An Analysis of Written Grammatical Errors of Tunisian Learners of English in EFL Context

Dr Sondes Hamdi

Assistant Professor of Linguistics

ISEAH institute of Kef – Tunisia

sondeshamdi@yahoo.fr

Abstract

This study investigated grammatical errors in a corpus of 18 essays written by 18 participants. The participants were third-year Tunisian students who were studying business English at the ISEAH Institute of Kef in Tunisia. They had experienced approximately the same number of years of education through primary, secondary and university education in Tunisia. All of the participants came from non-English speaking backgrounds and seldom communicated in English outside the school. The instrument used for this study was participants' written essays. All of the grammatical errors in the essays were identified and classified into various categorizations. The results of the study show that the most pervasive errors committed by the participants were tenses, morphology, prepositions, articles, verbs, and relative pronouns. This study has shed light on the process through which students internalize the grammatical rules of English as a target language. Such a study of language learning difficulties is useful to teachers because it tells about frequent "trouble-spots" in language learning which can be employed in the preparation of efficient teaching materials.

Keywords: Error analysis, grammar, English, Arabic, interference, acquisition.

1. Introduction

In the middle of the 20th century, when Behaviorism and Structuralism were popular, Contrastive Analysis (CA) started to gain credence in language teaching. It was conceived of as providing solutions to language teaching problems. As a result, several pedagogically-oriented contrastive studies purporting to analyze learners' errors began to appear. Brown (2000, p. 208) asserts that "the principal barrier to the second language system is the interference of the first language system with the second language system." Lado (1957), on the other hand, states that "the student who comes in contact with a foreign language will find some features of it quite easy and others extremely difficult. Those elements that are similar to his language will be simple for him, and those elements that are difficult will be difficult."

Error Analysis (EA) is a type of linguistic analysis that is concerned with the errors learners make. It consists of a comparison between the errors made in the Target Language (TL) and that Target Language itself. Pit Corder is considered to be the forerunner of EA. Errors used to be perceived as "flaws" that should be eliminated. Indeed, in the 1950s, the behaviourist learning theory described language learning as habit formation and explained why the second language (L2) learners made errors. According to Behaviourism, old habits could either hamper or facilitate forming new habits. That is why errors are unacceptable. Corder gave a different perception of these errors by considering them as "important in and of themselves" because errors shed light on the learning process. In the same vein, Gass and Selinker (1994) define errors as "red flags" that provide evidence of the learners' knowledge of the second language. Researchers are concerned with errors because they reflect and reveal the strategies that people use to acquire a language (Richards, 1974).

Corder explains the significance of learners' errors at three different levels. Errors tell the teacher how well the learner has progressed, and consequently what remains for him to learn. Second, they provide researcher with evidence of the process through which language is learned and acquired, what strategies and procedures the learner is using in his acquisition of the language. Thirdly, they are important to the learner himself because we can consider the making of errors to be a tool the learner uses in order to learn. Thus, teachers benefit from ER because errors provide feedback; they inform teachers about the effectiveness of their teaching materials and their teaching techniques.

According to the literature, errors can be interlingual or intralingual. Interlingual errors are attributable to the native language (NL). They occur when the learner's L1 habits (patterns

and systems) interfere and prevent them from acquiring patterns in the TL (Corder, 1971). In other words, interlingual errors are the result of a negative transfer from the mother tongue (L1) to the TL. To put it differently, interlingual errors are "those instances of deviation from the norms of either language which occur in the speech of bilinguals as a result of their familiarity with more than one language" (Weinreich, 1953, p.1). Intralingual errors, on the other hand, are those due to the language being learned (i.e. the TL). According to Richards (1970, p. 6) "they are items produced by the learner which reflect not the structure of the mother tongue but generalizations based on partial exposure to the target language."

However, a distinction should be drawn between "errors" and "mistakes." According to the literature, a mistake refers to a performance error, it is a failure to make use of a known system. Individuals make mistakes in both native and second language situations. Native speakers can recognize and correct such mistakes which are not the result of a deficiency in competence, but the result of imperfection in the process of producing speech due to lack of attention, slips of memory, anxiety, etc (Brown, 1987). Errors, on the other hand, are deviances that are due to deficient competence. Thus, they tend to be systematic and are not self-correctable (Corder, 1973).

Interesting enough, investigating errors has both diagnostic and prognostic aspects. It is diagnostic because it discloses the learners' state of the language at a certain level during the learning process It is prognostic because it can inform course organizers to restructure language learning materials in the light of the learners' current problems (Corder, 1967).

