

Writing Syntactical and Punctuation Errors Among First Level Sudanese University Students

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ABSTRACT:

The study is an attempt to analyze paragraph writing syntactical and punctuation errors that are committed by Sudanese university students, first level who study English a foreign language (FL). The targeted students have finished their academic study at secondary level schools then they joined the university in the year (2016 -2017). The objectives of the study are to investigate and analyze the difficulties and problems in their grammar and certain skills of writing performance. Based on the findings the results show clearly the weaknesses in grammar and students' certain writing skills. The weaknesses in grammar and students' writing performance are attributed mainly to the developmental errors that are associated to the developing sequence of learning English. Also, Intralingua errors and interference of mother tongue (interlinguas) set as extra important causes as well. The study adopts the descriptive methodology. Though students bear considerable problems in paragraph writing performance, they show promotion in acquiring certain writing skills and have shown noticeable developing in their writing performance by the end of the said year.

Key Words: English as a foreign language, target language, contrastive analysis, Error

**الأخطاء النحوية وعلامات الترقيم وسط طلاب المستوى الأول بالجامعات السودانية:
المستخلص:**

هدفت هذه الدراسة الى تحليل الأخطاء النحوية وعلامات الترقيم في مهارة كتابة الفقرة باللغة الإنجليزية لطلاب المستوى الأول بالجامعات السودانية. (دراسة حالة جامعة النيلين-كلية الآداب - قسم اللغة الإنجليزية- المستوى الأول)، والذين يدرسون اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية في بداية الفصل الدراسي الأول (2016-2017م). أوضحت الدراسة أن مشاكل كتابة الفقرة باللغة الإنجليزية تعود إلى أربعة أسباب رئيسية هي كالتالي: أ- تداخل اللغة الأم مع اللغة الإنجليزية. ب- مشاكل في تطبيق قواعد اللغة الأجنبية أو اللغة الثانية. ج- مشاكل أخطاء النمو اللغوي. د- أخطاء الترقيم. يتكون مجتمع الدراسة من عدد 75 طالباً في المستوى الأول، كما تمثلت أداة الدراسة في امتحان كتابي للفقرة الإنجليزية أجري في زمن المحاضرة. وقد توصلت الدراسة الى أنه بالرغم من وقوع طلاب الجامعات السودانية الذين يدرسون اللغة الإنجليزية في الأخطاء النحوية وكذا في علامات الترقيم عند ممارسة مهارة الكتابة باللغة الإنجليزية إلا أن بعض طلاب المستوى يشهدون تطوراً ملحوظاً بنهاية الفصل الدراسي المذكور أعلاه. تبنت هذه الدراسة المنهج الوصفي لوصف الأخطاء وتحديد مصادرها وتحليلها بهدف وضع الحلول لها. كذلك أوصت هذه الدراسة بقيام ما يعرف بنوادي كتابة اللغة الإنجليزية على غرار ونسق نوادي المخاطبة وكذلك تكثيف مقررات الكتابة في اللغة الإنجليزية في مرحلتى الثانوى والجامعى واستحداث طرائق جديدة وبتضمين ذلك في المناهج الجامعية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية (E.F.L.) التحليل المقارن (CA) الإنجليزية كلغة ثانية (E.S.L)

INTRODUCTION:

During stages of learning English as a foreign language (FL) or a second language (SL) learners might have no command of

mastering basics of writing skills. As learners gradually

move towards learning more writing skills, they tend to commit errors which are considered as language difficulties or language problems.

Contrastive Analysis helps to shed light on those obstacles learners tend to commit and enables teachers as well as writers to predict the learning problems or errors that learners of a foreign language are expected to face.

Lado, (1957) claims that Contrastive Analysis (CA) began to lose its prominence due to its association with an out-dated model of language description of the Structuralism and the learning theory of the Behaviourism of the Habit formation. James predicted that the learning difficulties formulated on the basis of CA were not entirely accurate since teachers had known about the errors already or the errors were not dealt, CA would be replaced by Error Analysis, which compared the two languages in order to identify differences without blaming the mother tongue. In other words, errors would be fully described in terms of the target (TL) language, without the need to refer to the learners' mother tongue.

