



Syntactic Errors in Verb Phrases Made by English Major Students in Written Composition at Omar Al-Mukhtar University

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Abstract

This study aimed to analyze the syntactic errors made in verb phrases by 35 students in written composition. The participants were English major students at the third and fourth years at Omar Al-Mukhtar University. Each participant wrote an essay and the written samples were collected for the analysis. The study classified the errors made by the participants using James's (2013) Surface Structure Taxonomy. The analysis of the data revealed that the participants produced a total of 545 verb phrases, of which 461 (84.59%) were correct and 84 (15.41%) were incorrect. Of the 84 incorrect verb phrases, 41 (48.84%) were classified as misformation, 25 (29.76%) were due to addition, and 18 (21.43%) were due to omission. The learners made 44 interlingual errors and 40 intralingual errors. The number and type of errors varied significantly across participants. The analysis attributed these errors interference from the participants' first language, and individual differences in language proficiency and learning strategies. This study provides insights into the challenges faced by language learners in producing verb phrases in second language writing and emphasizes the need for tailored instruction and support to develop language proficiency.



المستخلص

هدفت هذه الدراسة إلى تحليل الأخطاء النحوية في العبارات الفعلية التي ارتكبها 35 طالباً في مقالاتهم الكتابية. ركزت الدراسة على طلاب السنتين الثالثة والرابعة في تخصص اللغة الإنجليزية في جامعة عمر المختار. كتب كل مشارك مقالاً وتم جمع عينات الكتابة للتحليل. صنفت الدراسة الأخطاء التي ارتكبها المشاركون باستخدام تصنيف الهيكل السطحي المقترح من قبل جيمس (2013). أظهر تحليل البيانات أن المشاركين كتبوا 545 عبارة فعلية، منها 461 (84.59%) كانت صحيحة و 84 (15.41%) كانت خاطئة. من العبارات الفعلية الخاطئة الـ 84، كان 41 (48.84%) بسبب التركيب الخاطئ، و 25 (29.76%) بسبب الإضافة، و 18 (21.43%) بسبب الحذف. قام الطلاب بـ 44 خطأ بسبب تأثير اللغة الأولى (العربية) و 40 خطأ تطوري (من دون تأثير اللغة الأولى). اختلف عدد الأخطاء بشكل كبير بين المشاركين. تُعزى هذه الأخطاء إلى تدخل اللغة الأولى للمشاركين، والفروقات الفردية في الكفاءة اللغوية واستراتيجيات التعلم. توفر هذه الدراسة نظرة عامة على التحديات التي تواجه المتعلمين في إنتاج العبارات الفعلية في الكتابة باللغة الثانية، وتؤكد على ضرورة توفير الدعم التعليمي الملائم والتعليم الفعال لتطوير الكفاءة اللغوية.

1. Introduction

1.1 The English Verb Phrase

Verb phrases are a fundamental unit of sentence structure in English that play an essential role in conveying meaning and expressing the relationship between different elements of a sentence. According to Fareed, Ashraf, and Bilal (2016), a verb phrase consists of a main verb and its auxiliaries, complements, and modifiers. Wu and Garza (2014) emphasise that in English writing, a verb phrase is crucial to conveying tense, aspect, and voice, which are essential components of the language.

Syntax, on the other hand, is the study of the rules governing the structure of sentences and how words are combined to form meaningful expressions. Hourani (2008) asserts that syntax is an essential aspect of the grammatical competence of a language learner. It helps learners to understand how words are used in sentences, and how the different elements of a sentence are organised to convey meaning.



In English writing, syntactic errors can occur when the writer misuses or omits verb phrases. For instance, Ngangbam (2016) found that students in Mutah University committed errors such as omitting auxiliary verbs, using incorrect tense, and misusing modals. These errors can hinder effective communication and reduce the clarity and coherence of written texts.

The significance of verb phrases and syntax in writing has been highlighted in several studies. Zawahreh (2012) found that errors related to verb phrases were among the most common errors committed by students in Ajloun Schools, Jordan.

1.2 Background and context of the study

English language proficiency is important for academic and professional success. However, it is evident that learners of English as a second language often struggle with using verb phrases correctly in their written compositions (Moses & Mohamad, 2019). This study aims to investigate the types of errors made by learners in Omar Al-Mukhtar University, why they make them, and how to help them overcome these errors.

1.2.1 Statement of the problem

It is believed that English major students at Omar Al-Mukhtar University struggle with using verb phrases correctly in their written compositions, which can lead to syntactic errors. However, there is limited research on this topic, making it difficult for teachers, curriculum developers, and policymakers to develop effective solutions. This study aims to fill this gap in the literature by investigating the types of errors and factors contributing to them.

1.2.2 Definition of terms

Syntactic errors: Errors in the grammatical structure of a sentence, such as incorrect word order, verb tense, or subject-verb agreement.

Verb phrases: A verb phrase consists of a main verb, which may or may not be connected to one or more auxiliary verbs or particles that express tense, aspect, mood, voice, or emphasis. Examples of verb phrases include "study," "is writing," "has been studying," and "should have gone".



1.3 Research questions

1. What are the predominant types of syntactic errors that English major students at Omar Al-Mukhtar University make when using verb phrases in written composition?
2. What pedagogical strategies can be employed to overcome these errors and improve students' English language proficiency in written composition?

1.4 Aim of the study

The present study aims to:

1. Identify the types of syntactic errors that students make when using verb phrases in written composition.
2. Provide pedagogical implications on assisting students overcome such syntactic errors in order to improve their English language proficiency in composition.

1.5 Importance of the study

The finding of the study will be significant for English language teaching and learning at Omar Al-Mukhtar University and beyond.

