International Journal of Language, Linguistics, Literature and Culture
Vol. 04, No. 03; 2025
ISSN: 2583-6560

THE IMPACT OF MOTHER TONGUE INTERFERENCE ON ENGLISH SYNTAX: A CASE STUDY OF EFL STUDENTS AT TECHNICAL COLLEGE, SAUDI ARABIA

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https://doi.org/10.59009/ijlllc.2025.0118

ABSTRACT

The influence of a speaker's native language on second language acquisition is a well-established phenomenon in linguistics and English Language Teaching (ELT). This study investigates syntactic errors in the English writing of Saudi students enrolled at the Technical College of Al-Hait, Saudi Arabia, with particular attention to the impact of their first language (L1), Arabic. Data were collected from the final-term examination scripts of thirty students, and a comprehensive analysis was conducted to identify the most frequent syntactic errors. The findings indicate that the most common errors involve subject-verb agreement, word order, possessive constructions, conjunction usage, and infinitive structures. These patterns suggest a strong influence of Arabic syntax on English writing, underscoring the role of L1 interference. The study argues that such interference hinders syntactic development in English and recommends pedagogical interventions to address these challenges. Proposed strategies include explicit instruction on key syntactic differences between Arabic and English, as well as activities designed to promote metalinguistic awareness and syntactic accuracy. This research contributes to a deeper understanding of the difficulties faced by Arabic-speaking EFL learners and offers practical insights for improving their writing proficiency.

Keywords: Syntactic errors, mother tongue influence, first language interference, Saudi technical college, writing errors.

1. INTRODUCTION

Writing is a cornerstone of effective communication, indispensable in both personal and professional spheres. It provides individuals with a powerful tool for expressing thoughts, emotions, and ideas, and serves as a medium for conveying complex concepts with clarity and precision. The ability to write competently involves more than just the articulation of ideas; it requires the capacity to organize, structure, and refine one's thoughts to achieve coherence and impact. In the context of second language acquisition, writing proficiency becomes even more essential, as it embodies a comprehensive integration of linguistic elements, including vocabulary, grammar, syntax, and mechanics.

Mastering the art of writing, however, is no simple feat. It is a multifaceted skill that demands considerable effort in generating ideas, planning, organizing content, and revising drafts. Additionally, it requires an understanding of the conventions of writing—such as grammar, syntax, and punctuation—while also involving the cognitive processes of editing, refining, and rewriting. Among these components, syntax is particularly crucial, as it ensures the logical flow and clarity of the written text. A sound syntactic structure not only enables the writer to connect ideas effectively but also shapes how those ideas are received and understood by the reader. Writing, in general, is often perceived as the most challenging language skill, both for native speakers and, more acutely, for second language learners. For individuals

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learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL) or English as a Second Language (ESL), the challenges associated with writing can be especially pronounced. Research has consistently shown that these learners tend to find writing more difficult than other language skills such as speaking, listening, and reading (Macintyre & Gardner, 1989; Latif, 2007). This difficulty can be attributed to a variety of factors, including the complex nature of English syntax, the need for a deeper understanding of cultural and contextual nuances in writing, and the cognitive demands of producing coherent, well-structured text in a second language. Thus, writing is not merely a technical skill but a complex cognitive and creative process that requires both linguistic competence and the ability to navigate the intricacies of syntax, discourse, and revision.

Further, numerous factors influence the process and success of acquiring a second language. Among these, first language (L1) interference, also known as language transfer, is often regarded as one of the most critical factors. L1 interference occurs when the learner's native language affects their use of the second language (L2) in areas such as pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, and syntax. This influence can be either positive (facilitating learning due to similarities between L1 and L2) or negative (creating challenges due to structural differences). In case of negative transfer, L1 interference manifests when a learner's linguistic habits from their mother tongue negatively impact their ability to acquire the structures and rules of a second language. The phenomenon is known by several other terms, such as linguistic interference, cross-linguistic interference, and language transfer (Weinreich, 1968; Ellis, 2008; Gas & Selinker, 2008).

Dulay et al. (1982) categorize interference into two broad types: psychological and sociolinguistic. From a psychological perspective, 'interference' refers to the influence of pre-existing linguistic habits on the learning process, which may result in errors or misconceptions in L2 acquisition. In contrast, the sociolinguistic dimension of interference involves phenomena such as borrowing, code-switching, and other forms of language contact that occur when speakers alternate between languages in communicative contexts. Lott (1983) further refines the concept, defining interference as errors in foreign language learning that arise from the influence of the learner's mother tongue (as cited in Aziz et al., 2019). The study of mother tongue influence and language interference provides critical insights into the challenges and complexities of second language learning, highlighting the significant role of L1 in shaping L2 acquisition across various linguistic domains. Thus, For EFL and ESL learners, overcoming these challenges is crucial not only for academic success but also for effective communication in a globalized world.

1.1. Major Error Analysis Approaches

The exploration of error analysis in second and foreign language acquisition unfolds through several key theoretical lenses, each offering a unique perspective on how learners navigate the complex terrain of mastering a new language. Among these are the Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis (CAH) (Fries, 1945; Lado, 1957), Error Analysis (Coder, 1974), Interlanguage Analysis (Selinker, 1972), and Contrastive Rhetoric (Kaplan, 1966), each contributing distinct insights into the phenomenon of language transfer and its role in shaping learners' errors and progress.

The Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis (CAH), a cornerstone of applied linguistics, compares two languages in order to identify their structural similarities and differences (Lado, 1957; Ellis, 1997). Rooted in behaviorist theory, CAH proposes that the structure of a learner's first language (L1) exerts a powerful influence on the acquisition of a second or foreign language (L2). Lado (1957) argued that these linguistic transfers from L1 to L2, whether positive or negative, are critical in determining the success or challenges of language learning.

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The theory envisions language learning as a process of transferring familiar habits from the mother tongue, with the potential for interference when the L1 system diverges from that of the target language, a concept explored by Brown (2000).

In contrast, Contrastive Rhetoric, as articulated by Kaplan (1966) and expanded by Connor (2002), delves into the influence of culture and L1 on writing in a second language. It seeks to uncover the hidden patterns that govern how ideas are organized, argued, and conveyed in writing, demonstrating that the way one writes in a first language often shapes how one writes in a second. For instance, the organizational structures of argumentation and paragraphing in a native language may lead to distinct rhetorical styles when applied in a foreign language, which can either enhance or hinder the clarity and effectiveness of the writing.

Interlanguage, a captivating and dynamic concept introduced by Selinker (1972), describes the fluid, evolving linguistic system that emerges as learners attempt to bridge the gap between their L1 and the L2. Interlanguage represents a stage where learners experiment with and adjust their language output, creating a hybrid form that incorporates elements from both languages but is distinctly its own. This phenomenon is not merely a transitional phase but a systematic, rule-governed stage in language acquisition. As Latiff and Bakar (2007) note, interlanguage reflects the learners' attempts to approximate the norms of the target language, yet it remains unique—sometimes humorous or telling in its idiosyncratic forms. For example, a learner might say, *'I killed three sheeps yesterday'* (interlanguage), an incorrect plural form of *sheep*, which highlights the influence of L1 rules, in contrast to the grammatically correct *'I slaughtered three sheep yesterday'* in Standard English. This stage of interlanguage not only showcases the learner's ongoing development but also underscores the complexity and provisional nature of second language mastery.

Together, these theories—Contrastive Analysis, Error Analysis, Interlanguage, and Contrastive Rhetoric—offer a kaleidoscopic view of how language learners grapple with the intricate web of rules, habits, and cultural nuances that shape their understanding and use of a new language. By revealing the nuances of L1 interference and its various manifestations, these approaches illuminate the multifaceted challenges of second language acquisition, offering valuable insights for both learners and educators striving to navigate the delicate process of language learning.

1.2. Error Analysis

Error Analysis (EA) is a compelling field within applied linguistics that focuses on the examination of errors made by language learners, particularly in second and foreign language acquisition. The primary goal of EA is to identify specific errors and understand the stages of language development at which these errors tend to occur (Lightbown & Spada, 2013). It involves a detailed comparison of learner errors with both the target language (TL) and the learner's first language (L1), seeking to uncover patterns that can inform teaching practices.

Historically, errors were regarded as undesirable impediments to learning, signals of failure that required elimination. However, this traditional view shifted dramatically following Corder's seminal 1967 article, *The Significance of Learner Errors*, which reframed errors as essential components of the language acquisition process. Corder argued that errors should be seen not as obstacles but as valuable insights into learners' understanding, revealing gaps in knowledge that could be addressed to facilitate further learning. This paradigm shift positioned errors as a natural and beneficial aspect of language development, rather than a mere hindrance to overcome. EA, as Corder suggested, became a vital tool for teachers to evaluate student progress, identify areas for improvement, and tailor instruction to the learner's needs (Richards & Sampson, 1974).

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Corder (1974) further articulated two key objectives of Error Analysis: a theoretical objective aimed at understanding the cognitive mechanisms underlying second language acquisition, and a practical objective focused on enhancing the effectiveness of language learning. According to Corder (1967) and Brown (2000), learner errors provide crucial insights into both the proficiency level of students and the nature of the learning process itself. They offer educators a window into what students have mastered and what remains to be taught. These errors also assist learners in self-monitoring their progress, enabling them to track their linguistic development over time.

Over the years, various researchers have explored the sources of errors in language acquisition. Selinker (1972) identified five primary sources: language transfer, training transfer, L2 learning strategies, L2 communication strategies, and the overgeneralization of TL rules. Corder (1974) narrowed this to three: language transfer, overgeneralization, and teaching methods/materials. Richards and Simpson (1974) expanded the list, proposing seven sources of errors, including intralingual interference, sociolinguistic context, and age-related factors. Dulay and Burt (1974) identified four main sources: interference, L1 developmental, ambiguous, and unique goofs/errors (as cited in AbiSamra, 2003), while James (1998) examined errors from the perspectives of interlingual, intralingual, and induced influences.

A recurrent theme in these studies is the significant role of language transfer as a source of errors. Lado (1964) emphasized that a learner's first language (L1) often interferes with their ability to accurately produce the target language (L2), particularly when the two languages differ in structure or usage. This interference is a central focus of Contrastive Analysis (CA), a method used to predict potential difficulties learners might encounter by comparing the structural differences between L1 and L2. CA and EA are complementary approaches that together offer a comprehensive understanding of the errors learners make and the sources of those errors. Sajaavara (2000) highlights how CA helps distinguish between interlingual (L1-induced) and intralingual (errors arising from the target language itself) errors, while Al-Asfour (2018) suggests that EA reveals the specific impact of L1 on L2 acquisition.

