

# The First Language Influence on the EFL-Learners' Writing Performance: Errors Analysis and Remedial Perspective

AbdulMahmoud Ibrahim<sup>1\*</sup> Salih Ibrahim<sup>2</sup>

1. English Language Department, PO box 11953 (Thadiq College), Shaqra University, Saudi Arabia

2. English Language Department, Faculty of Education, University of Al-Butana, Rufa'a, Sudan

## Abstract

The purpose of the study was to inspect, identify, classify the source of errors to recognize the influence on learners of English as a foreign language (EFL) performance in writing text. The study was intended to find a remedial strategies to cope with the difficulties that affect the written works. A 100 students were chosen from the first level of English sections. It was found that the students' spelling, syntactic and lexical errors could be attributed to many sources such as: interference, different learning styles, inexperienced instructing and negative attitude towards the writing process. It is recommended that teachers should be trained to master writing, style and usage of the language, along with a steady marking scheme and feed back to encourage the learners improve their writing performance; furthermore, an attractive syllabus ought to be designed to meet the students needs.

**Keywords:** EFL-Learners; error analysis; first language; intralingual; interlanguage; writing

## 1. Introduction

Mastering English writing indicates a good level of the language mastery. Attention is drawn to many approaches of language teaching according to error analysis of the students' performance in order to improve the standard of English language writing. The study endeavors to find out the problematic areas in written work of the English language learners and to attribute these errors to their sources. The Sudanese learners of English encountered by many difficulties in performing basic writing tasks in order to communicate effectively in English; consequently it could be stated that their general command of the language, is reported by many researchers to be very poor. Sudanese learners are not exception, but most learners of foreign language experience such difficulties in writing their writing.

### 1.1. Statement of the Problem

The researchers has noticed that Sudanese students are incapable of performing the basic writing tasks in order to communicate effectively in English. Their general command of the language, namely vocabulary selection, grammatical usage and spelling, is reported to be very poor. Therefore, diagnosing students' errors will be of value and results in exploring difficulties which help students to avoid making errors and be of great use for teachers as well, and hence all efforts towards achieving better performance in English writing is sought. The study is restricted to Sudanese learners' errors at the first level of English sections at Rufa'a and Hasahisa faculties of education, University of Gezira, Sudan, but its findings would be of value to the EFL context worldwide.

### 1.2. Questions of the study

The study also tends to find answers for the following questions:

- 1) What types of errors do Sudanese EFL learners commit in their writing?
- 2) How could these errors be attributed to their possible sources?
- 3) What are the possible strategies for remedy?

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1. What is Writing

"Writing" is not just the process of using symbols (letters of the alphabet, punctuation and spaces) to communicate thoughts and ideas in a readable form, it is much more greater than this. Writing is capable to preserve human heritage from loss and save it for generations to come. The purpose of writing according to Burton (1955:) is to pass on experiences, ideas or information to others to possess. So, communication means coherent and interesting information, otherwise, it loses aim and effect. The coordinate parts of the sentence are of equal importance and the subordinate are less important and give even the less important significance by relating them to the overall purpose of the composition. Inexperienced writer, generally, is either indecisive about his point in writing, or aware of it, but still unable to express it in his writing. Hence, the teacher's role is to help the learner discover his purpose and show him how to express it in writing.

Writing as Xing and Jin (1989) assert, is a comprehensive ability including grammar, vocabulary, conception, rhetoric and many other elements. Besides having everything engaged with listening, speaking and reading. Therefore, as they remark, writing should by no means be restricted to writing courses or composition

classes; it must be integrated with all language courses. Good readers write well, i.e. good writers read well as Broukal (1994) claims that reading and writing are connected together. So he adds stating that over the past few years, a number of notable researchers in the field of the second language acquisition have written about a crucial need to effectively integrate reading and writing instructions in classroom practice and material development either. Since writing is considered as a freighting task for many students as Qiang (1989:36) claims, the students have no favor with writing and this causes the poor performance in writing task. Hill (1967:82) assures that the writing skill has three main divisions: the first is the form of the letter, the second is how to spell and the third is how to choose the appropriate words and the proper language structures. Therefore, it is crucial to think clearly and consecutively (direct thinking), which achieves the interrelation of all parts to serve the purpose that each part should be of significance.

### 2.2. *The Four Types of Composition*

'*The Golden Rule*' which Burton (1955) claims that whatever the kind of composition, there should be movement in the essay: a sequence from the beginning, through the middle, to the end of the essay. To plan the composition, as he indicates, firstly is to think of the paragraph unity; to ensure coherence, otherwise the reader gets bewildered and irritated for the badly paragraphed composition. Each paragraph should mark a distinct stage in the development of the composition.

According to his perspective Burton (1955), composition is divided into four kinds:

- 1) **Narration:** the telling of a story: progressing from one event to the next.
- 2) **Description:** representing by words the appearance of people, places, things etc.
- 3) **Exposition:** setting out the facts concerning any given topic or question; "an explanatory discourse".
- 4) **Argument:** discussion (sometimes in the form of speech and dialogue) in which facts and ideas are brought to bear upon a given point, so deductions are made, and conclusions are established.

He points out that all four kinds of writing may be found within a corpus of one topic. For instance, the biographer describes his hero's appearance, he narrates the events of his life, he sets out the facts relevant to a study of the period in which he lived, and he discusses the contribution that he made to his own times and posterity.