In the late 1980s researchers took an interest in learners' errors as they found that the learners' first language is not the only linguistic factor affecting the acquisition of the English language as a second or foreign language and also acquiring basics of writing English in skills implicitly. The learners' failure to grasp the English language comprehensively could be ascribed to intralingua interference, which was associated with the general learning strategies (Oxford, 2001)..

Many problems were discovered to be the causes for learners' errors including syntactical and punctuation which are the topics of the study. These include: overgeneralization, ignorance of the rules of restriction, incomplete application of errors and false concepts hypothesized.

Nevertheless, it has been proven beyond

doubt that the effects of the mother tongue on the target language cannot be denied. However, no scholars have doubted that the mother tongue has at least some level of influence on the process of learning the target language. The learners' prior linguistic knowledge, of one language or many languages should have its effect on learning the target language (TL).

James (1990) explored two potential causes of errors:

1. Interlingual Interference: It is caused by the interference of the mother-tongue. Learners have a tendency to copy every word of the learners' first language into the target language TL. In contrastive analysis, it is believed that the type of errors made by the learners of the target language can be predicted and their causes can be determined. In order to reduce if not eliminate these errors. Richards (1974) argues that

between 3-25 per cent of all errors are errors of mother tongue influence and 75 per cent of errors are 'non-contrastive' errors.

2. Intralingua Interference. These types of errors are caused by the target language (TL) itself. Apart from recourse to L1 transfer, either they can set about learning the needed item, engaging their learning strategies, or they can try to fill the gap by resorting to communication strategies. Learning strategies are used for code breaking while communication strategies are encoding and decoding strategies. Both types of strategy can be the source of error. Errors which are caused by learning strategies include:

1. Analogy: which also seemed a source of errors in the misuse of verbs, prepositions, and pronouns. Students attempt to follow the same forms in different situations. These are some of the examples: "He showed me the equipment" becomes "He explained me the equipment"; "ask him to do it" becomes "Make him to do it". (Richards, 1980) 2.

2. Grammatical errors: These happen in the shape of incomplete grammatical sentences. This happens when the learners try to simplify the sentence rather than get the whole structure correct. It is obvious in the use of direct and indirect questions. For instance: "I have no idea where is she?" The learners have applied only two components of the interrogative formation rule: they have selected and fronted a whole element (rule components 1 and 2), but failed to invert the subject and verb. Other examples include learners failing to follow the restricted rules of some syntax. Examples of this include failing to follow the rules of verbs followed by infinitives or gerunds. So we often find students saying "I enjoy to read" rather than "I enjoy reading."

3. Redundancy: This error occurs by carrying considerable unnecessary vocabulary. This is shown throughout the system in the form of unnecessary addition of words and indefinite articles.

4. Overcorrection: learners tend to be over cautious to avoid mistakes. Wrong sentences would be the result. An example of this is: "I have son five year(s) old." 5. Overgeneralization: This error is caused by the misuse of words or grammatical rules.

Objectives of the study:

Generally, the present study aims to analyze and provide description of certain writing syntactical and punctuation errors. The errors problem which hinder university students' in the first level to achieve better writing performance.

Further, the study intends to investigate sources behind the errors' problem, by analyze and describe the actual Interlingua errors problems (mother tongue interferences), which face Sudanese preliminary year students

Also, the study aims to analyze the punctuation errors which encounter the students in their writing performance. In additional it intends to describe and analyze

intra lingua and developmental errors. Innovating of suitable methods, new writing techniques and strategies are believed to be objectives of the study as well.

Materials & Methods

The paper analyzes the syntactical and punctuation errors in writing performance committed by Sudanese university students who study English as intermediate course, the focus will be on the possible ways in which errors could be avoided in their gradual process of learning writing. The data were collected during the academic year 2016 -2017. The subjects were male and female students in the first year level, English department, faculty of Arts Alneelain University. About 75 male and female students were drawn as samples of the study, they subduced to write paragraph test in English as tool of the study.

