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**An Investigation of EFL Learners' most Common  
Grammatical Written Errors and their Causes**

The Case of Second Year Licence Students at the University of Mohammed

Seddik Ben Yahia/ Jijel

Thesis submitted in partial fulfillments of the requirements for the degree of Master in  
English Language Sciences

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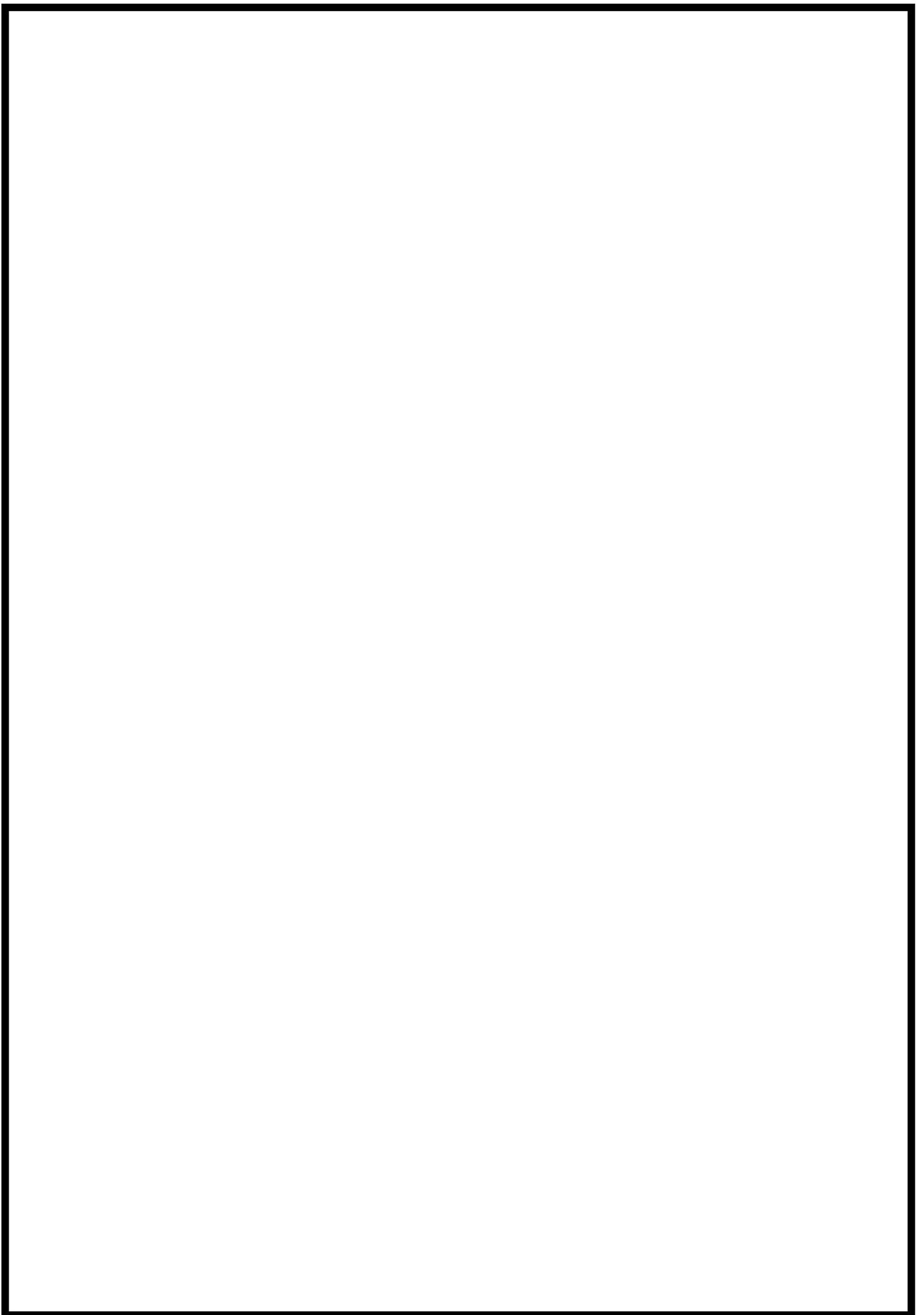
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## **Dedications**

I dedicate this work to my parents, my sympathetic father and thoughtful mother. The ones without their help, support, and love this work would never be brought to light. Thank you very much for everything; for your patience, sacrifices, emotional, and financial support.

To my lovely sister Moufida and brothers Fawzi, Zohir, and Chouaib, thank you for your encouragement, for motivating me to complete this research work and believing in me.

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To my faithful and wonderful friends; Meriem, Abir, Amira, Nadjat, Hassiba, Ikram, and Roumaissa with whom I shared the university experience.

A special dedication to my fiancé Zaki for his unconditional support.

May Allah bless you all

## Dedications

I dedicate this work to my parents, my sympathetic father and thoughtful mother. The ones without their help, support, and love this work would never be brought to light. Thank you very much for everything; for your patience, sacrifices, emotional, and financial support.

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### **Abstract**

EFL learners confront many difficulties in learning the English language, especially with regard to the writing skill. In fact, they may commit numerous errors in their writing. This study is an investigation of EFL learners' most common grammatical written errors and their causes. The aim of this study is to explore the most recurrent grammatical errors made by second year Licence students and their causes in their writing productions at the University of Mohammed Seddik Ben Yahia Jijel. Two questionnaires were addressed to 97 second year students and 5 teachers who are specialized in teaching writing classes. In addition, 31 essays of second year students were analysed to find out the most frequent errors in their writing. Based on the overall results obtained from the two research instruments, namely questionnaire and document analysis, it was found that students' most frequent grammatical errors are tenses, punctuation, subject-verb agreement, and capitalization. Moreover, the findings of this research work showed that intralingual transfer, negative transfer of students' mother tongue, lack of practice, and low level of proficiency are the main causes behind students' grammatical errors. Furthermore, there are other less influential causes to students' grammatical errors such as negligence, skipping classes, misorientation in majoring, demotivation, poor teaching skills, time limit, and lack of reading.

## **List of abbreviations**

?: Percentage

EFL: English as a Foreign Language

ESL: English as a Second Language

i.e.: That is to say

L1: First Language

L2: Second Language

Q: Question

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## **General Introduction**

The writing skill is of paramount importance in the field of teaching and learning English as foreign/ second language. It has received a great attention by both EFL teachers and learners. In fact, it is equally important as the other skills, namely listening, speaking, and reading since it is seen as a complement of these skills. In the Algerian universities, learners of English heavily rely on the writing skill to express their language competence. In other words, they use the writing skill not only in Written expression classes, but they use it also in other modules such as Linguistics, Literature, and Civilization. Developing the ability to produce the written form in the domain of foreign/ second language acquisition is a complex process fraught with difficulties. Davies (2007) stated that “writing a coherent text longer than a sentence is one of the hardest of all the skills that schools set out to teach” (p. 98). Therefore, it is considered as one of the most common problems faced by EFL learners. Most of English language learners face numerous problems in their piece of writing mainly in grammar. That is to say, these problems prevent them from being linguistically competent. Undeniably, overlooking the basic rules of grammar leads axiomatically to the emergence of different grammatical errors in learners' writing production that are deemed as not preventable. Hence, errors in this study could be defined as learners' systematic deviation from the norms of the foreign language and the failure in applying the grammar rules correctly and accurately. Indeed, the grammatical errors can be considered as the most frequent obstacle that hinders EFL learners to come up with an orderly and neat piece of writing.

### **1. The Background of the Study**

The issue of learners' errors has attracted the attention of many researchers and applied linguists over a long period of time. In this respect, Keshavarz (2012) asserted that

“Teachers, linguists and psycholinguists have always been interested in errors produced by second-language learners, either in their speech or writing or both. In fact, learners’ errors have been the subject of extensive investigation and heated controversy for quite a long time.”(p. 1).

Hourany (2008) conducted a study in which he explored the common types of grammatical errors committed by Emirati secondary male students in their English essay writing. His study was both quantitative and qualitative ; he implemented his study by means of two separate questionnaires for both teachers and students and semi-structured interviews. The results of the study showed that the most frequent committed errors found in the students’ essays included : verb tense and form, passivization, articles, plurality, and auxiliaries. He additionally indicated that these errors were due to the interlingual transfer.

The findings of Hourany’s study match with those explored by Subakir Mohammed and Fahim Abdalhussein (2015). They investigated the grammatical errors in the writing production of 15 Iraqi postgraduate students in the faculty of computer sciences at the university of Kebangsaan Malaysia. In this study, a qualitative approach was adopted and data were collected through analysing the preliminary proposals prepared by students ; this analysis using Corder’s (1967) methods of error analysis. Thus, it was based on exploratory investigation to answer questions in order to find out the most common grammatical errors. The analysis of the data revealed that Iraqi postgraduate students made various errors such as the misuse of the tense, prepositions, articles, active and passive voice, morphological errors, and prepositions. Moreover, it was found that errors generated were due to the interference of the mother tongue in the grammatical and linguistic system of the target language.

Likewise, Darus and Ching (2009) examined the most common errors in essays written by Chinese students from vernacular schools in Malaysia. The errors were explored through analysing students' essays using an error classification scheme and a software. The results of this study showed that Chinese students mainly committed four types of errors that included mechanics, tenses, prepositions, and subject-verb agreement. It was found that students were deeply affected by their native language. Besides intralingual transfer and developmental errors were noticed in their writing.

Somewhere else, Watcharapunyawong and Usaha (2013) investigated the writing errors in different types of texts produced by second year English major students, focusing on the interference of the mother tongue. This study used error analysis as a method to analyse the errors. Students were asked to develop a piece of writing using narration, description, and comparison/contrast, of at least 150 words. The most committed errors occurred mainly in verb tense, word choice, sentence structure, articles, prepositions, auxiliary, singular/plural form, verb form, and subject-verb agreement.

Likewise, Iamsiu (2014) sought to analyse the grammatical errors in Srinakarinwirot university students' writing. Data were collected through analysing pieces of second year English minor students writing. It was found that students' errors were in word choice, sentence structure, subject-verb agreement, word order, and connecting words. The major cause of these errors was the interference of the native language.

Based on the studies discussed earlier, several results reveal that EFL learners' grammatical errors are an ordinary phenomenon. EFL learners have almost shared the same kind of grammatical errors in whatever setting and in different contexts. Despite these studies used different tools and methods, the findings yielded showed a complete or partial support to each other. Errors such as verb tense and form, subject- verb agreement,

sentence structure, articles, prepositions, plurality, auxiliaries, and passive and active voice are identified as negative outcomes produced by EFL learners. Hence, these outcomes obstruct the development of the process of second/foreign language acquisition, more precisely in the field of the writing skill. Furthermore, it was also found that the interference of the mother tongue is the main cause of students' grammatical errors; it badly influences the linguistic and grammatical system of the target language.

Indeed, there is a set of studies about the topic of EFL learners' grammatical errors through experiencing their writing production in several contexts. The existing literature indicates that the major cause of learners' errors is their native language. Significantly, the results obtained suggest an opportunity to conduct a further study to explore whether there is a resemblance of the results with the Algerian context.

Algeria is a bilingual country where there are two dominated languages, notably Arabic and French. In the Algerian educational system, French is given a primacy to be learned before English since the primary school. That is to say, a prior learned language like French might have an influential impact as the native language in acquiring a foreign language such as English. So, French could be also problematic as the mother tongue, i.e. it can be a source of learners' errors.

## **2. Statement of the Problem**

An Error-free piece of writing is the ambition of learners to reach accuracy and the hope of teachers to make sure that their efforts were not in vain. A Huge number of studies were carried out by many researchers concerning grammatical errors made by EFL learners and their causes. To name few, Sanual et al (2015), Kim (2016), Darus (2009). Consequently, distinct results arose. The main concern of the current study is to find out if the grammatical errors in the Algerian context are similar to the previous studies, and

whether the causes are akin to those that are found in former studies, or other causes will arise.

### **3. Research Questions**

The present study addresses to the following questions :

- 1) To what extent do second year Licence students make grammatical errors in their writing?
- 2) What are the most common types of grammatical written errors that second year Licence students make ?
- 3) To what extent does second year Licence students' knowledge of the mother tongue affect their piece of writing ?
- 4) What other causes, if any, could make second year Licence students make grammatical errors than the mother tongue interference ?

### **4. Hypotheses**

Attempting to answer the questions mentioned above, the hypotheses on which the present study is based run as follows :

- Second year Licence students at the university of Mohamed Seddik Ben Yahia, Jijel encounter grammatical difficulties in their writing productions.
- Second year Licence students at the university of Mohamed Seddik Ben Yahia, Jijel make grammatical errors in their writing, mainly in the use of tenses, subject-verb agreement, articles, word order, and punctuation.
- The mother tongue of second year Licence students at the university of Mohamed Seddik Ben Yahia, Jijel is not the sole cause of students grammatical written errors.
-

## **5. Aims of the Study**

The present study tends to provide a humble explanation in the field of applied linguistics. It attempts to investigate the extent to which second year Licence students are successful in applying the English grammar rules in their writing. It is worthwhile to explore the most common committed and shared grammatical errors among second year Licence students and highlight the possible causes that contribute to increase the number of students' grammatical errors. That is to say, the main interest is to improve the quality of writing in the prominent linguistic areas where learners struggle and face difficulties.

## **6. Significance of the Study**

Grammatical errors are a prevalent problem in EFL students' writing. In fact, numerous researches have been conducted about this phenomenon. Their wide concern was to analyse these errors, identify their causes, and suggest some strategies to overt errors taking place. This study is based on the idea that students will be more aware of their grammatical errors. They also will be able to recognize the causes behind making these errors, i.e. errors are indicators of learners competence and can be used as devices to test previously learned grammar. Accordingly, students will follow certain ways to overcome these errors by processing them deeply in their minds. The study of errors is important because it provides teachers with better vision about what the learners have acquired from the course and what they still need to learn.

## **7. Research Design**

The current study will adopt a quantitative and qualitative approach. To carry out the research, two questionnaires will be administered ; a questionnaire will be addressed to second year Licence students and another will be conducted with some teachers who are specialized in teaching writing classes. In addition, another means will be used which is

document analysis in which the research tries to analyse second year Licence students' essays regarding that their grammatical errors are noteworthy.

