

ERROR ANALYSIS OF INTENSIVE ENGLISH STUDENTS' WRITTEN COMPOSITIONS AT THE OPEN EDUCATIONAL COLLEGE

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تحليل أخطاء طلبة كلية التربية المفتوحة في كتابة الإنشاء

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كلية التربية المفتوحة/ وزارة التربية

المخلص

يكشف البحث الحالي في مجال اكتساب اللغة ان تحليل الخطأ (Error Analysis) هو احد الوسائل المستعملة في قياس نقاط ضعف متعلمي اللغة الاجنبية حيث يهدف هذا البحث الحالي الى التحقق من خلال استقصاء تحليل الاخطاء ,الى الاخطاء الاعرابية والصرفية التي يرتكبها الطلبة عندما يكتبوا النصوص الوصفية و القصصية . تكونت عينة الدراسة من سبعين طالب و طالبة طبقوا البرنامج الانكليزي في الكلية التربوية المفتوحة/ مركز القادسية للعام الدراسي ٢٠١٤-٢٠١٥ . ان الهدف الاساسي لهذه الدراسة هو تحديد المشاكل النحوية التي تواجه الطلبة لكي نبني ونصمم منهاج في ضوء تلك النتائج. تقترح نتائج البحث ان كلا الانواع الادبية (Narrative) والوصفية (Descriptive) تؤدي الى نفس انواع الاخطاء. وفي ضوء النتائج ان الاخطاء الاعرابية التي وجدت هي اكثر من الاخطاء الصرفية . اخيرا, وجد ان المشاركين ارتكبوا اخطاء اكثر في النصوص الوصفية من النصوص الادبية.

ABSTRACT

Research in the field of language acquisition reveals that error analysis is one of the central means used to measure foreign language learners' areas of weaknesses. This research aimed at examining, through an error analysis investigation, the morphological and syntactic errors that student writers made when they wrote in descriptive and narrative genres. The population of the study consisted of seventy college students attending the intensive English program at the Open Educational College/ Al-Qadisiya Center for the academic year 2015-2014. The basic goal aimed at identifying the most problematic and grammatical areas that students faced in order to construct materials and narrative genres resulted in the same types of errors. In terms of frequency, syntactic errors were found to be much higher than the morphological ones. Finally, it was found that the participants had made more errors in the descriptive texts than in the narrative ones.

Introduction

Errors made by students have a high teaching value. The literature on error-analysis (EA) clearly demonstrates that making errors is a natural part in the process of teaching/ learning a language. For instance, Strevens (1969:45) observes that "The development of error analysis is in part a product of an increasingly rigorous and scientific outlook on two activities, learning and teaching". In this respect, EA has played a potentially important role in designing instruction to shed light on the second language (L2) learner's errors. Similarly, Corder (1967:48) maintains that EA states that errors made by the language learners provide evidence of the system of the language they are using. Furthermore, Corder reveals that EA provides the language teacher with an important source of information for the selection of items to be incorporated in the syllabus. Likewise, Richards (1974:98) asserts that EA has applied linguistic justification in that the data which is obtained from the classroom can both serve as the input to the theoretical discussion and, after evaluation, feedback to the design of remedial curricula.

The above line of research suggests that the error analyst views error as a natural part and a necessary stage in all learning (Kroll&Shacter, 1984:37). In an attempt to investigate on learners' errors, several researchers in the field of second language acquisition, such as Corder (1967:35), Richards (1971:112), George (1972:87), have examined the written products of L2 learners in order to identify and categorize their errors. In that respect, the writing of students have been the focus of language

research since it provides tangible evidence about the errors that the second language learners are making (Hayes and Flowers, 1981:77; Shaughnessy,1977:98).

From this view, it is argued that an error analysis investigation of students' written compositions plays a major role in shedding light on the errors that they make. The need, therefore, arises for undertaking a study on foreign language learners' errors made in their written tasks in order to identify, categorize and then describe these errors.

The problem

The purpose of this research is to examine the morphological and syntactic errors made by the students enrolled in the Intensive English Program at the Open Educational College. These errors will be examined and analyzed through students' written composition in order to identify their areas of weaknesses in English writing.

Researchers in the field of L2 or such as Corder (1974:65) argues that when students write in a particular text-type they may exhibit a tendency to make certain types of errors different from those errors that they make while writing in another text-type. Thus, the participants of this study will compose in two different text-types, i.e., descriptive and narrative, in order to identify such different type of errors. Both descriptive and narrative genres appear to be the most suitable for the participants of this study since all of them have had experience with these text-types during their writing course.

The study will address the following questions:

1. What types of errors do students make in morphology and syntax when they write in descriptive and narrative compositions?
2. Which types of errors are more frequent in the students' descriptive and narrative compositions?
3. In which text-type, descriptive or narrative, do students make higher percentage of errors?