The population of the study is drawn out of Sudanese University students who study English as foreign language in preliminary year level. All of the students sampled were required to have studied English as a foreign language for five to ten years in Secondary school prior to admissions in the university

.Significance of the Study: The importance of this study could be attributed to the importance of acquiring writing basic skills as its necessity for English language learning and acquisition. In fact, the importance of the study can be divided into direct and indirect significance. As for direct ones are as below:

To find solutions for first level university students writing syntactical errors problems will enable them to achieve better writing performance which help the students promotion and development in their academic study. Furthermore, university students are in need to carry on scientific research hence writing skills is an important tool in research layout. Also, there is indirect importance of carrying this study as hereinafter:

Due to globalization and an explosion of knowledge of 20th century, followed by increasing amount of English language (E.F.L) or(E.S.L). Hence, English as medium language of websites without gaining such writing skills learners in general and students in particular can neither enjoy using such means of communication as websites services nor deal actively with globalization.

Results & Discussion :

This study investigates syntactical and punctuation errors which students face in their paragraph writing performance. The focus will be on the possible ways in which these errors could be avoided during the process of writing in particular and learning English in general. It is clear to note that mother tongue interference causing a large amount of errors may be both Interlingua's mother tongue errors and intralinguas in nature. Students' errors are: The Syntactical errors are as the following:

1. Omission of Indefinite Articles (a, an).
2. Choosing the wrong verbs.
3. Adjectives and adverbs errors
4. Using of adequate Plurality.
5. Errors of Present and Present Continuous tenses.
6. The possessive genitive errors.

The Syntactical Errors Under each of the following headings, incorrect constructions are listed as they occurred in the students' collected papers:

Omission of Indefinite Articles: (a, an) in sentences. Examples are such as:

Khartoum is beautiful city instead [a beautiful city], I saw car [a car] accident near the university. The differences between the grammatical structures of Arabic and English could cause the learners to delete the indefinite articles in the above examples. Students showed confusion in the choosing the right article, definite and indefinite articles. Other errors noticed in using the indefinite

Misuse of Plurality errors: it is possible that the errors committed by the learners

article with plural nouns. An example of that:1 .

Arabic is spoken by large [a large] number of a people

Verbs errors: students have shown that difficulties in choosing the correct vocabulary even with the use of a dictionary. This could be the cause of mother tongue interlinguas interference. They failed to comprehend the core vocabulary to be used in the appropriate communication and writing.

Here are a few examples of these verbs wrongly used by the students in their compositions: Students set, or fire [ignite] the oil lamp. Push in' for insert. 'Turn upside down' for invert. Small bit' for small pieces.

In many cases, students failed to observe the rules of using simple present tense . For instance , He writing well instead of He writes , students persistently confused in using verb to be . out eir writing assignments, in spite of being reminded several times. Translation from the mother tongue is another possible cause of these mistakes

Adjectives and adverbs: learners of English as a second language encounter confusion in the use of adjectives and adverbs. This could be attributed to a poor strategy for learning these words. The interference of these learning strategies produces a hybrid learning structure, examples of such sentences are: Catch [hold] light [lighted] candle.

Errors in using the tenses: Learners forget how to use Simple Present tense to articulate their statements. They used 'will' to indicate future, 'be' in passive, or other auxiliary verbs like 'can' to refer to the simple Present tense. They made up combinations of auxiliary verbs. Examples of such errors are: He is illustrates the diagrams the machine can works.

are the results of overgeneralization of countable and uncountable nouns. So She

has a very important works to do. We have many important works to finish today.

Misuse of Possessive: Thus, learners run into sentences like: The moon's surface The car's maximum speed.

Errors in using the Passive and Active Voice: Students seemed unable to differentiate between the passive and active. Wrong use of the past participle or unaware of the grammatical combination of the verb in the passive voice so we see sentences like: "the gas will be appear..." "then the gas-jar taken off..." In other instances, they used the instead of the Passive: "Mariam was cooked food," "some trees uprooted." It was obvious that their lack of knowledge of the Passive was the cause of these errors but they failed to use it properly.

The Punctuation Errors: Eckersley (1979) reads the term 'punctuation', as" simply a device making it easy to read and understand written or printed matter .

