An Analysis of the Linguistic Errors Made by Students in Saudi Arabian Schools in the Acquisition of the Auxiliary "Do": A Comparison Between Boys' and Girls' Performances

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Abstract
Recently there has been an upsurge in research into why students of foreign languages make mistakes. There have been many reasons given including interference of the mother tongue and over-generalisation of the rules of the language being studied. This research is concerned with the reasons for mistakes but will concentrate on a particular focus, i.e. the mistakes made by English language students regarding the auxiliary verb "do". This is seen as a particularly difficult area for many foreign students of English language as this linguistic term does not feature in many other languages and is, therefore, a problem for some language students to grasp.It is hoped that reasons for the many mistakes (i.e. omissions, incorrect verb tense, etc.) can be identified and that from this identification, methods can be found to teach this term in a way that will allow students to grasp the concept and retain it throughout their language-learning careers.This dissertation is based on an error analysis of English written performances by students in the Third Grade (equivalent to Ninth Grade elsewhere) of the Intermediate Boys and Girls' schools in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. It focuses on the examination and analysis of the students' performances in a translation test. This should reveal information about some of the students' errors in the acquisition of the auxiliary "do", and other factors which might affect their English language learning. Furthermore, this dissertation seeks to find out whether there are any disparities in the responses of each of the two groups to the translation test which may be attributable to gender.

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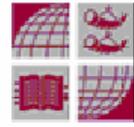
AN ANALYSIS OF THE LINGUISTIC ERRORS MADE BY STUDENTS IN SAUDI ARABIAN SCHOOLS IN THE ACQUISITION OF THE AUXILIARY "DO": A COMPARISON BETWEEN BOYS' AND GIRLS' PERFORMANCES

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ABSTRACT

Keywords: linguistic errors, English language, students in Saudi schools, acquisition of the auxiliary, comparison analysis.

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This research is concerned with the reasons for mistakes but will concentrate on a particular focus, i.e. the mistakes made by English language students regarding the auxiliary verb "do". This is seen as a particularly difficult area for many foreign students of English language as this linguistic term does not feature in many other languages and is, therefore, a problem for some language students to grasp.

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated with affection to the lights of my life, to my father and my mother, for their endless love.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS USED

BSM: Bilingual Syntax Measure.

CA: Contrastive Analysis.

EA: Error Analysis.

EFL: English as a Foreign Language.

ESL: English as a Second Language.

IL: Inter-language.

LAD: Language Acquisition Device.

L1:   The first Language.

L2:   The second Language.

SLA: Second Language Acquisition.

LIST OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

INTRODUCTION

Education is, as other fields are, progressing rapidly in the world today, in order to meet the needs of societies. This is particularly so in Saudi Arabia, which is considering its relations with the rest of the world. The Saudi Government has opted to educate people in every field to meet the needs of a rapidly developing industrial society with international connections.

General public education in Saudi Arabia consists of four stages: nursery, primary, intermediate and secondary. The nursery stage is optional for children between the ages of three and six. The primary stage caters for the education of pupils between the ages of six and twelve, in six year groups. The intermediate and secondary stages are both of three years' duration, providing education for children from the ages of twelve to fifteen, and from the ages of fifteen to eighteen, respectively. The latter three are compulsory stages (Al-Farsy, 2002: 22).

The Intermediate school curriculum, which is the focus of this dissertation, consists of Islamic Religious Studies, Arabic, Social Sciences (including Geography and History), Mathematics, Physical Education and English Language.

In Saudi Arabia, English is introduced as a foreign language when the pupils reach the age of thirteen, i.e. in the Intermediate stage, and continues until College level. Throughout this period, English is a compulsory subject in all schools in Saudi Arabia (Sedgwick, 2006: 5). It is believed that mastering a foreign/second language ultimately provides a competitive advantage in the workforce which opens up additional job opportunities. Students of foreign languages have access to a greater number of

career possibilities and tend to develop a deeper understanding of their own and other cultures (Al-Maini, 2002: 2).

The ultimate objectives of teaching English in the Intermediate schools in Saudi Arabia according to the Ministry of Education are as follows:

To produce, in three years, an individual who is able to speak, read and listen with understanding to simple current English, and to write a connected passage of up to half a page about a simple subject or incident. To give pupils who finish their formal education in third year intermediate enough knowledge of language to help them in their vocations. To give pupils who proceed to the secondary stage a sound foundation on which to build their future studies. To lay the foundations of a knowledge of English so that later they can acquire sufficient grasp to explain their religion to English speakers, and to refute the errors of the enemies of Islam concerning religion, (Saudi Ministry of Education, 2007: 9).

This study aims to evaluate whether Saudi pupils have acquired the "sound foundation" as mentioned above. It consists of an error analysis of the English written performances of students in the Third Grade Intermediate, i.e. Boys' and Girls' schools in Riyadh in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. It is based on an analysis of the students' performances on a translation test which is designed to reveal information about some of the students' errors in acquisition of the auxiliary "do", in interrogative and negative sentences. The auxiliary "do" was chosen as the focus of error analysis as it is an important element of the English language, and can reveal whether a student has, indeed, achieved "a sound foundation".

The timetable for English classes at the Intermediate stage is approximately four periods per week. Each period is of 45 minutes' duration and during this time, students are supposed to be able to cover all aspects of learning the fundamental skills required for any language, i.e. writing, reading, listening and speaking.

The course material, *" Say It In English"* consists of two manuals: the pupils' book and a workbook for Third Grade Intermediate students (Saudi Ministry of Education, 2007: 13). There is no special book from which to teach reading skills. The students' books focus on English grammar and literal translation of sentences directly after being read (*Saudi Ministry of Information,* 2007: 9).

There are several factors affecting successful language learning. Some of these factors are related to the student, e.g., motivation; in fact, many students in Saudi schools have no clear goal in their minds and cannot identify the reasons why they are learning English. All they know is that they have to learn it to pass their final examination with good grades. In this case, the most important thing for the students is to get a pass grade, not to speak, write or read the language, (Al-Kamookh, 1977: 9). Despite the lapse of three decades since Al-Kamookh's statement, it still holds validity as can be suggested by the continuously released reports from the Saudi Ministry of Education on the progress of English teaching and learning. (Ministry of Education, 2008). Another problem relates to the teachers; most language teachers are not from Saudi Arabia. It is my opinion that these foreign teachers, as well as the Saudi teachers, do not have good command of English because it is not their mother tongue. As stated by Al-Hakbani (1984); Al-Ahaydib (1986); and Al-Shabbi (1989) in their studies, reading and writing in English has been affected by the lack of well qualified English teachers in Saudi Arabia, (Al-Maini, 2002: 5).

In addition, the Ministry of Education in Saudi Arabia hires language teachers for only one or two years, the teachers then leave unless they have their contracts renewed. For this reason teachers appear to put little effort into their profession; they are not settled and often feel that they are not responsible for their students' successes or failures. Moreover, nobody appreciates what they do and, therefore, they rarely receive praise or an increase in salary even if they do a good job (Al-Salloom, 1995: 10).

Over the last ten years, the Ministry embarked upon an intensive process of replacing expatriate English teachers with Saudi ones, as part of a general national SaudizationPolicy. On the one hand, because some of these teachers were not well prepared or trained to shoulder such responsibility, and coupled with their lack of experience, the learning and teaching of English suffered a serious blow. On the other hand, the upsurge in school numbers exacerbated demand for more English teachers. Recruitment from amongst Saudi graduates were made less tough, to allow the recruiting of nationals with bachelor degrees in English or at least with English as major specialisation. Irrespective of the qualifications they had, some of them were said to be far from efficient and their mastery of linguistic skills, i.e. listening, speaking, reading and writing, was questionable.

Furthermore questions were raised regarding regular evaluation and promotion of English Curriculum in Intermediate and Secondary schools. Earlier works such as that of (Habereeh, 1992: 5) referred to a lack of regular evaluation.

Since the mid nineties, the situation has changed a good deal, as can be discerned from material obtained from the Ministry of Education. Realising that its set goals for learning English were far from being achieved, the Ministry implemented a programme, the aim of which was to continuously evaluate the English Curriculum. It is true that the

process was somewhat slow; nevertheless it is still ongoing. Despite bureaucratic impediments threatening the programmes' activation, pressure from the Government helped push English learning ahead. This was very much associated with the unprecedented and massive social and economic development in the country facilitated by the enormous revenues made available from sales of petrol and petrochemicals. Development projects at their different levels created jobs which no one qualified for without securing an acceptable competency in communications in English. Hence a huge number of English learning facilities were established to satisfy the escalating demand for English speaking personnel. More and more departments of English were opened in ten old and new universities together with approximately 150 teacher training colleges for both male and female students. All of them taught English as well as other subjects. Accelerated by the growing demands for English teachers and translators, students strove to secure admission to English departments. Competition for admission flared up in response to the Saudi governments' decision to introduce English teaching to the Fifth Year Elementary school pupils, in the academic year 2006 / 2007.

Hundreds of English teachers were required to enable the said decision, thus demand for English teachers reached unprecedented levels. Subsequently, the recruitment of English teachers from abroad was broadly resumed, despite opposition from those who clung to the idea that expatriates recruitment would undermine the Saudization process (Ministry of Education, 2007).

The Ministry was, and still is working hard on bettering the standard of audio – visual laboratories and educational aids. Unfortunately, these are provided in few schools, presumably because of the high cost of these aids. One of the reports criticised

the non use and/or "the abuse" of these invaluable and expensive facilities by some of the teachers. To avert these adverse reactions, the Ministry resorted to in – service training on how to maximise the benefits of using these educational aids in enhancing the teaching process and promoting teachers' consciousness towards their importance.

Along the same line of improving the English teaching the Ministry has recently been sending more and more of its nominees to pursue their higher degrees in English abroad, with the ultimate goal of transferring their earned knowledge and experience of English to trainee teachers, when they return home. The concept is not new as many Saudis have studied for their higher degree in English in the UK, USA and other English speaking countries since the early sixties.

At present, the Ministry of Education has increased its numbers of nominees who are pursuing studies in English speaking countries. New destinations are currently being targeted, for example - Australia, South Africa and India. Such development was partially sparked by the restrictions imposed upon Saudi students travelling to the USA in the aftermath of September 11, 2001.

Finally, one new impediment to English teaching is the sharp rise in prices which consumes the salaries of English language teachers, and which adversely impacts on their performance. Though the Government is striving to curb inflation, the cost of living is soaring day after day and there are fears that it is getting out of control. Whether the Government succeeds in the combat of inflation or not is very much determined by global and domestic factors, so more time is needed to judge the influences it may have on the lives of English teachers and hence on their performance. The success of language teaching, however, depends a great deal on the teachers. They must have a positive attitude towards their teaching and their students as their attitudes

can affect students' successes. They must convince themselves that their students are capable of learning another language effectively (Habereeh, 1992: 5).

To be effective, teachers must be thoroughly familiar with the phonological, morphological, syntactic, and lexical system of the language. They must also become interested in each student as an individual, and should have qualities such as warmth, tolerance, patience, sensitivity, enthusiasm, open-mindedness and flexibility (Armstrong, 2005: 16).