There is a general agreement among such as Corder(1967:98),Richards(1974:112), Etherton(1977:136),Dulay Burt and Krashen (1983:147) that EA can be significant and insightful in several ways. For example, EA provides information about the nature of the language learning process. Moreover, it can be helpful in assessing the teaching and learning process, setting up teaching priorities, and establishing a rank ordering of the areas of difficulties that students face. Also, EA shows which material is most suitable to teach at a given stage. As a result, educators and researchers in the field of second and foreign language acquisition have been interested in identifying, classifying and describing errors through EA in order to determine the language learners' areas of difficulties and to revise the syllabus to facilitate the teaching learning process in light of such errors.

Based on the important role of EA in understanding and facilitating the teaching learning process, the basic goals of this study centers around the following: identifying, categorizing and classifying students' written errors at the program to determine the students' areas of difficulties and to revise the syllabus and teaching materials in light of these findings.

Context of the problem

A considerable number of language learners in Iraq could be classified as limited English proficient (LEP). Most of these students, when applying to English medium universities, fail the English entrance examinations. Consequently, programs concerned with the needs of these students have proliferated in Iraq. One such program is the Intensive English program at the Open Educational College (O.E.C).This program was established in 1999 and has developed along the years. It caters for students who are eligible to join O.E. There are two levels in the program, Intensive II and Intensive III. Students who score between 400 and 499 on the English exam, are accepted at Level II. Students who score between 450 and 499 on the English Exam are accepted at Intensive III.

The program is divided into two semesters, Fall and Spring, and each semester consists of 12 weeks. During these weeks, students attend classes 8 hours per week, and each week is divided in the following way: 2 hours of grammar, 2 hours of writing, 2 hours of reading and vocabulary, and 2 hours of listening in the language laboratory.

The program aims at improving the English communication skills of students. Integrated communicative approach is adopted in teaching the major language skills. For instance, the writing exercise complements the reading lesson, and the listening lab complements the reading, writing and grammar skills. Each lesson in every skill is highly integrated with the other lesson in the other skills.

Limitation

The findings of this study cannot be generalized since they are limited to a sample of seventy students being studied in the first semester of the Intensive English program, Levels II and III, at the Open Educational College.

RELATED STUDIES

This section will clarify what has been written by specialists in the field of EA in terms of how errors are defined and viewed. Moreover, some light will be shed on how learners' errors have been investigated along the years moving from the contrastive analysis movement to error analysis. Finally, this section will review some of the related studies and research done in the field of EA from different language backgrounds.

Views on Errors and Their Significance

Errors have been viewed in various ways, from negative acts to necessary positive ones. Dulay, Burt and Krashen (1982:138) for instance, state errors as the defective side of the learner's speech or writing. According to them, errors "are those parts of conversation or composition that deviate from some selected norm of mature language performance".

Corder (1974:86) maintains that the language learner is progressively changing his language performance so as to bring it more into line with that of the native speaker.

Along the same lines, Lengo (1995:63) asserts that through the committed errors of the language learners, one can determine their level of mastery of the language system. Thus, errors should help determine which areas in the learner's language need more attention and what type of attention.

In the past, teachers have been concerned with students' errors; however, most teachers viewed errors in solely negative terms. Over the years, errors began to be approached from a different perspective. Teachers began to view student errors as exceptionally interesting clues about the unobserved linguistic and cognitive processes of the learner (Kroll and Shafer, 1984:25). Kroll and Shafer in that sense, view errors as "necessary stages in all language learning, as the product of intelligent cognitive strategies and therefore as potentially useful indicators of what processes the student is learning".

Moreover, Strevens(1969:87) supposes that errors should not be viewed as problems to be overcome, but rather as normal and inevitable features that indicate the strategies that the learners use. This researcher asserts that if a regular pattern of errors could be observed in the performance of all learners in a given situation and if a learner were seen to progress through this pattern, his errors could be taken as evidence not of failure but of success and achievement in learning.

Similarly, Corder(1973:76) mentions that errors in second language use reveal a systematic attempt to deal with the data, and that they should play the same role in the study of second language learning as differences between child and adult performance play in the study of first language acquisition. Moreover, he asserts that such an investigation in the study of the learners' errors would assume the role it already plays in the study of child language acquisition, since the key concept is that the learner is using a definite system of language at every point in his development, although it is not the adult system, in the one case, nor that of the second language in the other. Therefore, the learners' errors are evidence of this system and are themselves systematic.

