

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

1.1 Introduction

English language has become the lingua franca of the universe. It is a requirement at almost all universities across the globe. In addition to that, it is the medium of instruction in many Asian as well as Arabian countries. From this point, the significance of learning and teaching such a language sprang out. In many Arabian countries, English has been given so much importance in the education system in order to advance the society to the best and give people access to different fields of science and technology, and, consequently they will be able to meet the competitive challenges they face. However, in Saudi Arabia English language has not been given so much importance until recently. In fact, it is regarded as a foreign language. Moreover, the medium of instruction in schools and universities (except English departments where English is applied) is Arabic. English is taught as a subject in public schools starting from grade 6 (12 years old). Further, Saudi students get exposed to English four times per week, 45 minutes each time. Thus, they have few chances to be exposed to English, and to practice what they have gotten. Such a status of a language could make students feel negative and unmotivated, and they start paying little attention to the language. Consequently, they are expected to produce incorrect English sentences in terms of morphology, semantics and syntax which I will be focusing on in this research. Syntax is the main area of this study in the analysis of data.

Arabic has totally different sentence structures compared to English. Arabic sentences may start with verbs, subjects, or objects in accordance with the variety used whether it is the high variety (Standard Arabic VSO) or the low variety (Colloquial Arabic). In Saudi Arabia, the Saudi Variety, which is considered the low variety of Arabic language, is mainly used as the medium of instruction at schools and universities which may have some impact on the grammatical errors made by Saudi juniors. On the contrary, English sentence structures start with subjects (SVO) except in imperative sentence where subjects can be understood from the context. Aside from that, in some Arabic sentence structure the subject and the object can freely move in a sentence without affecting the meaning. For example,

kad alwaladu al sayyarata.

drive the boy the car. (The boy drove the car)

kad alsayyarata al waladu

drove the car the boy (The boy drove the car)

In Arabic *alsayyarata* is still the object no matter whether it follows the verb *kad* (drove) or not, and *alwaladu* is still the subject no matter the changes of its place. However, in English the moment we change the places of the arguments the syntactic structure and the semantic meaning change as well. Therefore, there is a big difference between Arabic structure and English sentence structure.

Linguistics has changed and evolved through the centuries and that denotes creativity of human's brain and their linguistic intuition. In fact, so many theories were developed and produced to explain the complicated parts of this human property. In 1957,

novel views of linguistics have appeared, by Chomsky, to prove that every human being has LAD (Language Acquisition Device) which contains principles of language that enables infants to learn and produce language. Chomsky's book "Syntactic Structures" (1957) attempted to construct a formalized general theory of linguistic structure and to explore the foundations of such a theory which spread throughout the world based on solid evidence and its practicality.

Traditional Grammar looks at language and rules in terms of labeling words with categorial and phrasal names and judging whether a sentence is correct or not. For instance, it labels parts of speech such as noun, verb, adjective, adverb, and preposition. at the same time it labels the phrasal level such as Preposition Phrase, Noun Phrase and Verb Phrase. In fact, that is the purpose of prescriptive grammar. However, Generative Linguistics, particularly Generative Syntax, goes further beyond that and plays a key role in explicating and justifying ungrammaticality of ill-formed sentences. In view of this, every single syntactic rule has been provided with reasons for how and why a particular rule must be applied and not violated or else the sentence is ungrammatical. The unique part of Chomskyan Grammar is that it exactly describes the real processes that take place in forming a sentence. It clarifies that every human being has lexicon which contains all the vocabularies of a language together with related knowledge about the words in terms of use and appropriateness and a computation system which receives lexemes to filter them before producing them in an acceptable grammatical form.

By employing the Minimalist Program, the latest by Chomsky (1995) on language description, every study conducted in the same field contributes to the output of the more obvious picture of the essence and the unique nature of English sentence structure and what kinds of language difficulties Arab EFL learners face in doing academic writing. This

research, **Grammatical Errors in Saudi Students' Writing: A Minimalist Approach** is conceptualized in the same field but with purposefully different theoretical framework to come up with something new that may be useful for academics and EFL/ESL learners.

1.2 Background of the Study

English language has received a lot of importance and attention during recent years in that so many studies have been conducted for simplifying its learning methods and grammatical rules in varied parts of the world. English language sentence structure has been studied in many Arab countries for the sake of making EFL learners understand and digest its unique nature of grammar and find out about students' deviations, their weaknesses and ungrammaticality in their writing.

In this research report, I am going to identify as well as to explain and explicate deviated students' sentences in terms of sentence structure and basic components of an English sentence employing X-Bar Theory as my theoretical framework; It is a modern theory, by Chomsky, efficient enough to dissect and clarify not only English sentence structure, but also other languages like Arabic and French. Central to this study is the syntactic analysis of English sentences written by Saudi female junior students belonging to department of English language in The Faculty of Arts and Humanities at King Abdul Aziz University. This study primarily deals with various syntactic structures of a sentence in English where importance is given to ungrammaticality, its explication and justification.

1.3 Objectives of the Study

In the related literature, there are several studies that have discussed the syntactic errors in the composition of Arab learners of English. In fact, all of these studies have adopted the traditional theory (which is Error Analysis developed by Corder 1974) of treating these errors by classifying, categorizing and judging them; giving no description to ungrammaticality of wrong sentences. However, this study will employ the Minimalist Program and it attempts to: (1) analyze the grammatical errors found in the compositions of participants; (2) explicate ungrammaticality of sentences in the compositions of the students; (3) evaluate the causes of ungrammatical errors found in the compositions of students.

1.4 Significance of the Study

The current study will be done for the sake of improvement of understanding English language sentence structure among Saudi students who face so many difficulties in producing a grammatically correct sentence. Moreover, in the academia, this research could be useful for English language instructors in classrooms whereby they can make it straightforward for students in presenting the different norms of English sentence structure. It will pinpoint the weaknesses of students in constructing an English sentence. With regard to teaching materials, it may be beneficial for curriculum designers in terms of focusing more on these errors in grammar and coming up with novel styles more suitable for

introducing English sentence structure in a straightforward manner to Arab EFL learners.

Since this study is novel in the way it looks at students' grammatical errors in a way as something that inevitably occurs in the process of learning and does not stop there but goes further to explicate those errors and comment on them, I hope that especially students benefit from it as it guides them in their path of mastering English language.

1.5. Statement of the Problem

Writing has been considered the most complicated skill to learn according to many linguists and educators. Mastering writing needs a lot of time and practice. Unlike listening, writing is regarded as a productive skill meaning that learners produce their written form after being exposed to language for an adequate period of time. In fact, according to Cook (2008) in her book *Second Language Learning and Language Teaching*, writing has been the issue of SLA research for two decades as it requires learners vast and comprehensive knowledge in order to be able to produce a meaningful and coherent passage of writing. The present research highlights and discusses the errors in grammar in relation to students' writing. One of the most complicated errors in grammar for EFL learners is constructing a syntactically acceptable sentence. Linguistic capacity of language that is acquired or learnt through different stages ensures that one's language is proficient enough in practicing the language in different domains and in different forms whether written or spoken. Therefore, it is absolutely essential to research the current fundamental errors that EFL learners face during the learning process so that it comes valuable and practical for the field of education and learning.

1.6 Research Questions

- 1) What kind of grammatical errors are committed in the composition of Saudi juniors majoring in English at King AbdulAziz University?
- 2) To what extent do Saudi juniors fulfill the requirement for lexical information of an English sentence?
- 3) What are the contributing factors that cause ungrammaticality in English sentences produced by Saudi juniors?

1.7 Background of the Theoretical Framework

1.7.1 Overview of Generative Grammar

The school of Generative Grammar is initiated and advocated by Noam Chomsky (1957) who is known as the greatest and the most influential linguist of the second half of the twentieth century. The aims of linguistics, according to the Generative School, are realized and briefed in three major questions (Cook & Newson, 2004). These questions are as follows:

- i. What constitutes knowledge of language?
- ii. How is this knowledge acquired?
- iii. How is such knowledge put to use?

Chomsky's concept of generative grammar is that it implies a finite set of rules that could be applied to generate sentences and simultaneously capable of building up an

infinite number of strings from the set of rules. In view of this, grammar of a language contains a specific and limited group of rules which indicates simplicity as well as learnability. Moreover, once these learnable rules are mastered learners or acquirers will be able to produce a new and infinite number of sentences.

1.7.2 The Minimalist Program

The framework that I am going to apply is the Minimalist Program developed by Noam Chomsky (1995). Briefly, the Minimalist Program (or MP), according to Jubilado (2010), is the expanded and developed version of the Principles and Parameters theory whose primary purpose to explain the grammaticality and ungrammaticality of errors of sentences not only in English, but also in all languages being a universal theory. In addition to that, this theory covers the notion of minimal complicated grammar system that is located in everyone's language faculty which facilitates the process of language learning. MP follows the notion of economy principles in order to demonstrate simplicity and parsimony of language system (Radford 2009). Being declared as a universal theory, it has proved its efficiency, universality as well as practicality through many studies carried out on English language and other foreign languages. It encompasses explanations and justifications for many possibilities of syntactic structures and errors in grammar.

The Minimalist Program employs the X-Bar Theory, by Chomsky, in order to represent and constraint the structure of phrases and sentences no matter what word order a language may have adopted whether it is SVO, OVS, or VSO.

The graphical representation of X-Bar theory is seen as in diagram 1.1

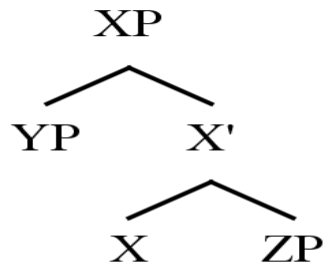


Diagram 1.1 X-Bar Theory

(1) X- Bar Theory

$$1.1 \quad \mathbf{XP} \rightarrow \mathbf{YP}, \mathbf{X}'$$

$$1.2 \quad \mathbf{X}' \rightarrow \mathbf{X}, \mathbf{ZP}$$

The X-Bar Theory puts restrictions on every phrasal structure in English or any language. In view of this, the theory bears the concept that every phrase has a head ‘**X**’. This head projects to and has the maximal projection of **XP** (X-phrase). It has the intermediate phrase known as **X-Bar**. The specifier **YP** has the relation of sisterhood to **X'**; the intermediate structure which immediately dominates both the head and the complement. The phrase **ZP** is the complement and has the relation of sisterhood to the head **X**. Every kind of phrases, whether headed lexically or functionally, makes use of X-Bar Theory for the structure representation.

