

## Analyzing Speaking Errors Made by EFL Saudi University Students

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### Abstract

This paper investigates speaking errors made by first-year Saudi university students. It aims to categorize these errors and identify their sources. The researcher follows Corder's (1974) steps in error analysis. Three sources of errors are considered in this paper: interlanguage errors, intralanguage errors, and unique errors. Finally, the researcher seeks to explain why the students commit such errors. Speaking samples of 44 participants are collected. The researcher gave the participants feedback on the errors they made and asked them to comment on those errors. Data analysis shows two major types of errors: pronunciation errors and grammatical errors. The results of the data analysis show that most of the pronunciation errors (91%) are classified as interlanguage errors. These results indicate that the participants relied heavily on their mother tongue in their usage of the target language. The results also show that almost one-third of the grammatical errors made by the participants belong to interlanguage errors. However, more than half of the grammatical errors are attributed to intralingual effects. Unique errors have the lowest frequency of occurrence, with 10.6% of the grammatical errors made. The participants' feedback about their errors reveals that lack of motivation and organization may be among the significant reasons for their errors. More evaluation and recommendations are given in the last two sections of the paper.

**Keywords:** Error analysis, grammatical errors, L1 interference, Saudi context, speaking errors

**Cite as:** Al-Tamari, E. A. (2019). Analyzing Speaking Errors Made by EFL Saudi University Students. *Arab World English Journal, Special Issue: The Dynamics of EFL in Saudi Arabia*. 56-69. DOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.24093/awej/efl1.5>

## 1. Introduction

In English as a foreign language (EFL) classroom setting, students are expected to make errors while learning English as a foreign language. Such errors are a valuable resource that can provide teachers with information about the students' progress in their learning process and the obstacles they are facing. If both students and teachers are aware of these errors, the learning/teaching process is expected to be more focused and centered. This study aims to identify first-year Saudi students' speaking errors, analyze them, and then provide some suggestions on how to utilize these errors to help both students and teachers achieve their teaching/ learning goals. Students should be informed of their errors, and teachers can tailor activities and assignments to focus on those errors. By studying their students' errors, teachers become aware of their students' level. Students also can use their errors to improve their English language. The claim that the errors made by EFL/ ESL (English as a second language) learners are systematic and expected (Corder 1967; Nemser 1971; Selinker 1972; Adjemian 1976) should help make the learning/ teaching process more transparent and the goals more achievable.

## 2. Literature review

### 2.1 Error Analysis

As a branch of Applied Linguistics, Error Analysis (EA) is concerned with learner's performance errors. It has shifted the researchers' attention from focusing on similarities and differences between the First language (L1) and Second language (L2) to concentrating on the regularities and types of errors made by different learners of English. Corder (1967) stresses the importance of learners' errors as a developmental stage in the learning process. Strevens (1969) argues that teachers should view their students' errors as learning 'strategies' used by the learner, not as a problem. EA has evolved as a hypothesis that would explain what Contrastive Analysis (CA) could not explain. Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis was first started by Fries (1945) and adopted later by Lado (1957). It compares the similarities and differences between learners' native language and the target language in an attempt to grasp the effect of the native language on the target language (Brown, 2007). CA studies similarities and differences between L1 and L2 to explain and predict which grammatical aspects in L2 would be easy to learn and which ones are expected to be complicated. Comparing two grammatical systems to justify the learner's errors has been a major 'defect' in CA, as Richards and Sampson (1974) puts it. The fact that CA could not explain specific errors that are not related to L1 weakened the researchers' reliance on it as a means to study learner's errors. EA, on the other hand, compares many aspects of the learning process of EFL/ ESL learners to the developmental stages children go through in their acquisition of their L1. In other words, errors made by L2 learners are as natural and expected as the ones made by children acquiring their L1 (Richards, 1971; Corder, 1974).

Richards (1971) classifies the errors made by the learners into three types:

1. Interlanguage errors (interference errors): These are the errors caused by the 'interference' from L1, i.e., errors that result from some 'characteristics' of the mother tongue 'carried over' to the learners' target language.
2. Intralingual errors: "those which reflect the general characteristics of rule learning, such as faulty generalization, incomplete application of rules, and failure to learn conditions under which rules apply" (pp. 5-6).

