

English Grammar Problems Encountered by Advanced EFL Learners

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Abstract: *This paper investigates English grammar errors made by advanced Arab Open University students majoring in English Language and Literature at Kuwait-Branch. A representative sample of 25 students' Tutor Marked Assignments (TMAs) comprised the corpus of the study. These TMAs (take-home assignments) are long essays whose length ranges between 1,500 words for ordinary assignments, and 4,000-5,000 words for the final projects. The corpus is based on assignments for a senior level, 16-credit-hour course entitled E300: English Language & Literacy. This course is the last language course studied by students before graduation. It was selected because the study is aimed at finding residual errors made by senior English majors who had previously passed courses meant to eradicate their more discrete language errors. The data were analyzed, tabulated and interpreted to mark the learning difficulties which persisted in the grammatical structure of the target students. The research findings are expected to help teachers and syllabus designers to be more informed about the areas that need to be addressed and the most adequate teaching methods to be adopted.*

1. Introduction

Research on analyzing types of errors and their significance dates back to the late 1960s and early 1970s. S P Corder's (1967) pioneering work on the significance of learner's errors set the scene for further research on the topic under the rubric of 'interlanguage' (Selinker 1974), 'approximative systems' (Nemser 1974), 'learner's errors', and 'negative transfer', among others (cf. George 1972, Hendrickson 1980, Corder 1981, Gass and Selinker 1992, Richards 1992, Odlin 1997, Ferris 2002, Karra 2006).

Investigating errors covered all levels of linguistic analysis including the grammatical, lexical, discourse, morpho-syntactic, semantic, and textual aspects. Global interest in investigating the types, sources, and interpretation of errors in world languages has been intensified. Evidence is drawn from Rosen's (2007) work on Swedish students' production of oral English, AbiSamra's (2003) analysis of errors in Arabic speakers' writing; Okuma's (1999) study of Japanese learners of English, Mohan and Lo's (1985) analysis of the academic writing of Chinese students, to cite a few. And although error analysis proper may be viewed as theoretical in nature, it is largely motivated by practical considerations. Top among those is the pedagogical implications impacting the teaching-learning operation. The error analysis schemata will be rendered pointless unless it boosts the individual learner's language competence and performance as end goals in the language acquisition process. Once utilized

effectively, error analysis leads to adopting sound teaching methods, well-advised curriculum design experiments, and more appropriate assessment techniques which are conducive to effective learning

The present study addresses the grammatical component of linguistic analysis at the advanced level. The study lends itself to the premise that grammatical accuracy is a corner stone in language acquisition and language development. A good knowledge of grammar is indicative of a learner's ability to adequately master other language-related skills like speaking and writing. A solid background in the knowledge of grammatical/syntactic structures and the rules of proper usage, for example, grammatical categories, form and function, sentence structure, verb forms, tenses, parallel structures, sentence fragments, and grammatical relations, is bound to yield control over the semantic level of language study and the understanding of meaning.

2. Rationale

Considering the vital role of grammatical accuracy in acquiring other aspects of linguistic competence, this paper sets to investigate and find solutions for some English grammar problems encountered by advanced university students specializing in English language and literature (ELL) at the Arab Open University (AOU). The study explores the written grammatical errors of students registered in a level-3 graduation course (E300), entitled “English Language and Literacy”. According to the AOU and the United Kingdom Open University (UKOU) system, E300 is a 16-credit-hour course taught over two semesters (32 weeks).

The themes of E300 cover English language and literacy issues divided into the following five blocks: sociolinguistics, functional linguistics, discourse analysis, language and literacy practices, and the politics of literacy and the position of English. The first three parts are concerned with texts while the latter two are more related to contexts in which literacy practices take place.

Through analyzing the grammatical corpus of the E300 students, the authors believe that the research findings will be valuable to language teachers, curriculum and test designers alike. From the outset, the data will provide language teachers with the necessary feedback on the students' performance through identifying their errors and determining their type. By tracing these problems to their roots and subsequently interpreting them, we can devise adequate learning strategies and teaching methods which are apt to curb and eventually eradicate many of the students' problems. Concomitant with identifying the learning problems is the need to modify the teaching-learning strategies and teaching materials accordingly. Concurrently, an overall review of assessment methods by setting new benchmarks for measuring student performance will be needed.

The quest for maintaining grammatical accuracy in the ELL students' written and spoken discourse is one of the prime concerns of the Faculty of Language Studies (FLS) at the Arab Open University. To this end, FLS adopted

a policy of allocating 30% of the overall mark of 3rd level Tutor-Marked Assignments (TMAs) -- and other types of assessment, including exams-- to form or language structure, while 70% is earmarked for content. In both TMAs and exams students write essay-type articles. The length of a TMA ranges between 1500 and 2000 words. However, in some courses, the last assignment takes the form of a project extending to 4000-5000 words. In E300, the course on which this study is based, students submit six TMAs, three in each semester. The last TMA is a project.

3. Scope and Limitations

The present study targets the grammatical aspect of essay writing rather than the mechanical aspects of organization, referencing, punctuation, etc. Inevitably, in similar studies, the researcher's concern rests with the need to improve students' performance in written expression, including writing essays and research papers. In line with this, the researchers' major concern is to find ways and means of reducing, perhaps significantly, the number of errors students make not only for the sole benefit of the AOU students, but also to enhance the teaching/learning process in the English programmes at a pan-Arab university level.

4. Research Methodology

4.1. Study Sample

A research sample of 25 AOU Kuwait-Branch students was chosen for this study. The native language of most participants is Arabic, but all of them have had English for at least 8 years through their basic and secondary stage education. Some of them were graduates of local British and American schools, and a few were raised in English-speaking countries where they experienced first-hand communication with native speakers of English in a typical English-speaking environment.