### 2.3. *The Error Analysis Approach*

Errors that students make in the process of learning a target language (TL) have always been a matter of high concern to both teachers and syllabus designers. This concern, as stated by Sridhar (1981:207) is reflected in the way writers of pedagogical grammars draw attention to the potential 'pitfalls' in the TL and likely in the numerous lists of 'common errors' prepared even by experienced teachers. Therefore, no competence in writing without taking trouble to acquire a good vocabulary. The reading of well-written books, the use of a dictionary, and frequent practice in writing, are all essential for success in this task. English language has gained enormous range of words through the course of its long history that reveals its power and richness. Sridhar (1981: 222), states that it is with the advent of CA and its claim to predict and explain errors, serious interest in Error Analysis (EA) began to be taken. In spite of the relatively sophisticated device of CA, and its strong claim to predict, linguists realized that there were many kinds of errors, other than those due to MT interference, could neither be predicted nor explained contrastively. This witnessed what Ellis (1982:51), called a "resurgence of interest in error analysis." By the late 60's (EA) developed from impressionistic collection of common errors and their linguistic classification into a more systematic research approach.

Influential articles by Corder (1967, 1974, 1981), provided the rationale for EA approach. It is now generally recognized as Corder (1981: 45) reported functions: theoretical and practical. The theoretical function should constitute part of the methodology of investigating the language learning process. It should provide a tool for the analyst to describe the learner's knowledge of the TL at any particular moment during learning time. The practical function of (EA) is in guiding the remedial action, which the analyst must take into account when correcting.

EA could help in determining the sequence of presentation of TL items in course book and classroom, after identification of the learner's difficulty areas. It also could help to decide the relative degree of emphasis, explanation and practice required in putting across various items in TL and devising remedial lessons and exercises, and finally selecting items for testing the learner's proficiency. The EA methodology consists of data collecting, identification of errors, classification of errors into error types, statement of relative frequency of error types, identification of the areas of difficulty in the TL and the remedial drills, and so on. As the above described methodology is almost representative of the majority of (EA) in the traditional framework, the more sophisticated investigations as represented by Dusvkova (1969), went further to include one or two of the following:

- Analysis of the causes of errors (i.e. MT interference, overgeneralization, inconsistencies of the spelling system of the TL, etc.)

- Determination of the degree of the disturbance caused by the error or its seriousness, which constituted a step forward in the sphere of EA.

#### 2.4. *The Contrastive Analysis Approach*

Learners often produce erroneous utterances in speech and writing in the course of their learning a TL. Traditionally, the attitude to errors as Corder (1979) states that they were mark indicate that the learner had not yet acquired the rules he was taught and they were therefore dealt with through repeated explanations until they vanished. It was also seen that the older habits prevented the new ones from occurring. In other words, the learning difficulties were attributed to the learner's MT interference. Wardhaugh (1970) divided the CA approach into two versions; a strong version and a weak version. The strong version is best explained by Lado (1957) as the plan of the book that depends on the assumption through which we can predict and describe the patterns that will cause problems in learning, and those that will not cause any problems by comparing 'systematically' the language and the culture to be learned with the native language and culture of the learners.

The claim of the strong version, however, does not essentially mean that linguists have to refer at all to speakers of the second languages under contrast for either contrast generated by any theory of contrastive linguistics. On the other hand, the weak version is less demanding than the strong version. It mainly depends on the experience of the linguist to account for remarkable difficulties in TL learning. The weak version is commanded as being in line with the experience of the teacher, which enables him to know the learner's learning problems without being predicted for him. Yet being aware and familiarized with the learner's errors, a prior CA does not mean the ability to explain the learning problems. However, the learning problems can best be explained when the two languages are compared together. According to Wardhaugh's (1970) definition of the weak version: "Reference is made to the two systems only in order to explain actually observed interference phenomena." This of course means that, many foreign language teachers have long recognized difficulties caused by interference from the source language.

However, Nickel (1971), puts it as "the contribution of contrastive linguistics to the design of teaching programmes is only a practical one and that predicting errors is not its only task." Therefore, CA has never claimed that MT interference is the sole origin of error although it accounts highly among the origins as Lado (1964), puts it as the main source of difficulty in learning a second language "and" the dominant factor determining ease and difficulty in learning the patterns of a foreign language in their similarity to or difference from the native language patterns. There are five sources of error, identified by Richards (1974), as overgeneralization, ignorance of rule restrictions, incomplete application of rules, the building of false analogy and MT interference as the chief source of errors. On other hand, Corder (1981), has also recognized the effect of MT habits on learner's problems. He mentions that one explanation of L2 errors is that the learner is carrying over the habits of his mother tongue into the second language. It is clear that the very explanation depends on the view of language as some sort of habit formation.

Despite of these criticisms made against CA, it remains one of the main approaches that has and will have influence on FL teaching. As justification for this point, attempts made to determine the sources of the learner's errors according to George (1972), estimated that one third of errors made by the TL learner can be traced to MT interference. Moreover, Dulay (1982), estimated it to range from 4%--12% for children, and from 8% - 23% for adults. A large number of syntactic errors in the written English of the first year Sudanese students in the University of Gazira were committed as a result of MT interference. Consequently, it is so clear that MT interference is still one of the strongest factors that influence FL learning and consequently CA has a strong variability in FL teaching methodology.

#### 2.5. *The Interlanguage Approach*

Within the 60's, the flow of Chomsky's views, according to Corder (1981), has caused the movement of emphasis from an obsession of teaching to a study of learning, where most of the mentalists' views were adopted in the explanation of TL learning. The learner is seen as an up-builder of his competence towards mastery of TL. He constructs for himself a grammar and a system of the TL on the basis of the linguistic data, which he is supposed to undergo. The learner's system is referred to as 'transitional idiosyncratic' dialect, according to Corder (1973), and approximative system according to Nemser (1971). However, Selinker's (1972) term Interlanguage (hence forth IL), has become the most popular and has come to characterize a major approach to research and theory of L2. The second continuum is embodied in the finding of the recent studies in learner's IL which strongly suggest that L2 learning is a recreation continuum, in which the learners' use of L2 increases gradually in complexity similar to that of the child's in L2 acquisition. So it is very important to point out that two processes produce learner's IL either, rather than one.

