual review (Collins et al., 2019; McDowell & Liardét, 2020). A hybrid approach combining AI and human proofreading is suggested to address the limitations of automated tools while leveraging their efficiency.

c. Major and Minor Revisions

Revisions are categorized as major or minor, depending on their complexity. Major revisions involve significant changes to sentence structure and argument logic, while minor revisions address technical errors like spelling and punctuation (Hyland, 2019; Karim & Nassaji, 2020). AI can expedite minor revisions, but human intervention is necessary for major revisions due to their complexity (Alharbi, 2023; Al-Sabahi & Yang, 2023; Shibani et al., 2024). Some argue that emphasizing major revisions might overshadow writer autonomy and creativity (Sommers, 1982; Zamel, 1985). Additionally, revision practices often reflect Western rhetorical norms, which may not align with NNES writers' cultural backgrounds (Canagarajah, 2006).

Cultural influences on writing style vary. Individual cultural perspectives, including writing habits and environments, play a significant role. While structural differences between L1 and English can affect writing, effective communication often involves understanding these individual and cultural nuances. The study finds that cultural factors influence writing style but cautions against reinforcing stereotypes (Atkinson, 1999; Cao, 2022; Guerra, 2015;

Kubota, 2001; Kubota & Lehner, 2021; McIntosh & Connor, 2022; Uysal, 2014; Zhou, 2016) Proper revisions should consider these cultural nuances, avoiding overemphasis on broad cultural comparisons.

d. Technology Used in the Proofreading Process

Historically, proofreading was a manual and labor-intensive process reliant on proofreaders' expertise. Early technology, such as typewriters and basic word processors, offered minimal assistance (Wang, 2024; Zadunaisky-Ehrlich et al., 2021). With the advent of AI, proofreading has become more efficient, especially for minor errors. Al Sawi and Alaa (2024) note that AI reduces proofreading time but cannot fully replace human judgment. Anderson and Park (2023) emphasize the need for a balanced approach integrating AI with manual proofreading to handle complex grammatical and non-textual issues.

AI tools, while beneficial for surface-level error detection, may struggle with rhetorical and contextual nuances (Florence & Yore, 2004; Gaskell & Cobb, 2004; Warschauer, 2020). This study highlights that technology can aid in understanding literal translations by reverting texts to the original language, which is useful when direct communication with authors is not possible. Integrating technology with human expertise ensures accurate, coherent, and culturally appropriate academic texts (Flowerdew, 2015; Kirkpatrick & Sussex, 2018).

D. CONCLUSION

This study has investigated proofreading strategies in academic writing for publication, with a particular focus on the experiences of professional proofreaders working with international journals. The research is vital for assisting authors, especially non-native English speakers (NNES), in effectively detecting and revising mistakes and errors.

The study finds that, despite cultural differences affecting how ideas are presented in texts, NNES authors can enhance their awareness of errors by improving their individual cultural practices. The observation that many NNES authors possess strong English academic writing (EAW) skills challenges, the notion that an author's country of origin is a primary factor in EAW failure. Instead, the reliance of NNES authors on translation technology emerges as a

significant cause of literal translation issues. Translation technology has proven inadequate in replacing the nuanced understanding and intuition of human proofreaders when evaluating argument coherence and persuasiveness. Utilizing specialized dictionaries and collocation resources is recommended to avoid errors in word usage that are frequently found in machine translations.

To improve article quality, both textual and non-textual strategies should be employed. While technology can save time, it is crucial to acknowledge that machine-generated language cannot substitute for the human touch in writing. Despite technological advancements, human expertise remains essential. Non-textual strategies may vary among individuals, but the key lies in maintaining focus and deriving enjoyment from the proofreading process.

These findings suggest that improving NNES authors and learners proofreading skills can begin with regular reading to understand how academic writing should be correctly written. Technology will continue to be helpful, but human oversight is necessary to ensure nuanced comprehension and the preservation of authorial intent.

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