Contrastive Analysis

The contrastive analysis (CA) hypothesis was powerful in the field of applied linguistics and second language teaching for over two decades. This movement, which was popular in the 1960's, rested on a comparison of the learner's native language and target language. For example, Lado

(1957:52), who was one of the early proponents of contrastive analysis, expressed the basic aim of this systematic as follows:

We can predict and describe the patterns that will cause difficulty in learning L2 and those that will not cause difficulty by comparing systematically the language and culture to be learned with the native language and culture of the student. In our view, the preparation of up to date material must be based on this kind of comparison. (Lado,1957: 52)

This view of learning, prevalent of that time, provided theoretical justification for contrastive analysis. It held that learning was basically a process of forming automatic habits and those errors should therefore result from first language habits interfering with the learners' attempts to learn new linguistic behavior. It was thought that contrastive analysis of the learner's two languages would predict the areas in the target language that would prove to be most difficult (Fries, 1945:65).

However, it was found that many of the predictions made by this hypothesis had been wrong. Attentive teachers and researchers noticed that a great number of student errors could not be possibly traced to their native language. Moreover, similar observations revealed the defects and gap between theory and reality and set the scene for the acceptance of a more comprehensive approach to errors (Dulay, Burt and Krashen, 1982:93).

According to Burt, Dulay and Krashen (1982:94), the available empirical data that addresses the contrastive analysis hypothesis has revealed that:

1. In neither child nor adult L2 performance do the majority of the grammatical errors reflect the learners' L1.
2. L2 learners make many errors in areas of grammar that are comparable in both L1 and L2-errors that should not be mad if "positive transfer" was operating.
3. L2 learners' judgments of the grammatical correctness of L2 sentences are more related to L2 sentence type than to their own L1 structure.
4. Phonological errors exhibit more L1 influence than do grammatical errors, although a substantial number of the L2 phonological errors children make are similar to those made by monolingual first language learners, and only a small proportion of phonological errors in reading are traceable to the learners' L1.

Interference from the mother tongue is a major source of difficulty in second language learning, and contrastive analysis has proved valuable in locating areas of interlanguage interference. However, researchers such as Richards (1974:99) maintain that many errors are errors are derived from the strategies employed by the learner in language acquisition and from the mutual interference of items within the target language. These cannot be accounted for by contrastive analysis. As a result, linguists started proposing closer studies of the performance of the actual learner and his errors.

Error Analysis

Corder (1957:22) who was one of the earliest researchers in the field of error analysis, maintains that learners' errors are of crucial significance to researchers, teachers, and students: researchers can reveal the strategies employed by the learners in concern; teachers will be able to know the proficiency level of their students; and learners can make use of errors to facilitate learning .

Traditionally, error analysis was basically used to identify and classify learners' errors while learning a second or foreign language. However, a shift started taking place and the purpose of error analysis became concerned with the differences between the learners' system of the target language and the system of the target language itself. From this perspective, Richards (1971:58) defines the field of error analysis as dealing with the differences between the way people learning a language speak, and the way adult native speakers of the language use the language.

According to Ney (1962:84), error analysis has several advantages over contrastive analysis. It has the advantage that it does not depend ultimately on certain assumptions as contrastive analysis does. For instance, it does not predict the patterns of difficulty in L2 learning based on the system of

the learner's L1. Another advantage is that it gives results that lead to a clear understanding of the relative difficulty of each error made.

Hence EA became, according to Burt, Dulay and Krashen (1982:140), a rich source of explanation for the many as yet unexplained but frequently observed errors. According to these researchers the movement of the error analysis can be characterized as "an account for learner errors that could not be explained or predicted by contrastive analysis behaviorist theory..."

As a result of this shift, error analysis has been most successful and significant in evaluating the status of errors from complete undesirability to the special status of research object, curriculum guide and indicator of learning stages.

Etherton (1977:147) also reveals that error analysis is a form of self-education: shows teacher areas where her teaching has not been successful; helps improve the teaching methods through a great awareness of the nature and causes of the mistakes which pupils make.

Corder (1974:67) distinguished three stages in error analysis: (a) recognition, (b) description (c) explanation. According to Corder, these stages are logically dependent on each other. For instance, the recognition of error is crucially dependent upon correct interpretation of the learner's intention. Moreover, description, which is a comparative process, can only begin when recognition has taken place. These two stages, the researcher can move on to the explanation stage where he intends to explain why and how this error came about.

Moreover, Corder moves on to distinguish between two types of errors: systematic and non-systematic. The former reveals the underlying knowledge of the learner- "Transitional competence. ". The latter, however, are those of performance which are made even by native speakers by virtue of memory lapses, physical state or psychological conveniences. These mistakes can be corrected by the learner himself.

