Investigating the Role of Grammatical Errors Encountered by Secondary School Students in Writing Composition

YAHYA ABDALLHA ADOW
Al-Gadaref State - Ministry of Education Secondary School
HASSAN MAHILL ABDALLAH HASSAN
College of Education
Sudan University of Science & Technology

Abstract:

This study aims at investigating grammatical errors encountering secondary schools English language learners in writing composition. The study adopted the Descriptive Analytical Method of research. The researcher designed for his instrumentation a test on writing composition for the students in addition to a questionnaire for ELT teachers. The writing composition test aimed measuring the students' abilities in dealing with the difficulties posed by grammatical errors in writing composition.

Key words: investigating, searching, grammatical errors, grammar mistakes

INTRODUCTION

The current status of the English language in the Sudan shows that, it is declining and is losing its former significance in the educational environment in the country, because the purposes for teaching English language have been changed.

Writing skill is major skill but it has been given little attention in the mid-sixties. In their analysis of the complexity of the writing process and its impact on the cognitive level, Hayes and Flower(1981:368)stated that: " Writing for EFL learners is a complex skill that is learnt rather than acquired " Thus writing which requires   using grammatical rules is not an easy task for both EFL learners and even native speakers. EFL learners find it, more difficult to know, first about grammatical rules and then write it in a language which is not their mother tongue.

Composition writing, particularly in a foreign language context, is one of the formidable tasks that poses a challenge even that advanced learners of English. Mohdy {1} states that:

> "Being learners of English as a foreign language, Sudanese students are poor writers in English."

There are several factors that cause students to commit grammatical errors. In the study of English errors Richard{2} pointed out that grammatical errors are not only caused by the interference of mother tongue, but also by what he called overgeneralization ignoring of rules restriction, incomplete application of rules.

During the British colonial period in the Sudan (1898 – 1956) English language was the official language of the state. It was the medium of instruction in the educational institutions established by the British administration during that period. It is worth mentioning that most of the teachers at that time were native speakers of English and that allowed a wide exposure to English language for Sudanese students. Later after Sudan gained its independence in 1956, Arabic language began gradually to replace English as a medium of instruction. Hence the reduction of using English language has begun since that time and has led to the problem of the current study.

This study will attempt to investigate grammatical errors in secondary school students' writing, and find the

causes of why students face such difficulties. The researcher will also suggest some effective techniques that are hoped to improve students' ability in writing composition and to suggest some practical ways to solve these grammatical difficulties.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The important goal of this study is to find the grammatical errors in writing composition. And promote the awareness of the teachers employing suitable writing strategies in teaching composition.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Before the Second Language Acquisition (SLA)field as it is known today was established , from the 1940s to the 1960s, contrastive analysis was managed, in which two languages were systematically compared. Researchers at that time were motivated by the view of being able to identify points of similarity and difference between native language and target language. There was strong belief that a more effective pedagogy would result when these were taken into consideration. "Charles Fries {3} expresses the importance of contrastive analysis in language teaching material design. Learners usually transfer forms, meanings and distributions of their NL and culture to the F L and culture when they attempt to speak the language, both productively and receptively.

The claim is still quite interesting to anyone who has attempted to learn or teach a foreign language. So many examples of the interesting effects of people's NL are encountered. They go on to produce elements that more controversial. However, Lado {4} explored those elements that are similar to the native language will be simple for him, and those elements are different will be difficult.

Errors are defined according to different syntactic and semantic criteria but most definitions take an error as a mistake. This anomalous nature of errors is the cause of many of the problems that L1 learners encounter when they deal with writing composition. They cannot treat errors the same way they treat other types of mistakes. Sujoko {5} states errors noticeable deviation from the adult grammar of native speaker .An error is different from mistake, so we have to be careful to differentiate according to Yulianti {6} a-a mistake is performance error, which is either a random guess or a slip. b- an error is a noticeable deviation from the adult grammar of native speaker.   Errors that students make in the process of learning a TL, have always been a source of much concern to teachers and syllabus designers alike. This chapter will describe the learner's interlanguage system approach of linguistic forms acquired by L2 learners. An investigation of learners' performance in different aspects of English language. It necessary to light the question of errors and hypotheses .The second language learner's errors are potentially important for the understanding of the process of L2 acquisition. What is not clear is:

a) how to arrive to a principled means, which will determine fully their sources and causes .

b) how to interpret their significance in a meaningful conceptual framework.

c) whether it is possible to use errors evidence in a linguistically oriented work effectively.

The Classification of Errors Besides the problems of definition, the classification of errors also draws a lot of attention from researchers. Burt and Kiparsky {7} distinguish between global errors and local errors " A global error is one which involves the overall structure of a sentence 'and local error is one which affects a particular constituent "On the global level, Corder {8} classifies errors into four main

categories: "Omission of some required element, addition of some unnecessary or incorrect element, selection of an incorrect element, and disordering of elements "Levels of language could be considered within each category: phonology, morphology, lexicon, syntax and discourse.

For all practical purposes, Corder {9} gave error analysis the respectability of a valuable topic of research in applied linguistics. He proposed that errors were evidence of the learners' strategies of acquiring the language rather than signs of inhibition, or interference of persistent old habits. Corder's view opened the way to linguists to search errors in a new perspective. For example, Strevens {10} agreed with Corder: "in that errors are unwanted forms but as evidence of the learner's active contribution in second language learning".

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Corder {11} provides an account summary of how errors are viewed nowadays as he says: "We live in an imperfect world and consequently errors will always occur in spite of our best efforts."

Corder mentioned how errors are viewed, errors will always occur in spite of our best effort, that means learners at any time make errors.

