

## Grammar Errors in the Writing of Iraqi English Language Learners

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### ABSTRACT

Several studies have been conducted to investigate the grammatical errors of Iraqi postgraduates and undergraduates in their academic writing. However, few studies have focused on the writing challenges that Iraqi pre-university students face. This research aims at examining the written discourse of Iraqi high school students and the common grammatical errors they make in their writing. The study had a mixed methods design. Through convenience sampling method, 112 compositions were collected from Iraqi pre-university students. For purpose of triangulation, an interview was conducted. The data was analyzed using Corder's (1967) error analysis model and James' (1998) framework of grammatical errors. Furthermore, Brown's (2000) taxonomy was adopted to classify the types of errors. The result showed that Iraqi high school students have serious problems with the usage of verb tenses, articles, and prepositions. Moreover, the most frequent types of errors were Omission and Addition. Furthermore, it was found that intralanguage was the dominant source of errors. These findings may enlighten Iraqi students on the importance of correct grammar use for writing efficacy.

**Key words:** Grammar; Errors, EFL, Writing

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Among the four language skills, writing is known to be the most complex skill to master. To gain mastery of the skill, a learner will need to know the morphological and syntactic rules of the language. In Iraq, students are exposed to the learning of English from the age of 9. However, Arab EFL learners still find it difficult to write in English. One possible reason could be because of the English writing system which differs from Arabic language. As a result, Arab EFL learners tend to structure their writing incorrectly and violate the English grammatical rules. Braganza (1998) commented that violating the essential rules of grammar can have adverse effect on the propositional content and this then will affect the credibility of the writer.

Several studies have documented on the writing difficulties of Arab learners. Benson, (2002), Cedar (2004), Chen and Huang, (2003) examine the interlanguage interference of the mother tongue in the process of writing in the target language. They found that most of the writing errors committed among Arab EFL learners are due to mother tongue interference.

Besides language interference, studies such as Bacha (2002), Khalil (2000), Rababah (2003), and Tanaineh (2010) reveal that Arab learners commit various errors in their writing and these errors have in some ways affected the learners' confidence and in turn these learners are unable to cope with the institution's literacy expectations. An example of this is

the study carried out by Tahaineh (2010) in which he tried to find out the kinds of errors that Jordanian Arab EFL learners make while using prepositions. The samples of his study were collected from compositions written by 162 students. His findings revealed that Jordanians tend to use proper preposition if equivalent was found in their first language (Arabic), employ incorrect preposition if equivalent is not found in their mother tongue, and delete preposition if equivalent is not required in their L1.

Indeed, to master the writing skill, the learner has to consider the grammar of the targeted language. Grammar as defined by Richards and Schmidt (2002) is the structure of a language in which words and phrases are combined to produce sentences in a language. As most Iraqi learners have problems with the grammar of English, this study aims to focus on the grammatical errors that affect the writing of Iraqi Arab EFL learners by using the error analysis approach.

Error Analysis is the process of identifying and analyzing errors (Corder, 1967). In this study, the grammatical errors made by Iraqi Arab EFL learners in writing a descriptive composition in the target language were identified and analyzed. The main purpose is to reveal the common errors committed in the writing of EFL students. The study also highlights the causes of committing such errors. The two main sources of errors that were pointed out by Brown (2000:224) are interlingual (interlanguage) and intralingual (intralanguage) errors. Interlingual (interference) errors are found to

be traceable to mother tongue interference while Interference errors are attributed to the negative interlingual transfer.

In Iraq, although English has been taught from primary school until university level as a foreign language (EFL), it has not been used in real life situation since Arabic is the lingua franca of Arab countries. Basically, in most Iraqi schools and for all subjects, from primary to tertiary stage, Arabic is the medium of instruction while English is considered as a foreign language and it is only taught as a subject (course) (Al-Murshidi, 2014). Therefore, Iraqi EFL learners have no opportunity to interact and communicate in English language outside the classroom.