All 25 students comprising the sample have had two compulsory English language courses of integrated skills, namely: EL111 "English Communication Skills I" and EL112 "English Communication Skills II". As English Department students, all sample members have completed the following set of courses before being enrolled in the senior level course E300:

- a) one level-1 course (A123): An Introduction to the Humanities
- b) one level-2 course (A210): Approaching Literature
- c) two level-2 courses: U210A and U210B "The English Language: Past, Present and Future I and II, respectively.
- d) one level-3 course: E303 "English Grammar in Context"

Except for U210A and U210B, which carry 8 credit hours each, all the other courses, including E300, are allocated 16 credit hours,

4.2. Corpus

The corpus of data for this study consists of 25 Tutor-Marked Assignments (TMAs) which were submitted by 25 E300 students. The data were collected

along the span of two academic years: 2005/2006 and 2006/2007. The course was taught by one of the authors who marked all the TMAs which fell in three groups: 4, 5, and 6. The group 4 TMA is a 1500-word project proposal.

Students were asked to choose a topic from a list provided by the course chair, a senior faculty member coordinating the tasks of E300 in all 7 AOU Branches. The topics, quoted from E300 *Assignment Book and Project Guide*, p. 10, are:

- a) A study of the changing role of English in the world.
- b) A comparison of two texts (for example, a spoken text with a written text, or an audio-visual text and a written one).
- c) An analysis of literacy practices in local schools.
- d) An analysis of one or more media texts and the social context in which they are viewed or heard.
- e) An examination of discourse practices (classroom discourse practices, for example).
- f) An analysis of a literacy event in a particular context.
- g) A study of family or community literacy practices.
- h) An analysis of policy issues in some area of language and literacy.

The outline of TMA 4, quoted from E300 *Assignment Book and Project Guide*, p. 11) was spelled out as follows:

Your proposal should be no longer than 1500 words, and should be structured according to the following headings:

- 1 Title of proposed project
- 2 Aims of proposed project in the form of a question or questions
- 3 An outline of the ideas in the course which are underpinning your work
- 4 A description of the practical work you are planning, and the evidence you will collect (e.g. observation notes, texts, recordings)
- 5 The methods you plan to use
- 6 A description of the settings in which you plan to collect your evidence
- 7 Any ethical issues that may be involved
- 8 How you plan to analyze the evidence you collect
- 9 The timetable for the proposed project

TMA 5 was about the following topic:

“How is the role of English changing in the world? Discuss what you see as important issues raised by these changes.”

The length of this assignment was also 1500 words.

TMA 6 was the project proposed in TMA 4, and the students were asked to write between 4000-5000 words.

4.2.1. The Significance of TMAs in the Open Education System

In open education in general and in the Arab Open University in particular, TMAs are considered a very important instrument of student support. In fact TMAs provide a viable way to compensate for the reduction of

contact/classroom tutoring where students are constantly coached and their progress is monitored by their tutors in conventional university environments. TMAs are take-home assignments which are downloaded on the AOU website. Students are required to do their assignments and submit them to their tutors at a specific cut-off date. In principle, TMAs should represent the students' best writing attempts. Consequently, the language errors detected in TMAs do warrant investigation because they shed light on some of the learning outcomes which the students failed to achieve, signaling that the academic programme was short of achieving its prescribed goals.

4.2.2. Why Third Level TMAs?

As noted above, the TMA sample in question had been written by 3rd level (exit level) students in their final year of study. The English language problems which continue to mar their linguistic competence are worth serious consideration so that future syllabus planning can be based on empirical research in view of which relevant remedial teaching/learning strategies can be implemented. Samples collected from a lower level would not be as representative of the language difficulties a senior level English major will continue to encounter after exiting the university.

4.2.3. Why Grammar?

Incorporating a grammar component in any English language teaching curriculum has become a common practice at the school and university level in the Arab world. According to Mukattash (2003: 225), "Teaching practices in most Arab countries are dominated by explicit grammar teaching..., and that both grammar and translation are unavoidable in our classes in the foreseeable future, regardless of the teaching methodology adopted in the EFL courses we use." In a similar vein, an excerpt from an Open University publication (A172 Block 1 *Getting Started*, p. 10) on the importance of grammatically correct sentences in essay writing reads:

The so-called rules of grammar, punctuation and spelling are the guidelines for the reader, enabling them to follow what you the writer might be saying to them. Mistakes in grammar are often either overlooked or overemphasized. Such mistakes in the writing make the reader stop to work out what is being said. The reader might lose the thread of your meaning and you risk baffling them completely. It causes confusion

Along the same lines, Hudson and Walmsley (2005) report how grammar has been revitalized since the 1960s under the influence of linguistics. Stressing the importance of grammar, Gordon (1947) was quoted as saying that grammar, which is not an end in itself, is indispensable since it is a measure of good writing (qtd. in Elley et al. 1975).

Naturally, placing special emphasis on the grammar component does not in the least mean that other aspects/avenues of learning should be eclipsed or

even sidelined. It is well known that extensive listening; writing, reading, speaking and Internet surfing are extremely useful in upgrading learners' competence in English. It is also true that some teaching methodologies concentrate on language areas other than grammar. Advocates of discourse analysis maintain that what is important is that learners acquire communicative competence, rather than simply internalize linguistic competence. One could, for instance, argue that communicative competence presupposes (and is built on) linguistic competence whose mainstay is grammar. Could a learner achieve communicative competence if his or her linguistic competence is not well developed?

The authors strongly believe that the relationship between the two competencies is one of interdependence, although the former is seemingly more dependent on the latter. For Savignon (1976), however, communicative competence is a prerequisite to linguistic competence, and not vice versa. On the other hand, Celce-Murcia et al. (1995) include linguistic competence in their pedagogically-motivated model, signaling the need for grammar in their model of competence. According to the National Capital Language Resource Center, Washington DC, (2003, 2004), linguistic competence, which includes how to use grammar, is one of the competence areas of communicative competence (<http://www.nclrc.org/essentials>).

4.3. Data analysis

In the process of data analysis, the authors did not commit themselves to a specific model. They meant for the analysis to be natural, spontaneous, and not pre-determined, which makes the analysis more compatible with the Exploratory Data Analysis (EDA) approach. Such an approach leaves the data free from any probabilistic or deterministic models and leaves the door open for the model(s) that fit the data. For further information, see *e-Handbook of Statistical Methods*: <http://www.itl.nist.gov/div898/handbook/>.

