

A SYNTACTIC ERROR ANALYSIS OF EFL ARAB LEARNERS: THE CASE STUDY OF PRIMARY SCHOOL STUDENTS IN SAUDI ARABIA

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Abstract: Primary school students might find the process of learning syntax confusing and complex presumably due to being unaware of the syntactic errors they make at this early stage. Yet, despite the complexity of such an issue, scant research has been conducted in the Saudi context. Therefore, the present study employs a mixed-method approach to examine the developmental sequences of acquiring syntactic rules and investigate the syntactic errors made by 60 EFL primary school Arab students in a Saudi international school using spoken interviews, written tests, and in-class observations. After analyzing the data quantitatively and qualitatively, it was found that the most common syntactic errors produced by EFL Arab primary school students are related to tense formation, subject-verb agreement, missing articles, conjunctions, pronouns to infinitives, and word order syntactic patterns. Furthermore, verb tense, articles, and copula have been determined as transfer errors. In addition, older children make fewer syntactic errors compared to younger children. Despite the significant results, more samples are needed to make them generalizable.

Keywords: Error analysis, syntactic errors, developmental sequences, EFL.

1. Introduction

Studying syntactic errors and examining sequential syntactic development help in reflecting on how students acquire a new language from their perspective and provide data for supporting EFL learners. Language errors refer to deviations from the norms of a language (Larsen-Freeman and Long 262). Toward offering a systematic account of such errors at all linguistic levels, error analysis emerged as a research

method that involves analyzing and identifying the errors L2 learners make as they are learning a new language (Richards and Rodgers 57).

Regarding second language acquisition (SLA), errors can occur when a learner is learning a new language and has not yet fully mastered its rules and conventions (Willis 82). The aim of error analysis is to understand the sources of errors and how they are related to the learner's first language (L1), the L2 being learned, and the learning environment (Gass and Selinker 101-102).

1.1. Problem Statement

EFL Arab primary students make common syntactic errors that vary by age group. More investigation is needed to identify the causes of these errors and develop a comprehensive understanding of the syntactic developmental sequences of EFL Arab students.

1.2. Questions of the Study

The present study seeks to answer two main questions:

1. What are the common syntactic errors produced by EFL primary school Arab students and to what extent do these errors differ across different age groups?
2. What is the sequential syntactic development of EFL primary school Arab students?

1.3. Objectives of the Study

In answering the study questions, the study aims at

1. identifying the common syntactic errors produced by EFL primary school Arab students.
2. outlining the sequential syntactic development in acquiring syntax.

1.4. Significance of the study

This paper provides an overview of the developmental sequences of EFL acquisition focusing on syntactic errors made by EFL primary school Arab learners who study at an international school in Saudi Arabia. Consequently, researchers and language instructors can gain insights into the developmental sequences of children's language learning and understand their linguistic competence, and therefore they can provide tailored remedies.

2.2 Literature Review

2.1. SLA and Developmental Sequences

Early approaches to SLA focused on the role of imitation and repetition in language teaching (Skinner 95). These behaviorist approaches viewed language learning as a process of habit formation, in which new language is gained through reinforcement and conditioning. Along with the cognitive revolution in psychology, researchers began to focus on the mental processes involved in language learning. Chomsky (26-58) introduced his concept of the *Language Acquisition Device* that suggested that humans possess an inherent capacity from birth to learn a language and that this ability is governed by a set of rules known as Universal Grammar (UG) (Chomsky 26-58; Chomsky and Berwick 69). For example, if a child is exposed to a language having subject-verb-object word order, he/she would use his/her knowledge of UG to learn this word order and use it to generate syntactically correct sentences in that language. Still, the setting has also a function in determining the method in which language is acquired (Hauser et al. 1574).

The unique process through which individuals acquire L2 is thought to be the developmental sequence of SLA (Dulay and Burt 129-130). Several studies determined that acquisition comes by learning a certain sequence of linguistic aspects (Dulay and Burt 129-130). For example, learners may first acquire basic vocabulary and simple grammatical structures prior to complex grammatical structures and phonological rules (Long 253). Nevertheless, other factors, including learners' native language, their age, their level of motivation, and the type of their linguistic input, play a role in acquisition (Dulay and Burt 129-130).

