

PEOPLE'S DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF ALGERIA  
MINISTRY OF HIGER EDUCATION AND SCIENTIFIC RESEARCH  
Abd Elhafid Boussouf University - Mila



*Institute of Literature and Languages*  
*Department of Foreign Languages*  
*Branch: English*

## **Syntactic Errors in EFL learners' Spoken Production:**

**A case study of Third Year LMD Students at Abdelhafid Boussouf  
University Center Mila**

A Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment for the Requirements of the Master Degree in  
**Didactics of Foreign Languages**

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Examiner: **Ms. AGGOUNE Amina**

**2021**

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## Dedication

All praise and thanks go to Allah who gives me help, strength, and determination to complete this work.

I dedicate this modest work to:

The two candles my father and my mother who sacrifice for my happiness and who are always present in my life in joyful and tough time. To my father “Abd elzarrak” who taught me the value of education and supported me to realize the person I am today. To my mother “Rahima” who is the source of encouragement and inspiration.

To my wise grandmother ” Djamila” who always prays for me.

To my lovely sister” Sara” who was beside me every time I need her.

To my sweet sister “ khadidja” and her husband” Imad” for their endless encouragement.

To my noisy and soft-hearted brothers” Adem” and “ Yacine”.

To my sister’s little angel “Amjad” and her coming baby.

A special dedication to my best friend and my partner in this humble work” Hadjer for her patience, understanding and collaboration.

To my adorable friends” Chams” and” Chayma” with whom I spent memorable days at university.

**Siham**

## **Dedication**

All praise and thanks to Allah who gives me help, strength, and determination to complete this work.

This work is dedicated to my dear mother for her endless support, encouragement and affection.

To my shining diamond my father the source of my happiness and inspiration.

I am really thankful for this great blessing may God protect them

I also dedicate this humble work to my lovely sisters Samira, Wahiba, Roufia and Zouleykha who have supported me until the end of this work. I pray to God to protect them from all evil.

To my brothers especially my little one Omar who supported me throughout my academic career

To my wonderful nephews and nieces.

To my husband, the most wonderful person in my life may God protect him from all evil.

To all my friends for their great help and support whenever I was in need.

To all whom I know.

**Hadjer**

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### **Abstract**

The aim of the current study is to identify, classify and analyze the syntactic errors in the spoken production of students of English at Abd Elhafid Boussouf university center of Mila. The data is collected from 77 students by means of observation based on their performance at courses of oral expression, linguistics and literature. The errors were identified and classified into grammatical categories.. These categories were not based on any pre- defined classification, rather the categories become clear after determining the nature of the errors. Then, the categories of these errors were analyzed and their possible sources were determined with the help of contrastive and error analysis. The findings show that the most frequent errors occur in subject verb agreement, the use of articles, tenses and noun agreement. Furthermore, the contrastive and error analysis of these most frequently occurring errors are due to interlingual transfer, intralingual transfer, the learning strategies employed by learners and lack of knowledge.

### **List of Abbreviations and Acronyms**

CA: Contrastive Analysis

CAH: Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis

EA: Error Analysis

EFL: English as a Foreign Language

FL: Foreign Language

IT: Interlanguage

LMD: License, Master, Doctorate

L1: First Language

L2: Second Language

MT : Mother tongue

N: Number

P: Page

Q: Question

SL: Source Language

SLA : Second Language Acquisition

Sv: Subject-verb agreement

TL: Target Language

%: Percentage

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## **General Introduction**

### **1. Statement of the Problem**

Learners of English do not get much practice of speaking. Emphasis is mostly put on the reading and writing skills. Speaking, however, is a skill that both teachers and learners should pay more attention to. It is the actual use of language. Speaking is difficult because while speaking, we do not have much time to think and construct sentences. Thus, learners may make more errors in their speech than in writing. It is necessary to give EFL learners more opportunities to practice speaking. Special English-speaking courses could be offered to enhance the speaking skill of EFL learners. This study will indicate the potential problems that learners have in speaking which may be addressed when designing the possible speaking course.

### **2. Aims of the Study**

The present study aims at:

1. Identifying and classifying the types of syntactic errors that EFL learners commit in their spoken production.
2. Determining the most frequently occurring errors.
3. Explaining the possible sources of these syntactic errors.

### **3. Research Questions**

The current study addresses the following questions:

1. What are the types of syntactic errors in the English spoken production of EFL learners?
2. What are the most frequently occurring errors in the spoken production of EFL learners?

3. What are the major sources of the most frequently occurring errors?

#### **4. Research hypotheses**

In the light of the current research questions:

1. It is hypothesized that the most frequently occurring errors are made in subject verb agreement, articles and tenses.

2. It is hypothesized that interference of the mother tongue and intralingual transfer are the main sources of the most frequently occurring errors.

#### **5. Research Methodology**

##### **5.1. Participants**

The participants of the study are 77 third year LMD students of English at Abd Elhafid Boussouf university center in Mila. They were selected randomly from the whole population 233 students.

##### **5.2. Data Collection and Analysis**

The data consists of students' speech at their academic courses of oral expression, linguistics and literature. This speech has been recorded. The recorded data consists of 270 minute speech of 77 students. The length of the speech ranges from 5 to 12 minutes. The recordings were transcribed. Syntactic errors were then identified based on the grammatical acceptability of the forms on the sentence level. After identification, the errors were grouped under relevant grammatical categories. The categories of errors were not based on any pre-determined taxonomy; rather, the categories became clear after the nature of the errors was determined. After categorizing errors, the number of errors in each category was counted.



After the identification of the most frequently occurring errors, these errors were described in terms of grammar and their possible sources were determined with the help of contrastive and error analysis

## **6. Structure of the Study**

The present study falls into two chapters. Chapter one consists of two sections. The first section discusses the concept of contrastive analysis, its definition, the strong version of contrastive analysis hypothesis and its models of hierarchy of difficulty. Also, the critics of contrastive analysis hypothesis, the weak version of it and the markedness theory have been discussed. The second section gives an overview on error analysis, its procedures, sources of errors, categorization, shortcomings and interlanguage. Chapter two is also divided into two sections. Section one is about research methodology, it presents a description of the participants and the procedures of data analysis. Section two is devoted to the results and their discussion. It identifies, describes, categorizes and explains the sources of syntactic errors made by EFL learners in their spoken production of English. A general conclusion summarizes the major findings, lists the limitations, implications as well as suggestion for further research.

## **Chapter One: Contrastive and Error analysis**

### **Introduction**

This chapter presents the theoretical framework of the current study. It is divided into two sections: the first section presents a review of literature on contrastive analysis, its definition, the strong version and its models of hierarchy of difficulty. The critics of the contrastive analysis hypothesis and the weak version as well as the markedness theory are provided. The second section sheds light on error analysis, its definition, procedures, categories and the sources of errors, it also draws a distinction between mistakes and errors, and provides a brief account of the main shortcomings in error analysis. The chapter ends with a discussion of the concept of interlanguage.

### **Section 1: Contrastive Analysis**

#### *1.1.1. Overview on Contrastive Analysis*

Contrastive analysis was first introduced by Robert Lado in 1957 in his book “Linguistic across Cultures”. He stated that second language learners when they come to speak, they tend to transfer structures, meanings and the culture of their first language to the target language both productively and receptively. He claimed that what is common between learners’ native language and the target language will be obviously simple for them, but those which are different will cause difficulty. Kin (2001, as cited in Heydari and Bagheri,2012.) argued that contrastive analysis is a process in which there is a comparison between the learner’s mother tongue and the target language on the basis of similarities and differences between these two languages.

Gass and Selinker(2008) define CA as systematic comparison of two or more languages in order to decide the possible errors the learners may fall in for the aim of determining what is needed to be learned and what is not in second language acquisition.

Contrastive analysis, as a field of research, has a number of fundamental objectives developed to help teachers in their task of teaching a foreign language. The main objectives are: predicting L2 problems, diagnosing L2 errors and developing course materials for language teaching.

Firstly, contrastive analysis is considered as an approach used to predict the problems and difficulties that may face learners as well as errors they may make. According to Christopherson (1973), predicting problems in second language learning can be realized through knowing the similarities and differences between the source language and the target language. That is, providing insights into similarities and differences between the native language and the foreign language will help the linguist to discover the difficulties that the learner can encounter during his process of learning that language.

Secondly, contrastive analysis is considered as an approach that aims at diagnosing errors. It is worth mentioning that this role is only attributed to the weak version of (CA) and not to its strong version since the first has an explanatory function while the second has a predictive one. Thus, the weak version with its explanatory function enables the teacher to use his linguistic knowledge to account for some errors made by learners of a foreign language. James (1980) claims that teachers' role is to know the reasons that lead EFL learners to commit particular errors, and therefore the teacher attempts to provide an adequate response to them.

Thirdly, contrastive analysis aims at developing course materials for language teaching. Fries (1945) was among those who support converting data from (CA) into teaching programs; he argues that a successful teaching process can be achieved by using course material based on systematic comparison of the source language and the target language. Dulay et al. (1982) writes "... a comparison of a learner's L1 and L2 –contrastive analysis– should reveal areas of difficulty for L2 lesson planning."

There are many interesting hypotheses related to language and language function. Contrastive analysis hypothesis (CAH) was one of the most interesting hypotheses that is based on several assumptions:

- Contrastive analysis is based on the idea that learning a language is a question of habit formation.
- The interference seems to be the main source of errors in the target language.
- Description of errors requires knowing the differences between the first language (L1) and the second language (L2).
- What is essential in learning a second language is to know the differences between the two languages. So, new learning is involved. In other words, what is variant between the L1 and L2 must be learnt.
- Similarities between two languages lead to easiness whereas differences lead to difficulty (Gass and Silnker, 2008).

Taysseir (2018) claimed that the interference of the first language in learning a second language can be negative or positive. The former refers to the existence of differences between two languages in which these differences lead into errors while the latter occurs when the similarities between the source language and the target language can facilitate the learning.

Wardhaugh (1970) distinguished between two versions of CA, a strong and a weak version.

### ***1.1.2. The Strong Version of Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis.***

It is also commonly known as priori version or the predictive version. Richards (1974, p.60) argues that “the learner’s behavior is predictable on the basis of a comparison of the SL and TL”. That is to say, the prediction of the difficulties that may face learners can be

determined by contrasting of the two languages. Lado (1957) was one of the proponents of the strong version. He claimed that this version is based on the transformation of forms and meanings of the native language and culture to the target one by learners, this transfer can happen both productively and receptively. The first type of transfer takes place when learners try to speak the language and act in the culture. The second is all about knowing and understanding how language and culture are practiced by natives. He stated that when EFL learners attempt to learn a foreign language, they will obviously find several easy factors, and this will help them learn the language easily and quickly but on the other hand, they may also face many difficulties. When there are similarities between the native language and the target language, this will lead to easiness in learning however, the differences will cause difficulty and hardness.

