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Analysis of Errors in Written English EFL Learners: Evidence from Mixed Method

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Abstract
Writing in English is a more conscious and less spontaneous phenomenon than speaking. However, the study examines the errors using a mixed method approach in written English as a foreign language (EFL) of Arabic speakers. Rare studies have investigated the errors committed by Arabic speakers in written English in the context of inflectional morpheme categories. The main aim of the study is to qualitatively analyze the variations in morphological features related to inflectional morphemes and quantitatively assess the associated errors in written English as a foreign language (EFL) made by Arabic speakers.This kind of study is important because it highlights which morphemes are most problematic, and how frequently these errors occur. By doing so, it equips educators with concrete, evidence-based targets for instruction, ultimately enabling them to tailor error correction leading to profeciency. To perform the study, data were collected from 430 undergraduate participants using purposive sampling based on the natural way of writing tasks. The data were analysed by examining the frequency of errors in written English. Additionally, the analyses employed Corder's (1972) inter-language and intra-language influence error framework and Dulay's (1982) surface strategy taxonomy. The qualitative analysis highlighted significant morphological differences between Arabic and English in the context of inflectional morphemes. Quantitatively, the results revealed that the most frequent errors occurred with the third-person singular present tense (-s) marker followed in descending order by errors related to the past tense (-ed), plural (-s), progressive (-ing), comparative (-er), superlative (-est), past participle (-en), and possessive (-'s') due to interlanguage influence errors in written English. The study underscores the necessity for instructional interventions tailored to address morphological differences, aiming to reduce error rates among Arabic-speaking EFL learners and enhance their proficiency in written English.

Keywords: Inter-intralanguage, morphological errors, inflectional morphemes, Saudi EFL Learners, writing

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Introduction

Writing in English as a foreign language (EFL) presents unique challenges that are significantly distinct from those encountered in spoken communication(Ellen, 2019; Ferris, 2009; Leki, 2001). While spoken language offers the flexibility of real-time correction and adaptation, written language demands a higher level of linguistic precision and awareness (Grabe & Kaplan, 2014; Olson, 2001).Among non-native speakers, Arabic speakers of English face particular challenges due to structural variations between Arabic and English (Al-Makatrah et al., 2017; Abushihab et al., 2011; Mudhsh et al., 2023; Atashian and Al-Bahri, 2018; Jubran and Khrais, 2023; Abdullah & Hussain, 2019; Al-Johani, 2019; Al-Shoumali, 2010; Muftah, 2023). However, studies do not have yet to specifically address the variations at the morphological level, particularly concerning inflectional morphemes, nor have they identified which features are responsible for the errors made by Arabic-speaking EFL learners. This study aims to fill this research gap by specifically investigating the errors in written English made by Arabic speakers in the context of inflectional morpheme categories.

The significance of the study arises from its method in which the study conducts a qualitative examination to investigate the morphological variations between the English and Arabic languages, with a primary emphasis on inflectional morphemes. It further investigates how these differences manifest in the errors made by Arabic speakers in their written English. By closely examining these errors, the study aims to identify how variations in the context of inflectional morphemes contribute to the errors Arabic speakers commit when in English, ultimately providing insights into the patterns and sources of these errors. Furthermore, this study employed the error analysis theory to understand the issues (Corder, 1974). The framework of error analysis helps to examine both interlanguage and interlanguage influence errors in written English (Corder, 1973; Richards, 2002). The focus is on how these errors result from the interaction between the learners' native language and English. By analysing these errors, the study aims to identify specific linguistic factors contributing to difficulties in learning written English.

The investigation holds great importance as it addresses a significant research gap by exploring the morphological differences between English and Arabic, with a focus on inflectional morphemes. Specifically, it delves into how these differences impact the writing accuracy of Arabic-speaking learners of English as a Foreign Language (EFL). Understanding these errors is essential for improving the accuracy of learners' written English. The research findings offer valuable insights for educators and curriculum designers. They are crucial for developing tailored teaching strategies and learning materials to effectively tackle the unique challenges encountered by Arabic speakers. Writing is often regarded as one of the most demanding forms of linguistic expression (Farooqui, Phramphun, 2023). The identification of specific linguistic factors contributing to difficulties in learning written English can guide the development of instructional interventions tailored to address these morphological differences. Finally, this study aims to improve English language instruction for Arabic speakers, resulting in better learning outcomes.

Literature Review

Background of Arabic

Arabic is a central member of the Semitic branch of the Afro-Asiatic language family. The Arabic language has a rich history that spans over 1,500 years. It originated from the Arabian Peninsula around the 1st century CE (Versteegh, 2001). Its evolution from Proto-Semitic languages led to the emergence of Classical Arabic in the 7th century, coinciding with the Islamic

conquests, which significantly expanded its geographical reach across the Middle East and North Africa. These expansions established Arabic as a lingua franca over about 13 million square kilometers, influencing numerous local languages and dialects. Modern Standard Arabic, which evolved from Classical Arabic, now serves as the formal language in over 20 countries and is spoken by approximately 310 million native speakers (Holes, 2004). This widespread use underscores Arabic's historical importance within Islamic civilisation and highlights its contemporary significance in global contexts, ranging from diplomacy and culture to education.

Adoption of English in Gulf Cooperation Council (Gcc) Countries

The adoption of English by Arabic speakers can be traced back to the colonial period. Globalization, technological advancement, and international relations have accelerated this process in recent decades. Particularly in the post-colonial era, English emerged as a vital tool for education, trade, and diplomacy in the Arab world, serving as a bridge to the global economy and international politics (Gewider, 2023; Salomone, 2021). In regions such as the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries, the importance of English has grown due to the influx of expatriates and the oil industry's expansion, which necessitates communication with multinational corporations (Hopkyns, 2022). English is often seen as a path to improved educational and career opportunities, leading to its incorporation into educational systems in many Arabic-speaking countries. As a result, English proficiency is highly valued (Kanwal, 2024), and numerous Arab nations have implemented policies to enhance English language education, reflecting its significance for economic development and international connectivity (Al-Issa & Dahan, 2011).

