

**SYNTACTIC AVOIDANCE IN THE ORAL PRODUCTION OF
ARAB EFL LEARNERS**

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated syntactic avoidance employed in the oral production of Arab EFL learners, addressing two research questions: (a) how does syntactic knowledge or the lack of it affect Arab EFL learners' choice in producing or avoiding particular syntactic structures? (b) How and why do Arab learners resort to syntactic avoidance in their oral production?

Data in the form of observations, documentary material, oral interviews, and online feedback discussions were collected from 10 Arab EFL learners enrolled in the Foundation Programme at a private college in the Sultanate of Oman. The 10 participants belonged to two groups in terms of English proficiency; 4 Foundation One (pre-intermediate) and 6 Foundation Two (intermediate) learners.

Findings of the study indicate that two main factors affected the participants' oral production; limited exposure to English and lack of syntactic knowledge. It was found that participants who were not exposed to English in their everyday life situations were less confident, more hesitant, and had a higher level of avoidance behavior towards oral communication compared to participants who were exposed to English outside the classroom. Findings also show that all participants lacked syntactic knowledge despite their varying proficiency levels, social and educational backgrounds, and exposure to English language. Four major causes of the participants' weaknesses in syntax were identified. Participants underused the troublesome syntactic structures by using avoidance strategies. The missing syntactic structures were also discovered. Two main factors affecting the participants' choice of avoidance were determined as well. However, it was found that proficiency level did not affect the participants' choice of avoidance. A taxonomy of avoidance emerged as a potential contribution to the field of the study.

ABSTRAK

Satu Kajian Exploratori Pengelakan Sintaktik dalam Pertuturan Bahasa Inggeris Sebagai Bahasa Asing Pelajar Arab

Kajian ini menyelidik pengelakan sintaktik yang digunakan dalam komunikasi lisan pelajar Bahasa Inggeris sebagai bahasa Asing, bangsa Arab. Kajian ini melibatkan dua soalan: (a) Bagaimanakah pengetahuan sintaktik atau kekurangan pengetahuan tersebut mempengaruhi pemilihan pelajar dalam penggunaan atau pengelakan sesuatu struktur sintaktik? (b) Bagaimana dan mengapa pelajar mengamalkan pengelakan sintaktik dalam pertuturan mereka?

Data dikumpul melalui pemerhatian, dokumentasi, temu bual dan perbincangan dalam talian yang melibatkan 10 pelajar yang mengikuti Program Asas di sebuah kolej swasta di Kesultanan Oman. Sepuluh orang pelajar tersebut dibahagikan kepada dua kumpulan dari segi penguasaan Bahasa Inggeris: 4 pelajar *Foundation One (pre-intermediate)* dan 6 pelajar *Foundation Two (intermediate)*.

Dapatan menunjukkan dua faktor penting mempengaruhi pertuturan mereka; pendedahan terhad kepada Bahasa Inggeris dan kekurangan pengetahuan sintaktik. Pelajar tanpa pendedahan kepada Bahasa Inggeris dalam kehidupan harian mereka didapati kurang yakin, lebih sangsi, dan menunjukkan kelakuan pengelakan pada tahap tinggi berbanding pelajar yang mendapat pendedahan kepada Bahasa Inggeris di luar kelas. Semua pelajar yang terlibat kurang pengetahuan sintaktik walaupun mereka berbeza dari segi tahap penguasaan, latar belakang sosial dan pelajaran, dan pendedahan kepada Bahasa Inggeris. Kajian mengenal pasti empat penyebab kelemahan sintaks pelajar. Mereka kurang menggunakan struktur sintaktik yang bermasalah dengan menggunakan strategi pengelakan. Struktur sintaktik yang dielakkan telah dikenal pasti. Dua faktor penting yang mempengaruhi pemilihan pengelakan juga dikenal pasti. Tahap penguasaan didapati tidak mempengaruhi pemilihan pengelakan. Akhir sekali, satu taksonomi pengelakan dibina sebagai sumbangan pengkaji kepada bidang kajian ini.

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DEDICATION

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 General Background

1.1.1 An Overview of the Sultanate of Oman

Oman is located at the south-eastern corner of the Arabian Peninsula. It covers a total area of 309500 square kilometres and it is the third largest country in the Peninsula. Its capital city is Muscat located on the Gulf of Oman. The Tropic of Cancer passes just south of Muscat. Its coastline extends for about 1800 kilometres on three seas: the Gulf of Oman, the Arabian Gulf, and the Arabian Sea. It shares borders with the United Arab Emirates in the north-east, the Republic of Yemen in the south west, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia in the west, the Strait of Hormuz in the north, and the Arabian Sea in the south and south east. Oman has a population of about 2.509 million (Oman, 2005). Administratively, Oman is divided into five regions: Al Batinah, AdDhahira, Ad Dhakhliyah, AsSharqiyah, and Al Wusta; and four governorates: Muscat, Dhofar, Musandam, and Al Buriami. The official language is Arabic. However, English is widely spoken as well.

1.1.2 The Omani Educational System

The educational system in Oman has developed since the Omani renaissance in 1970. Prior to 1970, there were only three schools in the whole country: in Muscat, Muttrah, and Salalah with only 30 teachers and 900 male students who used to study until grade six (Ministry of Information, 2001). For those who wished to continue their education, the only option for them was to study abroad in nearby countries. In addition, there was no education for women before 1970 who “simply lived indoors and for domestic and child-bearing purposes only” (Al Jadidi, 2009, p.12). There were also no

hospitals, no roads, and no infrastructure. During that time when Oman was ruled by Sultan Said bin Taimur, it was seen as a very backward country with high rates of poverty and illiteracy. However, the country has been rapidly developing since his Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Saeed took power in 1970. Sultan Qaboos has made efforts to develop and modernize the country through economic reforms and directing the government to give more care to education, healthcare, and welfare. Developing the education system has become a top priority. The development reached all sectors: primary, secondary, and higher education (Al Farsi, 2007). As a result, the number of schools, students, and teachers has mushroomed to 1019, 578003, and 30383 respectively in 2003 (Ministry of Education, Educational Statistical Year Book, 2003).

In the higher education sector, the only government university, Sultan Qaboos University, was established in 1986. There are other government colleges such as the Colleges of Education, the Colleges of Share'a and Law, Technical Colleges. There are a number of private universities and colleges spread all over the country (Al Farsi, 2007).

The school education system in Oman extends for a period of 12 years and is divided into three stages: primary (6 years) then preparatory (3 years), and the final stage is secondary (3 years). After students finish their first secondary education, they have two options: either to go to the science or art streams. It is worth mentioning that the official medium of instruction in schools is Arabic (Al-Farsi, 2007).

1.1.2.1 The Development of English Language Teaching in Oman

The Omani government has realized the importance of English as a source of national development (Al-Husseini, 2006) being the language of science and technology, and an effective tool for modernization (Al-Issa, 2002). English has been significantly valued as the means of communication within the country since it is used in

communication between Omanis and the expatriates coming from different countries to work in Oman (Al-Jadidi, 2009). In addition, English has become an important means for ‘Omanization’ which is “the government scheme for gradually replacing the expatriate skilled labour force with Omani citizens” (Al-Jadidi, p. 24). Therefore, English language competence has become a pre-requisite for undergraduate Omanis to get white-collar jobs, particularly in the private sector, where they need to be competent in writing and speaking (Al- Busaidi, 1995; Al-Issa, 2002; Al-Jadidi & Sanguinetti, 2010). In addition, the Omani government gives economic, legislative, and political support to teaching English in general and tertiary education (Al-Husseini, 2006). People in Oman learn English for different purposes such as “pursuing their post-secondary education, travelling, cultural analysis and understanding, conducting business, finding a white-collar job in the private and public sectors and acquisition of science and technology” (Al-Issa,2002; cited in Al-Issa,2006, p.221).

1.1.2.2 English Education in Omani Schools

In Omani schools, English is taught as a compulsory subject. In the public sector, English is taught from grade one. In the private sector, on the other hand, English is taught from the kindergarten (Al-Jadidi, 2009). Al Jadidi points out that English in public schools is a fact-based subject which is mainly textbook-based and teacher-centered. The classes are relatively large with “an average number of 30-35 students of mixed ability” (p. 24). The English curriculum used in public schools is produced by the Language Curriculum Department at the Ministry of Education (Al-Issa, 2002). As discussed by Al-Issa, the resources allocated to ELT often hinder communicative communication and interaction as they lack IT facilities such as multimedia labs. In private schools, the curriculum used is imported from the USA and the UK. The text books are rich of cultural representations

related to family and other social issues. Private schools tend to recruit more native speakers than the non-natives (Al-Jadidi, 2009).

1.1.2.3 English Teaching in Omani Higher Education

English is taught for general purposes (EGP), special purposes (ESP), academic purposes (EAP) in government higher education institutions (Al Jadidi, 2009). In addition, English is the medium of instruction in the science-based majors offered at government institutions (Al Jadidi, 2009).

On the other hand, there are 13 private colleges and 3 private universities in the Sultanate where English is the main medium of instruction in science-based majors. These colleges and universities use imported material along with in-house material. In order to get Ministry of Higher education approval, private colleges and universities have to affiliate with an educational institution in an English speaking country (Al-Jadidi, 2009). However, the English language competency for a large number of students who have completed their secondary school education is far below the level of English required in their tertiary education in which English is the medium of instruction for scientific specializations as in medicine, IT, and engineering (Flowerdew, 1993; Al-Issa, 2005; cited in Al-Husseini, 2006). Consequently, all Omani institutions of higher education, whether private or public, have a special language program called the Foundation Year Programme (FP) which aims at acquiring students with the four language skills as well as ESP and EAP which are necessary for them to pursue their academic specializations taught in English (Fowerdrew, 1993; Kromos, Kontra, & Csolle 2002; Al-Husseini, 2004). The FP is designed for students who join colleges and universities with very basic language abilities (Kobeil, 2005; cited in Al Husseini, 2006). The Programme aims at developing the students' linguistic competence "to meet labour market requirements" (Al Hanai, 2005, as

cited in Al-Husseini, 2006). In addition to developing the language needs of the first year students, FP gives considerable attention to other subjects such as mathematics, computer skills, and learning and thinking skills which they need in their specializations (Ryan, 2005). The Foundation year is considered a bridge between secondary school education and tertiary education which offers specializations taught in English.

Al Husseini (2006) believes that FP has two roles: visible and invisible. FP's visible role is in "fulfilling the students' language needs", while the invisible role is represented in fulfilling their "transitional and integration needs" (p. 36). He points out that secondary school graduates who join the higher education institutions might "face learning environments different from the ones that they are used to" (p.37).

1.2 Arab Learners' Syntactic Problems

Literature on the acquisition of English by Arab learners has focused on the identification of errors produced by Arab EFL learners either at school level or tertiary level (Atawneh, 1994). The major studies conducted on Arab EFL learners focus on the investigation and identification of the errors they produce. For instance, Kambel (1980) investigated the written errors of Sudanese learners of English at the Khartoum University. He found that the most common errors committed were in tenses, verb formation, articles, concord and prepositions.

Khurma (1981) conducted a study on the Kuwaiti EFL learners' syntactic difficulties using contrastive analysis. He found that the errors were mostly related to tense. Sharma (1981) studied the written compositions of ten Saudi learners of English as a second language at Indiana University. He found that errors of auxiliary and copula were the most problematic for those students. In a more recent study on bilingual Arab learners living in the United States, Atawneh (1994) found that their frequent errors were in tense

agreement, relative clause constructions, indirect questions, perfective tenses, and the use of prepositions. In another more recent study conducted on Arab EFL learners, it was found that the largest number of errors made were errors of prepositions, morphological errors, articles, verbs, active and passive, and tenses respectively (Abushihab et al., 2011).

Some other researchers attempted to identify the sources of Arab learners' syntactic errors. Abu Ghrarah (1990) identified the sources of Arab EFL learners' syntactic errors as L1 interference, overgeneralization, and insufficient syntactic mastery. Noor (1996), on the other hand, argued that the most frequent source of syntactic errors is the influence of Arabic language in processing syntactic structures.

The studies mentioned above identified Arab EFL learners' errors and their sources. However, avoidance of syntactic structures has been overlooked. This study, therefore, will attempt to investigate avoidance of syntactic structures.

1.3 Communication Problems Facing Arab EFL Learners

One of the major problems Arab EFL learners encounter is to communicate freely in the target language (Rababah, 2005). The observations I made show that students were reluctant to communicate in English although they were encouraged by their tutors to interact in the target language inside and outside the classroom. A vast majority of them barely practise English within the four walls of the classroom which is the only way to learn it. This problem is pointed out by Rababah (2005) who believes that the only way to learn English in most of the Arab countries is through formal instruction, that is to say, English is taught as an academic subject in the classroom where there is little opportunity to learn English through natural interaction. He attributes the communication problems faced by Arab EFL learners to traditional methods of teaching and the unsuitable learning environment. Rababah (2005) adds that even "English Language Department graduates do

not have enough practice in English and use Arabic most of the time even when they become English teachers” (p. 187).

Al Husseini (2004) further highlights the need to give students more opportunities to communicatively practise English inside and outside the classroom which is a challenging issue for the Foundation Programme in the Sultanate of Oman. Similarly, Al-Issa (2005) argues that students might have learned about the rules and system of the English language but failed to use the target language communicatively due to the scarce application of these rules in real-life interactive situations. As suggested by Halliday, McIntosh, and Strevens (1984; as cited in Rababah, 2005) the oral mastery of the target language depends on practice.

Moreover, a large number of Arab students who join universities and colleges come with very low English language proficiency. Many researchers have tried to identify the causes for the Arab learners’ weakness in English. Obeidat (1986) argues that the teachers’ use of the traditional teacher-centered method is a contributing factor to the Arab learners’ low proficiency level. He adds that this method which is still widely used gives little chance for learners to build their confidence and acquire the skills needed through interaction in the classroom since teachers fail to teach their students the required language skills. Other researchers attribute the weakness of Arab EFL learners to other factors such as the English curricula and teaching methods at schools and universities (Zughoul, 1983, 1987; Mukattash, 1983, as cited in Rababah 2005), the inadequate mastery of the four skills among school graduates who join universities (Suleiman, 1983), and the lack of exposure to English (Al-Issa, 2005; Rababah, 2005).

Mukattash (1983, as cited in Rababah, 2005) classifies the problems faced by Arab learners of English into two types. First, students who join universities continue to make the same basic errors they used to make in school. Second, they still cannot express

themselves freely and comfortably either academically or in their daily situations. The learners' weaknesses in English continue even when they start their tertiary education. As pointed out by Rababah (ibid), in most Arab universities, English language departments accept high school graduates without taking into consideration their proficiency level and whether or not they will be able to manage in their studies. As a result, thousands of students graduate every year without having enough competence in the four language skills. This issue has been discussed by Ibrahim (1983, as cited in Rababah, 2005) who did an evaluation of the English competence of the graduates at the University of Jordan and found that most of the faculty members were not satisfied with the graduates who leave universities with a low quality in English. He adds that faculty members used to often feel embarrassed whenever they were asked by company managers and school headmasters to recommend their students for employment.

Another contributing factor for the weakness of Arab EFL learners in communication is that they tend to avoid communicating with other non-Arabic speaking teachers of English. A large number of students prefer to register in classes taught by Arabic speaking teachers. For instance, Al Jadidi (2009) points out that Omani students leave the classes of native speakers and join classes taught by Arabic speaking teachers for several reasons such as the feeling of insecurity with non-native speakers, feeling more comfortable with Omani teachers, communication breakdown with non-native speakers as they speak too fast, and ability to understand Omani teachers' language as they perceive it to be clearer.

In Oman, the situation is almost the same as in other Arab countries. Al-Issa (2002) discussed the problems facing English language teaching in Omani public schools such as lack of educational technology facilities, the large class sizes, and the design of the English teaching curriculum which is mainly textbook-based and depends on students'

memorization. Teaching through memorization is one of the weaknesses of the educational system in Oman (Al-Balushi, 1999; Al-Issa, 2002). Even exams are based on memorization with no attention given to proficiency (Al-Issa, 2002; Al-Toubi, 1998). As a result, Omani students who join English medium universities and colleges come with very limited language proficiency since they forget what they have memorized at school (Babrazzai, 2001). Babrazzai's argument has been further supported by Al-Issa (2005) who points out that Omani students' competency in English is below the level required in tertiary education for several reasons such as the limited exposure to English and the quality of instruction they get in schools.

1.4 Statement of the Problem

Many researchers have conducted various studies to investigate the problems Arab EFL learners encounter in English. However, not much research has been conducted to discuss the possible solutions for these problems such as the use of communication strategies (Rababah, 2005). A number of researchers suggest that L2 learners can use communication strategies to help them overcome their linguistic difficulties (Bialystok, 1990; Dornyei, 1995; Ogane, 1998; Rababah, 2005). When faced with difficult or unknown target language structures and forms, L2 learners might resort to various communication strategies to overcome breakdowns in their communication. One of these strategies they might employ is to avoid using structures and words which they find difficult. That is to say, instead of trying to find different ways of expressing the intended meaning, they might either change the topic into a simpler one, or just give up talking about it and fall into silence. This strategy is referred to as avoidance strategy.

Based on my personal experience in teaching EFL in Jordan, Saudi Arabia, and Oman, I noticed that Arabic-speaking EFL learners avoid communicating in English

especially with other non-Arabic speaking teachers of English. If they want to report a problem or request help, they do not go directly to their non-Arabic speaking teachers but rather go to other Arab teachers or prefer to keep silent. The study, therefore, attempts to explore the avoidance strategy employed by Arab EFL learners. The major focus will be on syntactic avoidance in their oral production.

The first empirical study on avoidance was conducted by Schachter (1974) who highlighted the importance of studying not only the L2 forms that were produced by L2 learners, but also the L2 forms that have been avoided by them. Since then, avoidance behavior gained more attention from researchers concerned in the field of second language acquisition. There have been attempts by some researchers to define avoidance. Ellis (1986) holds that avoidance behavior occurs when L2 learners underuse specific language structures in their production (written or spoken) of the target language in comparison with the native-speaker's production. Moghimize (2008) points out that avoidance is a communication strategy that ESL/EFL learners resort to when they come across a communicative difficulty. The difficulty occurs for several reasons such as the difference between the first and second language structures, grammatical complexities and inconsistencies (Moghimize, 2008). In addition avoidance might be used by L2 learners to feel safe from making errors (Dagut & Laufer, 1985; Kleinmann, 1977; Schachter, 1974).

In addition, the notion of avoidance has become a controversial issue. Some researchers (Kleinmann, 1977; Gass, 1979; Seliger, 1989; Laufer & Elaisson, 1993; Liao & Fukuya, 2004) support Schachter's hypothesis that learning difficulty induced by the structural L1-L2 differences lead to avoidance. However, other researchers (Bley-Vroman & Houghton, 1988; Kamimoto, Shimura, & Kellerman, 1992; Li, 1996; Zhao, 1989) hold an

opposing point of view. They maintain that the underproduction of certain syntactic structures might not be caused by avoidance but result from L1 transfer.

As far as avoidance among EFL Arab learners is concerned, little research has been conducted so far. Most of the researchers have either contradicted or agreed with the previous findings on the causes of avoidance. Mattar (2003) states that avoidance is not ruled out by similarity and the findings of his study also show that reliance on avoidance is affected by the L2 learner's language proficiency level.

In my observations, I found Arab EFL learners tend to under-produce certain linguistic structures by replacing them with other structures. For example, the present perfect and past perfect tenses are frequently replaced by simpler structures such as the simple past tense basically because Arabic does not have these two tenses. Thus, EFL Arab learners limit their use of the English tenses into three only: the simple present, simple past and simple future.

The studies on avoidance mentioned above do not draw a clear cut distinction between avoidance and ignorance. That is, no evidence is given on whether the under-produced structures resulted from avoidance or complete ignorance. Thus, this study will attempt to distinguish between avoidance and ignorance. (See Chapter 2, Section 2.4.5)

Thus, it can be argued, based on the above studies, that avoidance is common in the English language learning process among Arab EFL learners particularly in their oral production. This study, therefore attempts to investigate the avoidance phenomenon and its effect on the oral production of Arab EFL learners.

1.5 Objectives of the Study

The present study aims to achieve the following objectives:

- to investigate how Arab EFL learners' syntactic knowledge affects their choice to produce or avoid using particular syntactic constructions
- to explore syntactic avoidance strategies and the potential reasons for Arab EFL learners to resort to them in their oral production

1.6 Research Questions

The study is designed to answer the following questions:

1. How does syntactic knowledge or the lack of it affect Arab EFL learners' choice in producing or avoiding particular syntactic constructions?
2. How and why do Arab EFL learners resort to syntactic avoidance in their oral production?

1.7 Significance of the Study

It is very significant for second language researchers and teachers to understand the role of avoidance in second language oral communication. This is because any absence of error in one area does not always mean the mastery of that area (Kleinmann, 1977). More attention has been given to avoidance since Schachter's 1974 classic article "an error in error analysis" by which she criticized error analysis of being incapable of explaining the avoidance strategy. The purpose of the present study, therefore, is to explore the syntactic structures that Arab EFL learners tend to underuse in an attempt to identify these structures and introduce them to both EFL teachers and learners. By understanding the nature of the avoided structures, EFL learners will be able to use them effectively rather than avoiding

them. As for EFL teachers, they will be able to determine when learners resort to avoidance especially that the absence of certain syntactic structures from their learners' production might give the impression that they are not facing any problems in these areas. As pointed out by Brown (2000), a learner "who for one reason or another avoids a particular sound, word, structure, or discourse category may be assumed incorrectly to have no difficulty therewith" (p. 219).

Findings of the study can also give insights to teachers to focus more on communicative interaction in the classroom and encourage learners to try to make use of communication strategies, including avoidance, to overcome their linguistic difficulties.

In addition, EFL researchers and teachers can benefit from the results of this research. By identifying the structures normally avoided by Arab learners; they can help other EFL learners around the world by making proper use of avoidance strategies and reduce their negative effects on English learning. This is, therefore, an important research effort not only for Arab EFL learners but also the methods used in the study could be applied to other student populations.

1.8 Theoretical Framework

As mentioned before in Section 1.5, the first research question in this study deals with the effect of lack of syntactic knowledge on the learners' choice of avoidance strategies in their oral production. To answer this question, this study will benefit from Error Analysis theory since avoidance strategies are classified as one of the communication strategies in the domain of this theory (Moghimizade, 2008). As for the second research question which deals with the potential reasons for avoidance, studies have identified three

reasons which might cause second language learners to resort to avoidance: structural differences between L1 and L2 , complexity and inconsistency of grammatical structures in target language, and second language learners' anxiety (ibid). Based on this premise, a theoretical framework is postulated in Figure 1.1.

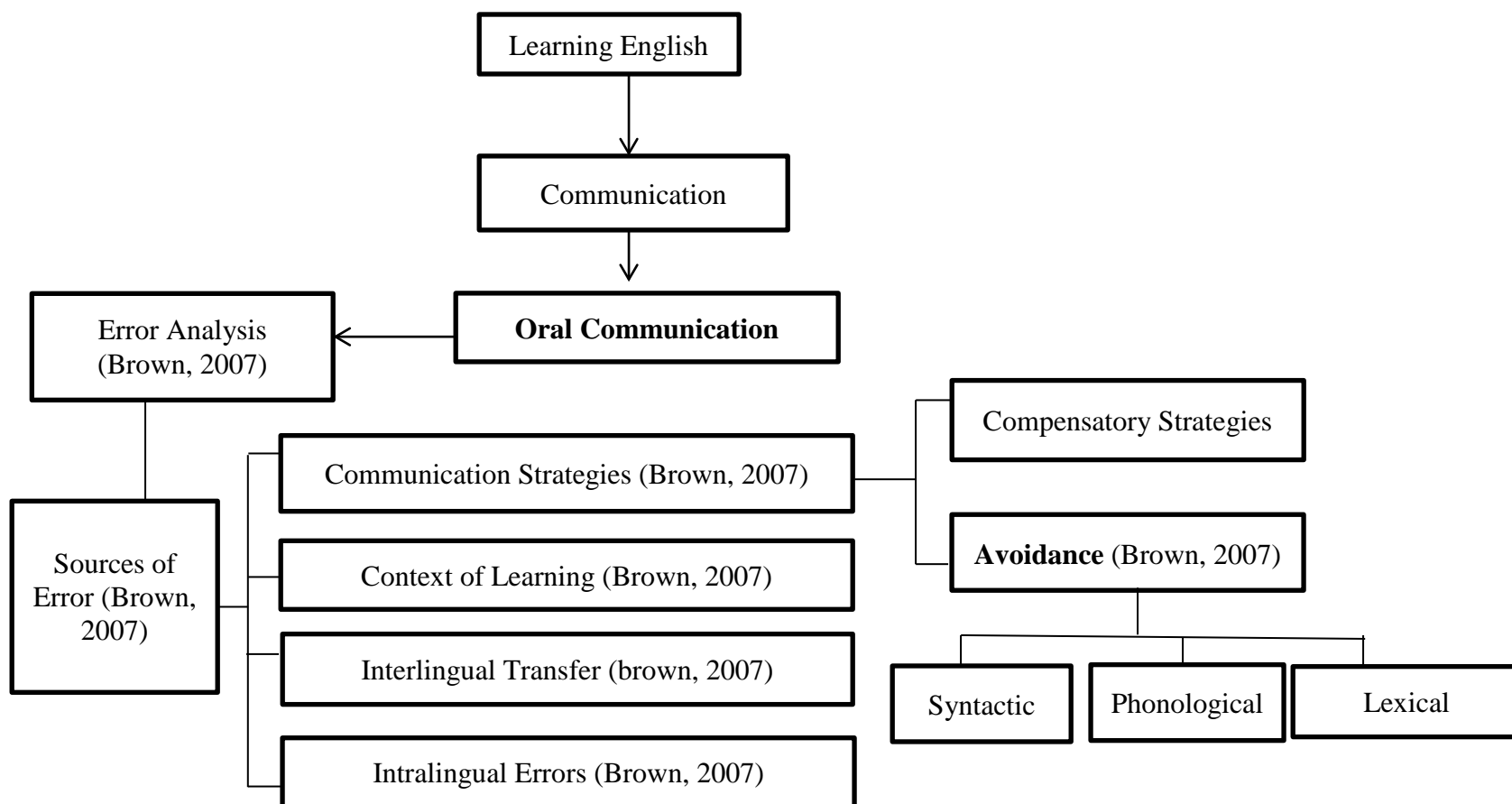


Figure 1.1 Theoretical framework of the study.
Adapted from Brown (2007)

As pointed out by Corder (1967, as cited in Brown, 2007), a second language learner's errors are very significant as they provide evidence of how the target language is acquired and what strategies the learner is using in the discovery of the language. Consequently, researchers realized the importance of carefully analyzing the errors committed by language learners as they hold in them some of the keys for understanding the process of second language acquisition (James, 1998).

Error Analysis (EA henceforth) is the process of observing, identifying, classifying, interpreting, and describing the unacceptable forms produced by a second language learner in writing or speaking (Brown, 1980; Crystal, 1987). EA is significant in three ways: (a) errors tell the teacher about the learners' progress; (b) errors give evidence for researchers on how language is learned or acquired and what strategy the learners are employing to learn the language; (c) they serve as feedback to the learners of the hypothesis they are using (Corder, 1967, p. 25).

EA is useful for identifying sources of error. Brown (2007) refers to four sources of error. The first source is interlingual transfer, intralingual transfer, context of learning, and communication strategies. Although communication strategies are used to help learners convey their meaning, Brown believes that sometimes they can become a source of error. One of the communication strategies that EFL learners might refer to is avoidance strategy. In addition, Brown mentions context of learning as a source of error which he refers to as "the classroom with its teachers and its materials in case of classroom learning or the social situation in case of untutored second language learning" (p. 266).

However, in spite of the significance of the theory of Error Analysis in second language acquisition, some researchers (James, 1998; Kleinmann, 1977; Schachter, 1974) have shown that it fails to trace the avoidance strategy. "A learner who for one reason or another avoids a particular sound, word, structure, or discourse category, maybe assumed

incorrectly to have no difficulty herewith” (Brown, 2007, p. 259). However, Error Analysis will be beneficial to this study since it will help in identifying the errors produced by the participants.

1.9 Thesis Structure

This thesis consists of five chapters summarized in Figure 1.2.

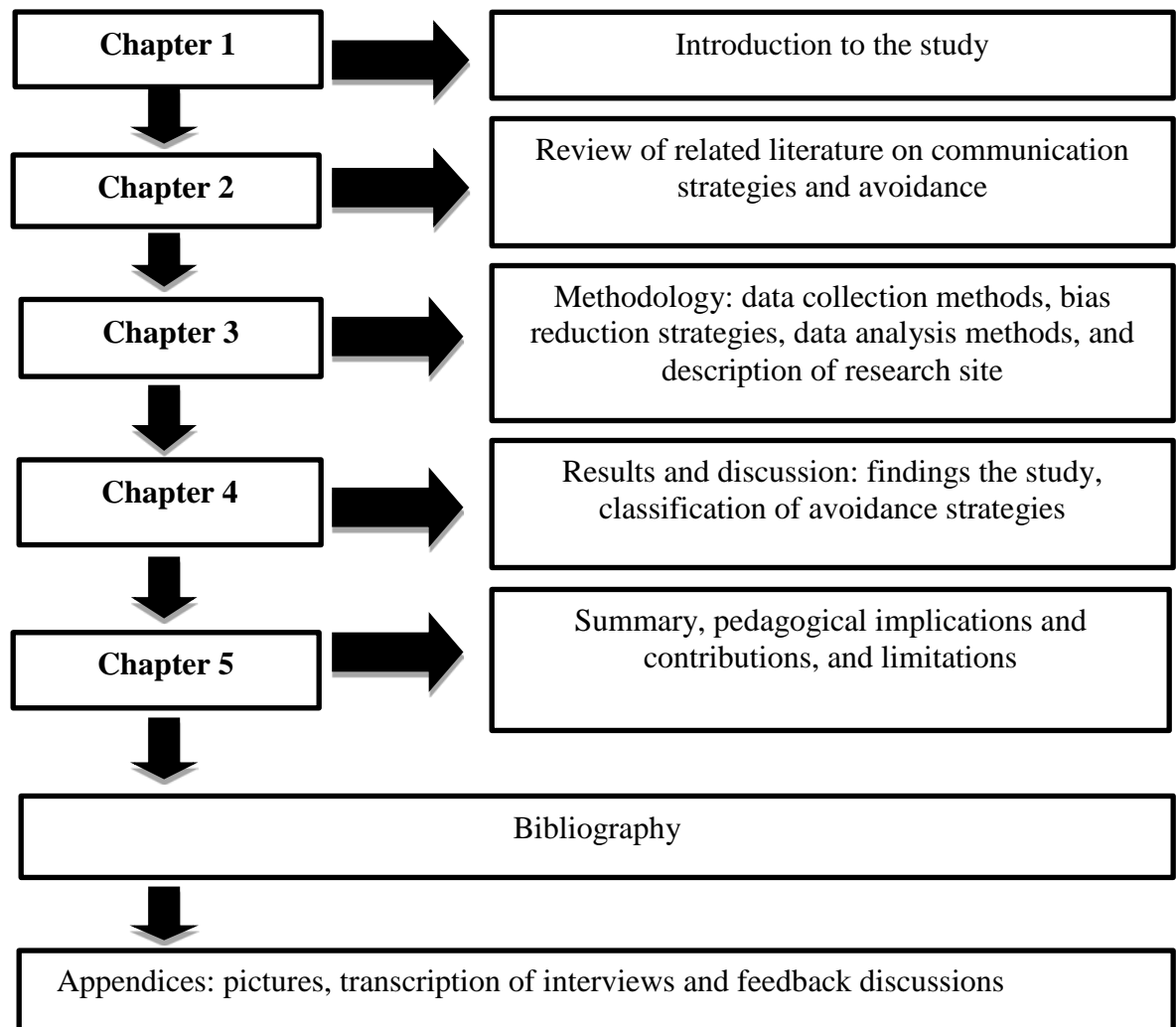


Figure 1.2. Thesis structure.

Chapter 1 includes the introduction and background of the study. In addition, it presents the research questions, objectives and significance of the study, and the theoretical framework.

Chapter 2 presents the review of related literature on communication strategies and the most recent studies conducted in the area of avoidance in second language acquisition.

Chapter 3 includes the research methodology. Methods of data collection, bias reduction, data analysis, and participant selection are discussed in detail. In addition, a detailed discussion of the research site and justification for choosing it is also provided.

In **Chapter 4**, a discussion of the findings of the study is presented. A typology of avoidance strategies is suggested. In addition, new theories of avoidance are introduced.

Chapter 5 presents the summary of the findings, limitations of the study, pedagogical implications, highlights contributions of the study, and recommendations for further study.

There are five **Appendices** in this thesis. The different taxonomies of communication strategies are presented in Appendix A. In Appendix B, seven pictures used in the interviews are provided. Appendix C includes transcription of the participants' interviews. Appendix D includes samples of the participants' syntactic errors and communication strategies they employed.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

2.1 Introduction

The purpose of the study is to investigate syntactic avoidance in the oral production of Arab EFL learners. Thus, this chapter presents literature related to learners' oral communication in three sections. In the first section, a review of the literature related to the oral proficiency development of EFL learners is presented. The second section provides a brief discussion of L2 learners' communication strategies and their various classifications. Finally, a review of previous studies on avoidance strategy is presented.

2.2 EFL Learners' Oral Proficiency Development

Oral communication proficiency is defined as “a system that enables a speaker to express himself/herself effectively during oral conversation with his or her interlocutors of a target language” (Cheng, 2007, p.16). Recent research suggests that learning to speak a second language is very similar to learning the mother language and such skill develops over time (Hakuta, Butler, & Witt, 2000). However, Hakuta et al. (2000) argue that it takes learners less time to develop their proficiency from beginner to middle level, whereas, it takes them longer time to advance from middle to more advanced levels.

As pointed out by Cheng (2007), the learners' acquisition of spoken skills might develop at a slower pace than in the case of writing. Cheng also suggested that focus be given to teaching spoken conversations since the learners' proper mastery of a second language can be achieved only when they get involved in oral communication. However, current studies assume that it takes learners four to five years to develop advanced levels of

oral proficiency (Hakuta et al., 2000) although it depends on the learners' age and previous educational level (Howard et al., 2003; cited in Cheng, 2007).

2.3 A Brief Review of Literature on Communication Strategies

Recently, how to communicate effectively in the target language has become more important than reading and writing. As a result, more attention has been given to communication strategies by researchers (Ya-ni, 2007). Communication strategies (hence after CS) can help learners expand the conversation regardless of the linguistic problems they might face during communication. Dornyei (1995) points out that some people can communicate effectively in the target language despite their limited vocabulary by using gestures, mixing their L1 with L2, creating new words, or describing an item. That is to say, by using communication strategies.

2.3.1 Definitions of Communication Strategies

Researchers have not yet agreed on a rigorous definition for CSs. Stern (1983) defines CS as “techniques of coping with difficulties in communicating in an imperfectly second language” (p. 411). Similarly, Ogane (1998) views CSs as “a technique that is used to solve problems in reaching a communicative goal” (p.6). In both definitions, CSs are viewed as techniques used by the learners to solve a problem in communication. On the other hand, Brown (2000) holds that CSs can be used to facilitate the learners' oral production and they can be either verbal or non-verbal.

According to Rababah (2005), CSs are “used to bridge the gap that exists between the non-native speakers' linguistic competence in the target language and their communicative needs” (p. 148). He further adds that when second language learners face such problems, they might try to avoid a certain grammatical item, paraphrase, abandon the

message, describe the object or its properties, mumble, repeat a certain structure or word to gain enough time to think, use gestures, ask for help, and translate literally from their native language. However, Rababah (2005) argues that CSs are not only used by non-native speakers but can be also used by native speakers though less frequently.

In an attempt to give a more comprehensive definition of CSs, Bialystok (1990) refers to three main features or criteria shared by the various definitions of CSs: problemat�city, consciousness, intentionality. Problemat�city means that the learners use communication strategies only when they recognize that they have encountered a problem that might hinder communication. Consciousness means that learners are aware of the communication strategies they use to solve their problems. Intentionality means that the learners have control over those strategies and deliberately select some of them to reach a communicative goal. ‘Problemat�city and consciousness are the key defining criteria for the definitions of CSs below:

CSs are potentially conscious plans for solving what to an individual presents itself as a problem in reaching a particular communicative goal (Faerch & Kasper, 1983a, p. 36).

Conscious communication strategies are used by individuals to overcome the crisis which occurs when language structures are inadequate to convey the individual’s thought (Tarone, 1977, p. 195).

Problem-solving devices that learners resort to in order to solve what they experience as problems in speech production and reception (Faerch, Haastrup, & Phillipson, 1984, p. 154).

The major defining criteria for the above definitions are problemat�city and consciousness. All the definitions mentioned above support the argument that L2 learners use communication strategies to overcome their communication problems. The definitions offered by Faerch and Kasper (1983) and Tarone (1977) focus on the idea that L2 learners might consciously make use of CSs. However, Bialystok (1990) adds a third criterion

which is intentionality. Intentionality refers to “the learner’s control over a repertoire of strategies so that particular ones may be selected from the range of options and deliberately applied to achieve certain effects” (p. 4). On the other hand, Bialystok (1990) excludes consciousness as a defining criterion for CSs and she claims that L2 learners might not be always aware of the strategies they use and the decisions they make.

Despite the many definitions of CSs, we can conclude that L2 learners might use communication strategies, whether verbal or non-verbal, to overcome problems in communication although they might not be always aware of using them. The use of such strategies by second language learners whether consciously or not should be the major concern of researchers. We can also conclude that difficulty is the common criterion in all the definitions listed above. In an attempt to overcome their linguistic difficulties, second language learners might resort to various communication strategies.

2.3.2 Theoretical Background on CSs

There are two main theories concerned with CSs: the psycholinguistic perspective and the interactional or sociolinguistic perspective. In Faerch and Kasper’s (1983) psycholinguistic perspective, CSs can be used to deal with production problems that occur at the planning stage.

According to Faerch and Kasper’s psycholinguistic approach to communication strategies (CSs), there are two phases of speech production: a planning phase which learners have in their consciousness and an execution phase. In the planning phase, the aim is to develop a plan which can be later executed to enable the speaker/hearer to achieve the communicative goal. Communication strategies are seen as part of the planning process. When learners realize a problem in the planning phase of their speech production, they might make use of them to carry out conversation. In the model suggested by Faerch and

Kasper, a consciousness issue is involved in strategy application (Lin, 2007). Faerch and Kasper believed that communication strategies are a consciousness behavior and they defined them as “potentially conscious plans for solving what to an individual presents itself as a problem in reaching a particular communicative goal” (Faerch & Kasper, 1983, p.36). Faerch and Kasper’s approach is intra-individual which focuses on the learners and the problems they experience in speech reception, and in the planning and execution of speech production (Mei & Nathalang, 2010).

Faerch and Kasper (1983) perceive CSs as “mental plans implemented by the L2 learner in response to an internal signal of an imminent problem, a form of self-help” (p.36). According to the psychological approach of Faerch and Kasper, problems in the learners’ speech production leave them with two alternatives: either to avoid the problem by changing the communicative goal or maintain the original goal by developing an alternative plan through what is called “achievement strategies”. Faerch and Kasper classified two types of reduction strategies: formal and functional. Formal reduction strategies include a reduced system (phonological, morphological, syntactic and lexical) to avoid producing non-fluent or incorrect utterances. Functional reduction strategies “may include modal reduction, reduction of propositional content through topic avoidance, message abandonment, or meaning replacement” (Faerch & Kasper, 1983, p. 52).

The other choice mentioned by Faerch and Kasper is to develop an alternative plan to expand the speaker’s communicative resources by using achievement strategies such as code-switching, word-coinage, requests for help, and paraphrase.

In addition, the focus of Faerch and Kasper’s approach is on the “learner’s ability to solve problems which may derive from gaps in their linguistic and pragmatic knowledge, or low accessibility of such knowledge” (1986, p. 180). In other words,

problem-solving is the main characteristic of their psycholinguistic approach to communication strategies.

In Tarone's (1980) interactional or sociolinguistic perspective, CSs are viewed as "a mutual attempt of two interlocutors to agree on a meaning in situations where requisite meaning structures do not seem to be shared" (p. 420). Tarone's inter-individual interactional approach focuses more on the joint negotiation of meaning between two interlocutors by making conscious decisions to use communication strategies based on their communicative goal. In addition, Tarone's approach suggests that communication strategies are used when expressions are unavailable to one or both speakers in a conversation. In other words, the negotiation of meaning is the key characteristic of the interactional approach. She defines communication strategies as "tools used in a joint negotiation of meaning, in situations where both interlocutors are attempting to agree as to communicative goal" (p.420). In other words, both interlocutors are aware of the communicative problem and cooperate with each other to solve it based on the process of negotiation of meaning.

For example, when speakers have difficulties conveying the intended message, they may appeal for help or when listeners discover that their interlocutors are facing problems in expressing the meaning, they might offer help by filling the gap (Hie & Yin, 2008). Tarone (1980) suggests that communication strategies have to fulfil the following criteria:

1. A speaker desires to communicate a meaning x to a listener.
2. The speaker believes the linguistic or sociolinguistic structure desired to communicate meaning x is unavailable or is not shared with the listener.
3. The speaker chooses to:
 - a. avoid- not attempt to communicate meaning x or
 - b. attempt alternate means to communicate meaning x. The speaker stops trying alternatives when it seems clear to the speaker that there is shared meaning (p.419).

The main characteristic of Tarone's approach, therefore, is negotiation of meaning. That is to say, the native language speaker will cooperate with the non-native language speaker to solve a communicative goal. Tarone (1977) developed taxonomy of communication strategy which is still considered as one of the most important in the field.

On the other hand, Tarone's interactional view on communication strategies was criticized by Faerch and Kasper. Their argument is based on two major points. First, in real-life conversations between language learners and native speakers, cooperation might not always take place as native speakers might not offer help for the language learners to solve their communicative problems. In addition, learners sometimes might want to solve their problems themselves and thus develop a non-cooperative problem solving attitude. Second, advanced learners might anticipate a communicative problem and try to solve it in advance which means that the problem does not necessarily appear in the course of interaction but occur in the normal planning process (Le, 2006).

I do believe, however, that communication strategies could be a combination of the two perspectives together: psycholinguistic and interactional. In real life conversations, speakers are usually aware of having linguistic difficulties and try their best to solve them. In day-to-day conversations, both the speaker and listener might negotiate for meaning as well. For instance, a conversation taking place between a learner and a more advanced speaker, an English teacher in this situation, might require negotiation for meaning. The learners who are fully aware of their linguistic problem might either want to solve their problem by using communication strategies or negotiate meaning with their teacher.

2.3.3 Categorization of CSs

Communication strategies are divided into two categories: achievement or compensatory strategies (Dornyei, 1995; Faerch & Kasper, 1983; Poulisse, Bongaert, & Kellerman, 1990) and reduction or avoidance strategies (Dornyei, 1995; Faerch & Kasper, 1983; Nakatani, 2006). In achievement or compensatory strategies, the learner tries to achieve the communicative goal by solving linguistic problems through paraphrasing, coining words, and miming.

On the other hand, in reduction or avoidance strategies, the learner gives up or alternates the target message. Reduction strategies are divided into two categories: topic avoidance and message abandonment. In topic avoidance, the learner tries not to talk about topics which pose linguistic difficulties (Corder, 1983; Rababah, 2002; Tarone, 1977; Yarmohammadi & Saif, 1992). In message abandonment, learners leave the message unfinished due to linguistic difficulty (Faerch & Kasper, 1983; Rababah, 2002; Tarone, 1977; Varadi, 1973). For the purpose of the study, focus will be on reduction or avoidance strategies.

The literature on CSs offers various taxonomies which are similar. Taxonomies of CSs offered by Tarone (1977), Dörnyei (1995), Rababah (2001), and Nakatani (2005) are discussed in this section.

Tarone (1977, 1980, 1983) perceives CSs from an interactional point of view by which the main function of CSs is to negotiate meaning. Tarone's interactional view is discussed in section 1.6 in Chapter One. Tarone classifies CSs into the following: **avoidance**: which includes *topic avoidance* and *message abandonment*; **paraphrase** which is further subdivided into *approximation*, *word coinage*, and *circumlocution*; and **conscious transfer** which includes *literal translation*, *language switch or mix*; *appeal for assistance*; and *miming*. Refer to Appendix A.

Dörnyei (1995) classifies CSs into three categories: **avoidance or reduction strategies**, **achievement or compensatory strategies**, and **stalling or time-gaining strategies**. Avoidance or reduction strategies are divided into *message abandonment* and *topic avoidance* which learners use when they decide to leave out a certain topic which they find difficult. Compensatory or achievement strategies are used to compensate for the limited competence in the target language. Compensatory strategies include *circumlocution*, *approximation*, *use of all-purpose words*, *word-coinage*, *nonlinguistic signals*, *literal translation*, *foreignizing*, *code-switching*, and *appeal for help*. The third category, on the other hand, is stalling or time-gaining strategies such as *using fillers* to gain time to think and come up with the intended meaning. Refer to Appendix A.

