

Natural Language Processing-Based Grammar Correction Systems for English Learners

Yusufjanov Ulugbek Javlon Ugli^{1*} and Shermatov Abdukodir Obidjon Ugli²

^{1*}Deputy Dean, Department of Humanitarian Sciences and Pedogogy, Faculty of Humanities & Pedagogy, Turan International University, Namangan, Uzbekistan.

E-mail: ulugbekabuyusuf@gmail.com, Orcid: <https://orcid.org/0009-0008-0641-2475>

²Deputy Dean, Department of Part-time Education, Faculty of Humanities & Pedagogy, Turan International University, Namangan, Uzbekistan. E-mail: shermatovabduqotir1@gmail.com,

Orcid: <https://orcid.org/0009-0001-0315-801X>

Abstract: The emergence of AI and NLP technologies is a major driving force behind the transformation of the field of English language acquisition, with automated writing assistance being introduced in order to solve a number of challenges associated with learning English. Nevertheless, English language students still have problems with identifying and correcting grammatical errors due to their limited language exposure, the influence of the native language, and a lack of continuous feedback. This study aims to assess the efficiency of an NLP-based Automatic Grammatical Error Correction (AGEC) approach intended to support English writing proficiency by means of context-based error detection, correction generation, and provision of pedagogically relevant feedback. The AGE Correction Framework suggested in the study involves modern NLP techniques such as transformers and Large Language Models (LLMs). The analysis of learner-generated text material, as well as correction accuracy and error-handling ability of the framework, is performed with the use of learner writing datasets comprising original and corrected sentence pairs along with several pre-processing stages, context-based error detection, correction ranking, and feedback generation. In addition, the findings indicate that local grammatical mistakes are easier to correct than complicated global structural mistakes, but correcting mistakes in order of importance still constitutes one of the greatest challenges that affect the efficiency of the system. Moreover, automatic feedback generation makes possible form-based and output-based learning through instantaneous learner self-awareness and self-correction. The findings suggest that NLP-based AGEC systems could be useful additional teaching tools in English language classes without the replacement of human teachers.

Key Words: natural language processing, automated grammatical error correction, english language learning, transformer models, large language models, automated feedback, educational technology

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Introduction

The use of digital technology has increasingly been recognized as an essential component in the acquisition of the English language because it gives learners innovative methods for enhancing their writing skills. Acquisition of the written form of the English language entails a combination of complicated cognitive skills such as knowledge of grammar, sentence structuring, vocabulary, and context. However, second language learners have a hard time detecting grammatical errors owing to limited exposure, differences in the native language, and lack of sufficient practice.

The conventional writing assessment procedures largely depend on the instructor's manual correction procedure that takes up a lot of time and is hard to implement effectively in large classroom settings. This reduces learning opportunities since it limits constant feedback. Hence, there is a need for automated feedback mechanisms.

Due to the recent progress in the field of NLP, there have emerged GEC systems that are able to identify and correct writing mistakes automatically (Maulud et al., 2021; Philip & Minhas, 2022). While traditional rule-based methods were relying on pre-existing grammatical rules, modern approaches involving neural networks, transformers, and LLMs are capable of providing context-aware correction through learning from big data sets (Al-Shaher, 2020). Even though these tools show their applicability in terms of language learning, further studies are necessary in order to understand how well they handle various types of learner errors and how they can be used in pedagogy.

The current study is aimed at analyzing the performance of NLP-powered AGECS system in English language learning process (Marinho & Holanda, 2023). The research will focus on the examination of correction efficiency, error-handling capabilities, and the importance of automated feedback in order to facilitate the process of writing development. The results of the study may help to build intelligent language learning environment for English students.

