Identifying University Students Writing's Errors

Huda Ahmed Yousif

Abstract

The ability of writing without errors is very necessary to EFL learners, particularly university students who they face some difficulties in composing correct text without errors .This study aims to identify university students writing errorsand take into the account the origin of the problem.in addition to provide teachers with some suggestions. The study is adopted descriptive analytical method.Data is collected by using two instruments: questionnaire to (40) EL teachers from different universities and a test to (80) university students (University of Science and Technology, Omdurman) .The findings revealed that students commit errors in spelling, syntax and lexical-semantic, and this due to origin causes of the problem such as overgeneralization, mother tongue interference in addition to other some teaching -learning strategies.

Key Words:contrastive analysis, interference, interlanguage, overgeneralization

المستخلص

القدرة على الكتابة بدون أخطاء أمر ضروري جداً لمتعلمي اللغة الانجليزية كلغة أجنبية خاصة طلاب الجامعات الذين يواجهون بعض الصعوبات في تأليف نص صحيح بدون أخطاء. تهدف هذه الدراسة لتحديد الأخطاء في الكتابة باللغة الانجليزية لدى طلاب الجامعات مع وضع الا عتبار لأصل المشكلة بالاضافة لتزويد معلمي اللغة الانجليزية ببعض المقترحات والحلول الممكنة. وتم جمع المعلومات باستخدام اداتين هما استبيان لمعلمي اللغة الانجليزيةمن جامعات مختلفة واختبار لعدد(80) من الطلاب الجامعيين (جامعة العلوم والتقانة بام درمان). كشفتنتائج هذه الدراسة أن الطلاب يرتكبون أخطاء إملائية ونحوية وبنيوية، ويعزى هذا لأسباب المشكلة الأساسية التي تتمثل في التعميم وتداخل اللغة الأم بالإضافة إلى بعض استراتيجيات التدريس والتعلم الأخرى .

Introduction

Errors have been seen as evidences of the processes and strategies of language acquisition. Analyzing errors is based on theories of first and second language learning and possible similarities between them. Many linguists and researchers investigate extensively errors produced by language learners either in their speech or writing or both of them. Writing is an important skill and is defined as a reflective activity that requires enough time to think about the specific topic to analyze and classify background of knowledge. Writing skill means the ability to arrange the graphic system such as letters, words and sentences in certain language in order that reader can understand the message.(Harmer,2004) states that process writing is a way of looking at what people do when they compose written text .Recently, English language has become a global language, so writing plays a vital role as a medium of communication and as an effective skill in learning process , which involves a set of integrated skills that are needed to be developed and mastered by EFL learners .this study is significant because it shed light on problems that face most of students as well as help the teachers in providing feedback to students make their writing more successfully. That is to say many EFL learners have some difficulties when they write in English language .These difficulties are mostly due to grammar ; syntax and organizational skills , which make students produce errors is their written assignments .

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This paper will try to identify errors in students' writing. Firstly it will briefly address contrastive analysis, error analysis andinterlanguage process. Next,view the results of the study. Finally, conclude with discussions of some issues and possible future suggestions in this area.

1.1 Objectives of thestudy:

The study aims to:

1- Identifying the errors made by first-year students at University of Science and Technology in writing English language.

2- Take into account the origin of the problem.

3- Providing teachers with suggestions and possible solution to the problem.

2.0 Contrastive analysis approach

Charles Fries (1945) describes CA "as the most efficient materials that are based on scientific description of the language are learnt carefully compared with a parallel description of the native language of the learner. Another definition for CA stated by Lado (1957) in his work (linguistic across cultures) who clarifies CA "as a way of comparing languages in order to determine potential errors for ultimate purpose of what needs to be learned and what does not need to be learned a second learning language situation".

In learning process of speaking and writing as a productive skills, learners often produce errors, this happen as Corder, S.P. (1979) points that mark indicate that learner had not yet acquired the rule he was taught and they were therefore dealt with through repeated explanation until vanished .He adds if learning were efficient, errors would not occur .This can be explained by the persisting of the habits of the mother tongue (MT) and their transfer to the new target language (TL).