3. Developmental errors: those errors that “illustrate the learner attempting to build up hypotheses about the English language from his limited experience of it in the classroom or text-book” (p. 6).

Dulay and Burt (1974) merge developmental and intralingual errors as one type of error and add another one that they term as ‘unique errors’. Such errors refer to errors that are neither interference errors nor developmental (intralingual) ones. In the present study, three types of errors will be considered: interlingual errors, intralingual errors (developmental), and unique errors.

## 2.2 Previous studies

The fact that most ESL/EFL error analysis studies have been conducted on writing samples can be attributed to two factors: first, collecting written ESL/EFL written samples is easier compared to collecting speaking samples. Second, it is less time consuming and relatively easier to analyze written samples. In the Saudi context, two studies have been conducted on speaking errors in the last few years, namely, Alahmadi and Kesseiri (2013) and Alahmadi (2014).

Alahmadi and Kesseiri (2013) study language transfer speaking errors among Saudi students. The authors conducted interviews with 30 students in Saudi Arabia and asked them general questions to elicit speaking samples from them. The subjects appear to be students who have studied English for six years with no reference to their age or which level they are at during the collection of the speaking samples. They report that the participants committed the following grammatical errors: an unmarked form of verbs, third-person pronouns, misused singular and plural, articles, sentences without a verb, and sentences with pronoun copying. The authors sporadically discuss the findings referring to some errors as direct results of the knowledge of L1 and labeling others as cases of generalization. They stress the importance of studying such errors for both teachers and students.

Alahmadi (2014) analyzes grammatical errors made by 30 Saudi students who study in the foundation year at the University of Tibah in Saudi Arabia. The author reports analyzing nine different types of errors made by the participants who were interviewed for an average of ten minutes. The nine categories are: an unmarked form of verbs, misuse of the verb tense, misuse of articles, misuse of singular and plural, misuse of prepositions, use of sentences without a verb, sentences with pronoun copy, third-person pronouns, and misuse of regular and irregular verbs. She refers to these errors as ‘interference errors’, ‘intralingual errors’, and ‘unique errors’. She classifies the following errors as interference errors: use of the singular form of the noun instead of the plural form, misuse of the definite article, deletion of the definite article, and deletion of prepositions. The ‘use of plural forms of nouns instead of singular ones’ and ‘third-person pronoun errors’ are classified as intralingual errors. Finally, she classifies examples of incorrectly adding a definite article that is not found in the Arabic equivalent sentences as unique errors. The addition of unnecessary prepositions (preposition redundancy) is also classified as a unique error in the study. In sum, she concludes that most of the errors made by the participants were cases of L1 interference.

### 3. Methodology

#### 3.1 Participants

The participants of this study are 44 first-year male students majoring in English at King Khalid University in Saudi Arabia. The participants studied English for at least nine years before joining the university. All the participants speak Arabic as their first language and have learned English as a foreign language. The average age of the participants is 18 years. All the participants were my students who studied 'Listening and Speaking 1' with me. In this course, instructors generally spend about one hour weekly on teaching speaking and two hours on teaching listening for about 14 weeks in the semester. In speaking sessions, specific topics are raised for discussion, and students practice talking about those topics. Students are encouraged to speak as many sentences as they can about each topic; short answers are not accepted. A minimum number of sentences is required for each topic. The topics covered in this course range from talking about self and family to talking about their daily routines and special occasions. Other topics taught include a physical description of a person or a place. Students are encouraged to write notes and use those notes as they practice talking about a specific topic. In later stages of practice, students are not allowed to use notes. Students practice speaking in class as one group where a student speaks in front of the class, and the teacher will comment on the student's performance. Students are also asked to practice talking about the specified topic in pairs. During the speaking sessions, students can ask about the meanings of certain words or how they are pronounced. Instructors always make sure that they focus on the speaking errors the students make or the ones that the students are expected to make. Students are always asked to take note of those errors. From the beginning of the semester, students are encouraged to use speaking dictionaries to help improve their pronunciation. Major pronunciation errors are mentioned in class, and the students are asked to repeat the correct pronunciation.