Morphological variations across Arabic and English: A qualitative analysis

The qualitative analysis of inflectional morphemes offers a clear insight into the morphology of Arabic and English. These languages represent the typological diversity between the Semitic and Germanic linguistic families (Vennemann, 2011). Arabic employs a complex inflectional system based on a root-and-pattern method (Neme&Laporte, 2013). This method intricately constructs verbs, nouns, and adjectives that inflect for gender, number, and case. This structure embeds complex grammatical relationships within the words themselves. Conversely, English uses a more straightforward, more linear approach to inflectional (Xanthos& Gillis, 2010). It primarily relies on suffixes to show grammatical categories such as tense and number. Additionally, English uses a fixed word order and auxiliary verbs to express more grammatical meanings (Assaiqeli et al., 2021). This marked difference in morphological strategies highlights the structural and functional differences between Arabic and English. The detailed analysis of morphological variations, specifically in the context of inflectional morphemes, between English and Arabic is presented below:

Table 1.*Morphological variations between English and Arabic in the context of third-person singular present tense marker*

Feature	English Third-Person Singular Present Tense Formation	Arabic Third-Person Singular Present Tense Formation
Morpheme Addition	Add –s	Pattern modification based on root consonants and gender
Gender Variation	No variation based on gender	Variation based on gender

Phonetic or Structural Changes	Minor phonetic changes for ease of pronunciation	Extensive changes involving internal modifications to the root word
Complexity	Relatively straightforward and consistent across all verbs	Highly complex varies significantly by verb and gender

The morphological variations between English and Arabic in forming the third-person singular present tense marker in Table Oneillustrate fundamental differences in their linguistic structures.

In English, the third-person singular present tense is formed by simply adding -s to the base form of the verb(Bonnefille&Rotgé, 2011; Vocroix, 2021; Aarts et al., 2021; Huddleston &Pullum, 2002). For example, "run" becomes "runs." This addition is consistent across all verbs and does not vary based on the subject's gender, highlighting a straightforward and uniform morphological process(Alhaj, 2016). The simplicity of this rule makes it easy to apply, with minimal phonetic adjustments required, ensuring consistency in verb conjugation.

Conversely, Arabic employs a more intricate system that involves pattern modifications based on the root consonants of the verb and the gender of the subject(Elshatshat et al., 2020; Ryding, 2014; Abboud&McCarus, 2023; Wright, 1996; Holes, 2004). For example, the verb "كتب" (kataba, to write) is conjugated as "يكتب" (yaktubu) for masculine and "تكتب" (taktubu) for feminine forms in the third-person singular present tense. This demonstrates not only a modification in the pattern of the root consonants but also an adaptation based on gender, leading to extensive changes in the structure of the verb.

Table 2. *Morphological variations between English and Arabic in the context of past tense marker*

Feature	**English Past Tense Formation**	**Arabic Past Tense Formation**
Morpheme Addition	Add –ed	Prefix and suffix changes based on root consonants
Irregular Forms	Many verbs undergo vowel changes or ultimately change form	Root pattern changes without straightforward regular rules
Phonetic or Structural Changes	Phonetic adjustments for regular past tense formation	Structural modifications to the root word
Complexity	Straightforward for regular verbs, variable for irregulars	Highly complex, varying significantly with each root and pattern

Table Two, detailing the formation of the past tense in English and Arabic, highlights significant contrasts in their morphological processes, each exemplified by specific verbs.

In English, the past tense of regular verbs is formed by simply adding -ed, as in ‘talk’ becoming ‘talked’(Aarts et al., 2021; Huddleston &Pullum, 2002). This demonstrates a straightforward morphological rule applicable to most verbs. However, English also harbors several irregular verbs that deviate from this pattern (Huddleston &Pullum, 2002). For example, ‘run’ changes to ‘ran’ and ‘see’ to ‘saw,’ where the verbs undergo vowel changes or complete transformations, introducing variability within an otherwise predictable system.

Conversely, Arabic's approach to forming the past tense is more complex and involves modifying the root consonants with prefixes and suffixes (Ryding, 2014; Abboud&McCarus,

2023; Wright, 1996; Holes, 2004). For instance, the verb "كتب" (kataba, to write) in its root form can become "كتب" (katab, he wrote) in the past tense. This process requires structural modifications to the root word, not just simple affixation. The changes are extensive and vary greatly depending on the specific root and pattern of the verb, reflecting Arabic's deep morphological complexity.

Table 3. *Morphological variations between English and Arabic in the context of progressive (-ing) marker*

Feature	English Progressive Formation	Arabic Progressive Formation
Morpheme Addition	Add –ing	Use of the prefix 'م' along with pattern changes
Auxiliary Verbs	Uses auxiliary "be" in various forms (am, is, are)	It uses the prefix "م" and sometimes auxiliary-like constructions
Complexity	Consistent addition of -ing varies only in the auxiliary verb	Complex due to variations in verb conjugation and prefixes

The morphological variations between English and Arabic in the context of the progressive (-ing) marker illustrate (see Table Three) distinct approaches to expressing ongoing actions within each language.

In English, the progressive form is constructed by adding -ing to the base form of the verb, accompanied by an auxiliary verb ‘be’ in one of its forms (am, is, are)(Aarts et al., 2021; Huddleston &Pullum, 2002). For example, "run" becomes ‘running’ in structures like ‘He is running.’ This approach showcases a consistent and straightforward methodology where the primary variation lies in the auxiliary verb, which depends on the subject.

Conversely, Arabic employs a more complex system to express the progressive tense. It involves using the prefix 'م' andchanging the verb pattern. For instance, the verb "كتب" (kataba, to write) can be transformed into "يكتب" (yaktubu, he is writing) in the progressive tense by adding the prefix 'م' to become "ميكتب" (mayaktubu, he is writing) (Ryding, 2014; Abboud&McCarus, 2023; Wright, 1996; Holes, 2004). Additionally, Arabic uses auxiliary-like constructions to emphasise continuity or duration, adding another layer of complexity to verb conjugation (Ryding, 2014; Abboud&McCarus, 2023).