The objective of this paper is to assess the grammatical errors made by Tunisian third-year students of English as a foreign language at the ISEAH Institute of Kef (Tunisia). It purports to identify and categorize Tunisian students' grammatical errors in English essays in order to find out the sources of those errors and a way of remediation.

This paper comprises four main sections. The first section sketches a few significant studies on error analysis. The second section provides information about the methodology, i.e. participants and procedure for data collection. The third section identifies and categorizes the subjects' grammatical errors. The final section sheds light on the pedagogical implications of EA for syllabus designers and EFL teachers.

2. Literature review

This section offers a survey of a few significant studies conducted on error analysis. Most studies on error analysis purport to pinpoint the errors committed by EFL and ESL learners of English. For instance, Darus and Subramaniam's study (2009) aimed at

investigating the types of errors made by four-year students in their written work. The study sought to answer the following research question: What are the six most common errors that students make in their essays?. The corpus was 72 essays written by 72 participants. The participants were form four Malay students who were studying at a secondary school in Malaysia; 37 male and 35 female. They had experienced approximately the same number of years of education through primary and secondary education in Malaysia. All of the participants came from non-English speaking background and hardly communicated in English outside the school. All of the errors in the essays were identified and classified into various categorizations. The results of the study showed that six most common errors committed by the participants were singular/plural form, verb tense, word choice, preposition, subject-verb agreement and word order.

In his article, Chan (2004) presented evidence of syntactic transfer from Chinese to English in the light of data obtained from 710 Hong Kong Chinese ESL learners at different proficiency levels. The focus of the study was on five error types: (a) lack of control of copula (b) incorrect placement of adverbs (c) problem in using the « there be » structure to express the existential function (d) failure to use the relative clause and (e) confusion in verb transitivity. The result showed that many Chinese ESL learners in Hong Kong tended to think in Chinese first before they wrote in English.

Abushiba, El-Omri and Tobat (2011) investigated and classified the grammatical errors in the writings of 62 students of the Department of English Literature and Translation at Alzaytoonah Private University of Jordan. The students enrolled in a paragraph writing course in the first semester of the academic year 2009/2010. These errors were first classified into six major categories and then they were divided into subcategories. It was observed that the most problematic category was prepositions, which comprised 26% of the total errors. The following most problematic areas were respectively: morphological errors, articles, verbs, active and passive and tenses.

Sarfraz (2011) examined the errors made in a corpus of fifty English essays. The participants were fifty undergraduate Pakistani students. They were non-native speakers of English. The instrument used was the participants' essays in English. The researcher followed Rod Ellis's (1994) procedural analysis of errors : collection of errors, identification of errors, description of errors, explanation of errors, and evaluation of errors in analyzing fifty English essays. The results showed that the number of interlingual errors committed by the participants was higher than the number of intralingual errors.

Darus and Ching (2009) investigated the most common errors in essays written in English by 70 form one Chinese students in a public school in Perak in Malaysia. For all of these students, Chinese was their first language (L1). Using an error classification scheme and Markin 3.1 software, 70 essays were analyzed and categorized into 18 types of errors. The results of the analysis show that four most common errors were mechanics, tenses, preposition, and subject-verb agreement. In these written essays, interlingual errors due to L1 interference were clear. Intralingual transfer of Malay and developmental errors were also observed in their writing. This study suggests that teachers need to emphasize on how certain concepts are handled in English, Malay and Chinese in order to make the students aware of the differences in the structure of English, Malay and their L1.

These studies provide an insight into language learning problems which occur when L2 learners internalize the rules of target language (TL). The errors identified serve as a useful guide for English teachers to design an effective curriculum for teaching and learning of English as a second language.

3. Methodology

Participants

Eighteen third-year students of English at the department of Business English at the ISEAH Institute of Kef in the Northwest of Tunisia participated in this study. All of them had their education in national schools, in which Standard Arabic and French were the media of instruction. They all started learning French in primary school at the age of 7 and Standard Arabic at the age of 6. English was taught as an additional subject within the school curriculum. All of the participants have experienced approximately the same number of 16 years of education through the primary, secondary and university educational system. All of them speak Arabic at home and with friends.

