

## Errors Analysis of Writing among Third and Fourth Year College Efl Students

Bilal Ayed Al-Khaza'leh  
English department, Shaqra University  
[balkazalh@su.edu.sa](mailto:balkazalh@su.edu.sa)

---

**ABSTRACT:** Writing in the target language is regarded as one of the most significant skill that enables L2learners to excel and master L2 as a target language. The present endeavour is devoted to investigate the possible writing errors committed by tertiary students. The sample consists of the third and fourth year students of English in English department, Shaqra University. The samples are homogeneous in terms of age, social and educational backgrounds. Results show that students committed errors in all assignments, paragraphs and short sentences they did. These errors include; but not limited to punctuations, subject-verb agreement, capitalization, singular-plurals etc. it is recommended that those students should be given heavy training course in writing so that they will be able to correctly construct English sentences.

**KEYWORDS:** writing errors, Shaqra University, L2 learners, English major undergraduates, academic writing

---

### I. INTRODUCTION

Corder and his colleagues established the field of error analysis in second language acquisition in 1975s. This linguistic field is very significant since it zooms on the errors learners commit in the target or the first language. Corder(1975) explains that error analysis field is concerned with understanding how the learners absorb the second language and enabling the students to learn effectively by using their own dialect. A few researchers observed the importance of error committed by the learners. These errors could provide important feedback for the teachers and the learners at the same time. This helps the teachers to correct the learners' errors and focus on the weak area of them, in addition to help teachers overcome these obstacles by using the most suitable strategies of teaching (Al-haysoni, 2012). Writing is considered a challenging skill for native and nonnative speakers. That is because many issues should be taken into consideration while trying to write a good piece of work such as organization, vocabulary, content as well as using the correct spelling, capitalization and punctuation (Alsamadani, 2010).

Arab EFL learners face problems in writing and they are not able to achieve written samples that are syntactically accurate, semantically acceptable and culturally appropriate. Multiple research has shown that Arab EFL lack the essential English proficiency that impact their academic development (Javid, Farooq, & Gulzar, 2012; Javid & Khairi, 2011; Rabab`ah&Melhim2015). These problems are due to many reasons such as the lack of the suitable environment for the learners to practice the target language. Also, it is because of the lack of the appropriate teaching methodologies which do not support the learning process (Abbad, 1988). Bjork and Raisanen argue: We highlight the importance of writing in all university curricula not only because of its immediate practical application, i.e. as an isolated skill or ability, but because we believe that, seen from a broader perspective, writing is a thinking tool. It is a tool for language development, for critical thinking and, extension, for learning in all disciplines (1997, p. 8).

### II. PROBLEM

Writing has been one of the most challenging and important skill in the circle of EFL environment. It is required for the students since research depends on it, thus, students should be able to master this skill effectively. It is required for writing essays, taking notes, describing things, writing compositions, answering written questions, etc. Furthermore, writing through a practical research task could help in developing the EFL learners' cognitive skills to acquire the essential learning strategies like being able to analyze results of a research task as well as infer from the significant differences observed in comparing means, frequencies (Bacha, 2002). Hence, writing has been as a vital part of the English process of learning the target language (Al-Khuwaileh&Shoumali, 2000). Various researchers have found that Arab learners suffer for lack of ability of constructing correct sentences in English Al-Haq& Ahmad (1994) and Al-Khresheh (2011). In Saudi context, Grami(2010) found that Saudi students have serious problems in writing as evident on their IELTS results compared to other skills.

Thus, it is of paramount significance to study the reasons of these errors and the possible ways to improve this important skill.

