



Error Analysis of Jordanian First - Year University Students' English Language Writing at Arab Open University – Case Study

¹Naima Al-husban

¹ Educational studies program, Arab Open University, Jordan Branch

Received: 20 Oct. 2017, Revised: 21 Nov. 2017, Accepted: 06 Dec. 2017, Published: 01 (January) 2018

Abstract: The present study aims at analyzing 33 English paragraphs written by first -year students at Arab Open University in Jordan. The participants are from different academic majors, and, all the participants are English foreign language students and face challenges in learning the English language. The tool of the current study was the participants' written paragraphs. All errors committed by the participants were analyzed and classified into different categories. The results showed that the most frequent error category was omission and addition, and the errors committed by the participants are attributed to intralingual difficulties due to the deformation of language learning as well as limited interlingual errors. In the light of the obtained results, several recommendations and pedagogical implications were suggested in order to help instructors and teachers in general in their efforts in lessening the obstacles regarding writing paragraphs in the English language.

Keywords: Error analysis, omission, addition, disinformation, interlingual, intralingual.

1. Introduction

The English language has recently become the primary language of science and communication. Therefore, the education system in every country tries to develop the English language skills of their students (Akbari, 2015). The increased efforts exerted by the governments to improve English language skills have not led to dissatisfying results, but sometimes the level of students after learning the English language for 11 to 12 years is not up to the required level; additionally, students may suffer from deficiencies in communicating their ideas.

The incompetence in language learning is obvious in all language skills, especially in students' writing. That is, students' results in both national or international exams revealed the English language level of students no longer improved, especially in writing (Phenix Center For Economics and Informatics Studies, 2014).

Writing is deemed as one of the most daunting and challenging skills, not only for students of English as a foreign language (EFL) but also for native speakers of English; this skill requires long and intensive instruction that pays attention to the proficiency of writing (Ulla, 2014). Therefore, examining the types of errors that learners made while writing could provide hints at what lies behind these deficiencies.

Error analysis (EA) is defined by Richards and Schmidt (2002) as "the study and analysis of the errors made by FL learners". According to Corder (1974), who was the first to advocate the significance of errors in learners' writing, error analysis is beneficial in learning English language due to its ability to highlight the weaknesses in the performance of teachers, students, or the education system as a whole. Similarly, Richards and Schmidt (2002) stated that EA could be implemented in order to identify the methods students use while learning



the English language, study causes of learners' errors, and determine the difficulties in language learning. Brown (1980), in turn, defined error analysis as the process used to observe, analyze, and classify the deviations from the rules of the language and then show the systems operated by learners. Similarly, Crystal (1987) considered error analysis the method that could be used to identify, classify, and systematically interpret unacceptable forms produced by EFL learners. It is clear that researchers accorded on how to analyze errors by performing several acts like observing, analyzing, and classifying errors and explaining reasons for making these errors.

It is important in this context to differentiate between errors and mistakes. According to Brown (1980) and Corder (1974), mistakes refer to a failure to utilize a known system correctly and are caused by inattention and fatigue, and can be self-corrected. Errors show a noticeable deviation and cannot be self-corrected, and they are caused by insufficient knowledge of the language system. This sheds light on the importance of studying errors due to their reflection of the competence level of learners that is what learners actually know about the language. Meanwhile, mistakes reflect the performance level of learners: what slips learners uttered although they may know the language system.

In this vein, errors are considered significant, that is without committing errors, learning couldn't take place; they are essential to the development of language. This positive view towards errors is due to Corder (1967), who contended that errors are important. In his opinion, analyzing errors systematically made by learners makes it possible to determine areas that need reinforcement in teaching and they give proofs of how language is learnt. They also provide feedback for both teachers and learners. This idea is reinforced by Langit-Dursin (2008), that is, errors committed by learners constitute normal language progress and learning and they indicate that students try to explore the rules and the patterns of the language.

It is worth to mention in this context that Richards (1971) as cited in Alahmadi (2014)

stated that learners demonstrate various kinds of errors relating to grammar, writing, and semantic. Therefore, he sheds light on the sources of errors as follows: interlingual errors and development errors. Interlingual errors result from the use of elements from one language while speaking or writing another, that is, they are caused by mother tongue interference; Intralingual errors reflect general characteristics of learning rules, such as faulty generalization, incomplete application of rules, and failure to learn conditions under which rules apply. Developmental errors occur when learners attempt to build up hypotheses about the target language based on limited experience. The second and the third types of errors take place when learners learn English as a foreign language and they haven't mastered the knowledge or due to the difficulty of the piece of knowledge of language. Khansir (2012) added that there are other sources of errors besides interlingual and intralingual errors. They are: ignorance of rule restriction, occurring as a result of failure to observe the restrictions or existing structures; incomplete application of rules, arising when the learners fail to fully develop a certain structure required to produce acceptable sentences; and false concepts hypothesized, deriving from faulty comprehension of distinctions in the target language.