Rababah (2002) provides a more detailed taxonomy. His taxonomy has two main categories classified on a consideration of the source of information on which the strategy is used: **L1-based strategy** (the information is derived from the learners' native language-Arabic) and **L2-based strategy** (the information is derived from the target language). L1-based strategies include *literal translation* and *slips of the tongue* which are further subdivided into: *L1 slips and immediate insertion* (inserting L1 words unintentionally due to slips of the tongue), *L1 appeal for help* (the use of confirmation checks), *L1 optimal meaning* (the use of L1 word to represent the target word), *L1 retrieval* (trying to remember the target word by saying its meaning in Arabic). The last sub-category is the *L1 ignorance acknowledgment strategy* (learners admitting their ignorance by saying "I don't know" in their native language). L2-based strategies include *avoidance* (topic avoidance and message abandonment), *word coinage*, *circumlocution*, *self-correction / restructuring*, *approximation*, *mumbling*, *L2-appeal for help*, *self-repetition*, *use of similar-sounding words*, *use of all-purpose words*, and *ignorance acknowledgement*. Refer to Appendix A.

However, there are some problems with the taxonomies of CSs offered above. According to Rababah (2002), although researchers have produced apparently different taxonomies with different structures, the underlying structure of these taxonomies is the same. For instance, what is referred to as “word-coinage” and “self-correction” in one of the taxonomies can be classified as “inventing” and “restructuring” in another. In addition, researchers have not yet agreed on a standardized taxonomy of CSs. Rababah argued that as a result of having no standardized taxonomy, a single utterance could be labeled under more than one category. Thus, an overlap exists over communication strategies. Such overlap is illustrated by Rababah (2002) who gave the example of an Arab learner using “cleaning hand” to refer to “broom” which could be classified either as word coinage or literal translation from Arabic.

2.3.4 Previous Studies on CSs

In his paper ‘Interlanguage’, it was Selinker (1972) who first introduced the notion “strategies of second language communication” by which he referred to the strategies second or foreign language learners might use when they face linguistic problems in their communication. However, he did not give a detailed discussion about the nature of these strategies. A year later, Varadi (1973) presented a paper at a small European Conference where he was the first to investigate the strategic language behavior. His main discussion was on message adjustment. Varadi referred to message adjustment as the second/foreign language learners’ replacement of the optimal-actual meaning with the adjusted meaning (what is actually said when learners encounter a difficulty).

A further study was carried out by Tarone (1977) who offered a taxonomy of CSs which is still seen as the most important in the field since the subsequent taxonomies relied on it (Rababah, 2002).

However, real work on CSs started in the 1980s (Dörnyei, 1995). Canale and Swain (1980) and later on Canale (1983) extended the concept of communicative competence by including a fourth component, “strategic competence”. Canale and Swain (1980) referred to strategic competence as “the verbal and non-verbal CSs that maybe called into action to compensate for breakdown in communication due to performance variables or to insufficient competence” (p.30).

Faerch and Kasper (1983) published their first edited volume ‘Strategies in Interlanguage Communication’ by which they collected the most important papers on CSs in one collection. Their publication increased the interest in CSs among researchers who mainly focused on the identification and classification of CSs as well as their teachability.

In the second half of the 1980s, the number of studies on CSs increased. The studies focused on the various aspects of CSs and challenged the previous taxonomies. In the 1990s, most of the studies focused more on the issue of the teachability of CSs which is still very controversial. Some researchers (e.g., Bialystok, 1990; Cook, 1993; Canale & Swain, 1980; Kellerman, 1991) have not been very enthusiastic about teaching CSs to L2 learners. Their opposition is based on the idea that CSs are acquired in real-life situations and not in the classroom. Bialystok (1990) added that what must be taught to L2 learners is language itself not strategy because “the more the learners know, the better they will be at meeting their demands” (p.145). Kellerman (1991) suggested that teachers should focus on teaching more language to their learners and “let the strategies look after themselves” (p.158).

On the other hand, other researchers (Dörnyei, 1995; Faerch & Kasper, 1986; Faucette, 2001; Maleki, 2007; Ogane, 1998; Rababah, 2005) supported the teaching of CSs to L2 learners since they are believed these lead to a better learning of the target language. Faucette (2001) conducted a study on ELT textbooks and teachers’ resource books aiming

at identifying the CSs activities used. Findings of her study showed that there are more CSs activities available in the teachers' resource books than textbooks. The most common CSs she found are approximation, paraphrasing, appeal for assistance, foreignizing, time-stalling devices, and message abandonment. She also suggested that avoidance strategies such as message abandonment should not be recommended in the ELT materials since they are not considered effective communication strategies.

Maleki (2007) added that there is a positive and fruitful connection between communication strategies and second language acquisition. He stated that "communication strategies are pedagogically effective, that teaching communication strategies facilitates language learning, and that textbooks with communication strategies are more effective than those without them" (p.592).

Similarly, Ogane (1998) also mentioned that CSs should be taught through activities not through lectures which will make students experience using them. He suggested using different activities to teach Japanese high-school learners of English five communication strategies: paraphrasing, borrowing from L1, miming, asking for assistance, and avoidance. Ogane's article is noteworthy since he included activities for teaching what he believed to be ineffective CSs such as borrowing from L1 and avoidance. He classified avoidance into positive and negative. Positive avoidance means that learners might keep the communication alive by changing the topic of the conversation into a more familiar one. Negative avoidance, on the other hand, means that the learner completely gives up the conversation and shuts down all channels of communication.

From my experience as a teacher, I have often found that the learner's use of communication strategies could evolve from a combination of psycholinguistic and interactional perspectives. Often in real life, speakers are aware of their language barriers or inadequacies and try to find ways to overcome such language problems. In day-to-day

conversations, both speakers and listeners are involved in negotiating the meaning of the conversation. Similarly, in the process of second language acquisition, when a learner converses with a more advanced speaker (someone with a higher language ability), in this case, with a teacher, he or she usually tries to negotiate meaning by using certain communication strategies to overcome linguistic problems.

2.4 A Brief on Avoidance Strategies

2.4.1 Introduction

Li (1996, cited in Kano, 2006, p. 1) quotes a comment given by one of the Chinese learners of English:

When I don't know whether a noun is countable or not, I just use 'a lot of' or 'lots of' to modify it. I don't use either 'many' or 'much' in such situation (p.172).

According to Kano, the above quotation explains the L2 learner's behavior when he or she wants to use a certain L2 structure but cannot use it due to a linguistic deficiency. As a result, he or she decides not to use it but chooses another structure instead. This behavior is referred to as avoidance.

It was Schachter (1974) who first introduced the phenomenon of avoidance when she emphasized that it is significant to study not only the L2 structures produced by L2 learners but also the structures that learners seem to avoid regularly. She also criticized Error Analysis of being deficient in explaining the avoidance phenomenon. This section reviews the various definitions of avoidance, its classifications, and reasons behind it as suggested by different studies.

2.4.2 Definition of Avoidance

As pointed out by Kano (2006) avoidance is defined in two different ways. It can be viewed as one of the communication strategies that might be used when “the gap between the linguistic knowledge of the second-language learner and the target knowledge of the interlocutor “seems to be “unbridgeable” (Tarone, 1981; cited in Kano, 2006, p. 8). Similarly, Moghimizade and Pandian (2007) view avoidance as one of the communication strategies that “second language learners use when they face a communicative difficulty and in order to overcome this difficulty they resort to this strategy” (p.2).

On the other hand, avoidance can be seen as a manifestation of language transfer (Ellis, 1994; cited in Kano, 2006, p. 8). Ellis (1994) defines avoidance as:

Avoidance is said to take place when specific-target language features are under-represented in the learner’s production in comparison to native-speaker production. Learners are likely to avoid structures they find difficult as a result of differences between their native language and the target language (p. 693).

In other words, the structural difference between L1 and L2 might increase the level of difficulty which will lead learners to avoid using the difficult structures. However, I do believe that avoidance is more of a communication strategy than a result of language transfer. On the other hand, Ellis (2003) argues that the more second language learners resort to avoidance by escaping specific syntactic forms, the more they produce erroneous deviant forms.

El-Marzouq (1998) hypothesized four entities which trigger the occurrence of avoidance behavior in second language acquisition: the aversive stimulus, the instrumental response, the negative reinforce, and the natural response

- a. The aversive stimulus is the aversive context or context which preconditionally require(s) the production of an L2 structure known to be difficult/ painful to process within the linguistic and nonlinguistic limitations of the context or contexts. This L2 structure (call it the aversive structure) could be either a lexical item or a grammatical item.

- b. The natural response (or the avoided response) is the avoided L2 structure, 'natural' in the sense that the attempt to process it will 'naturally' satisfy the context or contexts which preconditionally requires(s) its production and 'avoided' because it constitutes the aversive structure identified in (4a).
- c. The instrumental response (or the target response) is the appropriate and necessarily contributory L2 structure that is produced as a substitute for the avoided L2 structure identified in (4 c).
- d. The negative reinforce is the evasive context or contexts when illuminated by the production of the appropriate and necessarily contributory L2 structure identified in (4c) (p. 16).

According to Ellis and Al Marzouq, the level of difficulty correlates with avoidance behavior in L2 acquisition. It is evident from the above mentioned definitions that avoidance behavior is an outcome of semantic and syntactic difficulties in the target language. However, both linguists do not mention the learners' level, whether they are at beginner, intermediate, or advanced, and what teaching material is appropriate for their learning situations. The current study, therefore, attempts to identify the areas of difficulty in the target language by taking into consideration the learners' pre-existing knowledge, background, and their learning needs.

2.4.3 Classification of Avoidance

The literature provides various classifications of avoidance. Avoidance is referred to as **reduction strategies** by Faerch and Kasper (1983), Willems (1987) and Nakatani (2005). In resorting to reduction strategies, the learner aims at "either communicating an imperfect message or communicating a message other than the one intended initially (An Mei, 2009, p. 33).

Reduction strategies are further subdivided into **functional reduction** and **formal reduction strategies** (Faerch & Kasper, 1983; Willems, 1987). Faerch and Kasper (1983) refer to formal reduction strategies as "the learner communicates by means of a 'reduced system', in order to avoid producing non-fluent or incorrect utterances by realizing

insufficiently automatized or hypothetical rules/items” (p.52). In other words, L2 learners resort to formal reduction strategies when they are concerned with correctness or fluency of their utterances. Consequently, they avoid using the rules which they have not fully mastered and choose a reduced system of rules.

Faerch and Kasper further subdivided formal reduction strategies into the following sub-categories: **phonological, morphological, syntactic, and lexical**. Functional reduction strategies are employed when L2 learners reduce or abandon their communicative goal. Functional reduction strategies are further divided into the following sub-types: **actional reduction, model reduction, and reduction of the propositional content** (Faerch & Kasper, 1983). Actional functional reduction is employed by L2 learners when they prefer to avoid performing certain speech acts or discourse functions unfamiliar to them. Modal functional reduction is used when learners decide not to mark a certain speech act for politeness/ social distance. Propositional functional reduction includes topic avoidance (the learner’s decision not to talk about a topic for which the target word is not known), message abandonment (the learner begins a topic but then gives up when faced with difficulties), and meaning replacement (the learner replaces the concept by another one which shares a general meaning).

Moreover, Nakatani (2005) divided reduction strategies into four categories: **message abandonment, first-language-based strategies, interlanguage-based reduction strategies, and false starts**. Message abandonment refers to leaving the message unfinished and keeping silent. First-language-based strategies are employed when learners intentionally or unintentionally switch to their native language when facing problems in expressing the meaning in the target language. Interlanguage-based reduction strategies refer to learners reducing the message and coping with linguistic problems by using their incomplete interlanguage system to reduce intended utterances resulting in

inappropriate word order based on their interlanguage system. False starts refer to the learners' repetition of what they have said at the beginning of the utterance.

On the other hand, avoidance is classified into two subcategories: **topic avoidance** - avoiding talking about topics which pose difficulty to the L2 learner and **message abandonment**--leaving the message unfinished (Dörnyei, 1995; Rababah, 2001; Tarone, 1981). In Corder's (1983) taxonomy, avoidance is referred to as **message adjustment** or **risk avoidance strategies**. Corder added **semantic avoidance** as a third subcategory of avoidance. Furthermore, Brown (2007) classifies avoidance into the following types: **syntactic avoidance**, **lexical avoidance**, **phonological avoidance**, and **topic avoidance**.

2.4.4 Reasons behind Avoidance as Suggested by Previous Studies

The avoidance phenomenon was first reported by Schachter (1974) in her article "An Error in Error Analysis" where she investigated the causes of this phenomenon. She argued that if a certain structural or semantic aspect in the target language is difficult for learners to understand, it is more likely that they will attempt to avoid using or producing it. Schachter's argument was based on a study she conducted comparing the frequency of relative clause sentences produced by adult native speakers of Japanese, Chinese, Arabic and Persian EFL learners. Her study showed that Chinese and Japanese learners made fewer errors in relative clauses since they produced half the number of sentences. Thus, she found that the difficulty of relative clauses for Chinese and Japanese students manifested itself not in the number of errors made by them, but by the number of relative clauses produced which was much smaller than that produced by Arabic and Persian speakers. Based on the findings of her study, she criticized Error Analysis for not being capable of identifying the avoided target language structures since no errors will be committed.

The studies following Schachter's work either supported her argument or disagreed with it. The studies conducted by Kleinmann (1977, 1978), Chain (1980), Dagut and Laufer (1985), Hulstijn and Marchena (1989), Seliger (1989), Liao and Fukuya (2004) support Schachter's idea that avoidance is caused by the structural and semantic differences between L1 and L2.

However, Liao and Fukuya (2004) argued that Schachter's idea of avoidance was not comprehensive because it did not control proficiency level and the number of relative clauses in the texts. They added that in Schachter's study there was no evidence that the learners were able to use the relative clauses. Therefore, their under-representation of relative clauses might have resulted from ignorance. Similarly Kleinmann (1977) emphasized the importance of knowing the structure in order to avoid it. He argued that "to be able to avoid some linguistic features presupposes being able to choose not to avoid it, i.e., to use it" (p. 97).

In an attempt to gain a better understanding of avoidance, Kleinmann (1977, 1978) conducted a study on two groups of intermediate ESL learners: Arabic speakers, and Spanish and Portuguese learners. He examined four grammatical structures: the passive, present progressive, infinitive complement, and the direct object pronoun structures. To ensure if learners had prior knowledge about the four structures under investigation, he administered comprehension tests. Results of his study supported Schachter's hypothesis that avoidance could be predicted by L1-L2 structural differences although other factors affected the learners' choice of avoidance such as confidence and facilitating anxiety.

Moreover, Dagut and Laufer (1985) conducted a study on Hebrew learners of English who avoided using the phrasal verbs in English and preferred using one-word verbs because their L1 lacks phrasal verbs. They concluded that only interlingual factors

such as structural differences between L1 and L2 could explain the learners' difficulty and not intralingual factors such as generalization and fossilization.

Hulstijn and Marchena (1989) stated that avoidance does not result from structural differences between first and second language alone. Similarities between L1 and L2 could also be a possible cause of avoidance.

In addition, there has been a controversial question on whether avoidance is ruled out by similarity. Louda (1981), Touchie (1983), and Suzanne (1986) stated that avoidance is ruled out by similarity. On the other hand, Laufer and Eliasson (1993) investigated the avoidance of phrasal verbs. The subjects of their study were advanced Swedish learners of English whose native language had the phrasal verbs. Based on previous studies on avoidance, they identified three possible causes of lexical and syntactic avoidance: differences between first and second language, similarities between first and second language, and second language complexity. Their aim was to determine the real cause of avoidance by comparing the results of their study with those of Dagut and Laufer (1985). The results of Laufer and Eliasson (1993) showed that phrasal verbs were avoided by Hebrew speaking learners of English whose language lacked such a grammatical category, but they were not avoided by the Swedish learners whose native language had such a category. They also found that second language complexity and similar idiomatic meaning between first and second language did not play a significant role in avoidance. Thus, Laufer and Eliasson concluded that the main cause of avoidance was the difference between L1 and L2.

The findings of Laufer and Eliasson were supported by Moghimizade and Pandian (2007) who investigated the avoidance of phrasal verbs in the writings of Persian university students majoring in TEFL. The results of their study showed that the learners tended to avoid using phrasal verbs. Moghimizade and Pandian (2007) thus concluded that

EFL learners resort to avoidance strategy because of different reasons such as differences between the first language and the target language, and complexities of the target language. Mattar (2003) further investigated whether avoidance is ruled out by similarity. Mattar studied EFL Arab learners' avoidance of adversative subordinating adverbs (despite/in spite of) and the causal adverbs (because of). The results of the study indicated that the subordinating and causal adverbs were frequently avoided and paraphrased in such a way that the subordinating conjunctions (although and because) were used instead. Thus, three conclusions were drawn by Mattar. First, although Arabic has structures linguistically similar to the English subordinating adverbs, the subjects of the study avoided them even when the sentences they were asked to translate from Arabic contained them. This indicated that avoidance is not ruled out by similarity. Second, the findings of the study showed that resorting to avoidance is highly affected by the learners' language proficiency level, with learners at a lower level using avoidance more frequently than those at more advanced level. Third, the subordinating adverbs were not only avoided in English but also in the learners' native language, Arabic, over which they had limited mastery.

A more recent research was conducted by Moghimizade (2008) who studied syntactic avoidance employed by Persian university students majoring in TEFL when they write in English. Findings of his study showed that Persian TEFL learners avoided adjective clauses and reduced adjective clauses when they write in English. Moghimizade found that grammatical differences between English and Persian, grammatical complexity and inconsistency, and the large number of grammatical rules surrounding the two above mentioned structures led to the use of avoidance by the Persian TEFL learners. He also found that Persian learners employed avoidance in order to keep them safe from committing errors in moments of anxiety such as during exams.

The problem with the study of avoidance strategies is the difficulty to notice or observe when an L2 learner has employed them. This point has been highlighted by Brown (1980) who stated that “a learner who for one reason or another avoids a particular sound, word, structure, or discourse category maybe assumed incorrectly to have no difficulty” (p. 219).

On the other hand, Xiaoling and Mengduo (2010) believe that the term “avoidance” itself is problematic. They point out that avoidance strategy is very difficult to maintain since it is not available to second language learners for two reasons: either that they have not mastered the structure or that they have mastered it and thus have no reason to avoid it. He instead prefers using the term “underproduction” instead to refer to the structures less frequently used by ESL/EFL learners.

Similarly, Lio and Fukuja (2004), Kamimoto et al. (1992), Li (1996), Bley-Vroman and Hounig (1988), and Zhao (1989) argue that the under-production of a linguistic feature does not necessarily mean avoidance but could be traced to L1 interference.

On the other hand, Kellerman (1992) mentions a number of factors which interact with the learners’ L1 knowledge to determine avoidance behavior such as the extent of the L2 learners’ knowledge of the target language and the attitudes they hold towards their own and target language cultures. Kellerman distinguishes three cases of avoidance. The first case of avoidance takes place when learners know or anticipate a problem which they have some idea about. Second, is when the learners know the target structure but find it too difficult to use especially in free-flowing conversations. The third case is when learners are unwilling to use the target structure although they know what to say and how to say it in order not to break cultural norms.

Odlin (1989) adds that two manifestations of avoidance are: underproduction and overproduction. In underproduction, learners might produce very few TL structures; while

in “overproduction” which Odlin considers to be a consequence of underproduction, learners might over use some structures. Li (1996), on the other hand, distinguishes between avoidance and underproduction (see Section 2.4.5).

Avoidance can be seen as a manifestation of hesitation and a play-it safe strategy as pointed out by Dagut and Luafer (1985); Hulstijin and Merhena (1989, cited in Pazhakh, 2007) who suggest that avoidance might occur on four occasions. First, learners might hesitate to use a target structure which is perceived to be different from their L1 structure. Second, learners might hesitate to use a target structure as a result of fear of making an interference error in a form which they perceive to be too similar to their L1 form. Third, learners might hesitate to use a target structure which has specific semantic features. Fourth, learners might resort to avoidance as a “play-it-safe” strategy.

To sum up, avoidance as a strategy remains to be a controversial issue in the literature on second language acquisition. This study, therefore, will investigate whether avoidance can explain the underproduction of certain syntactic structures.

2.4.5 Avoidance and Ignorance

It is very important to draw a clear distinction between avoidance and ignorance. One distinction that can be made between avoidance and ignorance is in terms of knowledge. As pointed out by Seliger (1989, cited in Kano, 2006), it is very difficult to distinguish avoidance from ignorance or incomplete learning. He adds that “true avoidance” takes place “when learners can form the target structure, but have not yet acquired contextual or distributional rules of form” (p. 12). In the study conducted on Hebrew EFL learners’ use of the passive voice, Seliger found that they avoided using this structure in English not because of its complexity but because they did not use it in their native language and thus transferred their preference for the use of the active voice instead.

He calls this phenomenon “true avoidance.” However, Kamamoto et al. (1992) argue that what is called “true avoidance” might not be avoidance at all since Hebrew learners might not have known the context where the target structure is used and therefore might not have avoided a structure in English which they do not know. They point out that if avoidance presupposes knowledge, it is still problematic to tell what sort of knowledge and how much of it is needed in order to identify avoidance.

A more clear-cut distinction is made by Moghimizeade and Pandian (2007) who see ignorance and well-established knowledge as “the ends of a scale related to the mentally stored or memorized information”. They point out that “avoidance can be applied anywhere along this scale” (p.2). In other words, ignorance indicates lack of knowledge, while avoidance implies some degree of knowledge which could be faint. Similarly, Ellis (2003) argues that the identification of avoidance is not easy and “it only makes sense to talk of avoidance if learners know what they are avoiding” (p. 302).

Li (1998) clearly states that avoidance is a situation when L2 learners know the existence of the rules of a certain structure but are not sure about the details, Consequently, when they find themselves in situations which require the use of this structure, they try to avoid using it and use an alternative structure or structures which serve the same communicative purpose. Li further proposes four conditions of potential avoidance: (1) the learner knows the existence of the rules of a specific structure; (2) He/ She is not sure about certain details of the rule; (3) There is a need to use the structure and the learner is aware of this; and (4) The learner does not use the structure but uses some other structure(s) instead (p.172).

Second, avoidance is believed to be an intentional choice while ignorance is not intentional. In other words, avoidance “presumes an awareness, however faint of a given

target language feature, and it involves a quasi-intentional or intentional choice to replace the feature by something else” (Laufer & Eliasson, 1993, p. 36).

Similarly, other researchers (Congreve, 2004; Gass & Selinker, 2001; O’Grady et al., 1989) hold that avoidance is a conscious or deliberate plan by which the learner decides to use or not use a certain structure.

Avoidance as a conscious or deliberate plan is explained in El Marzouq’s (1998) argument that “the conscious and voluntary struggle for ‘freedom from difficult/painful expectancies’ is one of the most significant characteristics of avoidance conditioning” (p.23). He explains his idea that in second language acquisition “the learner is seen as an active agent, or rather an active avoider who has nothing but special yearning for ‘linguistic freedom’ until the expectancies being talked about are no longer difficult/painful in his/her focus of attention” (p. 23).

The issue of avoidance as a conscious strategy is further highlighted by Li (1996) who does not refer to ignorance but rather makes a distinction between avoidance and under-production. Based on his distinction, avoidance is conscious and under-production is sub-conscious. He further explains that “avoidance” should be used in a situation when L2 learners consciously try to avoid using certain structures in the target language. While the term “subconscious underproduction” is used when L2 learners under-produce certain structures in the target language without realizing that they are doing so.

Another distinguishing feature is based on difficulty. That is, if there are deep differences in syntactic structures between L1 and L2, these L2 structures might be too difficult for L2 learners and they therefore try to avoid using them (Dagut & Laufer, 1985; Kleinmann, 1977; Schachter, 1974). However, Li (1996) argues that gross differences between L1 and L2 structures might not cause learning difficulty while slight or subtle

differences can lead to more difficulties. In addition, he concludes that L2 learners do not necessarily avoid structures which are apparently different in form.

Based on the above theoretical perspectives, the distinction between avoidance and ignorance is based, first of all, on the level of knowledge and perceived structural difficulty of the target language. Consequently, the L2 learner might intentionally or deliberately take the choice to avoid using the structure which he or she perceives to be difficult to use. The L2 learner might be hesitant and unwilling to use the target structure.

2.5 Learners' Affective Variables

Brown (2007) classifies affective variables into self-esteem, anxiety, willingness to communicate, risk taking, extroversion, and introversion. As pointed out by Horwitz et al. (1986), speaking and listening seem to be the greatest source of anxiety among second language learners.

2.5.1 Self-esteem

Self-esteem is “the evaluation which individuals make and customarily maintain with regard to themselves; it expresses an attitude of approval or disapproval...” (Copersmith; 1967, cited in Brown, 2002, p. 154). Krashen (1980) believes that self-esteem is strongly related to language anxiety. According to him, foreign language anxiety has an impact on the individual's self-esteem. Second language learners who have very low self-esteem might not take risks. They also lack self-confidence which might slow their progress in learning a foreign language.

2.5.2 Anxiety

Anxiety is “the subjective feeling of tension, apprehension, nervousness, and worry associated with an arousal of the autonomic nervous system” (Spielberger, 1983; as cited

in Brown, 2002, p.161). Talon (2009) claims that language anxiety is one of the most significant affective variables in learning a foreign language. Language anxiety is “the feeling of tension and apprehension specifically in second-language contexts, including speaking, listening, reading, and writing (MacIntyre & Gardner, 1994, as cited in Wu, 2010, p. 175). L2 learners with higher levels of anxiety are like to be silent or unwilling to communicate in the classroom (Ellis, 1994).

2.5.3 Willingness to Communicate

There are various factors related to second language learner’s willingness to communicate such as motivation, English proficiency, attitude, foreign language anxiety, situational context, and language learning strategy (Yashima et al., 2004). MacIntyre et al. (2001) define willingness to communicate as “intention to initiate communication, given a choice (p. 369).

2.5.4 Risk-taking

According to Brown (2007), risk-taking is one of the most important characteristics of learning a second language successfully. He suggests that “learners have to be able to gamble a bit, to be willing to try out hunches about the language, and take the risk of being wrong (p. 160).

2.5.5 Extroversion and Introversion

Brown (2007) defines extroversion as “the extent to which a person has a deep-seated need to receive ego enhancement, self-esteem, and a sense of wholeness from other people as opposed to receiving affirmation within oneself” (p. 166). On the other hand, introversion is “the extent to which a person derives a sense of wholeness and fulfilment apart from a reflection of this self from other people” (Brown, p. 167).

In the second language classroom, an introvert student is characterized as the one having difficulties participating in classroom activities (Rashidi, Yamini, & Shefiei, 2011 p.148). Most often, those students remain unnoticeable by their teachers and peers due to their shyness and passivity inside the classroom (Byrnes, 1984). On the other hand, students who are extroverts are characterized by “their social, outgoing, talkative, active, and impulsive behaviour” (Rashidi et al., 2011).

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the research design, the rationale for choosing it, the issue of trustworthiness, the participant selection criteria, and the research site. Data collection and data analysis methods are also discussed in this chapter.

3.2 Research Design

For the purpose of the research, the qualitative case study was chosen as the most appropriate methodology to investigate syntactic avoidance employed in the oral production of adult Arab EFL learners. A case study has been defined in various ways. Bogdan and Biklen (1982) have defined case study as “a detailed explanation of one setting, or one single subject, or one single depository of documents, or one particular event” (p.59). On the other hand, Sturman (1997) defines a case study as a “generic term for the investigation of an individual, group, or phenomenon (p. 61). Merriam (2009) views the case study as an “in-depth description and analysis of a bounded system” (p. 40). Similarly, Creswell (2007) points out that a case study is “an in-depth exploration of a bounded system such as an activity, event, process, or individuals (p. 476). Moreover, a certain case which is unique and unusual can be studied in which researchers can develop an in-depth understanding of the case by collecting multiple sources of data such as e-mails, pictures, videotapes, interviews, etc. (Creswell, 2008).

In the present research, a multiple case study of 10 different cases will be examined and compared in order to explore the differences between the cases and replicate findings across these cases. In these case studies, prolonged observations and face-to-face

interviews which are both descriptive and exploratory will be conducted. The rationale for conducting a multiple case study research is that it allows the researcher to study a number of cases at the same time and compares between them to investigate a phenomenon, population, or general condition (Stake, 2005). For instance, a researcher might study several students or several universities to provide more insight on the issue.

On the other hand, the case study research has some shortcomings. First, the researcher might find it difficult to maintain a balance between description and analysis (Zhang, 2005). There is no consensus among researchers regarding whether the case study should be descriptive or analytical. Some researchers (Barker, 1968; Owens, 1982) argue that case study should give more focus on description, while others (Rist, 1982; Yin, 1981) suggest that it should give more space to analysis. However, both ways will be used in the present research. A detailed description of each case will be provided in section 4.1 (learners' profile) in Chapter 4. Then, an analysis will be given in sections 4.2 and 4.3 in Chapter 4 which discuss the learners' syntactic errors and syntactic avoidance.

3.3 Trustworthiness of the Study

One of the pitfalls of a case study research is the issue of generalizability since it focuses on examining a single unit, case, or individual. Fraenkel and Wallen (2008) point out that the issue of generalisation is the nature of qualitative research which lacks "methodological justifications for generalising the findings of a particular study" (p. 432). Hamel (1993) adds that the case study has been "faulted for its lack of representativeness" (p.23). On the other hand, Gomm, Hammersely, and Foster (2000) discuss the issue of 'naturalistic generalisation' which is often associated with case studies. They point out that in naturalistic generalisation, a case study can offer an appropriate hypothesis for other cases only if there are similarities between these cases. In other words, naturalistic

generalizations offer an “everyday common-sense reasoning” (ibid) which might be erroneous and biased (Tversky & Kahneman, 1974).

However, Fraenkel and Wallen (2008) hold a different point of view. They argue that the researchers in both quantitative and qualitative researches can generalise although the way of generalization could differ. The researcher in a quantitative study generalises to the practitioners and suggests to them that the findings should be applicable. The researcher in the qualitative study, on the other hand, can also generalise but it is the practitioner, not the researcher, who decides to what extent the findings are applicable to his or her situation. Similarly, Merriam (2009) underscores that to understand generalisability in a qualitative research; we have to think in terms of the reader or the user of the study who decides whether the findings of the study can apply to his or her case. She also adds that the qualitative researcher has an “obligation to provide enough detailed description of the study’s context to enable readers to compare the “fit” with their situations” (p. 226).

The goal of the qualitative researcher is not generalizability since he or she might be less concerned about the findings of his or her study which are often viewed as ideas to be shared, discussed, or further examined (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2008).

In the present study, considerable attention will be given to trustworthiness in both data collection and analysis. To enhance trustworthiness, I will first present the theories behind the study, the criteria for selecting the participants, and a thick description of them. In addition, I will describe the context from which data were collected and how they were collected.

I have also adopted the Lincoln and Guba’s (1985) four criteria for evaluating qualitative findings and enhancing trustworthiness: transferability, credibility, dependability, and confirmability.

3.3.1 Transferability

The qualitative researcher is interested in ‘transferability’ coined by Lincoln and Guba (1985). They point out that transferability is the responsibility of the readers or the practitioners since “the burden of proof lies less with the original investigator than with the person seeking to make an application elsewhere” (p. 298). The researcher does not know what findings can be applied to other contexts. It is the practitioner or readers, on the other hand, who can do that. In other words, transferability is the degree to which findings can be transferred or generalized to other contexts or situations.

I will enhance the transferability of the present study by giving a rich or thick description which is an “emic or insider’s account” (Maxwell, 2005, p. 116). According to Fraenkel and Wallen (2008), thick description involves giving a detailed description of what the researchers “have seen and heard frequently using extensive quotations from the participants in their study” (p. 504). Similarly, Merriam (2009) points out that rich-thick description enables transferability by giving a detailed description of the settings, participants of the study, findings supported with evidence presented in the form of quotes from the participants’ interviews, field notes, and documents (p. 227).

3.3.2 Dependability

Dependability is equivalent to the notion of ‘reliability’ in quantitative research (Golafshani, 2003). Reliability is referred to as the “extent to which research findings can be replicated” (Merriam, 2009, p. 220). Merriam adds that replication in qualitative research does not necessarily lead to the same results, but this does not dishonour the results of any qualitative study conducted since the data can be interpreted in several ways. She points out that what is more important in a qualitative study is “whether the results are consistent with the data collected” (p. 221). It was Lincoln and Guba (1985) who coined

the term 'dependability' or 'consistency' focusing on whether the findings are consistent with the data collected and make sense.

One of the strategies I used to ensure dependability and consistency was the use of 'audit trail' suggested by Lincoln and Guba. As pointed out by Merriam (ibid), in an audit trail, the researcher has to give a detailed description of how the data were collected, how decisions were made before and during the research, and how the research was conducted. To successfully construct the trail, I kept a "research journal" or "memos" suggested by Merriam (ibid) by which I wrote my reflections, questions, ideas, and decisions made.

Furthermore, to ensure dependability of the research, I used four types of documentation in the audit trail suggested by Rodgers and Cowles (1993): contextual, methodological, analytic, and personal response. In contextual documentation, I included excerpts from field notes of observations and interviews. I also provided a detailed description of the research setting, the participants, the social context and interview transcriptions. In the methodological documentations, I discussed the methodological decisions and the rationale for my decisions. I also described the data collection procedures and data analysis procedures in this chapter. In the analytic document, I included my own reflections on the analysis and the theoretical insights gained. In personal response, I documented all my thoughts and ideas.

3.3.3 Confirmability

Confirmability is equivalent to objectivity or neutrality (Golafshani, 2003). Fraenkel and Wallen (2008) define objectivity as "the absence of subjective judgments" (p.111). The issue of subjectivity or bias is of great concern in qualitative research. A very important question that might be frequently asked is whether the researcher reports the findings he wants to see and hear instead of the existing actual findings. To establish

confirmability, it is very important to give evidence to the readers that the results are linked to their sources. That is to say, the findings and conclusions of the study arise directly from the sources and are not the result of the researcher's prior assumptions (Daymon & Holloway, 2011). Furthermore, Lincoln and Guba (1985), point out that the findings should not be a "fabrication from the biases and prejudices of the researcher" (p. 192). To achieve confirmability, the findings must "reflect the participants' voice and the conditions of the inquiry, not the biases, motivations, or perspectives of the researcher" (Polit and Beck, 2008, p. 539).

In order to ensure confirmability, I included the raw material and its appendices with the thesis as a trial. The raw material includes transcriptions of the participants' interviews and online feedback discussions, field notes of the observations and the methodological decisions I made.

3.3.4 Credibility

The credibility of the study depends on establishing trustworthiness (Glesne, 1999). Similarly, Lincoln and Guba (1985) argue that ensuring credibility is one of the key factors in establishing trustworthiness. To ensure credibility in the study, the researcher followed a number of strategies. First, triangulation was used in this study. Fraenkel and Wallen (2008) define triangulation as "using a variety of instruments to collect data" (p.453). They add that triangulation involves "checking what one hears and sees by comparing one's sources of information_ do they agree?" (p.510). Patton (2002) strongly recommends the use of triangulation as it strengthens the study by combining methods. In this study, triangulation was used in terms of cross-checking different kinds of data (observational field notes and interviews) and different methods of data collection

(observations, interviews, online feedback discussion, documents collected from the registration department showing the participants performance).

A second strategy used was through adequate engagement in data collection (Merriam, 2009). I spent sufficient time (a period of four months) in the research site. This gave him the opportunity to get as close as possible to understanding the participants' avoidance behaviour, the context, and the research setting. I interacted with the participants on a daily basis and created rapport with them which made it easier for me to collect information about the participants. I was able to build trust.

The third strategy used was member checking. Member checking is to "solicit feedback on your emerging findings from some of the people you interviewed" (Merriam, 2009, p. 217). Member checking is an important strategy to identify the researcher's own biases and misunderstanding of what has been observed (Maxwell, 2005). In the study, I used the member check strategy by having an online feedback discussion with the participants. I discussed some of the findings with the participants to rule out any possible misinterpretations of what they have said. I was able to identify the causes of the participants' avoidance behaviour.

Listing the limitations of the study was the fourth strategy since it is a way of establishing the trustworthiness of the study (Glesne, 1999). Limitations of the study are listed in Chapter 5, Section 5.4.

3.4 Research Participants Selection

This study is qualitative which focuses in depth on relatively small groups or even individuals who can "present multiple perspectives to present the complexity of the world (Creswell, 2008, p. 214). 12 Participants meeting the purpose of the study were selected based on maximum variation sampling. Maximum variation sampling is "a purposeful

sampling strategy in which the researcher samples cases or individuals that differ on some characteristic or trait (e.g., different age groups)” (ibid). This strategy is seen as “a deliberate hunt for negative instances or variations of the phenomenon” (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 29).

The rationale for using maximum variation sampling is found in Patton’s (1990) statement that “it enables the researcher to document unique or diverse variations that have emerged in adapting to different conditions and identifies important common patterns that cut across variations” (p.182). Thus, this sampling strategy will help the researcher capture a variety of multiple perspectives on syntactic avoidance strategies.

The participants’ selection criteria were based on the following factors which are believed to have a significant role in the avoidance behaviour of the learners in oral communication: region, age, educational background, marital status, exposure to English, gender, proficiency level, and economic and social background which allow maximum representation of diversity. The sample was representative of the factors mentioned and reflects different types of students studying at the research site.

At the beginning of the study, 12 candidates were selected. Their ages varied from 17 to 26. However, two of the male participants were excluded from the study due to their death in a car accident. They were three female learners and seven male learners. The main reason for having male candidates outnumbering female candidates could be attributed to social and cultural implications. One of the challenges I faced in the selection process was to get the consent of female learners to participate in the study as they were not comfortable having their voices recorded in the interviews. Their inhibitions were partly due to the social taboo attached to females being photographed or interviewed in Oman.

All the participants were bachelors except for one who was married with two children (Learner 6). Participants varied in their social and economic backgrounds. One of the participants belonged to the Omani royal family (Learner 2). One was an expatriate whose father was a car mechanic (Learner 8). Learner 7 belonged to the upper-middle class as his father was a highly educated business man who owned a group of companies. The rest of the participants (learners 1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 9, and 10) belonged to the middle-class.

The participants belonged to two levels in the Foundation Programme representing two different levels of increasing difficulty. The levels of the participants varied from pre-intermediate to upper intermediate. Four participants were in Foundation One (pre-intermediate) and six were in Foundation Two (Intermediate and upper-intermediate). All the participants except for one had studied in government schools. Two participants came from the interior parts of Oman and were staying at the college hostel while the remaining eight learners lived in the capital city.

In addition, the participants varied in terms of exposure to English. Learners 1, 2, 4, 9 and 10 had exposure to English only in the classroom environment. Whereas, the other five participants had the opportunity to converse in English in their day-to-day lives; they could improve their proficiency in the target language by chatting to their peers and friends in English, going for conversational classes in English, watching English movies, reading English books, novels or magazines, listening to English music and such like.

All the learners were of Omani origin, except for one student who was from Syria. It was interesting to note that their attitudes towards oral communication differed. Apparently, learners 1, 2, 9 and 10 were negative in their approach as they preferred using their mother tongue in situations that required the use of English. Their reluctance to speak in English could be attributed to lack of self-confidence and motivation. The learners performed poorly in the oral exams and expressed their anxiety on being assessed. The

other six learners (3, 4, 5, 6, 7 and 8) showed more positive attitudes towards oral communication and seemed to be more confident and willing to converse in English as they were apparently more fluent in English.

Participants were recruited through four sources: first, their placement tests, second, direct contact with the students (observations, informal conversations, lectures, face-to face interviews), third, their assessments, and fourth, information provided by other teachers working at the research site regarding their students' oral performance, their backgrounds, attitudes, and their proficiency level.

3.5 Research Site

The data for this study were collected at a private college in the Sultanate of Oman located in the capital city of Muscat. This college is the fastest growing higher education institution in Oman in terms of infrastructure and student population. The number of students has rapidly grown from about 300 in 2002 to approximately 3000 in the academic year 2009-2010.

English is the language of instruction for the programmes offered by the college. Therefore, students joining the college are required to have sufficient language proficiency which enables them to perform competently in their academic programmes. Accordingly, all candidates seeking enrolment in the college are given a placement test in English and Mathematics. Based on the results of the test, candidates can either directly pursue their undergraduate studies or join the Foundation Programme. The placement test is held for a total of 100 marks and is divided into two parts: oral test out of 15 and a written test out of 85. The written test consists of reading comprehension, vocabulary, grammar, and essay writing. The oral test is conducted face-to-face between the candidate and the tutor in a procedure very much similar to that of the IELTS oral test. A candidate who gets 60

marks or below will enter Foundation 1, a candidate who earns 61-85 will enter Foundation 2, while a candidate who scores 86-100 will directly enter the Diploma/Degree Programme.

The Foundation Programme which is offered by the Languages Centre is a preparatory course for first year students. It aims at developing their competence in the four English skills as well as in computing, mathematics, and study skills. The Programme extends over a period of 36 weeks (one academic year) and it consists of two semesters: Foundation 1 (in semester 1) and Foundation 2 (in semester 2). Each of the modules offered in the Foundation Programme are assessed through a combination of continuous assessments, mid-semester exams and quizzes, and an integrated final written examination at the end of each semester. Foundation 1 students must score at least 50 marks in order to enter Foundation 2. Foundation 2 students also need to score a minimum of 50 marks to be eligible to go to the Diploma/Degree Programme. Students who score 35-49 % or miss the final examination will be given the chance to set for a supplementary examination in a one week time after the results are displayed. On the other hand, students who score less than 35% have to repeat the semester.

There are three reasons for selecting this research site. First, I am very familiar with the research site since I am a faculty member working there. This means that I have common-sense knowledge of the setting and have direct personal contacts with administrators, tutors, students, and teaching methods which can make it more convenient for me to conduct the study. Being in a direct contact with students, it will be easier and less time consuming for me to identify the participants of the study. In addition, it will be easier to get permission from the administration to conduct the study at the research site. Tutors can also help me identify the participants of the study. Second, it is easier to develop field relationships with the participants such as building trust, confidence, and

rapport with them. However, if the study is conducted in an unfamiliar setting, it might take more time to build field relationships with the participants. Third, students at the research site come from different regions in Oman with diverse cultural, educational, and social backgrounds. They, therefore, represent typical Omani students of varying levels which will allow maximum variation of representation.

My early observations and field notes on the research site indicate that students had difficulties in oral communication. A lot of students in the college used to avoid communicating with non-Arabic speaking teachers. Although they were encouraged to speak in English, their use of English was limited to the classroom only. However, a vast majority of students whether in the Foundation or Degree programme preferred using their native language, Arabic, outside the classroom to report problems, complain, or ask their teachers for help. Moreover, a large number of students used to register in classes taught by Arabic speaking teachers. This supports Al Jadidi (2009) who points out that Omani students leave the classes of native speakers and join classes taught by Arabic speaking teachers for several reasons such as the feeling of insecurity with non-native speakers, feeling more comfortable with Omani teachers, communication breakdown with non-native speakers as they speak too fast, and the ability to understand Omani teachers' English language since they find it clearer.

The students who had the most significant oral communication problems were the Foundation Programme students who had very limited opportunities to speak in English during their school education. A good number of students join the Foundation Programme with very low English proficiency level which does not enable them to communicate effectively. Although they had spent at least 12 years learning English at school, most of them had serious problems in the four English skills as well as in spelling and grammar.

The most accruing problem was in oral communication. Surprisingly, some students were good in writing but performed very bad in speaking.

3.6 Data Collection Methods

To gain a holistic picture of the avoidance phenomenon, I collected data from the following sources: observation field notes, documents of the participants' performance, and in-depth interviews and online feedback discussions with the participants.

3.6.1 Participant Observation

Observation is one of the major means of collecting data in qualitative research. It is “the process of gathering open-ended, first-hand information by observing people and places at a research site” (Creswell, 2008, p. 221). In a nonparticipant observation, the researcher does not participate in the activity that is being observed but rather “sits on the side-lines” and “watches” since he/ she is not directly involved (Fraenkel and Wallen, 2008, p. 41). I was a complete observer since I was a lecturer working at the research site. Therefore, I was interacting naturally with the participants who did not know that they were being observed daily.

Conducting observation is very useful for several reasons. First, it is the best technique to use when participants are not willing to share their ideas or discuss the topic under investigation, when an event or situation is observed first hand, or when a fresh perspective is desired (Merriam, 2009). In addition, the researcher spends a great amount of time at the research site which gives a good opportunity to learn about daily life (Rossman, 1983). Being a complete participant, the researcher is more likely to get the truest picture as argued by Fraenkel and Wallen (ibid). Observations also give the

opportunity to record information as it occurs in the natural setting and to study the actual behaviour of the participants (Creswell, *ibid*).