Procedures

The data was collected at the ISEAH Institute in kef in a classroom. Before the data collection, the participants filled out a brief background questionnaire. Each participant was asked to write on the following topic: "what are your future plans?" The compositions were required to be written according to the following criteria:

1) It should consist of 200-250 words.
2) They should pay attention to the unity, coherence, cohesion, grammar, vocabulary and organization of the written work.

The compositions were analyzed and classified by the researcher and then copies of the same compositions were submitted to two other raters who were English teachers. They were asked to identify the grammatical errors.

4. Data analysis and results

Table (1) shows the analysis of grammatical errors based on type of errors, number of errors, and percentage of errors committed by the participants:

Table 1: Analysis of Grammatical Errors

Type of errors	Number of errors	Percentage
Tense	28	33,33%
Morphology	21	25%
Prepositions	17	20,23%
Articles	13	15,47%
Verbs	3	3,57%
Relative pronouns	2	2,38%
Total	**84**	**100%**

The results show that the most common grammatical errors that the participants made were in tense (33,33 %), morphology (25%), prepositions (20,23 %), followed by articles (15,47 %), verbs (3,57 %), and relative pronouns (2,38%). These results are graphically represented in Figure 1:

Figure 1: Analysis of Grammatical Errors
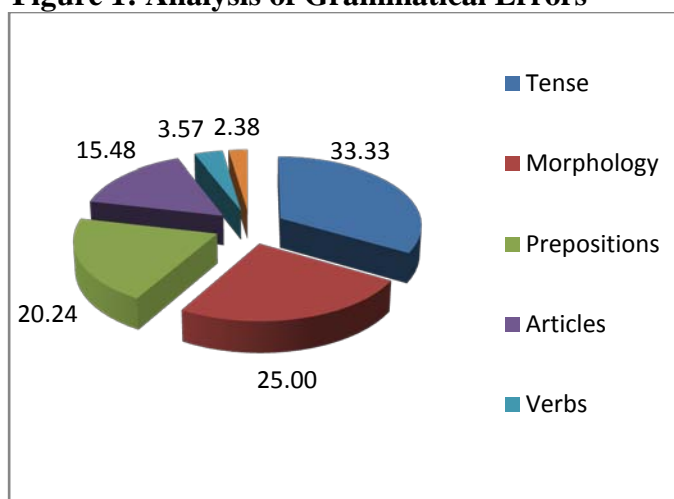
Each type of error will receive a detailed analysis.

Prepositions

This category constitutes a problematic area for the subjects. Most of the subjects omitted or misused some prepositions. This is no surprise since, as stated by O'Dowd (1998,

p. 6), "non-native speakers of English find prepositions among the most difficult forms that they have to master in learning the English language." These errors are summarized in Table (2) as follows:

Table 2: Errors of Prepositions

Types of errors	Number
Misuse of prepositions	12
Omission of prepositions	3
Addition of prepositions	2
Total	**17**

EFL learners are not sure of the semantic scope of certain prepositions, i.e. they do not know whether the preposition IN, for example, or the prepositions ON and AT should be used in a given context. This often follows from interference from their native language where the mental representation of spatial relations in a given scene is different from the representation in English, and therefore, it requires a different preposition. In Arabic, for example, one says "A bird is ON the tree" because the tree is not conceptualized as a container but as a supporting surface. In English, however, it is the reposition IN which is used in this context. Some omissions or misuse of prepositions are due to a negative transfer from Arabic and French; others derive from the Target Language itself. For instance, examples (1) – (11) are clear interlingual errors of prepositions:

1) **In** this age (instead of **at**)
2) **In** the same time (in instead of **at**)
3) I am so optimistic **for** my future (for instead of **about**)
4) I look **to** life from two sights (to instead of **at**)
5) I want to satisfy God **through** going to pilgrimage (through instead of **by**)
6) I hope to married **with** my fiancé (with instead of **to**)
7) I'm so proud **with** it (with instead of **of**)
8) I will search **for** the others (**for** is added)
9) **( )** Exemple, I would like to be more enthusiastic (**For** is omitted)
10) I prefer **for** my God to go to the pilgrimage
11) To provide them **for** training (for instead of **with**)

In examples (1) and (2), the subjects have literally translated the Arabic equivalent "fi haadha al-sin" (in this age) and "fin nafs al-waqt" (in the same time). They, therefore, used the preposition IN instead of AT. Example (3) is a case of a negative transfer from French. The French equivalent of "I am optimistic about the future" is "je suis optimiste **pour** le future" (I am optimistic **about** the future) wherein the preposition POUR (for) is used with the adjective "optimiste" (optimistic). The use of the preposition TO instead of AT in example (4) can be attributed to a negative transfer from Arabic wherein the preposition TO is used with the verb "nadhara" (to look) as in "andhuru **ila** al-hayaat" (I look **to** life). In

example (9), the preposition FOR was omitted because in Arabic the phrase "for example" requires no preposition "mathalan" (exemple).