The corpus of data was analyzed linearly by the authors where all TMA content was carefully read. All errors were listed regardless of type and category. The errors were then identified and classified according to their type and frequency of occurrence.

5. Results

The process of analyzing the data revealed that certain error types are more common and more frequent than others. Table 1 below tabulates errors according (1) type/category, (2) frequency of occurrence per mistake (FPM), (3) the number of TMAs where the same mistake recurred, and (4) the percentage of each error category.

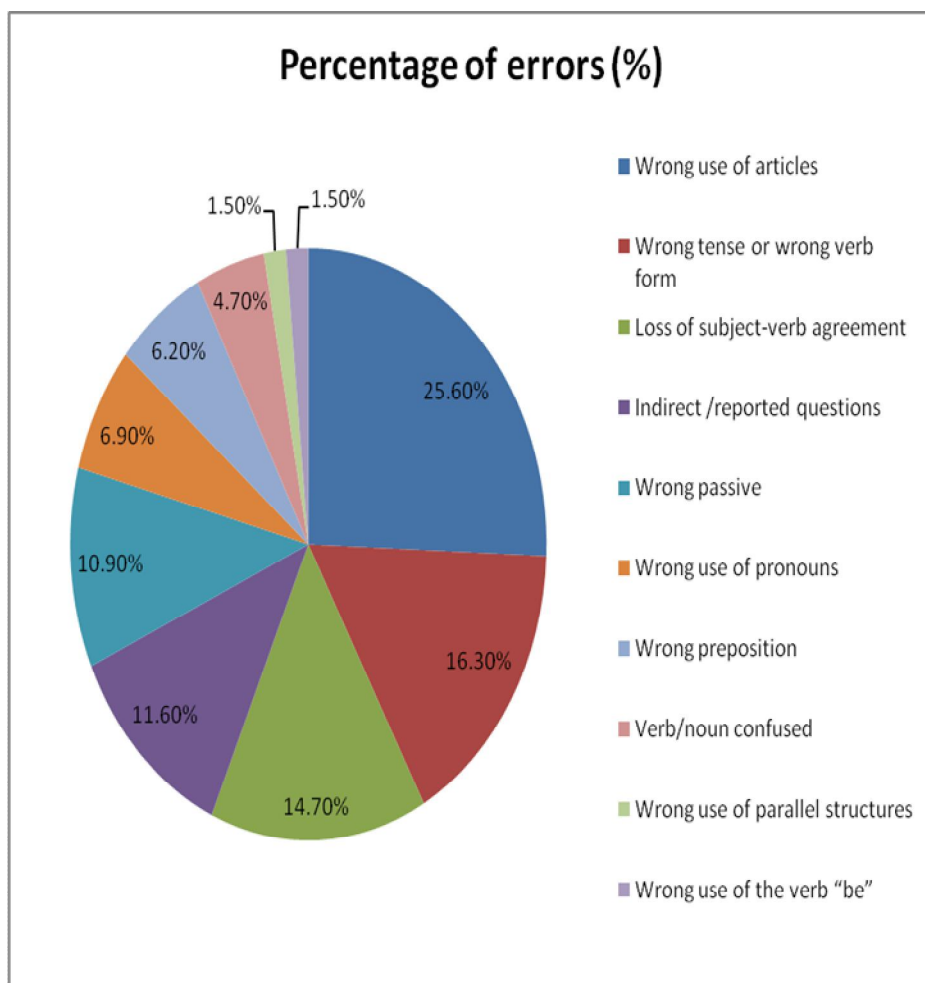
Table 1: Error Categories, Frequency, and Percentage

	Category	FPM	Percentage of errors (%)	Number of TMAs
1	Wrong use of articles	33	25.6 %	24
2	Wrong tense or wrong verb form	21	16.3 %	11
3	Loss of subject-verb agreement	19	14.7 %	13
4	Indirect /reported questions	15	11.6 %	12
5	Wrong passive	14	10.9 %	9
6	Wrong use of pronouns	9	6.9 %	6
7	Wrong use of prepositions	8	6.2 %	1
8	Verb/noun confused	6	4.7 %	4
9	Wrong use of parallel structures	2	1.5 %	2
10	Wrong use of the verb “be”	2	1.5 %	2

As Table 1 shows, ten categories of errors were identified in the corpus. Consistent with the scope and limitations of the study, only the grammatical level of linguistic analysis was targeted.

The total number of errors in all 10 categories amounted to 129. The ten categories reflected in the results are quite revealing as they pinpoint the most outstanding difficulties encountered by learners of English as a foreign language. Below is a representation of the percentage of errors per category in a pie graph and bar chart format, respectively.

The pie and bar graphs above show noticeable variation in the percentages of errors from 25.6% for the “wrong use to articles” to 1.5% for each of “parallel structures” and “the verb be”. In other words, the results indicate that the intensity of errors does not keep a steady pattern but rather slackens and drops at a certain level to average 10.9% for the passive constructions. The results, however, put forward some facts and figures which need to be addressed seriously. For example the 25.6%, 16.3%, 14.7%, 11.6%, and 10.9% figures for the “articles, verb forms, S-V agreement, indirect questions, and passive constructions, respectively, are statistically significant.



