Students′ Fossilized Writing Errors: EFL Postgraduates at Jordanian Universities as a Model *

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الأخطاء الكتابية المتحجّرة للطلبة: طلبة الدراسات العليا الاردنيين المتخصّصين في اللغة الانجليزية كلّغة أجنبية في الجامعات الأردنية أنموذجا.

ملخص:

هدفت هذه الدراسة تحديد الأخطاء الكتابية المتحجرة في مقالات طلبة الدراسات العليا في الجامعات الأردنية المكتوبة باللغة الإنجليزية بالإضافة إلى تقديم تضمينات تربوية تطبيقية لتلك الأخطاء. وتكونت الدراسة من مرحلتين، المرحلة الأولى، تمّ فيها إجراء اختبار كتابة مقالي لـ (57) طالباً متخصصاً في اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية من طلبة الدراسات العليا في ثلاث جامعات أردنية حاذيا بذلك تصميم البحث الوصفي، حيث خلص إلى تحديد الأخطاء الكتابية وتصنيفها، وظهر أن جلّ هذه الأخطاء هي نحوية بالإضافة إلى أخطاء في استخدام أدوات التعريف. بينما المرحلة الثانية من الدراسة، تمّ فيها جمع (24) مقالاً من ستة طلبة مشاركين في الدّراسة حاذياً بذلك تصميم بحث دراسة الحالة، وذلك للحصول على صورة أكثر وضوحاً، واعتمدت الدّراسة التحقق من وجود أو عدم وجود نفس الأخطاء اللغوية في أربع مقالات لدى الطلبة الستة خلال فصلين دراسيين متتابعين، الأمر الذي يظهر نقصاً في معرفتهم اللغوية مخلفا في النهاية أخطاءً متحجّرة. ومع ذلك، فإن الدراسة لم تركز على الأخطاء الغير متكررة عند الطلبة فقط، بل وركّزت على الأخطاء المتكررة أيضا. هذا وقد خلصت المرحلة الثانية من الدراسة إلى الإشارة إلى عدد كبير من الأخطاء الكتابية وبدرجات متفاوتة، حيث كان جلّ هذه الأخطاء المتحجرة يتمثل في أدوات التعريف، والنحو، والعدد، وأدوات الوصل والأسلوب. وقدّمت الدّراسة في نهايتها بعض التضمينات التدريسية المحتملة والتي من شأنها مساعدة طلبة الدراسات العليا في الحدّ من تحجّر الأخطاء الكتابية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: اللّغة الأنجليزية كلغة أجنبية، التحجّر اللّغوي، الأردن، مهارة الكتابة.

Abstract:

The present study aimed at identifying the writing errors across EFL postgraduates' English essays, at Jordanian universities together with providing implications for practice of such errors. The study entailed two research phases. In phase one, an essay writing test was administered to 57 EFL postgraduate students in three Jordanian universities as following a descriptive research design. Their writing errors were identified and classified. The study concluded that most these errors are related to grammar as well as to article use. However, in phase two of the study, 24 essays were collected from six participants as lending a case study research design. More specifically, checking whether postgraduates consistently make the same linguistic forms for four essays in two subsequent semesters shows a lack of knowledge and eventually a fossilized error. Nonetheless, the study did not focus only on students› infrequent errors, but also on repeated ones. The study reported that there were a large number of writing errors and with varying degrees. The utmost fossilized errors explored by this study were those of article, grammar, number, relative clauses and style. Finally, the study presented a few potential pedagogical implications that may help postgraduates to reduce fossilization.

Key words: EFL; Language Fossilization; Jordan; The Writing Skill.

Introduction:

Performance language errors are significant for they reveal learner›s operating system as Brown (2000) termed it; they include spoken and written output. The written output, as being the theme of this study, is inseparable from grammar. At times, researching EFL learners' written output displays identical grammatical errors in the writings of learners which show fossilized errors that require effective didactic procedures.

Although fossilization is an old phenomenon, since its orientation has been initiated by Weinreich as early as 1953, yet it has remained to have problematic impact on students' written production. Weinreich described fossilization as a permanent grammatical influence (1953:174). However, the term of 'fossilization' correlated with the

concept of interlanguage (IL) which came to eminence in 1972 (p. 209) in Selinker's paper entitled of the same name. Selinker defined IL as linguistic items, rules and subsystems which speakers of a particular native language will tend to keep in their IL relative to a particular target language. Additionally, all of Corder (1981) and Tarone (1979) described IL as a sequence of grammars established by the learner at different platforms of the second language acquisition which can be regular and systematic.

Regrettably, fossilization is still a problem with conventional written productions which appears overtly across EFL postgraduates' essays at Jordanian universities. Generally speaking, Richards and Schmidt (2003) referred to IL fossilization, however, as a process which sometimes occurs in which incorrect linguistic features become a permanent part of the way a person speaks or writes a language (p. 211). Nakuma (1998: 247) clarified that fossilization is a state of permanent failure to learn certain forms in L2. Tarone asserted that a central characteristic of any IL is that it fossilizes (1994: 1715). Further, Han (2004) verified cognitive (i.e. mental mechanisms) as well as empirical (i.e. speech or writing) levels of fossilization processes. Additionally, Thomas (1983) highlighted that since fossilization is a linguistic phenomenon, it can be demonstrated in many types: phonological, morphological, syntactic, semantic and pragmatic.

Besides, Skehan reported that fossilization as an error made by a system of rules which turns out as a model (1998: 61). Similarly, Long (2003) stressed that most ESL/EFL learners by no means grasp native-like proficiency even if motivated and exposed extensively for the target language. Long attributed such failure to IL fossilization which they are inclined to have.