**1.2.2.1. Models of Hierarchy of Difficulty.** The predictions made by CAH were criticized because they were subjective and not meeting the scientific description criteria. Therefore, to make the prediction stage of CA more formal, less subjective and scientifically justified, models of identifying the levels of difficulty were suggested by a number of contrastive analysis' proponents. Stockwell, Bowen and Martin (1965, as cited in Brown, 2007) were a group of researchers who suggested a well known model called hierarchy of difficulty. This model might help teachers or linguists predict the difficulty level of the relevant aspect of the target language. They proposed eight possible levels of difficulty for phonological contrast of two languages based on the notions of transfer (positive, negative and zero) as well as the notions of optional and obligatory choices of certain phonemes in the two contrasted languages. Through analyzing and comparing the properties of two languages by referring to the hierarchy of difficulty, linguists were capable to derive an accurate description for the phonological difficulties that may face the learner. Also, Stockwell and his partners offered a hierarchy of difficulty for grammatical structure of the two languages being

contrasted. This hierarchy of difficulty involved 16 levels that based on the same notions used in the hierarchy of phonological difficulty, in addition to the dimensions of “structural correspondence” and “functional/ semantics correspondence”.

Later, Chifford Prator (1967, as cited in Brown, 2007) constructed a hierarchy of difficulty of both phonological and grammatical structure of the languages being contrasted. His hierarchy includes six categories. These categories, in ascending order, are reworded below:

#### **Level 0: Transfer**

There is no difference between the two languages being contrasted. The learner can transfer (positively) the forms of his native language to the target one.

#### **Level 1: Coalescence**

Two items in the native language become only one item in the target language. In this case, the learner must overlook the differences between the two items of the native language and use just one form in the target one.

#### **Level 2: Underdifferentiation**

An item of the native language does not exist in the target one. In this case, the learner must learn to avoid these items.

#### **Level 3: Reinterpretation**

New interpretation (new shape or distribution) is given to an item of the native language in the target one.

#### **Level 4: Overdifferentiation**

The learner learns new items entirely, these items has little similarity to the native language item.

### **Level 5: Split**

Two or more items in the target language have just one existed item in the native language. The learner must make a distinction between these items which do not exist in his first language.

Both of Prator and Stockwell claimed that their hierarchy can work for any two languages, and it can help in predicting the difficulties of second language learners in any language with a fair level of certainty and objectivity.

#### ***1.1.3. Critics of Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis.***

Though the importance of CA and its crucial aid for second language teachers, it has been criticized by numerous linguists.

One of the main critics is the fact that not all errors expected by contrastive analysis occur in the learner's performance. One of those linguists who criticized the CAH were Whitman and Jackson (1972, as cited in Brown, 2007) who tested empirically the effectiveness of predictions by CAH for Japanese learners. They found no correspondence between the early predictions made by linguists and the obtained data. They concluded that contrastive analysis is inadequate for predicting the interference problems of a language learner. In this regard, although Lado (1957) was one of the proponents of the strong version of CAH, he claimed that the theoretical predictions of contrastive analysis should be tested empirically since it is not always true. He said that "Occasionally, however, we may encounter differences in the theoretical analysis that on further observation turn out to be of no importance" (p.17). For that, informants should test and revise the differences found by theoretical analysis. Thus, CAH has only theoretical background not empirical support.

Johanson (1973, as cited in Al- khresheh, 2016) claims that teachers are interested in identifying learners' difficulties rather than theoretical predictions of them, it also gives no

formal way to decide which elements of one language are to be compared with those of the other, and it is impossible for CAH to indicate which differences lead to difficulties and which of these differences will not. A number of studies revealed that CA is most predictive at the phonological level and least predictive at the syntactic level and this is because till now there is no adequate comparison between languages, and may be what is predicted as a difficulty by CAH is not always so in practice.

#### ***1.1.4. The Weak Version of Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis.***

The weak version or posteriori version, Cristopherson (1973) claims that some observed learning problems can be accounted for by the differences between the source language and the target language. Richards (1974, p.61) claims that “the weak claim of contrastive analysis is that of accounting for learner behavior.” It demands of the linguists to explain the similarities and differences between the two language systems after observing the interference phenomena (Wardhaugh, 1970). Thus, the weak version has an explanatory function and not a predictive function as the strong version has. Wardhaugh (1970) writes “the weak version leads to an approach which makes fewer demands of contrastive theory than does the strong version.”

Wardhaugh (1970) who considers the weak version of contrastive analysis hypothesis as a part of error analysis argues that a large number of contrastive analysts agree with the demands of the weak version and not the strong one. In order to support his view, Wardhaugh presents the example of the text of ‘The Sounds of English and Spanish’ written by Stockwell and Bowen (1965). He argues that these two linguists did not try to predict the problems that can face English learners. They use, instead, their linguistic knowledge to account for observed problems. Both strong and weak versions of (CAH) have common and different claims. They are common in the assumption of (L1) interference phenomenon, but different



since the strong version claims a predictive power while the weak one claims the ability to diagnose the committed errors.

#### ***1.1.5. The Markedness Theory***

Fred Eckman (1977, 1981, as cited in Brown, 2007) suggested a helpful method of predicting and determining directionality of difficulty. This method called markedness differential hypothesis or markedness theory. It based on the principle of universal grammar in determining the relative degrees of difficulty Celce-Murcia and Hawkins (1985, as cited in Ghazaryan, 2011, p.28) sum up the markedness theory as follow:

It distinguishes members of a pair of related forms or structures by assuming that the marked member of a pair contains at least one more feature than the unmarked one. In addition, the unmarked (or neutral) member of the pair is the one with a wider range of distribution than the marked one. For example, in the case of the English indefinite articles (a and an), an is the more complex or marked form (it has an additional sound) and a is the unmarked form with the wider distribution.

Furthermore, Eckman (1981, as cited in Brown, 2007) assumed that acquiring marked items in a language seems to be more difficult than acquiring the unmarked one, and “the degree of markedness will correspond to degrees of difficulty”(p.214). Many other researchers’ findings reinforce the assumption of the markedness theory which also gives an explanation for the reason of the natural order in the acquisition of the first language.

## **Section 2: Error Analysis**

### ***1.2.1. Definition of Error Analysis***

Error analysis (EA) is a branch of applied linguistics that was first introduced by Stephen Pit Corder in the 1960s. It comes as a reaction to the failure of contrastive analysis to account for learners' errors. While CA focuses on the prediction of errors, error analysis goes more deeply; it identifies, explains and classifies those errors. Furthermore, it demonstrates that learners' errors are not always due to the interference of the mother tongue but they are due to the reflection of some universal learning strategies such as simplification (Erdogan, 2005). Error analysis is a type of analysis that emphasizes the errors committed by the learners. Error analysis and the weak version of contrastive analysis are similar in which both of them focus on making a comparison between errors committed by the learners while producing the target language and the TL form itself. Moreover, Attia (1990, as cited in Taysseir, 2018 p. 12) defined error analysis as “ the study of student reoccurring mistakes, their classification into categories, using them as a basis for preparing lessons and mistakes designed to help students overcome such errors”. In other words, it is a technique that is based on the identification and the classification of errors into categories which later can help teachers to design their lessons by choosing the appropriate materials to treat such errors. Besides, as suggested by Keshavars(1997)error analysis is divided into theoretical(EA) and applied(EA). The former tries to investigate and decode the strategies used in learning a language and their similarities with that of acquiring the native language, while the latter seeks to design course materials to language teachers.

### ***1.2.2. Procedures of Error Analysis***

Brown (2007) claimed that it is difficult to comprehend the linguistic system of L2 because it cannot be immediately observed. For that, it should be deduced by means of

analyzing production and comprehension data. The instability of the learner's system makes this process more complex since the recurrent observation of a learner will evidently lead to changeable and contrary facts.

Error Analysis is made up of four consecutive stages. Ellis (1994, as cited in Al-Khresheh, 2016, p.51) suggested four stages. These stages are: (1) "Collection of a sample of learner language, (2) identification of errors, (3) description of errors, (4) explanation of errors".

**1.2.2.1. Collection of a Sample of Learners' Language.** Choosing the data collection method differs from one researcher to another. Learners' errors are affected by several vital factors. Ellis (1994, as cited in Al-khresheh, 2016, p.51) argued that these factors are significant in "collecting a well- defined sample of learner language so that clear statements can be made regarding what kinds of errors the learners produce and under what condition". The factors are shown in Table 1.

*Table 1: Factors to Consider when Collecting Samples of Learner Language (Ellis,1994, p.49).*

<b>Factors</b>	<b>Description</b>
<b>A. Language</b>	.....
Medium	Learner production can be oral written
Genre	Learner production may take form of conversation, a lecture, an essay, a letter, etc.
Content	The topic the learner is communicating about
<b>B. Learner</b>	.....
Level	Elementary, Intermediate, or advanced
Mother tongue	The learner's L1
Language learning Experience	This may be classroom or naturalistic or a mixture of the two

**1.2.2.2. Identification of Errors.** Identification seems to be the second step in analyzing errors. Corder (1981) proposed a model in which he made a comparison between overt and covert errors. He referred to overt errors as those errors which are indisputably ungrammatical at the sentence level whereas, the covert ones are grammatically correct at the level of sentence but, they are considered as interpretable in a broader context as in this example suggested by Brown (2007): “I am fine, thank you” the sentence is grammatically correct but it is not an accurate answer to the question “who are you”. Ellis (1997) also suggested that in order to recognize the learners’ errors, a distinction between the correct sentence in the target language and the sentence that is produced by the learner should be made. To clarify this aforementioned idea, he suggested the following example; “A man and the little boy was watching him”(Ellis, 1997, p.16). It is obvious that this sentence is incorrect since it should be” a man and a little boy were watching him”.

**1.2.2.3. Description of Errors.** Description of errors is placed after the identification step in which there is no description without the identification of those errors. Description of EFL learners’ errors are a vital step that help in obtaining a good explanation for them. According to Al-Khresheh (2016), description of errors aims at classifying or categorizing errors into different types. This can be done according to several ways.

Corder (1971) suggested a classification where he makes a distinction between two types of errors: errors of performance and errors of competence. The former occurs due to the mistakes in language use made by the learners whereas the latter can be caused by the wrong application of the target language rules. Corder (1973) stated that errors fall into four main categories: firstly, omission errors. These appear when a learner leaves out a required item of an utterance of the target language. For example: there is boy over there. Here, he omits the indefinite article ”a” where it should be added before the word “boy”. Secondly, additional errors, these errors show when a learner adds unnecessary elements like “the London”.

Thirdly, selection errors occur when selecting an incorrect element” My brother is oldest than me”. Lastly, ordering errors occur due to the misplacing of items or putting them in the wrong place such as” he is a dear to me friend”.

