Errors in Foreign Language Writing: English Grammar Errors among Arab 8th -Grade Students in Israel

Fidaa Ali & Muhammad Amara[1]

Abstract

This study investigates English grammar errors produced by Arab students in Israel. It examines the types and number of errors found in 8th-grade Arab students' English writing samples and how they correspond to their proficiency levels in English as a foreign language (EFL). A corpus of 180 writing samples was collected from sixty students and evaluated using Gass and Selinker's (1994) framework based on Corder's Error Analysis model (1974). This framework includes six stages: data collection, error identification, error classification, error quantification, analysis of error sources, and error remediation. The study used quantitative and qualitative methods to collect and analyze the data. The findings reveal fifteen grammatical errors produced by Arab EFL students in Israel; these are errors in tenses, fragments, pronouns, agreement, word order, prepositions, articles, parts of speech, plural forms, irregular verbs, infinitives, possession, conjunctions, relative pronoun omission, and voice. Tense errors were found to be the most frequent type of error, whereas voice errors were the least common. All errors were attributed to two primary sources: interlingual (stemming from the negative influence of first-language transfer, i.e., Arabic) and intralingual (arising from the incomplete or inaccurate knowledge of the target language, i.e., English). The study further identified significant statistical differences based on students' English proficiency levels. Linguistically weaker students produced the highest number of grammatical errors, with fragments being the most challenging category for them. In contrast, the more advanced students made only a few errors, most of which were related to tenses .

Keywords: English as a Foreign Language (EFL), Arabic as a First Language (L1), Grammar, Writing, Error Analysis, Arab Students

---

[1] Al-Qasemi Academic College.

Errors in Foreign Language Writing: English Grammar Errors among Arab 8th-Grade Students in Israel

Writing has always been considered an essential productive skill in educational settings. As Graham (2008) asserts, writing is critical for enhancing students' overall learning and thinking skills. However, writing requires substantial time and effort. This is because well-structured writing entails producing a connected sequence of words and sentences that are grammatically and logically linked so that the reader can clearly understand the writer's intended purpose (Harmer, 2004, as cited in Haryanto, 2007). Therefore, to become a skilled writer, one must master various writing components, including content, grammar, syntax, organization, spelling, mechanics, and vocabulary (Raimes, 1985).

Indeed, writing is one of the most challenging language skills to acquire. It is a complex and intricate process that demands mastery of linguistic, cognitive, and socio-cultural competencies (Barkaoui, 2007). The composing process, which involves planning, transcribing, and reviewing, is similar in both first languages (L1) and second languages (L2)/foreign languages (FL). Still, it is often more complicated and challenging to write in a second/foreign language (Benesch, 1993). Non-native English speakers, for example, usually encounter difficulties when writing in English. This is due to the complexity of the writing process, which demands a great deal of conscious and mental effort that exceeds the effort needed when writing in one's first language (Raimes, 1983). Also, there is no immediate feedback on writing compared to speaking interactions, and feedback on writing is generally a more complicated process (Bashiri & Shahrokhi, 2016).

When students learn to write in English as a foreign language (EFL), they tend to make errors they cannot correct by themselves. This is because, in many cases, EFL learners think in their native language and then try to translate their ideas into a foreign/second language (Ridha, 2012), when instead, they must

consider the writing rules, conventions, and norms of the target language (Karim et al., 2015). Hence, errors are an unavoidable part of EFL writing, and they can actually help learners further develop their competence in EFL (Kaweera, 2013; Karim et al., 2015).

Many studies explore the challenges faced by Arab learners while writing in English as a second/foreign language (ESL/EFL) (e.g., El-Mortaji, 2001; Rababah, 2003; Al-Othman, 2013). For instance, Rababah (2003) highlights that Arab students in Jordan typically learn English in formal settings where their teachers are also native Arabic speakers, so the teachers themselves might not be able to detect and correct specific errors. Also, since Arab students mainly learn and use English in classroom settings, they have few opportunities to interact in English in more natural environments. Similarly, Adas and Bakir (2013) found that most Arab students studying EFL in Palestinian universities have weak English writing skills because their teachers often follow traditional methods that do not spark student creativity.

Writing problems encountered by Arab EFL learners can also be attributed to other subject-related factors. Al-Khuwaileh and Shoumali (2000), for instance, conclude that poor English writing skills correlate with a similar skill level in Arabic writing. That is, the errors produced by students when writing in a foreign language may also be related to poor writing skills in their first language, ultimately leading to errors in interlingual lexical and discourse transfer (see Jenwitheesukk, 2009).

Theoretical Background

The current study focuses on the common grammatical errors found in the English writing of Arab EFL students in Israel. It employs the error analysis framework developed by Corder (1967, 1974) and further elaborated by Gass and Selinker (1994). The following section provides an overview of the error

analysis framework, explores the sources of errors, and reviews previous studies on error analysis in the context of Arab students writing in English as a foreign language (EFL).

Error Analysis

Error Analysis (EA) is a linguistic model established in the late 1960s by Corder and his colleagues. It is a well-developed framework of linguistic analysis that documents the systematic errors produced by learners of a particular target language. This analytical approach compares the errors made in the target language and the correct norms followed in this language. More specifically, EA focuses on "the significance of errors in learners' interlanguage system" (Brown, 1994, p. 204) – referring to the dynamic linguistic system developed by learners of a second/ foreign language as they attempt to convey meanings in the target language being learned (Selinker, 1972).

Corder (1967) states that EA has two crucial objectives: theoretical and applied. The former explains *what* and *how* learners learn in foreign language education, while the latter enables learners to learn effectively by using the target language in pedagogical processes. Corder (1967) also asserts that errors can provide feedback for language teachers regarding the quality of their teaching methods. Errors thus highlight the areas requiring adjustment or reinforcement in both learning and teaching strategies (Corder, 1974; Ringbom, 1987). Moreover, Corder (1974) classifies errors into four categories: the omission of some required elements, the addition of some unnecessary elements, the selection of incorrect elements, and the misordering of elements. Gass and Selinker (1994) further elaborate on Corder's model and suggest that errors can be analyzed using six steps: collecting data, identifying errors, classifying errors, quantifying errors, analyzing the sources of errors, and remediating the errors.