First, the insights from the current studies can be very beneficial for teachers in helping them to identify the difficulties that their learners face when learning or using phrasal verbs. By understanding these difficulties, teachers can adapt their teaching methods and materials to better suit the needs of their learners.

Second, the results of the study can help learners to understand the difficulties they face when learning or using phrasal verbs. By understanding these difficulties, learners can take steps to overcome them and improve their language skills.

1.6 Scope of the Research

This research explores the nature and causes of syntactic errors in verb phrases produced by Libyan EFL learners. Through a comprehensive analysis of written English samples, the study seeks to identify the most prevalent types of verb phrase errors, categorize them based on



their underlying causes, and explore their connection to interlingual transfer and intralingual factors. The findings will contribute to a deeper understanding of the challenges faced by Libyan EFL learners and inform pedagogical strategies to enhance their verb phrase proficiency.

1.7 Limitations of the study

The limitations of this study include the small sample size, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to other populations or levels of study. Additionally, the lack of qualitative data and interviews may limit the depth of understanding of the factors contributing to the syntactic errors of using verb phrases in written composition. However, the study's quantitative design and comprehensive analysis will provide a detailed understanding of the issue among the participants and inform future research and teaching practices.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

In the field of second language acquisition (SLA) research, error analysis stands as a cornerstone for understanding and evaluating learners' progress. By scrutinizing the errors learners make, we gain invaluable insights into their developing language systems, the obstacles they encounter, and the strategies they devise to navigate the intricacies of the target language (Ellis, 1997). This chapter delves into the significance of error analysis, with a particular focus on syntactic errors in verb phrases among Libyan EFL learners.

2.1.1 The Importance of Error Analysis

Error analysis plays a pivotal role in SLA research by providing a window into the cognitive processes underlying language acquisition. Unlike mistakes, which are typically random and attributed to lapses in attention or performance, errors reflect patterns and strategies that learners employ as they strive to master the target language (Corder, 1975). By systematically examining these errors, researchers can identify areas of difficulty, uncover underlying



causes, and inform effective teaching practices (Celce-Murcia, Larsen-Freeman & Williams, 1983).

Ellis (1997) argues that error analysis provides a window into the learner's mind, revealing how they are processing and interpreting the target language. By analyzing these errors, we gain a deeper understanding of the developmental processes involved in language acquisition and can tailor teaching methodologies to address specific learner needs.

2.1.2 Syntactic Errors in Verb Phrases: A Focus on Libyan EFL Learners

Syntactic errors, those related to the structure and organization of sentences, hold particular significance in SLA research. Verb phrases, the heart of English sentences, constitute a complex grammatical structure that often poses challenges for EFL learners (Al-Jarf, 2002). Libyan EFL learners, in particular, face unique obstacles due to the influence of their native Arabic language, which exhibits a distinct grammatical structure (Algeo & Butcher, 2014).

2.2 Defining error analysis

Error analysis, a cornerstone of second language acquisition (SLA) research, involves the systematic examination of errors made by learners in the process of acquiring a new language (Corder, 1967). By analyzing these errors, researchers can gain valuable insights into the cognitive processes underlying language acquisition, identify common areas of difficulty, and inform effective teaching practices.

2.2.1 Approaches to Error Analysis

Error analysis encompasses a range of approaches, each with its own unique perspective and methodology. Some of the most prominent approaches include:

- Contrastive Analysis (CA): CA compares the linguistic systems of the learner's native language (L1) and the target language (L2) to predict potential areas of difficulty. However, CA has been criticized for its overreliance on linguistic theory and its limited ability to account for individual learner variability (Ellis, 1997).



- Error Gravity: This approach assigns weights to errors based on their perceived severity or impact on communication. Errors that significantly hinder communication are considered more serious than those that have minimal impact (James, 2013).
- Interlanguage Analysis: This approach views learner language as a distinct system, or interlanguage, that evolves as learners progress towards target language proficiency. Errors are analyzed within the context of the learner's interlanguage, providing insights into their developing grammatical and lexical systems (Selinker, 1972).

2.2.2 Errors versus Mistakes

It is important to distinguish between errors and mistakes in SLA research. Errors are systematic patterns that reflect underlying gaps in the learner's knowledge of the target language (Corder, 1975). Mistakes, on the other hand, are random occurrences that result from factors such as fatigue, carelessness, or performance anxiety. By focusing on errors, researchers can identify areas of systematic difficulty and inform targeted instructional interventions.

2.2.3 The Role of Error Analysis in Diagnosing Learner Language Development

Error analysis provides a valuable tool for diagnosing learner language development. By analyzing the types and patterns of errors, teachers and researchers can gain insights into the learner's current level of proficiency, identify areas of strength and weakness, and tailor instructional strategies accordingly. Error analysis can also be used to track learner progress over time, providing evidence of their developing language abilities.

2.3 The English Verb Phrase and Common Errors

The English verb phrase, the core of English sentences, plays a pivotal role in conveying meaning and expressing grammatical relationships. However, due to its complex structure and diverse usage patterns, verb phrases often pose significant challenges for second language learners, particularly in the context of written English production. This section introduces the concept of the English verb phrase and highlights the importance of understanding verb phrases in order to analyze syntactic errors in verb phrases.



2.3.1 Definition and Components

The English verb phrase is a grammatical unit that consists of a verb and its modifiers (Quirk et al., 1985). The verb serves as the core of the phrase, providing the lexical meaning and grammatical function. Modifiers, such as adverbs, auxiliaries, and prepositional phrases, expand upon the verb's meaning and contribute to the overall grammatical structure of the sentence.