Table 4.*Morphological variations between English and Arabic in the context of past participle marker*

Feature	English Past Participle Formation	Arabic Past Participle Formation
Morpheme Addition	Add –en	Use of derived forms based on root consonants
Irregular Forms	Many verbs have irregular past participles	Derived forms often follow specific patterns for passive voice
Phonetic or Structural Changes	Changes often involve vowel shifts or complete form changes	Structural modifications align with specific verb forms
Complexity	Variable complexity, especially with irregular forms	Highly complex, with modifications dependent on verb roots

The morphological variations between English and Arabic in forming the past participle highlight the significant differences (see Table Four) in how each language handles verb transformations for passive constructions and perfect tenses.

In English, the past participle is typically formed by adding -ed to regular verbs, but many verbs adopt the -en ending or undergo irregular changes(Aarts et al., 2021; Huddleston &Pullum, 2002). For example, "break" becomes "broken", and "write" becomes "written." These transformations can involve vowel shifts or complete changes in the verb form, introducing complexity, particularly with irregular verbs.

In contrast, Arabic forms the past participle through a process deeply embedded in its morphological structure, which relies on the root consonants of the verb. Arabic verbs are modified into derived forms that often follow specific patterns, particularly for expressing passive voice or completed actions (Ryding, 2014; Abboud&McCarus, 2023; Wright, 1996; Holes, 2004). For instance, the root "كتب" (k-t-b, write) can be transformed into "مكتوب" (maktūb, written). These changes are not merely additive but involve structural modifications to the root, aligning the transformed verb with specific grammatical functions (Holes, 2004).

Table 5. *Morphological variations between English and Arabic in the context of the plural marker*

Feature	English Plural Formation	Arabic Plural Formation
Morpheme Addition	Add –s	Sound plurals and broken plurals
Rules for Addition	-s for most nouns, -es for nouns ending in sibilants	Sound plurals use suffixes. Broken plurals alter the root.
Irregular Forms	Irregular plurals change vowels, retain the same form or completely change.	Broken plurals do not follow a predictable pattern.
Complexity	Relatively straightforward with some exceptions	Highly complex, varies significantly with root words

The morphological variations between English and Arabic in the context of plural formation demonstrate (see Table Five) the contrasting approaches these two languages take to modify nouns for quantity.

In English, Aarts et al., 2021 and Huddleston &Pullum, 2002 explains that the plural of most nouns is formed by simply adding -s to the base form of the word, as in ‘cat’ becoming ‘cats.’ However, English also features irregular plurals where the changes may involve vowel shifts, retaining the same form, or completely transforming the word, such as ‘child’ becoming ‘children’ or ‘mouse’ becoming ‘mice.’ While the regular pluralisation rule is generally straightforward, these irregular forms introduce exceptions that add a layer of complexity to the system.

On the other hand, Arabic employs a more intricate system for creating plurals, categorised into sound and broken plurals (Ryding, 2014; Abboud&McCarus, 2023; Wright, 1996; Holes, 2004). Sound plurals are somewhat similar to the regular plurals in English, involving the addition of suffixes. However, broken plurals involve changes to the root of the word itself, significantly altering the structure of the original noun. For example, the word "كتاب" (kitāb, book) becomes ‘كتب’ (kutub, books). Broken plurals do not follow a predictable pattern and are highly dependent on the specific root words, contributing to the complexity of Arabic plural formation.

Table 6. *Morphological variations between English and Arabic in the context of possessive marker*

Feature	English Possessive Formation	Arabic Possessive Formation
Morpheme Addition	Add -'s or -'	Suffixes or construct phrases (Idafa)
Rules for Addition	-'s for singular nouns, -' for plural nouns ending in s	Suffixes vary by gender, number, and definiteness
Irregular Forms	Consistency in the use of -'s and -'	No irregular forms, but rules for constructing phrases apply
Complexity	Relatively straightforward, with clear rules	Moderately complex due to variations in suffix and construct usage

The morphological variations between English and Arabic in the context of possessive markers reflect each language's different grammatical strategies for expressing possession (see Table Six).

In English, possession is typically indicated by adding -'s to singular nouns, as in 'John's book' (Aarts et al., 2021; Huddleston &Pullum, 2002). This system is relatively straightforward and applies consistently across most nouns, with clear rules that are easy to follow. The use of -s does not vary by the gender or number of the nouns, making it a simple and uniform method for expressing possession.

In contrast, Arabic uses a more complex system involving suffixes or constructs phrases known as 'Idafa' to indicate possession (Ryding, 2014; Abboud&McCarus, 2023; Wright, 1996; Holes, 2004). The possessive construction in Arabic can vary depending on the gender, number, and definiteness of the noun. For example, the word 'book' in Arabic is 'كتاب' (kitāb), and 'my book' is 'كتابي' (kitābī), where the suffix '-ي' (ī) indicates possession. Additionally, Arabic employs the Idafa construct, where the possessed noun comes first, followed by the possessor, as in 'كتابالطالب' (kitāb al-ṭālib), meaning 'the student's book.' These constructions do not have irregular forms, but the complexity arises from the variations in suffix usage and the rules governing the Idafa construct.

Table 7.*Morphological variations between English and Arabic in the context of comparative marker (-s)*

Feature	English Comparative Formation	Arabic Comparative Formation
Morpheme Addition	Add –er	Use of the particle "**أكثر**" (akthar) or particular forms
Regular Forms	Most adjectives can add -er to form the comparative	Many adjectives transform into a particular comparative form
Irregular Forms	Some adjectives have irregular comparative forms	Comparative can also be expressed with "أكثر" + adjective
Phonetic or Structural Changes	Changes usually involve simple suffixation	Changes can involve entire morphological transformations
Complexity	Straightforward for most adjectives, except for a few irregulars	Requires knowledge of specific forms or constructions

The morphological variations between English and Arabic in forming comparatives reveal distinct linguistic strategies (see Table Seven) for expressing degrees of comparison.

In English, the comparative form is typically created by adding the suffix -er to the base form of most adjectives, such as ‘tall’ becoming ‘taller’ (Aarts et al., 2021; Huddleston &Pullum, 2002). This process is generally straightforward and applies to the majority of adjectives.