In the literature, there are very few studies which were conducted to investigate the grammatical errors in writing production of Iraqi EFL learners. For example, Al-Bayati (2013) examined the writing errors made by Iraqi final year undergraduates in English language department at Kufa University. His analysis was limited to the use of prepositions where he concluded that the major causes of these errors were due to L1 interference and the misapplication of the rules in L2. Moreover, Mouhammed and Hussein (2015) investigated the grammatical errors in the writing of Iraqi postgraduates in Malaysia. The data were collected from students' research proposal. The results indicated that Iraqi students are facing serious problems in various grammatical categories such as tenses, prepositions, articles, active and passive voice, verbs and morphological errors. Although these two mentioned studies conducted on Iraqi EFL learners, none of which found in literature had addressed the grammatical problems that Iraqi pre-university students face in their writing descriptive composition. Thus, this study was conducted to fill the gap by analyzing the descriptive composition produced by Iraqi high school students particularly those who are currently engaged in their final year.

### 1.1 Research Objectives

The objectives of the current study are:

1. To find out the grammatical errors made in descriptive compositions written by Iraqi pre-university students.
2. To explore the types of errors committed in each grammatical category.
3. To examine the sources of errors in each grammatical category.

### 1.2 Research Questions

The present study aims to answer the following questions:

1. What are the categories of grammatical errors found in the descriptive compositions written by Iraqi pre-university students?
2. What error types do Iraqi pre-university students commit for each of the category of grammatical errors?
3. What is the cause of the grammatical errors made in the writing of Iraqi pre-university students?

## 2. PREVIOUS STUDIES

The growing amount of studies on error analysis is very remarkable. Several studies have been conducted to investigate

Arab EFL learners writing errors in general and grammatical errors in particular.

In a large study, Al-Zoubi and Abu-Eid (2014) examined the writing of 266 Jordanian first year university students. They used a translation test to find out the errors and the source of committing them. The percentage of total errors made exceeded the percentage of correct answers. In other words, the writing of these students has more grammatical errors than correct ones. They also found that most of the errors made are due to the L1 transfer (interlanguage). The unexpected results of their study may be due to the use of instrument (translation test). It can be expected that first year students would use the word to word translation method to translate. As a result, a large amount of interlanguage grammatical errors would occur in their translated sentences. Using a different method, Ridha (2012) examined English writing samples of 80 EFL college students and then categorized the errors according to the following taxonomy: grammatical, lexical/semantic, mechanics, and word order types of errors. The results showed that most of the students' errors were due to L1 transfer. Furthermore, she found that most students rely on their mother tongue in expressing their ideas. Therefore, it seems that Arab EFL learners commit numerous various errors when they write in the target language. In addition, the influence of the mother tongue seems to be a major source of committing these errors. Both studies contend that most of errors committed by Arab English learners are due to the mother tongue interference.

In a more focused research, Sawalmeh (2013) analyzed the grammatical errors in a corpus of 32 essays written by Arabic-speaking Saudi learners of English in a preparatory year program at University of Ha'il. The findings revealed that the most frequent errors were in verb tense, article, and sentence fragment whereas the least frequent errors were in capitalization, pronoun, and preposition. The findings also indicated that most of students' errors were interlingual errors due to the influence of mother-tongue. The tense system of Arabic language is almost completely different from that of the target language. Additionally, Arabic language has no indefinite article (an, a) in their system. Therefore, most of the interlanguage errors committed in the use of tense and article. In the same line, Hourani (2008) examined the grammatical errors in essays written by 115 Emirati secondary students. He found that most of errors were in the categories of verb tenses and subject-verb agreement whereas the least frequent errors were in the categories of passive voice and singular/plural. Both studies are similar in the sense that most of the errors committed were in verb tense. However, there is a difference in source of committing those errors. The former indicated that most of students' errors were interlingual errors (mother-tongue interference) while the later showed that most of the errors made were intralingual (lack of knowledge). From the contradicted results that have been seen in both mentioned studies, it can be noticed that there is a need to conduct a further research with more deep analysis on the causes of the errors that commonly made by Arab EFL learners.

Moreover, Abushihab et al. (2011) conducted a study to identify and classify the grammatical errors in the writings of

62 Jordanian university students who study in the department of English Literature and Translation. The errors were first classified into six major categories and then they were divided into subcategories. The findings showed that the largest number of errors were in the use of prepositions followed by morphological errors, articles, verbs, active and passive and tenses. Similar results were found in the study conducted by Nawar Diab (2014) who examined through error analysis 73 essays written by Lebanese university students. In his findings, Nawar showed that the transfer of Arabic linguistics structure influences the writing of Lebanese EFL learners. In most past studies, the mother tongue (Arabic) had a negative influence in Arab EFL learners writing in the target language. The reason could be due to the learning method employed by the students and the instruction given by EFL teachers in teaching their students to write in the target language. It is important to mention that Arab EFL learners need to understand the grammatical system of English language and applied it in their writing without any influence from the first language (Arabic).

