

## Common Linguistic Errors among Non-English Major Libyan Students Writing

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### Abstract

This study aims to investigate the most common types of linguistic errors and their frequency occurrence in compositions written by forty (40) non-English major Libyan students at the pre-intermediate level in Language Centre at Omar EL-Mukhtar University, EL-Beida, Libya. A corpus of 40 compositions was collected from a sample of 40 students in order to be investigated in terms of Hubbard et al.'s (1996) taxonomy of errors. This study is designed to answer the following questions: 1) what are the most common types of linguistic errors made in English writing by non-English major Libyan students? 2) How frequent do these errors occur in their English written work? The findings showed that substance errors (331) constituted the highest number of errors, followed by grammatical errors (150), syntactic errors (54), and lexical errors (29). The findings also revealed that spelling, capitalization, tenses, punctuation, articles, varied words, subject-verb agreement, and prepositions were the most common types of linguistic errors found in the students' writings. These errors could be due to overgeneralisation in the target language, resulting from ignorance of rule restriction and incomplete application of rules and interference resulting from first language (Arabic) negative transfer. This study is important for teachers and educators who should become aware of the types of linguistic errors that their target learners make. These findings are discussed with implications for English as foreign language Libyan teachers. Along with the discussion of findings, limitations of the present study are discussed, and directions for further research are highlighted.

**Keywords:** English writing, error analysis, linguistic errors, non-English major Libyan students

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## Introduction

Writing in a second language is a complicated task; it is the hardest skill of the language to be mastered (Allen & Corder, 1974). As such, it is impossible to find the foreign language students not to make errors in writing. These errors are to be expected during the process of learning a second language. Errors are systematic deviations from the norms of the language being learned (Cunningsworth, 1987). Corder (1967) considers errors as a problem that should be eliminated as soon as possible. However, errors are now looked on as a device that can assist in the process of learning. They provide evidence of the learner's level in the target language, as stated by Gass and Selinker (1984). Corder (1974) views "the study of error is part of the investigation of the process of language learning" (p. 125). Studying and analyzing students' errors can help the teachers to discover what areas of language need further attention in teaching. Therefore, the study and analysis of the errors which students make in their writing in the second language have been a productive field for a large number of researchers.

Several studies ( Ababneh, 2017; Darus & Subramaniam, 2009; Kambal, 1980; Khuwaileh & Al Shoumali, 2000; Lin, 2002; Mungungu, 2010; Scott & Tucker, 1977; Smith, 2001) have examined errors in writing produced by English language learners. These studies demonstrate that learners of English language have difficulty in using tenses, articles, prepositions, subject-verb agreement, spelling, punctuation, capitalization, word order, word choice ...etc. Yet, to my knowledge, only two studies have investigated errors in the English writings of Libyan tertiary students (Abdalwahid, 2012; Hamed, 2014). In fact, Abdalwahid and Hamed's studies have focused only on investigating cohesion errors in students' writing whose major is English. It seems that no studies have been conducted thus far to investigate the most common types of linguistic errors and their frequency occurrence in English writings of non-English major Libyan students.

Therefore, it is essential to investigate the most common types of linguistic errors and their frequency occurrence in the English writings of non-English major Libyan students. This study is important for teachers and educators who should become aware of the types of linguistic errors that their target learners make. The present study is an attempt to fill the gap in literature and will contribute to the research in English language education in Libya. The study aims to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the most common types of linguistic errors made in English writing by non-English major Libyan students?
2. How frequent do these errors occur in their English written work?
- 3.

## Review of related literature

This section will review literature on difficulty of learning ESL/EFL writing and error analysis including the emergence of error analysis, definition of error analysis, classification of errors, the importance of errors, and previous studies on error analysis.

### *Difficulty of learning ESL/EFL writing*

The ability to write in a second language without errors is not an easy task for many of ESL/EFL learners. Kroll (1990) considers writing to be a difficult skill which presents a challenging task for non-native speakers of English. Writing is not a natural skill. It is an

instructional skill that "must be practised and learned through experience" ( Grabe & Kaplan, 1996, p. 6). It means that it requires training, instruction, practice, experience and purpose.