In contrast, Arabic uses a more complex method to form comparatives. The language often employs the particle ‘أكثر’ (akthar), meaning "more," which is placed before the adjective to create the comparative form, such as ‘أكثرجمالاً’ (aktharjamalan) for ‘more beautiful’ (Ryding, 2014; Abboud&McCarus, 2023; Wright, 1996; Holes, 2004). Additionally, many adjectives in Arabic transform into a particular comparative form by altering the root pattern of the word itself. This can involve significant morphological changes that are not as straightforward as the simple addition of a suffix, as seen in English. For example, the adjective ‘كبير’ (kabīr, meaning ‘big’) can become ‘أكبر’ (akbar, meaning ‘bigger’).

Table 8. *Morphological variations between English and Arabic in the context of superlative marker*

Feature	English Superlative Formation	Arabic Superlative Formation
Morpheme Addition	Add –est	Use of the particle "**أفضل**" (afdhal) or particular forms
Regular Forms	Most adjectives can add -est to form the superlative	Many adjectives transform into a particular superlative form
Irregular Forms	Some adjectives have irregular superlative forms	Superlative can also be expressed with "أفضل" + adjective
Phonetic or Structural Changes	Changes usually involve simple suffixation	Changes can involve entire morphological transformations
Complexity	Straightforward for most adjectives, except for a few irregulars	Requires knowledge of specific forms or constructions

The morphological variations between English and Arabic in the formation of superlatives demonstrate distinct approaches to expressing the highest degree of an adjective (see Table Eight).

In English, the superlative form is typically created by adding the suffix -est to the base form of most adjectives, such as ‘tall’ becoming ‘tallest’ (Aarts et al., 2021; Huddleston &Pullum, 2002). This straightforward method applies to many adjectives, making it a relatively simple and consistent process.

In contrast, Arabic uses a more complex method for forming superlatives. The language often employs the particle ‘أفضل’ (afdhal), meaning ‘best’ or ‘most,’ which is placed before the adjective to create the superlative form, such as ‘أفضلجمالاً’ (afdhaljamalan) for ‘most beautiful’ (Ryding, 2014; Abboud&McCarus, 2023; Wright, 1996; Holes, 2004). Additionally, many adjectives in Arabic transform into a particular superlative form, which often involves altering the root pattern of the word. This process is more intricate than the simple suffixation in English and can involve significant morphological changes. For example, the adjective "كبير" (kabīr, meaning ‘big’) can become "أكبر" (akbar, meaning ‘biggest’ or ‘greatest’) in its superlative form.

Previous studies based on errors in written English committed by Arabic speakers

The literature review was conducted to determine how speaking EFL learners made errors in written English, specifically focusing on tense, aspect, plurals, case, comparative, and superlative categories of errors from a morphological perspective. Many studies have been carried out to identify which specific features or structural variations contribute to these errors (Kanwal, 2017).

Abushihab et al. (2011) analysed errors within the theoretical framework of error analysis in written English by Arabic speakers from Jordan. The data were collected from 62 Arab students learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL) at Alzaytoonah Private University of Jordan. The analysis showed that Arabic speakers committed more errors related to the simple past and present tense than to the progressive, owing to interlanguage influence. A smaller number of errors were reported due to intralingual errors. Moreover, Mudhsh et al. (2023) collected data from Arabic speakers in Oman regarding English writing and analysed the grammatical errors. During the analysis, they identified several grammatical errors in written compositions. The errors related to tenses and aspect represented a significant area of difficulty. The study concluded that these errors mainly resulted from interference from the student's first language (L1), Arabic, and from incomplete learning of the target language, English.Atashian and Al-Bahri (2018) also analysed errors in written English committed by Arabic speakers of Oman. They found that errors were the most frequent, particularly in the present, past, and progressive tenses marker. These errors were primarily attributed to structural differences between Arabic and English. Furthermore, Jubran and Khrais (2023) indicated that Jordanian EFL learners face significant challenges in mastering the grammatical aspects of the English language, particularly the perfective aspect. The data were collected from 120 English learners through their written English compositions. The analysis revealed that Arabic speakers face more challenges in the perfective aspect category. The study highlighted that the influence of Arabic, which has a different aspectual structure compared to English, contributed to the difficulties experienced by learners. This influence led to frequent errors where students substituted past tense forms for the present perfect tense and struggled with subject-auxiliary agreement.

Abdullah and Hussain (2019) analyzed errors in English writing by Arabic speakers from Saudi Arabia. The analysis showed that Saudi EFL learners, particularly at the undergraduate level, exhibited various types of grammatical errors in their writing. The most common errors were identified in the areas of tense, subject-verb agreement, articles, prepositions, and mechanics, including punctuation and spelling. Specifically, errors related to tense included using the simple past instead of the present perfect and using the simple present instead of the present perfect, demonstrating a significant challenge with the temporal aspects of English grammar. These findings suggest that both interlingual interference from the learners' native Arabic and intralingual challenges within English contribute to the persistence of these errors. Additionally, Al-Johani (2019), Altarawneh and Hajjo, 2018andKhawaldaandAl-Saidat (2012) analyzed errors related to tense and aspect marker within the framework of contrastive analysis in written English by Arabic speakers of Saudi Arabia. They found that due to structural variations between Arabic and English, learners committed errors in English writing. Furthermore, Alahmadi (2019) investigated the impact of Arabic verb tenses on the use of English tense and aspect related morpheme among Arabic learners of English. Lastly, Muftah (2023) investigated errors in English writing related to the simple present and past tenses within the framework of inflectional morphemes. The study revealed that EFL learners frequently misused or omitted the suffixes –s and –ed from the main verb in the third person singular present tense and simple past tense, respectively.

Theoretical Framework of Error Analysis

The framework of the present study is grounded in Corder's (1974) error analysis theory, which offers a structured methodology for identifying, categorizing, and analyzing language errors made by second language (L2) learners. According to Corder (1967, 1971), errors play a crucial role in comprehending the language learning process. They offer insights into the learner's current knowledge state and the strategies used to internalize the new language. Corder (1974) differentiates between errors, which are systematic and indicative of underlying knowledge gaps, and mistakes, which are performance-related and can typically be self-corrected by learners.