Specifier Rule: $\mathbf{XP} \rightarrow \mathbf{YP} \mathbf{X}'$

Adjunct Rule: $\mathbf{X}' \rightarrow (\mathbf{ZP}) \mathbf{X}'$

Complement Rule: $\mathbf{X}' \rightarrow \mathbf{X} (\mathbf{WP})$

The X-Bar Theory primarily distinguishes the syntactic relations among heads, specifiers and complements. It rightly represents constituents smaller than XP, bigger than X. Based on the Headedness Principle; X-bar theory suggests that for every phrase there must be a head by 'X'. Then, in order to have the maximal projection, the heads must be projected to the XP. The intermediate projection is demonstrated by the intermediate phrase known as **X-Bar**.

This is the way this program works when it comes to dissecting sentence structure. Chomsky created these symbols and rewrite rules to be universal and be easily applied to different languages. Basically, this also simplifies the way of learning the rules of a language by EFL/ESL learners. Furthermore, this program holds the idea that words have features. According to Adger (2003), features work as the property that every word possesses which has effects on the morphology of words. The impact of this property extends to reach the syntax of a word in a sentence where it may affect the copula being used, for instance. In fact, features of words are stimulated by both morphology and semantics in that features that stand behind morphological difference are also responsible for semantic difference. Often, a plural noun denotes a semantic group of entities in the globe. However, lexemes such as jeans and glasses are plural in form but they refer to just one entity though syntactically we treat them as plurals giving them plural copulas as in *My jeans are new*. Thus, there are exceptions for every rule which should be taught for the sake of explaining the language in a better and complete manner.

1.8 Organization of the Research Report

This research report is composed of five chapters. The first chapter contains the introduction wherein the basic elements of the research are discussed. The second chapter discusses the previous studies done which are in relation with my research in terms of the core points that are going to be analyzed. In fact, this chapter creates a solid base for my research since

the studies draw a quite complete picture for errors analysis using a different analytic instrument that I am using in my research. The third chapter includes the methodology and the design of the research starting from chapter one up to chapter five mentioning in detail all the crucial points about the subjects. The fourth chapter, which is the core research, deals with data analysis including explanation and explication of ungrammaticality of sentences. In fact, this chapter incorporates a big part of the research where novelty of analysis and justification for ungrammaticality dominate the chapter. Finally, the fifth chapter contains the conclusion of the research as well as some pedagogical implications that could be beneficial and useful for language instructors and curriculum designers who hold big responsibilities in designing suitable text books for EFL/ESL learners.

CHAPTER TWO

Review of Related Literature

2.1 Introduction

In order to carry out this study, I have reviewed several related publications that have discussed the topic of syntactic analysis of EFL writings, and parallel researches in relevant fields. In fact, these studies contain dissertations as well as journal articles that pinpointed the weaknesses of EFL learners and analyzed the grammatical errors in their writings. These researches discussed the grammatical errors from different perspectives using different analytical tools and theoretical frameworks and providing a rich knowledge in the field and other related fields like semantics and morphology.

This study has also reviewed several published books in close relation to the center of the study; both as a theoretical framework for the analysis of data and a source of general linguistic knowledge typically and specifically required to have full and comprehensive understanding of the topic and the manner the data should be analyzed and explained properly.

2.2 Review of Relevant Literature

The literature on analyzing students' mistakes is full of studies which covered different aspects of the topic in terms of discovering various kinds of grammatical errors. In

light of that, I am going to present these relevant studies to enable a reader to create a full background about the topic and try to relate it to this research and understand what is novel in the present study.

Khodabandeh (2007) investigated the problematic issues among English department students in terms of two aspects, namely morphosyntax, and semantics; however, there are some sentential mistakes that cannot be classified under the previous categories. In fact, her study aimed at casting light just on the difficulties students face in translating the language of the media. She asked the subjects to translate particular newspapers headlines from Persian into English and vice versa in order to find out the weakness points students have with respect to English grammar and vocabularies collocation.

In order to identify the grammatical errors found in students' translation and to come up with the sources of such grammatically incorrect sentences, the researcher adopted error analysis theory by Corder (1967) which assisted the researcher to identify, classify and categorize various sentential mistakes as well as semantic difficulties that she came across. Moreover, the taxonomy of errors by Keshavarz (1993) was employed, particularly the two major categories of errors: lexico-semantic and syntactico-morphological.

Following Keshavarz' taxonomy, the researcher came up with different grammatical errors that belong to subcategories, namely, errors in the use of preposition as in **Wrights' plane reached to Mashhad*, errors in the use of articles as in **The Rights brothers' plane arrived in Mashhad* , errors due to lack of concord as in **killing of muslims do not have justification in Samara*, wrong use of the plural morpheme as in **34 chineses were lost in Zagroub*, wrong use of quantifiers and intensifiers as in **china will be largest shipmakers worldwide*, wrong use of parts of speech as in **Iranian ambassador was appointed in Greek*, and use of typical Persian constructions in English as in **last previous head was*

killed. Obviously, the previous subcategories belong to the major category: Syntactico-morphological errors. However, subcategories of errors such as cross-association which refers to situations where two words are available in the target language for which there is one word in the learner's mother-tongue as in **The price of euro grew again*, and language switch, which is rarely found, as in *Toofan crossed Boshsher province*. The last two subcategories are classified under lexico-semantic errors.

To comment shortly on the previous ill-constructed sentences, there are some grammatical errors like misuse of preposition after some words which can be justified, according to generative grammar, by what is called sub-categorization restrictions which refers to verbs that subcategorize into various sub-groups, based on whether they require a complement, and if they do, what kind of complement they require (Ouhalla 1999). We have seen above the sentence **Wrights' plane reached to Mashhad* which is ungrammatical because it goes back to the properties of the verb reach that requires an NP complement as in *Wrights' plane reached Mashhad*; therefore, putting a preposition right after the verb reach is incorrect. In fact, I will talk about grammatical errors in detail and explicate the ungrammaticality of ill-constructed sentences reasoning out from a Generative Linguistics point of view in the forth chapter.

Since the researcher is concerned more with headlines language, two stages of analysis were applied in terms of English common core grammar and headlines language rules. In the end, she tried to come up with frequency percentages for each subcategory in order for it to be the focus for English language teachers as well as curriculum designers. To start with, it has been found that the *use of typical Persian constructions in English* made the highest percentage of error frequency followed by *wrong use of preposition* under the major category of syntactic-morphological errors. In addition to that, cross-association

subcategory under the category lexico-semantic errors scored the highest frequency of errors followed by language switch. Actually, this reflects the misunderstanding of English sentence nature and its components among the Persian students which, consequently, gave a rise to such grammatically ill-formed sentences. To sum up, every language has its unique sentence structure which cannot be duplicated in another language.

However, in my research I will not pay attention to the frequencies of grammatical errors because my focus is more on explicating ungrammaticality of ill-constructed sentences, and how a sentence could be explained in a very simple way to EFL learners. Secondly, the language analyzed above by the researcher, is based primarily on the rules of newspapers headlines. Actually, newspapers headlines language has different rules such as omission of articles and use of present tense instead of past tense which may not be known to English department students. Moreover, the choice of such texts to be analyzed does not truly represent the level of students where they are tested in a kind of language (the language of media) they might not be so exposed to. However, the language I am going to analyze is the academic language required at universities in essay writing which totally differs in that it should be as clear as possible in terms of grammar, lexical items as well as syntactic structure.

Another study by Darus entitled *Common Errors in Written English Essays of Form One Chinese Student: A Case Study* (2009) focuses primarily on the Chinese students from vernacular schools in Malaysia where they are obliged to learn Chinese, Malay and English. In fact, Chinese is their first language whereas Malay and English are compulsory subjects; they learn them at schools because they are the national and the second language respectively. Therefore, such a study is absolutely crucial as it tries to shed light on some problems students usually face while acquiring more than one language at the same time.

Since writing is too hard to master, it does examine the proficiency of one's English and whether or not she or he is aware of the language grammatical rules. Thus, the tool to collect the data was multi-purpose through giving the Chinese students a task of writing an essay to check out how perfect their language is. In fact, the 70 students were given one week to prepare for the topic *my family*, so that they could write a number of words that did not exceed 300 lexical items. One more interesting thing to highlight about the tool is that the students were given some time to get their ideas and expressions prepared before the exam which could prevent them from doing a lot of thinking. However, this might add a negative consequence in that some students may have someone to write it for them and memorize it; then they just paste it on the exam paper.

The principal objective of the study is to investigate the four most frequent errors in the form one Chinese students' written essays. In fact, pinpointing the difficulties faced by students may clarify the problems to students and give feedback to teachers in terms of how efficient and useful their teaching methods are.

In order to analyze the data rigorously, the Error Classification scheme developed by Darus et al. (2007) was adapted in the study. The scheme consists of 18 types of errors as follows: tenses, articles, subject-verb agreement, other agreement errors, infinitive gerunds, pronouns, possessive and attributive structures, word order, incomplete structures, negative constructions, lexical categories (preposition), other lexical categories, mechanics, word choice, word form, verb to be and Malaysian typical words. In fact, the essays were typed and then analyzed by using Markin 3.1 software. According to the researcher, this program offers precise classification and statistical analysis of errors. In my point of view, such a program may have advantages and disadvantages which, as a result, might not result in linguistically accurate analysis.

The results show crucial points that are also common in the previous study in terms of the types of grammatical errors such as subject-verb agreement, misuse of tenses, wrong use or omission of prepositions and mistakes in mechanics such as spelling, capitalization and punctuation. In fact, the previous categories of grammatical errors make up the four most common grammatical errors among the Chinese students. In my point of view, since such categories are shared by two studies of different EFL learners, this reflects the fact that such grammatical errors are necessary and inevitable in the process of learning English as a second language because English language is unique by its grammatical rules which make EFL learners switch back and forth whenever they face difficulties whether in choosing the proper preposition, tense, word endings or even capitalization as what has been found in the studies.

However, in my study whether the students deliberately or subconsciously repeated different types of errors in sentences is not the focus of this research. Rather, my focus is more on explicating the ungrammaticality of sentences written by English-major students which I hope will be very useful for understanding the nature of an English sentence by Arab and other EFL learners. Additionally, I will include some humble teaching styles that I experienced during my short period of teaching.