Widdowson (1983, p. 36) describes the learning of writing in a second language as problematic because "learning to write in English when it is not your first, but a second or a third language poses its own problems". That is, writing in English is more difficult for EFL/ESL students because they are faced with the task of learning the language along with the cognitive and psychological difficulties of writing.

Writing without teaching is too complex and difficult skill to be mastered. Accordingly, the teacher and teaching methods play an important role in determining the development of the students' writing. Piper (1989) emphasises this point by saying that instruction, with no doubt, does have an explicit outcome on how the learners write both in terms of written output, writing behaviours and attitudes to writing. The purpose and emphasis of the writing activities determine the methods of teaching to be adopted in the classroom.

The mechanics of writing such as 'handwriting', 'capitalization', 'punctuation' and 'spelling', as well as 'vocabulary' and 'grammatical structures' are traditionally believed to be the major ingredients of good writing ( EL-Aswad, 2002). Therefore, a great number of empirical studies have investigated students' writing errors in terms of these mechanics of writing.

### ***Error Analysis***

#### ***The emergence of error analysis***

Error Analysis is a branch of applied linguistics established in the 1970s by Corder, the father of error analysis, and colleagues. Error analysis was originated from contrastive analysis (Keshavarz, 1999), an area of comparative linguistics which compares the structures of two language systems and predicts errors (Kim, 2001). The contrastive analysis hypothesis was based on the idea that second language learners transfer the habits of their first language (L1) into their second language (L2). In the 1960s, the theory of contrastive analysis was replaced by error analysis, which maintained that the errors learners make were not only due to the transfer or interference from L1. Error analysis indicates that contrastive analysis was unable to predict a great majority of errors, which were yielded by learners making faulty inferences about the rules of the new language (Ghani and Karim, 2010).

#### ***Definition of error analysis***

Before defining error analysis, it is important to distinguish between errors and mistakes which are "technically two very different phenomena" (Brown, 2007, p. 257). Brown (2007, pp. 257-258) defines a mistake as "a performance error in that it is a failure to utilize a known system correctly; while an error is a noticeable deviation from the adult grammar of a native speaker, reflecting the competence of the learner". As reported by James (1998), mistakes can be correctable by the learner himself, while errors cannot be self-corrected. Errors are "systematic," i.e. expected to happen frequently and not identified by the learner. Hence, only the teacher or researcher would find them, the learner would not (Gass & Selinker, 1994).

Over the years, error analysis has been defined by several researchers. Richards and Schmidt (2002, p. 184) define error analysis as “the study and analysis of the errors made by second language learners”. According to Corder (1967)’s definition, error analysis is a method used by both researchers and teachers to collect samples of learner language, identify the errors in the sample, describe these errors, classify them according to their nature and causes, and evaluate their seriousness. Similarly, Crystal (as cited by Hasyim, 2002, p. 43) proposes that error analysis is a procedure for identifying, classifying and systematically interpreting the ungrammatical forms produced by someone learning a foreign language. Also, Brown (1980, cited by Hasyim, 2002, p. 43) defines error analysis as the process of observing, analysing, and classifying the deviations of the rules of the second language and then to discover the systems operated by a learner. Gass and Selinker (2001, p. 67) define errors as “red flags”, warning signals that provide evidence of the learner’s knowledge of the L2.

### *Classification of errors*

Corder (1967) states that there are two types of errors: performance errors and competence errors. The first are made when learners are tired or hurried. It means that the learners make performance errors not because of incomplete learning but due to careless, stress or fatigue ... etc. The second are more serious since they reflect inadequate learning. Brown (2007) views errors as being either global or local. Global errors hinder communication; they prevent the message from being comprehend. On the contrary, local errors do not prevent the message from being understood because there is usually a minor violation of one segment of a sentence that allows the hearer to guess the intended meaning.

Corder (as cited in Keshavarz, 1999) categorizes errors into two groups: overt and covert errors. As he argues:

An overt error is easy to identify, because it is unquestionably ungrammatical at the sentence level. A covert error occurs in utterances that are superficially well formed but which do not mean what the learner intended them to mean. Therefore, it is not interpretable within the context of communication. ( p. 70).