Towell and Hawkins (1994: 118) evidenced that second language acquisition is slow, laborious … even in talented L2 learners, when language learners are beyond the age of ten years old. In 1972, Selinker noted that 95% of L2 learners failed to grasp the matching level of first language competence. Fidler (2006) labeled fossilization as the level where learners never reach native-like proficiency in their target languages (p.398).

Several psychological causes are crucial to second language learning. First of all, language transfer which looks as the use of L1 grammar patterns to create sentences in English. Second, transfer of inappropriate training involves the effect of a third party, usually a textbook or upon a certain social setting. Third, inappropriate strategies of second language learning and communication which are culture-bound do affect language learning (Selinker, 1972: 217). According to Ellis (1994), fossilization can be triggered by external environmental causes; such as the absence of instruction. Avoidance can be caused by internal cognitive factors like knowledge representation (e.g. L1 influence, lack of access to Universal Grammar), knowledge processing (e.g. lack of attention), or psychological (e.g. avoidance, simplification). Other internal causes of fossilization may include nero-biological factors (e.g. age, lack of talent) or social-affective factors (e.g. lack of acculturation).

Alternatively, Montgomery and Eisenstein (1985) stated that the communicative approach helps avoiding fossilization errors. In their study, they reported that learners who were taught by the means of the communicative approach in their grammar classes made better enhancements than learners who were not taught through the communicative approach.

One case of fossilization is that of Alberto, examined by Schumann (1978), a thirty three Costa Rican adult whose language progress was studies when he first came to Massachusetts. His language was observed for more than ten months. Alberto's speech was fossilized rapidly. For example, Alberto only used for negation the two most basic stages: no + V as in I no understand good and don't + V as in don't know and as a result using the first of these most often.

As early as 1986, fossilization was acknowledged as a problem across the written output of Jordanian university learners. In this regard, Mukkatesh described it as poor. Mukkatesh (1986) examined the written output of eighty learners at a Jordanian university.

He reported that Jordanian learners continue making errors such as the use of simple past instead of simple present after eleven years of instruction in learning English. He called these errors as non-target like performance errors. Mukkatesh concluded that grammatical explanation of error correction had no effect on their written output. Many years later, the issue of fossilization was revisited by Mahmoud in 2005. Mahmoud studied forty-four essays written by Arabic-speaking university learners majoring in English. He reported that foreign language learners create unnatural and strange mixture of English sentences.

In 2015 and as the same old matter (i.e. fossilization) persists across essays, it was attempted again by the present study. The present study examined areas of written errors in an effort to help postgraduate EFL learners at Jordanian universities better avoid its effect by the proposal of some suggestions of potential pedagogical implications. When learners are adults, their committed mistakes or errors get fossilized (Hagège, 1996). Writing competence is very crucial for postgraduate EFL learners as they may fail/pass their courses, proposals and theses because of this skill. In consequence, it was decided to examine this skill in light of fossilized linguistic forms learners may commit in order to help learners through by providing some potential pedagogical implications. However, IL in the current study relates to the written essays produced by EFL postgraduate learners at seminars at Jordanian universities.

Literature review

Generally speaking, errors are studied from different viewpoints in terms of their nature or significance in classroom setting. Initially, errors need to be recorded and categorized, as learners make different types of errors during the process of learning the language. Second language acquisition is typically examined by describing learners' oral/written production the means and ways of contrastive analysis in addition to error analysis.

There are different viewpoints of SLA that explain interlanguage errors such as the Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis as well as the Error Analysis hypthesis. CAH, however is associated with linguistic perspectives linked to Lado (1957) with Chomsky's (1959) linguistic theory together with Skinner's (1967) language learning theory. However, EA is associated with Selinker's (1972) interlanguage theory in addition to Corder's (1967; 1981) cognitive language processing

One viewpoint as stated by Lado (1957: 2) affirms learners transfer aspects from their mother-tongue in the production process of L2. Exactly, Lado said: individuals tend to transfer the forms and meanings of their native language and culture to the foreign language and its culture. Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis (CAH) was then coined which is based in behaviorist learning theory by Skinner (1957). CAH aimed at identifying linguistic forms that are at variance in L2 from those of the L1 with the intention of helping learners to make new habits in L2. Interference takes place when there is a difference between L1 and L2; errors accordingly occur. The more L2 forms are unfamiliar, the more errors are potential to occur.

However, the process-centered approach (i.e. prewriting, writing & revision) in teaching attends creating ideas (Reid, 1993). As such, the assessments of the quality of essays in EFL classes tend to be centered on the product rather than on the process of writing (Santos, 1988). That is, the process that touches the quality of essays is perceived as unimportant. At university level in general, there is a gap between instruction and the quality of essays as evaluative criteria which should entail pedagogical vocabulary items and proper aspects of grammar a long with text.

There are two distinct perceptions of the teaching of the writing skill at university level; namely, writing as a product or writing as a process. Hairston (1982) maintained that teaching of writing at university involved an emphasis on the final product as being concerned with grammar, vocabulary and coherence. On the other hand, Zamel (1983) established the teaching of foreign language learners through the writing process involved a recursive activity

of outlining, drafting, and rereading where grammar, vocabulary and coherence are to be attempted merely in context.

What's more, a linguistic perspective was offered by many researchers. As the psycholinguistic perspective of second language acquisition is fixed on Chomsky's (1959) idea of Universal Grammar (UG), individuals are born with innate linguistic principles where linguistic forms are controlled by such principles in the brain. Yet, this innate disposition vanishes as individuals grow older. However, fixed order stages of SLA that proceed to near native ability were labeled as interlanguage which Selinker (1972) himself called it. A further extra example of the linguistic perspective of errors was introduced by Allwright and Bailey (1991). They introduced an account of error as a deviant from the right linguistic form. For sometimes the right linguistic form is demonstrated as the way mother tongue speakers normally say. Yet, native speakers' proficiency is a challenging standard for L2 learners (James, 1998). That is, such linguistic view is very demanding in the part of L2 learner. Thus, other views may prevail.