The subjects made errors of prepositions which can be attributed to a deficiency of knowledge due to a lack of mastering the necessary rules of prepositional semantics in English. This is illustrated by examples (12) - (16):

(12) All **over** the world need English (addition of the preposition **over**)
(13) I invest **( )** a project in my country (omission of the preposition **in**)
(14) I plan to travel **( )** different places (omission of the preposition **to**)
(15**) In** the other hand (In instead of **on**)
(16) I am so care **about** my future (about instead of **with**)

In the examples above, we cannot argue that the subjects' mother tongue or French were the sources of these prepositional errors simply because in French and Arabic, prepositions other than those used by the subjects are employed. The subjects did not seem to fully master the use of the appropriate prepositions with certain verbs and adjectives in English. This explains the omissions, misuse and additions of prepositions in their writings.

Morphological errors
This category constitutes 25 % of the total errors and the number of errors is 21. Table (3) indicates the classification of the morphological errors:

Table 3: Morphological Errors

Types of errors	Number of errors
Wrong word formation	10
Omission of plural "s"	6
Misuse and addition of the plural ending "s"	5
Total	**21**

Some participants did not know that the plural form using the suffix 's' must be applied to the countable plural noun. A possible reason for the failure to construct plural noun forms is probably because in Arabic, there is no plural marker for a noun as shown in examples (17)-(19):

(17) To complete **my study**
(18) I like to finish **my study**
(19) I finished **my study**

Some participants have already hypothesized that English nouns have plural and singular forms. However, they were not sure when they should apply the plural form. When the subject was in the singular form they applied the plural form to the noun as shown in the examples (20) - (25):

(20) My **plans** is to have a job
(21) My future **plans** is very important

(22) The future **plans** depends on a good strategy
(23) I have not a big **dreams** or a large **plans**.
(24) My future **plans** is to complete my route
(25) I can help **peoples**

Other morphological errors show that the subjects have problems with word formation in English. This problem is reflected in examples (26) - (35):

(26)   I live in **jobless**
(27)   **Unfortnally**
(28)   **Basicly**
(29)   I would like to be more **tolerent**
(30)   I have no **exactly** plans
(31)   I live in **harmony** life
(32)   When I **expansion** to be a big a company
(33)   To became a business **women**
(34)   When I was a business **women**
(35)   Through **enrolled** in schools

The subjects had problems adding the appropriate affixes to the roots. It is no surprise to find these errors common in the subjects' essays since the morphological rules of English are different from the rules inherent in their L1. Babalola & Akande (2002) contend that most ESL learners have problems in the acquisition of English morphology because of the inconsistency inherent in English language. This inconsistency is generated by the polysystemic nature of English. For instance, if the plural of "knife" is "knives," why should not the plural of "chief" be "*chieves"? Similarly, if the plural of box is boxes, why is *oxes not the plural of ox? This also applies to the formation of past tense in English. "cooked" is the past of cook but "*writed" is not the past of the verb "write." This inconsistency has a serious implication in the learning of English by ESL learners, who find it difficult to master all the morphological rules along with their exceptions in English grammar.

As put forth earlier, some important causes of morphological errors are the overgeneralization and the misapplication of rules. In most cases, students do overgeneralise or misapply certain morphological rules. For instance, a student who forms *peoples based on his knowledge that the affix "s" could be added to any noun to mark plurality overgeneralises. Overgeneralization and misapplication of rules are usually the aftermath of the ignorance of certain restrictions. Another source of morphological errors pinpointed is the interference factor. It was observed that most errors were made as a result of L1 interference.

