Error Analysis

Analysis of Compositions Written by IT Students

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Abstract

This study aims to identify the common linguistic errors among the third and the fourth grade students of IT at the Collage of Computer Technology. The researcher used the analytical descriptive method. He chose a random sample consisting of 80 male and female students. He constructed a list comprising of 294 common linguistic errors. He then built an objective test in the light of the list as the study tool, which is analytical description of students' written compositions. The results showed that the level of frequency at which these errors occur differ from one category to another. Errors in spelling and tense took the highest rate of occurrence raging from (27.8%) to (22.4%) whereas errors in. Articles and capitalization took the lowest rate of occurrence raging from (15.6%) to (14.2%). Further studies are suggested to investigate the causes, which constitute this huge numbers of errors.

Key words*: Error analysis, grammatical errors, written composition*.

Introduction

This paper makes a study of error analysis and how it is used to analyze errors of several compositions written by college students of IT in Libya. By examining the errors, teachers can give students comprehensive feedback and eventually help them achieve successful learning. This paper also looks at the constitution of errors and the benefits of error analysis to the Process of language teaching.

The statement of the problem

Poor level of college student of Information Technology in writing activities are commonly heard from professors. One of the reasons for students‟ incompetence could be that they are taught in a second language. Nunan (2001:89) states that proponents of Contrastive Analysis claim that where the first and second language rules are not the same, errors are likely to occur as a result of interference between the two languages. To investigate the problem this paper examines the types of errors involved in written compositions and the frequency at which these errors appear.

The Aim of the Study

This paper aims at determining areas of weakness in compositions written by third and fourth year college students of Information Technology using error analysis and to identify the frequency at which these errors appear, so we as teachers can give a comprehensive feedback that could raise their educational level.

Research questions

1. What are the most common language errors made in English writing by the third and the forth- year college students of Information Technology?
2. How frequent do these errors occur in their written work?

Research Methodology

This research adopted the steps by Corder (1974) (as cited in Ellis, 1994, p. 48) to analyze the data, which are collection of a sample of learner language, identification of errors, description of errors, explanation of errors, and evaluation of errors. This work examines 80 students' written compositions about topics of their choice by which errors can be identified, analyzed and evaluated.

Literature Review

Error analysis is the study of the unacceptable forms produced by language learners, especially by those learning a foreign language (Crystal, 1999). This analysis serves three purposes. It provides information on the level of language proficiency that the learner has reached, the common difficulties in language learning, and how people learn a language. According to Corder (1967), there are two types of errors: performance errors and competence errors. While the first type of error may be done unintentionally, the second reflects inadequate learning. A further distinction of global errors and local errors is made by Burt and Kiparsky (1972). Global errors hinder communication by causing confusion in the relationship between and among the parts of the discourse, e.g., wrong word order in a sentence. Local errors, on the other hand, do not go beyond the clause or sentence level.

Ancker (2000, p. 21) explained that there are many reasons why learners make errors when learning a language. Among the common reasons are interference from the native language, overgeneralization, incomplete knowledge of the target language, and the complexity of the target language itself. Giri (2010) found that undergraduate students in Nepal committed many grammatical errors in the use of the English language. The major errors committed by them were apparently manifested in the application of some grammatical units while constructing sentences and clauses. Also, their errors could be noticed in the use of conditional moods, forms, tenses, main verbs, subject-verb agreement, question formations, word order, and noun phrases.

We often hear that people make a lot of mistakes in their past time and eventually be successful in the future. It may be occurred in learning a language or a target language. The definition of error can be seen through the classification of errors. The classification is very important to explain the error analysis. Richards (1985) says that errors result from incomplete learning and knowledge of learners about target language system. Norrish (1983) says that errors result from incomplete learning and knowledge of learners about target language system Norrish (1983:7) in Sembiring (2011:5) says that error is systematic deviation from the accepted system of the target language. Mistake is nonsystematic deviation from the accepted system of a language being learned and it usually due to human limitation such as tiredness, nervousness, and fatigue. It means that errors may occurs because of human factor in mastering the target language such as the limitation of

memory, psychological problem and do not understand about the material of subject. In another side, the learners never recognize their errors or they never know that they have made errors.

What is error analysis?

Richards and Schmidt (2002:184) define error analysis as "the study and analysis of the errors made by second language learners". EA compares "learner English" with English (L2) itself and judges how learners are "ignorant" (James, 1998:304) about the grammatical and semantic rules of the target language.

Another view of error analysis is given by Brown (1980, cited by Hasyim, 2002:43), when he defines error analysis as the process of observing, analysing, and classifying the deviations of the rules of the second language and then to reveal the systems operated by a learner. Similarly, Crystal (as cited by Hasyim, 2002:43) proposes that error analysis is a technique for identifying, classifying and systematically interpreting the unacceptable forms produced by someone learning a foreign language.

What constitutes an error?

Richards and Schmidt (2002:184) define an error as the use of language in a way which a fluent or native speaker of the language regards as faulty or incomplete learning. An error refers to a systematic error of competence, both covert and overt, that deviates from the norms of the target language (Eun-pyo, 2002:1). Ellis (1996:710) and Brown (2002:220) differentiate between covert and overt errors. They define covert errors to be grammatically correct but not interpretable within the context of communication, whereas overt errors refer to the obviously ungrammatical utterances.

