

Assessing English Syntactic Structures Experienced by Sudanese Female Students at Secondary Schools, (2013-2014)

Omer Elsheikh Hago

Department of Languages & Translation
Taibah University, Saudi Arabia

&

Mrs. Mai Hassan Ahmed Ali

Abstract

This study is restricted to assess writing performance in the Sudanese female students at secondary schools at Omdurman locality, Aluola secondary school for girls, in the academic year 2013 – 2014. It aims at investigating the English syntactic structures experienced by Sudanese Students at secondary schools. The researcher used the analytical descriptive method in this study and a test as a tool for collecting data. The sample of the study was about ninety nine students at secondary schools in the academic year (2013-2014). After the analysis of the types of errors made by the subjects, the study has come out with many findings. The major problem behind the students' errors is the mother tongue interference. The Sudanese learners of English in general seem not to have an adequate proficiency in understanding the meaning and semantics when they express themselves in English syntactic structures. Students need a supplementary method in order to express themselves accurately. Finally the researcher has recommended certain areas such as: Teachers and students should be aware of the importance of writing in relation to other skills. Activating English literature lessons and providing a library for extra activities. Students need enough time to practice writing in the class room because the time allotted for teaching English is not matched to the content of the syllabus designed. Students should be prepared to use the language for a variety of purposes beyond the classroom.

Keywords: assessment, English syntax, errors analysis

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Introduction

There is no doubt that language studies constitute a very important field of knowledge, because no person can live a normal life without a language.

From the performance of English foreign language learners the presence of many errors when writing in English can be noted. Traditionally, when students write in a foreign language the purpose of the writing activity is to catch errors in grammar, spelling, punctuation.... etc. Students get good marks if they write texts with as few errors as possible.

Syntactic Errors analysis, in this study, is the result of those errors made by the Sudanese secondary school for girls in Omdurman locality (Aluola secondary school for girls) in the written medium.

Sudanese learners of English language at secondary schools face many problems in expressing themselves in English, so they make poor English texts. This issue has been experienced by the researchers that most of the students confront serious rhetorical, cultural and linguistic problems in English and are not capable to learn this skill easily. The researchers believe that Sudanese learners of English language need a supplementary method to support them. A main question can arise: what are the best methods that make students master the English structures? So, the importance of this study stems from the fact that: it might be a useful study to the English language teachers to spot the difficulties in English language structures, and to the planners and course designers to put more emphasis on syntactic exercises. Finally, it is important to discover the syntactic structures revealed by the students at secondary schools to try to develop a better mastering of English structures.

Objectives of the Study

This study aims at:

1. providing an overview of theoretical issues and core empirical findings in cross-linguistic research on the acquisition of syntactic structures;
2. identifying key issues in syntax acquisition research: the respective contribution of learners' input and innate predispositions for language acquisition; the time course of syntactic development;
3. introducing methods for investigating syntactic development;
4. discussing the relative role of learners' input and innate predispositions for syntax acquisition; and
5. focusing on the emergence of syntax and discussing the empirical findings and their theoretical implications and highlights current trends.

Questions of the Study

This study can be achieved through tackling the following three questions:

1. What are the factors that affect the students' performance when writing in English?
2. What types of English syntactic errors committed by secondary schools students?
3. What do teachers and students need to enhance practicing English syntactic structures?
- 4.

Limits of the Study

This study is restricted to assess writing performance in the EFL students at secondary schools at Omdurman locality, Aluola secondary school for girls, in the academic year 2013 – 2014. Ninety nine students in the third year were chosen to represent the original subjects in this

study. The study is limited to assess English Syntactic Structures Experienced by Secondary Schools Students in Sudan.

Method of the Study

This study has taken its results through a formal test given to students of third year. It consists of three types of questions. The researchers adopted the descriptive analytical method and a test as a tool for collecting data.

Literature Review

Methods for investigating the acquisition of syntax

Researchers have developed a broad range of methods for (i) naturalistic sampling, (ii) experiments and (iii) semi-structured elicitation. Naturalistic samples are obtained by audio/video-recording learners' speech in spontaneous interactions with family members, friends or researchers (Behrens 2008; McDaniel, McKee, and Smith Cairns 1996; Eisenbeiss 2006, 2010; Menn and Bernstein 2000; Wei and Moyer 2008).

In naturalistic sampling, researchers only interfere by recording learners and their interaction partners – sometimes without them even knowing that they are being recorded. Hence, the recording situation closely approximates the real-life situation under investigation and learners are unlikely to develop particular response strategies - even when samples are collected repeatedly. Thus, naturalistic sampling has a high ecological validity. Moreover, naturalistic samples can be obtained from any learner, independently of age, cognitive and linguistic ability; and recordings with learners' regular conversation partners also provide input samples. Finally, naturalistic samples do not target a particular construction and can be (re)analyzed with respect to a broad range of phenomena. Naturalistic sampling does not require specific stimulus materials and hence no prior in-depth knowledge of the respective language. Thus, it is ideal for obtaining a first overview of learners' input and their own production.

However, minimizing researcher control can lead to incomparable samples, as learners may talk about different topics and use different words or constructions. Moreover, naturalistic samples often contain very few examples of low-frequency constructions, such as embedded questions. Pooling data from several learners is no solution as this can lead to sampling errors and ignores inter-learner variation. Note also that even the frequent occurrence of a given construction cannot simply be taken as evidence for its acquisition: naturalistic data often involve recurring word-forms and phrases that might be parts of formulaic patterns (Eisenbeiss 2000; Radford 1990; Tomasello 2001), e.g.:

Where's the key/car/cat...? -> Where's the X?