Based on those facts, it is necessary to focus on learners' errors and analyzing them as they help predict the challenges involved in learning a second language. In this way, teachers become recognizant of the difficult areas learners face and devote special care to them. According to Khansir (2012), error analysis is deemed a type of linguistic analysis that focuses on errors committed by learners while they are exposed to the language. In a similar vein, Amara (2015) clarified that error analysis is one of the most influential theories of second language learning, and it is concerned with the study of unacceptable forms and structures produced by learners while learning a foreign language. On the other hand, Brown (2000) defined error analysis as "the process to observe, analyze and clarify the deviations of the rules of the



second language and then to reveal the systems operated by learners.”

Furthermore, conducting error analysis requires a systematic way of classifying errors into categories. According to Tono (2003), errors could be classified into two types: linguistic, such as phonology, grammar, and lexis, and surface structure taxonomy. Surface structure taxonomy includes four ways:

- Omission, that is, learners tend to omit function words rather than content words, such as the verb “be”.
- Addition, which includes regularization in which learners overlook exceptions and spread rules to domains where they do not apply, for example, using the incorrect “drinked” for “drank”.
- Double marking, which means being unaware of certain linguistic changes in some structures for example, “he doesn’t play chess” or “he didn’t took photos.”
- Disordering mistakes, in which students arrange the right forms in the wrong order, such as, adjectives and interrogatives. Dulay et al. (1982) stated that disordering is the result of learners relying on carrying out word for word translations of the native language when speaking or writing.

It is worth saying here that many famous studies aimed at identifying error patterns to design remedial programs to lessen their committing of these errors like Lunsford and Lunsford (2008), and Sloan (1990). However, they have not investigated the reasons why these errors take place. Therefore, this study tried to answer this question. According to Spada and Lightbown (1999), it is hard to investigate the sources of errors made by learners and they sometimes tend to avoid using such language or over apply such rules to reduce the occurrence of these errors. This makes the task of identifying the sources of errors more difficult for researchers. Therefore, it is the responsibility of the teachers to encourage students to write regardless of their performance to be able to identify the source of their errors.

Related studies

Therefore, the study in this field is of paramount importance as the body of research reveals that researchers are interested in exploring reasons and sources of learners’ errors. For example, Sarfraz (2011) investigated the errors committed by 50 Pakistani students in written essays; the study found that the majority of errors the students made resulted from learners’ intralingual process and some errors resulted from mother tongue interference “interlingual process”. Darus and Subramaniam (2009) examined errors in 72 Malay students, and they identified six types of errors: singular/plural forms, verb tense, word choice, preposition, subject-verb agreement, and word order. Additionally, Ridha (2012) studied 80 writing essays of EFL college students and the results showed that most students’ errors were due to mother tongue transfer as they depended on it in expressing their ideas. Furthermore, Karim et al. (2015) examined the errors on the usage of verbs in English essay of the comparison and contrast method written by 36 EFL learners in Bangladesh. Results show that students committed errors of agreement with verbs, missing of verbs, misusing verb tense, and misusing past tense after infinitive. The study revealed that these errors lead to miscommunication. Based on these results, it is recommended that attention should be given to the analysis of mother tongue influence and whether it causes errors of verb forms. In the same context, Wu and Garza (2014) conducted a study to identify errors made by EFL Chinese learners by analyzing the nature and the distribution of their writing errors and the causes of those errors. The study revealed that participants made more errors on interlingual or transfer errors than on intralingual or developmental errors. That is, students used their mother tongue habits, rules, and patterns in the second language writing. However, students also had intralingual errors due to overgeneralizations and partial exposure to the target language. The study recommended that teachers should understand what grammar is difficult for EFL learners so that teachers can include these errors in their teaching. For



teachers explicit instruction on different errors is needed, and teachers should provide context where fluent and accurate language use should be modeled to learners.

