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WRITTEN GRAMMATICAL ERRORS MADE BY LEARNERS OF ARABIC AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE

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Abstract: Arabic has become a desirable language for learning all over the world. Learning Arabic. As a result, learning it opens up many employment possibilities in a number of fields. Like any other language, Arabic is difficult as it contains complex rules and requires an effort to acquire it. A number of learners of Arabic as a foreign language are afraid to learn because there is more than one form of Arabic. This may disrupt learners and result in making errors during the process of learning. This study was conducted in one of the Arabic language institutes in the UK in order to identify grammatical errors, the reasons behind these errors and to find some solutions to prevent making them. The results of the study showed that the most frequent type of errors was the use of nouns and the least type was the use of pronouns. The results also revealed that there is no need to rely on one form of teaching Arabic, but rather the diversity teaching more than one variety may lead to better results and make learners acquire as much knowledge as possible.

Keywords: Arabic as a foreign language, errors, Modern standard Arabic, Spoken Arabic.

Introduction

The significance of Arabic language in international communication is growing (Taha, 2007;Cote, 2009). It is one of the most important languages for some reasons. First, t is significant in terms of international business,trade and diplomacy.Second, it is the language of the Quran and is desired for Islamic practices to all Muslims. Finally, it is one of the official languages adopted by the United Nations and achannel for developing relationships (Taha, ibid). Moreover, the progress of some Arab countries economically makes Arabic language a needed language to acquire and use.As a result, learning it opens up many employment possibilities in a number of fields (Al Matooq, 2008)

Arabic is a language with complexities similar to other languages such as English.Although there is a modern standard Arabic language used in many contexts and positions, many Arabic varieties or dialects among Arabic-speaking countries and even differences within one country are used. Such variations may make learning Arabic difficult as learners may be confused by the different varieties of the same language, especially that the varities/dialects of some countries such as Algeria are difficult to understand and learn even to some native speakers of Arabic. Moreover, the variety learners learn at school is different to the variety spoken in practice may result in confusing learners of what to use.

Moreover, Arabicis a diglossic language. According to Al-Mamari (2011), diglossia means a position in which two varieties of the same language are used under different conditions within a community, regularly by the same speakers.The term is usually applied to languages with distinct "high" and "low" (colloquial) varieties, such as Arabic. Perhaps one of the reasons for the difficulties in learning Arabic is the nature of the curriculum used in teaching, as there are books use different varieties of Arabic including formal language (i.e. Modern Standard Arabic) whereas others are presented in different Arabic varieties such as Egyptian and Jordanian. .

This study aims at presenting grammatical errors made by learners of Arabic as a foreign language. It tries to figure out the causes behind making errors and present some solutions to solve making them while learning Arabic. The participants in this study were asked to write some paragraphs at different fields. Their writings were collected and analysed in accordance with grammatical rules.

Literature Review

Teaching Arabic as a Foreign Language

Teaching Arabic to speakers of other languages has become a wide field that attracts students from all over the world to learn Arabic. The efficiency of teaching Arabic for non-nativespeakers is affected by many factors; some of these factors are related to teachers, teaching methods and type of language variety adopted to meet the learners' needs.

There is controversy on how to teach Arabic to non-native speakers. In other words, which variety or dialect may be adopted to teach Arabic? The answer to this question is not easy to determine because there are various varieties of Arabic. In fact, some agree that Arabic may be taught using formal Arabic known as Modern Standard Arabic (MSA), which is used in writing, because it is the language used in formal positions such as politics andinternational business. They state that Modern Standard Arabic has been selected to be taught in many countries such as the United States. It is still taught in most of the programs as the target language and the medium of instruction in a lot of

institution in the world as it is seen as a language of wider communication, since it is easily understood all over the Arab world. For some researchers (Sawaie, 2006) MSA is not a regional variety. It means that learners can use it across Arab countries.

From another perspective, other researchers (e.g. Palmer, 2007) encourage usingdifferent Arabic varieties because they are used widely in spokenby native speakers of the language. Some researchers believe that teaching Arabic should start with a regional variety for some time at the beginning and then moving to MSA to assist students read, speak, and write.(Younes, 2006; Jaradat, 2015).According to Wahba (2006), selecting one variety of Arabic for non-native learners will not allow them to communicate effectively. They believe that teaching using various varieties is more realistic than focusing on one variety or teaching them separately.