George {12} adds: "We may judge error making as a necessary part of learning."

George agreed with Corder in judging error making as a necessary part of the process of learning.

Whereas Dulay et al {13} are of the view that "When language learners make errors, they are gradually building system into the target language they are learning."

While Brown {14} seems to think that errors are manifestation of a creative process adopted by the learner of a language to understand, analyze and then to master the system

of the TL, as he declares: "Those who make errors are creative beings proceeding through logical and systematic stages of acquisition creativity acting upon their linguistic environment."

All these views above are judging, making of errors is a way a learner is trying to test his hypotheses about the nature of the language he is learning.

METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

Sample of the study

The first population of the study was represented by sample group consisting of 250 students distributed in five secondary schools at al-Gedaref town. The subjects were 3 year students majoring in English language. The majority of these subjects have the same cultural and language background, with Arabic as their first language. Most of them had studied the target language as a compulsory subject for seven years from the same school language curriculum approved by the Sudanese Ministry of Education.

Study experiment

There were actually two tests in this study. The first dealing with composition in the area want to test (spelling, propositions, conjunctions and verbs), while the other test dealing with grammar test at the same class. The students were having high marks than the other ones.

The result shows students face more difficulties in writing when they write grammatical items through writing composition. The second test deals with grammar to test the same area in test one , and compared between two tests, the result shows that the second test is better than the first test. That for several reasons, firstly the ways of the teaching some teachers teach grammar in isolation without context. Secondly, students are accustomed to answering grammatical questions

easily, because they are very simple and need only formation of rules, recalling the recognition of time and aspects. But in composition writing students' are asked to give meaningful, connected ideas. They need to arrange the paragraphs using sentences formations. To compose a sentence we need a lot of skills, you have to master all aspects of language. Students find difficulties in thinking in English, then form the ideas and write these ideas correctly in meaningful sentence and correct grammar. Students learn grammar explicitly and not in context. They are not accustomed to learning grammar in context, so they can't contextualize that in composing situational sentences and so situational paragraphs that form composition.

Validity and Reliability of the instrument

The tests are believed to have content validity as they aimed at assessing the students achievement in writing composition . The tasks required in the tests were comparable to those students who write grammatical items through writing composition. In addition, the test instructions were written clearly in English. The test was validated by a group of experts who suggested some valuable remarks about the tests and the researcher responded to that. For the test reliability the study used the test –retest method to verily the reliability of the test It was first administrated on 20 students (selected later from the sample of the study), and then administrated once again on the same group two weeks later. The following formula for the Person Correlation Coefficient {r} was used to correlate subjects scores in the two tests.

$$r = \frac{\sum x\,Y - (\sum x)(\sum Y)}{\sqrt{(\sum x2 - (\sum x)2)(\sum Y2 - (\sum Y)\,2)}}$$

The results showed were also processed using SPSS program and the scores of the subjects in the first test were correlated with those in the second test using Pearson Correlation coefficient was 0.648 which was quite adequate for the test reliability . Upon considering all the validity and reliability coefficients of the subjects of the pilot sample which reported more than 50%, the composition test was of adequate validity ad reliability and that it would help in obtaining acceptable statistical analysis.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis of the experiment will focus on answering a vital question: What kind of grammatical errors in composition writing are facing third year secondary school students? To answer this question, we computed the mean, standard deviation, standard error and ranges for the first test and second test scores of both experimental and control class. To find out whether each test had made any progress as a direct result of instruction, within T-test class.

As indicated by the results from the table 4.22 and figure above about %16,9 of the respondents chose wrong. The results of this question revealed that the respondents had difficulties with the tenses. The tenses mistakes are most common students' writing and the researcher noticed that most of students find difficult in differentiate between present simple and past simple, present continuous and past continuous in writing.

Table (1) compared means between Male and Female (Independent sample test) about Tenses errors

Variable	Compare Means	Means	Std. Deviation	df	T	Sig-(2tailed
Tenses	Male	3.2689	2.91204	298	-0.929	0.354
	Female	3.4751	2.86061			

Table (2) ANOVA (Analysis of Variance)

Variable	Means	Means	Std. Deviation	df	T	Sig-(2tailed
Spelling	Male	3.4874	2.77012	298	-0.307	0.759
	Female	3.5525	2.81161			

The number frequency 355 having high degree (%35,6), the table shows that the students facing difficulties in spelling, if comparing with tenses   168 . In the light of the result above**,** the spelling mistakes are most common student's writing . The researcher noticed that most of students find difficult in write some letters by sound.

Table (3) Second test on English grammar

Valid	Frequency	Percent
Pass	108	43.2%
Frailer	142	56.8%
Total	250	100.0%

The second test on English grammar, this is another way to collected information about errors in students' writing at same area (tenses, spelling, punctuation and tidying words). And compared between the first test on composition.

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teachers teach grammar in isolation without context. Secondly, students are accustomed to answering grammatical questions easily, because they are very simple and need only formation of rules, recalling the recognition of time and aspects. But in composition writing students' are asked to give meaningful, connected ideas. They need to arrange the paragraphs using sentences formations. To compose a sentence we need a lot of skills , you have to master all aspects of language. Students find difficulties in thinking in English, then form the ideas and write these ideas correctly in meaningful sentence and correct grammar. Students learn grammar explicitly and not in context. They are not accustomed to learning grammar in context, so they can't contextualize that in composing situational sentences and so situational paragraphs that form composition.

CONCLUSION

This study tried to find out difficulties in grammatical items facing secondary school students, when they practice writing composition. As hypothesized grammatical errors in writing composition. The results of this study showed that writing grammatical items in insulated its better than writing through writing composition.

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