2.3.2 Types of Verb Phrases

Verb phrases can be classified into different types based on their grammatical properties and lexical characteristics (Huddleston & Pullum, 2002; Levin, 1993; Quirk et al., 1985). Some of the most common types of verb phrases include:

1. Transitive verb phrases: These phrases contain verbs that require a direct object, which receives the action of the verb (Quirk et al., 1985). For example, "The student wrote a letter."
2. Intransitive verb phrases: These phrases contain verbs that do not require a direct object (Quirk et al., 1985). For instance, "The girl was sleeping."
3. Ditransitive verb phrases: These phrases contain verbs that require two direct objects (Quirk et al., 1985). For example, "The teacher gave the student a book."
4. Ambitransitive verb phrases: These phrases contain verbs that can be used with or without a direct object (Levin, 1993). For instance, "I read the book." or "I read all afternoon."
5. Phrasal verbs: These phrases consist of a verb and a preposition or adverb that together form a new meaning (Huddleston & Pullum, 2002). For example, "She looked down on him."
6. Prepositional verbs: These phrases consist of a verb and a preposition that are closely linked in meaning (Huddleston & Pullum, 2002). For example, "The teacher looked at the student."
7. Complex verb phrases: These phrases include additional elements along with the main verb and auxiliary verbs (Quirk et al., 1985). These elements can be adverbs,



prepositional phrases, or infinitive/gerund phrases that modify or further describe the action or state. For example, "She went to the park to play."

2.3.3 Common Errors in Verb Phrases

English verb phrases are susceptible to various syntactic errors, often stemming from interlingual (transfer) factors or intralingual factors due to incomplete mastery of English grammar rules. (James, 2013) points out some of the most common verb phrase errors, which include:

1. Subject-Verb Agreement: This error occurs when the verb does not agree with the subject in number or person. For example, "The students studies hard."
2. Verb Tense: This error involves the incorrect use of verb tense, often resulting from confusion between past, present, and future tenses. For example, "I will go to the store yesterday."
3. Verb Form: This error entails the incorrect use of verb forms, such as infinitive, participle, or gerund. For example, "I enjoyed to watch the movie."
4. Verb Placement: This error involves the incorrect positioning of the verb in the sentence, particularly in question and negative constructions. For example, "Did he to the park go?"

2.3.4 Causes of Common Errors

The occurrence of common errors in verb phrases can be attributed to various factors, including (Corder, 1975; Ellis, 1997):

1. Interlingual Transfer: This phenomenon involves the transfer of linguistic features from the learner's native language to the target language. For instance, Arabic, which treats subject-verb agreement in a different way to English, may influence EFL learners to make subject-verb agreement errors in English. In Arabic, the subject and the verb must agree on gender and number. On the other hand, in English, the number is the only aspect which affects subject-verb agreement.
2. Incomplete Mastery of English Grammar Rules: Learners may struggle to apply grammatical rules correctly due to limited exposure to the target language or



insufficient instruction. For example, learners may confuse the usage of verb tenses due to the complexities of English time systems.

3. Processing Limitations: The process of language acquisition involves cognitive demands, and learners may make errors simply due to fatigue or lack of motivation to produce accurate structures or lack of focus.

2.4 Sources of Errors

This section offers a discussion on the sources of errors and illustrates the most commonly used taxonomies of error analysis.

2.4.1 Interlingual and Intralingual Errors

In the realm of second language acquisition (SLA) research, errors are typically categorized into two broad categories: interlingual and intralingual (Richards, 1980).

2.4.1.1 Interlingual Errors

Interlingual errors arise from the transfer of linguistic features from the learner's native language (L1) to the target language (L2) (Corder, 1975; Richards, 1980). These errors reflect the learner's attempt to apply the rules and patterns of their L1 to the L2, leading to deviations from the correct L2 structure (Ellis, 1997). For instance, an EFL learner whose native language does not have subject-verb agreement may make errors like "The students studies hard" due to the influence of their L1 (James, 2013). Learners might mistakenly use the plural -s suffix to make verbs plural – a clear overgeneralization of the rule based on what they had learned about making nouns plural in English. This error may be caused by the interference of the learner's first language, such as Arabic, which uses suffixes to make the plural form of most verbs.

2.4.1.2 Intralingual Errors

Intralingual errors, on the other hand, stem from developmental processes within the learner's interlanguage, the evolving system of language that represents their current level of proficiency in the L2 (Corder, 1975; Ellis, 1997). These errors reflect the learner's incomplete mastery of L2 grammar rules or their struggles with processing demands during language



production (Ellis, 1997). For example, an EFL learner may make errors like "I go to school yesterday" due to difficulties with verb tense usage or processing limitations under pressure.

2.4.2 Classification of Errors

In addition to the distinction between interlingual and intralingual errors, various taxonomies have been proposed to classify errors based on their linguistic characteristics and underlying causes. Some of the prominent taxonomies include:

1. The Surface Structure Taxonomy

This taxonomy categorizes errors based on the surface structure of the learner's utterances, focusing on the observable deviations from the correct L2 structure (James, 2013). For instance, an error like "I enjoyed to watch the movie" would be classified under the 'misformation' category.

2. Selinker's Interlanguage Model

Selinker's interlanguage model proposes a three-stage process of interlanguage development: pre-systematic, systematic, and post-systematic (Selinker, 1972). Errors are categorized based on the learner's current stage of development, providing insights into their evolving grammatical system.