Moreover, Al-Batal (1992, p 132) stated that teaching only MSA may lead to confuse learners of Arabic. He added

The teaching of formal variety of Arabic creates a fake model of oral proficiency by presenting the students with an artificial variety that is not used by the native speakers since no one uses [formal Arabic] for daily-life situations.

In line with Al-Batal, Ebrahim (1986) believed that learners who received several years of formal Arabic learning ,usually, remain deficient in the ability to apply the language and to realise its use.

Generally, some researchers agree that the choice of which variety to adopt in teaching is according to some reasons such as learners' needs. For instance, it is preferred to teach using Modern Standard Arabic if learner's purpose is to understand the language of Quran. If learners' goal of learning Arabic is to communicate, it is better to use one of the spoken varieties. (Younes, ibid).

Formal and Spoken Arabic

Learning Arabic differs from other foreign languages for both native and non-native Arabic speakers. This is due to the reason that MSA is the mother tongue of nobody. For native speakers, learning MSA is like learning a foreign language, as it isnot used at home with their families and friends. Moreover, for non-native speakers the situation is also difficult because the variety they learn at school is different to the variety spoken in practice.

Arabic is a diglossic language. Diglossia is a term introduced by Ferguson(1959). He defines it as

"a relatively stable language situation in which, in addition to the primary dialects of the language (which may include a standard or regional standards), there is a very divergent, highly codified (often grammatically more complex) superposed variety- the vehicle of a large and respected body of written literature either of an earlier period or in another speech community- that is learned largely by means of formal education and used for most

written and formal spoken purposes but is not used by any sector of the community for ordinary conversations (....). The superposed variety is the High (H) variety and the regional dialect is the Low (L) variety".

By high variety, he refers to MSA as it displays a high degree of uniformity around the Arab countries. Low varieties are essentially spoken dialects that are rarely codified. Moreover, each form has different areas to be used in. For instance, the High form is used in religious sermons, letter writing, conferences, TV programs, newspaper editorials, books and poetry, whereas the Low form is used in family conversation and folk literature.

Furthermore, high variety is highly standardised and may have a long tradition of grammatical study associated with it (Haeri, 2000). This means that grammar and literature of the language are associated with it. Low varieties, however, may not be standardised. This means that it does not have standard grammar as it differs from one Arabic region to another.

Most importantly, the syntax of high variety is thought to be more complex than that of low varieties in terms of grammatical features such as, tense, gender and number. Complex sentence structures are thought not to be a feature of low varieties in the languages determined by Ferguson. The lexicon of the two varieties, on the other hand, is largely shared but there is a difference

because of the specific domains in which each is used.

Again, the key questions discussed in the literature are 'which Arabic form (MSA/ spoken varieties) should be taught; should bothforms betaught simultaneously, separately or independently (Alosh 1992; Al-Batal, 1995). It is not an easy job to do and confusion will arise because they will be interchangeably used by students. They may be confused in choosing which word or structure should be used. If they use MSA items in speaking, it is not a fatal error but if they write some colloquial words in their letters or essays, a very serious problem will appear.

The present study tries to add to the literature in that it offers some solutions on how to teach Arabic to non-native speakers. These solutionswill assist overcoming errors in the use of Arabic as a foreign language.

Methodology

This study useda descriptive analytical method where the researcher analysed a set of 15 samples of written work done by 15 non-native learners of Arabic in a language centre in the UK. The participants were taking a practical course in Arabic. They enrolled in the firstsemester Arabic class. Their English level were beginners. They were taught by a native speaker of Arabic. The form of Arabic adopted in their teaching was Modern Standard Arabic.At the end of the course, the participants were asked to write two paragraphs with 150

word in each paragraph. In order to analyse data,the steps of error analysis of Corder (1974) (as cited in Ellis, 1994, p. 48) were adopted. The steps are (1) collection of a sample of learner language, (2) identification of errors, (3) description of errors, (4) explanation of errors, and (5) evaluation of errors