Alhaysony (2012) also examined written samples of 100 first-year female Arabic-speaking EFL students in the University of Ha'il. The findings showed that students made a considerable number of errors in their use of articles, especially the omission errors. This study had mixed findings because these errors included interlingual and intralingual transfer. In the Jordanian context, several studies have been conducted to examine errors made by learners, such as Tahaineh (2010), who conducted an error analysis study to find out the types of errors Jordanian first, second, and third- year university EFL students made in the use of prepositions. Data was collected from free compositions written by a stratified random sample of 162 students whose educational and linguistic backgrounds were similar. The study found mother tongue interference is the major source of committing errors, that is, students use proper prepositions if they are used in their mother tongue, but they select the improper prepositions if equivalents are not used in their mother tongue.

All in all, developing students' writing skills is of a major concern of all who are responsible for the educational sector, and error analysis could be a means for exploring the sources of committing errors, thereby teachers could know how and why students study and produce utterances and how to help them lessen these errors. Therefore, this study aims at identifying the types of errors students commit while writing and to determine the causes of these errors.

The significance of the study

The significance of the study lies in its attempt to investigate errors made by first- year university students at Arab Open University. Errors should be viewed from a positive perspective due to reflecting the systematic attempts of learners to learn the language. This perspective is useful for teachers, curriculum developers, and supervisors to have a comprehensive idea about how far the

learners progress. Furthermore, it is important for researchers as it unveils the strategies and techniques learners employ to master the language and the sources of committing errors. Therefore, the results of this study provide instructors at universities with the information they need to identify suitable strategies that students may utilize to learn the target language. It might provide researchers with insights in how to tackle areas of development to eradicate errors.

Research questions

This article aims at answering the following questions:

- What are the most and the least common categories of errors made in students' writing according to the error classification of Dulay, Burt, and Krashen (1982)?
- Are Jordanian students' errors due to interlingual or intralingual factors?

2. Research Methodology

Sample of the study

The sample of the study consisted of the students who registered for the course EL099 - English Orientation at Arab Open University, taught by the researcher. The course is a prerequisite that all incoming students are required to take during their first year of study if they don't score well on the Oxford Online Placement Test (OOPT).

The Arab Open University has several branches Jordan one of them, it adopts the concept of blended learning, whereby the traditional classroom face-to-face lecturing is blended with modern techniques of learning that maintain direct and constant contact with students via the "learning management system" and multimedia and computing laboratories. The study is conducted on a group of 53 students. Out of 53 students, 33 students participated in the study. Most students were in the first semester of their study.

Data Collection

The study examined errors types usually committed by EFL students when writing. Students were asked to write about different



topics related to the themes studied in the textbook, for example, personal statement, university life, mobile phones, and the best or the worst day in their life. They were allocated 50 minutes for writing a composition on one of the mentioned topics. The participants were asked to approve of conducting the study and analyzing errors committed in the compositions; they were told that the results would not affect their grades, and that they would be investigated to identify the errors types committed by students only to help them overcome these errors in the after time.

Validity and reliability of the composition writing

To establish the validity of the research instrument, the researcher used experts' validation. That is, the topics of writing were studied by three language experts and they approved that the topics were taken from themes appropriate to students' level and skills. On the other hand, reliability achieved by scorer reliability coefficients for the scoring of the writing compositions. It is the consistency of scoring by more than one scorer. Thereby, to ensure inter-coder reliability, Cohen's Kappa (Cohen, 1960) was used. The scoring process was performed by two instructors of English who scored the students' compositions. The scoring process started by the researcher and the other two scorers reading the writing compositions three times to identify writing error categories, which have been identified by reviewing the related literature. The researcher adopted the error categories proposed by Dulay, Burt, and Krashen (1982); they described their trend in categorizing errors as the way how learners alter surface structures of the language when they use it in an incorrect way. It includes four ways in which learners change the target forms:

- Omission: learners tend to omit function words rather than content words.
- Addition: this is the over use of certain language rules; it contains subtypes like overlooking exceptions and spreading to domains where they do not apply and thereby producing the incorrect utterances like "goed" instead of

"went". It also includes double marking, which means not deleting certain items that are required in some linguistic constructions but not in others, for example, "he did not went".

- Misinformation: using the wrong form of a structure or morpheme, such as regularization, forms like using the subject pronoun as an object pronoun, and alternating forms like using no + verb instead of do +base verb.
- Disordering: learners select the right forms to use in the right context, but they arrange them in the wrong order, for example, adverbials, interrogatives, and adjectives.