Thus, one might overestimate learners' knowledge. Conversely, one might underestimate learners' knowledge when they are engaged in unchallenging activities that only require imitations, object naming, and elliptical answers (meals, picture-book reading, etc.). Moreover, naturalistic samples do not provide information about learners' interpretation of their utterances, which hampers studies on semantic aspects of quantifiers, co-reference, etc. Finally, when researchers refrain from interfering with the recording situation, they cannot systematically manipulate and study variables that affect learners' performance (e.g. sentence length).

In experiments, researchers systematically manipulate one or more variables and measure whether any changes with respect to these variables affect speakers' behavior (Crain and Thornton 1998; McDaniel, McKey, and Smith Cairns 1996; Menn and Bernstein 2000; Sekerina, Fernández, and Clahsen 2008; Wei and Moyer 2008). Standardized procedures ensure comparability and the avoidance of models or feedback that occurs in spontaneous speech allows one to rule out some potential confounding factors. Moreover, the use of stimuli in some experiments can make it easier to determine learners' intentions and interpretations.

In elicited imitation experiments, participants are asked to imitate spoken sentences (Bernstein 2000; Gallimore and Tharp 2006; Vinther 2002). This can provide insights into learners' knowledge as participants cannot memorize complex sentences holistically, but must employ their own grammar to recreate them. As high task demands and partial memorization of targets can make results difficult to interpret, many researchers only use elicited imitation as a first step.

In elicited production experiments, learners receive prompts to produce particular constructions, e.g. questions like (a) or negated sentences like (b); Some production experiments investigate whether learners can productively use a construction with novel words (see (c); Berko 1958; Menn and Bernstein 2000).

- a. *The dog is eating something, but I cannot see what. Can you ask the puppet?*
- b. *I'll say something and then you say the opposite.*
- c. *This is a wug. These are two...?*

Other experiments involve syntactic priming, speakers' tendency to repeat syntactic structure across otherwise unrelated utterances (Bencini and Valian 2008; Bock 1986; Branigan 2007; Huttenlocher Vasilyeva and Shimpi 2004; Kim and McDonough 2008; Pickering and Ferreira 2008; Savage, Lieven, Theakston, and Tomasello 2003, 2006). For example, speakers are more likely to use passives after hearing or producing passive prime sentences than after active primes. If learners show such priming effects, even when the primes and learners' own productions contain different words, this suggests that learners possess abstract syntactic representations that can be activated by priming. In contrast, if priming only occurs when primes and learners' own productions involve the same verb, this indicates that learners' syntactic representations are not abstract, but lexically bound.

Learners' comprehension of syntactic constructions or grammatical markers can be tested in different ways (Crain and Thornton 1998; McDaniel, McKee, and Smith Cairns 1996; Sekerina, Fernández, and Clahsen 2008): children can be asked to act out sentences with toys or to select pictures that match sentences they hear like (8a) and (8b). For younger learners, one can use a preferential looking task where an auditory stimulus is presented while two visual stimuli are shown simultaneously and researchers measure which of two visual stimuli learners attend to for longer. Alternatively, one can show a learner a picture or tell a story and then ask learners to answer a comprehension question or to provide a truth-value judgment for an utterance like.

- a. The girl is hitting the boy.

- b. The girl is being hit by the boy.

All crocodiles are in the bathtub. Is this true?

In grammaticality-judgment experiments, learners from the age of three can either be asked to tell the experimenter whether a sentence is grammatical or they are asked to decide between a grammatical utterance and an ungrammatical variant of this utterance (McDaniel, McKee and Smith Cairns 1996).

Recently, researchers have employed online-methods that are sensitive to the time-course of processing to study the syntactic processing involved in learners' production and comprehension (Clahsen and Felser 2006a, b; Marinis 2003; Sekerina, Fernández, and Clahsen 2008). Such studies typically involve auditory or visual stimuli and measure learners' reaction times or they record learners' eye movements to detect their focus of attention at different times in the comprehension or production process.

As performance in experiments might be affected by memory problems, task-induced strategies or problems in focusing on relevant aspects of the stimuli, some researchers supplement naturalistic and experimental data with semi-structured elicitation (Berman and Slobin 1994; Eisenbeiss 2009b, 2010; Jaensch 2008). Semi-structured elicitation techniques keep the communicative situation as natural as possible, but use videos or games to encourage the production of rich and comparable speech samples. For instance, one can use form-focused techniques to investigate particular constructions, for example games contrasting colors or sizes to elicit noun phrases with color/size adjectives. Alternatively, one can use meaning-focused tasks to study how learners encode particular meanings, for instance elicitation games for possession transfer constructions, in which learners have to describe which food they give to which animal; see the sentences (a) vs. (b):

- a. *I give the bear the honey pot.*
 b. *I give the honey pot to the bear.*

Other techniques are broad-spectrum tools to encourage learners to speak, for instance word-less picture books such as the "Frog-story" (Berman and Slobin 1994) or games requiring speakers to coordinate their actions verbally, such as the Bag Task, where players hide toys in pockets of a big bag (Eisenbeiss 2009b).

Acquisition studies often involve converging evidence from naturalistic, experimental, and semi-structured studies. Experiments are typically part of cross-sectional studies, where learners are recorded once or a few times within a short period. Naturalistic and semi-structured studies may be cross-sectional, but often involve longitudinal sampling, where learners are recorded over longer periods.

The Importance of Writing

Writing is one of the ways that we translate our thoughts for other people. Some people are better at expressing themselves in writing than any other way, and one thus gets a better translation when he /she reads what they have to say rather than hearing them speak.