#### 3.2 Data Collection

The data for this paper were collected during the final exam of the course. In this course, the students take two speaking exams, a midterm and a final. The exams are administered in my office, where each student is tested individually. The fact that each student is tested individually gives the students more confidence since some of them are reluctant to speak in front of the whole class. Each student is allocated ten minutes to take his exam, and all sessions are recorded. To break the ice and lower the tension, the researcher welcomes and greets the students in Arabic and asks them to relax and do their best. The students know that they need to speak a minimum number of sentences for each topic. For example, they need at least six sentences when they talk about self and at least ten sentences when they talk about their daily routine.

Each student is given feedback on his performance. The following questions are asked after each student finishes his exam:

1. Why did you make those errors? (To most students)
2. Have you used speaking dictionaries? (To all students)

The first question is asked to the students who make a significant amount of errors. The students who do very well with minimum or no errors are excluded from this question. The second question is asked to all students. The purpose behind these questions is to see how motivated and committed

the students are. About 70% percent of the students passed the exam although most of them got low to good grades. Only 11% of students got A.

In the present study, the author follows Corder's (1974) five steps of error analysis: a collection of a sample of the learner's language, identification of the errors, description of the errors, explanation of the errors, and evaluation of the errors.

### 3.3 Research Questions

This study aims to answer the following questions:

4. What are the errors committed in the spoken language of Saudi EFL college students?
5. What are the categories that these errors fall under: interlingual, intralingual, or unique errors?
6. Why are these errors committed?

## 4. Data Analysis

The researcher recorded the final speaking exam of 47 students. Three samples were excluded for lack of enough material where students said little to nothing on the exam. The remaining samples were analyzed: errors were identified, classified, and explained. Table 1 shows the steps used to analyze the data:

Table 1. *Analysis procedures*

Step	Description	Examples
Step 1 Data collection	Speaking Final Exam	44 samples were collected
Step 2 Identify errors	Different types of errors	(sounds, subject, articles, verbs, plural nouns, prepositions, pronouns, and word order)
Step 3 Classify errors	Is it related to pronunciation? Is it related to verbs?	- Pronunciation errors - Grammatical errors
Step 4 Count errors	How many errors are there?	- How many students made each specified category?
Step 5 Identify source	What is the cause behind these errors?	- Interlingual - Intralingual - Unique

Based on their nature, the errors are classified into two groups: pronunciation errors and grammatical errors.

### 4.1 Pronunciation errors

Many students make errors in pronouncing English words during the different stages of their learning process of English as a foreign language, and Arab students are no exception. English programs and teachers do not give pronunciation a priority in their curricula and classroom activities although students often view pronunciation as a priority in their learning activities (Willing, 1988; Brown, 1992; Fraser, 2000; Yates, 2001). Speaking without paying attention to the pronunciation of the words may result in conveying different meanings or misunderstanding.

The collected samples for this study indicate that pronunciation needs to be given more time while doing classroom activities and self-study activities.

Table 2 illustrates with examples the types of errors made by the participants. It also shows the frequencies of these errors and their percentages among the participants and the errors in total.

Table 2. *Errors and their frequencies*

Types of Errors	Number of students who made the errors	Percentage among students	Percentage among errors
<b>1. Sound replacement errors</b>			
a. [p] → [b] - prayer → brayer - play → blay	36	82%	27%
b. [v] → [f] - five → fife - every → efery	33	75%	25%
c. [ə:] → [eɪ] / [i:] / [ɪ] - first → [feɪrst] or [fɪrəst] - first b → [fɪrəst] - early → [ɪrli]	35	80%	26%
<b>2. Syllable breaking errors</b> - [fɪrəst]; [wɔrkəs]; [wɔrkəd]; [nɪkəst]	18	41%	13%
<b>3. Mispronounced words</b> - eyes → [ɪz]; [ɪzi] - beard → bird / bread - height → heat / hate	12	27%	9%
<b>Number of Errors</b>	<b>134</b>		<b>100%</b>