Following these efforts, various researchers began examining *errors* as a focal point in investigating the strategies students use in foreign/second language acquisition (Touchie, 1986). Researchers and teachers began to systematically select a corpus of target language writing samples, identify all the errors found in those samples, classify them, and then explain the different types of errors and their sources as a way to enhance language teaching and learning methods. Therefore, error analysis can give researchers and teachers a broader understanding of the sources of errors and how to improve learning and teaching approaches than contrastive analysis, which only accounts for errors based on learners' native language.

Sources of Errors

Many systematic processes are involved in learning a foreign/second language. Gass and Selinker (1994) focus on the concept of "interlanguage" and its components. This concept was first proposed by Selinker (1972), who defines it as follows:

> Learners create a language system and it validates learner's speech, not as a deficit system, that is, a language filled with ransom errors, but as a system of its own with its own structure. This system is composed of numerous elements, not the least of which are elements from the NL [Native Language] and the TL [Target Language]. There are also elements in the IL [Interlanguage] that do not have their origin in either the NL or the TL (Selinker, 1972, p. 12).

Many theorists have built upon this framework and introduced various types and sources of errors. Richards (1975), for instance, points out that there are three primary sources of errors: interlingual errors, intralingual errors, and developmental errors. Interlingual errors are traceable to first-language interference. In contrast, intralingual and developmental errors are attributable

to the partial or incorrect learning of the target language itself rather than language transfer, namely, the learning characteristics at a specific stage. Richards (1975) further distinguishes intralingual errors from developmental errors, stating that intralingual errors reflect the characteristics of rule-learning, while developmental errors occur when learners try to build up new hypotheses concerning the foreign language based on their limited experiences in the classroom or from textbooks.

Nonetheless, the error analysis framework rests on two primary sources of errors: interlingual and intralingual errors. Interlingual errors are the errors produced in relation to the learners' native language, while intralingual errors are those attributed to the target language being learned (Gass & Selinker, 1994). Therefore, interlingual errors are caused by the impact of the native mother tongue on acquiring a second/foreign language (L2/FL). Odlin (1989) states that interlingual errors can occur at different levels, such as transferring the first language's morphological, grammatical, and lexical-semantic elements into the target language. This transfer could be positive or negative. It is considered positive when learners' knowledge of their first language improves their ability to understand a second/foreign language, which often occurs when the structures of the two languages are similar. However, it becomes negative when transfer or 'interference' is substantially needed, i.e., when the structures of the two languages are very different (Wilkins, 1972).

Error Analysis and Arab EFL Learners

Scott and Tucker (1974) suggest that Standard Arabic (*alfusha*) interference impacts Arab learners' English writing skills, while colloquial Arabic interference influences their English speaking skills. As revealed by various studies, Arab students at all levels of English proficiency make different types of errors in their English writing due to Standard Arabic interference. For

example, Ridha (2012) investigates the types and sources of errors made by Arab EFL college students in Iraq. The errors are categorized into four main categories: grammar, lexical, mechanics, and word order. The most frequent grammatical errors these students produced were related to tenses, articles, pronouns, plural and singular forms, and prepositions. Ridha (2012) further notices that most of the errors Arab students produce are due to first-language interference because Arabic and English have very different linguistic structures.

Similarly, Sawalmeh's (2013) study among Arab Saudi EFL students reveals that the students produced ten types of errors in their English writing: verb tenses, word order, singular and plural forms, subject-verb agreement, double negative, spelling, capitalizations, articles, sentence fragments, and prepositions. According to Sawalmeh (2013), most of these errors also occurred due to Arabic interference, with verb tenses being among the most common errors produced by Arab EFL learners (also see Ridha, 2012). However, Bataineh's (2005) study, which investigates Arab Jordanian students' English writing errors, particularly their use of indefinite articles, shows that most errors made by students were due to standard learning processes related to the target language itself. Hence, unlike the previous studies, Bataineh (2005) observes that the impact of the native language on EFL writing errors was minimal.

More precise and complementary results can be found in Alsher's (2021), Adam's (2024), and Murad and Khalil's (2015) studies. Alsher's (2021) quantitative analysis of English essays written by Palestinian EFL university students reveals that the errors produced by the students are attributed to both first-language interference and the incomplete acquisition of the target language and its grammar rules. In this study, Alsher (2021) identifies that the most frequent errors produced by Arab students are related to verb inflections, prepositions, articles, and tenses. Adam's (2024) qualitative study among Palestinian students at Hebron University also shows that learners faced

challenges with English sentence structure due to grammatical differences between Arabic and English. This resulted in common errors such as incorrect uses of verb tenses, word order, articles, and prepositions.

Furthermore, Murad and Khalil's (2015) study, which investigates English writing errors among Arab EFL learners living in Israel, reveals that the learners produced four types of errors to varying degrees: content and organization, vocabulary, language use, and mechanics. The most frequent error type these students produced is related to 'language use', consisting of word order, negation, omission of copula and auxiliary verbs, subject-verb agreement, and prepositions. Murad and Khalil (2015) further show that the causes of errors can be attributed to both intralingual errors and interference of negative first-language transfer.

Together, all these studies highlight the complexity of foreign/second language acquisition and underscore the importance of employing diverse instructional approaches to enhance learners' linguistic capabilities. They also point out that Arabic has special syntax features different from English, which must be considered when teaching English to Arab EFL students. For example, word order in Arabic is less restrained and has a more flexible movement of constituents than in English, especially in poetry. Therefore, Arabic interference can lead to an incorrect word order in English – a common syntactic error that Arab learners make when writing in English as a foreign language (Al-Khresheh, 2010).