Writing assists one with other language tasks as well, writing helps on learning how to form language, how to spell, how to put together a plot. One learns how to make a logical argument, or how to persuade, mainly through writing.

So writers write because they are driven to do so or because no other pursuit is appropriate to them. This doesn't tell us very much. This is a true statement but not a useful

one. There's occasional positive reinforcement. That's supposed to be what keeps gamblers hooked-not constantly winning, but winning occasionally, which keeps them fixated on the idea that a big score in the future is inevitable. That could explain why those writers who are generally unsuccessful but some of whose writings occasionally do moderately well keep writing. So that's certainly part of it. On a personal, emotional level, it's not enough to produce writing, no matter how brilliant, no matter how perfectly one accomplishes the goal of giving form to an idea. There's also the need to be able to keep on doing just that, writing, unhindered, instead of spending the best, why do we write? We know that we cannot capture all of life, so what's the point? Here's my answer. We may not be able to create a complete map, but we can create a useful one. All of writing is an attempt to create a useful abstraction of the world. It is distilling it down to interesting or useful tidbits that can be captured. It's making a map of life that others can hopefully use to assist them in finding their way. (Jeremy Hamer, 1994).

Writing Development

Many of the early objections to the national curriculum for English in England and Wales were that it was based on a linear model of progression, whereas actual development in English was recursive. In practice, students are asked to return to the same themes and cues for writing-autobiographical writing, reflections on conflict, research into particular topics-again and again through their education, and yet the nationally formulated mode assumed a step-by-step progression, as many teachers promote in the teaching of mathematics or foreign language. Arnold (1991) bases her recursive model of writing development on a four-year teacher-researcher study with 11- to 19 years old in Sydney. Her psychodynamic theory of writing development assumes a spiral rather than a linear curriculum and an interest in the mind of the writer at work, not just an interest in the texts they produce, (p.5). This interest in the writer is associated with a wider interest in what writing can do for a young person- 'the powerful psychological benefits which accrue from feeling centered in one's own exploratory writing and focusing on one's expressive needs' (ibid). The focus on process rather than on product is indicative of a shift from the text to the writer that took place in the 1970s, 1980s and early 1990s, and marks what seems to be a generational pendulum swing between process and product.

One of the many valuable insights by Arnold is that there is more to writing than making marks on a page. All teachers have noticed that sometimes writing assignments encourage a flow of writing and at other times the students can hardly scrape together a few words. Writing is a complex activity that draws on the imagination, feelings, state of mind, mood, and cognitive state, capability with the medium, context and other factors. Her spiral model starts at points, which is the 'core self' and then moves up and away from that point with the expressive self always at the centre of the spiral. The outer edge of the spiral touches different kinds of writing-the transactional, the poetic and other kinds (categories derived from the work of Britton in the 1970s) – as the writer increasingly widens the range of types of writing while at the same time holding on to the centrality of the self and the energy focused there in. Experience, contact with arrange of audiences and self-reflection are as important as the kinds of writing they engender.

Critics of this approach would argue that the model is predicated on a single sense of self, and that young children have multiple sense of selves that are expressible in a number of different ways; they would see models of writing development such as those by Britton and Arnold to be manifestations of a late Romantic approach to writing development, I with the individual (supposedly integrated) self at the heart of the act of writing.

Many others would see the approach as a fundamental to the development of writers because it keys into their sense of purpose in the act of writing.

Arnold's key point, I think, is that the integration of self that is possible through imaginative and well-thought-out writing activities justifies the act of writing; it expands writers' awareness of their expressive potential, centering them in a much larger universe of discourse, (1999: 32).

Crucially: Self-reflection and reflexiveness are fundamental to self-development and the personalization of knowledge. Writing can play a part in the development of creative, integrated human beings who can afford to respect the uniqueness of themselves and of others because they have experienced their own capacity to make a mark in the world. (ibid).

'Making a mark' is a key phrase here, as writing is put a long side other graphic forms of expression (painting, multi-media creation) as extensions of human expressiveness.

Not all research is of this people-centered approach, however. Research into writing (rather than the writers and their motivation) has tended to focus on types of writing.

The Assessment of Writing

Drawing on models of English such as that presented in Moffett (1968) and Britton et al. (1975), Wilkinson et al. (1980) studies the development of written language in 7- to 14 years old, suggesting that the used criteria for judging writing were too narrow, and that teachers needed to take into account such factors as the emotional, moral and cognitive development of the children behind the texts, as it were. As the authors describe the experiment ('The Crediton project'), four different kinds of composition- narrative, autobiographical, explanatory and argumentative-were requested from groups of children at seven, ten and thirteen respectively, in the context of their normal lessons. The same four subjects were given to each group so that the compositions could be more easily compared' (p.2). The authors set out the four models used to serve as systems of analysis-in the fields of cognition, affect, moral and style:

Cognitive: The basis of this model is a movement from an undifferentiated world to a world organized by mind, from a world of instances to a world related by generalities and abstractions.

Affective: Development is seen as being in three movements-one to words a greater awareness of self, a second towards a greater awareness of neighbor as self, a third towards an inter engagement of reality and imagination.

Moral 'Anomy' or lawlessness gives way to 'heteronomy' or rule by fear of punishment, which in turn gives way to 'socioonomy' or rule by a sense of reciprocity with others which finally leads to the emergence of 'autonomy' or self-rule.

Stylistic: Development is seen as choices in relation to a norm of the simple, literal, affirmative sentence which characterizes children early writing.

Features such as structure, cohesion, verbal competence, syntax, reader awareness, sense of appropriateness, undergo modification. (pp.2-3).

