

# Errors in English Paragraph Writing Made by Jazan University Students: A Linguistic Analysis

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**Abstract:** Systematic studies of language errors made by students while learning a foreign language (FL) have been of great interest for researchers that help in designing the curriculum and textbooks for the learners. Mistakes which constantly appear in certain structures of a target language learnt by people speaking same native tongue draw the researcher's attention to the foreign structures difficult to acquire by learners. In recent years, applied linguistics have been much concerned with the description of the linguistic behavior of the FL learners labeled as deviant or error. In particular, a technique known as error analysis has been developed by means of which it is claimed access is gained to the transitional competence of the FL learner. The source of mistakes is plentiful and the errors discussed in this study are interpreted linguistically. In this study, only those mistakes are discussed which are caused by the linguistic phenomenon and interpreted linguistically. The present study focuses on the most common linguistic errors which Arabic speaking learners in Jazan University encounter in learning English as a foreign language.

**Keywords:** Language, Error Analysis, Foreign language, Applied Linguistics, Competence.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Language has an important role in all activities of life. The need to communicate our thoughts makes an urge in humans to develop a variety of language. Language helps to grow knowledge and wisdom. The main function of the language is to share the common experience of human beings.

First language is the language through which a child makes acquaintance with everything about it to communicate. Mostly, it may be their mother tongue. Learning of mother tongue takes place in very natural way and through proper imitation and exposition. But the process of second language learning is quite different.

Among all the world languages, English is considered as the international language. There are some reasons why English is so important and many people attempt to learn it. Taking up a professional degree in the higher level of study, English is being inevitable. English plays a vital role in higher education, research, for aesthetic aspect and employment in this modern scenario. At present, we are members of the global village. The correct knowledge of English is necessary for students studying in higher education in general and in professional courses in particular. Nowadays, English is used by all people worldwide because of the ongoing advances in technology such as internet, and other businesses (Pakir, 1999). English also plays an important role in education and students are expected to use it effectively. Flanegin and Rudd (2000) found that English is necessary for all professions. However, Teaching English in the Arab world is challenging. Many students are able to understand the language, but most of the students face the problem while communicating their ideas effectively.

## 2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Many researchers have identified that Arab university student lacks the required English language proficiency that hinders their academic progress (Javid, Farooq, & Gulzar, 2012; Javid & Khairi, 2011; Rababah, 2003). A proper language learning atmosphere is necessary to facilitate the students' success in English language learning in general and developing writing skills in particular. Such atmosphere can't be found here because English language exposure is limited to the university campus only.

It is believed that the teaching of English as a foreign language was actually introduced into the Saudi Arabian educational system in 1928, a few years after the establishment of the Directorate of Education in 1923 (Al-Seghayer, 2011). Since then, the education process has undergone several changes and modifications. English currently asserts several functions and enjoys an eminent status in various sectors at all levels within the Saudi Arabia.

Acquiring English is a difficult issue among second or foreign language learners ESL/EFL especially Arabic learners (Abbad, 1988; Rababah, 2005; Zughoul & Taminian, 1984). Researchers have stated that learners face difficulties to write effectively. It has been found that most language learners at all levels believe that writing is one of the most difficult language skills to master (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1989; Kurk & Atay, 2007; Latif, 2007) or a sophisticated skill compared with other skills (Daud, Daud & Kassim, 2005; and Abu Shawish & Atea, 2010).

Arabic society misses the opportunity to use a foreign language like English in their daily life. As a result, many problems occur when they study at a university where the medium of instruction is a foreign language like English (Al-Khasawneh, 2010). Ansari (2012) mentioned that more than 50% of students in Saudi Arabia do not know how to write English. Most of them are unaware of the cursive writing.

The problem of language contact has been discussed by many linguists. This paper, however, is limited to some general remarks on mistakes made by students of Jazan University in English paragraph writing. This work can be considered as a preliminary one in the context of Jazan University.

## 3. SIGNIFICANCE OF STUDY

The researchers noticed that most of the studies in the field of writing difficulties or errors have done through quantitative method. A few researches have used linguistic interpretation to know the root cause of the errors made by the learners. The aim of the present paper is to study the most general types of syntactic errors, Arabic speaking learners encounter in learning English as a foreign language. The present study will also pave the way for intensive research in this field. It will also provide feedback to curriculum designers and text book writers to design syllabus and text books accordingly.