Research Questions

The current study investigates English writing grammatical errors produced by sixty 8th grade Arab students in Israel, focusing on the total number of errors, the types of errors, and the frequency and types of errors made by students in relation to their English proficiency levels. The study addresses the following questions:

(1) How frequently do 8th-grade Arab students in Israel produce grammatical errors in their English writing?

(2) What types of errors do they commonly produce?

(3) What are the sources of these errors?

(4) Are there any statistically significant differences in the types and number of errors the students produce based on their proficiency levels in English?

Hypotheses

The study is based on two main hypotheses. The first hypothesis states that there will be statistically significant differences in the number of errors produced by 8th-grade Arab students in Israel according to their English proficiency levels. The second hypothesis claims that there will be statistically significant differences in the types of errors produced by 8th-grade Arab students in Israel according to their English proficiency levels.

Methodology

This current study used both quantitative and qualitative methods. The data obtained were identified, classified, and analyzed to determine the percentages of frequent grammatical errors found in the participants' writing samples. The differences in the types and numbers of errors according to students' levels of English proficiency were examined statistically. Examples from the collected corpus of writing samples are included to illustrate the various types of identified errors and explore their sources.

Participants

The participants consisted of 8th grade Arab students (between the ages of 14 and 15) from one Arab city in the North of the Little Triangle, located in the center of Israel. The participant sample comprises sixty students whose native language

is Arabic, and they were selected from the same junior high school in Israel. At the time of the study, the students had already been studying English as a Foreign Language for six years in school, i.e., since the third grade, and they had been taking four English lessons per week. The students were selected from various levels of English language competence, ranging from beginner to intermediate and advanced levels, based on their school test results in the first term. Twenty students were selected at each level. Students scoring 85-100 points were classified as advanced, those scoring 70-84 as intermediate, and those scoring below 70 as beginners.

Instruments

Sixty 8th grade Arab students from one school in Israel took part in this study. The students were asked to compose texts of 60-80 words within 40 minutes on three topics: *life without electricity*, *writing a story about what happened on a bicycle trip from school to the beach according to the pictures presented in the task*, and *a special event*. The topics were selected based on the learning units already existing in the students' textbooks, and they were derived from past English Meitzav exams.[2] These topics were thus selected because the students had to prepare for the English Meitzav exam at the end of the year, and they were

---

[2] Students in Israel from grades five to eight have taken the Meitzav exams (Development and Aptitude Tests) every year since 2008. The Ministry of Education uses these exams to evaluate primary and middle school student achievement. The tests check the students' cognitive abilities, aiming at helping the Ministry of Education monitor achievements at the state level. The Meitzav examines several areas of knowledge: Hebrew as a first language in Hebrew education, Arabic as a first language in Arabic education, English as a foreign language, mathematics, and science and technology for eighth-grade students only.

already offered in the 2010, 2012, and 2016 exam past papers. In total, the students produced 180 written compositions.

Procedures

English written samples were collected from the participants thrice: once in February, once in March, and once in May 2023. Students were asked to write about the three aforementioned topics during their school English lessons, each within a limited time of 40 minutes. Additional time was given to students, especially beginner-level students, who needed or asked for extra time. Students were given relevant topics according to the learning units found in their textbooks. The teacher began each lesson with a brainstorming activity to motivate the students to write, especially those struggling to start the writing process. Students were asked to write independently, relying on their individual lexical repertoire. However, their teacher also helped them with basic vocabulary or difficult words when needed.

Data-Analysis

Data was analyzed using Gass and Selinker's (1994) framework of the error analysis model: collecting data, identifying errors, classifying errors, quantifying errors, analyzing the sources of errors, and remediating the errors. The grammatical errors were thus identified and then counted, considering their frequency. After this, the errors were classified based on the types of grammatical errors. Then, the sources of the errors were examined as follows: intralingual errors (L2), interlingual errors (IL), and first-language transfer errors (L1). This was based on the corpus of writing samples collected from the students. Examples from these writing samples are shown in this study to illustrate and explore the types and sources of errors produced by the students.

Results

To answer the research questions, students' errors were first analyzed and tabulated using frequencies. After this, the mean and standard deviations were calculated using One-way ANOVA.

Frequency and Types of Errors

The most frequent grammatical errors found in students' English writing samples relate to tenses, fragments, prepositions, articles, word order, and pronouns, respectively. More specifically, the most frequent grammatical error involved the incorrect use of tenses (971 errors). The second most frequent error was related to the incorrect use of fragments (521 errors), while the third was related to prepositions (472 errors), and the fourth was related to articles (441 errors). The fifth most frequent error was related to incorrect word order (210 errors), and the sixth was related to pronouns (198 errors). In contrast, the most minor frequency of errors was related to voice (26 errors) (see Figure 1).

Figure 1

The Frequency of Errors and Their Distribution According to the Types of Errors
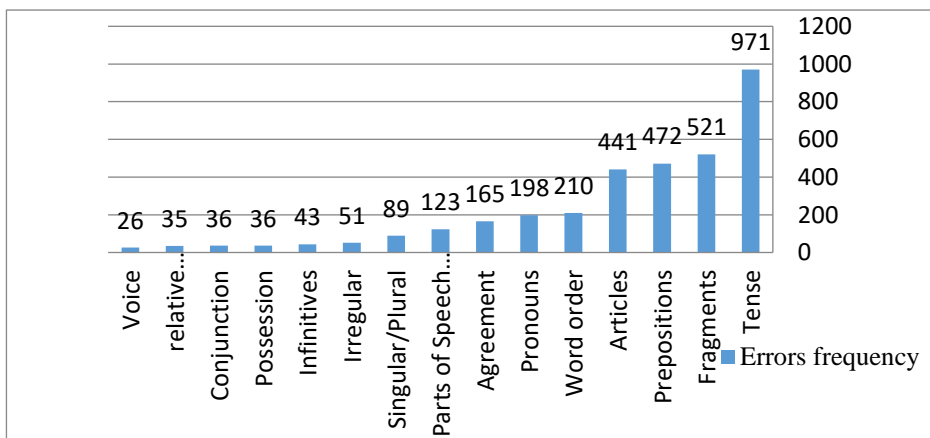
Number of Errors