The process of error analysis involves several key stages: identifying, describing, classifying, and evaluating errors to understand their origins. Corder (1974) and Richards (2002) highlighted two main sources of errors: interlanguage influences, which stem from the learner's native language, and intralanguage influences, which arise from overgeneralization or other cognitive strategies within the target language. Through this analysis, educators can gain valuable insights into the areas where learners struggle, enabling them to design targeted instructional strategies and develop teaching materials that effectively address these challenges (Ellis, 1994; James, 1998).In applying Corder's theory to the present study, the focus is on examining the morphological errors related to inflectional morpheme usage made by Arabic speakers learning English. This approach aims to uncover specific areas of difficulty and provide a deeper understanding of the linguistic challenges faced by these learners. The findings are expected to contribute to the development of more effective teaching strategies that are tailored to the needs of Arabic-speaking learners, ultimately enhancing their ability to acquire English as a second/foreign language.

Aim of the Study

This study aims to thoroughly examine and detail the frequency and types of errors that English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners make when using inflectional morphemes, and to order these errors from the most to the least frequent. The study also aims to analyze how differences in the morphological structures of learners' native languages compared to English contribute to these errors.

1. What are the patterns of errors in the use of inflectional morphemes by EFL learners, ranked from most to least common?

2. How do morphological differences between learners' native language and English contribute to errors in inflectional morphemes in written English?

Methodology

Participants and Sampling

The study utilized a purposive sampling method. The sample consisted of 430 native Arabic speakers who were randomly selected from two different colleges of PSAU university population. The group included individuals from both rural and urban backgrounds, ensuring a diverse representation of living environments. None of the participants were living abroad, providing a consistent cultural context for the research. The study included undergraduate students at majoring in English, aged between 19 and 21. This sampling approach enabled the researchers to intentionally select individuals who fulfilled these particular criteria and were deemed to be a good representation of the population of interest for the study. This approach facilitated a focused examination of the linguistic and cultural attributes pertinent to the research questions.

Techniques of Data Collection

The data collection technique employed in the study involved the use of a picture prepared by the researcher. The students were shown a picture and asked to freely write about their interpretations and understanding of it. The specific task related to the picture was not predefined or disclosed to the students beforehand, allowing for a more natural and spontaneous method of data collection. To ensure authenticity in responses and prevent recollection of potentially familiar narratives, a traditional picture was deliberately not used. This strategy aimed to elicit genuine and unguided insights from the participants, thereby enhancing the validity of the data collected.

Data Analysis

Data analysis was conducted in a two-stage process using Dulay's (1974) Surface Strategy Taxonomy, which categorizes learner errors into omission, addition, and mis-formation. Initially, proficient teachers of English analyzed the data, which was subsequently rechecked by another teacher to ensure accuracy and consistency. Following this initial review, an English Language Teaching (ELT) professor, who was a native Arabic speaker, conducted a focused analysis to identify specific linguistic errors. The professor specifically examined inter-intra language influence errors related to inflectional morphology. The analysis focused on inflectional morphemes, such as '-s' for the third person singular present tense and plurals, '-s' for possessive, '-ed' for the past tense, '-ing' for the progressive form, '-en' for past participle, '-er' for comparative, and '-est' for superlative.

Additionally, the data underwent a detailed quantitative analysis, wherein the frequency and percentage of occurrences of specific errors in written English were calculated across the dataset. This approach provided a precise measurement of the prevalence of linguistic errors, facilitating a deeper understanding of common patterns and issues within the learners' written outputs.

Results and Discussion

The study results showed that Arabic-speaking EFL learners committed various errors related to inflectional morphemes in their written English. Figure one illustrates the percentage of errors made by Arabic-speaking EFL learners in different categories. The specific types of errors are detailed below:

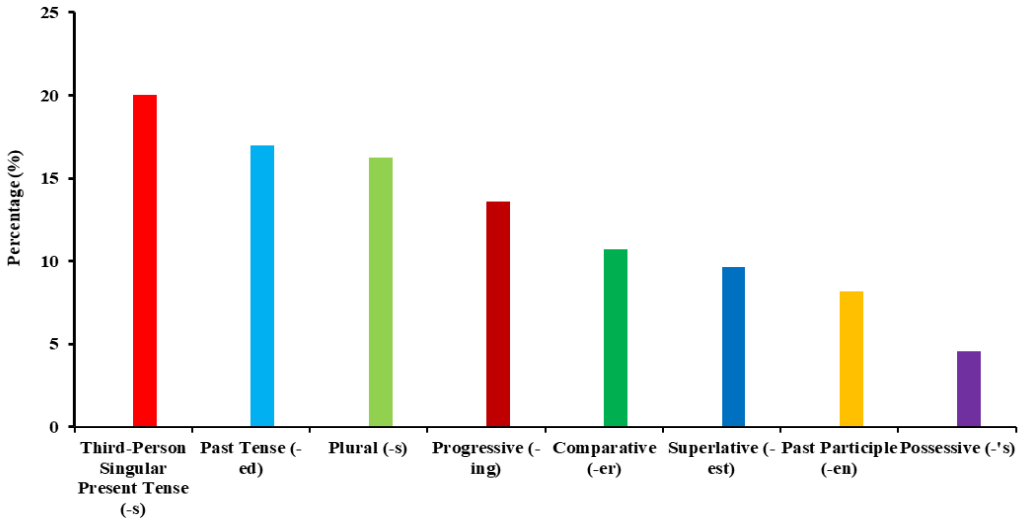


Figure 1. Distribution of Inflectional Morpheme Errors in Written English among Arabic-speaking EFL Learners

ERRORS RELATED TO THIRD-PERSON SINGULAR PRESENT TENSE (-S) MARKER

The analysis revealed significant challenges faced by Arabic-speaking EFL learners with the third-person singular present tense (-s) marker in written English, totaling 2,268 errors. These constituted the highest frequency of errors among all inflectional morphemes analyzed, accounting for 20.03% of the total identified errors (Table A in the appendix, Figure One). Detailed examination (Appendix B, Figure Two) showed that 989 instances (43.60%) were omissions, where the necessary -s morpheme was omitted from the verb form. Furthermore, 570 errors (25.13%) resulted from the incorrect addition of the -s morpheme, used inappropriately across various contexts, while another 709 errors (31.26%) were classified as misuse, involving incorrect placement of the -s morpheme.

