### CHAPTER FOUR

### RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

#### 4.0 Introduction

This chapter explains the methodology employed in this study. The framework of these sections will report on: the nature of the study, elicitation procedures of the study, subjects of the study and methods of research of the study.

Research is a systematic process to obtain valid results; in fact many researchers describe research as a systematic process. Wiersma (1995:3), among others, states that "Research is a process, and in order to enhance conducting research, it would seem reasonable to make it as systematic as possible." Seliger et al., (1989:5) says "Research is objective and always seeks to show the 'truth', or the 'facts' about some phenomenon which is being investigated." Other educationists introduce research as a systematic process of collecting and analysing information (data) for some purpose. Generally, the general feature of research is to be empirical and should be systematic, valid, and reliable. Of course, research has many varieties of forms - not to say, part of being systematic is having a well-planned research method.

Educational research has to be systematic and follow scientific methods. Opinions regarding the exact number of steps taken to do research vary. The analytic research begins with identifying the problem and culminates with interpreting the results and drawing conclusions. There are five basic steps, which are compatible with the scientific method providing the elements of a general, systematic approach to research.

The following figure illustrates the five steps of educational research according to Wiersma (1995:4):

1		2	3	4	5
Identifying	the	Reviewing	Collecting	Analyzing	Drawing
Problem		Information	Data	Data	Conclusions

Figure 4.1

Research Process'

The study follows the steps, which are elaborated in the chapters of this study:

- 1. Chapter One: Background of the Study In this chapter the problem of the study has been defined, and related knowledge, such as the Arabic and the Malay language, the learning and teaching of the Arabic language in Malaysia as the place of research that has been identified.
- 2. Chapter two, Reviewing Literature, which represents in the second step of the figure.
- 3. Chapter three, the Arabic Verb.
- Chapter four, the Research Methodology, which is in the figure collecting data, together with chapter three.
- Chapter five, Diagnostic and Data Analysis, and the sixth chapter, Suggestions,
   Recommendations and Conclusions representing the fourth, and fifth steps in figure
   (4.1) respectively.

# 4.1 The Nature of the Study

Research can be divided into three types: basic, or theoretical, applied and practical, according to Seliger (1989) and others. However, as he states (1989:20) "While each of these types of research may be carried on independently of the others, there is often an interaction between these types." However, by the early 1970's, teachers and researchers began to realize the importance of case studies and what they reveal about systems, sequences, and variations in second language acquisition.

# 4.1.1 What is a Case Study?

The term "case study" has multiple meanings. It can be used to describe a unit of analysis or to describe a research method. According to Gillham (2000) a case can be an *individual*: it can be a *group*- such as a family, a class, an office, or a hospital ward. Gillham (2002:1) states "the case study is one which investigates the above to answer specific research questions...which seeks a range of different kinds of evidence...this use of multiple sources of evidence, each with its strengths and weaknesses, is a key characteristic of case study research." In their article "What Case Studies Reveal about System, Sequence, and Variation in Second Language Acquisition" Hatch et al., (1985:37) states "These research studies are useful for three basic reasons:

- They can help explain the errors students make, not as isolated mistakes, but as part of the language acquisition process.
- They can give the teacher information on the general sequences used in acquiring the language under natural conditions.
- 3. They can show important differences among individual learners.

# 4.1.1 (a) Data in Case Study Research:

Usually, we study a case when it itself is of interest. We look for details of interaction with its contexts. Stake (1995:xi) says "Case study is the study of the particularity and complexity of a single case, coming to understand its activity within important circumstances." Therefore, case study research, according to Gillham (2000), does not equate qualitative (descriptive, interpretative) methods and data only. They are predominant, but as Gillham (2000:80) describes "quantitative data and its analysis can add to the overall picture." Thus, the power of a case study appears in providing details, as Gillham (2000:101) states "the meticulous description of a case study have an impact greater than almost any other form of research report." Therefore, this is a case study because only twenty students of one class, were involved, allowing the researcher to look into the errors in details, so, the depth of the study is more important than the quantity.

To this extent, the present case study formulates possible conclusions concerning the acquisition of the Arabic language by Malay learners.

Most of the studies in Error Analysis (EA) are cross-sectional in nature, and EA can be used in longitudinal studies of second language learners to find out what areas of language errors persist overtime. Chamot's (1978, 1979) study, as mentioned by Ellis (1994:55), is a good example in this sense. In her study of the acquisition of English by a bilingual French/Spanish boy, she found that the main linguistic problem areas were the omission of constituents, verb form..." Ellis (1994:55) says, "In all the areas, however, there was considerable fluctuation in error frequency throughout the period," this shows the importance of the longitudinal study.