Verb Tenses

Verb tenses were the most problematic area of English grammar for the subjects. The number of errors in the use of tenses was 28, which represents 33,33 % of the total errors. These errors are subdivided into nine sub-categories as stated in Table 4 below:

Table 4: Errors of Tenses

Types of errors	Number
Misuse of subject/Verb agreement	11
Misuse of tenses after modals	4
Simple past instead of infinitive	3
Simple present instead of future	2
Simple past instead of simple present	2
Simple past instead of gerund after prepositions	2
Simple past instead of present perfect	2
Simple past instead of future	1
Nouns instead of infinitive	1
Total	**28**

As Table (4) shows, tenses represent a learning difficulty for these subjects. Wrong application of verb tenses can be seen when the participants did not apply the correct tense to the verb in the sentences. Some errors can be attributed to interference from their L1. For instance, the errors in examples (36) – (37) may be due to the absence of the present perfect tense in Arabic. The subjects, thus, tended to use the simple past instead of the present perfect.

(36) My dream is to marry the girl **I loved**
(37) To visit many country that **I never visited**

Another error tended to be pervasive in the subjects' essays was related to subject/verb agreement in simple present as shown in examples (38) - (45):

(38) To make a system that **help**
(39) All over the world **need** English
(40) The future plans **depends** on strategy
(41) I hope to my God **help** me to achieve your dreams…**to became** a business women
(42) All what he **need**
(43) It **allow**
(44) There **isn't** many **jobs**
(45) My **plans is** to have a job

It can be assumed that some of these errors are due to interference from L1 since, unlike English, no "s" affix is added to verbs in Arabic when occurring with specific personal pronouns. Some of the students were not aware of the different rules of tense application. In other words, the subjects did not seem to fully master the appropriate syntactic rules of verb

tenses in English. They had problems with the use of gerund after prepositions, the use of bare infinitive after modals, the use of the simple present tense when the context is in the present, and the use of simple present to refer to actions in the future. These errors are illustrated by examples (46)-(60) below:

(46) We will **continuing** our life (misuse of tenses after modals)
(47) I will **decided** (misuse of tenses after modals)
(48) By **finished** the Master (Simple past instead of gerund)
(49) When I finished education (simple past instead of simple present)
(50) My future plans **is** very interesting (misuse of subject/verb agreement)
(51) But I **could** not forget my main aim (simple past instead of simple present)
(52) After 17 years, I **return** to study (simple present instead of future)
(53) In the future my plan is **continued** my study (simple past instead of infinitive)
(54) They earned a lot of money to **continued** and **finished** my study (simple past instead of infinitive)
(55) When I was a business women, I will **helped** any needy person (misuse of tenses after modals)
(56) I hope Tunisia **became** the famous (simple past instead of future)
(57) After **finished** I plan to marriage (simple past instead of gerund)
(58) My future plans **is** to complete my route (misuse of subject/verb agreement)
(59) I hope to **married** with my fiancé (simple past instead of infinitive)
(60) Everything will **comes** (simple present instead of bare infinitive)

The past tense used in example (49) is not relevant to the context given because the context required a verb to be written in the simple present to refer to the future. This information revealed that the different tense rules were not completely mastered by the learners, but they have already learned that these tense forms exist in English grammar. Darus & Ching (2009) contend that it is not surprising that L2 learners face problems with tenses since English notion of tense is somewhat confusing to the L2 learners who regard time as a separate entity by itself.

Articles
Besides the obove errors, participants had problems in using articles in English. Nearly 15,5 % of the total errors are in this category. The number of errors is 13 as stated in Table (5):

Table 5: Errors of Articles

Types of errors	Number
Omission of "a/an"	6
Omission of "the"	3
Addition of "a/an"	3
Addition of "the"	1
Total	**13**

Table (5) shows that the subjects had problems with the use of articles in English. This is not surprising since their L1 has different rules of article use. As Raehan, Chodorow & Leacock (2006, p. 123) state "mastering the English articles is one of the most daunting tasks facing the non-native speakers - especially when L1 does not have articles." Some students omitted the articles "a" and "the." Other subjects wrongly added them. This is reflected in examples (61) - (73):

(61) In ( ) British embassy (omission of the article "the")
(62) In ( ) second dream (omission of the article "the")
(63) Charity for ( ) poor (omission of the article "the")
(64) Through **the** investment (addition of the article "the")
(65) Each one of them has ( ) value in his life (omission of the article "a")
(66) I would like to work in ( ) other country (omission of the article "an")
(67) ( ) Company need a good manager (omission of the article "a")
(68) I hope to carry on ( ) professional Master (omission of the article "a")
(69) The future plans depends on ( ) good strategy (omission of the article "a")
(70) With ( ) good salary (omission of the article "a")
(71) I would like to need **an** intelligent employees (addition of the article "an")
(72) **An**other types (addition of the article "an")
(73) To have **a** good relations (addition of the article "a")

It is not easy for EFL learners to fully grasp the subtle usages of English articles. Indeed, some linguists (Raehan, Chodorow & Leacock, 2006) contend that the distribution of articles in English is complex mainly because it showcases the interaction of many "heterogeneous factors." Some are lexical, such as the countability of the head noun in the NP, which determines the choice of the indefinite article "a" (*a knowledge). Moreover, this property of countability is not "dichotomous." Countable nouns in English can be fully countable (e.g., boy) at one extreme, strongly countable (cake), weakly countable (beer), and uncountable (knowledge) at the other extreme.