### Findings
Descriptive Statistics

The findings of this study revealed that the highest number of grammatical errors was observed in the misuse of nouns (23%), followed by the misuse of verbs (18%). Meanwhile, misuse of adjectives was (14%), followed by misuse of prepositions (13%), misuse of determiners (12%), and misuse of adverbs (11%). The lowest number of errors was the misuse of pronouns (9%)

Table 1. Average, frequencies, median, standard deviation and percentage of types of types of grammatical errors

	Frequency	Average	Median	St. deviation	Percentage
Nouns	**169**/722	13	12	4.14	**23%**
verbs	**130**/722	10	10	1.82	**18%**
adjectives	**99**/722	8	8	2.53	**14%**
Adverbs	**77**/722	6	6	2.69	**11%**
pronouns	**65**/722	5	6	2.54	**9%**
Prepositions	**95**/722	7	8	3.30	**13%**
determiners	**87**/722	6	7	2.89	**12%**

Figure 1. The Percentage of Grammatical Errors
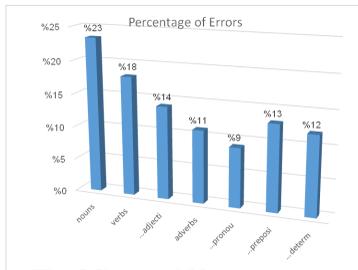
The Misuse of Nouns

In Arabic, verbs must agree with the subject in number (i.e. singular, dual or plural) and in gender (i.e. masculine or feminine). In the case of verbal sentences (when a sentence begins with a verb precedes the subject), verbs must agree with the subject in gender only but not in number, all post-verbal subjects being in the singular (Dickins, 2010). Such a rule may confuse learners of Arabic.

In this type of errors,learners misusedmasculine and feminine as well as the misuse of words on singular, dual, or plural forms. In some cases, learners cannot differentiate between nouns on the basis of gender. For instance, some leaners in this study considered some feminine nouns masculine ones; therefore, they used the Arabic masculine verb to go with feminine proper noun. The example below demonstrate

*مصر يتطلب تأشيرة دخول Egypt requires visa.

*الأبواب يغلق في المساء Doorsclose in the evening.

* الشعر تؤكد أصالة الشاعر Poetry confirms the authenticity of the poet.

As noted above, both مصر and أبواب are feminine nouns in Arabic. However, learners treated them as masculine and used masculine verb reference with them. The reason could be due tolearners' lack of knowledge in Arabic. In Arabic,many feminine plural nouns end with feminine reference (ت). Other nouns do not have this end reference (أمهات, اخوات) مثل). Other nouns do not have this end reference (they are called non-human plural nouns such as (دول, أمواج). Such nouns require feminine singular agreement, so learners might confuse when using these nouns and think that such nouns are masculine since they do not end with feminine reference (Ryding, 2005).

Moreover, errors were made regarding number agreement. As mentioned earlier in this study,

in nominal sentences, the verb that follows the subject must agree in both number (singular, dual and plural) and gender (masculine or feminine). In some sentences, learners did not apply this rule properly.

* الكتابان كان مفيدا.   The two books <u>were</u> very useful.

* الطلاب حضر متأخرا عن محاضرة القراءة The students <u>arrived</u> late.

In the above example, the verbs كان and حضر must agree with the nouns الكتابان and الطلاب in number. That is, learners should have written them as حضروا and كانا .

Another type of errors with nouns is the misuse of nouns after the question word (how many).

* كم طلاب في فصل لغة العربية   How many <u>students</u> are there in the Arabic class?

In Arabic, ***How many***...?) (كم) should only be followed by a singular noun. The above example should be written as (كم طالبا في فصل اللغة العربية؟)

The Misuse of Verbs

In Arabic, verbs appear in three tenses (perfect, imperfect and imperative), two voices (active and passive) and four moods (indicative, subjunctive, jussive and energetic).

In some cases, learners did not provide proper agreement when using verbs. The verb (***read***) '*يقرأ*', for example, ddi not agree with dual pronoun***they*** (هما).

* هما يقرأ كتاب عن اللغة العربية كل يوم<u>They read</u> a book about Arabic every day.

The verb should agree with the subject in the above example. Arabic pronouns should agree with verbs in all cases (Singular, dual, and plural). Such an error could be attributed to the fact that Arabic has singular, dual and plural, and many learners of Arabic find it difficult to apply such rules especially if learners first language has only singular and plural pronouns.