From an early twenty-first century perspective, these models appear informed by Piagetain theories of development, nevertheless, as Wilkinson et al. (1980) point out, 'There was scarcely any previous work to go on' as far as the second fourth categories were concerned. The main point-and one which continuous to endure-is of a holistic and carefully calibrated model for gauging development in writing.

Types of Errors

Selinker (1972) in addition presents the other types of errors encountered by non-native speakers when learning a foreign language, eliminates them in: Language transfer, Transfer of training, Strategies of L2 learners, Strategies of L2 communications, and Over generalization of the rules. Similarly Richards (1973) groups errors into three classes: Interference errors, Intralingual errors, and Developmental errors. These types of errors are according to Richard (1973-98) identified as "... instances where the characteristics of one language are being carried over into another tongue...

Intralingual errors are those which reflect general characteristics of rule learning such as faulty generalization, incomplete application of rule and failure to learn conditions under which the rules apply.

Developmental errors illustrate the learner attempting to build up hypothesis about English language from his limited experience of it in the classroom or textbook. In the light of the preceding views and others, concerning the analysis of errors encountered by the eliminated 7 types of causes errors. The eliminated types of errors are: Negative transfer, Overgeneralization, Lack of awareness, Omission, Addition, Ignorance of rule restrictions, and Simplification.

Errors Analysis

Systematically analyzing errors made by language learners makes it possible to determine areas that need reinforcement in teaching (Corder, 1974). Error analysis is a type of linguistic analysis that focuses on the errors learners make. It consists of comparison between the errors made in Target language (TL) and that TL itself. Pit Corder is the "Father" of Errors Analysis (the EA with then "newlook"). It was with his article entitled "The Significance of Learners Errors" (1967) that EA took a new turn. Errors used to be "flaws" that needed to be eradicated. Coder presented a completely different point of view. He contended that those errors are important in and of themselves. For learners themselves, errors are 'indispensable', since the making of errors can be regarded as advice the learner uses in order to learn.

In 1994, Gass & Selinker defined errors as "red flag" that provide evidence of the learner's knowledge of the second language. Researchers are interested in errors because they are believed to contain valuable information on the strategies that people use to acquire a language (Richard, 1974; Taylor, 1975; Dulay and Burt, 1974). Moreover, according to Richards and Sampson (1974, p.15), "At the level of pragmatic classroom experience, errors analysis will continue to provide one means by which the teacher assesses learning and teaching and determines priorities for future effort. "According to Corder (1974), error analysis has two objects: one theoretical and another applied. The theoretical object serves to "elucidate what and how a learner learns when he studies a second language". And the applied objects serve to enable the learner "to learn more efficiently by exploiting our knowledge of his dialect for pedagogical purposes.

The investigation of errors can be at the same time diagnostic and prognostic. It is diagnostic because it can tell us the learner's state of the language (Corder, 1967) at a given points during the learning process, and prognostic because it can tell course organizers to reorient language learning materials on the basis of the learners' current problems.

Errors analysis stresses often only on what the learner cannot do at a given point in time. It doesn't give any insights into the course of SLA process and difficulty of error identification is mainly due to the different usages of the L2 norms. In addition to, learners sometimes adopt the avoidance strategy not commit errors. In this case certain types of errors don't appear in the L2

learner's performance, beside errors may be wrongly classified between language tasks, and finally the same errors may be classified as interlingual and interlingual. All these facts must be kept in mind when conducting an error analysis.

Model for Error Analysis

Corder (1967 & 1974) identified a model for error analysis which included three stages:

1. Data collection: Recognition of idiosyncrasy.
2. Description: Accounting for idiosyncratic dialect.
3. Explanation (the ultimate object of error analysis).

Brown (1994: 207-2011) and Ellis (1995:51-52) elaborated on this model. Ellis (1997, pp.15-20) and Hubbard et al. (1996:135-141) gave practical advice and provided clear examples of how to identify and analyze learners' errors. This initial step requires the selection of errors. The errors are then classified. The next step, after giving grammatical analysis of each error, demands and explanation of different types of errors.

More, Gass & Selinker (1994, p.67) identified 6 steps followed in conducting an error analysis: Collecting data, identifying errors, classifying errors, quantifying errors, analyzing source of error remedying for errors.

Sources of Errors

In 1972, Selinker (in Richards, 1974:37) reported five sources of errors: Language transfer, transfer for training, strategies of second language learning, strategies of second language communication and overgeneralization of TL linguistic material. In 1974 Corder (Allen & Corder, p.130) identified three sources of errors: language transfer, overgeneralization or analogy and methods or materials used in the teaching (teaching-induced error).

Based on a review of research, Hashim (1996) the most common syntactic errors made by native Arabic-speaking learners of English as a second language are discussed. Seven categories of error are distinguished and described: verbal errors (use of tense, phase, aspect, voice, verb formation, concord, finite/non-finite verbs); relative clauses (interlingual and intralingual errors, structural misrepresentation, simplification); adverbial clauses (comparison, purpose, result, concession, manner); sentence structure; articles (definite and indefinite); prepositions (deletion, substitution, redundancy); and conjunctions. It is concluded that most common source of error is the influence of the native language, and that in processing English syntactic structures; Arabic speakers adopt certain strategies similar to those of first-language learners, including simplification and overgeneralization.