Verbs

Compilation and categorization of errors in this study show that errors in verbs account for 3,57% of the total number of errors in the corpus which is 84 errors. These errors fall into two sub-categories as shown in Table (6):

Table 6: Errors of Verbs

Types of errors	Number of errors
Omission of the verb "do"	2
Misuse of verbs	1
Total	**3**

Wrong application of the negative form can be seen when the subjects did not apply the correct negative form to the verb in the sentences. It can be assumed that these participants

were not aware of the different rules for negative applications in English as reflected in the two examples below:

(74) They **haven't** to eat (omission of the auxiliary "do")
(75) They **haven't** any solution (omission of the auxiliary "do")

The use of the negative "not" with the verbs, however, showed that the participants had already learned that the negative form requires the use of "not." This shows that they acknowledged the 'not' form but they did not fully master the complete rules of negation in English, such as the use of the auxiliary "do."

Example (76) below is another error observed in the data. It is an obvious transfer from French wherein the phrase "passer l'examen" is used to mean "to sit for an exam."

(76) I'll **pass** the exam

The subject showed confusion for the use of the correct verb simply because "passer" and "pass" are "faux amis." Tenjoh-Okwen (1977) corroborates that "faux amis" represent a problematic area for francophone learners of English. They are shown to be the cause of about fifty percent of the lexical errors analyzed in his study.

Relative pronouns

Participants had problems with relative pronouns in English. This is reflected in Table (7):

Table 7: Errors of Relative Pronouns

Types of errors	Number of errors
Misuse of relative pronouns	2
Total	**2**

As Table (7) shows, there are two grammatical errors related to relative pronouns in the data. Two subjects find it confusing the choice of the appropriate relative pronouns. This is reflected in examples (77) - (78) below:

(77) All **what** he need (what instead of that)
(78) Employees **which** have the good capacity (which instead of who)

The difficulty faced by the subjects in choosing the correct relative pronouns can be explained by the divergence of rules of relative pronouns in English and their L1. Relative clauses represent a learning problem for L2 learners of English whose L1 has a different linguistic system. For instance, Nakamori (2002, p. 29) states that "relative clauses are one of the most difficult grammar targets for Japanese learners of English to master, and for Japanese teachers to teach." It can be argued that the same difficulty is faced by the Tunisian

learners of English given the divergence of linguistic systems between their native language, i.e. Arabic, and their target language, i.e. English.

The results of error analysis presented in this study can be summarized in Table (8) as follows:

Table 8: Common Grammatical Errors

Definition and grammatical error classification	Identification of errors	Correct sentences
1) **Prepositions** When a preposition is misused, omitted or added	1) **In** this age 2) **Example**, I would like to be more enthusiastic 3) I'll search the others	1) **At** this age. 2) **For** example, I'd like to be more enthusiastic 3) I'll search **for** the others
2) **Morphology** Omission of plural "s" Misuse and addition of the plural ending "s" Wrong word formation	1) I like to finish my **study** 2) I can help **peoples** 3) Unfortally	1) I like to finish my **studies** 2) I can help **people** 3) **Unfortunately**
3) **Verb tenses** Misuse of verb tenses and misuse of subject/verb agreement	1) To visit many country that I never **visited** 2) To make a system that **help** 3) The future plans **depends** on strategy.	1) To visit many countries that I **have never visited** 2) To make a system that **helps**. 3) The future plans **depend** on strategies.
4) **Articles** Omission or addition of "the" Omission or addition of "a" and "an"	1) To have **a** good relations 2) Charity for **( )** poor 3) **( )** Company need a good manager	1) To have good relationships 2) Charity for **the** poor 3) **A** company needs a good manager
5) **Verbs** Omission of the verb "do" and confusion for verb choice.	1) They **haven't** to eat 2) They **haven't** any solution 3) I'll **pass** the exam	1) They **don't** have anything to eat 2) They **don't** have any solution 3) I'll **sit for** the exam
6)**Relative pronouns** Misuse of relative pronouns	1)All **what** he need 2)Employees **which** have the good capacity	1) All **that** he needs 2) Employees **who** have the good capacity