### **8. Organization of the Study**

The present study will be divided into two chapters. The first chapter will be theoretical in nature ; it will be devoted to describe the related review of the background literature. The second chapter will exclusively consist of the practical part. It is split into three sections : The first section is devoted to the research methodology ; subsequently, the second section deals with the data analysis, while the third section concerns with the interpretation of the data gathered.

# **Chapter one: Theoretical Perspectives on Grammar, Writing, and Error Theories in Second/Foreign Language Learning**

## Introduction

### 1.1. Grammar and Writing in Second Language Acquisition

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##### 1.1.1.2. The Importance of Grammar

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###### 1.1.1.2.2. Grammar and Language Learner

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#### 1.2.4.3.1. Positive Transfer Vs Negative Transfer

### 1.2.4.4. Induced Errors

## 1.2.5. Significance of Errors

## 1.2.6. Treatment of Errors

## Conclusion

## **Chapter One**

### **Theoretical Perspectives on Grammar, Writing, and Error Theories in Second/Foreign Language Learning**

#### **Introduction**

This chapter is devoted to the background of the related literature, highlighting some key terms concerning grammar, the writing skill, and the concept of error. The chapter is divided into two sections: the first section deals with a general overview about grammar presenting its definition, its role in English language teaching and learning, and indicating some common grammatical difficulties that may confuse learners to make the correct form of the foreign language. Subsequently, the writing skill is reviewed in terms of its definition, importance, and approaches. This section also considers the link between the accurate application of grammar rules and the production of good writing. The second section begins with reviewing the different definitions given to error and explains the theories that have been set for error. Then, the classification, causes, significance, and treatment of errors are central elements to be identified in this section.

#### **1.1. Grammar and Writing in Second Language Acquisition**

This sections deals with grammar and writing. It is concerned with some theoretical issues related to both grammar and writing.

##### **1.1.1. Grammar**

Grammar has an important role in teaching second/foreign language. That is to say, when having a considerable knowledge of grammar, learners find it easy to learn about the other areas of the language. So, a deep understanding of the grammar concepts is important because it is deemed as the core of the language.

### **1.1.1.1. Definition of Grammar**

The concept of grammar has been defined in relatively different ways by many researchers. Brinton (2000) claimed that from the outset a clear explanation should be given to the ambiguity of the term grammar. In linguistics, grammar refers to the system or the structure that refers to the rules or principles by which a language functions. Similarly, Sudhakar and Farheen (2015) stated that “grammar is generally thought to be a set of rules specifying the correct ordering of words at the sentence level. Grammar explains how the language should be structured, using various categories” (p. 122). Taken together, grammar is viewed as set of rules and structures that are ordered correctly to constitute language.

However, there are other researchers who defined grammar differently. According to Bates (n. d.) grammar in the subfield of linguistics is the study of how meaning expressed through the combination of individual words and other sounds. Equally, Ur (1980) stated that grammar is “the way a language manipulates and combines words or bits of words in order to form longer units of meaning” (p. 4). Thus, grammar is defined as the combination of words to express meaning. Additionally, Thornbury (1999) suggested that grammar describes rules that form sentences with regard to meaning that these forms convey. In this regard, grammar includes phonology, morphology, and syntax to express meaning in a given language. Expressed differently, Chomsky (1972) viewed grammar of a natural language as a systematic description of linguistic abilities of its native speakers. These linguistic abilities would enable any native speaker to speak and understand his/her language fluently. In other words, a native speaker of a natural language is able to tell whether a given sentence in his/her native language is well formed or not, has a structure or not.

Taken all together, grammar is viewed from two different perspectives. From one hand, it is the sum of structures and rules of a given language. From the other hand, it is the link of sounds, words or sentences to transmit meaning.

### **1.1.1.2. The Importance of Grammar**

The accurate knowledge of grammar is helpful to use the language correctly either in speech or writing. Significantly, grammar plays a crucial role in teaching second/ foreign language and has a positive impact on language learner.

#### **1.1.1.2.1. The Role of Grammar in English Language**

Grammar is one of the essential elements in acquiring a second language. It is very important for learners of a foreign/second language to convey their messages. Accordingly, Azar (2007) pointed out that the role of grammar is “to help students discover the nature of language, i.e. that language consists of predictable patterns that make what we say, read, hear, and write intelligible” (p.3). Accordingly, grammar allows learners to understand the nature of language and makes them clearly interpret what is produced around them in a comprehensible way. Azar also supported the idea that in the presence of grammar people would use only individual words or sounds, pictures, and body language to convey meaning (as cited in Lin 2008. p. 03). Equally, some researchers proposed other benefits of grammar instruction. Schmidt and Froter (1986) asserted that grammar helps learners pay attention to the gap between new learned features in a structure and how they can be different from their own language (as cited in Larsen-Freeman, 2009, p. 527). In a similar view, Spada and Lightbown (1993) further stated that “another contribution of grammar teaching may be to fill in the gap in the input” (as cited in Larsen-Freeman, 2009, p. 527). On the whole, grammar is of great importance; it helps students to generalize their actual grammatical knowledge to newly learned structures. Moreover, According to Wu

(2007) neglecting grammar in teaching could lead students to think that sloppy English is tolerated which is an unpleasant mind-set for second language learners to have.

#### **1.1.1.2.2. Grammar and Language Learner**

Grammar enriches the learners' ability to use the foreign language accurately. In this respect, Pekka (2015) acknowledged that grammar contains the instruction of the correct use of language; it is important because it is a prerequisite for a better use of language. Mulroy (2003), by contrast, pointed out that learners who understand part of speech of grammar have a special advantage over others where they can use the language in different settings.

In line with this, Tabbert (1984) asserted that "it is frequently pointed out that students confuse lie and lay, do not choose who and whom correctly, say infer instead of imply, mismatch subjects and verbs, mix up pronoun reference, use double negative etc, and that these mistakes are evidence of their need to study grammar" (p. 39). That is to say, grammar can be taught to prevent learners making errors.

Differently stated, according to Richards and Renandya (2002) there are two good reasons for teaching grammar: comprehensibility and acceptability. From the one hand, comprehensibility concerns with the knowledge of how to build up and apply certain structures to communicate meaningfully. These structures should be well identified and taught, otherwise it will be difficult to produce comprehensible sentences. From the other hand, according to acceptability within some social context, the deviation from norms of native speaker may affect the integration and excite the prejudice in a target society. Consequently, a learner who speaks badly can be considered uneducated or stupid. Therefore, a higher level of grammatical correctness is needed for more comprehensibility.

In summation, accuracy consolidates the relation between English language and its users. Importantly, learners will competently use the language in a correct manner.

### **1.1.1.3. Grammar Difficulties**

Grammar is a part of language that learners may find hard to master. Significantly, according to Dekeyser and Sokalski (1996) grammar difficulties are measured in conjunction to comprehension and production, arguing that some grammar rules are easy to comprehend but difficult to produce, while some rules are easy to produce but difficult to comprehend. (as cited in Shiu, 2011, p.2). Equally, Berent (1985) supported the view that grammar difficulties are related to production and comprehension (as cited in Shiu, 2011, p.2). Differently stated, according to Larsen-Freeman (2003) grammar difficulties are investigated in terms of linguistic form, semantic meaning, and pragmatic use. The correct use of morph-syntactic aspect of a grammar feature deals with linguistic form, while the comprehension of the literal message which is encoded by a lexical item or a lexico-grammatical feature is mainly the concern of semantic meaning. Moreover, a lexical-grammatical feature should be used in an appropriate way within a context goes with pragmatic use. (as cited in Shiu, 2011, p.2). In line with pragmatic use, Larsen-Freeman (1991) stated that

It is neither the form nor the meaning of the English tenses that presents the greatest long-term challenge to ESL/EFL students; rather, it is when/why to use one tense and not the other. In other words, it is the pragmatic usage of the tenses that is the major obstacle to their mastery. (p. 289)

Typically, one of the difficulties learners may face is the pragmatic use of tenses, i.e. they are confused when or why to use a tense than the other.

According to Harmer (1995) English language learners confront typical problems in grammar regardless of their native language. One of them occurs when form and function are misjoined. For example, the present progressive tense is used to describe actions in the future such as “I am eating lunch with him tomorrow”. Another problem introduced by Harmer is plurality. Some forms of nouns do not change when making their plurality as “furniture”. Some others change just a phoneme inside like “teeth, women”. Harmer also indicated the misuse of prepositions “since” and “for” when referring to time such as “I am living here since 1998. I have been living here for two years”. Harmer pointed out to the fact that learners compare their mother tongue with English grammar. Consequently, similarities between the mother tongue and the foreign language lead to easiness and correctness and differences lead to difficulties (as cited in Tuomas, 2015, pp. 5-6).

In summary, grammar difficulties are dissimilar from one learner to another. Some may find a particular area of grammar easy to grasp while others can see it difficult to be mastered.

### **1.1.2. The Writing Skill**

The writing skill is tightly related to second/foreign language acquisition. Indeed, it is a necessary area of literacy that supports comprehension, critical and creative thinking when learning a certain language. Thus, identifying the central elements that construct the writing skill should be indicated to develop this skill.

#### **1.1.2.1. Definition of Writing**

In fact, writing is generally defined as the use of symbols and graphs to record speech. In this sense, Yule (2010) defined writing as “the symbolic representation of language through the use of graphic signs” (p. 212). Equally, Byrne (1991) pointed out that writing clearly goes beyond the production of graphic symbols just like speech is more than the

production of sounds. The symbols should be arranged in terms of certain conventions, to form words, and words should be arranged to form sentences. Taken together, writing is based on the representation and arrangement of symbols and graphic signs to build a systematic construction of language.

Other researchers, however, claimed that reviewing writing as graphic symbols is not valid anymore. In this regard, Pope (1998) regarded writing as the process of putting verbal marks on paper or some other substance (stone, wood, plastic, computer screen, etc.) and the result is a piece of writing. In line with this, Linse (2005) maintained that whenever saying the word 'writing' two main ideas come to our mind. The first one is the act of picking out the pencil and forming a letter or composing a piece of a text. The second idea views writing as an act which is performed by others like Shakespeare. To put it concisely, writing is primarily the act of transforming verbal actions into written forms. Also, Saville-Troik (2006) pointed out that writing is a means for testing knowledge in much of the world among which knowledge of the second language itself, even instructional programs that focus on oral production. Accordingly, writing is a medium to test learners' knowledge of the second language, even if they are engaged in oral instructions. Having considered the definition of writing, it is also valuable to highlight its importance in foreign/second language acquisition.

#### **1.1.2.2. Importance of Writing in English Language Teaching**

The writing skill forms a part of the university syllabus in teaching English as a foreign language. That is to say, writing should be given a considerable attention in the curriculum due to its complexity as a process. Importantly, Green (1993) acknowledged that the foundation of formal education is the shift from "speech" to "writing". The shift needs to be considered as crucial to the development and improvement of modern

schooling. This shift goes jointly with a new estimation of silence in education, increasingly an official focus on reading and writing than speaking and listening (as cited in Fleming and Stevens, 2004, p. 78).

Other researchers, by contrast, regarded writing as an intellectual process. In this vein, Krashen (1993) stated that “actual writing can help us solve problems and can make us smarter” (p.27). Similarly, Harmer (2007) also supported the idea that writing provides students with more thinking time than they can gain when they are engaged in spontaneous conversation. Consequently, more opportunities are created to process language; that is, thinking about the language. On the whole, when learners are engaged in writing, their cognitive and mental abilities are involved in developing a final product. Significantly, Harmer also distinguished two reasons for teaching writing, mainly ‘writing-for-learning’ and ‘writing-for-writing’. According to the former, writing is a tool to practise language; it enables students to work with language they have been studying. The latter, however, develops students’ skills as good writers. That is, the major aim for activities of this kind is that students should be good at writing, regardless of the type of writing that might be.

Saville-Troik (2006) firmly believed that writing helps learners to pay attention to the gaps in their knowledge as they are driven to encode concepts in second language forms, which may guide them to give more interest to appropriate information. He further asserted that writing can contribute to enhance the process of second language acquisition through “providing opportunities for others to comment on problems and give corrective feedback” (p. 146). Additionally, Saville-Troik argued that second language writing may help learners compose informal letters and e-mail if they communicate with the native speakers outside an instant interactional context; everyday life in some highly literate communities can necessitate at least limited second language writing ability. Thus,

writing is beneficial even outside the instructional context; it enables students to interact meaningfully with other speakers and societies of the second language. Expressed differently, verbal actions can be faded away over time. That is why writing can strongly ensure the maintenance of verbal productions. In this sense, people may easily refer to writing to remember what have been said by others. In line with this, Kristin et al. (2001) stated that “it is clearly the case that if there weren't writers, there would be nothing to read” (p. 192). After having considered the importance of writing in teaching English language, the subsequent part will be devoted to the approaches of teaching writing.

### **1.1.2.3. Approaches to Teaching Writing**

Writing is a highly-demanding and a difficult skill for EFL learners. Thus, developing the writing skill is not an easy task. Therefore, many approaches to writing have been set, namely process-oriented approach, product-oriented approach, and genre approach. Accordingly, the choice of one approach over the other depends on what students need to learn in order to develop their second language writing.

#### **1.1.2.3.1. The Process-oriented Approach**

The product-oriented approach is a teaching approach to writing that a writer follows when constructing meaning. As an instance in point, Tribble (1996) defined the process-oriented approach as an approach to teach writing. In fact, it focuses on the individual writer's creativity and takes into account the development of good writing practices than imitating other models. In line with this, Nunan (2001) pointed out that process approach emphasizes the different classroom activities that encourage the development of skilled language practice. On the whole, the process-oriented approach enhances the creative use of language and prepares learners to become good writers as well as skillful language users.

Of a particular importance, the process-oriented approach generally refers to the different stages students go through to reach a well-produced composition. In this regard, Harmer (2001) acknowledged that those who adopt a process-oriented approach to writing have to consider the different stages that any piece of writing goes through. By providing learners with much more time on pre-writing phases, editing, redrafting, and lastly publishing their work. Equally, White and Arndt (1991) also proposed a model includes a set of interrelated recursive stages. Drafting and structuring stages are the stages where learners organize information and experiment them with an arrangement. Then, reviewing stage where learners review the context, connections, and edit their writing. The next stage is focusing where learners are making sure that they are getting the message they want to get across. Finally, generating ideas and evaluating the draft (as cited in Harmer, 2001, p. 258).