2.1 The objectives of contrastive analysis

The objectives of contrastive are identified by Van et.al, (1974). As follow:

1-Providing insights into similarities and differences between languages.

2- Explaining and predicting problems in target language learning (TLL).

3- Developing course materials for language teaching.

Making errors in second language can be explained by the notion of transfer which is divided into two types:

1- Positive transfer (facilitation): making use of first habits help in the target language learning.

2- Negative transfer (interference): assuming that the mother tongue background and habits are transformed to the target language causing errors.

Contrastive Analysis Hypotheses

Contrastive analysis hypotheses are classified by WardHaugh, G (1970: 124) into two versions: strong version and weak version.

a - Strong Version

The most important goal of strong version is to conduct a comparison between two linguistic systems so as to distinguish the areas of similarity and difference lbetween the two systems. It is expected areas of difference to cause learning problems not areas of similarity. Accordingly, TL teaching and FL teacher must be based on these differences.

b- Weak Version

WardHaugh,G. (1970:55) defines the weak version as: " Reference is made to the two systems only in order to explain actually observed interference phenomena". The weak version is commanded as being in line with the experience of the teacher, which enables him to know the learner's learning problems with being predicted for him and being familiar with learner's errors.

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4.0 Error Analysis Approach

This approach based on theories of first and second language learning and possible similarities between them .EA is based on three important assumptions as follows:

1-Errores are inevitable as language cannot be learnt without committing errors.

2- Errors are significant in different ways.

3- Not all errors are attributable to the leaner's mother tongue;i.e. first language interference is not the only source of errors.

4.1 Significance of Errors Analysis

Error analysis is one of the most major fields of second language acquisition since it investigates errors made by L2 learners and describes procedures to identify learners' errors.

Many linguists emphasize the significance of SLL errors. Pit Corder,S.P. (1967) remarks that errors are significant in three different ways: First, to the teacher to check learner's progress .Second, provide researcher evidence of how language is learnt or acquired. Thirdly, errors are indispensable to the learner himself. Another notion was viewed by Jain (1974) maintains errors are significant for two reasons:

1- Understanding the process of second language acquisition.

2- Planning courses incorporating the psychology of second language learning. Therefore, EA is useful both at the theoretical and applied (practical) levels, theoretical is concerned with processes and strategies of SLL and its possible similarities with first language with first language acquisition. Furthermore,

Sridhar (1981) lists the goals of applied error analysis as follows:

a- Determining the sequence of the presentation of target language items in textbooks and classroom, with the difficult items following the easier one.

b- Deciding the relative degree of the emphasis, explanation and practice required in putting across various items in the target language.

c- Revising remedial lessons and exercises.

d- Selecting items for testing the learner's proficiency.

Corder (1973) confirms that the practical use of errors is to provide teacher with feedback in addition they provide the information for designing a remedial syllabus or a program of re-teaching.

4.2 Errors versus Mistakes

Errors are rule-governed and systematic in nature and as such indicative of the learner's linguistic system at a given stage of language learning .Jain (1974) defines systematic errors as those which show a consistent system and fall into definable patterns, they are internally principled and free from arbitrariness.

In contrast to errors , mistakes are random deviations , unrelated to any system , and instead representing the same types of performing mistakes that might occur in the speech or writing of native speakers such as slips of the tongue or pen , false starts , lack of subject and verb agreement in a long complicated sentence .Distinguishing between learner's errors and mistakes has been problematic area for teachers and researchers as Corder (1967) asserts that the problem of determining what a learner's mistake and what a learner's error is one of some difficulty.

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5. 0 Interlanguage Processes

Selinker (1972) views interlanguage as a separate linguistic system resulting from the learner's attempted production of the target language norm .He considered it as a product of five cognitive processes as central to second language learning .These five postulates processes as:

1- Language transfer.

2- Transfer of training.

3- Strategies of L2learning.

4- Strategies of L2 communication

5- Overgeneralization of the TL rules.

The above process will be discussed according to the learner's errors.