Lenneberg (525-527) discussed the critical age period for SLA. The hypothesis was further investigated by Johnson and Newport (60-99) and Singleton and Lengyel (76) stressing that children can learn languages better than adults, especially pronunciation and grammar. Other studies focused on the role of input and interaction in second language development. Krashen and Terrell (7-21) recommended the "natural approach", which proposed naturalistic input and interaction, whereby L2, if used for communication rather than explicit instruction, can facilitate SLA in children.

2.2. Error Analysis

Error analysis emerged as a way to understand the process of L2 learning and identify areas where learners may need additional instruction or support. Developed by Corder (160-170), it became a research method that involves analyzing and identifying the errors that L2 learners make as they are learning a new language. The basics of the

error analysis paradigm as built by Corder (57-64) could be examined in terms of discrepancies between the learner's interlanguage system and the target language and the cause of the errors, whether linguistic, pragmatic, or psycholinguistic.

Schumann (391-408) recommended that studying L2 learners' errors might yield dynamic insights into the nature of linguistic acquisition and the origins of interlanguage errors, suggesting that errors committed by L2 learners might be seen as evidence where learners strive to simplify and adapt the target language to their own linguistic and cultural background. Furthermore, Littlewood (21) linked language acquisition strategies and error analysis arguing that the emphasis on errors should be shifted from identification and rectification to a more communicative approach. By this, errors shall be viewed as chances for knowledge and progress rather than being addressed as drawbacks (Littlewood 21). This was supported by Dörnyei (117-135) who claimed that by analyzing errors, researchers can identify areas where additional instruction may be needed.

In other words, error analysis is used to analyze the developmental sequences of children's language learning, specifically in terms of intralingual developmental errors, that is, errors that occur when a learner has difficulty with the language itself away from the influence of their L1 or other external factors. Intralingual errors can be include overgeneralization, oversimplification, communication-based errors, induced errors (errors caused by negative feedback or correction), analogical errors (errors based on similarity to familiar words or structures), ignorance of rule restrictions, incomplete application of rules, and false hypotheses (errors based on incorrect assumptions about the language) (Puspita 12-18).

It is worth noting the difference between an error and a mistake. An error refers to a deviation from the norms of a language (Larsen-Freeman and Long 262) (a competence issue). Conversely, a mistake is an unintentional deviation from the norms of a language (Spada and Lightbown ch. 2). Mistakes occur in language performance, but they are less systematic and more random than errors (Gass and Selinker 102). Mistakes are often corrected quickly and do not reflect a lack of knowledge or understanding of the language (Richards and Rodgers 57).

2.3. Previous Studies

Studies reported that errors arise due to several reasons, including differences in grammar between L1 and L2, and lack of knowledge in L2, making students not recognize the production of an error (Dinamika and Hanafiah 120-129). Furthermore, it has been found that types of errors

are influenced by age; for example, students over 13 years old are less likely to make grammatical errors because they learn grammar explicitly. On the contrary, children below 13 years old learn grammar implicitly. Linguistic research studying brain function highlights that while children have an intrinsic sensitivity to deep language elements and may understand prosodies, their capacity to replicate and generate syntax in their own speech may be limited throughout the early stages of language development. The age factor plays a critical role in understanding a language, and adults may face weaknesses in comprehending a second language if developmental errors are not taken into account in the first place (Hussain 242-244).

According to Vakili and Ebadi (345-380), the causes of errors can be classified into three categories: developmental, transfer, and interference errors. Developmental errors are those that reflect the learner's level of proficiency in the target language and they are typically made by fresh learners. Transfer errors occur when the learner uses the rules and structures of their L1 to produce the target language. Interference errors happen when the learner uses the rules of their L1 to produce the target language (Bialystok et al. 240-250).

Roquet (149-231) indicated that the acquisition of explicit knowledge would deteriorate if the learner was not ready in terms of his developmental stage to grasp it or if there was a lack of subsequent communicative exposure and practice. In her study, error patterns made by learners were analyzed, at different stages of language acquisition. It was found that verb-related errors were more common among lower-level learners, while noun-related errors were more common among advanced-level learners. It was noted also that noun-related errors in written production do not disappear easily over time.