Moreover, Yi (2009: 142) explained why learners can't recall vocabulary, structure and usage. Yi stated that learners find it difficult to apply their language knowledge automatically to performance despite their extensive knowledge in the target language, learners find it somewhat hard to use language: spontaneously and unconsciously to communicate. Richards (2008, p. 19) described fossilization as the persistence of errors in learners which are difficult to eradicate, despite the teacher's best efforts. In the same way, Jiang (2004) maintained that the semantic system of L1 tends to be the main source for L2 lexical development hindrance, which may in turn, lead to the fossilization of most L2 words. As early as 1978, Ibrahim investigated spelling errors in the written output of undergraduates at a public Jordanian university and reported that the majority of errors are caused by three reason; firstly, the non-phonetic nature of English spelling; secondly, the differences between the sound systems of English and Arabic; thirdly, the inconsistent spelling in English word derivation; and finally, ignorance or overgeneralization of a spelling rule.

In contrast, errors were explained differently and no longer caused by L1 transfer. Ellis (1985) criticized CAH by maintaining that errors are not related to language learning process, but rather related to wrong learning on the basis of prediction of their occurrences. The prediction process nonetheless is associated with combining L1 with L2. In this regard, Corder (1967) considered errors as a consequence of cognitive processing. Corder reported that L2 learners use their own cognitive abilities when they process language learning. As such, L2 learners have their own distinct language habits that enable them to understand and interpret L2.

Corder (1981) established several classifications of errors as dependent on the time of their occurrence in addition to their identification by the learner; namely, (i) pre-systematic, (ii) systematic, and (iii) post-systematic. Systematic errors are the most relevant to the current study can be possibly interference, interlingual or developmental errors. If caused by L1, it is an interference error. But if caused by a linguistic form that differs significantly, it is an interlingual error. Yet if caused by a certain L2 structure, it is a developmental error.

A more plausible explanation of errors was presented by Error Analysis (EA) which is related to Interlanguage Theory (IL) by Selinker (1972) who pronounced IL as a between language. IL was perceived as a changing dynamic process towards L2 learning. Selinker described the process of IL as entailing the following processes: creating and testing hypotheses about L2 gradually; modifying their cognitive constructions; and refining their communicative ability. Brown (2000) translated these processes differently while pinpointing interruption points on learner's IL. In this regard, Brown said: less successful learners become 'fossilized' somewhere along the IL continuum. Thus, fossilization is associated with unsuccessful learners which usually talks about the end of learning.

Selinker identified some strategies related to errors in learning and in communication such as simplification and overgeneralization. When learners simplify linguistic forms, they possibly will realize that the sentence is wrong yet understood by a native-speaker of English. Overgeneralization, nonetheless, is associated with using an L1 rule in the production of L2 forms.

Besides, a sociolinguistic perspective of errors in second language acquisition was pinpointed by Brown. In his optimal distance model, Brown (1980: 180-1) explained why adults fail to have command of a foreign/second language in a foreign culture. He affirmed that: adults who achieve nonlinguistic means of coping in the foreign culture will pass through Stage 3 (of acculturation) and into stage 4 (adaptation assimilation) with an undue number of fossilized forms of language, never achieving mastery.

Many authors stressed that EFL students strive in their graduate or undergraduate classes at university as they demonstrate many problems. For example, Johns (1997) established that regardless to years of instruction, lots of students tend to fail to use the writing conventions. She reported that university students produce indefinable, rhetorically unstructured, and excessively personal essays. Particularly, non-native speakers' writing was featured with problems related to sentence-level problems such as verbs, pronouns, tense, generalizations, and even exemplification.

Another investigation by Chang and Swales (1999) of advanced non-native speakers' essays was put forward. Chang and Swales reported that even advanced level students tend not to be aware of the features of writing related to coherence or sentence-level problems.

Nozadze (2012) studied grammatical error fossilization in terms of its history, definition, classification, and treatment. In her study, Nozadze steered a survey in Georgia/ Tbilisi to map EFL teachers' views on the problems of error fossilization. Her study concluded that grammatical error fossilization is a severe problem which should be planned for regularly.

Hong-wu and Jing (2014) studied IL fossilization of 20 Chinese EFL college students' assignments. Their study reported 12 typical errors, among which five fossilized ones. The researchers, accordingly used negative/ corrective feedback in order to reduce such fossilized errors. Yet, in spite of such effort, fossilization persisted. **Reasons given by the researchers were summarized as follows**:

1. The lack of direct form-function relationship

2. Learners (advanced ones) form their own IL that abandons rules.

3. The level of the task; if difficult , it distracts them from

4. Learners' fixed thinking patterns.

Xinguang and Xiuqin (2015) explored the causes of chines college students' fossilization process. In order to achieve the objective of their study, questionnaires and interview were used. They reported that fossilization among college students is attributed to the reasons of lack of interest and strategies in English language learning and teaching, negative transfer from L1, and inappropriate textbooks.

Statement of the problem

Through the researcher's observations at universities, she noticed that although postgraduate EFL students have studied many courses in English language, most postgraduates lack the ability to write in English properly. More specifically, the researcher observed that the corrections of postgraduate written essays showed many errors that remain apparent in their writings regardless to the amount of feedback. So, the researcher felt the need to determine 'what' errors postgraduates have, to identify 'which' errors do fossilize, and think of 'how' to solve such problems.

Questions of the study

Stemming from these purposes, the following *question*s were posed: (1) what types of errors do EFL postgraduates make? (2) What errors are fossilized over time? (3) What are the pedagogical implications of such fossilized errors?