Sattayatham & Ratanapinyowong(2008) conducted a study which bears the title **Analysis of Errors in Paragraph writing in English by First Year Medical Students from the Four Medical Schools at Mahidol University**. Basically, the study was done in Thailand where English is considered as a Second language, and medical schools students are supposed to have a good command of English, according to the researchers of the study. Different criteria were adopted in order to do the error analysis. Additionally, the unique thing in the study is that the subjects were from four medical schools and divided into four

groups in order to do comparison between the groups. The study targeted to answer the question *what are the frequent types of errors committed in paragraph writing by first-year medical students from four medical schools at Mahidol University*. In order to answer such a question, the researchers applied 10 error analysis criteria which somehow differ from the ones adopted in the studies mentioned earlier in that most of the standards greatly pay more attention to the layout of the paragraph with respect to coherence, cohesion, no introduction, no conclusion, and lack of organization. However, there are other standards of error analysis which helped the researchers to identify and categorize grammatical errors found in the students' writing such as sentence structure, word choice and misuse of articles.

A hundred and thirty four students were subjected to the study from four medical schools at Mahidol University. In fact, the students were given three medical ethical passages chosen from the internet. Then, they had to select one of these passages and write their opinion about medical ethics in one paragraph. Later, a process of comparison was applied to compare the four groups' writing. Such a tool is very interesting as it may reinforce different skills in the mind of the students in that reading several passages before writing will trigger him or her to write putting into consideration the different writing styles he or she has just read.

Interesting results show different points to pay attention to. Unlike the previous studies' results, this study reflects the fact that most of the students' mistakes have to do with four criteria, namely, no transitional words, lack of organization, no introduction and no conclusion. However, there are some grammatical errors found in the students' writing with regard to sentence structure, word choice and misuse of articles. In view of this, such students are quite aware of the English language grammatical rules, but needed to be more

careful about the rules of writing a paragraph such as a topic sentence, a concluding sentence, what is meant by coherence and cohesion which and how they contribute to make a meaningful passage. Since the major focus is on the general layout of a paragraph, few criteria were adopted with respect to grammar mistakes, and consequently few grammatical errors were reflected in the students' writing.

However, my research will not discuss at all the layout of paragraphs or essays. In fact, whether there are topic sentences to introduce a paragraph or not, whether or not there are transitional words which make a passage cohesive and easy to connect ideas, whether or not the paragraphs are coherent in that they make sense to the reader in terms of stating thoughts gradually and supporting them with examples to make a passage understandable and self-explanatory; that would not be in the interest of my research. Rather, I will go beyond grammatically ill-constructed sentences to explicate and clarify why such sentences are incorrect adopting The X-Bar Syntactic Theory which proved its authenticity and adequacy not only to explain grammatical sentences, but also to explain in detail when and why a sentence is grammatically incorrect through rules explication.

Spoken language is totally different from written language in terms of grammar accuracy, time for planning and what to write and modify. Moreover, the situation of a speaker with respect to comfort and anxiety plays a key role in one's speech and grammar. In view of this, a student is subject to errors in his speech more than when he writes according to the topic and the situation which may have an impact on the fluency and accuracy of the language of a speaker. However, the level of grammaticality and acceptable sentences in spoken language is not considered as the same as that of written language grammar. Basically, a question with no copula (verb to be) is grammatically acceptable in spoken language e.g. you happy?, however, this is grammatically incorrect in written language.

Ting, Chang and Mahadhir(2010) carried out a study entitled **Grammatical Errors In Spoken English Of University Students In Oral Communication Course**. This study highlighted a lot of grammatical errors in spoken language by university students who are less proficient in English. Basically, the study is unique in nature in that it tests the spoken language of university students which is not covered by many studies. Such a study has contributed to the field of applied linguistics, particularly conversation teaching approaches which are rarely touched by researchers as it takes a long time to transcribe audio-recorded conversations.

The subjects of the study were 24 students who, actually, were enrolled in English for Special Purposes; a 50-hour course at a Malaysian University. All the subjects have gone through Malaysian University English Test (MUET) scoring bands from 1 to 3 which, obviously, reflect their weak level of English. MUET is a test which enables students to pursue their university education. Since the program focuses more on fluency, different topics were introduced to students ranging from talking about schedules and contacting with professors to extending hospitality and describing procedures and people. The materials for the study were derived from 126 simulated conversations in role-play situations produced by 42 students.

The study aimed to investigate the grammatical errors in spoken English of non-proficient university students and the changes in grammatical accuracy during the period of the English for social purposes course.

Magnificent results came out of this research where some grammatical errors such as misuse of preposition are also found in ill-formed sentences of written compositions by university students from the previous studies. It is natural to come across the same grammatical errors which are found in the written language of students. However, the

frequencies of particular errors may recur more in spoken language since there is no time to recycle or rectify what is being said. Moreover, some errors were categorized as misinformation which indicates that a student knows the grammatical rule for a specific sentence but she or he made a wrong choice, for example, “The other stall just sell it in *about eleven ringgit like that”. In addition to that, omission of articles or auxiliary verbs came right after misinformation in terms of frequency. In fact, as explained earlier that some features of speech may not include auxiliary verbs as in you happy? Instead of Are you happy? so such mistakes could not be fatal in terms of grammar as there is an extent to which a sentence is acceptable or not. Addition of some grammatical rules, which are not necessary in an utterance, and disordering components of a sentence are other types of the grammatical errors found in students’ spoken language. In my point of view, this always reflects the mother-tongue influence on student’s L2 in that they always try to make rules according to their native language system which usually contradicts the target language grammar. Severe errors as the researchers prefer to categorize it are the least frequent among the previously mentioned grammatical errors. In view of this, what is meant by severe errors here is that a sentence is judged as a non-English sentence as it lacks the basic structure of an English sentence such as “*How very high price do you?*”. In the previous question, we can notice that the question has no main verb to express the meaning since *do* is just an auxiliary one. Suppose we consider *do* as the main verb the question still lacks the helping verb. Regardless of the missing verb the whole question is not meaningful or even understandable, so it was classified under severe errors.

What we have just seen about the grammatical errors in spoken language is quite similar to those found in written language. Basically, this reflects the fact that both spoken and written languages share some features in terms of grammar rules and even the

application of such rules. In view of this, articles, whether definite or indefinite, must be there in written language as well as spoken language such as “This is a red car” the *a* must be there no matter we write the sentence or we utter it as long as we care about the rules of English language. Moreover, the most prevalent grammatical issue that researchers came across in the previous studies and even in other studies I have read is subject-verb concord which is also so common in my study. This, in fact, pinpoints the weakness of students in comprehending and applying this rule appropriately. I will discuss this issue in detail in chapter four. It, also, reflects and emphasize that EFL/ESL learners build their own language system during the learning process which influences their produced language. In fact, although learners come from different backgrounds and speak various native languages, they still commit the same grammatical issue which is subject-verb agreement.

Speaking of varieties of a language, Arabic language has different colloquial varieties which may have an impact, in one way or another, on the learner’s target language. In view of this, in Arabic-speaking countries colloquial Arabic is the most spoken among people as a daily-basis language and even in schools, so learners usually fall back on their native language (colloquial Arabic) in order to compensate for what they lack in the target language. Additionally, they sometimes translate slang Arabic phrases into English to suit their English speech. Consequently, this subjects them to errors in grammar as explained in the following study.

Al-khresheh (2010) did a study which is entitled Interlingual Interference in the English Language Word Order Structure of Jordanian EFL Learners. In fact, the study is distinguished from the previous studies in that it touches on the interference of both the standard Arabic and the colloquial variety of Arabic which is used in everyday communication among Jordanians. Consequently, the results revealed that standard Arabic

variety has more influence on the errors committed by Jordanian EFL learners although the standard variety is not spoken in schools. In view of this, whenever written language is mentioned, the standard variety comes first to students' mind as all books, journals and magazines greatly use it in their written form which influences even their English written form.

An excellent point in the previously mentioned study is that the researcher tried to give an informative introduction to readers in order to draw a complete image about the topic from different angles. Firstly, he introduces readers to the status of English in Jordan whether it is official, foreign or a second language. In fact, from such information provided in the introduction a reader can imagine the way people use English in Jordan, and why they commit syntactic errors in terms of sentence word order. Secondly, he also gives readers an idea about the simple sentence structure word order in Arabic (both varieties: standard and colloquial) as well as English to make it easy to identify the errors and how serious such kinds of errors are. To sum up, the introduction is a prediction of the kinds and the sources of errors.

The methodology that has been applied in the Al-khresheh's study is the quantitative method. In fact, it is very effective and accurate in a way that the research questions require such a method to collect more data to find out how frequent the errors are. Furthermore, such a method helps a researcher prove the actual causes underlying the errors. The subjects have been chosen based on the cluster sampling method where groups, not individuals, are randomly selected from the same background of English. The participants were 69 males and 46 females. Additionally, though he classified two groups which differ in gender, he did not mention in the results if there is a significant difference between males and females in terms of errors frequencies since one of his research

questions discusses the frequencies of grammatical errors. The testing instrument that was applied is a multiple-choice test where 20 items and three options were provided for each item. In my point of view, for such a study if the instrument is a composition test it would have been better in terms of testing what comes to a learner's mind when she/he wants to write a sentence in a foreign language. Do students think in their mother-tongue? If yes, what variety does he/she uses? Is it the standard or the low variety? However, if we give them multiple-choice questions, they may choose randomly which makes it more difficult to decide whether the errors resource is the mother-tongue (including the high and the low variety) or sometimes the learner's own creation of grammar system which is based on neither the mother-tongue nor from the foreign language; it is like a bridge between his native language and a foreign language depending on their language background in both L1 and L2.

The objectives of the study were met, and the researcher was able to answer the research questions clearly and completely through his study in a sense that he came up with percentage of how often Jordanians make errors, and what kind of causes that stands behind such errors. Moreover, he was able to distinguish between whether the standard or the colloquial variety has more influence on the errors. Further, after finding the results the researcher tries to convince the reader why such results are reliable and practical which is highly appreciated to share with a reader some points that may come to her or his mind. The results of the study are beneficial for both teachers and learners. Teachers can find the weaknesses of their students and they can work on them to reduce the frequency of such errors in the future. Further, students may have an idea about the common errors, so they may try to avoid them.

In relation to my study, actually, this paper is useful since the subjects of it have

something in common with the sample students of my study where both share the same native language that is Arabic. This is, actually, even reflected in their kinds of grammatical errors found as they almost face the exact difficulties in English grammar, particularly in misuse of prepositions as well as subject-verb agreement.