Sompong (109-127) indicated that it is an obligation to understand the nature, patterns, and frequency of the errors conducted in order to examine the causes of those errors systematically. He indicated that such practices will aid the process of SLA and support students' and teachers' practices since errors represent essential material in progress, and therefore it would be valuable to study those errors and analyze them scientifically. Furthermore, Sompong (109-127) emphasized the need to classify errors for having deeper analysis. The classification process might include the addition of specific lexis, omission, disordering, and so on.

Eckstein et al. (1-11) studied the writing of students in the Writing Program Administration's (WPA) First Year Composition Outcomes Statement (FYC). Writing samples from L1 and L2 students were analyzed for language errors, measuring lexical and syntactic

complexity. Findings showed that while there are similarities between L1 and L2 students, L2 students had different observed and perceived language needs, including differences in linguistic accuracy, lexical diversity, and language-related anxiety – which are directly linked to intralinguistic errors; for instance, L2 writers wrote fewer words and repeated words frequently. Although L1 students made some mistakes, they proved more confident in their writing, without major grammatical or word order errors.

Sattar et al. (521-535) examined the syntactical errors made by Pakistani secondary school students in the English language. The errors identified were subject-verb agreement errors, word form errors, word order errors, missing objects, run-on sentences, orthographic errors, fragments, punctuation errors, article errors, preposition errors, and conjunction errors. The results of the study showed that punctuation errors accounted for 50% of all errors. Run-on sentences, missing objects, and fragments accounted for only 4% of all errors. Additionally, both interlanguage and intralanguage factors contributed to the syntactical errors made by the students although intralanguage errors were more prevalent.

Darus and Subramaniam (483-495) tried to identify why Chinese students in Malaysia made errors specifically in written English, given that they study three languages in school (Malay, Chinese, and English). It was found that the most common errors made were related to mechanics of writing, tenses, prepositions, and subject-verb agreement. These errors were attributed to the interference of their L1 and a lack of understanding of English grammatical rules. These factors can be classified as interlingual, intralingual, and developmental errors. The students' reliance on their L1, exposure to Malay, and confusion between the rules of these languages and English contributed to the errors in their writing.

Spada and Lightbown (1-22) examined the acquisition of English by francophone children aged 11-12 years (n=150). Oral and written experimentation were used in which the youngsters were pre-tested using several criteria to identify their developmental level of English question acquisition. Over two weeks, the children took part in classroom activities that exposed them to hundreds of English questions. Then, the children were re-tested using the same measures. While students at stage 3 did not perform better in their use of questions in oral production than those at stage 2, all students had some understanding of questions at stages 4 and 5. Further investigation found that students recognized higher-level questions with subject and verb inversion when the subject was a pronoun, but not when the

subject was a noun. This trend is consistent with their native language, French. Given that, Spada and Lightbown (1-22) concluded that L2 acquisition is influenced by a combination of developmental factors as well as the learner's L1 interference.

Likewise, Mahmoodzadeh (734-740) examined the errors produced by intermediate-level Iranian EFL learners due to cross-linguistic influences between their native language (Persian) and second language (English). The study's findings revealed that Iranian EFL learners commonly made errors in the incorrect and repetitive use of prepositions while translating from Persian to English, rather than errors in preposition omission. This, according to Asma (32-54), is an overgeneralization of L2 rules which are affected by L1, and not a developmental error, especially since the study was for adult students whose brains lack the neuroplasticity that children have (Spada and Lightbown 1-22).

Equally important, there have been several studies that have studied the syntactic errors made by Saudi EFL learners. Alahmadi (84-98) analyzed grammatical errors for a sample of 30 fresh Saudi students at the University of Tabuk in Saudi Arabia. The study involved interviews with the participants, during which nine different types of errors were identified and analyzed. Those included the misuse of verb tense, the misuse of articles, the misuse of singulars and plurals, the misuse of prepositions, sentences without verbs, sentences with wrong pronouns, errors with third-person pronouns, and the misuse of regular and irregular verbs. The study concluded that the errors made by participants were caused by L1 interference, while fewer errors were caused by intralingual or other factors.

Al-Shurfa (753135) targeted males and females (18 to 44 years old) who speak English as a second language. Results showed that the misuse of articles is random among speakers. They frequently omitted indefinite articles and repeated the definite article *the* before nouns. She clarified that Saudi English speakers sometimes employ plural forms differently, either deleting the plural marker *s* or adding it to single nouns. Possessive markers are commonly utilized; however, there are notable exceptions. Pronoun use varies, with object pronouns being used instead of possessive pronouns and subject pronouns being substituted (Al-Shurfa 753135).