2.5 Limitations of error analysis

Error analysis, while a valuable tool for understanding the nature of errors in second language acquisition (SLA), is not without its limitations. Some of the key limitations of error analysis include:

- Focus on production errors: While focusing on production errors in error analysis offers valuable insights into learners' internal grammar and developmental processes (Ellis, 1997), solely relying on this approach presents limitations. This narrow scope neglects the crucial dimension of comprehension, which plays a vital role in SLA (James, 2013). Learners can grapple with misinterpretations of grammar, vocabulary meaning, and pragmatic nuances that may not be readily apparent in their own output (Ellis, 1997). For instance, complex sentence structures can pose challenges, idiomatic



expressions may be misinterpreted, and implicit meaning may be missed. By overlooking these comprehension-related difficulties, the picture of language acquisition remains incomplete.

To address this limitation, researchers have advocated for incorporating complementary methods that tap into learners' comprehension abilities (James, 2013). Tasks such as rephrasing, summarizing, or answering questions based on written or spoken input can reveal comprehension gaps that might otherwise go unnoticed in production-based analysis. By acknowledging the significance of both production and comprehension errors, we gain a more holistic understanding of the challenges and achievements of learners within the SLA process.

- Neglect of non-errors: Error analysis often overlooks instances where learners use correct language forms (Corder, 1975). This focus on errors may lead to an incomplete understanding of learners' language proficiency, as accurate production is also an essential aspect of SLA (Ellis, 1997).
- Difficulty in determining error causes: Identifying the precise causes of errors can be challenging (Corder, 1975). Errors may stem from a combination of factors, including interlingual transfer, incomplete mastery of L2 rules, processing limitations, and strategic choices made by learners (Ellis, 1997).
- Limited scope of analysis: Error analysis often focuses on specific linguistic features or grammatical structures (Richards, 1980). This narrow focus may overlook broader patterns of error distribution and language development, which can provide a more comprehensive understanding of learners' strengths and weaknesses (James, 2013).
- Lack of longitudinal data: Error analysis often relies on cross-sectional data (Corder, 1975). This approach provides a snapshot of errors at a particular point in time, rather than tracking error patterns over time, which can reveal important developmental trends (Ellis, 1997).

Despite these limitations, error analysis remains a valuable tool for understanding the challenges and processes involved in SLA. By acknowledging the limitations of error analysis and employing it in conjunction with other research methods, researchers and educators can



gain a more comprehensive understanding of learner development and identify effective teaching strategies to address learners' specific challenges.

2.6 Previous Studies

A substantial body of research has explored the use of error analysis in second language acquisition (SLA) (Ellis, 1997). Early studies focused on identifying and classifying errors (Richards, 1980), while later research delved into the underlying causes of errors and their relationship to language development (Corder, 1975). More recently, research has focused on investigating specific types of errors and their relationship to learner characteristics, instructional approaches, and input factors (Ellis, 1985; James, 2013; Selinker, 1972).

In the context of verb phrase errors, several studies have examined the patterns and causes of these errors in different ESL/EFL contexts. For instance, a study by Aslani and Tabrizi (2015) investigated the verb phrase errors of Iranian EFL learners and revealed a similar pattern of errors, with subject-verb agreement and verb tense being the most common types of errors.

There is a distinct lack of similar studies within the Libyan context. However, a few studies were conducted over the recent years. One such study by Abied, Ali, and Ashfello (2022) focuses on error analysis of written English essays by Libyan EFL learners, specifically examining EFL students at Alasmarya University. Within the realm of language teaching, the behaviorist perspective initially posited that errors in a foreign language arose from the transfer of first language routines into the target language. This assumption prompted the utilization of contrastive analysis to identify differences and similarities between languages, aiding in the prediction of challenges in learning the target language. However, as research revealed that language transfer alone did not account for all errors, questions arose regarding the validity of the contrastive analysis hypothesis. This uncertainty gave rise to the concept of 'Interlanguage,' which posits the existence of a system bridging the gap between the learner's mother tongue and the language they are acquiring. The primary objective of this research is to shed light on the interlingual and intralingual error sources of Libyan (Arabic-English) learners through the analysis of their written essays. The results of the study indicated that participants tended to make errors predominately because of developmental reasons. The



paper highlighted the presence of 115 interlingual errors out of a total of 430 errors, constituting 26.74% of the overall error percentage, while intralingual errors amounted to 315 instances, accounting for 73.25% of the total errors identified.

Al Jawad and Mansour (2021) conducted a study on grammatical errors among Libyan EFL students, particularly concerning the influence of Arabic as their first language. The paper involved a meticulous analysis to delve into the intricacies of error patterns. Notably, the research highlighted significant discrepancies in error occurrences between Written Essays (WT) and the Grammar Recognition Test (GRT) administered to the participants. The findings revealed a total of 205 grammatical errors across ten distinct categories in the WT, with a predominant number of errors attributed to article usage, followed closely by word/verb form inaccuracies. Specifically, in the realm of verb forms, the study identified a total of 28 errors in the WT, which confirms the challenges participants faced in verb conjugation and form agreement. On the other hand, the GRT exhibited a lower frequency of errors, with verb form inaccuracies accounting for only six instances. The higher accuracy highlights a critical area for targeting teaching methods to improve verb phrase construction among EFL learners, which is used to enhance proficiency in this grammatical domain and reduce error occurrences in written compositions.

While Alsied, Ibrahim, and Pathan (2018) identified a spectrum of errors in Libyan EFL learners' essays, discourse errors stood out as the most prominent, constituting over 22% of all instances. Notably, learners struggled with crafting effective topic sentences, often resorting to weak statements like "She was very important person in my life." Additionally, developing supporting sentences proved challenging, with examples like "and run also is very important to your health some people are didn't exercising sport" highlighting incoherent transitions and unclear elaboration.