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This study is a cross-sectional study because its aim is to:

- 1. Examine the use of the Arabic language by Malay learners.
- To find out the difficulties learners encounter in using the Arabic verb. The administration of the study took place within the university's semester

The methodology adopted in this study is a qualitative, as well as a quantitative nature, Krathwohl (1993), in Wiersmam (1995:12), defines qualitative research as "Research that describes phenomena in words instead of numbers, or measures," i.e., involves classification of processes, and description of errors. On the other hand, this is a quantitative research, as "Research that describes phenomena in numbers and measures instead of words," in that its method and instruments as stated by Chaudron (1988:14) "Involve numerical measurement, statistical analysis and inference."

Learners errors in this study are described qualitatively, as well as quantitatively; the procedures include a classification of errors, error taxonomy, description of errors, and explanation of errors. In addition, the statistical analysis is a quantitative description shown in tables, groups, percentages and gravity of errors.

# 4.2 The Subjects of the Study:

The subjects of this study were pre -university learners who had attend eleven years of schooling and completed their secondary school examinations. Arabic was a compulsory subject in the secondary school and a required subject for admission into the Matriculation Center, of the International Islamic University (IIU).

The minimum qualification was a C4 in *Bahasa Arab Tinggi* (advanced Arabic language), or A2 in *Bahasa Arab Komunikasi* (Arabic language for communications), that is to say, their overall result was grade one. Participating students were male (25%) and

female (75%), both were admitted into the Matriculation programme of the International Islamic University of Malaysia (IIUM) based on their 'Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia' (SPM) examination results.

The subjects were from the advanced Arabic language group or level five. The code of this level is (LQM 2055). This group formed one class and the Admission and Records Office (A&R) granted to the researcher.

After graduation from the Matriculation Center, the students aimed at obtaining a bachelor's degree in Islamic Revealed Knowledge (IRK). In order to receive their degrees the students must pass eight core courses of Islamic Studies, Human Sciences, as well as the Arabic language, level four, (LQM 2045). Afterwards, the students will continue studying Arabic at the university. The students also have to take the English language course (LEM 1021), introduction to computers, and four fundamental Islamic knowledge courses (FKM) are also required.

One could say the above-mentioned programme concentrates on the Arabic language because the students must proceed and pass level six (LQM 2065), in order to graduate.

The students were in the second semester, of the first year when they started learning Arabic at level three (Arabic Language III, LQM 1036). After passing the Arabic Placement Test (APT), afterwards continuing to study Arabic to fulfill the requirements, of the Arabic language level six.

The students were all Malaysian nationals, aged ranged between 18 - 20 years; there were sixteen females and four males. The students shared the same mother tongue, the Malay language, Bahasa Malaysia (BM).

education, which consisted of six years of primary education in government schools, with BM as the medium of instruction. These six years were followed by five years of study in an Islamic religious secondary school, where the Arabic language was introduced. The Arabic language is a compulsory subject in form one and is also a medium of instruction of about eight other subjects including: أصول الفقه, أخلاق, أداب, تاريخ إسلامي, بلاغة, تنسير and أصول الفقه, أخلاق, أداب, تاريخ إسلامي, بلاغة, تنسير "uSuwlu 'al-fiqh, 'akhlag, ~aadaab, taayikh 'islamy, mantiq, fiqh and tawhiyd, balaaghah, tafsyyir and Hadiyth. . It can be concluded that the students were exposed to the Arabic language between five and six years.

The characteristics of the sample, which include the country of origin, ethnic group, religion, age, mother tongue, gender and education background, are discussed above. The subjects involved in this study, were homogeneous as far as their ages, gender, education background and mother tongue are concerned. According to Yok (1996:94) "The age difference should not be too great as age plays an important role in language learning." As with regard the level of proficiency in the target language (Arabic Language), the subjects in this study were more, or less equal in their exposure to the target language because they had the same educational opportunities. Yok (1996:94) also highlights "The subjects should have the same mother tongue and a similar level of competence in the TL".

### 4.3 Students' Interview

An interview on the backgrounds of students and their exposure to the Arabic language was held in May 1998 (see Appendix A). This interview was given to the students as a second instrument for this research; it was designed, based on the pilot study that was conducted in July 1997.