### **III. LITERATURE REVIEW**

Error analysis is “the study of linguistic ignorance, the investigation of what people do not know and how they attempt to cope with their ignorance”. James (2001, p. 62). Error analysis is very influential theory of teaching EFL; it is concerned with comparing the learners’ writing styles and norms with the native speakers’ styles and spot the possible differences and work on correcting them. According to Crystal (1999), error analysis is the study of the unacceptable forms written by the second language learning, while Brown (2012) considers the process of error analysis as studying the deviations of the rules of the target language and trying to classify them and correct them at the end. According to Brown (2000) the reasons of these errors back to two main sources; interlingual and intralingual; the interlingual occur due to the interference of the first language. The intralingual occur due to lack of the learning the language in the correct way far from transfer. In the same vein, Richards (1980) proposed four types of Intralingual errors, namely: (1) overgeneralization, (2) ignorance of rule restrictions, (3) incomplete application of rules, and (4). On other hand Stenson (1974) attributed the reasons of errors to problems of language performance, incomplete target language acquisition and differences of language teaching/learning situations. Moreover, Candling (2001) hailed error of EFL learners since these errors could be as a reliable source for understanding the mechanism of L2 acquisition. Sercombe (2000) clarifies that error analysis process plays very significant role and has three advantages; to find out the learners’ proficiency level, to understand the prevailed difficulties those learners face and understand how the learners learn the TL. Previous literature concerning error analysis is rich. However, errors are still there and students still face same problems. Among these study for example, Al-Khairy (2013) studied the writing errors for a group of Saudi English major students. Results showed that those students are very weak in writing skills and he suggested improving the teaching materials and using new teaching techniques.

Further, Nuruzzaman, Shafiqul Islam and Shuchi (2018) investigated the writing errors of ninety Saudi non-English major undergraduate students of different proficiency levels. The findings reveal that the common errors the Saudi EFL students make in writing English paragraphs fall under four categories; grammar, lexis, semantics and mechanics, with grammar is the most committed mistakes. Among different L2 composing abilities showing draws near, the item approach has been recognized as the most. Grami, (2009) and Yan, (2005) explain that the product approach is one of the most significant technique in writing skills. This product approach is concerned with the final product of the writing, which is a reaction of the product based approach which focuses on the underlying process of writing. White and Arndt (1991) suggested that the writing process follows the following steps

Rewriting ----> composes ----> revising ----> editing.

### **IV. IMPORTANCE OF ERRORS**

Students become familiar with a language through experimentation. We cannot expect that the students will get familiar with a language without making mistakes. In any case, numerous teachers and scholars in the field of errors investigation have zeroed in on the significance of second language students' mistakes. As per Corder (1967) and Brown (2000) language students' errors are critical to contemplate on the grounds that they show the levels of the students' information. Corder (1967) states that mistakes are something to be eliminated, but instead can be significant all by themselves. He shows that mistakes are huge in three distinctive manners. To begin with, to the educators, they disclose to them how far towards the objective the students have progressed and thus, what stays for them to learn. Second, they give the specialists proof of how language is learnt or gained, what methodologies or methodology the students are utilizing in their disclosure of the language. Third, they are fundamental to the actual students, since we can see the creation of errors as a mean the students use to learn. Exploration has given exact proof highlighting the accentuation on students' errors as a powerful method for working on syntactic precision (White et al, 1991; Carroll and Swain, 1993). There is a requirement for students to perceive the meaning of mistakes which happen in their composition, to completely get a handle on and comprehend the idea of the errors made. This requires English language instructors to be better prepared, more delicate and mindful of the hardships students face as to sentence structure, lexis, semantics etc. dealing with these mistakes will help to recognize the linguistic, lexical, mechanical and semantic mistakes students commit to help English instructors tackle the issue and to show the marks of shortcoming in English composition

## V. METHODOLOGY

**Participants :** The sample is the third and fourth year male students of English in English department, Shaqra University, Dawadmi campus. The ages of the samples range between 21-22. The samples are homogeneous in terms of age, social and educational backgrounds.

**Instrument:** The instrument used for data collection is essays and short paragraphs written by the students in a period of two semesters in the academic session of 2019-2020. The topics of these written works are general but the participants were required to initiate an argument and narrow it down to explain the main ideas. Students were required to follow the structure of essays which consists of introduction, thesis statements, main ideas and relevant conclusion. The writing was supposed to be grammatically correct along with correct spelling. All 160 essays were checked and errors were located.

## VI. DATA COLLECTION PROCEDURES

Data collection analysis follows Ellis (1994) approach for identifying errors in writing. This approach comprised of the following steps:

- ✓ The collections of the samples' written essays
- ✓ Identifying the errors
- ✓ Categorizing the errors and
- ✓ Evaluation of these errors

## VII. CONTENT ANALYSIS RESULTS

Results clearly show that English major students face numerous obstacles in terms of grammar, structures, syntax while writing. They still do not have the good command in English despite that they are fourth year students. The analysis of students' article on a span of two semesters shows that students always repeat the same writing mistakes; these mistakes are shown in the following sections.