Grammatical errors also emerged as a significant hurdle: missing and incorrect capitalization accounted for almost a third of all errors, as seen in cases like "family is the most important thing" and "My Mother is housewife." Punctuation errors were even more prevalent, encompassing nearly half of all mistakes observed. Missing and incorrect punctuation marks



disrupted sentence flow and obscured meaning, as exemplified by "I will do that" and "please lets go, he was vampire."

A more recent study by Altoate (2022) conducted a corpus-based analysis of spelling, noun phrase, and verb phrase errors produced by Arabic L1 undergraduate learners of English at Benghazi University, Libya. The study found that errors attributable to first language influence were most prevalent in spelling, followed by verb phrase errors. The study also showed that interlingual spelling errors decreased from one university level to the next, but this was not the case for noun phrase and verb phrase errors.

The research on verb phrase errors in SLA suggests that these errors are common and persistent across different ESL/EFL contexts. The specific types of errors and their underlying causes may vary depending on the learner's native language – which causes different types of interlingual errors, proficiency level – which often causes intralingual errors, and instructional environment. Learners in environments with limited exposure to authentic English might overuse the base form of verbs ("I like play soccer") due to insufficient input of correct verb conjugations (Richards, 1980). However, some general patterns emerge, such as the high frequency of errors related to subject-verb agreement, verb tense, and verb form.

3. Methodology

3.1 Participants

This study draws upon a purposeful sample of 35 undergraduate students enrolled in the English program at Omar Al-Mukhtar University's English Department. Participants were drawn from both the third year (22 students) and fourth year (13 students) of the bachelor's degree program, representing a crucial stage in their academic trajectory where effective English communication becomes increasingly vital for professional and academic pursuits.



3.2 Procedures

3.2.1 Data collection:

Data for this investigation was primarily gathered through written essays. To elicit verb phrase usage in a natural and contextualized setting, participants were provided with a writing prompt related to a familiar topic, namely: (Write about the importance of learning a second language. Consider the challenges and your personal experience.). Informants were instructed to write an essay of at least 150 words in English, ensuring sufficient data for error analysis.

3.2.2 Data exclusion:

During the initial data screening, seven essays were excluded due to falling below the minimum word count of 150. This reduced the final sample size to 35 participants.

3.2.3 Data analysis:

The essays were meticulously analyzed for the occurrence and types of verb phrase errors. Employing established error analysis techniques as discussed in chapter 2, each verb phrase was examined for accuracy in tense, aspect, agreement, and form. Identified errors were then categorized based on their nature: interlingual (stemming from first language transfer) or intralingual (internal to the learner's developing English grammar). Within each category, further subcategories were applied to capture the specific types of errors observed (e.g., misinformation, omission, addition, misordering).

4. Results and Analysis

4.1 Participants' Accuracy

Table 4. 1 Accuracy of Verb Phrases in Participants' Writing

	<i>Correct</i>	<i>Incorrect</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>Accuracy</i>
<i>Third Year</i>	282	68	350	80.57%
<i>Fourth Year</i>	179	16	195	91.79%
<i>Total</i>	461	84	545	84.59%



Categorized by student year, table 4.1 summarizes the verb phrase accuracy of the participants. Third-year students used a total of 350 verb phrases, with 282 being grammatically correct and 68 containing errors. This translates to an accuracy rate of 80.57%. Fourth-year students exhibited greater accuracy, achieving a rate of 91.79%. They used a total of 195 verb phrases, out of which only 16 were found to be incorrect. Considering both year groups, a total of 545 verb phrases were used in the writing samples. Of these, 461 were grammatically correct, resulting in a combined accuracy rate of 84.59% (Table 4.1).

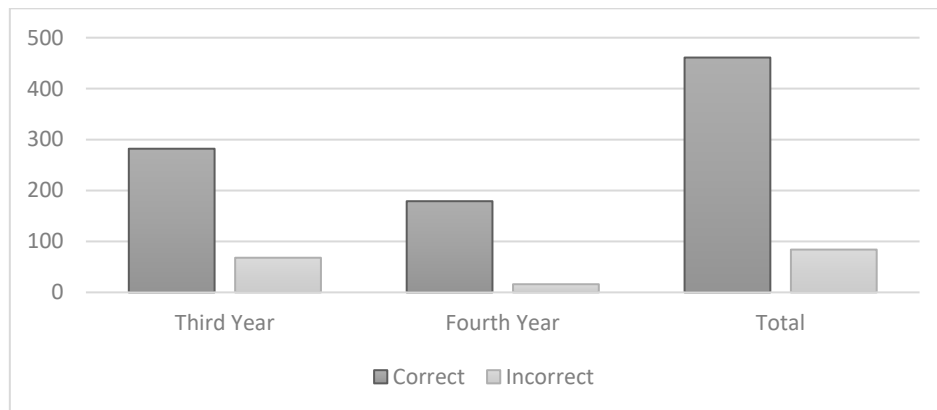


Figure 4. 1 Accuracy of Verb Phrases in Participants' Writing

4.2 Sources of errors

Table 4.2 highlights the distribution of error types in writing samples between third and fourth-year English majors. Third-year students made a total of 37 interlingual errors, influenced by their native language, compared to 31 intralingual errors within English grammar. Fourth-year students exhibited a similar trend, committing 7 interlingual errors and 9 intralingual errors. The data suggests a slightly higher prevalence of interlingual errors across both year groups. However, the difference is insignificant in both years.