The interview was aimed at investigating the difficulties encountered by Malay students in learning the Arabic language. It also helped to ascertain the sources of errors committed by the students in learning Arabic; it was intended to disclose the students' use of the Arabic language, their learning strategies, and the language environment to which the students were exposed, hence, the interview was recorded, and transcribed to acquire the data.

The interview was in the Arabic language; the questions and purposes of the interview were explained to the subjects in both Arabic and the English language, a Malay lecturer (native speaker) helped as a research assistant. The interview was conducted separately with individual subjects in the researcher's office, as mentioned earlier, the interview was audio-recorded.

The structured interview questions were organised in three parts:

- 1. Part one: dealt with the respondents' profile and language use consisting of 20 questions dealing with the students' personal information, academic background, current programme, language use and courses taken before. The purpose of this was to identify the students and their abilities in the Arabic language.
- 2. Part two: dealt with language difficulties. This part was aimed at eliciting information, to identify the difficulty encountered by students in learning Arabic, particularly in using Arabic verbs; this part consisted of 51 questions divided into three sections as follows:

### 4.3.1 Language Skills

Section one, the interview discuses the skills of the language: 6 questions dealt with the difficulties in learning the four skills of language, listening, speaking, reading, and writing.

### 4.3.2 Grammar

Section two, the interview presents questions about the grammar of the Arabic language. This section deals with the difficulties in learning grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation.

# 4.3.3 Students' Competence

This part consists of 42 questions, investigating the competence of the students in mastering the Arabic form tenses, gender, person, and number in both verbal and nominal sentences.

3. Part Three: of this interview dealt with error sources: This part is meant to disclose the reason for the errors committed by the students in producing sentences. This part discussed four points, namely the mother tongue interference, second language L2 interference, learning strategies and insufficient mastery in syntax, with reference to the students' views. The interviewer used these points to detect the sources of errors.

# 4.3.4 Conduct of the Interview

The Arabic language was mainly used in the interview. The Malay language and the English language were used for illustrating any impediment, a Malay lecturer observed during the interview, to ensure that the students fully understood the

questions. A schedule was drawn up to include all the students. The interview schedule did not interfere with the students' class hours. Prior to conducting the interview by the researcher, the students were briefed on the purpose of the interview and the importance of their responses.

# 4.3.5 Effectiveness and Validity of the Interview

The validity and effectiveness of an interview is based on whether it achieves its goals, or not, Dalen (1979:160) makes clear "A successful interview is a dynamic interpersonal experience that is carefully planned to accomplish a particular purpose." Meanwhile, in order to ensure the validity of the interview, one must bear in mind certain points, Dalen (1979:161) states "To evaluate the effectiveness of interviews, one must keep in mind many of the questions that were raised..." according to Dalen (1979) these points are:

- 1. Preparing for the interview
- 2. Establishing rapport
- 3. Eliciting information
- 4. Recording data

As for the first point here, the interviewer was sure about the areas of information to cover, the interviewer also set a definite appointment (schedule) for each interviewee at a time convenient. The interviews were conducted in an environment where the subjects would be at ease (the office of the interviewer) and in a setting where the most fruitful information could be obtained.

On the subject of establishing rapport, the interviewer used suitable vocabulary and approaches with each respondent, in addition, the subjects were students of the researcher, so the researcher did not find any difficulty in interviewing.

Regarding eliciting information, the interviewer was very concerned about the

vocabulary used in the interview; therefore, the wording of the questions was carefully planned, another well thought-out point here was the speed of the questions, the interviewer placed the questions at the proper speed for the respondent. As for the final point in this evaluation scheme, the interviewer used a tape recorder for easy reference, and to free himself from writing during the interview. The responses of the subjects have been transcribed.

### 4.4 Elicitation Procedure

One way of getting data to analyse is to ask students to produce certain items for investigation and study. Researchers refer to instruments for collecting linguistic data by different names, Freeman and H. Long mention (1991:27): "Elicitation procedure, or elicitation device, technique for eliciting performance data, data collection, or data gathering device, a task or even a test, but the most common use are data collection and elicitation procedure."

Many ways of eliciting data are used because learners often do not produce sufficient spontaneous data. Freeman and H. Long (1991:44) claim that: "Certain language features could not be studied because they do not occur frequently in normal conversation ... a researcher would have to wait a long time, ... for the subject ... to be able to say anything meaningful."

