

## ***Analysis of grammar errors in the written productions of second year students of Biskra University***

**SAIHI Hanane**  
**University of Biskra**

### **Abstract:**

Language learning is the process of trial and error through which learners form hypotheses, and then they accept them or reject them. The present paper reports the grammar errors of the second year students at Biskra University, and the factors that caused these errors. (N=33) students were to write paragraphs to be used as sources for data collection, and the data analysis was descriptively done. The researcher found 49 grammar errors that were mainly related to omission, addition, forming and ordering. The first factor that caused the students' errors was inter-lingual transfer because they often transferred the system of Arabic language (L1) into English language (L2). The second factor was Intra-lingual transfer, for the students transferred within English itself.

### **المُلخَص:**

تعلم اللغة الأجنبية يتطلب المحاولة و الخطأ. و عليه تم التطرق في هذا البحث إلى الأخطاء النحوية الموجودة في كتابات 33 طالب في أقسام السنة الثانية انجليزية بجامعة بسكرة للسنة الدراسية 2014/2013. كما تم وصف العوامل المسببة لمثل هذه الأخطاء الشائعة بين كتابات الطلبة. و النتائج المحصل عليها أكدت على وجود عاملين أساسين وراء هذه الأخطاء و هما: التحويل من النظام النحوي للغة الأم إلى اللغة الانجليزية؛ أو التحويل في النظام النحوي الانجليزي و ذلك بتعميم قاعدة لغوية على بقية الكلمات و الجمل في نفس اللغة.

## Introduction

Language is a means of communication which functions as a medium to transfer information and thought between people. Hence, English is a means of communication that has become a medium of transfer all over the world. It dominates technology and trade, and it helps its users to cope with scientific advances. In Algeria, learning English became an ultimate objective for the university students who made errors in learning, especially in terms of its grammar use. The students of Biskra University, as a case, seemed to find it difficult to learn English language because its sentence structure is completely different from their mother tongue (L1). This problem appeared clearly in their written productions.

A selection of tutorials was presented to the students on parts of speech and sentence structure of English across three semesters; however, they still made grammar errors in their written productions. This situation motivated this researcher to conduct the present study in order to diagnose and to minimize their problems. Departing from error analysis literature, this researcher attempted to diagnose the common difficulties and matched them to previous findings to be able to assist the participants to decrease them. The researcher has analyzed the written productions of the students in terms of grammar rubric for an attempt to answer the following questions: *what are the kinds of grammar errors common in the paragraphs of second year students of Biskra University? How can teachers of English grammar and written expression assist in diagnosing and minimizing the grammar errors of their students?* To conduct the present study; the researcher classified students' errors in the light of surface strategy taxonomy, which is based on four types of errors omission, addition, formation and ordering (Dulay, Burt and Krashen, 1982),

### 1. Literature review

Error is a noticeable deviation from the grammar of native speaker, reflecting the inter-language competence of the learner (Sujoko, 1989). The learners do then make errors that can be observed, analyzed, and classified to reveal something of the system operating within the learners, led to a surge of study of learners' errors which is called error analysis, (Sujoko, 1989). Error analysis is a type a linguistic analysis that focuses on the process of identifying, and describing the learner's error in target language learning. Accordingly, there are four major sources that cause the learner's error: Inter-

lingual Transfer, Intra-lingual Transfer, Context of Learning and Communication Strategies.

Inter-lingual transfer refers to the transfer from the mother tongue to a foreign language. It represents a major cognitive strategy that learners fall back on when their linguistic means falls short of achieving their communicative ends. Nevertheless, the mother tongue is an additional source for hypothesis formation that the first language learner does not have. The influence of the mother tongue and the pervasiveness of inter-lingual transfer is indisputable, especially in learning situations where students' exposure to a foreign language is confined to a few hours per week of formal classroom instruction, (Mahmoud 2000). Thus, inter-lingual transfer is a strategy that is readily available to the learners to compensate for the inadequacies when they attempt to communicate in foreign language.

Intra-lingual transfer refers to the transfer within the target language itself. When learners have studied L2 for some time, they may transfer previous habits to the development of a new one. Intra-lingual transfer may arise from overgeneralization or over-extension; for instance, when learners study the morphological rule for the past-tense form of verbs, they may generalize from verbs like *worked*, *played*, *kicked*, and they add the inflectional suffix (-ed) to irregular verbs such as *speak*, *say* and write *speaked* and *sayed* instead of *spoke* and *said*. Error analysis reveals that inter-lingual transfer prevails at the early stage, but intra-lingual transfers increase at later stages.