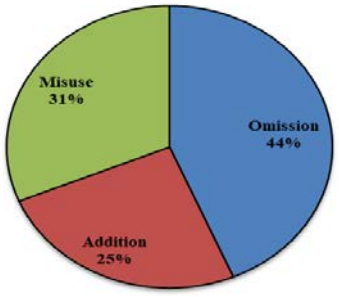


Figure 2. Errors Related to Third-Person Singular Present Tense Marker

The pattern of errors among Arabic-speaking EFL learners primarily results from interlanguage influence, where significant morphological differences between Arabic and English contribute to learning challenges. In Arabic, verb forms in the third-person singular present tense are modified by a prefix, while English uses a suffix, leading to frequent errors in English verb among Arabic speakers (see Table One above for more details). These findings are consistent with previous studies on speakers of other languages, including Arabic (Mudhsh et al., 2023; Jubran and Khrais, 2023), Hindi (Alam & Usama, 2023; Usama et al., 2024), Bangla (Hoque et al. 2021; Karim et al., 2018), and Turkish (Kazazoğlu, 2020; Terzioğlu& Bostanci, 2020), all of which documented similar interlanguage influence errors in written English.

ERRORS RELATED TO PAST TENSE (-ED) MARKER

The analysis indicated that Arabic-speaking EFL learners faced considerable challenges with the past tense (-ed) marker, with 1,925 errors in this category, accounting for 17.00% of all errors observed, thus ranking as the second most problematic category of inflectional morphemes (Appendix A, Figure 1). Detailed examination revealed that 813 instances (42.23%) of these errors were omissions where learners did not apply the -ed ending correctly, failing to indicate the past tense as required (Appendix B). Additionally, 402 errors (20.88%) involved unnecessary additions of the -ed marker, and 710 errors (36.88%) were classified as misuse, where the placement or grammatical function of the -ed marker was incorrect (Figure 3).

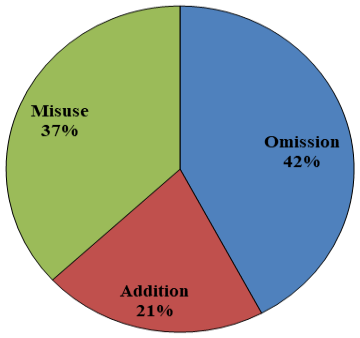


Figure 3. Errors Related to Past Tense Marker

The issue primarily stems from the morphological differences between Arabic and English. Arabic utilizes a root-based system where verb tenses and forms are derived by altering vowel patterns and adding prefixes and suffixes to core consonants. In contrast, English employs a linear affixation method that involves adding affixes to the base verb, adhering to a more consistent set of rules across most verbs. This fundamental disparity in verb formation processes requires Arabic speakers to shift from a flexible, pattern-based system to a more fixed, affixation-based approach, introduce significant learning challenges (see Table 2 for more details). These difficulties are not isolated to Arabic speakers; similar interlanguage influence errors have been observed in speakers of Spanish (Montrul, 2011), and both Chinese and Korean (Zheng & Park, 2013), highlighting the global and pervasive nature of these grammatical challenges across various language speakers.

ERRORS RELATED TO PLURAL (-S) MARKER

The analysis showed that Arabic-speaking EFL learners encountered substantial difficulties with the plural (-s) marker, resulting in 1,840 errors (Appendix A), accounting for 16.25% (Figure 1) of all errors identified, ranking it as the third most challenging inflectional morpheme. A detailed review (Appendix B) of these errors revealed that 615 instances (33.42%) were omissions, with learners failing to apply the plural form correctly, leaving nouns in their singular state when a plural was needed (Figure 4). The largest share of errors, 818 instances (44.45%), arose from the incorrect addition of the plural -s in unnecessary contexts. Additionally, 407 errors (22.11%) involved misuse, where the -s was incorrectly applied.

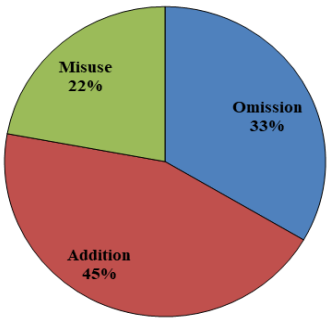


Figure 4. Errors Related to Plural Marker

The challenge of learning English plurals is exacerbated by the significant morphological differences between Arabic and English. Arabic employs 'broken plurals,' which alter the internal structure of words, and 'sound plurals' used primarily for feminine or non-human entities, processes that are highly unpredictable compared to the straightforward and consistent application of the -s suffix in English (see table above for more detail). These fundamental differences often lead to omission errors as Arabic speakers grapple with the simpler English pluralization rules. This issue is not isolated to Arabic speakers; previous studies indicate that similar morphological challenges are faced by speakers of other languages, including Mandarin, and Chinese. Studies by Chen (2021) and Li, 2021 illustrate a widespread interlanguage influence, highlighting the commonality of these challenges across multiple linguistic speakers, reinforcing the global nature of the difficulty in learning English plural forms

ERRORS RELATED TO PROGRESSIVE (-ING) MARKER

The study revealed that Arabic-speaking EFL learners encountered significant challenges with the progressive (-ing) marker, resulting in 1,539 errors and accounting for 13.59% of all errors observed, ranking it as the fourth most frequent error type among inflectional morphemes (Figure 1). Detailed analysis (Appendix B) showed that 912 instances (59.25%) of these errors were omissions, where learners failed to apply the -ing ending, thus not accurately representing the continuous aspect of actions in English (Figure 5). This high rate of omission highlights a significant gap in learners' understanding of the continuous tense and its function. Additionally, 231 errors (15.00%) involved unnecessary additions of the -ing morpheme, indicating an overgeneralization of its usage, and 396 errors (25.73%) were due to misuse, where the -ing form was incorrectly placed or used in inappropriate grammatical contexts.