Success in language learning depends a great deal on the individual; all students are different, every student has his/her own intelligence, ability, competence and personality, but successful language learners accept the educational value of foreign language study and accept its vocational relevance. Language learners might also be interested in learning a language for personal reasons (Baki, 2004: 4). Obviously learning a foreign language in general, and English in particular, is not an easy task. As the main language of this present civilisation, English learning is gaining ground day after day in terms of morphology, phonology and vocabulary. The latter i.e. vocabulary, is becoming richer and richer in response to widespread innovations in almost every domain of life including sciences, arts, law, religion, economy, entrepreneurship, social sciences and culture. The fact that English is the main language of multinational communication systems such as the Internet has created an extra impetus for learning English, regardless of the difficulties encountered. Therefore, motivation for understanding and learning English is always present. In connection with this, it has been noticed that successful language learners are usually more enthusiastic and more active both in- and outside the classroom. They become involved in other foreign

activities pertaining to language practice and struggle to express their ideas in the way a native speaker might, (Al-Maini, 2002: 9).

1.1 RESEARCH PROBLEM OBJECTIVES

Based on my personal observations, I noticed that girls are generally making better progress in learning English in comparison to boys at the same educational level, i.e. Third Year Intermediate (9th Grade). Therefore, this study attempts to verify the authenticity of this observation on the one hand, and to uncover those factors impacting the learning of English at this level of education on the other hand, since both groups study the same curriculum. In order to actualise these objectives an error analysis strategy was adopted. It was based on identifying errors and their sources, together with comparing their types and frequencies. Since errors are too broad an element of linguistics, I have restricted myself to the analysis of one single aspect of it, i.e. errors pertaining to the acquisition of the auxiliary "*do*" in interrogative and negative sentences. Consequently, the research attempts to highlight the possible role of gender in explaining anticipated differences in the performances of each of the two groups on the translation test. A series of questions was believed to best serve this purpose.

1- Do students in the Third Grade Intermediate Boys' and Girls' schools show similar or different performances on the translation test?

2- What similarities and/or differences in number and type of errors in the acquisition of the auxiliary "*do*" can be found among learners at the Third Grade Intermediate Boys' and Girls' schools of English learning?

3- Do students at the Third Grade Intermediate Boys' and Girls' schools reveal similar or different performances on the three sentence types, i.e. Wh- Questions, Yes/No Questions, and negatives in the acquisition of the auxiliary "do"?

4- Does "gender" directly or indirectly impact the type and/or frequency of errors in the acquisition of the auxiliary "do"?

5- What are the solutions and recommendations for improvement?

 Finally, this study will attempt to draw some conclusions, although limited, in order to seek improvements in English instruction in Saudi Arabian schools.

1.2   SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

 Foreign language teachers, concerned with the identification, correction, and prevention of spoken and written errors made by their students, can profit greatly from L2 acquisition research. A significant and positive change has occurred in the attitudes of second language learning researchers towards learners' errors. This attitude was summarised by George (1972: 189) who stated: *"At the beginning of the sixties the word 'error' was associated with correction, at the end with learning."*

 Within this perspective, researchers in L2 learning have become increasingly interested in the study and analysis of students' errors (Corder, 1981; Richards, 1974; Taylor, 1975; Sharma, 1981; Bonert, 1988; and Ellis, 2004).

 They propose that learners' errors should be expected and accepted as a natural result of language learning. The overriding objective of most of the studies has been to try to understand the processes underlying L2 learning. Based on students' observed written or spoken utterances, investigators attempted to infer the strategies employed by the learners in their efforts to express themselves in the target language.

A number of error analysis studies have been conducted with children and adult L2 learners. The researchers have come to various theoretical conclusions and have made practical suggestions regarding the sources of errors, and the pedagogical importance of learners' errors (Dulay and Burt, 1972; Richards, 1974; Corder, 1981; Selinker, 1974; Taylor, 1975; Doughty and Long, 2003; and Ellis, 2004).

Interestingly, many have concluded that most of the errors made by both children and adults learning a foreign language are similar to those made by children learning their L1 (Dulay and Burt, 1972; and Burt, 1975).

"Second language acquisition is the study of how learners learn an additional language after they have acquired their mother tongue. The study of language-learner language began with the study of first language (L1) acquisition. SLA research has tended to follow in the footsteps of L1 acquisition research, both in its methodology and in many of the issues that it has treated. It is not surprising that a key issue has been the extent to which SLA and L1 acquisition are similar or different processes" (Ellis, 2004: 4).

However, very few studies have been carried out in Saudi Arabia, to investigate errors made by two different groups of students of L2 (male and female). Empirical research regarding students' performances in different types of English learning in spite of being highly necessary is, in fact, really scarce. It is hoped that this study will increase the store of knowledge in this field of L2 acquisition and provide useful information for both curriculum designers and teachers, particularly teachers of Arab students learning English, but also teachers interested in foreign language learning in general, (Al-Muarik, 1982:5).

1.3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Sieny (1982: 136) points out that in evaluating learners' errors, researchers usually use one (or more) of the following techniques:

1) Content analysis: where the researcher analyses the material qualitatively and quantitatively in order to determine how far it corresponds to the set of criteria chosen for the study.

2) Test: where the researcher gives the learners a test and compares their achievement grades with those of another group which uses a different set of materials or with their own grades before being exposed to the material under evaluation.

3) Informal interviews: where the researcher interviews a number of the people who are involved in the situation to gain additional insights into how teachable or learnable the materials are.

4) Questionnaires: where the researcher constructs a number of questions and distributes them among the people involved in the situation to find out how far the materials are useful in practice.

The first technique (content analysis), presumably the most objective of all the techniques, focuses on finding out how far the material corresponds with the theoretical criteria established in the field.

The second technique takes into account many factors, which contribute to the learners' overall achievement. Unique amongst these are the teacher, his/her relationship with the students, the method of teaching, the learner himself/herself, his/her psychological status, the atmosphere in the school community and the socio-cultural background. This test technique appears to best serve the research purpose,

(Al-Ajlan, 2003: 4), and seems to be the most suitable for my study as it takes into account all related considerations, particularly its emphasis on the socio-cultural element, which characterises and distinguishes the socio-cultural environment of learning L2 in Saudi Arabia.

The third technique gives practical information, its' drawback being that it takes considerable time to collect data from interviews.

The fourth technique (the questionnaire) which was defined by Brown (2001: 6) as "Any written instruments that present respondents with a series of questions or statements to which they are to react either by writing out their answers or selecting the right answer from among existing answers."

In this study, I chose the test technique, i.e. the translation test to collect the data to analyse learners' errors. The test was especially designed to elicit specific English syntactic structures pertaining to students' errors in the acquisition of the auxiliary "d*o"*.

1.4 LIMITATION OF THE STUDY

This study is limited in its scope by four factors:

1- The study has been designed only for students at the Third Grade Intermediate Boys' and Girls' schools. Third Grade refers to the 9th Grade in Saudi Arabia's school system, i.e. students of fifteen years of age. The study cannot be generalised to other grades or other subjects because my research was carried out only for the English language (considered as a foreign language in Saudi Arabia). In addition, the research could not be expanded to another level because this would require more time, and this study was limited in time to one year. Therefore, I decided to do my research on a Grade in which boys and girls study the same basic curriculum.

2- The study is concerned with the fulfilment of Saudi Arabia's educational goals and cannot be generalised to other situations without considering the particular national or regional goals for a particular programme or situation.

3- The study analyses errors of English written performances by the students of the Third Grade Intermediate Boys' and Girls' schools in Riyadh, neglecting any other kind of error e.g. reading, oral, listening, or comprehension.

4- The study is mainly concerned with particular syntactic errors made by the students, in the acquisition of the auxiliary "d*o"* in interrogative and negative sentences. It will disregard spelling and lexical errors.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

LITERATURE REVIEW

This work falls within the context of English language syntax. In other words, the acquisition of the auxiliary "do" can better be perceived within the perspective of grammar which is in turn part and parcel of the acquisition of the English language as a whole. Whether "syntax" and "grammar" are of equal footing and can be used interchangeably or that syntax holds a lesser position than grammar. i.e. one of grammars' components remains an unsettled issue according to Sag and Wasow *"the term 'syntax' is often used instead of 'grammar' in technical work in linguistics. While the two terms are sometimes interchangeable, 'grammar' may also be used more broadly to cover all aspects of language structure; 'syntax' in contrast, refers only to the ways in which words combine into phrases, and phrases into sentences – the form or structure of well formed expressions"* (Sag & Wasow, 1999: 3).

Emanating from this vision, one needs to confirm what has long been an established fact that L2 acquisition is a process which involves several interrelated factors. These factors pertain to the learner on the one hand and the learning situation on the other hand according to Ellis (2004: 4), who furthermore differentiated between naturalistic or spontaneous acquisition of the language and the tutored one and continued to assert how research on acquisitioning L2 closely followed L1 acquisition. He also reiterated the significance of syntax and morphology in the acquisition of L2. (Ellis, 2004: 5).

The field of SLA is relatively young. Up to this point, there is no comprehensive single theory on the issue. However, in the course of its development SLA research adopted many concepts and approaches. None of them began from scratch, but were largely based on previous works. In this respect and notably during the last few decades

some considerable literature on the acquisition of L2 in general and L2 syntax in particular was produced. Instances include: Dulay et al, 1982; Cook, 1993; Ellis, 1997; Doughty, 1998; Johnson, 2001; Green, 2003 and Goldberg, 2006.

Mackey's work (2006) maintains a special significance, at least from my own point of view. Bearing in mind the close relevance of his work to my study I feel he skilfully and without unnecessary details surveyed the main concepts and themes, so far propounded by the different schools on the acquisition of L2. In brief, he has highlighted four main bodies and approaches, namely: the behaviourist; the nativist; the interactionists and the frequency based approaches. I will later consider each of these approaches; and examine some of the key studies related to this research. In consonance with what is mentioned above, it is noteworthy to state that the process of theorisation and conceptualisation in the SLA arena is still ongoing. This is, to a greater extent, energised by the many insights from related disciplines. Actually, had it not been for interdisciplinariness, major concepts in language acquisition, such as universal grammar, generative grammar, generalisation, interference, inter and intra lingualism etc. could never have been developed and/or tested.

Undoubtedly, most of comparative linguistics approaches especially in the domain of "syntax" owe their existence to interdisciplinariness between L1 and other target language or languages.

My study on the acquisition of the auxiliary "*do*" in Saudi Arabia implies a comparative dimension which also places it under the umbrella of interdisciplinariness.

Following these broad views, I would like to examine in the remainder of this Chapter some of the key studies related to this research. I will begin with theories of

language acquisition and a review of child and adult L2 acquisition studies. The Chapter will conclude with a review of various studies which investigated learners' errors.

2.1 CHILD AND ADULT L2 ACQUISITION STUDIES

Several L2 acquisition studies have been conducted in the past decade as part of a larger body of research into the area of language acquisition. These studies have attempted to enrich our understanding of the acquisition process and the factors underlying it.

Among the research dealing with first language acquisition (L1), two prominent morpheme acquisition studies merit particular consideration. One is a longitudinal study carried out by Brown (1973) who investigated the acquisition order of fourteen morphemes by three children learning English. He found a common order of acquisition for all the fourteen morphemes by all subjects. The other is a cross-sectional study conducted by Devilliers and Devilliers (1973) to examine the order of English morpheme acquisition by twenty one children. The investigators found a significant correlation between their study and Brown's regarding the sequence of morpheme acquisition.

Inspired by the studies carried out on L1 learners, some L2 acquisition studies were undertaken to investigate L2 learners' acquisition of syntax and various selected morphemes. Other research has attempted to find out whether there is a common order of morpheme acquisition by L2 and L1 learners.

