

An Analysis of the Common English Writing Mistakes Made by College Students

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Abstract:

This research aims to analyze, categorize, and elucidate the writing mistakes committed by third-year college students who are pursuing a degree in English in Iraq. Additionally, it seeks to determine the underlying reasons of these errors. The research included a total of 20 students from Al-Nisour College University. The approach undertaken included the task of composing an essay. The research reveals that students' writing proficiency is inadequate due to several variables, including interlingual and intralingual interference, as well as overgeneralizations.

Keywords: (Error Analysis, Target Language, Language Transfer, Intralingual Interference, Sources of Errors).

تحليل الأخطاء الشائعة في الكتابة باللغة الإنجليزية التي يرتكبها طلاب الجامعات

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الملخص:

يهدف هذا البحث إلى تحليل وتصنيف وتوضيح الأخطاء الكتابية التي يرتكبها طلاب السنة الثالثة الجامعيين الذين يسعون للحصول على شهادة في اللغة الإنجليزية في العراق. بالإضافة إلى ذلك، فإنه يسعى إلى تحديد الأسباب الكامنة وراء هذه الأخطاء. وشمل البحث ما مجموعه ٢٠ طالباً من جامعة كلية النصور. وتضمن النهج المتبع مهمة كتابة مقال. ويكشف البحث أن إتقان الكتابة لدى الطلاب غير كاف بسبب عدة متغيرات، بما في ذلك التدخل بين اللغات وداخل اللغة، فضلاً عن الإفراط في التعميم.

الكلمات المفتاحية: (تحليل الأخطاء، اللغات البنينية، نقل اللغة، التداخل بين اللغات، مصادر الأخطاء).

I. Introduction

Writing is a valuable skill that empowers college learners to become proficient writers by acquiring various techniques and methods for composing written works. These university students should explore their own writing abilities. The more they write, the more they realize they often make common errors in essay writing. Just like Chomsky, these errors are often made by university students without even realizing it,

simply because they are not familiar with proper writing techniques and criteria.

Students in higher education can benefit from adopting effective writing techniques to enhance their essay writing skills. Indeed, it is crucial for university students to be highly conscious of these prevalent mistakes. The study will delve into the errors that occur at different levels of language. As students delve deeper into the study of these errors, their writing skills naturally develop and improve over time.

II. Problem of the Study

Students at the university level often encounter challenges when it comes to writing compositions. These challenges include issues such as incorrect use of vocabulary, errors in morpho-syntactic structures (such as adding suffixes incorrectly or having inconsistency between verb and subject), and problems with syntactic styles (such as misusing tense forms or using faulty verb forms). These challenges can be attributed to several factors, including both interlingual and intralingual errors that students may have developed throughout their academic journey from primary school to university.

III. Question of the study (hypothesis)

Is the influence of one's first language a significant factor in the errors found in the English writings of university students?

IV. Objectives of the study

The objective of this research is to accomplish the following:

1. 1. Present a theoretical foundation for: a) Error Analysis, b) Models for Error Analysis, and c) Sources of Errors. The analysis will also include associated concepts such as interlingual errors, negative L1 transfer/interference, interlanguage, and interlingual mistakes.
2. 2. Analyze, elucidate, classify, and assess the mistakes made by Al-Nisour College University students in their English essay writing to determine the origins of these problems and provide recommendations.

V. Theoretical Background

This part comprises the following divisions:

1. Distinction between Mistake and Error

Prior to moving on, it is crucial to differentiate between Mistake and Error:

Mistakes	Errors
1. They have the ability to be rectified autonomously.	1. They cannot.
2. They manifest in a manner that allows the learner to identify them and then rectify them.	2. They manifest in a methodical fashion and go unnoticed by the learner. Therefore, the teacher/researcher would find them.
3. Experts classify this phenomenon as an Efficiency Error, which occurs when the learner has knowledge	3. They arise from a lack of systematic competence, meaning that the learner's system is

of the system but fails to apply it correctly.	faulty.
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Therefore, the researcher has chosen to perform an error analysis, which is considered the most effective method for identifying and elucidating mistakes made by individuals who speak numerous languages (Johanson, 1975). The objective is to determine the origins of these errors and understand why they persist over time across various categories of learners. The researcher must acquaint himself with the various faults made by his pupils in order to ascertain the appropriate chronology and focus for education.

2. Error Analysis

Error Analysis, a field within applied linguistics, focuses on categorizing and determining the origins of mistakes. Analyzing mistakes produced by language learners in a systematic manner enables the identification of specific areas that need further focus in instruction (Corder, 1974). Error analysis is a kind of language analysis that specifically examines the mistakes made by learners. It involves analyzing the discrepancies between the mistakes produced in the Target Language (TL) and the TL itself. Examining mistakes may have both a diagnostic and predictive purpose simultaneously. The diagnostic nature of this assessment lies in its ability to provide information about the learner's language proficiency

at a certain stage of the learning process, as stated by Corder (1967). Additionally, it has a prognostic purpose by informing course organizers about the learners' present difficulties, allowing them to adjust language learning materials accordingly.