Table 4. 2 Ratio of Interlingual to Intralingual Errors

	<i>Interlingual</i>	<i>Intralingual</i>
<i>Third Year</i>	37	31
<i>Fourth Year</i>	7	9
<i>Total</i>	44	40

4.2.1 Interlingual errors

Table 4.3 analyzes error distribution by academic year, revealing a downward trend in all categories. Third-year students exhibited a higher error rate across the board, making 9 addition errors, 15 omission errors, and 13 misinformation errors. Fourth-year students demonstrated significant improvement, committing only 3 addition errors, 2 omission errors, and 2 misinformation errors. This data suggests that English majors produce progressively fewer errors in their writing as they advance through their studies. Omission errors were the most prevalent type of interlingual errors, accounting for 38.64% of interlingual errors made by the participants.



Table 4. 3 Interlingual Errors by Academic Year

	<i>Addition</i>	<i>Omission</i>	<i>Misformation</i>
<i>Third Year</i>	9	15	13
<i>Fourth Year</i>	3	2	2
<i>Total</i>	12	17	15
<i>Percentage</i>	27.27%	38.64%	34.09%

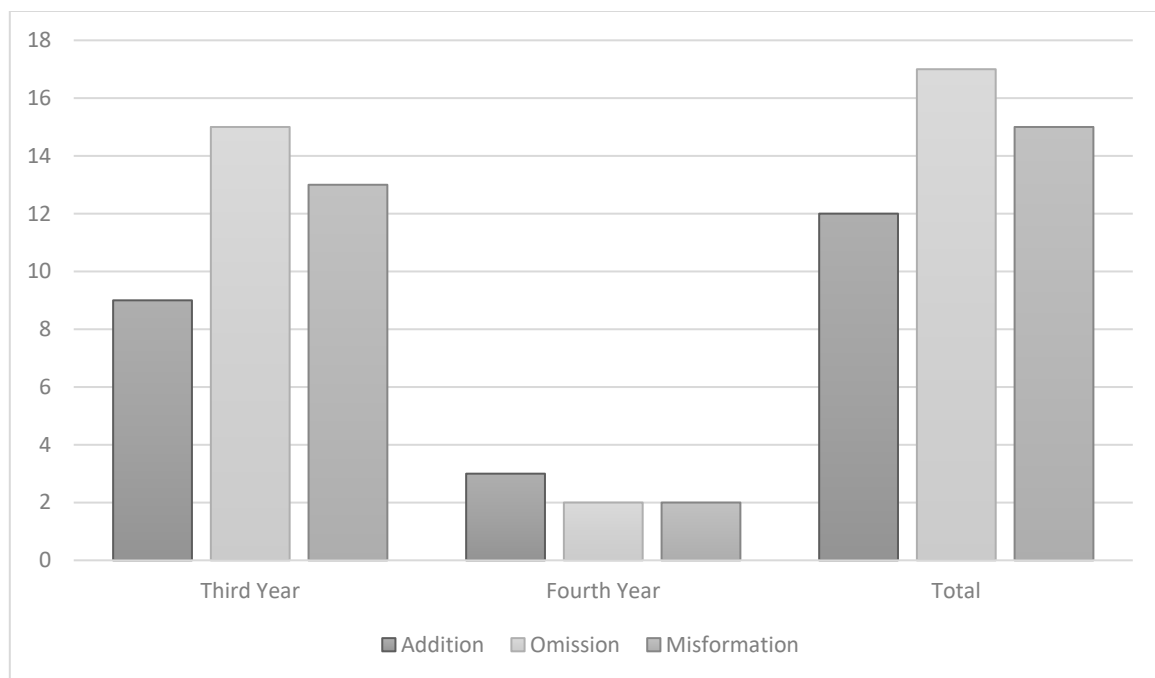


Figure 4. 2 Interlingual Errors by Academic Year

4.2.1.1 Misformation

Misformation errors refer to instances where the syntactic form is incorrect, resulting in grammatical inaccuracies or structural inconsistencies (James, 2013). This section highlights



the prevalence of misinformation errors based on the data presented in Table 4.3 with examples from the participants' writing.

According to the table, a total of 15 misinformation errors were identified across the two academic years under consideration. This corresponds to 34.09% of the total interlingual errors observed. These findings indicate that a significant proportion of the errors in the analyzed sample were related to syntactic issues.

For example, in sample 3-15, the participant wrote the following:

"It might helps you to get a job."

In this example, the participant added the third person present simple -s after a modal verb, which was a very common error among the participants.

4.2.1.2 Omission

Omission errors pertain to instances where important elements or required information are missing from a certain phrase (James, 2013). This section focuses on analyzing the occurrence of omission errors based on the data presented in Table 4.3.

Based on the information provided in the table, a total of 8 interlingual omission errors were identified throughout the two academic years under investigation. These errors accounted for 38.64% of the total errors observed. This percentageshowsthatomission errors were the most significant category of interlingual errors.

Participants commonly omitted the verb be from the verb phrase due to first language interference, as Arabic does not have an equivalent verb. One instance of such occurrence was in sample 3-05, where the participant wrote:

"It [is] helpful for many reasons."

Another common omission due to interlingual factors is the omission of the preposition following the verb or the omission of the infinitive particle "to", as in this example from sample 3-08:



“My dream is [to] be great [at] speaking English”

Such an error may have occurred because of a direct translation from Arabic where such structure is directly followed by a verb in the base form instead of a verb with the infinitive marker.

4.2.1.3 Addition

Addition errors occur when extra elements are included within the phrase, leading to redundancy or grammatical inconsistencies (James, 2013). This section examines the prevalence of addition errors based on the data presented in Table 3.

10 interlingual addition errors were identified in the writing samples of the participants, as highlighted in table 4.3. This accounts for 22.73% of the total errors observed. Although addition is the least prevalent type of interlingual errors, it remains a notable type within the analyzed context.