**1.2.2.4. Explanation of Errors.** According to Al-Khariesheh (2016), the first two steps are preliminaries to the most interesting step that is the explanation of errors. It is necessary to find and explain the different sources of these errors. Ellis and Barakhuizen (2005, p. 62) claimed that” explaining errors involve determining their sources in order to account for why they were made”. Previously, the CAH supporters’ assume that the only source of errors is interference, however, EA appear to confirm that interference is not the only source of errors. Second language learners’ errors are also due to other several reasons. (Al-Khariesheh, 2016). Richards (1971) identified two main sources of errors which are interference errors and intralingual errors. Interference errors (interlingual errors) are those which result from the use of the native language in the target one. Whereas, intralingual errors(it is also called developmental errors) are those which occur within the structure of the target language itself; They are subdivided into errors of overgeneralization, incomplete application of rules, ignorance of rule restriction and false concepts hypothesized.

The focus on errors have many benefits in which it helps knowing the reasons that lead learners to commit these errors, and it is useful for teachers to know what errors learners make. Making errors is a good aid for learners to enhance their learning especially, when they correct themselves.

### ***1.2.3. Sources of Errors***

A number of researchers have suggested some sources for the occurred errors. Some of those sources are:

**1.2.3.1. Interlingual Transfer:** According to Arabaski (2004) transfer is a term used in applied linguistics to refer to the learners' transformation of knowledge of their native language to their performance in the target one. This transfer can be either positive or negative. The former occurs when there are similarities between the native and the target language which facilitate the acquisition of L2 and the latter appears when there are differences between the old and the new behavior that is being learned. This may result in error. Negative transfer is also called interlingual transfer or interference.

Taysseir (2018, p.9) defined the term interlingual as “the system in the brain that language learners attempt to use the structure or the system of the prior language that exists in order to acquire second language”. As it is clear from the definition, interlingual transfer is a technique in which language learners tend to acquire the second language based on the use of formations and constructions of the previous language. Also, it is a significant source of errors for EFL learners. This type of error tends to appear at the first stages of learning a second language in which learners do not yet have sufficient knowledge in the target language, so they rely a lot on their native language by transferring forms and constructions from L1 to L2. We hear English language learners say “sheep” for “ship”, or the book of Jack instead of Jack's book, the occurrence of these errors is referred to negative lingual transfer, but in fact it is not considered as the solely source. Ellis (1997) provides an illustrative example about how Bantu learners of English fare in the use of the English prepositional system. Bantu and English are different from each other regarding the use of the preposition “at”, he cites the following example:

We went at Johannesburg last week (Ellis, 1997, p.19).

The error in this sentence reflects the fact that Bantu language uses only a single preposition when referring to location and direction whereas, English uses two distinct ones; at and to.

**1.2.3.2. Intralingual Errors:** Ghazaryan (2011) claims that intralingual errors are related to the learning of the language itself, independent from the learners' L1." They bear this name because they are not related to the mother tongue" (Mansour, 2018, p.41). They start to appear in more advanced stages of learning when L2 learners really develop an inadequate knowledge of the second language and begin to generalize what they have learnt. That is why they are also called developmental errors. The noticeable thing is that learners of different language backgrounds fall into the same errors. Thus, this will prove the idea that the occurrence of these errors has nothing to do with the mother tongue interference. Richards (1971) comes with the major causes of interlingual errors which consist of overgeneralization, simplification, ignorance of rule restrictions, incomplete application of rules and false concepts hypothesized.

**1.2.3.2.1. Overgeneralization:** According to Richards (1974) overgeneralization refers to the learners' creation of deviant structure when they confront with new unknown information in the target language. Learners rely on their previous knowledge of the L2 and use it in new situations. Examples include: he can sings, we are hope, it is occurs and he come from. From these examples, it is noticeable that learners attempt to apply rules in contexts where they do not apply (add the "s" of the third person singular after a model verb).Taysseir (2018) argued that each language has its own system of rules which are similar at the level of the complexity. Learners of English language tend to believe that when they want to express past events, it is necessary to use the verb be "was, were" otherwise they will fall into error but, in fact this belief is wrong. They cannot apply this rule with all types of sentences.

**1.2.3.2.2. Simplification:** Ghazaryan (2011) states that simplification is the process which is emphasized on the omission of some language elements, the occurrence of this phenomenon generally takes place in the early stages of language learning. This process

carries benefits in which it is helpful for L2 learners with minimum knowledge and linguistic competence to communicate effectively. In contrast, Littlewood (2004, p.510) pointed out that it is discussible whether such simplified utterances” are best seen as products of the speaker’s developing linguistic system as one-off strategies designed to solve an immediate communication problem”. As it is clear from the quote above, it cannot be certain whether this process is viewed as products that help speakers to develop their linguistic system or just strategies planned to find solutions for immediate communication problems. In the same perspective, Touchie (1986) stated that learners prefer to use simple words and constructions instead of complex ones in order to keep communication going for instance, the use of simple present rather than the present perfect.

**1.2.3.2.3. Ignorance of Rule Restrictions:** According to Richard (1974) ignorance of rule restrictions is not totally different from overgeneralization. It is closely related to it. It occurs when the learners are uncapable to administrate rules to inappropriate situations. That is, they apply rules in contexts where they are not applicable. For example:” (he made me to go rest) through extension of the pattern (he asked/ wanted me to go)” (Haydari and Bagheri, 2012, p. 1584). The example demonstrates that learners make use of previous acquired rules in new contexts where they do not apply.

**1.2.3.2.4. Incomplete Application of Rules:** Richard (1974) indicates that learners tend to construct deviant forms in order to facilitate their learning. For Al-khersheh (2016), incomplete application of rules may be also called as failure to achieve complete knowledge of the target language. It happens when learners realize that they can communicate easily and effectively through the use of simple grammatical rules rather than complex ones. In simple words, learners prefer to use simple forms and construction to communicate instead of using complicated one. Learners’ failure in constructing questions is best examples of these types



of intralingual errors. Learners may produce “when you will come to the meeting?” instead of “when will you come to the meeting?”.

**1.2.3.2.5. False Concepts Hypothesized:** Touchie (1986) claimed that the majority of learners’ errors are due to learners’ formation of wrong hypotheses about the target language. More specifically, these errors occur when learners misunderstand a particular rule which lead them to form a hypothesis about some grammatical rules of the target language. For instance: some learners think that “was, did” are the past tense markers; therefore, they say “one day it was happened” or “she was finished the homework” as well as they may interpret the form “is” as the marker of present simple. So, they produce “he is talk to the teacher”. Here, learners do not fully understand a distinction in the target language (the use of was, did and is).

#### **1.2.4. Categories of Errors**

Corder (1973) classifies errors into four main categories: omission of some required elements, addition of some unnecessary elements, selection of an incorrect elements and disordering of elements.

**1.2.4.1. Omission Errors:** Omission errors are concerned with the omission of certain linguistic forms due to their complexity in both oral and written production. Omission occurs at three levels including pronunciation, morphology and syntax.

At the level of pronunciation, EFL Learners face a problem with consonant clusters since some of their constitutions are left unpronounced.

At the level of morphology, the third person singular morpheme “s”, the plural marker “s” and the past tense inflection “ed” are missed by learners. As in the following illustrative example:

a strange thing happen to me yesterday.

In syntax, learners tend to leave out certain obligatory elements, this can be illustrated by some examples:

- It divided into three parts.
- He pleased so much because he wait me for long time.
- There are many language in this world, but famous language is English.

**1.2.4.2. Additional Errors:** While learning a second language, learners may omit some necessary elements, they also add redundant elements.

In morphology, learners often overuse the third person singular morpheme "s" and plural marker "s".

At the syntactic level, learners may use wrong combination as in using the definite article with names of places. For example: The Algiers instead of Algiers.

At the lexical level, learners may attach an unnecessary element as in the following example:

- The speech is a group of the sounds.
- Speech it is a way of communication between the human.
- So, we must be study this event.

**1.2.4.3. Selection Errors:** The selection of the wrong phoneme, morpheme, structure or vocabulary item leads learners to make errors in pronunciation, morphology, syntax and vocabulary. These errors may occur due to interlingual transfer or generalization. Learners replace a familiar phoneme from the native language as in the following example: Arabic learners who substitute "p" with "b" like in saying: broplem instead of problem. Therefore, the message cannot be conveyed.

At the level of syntax, learner may choose a wrong structure like: this organs. In addition, these errors may occur at the learner's lexicon level. In the sense that, they pick terms and words which do convey the intended meaning.

-When the immigrants leave in a broad countries.

**1.2.4.4. Ordering Errors:** Disordering may occur at the level of pronunciation when learners shift the position of a certain phoneme as in saying:

- Fignisicant instead of significant

These errors are less frequent at the morphological level for instance: he is get upping now. In this example, the learner links the inflection "ing" to the second part of the verb "get up" while it should be attached to the first part of the two word verb.

In contrast, disordering errors happen a lot at the syntactic level as in the sentence: he is a dear to me friend. Here, there is a kind of inversion in the elements of a single noun phrase.

At the lexical level, learners may reverse the components of a compound noun. For example: a car key may become a key car, which may be regarded as caring keys.

What is obvious is that learners find it difficult to use articles and propositions appropriately.

### ***1.2.5. Mistakes and Errors***

In order to understand learners' linguistic system, linguists in the field of error analysis make a distinction between the two terms errors and mistakes. Brown (2007, p.217) stated that " a mistake refers to a performance error that is either a random guess or a ' slip'; in that is a failure to utilize a known system correctly". That it is to say, both EFL learners and natives tend to commit mistakes while speaking and this is not because of the deficiency

in competence or lack of knowledge, but it is due to other several factors including lack of attention, tiredness and carelessness. Corder (1967) distinguished between two kinds of errors by referring to mistakes as non-systematic errors in which the producer of these errors can recognize and correct directly. It is because they occurred as a result of memory lapses or physical conditions as fatigue and lack of concentration. On the other hand, he also introduced the concept of systematic errors which are errors that cannot be corrected by speakers in the first awhile they committed them. This is because of inadequate learning. Moreover, Brown (2007) claimed that errors are gaps in learners' knowledge which means that EFL learners deviate from the original rules when they want to apply them in the target language.

To distinguish between errors and mistakes, Ellis (1997) proposed two ways:

The first one is to ask the learner to correct himself; if he succeeds to do so then it is a mistake, but if he fails, it will be considered as an error. The second one is to check the performance of the learner; if he sometimes uses the correct form and sometimes the wrong form we consider it as a mistake, but if he always uses the wrong form we consider it as an error.