Prepositions are the most difficult part of syntactic categories which EFL/ESL learners face. In view of this, since one preposition may have more than one meaning according to the context, whether in the native language of a learner or in the target language, this makes EFL learners confused about what appropriate prepositions to use. Moreover, according to Ouhalla(1999) some verbs or words subcategorize for prepositional phrase (or PP) and some do not which are not known to EFL learners since they receive limited exposure to English language such as *importance* in a sentence like “The importance of English in the Arab world”. In the previous sentence the preposition *of* must be there right after the noun importance which marks the sentence grammatically incorrect if it is omitted. In fact, this can be attributed to the property of the word importance which makes it obligatory to be followed by a preposition; therefore, the absence of it makes the language of a sentence even sound awkward to a good speaker of English irrespective of being syntactically acceptable or not. On the other hand, Arabic language has no such a property for the same word which stands as an obstacle for Arab EFL learners of English, particularly those who are not getting adequate exposure to the language.

To shed light on students’ errors in the use of prepositions, a study conducted by Tahaineh (2010) with the title Arab EFL University Student's Errors in the Use of Prepositions. It discussed the issue in detail. Actually, the study is excellent in that it covers the issue from different perspectives in order to pinpoint the weaknesses of students in such a syntactic category.

The researcher's approach produced results that can be enormously useful for EFL students, teachers as well as curriculum designers. He set up questions which can help him identify the source of errors, to what extent there is a relation between the students' level of proficiency and the kinds of grammatical errors reflected in their essays and to what extent can the difference of students' errors be attributed to the average length of compositions.

In order to come up with the results, a hundred and sixty students were selected and categorized as 54 freshmen, 54 sophomores and 54 juniors. All of them started learning English as a foreign language at public schools in the fifth grade and they are English majors at Al-balqa Applied University in Jordan at the time of the research. A very good criterion that the researcher adopted is that all the students are at the same level in terms of their linguistic and socio-linguistic background as well as the education and the economic status. The subjects were given five topics to choose from and write an essay within 50 minutes. The topics were simple compared to the level of students, so all of them were able to do the task comfortably.

Interesting results came out and were classified according to particular categories. In fact, the categories of errors in the use of prepositions are similar in nature to categories of different grammatical errors and they are: substitution, addition and omission. As I explained earlier the native language of EFL learners, which is Arabic in this case, is not always responsible for the grammatical errors found in students' compositions. In view of this, there were some errors in the use of prepositions such as *at* instead of *in*. Besides, in Arabic language both the prepositions *in* and *at* have one meaning, so there is no possibility of mother tongue interference here. However, in English the situation is different in that each preposition has a different usage and meaning from the other which stands as a difficulty for EFL learners and causes some mistakes in their writing. This is, in fact, what

is called intra-lingual error where a learner is either not aware of the rule completely and its exceptions or he/she over-generalizes from narrow background of English language during the study.

On the other hand, there are other errors in the use of prepositions which are caused of mother tongue interference such as *by* instead of *for* as in “Amman is famous by its ruin” and “I paid JD 4000 by the car”. In fact, it is completely obvious that Arabic is the only source for such a mistake because in Arabic *bi* or *fii* bear the meaning of *by* or *in* which is interchangeably used to indicate a reason behind fame.

Since mother-tongue transfer strategy is used mostly by EFL learners, it was more common than target language transfer as a source of errors according to the researcher. In my opinion, this can be attributed to the teaching style adopted by their teachers which is reflected in their written compositions errors.

A very interesting work carried out by Xiaoy (2005) that is entitled Multilevel Analysis of Chinese EFL Learners Errors in Their Writing. Obviously, the title shows that the data will be analyzed through three stages or levels, namely, grammatical level, lexical level and textual level that encompasses cohesion and coherence. The data of the study consists of a hundred and fifty one compositions written by EFL Chinese intermediate learners. In order to analyze the data, the researcher employed the error analysis theory (Corder 1974) as the theoretical framework of the study. In my opinion, such a theory helps just for identifying the errors and their frequencies; however, we should go beyond identifying and categorizing these errors to explaining the real process of constructing an English sentence and how ungrammaticality is caused through omitting or reordering some components of a sentence.

Since frequencies of errors were in question to the researcher, magnificent results revealed that grammar occupied the position of the most frequent errors; the less frequent errors are the lexical errors whereas the least frequent type of errors is the textual errors. Actually, grammar has always been considered the most complex part of language to be learnt by EFL/ESL learners and it was demonstrated by the outcomes of the previous studies as well as my studies. Inappropriate lexical choices come out as a result of inadequate or limited exposure to language.

In relation to my study, this study already discussed two points which are similar to my research, namely, grammatical and lexical errors. However, cohesion and coherence or textual errors which concern the layout of an essay and how well ideas are presented and connected with each other are not included in the present research.

CHAPTER THREE

Methodology

3.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the methodology and procedures applied in carrying out this research. This covers the data collection process as well as the participants. Moreover, this chapter explains the process of data analysis followed in the research.

3.2 Participants

Having taught Arab EFL learners for a while, I discovered some areas where they face difficulties in constructing an English sentence with no grammatical errors. Therefore, I have decided to conduct a study on Arab EFL learners. In fact, all my samples speak Arabic as their native language in a setting where Arabic language is the official language of the country, Saudi Arabia, as well as the medium of instruction except in the European and English language departments. Additionally, opportunities for communication and talks in the target language were too few. Consequently, Arab EFL learners are not exposed enough to the target language which causes so many grammatical errors in their writing.

There are 20 sample compositions written by twenty junior female students majoring in English language at The Faculty of Arts and Humanities at King Abdul Aziz University in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia. In fact, the kind of writing students were asked to do is critical writing on the play *Trifles* by Glaspell. This was an assignment given to drama course students to write their points of view on the play in terms of the basic elements and how well it represented the reality

and the status of women at the time of the play. There was no a defined number of words i.e. there was no word limit; the focus is on the content no matter how words one could write.

There is no distinction or description about their linguistic, cultural or even socio-linguistic background of English language. In fact, I have selected the samples randomly without any criteria because I want to discover the general difficulties in English language that Saudi students have regardless of differences in their living status and expertise in English language. The education system in Saudi Arabia does not allow boys to mix with girls i.e. there is no co-education system; rather boys and girls study in totally separate places. With regard to my subjects being only females, the choice was made because that is the only access I have to collect data from that university.

3.3 Organization of Analysis

The analysis will be done by employing the Minimalist Program as the main analysis tool represented in the X-Bar Theory. In fact, the analysis will be carried out through three stages; the first stage will discuss the kinds of grammatical errors found in the writings of students; the second stage of analysis, which is the most important one, will explain and explicate ungrammaticality of ill-formed sentences; the third stage will evaluate the factors or causes that contribute to such errors.

Regarding the kinds of grammatical errors to be analyzed, I will be focusing more on the most problematic errors for Saudi students although there are many others. In fact, since it is just a research report and I am restricted to the number of pages, so I am not able to cover all the errors in grammar that stand as a barrier blocking them from reaching an acceptable level in terms of grammar. In addition to that, explication of ungrammaticality of errors, especially syntactic parts, requires drawing tree diagrams to explain and be able to justify in words since the tree

diagram illustrates how sentence components merge with each other to form a complete sentence. However, in drawing a tree diagram I always represent only the wrongful part of a sentence i.e. I don't represent the whole sentence in the tree diagram as long as the other parts are clear enough to students and readers. Besides, being restricted to a number of pages that I cannot exceed, I will try to focus more on the problematic components of a sentence and illustrate them in two diagrams; one diagram to represent where mistakes take place and the other one to represent the same part after correction and how it should be written.

Finally, since my subjects and I are native speakers of Arabic language, I will be able to trace the different sources of errors that stand behind committing grammatical mistakes putting into consideration inter-language theory and intra-language theory as main sources of errors

Chapter Four

Data Analysis

4.1 Introduction

Going over the compositions of the subjects has resulted in so many various kinds of errors in grammar which I am going to discuss individually from generative linguistics point of view. In view of this, I am going to explicate the ungrammaticality of ill-constructed sentences applying the Minimalist Program, by Chomsky (1995), in order to make it easy for students, and explain to teachers as well as curriculum designers the weak points and troubles that face Saudi students whenever they have to compose an English sentence. Moreover, through explaining the basic components of an English sentence, students may better understand the unique nature of an English sentence which differs totally from an Arabic one in terms of basic structure, word order and several changes that may occur which I am going to make clearer.

In my analysis, I will use up-side-down tree diagrams to illustrate grammaticality and justification for ungrammaticality. In fact, I always care more about the problematic errors when it comes to drawing tree diagrams, so I do not want to discuss things which students have no difficulties with in order to focus more on what students are in urgent need of. That is the reason why I sometimes do not draw a complete diagram for the whole sentence.

The findings of this research will be presented, analyzed and discussed in an orderly fashion in light of its questions.

4.2 Identification of Grammatical Errors

The purpose of the first question is to define and classify the grammatical errors, found in the subjects' writing, under different categories in order to make the process of explication and justification easy and clear to readers.

1. Tense sequence

*Mrs. Wright changed after she get married. (appendix 2)

2. Voice

The rule of forming passive in English is different from Arabic in that the verb to *be* (is, am, are) or *get* must be there along with the past participle form of a verb. As a result, Arab learners may have some troubles, especially if they do not understand the rule well, in changing active voice into passive making such mistakes as in the following sentence:

*Trifles wrote by Glaspell.

3. Verb formation

a. Copula deletion

*Susan Glaspell an American Pulitzer prize-winning playwright... (appendix 2)

*The play about the life of Mrs. Wright...

b. Auxiliary deletion

*The men still trying to figure out what happened.

*In that play, they focusing on the stereotype that looking for a woman.

c. Auxiliary redundancy

*She wants to remember her past and that beautiful days that she *was* lived in.

(appendix 3)

*It reflects her husband who *was* quite did not concern about her wife.

4. Concord

a. Deletion or addition of the third person singular marker

*He doesn't allows her...

*I like that image that the writer describe the way...

*I hope other students read this play to discover other symbols that the writer explain.

b. Agreement on NP-internal elements

*She wants to remember her past and *that* beautiful days...

c. The incorrect use of be

*The kitchen and what was in it *is* significant symbols.

*There is many errors that deals with men...

5. Sentence Structure

a. Subject repetition

*This shows that she how unstable and nervous she is.

*Professionals, whose job it is to find out what happened, failed in their task.

b. Subject deletion

*Also, reveals how her spirit...