As Table 2 shows, the errors are made at the level of the sound by mispronouncing certain consonants or vowels. They are also made at the levels of the syllable and the word. The errors at the level of the sound can be safely referred to L1 interference since these sounds do not exist in Arabic and their pronunciation is difficult for the students. Students need to learn and practice pronouncing these sounds to have them correctly pronounced in words. It is clear that most of the students (75-82%) chose the closest Arabic counterparts for these sounds. The closest equivalent for [p] is [b], while the closest one for [v] is [f]. For the sound [ə:], there is no clear equivalent for it, so the options students chose were [eɪ], [i:], and [ɪ]. To work on correcting the pronunciation of these sounds, more effort from both teachers and students is needed.

The second type of pronunciation errors can also be safely attributed to L1 interference. Classical Arabic does not allow consonant clusters word or syllable initially. The following CV structures are permitted in Arabic: CV, CVV, CVC, CVCC, CVVC, and CVVCC (Abushihab, 2010; Chentir, Guerti, & Hirst, 2009). Accordingly, only one consonant is allowed at the beginning

of the syllable, and a maximum of two are allowed in the coda position. To make it easier to pronounce, students tend to break the unfamiliar cluster by inserting a vowel between the consonants. For example, the word ‘first’ is a one-syllable word that has a cluster of three consonants in its coda, which is an unfamiliar structure for Arab students. To make the word easier to pronounce, they tend to break the cluster by inserting a vowel as shown in the Table 2.

The third type of errors is what we termed ‘mispronounced words’ because we could not identify a pattern, nor could I find a clear reason for making these pronunciation errors. Such errors show that the students are not putting enough effort into learning the correct pronunciation of such words. For example, the word ‘eyes’ is a relatively easy word to pronounce, and we have repeatedly practiced pronouncing it in the classroom. There is not a clear reason for why students make such an error other than lack of practice and lack of interest in learning the language. On the bright side, these are the least made errors in terms of the number of the students who made them (27%) and the least in the total number of the errors made (only 9%). Most of these errors can be easily overcome once a clear plan is devised and follow up procedures are taken. Table 3 summarizes the classification of the pronunciation errors made by the students and the causes of those errors.

Table 3. *Error types and causes*

<b>Types of Errors</b>	<b>Cause</b>
<b>4. Sound replacement errors</b>	Interlingual errors
<b>5. Syllable breaking errors</b>	Interlingual errors
<b>6. Mispronounced words</b>	Unique errors

In the next section, we will deal with the grammatical errors that constitute the majority of the errors made by the participants. As the next section shows, the number and frequencies of the grammatical errors made by the participants are much more than those of the pronunciation errors discussed earlier.

#### **4.2 Grammatical errors**

This section explores the grammatical errors made by the participants. For ease of discussion and presentation, the errors are grouped into three tables. The first table (Table 4) presents the grammatical errors that are related to ‘verbs’. These errors are classified into eight categories, namely: wrong verb, wrong form of verb, omission of 3<sup>rd</sup> person singular –s, omission of to-infinitive, addition of unnecessary to-infinitive, omission of ‘be’ as a helping verb, and omission of ‘be’ as a main verb.

Table 4. *Verb errors*

Types of errors	Number of students made the errors	Percentage among students	Percentage among errors
<b><i>Errors related to verbs</i></b>			
a. <i>Wrong verb</i> - <i>has</i> instead of <i>is</i> (He has slim.) - <i>is</i> instead of <i>has</i> (He is white skin.)	8	18%	5.3%
b. <i>Wrong verb form</i> - He is teach Islamic. - We are play football every day. - My family is consist of 5 people.	15	34%	9.8%
c. <i>Omission of 3<sup>rd</sup> Person singular -s</i> - He work in the police. - He teach in school.	11	25%	7.2%
d. <i>Omission of to-infinitive</i> - I go to mosque pray fajr.	2	5%	1.3%
e. <i>Omission of 'be' as a helping verb</i> - Then I watching TV. - I playing football. - I reading Quran.	8	18%	5.3%
f. <i>Omission of 'be' as a main verb</i> - He slim. - My father 48 years old.	9	20%	6%