Prior to moving on, it is essential to establish precise definitions for certain terminology that will be used throughout this presentation:

Interlingual/Transfer errors refer to mistakes that are caused by the influence of the original language (NL). Interlingual mistakes occur when the learner's first language habits, patterns, systems, or norms hinder or impede their acquisition of the patterns and rules of the second language (Corder, 1971).

Intralingual/Developmental errors refer to mistakes made in the process of learning a new language (TL), regardless of the individual's original language. Richards (1970) defines them as "productions made by the learner that do not reflect the structure of their native language, but rather are based on generalizations derived from limited exposure to the target language."

3. Error Analysis Approaches

Corder (1967 & 1974) proposed a framework for error analysis consisting of three distinct phases:

1. Data collection: Identification of unique characteristics

2. Description: Accounting for unique language variations

3. Interpretation (the pinnacle of error analysis).

What are the methods for identifying and analyzing mistakes made by learners?

The first phase involves choosing a linguistic database and then identifying mistakes. Subsequently, the mistakes are categorized. Following the grammatical examination of each mistake, the subsequent stage necessitates an elucidation of several categories of errors.

In addition, Gass & Selinker (1994: 67) outlined six processes for performing an error analysis: data collection, error identification, error classification, error quantification, analysis of error sources, and error remediation.

4. Causes of Inaccuracies

Selinker (in Richards, 1974: 37) identified five causes of inaccuracies in 1972:

- 1. Linguistic Transference**
- 2. Training Transfer**
- 3. Second Language Learning Strategies**
- 4. Second Language Communication Strategies**
- 5. Inference of Target Language Linguistic Content.**

The article entitled "The Study of Learner English" authored by Richards and Simpson in 1974 identified the following causes of errors:

- 1) **Language transfer**, also known as interlingual intrusion, accounts for about one third of the incorrect sentences produced by second language learners (George, 1971).
- 2) **Intralingual interference**: In 1970, Richards identified and explained four categories of intralingual mistakes and their underlying causes:
 - a) **Overgeneralization**, as described on page 174, is linked to the process of reducing repetition. This pertains to situations in which the learner produces an atypical pattern based on their exposure to different patterns in the language they are learning. It might be due to the student minimizing their language workload.
 - b) **Lack of knowledge on rule limitations**, specifically the application of rules to inappropriate settings.
 - c) **Partial implementation of regulations**
 - d) **Semantic mistakes occur when erroneous ideas or systems are constructed**, such as a flawed understanding of distinctions in the target language.

6. Procedures

A. Collecting Errors and Data

To choose a linguistic data, researchers followed the instructions provided by Ellis (1995:51–52) and gathered a sample of written work from 12 students. The pupils are enrolled in the third year of the English department at Al-Nisour College University. They have been learning English since elementary school and have mostly received instruction from instructors. Nevertheless, it is worth noting that the majority of them converse in Arabic with their parents at home and with their friends at university. The pupils were given several subjects and instructed to write an essay on each issue within a word limit of 200 to 250 words. The individuals were provided with an ample amount of time to compose their written work (Ellis 1997: 114). They were required to start with an outline, followed by a preliminary draft and ultimately a conclusive document.

B. Recognizing and Classifying Errors

To begin, researchers created Taxonomy for error analysis by drawing from various sources in the literature (Corder, 1974; Richards, 1974; James, 1998; Selinker, 1972 in Richards, 1974; Richards & Sampson, 1974). This taxonomy encompasses several sections and subdivisions, namely: grammatical errors (such as prepositions, articles, reported speech, singular/plural, adjectives, relative clauses, irregular verbs, tenses, and possessive case), syntactic errors (including coordination,

sentence structure, nouns and pronouns, and word order), and lexical errors (pertaining to word choice). Regarding the organizational and discourse faults, we will acknowledge their presence without providing specific numbers due to the inherent difficulty in quantifying them.

Once the categories were established, we selected the mistake sources we want to investigate, primarily focusing on Interlingual (negative L1 Transfer) and Intralingual (Developmental) errors.

