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

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### Abstract:

*This study aims at exploring the grammatical errors being faced by students. The study employed the descriptive –analytical method. The data has been calculated through a number of statistical procedures (questionnaire for teachers and test for students). The findings revealed low abilities in using the correct of respondents in recognizing the essential grammatical rules of writing composition. In light of the findings of the study the researcher recommended students should learn grammar in meaningful context, teachers should make more efforts to develop students' abilities in writing.*

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

### INTRODUCTION

English language is the language of technology language of the Globule Communing. The writing skill is one of the communication skills. So writing skill is important to be used for this. In this study the researcher wants to investigate these

difficulties and to find the causes of why students face such difficulties.

Although writing is one of the most important skills, the secondary schools students make grammatical errors in writing composition. They do not communicate effectively and they also commit many errors such as in tenses, propositions, articles, sentences structures, conjunctions.

The study will investigate the kind of grammatical difficulties that are facing third year secondary school students in al- Gedaref town in writing composition, their frequency and the possible causes behind these grammatical difficulties in writing composition.

The efforts should be done to correct the grammatical errors in writing composition in teaching learning process at Al Gedaref secondary schools third class students. Hence, these problems will be investigated and some possible solutions will be suggested to overcome them.

## **OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

The goal of this study is to find out the grammatical errors in writing composition, causes of these difficulties, promote the awareness of the teachers employing suitable writing strategies in teaching composition and find ways for improving writing composition.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

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. Most definitions of errors

focus on the native speaker and native language. In fact these definitions do not essentially vary in their terms for Sujoko (1) states that: Error is noticeable deviation from the adult grammar of native speaker, reflecting the inter-language competence of the learner.

An error is different from mistake, so we have to be careful to differentiate. According to Yulianti (2): - A mistake is a performance error, which is either a random guess or a 'slip', i.e. a failure to utilize a known system correctly. An error is a noticeable deviation from the adult grammar of a native speaker, reflecting the inter language competence of the learner. Another differences according to Ancker (3):

(1) Interference from the native language. The learner may assume that the target language and his native language are similar. Then, he will over generalize the rules of his native language and the target language.

(2) An incomplete knowledge of the target language "Because of the incomplete knowledge, the learner may make guesses. When he has something that he doesn't know, he may guess what it should be there."

Lengo (4) added: "that foreign language learners commit errors largely because of the paucity of their knowledge of the target language whereas deviant forms produced by native speakers are dismissed as slips of the tongue or slips of the pen"

(3) The complexity of the target language: Certain aspects in English are difficult for some learners, it may be caused by the rules of their native language are quite different from English and even more complex than their native language.

From those definitions above, a mistake may refer to just a tongue slip that the learner forgets the right form while, an error is a deviation which is made by the learner because he/she does not know the rule and he /she will make it repetitively. Analyze of error is beneficial as we see.

Errors are normal and unavoidable during the learning process as Richard (5) mentioned that "*no one could learn without making errors.*" Meanwhile, Lengo (6) stated that: "errors are believed to be an indicator of the learners' stages in their target language development. So, it is important to analyze the errors because there are many benefits in analyzing the errors, such as:

- (1) a device which the learner uses in order to learn Selinker in Soesanti's thesis, (7)
- (2) to fully grasp and understand the nature of the errors made
- (3) instead of just being able to explain the rules and correct the errors. So, there are very important to analyzing errors.

From above the researcher concludes that errors analysis is a type linguistic analysis that focus on the process of identifying, and describing the learner's error in target language learning

Besides the problems of definition, the classification of errors also draws a lot of attention from researchers. Burt and Kiparsky (8) 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 (9) 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.

Using the source as the standard for categorizing, errors can be categorized into interlingual errors and intealigual errors Richards, (10) Errors found can be traceable to first language interference are termed interligual. A large number of similar errors, however, are found to be made by second

language learners regardless of their first language. These are termed intralingual errors. They are often analysed to see what sorts of strategies the learners are using. Intra-lingual errors include overgeneralization, simplification, communication-based and included errors.

There are three kinds of errors, which are adapted from Selinker (11), are simplification, communication-based errors, and teaching-induced errors: Simplification errors occur when the learners tend to reduce the target language to a simpler system. When the learner incorrectly labels the object, but successfully communicates a desired concept, this kind of error is named communication-based error. The last type of error, teaching-induced error, happens because of inappropriate training, the overemphasizing of drilling technique on a certain linguistic item.

Another problem with error analysis is typically based on casual samples, in which data are gathered at a single point in time from many subjects from different degrees of proficiency.