A significant distinction is made by James (1983), between two types of fossilization; 'formal fossilization' and 'functional fossilization'. Therefore, since one of the main objectives of a FL teacher is to eliminate learner's errors, it is expected, as James (1983), points out that formal fossilization would perplex a native speaker.

Consequently, the FL teacher works for formal defossilization by form stressing and the native speaker works for functional defossilization by message stressing. Selinker (1972), views IL as a separate linguistic system resulting from the learner's attempted production of the TL norm. He considers it as a product of five central cognitive processes and perhaps some additional minor ones such as spelling, pronunciation and the hypercorrection involved in L2 learning. The five central cognitive processes are:

### 2.6. *Language transfer*

Interference as a term was first introduced by Wringe (1989: 1), referring to: 'These instances of deviation from the norm of either language which occur in the speech of bilinguals as a result of their familiarity with more than one language, i.e., as a result of languages in contact.' Here transfer, as suggested, does not happen automatically, but it could be predicted to occur both positively and negatively and in productive and receptive skills altogether. Transfer of training is a process that is quite different from both language transfer and overgeneralization of the TL rules. Selinker (1972), observes that the occurrence of errors which he attributes to the way drills and exercises are constructed, can be attributed to the transfer of training.

### 2.7. *The Intralingual Approach*

Intralingual error is an error that takes place due to a particular misuse of a particular rule of the target language. According to Richards (1971), Intralingual or developmental errors are embedded within the structure of English language itself. These errors happens due to faulty or inadequate learning of the target language rather than language transfer. Erdogan (2005) adds "intralingual errors occur as a result of learners' attempt to build up concepts and hypotheses about the target language from their limited experience with it". They explore learners' competencies at certain stage to reflect the type of strategies' operated by teachers and the environment during the acquisition of the target language. In this context the culture in Sudanese educational institution and the strategy employed by Sudanese teachers during teaching of English to their learners.

In a study conducted by Nayernia (2011), written sentences of learners were analyzed to find out what proportion of the learners' errors were intra-lingual errors and whether the native language plays a significant role in learners' difficulties in learning the target language.

#### 2.7.1. *Strategies of L2 learning*

Corder (1981), states that learning strategies (LSs) refer to the mental processes whereas the learner creates for himself a language system underlying the data he is exposed to. While communication strategies (CSs), are the devices which the learner exploits whatever linguistic knowledge he owns to achieve his communicative needs. Furthermore, Corder (1981), argues that much of the literature in the field seemed to lack a general view of the problem as one of the basic confusions found between what are called LSs and CSs. Learner's errors could sometimes only be explained as an interaction of both strategies.

#### 2.7.2. *Strategies of L2 communication*

Selinker (1972), was the first to invoke strategies of communication to account for certain classes of errors made by learners of L2 and these errors were considered as a by-product of the learner's attempt to express himself in 'spontaneous' speech without having an inadequate TL system grasp. According to Corder (1981), that Varadi (1983), was the first to investigate CS experimentally, but little work has since been published in the same field. However, Tarone (1977), considers CSs as 'the learner's contribution to the interactional work required to overcome a communication problem.' Nevertheless, from a psycholinguistic point of view according to Faerch and Kasper (1983), that CSs are treated as the mental phenomena which underlies actual language behavior. As-samawi (1995), surveys literature on CSs and differentiate LSs and CSs. Furthermore, he suggests a classification for replacement strategies that is based on Tarone's (1977) work.

#### 2.7.3. *Overgeneralization of the TL rules.*

Brown (2007), defines 'Overgeneralization' as "the incorrect generalization of rules within the target language". Taylor (1975), defines syntactic overgeneralization along the same lines as: 'A process in which a language learner uses syntactic rules of the target language inappropriately when he attempts to generate a novel target language utterance'. This definition suggests that the product of such process will suggest that the learner grasps the mechanics of a particular grammatical rule of the TL, but he fails to master its correct forms. This in turn would suggest that the learner is operating on his already acquired knowledge of the TL creatively as he is neither imitating what he hears around nor transferring MT structure in his TL attempts. Thus overgeneralization may be the result of the learner's attempt to reduce his learning load, i.e. the learner may omit the third person singular (-s), relieving himself of the effort that necessitates concord, producing a sentence as:

\*She speak English well, (Not 'speaks').

A more powerful task of performance analysis has recently been assigned to EA, regarding the investigation of the IL of the TL learners, where the focus of the attention is no longer paid to deviation from the L2 norm at a given point of time, but to L2 learning behavior in general. Thus the learner's errors are related to five distinct processes; language transfer, transfer of training, strategies of L2 learning, strategies of L2 communication and

overgeneralization.

### 3. Methods

#### 3.1. Subjects

100 students were chosen homogeneously from the first level of English sections at Rufa'a and Hasahisa Faculties of Education, Gezira University, Sudan to represent the population of the study. The students' ages range between 18-21 years. They have had an average of seven years of formal instruction in English as FL at schools. They share the same L1, which is Arabic.

Table 1. Sample Selection

Faculty of Education	Type of test	Original Population	Tryout Study	Strata in the Sample
Rufa'a	Pre-test	30	20	30
	Post-test	30	/	30
Hasahisa	Pre-test	20	/	20
	Post-test	20	/	20
<b>Total</b>		<b>100</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>100</b>

#### 3.2. Data Collection Instruments

The Data Collection Instruments which were utilized in this study are two tests (Pre-test and Post-test) The pre-test study was undertaken in order to try out the test before giving it again to the same strata with the aim of examining the appropriateness of the test. Hence, the two tests (pre-test and post-test) were administrated under exam-like conditions; the first was before any specialized studies and learning strategies were to be taken, the second was after the term where some learning strategies and language studies of writing skills had been carried out. The conclusion arrived at for both tests were carefully compared and studied according to data collection methods.