5. Pedagogical implications

This section will highlight the pedagogical implications of error analysis for EFL teachers and syllabus designers. This study shows that Tunisian students of English have problems with basic grammatical rules in English. Textbooks should address these problems

by providing the appropriate strategies to foster the learning process. For instance, this study shows that Tunisian learners have problems with prepositions. One of the reasons of these persistent problems in learning and teaching prepositions efficiently could be that popular grammar books fail to provide thorough semantic analyses of prepositions based on a unified description of the underlying system of the prepositions' senses, which would help explain the prepositions' various applications in different cognitive domains, such as space, time and abstraction. In other words, popular grammar books do not offer a satisfactory explanation of why one and the same preposition IN, for instance, can be used with complements belonging to different domains of human cognition, as shown by the uses in (79)-(81):

> **(79)** Here is a little pie **IN France** (Dickens, 1975, p.19) (Spatial domain)
> **(80)** You were not born **IN sinfulness** (Dickens, 1975, p. 19) (Abstract domain)
> **(81)** Staying out late **IN the evenings** did me no good (Slager, 1975, p. 35) (Temporal domain).

The prepositional analyses provided by grammar books are based on the generative and the descriptive grammar approaches. Generative and descriptive accounts of prepositions did little to define prepositions adequately, which is due essentially to the assumptions adopted in these approaches. For example, generative grammarians (Letournau, 2001; Klammer & Schultz, 1996) consider prepositions as semantically empty items whose role consists in merely relating elements in a sentence. Descriptive grammarians (Quirk, 1972; Lindskvist, 1972, 1976, 1978) adopt a purely descriptive approach which consists in providing various classifications of different prepositional uses, and they focus on the prepositions' syntactic functions.

Rudzka-Ostyn (1985) has raised the problem of the lack of adequate analyses of prepositions when talking about PV (phrasal verbs) analyses saying the following:

> The textbooks available are poor learning tools: the focus in these textbooks is often more on the grammatical frames than on the meanings….As for the dictionaries on the market, by their arrangement –an alphabetical list of verbs with their particles-they do not lead to any real insight into the meanings of the particles. PVs are also often called 'idiomatic expressions' and can thus only be explained in an atomized way (p. 1).

Since syllabus design of an English teaching course is a very important component of teaching-learning process (Erdogan, 2005), supplemental materials should be constructed. Thus, analysis of learners' errors, as done in this study, can help identify learners' linguistic difficulties and pinpoint their needs at a particular stage of language learning.

This study has implications for language teachers. EFL teachers should be trained to teach English as a foreign language. They should be aware of the different techniques and methods that can be used in classroom to implement the syllabus efficiently.

Teachers can benefit from the findings of error analysis in different ways. Errors tell the teacher how much learners have progressed and what remains for them to learn. Errors provide teachers with feedback about their teaching techniques and method. In other words, errors tell the teacher how efficient he is in teaching and what changes he has to make to foster the learners' performance. In general, the teacher's job is to point out when something has gone wrong and see whether the student can correct himself. The teacher should not only present the data repeatedly and go through the same set of drills and exercises, but also comprehend the sources of the errors so that he can remedy them and help the learner discover the relevant rules.

6. Conclusion

The objective of this paper was to analyze the grammatical errors made by third-year students of English as a foreign language at the ISEAH Institute in Kef (Tunisia). It attempted to identify, describe, categorize Tunisian students' grammatical errors in English essays in order to find out the sources of those errors and a way of remediation. The results suggest that Tunisian students of English face problems with basic grammatical rules in English, such as articles, prepositions, tenses, verbs, relative pronouns, and morphology. It is observed that the category that includes the largest number of errors is verb tenses, which comprises 33,33% of the total errors. The following most problematic areas are respectively: morphological errors, prepositions, articles, verbs, and relative pronouns. It was argued in this paper that textbooks and EFL teachers should address these problems in order to foster the learning process.

This study has shed light on the process through which EFL learners internalize the grammatical rules of English as a target language. It further shows that EA can help teachers pinpoint in a systematic way the common language difficulties students meet, so that they can work on these types of errors. Such an insight into language learning problems is useful to teachers because it tells about common «trouble-spots » in language learning which can be used in the preparation of efficient teaching materials.