...*when they are free, are flying.

c. Object deletion

*In the end, they found because her husband killed the bird...

6. Articles

a. Deletion of the indefinite articles

*The dead canary is major symbol... (appendix 1)

b. Deletion of the definite article

*bird in the play is a symbol of freedom... (appendix2)

c. Redundancy of the definite article

*This symbol is representing *the* Mr. Wright's oppression. (appendix 5)

*It is the symbol for *the* freedom...

7. Prepositions

a. Preposition deletion

*Trifles shows the image of women that time and how men look at them.

(in/during)

b. Preposition substitution

... *to focus to the fact...

*She was finally at peace. (appendix 4)

c. Preposition redundancy

*The bird symbolized *to* Minnie Foster... (appendix 3)

8. Wrong use of words

*Trifles *issues* the differences between genders: men and women. (discuss)

... *they wanted to be heard as well as men. (Listened to) (appendix 1)

*I will talk about the *symbolize*...(symbol)

... *and how women can *analysis* and find the main evidence... (appendix 2)

4.3 Explication of Grammatical Errors

In order to answer this question completely and clearly, I am going to analyze the grammatical errors mentioned above first. Moreover, I am going to explicate the ungrammaticality of sentences produced by the participants of this research in their composition in order to be able to answer the second question.

1. Tense sequence

*Mrs. Wright changed after she *get* married.

Since the sentence is using the past tense as it is clear from the first verb in the main clause, this forces the time clause or the subordinate clause to be in the past tense as well. However, the sentence above is syntactically and semantically unacceptable.

First, I would like to explain how tense is marked on verb in English language from a generative grammar point of view. It would be easier, then, for readers to follow and see how ungrammaticality occurred in the sentence. According to (Adger2003), he explains that little *v* has an un-interpretable tense feature. Moreover, T (tense), which bears tense of a sentence (present, past), checks the feature of little *v* and values it. In the following

structure, [past] on T is a tense feature, and it matches the unvalued tense feature on little *v*. When they match, the little *v* receives a value from the tense feature [past] on T. Consequently, when this structure is spelled out, the little *v* and the verb itself are pronounced as the past tense of the verb. With a deep look at Diagram 4.3.1.1, we can see what was explained earlier is illustrated here in the tree diagram.

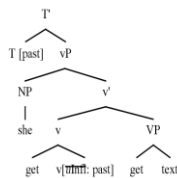


Diagram 4.3.1.1

However, the following diagram 4.3.1.2 illustrates exactly where ungrammaticality exists in the sentence. Actually, I can say that the grammatical issue here occurred in the spelling out of the structure where the little *v* and the verb itself are pronounced in different tenses. Thus, a mismatch can be observed between the little *v* and T which made the sentence grammatically unacceptable. We can reason this out by going back to the lexicon of students which is responsible for such mistakes since the lexicon includes not only knowledge of meaning about words, but also possibilities of where and how these words can be used and where or why they cannot be used.

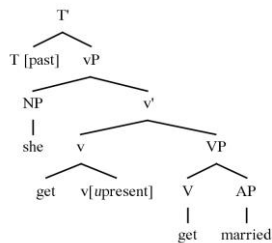


Diagram 4.3.1.2

2. Voice

*Trifles wrote by Glaspell.

The sentence above should be passive as we can notice that the active form of it is *Glaspell wrote Trifles* which is a play. However, in forming a passive voice out of this sentence, students moved the object to the specifier of TP without adhering fully to the rule of changing active into passive which even affects the semantic meaning of the sentence. So, the tree diagram 4.3.2.1 below represents what happened in the mind of the students when making such a sentence:

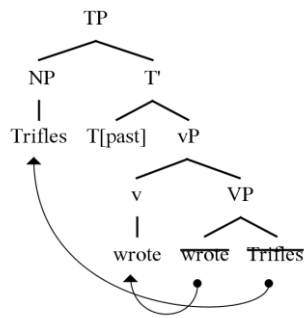


Diagram 4.3.2.1

We can notice here that there are two things missing in order for a passive construction to be completed. First, the student has written the main verb in the second form which violates the rule that states the main verb must be past participle (the third form of a verb) in passive formation. Additionally, the main verb is not the finite verb in passive construction which leads us to the question where is the finite verb since it is responsible for bearing the T tense of a sentence. According to Adger (2003) he states that the auxiliary *be* is a passive functional head that is recognized in English language which bears the categorial feature Pass as well as the T tense feature being the finite verb in passive construction. Therefore,

we need the auxiliary *be* followed by the past participle form of a main verb to grammatically generate a passive construction which can be illustrated in diagram 4.3.2.2 beneath.

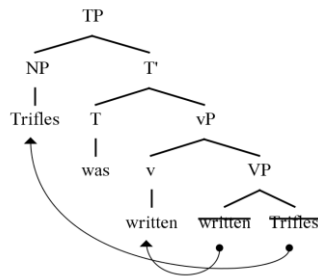


Diagram 4.3.2.2

3. Verb formation

3.1 Copula deletion

*The play about the life of Mrs. Wright. (appendix 2)

The following diagram represents the ungrammatical sentence by students whereas diagram 4.3.3.1.1 represents the syntactically accepted sentence.

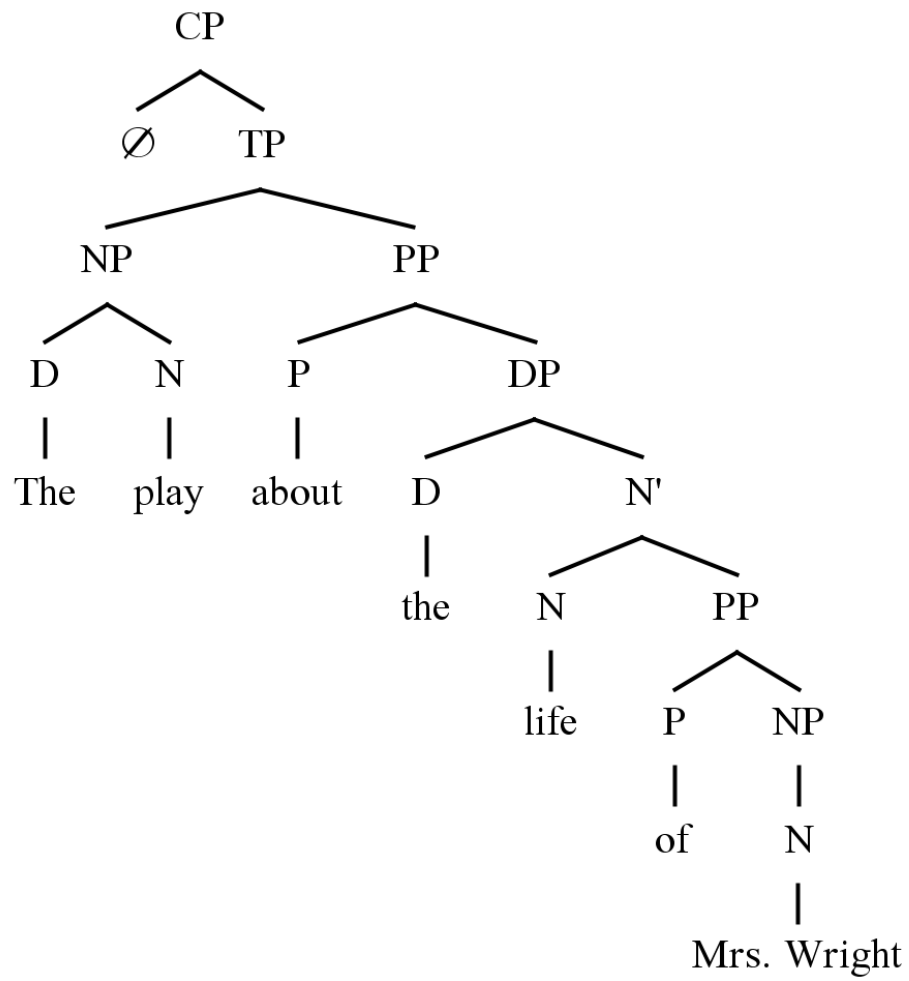


Diagram 4.3.3.1.1

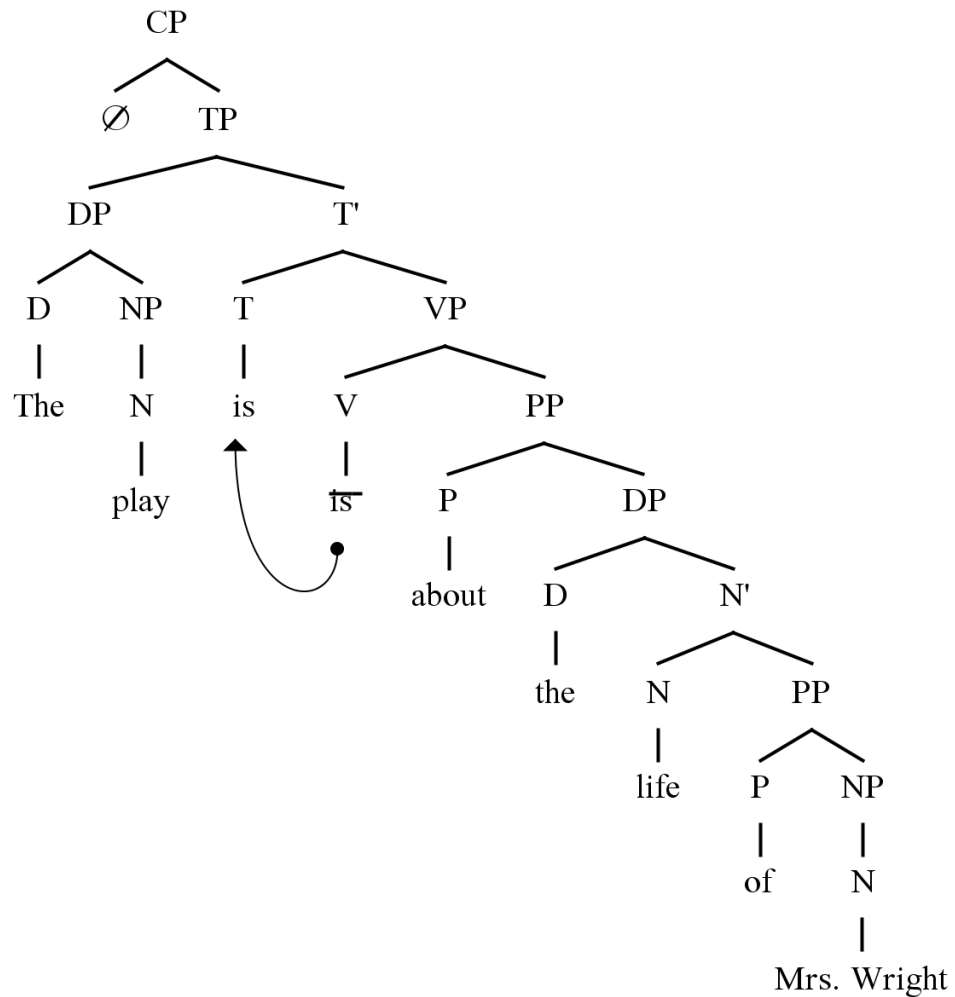


Diagram 4.3.3.1.2

If we look at diagram 4.3.3.1.1 we will clearly see that the sentence has a terrible grammatical issue which is missing verb to *be*. In fact, verb to be (taking the form *is* here) is a finite verb which, basically, carries the feature of tense that is present in this context as I predicted it from the paragraph of the student where all other sentences were written using the present tense. Therefore, the absence of *is* is the reason behind its ungrammaticality as every English sentence must be headed by a verb. Chomsky has invented the rewrite rules

in generative grammar which indicate the constituents of a phrase structure. In the case of a sentence he has created this rule:

$$S \rightarrow NP \text{ Aux } VP$$
$$\text{Aux} \rightarrow \text{Tense (Modal)}$$