**Figure: 1. White and Arndt's Process Writing Model (as cited in Harmer, 2001, p. 258)**

Moreover, process approach is given a priority over product approach in writing. Brown (2001) asserted that product-oriented approach is the ultimate goal; it is the main cause that learners go through the process of reviewing, drafting, revising, and editing. Process is seen as not the end; it is the means to the end. Taken together, learners writers should respect these stages to arrive at an effective piece of writing. The writer needs to generate new ideas, modify his/her thesis, and recognize the paragraphs.

The aim of the process approach can vary in many ways. Harmer (2001) stated that “a process approach aims to get to the heart of various skills that should be employed when writing” (p. 257). Brown (2001) also claimed that in process-oriented approach “the focus in the first instance is on quantity rather than quality, and beginning writers are encouraged to get their ideas on paper in any shape or form without worrying too much about formal correctness” (p.87). On the whole, it can be said that the purpose of the process-oriented approach is to integrate learners’ skills together with writing. Besides, beginners are supported to express their thoughts on paper with no regard to correct language.

#### **1.1.2.3.2. Product-oriented Approach**

Unlike the process-oriented approach, the product-oriented approach to writing is concerned with accuracy, correctness, and the form of the final product. In this respect, Pincas (1982) described the product approach as being primarily about linguistic knowledge, with attention to the relevant use of vocabulary, syntax, and cohesive devices. (as cited in Badger & White, 2000, p. 153). In a similar vein, Brown (2001) stated that a half century ago, writing teachers were usually interested in the end product of writing such as the essay, the report, the story, and the shape of that product. Compositions should reflect certain standards of English rhetorical style, show the accurate use of grammar, and be arranged in conformity according to what the audience would believe to be conventional. Essentially, the process-oriented approach is mainly concerned with linguistic competence, grammatical structures, and how they are organized to form a comprehensible and orderly final whole.

Other researchers confirmed that product approach is a final product of learners’ writing process. In line with this, Nunan (2001) asserted that “a product-oriented approach focuses on the end result of the learning process what it is that a learner is expected to be

able to do as a fluent and competent user of the language” (p. 86). Likewise, Harmer (2001) stated that “when concentrating on the product we are only interested in the aim of a task and in the end product” (p. 257). That is to say, the central aim of product approach is not the process or stages that learners can perform when writing, but the aim is the final work of the writing process.

In a typical product-oriented approach classroom, students are supplied with standard sample of test, and they are expected to follow the standards to construct a new piece of writing. Accordingly, Badger and White (2000) viewed that writing primarily deals with the knowledge related to the language structure. Additionally, writing development is the result of imitating the input provided by the teacher generally in a form of a written text. Equally, Nunan (2001) maintained that product-oriented approach is based on classroom activities in which the learner is occupied in imitating, copying, and transforming the samples of correct language. In the same account, Gabrielatos (2002) stated that the product approach is “a traditional approach in which students are encouraged to mimic a model text, usually is presented and analyzed at an early stage” (p. 5). Taken all together, learners applying the product approach are significantly asked to write compositions imitating a certain pattern given by the teacher to develop their own writing.

In fact, according to Pincas (1982) the product approach to learning writing has four main stages, namely familiarization, controlled writing, guided writing, and free writing. The familiarization stage raises awareness among learners of some aspects of a given text like grammar and lexical items. In the controlled and guided writing stages, learners use the skills with cumulative freedom. Free writing is the last stage where learners have a total freedom to practise the writing skill. The learners' practice of the skills results in an authentic writing activity as a letter, story or essay (as cited in Badger & white 2000, p.153).

In summation, the product approach perceives writing as mainly concerned with knowledge about the structure, form of language, and writing development as mainly the result of the imitation of models or samples of texts provided by the teacher.

#### **1.1.2.3.3. The Genre-Oriented Approach**

Genre approach supplies learners with natural opportunities to learn about many aspects of writing. A number of researchers supported teaching genre directly to learners. In this regard, Hyland (2004) stated that “ the ability to function competently in a range of written genres is often a central concern for ESL learners as it can determine their access to career opportunities, positive identities, and life choices” (p. 43). Significantly, dealing with different genres of texts allows learners to act independently in real life situations using the language competently depending on the genre they may encounter.

Other researchers believed that genre approach is related to product approach. Flowerdew (1993) noted that writing in the genre-based approach is, in some ways, regarded as an extension of the product-oriented approach since both approaches view writing as pre-dominantly linguistic. Moreover, learners in both approaches are supposed to study a wide variety of patterns such as business letters, academic reports, and research papers (as cited in Badger &white, 2000, p. 155). In a similar vein, Hyland (2004) suggested that teaching genre is deemed as an effective way for students to acquire the English grammar, enabling them to use grammatical structures within context rather than in isolated classroom activities. In line with this, Harmer (2001) pointed out that in a genre approach students examine texts in the genre they are going to be engaged in before they start writing their own production. For instance, they are exposed to business letters of different kinds before they start writing theirs; they can also be exposed to write newspaper articles to explore facts about construction and particular language areas

which are well known in that genre. Taken together, learners in genre approach are supposed to deal with real contextual models to discover meaningful aspects about language use.

In the field of English language teaching, Dubley Evans (1997) identified three stages in genre approach to writing. The first stage includes the presentation and analysis of a particular genre. In the second stage, exercises are done by learners which deal with language forms. Finally, learners attempt to produce a short text in accordance with the sample provided previously by their teachers (as cited in Badger & White, 2000, p. 156).

In short, the genre approach can be considered as those goals that the writer wants to achieve depending on the various situation where writing may occur.

#### **1.1.2.4. Components of Writing**

Unlike the other fundamental skills, namely listening, speaking, and reading, writing is considered as a complex cognitive process that requires learners to have a basic awareness and great deal of lexical and syntactical knowledge to produce a good piece of writing. Therefore, many researchers proposed a set of components that belong to writing. Accordingly, Harris (1969) suggested five elements that form the writing skill. First, Content is introduced as the element which constitutes the various ideas that are indicated by the writer to transmit messages. Second, form which is the state in which the content and ideas are coherently organized. Third, grammar reflects the use of grammatical structures, syntactic forms and word choice. Fourth, style which involves practicing a variety of structures and lexical items that contribute to enhance the written production, in a way writing is given a specific tone. Fifth, another element refers to mechanics which is constituted of the implementation of the language graphic conventions.

Importantly, Raimes (1983) supported Harris' view of writing elements, but he expressed the elements differently. According to Raimes, content or the message should be clear and appropriate enough to be understood by the reader. Organization of ideas is an important element to shape a coherent composition. Tools such as grammar, syntax, mechanics, and word choice are used to transmit the message. Another component is the audience or the reader for whom the written production would be addressed. The final element is the processes through which the writer receives ideas, sets about writing, and checks the product after writing the final draft.

Unquestionably, the writer should consider the essential elements of writing. In fact, learners are supposed to respect the cohesion of ideas that are expected to be linguistically structured in a well-formed composition. In addition, the messages should be properly conveyed to the reader.

#### **1.1.2.5. Grammar and Good Writing**

Grammar and writing skill have a complementary as well as a circular relationship. From one hand, the persistent practice of the writing skill results in a successful mastery of grammar rules. As an instance in point, Harmer (2004) acknowledged that writing is a 'backup' for grammar teaching. That is to say, through practicing writing grammar rules can be mastered. In addition, writing occupies an essential role in the curriculum since it provides a product which can be examined instantly the thing that enables teachers and learners to bring a feedback. Likewise, grammar is helpful to overcome the difficulties that occur in the writing process, i.e. when grammar rules are applied correctly, free error piece of writing will be obtained. Accordingly, Zermach and Islam (2006) suggested that good writers are able to talk about grammar and writing. Moreover, knowing about some grammar bases makes it easy to write correctly interesting sentences. Furthermore,

knowing grammar terms enables a better understanding and helps to correct grammatical mistakes in writing.

Greenbaum (1996) pointed out that the writing style could be reasonably improved through learning about the grammatical structures, word order, and items for linking sentences and paragraphs. Importantly, that type of knowledge will help learners at the editing stages through enhancing the style of earlier drafts and correcting grammatical errors. Equally, Noguchi (1991) indicated that the choice of grammar affects the writing style; linking sentences is an effective way for learners to develop fluency and variety in their writing style. On the whole, grammar positively influences the learner's writing style; it helps them to recognize their errors and correct them immediately by their own. Significantly, grammar can function as factor to communicate written language meaningfully. In this account, Beverly (2008) stated that "because writing is a complex and challenging activity for many students, teachers should focus on the grammatical concepts that are essential for the clear communication of meaning" (p. 2).

To put it in a nutshell, the exploitation of the creative potential of grammar makes learners vary their sentences and form their own ideas. They are also able to provide corrective feedback and good style of writing.

## **Conclusion**

The primary concern of this section is reviewing the theoretical part by shedding light on some key issues related to grammar and writing. It has first presented some definitions of grammar in conjunction with its importance in terms of its contribution to both English language and language learner. Then, it has highlighted the most common grammar difficulties that learners may be confused with when studying English grammar. Subsequently, it has brought to light some definitions of writing with a consideration of

its importance in English language teaching. The section has also discussed the approaches of writing, namely the process approach, the product approach, and the genre approach that have been proven very influential in the development of second/foreign language writing. After that, the components of writing have been underlined as being important elements in understanding the concept of writing. The section has concluded with a useful combination of grammar and good writing. After having considered grammar and the writing skill, the next section will discuss the notion of error and its theories in second language acquisition.

## **1.2. Error and Error Theories in Second/Foreign Language Acquisition**

This section will discuss mainly the core topic of this research, i.e., errors. Additionally, it will define the concept of error and will deal with the two main theories related to error.

### **1.2.1. The Notion of Error**

Learning a second/foreign language is a fundamental process in which learners confront many difficulties. Therefore, different types of errors can emerge. These errors may give valuable information on the ways students are acquiring a language.

#### **1.2.1.1. Definition of Error**

Broadly speaking, many researchers have been interested in the notion of error. In this respect, Selinker and Gass (2008) asserted that learners' errors are not due to a faulty imitation. Rather, they are counted as indicators of learners' attempt to understand some system; that is, they try to make regularity on that language they are learning. Allwright and Bailey (1991), however, defined errors as "the production of linguistic form which deviates from the correct form" (p. 84). Equally, Ferris (2011) acknowledged that errors are the morphological, syntactic, and lexical deviation from norms of the target language,

opposing the expectations of an adult native speaker. Taken together, errors can be seen either as learners' effort to comprehend and regulate the language they are exposed to or as a deviation from the language rules.

Another definition of error introduced by Tsui (1995) is that "an error in the classroom is commonly understood as something that is rejected by the teacher because it is wrong or inappropriate" (p. 3). That is to say, any language refused by the teacher in the classroom is considered as an error.

### **1.2.2. Error Theories**

In second language acquisition, there are two main theories have been set, namely contrastive analysis and error analysis. Indeed, both of them are used to predict and explain learners' errors when acquiring a second/foreign language.

#### **1.2.2.1. Contrastive Analysis**

Contrastive analysis is a systematic comparison between the features of two languages to find out similarities and differences between these languages. In this regard, Saville-Troik (2006) pointed out that contrastive analysis is an approach to the field of second language acquisition. Contrastive analysis requires predicting and explaining learner difficulties on the basis of comparing the first language with the second language to find out similarities and differences. Likewise, Corder (1973) defined contrastive analysis as a comparison between two different languages, mainly the learners' native language and the second language. That is to say, contrastive analysis is a way to compare and determine differences and similarities of these languages. So, learners' problems can be predicted in language teaching-learning process.

Selinker and Gass (2001) maintained that contrastive analysis is a way to compare languages. The purpose is to find out potential errors in isolation to determine what learners need to learn and what they do not in second language learning situation.

All in all, it can be concluded that contrastive analysis is an analysis to compare the mother tongue and the foreign language. It aims to find out differences and similarities in order to predict the difficulties. Accordingly, the process of teaching and learning can be easy and achievable.

#### **1.2.2.1.1. Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis**

In point of fact, contrastive analysis hypothesis is considered as an extension to the notion of contrastive analysis. According to Brown (2000), one of the most famous issues for applied linguists was the study of two different languages. The data comparison on multiple pairs of languages is commonly known as contrastive analysis hypothesis.

According to contrastive analysis hypothesis, the acquisition of the second language is affected by the learners' native language. Consequently, a number of difficulties resulted from differences between the learners' mother tongue and the foreign language. In line with this, Lado (1957) stated that "the comparison between native and foreign language lies the key to ease or difficulty in foreign language learning... those elements that are similar to the learners' native language will be simple for him and those elements that are different will be difficult" (pp. 1-2 as cited in Brown, 2000, p. 209). That is, similarities between learners' native language and the target language lead to easiness and correctness, but differences lead to difficulties in acquiring the second/foreign language. In a similar vein, Banathy et al. (1966) strongly confirmed that the change which occurs in the behavior of the foreign language learner can be equated with the differences between the learners' native language structure as well as its culture and that of the foreign language.

### **1.2.2.1.1.1. The Versions of Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis**

After having considered the claim of contrastive analysis hypothesis, it is also pertinent to expatiate upon its two versions, namely strong version and weak version.

#### **1.2.2.1.1.1.1. Strong Version**

The Strong version primarily predicts the errors that may occur while learning or using the second language. In this regard, Keshavarz (2012) pointed out that the strong version of contrastive analysis hypothesis focused on the barrier to second language learning which is mainly attributed to the interference of the first language. Moreover, the strong version claimed to predict the difficulties of second language learners. Hence, the strong version of contrastive analysis has a predictive power. Additionally, Wardhaugh (1970) argued that the strong version needs linguists to have a set of linguistic universals formulated within an exhaustive linguistic theory, which deals sufficiently with syntax, semantics, and phonology (as cited in Brown, 2000, p. 211). That is, the difficulties are already noted.