The first type of error, 'using a wrong verb', cannot be referred to as an interlingual error nor as an intralingual error. Two verbs are affected by this error: 'is' and 'has'. The two verbs wrongly replace one another as the examples in Table 4 show. Such an error may be traced to the fact that the participant is unaware of the subtle differences in meaning and usage between 'is' and 'has'. To him, both verbs are used to report the quality the subject has. In this case, the participants are referring to the quality of 'being slim' and the quality of 'having white skin'. Notice that the frequency of this error is relatively low as 18% of the students committed this error, and it ranks low among other errors at 5.3% of the total errors made.

Using the 'wrong form of the verb' is an example of intralingual errors. According to Richards (1971), these cases can be examples of overgeneralization since the learner is creating a 'deviant' structure by reliance on his 'experience' of other structures in the target language. The 'omission of to-infinitive' is an example of unique errors because there are no signs of the effect of the target language on the learner to cause this error. In addition, a literal translation from Arabic will lead the participant to use 'to' before the verb 'pray' not to delete it. The 'omission of the 3<sup>rd</sup> person -s', on the contrary, is an intralingual error that has nothing to do with Arabic. The rule of adding a '3<sup>rd</sup> person singular -s' to the verb in the simple present when the subject is third-person singular can be difficult for learners, especially for beginners. Students tend to generalize the use of the verb without '-s' as is the case when the subject is not third-person singular.

Another intralingual error is the ‘omission of “be”’ both as a helping verb and as a main verb. According to Richards (1971), these errors are common among learners with different mother tongues and should not be explained as resulting from L1 interference. More grammatical errors are displayed in Table 5. These errors are related to the use of articles and prepositions.

Table 5. *Articles and prepositions errors*

Types of errors	Number of students who made the errors	Percentage among students	Percentage among errors
<b><i>Errors Related to the articles</i></b>			
a. <i>Omission of indefinite article</i> - I have big family. - He has child.	9	20%	6%
b. <i>Addition of unnecessary indefinite article</i> - He is a single. - He has a straight brown hair.	26	59%	17%
c. <i>Omission of definite article</i> - I go to bathroom. - I go to kitchen.	3	7%	2%
d. <i>Addition of unnecessary definite article</i> - Then take the shower. - I go to the bed. - I go to the grandfather.	5	11%	3.3%
<b><i>Errors related to prepositions</i></b>			
a. <i>Omission of prepositions</i> - He is 8 <sup>th</sup> grade. - I wake up 5 o'clock.	15	34%	9.8%
b. <i>Addition of unnecessary prepositions</i> - Then I go back to home. - I go to swimming.	5	11%	3.3%
c. <i>Using wrong prepositions</i> - My family consist for my father ... - My family consist from ...	5	11%	3.3%

Since Arabic does not have an indefinite article, the ‘omission of the indefinite article’ as shown in Table 5 can be explained as a direct result of L1 interference. This error is made by 20% of the participants. However, the ‘addition of unnecessary indefinite article’ is recorded as the most frequent grammatical error among students (59%) and among the errors made (17%). This error can be explained as a result of the participants’ awareness of the importance of the indefinite article rule and the fact that their teachers might have repeatedly reminded them of not leaving out the

indefinite article. The fact that they have not mastered this rule yet could have resulted in the overgeneralization of the rule. This error can be categorized as an intralingual error because if it were an interference error, we would expect the omission of the indefinite article as mentioned earlier. With regard to the omission of the definite article, it cannot be categorized as an interference error either since the Arabic equivalents have a definite article. A direct transfer of the words in the sentence would require the student to use the definite article. There is also no logic in referring to this error as an intralingual error since the structure is not difficult for the participants and no analogy or generalization is evident. This is why we will classify this error as unique. The other type of errors regarding the definite article is ‘the addition of unnecessary definite article’. By examining the Arabic counterparts, it becomes evident to us that these errors are cases of interlingual errors since they all include an equivalent definite article in Arabic.