Purposes of the study

The aim of this study was to explore, identify, and offer pedagogical implications of the intricacies of writing errors postgraduate students of EFL at Jordanian universities. The present study was intended to scrutinize linguistic written errors among EFL postgraduates' essays in order to: (1) identify the type of errors in their essays; (2) isolate fossilized errors; and (3) establish pedagogical implications in light of these errors.

Significance of the study

The justification for conducting this study was to increase the awareness of EFL learners' written errors in order to provide advice for possible actions for learners who insist on committing errors while writing. That is, this study came to existence as an attempt to help postgraduates to be better writers. Moreover, the study addresses the frequency as well as the explanations of areas in writing by referring to actual incidents across their written output. The exact identification of fossilized errors is a significant step toward error treatment that can take place at most EFL courses where essays are requisites. In addition, there is no previous research in Jordan, as to the researcher's knowledge, that investigated fossilized IL errors as related to the postgraduate level.

Limitations of the study

The generalizability of the findings may be limited by the following considerations:

1. Postgraduate EFL students at Curricula and Instruction departments enrolled at public Jordanian universities at the academic year of 20142015-.

2. The writing tests where students were asked to write up to 400 words essay on specified pedagogical themes.

3. The correction rubric used by the present study.

Definition of terms

Fossilized errors: Selinker (1972) defined fossilization as a mechanism that underlies surface linguistic material which speakers will tend to keep in their IL productive performance, no matter what the age of the learner or the amount of instruction s/he receives in the TL. In the current study, it refers to persistent errors found across EFL postgraduates' essays.

Method

Design: The present study entailed two research designs as delivered in two phases of the study. In phase one, an essay writing test was administered to 57 EFL postgraduate students in three Jordanian universities as following a descriptive research design. However in phase two of the study, 24 essays were collected from six participants as lending a case study research design.

Population and sample: the population of the study consisted of all EFL postgraduates studying at Curricula and Instruction departments at public Jordanian universities at the academic year of 2014 - 2015. The sample, however, was random as only three departments cooperated to give the researcher access to EFL classes.

Procedures of the study: The present study comprised two phases:

Phase one: a writing essay test was piloted concerning identifying students' writing errors. The data of the study consisted of 57 exam scripts of postgraduate students. The participants were all female students majoring

in TEFL program courses at four Jordanian universities (no male students accepted to take part during that time) whose ages range from twenty-two to forty-seven years. These learners have finished their Bachelor degrees in English language and literature at university. Students were asked to write an essay on the topic of the problems of teaching English as a foreign language in Jordan that ranged up 400 words. Students were to express their views freely.

Phase one procedures: all essays were corrected in terms of the classification introduced by this study. The scoring method entailed developing a ten-point scale to evaluate each aspect, then the average of the scores was calculated on the basis of two marks for each type of error. As analyzing students' errors is a valuable source of information, data were analyzed by separating, categorizing and identifying the error type.

Phase two: a longitudinal case study was carried out in order to decide on the fossilized errors. The analysis of postgraduates' errors embraced the phases proposed by Corder (1974). The phases are as follows: (1) gathering a sample of learners' written input, (2) pinpointing errors and (3) explaining errors. The aim of these phases was to identify fossilized errors as based on reoccurrences and persistence of the same type of error made by the same participant throughout four written essay assignments. Six EFL postgraduates studying in curricula and instruction departments at a Jordanian university took part in the current study. All participants have passed TOFEL exam as a perquisite for postgraduate entry and thus may be regarded as advanced English learners. They were aged between 24-39 years old. Participants were asked to write on four general and methods, (2) managing classroom activities, (3) teaching by principle, (4) authentic assessment.

Phase two procedures: All essays were instantly corrected and copied and kept as raw data. The essays were analyzed in terms of errors that were classified into word level errors as well sentence level errors. Once errors are detected, every single error was classified. After classifying the types of written output errors,

the most frequently occurring errors were recognized. The persistent frequent error types, for each participating writer for four successive essays, were recorded and acknowledged from the corpus. Then, the types of these errors were crossed against the four essays for each single writer in order to find out whether the amount of each error type considerably persisted or fossilized across the four essays for each participating writer. It's worth pointing out that, errors that were declined or reduced and did not reoccur for each writer (i.e. developmental errors) were not considered in the final analysis of research, simply because they were not addressed in the purposes of the study.

Validity and Reliability

Fossilization was first defined accurately, and then writing tests were generated. Correction rubrics, however, were based on Corder's (1974) grammatical categories of: structure, article, punctuation, coherence, cohesion, strength of argument, spelling, aesthetic dimension, word form, unnecessary word. These tests as well as the correction rubric were displayed to a jury of seven EFL and linguistics experts and English teachers to determine whether the behavioral indicators of the tests were adequate, appropriate and comprehensive for the EFL context. There was a consensus among them regarding these definitions and categorization of most of the items. The instrument appeared appropriate for the study. The test, as a result, proved to have faced content validity.

In order to establish the reliability of the observation checklist, the researcher asked another EFL tutor to correct ten essays with her. Firstly, she told her about the purpose of the study, and then she trained her to be able to correct essays according to the categories in question. The researcher calculated the frequency of agreement/disagreement between the second rater and hers. In this way, the researcher examined the consistency coefficient between the second rater and herself. The researcher used Cronbach's alpha to calculate the reliability coefficient. the agreement coefficient was measured as 70.2%, which was educationally acceptable. This showed that the

research tool used by the researcher was reliable.

Findings related to phase one

The current study explored EFL postgraduate essay writing errors by surveying 57 scripts. In this phase, identifying the linguistic forms helped in identifying their error types. In fact, their errors are grouped in the following Table.