Furthermore, Lee (1968) asserted that the strong version of contrastive analysis hypothesis is based on the assumption that the main cause of learners' errors is due to the interference of the mother tongue. In fact, the learning process becomes more difficult whenever there are differences between the first language and the target language. In addition, the comparison between two languages is required to predict the difficulties that take place in learning the target language. Then, the learning process should focus on the differences because difficulties can be useful for teaching materials (as cited in Keshavarz, 2012, p.10).

To sum up, the strong version of contrastive analysis hypothesis is based on a priori description or a comparison between the first and the second language before the errors are committed by the learners.

#### **1.2.2.1.1.1.2. Weak Version**

The weak version, however, attempts to find an explanation to the sources of learners' errors. In a similar vein, Keshavarz (2012) stated that "The weak version is a model with diagnostic and explanatory as opposed to the predictive claim of the strong version" (p. 11). Equally, Brown (2000) acknowledged that the weak version entails a post explanation of learners' difficulties. Taken together, the weak version has an explanatory power to learners' errors after they have been committed. In line with this, Wardhaugh (1970) argued that the weak version demands the linguist to apply all the knowledge that he has to observe difficulties in the process of second language learning (as cited in Keshavarz, 2012, p. 11).

In summation, the weak version of contrastive analysis hypothesis attempts to provide a post description of second language learners' errors, i.e. the sources of these errors that are attributed to the native language interference.

#### **1.2.2.1.2. Procedures of Contrastive Analysis**

Contrastive analysis is regarded as a linguistic activity because it is based on the assumption that two languages can be compared or contrasted. As a result, certain procedures are to be followed in order to compare languages. Ellis (1994) mentioned four procedures in the comparison of two languages: description, where the two languages are formally described; selection, where certain forms are selected from the description; comparison, where differences and similarities are determined; and prediction, where identifying the areas that may cause errors take place.

In the same scope, Keshavarz (2012) identified five procedures of contrastive analysis that are nearly similar to those introduced by Ellis. Significantly, Keshavarz claimed that contrastive analysis primarily worked through the procedures of selection in which the

analyst may select particular forms from the foreign language that can be the cause of learners' difficulties. After the process of selection, description of the two languages should take place through the same linguistic framework. After having described the two languages, comparison of features between these languages is made by the analyst to find out the similarities and the differences. When the process of comparison is completed, predictions of learners' difficulties are identified. The final procedure is verification of the predictions that were set about learners' errors whether they are really committed by learners or not.

On the whole, contrastive analysis does not rely on a random comparison of languages. In fact, it is based on a systematic comparison through following certain procedures of analysis.

#### **1.2.2.1.3. Contrastive Analysis and Foreign Language Teaching**

Contrastive analysis has a useful predictive role to learners' difficulties usually through comparing learners' native language and the foreign language. On this basis, it is conducive to the development of foreign language teaching curriculum. In this regard, Flynn and O'Neil (1988) acknowledged that contrastive analysis cannot be only considered as a source of theoretical explanation to learning a second language; it is also counted of great effectiveness to construct language teaching curriculum. In line with this, James and Westney (1981) stated that "no matter who did the contrastive analysis, it was aimed at providing a basis for the selection of words and structures for teaching purposes" (p. 39). In a similar vein, Fries (1945) noted that the teaching materials that should be learned are those that are based on a scientific description, attentively contrasted with a parallel explanation of the learners' first language (as cited in Flynn & O'Neil, 1988, p. 35). Taken

together, contrastive analysis has a selective power of what should be included when designing the curriculum.

Moreover, James and Westney (1981) asserted that contrastive analysis can provide an explanation to the complexity of the target language. Additionally, learners may benefit from these explanations in a direct or an indirect way, depending on the type of the language that the learners are exposed to. Furthermore, Akbarov (2015) claimed that contrastive analysis is used as a tool to help a better processing in teaching, particularly in the highest stages of learning the target language. On the whole, contrastive analysis may facilitate the process of teaching and explain those complex areas that occur when acquiring the foreign language.

#### **1.2.2.2. Error Analysis**

The construct of error analysis has been defined with some variation by different researchers. In fact, error analysis is a systematic investigation of learners' errors. In this respect, Corder (1974) acknowledged that error analysis is an investigation of second language learners' language. In line with this, Gass and Selinker (2001) defined error analysis as a kind of linguistic analysis that emphasizes errors made by learners. It compares learners' errors of the foreign language and the form of the foreign language itself. Expressed differently, Saville-Troik (2006) stated that error analysis is the initial approach to second language acquisition, which involves a focus on learners' creative capacity to produce language. It is concerned with the description of second language learners' errors, rather than comparing first language linguistic features with those of the second language as contrastive analysis does.

Another definition of error analysis is proposed by Brown (2000). He believed that "the fact that learners do make errors, and that these errors can be observed, analyzed, and

classified to reveal something of the system operating within the learner, led to a surge of study of learners' errors called error analysis" (p. 218). That is, error analysis is an examination of the errors committed by the learners, i.e. it is a process that is used to observe, analyze, and classify learners' errors. Importantly, error analysis is one of the most influential theories of second language acquisition. In this account, Brown noted that error analysis differs from contrastive analysis in terms of its attempt to examine errors ascribed to all possible sources not only those coming from the learners' native language. In other words, error analysis is a type of linguistic analysis that focuses on the errors learners make.

Taken together, error analysis is considered a method of describing the linguistic system that has been developed by the learners within their progress, specifically when constructing the foreign language based on exploring which kind of difficulties learners face.

#### **1.2.2.2.1. Error Vs Mistake**

To analyse learners' language in appropriate manner, it is worthwhile to draw a distinction between the term mistake and error. In this vein, Gass and Selinker (1993) argued that errors occur when there is an incomplete use of the target language by the learners. So, they are indicators of learner's level at a certain stage of language learning. They can occur many times and can also be self-corrected by the learner. (as cited in Keshavarz p. 60). Equally, Brown (2000) pointed out that "an error, a noticeable deviation from the adult grammar of a native speaker, reflects the competence of the learner" (p. 217). That is to say, an error is a remarkable deviation from the correct form of the native speaker's language; it reveals learners' actual knowledge of the target language.

Mistakes, by contrast, are considered as a misuse of a previously learned knowledge. In this regard, Keshavarz (2012) stated that mistakes are an arbitrary deviation, not systematic, and they present performance mistakes that might occur in either speech or writing of native speaker, as slips of tongue, false start, and lack of subject verb agreement in long complex structures. In a similar vein, Brown (2000) further stated that “a mistake refers to performance error that is either a random guess or a “slip”, in that it is a failure to utilize a known system correctly” (p. 217). In other words, mistake refers to non-competence errors that usually results from the incorrect use of a known system.

In short, errors occur repeatedly; they are caused by the absence of the rule and are related to competence. However, mistakes are occasional and are related to performance because the learners have already mastered the rule.

#### **1.2.2.2.2. Procedures of Error Analysis**

Error analysis has certain procedures that are provided for the analyst to explain learners' errors. According to Ellis (1994), the first step in error analysis procedures is the collection of a sample of the learner language to decide what samples of learner language to analyse and how to collect them. In fact, some samples are gathered from a few learners over a period of time to check if there is a change in error occurrence when learners are exposed to the foreign language. The second step in the analysis is the identification of errors, which involves fixing the elements in learners' samples where there is a deviation from the foreign language. The next step is description of errors, which usually requires classification of errors whether they are phonological, morphological or syntactic. The final step is the evaluation of errors, which requires analysis of the effects that the error has on the addressee. The effect can be potentially measured according to the addressee's understanding or his affective reaction to the error. After having identified the procedures

of error analysis, the subsequent part of this section will be devoted to the classification of errors.

### **1.2.3. Classification of Errors**

Importantly, many second/foreign language acquisition researchers provide different procedures for the classification of errors. In fact, a systematic classification of errors can be useful to clarify some areas in the target language that may cause difficulties for learners. Hence, errors can be classified into two different categories: linguistic-based classification and process- based classification.

#### **1.2.3.1. Linguistic-based Classification**

Many researchers acknowledged the significance of the linguistic classification of errors. Minami (2016) asserted that during the heyday of error analysis, researchers were concerned with the description of errors, i.e. they classified errors linguistically. Additionally, Zamel and Spack (2002) confirmed the importance of classifying errors on a linguistic basis claiming that a linguistic classification is considered as a helpful analytical process. Indeed, it can also give a helpful foundation for the instructional interventions. In line with this, Jager et al. (2009) stated that “in order to find an applicable way of classifying errors a large number of actual errors has to be analyzed and classified. Classification is possible with respect to various aspects such as linguistic level” (p. 64). Taken together, it can be stated that a linguistic-based classification of errors is one way to facilitate the activity of describing and analysing learners' errors.

##### **1.2.3.1.1. Morpho-syntactic Errors**

Morpho-syntactic errors are a subdivision within the linguistic classification of errors. Essentially, these errors include a deviation in both the morphological and syntactic system

of the target language. In this regard, Vosse (n.d) asserted that “morpho-syntactic errors result from misapplication of morphological inflection and syntactic rules” (p. 111). After having considered the linguistic classification of errors, it is also important to point out to the process classification.

### **1.2.3.2. Process-based Classification**

Errors can be also classified in terms of their processes. Importantly, Keshavarz (2015) stated that process is the ways through which learners commit errors when using the language. In line with this, According to Ellis and Barkhuizen (2005), the process classification of errors is premised upon four main processes. First, omission which occurs when the learners leave out some required words. Second, addition in which learners add certain redundant words to a certain sentence, which is grammatically incorrect. Third, substitution in which the learners replace incorrect forms of a morpheme or a structure for correct ones. Fourth, Permutation which includes an incorrect ordering of words in a grammatical construction. To put it concisely, process classification is another taxonomy which enables a better description of learners' errors.

### **1.2.4. Causes of Errors**

Many researchers have been put in an attempt to investigate the various causes that push second/foreign language learners to commit errors. That is, in order to analyse learners' errors in a very appropriate way, it is worthwhile to determine the exact causes behind these errors.

#### **1.2.4.1. Interlingual Transfer**

Interlingual transfer is considered as a major source of learners' errors. They are caused by first language interference. In this respect, Keshavarz (2012) asserted that the transfer of phonological, morphological, grammatical, lexico-semantic, and stylistic elements from

the learners' native language to the target language cause interlingual errors. Brown (2007), similar to Keshavarz, did not deny that interlingual errors result from the negative influence of learners' mother tongue. In addition, He argued that "interlingual transfer is a significant source of errors for all learners. The beginning stages of learning a second language are especially vulnerable to interlingual transfer from the native language or interference" (p. 263). Taken together, learners' errors are related to the transfer from L1 system to L2 system. This transfer includes phonology, morphology, and grammatical rules.

#### **1.2.4.2. Intralingual Transfer**

It is widely believed that intralingual transfer is an important factor that leads second/foreign language learners to commit errors while learning. Indeed, it is the negative influence which comes from the target language itself. In line with this, Brown (2007) acknowledged that "it is clear that intralingual transfer (within the target language itself) is a major factor in second language learning" (p. 264). That is to say, it is quite clear that intralingual transfer influences the process of second/foreign language acquisition.

Moreover, Keshavarz (2012) noted that intralingual errors result from the mutual influence of items in the target language. That is, the interference of one element on the other. Equally, Richards (1971) argued that intralingual interference can be defined as "items produced by the learner which reflect not the structure of the mother tongue, but generalization based on special exposure to the target language" (p. 6). In other words, learners' errors are due to the incorrect generalization of some rules within the target language, not the native language.

Richards (1974) also proposed four types of causes for intralingual errors, namely overgeneralization, ignorance of rule restriction, incomplete application of rules, and building false concepts or false hypothesis.

#### **1.2.4.2.1. Overgeneralization**

Overgeneralization associated with instances where the learner creates a deviant structure on the basis of his experience in using other structures in the target language. Brown (2007) further asserted that “once learners have begun to acquire parts of the system, more and more intralingual transfer-generalization within the target language- is manifested” (p. 264). To put it concisely, overgeneralization deals with the overuse of some second language rules or forms where learners apply the rules that they are sure about rather than using rules that are not sure about or not mastered yet.

#### **1.2.4.2.2. Ignorance of Rules Restriction**

Ignorance of rules restriction is a situation where the learner applies rules to context where they are not applicable. Similarly, Keshavarz (2012) claimed that ignorance of rules restriction results from learners' ignorance of the restrictions and the exceptions of the target language rules. In other words, the learner cannot deal with restrictions of the target language.

#### **1.2.4.2.3. Incomplete Application of Rules**

Incomplete application of rules occurs when the learner fails to acquire more complex structures of the target language. In other words, it occurs when the learner does not use fully-developed structures to constitute comprehensible sentences. Indeed, the learner applies relatively simple rules or structures. In summation, the learner is unable to deal with the complete and the correct structure of the target language.

#### **1.2.4.2.4. False Hypothesis**

False hypothesis is considered as a faulty comprehension of distinction by second/foreign language learners in the target language, i.e. they can form wrong hypothesis about a certain rule. In fact, errors that rise from false hypothesis can be attributed to poor sequencing of teaching items. Touchie (1986) stated that learners may learn the present tense of the verb “to be” including “am, are, and is” and the past tense “*was and were*”. However, they may falsely hypothesize that “am, is and, are” are markers of the present and “was and were” are markers of the past. Consequently, they say “he is talk to the teacher”, “I am go to school”, and “It was happened last night”.

#### **1.2.4.3. Transfer**

Transfer is a hypothesis that means to take features from the mother tongue or the already formed habits in the first language and put them while learning a foreign language. In this respect, Brown (2007) acknowledged that transfer is the use of previously learned items and apply them to a present subject matter. That is, transfer is the use of L1 features by second/foreign language learners. In fact, transfer can be positive or negative.

##### **1.2.4.3.1. Positive Transfer Vs Negative Transfer**

On the one hand, a positive transfer may be considered as the counter parts in the foreign language which are similar to those existing in the learners' first language. In this case, learners will find it easy to learn a foreign language. In this account, Brown (2007) approvingly asserted that “positive transfer occurs when the prior knowledge benefits the learning task-that is, when a previous item is correctly applied to present subject matter” (p. 102). In a similar vein, Yule (2006) argued that if there are similar features between first and second language, learners will benefit from the positive transfer of the mother

tongue knowledge to the target language. Taken together, similarities between first and foreign language facilitate the process of second/foreign language acquisition.