In view of the above rules, Aux is an obligatory constituent of a sentence as it breaks its grammaticality in case of its absence. Regarding tense, since there is no modal verb in the above sentence, the tense is considered as a constituent of Aux (Ouhalla 1999). Moreover, the raising of *is* from head V position in VP into the head T position in TP also indicates that this verb is finite so it must be raised up to T position to represent the tense of the sentence as every sentence must carry a tense (Radford 2009). Therefore, we see the perfectly accurate representation of the sentence in tree diagram F. The same thing could be applied to the other sentences mentioned under the same category:

*Susan Glaspell an American Pulitzer prize-winning playwright...

*Second, an important symbol the quilt.

3.2 Auxiliary deletion

*The men still trying to figure out what happened.

* In that play, they focusing on the stereotype that looking for a woman.

The previous two sentences lack an auxiliary verb which is (are) in this case. This verb bears the T tense marker being the finite verb of the sentence whereas the main verb indicates progression of the action going on. That is the reason behind their ungrammaticality. As explained earlier that the AUX is used to head the AUXP, but it has to move to the head T position in TP since it is the finite verb.

3.3 Auxiliary redundancy

*She wants to remember her past and *that* beautiful days that she *was* lived in.

*It reflects her husband who *was* quite did not concern about her wife.

The diagram below represents the wrong part of the first sentence above.

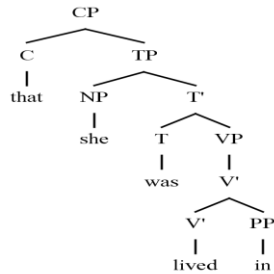
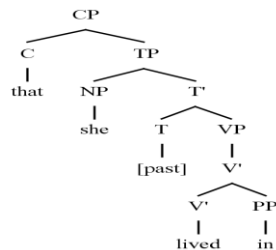


Diagram 4.3.3.1

What we can see above is that the student used the verb *live* as an accusative verb with an intransitive feature meaning in the passive voice. This is so because we have seen in the structure of passive that there must be the verb *to be* which has a passive feature and at the same time it is the finite verb of the sentence. Additionally, sentences have just one head

which bears the tense. In fact, the property of the verb does not allow it to be used in passive voice since it has no transitivity feature. Besides, there is no need for *was* to bear the tense marker since the suffix *ed* indicates so. Therefore, the verb *live* is the finite verb of the sentence which forces us to delete the auxiliary *was* to make the sentence grammatically correct which is represented in the diagram below.



'Diagram 4.3.3.3.2

The same analysis can be applied to the second sentence.

4. Concord

4.1 Deletion or addition of the third person singular marker

*He doesn't allows her...

*I like that image that the writer describe...

If we have a quick look at the previous two sentences, we will encounter an issue in grammar which is so prominent among EFL/ESL learners; it is subject-verb agreement. Actually, English language rules differ from other languages where singular and plural subjects must agree with their predicates (verbs) in the present tense. Additionally, tense marker in English is put on verbs, whether auxiliaries or main verbs, depending on the syntactic structure of a sentence. In view of this, when a sentence has no main verb or in negated clauses, an auxiliary is raised up to T (tense) position in order to carry tense as explained earlier in copula deletion whereas in negated clauses where a tense affix cannot find a verbal host to attach to, so it is spelled out by Do-support as an inflected form of the auxiliary do/does. However, if a sentence is constructed without an auxiliary, then it follows that Affix hopping will be lowered to the tense affix in order to spell out the tense marker (Radford 2009). Thus, we can conclude that Do-support and Affix Hopping are two phonetic form operations which result in two different manners of spelling out an affix which carries tense. Additionally, once one operation is carried out the other one is not allowed to undergo which causes ungrammaticality to the sentence above **He does not allows her*. In the second sentence, none of the operations was conducted, so the sentence is also ungrammatical since we already accepted the fact of agreement between subjects and verbs which also states that a verb under singular subject must be s-suffixed in the present tense only.

4.2 Agreement on NP-internal elements

*She wants to remember her past and *that* beautiful days...

According to Baker (2008), NP-internal elements such as determiners, numerals, demonstratives as well as possessive pronouns must agree in number with their nouns in

the same Noun Phrase (NP). So, the previous sentence violates such a rule as it does not consider the plural feature of the noun *days* which requires a plural determiner. Thus, we judge the sentence as ungrammatical which can only be corrected by changing *that* into *those*.

4.3 The incorrect use of be

*The kitchen and what was in *is* significant symbols.

In English language, the finite verb agrees with the preverbal thematic subject in person and number (Baker2008). Having adopted this theory, the previous sentence is marked ungrammatical because the subject has *pl* feature which requires the plural form of verb to be as well which is *are*.

5. Sentence Structure

5.1 Subject repetition

*Professionals, whose job *it* is to find out what happened, failed in their task.

The diagram below represents exactly what happened to the structure of the sentence according to the students' perspective of forming an English sentence. As we can see, there are two specs, subjects (whoso job and it) which is not allowed in English sentence structure as well as other languages such as Arabic, German and French. Furthermore, according to Radford (2009) every T constituent has an Extended Projection Principle (EPP) feature which requires having a noun or pronoun as its specifier. Consequently, a subject moves from spec-V to spec-T to satisfy EPP. Therefore, the subject of an English sentence must be immediately dominated by TP and having a sisterhood relation with T'. Thus, the sentence is judged ungrammatical. The following diagram illustrates so.

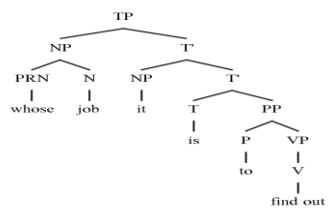


Diagram 4.3.5.1.1

However, the sentence is grammatically acceptable if we delete the unnecessary *it* as illustrated in the diagram beneath.

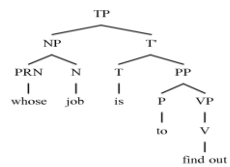
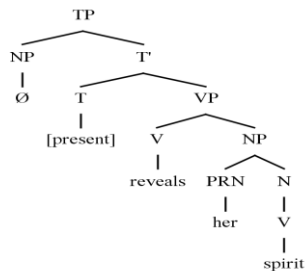


Diagram 4.3.5.1.2

5.2 Subject deletion.

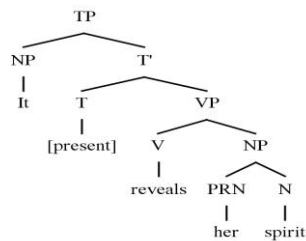
*Reveals her spirit.

The sentence shows ungrammaticality where the property of the verb *reveal* requires two arguments (subject and object), However, we can see only one which is the object. The subject is marked with null since it is missing. I have mentioned earlier that T constituent has an EPP feature which requires a noun or pronoun to raise to its spec which is unavailable here in the diagram below.



'Diagram 4.3.5.2.1

Therefore, to make the sentence grammatically correct we need to add another argument to indicate the subject of the verb *reveal* as it is illustrated in the diagram beneath.

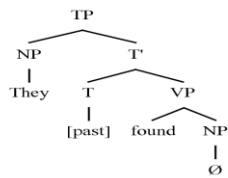


'Diagram 4.3.5.2.2

5.3 Object deletion

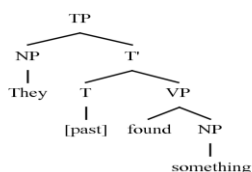
*In the end, they found because her husband killed the bird...

In the sentence above, there is ungrammaticality in *they found* represented by the absence of an object for the verb found. In fact, the verb found (past of find) is a two-place predicate meaning it requires two arguments (subject and object). Besides, the verb found does not freely permit object deletion as /read/ and /eat/. The diagram below represents exactly what occurred in the structure of the sentence.



'Diagram 4.3.5.3.1

Therefore, there is no other way to make it grammatical but to add an object after *they found* to assign the accusative case since the verb is accusative in nature. The diagram beneath represents the grammatical structure of the sentence having such a verb.



'Diagram 4.3.5.3.2

6. Articles

6.1 Deletion of the indefinite articles

*The dead canary is major symbol...

According to Baker (2008), all words inside the noun phrase must follow the noun and agree with it in noun class (in number and gender) including numerals, determiners and possessive pronouns. What we can infer from this theory is that, and since the noun *symbol* is a count noun in nature, there must be an indefinite article before the adjective *major* as it is a part (adjunct to the noun *symbol* in Baker's perspective) of NP *symbol*. In addition to that, we can also consider such determiners (a and an) as numerals in terms of semantic meaning as they semantically indicate one. Therefore, the sentence must be corrected by adding an indefinite article *a* as in: *The dead canary is a major symbol.*

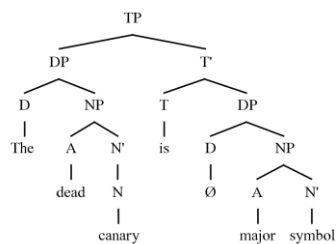


Diagram 4.3.6.1.1

Determiners are heads in DP and articles *a*, *an* and *the* are determiners. In addition to that, NP is the complement to the determiner head (Carnie 2007). Applying the DP Theory introduced by Abney (1987) the sentence above is ungrammatical because the head of DP, which is a determiner D, is missing which also violates Headedness Principle that obliges a DP to be headed by a D. Therefore, the above sentence is incorrect, and the only way to correct is to add a determiner as illustrated in the diagram underneath.