## 4. METHODOLOGY AND SOURCE

The present work is a case study of Jazan University students to check the errors in paragraph writing. The common possible errors made by the learners are interpreted linguistically. While analyzing lexical and grammatical errors in the written texts, one also faces the problem of spelling mistakes. Spelling mistakes are not considered in this paper. Sometimes, it is difficult to distinguish among the lexical, grammatical or a spelling error.

The source used for this study is primary. The data was collected from the students of Jazan University at different colleges. The students were asked to write a paragraph of their own choice. Some previous answer scripts were also used for the same. Later the data was analyzed to find a common pattern or a series of errors made by them.

## 5. DISCUSSION AND RESULTS

The main source of language errors is linguistic interference. This occurs when one language is put in contact with another one. Interference, in the case of the foreign language learner, occurs when all his previous linguistic habits are put in contact with the new ones he has to learn. From practical experience we know that it is not only the learner's native tongue habits which interfere with those of the foreign languages he study. If he, by any chance knows two or more languages all his linguistic habits will interfere with the new ones.

Richards (1974), identifies six sources of errors: i) Interference, ii) overgeneralization, iii) performance errors, iv) markers of transitional competence, v) strategies of communication and assimilation and vi) teacher-induced errors.

The common pattern of errors noticed in the data available is discussed below with illustrations:

### **COPULA:**

The absence of an overt verbal copula is considered to be one of the significant characteristics of the Arabic language syntax. The most frequent type of deviation Arab speaker encounters in forming the English verb is the deletion of the copula (Scott & Tucker, 1974). The studies refer this type of deviation to MT interference since Arabic, as they claim, does not have copula. Arabic language does not report verbal copula in its structure. It is clear in the following example that Arabic construction does not use overt verbal copula:

ahmad-u mu'aallim-un  
 Ahmad-Nom teacher -Nom  
 'Ahmad is a teacher.'

This phenomenon prominently influences the structures of English language. The learners use English sentences without verb. In the available data such error is very much prominent e.g.

- 1.\*He 21 years old.  
He is 21 years old.
- 2.\*My friend name Ali.  
My friend's name is Ali.
- 3.\*He a student.  
He is a student
- 4.\*His name Abdul Rahman.  
His name is Abdul Rahman.
- 5.\*Ali my new classmate in this semester.  
Ali is my new classmate in this semester.
- 6.\*My name Zahra.  
My name is Zahra.

### **CONCORD:**

Many studies report the deletion of the [-s] marker when the Arabic speaking learner uses the present simple (Beck, 1979; Al-Kasimi et al. 1979). Subject-verb agreement in Arabic follows a regular pattern. When the verb follows the subject, it must agree with it in number and gender. However, if the verb comes before the subject, it only agrees with the subject in gender and it remains singular. This rule is not affected by the tense of the sentence, i.e. it applies to any verb and subject regardless of the tense. But in English language, third person singular subject (e.g. He, She, It, Ahmad, Car, etc.) takes a [-s, -es, or -ies (e.g. plays, goes, studies, etc.)], whereas a plural subject does not take any above mentioned suffix.

Arabic has a complex system of concord but when Arabic speaking learners use English language they are not able to follow the correct subject-verb agreement in their sentence structures e.g.

- 7.\*He play football.  
He plays football.
- 8.\*He speak English.  
He speaks English.
- 9.\*She live in Sabiya.  
She lives in Sabiya.
- 10.\*He have big family.  
He has big family.

11. \*He like football.

He likes football.

12. \*Ali say that he doesn't like music.

Ali says that he doesn't like music.

#### **TENSE/ASPECT:**

a) The literature reported cases where Arab learners do not use the progressive instead use the non-progressive (Mukattash, 1986). In progressive aspect the learners either delete the progressive morpheme i.e. [-ing] or they will not use the auxiliary verb at all. Such type of errors could also be the examples of negative transfer from MT. While most of the verbs do not occur in the progressive aspect in Arabic, so the Arabic speaking learners aren't able to understand the phenomenon e.g.

13. \*He is study in Medical College.

He is studying in Medical College.

14. \*I studying in Jazan University.

I am studying in Jazan University.

15. \*He is stay in Abha.

He is staying in Abha.

16. \*He is play football.

He is playing football.

17. \*He is eat Kapsa.