Negative transfer, on the other hand, is the use of the learners' native language knowledge when there are no counter parts in the foreign language. Thus, learners will use what they have already learned in their native language. In this respect, Brown (2007) stated that "negative transfer occurs when previous performance disrupts the performance of a second task" (p. 102). That is, a negative transfer may happen when learners' previous knowledge prevents them from learning a new knowledge. Accordingly, Yule (2006) claimed that transferring feature from first to second language causes a negative transfer, which may cause difficulties in understanding second language expressions. In other words, negative transfer can be described as the learners' mother tongue interference when there are differences between the two languages.

To sum up, positive transfer occurs when similarities between the first and the target language lead to correctness and easiness, whereas negative transfer occurs when differences result in difficulties.

#### **1.2.4.4. Induced Errors**

Among the causes behind learners' errors that have been introduced by many researchers are induced errors. In fact, induced errors result more from the classroom situation than from either the students' incomplete competence in English grammar or first language interference. In this account, Corder (1974) maintained that induced errors are caused by many aspects of the teaching process such as the classroom situation, the used materials, the teacher's language use, and the teaching method. In a similar vein, Brown (2007) subscribed to Corder's definition and asserted that students' errors are due to a

misexplanation from the teacher, a deviant presentation of a structure or a word in a textbook, and even due to a rote memorized pattern in an inappropriate context.

Moreover, induced errors are those errors that result from a faulty procedure in a textbook, which is presented by the teacher. Accordingly, Keshavarz (2012) asserted that “an induced error is an error, which has been caused by the method in which a language item has been presented or practiced through teaching techniques or course design” (p. 128). Taken all together, induced errors are due to the teacher’s presentation of the material i.e. he may unintentionally mislead his students by the way he explains the lesson, defines an item or presents a material.

#### **1.2.5. Significance of Errors**

Many researchers and theorists in the field of second/foreign language acquisition have focused on the importance of learners’ errors. Accordingly, Delay and Burt (1974) avidly asserted that making errors is necessary and essential to language teaching and learning. Similarly, Keshavarz (2012) maintained that errors were no longer seen as a negative sign to be fought. Rather, they were considered as an essential part of language learning process. Expressed differently, errors are clues indicating that the learning process is taking place.

Moreover, errors can show how far the learner has progressed towards the goal, and consequently what remains for him to learn. In a similar vein, Keshavarz (2012) approvingly stated that “from the study of learner’s errors (error analysis) we are able to get some information about the nature of his/her knowledge of the target language at a given point in his/her learning career and discover that s/he still has to learn” (p. 58). In line with this, Corder (1967) noted that learners’ errors are important; they give the researcher a proof of the way language is learned or acquired, and what kind of strategies

or procedures learners are using to learn the language (as cited in Brown ,2000, p. 217). On the whole, learners' errors provide evidence of the learned system of language at specific part of the course even if they are applying some systems that are not yet the right system of the target language. After having shed light on the significance of errors, it is also worthwhile to consider their treatment.

### **1.2.6. Treatment of Errors**

Since errors are expected in the language learning process, teachers are likely to confront numerous errors in their learners' piece of writing. Therefore, the teachers should have a way to deal with errors. Many researchers widely believed that treatment of errors is a form of feedback given to learners by the teacher on their wrong use of the target language. In this regard, Tsui (1995) distinguished between negative and positive teacher feedback. She argued that a teacher who always gives negative feedback is likely to create failure and frustration among students and will restrain learners' participation. However, a teacher who appreciate learners' participation and gives valuable feedback is bound to motivate learners to contribute in classroom and will help to invent a kind of participatory work in the class. That is, the type of feedback that the teacher gives affects his students' way of learning.

It is strongly believed that correcting the errors that students make when they speak or write is one of the most difficult tasks in language teaching. Thus, teachers have to consider whether they correct learners' errors by themselves, let learners discover their own errors, or give opportunity to other sources to do so. In a similar vein, Allwright and Bailey (1991) stated that "the manner in which errors are treated - whether by the teacher, the learners themselves, or by their peers - may do much influence the learners' openness to treatment" (p. 108). Expressed differently, teachers usually have the responsibility to

correct students' errors but if they let learners discover their own errors, a lot of hard work would be avoided. Additionally, the other members of the group can help to correct errors.

In summation, error treatment is a very crucial process in language teaching. Thus, teachers need to be aware of what learners are doing in the classroom, i.e. they should be able to judge in the class whether they treat or ignore the errors, when and how to correct them.

### **Conclusion**

This section has taken as its main concern a review of the related literature by discussing some key issues related to error theories in second/foreign language acquisition. It has highlighted the different definitions that have been given to the concept of error and its theories. It has also touched upon the classification of errors, which is divided into two different categories, mainly linguistic-based classification and process based classification. Additionally, it has discussed the causes of errors that have been set by some researchers. Lastly, it has brought to light the significance of errors for second language learners and the possible treatment of these errors.





## **Chapter Two: Research Methodology and Data Analysis and Discussion**

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## **Chapter Two**

### **Research Methodology and Data Analysis and Discussion**

#### **Introduction**

The previous chapter has presented a review of the related literature. This second chapter takes as its main concern the field of investigation. It is divided into three sections. Specifically, the first section investigates the research methodology which contains research paradigm, setting, sample of the study, data gathering instruments, data collection procedures, data analysis, and limitations of the study. The subsequent section is devoted to the analysis of results obtained by both students and teachers' questionnaires and document analysis. Finally, the third section discusses the whole results obtained by the two research tools.

#### **2.1. The Research Methodology**

The research methodology section deals with the research paradigm, the setting, the sample of the study, the data-gathering instruments, the data collection procedures, the data analysis, and the limitations of the study.

##### **2.1.1. Research Paradigm**

The present study provides an investigation of EFL learners most common grammatical written errors and their causes. This research work is both quantitative and qualitative in nature; thus, it adopted a mixed methods approach, i. e. triangulation. Accordingly, the term triangulation refers to the integration of different methods when collecting, analyzing, and interpreting data. Unlike the use of one method, triangulation aims at gaining more accurate and broader insights to research (Denzin, 1978 ; Straus, 2002; Creswell, 2009, as cited in Domingues & Hollstein, 2014, p. 66).

In this research, triangulation tended to examine the quantitative data obtained from the questionnaires in conjunction to the qualitative data generated from document analysis. The results yielded by the quantitative tool may support or contradict those yielded by the qualitative tool. The quantitative approach has a priority over the qualitative approach; that is, the quantitative data basically provided the fundamental requirements to answer the research questions about learners' grammatical errors and their causes. Indeed, the information gathered were statistically analysed even the qualitative data were interpreted quantitatively.

The data of the quantitative approach came from the questionnaire. First, the topic of EFL learners' errors and their causes required the use of the questionnaire as an appropriate research tool for collecting data. Importantly, two main questionnaires were administered ; one for students and the other for teachers. Second, document analysis is a qualitative tool but to meet the purpose of our research work it was used quantitatively.

The choice of the most appropriate method of research is certainly a very important matter. This research is both quantitative and qualitative in the sense that it simply requires the use of both of these research paradigms. Significantly, Creswell (2014) pointed out that "the combination of qualitative and quantitative approaches provides a more complete understanding of a research problem than either approach alone" (p. 4).

### **2.1.2. Setting**

The current study explores second year students' most common grammatical written errors and their causes. This study was carried out at the department of English language and literature; specifically, at the University of Mohammed Seddik Ben Yahia, Jijel. Importantly, students who are specialized in English language at the university level are not expected to make many grammatical errors in writing.

### **2.1.3. Research Design**

The research design discusses such issues as the sample of the study, the data-gathering instruments that involve the questionnaires and the document analysis, and the data collection procedures.

#### **2.1.3.1. Sample of the Study**

The population of the present study includes a total number of 213 second year students. Since it is impossible to deal with the whole population, a sample of 100 subjects is randomly selected. Additionally, the sample also includes five teachers of writing. Dornyei (2007) stated that a sample is “the group of participants whom the researcher actually examines in an empirical investigation” (p. 96). The reason for choosing second year license students is that they studied the basic rules of grammar in first year. Therefore, they are expected not to make many grammatical errors while writing.

#### **2.1.3.2. Data-gathering Instruments**

In order to elicit teachers/students' perceptions about the most committed grammatical errors in students writing and their causes, two research tools are implemented, namely questionnaire and document analysis.

##### **2.1.3.2.1. Questionnaire**

In this research the questionnaire is acknowledged as an important source of information in order to obtain quantitative data. According to Nunan (1992) “the questionnaire is a relatively popular means of collecting data. It enables the researcher to collect data in field setting, and the data themselves are more amenable to quantification than discursive data” (p. 142). Expressed differently, the participants are familiar with the

questionnaire; it can be easily used in field setting such as the classroom. Besides, the data obtained from the questionnaire are analysed quantitatively than qualitatively.

In fact, the questionnaire is more practical in nature. That is to say, it is easy to administer and analyse; it provides the researcher with the necessary data in a short period of time. Both teachers and students' questionnaires in this study are divided into two distinct sections. The first section is named "Grammatical Errors in Writing"; it aims to elicit data about the most frequent grammatical written errors made by second year students. Then, the second section is entitled "Causes of Grammatical Written Errors"; it attempts to gather the necessary information about the causes that lead students to make grammatical errors in their writing.

The students' questionnaire was designed for second year students who are likely to have some information that can meet the research purpose. It includes 17 questions. The questions are close-ended and open-ended. (Q1, Q3-Q7, Q9, Q10, Q12, Q14-Q16) are closed questions, whereas (Q2, Q8, Q11, Q13, Q17) are open questions.

Likewise, teachers' questionnaire was administered to teachers who are believed to be in good position to provide data that are relevant to the study. It contains 9 questions. (Q1-Q5, Q7) are closed questions, while (Q6, Q8, Q9) are open questions. Accordingly, Nunan (1992) asserted that "a closed item is one in which the range of possible responses is determined by the researcher...an open item is one in which the subject can decide what to say and how to say it" (p. 143).

It is widely believed that closed questions are easy to answer by the participant since the answer is determined by the researcher. However, open questions are also used to get the participants to provide additional information. In line with this, Nunan stated that

“while responses to closed questions are easier to collate and analyse, one often obtains more useful information” (p. 143).

#### **2.1.3.2.2. Document Analysis**

Document analysis is another instrument that was employed in this research. Mangal (2013) asserted that document analysis “represents a type of research in which a researcher is required to carry out the task of his research by analysing the document available to him for providing information and evidences related to his research study questions” (p. 213).

Document analysis is a qualitative tool but to meet the aim of our research, it is used in a quantitative way. The data gathered from document analysis were classified in a checklist which is a component of document analysis. Accordingly, Jackson (2016) stated that a checklist is “a tally sheet on which the researcher records attributes of the subjects and whether particular behaviors were observed. Moreover, checklists enable researchers to focus on a limited number of specific behaviors” (p.81).

#### **2.1.3.3. Data Collection Procedures**

Students' questionnaire was administered by the researchers to second year students. During the completion of the questionnaire, the researchers were present to provide participants with the necessary explanation to avoid any misunderstanding. At the end, the questionnaires were filled out by students and returned immediately to the researchers.

Teachers' questionnaire was given directly to five teachers in the department of English at Mohammed Seddik Ben Yahia University, Jijel. Those teachers have an experience in teaching written expression classes. Therefore, their responses and suggestions are valuable for the aim of this research work. An agreement with the researchers and each teacher was made concerning the setting in which the questionnaires would be returned

after completion. The teachers were cooperative in a way that they handed back the questionnaires in less than two days.

Additionally, the researchers made use of document analysis as another instrument to collect data. As a starting point, the researchers conducted a preliminary work. In fact, this preliminary work was an initial analysis and reading of second year students' exams copies. On this basis, the researchers got a considerable knowledge about the related literature. Subsequently, the researchers previously asked teachers permission for taking students' essays. In fact, the essays were produced inside the classroom during a written expression session but they were analysed outside the classroom setting. To analyse students' essays, the researchers used a checklist. After the accomplishment of the analysis, students' essays were returned to the teacher.

#### **2.1.4. Data Analysis Procedures**

The data of this research were elicited by means of questionnaire and document analysis. On one hand, the data obtained from the questionnaire are systematically presented; that is, closed questions were manually analysed through using tables for which relevant headings were given. On the other hand, the data obtained from open questions were orderly classified into different categories in terms of their frequency and occurrence. Subsequently, tables are implemented to organize the data gathered from open questions using numbers.

The results obtained from document analysis are analysed through a checklist. The researchers used the checklist in which they classified students' grammatical errors in accordance to their occurrence in students' essays. In fact, the errors are classified from the most committed to the least committed using numbers.

### **2.1.5. Limitations of the Study**

For many reasons, this study confronted some unavoidable limitations that will run as follows:

- Because of the time limit, another research instrument which is teachers' interview was dropped.
- The lack of relevant resources leads to the repetitive use of second-hand resources.
- The researchers also attempted to administer the questionnaire with more than five teachers; however, some teachers were not cooperative with this research work. In fact, they refused to answer the questionnaire on the grounds that they did not have enough time to complete the questionnaire.
- The researchers attempted to deal with a sample of 100 students. However, three participants were excluded from the analysis since they did not give questionnaires back.

The first section of this practical part has been devoted to the research methodology. It has discussed the research paradigm, the setting, the sample of the study, the research instrument, the data collection procedures, the data analysis, and the limitations of the study. After having dealt with the methodology section, we move on to shed light on the data analysis section; that is, the data obtained from the questionnaire and the document analysis will be carefully analysed and described.

## **2. 2.Data Analysis**

This section is concerned with data analysis. It includes the analysis of the questionnaire and the analysis of the documents (students' copies). In other words, it starts

with presenting the results generated by means of questionnaire, then presenting those obtained by document analysis.

## 2. 2.1. Analysis of Students' Questionnaire

The data presented below are gathered by means of students' and teachers' questionnaires. While answers of closed questions are transformed into percentages, answers to open questions are presented in tables using numbers.