The data obtained from the students, their paragraphs test has shown that capitalization, the use of comma and were among others are most common punctuation errors. Experienced teachers of English as a second language have noticed punctuation to be extremely difficult and confusing for many ESL/EFL students.

They do not use commas in combining simple or compound sentences to make new sentences. An example of that is: Students love university [, and] they plan to study more They usually do not combine the two simple sentences by using a semicolon. An example of that: Students like English [;] they plan to major in that disciplinary area. It is not unusual to see students write compound sentences using a comma without a coordinating conjunction. They use an adverb instead of conjunction. An example: Students love English, therefore, they want to major in this area.

Another common punctuation error noticed in the students' papers is the ability to write sentence after sentence without a period at the end of one sentence, or a capital letter at the beginning of the next. Sentences just run together. An example:

"i do not forget the invitation that i sent it to you before several weeks as you said that you are very busy now you do not have any excuse to reject my invitation so however i hope you choose the time that you want to get the dinner together and sent the date to me. thank you very much"

"He likes English and he wants to continue study" Students were asked to rewrite some passages and sentences in the correct forms of punctuation.

The above mentioned errors should be brought to both the learners' and teachers' attention. Teachers should exert extra effort in teaching these aspects of writing techniques.

Conclusion

Based on analysis of the data, the researcher found that the learners' failure to understand basics of English grammar could be ascribed to intralingua interference, which is associated with developmental sequence of learning English. Communication may be in the form of speaking, listening, reading and writing, rather than to interference of the mother tongue. A plan of action is necessary to ensure that programs manifest adequate objectives in operational and behavioral terms to suit the needs of English learning of writing.

The objectives ought to be sound in terms of the learners' previous knowledge of English, level of training and the influence of the mother tongue and the differences with the English language. The current English course at the university needs to be reviewed and take into consideration the above criteria in choosing the right teaching materials.

At present it is not an ESP course but rather a compilation of handouts. Further studies are needed to research the most appropriate teaching syllabus for tackling writing skills. There should be an adequate amount of repetition and review work. Cognitive strategies ought to be applied to involve practice and repetition as well as creation of grammatical structure for input and output. This means raising the learners' knowledge of the grammar and structure of the English language. Learners needed to constantly check the grammar and vocabulary they learned. It means also to raise the learners' consciousness of intralingua differences associated with syntactical and punctuation rules. English, level of training and the influence of the mother tongue and the differences with the English language. The current writing course needs to be reviewed and take into consideration the above criteria in choosing the right teaching materials. Learners needed to constantly check the grammar and vocabulary they learned. It means also to raise the learners' consciousness of intralingua differences associated with syntactical and punctuation rules. They need to be encouraged to use the dictionary both in and out of the classroom.

The above mentioned errors should be brought to both the learners' and teachers' attention. Teachers should exert extra effort in teaching these aspects. These should be done simultaneously with speaking and reading exercises. Learners should be familiarized with singular/plural subjects, auxiliary verbs in combination with other verbs, question forms, present simple and continuous tenses, and technical writing techniques. There should be more adequate coordination and reinforcement in reading, listening, writing, and oral practice. Learners should be supplied with more resources for learning technical vocabulary. These are not the only errors but just a sample of what teachers should bear in mind

Recommendation of the study:

1 Extensive course in writing skills for pre university student's in the secondary level.
2. Special writing tasks should start by group-work, in group-work (E.F.L) learner to perform writing activities through small groups university English clubs and English societies.

3. Innovations of modern teaching techniques like role-play and problems solving in teaching writing skills .

4. University test books should be prepared by more of writing skills in syllabus

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Table Shows Students Errors' Frequency and rates.

Errors' type	Errors' frequency.	Errors' Rates%	
1. Omission of Indefinite Articles (a, an).	507	9.65	
2. Choosing the wrong verbs	303	5.77	
3. Adjectives and adverbs	235	4.47	
4 .Using in adequate Plurality	182	3.46	
. Present and Present Continuous tenses	102	1.94	
.The possessive genitive.	75	1.43	