#### ***1.2.6. Shortcomings in Error Analysis***

Error analysis as a branch of applied linguistics which focuses on analyzing learner's errors was criticized by many linguists and scholars in the field due to a number of reasons:

First, Brown (2007) states that error analysis focuses a lot on errors that are committed by EFL learners while it ignored the correct utterance. Second, error analysis did not focus on learners' comprehension errors. It only emphasizes production data. For this reason, normally special tasks should be designed to elicit data on comprehension. Besides, Ghazaryan (2011, .p36) claimed that the difficulty in learning is never determined by the

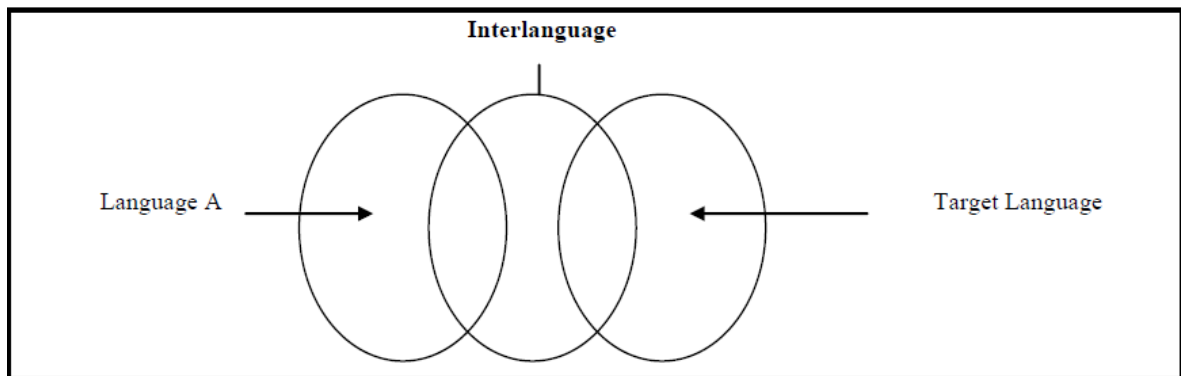
existence of errors in the sense that, when learners do not make errors while learning a foreign language, this does not mean that their learning is going in the right way. In contrast, avoidance may denote difficulties. However, “it should again be noted that, in case of necessity, special task may be conducted to elicit those constructions and items being avoided”.

### ***1.2.7. Interlanguage***

Error and contrastive analysis as two main branches of applied linguistics were criticized by many scholars because they were insufficient for describing L2 errors. On the one hand, CA was criticized because of its belief that interlingual interference from L1 tend to be the only source of the occurrence of errors in SLA. The claim was that” CA is most predictive at the phonological level and least predictive at the syntactic level because no language has been adequately compared yet to another language”(Al-Khresheh, 2015, p. 123). From the other hand, although the popularity of error analysis in 1960 and 1970, it has been subjected to criticism by some researchers for its poor statistical inference (Al-Khresheh, 2016). Thus, CA and EA open the door for Interlanguage theory to appear as a new approach that aims at describing and explaining learners’ errors from its own perspective.

The term interlanguage was first introduced by the American linguist Larry Selinker (1972), in his famous article” interlanguage”, in which he referred to it as the separateness of second language learners’ system that has structurally intermediate status between the native and the target language. It has become the basis of error analysis since it allows researchers to explore learning strategies based on the learners’ errors. Corder (1971) and Nemser (1971) used the terms “idiosyncratic dialect” and “approximate system” respectively in alternation with the term interlanguage to refer to the independent linguistic system used by the learner. These two terms represent the same phenomena, but each of them has its own aspect of focus (Othman, 2004). Selinker (1972 as cited in Corder, 1981) considered IT as dialect in which

its rules has common features with two social dialects of languages, regardless whether these two languages have the same rules or not. For him, the notion of IT is illustrated in Figure01:



**Figure 1: the Notion of the Interlanguage. (Adopted from Corder, 1981:18. In this diagram, Language A represents the Learner's L1.**

## Conclusion

Contrastive analysis is a very useful procedure. It is concerned with the comparison of two languages' systems. The first is that of the MT of learners, while the second is of the TL. However, error analysis came to the surface as an effective substitute to the failure of this approach in which in recent years, there have been a growing number of studies in the area of error analysis. Error analysis seeks to indentify, classify and explain errors and thus help teachers know the problematic areas of EFL learners in order to help them learn better. These studies reveal that the interference of the mother tongue is not the only source behind the occurrence of these errors but there are many other reasons. Despite the popularity of error analysis in the field of SLA research, it was not without any limitations since it was criticized by many researchers in the field.

## **Chapter Two: Research Methodology, Findings and Discussion**

### **Introduction**

This chapter is divided into two sections; the first section is about research methodology. It presents a description of the participants, and then the data collection means and procedures. The second section is about results and discussion. It focuses on analyzing the syntactic errors that are committed by EFL learners in their spoken production, identifying the most frequently occurring ones, and determining their possible sources.

### **Section 1: Research Methodology**

#### ***2.1.1. Participants***

The participants of this study are 77 third year English students at the university center of Mila. Their native language is Arabic. They consist of both males and females in which their age average was between 20 to 22 years old in order to avoid gender biases. Moreover, this sample is selected randomly out of the whole population of about 233 students. The selection of such level is based on the assumption that third year students are more capable of providing us with enough data concerning our research topic and help us to reach the aim of our research since they have the ability to speak and interact in the classroom.

#### ***2.1.2. Data Collection Means***

A classroom observation is adopted in order to collect enough data from the chosen sample of third year students at Abd Elhafid Boussouf university center of Mila during several sessions of different modules including oral expression, Linguistics and Literature. In this context, Gorman and Clayton define observation studies as those that “involve the systematic recording of observable phenomena or behavior in a natural setting” (2005, p.40). In simple and clear words, observation is a quantitative research method where the researcher

observe what the participants actually do (their behaviors) in natural situations. This method is very beneficial for researchers since it allows them to study people in their native environment in order to understand things from their own perspectives, also it may help them to see the things that routinely escape awareness of the participant using a different method.

The aim of implementing the observation is to observe and gather the needed data about the errors that EFL learners commit inside the classroom during presentation or classroom interaction either among students and teachers or between students themselves. The observation was carried out during the second semester of the academic year 2020-2021. It takes place in different sessions with different modules as oral expression, linguistics and literature. Each session consists of 45 min to explore the syntactic errors that third year EFL learners committed in their presentations and interactions in the classroom

### ***2.1.3. Procedures***

The data consists of 270 minute speech of 77 students. The length of the speech ranges from 5 to 12 minutes. The recordings were transcribed. Syntactic errors were then identified based on the grammatical acceptability of the forms on the sentence level. After the identification, the errors were grouped under thirteen relevant grammatical categories. These categories of errors were not based on any pre-determined taxonomy; rather, the categories became clear after the nature of the errors was determined. After categorizing errors, we count the number of errors in each category.

After the identification of the most frequently occurring errors, these errors were described in terms of grammar and their possible sources were determined with the help of contrastive and error analysis.



## Section 2: Results and Discussion

This section presents the results of the study and their discussion. Errors are first identified, classified then their sources are explained.

### 2.2.1. Categories and Sources of Errors

In the current data, the errors learners committed are grouped into 13 categories. The categories, number of errors, and percentages of errors within each category are displayed in the following table.

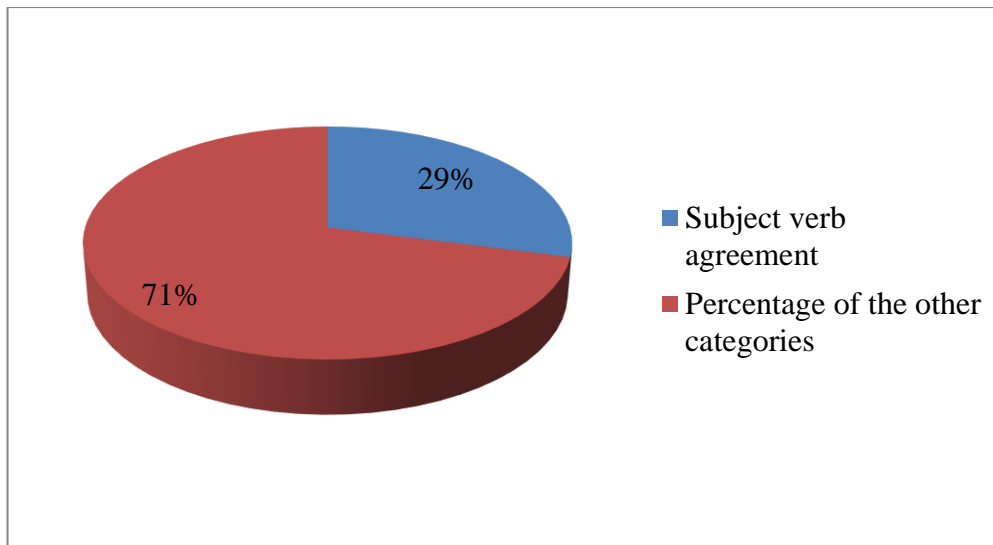
*Table 2: Categories, Number of errors, and Percentages of errors within each category*

Categories	N° of errors	Percentage %
Subject-verb agreement	127	29
Articles	74	17
Tenses	68	16
Noun agreement	54	12
Prepositions	25	6
Repetition of the subject	23	5
Pronouns	19	4
Negation	17	4
Verb+ infinitive or gerund	12	3
Possession	12	3
Passive	4	1
Modals	0	0
Inversion	0	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>435</b>	<b>100</b>

As it is clear from the table above, the total number of errors was 435. These errors were classified into thirteen categories (Sv agreement, Articles, Tense, Noun agreement, Prepositions, Repetition of the subject, Pronouns, Negation, Verb+ Infinitive or Gerund, Possession, Passive Modals and inversion). More specifically, the table shows that the highest percentage of errors (29%) relates to Sv agreement in comparison with other categories. The next more frequently occurring category of errors was articles (17%). The third category of errors is tenses that represent 16% and the next category is noun agreement (12%). 6% of errors was in the use of prepositions. 5% of errors committed in repetition of the subject. 4% of errors committed in pronouns as well as in the use of negation. 3% of errors is scored in verb+ infinitive or gerund and the same percentage in possession. 1% of errors committed in the use of the passive voice while nothing is noticed in modals and inversion.

There are two newly occurring categories of errors that fall out of the classification. They include repetition of the subject and possession

**2.2.1.1. Subject verb agreement.** Subjects and verbs must agree with one another in number (singular or plural). Thus, if a subject (the person or thing doing the action) is singular, its verb (the word representing the action) must also be singular, if a subject is plural, its verb must also be plural.



**Figure 2: The percentage of errors in subject verb agreement**

From figure 2 above, 29% of learners' errors are of the type subject verb agreement.