In the same respect, Richards (1971:50), draws a distinction between developmental errors and intralingual errors. According to him, the developmental errors are basically systematic and represent either a transitional stage in the development of a grammatical rule or the final stage of the speaker's knowledge. As for the intralingual errors, Richards defines them as reflecting the general characteristics of rule learning, such as faulty generalization, incomplete application of rules, and failure to learn conditions under which rules apply (Richards, 1971:51).

A more comprehensive approach to errors has been developed by Selinker(1972:72) who coined the term "interlanguage." This term refers to the learners' speech as being invariably different from the target language. Selinker also draws attention to the constructive features of errors in language learning. In studying errors, one should not, according to Selinker, limit himself to the surface phenomenon. On the contrary one has to go deep into the linguistic and psychological aspects of errors. Selinker called the characteristic features of "interlanguage" fossilizable structure." These are considered as erroneous constructions emanating from five processes: language transfer, transfer of training, strategies of learning, strategies of communication, and overgeneralization of linguistic material.

In light of what has been mentioned , it becomes clear that error analysis has major roles in the field of second language learning. For instance, error analysis has shown through research done in the field that the majority of errors do not come from first language interference. Moreover, error analysis proved to be most prominent in facilitating the language/ teaching process. Corder (1974:69) considers error analysis as one of the main sources of information that can be used in developing language teaching programs and syllabuses.

Defects in Error Analysis

Error analysis is not free of weaknesses. One of its major defects has been its inadequacy to cope with all the errors made by foreign or second language learners.

Schacter and Celce-Murcia (1977:132) argue that there are six potential weaknesses in the area of error analysis. These weaknesses are

1. The analysis of errors in isolation;
2. The classification of identified errors;
3. Statements of error frequency;
4. The identification of points of difficulty;
5. The ascription of causes to systematic errors;
6. The biased nature of sampling procedures

Along the same line, Dulay, Burt and Krashen (1982:78), maintains that there are three conceptual weaknesses:

1. Confusion of explanatory and descriptive aspects of error analysis;
- 2 .Lack of sufficient and specificity in the definition of error categories;
- 3 .The inappropriate use of simplistic classification to explain learners' errors.

Previous Studies

In this section, an overview will be presented on some of the previous studies and research work done in the field of error analysis on student's error coming from different linguistic background

Dualy and burt (1973) conducted two research studies sequentially on child second language acquisition .The first study used comparative error analysis to determine whether the L2 errors children make be accounted for be creative construction . The second study compared the sequence of certain grammatical morphemes in three different groups of children using a cross-sectional technique. The combined findings of the two studies suggest that, given a natural communication situation , children's innate ability to organize structure accounts in a major way for their acquisition of L2syntax. They eventually suggest that learning of syntax should be left to the children and not to the teachers.

Scoot and tucker (1974) studied both written and oral errors in English language made be Arabic-speaking students. The data were gathered at two intervals. The first was at the beginning of the semester of intensive English instruction at the American University of Beirut, and the second at the end of the same semester. Errors were analyzed in terms of performance errors, native language interference, and false interference analogy. It was found that intralingual interference (confusion arising within English) accounted for omission of auxiliaries, copula, prepositions, articles and repetition of subjects and objects.

The results of this study showed that the major areas of difficulty to Arab learners of English language were tenses, preposition, articles and relative clauses.

Abu shanab (1978) carried out a study on Saudi Arabian students who were studying English in Aramco Training center. In his study, Abu Shanab analyzed the grammatical errors in the composition of 163 students. The data of the study were collected at two different periods. Among other syntactic errors made by the subjects of the study, it was found that errors in the verb category were the most frequent. Moreover, this researcher reported that L1 was a major influence especially with tenses, articles, prepositions, and pronouns.

Kharma(1982)undertook a study in Kuwait to investigate the errors in definite and indefinite articles committed by Arab students at the secondary level. The results uncovered some of the causes of errors in articles. Among these are interference from Arabic, overgeneralization, the complicated nature of English definite and indefinite system, the nature of the English language course taught at schools in Kuwait and inadequate teaching of English articles. The percentages of error were recorded as 36.6% in the indefinite articles "a" and "an",51.4% in zero articles, and 31.7% in the definite " the"

Reid (1990) undertook a study to determine whether or not text difference would result in different types of errors in syntax and vocabulary, and if the percentage of content words differs. The reported findings reveal that when student writes address two different text types, their syntax does not change. However, the vocabulary chosen by the students in their essays varied significantly with text types

METHODOLOGY

Participants

The participants in this research were seventy students enrolled in the first semester of the Intensive English program, levels II and III, at the Open Educational College in Al-Qadisiya Center. The participants had completed their high school education in Iraq. They work as primary teachers in Iraqi schools. Their native language is Arabic with English as a foreign language. They ranged in age from 25 to 50 years. They were accepted into the college on the basis of their work as primary teachers in schools.