A test paper containing two paragraphs; guided and non-guided, was constructed by the researcher, assuming that it will measure students' ability in using grammar and vocabulary with and without guidance to lessen errors in grammar, lexis, structure and punctuation. The reasons behind that were to see how much English the subjects had learned through their schooling and what type of errors they make. The topics had been submitted to a jury before they were introduced to the testees in order to judge their appropriateness to the students' level as an elicitation technique. After getting. The students were instructed to write not less than 100 words for each topic. The topics were:

- Crossing the Nile in a boat (a guided paragraph),
- A picnic to the nearest wood / forest. ( a free paragraph).

Testees were also told that the test had both linguistic and informative purposes. Test papers were collected, marked and registered as data due to analysis and interpretation.

#### 3.3. Procedures

An investigation about the composition of the study had been made then the following procedures were taken in order to identify and classify errors to achieve the results of the study:

- Each paper was given a number to facilitate easy back reference.
- Errors were underlined.
- Errors were classified into three main categories: spelling, syntax and lexical divisions.

Even within each category, sub-classifications were also made. For example, within the syntactic errors, tenses errors, preposition errors...etc. Moreover, sub-divisions were made such as omission of articles, redundant article and wrong choice of article. The percentage of each category and sub-category were calculated to indicate their relative frequency.

### 4. Analysis and Discussion

Test errors made by the students are classified into three main divisions; spelling, syntactic and lexical errors.

#### 4.1. Spelling Errors

This section is devoted to identify, classify and explain the spelling errors made by the university students at the first level and beginners of a new stage of a study, who were the selected and investigated population of the research. The total test paper including the pre-test and the post-test were counted to 100 scripts. After marking scheme had taken place, the spelling errors were sought and classified quite thoroughly. Four major spelling error categories were identified in this study: Omission, Addition, Substitution, and Transposition as shown in the table below:

Table 2. The Relative Frequency of Occurrence of Spelling Errors

Type of Error	Cases	Percentage
Omission	72	33.64%
Addition	69	32.24%
Substitution	55	25.71%
Transposition	18	8.41%
Total	214	100%

#### 4.2. Vowels Omission

Vowels omission were more frequent; (they form 44.4% or 32 cases out of 72 cases) than consonant and vowel/consonant omission as shown in the following table:

Table 3. Occurrence of Spelling Errors in Percentage

Category	Sub-categories					
	Vowel		Consonant		Vowel/ Consonant	
	Cases	Percentage	Cases	Percentage	Cases	Percentage
<b>Omission</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>44.44%</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>47.23%</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>8.33%</b>
<b>Addition</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>38.2%</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>52.7%</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>9.1%</b>
<b>Substitution</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>43.5%</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>46.4%</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>10.1%</b>
<b>Transposition</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>77.8%</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>22.2%</b>	<b>/</b>	<b>/</b>

The frequent omitted vowel was the 'e' mostly in its function as a 'silent letter' in words like:

- \* giv for give
- \* mak for make
- \* includ for include

#### 4.3. Consonants Omission

Consonants omission constitute (47.23%) of the total number of omission errors. Notably errors occur in the omission of the silent consonants as in:

- \* neibor for neighbor
- \* bak for back
- \* nait for night

Stone (1991: 28) explains this as attribution to that English doesn't sound the same as its written words and is not written as it sounds. Therefore, this is due to that English is not like other languages that have consistency of sound-spelling relation. So, in English, there is no one-to-one correspondence shown between sounds and letters. Added to that, some consonants are written but not pronounced. But that contradicts the situation of the same concern in the Arabic language where we find one-to-one correspondence between sounds and letters. Besides, each written consonant has a sound. Sudanese students, as target strata, made consonant omission errors on words where consonants are doubled in writing, when representing a single sound. For example:

- \* realy for really
- \* hapy for happy
- \* madnes for madness

Therefore, the problem of error here is attributed to the fact that in Arabic, a single consonant in spite of its articulation orthographically represents the doubling consonant as double similar sounds. Yet, the representation in English is a single sound for the double consonants.

In Arabic, the doubling is shown by the diacritic mark (---), 'shadda', which is put above the consonant which is to be doubled as in (المستر); 'e-ssir'. Hence, no doubling of consonant letter is required. So, such errors as in the above given examples, are attributed to the MT interference. Another possible reason added to MT interference for making such errors, is that students ignore spelling rules in general, and the rules concerning the doubling of consonants in specific.

#### 4.4. Addition Errors

Addition errors, known as redundancy, may occur at all levels of language production, where it leads to spelling errors. Data collected, revealed errors occurrence as a result of vowel and consonants letters being added. Misspelling of vowels addition is more frequent than that of consonants addition. Occurrence of errors resulting from addition or redundancy of the vowel 'e', constitute the highest frequency (47.5%) out of this domain. These errors are resemblance of the 'e' letter addition in words like:

- \* foreste for forest
- \* songe for song
- \* sinke for sink

Redundancy of the vowel letter 'a' is also witnessed, constituting 35.5 of the vowel errors frequency. It is also noticed to be inserted in sound environments preceding 'i' and 'y' letters, such as:

* familay	for	family
* tray	for	try

Therefore, the adding of the vowel letter 'a', is due to the false analogy with English words as: 'against', 'prevail', 'claim'...etc. Spelling errors resulting from insertion of a vowel sound in the consonant clusters is shown in the data provided.