The study of error is part of the investigation of the process of language learning. In this respect, it resembles methodologically the study of the acquisition of the mother tongue. It provides learners with a picture of the linguistic development of a learner and may give them indications as to the learning process. It ignores many errors that the learner seems to make notwithstanding his language background. Different L1 independent variables related to L2 learners operate differently in each L2 learning situation. Therefore, learning strategies, different training procedures, individual differences of teachers, learners' textbooks – all seem to operate to make each learning situation different from other. The study seeks to suggest that there is a system in learner's errors in spite of their apparent arbitrariness in performance data, but

this method could not be captured through a simple binary opposition between systematic non – systematic errors.

One of the purposes of adopting Error Analysis is to identify the principles that should guide effective error correction (EC). People's ideas about what is involved in correction are not always clear.

Whereas James (12) disputes about correction as he applies the term in three senses:

- 1) Informing the learners that there is an error, and leaving them to discover it (intervention feedback).
- 2) Providing treatment or information that leads to the revision and correction (correction proper).
- 3) Providing learners with information which allows them to revise or reject the wrong rule (remediation).

The problem here is whether to correct an error, as it appears to be at first sight. It is bound up with two broader questions. The first is whether presentation of error is better than cure: the second question is whether explicit formal instruction –in a word 'teaching' is effective.

Current researchers have looked at different methods of error correction putting a number of consideration such as the importance of that, its frequency in the class, whether the student in fact knows the correct description. All these consideration have to be taken fast in order not to interrupt the flow of the lesson.

On other hand, Allwright (13) thinks that teachers may cause errors in learners without meaning to do so, if they correct learners as he says:

A teacher is indicating that an error has been made researchers show that teachers tend to vary the account of time allowed to different learners to answer correctly. To be a good language learner, any language leaner is advised to adopt the following advice;

- a) To be able to respond to group dynamics of the learning situation so as not to develop negative anxiety and inhibitions.
- b) To seek out all opportunities to use the TL.
- c) To make maximum use of the opportunities offered to practice listening, responding, reading and writing the L2 addressed to him and to others.

Attitudes to error correction vary out only among teachers but also among students. A teacher may be influenced by the following facts:

- a) The fact that English is their second language and great emphasis was placed on correctness at their teacher training.
- b) The fact that: students as native speakers, have never had to worry about their English.

Students must master the skills of language (The receptive and the productive)

- 1-receptive: the degree to which a student makes automatic responses to linguistic features
- 2- productive: the degree to which he makes automatic use of linguistic features.

Moreover, the experiences of students involve the school activities, the home, the family, relatives, some sports and some outings. The vocabulary connected with these activities should be taught. Hence, teaching words that represent new ideas is a mere burden on them. Two general principles could be stated for the choice of vocabulary items to be taught to students.

There are many obstacles hindering the performances of the four skills in English language, the differences between Arabic script and English script, phonological differences,

morphological differences, grammatical differences. As we see here errors vs mistakes.

Language learning is like any other human learning. It is known that children when learning their L1 make countless mistakes. Many of these mistakes are local in the limited linguistic system within which they operate or write. However, by careful feedback from others, they slowly learn to produce an acceptable and perfect performance. On other hand, errors committed by a learner of a L2 have to be distinguished from mistakes of the L1 by EA approach. A classroom FL teacher can notice the errors resulting from utterance, operating, writing or reading.

Accordingly, a more favorable attitude has developed for Errors Analysis during the 1970s and 1980s. Corder (14) was the first to defend the importance of errors in the language learning process. He suggested that by classifying the errors that learners made, researchers could learn a great deal about the second language acquisition process by inferring the strategies that second language learners were using. For learners themselves, errors are “indispensable” since making errors could be regarded as a device the learners use in order to learn. Selinker (15) pointed out: two highly significant contributions that Coeder made in the field of second language acquisition: that the errors of a learner , whether adult or child, are(a) not random, but are in fact systematic ,and are (b) not negative or interfering. In any way with learning a target language but are not the contrary a necessary positive factor, indicative of testing hypotheses.

Brow (16) differentiates between errors and mistakes. He thinks that a mistake is a failure to develop a known system correctly while an error is a noticeable deviation:

*“A mistake refers to a performance error that is either a random guess or a slip. It is a failure to utilize a known system correctly. Errors “goofs” for which no blames is implied.”*



It is a noticeable deviation from the adult grammar of native speaker, reflecting the inter-language competence of the learner James (17) meanwhile tries to offer a definition of error declaring that intentions play an important role in this definition. As if he wants to say that a mistake is either deliberately or in deliberately deviant and self-correctible for learners . *“Mistakes: since they were not as intended “ “An error arises only when there was no intention to commit one”* . When any sort of deviance is intentionally incorporated into an instance of language, we do not say it is erroneous.