One of the limitations of the observation is the observer bias. Fraenkel and Wallen (2008) define observer bias as “the possibility that certain characteristics or ideas of the observers may bias what they see” (p.443). To reduce researcher bias, I used a number of ways suggested by Fraenkel and Wallen (2008) such as spending sufficient time at the research site, knowing the participants and the surrounding environment, and collecting data from different perspectives. I also used other different methods to reduce bias such as triangulation and document analysis.

Another disadvantage of observation is that when participants know that they are being observed, they might deliberately behave in an acceptable manner that will leave a desirable impression on the observer (Merriam, 2009). As for the present study, I took permission from the participants to observe them throughout the study. However as they were not precisely informed about the nature of the study, they reacted more naturally and I was able to record their attitudes and behaviour more objectively.

I observed the participants and the research site for a period of four months starting from 28th February to 20th June, 2010. Emphasis was placed on the participants’ engagement in oral communication, their avoidance behaviour, their classroom participation, their written and oral assessments, and their non-academic interaction with their tutors and peers. To capture a holistic picture of the participants and the research site, I conducted my observations on a daily basis in the classroom, the canteen, the tutors’ offices, and the auditorium. Since I did not teach some of the participants, permission from their tutors was solicited to visit their classes. Tutors were also asked about the participants’ performance, attitude, and engagement in oral communication. The participants’ academic and non-academic interaction with their tutors and peers was also

observed inside the classroom, the tutors' offices, or the canteen. In addition, the auditorium provided a great opportunity for me to observe the participants at the same time. There was a lecture given to Foundation 1 and Foundation 2 learners once a week. The Foundation 1 lectures were mainly on grammar, while the Foundation 2 lectures were on Public Speaking Skills and research skills. All sections were combined in the auditorium on the day of the lecture. I used to sit in the back rows and record the participants' interaction and oral engagement during the 90-minute lecture.

I wrote down my field notes in an observation sheet I created. The observation sheets included the following information: date and time of observation, place of the observation (the classroom, tutor's office, canteen, auditorium, etc.), name of the participant, duration of the observation, and general information about the setting and the participants being observed.

Since five of the participants were recommended by their teachers based on the selection criteria mentioned earlier in Section 3.3, it was very significant to obtain thorough background knowledge about the five recommended participants. I started observing their classes after getting permission from their teachers. I visited classes once every week. My focus was on the speaking classes and I attended their oral tests and presentations. The other five participants were my students. I spent the first three weeks of my study observing them and since I was able to meet them on a daily basis; it was more convenient to identify the students who meet the selection criteria. I used to write down my field notes immediately after the end of the lecture. At the end of the semester, oral interviews with participants were conducted. They were told about the purpose of the interview and were given instructions about it.

3.6.2 Interviews

The most popular means of data collection in qualitative research is interviewing (Fetterman, 1989, cited in Fraenkel & Wallen, 2008). DeMarrais (2004, cited in Merriam, 2009) defines interviewing as “a process in which the researcher and participant engage in a conversation focused on questions related to research study” (p. 55). Interview is a good method to find out missed out information in observations. As pointed out by Fraenkel and Wallen (2008), interviewing is ‘an important way for the researcher to check the accuracy of-to verify or refute- the impression he or she has gained through the observation’ (p. 445). The main purpose of the interview is to find out what is in the participants’ minds that we cannot directly observe such as their feelings, thoughts, intentions, behaviors, and interpretations of the world around them (Patton, 2002). Another reason for conducting interviews is that the interviewer has a “better control over the types of information received, because the interviewer can ask specific question to elicit information” (Creswell, 2008, p.226).

The interviews were mainly semi-structured. As pointed out by Fraenkel and Wallen (2008), both structured and semi-structured interviews are useful when conducted at the end of a study since they are the best “for obtaining information on a specific hypothesis that the researcher has in mind” (p.446). In addition, open-ended questions in a qualitative research are the most appropriate. Therefore, the best type of interview used for open-ended questions is the semi-structured (Merriam, 2009). She adds that in a semi-structured interview, “either the questions are more flexibly worded or the interview is a mix of more and less structured questions” (p. 90). She adds that the questions in a semi-structured interview are not determined in advance.

Interviews with the participants were conducted at the end of the semester between the 25th of May and the 26th of June, 2010. All the interviews were conducted in the MBA

room except for two conducted in the Computer Lab. The interviews consisted of two parts: general questions to get more information about the learners' educational and social backgrounds, and picture description to identify the learners' linguistic difficulties in Oral communication. Each participant was given seven pictures and was given the freedom to choose one that he or she could talk about more confidently. Then, they were asked to describe one or two pictures chosen by me. Questions in the interviews were open-ended, particularly in the second part. My aim was to know enough about the participants' avoidance behaviour, the syntactic structures mostly avoided, and the syntactic errors most frequently made (See Appendix B).

Picture 1 shows an Omani man standing in front of an Arabic fast food restaurant selling Shawerma. Picture 2 is of a western tourist riding a motorbike in the middle of the desert. Picture 3 shows an Omani Bedouin walking bare-footed in the desert and dragging a camel behind him. Picture 4 is of young people playing football on one of the beaches in Oman. Picture 5 shows three men holding three big fish which they have caught. Picture 6 is of three western women sitting with an Omani in one of the restaurants. Picture 7 shows two Omani men sitting on the floor in one of the local restaurants and having local food. However, participants had different attitudes toward the interviews and varied in terms of oral performance during the interviews as explained below.

3.6.3 Online Feedback Discussions

For further in-depth information, there was an online feedback discussion with the participants through Facebook and Hotmail Messenger. Creswell (2008) argues that electronic interviews are useful for collecting "detailed rich text for qualitative analysis" (p.227). The questions were available either in Arabic or English. However, most of the participants preferred using their native language in the feedback discussion. The major

aim of the online discussion was to extend my understanding of avoidance phenomenon under investigation. Furthermore, giving an online discussion was the only possible way for me as it was difficult to meet the participants after the semester ended.

3.6.4 Documentary Information

Documents are “ready-made source of data easily accessible to the imaginative and resourceful investigator” (Merriam, 2008, p.139). She adds that the documents usually included in a study are personal documents, public records, and physical material which have not been produced for the research purpose and might contain a lot of irrelevant material to the study. However, they might contain clues that can help learn more about the phenomenon being investigated (ibid).

The documentary information collected in this study supplements the data obtained from interviews and observations. The documentary information collected was taken from the registration department and it involves documents of the students’ academic performance in all the modules and the regions they come from.

3.7 Data Analysis

In qualitative research, data collection and data analysis can be conducted concurrently (Merriam, 1998). In this study, data analysis was also conducted at the same time of data collection. The 10 audio-recorded interviews were transcribed word by word. The feedback discussions were transcribed and translated into English. The transcripts were read several times to get the sense of data as a whole (Ager, 1980; Creswell, 1998). The participants’ responses were described thickly, reconfirmed, compared and analysed.

The second step in data analysis was organization. It was very important to organize the data into sections to facilitate retrieval. Each participant was given a code

number (Learner 1, Learner 2, Learner 3, etc.) not their real names. I used the typological analysis suggested by Goetz and LeCompte (1984) and Hatch (2002) through which I coded and categorized data. The typological analysis model is presented as follows:

1. Identify typologies to be analyzed.
2. Read the data, marking entries related to the typologies.
3. Read entries by typology, recording the main ideas in entries on a summary sheet.
4. Look for patterns, relationships, themes within typologies.
5. Read data, coding entries according to patterns identified and keeping a record of what entries go with which elements of the patterns.
6. Decide if the patterns are supported by the data, and search for data for non-examples of the patterns.
7. Write the patterns as one sentence- generalizations.
8. Select data excerpts that support the generalizations. (Hatch, 2002, p.153)

The main focus of the present study was the participants' avoidance behavior in their oral production. The participants' syntactic errors were also identified and analyzed. Therefore, data were analyzed to identify the syntactic structures avoided by the participants and to investigate the type of reduction strategies they used. The question of how lack of syntactic mastery shaped the oral production of the participants was investigated through observations and interviews. The participants' utterances were analyzed to identify the types of avoidance and compensatory strategies they used to solve their communication problems. Special attention was given to identification of syntactic avoidance strategies the participants used. For example, avoidance strategies were subdivided into topic avoidance, replacement, and giving short answer replies. Attention was also given to identifying whether the missing syntactic structures in the participants' oral production resulted in a deliberate choice of avoidance or a complete ignorance. Therefore, the missing structures were categorized into avoidance or ignorance. The feedback discussions with the participants' helped me in identifying the missed-out syntactic structures and categorizing them.

CHAPTER 4

DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the findings and analysis of the study in an attempt to answer the two research questions. The chapter is divided into three sections. In the first section, participants' profile is presented in order to obtain a better understanding of their syntactic and communication problems, their attitude towards learning English, their educational and social backgrounds, and their affective variables which will give a holistic picture about their choice of avoidance in oral communication. The second section addresses the first research question: how does syntactic knowledge or the lack of it affect the learners' choice in producing or avoiding particular syntactic structures? The section gives a description on the learners' syntactic knowledge and how the lack of it might affect the learners' choice to avoid certain syntactic structures. Section three attempts to answer the second research question: How and why do Arab EFL learners resort to avoidance in their oral production? The section provides a thick description of all the factors contributing to the learners' choice of avoidance. In an attempt to explore syntactic avoidance strategy in the participants' oral production, a distinction is also made between avoidance and ignorance in addition to suggesting taxonomy of syntactic avoidance as a potential contribution to the field of the study.

4.2 Profiles of the Participants of the Study

The 10 participants of the study enrolled in the Foundation Programme in the academic year 2009-2010 in order to develop their competence in English, computing,

mathematics, and study skills. Their ages ranged between 17 and 26 years old. They had their school education in government schools, except for one participant who studied in a private school in the first two years of his school education then he shifted to a government school. All the participants were Omanis excluding one Syrian who lived in Oman all his life and had his school education in Omani government schools as well. Four of the participants were enrolled in Foundation One (henceforth F1) and six in Foundation Two (henceforth F2). Five of the participants were pre-intermediate learners, three were intermediate, and two were upper-intermediate. Two of the participants came from the interior and were staying in the college hostel at the time of the study. The other eight participants, on the other hand, were living in the capital city of Muscat.

In order to ensure variation and diverse representation, the participants were selected using the following criteria: age, gender, academic performance, attitudes toward learning, and exposure to English language. Participants were recruited through two main sources: teachers' recommendations and my own teaching observations. The real names of the participants are not mentioned in this study; instead they are referred to as Learner 1, Learner 2, Learner 3, Learner 4, Learner 5, Learner 6, Learner 7, Learner 8, Learner 9, and Learner 10 respectively. A detailed discussion on the participants' selection is provided in Chapter 3, Section 3.3. This section presents the participants' diversities. It also provides information on the interviews conducted with each of the participants.

4.2.1 Participants' Diversities

The participants' profiles include information about their social and educational backgrounds, their academic performance, personality traits, and their attitudes towards learning. Table 1.1 below summarizes the participants' diversity in terms of age, gender, level of proficiency, and school education.

Table 4.1

Participants' Diversities

Participant	Gender	Age	Proficiency Level	Social and Educational Background
Learner1	Female	19	Pre-intermediate	government schools/ from interior
Learner 2	Male	17	Pre-intermediate	government schools/ from Muscat
Learner 3	Male	18	Pre-intermediate	private and government/ from Muscat
Learner 4	Male	19	Pre-intermediate	government schools / from Muscat
Learner 5	Female	19	Upper-intermediate	government schools / from Muscat
Learner 6	Male	26	Intermediate	government schools/ from Muscat
Learner 7	Male	19	Upper-intermediate	government schools / from Muscat
Learner 8	Male	19	Intermediate	government schools/ from Muscat
Learner 9	Female	20	Intermediate	government schools/ from interior
Learner 10	Male	19	Pre-Intermediate	government schools / from Muscat

Table 4.1 summarizes the participants' diversities. Participants who come from an educated family and speak more than one language showed interest in learning English and were more motivated as the case with learners 5 and 7. In addition, participants who conversed in English in their daily life situations seemed to be more competent and less anxious while speaking as with learners 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, and 9. On the other hand, participants who did not practise English very often in their everyday-life situations seemed to be more anxious and less competent as in the case with learners 1, 2, and 10. A detailed description of each participant is provided later in this section.

In addition, participants varied in terms of proficiency and academic performance although placement test results indicate that there was not much disparity in the

participants' proficiency level when they first joined the Foundation Programme. Table 4.2 shows the placement test results and the semester they joined the Foundation Programme.

Table 4.2

Participants' Placement Test Results and the Semester of Joining

Participant	PT results	Semester of Joining College
Learner 1	45	Spring Semester 2009-2010
Learner 2	47	Spring Semester 2009-2010
Learner 3	54.5	Spring Semester 2009-2010
Learner 4	29	Spring Semester 2009-2010
Learner 5	53	Fall Semester 2009-2010
Learner 6	49	Fall Semester 2009-2010
Learner 7	52	Fall Semester 2009-2010
Learner 8	55.5	Fall Semester 2009-2010
Learner 9	48.5	Fall Semester 2009-2010
Learner 10	45	Fall Semester 2009-2010

Note. PT = placement test

Source. Middle East College of Information Technology, Registration Department, 2009-2010

Since all participants scored below 61% in the placement test, they entered F1. A detailed explanation of the placement test process at the college is provided in Chapter Three, Section 3.5. Despite the little discrepancy in the participants' placement test results, Learner 8, Learner 3, Learner 5, and Learner 7 scored the highest in the placement test. In my observations, I found those participants to be the most competent, most confident, the

most active, the most eager to learn, and the most able to communicate in English. In addition, they are the ones who were exposed to English through practice and interaction with others. In fact, they were far ahead of their peers. Learner 4, on the other hand, got the lowest mark in the placement test. In the interview, he made so many errors and his oral production lacked cohesion and coherence. His teachers said that he was weak especially in speaking. In spite the fact that his elder sister was an English teacher who used to help him in learning English, he was one of the weakest students in the Foundation Programme. The other participants (Learner 1, Learner 2, Learner 6, Learner 9, and Learner 10) scored between 45 and 48.5. However, they showed varying levels of proficiency throughout the Foundation Programme.

Although the participants' placement test results indicate that there was little disparity in terms of their proficiency level when they joined the Foundation Programme, their performance varied throughout the one year Programme. Before explaining the participants' diversity in academic performance and proficiency level, a brief discussion on the modules taught in the Foundation Programme and their assessment criteria is provided below to give a better understanding. Four English modules were offered in F1: General English Skills (GES), Intensive Reading Skills (IRS), Basic Study Skills (BSS), and Computer-based Learning 1 (CBL1) in addition to Mathematics 1.

In GES, the four language skills in addition to grammar were integrated with more focus on listening and speaking. GES had a total of eight contact hours per week. Two hours were allotted for a weekly general lecture in the auditorium, mainly grammar-based. Students were given speaking tasks such as role-plays and individual short presentations. The speaking tasks were mainly ice-breakers and their major aim was to prepare students to speak more. Themes covered were on family social relations, asking for directions, descriptions, making comparisons, and self-introductions. The grammatical structures

taught were parts of speech, the simple present, the simple past, the present progressive, the past progressive, the present perfect, the simple future, and the comparative and superlative adjectives. The aim of the BSS module was to prepare the students for their research projects in semester 2. For this purpose, research skills in addition to other study skills such as note-taking, group discussions, time-management, and library and Internet skills were taught to them. Students developed their writing skills starting from paragraph to essay writing. They practised writing different types of essays.

In addition, the aim of IRS was to develop the students' reading strategies and to achieve fluency in areas of vocabulary building and reading comprehension. The three modules were supplemented in CBL 1 by which students practised the four language skills in the lab. The module also aimed at developing the students' proficiency in using computers as well as enhancing their typing skills. In Mathematics 1, students were taught different types of numbers, solve equations as well as inequalities, and develop simple mathematical models for real-life problems.

The modules offered in F2 were Public Speaking Skills (PSS), English for Academic Purposes (EAP), Extensive Reading Skills (ERS), and Computer-based Learning 2 (CBL2) in addition to Mathematics 2. Students had more opportunities to speak in PSS by which they practised giving group and individual presentations on topics of their own choice. In addition, students were given other speaking tasks such as role-plays and group discussions. In EAP, students developed their research skills and worked on a group project. The aim of the ERS was to develop the learners' reading strategies and to enhance their reading skills and vocabulary building. CBL2 was a continuation for CBL1. The aim was to enhance their research skills, typing skills, and the use of Microsoft Word, PowerPoint, and Excel. In Mathematics 2, students learned how to manipulate polynomials, evaluate trigonometric functions, and solve problems in coordinate geometry.

Each module was assessed through a combination of continuous assessment in addition to quizzes, mid-term exams, and a final exam. Each module was assessed out of 100 marks. To pass a module, a student must score at least 50%. Table 4.3 shows the academic performance of the participants of the study.

Table 4.3

Participants' Academic Performance in the Foundation Program

Participant	Fall Semester 2010-2011	Spring Semester 2010-2011
Learner 1	---	92 (A)
Learner 2	---	59 (F)
Learner 3	---	85 (B+)
Learner 4	---	66 (C-)
Learner 5	88 (A-)	82 (B)
Learner 6	88 (A)	87 (A-)
Learner 7	75 (C)	80 (B)
Learner 8	80 (B)	73 (C)
Learner 9	80 (B)	74 (C+)
Learner 10	51 (D)	57 (D)

Source: Middle East College of Information Technology, Registration Department, 2009-2010

As Table 4.3 shows, participants varied in their academic performance. Scores of the F2 learners show a decline in their academic performance in the second semester except for learner 7 who scored slightly higher. Learners 1, 2, 3, and 4 were F1 students who joined the college in the second semester. On the other hand, Learners 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, and 10 were F2 learners who were in their second semester of the Foundation Programme.

Learner 1 outperformed the other F1 participants while Learner 6 scored the highest of the other F2 Learners.

A detailed description of the social and educational backgrounds of each participant is provided below as well as their learning attitudes and personal traits.

a) Learner 1

She was a 19 year-old pre-intermediate Arab EFL learner who enrolled in F1 in Spring Semester 2010. She studied in government schools where she received formal English instruction starting from grade four. She came from the interior, Al Batinah Region in the north of Oman. She was staying in the college hostel away from her family when the study was conducted which might had an effect on her as she was always complaining about her loneliness and alienation. Her father is a policeman and her mother is a housewife. She has five sisters. She studied for one year in one of the colleges before joining her recent college.

As a student in the Foundation Programme, she was very outstanding and outperformed the other students as she got a total of 92 (A-) in all the five modules offered in the first semester of the Foundation Programme. She also scored the fourth highest mark among the 176 Foundation One students. In addition, she was very motivated and eager to learn. She always had an effect on her classmates especially the girls who tried to compete with her. She used to speak on behalf of the female learners.

b) Learner 2

He was the youngest student in his class. He was only 17 years old at the time the study was conducted. He comes from the capital city of Muscat. He is a ‘Sayyid’, an honorific title given to members of the Omani Royal Family, and his father is a very

important person in the Sultanate. However, Learner 2 was a very humble and descent student who preferred not to be called by his title in front of his peers. He received his school education at government schools. In the interview, he implicitly blamed the methods of teaching English in his school as the main reason for his low proficiency level. He said that he developed his English language by watching English films rather than learning it from school. He also said that he studied in public schools to be equal with his other brothers and sisters who studied in public schools as well. He was quite satisfied with disciplinary issues at public schools which he described as “the producer of real men” because there was “punishment just like the military” unlike private schools which he said that students are “more comfortable there and are taught by “female teachers”. However, he believed that the quality of English teaching at private schools was better since all teaching and learning facilities are available there in addition to having very qualified teachers.

It is worth mentioning that the participant failed in all the modules because he missed the final examination for personal reasons which he didn't specify. He also missed the supplementary exam later for the same unspecified reasons.

c) Learner 3

He was 18 years old when the study was conducted. He studied in a private school in grades 1 and two, then he shifted to a public school. He lives in Muscat but originally comes from the interior. His English improved through practice because he used to always chat with his father's friends in English. He highly respected his teachers in and outside the classroom. However, unlike other students, he rarely came to my office asking for clarification.

The three participants were studying in the same section. However, each one of them had a different attitude towards oral communication. Learner 3 was the most confident and willing to speak without paying much attention to accuracy. Learner 2 was not very confident but was eager to speak without giving consideration to accuracy as well. Learner 1, on the other hand, was the least confident. She tried to avoid speaking in English and if she had to communicate, she would give much attention to accuracy although she often produced inaccurate utterances.

d) Learner 4

He was a 19 year-old pre-intermediate learner who joined F1. He used to work as a bus driver in his free time either before coming to college or after he finished his lectures. He was a motivated learner and always tried to communicate with his teachers in English. The major problems he faced when speaking were lack of cohesion and coherence, insufficient vocabulary, and grammatical errors, particularly in the wrong use of pronouns and tenses, and subject-verb agreement errors. He received his education at public schools. According to him, his language was weak in spite of the so many years he spent learning English at the school because little opportunity was given for the students to practise English.

Learner 4: ...when school more student don't talked English and the teacher same don't talked English he's talked Arabic more time and sometime talked English.

(Interview, 14th June, 2010)

The participant intended to say that students didn't communicate with each other in English and the teachers were speaking in their native language rather than English.

e) Learner 5

She was a 19 year old Foundation 2 intermediate student in her second semester. She lives in the capital city of Muscat and comes from an educated family who speak English with each other at home. Both of her parents hold a university degree and are employed. She was a distinguished student because she could speak three languages: Arabic, English, and Swahili. In addition, she was a very popular student as she was active and got herself engaged in extra-curricular activities. She was an active member in the English Club organized by the college. The teacher responsible for the Club said that Learner 5 was an active member and liked the activities related to speaking. She participated in most of the events and showed interest in creative writing. In the interview, Learner 5 explained more about the duties of the English Club. She said that she was a member then she was made the President of the Club. She talked about the activities organized by the club and the support they offered to students who are weak in the four language skills:

We did many things for the students and for the college, errr, in English Club we help students who weak in English if they have any problem in grammar writing or, errr, speaking we give them classes if they need help or something and we make for them worksheets.

(Interview, 25th May, 2010)

f) Learner 6

He was a 26 year old F2 intermediate student. It was his second semester in the college. He was unemployed and a bachelor. Being the eldest student in the class, he was more mature, more serious, more disciplined, more motivated, and more eager to learn. His performance in the first semester was better. In the interview, he expressed his dissatisfaction with the curriculum and the methods of teaching in F2:

There is difference. Foundation one, the image was clear you study this module for this subject and this module for this subject but in foundation two, there is unclear picture
(Interview, 9th June, 2010)

g) Learner 7

He was a 19 year old F2 intermediate student in the second semester of his tertiary education. He is from Muscat. He comes from a high-income family and his father is a general manager of one of the largest group of companies in the Sultanate. He comes from a well-educated family. His father has a degree in MBA from the UK. He has two brothers. His older brother has a bachelor degree in accounting and is recently working in a bank. His younger brother is still in school. He speaks Arabic, English, and Buluci. He could also understand Urdu and was planning to start learning Spanish. He was quite good in speaking because he joined one of the English language institutes where he developed his oral proficiency. His two favourite hobbies are playing the guitar and photography. He also likes Flamingo. He studied in government schools, yet he was the most competent speaker among the 10 participants of the study.

h) Learner 8

He was a 19 year old F2 intermediate learner. He was in the second semester of the Foundation Programme at the time the study was conducted. He is a Syrian who lived most of his life in Oman and studied in Omani schools. He could speak more confidently and fluently than most of his peers although they learned English in a similar environment at Omani schools. He said that he developed his English through practice and communication with his Sudanese friends who were competent speakers of English.

i) Learner 9

She was 20 years old when the study was conducted. She was in her second semester at the time of the study. She was a hard-working student and worked in a team spirit. She was a quiet student, but she actively participated in class discussions. She was highly motivated and developed a positive attitude towards learning.

I have not taught Learner 9 before. However, I came to know her through her teachers who described her as a very shy student who tried to avoid interaction in the classroom although her level of proficiency in English was quite good. She also never came to our offices alone but rather accompanied by one or two of her friends.

Learner 9 comes from the interior, Al Sharqiya Region in the east of Oman. She was staying in the college hostel away from her family. Learner 9's attitude was quite similar to that of Learner 1 who also comes from the interior. To understand the way the two participants behaved, it is significant to know their social and cultural backgrounds. Both of them came from a very conservative society mostly dominated by men. Both of them were a way, for the first time, from their home towns and families which might have increased their feelings of alienation and discomfort. Both of them might not have appreciated being in a co-educational environment. However, learner 9 was more confident and made fewer errors than Learner 1. This could be because she used to practise speaking English with her father once she reached home unlike Learner 1 who rarely practised English outside the classroom.

j) Learner 10

He was a 19 year old F2 student in his second semester. He comes from an educated family. His father holds a master's degree in engineering. He has seven brothers and one sister. His older brother has a diploma in engineering and is recently pursuing his

bachelor. His sister also holds a diploma in medical data processing. His other younger brothers are still in school and the youngest has not joined school yet. However, Learner 10 seemed to be different than the rest of his family members as he showed no interest in learning and lacked the needed motivation. Even though the learner had been my student for two consecutive semesters, he did his best to avoid communicating in English.

4.2.2 Participants' affective variables

In section 4.2.1, the participants' disparities are thoroughly discussed. In this section, however, their affective variables will be highlighted since “the affective side of the learner is probably one of the most important influences on language learning success or failure” (Oxford, 1996:140). Table 4.4 below summarizes the participants' affective variables observed throughout the study as well as during the interviews I had with them (See Section 2.5).

Table 4.4

Participants' Affective Variables and their Effect on Oral Communication

Participant	Anxiety	Willingness to communicate	Self-esteem	Risk-taking	Introversion	Extroversion
Learner 1	high	not willing	low	no	yes	no
Learner 2	high	not willing	low	no	yes	no
Learner 3	low	willing	high	yes	no	yes
Learner 4	low	willing	high	yes	no	yes
Learner 5	low	willing	high	yes	no	yes
Learner 6	low	willing	High	yes	no	yes
Learner 7	low	willing	high	yes	no	yes
Learner 8	low	willing	high	yes	no	yes
Learner 9	seemed to be low	not willing	high	no	no	no
Learner 10	high	not willing	low	no	yes	no

As Table 4.4 shows, the oral proficiency of learners 1, 2, 9, and 10 were influenced by the same affective variables. They were apparently the most anxious learners, the most unwilling to communicate, and had the lowest self-esteem though to a varying degree. On the other hand, learners 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, and 8, seemed to be more risk-taking, willing to communicate, less anxious, and more extrovert learners. I could identify the participants' affective variables through close day-to-day observations, their teachers' feedback, and the interviews I had with each of them.

Learner 1

In spite of being an outstanding student who scored very high in the written assessments, Learner 1 seemed to have low self-esteem and high level of speaking anxiety. She was not a competent speaker and there were other students in her class who could speak more competently than her. She was perceived by her teacher as an introvert who was hesitant to speak and never took the initiative to participate in class discussions unless being asked to. However, she often gave correct answers whenever she was asked to participate. She had a tendency to avoid communicating in English inside and outside the classroom. She even once deliberately missed a meeting with the dean held every semester with student representatives from the Foundation Programme. In the feedback discussion, she said that she was afraid to speak and make errors in front of other students. Therefore, she preferred not to attend the meeting.

At the beginning of the semester, she showed negative attitude towards learning because she used to complain almost about everything. She seemed not to be satisfied with the classroom, the college facilities, some of the teachers and classmates, the assessments, and the methods of teaching. She showed concern about her performance and sought

perfection. She was always worried about getting comments on her oral performance from her peers.

Learner 1's attitude was expected and even justifiable in certain cases for several reasons. First, it was her first semester to stay away from her family which might have increased her anxiety. Second, it was the first time for her, as it is the case with most of the first year students coming from the interior, to be in a co-educational environment since schools are segregated by gender in Oman. This problem was common among other learners who were used to an educational system based on gender segregation which made them very concerned about appearing perfect in front of the opposite gender. Therefore, the learner who comes from a conservative background might have faced problems in adaptation. She must have had feelings of alienation which might have increased her anxiety and unwillingness to communicate. In fact, she talked to me several times about the hostel and her loneliness there. She was a very worried student who used to show a lot of concern before and after any oral assessment given to her. She used to come to my office and request me not to correct her errors in front of her classmates.

The third reason which might have increased her unwillingness to communicate is lack of English practice in everyday situations. In the interview, Learner 1 pointed out that the English taught at school was not sufficient enough for oral communication. She also said that she rarely used English in real-life situations. As a result, she lacked confidence to speak in front of others. She was also hesitant and afraid of making errors while speaking. She preferred using her native language in almost all the situations even inside the classroom. In other words, her limited exposure to English might have increased her speaking anxiety and lack of self-confidence. In spite of her speaking anxiety and unwillingness to communicate, she performed very well in the formal assessments given to her. This could be as a result of memorizing and studying hard.

Learner 2

Learner 2 had problems comprehending English but tried hard to focus during lectures. He was very eager to learn and never hesitated to ask for clarifications if he didn't understand a certain point. He was not a competent speaker but his case was different than that of Learner 1 as he appeared to be more confident and was more willing to accept being corrected by his teachers. In fact, he used to come and thank me for correcting his errors at the end of the class. He was very happy to be selected for the study. In the feedback discussion, he was eager to know his errors and to be corrected unlike the case with Learner 1. Although he was not a very competent speaker and found difficulties to find the proper structures and vocabulary, he tried his best to convey the message even by whispering some words in Arabic. In addition, he had a major problem in attendance since he missed a lot of classes and used to come late very frequently. His teachers complained about his irregular attendance although they were satisfied with his attitude.

Learner 2 was very anxious whenever he was asked to participate in classroom discussions. Once he had a presentation but politely asked to postpone giving the presentation claiming that he was not well-prepared. However, he never presented afterwards and got a zero for the presentation. He was very interested in learning grammatical rules and always asked me to repeat the rules he could not comprehend. He was a very introvert learner who was silent almost all the time. He used to prefer sitting at the back rows and he rarely came to class on time.

Learner 3

He was a very active learner who enthusiastically participated in class discussions. He was the best speaker in the class and the most fluent compared to his peers. This might have made him feel over confident. He took risk of speaking despite producing erroneous

utterances. In fact, he was more concerned about conveying the message than accuracy to the extent that he seemed to be a careless speaker. He was sometimes behaving annoyingly in the class as he wanted to dominantly take control of all the discussions, giving no chance for others to participate. He might have had the impression that he was better than the other students. He was never hesitant to give answers no matter who incorrect they were. In fact, he gave a good example of a second language learner who was always willing to communicate. However, he sometimes became naughty and interrupted the teaching and learning process in the classroom by giving comments in Arabic. Towards the end of the semester, he became quite careless although he had good background in English. In addition, his other teachers described him as being highly motivated and had a very positive attitude towards learning. He liked to speak in English and motivated his classmates as he had aroused the competitive spirit among them.

Learner 4

He was a motivated learner who showed willingness to communicate in English. He once invited me to observe him giving a presentation on car accidents. Although he made so many errors, he was confident enough to clearly express his ideas. After the presentation, I told him to meet me in my office. I asked whether he found it difficult to communicate in English. He said that he encountered so many difficulties in English and the reason for him to enrol in the Foundation programme was to improve his English. He was an extrovert learner who always tried to express himself freely. He had a very positive attitude towards learning.

Learner 5

She was one of the most outstanding students in the Foundation Programme. She was highly motivated and over-confident about her abilities as a non-native speaker. She outperformed her peers since she was very good in speaking. Her Public Speaking Skills teacher described her as one of the best speakers in the class who was fluent, though not accurate, which the examiner tends to condone due to the confidence with which she delivers the speech. Her other teachers found her to be smart, bright, and far ahead of the class. However, they complained about her showing attitude towards the end of the semester. Her Public Speaking teacher pointed out that she sometimes felt bored especially when the rest of the class was struggling with an activity which she could finish in no time. She also started missing classes at the end of the semester which ,according to her Public Speaking Skills teacher, was due to the fact that she didn't find her peers to be as competent as she was which generated a sense of over-confidence and carelessness in her. I did not teach her but knew her as she used to come from time to time to my office for a casual chat in English. Once, I had a chat with the participant and asked her about the reason for not attending classes. Her response was that she was not as enthusiastic as she was earlier since none of her peers could compete with her which made her feel quite bored.

Learner 6

Compared to his peers, he was far ahead in both the receptive and productive skills. He was confident and did not mind being corrected or receiving comments from his peers because he had the impression that his performance was better than his peers. However, he was not a very competent speaker as he committed a lot of errors. In the interview, which

was the longest, he frequently referred to code switching by which he shifted to Arabic to compensate the lack of vocabulary.

In terms of risk-taking, he never hesitated to communicate in English even if he committed so many errors in speaking. He always used to tell me that he never minded producing erroneous utterances while speaking as long as the message he intended to convey was clear enough. He was quite confident of his abilities believing that he was better than his other classmates. He was very concerned about learning correct English. However, he believed that he was not learning English very fast and always expressed his desire to become a very competent speaker of English.

Learner 7

He was a very sincere, motivated, outstanding, polite, friendly, and quite shy student. He liked the Public Speaking Skills class and always took part in oral discussions. He never missed any of his classes, especially the Public Speaking class. Although he was very enthusiastic and active in the first semester, he became less active and seemed to have lost enthusiasm in the second semester. His performance might have been affected by his classmates who were not up to his level. They were bored, lazy, naughty, unmotivated, and careless which might have made him feel disappointed. In contrast, students in his Foundation One class were highly motivated and there was a strong competition among them. This might explain why he seemed to be very active and more motivated to learn in the first semester. Learner 7 was an extrovert learner who actively and confidently led classroom discussions. He sometimes assisted me in giving support to weaker students.

Learner 8

Although I did not teach Learner 8, I had the chance to know him very well since he used to visit me in the office where we usually exchanged chat with each other in English. Learner 8 was one of the few students who always communicated with his teachers in English, even outside the college campus. I also came to know Learner 8 in the auditorium where I used to give a lecture to foundation students once a week. He used to sit in the front rows with his Egyptian friend. He always asked a lot of questions and participated actively. He was very friendly, cheerful, polite, and above all, very concerned about learning English. He was very confident and his self-esteem was high especially when speaking in English.

Learner 9

She was not an active learner in the classroom although she was proficient and was able to communicate. If she had the willingness to communicate in English, she would have performed very well since she did not make many errors compared to the other participants. The main problem with her was her hesitation to take part in oral communication. Her teachers described her as a very hesitant speaker. In fact, I could not understand the reasons for her hesitation and unwillingness to communicate. As for the interview, she was quite happy at being selected although she was always wondering why she has been selected. However, compared to Learner 10 and Learner 1, she was much more confident and more proficient.

Learner 10

He was a highly distracted and irregular student who missed a lot of classes especially in the second semester. The excuses he used to give to his teachers were not

justifiable in most of the cases. It was difficult to assess his performance since he missed a lot of exams. As far as I recall, he used to sit at the back. He rarely got involved in useful classroom discussions. In many cases, he used to distract his teachers and classmates because he used to annoyingly pass jokes in Arabic and speak too loudly. Similarly, his other teachers shared the same complaints about his attitude in and outside the classroom. He seemed to be unwilling to communicate in English and if he had to, he used to bring one of his colleagues or even one of the Arabic speaking teachers to translate to him whenever he had to communicate with a non-Arabic speaking teacher. He tended to avoid communicating in English as much as possible. His low attendance explains the low marks he got in the two semesters. He was very careless about attendance and setting for exams which he missed. Once, he brought me along with him to translate to one of his teachers his request to re-take one of the quizzes. He then got scolded by his teacher who refused to give him the make-up test since he had missed the date given to him for re-taking the exam.

Interestingly, Learners 7 and 10 were classmates. However, they never seemed to get along with each other. There were several cases when Learner 7 came to my office complaining about the attitude of Learner 10. I remember that learner 7 once requested me to speak to the Registration Department to allow him to shift to another session as he was very disturbed of the attitude of Learner 10 in the class.

4.2.3 Reflections on Participants' Behaviour during Interviews

This section will reflect and comment on the attitudes and interpersonal skills of the participants as observed during the interviews.

Interview with Learner 1

Learner 1 seemed to be very anxious and worried before, during, and after the interview although I explained to her the purpose of the interview. Before the interview, she continuously asked about the nature of the interview and expressed her fear of making errors. During the interview, she spluttered a lot, and tended to give short answers. Towards the end of the interview, the participant expressed her dissatisfaction with the interview when she said “*wasn’t*” in response to my comment that “*it was interesting talking to you actually*”.

After the interview, she asked me how well she did and asked whether she committed many errors. During the feedback discussion, the participant explicitly mentioned that she was afraid of committing errors in the interview specifically because that it was voice-recorded. Several reasons could have increased her feelings of anxiety and discomfort with the interview. First, the context of the interview was different than that of the classroom since she was alone unlike the case when she used to find her peers in the classroom. Psychologically speaking, she could have felt more comfortable and free to communicate in the classroom environment as she might have felt that her peers would give her support and encourage her. Accordingly, being alone in the interview could have increased her feelings of anxiety and lack of self-confidence. Second, the idea of having the interview voice-recorded could have increased her tension and speaking anxiety as it might have given her the impression that she was being assessed. This explains why she was very concerned about her performance. Therefore, I had to repeatedly calm her down by explaining that the interview had nothing to do with her academic assessments. In fact, in the feedback discussion, she said that she was worried during the interview as she was afraid of me. The extracts below are taken from the feedback discussion with her sometime

after the interview. Learner 1 said that she was very worried. She was not confident and felt that she did not do very well in the interview.

Researcher: Do you still remember the interview I had with you?

Learner 1: Of course, I can never forget it.

Researcher: Why can't you forget it?

Learner 1: because it reminds me of you. I was afraid.

Researcher: You seemed very worried during the interview, right?

Learner 1: Yes, correct

Researcher: You know, it was very obvious, actually. But why were you afraid?

Learner 1: The interview wasn't fun with me.

Researcher: Why are you saying this? Why do you feel this way about the interview?

Learner 1: I know

Researcher: On the contrary, you don't know how much I benefited from this interview.

Learner 1: Don't flatter me, please.

Researcher: Anyway, I listened to the interview and I analyzed it too.

Learner 1: I was the worst.

As for the picture description, she selected picture 1 and gave a physical description of the man standing in front of the restaurant. Then she was asked to compare pictures 2 and 3. Her replies indicated that she preferred giving short answers instead of using the comparative forms to compare both pictures.

Interview with Learner 2

Apparently, Learner 2 showed more enthusiasm towards the interview and he seemed to be more willing to participate. However, he whispered some words in Arabic when he could not find the proper vocabulary in English.

Researcher: ...when did you start learning English actually?

Learner 2: errr when I errr[pause] started [whispered to me in Arabic the word 'al saf al awal' which means first grade]

Researcher: errr, first grade you mean!

Learner 2: yes, yes

Learner 2: I like Oman to be errr more [pause] more errr future errrr [whispered the Arabic word 'tatawo' which means 'development']

Researcher: Sorry? ah, developed you mean

Learner 2: yes, developed

Researcher: Okay, it's Bedouin in English

Errr, can you tell me about Bedouin life? How do they live in the desert?

Learner 2: They live in [long pause, then he whispered the Arabic word “ Khiama”]

Researcher: sorry? tents, they live in tents

Learner 2: Yes, they live in tents and errr they travel many ...many place and errr they have a camels and goats...

In the above extracts, the learner resorted to Arabic when he found difficulties in finding the appropriate words in English. He, therefore, borrowed from Arabic to solve his communicative problems. In other words, in spite of not being fluent, he tried his best not to give up communication.

In the interview, he was able to give full answers. For instance, he talked about his best friend at school who died in a car accident and expressed his feelings about the incident. However, he could not use the proper tense and used the simple present instead of the simple past. He selected pictures 5, 2, and 3.

Interview with Learner 3

Learner 3 did not seem to be afraid or anxious during the interview. On the contrary, he was rather satisfied and seemed to be confident. He selected Picture 4, while pictures 2, 3, and 6 were chosen for him. He gave a physical description of picture 4 by which he used some alternative words when he did not know the correct vocabulary such as using the word “fried” meaning “barbeque”. As for pictures 2 and 3, he could give a more comprehensive comparison as he was able to express his opinion more clearly than Learners 1 and 2. For instance, he said that the Bedouin was not having fun because he seemed to be tired in the picture unlike the tourist who was ‘wearing sun glasses’ and ‘driving very fast’. He also successfully described Picture 6 and assumed that the three women were tourists sitting in a restaurant with an Omani tour guide and having sea food in a restaurant.

Interview with Learner 4

Learner 4 seemed very enthusiastic about the interview. He always asked about the date for his interview and wanted to have more interviews. He failed to give a proper comparison although he compared the two pictures more competently than Learner 2 and Learner 1. Learner 4 selected Picture 2, but pictures 3 and 4 were chosen for him. He tried hard to convey the message and describe the pictures properly. However, he did not have sufficient vocabulary. His utterances lacked cohesion and coherence. He resorted to other communication strategies in an attempt to solve his linguistic deficiencies such as restructuring and self-correction and code-switching.

Interview with Learner 5

Learner 5 also appreciated the idea of being interviewed. She thought of it as a good learning experience. Learner 5 was apparently very confident of her speaking abilities. She described 4 pictures: picture 6 of her own choice and pictures 2, 3, and 4 were chosen for her.

Although she seemed very confident and competent, to some degree, she reluctantly described Picture 3 of the Bedouin walking with his camel in the desert. When I asked her to describe the picture, she seemed very hesitant and said she preferred not to give a description. She did not give complete sentences when making a comparison. She said: “a camel, a man” when comparing the two pictures unlike the other pictures by which she was more confident and talked more.

Interview with Learner 6

The interview with Learner 6 was the longest as it lasted 26 minutes. However, Learner 6 excessively resorted to Arabic during the interview. He talked about Picture 5 of

the three men with the fish. He also made up a story imagining the three men to be his friends who challenged each other to catch the largest fish. He then was asked to talk about picture 6 of the three expatriate women with an Omani in the restaurant. He gave an interesting explanation reflecting his own point of view when he described the people in the restaurant as hypocrites who were lying to each other since they did not eat any of the food and they were well-dressed. As for Picture 2 of the tourist riding the motorbike, he described him as being selfish since he was playing alone. However, he gave a justification for the Bedouin who was also walking alone in the desert that he might have been walking to his destination and described him as being “saboor” (patient). The main problem with Learner 6’s interview was that he used many Arabic words as a response to lack of sufficient vocabulary. He also resorted to some other communication strategies such as appeal for help, word-coinage, approximation, restructuring or self-correction, and literal translation.

Interview with Learner 7

Learner 7 was seemed to be very comfortable and confident in the interview. He was well-organized and gave clear answers. He described Picture 6 of the Omani man setting with three expatriate women in a restaurant. In his description, he said that the women were from England, while the Omani was their boss who invited them for lunch.

Learner 7: This pictures errr there are people in the restaurant and they actually I think having lunch and there are – there is a man wearing Omani dress and other peoples maybe English – England from England and I think this Omani guy he’s their boss and he made this party for them to have lunch together and that’s all and they are in a good restaurant I think

The second picture was chosen for him. He described Picture 4 of the three men with the fish and said that they were happy because they were able to catch big fish.

Learner 7: I can say there are three guys they are look very happy because they caught very big fish and they- and they are happy

Researcher: aha why do you think they are happy?

Learner 7: because the smile on their face

Researcher: and what happened to the fish?

Learner 7: [laughed and gave no response]

Researcher: Okay what do you think those three men did to the fish?

Learner 7: they caught the fish and they took it maybe to sell this fish

Researcher: aha aha okay

I also asked Learner 7 to describe Picture 7 of two Omani young men having lunch in a local restaurant. He started talking about the Omani traditional food and how people eat rice using their hands and sit on the floor. When comparing the pictures of the Bedouin and the tourist, he looked at them from a different point of view. To him, the two pictures reflect modernization represented by the tourist and old life represented by the Bedouin.

Learner 7: This is two pictures one of them shows the past there's a man and he's walking on the desert and his camel is with him and here the guy and he's driving a motorcycle and it's modern things now and the future they errrr guys use this this machines or motorcycles not like the past because it was difficult now everything is ...[pause]

Interview with Learner 8

Learner 8 appeared to be confident in the interview and expressed his opinion freely. He was not anxious and did not show any fear of making errors during the interview. He described Picture 4 of the three fishermen with the fish. He said that he chose that picture because he loves fish. In his opinion, the three men were friends who went to a “place for tourism” meaning they were tourists. As for the pictures of the tourist and Bedouin, he described them in terms of different means of transportation. That is, the camel represents the old means of transportation, while the motorbike represents the modern means of transportation.