Regarding the types of errors committed in the grammatical categories, Zawahreh et al. (2012) studied errors made by ten graders in writing English essays and found that the most dominant errors were in subject-verb agreement, insertion of preposition, verb omission, tense, and word choice. The fact that Arabic language has no subject-verb agreement in their system might led students to commit many errors in this grammatical category. Regarding the prepositions, Arabic and English language are similar in that they both have several types of prepositions. However, the using of prepositions in Arabic is differ from that of English language. Using the same method but different sample, Abushihab et al. (2011) found that the omission of prepositions and articles were the most types of errors occurred in Jordanian students' writings. On the other hand, Mohammed and Abdalhussein, (2015) conducted study to investigate the grammatical errors committed by Iraqi postgraduate students in UKM. They found that addition of preposition, omission of plural ending "s" and misuse and addition of plural ending "s" are among the most frequent types of errors occurred. The differences found in the results of Mohammed and Abdalhussein, (2015) and Abushihab et al. (2011) could be due to the sample used or the educational level of the students. The former used Iraqi Arab students and the later used Jordanian students. In addition, Mohammed and Abdalhussein, (2015) investigated research proposal written by postgraduates while Abushihab et al. (2011) analyzed essays written by undergraduates.

Most of the aforementioned studies analyzed the errors of the grammatical categories committed in the writings of Arab EFL learners and the cause of committing these errors. However, few studies have been done to look at the types of errors (omission, addition, substitution and permutation) committed in each grammatical category. Thus, there is a need for further research to examine the types of errors that could be found in the grammatical categories. On the other hand, many studies used Arab EFL learners from various countries as their participants whereby research investigated the writing of Iraqi Arab EFL learners have been neglected.

Therefore, the present study aims to examine the grammatical errors committed by Iraqi pre-university students in their writing in English language.

### 3. METHOD

The researcher employed a qualitative dominant mixed-method design. A quantitative simple frequency count has been tabulated to determine the most frequent categories and types of grammatical errors that appeared in students' writing. At the same time, the study is qualitative because it aims to examine through error analysis the sources of committing such errors.

#### 3.1 Sampling

The sample of this research is 112 descriptive compositions written by pre-university students studying in an Iraqi high school located in Babylon city. The total number of words written in all the collected data is 11555 words. The average number of words in the compositions is 110. The students have been studying English as a foreign language at school for 10 years. Their age is between 17 and 18 years old, but factors such as sex and age were not controlled in this study. They are homogeneous in terms of their socioeconomic, linguistic, and educational background.

#### 3.2 Data Collection

The data of the present study is students' composition papers. They were compositions written as a class assignment. The topics for the class assignments were Christmas, An Interesting Journey, and The Professional Success) to write about. At the beginning, permission was sought from the school manager and the English language teacher to gather the data from the students. 112 Students' composition papers were collected from the English teacher of Al-Mussayab school which is located in Iraq, Babylon city. According to Oyedepo (1987), asking students to write an essay in a foreign/second language will reflect their normal performance. These three topics are descriptive in nature. The researchers copied all of them into a Microsoft word file to be ready for analysis. Another set of data was collected through an interview. 8 selected participants were interviewed with regard to their writing performance to find out if they rely on the grammatical system of their mother tongue when they write in the target language. The students were asked indirect questions so that unplanned responses from the participants were obtained.

*Example1:* (it was very tirdly journey). This sentence has been found in your writing. What were you trying to say exactly? Or what did you mean by this sentence?

*Example2:* (he want to buy a car). Do you think there is a need to add an "s" to the verb (want) and why?

#### 3.3 Instruments

AntConc 3.2.4.w program was used as an instrument for data analysis. This software helps in coding most of grammatical

categories such as Prepositions and definite/indefinite Articles. The main purpose of using this software is to ease the coding process of determining the frequency and location of the grammatical categories. Moreover, a face to face interview was conducted to triangulate the study. The students were asked semi-structured questions concerning their writing production. The purpose of the interview is to validate the findings of this research.