**Spelling Mistakes:** This mistake type is the most common mistakes committed by the students, they used to write based on pronunciations and sense. For instance gose (goes), hungry (hungry), castle (place), discribe (Describe), achived (accomplished), studen (understudy), Governmen (Government), colloge (College), momen (second), goad (Proud), compitition (Competition), livining (living), memorible (essential), my frind is Ali.

**Wrong use of Punctuation marks:** Many students are not aware of information on complicated and compound-complex sentence thus; their sentences neither have rhyme nor reason due to some unacceptable utilization of the punctuation marks. A few students composed extremely long sentences with simply the utilization of comma. A portion of the students just composed exceptionally complex sentences without utilizing any sort of punctuation mark. This prompts no feeling of the sentence.

**Capitalization:** Most students start their sentence without using capital letters, and sometimes suddenly capital letters are written in the middle of the sentence. Also there are not aware of that the proper nouns and nouns of cities and human are written in capital letters first.

### 1. verb tense

Some students mix between the present and the past in certain sentences, sometimes they use the present and the past for the same event, or use present for events occurred in the past. For example, we *go* to Riyadh last week, instead of we went to Riyadh last week.

**Use of was with plurals :** Some students wrongly utilized 'was' with plural words which is exceptionally serious mix-up in English language. For instance: 'My imprints was highest..', 'that his seniors was appreciating him', and so forth.

### 2. Subject –verb agreement

Students showed lack of understanding to the simple grammar of English; simple present for example. Subjects and verbs must agree with one another in numbers, so if the subject is singular, in simple present sshould be added to the end of the verb by contrast if the subject is plural this *s* or *es* is no longer needed. Many students still commit mistakes while writing this simple tense. For example, Ahmad *go* to the college yesterday

**Minor errors:** The minor errors of students incorporate some unacceptable use of pronoun (it and city together). It additionally incorporate some unacceptable utilization of article 'A' with plural things (A spots),

mistakes of 'a' and 'an' in the use, wrong utilization of is and are (our kin is exceptionally legit), beginning of sentences normally with aides and praises. This additionally includes the redundancy of plural markers, wrong use of ownership markers and intonations

### VIII. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Students lack the correct syntax and writing simple sentences; they face errors on spelling mistakes, capitalization, etc. They are unable to distinguish between the singular or plural subjects; this lack of knowledge made them mix between the tenses. Sometimes they use singular and other times they use plurals. Punctuation on other hand is very important since any wrong usage could change the whole meaning of the sentence. These mistakes could be attributed to the lack of the necessary vocabulary which is in line with Rababah study (2003) who confirmed that students did not have the vocabulary size to enable them to write effectively, followed by grammar which is in line with Al-Khasawneh's (2010) findings who found that students miss the correct English grammar. These grammars should be included extensively in the syllabuses due to their paramount significance (Hutchinson & Waters, 1987). Using inappropriate capitalization affects the smoothness of the sentence or paragraph writing. The other mistakes also negatively affect the quality of writing such as subject-verb agreement, articles and spelling are also common problems as confirmed based on this study results and in accordance with other studies such as (Khan, 2011; Kambal, 1980). To conclude, Findings of this study show that students face serious obstacles in mastering English writing skill. They almost have problems in all types of writing, syntactic, semantic and word formation. The examination calls attention to English composing issues of students of Shaqra University. It uncovers the way that they are confronting various syntactic and primary issues while acquiring English language. The errors committed by them show that those students have problem of learning English during their high school period. Perhaps educators did not give appropriate rule for students to thrive in the realm of English. They simply focus on the course diagram and time limit. The students are simply going ahead without having the ideas of courses they study. Hence, it is highly recommended that before those students are accepted in college, they should sit for intensive training courses to teach them the main four skills of the target language especially writing.