Errors can also be classified as interlingual or intralingual (Richards & Schmidt, 2002, p. 267). Interlingual errors can be identified as transfer errors which result from a learner’s first language features, for example, grammatical, lexical or pragmatic errors. Conversely, intralingual errors are overgeneralisations (Richards & Schmidt, 2002, p.379) in the target language, resulting from ignorance of rule restrictions, incomplete applications of rules, and false concepts hypothesised.

Hubbard, Jones, Thornton, and Wheeler (1996) classify errors into four main categories, namely grammatical, syntactic, substance, and lexical errors. Then they subcategorized grammatical errors into seven categories: *prepositions, singular/plural nouns, adjectives, tenses, possessive case, relative clauses, and articles*; syntactic errors into three categories: *nouns/pronouns, subject/verb agreement, and word order*; substance errors into three categories: *capitalization, punctuation, and spelling*; lexical errors into two categories: *varied words, and idiom choice or usage*. This taxonomy of errors has been chosen as a framework in the present study as it has been widely used in several studies (Ababneh, 2017; Napitupulu, 2017).

### ***The importance of error analysis***

Many researchers in the field of EA have stressed the importance of second language learners' errors. As Corder (1967), in his article *The significance of learners' errors*, remarks that: They are significant in three different ways. Firstly, to the teacher, in that they tell him, if he undertakes a systematic analysis, how far towards the goal the learner has progressed and, consequently, what remains for him to learn. Secondly, they provide to the researcher evidence of how a language is acquired, what strategies the learner is employing in his learning of a language. Thirdly, they are indisputable to the learner himself because we can regard the making of errors as a device the learner uses in order to learn (p. 161).

As Corder (1967) points out, EA has two objects: theoretical and applied. The theoretical object is to understand what and how a learner learns when he studies an L2. The applied one is to enable the learner to learn more efficiently by using the grasp of his dialect for pedagogical purposes. At the same time, he says that the investigation of errors can serve two aims: diagnostic (to in-point the problem) and prognostic (to make plans to solve a problem). It is diagnostic because it can tell us the learner's understanding of a language at any given point during the process of learning. It is also prognostic because it can inform the teacher to adjust learning materials to meet the linguistic needs of learners.

Corder (1974) notes that Error Analysis is useful in second language learning because it reveals the problem areas to teachers, syllabus designers and textbook writers. Errors can tell the teacher how far towards the goal the learner has progressed and consequently, what remains for him or her to learn. In consensus, Richards and Schmidt (2002) point out that EA may be conducted in order to 1) identify strategies which learners use in language learning; 2) try to identify the causes of learner errors; 3) obtain information on common difficulties in language learning as an aid to teaching or in the preparation of teaching materials.

### ***Previous studies on error analysis***

Several research studies have been conducted to investigate errors in students' writing in English worldwide. Lin (2002) examined 26 essays written by Taiwanese EFL students at college level. The results of this study showed that the four highest error frequencies were sentence structures (30.43%), wrong verb forms (21.01%), sentence fragments (15.94%), and wrong use of words (15.94%).

In their study, Darus and Subramaniam (2009) examined errors in a corpus of 72 essays written by 72 Malaysian students. The findings of their study showed that the most common errors committed by the participants were closely related to: singular/plural form, verb tense, word choice, preposition, subject-verb agreement and word order.

Along in the same lines, Mungungu (2010) conducted an empirical study, using quantitative research methods, to examine common English language errors made by Namibian learners who are L1 speakers of Oshiwambo, Afrikaans and Silozi learning English as a second Language. The study investigated errors and their frequencies in a corpus of 360 essays written by 180 participants. His findings revealed that the students who committed 763 errors in tenses, prepositions, articles and spelling, the four most common in students' writing. Among the four

types of errors, spelling errors (419) seem to be the most difficult for the students since it is probably due to the rare use of English vocabulary in everyday language, followed by tense errors (139), preposition errors (117), and article errors (88).