### 3.4 Framework of Analysis

James's (1998) framework of the grammatical categories was adopted to identify the grammatical errors committed in students' writing. James classified errors into 9 categories namely (Prepositions, Articles, Singular/Plural, Adjectives, Irregular verbs, Tenses, Concord, Passive/Active, and Possessive case). Before commencing with the data analysis, the researcher conducted a pilot study on 10 students' composition papers. Accordingly, it was found that students committed errors in most of the grammatical categories that could be found in James's Framework. However, there was no application of the Passive form in students' writing production and that could be due to the nature of the composition type (descriptive). Thus, the Passive voice category was excluded from the framework adopted. Table 1 below shows all the grammatical categories examined in this study.

### 3.5 Data Analysis

Gass and Selinker (1992) pointed out that "A great deal of the work on error analysis was carried out within the context of the classroom". The goal was clearly one of pedagogical remediation. In the present study, Selinker's (1992)

**Table 1.** James's (1998) framework of grammatical categories

Grammatical errors	Examples
Prepositions	*I mean in this example. Instead of: I mean by this example.
Articles	*The money is very important. Instead of: Money is very important.
Singular/Plural	*We have a lot of homeworks for today. Instead of: We have a lot of homework for today.
Adjectives	*In our school the number of students is less. Instead of: In our school the number of students is small.
Irregular verbs	*I telled him to stay far from me. Instead of: I told him to stay far from me.
Tenses	*She speaking now. Instead of: She is speaking now.
Concord	*He drink tea after dinner. Instead of: He drinks tea after dinner.
Possessive case	*I used my sister phone to call my mother. Instead of: I used my sister's phone to call my mother.

procedure has been used to analyze the grammatical errors. In his model, Selinker followed five main steps in conducting an error analysis: collect the data, identify the errors, classify the errors, quantify the errors, and analyze the source of errors.

Firstly, all students' papers were analyzed according to the 8 grammatical categories that have been explained earlier. Due to the limitation of the coding software (AntConc), the researcher identified the rest of the errors in students' writing by marking them with certain symbols. For example, t\* stands for Tense errors and c\* stands for Concord errors. After that, the errors that were found in students' papers were grouped according to the features of each error. Second, the frequency and the percentage of each grammatical category were calculated.

Third, the different types of errors found in students' writing were explained in details and an example of each type of errors was given. Finally, the cause of committing each type of errors detected in students' writing was explained according to the phenomenon of mother tongue interference.

Regarding the interview, since the students are Iraqi Arab students and one of the researchers is an Arab as well, it was preferable that the interview be carried out in Arabic. Students' responses and answers were recorded and then translated by the researcher into English. The analyzed data of the interview showed whether students rely on their mother tongue in writing in the target language or not.

## 4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

In total, 752 errors were found in students' composition papers. Table 2 below shows the frequency and the percentage of all errors in each grammatical category made by the students.

Based on the table above, the errors in the category of Article were found to be 29% which were the most frequent errors committed by Iraqi pre-university students followed by the errors in the use of Tense (19.3%) and Preposition (16.1%). The findings of this study are in line with Abushihab (2011), Althobaiti (2014), Sawalmeh (2013) and Hourani (2008) who found that errors of tense, preposition, articles are the most frequent committed errors by Arab EFL

**Table 2.** The frequency and the percentage of the grammatical errors

Categories of grammatical errors	Frequency	Percentage
Prepositions	117	16.1
Articles	212	29.2
Singular/Plural nouns	100	13.7
Adjectives	22	3
Irregular verbs	28	3.8
Tenses	140	19.3
Concord	78	10.7
Possessive case	28	3.8
Total	752	100

learners. While errors of tense and preposition were the most frequent errors in the above mentioned studies, errors of article were seen to be the most frequent in the current study. Sawalmeh (2013) found that 16.5% of the total errors were in the category of Tense followed by Article errors (12%). The errors in these two categories were the most frequent errors in his study. In addition, Hourani (2008) found that the most frequent committed errors were in the use of Tense (22%) followed by Preposition (15%) and Article (10%). The results of the previous studies are similar to the present one, in that, they all show that most of Arab EFL learners are not able to write a simple English sentence without committing a grammatical error as these grammatical categories are fundamental in constructing any sentence in the target language.