Ravem (1968: 178) studied his own child's acquisition of English negative and interrogative sentences which require a "*do-transformation*." He pointed out that as "*do"* is semantically empty, *"this might help to explain the reason why do-transformations*

constitute a particular difficulty for foreign learners of English". He also found many similarities between his son and L1 learners in the developmental sequence of negative and interrogative sentences.

Isman (1973) investigated the general development of English syntax by his three children; he found a similar order of acquisition of complex structures among his children (L2 learners) and L1 learners. Similarly, Henkes (1974) conducted a study of English syntax acquisition by three children from different native language backgrounds. The study indicated that children acquiring an L2 in a natural situation go through similar processes of language acquisition, regardless of their L1, and follow developmental trends similar to L1 learners.

Hanania (1974) carried out a longitudinal study of the early stages of L2 acquisition in a natural setting by an adult native speaker of Arabic. She found a similar pattern of linguistic development in her subject and that of L1 learners. However, in comparison to children learning L2 in a natural environment, her subject made only slow progress which, as noted by Hanania, could be ascribed to affective and environmental factors. Among the interesting findings of the study were the strategies used by the subject which were also commonly observed among L1 learners.

Two studies by Dulay and Burt (1974) on morpheme acquisition used an elicitation instrument called the Bilingual Syntax Measure (BSM). Briefly, the BSM is designed to elicit natural speech from young ESL learners; it consists of seven coloured cartoons and a set of questions to test the learner's degree of proficiency. The researchers looked at the sequence of acquisition of eleven English morphemes by children learning ESL in a natural situation; they found a common order of morpheme acquisition among their subjects. However, their findings did not correlate significantly with the results obtained

by Devilliers and Devilliers (1973) which Dulay and Burt attributed to the cognitive maturity of their subjects.

Similarly, Bailey, Madden and Krashen (1974), using the BSM, conducted a study of morpheme acquisition by adult ESL learners and found an invariant order of morpheme acquisition by their subjects. Their results significantly correlated with Dulay and Burt's but not with DeVilliers and Devilliers' (1973). Likewise, Larsen-Freeman (1975) undertook a study of accuracy order of morpheme acquisition by adult ESL learners. From the data obtained from the BSM, the morpheme sequencing she studied correlated with Dulay and Burt's (1974) study. Interestingly, the results differed when she used other instruments; she therefore suggested a cautious interpretation of the studies claiming a common sequence of morpheme acquisition.

Moreover, Hakuta (1976), in a longitudinal study, investigated the order of morpheme acquisition by a Japanese ESL child. She found a different order of morpheme acquisition from that found by Dulay and Burt.

During the 1980s and 1990s a huge number of works on SLA was accomplished in form of textbooks, articles and general references. The most salient among these include the works of Brown, 1980; Littlewood, 1984; McLaughlin, 1987; Cook, 1991; Ellis, 1994; and Ellis, 1997.

With regard to Saudi Arabia, several theses on English teaching were successfully completed. Instances include Al-Hakbani, 1984; Al-Ahaydib, 1986; Al-Maini, 2002; and Al-Ajlan, 2003.

However, none of these focused on the impacts of gender on SLA processes. One work, though not a thesis, attempted to highlight the consequences of male/female

segregation on education in general, and English Learning in particular. According to Baki (2004), the Saudi education system needs to be re-evaluated to allow for more female participation in social, cultural and economic activities.

2.2 ERROR ANALYSIS

Error Analysis (EA) is related mainly to investigating the language of the learner acquiring and/or learning a second/foreign language. The study of learners' errors makes it possible to assess how much a student has learnt and to find out what they still need to learn. EA is a technique used to identify, classify and describe (in linguistic terms) errors allowing the researcher to discover which aspects of the target language are presenting difficulties to learners. EA can also be used to give an explanation as to why certain errors have been made (Abbas, 2005).

It should be noted that the process which EA follows in order to arrive at certain conclusions about a learner's state of knowledge (at a particular point in time) is a comparative one. The process requires the comparison of synonymous utterances in the learner's IL (Inter-language) and the target language. Since this involves the comparison of two languages it can be regarded as a special case of Contrastive Analysis (the starting point of which is the same message expressed in the learner's native language and in the target language).

However, whereas in CA the researcher already possesses a description of the two languages involved which helps with making comparisons, in EA there is not a prior description of the learner's IL, which could assist in carrying out the task. In this respect, EA is more like the task a linguist is faced with when trying to give a description of a language which has not yet been described or recorded (Corder, 1973).

Learners' errors are part of the data upon which a description of their IL is based. The process of comparison is a two-step operation, i.e. 1) by studying the learner's utterances a description of his/her IL is attempted, and 2) this description is then compared with the description of the target language. The differences found between the two descriptions represent the aspects of the target language that the student still has to learn (Merzougui, 1994).

Corder (1981) makes a distinction between two kinds of EA, i.e. remedial and developmental. Remedial EA is used by the teacher as a technique for evaluating and correcting classroom errors. Developmental EA is used by the researcher to describe the successive transitional dialects of a language learner.

Schachter and Celce-Murcia (1977) have pointed out that it is useful to distinguish between remedial, classroom-oriented EA, and developmental EA. They claim that it may be fairly easy for researchers to distinguish between one kind of EA and the other if their studies are in the area of developmental EA. However, in their view, the line is much more difficult to draw if the aims of a particular research project are in the realm of classroom oriented EA. The reason for this, they say, is that: *" One's views on how the learner processes the second language data he is exposed to should influence one's views on the pedagogical implications of a particular study"* (Schachter and Celce-Murcia, 1977: 444). They also indicate that although theoretical distinctions between the two kinds of EA exist, in practice the majority of EA studies deal with implications which are both developmental and pedagogical.

Error analysis can, therefore, be seen to serve two functions: one pedagogical and applied in aim and the other theoretical and psychological leading to a better

understanding of L2 learning processes and strategies. This methodology has therefore been chosen for this study, because the research is focused on a specific point.

2.2.1 THE THEORETICAL FUNCTION OF EA

When attempting to understand the reasons why errors have been produced, a teacher or researcher is entering the realm of the theoretical function of EA, which is to understand the learning processes and strategies used by the learner. This is best achieved through the study of the development of individual learners in relation to their particular social and linguistic learning setting (Corder, 1975).

Since little is known about the learning processes and what goes on in learners' minds, the only way in which inferences about the nature of the language learning process can be made is by studying the only observable data available, i.e. the learner's utterances in the target language. Therefore, by carrying out an EA of the learner's IL some interesting theoretical observations may be made. For example, EA may confirm or disprove the psycholinguistic theory of transfer which has predicted that those structures which are different in the learner's native language and the target language will be difficult for the learner and the errors can show whether this is so or not. Corder (1973) warns, however, that if it is found that a predicted difficulty does not show itself in errors, or actual errors committed have not been predicted by CA, the theory of transfer cannot be seen as automatically disproved. The reason for this may be that inadequate descriptive and comparative techniques have been used, i.e. the experimental method used may have been poor. From this it follows that EA may provide feedback to both descriptive linguistics and psycholinguistics.

Additionally, EA may help to answer the question as to whether all the speakers of the same mother tongue follow the same course of development in the process of learning a particular L2. Although the L2 learner is required to follow an "*externally imposed syllabus*" (Corder, 1973) which might act as an interference factor in the course of development, the child acquiring his mother tongue follows an *internal syllabus*. Of course, the L2 learner may also possess an internal syllabus which would represent the *psychologically natural route* between the mother tongue and the target language. The L2 learner's course of development may be determined by the inherent cognitive properties of the human mind but at the same time may be conditioned by the particular properties of the learner's mother tongue and the target language.

Thus, some of the research conducted into L2 learning has suggested that both children and adults seem to follow a similar route in their learning of certain English structures (Dulay and Burt, 1973, Bailey et al., 1974).

Currently, however, for both the theoretical and the pedagogical aims to be accomplished successfully, there is a common need for an adequate linguistic explanation as to the nature of the errors encountered in any particular learning situation. Only when a linguistic account of the nature of the learners' errors has been given, will it be possible to suggest some pedagogical measures to deal with them, or to draw some inference from errors about the learning processes (Corder, 1975).

Since the divergent aims of EA determine the data for analysis, i.e. the theoretical function being served by the study of the development of individual learners and the pedagogical function by the study of performance errors of learning groups, a terminological distinction has been proposed. Svartvik (1973, in Bonert, 1988) suggests that the term *"error analysis"* should be used only for the study of errors which have

been made by groups of learners in the course of learning their target language, at a point in time, whereas, the term "*performance analysis*" should be used for the study of all the utterances (not only those containing errors) made by individual learners at successive stages in the development of their target language systems.

2.2.2   THE PEDAGOGICAL FUNCTION OF EA

This function places EA firmly in the classroom. The study of errors of groups of learners, who should, according to Corder (1973), be homogeneous in terms of age, gender, stage of learning or mother tongue, can be helpful to the teacher in several ways, although some of these may not be immediately obvious.

Etherton (1977) has identified a number of findings that an EA based on adequate data may bring to light, and these include:

1) The common weaknesses students exhibit and with which they need help. This help may be offered through remedial teaching or the presentation of new material;

2) Certain words, structures or verb forms that are too difficult for students at a particular stage and, therefore, would need to be taught or re-taught at a later point in the course;

3) Weaknesses exhibited by the complete failure to use a particular language item, e.g. relative pronouns. If it is detected that students do not use relative pronouns but avoid them by seeking alternative constructions, although they have been taught, it may be inferred that this is due to some deficiency which the teacher should think about;

4) Language items that do not occur in the syllabus or textbook but which the students need at certain stages; e.g. conditionals may not have been taught for the reason mentioned above. If, however, an EA reveals that students make mistakes in the use of

these structures (which they may have encountered elsewhere) or if they invent incorrect structures to fill a linguistic gap, it may be found necessary to teach them at this point so as to allow students to express their meanings more efficiently;

5) Inadequacies that the official syllabus may contain, such as an excessive quantity of material to be taught, a faulty sequence of the material, or the omission of essential material. This may occur when syllabuses are arbitrary or when there are widely varying standards within a region or a school;

6) Problem areas or errors which the teacher may hardly be aware of or which may be completely new to him/her. An EA may reveal problems which should be dealt with in class but which are unknown to some textbook writers. EA can be most useful in this field since it is often the only practical way in which a teacher can discover which learning difficulties his students are experiencing.

To the teacher "*making an error analysis is a form of self-education, a type of self-imposed in-service training"*. (Etherton, 1977: 69) Students' errors may reveal to the teacher those areas in which his/her teaching has been effective. By carrying out a systematic study of errors the teacher will become better able to improve their teaching methods which may in turn help their students to progress faster towards the desired goal, i.e. the learning of the target language.

Additionally, the data obtained from an EA can be most valuable in the preparation of teaching materials, textbooks and examinations. Etherton (1977) even goes as far as to claim that some textbooks cannot be prepared efficiently without access to an extensive EA.

To Corder (1981) one of the main practical functions of EA is to guide the teacher when making decisions regarding remedial action, i.e. when an unsatisfactory state of affairs for the learner or teacher has to be corrected. The information obtained about the nature of a learner's IL and the differences found to exist between his/her language and the target language, can provide the teacher with the information required to achieve effective remedial teaching. In Corder's (1981) view, language learners' errors can only be corrected systematically if it is known why the errors have been produced.