### REFERENCES

- [1] Corder, Stephen P. "Error analysis, interlanguage and second language acquisition." *Language teaching* 8, no. 4 (1975): 201-218.
- [2] Alhaysony, Maha. "An analysis of article errors among Saudi female EFL students: A case study." *Asian Social Science* 8, no. 12 (2012): 55.
- [3] Alsamadani, Hashem Ahmed. "The relationship between Saudi EFL students' writing competence, L1 writing proficiency, and self-regulation." *European Journal of Social Sciences* 16, no. 1 (2010): 53-63.
- [4] Al-Khairi, Mohamed Ali. "Saudi English-Major Undergraduates' Academic Writing Problems: A Taif University Perspective." *English Language Teaching* 6, no. 6 (2013): 1-12.
- [5] Farooq, Muhammad Umar, and Choudhary Zahid Javid. "Attitude of students towards E-learning: A study of English language learners at Taif University English Language Centre." *NUML Journal of Critical Inquiry* 10, no. 2 (2012): 17-28.
- [6] Rababah, Luqman, and Nour Bani Melhem. "Investigation into strategies of creativity in EFL writing in Jordan." *Journal of Literature, Languages and Linguistics* 3, no. 5 (2015): 14-25.
- [7] Abbad, Aziza Taleb. "An analysis of communicative competence features in English language texts in Yemen Arab republic." PhD diss., University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 1988.
- [8] Björk, L., and C. Räisänen. "Academic writing: A university course." (1997).
- [9] Bacha, Nahla N. "Developing learners' academic writing skills in higher education: A study for educational reform." *Language and Education* 16, no. 3 (2002): 161-177.
- [10] Khuwaileh, Abdullah A., and Ali Al Shoumali. "Writing errors: A study of the writing ability of Arab learners of academic English and Arabic at university." *Language Culture and Curriculum* 13, no. 2 (2000): 174-183.
- [11] Al-Haq, Fawwaz Al-Abed, and Ahmed SEA Ahmed. "Discourse problems in argumentative writing." *World Englishes* 13, no. 3 (1994): 307-323.
- [12] Al-Khresheh, Mohammad. "An investigation of interlingual interference in the use of 'and' as a syntactic coordinating structure by Jordanian EFL learners." *European Journal of Social Sciences* 18, no. 3 (2011): 426-433.
- [13] Grami, Grami Mohammad Ali. "The effects of integrating peer feedback into university-level ESL writing curriculum: A comparative study in a Saudi context." PhD diss., Newcastle University, 2010.
- [14] Crystal, David. "The Penguin dictionary of language." (1999).
- [15] James, Carl. *Errors in language learning and use: Exploring error analysis*. Routledge, 2013.

- [16] Brown, H. Douglas. "Principles of language learning and teaching. New Jersey: Pentice-Hall." (1987).
- [17] Richards, Jack C. "Second language acquisition: Error analysis." *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics* 1 (1980): 91-107.
- [18] Candling, R. B. "Vocabulary and language teaching." (2001).
- [19] Stenson, Nancy. "Induced errors." *New Frontiers in Second Language Learning. Massachusetts: Newbury House Publishers* 54 (1974): 70.
- [20] Nuruzzaman, Mohammed, ABM Shafiqui Islam, and IsratJahanShuchi. "An analysis of errors committed by Saudi non-English major students in the English paragraph writing: A study of comparisons." *Advances in language and literary studies* 9, no. 1 (2018): 31-39.
- [21] Yan, Guo. "A process genre model for teaching writing." In *English Teaching Forum*, vol. 43, no. 3, pp. 18-26. 2005.
- [22] White, Ron, and Valerie Arndt. *Process writing*. London: Longman, 1991.
- [23] Carroll, Susanne, and Merrill Swain. "Explicit and implicit negative feedback: An empirical study of the learning of linguistic generalizations." *Studies in second language acquisition* 15, no. 3 (1993): 357-386.
- [24] Ellis, N. C. "Implicit and explicit language learning." *Implicit and explicit learning of languages* (1994): 79-114.
- [25] Hutchinson, Tom, and Alan Waters. *English for specific purposes*. Cambridge university press, 1987.
- [26] Khan, IntakhabAlam. "Learning difficulties in English: Diagnosis and pedagogy in Saudi Arabia." *Educational Research* 2, no. 7 (2011): 1248-1257.
- [27] Kambal, M. "An Analysis of Khurtoum University Studentsr Composition Errors." PhD diss., PHD Dissertation. University of Texas, USA, 1980.

#### **BIOGRAPHY**

*Dr. Bilal Ayed Al-Khaza'leh* is an assistant professor of English linguistics in English department, Shaqra University, Saudi Arabia. My research interests include sociolinguistics, second language acquisition and education.