Moreover, the present study found that errors in the category of Singular/Plural Nouns amounted to 13.7%. Although the errors in this category are not among the most frequent errors committed, the number of errors found is 100 which is considered having high frequencies. This finding is in contrast with Mohammed and Abdalhussein (2015), Sawalmeh (2013) and Hourani (2008) who found that plurality errors amounted to 8%, 5% and 3% of the total errors. The errors in this category were among the least committed errors in Arab students' writing. Therefore, it can be concluded that Iraqi Arab students are in need to understand the system of English Singular/Plural Nouns to avoid making such minor errors.

On the other hand, the errors of Adjective (3%), Irregular verbs (3.8%) and Possessive case (3.8%) were seen to be the least frequent errors in students' written work. Abushihab (2011) found that the errors in Possessive case consist of only 4% of the total grammatical errors in students' writing. Moreover, Al-Zoubi and Abu-Eid (2014) revealed that only 8% of the errors were in the category of Adjectives which was seen to be the third least committed error among Jordanian EFL learners. In this study, although the errors in these categories might be considered as minor errors, each of which occurred around 20 to 28 times in Iraqi pre-university students' composition, they indicate that Iraqi students' still lack the fundamental knowledge on the English grammatical rules.

#### 4.1 The Types of Errors

In this section, the types of errors that occurred in each grammatical category were presented to answer the second research question Table 3 below shows the percentage of error types in all the grammatical categories investigated in the present study.

The table above shows the four types of errors with regards to their occurrences in the grammatical categories. Omission was found in most grammatical categories. However, the highest occurrence of this type was in Possessive case (60%) followed by Singular/Plural nouns (56%). Moreover, Addition errors were made in six grammatical categories. This type was most frequently committed in the category of Irregular verbs (75%) where students tended to add the inflection "ed" to the irregular verbs and in the use of Articles. In addition, substitution type of errors was seen in

most of the categories investigated in this study. This type occurred very frequently in students' written papers. For example, it was shown that 61% of the Preposition errors were errors of substitution where learners substitute the correct preposition with the wrong one. 56% and 57% of the errors in the use of Concord and Tenses were substitution errors as well. On the contrary, the least common type of errors committed by Iraqi pre-university students was Permutation errors. It was detected in only two grammatical categories which are Preposition (4.0%) and Adjectives (68.2%). In the following sub-sections, the types of errors in the grammatical categories were explained with examples.

##### 4.1.1 Omission

###### A- Omission in Possessive Case

Of the total possessive case errors 60% were omission cases. The deletion of the possessive "s" appeared frequently in students' writing. In example 1 below, the student omitted the possessive "s" from the noun "person" and did not indicate "whose situation it was". In Arabic language, there is a possessive case but it is little bit different. The addition of the definite article "Al" "ال" to the noun can generate a possessive case in Arabic language. Thus, the addition of the definite article "the" before the word "person" which does not need one could explain the influence of the mother tongue while writing in the target language.

- (1) It depends on the \*person situation that.....(wrong)  
It depends on the person's situation that.....(correct)

###### B- Omission in Singular/Plural Nouns

The number of omission errors made in Plural/Singular Nouns category is higher than the addition errors. The students tended to omit the plural morpheme "s" more frequently in their writing. Example 2 shows that the learner omitted plural "s" even when there was a plural number that required adding "s" for the following noun. Mother tongue interference did not happen as the plural form should be applied in both cases if the sentence was written in Arabic.

- (2) I have three \*brother and two \*sister..... (wrong)  
I have three brothers and two sisters.....  
(correct)

##### 4.1.2 Addition

###### A- Addition of the Definite and Indefinite Article

Most of the errors committed in the category of Article were additional errors. The addition of the definite article "the" comprised 23% of the total errors followed by the omission of the indefinite articles "a" and "an" which also comprised 23%. In example 3 below, the student tended to insert the definite article "the" in a place where it is not supposed to be added. The logical explanation for such errors is that the definite article is used more widely in Arabic language which leads the students to insert it frequently in their writing in the target language. Examples 4 and 5 show the addition of the indefinite article in students' writing. As mentioned above, the mother tongue of the learners has no indefinite article in

**Table 3.** The Percentage of error types in the grammatical categories

Types of errors	Preposition %	Article%	Singular/ plural nouns %	Adjective%	Irregular verb %	Tense %	Concord%	Possessive case %
Omission	4	38	56			16	28	60
Addition	28	46	44		75	28	14	
Substitution	61	13		31.8	25	56	57	40
Permutation	4			68.2				
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

its system, so; the addition of this huge number of “a” and “an” is due to overgeneralization of the use of indefinite article. The learners over generalized the rule of the indefinite article and used it in places where it is not supposed to appear.