Materials

For the purpose of this study, a linguistic taxonomy was followed for the identification, categorization, and coding of students' errors. This taxonomy was devised by Politzer and Ramirez (1973:75) in an attempt to classify and categorize the errors made by students of the open education collage in morphology and syntax. Based on this taxonomy, the present study devised categories and subcategories of morphology and syntax in the following order:

I. Morphology

- A. Indefinite Article
- B. Possessive Case
- C. Third Person Singular
- D. Simple Past Tense
- E. Comparative Adjective/ Adverb

II. Syntax

A. Noun Phrase

1. Determiners
2. Nominalization
3. Number
4. Pronouns
5. Prepositions

6. Conjunction

B. Verb phrase

1. Main Verb
2. Progressive Verb
3. Agreement of Subject and Verb

C. Word Order

D. Transformations

E. Passive

Procedure

All of the students participating in the study were asked to write two compositions, at two different intervals, the first using the descriptive genre and the second using the narrative genre. They were not asked to write a specific number of words. The data were collected over a period of two weeks. During the first week, the participants wrote descriptive compositions in response to the following topic:

Between classes, you probably spend time somewhere on campus. Try to describe the place accurately. Concentrate on look, smell, and sound.

After one week, the participants were asked to write narrative compositions in response to the following topic:

You are half an hour late for class and you report to your teacher who is very strict. She says, "There will be no punishment if you come up with a good story to explain your lateness." What story do you give her?

Both the descriptive and narrative samples were analyzed in order to identify and classify the types of errors made by the participants. These identified errors were then coded on prepared taxonomy sheets according to categories and subcategories. To make sure that they were properly identified, the inter rater reliability was calculated. Another rater, an English teacher who teaches in the intensive program, corrected 35 compositions. These compositions were randomly chosen from the 140 essays by drawing out every fourth paper. The correlation coefficient between two raters on 35 items score was 0.95.

Data Analysis

To accomplish the purpose of the study, several consecutive stages of analysis were performed. The first stage addressed the first question posited in this study: What types of errors do students make in morphology and syntax as they write descriptive and narrative compositions? Analysis of students' errors was performed by identifying, categorizing, and coding these errors on the prepared taxonomy sheets. A sentence was considered to have a grammatical error on the basis of its correspondence to Standard English. For instance, a student who wrote in his descriptive composition:

'me and my friends have a special place on campus and it has it's own look, smell, and sound.'

This sentence had morphological errors, after identification one error was coded under the 'possessive case' category since the student added an apostrophe to the latter *s*, hence, writing *it's* instead of *its*. Another error was coded under the pronoun case because the student wrote "me and my friends" instead of "my friends and me". In that manner, all the grammatical errors identified in both samples were coded according to category or subcategory, and were later entered in to the computer program.

The second stage included the statistical computations needed to answer question two and three: Which types of error are more frequent in the participants' descriptive and narrative compositions? And in which text type, descriptive or narrative, do students make higher percentage of errors? In an attempt to answer these two questions, all data calculations were performed using the statistical package for the social science (SPSS) computer program. This program was used in order to calculate the frequency distribution and the percentages of the analyzed errors.

RESULTS

The data collected and analyzed in this study reveal that the participants made errors in all of the morphological and syntactic categories constructed in the taxonomy except for the indefinite category.

After having identified the types of errors made by the participants, a list of categories and subcategories that includes all the morphology and syntax errors emerged (see table 1).

Table 1 lists all of the categories and subcategories of the identified errors made in both the descriptive and narrative samples. The table also indicates the number of errors made in each category and subcategory, as well as the percentages of those errors as a function of the total number of error made in each sample.

Table1
Number of Error Found in the Descriptive & Narrative Samplers & Their Percentages as a Function of Total Number of Errors in Each Sample

Error Category	Frequency	Descriptive Sample		Narrative Sample
		Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Morphology	114	18.12	145	29.2
Indefinite article	0	0	0	0
Possessive case	27	4.29	12	2.41
Third person singular	38	6.04	18	3.62
Simple past tense	41	6.51	107	21.57
Adjective/adverb	8	1.27	8	1.61
Syntax	515	81.8	351	70.76
Noun phrase	389	61.8	268	54.03
<i>Determiners</i>	113	17.9	57	11.49
<i>Nominalization</i>	7	1.11	4	0.80
<i>Number</i>	63	10	15	3.02

<i>Pronoun</i>	64	10.17	43	8.66
<i>Preposition</i>	137	21.78	139	28.02
<i>Conjunction</i>	5	0.79	10	2.01
Verb phrase	77	12.24	50	10.08
<i>Main verb</i>	16	2.54	38	7.66
<i>Progressive tense</i>	27	4.29	7	1.41
<i>Subject/verb agreem</i>	34	6.83	5	1
Word order	22	3.49	18	3.62
Transformations	16	2.54	3	0.60
Passive	11	1.74	12	2.41
Total No. of errors	629	55.9%	496	44%

Morphological Errors

This major category includes all the errors made in the following areas: indefinite article, possessive case, third person singular, simple past tense, and the comparative adjective/adverb. The results reported in table 1 indicate that none of the participants made errors in the indefinite article. Hence, in this chapter this error category will not be discussed any further.