The third and fourth major sources of error can be illustrated in the context of learning and communication strategy. Context refers to the classroom with its teacher and its material. Students often make errors because of a misleading explanation of the teacher, faulty presentation of word structure in a textbook, or a rotary memorized pattern in a drill. On the other hand, a communication strategy is the conscious employment of verbal or non-verbal mechanism for communicating an idea when precise linguistic forms are not available to the learner at a point in communication. In communication strategy, there are five types of strategy: avoidance, Prefabricated Pattern, Cognitive and Personality Style, Appeal to Authority and Language Switch. Avoidance is a common communication strategy that can be broken down into several subcategories: Syntactic or lexical avoidance, Phonological avoidance and Topic avoidance (Sujoko, 1989: 24). Second, another common communication device is to

memorize certain stock phrases or sentences without internalized knowledge of their components. “How much does this cost?” “Where are the toilets?” “I don’t understand you” are the sorts of the prefabricated patterns that a student sometimes learns at the beginning of a language learning experience when the languages structure is not known. Third, cognitive and personality style is a reflective and conservative style in very careful but hesitant production of speech with fewer errors. Fourth, in appeal to authority, the students just memorize without understanding, and they just store the particular word or phrase. Fifth, in language switch, the students use their mother tongue language in the target language because they have limited vocabulary.

Dulay, Burt and Krashen (1982) classified four types of errors based on the surface strategy taxonomy: omission, addition, formation and ordering. First, omission errors are characterized by the absence of items that must be present in a well-formed utterance; for example, *He is good student* (the students omits an indefinite article). Second, addition errors are the opposite of omission errors, for they are characterized by the presence of an item which must not be present in a well-formed utterance; for example, *they didn’t went here* (two items rather than one are marked for the same feature in terms of tense). Third, formation errors are characterized by the use of the unacceptable forms of the morpheme or structure. While in omission errors the item is not supplied at all, in formation errors the learner supplies something, although it is incorrect; for instance, irregular verbs and plurals: *runned* for *ran* or *sheeps* for *sheep*. Fourth, ordering Errors refer to the incorrect placement of a morpheme or group of morphemes in an utterance. Ordering errors occur systematically for both L1 and L2 learners; for example, *What you are thinking about?*

## 2. Research methods

In order to answer the research questions, the researcher followed certain procedure related to sampling, data collection and data analysis.

### 2.1. Sample

In the present study, this researcher has selected randomly a group of 33 participants from a population of 243 during 2013/2014. They were from a mixed and multileveled class: 23 female students and 10 male students. They were all exposed to the same courses along their three semesters of their university studies. They studied a

series of grammar courses related to parts of speech and sentence structure. They were further taught written expression course on the techniques of paragraph writing and techniques of avoiding common sentence errors. The students attended written expression class during 180 minutes allotted per week and so do grammar courses.

**2.2. Instrumentation and data analysis**

According to the nature of the present study, the researcher relied on the written productions of 33 students. The texts were paragraphs about a selection of topics. The students wrote their paragraphs according to what they were taught under the tenets of process-based writing instruction. Based on a descriptive analysis, the researcher classified and described the types of grammar errors that the participants make when they wrote their paragraphs. Each participant wrote a paragraph of no more than 250 words. Regarding to unity, coherence, cohesion, grammar, vocabulary and organization, the researcher analyzed the errors according to the four types: omission, addition, formation and ordering.

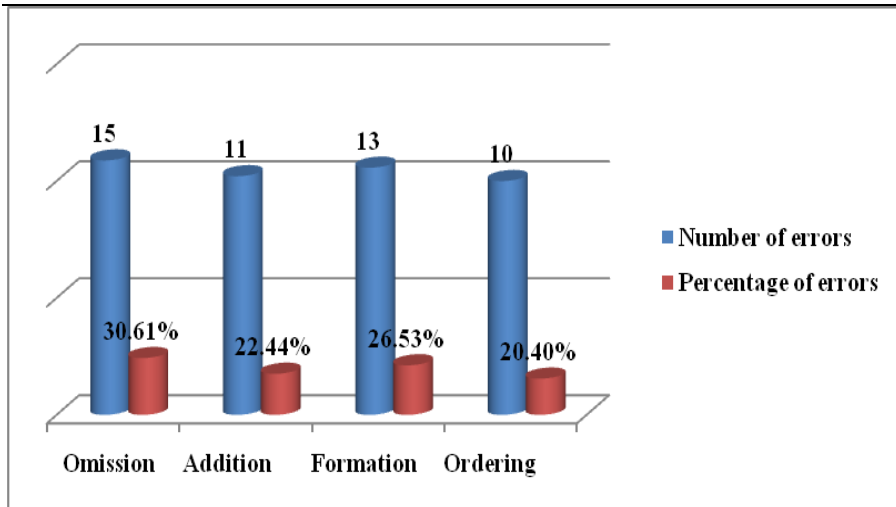
**3. Results**

The table below shows the types of grammar errors committed by second year students of Biskra University, the number of errors and the percentage of errors.