(3) To the north of Iraq back in time in \*the 2011.....(wrong)  
To the north of Iraq back in time in 2011.....  
(correct)

(4) There are \*a many things.....(wrong)  
There are many things.....(correct)

(5) Arbil and Sulymanya are an important cities in.....(wrong)  
Arbil and Sulymanya are important cities in.....  
(correct)

#### B- Addition in Irregular Verbs

Of the total errors made in Irregular verbs category 75% are additional errors. The students tended to add the inflection of the regular verbs “ed” to the irregular verbs. In example 6 and 7, instead of writing the past form “took” and “wrote”, the students wrote “\*took” and “\*wrote” to indicate past tense. It can be clearly seen that the students tended to over-generalize the rule of adding certain inflection like “ed” for all verbs to get a past form.

(6) He \*took me and all the students.....(wrong)  
He took me and all the students.....(correct)

(7) I \*wrote a letter to invite him for .....(wrong)  
I wrote a letter to invite him for.....(correct)

#### 4.1.3 Substitution

##### A- Substitution of Preposition

Errors of substitution were found to be the most common errors in the use of prepositions. 61% of the total error types were made in the category of preposition. Most of the substitutional errors were found to be attributed to mother tongue interference (interlanguage). In examples 8 and 9 below, prepositions “for” and “in” were supposed to be used, instead, the students included “by” which is equivalent to “bel” “لـاب” in Arabic and “in” which is equivalent to “fee” «في». These prepositions in Arabic can be used in the same way as in English. However, their meaning and functions are changed when they are translated from Arabic into English. Hence, the process of translating the meaning from Arabic to English resulted in the use of inappropriate prepositions.

(8) Arbil is famous \*by its beautiful nature.....(wrong)  
Arbil is famous for its beautiful nature.....(correct)

(9) They are the best friends \*on the world.....(wrong)  
They are the best friends in the world.....(correct)

##### B- Substitution in Tenses

The data analysis revealed that 56% of the total errors made in the use of Tenses are substitution errors. The students either used the present tense when the past tense is required or vice versa. In examples 10 below, the students substituted the past tense with the present tense. They seemed to be aware of the events that happened in the past have to be told in the past tense, yet; the second verb of the sentence was substituted with the present form. Instead of writing “rested”, the student wrote “rest”. In example 11, similar error to the previous example occurred. However, in this case, the present tense was substituted with the past tense in sentences that required present tense. The verb “play” was replaced with the past form “played”.

In both cases, it seems that the students do not fully understand the function of the verb tense in the sentence. They focus more on the content than on the right tense that must be used to convey meaning. Therefore, the errors made in this type can be due to the false concepts hypothesized. False concepts hypothesized happens when learners of language do not understand a distinction in the target language.

(10) We came back tired and we \*rest the night over....(wrong)  
We came back tired and we rested the night over.....  
(correct)

(11) I usually \*played football with my friends in holidays.....(wrong)  
I usually play football with my friends in holidays.....(correct)

##### C- Substitution in Concord

Substitutional error was the most frequent errors in the category of Concord. It comprised 57% of the total Concord errors were found in students’ written papers. They used the wrong verb “be” in examples 12 and 13. In the first example, the student used singular verb “was” instead of “were” where the subject is plural and required plural form of the verb “be”. In the second example, the opposite happened, the student used “were” for the singular subject “my family”. These errors indicate that Iraqi students know the target language system rules but lack the ability to apply them correctly.