However, is to an extent of (25.71%). Thus, a consonant cluster is a series of two or more consonant sounds, not separated by a vowel. Added vowels are mainly 'i' and 'e'. For example:

* transiport	for	transport
* desciribe	for	describe
* ciry	for	cry
* exipect	for	expect
* askied	for	asked

Consonant Addition or Redundancy: addition of redundant consonants constitutes (52.7%) of all the addition errors in the data displayed.

such as: 'c', 'l' in words like:

* speack	for	speak
* wellcome	for	welcome
* beautifull	for	beautiful
* allways	for	always

#### 4.5. Substitution Errors

Substitution errors can either be grammatical, lexical, phonological or orthographical substitution. In this part, the substitution errors are categorized into vowel for vowel and consonant for consonant substitutions and accordingly discussed.

##### 4.5.1. Vowel for vowel substitutions:

Vowel substitutions were less frequent (43.5%) as shown below:

The vowels 'e' and 'i' are most frequently substituted for each other. For instance 'e' replaces 'i' in words like:

* fetting	for	fitting
* devide	for	divide

And 'i' for 'e' in words as:

* discribe	for	describe
* forist	for	forest

##### 4.5.2. Consonants Substitutions:

Consonants substitutions were more frequent than the vowels substitutions. So, substitution of the consonants 'b' for 'p' and 'p' for 'b' occur more frequently than the other consonants as in:

<b>'b'</b>	<b>for</b>	<b>'p'</b>
* boor	for	poor
* blace	for	place
* hobe	for	hope
<b>'p'</b>	<b>for</b>	<b>'b'</b>
* poat	for	boat
* tripe	for	tribe
* possiple	for	possible

The substitutions of the consonant letter 's' for 'c' appear in words. For instance:

* Acept	for	accept
* Spase	for	space
* Exersise	for	exercise

The substitution occur in such cases when both letters 's' and 'c' are pronounced as /s/ sound, which creates confusion in pronunciation, so substitution in spelling occurs.

#### 4.6. Transposition Errors

Transposition is the exchange of the order of two letters each one takes the place of the other. In this respect, this category is of the lowest frequency (9.2%) compared with other categories. Spelling errors here were also sub-categorized into vowel/consonant, consonant/vowel, vowel/vowel and consonant/ consonant transposition.

#### 4.6.1. Vowel/consonant, consonant/ vowel transposition

The constitution of spelling errors, in this category, is (2%) of the whole category.

Errors made by the students in this respect were on words as:

\* Tow for two  
 \* pwoder for powder

#### 4.6.2. Vowel/vowel transposition

Transposition of the vowels 'ei' instead of 'ie' and vice versa are revealed to be frequent as in:

**'ei'** for **'ie'**  
 \* Feild for field  
 \* beleive for believe  
**'ie'** for **'ei'**  
 \*recieve for receive  
 \*decieve for deceive  
**'ia'** for **'ai'**  
 \*plian for plain  
 \*rian for rain

#### 4.6.3. Consonant/ consonant transposition

Consonant/ consonant transposition occurred very little in the data provided. It was only 2.2% of the total transposition. It was shown in words such as:

\*Shcool for school  
 \*Beings for begins

#### 4.7. Analysis of Articles Errors

Data analysis for this study, revealed (17.78%) article errors with relative frequency occurrence 18.2/ 45%. These errors have been tabulated and classified under three main categories: omission of articles, redundant of articles and wrong choice of article as shown in the following table:

Table 4. Types of Articles errors

Types	Cases	Percentage
Omission of articles	9	16.4%
Redundant articles	28	50.9%
Wrong choice of articles	18	32.7%
<b>Total</b>	<b>55</b>	<b>100%</b>

The omission of article errors was 8/ 17.8% of the total articles errors, and divided as thus:

**The definite article** was frequently omitted before nouns which are post modified by a preposition phrase, e.g.:

\* ...out of water under the trees.

(...out of the water under the trees.)

#### 4.8. Syntactic Errors

In this section, syntactic errors made by the students are subdued to identification, description and explanation. These errors are classified according to the areas of the English grammar within six categories; articles errors, tenses and verbs errors, preposition errors, concord errors, pronominal errors and other errors category, to act out a norm against which students' performance is measured, to determine the errors being made. The following table indicates the frequency of the occurrence of 9248 syntactic errors in the investigated data. the typology was constructed according to linguistic usages.

Table 5. Frequency of the Occurrence of Syntactic Errors

Errors category	Cases	Percentage
1.articles errors	48	17.78%
2.tenses and verbs errors	160	59.26%
3.preposition errors	8	2.96%
4.concord errors	38	14.07%
5.pronominal errors	12	4.44%
6.other errors	4	1.49%
<b>Total</b>	<b>270</b>	<b>100%</b>

#### 4.9. Tenses and Verbs Error Analysis

Tenses and verbs errors have been typed according to usage into: wrong choice of tenses, wrong formation of tenses and verb to (be) as exposed in the subsequent table:

Table 6. Frequency of Occurrence of Tenses Verbs Errors

Sub-category	Cases	Percentage
Wrong choice of tenses	23	13.1%
Wrong formation of tenses	96	54.9%
Verb BE errors	49	28
Wrong formation of passive	7	4
Total	175	100

#### 4.9.1. Wrong Choice of Tenses

Wrong choice of tenses represents 13.8% of the total tense errors. The data revealed that students would use the present tense form of the verb in contexts where the past tense form is required. Thus, the student either omits the (ed) prefix or ‘stick’ to the present form of verb to be/to have. For example:

- \* After we walked to the river we **get** into the boat.  
(After we walked to the river, we **got** into the boat.)
- \* We lived together for eleven years.  
(We **have** lived together for eleven years.)
- \* My brother lost his pen at first but he **find** another one in the bag.  
(My brother lost his pen at first, but he **found** another one in the bag.)
- \* Zahir was live in Kosti.  
( Zahir lived in Kosti.)