In this study, both Contrastive Analysis and Error Analysis were employed to examine the errors made by learners in acquiring a second language. By applying both methods, we were able to identify errors influenced by the learners' mother tongue, providing a nuanced understanding of how L1 transfer shapes L2 learning. These approaches contributed significantly to uncovering patterns of interference and offered insights into the learners' progress, allowing for targeted pedagogical interventions that address these common sources of error.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Several studies have investigated the impact of a learner's native language on learning a second language. Most of the research suggests that the first language can hinder the learning of a second language. For instance, Younes and Fatima (2015) conducted a study at Tabuk University involving 40 female students, aiming to identify the most frequent language errors in English writing among Saudi EFL learners. Their analysis revealed recurrent problems in areas such as verb tenses, prepositions, syntactic structure, subject-verb agreement, articles, and punctuation. These findings reflect a pattern of linguistic interference and insufficient mastery of English grammatical conventions, particularly those that differ significantly from Arabic.

In a similar vein, Sawalmeh (2013) analyzed 32 essays written by Saudi learners at the University of Ha'il and documented ten recurring types of errors, including incorrect verb tense usage, word order issues, confusion between singular and plural forms, subject-verb

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disagreement, double negation, as well as spelling, capitalization, article misuse, sentence fragmentation, and incorrect prepositions. This comprehensive categorization illustrates the multidimensional nature of writing challenges faced by Saudi EFL students, many of which are syntactic and morphological in nature.

Hafiz et al. (2018) examined syntactic errors in the English writing of preparatory-year students at Jazan University, identifying common syntactic issues including, subject-verb agreement, word order, and verb tense usage. Their findings indicate that these errors are largely caused by the first language (L1) interference from Arabic. The study suggests focused instruction on syntactic difference between Arabic and English.

Farooq et al. (2012) also examined English writing errors among secondary school students and emphasized that grammatical difficulties are among the most persistent barriers to writing proficiency. Their findings indicated consistent errors in sentence structure, subject-verb agreement, parallel construction, modifier placement, and tense consistency. The study concluded that a weak grasp of English grammar significantly hampers students' ability to construct coherent and accurate written texts.

Karim and Nassaji (2013) found that learners' writing in a second language is significantly influenced by their first language. The study revealed that learners made various grammatical errors related to verbs, tenses, articles, prepositions, and other aspects of English writing. Ridha, (2012) examined the English essays of EFL students and concluded that the primary cause of grammatical errors in their writing is the influence of their native language. Similarly, AbiSamra (2003) found that the native language of Arab EFL students is a major contributor to syntactic errors in their English writing.

Al-Khresheh's (2010) fascinating study delved into the challenges faced by Jordanian students learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL). The research revealed that these students frequently grappled with syntactic errors, particularly related to word order in simple phrases and the conjunction misuse 'and' (Al-Khresheh, 2011). These findings showed complexities EFL learners encounter as they strive to apply their knowledge of Arabic syntax to their English writing.

Supporting this, Bhela (1999) argued that second language (L2) learners often heavily rely on the syntactic structures of their first language (L1) when navigating difficulties in L2 writing. This reliance can lead to significant misunderstandings and errors as learners attempt to transfer familiar grammatical patterns from their native language to the target language.

In a similar vein, Murad and Khalil's (2015) research delved into writing errors among Arab EFL learners, identifying that negative transfer from L1 to L2 significantly contributes to the emergence of various writing errors in English. Their findings underscored the widespread impact of L1 interference, revealing that many errors stem from an incorrect application of Arabic syntactic rules when constructing sentences in English. Together, these studies illustrate the complexities of language transfer and the need for specific instructional strategies to address the syntactic challenges faced by EFL learners.

Al-Balawi (2016) investigated the impact of grammatical differences between Arabic and English on the English writing of Saudi female students at Prince Fahad Bin Sultan University. The result shows the most common errors, including subject-verb agreement, verb tense forms, prepositions, word order, articles, plurality and voice. The findings suggest that these errors stem from negative transfer of Arabic grammatical patterns to the English writing.

Al-Hajailan (2020) conducted a syntactic analysis of Arabic interference in the English writing of Saudi female college, with a focus on noun phrase constructions. Using Error Analysis and Comparative Analysis, she categorized errors as interlanguage and intralanguage. Her analysis of 178 essays revealed that interlanguage errors, especially in the use of articles,

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pronouns, nouns, and prepositions were more frequent. These were linked to structural differences between Arabic and English, such as the absence of an indefinite article in Arabic.

3. MAIN OBJECTIVES OF THE PAPER

As previously mentioned, the impact of a learner's native language on acquiring English as a foreign language has been extensively studied, particularly among Arab learners. These studies consistently demonstrate that Arab learners of English frequently make various types of errors in their writing, including mechanical, grammatical, and syntactic errors. This is especially prevalent at the university level, where more advanced written work is expected. The challenges faced by these learners are often due to the structural differences between Arabic and English, which make mastering English syntax and grammar difficult.