	<b>Number of errors</b>	<b>Percentage of errors</b>
<b>1. Omission</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>30.61%</b>
<b>2. Addition</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>22.44%</b>
<b>3. Formation</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>26.53%</b>
<b>4. Ordering</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>20.40%</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>49</b>	<b>100%</b>

**Table 01: analysis of grammar errors**

The results show that the most common grammar errors that the participants made are related to omission (30.61%), addition (22.44%), formation (26.53%) and ordering (20.40%). These errors are due to two main factors: inter-lingual transfer and intra-lingual transfer, yet each type of errors differs in terms of its factor. The results are also presented in the following graph:



**Figure 01: Analysis of grammar errors**

This figure recapitulates the percentage and number of the errors done by the 33 participants in the present study.

**3.1. Errors of omission**

This category of errors presented a problem for the participants. Most of them omitted some parts of speech and morphemes. They sometimes misused some parts of speech such as: prepositions which presented a challenge in learning English, so “non-native speakers of English find prepositions among the most difficult forms that they have to master in learning the English language” (O’Dowd, 1998: 6).

Types of omission errors	Number of errors	Examples	Correct sentences
1. Prepositions	3	...; example,...	...;(for) example,...
2. Verbs	2	The teacher in the classroom	The teacher (is) in the classroom
3. Articles	3	In...British Parliament...	In (the) British Parliament
4. ‘s’ in third singular	4	..., but it generally include	.., but it generally includes
5. Pronouns (no subject/ fragment)	3	...Make progress.....	It makes progress..
<b>Total</b>	<b>15</b>		

**Table 02: Analysis of omission errors**

The participants omitted some prepositions which do not have an alternative in Arabic; they wrote (*example*) instead of (*for example*) which is in Arabic (Mithal) without preposition. Furthermore, they did not use appropriate prepositions of place such as: IN, ON and AT. Some of the participants used *ON* instead of *IN* ; for example, they wrote “it was a lovely bird singing **on** the tree” instead of “it was a lovely bird singing **in** the tree” Some omissions or misuse of prepositions were due to a negative transfer from Arabic and French; others derived from the Target Language itself. The second type of omission error was related to verb “to be”; the participants wrote it like in Arabic; for example, “the teacher in the classroom” which is “El Oustedh fi El Kism”. *To be* has no equivalent word or phrase in Arabic. Concerning the articles, the participants omitted the articles (the/a/an) because they had problems with the use of articles in English, and their L1 has different rules of article use. Raehanetal. (2006: 123) stated that “mastering the English articles is one of the most daunting tasks facing the non-native speakers - especially when L1 does not have articles.” The omission of the inflectional affixation of ‘s’ in the third singular person shows that the participants over generalized the inflection of the present tense used with the first and second person singular or plural. This indicates the intra-lingual error in using the tenses of English. Meanwhile, the absence of the subject in the sentences indicates L1 interference in which the subject is located after the verb.

**3.2. Errors of addition**

Types of addition errors	Number of errors	Examples	Correct sentences
1. Articles	<b>4</b>	To have <b>a</b> good relations	To have (/) good relations
2. ‘s’ in plural	<b>3</b>	It can help <b>peoples...</b>	It can help <b>people...</b>
3. ‘s’ in third singular	<b>3</b>	The social networks <b>depends</b>	The social networks <b>depend</b>
4. Prepositions	<b>1</b>	All <b>over</b> the world need	All (/) the world need
<b>Total</b>	<b>11</b>		

**Table 03: Analysis of addition errors**

While some participants omitted some parts of speech and morphemes, other participants added them. Table (03) shows that some participants wrote the article (A) with the plural noun, for they

thought that all the countable nouns could be used with the article (a/an). This clearly indicates that the participants were encountering a challenge to use the articles, especially in case of countable and uncountable nouns. Babalola&Akanke (2002) contended that most EFL learners have problems in the acquisition of English morphology because of the inconsistency which is inherent in English language. The researcher further noticed that the overgeneralization and misapplication of (*peoples..*)indicated their ignorance of the exceptions and irregular plurality. Accordingly, L1 interference mainly led to the rest of errors.