(12) My final results \*was not good.....(wrong)  
My final results were not good.....(correct)

(13) My friend \*were in the car.....(wrong)  
My friend was in the car.....(correct)

#### 4.1.4 Permutation

##### A- Permutation in the use of Adjectives

The major errors made in the category of adjectives were

permutation errors. It can also be described as misordering errors (wrong word order). Of the total adjectives errors 68.2% were permutation errors. Lamtabbet (2010) explained that Arabic language is different from English language in that, the adjective in Arabic should come after the noun they qualify (N+adj) whereas in English, it should come before the noun (adj+N). Moreover, the adjective in Arabic should agree with the noun in gender and number. These differences may lead Arab EFL learners to make serious word order errors in the use of adjectives. As shown in example 14 below, the student tended to write the adjective after the noun. Instead of writing "the biggest place" they wrote "the place biggest". It can be clearly concluded that the errors made in this type are due to the mother tongue (Arabic) interference. (14) The place \*biggest in Iraq.....(wrong)  
The biggest place in Iraq.....(correct)

#### 4.2 The Sources of the Grammatical Errors

After analyzing the grammatical errors, it was found that Iraqi Arab EFL learners made grammatical errors due to the two main reasons namely; interlanguage and intralanguage. The total number of interlanguage errors was 275 whereas for intralanguage errors were 450. The two tables below illustrate the source of errors for each grammatical category that was examined in this study.

Based on Table 4 above, it was found that 275 errors were interlanguage errors which were due to the mother tongue interference. The highest percentage of interlanguage errors committed was in the category of Article which was 36.3% of the total errors followed by Preposition which was 34.9% whereas the lowest percentages of interlanguage errors were in the category of Tense and Irregular verb which was 0% for each. For other grammatical categories, the lowest occurrences of interlanguage errors could be because of the small number of errors committed in students' writing compared to the errors made in other categories such as Article and Preposition.

Table 5 above shows that 450 errors committed by Iraqi students were intralanguage errors. It also shows the number and the percentage of intralanguage errors which occurred in each grammatical category. Accordingly, the highest number of intralanguage errors is committed in the category of Tense which was 31.1% of the total intralanguage errors followed

by Article category which was 24.8%. The Tense and the Article systems of the target language are extremely different from the first language (Arabic) in that, English language has many tenses whereas Arabic language has only few limited tenses in its system. In addition, the indefinite articles in the target language do not exist in Arabic. Therefore, there is no way for the learners to transfer the system from their first language to the target language. Iraqi EFL learners need to consciously learn and be aware of these two systems, one in the first language and the other in the target language. Based on the findings, it can be concluded that Iraqi EFL learners lack the fundamental grammatical knowledge of the target language, especially when it comes to Tense and Article systems of the English language.

On the other hand, the lowest number of intralanguage errors occurred in the category of Adjective which was 1.5% followed by possessive case which was only 2.5% of the total intralanguage errors. The findings indicated that Iraqi EFL learners do not have enough knowledge about the possessive case in the target language. However, when it comes to the Adjectives, Iraqi pre-university students committed negative transfer when there is equivalent in their first language and intralanguage errors when there is no equivalent in Arabic. Similarly, the case is repeated with other categories such as Prepositions, Singular/Plural Nouns, and Concord. Nevertheless, the case is different in the category of Irregular verbs when all the errors committed are intralanguage errors. This is because the students lack the knowledge of the target language and as mentioned earlier, they tended to over generalize the rule of applying "ed" to all kind of verbs in English. Thus, errors are revealed in this category due to the interference within the target language.

Table 6 above shows the average number and the percentage of the two causes of errors namely; interlanguage and intralanguage. Predicting the source of errors may not be enough to come up with a strong claim. Therefore, in the present study, the researcher triangulated the findings with an interview with students to find out the actual cause of errors. The result revealed that 62.1% of the total errors were intralanguage errors whereas only 37.9% were interlanguage errors. To put it in another word, the findings from the analysis of students' written work and the students' responses in the interview indicated that the errors committed due to the interference within the target language (English) were more

**Table 4.** Interlanguage errors

Grammatical categories	Number	Percentage
Prepositions	96	34.9
Articles	100	36.3
Singular/plural	24	8.7
Adjectives	15	5.4
Irregular verbs	0	0
Tenses	0	0
Concord	23	8.3
Possessive case	17	6.1
Total	275	100

**Table 5.** Intralanguage errors

Grammatical categories	Number	Percentage
Prepositions	21	4.6
Articles	112	24.8
Singular/Plural	76	16.8
Adjectives	7	1.5
Irregular verbs	28	6.2
Tenses	140	31.1
Concord	55	12.2
Possessive case	11	2.4
Total	450	100

**Table 6.** The average of interlanguage and intralanguage errors

Source of errors	Number	Percentage
Interlanguage errors	275	37.9
Intralanguage errors	450	62.1
Total	725	100

than the errors made due to the mother tongue (Arabic) interference. What were some of the responses of the students in the interview? Some excerpts from the interview will put your discussion in context.