2.3 LEARNERS' ERRORS

The study of learners' errors and their possible sources can provide foreign language teachers and researchers alike with valuable insights into the language learning process. In the past, learners' errors have been viewed as symptoms of undesirable performance caused by negative interference from the mother tongue (Fries, 1945; Lado, 1957). In fact, it has been claimed that

> *"Individuals tend to transfer the forms and meanings, and the distribution of forms and meanings of their native language and culture to the foreign language and culture, both productively when attempting to speak the language and receptively when attempting to grasp and understand the language"* (Lado, 1957: 2).

For this reason, when dealing with students' errors, structural linguists have tried to identify errors or difficulties for L2 learners simply by comparing the students' native language with that of the foreign language; this is so as to be able to predict the difficulties students are likely to have in learning the L2. Furthermore, structural linguists have claimed that errors made by foreign language learners could be avoided by preparing teaching materials, the most effective being those which

"are based upon a scientific description of the language to be learned, carefully compared with a parallel description of the native language of the learner" (Fries, 1945: 9).

This technique, however, known as contrastive analysis, has remained limited and has failed to either predict foreign language learners' errors or to prevent their occurrence; in fact, it is believed that it will, in the future, have less influence on foreign language teaching and on programme construction than it has had to date, (Wardhaugh, 1970; Gradman, 1970).

Moreover, some researchers have de-emphasised the role of language transfer; they claim instead that the majority of learners' errors are developmental ones due to universal language processing strategies. Among such strategies are the creative construction and testing of hypotheses about the language system being learned (Dulay and Burt, 1973; Bailey, Madden, and Krashen, 1974). Others such as Newmark and Reibel (1968), for example, view interference as a problem of ignorance.

"'What can he (the foreign language learner) do other than use what he already knows to make up for what he does not know? To an observer who knows the target language, the learner will seem to be stubbornly substituting the native habits for target habits. But from the learners' point of view, all he is doing is the best he can: to fill in his gaps of training he refers for help to what he already knows. The problem of 'interference' viewed thus reduces to the problem of ignorance" (Newmark and Reibel, 1968: 159-160).

Nonetheless, the notion of language transfer or interference remains one of the controversial issues in L2 learning research. More research is, therefore, needed at all levels, i.e. syntax, morphology, phonology, etc. of language acquisition in order to reach

a deeper understanding of the nature and role of language transfer in foreign language learning.

The failure of contrastive analysis to adequately explain students' errors has resulted in the formulation of a new technique known as error analysis. Using this technique, which includes the assessment of students' errors from different sources, a number of error analysis studies have been carried out. From these studies various theoretical and practical conclusions and suggestions regarding the sources of errors, learners' strategies, and the pedagogical importance of learner's errors have evolved (Dulay and Burt, 1972; Richards, 1971; Corder, 1967; Selinker, 1972; Duŝkova, 1969; Taylor, 1975; Scott and Tucker, 1974; Sharma, 1981).

Error analysts are interested in identifying learners' strategies as well as the cause of their errors. To this end, they have examined the performance of students learning a foreign language and have attempted to analyse learners' errors in order to understand the processes and strategies of learners as they progress towards competence in the foreign language. The learner is seen as an active participant in the language acquisition process; Brown (1973) and Dulay and Burt, (1974) have called this process the *"creative construction hypothesis"*.

Various researchers have given L2 learner's systems different names, for example, *"idiosyncratic dialect"* by Corder (1981), "inter-language" by Selinker (1972), and the "*approximative system"* by Nemser (1971). Selinker (1972) hypothesizes that the L2 learner has an innate or latent psychological structure which, upon exposure to the target language, results in a unique language system. This language system or "inter-language" has its own unique structure different from both L1 and L2 structures. Further, Selinker

suggests that there are five processes central to L2 learning: language transfer; transfer of training; learning strategies; communication strategies; and over generalisation.

Duŝkova (1969) examined the sources of composition errors made by fifty Czech adult learners of English. She discovered that interference from the learners' native language was one among several factors involved in L2 learning, another being interference from various structures within the language being learned.

Similarly, Buteau (1970) investigated written errors made by students learning French as a foreign language. Her findings concur with Duŝkova's that students' errors could be ascribed not only to mother tongue interference but also to other factors of difficulty, namely, the target language system itself.

In his observation of common errors made by foreign language learners, Richards (1971) has suggested the classification of errors into intra-lingual and developmental errors. Intra-lingual errors, according to him, are

"those which reflect the general characteristics of rule learning, such as faulty generalisation, incomplete application of rules, and failure to learn conditions under which rules apply. Developmental errors illustrate the learner attempting to build up hypotheses about the English language from his limited experience of it in the classroom or textbook", (Richards, 1971:98).

In a cross-sectional study, Assubaiai (1979) examined the written compositions of forty Saudi Arabian students learning English in Saudi Arabia. The subjects represented eight different levels of English achievement. This investigation is of particular interest to the present study because (1) it was focused on the tense, aspect, and verb forms of

English and (2) it involved 9th Grade students as well as other grade level students as subjects.

Among the major findings of Assubaiai's study was the fact that the subjects' inter-language was characterised by two factors: be-addition and be-deletion; moreover, the distribution of the verb *to be* suggested that *"the learners' inter-language, unstable as it is, developed in a specific way away from the mother tongue"* (p.103).

Scott and Tucker (1974) carried out an error analysis of oral and written English by twenty two Arab students of EFL. They analysed students' errors in terms of performance mistakes, mother tongue interference, and false intra-language analogy. Their findings resulted in a tentative description of the students' transitional grammar, and a rank order of the students' areas of difficulty. Moreover, the researchers suggested that future research needs to investigate errors of Arabic speakers at high and low levels of English learning.

Similarly, Sharma (1981) studied the written performance of ten Saudi Arabian students (five at intermediate level and five at advanced level) learning English as a second language at Indiana University. The subjects' written compositions were gathered at the beginning, middle and end of the English programme. Following Scott and Tucker's methodology and error typology of finite verb phrases and relative clauses, the data was subjected to an error analysis and T-unit analysis. His findings were similar to some of Scott and Tucker's results, in that the auxiliary and copula omissions and third person singular unmarked were found to be the highest sources of problems for both groups. Sharma attributed most of his subjects' problems to universal processes of simplification and generalisation, which were equally adopted by both groups.

This Chapter has covered much of the literature concerned with methods of dealing with and analysing students' errors. As illustrated, it is not a simple matter to explain why an error is made, whether it is L1 interference or 'ignorance' or any other of the reasons given above. This dissertation will attempt in future Chapters to research more fully and in specific detail why students make the errors they do and what can be done to prevent future errors.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY AND RESEARCH DESIGN

METHODOLOGY AND RESEARCH DESIGN

3.1 PLACE AND POPULATION OF THE STUDY

The location for this study is the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA). The country is a vast one with an area of more than two million square kilometres. Most of its regions are sparsely populated. The total number of its population according to the last conducted census in 2005 is around 23 million with 85% of people dwelling in cities (Ministry of Planning, 2005). The major cities with more than one million inhabitants include Riyadh, Jeddah, Makka, Medina and Dammam. Riyadh, capital of KSA and the primary urban body in the country is estimated to host slightly more than 20% of all KSA population (Riyadh Development Authority, 2007: 9). It is the main centre for political, economic, social and cultural activities. In many ways the city is a microcosm of the country and fairly represents it. For this reason, and the impracticality of carrying out a linguistic study on all KSA 9th Grade students (3rd year Intermediate school), I chose the city of Riyadh as a site for my study. The city, according to the latest information released by the Ministry of Education accommodates 320 Intermediate schools, with approximately 320 9th Grade classes. The minimum convenient number of these to give a statistically representative sample is 5% (Harper, 1971: 24; Weilberg, 2007: 21). In other words sixteen schools with 9th Grade classes were incorporated in the study in such a way that 8 classes were for female students and 8 classes were for male students. However, despite difficulties encountered in the administration of the translation test, I was keen enough to get the subjects distributed over this relatively large number of classes with the aim of guaranteeing a fairer representation of the study population. The total number of the

present study population was 208 students chosen on a stratified random sample basis in such a way that half the sample members were female students and the other half were male students. From each of the sixteen classes, the number of subjects chosen was approximately thirteen, bringing the total to 208 students. Based on the number of unanswered questions, 45 forms were excluded to end up with 153 completed forms, 78 of which were from female students and 75 were from male students. To guarantee a just comparison I further excluded three of the female forms (with highest number of errors) in such a way that I had 75 forms for each group. Both sexes are of the same age and have the same common background in English language.

3.2 ELICITATION INSTRUMENTS OF THE TRANSLATION TEST

The data for this study was obtained in October 2007, during the first term of the 2007/2008 academic year. Students' written performances were collected through the administration of the translation test. (See Appendix 1).

The translation test was especially designed to elicit specific English syntactic structures. Some previous error analysis studies, including that of Scott and Tucker (1974), encountered some methodological problems because of a failure to elicit a varying sample of student errors. *"Our task elicited mostly affirmative declarative sentences. Further studies should devise some way to obtain negative, interrogative, and passive sentences as well as direct speech, questions and other transformations."* (Scott and Tucker, 1974: 96)

In order to overcome this methodological problem, and in accordance with Corder's (1973) suggestion, a translation test was conducted to elicit specific syntactic structures,

i.e. structures including the auxiliary "d*o*". This approach had proved successful in earlier studies carried out by Taylor (1975), and Tahririan (1978).

The translation test consisted of thirty Arabic sentences (see Appendix 1) designed to cover the students' knowledge of the following English structures in the acquisition of the auxiliary "*do*":

1. Wh-questions   -   10 sentences.

2. Yes/No questions   -   10 sentences.

3. Negative   -   10 sentences.

Each of the 30 sentences in the translation test was designed to reveal information about some of the students' errors in the acquisition of auxiliary "d*o*" and the analysis of these errors may illustrate the factors which might affect their English language learning.

Students were asked to translate each sentence into English in the space provided on their answer sheet. The test contained structures and vocabularies familiar to all subjects because they were chosen from the lessons in their textbooks. Furthermore, spelling and lexical mistakes were disregarded since the test emphasised syntactic rather than lexical translation. Students were given 45 minutes to finish the test.

3.3 *ADMINISTRATION OF THE TRANSLATION TEST*

The test was administered four times within four weeks during the regular English classes. The students' English teachers helped in the administration of the test and with the collection of students' responses. Test instructions, written in English, were read aloud and explained to the students. The translation test was typed in Arabic script with spaces for students' responses. A copy of the translation test is given in Appendix 1.

3.4 METHOD OF DATA ANALYSIS OF THE TRANSLATION TEST

Students' responses in the translation test were scored using the method developed by Spolsky et al. (1968), with a very slight modification. Depending on the number and kind of the errors made, students were given:

a) Five points for a grammatically correct use of the auxiliary "*do*";

b) Four points for a response with one minor error in using "*do*" i.e.

changing the place of "*do*" in the sentence;

c) One point for a response with one major error in using "do";

d) No points for a total absence of "*do*".

This technique was used by Gradman and Gaies (1975) and was employed by Tahririan (1978) and Alfi (1980).