Moreover, in some examples, learners failed to apply Arabic verb tense/aspect system properly.

* **كنت قد اتعلم اساسيات اللغة العربية** have learned basic structures of Arabic.

This learner did not use the correct form of the verb and ignored the aspect of the verb in Arabic. She/he should have written **كنت قد تعلمت**(I have had learned).

The Misuse of Adjectives

The errors made in this type of error revealed that some learners were not familiar with the number-adjective agreement in Arabic. In Arabic, adjectives follow nouns and take all their case markers. That is, if the noun is first person masculine singular (1st. p. m. s.), the adjective should be (1st. p.m.s) too.

* **معلمة اللغة العربية كان جيد**Arabic teacher <u>was good</u>
* **اللغة العربية لغة صعب**   Arabic <u>is difficult</u>.

Learners in the examples above did not use the right form of adjective. Both **Arabic teacher** and *Arabic* refer to feminine in Arabic, therefore, the adjective should agree with the subject (لغة صعبة and كانت جيدة).

In addition, another type of errors of adjective occurredwith comparative adjectives. E.g

* **هو الأفضل كتاب**.…....is <u>the best</u> book .
* **اللغة عربية هي الأصعب لغة**Arabic is <u>the most difficult</u> language

It should be note that in Arabic superlative degree can have two forms: With the definite article 'the' and the second one is without the definite. The definite article is used only when the adjective is not followed by a noun. That is, the above sentences will be correct when the order of the sentences change as in (هو الكتاب الأفضل) and (اللغة العربية هي الاصعب).

The Misuse of Adverbs

Because learners were not familiar with the uses of Arabic prepositions, they substituted some prepositions for others.

* **اذا المعلمة تسأل سؤال عن اللغة العربية***When* the teacher*asked* a question concerning *Arabic*.

In the above example, the learners used اذا   instead of عندما . in Arabic grammar, the difference between the two adverbs is that the former (i.e. اذا) should be followed by the perfect verb no matter what aspect it indicates to. It should be written (اذا المعلمة سألت). In comparison, the latter (عندما) can be followed by any verb in the present or in the perfect form. It can be written as (عندما تسأل) or (عندما سألت).

Another example made by another learner is when he/she wrote * نطق الكلمة صحيح (he pronounced the word correctly) where he should have written (نطق الكلمة بشكل صحيح). The learners in this example replace the adverb with an adjective which is not correct in the context of this sentence.

In some cases, both عند and لدى were treated as verbs which is not correct in Arabic.

سعندي الكتاب يوم خميس I will have the book on Thursday.

The Misuse of Pronouns

The results showed that this type of error got the lowestpercentage. Learners found some difficulties using the proper pronouns, especially regarding the dual as they have two rules, one for masculine and the other one for feminine. The results revealedsome learners inability to apply the subject verb agreement like in the case of dual pronoun (هما) 'Second Person Masculine and (هن) 'second person feminine.

* *هم أصدقاء سيئة*They (two) are bad friends.

The learners should have written (هما صديقان سيئان) to refer to two friends as a dual marks.

Moreover, some nouns in Arabic may imply a dual gender. Such a rule may confuse Arabic learners and result in errors. For example the words **agent**(وكيل), **member** (عضو), **witness** (شاهد), and **trustee**(وصي)may grammatically indicate either the male or female genders in Arabic.

The Misuse of Prepositions

According to Badawi and Gully (2004), prepositions contribute to meaning by referring to location, space, time, reason or direction. In addition,Al-Hwary (2011, p. 119) states that 'Prepositions are sometimes followed by pronouns and question words……Nouns following prepositions take the genitive case ending'.

The prepositions errors made in this study were omission/ addition of prepositions and the use of the wrong preposition.

*من العادات السيئة لمدخين*one of the worst habits of smokers….

* *انا ادرس مستوى اول معهد لغة* I study level one in language centre.

* *عندما وصلت في المعهد*when I arrived to the centre,….

In the first two examples, learners omitted propositions that result in ungrammatical sentences. In the first example the sentence should be (من العادات السيئة للمدخنين) and in the second one, the learner should have written (انا ادرس المستوى الأول بمعهد اللغة). It is significant to note that the definite article in such cases has to be used even though the word before it is preceded by a preposition.