Khasawneh (31-41) conducted interviews and writing assessment for King Khalid University students, highlighting that participants expressed difficulties with organizing paragraphs, employing suitable links and transitions, and sustaining writing flow. Furthermore, word-choice selection and a lack of grammatical expertise were noted as

typical writing obstacles. Interestingly, students had less trouble defining the primary elements of their writing projects, showing that they knew where to start but had difficulty writing (Khasawneh 31-41).

Most of the available studies on error analysis in the Saudi context are geared toward university or high school students, which leaves a major research gap. In order to figure out the mechanisms and factors associated with children learning English in primary schools in Saudi Arabia, this study targets students aged 6-12.

3. Methodology

Corder (57-64) outlines the following five steps for analyzing student errors: selection, identification, classification, explanation, and evaluation. Corder's method is well-suited for this study because it is a systematic approach that looks at errors as a source of information about the learning process, rather than just mistakes that need to be corrected.

3.1. Research Design

Researchers utilized a cross-sectional mixed-methods approach to investigate participants' transfer and developmental errors. Data were collected at a single point in time and later analyzed to maintain objectivity, avoiding interference with participants to prevent bias during data collection.

3.2. Participants

60 EFL male and female students, aged 6-12, were selected from an international primary school in Riyadh. The students were randomly divided into six groups based on their age (10 in each). Non-Arabs were excluded.

3.3. Instruments

This research employed classroom observation after securing consent from the school administration to observe student spoken interactions with teachers. The syntactic errors in their spoken English were recorded to analyze their types and causes. In this first step, the notes were qualitative in nature, and then selected students were invited to an interview in which the researcher asked them verbally about their specific interests (see Appendix A). As a final step, students were required to complete a writing test on specific topics (see Appendix B). The students were divided into six categories based on age group. Questions for the interview and writing test were created in a

questionnaire form as each student was anonymously labeled, along with his/her age group.

Test results were used to evaluate the developmental sequence of students' errors. Furthermore, the errors were classified per type to align the type of error made versus the age group to unveil correlations between error types and age.

3.4 Data Analysis

Since the present study uses both qualitative and quantitative methods, it is essential to demonstrate how data was gathered quantitatively through verbal interviews and written tests. Each interview and test was evaluated individually to identify syntactic errors. Students' gender and nationality were also labeled beside each student in an Excel sheet. Then, the errors were categorized into columns using Microsoft Excel (copula, subject-verb agreement, tense, etc.). Moreover, data for each grade were put in separate Excel sheets (Grade 1 Excel sheet, Grade 2 Excel sheet, etc.). Therefore, there were six Excel sheets for interviews and six Excel sheets for tests. If the student commits a tense syntactic error, for example, it is considered as 1. If he commits two tense errors, they are counted as 2. If he commits no tense errors, it is counted as 0. After collecting and labelling all types of errors, the total number of each error type was calculated and put in columns across the six grades in a new Excel sheet. This is to show the categories of the errors made in each grade.

4. Findings and Discussion

The findings of the study will be interpreted analytically along with answering the research questions:

1. What are the common syntactic errors produced by EFL primary school Arab students and to what extent do these errors differ across different age groups?
2. What is the sequential syntactic development of EFL primary school Arab students?

Analyzing interview transcripts, *Table 1* shows the common types of syntactic errors made by EFL primary school Arab students. The errors are categorized in descending order from the most frequent to the least frequent. As shown in the table, G1 students made 12 tense errors, which is the highest error rate. This significant rate suggests that G1 students have the greatest difficulty understanding and using English verb tenses appropriately. One practical justification of this finding is students' lack of language proficiency, as they are still in the early stages of learning English. The table also shows that there are 7 errors made by