Kambal (1980) and Scott and Tucker (1977) carried out studies in order to analyse the performance of Arabic-speaking students enrolling in an intensive course. They found that Arabic-speaking learners have problems in prepositions, articles, tense, verbs and nouns. Recently, most studies in the Arab world (e.g. Mohammed, 2005; Muortaga, 2004) investigated EFL Arab learners' syntactic errors, the results of which revealed that Arab learners were incompetent and weak mainly in verbs and prepositions.

Khuwaileh and Al Shoumali (2000) carried out a study to investigate the errors of the Jordanian students' writing and they discovered that tense errors are the most frequent ones committed by the students. They attribute this error to Arabic language interference because it has only three tenses.

In his detailed article on Arabic speakers, Smith (2001) pointed out that Arabic learners of English commit many examples of errors. Among these errors, for instance, were mistakes in consonant clusters, word order, questions and negatives, auxiliaries, pronouns, time, tense and aspect, modal verbs, articles, etc. As for articles, he stated that the indefinite article causes the most obvious problems as it is commonly omitted with singular countable nouns.

Ababneh (2017) conducted a study on the writings of 50 EFL Saudi female college students majoring in English and then categorized their writings errors in terms of Hubbard, Jones, Thornton, and Wheeler's (1996) classification of errors namely grammatical, syntactic, substance, and lexical errors. The findings of his study showed that most frequent types of errors made by the students were in the categories of grammar (570), followed by substance (513), syntax (121) and lexical (90). His findings also revealed that the most frequent types of errors made by the students were: spelling, subject-verb agreement, tenses, singular/plural nouns, and articles. He ascribed these errors to the lack of conversation in the target language, rare reading in English, and interference of Arabic language.

Napitupulu (2017) investigated Indonesian students' linguistic errors in English letter writing, adopting Hubbard et al. (1996) taxonomy of errors. His study revealed that students committed 42.4% of grammatical errors, 26.7% of syntactic errors, 17.9% of substance errors, and 13% of lexical errors. Based on the discussion of his findings, he concluded that Indonesian students committed a great number of errors due to first language transfer.

In general, most studies conducted in the field of error analysis among Arab and non-Arab students revealed that approximately the most common types of errors are all similar ( prepositions, spelling, tenses, articles and subject-verb agreement ). These studies have attributed the aforementioned errors to overgeneralisation in the target language which result from ignorance of rule restriction and incomplete application of rules and interference resulting from first language (Arabic) negative transfer.

From the preceding discussion, it is evident that errors committed by language learners have been extensively investigated worldwide. However, there seems a paucity of errors analysis research in Libyan context (Abdalwahid, 2012; Hamed, 2014). In fact, Abdalwahid and Hamed's studies have focused only on investigating cohesion errors in students' writing whose major is English. This study is an effort to fill this gap by identifying the most common types of errors and their frequency occurrence in the English writings of non-English major Libyan students.

## Method

### *Participants*

The participants in this study were 40 non-English major Libyan students who enrolled in the English General Classes at the pre-intermediate level in spring semester, 2017 in Language Centre at Omar EL-Mukhtar University, EL-Beida Campus, Libya. They were all native speakers of Arabic at the age of 25 and 28 years. They have been learning English as a foreign language for at least 10 years: eight years at school through regular Arabic language instruction, one year at university and one year at the University of Omer EL-Mukhtar's Language Centre. The University of Omer EL-Mukhtar's Language Centre is an academically oriented English language instruction that provides courses for the students to improve their English.

### *Data and data collection*

After obtaining a permission from manager of Language Centre, forty (40) compositions were collected from the Language centre at Omar EL-Mukhtar University, EL-Beida, Libya. The data were guided compositions produced by the participants during their pre-intermediate level final examination in May, 2017. The participants were asked to write 150 word about one of the following topics:

Topic 1: Write a description of your country.

Topic 2: Write an email to someone in your family and tell them about your weekend.

Topic 3: Describe a film you have seen.