Despite a wealth of research in this area, there is a gap in the literature concerning the specific linguistic errors made by technical trainees in Saudi Arabia, particularly at the Technical College. Few studies have focused on this demographic, leaving a critical void in understanding how technical trainees make linguistic errors, especially syntactic errors in their English composition. This gap is significant given the increasing importance of English proficiency in technical and vocational training fields. Therefore, this study aims to bridge this gap by systematically investigating the types of errors, especially syntactic errors, produced by these technical trainees at Technical College of Al-Hait. The research seeks to provide valuable insights that can assist both educators and students in effectively addressing the challenges associated with these errors. Ultimately, the findings will contribute to the development of targeted instructional strategies, thereby enhancing the overall English language proficiency of technical trainees and better preparing them for their professional futures.

The present study aims to achieve the following main objectives:

1. Investigate the most prevalent syntactic errors in the English writing among technical students.
2. Uncover the influential factors contributing to these errors.
3. Calculate the frequency and percentage of different subtypes of syntactic errors.
4. Develop recommendations for improving English writing and reducing mother tongue interference (MTI).

4. METHODOLOGY

This study employs a methodological approach employed by previous research in the field of error analysis (Corder, 1967; Brown, 2000; Ellis, 1995). The methodological framework encompasses several key components: data collection, identification of errors, classification of errors, analysis, and explanation of errors.

4.1. Research Design

The present study employs a mixed-methods approach, integrating both quantitative and qualitative methodologies. In the quantitative aspect, the frequency of various types of syntactic errors was calculated to identify prevailing trends within the participants' writing. This statistical analysis allows for a clear understanding of the most common error types. Conversely, the qualitative component involves a thorough examination of the collected samples of syntactic error to gain insights into their underlying causes. This analysis takes into account influential factors, such as the impact of the participants' mother tongue (MTI) and their individual learning strategies. By combining these methods, the study aims to provide a comprehensive perspective on the nature of syntactic errors in English writing.

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4.2. Participants

The study included thirty male technical college students who enrolled in a vocational and technical training program at the Technical College of Al-Hait. They were aged between 20 and 26, with an average age of 23. Before attending the technical college, these participants had been exposed to English for over six years, primarily through formal education in primary and secondary schools. Importantly, none of the participants exhibited any disorders or neuropsychological symptoms, ensuring a homogeneous group for this investigation.

4.3. Data Collection

The study collected data from the final-term examination answer scripts of thirty participants. The focus was on identifying and analyzing syntactic errors in their English writing. The choice of the final-term exam as the primary data source was deliberate, as it offered an authentic context in which students were required to demonstrate their language proficiency under timed conditions. This format not only facilitated the elicitation of written responses reflecting the participants' actual language skills but also provide an environment conducive to assessing their syntactic competencies in a manner similar to the real-word academic demands.

4.4. Data Sample

Students were asked to write an essay titled 'Myself', for their final exam. They were expected to write it approximately 60 to 80 words, which is about ten sentences. As a result, 300 data samples were collected, with around 10 sentences from each of the 30 students. This dataset provided a substantial amount of material for analysis, allowing for a detailed examination of any syntactic errors in the students' essays.

4.5. Data Analysis

The present analysis involved identifying various linguistic errors in the students' English writing at the Technical College of Al-Hait. The linguistic errors found in the technical students' English compositions were classified into three categories: mechanical errors (Asad, 2024), grammatical errors (Asad, 2025), and syntactic errors. Further, the errors were systematically categorized into two primary types: interlingual errors, stemming from the influence of the students' the first language (L1), and intralingual errors, arising from the learning of the second language (L2). While both interlingual and intralingual errors are significant in the context of second language acquisition, the current study primarily concentrates on syntactic interlingual errors. This focus aims to elucidate the extent to which L1 influences participants' use of English syntax, providing insights into the mechanisms of language transfer and the specific syntactic structures that pose challenges for learners.

Furthermore, this large dataset enables thorough qualitative and quantitative evaluations, which facilitate a comprehensive exploration of the syntactic abilities of the participants and areas that require improvement. By analyzing these cross-linguistic syntactic errors, the study aims to identify patterns of influence from the participants' first language, thus contributing to a deeper understanding of how these influences impact the writing skills of students learning English as a second language.

The table 1 clearly demonstrate a range of syntactic errors commonly made by Saudi technical students when writing in English. The table categorizes the errors into specific types and provides illustrative examples for each, highlighting the influence of native Arabic structures on English sentence formation. These errors reflect challenges in mastering English syntax.

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Table 1. Types of Syntactic Errors

Syntactic Error Type	Examples
Subject-verb agreement	*He have a car. Instead of: He has a car.
Present simple tense	*My brother go to work. Instead of: My brother goes to work.
Present continuous tense	*My father living in Hail now. Instead of: My father is living in Hail now.
Word order (adjective phrase)	*I have a car new. Instead of: I have a new car.
Word order (simple sentence)	*go I madinah on thursday. Instead of: I go to Madinah on Thursday.
Possessive (’s) noun	*My name father Abdul Majid. Instead of: My father’s name is Abdul Majid.
Conjunctions	*I have a brother and a sister and parents. Instead of: I have a brother, a sister and parents.
Infinitive particle ‘to’	*I like watch hindi movies. Instead of: I like to watch Hindi movies.

5. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The primary objective of this study was to investigate the syntactic errors present in English compositions produced by Saudi technical trainees. This investigation aimed not only to catalogue these errors but also to provide a deeper understanding of the underlying causes contributing to these syntactic inaccuracies in their writing.