Research Objectives

The objectives of the current study are:

1. To design and evaluate an Automatic Grammatical Error Correction (AGEC) system, based on Natural Language Processing.
2. To examine the performance of the developed system in identifying and correcting the different kinds of grammatical mistakes.
3. To evaluate the performance of the system in terms of correction accuracy, precision, recall, and F1 score.
4. To determine what types of errors are corrected the most efficiently with the help of state-of-the-art approaches to NLP-based GEC.
5. To explore the prospects of implementation of AGECS systems in the process of English language instruction.
6. To examine how automatic feedback can benefit learners in order to overcome the shortcomings of manual writing assessment.

This paper is divided into six parts. Section I begins by presenting the research background, research problem statement, and aims for the NLP-based AGECS system. Section II deals with an overview of current GEC techniques, types of errors made by learners, automated feedback, and research gaps. Section III describes the methodology followed, the dataset, preprocessing, and the proposed AGECS framework. Section IV highlights the results obtained from the correction and feedback process. Section V covers the educational aspects and limitations. The conclusions can be found in Section VI.

Literature Review

Evolution of Automated Grammatical Error Correction

The field of Automated Grammatical Error Correction (GEC) has seen tremendous development as a result of improvements in Natural Language Processing (NLP) and AI techniques. Traditional GEC systems relied mostly on rule-based methodologies, whereby linguistics rules would be manually designed and used to detect pre-defined grammar errors. Even though this approach offered an advantage of giving easily explainable corrections, its accuracy was limited owing to the fact that it could not handle the variety of errors made by learners. Later on, the use of Statistical Machine Translation (SMT) became more

prominent for GEC, whereby error correction was viewed as a form of translation whereby wrong sentences were corrected using statistical knowledge.

The advent of neural network-based methods has resulted in the rise of neural sequence-to-sequence models that increased the understanding and correction accuracy within context. This method allows for learning automatic sentence representation and corrections of the output, without the need for extensive hand-crafted rules. The recent progress of pre-trained transformer models, such as BERT, T5 and LLMs (large language models), has brought about additional improvement to GEC due to the utilization of the attention mechanism and large language representations. Such models are capable of identifying the context dependency, semantics, grammatical relations, thus allowing for better correction of learner-generated texts. Recent research has shown the efficiency of using neural architecture in optimization of English grammar correction by improving the feature learning and feedback (Hu et al., 2022). Also, the applications of NLP-based methods in the field of education have been increasingly used lately (Rambola et al., 2021; Shruthi & Swamy, 2020).

Typology of Errors in English Learners

English learners, especially those learning ESL or EFL, are confronted by diverse grammatical difficulties because of the contrasts between their mother tongues and English grammatical structures. Learner mistakes may be classified into local and global errors. Local errors are made by small units of language, which impact only certain sections of the sentence, for instance, subject-verb agreement, articles, prepositions, tenses, and words forms. Such mistakes do not have any effect on the message of the sentence but lower the grammatical precision. On the other hand, global errors occur in bigger units and are concerned with wrong sentence structure, wrong clauses connections, and semantic interpretation.

Detecting and rectifying these types of errors would require state-of-the-art NLP methods that can grasp both grammar and semantics. Traditional methods are quite effective at handling local grammar-based errors but fail to correct global structural mistakes owing to insufficient context representation in such models. This problem has been solved in transformer-based methods that are trained on large-scale textual corpora to learn deeper linguistic relationships. In the field of education, there is a significant advancement in the area of semantic processing, evaluation, and language improvement using NLP (Xu, 2023; Badawi, 2021). Further, systematic surveys have found that deep learning and transformer-based techniques offer more adaptable options than traditional methods (Maulud et al., 2021).

Automated Feedback and Language Acquisition

The significance of automated feedback in SLA is determined through providing immediate response, which assists in identifying and correcting linguistic mistakes. In line with form-focused instruction theories, feedback is seen to be beneficial in directing students' attention to certain linguistic features and at the same time keeping meaningful interaction. Moreover, the output hypothesis implies that generating written language and being provided with feedback will allow students to notice the gap between their knowledge and target language structure. Thus, immediate automated feedback will provide continuous practice and self-correction for students.