Interview with Learner 9

The interview with Learner 9 was conducted in the computer lab. Apparently, she was a bit nervous and unwilling to give long explanations though she was a more fluent compared to the other participants. She chose the picture of the Omani man sitting with three expatriate women. In her description, she said that they were having a business meeting in the restaurant. She was then asked to talk about the picture of two Omani young men having a meal in a local restaurant. When describing the picture, she did not know the correct word for “popular” so she used another word “publish” meaning that the two men were having rice which is the most popular food in Oman.

Interview with Learner 10

The interview was also conducted in the computer lab. Learner 10 seemed to be stressed and worried before the interview. He missed three previous appointments for the interview. It was difficult to set a date for him since we were both busy. He requested me to have the interview with Learner 9 first. During the interview with Learner 9, he stayed in the lab and was listening to our conversation. I think he wanted to know the questions and gain time to prepare for the interview. When it was his turn, he suddenly changed his mind and no longer wanted to be interviewed and I had to convince him to participate in the interview. He was very stressed at the beginning of the interview and he spoke in an unusually low voice. However, as the interview progressed, he gradually started gaining some confidence and spoke in a louder voice. He gave very brief replies without elaborating on his answers. He chose the picture of the Omani with the three expatriate women in a restaurant. However, his description lacked coherence and cohesion in addition to the lack of organization which made his ideas unclear. The second picture he described

was that of the three men with fish. He did not know the word “caught” so he used gestures to explain the meaning.

In fact, Learner 9 and Learner 10 were the last participants to be interviewed. They were interviewed immediately after they had their final mathematics exam. Since all rooms were occupied as the exams were going on at that time, the two interviews were conducted in the computer lab rather than the MBA room. I made sure that the lab was suitable and provided a similar interviewing environment as in the MBA room. The lab was almost the same size, air-conditioned and very quiet. Learner 9 was first interviewed then Learner 10.

The participants, therefore, were diverse and showed different attitudes towards learning English. In this section, their social and educational backgrounds were highlighted as well as their attitudes, exposure to English, and their oral performance in the interview. The next sections answer the two research questions.

4.3 Research Question One

- **How does syntactic knowledge or the lack of it affect Arab EFL learners’ choice in producing or avoiding particular syntactic structures?**

The answer to this research question is discussed in two aspects. The first aspect reveals the causes of the participants’ lack of syntactic knowledge. The second aspect indicates how lack of syntactic knowledge affects the participants’ choice to produce or avoid certain syntactic structures. To answer this research question, I collected data from my observation notes, interviews, and feedback discussions. In addition, EA was used as it best explains the research question (Refer to Section 1.8). In this section, samples of participants’ errors were collected, identified, described, and explained. However, the structures which were not produced by the participants could not be explained by EA as it only focuses on the errors produced. This supports, to some extent, Schachter’s (1974)

argument that error analysis fails to explain avoidance behaviour in second language learners' production.

The major syntactic errors committed by participants during the interviews according to their frequency were in tenses, determiners, subject-verb agreement, prepositions, copula and auxiliary, concord, pronouns, missing MP and complementizers, and word order respectively.

Table 4.5
Types of Errors and Their Frequency

type of error	frequency
noun-phrase errors	
1.errors in determiners	68
2.errors in prepositions	39
3.errors in relative clauses	15
4.word-order errors	2
5.missing NPs and complementizers	7
6. errors in concord	20
7.wrong use of pronouns	15
Total	166
verb-phrase errors	
8.copula and auxiliary errors	38
9.errors in tenses	68
10.subject-verb agreement	58
Total	164

Table 4.5 shows the syntactic errors of the participants and their frequency. Errors are classified into two major types: noun-phrases with a total of 166 errors and verb-phrases with a total of 183 errors. The most frequent errors were in tenses. A more detailed description of errors is provided in Appendix D.

4.3.1 Causes of the Participants' Lack of Syntactic Knowledge

Throughout the whole year I spent observing my participants; I have noticed that they had serious problems in syntax. The interviews I had with them and the feedback discussions that followed suggest that they lacked syntactic knowledge. They made syntactic errors which were consistent despite their proficiency level.

Figure 4.1. Potential Causes of the Participants' Lack of Syntactic Knowledge

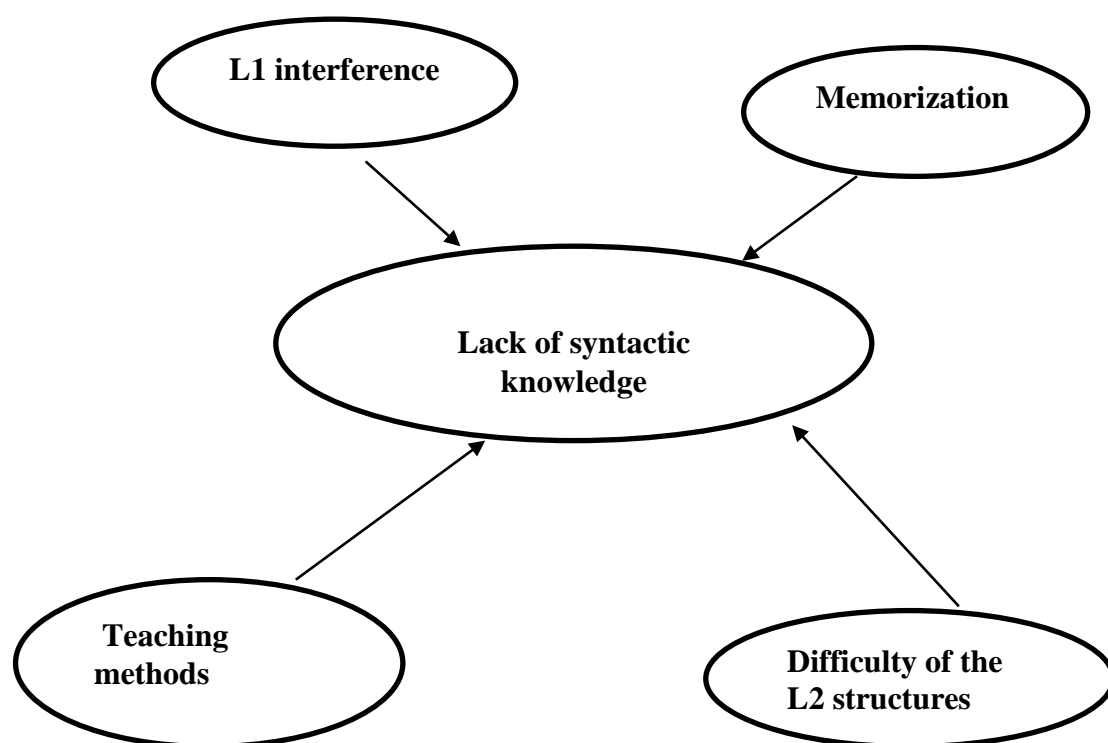


Figure 4.1. Potential causes of the participants' lack of syntactic knowledge.

Figure 4.1 summarizes the participants' perspectives on the causes of their syntactic weaknesses: the participants' learning habits based on memorization, grammar, teaching methods, difficulty of the target syntactic structures, and L1 interference.

4.3.1.1 Participants' Study Habits

All participants said that they heavily depended on memorization to learn grammar for examination purposes. In other words, they memorize the rules to pass their exams only. I have noticed this with the participants who showed fair knowledge about the syntactic structures they had learned in the classroom through participation before exams were conducted. However, after exams were over, learners seemed to care less about the syntactic structures they had learned. It seems that participants joined the college bearing in mind the teaching and learning methods practiced at schools which were based mainly on memorization.

According to Al-Seyabi (1995), and Al-Issa (2002), English in Oman is seen as a subject to memorize; students do not see its importance. The findings also support (Al-Toubi, 1998; Al-Hammami, 1999, Al-Balushi, 1999; Al-Issa, 2002) who argue that teaching through memorization is one of the general weaknesses in the Omani educational system. This is because students mainly depend on memorization and neglect practice in everyday life situations. I have also noticed that the main concern for Omani students in general was the exams. That is, the major motivator for students to study was for the exam. As pointed out by Al-Toubi (1998), one of the reasons behind the poor English proficiency level of Omani students is the exam-based system which drives motivation.

Moreover, the feedback discussions with the participants support the previous arguments. The following excerpts are taken from the participants' online feedback discussions regarding their learning of grammar. All the participants said that they learned grammar through memorization. The excerpts were translated into English since the discussion was in Arabic.

Learner 1: English was not an important subject at school. We used to memorize it only.

(Feedback discussion, Facebook on 12th November, 2010)

Learner 2: We used to memorize the book at school. This is how we used to learn English. I still depend on memorization. It helps me a lot.

(Feedback discussion, Hotmail Messenger, 20th November, 2010)

Researcher: Which tense do you prefer to use, the simple present or present perfect?

Learner 3: Frankly, I forgot them.

Researcher: Why did you forget them?

Learner 3: I do not use them in my daily life.

(Feedback discussion, Hotmail Messenger, 24th April, 2011)

Researcher: Which syntactic structure do you use most frequently?

Learner 4: You know something? I forgot all of them.

Researcher: Why?

Learner 4: I don't know, but when I finished Foundation [Foundation Programme] I forgot them.

Researcher: Okay, but why?

Learner 4: Sir because in Foundation, we used to study for the exam. Now I am in semester and we do not need to use them anymore.

(Hotmail Messenger feedback discussion, 20th April, 2011)

Researcher: Do you find the English syntactic structures difficult to learn?

Learner 5: The problem in English syntactic structures that they are too many and it is difficult to memorize all of them

(Feedback discussion, Facebook, 11th March, 2011)

Learner 6: I study to get high marks in the exam. The problem is that I find difficulties trying to memorize the rules which are similar and confusing.

(Feedback discussion, Hotmail Messenger, 13th April, 2011)

Learner 7: We concentrate a lot on grammar, but I think the best way to learn it is through practice.

Researcher: So do you practice it?

Learner7: To tell you the truth, when I speak English I do not think a lot about grammar. We used to study grammar in school just for getting good marks because the curriculum was based on grammar.

Researcher: Was that good?

Learner 7: No, we used to memorize the grammar a lot.

(Feedback discussion, Hotmail Messenger, 10th May, 2011)

Researcher: What is the best way to learn grammar?

Learner8: The best way is through memorization and practice, maybe practice with native speakers.

(Facebook, Hotmail Messenger, 20th November, 2010).

Learner 9: In the exams, I focus on grammar and try hard to learn it. But, after the exam is over I forget everything. This is my problem
(Feedback discussion, Hotmail Messenger, 29th April, 2011)

Learner 10: I can improve my English language by focusing on grammar, practicing the language with native speakers, and practicing reading and writing daily.

Researcher: What is the difficulty you face in grammar?

Learner 10: It is very difficult for me to remember all the rules in addition to not practicing what I learn in real-life situations.

Researcher: Why do you need to remember the rules?

Learner 10: Is there another way? This is how we learned English.
(Feedback discussion, Hotmail Messenger, 23rd March, 2011)

Two main points can be inferred from the selected excerpts. First, all participants gave more attention to learning grammar. Second, they over-depended on memorization as the method for learning the syntactic structures. It is worth pointing out that the feedback discussions were conducted one semester after participants had finished their foundation studies. Consequently, some of them might have forgotten the structures taught to them in the Foundation Year Programme. For instance, Learner 1 and Learner 2 talked about English being a subject based on memorization at school which they did not consider important. Learner 3 and Learner 4 said that they forgot the structures they learned in the Foundation Programme. Learner 3 mentioned that he forgot the structures due to lack of practice in everydaylife situations. Learner 4, on the other hand, said that he forgot all the tenses once he joined the Diploma Programme as they were no longer required to use them in classes. In addition, Learner 4 viewed learning English by memorization as an adequate method they used to have during school time.

Researcher: Do you mean that you depended on memorization in learning English?

Learner 4: Of course, is there another way of learning correct English? This is how we used to learn English at school.

(Feedback discussion, 20th April, 2011)

Learner 5 and Learner 6 said that they found difficulties memorizing all the structures. Similarly, Learner 8 and Learner 9 talked about two elements of learning English: grammar and practice.

From the excerpts discussed, all participants said that memorization was the method of learning English at school. All of them continued to depend on memorization when they joined the Foundation Programme. In addition, the educational system at the research site was, to some extent, not very different from that at Omani schools. Curriculum was still designed in a way that encourages students to memorize mainly for examination purposes. Even in student-centered modules such as Public Speaking Skills, students used to memorize their topics at home then recite them the following day in class. Tests were also designed such that students can pass if they memorize. In other words, the educational environment at the research site still encourages students to memorize rather than practise using language. This might explain why participants have forgotten the structures taught to them once they joined semester classes.

4.3.1.2 English Curriculum and Methods of Teaching

Participants of the study expressed their dissatisfaction with how English was taught at schools which they described as being poor and not up to the level. The excerpts below are taken from the participants' interviews and feedback discussions regarding the teaching of English at school.

Researcher: How was your English at that time [at school]?

Learner1: It's bad.

Researcher: Can you tell me what did you learn back there in school?

Learner1: The letter A, B, C. The name of things like ...such as fruit, animals, errr, family: mother, father like this (Interview, 14th June, 2010).

Researcher: Can you explain to me the difficulties you used to face when you were learning English at school?

Learner 1: The first problem we started learning English in grade 4 and we learned the numbers and the alphabets instead of being taught vocabulary. I think it would be better to teach such things [vocabulary] at early stages.

Researcher: Okay, how was the English class?

Learner 1: Very ordinary

Researcher: Do you think that learning English at school was enough?

Learner 1: Of course not

Researcher: Why?

Learner1: Because we did not learn all the skills such as speaking

Researcher: What was the focus on?

Learner1: Concentration was on very specific things in grammar.
(Feedback discussion, 12th November, 2010)

Learner 2: We had less than the basic education in English. Even some students had to be taught the alphabets although they were in the third secondary!

Researcher: Really? Where is the problem then?

Learner 2: Not all students in government schools are interested in learning. There were some careless students who used to take remedial classes.

Researcher: Were they useful?

Learner 2: They weren't useful.

We studied the present tense and other tenses
(Feedback discussion, November 20th, 2010)

Researcher: While you were at school, how did you find learning English? Was it useful? Did you have any problems?

Learner 3: Actually, I have a private situation [special case] I was – when I was learning English, my father at the holidays take me to the his office and his friend was from India they just speak English so I just go and make a chat with them...
(Interview, 7th June, 2010)

Learner 4: I learned English by practicing it outside school
(Feedback discussion, 20th April, 2011)

Learner 4: I when I came here I don't know more [much] things to English. I want to learn something new to English
(Interview, 14th June, 2010).

Researcher: What about in school like you didn't study grammar during school time?

Learner 5: We study grammar but not that much. We did not study everything in grammar just headlines.
(Interview, 26th May, 2010)

Researcher: How was English taught at school?

Learner 6: It was very bad. Passing the subject was in the bag and that was the biggest problem.
(Feedback discussion, 13th April, 2011)

Researcher: How was English taught at school?

Learner 7: In fact, there are several problems and obstacles which faced school students when learning English. I believe that the English curriculum is quite good and meets the students' levels at that stage. However, it has some shortcomings like lack of the speaking component and not giving students enough opportunities for oral discussions and expressing their ideas freely in the classroom. The English curriculum at schools focuses mainly on grammar and vocabulary, but neglects giving students' communication and speaking skills.

(Feedback discussion, 10th May, 2011)

Learner 8: I was in the school but I didn't learn English from the school actually. The school was give us – they teach us English in school but we don't love it that too much because it was difficult some grammars and a lot – you know- a lot of we [us] don't love it and school come - you know – every day.

(Interview, 2nd June, 2011).

Researcher: How was English taught at school?

Learner 9: English was not given significant importance as it is the case in our college. Short time was allotted for teaching English and we could not thoroughly understand the material taught to us.

(Feedback discussion, 29th April, 2011)

Researcher: How was English taught at school?

Learner 10: It was very weak and mainly based on grammar teaching rather than speaking (Feedback discussion, March 23rd 2011)

All the participants said that English teaching at school was poor and the curriculum was grammar-based giving little attention to oral communication skills. Such complaints are pointed out by Al- Toubi (1998) who criticized the Omani ELT curriculum for its failure to prepare Omani students for oral communication. In addition, Nunan et al. (1987) hold that the reason for little chances for genuine communication and interaction among Omani students is that they receive only 500-600 hours of English over the nine years of their English education at school.

The participants' perspectives on teaching English at schools seem to go in line with some researchers who criticize the Omani educational system (Babrazai, 2001; Al-Issa, 2002; Al Jadidi, 2009; Al Toubi, 1998). Babrazai (2001), for instance, argues that Omani students who join English medium universities and colleges have a very limited

knowledge of functional English since they forget what they have memorized at school. Babrakzai's argument seems to be correct. I have noticed that students who join the Foundation Programme have a very basic knowledge in English. The problem is more crucial in speaking. A lot of students cannot successfully engage in basic conversation such as introducing themselves and talking about their families. Even in grammar, students have shown serious weakness although the English curriculum is heavily based on grammar teaching.

The teaching of English at the research site is, to some degree, different than schools. Having in mind the students' weaknesses in oral communication, more attention was given to speaking when the new curriculum was designed in 2007. As for the teaching of grammar, although it is not taught separately, much of the time allotted for teaching is still based on grammar. Grammar is mainly taught in the first semester (Foundation 1). However, the textbooks are still heavily dependent on memorization for examination purposes.

The structures taught are a repetition of what students are supposed to have learned at school. The structures taught are: parts of speech, tenses, comparative and superlative adjectives, types of sentences, and the if-clauses. Although students were supposed to join the college with at least fair knowledge of these structures, we had to start from scratch since a large number of students seemed to have almost zero background knowledge in English. These structures were taught and repeated throughout the semester in all the modules. There was also a two-hour weekly lecture in the auditorium mainly grammar-based though communicative interaction took place as well.

As a result of intensive integrated grammar teaching, students gained some knowledge of the syntactic structures although not up to the expected level. In fact, there is a good reason to believe that the main motivator for learners to study was to pass the

exams. Consequently, students still had serious problems in syntax, phonology, spelling, and morphology. Exams were designed in a way similar to school examination by which a lot of memorization is acquired especially the grammar component. Even after students complete the Foundation Year Programme, their syntactic errors keep recurring. Serious problems in sentence structure and lack of syntactic knowledge still appear in their oral production.

4.3.1.3 L1 Interference

When learners try speaking or writing in the target language, second language learners might rely on their L1 structures. If L1 and L2 structures are significantly different, learners might produce a large number of errors when producing L2 structures (Dechert, 1983 and Ellis, 1997; cited in Bhela, 1999). L1 interference is referred to by Ellis (1997, p.51) as “transfer” which is “the influence that the learner’s L1 exerts over the acquisition of an L2”. L1 interference was found in the participants’ oral production though at varying degrees. A lot of syntactic errors made by the participants might be traced to L1 interference. L1 interference manifested itself either by making syntactic errors or a strategy by which the participants directly translated from Arabic. The participants might have been influenced by the Arabic syntactic structures in their oral production. This explains the so many errors made by them.

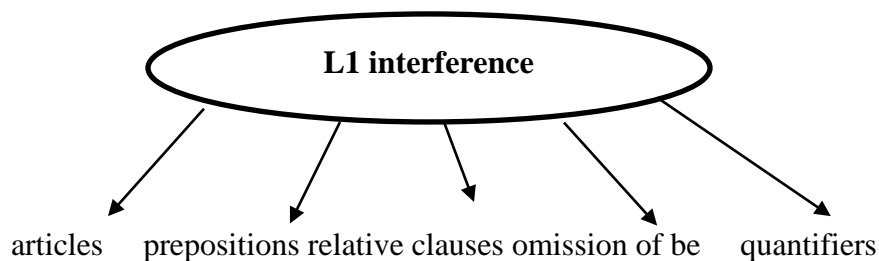


Figure 4.2 Syntactic errors caused by L1 interference.

omission of copula be
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Learner 1: What # the meaning in Arabic? 2. Learner 2: Some of them #from Oman. 3. Learner 4: My favourite place # Oman. 4. Learner 2: He # driving a motorbike. 5. Learner 2: When I see people in the city they# wearing t-shirt and style but the Bedouin #wearing Dishdasha and Maser.
errors in articles
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 6.Learner 4: His favorite, errr, his favorite, errr, meal is the rice. 7.Learner 3: I have my garden there and he’s work there all things and I have the water 8.Learner 6: If I have the money, no problem. 9.Learner 1: I want to get person good [a good mark] in the English. 10. Learner 1: He is in the restaurant. 11. Learner 9: They stay in the restaurant. 12. Learner 8: The life in the hostel actually boring. 13. Learner 2: I see #man in this picture - man with camels. 14. Learner 6: You are # man you must be stronger. 15. Learner 3: It is sunny# day.
relative pronouns
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 16. Learner 2: There is something very sad in my school. 17. Learner 3: They know some friends here-work here.
prepositions
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 18. Learner 9: I search about a lot of colleges. 19. Learner6: I don’t know but when you look in the picture you think like that.

Figure 4.2 summarises the effect of L1 on the participants who made errors in quantifiers, articles, copula be, prepositions, and relative pronouns. These structures are

different in both languages. This could explain the large number of errors made by the participants when producing these structures. Since the participants did not seem to be aware that their errors could be traced to L1 interference, some examples are provided below for illustration purposes. A detailed presentation of the participants' syntactic errors is provided in Appendix D.

All the errors above might be explained in terms of L1 interference. The omission of the 'copula be' is a result of L1 interference. The copula be does not exist in the Arabic structure. As indefiniteness in Arabic is marked by the absence of the definite article 'al', the indefinite articles were absent in the sentences above. This could be the only possible explanation for the omission of the copula in extracts (1-5).

The addition of articles is an error that could be attributed to L1 interference since no such restriction exists in Arabic (Oeidat, 1983; Abu-Ghararah, 1989). According to Abu Ghararah (ibid), the definite article is widely used in Arabic and it can be used before any noun. It is very dominant in Arabic. Therefore, Arab EFL learners might excessively use the definite article in English which is a result of Arabic interference.

In extracts (6-8), the learners added the definite article to the uncountable nouns 'rice' 'water', and 'money'. In English, uncountable nouns take a zero article while Arabic adds the definite article 'al' to any noun 'al -aruz' (the rice) 'al- ma'a' (the water) , and ' al-fuloos' (the money).

In (9), the learner added the definite article to a proper noun which is not correct in English. In contrast, names of languages in Arabic are identifiable and take the definite article 'al' (al-inglizya = the English).

In extracts (10) and (11), the learners were describing the pictures of people having food in a restaurant. The definite article was added to 'restaurant' which is not definite because they were not talking about a particular restaurant identifiable for both the listener

and the speaker. In contrast, the same sentences in Arabic are grammatical because the definite article can be added 'al-mata'am' (the restaurant). In (12), the learner added 'the' to an abstract noun. In English, abstract nouns take zero articles. In contrast, Arabic adds 'al' to any noun.

On the other hand, the absence of the indefinite article in Arabic might lead Arab learners of English to omit the indefinite articles 'a' and 'an' (Obeidat, 1983, Abu Gharah, 1989, and Qaid, 2011). In extracts (13-15) above, the indefinite article was omitted (# stands for the omitted indefinite article). The omission errors above could be attributed to L1 interference because Arabic has no indefinite articles equivalent to 'a' and 'an' in English. As indefiniteness in Arabic is marked by the absence of the definite article 'al', the indefinite articles were absent in the extracts above.

In addition, the omission of the relative clause is also believed to be a case of L1 interference because Arabic obligatorily deletes relative clauses in indefinite noun phrases. The Arabic translation for extracts 17 and 18 are provided below:

ya'rif-una ba'ada al asdiqa'i ya'maluna huna.
(Literally: Know-they some friends work here)

sha'un hazeenun hadatha fi madrasati
(Literally: Something sad happened in school-my)

In extracts 19 and 20, the substitution of the pronouns 'for' and 'at' with 'about' and 'in' respectively could be a clear case of L1 interference. The participants directly translated from Arabic the two sentences.

The errors above, therefore, present a good example on how L1 interference might be one of the causes for syntactic errors. It is worth mentioning that the participants made numerous errors which could be traced to L1 interference. However, the purpose of the

study is not to present a contrastive analysis between English and Arabic. The aim is to present evidence on the influence of Arabic on the participants' oral production.

4.3.1.4 Difficulty of the L2 Structures

Findings of this study suggest that lack of syntactic knowledge could also be a result of difficulty of L2 structures. Some of the errors made by the participants might not be traced to L1 interference but rather to the English language itself. I noticed that learners continue to make errors in the same structures although they practised using them many times throughout the semester. In the oral interview and online feedback discussions, participants believed that they find the English tenses to be the most difficult. The difficulty of the English tenses might be explained in terms of the students' learning habits such as memorization mentioned earlier, L1-interference, and the many irregularities in these structures. In the following excerpts taken from the interviews and feedback discussions, participants shared their perspectives on the issue of L2 structural difficulty.

Researcher: What is the most difficult syntactic structure for you?

Learner 1: I don't find difficulties but sometimes I find difficulties with the past continuous because it is confusing
(Feedback discussion, 10th October, 2010)

Researcher: What is the most difficult tense for you? Is it the simple present, simple past, present perfect or what?

Learner 2: It is the present perfect.

Researcher: Why?

Learner 2: because I confuse the present perfect with other tenses.

Researcher: What other tense do you confuse it with?

Learner 2: with the simple present
(Feedback, 20th November, 2010)

Researcher: What tense do you find the most difficult?

Learner 3: Frankly, I forgot them.
(Feedback, 24 April, 2011)

Researcher: What is the most difficult structure you find?

Lerner 4: Well, the past perfect

Researcher: But, we did not teach this tense.

Learner: I don't know mister.
(Feedback, 20th April, 2011)

Researcher: What is the most difficult syntactic structure?

Learner 5: the present perfect

Researcher: Why?

Learner 5: I don't know why.
(Feedback, 11th March 2011)

Researcher: What is the most difficult structure for you?

Learner 6: I find the past perfect the most difficult.

Researcher: But, it was not taught in the Foundation Programme.

Learner6: It is the past of the past isn't it? We studied it at school.

Researcher: Why is it difficult?

Learner 6: How to know the past of the past
(Feedback, 13th April, 2011)

Researcher: What is the most difficult structure for you?

Learner 7: the past perfect

Researcher: Why?

Learner 7: just like this
(Feedback, 10th May, 2011)

Researcher: What is the most difficult syntactic structure?

Learner 8: mostly the simple past

Researcher: Why?

Learner 8: I have to add 'ed' in the last of the word and I have to be careful when I am talking.
(Feedback, 20th November, 2010)

Researcher: What are the most difficult syntactic structures for you?

Learner 9: all of them

Researcher: Why?

Learner 9: They are all confusing.
(Feedback, 29th April)

Researcher: What tense do you find the most difficult?

Learner 10: the present progressive

Researcher: Why?

Learner 10: It is difficult for me.
(Feedback, 23rd march, 2011)

The participants indicated having difficulties mainly with the English tenses though they were not quite familiar with the potential causes. According to learners 1, 2, and 9, confusion is the main cause of difficulty. However, other participants could not specify the

reasons for their difficulties as with learners 10, 7, 5, and 4. Learner 3, on the other hand, could not remember the structures as he forgot all of them. Learners 6 and 8 gave a specific reason for their confusion. For learner 8, it was the use of the simple past form by adding the suffix (-ed). For learner 6, the most difficult tense was the past perfect since he could not determine when to use it exactly.

Teachers always complained about their students' weak performance in grammar. Many of them believed that L1 interference was one of the major factors for their low performance in grammar. It is significant to share some of their views concerning this issue. I have quoted the former Acting Head of the Languages Centre at the research site:

It has been known that from early stages English teachers are so generous when it comes to marks. Add to that some of those teachers are not well qualified to teach English as a second language. Most of the teachers are fresh graduates from the universities or private colleges and lack the experience needed to be English teachers. Those teachers still follow the old method of teaching (just memorize the text and it might be in the exam). Another problem added to the learning difficulties is that students are not motivated to the point that they are not encouraged or checked by their guardians but they are expected to pass and get a degree (A, Guma, Personal Communication, July 2nd, 2011).

He points out that the most common errors that his students make is adding the copula be to the sentences. He also believes that four factors are responsible for the students' lack of syntactic mastery: the school educational system and methods of teaching, the students' lack of motivation and their lack interest in learning English, L1 interference, the students' studying habits which are mainly based on memorization. He adds the teachers' lack of teaching experience as a contributing factor for the students' weaknesses.

On the other hand, one of the senior lecturers at the Languages Centre believes that Arab learners' syntactic errors are attributed to their mother tongue interference. She

believes that the most common errors are in the sentence structure, the use of nouns and pronouns, and in word order.

Syntactic errors made by Arab speakers of English are found mostly in the sentence structure, the use of nouns and pronouns, and in the word order. These syntactic errors are made in the target language due to negative L1 influence or interference. One of the common errors made by Arabic learners of English is in the use of articles, particularly the omission of the indefinite article in obligatory contexts, the use of "the" redundantly, omission of the article "the," and redundant use of the articles "a" and "an." Indefinite article does not exist in Arabic. Another common error due to first language interference is the omission of the auxiliaries (be- is, was, are, am, were) in sentences. Verbless sentences are acceptable in Arabic syntax, and the learners tend to use the same structure in English too (R.Naraynan, personal communication, November 26th, 2012).

Another lecturer, then again, stated that most of the syntactic errors made by students are attributed to not being fully aware of the parts of speech of a sentence as well as subject-verb agreement, and the omission of the subject and verb in complex and compound sentences. However, she refers to such errors as mistakes since she believes that the students know the forms of these structures but do not give attention to them.

These are the syntactic errors often made by my students both in Writing and Speaking. They often don't know what part of speech to use in a sentence. Subject-verb agreement is another area of concern. Punctuation and spelling mistakes are also common. I refer to them as 'mistakes' in the real sense of the word since I think that these learners know the real forms and do not pay attention. If they are prompted, self-correction is possible. In complex and compound sentences, learners sometimes omit the subject and verb. I encounter the tendency to overgeneralize in many above average students. Some of the errors mentioned above are mistakes for some students while they are errors for others. Some of these errors have become 'fossilized' and in spite of countless teacher and teacher-prompted corrections, they keep recurring. I have noticed that for motivated learners, the moment the teacher points out their errors and corrects them, they experience a moment of epiphany. I find that such learners work hard to avoid the same mistakes while the student who is not motivated does not make any effort to shake off the complacency and laid-back attitude that surrounds him/her (P. Mathew, personal communication, December 1st, 2012).

To sum up, based on my observations, the participants' own perspectives, the teachers' perspectives, and the participants' academic performance, there is a good reason to believe that they did not have sufficient syntactic knowledge mainly in the use of tenses

and subject-verb agreement. Several factors might be responsible for their lack of syntactic knowledge: school educational system and teaching methods, studying habits based on memorization, L1-interference, and L2 structural difficulties. The next section will discuss how participants coped with their insufficient syntactic knowledge.

4.3.2 Participants' Lack of Syntactic Knowledge

Figure 4.3 explains how participants addressed their syntactic difficulties in oral communication.

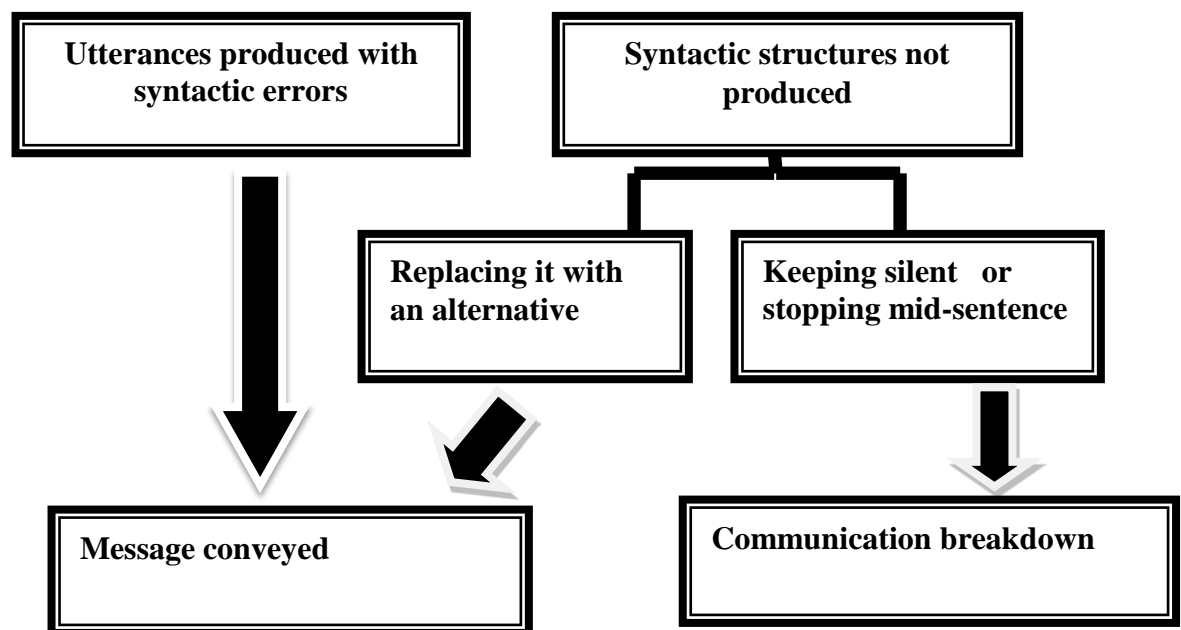


Figure 4.3 Effect of insufficient syntactic knowledge on the learners' oral production.

Figure 4.3 explains how participants might have coped with their lack of syntactic knowledge in oral communication. Findings suggest that participants had two options: they produced utterances with syntactic errors or did not use the problematic syntactic structures and used an alternative, kept silent, or stopped mid-sentence. There is a good reason to believe that making syntactic errors and replacing the problematic structures with an

alternative did not result in communication breakdown since participants successfully conveyed the intended message. In contrast, keeping silent and stopping mid-sentence as a response to lack of syntactic knowledge might have led to communication breakdown since the intended message was not conveyed.

4.3.2.1 Participants' Syntactic Errors

Figure 4.4 illustrates the common syntactic errors made by the participants. I have found that participants' errors were consistent regardless of their proficiency level.

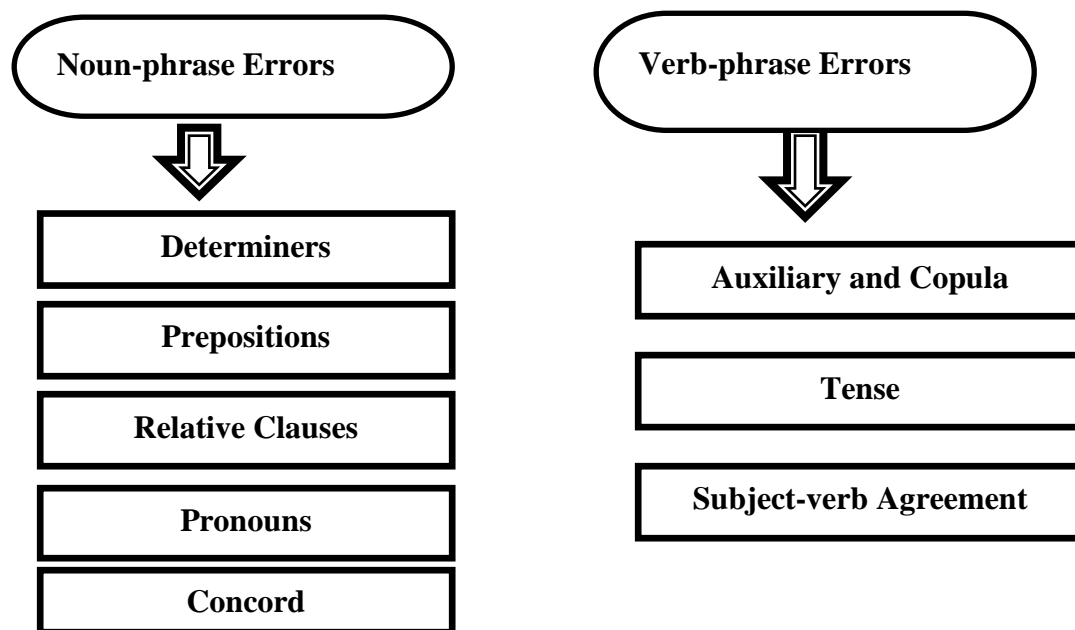


Figure 4.4 Participants' common syntactic errors.

Surprisingly, all participants shared the same syntactic errors despite the varying degrees of their proficiency levels. In this study, the main focus was on noun-phrases and verb-phrases.

In the interviews, participants of the study committed syntactic errors at two levels: the noun-phrase level and verbal level. Errors at the noun-phrase level were committed in

determiners, prepositions, relative clauses, pronouns, and concord. At the verbal level, errors were identified in auxiliary and copula, tense, and subject-verb agreement. At the noun-phrase level, errors were made in articles: addition of the definite article ‘the’ and omission of the indefinite article ‘a/an’; prepositions: substitution and omission of prepositions; the use of resumptive or returning pronouns; pronouns; and concord: the use of plurals with demonstratives ‘this’ and ‘that’.

The verb-phrase errors most commonly committed by the participants were in copula and auxiliary: omission of copula ‘be’ and insertion of be when not required; tenses, tense sequence; and subject-verb agreement: omission of the third person singular marker, the wrong use of auxiliary with singular and plural nouns. Appendix D provides a detailed description of the participants’ syntactic errors.

Although the above syntactic structures were intensively taught to Foundation students, mainly in the first semester, students continued to make the same errors in their oral production. Although participants varied in their proficiency level, they all made the same errors. I have noticed that students in general have serious problems in syntax despite the fact that they highly value it. However, the way how participants managed to deal with their insufficient syntactic knowledge was worth investigating.

4.3.2.2 Absence of Syntactic Structures

The participants’ responses in the interviews show that tenses were the major sources of errors in their oral production. Certain tenses were absent and replaced by alternatives instead. In addition, keeping silent and stopping mid-sentence might reflect difficulties in using tenses among participants of the study. It was found that the simple present was overused. The present perfect, simple past, and present progressive were

replaced by the simple present. The present perfect was absent and it was replaced by other tenses, mainly by the simple present and simple past.

Table 4.6

Tense Errors and Their Frequency

Tense Error	Frequency
substitution of present perfect by simple past	5
substitution of present perfect by simple present	8
substitution of simple past by simple present	36
substitution of present progressive by simple present	12
substitution of simple present by present progressive	2
substitution of simple present by simple past	1
deletion of (-ing) from the progressive tense sequence	4
Total	68

Table 4.6 shows that the most common errors in tenses were in substitution and tense sequence. It was found that the learners frequently used the simple present in place of other tenses. The most common error was in substituting the simple past by the simple present and the least was in substituting the simple present by the simple past.

a) Replacing Syntactic Structures with Alternatives

Table 4.7

The Participants' Alternative Choices

Absent syntactic structures	The alternative
The present perfect	Simple present and simple past
The Simple past	The simple present
The present progressive	The simple present
The simple future	I + want + to

The following excerpts give an illustrative example on the absent syntactic structures and the alternatives given by the participants (See Appendix D for further details).

Present perfect —→ simple present

Researcher: Have you ever seen a camel?

Learner 1: ha?

(Question was repeated): Have you ever seen a camel?

Learner 1: no, mister

(Question was repeated in another way): You have never seen a camel?!

Learner1: I see, mister, in my place [her hometown]

(Interview, 29th May, 2010)

Researcher: Have you seen it [the ATV motorbike] anywhere here in Oman?

Learner 4: Yes, I see it a lot in the beach.

(Interview, 29th May, 2010)

Researcher: What have you studied throughout the whole year?

Learner 7: I learn many things in the math all new things in English.

(Interview, 2nd June, 2010).

Researcher: Have you ever been to the desert?

Learner 8: I never be in the desert but I cross the desert many times.

I never go to the desert before.

(Interview, 2nd June, 2010)

Learner 9: I am study in this college for two semesters: Foundation 1 and 2.

(Interview, 26th June, 2010)

In the given extracts, all participants did not use the present perfect. For instance, Learner 1 did not use the present perfect. Instead, she indirectly appealed for assistance by

saying 'ha' then the question was repeated. In her reply, she omitted the present perfect and only said 'no'. It could be that she was trying not to use the present perfect in her response. The question was repeated for the second time and she replied in the simple present instead.

Similarly, Learner 4 and Learner 7 gave a reply in the simple present to a question in the present perfect. Learner 8 also used the negative simple present instead of the negative present perfect. Learner 9 used the simple present to talk about complete events with no specific time in the past. The present perfect should have been used instead. On the other hand, the present perfect was replaced by the simple past in other cases.

Present perfect —————> simple past

Researcher: Have you ever tried riding such a bike?

Learner 3: not like this, I tried the two-tire CVR.
(Interview, 29th May, 2010)

Learner 5: They completed their higher studies.
(Interview, 26th May, 2010)

Learner 6: I did not choose [my specialization] until now.
(Interview, 9th June, 2010)

Learner 7: They all finished their college year and they are working now.
(Interview, 2nd June, 2010)

The participants in the excerpts used the simple past instead of the present perfect. I have also found that participants who were more competent speakers tended to replace the present perfect by the simple past. However, the simple present was used more frequently by the participants, particularly the F1 learners, instead of the present perfect. A possible explanation could be that F1 learners might have found it difficult to use the simple past and replaced it with the simple present instead. The omission of the present perfect could be also traced to L1 interference. Arabic lacks an equivalent present perfect. As a result,

learners might literally translate from Arabic and use the simple past or simple present which are the nearest equivalent to the present perfect (Abushihab et al., 2011).

In the interviews, the present perfect was not used by any of the participants. The findings, therefore, support some researchers (Asfoor, 1978; Atawneh, 1994; El-Badrin, 1982; Kambel, 1980; Mukattash, 1986) who have found that Arab EFL learners tend to replace the perfective structures with the non-perfective. The present perfect was substituted either by the simple present or the simple past. My field note observations and findings of the interviews show that the participants tended to use the simple present more than the simple past. This contradicts Atawneh's (1994) argument that Arab learners avoid using the present perfect and use the simple past as an alternative choice.

On the other hand, I have found that F1 participants whose English proficiency is lower than that of F2 participants preferred to use the simple present tense in most cases. It was more frequent among F1 learners than F2 learners. The simple past was replaced by the simple present. Accordingly, there is a good reason to believe that learners find the simple present the easiest tense and tend to excessively use it. In my classroom observations, I noticed that learners tend to use the simple present in all situations where they do not have to worry about changing the form of the verbs or the irregularities of the simple past. This supports Al Fallay's (1999) findings that the present tense was more accessible to his Arab EFL learners than the past and future. Replacing the simple past by the simple present was common among the participants regardless of their proficiency level.

Simple past —————> **simple present**

Learner 1: I am study last in (IMCO) International Maritime College Oman.
(Interview, 29th May, 2010)

Learner 2: When I study in school there is my friend [short pause] in my class he die and he die in a car accident and [short pause] he-he very my, errr, best friend and this...

(Interrupted by researcher): aha! Okay how did you feel about it?

Learner 2: I feel very sad.
(Interview, 7th June, 2011)

Learner 6: After the school, I work and when I work and when I work, I speak with people who have different culture.
(Interview, 9th June, 2010)

In the cited excerpts, participants were supposed to use the simple past tense. However, they used the simple present instead. Learner 1 was talking about her previous college where she studied for some time before joining her recent college. Learner 2 was talking about a sad event when his best friend at school died in a car accident. Learner 6 was talking about working after school where he got the chance to speak in English with people of various cultural backgrounds. However, none of them used the simple past to talk about their past experiences.

Furthermore, the present progressive was replaced by the simple present in many cases regardless of the learners' proficiency level. Studies show that Arab learners failed to use the progressive and used the non-progressive instead (El-Badarin, 1982; Mukattash, 1986). In the excerpts below, the participants used the present simple instead of the present progressive.

Present progressive —————→ **present simple**

Researcher: What is similar about these pictures?

Learner 2: I think people do activities and, errr, they have fun.

Researcher: What can you say about these pictures?

Learner 2: This is [short pause] man [short pause] drive motorbike and he travel in I think [short pause] I don't know what this place but [short pause] he driving a motorbike and this man in this picture he have camels, this all.

(Interview, 7th June, 2010)

Learner 3: So, errr, he's looks like tourist because you can see he didn't used to drive this bike. He drive in the sand and he enjoy it and, errr, in a sunny day. This bike is called
(Interview, 29th May, 2010)

Researcher: Can you tell me about it [the picture]

Learner 4: He play with the motorcycle with his friend but I didn't saw his friends and, errr, because he's England man because not Arabic man I saw.
(Interview, 14th June, 2010)

In the excerpts, the learners used the non-progressive instead of the progressive when they were describing the pictures given to them. Learner 2 gave a general description of all the pictures when he was asked to talk about the similarities between them. He was supposed to use the present progressive to describe the pictures, but instead he used the simple present. Similarly, Learner 3 and Learner 4 replaced the progressive with the non-progressive when describing the pictures. It was also found that replacing the present progressive by the simple present was more common among F1 participants.