In the third example, the learners substituted the preposition **to** (الى) with the preposition **in** (في). he/she should have written (عندما وصلت الى المعهد)

The Misuse of Determiners

Some learners failed to use the correct form of the Arabic definite article. In some example, learners added the definite article **the** (ال) in situations that require its absence.

* because it is a language with difficult لأنها اللغة تحتوي على قواعد صعبة
rules
* I am a German student. أنا الطالب الماني
* I saw this film before. رأيت هذه فيلم قبل

However, in some examples, learners omitted the definite article in sentences require its presence.

* learning Arabic require patience and تعلم لغة عربية تتطلب صبر واجتهاد
effort.

* I like coffee very much. احب قهوة كثرا

Causes of Errors

This study triedto describe errors and attempt to answer questions on how and why certain errors are committed and possibly trace the sources of these errors. Based on the results of this study, there are a number of reasons behind making errors.

1. The difficulty of learning Arabic may lie in the fact that there is more than one form of Arabic in addition to the variety of dialects, even in the programs used in teaching Arabic. As mentioned previously in this study, there are two forms of Arabic.Modern Standard Arabic is the written form of the language and this style is rarely used in day-to-day speech. Spoken Arabic, on the other hand, is used in regular verbal interactions. If learners were taught using MSA, they may have difficulties in practicing it in some Arab countries. In case that they were taught using one variety of Arabic (Spoken Arabic), they will be restricted in using that variety in some Arab countries where they might not be understood if they use it somewhere else.

2. The diversity in Arabic grammar and some grammatical exceptions make it a difficult language to understand and apply properly.

3. Leaners' lack of knowledge of Arabic. Because sometimes they apply grammatical rules and they are not sure of the validity of these rules or that they overgeneralise a rule on the rest of the grammatical rules, causing errors.

4. Learners' first language may have an impact in learning another language. In some cases when learners do not know how to apply some grammatical rules, they think that such rules might be similar to their first language.

Solutions to be considered when Teaching Arabic as a Foreign Language

Teaching Arabic as a Foreign Language has a serious problem because of diglossia which differentiates Arabic into two forms: Modern Standard Arabic and Spoken Arabic. Modern Standard Arabic is typically written and rarely used in speaking. Spoken Arabic refers to the varieties of language used by Arabs for daily

communication and not in formal contexts. In most of Arab countries, the language of instruction in schools or university lectures is the colloquial in its numerous forms. Therefore, students sometimes face problems of receiving their instruction in one form and reading and writing in the other. This diversity of language causes problems for learners. Hence, the question lies in knowing what form of language learners should study so that they can cover the basics of that language. Some solutions that can be made are summarised as follows:

1. Besides teaching Standard Arabic, Spoken Arabic should be adopted because it is used and understood by most educated Arabs.

2. Two Arabic courses should be taught, one for Standard Arabic and the second for an optional variety.

3. When teaching Arabic, instructors should changethe focus of attention from the grammatical to the communicative features of the languagein order to attain the desired outcomes of learning.

Conclusion

As it is apparently noticed, the process of the data analysis used in this study showed that some learners committed more errors than others did.It was demonstrated that the learners encountered difficulties in learning Arabic. The most frequent type of errors occurred was in the use of nouns at (23%). The second most difficult type of errors was in the use of verbs at(18%). In the third place come the misuse of adjectives at (14%), followed by the misuse of preposition at (13%). The percentage of the misuse of determiners was (12%) and the misuse of adverbs was (11%). Finally, the least difficult type of errors was the misuse of pronouns at (9%).

Errors which occur while learning Arabic, some of which are mentioned in this study, are due to several reasons. The most important of which is that Arabic language is complex andhas difficult rules even for its native speakers (Benkharafa, 2013). Second, Arabic is diglossic and it has more than one form. This diversity in forms affects the process of learning aslearners become confused about what form to learn and why.

Based on the results of this study, both Modern Standard Arabic and Spoken Arabic should be involved in the process of learning Arabic as a second language. This conclusion assists learners avoid some errors and make them form ideas about the different varieties of that language.

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