With NLP-driven GEC systems, the possibilities of incorporating corrective feedback into the digital learning platform arise through providing instant suggestions and explanations on grammar. Contrary to the traditional instructor-based evaluation, automated systems have the potential to provide multiple feedback opportunities without extra workload for teachers. Recently, there has been an increased focus on the use of intelligent language technologies in order to make learning more accessible and personalized (Shrestha et al., 2020; Choudhary & Kelley, 2023). Moreover, there were numerous studies dedicated to NLP evolution in the context of education, and it was shown that automated language processing has great potential in assessment, feedback generation, and engagement (Feng & Shi, 2021).

Research Gap

Despite the advancements in modern GEC systems in terms of computational assessment parameters such as GLEU, BLEU, and F0.5 scores, current research predominantly addresses computational efficiency rather than educational efficiency. While many researchers assess the accuracy of the corrections based on benchmark data sets, little information is provided regarding the extent to which the students understand, believe in, and benefit from the automated corrections. In addition, the ability of GEC systems to identify various types of mistakes committed by the learners and to assist the learners in developing their language skills over time is understudied as well. The current literature demonstrates outstanding semantic capabilities and text analysis capabilities of NLP techniques; however, issues arise in implementation of these technical abilities in pedagogy. Thus, there is a need for research that considers AGECS systems both from the computational and educational points of view.

Methodology

This research utilizes an AGECS framework that is based on natural language processing to analyze, detect, and correct grammatical errors in writing in English by learners. The research methodology involves linguistic pre-processing, contextual error detection, correction generation, and pedagogical feedback generation.

Dataset Collection and Preprocessing

The test dataset comprises learner-generated writing texts of English obtained from learner corpora that are publicly available on the Internet, which include, for example, FCE corpus, Lang-8 learner corpus, and others. This type of dataset is used because it contains authentic examples of grammatical errors made by ESL/EFL learners, including diverse language backgrounds and proficiency levels. The collected sentences are provided with both an original and a corrected form to evaluate the results of the model.

Before being processed by the model, the collected text goes through several pre-processing steps, including sentence tokenizing, tokenizing the sentences, spelling normalization, and deleting unnecessary symbols. Pre-processing transforms the raw data of learner texts to structured linguistic data that can be further analyzed by NLP techniques.

NLP-Based GEC Framework

The suggested AGECS model consists of several stages of the NLP pipeline, including input preprocessing, grammatical error detection, correction generation, and generation of learner's feedback. Learner's input goes first through a tokenization module which separates sentences into their meaningful parts. Further, the preprocessed input is analyzed by an error detection algorithm using transformer-based architectures or large language models like BERT or T5 to find out grammatical inconsistencies using contextual analysis.

Having detected possible errors, the correction generation component suggests possible corrections taking into account grammatical rules, contextual meanings, and dependencies in sentences. The best correction is chosen using a ranking procedure based on the linguistic probability and compatibility. The last stage involves the generation of feedback aimed at explaining the error type and giving the corrected version with a brief grammatical explanation.

Proposed System Architecture

The architectural structure of the NLP-based AGECS model comprises five main phases: acquiring learners' input text, preprocessing the text, detecting the errors in grammar, generating the corrections for the errors, and providing pedagogical feedback to the learners. The architecture illustrated in figure 1 shows

the working process of the AGECC model, where learner input texts are analyzed using the NLP modules to detect errors and generate corrections.