Another significant finding shows that participants overused the simple present although it was not used properly. For instance, in the excerpts above, participants also committed errors in the third person singular simple present tense by omitting *-s/es*. The simple future forms 'will +base verb' and 'be +going to' were replaced by 'I want to' as illustrated in the two following excerpts.

Simple future —————→ **I want to**

Researcher: What are you planning to study after the Foundation Programme?

Learner1: I want to be, inshallah, [God willing] study hard for English. I want to be engineer.
(Interview, 29th May, 2010)

Researcher: What are you planning to do after you finish your foundation?

Learner 4: I want I want to, errr, I want to , errr, Salalah [I want to go to Salalah] after I go back I want to go to some place to learn English...
(Interview, 14th June, 2010)

In the excerpts above, the participants used ‘I want to + base verb’ instead of ‘will+ base verb’ and ‘be + going to’ when asked to talk about their future plans after they finish their foundation studies. Learner 1 used ‘I want to’ to talk about what she was planning to study after finishing her foundation studies. Learner 4 repeated ‘I want to’ three times. This could be because he wanted to gain more time to think of the structure. In addition, the verb ‘visit’ was missing.

The relative clause was another structure under-used in the utterances of Learner 2, Learner 3, and Learner 7. Instead, they used a simplified sequence of sentences as shown in the excerpts below.

Relative clause —————> sequence of sentences

Learner 3: There is some tourist or something or something like this. They go to fishing.
(Interview on 29th May,2010)

Lerner 7: I think this is Omani guy. He’s their boss and he made this party for them to have lunch.
(Interview on 2nd June,2010)

Learner 2: My father actually he a very famous in this country and he-he know he know many things
(Interview on 7th June,2010)

The participants used a sequence of two sentences instead of the relative clause. Learner 3 was talking about three men whom he described as tourists grabbing three big fish. He split the sentence into two. His sentence should have been something like this: ‘There are some tourists who went fishing’.

Similarly, Learner 7 did not use the relative clause but split the sentence into two. He was describing the picture of an Omani man with three expatriate women in one of the luxurious restaurants in Muscat. His sentence could have been constructed as in the following: ‘I think this is an Omani man who is their boss and has invited them for lunch’.

Learner 2 was talking about his father who is a famous person in Oman. However, he had to use a sequence of two sentences where the relative clause should have been used. He also used the personal pronoun “he” to refer to his father.

One possible explanation for the absence of the relative clauses in the excerpts above is L1 interference (El-Sayed, 1981; Mukattash, 1976; Obeidat, 1986; Scott & Tucker, 1974; Sharma, 1979). Other researchers attribute the absence of relative clauses to avoidance (Shourmani, 2010). It is worth referring back to Schachter’s (1974) study of the use of relative pronouns by Chinese, Japanese, Persian, and Arab learners mentioned in Chapter 2. In her study, Schachter found that the Japanese and Chinese learners tended to avoid using the relative pronouns due to structural differences between their native languages and English. The fewer errors committed by Arab learners have been attributed to avoidance (Larsen-Freeman & Long, 1991; Yuan & Zhao, 2005; cited in Shourmani, 2010). However, there is no evidence in the studies mentioned above that the omission of the relative pronouns is attributed to avoidance even in Schachter’s study. Similarly, it might be premature to claim that the absence of relative clauses in the participants’ oral production is due to avoidance or even complete ignorance of the structure. However, there is a good reason to believe that the absence of the relative clauses in the participants’ oral production might be due to ignorance since they were not taught the structure in the Foundation Programme and they were not familiar with it.

b) Keeping Silent and Giving no Response

Keeping silent instead of offering a response might have had a negative effect on the participants’ oral communication since it resulted in communication breakdown. The participants had to stop after they started and their ideas were not expressed successfully.

At other cases, though less frequent, participants kept silent. Consequently, the topic was changed.

Researcher: Why [don't you like Showerma]?

Learner1: I don't know (laughing nervously)
(Interview, 14th June, 2010)

Researcher: What makes you think so [that the Bedouin is happier than the tourist]?

Learner 1: I don't know what, mister (she said angrily).
(Interview, 14th June, 2010)

In the two excerpts above, Learner 1 preferred to keep silent when asked to give her opinion. She implicitly asked for assistance by saying "I don't know" followed by laughter showing her nervousness. In the other excerpt, she also avoided answering the question and said that she did not know the answer.

Researcher: What subjects have you studied in the Foundation Programme?

Learner 10: (kept silent).

Researcher: Ok, you don't know what subjects or you can't remember?

Learner 10: I will learn English and I will improve myself.
(Interview, 26th June, 2010)

Here, the participant kept silent. However, he did not indicate his inability to speak which gave the impression that he might have not understood the question clearly. When the question was repeated in a different way, the learner gave an irrelevant response which showed that he did not understand the question. The question was about the subjects he had studied in the Foundation Programme. Instead of talking about what he had studied, he talked about his future plans.

It was noticeable that Learner 1 and Learner 10 were not comfortable with information and opinion questions since they had to speak more. They preferred to keep silent probably because it was the best way to avoid making errors while speaking.

To sum up, findings suggest that participants had insufficient syntactic knowledge for several reasons such as teaching methods and curriculum, studying habits mainly based

on memorization, L1 interference, and difficulty of the syntactic structures. Based on the findings of this study, there is a good reason to claim that lack of syntactic knowledge affected the participants' oral production in two ways: either by the existence of syntactic errors or the absence of syntactic structures which are possibly difficult. The problematic syntactic structures were not used by giving an alternative, keeping silent or stopping mid-sentence. Findings also suggest that producing erroneous syntactic utterances and replacing the structures with alternatives did not lead to communication breakdown since participants were able to convey the intended message without any obstruction. In contrast, keeping silent and stopping mid-sentence without changing the structure led to communication breakdown because participants could not complete their ideas which affected the conversation negatively.

4.4 Research Question Two

- **How does lack of syntactic knowledge affect the learners' choice of avoidance?**

As pointed out in the previous section, participants who had insufficient syntactic knowledge either made syntactic errors or did not produce the structures they found difficult. However, the absence of syntactic structures in the participants' oral production is worth investigating since it could be a result of ignorance or an intentional choice of avoidance. Therefore, there was a desperate need to collect evidence on the participants' avoidance behavior. Figure 4.5 briefly summarizes the findings of research question two. It illustrates the participants' avoidance behaviour and the potential factors affecting the syntactic avoidance strategies which they might have resorted to in their oral production.

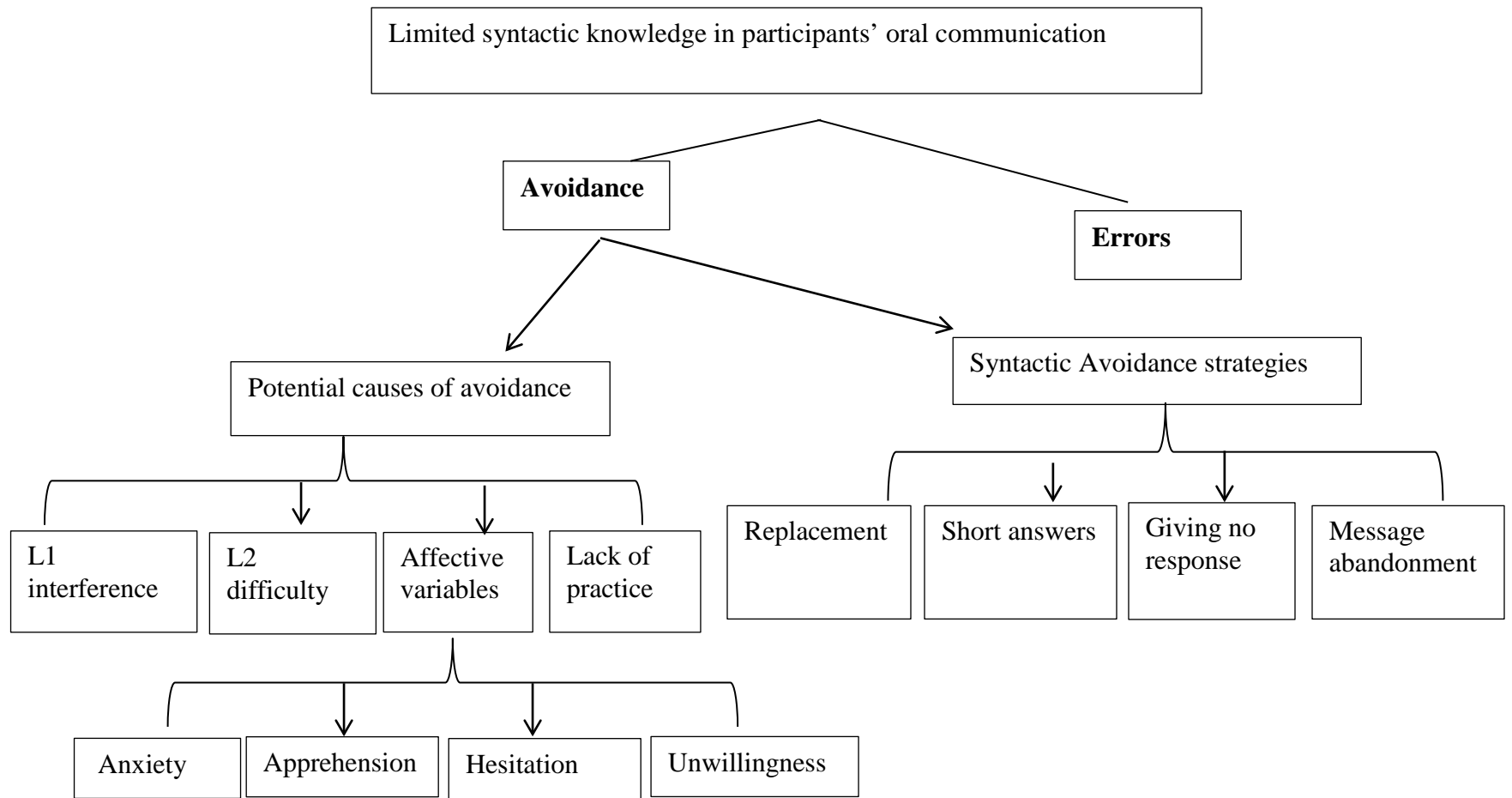


Figure 4.5 Participants' limited syntactic knowledge and how they potentially resort to syntactic avoidance.

4.4.1 Factors leading to avoidance based on participants' points of view

Based on the distinction between avoidance and ignorance in Section 2.4.5, it has become a requirement of this study to determine whether the absent syntactic structures resulted from complete ignorance or avoidance. This could only be determined by prompting the participants to reflect on whether they have used the strategy of avoidance or whether it was their ignorance. Therefore, I had feedback discussions with the participants as a follow-up with their interviews. The feedback discussions had two aims. The first was to identify the participants' perceived syntactic difficulties. The second was to determine whether the underused syntactic structures were a result of avoidance or ignorance. The questions were available in English and Arabic to accommodate their needs. Participants preferred using their native language, Arabic, in their discussions which were translated into English.

In their feedback discussions, participants mentioned several reasons behind their decision not to use certain structures such as the level of difficulty, their knowledge of the target structure, willingness or intentionality, and hesitation to use the structure due to fear of making errors. Participants of the study admitted that due to the difficulty of certain structures, they decided to substitute them with other simpler ones. The feedback discussions also show that the participants had a certain degree of knowledge, though vague, of the structures which they underused. Hence, having in mind the distinction between avoidance and ignorance mentioned in Section 2.4.5 as well as the feedback discussions with the participants, it could be inferred that they resorted to avoidance. In addition, findings of the interviews and feedback discussions show several potential factors which might have affected the participants' choice of avoidance. These factors are mentioned in the following section.

4.4.1.1 Perceived difficulty and level of knowledge

Findings of the interviews and online feedback discussions seem to go in line with the hypothesis that avoidance is caused by difficulty due to differences between L1 and L2 (Dagut & Lufur ,1985; Kleinmann, 1978; Laufer & Eliasson,1993; Liao & Fukuya,2004; Schachter, 1974; Seliger, 1989;). All the participants replaced the present perfect with the simple present and simple past. Since structural differences between Arabic and English could result in difficulties using the present perfect structures, participants might have avoided using them. Results of the study also support Moy's (1982) argument that one of the major mistakes committed by EFL learners regarding the present perfect is to avoid it. Furthermore, in the feedback discussions, the participants admitted having difficulties using the present perfect and replaced it with other tenses. The following are excerpts taken from some of the participants' online feedback discussions. The whole transcripts of the feedback discussions are presented in Appendix (C).

Researcher:What is the most difficult tense for you? Is it the simple present, simple past, present perfect or what?

Learner 2: present perfect

Researcher: Why?

Learner 2: because I confuse present perfect with other tenses.

Researcher: What tense do you confuse it with?

Learner 2: present perfect and simple present

Researcher: Do you know the difference between them?

Learner 2: yes, simple present singular subject

I mean the form

Researcher: What is the form of the present perfect?

Learner 2: has/have + past participle

Researcher: good!

Do you know the difference in meaning between the present perfect and simple present?

Learner 2: present perfect say an action happened.

Simple present: to express the idea for action

(Feedback discussion 20th November, 2010)

In the above excerpt, Learner 2 was aware of the difficulty of the present perfect and he confused it with the simple present. I wanted to know if he had background

knowledge of the present perfect. He seemed to have a certain level of knowledge although very faint as he could not give a clear distinction between the present perfect and the simple present. However, the excerpt above does not indicate that the participant deliberately avoided using the present perfect. The participant confused the present perfect with the simple present and this could be one possible explanation for replacing the present perfect with simple present.

Researcher: What do you do when you have to use the present perfect?

Learner 5: I just try to use it when I speak.

Researcher: Do you try to use other tenses instead?

Learner 5: yes, the simple past

Researcher: why?

Learner 5: because it is very easy.

Researcher: Do you know the structure of the present perfect?

Learner 5: No, not that much, I'm confused.

Researcher: What is the easiest tense for you?

Learner 5: the simple past

(Feedback Discussion, 3rd January, 2011)

Learner 5, on the other hand, said that she preferred using the simple past instead of the present perfect. She also said that she found the present perfect very confusing. In the interview, she replaced the present perfect with the simple past as illustrated in the following examples taken from her interview.

Learner 5: They completed their higher studies.

(Interview, 25th May, 2010)

In the above excerpt, Learner 5 was talking about her parents' education. Since she did not refer to a specific time in the past, she should have used the present perfect. However, she used the simple past instead as she found it easier for her. It can be concluded from the excerpt that Learner 5 deliberately did not use the present perfect and preferred using the simple past instead. She was familiar with the structure but decided not to use it.

Another reason for the difficulty of the present perfect could be explained in terms of L1 interference since Arabic has no equivalent present perfect. As a result, Arab learners use the simple past or the simple present which are the nearest equivalents (Abushihab et al., 2011; Obeidat, 1986).

Learner7: I did replace the present perfect with the present simple because I find difficulties constructing a sentence in the present perfect. In addition, there is no counterpart in Arabic which makes it difficult for us to use the present perfect.

Researcher: Why did you use the simple present?

Learner 7: It is easy and I know how to use it.

Similarly, Learner 7 pointed out that he replaced the present perfect with the simple present. He admitted having difficulties in constructing the present perfect. He was also aware of the fact that there is no equivalence in Arabic. Another significant point Learner 7 referred to in the feedback discussion was that he used the present simple instead of the present perfect because he found it easier. It can be concluded from the above discussion with learner 7 that he deliberately might have not used the present perfect and has chosen the simple present instead. The example is taken from his interview. It gives a clear example on how he has replaced the present perfect with the simple present.

Researcher: What have you studied throughout the whole year?

Learner 7: I learn many things in the math all new things in English
(Interview, 2nd June, 2010)

Other participants said that the simple past was difficult for them. For instance, learner 8 said in the feedback discussion that he found the simple past the most difficult tense. He said that he sometimes substituted the simple past with the simple present. He was not very familiar with the form of the simple past and used the simple present as an alternative.

Researcher: What tense do you find the most difficult when you speak?

Learner 8: I find the simple past the most difficult.

Researcher: Why?

Learner 8: Because I have to add (-ed) at the end of the verb to make it simple past and I have to be careful when speaking about past events.

Researcher: Okay, what do you do when talking about past events?

Learner 8: I try to use the simple past.

Researcher: What do you do if you could not use the simple past?

Learner 8: I like to use the simple present

(Feedback discussion, 20th November, 2010)

The following excerpts are taken from Learner 8's interview. He used the simple present instead of the simple past on so many occasions.

Learner 8: So he finishes study and go out searching about work.

(Interview 2nd June, 2010)

Learner 8: At school we learn English.

(Interview, 2nd June, 2010)

In the two excerpts cited, the participant did not use the simple past when talking about the two events. In the first one he was talking about his father who started searching for a job immediately after leaving school. In the second, he was talking about learning English at school. However, he did not use the simple past for the reasons he mentioned in the feedback discussion.

Similarly, Learner 9 admitted that she found all the tenses difficult although she preferred using the simple present since she found it the easiest.

Learner 9: I use the simple present more than the simple past. It could be find it easier.

(Feedback discussion, 29th April, 2011)

Another potential area of difficulty, though less frequent, was the use of the simple future. The simple future forms 'will+ base verb' and 'be+ going to' were substituted by 'I want to'. The analysis of the feedback discussion with Learner 1 reveals that she demonstrated knowledge of the forms and function of the simple future. However, she preferred to substitute it with a simpler form to avoid the risks of making errors. The

learner said that she found the simple future difficult and confusing because she could not determine which form to use.

Researcher: Do you know the form of the simple future in English?

Learner1: you mean the use of “will”?

Researcher: yes

There is another form other than “will”. Do you know it?

Learner1: I might know it but I forgot. Can you remind me of it?

Researcher: “be+ going to”

Can you remember it?

Learner 1: Yes I know it.

Researcher: Do you know the difference between them?

Learner1: ‘will’ is not a 100% plan and ‘be+ going to’ is planning for something previously

Researcher: Do you find the simple future difficult?

Learner 1: yes because it is confusing

Researcher: How is it confusing?

Learner 1: I cannot determine which form to use.

(Feedback discussion, 12th November, 2010)

Researcher: When you finish the Foundation Programme after one, let’s say one semester, what are you planning to do?

Learner 1: I want to be, inshallah, study hard for English because I want, errr, good percent in English.

(Interview 29th May, 2010)

In the excerpt, the participant used the form “I want to” instead of the simple future form. However, she gave an irrelevant answer as she said that she wanted to study English to get good results. Her answer also indicates that she was interested in marks and that was her only motivator. In fact, in the four months I spent observing her, I found her to be very much concerned about marks. That was the only thing she was concerned about regarding learning English. This explains why she scored the highest in her class although she was not a very competent speaker.

Moreover, the comparative adjective was omitted although the learners showed some degree of knowledge especially that they were taught the structure at the end of the semester. Learner 1 omitted the comparative adjectives when she was comparing the

pictures of the Bedouin and the tourist. In the feedback discussion, she was quite familiar with the structure.

Researcher: Do you know the comparative and superlative adjectives?

Learner 1: yes

Researcher: Do you know how to distinguish between them?

Learner 1: taller than -- the tallest

Researcher: Do you know that you didn't use the comparative adjective when describing the two pictures? Why? You did not know how?

Learner 1: I know but I don't know why I didn't use it in the interview.

(Feedback, 12th November, 2010)

The participants did not give a specific reason for not using the comparative adjectives when she compared the Bedouin and the tourist. The following is an illustrative example taken from her interview.

Researcher: Who is having more fun in these two pictures (the Bedouin or the tourist?)

Learner 1: This. [Pointing at the Bedouin]

(Interview, 29th May, 2010)

This was her response to the question. It was a one word answer by which she used the demonstrative pronoun 'this' and pointed at the picture of the Bedouin. When she was asked to give her opinion why she thought the Bedouin was happier, she started an idea which was not meaningful, then stopped and indicated her inability to express her idea.

Researcher: Why?

Learner 1: because, errr,[short pause] don't delicious the life without the angry in this life so it is a [pause] aI don't know what.

(Interview, 29th May, 2010)

Her response might have been a case of direct translation from Arabic. In addition, she used the wrong words such as 'delicious' and 'angry' to express her ideas. She might have wanted to say 'Life is more enjoyable when we experience its hardships'.

Moreover, all the participants failed to make a proper comparison. For instance, Learner 6 though he was able to express his ideas regarding the two pictures, he did not

use comparative adjectives in his distinction between the Bedouin and the tourist as in the following excerpt.

Researcher: Now, these two pictures I would like you to have a look at them and compare like tell if you were asked to talk about these pictures – these two pictures what can you say?

Learner 6: I say this man who bike the motor – the motor bike [who is riding the motorbike] he's I think selfish because he play with himself....

Researcher: but also this man [the Bedouin] is also walking alone, right?

Learner 6: ya

Researcher: and he's – nobody else is with him don't you also think that he is selfish?

Learner 6: I don't know but when you look in the picture, you think like that. Maybe this one who have the bike, he play alone ... okay this one he didn't play maybe he walk to his [short pause] target or place

(Interview, 9th June, 2010)

In the excerpt, Learner 6 at the beginning described the tourist alone. Then, I gave a comment on the other picture to make him speak more. He was better than Learner 1 since he tried to give his own points of view regarding the two pictures. However, he still failed to use the comparative adjectives. I wanted to identify if he was familiar with the comparative adjectives. Therefore, in the feedback discussion, I asked him about the comparative adjectives. In the beginning he did not remember; then he recalled and was able to give good examples.

Researcher: in the interview, I asked you to talk about two pictures: one of a Bedouin and the other of a tourist.

Learner 6: I do not remember. It was a long time ago.

Researcher: yes it was. Any, do you know how to compare between two things.

Learner 6: You mean in English?

Researcher: yes

Learner 6: I forgot.

Researcher: Okay

Learner 6: you mean like saying short, shorter?

Researcher: yes

Learner 6: Yes, I know. But, it is difficult.

Researcher: What is the comparative form of 'tall'?

Learner 6: taller than

Researcher: what about 'expensive'?

Learner 6: the more expensive

Researcher: actually, it is 'more expensive than'(Interview, 13th April, 2011)

Researcher: You know, you did not use the comparative adjectives when comparing the two pictures in the interview. What is the reason?

Learner 6: As I told you, I forgot what I said in the interview.

Researcher: But, do you usually use the comparative adjectives like the ones we talked about?

Learner 6: I do not use them. But you know I try to make my ideas and comparisons clear.

Researcher: How?

Learner 6: I do not know I just try to be clear.

The feedback discussion with the learner shows that he was familiar with the comparative adjectives to some extent. It was clear that he had forgotten the structure since the feedback discussion was conducted a long time after the interview. He also said that the comparative adjectives were difficult and he used other ways to make a clear comparison. Based on the above discussion, there is a good reason to believe that the absence of comparative adjectives in the participants' oral production might reflect their intentional choice of avoidance rather than ignorance. Participants were familiar with the structure despite their limited knowledge. Therefore, we cannot claim that participants were completely ignorant about the comparative adjectives.

Another structure which was not produced by the participants was the relative clause. Instead, it was replaced by a sequence of two sentences. I might have had prior assumptions about the participants' knowledge regarding English relative clauses. The reason for me to believe that participants were completely ignorant of English relative clauses was that they were not taught to our students in the Foundation Programme. I also was not clear whether the structure was taught to them at school. To identify whether the absence of the relative pronouns resulted from avoidance or ignorance, I asked the participants about it in the feedback discussions. Their answers confirmed my assumption since they were not familiar with it. They also said that the structure was never taught to them except for Learner 5 who used it properly and said that she was familiar with it.

Researcher: Can you tell me about the relative clause?

Learner 2: What is this?

Researcher: We use the relative clause to put two pieces of information in one sentence rather than two. I will give you an example.

Learner 2: Okay

Researcher: The man is married. He is my neighbour.

Can you make them in one sentence?

Learner 2: mmm,

The man is married and he my neighbor.

Researcher: Actually we can use the relative pronoun 'who' by saying:

The man who is married is my neighbour.

Even in Arabic we have it and it is called '*al isim al mawsoul*'

Learner2: aha, thank you for this information.

Researcher: Have you studied it before?

Learner 2: I can't remember, but I don't think we learned it at school.

(Feedback discussion, 12th November, 2010)

The excerpts above show that Learner 2, Learner 3, and Learner 7 did not have prior knowledge of relative clauses. This might explain the reason for not using this construction in their oral interviews and why they used a sequence of two sentences instead. Learner 2 and Learner 7 said that they might not have studied it at school though they could not remember. Learner 3 said that he forgot all the grammar and could not remember whether he studied it or not. Learner 5, although she did not know the term 'relative clause', she was able to use it correctly and she said that she is familiar with this structure. However, she added a resumptive pronoun 'he' which could be a result of Arabic language interference. In Arabic, it is called 'dameer a'aid' (returner pronoun) and in English it is called 'resumptive pronouns' (Rydin, 2005, p. 324).

Therefore, the absence of the relative clause in the oral production of Learner 2, Learner 3, and Learner 7 might indicate ignorance rather than avoidance since they were not familiar with it.

4.4.1.2 Communication Apprehension

Interestingly, results of the study suggest that psychological factors might have also affected the participants' choice of avoidance. Analysis of the feedback discussion with the participants seems to support Kelienman's (1983) argument that other factors such as confidence, anxiety, and willingness to take risks might determine the learners' choice of avoidance. It was noticed that learners who were very anxious had an avoidance attitude and tended to reduce their speaking time more than learners with no high anxiety. This supports, to some extent, the statement by Horwitz et al. (1986) that more anxious learners tend to avoid delivering difficult messages in the target language. For instance, Learner 1, learner 9, and Learner 10 were the most anxious during the interview. On the other hand, the other learners were less anxious although they felt anxious at certain times during the interview especially when using some structures such as the present perfect. Gardner and MacInyre (1994) define language anxiety as "the feeling of tension and apprehension specifically associated with second language texts, including speaking, listening, and learning" (p.284). There is a good reason to believe that communication apprehension might cause learners to resort to avoidance. The term 'communication apprehension' was coined by Daly (1991) who defined it as "the fear or anxiety an individual feels about orally communicating" (p.3).

Foss and Reitzel (1988) point out that foreign language anxiety includes "high feelings of self-consciousness fear of making mistakes and a desire to be perfect when speaking" (p. 438). Highly anxious learners were found to be conscious about what they were saying, and had a strong desire to be perfect. For instance, participants with high anxiety seemed to be more concerned about the correctness of their utterances, while

participants with low anxiety appeared to be more concerned about conveying the message and gave less attention to constructing correct structures.

Researcher: While you are speaking, do you focus on whether the grammatical structures you are using are correct or not?

Learner 1: For me, grammar is Okay but my fear makes me make errors.
(Feedback discussion, 12th November, 2010)

Learner 2: Mister, when I speak to someone in English, I sometimes use a tense and at other times a wrong one. I do not focus on which tense to use.
(Feedback discussion, 20th November, 2010)

Learning 3: Frankly, I do not concentrate on using the correct grammatical structures, I only focus on the message I want to convey.
(Feedback, 10th May, 2011)

Learning 4: I focus on conveying the message.

(Feedback discussion, 20th April, 2011)

Learner 5: Yes, I do concentrate on constructing grammatically correct utterances because I want my speaking to be clear.
(11th March, 2011)

Learner 6: When I speak, I do not think about grammar. I am only concerned about expressing my ideas. However, when it comes to grammar, I find the past perfect the most difficult.
(Feedback, 13th April, 2011)

Learner 7: I always focus on conveying the meaning in a good way because I might make many mistakes if I concentrate on using the correct grammar which will make me feel nervous.
(Feedback, 10th May, 2011)

Learner 9: I concentrate on both but I do give more attention to conveying the meaning.
(Feedback discussion, 29th April, 2011)

Learner 10: I concentrate on conveying the meaning.
(Feedback discussion, 23rd March, 2011)

The excerpts taken from the participants' feedback discussions show that less anxious learners seemed to be more concerned about conveying a clear message than constructing correct grammatical structures. Learner 1 and Learner 5 showed their interest in constructing correct grammatical structures. Learner 1 pointed out that she knew how to

use the correct structures but she might make grammatical errors due to her fear. On the other hand, Learner 5 seemed more competent and more confident than Learner 1 but she said that she was also concerned about speaking correctly. Learner 5 was not an anxious learner. However, she might have been concerned about correctness since she viewed herself to be better than the other students. Therefore, she might have thought that she should be correct when speaking in front of her peers. Thus, the two cases above were concerned about the correctness of their utterances. One participant lacked self-confidence and was less competent while the other was more confident but still was concerned about her correctness. This goes in line with Tiono and Sylvia (2004) who argue that “students who concern too much on their performance may become anxious when speaking in front of others” (p. 33).

In my classroom observations, I found Lerner 1, Learner 2, learner 9, and learner 10 to be very anxious when speaking. Learner 1 always requested to be given extra time to organize her thoughts before speaking. I used to see her writing down sentences and searching in her notebook for the correct structure. In the oral exams and speaking tasks, her utterances seemed to be pre-fabricated. This might explain why her performance in the speaking tasks in the classroom was better than her oral interview since she was not given time to write down her notes. This could have increased her anxiety during the interview.

Learner 2 was also concerned about the correctness of his utterances. His attitude was quite similar to Learner 1. He used to write down his sentences before speaking. Whenever he wanted clarification, he used to ask me when other students were engaged doing other tasks. He used to find it embarrassing to ask me in front of his peers. However, he was not as anxious as Learner 1 because he accepted being corrected more than Learner 1 who did not like to be corrected in front of her peers.

I taught Learner 10 for two semesters. In Foundation One, he never participated in classroom discussions. He used to speak only in oral exams. He never tried practicing speaking in the classroom although I used to push him to speak. In Foundation 2, he found himself forced to speak since there was a course on Public Speaking. In group presentations, he used to speak the least and focused on demonstration rather than speaking. There was a group presentation on how to make a cake. While the other students actively took part in the presentation, his focus was on demonstrating the steps of making a cake and he spoke one or two sentences only. In individual presentations, he used to read-out a prepared slip of paper without looking at his peers. He was very anxious, had a high communication apprehension, and above all lacked interest in speaking. In fact, he neither concentrated on correctness of utterances nor on conveying meaning. He just tried as much as possible to avoid communicating in English.

On the other hand, Learner 10 said that he focused more on meaning than grammar. He, in fact, was one of the anxious students who hesitated too much to participate in classroom discussions. I rarely heard him speak in English. I found him to be more concerned about correctness than conveying the message. He used to come to my office every time he had a problem with one of his teachers. He wanted me to translate the discussions that took place between him and his teachers. It is not that he could not speak, but it was that he did not want to speak. He used to tell me that he wanted his teachers to understand him more clearly thinking that if he makes errors, his teacher might not understand him. This is the main reason he used to come to me whenever he had an issue with one of his teachers. In other words, he was concerned about his correctness. He used to think, as it was the case with a vast majority of students, that speaking correctly is more important in oral communication.

I did not teach Learner 9. However, I observed her speaking performance. I attended two of her presentations. She was quite competent in speaking although she lacked confidence and did not seem to feel comfortable having me observing her presentations. However, she was able to express herself clearly without the need to read-out although she did at certain points.

I also found Learner 3, Learner 4, Learner 5, Learner 6, Learner 7, and Learner 8 to be less anxious and more willing to speak. Learner 3 was very confident and always participated actively in the class. He once gave a presentation on happiness although it was not a requirement in the first semester of the Foundation Programme. His presentation was better than a lot of presentations given by Foundation Two students. He was very confident, made good use of gestures and was very clear though he was reading out some of the slides.

As for learner 7, I taught him for two semesters. I found him to be one of the best speakers. Although he lacked the initiative to speak, he did very well in all the assigned oral tasks. He was confident and more competent. His presentations were quite good especially when he was able to speak spontaneously and was less dependent on written notes.

Learner 6 was less confident about his speaking abilities although he did his oral tasks very well. I taught him in the first semester; he was trying to speak more in English although he used to make a lot of errors. In the second semester, I observed him giving presentations. In the presentations, he used to speak spontaneously although it seemed as if it was pre-fabricated.

I did not teach Learner 5 and Learner 8. However, in my continuous visits to their classes, I found them to be very eager and enthusiastic to speak in English. They used to call me whenever they had a presentation. Learner 5 was more competent and spoke better

than Learner 8. In her presentations, she spoke very confidently with less grammatical errors. Her ideas made sense and she was able to connect between them. Learner 8 was also confident but made a lot of errors particularly in subject-verb agreement.

In addition, communication apprehension might manifest itself in giving short replies due to fear of making errors. Findings of this study seem to support Young's (1991) argument that giving a short answer response is one of the manifestations of foreign language anxiety. By not giving full answers, participants might have avoided making grammatical errors. Participants gave brief answers by which they omitted the subject and the verb to avoid using certain structures such as the present perfect, simple present and comparative forms. All participants gave short answer replies in certain situations. It was noticed that all participants gave short replies to questions in the present perfect. In the feedback discussion, the participants pointed out that they gave short answer replies for several reasons such as fear of making errors (Learner 1, Learner 6, Learner 7, and Learner 9), stress and tension while speaking (Learner 7), lack of confidence (Learner 10). However, some learners preferred giving short replies if they were clear and understandable (Learner 4 and Learner 5).

Giving no response was not frequently used by the participants. One possible explanation to this is that they were trying their best to carry on with the conversation. It was noticed that two of the participants resorted to keeping silent as a sign of giving up communication. For instance, Learner 1 and Learner 10 gave no responses and indicated their inability to speak by saying "I don't know". It was found that in all opinion questions, those two learners resorted to silence. Learner 10 also resorted to silence when asked about the courses he had studied in the Foundation Programme. Keeping silent could be explained in terms of communication apprehension where the learners have no initiative and prefer to give short answers. The two participants were not comfortable with opinion

questions although Learner 10 did not mention this explicitly. This could be due to lack of self-confidence which increases communication apprehension. Based on the above discussion, there is a good reason to claim that resorting to message abandonment could be explained in terms of communication apprehension since the learner might prefer to stop than to make more errors. Lack of sufficient vocabulary could be another explanation for message abandonment.

Moreover, there seems to be, to some extent, a link between participants' backgrounds and communication apprehension. Participants' backgrounds and learning attitudes seemed to play a role in their choice of avoidance. All the participants had the same educational background since they started learning English at government schools except for Learner 3 who studied in a private school in his early stages of school education before going to public schools. However, it was found that learners who did not communicate in English very often were the ones who had communication apprehension and lacked self-confidence, while those were exposed to English outside the classroom seemed to be more confident and less apprehensive. For example, Learner 1, Learner 2 and Learner 10 were the least confident during the interview. It was also found that they were the least who practiced English in everyday life situations. In contrast, Learner 3, Learner 4, Learner 5, Learner 7, Learner 8, and Learner 9 were the most confident while speaking because they were the ones who practised speaking in English all the time with their friends. In other words, lack of English practice might play a significant role in the learners' avoidance attitude since it could increase oral communication apprehension.

Findings of the interviews and online feedback discussions, thus, give evidence that the absent syntactic structures in the participants' oral production might have resulted from participants' choice of avoidance. However, other factors such as L1-L2 structural differences and L interference might also be responsible for the absence of these structures.

On the other hand, some studies (Chiang, 1980; Congerve, 2004; Liao & Fukuya, 2004; Paribakht, 1983; Pazakah, 2007; Tarone, 1977) have found a strong correlation between avoidance and English language proficiency. In the present study, however, I could not easily claim that proficiency level played a significant role in the participants' choice of avoidance since they resorted to this strategy at some point regardless their proficiency level. Although participants come under two categorical groups in terms of proficiency, it was found that had the same syntactic problems, committed the same syntactic errors, and avoided the same syntactic structures.

4.4.2 Classification of Avoidance Strategies Based on the Study Findings

Based on the avoidance behaviour of the participants of this study, avoidance could be classified into two major categories: topic avoidance and message abandonment. Table 4.8 illustrates the types of avoidance strategies as suggested in this study.

Table 4.8

Avoidance Strategies and their Subcategories

Type of avoidance	Subcategory
a) topic avoidance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - replacement - giving short answer replies - giving no response
b) message abandonment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - stopping mid-sentence and expressing inability to continue or ask for help due to difficulty without changing the sentence - stopping mid-sentence and expressing inability to complete the idea then changing the sentence

Table 4.8 shows that avoidance strategies could be further divided into subcategories. Topic avoidance could be classified into three subcategories: replacement,

giving short answers, and giving no response. Message abandonment might also be classified into two subcategories: leaving the message incomplete without trying to change the structure, and leaving the message unfinished, then changing the structure of the sentence.

4.4.2.1 Topic Avoidance

Topic avoidance can be further divided into three subcategories: replacement, giving short answer replies, and giving no response at all. The three sub-categories will now be discussed.

a) Replacement Strategy

Based on the above discussion, participants might have resorted to replacement strategy by substituting the structures they found difficult with simpler ones. The substituted structures were the simple past, present perfect, present progressive, the simple present, and the simple future. Several factors, as mentioned in Section 4.5, might be responsible for replacing those structures with alternatives such as L1 interference, L1-L2 differences, and avoidance.

b) Giving Short-answer Replies

Although the participants were clearly instructed to give a full answer reply, they tended to give short answers. Participants gave short answers by omitting the sentence constituents. By giving short answer replies, some tenses such as the present perfect, simple present, simple past, in addition to the comparative forms were not used. However, it was found that participants with high anxiety and high communication apprehension are

the ones who seem to have preferred giving short answer replies as illustrated in the following excerpts.

Researcher: Have you ever tried riding a camel?

Learner 2: no, teacher

(Interview, 7th June, 2010)

Researcher: Have you ever experienced living in the desert or walking in the desert?

Learner 6: no,no,no

(Interview, 9th June, 2010)

Researcher: Have you ever been to the desert?

Learner 7: to the desert, no

(Interview, 2nd June, 2010)

Researcher: Have you ever seen a camel?

Learner 2: yes

(Interview, 7th June, 2010)

In the above excerpts, participants did not use the present perfect in their replies by omitting the subject and verb. They might have wanted to avoid committing errors. In the examples, the participants gave a very short answer instead of using the present perfect although they were informed before the interview to give full responses.

Researcher: When did you start learning English?

Learner 1: in the school

(Interview, 29th May, 2010)

Researcher: Did you study in a government school or a private school?

Learner 10: in a government school

(Interview, 26th June, 2010)

Learner 1 omitted the subject and the simple past tense. The question was about the time she started learning English not about the place where she learned it. It seems that she did not understand the question clearly. In this case, the simple past was omitted from the participant's response. Similarly, Learner 10 omitted the subject and the simple past tense.

Researcher: What can you see in this picture?

Learner 5: errr, a camel, a man

(Interview, 26th May, 2010)

Learner 5 gave a short answer reply (unlike most of her responses) when she was asked to describe the picture of the Bedouin walking in the desert and pulling a camel. It was noticed that the participant was reluctant to describe the picture. It could be that she was not very confident about giving the proper description.

Researcher: Where do you live?

Learner 6: Mawalih
(Interview, 29th June, 2010)

Although Learner 6 gave full elaborative responses to most of the questions, he gave a short answer reply to the question above omitting the subject 'I' and the present simple tense 'live'. The learner might have omitted the sentence constituents because his focus was on the place 'Mawalih'.

Researcher: Which do you think is better?

Learner 4: better?

Researcher: ya, which one do you think is better [the camel or motorbike]?

Learner 4: motorcycle

Researcher: Why?

Learner 4: because use batrol [petrol] and this when you go somewhere cut [he means that if it runs out of petrol, it will stop in the middle of the road] this only off and the camel you dropped some water and some dinner and no problem
(Interview, 14th June, 2010)

It seems that Learner 4 found difficulties making a comparison. This is why he indirectly asked for the meaning of 'better' or for the repetition of the question to gain time to think of an answer. After the question was repeated, he gave a one word answer "motorcycle" omitting the sentence constituents and the comparative adjectives. However, the participant gave a completely opposite idea showing that the camel is better than the motorcycle when asked to elaborate on his answer. In his reply, he made a comparison between the camel and motorbike, contradicting his first answer. He also did not use comparative adjectives in his comparison. This means that he was not quite familiar with the comparative forms.

Participants gave short answer replies for several reasons as discussed in the feedback. Learner 1, Learner 6, and learner 7 said that they preferred giving short answers because of their fear of making errors. Lerner 10 said that he lacked confidence when speaking and had to give short answers. Learner 4 and Learner 5 said that they gave short answers if they felt that the listener understood the answer and there was no need for clarification.

Researcher: So when you speak are you afraid of errors?

Learner 1: I was afraid of you.

Researcher: Why were you afraid? Am I scary?

When you were answering my questions, did you prefer to give full answers or just a one or two-word answer?

Learner 1: full answer

Researcher: But you didn't give complete answers in the interview.

Learner 1: I wanted to finish fast.

Researcher: Were you afraid?

Learner 1: actually, a lot

(Feedback, 12th November, 2010)

Researcher: In the interview you sometimes gave very brief answers. I will give you an example.

“Have you ever experienced living or walking in the desert?”

Your answer was: “no,no,no”

As you can see, your answer was very brief unlike your other responses. Was this due to your fear of making errors when using the present perfect or because you did not have enough knowledge about it?

Lerner 6: The reason is very simple. The more you reduce your talking time the more you can reduce your errors. The more you speak, the more errors you make.

(Feedback, 13th April, 2011)

Researcher: In the interview, you sometimes gave short answers. What is the reason?

Learner 7: In fact, during the interview, I was very anxious. As a result, my answers were very brief. In addition, I was afraid of making errors.

(Feedback, 10th May, 2011)

Researcher: During the interview, you sometimes gave very short answers. Why?

Learner 10: it is true because I lack self-confidence and I feel that I am not competent enough.

(Feedback, 23rd March, 2011)

Researcher: In conversations, do you usually prefer giving short answer replies?

Learner 5: If I feel that my answer could be clearly understood, then I will give a short answer reply as there is no need to elaborate on it.

The above excerpts taken from the participants' feedback discussions indicate that they might have deliberately decided to give short answer responses for several reasons such as fear of making errors, anxiety and tension, lack of self-confidence, and the assumption that the short answer is clearly understood by the interlocutor.

c) Giving no Response

Findings of this study show that this strategy was common among learners who showed high level of communication apprehension and anxiety during the interview. In all opinion questions, Learner 1 and Learner 10 tended to keep silent and gave no response. They were not comfortable with opinion questions since they need to explain and talk more which might lead them to making errors while speaking.

4.4.2.2 Message Abandonment

Message abandonment was employed when the learners had to leave their messages incomplete due to linguistic difficulty. Findings suggest two types of message abandonment: leaving the message unfinished without changing the structure, and leaving the message incomplete then changing the structure.

Results of the study indicate that message abandonment was more common among Foundation One participants who showed a lower level of proficiency. However, most of the participants did not give up the message and changed the structure of their utterances to continue with their conversation. The following below give an example on message abandonment employed by the participants.

Researcher: Do you find any problems when you communicate in English?

Learner1: ya

Researcher: like?

Learner 1: like in reading, I can't read the paragraph and I can't answer for the question because I can't understand some meaning in the reading, errr, in the

speaking because sometimes, errr, I shy, from, errr, anyone... [Pause] what the meaning in Arabic- English?
I can't find the word for the speaking.
(Interview, 29th May, 2010)

Learner 1 in the above excerpt had to stop in mid-sentence then restructured her utterance. Since she found it difficult to continue with her idea, she paused for a while and asked for help. Then, she changed her sentence to explain her idea. It was also found that her sentences in the excerpt above lacked cohesion. She could not convey the message clearly. She might have wanted to say that she had reading comprehension problems and felt shy to speak in front of others. She also used 'shy', which is an adjective, as a verb since she could not find the suitable word for her sentence.

Researcher: What does this picture mean to you?

Learner 2: This picture actually mean(pause)

When I see this picture, I see Oman because Oman there is many camels in Oman and this is the Omani people. (Interview, 7th June, 2010)

In the excerpt, Learner 2 could not express his idea clearly. He, therefore, stopped then changed the structure of the sentence to successfully convey the message.

Learner 4: Some people like village same me and my family because you – I have my garden [farm] there and he's work there all thing and I have the water.
(Interview, 14th June, 2010)

The learner was talking about an idea which was not clear. Most probably he might have intended to say that some people like to live in the village just like he does. However, he stopped and changed the structure of the sentence by which he shifted into another idea talking about his farm, the people who work there, and the water supply available there. The participants above employed the first type of message abandonment by which they did not completely give up the conversation, but rather changed the structure of their utterances to simplify them. However, only two learners totally gave up the conversation by leaving the message uncompleted and not trying to change the structure.