Both cases of the omission and addition of ‘prepositions’ can be explained as cases of L1 interference. For example, you do not need a preposition before ‘time’ in Arabic, unlike the case in English. Therefore, a student relying heavily on L1 knowledge is expected to make such errors. The same argument can be said about ‘the addition of unnecessary prepositions’. While English does not require a preposition with ‘go’ in the examples provided, Arabic does. It seems that we can argue that the omission and addition of prepositions errors made by our participants are interlingual errors; especially, we are dealing with errors made by beginner learners of English. The last type of errors in Table 5 is ‘wrong use of prepositions’. Koffi (2010) argues that the ‘polysemous’ nature of the English prepositions makes them so difficult to learn. Lam (2009) adds that prepositions are not easily understood in oral speech because many of them are ‘monosyllabic’ which adds to the difficulty of them being recognized. Richards (1971) states that “Analogy seems to be a major factor in the misuse of prepositions” (p.9). He argues that:

*He showed me the book leads to he explained me the book; he said to me gives he asked to me; we talked about it, therefore we discussed about it; ask him to do it produces make him to do it; go with him gives follow with him.(p. 9)*

The above examples presented by Richards (1971) show that the nature of the meaning and use of the prepositions makes it difficult for the students to master their usage easily. Indeed, analogy seems to be their best bid. Therefore, errors that result from the misuse of prepositions can be classified as intralingual errors.

So far, most of the errors appear to be related to factors other than L1 interference. This indicates that unlike pronunciation errors, grammatical errors can result from sources other than the mother tongue. Most of these errors seem to be resulting from some ‘developmental stage’ in which the learner relies on his knowledge of the target language more than on his knowledge of his mother tongue.

Finally, Table 6 shows the rest of the errors made by the participants. These errors include: omission of plural –s, omission of subjects, addition of unnecessary pronouns, using wrong pronouns, and errors related to word order.

Table 6. *Errors related to nouns, pronouns, and word order*

Types of errors	Number of students who made the errors	Percentage among students	Percentage among errors
<b>Errors related to nouns</b> <i>Omission of plural -s</i> - I have two brother and 2 sister.	8	18%	5.3%
<b>Errors related to subjects</b> <i>Omission of subjects</i> - First, wake up at 5 o'clock. - After pray almaghreb go with my friends	11	25%	7.2%
<b>Errors related to pronouns</b>			
<i>a. Addition of unnecessary pronouns</i> - My father he is 50 years old. - My mother she is 35 years old.	3	7%	2%
<i>b. Wrong pronouns</i> - He works housewife. - I hair color black.	6	14%	3.9%
<b>Errors related to word order</b> - Brother second name is Yazeed. - He has skin brown.	3	7%	2%
<b>Number of errors</b>	<b>152</b>		<b>100%</b>

Jain (1974) and Tan (1978) justify 'the omission of plural morpheme –s' as a simplification or overgeneralization strategy that is utilized by the learners. We cannot refer to the omission of the plural morpheme as an interference error since Arabic has its unique plural system that differs entirely from that of English. Such errors can be categorized as intralingual errors. On the contrary, the omission of the subject errors can be justified as cases of transfer from Arabic to English. Subjects can be deleted in Arabic, and they can be understood by the form of the verb. It seems that some students find it easier to follow that pattern and transfer it to English. More work needs to be done regarding this error since 25% of the participants made the error.

Errors related to 'the addition of unnecessary pronouns' can be attributed to the way the participants were practicing and preparing for their speaking exams. Students are encouraged to take notes to make it easier for them to remember the ideas they need to talk about. For example, a student may write a note 'father' and write next to it some notes about his father. When he starts speaking, he mentions the 'note' and then the sentence, which results in a sentence like, 'My father he is a doctor'. This kind of error can be categorized as unique. However, using 'the wrong form of the pronoun' such as using 'he' to refer to the participant's mother can be classified as an intralingual error. Arabic has a complicated system of pronouns that distinguishes case, gender, and number similar to the one in English. This kind of error may be justified as a case of overgeneralization or simplification. Finally, three students made errors related to 'word order'. English noun phrases require the adjective to precede the noun, but the Arabic ones require the adjective to follow the noun. The errors made by the participants are straightforward cases of L1

transfer. For example, the participant said 'skin brown' instead of saying 'brown skin' placing the adjective 'brown' after the noun 'skin' as required in Arabic.