The findings of this study do not agree with the previous studies conducted by Al-Zoubi and Abu-Eid (2014), Sawalmeh (2013), and Ridha (2012). They also investigated Arab EFL learners and they found that most of the errors made in students' writing were due to the mother tongue interference. They stated that Arab EFL learners tend to transfer from their native language (Arabic) to the target language (English). In the present study, the results from error analysis and the interview showed that Iraqi Arab EFL learners committed both interlanguage and intralanguage errors. However, most of the errors made are intralanguage errors which results from students' lack of knowledge of the target language.

In another study, Ridha (2012) investigated Iraqi undergraduate students who were enrolled in third year of English language department. She found that Iraqi Arab EFL learners rely mostly on their mother tongue when they write in the target language. In her findings, she indicated that errors of Tense and Article were the most frequent grammatical errors which are in line with the findings of the present study. However, she revealed that errors made in the categories of Tense and Article is due to the influence of mother tongue. On the contrary, in the present study, it was found that most of the errors committed in these two categories are due to the interference within the target language. Two factors could be attributed to the differences between the two findings. First, the sample of the present study were taken from high school students whose proficiency level is low while the sample of Ridha's (2012) study were taken from English major students who have higher proficiency level. Second, Ridha (2012) did not provide enough explanation about the mechanism of students' translating from their first language while in this study, the grammatical errors were classified and more explanations were provided with regard to each type of errors.

Uniquely, the results of the current study are similar to what Hourani found in (2008). He examined the grammatical errors made by Emirati secondary male students and found that intralanguage errors were committed more than interlanguage errors in students' writing. He indicated that Arab high school students lack the knowledge of the target language (English) which made them commit such a big number of intralanguage errors in their writing. The same was seen in this study, Iraqi Arab pre-university students do not understand the grammatical system of the target language, which led them to make such errors.

## 5. CONCLUSION

To conclude, the present study found that the most frequent errors made by Iraqi Arab EFL learners were in the categories of Articles, Tenses, Prepositions, and Singular/Plural nouns. On the other hand, errors in irregular verbs, adjectives and possessive case were found to be the least committed errors in students' written paper. Regarding the types of errors found in the grammatical categories, the researchers classified them into four types according to the Brown's (2000) taxonomy of errors. The omission errors were dominant in Possessive case and Singular/Plural nouns while addition errors were dominant in Articles and Irregular verbs categories. The errors of substitution were mostly found in the categories of Prepositions, Tenses, and Concord while the permutation errors were limited only to Prepositions and Adjectives. In this research, both interlanguage and intralanguage interference were seen as the causes of the grammatical errors committed. However, intralanguage interference (interference within the target language) was found to be the most dominant cause of errors in students' written work. This means that Iraqi pre-university students lack concrete grammatical knowledge of the target language. Further studies may consider comparing high school students with undergraduates or postgraduates regarding the errors they make in their writing. Knowing the similarities and the differences between two groups through error analysis would tell us a lot about students' learning process.

Three possible pedagogical implications could be drawn from this study. First, committing errors is a part of language learning process. Thus, students' errors can be considered as valuable resources to improve teaching and learning in writing classrooms. Students' attempt in trying to write ought to be praised and teachers must motivate their students to write in order to apply the correct grammatical form in their writing. Second, for specific instructional activities for verb tense, explicit instruction in each linguistic feature should be included in the classroom. Teachers can provide collaborative teaching technique for practicing different tenses in different contexts. Third, most of the grammatical errors found in the study were from the lack of knowledge of the target language, which may indicate that students have not received sufficient input in their writing instructions. Therefore, English language teachers ought to be trained in using various innovative teaching methods and techniques in the class to help students fully understand the English language system.

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