

# A study of some grammatical errors made by arab learners of english research prop...

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## **Problem statement**

Arab students learning English language in UK universities often commit grammatical errors in their written English. The reasons are far other than issues associated to the fact that the students are non-native English speakers and that is why this research study focuses on thorough investigation of the patterns of Arabic students' grammatical errors in their writing.

## **Aim of research**

The aim of this research study is to identify patterns of grammatical errors committed by Arab learners of English, to explain the causes of these patterns, and as well, make recommendations on the plausible ways of addressing the problems. The research seeks to attract the attention of English teachers since the recommendation will also focus on ways of improving the process of teaching and learning of English in ESL classrooms.

## **Importance of research study**

Cohen (23) notes that it is not that easy to strengthen language skills of native students, and it is even more difficult to strengthen the language skills of non-native students. As a result, an increasing interest in conducting research studies that provide description of the performance of English students is gaining much attention. Through such descriptions, the problem areas faced by learners can be identified and pointed to relevant stakeholders including textbook writers, syllabus designers, and teachers to enable them in focusing their attention on the problems that impede learning

of English as a second language. Furthermore, detecting the errors will help teachers design remedial exercises in such a way that will improve the learning outcomes of Arab students.

Several error analysis research studies which seek to identify and analyze the grammatical errors made by non-native learners of English language have been conducted by many a researcher. Despite this fact, a room for further investigation in the area under study still exists, and therefore, this particular research hopes to inspire other researchers to carry out research on error analysis or rather evaluate the reliability or credibility of research already conducted.

## **Research design and methodology**

The research design suited for this study is descriptive because the study will systematically develop a description of the characteristics and facts behind the reasons for grammatical errors made by Arab learners of English.

## **Research approach and justification of the selected approach**

The approach to be used in the study is error analysis that involves investigating the mistakes committed by Arab students of English in order to identify patterns of errors and come up with ways of addressing the problem. The error analysis approach is based on the cognitive movement in psychology and the generative transformational theory in language studies. These theories sought to develop a different perception on the errors committed by students during teaching and learning of the English language. Before the emergence of this perception, errors were banned and expected

to be avoided at all levels of language learning. However, according to Wei (10), errors are considered a student's own way of approximating the real system of a language, and they should therefore be treated as surface phenomenon. If there are no errors, then it can be hard for language researchers to gain information relating to the linguistic system of students.

Error analysis has been described to have benefits in three respects. The first one is to the researcher, then to the teacher, and lastly to the learner.

Analysis of errors according to Corder (23) provides insight to the nature of the English language, learner's linguistic system, and the process of teaching and learning English. These reasons form the basis for the selection of error analysis approach in answering the research problem.

## **Research questions**

The nature of the task requires some questions that must be answered in order to ensure a systematic and an objective approach to the research. The questions that need to be answered are:

1. Does the manner of teaching English in Arab schools really address the grammatical problems of students?
2. Are the grammatical errors different in kind or fall together structurally?
3. Does the Arabic language have any influence on students' use of English?
4. Does the time a student spend in school have any influence on his/her level of proficiency?

## **Method of data collection, procedure, and technique**

One principle source will form the main source of data collection for this research study. The researcher has noted that the number Arab students studying English in UK universities has significantly increased, and therefore the selection of one university where the data will be collected from is going to be through non-random sampling. Essentially, the researcher will identify the university with the highest enrolment of Arab students taking English as a second language. The researcher will then take the opportunity by using the students from this particular university as the main source of data. Using a university with high enrolment of Arab students in the English literature, and translation department is important to gain a large population sample, which will also increase the accuracy of the findings.

The tools to be used in data collection will be written scripts. The selected sample students will be enrolled in paragraph writing session where the researcher will give sufficient number of students free composition tests. There will be a criteria expected to be followed by the students during the composition test. The students will be asked to write only one essay that is made up of approximately 250 words in length. The students will also be expected to pay attention to certain aspect of the written work. These aspects include organization, vocabulary, grammar, cohesion, coherence, and unity.

## **Sample population**

The sample population for this research is Arab students enrolled in English language course in a UK university. The students will be selected across the

undergraduate level meaning that some of the participants will be first year students in their second semester while others will be second years, third years, and fourth years. The researcher is expected to enroll 60 students into the free composition test implying that the sample population will constitute 60 Arab students of English. The participants will be selected from different Arab speaking background in order to effectively answer the question related to the influence of Arabic language on the use of English in written communication.

Sampling method to be used is random sampling where the researcher will select a representative unit from the entire population. This sampling method will help the researcher eliminate biasness, as the results from the analysis will be used to make inferences about the whole population of Arab students of English in UK. The criteria to be used in sampling the participants will involve the following steps:

defining the population of interest to this study,

obtaining the list of population,

establishing sample size which encompasses all the characteristics of the whole population,

and lastly selecting the representative sample from the total population.