Pie graph representation of error types and percentages

6. Discussion of Results

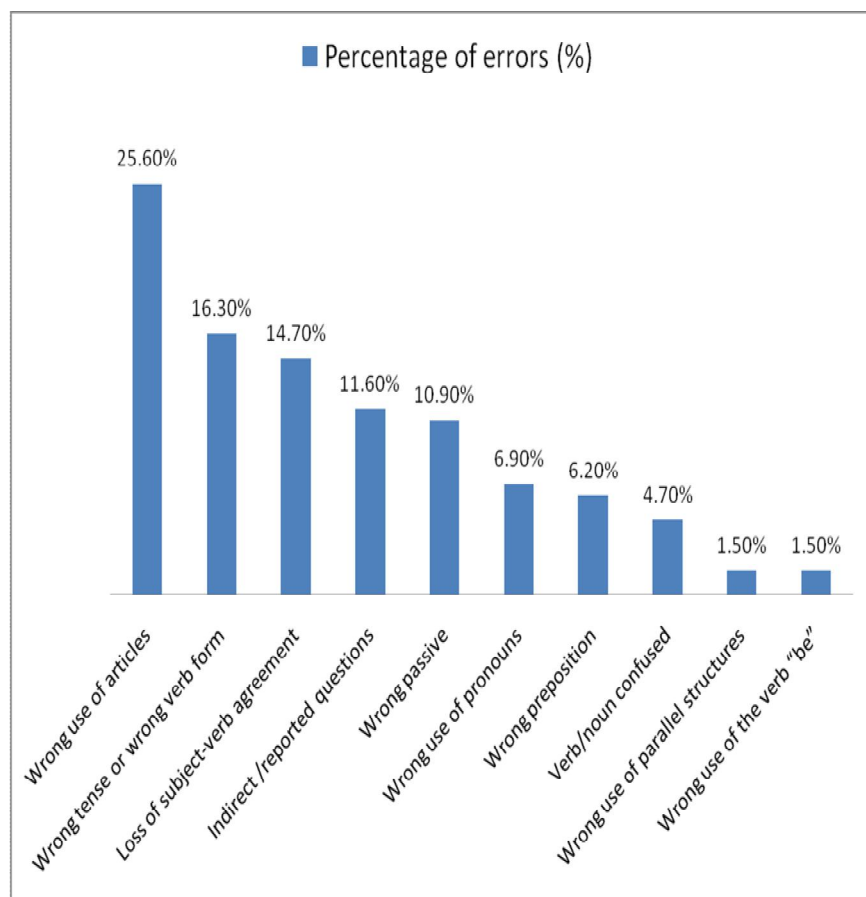
The results of the current study will be discussed in two modes: (1) a run down of the faulty cases of grammatical usage obtained from the data will be briefly presented and exemplified, and (2) an interpretation of these errors will be provided.

6.1 Brief description of error categories

6.1.1 Wrong use of articles

As we stated earlier, the data were analyzed linearly and spontaneously without any predetermined categorization or pre-stratification of the error types. With this in mind, the "wrong use of articles, "definite article "the" and indefinite articles "a (n)" topped the list with a frequency of (33) errors, accounting for 25.6% and recurring in 13 TMAs. Noticeably, the erroneous use of articles was

recorded in 24 out of the 25 TMAs. Such wrong usage extended over definite and indefinite articles, as shown in the following examples:



Bar graph representation of error types and percentages

6.1.1.1. Definite article

- ... A scene for ____ understanding of their utterances. [missing article 'the']

6.1.1.2. Indefinite articles; a(n):

- Oprah has produced ____ specific image of herself. [missing article 'a']
- ... He contributed ____ article about [missing article; 'an']

The fact that articles have a role to play in the structure of the English language creates a considerable amount of confusion for speakers of most of the world's other languages, who seem to get on rather well without them. And although greatly simplified, English article usage still poses a number of challenges to speakers of other European languages (cf. David Appleyard's *World of English: Guide to Article Usage in English* (2010): <http://www.davidappleyard.com>).

6.1.2. Wrong tense or verb form

Of the twenty most common errors in college writing identified by Andrea Lunsford and Robert Connors, "wrong tense and verb form was ranked 13" (cf. Lunsford and Connors 1997) <http://bcs.bedfordstmartins.com/easywriter3e/20errors/13.asp>.

Examples of tense/verb form errors are found in the following data obtained from the corpus:

- My practical work will base on comparison. [wrong form of the passive structure]
- How the two literary texts are differ from each other. [ill-formed verb phrase]
- Are my findings can be applied to any other profession other than teaching? [ill-formed verb structure in a question transformation]

6.1.3. Loss of subject-verb agreement

In standard academic English, the subject of a present-tense sentence must always agree with the verb in number. In his article "Subjects and verbs must agree," Wilbers (2005) states that subject-verb agreement errors are common, and he provides guidelines for making sure that verbs agree with their subject (www.wilbers.com).

Examples on "loss of subject-verb agreement/concord" errors are found in the following examples from the data:

- He encourage them to make.... [... encourages...]
- And how the product change to include tangible and intangible products. [...changes...]
- Gossip may provides a great deal.... [...may provide...]
-

6.1.4. Indirect /reported questions

Indirect or reported questions can often pose problems for foreign learners of English (<http://www.linguapress.com> 2009). When we report a question a number of things change like: word order (i.e., subject-verb inversion), tense, pronouns, and punctuation marks. The following examples, from the corpus, may be cited:

- ... to clarify how can we use this information. [inversion]
- ... explain why do we say... [inversion]
- How power relations are reflected?? [wrong use of question mark]

6.1.5. Wrong passive

Active and passive voice constructions are often confused, resulting in ill-formed grammatical structures (cf. Hewings 2001). The problems often arise from determining when to use the passive and how to construct it. Relevant examples on the wrong use of the passive are given below:

- Students were expecting to generate ideas. [...were expected...]
- The level of all stories which re-written to non-native people. [...were rewritten...]
- The Oprah Winfrey show is one of these programmes that showed MBC4 channel. [...are shown]

6.1.6. Wrong use of pronouns

Ambiguous pronoun reference, distance pronoun reference, and vague use of pronouns together with the use of pronouns to refer to possessives and adjectives have proven to be problematic.

(<http://www.nipissingu.ca/english/hornbook/proref.htm>).

The corpus of data collected in this study cites the following example of relative pronouns and anaphoric reference:

- ... I found a whole chapter _____ talks about gender. (Missing relative pronoun).
- The evidence I will collect it... [redundant resumptive pronoun "it"]

6.1.7. Wrong preposition

Common among the problematic areas of structural accuracy is the use of prepositions. "Prepositions are a hazardous area in the learning of any second/foreign language. These short, seemingly innocent words can often be (dangerous). One of the most common mistakes made by the foreign speaker of a language is the incorrect use of prepositions."

<http://german.about.com/od/vocabulary/a/PrepPitfalls.htm>

The following examples extracted from the data will illustrate the case:

- ... to be aware from the relations... [...of...]
- I combine between them. [zero preposition]
- In addition for creating [... to ...]