### *Data analysis*

Based on the guidelines of selecting a corpus of language (Ellis, 1995), a sample of written work was collected from 40 pre-intermediate level students' examination scripts. Various researches on error analysis including Ellis (1997) and Gas and Selinker (2001) informed the processes used to analyse the data. The following four steps were followed: 1) data collection, 2) identification of errors, 3) classification of errors, and 4) a statement of error frequency.

The 40 compositions used in this study were read and analysed by the researcher himself. Firstly, a corpus of writing data was collected, and secondly did the identification of errors. Next, the errors were classified according to their categories and subcategories based on Hubbard et al.'s (1996) taxonomy. This taxonomy of errors has been chosen as a framework in the present study as it has been widely used in several studies (Ababneh, 2017; Napitupulu, 2017). After categorising each error, the frequency of occurrence of different types of linguistic errors was quantified.

## Results and discussion

The aim of this study, as previously mentioned, was to identify the most common types of errors and their frequency occurrence in English writing of non-English major Libyan students. A total of 564 errors were found in the compositions under analysis (See Table 1). The results of this study showed that substance errors had the highest number of errors. They accounted for (331), followed by grammatical errors (150), syntactic errors (54), and lexical errors (29), as Table 1 shows. The results of this study are different from Ababneh (2017) who reported that grammatical errors were the most frequent ones committed by the Saudi college students while substance errors were found to be the most frequent errors in this study.

**Table 1.** Total number of errors in students' writing

Category	Frequency
Grammar	150
Syntax	54
Substance	331
Lexical	29
Total	564

As can be seen from Table 2, as far as the seven subcategories of grammatical errors committed by the students were concerned, tenses were the most common errors (11.0%), followed by article errors (7.1%), preposition errors (3.9%) and singular/plural nouns (3.5%). Possessive case and relative clauses had the least percentage of errors (0.2%). Of the three subcategories of syntactic errors, the highest frequency of errors was in subject/verb agreement (4.4%), followed by nouns and pronouns (3.4%) and word order (1.8%). Among the three substance errors committed by the students, spelling errors had the highest frequency (38.8%), followed by capitalization errors (12.4%) and punctuation errors (7.4%). Of the subcategory of lexical errors, varied words had the highest percentage (4.8%) followed by idiom choice or usage (0.5%).

**Table 2.** Frequencies and percentages of errors based on Hubbard et al. (category/subcategory)

Category	Subcategory	Frequency	Percentage
Grammar	Prepositions	22	3.9%
	Singular/plural nouns	20	3.5%
	Adjectives	4	0.7%
	Tenses	62	11.0%
	Possessive case	1	0.2%
	Relative clauses	1	0.2%
	Articles	40	7.1%
Syntax	Nouns & pronouns	19	3.4%
	Subject/verb agreement	25	4.4%
	Word order	10	1.8%
	Capitalization	70	12.4%

Substance	Punctuation	42	7.4%
	Spelling	219	38.8%
Lexical	Varied words	26	4.6%
	Idiom choice or usage	3	0.5%
Total		564	100.0%

As evidenced in the results (see Table 2), the most common errors found in the participants' written compositions are associated with spelling (38.8%), capitalization (12.4%), tenses (11.0%), punctuation (7.4%), articles (7.1%), varied words (4.6%), subject-verb agreement (4.4%), and prepositions (3.9%). Only the aforementioned errors will be discussed under their main categories: grammatical errors, syntactical errors, substance errors, and lexical errors.

### **Grammatical Errors**

As shown in Table 2, the students had great difficulty in using tenses (11.0%), followed by articles (7.1%), prepositions (3.9%). The students had problems deciding which tense to use. They used simple present or present perfect improperly instead of simple past and present continuous in place of simple present, as in the following sentences with the revised version in parenthesis, '*...when he started war on Russia, he has chosen (chose) her ...*', '*he hides (hid) in when the British army were looking for him*', and '*I am studying (study) English...*'. The misuse of tenses is not difficult only for Libyan students, but also for most of Arab students, as in Scott and Tucker's (1977), Kambal's (1980), and Khuwaileh and Al Shoumali's (2000) findings, which show that Arab students misused tenses in their writing. This result is not surprising since the Arabic language has only three tenses, yet there are 14 tenses in English and each one has more than one usage. Thus, tenses can be a thorny problem even for advanced learners of English in Libya.