## **Data analysis**

The researcher will analyze and classify the compositions. The errors identified will be analyzed according the categories of linguistic errors identified by Dulay and Burt (12). The categories are four and they include discourse, syntax and morphology, lexicon and semantics, and orthography.

The common areas of errors expected to be analyzed include morphology, voice, articles, prepositions, and tenses.

### **Significance of the research study**

This study is expected to make a huge contribution to the development of pedagogic strategies because it seeks to make investigations into the process of language. By investigating the process of language, language teachers as well as course designers, will be able to make informed decisions on the particular areas of grammar to focus attention and the nature of attention to give in these areas. At the same time, textbook writers will be informed about the critical areas of English language that pose problems to ESL learners. This will be addressed in the English language textbooks and will be written with the needs of the students in mind. Therefore, the study will not only be helpful to Arab students but also to the entire population of non-native English speakers.

### **Literature review**

The research will rely on review of secondary materials to identify further need for executing the study. Through review of secondary data, the researcher will establish the greater need for the research as well as support similar studies that have been conducted earlier. The materials to be reviewed in this section are relevant data for the topic under investigation and they are retrieved from credible academic databases including Emerald insight and ProQuest research library.

Researchers have investigated the topic on the errors made by Arab students learning English as a second language. The research studies have been conducted in several of the English speaking countries of the world. O'marley (26) did a comparative study of Arabic and English while focusing on three areas: grammar, vocabulary, and phonology. In attempting to predict the some of the problems faced by Arab students learning English as a foreign language, he asserted that there are little linguistic problems among the students. This study implied that the there is little difference between Arabic and English languages concerning phonology, grammar, and vocabulary. Naiman (45) conducted his research and recorded conversations and written scripts of participants. He asserted that Arabic students make errors in their speech and written English language communication because of the influence of Arabic language. This particular study contrasted with that of Richards (56) says. Richard contends the lack of difference between English language and Arabic language that can affect the learning process of Arabic students learning English. However, Richard did not take into account the possibility of the errors emerging from other factors such as methods used in teaching, the language teacher, and language teaching materials.

Emam also analyzed written composition of the Arabic learners of English language. However, the focus of his population mainly constituted secondary school learners. He managed to identify recurring errors and classified them in order to predict the areas that seemed problematic to the students. In his study, he covered mainly the aspects of articles, adjectives, pronouns, preposition, verbs, nouns, articles, and spelling. The findings of the study



were concurrent to earlier studies where mother tongue had little influence to the committing of errors by students. In his study, he was able to diagnose and identify common lexicon and grammatical problems in written English by Arabic students from Northern Sudan. In addition to diagnosing the problem, he also managed to make recommendation to the process of pedagogy.

In a recent research study of the topic, Brown (208) says that interference by the first language is the main barrier to the second language system.

Because of this interference, foreign students learning English as a second language will always make errors in their writing. Students having contact with a foreign language will always find some of the features of that particular language easy to grasp. At the same time, some other features of that language will be difficult for them. Stockwell, Bowen and Martin (1965) says that the features which appear similar to a student's native language will always be simple for the student while those that appear different from the student's native language will always be difficult to grasp. Most students find themselves using the concept of transfer theory during their learning of English as a second language. This involves the use knowledge in their native language in learning English as a second language.

Wei was able to present data providing evidence of the use of transfer theory by Chinese students while learning English as a second language. The participants who were mainly Chinese students made syntactic transfer from their native language to English language. The study focused mainly on five types of errors commonly related to syntactic transfer from first language to

second language. These areas include confusion in verb transitivity, failure or confusion in use of the relative clause, inability to express the existential function in its correct structure, wrongful adverb placement, and inability to have control of copula. According to the findings of this study, a significant number of the students tend to first think in their native language, Chinese, before writing in English. The study analyzed the inter-language strings identified from the participants and was able to detect similarities with the Chinese language. This literature material is relevant for this study in the sense that the researcher will also be able to identify whether the first language has an impact on learning of English as a second language by the Arab students in UK.

According to Abushihab, El-Omari and Tobat (545), the use of error analysis in understanding the linguistic systems of learners and contributing towards pedagogy has formed part of language research for long. Error analysis has two basic functions; the first one is theoretical, while the second function is more of practical. Theoretical function of error analysis focuses mainly on methodology and it describes the knowledge of the learner concerning the target language. It helps the researcher to identify the relations between teaching and knowledge the learner has received. At the same time, the researcher can identify the psychological processes concerning the knowledge and teaching received by the learner. The other function of error analysis is the practical function that seeks to create remedial action or pedagogical solution to the identified mismatch from the theoretical aspect.

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