In the other context the past form is used instead of the infinitive forms as in the following examples:

- \* We began rowed the boat.  
(We began to row the boat.)
- \* I want gathered some wood from the forest.  
(I wanted to gather some wood from the forest.)

The study also revealed other errors in the use of the present simple with the third person singular, pronouns that the students tended to use without the suffix (-s) as in the following examples:

\*A boatman usually **use** two oars to row with.(A boatman usually **uses** two oars to row with.)

In the other similar cases, the students used the present progressive form instead of the present simple tense, as in:

- \* We are having a lot of friends. ( We have a lot of friends.)
- \* One of our friends is working everyday. (One of our friends works everyday.)
- \* The woodman is coming to the forest everyday. (The woodman comes to the forest everyday.)

In the previously mentioned examples, the present progressive is used for regular or habitual actions instead of the present simple tense. In addition to that, the adjunct of time “everyday” makes the use of the present simple tense very crucial because it refers to the permanent activity in the present time. Besides, the use of the present progressive instead of the present simple is the most probable option due to the false conceptions hypothesized by the students about the present progressive tense.

#### 4.9.2. Wrong Formation of Tenses Errors

The wrong formation of tenses errors constitutes 59.2 out of the total of the tense errors. So, they are classified into the followings:

- Wrong formation of past tense forms
- Wrong formation of tenses with infinitive + to.
- Wrong formation of tenses with negations.

##### Wrong formation of past tense forms

The students made errors in the formation of the simple past tense with irregular verbs. They added the past tense morpheme (-ed) to irregular verbs as in the following examples:

- \* The boat **sanked** into the river. (The boat sank into the river.)

##### Wrong formation of tenses with infinitive + to

In fact, the infinitive has the same form as the simple present tense except the main verb is either followed by (s in the base form). For example:

- Huda wants to work hard in the farm.
- Or with a verb without ‘to’, as, for instance, in:  
She should work hard.

Most English verbs can be followed by infinitive with ‘to’, except the following verbs, which are followed by infinitive without ‘to’: will, shall, can, do, must, make, let...and so forth. For example:

- They let me enter.
- My teacher made me repeat the exercise.

In this concern, the students made errors by using the infinitive + to with verbs which require infinitive without ‘to’, such as; let, make...etc. They also inflected infinitive with ‘to’ to take the (-s, -ed and -ing) endings. As in

these examples:

- \* I left the boat so as to swam in the river. (I left the boat so as to swim in the river.)
- \* Tatif started cry when she saw the snake. (Tatif started to cry when she saw the snake.)
- \* Her mother let her going with us. (Her mother let her go with us.)

#### Wrong formation of tenses with negations

Investigated students made errors of wrong formation of tenses with negations, such as:

- \* Tariq do not know to swim well. (Tariq doesn't know to swim well.)
- \* We didn't noticed what he was doing. (We didn't notice what he was doing.)
- \* People must don't cut any trees. (People must not cut any trees.)

Errors in the above examples are results of overgeneralization of a certain grammatical rule, i.e. the third person present tense agreement and the past tense, whereas the tense is shown as conceded by both the auxiliary verb and the main verb.

#### 4.9.2. Verb to 'BE' Errors

As a foundation, a theoretical background about the verb to 'Be' is to be displayed since the verb to Be can function as a main verb with a copula, like:

- Amani is a keen student.
- Kamil is a teacher.

And also as a progressive auxiliary verb as in:

My father is studying in Open University of Sudan.

And as a passive auxiliary verb as in:

Huda was given a prize last month.

The beautiful boat had been destroyed.

Verb to 'be' is extremely unique among English verbs in having a full set of both finite and non-finite forms in auxiliary function. Also it is unique in having 8 different forms with different persons. For example:

Base (infinitive): be

1<sup>st</sup> person singular (present): **am**                      The third person singular present: **is**

2<sup>nd</sup> person present, 1<sup>st</sup> person and 2<sup>nd</sup> person plural present: **are**

1<sup>st</sup> person singular and past: was      2<sup>nd</sup> person past, 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> person plural past: were

-ing form: being                      Past participle: been.

Data under analysis indicated that errors in the use of Be constitute 30.2%. They were treated under the following divisions:

#### Omission of 'Be' as a Copula

Omission of 'Be' as an auxiliary in the context of progressive and passive voice the redundant use of **Be**. Errors in omission of the copulative **Be** constitute 15% of the total errors of Be.

The examples below demonstrate the omission of Be as a copula:

- \* The nearest forest Ø very beautiful. (The nearest forest is very beautiful.)
- \* Our neighbors Ø generous people. (Our neighbors are generous people.)

But in Arabic, when the context implies a past action, the insertion of Be is quite possible, such as in:

- Et-timsah cana fi er-rimal.                      The crocodile was in the sand.

#### Omission of 'Be' as an Auxiliary

Omission errors of Be as an auxiliary constitute 10% of the total errors of Be. Hence the data concealed errors in the omission of Be in the context of the progressive forms as in these examples:

- \* We studying in the faculty of Education. (We are studying in the faculty of Education.)
- \* Those people cutting down trees. (Those people are cutting down trees.)

Also the data showed errors in the omission of Be in the contexts where the passive voice is used. For example:

- \* His finger cut and he cried. (His finger was cut and he cried.)
- \* They brought by the police. (They were brought by the police.)

The very type of omission of Be, according to Ellis (1982:179), is known as 'linguistic simplification'.

#### Redundant Use of 'Be'

The redundant use of 'Be' errors constitutes 5% of all the 'Be' errors. The students made the 'Be' redundant errors as illustrated in the next examples:

- \* Othman's friends are help him. (Othman's friends help him.)
- \* My uncles are give me money. (My uncles give me money.)