Possessive Case

The possessive case is formed by adding an apostrophe and an S to signify possession. Errors identified in this category were either the addition of an apostrophe to S when not needed, or the omission of the apostrophe when needed. Examples of such errors are included in the following sentences taken from both the descriptive and narrative samples:

- I'll say very noisy, all the students' are taking ... phone' are ringing.
- I discovered that the alarm clocks' battery was empty.
- I usually prefer spending my free time in the universities cafeteria.

The researcher identified 39 possessive case errors, 27 were in the descriptive sample, (which represents around 4.29% out of the total number of errors made in that sample), and 12 errors were in the narrative sample (which represents around 2.41% out of the total errors made in the narrative sample) (see table 1).

Moreover, table 2 shows how many participants made errors in the possessive case category. First, the table refers to the number of participants and their percentages of errors in this category in both samples at the same time Second, the table more specifically explains how many of these participants were from the descriptive sample and how many were from the narrative sample.

Table 2
Possessive Case Errors

	Number of errors	Number Of participants	Percentage Of participants
Descriptive & narrative Samples	0	116	82.9
	1	14	10
	2	6	4.3
	3	3	2.1
	4	1	0.7
	4	140	100
Descriptive Sample	0	54	77.1
	1	10	14.3
	2	2	2.9
	3	3	4.3
	4	1	1.4
Narrative Sample	0	70	100
	0	62	88.6
	1	4	5.7
	2	4	5.7
		70	100

As table 2 shows, 116 participants (around 82.9%) out of the 140 did not make errors in this category. The data also show that 54 participant (77.1%) out of the 70 did not make errors in this category while writing the descriptive compositions, and 62 participant (88.6%) while writing the narrative composition. However, 14 participants (10%) misused this category once, 10 of those participants were in the descriptive sample and 4 were in the narrative. Those who made errors in this area twice in the same compositions were 6 participants, 2 in the descriptive sample and 4 in the narrative one. The remaining errors that appeared 3 times and 1 time were identified in the descriptive sample only.

Third Person Singular

Errors in this category were the failure to add an S to the verb or the wrong attachment of S to the verb. Examples of third person singular include:

- It is always full of students who eats and watch T.V.
- When one look in the study room he/she see tables and chairs.

The above example show that students either omitted or added an S to the verb, and table 1 shows that 56 third person singular errors were identified in both samples. From this table it is indicated that 38 errors (6.04%) were identified in the descriptive sample, and 18 errors (3.62%) in the narrative sample.

Table 3 also shows how many participants did not use this area correctly. For instance, 37 participants had problems using this category in both sample, 23 in the descriptive sample and 14 in the narrative. Those who made errors in this category once in their compositions were 27 students (19.3%), 17 of these in the descriptive (24.3 %), twice while composing, 4 while composing in the descriptive (5.7%) and also 4 while composing in the narrative. The table indicates that the rest of the errors were made in the descriptive composition; one student used this category incorrectly six times, another 7 times.

Table 3\ Third Person Singular Error category

	Number Of errors	Number Of participants	Percentage Of Participants
Descriptive & narrative Samples	0	103	73.6
	1	27	19.3
	2	8	5.7
	6	1	5.7
	7	1	100
	7	140	
Descriptive Sample	0	47	67.1
	1	17	24.3
	2	4	5.7
	6	1	1.4
	7	1	1.4
	7	70	100
Narrative Sample	0	56	80.3
	1	10	14.3
	4	4	5.7
	2	70	100

Simple Past Tense

Errors in this area were divided into two subcategories: the regular and irregular past tense. In the regular past tense subcategory, an error was identified if a student omitted 'ed' or added 'ed' to past already formed. In the irregular past tense subcategory, an error was identified if student regularized the verb tense by adding 'ed' to irregular tense or substituted the past tense another non-past tense. The following are example of tense errors taken from both samples:

- everyone was interested and attract to do many activities.
- most of my time spend on campus between classes.

- sometimes I tried to study there by I can't.
- there is a large bar for preparing food and people can found many waiters.

In table 1 the results that the participants had 148 errors in this area, 41 were identified in the descriptive sample (65%) and 107 were identified in the narrative sample (21.57%).