He is eating Kapsa.

b) The Arabic speaking learners are sometimes unable to differentiate between simple present and simple past. If they have to use simple present time, they use simple past e.g.

18. \*I took tea usually.

I take tea usually.

19. \*Ahmad didn't come to university every day.

Ahmad doesn't come to university every day.

c) Similarly, the learners are not able to distinguish between simple past and present perfect e.g.

20. \*He has gone to Jeddah yesterday.

He went to Jeddah yesterday.

21. \*Yesterday, I have seen my friend.

Yesterday, I saw my friend.

#### **SENTENCE STRUCTURE:**

Errors in disordering of adjectives are commonly used by the Arabic speaking learners (Scott & Tucker, 1974). In English language adjectives come before the noun which it modifies while as in Arabic language adjectives come after the noun. The examples given below show clearly that how mother tongue (Arabic) influences English.

22. \*You have car black.

You have a black car.

23. \*Open the book, number page 21.

Open the book, page number 21.

24. \* My number mobile is ...

My mobile number is ...

25. \*I grew up in predominantly family male.

I grew in predominantly male family.

26. \*My hobby favorite is watch movies.

My favorite hobby is watching movies.

#### **PREPOSITIONS:**

English prepositions are a real challenge for the Arabic speaking learners. Arabic speaking learners attempt to establish one-to-one correspondence between English and Arabic prepositions. This led them to omit or choose wrong prepositions. This type of errors can be attributed to negative transfer from Arabic e.g.

27. \*I born in Makkah at 1991.

I was born in Makkah in 1991.

28. \*He is live Abha.

He lives in Abha.

29. \*He is student Jazan University.

He is a student of Jazan University.

30. \*They injustice us.

They do injustice to us.

31. \*I am student in English.

I am a student of English.

#### **INFINITIVAL 'TO':**

The Arabic speaking learners are not able to use the infinitival 'to' properly. They don't have the understanding of finiteness so they do errors while using English language e.g.

32. \*He like play football.

He likes to play football.

33. \*He like drive car.

He likes to drive car.

34. \*Murtaza like eat fish and orange.

Murtaza likes to eat fish and orange.

35. \*My dream is visit all countries world.

My dream is to visit all the countries of the world.

36. \*I want become good teacher.

I want to become a good teacher.

37. \* I wish visit Makkah.

I wish to visit Makkah.

#### **ARTICLES:**

The most noticeable error in using the indefinite article by Arabic speaking learners was in deleting the indefinite article (Scott & Tucker, 1974). This type of error could be attributed to negative transfer from the MT since Arabic marks nouns as definite or indefinite by the presence or absence of the article. Al-Kasimi et al. (1979) reported that some of their Arabic speaking learners use indefinite articles for definite articles. The Arabic speaking learners do not properly use the English articles. The data reports deviation in the use of both indefinite and definite articles e.g.

38. \*I like reading a books.

I like reading books.

39. \*I want become teacher.

I want to become a teacher.

#### CONJUNCTION:

Khered (1984) in attempting to establish an Arab EFL index of development found that the Arabic speaking learners of English rely heavily on sentence coordination in initial stage of development; subordination, in the intermediate stage; clause length, in the advanced stage. The same is reported in the context of Jazan University. The learners do not use the conjunctions properly. The following examples show the direct influence of Arabic language. The learners apply the Arabic conjunction rule for English compound sentences.

40. \*I am single, and my dream is buy big home and car nice and I have five brothers and three sisters.

I am single. My dream is to buy a big home and a nice car. I have five brothers and three sisters.

41. \*I like watch T.V and like swimming, and I listen the Qur'an, and I am student in Jazan University.

I like watching T.V, swimming, and listening the Qur'an. I am a student of Jazan University.

## 6. CONCLUSION

This preliminary work is an effort to test Jazan University students' understanding of English syntax in general and the common errors in paragraph writing in particular. All the basic syntactic structures were taken into consideration to check the errors. The common errors are seen in copula, concord, number, tense markers, aspect, infinitival to, prepositions, articles and conjunctions. Many examples are reported where learners make unnecessary insertion or deletion of any lexical or grammatical unit. Sometimes, we find the structures without main verbs, prepositions or some other head words. The interference of mother tongue is very much prominent among the Arabic speaking learners. Sometimes the learners over-generalize a particular rule in other contexts.

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