After thoroughly examining the essays written by the participants, a total of 222 syntactic errors were identified. This extensive dataset allowed for a detailed investigation of the types and frequencies of errors, providing valuable insights into the language difficulties experienced by these learners. The frequency and percentage of these syntactic errors are presented in Table 2 and Figure 1, offering a clear visual representation of the collected data.

Table 2. Frequency and Percentage of Syntactic Errors

Syntactic Error Type	Frequencies	Percentages
Subject-verb agreement	60	27%
Present simple tense	10	05%
Present continuous tense	16	07%
Word order (adjective phrase)	40	18%
Word order (simple sentence)	20	09%
Possessive (’s) noun	27	12%
Conjunctions	16	07%
Infinitive particle ‘to’	33	15%
Total	222	100%

Table 2 presents the types of syntactic errors produced by the technical students, along with their frequencies and percentages. It shows that errors in subject-verb agreement account for the highest percentage, at approximately 27%, while errors in the present simple tense represent the lowest percentage, around 5%.

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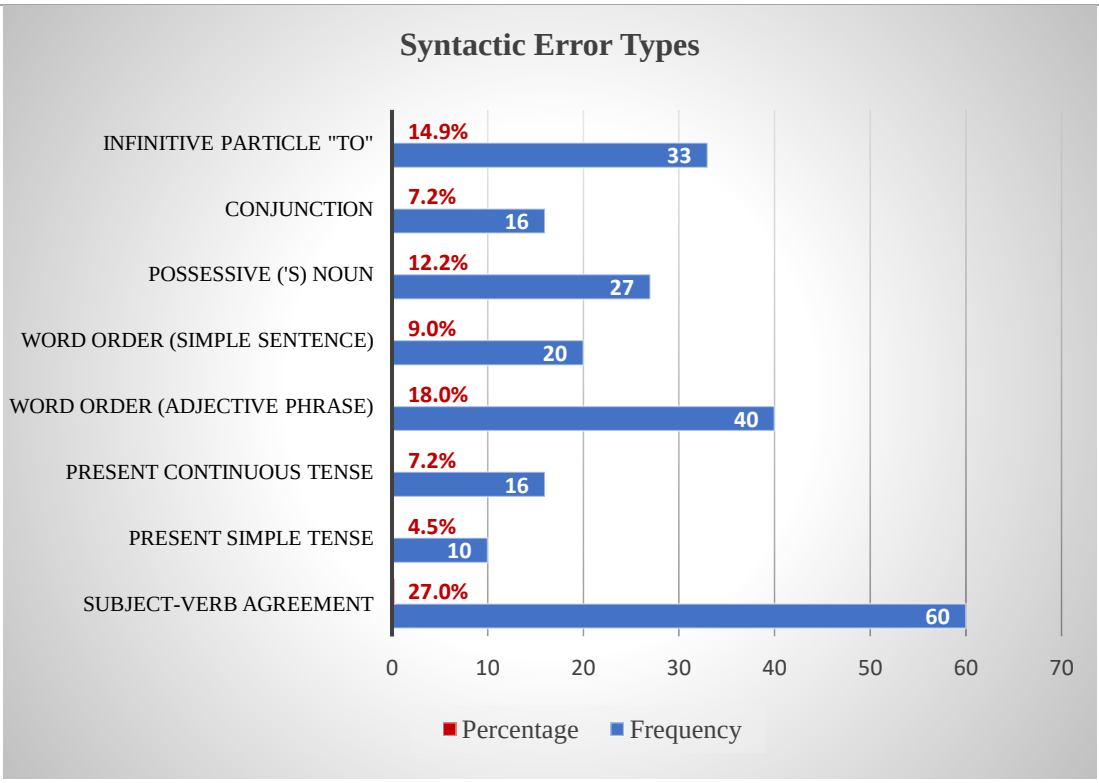

Figure 1. Percentage and Frequency of Syntactic Errors in English Writing

In Figure 1, we can see the breakdown of common syntactic errors made by learners in their English writing. The chart shows that subject-verb agreement errors were the most common, making up 27% of the total errors (60 errors). Word order errors related to adjective phrases followed at 18% (40 errors), errors involving infinitive particles at 15% (33 errors), possessive (’s) noun errors at 12% (27 errors), word order errors in simple sentences at 9% (20 errors), and conjunction errors at 7% (16 errors). Additionally, within the tense category, errors in the present simple tense accounted for 5% (10 errors), while errors in the present continuous tense made up 7% (16 errors).

5.1. Explanation of Errors

5.1.1. Subject-verb agreement

Subject-verb agreement pertains to the grammatical concordance between a subject and its corresponding verb within a sentence. In English, this rule dictates that a singular subject necessitates a singular verb, while a plural subject requires a plural verb. Both English and Arabic display distinctive syntactic rules that govern their sentence structures. Firstly, English predominantly adheres to a subject-verb-object (SVO) word order, whereas Arabic permits both verb-subject-object (VSO) and SVO arrangements.

Consequently, an Arabic sentence may initiate with either a verb or a subject, whereas an English sentence obligatorily begins with a subject. Secondly, in English, a subject must agree with a verb in both number (singular and plural) and person (first, second, and third). In contrast, Arabic requires that a verb agree with its subject in number (singular, dual, and plural) as well as in gender (masculine and feminine).

Furthermore, Arabic is classified as a pro-drop language, meaning that the subject can be omitted in certain contexts, as the verb conveys essential information regarding the subject’s person, number, and gender.

