

Common English Syntactic Mistakes by Arabic Speaking Learners

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Background

Based on a review of a carefully-designed research ,where the most common English syntactic mistakes made by our native Arabic-speaking university fresher students of English as a second language are thoroughly and carefully discussed .The researchers casted a shadow on at least seven categories of errors which are distinguished and describe verbal errors (the use of tense, phase ,aspect, voice ,verb formation, concord, finite, non-finite verbs) , relative clauses(interlinguas errors, structural misrepresentation, simplification) adverbial clauses(comparison, purpose, result, concession, manner: sentence structure, articles(definite and indefinite) prepositions. It is concluded that most source of these common errors is mainly due to the influence of Arabic the native language , and that is clearly shown in processing English syntactic structures. Arabic speakers in general adopt certain strategies similar to those of first-language learners, including simplification and over generalization,(ERIC, 1996-Jan) English syntactic Errors by Arabic Speaking learners: Reviewed (Noor, Hashim H.).A number of desperate approaches to language, ranging from cognitive linguistics to stochastic implementations of optionally theory, have challenged the classical distinctions between knowledge of language.How realistic are the requirements and need of a National curriculum for the teaching of English in general and grammar in particular in primary stage.This paper reviews these urgent and necessary demands, and also reports the results of an informal survey of practice done by our fresher university learners.

Introduction

The extensive research done by a number of researchers like David Crystal William Somerset Maughan,Betty, SchramperAzar,Scott and Tucker, Mukattas , Kambal,,Richards,AIKasimi,El-Badarin, Elsayed and many other researchers who all agreed depending on the data they collected and tested , that the native language ,Arabic, is behind falling in the many common structural mistakes made by our Arabic-speaking learners. The aim of the present paper, by reviewing the studies available is to demonstrate the most general types of syntactic errors Arabic-speaking learners encounter in learning English as a foreign language which

are presented in this paper in the following divisions: Verbal errors, relative clauses, adverbial clauses, sentence structure, articles, prepositions and conjunctions. In recent years, applied linguistics have been much concerned with the description of linguistic behavior of the L2 learners labeled as deviant or error. In particular a technique known as error analysis has been developed by means of which it is claimed access is gained to the transitional competence of the L2 learner thus making the description of the learners interlingua and the explanation of the systematic nature of the errors generated by its grammar possible. Such a technique it seems plays a vital role in understanding the processes that underline SLA. It figures out statistically the troublesome linguistic areas L2 learners always encounter while learning English Those linguistic areas or errors for short are just but an inevitable part of the process of SLA. They provide valuable and fruitful feedback to both instructors and learners regarding learners' strategies and progress. They also provide researchers with insights into the SLA process itself. The study supports the view of many expertise English teachers of all levels that grammar-based communicative approaches are not mutually exclusive, but rather mutually supportive and can advantageously co-exist in the same language program , even in the same lesson (Betty SchramperAzar, understanding and using English grammar, 3rd edition .Within the UAE context, .This study explores how syntactical errors are made by 125 fresher students at Abu Dhabi university. It investigates their attitudes towards perfect grammar usage and technique and how it affects their speaking and writing skills bearing in mind that the four language skills are integrated., but since Grammar is the core of the language and it is " also necessary to know grammar, and it is better to write grammatically than not, but it is well to remember that grammar is common speech formulated-.Usage is the only test:(William Somerset Maughan., The Summing Up, 1938). "Grammar is the structural foundation of our ability to express ourselves. The more we are aware of how it works, the more we can monitor the meaning and effectiveness of the way we and others use language. It can help foster precision, detect ambiguity and exploit the

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richness of expression available in English. And it can help everyone -not only teachers of English, but teaching of anything, for all teaching is ultimately a matter of getting to grips with meaning(David Crystal in Word and Deed TES Teacher, April 30, 2004). There are two definitions of grammar as comes in the glossary of grammatical and rhetorical terms : the systematic study and description of a language and the second definition is a set of rules and examples dealing with the syntax and word structures of a language usually intended as an aid to the learning of that language. Descriptive grammar refers to the structure of a language used by speakers and writers. Whereas, perspective grammar of a language as certain people think it should be used. Both kinds of grammar are concerned with rules-but in different ways. Specialists in descriptive grammar called linguists, study the rules or pattern the words, phrases clauses and sentences. On the other hand, precisely (such as most editors and teachers) lay out rules about what they correct or 'incorrect ' use of language.

Literature Review

Perspective grammarians prefer giving practical advice about using straight forward rules to help us avoid making errors. The rules may be oversimplified at times, but they meant to keep us out of terrible- the kind of terrible that may distract or even confuse or readers. This paper presents and discusses some types of the syntactic errors as follows:

Verbal Errors

Morphological and inflectional errors, which seem to be characteristics of most EFL learners (see Richards 1971) are excluded here. Errors in use of tense, phase, aspects, voice, verb-formation, concord, finite and non-finite verbs they are discussed in this paper

Tense

The three types that were recorded in the literature are: tense sequences, tense substitutions and tense marker deletion.