Additionally, the following criteria were used in grading the students' performances:

a) Minor spelling and lexical errors were disregarded;

b) Ambiguous errors due to handwriting were also ignored;

c) Since each sentence in the translation test was testing a grammatically correct use of the auxiliary "*do*", other errors (in articles, prepositions, and possessive pronouns) were not taken into account. The scores given applied only to the structures tested; for example, in response to question 24, *"Sami does not live in a big house"* the omission of the article "a" was not considered in grading the students' performances. One student's response to question 27 was: "he does not write him homework today." This student's error of substituting "him" for "his" was also disregarded, and the scoring of

the student's performance was based on his attempt to deal with the correct use of the auxiliary "*do*".

d) Errors in word order and the omission of the obligatory auxiliary "*do*" were considered a major error and students who made such errors were awarded one point. However, if an auxiliary was substituted for another form of the auxiliary and the correct word order was maintained, four points were given. For example, for question 12 "does Khalid live in Riyadh?":

a. Do Khalid live in Riyadh? (Four points).

b. Do live Khalid in Riyadh? (One point).

The subjects' erroneous responses were first identified and classified into their syntactic types, for example: Wh- questions, Yes/No questions and negative formation.

These types of errors were grouped according to either some elementary transformational process such as: omission, substitution and redundant omissions, or inter-lingual and intra-lingual errors. Inter-lingual errors reflected the students' native language structure whereas intra-lingual errors reflected the target language structure.

3.5 *DATA ANALYSIS*

The total erroneous responses from both groups were 2794. Errors made by male students were 1749, whereas the number of errors made by female students totalled 1045. The difference is astonishingly great between the errors of the two groups suggesting a sharp impact for the students' gender. The distribution of errors over the three types of sentences was as follows:

1. Wh- questions: 1526 errors, i.e. 54.6% of all errors made with 919 of these made by male students.

2. Yes / No questions: 570 errors i.e. 20.4% of all errors made with 365 of these made by male students.

3. Negative sentences: 698 errors i.e. 25% of all errors made with 465 of these made by male students.

It is obvious that, amongst the several factors which might have contributed to this outcome, gender holds a special significance. This is what I will try to explain through the furthered analysis and discussions in terms of the above mentioned elementary transformational forms under each of the three syntactic types: Wh- questions, Yes/No questions and negative sentences. Elementary analysis of the errors mentioned above reveals the following:

1. The average number of errors made by any of the 150 subjects is approximately 19.

2. The average number of errors made by any of the male students is around 23.3 whereas the average for female students is 13.9 errors.

3. Errors in response to Wh- questions were 54.6% of the total responses, negative sentences 25% whereas responses to Yes/No questions were 20.4%.

4. The differences between the number of errors made by male students and those made by females are 704.

5. The average for the male errors is 23.3 compared to 13.9 errors for female students. However, in all three of the categories of sentences, male students' supremacy in errors demonstrates itself in substantial differences.

6. The total number of types of errors under the three categories was 25, the details of which are shown in Tables 1 to 5 (appendix 2). Error types tend to repeat themselves under all three categories, but few of them are found in Tables 1 or 2.

7. Out of the 4500 (30x150) anticipated desired responses, almost 2794 were erroneous, i.e. around 62% of the answers were incorrect though at varying degrees.

Generally this relatively high number of responses to the translation test is indicative of the poor performance, not on this linguistic element under study alone, but of the poor performance in learning EFL in KSA. Many works conducted on one aspect or more of learning EFL in Saudi Arabia confirmed this idea and emphasised the fact that the EFL learning process is lagging far behind the ambitions of the Ministry of Education as expressed in the targets referred to in Chapter 1 (Al-Muarik, 1982; Al-Hakkbani, 1984; Al-Ahaydib, 1986; Al-Maini, 2002 and Al-Ajlan, 2003).

Taking this into account, an appropriate analysis of the errors related to the acquisition of the auxiliary "do" necessitates dealing with them within the broader context of learning EFL in KSA. Hence, by examining errors' information in the series of Tables 3.1 to 3.3, and Tables 1-6 (appendix 2). I am specifically targeting answers for two main questions:

 1. Why were the performances of female students less erroneous than the male students'?

 2. What were the reasons behind the common errors of both groups?

Answers to these questions are sought in the examination of the student's performance on the translation test in relation to three types of sentences investigated Tables 3.1 to 3.3 and Tables 1-6 (appendix 2).

First each category was analysed separately. Students' errors were tackled in terms of error type, frequency of error occurrences and the possible causes of sources of students' errors.

The students' performances on the translation test were examined in relation to the three sentence types investigated, i.e. Wh-questions, Yes/No questions and negative sentences. First, each category was tackled separately. Students' errors were then compared to observe similarities and/or differences in terms of error type, frequency of error occurrences and the possible causes or sources of students' errors.

3.5.1 WH-QUESTIONS

The translation test included ten items which tested the students' knowledge of Wh-question formation using the auxiliary "*do*". The items varied in terms of their complexity but all required the use of the auxiliary "*do*". The total number of errors in this category was 1526 representing 54.6% of the total of all errors in the three categories. Errors of 9th Grade male students were 919 whereas 9th Grade female students made fewer errors (607). Obviously the difference is relatively big and I will later make an attempt to explain it. Instances of those errors are shown in Tables 1 and 2 (appendix 2) along with frequencies of occurrence and types. Table 1 (appendix 2) compares in terms of percentages the errors of both groups already shown in Tables 1 and 2 (appendix 2). A close look into the Tables 1 and 2 (appendix 2) and 3.1 reveals that omission of the auxiliary "do" surpasses all errors made by both groups but with a remarkably higher result in the errors of male students. These omission errors included "*do*", "*does*" and "*did*". The students' omission of one of these auxiliaries could be attributable to one of the following three factors:

1.) The students' inadequate knowledge of question formation;

2) The students' reliance on their native language in dealing with question formation. Arabic, the subjects' mother tongue, does not have an auxiliary in the sense that English

does in question formation. Hence the English sentence, "When do you go to school?"

is rendered in Arabic as "When you go to the school?"

3) The fact that auxiliary omission in question formation has been observed among

other ESL learners of different language backgrounds (Ravem, 1974; Taylor, 1975)

seems to suggest that the students may have been working under a reduction or

simplification strategy simply by omitting auxiliaries in question formation.

Type of Error	Male Students' Errors %	Female Students' Errors %
1. Wrong use of Auxiliary do	39.6	34.3
2. Redundant Auxiliary do	22.6	14.9
3. Omission of Auxiliary	15.5	11.9
4. Incorrect Word Order	13	7.2
5. Substitution of Auxiliary do	0,9	5.3
6. Total Absence of do	6	6.9
7. Verb Incorrectly formed	5.2	19.3

Table 3.1 Errors in Wh-questions (Both Groups)

The same three factors (mentioned on p.57) provide convenient reasoning for other

error types especially the wrong use of "do" which is second to the omission of the

auxiliary "do". The difference between the errors of the male and female student graders

(127) is sufficient enough to confirm the sizeable variation between the two groups in

error making. However, although male students supersede female students in error

making, it is not always the rule, for as I reveal in the Tables 1 and 2 (appendix 2) and

3.1, female students surpassed their counterparts in the making of two error types:

1) Substitution of the auxiliary "do".

2) Verb incorrectly formed.

Another frequent type of error is the total absence of "do" (120 and 44); such as 'Why Sami go to the airport?' or 'What study at school?' Tables 3.1 and 3 (appendix 2) display more examples of students' errors some of which occurred in number and tense concord. Admittedly certain students' responses were correct grammatically but were included as errors because they were not produced according to the desired response. Most wrong tense errors involved the use of "*did*" instead of "*does*"; for example, in the question "When *does* Ahmed leave?" some students wrote "When *did* Ahmed leave?" However, further analysis of Tables 1 and 2 (appendix 2) and 3.1 reveals that:

1. Apart from two types of errors under the category Wh-questions, i.e. verb incorrectly formed and substitution of the auxiliary "do", errors of male students exceed those of female students;

2. Omission of the auxiliary "do" by both groups is the dominant type (364 and 208 for male students and female students respectively) reflecting the huge impact of interference from L1. Students being unfamiliar with the use of auxiliaries in their L1 found it really difficult to appropriately use it;

3. This claim is also supported by the second type of error "wrong use of auxiliary do" in which students' scores ranged between 205 for male students and 88 for female students. This implies that there were difficulties in the use of auxiliaries thus confirming the considerable interference from L1;

4. Interestingly the range of difference between the two groups is relatively large in four of the five types of errors in which male students' errors exceeded those of female students. Such a difference emphasises the significance of gender in ESL learning at

least at this level of schooling (9th Grade). Equally, the enormous difference between female and male students in the substitution of the auxiliary "do" i.e. 19.3% and 5.2% provide empirical evidence of the role of gender on the ESL learning;

5. Stemming from the fact that the Wh-questions category errors account for 54.6% of the total errors encountered, one could argue that much of the justifications sought for errors made here could be generalised to justify errors under the other two categories i.e. in the Yes/No questions and the negative sentences.

3.5.2   YES / NO QUESTIONS

Five of the seven types of students' errors within this category are similar to those types of errors made by students under the first category. The two types which bear no similarity to any of the types within Wh– questions' category are: 'Omission of the subject "you"', and 'Omission of the third person sing. – s'. Hence, the ordering of errors types within each category will be slightly different (in presentation). Likewise the ordering of errors types in the negative sentences category will be different too. Thus, presentation of all the Tables cannot be the same, i.e. each set of Tables presents errors according to the types of errors identified. However, the category under study contained ten questions requiring the use of "*do*" in both the past and present tenses.

1. Errors in this category contribute to only 20.4% of the total responses thus occupying the second position in terms of errors number;

2. The order of error types is somewhat different from the order of the previous category with the substitution of the auxiliary leading the seven types whereas the redundant auxiliary occupies the last position;

3. Again, female students were less erroneous than male students (205 compared to 365).

It is worth mentioning that 61.4% of the male students' errors and 82% of female students' errors were on the "substitution of auxiliary". Presumably they were attributable to interference from L1, hence confirming what has repeatedly been aforementioned, namely that subjects being unable to comprehend the proper usage of the auxiliaries tend to avoid this by resorting to substituting them with another linguistic element. Such behaviour bears analogy to omission of the auxiliary "do", since it reflects a failure with regard to the correct use of the auxiliary "do". It is true that omission of the auxiliary for both groups under this category had been very minimal (10 and 6 respectively), but it needs to be justified. To argue that fewer errors here could be attributed to the greater increase in the number of auxiliary substitution alone seems inconvenient; it could be one of the reasons but definitely not the only one. Judging from my personal observation I think the nature of the Yes/No-questions compared to the previous category Wh-questions implicitly or indirectly oriented the subjects to respond in the way they did, but at varying degrees.

Within the auxiliary substitution errors, Tables 3 and 4 (appendix 2) and 3.2 demonstrate that both groups made more errors (324 compared to 168) in the questions which required the use of "do".

They include:

"Where live Mohammad?" for "Where does Mohammad live?"

"When leave Ahmad?" for "When does Ahmad leave?"

"When go you to the school?" for "When do you go to school?"

The female students made considerably fewer errors in word order. Their major problem was the lack of subject-auxiliary inversion as exemplified in the following response: "When Ahmad would travel?" for "When does Ahmad leave?"

Type of Error	Male Students' %	Female Students' %
1. Omission of Auxiliary do	2.7	2.9
2. Substitution of Auxiliary	61.4	82
3. Redundant Auxiliary	2.7	2.4
4. Omission of subject you	14	1
5. Omission of 3rd person sing. -s	6.3	1.5
6. Incorrect Word Order	9.6	7.8
7. Verb Incorrectly formed	3.3	2.4

Table 3.2 Errors in Yes/No questions (Both Groups)

The students' errors of auxiliary substitution could be the result of over-generalisation strategies in which students, due to their insufficient command of the English language, over-generalised the auxiliary rule to areas where it did not apply.