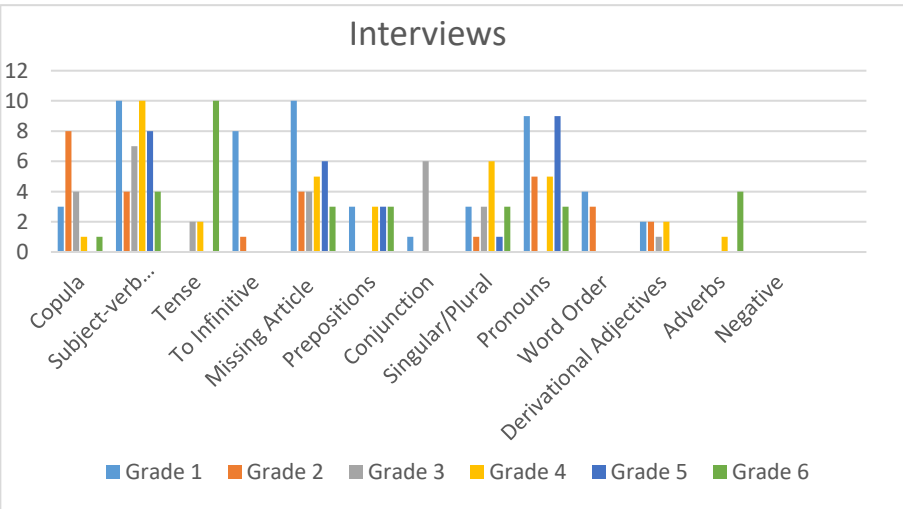
G3 students related to subject-verb agreement, 7 by G1 students related to missing articles, 7 by G3 students related to conjunctions, and 7 by G5 students related to pronouns.

As G1 students are in the earlier stages of learning English, they may lack the ability to comprehend complex syntactic aspects such as verb tenses. Additionally, G3 students may be struggling with subject-verb agreement, G1 students with missing articles, G3 with conjunctions, and G5 with pronouns. This indicates that as students progress through their English learning journey, they gain more understanding of the language, but simultaneously they come across different challenges. The least prevalent error committed is found with to-infinitive (1 error made by G5 students) and word order (1 error made by G1 students).

Table 1: Syntactic Errors according to Grade

	Copula	-verb Agre	Tense	To Infinitiv	issing Artic	reposition	Conjunction	ingular/Plu	Pronouns	Word Order	etional Adje	Adverbs	Negative
Grade 1	0	0	12	0	7	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0
Grade 2	1	2	7	0	5	5	0	0	1	0	0	0	0
Grade 3	4	7	1	0	4	0	7	3	0	0	1	0	0
Grade 4	1	4	1	0	2	2	0	4	1	0	3	0	0
Grade 5	3	4	0	1	2	0	0	3	7	0	1	2	0
Grade 6	1	5	1	0	4	2	0	0	1	0	1	0	3

Figure 1: Common Types of Syntactic Errors and Grade Variation (Interview Transcripts)



Student errors were most commonly associated with tenses (12 errors in Grade 1), which is likely because tenses represent a more complex area of grammar. The errors in verb tenses could also be attributed to the use of incorrect forms of verbs or incorrect conjugations of verbs. Figure 1 also shows a decrease in the number of errors associated with tenses as the student's grade level increases. In G6, there was only one error associated with tenses. This indicates that students get more proficient in their understanding of tenses as their grade level increases. Additionally, the most common errors include subject-verb agreement (7 errors made by G3 students), missing articles (7 errors made by G1 students), conjunctions (7 errors made by G3 students), and pronouns (7 errors made by G5).

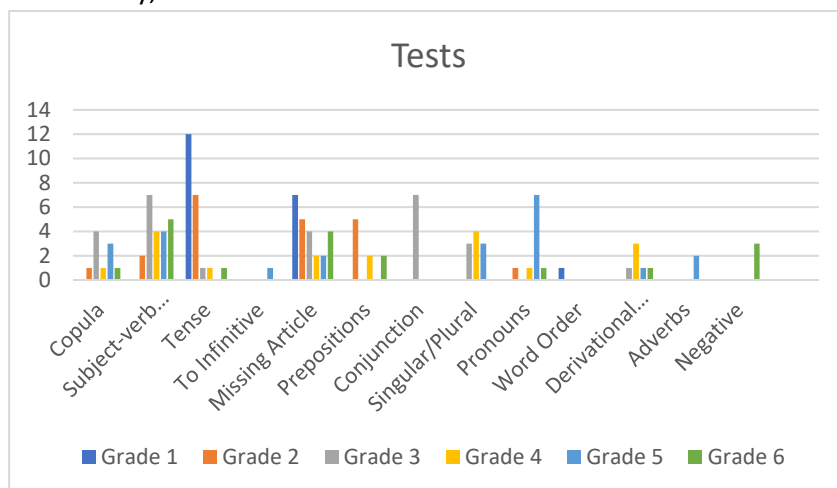
Combining all grade data showed that subject-verb agreement errors were the most common, occurring 43 times, making up 19.91% of the total errors. Article errors occurred 22 times, making up 10.19% of the errors. Pronoun errors were the third most common, with a total of 31 occurrences, accounting for 14.35% of the errors. Developmental errors play a major role in L2 acquisition among children; 25% of all the errors made were from Grade 1 students, and all remaining distributions did not go beyond 17% per grade.