Table (1)

Error types, frequencies and percentages in a descending order

Error type	Frequency	Percentage %
Structure	129	20.6
Article	111	17.7
Punctuation	107	17.1
Coherence	58	9.3
Cohesion	56	8.9
Strength of argument	47	7.5
Spelling	47	7.5
Aesthetic dimension	32	5.1
Word form	19	3.0
Unnecessary word	11	1.8
Others	10	1.6
Total	726	100 %

Table 1 reports the types of errors that EFL postgraduate make in writing essays in English. The Table reflects excessive amounts of errors across the 57 transcripts that reached up to 726 frequencies. Undergraduate EFL students tend to make structural errors (129 frequencies), article errors (111 frequencies), and punctuation errors (107 frequencies). Inserting unnecessary words was moderate (11 frequencies) across the scripts together with word form errors (19 frequencies).

The present study reported a large number of example of errors related to verb misuse. Such errors may be caused by L1, that is, interference (Selinker, 2011) from Arabic. In phase two of the study, an in-depth analysis of such errors. The patterns of verbs in Arabic are different from those in English in terms of aspect. The misuse of the 'perfect' tense came top of these errors. One student wrote:* I have saw may problems throughout my career as a teacher.

The essays were loaded with fragments. The sentence in English starts with 'the subject' whereas the sentence in Arabic starts with 'the verb'. The transcripts, also, revealed errors related to linking words (copula) as they do not correspond to the case of Arabic language where copula is absent. Problems related to 'article' misuse were overt across the essays. Punctuation errors were so overt throughout the transcripts. This can be explained on the grounds that punctuation differs significantly in Arabic from that in English.

The analysis of the corpus of essays revealed learners' excessive use of the linguistic and rhetorical aspects of formal essays. So, the transcripts understudy mirrored students' grammatical knowledge rather than their knowledge of a specific topic. Writing in a foreign language first needs an achievement of ample L2 linguistic proficiency (Larsen-Freeman, 1993). In this regard, Leki and Carson (1997: 64) stated that: What is valued in writing for writing classes is different from what is valued in writing for other academic courses. Nevertheless without overt, intensive, and regular teaching, such academic writing may not likely be achieved, even for advanced learners (Ellis, 1994).

Findings related to phase two

The present study was concerned with linguistic forms that tend to be fossilized, across six cases of Jordanian postgraduate learners who made some obvious errors repeatedly. Examples of these word or sentence levels errors are many and common in the present study. In spite of the constant feedback for four times successively, fossilization took place in all of learners' written essays. IL fossilized errors were monitored and assessed. Actually, the most common errors were grouped in light of being related to word level or sentence level, as shown in Figures 1 and 2. 11.2.

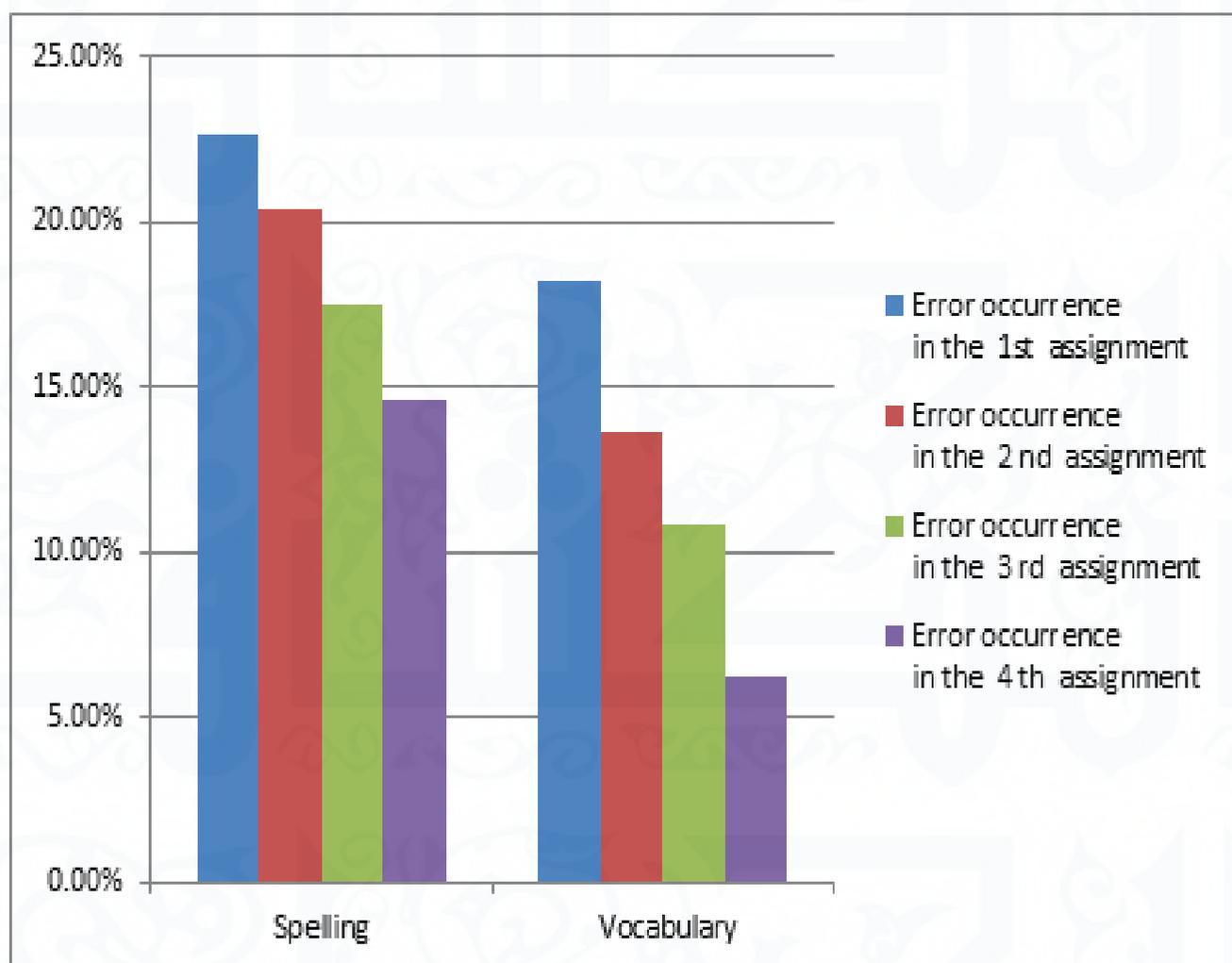**Figure (1)**
A summary of word level error occurrences