6.1.8. Verb/noun confused

Confusion in figuring out the meaning of sentences is often attributed to uncertainty about the part of speech. This often results in ill-formed grammatical structures especially when a word can be used as either noun or verb.

<http://www.dailywritingtips.com/is-that-a-noun-or-a-verb-im-confused/>

The following examples are cited from the corpus:

- I am going to analysis two analysis two sequences... [...to analyze]
- Since I made a full video recorded of the teacher.... [...recording ...]
- He critics the dominant.... [... criticizes ...]

6.1.9. Wrong use of parallel structures

Like dangling modifiers and run-on sentences, the act of mastering the use parallel structures is one of the most dubious techniques learners of English face. "Elements in a sentence that have the same function or express similar ideas should be grammatically parallel, or grammatically matched."

http://www.cliffsnotes.com/study_guide/Parallel-Structure.topicArticleId-29011,articleId-28976.html#ixzz0pGMhqr9H.

Lack of recognizing parallel structures is shown in the following examples from the corpus:

1. ...whether (he/she) pass the judgment, criticize, or simply giving facts. (subject-verb agreement is faulty as well). [... give...]
2. Students follow the official discourse but showing resistance when being asked to write a play. [...show...]

6.1.10. Wrong use of the verb "be"

"The verb "To be" is said to be the most *protean* of the English language, constantly changing form, sometimes without much of a discernible pattern. Considering that we use it so often, it is really too bad that the verb "To be" has to be the most irregular, slippery verb in the language."

http://grammar.ccc.commnet.edu/grammar/to_be.htm

The following examples show the problematic nature of the verb "be"

- That ____ what Fairclough represents. [missing form of the verb "be"].
- There is also an index which ____ situated in the lower left part. [missing form of the verb "be"].

6.2. Sources of errors

A careful analysis of the results shows that three sources of errors may be identified:

- 1) Inter-lingual errors: triggered by negative transfer (interference) from the native language;
- 2) Intra-lingual errors: prompted by (a) overgeneralization, (b) violation of co-occurrence restrictions/constraints;
- 3) Strategies of second language learning.

6.2.1. Negative transfer (Interference)

Ever since the term inter-language was coined (Selinker 1974), learners' errors have been largely attributed to negative transfer or interference from the learner's native language resulting in an approximative system of L1 and L2 (Nemser 1974). Recent studies on error analysis in general and Arab learners' grammatical and writing errors in particular attribute about 30% of learners' errors to native language interference. (cf. Diab 1996, Al-Nawas 2009, Perez-Llantada 2009, Yule 2006, AbiSamra 2003, Khalil 2000).

The findings of the present study show that 8 of the 10 categories of error types include cases of native language interference. Cases of negative transfer in the data are remarkably high, accounting for about 40% of the errors. The greatest majority of the students' choices originated from applying analogous rules of Arabic grammar. Such errors normally persist with most learners to the extent that they become "fossilized" and hard to eradicate. The following examples may be cited:

1. Loss of subject-verb agreement:

- The reader who address.... [... addresses ...]

Arabic grammar does not enforce such a rule where third person singular subjects require adding an s to the base form of the verb.

2. Loss/wrong use of article

- I will use analytical method. (The zero article choice is based on the lack of it in Arabic).

3. Wrong verb form

- How you plan to analyze the evidence you collect? (Arabic does not insert a verb 'to do' or any other additional auxiliary to form a question.

4. Wrong use of passive

- The level of all stories which rewritten to non-native speakers. (Arabic passive does not insert a verb "to be" in the passive transformation.

5. Wrong use of preposition

- I combine between them. (In Arabic, the equivalent of the English preposition "between" is usually used in such sentences.

6. Wrong use of the verb "be"

- That what Fairclough represents. (The Arabic equivalent of this sentence does not have a verb "to be" (is).

7. Loss/wrong use of pronouns

- ... I found a whole chapter talks about gender. (The Arabic counterpart of this sentence does not have the relative pronoun "which" or any other relative pronoun).
- The evidence I will collect it. (The Arabic equivalent of this sentence should include a copy of the resumptive pronoun "it".

8. Parallel structures

- ...whether (he/she) pass the judgments, criticize, or simply giving facts.

Since Arabic has two kinds of sentences, nominal and verbal, some native speakers of Arabic unconsciously use the gerund (verbal noun) instead of the verb to form similar parallel structures. Thus the use of 'giving' instead of 'give' could be explained as a function of native language interference.

To sum up, the above examples show the massive effect of L1 on L2 in the process of foreign/second language learning. The most common learning strategy applied by learners in this context is direct "translation" from the native language.

6.2.2. Intra-lingual errors

Another essential source of persisting learner's errors is the 'developmental' errors which many learners cannot avoid. Such errors are triggered by a false analogy of "overgeneralization" and "violation of co-occurrence restrictions/constraints". The following examples may be cited from the data:

1. Wrong use of article:

- I took a time to make that audio record(ing)....

This is a case of overgeneralization through false analogy, which results in the wrong application of rules. In English, an indefinite article is allowed with count noun, e.g., "I took a book", but not with non-count nouns.

2. Wrong tense or verb form

- My practical work will base on comparison.

The wrong verb form "will base" builds on the verb formation rule of "modal auxiliary + infinitive". Some learners over-generalize this rule and use it in its absolute sense irrespective of other rule application constraints like the need to use the passive construction as in the given example.

3. Subject-verb agreement

- My analysis will depends on Halliday's approach.

The third person subject-verb agreement is being erroneously used here since it is blocked by the modal verb co-occurrence restriction rule.

4. Wrong passive

- The remarkable point is that text 1 is achieved its density.
- Students were expecting to generate ideas....

The two examples pose a problem in the use of passive. The first exhibits a passive form (be + past participle) which has been used erroneously since the sentence does not warrant it but requires the perfect tense (has achieved) instead. In the second examples, the student has erroneously used the past progressive "were expecting" instead of an assumed past passive "were expected". Confusion is caused by the varied use of the verb "to be". For example, while "be + past participle" yields a passive, (be + ing participle)

yields a progressive tense. Therefore, ignorance of rule restrictions by applying rules in contexts where they do not fit is responsible for such a discrepancy.