Table 7 summarizes the causes of all the grammatical errors that we have discussed in this paper.

Table 7. *Summary of errors and causes*

Interlingual Errors	Percentage	Intralingual Errors	Percentage	Unique Errors	Percentage
1. Omission of indefinite article	6%	1. Wrong verb form	9.8%	1. Wrong verb	5.3%
2. Addition of unnecessary definite article	3.3%	2. Omission of 3 <sup>rd</sup> Person singular -s	7.2%	2. Omission of to-infinitive	1.3%
3. Omission of prepositions	9.8%	3. Omission of 'be' as a helping	5.3%	3. Omission of definite article	2%
4. Addition of unnecessary prepositions	3.3%	4. Omission of 'be' as a main verb	6%	4. Addition of unnecessary pronouns	2%
5. Omission of subjects	7.2%	5. Addition of unnecessary indefinite article	17%		
6. Error related to word order	2%	6. Using wrong prepositions	3.3%		
		7. Omission of plural -s	5.3%		
		8. Using wrong of pronouns	3.9%		
	<b>31.6%</b>		<b>57.8%</b>		<b>10.6%</b>

As Table 7 shows, most of the errors are intralingual ones, which reflects the developmental stage the participants are still in. The effect of Arabic on the learners is evident as they continue to make errors based on their knowledge of Arabic. The percentage of the interlingual errors is close to the average found by Ellis (1985), which is around 33%. The unique errors, 10.6%, comprise the least percentage of errors.

#### 4.3 *Participants' evaluation of their errors*

To get feedback from the students, the researcher asked the following questions after giving each student feedback on his performance:

1. Why did you make those errors? (To most students)
2. Have you used speaking dictionaries? (To all students)

Out of the 44 participants, eight students expressed their lack of interest in studying English and that they were planning to transfer to another department. However, it is worth mentioning that these students knew that in order to transfer, they needed to pass the course and get a good score to raise their chance of transferring to another department. It was evident that those students lacked the motivation to improve their English since they are already planning to transfer to other departments. Eleven of the participants stated that they studied hard for the exam, and they expected to do better. The researcher explained to them that preparing for the speaking exam should be an ongoing task. The point here is that teachers make it clear to the students that speaking

is a skill that they need to practice daily and that studying a week or two before the exam is not a wise thing to do. The last group of the participants, 13 students, said that they did not have time to prepare for the exam. This reflects misjudgment and lack of organizational skills among those students.

The answers to the second question show a lack of motivation and carelessness among students. Only eight students said that they used speaking dictionaries. Again, the importance of using electronic devices to help the students in learning English is stressed repeatedly during the semester. It is also obvious that the time allocated for speaking practice is not enough. More time is needed for the students to practice speaking. Moreover, at least in the first semester of the students' experience in the university, guided speaking practice and close follow up on the students' progress is needed.

## 5. Conclusions

This study has reviewed the types and classifications of speaking errors made by Saudi university freshmen. The study aimed to investigate the reasons behind these errors. Two types of errors are found: pronunciation errors and grammatical errors. Careful analysis of the pronunciation errors shows that the effect of L1 on the target language is tremendous. Most of the errors made are classified as interlingual errors. More attention to the teaching/ learning of pronunciation is required. The analysis of the grammatical errors shows that about one-third of the errors can be referred to as L1 interference, and more than half of those errors can be classified as intralingual errors. Unique errors form about 10.6% of the errors.

The brief feedback from the participants shows that lack of motivation and lack of proper management of time affected the students' performance. Students need to be guided at the beginning of the semester by providing counseling on how to manage their time. Teachers need to track their students' achievement and provide extra assistance when needed. Students need to be motivated and convinced that with hard work and guided assistance from their teachers, they will become successful language learners.

### About the Author:

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