Learner 2: I study foundation of English and, errr, maybe I will, errr, finish maybe I will, errr, maybe I will, errr (stopped and could not finish his idea).
(Interview, 7th June, 2010)

It seems that the participant was struggling with the simple future. He could not continue his idea about his future plans after finishing the Foundation Programme. He had to repeat the utterance three times before he stopped and fell into complete silence.

Learner 9: They are eating rice the more publish [popular] what to say food in Oman ... I don't know what I can say.
(Interview, 26th June, 2010)

The learner had to leave the message unfinished as she was facing problems in finding the correct word. She used a wrong word “publish” in place of “popular”. She then implicitly appealed for assistance by saying that she did not know what to say.

4.5. Conclusion

Several potential factors contributing to the participants' lack of syntactic knowledge have been identified: methods of teaching and the English curriculum mainly designed for examination purposes, the participants' study habits based, L1 interference, and L2 structural difficulties.

Moreover, it can be argued that the syntactic structures underused resulted from avoidance rather than complete ignorance. For instance, avoidance is claimed to be an intentional choice made by the participants that could be attributed to several factors such as perceived difficulty, level of knowledge, and most importantly personal factors related to anxiety, lack of exposure to English, and communication apprehension.

CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY AND IMPLICATIONS

5.1 Introduction

The present study investigated syntactic avoidance employed by adult Arab EFL learners in their oral communication. The study had two main objectives. The first objective was to explore how Arab EFL learners' syntactic knowledge affects their choice to produce or avoid using particular syntactic constructions. The second was to investigate the potential reasons for Arab EFL learners resorting to syntactic avoidance in their oral production. Participants of the study were 10 EFL learners who joined the English Foundation Programme at a private college in the Sultanate of Oman. Participants belonged to two categories in terms of level of proficiency: Four learners were from Foundation One and six from Foundation Two (for further information, refer to Chapter 3, Section 3.5). Data were collected from observation field notes, oral interviews, documentary information, and online feedback discussions with the participants.

The study was carried out over four months. Participants were observed throughout the four months inside and outside the classroom. The observation included in-depth information about the participants' performance, classroom participation, and attitude. Then, towards the end of the semester, they were subjected to semi-structured interviews. The interview consisted of two parts: general information questions about the participants, and picture description. In the first part of the interviews, the questions focused on the participants' social and educational backgrounds. It also included questions to gather information about their awareness of the linguistic problems in communication. The second part of the interview involved picture description. Each participant was given seven pictures, all presenting the Omani culture, taken from a local magazine. Each participant

described at least three pictures: one picture of their own choice and the other two chosen for them.

This chapter summarizes the findings and discussions presented in Chapter 4, followed by pedagogical and classroom implications, limitations of the study, and recommendations for further study.

5.2 Summary of Findings

This study attempted to answer two research questions:

1. How does syntactic knowledge or the lack of it affect Arab EFL learners' choice in producing or avoiding particular syntactic structures?
2. How and why do Arab learners resort to syntactic avoidance in their oral production?

To answer the first research question, I used error analysis (EA) where I collected samples of participants' oral errors, identified them, and classified them into categories. Findings suggest that two main factors might have affected the participants' oral production: exposure to English and lack of syntactic knowledge. Participants can be categorized into two types in terms of exposure to English language: those whose exposure to English was limited only to the four walls of the classroom and those who were exposed to English and had more opportunities to practise it in their daily-life situations. Findings provide good reasons to claim that participants who received formal English instruction at school and had no other opportunities for using the language outside the classroom, were less confident, more hesitant to engage in oral communication, and had higher level of avoidance behaviour. On the other hand, participants who were exposed to English outside the classroom were found to be more confident and willing to speak.

However, results of the study indicate that all participants had insufficient syntactic knowledge despite their varying proficiency levels and exposure to English language (Appendix D provides examples of participants' errors). All of them had similar syntactic problems and made similar syntactic errors. Findings also suggest that the participants' weaknesses in English, particularly in syntax, could be traceable to the school educational system although grammar was dominant in the English curriculum. Four potential reasons behind the participants' insufficient syntactic knowledge were identified: study habits mainly based on memorization, teaching methods, L1 interference, and difficulty of the L2 structures (See Chapter 4, Section 4.3.1).

Findings suggest that participants' limited syntactic knowledge shaped their oral communication in two ways: either by producing utterances with syntactic errors, or underusing the problematic syntactic structures. As for the first option, all participants shared similar syntactic errors in their oral production. The most common errors they made were in determiners, prepositions, concord, relative clauses, pronouns, complementizers, tenses, subject-verb agreement, and auxiliary and copula. Findings of the study also indicate that syntactic errors were consistent among learners despite their proficiency level. (See Chapter 4, Section 4.3.2). There was not much disparity between learners regarding the frequency of syntactic errors.

As for the second option, participants did not use the syntactic structures which they might have perceived difficult. Instead, they used an alternative structure, stopped mid-sentence and changed the structure, stopped mid-sentence without changing the structure, or kept silent. The syntactic structures that were replaced by an alternative were the present perfect, the simple past, the present progressive, the simple future, and the relative clause. The present perfect was not constructed by any of the participants; instead

it was either substituted by the simple present or simple past. The simple past was also difficult for the learners and it was replaced by the simple present.

In addition, there is a good reason to claim that learners showed preference for the use of the simple present over other tenses. The simple future was replaced by using 'I + want + to' and the relative clause was replaced by a sequence of simple sentences.

It was also observed that producing utterances with syntactic errors, replacing the syntactic structures with an alternative, and stopping at the middle of the sentence then restructuring it did not lead to communication breakdown since participants could successfully convey the intended message. On the other hand, keeping silent and leaving the message unfinished might have caused communication breakdown because the participants had to stop and could not complete their ideas.

In an attempt to answer the second research question, the study first aimed at identifying whether the missing syntactic structures resulted from complete ignorance or avoidance. The literature distinguishes between avoidance and ignorance in terms of level of knowledge (Kamimoto et al., 1992; Kleinmann, 1977; Moghimade & Pandian, 2007), intentionality (Laufer & Eliasson, 1993), consciousness (Congreve, 2004; El-Marqouq, 1998; Gass & Selinker, 2001; O' Grady et al., 1989), and anticipated problem (Kellerman, 1992) (See Chapter Two, Section 2.4.5). Therefore, the participants' reflections in the feedback discussions provide a good reason to argue that they had intentionally decided to avoid the structures which they perceived as difficult, mainly the present perfect, simple past, simple future, and comparative adjectives although they had demonstrated passive knowledge of these structures. However, since participants have clearly mentioned in the feedback discussions that they were not familiar with the relative clauses and lacked prior knowledge about them, it can be suggested that their underproduction of this structure was a result of ignorance rather than avoidance.

In addition, based on the findings of the study, one would infer some evidence for avoidance based on structural difficulty, supporting (Dagut & Laufer, 1985; Ellis, 1994; Hulstijn & Marchena, 1989; Kleinmann, 1977; Liao & Fukuya, 2004; Schachter, 1974). However, findings suggest other linguistic and psychological factors which might lead to avoidance such as the learner's degree of anxiety, communication apprehension, and exposure to English.

Moreover, this study shows two main factors which might have affected the participants' choice of avoidance: level of difficulty and communication apprehension. Findings of the study provide some evidence showing that participants might have resorted to avoidance when they faced difficulties using the target syntactic structures. The results, thus, support, to some extent, the argument that avoidance is caused by linguistic difficulties (Dagut & Laufur, 1985; Fukuya, 2004; Kleinmann, 1978; Laufer & Eliasson, 1993; Liao & Schachter, 1974; Seliger, 1989).

The second factor is mainly related to communication apprehension (Horwitz et al., 1986). Communication apprehension seems to be a strong factor contributing to avoidance. It was noticed in the study that anxious and apprehensive learners showed avoidance behaviour more than the less anxious and less apprehensive ones. Communication apprehension manifested itself in high levels of communication anxiety, lack of confidence, hesitation, and fear of making errors. Participants with high communication apprehension seemed to be more anxious, more worried, and less confident, and their oral performance seemed to be lower than those with low communication apprehension. Giving short answers, substituting the difficult tenses with simpler ones, and giving no response showed indications of communication apprehension.

It was also found that even low apprehensive learners resorted to avoidance whenever they lacked confidence using a certain structure or when they were afraid of

making errors. It can be argued, therefore, that when learners experience some moments of anxiety, apprehension, and fear of errors, they might resort to avoidance strategies regardless of their levels of proficiency.

The study also provides good reasons to believe that there might be a correlation between anxiety and language proficiency. Findings, therefore, seem to support Philip's (1992) argument that the more anxious learners are, the worse they perform in oral communication. It was observed that participants with high anxiety tended to perform poorer in oral communication. For instance, Learner 1 despite performing very well in written assessments did not perform well in oral communication.

Findings of the study also suggest that there might be a correlation between exposure to English and communication apprehension. It was observed in this study that learners who had little opportunity to use English in their daily-life situations were the ones who had high communication apprehension and tended to avoid oral communication.

In addition, it was noticed that proficiency level was not a significant factor in the participants' syntactic errors and their avoidance behaviour. Participants had the same syntactic problems, made similar syntactic errors, and avoided the same syntactic structures although they had varying proficiency levels.

Avoidance strategies employed by the learners could be classified into two categories: topic avoidance and message abandonment. The two categories of avoidance could be further divided into subcategories: topic avoidance (replacement, giving short answer replies, and giving no response), and message abandonment (stopping mid-sentence and indirectly appealing for assistance without altering the message, and stopping mid-sentence then altering the message).

Replacement was the strategy used by all the participants. The tenses that were mostly replaced by the participants were the present perfect, simple past, simple present, and the simple future.

Giving short replies was another strategy used by the participants though less frequently. By giving short responses, learners omitted sentence constituents such as the subject and verb perhaps to avoid making syntactic errors in the simple present, present perfect, simple past, and comparative forms. Only two participants kept silent and preferred not to give answers.

It was found that participants with high communication apprehension gave no responses to opinion questions which require more speaking time and more elaboration. In message abandonment, participants left the message unfinished but changed its structure or stopped mid-utterance without changing the structure.

Furthermore, I propose a taxonomy of syntactic avoidance which consists of two major categories: topic avoidance and message abandonment. Each category is divided into subcategories. Topic avoidance is subdivided into three subcategories: replacement, giving short responses, and giving no response (keeping silent). The subcategories of message abandonment are: stopping mid-sentence without altering it, and stopping mid-sentence then altering its structure. Table 5.1 illustrates my taxonomy.

Table 5.1

Proposed Taxonomy of Avoidance Strategies

Type of avoidance	Subcategory
topic avoidance	-replacement
	-giving short answer replies
	-giving no response
message abandonment	- stopping mid-sentence and expressing inability to continue or ask for help due to difficulty without changing the sentence
	-stopping mid-sentence and expressing inability to complete the idea then changing the sentence

It was also found that the theoretical framework does not cover all aspects of syntactic avoidance identified in this study. Brown identified four sources of errors out of which he considered communication strategies to be one source. Error Analysis (EA) was useful for collecting, analyzing, and identifying the different sources of error. However, as expected, EA failed to trace avoidance strategies. Findings suggest that participants' affective variables might be one of the potential factors affecting their decision to resort to avoidance. Theories summarized in Figure 5.1 are suggested as a theoretical framework for syntactic avoidance strategies in oral production of EFL learners.

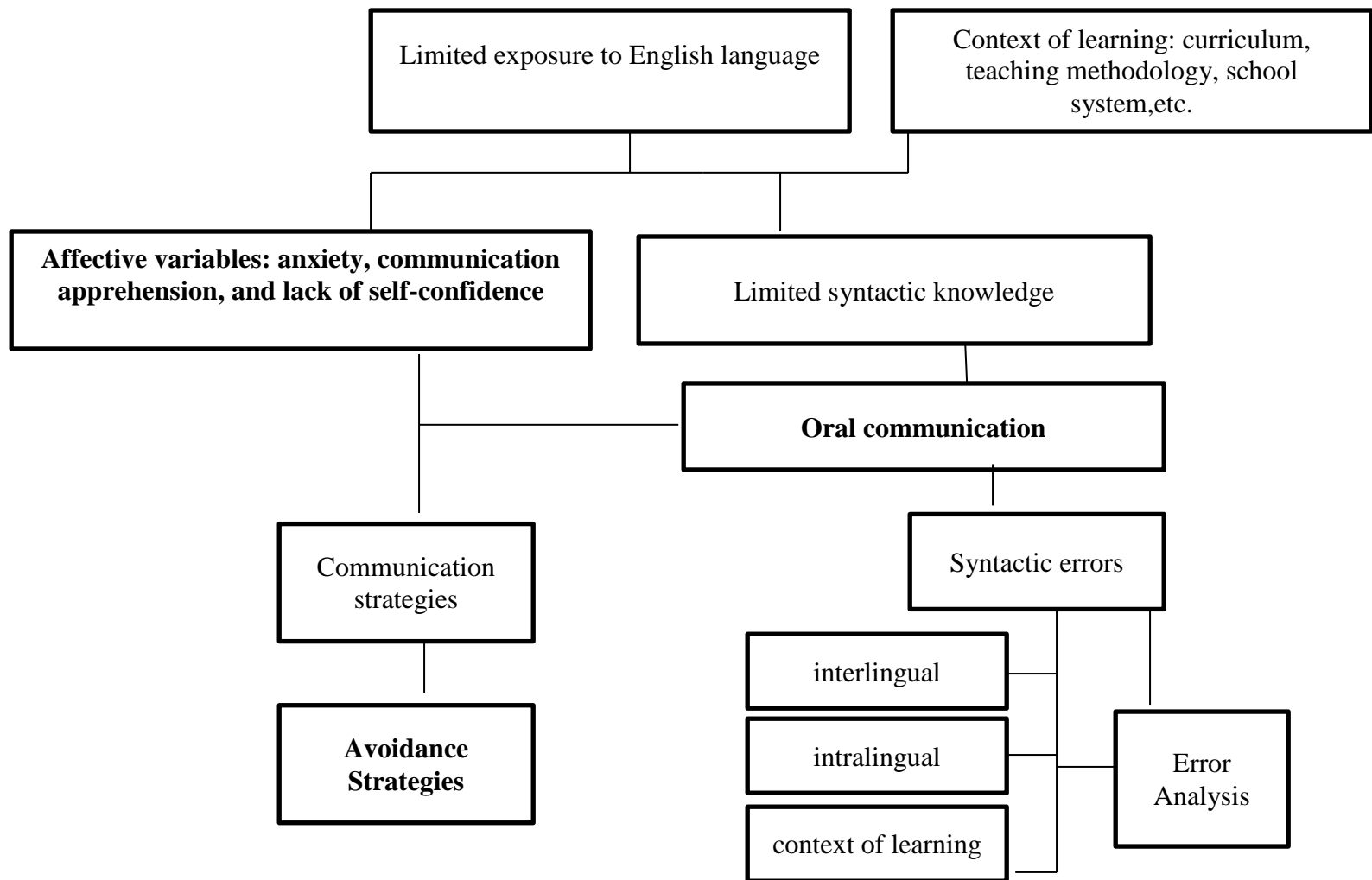


Figure 5.1 Suggested theoretical frameworks for syntactic avoidance strategies.

5.3 Pedagogical Implications

Findings of this study have significant pedagogical implications despite the limitations that will be discussed in the next section. One of the findings of this study indicates that participants coped with their insufficient syntactic knowledge in oral communication in two ways: producing utterances with syntactic errors, or missing out the difficult syntactic structures. It was also found that making syntactic errors or replacing the troublesome structures by an alternative did not hinder the participants' oral communication since they conveyed the message successfully. However, communication was obstructed when participants chose not to produce the difficult syntactic structures by keeping silent or stopping mid-sentence without trying to change the structure. This finding can offer a good answer to the following question: How can EFL learners solve their syntactic problems without obstructing oral communication? ESL/EFL educators can teach and encourage L2 learners to use various communication strategies to cope with their syntactic problems which can help them achieve their communicative goals such as using replacement strategies, restructuring, paraphrasing, and so forth.

Students should be made aware of their strategic competence to solve their linguistic problems. Participants of the study did not seem to be familiar with communication strategies. This explains why they could not properly use these strategies in oral communication. Moreover, L2 learners need to be taught that language is a means of communication and that they should focus on delivering the message rather than leaving it unfinished.

Findings show that avoidance strategies could have a positive and negative effect on communication as suggested by Ogane (1998). Ogane points out that negative avoidance takes place when the learner completely gives up the conversation and shuts down all channels of communication. On the other hand, positive avoidance means that

learners might keep the communication alive by changing the topic of the conversation to a more familiar one. Using strategies such as replacement, giving short answers, and stopping mid-utterance then changing the structure of the sentence, are believed to have a positive effect since learners do not give up communication and try to convey the message as much as possible. On the other hand, keeping silent and leaving the message unfinished without any attempt to restructure the sentence might have a negative effect since it will lead to communication breakdown.

Most of the research on the teachability of CSs does not recommend teaching avoidance strategies to EFL/ESL learners as they are not considered useful for the learners (Faerch & Kasper, 1983a; Faucette, 2001; Melaki, 2010; Ya-ni, 2007). For instance, Melaki (2010) believes that “if allowed to take a root, avoidance strategy will kill innovative thinking of the learner” (p. 645).

This study, however, can provide useful applications on classroom pedagogy. That is, EFL/ESL teachers and educators should teach positive avoidance strategies such as replacement, restructuring, and changing the topic to their learners. They can teach them useful expressions and give them more opportunities for practice in classroom activities.

Moreover, findings of the study indicate that participants who lacked exposure to English were the most apprehensive and unwilling to engage in oral communication. They also tended to avoid speaking and their oral performance was low. Therefore, ESL/EFL teachers and educators can assist Arab EFL learners in improving their oral communication by giving them more opportunities to practise English. Arab EFL learners need more practice inside and outside the classroom, especially at school.

First of all, EFL/ESL educators should re-design the English curriculum in Oman to include more communication skills such as role-plays, picture description, short presentations, and conversational skills. Second, EFL/ESL teachers need to

encourage students to participate in extra-curriculum activities such as speaking competitions, vocabulary games, speaking corners, and acting plays. The speaking component should be included in the English curriculum starting from early stages in school education. The English curriculum at Omani schools is mainly based on grammar teaching and few opportunities are given for the learners to practise English.

5.4 Limitations and Suggestions for Further Study

This study has several limitations. First, the research was conducted on a very small number of Arab EFL learners. Therefore, the results of the study cannot be generalized to all Arab EFL learners. To confirm the findings of this study, further research on a larger number of Arab EFL learners is recommended.

Another limitation arises from the fact that the feedback discussions had to be conducted quite a while after the oral interviews despite all the efforts I made to minimize the time between the interviews and the feedback discussions. It was quite difficult to meet the participants since the interviews were conducted at the end of the semester. Unfortunately, after the semester came to an end, each participant went to his/her hometown. Accordingly, it was very difficult to meet them as they did not find it convenient to come to Muscat from their hometowns.

Therefore, the only possible way was to conduct an online feedback discussion with the participants. The feedback discussions were quite useful. However, participants seemed to have forgotten the issues discussed during the interviews due to the long intervals between the oral interviews and the feedback discussions.

In order to minimize the limitations that could result from the long intervals between the oral interviews and feedback discussion, I had to remind the participants of what was discussed in their interviews (e.g., the pictures they described, the syntactic errors they avoided, and errors they made).

In addition, only one interview was conducted with each participant since dates of the interviews were totally dependent on the participants' schedules. Since all the participants were enrolled in the Foundation Programme during the data collection, it was not possible to ask them for interviews when they were busy with their undergraduate programme. In addition, for many reasons, some participants missed their interviews and I had to set another date for them based on their availability. To gain a better understanding of the participants' syntactic avoidance in oral communication, it is recommended to conduct several interviews with each participant. It is also recommended to assess their oral proficiency in different situations (interviews, oral exams, natural conversations inside and outside the classroom).

Another limitation arises from the relative difficulty of identifying whether the underuse of certain linguistic items resulted from avoidance or ignorance. The findings regarding this were based on the participants' own perspectives during the feedback discussions, which may be a limitation. The possible limitation is that there might be other factors which have affected their choice of avoidance. In addition, the time between the interviews and the feedback discussions was quite long. Therefore, participants might have forgotten the circumstances under which the interviews were conducted. Thus, it is suggested that a test be conducted to examine the learners' level of knowledge of the syntactic structures under investigation. It is also recommended to study more cases to identify other potential factors that could affect their syntactic knowledge as well as their choice of avoidance.

Moreover, conclusions drawn from this study regarding syntactic avoidance suggest further research in this field, particularly in the area of English tenses. Findings indicate that English tenses were the most problematic for the participants despite the fact that these were repeatedly taught to them in school and the Foundation Programme at the research site. It was also found that participants perceived the simple present as

the easiest tense and preferred using it over other tenses. Therefore, it would be significant to conduct further research on the Arab EFL learners' acquisition of the English tenses and the reasons for the difficulties in acquiring them. It would also be very interesting to investigate the learners' avoidance of the present perfect and their choice of using the simple present instead.

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Appendix A

Taxonomies of communication strategies

Table 1
Dörnyei's (1995) taxonomy

Communication Strategies
1.avoidance or reduction
➤ message abandonment
➤ topic avoidance
2.achievement or compensatory
➤ circumlocution: describing the target object
➤ approximation: using an alternative lexical item to replace the L2 lexical item as closely as possible
➤ all-purpose words: stuff, thing, something
➤ word coinage: creating a non-existing L2 word
➤ non-linguistic means: facial expression, gestures, etc.
➤ code switching: using L1 word in L2
➤ foreingizing: using L1 word and adjusting it phonologically of morphologically to L2
➤ literal translation: translation from L1 word for word
➤ appeal for help: asking either directly or indirectly
3.time stalling devises:
➤ using filler to gain time

Table 2
Nakatani's (2005) Taxonomy

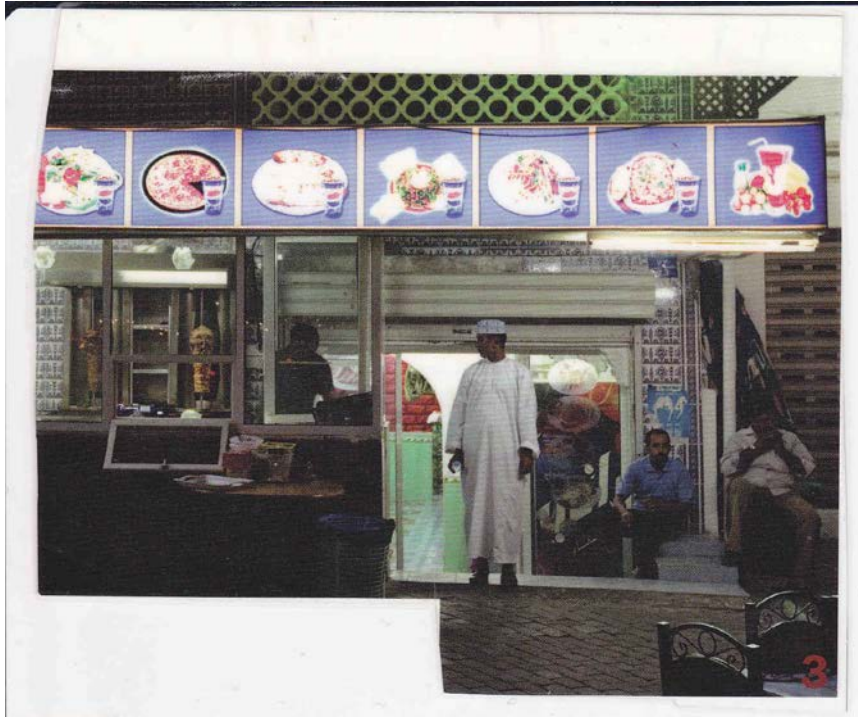
Communication Strategies	Types of Communication Strategies
1. Achievement Strategies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - help seeking strategies <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ appeal for help ➤ asking for repetition - modified interaction strategies <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ confirmation checks ➤ comprehension checks ➤ clarification requests - modified output strategies (rephrasing the utterance) - time gaining strategies: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ fillers (Well, Ok, let me see, etc.) ➤ filled pauses (Oh,...) - maintenance strategies <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ providing positive response (giving positive comments “ That’s good”) ➤ shadowing (repeating a the interlocutor’s utterance to show understanding) - self-solving strategies: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ paraphrasing ➤ approximation ➤ restructuring
2. Reduction Strategies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - message abandonment - first language based strategies (using L1 lexical items and structures) - interlanguage-based reduction strategies (using the interlanguage system to avoid using certain L2 structures) - false starts (repetition with pauses due to linguistic difficulties: I...I don’t ... I don’t know)

Appendix B

Pictures for interview questions

Pictures taken from Timeout Muscat, an Omani local magazine, winter 2009

1)



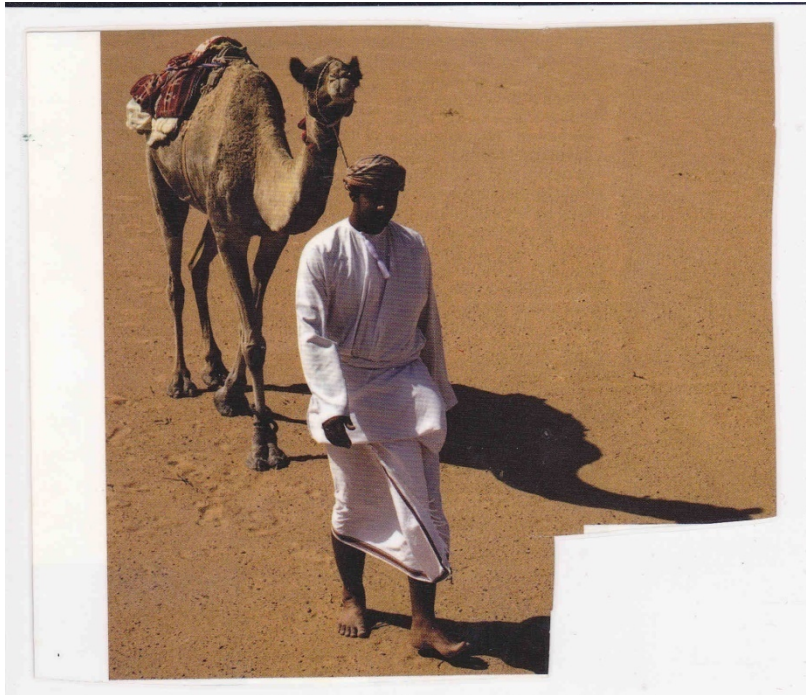
Picture showing an Omani man standing in front of an Arabic fast food restaurant

2)



Picture of a tourist riding a motorbike in the desert

3)



Picture of a Bedouin walking bare-footed and dragging a camel in the desert

4)



Picture showing young people playing on one of the beaches in Oman

5)



Three men taking a picture with three big fish they have caught

6)



Picture of three Western women sitting with an Omani in one of the restaurants

7)



Picture of two Omani men having lunch in a local restaurant.

Appendix C

Interview transcripts

Learner 1

Researcher: Good morning.

Learner1: Good morning, mister.

Researcher: Can you introduce yourself?

Learner1: errr, I am Ahlam Al Ghassani. I live...all the myself?

Researcher: ya,ya

Learner1: I live in Suwaiq.

I was born in 1919 [**She means 1990**] errr, I am study last in errrrr (IMCO)

International Maritime College Oman.

errr....I want to be inshallah engineer in IT, errr bas [**“bas” is an Arabic word which means “that’s it”**]

Researcher: OK. Now this is one thing. Now where do you come from, errr Ahlam? I mean from which part of Oman you originally come from?

Learner1: Batinah Region

Researcher: Okay, and now you’re living with your family here in Muscat?

Learner1: no, in the hostel

Researcher: Okay in a hostel. Now can you tell me a little bit about your family?

Like, errr, do you come from an educated family? Your brothers, sisters, parents are they all educated or what?

Learner1: I has five sister. My first- my old sister study in Nizwa Uiversity and ...[**pause for a while**]

Researcher: aha

Learner1: andmy father is work in ,errr , police man. My father is -my mother is wife home [**housewife**] ,what else? [**Spluttering**]

Researcher: Now, errr, this is your first semester in college right?

Learner1: ya

Researcher: Do you remember how much you did get in secondary school, your grade in secondary school?

Learner1: 82

Researcher: Okay. What about English? How much did you score?

Learner1: I think.....87

Researcher: Okay. Can you tell me now when- when did you start learning English?

Learner1: In the school

Researcher: I mean which grade you started like first grade or fourth grade or what?

Learner1: first grade

Researcher: Okay you were in a private school or in a government school?

Learner1: No private-government

Researcher: government? [**as he wanted to confirm this piece of information**]

Learner1: ya

Researcher: All the years you studied in a government school in Al Batinah Region.

Learner1: Ya[**not clear**]

Researcher: Okay, how was your English at that time?

Learner1: It’s bad.

Researcher: Can you tell me what did you learn back there in school?

Learner1: The letter A,B,C,D.

The name of things like ...such as fruit, animals, errr, family: mother, father like this.

Researcher: Okay, good, errr, do u find any problems when you communicate in English?

Learner1: Ya

Researcher: Like?

Learner1: Like in reading. I can't read the paragraph and I can't answer for the question because I can't understand some meaning in the reading and errr in the speaking because sometimes ,errr, I shy ,errr, from ,errr, anyone ...**[pause]** what the meaning in Arabic -English? **[She spluttered then started a new sentence].** I can't find the word for the speaking.

Researcher: aha

Okay, actually this leads me to the second or to the next question. Now when you find, and here we're interested in speaking, ok, if you find difficulties communicating like in speaking , okay, what do you do? Do you stop speaking, you say that I finished that's it I can't continue or do you try to – **interrupted by Learner 1:** Try- express your ideas?

interrupted by Learner 1: try

Researcher: Okay what do you do ? What are the things- the ways that you do **[you follow]?**

Learner1: When ,errr, some when someone ,errr, tell me anything and ,errr, didn't understand for him or for her I said for him please give me this question or this topic by another way.

Researcher: Okay. This is one way. What other ways do you follow? Now one way is you ask the other person maybe to repeat it or maybe to explain it in a simple way. Now what other ways- like for example do you sometimes use some Arabic words when you speak?

Learner1: In the school, ya but, when I am study in the college no

Researcher: Okay ,errr ,can you tell me about your daily activities? What do you usually do? How do you spend your day?

Learner1: errr read books and ,errr, read dictionary and save the some word in mind and ,errr, write , writing anything or I give for myself some topic and write paragraph for the active ya'ani **[“ ya'ani is an Arabic word; its equivalent in English is “it means”]**.

Researcher: Okay good. What about your plans? like hopefully when you finish the Foundation Programme after one, let's say, one more semester, what are you planning to do?

Learner1: I**[pause]** I want to be inshallah study hard for English to because I want ,errr, get person good in the English.

Researcher: Okay, other than English what are you planning to study after the Foundation Programme?

Learner1: Engineer inshalah. I want to be engineer.

Researcher: Do you- what do you know about Engineering?

Learner1: **[pause]**

Researcher: Engineering, sorry, Engineering in which field?

Learner1: What the meaning field?

Researcher: Like in which area- like is it in computer engineering, **[interrupted by the learner]:** ya, computer engineering

Researcher: Electric engineering?

Learner1: No, computer engineer

Researcher: Okay, aha. Okay, good

Now, I have some pictures. This is the second part of our interview. I'll show you some of these pictures and you are free to choose anyone of these pictures and talk about them. I might ask you also some questions.

[She was given the pictures and started looking at them to choose one to talk about].

Researcher: What- first of all what do you notice about these pictures?

Learner1: describe? What the mean?

Researcher: Like all these pictures are taken in which country?

Learner1: In Oman

Researcher: aha, okay, okay, in Oman
So maybe they show the Omani culture.

Learner1: ya

Researcher: Okay, now, errr, which one do you feel you can talk more about?

Learner1:[long pause]
I think this.
[She chose the picture of the Omani man standing in front of an Arabic fast food restaurant selling Shawerma]

Researcher: Okay, can you tell me about it?

Learner1: The first I see in this picture Omani person. He is in the restaurant. He is tall and ,errr. thin. She is-[spluttered]he is dark skin. She –he ,errrr, he- he -she – he is wearing Dishdasha and Cap [pause] what else? [pause] He is say for the waiter what do you – what do what do what do in the restaurant [pause].

Researcher: Okay, what is this restaurant- I mean what type of food do they do [make] in this restaurant? Do they? Like what?

Learner1: This is the food, errr[pointing at the Shawerma in the picture].

Researcher: What do we call this?

Learner1: where?

Researcher: This one, errr, just a second, this. [pointing at the Shawerma]

Learner1: [pause] What the meaning in Arabic- English?[laughing]

Researcher: It- it's the same we call it - we call it Shawerma.

Learner1: Shawerma, ya

Researcher: Okay, do you like Shawerma?

Learner1: no

Researcher: why?

Learner1: I don't know[laughing]

Researcher: Okay, what type of food do you like?

Learner1:[chicken sandwich] [pause] and meat, bas [“that's it” or “enough”].

Researcher: Okay

Learner1: and sometimes I didn't like ,errr, ate in the restaurant.

Researcher: Why?

Learner1: because unhealthy

Researcher: Okay, because it's not healthy.

Learner1: not healthy, ya

Researcher: aha, okay
Now, you're living in a hostel you told me. Do you find difficulties having something to eat?

Learner1: no, no

Researcher: aha, do- do - do you cook?

Learner1: yes of course

Researcher: Really?

Learner1: ya[confirming confidently and with a laughter]

Researcher: aha, nice so can you tell me a little bit about that?

Learner1: [Pause]
When I finish class ,errr, my class, I go to ,errr, hostel and cook rice [laughing]

Researcher: Okay

Learner1: and, errr, not enough add to the rice because I didn't eat anything for the time- all the time only eat at night only ya'ani [it means]

Researcher: aha

Learner1: So I eat rice.

Researcher: Okay, good. Now, if I ask you for example to have a look at these two pictures here.

[The researcher asked Ahlam to compare two pictures; one was about a Bedouin walking bare-footed in the desert and pulling a camel along with him; the other picture was of a tourist riding a motor bike in the desert]

Researcher: Can you compare between these two pictures?

Learner1: [long pause] I think, do this picture in the same place, in the desert.

Researcher: Okay

Learner1: and this ,errr, [long pause] this travel by camel.

Researcher: aha

Learner1: This travel by car.

Researcher: Is this a car?

Learner1: errr, bike?

Researcher: Okay, what else?

Learner1: What else?

Researcher: Who's this person and who's this?

Learner1: I think it is Omani person but it is foreign person.

Researcher: Okay

Learner1: [pause]

Researcher: errr [pause] Who do you think is more comfortable here in these two pictures?

Learner1: comfortable mean comfortable?[**Maybe she was not familiar with the researcher's pronunciation of the word "comfortable"**]

Researcher: ya, who is more comfortable?

Learner1: I think this[**pointing at the Bedouin**] because this by ,errrr, the ,errr, the hot is ...this person is very hot and ,errr, and he-he is walk in the in the sun but this in the bike so it is comfortable.

Researcher: aha, who is like having more fun in these two pictures?

Learner1: This [**pointing at the Bedouin**].

Researcher: He's having more fun.

Learner1: ya

Researcher: The man with the camel?

Learner1: ya

Researcher: why?

Learner1: because errr[**short pause**] don't delicious the life without the angry in this life so it is a [**pause**] a ... I don't know what

Researcher: aha

You mean that ,errr, this man, of course by the way is he a Bedouin or he's not a Bedouin?

Learner1: ya ya

Researcher: He's a Bedouin. Now this Bedouin –what you want to say this is what I understand- that this man is having a tough life.

Learner1: tough life?!

Researcher: ya, difficult life

Learner1: ya

Researcher: Okay , this man is not having a difficult life [**meaning the tourist in the other picture**] so what you want to say- this is what I understand- is that if you are having a more difficult life you'll enjoy it?

Learner1: ya

Researcher: really?

Learner1: ya

Researcher:
Okay, aha nice
errr, who seems to be happier here?

Learner: [pause with a laughter indicating that she is not happy with the question]

Researcher: the tourist or the Bedouin?

Learner1: enjoy?

Researcher: Who seems to be happier?

Learner1: happier?!

[long pause] that one I think

Researcher: Okay, what makes you think so?

Learner1: ha?

Researcher: What makes you think so?

Learner1: [long pause]
I don't know mister what[laughed showing her confusion]

Researcher: [laughed]
Okay,okay good, good, good
errr[long pause] What else do you want to say about it?

Learner1: [no response]

Researcher: Have you ever seen a camel?

Learner1: ha?

Researcher: Have you ever seen a camel?

Learner1: no mister!

Researcher: You have never seen a camel?

Learner1: I see mister in my pl..in my place! [She was very surprised with this question]

Researcher: Okay

Learner1: Ya!

Researcher: errr, what do you think about it?

Learner1: mister?

Researcher: Yes

Learner1: Suwiauq is camel - a lot of camel in Suwiauq [laughed softly]

Researcher: Ah, so there are a lot of camels.

Learner1: Ya

Researcher: Okay, in Suwiauq
errr,good.

Researcher: Why not?

Learner1: because my family don't have camel so how?

Researcher: Okay

Learner1: ya, only see with the neighbor

Researcher: Okay, nice
Is there anything else you like to add?

Learner1: no

Researcher: Thank you very much for coming.
It was interesting talking to you actually.

Learner1: wasn't

Learner 2

Researcher: good afternoon

Learner 2: good after noon

Researcher: can you introduce yourself?

Learner 2: yes, my name is Learner 2 Al Busaidi. I am from Oman. I am 17 years old.

Researcher: aha

Learner 2: I study in [pause] MECIT college.

Researcher: aha, what are you studying at MECIT?

Learner 2: I study foundation of English and errr maybe I will err finish maybe I will errr maybe I will errr [stopped and couldn't continue the sentence]

Researcher: ok now after you finish your foundation errr you have one more semester to go because it's for one year, what are you planning to study?

Learner 2: Maybe I will study hardware and software [not clear]

Researcher: aha and why do you want to study hardware? I think it's hardware engineering , something?

Learner 2: yes

Researcher: ya

Why do want to specialize in hardware?

Learner 2: because I know very much about this and this maybe many – many company want this

Researcher: aha

Learner 2: yes

Researcher: Okay, now can you tell me about your- when you were studying English at school when did you start learning English actually?

Learner 2: I start learn errrr school !

Researcher: when?

Learner 2: errr when I errr[pause] started [whispered to the Researcher in Arabic the word al saf al awal which means first grade]

Researcher: errr first grade you mean

Learner 2: yes, yes

Researcher: okay, aha, ok , good

errr, did you face any difficulties ? how did you find learning English at school? Was it useful or it wasn't useful?

Learner 2: sometimes it's useful but when the teacher maybe get hard with the student [was strict with the students] maybe the student hate English but I learn English actually when I see films and many films I see and I learn English very much.

Researcher: Okay, errr what is the most difficult skill you find in English? Is it reading, writing, listening and speaking? What exactly ?

Learner 2: actually writing in spelling, I have problem in spelling when I spelled word but in speaking I can speak

Researcher: aha, ok now can you tell me about your family? Do you come from an educated family?

Learner 2: Yes , my family is – my father actually he a very famous in errr in this country and he [short pause] he know he know many things he study many things and errr he's actually he work in arm [army] but...

Researcher: in the army?

Learner 2: yes yes

Researcher: Okay, are you the eldest among bothers and sisters, or?

Learner 2: I'm I'm in the middle [laughter]

Researcher: Okay, okay good

Now is there anybody in your family who checks up with your study like they come they ask you, they follow up with you?

Learner 2: Yes, my brothers actually , they help me with this with study

Researcher: Okay, good now errr what- can you tell me about your interests and your hobbies?

Learner 2: I like play football

Researcher: aha

Learner 2: and I like to go with my friend and errr with a long time

Researcher: aha

Learner 2: I spend all my time with my friend and go many many ... [paused and stopped talking about his idea]

Researcher: Okay, ya, other than this errrr do you like sports like a particular type of sport?

Learner 2: I like very much in play football in the beach

Researcher: aha

Learner 2: and I like play tenni- table tennis all this

Researcher: Okay good, now if you find difficulties communicating in English and here we're talking about speaking , for example you are talking to somebody in English and you found some difficulties like in grammar or in using some words or vocabulary, what do you do in this case? Do you stop communicating? Ya'ani do you stop speaking to that person or do try to continue talking with that person ?

Learner 2: I will continue but errr as I can.

Researcher: ya, can you explain?

Learner 2: maybe when I when I want to told something , I will I will tell for myself at - in Arabic and I will translate

Researcher: aha, okay, do you sometimes find yourself using Arabic words when you are speaking in English ?

Learner 2: Sometimes yes

Researcher: aha now if you don't understand a person speaking to you in English what do you do?

Learner 2: [short pause] I will try to errr to know and errr and [short pause] write the words that I don't know and found the dictionary

Researcher: okay, good, now can you tell me about errr a very sad errr incident that happened to you – something very sad that happened to you in the past ?

Learner 2: Yes actually, there is something very sad in my school

Researcher: aha

Learner 2: when I study in school there is my friend [short pause] in my class he die and he die in a car accident and [short pause] he- he was very my errr best friend and this

Researcher: aha, ok how did you feel about that?

Learner 2: I feel very sad.

Researcher: aha, now can you tell me how do you want or how do you like Oman to be like after 10 years?

Learner 2: I like Oman to be errr more [pause] more errr future errrr [whispered the Arabic word “ tatawor” which means development]

Researcher: Sorry? ah, developed you mean

Learner 2: yes, developed

Researcher: okay

Learner 2: and errrrr the the people be happy

Researcher: okay, hopefully

Now we come to the second part of our interview where you have to errr describe one of these pictures. I'll give –I'll just give you we have a number of pictures here you are free to choose anyone of these pictures and errr [pause]

[At this time, Learner 2 was looking at the pictures to decide which one to describe.]

Researcher: ha, tell me

Learner 2: This picture

Researcher: This picture

First of all can you tell me what is in common among these pictures?

Learner 2: no response

Researcher: okay, ya, what is in common ? what is similar about these pictures

Learner 2: errr, this activities I think people do activities and errr they have fun

Researcher: Okay, are they all in Oman or what?

Learner 2: no, some of them from Oman and [not clear]

Researcher: aha, ok, now you have chosen this picture [the picture of three fisher men who had caught three very big fish]

Learner 2: yes

Researcher: can you tell me- can you describe and why did you choose it?

Learner 2: This picture is three people catch fishes and I choose this picture because I like fish and I like to finishing and I know very much about fish

Researcher: Okay, errr have you ever caught a fish before?

Learner 2: yes, with my friend I go but my father said don't go

Researcher: Why?

Learner 2: because it is so danger [dangerous]

Researcher: What is dangerous about fishing?

Learner 2: maybe errr there is a kind of fish it is so danger maybe come to attacked us and like this

Researcher: aha, did it ever happen?

Learner 2: no actually, but I saw in the television

Researcher: aha, okay now if you were asked also to describe other pictures here, what- which one would you also like to talk about?

Learner 2: This [the picture of the Omani Bedouin walking in the desert and dragging a camel behind him]

Researcher: Which one? This One?

Learner 2: Yes, desert

Researcher: desert

Learner 2: This errr I like desert actually and I like camels and I see in this picture man with camels and it's very hot actually

Researcher: aha, what does this picture mean to you?

Learner 2: This picture actually mean [paused and changed the structure of the sentence] when I see this picture, I see Oman because Oman there is many camels in Oman and this the Omani people.

Researcher: Have you ever seen a camel?

Learner 2: yes

Researcher: in real life?

Learner 2: yes, I see

Researcher: Where did you see it?

Learner 2: in desert actually, I go to the desert and see many camels

Researcher: aha, can you tell me about life in the desert [desert life] here in Oman? How is it like?

Learner 2: The life in the desert it's so difficult but [short pause] the man who live there they can live because they live in desert from when he's young and he grown up there

Researcher: Okay, what do we call the people who live in the desert like this man here?

Learner 2: [pause] in Arabic [he whispered the word " Badu" which means Bedouins in English]

Researcher: ah Badu in Arabic, in English it is almost the same it's Bedouin

Learner 2: yes

Researcher: Okay, it's Bedouin in English

Errr, can you tell me about Bedouin life? How do they live in the desert?

Learner 2: They live in [long pause, then he whispered the Arabic word “ Khiama”]

Researcher: sorry?

tents, they live in tents

Learner 2: Yes, they live in tents and errr they travel many ...many place and errr they have a camels and goats and cow and many errr animals

Researcher: aha, now if you were asked to compare between these two pictures , they are in the desert

Learner 2: yes

Researcher: okay, taken in the desert, what can you say about these two pictures?