Also, table 4 shows how many participants used incorrectly this category. The data indicate that the simple past tense is one of the most frequently incorrect categories in this study. Only 69 participants did not make errors in this category (49.3%), however, around 50% of the participants had trouble using this category. For instance, in the descriptive sample, 17 students made errors in this category once while composing (24.3%), and in the narrative sample 20 students had the same value (28.6%). Those who had this error twice in the same composition were 9 participants in the descriptive sample (12.9%) and 8 in the narrative sample (11.4%). Those who made errors in this category 3 times were 2 while writing in the descriptive (2.9). This table indicates that the remaining errors were identified in the narrative composition. Two students made errors in this category 4 times, 2 of them 6 time, one made errors 7 times, one made 8 errors, and finally one student had major problem using this category for he incorrectly formed this category 12 times while writing.

**Table 4\ Simple Past Tense Error Category
Comparative Adjective/Adverb**

	Number Of errors	Number Of participants	Percentage Of participants
Descriptive & narrative sample	0	67	49.3
	1	37	26.4
	2	17	12.1
	3	10	7.1
	4	2	1.4
	6	2	1.4
	7	1	0.7
	8	1	0.7
	12	1	0.7
	140	100	
Descriptive Sample	0	42	60
	1	17	24.3
	2	9	12.9
	3	2	2.9
		70	100
Narrative Sample	0	27	38.6
	1	20	28.6
	2	8	11.4
	4	2	2.9
	6	2	2.9
	7	1	1.4
	8	1	1.4
	12	1	1.4
		70	100

This category includes the wrong use of adjective for adverbs or adverbs for adjectives as well as using nouns instead of adjectives or adverbs. Also misusing the comparative or superlative adjectives. Examples include:

- I put on my clothes and started running like a fool person.
- I feel comfort in the cafeteria.
- But unfortunately, like usually, obstacles occurred.
- But it was the most bad day in my life.

The results in table 1 demonstrate that the participants did not have a real problem in this area compared to the other morphological categories. Sixteen errors were identified in both samples, 8 in the descriptive sample (1.27%) and 8 in the narrative sample (1.61%).

Also, table 5 shows that around 89% of the students did not make errors in this category. Thus 14 participants (around 10%) incorrectly used the adjective/adverb category once; 6 students in the descriptive sample, and 8 in the narrative sample. Moreover, one participant made 2 errors while composing in the descriptive genre.

Table 5\ Comparative Adjective/ Adverb Error Category

	Number Of errors	Number Of participants	Percentage Of participants
Descriptive & narrative Samples	0	125	89.3
	1	14	10.0
	2	1	0.7
		140	100
Descriptive samples	0	63	90
	1	6	8.6
	2	1	1
		70	100
Narrative Samples	0	62	88.6
	1	8	11.4
		70	100

Syntax Errors

The syntactic errors that were included in this study were divided into five categories and nine subcategories. The result reveal that the verb phrase category and the noun phrase category, unlike transformation, word order, and passive, were determiners, pronoun, number, and verbs.

Noun Phrase

This area included the following subcategories: determiners, nominalization, number, pronoun, preposition, and conjunction. The total number of errors made in these subcategories was 657, of these 389 noun phrase errors were identified in the descriptive phrase errors were identified in the narrative sample (54.03% out of the total errors in the narrative sample).

Verb Phrase Errors

This category is divided into 3 subcategories: main verb, progressive verb, and subject/verb agreement. All three of these subcategories resulted in 127 verb phrase errors out of all the errors identified in the study , i.e., around 11.28% out of total number of errors made in both samples.

In the descriptive sample, the total number of errors was 77, around 12.24% out of the total errors made in the descriptive sample. Also, in the narrative sample, 50 errors were identified, around 10.08% out of the total number of errors made in this sample.

Word Order

This category included wrong order of words. For instance, errors such as the use of nouns for adjectives, nouns for verbs and vice versa were identified. Also, Arabic word order retained in the English sentence was identified. Examples of such errors include:

- So I forgot to set the alarm clock on six oclock.
- and you can imagine about what he had to talk about.

From both samples, 40 word order errors were identified. Table 1 shows that 22 of these errors were made in the descriptive compositions (3.49%) and 18 errors were made in the narrative compositions (3.62%).

Table 6 shows that 75% of the participants did not make word order errors. However, around 24% of the students had problems in this area. In the descriptive sample, 17 participants made errors in this subcategory once (24.3%), one student made it twice (1.4%) and one student 3 times (1.4%).

Moreover, in the narrative sample, 13 participants made errors in this area once (18.6%), 1 student made it twice (1.4%) and another student 3 times (1.4%).