5. Indirect/reported questions

- I will talk about how is the role of English changing in the world.

This example shows how the question rule is being deeply rooted in the students' competence. As such, the rule is overgeneralized and is erroneously applied in the case of "indirect questions" where inversion should be applied to yield a "subject + verb" word order.

6. Verb/noun confused

- I am going to analysis two sequences....

In this example, the student has erroneously extended the "to + infinitive" rule and overgeneralized it to cover the "to + noun" as well.

7. Wrong pronouns

- I found a whole chapter ____ talks about gender.
-

The loss of the relative pronoun "which" is triggered by the analogy of reducing relative clauses by dropping the relative pronoun "which" in cases like "I found a whole chapter talking about gender," which is permissible. Admittedly, the loss of 'which' can also be attributed to interference from Arabic.

To conclude, the previous examples on intra-lingual errors illustrate how overgeneralization, improper application of grammatical rules, and ignorance of rule restrictions have proven to be the real causes of about 90% of the learners' errors. Interestingly enough, the two major causes of errors, inter-lingual and intra-lingual, are not mutually exclusive since many of the errors have been shared by both.

6.2.3. Strategies of second language learning

As a rule errors are viewed as a benchmark for assessing learning and teaching (AbiSamra 2003). Having attributed 90% of the sources of errors to inter-lingual and intra-lingual sources, does not suggest that the third cause of errors is marginalized, with only 10%. In essence, strategies of second language learning are here perceived as a technique of remediating and resolving errors caused by the two sources outlined above.

Teaching grammar is a particularly difficult task as it plays a central role in the EFL/ESL classroom. According to Kenneth Beare (<http://www.els.about.com>), students' learning strategies vary according to their learning styles, which make it difficult to teach learning strategies to students. But in any case, lessons should be more student centered than teacher centered. Therefore, in order to teach grammar effectively, a teacher must define the objectives of the class, the kind of style each student has, and the available learning materials and sources. But an equally important measure for teaching

grammar effectively is indeed consistent with Carter's (1997:5) thesis which stipulates that "Knowing more about how grammar works is to understand more about how grammar is used and misused.... This requires English language teachers to be better equipped, more sensitive and aware of the difficulties students face with regard to grammar."

In view of the above, second language teachers are mandated to combat the sources of errors by drawing up robust plans and devising effective teaching techniques and learning strategies. Such plans can only be effective if language teachers have the theoretical background and knowledge about the sources of errors. In other words, unless the language teacher is quite familiar with the theoretical details of inter-language and intra-language errors, negative transfer and interference, co-occurrence restrictions, over-generalizations, etc., he/she will not be able to develop the right strategy to help students assimilate the problems and eventually overcome them. The teachers themselves should be able to explain the source of errors to their students and to provide concrete solutions through explanation, exemplification, discussion and practical applications.

In addition, teachers should motivate and encourage their students to surf the net for additional learning resources that will provide concrete support to the face-to-face classroom interaction. Teachers should refer their students to varied online sources which are interactive and adaptive. In other words, teachers are required to introduce modern technology to the classroom and to make it an integral part of the teaching-learning process. With this tri-partite relationship of (a) teacher's theoretical knowledge, (2) student's motivation and proper guidance, and (3) utilizing cutting-edge educational technology, strategies of second language learning can help eradicate many of the fossilized learners' errors.

6.3 Interpretation of errors

The host and diversity of errors manifested in this study is apt to demonstrate that such errors are deeply rooted in the students' writing routines. These errors may be classified into two major categories of: (a) high frequency errors, and (b) low frequency errors. The high frequency errors comprise the first five types of errors ranging from "wrong use of articles" 25.6% to "wrong use of passive" (10.9%), and constituting 79.1% of the total size of errors. The other five types comprising: verb/noun distinction, pronouns, prepositions, parallel structure, and the verb 'be', constitute 20.9% of total errors.

The significance accrued to the two categories of errors identified in the corpus hinges on a tri-partite relationship of: (1) their being committed by senior-level English majors, (2) their high frequency of occurrence, and (3) their reflection on students' overall proficiency in English.

6.3.1. Senior-level students' errors

The fact that the subject errors are made by senior level English majors is a source of concern. The error categories reflected in the data, e.g., "improper use

of articles, wrong verb forms, and lack of subject-verb agreement” suggest that such basic errors have become so deeply rooted in the students' grammatical competence to the extent that they portray themselves as the norm. When errors continue at this advanced stage, they are said to be "fossilized". A case in point is errors like: "I took a time to make that video recording", Gossip may provides a great deal"; and "I will not generalized my findings."

The authors attribute such a deficiency in student performance to a number of factors, top among which are: a) inadequate preparation in the students' formative years of basic education in elementary and intermediate schools, (b) students' lack of follow-up and exposure to the English language outside the face-to-face in-class tutorials, e.g., radio and TV. programmes, (c) failure to develop in themselves the habit of reading which boosts other skills especially vocabulary building, grammatical structures, and writing.

6.3.2. High frequency of occurrence

When errors reach the stage of fossilization, as indicated above, they become so frequent, recurrent and often uncontrollable. The high frequency of some errors in our corpus, e.g. wrong use of articles (33), wrong tense (21), loss of subject-verb agreement (19), improper use of indirect/reported questions (15), and wrong passive (14), is quite alarming. Not only do these errors mark the performance of advanced students, but they also occur in large numbers. Their degree of density and dominance poses a serious threat and a challenge to language teachers, together with curricula and textbook designers. For example, failure to construct a proper passive structure in: "Should handguns banned?" instead of "Should handguns be banned?" leaves the door open for a number of interpretations for the real reason behind such mistakes. Negative transfer or interference from mother language is a prime candidate for most structure and pronunciation errors.

For Sheen (1980), interference is responsible for the largest number of errors in grammar, vocabulary and second language speech (cf. Glennen et al. 2005, Oldin 1997). Another important reason relates to the teaching methods. More often than not teachers teach each of the language skills as a separate entity without integrating it with other skills. For example, grammar topics are presented to students in the form of theoretical sentence grammar without having these grammatical structures contextualized in a text/essay format. In addition, teaching methods should make use of textbooks with additional teaching support materials of interactive nature. This enables students to exercise skill-oriented materials through interactive and adaptive CD-ROMs and specially designed on-line drills. It also encourages individual students to choose the language areas, e.g., vocabulary, grammar, reading, listening, or writing, they need most (cf. Al-Jarf 2005).