### 2.2.1.1. Students' most Recurrent Grammatical Written Errors

**Answer to Q 1** (How do you consider your language ability?)

Table 1:

*Students' Evaluation of their Language Ability*

<b>Options</b>	<b>Percentage %</b>
Very Good	5%
Good	40%
Average	51%
Below the average	4%
Total	100%

As it is shown in the table above, 51% of students evaluated their language ability as average. It is noticeable that making grammatical written errors may have to do with students' language ability.

**Answer to Q 2** (What do you think of the writing process?)

Table 2 (a)

*Students' Perceptions of the Writing Skill*

<b>Options</b>	<b>Percentage %</b>
Easy	29%
Difficult	71%
Total	100%

This question attempts to find out how second year students consider the writing process. The results in the above table revealed that the majority of students (71%) considered writing as a difficult task. It can be deduced that students may make errors because of their negative attitudes towards writing.

In an attempt to have students to say more, they were asked to provide justifications. Students' justifications are presented and thematised in the table below.

Table 2 (b)

*Students' Justifications for Evaluating the Writing Process*

<b>Easy</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Difficult</b>	<b>Number</b>
Having the background knowledge about the topic	5	Making grammatical errors	26
Knowing the techniques of writing	7	Lack of vocabulary	14
Continuous practice	1	Lack of knowledge about the topic	9
Knowing the grammar rules	3	Lack of knowledge about the writing techniques	13
Having enough vocabulary	6		
Having qualified teachers	2		

Total	24	62
No response	4	7

Based on students' justifications in the above table, students' evaluation of the writing skill as an easy task is explained by their knowledge of the writing techniques and having the background knowledge about the topic they were asked to write about. Nevertheless, most students who supported the belief that the writing skill is a difficult task, provided valuable justifications among which are making grammatical errors and lack of vocabulary. On the whole, the writing skill seems to be problematic mainly due to grammar difficulties.

**Answer to Q 3** (Is error making considered as a stage of language learning?)

Table 3

*Students' Attitudes towards Error Making*

Options	Percentage
Agree	92%
Disagree	8%
Total	100%

The results that are shown in the above table leave no doubt to say that the majority of students (92%) consider error making as a stage of language learning. So, it can be said that students make errors.

**Answer to Q 4** (what do you think of the English grammar?)

Table 4

*Students' Views of the English Grammar*

<b>Options</b>	<b>Percentage %</b>
Easy to learn	43%
Difficult to learn	57%
Total	100%

According to the results obtained from the above table, more than half of the participants (57%) believed that English grammar is a difficult task to learn, while about half of them (43%) opposed the fact that English grammar is difficult to learn. On average, it can be said that students confront difficulties in English grammar.

**Answer to Q 5** (Do you think that you should master the grammatical rules of target language before writing?)

Table 5

*Students' Perceptions of Mastering the Grammatical Rules of the Target Language before Writing*

<b>Options</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Agree	90%
Disagree	10%
Total	100%

The results from the above table clearly indicate that 90% of the participants did not deny the fact that mastering grammar rules before writing is a very important matter.

Consequently, this means that lack of grammatical mastery can be problematic for learners when they write.

**Answer to Q 6** (How often do you commit grammatical errors?)

Table 6

*The Frequency of Students' Grammatical Errors in Writing*

<b>Options</b>	<b>Percentage %</b>
Always	5%
Often	60%
Sometimes	27%
Rarely	8%
Never	0%
Total	100%

In response to this question, the participants would provide an insight into the frequency of errors in writing. The highest percentage (60%) was scored by the second option "often". This means that grammatical errors are still common among the participants in the study.

**Answer to Q 7** (Which grammatical errors do you mostly make?)

Table 7

*Students' most Frequent Grammatical Errors*

<b>Options</b>	<b>Percentage %</b>
Tenses	37%
Subject-verb agreement	9%
Articles	5%

Word order	3%
Capitalization	5%
Plurality	1%
Prepositions	6%
Punctuation	34%
Total	100%

Based on the results from the above table, students' answers vary from option one to option eight. "Tenses" received the highest percentage by participants (37%), while "punctuation" had a percentage of 34%. That is, the most common grammatical errors are mainly tenses and punctuation.

### 2.2.1.2. Causes of Students Grammatical Errors

**Answer to Q 8** (Do you translate from your mother tongue to the target language when you write?)

Table 8

*Students Use of Translation from the Mother Tongue to the Target Language*

Options	Percentage%
Yes	57%
No	43%
Total	100%

In response to this question, the results from the above table revealed that more than half of the participants (57%) translate from their mother tongue to the target language, while about half of them (43%) do not like translation. On this basis, it can be deduced that interference of the mother tongue can be a cause of students' errors.

**Answer to Q 9** (Do you think that there are similarities of grammar between your mother tongue and the English language?)

Table 9

*Students' Perceptions of Similarities of Grammar between Students' Mother Tongue and English*

<b>Options</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Yes	31%
No	69%
Total	100%

The results reported from the above table clearly indicated that (69%) of the participants denied the fact that there are similarities of grammar between students' 'mother tongue and the English language. What can be drawn from students' answers to this question is that students' grammatical errors are not due to similarities between the mother tongue and the English language. Actually, the grammatical system of Arabic is significantly different from the English one.

**Answer to Q10** (If your answer is yes, how do similarities affect your application of English grammar rules?)

Table 10

*Students' Perceptions of how Similarities Affect their Application of English Grammar Rules*

<b>Options</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Positively	15%
Negatively	85%
Total	100%

The results obtained from students' answers to this question highlight that the majority of students who said "yes" admitted that similarities between the mother tongue and the English language negatively affect their application of English grammar (85%). This means that similarities do not always lead to easiness and correctness but they may lead to difficulties (errors).

**Answer to Q 11** (Do you think that differences in grammar between the mother tongue and the English language lead to making grammatical errors in writing ?)

Table 11(a)

*Students' Perception of Differences between Students' Native Language Grammar and the English Grammar*

<b>Options</b>	<b>Percentage %</b>
Yes	71%
No	29%
Total	100%

As it is shown in the above table, 71% of the participants said that grammar differences between the mother tongue and the English language lead to making errors. Nevertheless,

29% of them stated that differences do not lead to grammatical errors. It can be said that differences between both languages seem to be problematic for students.

With the aim of getting participants to provide more explanations, they were asked to justify their responses. Students' justifications are thematised and presented in the following table :

Table 11 (b)

*Students' Justifications for Differences between their Mother Tongue and the English Language.*

<b>Yes</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>Number</b>
The failure of word by word translation	13	Recognizing the differences between the mother tongue and English lead to avoid grammatical errors	5
Different grammar rules	23	Each language has its own grammar	21
Different sentence structure	14		
Lack of awareness of the differences between the mother tongue and English	4		
Total	54		26
No response	15		2

The results from the above table show that most students make grammatical errors because of differences between the mother tongue and the target language, largely since they subscribe to the fact that there is a noticeable difference between the grammar of the

mother tongue and English. Some students illustrated their responses by indicating that grammar rules and sentence structure differ in both languages. Nevertheless, few students were opposed to the belief that there are differences between both languages. Particularly, they provided such a justification as each language has its own grammar. Thus, differences between the mother tongue and English have a negative interference on the English grammar system.

**Answer to Q 12** (Do you speak French as another foreign language?)

Table 12

*Students' Ability to Speak another Foreign Language*

<b>Options</b>	<b>Percentage %</b>
Yes	75%
No	25%
Total	100%

From the above table, it is shown that the majority of participants (75%) speak French as another foreign language. Such percentage reflects that French is another spoken foreign language; hence, it may affect acquisition of the English language.

**Answer to Q 13** (Do you mix English grammar rules with those of French when you write?)

Table 13 (a)

*Interference of the French Grammar Rules on English*

<b>Options</b>	<b>Percentage%</b>
Yes	45%
No	55%
Total	100%

With regard this question, more than half of the participants (55%) do not mix English grammar rules with those of French, whereas about half of the participants (45%) admitted that the knowledge of French grammar is not an obstacle to achieve mastery of grammar. The conclusion that can be drawn is that French interference seems to be not problematic.

In an attempt to elicit further information from the participants, they were asked to justify their choices. Students' responses are categorized and presented in the table below.

Table 13 (b)

*Students' Justifications of the French Interference on the English Grammar*

<b>Yes</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>Number</b>
Generalizing some grammar rules of French to English	9	Each language is independent by its own grammar	12
Frequent use of French	6	Neglecting the use of French	7
Similarities between grammar rules of French and English lead to make errors	3	Similarities between the mother tongue and English lead to apply grammar rules correctly	17
Total	18		36
No response	24		16

The results from the above table reveal that most students do not deem the French language as an obstacle to achieve grammar mastery. Particularly, an important belief was held by these students which is similarities between French and English can lead to the application of grammar rules accurately. Therefore, students' grammatical errors might not be due to the interference of French.

**Answer to Q 14** (When you write, do you?)

Table 14 *Students' Way of Thinking When Writing*

<b>Options</b>	<b>Percentage%</b>
Directly think in English	54%
Think in Arabic first, then, translate into English	44%
Think in French first, then, translate into English	2%
Total	100%

The results obtained from the above table clarified that 54% of the participants directly think in English. While about a significant number of them (44%) think in Arabic first, then, translate into English. Thus, students' 'mother tongue can be problematic since they translate.

**Answer to Q 15** (Has it happened to you to learn an erroneous grammatical rule from your teacher?)

Table 15

*Students' Experience of Acquiring an Erroneous Grammatical Rule from the Teacher*

<b>Options</b>	<b>Percentage%</b>
Yes	61%
No	39%
Total	100%

The results from the above table show that 61% of the participants affirm that they have already learned an erroneous grammatical rule from their teachers. Consequently, it seems that some of students' errors can be because of an erroneous learned grammatical rule.

**Answer to Q 16** (When you pick up an incorrect grammatical rule from your teacher, do you?)

Table 16

*Students' Reaction towards Learning an Erroneous Grammatical Rule from the Teacher*

<b>Options</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Take it as it is	6%
Ask your teacher again	34%
Check another source	60%
Total	100%

In answering this question, 60% of the participants indicated that they check another source in case they learn an erroneous grammatical rule from their teacher. 34% of them ask the teacher again to explain it. But only 6% of them take it as it is. On the whole, this confirms that learners correct their grammatical errors.

**Answer to Q 17** (What do you suggest to avoid grammatical errors in writing?)

Table 17

*Students' Suggestions for Avoiding Grammatical Errors in Writing*

<b>Students' suggestions</b>	<b>Number</b>
Continuous Practice	25
Further reading	32
Memorizing the grammatical rules	24
Communicating with others	6
Total	87
No response	10

The results obtained from the above table indicate that further reading, more practice, and memorizing the grammatical rules have been suggested by students to avoid grammatical errors in writing.

**2. 2. 2. Analysis of Teachers' Questionnaire**

The data presented below are gathered by means of the teachers' questionnaire. Answers of closed questions are transformed into percentages, whereas answers to open questions are presented in tables using numbers.

**2.2.2.1. Students' most Recurrent grammatical written Errors****Answer to Q 1**(How do your students consider writing?)

Table 18

*Teachers' Perceptions on Students' Views on Writing*

<b>Options</b>	<b>Percentage%</b>
An easy task	100%
Difficult task	0%
Total	100%

As it is shown in the table below, there was a complete accord among the teachers in answering this question. 100% of the teachers admitted that their students consider writing as a difficult task. This is a clear indication that writing seems to be problematic to students since it is a productive skill.

**Answer to Q 2** (How would you evaluate your students?)

Table 19

*Teachers' Evaluation of their Students Writing Capacity*

<b>Options</b>	<b>Percentage%</b>
Non-writers	0%
Poor writers	80%
Average writers	0%
Good writers	20%
Very good writers	0%
Total	100%

The results in the above table suggest that the majority of teachers (80%) consider their students as poor writers. These findings obviously emphasize that students make errors when writing.

**Answer to Q 3** (In case your answer is poor writers, what is the language area that they should be competent at to be good writers?)

Table 20

*Teachers' Views of the Language Area in which Students are Poor*

<b>Options</b>	<b>Percentage%</b>
Grammar	58%
Vocabulary	22%
Spelling	20%
Total	100%

In response to this question, grammar received the highest percentage (58%). It can be said that students face difficulties in grammar which lead to making errors.

**Answer to Q 4** (How often do your students commit grammatical errors in their writing?)

Table 21

*Teachers' Views on the Frequency of Students' Writing Grammatical Errors*

<b>Options</b>	<b>Percentage%</b>
Always	20%
Often	60%
Sometimes	20%
Rarely	0%
Total	100%

The results from the above table indicate that teachers' responses to this question show that 60% of students mostly commit grammatical errors when writing.

**Answer to Q 5** (What are the most common grammatical errors noticed in your students' writing?)

Table 22

*Teachers' Perceptions of Students' most Common Grammatical Errors in Writing*

<b>Options</b>	<b>Percentage%</b>
Tenses	20%
Subject-verb agreement	15%
Articles	10%
Word order	5%
Capitalization	15%
Preposition	10%
Plurality	5%
Punctuation	20%
Total	100%

The above table clearly indicates that the most noticeable grammatical errors in students writing are tenses and punctuation (20%). The next grammatical errors that were chosen by the teachers are subject-verb agreement and capitalization with an equal percentage of (15%).

### 2.2.2.2. Causes of Students' Grammatical Errors

**Answer to Q 6** (Do you think that the mother tongue interference (negative transfer) is a cause for grammatical errors in EFL learners' writing?)

Table 23

*Teachers' Views of students' Mother Tongue as a Cause of grammatical Errors in Writing.*

<b>Options</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Yes	40%
No	60%
Total	100%

The results from the above table show that 60% of the teachers do not consider students' mother tongue as a cause of their grammatical errors in writing. It can be said that this question is revealing that students' mother tongue has almost little interference on their writing.

With the aim of getting teachers to provide more insights on the interference of students' mother tongue, they were asked to justify their responses. Their responses are thematised and presented in the table below.