The literature reported that Arabic speaking learners of English may use present simple with past simple tenses particularly with compound and complex sentences (Scott & Tucker; 1974; Al-Kasimi et al. 1979; Kambal, 1980; El-Badarin, 1982; El-Sayed, 1983). Arabic speaking learners may use simple past tense instead of the simple present (Scott & Tucker, 1974; Mukattash, 1978, 1986; Kambal, 1980; El-Badarin, 1982; El-SaYed, 1983; Meziani, 1984). Deletion of the auxiliary 'have or has' in forming the present perfect was the most common errors, (Kambal, 1980; El-Badarin, 1982). The most frequent type of deviation Arab speakers encounter in forming the English verb is the deletion of the copula (Scott & Tucker, 1974; Asfoor, 1978; Mukattash, 1978, 1986; Assubaiai, 1979; Beck, 1979; Al-Kasimi et al. 1979; Kambal, 1980; Sharma, 1981; Al-Muarik, 1982; El-Badarin, 1982; Thompson-Panos & Thomas-Ruzic, 1983; Abu Ghararah, 1989).

On the analysis of errors of writing expression of secondary school students in Khartoum State, University of Khartoum, El Maki (2005), revealed that most of secondary school students lack the optimum level in the writing skill. The writing skill received little attention from both students and teachers at secondary schools, accompanied by inefficient methods of teaching. Errors in students writing could be attributed to lack of a certain level of language efficiency carried throughout the primary to the secondary school, as reflected in the wrong generalization of grammatical rules and orthographic errors, and lack of ability to express them.

On the other hand, Yaagub, (2005) investigated difficulties facing the Sudanese secondary school students in writing in English as foreign language. His results and recommendations have indicated that teaching program contributed a great deal in overcoming the students' difficulties in writing, the contributed effectively in improving students performance. So the performance in post test was far better than in pre test. There was significance difference between the mean of post test and the pre test in guided composition of the first year indicating the effectiveness of the teaching program. There was a significance difference between the mean of post test and pre test in free composition of second class in favour of the post test indicating the effectiveness of teaching.

Aradeb, (2010), in his study, has come to a conclusion that Students were weak in sentence and paragraph construction and the use of punctuation marks, students were not interested in practicing the skill of writing, so the researcher recommends that there should be qualified teachers in the field of writing comprehensive studies in the field of writing should be carried out.

Hago, (2012) assessed English Language Communicative Ability of Sudanese University. He has come to conclude that language communicative functions have been defined and discussed in many different ways by language scholars of different fields. There is, however one thing in common that is seen in the writing of all these scholars: Linguistics, or grammatical competence, should be considered just one aspect of overall competence an individual has with language. The researcher recommends that language communicative ability should be assessed along three dimensions: Linguistics form, semantic meaning and pragmatic use.

Aspects of the Agreement

Most of the previous studies aimed to find out and investigate the difficulties facing the Sudanese students in writing in English as a foreign language, was to identifying the actual problems that affect ELT in secondary schools and suggested solutions, also aimed at introducing interactive communicative approach and was studying some of its applications in the Sudanese formal curriculum for teaching English the same as aimed by the current study.

This study used the same method which was used in the most previous studies which was descriptive and analytical method. All these studies are of different titles and different environments in which they were conducted. The goal is to identify the problem of using English as a foreign language and analysis of linguistic errors that committed by the Sudanese student in different fields of linguistics what contributes to this research and what gives this study uniqueness that the researchers found that the students' vocabulary affected by the usage of internet.

The Differences

This study is different from previous studies that it focuses on the assessment of syntactic structures experienced by Sudanese students at secondary schools and indicated several points

that have to put in consideration in order to improve the proficiency of the students and to improve their writing performance.

This study has taken results through a formal test (writing composition). The test is designed to the students of the Sudanese secondary school certificate. Questions were also chosen to be familiar to the students.

Analysis Of Data And Presentation of Results

The students' errors with their different types, categories and subcategories are going to be analyzed through certain steps; firstly the errors types, then the errors correction after that the data analysis.

Before going deeply in examining syntactic structures (errors), the researchers try to signal out the other unexpected errors committed by the students. They come to the fact that most errors can be classified into three categories as in table one.

Table 1. Error Categories

Error category	Occurrence	Percentage
- Syntactic errors	247	49.79%
- Spelling errors	189	38.1%
- Lexical errors	60	12.11%
Total	496	100%

Syntactic Errors

These errors are classified according to the frequency of their occurrences, namely, tenses verbs errors, preposition errors, article errors, pronominal errors and other errors.

A total of 247 syntactic errors were identified in the data. The tabulation below highlights the number of occurrences of each of the errors category and their overall percentages.

Table 2. Syntax Errors

Errors type	Occurrence	Percentage
- Tenses verbs errors	77	31.18%
- Preposition errors	59	23.89%
- Article errors	44	17.81%
- Pronominal errors	41	16.61%
- Other errors	26	10.51%

total	247	100%
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Tenses and Verbs Errors

Tenses and verbs errors have been classified according to usage into wrong choice of tenses, wrong formation of tenses and verb to be errors.

Wrong Choice of Tenses

Errors in the choice of tenses are the most frequent errors out of all tenses errors. The data revealed that the students made in the use of present tense form of the verb in contexts where the past tense form is required, e.g.

A: When we arrive, we sat down and eat our breakfast.

B: When we arrived, we sat down and ate our breakfast.

A: That day we play some games.

B: That day we played some games.

A: We were very tired, so we go to sleep.

B: We were very tired, so we went to sleep.

A: Last Friday my family decide to visit JabaMara.

B: Last Friday my family decided to visit JabaMara.

A: After that we return home.

B: After that we returned home.

In the other contexts the past form is used instead of the infinitive form which is required as in the examples below:

A: I start collected money.

B: I start to collect money.

A: Farmers want harvested their crops.

B: Farmers want to harvest their crops.

A: We begin played football.

B: We begin to play football.