Another type of error was auxiliary redundancy, i.e. the use of the auxiliary when not required or using more than one auxiliary when only one was needed. Female students made 5 errors of this type, but the males made 10 errors.

However, this low number of errors made by both groups is explicable by shortcomings associated with the capabilities of each subject on the one hand, and the quality of the input received by the subjects on the other.

In other words, gender seems to be of no significance in explaining differences when the total number of errors is quite negligible as it is in this type of errors.

Contrary to this are the errors made under the type "incorrect word order" where 35 errors were made by male students compared to 16 errors made by the female ones. The relatively remarkable difference in error numbers suggests some role for gender. However a rational explanation of such difference necessitates looking at these errors within the broader context of difficulties hampering the EFL learning.

One of the causes for this type of error was the word-for-word translation which reflects the poor command of the English language and substantial interference from L1.

3.5.3 NEGATIVE SENTENCES

Errors in negation were second to the Wh– question category at a proportion of 25% of all the errors made by both groups. The same trend experienced in the two previous categories continued, i.e. females made nearly half those errors made by males (233 compared to 465). Tables 5 and 6 (appendix 2) demonstrate the details of these errors. Contrary to the Wh– question and the Yes/No question categories, the errors here fall under 8 types as opposed to 7.

The order of importance for the 8 types of male students' errors according to their number was as follows:

1. Omission of auxiliary do.

2. Substitution of auxiliary.

3. Substitution of no for not.

4. Omission of subject.

5. Redundant auxiliary.

6. Verb incorrectly formed.

7. Omission of third person sing. – s

8. Redundant subject.

The order of importance according to the number of errors for female students was:

1. Substitution of auxiliary.

2. Omission of auxiliary do.

3. Verb incorrectly formed.

4. Omission of third person sing. – s

5. Redundant auxiliary.

6. Omission of subject "he".

7. Redundant subject.

8. Substitution of no for not.

Type of Error	Male Students' %	Female Students' %
1. Omission of Auxiliary do	41.7	12.9
2. Substitution of Auxiliary	23.4	61.8
3. Substitution of no for not	15.3	.94
4. Redundant Auxiliary	5.2	4.3
5. Verb Incorrectly formed	2.6	11.2
6. Omission of 3rd person sing. -s	2.6	6.9
7. Omission of subject	9.5	1.3
8. Redundant subject	.94	1.3

Table 3.3 Errors in Negation (Both Groups)

The difference in the ordering of errors made by the two groups testifies to a certain role for gender in this respect. However, it is amazing that in all categories, performance of female students was better than that of male students. I do believe that gender

contributes to the causation and the explanation of errors but it is not the only factor. Other factors are always there. I will later address them elaborately.

As shown in Tables 5 and 6 (appendix 2) and 3.3, students made frequent errors in negation, which are to a greater extent similar to those made in the other categories. Specifically, these errors involved the omission, substitution and/or redundant addition of the auxiliaries "*do*", "*does*" and "*did*".

The number of auxiliary omissions made by male students was high (191 compared to 30 by female students) when processing the negative structure. As shown in Tables , 5 and 6 (appendix 2) and 3.3, both groups inserted the negative marker "*not*", but failed to supply the appropriate auxiliary as shown by the following example:

"No/not go with Salem" for "Do not go with Salem" – other examples are shown in Tables 5 and 6 (appendix 2).

The disparity between the two genders in omissions of the auxiliary is attributed to the fact that female students, contrary to their male counterparts, were subjected to relatively greater input through interaction outside the school. Advocacy to this claim refers to the restricted movement of girls, except with company, as a way of keeping females students at home for long hours. This behaviour is well observed as an integral component of the Saudi societal system. To break the monotony of overstaying at home, female students resort to extramural studies (including English): interacting with English speaking housemaids, watching foreign movies; getting access to websites and reading materials in English. Male students, with the exception of a few, tend to stay outside homes thus spending much of their leisure pursuing sports, or other hobbies that are mostly non-educational with other Arabic speaking members of the community.

These factors, which I will consider later in detail, really provide a rational explanation for the difference in the performance of both groups.

As such, this argument follows the concept of socio-culturists, which focuses on the impact of interpersonal and social aspects of interaction on language learning.

Apart from differences between the two groups, I would like to specifically emphasise those common factors that led both groups to omit the auxiliary. One factor was their reliance on their native language in processing this type of structure due to their still-developing knowledge of the target language system. It could also be the result of a word-for-word translation of the desired response or that students were simplifying their language learning due to the difficulties involved in auxiliary options, by reducing their learning burden to an easy and simple task.

As I have previously stated, female students in Saudi schools seem to be in a better position when compared to male students, in terms of ESL learning. This is true when the process of learning ESL is viewed from a comprehensive perspective, but if pressed, several exceptions will be revealed. One of these is the substitution of the auxiliary where the reverse took place, i.e. female students made more errors than male students (144 compared to 109). How this occurred and to what extent do these numbers of errors raise scepticism about the validity of what I have enthusiastically tried to defend, i.e. female students had a better command of the language due to the better quality and quantity of input they received through various channels within their homes. Moreover, I need to emphasise that this situation is true for female students in Saudi Arabia (at the 9th Grade) due to norms and traditions that may be unacceptable elsewhere; nevertheless they proved their benefit as far as the learning of L2 is concerned, even though they have their own setbacks.

However, other reasons may be incorporated to explain the occurrence of errors associated with auxiliary substitution from both groups (Tables 5 (appendix 2) and 3.3). These include the method of teaching, the resources, and the dire lack of support elements. Individual variation in response to these input elements could be accepted as a reason for individualistic differences between the members of the sample, be they females or males. Hence, gender is of no tangible bearing here, thus difference of inputs and interaction mentioned above as posited by socio-culturists may account for disparity in performance between the two genders. Stemming from this conviction I will continue to survey and examine the errors depicted in Tables 5 and 6 (appendix 2) and 3.3. Table 3.3 relates each type of error ratio to the total errors made by males and females. Some of the errors were quite negligible, such as redundant subject for both groups, whereas substitution of the auxiliary *"does"* and substitution of the auxiliary account for 65.1% of males'

errors and 74.7% of female students' errors. Both percentages are quite high and are expressive of the substantial interference from L1 rather than resulting from impact of the targeted language. Yet here reference is needed to the real number of errors which occurred with regard to these two types (300 for males compared to 174 for females). To admit that there was strong interference from L1 furnishes evidence for the low standard of learning the target language. Actually, and irrespective of the fact that girls have a relatively better command of English, the overall look reveals that the learning process is not achieving the minimum standards targeted by the Ministry of Education. By way of supporting evidence, it suffices to refer to the large number of errors shown in Tables 5 and 6 (appendix 2), unique amongst which is the students' substitution which involved, amongst other things, the use of *"do"* for *"does*, and *"did"* etc. The

increased numbers of errors made by female students could be explained by the decrease in the number of errors made in auxiliary omission. Thus, while male students omitted a large number of auxiliaries, female students, rather than omitting the auxiliary, were willing to try other types of auxiliaries in their processing negative structures.

The cause of students making these types of errors is not attributed to their native language, but rather to intra-lingual interference due to the students' confusion in applying rules of auxiliary distribution appropriately.

Another less frequent type of error made by both groups was auxiliary redundancy. As Tables 5 and 6 (appendix 2) reveal, male students made twice as many errors of this type as female students (24 to 10). Most of the auxiliary redundancy errors involved the use of *"do"* redundantly. The students may have been working under the hypothesis that *"don't"* is another negative marker that could be used with such sentences.

The omission of the sentence subject was another common error made by male students but observed less frequently among female students. As Table 6 (appendix 2) demonstrates, female students omitted the sentence subject only 3 times as compared to 44 times by male students. The occurrence of such errors is not attributed to the subjects' native language because if it were, I would anticipate the sentence subject to be provided by the students.

Students also made some errors relating to the wrong formation of the verb after *"do"*. As Tables 5 and 6 (appendix 2) reveal, both groups made few errors with regard to using a verb in the past tense as opposed to the present tense following "do".

The fact that students made few such errors could be attributed to the students' hypothesis that since the sentence was related to a past event, then the sentence verb

should remain in the past, the so-called 'sequence of tense'. These types of errors, however, were found to be made by other EFL students with different language backgrounds, and are considered *developmental* (Richards, 1971).

Another common error occurring within the negative category was the omission of the third person singular-s. Tables 5 and 6 (appendix 2) show that both male (12) and female (16) students made similar errors, with relatively fewer errors made by male students. Thus, as illustrated in Tables 5 and 6 (appendix 2), students wrote "Sami *don't* live in a big house," for "Sami *does* not live in a big house". The possible causes of such errors have been previously discussed.

Tables 5 and 6 (appendix 2) portray a type of error which was rare among female and male students (3 compared to 2); this was the redundant repetition of the sentence subject. This error probably occurs as a result of a word-for-word translation of the Arabic stimulus sentence.

Lastly, an interesting type of error made within the negative category was the substitution of the negative marker "*no*" for "*not*". This error, as depicted in Tables 5 and 6 (appendix 2) occurred among male students but rarely among female students (71 times as opposed to 1), indicating a relatively better command of English by female students due to the means outlined earlier.

As Tables 5 and 6 (appendix 2) illustrate, male students made this error in all but two of the negative items investigated on the test. For some students "*no*" seemed to be used as an *all-purpose negative marker.* This may reflect some learning strategies commonly observed among many EFL learners, namely the reduction and simplification of the target language system. It may also be that students, due to their lack of familiarity with English language rules, resorted to a literal translation of the

sentence. However, for other sentences even a literal translation would reveal different responses because Arabic, like English, maintains or has different types of negative markers for different types of sentences.

Now that the types of errors have been fairly examined, I would like to address the two basic questions which have arisen, namely:

Question 1:   Why were female students making fewer errors than male students?

1) Recent studies on educational wastage in KSA emphasised the conspicuous role played by dropping out of school among male students as one of the main reasons for downsizing learning output of male students compared to that of their counterpart female students in all syllabuses including English. The average annual rate for male students dropping out of Intermediate Riyadh Schools is 30% compared to less than 1% for female students. (Ministry of Education, 2007). Female students are not permitted to leave home or school alone. They should always be, according to Saudi social traditions, in the company of a guardian, a first degree relative, on a public governmental or private school bus, or with a reliable family chauffeur. Such a system, irrespective of its pros and cons, contributed and is still very much contributing to giving female students the lead over their male colleagues in learning ESL. Teachers of English in the eight male students' classes chosen as part of the study sample confirmed the remarkable absenteeism whereas the opposite had been observed by the teachers of the other eight female classes. Presumably both groups were impacted by the same factors, but constraints exerted on female students by the dominant strict conservationist attitudes that are well observed by the Saudi community, overwhelmed those impacts, thus making dropping out of school a male phenomenon. Unfortunately, according to several reports from the Ministry of Education, absenteeism is on the increase. For

English learning at 9th Grade, sporadic attendance influences both input and output as well as bringing down the whole process to semi-failure.