## **SAMPLE OF THE STUDY**

This experiment was conducted at some of al Gedaref secondary schools. Two groups of population were identified for carrying out this study, students who are target of teaching writing composition and teachers who are engaged in evaluation. The first population group of senior Sudanese secondary students (male – female) second group consisted of ELT teachers.

The test used to students at third year test practice on their writing composition and as Sudanese secondary certificate (see appendix) The test consist of guiding items to writing composition, another test consist of grammar items (filling gaps). There were 50 students per class in 5 schools (250) students.

Most of the teachers are experienced English department were about (40) teachers.

## **STUDY EXPERIMENT**

There were actually five classes in this study (male and female). The students in the five classes were hand writing composition. The main difference between the tests, in terms of studied, was that the researcher could use grammar in writing.

The researcher used guiding questions to help explain things when they were not clear grammatical items.

## **VALIDITY AND RELIABILITY OF THE INSTRUMENT**

Validating a research tool is determining whether it is accurate. To ensure the validity of the research tools, the researcher consulted 5 ELT experts referees. He distributed copies of the grammar test and the ELT teachers' questionnaire to these experts to give their judgment, opinions and remarks about these instruments with regard to their suitability, relevance and clarity.

The suggestions and opinions of the experts about the construction and content of both the test and the questionnaire were taken into consideration and were incorporated in the final version.

Test – reliability refers to the test's consistency which means that the test should give similar results if it is given to the same group of subjects on at least two separate circumstances. It should be expected that the relationship between the first and the second administration of the test would be a high positive correlation.

The following formula for the Person Correlation Coefficient {r} was used to correlate subjects scores in the two tests .

$$r = \frac{\sum XY - (\sum X)(\sum Y)}{n \sqrt{(\sum X^2 - (\sum X)^2/n)(\sum Y^2 - (\sum Y)^2/n)}}$$

$$\sqrt{(\sum X^2 - (\sum X)^2/n)(\sum Y^2 - (\sum Y)^2/n)}$$

r= Pearson correlation coefficient

x= variable 1 (subject scores in the first test)

y= variable 2 (subject scores in the second test)

n= number of subjects

Furthermore, to increase the validity and reliability of the test, the researcher gave two tests as composition test and grammar test. Taking more than one sample of students' can help reduce the variation in performance that might occur from one task to task. Thus, we decided to take more than one sample.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

The analysis of the experiment will focus on answering a vital question: What is the frequency of the grammatical errors in writing composition facing secondary school students in al. Gedaref town? To answer this question, we computed the mean standard deviation, standard error and ranges for the writing composition test and grammar test. To find out whether each test had made any progress as a direct result of instruction.

Table 1 In the light result above, the punctuation errors are the most common in student's writing, and data analysis of the test approves with the majority that students at the secondary schools find difficulties in writing, most of them can't use correctly (.) (,) and insert big letter in middle of the word. Also they face problems in paragraphing and big letter. When making comparing between male the mean is 2.9748 and female the mean is 3.1989 it is clear as we show in the table above more than females are better than the males. Table 2 Conjunctions are link words that connect ideas and opinions. As it mentioned above, the researcher noticed that the conjunctions errors are the most common among student's writing. The table shows that the females are better the mean is 3.663 than the males the mean is 2.6471. Most of students are not able to use conjunctions words in its right place, a good teacher can subsumed a course focus on conjunctions words.

**Table 1 Punctuation Mistakes**

Variable	Compare Means	Means	Std. Deviation	df	T	Sig- (2tailed)
Punctuation	Male	2.9748	2.20347	298	-0.852	0.395
	Female	3.1989	2.24702			

**Table 2 The Compared Means between Male and Female (Independent sample test) about conjunctions errors**

Variable	Compare Means	Means	Std. Deviation	df	T	Sig- (2tailed)
Conjunctions	Male	2.6471	2.48244	298	-1.462	0.145
	Female	3.0663	2.39583			

Through observation, we can state that the results within table 1 show that while all the classes improved, the results of the experimental grammar test improved more than the writing composition test. 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.

## CONCLUSION

The study tried to find out whether students face difficulties when we practice grammatical items through writing composition or writing grammar insulated. As hypothesized the difficulties facing secondary school students are of different frequency. The results of this study showed that writing grammar insulated improved significantly as a result of introducing the grammatical items through writing composition.

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