EAP (Sc.) Sample Report
(Adapted from *2021 Faculty Community Project: Does Use of Grammarly Improve Students'*
Writing Output and Skills?)
Word Count: 1389

Language Learning, Grammarly, and the DLE
Bryan Alkema

Introduction

Handong Global University's Department of Language Education (DLE) is responsible

for preparing students to effectively use English within English-mediated classes (EMCs) and, of

course, after graduation as they fulfill the university's stated goal of preparing the next

generation of Christian leaders. Completing this ambitious task requires professors to wisely use

available resources of time and attention. By far the greatest challenge to DLE staff lies in the

area of assessment. Most DLE staff members teach five sections in an average semester; each

section has 22 students; and each student completes an array of assignments, including journal

entries, paragraphs, scheduled discussions, quizzes, paragraphs, essays, and presentations. Some

of these assignments can be scored objectively through the university's learning management

system (LMS) or by teaching assistants, but many require professional skill for feedback and

assessment. The research question driving this project is to determine whether using a specific

AI tool (Grammarly) will lead to significant improvements in student output (present

performance) and skills (future ability).

Context / Background

Use of Grammarly falls into the greater area of corrective feedback (CF), which is an

ongoing issue within language education. The central concern is the amount of CF provided to

students, based on two considerations. First, students faced with too much error correction in

areas as diverse as word usage, grammatical accuracy, paragraph structure, and purpose

completion may be unable to integrate this feedback, and fail to benefit from such feedback.

Second, from the professor's standpoint, providing such feedback takes time and effort which

may not result in the desired outcome of enhanced student ability. AI offers a new approach to

this dilemma because little time is needed from the professor, while students receive individual

guidance on errors and improvement. However, early iterations of Grammarly caused some

concerns amongst reviewers about the types of corrective feedback (CF). Dembsey's 2017

review noted some valid concerns about over-dependence on AI. The review points out that the

AI identifies errors and weaknesses, thus providing only negative feedback; that the AI provides

only local (sentence-level) CF, not global (paragraph / essay-level) suggestions; and that much of

the CF is repetitive in nature -- for example, each subject/verb agreement error will be marked as

a separate entry, whereas a human reviewer might provide a single comment or mark just a few

examples of the pattern-level error.

Body Paragraph 1: Student Output

Several reviews of Grammarly have indicated that use of this app provides students with

an increased understanding of grammatical rules and practices. In 2016, a study by Cavaleri and

Dianati found that "...students perceive Grammarly as useful and easy to use, and students

reported that Grammarly improved their writing and understanding of grammar rules." Similarly,

Qassemzadeh and Soleimani (2016) found that students were more likely to respond to and retain

repeated feedback provided by Grammarly rather than the limited feedback which human

instructors were able to provide. Karyuatry et al summarized their 2019 project by stating,

"...when Grammarly is used in teaching descriptive (sic), there are 32 (82%) out of 40 students

passed the passing grade. The researchers concluded that Grammarly can be used as an appropriate tool to minimize errors and improve students' writing quality." Park, also writing in 2019, gave Grammarly a positive review, sharing that the use of Grammarly provided students with immediate feedback, enhanced their awareness and accuracy of specific grammatical features, and reduced their cognitive load in the writing process. The overall agreement of these different sources indicate that Grammarly is useful for improving student output. Based on these reports, it seems that use of this AI tool results in better scores on final submissions.

Body Paragraph 2: Student Skills

While Grammarly is generally acknowledged to be a useful tool for improving student output, there is less agreement about the use of the app in improving overall student skills of grammar and writing. On the one hand, Huang et al (2020) completed a 16-week longitudinal study of 43 university students in China and found that the students' writing performance had increased, and that the students were satisfied with the AI-based feedback they had received; thus, "...applying Grammarly in writing classes is an effective approach for EFL students in developing writing skills and help teachers reduce teaching load." However, Rao et al (2019) came to a different conclusion: after noting that Grammarly provided unprecedented abilities for students in terms of ease-of-use, integration with other programs (such as Microsoft and Google programs within which writing often takes places) and immediate feedback, they go on to say: "Although Grammarly is quite sophisticated and supports a lot in correcting the writings, users need to take their own decision in incorporating the changes suggested by the tool in their manuscripts." The key issue in this area is that students may come to rely on the external AI tool rather than developing their own internal understanding of grammar and other principles of

writing. For educators, an increase in student scores based on use of an AI tool may not be in alignment with the desire to develop an increase in student skills. The purpose of teaching is not to make an AI tool more intelligent, but to provide human students with increased abilities.

Body Paragraph 3: Human Cost

What many of these reviews have in common is a recognition that Grammarly alone is insufficient for teaching students how to write well. This point is, in effect, what Dembsey pointed out, and this is affirmed by Barrot's study (2020), which concluded: "While Grammarly can be a powerful tool that teachers and students can explore in their writing classrooms, it has some limitations that require further enhancements." Ghufron's two studies of Grammarly (2018 & 2019) provided clear indications that this AI construct was able to provide students with meaningful feedback about words and sentences, but not about the skills needed for effective paragraph construction:

> Grammarly software gives the better effect on three indicators of EFL writing, i.e., diction, language use (grammar), and mechanics (spelling and punctuation), but it gives less effect on content and organization. On the contrary, the teacher's corrective feedback (indirect corrective feedback) gives a better effect on two indicators of EFL writing, i.e., content and organization, but it has less effect on diction, language use, and mechanics. However, for overall indicators, it can be inferred that Grammarly software is more effective than teacher corrective feedback.

One way of summarizing this aspect of AI use is that the combination of teacher support and AI feedback is both efficient and effective. However, the overall concern of these writers is that

students may become over-reliant on AI writing support and, as a result, not develop their own abilities.

Conclusion

  The use of a specific AI tool (Grammarly) for the DLE has already been approved and implemented. There are three main considerations which professors and students should keep in mind as they continue to use AI – including new forms of AI such as ChatGPT. First, recent advances in AI, and improvements to specific programs such as Grammarly, make these tools useful for the DLE language program. Second, Grammarly is apparently able to provide students with detailed feedback on issues such as vocabulary usage and grammatical accuracy; while these aspects are not the main focus of our classes, they clearly do have an effect on overall student writing. Third, Grammarly is widely recognized to be currently unable to provide effective feedback on paragraph- or essay-level writing features such as direct topic sentences, or on conceptual aspects such as meaningful content. Current AI technology is able to detect and correct specific or small-scale errors of language, but is not able to identify or modify large-scale ideas, purpose, or development expressed through language; but those have always been the major goals of the writing skills taught and assessed throughout the DLE program. Therefore, student use of AI tools should streamline the process use for written assignments so that the feedback, comments, and suggestions provided by professors are <u>fewer in quantity</u> but <u>greater in quality</u>. After using Grammarly, students will be able to focus their attention on the most meaningful aspects of improvements throughout our courses. In the end, Grammarly helps the students as much as it helps the professors running the courses – it is a source of knowledge and an asset which will strengthen students' digital literacy as well as their second-language skills.

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