Learners commit more errors in subject verb agreement category when they come to speak. Examples from the collected data include:

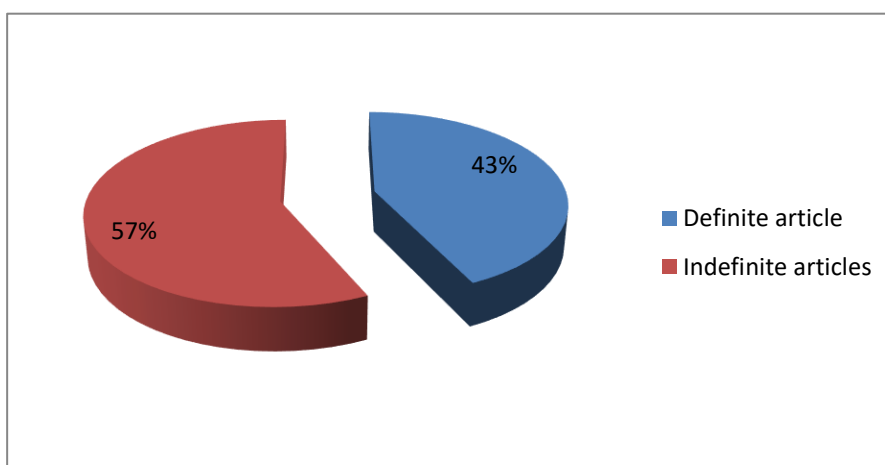
1. Languages is (should be "are") different from each other.
2. The rules of Arabic is not (it should be "are").
3. The boy are (should be "is") the alchemist
4. He want (you should add "s") to be free.
5. He try to reach.
6. They focuses (No "s") on.

From the aforementioned examples, learners ignore the relationship between the subject and the verb in which both of them must agree in two ways: tense and number. In the above examples, the subject and the verb do not agree in number. In the first two examples, the subject of the sentence is in the plural form, but students use the singular form of the auxiliary to be "is" instead of the plural form "are". In the third example, there is a kind of

ignorance at the level of number between the subject and the verb. Moreover, in the last three examples, a kind of omission or addition to the third person singular occurred in which in the fourth and the fifth examples, learners tend to omit the “s” with the third personal pronoun “he” whereas, in the last example, it is the vice versa in which learners added the ”s” of third person singular when the subject is plural. Thus, they fall into error.

Intralingual transfer is the major reason since learners did not know exactly about the subject verb agreement. That is why, they did not know well how to construct correct sentences. In other words, intralingual transfer includes the rules of subject verb agreement itself. The students sometimes understand when the material been taught but they easily forgot the rules after the class. They claim that teachers do not give them the chance to practice what they have learnt before, and after a short period of time they fail to remember its rule. In addition, It is clear that the only thing that they know about subject verb agreement is about adding” s” only. As a result, they sometimes do not pay attention to the subject when determining the verb.

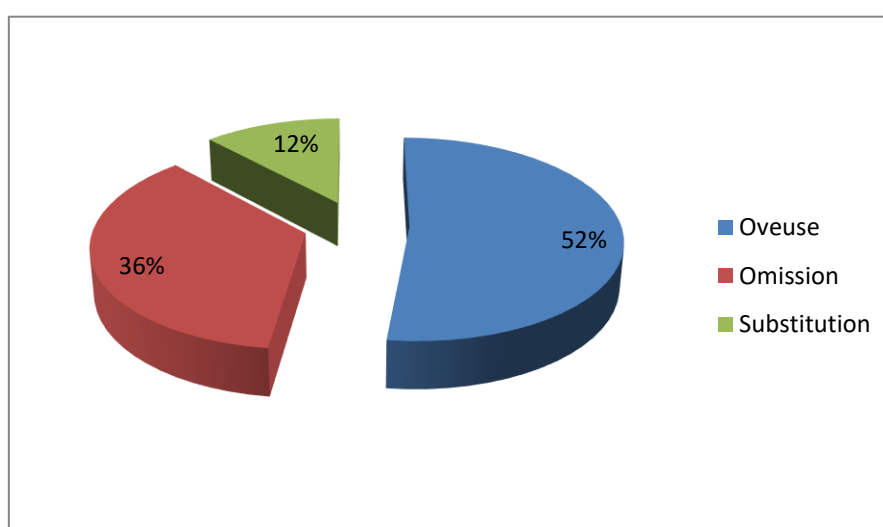
**2.2.1.2. Articles.** Articles are words that associate with a noun. They are actually adjectives because they describe the nouns that they precede. In English grammar, there are two types of articles which are: definite and indefinite articles.



**Figure 3: The percentage of errors in the use of definite and indefinite articles**

Figure 3 above reveals that articles are divided into two main types which are definite and indefinite articles. The largest percentage (57%) of errors is within the indefinite article "a" or "an". In contrast, 43% of errors are in the use of the definite article "the".

**2.2.1.2.1. Indefinite articles.** Indefinite articles *a/an/* are forms that are used before singular countable nouns. The general rule of it is to use "an" when the word starts with a vowel sound while we put "a" with words that begin with consonant in order to refer to a person or thing that is not identified or specified.



**Figure 4: Percentages of overuse, omission and substitution of the indefinite articles**

Figure 4 shows that 52% of indefinite articles errors are due to overuse, 36% of these errors are because of omission while 12% of errors in the use of indefinite articles due to substitution.

The second most frequently occurring errors are related to Articles. More specifically, It occurs at the level of indefinite articles "a" or "an" (57%) in which learners overused the indefinite articles especially "a" rather than substituted or omitted them because the largest percentage (52%) was marked on it. Examples include "we are not a native speakers" instead of " we are not native speakers" or "each language has a specific rules" instead of " each language has specific rules" also, they said " speech communities are a groups of a people"

instead of “ speech communities are groups of people”. In these examples, learners used the indefinite article “a” where it is not necessary. As all we know the indefinite article “a” is used with singular nouns but in these examples, they used it with nouns which are in the plural form such as “a groups”. However, 36% of errors are because of omission of the indefinite articles when referring to non-specific things as in the following examples: “Alchemist is novella”, “he is novelist” or “it is allegorical novel”. Here, in these examples, learners should add the indefinite articles “a” or “an” before each noun. So, it should be a novella, a novel and an allegorical. In contrast, the lowest percentage (12%) of errors is because learners substituted the indefinite articles. Learners substituted the indefinite articles ”a” or “an” by the definite one “the” as in this example: “we make the presentation about” here, the learner substituted the indefinite article “a” with the definite one “the” and this is wrong. He should say “we make a presentation about”.

The overuse of the indefinite articles occurs more frequently in comparison with the omission and substitution, and this is probably because of the intralingual transfer in which learners do not respect the rules of the target language concerning the usage of those indefinite articles. A/an is used to express indefinite meaning of singular countable nouns. However, with plural countable nouns the zero articles should be used. The following examples illustrate the case above:

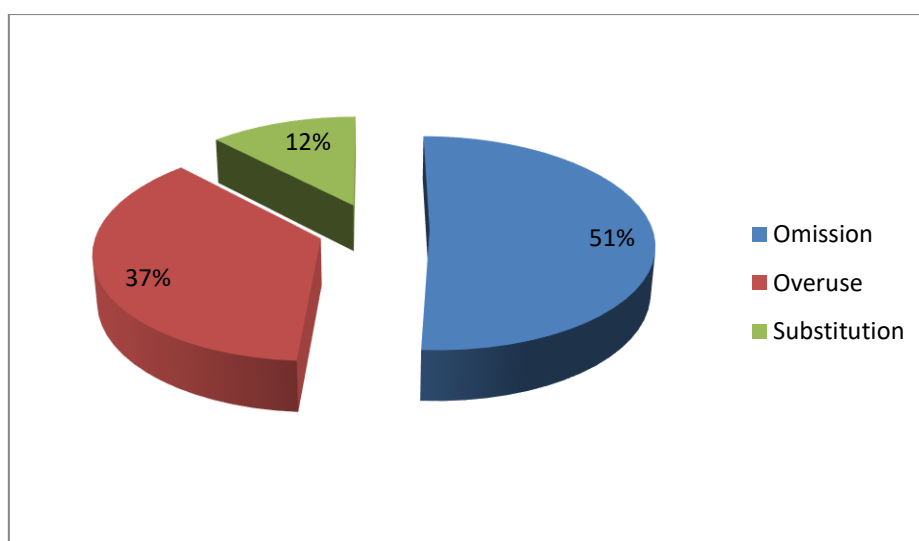
- Speech communities are a groups.
- Her brothers and sisters was also a writers.
- A Communities are.....

The above examples show that learners are not aware of the usage of the indefinite article ”a” since they use it with plural countable nouns. Here, English language does not

permit such usage because the rule is that the indefinite article "a" should be used before singular countable nouns and zero article with plural countable ones.

In the current data, there were also cases of substitution of the indefinite article with the definite article and vice versa. It was not possible to systematically analyze those cases and suggest possible sources of such errors as there were only a few of them which did not yield enough information to make any judgments.

**2.2.1.2.2. Definite article** .A definite article is a determiner that is used before a noun to show that the identity of the noun is already known to the listener.



**Figure5: Percentages of omission, overuse and substitution of the definite article**

Figure 5 indicates that the occurrence of errors in the use of the definite article “the” takes place at three levels. The largest percentage (51%) of errors is due the omission. Then, 37% for the overuse of the definite article whereas, the lowest proportion (12%) is marked in the substitution level.

The frequency of errors that third year EFL learners commit while speaking in the definite article “the” are less than those errors which they make in the use of the indefinite articles ”a” or “an”. Unlike the indefinite articles, learners commit much more errors at the

level of omission rather than the overuse of it as in saying: “ story start”, “ Nick leaves two alone for short time” (should add “the” in both examples). Here, learners exclude the definite article ”the” where it is necessary because this determiner indicates that what is mentioned has already been referred to. In addition, learners sometimes overuse this determiner. For instance: learners said” clarisa is the fifty one years old” instead of “clarisa is fifty one years old” and “ we have problem with the tenses” instead of “ we have problem with tenses”. These examples show that learners exaggerate the use of the determiner “the” where it is not needed. In contrast, the lowest percentage is for the substitution of this determiner since learners rarely substituted the definite article ”the” with the indefinite one ”a” like in saying “he is a person who has”. Here, normally, learners should use the definite article instead of the indefinite one ”a”. So, the noun should be preceded by the definite article “the” and the sentence becomes” he is the person who has”.

The occurrence of errors at the level of omission of the definite article may be because of intralingual transfer. EFL learners do not have enough knowledge about the language rules that permit them to use it easily without any hesitation where necessary. They should first know that this indicator is necessary to determine whether this thing is first mentioned or already has been mentioned like in this example: “story begin”, it is illogic to speak about and discuss the events of a particular story without knowing what the story is, so here students are unaware of this point. They may omit the definite article ”the” since they speak quickly and forget restrictions to that rule. However, through the examination of the errors in the overuse of the definite article, the English and Arabic rules, we determine that the main source behind the occurrence of these errors is possibly the negative transfer of the learners’ L1. In some cases, learners rely a lot on their mother tongue, they construct the sentence that they want to say in Arabic and then they translate it into English without paying attention to the rules of that language.