#### 4.9.3. Wrong Formation of Passive Voice

The data attained revealed errors of wrong formation of passive voice, whereas the students use the base form of the main verb after the auxiliary. For example:

- \* Shahira was deceive by his appearance. (Shahira was deceived by his appearance.)
- \* Her car is repair every month. (Her car is repaired every month.)

#### 4.10. Analysis of Preposition Errors

In this researching study, the preposition errors were 2. 16% of the total errors in the whole data. Errors of this respect revealed that the students made mistakes in selecting the appropriate preposition, as in these examples:

- \* Munira works in Wad Medani Trade Centre. (Munira works at Wad Medani Trade Centre.)
- \* I was one from them. (I was one of them.)

#### 4.11. Concord Errors Analysis

Concord errors amount to 12. 90% of the errors captivated in the study. These errors have been dealt with under only one heading, i.e. subject-verb agreement because it is the merely type of errors revealed in the data.

The normal notable rule is quite simple since a singular subject requires a singular verb and a plural subject needs a plural verb. For example:

This car is new. (Sing. subj. + sing. v.)

These cars are new. (pl. subj. + pl. v.)

In this concern, the students made faults of subject-verb agreement, namely the omission of 3<sup>rd</sup> person singular marker (-s) as in:

\* Tatif work as a mechanic. (Tatif works as a mechanic.)

\* Ibrahim always drive his car alone. (Ibrahim always drives his car alone.)

Many errors made by the students in this data were approved to be as an omission of the plural marker the (-s). For example:

\* We caught three big bird. (We caught three big birds.)

\* We brought many beautiful thing from the forest. (We brought many beautiful things from the forest.)

#### 4.12. Pronominal Errors

The grammatical term 'pronoun' is known as a word used in a place of a co-referential noun or a nominal phrase to make a statement sensible and avoid silly repetition when the connection is shown between a subject and object of a clause or series of clauses like:

Fahmi bought a grey jacket and wore it. I saw a snake under the stone. It was a big black one.

In fact, the English language demonstrates concord in number, gender and person between the pronoun and its antecedent to show connection. For example:

The boatman does his work patiently. (sing. M.) The girl does her work successfully. (sing. F.)

The boatmen do their work patiently. (pl. M.) The girls do their work successfully. (pl. F.)

You have to help the poor. (2<sup>nd</sup> person, M/F, sing./pl.) I must aid my relatives. (1<sup>st</sup> person M/F. sing.)

In addition to that, English language distinguishes numerous types of pronouns. They are:

- 1) Personal pronouns,
- 2) Possessive pronouns,
- 3) reflexive pronouns,
- 4) demonstrative pronouns,
- 5) relative pronouns.

Accordingly the pronominal errors constitute 4. 43% of the errors in the hereby study and they were treated under these following sub-categories:

- a. Wrong choice of pronoun,
- b. Redundant pronoun.

The errors of the **wrong choice of pronoun** count to 5.2% of the total pronominal errors. Personal pronouns were used in a variety of mistaking and the result is the following error examples:

\* I told their not to swim in that place. (I told them not to swim in that place.)

\* Them village was very near. (Their village was very near.)

\* The boatman gave I the oar. (The boatman gave me the oar.)

#### 4.13. Analysis of Lexical Errors

As are faced with difficulty in finding the TL lexical which is required to convey the intended message, they soon resort to translate it using their own MT in the TL context. Consequently, the translated item results in either a clear cut error or in an expression which will sound oddly to the native speaker. Though it may fulfill a communicative objective.

##### 4.13.1. Errors of Paraphrasing

The strategy of paraphrasing is defined by Tarone et al. (1977: 10) as:

“The rewording of the message in an alternative acceptable construction in order to avoid more difficult form or construction.”

Also Tarone et al. (1977: 10) and Varadi (1983: 84) use the term “circumlocution” to refer to paraphrase. Hence, the learner produces the intended message in quite different words since he cannot afford giving the exact

appropriately in a certain context, as in the examples below:

I like journeys more than anything. (I like journeys very much.)  
Imam was raised up in good condition. (Imam was well brought up.)

However, the native speaker may understand the latter sentences though the phrase in each of them is not accepted as proper English. This means that learners have resorted to elaborate descriptive paraphrasing where the speakers of the TL could prefer a single lexical item to capture the required meaning. Such a paraphrasing as a characteristic feature is the introduction of separate words to specify some of the semantic features of the defined word. For example “more than everything”, “was raised up in good condition”, contain some of the semantic features of the formulate words (very much, well brought up) in sequent.

Sometimes learners recourse to incorporate long, big sound words in their writings to make them literary like and give extra impressive features. As a result, strictly formal, less familiar or even archaic words and expressions might replace more appropriate current ones. Nevertheless, learners transfer words from their MT into their English writings that might distort the target conveyed meaning.

#### 4.13.2. Errors Resulting from False Analogy

According to Tarone (1977: 82), the learner resorts to analogy in situations where the intended lexical item is known. However, the learner uses analogy out of variable backgrounds and coins new words; verbs, nouns, adjectives and other parts of the speech within the existing TL rules. So, his desire to convey a certain concept presses him to adapt his own strategy in communication. Yet, the use of terms in analogy to others indicates an active participation of the learner in the language learning process. Besides, it can be a good signal of the inventive use of the language.

Students, in this respect, made errors like:

We enjoyed our feeding under a big tree. (We enjoyed our food under a big tree.)  
One of our friends was a good cooker. (One of our friends was a good cook.)

Such errors are referred to by Richards (1984: 174) as ‘developmental errors’, which demonstrate that the learner is trying to build up hypotheses about English as a TL out of his inadequate experience from the textbook or the classroom. This also suggests that the learners’ problems are consequences of their restricted knowledge of the English language.