(1) Language transfer (interference)

Wringe (1989) defines interference by referring it to "these instances of deviation from the norm of either language which occur in the speech of bilinguals as a result of their familiarity with more than one language, i.e. as a result of languages in contact" this definition is to Lado's point analysis of the forms of linguistic interference conventional terms like mother tongue, first and second language.

(2) Transfer of Training

This process is quite different from language transfer and over generalization of TL rules .Selinker (1972) observes that the occurrence of errors attributes to the way drills and exercises are constructed , can be attributed to the transfer of training where course books and teachers in interligual situation always present drills and exercises with (he) never with (she).

(3) Strategies of L2 learning

Conder, S.P (1981) states that learning strategies refer to the mental processes whereas the learner creates for himself a language system underling to the data he is exposed to Richards, J.C. (1974) points to simplification as the way speakers of different languages make anew language easier to learn and use. Learner simplifies preposition, auxiliary and article usage. Order (1981)also confirms learner's errors could sometimes be explained as an interaction of learning strategies and communication strategies. On the other hand Brown (1987) identifies four learning strategies:transfer, interference, generalization and overgeneralization.

(4) Strategies of L$_2$ communication

Tarone, E. (1977) defines communication strategies as" the learner's contribution to the interactional work required to overcome a communication problem" .Corder (1981) points to " message adjustment " and "recourse expansion" in communication process the learner either has negative attitude towards the communication task or has willingness to participate in it ."The message adjustment" strategy includes "risk and topic avoidance". The recourse expansion strategy includes "paraphrase and borrowing".Tarone (1977) classifies paraphrase to three types:

a-Approximation: the use of a single TL vocabulary item or structure.

b- Word -Coinage: the learner makes up a new word in order to convey a desired concept.

a- Circumlocution: the learner describes the characteristics or elements of an object or action instead of using the TL word appropriately of the learner's attempt to reduce his learning load such as omission of some letters, as " He teach French instead of "teaches".

(5)Overgeneralization of the TL rules

Overgeneralization errors refer to the deviant structures created by the learner on the bases of his limited exposure to and knowledge of other structures in the target language. For instance, the omission of the third person singular "s" as in this example:

He always play tennis in the morning

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6.0 Methodology
6.1 participants

The participants of the study were (80) students study at faculty of engineering at University of Science and Technology, theywere (40) male and (40) femalestudents. The test was administeredto students because they were the major target of the study.

6.2 Student's Test

The main instrument for this study is a test of writing paragraph was given to students; the test was administered to the first year undergraduate students at University of Science and Technology. The main objective of the test was to identify the errors that might be committed by students in English language writing.Students were given

choice to write aparagraph on one of the following topics:

a- Your family.
b- Your favorite sport.
c- Advantages and disadvantages of using mobile.

6.3 Test errors analysis

Classifying and analyzing data collected from the test papers, confirm that the respondents committed spelling, syntactic and lexical errors.

6.3.1 Spelling error

Four main processes or categories which lead to spelling errors have been identified,i.e.   .Omission,addition, substitution and permutation or wrong ordering (Corder, 1973- Mckeating, 1981- Brown 1987) .These four categories are classified in the following tables:

Table (1): Spelling Errors in Percentage:

Error	Respondents	Percentage
Omission	89	34.5%
Addition	81	31.4%
Substitution	66	25.6%
Permutation	22	8.5%
Total	258	100%

Table (1) shows four main categories lead to spelling errors, i.e. omission, addition, Substitution andpermutation or wrong ordering:

Table (2): vowels Errors in percentage:

Error	Respondents	Percentage
Omission	40	35.1%
Addition	33	28.9%
Substitution	24	21.1%
Permutation	17	14.9%
Total	114	100%

Table (2) shows four vowel omissionerrors, for example:
Phon for phone
Mony for money
It shows also vowel addition errors such as:

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Movieefor movie

Contacte for contact

It shows as well vowel substitution, for instance:

Systim for system

Emportant for important

It shows permutation errors which are classified into vowel-consonant, vowel-vowel and consonant-consonant permutation or transposition, as in:

Tow for two

Pieces for pieces

Table (3): Consonants Errors in percentage

Error	Respondents	Percentage
Omission	42	37.%
Addition	35	31.5%
Substitution	26	23.4%
Permutation	08	7.3%
Total	111	100%

Table (3) shows consonants omission errors, for example:

Shoping for shopping

Scool for school

It also shows consonant addition errors as in:

Junck for junk

Banck for bank

This table also shows consonants substitution errors as;

Sities for cities

Packground for background

The table also shows permutation for consonant-consonant such as:

Hubsand for husband

Nihgt for night

6.3.2 Syntactic Errors

Syntactic errors are analyzed according to the scope of English grammar particularly,

tenses, prepositions and articles.