The use of articles, totalling 40 ( approximately 7.1% of all the error tokens ), posed the second most common difficulty for Libyan EFL students. The students often used unnecessary articles. For instance, they added the indefinite article 'a' where it is not needed, as in the following sentence with the revised version in parenthesis, '*It was a sunny in the middle of the summer*' ( $\chi$ ). They also inserted the definite article 'the' that must not appear in a well-formed sentence in the target language. For example, they misused 'the' before the names of places, such as '*I went to the London*' ( $\chi$ ) and '*I live in the Shahat*' ( $\chi$ ), a city in Libya. In addition to this, the students omitted necessary articles where these articles should be used in the target language. They omitted the indefinite article 'a' more frequently, as in the following sentences, '*It was ^ great film*' (a), '*I had ^ piece of toast and ^ terrible cup of tea*' (a, a). The students also omitted the indefinite article 'the' where it is required, as in the following sentence, '*we went to ^ zoo*' (the). (Note: this symbol ^ indicates missing articles). The results indicated that the students had no problems with the indefinite article 'an'. Such errors are imputable to the 'negative transfer' from the mother tongue, Arabic. Unlike English, which has definite and indefinite articles, Arabic has only a definite article called '*L of definition*' (Abushihab, El-Omari & Tobat, 2011). While Arabic uses the definite article to refer to generic nouns, English does not use it in this way (Abdalwahid, 2012). Accordingly, Arab-English foreign language learners tend to produce so many errors of articles.

Preposition errors (3.9%) rank the third among all grammatical errors. The students misused the prepositions in their writing. They used wrongly 'in' instead of 'to', and 'to' in place of 'at', as in the following examples, '*she decided to move in a new house*', and '*After Vikram arrived to the house*', respectively. In some cases, the students avoided the application of prepositions. For example, the students omitted the prepositions 'in' and 'at' in the following sentences, '*I live ^ a very nice house*' and '*Students hold an ethic dinner ^ night*', respectively. This finding correlates with other studies of Arab EFL learners (Mohammed, 2005; Muortaga, 2004; Zahid, 2006).

### **Syntactical Errors**

Among syntactical subcategories, subject/verb agreement (4.4%) was the most problematic to the students (see Table 2). In English grammar, the subject and the verb should both agree in number and in person. Depending on whether the subject is singular or plural, the verbs should take similar forms. However, this rule is often disregarded by Libyan students. In many cases, the students did not use the third person singular 's' with the verb when the subject is singular, as in the following examples with the revised version in parenthesis, '*My mother wait (waits) for me*', '*My friend Najla work (works) with me*' and '*The weather in Libya change (changes) all the time*'. The students also misused the verbs 'to be' and 'to have' in their writing. They used incorrectly the singular verb 'is' instead of the plural verb 'are' with the plural noun 'people', as in the following sentence, '*People is(are) very friendly*', and the verb 'has' in place of the verb 'have' with the singular noun 'Libya', as in the following, '*Libya have (has) a lot of oil and gas*'. The findings of the current study were in line with those of previous EFL research studies ( e.g. Ababneh, 2017; Darus & Subramaniam, 2009) in that EFL learners faced difficulty in using subject-verb agreement to generate grammatical sentences.

### **Substance Errors**

Based on the percentage of each substance error (see Table 2), it is evident that misspellings constituted the highest percentage of errors (38.8%), followed by the capitalization errors (12.4%) and punctuation errors (7.4%). The students made many spelling errors, as illustrated by the following examples, taken from the students' compositions with the correct spelling in parenthesis: *frendly, frindly (friendly), frend, frind (friend), beutiful (beautiful), jop (job), rememper (remember), whol (whole), befor (before), futur (future), proplems (problems)*. It can be said that the students had problems with the words that have the consonant letters 'b' or 'p' and the vowels 'e' or 'i'. This finding is mirrored in previous study (Ababneh, 2017) in that Arab native students faced problems with spelling words contained those letters. This is probably due to inadequate learning in the target language.