The canary bird is a major symbol...

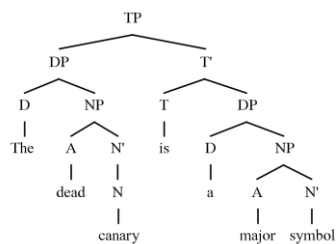


Diagram 4.3.6.1.2

The same analysis could be applied to the following category as well as to deletion of preposition where the head P is omitted.

6.2 Deletion of the definite article

*Bird in the play is a symbol of freedom...

The word bird in this context in the student's composition was already mentioned for several times which changes the feature of the word *bird* from being indefinite to definite to the writer as well as readers. In addition to that, since we have definite (the) and indefinite articles (a, an); and since we already agreed on what Baker stated in his theory that all

words in NP phrases must agree with it in noun class (except adjectives), so in this case also the definite determiner *the* must be there since the word *bird* is already definite.

6.3 Redundancy of the definite article

*It is the symbol for *the* freedom...

The property of the word freedom in the sense of liberty does not allow an article to precede it since there is no definite kind of freedom as in the academic freedom. In fact, it is an abstract noun like love, sincerity, honesty etc and those nouns are never preceded by an article.

7. Prepositions

7.1 Preposition deletion

*Trifles shows the image of women that time and how men look at them. (in/during)

Ungrammaticality here lies in the absence of a preposition before the DP *that time* which is syntactically and semantically unacceptable. In fact, the absence of P preposition violates Headedness Principle which obliges a PP to be headed by a P. If we put syntax aside, we will feel that there is something missing through our sense of language. Moreover, we can justify the necessary presence of a preposition in this position by saying that the property of the word time (which indicates era/age according to the context) requires a preposition to precede it and of course it will be before the determiner *that*. Therefore, there must be a preposition.

7.2 Preposition substitution

... to focus *to* the fact...

First of all, the verb *focus on* is a phrasal verb which consists of a verb and a preposition; so the preposition cannot be changed since the property of the verb has chosen such a

preposition (*on* in this case) to join up with. So, any substitution to the preposition with another one causes ungrammaticality.

7.3 Preposition redundancy

The bird symbolized *to* Minnie Foster...

The preposition *to* in the above sentence is redundant in the sense there is no need for it as the meaning is complete without it. Furthermore, the feature of the word *symbolize* does not allow a prepositional phrase (PP) to follow, rather it permits only an NP to follow. Thus, ungrammaticality is caused by any kind of a phrase added to it except an NP.

8- Wrong use of words

Trifles *issues* the differences between genders: men and women.

In the above example we can clearly detect the grammatical error which is in associating the word *issue* with the word *difference*. To start with, lexical items do have selectional features: Categorical selectional features and semantic selectional features (Adger 2003). In view of this, lexical items have properties of categorial selection which means that every lexical item assigns a word category which can follow it e.g. N, V, P etc which is already met here in the word *difference* being a noun as *issue* has c-selectional N-feature. Therefore, *difference* can merge with *issue* from a syntactic point of view; however, since lexical items have also semantic selectional features, this merging process will encounter a semantic mismatch between the requirements of the word and the noun merging with it i.e. the two words do not collocate with each other. The exact explanation can be applied to this sentence which is also produced by one of the research samples: ...*they wanted to be *heard* as well as men.

However, in the following sentence, we will come across the otherwise of the previous ones in terms of meeting the requirements for c-selectional feature and s-selectional feature:

*I will talk about the *symbolize*...

Such a sentence retains one feature which is the s-selectional feature which has to do with the meaning, but lacks the c-selectional feature which determines the word category that can follow. In fact, what we can see in the above sentence is a verb after a definite article and this is where ungrammaticality lies since the property of the definite article *the* can subcategorize only for noun to follow which is replaced by a verb above. Thus, the sentence is not syntactically accepted unless a noun replaces the verb. As a result of this, we can conclude that both features (syntactic and semantic) are really inseparable since they shape the word that can follow any lexical item.

The wrong choice of words that was detected in the two examples above violates the Full Interpretation Principle:

'every element of PF and LF, taken to be the interface of syntax with systems of language use, must receive an appropriate interpretation – must be licensed in the sense indicated' (Chomsky 1986a).

This means according to Cook (1996) that there are no superfluous elements in the structure of a language. In view of this, this principle takes in part of Theta Theory whereby every argument must assign only one theta role. Thus; wrong choice of words may allow for assigning more than one theta role to an argument which violates the rule and causes ungrammaticality in sentence structure.

4.4 Sources of Grammatical Errors

From categorizing and classifying the grammatical errors of the students' composition to analyzing these errors, I shall now evaluate different sources of these grammatical errors that can be attributed to. In fact, the previous studies that I have included in the literature review have already done such a step and listed a number of sources that stand behind deviated sentences by Arab EFL learners. As a matter of fact, making mistakes in a foreign language learning is not in itself a big issue, but what matters most is why these deviated sentences keep on happening. This is what I am going to discuss in chapter five.

The kinds of grammatical errors that I have come across are quite identical to the errors found in the previous studies since the samples of their studies and mine are Arabic native speakers. As a result of this, the sources that these errors can be attributed to, of course, would be the same ones that caused ungrammaticality in the composition of the samples.

Sources of grammatical errors have been of interest to so many linguists and educationists which resulted in several different types and categories. Furthermore, such sources may be of interest to teachers, so they can identify and focus more on treating these errors. However, most of these types are classified under two major categories: inter-lingual and intra-lingual sources. Basically, Inter-lingual grammatical errors are those ascribed to the native language interference (Corder, 1971). Actually, the term *inter-language*, introduced by Selinker (1974), represents the systematic knowledge of an L2 which is independent of both the learner's L1 and the target language.

4.4.1 Inter-language Source of Errors

This type of sources of grammatical errors is greatly responsible for most of the student's ill-constructed sentences in the previous studies done. However, in my study the analysis shows different outcomes in that mother-tongue influence rarely stands behind committing errors in writing. The errors in grammar stated below reflect mother-tongue interference in the omission of words, substituting with other words or even repeating unnecessary words. For example, *Susan Glaspell an American Pulitzer prize-winning playwright... in this sentence the copula or verb *to be* is omitted by the students which really reflects mother-tongue interference where there is no copula in such a sentence in Arabic. This can be translated into Arabic as: *Susan Glaspell katebat masrah haselah ?la ja?izat Pulitzer Al-?mreekiyyah = Susan Glaspell playwright and American Pulitzer prize-winner*. As we can see the Arabic structure does not require a copula right after the subject which makes Arabic students commit such a mistake when they write in English. The examples below show this interference clearly in different situations:

Deletion of the indefinite articles

The dead canary is major symbol...(a major) In fact, Arabic language does not have such kind of rule since the absence of the definite article indicates its indefiniteness.

Redundancy of the definite article

It is the symbol for *the* freedom...

Such an abstract concept is written with a definite article in Arabic as in *al-hurriyah* where *al* stands for *the* in English.

4.4.2. Intra-language Source of Errors

On the other hand, intra-lingual grammatical errors are attributed to the language being learned, independent of the learner's mother-tongue. Richards (1974) made it clear that they are “items produced by the learner which reflect not the structure of the mother tongue, but generalizations based on partial exposure to the target language. The learner, in such a case, attempts to “derive the rules behind the data to which he/she has been exposed, and may develop hypotheses that correspond neither to the mother tongue nor to the target language” (Richards, 1974, p. 6). The examples below show how intra-lingual errors are the source of most errors committed by the sample for this research. Examples will be provided from the samples of students to prove the real source of errors.

Auxiliary deletion

* In that play, they focusing on the stereotype that looking for a woman.

In such a sentence, we can see that the students did not fully understand the formula of making a progressive tense which made their sentence ungrammatical. That is what is called incomplete rule application where learners apply the part they understand and leave the other parts which, as a result, causes ungrammaticality. This analysis can be, also, applied to the passive voice sentence below as well as to concord and auxiliary redundancy.

Voice

*Trifles wrote by Glaspell.

Concord: There are two sub-headings under this heading as follows.

Deletion or addition of the third person singular marker

*He doesn't allows her...

Auxiliary redundancy

*It reflects her husband who *was* quite did not concern about her wife.

Whenever EFL learners learn the grammar of a language, they tend to over-generalize rules as it is easier for them compared to many rules.

Sentence Structure

Subject repetition

*This shows that she how unstable and nervous she is.

In this sentence, we can see two specs (subjects) in the CP *that she how unstable and nervous she is*. In fact, this also reflects incomplete understanding of sentence rules in English or even over-generalizing the rule that every sentence must have a spec, but not a phrase as in **she how unstable*.

Prepositions

Preposition deletion

*Trifles shows the image of women that time and how men look at them. (in/during)

Preposition substitution

*... to focus to the fact...

Preposition redundancy

The bird symbolized *to* Minnie Foster...

Prepositions in English are confusing to Arab students since there are a lot of them and, at the same time, some of them could be used interchangeably with very slight difference which makes Arab EFL learners unsure which preposition is right in a particular situation or not or even if there must be a preposition before or after a particular word or not.

Wrong use of words

e. ...they wanted to be heard as well as men. (Listened to)

Even though there are two equivalent words in Arabic for the English words *hear* and *listen*, Arab learners still commit errors when it comes to the right choice of these two words. This could be due to inadequate exposure to the English language in various contexts which, consequently, results in the wrong choice of lexemes.

In conclusion, I can evidently say that intra-lingual source of errors stand behind the most errors in grammar in compositions of female students at King Abdul Aziz University. However, this may reflect a positive point which almost that the mother-tongue is never used when learning or writing in English. Furthermore, this may show that the mother-tongue is not used in the class by the subject instructor.

4.5 Discussion

After identifying and categorizing the grammatical errors in the students' compositions, I can prove, based on evidence from the data, that Saudi junior students do not have adequate knowledge of the unique nature of English sentence structure. As we have noticed through the analysis of ungrammaticality of sentences, there are several language difficulties that students face in forming a grammatically acceptable sentence. Thus, I can answer the second question that Saudi junior students do not completely fulfill the requirements for lexical information of an English sentence as we have encountered so many sentences lacking the basic elements of a sentence like Verb, subject or even object in case a verb has a transitivity feature.