Are there any statistically significant differences in the number of errors produced by 8th-grade Arab students based on their proficiency levels in English? To answer this question, the mean, standard deviation, F-value, and statistical significance (P-value) of grammatical errors were calculated using One-way ANOVA. Table 1 reveals significant statistical differences in the number of errors produced by students based on their English proficiency levels (F= 8.53, p< .05): beginner-level students produced the highest number of grammatical errors. In contrast, advanced-level students produced the lowest number of errors. The first hypothesis is thus confirmed (see Table 1).

Table 1

Differences in the Number of Errors Based on Students' English Proficiency Levels

	Advanced n=20		Intermediate n=20		Beginner n=20		F-value	Sig (P-value)
	M	*STD*	*M*	*STD*	*M*	*STD*		
Error Frequency	40.15	19.72	62.7	28.58	68	18.209	8.53	.001

Types of Errors

Are there any statistically significant differences in the types of errors produced by 8th-grade Arab students based on their proficiency levels in English? To answer this question, a One-way ANOVA test was conducted to measure the mean, standard deviation, F-value, and statistical significance (P-value) of students' grammatical errors (see Table 2).

Table 2

Differences in the Types of Errors Based on Students' English Proficiency Levels

	Advanced n=20		Intermediate n=20		Beginner n=20		F-value	Sig (P-value)
	M	STD	M	STD	M	STD		
Tenses	12.6	8.12	18.75	9.16	14.3	5.94	3.26	.04
Fragments	2.3	1.55	7.95	6.55	15.8	6.32	32.29	.000
Prepositions	5.95	3.45	8.4	6.54	9.25	4.35	2.38	.101
Articles	5.1	3.32	8.95	6.18	8.0	3.008	4.13	.02
Word order	1.6	1.31	3.1	2.75	5.8	3.3	13.38	.000
Pronouns	1.45	1.5	3.6	2.47	4.85	2.96	10.3	.000
Subject-verb Agreement	2.75	2.59	2.8	2.91	2.7	2.47	.007	.993
Parts of Speech	2.15	2.3	1.8	1.88	2.2	1.67	.24	.783

Table 2 reveals statistically significant differences between advanced-level, intermediate-level, and beginner-level students in relation to five types of errors: tenses, fragments, articles, word order, and pronouns. However, the results show no statistically significant differences between students' English proficiency levels in terms of prepositions, agreement, and misuse of parts of speech (P> .05). Comparing the mean ranks indicates that beginner-level students made the highest number of errors in this category (see Table 2). The results also indicate that beginner-level students made the highest number of errors in fragments. In contrast, most errors produced by advanced- and intermediate-level students were related to tenses. All in all, the study's results show statistically significant differences in the types of errors produced by 8th grade Arab students based on

their levels of English proficiency, which supports the study's second hypothesis.

These quantitative results present great insights into the grammatical errors produced by Arab students learning to write in English as a foreign language. The following is a more detailed examination of the nature of these errors and their sources, illustrated using examples from the students' written samples.

Types of Errors and Their Sources

The previous section presented quantitative data on the number and types of errors Arab students made relative to their levels of English proficiency. This section addresses questions concerning the specific errors these students produced and the sources of these errors. The examples below are drawn from the collected corpus of students' writing samples.

The most frequent types of errors found in this study are tense errors, syntactic errors (fragments, infinitives, and voice), function word errors (prepositions and articles), word order errors, and morphological errors (agreement, plural forms, misuse of parts of speech, pronouns, relative pronoun omission, and irregular verbs). The nature of students' errors reveals two primary sources of errors: interlingual transfer and intralingual transfer.

Tense Errors

As shown previously, most of the grammatical errors produced by Arab students were related to tenses. Indeed, tense errors were detected in the 180 writing samples. This type of grammatical error manifested as aspect errors (incorrectly using simple and progressive past tenses), tense confusion (using incorrect tenses or incorrect sequence of tenses), and omitting auxiliary verbs.

Aspect Errors: Incorrect Use of Simple and Progressive Past Tenses. Many students appeared unable to differentiate between simple and progressive past

tenses. They seemed to have difficulty producing progressive tenses because this form does not exist in their first language, i.e., Arabic. In Standard Arabic, the past tense indicates both the past simple and progressive tense.

- A student wrote: "We were **climb** in the top of the mountain", instead of correctly writing, "We were climbing to the top of the mountain". The correct tense form is "climbing" because the sentence indicates a continuous action in the past. In such cases, students incorrectly used the simple present rather than the progressive past tense [Student no. 2, topic 3].

- A student wrote: "I **feeling** in tired" to describe a past state, instead of correctly writing, "I felt tired". Therefore, rather than using the correct stative past tense "felt", students, in these cases, incorrectly used the progressive tense [Student no. 24, topic 3].

Tense Confusion. This type of grammatical error refers to the incorrect use of tense sequences or the incorrect switch between tenses in an embedded clause. Many students appeared to confuse present and past tenses, producing an incorrect tense sequence.

- A student wrote: "The trip **start** at 8.00 morning", instead of correctly writing, "The trip started at 8.00 in the morning". The student incorrectly used the present rather than the past tense "started" [Student no. 28, topic 2].