**3.3. Errors of formation**

Types of formation errors	Number of errors	Examples	Correct sentences
1. Affixation of (-ed) in the past tense	7	Goed writed	Went Wrote
2. Affixation of irregular plural	6	Oxes chieves	Oxen Chiefs
<b>Total</b>	<b>13</b>		

**Table 04: Analysis of formation errors**

This table discloses that shows the errors committed by the participants in terms of affixation of (-ed) and of the irregular plural. This reflects the overgeneralization of the past tense rule of the regular verb to the irregular verbs. It further indicates that the different tense rules were not completely mastered by the participants although they had learned that these tense forms exist in English grammar. Darus&Ching (2009) contended that it was not surprising that L2 learners faced problems with tenses since English notion of tense was somewhat confusing to the L2 learners who regarded time as a separate entity by itself.

**3.4. Errors of ordering**

Types of addition errors	Number of errors	Examples	Correct sentences
1.Order of modifiers	5	<b>The room very important</b> is the kitchen	<b>The most important room</b> is the kitchen.
2.Order of question	3	How old your best friend <b>is</b> ?	How old <b>is</b> your best friend?
3.Order of negative sentence	2	To <b>not</b> go to...	<b>Not</b> to go
<b>Total</b>	<b>10</b>		

**Table 05: Analysis of ordering errors**



Table (05) indicates that the participants committed errors when they arranged modifiers, questions and negative sentences due to L1 and L2 interference. They placed modifiers after the antecedents; for example, they wrote (the room the very important) which is in Arabic (El ghourfa el aktharahammiya...). They further put (not) after 'to' like in Arabic; for instance, (li ademedhahab). The participants showed misapplication of the order of words in a question, and they did not invert the subject and the verb, so they overgeneralized the order of the positive statement to the interrogative sentence.

### **1. Discussion**

This study showed that the second year students of Biskra University had problems with basic English grammar rules. The researcher analyzed the errors and matched them to the factors contributing to their commitment of errors: inter-lingual transfer and intra-lingual transfer. The participants often transferred the system of the L1 into L2. In other words, intra-lingual transfer occurred when they transferred from L2 to L2. The results clearly indicated that the students are encountering problems mainly with articles, prepositions, tenses, nouns, irregular verbs, and word order. In general, the largest number of errors was articles and prepositions.

To sum-up, teachers of grammar may explain the forms and rules, and then drill students on them. This may lead the students to produce correct forms on exercises and tests, but they consistently make errors when they try to use the language in oral or written context. As a result, the researcher suggests that the communicative competence model is the model that recognizes that overt grammar instruction helps students acquire the language more efficiently, but it incorporates grammar teaching and learning into the larger context of teaching students to use the language. Grammar teachers who integrate this model into their grammar classes need to know how to accomplish communication tasks in a real-like situation. Consequently, a grammar teacher can help reduce grammar errors in the students' written productions.

### **Conclusion**

Based on the present study, this researcher concluded that error analysis is required in developing or increasing the techniques for teaching English. By analyzing the errors, a teacher can concentrate on the materials in which most learners make errors; teachers can also evaluate their success or failure in teaching English grammar. As a

result, they can improve their teaching techniques by preparing systematic materials. Based on the results obtained via analyzing the data, the main conclusion is that mother tongue interference can be the main cause of errors in foreign language learning, and then comes intra-lingual transfer factor. Diagnosing these errors should be involved in designing courses of grammar and written expression at the level of their warm-up activities and course objectives.

### **Bibliography**

- Aisyiah, A. (2009). *Students' grammatical errors analysis in writing English composition (a and fluency of 12 writing. Journal of second language writing, 12 (3)*, 267-296.
- and writing. New York: Routledge.
- Babalola, E. T. & Akande, A. T. (2002). Some linguistic problems of Yoruba learners of English in Nigeria. *ES: Revista de Filologia Inglesa* 24, 245-257.
- Bitchener, J., & Ferris, D. (2012). *Written corrective feedback in second language acquisition case study in class XI of SMK BPP Bandung*. Indonesia University of Education: Unpublished.
- Chandler, J. (2003). The efficacy of various kinds of error feedback for improvement in accuracy
- Darus., S & Ching K. H. (2009). Common errors in written English essays of form one Chinese students: A case study. *European Journal of Social Sciences*, 10, 242-253.
- Dulay, H., Burt M. and Krashen S. (1982). *Language two*. New York: OUP.
- Mahmoud, A. (2000). Modern standard Arabic vs non-standard Arabic: where do Arab students transfer from? *language, culture and curriculum*, 13, 126-136.
- O'Dowd, E. M. (1998). *Prepositions and particles in English: A discourse-functional account*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Raehan, N., Chodorow, M., & Leacock, C. (2006). Detecting errors in English article usage of non-native speakers. *Natural language engineering, 12*, 115-129.
- Sujoko. 1989. *Error analysis*. Surakarta: Sebelas Maret University Press.