Figure 1 demonstrates that word level errors such as spelling (22.6%, 20.4%, 17.5%, 14.6%) and vocabulary errors (18.2%, 13.6%, 10.8%, 6.2%) did not diminish significantly throughout the four writing assignments. Difficulties in spelling and vocabulary are very common among EFL writers. As such, the conventions of writing in English are enormously different from Arabic writing ones adding more difficulties for Arab learners. Further, restrictions of vocabulary are typical of FL learning. Arabic and English have dissimilar structure of nouns and over and over again errors in vocabulary use are associated to meaning rather than to structure. Further, here are cultural and pedagogical obstacles that restrict learners' vocabulary learning.

Based on the Figure, it can be concluded that learners' essays are considered as neither that of English nor Arabic; its rather a combination of both (namely; IL) . Their IL fossilized errors are systematic. Concerning having systematic IL, Saville-Troike (2006) established that learners' L2 linguistic forms are not mere random of assemblage of entities but rather an embracing of definite linguistic bounds. Further, Yip (1995) confirmed that IL fossilized errors are systematic. This is evident in the data when learners' liability of IL structures was inhibited by their L1 such as in the following sentence: *Topic I don't teach is ecology as is very difficult. In sum, this study reported that learners' errors were not wiped out completely. This was proved by Mukkatash (1986) who stated that learners' errors continued in spite of systematic intervention.

Figure (2)
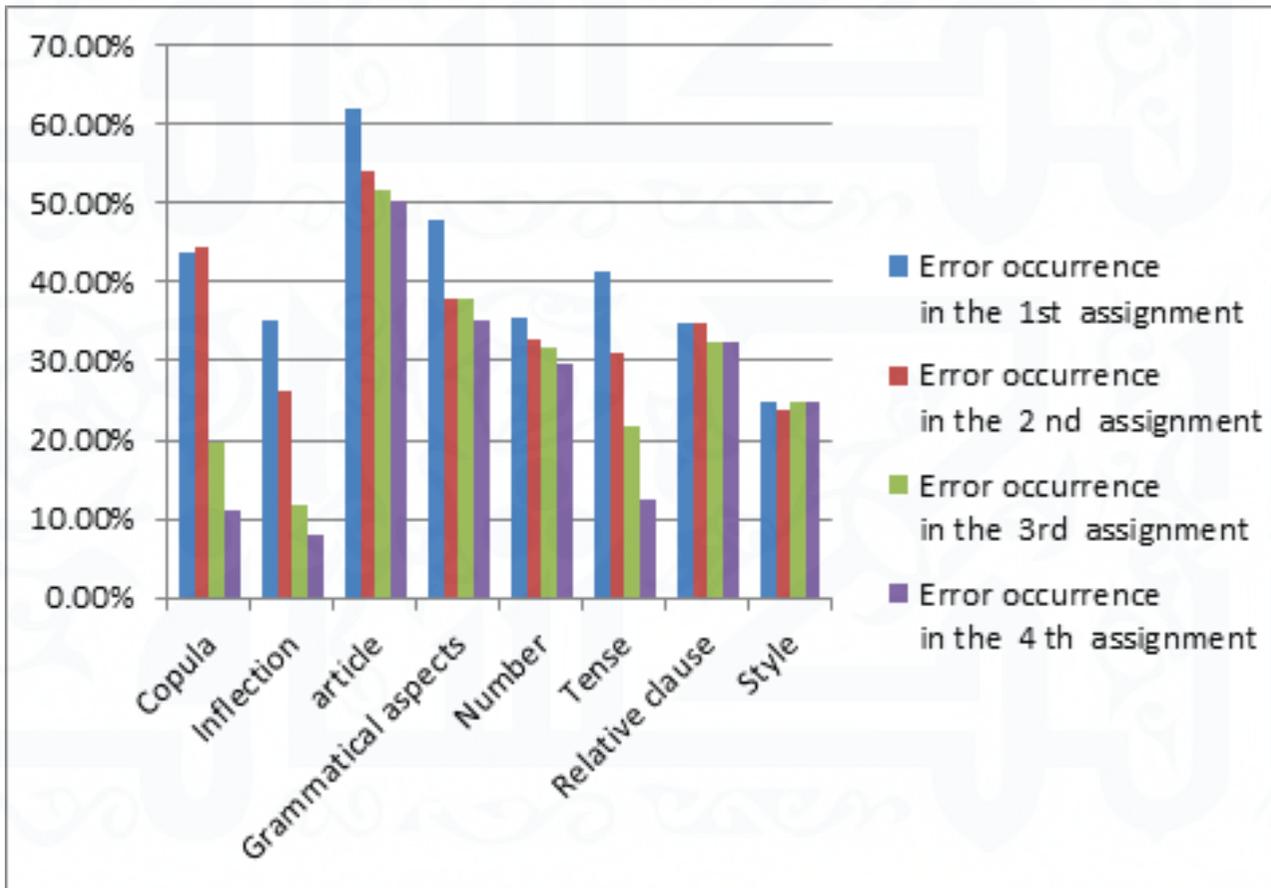**A summary of sentence level error occurrences**

Figure 2, however, displays the types of problems in using grammatical features such as copula, auxiliary, verb inflection, articles, grammatical aspects, tense, number, relative calluses and style are reported as very common across EFL written outputs in the current study. For example, participating EFL postgraduates' insistence on deleting copula is related to the fact that there is no copula in Arabic. Accordingly, such error appears as challenging and difficult for many Arab learners to some extent. Moreover, in Arabic language verbs are used to refer to state more often than English.