Learner 2: This is [short pause] man drive [short pause] motorbike and he travel in I think [short pause] I don't know what this place but [short pause] he driving a motorbike and this man in this picture he have camels . this all

Researcher: Okay, so having a camel in the desert and having a motorbike , what can you say about this?

Learner 2; having a camel, you must give the camels errr ... the camels different than motorbike

Researcher: aha

Learner 2: the camels it's better than motorbike because the camel is don't have – make up pollution and noise and like this

Researcher: aha aha

Learner 2: but the motorbike make pollution and it's bad actually but the motorbike can pick you up fastly but the the camel slowly

Researcher: okay errr look at the man here on the motorbike and the man here the Bedouin. How can you compare between them?

Learner 2: The man in the motorbike he wearing errr a city city errr when I see people in the city they wearing t-shirt and style [he means casual clothes] but the Bedouin wearing Dishdasha and [short pause] and maser [Dishdasha an Maser are Omani traditional clothes] like this

Researcher: aha

Learner 2: different

Researcher: ya, okay

Who do you think is happier

Learner 2: I don't know but I think errr the man who drive the motor bike

Researcher: why do you think so?

Learner 2: because I drive the motorbike and I feel so happy

Researcher: have you ever tried to ride a camel?

Learner 2: no teacher

Researcher: Do you like to try it?

Learner 2: maybe yes

Researcher; aha, ya okay

Researcher: Is there anything else you like to add Learner 2?

Learner 2: no, thank you

Researcher: Okay, thank very much for coming nice talking to you thank you very much

Learner 3

Researcher: Good morning

Learner 3: Good morning

Researcher: Can you introduce yourself?

Learner 3: My name is Learner 3 al Katib Al Harrasi. I am from Al Mawaleh- I live in Al Mawaleh but my town is Barka- my hometown. I am 18 years old. I just finish high school and I came to M.C.I.T College [**He means MECIT**] I'm at Foundation now.

Researcher: Ok, errrr and where do you originally come from?

Learner 3: errr from Al Mawaleh

Researcher: Okay okay good. Now I just want to know some little information about your family like do you come from an educated family?

Learner 3: yes

Researcher: Are both of your parents educated?

Learner 3: No. Just my father

Researcher: and what is his degree?

Learner 3: He just have errr school degree - not much but he learn when he was work.

Researcher: Okay good. Now are you the eldest [**among your brothers and sisters**] in your family?

Learner 3: I am the last one.

Researcher: Okay, what about your brothers and sisters? Are they also educated?

Learner 3: yes

Researcher: Okay, now for your studies now does anybody from your family follow up with you and for example they come they check up with you they ask about your progress in your studies?

Learner 3: Yes

Researcher: aha

Learner 3: They do it a lot my brother and my father. They came here at the college and ask about me. They know some friends here- work here so they make connection with my parents.

Researcher: aha ok now errrr [pause] remember when you were at high school how much did you get in English- how much did you score?

Learner 3: about errrr 69

Researcher: aha

Learner 3: something like this

Researcher; Okay

Now when did you start learning English?

Learner 3: errr, first errr first school

Researcher: in the first grade you mean

Learner 3: yes

Researcher: Okay, this means that you studied in a private school first, right?

Learner 3: yes

Researcher: What about your secondary school?

Learner 3: secondary also in a private school but the third I was in a normal school

Researcher: Okay, now while you were learning English in school, errr, how did you find learning English? Was it useful? did you have any problems or what?

Learner 3: actually, I have a private situation [**special case**] I was- when I was learning English , my father at the holidays take me to the his office and his friend was from India they just speak English so I go and just make a chat with them not very good chat but just“ how are you” [not clear] something like this the normal English so I just train because when I was chat I make practice every day that's why I can increase [**improve**] in English.

Researcher: Okay, good now errr do you find any difficulties communicating in English?

Learner 3: sometimes

Researcher: like?

Learner 3: like if there is someone talk with me and he say something- some words I don't understand it , I try to understand from the context but sometime I fail I didn't understand it well

Researcher: Okay, if you don't understand, what do you do in this case?

Learner 3; I just tell him to repeat it but in another way.

Researcher: aha

Learner 3: to try to understand it

Researcher: Okay, this leads me actually to this question now if you find difficulties communicating ya'ani [**it means**] we're talking about communicating here in English we mean the speaking part

Learner 3: yes

Researcher: what do you do if you find difficulties? Now, do you for example stop communicating because you find it difficult to continue? What do you do then?

Learner 3: I just ask him to repeat the sentence but in another way just choose that word; make some synonym word for it **to** errrjust I got him.

Researcher: Okay now, errr, this is one way, now if you find difficulties communicating in English- if you find it, errr, sorry if you find problems communicating in English , one way is that you ask the person to repeat the sentence in another way to make it more simple , now is there another way? Like do you use Arabic for example sometimes if you find it difficult to use some English words?

Learner 3: No

Researcher: you don't use

Sulliaman: I don't use Arabic because when I start in English I just finish in English

Researcher: aha

Learner 3: I don't like to change the language the mid of the time so I try I try hard to understand what they mean because that's how you increase your English

Researcher: okay

Learner 3: you just practice and just chat more time

Researcher: ok

Learner 3: in English way

Researcher: Okay, how often do you use English?

Learner 3: at the college, and I have some friends in the hot [**the hotmail messenger**] they are not from Oman some from India some from Malaysia and they just speak English and I have some friends in the chat I just speak English.

Researcher: Good, now you know I have noticed in the classroom that errr you know you have some grammatical background like your information in grammar is ok. Where did you learn grammar? Is it [**was it**] during school or because of like [**interrupted by Learner 3: practice**] practice because of chatting and speaking to others in English?

Learner 3: That's why I just make a chat more than one time and this is how we can increase our English just make practice every day and if you today make a practice for one hour tomorrow just make one hour and ten minute.

Researcher: Okay

Learner 3: just everyday you just add one or two minute it will be enough

Researcher: Okay

Learner 3: after one week you will see yourself increasing very much

Researcher: Okay, good now we come to the second part of this interview. I will show you some pictures. I'll give you the freedom to choose anyone of them and describe or

talk about them. I'll just first of all show you the pictures, ok? [**The researcher started showing the pictures to Learner 3**]

Now before you errr decide to describe anyone of these pictures, I'd like to ask you a question: What can you notice about these pictures? I mean what is in common about all of these pictures?

Learner 3: You mean the point of the pictures?

Researcher: I mean like errrr if you look at all of these pictures, there is something that it is all – it is in all of these pictures.

Learner 3: [pause] human?

Researcher: Okay, we have people

Learner 3: and errr we have about two ways: some of people have a fun some people have errr food like lunch or dinner

Researcher; aha

Learner 3: and something like travels because in this picture we can say there is some tourist or something like this they go to fishing and they have very big fish [**he described the picture of three tourists catching three big fish**] and this one [**he described the picture of the tourist riding the motor bike in the desert**] he have a bike and he enjoy the sand – drived in the sand and errr this one looks it's look like errr they are camping [**describing the picture of young boys playing football on the beach**]

Researcher: ok , good

Learner 3: This one[**pointing at the picture**]

Researcher: ya, now errrr ok if you want to describe one of these pictures in details which one do you feel more comfortable with? You find that you really can talk about very much?

Learner 3: This- this one will be good for me. [**He choose the picture of the young boys playing on one of the Omani beaches**]

Researcher: Okay, can you tell me about it?

Learner 3: What can I say in this picture is ,errr, nice beach

Researcher: aha

Learner 3: big beach and there is some people errr playing something like football or something like this and errr it's a sunny day there is some umbrella errrr some of errr some of errr family have fried – not fried [**short pause**] just cook

Researcher: You mean barbeque?

Learner 3: yes barbeque

and there's a bimb[**not clear what the word is**] there is sand

Researcher: Ok, now do you know where is this beach? in which part of Muscat?

Learner 3: I guess this beach is in Al Uthiaba

Researcher: Al Uthiaba

Learner 3: Yes

Researcher: Aha, okay

Do you know what do we call these?

Learner 3: it's, errr, umbrella I guess

Researcher: aha

Learner 3: or something like this,I didn't get it

Reasercher: What are they used for?

Learner 3: They just sit under it to errrr to errr [short pause] to just be over them the sun[**he means to protect them from the sun**]

Reasearcher: Okay

Learner 3: cover the sun

Researcher; aha

Do, sorry, do you usually go to the beach?

Learner 3: No, just sometime when the weather is errr cloudy

Researcher: aha

Learner 3: I just go because if it's sunny day and you go to the beach you will have a lot of problems the suns [the sun] will be so hard that's all

Researcher: exactly

Ok, now what other pictures do you like to describe?

Learner 3: [pause] anyone you choose, this one? [**he chose the picture of the tourist riding a motorbike in the desert**]

Researcher: Okay, let's talk about this one.

Learner 3: so errr he's looks like tourist because you can see he didn't use to drive this bike he drive in the sand and he enjoy it and errr in a sunny day . This bike is called ATV

Researcher: aha, sorry what is it called?

Learner 3: ATV

Researcher: What is this?

Learner 3: this kind of bike

Researcher: aha , ok

Learner 3: There is many...

[Interrupted by researcher]: have you seen it anywhere here in Oman?

Learner 3; yes, I see it a lot in the beach and errr rimal - the sands

Researcher: Okay, aha, errr [short pause] have you ever tried riding such bike?

Learner 3: not like this I tried the two- two tires CVR

Researcher: aha, okay, errr [pause] if you were asked to compare between these two pictures you know both of them are in the desert right?

Learner 3: yes

Researcher: What can you say about them?

Learner 3: the first picture is about an Omani errr holding camel he pull it and the other picture is a tourist not Omani and he's driving also in the desert he's driving a bike and the Omani have a camel [pause] looks like the Omani is not having fun – fun day looks like he's tired or something like this and the first it looks like he having fun

Researcher: How do you notice this?

Learner 3: [short pause] because the tourist have errr- he wearing glasses and errr he just drive fast

Researcher: aha aha okay

errr now [short pause] looking at the camel and looking at the bike , what can you say? What does this mean to you? Like?

Learner 3: you can ride the camel and go anywhere you want and you can ride the bike and go anywhere you can – you want

Researcher: aha

Learner 3:you can use the camel and the bike

Researcher: aha, which one of these pictures? We have two men here

Learner 3; yes

Researcher: an Omani and a tourist – which one do you think is having more fun ?

Learner 3: The tourist I told you

Researcher: ya, okay

Learner 3: because he's wearing a bike [**he means wearing sun glasses**] he just go fast in the desert in the sand he burn now the tires that's all

Researcher: aha, okay [pause]

I also would like you to tell me about this picture [**the picture of an Omani man with three women – most probably tourists or business women- having a business meal in one of the restaurants**].

Learner 3: It's also looks like errr three womens something like tourist also because the -they are chatting with an Omani in a restaurant they have sea food and looks like they are having fun time they are joking or something like this

Researcher: Okayokay errr [short pause] by looking at those women and the man , what do you think there job is?

Learner 3: [short pause] The Omani is work errr [long pause] in errr I don't know how I can say it [long pause then changed the idea]

looks three women like just came here in Oman just to describe it to have a fun and the Omani just who lead them to lead them to good places in Oman like the beach and the wadis , the desert , the flats- the forts I mean

Researcher: aha

Learner 3: and looks like he -he's tell them something fun in Oman some situation he had with the tourist or something like this because they are laughing

Researcher: aha, okay, okay thank you very much Learner 3 thank you for your time

Learner 4

Researcher: Good afternoon

Learner 4: Hello, good afternoon

Researcher: can you introduce yourself?

Learner 4: Okay errr my name is Hamam Suliaman Al Hinai. I live in Al Khoud Old [Old Town of Khoud]. I'm 19 years old. I like play football and drive car and I have my family. I have three brothers and two sisters

The big sisters he's- errr she's errr teacher and my big brothers errr he's work in al bahriya [in the marine] ok and errr my favourite my favourite place Oman and exactly Al Khoud because same old village and all people he's help gather [all the people help each other] and I actually I stay with my family all time and errr only this and what tell you about when you some people like village same me and my family because you - I have my garden [farm] there and he's work there all thing and I have the water when you don't don't have water how can how from [not clear] another place like that

Researcher: Ok that's nice. Now you told me that you're sister is a teacher

Learner 4: Yes

Researcher: Now what subject does she teach?

Learner 4: What subject? English

Researcher: Oh Really?

Learner 4: Yes

Researcher: Okay now that's interesting because I'm going to ask you this question errr so this means that you come from an educated family

Learner 4: yes

Researcher: Right? Now, does your sister follow up with your studies like does she help you?

Learner 4: yes more and more

Sometimes when I go with him he tell me what do all time you come all time you come [not clear] yourself I tell him I know something I know something but she's help me more time

Researcher: Ya, now does she speak to you in English sometimes when you are talking?

Learner 4: yes all time speak to me English

Researcher: Okay errr that's nice errr you are in this college: Middle East College of Information Technology

Learner 4: Yes

Researcher: Now can you tell me why did you choose this college?

Learner 4: Yes, because I want to know all about computer about computer and how I can to get some information to another place and I can't from internet and errr this
Researcher: Okay, did- when you chose this college did anybody from your family tell you that no you choose this college or it was your own choice?

Learner 4:no no own choice

Researcher: aha

Learner 4: it's my- all my family tell me where- which college you want go and no problem and I actually I see more college I go to first I go Al Khalej College [Gulf College] after that I will go Muscat College and more and more after that I came here and I see nice college and I ask more the friend and my brother – big brother, big sister and tell me ok nice this college [not clear] you want go this college number one and I come here

Researcher: okay good and you joined this college; you joined the Foundation Programme

Learner 4: yes

Researcher: and you are in Foundation One

Learner 4: yes

Researcher: Now errr can you tell me what are the things you have been studying in the Foundation Programme?

Learner 4: Actually, I- when I came here I don't know more things to English I want learn something new to English

Researcher: Okay

Learner 4: and I learn grammar – some grammar, vocabulary, how I can use vocabulary , and when past, simple like this [not clear] I don't know because in my school , I study but I don't – forget

Researcher: Ok, now ,errr, when did you start learning English?

Learner 4: in my school

Researcher: When, I mean? in which grade?

Learner 4: It's level 4.

Researcher: Now from the fourth grade till the second secondary I think second secondary we call it

Learner 4: yes

Researcher: You have been learning English, right?

Learner 4: yes

Researcher: Now can you tell me what are the things you learned or how was- how was it ?like how many years did you errr - did it take you to learn English now let's say fourth grade , second secondary were talking about ...

Learner 4 [interrupting]: 12

Researcher: No less than 12 years we're talking about [short pause]...

Learner 4: 9

Researcher: Nine years now nine years at school learning English and errr [short pause] did you learn a lot ? how do you find this?

Learner 4: Exactly, I learn a lot you know when school more student don't talked English and the teacher same don't talked English he's talked Arabic more time [students and teacher didn't communicate with each other in English] and sometime talked English when finish the... and all the student don't give the teacher don't give the teacher [not clear] to each other and teachers learn [teach] for like that I don't like English first in the school for that I don't learn a lot only

Researcher: Okay

Okay, good, now can you tell me about your interests, your hobbies, your daily routine?

Learner 4: yes, exactly my daily routine I get up at six O'clock every day because I have work on my bus I have bus and I take my bus because six thirty and I will went to some student and give them [take them or drop them] the college same me and errr I come and study I start sometime eight o'clock – my class start eight o'clock when I finish the class I will go there and there you know I go to get breakfast all thing after I finish my college I errr back will back this student to his home [not clear] home I take a shower after that I go to pray and I study something- learn something after finish all my studies what I want I go to watch TV and go...
[the interview was interrupted by some colleagues who had to discuss and issue with the researcher, so the interview had to be stopped]

[The interview was resumed after a short while]

Researcher: ya ok, sorry about this Hamam that we got interrupted.

Learner 4:[not clear]

Researcher: ya so my question was about daily routines- daily routine sorry and hobbies

Learner 4: yes

Researcher:ya , anyway I'll go to another question now do you- when you speak in English do you find any difficulties or problems?

Learner 4: No, exactly I when I speak , I don't have any any problem only for because some word I don't know what's mean or how about I can use it for how I talked, but when I write and when I read and like something this is difficult for me

Researcher: Okay

Learner 4: yes

Researcher: now if you- while you are speaking if you find any problems like for example difficult grammar or some – some difficult vocabulary that you cannot speak because of this what do you do?

Learner 4: Exactly I errr I use some word not same same but same meaning exactly when I want tell some one when I want go up this road or I want to go, I can't use them I can take my hand or like this

Researcher: aha

Learner 4: yes

I can use it my hand [use gestures]

Researcher: You mean gestures and body language

Learner 4: yes, yes and body language

And when I – he's help me who I talk because I talk to you, you help me

When I take you I want go right side I don't try to and this you can help me

Researcher: Okay, this is good

Now do you also use Arabic?

Sometimes

Learner 4: When I talked -exactly when I talk to English man or English people I don't use Arabic only English. But when I talked from Arabic people [to Arabs] exactly I doing something Arabic [I use some Arabic words].

Researcher: Okay good, if you don't understand a question what do you do?

Learner 4: errr I errrr when I don't stand [don't understand] the question?

Researcher: ya

Learner 4: Exactly I can't do anything but I remember when I can remember I remember what this question mean and I get some word for this questions

Researcher: Okay, ya good

Now before we go to the second part of the interview errr what are you planning to do after you finish your foundation?

Learner 4: I want I want to errr I want to errr Salalah [I want to go to Salalah] after I go back I want to go to some place to learn English and this I don't know what its mean Al Khaleej Al Hadeeth [Modern Gulf Institute] you know?

Researcher: aha

Learner 4: and I want learn English one month after

Researcher: OK, okay good now errr you have some pictures here

Learner 4: yes

Researcher: I want you to choose one of these pictures and describe the one you find easy for you

Learner 4: OK, I choose this [the picture of the tourist riding a motorcycle in the desert]

Researcher: Okay

Can you tell me about it?

Learner 4: Exactly I see one man

He's drive motorcycle in the desert and he's laughing because he's doing something no body can do.

Researcher: What is this something?

Learner 4: because he drifting

Researcher: aha

Learner 4: drifting this motorcycle and he's laugh because he's came to the desert and he play with the motorcycle because with his friend but I didn't saw any friends and errr because he's England man because not Arabic man I saw

Researcher: How do you know [that he's an English]?

Learner 4: His face and he's laughing [smiling] and this desert and there no I think have desert but don't go it the desert

Researcher: Okay, now you mentioned something about drifting right?

Learner 4: yes

Researcher: what do you think of drifting ?

Learner 4: I think it's bad

Researcher: aha, why?

Learner 4: not good because when you more drifting some accident and your tires and you want to pay money for the tires and this not good for you and for the people.

Researcher: Okay, good

There's another picture here [the picture of the Omani Bedouin walking in the desert with his camel]

Interrupted by **Learner 4:** yes about the desert

Researcher: ya same

Learner 4: same like

It's also I saw one man - Omani's man and his camels [one camel only] in the desert errrr I saw this man because he's walked and catch his ...

Interrupted by researcher: Do you think he lives in the desert?

Learner 4: I think no

Researcher: Why?

Learner 4: because his clothes

Yes, because when he's live in the desert, first his clothes his face don't – you cannot saw his face [he means that a Bedouin covers his face maybe to protect him from the heat and sand] because you know the desert he have some wave and – not wave

Interrupted by researcher: sand

Learner 4: sand

Interrupted by researcher: it's windy sometimes

Learner 4: yes and his face his face and his clothes I think it's not not to desert

Researcher: aha

Learner 4: yes

And exactly I think he's I think so he's want to take a picture only and he's grab the camel only

Researcher: Okay, now if you were asked to compare between this man here in the first picture the one on the motorbike and the man with the camel what do –what can you say about them?

Learner 4: Exactly I can say this motorcycle when you want to go any place you can go with him – yes with it

And the camel same like the motorcycle when you want to go anywhere you can [not clear] on the desert on the mountains on the road anything

Researcher: Which one is better the camel or the motorbike?

Learner 4: better?

Researcher: ya which do you think is better ?

Learner 4: motorcycle

Researcher: why?

Learner 4: because use batrol [petrol] and this when you go some where cut [he means that if it runs out of petrol, it will stop in the middle of the road] this only off and the camel you dropped water and some dinner and no problem

Researcher: Okay,

If I ask you about this picture what can you see in this picture?

Learner 4: I can see some family or people here he's playing and errr and write some big word Love I think

Interrupted by researcher: where is it?

Learner 4: Love Oman [He referred to writing done on the wet sands of the beach by the young people playing. although the writing was not clear in the picture he read it as "Love Oman"]

Researcher: aha! okay I haven't noticed this actually

Learner 4: and he's [they're] playing and someone is doing barbeque

Researcher: aha

Learner 4: and he's [they're] playing and laughing like this on the sea- on the beach

Researcher: on the?

Learner 4: beach, yes

Researcher: errr do you like going to the beach?

Learner 4: Yes, I like.

Because when you go to the beach your feel your feel your life is free when you saw the beach because the biggest and no saw anything only the water and the wave like that

Researcher: Do you know how to swim?

Learner 4: Yes I know. My father he's learn to me [has taught me] how to swim

Researcher: aha aha!

OK, what about this picture?

Learner 4: two person , Omani person he's eat his favourite dinner – his favourite errr his favourite errr meal is the rice and I think I think in his home he's eat [drinks] water the dates – not dates here use errr-one man use the spoon and the other one use her hand her hand [his hand] and he is he is eating.

Researcher: Okay, now

If two Omanis are having rice, can they use a spoon or it's not good in Oman?

Learner 4: In Oman is when use a spoon is not good exactly

Researcher: Why?

Learner 4: because the spoon it's slow and when you use hand is eat fast and when you use their rice because now how many rice you can use in your mouth [the idea not clear] and exactly this not to same like your hand yes and like this and Omani people

still [are still having rice with their hands] because Mohammed Salalah Allahu Alyahi wa Salam [Peace be upon him] is use his –her hand and all people use her hand

Researcher: Okay, okay Hamam is there anything else you like to say?

Learner 4: No ,but thanks to [for] your interview nice interview I feel get happy and thanks and good luck for how about you want to be [meaning good luck in your studies]

Researcher: Thank you very much it was nice talking to you

Thank you

Learner 5

Researcher: errr hello errr can you first introduce yourself?

Learner 5: Hello, My name is Sabreen Abdul Hakeem Al Hatmi. I am 19 years old. I'm a student at MECIT errrr Foundation 2

Researcher: aha ok and where do you come from?

Learner 5: errr I come from al Batinah errr I live in Muscat

Researcher: So you are staying in Muscat like not in a hostel, with your family

Learner 5: No, I'm living with my family.

Researcher: oh but originally you are from Al Batinah Region

Learner 5: yes

Researcher: okay errr okay now this leads us to the third question can you tell me a little bit more about your family like for example are they educated? do they follow up with your studies?

Learner 5: ah yes my father and my mother they're- they complete -they completed their higher studies – high studies. My father has bakaloruiuos [bachelor] in business also my mother she have diploma in banking both of them they're working.

Researcher: aha okay now do they follow up with you like does anybody of them come to college from time to time and asks about your studies and your progress?

Learner 5: they don't come in the college bas- but they ask me about my studies how ... how it is difficult or I need help or something.

Researcher; aha okay now let's go a little bit a little bit back to Foundation One. How did you find Foundation One first of all?

Learner 5: It was very easy and errr

Interrupted by Researcher: sorry it was easy in which sense?

Learner 5: Okay, errr it was easy because they organized everything the subjects and most of the things that we didn't know about them before at school or anywhere but we know them in the college we get benefit of that

Researcher: Okay, what was the module that you felt you benefitted a lot from?

Learner 5: GES [General English Skills]

Researcher: How come?

Learner 5: because I wasn't know about grammar that much so errr I improved English by grammar

Researcher: Okay, what about in school like you didn't study grammar during school time or what?

Learner 5: no we study grammar but not that much we didn't study everything in grammar just headlines

Researcher: aha, okay errr now did you study in a private school or government school?

Learner 5: not private school , government

Researcher: government school, ok

Learner 5: yes

Researcher: and how did- how much did you score in English during that time?

Learner 5: in English, 91

Researcher: aha, now how come you scored 91 is it because you were studying English all the time following up with your language?

Learner 5: first of all, all my family they're speaking English and errr they they they advise us to speak English and improve our English and I like reading that's why – especially English I like to read English books ,English magazines , English stories

Researcher: aha aha, ok

Now when did you start learning English?

Learner 5; at errr level 4

Researcher: Okay, errr now did you have what so ever any problems in English during school ?

Learner 5: errr I have problem until now in writing- spelling

Researcher: aha, okay

What about speaking?

Learner 5: speaking [short pause]I don't want to say that I'm excellent in speaking but I'm I'm very good in speaking

Researcher: aha okay now this leads us actually to this question like when you communicate in English do you find any difficulties communicating in English whether in writing or in speaking?

Learner 5: [short pause] no. no difficulties

Researcher: Do you face any problems communicating in English?

Learner 5:[short pause] no

Researcher: okay now this semester your having this course it's Public Speaking skills right?

Learner 5: yes

Researcher: errr, first of all how do you find this course?

Learner 5: very good it's nice

Researcher: okay very good and nice in which sense?

Learner 5; errr it's give chance to the student to speak and to improve her speaking

Researcher: Okay, now errr do you fear any comments given from the students when you speak like you fear that they might give comments or that they might laugh if you make any mistakes in speaking?

Learner 5: I don't care I'm what we say I am confidence [confident] I don't care if anybody say anything or comment on me

Researcher: Okay, now errr if you find difficulties communicating in English, what do you do? Do you for example stop communicating because you find it difficult to continue you say that's it I can't continue , or do you try to find another way to communicate with the other person?

Learner 5: of course I don't stop the communication, if I don't – if I didn't understand, sometimes when I'm speaking with somebody in English errr sometimes I understand what he says but I don't know how to exp- to answer him so I try to ask him what he says and he will try to explain it in another way

Researcher: okay, now if – let me ask you this question for example you were saying something and there's a word that you don't know how to say in English , do you use Arabic in this case?

Learner 5: sometimes

Researcher: aha

Learner 5: ya [with gentle laughter]

Researcher: Okay, do do you find it useful to use Arabic?

Learner 5: no

Researcher: okay, now do you sometimes like if you find it difficult it difficult talking in English or let's say in grammar – do you avoid like for example let's say you're

using the present perfect ok and you find it difficult to use the present perfect do you avoid, you know what's the meaning of avoid?

Learner 5: yes

Researcher: do you avoid using the present perfect and you use another tense instead of that ?

Learner 5: [short pause] errr sometimes not

Researcher: ok now... [Long pause]

Learner 5; but if I'm starting with the present perfect I'll complete it with present perfect better than change the tense

Researcher: okay okay good errr I also heard that you are responsible for one of the clubs

Learner 5; English Club

Researcher: ya can you tell me a little bit more about it what do you do in that club?

Learner 5: errr of course I wasn't the I wasn't the leader of the English Club I was only the – a member in the English Club

First she was errr - the leader of the English club she was Sabriya Al Nomani but now she's busy in this semester so she said to me that you should take this responsible [responsibility] to be the leader in English Club also Ms. Rahma she said you are you are – you can you can be leader so I am now the leader of English Club errr as member in the English Club we did many things for for the students and for the college errr in English club we help students who weak in English if they have any problems in grammar, writing , or speaking we give them classes if they need help or something and we make for them worksheets and every week Ms. Rahma she make timetable for the students and she send it on the CIS and the events also if they can see it they want to enter [not clear] for the students also for the college we make many things parties if there is open day or something we try to make – to organize something for the college

Researcher: Okay, that's good

Now we come to the second part of this interview you have a number of errr pictures errr you are free to choose anyone of them and you can talk about them I might sometimes ask you some questions about them also

[long pause as the learner was looking at the pictures trying to choose one to talk about]

Researcher: errrr, what do you notice these pictures? What's in common about them?

Learner 5: err most of them they are explaining something what you like and pictures errr hobbies or something people they like to do

Researcher: aha and what else can you notice about these pictures?

Learner 5: [no response]

Researcher: if we are talking about culture here, what culture do those pictures show?

Learner 5: Omani

Researcher: aha, Omani culture right?

Learner 5: yes

Researcher: so?

[there was silence as the learner had to decide on one of the pictures]

Researcher: which one do you find easy for you to talk about?

Learner 5:errr [long pause] I am confused between these

So I choose this one [she chose the picture of three non-Omani women who are chatting with an Omani man in one of the restaurants]

Researcher; sorry?this one ok

So can you tell me what does this picture show?

Learner 5: It shows that some people they're outside of Oman they come from errr another countries like European countries or errr Asian countries and it seems that

maybe they don't know about Oman and somebody- Omani person he invite them somewhere and tell them about Oman or something

Researcher: aha, ok errr [long pause] ok who do you think this person is? This one the Omani person

Learner 5: Maybe he's ,errr, from errr - responsible for tourism or something

Researcher: aha okay if you have a look at those three girls there , errr looking at their facial expressions what can you say about them?

Learner 5: They're happy

Researcher: errr, do you think that they are enjoying their time?

Learner 5: yes, of course

Researcher:aha ,okay errr where do you think this restaurant is? in which place? Have you ever seen it?

Learner 5: No, I haven't seen it before.

Researcher: aha, ok

What about this picture? [the picture of some young boys playing football on one of the beaches in Muscat]

Where is it?

Learner 5: It's like Sawadi beach

Researcher: oh really?

Learner 5: ya,

Researcher: I think it's Shati Al Qurm

Learner 5: Shati al Qurm?

Researcher: ya

Learner 5: yes

Researcher: right, you remembered?

Learner 5: ya [laughing]

Researcher: it seems that you don't go there very often

Learner 5: not often ya I don't go

Researcher: okay

What are those people doing here?

Learner 5: They're playing football.

Researcher: ok can you tell me which part of the year is the most suitable time for the people to go and enjoy their time on the beach?

Learner 5: in holiday in summer

Researcher: summer! really? not – summer but it'll be very hot right?

Learner 5; but it's better than or spring or something

Researcher: aha, okay

Learner 5: in winter it's very cold

Researcher: aha so people might not enjoy especially if they want to swim maybe

Learner 5: but going in beach or spending holiday it's usually in summer

Researcher: aha ya exactly exactly

Do you like to talk about this picture? [the picture of an Omani Bedouin walking bare-footed in the desert and draggling a camel behind him]

Learner 5: no [with laughter]

[the learner was not very eager to describe the picture and when she was asked why she didn't want to talk about it she didn't give a response]

Researcher: Why? [with laughter]

What can you see in this picture?

Learner 5: errr a camel , a man

Researcher: okay

What does this tell you a camel and a man?

Learner 5: about life in errr in people who don't live in cities they live in village or in desert

Researcher: errr where do you usually find camels and people with camels here in Oman in which part of Oman?

Sbareen: in Hima

Researcher:aha , ok [short pause] have you ever seen a real camel?

Learner 5: ya

Researcher: what do you think about it?

Learner 5: it's beautiful animal [laughing]

Researcher: okay [laughing]

Learner 5: it's strong to survive

Researcher: What about this? [the picture of a western tourist riding a motorbike in the middle of the desert]

Here we have two pictures actually this picture is of a man with the camel in the desert and this person also is in the desert

Learner 5: ya

Researcher: but there is no camel here what can you see ?

Learner 5: a motorbike

Researcher: aha

Errr [pause] where- ok motorbike - why is he using the motorbike what do you think?

Learner 5: he's trying to enjoy

Researcher: aha

Learner 5: ya drving it

Researcher: okay okay

What about this? [the picture of three men who have caught three large fish]

Do you know what do we call this type of fish?

Learner 5: no

Researcher: I also don't know

But could it be that it is errr maybe it's a shark or something?

Learner 5: no

Researcher: It's not a shark?

Learner 5: no

Maybe it's type of shark but not it's not shark

Researcher: aha, maybe

[short pause] do you think- what do you think the nationality of these people – their nationalities what do you think they are/?

Learner 5: They're like Indian people

Researcher: Indian people ya maybe

Okay Learner 5 it was nice talking to you

Do you like to add anything else?

Learner 5: no, I just want to say that it was great conversation and I like the questions and thank you

Researcher: thank you very much

thank you for your help

Learner 5: Thank you

Researcher: thank you

Learner 6

Researcher: Good afternoon

Learner 6: good afternoon, mister

Researcher: Can you introduce yourself?

Learner 6: My name Haitham Salim Abdullah Al Rahbi , I am 27 – 26 old . I am study in Middle East College.

Researcher: aha

Learner 6: and I am non-married (exchange of laughter)

Researcher: not married single, ok

Now, you are studying in the Foundation Programme

Learner 6: ya

Researcher: Can you tell me a little bit about the Foundation Programme?

Learner 6: Foundation Programme is errr (short pause) the structure to be – to think to be ,errr, more ,errr, (stopped and changed the structure)

Foundation One errrr increase yourself to be think like academic person and it is improve your English skills and research skills and like that

Researcher: Ok and what are the things [subjects] that you have been studying in the Foundation Programme?

Learner 6: We studied how to speak with a group of people and errr how to do projects steps by steps and errr math and also computer how to use computer Microsoft Office and Windows what is on Windows and Hardware. Some basic (short pause) basic thing about computer and that's all

Researcher: Okay

Now, you are now in Foundation Two , is there any difference between Foundation One and Foundation Two?

Learner 6: Yes, there is difference. Foundation One , the image was clear you study this module for this subject and this module for this subject but in foundation two , there is unclear picture.

(Interrupted by researcher): can you explain more?

Learner 6: Okay, in EAP, English for Academic Purpose, you study- they told you to do project. Teacher show you the way but how to do it and how to think and how to research this is your problem [The learner reflects the idea of spoon feeding which is common in school education as well as tertiary education] you must learn- teach yourself and speaking English errr English (stopped) not speaking – (He asked the researcher about the name of the module in Arabic) *el madda wesh isimha?*[what is the name of the module?]

Researcher: Public Speaking Skills

Learner 6: Public Speaking Skills they teach you how to move the body language [how to make use of body language] and how to increase the audience but you must have your own style , each student have their own style and this is the problem because this is the first time you studied something that give you the choice to errr put on it your style

And this is in the beginning it is unclear and grammar Foundation One was better.

Researcher: aha aha ok

Now let's go back to errr during your - when you were studying at school, now when did you start learning English, in which grade? I mean

Learner 6: ah (long pause) when I was 10 years old I started.

Researcher: Okay this means fourth grade or?

Learner 6: not errr fourth ya

Researcher: fourth grade ok

Learner 6: I think also

Researcher: Now, how did you find learning English at school?

Learner 6: it's very bad

Researcher: Okay, can you tell me why?

Learner 6: because errr (pause) you can succeed in this module without do any work [He means that students pass the English subject without working and studying hard] just go to final exam and write there anything and you will pass.

Researcher: Oh, so this means that neither teachers nor students were taking this course which is English seriously.

Learner 6: Yes,

Researcher: and usually what students used to do in the English class?

Learner 6: They only speak with each other and have fun that's all and errr sometimes they are always absent from the lecture.

Researcher: Okay, then how did you improve your speaking?

Learner 6: After the school, I am work and when I work I speak with people who have different culture like Indian and pakistani

Researcher: and...

(interrupted by Learner 6): and from there this is the beginning [not clear]

Researcher: what was like the type of your work?

Learner 6: before I am work like salesman and this improved my [not clear] because the customer who come to me they have errr they always from another country [foreigners] so I must to talk with him – to them with English Language and this is help me a lot to improve my language

Researcher: Okay, now are you the eldest in your family or there are other brothers and sisters who are older than you?

Learner 6: There is errr brothers older than me

Researcher: Are they educated or ...?

Learner 6: Yes, some of them

Researcher: Now usually when you study when you do your projects or study for the exams, is there anybody who from your family who follows up with you who checks

(interrupted by Learner 6): who helps me ya'ani?

Researcher: yes who helps you

Learner 6: Yes, my sister

Researcher: Is her English language better than yours?

Learner 6: yes all my brothers

It's only two have errr less language than me and the others more than me

Researcher: Okay

Learner 6: and my father speak English

Researcher: okay that is something good

Now, do you find any difficulties communicating in English and here I'm interested more in speaking, in the oral communication, do you find any problems?

Learner 6: sometimes yes

Researcher: okay can you tell me what types of problems do you face?

Learner 6: your mood, sometimes you have the good mood to speak English sometime even one word you cannot speak . You know the word but I don't know stuck [not clear] stuck and sometime you speak English like errr English man [native speakers] they think you are perfect in English.

Researcher: okay and, now, are you in a good mood to speak in English or you're not in a good mood?

Learner 6: (paused for a while then used a gesture indicating half-half)

Researcher: half-half?

Learner 6: half – half yes

Researcher: Why ? Are you a little bit worried because of the interview or what?

Learner 6: no it is not related to the time that is natural sometime yes sometime no

Researcher: Okay, good

Now, errr, when you speak in English in the classroom do you fear students' comments when they speak in front – when you speak in front of them like they make fun or they start laughing?

Learner 6: With me no because I'm better than them but some student when they come out and speak they comment of their language – them language ,ya'ani

Researcher: ya, ok

Now if you find difficulties communicating in English, what do you do? Do you stop speaking because you find it difficult to continue or do you try another way to continue with your conversation?

Learner 6: stop

Researcher: you stop

Learner 6: ya

Researcher: What do you usually do like stop – what do you say that's it I can't or what?

Learner 6: I mix English with Arabic and sometime I am shut up my mouth and didn't speak any word maybe I talk with my friend to help me like that this is almost sometime some time I speak I change the way

Researcher: Okay, now coming to grammar do you find any difficulties using grammatical structures in speaking for example?

Learner 6: yes

Researcher: What do you do in this case? If you want to say something but you want to use a certain structure but you find it difficult sometimes what do you do?

Learner 6: I change the whole sentence and begin from the beginning

Researcher: Okay, that's good. Now can you tell me about your future plans

(interrupted by Learner 6): There is no plan.

Researcher: after you finish Foundation?!

Learner 6: There is no plan

Researcher: You are not planning to study or continue with your studies after Foundation?

Learner 6: If I have the money and time , ok no problem but if I don't have the money and money [time], no.

Researcher: So it depends on your financial situation – money situation

Learner 6: yes

Researcher: OK,

Learner 6: Not financial maybe I have the job- I found good job, I will not continue Maybe after I am work and they gave me the choice to continue my education, ok no problem. This is good for me

Researcher: Okay, now you told me that you are 26 years old.

Learner 6: yes

Researcher: what made you think of continuing your studies

Learner 6: before I don't have money, now I have money this is the situation.

Researcher: oh so that depended on your financial situation

Learner 6: yes yes

Researcher: ya, okay

Now if you were given the choice to study, I mean to choose your specialization , what would you choose?

Learner 6: (long pause) programmer

Researcher: Are you good at programming?

Learner 6: No, but it is interested me because it is something special and every student want wireless and hardware I know this is good errr - something good but I think the programming is better especially if you can – if it interested you

Researcher: Okay

(interrupted by Learner 6): Maybe maybe I change it it's depends – I didn't choose until now because first semester they give us something missed ya'ani it is not special I can't change in first first semester and that time I can – I have the good idea to choose until now I didn't think about it because Middle East of – this is college for IT and everything in IT it is interesting me: computer, video games, internet, multimedia, everything

Researcher: Okay, that is good

Do you remember any incident?

Learner 6: What's mean incident?

Researcher: incident means something something that happened

Learner 6: accident

Researcher: not necessarily accident because an incident could by a happy incident or it could be a sad incident

An incident or something very- happened that made you very very sad

Learner 6: When my brother died

Researcher: Oh, your brother died?!

Learner 6: Ya

Researcher: can you tell me about this experience?

Learner 6: I was in my room and errr I heard some noise and when I go down errr they told me my brother died I am not cry like lady and none see me – see my tears but in my side ..

(interrupted by researcher): you were sad

Learner 6: ya very sad

Researcher: but errr I don't know I mean

Learner 6: this is the baddest [the worst] in my life

Researcher: ya but I mean talking about you didn't cry but maybe you felt because you didn't cry and maybe you felt more sad, right?

Learner 6: yes

Researcher: maybe if you let your tears fall maybe you might have felt better, what do you think?

Learner 6: maybe that but your are man you must be stronger

Researcher: ya but sometimes you have to cry

Learner 6: yes I know I know when I turn my back

Researcher: ah okay but not in front of others

Learner 6: no

Researcher: no way

Something that made you feel very happy?

Learner 6: (pause) the people didn't think or remember something happen very happy for them because people only remember the bad events but errr something happy (pause) maybe I am happy when I see my mother and father every day this make me happy because everything sad but when I see my brother and my sister and family I feel very happy that's all.

Researcher: You see them everyday of course

Learner 6: yes of course

Researcher: where do you live?

Learner 6: Mawalih

Researcher: Oh, so you live in Muscat

Learner 6: ya but everyday I'm very happy when I see them and this is it

Researcher: aha aha that is something good
 Now let's move to the other - to the second part of the presentation [interview]
 I'll show you some pictures just take your time have a look – a close look at the pictures you can choose one and talk about
 First of all before you describe one of the pictures , can you tell me what do you notice about these pictures? what is in common about them?

Learner 6: This is friend and this is family and this is family and this is like to walk way alone and this is anani [selfish]

Researcher: Sorry what is it?

Learner 6: anani anani bil a'arbi [he asked for the meaning of selfish in English]

Researcher: In English? selfish you mean?
 Why?

Learner 6: I don't know I just because he play alone without any people

Researcher: you mean the man on the ... what do we call this one (pointing at the motorbike in the picture)

Learner 6: draja [the Arabic word for motorbike] - bike?

Researcher: ya, motorbike

Learner 6: motorbike

Researcher: Okay, aha

Learner 6: and this is errr one man he didn't know what he want maybe lost himself and this is people who play with each other like this picture and this is people lire [he then explained in Arabic – “yakthibo a'ala ba'dahum” which means they lie to each other]

Researcher: they are lying?

Okay, I'll ask you about this picture later on but first of all I saw that you wanted to talk about this [the picture of three men or fishermen who have caught three big fish]

Learner 6: ya because this is my friend Mohammed , Ali, and Idress (invented names)

Researcher: oh, really?

Learner 6: no

Researcher: ah, you are imagining

Learner 6: yes

Researcher:okay, good

Learner 6: I have three – two friends like brothers

Researcher: errr ya what else can you say about it?

Learner 6: and they have fight not fight – tahadi [meaning challenge]

Researcher: challenge?

Learner 6: challenge yes and me and my friends challenge with each other

Researcher: Okay do you think they are fishermen?

Learner 6: no

Researcher: why?

Learner 6: I don't know but errr they didn't look like fisherman

Researcher: aha

Learner 6: They only tourist

Researcher: Okay, have you ever caught a fish in your life?

Learner 6: Yes, like this (using his finger) small errr micro-fish (exchange of laughter)

Researcher: Can you tell me about this experience?

Learner 6: Okay, I think maybe me and my friend Mohammed and Idrees we fished- we fish - fisher – fished? *madi*[the past?] istadna [the Arabic word for fishing]- we hunt [here the learner was influenced by Arabic since the word ‘ *istad*’ in Arabic means both ‘ hunted’ and ‘ caught a fish’ in English].

Researcher: caught

Learner 6: we caught a fish and it was very small so my friend Idrees appeared the knife and cut the fish [direct translation from Arabic – his intended meaning was ‘ he caught the fish with the knife] and (laughing) it’s become smaller smaller than my finger

Researcher: Why?

ah because the fish was...

(Interrupted by Learner 6): was very small – too small before so we laughed and throw the fish in the water again

Researcher: aha aha aha that’s nice

Do you think it’s easy to catch fish or ...

Learner 6: No it’s very hard very hard

Researcher: very hard

Aha, so those three men who were able to ... (got interrupted by Learner 6)

Learner 6: Maybe they didn’t caught this fish maybe somebody and give him – gave them this fish and only to take this picture

Researcher: Ok, good

Now, your comment on this picture actually is very interesting because you said they are lying to each other, can you tell me why?

Learner 6: because errrr I don’t know but I think that maybe look the or to the food it was very errrr *mrtaba*? [asked about the meaning in English using his native language Arabic]

Researcher: Sorry, what do you want to say?

Learner 6: munatham [meaning well- arranged in English]

Researcher: What is it? the food?

Learner 6: yes

Researcher: arranged – well-arranged

Learner 6: arranged with water they didn’t drink look for to the juice here and there and errr (pause) and look to them face ya’ani [it means] they wear [put on] make up and beautiful clothes I don’t know but I feel munifiqeen yunafiq ba’adahum [hypocrites who are hypocrites with each other]

Researcher: aha like they are hypocrites.