Table6\ Word Order Error Category

	Number Of error	Number of participants	Percentage Of participants
Descriptive & narrative Sample	0	106	75.7
	1	30	21.4
	2	2	1.4
	3	2	1.4
		140	100
Descriptive Sample	0	51	72.9
	1	17	24.3
	2	1	1.4
	3	1	1.4
		70	100
Narrative Sample	0	55	78.6
	1	13	18.6
	2	1	1.4
	3	1	1.4
		70	100

Transformations

In this category, 'there' transformation was incorrect if the participants used 'there is' instead of 'there are' or vice versa. Examples include:

- there is too many reasons I can tell.
- in the corner there are a stand of food.

Table 1 shows that 19 such errors were identified under this category from both samples; 16 errors from the descriptive sample (2.54%) and 3 errors from the narrative sample (0.60%).

Since this category was not problematic, around 90% of the students did not make errors in this area. Table 16 shows that in the descriptive sample six participants made errors in this category once (8.6%), 2 students 2 times (2.9%) and 2 other students had this error 3 times (2.9%). In the narrative sample only 3 students made errors in this area once (4.3%).

Table 7\ Transformation Error Category

	Number Of error	Number Of participants	Percentage Of participants
Descriptive & narrative samples	0	127	90.7
	1	9	6.4
	2	2	1.4
	3	2	1.4
		140	100
Descriptive sample	0	60	85.7
	1	6	8.6
	2	2	2.9
	3	2	2.9
		70	100
Narrative	0	67	95.7
	1	3	4.3
Sample		70	100

Passive

In this category errors included the misformation of passive verbs, using the active order but passive form, or using the passive order but the active form. For example:

- then something was hit by the car.
- I was woke up by a strange noise.
- You will be very noisy by the sound of music.

Table 1 shows that there were 23 passive errors in both samples, 11 in the descriptive (1.74%) And 12 in the narrative sample (2.41%).

Also table 17 shows that 85% of the participants did not make errors in the passive verbs. The results of this table indicate that the number of participants who made errors in both descriptive and narrative were very close (10 descriptive and 11 narrative). In the descriptive sample, 9 participants made passive errors once in their compositions (12.9%), and one student had 2 errors in his composition (1.4%). In the narrative the results were similar, 10 participants made one error in this area (14.3%) and one student had it twice (1.4%).

Table 8\ Passive Error Category

	Number Of errors	Number Of participants	Percentage Of participants
Descriptive & narrative sample	0	119	85
	1	19	13.6
	2	2	1.4
		140	100
Descriptive sample	0	60	85.7
	1	9	12.9
	2	1	1.4
		70	100
Narrative Sample	0	59	84.3
	1	10	14.3
	2	1	1.4
		70	100

With respect to the third question addressed in this study and which aims at investigating whether the descriptive or the narrative text results in a higher number of errors, the findings presented in figure 1 show that around 60% of the errors were identified in the descriptive sample and around 40% were identified in the narrative sample.

conclusion

The purpose of this study sought to examine the grammatical errors made by the student writers at the Intensive English Program at The Open Educational College. More specifically, the study aimed at identifying the frequently occurring errors in both descriptive and narrative composition, and to investigate in which of these text types did students make a higher number of errors. The 140 compositions that were linguistically analyzed rendered several important findings. However, it is important to mention here that the findings of this study are limited to the sample being studied.

Concerning the grammatical errors, it was found that the participants had problems in morphology and syntax. This finding is similar to the findings of those earlier done in the field of error analysis. For instance, Karallah (1986:89) reported in the findings that many areas of morphology and syntax posed problems for the Arabs participants while trying to communicate in writing in English. This present study, however, indicates that syntax was more problematic than morphology. The noun phrase category, under the syntax area was considered to have the highest number of errors. Also, the

ranking order that was established in this study shows that prepositions, articles, pronouns, and number were the most frequent errors made in this study.

The findings also reveal that the participants had made the same types of grammatical errors in both texts. Similarly, Reid (1990:143) reported that regardless the type of text; student writers use similar grammatical constructions, and thus make similar grammatical errors. It becomes evident then that the linguistic data of this study indicate that when students composed in descriptive and narrative compositions, the same errors were made. Nevertheless, the findings show that the participants had made a higher number of errors in the descriptive mode.

Although most of the errors occurred more frequently in the descriptive sample, it is important to mention that simple past tense, main verb, and conjunction categories resulted in a higher number of errors in the narrative sample.

Finally, the results show that most of the identified errors were the result of either first language interference or overgeneralization. These findings are similar to other research studies done in the field which report that interference from mother tongue and overgeneralization account for most of students' errors (Scott and Tucker, 1974:97; Taylor, 1975:46; Karallah, 198:86).

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