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Examples

1) *My brother police.	My brother is a police officer.
2) *My father go to school.	My father goes to the school.
3) *My mother work in hospital.	My mother works in the hospital.
4) *He go to madinah.	He goes to Madinah.
5) *He have car toyota.	He has a Toyota car.
6) *Go home every day.	I go home every day.
7) *Eat breakfast in 11 am.	I eat breakfast at 11 am.

The data reveals that technical students often struggle with subject-verb agreement, a challenge rooted in several key factors: the absence of the 'to be' verb in Arabic, the complexities of subject-verb agreement in English, and the pro-drop nature of Arabic. In sentence (1), for instance, the 'to be' form is missing, while in sentences (2-5), third-person singular subjects are incorrectly paired with singular verbs. Furthermore, sentences (6-7) exhibit subject omission, reflecting a structure more typical of Arabic. These patterns clearly point to interlingual errors that arise from the influence of their native language on their English writing.

5.1.2. Word order

Word order refers to the specific arrangement of words within a phrase, clause, or sentence, and it is crucial for clearly conveying meaning in both Arabic and English. Both languages have distinct rules governing word order that shape how information is structured and understood. This study focuses specifically on word order within adjective phrases and simple sentences.

In Arabic, the typical sentence structure follows a verb-subject-object (VSO) order, though variations such as subject-verb-object (SVO) are also possible. In contrast, English generally adheres to an SVO order, where the subject precedes both the verb and the object. However, in Arabic, the verb usually comes before the subject and the object, although there are situations where the subject may precede the verb.

When it comes to adjective phrases, English places adjectives before the noun they modify, as in 'a beautiful house.' In Arabic, however, adjectives typically follow the noun they describe, as in '*bayt Jameel* – جميل بيت' (house beautiful). This difference in word order in both sentence structures and adjective phrases highlights key syntactic distinctions between the two languages.

Examples

8) *My father have house big.	My father has a big house.
9) *He have car Toyota.	He has a Toyota car.
10) *I have car small.	I have a small car.
11) *Go I college in 8 am.	I go to college at 8 am.
12) *Eat I breakfast in 7 am.	I eat breakfast at 7 am.

The data reveals that EFL students encounter significant difficulties with English word order, particularly when constructing adjective phrases and simple sentences. In sentences (8-10), for instance, the adjective follows the noun, which is the reverse of the standard English structure where adjectives typically precede the noun. Similarly, in sentences (11-12), the verb is positioned before the subject, contrary to the English subject-verb-object order. These patterns strongly suggest that the students are inadvertently applying Arabic syntactic rules, where adjectives often follow nouns and subject-verb inversion occur, when writing in English. As a result, this interference from their native language leads to recurring syntactic errors, highlighting a clear case of interlingual influence.

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5.1.3. Conjunction

Conjunctions are used to combine or connect two lexical items, phrases, clauses, and sentences. Both English and Arabic utilize the conjunction 'and'; however, its usage differs between the two languages. The English conjunction 'and' corresponds to 'و /wa' in Arabic. In Arabic, 'و /wa' is attached to the following word and is repeated before each constituent in a series of words within a sentence. For example, 'لدي قلم وقلم رصاص وكتاب' translates to '*I have a pen and a pencil and a book*.' In contrast, in English, the conjunction 'and' is placed only before the last constituent in a series, as seen in the sentence, '*I have a pen, a pencil, and a book*.' It was observed that students often make errors related to conjunctions in their English writing due to the negative influence of their native language.

Examples

13)	*I have mother and father and brother.	I have a mother, a father, and brothers.
14)	*I have tv and table, and chair.	I have a TV, a table, and a chair.
15)	*I drink tea and coffee and coca.	I drink tea, coffee, and coca.

The sentences (13-15) above highlight that Arabic speakers learning English as a second or foreign language tend to apply the grammatical rules of conjunctions from Arabic when writing in English. These errors highlight the detrimental effect of native language influence, where the students' familiarity with Arabic rules disrupts their ability to follow the more rigid conjunction norms in English, ultimately leading to constructions that sound awkward or incorrect to native English speakers.

5.1.4. Possessive ('s) noun

Possession refers to the relationship between a person (or thing) and something that belongs to them or is associated with them. It indicates ownership or a sense of belonging. In English, possession is often expressed using possessive forms, such as possessive noun ('s), pronouns, or phrases. This paper, however, focuses specifically on the possessive noun ('s) construction in both English and Arabic. While both languages convey possession, they do so in distinct ways: in English, the possessed object follows the possessor, whereas in Arabic, the possessed object precedes the possessor.

Examples

16)	My name father is Ahmad.	My father's name is Ahmad.
17)	My name brother is Majid.	My brother's name is Majid.
18)	My name grandfather is Abdullah.	My grandfather's name is Abdullah.
19)	My name friend is Faisal.	My friend's name is Faisal.

The data above reveals that the technical students tend to follow Arabic grammatical patterns in their English writing. In their possessive constructions, they place the possessed object before the possessor, mirroring the structure of Arabic syntax. This pattern highlights a clear influence of their native language on their English compositions, suggesting that their mother tongue negatively impacts their English writing.

5.1.5. Tense and Aspects

The concept of tense refers to the various forms of a verb that indicate the timing of an action or state. Both English and Arabic recognize three tenses: present, past, and future. However, this study focuses exclusively on the present simple and present continuous tenses.