Table 23 (b)

*Teachers' Justifications of the Mother Tongue Interference on Students' writing*

Yes	Number	No	Number
The interference of the mother tongue in the case of prepositions	1	There is no students' mother tongue interference but there is a French one on lexis	1
Word by word translation from the mother tongue to English	1	Students' errors are due to the English grammar difficulties not due to students' mother tongue	2
Total	2		3

This question in conjunction with the previous one reveal that students' grammatical errors are not really due to the mother tongue as they are related to the influence of the French language on students' English language vocabulary and their shortage of competence in English grammar.

**Answer to Q 7** (Do you think that learners make errors because of the complexity of English grammar rules?)

Table 24

*Teachers' Perceptions of the Complexity of the English Grammar*

Options	Percentage%
Yes	80%
No	20%
Total	100%

As it is shown in the above table, the majority of the teachers (80%) consider the complexity of the English grammar rules as a cause of students' errors. So, it can be said that the complexity of English grammar itself can influence grammar use negatively.

**Answer to Q 8** (Do you think that the grammar rules of a prior learned foreign language (French) are problematic to the application of correct English grammar rules?)

Table (a) 25

*Teachers' Views of the Grammar Rules of a Prior Learned Foreign Language (French)*

<b>Options</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Yes	40%
No	60%
Total	100%

The above table clearly demonstrates that 60% of the teachers admit the fact that the grammar rules of a prior learned foreign language (French) do not seem as an obstacle to apply the English grammar rules correctly. Nevertheless, 40% of teachers hold that it is an obstacle to the correct application of English grammar. On the whole, grammar knowledge of a prior learned foreign language might be not an obstacle to apply the English grammar rules correctly.

In an attempt to elicit more information from the teachers, those who answered "yes" were asked to justify their answers. The responses are thematised and presented as follows:

Table 25 (b)

*Teachers' Justifications of influence of Grammar Rules of a Previously Learned Foreign Language (French)*

<b>Yes</b>	<b>Number</b>
Mixing between French and English	2
object pronouns	

After the detailed analysis, the results from the above table show that students get confused with the French object pronouns since they apply its rules in the case of English.

**Answer to Q 9** (What other causes do you suggest of grammatical errors in students' writing?)

Table 26

*Teachers' Suggestions of Other Causes of Grammatical Errors in Students' Writing*

<b>Teachers' suggestions</b>	<b>Number</b>
Lack of practice	27%
Negligence	8%
Having poor level	17%
Skipping classes	8%
Majoring	8%
Demotivation	8%
Poor teaching skills	8%
Time limit	8%
Lack of reading	8%
Total	100%

Teachers' responses to this question show that the suggested causes are mainly lack of practice, negligence, poor level of proficiency, skipping classes, majoring, demotivation, and poor teaching skills, skipping classes, time limit, lack of reading represented (27%), (8%), (17%), (8%), (8%), (8%), (8%), (8%), and (8%) respectively.

Table 27

*A Comparison of EFL Learners' most Common Grammatical Errors Yielded by the Analysis of both Teachers and Students' Questionnaire*

<b>Types of errors</b>	<b>Teachers' questionnaire</b>	<b>Students' questionnaire</b>
Tenses	20%	37%
Subject-verb agreement	15%	9%
Articles	10%	5%
Word-order	5%	3%
Capitalization	15%	5%
Prepositions	10%	6%
Plurality	5%	1%
Punctuation	20%	34%
Total	100%	100%

The table above represents a comparison between the results obtained by the analysis of both teachers and students' questionnaire. It is clearly established that the results of the two questionnaires are almost identical in terms of their frequency. That is, students' most frequent grammatical errors are tenses, punctuation, subject-verb agreement, capitalization, preposition, and articles.

### 2.2.3. The Analysis of Students' Copies

After having analysed the results generated by teachers and students 'questionnaire, the following part of this section will deal with the analysis of the results obtained by means of document analysis. In fact, document analysis is another research tool which was used in this research work. Importantly, 31 copies of second year students were analyzed to find out the students' most common grammatical errors. All students' errors that were obtained from documents are classified in a checklist in accordance to their frequency in the students essays.

The classification of grammatical errors that were yielded by the checklist are presented as follows:

Table 28

*The Frequency of Students' Grammatical Errors in their Essays*

<b>Types of Errors</b>	<b>Frequency of Errors</b>	<b>Percentage %</b>
Tenses	35	20%
Punctuation	32	18%
Subject-verb agreement	27	15%
Capitalization	25	14%
Prepositions	22	13%
Articles	20	11%
Plurality	10	6%
Word order	4	2%
Total		100%

The results obtained from the checklist above indicate the frequency of learners' grammatical errors in their essays. The students' grammatical errors are classified from the most to the least committed in accordance to their frequency. Students most common grammatical errors are tenses, punctuation, subject-agreement, and capitalization that presented (21%), (19%), (14%), and (13%), respectively.

Table 29

*A Summary of the Causes of Students' most Frequent Grammatical Written Errors*

Causes of students' grammatical errors	Percentage%
Complexity of the English grammar	80%
Rules	
Differences between the English language and students' mother tongue	71%
Lack of practice	27%
Low level of proficiency	17%
Negligence	8%
Skipping classes	8%
Misorientation in majoring	8%
Demotivation	8%
Poor teaching skills	8%
Time limit	8%
Lack of reading	8%

The above table summarizes the causes of students' most frequent grammatical errors. Based on the whole results obtained from both teachers and students' questionnaire, students' most frequent grammatical written errors are due to some causes as the complexity of English grammar rule, differences between the English language and students' mother tongue (negative transfer), students-related causes (such as lack of practice, negligence, skipping classes, low level of proficiency, misorientation in majoring,

demotivation, and lack of reading), teacher-related causes (such as poor teaching skills), and time limit.

### **2.3. Data Discussion and Recommendation**

This section is devoted to the discussion and interpretation of the results obtained from the research instruments. The results generated from teachers and students' questionnaires and document analysis will be discussed in relation to the research questions of this study. Since the major aim of this section is answering the research questions, it seems useful to remind the reader of these questions.

1. To what extent do second year Licence students make grammatical errors in their writing?
2. What are the most common types of grammatical written errors that second year Licence students make?
3. To what extent does second year Licence students' knowledge of the mother tongue affect learners' piece of writing?
4. What other causes, if any, could make second year license students make grammatical errors than the mother tongue interference?

#### **2.3.1. Evaluation of the Frequency of Grammatical Errors in Students' Writing**

The results obtained from the two research instruments reveal that second year Licence students make grammatical errors in their writing productions. On the basis of the analysis of both teachers and students' questionnaire, the responses show that the majority of the teachers agree that students often make grammatical errors, while more than half of students also acknowledge that grammatical errors often appear in their writing. Additionally, in accordance to document analysis, a grammatical error occurs in students' copies at least once in each two sentences.

### 2.3.2. Most Recurrent Errors

After a careful analysis of the results obtained by the three research tools, the findings show that the most frequent errors are tenses, punctuation, subject-verb agreement, and capitalization. They are presented below from the most frequent to the least.

#### 2.3.2.1. Tenses

Both teachers and students agree that the most recurrent grammatical error in students' writing is tenses. In fact, teachers and students' responses reveal that tenses are the most frequent grammatical error in students' writing. Moreover, the results from documents analysis are in accord with those obtained from the questionnaire. Through the analysis of students' copies, numerous errors were found.

Sample tense errors obtained through document analysis are presented in the table below, providing the correct form of each error. Both the erroneous and correct forms are underlined.

Table 30

#### *Examples of Students' Errors in Tenses*

<b>Errors in tenses</b>	<b>Their corrections</b>
*In this way, he will find what he <u>understood</u>	In this way, he will find what he <u>has understood</u>
*Preparation successfully for an exam <u>had</u> three main ways	Preparing successfully for an exam <u>has</u> three main ways
*When he <u>is missing</u> his classes	When he <u>misses</u> his classes
*In our life, exams always <u>determined</u> whether you fail or succeed	In our life, exams always <u>determine</u> whether you fail or succeed

The above table indicates some examples of errors in tenses accompanied with their corrections. From the above examples, it is clear that students face difficulties when to use a tense than the other. In fact, the tenses that are most commonly misused include present simple, present continuous, present perfect, and past simple. Students' errors in tenses can be explained by the incomprehensibility of English tense rules. This, in fact, accords with the study of Hourani (2008) which indicated that students frequently find difficulties to use the appropriate tense.

### 3.3.2.2. Punctuation

The results from teachers and students' questionnaires reveal that punctuation is also one of the most frequent grammatical errors. In addition, the results gathered from analyzing students' copies clearly indicate that students frequently make such kind of errors.

According to the analysis of students' copies, some illustrations are quoted from students essays and presented in the table below as follows:

Table 31 *Examples of Errors in Punctuation*

Errors in punctuation	Their corrections
*By attending <u>classes</u> <u>students</u> will benefit and get more extra information	By attending <u>classes</u> , <u>students</u> will benefit and get more extra information
*By following all these <u>steps</u> <u>you</u> will be successful	By following all these <u>steps</u> , <u>you</u> will be successful
*Good preparation goes through the essential <u>steps</u> , <u>if</u> they are followed, students will pass their exams	Good preparation goes through the essential <u>steps</u> . <u>If</u> they are followed students will pass their exams
*Success is the achievement of a high position in a particular field especially in <u>education</u> , <u>in fact</u> , success is a turning point in our life	Success is the achievement of a high position in a particular field especially in <u>education</u> . <u>In fact</u> , success is a turning point in our life

As it is shown in the above table, students in some cases ignore the use of a comma where necessary as in the first and the second examples, whereas in other cases they use a comma instead of a period like in the third and the fourth examples. This type of punctuation is widely used in students' mother tongue punctuation system. Thus, it can be suggested that this kind of punctuation errors might be due to the influence of students' native language.

### 2.3.2.3. Subject-verb Agreement

Taking into account the data obtained from teachers and students' questionnaire, it is also found that subject-verb agreement is another frequent error in students writing. Three teachers were in accord that students misuse the verbs with their appropriate subjects and vice versa. In addition, the results obtained from document analysis also reveal that students misrelate some verbs with their suitable subjects.

The table below provides some examples of subject-verb agreement identified in the analysis of students' copies

Table 32 *Examples of Students' Errors in Subject-verb Agreement*

<b>Errors in subject-verb agreement</b>	<b>Their corrections</b>
* <u>It keep</u> the anxiety and discomfort away from the students	<u>It keeps</u> the anxiety and discomfort away from the students
* <u>College exams is</u> something difficult	<u>College exams are</u> something difficult
*They will make sure that <u>they has</u> grasped everything	They will make sure that <u>they have</u> grasped everything
* <u>He still need</u> the teachers' explanation	<u>He still needs</u> the teachers' explanation

A possible explanation why students' subject does not agree with the verb that follows is that students overgeneralize a previous learned rule. As indicated in the first and the last

example, students tend to omit the “s” of present simple with third person singular pronouns “he” and “it” since there is no “s” with “I, you, we, and they”. The second and the third examples show that students overgeneralize the rule of singular form of the verbs “to be” and “to have” in the present “is” and “has” to plural subjects. This, in fact, accords with what Brown (2007) said in the literature. He acknowledged that “once learners have begun to acquire parts of the system, more and more intralingual transfer-generalization within the target language-is manifested” (p. 264). In the current study, errors in subject-verb agreement meet what Henning (1979) found in his study that one of the most recurrent errors of students is subject-verb agreement.

#### **2. 3. 2. 4. Capitalization**

Errors of capitalization are found to be the fourth most common type of errors. According to the findings of students' questionnaire, the majority of students denied the fact that they make capitalization errors, however, on the basis of the results obtained by teachers' questionnaire students neglect the use of capitalization. Noticeably, from the analysis of students' copies, it became clear that students in some cases do not capitalize the initial letter of words after the full stop, whereas in other cases students capitalize the initial letters of words after a comma where capitalization was not permissible. Samples of this type of errors derived from document analysis are stated bellow.

Table 33

*Examples of Students' Errors in Capitalization*

<b>Errors in capitalization</b>	<b>Their corrections</b>
* <u>in</u> brief, in order to get good results in the exam	<u>In</u> brief, in order to get good results in the exam
*Students should be ready to answer any question in the exam. <u>also</u> , they should ask the teacher when they do not understand anything	Students should be ready to answer any question in the exam. <u>Also</u> , they should ask the teacher when they do not understand anything
*The first step for preparing for a college exam is attending classes. <u>it</u> is very important to get good marks	The first step for preparing for a college exam is attending classes. <u>It</u> is very important to get good marks

A possible explanation of the neglect of capitalization is that students may be affected by their mother tongue. Since the Arabic letters do not have a capitalization form, students can forget to capitalize the English letters in their writing when necessary.

### **2.3.3. Impact of the Mother Tongue on Students' Writing**

The results from teachers' questionnaire were not in a complete accord with those obtained from both students' questionnaire and document analysis. Whereas teachers hold that the students' mother tongue does not have an impact on English grammar in writing, the findings from students' questionnaire and document analysis clearly show that there is an interference of students' mother tongue on students' grammatical accuracy in their writing.

#### **2.3.3.1. Positive Impact of Arabic**

Along the analysis of the results, it has been found that students' mother tongue does not have a positive impact on students' writing. That is, the majority of students (69%) said that there are no similarities between the English language and students' native language.

Nevertheless, there is a minority of students who believe the existence of similarities between both languages; however, according to them similarities between the two languages negatively affect their application of English grammar rules.

### **2.3.3.2. Negative Impact of Arabic**

Through the analysis of the results obtained from students' questionnaire, it can be said that there is an accord among the majority of students that there is a difference between the mother tongue and English. In fact, 71% of them agree that differences between English language and students' mother tongue lead to difficulties in the application of English grammar rules. Importantly, some students stated:

Differences between my mother tongue and the English language lead to making grammatical errors in writing because they do not have the same structure of phrases, sentences, tenses, and preposition

Another student stated:

I think I make errors because of the differences between the mother tongue and the English language; there are different rules and structures between them. Thus, when I want to translate from my mother tongue, I face some cases that are not applicable in English language.

Additionally, the majority of teachers who considered the mother tongue as an obstacle to English accuracy argued that:

The mother tongue can interfere in EFL learners' writing in case of prepositions. For example, I will see you in my birthday rather than saying (on). Moreover, the verb deprive (from) instead of deprive (of).