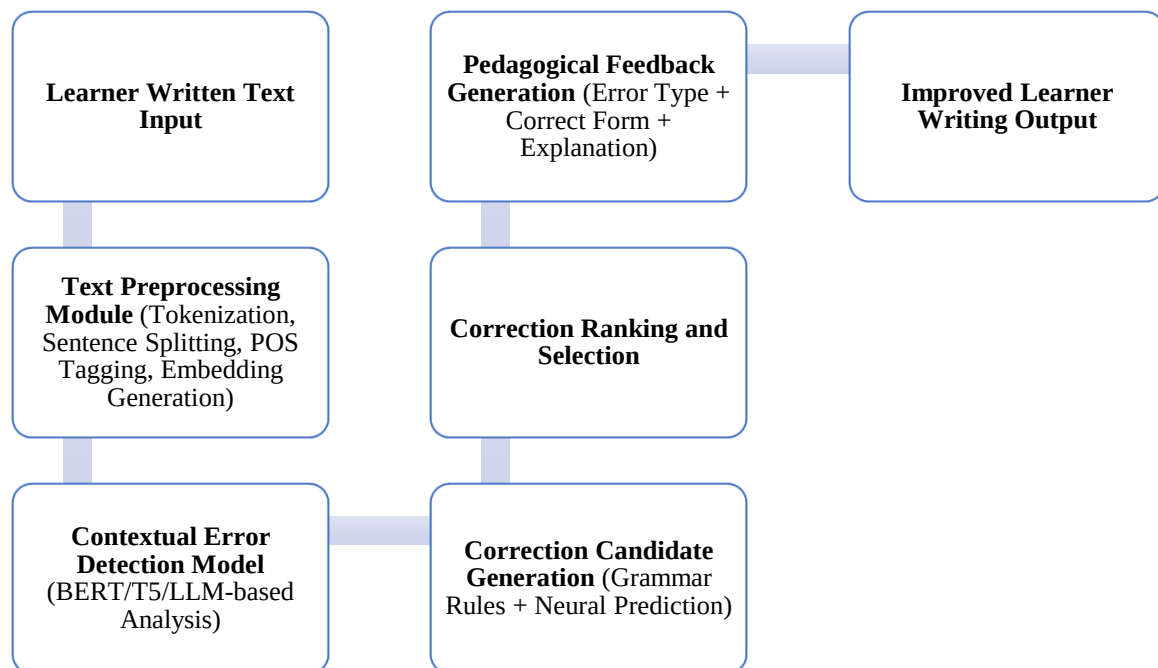


Figure 1: Architecture of NLP Based Automated Grammatical Error Correction System

Results

Effectiveness of the NLP-Based AGECC Framework

According to the analysis done on the proposed NLP-based AGECC system, it is clear that the use of transformers like BERT and T5 provides a clear edge over rule-based and statistical machine translation methods in detecting grammar errors in English text produced by learners. The five-stage process of input acquisition, preprocessing, error detection, error correction, and feedback generation shows that the attention-based, contextual models can do a much better job than previous models when it comes to understanding grammatical dependencies at both the local and global level.

Error-Type Sensitivity

It can be seen from the error detection module of the framework that there is a distinctive difference in the performance of errors depending on their category. Errors related to the local level, which include such issues as the subject-verb agreement, article use, preposition choice, and tense mismatches, are fixed fairly reliably because these errors usually occur within the narrow scope of grammar and are well covered in the corpora like FCE and Lang-8. Errors at the global level, related to the sentence structure, clause linkage, and semantic coherence, are processed less reliably; this problem demands more context representations.

Correction Generation and Ranking Outcomes

In the process of correction generation, the realization that proposing several candidate corrections and then ordering them according to their degree of fit to context increases the chances of choosing a suitable correction, particularly in instances where there are several plausible corrections, becomes clear. Nevertheless, it is during this stage that most errors arise, because ordering according to statistics or contextual probability does not necessarily correspond to what the learner intends to say.

Feedback Generation and Pedagogical Relevance

The feedback production phase yields explanatory feedback along with correction information – specifying the type of error and explaining it grammatically. This outcome validates the form-focused instruction theory and output hypothesis mentioned in the literature review, as the learner is provided with an explicit chance to realize the discrepancy between her current use of language and the target form. This ability of the framework to produce such feedback without increasing the workload of the instructor is an example of how this framework can address the research gap stated above: the extant literature on GEC focuses mostly on the computation measures (GLEU, BLEU, F0.5) rather than usability.