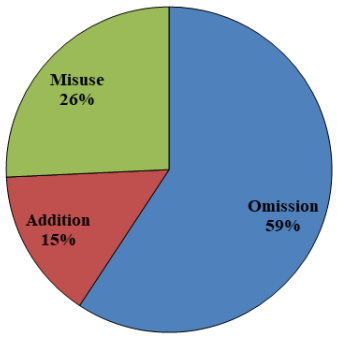


Figure 5. Errors Related to Progressive Marker

The significant challenges Arabic-speaking EFL learners face with the progressive (-ing) marker stem from the complexities of expressing continuous actions in Arabic compared to English, where Arabic employs intricate systems involving specific prefixes and altering verb patterns, along with auxiliary-like constructions to indicate continuity or duration (see table above for more details). These structural differences can lead to confusion when attempting to apply the simpler English -ing form, resulting in errors such as omissions, unnecessary additions, and misuse within various grammatical contexts. However, these difficulties are not unique to Arabic speakers; studies indicate that learners from various linguistic backgrounds, including Chineseand Russian also experience similar interlanguage influence errors in written English (Sun, 2014;

Westergaard et al., 2016). This widespread occurrence highlights the universal challenge learners' face in learning the English progressive aspect, underscoring the global nature of these grammatical hurdles.

ERRORS RELATED TO COMPARATIVE (-ER) MARKER

The analysis revealed that Arabic-speaking EFL learners encountered difficulties with the comparative (-er) marker, resulting in 1,214 errors (Appendix A). These errors represented 10.72% of the overall errors, making the comparative (-er) marker the fifth most frequent error category among the inflectional morphemes examined (Figure 1). A closer analysis (Appendix B) of these errors showed that the majority, 719 instances (59.22%), were omissions, where learners often failed to apply the -er suffix to form the comparative. Additionally, 134 errors (11.03%) were due to the unnecessary addition of the -er marker, indicating that some learners overgeneralized the rule and applied it in contexts where it was not needed. Furthermore, 361 errors (29.73%) were classified as misuse, where the comparative form was applied incorrectly, either through improper placement or by using the form inappropriately within the sentence structure (Figure 6).

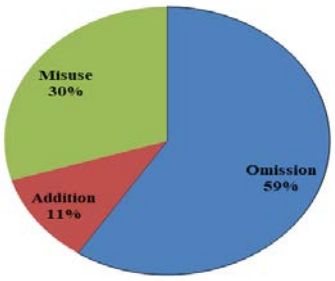


Figure 6. Errors Related to Comparative Marker

The morphological variations in forming comparatives between English and Arabic substantially contribute to errors among Arabic-speaking EFL learners. English generally uses a straightforward approach by adding the suffix -er to adjectives, a consistent rule that simplifies learning. In contrast, Arabic's more complex system often incorporates a particle similar to 'more' before an adjective and modifies the root pattern of words, resulting in considerable morphological alterations. These complexities may lead Arabic speakers to struggle with the simpler English system, often misapplying Arabic rules to English words or encountering confusion due to the absence of direct morphological equivalents, thus frequently erring as they navigate the significant differences between the two languages (see table for more details). Such difficulties extend beyond Arabic speakers, with learners from diverse linguistic backgrounds, including Japanese, and Italian, similarly experiencing interlanguage influence errors in written English (Hatta et al., 2002; Aliyar, 2020). This widespread issue underscores a global challenge in mastering the English comparative degree. However, a study on German speakers indicates fewer problems with this grammatical aspect, likely due to structural similarities between German and English that aid learning (Lalande, 1982), highlighting that not all language groups face the same difficulties with English comparatives due to varying linguistic structures.

ERRORS RELATED TO SUPERLATIVE (-EST) MARKER

The analysis revealed that Arabic-speaking EFL learners encountered significant challenges with the superlative (-est) marker, resulting in a total of 1,090 errors (Appendix A). These errors accounted for 9.63% of the total errors observed, positioning the superlative (-est) marker as the sixth most common error type among the various inflectional morphemes analyzed in the study (Figure 1). The difficulties associated with using the superlative form in English, which typically involves adding the suffix -est to an adjective, were particularly evident in the detailed breakdown of these errors (Figure 7). A closer examination showed that 512 of these errors (46.97%) were omissions, where learners failed to apply the -est suffix, leaving adjectives in their basic form even when the superlative degree was required. Additionally, the study found that 190 errors (17.43%) were related to the incorrect addition of the -est marker in contexts where it was not needed. Furthermore, 388 errors (35.59%) were classified as misuse, where the superlative form was applied incorrectly in contexts where the comparative form was more appropriate.

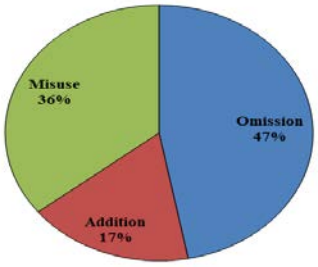


Figure 7. Errors Related to Superlative Marker

The morphological variations between English and Arabic in forming superlative adjectives significantly contribute to errors among Arabic-speaking EFL learners. English typically forms superlatives by simply adding the suffix -est to adjectives, such as transforming ‘tall’ to ‘tallest,’ a straightforward and consistent process applied uniformly across many adjectives. In contrast, Arabic employs a more complex method, often using a particle meaning ‘best’ or ‘most’ and altering adjectives by modifying their root patterns, which involves significant morphological changes (see table for more detail). This complexity steepens the learning curve for Arabic speakers, leading to frequent errors as they try to apply these intricate rules to the simpler English system, resulting in incorrect pattern applications or misuse of morphological rules. However, a contrasting study on German speakers shows fewer difficulties with the superlative degree, likely due to structural similarities with English that ease the learning process (Bushi et al., 2022), highlighting that linguistic structures significantly influence the learning of English grammar, with varying degrees of challenge across different language groups.