For that reason, participants' written output in the current study was characterized by employing auxiliary verbs to give different time-based particle (i.e. English modals) which are blurred and unclear. Example of such problems: aux + modal/particle + base-form verb. The following extracts stand for such error: *the English teacher didn't taught learners effectively, *the learners would didn't

understand the lesson. Percentages (i.e. 43.6%; 44.6%; 19.6%; 10.9%) of errors attributed to copula reflected the incorrect use of auxiliary are the grounds that there is no auxiliary in Arabic language.

Nevertheless, errors in copula were not persistent. Such syntactical errors were developed by the participating writers by the means of feedback. These errors are likely to be reduced since errors in identified in the first essays were more errors than the second, third or the fourth assignment essays. Verb inflection errors, nonetheless, are reported by the results as having significant reduction percentages (i.e. 35.1%; 26.1%; 11.7%; 8.1%). Per se, inflection errors were developed by feedback all through the four writing assignments.

Phonological and written errors of English as an international language were included by Melchers and Shaw (2003) in order to grow a linguistic map in countries where English is a second language. They reported that the most

frequent errors were as: lexical translations, third person singular and simplification. These, in conjunction with other errors reported in this study, form a set of IL fossilized errors that shape learning and teaching the English language.

Conversely, the use of articles was the most prevalent in this study; ranking the highest in percentage (61.9% errors in article use in the first essays, 54.1% in the second essays, 51.6% in the third essays, and as 50.3% in the fourth essays) and still having a persistence inclination to be fossilized. Particularly, the current study reported that the majority of errors related to the use of articles were mostly associated with indefinite article (a/an). This can be explained to participants' lack of awareness that each noun phrase must be preceded by a determiner. Accordingly, it seems that the participants tended to replace the indefinite article (a/an) for the definite article (the).

What's more, the following example was taken from of their essays: I need to explain to * status of English in Jordan. The omission of articles is a common error among EFL learners. Nevertheless, there is equivalent to articles in Arabic. Bataineh (2005) identified error types as caused by the use of the indefinite article by Jordanian undergraduate EFL learners. She reported that juniors and seniors errors were 20% and 23% less than those made by the freshmen. Indefinite article errors were attributed to developmental aspects such as overgeneralization or simplification.

The present study reported that the participating writers attempted repeatedly to omit grammatical aspects that do not give meaning for a sentence. Errors in grammatical aspects were quiet large as well as persistent. That is, having such percentages of errors (47.8%; 37.8%;37.8%;35.2%) indicates unchanged fossilized errors. For instance, Neither the student nor the teacher *writes on the board. The same student later wrote: One of the activities that the teacher *give each week is dull. Evidently, the structure of neither nor needs proximity, so the student needed the verb write instead of writes. In the subsequent sentence, another student similarly did the same

error. The student assumed that one of + noun should have a third person singular, at that point the student in question ignored third person singular marker s (give). Learners' examples of IL fossilized errors are in line with Field's (2008) principles. To Field, learners' written performance seems to be rather incidental, as linguistic forms deviations often happened example-based arbitrarily.

The analysis of the corpus of participants' written output revealed their errors in the use of number throughout their four essays. Errors made in number, as displayed by the Figure, did not drop throughout the four essays (i.e. 35.6%; 32.6%; 31.6%; 29.7%). Examples from learners' written essays are the following: *without doubt the technique used in class are extremely effective.

However, Figure 2 indicates that the participants in the present study demonstrated a reduction of errors usage related to tense. So the percentages of errors in tense dropped off significantly throughout the four written essays. Hence, errors in tense use in the first essays were 41.3% which were reduced to 30.9% in the second essays. Errors in the third and fourth essays were decreased further as to 21.6% and 12.3% respectively. Tense in English is dissimilar to Arabic. Perfect and imperfect tenses do not have the same exact meaning in Arabic language. The perfect tense refers to a finished action whereas the perfect tense refers to an uncompleted event, while the imperfect tense refers to routine, past continuous, or past future situation. Lim (2003) examined the acquisition of tense among Malay learners was much affected by intralingual issues. Errors attributed to tense were caused by tenses or verb forms, rather than the learners' native language. This may explain developmental tense errors produced by the learners understudy, as well.

What is more, sentence level errors, such as relative clause errors did not increase in the second, third or in the fourth written assignment essays. They were the second utmost distinctive errors as having great persistent percentages all through the four essays as 34.8%, 34.8%, 32.48% and 32.4% respectively. Since relative

clause formation in English is different from that in Arabic, EFL writers in general face difficulties with their relative clause formation. One main difficulty is the absence of relative pronoun in Arabic; thus sentences are linked together by the means of relative particles. This was evident throughout the participants' essays in the present study. Most learners used a relative pronoun where the antecedent is indefinite, as in the sentence the ministry of education trained teachers *who does not have ICDL. Another difficulty with relative clause formation evident in the present study was the repetition of the relative pronoun as it is the case in Arabic. For instance, one student wrote: *This is the authentic assessment which English language teachers thought it.

One more likely difficulty to EFL postgraduates is style, as it differs significantly in Arabic. Generally speaking, exaggeration characterized the writing of the participant postgraduates. One exaggerated quote in one essay was: she teaches English like a teacher. Another student wrote: the naked truth about culture across curriculum is related politics. Obviously, the writers, here, attempted to stretch the facts more. Figure 2, clearly, indicates how the participants in this study face obstacles with sentence-level grammar are often discouraged to find feedback such as "out of focus" on their essays. Thus, errors in style were apparent, persistent as well as unchanging. All learners' written input was featured by 24-25% errors in the use of style. Sentence level command is not the ultimate end for EFL writers, since sentences take place in a bigger context. Thus, coherence where writers 'put it all together' as Halliday (1976) called, is related to organizing ideas logically and meaningfully. For example, one student wrote: My class was demotivated. So I had to prepare audio visual aids *so I could motivate them take part in class discussion (so that).