Tense Sequence:

The literature reported that Arabic-speaking learners of English may use present simple with past simple tense particularly with

Compound and complex sentences (Scott and Tucker, 1974, AL-Kasimiet.al, 1979, Kambal ,1980, El-Badarine ,1982, Elsyed,1983).

- “They came late yesterday and go directly to the hall”.

One can argue here that the error in tense sequence may not be a negative transfer from the mother tongue (MT) since Arabic one require that he same tense be used a cross such sentences.

Tense Substitution

Arabic-speaking learners may use simple present. (Scott and Tucker 1974and Mukattash, 1978, 10986, Kambal ,1980). The literature also reported cases were Arab learners failed to use the progressive, and used instead the non-progressive (EL-Badarin,1982, Mukatash,1986)

- “They aren’t cause difficulties to us” (Makatash,1986) mentioned that his subject (Arab EFL university students)tended to use the progressive in the above example instead of the non-progressive(p.193). (Asfoor, 1978); however, found that some of his subjects (Ss) use the

progressive aspects (-ing) of certain verbs instead of the present tense.

- “I am not understanding the lesson” the errors in (a) and (b) above are examples of negative transformation (NT), while the verb cause in (a) doesn’t occur in the progressive aspect in Arabic. Understand in (b) is allowed ro be used in the progressive aspects .consider the following example which in view clearly shows the Arabic effect on the English syntax.
- English "(understanding lesson today". Arabic equivalent:" /? Ana fahimdars al-yawm/ ". English translation (I’m understanding my lesson today).

II. A. Voice : the Arabic –speaking learners found active sentences less problematic than the passive ones. This let some of them avoid using the passive(Kleinman,1973, Schachteax, 1976, El-Badarine, 1983, EL-sayed, 1983, Mezianai, 1984)

II. B. 'The sun rose from the east' or they may use the simple present instead of the simple past(al-kasim, et.al,1979, AL-madrik, 1982,Mezaini ,1982)

II.C. 'Yesterday I has a party that why the house is in a mess'. The errors instanced in two examples above which are more noticeable in compound and complex sentences, seem unlikely to be done to negative transfer from Arabic. Instead the linguistics contexts of these examples do require the use of the simple present and the simple past , respectively in Arabic as in the case in:

Tense Marker Deletion: Deletion of the auxiliary have or has informing the present perfect was the most common errors here(Kambal ,1980, EL-Badarine, 1983) * ‘ He just gone to the market’

Phase: Arabic-speaking learners use enormously non-perfective instead of the perfective or avoid using it as a whole (Asfoor, 1978, Kambal, 1980,El-padrine, 1982, Mukttash,1986) ‘He didn’t come until now’. One can admit how that the systems of the time sense in the two languages concerned, i.e. English and Arabic, are very different (Al- Bouk,1988). For example , Arabic has fewer restrictions on agreement between tenses across clauses than in English. This means that it is normally acceptable in Arabic to switch from one tense to another , while in English switching of this sort is considered deviation . for example the Arabic sentences(/ra? Aytuho min qabl/) can be translated to mean “ I saw him before”, or “I have seen him before”. This may explain the fact that the Arabic speaking learner is not restricted in his choice of verbs as noted above and as a result he tends transfer in to English.

- **Sentence Structure** : (Scott and Tucker, 1974) marked that their students used erroneously , redundant ‘ subject’ and ‘objects’ in main clause , relative clauses , and after the infinitives errors in misplacing adverbs and participles , and mis-ordering adjectives were also reported in literature (Scott and Tucker, 1974, Mackattash , 1986 , Noors, 1987) other deviations reported in the literature are as follows:

Subject Repartition: ‘the computer it can arrange your work better’

Wrong Form of ‘be’ With Plural Subjects :‘ they was excited’

* ‘be’ with verb stem: (past)

John was bought tobacco

- **Finite clauses**

Yesterday he went fishing

The appearance of the presumptive pronoun in the relativized site: Arabic- speaking learners were found

users of the presumptive pronoun in the relative clause (Schater , 1974, Scott and Tucker ,1974 Schachter,et.al, 1976, Louptkruse, 1977 Asfoor 1978, Gasso, 1979, Makattash, 1968 , Kharna, 1987, Tushyeh 1988). 'This is the house which I live in'

Structural Misrepresentation of Relative Clauses

Tusheyh .(1988) reported the following deviations:

- a. Repetition of the identical NP- " the knife which he cut out with
 1. Knife is sharp.
 2. Incorrect word order: " the knife he cut with which is sharp"