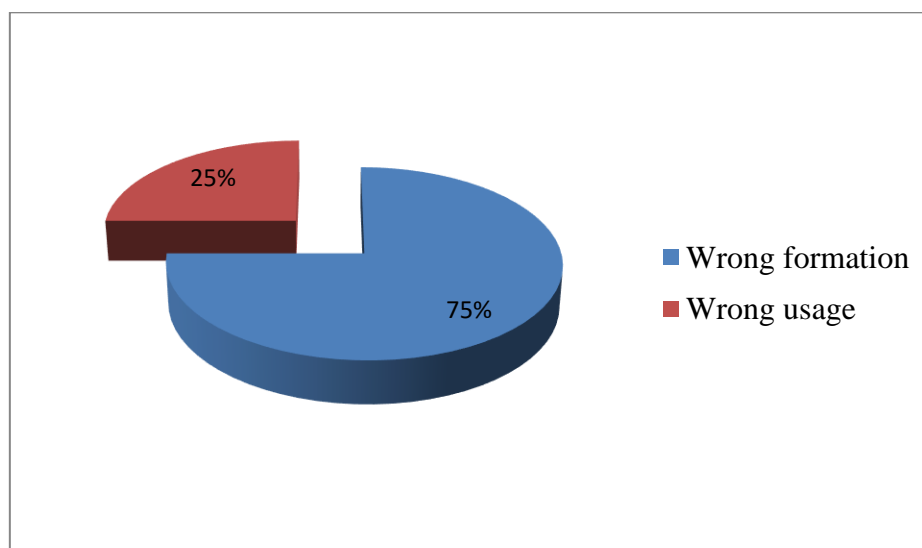


We have problem with the tenses: لدينا مشاكل مع الأزمنة:

Clarissa is the fifty one years old كلاريسا في الواحد والخمسين من عمرها

These two examples show that learners are really influenced by their mother tongue, in which they use the definite article “ the” where it is not necessary. They think that if the word “الأزمنة” and “الخمسين” are defined in their mother tongue by “ ال التعريف ”, they should follow the same rule when translating it into English by using the definite article “the”. This what lead them to fall into this kind of errors.

**2.2.1.3. Tenses.** The term “tense” originates from the Latin translation of the Greek word for “time”. Reishaan (2013, p.101) describes tense as a method of locating” an event or action at the scale of time by virtue of a specific verb- form”.



**Figure6: Percentages of wrong formation and wrong usage of tenses**

Figure 6 shows that learners’ problems with tenses are due to wrong formation (75%). Only 25% of errors related to tenses due to wrong use. These results indicate that third year EFL learners make more errors in the formation of verbs rather than the usage of the appropriate tense.

A large number of students omitted the auxiliary as in the following examples: "when you listening", "the way they looking" "Dazzy chosen to marry Tom". These three examples show that learners are not aware about the language rules as if they do not know that it is necessary to use the auxiliary of the verb "to be" before the verb when it is in the present continuous. So they should be "when you are listening" and the way they are looking." Moreover, they also excluded the auxiliary "to have" when they come to use present or past perfect so the verb in the example above should be in this form "Dazzy has chosen to marry Tom". Furthermore, students unconsciously added the auxiliary where it should not be as "he is was born" here the sentence should be "he was born" as a result the learner used the same auxiliary twice with the different tenses. Based on our findings, learners add redundant elements to the verb like in "he gaves" and that creates a problem in terms of the acceptability of the structure they sometimes do not have enough language credit about regular and irregular verbs so they generalize the rule of adding "ed" to form the past tense like in saying "he meeted" instead of "he met".

learners also tend to commit errors when they come to use the appropriate tense that serves the event of the sentence, but the occurrence of these errors are less frequent than those of wrong formation. Several examples include "if I master the rules of the English language well, obviously I speak( wrong tense use, it should be will speak) it as natives. Learner misused the tense in this sentence since it is "if conditional type one" in this case, the learner should use future tense in place of present simple in order to express possibility in the future. Besides, in the example "After he die", the speaker used the wrong tense that does not fit the meaning of the sentence. Consequently, the latter should be something like that "after he died."

The main sources of this type of errors may be the intralingual transfer- namely overgeneralization and interference. The following examples illustrate the case where learners overgeneralize the English language rules:

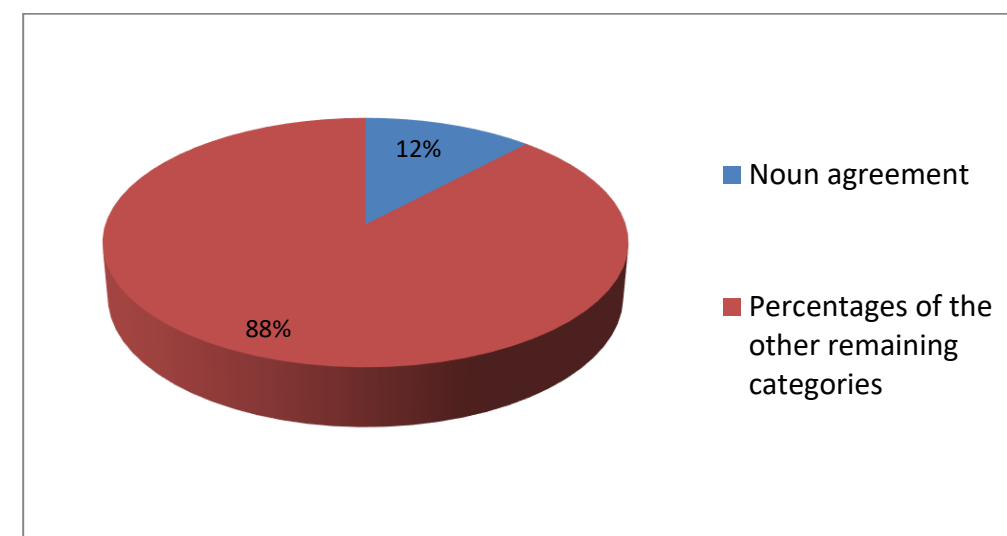
-He buyed/ He metted.

Learners are aware of the English language rules concerning how to form the past tense. they already know that” ed” inflection symbolizes the past tense. So, in order to form the past tense, you should put the inflection” ed” at the end of the verb but this rule is not always applicable because English language contains two types of verbs( regular and irregular verb), and this rule does not work with irregular ones in which the verb should be changed completely. Thus, learners use one form or construction in one context and extend its application to other contexts where it does not apply.

Furthermore, our study reveals that language transfer or linguistic interference is another reason for errors. They occur due to language contact situation in which Lott (1983, p.256) defines interference as” errors in the learner’s use of the foreign language that can be traced back to the mother tongue “. In Arabic, most of the verbs do not occur in the progressive aspect. So, it is hard for Arab learners of English to use the progressive form appropriately. This leads them to use the non-progressive instead of the progressive one. In this case, either the progressive morpheme” ing” is deleted or the auxiliary verb is omitted by the learners. These errors can be seen due to the negative transfer of their mother tongue as in saying: “santyago walking” instead of “ santyago is walking” or “ he is study to become an alchemist” instead of “ he is studying to become an alchemist”.

The other problem Arab learners of English face is their misunderstanding of tenses. In other words, they do not know where they should use one tense rather than the other, and this may be because of inadequate knowledge of the target language.

#### 2.2.1.4. Noun Agreement.



**Figure7: The percentage of errors in noun agreement**

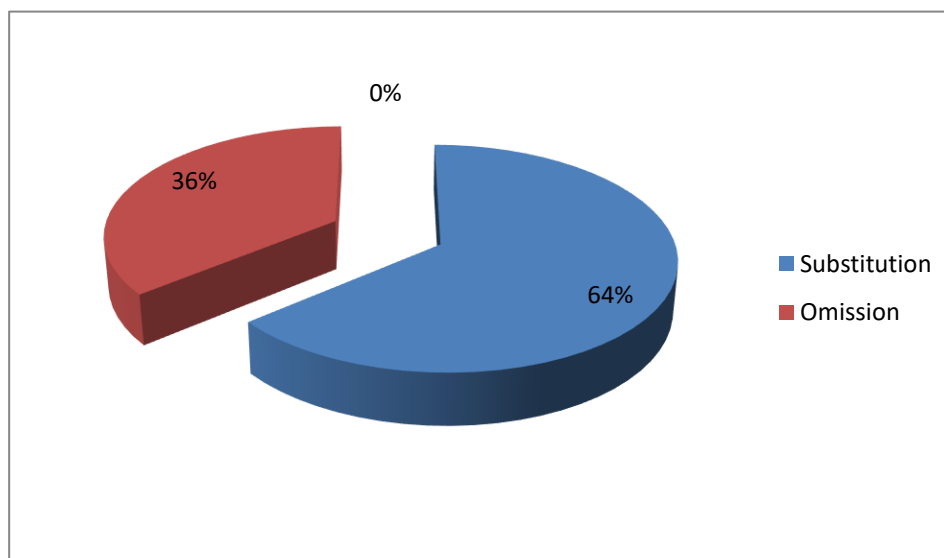
Based on the findings presented in figure7, it is clear that 12% of errors third year EFL learners make are in noun agreement

Learners do not respect the singular and plural form of the noun. They often get confused using of the demonstrative pronouns (this, that, these and those) with it. More specifically, learners use a singular demonstrative pronoun with a noun in its plural form or vice versa as in following examples: “this persons”, “this communities developed” or “these group of people considered as speech community”.

The possible reason for committing this type of errors is the learners’ lack of knowledge of the rules related to noun agreement, or it may be that the learners know these rules, but when they come to applying them in real situations they forget them and this may be because of pressure, stress and lack of time.

**2.2.1.5. Prepositions.** A preposition is a word that shows the relationship between a noun or pronoun and other words in a sentence. It links nouns, pronouns and phrases to other words in a sentence. The word or phrase that the preposition introduces is called the object of

the preposition. A preposition usually indicates the temporal, spatial or logical relationship of its object to the rest of the sentence. In other words, A preposition is a type of a word or group of words often placed before nouns, pronouns or gerunds to link them grammatically to other words.



**Figure8: Percentages of omission and substitution in the use of prepositions**

As the above figure 8 indicates, errors in the use of the prepositions are due to omission and substitution. Substitution (64%) presents the most frequently used strategy while the omission of those prepositions is used less (36%) frequently by students.

Learners of English often omit or substitute the prepositions with inappropriate ones which do not fit in the sentence. These examples from collected data include: “Differences about( should be between) them”, “ he invite Santiago to trip at( should be in) the desert”, ” Santiago is walking through( should be in) the desert”,” when he went in((should be to) “ Santiago fall( in is needed) a love with” and” clarisa go(to is needed) London”. The first four examples represent the case of substitution of prepositions whereas, the last two examples show the case of omission.

Probably, errors made by EFL learners concerning the usage of prepositions are due to two different sources including negative transfer of L1 and intralingual transfer. The first

source may be the result of the learners' lack of knowledge about the differences between the prepositional system of the Arabic and the English language in which prepositions in Arabic are much less in number than their English counterparts. English language comprises about one hundred prepositions whereas, in Arabic the number of preposition is about twenty. This may indicate that one preposition in Arabic has many equivalents in the English language for example the preposition "في" has a number of equivalents in English language (in, at, on).