Errors Related to Past Participle (-en) Marker

The result revealed that Arabic-speaking EFL learners faced considerable difficulties with the past participle (-en) marker, resulting in a total of 929 errors, which constituted 8.21% of the total errors observed, positioning the past participle marker as the seventh most frequent error category among the various inflectional morphemes analyzed (Figure 1, Appendix A). This complexity was evidentin the distribution of errors identified (Figure 8, Appendix B), with the majority, 728 instances (78.36%), being omissions where learners failed to apply the -en suffix, leaving the verb in an incorrect form. In addition to omissions, the study found 123 errors (13.24%)

due to the unnecessary addition of the -en suffix, indicating that some learners overgeneralize its use, applying it to verbs that do not require it. Furthermore, 78 errors (8.39%) were categorized as misuse, where the -en marker was applied incorrectly.

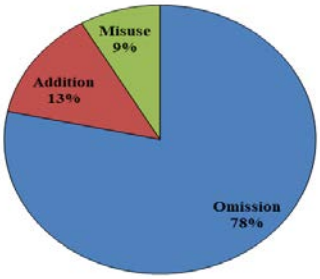


Figure 8. Errors Related to Past Participle Marker

The difficulties Arabic-speaking EFL learners encounter with the English past participle marker can largely be attributed to the morphological differences between Arabic and English. While English typically forms past participles by adding suffixes like -en to verbs, Arabic often uses prefixes and modifies the internal structure of the verb to express the past participle (see table for more details). This fundamental disparity between Arabic's prefix usage and English's suffix usage leads to interlanguage influence, causing learners to inadvertently apply native language rules when using English grammar. However, contrasting findings suggest that Swedish speakers face fewer difficulties with the past participle, likely due to structural similarities with English that facilitate the learning process (Jonsson, 2015). This variation underscores the significant impact of native linguistic structures on the acquisition of English grammar, revealing differing levels of challenge across language groups.

ERRORS RELATED TO POSSESSIVE (-‘S) MARKER

The analysis revealed that Arabic-speaking EFL learners encountered significant challenges with the possessive (-'s) marker, accounting for 517 errors or 4.57% of all observed errors, making it the eighth most common error category among inflectional morphemes (Appendix A, Figure 1). A closer examination indicated that 345 instances (66.73%) were omissions, with learners failing to apply the -'s suffix correctly to indicate possession. Additionally, 74 errors (14.31%) stemmed from the inappropriate addition of the -'s marker, suggesting an overgeneralization of its usage. Furthermore, 98 errors (18.95%) involved misuse of the possessive form, either through incorrect placement or inappropriate application within sentence structures (Appendix B, Figure 9).

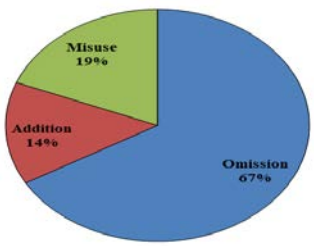


Figure 9. Errors Related to Possessive Marker

The morphological differences between English and Arabic in expressing possession significantly contribute to errors among Arabic-speaking EFL learners. English straightforwardly denotes possession by appending -'s to singular nouns, such as "John's book," with rules that remain consistent regardless of the noun's gender or number, simplifying acquisition for learners. In contrast, Arabic employs a more complex system, using suffixes or constructing phrases known as 'Idafa' that structurally differ from English. The Arabic possessive form varies with the gender, number, and definiteness of the noun, introducing complexity that can lead to frequent errors as Arabic speakers try to apply their native grammatical conventions to English, often resulting in incorrect suffix use or poorly constructed phrases (See table for more detail). These challenges are not unique to Arabic speakers; research shows that learners from diverse linguistic backgrounds including Tamil andFrench also face similar interlanguage influence errors in written English (Poongodi, 2006; Lalitha, 2001), highlighting a universal difficulty with the English Possessive (-'s) marker.

Conclusion

The conclusion of the study reaffirms that Arabic speakers most frequently make errors in using the third-person singular present tense, followed by the past tense, plural, progressive, comparative, superlative, past participle, and possessive forms. These findings underscore the significant morphological differences between Arabic and English, particularly within the context of inflectional morphemes, which contribute to interlanguage influence errors in written English. This analysis improves our understanding of the linguistic difficulties that Arabic-speaking EFL learners encounter. It also indicates wider implications for linguistic theory and language teaching practices. While recognizing the study's limitations, it is evident that further research could explore other linguistic backgrounds to determine if these patterns persist or how they may vary. Future research should also consider intervention strategies that could mitigate these common errors. Conclusively, this research highlights the crucial need for educational frameworks that better accommodate the morphological complexities faced by non-native speakers, aiming to improve proficiency and reduce common errors in learning English.

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Dr. Afia Kanwal **is a** distinguished linguist who received her early education in Islamabad, Pakistan and Virginia, USA. Her research interests are diverse, which include socioeconomics of

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Appendices

APPENDIX A

	Types of Inflectional Morpheme	Frequency	%
i	Third-Person Singular Present Tense (-s)	2268	20.03
ii	Past Tense (-ed)	1925	17.00
iii	Plural (-s)	1840	16.25
vi	Progressive (-ing)	1539	13.59
v	Comparative (-er)	1214	10.72
vi	Superlative (-est)	1090	09.62
vii	Past Participle (-en)	929	08.20
viii	Possessive (-'s)	517	04.56
	Total	11322	100

APPENDIX B

		Omission		Addition		Misuse	
	Types of Inflectional Morphemes	F	%	F	%	F	%
i	Third-Person Singular Present Tense (-s)	989	43.60	570	25.13	709	31.26
ii	Past Tense (-ed)	813	42.23	402	20.88	710	36.88
iii	Plural (-s)	615	33.42	818	44.45	407	22.11
iv	Progressive (-ing)	912	59.25	231	15.00	396	25.73
v	Comparative (-er)	719	59.22	134	11.03	361	29.73
vi	Superlative (-est)	512	46.97	190	17.43	388	35.59
vii	Past Participle (-en)	728	78.36	123	13.24	78	08.39
viii	Possessive (-'s)	345	66.73	74	14.31	98	18.95