Norrish (1987:7) defines an error as a systematic deviation when a learner has not learnt something and consistently gets it wrong. Cunningsworth (1987:87) concurs and 29

adds that errors are systematic deviations from the norms of the language being learned. These two scholars use the phrase „systematic deviation" in their definitions of an error which can be interpreted as the deviation which happens repeatedly.

Benefits of error analysis

Corder (1974:125) emphasizes the importance of studying errors made by second language learners: The study of error is part of the investigation of the process of language learning. It provides us with a picture of the linguistic development of a learner and may give us indications as to the learning process (Corder, 1974:125). He adds that, Remedial exercises could be designed and focus more attention on the trouble spots. It is the learner who determines what the input is. The teacher can present a linguistic form, but this is not necessarily the input, but simply what is available to be learned (Corder, 1974:125).

Other studies confirm Corder"s observations. Kwok (1998:12) asserts that language errors provide important information about the progress, or language system, of the learner. Nation and Newton (2001:140-141) posit that correcting error is done if there is some understanding of why the error occurred, thus error analysis is the study of errors to see what processes gave rise to them.

Error analysis is not only beneficial to teachers, syllabus designers and textbook writers by showing them a student"s progress, but it is also significant to researchers and to the learners. It can show
researchers what strategies learners use to learn a second language and also indicate the type of errors learners make and why. When a learner has made an error, the most efficient way to teach him or her the correct forms is not by simply giving it to a learner, but by letting the individual discover the error and test different hypotheses. Carroll's proposal (cited in Corder, 1974:125) is that the learner should find the correct linguistic form by searching for it.
Data Collection Students were asked to write a composition about a topic of their choice, after that samples were collected and analyzed.

Data Analysis

Grammatical errors were classified and categorized into 5 different types of errors which are capitalization errors, tenses, spelling, wrong substitution of lexical items and articles' misuse. Each error was counted and put into each category.
Now I will present the five types of error the students made in their written compositions followed by a table of classification of each type:

(1) Verb Tense

Errors of wrong tense or wrong verb occur when a learner uses the wrong verb tense in a certain sentence. The results of this study reveal that the participants were not aware of applying the correct tense to the verb in the sentences.

(2) Capitalization

Capitalization means writing a word with its first letter as a capital letter (upper-case letter) and the remaining letters in small letters (lower-case letters).

(3) Wrong Substitution

Wrong substitution refers to situations in which, for example, "*a"* was used instead of "*the"*, or vice versa.

(4)Spelling

Spelling means the act or process of writing words by using the letters conventionally accepted for their formation.

(5)Articles

An article is a word that is used with a noun to indicate the type of reference being made by the noun. English has two articles: **the** and **a/an**. **The** is used to refer to specific or particular nouns; **a/an** is used to modify non-specific or non-particular nouns. We call **the** *the definite* article and **a/an** the *indefinite* article

Table 1 shows the classification and identification of the sample errors along with correction of each type.

Error sample Classification	Error sample Identification	Error sample Correction
Capitalization	1. I went to **al-haya** mall with my family 2. I live in bengazi 3. **aljamahiria** was good 4. **darna** is my favorite city 5. I worked in **ajdabia** 6. Ali **aljazwi** is my best friend	**[Al-Haya]** **[Benghazi]** **[Al-Jamahiriya]** **[Darna]** **[Ajdabia]** **[Aljazwi]**
Tenses	1. I **have plan** a lot of things before the war started 2.we **leave** our house and went to my uncle in Darna 3. It **look** so bad 4. I like **play** football with my friends 5. I entered the mall and **walk** around 6. I enjoy **watch** football .7 . Now we **come** back home 8.Last year I **go** to Misrata	**[had planned]** **[[left]** **[looks]** **[[playing]** **[walked]** **[watching]** **[came]** **[went]**
Spelling	1. Tommorrow 2. Espacally 3. Of corse .4 Uneversity 5.Barking 6. moll 7. Hapy 8. Becase 9. actully 10. fotbol 11. shes 12. bilyardo 13. kafi 14. tee 15. bezy	**[tomorrow]** **[especially]** **[of course]** **[University]** **[parking]** **[mall]** **[happy]** **[because]** **[actually]** **[football]** **[Chess]** **[billiards]** **[coffee]**

		[tea] **[Busy]**

Error sample Classification	Error sample Identification	Error sample Correction
Articles	I study at **University** of Benghazi 2.He was **good** teacher of English 3. Because situation is very bad 4. **Aljazwi** is my the best friend 5. Fariha is **oldest** in my family	**[the university]** **[a good teacher]** **[the situation]** **[my best}** **[the oldest]**