2) With Asian women prepared to work at a lower rate of pay, the majority of Saudi families can afford to hire housemaids. Some of these women, particularly Filipinos, are capable of communicating through English at an acceptable level of efficiency. With female students remaining at home for longer hours per day than male students, they benefit from the direct contact with these housemaids and thus improve their English standards. Conversation between the two parties, even though intermittent and unplanned, offers female students a lead over their male counterparts. To reiterate, the Saudi male students spend most of their leisure time outside their homes where the opportunity for similar contact seldom arises. Their language of conversation is predominately native Arabic. Contact with non–Arabic speakers outside the home tends to be in either colloquial Arabic, or a combination of Arabic and English.

3) Furthermore, the advent of the mobile telephone and its widespread use has helped in the expansion of conversations between students in general, and female students in particular. Female students, faced with the boring prospect of a lengthy stay at home, resort to mobile telephone usage, as well as to any other distraction at their disposal, to communicate using English or Arabic in an attempt to break monotony.

4) Another element which vastly contributes to promoting the female students' standard in the English language is the opportunities provided by accessing foreign websites via the Internet, which they take advantage of more than their male counterparts do. This is also attributed to their staying at home for longer hours. Such a pastime enhances their knowledge of English as English is the dominant international language of the Internet.

The same argument holds true for international television channels at home, as well as radio broadcasting stations.

5) As early as 15 years of age, the thoughts of female students and their families (or at least the majority of them) turn to marital life in a conservative community which offers respectability. At present the rate of the unmarried girls is quite enormous. The prospect of marriage for educated females is relatively higher as education paves the way for securing jobs, despite the limited number of jobs allocated to women in the public and private sectors in KSA. Knowledge of English contributes very much to promoting the potentiality for jobs as could be discerned from the advertisements in the national circulation Saudi dailies: Arab News and Saudi Gazette. With this in mind, female Saudi students do their utmost to outperform male students in English studies. To be in work, for which English is a prerequisite, is a guarantee against divorce, separation, negligence, or any act that may destabilise family life.

Question 2: What were the reasons behind the common errors of both groups?

Reasons for the low scores in the English learning process among male and female students include:

1. Shortcomings associated with the students and the teachers books. Many of the 9th Grade teachers with whom I spoke, expressed their dissatisfaction with the student and teacher books describing them as 'rigid', 'sometimes difficult' and containing 'material that is not related to the students' environment'.

2. According to the teachers interviewed, grammar is the least popular aspect of the language syllabuses.

3. Commonly observed pedagogical difficulties pertain to the continued decline in the English teachers' standards. They seldom get the chance to communicate in English.

Outside classes, limited practice of the language coupled with limited reading in English, has produced, over time, general weaknesses in the pedagogical aspects of the language which in turn has a negative impact on the English learning process. Refresher courses on English for the language teachers are regularly organised by the Ministry of Education, and although limited in number and scope, they are intended to enhance the teachers' pedagogical performance.

4. Some of the teachers of the studied 16 classes believe that the number of English periods timetabled i.e. four in number totalling three hours' duration, is not enough, if the goals targeted by the Ministry of Education are to be met. Some of the works on learning ESL in Saudi Arabia support the insufficiency of time allocated for English language learning. They also admit that the pedagogical problems (including those mentioned in 3. above) impede the ESL learning in KSA schools.

5. Interference from L1, as I believe, account for the majority of the errors of both groups. The auxiliary "do" is not found in Arabic. As Arabic is a Semitic language, it has a distinctive syntax system that is quite different from English Anglo-Saxon syntax system.

6. English is socially dubbed difficult or even impossible to learn. The idea has its roots in Saudi's communal values and it can be traced back to the early days of incorporating English in the school curriculum. The process was not easily implemented, with strict religious leaders taking a tough stance against teaching English in schools (language of the Kafirs, i.e. Non-Muslims). They claimed that teaching English would be at the expense of teaching religious subjects and Arabic language. This concept was the reason behind the small number of periods allocated for learning English at school. In the past, timetabling allowed two periods per week but gradually this was increased to

four periods with a total time of 180 minutes' per week. Bearing in mind that the academic year in Saudi Arabia is shorter than in other countries due to the multiple intermittent holidays, the total teaching period for the year seldom exceeds six months. All of these elements contribute to the low input that English instructors can provide for the students.

7. Students are restricted to the curriculum material (text books for students and teachers). School libraries are lacking. The few libraries available contain only a small number of abridged books that are readable by some 9th Grade students according to their teachers. Furthermore, these same teachers believe that the reading habit is not well developed amongst 9th Grade students.

To conclude, this Chapter primarily determined the place and population of the study. Criteria for the size of the sample representative to the population were outlined and explained. I then described the content of the translation test to which the subjects (member of the sample) were exposed. Additionally, the Chapter demonstrated strategies with regard to test elicitation and administration, together with method of data categorisation and types of errors within each category. In this connection, the Chapter adopted simple statistical methods on the processing and analysis of data. The main outcomes were that both male and female students made many errors but those of the females being less erroneous, thus suggesting an impact of gender on the overall performance of both groups. Reasons for common errors (of both groups) are fairly brought to light. Additionally, an attempt was made to explain the lesser errors of female students. Interestingly, I found that the Saudi conservative social system, which compels females to stay at home for longer periods, helped to improve their English learning process.

CHAPTER FOUR

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

4.1   SUMMARY

This study, to a greater extent, realised its objectives as set in part 1 of the first Chapter. On the basis of related concepts, theories, definitions and observations obtained from a thorough coverage of literature pertaining to SLA or L2 learning, I formulated a methodology for my research. It was grounded on fieldwork, which had been conducted by me at 16 schools in Riyadh, KSA. Equal numbers of male and female students at the 3rd Grade Intermediate school (equivalent to 9th Grade elsewhere) were chosen on a random sample basis and exposed to a translation test, in such a way that they represent the 9th Grade student population in KSA. Errors made in response to the test question were expressive of the level of the acquisition of the auxiliary "do" specifically and the level of learning L2 in particular. A convenient strategy was adopted in the aim of administering and eliciting the translation test. Collected data was then subjected to rigorous tabulation, examination and analysis. Simple statistical were methods carefully utilised to portray the situation of learning and aid with the process of comparisons. The results proved that L2 English language learning in Saudi Arabia, based on the errors' analysis, is still staggering. Astonishingly, the number of errors concerning the acquisition of "do" proved extraordinarily enormous from both males and females, though females were less erroneous than males. The level of SLA lags far behind the ambitions of the Saudi Ministry of Education thus sending alarming messages to the Ministry to act promptly. The study actually attempted to identify those reasons which might have contributed to the humble situation of SLA in KSA, be they social, cultural, pedagogical or related to mal-qualification or poor expertise of teachers and instructors. Additionally the class and

school learning climate is held responsible, amongst other factors, concerning the serious downsizing of EFL learning standards.

Surprisingly the study concluded with an important outcome; substantial disparities in SLA between the two genders. There is strong evidence that performances of female students in the test were better than their counterpart male students despite the fact that they were of the same age, sharing the same English knowledge background and were exposed to the same English input at school level. To unravel this problem further through investigation, I discovered some convenient causes for the better performance of girls in the translation test. These causes stem from the fact that the Saudi community imposes conservative restrictions on the movement of females, including the female students under examination. This sort of behaviour, though condemnable from the perspective of Western measures, offered females a lot of leisure time which female students strive to benefit from. They make use of it by enhancing their English communication skills through conversation with English speaking housemaids from Asia, watching television channels broadcasting in English, and accessing the Internet, in addition to employing an array of socio–cultural instruments to promote English learning at home. Therefore, their English learning capacity is upgraded. On the contrary, male students seldom make use of these devices. Ultimately, female students surpass male students in SLA.

The study also attempted an identification of errors commonly made by both male and female students, and what causes them. Setbacks within the curriculum's attitude towards syntax, insufficient time allocated for teaching English, poor or absent school libraries, and interference of L1 account for the relatively enormous number of errors in the acquisition of the auxiliary "do" in particular, and in SLA in general.

4.2   MAIN CONCLUSIONS

Several interesting results emerged, most of which support the findings of previous research carried out on foreign language learning. The main questions posed by the study will now be and briefly discussed in relation to the results obtained.

The first question focused on the relationship between male and female students' performances on the translation test. The analysis of collected data revealed that there was a significant difference in the scores of male and female students on the translation test as a whole, as well as on each of the three sentence types investigated. An attempt is made to explain those differences. Generally, the male students made more errors in all English structures examined on the translation test than the female students. However, while the male student made more errors in terms of quantity, the quality of their errors was similar to those errors made by the female students. In other words, the results indicated that the types of errors that caused problems for the boys of the 9th Grade were also those which caused difficulties for the girls. The only difference, in fact, was the degree of error frequency which varied from one group to the other and individually from student to student. Similar findings were reported by Taylor (1975) in his study of ESL Spanish-speaking students, and by Sharma (1981) with Arabic-speaking EFL students.

Regarding the number and frequency of errors amongst the subjects, it was found on the translation test that in all but three of the error types categorised, the male students frequently made a higher number of errors than the female students. In fact, the only three types of errors that the female students made more frequently than their male counterparts were in auxiliary substitution, auxiliary redundancy and the incorrect

formation of verbs. This was attributable in part to the female students' willingness to try other kinds and forms of auxiliaries and verbs.

For the male students, auxiliary omission and auxiliary substitution accounted for the largest numbers of errors classified, followed by the omission of the sentence subject, incorrect word order, incorrect verb forms, and the omission of the third person singular ending. In contrast, the female students had their highest proportion of errors in auxiliary substitution and auxiliary omission, followed by incorrect verb forms, incorrect word order, omission of the third person singular ending and auxiliary redundancy.

4.3 IMPLICATIONS

Despite the limitations of this investigation, some of the implications that can be drawn from this study for foreign language learning and instruction are given below.

A significant implication is that a cross-sectional study without a third group as a reference point could be liable to give inaccurate impressions or generalisations about the development or acquisition of certain structures by ESL or EFL learners. It would be worthwhile to carry out a longitudinal study or a cross–sectional study with more than two groups which would trace the acquisition of specific English structures by EFL learners. Such a study could give a more accurate picture of learners' acquisition problems in English or any other language.

Since one of the primary objectives of most, if not all, foreign language learning programmes is to encourage and enable students to express themselves in the foreign language, a change of attitude towards errors and error treatment is needed. Students'

errors and deviations should be tolerated and should no longer be considered indicative of faulty learning habits. In fact, students' errors can be of great benefit to teachers in that they may reveal some of the strategies employed by learners in their attempts to master the foreign language.

The results of this study call into question the problems encountered in realising the objectives targeted by the Ministry of Education as regards EFL Learning, the main ones pertaining to language instruction, preparedness and readiness of learners, and other pedagogical aspects. Unless these problems are addressed, no progress can be accomplished.

The objectives do not seem to work in view of the fact that a perfect or error-free performance should not be expected nor demanded of learners, particularly at the early stages of language acquisition. Furthermore, a high number of observed students' errors are not attributable to students' native language but rather to common learning processes generally adopted by learners of divergent language backgrounds.

Another implied outcome out of this study is related to translation as an elicitation instrument. Despite its disadvantages, in that some students may sometimes resort to a literal translation of the given stimulus, (Taylor, 1975) the use of translation seems to be a useful procedure for obtaining specific types of sentences. This lends further support to previous related studies using translation to elicit certain types of sentences. (Taylor, 1975; Tahririan, 1978)

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APPENDIX ONE

APPENDIX ONE

The translation test and the desired responses to the translation test:

The Translation Test

The following thirty sentences are designed to test your knowledge of some English structures, i.e. Wh-question sentences, Yes/No question sentences, and Negative sentences. Translate each sentence into correct English using the auxiliary "do", "does", or "did" in the space provided on your answer sheets. You have 45 minutes to do this test. Please write clearly.