6.3.3. Reflection on Students' overall proficiency in English

The emergence of grammatical errors in student writing has always been matched with poor linguistic competence which hampers the students'

communicative competence (cf. Fatemi 2008, Celce-Murcia et al. 1996, Savignon 1976). The vast majority of errors in the students' written tasks are referred to grammatical problems. A student's written product is often judged and checked against grammatical accuracy. If this level of linguistic competence is lacking, then the overall product is rendered as deficient. Grammatical accuracy is a mirror and predictor of language proficiency and effective communication (cf. Fakey and Ogunsiji 2009).

The ten types of errors represented in the corpus are indicative of poor linguistic competence and consequently impaired communicative competence. For example, cases of subject-verb agreement and verb forms like:

- Does power plays a role in male or female classroom talk?
- I will not generalized my findings

reflect a low level of proficiency in English, let alone the fact that such mistakes are committed by senior level English majors. Similarly, cases of indirect/reported questions, verb/noun confused, wrong prepositions and pronouns, and loss of the verb to be, like:

- Comments on what can I observed....
- I choice mediator English classroom.
- In addition for creating....
- The evidence which I will collect it.
- That __ what Fairclough represents.

confirm that more groundwork from the grassroots is still needed before those students can attain adequate control of the English language. It is worth pointing out, however, that the results obtained from the current study show that the category (b) errors reflect a low frequency of occurrence with a low percentage. e.g., parallel structures (1.5%), and loss of lexical "be" (1.5%). Likewise, the number of TMAs in which some errors were detected is relatively small, as in: wrong use of prepositions (1), wrong use of parallel structures (2), wrong use of lexical "be" (2) and wrong use of verb/noun (4). Furthermore, some aspects of grammatical structure were not detected in the TMAs such as: number, personal pronouns, conjunctions, as well as the use of adjectives and adverbs. Such indicators suggest that the more serious and frequent types of errors in category (a) can still be reduced significantly if not totally eradicated through the implementation of sound teaching-learning techniques and strategies. School and college teachers are required to utilize up-to-date technology in the classroom such as CALL, CD-ROMs and other interactive learning kits.

7. Conclusion

The present study has provided empirical evidence pointing to the difficulties senior level college students face in mastering grammatical structures in the

English language. With the errors being identified, defined and explained, the research findings have shown that these errors are systematic and fossilized.

The implications of the research findings obtained in the present study lead to the conclusion that grammatical accuracy is not an end goal in itself, but it partially contributes to good reading and writing. With this importance accrued to grammar, Jingling (2002) stresses the importance of explicit grammar instruction for developing the skill of reading.

The research findings have shown that many of the mistakes have been attributed to first language transfer, which makes it necessary for teachers to discuss and explain how the students' first language works. The same holds for intra-language errors which originate from improper use of second/foreign language grammatical rules.

To this end, the following course of action is recommended:

1. College-level language teachers take concrete steps to teach college students about grammar. This requires knowledge of the theory of contrastive analysis. A bottom up analytical style of teaching may be adopted.

2. Language teachers devise teaching-learning strategies compatible with the students' learning styles.

3. Grammar teaching be contextualized rather than simply introduced in the form of isolated abstract rules.

4. The teaching-learning strategies be student centered and not teacher oriented.

5. Enhancing the interactive mode of learning whereby students are encouraged to benefit from educational technology through online sources.

6. The teaching of grammar be viewed as an integral part of grasping all other language skills.

To conclude, the present piece of research points to the role of grammar in developing language skills. To help students improve their language repertoire and their overall proficiency in English, grammar teaching should be implemented efficiently and effectively.

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Appendix

Error Types and their Status

1. Loss of Subject-verb Agreement/concord

Examples:

A. Statements

1. the reader who address...
2. Female writing tend to be simple...
3. ...whether (he/she) pass the judgment, criticize, or simply giving facts.
4. People's spoken language vary
5. And how the product change to include both tangible and intangible products.
6. ...through the way in which the teacher ask Walter
7. those who does abortion...
8. ...and the questions I introduces in the aim's section.
9. The size of these people are very small [principle of proximity]

10. English as a world language have tended to be constructed
11. They argues that literacy is...
12. He encourage them to make...
13. ...but English play an important role in their lives.
14. If the child utter sounds adults pay no attention

B. With modals

15. Gossip may provides a great deal...

C. Questions

16. Does power plays a role in male or female classroom talk?
17. Is there any particular linguistic features?
18. Do the linguistic behavior of boys and girls differ?
19. Do power plays a role in the boys or girls classroom talk?

2. Parallel Structures [my addition]. Total errors:

1. ...whether (he/she) pass the judgment, criticize, or simply giving facts.
2. Students follow the official discourse but showing resistance when being asked to write a play.

3. Wrong Tense or wrong Verb forms

1. And it is also highlight the idea that...
2. How the two literary texts are differ from each other?
3. Is there is any particular linguistic features occur in the girl's speech?
4. It is clearly noticing over recent years that there is ...
5. It use infographic map illustrates
6. It also used a picture represents how the titanic disaster occurred.
7. ... which can't be fined in any another newspaper
8. ...and I making them evoking...
9. My practical work will base on comparison
10. My analysis will depends on Halliday's approach
11. We will concern with the frequency some terms
12. I will not generalized my findings
13. I am will to record their speeches...
14. are my findings can be applied to any other profession other than teaching?