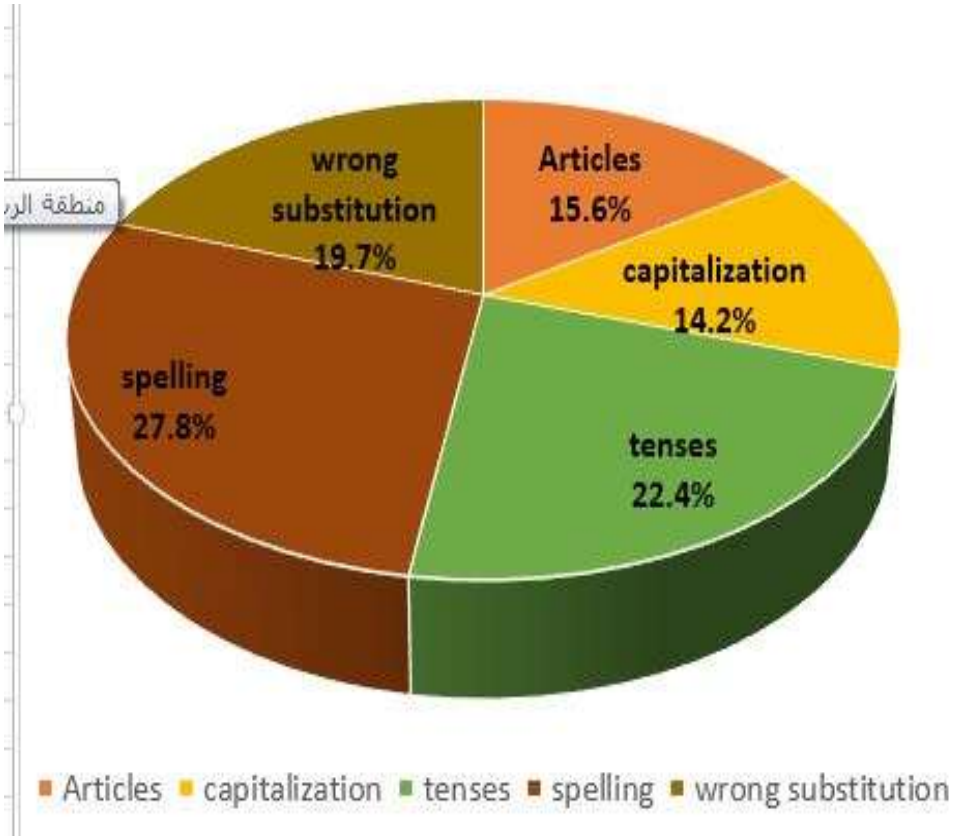
Results and findings:

From 80 students participated in this study, it was found that 294 errors committed by students. The dominant error classification was spellings use with 82 errors, while, the least dominant error was capitalization with the total of 42 errors. Thus, based on each category, the total errors can be classified in the following graph:

Table 2 shows the frequency at which the previous errors occurred.

Error type	Times of Occurrence	Error Percentage
Spelling	82	**27.8%**
Tense	66	**22.4%**
Wrong substitutions	58	**19.7%**
articles	46	**15.6%**
Capitalizations	42	**14.2%**
Total	**294**	

Figure-1 shows the percentage of students' errors



Conclusion

In this study, we have applied error analysis on several compositions written by college students of IT in Libya. Overall, most students confess that they did not do revision on the composition writing. Hence, they tended to commit errors in any of the linguistic errors above explained. The participants also had a relatively weak vocabulary and their sentences were sometimes incomprehensible. They committed errors in applying sentence structure rules in the English language. Hence, we can conclude that these participants have problems in acquiring normal grammatical rules in English. However, the results of this study help teachers to reflect on their students' writing and teach some of the above-mentioned aspects to improve students' writing in English.

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تحليل أخطاء شائعة في كتابات

طلبة قسم البرمجة والشبكات في كلية تقنيات الحاسوب

المستخلص:

هدفت الدّراسة إلى تسليط الضوء على الأخطاء اللغويّة الشّائعة عند الكتابة بالإنجليزية، لدى طلبة الفصل الثالث والرابع في كلية تقنيات الحاسوب، والكشف عن الفروق في هذه الأخطاء، استخدم الباحث المنهجين الوصفيَّ والتحليليَّ، واختار عيّنة عشوائيَّة من مجتمع الدّراسة بلغت (80) طالبًا وطالبة، وقام ببناء قائمة بالأخطاء اللّغويّة الشّائعة بلغت (294) خطأ، ثمّ بنى اختبارًا موضوعيًّا في ضوء القائمة أداة للدّراسة تتمثل في الإحصاء الوصفي للبيانات واستخلاص النتائج. ومن النّتائج الّتي توصلت إليها الدّراسة أنّ اعلي نسبة مئوية للخطأ تضمنت الإملاء والتركيب النحوي للجمل بنسبة ما بين (27.8%) الي (22.4%)، واقل نسبة خطأ، تضمنت أدوات التعريف وعلامات الترقيم بنسبة تتراوح ما بين (15.6%) الي (14.2%)، كما اوصت الدراسة بإجراء المزيد من الدراسات من اجل الكشف عن الأسباب الكامنة وراء وجود هذا الكم من الأخطاء، ومعرفة طرق معالجتها.

الكلمات الأساسية: *تحليل الأخطاء، الأخطاء النحوية، أخطاء املائية*