- A student wrote: "When we **reach** to beach" to describe a past activity. Instead of correctly writing, "When we reached the beach", the student incorrectly used the present rather than the past tense "reached" [Student no. 2, topic 2].

- A student wrote: "I didn't **saw** my sister", instead of writing the correct verb form "see". The student thus incorrectly used the past tense instead of the infinitive present tense and produced the wrong tense sequence [Student no. 10, topic 3].

- A student wrote: "Because we now **needed** the electricity", instead of writing the correct verb form "need". This student incorrectly used the past rather than the present tense [Student no. 12, topic 1].

- A student wrote: "When my sister was born, I was very worried because my sister **is** small". Here, the student did not use the correct sequence of tenses. Instead of writing, "..my sister was small", to continue the proper sequence of tenses, the student incorrectly used both the past and present tenses in that sentence [Student no. 9, topic 3].

- A student wrote: "We sang a beautiful songs and **play** many things". Instead of using the correct verb form "played" to continue the proper tense sequence, the student incorrectly used the past and present tenses in that sentence [Student no. 15, topic 2].

Omitting Auxiliary Verbs. English has different verb aspects, such as simple, progressive, and perfective aspects, that require auxiliary verbs for a sentence to have a complete meaning. Arabic, however, has only two aspects: perfective and imperfective. Thus, auxiliary verbs are rarely used in Standard Arabic because they are not needed to complete the meaning of a sentence. Therefore, many Arab students tend to omit auxiliary verbs, especially progressive verbs, but they successfully add the suffix "ing" to the verbs. This means that this type of error stems not only from first-language transfer but also from intralingual errors.

- A student wrote: "**We playing**", instead of correctly writing, "We were playing". This student incorrectly omitted the auxiliary verb "were" [Student no. 36, topic 3].

- A student wrote: "**Them singing and dancing**", instead of correctly writing, "They were singing and dancing". This student incorrectly omitted the auxiliary verb "were" [Student no. 35, topic 2].

Students also seemed to omit auxiliary verbs such as *do*, *does*, and *did* because there are no equivalent verbs in Arabic.

- A student wrote: "**What you talk** to your friend?", instead of correctly writing, "What do you talk about with your friend?". This student incorrectly omitted the auxiliary verb "do" [Student no. 32, topic 3].

- A student wrote: "His bicycle **wasn't** work", instead of writing the correct verb form "didn't" [Student no.21, topic 2].

Based on the examples above, the source of aspect and tense confusion errors appear to stem from intralingual transfer due to the partial or inadequate knowledge of grammar rules in English. That is, students do not have a good command of the English language. However, the source of auxiliary verb omission errors also appears to be due to interference, further showing the impact of negative first-language transfer on the target language. It is also noticeable that students' English writing depends mainly on using simple present and past tenses. This finding reveals that students do not have a good command of different verb tenses, particularly continuous and passive voice tenses.

Fragments: Omitting the Subject or the Main Verb

Fragments are incomplete sentences that either lack a subject or a verb or do not express a complete thought. Many students omitted the main verb or copula (verb *to be*) from the sentence, while others omitted the subject.

Omission of the Main Verb or Copula. One of the frequent errors the students made was omitting or deleting the copula (verb *to be*). Such syntactic errors result from Arabic interference because learners apply the rules of their mother tongue language, Arabic, to the target language, English. In Arabic, nominal sentences have subject phrases and predicate phrases that do not require verbs or copulas. Thus, students negatively transfer such structures into English.

- A student wrote: "And now **I happy**", instead of correctly writing, "And now I am happy". This student incorrectly omitted the copula "am" [Student no. 32, topic 3].

- A student wrote: "Life with **electricity very good**", instead of correctly writing, "Life with electricity is very good". This student incorrectly omitted the copula "is" [Student no. 33, topic 1].

- A student wrote: "**She beautiful** and small", instead of correctly writing, "She is beautiful and small". This student incorrectly omitted the copula "is" [Student no. 27, topic 3].

Omission of the Subject. Various students faced issues with subject fragments due to negative first-language transfer. Unlike in English, the subject in Arabic can be a pronoun that is hidden or attached to the verb, acting as an antecedent.

- A student wrote: "When **I am boring, can't** play", instead of correctly writing, "When I am bored, I can't play". This student incorrectly omitted the subject "I" [Student no. 6, topic 1].

- A student wrote: "**Walk** far away", referring to students finishing an activity in the past. Instead of correctly writing, "They walked far away", this student omitted the subject "They" [Student no. 14, topic 2].

- A student wrote: "**Was** a very happy moment for me", instead of correctly writing, "It was a very happy moment for me". This student omitted the subject "It" [Student no. 27, topic 3].

Pronouns

Students appear unable to differentiate between subject pronouns and other kinds of pronouns (possessive pronouns, possessive adjectives, and object pronouns). Like Arabic, English includes subjective, possessive, and objective pronouns. However, unlike Arabic, attached pronouns (pronominal suffixes) do not exist in

English. Errors in subject pronouns are thus attributed to the partial knowledge of grammar rule restrictions in English because the students appear to overgeneralize specific structures and use them in inappropriate contexts.

- A student wrote: "Someday **me and my family** were in some place", instead of correctly writing, "Someday my family and I were in some place". This student used the incorrect pronoun "me" instead of the correct one "I" and made an error in word order [Student no. 10, topic 3].

- A student wrote: "One day **me and my friends** decided to do adventure", instead of correctly writing, "One day, my friends and I decided to do an adventure". This student used the incorrect pronoun "me" instead of the correct one "I" and made an error in word order [Student no. 19, topic 3].

- A student wrote: "We helped **it** and fixed the bicycle", instead of correctly writing, "We helped him and fixed the bicycle". This student used the incorrect pronoun "it" instead of "him" [Student no. 16, topic 2].