15. It is noteworthy that the summary notes of experiential, relational and expressive values are presented in form of questions on pages 92 & 93 is very useful. [Also fits as an example of "subject-verb agreement"]
16. How you plan to analyze the evidence you collect.
17. Do power plays a role in the boys or girls classroom talk?
18. Is there any particular linguistic features occur in the girl's speech? [Also fits as an example of "number agreement"]
19. Does the meaning of "product" changed from its meaning several years ago?
20. How the two literary texts are differ from each other?
21. Newspapers were paying little attention to the way they looked

4. Loss/wrong use of articles. Total errors:

4.1 Definite article "The"

1. In ___ case of lexical cohesion...[the]
2. According to ___ Oxford Dictionary, sensibility is ...[the]
3. ... and other women in ___ Kuwait society. [the]
4. Joy for ___king's return... [the]
5. ... it is important to know more about ___ student's home literacy practices.[the]
6. ... A scene for ___ understanding of their utterances.[the]

4.1.1 Definite Article used Needlessly:

7. Fairclough spots the light in his book. [zero article] [Reason: *Translation*] *interference*
8. By thematizing them the light is spotted on them.... [zero article]

4.2 Indefinite articles "A(n)"

9. ... in ___ ideological way. [an]
10. ... in ___ branching and emotional way. [a]
11. It use ___ info graphic map [an]. (Also fits as an example of subject-verb agreement)
12. Oprah has produced ___ specific image for herself. [a]
13. ... and language as ___ power resource. [a]
14. ... to buy ___ certain newspaper rather than another. [a]
15. I will use ___ analytical method. [an]
16. ... He contributed an article about...
17. ...involved in writing ___ letter to ___ friend. [a]
18. ... in ___ particular way. [particular]
19. Also the students faced ___ problem. [a]
20. ... and each may be in ___ different language. [a]

21. ... and to be human in ____ specific cultural context. [a]
- 4.2.1 Indefinite Article used with plural/uncountable nouns [my addition]
22. - ... entitled to a respect terms. [zero article]
23. ...the data I used are a public data on the Internet. [zero article]
24. I took a permission from the teacher. [zero article]
25. They will give me a permission to record... [permission]
26. Viewers inner life has become a vital subjects or materials of the show...[zero article]
27. how to analyse a social interactions. [no article]
28. how do these techniques position us in a certain ways?[no article]
29. In a simpler words...[zero article]
30. I took a time to make that audio record(ing)...[zero article]
31. I decided to collect data from a real observations... [zero article]
32. ... In a conventional ways. [zero article]
33. ...relate events from the real world to a similar events from (the) book. [zero article]

5. Wrong Passive

Examples:

1. The remarkable point is that text 1 is achieved its density.
2. ...With regard to the subject which is be discussed. [is (being) discussed]
3. When she annoyed, she calls her ...[is annoyed]
4. We can find that the lead story covered in the whole Front page. [is covered]
5. ...newspapers in the past were competed on how to have more readers. [were competing], (A passive construction does not fit here).
6. They were not care about their design...[didn't care], (a passive construction does not fit here)
7. They are followed the Britain curriculum. [followed, no passive]
8. Students were expecting to generate ideas.... [were expected]
9. The Oprah Winfrey show is one of these programs that showed MBC4 channel. [are shown]
10. I think they were displayed the most important issues I want to addressed. [displayed, no passive]
11. Should handguns banned. [be banned, and a question mark]

12. The level of all stories which rewritten to non-native people. [are rewritten]
13. ... that women are used language which reinforced their subordinate status which is reflected the language used. [used, reflected: no passive]
 14. For example, the dialect used in Lebanon is different from the one is used in Kuwait...['used' or 'which is used']

6. Indirect /Reported Questions

Examples:

1. ... to clarify how can we use this information. [...we can]
2. ... explain why do we say ...[...we say]
3. Where some of these linguistic features are more frequently used? [no question mark is needed]
4. where functional words are more used? [No question mark is needed]
5. Comments on what can I observed ... [I can, also fit as an example of verb form]
6. How language ... is used to achieve...? [No question mark is needed]
7. How power relations are reflected ...? [No question mark is needed]
8. How the texts are organized in terms of its thematic structure? [No question mark is needed]
9. How our social identity is indicated? [No question mark is needed]
10. And how these different beliefs and values are indicated...? [No question mark is needed]
11. Comments on what can I observed. (...I can; also wrong verb form]
12. ... And could be such choices motivated by social or political factors...? [Such choices could be motivated ...; and no question mark is needed].
13. ... how language is used to refer to women? [No question mark is needed]
14. I will talk about how is the role of English changing in the world.[...how the role of English is changing]
15. I will discussed how is the role of English changing in the world. [... how the role of English is changing; also the verb form "will discussed" is wrong"]

7. Verb/Noun confused. Total errors

Examples:

1. ... the way Filipinos choice the code. [choose]
2. I choice mediator English classroom. [choose]
3. I am going to analysis the class's ...[to analyze]
4. I am going to analysis two sequences....[to analyze]
5. Since I made a full video recorded of the teacher...[recording]
6. He critics the dominant.... [criticizes]

8. Wrong preposition. Total errors

Examples:

1. So newspapers became as a product... [zero preposition]
2. Become as an advertisement...[zero preposition]
3. His essential aim is to make people conscious from how power holders shift.
4. ... to be aware from the relations... [about]
5. I combine between them [zero preposition]
6. Responsible of the violence [for]
7. In addition for creating...[to]
8. He gives an example on literacy in non-European contexts. [of]

9. Wrong use of the verb be

Examples

1. That _____ what Fairclough represents. [is]

9.1 Loss of the verb be in relative clauses

Examples:

2. There is also an index which situated in the lower left part. Which is situated.

10. Loss of/wrong use of relative/personal /anaphoric pronouns.

Examples:

1. We can find a byline _____ contains the name of the writer. [missing which]
2. (Is there) any particular features _____ occur in the female's speech. [missing which]

3. Those clauses _____ are dominant are ... [missing which/that]
4. ... I found a whole chapter _____ talks about gender, ... [missing which]
5. To investigate the differences _____ exist between the ... varieties in English Language. [missing which]

10.1 Wrong Pronoun

Examples:

6. I won't criticize the newspapers which I used its front pages. [Whose front page I used]
7. Also how the newspapers start to compete by using, developing and inventing various visual techniques to combine it with the verbal one.... [them].
8. ...the author is trying to lessen it importance. [its]

10.2 Double Anaphoric/resumptive Pronoun

Examples:

9. The evidence which I will collect it.... [which I will collect]