It is worth-noting, however, that this study is contributive to EFL research in the Tunisian context since, to the best of our knowledge, no study has provided a systematic analysis of the grammatical errors committed by the English learners at the ISEAH in Kef.

Bibliography

Abushihab, I., El-Omri. A. H., & Tobat M. (2011). An analysis of written grammatical errors of Arab learners of English as a foreign language at Alzaytoonah private university of Jordan. *European Journal of Social Sciences, 20,* 543-552.

Babalola, E. T. & Akande, A. T. (2002). Some linguistic problems of Yoruba learners of English in Nigeria. *ES: Revista de Filologia Inglesa 24,* 245-257.

Brown, C. (2000). The interrelation between speech perception and phonological acquisition from infant to adult. Great Britain: Blackwell Publishers Limited.

Brown (1987). *Principles of language learning and teaching*. Prentice Hall Regents.

Chan, A.Y.W. (2004). Syntactic transfer: Evidence from the interlanguage of Hong Kong Chinese ESL learners. *Modern Language Journal, 88*, 56-74.

Corder, S. P. (1967). The significance of learners' errors. *International Review of Applied Linguistics*, *5(4),* 161-169.

Corder, S. P. (1973). *Introducing applied linguistics*. Harmondsworth: Penguin Education

Corder, S.P. (1971). Idiosyncratic errors and error analysis. *IRAL, 9,2*, 147-159.

Darus., S & Subramaniam K. (2009). Error analysis of written English essays of secondary school students in Malaysia: A case study. *European Journal of Social Sciences, 8,* 483-495.

Darus., S & Ching K. H. (2009). Common errors in written English essays of form one Chinese students: A case study. *European Journal of Social Sciences, 10,* 242-253.

Dickens, C. (1975). *Bleak house*. London: Oxford University Press.

Ellis, R. (1996).*The Study of second language acquisition.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Ellis, R. (1985). *Understanding second language Acquisition*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Erdogan, V. (2005). Contribution of error analysis to foreign language teaching. *Mersin University Journal of the Faculty of Education, 1,* 261-270.

Gass, S. M., & Selinker L. (1994). *Second language acquisition.* Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Klammer, T. P., & Schultz, M. R. (1996). *Analyzing English grammar*. MA: Allyn and Bacon.

Lado, R. (1957). *Linguistics cross cultures: Applied linguistics for language teachers.* Michigan: University of Michigan.

Letourneau, M. S. (2001). *English grammar*. Philadelphia : Harcourt College Publishers.

Lindkvist, K. G. (1972). The local sense of the prepositions over, above, and across. *Studies in the present day English.* Stockholm: Wiskel.

…..(1976). *A comprehensive study of conceptions of locality in English prepositions*. Stockhom: Wiskel.

….. (1978). *At versus ON, IN, BY. On the early history of spatial at*. Sweden: Stockhom.

Nakamori, T. (2002). Teaching relative clauses: How to handle a bitter lemon for Japanese learners and English teaching. *ELT Journal*, 29-40.

Quirk, R. (1972). *A grammar of contemporary English.* New York: Seminar Press.

O'Dowd, E. M. (1998). *Prepositions and particles in English: A discourse-functional account*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Tenjoh-Okwen, T. (1977). Faux amis: A problematic area for francophone learners of English. *TESL Talk, 8,* 39-46.

Sarfraz, S. (2011). Error analysis of the written English essays of Pakistani undergraduate students: A case study. *Asian Transactions on Basic and Applied Sciences, 1,* 29-50.

Slager, W. R. (1975). *English for today*. New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company.

Stockwell, R., Bowen, J. & Martin, J. (1965). *The Grammatical structure of English and Spanish.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Raehan, N.,Chodorow, M., & Leacock, C. (2006). Detecting errors in English article usage of non-native speakers. *Natural Language Engineering, 12*, 115-129.

Richards, J. C. (1974). *Error analysis: perspectives on second language acquisition*. London: Longman.

Rudzka-Ostyn, B. (1985). *Vocabulary teaching: A cognitive approach*. In A. M. Cornu et al. (eds) Beads and bracelet? How do we approach LSP?. Oxford/Leuven: OUP. 241-255.

Weinreich, U. (1953). *Language in contact*. The Hague: Mouton.