The data also revealed some errors in the use of the present simple with the (3rd person) pronoun that the students tended to use without the suffix (-s) as in the following examples:

A: T.V. always show useful programmes.

B: T.V. always shows useful programmes.

A: Lion eat his food twice a week.

B: Lion eats his food twice a week.

A: My friend usually support me.

B: My friend usually supports me.

Also the students sometimes add the suffix (-s) when it is not required, e.g.:

A: Farmers works together every Friday.

B: Farmers work together every Friday.

A: Boys and girls helps villagers on harvesting their crops.

B: Boys and girls help villagers on harvesting their crops.

In other case the students usually use present continuous to denote habitual actions or daily activities, as we can see;

A: We are going to the park every Friday.

B: We go to the park every Friday.

A: Sometimes my brothers are playing there.

B: sometimes my brothers play there.

Also the perfect present sometimes comes in the students writing to express what the simple present should stand for;

A: I have always wished to work in a charity.

B: I always wish to work in a charity.

A: Usually we have worked a team.

B: Usually we work as a team.

In the previous cases the students want to use the simple present (that express the habitual actions or the daily activities) and this tense is formed in this way (he, she, it +VI+ s or es) “es” with certain verbs ending in (ch-sh-o-ss and x) like watch – wash – dress and box) and with plural pronouns (I, you, we, they) we form it by using just (VI) then we use certain verbs of times such as (always, usually, seldom....etc).

Wrong Formation of Tenses

The EFL students sometimes assure their weak mastering of grammar by putting verbs in wrong forms to talk about or to express one idea.

The first case is that the students should use the past form (ed) with regular verbs which is required, but sometimes they use it with irregular verbs, as can be seen in the following examples:

A: We leaved the garden at the end of the day.

B: We left the garden at the end of the day.

A: The animals eated all the food.

B: The animals ate all the food.

A: I seed the lion inside the cage.

B: I saw the lion inside the cage.

A: My sister buyed bananas to feed the monkey.

B: My sister bought bananas to feed the monkey.

A: Many people lied over the yellow sand.

B: Many people lay over the yellow sand.

According to the examples the students must use (ed) with regular verbs to form the past tense such as (play – watch- help...etc) and they must form the irregular verbs without adding (ed) any verb has a certain irregular form such as (buy- bought, see – saw, eat- ate...etc).

The second case is that the student wrong formation of adding the suffix (s) to the verbs ending in (y) as the following examples:

A: This bird often flys at night.

B: This bird often flies at night.

According to the examples of the verb that end in y, when the suffix (s) is added to the verbs ending in (y), this should be change into (i) and then adding (es) as in these examples (flu- flies), (cry- cries...etc).

Verb to be Errors

The verb to be can function as a main verb with a copular function, progressive auxiliary and passive auxiliary. It is also unique among English verbs in having eight different forms with different persons, as:

a. Base: be.

- b. 1st person singular present (I): am.
- c. 2nd person present, (you, we, and they): are.
- d. 3rd person singular present (he, she, it): is.
- e. 1st and 3rd person singular past (I, he, she, it): was.
- f. 2nd person past (you, we, they): were.
- g. ing form: being.
- h. -ed participle: been.

According to the data in this study the students' errors can be classified under two headings, the omission and the addition of be and the subject – verb (be) agreement. The following examples illustrate the first case:

- A: Last Friday we are worked together.
- B: Last Friday we worked together.
- A: T.V. is provides company for the lonely and elderly.
- B: T.V. provides company for the lonely and elderly.
- A: The bus was stopped suddenly.
- B: The bus stopped suddenly.
- A: We were managed to remove and burn all the rubbish.
- B: We managed to remove and burn all the rubbish.

The previous examples show that the students added the verb be when it is not needed.

Also the students sometimes omit the verb when it is required as can be seen in the following examples:

- A: Collective workthe most valuable custom.
- B: Collective work is the most valuable custom.
- A: T.V.passive entertainment.
- B: T.V is passive entertainment.
- A: The first method of collective work based on work teams.
- B: The first method of collective work is based on work teams.
- A: young people active and helpful.
- B: young people are active and helpful.

The Subject- verb be Agreement

This case can be divided into two types of errors:

Subject-verb be agreement form with singular and plural nouns or pronouns, such as the examples below:

- A: On that day farmers was very happy
- B: On that day farmers were very happy.
- A: Radio and T.V. is regarded as the most important mass media.
- B: Radio and T.V. are regarded as the most important mass media.

As the above examples the students don't match the verb be with subject, the auxiliary (is-was) should come with the singular nouns or pronouns (he – she – it) and the auxiliary (are – were) should follow or precede the plural nouns or pronouns (you – we – they).

The second type of errors is the present form and past form. The students confuse between the present form of be and the past one as it can be seen in the following examples:

- A: All yesterday we are playing games.
- B: All yesterday we were playing games.
- A: All the trees are grown.

- B: All the trees were grown.
 A: This place was very suitable for us.
 B: This place is very suitable for us.
 A: An ostrich was the biggest bird in the zoo.
 B: An ostrich is the biggest bird in the zoo.

In the examples above the students in the first and second examples use the present form of be instead of the past one, and in the third and fourth examples they use the past form of be instead of the present one. This shows the students' weakness of mastering the grammar rules.