Furthermore, perhaps the second source of the occurrence of these errors is the intralingual transfer. Learners are not aware of the rules of using these prepositions because in English, every preposition has a special function and use that serves the intended meaning of the sentence. For instance:

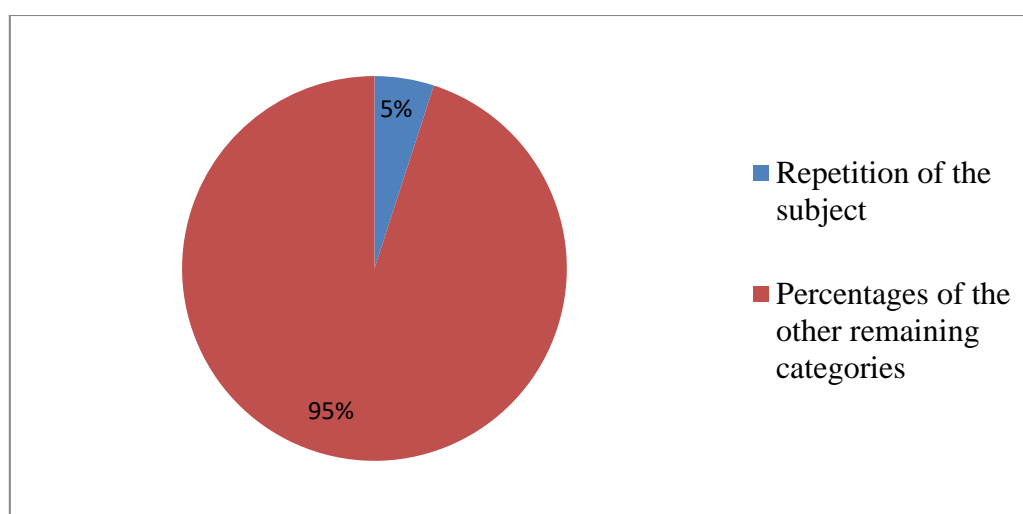
-It is my problem in(it should be to) correct my mistakes.

-When he went at(it should be to) Spain.

-They focus at( it should be on) these objectives.

These examples show that learners fail to select the appropriate preposition which fits the context of the sentence.

#### 2.2.1.6. Repetition of the Subject.

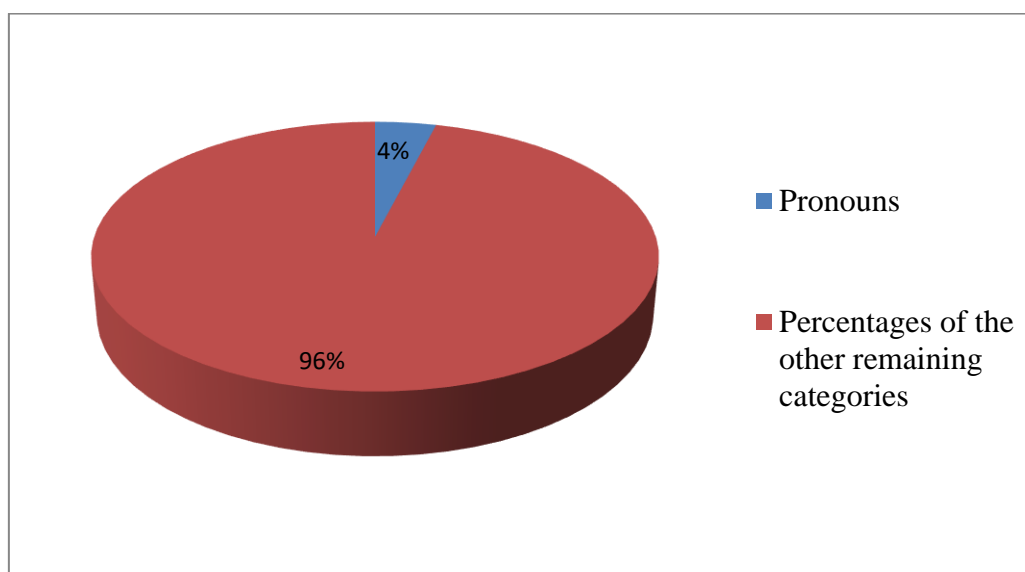


**Figure9: The percentage of errors in repetition of the subject**

As it is shown in figure 9, the repetition of the subject ranks the sixth (5%) in our classification of errors.

EFL learners sometimes, tend to repeat the subject twice unintentionally, and this may be because of some psychological conditions as stress, hesitation or the shortage of time. Examples: “Nick, he feels” or “Gatsby he arrives early”. Here, learners used two subjects instead of one in the sentence, and it is wrong. He should just choose one subject and omit the other.

**2.2.1.7. Pronouns.** A pronoun in the English language is considered as a part of speech. According to Dykes (2007), the concept “pronoun” is derived from the Latin word *pronomem* which means “ for a noun”. In which it utilized to avoid awkward repetition. likewise, Stobbe (2008) argues that pronouns can be used instead of nouns to keep away from clumsy repetition.



**Figure10: The percentage of errors in the use of pronouns**

The findings in figure 10 demonstrate that 4% of errors are in the use of pronouns

The third year EFL learners are conscious about how to use pronouns while speaking” the atmosphere (where is needed) students find themselves, ”the one which ( it should be

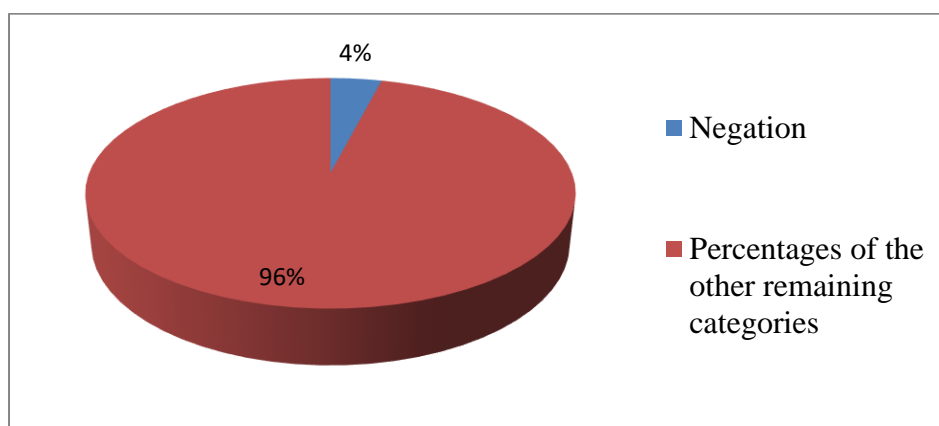
who) give ”and “people which have this believe.” Learners sometimes leave out the relative pronoun in the sentence while they sometimes tend to substitute a relative pronoun with another one that does not have the same meaning.

The lack of knowledge about English pronouns is possibly the reason causing learners’ errors since most of them are incapable of using them when and where they are needed. As it is shown in these examples:

- People which have this belief.
- The speech community who share the same language.
- When she came back the home which she grew up.

The aforementioned examples demonstrate that learners are unaware about the rules of using these relative pronouns to serve the meaning of the sentence. The first example suggests that learners use the relative pronoun” who” which in normal cases substitute persons not objects so, here they select the wrong pronoun that does not fit in this sentence. Also, in the third example learners fall into the same errors where they replace the relative pronoun “where” which is used to substitute places with “which” that is used for the substitution of animals and objects.

#### 2.2.1.8. Negation.



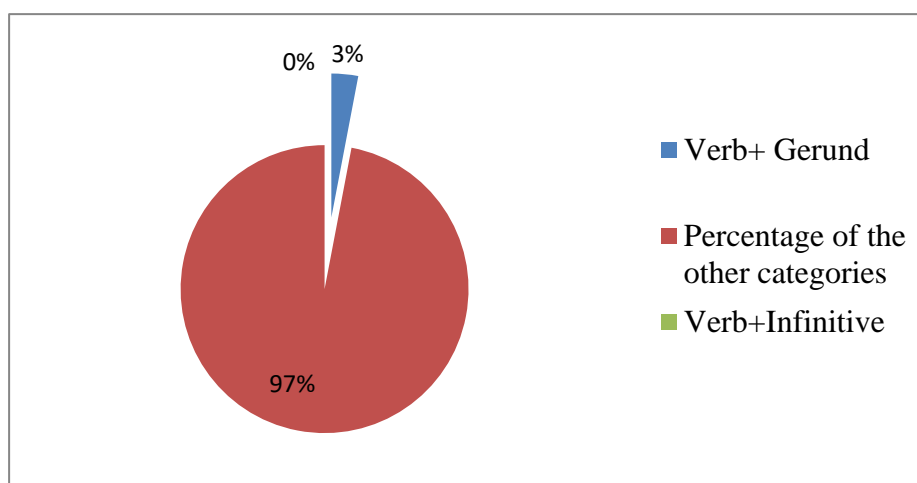
**Figure 11: The percentage of errors in the use of negation**



Third year EFL learners do not commit many errors in the use of negation as it is shown in figure 11. This category ranks the eighth. The percentage of learners' errors in the use of negation is 4%.

Learner forget to use the auxiliary "to do" to express negation and this auxiliary is of a vital role in the sentence, this example "they not understand"( is needed do) and "Santiago not join"(is needed does), but negation does not occur only at the level of this auxiliary, it might happen with the auxiliary "to be" as well.

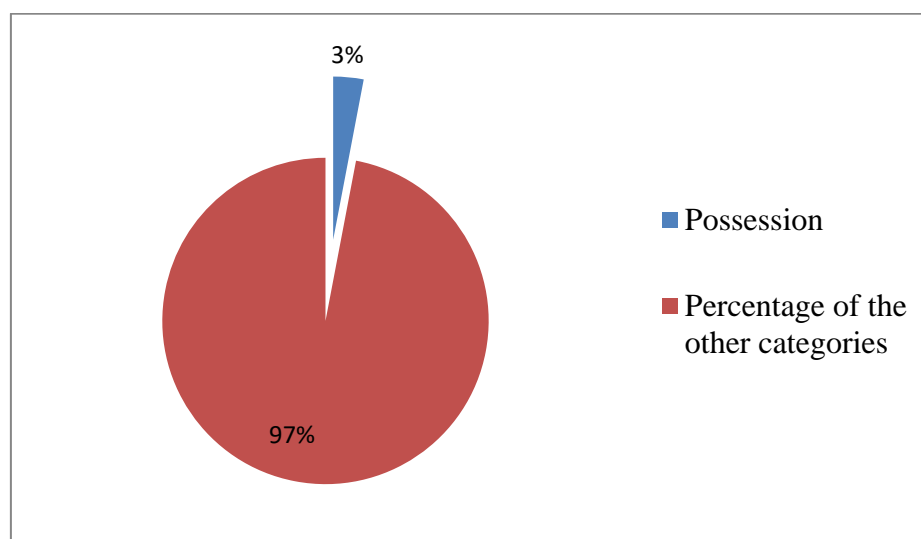
#### 2.2.1.9. Verb+ Infinitive or Gerund.



