

Spelling and Grammar Checker Analysis

In this paper the robustness of two free spelling and grammar checkers will be analyzed: After the Deadline and Slick Write. The learner sentences used in this analysis are the same ones utilized for Assignment 3, Question 1, selected from the International Corpus of Crosslinguistic Interlanguage. Appendix A, located at the end of this document, contains the learner sentences and the error output from these two programs as well as a baseline spelling/grammar checker, LibreOffice Writer. This third program was also added to this table to provide a brief comparison as to what advantage the user (the language learner/writer) would get using one of these specific spelling/grammar checkers instead of simply relying on the red squiggly lines in a word processing program alone. Even though LibreOffice Writer is also included in this analysis, the vast majority of the information will be focused on the two stand alone spelling/grammar checkers.

The first spelling/grammar checker analyzed was **After the Deadline**, an open source program (<https://open.afterthedeadline.com/download/download-source-code/>). Their website states that this is an intelligent language checking service. The rule program files are saved in R but look relatively easy to read. They have rules for agreement, complex, diacritic, grammar, redundancy and more with grammar being the biggest file by far at 202 KB. I mention this because despite these ten learner sentences having many common grammar errors, After the Deadline only identified 2 errors: one spelling and one grammar. The spelling error was in learner sentence 1, “meanwhibe” instead of “meanwhile.” The grammar error is listed below in Example 1.

Example 1:

Learner sentence 7: I has made a dream that tomorrow evening not go to school.

Error message: **Try: "I have". In English, the subject has a count (singular, plural) and so does the verb. These counts must agree for your sentence to be valid.**

It is interesting to note that of the word processing program and the two grammar checkers, After the Deadline was the only program that identified this subject-verb agreement error as an error, albeit for the wrong reason (passive voice instead of subject verb agreement). LibreOffice did not highlight this mistake at all and Slick Write focused on excessive adverb usage instead of this verb error.

This is not the only grammatical oversight that occurred in **Slick Write** (<https://www.slickwrite.com/#!home>). This checker had little to no information about its backend configuration but it appears to be available as an extension in Firefox, if that is desired. At first glance it seems as if Slick Write would be a more productive spelling/grammar checker due its propensity for adding many error and suggestions markings, even to something as short as these ten sentences (Appendix A). However, the vast majority of the errors highlighted in this program were overuse of adverbs like “very”, “more” and “also”, which seems much more of a stylistic suggestion than a grammatical error that might deter meaning from being conveyed. In fact, 5 of the 7 errors identified were of this adverb type. The only two errors it identified outside of these adverb ones were the spelling error in sentence 1 “meanwhibe” to “meanwhile” and the Example 2 (below) passive voice error. This learner sentence is not even written in passive voice, nor should it be, to retain the original meaning. It can only be assumed that there is a lot of work needed to done on the program still to improve its robustness.

Example 2:

Learner sentence 9: I will cost money on my birthday.

Error message: **“Passive voice: A transitive verb is preceded by an auxiliary verb such as “be” or “get.” It is the standard in scientific writing, but is frowned on in most other genres**

Another slightly discouraging things about Slick Write was the lack of reliability. I specifically ran the Example 3 (below) learner sentence through the program a few times to check its reliability. Unfortunately, the output oscillated between the two error messages. The Slick Write default settings were used in every test so it is unclear why the error message would have varied as it did.

Example 3:

Learner sentence 7: I has made a dream that tomorrow evening not go to school.

OUTPUT 1: **Adverb message for TOMORROW**

OUTPUT 2: **Adverb message for TOMORROW and NOT**

Slick Writer does offer many more user options than After the Deadline. The SETTINGS page lets users pick from 6 categories of feedback: marking, the basics, sentences, concise language, professional language, honesty and objectivity. Although their homepage boasts that Slick Writer, “is a powerful, free tool that makes it easy to check your writing for grammar errors,” there is not a clear option for just grammar corrections. The two categories it would be thought to fall into: ‘the basics’ and ‘sentences’ are shown below in Figure 1. It is clear to see that there are very few (misplaced prepositions, misplaced conjunctions) grammar checking choices in these menus. Incorrect verb tenses, simply put, THE most common error for both L2 writers and native speakers alike, is not available as an option in any of the six categories in this SETTINGS menu.



Figure 1: Some of the Slick Writer SETTINGS options

It can be assumed that these grammar options are in a standard hidden menu that is always utilized. But given all of the choices available here, it may be a good idea for this to be explicitly stated. If the ten learner sentences analyzed in this paper are any indication of how robust (or how non-robust) their grammar checking functionality is, it appears that their options menu is more explicit about this program’s (lack of) abilities than their consumer information on the homepage.

Due to the large number of spelling and grammar checkers readily available online it is clear that there is a need for such programs. However, these two checkers do not seem to provide much advantages to the spelling and grammar checking functions already in existence in most word processing programs.

Appendix A:

	Learner sentence: http://cblle.tufs.ac.jp/lc/icci/search.php?menulang=en	Libre Office Writer	After the Deadline http://www.polishmywriting.com/	Slick Write: https://www.slickwrite.com/#!home
	# of errors:	1	2	7
1	Meanwhibe, I want to express my love to her by the flowers.	Caught spelling error for “meanwhile”	Caught spelling error for “meanwhile”	Caught spelling error for “meanwhile”
2	I began to like him from I was very young.	No errors	No errors	For “VERY” “ADVERS: They aren’t bad in small quantities, but consider revising your document if more than 5.5% of its words are adverbs.”
3	So I should think my parents.	No errors	No errors	No errors
4	I like dance very much, because of study I have to stop it.	No errors	No errors	Adverb message for “very”
5	But in fact, he has a little clothes.	No errors	No errors	No errors
6	I go back home from school, because she want me can sleep more time in the afternoon.	No errors	No errors	Adverb message for MORE
7	I has made a dream that tomorrow evening not go to school.	No errors	Try: “I have” In English, the subject has a count (singular, plural) and so does the verb. These counts must agree for your sentence to be valid.	Adverb message for TOMORROW and NOT
8	But I think we should have a heart that full of love.	No errors	No errors	No errors
9	I will cost money on my birthday.	No errors	No errors	“Passive voice: A transitive verb is preceded by an auxiliary verb such as “be” or “get.” It is the standard in scientific writing, but is frowned on in most other genres.
10	I also to buy some candles because I be fourteen years old.	No error	No errors	Adverb message for ALSO & extra space

Learner sentences outside of chart (for copy and paste functionality)

Meanwhibe, I want to express my love to her by the flowers.

I began to like him from I was very young.

So I should think my parents.

I like dance very much, because of study I have to stop it.

But in fact, he has a little clothes.

I go back home from school, because she want me can sleep more time in the afternoon.

I has made a dream that tomorrow evening not go to school.

But I think we should have a heart that full of love.

I will cost money on my birthday.

I also to buy some candles because I be fourteen years old.