Agreement

Subject-Verb Agreement. Verbs must match the subject's person, number, and gender. However, many students incorrectly used singular verb forms when referring to plural subjects. Other students omitted present tense markers, such as the s-inflection, when referring to singular third-person subjects (she/he/it). This type of error could be attributed to intralingual transfer and an overgeneralization of English grammar rules.

- A student wrote: "The people **was** very happy", instead of using the correct verb form "were" [Student no. 37, topic 2].

- A student wrote: "We **was** so tired", instead of using the correct verb form "were" [Student no. 38, topic 2].

- A student wrote: "There **is** good things", rather than using the correct verb form "are" [Student no. 13, topic 1].

- A student wrote: "The electricity **harm** the people", instead of including the correct present tense marker (s-inflection) and writing the correct verb form "harms" [Student no. 45, topic 1].

- A student wrote: "But he **help** me", when referring to electricity. This student first used the wrong subject pronoun by referring to electricity as "he" instead of "it". Most importantly, here, the student omitted the present tense marker (s-inflection), thus not writing the correct verb form "helps" [Student no. 47, topic 1].

Adjective-Noun Agreement. Many students also showed a lack of understanding of the adjective-noun agreement rule. Arabic interference is not the cause of this type of error because in Standard Arabic, adjectives and nouns must match in terms of gender and number. Thus, this is considered an intralingual transfer error.

- A student wrote: "**This machines very important**", instead of correctly writing, "These machines are very important". The student here did not match the adjective and the noun and omitted the verb "are" [Student no. 4, topic 1].

- A student wrote: "After all **this** activities", instead of correctly writing, "After all these activities" [Student no. 18, topic 2].

Word Order

Various students made errors in word order and seemed unable to form correct syntactic arrangements of words in a sentence, clause, or phrase. The source of word order errors is negative first-language transfer. This is because the typical word order in Standard Arabic is Verb-Subject-Object, which differs from English.

- A student wrote: "I see **horse beautiful**", instead of correctly writing, "I see a beautiful horse". The student here used the wrong noun and adjective word order [Student no. 49, topic 3].

- A student wrote: "**Ended the lesson**", rather than using the correct word order, "The lesson ended" [Student no. 32, topic 2].

- A student wrote: "**Was with his hands a big rifle**", rather than using the appropriate word order, "A big rifle was with his hands" [Student no. 33, topic 3].

Therefore, students neglected the correct word order norms in English and instead came up with constructions that are more applicable in Arabic, such as verb-subject-object order. Also, in English, an adjective usually precedes the noun it modifies, whereas in Arabic, it follows the noun it modifies. This is why some Arab students often produce incorrect word orders in their English writing.

Function Words

Errors in the Use of Prepositions. Prepositional errors were the third most frequent type of grammatical error produced by students in this study (as also shown in previous examples). Students appear to show difficulty using the appropriate prepositions, which stems from negative first-language transfer. Arabic has a minimal number of prepositions compared to the ones used in English. This confuses students because not every English preposition has an equivalent in Arabic and vice versa.

- A student wrote: "One **from** the pupils", instead of using the correct preposition "of" [Student no. 3, topic 2].

- A student wrote: "And played **in** guitar". Instead of correctly writing, "played guitar", this student incorrectly added the preposition "in" [Student no. 6, topic 2].

- A student wrote: "**Went to the homes**". Instead of correctly writing "went home", this student incorrectly added the preposition "to" and the definite article "the" [Student no. 6, topic 2].

- A student wrote: "**In** Tuesday", instead of using the correct preposition "On" [Student no. 27, topic 2].

Errors in the Use of Articles. Errors in articles were the fourth most frequent type of grammatical error the students produced (as also shown in previous examples). Many students avoided using articles altogether, while others omitted the indefinite article (a) because it does not have an equivalent in Arabic. Some students also seemed unable to use the appropriate article (a/an/the) in its correct place.

- A student wrote: "**We feed animal**", instead of correctly writing", We fed the animal". This student omitted the definite article "the" and used the incorrect verb tense [Student no. 7, topic 3].

- A student wrote: "**In beginning**", instead of correctly writing, "In the beginning". This student omitted the definite article "the" [Student no. 11, topic 2].

- A student wrote: "**The** 6:00 o'clock", instead of correctly writing, "At 6:00 o'clock". This student incorrectly added the definite article "the" and omitted the preposition "at" [Student no. 12, topic 2].

- A student wrote: "We spent **a** happy and enjoyable times". This student incorrectly added the indefinite article "a" [Student no. 27, topic 3].

- A student wrote: "We was very fine in **the Jordan**", instead of correctly writing, "We were very fine in Jordan". This student incorrectly added the definite article "the" to the definite noun Jordan [Student no. 36, topic 3].

Parts of Speech

Errors in parts of speech are morphological errors, which indicate students' confusion between nouns, verbs, adjectives, and/or adverbs. The source of such errors can be attributed to inaccurate or partial knowledge of the grammar rules in English (intralingual transfer).

- A student wrote: "I was very **exciting**", instead of using the correct verb form "excited" [Student no. 11, topic 2].

- A student wrote: "The **interact** with the family", instead of using the correct noun form "interaction" [Student no. 4, topic 1].

- A student wrote: "We can't **life** without electricity", rather than using the correct infinitive verb form "live" [Student no. 37, topic 1].

Plural Forms

Various students produced grammatical errors related to the use of plural forms.

- A student wrote: "One of **friend**", instead of correctly writing, "One of the friends". The student here incorrectly used the singular form of the word rather than its plural form "friends" [Student no. 24, topic 2].

- A student wrote: "We became **friend**", also incorrectly using the singular form of the word rather than its plural form "friends" [Student no. 31, topic 1].

- A student wrote: "We **will** know to do **somethings** by **ourselfies**", instead of correctly writing, "We know how to do things by ourselves". The student here misspelt the words "ourselves" and "things" [Student no. 13, topic 1].