#### 4.13.3. Errors of Synonymy

As for synonyms, English is assumed to be very rich because of the French, Latin and Greek influence on the language and also due to the extensive number of borrowed words from other languages.

Richards (1985: 28) defines synonymy as: “a word which has the same or nearly the same meaning as another word. For example, in English: hide and conceal in:

My friend hid his shoes under the bush.  
Hanadi concealed her shoes under the bush.

However, the emphasized point, which has been universally argued in semantics, that there are no real synonyms in a language. It is vitally important, from the FL learning point of view, to whether TL learners preserve the differences that actually exist between synonyms. These differences, in a huge figure of cases, can be specified in terms of features that might be tend to be more language specific than universal as the FL student could imagine. If we consider the words ‘tall’ and ‘long’ as examples, ‘tall’ might have the feature [+human], and ‘long’ might have the feature [-human], as the following examples:

Ahmed is tall.  
The way/street is long.

Yet, in Arabic both ‘human’ and ‘way/street’ as described as (taweel) to include the two exemplified adjectives ‘tall’ and ‘long’ in a single utterance.

For more assumed synonymy, the following examples are provided:

- \* The Nile is very large (wide) near our village,
- \* I was playing with my old (elder) sister, whereas the Arabic equivalent ‘kebir’ can stand for both adjectives; ‘wide’ and ‘elder’, so the learners are perplexed which one to use. Moreover, the FL student is liable to suppose that a number of associated words are synonyms to the extent that they can be used interchangeably.

Hornby (1994) verifies this view by stating that there are few real synonyms in the English language. Therefore, rounded definitions are dangerous mainly in a dictionary anticipated for learners to whom the language is foreign. He also adds that a monolingual dictionary is insufficient in this respect. This tendency is reinforced by the fact that in a bigger number of words the dissimilarity in meaning is fine and subtle.

## 5. Conclusions

### 5.1. Summary of the findings

According to the results being attained from the analyzed data of the research the following findings have been obtained:

Students of English do really make spelling, syntactic and lexical errors in guided and free writing. Committing errors in the process of learning a foreign language is normal phenomena. These errors are attributed to both MT interference and developmental sources. Learners made interlingual/transfer error from Arabic language to English. In addition, they have many errors regarding the subject-verb agreement the students and omission errors are frequent. Different learning and communication strategies underlie such errors. The learners have difficulty in word choice in the verb phrase and prepositional phrases. Moreover, they have spelling errors, syntactic errors as well as wrong analogy.

Addition errors were sub- classified into vowel addition errors and consonant addition errors. Substitution errors were sub- classified into vowel substitution errors and consonant substitution errors. The final category was also sub- classified into vowel/ consonant, consonant/ vowel, vowel/ vowel and consonant/ consonant transposition.

Neglecting writing as productive skill in the students' previous years was not sufficient enough to avoid these errors. Students' attitudes towards English language in general and writing in particular are really negative due to unexciting techniques of their teachers and their ignorance of the proper stages of the writing process which motivate the learners to write more perfect in English. The study has been able to figure out some of the difficulties encountering the students' English writing performance.

### 5.2. Pedagogical Implications

Teachers, EFL learners, syllabus designers and researchers benefit from the findings of (EA). Erdogan, (2005) indicates that teachers can examine the effectiveness of their teaching styles and techniques by studying learners' errors. Additionally, Errors have feedback value and correct diagnosis of error sources helps teachers choose proper sort of treatment. He adds that error awareness is essential for both teachers and learners.

Being aware of the most frequent error types as well as the main error sources, teachers can focus on the learners' linguistic difficulties. Corder (1967) thinks that learners' errors are evidence of a definite language system, which show learners' language development at any point. Errors analysis (EA) helps teachers and material developers to design systematic syllabi and organize the materials in the most proper mode.

Since teachers are always responsible to carry up the heavy burden of education problems and treat all the problematic areas that face their students, the following tips would be of help in paving the way towards better performance in the teaching/learning process of English writing.

The proper writing process should be followed before involving the students in peer editing, a stage in which you can get help of friends and colleagues and read their drafts. Revision for more ideas and information, here, is essential. After that rewrite, making use of revision. A proofreading to check your writing for spelling, punctuation and other details is finally required.

Awareness and training in the proper use of punctuation and capitalization is essential so as to enable the required meanings to be achieved to achieve the communication. For real and practical progress, start with teaching the writing of sentences being dictated by the students themselves. This makes them enthusiastic and ready to participate actively.

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- 1. AbdulMahmoud Idrees Ibrahim** is an associate Professor of English language. He is specialized in applied linguistics, second language acquisition, and research methods in EFL. Moreover, he is a teacher trainer and syllabus developer. He participated in many conferences inside Sudan and abroad. He is a member of ASTEL & TESOL Sudan. Currently, he works at Shaqra university, Saudi Arabia but formerly at Alzaiem Alazhari, Faculty of Education, Sudan He received BA in English language and Education and MA in Linguistics from the University of Yemen, Sana'a. He had awarded Ph.D. in English Language from Nilain University, Khartoum, Sudan.
- 2. Salih Idrees Ibrahim Ahmed** is an assistant Professor of English language. He is specialized in applied linguistics, second language acquisition, and research methods in EFL. Moreover, he is a teacher trainer and a community activist. Currently, he works at University of Butana, Sudan but formerly at Gazira University, he has BA in Mass Media from Omdurman Islamic University. In addition, he received BA in English language from Gazira University and M.Ed. in Applied Linguistics from Nile Valley University, Sudan. He had awarded his Ph.D. in applied linguistics from Omdurman Islamic University, Khartoum, Sudan.