Elicitation procedure instruments include, reading aloud, structured exercises, completion tasks, guided compositions, questions and answers, reconstructions, and others. Corder 1973 introduces clinical elicitation, which involves getting the informant to produce data of any sort; Ellis (1994:50) adds that it is "...by means of a general interview, or by asking the learner to write a composition." However, this study used free compositions as the main instrument for collecting data.

# 4.4.1 Free Composition

Free compositions were chosen to be the instrument for this study, free compositions are used here in contrast to controlled compositions, Crystal (1992:77) elaborates "In free composition, the student has total control over what is written about; in controlled composition, stimulus questions, pictures, or other techniques are used to guide the student's response."

The nature of the Arabic language as an inflected language led the researcher to design nine topics of free compositions to study how subjects express the past tense, present tense, and future tense with inflection for person, number, and gender. A brief description concerning the data produced by the subjects' is given in the table 4.2:

Table 4.2
Elicitation Procedure Factors

Factors	Descriptions		
Medium	Written Task		
Genre	Free Composition		
Language feature	Tense and Agreement (Arabic Verb)		
Content	ent 9 Topics		
No of Script	180		
Place	Classroom		
Time	1 hour		
Length	200-250 words		

Since the researcher wanted to obtain errors from a natural performance, the subjects remained unaware of the items under investigation. They were encouraged to respond naturally. The length of the compositions and topics were similar to those which students usually did in class, as explained in the table (4.2) above.

The subjects were asked to write on nine free composition topics at different intervals during the semester, during the second semester of the 1998 – 1999 academic year.

The table on the following shows the dates and the topics of the production task given to the students.

Table 4.3
Free composition topics

No	Торіс	Date
î.	اكتب عن مر احل در استك من المدر سة الابتدائية حتى الأن Write about your study stages from primary school till now.	March 10, 1998
2.	اکتب عن صدیق عزیز رحل مع اسرته الی مدیدة احری Write about a dear friend who left with his family to another city.	March 17, 1998
3.	أصدقاء طغولتي My childhood friends.	March 19, 1998
4.	صف يوما دراسيا من الصباح حتى المساء Describe a typical studying day from morning till evening.	March 23, 1998
5.	اکتب عن شخص بعیش الأن أنت معجب به کثیر ا Write about a person, who is living that you admire a lot.	March 26, 1998
6.	رمضان شهر الصوم والعبادة اكتب عن الصوم في ماليزيا و كيف يحتفل الماليزيون بهذا الشهر Ramadhan is the month of fasting and worship. Write about fasting in Malaysia and how Malaysians observe fasting in this	March 31, 1998
7.	month.  كيف ستقضى العطلة القادمة  How are you going to spend the coming holidays?	April 1, 1998
8.	ماذا یجب أن يفعل صديقك عندما يزور ماليزيا سبتمبر القادم What should your friend do, when he comes to visit Malaysia in September (during the commonwealth games).	
9.	ماذا سيفعل الفاس إذا ارتفعت أسعار البضائع في ماليزيا What would people do if the prices in Malaysia increase?	May 5, 1998

### 4.5 Language Area Investigated

The area of investigation in this study, as mentioned earlier, is the inflection of the Arabic verb; the focus is on tense, number, gender, and person.

There are many reasons for this investigation:

- 1. Studying the Arabic verb is the corner stone in learning the Arabic language.
- Inflection is the 'soul' of the Arabic verb, so learning the Arabic verb inflection is, more or less, learning Arabic grammar.
- Inflectional errors are a problem for Malay learners of Arabic; the Malay students
  are faced with very serious problems in verb inflection.
- 4. The pilot study, which was conducted in July 1997, confirmed the observation that Malay learners have difficulties, in particular, with verb inflections.

As regards to the writing sample, the researcher has shown that the Arabic verb is inflected for tense, person, number, and gender. Therefore, investigating these variables makes a significant difference in writing, and this is the rationale behind having the subjects write nine free compositions, using each of the tenses: Past Tense, Present Tense and Future Tense. Hence, The first three topics were designed to examine the past tense, and the fourth, fifth, and sixth topic were designed to examine the present tense. While, the last three topics were designed to examine the present tense. While, the last three topics were designed to examine the future tense. Again, the rationale behind the three topics for each tense is to examine the inflections of the tenses for person, number, and gender.