Other Frequent Errors

Irregular Verbs. Various students made errors related to irregular past tense verbs. For example, instead of using the correct past form of the verb "sing", i.e., "sang", one student wrote the word "**singed**" [Student no. 11, topic 2]. Another student used the word "**sawed**" instead of "saw", as well as "**drinked**" instead of "drank" [Student no. 3, topic 2]. A different student used the word "**rided**" instead of "rode" [Student no. 24, topic 2]. The source of this type of error is attributed to overgeneralization (intralingual transfer) because students tend to extend grammar rules and infer them from basic ones due to their partial knowledge of English.

Relative Pronouns. Some students made errors related to relative pronouns, either misusing them or omitting them altogether. For instance, one student wrote, "There was somebody **where** selling fruits", instead of writing, "There was somebody who was selling fruits" [Student no. 13, topic 2]. Another student wrote, "In my opinion the electricity **have** both negative and positive", instead of writing, "In my opinion, electricity has both negative and positive sides" [Student no. 4, topic 1]. Incorrectly using or omitting relative pronouns is attributed to Arabic interference.

Voice. Very few students made voice errors. A prominent example is one student who wrote, "**Houses destroyed**", instead of writing, "The houses were destroyed" [Student no. 48, topic 3]. The source of this type of error is Arabic interference because students are directly translating from Arabic without considering the particularity of grammar rules in English.

Omission or Overuse of Conjunctions. Some students made errors related to conjunctions by either omitting conjunction words or overusing them. A prominent example is one student who wrote, "**played swimmed had fun time**", instead of correctly writing, "played, swam, and had fun". [Student no. 24, topic 2]. This student also made an error with irregular past tense verbs, i.e.,

"swimmed" instead of "swam". Nonetheless, this type of error is considered part of interlingual errors because conjunction systems in Arabic and English differ significantly.

Infinitive Verbs. Various students faced issues with writing the correct form of infinitive verbs. For example, one student wrote, "...and decided **to eating** the dinner", instead of "...decided to eat" [Student no. 2, topic 2]. Another student also wrote, "We **should to go** to the house", instead of "We should go to the house" [Student no. 38, topic 2]. This error could be considered part of negative first-language transfer because the equivalent of the preposition "to" in Arabic is used after the verb, different from English in which it is used before the verb to create an infinitive.

Discussion

The study's findings reveal that the most frequent English grammatical errors produced by 8th-grade Arab EFL students include errors in tenses, fragments, prepositions, articles, word order, pronouns, and agreement. These results confirm the study's hypotheses and highlight significant differences in the number and types of grammatical errors across students' English proficiency levels. Advanced-level students demonstrated a better grasp of English grammar rules than intermediate- and beginner-level students, with beginner students mostly struggling with sentence fragments and simple sentence construction. These patterns underscore the necessity of differentiated instructional approaches to address the various needs of different learners.

The errors identified in this study align closely with those documented in previous research. For instance, tense errors were found to be the most prevalent among Arab students, which is consistent with the study results of Ridha (2012), Sawalmeh (2013), and Adam (2024). Errors involving sentence fragments, such as copula omission, were similarly noted in earlier works (e.g., Sawalmeh, 2013;

Murad & Khalil, 2015). Errors in prepositions, articles, and word order also emerged as a persistent challenge for Arab students, similar to the findings from the studies conducted by Ridha (2012), Alsher (2021), and others. Furthermore, the current study's findings corroborate the view that such English grammar errors among Arab EFL learners largely stem from first-language interference (L1) and intralingual factors such as overgeneralization, incomprehension of rule restrictions, and incomplete application of rules.

The influence of negative first-language transfer is particularly evident in errors concerning tenses, articles, and prepositions. The lack of equivalent grammatical structures in Arabic, such as auxiliary verbs (*do, does, did*) or progressive tense forms, often confuses Arab EFL learners. In addition, word order errors highlight a tendency to apply Arabic syntactic patterns to English sentences, resulting in literal translations that compromise English grammatical accuracy. These observations align with Al-Khresheh's (2010) and Adam's (2024) findings regarding the impact of Arabic syntactic structures in shaping learners' English output.

This study emphasizes the importance of error analysis and the critical examination of the types and sources of language errors produced by learners of foreign language acquisition. Error analysis can thus help researchers and educators create more tailored instructional strategies and further enhance the teaching and learning of a target language. For instance, tailored instructional strategies focusing on tenses, articles, and word order are essential for overcoming the obstacles facing Arab EFL learners and improving their learning outcomes. The study also underscores the value of contrastive analysis in addressing these challenges. Educators can help students internalize English rules more effectively by identifying differences between Arabic and English grammar, further fostering metalinguistic awareness, reducing error frequency, and improving their overall English writing skills.

Conclusion

The current study highlights the critical need for targeted instructional strategies addressing the specific grammatical challenges faced by Arab EFL learners. The findings emphasize that proficiency levels significantly influence error patterns, with advanced-level students demonstrating fewer errors and beginner-level students struggling with fundamental grammatical rules. Therefore, teachers must adopt differentiated instructions that consider Arab students' varying proficiency levels in English. For beginner-level students, the focus should be on building foundational skills, such as constructing simple sentences and mastering basic grammatical rules. Advanced learners, in contrast, can benefit from tasks that refine their understanding and application of more complex grammatical structures.

The errors identified in this study should be viewed as opportunities for targeted intervention rather than sole deficiencies. Teachers can use these insights to develop curriculum content that directly addresses frequent error categories and fosters a deeper understanding of English grammar rules. Incorporating error and contrastive analysis exercises into lesson instructions can thus help students become more aware of the structural differences between Arabic and English, reducing the influence of negative first-language transfer and intralingual errors. Fostering metalinguistic awareness and encouraging peer feedback can also aid learners in internalizing English grammatical rules more effectively. By understanding the sources and patterns of errors, educators can create more effective teaching strategies that support learners at all levels, ultimately contributing to better English proficiency outcomes.