The present study identified some writing features of essays in English in order to meet the prospects of the preparation of postgraduate skills to establish their ideas into coherent essays. The study reported that what has become of greater importance, however, is the language

tools (i.e., the grammar and vocabulary that L2 writers must have to write essays, which in turn can be organized into a coherent written academic discourse). To put it plainly, no matter how well discourse is organized or how brilliant the writer's ideas may be, it would be hard to understand them if the language is opaque.

Moreover, learners' written output relied on the rules of both L1 and L2. Accordingly, simplification and overgeneralization were clear in the data when learners wrote: *I have one general goal and two behavioral objective (i.e. simplification) and I esteemed the communicative approach (overgeneralization).

On the other hand, an exclusive helpful influence of Arabic language in English written output is the formality in style. Some learners wrote the following in their essays: establish; formulate; ingredient; stimulus; segment; current. Concerning such positive transfer, Tarone and Swierzbin (2009) referred to such interference from L1as remarkable deviations from the target language performance which may result in turn in well-formed linguistic performance.

In a word, the written essays of the participant learners in this study echoed their common linguistic stages of their SLA. An analysis of their written output may possibly spell out different phases in the process of foreign language learning. As such, the concept of IL (Selinker, 2011) in the present study refers to learners' written essays which demonstrate definitely their actual phase in their language learning development, as a result having concerns on their teaching/learning process. Implications for practice

The complete success in foreign language learning is reached by very small number of learners as being perhaps a *permanent failure* (Nakuma, 1998: 247), thus stopping or preventing fossilization is challenging to EFL educators. Developing a methodology that is based on precise practices can be a crucial concern for each teacher as to be established in light of learners' stages

of fossilization. Nonetheless, the outcomes of the present study put forward a number of pedagogical implications for the skill of writing in an EFL setting. The main implication, as errors echo writers' IL (Selinker, 1972), it is imperative for teachers to create a wide-ranging classification of their errors; particularly errors related to sentence level, i.e. syntax and style (as indicated under the category of 'others' in the Table earlier). Such classification help in understanding the writing process in terms of identifying the causes of errors as well as in informing writers about their persistent unchanging errors (James, 1998).

What's more, as this study reported that a quiet large number of errors that are fossilized, it is crucial for teachers to use translation when cross-linguistic similarities between English and Arabic are found (Brown, 2000; Nation, 2003). Further, Selinker (2011) confirmed that some errors can be stabilized after being simplified. For example in this study, earlier *fossilized* learners' errors continued to use verb inflection despite the fact of continuing to write simplified forms of stabilized verbs. Still, Corder (1981) asserted that simplification cannot take place unless learners already possess linguistic forms.

FL writing involves a planning process (i.e. a cognitive psychology perspective) as well as a consideration of the setting process (i.e. a sociocultural perspective) which are combined constructively (Han, 20054).Thus, learners' role should be activated by inviting them to use strategies which help them to raise their consciousness towards their writing performance. In such instance, errors will be no more seen as negative but rather as constructive stages in the process of FL.

Specifically*,* learners can be trained to use 'good' writing strategies. Effective foreign language learners are aware of the learning strategies they use and why they use them (O'Malley & Chamot, 1990). Since successful learning takes place when learners deliberately relate new knowledge to the existing one (Ausubel, 2000). For vocabulary learning for instance, memory strategies are advocated.

Communicative competence strategies entailing functional practice in L2 writing will be helpful in L2 writing. Richards (2008) indicated that fossilization is caused by the absence of communication in classroom where fluency is accentuated over accuracy. Therefore, learners should be stimulated to speak and write meaningfully rather than being grammatically right. In order to reduce transfer from l2, Corder (1978) suggested encouraging writers to read more articles and to scrutinize the usage of the words and sentences in context. Since Exposing to L2 culture may also promote L2 learning, which in turn, reduces learners' IL fossilized forms

In written essays, IL performance is a concrete proof of a writer's phase of Vygotsky's (1978: 85) cognitive Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). Vygotsky specified that ZPD is *the difference between the child's developmental level (...) and the higher level of potential development as determined through problem solving*. IL offers tangible linguistic proof which in turn helps to assess language development accurately (i.e. ZPD). Thus, ZPD entails didactic practices to be performed by the teacher as it displays clear indication of the positive/negative accomplishment in language learning progress. As far as entailing techniques in classroom to overcome IL fossilized errors. Richards (2008) proposed three chief techniques: firstly, integrating an overt instruction of grammar; secondly,

conscious raising techniques for detecting grammatical aspects through review processes; and thirdly, expanding techniques by the means of intensified communicative tasks in addition to in view of linguistic form.

Finally, IL practice implications were made evident by Selinker (1972) who confirmed incorporating investigation in addition to practice implications in order to develop FL learning process. As being rather difficult to demonstrate, longitudinal studies may provide answers for unseen secrets of IL fossilization as opposed to cross sectional studies (Long, 2003). As such, error can be detected and asserted. Such detection is regarded as a crucial step that paves the way feedback by the teacher.

It' worth pointing out that there is no one standard way to judge the meaning of sentences, paragraphs or essays. For instance, one participant in this study wrote: *teachers give no strategies*. This sentence is considered as ill-formed for advanced level learners in academic written output where accuracy is important, nonetheless it is certainly an adequate sentence if written in another social context. And so, in order to judge sentences, paragraphs or essays as being ill-formed or as well-formed it is crucial to identify its context (Hymes, 1972).

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