Table (4): Tenses Verbs and Prepositions Errors in percentage:

Table (4) shows tenses verbs and prepositions errors as follow:

Errors	Respondents	Percentage
Wrong uses of tenses	74	50.3%
Verb Be errors	52	35.4%
Preposition errors	21	14.3%
Total	147	100%

1) Tenses

-Present continuous instead of simple present:

-am going to university at 7 o'clock everyday (instead of) I go to university at 7 o'clock every day.

2) Verb to be errors: omission and addition:

-My sister studying medicine (instead of) my sister is studying medicine.

-My father is works in Software Company (instead of) my father works in Software Company.

3) Preposition errors

Table 5 also shows omission,redundant and wrong use of preposition as:

-we travel abroad holiday (insteadof) we travel abroad on holiday.

-we go for shopping every week (instead of) we go shopping every week.

I usually go aerobics on the afternoon (insteadof) I usually go aerobics in the afternoon.

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Table (5) shows articles errorsin percentage:

Type of Error	Students	Percentage
Omission of articles	10	19.2%
Redundant articles	25	46.1%
Wrong choice of articles	17	32.7%
Total	52	100%

Table (5) shows the article errors which are classified into omission, redundant and wrong use of articles as follow:

1- The definite article "the":

a- Omission of the definite article "the"

- My sister plays tennis in Ømorning.

- My sister plays tennis in the morning.

- My friend Ali is Ø best player in our college

- My friend Ali is the best player in our college.

2- The indefinite article "a" / "an":

a- Omission of (a) and(an):

- My father is Ø enginerr.

* My father is an engineer.

- My mother has nice car .

* My mother has a nice car .

b- Redundant uses of the indefinite article:

- Mobile phone gives us an information .

* Mobile phone gives usinformation .

c- Wrong use of articles

- I play football once Ø week.

* I play football once a week.

- I bought a three shirts last month.

* I bought three shirts last month.

6.3.3 Lexical - Semantic Errors

Students tend to translate words by using their (MT) in the target language context , which causes error in translated items , for example , using read instead of study or o'clock for hours as in :

- I <u>read</u> in a university of science andtechnology.

* I study in a university of science andtechnology.

- I am watching TV six <u>o'clock</u>everyday.

*I watch TV six hours everyday

7. Results

The data was collected from the questionnaire and the test. The analysis questionnaire confirmed that students commit errors in their writing compared with other skills and EL teachers must support students when they practice writing inside or outside the classroom .The findings of the test revealed that students are incapable to write unity paragraph with correct spelling grammar and vocabulary .

8. Discussion

This study is dedicated to identify errors committed by respondents after classifying and analyzing data collected from questionnaire and test paper.

Test errors are divided to three categories : spelling, syntactic and lexical – semantic errors most spelling errors are caused by inconsistency of English spelling system since there is no correspondence between letter of alphabet and sounds they represent, for example , the first letter of English alphabet has different pronunciation such as : man , ball , share … etc. Another errors are found in the words have the same pronunciation but different in spelling and meaning such as see and sea or be and bee. Furthermore syntactic errors are analyzed according to the scope of English grammar. Three major categories are identified:tenses, prepositions and articles errors. In third category – semantic errors, notably students tend to translate words by using their MT in the target language context which causes error in translated items.

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For further studiessome suggestions is conducted to identify errors .presumably the strategiesshould be developed in English language syllabus to design textbooks include varieties of student's needs and interests. other suggestion for teachers to help students develop writing skills so as to communicate in writing effectively and overcome problems in writing and other skills generally.

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