Bibliography

Adam, M. H. *Postsecondary Arabic-Speaking English as a foreign language learners' perceptions of learning English Sentence Structure* [Doctoral dissertation, Walden University]. (2024) ScholarWorks. https://scholarworks.waldenu.edu/dissertations/16265/

Adas, D., & Bakir, A. "Writing difficulties and new solutions: Blended learning as an approach to improve writing abilities." *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science 3*(9), (2013): 254-266.

Al-Khresheh, M. "Interlingual interference in the English language word order structure of Jordanian EFL learners." *European journal of social sciences 16*(1), (2010): 106-113.

Al-Khuwaileh, A. A., & Shoumali, A. A. Writing errors: a study of the writing ability of Arab learners of academic English and Arabic at university. *Language, Culture and Curriculum 13*(2), (2000): 174-183.

Al-Othman, F. H. Some English writing difficulties faced by Arab students. *Sahifatul Alsun 29*(1), (2013): 2-16.

Alsher, T. Error Analysis of Written Essays: Do Private School Students Show Better EFL Writing Performance? *International Journal of Research in Education and Science 7*(3), (2021): 608-629.

Barkaoui, K. Teaching writing to second language learners: Insights from theory and research. *TESL Reporter 40*(1), (2007): 35-48.

Bashiri, A., & Shahrokhi, M. Improving writing proficiency, autonomy, and critical thinking ability through process-based writing instruction: A study of Iranian EFL learners. *International Journal of Applied Linguistics and English Literature 5*(1), (2016): 232-244.

Bataineh, R. F. Jordanian undergraduate EFL students' errors in the use of the indefinite. *The Asian EFL Journal Quarterly 7*(1), (2005): 56-76.

Benesch, S. Teachers of English to speakers of other languages. *TESOL Quarterly 27*(4), (1993): 705-717.

Brown, H. D. *Principles of language learning and teaching.* 3rd ed. S.l.: Prentice-Hall Regents, 1994.

Corder, S. P. "The significance of learners' errors." In J. C. Richards (Ed.). *Error analysis: Perspectives on second language acquisition* (pp. 19-27). Longman: s.n., 1967.

Corder, S. P. "Error analysis." In J. P. B. Allen & S. P. Corder (Eds.). *The Edinburgh course in applied linguistics. Vol. 3, Techniques in applied linguistics* (pp. 122-154). Oxford University Press, 1974.

El-Mortaji, L. *Writing ability and strategies in two discourse types: a cognitive study of multilingual Moroccan university students writing in Arabic (L1) and English (L3)* [Unpublished doctoral dissertation]. University of Essex, 2001.

Gass, S., & Selinker, L. *Second language acquisition: An Introductory course.* S.l.: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1994.

Graham, S. (2008). Effective writing instruction for all students. *Renaissance Learning.* Retrieved December 8, 2024, from http://doc.renlearn.com/KMNet/R004250923GJCF33.pdf

Haryanto, T. *Grammatical error analysis in students' recount texts* [Doctoral dissertation, Semarang State University]. Academia.edu. (2007). https://www.academia.edu/4382003/GRAMMATICAL_ERROR _ANALYSIS_in_STUDENTS_RECOUNT_TEXTS

Jenwitheesukk, T. "A study of persisted syntactic errors in writing of the 3rd year students of English for international communication program." *Proceedings of international conference on the role of university in hands-on education, Rajamangla University of Technology Lanna, Chaing-Mai*, (2009): 982-986.

Karim, S. M. S., Fathema, F., & Hakim, A. Common errors on the usage of verbs in English composition: a case study of Bangladeshi EFL learners. *Asian Journal of Educational Research 3*(2), (2015): 1-7.

Kaweera, C. "Writing error: A review of interlingual and intralingual interference in EFL context." *English language teaching 6*(7), (2013): 9-18.

Murad, T. M., & Khalil, M. H. "Analysis of errors in English writings committed by Arab first-year college students of EFL in Israel." *Journal of Language Teaching and Research*, *6*(3), (2015): 475-481.

Odlin, T. *Language transfer: cross-linguistic influence in language learning.* S.l.: Cambridge University Press, 1989.

Rababah, G. "Communication Problems Facing Arab Learners of English: A personal perspective." *TEFL web journal 2*(1), (2003): 15-27.

Raimes, A. "Tradition and revolution in ESL teaching." *TESOL Quarterly 17*(4), (1983): 535-552.

Raimes, A. "What unskilled ESL students do as they write: A classroom study of composing." *TESOL Quarterly 19*(2), (1985): 229-258.

Richards, J. C. "A Non-Contrastive Approach to Error Analysis." In J. C. Richards (Ed.). *Error analysis: Perspectives on second language acquisition* (pp. 172-188). S.l.: Longman, 1975.

Ridha, N. S. A. "The effect of EFL learners' mother tongue on their writings in English: An error analysis study." *Journal of the College of Arts* 60, (2012): 22-45.

Ringbom, H. *The role of the first language in foreign language learning*. S.l.: Multilingual Matters Ltd, 1987.

Sawalmeh, M. H. M. "Error analysis of written English essays: The case of students of the preparatory year program in Saudi Arabia." *English for Specific Purposes World 40*(14), (2013): 1-17.

Scott, M. S., & Tucker, G. R. "Error analysis and English language strategies of Arab students." *Language Learning 24*(1), (1974): 69-97.

Selinker, L. "Interlanguage." *IRAL-International Review of Applied Linguistics in Language Teaching* 10(1-4), (1972): 209-232.

Touchie, H. Y. "Second language learning errors their types, causes, and treatment." *JALT journal*, *8*(1), (1986): 75-80.

Wilkins, D. A. *Linguistics in language teaching*. S.l.: MIT Press, l972.