Participants often added unnecessary elements such as prepositions after verbs to correspond with the Arabic equivalent of the phrase. In sample 4-07, for example, the participant wrote:

“Learning a second language provide[s] to you [with] a lot of opportunities”

Adding the preposition “to” is an error that may have been caused because of a direct translation from the participant’s first language, as it is necessary to add a preposition after the verb “provide” in Arabic. This tendency is common among the participants as the sample shows many similar errors in this study.

4.2.2 Intralingual errors

Table 4. 4 Intralingual Errors by Academic Year

	Addition	Omission	Misformation
Third Year	9	1	21
Fourth Year	4	0	5
Total	13	1	26
Percentage	32.50%	2.50%	65.00%

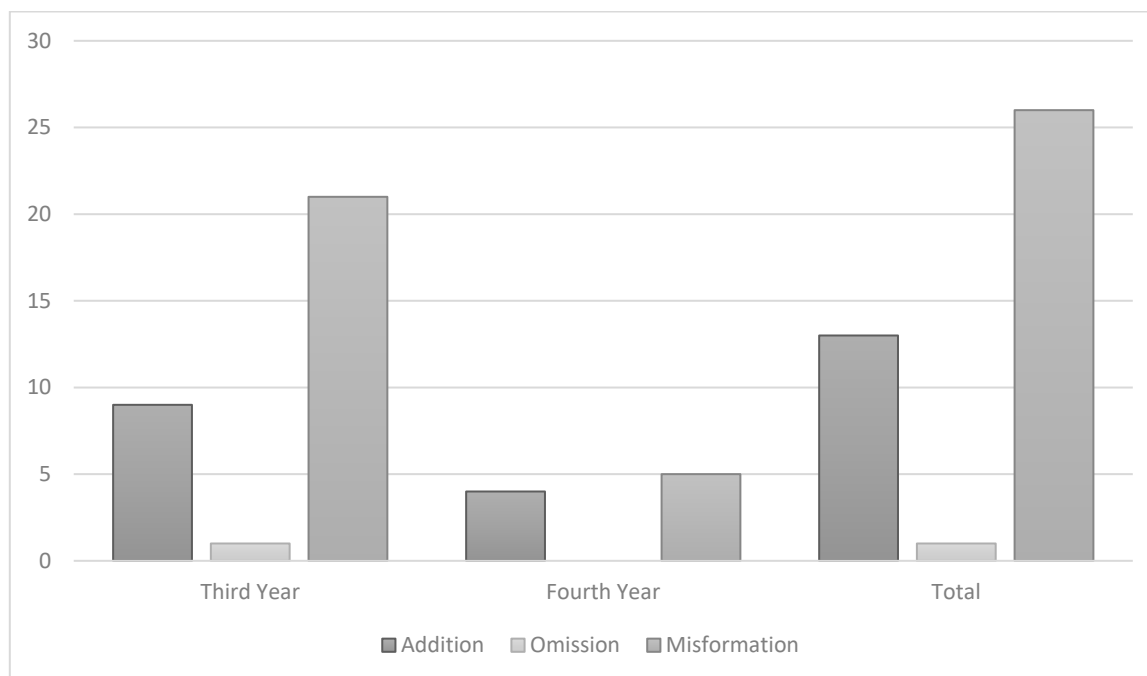


Figure 4. 3 Intralingual Errors by Academic Year

4.2.2.1 Misformation

In this section, we analyze the prevalence of misformation errors based on the data presented in Table 4.4. According to the table, the majority of intralingual errors were misformation. A total of 26 misformation errors were identified across the two academic years. This corresponds to 65% of the total intralingual errors observed.

It is clear from the prevalence of misformation errors that participants struggled to form verb phrases due to developmental reasons. The following example is from participant 4-05:

“Then they must be pronounced the word correct[ly]”

In this example, the learner uses the passive form instead of the active. This type of error may be attributed to hypercorrection from the participant. The overuse of less commonly used structures is a developmental error that learners make during the learning process (James, 2013).



4.2.2.2 Omission

There was only one intralingual omission error (2.50% of total errors), indicating a low occurrence of missing elements.

The error occurred in the writing sample of participant 3-01:

“You may travel [to] another country”

This type of error is very rare as participants didn't tend to omit any elements of the verb phrase without the interference of their first language.

4.2.2.3 Addition

The data presented in Table 4.4 illustrates the occurrence of several addition errors among third-year and fourth-year students. A total of 13 addition errors were identified, representing 32.50% of the total intralingual errors.

Participants tended to unnecessarily add elements to the verb phrase, such as some prepositions and the verb *be*. This is a common error as students are too focused on using the grammar that they are learning at this stage. An example from participant 3-09:

“I find studying English is very beneficial”

4.3 Discussion and analysis

The results shed light on several features of errors. No significance difference between interlingual (52.38%) and intralingual (47.62%) errors is clear at first glance. However, taking a deeper look shows that the types of errors vary significantly.

When participants made an interlingual error, the likelihood that the type of error is addition, omission, or misformation is not significantly different. Learners who make errors due to first language interference make these errors by omitting part of the phrase (38.64%), using incorrect word forms (34.09%), or adding unnecessary words to the phrase (27.27%).

However, there is less diversity in the types of intralingual errors. When learners make these developmental errors, they predominantly use the wrong word form (65%), followed by



addition errors (32.50%). They do not tend to omit words for reasons unrelated to their first language as only one error occurred in the sample.

Educators should consider these results while creating curricula and target teaching approaches towards the most common types of errors.