Additionally, the students made errors in capitalization (12.4%) by using lowercase (small) letters instead of uppercase (capital) letters in many cases. For instance, they did not sometimes capitalize proper names, names of places, and names of countries. All these errors can be demonstrated by the following extracts, with the revised version in parenthesis, from students' compositions: '*james*' (*James*), '*benghazi*' (*Benghazi*), '*libya*' (*Libya*), '*africa*' (*Africa*). Also, the students often commenced sentences with small letter words after a period, as exemplified in the following sentences, '*the teachers aren't good and unexperienced. there (There) is only... .', I watched film called 'the Green Meil'. it (It)was very amazing*'. Such errors can be imputed to the

students' mother tongue, the Arabic language. Unlike English, which has uppercase and lowercase letters, Arabic language has only lowercase letters.

It was clearly found that the use of punctuation was a problematic area for the participants. A considerable number of the students committed punctuation errors (7.4%) by writing too long sentences without using punctuation between them, as illustrated in the following examples with the revised version in parenthesis, *'Libya is the best place to visit (.) it (It) is a big country...'*, *'When the film ended, we went for a meal on a boat on the Nile (.) the (The) meal was fish with rice and salad'*. As a result, the sentences ran on too long and confused the readers. These errors can be attributed to overgeneralisation in the target language, resulting from ignorance of rule restriction and incomplete application of rules.

### ***Lexical Errors***

As shown in Table 1, of the four categories, the lexical category had the least number of errors (29). The same finding was found by Ababneh (2017). And among the lexical errors, varied words (26) were the most problematic for the participants (See Table 2). A small number of the students used inappropriate words in their writings; for instance, using the word 'save' instead of 'safe', 'work' instead of 'job' and 'live' instead of 'life', as exemplified in the following examples respectively, *'I was born in Libya and I feel in it very save'*, *'I will starting my work as a teacher next week'*, *'what makes his live very difficult is the people who hearts his family'*. It can be said that the students faced difficulty in using the appropriate word in its correct place. These errors could be due to overgeneralisation in the target language which results from ignorance of rule restriction and incomplete application of rules.

### **Conclusion**

The purpose of the present study was to identify the most common types of errors and their frequency occurrence in compositions written by non-English major Libyan students. The errors were analysed in terms of Hubbard et al.'s (1996) taxonomy. The analysis of the errors showed that substance errors (331) constituted the highest number of errors, followed by grammatical errors (150), syntactic errors (54), and lexical errors (29).

The findings revealed that the most common types of errors found in the students' writings were: spelling, capitalization, tenses, punctuation, articles, varied words, subject-verb agreement, and prepositions. These errors could be due to overgeneralisation in the target language, which results from ignorance of rule restriction and incomplete application of rules and interference resulting from first language (Arabic) negative transfer.

The present study has focused only on forty (40) students in one language centre and thus the findings cannot be generalized to all non-English major students studying English as a foreign language in EL-Beida Language Centre or to any other language centres in Libya. Therefore, much more research needs to be done on the analysis of students' errors in writing in different language centres to reach final conclusions about an effective and enhanced writing teaching in Libya.

The research findings have suggested some implications which can be of great help to improve students' writing skills. Direct corrective feedback on those errors is necessary and

helpful. In the direct corrective feedback, the teacher provides the student with the correct form by writing it above or near to the incorrect one. As Sheen (2007, cited in Ellis, 2009, p. 99) suggests, direct corrective feedback can be important in fostering acquisition of specific grammatical features. Further, explicit instruction on the errors identified in the students' composition can foster the students to overcome these difficulties. In explicit instruction, the teacher either explains the rules to the learners or directs the learners to find the rules by looking at linguistic examples exemplified in sentences (Cowan, 2008). It has been shown that explicit instruction yields better and longer-lasting learning than implicit instruction (Norris & Ortega, 2000). EFL Libyan teachers should take the two aforementioned implications into account when they teach writing.

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