Data analysis

The researcher adopted Corder's procedures in analyzing errors. That is, Corder (1967) proposed five steps to analyze errors; they are the following: collecting the writing compositions, identifying the errors in the writing compositions, describing the errors, explaining errors, and evaluating errors.

The procedures mentioned above were followed in this research by collecting participant's writing compositions, identifying their writing errors, and describing, explaining, and evaluating those errors.

Results and discussions

Table (1) shows the number of errors found in the paragraphs analyzed, including all the error categories, and their percentage of frequency.

Table (1) Number of Errors found in the paragraphs analyzed

Error category	Number of errors	Percentage
Omission	103	31.3%
Addition	82	24.9%
Misinformation	76	23.2%
Disordering	68	20.6%
Total	329	100%



After analyzing the data, the four error categories were identified, including omission, addition, misinformation, and disordering, as well as each category's percentage of the errors committed by students. Among these four types of errors, the omission and addition categories of errors were the most committed by students (31.3% and 24.9% respectively) and disordering and misinformation categories were the least committed (20.6% and 23.2%, respectively).

Table (2) Samples of the Main Error Construction

No	The incorrect sentence	Error category	Explanations
1	I born , I hard-working, I strong, university life more different than school life, I from Jordan, my work so beautiful, I 20 years old, I living Amman, when 6 years old, the best hobbies driving, I interesting, it good in math, mobile phone the world small, there	Omission	Students omitted function words rather than content words.
2	I selled, she taked, she is finished, she did not played, they do not knows, riding horses and swimming they is my favourite hobbies, Tala she have 8years old, it is make, I am study at university.	Addition	These errors resulted from the exaggerated use of certain rules
3	Are they go to Aqaba? me house is nice, I told I, do you are study? No study enough, him misuses the computer, there funny swimming.	Misinformation	The use of the wrong form of a structure

4	Tell me where did you study, when you did travel, I strong, he arrive late, a person have, I liking help, the mobile phone pomb the world, a mobile phone make easy, I can often my gmail on mobile,	Disordering	Learners select the right forms to use in the right context but they arrange them in the wrong order, these errors are the results of word for word translations
---	--	-------------	--

The samples of errors identified in table (2) show that the sources of errors committed by the participants in this study are attributed to their carelessness, interference from the students' first language, translation from the first language, overgeneralization, and incomplete application of rules. According to Norrish (1983) students easily committed errors as they have one source to express their ideas, which is the language. According to research, intralingual and interlingual factors are the main sources of errors. Interlingual errors or "mother tongue influence are committed due to the influence of the native language, which interferes with the target language learning, so the students use their knowledge of the first language in learning the second language. Errors made due to this source are those like the following: plus my mobile voice clear, picture big, the save good, mobile phone جعل (made) the world small, mobile phones يوفر به (provide) applications. Intralingual errors are caused by the language itself due to various sources which are the following:

- Incomplete rule application by simplifying the use of complicated rules, such as "do you know what is the weather"
- Overlooking the exceptions to rules, such as "a person have"
- Overusing the rules or overgeneralization due to the fear of being wrong, such as "Tala she is tidy", "I was liking", "me toy is nice", "Huda that is tall".
- Errors resulting from the way in which teachers explained the language and gave practice opportunities and not giving correct



models of the target language such as” I strong”, I am responsible about”, “university life more different than school life”, “my work so beautiful” , “I from Jordan”, “I be”, “I born”, “mobile phone it good in”.

This indicated that the most prominent source of making errors is intralingual due to the deformation of language learning as well as limited interlingual errors. The results of this study are consistent with the results of several studies like Sarfraz (2011), Ridha (2012), Karim et al (2015), and Alhaysony (2012) in that students made several types of errors related to different sources, such as interlingual and intralingual. The results of the studies of Tahaineh (2010) and Wu and Garza (2014) contradicted with the results of the current study in that they identified the main source of committing errors as interlingual; students use their knowledge of the first language in learning the second language.