Use of Personal Pronouns Instead of the Relative Pronouns

I get a friend he speaks French

On the other hand, some studies reported two types of deviations these learners (Arabic speaking learners) encounter while constructing a passive :

1. Adding an appropriate (tense form of be, but not adding the pp form of the main verb (kambal, 1980) Almouarik , 1982, ElBadarine , 1982, Scatcher 1992) " oil was discovered in the 19th century) and
2. Using the pp form of the main verb but no form of 'be' is added (kambal, 1980, Al-Mouarrak , 1982, El-Badarine , 1983, ,Mukttash, 1986, Schachter ,1992)

Verb Formation

The most frequent type of deviations Arab encounter information the English verb in the deletion of the copula(Scott and Tucker, 1974, A sfoor , 1978, Muckattash , alqasimi et.al, 1979, Kambal ,1980, Sharma , 1981 , Thumpson-Panas and Thomas- Ruzic , Abu Ghararah , 1989)

- 'You said you not tired'
- 'He intelligent'

All the study mentioned above, refer this type of deviation MT (missed Tense) was interference since Arabic, as they claim does not have copula. One can concede have that contrary to what these errors analysis maintain. The verb 'be' is available in the deep structure of the Arabic nominal sentences such as these (7 and 8) mentioned above, but not in the surface structure.

Methodology

*participants: The study was conducted with 125 fresher university or undergraduate students in five groups in Abu Dhabi University (Military program at Zayed The Second Military College) in the academic year 2014-2015. They only study English and IT before they enroll in a variety of majors as a part of the university requirements. The participants are all male students. The majority are 18 years old. Arabic is their main native language. The students are introduced to the basic principles of English before they study the English course assigned book(Progressive skills in English , level 1) following a carefully planned and designed program in which the main objective is , by the end of the 3 credit hours English course, enable them to speak clearly and write short informal letters and short reports. The main focus is on learning and adapting correctly the basics of the English grammar which is considered the core of the language in addition to the intensive and carefully - apted and prepared extra-curricular

activities.All English instructors, efforts are always pooled to gather our students heads, motivate and help them grade.

Stages of Implementing Group Feedback

Peer and group feedback is strongly recommended by almost all researchers in the field of learning English as a second language. This three-sided feedback is mainly planned to give more care to build and encourage students' independence and cooperation in addition to help create a wider and suitable learning environment in which learners can get benefited from the three-sided feedback. Peer feedback is considered by Chong(2010) as a form of " collaborative working approach' in which students benefit from the feedback and the diversity of input of their peers. Richards and Schmidt (2010) viewed it as the counterpart of peer review and peer response in which students receive feedback in their speaking(communication), and writing.(Charoenchang(2013) considers these terms as similar in the process of implementation since they serve as a means to promote independent writing. in addition , Liu and Hansen, (2002) argue that PF refers to the " use of learners as sources of information, and interacts for each other in such a way that learners assume roles and responsibilities normally taken on by a formally trained teacher, tutor or editor, in commenting on and critiquing each others' drafts in both written and oral formats in the writing process.

in the editing stage, both producers and receivers of edits were regularly motivated and encouraged by their competent teacher to make their identities anonymous during the time of editing in class. this will definitely offer both sides greater space of freedom and reduce embarrassment that always arises as a result of the editing process. The instructor has a vital role in advising, motivating and directing his students during the editing process then, check their written work with a focus on their grammatical errors. This is recommended to be preceded by closed peer and group oral and open discussions in which all students are encouraged to participate in to get both the editor's and writer's view.

The feedback organized discussion is mostly preferred to be monitored by the teacher who should also intervene to provoke and provide discussions on the suggested corrections by peers. the main goal behind this is to allow the whole group or class easily

identify the errors they have encountered in their written work.

It's obvious that learning a language is not an " unknown" area like scientific research or marketing where mistakes are truly inevitable, where no one can predict what will work, people who try and fail have a higher probability of success than those who are doing nothing for fear of failure. Think of Thomas Edison, who had to test over 6,000 unsuitable materials for light bulb filaments until he found one that worked., but in language learning no one is asking learners to invent anything (indeed, they should not invent

their own grammar and vocabulary) they just need to do things exactly the way the native speakers do.

Student Questionnaire

Administering the questionnaire was carried out after the students finished doing both the course (Skills in English ,level 1) together with the prepared intensive extra-curriculum oral and written activities through peer and group feedback supervised by their English tutors .. I succeeded in getting the Ethical formal approval from Abu Dhabi university and the Military Program at Zayed the Second Military College where I teach. The questionnaire is optional in which students have the chance to express their individual views and needs regarding the merits and / or demerits of the feedback.