4.3.1 Third-year and fourth-year participants

The results showed a degree of success in the education process as fourth-year students exhibited a higher rate of accuracy in their verb phrase production. Compared to third-year students who produced an accuracy rate of 80.57%, fourth-year students had a higher percentage of correct verb phrases with 91.79%. Fourth-year students have done more courses on academic writing, grammar, and linguistics, which may have contributed to their higher accuracy. Furthermore, fourth-year students had more exposure to English inside and outside of the classroom, which shows how more exposure leads to fewer errors, particularly developmental errors.

4.3.2 Absence of certain types of errors

The analysis of the sample highlights the absence of an important type of error – misordering. Participants made no errors in the word order inside the verb phrase. From an interlingual perspective, it is evident that Arabic exhibits the similar word order within verb phrases to that of English. This can explain the absence of interlingual misordering errors. This stands in clear contrast with noun phrases, whose order in English is significantly different from that of Arabic. This difference in word order usually leads to a higher frequency of misordering errors.

On the other hand, the lack of intralingual misordering errors in the sample shows how instruction can be beneficial as a teaching approach. Since there is a clear-cut word order to verb phrases that students can easily learn and recall, there were no significant intralingual misordering errors in the sample.

Another type of error which was not encountered in the study was intralingual omission errors. Although participants tended to omit words for interlingual reasons, they were far less



likely to omit words from the verb phrase due to intralingual reasons. Comparing this to the frequency of intralingual addition errors highlights a case of hypercorrection that students exhibited, as studied in Hubers et al (2020).

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

5.1 Summary of the Findings

The examination of syntactic errors in verb phrases made by English major students in written composition at Omar Al-Mukhtar University yielded the following main findings:

1. Syntactic Error Types: The analysis revealed a range of syntactic errors within verb phrases, including misformation, omission, and addition. The occurrence rates of these errors varied significantly.
2. Causes of Errors: Two main causes of syntactic errors were identified: interlingual errors and intralingual errors. Interlingual errors were influenced by learners' native language (Arabic), which has a different grammatical structure compared to English. Intralingual errors were attributed to learners' incomplete understanding of English grammar rules and their attempts to apply them incorrectly.

The findings highlight the nature and patterns of syntactic errors in verb phrases made by English major students in written composition. These errors encompass various types and are often characterized by learners adding, omitting, or using the wrong form of parts of the verb phrase. The identified causes of errors shed light on the influence of learners' native language and their incomplete understanding of English grammar rules.

5.2 Recommendations for Future Research

Building upon the findings of this study, several recommendations for future research can be proposed to further deepen our understanding of syntactic errors in verb phrases made by English major students in written composition. These recommendations encompass potential areas of exploration and investigation, aiming to contribute to the existing knowledge in the field of applied linguistics. Further research in the following areas is suggested:



1. Longitudinal Studies: Undertake longitudinal studies to examine the developmental trajectory of verb phrase accuracy among English major students. By observing learners' progress over time, researchers can gain a deeper understanding of the factors that contribute to the improvement or persistence of syntactic errors and identify effective instructional practices for long-term language development.

2. Error Correction Strategies: Investigate the effectiveness of various error correction strategies in addressing syntactic errors in verb phrases. Compare the outcomes of different approaches, such as explicit error correction, peer feedback, or self-correction, to determine the most beneficial methods for helping learners overcome their specific error patterns.

3. Learner Differences: Future studies could explore the impact of individual differences, including factors such as motivation, age, and exposure to the target language, on the production of verb phrases in second language writing. By collecting data on the verb phrase production of learners with varying levels of motivation, age, and exposure to the target language, researchers can investigate the specific factors that contribute to individual differences in the production of verb phrases. Such research would facilitate the identification of key variables that influence learners' performance and enable the development of personalized interventions tailored to address the specific needs of different learners.

Pursuing these recommended research directions will help scholars and educators further advance our understanding of syntactic errors in verb phrases. The findings from these future research endeavors can inform instructional practices, curriculum development, and assessment strategies, ultimately enhancing the quality of English language education and supporting learners in achieving greater accuracy and proficiency in their written compositions.

5.3 Implications for Practice

The findings of this study have important implications for practice in the context of English language education and can provide guidance for language instructors and curriculum designers. The following implications for practice are derived from the analysis of the results of this study:



1. Targeted Instruction: The identification of specific syntactic error types, such as misformation, omission, and addition, highlights the need for targeted instruction. Language instructors should focus on these specific error patterns and design instructional activities that provide explicit guidance and practice opportunities to address them. Directly targeting the areas of difficulty can help learners develop a more accurate and proficient use of verb phrases.

2. Grammar Instruction: The findings emphasize the importance of comprehensive grammar instruction. English major students should receive explicit instruction in English grammar rules, paying particular attention to the components and structure of verb phrases. Instructional materials and activities should provide clear explanations, examples, and opportunities for practice to enhance learners' understanding and proper use of verb phrases.

3. Error Correction: Effective error correction strategies should be integrated into writing instruction. Language instructors should provide timely and constructive feedback on syntactic errors in verb phrases, focusing on both interlingual and intralingual errors. Different approaches, such as explicit error correction, peer feedback, or self-correction, can be employed based on their effectiveness in addressing specific error patterns and the needs of individual learners.

4. Long-Term Development: Language instructors should incorporate ongoing assessments and progress monitoring to track learners' improvement over time. This approach allows for targeted interventions and the identification of persistent error patterns that require additional support and practice.

Language instructors and curriculum designers can create a supportive and effective learning environment that addresses the challenges faced by their students in the production of accurate and appropriate verb phrases by implementing these practices. These practices can promote greater language proficiency, enhance written composition skills, and contribute to the overall success of English language education.



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