Learner 6: like like errr *mu ismoh* [what it’s name] character [means actors]

Researcher: like it’s just... (got interrupted by Learner 6: tamtheel [acting])

Researcher: for the sake of taking the picture

Learner 6: ya

not not for taking the picture because like interview and this is new man of them and the this first time and you know the formal and when you speak formal language and formal (pause) when you think formal [in a formal way] , you must be *diblomaci* [the Arabic word for diplomatic] and when you become diblomaci you must be liar and errr not liar liar this strong language but *tnafiq* [you become a hypocrite]

Researcher: ya okay okay thank you very much

Now, these two pictures I would like you to have a look at them and compare like tell if you were asked to talk about these pictures - these two pictures what can you say?

Learner 6: I say this man who bike the motor- the motorbike (short pause) he’s I think selfish I don’t know why because he play only with himself [alone]

Researcher: but just a second let me just stop you here now you described this man as being selfish but also this man is also walking alone right?

Learner 6: ya

Researcher: and he’s - nobody else is with him don’t you also think that he is selfish?

Learner 6: no

Researcher: Why?

Learner 6: I don't know but when you look in the picture, you think like that maybe this one who have the bike , he play alone ok this one he didn't play maybe he walk to his (short pause) sorry, target or place (pause) saboor yakhi fi al shams wa mashi [he's patient walking under the sun]

Researcher: ah so he's a very patient person

Learner 6: Yes, I don't know but I felt like that

Because maybe when you see someone play with himself , sometime (short pause) he will be selfish in the future

Maybe I think [not clear]

Researcher: So, can we – if we look at these pictures, these two pictures were taken in the desert. But, there is a big difference, right?

Learner 6: ya

Researcher: the big difference, maybe this is how I feel, that one of them is ... (got interrupted)

Learner 6: tourist

Researcher: ya, and this one is?

Learner 6: Omani

Researcher: Omani, what do we call the person who lives in the desert?

Learner 6: Badawi [the Arabic word for Bedouin]

Researcher: Bedouin , Bedouin, that's in English.

Learner 6: Bedouin?

Researcher: ya

So one of them is having fun in the desert and the other one is not having fun probably, right?

Learner 6: yes

Researcher: How do you know that the Bedouin is not having fun?

Learner 6: He have the fun but in this picture he have maybe work or want to go to some place and it is very hard when you walk in the desert alone and he have the patience – saboor la? [he is patient, isn't he?]

Researcher: have you ever experienced living in the desert or walking in the desert?

Learner 6: no no no

Researcher: Why?

Learner 6: (short pause) because when you live in Oman (short pause) maybe you don't have the (short pause) fashion fashion , al raghba la? fashion?[here, he gave a wrong word ' fashion' but he meant desire, so as he was not sure of the word he asked about it in Arabic]

Researcher: the desire

Learner 6: fashion wesh? [what is fashion?]

Researcher: fashion?

Learner 6: fashion, ya

Researcher: ya fashion is related to clothes and things like this – you say fashion

Learner 6: desire, desire?

Researcher: ya

Learner 6: when you live in a place you don't have the desire to discover your country but when the other people come in your country, he want to desire this country and like that everyman like that, maybe when someone come in your country and he is tourist maybe after one year he know better than you about your country.

Researcher: if you were asked to describe the Bedouin , what would you say?

Learner 6: (short pause) he is a strong man and he like to work

(he started speaking in Arabic): awsef sha'uri wil aswef el sura bel dabet [shall I describe my feelings or the picture itself] ?

Researcher: both, the picture and what you feel

Learner 6: okay and he caught errr camel and so with a rope, so this mean he like to be like errr like a boss (shifted into Arabic): yahub el qiyada ya'ani [he likes to be a leader]

Researcher: ah, he likes to lead

Learner 6: ya to be the leader and errr it was a sunny day and errr it's very hot And he walk to errr do some formal work to another Bedouin people, that's it

Researcher: okay, what about this man?

Learner 6: this man is American man

He is come to my country Oman to have fun (short pause) and this is good for him (short pause) I don't know how he enjoyed there because maybe in his country there is no hot sun like here this is good for him

I like to go-goes to America to have fun like him but he come to desert, and I will go to snow

Researcher: aha aha I see

Learner 6: like that

Researcher: I understand

Learner 6: when he see me in the picture and see me with the snow – I play with snow, he will say like what I say before [he means he will have the same opinion when he sees me in the photograph playing with the snow]

Researcher: aha aha, I see

It was nice, do you like to add anything else?

Learner 6: no, thank you

Researcher: thank you very much

Learner 7

Researcher: Assalam Allykum

Learner 7: wa allykum assalam

Researcher: can you introduce yourself?

Learner 7: First, my name is Ghassan Ghullam Al Bullushi and I am 19 years old and I am now in MECIT college and I am almost finishing my foundation years and ...

Researcher: Okay, can you tell me a little bit about the foundation programme what have you learned what have you studied throughout this whole year?

Learner 7; I learn many things like in the math all new things in English I learned and also in other modules like English we know how to do good presentations and what is the steps you follow when you present your presentations and how to speak and all of this

Researcher: OK, good and what was errr the module you liked the best? Throughout the whole year

Learner 7: actually the Pubic Speaking Skills

Researcher: Why?

Learner 7: because we can speak a lot in this classes and that's what we need we have to talk much

Researcher: OK, now mmm about your family- I mean do you come from an educated family like your brothers, sisters, parents [are they educated?]

Learner 7: ya they all finished their college year and they are working now

Researcher: Okay now do they follow up with you? do they check like come and ask you about your studies?

Learner 7: ya, always they always ask me about my study and ...

Researcher: Okay, what about your time at school like you studied in a government or a private school ?

Learner 7: government school

Researcher: OK, now when did you start learning English?

Learner 7: I start because the first – in the first year in school I studied in a private school that's why from the beginning I am learning English

Researcher: aha, okay and how was it ? I mean I'm talking about learning English at school

Learner 7: first for sure I faced problems because the new language we have to know the skills the rules and after that it's easy ya'ani

Researcher: What are you planning to study after you finish your foundation?

Learner 7: actually is designing multimedia

Researcher: why?

Learner 7: because it's I like it from I like drawing and designing with the computers

Researcher: aha aha okay now mmm while communicating in English and here we're talking about speaking do you face any problems?

Learner 7: with the communicating with others?

Researcher: ya ,speaking in English trying to express your ideas your thoughts

Learner 7: before, I faced problems because it was new language for me but now I think I am improving and I can speak with other people

Researcher: If you face problems communicating in English, what do you do? Like for example while you are speaking to somebody you might face sometimes problems in grammar , you don't know the correct grammatical structure or you might find it sometimes difficult to find the suitable word in this case what do you do?

Learner 7: ya actually this mistake always happens with me and I will not stop talking I continue but after that I know what's my mistake and I'll try to avoid next time

Researcher: Okay if you don't understand- somebody is speaking to you in English and you don't understand that person

Learner 7: actually I always ask

Researcher: What do you ask?

Learner 7: if there's a word he said I don't understand it I told him what's the meaning of this word

Researcher: Okay other than asking for the meaning of a certain word , what else?

Learner 7: dictionary help me [with laughter]

Researcher: but let's suppose that you are speaking to somebody and you don't have a dictionary

Learner 7: keep silent [with laughter]

Researcher: [laughed] ok

Errr do you sometimes use Arabic?

Learner 7: When I am talking English?

Researcher: yes, if you find it difficult like using some words or something like this

Learner 7: if it's with my friend maybe but if I'm talking in front of other peoples who I don't know them I don't use Arabic I try to find other ways

Researcher: Okay, okay good

Now we go to the second part of the errrr interview I'll just show you some pictures and you can choose anyone of them and describe or talk about

I'll give you some time to think about it

Okay, but before that what is in common if you look at these pictures? There is something in common about these pictures

Learner 7: Omani people?

Researcher: Okay, Omani people

Which culture is this?

Learner 7: the Omani culture

Researcher: Okay, okay can you describe this picture please? [the picture of three non-Omani women with an Omani man wearing traditional clothes exchanging chat in a restaurant]

Learner 7: This pictures errr there are people in the restaurant and they actually I think having lunch and there are- there is a man wearing Omani dress and other peoples maybe English – England from England and I think this Omani guy he's their boss and he made this party for them to have lunch together and that's all and they are in a good restaurant I think

Researcher: aha. aha okay can I ask a question why did you choose this picture? Is it because you find it easier for you to talk about or what?

Learner 7: just like this

Researcher: ah, okay just like this

Ok if I ask you to talk about this picture what can you say?

[the picture of three fishermen or tourist smiling while they are grabbing three big fish they have caught]

Learner 7: I can say there are three guys they are look very happy because they caught very big fish and they- and they are happy

Researcher: aha why do you think they are happy?

Learner 7: because the smile on their face

Researcher: and what happened to the fish?

Learner 7: [laughed and gave no response]

Researcher: Ok what do you think those three men did to the fish?

Learner 7: they caught the fish and they took it maybe to sell this fish

Researcher: aha aha ok

What about this picture? [the picture of two Omani men having rice for lunch in a restaurant]

What are those people here doing?

Learner 7: They are having lunch because it's rice and water because traditional food in Oman all- everybody in Oman they usually eat rice to have a lunch and they are sitting down not on the table because it a traditional thing we like to sit in the ground and eat

Researcher: aha aha okay

If you look at these two pictures, can you compare between these two pictures? Can you make a comparison? [the picture of the Bedouin with the camel and that of the tourist riding a motorbike in the desert]

Learner 7: This is two pictures one of them shows the past there's a man and he's walking on the desert and his camel is with him because it is the trans-transitive – they...

Researcher: transportation

Learner 7: yes and here the guy and he's driving a motorcycle and it's modern things now and the future they errrr guys use this this machines or motorcycles not like the past because it was difficult now everything is ...[pause]

Researcher: aha which [who] do you think is happier in this picture?

Learner 7: for me this [the tourist riding the motorbike]

Researcher: why?

Learner 7: because I am living now this life because I don't know the – how they live in the past

Researcher: so you mean that the man on the motorbike is happier than the man with the camel

Learner 7: I guess

Researcher: Okay, do you know what- who is in the desert now – this man lives in the desert do you know what we call this person?

Learner 7: Bedouins
Researcher: okay
What about this person?
Learner 7: live in the city
Researcher: Is he an Omani?
Learner 7: looks like Omani , now guys like this
Researcher: aha aha have you ever been to the desert?
Learner 7; to the desert, no
Researcher: okay do you like to go there?
Learner 7: ya I like I see pictures and on the television it's look good
Researcher: okay, what about the camel? Have you ever had the experience of riding a camel?
Learner 7: unfortunately no
Researcher: why unfortunately?
Learner 7: because [not clear] past and its very good things and they- the Bedouins they always say the camel is the best animal it's good to try
Researcher: which do you like best the sea or the desert?
Learner 7: the sea
Researcher: why?
Learner 7: sea it's comfortable place you can also sit anytime you want and the desert is very hot all the years every time is hot but in the beach the weather is good we can play and swim
Researcher: OK Ghassan is there anything else you like to add?
Learner 7: no thank you
Researcher: thank you very much for coming
Nice talking to u

Learner 8

Researcher: Good afternoon

Can you introduce yourself?

Learner 8: My name is Musaab Mazin Al Sayyid Ismail. I am from Syria. I am 19 -18-19 years old. I come this year just to study in MECIT and what else?

Researcher: ya, errr I just want you to tell me a little bit about – to give some background information about you like your education

Interrupted by Learner 8: It's ok my education was my full education was in Oman my father was work here in Oman before sixteen years so that I live with him here in Oman. My education was in Suwiah here in Oman from the grade one to grade to full class –study ya3ni[it means] was in the school here in Oman after my school I think to study engineering – computer so I search about a lot of colleges but the MECIT is the best

Researcher: aha

Learner 8: MECIT is the best so I come here to study I finish Foundation One and now inshallah I will go to finish foundation two and inshallah I'm going to study hardware and networking the next semester.

Researcher: Okay, ya that I will ask about it later on. Now what about your family like are they educated? your parents, your brothers?

Learner 8; aha, okay errr informations about my family ok?

My father in the first is he didn't study full grades or he just study until class errr class seven after that you know in the past there wasn't study too much. So he finishes study and go out to searching about work. My father[mother] she's a house a housewife and she didn't work errr she didn't work in any place just working at home

I have four brothers, one of them in class seven, one one of them class six , and one of them class four, and the last one class three, in order

Researcher: Okay, good now let me go and again we are going to talk about your English

Learner 8: aha, ok

Researcher: When did you start learning English?

Learner 8: actually errr before five years ago

Researcher: really?! Before that you what?

Learner 8: before I was in the school but I didn't learn English from the school actually the school was...

interrupted by the researcher: aha, can you tell me about? ya ya tell me about this please.

Learner 8: The school was just give us errr ok they teach us English in school but we don't love it that too much ya'ani [**it means**]

Researcher: aha

Learner 8: because it was difficult some grammars and a lot you know a lot of we don't love it and school come you know every day so I have my friend he is from Sudan and most of the Sudanese their accent in English they're good and they learn English quickly

Researcher: aha

Learner 8: I errr he was my good – my best friend we was- when we was walking together or going to somewhere together we was talking in English all the time errr after that I started to watching movies without translation but I watch it without translation to ... because to learn [**here he got the help of another female student who was there and told him the word “improve”**] ya to improve my English

Researcher: aha

Learner 8: Ok?

So after the films, I face some errr - there is Indians work in our in our town in there he's computer engineering he's working in a shop so I know him and we we were to going together to some places and speak together fully in English so all the time alone English like this.

Researcher: So what was the thing that made you learn English more? Like was it through communicating with others or was it through watching films and listening to English songs or what?

Learner 8: all of this

Watching TV is the one one reason because I was always watching TV and the new movies and communicate with the peoples they don't know Arabic they just speak in English

Researcher: What about at school?

Learner 8: at school we learn English I have my teacher errr he's Indian he learn us OK the grammar and everything but not that too much we learn it in school better- we learn it better out of the school actually

Researcher: aha, ok good

Can you tell me about your interests, your hobbies?

Learner 8: OK, errr I love to errr computing too much I love to play with computer it's the if there's any problem in the computer I like to open it and try to prepare[**repair**] it by myself this is one of the hobbies, the other one I love sports you know football exactly football errr play games the errr and the cars games mostly I love this errr that's it and checking websites and internet

Researcher: Okay, good errr [**pause**] ok now let's errr or let me ask you this question errr if you have a problem in English, like communicating in English what do you usually do? Like for example if somebody was speaking to you in English and you

didn't understand him or her or you want to say something in English and you found some difficulties . What do you do? Do you stop communicating or...

Interrupted by Learner 8: no never

Researcher: or do you try another way? or what do you do?

Learner 8: ya I actually when I errr face this I try to find any way and any word to just you know send this message when I want to talk to him I I ya'ani I use any way to communicate with him ya'ani [**not clear**]

[**Interrupted by the researcher:** Can you give me any example?

Learner 8: Okay errr like [short pause] if that guy who's speaking with me I didn't understand him, if he's my friend -it's depend about the person- if he's my friend I ..I ask him I don't understand you so repeat in other way so I- when he repeat in other way I can understand but...

Interrupted by the researcher: So one way is you ask that person to repeat

Learner 8: ya, if he's my friend but he's a person I don't know him actually I will not I will try to

Researcher: then what do you do in this case?

Learner 8: I will try. Actually errr when he speaking there is just a few words I don't - I will not understand it maybe so but the other words it make me understand what he ask about and there is a key words when he speaking.

Researcher: Okay, do you try to use Arabic sometimes if you find the difficult word or ...

Interrupted by Learner 8: not always not always I try errr I try hard to- hard way to just communicate with English I don't stop and speak in Arabic no

Researcher: Okay, good errr now I think you told me that you are living in a hostel

Learner 8: ya

Researcher: Okay, can you tell me about it? How errr how's your life there

Interrupted by Learner 8: it's boring

Researcher; being away from family

Learner 8: Okay, it's a way from family actually I miss them but not that too much because I weekly I go to them in weekend I go because it's not far way in Suwiah just two hours far way so the life the life in hostel is sometimes became boring sometimes became funny[**fun**] errr because errr we don't have like TV - we don't have TV in the hostel

Researcher: aha, why don't you buy a TV?

Learner 8: **The guys- it depend about the guys [with laughter]** wiz[**with**] me I love to that to [**not clear**] buy TV buy everything to make our hostel funny but no one want to dothis

Researcher: aha

Learner 8: they are not thinking about this

Researcher: okay

Learner 8: so and the life in the hostel actually boring

Researcher: aha

Learner 8: that actually ,Mister, that depend about the people who living with you if the people who living with you errr love each other and they like to errr they love you they will be funny but most of them we don't understand each other in a good way.

Researcher: aha, okay, good now I'll show you a number of pictures and you are free to choose errr any of these pictures and talk about them or describe them

Learner 8: aha, okay

Researcher: the one that you feel that it is very easy for you to describe

Learner 8: mmmmm

Researcher: but you know before you errr let's say decide to talk about one of about one of the pictures, I'd like to ask you a question: now if you look at these pictures, ok, now what do you find in common? What's in common?

Learner 8: Like errr like what?

Researcher: Like having a look at these pictures, these- all of these pictures show something that is found in all the pictures, it's common in all the pictures

Learner 8; errr each picture there is not just one person I think the people together ya'ani not single

Researcher: Okay

Learner 8: except this one[**talking about the picture of the Omani standing in front of the Shawirma restaurant**]

Researcher: ok, ok and

Learner 8 [not clear]

Researcher: but don't you notice that maybe all of these pictures talk about Oman?

Learner 8: ah from this side! Ya actually because the most of the photos ya it's about Oman

Researcher: aha

Learner 8: aha

Researcher: okay so which one do you like to talk about?

Learner 8: I think this one errr because ...

Interrupted by Researcher: the three – the men with the fish

Learner 8: with the fish ya because I love fish so I describe it

Researcher: aha

Learner 8: in this picture I can see there is three people I think errr they are friends because they are happy errrr and also I can see they they catch this fish fresh from the sea now and they are so happy to catch it. It's a big fish actually and errr...

Researcher: How many **[fish]** we have- there are?

Learner 8: There are three with three fish. Each one have a big one.

Researcher: Okay, aha

Learner 8: and errr they are so happy. I think they are in errr in a place like errr what can say It's like errrr for a place for the tourisms **[tourists]** and errr I don't know what its mean exactly but that's ok what else?

Researcher: Okay, if I ask you to look at these two pictures here and make a comparison

Learner 8: aha, okay

errr this two pictures show me one errr one man is walking in the desert with his animal – with his camel and errr walking without errrr ok this without shoes and the second one errr the guy with errr what's call it errr motor in the desert

Researcher: motorbike

Learner 8: motorbike in the errr in the desert this two pictures can show me the different between the people who use the camel to trans ...transfer **[travel]** from place to another place and the other how the... the modern way to transfer

Researcher: aha

Learner 8: actualy with errr before there was transfer with camels but now they use some other ways modern ways

Researcher: Which one of the two people **[who is]** is more comfortable?

Learner 8: actualy from the person or from me?

Researcher: you think

Learner 8: errr actualy I think the second one because the guy ...

Interrupted by the researcher: which one? The second one you mean this one

Learner 8: ya who who who who driving the motor cycle- motor bike beacause it is more comfortable and easy to drive and **[short pause]** it's easy to drive and funny [

more fun] but that one it's errr [**not clear**] the camel slowly and the weather is hot you will try to work in slowly thing like this

Researcher: aha aha , do you –what do we call the man here?

Learner 8: errrr what like from from which?

Researcher: like if you see a person in the desert with a camel, who is this person?

Learner 8: He is errr in Arabic known actually because in Arabic they say here in Oman “Badawi” but...

Interrupted by researcher: Ok, do you do you know the meaning of it in English?

Learner 8: no because I didn't face this word before.

Researcher: ya it is Bedouin

Learner 8: Bedouin?! The same?!

Researcher: ya ya

Learner 8: aha

Researcher: and this person, who do you think this person is?

Learner 8: He is motorbike- motor biker

Researcher: Okay, could it be that he's a tourist?

Learner 8: yes because he's looking different than the Omani he's look different yes he's a tourism actually and he's happy to drive this bike in the Oman desert

Researcher: aha, aha errr do you like driving bikes like this?

Mussab: ya but errrr I tried it one time and I will never try it again because...

Interrupted by the researcher: Why? What happened?

Learner 8: because when I was drive it errr this this motor is actually very hard to drive because there is gears here ok so we use the gear more than one time and try to back up before the gear ok you are in gear 1 and 2 and 3 when you back from 3 to 2 actually the motorbike is like going up too fast and you can't control it so I was driven it from the first time and I do that mistake and it's make a accident but with with other there is one car work errr on the beach and I hit this car but it was funny

Researcher: ok [**with laughter**] have you ever been to the desert?

Learner 8: errr I never be in the desert but I ...I cross the desert many times because when we are going to Syria on the road we have to cross the desert in Saudia [**Saudi Arabia**] it's called it Al Rubi'a AL Khali [**the Empty Quarter Desert**] We have to cross that desert.

But I never go to the desert before

Researcher: aha, aha ok is there anything else you like to add?

Learner 8: ahh on the pictures?

Researcher: ya

Learner 8: errr that's it I think it's enough

Researcher: Okay, okay thank you Musaab thank very much

Learner 8: you're welcome mister.

Learner 9

Researcher: good afternoon

Learner 9: good afternoon, mister

Researcher: Can you introduce yourself, please?

Learner 9: my name is Fatma Al Aرامي. I am in Foundation 2 I [her section division is I]. I am 20 years old. I am study in this college for two semesters: foundation1 and 2.

Researcher: Okay, can you tell me about the Foundation Programme, what have you been studying so far?

Learner 9: errr in Semester 1- Foundation 1, errr I was studying grammars , vocabulary- a lot of vocabulary, and I will improve – I was improve in my writing and reading and more skills

Researcher: aha, okay

Today you had an exam right? [final exam]

Learner 9: ya

Researcher: what was- which exam was this?

Learner 9: mathematic

Researcher: aha how was it?

Learner 9: errr so so , it was so long and we don't have more time to answer all these questions

Researcher: okay , errr Learner 9 can you tell me a little bit about your family , do you come from a large family or small family?

Learner 9: no I have a large family, sure I'm from Sur *min* [from] Al Sharqiya Region. I have 7 sisters and 2 brothers only errr my family is enjoyable together and was tell me to (short pause)- to make me good in English and more exercise

Researcher: Okay,

Do you come from an educated family like for example your brothers, your sisters are they educated? did they study in a college or in a university or ...?

Learner 9: errr, I have four sisters it was in SQU University [Sultan Qaboos University] and one of them it was when he finished- when she finished educated it was work in SQU.

Researcher: okay, nice

errr ok is there anybody in your family who speaks English very well?

Learner 9: ya, my father

It was good in English

Researcher: ok, does he help you in your studies, does he help you in English for example?

Learner 9: ya, he make me a lessons [gives me lessons in] for vocabulary and speaking when when I arrive to Sur he sit with me and start to learn-teach me a lot of vocabulary

Researcher: aha, ok

Errr when did you start learning English?

Learner 9: when I was 8 years old

Researcher: that is to say in the fourth grade almost?

Learner 9: no two,

Researcher: second grade

Learner 9: second

Researcher: ok now, errr how was errr like - during school time how was English taught was it taught in a good way or in a bad way?

Learner 9: emmm in the middle not is good and not is bad but when I come to the college I was good in English

Researcher: okay now can you tell me about your daily routine? what do you usually do every day?

Learner 9: errr (laughing) I don't have same daily routine for every day I have different maybe I stay with my family and start learning English or watch TV, movie English, Arabic and stay for sure stay in using internet

Researcher: aha, okay can you tell me about for example a happy day or a very sad day in your life if you remember?

Learner 9: ya (laughing) errr in last week we have fighting here in the college I saw this fighting and errr...

Researcher: What happened in this fighting?

Learner 9: (laughing) two of the guys start fighting in front of me

Researcher: if front of you

So how did you feel about that ?

Learner 9: so scared and I don't know what I can do there

Researcher: Okay, for example if you speak in English ok if you find problems while you are speaking like for example you couldn't find the correct grammar or the correct vocabulary what do you do when you speak to somebody in English? Do you for example stop speaking or do you try another way to express your ideas in a simple way let's say?

Learner 9: ya, try in another way to explain what I can't... (got interrupted)

Researcher: like what? What do you use?

Learner 9: errr body language, different vocabulary to explain for another person

Researcher: aha aha

Do you sometimes use Arabic?

Learner 9: maybe

Researcher: When is this maybe?

Learner 9: when I speak to Arabic person like you

Researcher: but if you are for example speaking to somebody whose language is not Arabic like for example an English person or an American

Learner 9: I will tell you that Ms. Bina [one of her non-Arabic speaking teachers] When I speak to Ms. Bina, she try to understand me when I said any word she try to explain- to understand me

Researcher:ok she tries to understand you, that's nice

Now we'll come to – do you feel cold?

Learner 9: no

Researcher: ah you don't feel cold

Are you worried or something?

Learner 9: maybe

Researcher: why because of the meeting?

Learner 9: ya

Researcher: no problem it will be easy

Now we come to the second part this will not take long time now I'll show you a number of pictures and errrrr I just want you to have a look at these pictures and you choose you choose any of these pictures and talk about one of these pictures at least (pause) the one that you find easy for you

Learner 9: maybe this pictures [she talked about the picture of the Omani man sitting with three foreigners in a restaurant]

Errr, this person have a meeting like me and you and they stay in the restaurant and start eating

Researcher: who can tell me – sorry can you tell me who those people here are in the restaurant?

Learner 9: I don't know but maybe the reason in works and errr (paused)

Researcher: employees?

Learner 9: ya

Researcher: ok, what else can you say about them?

Learner 9: errr they have a delicious lunch, I'm very hungry so

Researcher: (laugh) you feel a little bit hungry now you'll become more hungry I think now

Talking about food and being hungry we have another picture here of what?

Learner 9: Omanis person [the picture of two Omani men sitting on the floor in one of the local restaurants and having a traditional meal with their hands]

Researcher: What are they doing in this picture?

Learner 9: sure, they are eating rice the more publish [popular] what to say food in Oman (pause) I don't know what I can say

Researcher: usually when Omanis eat rice how do they eat rice [it]? Do they use a spoon or?

(interrupted by Learner 9): no, use the hand – their hand

Researcher: Okay, which is better for to use a spoon or to use your hand?

Learner 9: when I stay in the restaurant for sure I will errr use a spoon when I was in home- in our house no, use my hand

Researcher: you use your hand

Is there anything else you like to add, Learner 9?

Learner 9: no thanks

Researcher: thank you very much Fatma for coming, thank you

Learner 9: you're welcome

Learner 10

Researcher: good afternoon

Learner 10: good afternoon

Researcher: Can you introduce yourself?

Learner 10:errr my name is Mohammed Al Amrani I am 19 years old

I am from Muscat

Researcher: okay, are you the eldest among your brothers and sister?

Learner 10: errr I have (pause) three sisters and five brothers

Researcher: OK, you are studying at Middle East College of Information Technology
This is your second semester, right?

Learner 10: ya

Researcher: and you are in the foundation programme

Now what subjects have you studied in the foundation programme?

Learner 10: (gave no response)

Researcher: Okay, you don't know what subjects or you can't remember?

Learner 10: I will learn English and I will improve myself

[the learner gave a different response and used the future form]

Researcher: okay, good when did you start learning English?

Learner 10: errr (long pause) when I was eight years old

Researcher: Ok, did you study in a government school or a private school?

Learner 10: in a government school

Researcher: Can you tell me about your daily routine?

Learner 10: (short pause) different routine everyday

Researcher: like what? What do you usually do?

Learner 10: (short pause) I start at errr- in the morning at 8 O'clock (short pause) I was eat errr ... (he then whispered in Arabic the word 'fatoor' which means breakfast)

Researcher: breakfast

Learner 10: breakfast and I come to the college study and finish the college at errr 4 O'clock I errr return to the house.

Researcher: Do you find speaking in English very difficult?

Learner 10: maybe

Researcher: like when you speak in English if you find some problems like for example in grammar or using vocabulary or somebody doesn't understand what you are saying or you don't understand what somebody is telling you what do you do? Do you stop talking, you say khalas [an Arabic word which means that's enough] I can't speak in English or do you try to ,although you have a lot of problems, you try to continue?

Learner 10: no, I try I chance

Researcher: so what do you do in order to make others understand what you are saying or to make yourself understand what others are saying?

Learner 10: (pause) I understand when you say me

Researcher: like for example if you don't – if somebody asks you a question and you don't understand this question what do you do?

Learner 10: (pause) I ask (short pause) another another people ya'ani [it means] we do this question

Researcher: Okay, what about Arabic? Like for example do you sometimes use Arabic?

Learner 10: every time

Researcher: when you speak in English I mean

If you are speaking in English but you found it very difficult to speak, do you sometimes use Arabic?

Learner 10: sometimes I use Arabic

Researcher: in order to make it easy?

Learner 10: ya

Researcher: now can you come please here closer so that you can have a look at these pictures and just tell me or describe some of these pictures?

[There was a moment of silent because the learner was looking at the pictures]

Learner 10: some people we sit in the restaurant and errr eating and we sit together and errr enjoying [the picture of three women in a restaurant with an Omani]

Researcher: Ok, what else?

Learner 10: (no response)

Researcher: Who do you think those people are?

Learner 10: (short pause) I don't know

Researcher: Do you think that they are visitors

They came to visit the country or what?

Learner 10: errr visit the country he come in Oman

(short pause) three girls

Researcher: What about this one?

Learner 10: (long pause) three people and errr [here he stopped and used gestures to refer to catching fish]

Researcher: caught

Learner 10: caught the fish

Researcher: Okay, do you think that they are fishermen?

Learner 10: errr (long pause) no

Researcher: Why?

Learner 10: because they don't seem

Researcher: They don't seem to be fishermen?

Learner 10: aha

Researcher: Do you know how a fisherman looks like?

Learner 10: (long pause) errr (pause) and we don't have a boat [he means that the three men in the picture are not fishermen because they don't have a boat].

Researcher: (pause) errr...

Interrupted by Learner 10: we sit near the sea

Researcher: Okay, have you ever caught a fish?

Learner 10: (short pause) me?

Researcher: ya

Learner 10: no

Researcher: You don't know how to catch fish

Learner 10: No, I don't like fish

Researcher: you don't like?

Learner 10: no

Researcher: Do you like the sea in general or you don't like it?

Learner 10: errr (pause) yes I like sea but I don't like caught the fish

Researcher: Is there anything else you like to add?

Learner 10:[he shock his head indicating no]

Researcher:(with laughter) Ok thank you

Learner 10: thank you

Appendix D

Description of participants' syntactic errors

Table 1
Type of errors and their frequency

type of error	frequency
noun-phrase errors	
3.errors in determiners	68
4.errors in prepositions	39
3.errors in relative clauses	15
4.word-order errors	2
5.missing NPs and complementizers	7
6. errors in concord	20
7.wrong use of pronouns	15
Total	166
verb-phrase errors	
20. copula and auxiliary errors	38
21. errors in tenses	68
10.subject-verb agreement	58
Total	183

1. noun-phrase errors

1.1. errors in the use of determiners

1.1.1. errors in articles

- a. wrong addition of 'the'

Learner 4: His favorite, errr, his favorite, errr, meal is the rice.

Learner 3: I have my garden there and he's work there all things and I have the water

Learner 6: If I have the money, no problem.

Learner 1: I want to get person good [a good mark] in the English.

Learner 1: He is in the restaurant.

Learner 9: They stay in the restaurant.

Learner 8: The life in the hostel actually boring.

Learner 8: My education was in Suwiah here in Oman from the grade one to grade to full class.

b. omission of 'a' and 'an'

Learner 2: I see #man in this picture - man with camels.

Learner 2: This is man drive# motorbike.

Learner 4: I have # bus.

Learner 5: I have # problem until now in writing- spelling.

Learner 6: You are # man you must be stronger.

Learner 3: It is sunny# day.

Learner 3: What I can say in this picture is# nice beach.

Learner 5: It's #beautiful animal.

Learner 5: It was# great conversation and I like the questions.

In the sentences above, the indefinite article was omitted (# stands for the omitted indefinite article). The omission errors above are attributed to L1 interference because Arabic has no indefinite articles equivalent to 'a' and 'an' in English. As indefiniteness in Arabic is marked by the absence of the definite article 'al', the indefinite articles were absent in the sentences above.

c. addition of the definite articles

This error was identified although it was less common than the aforementioned two types of error.

Learner 3: My father actually he a very famous in this country.

Learner 3: Some people have a fun.

Learner 7: Everybody in Oman they usually eat rice to have a lunch

1.1.2. Wrong use of quantifiers

In Arabic, all of the partitives mentioned above could be transferred into two words: qalil (little, few, a few) and kathir (many, much, a lot of). Thus, Arab EFL learners tend to use "few, a few, a lot, much, many" interchangeably because they confuse between them.

Learner 2: I know much about this maybe many company want this.

Learner 2: They live in tents and they travel many place.

Learner 3: There is some tourist or something like this they go to fishing.

Learner 3: There is some umbrella.

1.1.3. Errors in prepositions

Table 2
Types of preposition errors and their frequency

type of error	frequency		total
	F1 learners	F2 learners	
substitution of prepositions	10	13	23
addition of prepositions	7	3	10
omission of prepositions	6	–	6
			39

a. substitution of the prepositions

Learner 1: I said forhim please give me this question or this topic by another (in another way.

Learner 1: He say for the waiter what do you do.

Learner 4: Thanks to your interview.

Learner 6: I don't know but when you look in the picture, you think like that.

Learner 8: I search about a lot of colleges.

Learner 9: When I arrive to Sur he sit with me.

b. addition of prepositions

The examples below illustrate the redundancy in the use of prepositions by unnecessarily adding the prepositions when not required.

Learner 1: When somebody tell me something and didn't understand for him or for her...

Learner 1: I can't answer for the question.

Learner 2: When I want to told something, I will tell for myself at-in Arabic.

Learner 6: Me and my friends challenge with each other.

Learner 4: How I can to get some information to another place.

In the examples above, unnecessary prepositions were added when not required. Such errors are not traceable to mother tongue interference because Arabic does not require prepositions in these sentences.

c. omission of prepositions

I like # play football.

They travel # many ...many place.

The preposition 'to' is omitted in the sentences above. L1 influence could be the reason for omitting the preposition after like because in Arabic there is no preposition after the

verb ‘ahubu’ (like). Analogy could be another explanation because the learner might have compared the use of ‘like’ in a different context as in the following example:

Learner 4: First I go Al Khalej College

The preposition ‘to’ was also omitted in sentence (45). In English, the verb ‘go’ is accompanied with the preposition ‘to’. Arabic also requires the preposition ‘ila’ (to) after the verb ‘yathhab’ (go). Therefore, L1 interference is the cause of this error. A possible explanation for this error is the difficulty of learning prepositions in English.

1.1.3. Errors in relative clauses

Table 3

type of error	frequency		total
	F1 learners	F2 learners	
omission of relative pronouns	6	2	8
The use of resumptive pronouns	2	5	7
			15

a. omission of relative pronouns

Learner 3: They know some friends here-work here.

Learner 2: There is something very sad in my school.

Arabic obligatorily deletes relative clauses in indefinite NPs. The Arabic translation for these sentences is provided below.

ya’rif-una ba’ada al asdiqa’i ya’maluna huna.
(Literally: Know-they some friends work here)

sha’un hazeenun hadatha fi madrasati
(Literally: Something sad happened in school-my)

The omission of relative pronouns could be due to factors other than L1 interference as in the following example.

Learner 3: There is some tourist or something or something like this. They go to fishing.

Learner 7: I think this is Omani guy. He’s their boss and he made this party for them to have lunch.

As in the above examples, the learner used simplification strategy. He used a sequence of two sentences instead of the relative clause.

Learner 2: My father actually he a very famous in this country and he - he know he know many things.

Learner 2: When I study in school there is my friend in my class he die.

This error is also a result of structural misrepresentation of the relative clause by which the learner used the personal pronoun ‘he’ instead of the relative pronoun. The correct form should be ‘I had a friend in my class who died’.

b. the use of resumptive pronouns in the relative clause

Learner 2: The man who live there they can live...

The learner retained the resumptive pronoun “they” although its reference is not correct because ‘man’ is singular and ‘they’ refers to more than one. The resumptive pronoun in this sentence refers back to the subject not to the object.

Learner 5: They organized everything the subjects and most of the things that we didn’t know about them before at school.

Learner 7: Maybe if I am talking in front of peoples who I do not know them I do not use Arabic.

Learner 3: He say some words I don’t understand it.

Learner 7: If there is a word he said I don’t understand it, I told him what’s the meaning of this word.

1.1.4. Word order errors

While Arabic follows the VSO word order, English is a SVO language. This might cause Arab EFL learners to commit errors in word order which could be explained in terms of L1 interference. One of the problematic areas in word-order is adjective-noun word order. In the Arabic structure, the adjective follows the noun it qualifies.

I live in Al Khoud Old.

I stay with my family and start learning English or watch TV, movie English.

1.1.5. Missing NPs and complementizers

Table 4

Type of Error and its Frequency

type of error	frequency		total
	F1 Learners	F2 Learners	
missing subjects	4	2	6
missing nouns in complex NP structures	1		1
			7

1. missing subjects

Thahab-tu ila al madrasati. (Perfect form)
(Literally: Went -I to the school.

In the example above, the subject pronoun is implied in the verb in the suffix (tu).

Ya-qra'u qisatan kula yam. (Imperfect)
(Literally: He- reads a story every day.

Learner 1: read books and ,errr, read dictionary and save the some word in mind and ,errr, write

Learner 1: ya, only see with the neighbor

Learner 9: try in another way to explain what I can't

In the above sentences, the learners omitted the subject pronouns. It is clear that L1 interference plays a role here because in Arabic the subject pronoun is conjugated with the verbs.

b. missing noun in complex NP structures

Learner 3: The Omani just who lead them to good places in Oman.

The NP “the one who is” is missing in the above sentence. This could be attributed to L1 interference because the counterpart structure in Arabic does not require a NP.If translated into Arabic, the sentence will be grammatically correct. The equivalent sentence in Arabic is:

Al Omani faqat yurshidahum ila amakan jayida fi Oman
(Literally: The Omani just guides- them to places good in Oman)

1.1.6. Errors in concord

Table 5
Type of Concord Error and its Frequency

type of error	frequency		total
	F1 learners	F2 learners	
the use of plurals with ‘this’ and ‘that’	2	4	6
the use of singulars with quantifiers	10	1	11
lack of concord between numerals and nouns	3	0	3
			20

a. the use of plurals after demonstratives ‘this’ and ‘that’

Arabic has more specifications of demonstratives which refer to masculine, feminine, singular, plural, and dual: *hatha* (this singular masculine), *hathihi* (this singular feminine), *thalika* (that singular masculine), *tilka* (that singular feminine), *au'lai'ka* (those singular and feminine plural) , and *ha'u'lai'* (these masculine and feminine plural), *hathani* (these masculine dual) ,and *hatani* (these feminine dual). In addition, the plural intimate is treated as feminine singular which might lead Arab EFL learners to make errors in the use of demonstratives.

hathihi al-aqlamu
this(feminine) the-pens

tilka al aqlamu
that (feminine) the- pens

Learner 2: This activities I think people do.

Learner 1: I remember what this question mean and I get some word for this questions.

Learner 7: We can speak a lot in this classes.

Learner 7: This pictures there are people in the restaurant.

Learner 8: This two pictures show me one man.

In all the above examples, the demonstrative ‘this’ was erroneously used with plural countable nouns. This error is a result of L1 interference because Arabic uses the singular demonstratives ‘this’ and ‘that’ with plural inanimate nouns.

b. the use of singulars with quantifiers (many, all, some, every, and each)

Learner 2: They live in tents and they travel many...many place.

Learner 2: I know much about this maybe many company want this.

Learner 4: I have my garden there and he's work there all thing.

Learner 4: How many rice you can use in your mouth.

In this sentence, the learner wanted to say ‘how much rice a person can eat’. However, he used ‘many’ with an uncountable noun. He should have used ‘much’ instead as it is used with uncountable nouns. This error could be explained in terms of L1 interference because in Arabic ‘*katheer*’ stands for ‘many, much, and a lot of’. There is no distinction between countable and uncountable nouns.

c. lack of concord between numerals and nouns

Learner 1: I has five sister.

In this sentence, the learner used singular after the numeral five which should take a plural noun both in English and Arabic. In this case, the error cannot be due to L1 interference. It is an intralingual error which could result from lack of proficiency or inadequate teaching.

1.1.7. Wrong use of pronouns

Table 6
Frequent use of wrong pronouns

type of error	frequency		total
	F1 learners	F2 Learners	
wrong use of pronouns	6	9	15

Learner 1: I think it is Omani person but it is foreign person.

Learner 4: When I go with him he tell me what do all time you come all time you come.

Learner 4: He's playing and someone is doing barbeque.

Learner 4: He's playing and laughing like this on the sea- on the beach.

Learner 8: The most of the photos it's about Oman.

Learner 9: I have four sisters it was in SQU University.

2. verb-phrase errors

2.1. Errors in copula and auxiliary

Table 7
Error in copula and its frequency

type of error	Frequency of error		total
	F1 learners	F2 learners	
omission of copula be	12	7	19
insertion of be when not required	6	13	19
			38

a. omission of copula be

This could be due to L1 interference in Arabic. The subject appears first in the sentence followed by a predicate which could be adjectival or nominal.

Learner 1: What # the meaning in Arabic?

Learner 2: Some of them #from Oman.

Learner 4: My favourite place # Oman.

Learner 5: We help students who #weak in English.

Learner 6: They only # tourist.

The omission of the copula could be due to L1 interference. In Arabic, the auxiliary verb does not exist when interrogative sentences are formed.

Learner 2: He # driving a motorbike.

Learner 2: When I see people in the city they# wearing t-shirt and style but the Bedouin #wearing Dishdasha and Maser.

Learner 3: The first it looks like he #having fun.

Learner 8: If the people who living with you love each other and they love you, they will be funny.

Learner 7: They actually I think # having lunch.

2.2. errors in tenses

Table 8

Tense errors and their frequency

type of error	frequency of errors		total
	F1 learners	F2 learner	
substitution of present perfect by simple past	1	4	5
substitution of present perfect by simple present	3	5	8
substitution of simple past by simple present	22	14	36
substitution of present progressive by simple present	6	6	12
substitution of simple present by present progressive	0	2	2
substitution of simple present by simple past	1	0	1
deletion of (-ing) from the progressive tense sequence	4	0	4
	15	4	19
			87

The table above shows that the most common errors in tenses were in substitution and tense sequence. It was found that the learners frequently used the simple present in place of other tenses. The most common error was in substituting the simple past by the simple present and the least was in substituting the simple present by the simple past. Since one of the possible causes for substitution errors could be due to avoidance behaviour, these errors will be further discussed in section 2 avoidance strategies. Only the omission of (-ing) and errors in tense sequence will be discussed in this section.

a. omission of (-ing) from the progressive form

Learner 1: He is walk in the sun.

Learner 3: The Omani is work.

The learners in the above two sentences omitted the (-ing) from the present progressive. This error could be due to lack of mastery of the progressive, or confusion of using the

correct form of the progressive especially that a large number of learners depend on the memorization of the form.

b. tense sequence

Learner 1: When someone tell me anything and didn't understand for him or for her I said for him please give me this question or this topic by another way.

Learner 2: He die in a car accident and he- he was very my, errr, best friend

Learner 3: I try to understand from the context but sometime I fail I didn't understand it well.

2.3. subject-verb agreement

Table 9

Subject-verb agreement errors and their frequencies

type of error	frequency		total
	F1 Learners	F2 Learners	
omission of the third person singular marker	18	19	37
auxiliary with singular and plural nouns	7	5	12
be with existential there	1	6	7
be with plural nouns	0	2	2
			58

a. omission of the third person singular marker s/es

Learner 1: My old sister study in Nizwa University.

Learner 2: My friend in my class he die and he die in a car accident.

Learner 3: He drive in the sand and he enjoy it.

Learner 9: She try to understand me when I said [say] any word.

1. The wrong use of auxiliary with singular and plural nouns

Learner 1: I have five sister.

Learner 2: This man in this picture he have camels.

Learner 3: The Omani have a camel.

Learner 5: My mother she have diploma.

Learner 6: Each student have their own style.

2. wrong form of be with existential there

Learner 6: There is brothers older than me.

Learner 3: There is some people playing.

Learner 8: There is Indians work in our in our town.

3. wrong form of be with plural nouns

Learner 6: This is people.

Learner 7: This is two pictures.

In the sentences above, the learners used the wrong form of be with a plural noun. They also used the singular demonstrative 'this'. The error in Learner 6's sentence cannot be explained in terms of L1 interference because in Arabic 'annas' (the people) is treated as plural and takes the plural demonstrative 'ha'ulai' (those). However, L1 interference could be the cause for the error in Learner 7's sentence because Arabic treats the plural inanimate as singular feminine.