Additionally, both languages feature two aspects: the perfect aspect (completed actions) and the imperfect aspect (ongoing actions). English clearly distinguishes between the progressive aspect, which denotes ongoing actions (Leech, 1974), and the non-progressive

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aspect, which refers to habitual actions (Comrie, 1976). In contrast, Arabic places greater emphasis on perfective and imperfective distinctions than on tense distinctions (Ryding, 2005; Comrie, 1976). The present tense in Arabic typically refers to incomplete and ongoing actions (Ryding, 2005). This means that the Arabic imperfective aspect encompasses both the English present tense and the present continuous tense (Ryding, 2005, as cited in Mudush, 2021).

Thus, unlike in English, there is no clear distinction between the present tense and the present continuous tense in Arabic. For example, both '*Salma cooks the food'* and '*Salma is cooking the food*' can be translated as 'سلمى تطبخ الطعام' (salmaa tatbuxu at-taa'm), as noted in Mudush (2021). In the absence of temporal adverbs, it is challenging to differentiate between the present tense and the progressive tense in Arabic.

Examples

20)	*Now I am stay in Hail.	Now I am staying in Hail.
21)	*My brother studying in school.	My brother studies in the school.
22)	*My parents working in the school.	My parents work in the school.
23)	*I eating breakfast daily.	I eat breakfast daily.
24)	*I am play football in the evening.	I play football in the evening.
25)	He is go to bathroom.	He is going to the bathroom.

The examples above reveal that Arabic-speaking students learning English often either omit the progressive marker [-ing] or leave out the forms of 'to be' (is/am/are). This tendency reflects a challenge in distinguishing between the present simple tense and the present continuous tense, a distinction that is less pronounced in Arabic. In Arabic, the present continuous is typically expressed using context and the present tense verb alone, without the need for an auxiliary verb like 'to be' or the progressive marker [-ing].

For example, the verb 'yaktubu' in Arabic can mean both '*He writes*' (present simple) and '*He is writing*' (present continuous), depending on the context. As a result, these technical trainees tend to transfer this structure into their English writing, leading to errors. This pattern of omission highlights the strong influence of their native language grammar on their understanding and use of English tense forms.

5.1.6. Infinitive Particle 'to'

The infinitive represents the base form of a verb, expressing an action as an abstract concept or idea. In English, it is typically preceded by the particle 'to', as exemplified in 'to walk.' In contrast, the Arabic language does not have an equivalent concept of the infinitive verb. Instead, the base form of an Arabic verb is generally represented by the third-person masculine singular form in the past or perfect tense. For instance, the Arabic verb كَتَبَ /kətəbə/ translates to '*he wrote*' or '*he has written*' and corresponds to 'to write' in English (Abu-Chacra, 2007). As a result, English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners whose mother tongue is Arabic frequently make errors in the usage of infinitives. This is illustrated in the following examples:

Example

26)	*I like see bollywood movie.	I like to watch Bollywood movies.
27)	*I want become teacher.	I want to become a teacher.
28)	*I love listen music.	I love to listen to music.
29)	*I like play video game.	I like to play video games.

In these examples, verbs such as 'like,' 'want,' and 'love' are not followed by the required 'to-infinitive' constructions (e.g., 'to see,' 'to become,' 'to listen,' 'to play'). This reflects a transfer of grammatical structures from Arabic into English, as these learners rely on the

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syntactic patterns of their native language. According to English grammar rules, such verbs should be followed by to-infinitives. These errors underscore the influence of the learners' first language on their written English.

6. CONCLUSION

The findings of this study provide significant insights into the syntactic challenges faced by vocational students at the Technical College of Al-Hait in their English writing. The most frequent errors identified include issues with subject-verb agreement (27%), adjective-noun order (18%), the use of infinitive particles (15%), possessive constructions (12%), word order in simple sentences (9%), conjunction usage (8%), and distinctions between present simple and present continuous tenses (12%). These errors stem predominantly from interlingual interference, where students rely on the grammatical structures of Arabic while constructing sentences in English. This reflects the profound impact of native language habits on second-language acquisition.

Key linguistic contrasts between Arabic and English emerge as the primary cause of these errors. For instance, the absence of the ‘to be’ verb in Arabic, the flexible word order (VSO or SVO) in Arabic versus the rigid SVO structure in English, and the lack of a clear distinction between present simple and present continuous tenses in Arabic significantly influence learners' ability to write accurate English sentences. Additionally, Arabic’s pro-drop nature and its syntactic rules for possessives and adjective phrases further contribute to the learners’ struggles with English grammar. These interlingual challenges highlight the systemic nature of syntactic errors and the difficulty of mastering a language with fundamentally different linguistic features.

Despite these challenges, it is important to recognize that errors are an essential and natural part of the language learning process. They reflect students’ attempts to construct meaning in the target language and their evolving interlanguage systems. Consistent with existing research, this study underscores that language acquisition is a gradual process influenced by both cognitive factors and linguistic transfer from the native language.

6. PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATIIONS

Building on the findings of this study, it is evident that the syntactic errors made by vocational students at the Technical College of Al-Hait stem from the influence of their native language, Arabic, as well as from a lack of consistent exposure to and practice in English grammar and syntax. To address these challenges and support students in overcoming their writing difficulties, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. **Daily Writing Practice*:*** Regular writing practice is essential for students to internalize the rules of English grammar and improve their proficiency. The following strategies can help:
    a) ***Daily Journaling***: Encourage students to maintain a journal where they record their daily activities in English. This not only promotes routine practice but also allows them to experiment with sentence structures, tenses, and vocabulary in a low-pressure environment.
    b) ***Writing Assignments***: Teachers should assign brief, daily writing tasks that focus on specific grammatical areas, such as subject-verb agreement, word order, or adjective placement.
    c) ***Freewriting on Preferred Topics***: Allowing students to write about topics of their choice fosters creativity and engagement while providing opportunities to apply correct grammar in their writing.

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By engaging in these activities, students can gradually build confidence and competence in English writing, reducing their reliance on Arabic syntactic structures.

2. **Use of Technology for Language Learning**: In the digital age, students can benefit from a variety of tools, applications, and resources that provide instant feedback and personalized instruction:
    a) ***Grammar and Style Tools***: Applications like Grammarly, Hemingway, Ginger, and QuillBolt can help students identify and correct common grammatical and syntactic errors. These tools provide explanations for mistakes, reinforcing grammatical concepts.
    b) ***Interactive Platforms***: Websites such as Cambridge's 'Write & Improve' offer targeted writing exercises and instant feedback, enabling students to refine their skills at their own pace.
    c) ***Mobile Apps for Grammar Practice:*** Mobile apps designed for English grammar learning can offer gamified exercises to make language learning engaging and accessible anytime, anywhere, for example free mobile Apps 'LearnEnglish Grammar' by British Council and many more.

Integrating technology into the learning process empowers students to take charge of their language development and access diverse learning resources.

3. **Designed Targeted Instructional Activities*:*** The study revealed that specific syntactic errors, such as those related to subject-verb agreement, possessive constructions, and adjective-noun order, are prevalent among students. To address these issues:
    a) ***Focused Grammar Lessons***: Teachers should dedicate instructional time to areas where students struggle the most. For example, lessons on subject-verb agreement should emphasize the differences between singular and plural forms, while sessions on possessive constructions should contrast English and Arabic possessive structures.
    b) ***Error Analysis Exercises***: Students can analyse and correct their own errors in writing samples. This reflective approach helps them understand the rules and avoid making the same mistakes in the future.
    c) ***Contextualized Practice***: Incorporate real-life scenarios into writing exercises. For example, students could write dialogues, short essays, or reports on familiar topics, ensuring practical application of grammatical rules.

By targeting the root causes of syntactic errors, these activities can help students bridge the gap between Arabic and English syntax.

4. **Foster Teacher Support and Curriculum Development:** Teachers play a pivotal role in guiding students through the language learning process. The following measures can enhance their effectiveness:
    a) ***Provide Immediate Feedback*:** Teachers should offer timely and constructive feedback on students' writing assignments, focusing on recurring grammatical errors and providing clear explanations for corrections.
    b) ***Create a Supportive Environment*:** Encouraging students to take risks and learn from their mistakes fosters a positive attitude toward language learning.
    c) ***Update Curriculum and Syllabus*:** Regularly revising the English curriculum to include contemporary writing techniques, culturally relevant materials, and exercises targeting common syntactic challenges can better cater to the needs of EFL learners.

A motivated and well-prepared teacher can significantly impact students' writing development by fostering a supportive and engaging learning environment.

5. **Encourage a Comparative Approach to Language Learning**: Given the strong influence of Arabic syntax on English writing, teachers should use a comparative approach to raise students' awareness of the key differences between the two languages. For example:
   a) Highlight the distinctions in word order (e.g., adjective-noun placement) and possessive constructions.
   b) Emphasize the use of auxiliary verbs (e.g., 'to be' in English) and the progressive marker [-ing], which are absent in Arabic.
   c) Use bilingual examples to illustrate how syntactic structures vary between English and Arabic, helping students consciously avoid transferring Arabic rules into their English writing.

Such a comparative approach equips students with a deeper understanding of English grammar and enhances their ability to construct sentences correctly.

6. **Promote Consistency and Motivation**: Language learning is inherently a time-intensive process, requiring perseverance and consistent effort. To sustain students' motivation:
   a) ***Celebrate Small Wins*:** Acknowledge and reward progress in students' writing abilities to keep them motivated.
   b) ***Set Achievable Goals*:** Establish short-term goals for students, such as mastering a specific grammatical rule each week.
   c) ***Provide Inspiration*:** Share success stories of individuals who have improved their English writing skills despite initial struggles, demonstrating that improvement is attainable with effort and persistence.

Motivated students are more likely to invest the time and energy needed to overcome syntactic challenges and develop fluency in English.

These recommendations are directly aligned with the findings of this study, which emphasizes the need for targeted interventions and consistent practice to address syntactic errors and reduce the influence of Arabic on students' English writing. By integrating daily writing exercises, leveraging digital tools, designing targeted instructional activities, and fostering teacher support, students can gradually overcome the interlingual interference that hinders their progress. Additionally, the comparative approach to language learning empowers students to identify and adapt to the structural differences between Arabic and English, fostering greater grammatical accuracy. Ultimately, implementing these recommendations can equip vocational students with the skills they need to succeed academically and professionally, reinforcing the notion that language learning is a transformative and rewarding process.

Funding: This research received no external funding.
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