The students most of the time build the idea in their mother tongue and then translate it into English.

In answering the third research question, it can be said that students' native language is considered to have a negative impact on students' writing. That is to say, differences between the two languages lead to the appearance of errors in the application of grammar rules. The findings of this study concur with Iamiu's study (2014) in the sense that the cause of students' grammatical errors is the interlingual transfer.

#### **2.3.4. Other Causes of Grammatical Errors in Students' English Writing**

Through the analysis of the findings of this study, it can be easily noticed that there are other causes than the mother tongue that could make students commit grammatical errors in their writing.

##### **2.3.4.1. Intralingual Transfer**

The findings of this study revealed that students make grammatical errors in their writing because of the English language itself. The results obtained from teachers' questionnaire show that 80% of teachers agree that students make errors because of the complexity of the English grammar rules. In addition, more than half of the students (57%) consider English grammar as a difficult task to learn. Furthermore, based on the results obtained from document analysis, learners can overgeneralize some rules as the case of subject verb agreement. In this respect, Brown (2000) acknowledged that in the early stages of learning the language, Interlingual transfer is dominant. However, when learners start to learn new systems of the language, errors that are related to intralingual transfer occur, i.e. generalization within the target language itself.

#### **2.3.4.2. Lack of Practice**

The results of this current study indicate that one of the contributing causes of students' grammatical errors is lack of practice. It is shown through teachers' responses to the questionnaire. This is a clear indication that students' current practice is not really satisfactory, i.e. students do not spend enough time writing whether inside or outside the classroom. In this respect, Murray et al. (2011) stated "difficulties with grammar were sometimes attributed to personal shortcoming, whereas other students attributed them to poor explanation and lack of practice activities" (p. 155).

#### **2.3.4.3. Low Level of Proficiency**

The results from both teachers and document analysis show that students' poor level is one of the contributing causes to students' errors. The majority of teachers (80%) consider their students as poor writers; they make errors because of their weakness in English language. The results from document analysis reveal that students have a poor level. That is, through the analysis of students' copies, a considerable number of grammatical errors have been noticed.

In addition to the causes of students' grammatical errors that have been tackled earlier, it is noteworthy to mention others that have been suggested by teachers such as negligence, skipping classes, misorientation in majoring, demotivation, poor teaching skills, time limit, and lack of reading.

This section has presented the results yielded by the two research instrument used in this study; the questionnaire and document analysis. The results of the current study are discussed in relation to the research questions mentioned earlier.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter takes as its main concern the practical part; it is divided into three sections, namely the research methodology, data analysis, and data discussion. The first section is devoted to research methodology which contains the research paradigm, the setting, the sample, the research instrument, the data collection procedures, the data analysis, and the limitation of the study. Subsequently, the second section has been concerned with the presentation and the description of the results yielded by means of the research instruments; teachers/students' questionnaire and document analysis. Lastly, the third section has dealt with data analysis and discussion, interpreting and summarizing the main findings that are analysed in the second section. Significantly, the results of the current study show that second year students' most recurrent grammatical errors are tenses, punctuation, subject-verb agreement, and capitalization. Furthermore, on the basis of the results of this study, the main causes that prompt students to make such grammatical errors are intralingual transfer, negative transfer of students' mother tongue, lack of practice, and students' poor level in English.

### **2.3.5. Recommendation**

On the basis of what has been found in this research work, some recommendations are made to both teachers and students to significantly eliminate the problem of making grammatical errors in students' writing.

- **Providing Further Explanation to Difficult Grammatical Rules of English**

Some grammatical rules of English are thought to be difficult or complex. Indeed, students might find it difficult to understand even simple rules. Thus, teachers should provide their students with more explanations and attempt to simplify to the maximum the complex rules as well as the simple ones especially with illustrations.

- **Avoiding Word by Word Translation from the Mother Tongue to the Target Language**

The findings of this research revealed that some students translate from their native language to English when they write. Accordingly, the results call for the avoidance of word by word translation; instead students should be encouraged to think directly in English. Furthermore, teachers should draw the attention of their students to the grammatical differences between the mother tongue and the English language. Importantly, they can raise students' awareness of these differences. As a result, students can avoid making errors of mother tongue interference.

- **Creating English Practice Opportunities Inside and Outside the Classroom**

Teachers should create English practice opportunities for their students. Thus, they should supply them with a considerable number of assignments to be done inside or outside the classroom. Hopefully, when students practise the language inside or outside the classroom, they might be exposed to the correct form of English through reading. In this way, they will be more aware of their grammatical errors and will try to improve their writing after knowing their weak points.

- **Helping Students who Have Poor Level**

According to the results of this research work, it is evident that there is a lack of language accuracy. That is, some students are evaluated to have poor language ability. Hence, teachers should help those students who have poor level through encouraging them to write about their preferences. Moreover, teachers are asked to correct their grammatical errors in order to reduce their occurrence in students writing.

- **Attending Classes**

To remedy the problem of errors, students have to attend their classes. In fact, grammar lessons are interrelated. Therefore, skipping one lesson may affect the comprehension of the other, i.e. students should regularly attend their classes to avoid impartial learning of grammatical rules.

### **General Conclusion**

Grammatical accuracy in a foreign/second language is not easily reachable whether in speech or writing. In point of fact, grammar rules entail double effort from the learners in order to be mastered. Despite the fact that English students acquire a considerable knowledge of grammar during their academic years, they still confront difficulties to use the language accurately. Particularly, students repeatedly make grammatical errors in their English writing. The causes that prompt students to commit such errors could be the students' native language or other causes. Accordingly, the main concern of this study is to investigate EFL learners' most common grammatical errors in writing and their causes.

The current research work consists of two main chapters. The first chapter is devoted to the related literature; it is divided into two main sections: the first section focused on an overview about grammar and writing. Subsequently, the second section discussed the concept of error and its theories in second language acquisition. The second chapter, on the other hand, took as its main concern the practical part, which contained three sections. The first section dealt the research methodology used to carry out this study. The second section was devoted to the presentation and the analysis of the results obtained by the two research instruments, namely teachers and students' questionnaire and document analysis. The third section discussed the general results generated by the two research tools in conjunction with the research questions of this research work.

The findings of this study revealed that second year Licence students encounter grammar difficulties. Importantly, they make grammatical errors when writing, mainly in the use of tenses, punctuation, and subject-verb agreement. It should be noted here that articles and prepositions were not found as problematic. Moreover, the findings indicated that students' mother tongue is not the sole source of their grammatical written errors.

Thus, the hypotheses of the present research have been confirmed. Furthermore, students' grammatical errors are due to other influential causes such as intralingual transfer, lack of practice, and low level of proficiency. In addition, some less important causes were suggested by the teachers. They include: negligence, skipping classes, misorientation in majoring, demotivation, poor teaching skills, time limit, and lack of reading. According to the results concluded from this research, some recommendations were made for both teachers and students to eliminate the problem of students' grammatical errors in writing.

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# Appendices

## Appendix A

### Students' Questionnaire

Dear students,

The aim of the present study is to investigate EFL learners' most common grammatical errors in writing and their causes. Your participation in this questionnaire would help us to collect the necessary data for this research work.

For the sake of reliability of the study, answer the questionnaire as sincerely as possible. Your answers are highly appreciated and will be confidentially used in this study.

Thank you very much in advance for your cooperation

**Guidelines :** for each item please tick (✓) the right box or justify your answer whenever it is possible.

#### Section I: Students' most Recurrent Grammatical Written Errors.

1. How do you consider your language ability?

Very good       Good       Average       Below average

2. What do you think of the writing process?      Easy       Difficult

Please, explain why ?

.....  
.....

3. Is error making considered as a stage of language learning?

a. Agree       b. Disagree

4. What do you think of the English grammar?

Easy to learn                       Difficult to learn

5. Do you think that you should master the grammatical rules of the target language before writing?

Agree                       Disagree

6. How often do you commit grammatical errors?

Always    Often    Sometimes    Rarely    Never

7. Which grammatical errors do you mostly make?

- a. Tenses
- b. Subject-verb agreement
- c. Articles
- d. Word order
- e. Capitalisation
- f. Plurality
- g. Prepositions
- h. Punctuation

## Section II: Causes of Grammatical Errors

8. Do you translate from your mother tongue to the target language when you write?

Yes                       No

.....  
.....

9. Do you think that there are similarities of grammar between your mother tongue and the English language ?

Yes

No

10. If your answer is yes, how do similarities affect your application of English grammar rules?

Positively

Negatively

11. Do you think that differences between the mother tongue and the English language lead to making grammatical errors in writing?

Yes

No

Please, explain

.....  
.....

12. Do you speak French as another foreign language?

Yes

No

13. Do you mix English grammar rules with those of French when you write?

Yes

No

Please, Explain

.....  
.....

14. When you write in English do you:

- a. Directly think in English
- b. Think in Arabic first, then, translate into English
- c. Think in another foreign language first, then, translate into English

15. Has it happened to you to learn an erroneous grammatical rule from your teacher?

Yes

No

16. When you pick up an incorrect grammar rule from your teacher do you:

- a. Take it as it is
- b. Ask your teacher again
- c. Check another source

17. What do you suggest to avoid grammatical errors in writing?

.....

.....

## Appendix B

### Teachers' Questionnaire

Dear Teachers,

This study aims at exploring EFL learners' most common grammatical written errors and their causes. You are kindly requested to give us few minutes of your time to complete this questionnaire.

Thank you so much for sharing your ideas and experiences. Your responses are very important and greatly appreciated.

#### Section 1: Students' most Recurrent Grammatical Written Errors

1. How do your students consider writing?

An easy task       A difficult task

2. How would you evaluate your students?

a. Non-writers

b. Poor writers

c. Average writers

c. Good writers

d. Very good writers

3. In case your answer is poor writers what is the language area that they should be competent at?

- a. Grammar
- b. Vocabulary
- c. Spelling

4. How often do your students commit grammatical errors in their writing?

Always  often  sometimes  rarely

5. What are the most common grammatical errors noticed in your students' writing ?

- a. Tenses
- b. Subject-verb agreement
- c. Articles
- d. Word order
- e. Capitalisation
- f. Prepositions
- g. Plurality
- h. Punctuation

**Section Two: Causes of Students' Grammatical Errors**

6. Do you think that the mother tongue interference (negative transfer) is a cause for grammatical errors in EFL learners' writing?

Yes  No

Please, explain

.....

.....

7. Do you think that learners make errors because of the complexity of English grammar rules?

Yes  No

8. Do you think that the grammar rules of a prior learned foreign language (French) are problematic to application of correct English grammar rules?

Yes  No

If your answer is yes, please explain.

.....  
.....

9. What other causes do you suggest of grammatical errors in students' writing?

.....  
.....

## Résumé

Les apprenants de la langue anglaise font face à de nombreuses difficultés dans leur apprentissage ; surtout en ce qui concerne leurs compétences d'écriture, en fait, beaucoup peuvent commettre des erreurs en écrivant. Cette étude est une analyse des fautes grammaticales les plus courantes chez les apprenants de la langue anglaise, mais aussi de leurs causes. L'objectif de cette étude est d'explorer les erreurs grammaticales les plus récurrentes faites par les étudiants de deuxième année licence, de l'université de Mohamed Sadik Ben Yahia à Jijel, et leurs impacts sur les productions écrites. Deux questionnaires ont été adressés à 100 étudiants de deuxième année, et à 5 enseignants spécialisés dans l'enseignement des cours d'écriture. En outre, 31 essais des étudiants de deuxième année ont été analysés pour détecter les erreurs les plus fréquentes. D'après les résultats globaux obtenus à partir des deux instruments de recherche, à savoir l'analyse des questionnaires et des documents, on a constaté que la majorité de fautes commises par les étudiants sont ceux de : la conjugaison, la ponctuation, l'accord du participe passé et la majuscule. De plus, les résultats de ce travail de recherche ont prouvé que le transfert intralingue, l'influence de la langue maternelle de l'étudiant, le manque de pratique, et l'incompétence sont les causes majeures derrière les fautes grammaticales des étudiants. Par ailleurs, il existe des causes moins importantes des erreurs grammaticales des étudiants, telles que : la négligence, l'absence fréquentes pendant les cours, la mauvaise orientation, la démotivation, les compétences pédagogiques médiocres, le manque de temps et de la lecture.

## ملخص

يواجه متعلمي اللغة الإنجليزية العديد من الصعوبات في تعلم اللغة الإنجليزية و خاصة فيما يتعلق بمهارة الكتابة. و في الواقع قد يرتكبون العديد من الأخطاء في كتاباتهم. هذه الدراسة هي تحقيق في الأخطاء النحوية المكتوبة الأكثر شيوعا لمتعلمي اللغة الإنجليزية و أسبابها في إنتاجهم الكتابي بجامعة محمد الصديق بن يحيى، جيبل. و قد تم توجيه استبيانين إلى مئة طالب يدرسون في السنة الثانية و خمسة أساتذة متخصصين في تدريس حصص التعبير الكتابي. و بالإضافة إلى ذلك قد تم تحليل واحد و ثلاثون مقالا لطلبة السنة الثانية لمعرفة الأخطاء الأكثر شيوعا في كتاباتهم. و استنادا إلى النتائج الإجمالية المتحصل عليها بواسطة وسيلتي البحث و هما الاستبيان و تحليل الوثائق، وجد أن الأخطاء النحوية الأكثر شيوعا عند الطلبة هي زمن تصريف الأفعال، علامات الوقف و الوصل، توافق الاسم و الفعل، و كتابة الحرف الأول من الكلمة بحجم كبير. و زيادة على ذلك أظهرت نتائج هذا البحث أن الأخطاء البينية، النقل السلبي من اللغة الأم للطلبة، نقص الممارسة و ضعف مستوى الكفاءة هي الأسباب الرئيسية وراء أخطاء الطلبة النحوية. و علاوة على ذلك هناك أسباب أخرى أقل تأثيرا على الأخطاء النحوية للطلبة مثل الإهمال، الغياب عن الحصص، سوء التوجيه في التخصص، عدم التحفيز، ضعف مهارات التدريس، محدودية الوقت، و نقص المطالعة.