Prepositional Errors

Prepositional errors which are considered to be one of the real problems that face the EFL students when they write because of English language preposition richness. All the errors in the data reveal that the students made mistakes in choosing the correct preposition as shown in the examples below:

- A: In the same day in night.
 B: In the same day at night.
 A: We traveled on bus.
 B: We traveled by bus.
 A: We decided to go in Friday morning.
 B: We decided to go on Friday morning.
 A: I went by my family.
 B: I went with my family.
 A: T.V. can help someone on his work.
 B: T.V. can help someone with his work.
 A: On my opinion collective work is very useful.
 B: In my opinion collective work is very useful.
 A: At the afternoon we started playing football.
 B: In the afternoon we started playing football.
 A: In the sunset we finished collecting the crops.
 B: At the sunset we finished collecting the crops.
 A: Radio and T.V. are important source for information.
 B: Radio and T.V. are important source of information.
 A: One summer holiday I wanted to travel between Khartoum to Atbara.
 B: One summer holiday I wanted to travel from Khartoum to Atbara.

Prepositions are very important elements in English grammar. The meaning of a preposition is in its use with a noun or a pronoun. In English we divide prepositions according to time and place, that is to say there are certain preposition we use to denote to places (prepositions of place) and there are certain ones we use them with time (prepositions of time), the students problem is that sometime we use some of them in both as when we say (at) is use with times as:

- At six O'clock.
 At lunch time.
 At mid night.

We use (in) for longer periods of time we say:

- In March.
 In 1998.
 In summer holiday.

So the students sometimes generalize some rules for the uses of prepositions (in) with all the places (in home) which is wrong and we can say (at home) also (at summer holiday) we must use in instead of (at) because we use in for longer period of time.

Other cases that students insert preposition in wrong places or add some when there is no need for them, as they write:

A: T.V. helps us to enjoy our time in it.

B: T.V. helps us to enjoy our time.

A: We arrived at the moment of at sunset.

B: We arrived at the moment of sunset.

A: I returned at home after a nice day.

B: I returned home after a nice day.

Also sometimes the students omit the preposition when it is required such as:

A: My old grandmother insisted going with us.

B: My old grandmother insisted on going with us.

A: We can receive the information all over the world.

B: We can receive the information from all over the world.

Article Errors

In the third type of the syntactic errors comes the problem of using the English articles (the definite article “the”) and (the indefinite articles “a – an”) correctly and also are they necessary or it is preferable to omit them in certain cases?

A: The view of a sunset is very amazing.

B: The view of the sunset is very amazing.

A: Giraffe is a tallest animal in the zoo.

B: Giraffe is the tallest animal in the zoo.

According to the above we use (the) with nouns which are considered as one something (the sun – the moon – the earth...etc).

Also we use (the) when we use superlative (the tallest – the biggest – the most expensive ...etc).

Also sometimes students use articles (the – a – an) when it is not necessary as in the following:

A: on the Friday we went to visit Kassala.

B: On Friday we went to visit Kassala.

A: We ate a lot of the fruit.

B: We ate a lot of fruit.

A: In the zoo we ate a lot of fruit, like bananas, an oranges and dates.

B: In the zoo we ate a lot of fruit, like bananas, oranges and dates.

As we saw in the previous examples (the) is not necessary in the first example because (the) is not used with days and month. In the second example (the fruit) no article is needed with non countable noun. In the third one (an oranges) no necessary of (an) with plural nouns.

Also the students sometimes use (the) instead of (a) or (an);

A: Last night I watched the nice film.

B: Last night I watched a nice film.

A: The unemployed boy cleaned our car.

B: An unemployed boy cleaned our car.

Here when the adjective followed by a noun we use (a) or (an) instead of (the).

Pronominal Errors

In the fourth type of the syntactic errors comes the problem of using the three kinds of pronouns (subject, object and possessive), also confusing the usage of them and sometimes there is no agreement between the subjects and the pronouns, as it can be seen:

A: My mother prepared everything to we.

B: My mother prepared everything for us.

A: Boys and girls help yours societies in different ways.

B: Boys and girls help their societies in different ways.

A: We must remove litter and dirt to make my village clean.

B: We must remove litter and dirt to make our village clean.

A: My father told us to clean him car.

B: My father told us to clean his car.

A: My friends took food and drinks with theirs.

B: My friends took food and drinks with them.

A: To take part in your community we must help others.

B: To take part in our community we must help others.

It is evident from the extracts above that the students have a little knowledge about the English pronouns. The English pronouns are of three types (subject, I, you, we, they, he, she, and it), and these are the doers of the actions so they should be placed only at the beginning of the sentences. The second type is the object pronouns and from its name they should be placed in the object position that means the action happened to or upon them (me, him, her, you, them, and us). Also we have possessive pronouns (me, him, her, its, you, our, and their) the students sometimes confuse them with what we call possessive adjective (mine, his, her, its, yours, ours and theirs).

Also the students have another problem with the usage of the relative pronouns (who, whom, which, where, when, and that) as we can see in the following examples:

A: The animals whom we saw were very dangerous.

B: The animals which we saw were very dangerous.

A: T.V. shows an interesting programme who I love.

B: T.V. shows an interesting programme which I love.

A: Port Sudan is the most beautiful town which we went.

B: Port Sudan is the most beautiful town where we went.

A: People which work together must love each other.

B: People who work together must love each other.

A: Collective work is something when we done together.

B: Collective work is something which / that we done together.

The extracts above show that the students confusing of the usage of relative pronouns. (Who) and (whom) are used for people, and functions as the subject of verbs, (who) is usually used instead of (whom) specially in speaking, (whom) is generally used in very formal English. (which) is used for things and functions as the subject or object of verbs. (That) is used for both people and things. (Where) is used for the place and (when) is used for the time.

Other Errors

The students' other syntactic errors are the usage of comparative and superlative forms of the adjectives, as we see:

A: Gorilla is clever than the baboon.

B: Gorilla is cleverer than the baboon.