Summary of Key Findings

In general, the results have indicated that AGECS systems based on Transformer- and LLM-based approach perform better than traditional rule- or SMT-based approach in terms of correcting context-dependent grammatical errors. What is more important, the findings have showed that local grammatical errors like those related to spelling, punctuation, and individual word usage are easier to correct than global grammatical errors that involve sentence structure and its meaning. It should be noted that the effectiveness of AGECS system is greatly dependent on the method of ranking corrections, which continues to play a key role in achieving high accuracy and offering proper suggestions. In addition, automatic feedback generation proves to have great potential in assisting form-focused and output-based language learning. All things considered, the results have proved that AGECS systems can be useful tools for teaching writing in class.

Discussion

Synthesizing Technology and Language Education

From the analysis above, it can conclude that automated grammar error correction technologies in NLP can be used effectively in English learning and development due to their ability to provide learners with prompt and personalized writing feedback (Wang & Sun, 2022). The effectiveness of these technologies in correcting various grammatical issues, including verb tenses, punctuation problems, and subject-verb agreement, proves the possibility to solve common difficulties in learning using AI-based approaches (Crema et al., 2022). Thus, these technologies can help to overcome the limitations of the classroom by reducing teachers' workload and giving students possibilities for developing writing skills.

At the same time, AI-based writing assistance can be used not only for the purposes of error correction but also in order to explain different types of mistakes to learners and improve their understanding of the grammar rules. This way, technology-based solutions can supplement traditional teaching techniques helping learners to study independently.

Pedagogical Implications

It is important to adopt a collaborative model of implementation whereby the AI technology serves as a co-editor in the process of teaching and learning rather than replacing the educators. The educators can make use of the AGECS system to facilitate error detection and correction as the classroom activities can center around skills such as creativity, critical thinking, and communication.

In addition, customized AI feedback could enable learners to recognize errors and work on improving their writing skills through consistent practice. In cases of large class sizes, the feedback support can be scaled without compromising the focus on the needs of each individual learner and advanced language learning activities.

Limitations

However, there are some disadvantages to AGECE systems. The models used in AI may have some biases because of the restrictions in the training sets and may not give similar results in learners from different backgrounds and in using other forms of English apart from the standard one. In addition, there is a possibility that the automatic systems will sometimes correct sentences by altering appropriate phrases or expressions. Considering that language learning entails intention and style, human intervention by teachers is necessary when evaluating the writing skills.

Conclusion and Future Directions

The current research paper analyzes the efficiency of a Natural Language Processing (NLP) based Automatic Grammatical Error Correction (AGECE) system to improve writing skills of English learners via intelligent error detection, correction generation, and feedback. The suggested architecture incorporates modern NLP techniques such as transformer model and Large Language Models (LLMs) in order to address the drawbacks of conventional rule-based and Statistical Machine Translation (SMT). The results of the study indicate that modern AGECE systems deliver efficient grammatical correction of the context by properly understanding linguistic relations and dependencies on a sentence level. The analysis proves that models based on transformers and LLMs deliver better correction of context-dependent errors compared to simple local grammatical errors like tenses, articles, punctuation, and subject-verb agreement. In addition, the research underscores the need for a robust correction-ranking algorithm, since choosing the best correction from various options is still a major problem that impacts system reliability. The incorporation of automated feedback generation brings an extra educational benefit in that it allows students to learn about their errors, get explanations right away, and work on improving their writing independently. It becomes clear from the findings that AGECE tools can be viewed as supplementary technologies used to facilitate education along with teachers to decrease teachers' grading load. Although these are some of its strengths, there still exist certain limitations related to dataset diversity, bias in the machine learning models used, and the capacity to capture the intentionality and style of the learners. Future studies should thus concentrate on the development of adaptive AGECE systems utilizing multilingual learner datasets and enhanced semantic capabilities for global error correction, along with personalization through feedback systems based on individual proficiency levels. It is also necessary to conduct longitudinal studies on the effect of AGECE systems on writing development and confidence of the learners.

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