3. Conclusion

Learning English as a second language is an accumulated process, and committing errors is inevitable. Errors should be viewed as learning taking place but encountering such difficulties and challenges due to the teaching process that students are forced to use their mother language to bridge the gap and continue his/her communication. Therefore, findings related to this study can be utilized to identify what students still need to learn; and how to improve their process of learning; the strategies and methods they should use when learning the language; why students add, omit, use wrong forms or words, or disorder structures and sentences; and how to eliminate the use of the mother language in learning a second language. Additionally, the results show how the effectiveness of the teachers in the primary and secondary schools on students; after twelve years of learning English language. Students still commit errors related to omission, addition, misinformation, and disordering, and their mother tongue interferes in their learning of the second language. The results of this study are of paramount importance for

instructors at universities to view their students’ errors positively and not as signs of failure. Thereby, they should implement effective teaching materials and techniques that help students overcome their weaknesses in learning the language. This is actually implemented by Arab Open University by having a special focus on teaching writing skill and giving it good weight of the total marks: 40%. It applies to three courses at the university. Therefore, it is recommended that researchers conduct research about the errors committed by students after completing the three language courses at university to identify their effectiveness in eliminating students’ errors. Furthermore, the results of the current study are beneficial for instructors of advanced language courses by helping them prepare effective teaching material that tries to overcome and avoid the causes and sources of committing errors.

References

- Alahmadi, N. S. (2014). Errors Analysis: A Case Study of Saudi Learner’s English Grammatical Speaking Errors. **Arab World English Journal**, 5(4), 84-98.
- Alhaysony, M. (2012). An analysis of article errors among Saudi female EFL students: A case study *Asian Social Science*, 8(12), 55-66.
- Amara, N.(2015). Errors Correction in Foreign Language Teaching, *The Online Journal of New Horizons in Education*, 5(3), 58-68.
- Akbari, Zahra. (2015). Current challenge in teaching and learning English for EFL learners: The case of junior high school and high school, *Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 199, 394 – 401. Doi10.1016-j.sbspro.2015.07.524
- Andrian, A. (2015). An Error Analysis of EFL Students’ English Writing. *English Education Journal*, 6(4), 511-523.
- Brown, H.D. (1980) *Principles of Language Learning and Teaching*. New Jersey:Prentice-Hall Inc.
- Corder, S. P. (1974). Error Analysis. In J. P. B. Allen and S. P. Corder (eds.) *Techniques in Applied Linguistics (The Edinburgh Course in Applied*



- Linguistics: 3). London: Oxford University Press (Language and Language Learning), pp 122-154.
- Dulay, H., Burt, M., & Krashen, S.D. (1982). *Language Two*. New York: Oxford University Press
- Hasyim, S. (2002). Error Analysis in the Teaching of English, *Jurusan Sastra Inggris*, University Kristen Petra, 4(1), 42-50.
- Karim, S. M. S., Fathema, F., & Hakim, A. (2015). Common errors on the usage of verbs in English composition: A case study of Bangladeshi EFL learners. *Asian Journal of Educational Research*, 3(2).1-7
- Khansir, A. (2012). Error Analysis and Second Language Acquisition, *Theory and Practice in Language Studies*, 2(5), 1027-1032.
- Langit-Dursin, R. (2008). English as Second Language – learning from mistakes. Retrieved on the 30th of Jan, 2017 from www.thejakartapost.com
- Lunsford, A. A., & Lunsford, K. J. (2008). **Mistakes Are a fact of life: A national comparative study**. *College Composition and Communication*, 59(4), 781–806 (2008).
- Norrish, J. (1983). **Language learners and their Errors**. London: Macmillan Press.
- Phenix Center For Economics and Informatics Studies, (2014). **Improving the Quality of Primary Public Education in Jordan, Policy Paper**. Retrieved on the 24th of August, 2017 from <http://www.phenixcenter.net.en.home>
- Jordan, Policy Paper. Retrieved on the 24th of August, 2017 from <http://www.phenixcenter.net/en/home>.
- Richards, J. C., and Schmidt, R. (2002). **Dictionary of Language Teaching & Applied Linguistics**. Pearson Education Limited. London: Longman.
- Richards, J.C (1974). *Error Analysis: Perspectives on Second Language Acquisition*, London: Longman.
- Sloan, G. (1990). Frequency of errors in essays by college freshmen and by professional writers. **College Composition and Communication**, 41(3), 199–308.
- Lightbown, P.M. and N. Spada. 1999. **How Languages are Learned**. Oxford: Oxford, University Press.
- Tahaineh, Y. S. (2010). Arab EFL university students' errors in the use of prepositions. **Modern Journal of Applied Linguistics**, 1(6), 76-112.
- Ulla, M.B. (2014). Analysis of the Language Errors in Writing among BSEE and AB English Students, **European Journal of Academic Essays**, 1(3), 39-47.
- Wu, H. P., & Garza, E. V. (2014). Types and Attributes of English Writing Errors in the EFL Context—A Study of Error Analysis. **Journal of Language Teaching and Research**, 5(6), 1256-1262.