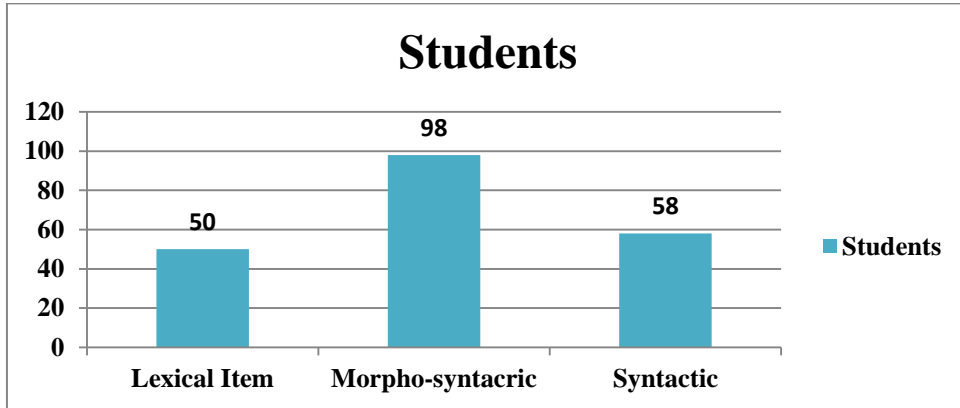
C. Results and Data Analysis

The researchers identified a total of 206 mistakes in the 21 essays that have been analyzed. Below is a graph that displays the numerous groups into which they are divided:

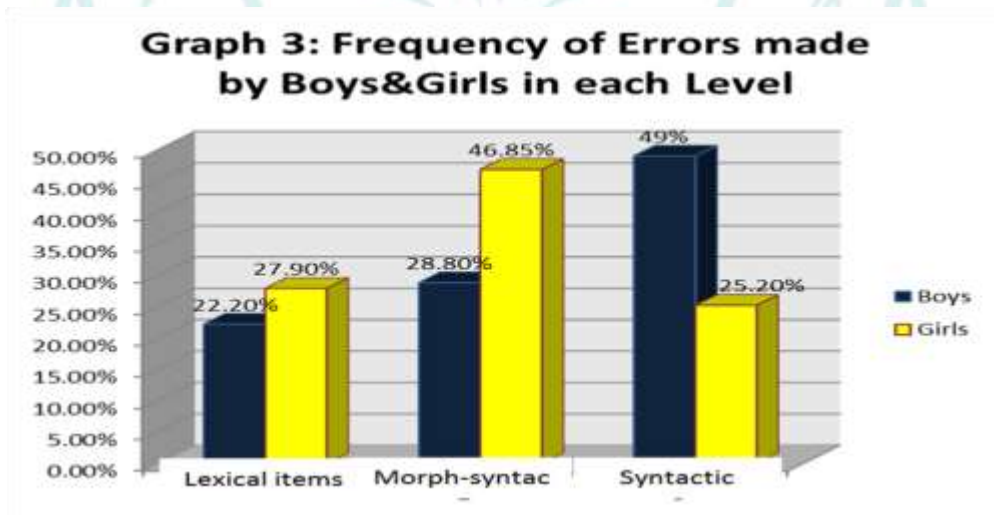
GRAPH 1

ERROR TYPE	No. Of Errors in Males	No. Of Errors in females	Total Errors
	Total Analyzed Data:11	Total Analyzed Data:10	Total Students: 12
*Lexical Errors	10 (22.2%)	40 (27.9%)	50 (23.8%)
*Morpho-Syntactic Errors	31(28.8%)	67 (46.85%)	98 (47.6%)
*Syntactic Errors	22(48.9%)	36 (25.2%)	58 (28.15%)
TOTAL	63 (100%)	143 (100%)	206 (100%)

GRAPH 2



In graph number three, readers can see the various mistake frequencies. As the reader can see in the first group (lexical items), the gender gap in the range of mistakes made is really small. Compared to females, men



are more likely to make mistakes (22.20%), which translate to two or three mistakes every essay on lexical items level. With a slightly greater

frequency of 27.90%, this suggests that there is a probability that each female writer may make four or six mistakes in only one essay. The range is much distinct and contrastive in the second group, which is Morph-syntactic. Males have a 28.80% chance of making a mistake, whereas females have a 46.85% chance of making a very common mistake. With a frequency of 49%, the final category (Syntactic) reveals that men are more prone to committing mistakes at the syntactic level, which is also their weakest spot.

7. Conclusion

This research aimed to detect, define, classify, and evaluate the faults in English essay writing made by students at Al-Nisour College University. This study's findings align with those of George (1972), Lance (1969), Richards (1971), and Brudhiprabha (1972), who discovered that barely one-third of the language transfer in second language learners occurs. The majority of mistakes arise from an excessive usage of intralingual errors rather than the use of one's native language (L1). Therefore, the idea is refuted, indicating that the influence of the mother tongue is not the cause, but rather the way the target language is used. The hypothesis is unequivocally confirmed in the data analysis. It is imperative that we motivate our students to engage in weekly writing exercises and actively address their mistakes in order to minimize the

occurrence of errors. However, it is equally important that we enhance our teaching methods to successfully impart the norms and conventions of writing.

VIII. Suggestions

This research aims to provide the following suggestions:

1. An extensively coordinated method of instruction, with teachers collaborating on improving skills, might be implemented.
2. To significantly enhance students' proficiency in grasping the inner workings of English writing, an instructional teaching style should be used.
3. The establishment of a Writing Club called the Al-Nisour Writing Club (BWC) will aim to enhance the writing abilities of learners as well as faculty personnel.

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