Since English language is a foreign language in Saudi Arabia where Arabic is the mother-tongue of my research subjects, there must be language interference in the learning

process which is very normal especially when communication in the target language is so rare which is the case in Saudi. Thus, two sources of errors were identified and they are inter-lingual and intra-lingual. However, the latter is responsible for the most grammatical errors that are reflected in the students' compositions.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

5.1 Summary

This research report is set out to investigate the kinds of grammatical errors committed by Saudi juniors majoring in English language at Faculty of Arts and Humanities at King Abdul Aziz University in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia. They were given an assignment to write critically on the play *Trifles* by Glaspell. The research outcomes reveal that Saudi Junior students have difficulties when it comes to constructing an English sentence. In fact, they make errors which could be considered as fatal errors especially in the basic components of English sentence e.g. omission of subjects, objects or omitting the finite verb of a sentence which results in tenseless or deviated structure. Moreover, there are minor grammatical errors in the eyes of students which are key points in the construction of an English sentence e.g. tense sequence when there are two verbs in a complex sentence where the two verbs must agree with each other in tense not just for the sake of syntax, but also it affects the meaning of the sentence as sometimes syntax and semantics contribute together in order to produce a grammatically correct sentence. The results showed that Saudi students face difficulty in terms of prepositions choice. They either leave out a preposition, delete it, or they add it where it is not necessary as the property or feature of the previous word does not subcategorize for an PP.

Since the second question required a detailed analysis, I illustrated the ungrammatical and grammatical sentences using an up-side-down tree diagram tool which is always employed for syntactic analysis. The findings of this analysis demonstrated that Saudi junior female students do

not entirely satisfy the requirements for lexical information of an English sentence through many deviated sentences. Actually, Saudi students, through their compositions, proved that they are in bad need of mastering the core elements of an English sentence as they are not able to produce a sentence without errors in grammar. Furthermore, wrong use of words has recorded a big number of mistakes which shows that they do not even master choosing suitable words for the appropriate context as a result of inadequate exposure to English language.

I have applied the two theories which work in ascribing grammatical errors in the target language to either inter-language theory or intra-language theory. Inter-language theory attributes the errors of grammar to the mother-tongue interference as the contributing factor that causes ungrammaticality in a sentence. On the other hand, intra-language theory holds the idea that every learner creates her/his own language system, as a bridge between the native language and the target language, which causes grammatical errors as the result of either over-generalizing rules or failing to understand the rule and its exceptions. These two theories explain the two sources of errors that Saudi junior students commit in their writings. As a matter of fact, it is easy to distinguish between intra-language errors and inter-language errors since the students' native language is Arabic that is similar to the researcher's.

The present research is consistent with the previous studies in terms of the grammatical errors found in the Arab EFL learners' compositions as well as the types of sources of errors that cause language interference. However, my study showed quite different results with respect to the sources of errors that are responsible for mistakes. In fact, almost all the previous studies that I have come across so far which are included in my literature review revealed that inter-language source of errors is the dominant over students' grammatical errors. However, my study demonstrated the otherwise that inter-language source of errors is not responsible for the majority of grammatical errors; rather intra-lingual source stands behind the majority of the students' errors. In my point of view, this may be justified that Saudi students receive more adequate

amount of exposure to English language than other students in the other studies that come from countries like Jordan, China and Thailand.

5.2 Pedagogical Implications of the Research

Since the data has been collected from the academic place (KAA University), there must be some pedagogical implications which academics may find useful and practical. Actually, explaining learners' errors, whether in syntax, morphology or any other fields, clarifies the complicated parts where learners stop and do not know what to do except either falling back on their mother tongue or inventing their own rules. In addition to that, these errors could be used as feedback to language instructors in that they may reconsider their teaching styles or techniques in conveying their message. They, also, may focus more on these errors of grammar and give more activities to their students to ensure they are able to master problematic grammatical rules for them. Furthermore, language instructors are strongly advised to keep themselves up-to-date with recent studies on teaching styles and errors analysis of learners which lead them directly to what students are in bad need of.

Such a study may be helpful for EFL/ESL learners since they can see with their eyes what they should pay great attention to. In fact, students can learn a lot from their own errors once explained in a straightforward manner. Exposing learners to such studies or even conducting studies on them examines their level of proficiency and clarifies exactly at what level they are in the process of learning. Moreover, it provides them with feedback about the quality of their language and how to improve it. Having seen all these benefits from students' errors, generative linguistics does not consider them as errors any longer as they inevitably occur in the process of learning; rather, they are called grammatical issues which indicates their positive existence and practical guidance to the proficiency of language. Likewise, every child starts making incorrect

structure of grammar, then in the course of time she or he gets better to reach fluency level.

This, actually, leads us to the question why do students keep on committing the same grammatical errors although so many studies have been carried out so far that discuss these errors in detail? In my opinion, the question could be answered from two angles. First, to make good use of these studies and to bring them to real life, research should be part of teachers' job in that language instructors need to keep themselves up-to-date with these studies to find out what is happening on the other side of the road. Additionally, Teachers are highly recommended to conduct some research-based studies on their own students through applying different teaching methods and techniques in order to discover a suitable style for a particular group of students and to get useful feedback on their teaching styles. Consequently, by doing this we can bring research to practice and it will become as a discovery and developmental tool for both teachers as well as learners.

Secondly, curriculum designers, also, play a key role in developing and advancing the process of learning. Actually, they hold big responsibilities as they plan and design text books and materials to be studied. Furthermore, curriculum designers provide a teaching design for language instructors and how they may modify their styles for the sake of enhancing the teaching and learning process which in turn should results in better outcomes. Therefore, the results of this study may help curriculum designers in the way of introducing English grammar and the way sentence components merge with each other.

In the process of teaching and learning, there are things to be learnt first that are simple and straightforward in terms of structure and the number of words which may take several stages. In view of this, during first stage learners may learn to produce few words or formulas such as *How are you?* At this stage learners care much about content words which convey their message clearly no matter how grammatical they are. In the second stage learners start acquiring the typical word order of the language e.g. English that is SVO. Later in the third stage learners start

making yes/no questions and they may be able to put adverbial at the beginning of a sentence as *On Nov 23rd, I will fly to Tokyo*. At the fourth stage they start discovering how phrasal verbs can be separated with nouns in between such as *Put the book back*. In the last two stages learners making wh-questions and learning the third person grammatical morpheme and subordinate clauses according to the processability model in(Cook2008). However, this also might be arguable in that some educationists would say that this kind of expected linear order depends on the setting or context where the learning process takes place. In fact, a learner who learns English in the United Kingdom may learn first how to make wh-questions as they are daily basic needs for him whereas a learner learning English in an Arab country may learn at the third level subordinate clauses and how they combine with main clauses as the syllabus designed in this manner. In my point of view, the processability model mentioned earlier is effective for EFL/ESL learners as it goes gradually from simple to complex matters in grammar. In introducing the unique nature of English sentence to EFL/ESL learners the processability model is useful and efficient in that it suits the needs of learners step by step to lead them to proficiency level. Moreover, it simplifies learning of grammar of language as it explains through stages what should be learnt and what should be not.

In my humble two-year experience as an English instructor I have found out that some teaching approaches such as communicative approach, audio-visual teaching method as well as thinking aloud technique in teaching reading are highly useful for EFL learners. In fact, since the purpose of teaching is to stimulate the brain of students, such approaches make learners participate and put the majority of class activities on students. Consequently, practice makes perfect; the previously mentioned teaching methods guarantee excellent results in the course of time.

5.3 Conclusion

In this study I looked at the errors of Saudi EFL writings from three angles. Firstly, I identified the grammatical errors in their compositions and categorized them according to main categories and subcategories. Actually, these categories are based on basic sentence components such as subject, object and verbs. Furthermore, content or lexical words and functional words were also considered in the process of categorization and sub-categorization. Secondly, I analyzed these grammatical errors from a generative point of view in that I explicated the ungrammaticality of errors employing the X-Bar Theory as my research analytical tool; I also used up-side-down tree diagrams to illustrate perfectly and effectively how English sentence structure is built and what makes it ill-formed. Thirdly, I went beyond that evaluating the sources of these errors that could be responsible for not producing grammatically correct sentences employing Inter-Language Theory and Intra-Language Theory as a guidance as well as my Arabic linguistic competence to help me distinguish intra-lingual errors from inter-lingual ones.

The results revealed many categories of errors that Saudi EFL learners made in their writings such as Subject-verb agreement or other NP-internal components agreement. The outcomes, also, showed categories such as misuse of words and redundancy of articles. This, in turn, led to the answer of the second question that Saudi EFL learners do not fulfill the requirement for lexical information of English sentence to a great extent because we have noticed in the examples of errors that they produce sentences wherein the verb bears transitivity feature, yet they omit the object. Moreover, they made sentences with two subjects which creates ungrammaticality as X-Bar Theory allows a sentence to have just one spec (specifier) in order to satisfy the Extended Projection Principle. Finally, sources of errors that stand behind these errors were either inter-lingual or intra-lingual; however, the latter was responsible for the majority of

the grammatical errors.

This study could be beneficial and effective in the EFL/ESL teaching contexts as it shed some light on the errors of learners in terms of basic English sentence structure. In fact, it clarifies some errors that EFL learners are in need of in that EFL learners should be familiar that words whether lexical or functional have features which play a key role in the sub-categorization process that follows. In addition to that, EFL/ESL learners should be aware of English sentence word order through a lot of activities that a teacher should get them involved in. Also, when explaining questions, whether yes/no or wh-questions, learners should be introduced to the movement that take place in the process of forming a question and what could be moved what could not e.g. moving a component part of a sentence not just the second or the third word of the sentence. Consequently, this enables learners to have a full background of the target language whenever they write.

5.4 Recommendations for Further Research

This study acts as a testimony for the significance of EFL writings in the process of teaching and learning a foreign or second language. EFL writings show the learners' proficiency and how professional they are in writing. In fact, this study highlights some errors in their writing that could be a starting point for future research. EFL writings could be analyzed in terms of the layout; how coherent and cohesive the text is, and how well the topic is presented. Also, the same study may be applied or conducted on male learners in other countries wherein English or another language is a foreign or second language, and later results could be compared to each other in terms of different categories and sources of errors as this study presented and analyzed only female EFL learners. Other frameworks could be used in future research depending on the primary aim of the research.