### 4.6 Method of Analysis

One way in which researchers investigated the learning process is Error Analysis (EA) i.e., by analysing the errors the learner makes. EA is link with Corder (1961,1974) and his work in the field in the 1960's, 1970's, Corder wrote a number of

articles, and elaborated many of the concepts related to EA. Thus, many researchers consider his article "*The Significance of Learners Errors*" 1967, as the real beginning of studies in second language acquisition (SLA).

EA constitutes an appropriate method of studying the learning process. It provides a method for investigating learners' language. Corder (1974), who helped to develop a methodology for working out error analysis research, suggests the following steps in conducting an error analysis study:

- Collections of samples of learner's language.
- 2. Identification of errors.
- Description of errors.
- 4. Explanation of errors.
- 5. Evaluation of errors.

This study adopts Coder's method in analyzing the learners' error, except for the last stage that is the evaluation of errors. Many researchers deem this as a separate topic, among them Abdalla (1996).

### 4.6.1 Collecting of Samples:

Ellis (1994:49) says, "The starting point in EA is deciding what samples of learner language to use for the analysis and how to collect these samples," a written task of nine free compositions, by twenty Malay learners of Arabic was collected in class. To facilitate the analysis-, after collecting the scripts in class-, each student was given a number from (1-20). Also, the composition topics were numbered, form (1-9). In each student paper, both numbers were written, the number of the student, as well as the topic number. For instance, 1/1 (one, one) meaning the student number and topic number one, 1/2 - student number one and topic number two, and so forth.

### 4.6.2 Identification of Errors:

Once a corpus of learner language has been collected, the errors in the corpus have to be identified (Ellis 1994), therefore, an error can be defined as a deviation from the norms of the target language (Ellis 1994). In this study the standard written Arabic language serves as the norm, since the goal is to describe the learners written production of the Arabic language, which is the target language here.

The students' unaccepted form of the verb usage was consider as an error, when found to deviate from modern *Standard Arabic* (MSA), with special reference to the Arabic taught to them, 'al'arabiyyh lin-naash'iyn العربية للناشئين a series of six books in teaching Arabic to non-native speakers.

### 4.6.2(a) Ignored Cases:

An error will not be isolated from the sentence and context, therefore, erroneous sentences, which are incomprehensible, were ignored and were not counted as errors, that is to say, the writing was not clear and made no sense in the analysis. Other cases ignored were:

- 1. Ambiguity due to signs of declensions as in: کتب الطالب as the sentence could mean "The student wrote", or "The student's books."

  However, if the declension (placement of the sort vowel) was not ambiguous in analysing the sentence, as in کتبت الدرس it was not to be ignored.
- Other cases that were ignored, non-placement of dots or placing dots incorrectly.
- 3. Not placing the letter 'hamzah' همزة

- 4. Placing 'hamzah' in the place of 'alif' instead of 'waaw', or 'yaa''. All 'hamzah' errors were not consider errors.
- Spelling errors were also not counted because these errors did not fall under the investigated area, and hence were of no use for the investigation.

However, the process of error identification proposed by Corder (1974) is useful, besides setting the previous criteria in evaluating the students' errors.

The following steps were undertaken in the stages of the error identification:

- A careful reading of all corpuses was done prior to any identification of the errors.
- The identification of errors, i.e., the mistaken verbal utterances was identified on the students' original scripts.
- 3. Identification of errors was conducted in two steps:
  - i. Underlining the errors
  - ii. Placing a code above the errors.
- 4. A twenty eight-error code was created to identify the errors; see (Appendix D, Errors identification code).
- 5. Each error was transferred to a separate sheet of paper for further analysis.

# 4.6.3 The Categorization of Errors:

Sentences, phrases, or structures that deviate from the standard Arabic language usage are considered errors. This approach is adopted by many analysts and researchers among them, Abdalla (1996), Jassem (1999) and others, including the researcher in this study.

Therefore, an error is considered, either deviate in tense form, or in agreement, also, the error could not be added twice.

On the subject of errors categorization, James (1998:97) elaborates "One of the prime purposes of describing errors was that this procedure reveals which errors are the same and which are different, and this was a necessary step in putting them into categories." Furthermore, there are a number of classificatory systems that have been used in EA studies, according to Dulay et al., (1982:146) the most useful and commonly used bases for the descriptive classification of errors are as follows:

- 1. Linguistic category.
- 2. Surface strategy.
- Comparative analysis.
- 4. Communicative effect.