**Figure 12: The percentage of errors in the use of verb+ infinitive or gerund**

As it is clear from the figure 12,3% of students' errors are in verb +gerund and nothing is recorded in verb+ infinitive. Therefore, it indicates that third year EFL learners commit few errors concerning verb+ gerund category. An example is "what hinder us is the fear of make ( it should be making) mistakes". This proves their weakness in selecting where they need to attach the verb with "ing" to form gerund. However, no error is made on verb+ infinitive.

### 2.2.1.10. Possession.

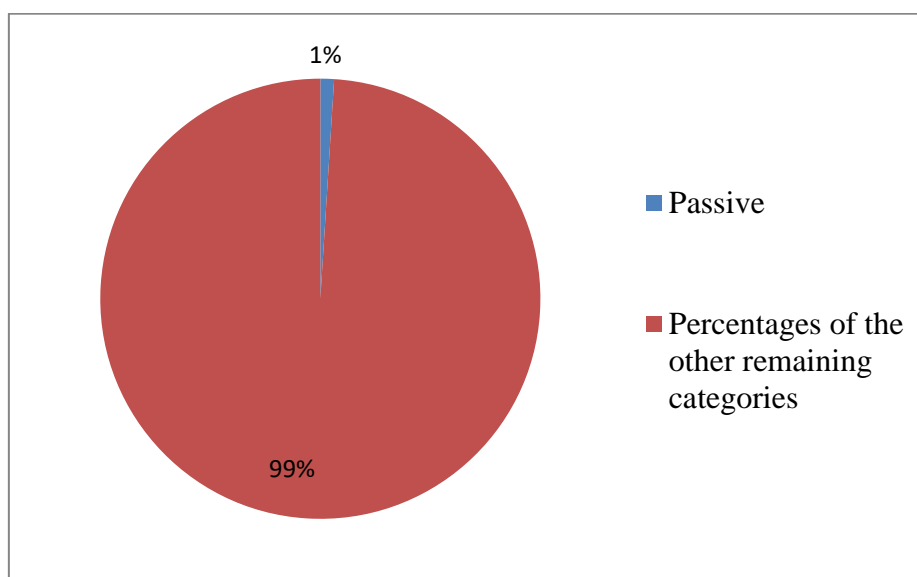


**Figure 13: The percentage of errors in the use of possession**

Figure 13 indicates that 3% of learners' errors are in the use of possession.

This reveals that when learners speak about ownership or may be to attribute something to them, they miss the possessive "s" marker as shown on the examples: "she is Richard wife" and "he reach Gatsby friends". Here, learners miss the possessive "s" marker that indicates the relationship between Richard and his wife and the same with Gatsby and his friends. Here, Even if the percentage in this category is low but it still exists among some learners because they do not know that the possessive form shows the relationship between one thing and another, and in order to form it, you should put apostrophe+ s to the singular noun but if the noun is plural or already ends in "s", you just add an apostrophe after "s". thus, the ignorance of this rule leads to this type of errors.

### 2.2.1.11.Passive.



**Figure 14: The percentage of errors in the use of passive**

From figure 14, we notice that the lowest percentage is scored for this category in which it represents just 1% of learners' errors. This shows that learners rarely fall into errors within this category.

It is noticeable that EFL learners are capable of using passive voice very well in comparison with the already mentioned categories, and the evidence is that only 1% of learners' errors relate to the use of the passive voice and less examples are provided on our data as in :”novel is wrote by a Russian novelist”, based on this example we can say that learners do not know how to form passive voice correctly, so the sentence should be like that ”the novel was written by a Russian novelist.”

### **Inversion and Modals**

No occurrence is scored concerning these two last categories” Modals and Inversion”. This may symbolize that EFL learners know well how to use them in the sentence when they speak. Thus, they speak fluently and effectively.

The analysis of the data collected from the classroom observation shows that the highest percentage of learners' errors is with subject verb agreement, then articles, and tenses. The fourth category of errors is noun agreement. Moreover, the findings reveal that these errors are the result of mother tongue interference, lack of knowledge and intralingual transfer.

### **Conclusion**

Learners' syntactic errors falls into thirteen categories which are: subject verb agreement, articles, tenses, noun agreement, prepositions, repetition of the subject, pronouns, negation, verb+ infinitive or gerund, possession, passive, modals and inversion. Repetition of the subject and possession are new categories in the current study. However, the remaining categories are common in the majority of the studies in the field of error analysis. The findings show that the most frequently occurring errors are as follow: First, subject verb agreement is considered as the most frequently occurring errors among third year students with a high percentage 29%. Second, errors in the use of articles present 17% precisely, it occurs at the level of the indefinite articles (57%) rather than the definite one (43%). Then, tenses are the third category of errors with a percentage of 16%. Here, learners make more errors in the formation of verbs(57%) rather than the use of the appropriate tense(25%).Finally, noun agreement is the fourth category with a low percentage 12%.These errors which are committed by learners can be attributed to the lack of knowledge, intralingual transfer or mother tongue interference since Arabic is the official language, English does not receive the required attention in the early stages of learning. It is included in the later stages in the curriculum.

## **General Conclusion**

The aim of the present study was to identify, categorize and describe the errors made by third year EFL learners in their spoken production. The study also attempted to explain the sources of the most frequently occurring errors.

The results obtained from the data show that errors fall under thirteen categories which are subject-verb agreement, articles, tenses, noun agreement, prepositions, repetition of the subject, pronouns, negation, verb+ infinitive or gerund, possession, passive, modals and inversion. They were identified, and the sources of these errors were explained. The findings show that the most frequently occurring errors are in subject verb agreement, articles, tense and noun agreement. The sources of errors in these categories may be the mother tongue interference, intralingual and lack of knowledge. The findings reveal that an error may be caused by two factors simultaneously; for example: errors in tense category may be caused by both the L1 negative transfer and intralingual transfer, namely – overgeneralization.

Teachers need to be aware of the types and sources of errors in their learners' speech. Unfortunately, English does not receive the required attention in the early stages of learning. It is involved just in the later stages in the curriculum. Because of this, learners face many difficulties while learning it and they study it just for the sake of passing exams. Also, EFL learners do not have many opportunities to practice speaking in English, and, even if they are aware of the rule, they may make errors because of the lack of practice of speaking. If the teachers know the potential difficulties and errors of their learners and the probable sources of those errors, they can better provide focus on the areas where attention is needed. Understanding causes of errors may help teachers better explain the rules of the L2 and the differences of the L1 and L2 to their learners. This may help teachers explain to their students not only where the error occurs, but also why it occurs. In this case, students will also be

aware of both their errors and the causes of those errors. This might help the students to decrease their errors consciously.

### **Limitations of the Study**

The current study is restricted to the following points:

- Short period of time to complete this work.
- Some types of syntactic errors were not investigated because of the complexity of error identification and the impossibility of reconstructing the correct sentences.
- This study was concerned with the frequency of errors and not the error gravity or seriousness of each type of errors.
- In the explanation of errors, the most recognizable sources were suggested; however, other sources of errors were not demonstrated.

### **Suggestions of Further Research**

Based on the results of this study, researchers are recommended to conduct more studies on the investigation of syntactic errors among EFL learners using different instruments. Also, they may conduct the same study on another study sample such as second and first year LMD students. Furthermore, another study could be carried out to investigate the errors in unprepared speech since our study analyzes the semi-prepared speech.

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## **Résumé**

Le but de la présente étude est d'identifier, de classer et d'analyser les erreurs syntaxiques dans la production orale des étudiants d'anglais du centre universitaire Abd Elhafid Boussouf de Mila. Les données sont recueillies auprès de 77 étudiants au moyen de d'observation basées sur leurs performances lors de cours d'expression orale, de linguistique et de littérature. Les erreurs ont été identifiées et classées en catégories grammaticales.. Ces catégories d'erreurs n'étaient basées sur aucune classification prédéfinie, mais les catégories deviennent claires après avoir déterminé la nature des erreurs. Ensuite, les catégories de ces erreurs ont été analysées et leurs sources possibles ont été déterminées à l'aide d'analyses contrastives et d'erreurs. Les résultats montrent que les erreurs les plus fréquentes se produisent dans le verbe sujet, l'utilisation d'articles, les temps et l'accord des noms. De plus, l'analyse contrastive et des erreurs de ces erreurs les plus fréquentes sont dues au transfert interlingue, au transfert intralingue, aux stratégies d'apprentissage employées par les apprenants et au manque de connaissances.

## ملخص

الهدف من الدراسة الحالية هو تحديد، تصنيف و تحليل الأخطاء النحوية لطلاب اللغة الانجليزية بالمركز الجامعي عبد الحفيظ بوصوف أثناء الكلام .تم جمع البيانات من 77 طالبا عن طريق الملاحظة بناءا على أدائهم في حصص التعبير الشفهي،اللسانيات و الأدب . تم تحديد الأخطاء وتصنيفها تصنيفا نحويا.لم تستند فئات الأخطاء على أي تصنيف مسبق التحديد، بل تصبح الفئات واضحة بعد تحديد طبيعة الأخطاء. بعد ذلك حددت المصادر المحتملة بمساعدة تحليل التباين والخطأ.. تظهر النتائج أن الأخطاء الأكثر شيوعا تحدث في اتفاق الفعل و الفاعل، استخدام أدوات التعريف ، الأزمنة و اتفاق الاسم. علاوة على ذلك، فإن تحليل التباين و الخطأ لهذه الأخطاء الأكثر شيوعا يرجع إلى النقل بين اللغات، النقل داخلها، استراتيجيات التعلم التي يستخدمها المتعلمون و نقص المعرفة .

## **Appendix**

### **Error Categories Used in This Study**

#### **Subject verb agreement**

Languages is( it shoud be are) different from each other.

#### **Articles**

##### **Indefinite Articles**

###### **Overuse:**

We are not a ( a is not needed) native speaker.

###### **Omission:**

It is ( an is needed) allegorical novel.

###### **Substitution:**

We make the( a is needed instead of the) presentation about.

##### **Definite Article**

###### **Omission:**

( the is needed) story start.

###### **Overuse:**

We have problems with the ( the is not needed) tenses.

###### **Substitution:**

He is a (the is needed instead of a) person who has.

#### **Tenses**

##### **Wrong formation**

When you (are is needed) listening.

##### **Wrong usage**

If I master the rules of English language, obviously I (will is needed) speak.

## **Prepositions**

### **Substitution**

Differences about (should be between) them.

### **Omission**

Clarisa go (to is needed) London.

## **Repetition of the subject**

Santiago, he went.

## **Pronouns**

The one which (it should be who) give.

## **Negation**

They not (do is needed) understand.

## **Verb+ Infinitive+ Gerund**

The fear of make (ing is needed) mistakes.

## **Possession**

She is Richard ('s is needed) wife.

## **Passive**

Novel is wrote by a Russian novelist (was written)

## **Inversion and Modals**