A) Wh-question Sentences

1- متى يغادر أحمد؟

2- أين ذهبت؟

3- ماذا نفعل؟

4- لماذا(هي) تتكلم ببطئ؟

5- أي لون تحب ,الأزرق أم الأحمر؟

6- كيف حاله؟

7- متى يذهبوا الى المدرسة؟

8- أين يسكن أحمد؟

9- لماذا ذهب سامي الى المطار؟

10- ماذا تدرس في المدرسة؟

B) Yes/No question Sentences

11- هل تشاهد التلفاز كل يوم؟

12- هل يسكن خالد في الرياض؟

13- هل قابلت والدها؟

14- هل يسافرون (هم) الى جدة اليوم؟

15- هل ذهبت(هي) للتسوق بالأمس؟

16- هل قابلت نورة الطالب الجديد؟

17- هل نذهب مع أخواننا؟

18- هل تذهب (هي)مع أحمد؟

19- هل تدرس(أنت) في المدرسة؟

20- هل كسر الأطفال الزجاج بالكرة؟

C) Negative Sentences

21- نورة لم تأكل فطورها.

22- لا تذهب مع سالم.

23- (هم) ماذهبوا مع أخوانهم.

24- سامي لا يسكن في منزل كبير.

25- (نحن) لا نعرف اسمك.

26- (هي) ماذهبت للتسوق بالأمس.

27- (هو) لم يكتب واجبه المدرسي اليوم.

28- الأطفال ما كسروا الزجاج بالكرة.

29- أنا لا أعرف الطالب الجديد.

30- مدرسنا لم يعطينا واجبا مدرسيا اليوم.

Desired responses to the translation test

A) Wh-question sentences

1- When does Ahmad leave?

2- Where did you go?

3- What do we do?

4- Why does she speak slowly?

5- Which colour do you like, blue or red?

6- How did he do?

7- When do they go to school?

8- Where does Mohammad live?

9- Why did Sami go to the airport?

10- What do you study at school?

B) Yes/No question sentences

11- Do you watch T.V. every day?

12- Does Khalid live in Riyadh?

13- Did you meet her father?

14- Do they travel to Jeddah today?

15- Did she go shopping yesterday?

16- Did Norah meet the new student?

17-Do we go with our brothers?

18- Does she go with Ahmad?

19- Do you study at school?

20- Did the children break the glasses by the ball?

C) Negative Sentences

21- Norah does not eat her breakfast.

22- Don't go with Salem.

23- They did not go with their brothers.

24- Sami does not live in a big house.

25- We don't know your name.

26- She did not go shopping yesterday.

27- He does not write his homework today.

28- The children did not break the glasses by the ball.

29- I don't know the new student.

30- Our teacher does not give us homework today.

APPENDIX TWO

APPENDIX TWO

Tables: Types of errors, statistics and examples

Type of Error	Frequency of Occurrence	%	Example of Students' Responses
1) Wrong use of the auxiliary do	70		What does we did?
	54		When does they go to school?
	35		Why does Sami go to the airport?
	46		Why do she speak slowly?
Total	**205**	**22.3**	
2) Redundant auxiliary do	3		Why does we did?
	5		What is do you study at school?
Total	**8**	**9**	
3) Omission of auxiliary do	74		When Ahmad leave?
	44		Which color you like blow or red?
	64		When you go to the school?
	60		Why Sami go to the airport?
	58		Where Mohammad live?
	64		Why went Sami to airport?
	364	**40**	
Total			
4) Incorrect word order	51		When leave do Ahmad?
	12		When go to airport does Sami?
	3		Why she does speak slowly
	48		How he did do?
	28		Why go Sami to airport?
Total	**142**	**15.5**	
5) Substitution of auxiliary do	3		Where Mohammad does live?
	3		How do he did?
	5		What clar did you like blow or red?
	9		Win is go at the school?
	5		Where do Mohammad live?
	16		Where is Mohammad live?
	7		What is study in school?
	48	**5.2**	
Total			
6) Total absence of do	37		Why Sami go to the airport?
	35		How he do?
	48		What study in school?
Total	**120**	**13.1**	
7) Verb incorrectly formed	32		What do you studying at school?
Total	**32**	**3.5**	
Total number of errors	**919**	**100**	

Table 1 Errors in Wh-questions (Male Students)

NB. Figures approximated to the nearest decimal point.

Type of Error	Frequency of Occurrence	%	Example of Students' Responses
1) Wrong use of the auxiliary do	46		Why do she speak slowly?
	12		How did he did?
	16		Why does Sami go to the airport?
	14		What does you study at school?
Total	**88**	**14.9**	
2) Redundant auxiliary do	14		What is do you study at school?
	18		What is do you study at school?
Total	**32**	**5.3**	
3) Omission of auxiliary do	35		When Ahmad leave?
	44		Which color you like?
	30		When you go to school?
	30		Where Mohammad live?
	46		Why Samy go to airport?
	23		What you stady in school?
Total	**208**	**34.3**	
4) Incorrect word order	21		When Ahmad is going to leave?
	30		Where did go you?
	7		When you wohuld go to the school?
	9		Where live did Mohammad live?
	5		Why Sami was went to airport?
Total	**72**	**11.9**	
5) Substitution of auxiliary do	16		When is leave Ahmad?
	3		What is study in school?
	7		What are we do?
	7		What color is like?
	12		When did go to school?
	12		What are you study in the school?
	30		Where is Mohammad live?
	5		Why is Sami went to the airport?
	25		What is you study in school?
Total	**117**	**19.3**	
6) Total absence of do	28		Where you go?
	7		How he do?
	9		What you study at school?
Total	**44**	**7.2**	
7) Verb incorrectly formed	9		Why do she speaks slowly?
	37		Why dead Sami go to the airport?
Total	**46**	**6.9**	
Total number of errors	**607**	**99.8**	

Table 2 Errors in Wh-questions (Female Students)

NB. Figures approximated to the nearest decimal point.

Type of Error	Frequency of Occurrence	%	Example of Students' Responses
1) Omission of auxiliary do	5		You watch T.V. every day
	5		You meet she father
Total	**10**	**2.7**	
2) Substitution of auxiliary	35		Are you watch T.V. everyday
	53		Do see T.V. everyday
	51		Are Khalid live in Riyadh
	25		Do Norah meet the new student
	60		Is you meet my father
Total	**224**	**61.4**	
3) Redundant auxiliary	7		Does Khalid are live in Riyadh?
	3		Can was meat your father
Total	**10**	**2.7**	
4) Omission of subject you	21		Is watch T.V. every day
	30		Do meet the father
Total	**51**	**14**	
5) Omission of 3rd person sing. –s	23		Do Khalid live in Riyadh
Total	**23**	**6.3**	
6) Incorrect word order	35		Do live Khalid in Riyadh
Total	**35**	**9.6**	
7) Verb incorrectly formed	12		Does he watching T.V. today
Total	**12**	**3.3**	
Total number of errors	**365**	**100**	

Table 3 Errors in Yes/No – questions (Male Students)

NB. Figures approximated to the nearest decimal point.

Type of Error	Frequency of Occurrence	%	Example of Students' Responses
1) Omission of auxiliary do	3		We go with our brothers
	3		You Khalid live in Riyadh
Total	**6**	**2.9**	
2) Substitution of auxiliary	9		Are they travel to jedh tody
	41		Is she go with Ahmad
	46		Is Khalid live in Riyadh
	28		Are you meet her father
	44		Do you meet her father
Total	**168**	**82**	
3) Redundant of auxiliary	5		Did he Khalid live in Riyadh
Total	**5**	**2.4**	
4) Omission of subject you	2		Do meet the father
Total	**2**	**1**	
5) Omission of 3rd person sing. –s	3		Do Khalid live in Riyadh
Total	**3**	**1.5**	
6) Incorrect word order	5		She does go with Ahamad
	3		You are saw T.V. every day
	3		Do Khalid live in Riyadh
	5		You do study at school
Total	**16**	**7.8**	
7) Verb incorrectly formed	5		Did you watching T.V. today
Total	**5**	**2.4**	
Total number of Errors	**205**	**100**	

Table 4 Errors in Yes/No – questions (Female Students)

NB. Figures approximated to the nearest decimal point.

Type of Error	Frequency of Occurrence	%	Example of Students' Responses
1) Omission of auxiliary do	16		Norah not eat her breakfast
	39		Not go with their brothers
	14		I not know the new student
	3		Not go with Salem
	32		She not go to shopping yesterday
	39		Sami not live in a big house
	16		The children not break glasses.
	32		We not know your name
Total	**191**	**41.1**	
2) Substitution of auxiliary	7		Norah not eat her breakfast
	5		They are not go with their brothers
	30		I am not know the new student
	18		She was not go to shopping yesterday
	46		Sami is not live in a big house
	3		The children do not break the glasses
Total	**109**	**23.4**	
3) Substitution of no for not	3		Nora not eat her breakfast
	39		No go with their brothers
	3		No go with Salem
	5		I no know the new student
	9		Sami no live in a big house
	12		No know your name
Total	**71**	**15.3**	
4) Redundant auxiliary	7		I am do not know the new student
	9		Is do not go with Salem
	3		She was did not go to shopping yesterday
Total	5		The children were did not break the
	24	**5.2**	
5) Verb Incorrectly formed	7		They do not went with their brothers
	5		Sami is not lived in house big
Total	**12**	**2.6**	
6) Omission of 3rd person sing. –s	12		Sami do not lived in a big house
Total	**12**	**2.6**	
7) Omission of subject he	44		Do not know your name
Total	**44**	**9.5**	
8) Redundant subject	2		
Total	**2**	**.4**	
Total number of Errors	**465**	**100.1**	

Table 5 Errors in Negation (Male Students)
NB. Figures approximated to the nearest decimal point.

Type of Error	Frequency of Occurrence	%	Example of Students' Responses
1) Omission of auxiliary do	7		Norah not eat her breakfast
	3		Not go with Salem
	7		We not know your name
	5		Our teacher not give us homework today
	3		She not go to shopping yesterday
Total	5		He not write his homework today
	30	**12.9**	
2) Substitution of auxiliary	14		Norah is not eat her breakfast
	3		Did not go with Salem
	14		We did not know your name
	30		Our teacher was not give us homework today
	28		Sami is not live in big house
	37		She was not go to shopping yesterday
	18		He is not write his homework today
Total	**144**	**61.8**	
3) Substitution of no for not	1		No go with Salem
Total	**1**	**.4**	
4) Redundant auxiliary	3		She was did not go to shopping yesterday
	7		The children were did not break the glasses
Total	**10**	**4.3**	
5) Verb Incorrectly formed	16		Sami is not lived in house big
	5		Our teacher does not us give today homework
	5		Sami did not lived in a big house
Total	**26**	**11.2**	
6) Omission of 3rd person sing. –s	16		Sami do not live in a big house
Total	**16**	**6.9**	
7) Omission of subject *he*	3		Does not write his homework today
Total	**3**	**1.3**	
8) Redundant subject	3		
Total	**3**	**1.3**	Norah she does not eat her breakfast
Total number of Errors	**233**	**100.1**	

Table 6 Errors in Negation (Female Students)
NB. Figures approximated to nearest decimal point.