A: Portsudan is beautiful than Khartoum.

B: Portsudan is more beautiful than Khartoum.

A: Lion is dangerous than the tiger.

B: Lion is more dangerous than the tiger.

A: T.V. is gooder than the radio.

B: T.V. is better than the radio.

In the previous examples the students use the adjectives to compare between two things, but when we compare two things we must add (er) to the adjectives of one syllable (clean – big – tall –etc) and must add (more) to the adjectives of more than one syllable (beautiful – interesting – difficult...etc). In the last example the students add (er) to the adjective (good) which is wrong, there is certain adjectives have irregular form like (good – bad..etc).

Also the students' other problem the use of the superlative forms:

A: An elephant is the big animal in the zoo.

B: An elephant is the biggest animal in the zoo.

A: Collective work is the important work in the village.

B: Collective work is the most important work in the village.

A: Kassal is the beautiful place where I went.

B: Kassal is the most beautiful place where I went.

According to the above the students should use the superlative form (est) with adjectives of one syllable like (big – long – pretty ...etc) and use the superlative form (most) with the adjectives of more than one syllable (important) –comfortable – useful ...etc). Also they should use the article (the) before the superlative and irregular superlative forms like (good – better – best), (much- more- most) and (old – elder- eldest).

The data also revealed another type of errors, the wrong formation of regular and irregular plural nouns, as the students write:

A: The street was full of cars and busies.

A: The street was full of cars and buses.

The plural of the most nouns is formed by adding (s) like (cat – cats), (dog – dogs) or (es) like (box – boxes, bus, buses).

Final (es) is added to nouns that end in (sh), (ch), (s), (z) and (x).

Another problem with the plural of words that end in (y) as they write:

A: Villagers travel by lorrys.

B: Villagers travel by lorries.

A: We must clean our citys.

B: We must clean our cities.

According to the above examples the plural of words that end in (y) preceded by a consonant is spelt (ies), (cities – babies, lorries...etc).

Another case that some nouns have irregular plural forms are don't end in (s):

A: Womans also collected the crops.

B: Women also collected the crops.

Summary of Results

The results obtained from the data analysis confirmed that research hypotheses mentioned in chapter one.

The researcher has found out many results that represent the answers to the research's questions which support hypotheses:

1. Sudanese learners of English as a foreign language in general seem not to have an adequate proficiency in understanding the meanings and semantics at the performance of writing.
2. The major problem behind the students' errors is the mother tongue interference.
3. Writing which is eventually produced is seen as an outcome of the learning process rather than as the cause of learning.
4. The weak mastering of grammar affected the students' writing performance.
5. Students need a supplementary method in order to get their writing performance accurately.
6. Students need motivation and self assessment because it is widely accepted that self assessment is a key of learning strategy for autonomous language learning, enabling the students to monitor their progress and relate learning to individual needs.
7. The students depend on their literacy translation in order to get the equivalent meaning.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study is to investigate the student's performance writing at Sudanese secondary schools and to provide useful suggestions, which may lead to improve students writing performance. Despite the importance of writing, it has been noticed that: syntactic errors that committed by the students could be attributed to lack of a certain level of language efficiency carried throughout the primary to secondary school curriculum, which are reflected in the wrong generalization of grammatical rules, also the analysis shows that there is a great weakness in the students' performance, lack of the vocabulary, the structure of the sentence and the punctuation, and most of the secondary schools students confront serious rhetorical cultural and linguistic problems when writing in English and they are not capable to learn this skill easily.

Recommendations

1. Students should be prepared to use the language for a variety of purposes.
2. Activating English literature lessons and providing a library for extra activities.
3. Teachers and students should be aware of the importance of writing in relation to other skills.
4. Students need enough time to practice writing in the classroom, because the time allotted for teaching English is not matched to the content of the syllabus designed.
5. English grammar should be taught (implicitly) especially in the lower level.

Suggestions for Further Studies

1. Since some of the linguistic errors might stem from teaching methods, there is a need for research in the way (s) of how teaching linguistic skills is given.
2. Further studies are needed to handle the area of teachers' training, teaching methods and curriculum designing.
3. Related studies will display studies focusing on mother tongue interference, problems with semantic denotations and pedagogical implication for non native speakers.
4. More researches highly needed in the areas of spelling and lexical errors.

About the Author:

Dr. Omer Elsheikh Hago Elmahdi: Associate professor at Department of Languages & Translation, Taibah University, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia his research interests include TEFL,

Applied Linguistics, ICT, Communication Science, Education Technology.

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Appendix A

TEST

Write a composition on one of the following topics. Your composition should contain the ideas and information given below, but you may add to them if you wish. It should be about (100-120) words.

(1) Write a composition of about (100-120) words to describe a journey you went on:

- Means of transport.
- Things you saw on the way.
- Description of the farm – garden - parketc.
- Pleasant and enjoyable things.

- Activities – joking – singing – playing games...etc.

(2) Today, television is regarded as one of the most popular mass media in the world. In not more than (100-120) words, write a composition about the advantages and disadvantages of T.V:

- The advantages:

- It is a source of information, news, knowledge, education, advertisement, etc.

- The disadvantages:

- Passive entertainment (watch only).

- Steals valuable time, neglect studies, hobbies, visit friends, relatives.

- It is bad for health, causes blindness.

(3) Young people, both boys and girls, can help their societies in many ways. One day you took part in communal and collective work (Nafeer) in your village. Write about (100-120) words describing the work you did with others:

- planting trees.

- helping someone to collect his crop.

- collecting money to help the poor.

- Campaign to remove litter and dirt to make your village clean.

Good Luck