Hence, one way of organizing a collection of errors into categories is the linguistics category classification, Dulay et al., (1982:146) reports "Many error taxonomies have been based on the linguistic item by an error." This type of classification carries out the feature of errors in terms of linguistics categories, in terms of where the error is located in the overall system of the TL (James 1998). Therefore, specification of level, class, rank, and system would be necessary in linguistic classification, James (1998:105) explains "First it indicates on what level.... phonology, graphology, grammar, lexis, text or discourse...one next asks about its class. Given that it is a grammatical error, does it involve the class of a noun, a verb, an adjective...ete? Then, we need to assign a rank to the error...Finally, we need to specify the grammatical system that the error affects: tense, number...etc."

In this study, the researcher developed the following classification diagram as an initial, but not final classification.

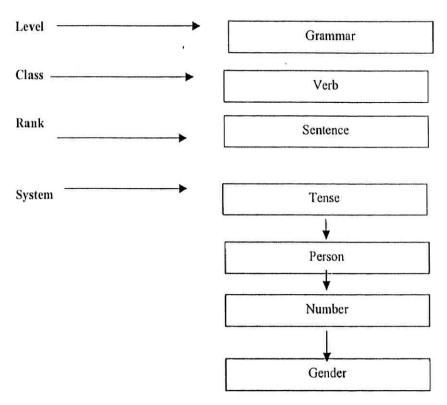


Figure 4.2: Classification of Errors

The diagram shows a linguistic classification, and one could say that: this is a grammar level error involving the class verb, its location rank in the sentence, the affected tense and the affected agreement in the grammatical system. As this diagram enlightens the level of the study is grammar, or syntax, although the focus of the investigated area (the rank) its sentence (verbal and nominal). Moreover, the verb is the main point in the investigation to show how the system of tense and agreement (person, number, and gender) works.

As mentioned earlier, this study classifies errors according to the linguistic category, as stated by Dulay et al., (1982:146) "These linguistic category taxonomies classify errors according to either, or both of the language components, or the particular linguistic constituent the error affects."

The diagram on the previous page shows the language component classification. Thus, as to the actual mechanics of an error analysis there are fundamentally two main approaches, (Norrish: 1983). The first, and more common one, is to set up one's categories for error, based on a set of preconceptions about the learner's most common problems. The second, is to group the errors, as collected, into particular errors of grammatical and semantic problems."

As for the final classification in this study the second procedure is followed, Norrish (1983:81) says: "The second approach has the advantage of allowing the errors themselves to determine the categories chosen; by a process of sorting and resorting."

The classification of errors in this study took many steps, however, after the identification of errors, they were classified under the following categories:

- Tense errors.
- Disagreement errors.
- 3. Verb-noun misplacement errors.
- Verb to be errors.
- Verb negation errors.

As for the first category, it has been subdivided as follows:

- 1. The past instead of the present, called the first tense, (TNS1).
- 2. The present instead of the past, called the second tense, (TNS2).
- 3. The past instead of the future, called third tense, (TNS3).
- 4. The present instead of the future, called the fourth tense, (TNS4).
- 5. The future instead of the past, called the fifth tense, (TNS5).
- 6. The future instead of the present for the sixth tense (TNS6).

The second category of the errors, disagreement errors, has been subcategories into three parts:

- 1. Disagreement in Gender, "Agr (G)"
- 2. Disagreement in Person, "Agr (P)"
- 3. Disagreement Number "Agr (N)"

The following diagrams illustrated these categories:

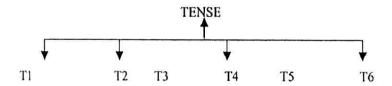


Figure 4.3 Tense classification errors

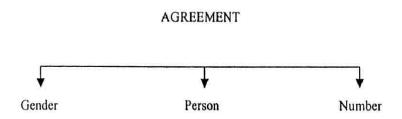


Figure 4.4 Agreement classification Errors

Subsequently, when the corpus of the data was established, and the errors were manually computed, the final classification of the errors showed the following results:

Table: 4.4 Categorizations of the Errors

No	Category	Abbreviation
ı	Past Instead of Present	TNSI
2	Present Instead of Past	TNS2
3	Past Instead of Future	TNS3
4	Present Instead of Future	TNS4
5	Future Instead of Past	TNS5
6	Future Instead of Present	TNS6
7	Agreement Errors/Gender	Agr (G)
8	Agreement Errors/Person	Agr (P)
9	Agreement Errors/Number	Agr (N)
10	Verb Instead of Noun	V // N
11	Noun Instead of Verb	N//V
12	Verb to be / Kana Addition	Kana Ad
13	Verb to be / Kana Omission	Kana Om
14	Verb Negation	V-Neg

### 4.6.4 Scoring Errors:

The technique of scoring errors in this study is as follows:

Each script was read carefully, then an analysis of the errors was made and every error was categoriely classified. The frequency of occurrence was noted meaning the frequency of errors. Accounting for the frequency of errors was worked out according to Norrish (1983:103):

"Frequency, the number of times an error occurred, can be regarded in basically two ways, firstly, the so-called "absolute" frequency of an error (the number of times that the error occurs) and secondly, the number of times the error would have occurred, relative to the length of the piece of writing."

The percentage was worked out by dividing the number of errors by the total number of non-errors [words] in the area investigated,"

Norrish (1983:103) illustrates this:

"if a learner produces, for example, a piece of writing of two hundred and fifty words and makes ten errors, we can simply register the fact that the number of errors is ten, or we can calculate a "relative frequency" by multiplying the number by one hundred

and dividing the result by the total number of words written to obtain a percentage, thus:

$$\frac{100x100}{250} = 4$$

The present study has calculated an absolute frequency, that is to say the number of times that an error occurs.

Other studies, at the doctoral level follow the absolute frequency, among them are Elhibir(1976), Mattar(1978), Hamdallah(1988), and Haja (1994).

# 4.7 The Pilot Study

A pilot study was conducted in July 1997 to arrive at a better method of obtaining sufficient data for the final study and to determine the main learning problems of Malay learners when using Arabic verbs. The pilot study investigated the usage of Arabic verbs, more precisely, the common Arabic tenses usually used by Malay students in their writhing

The place of the study was the IIUM Matriculation Centre, and the study was conducted in semester three, during study time. Second year students of semester three were the subjects of study. The data was collected from freely written compositions written by the subjects, twenty-seven Malay students participated in the study, apart from the Malay language (*Bahasa Malaysia*), the subjects knew the Arabic and the English language.

The subjects had studied the Arabic language about 5 to 6 years. A dissection of the subjects in terms of gender shows approximately an equal number of males and females, (14) females and (13) males aged between 17 to 19. The subjects were from all parts of Malaysia, having almost the same language experience, and similar educational opportunities.

After admission to the IIUM Matriculation center, the subjects enrolled to sit for the Arabic language placement test (APT), and were placed in level three (LQM 1036), learning Arabic intensively; 24 contact hours per week.

During this semester the subjects were asked to write three free compositions, they were given a choice of topics, that is to say the students had to choose one topic from each category. On the other hand, each topic category dealt with a different tense.

The tables below show the topics, as well as the student's selection of each category tense:

# a. Present Tense

Table 4.5: Students' Choices in First Category Topics

Item	Topic	Number of Scripts
1.	Describe a typical studying day.	19
2.	Write about Ramadhan in your country.	7
3.	Write a letter to your friend, describe your country and invite (him) to visit you.	1

# b. Past Tense

Table 4.6: Students' Choices in Second Category Topics

Item	Topic	Number of Scripts
1.	My school day.	19
2.	A dear friend who left with his family to go to live in another city.	
3.	When you were in secondary school, write about a theatrical party.	1

### C. Future tense:

Table 4.7 Students' Choices in Third Category Topics

Item	Topic	Number of scripts
1.	How are you going to spend the summer vacation?	13
2.	Imagine that you are SalaHudiyn 'alayuby (an Islamic hero). Tomorrow, you are going to fight the Crusaders in (HiTyyn) what are you going to say to your soldiers?	
3.	What do you want to be in the future and why?	12

Ninety-seven assignments were collected. At the end of the pilot study an opened eye marking system was used, followed by, analysis of errors. The results obtained from the pilot study showed that the Malay students encountered many problems in using Arabic tenses.

# 4.7.1 Validity of the Pilot Study:

There is no trouble free fieldwork, but the researcher tried to overcome expected problems. A well organised test, and students who assisted helped in preventing students from copying from each other.

Conducting the test in the class helped the students to finish their task within the time limit. From the pilot study, the researcher found that, the production task (free composition) is appropriate in examining the problems of Malay learners of Arabic.