The questionnaire used in this study consists of five focused items, five of which are designed on the liker type template ranging from level 5 "strongly agree" to level on "strongly disagree" with level 3 "not sure". This format allows students to answer research questions systematically and to examine students' attitudes in a structured and disciplined way. This simple and reliable format gives participants the chance to shift smoothly from positive to negative and to choose the figure that most closely expresses their views. A final open ended Question followed:

"what other advantages/ disadvantages of peer and group feedback do you see or suggest?"

This question was added to allow students reflect on the ideas they find relevant, yet were not covered.

Analyses of Results Peer and Group Feedback

I administered 2 different written tests on grammar. These tests are mainly to convey the number of deviations encountered by the students in the use of a limited number of the following syntactical areas: definite and indefinite articles, demonstratives, possessives, and qualifiers. These tests required aptitude with syntactic-semantic features. The grades scored by the learners (group 5) were significantly different from those of the other groups 1,2,3 and 4 students, but the grades attained by the four groups of learners 1, 2, 3 and 4 didn't differ significantly. in their ability to provide correct answers to test 1 questions. It is obvious that this form of input based on the scores which are out of the total mark 20 for the two tests achieved by the 125 students was selective rather than informative and didn't provide sufficient hints and helpful suggestions on how the whole syntactic areas tested could be enriched and improved. In sample answer number 1 (figure 1) the peer editor of this reference correct answer with a full mark score of 20. This clearly shows that this student seems to have awareness of a range of aspects in grammatical rules that enabled him to choose and encircle the correct answers. The analysis of the 125 fresher university students feedback i.e. scores shows different levels of input. This is clearly shown in sample answer 1 (figure 2) The examinee didn't provide correct answers from the multiple options answers, and

feedback on nearly all the twenty grammatical statements of the two tests. Consequently, I felt uncomfortable with the level of almost half the number of the tested students who I think need more motivation and feedback. because this poor syntactical responses could be attributed to lack of both motivation and absence of awareness of grammatical basic rules. The reflection on the third sample answer (figure 3) the student scored only ten out of twenty . This clearly shows to some extent a reasonable knowledge and awareness of grammatical basic rules. by this student

Almost all sample peer answers and grammatical tested areas need to be properly examined where the feedback should only be limited to checking sample encountered errors , for example questions 2 and 3 in test one based on definite and indefinite articles e.g. " The doctor advised me to eat an apple" 50 students out of the 125 students who failed the test provided the following incorrect answer " The doctor advised me to eat a apple" which versus to the above correct answer. from the sample answers clearly convey the disability of our fresher students to infer general learnt rules about the indicators of grammatical features regarding the differentiation between finite and non-finite articles and as comes in the test " The elephant eats a ton of grass" most of the failure circled a the following incorrect answer versus to the answer correct above " The elephant ate a ton of grass " These findings are consistent with others. Clahsen, using data from the German language, "These findings are consistent with others. Clahsen, using the German language in this sentence, " He puts " which is ungrammatical.

I'd like to point out that the deficits with which we are concerned here with are spontaneous grammatical judgment and repetition because the deficits are apparent in almost all aspects of language. Their roots properly lie in the underlying grammar in its perfect and carefully- ruled processing system because the language skills that are not impaired are at least as complex as those which are, it is unlikely that the (marked underlying deficits is one of the cognition as such- (M-Gopnik , 1986) feature-blind grammar and dysphasia.

The questionnaire result is as follows: The arithmetic mean of student performance in this questionnaire on students collective work was calculated in accordance with the following mathematical rule, normally used to determine collective work satisfaction levels: the highest level used- the lowest level used/ the most common level of occurrence. In this case, it's (5-1) / 3= 1033 , and it represents the length f one function; ZMC (Zayed the 2nd Military College) students' satisfaction level of collective work. The average is as follows:

. less than 2033= low

. 2034-3066= middle

. 3067= high

The following table reflects collective work satisfaction levels for a selected sample of ZMC fresher students:

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NO	Area	Arithmetic mean	Score
1	Group Work	309	high

It is clear from the above table that the arithmetic mean for ZMC fresher students' peer and group work satisfaction is 309, reflecting that the peer and group work satisfaction is quite high.

Conclusion

This paper has reviewed the literature of the studies that investigated the processing of English syntactic structures by Arab-speaking learners. The problematic areas were identified and sources for these areas were discussed. Arguments concerning certain sources, particularly those of negative transfer or interference, were re-tackled and suggestions were presented. The paper has shown some interesting findings. The most common source of these deviations is the influence of the native language (Arabic). This may support the current L2 thinking which emphasizes the important role the mother tongue can play in understanding the processes of SLA. The review has also shown that the Arabic speaking learners in processing English syntactic structures adopt certain strategies similar to those of L1 learners, e.g. simplifications, overgeneralization, etc. This similarity between L1 and L2 acquisition gives an evidence to the natural sequence of development (or L2=L1 hypothesis; of Burt and Dulay, 1980).

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