Several studies emphasized that younger learners tend to display distinct error patterns compared to older learners (Dulay 26-29). According to Singleton and Lengyel (2-5), when it comes to developmental abnormalities in children, age becomes an important aspect. Younger children are more likely to make errors as they learn and internalize the rules of their native language. These are sometimes referred to as developmental errors since they are common during the natural language acquisition process. However, it has been observed that some errors exhibited by young learners resemble "transfer errors," akin to those made by adults. The current analysis of syntactic errors across different grade levels unveiled a distinct pattern of language interference from Arabic, the students' native language, to English, which they are acquiring as a foreign language. This interference is evident in the frequent occurrence of errors related to verb tenses, articles and copula. In other words, these errors appear less on the chart that is demonstrated in figure (1). This indicates that students make these errors less as they grow, which is presumably caused by the assumption that they are less susceptible to transfer errors because their brains are developing as they grow, and they are more aware of the error they used to do. This may sprout from the assumption of (Dulay and Burt 4) that language is refined through positive

reinforcement for correct structures and correction of incorrect structures.

Figure 2: Common Types of Syntactic Errors and Grade Variation (Writing Test)

Notably, there is also a remarkable difference between different



age groups and grades. Based on the tests, it can be concluded that the main syntactic errors vary among grades: G1 12 errors, G2 7 errors, G3 1 error, G4 1 error, G5 0 errors, and G6 1 error. The number of syntactic errors related to missing articles varies among grades: G1 7 errors, G2 5 errors, G3 4 errors, G4 2 errors, G5 2 errors, and G6 4 errors. This variation casts light on the complex nature of syntactic errors committed by ESL Arab primary school students. The exact reasons for such a variation in syntactic errors at different ages are vital to understanding and teaching. This finding confirms Sompong's claim that error analysis is essential in teaching EFL as it "can reveal the sources of these errors and the causes of their frequent occurrence" (Sompong 110). Similarly, Farooq and Wahid (336-348) found that syntactic errors can be caused by a variety of factors, including interference with the first language, lack of knowledge of basic grammatical rules, a lack of awareness of parts of speech, inappropriate use of dictionaries, and overgeneralization.

Al-Sofi (2) argued that the main reasons behind syntactic errors are "rooted in the students' interlingual (first language interference) and intralingual (overgeneralization, inadequate knowledge of second language rules, and inappropriate application of such rules) factors". Drawing on their findings, it is evident that students fail to accurately apply grammar rules due to inter- and intra-lingual errors.

Furthermore, the data depicted in Table 1 and Figure 1 indicate that tense errors represent the highest prevalence among Grade 1 students, with a noticeable decrease as students advance to higher grade levels. Sabbah (9) states that one of the main reasons why students tend to incorrectly synthesize tenses in English is that the students formulate their expressions based on the closest they have in the Arabic tenses. According to Sabbah (9), English has multiple tenses compared to Arabic that only has two tenses. These are the perfect tense and the imperfect tense. As a result, it is safe to assume that the students reshape what they want to express in English to fit in one of the either two tenses in Arabic, which causes the tense-related errors they make (Sabbah 2).

The qualitative analysis of the interview transcripts would offer a more in-depth analysis of the nature of these errors.

4.1. Subject-Verb Agreement

The prevalence of subject-verb agreement errors among students was evident, even in simple sentences. It appears that the students may lack awareness of the necessity for the subject and verb to be in agreement. Despite prior exposure to this grammar rule in their earlier education, they continue to encounter difficulties when it comes to correctly applying subject-verb agreement in their sentences (Nurjanah 23). Examples include:

- Grade 3 Student: Hares *stays* alert, *runs* 4 miles per hour. Bears *runs* 30 miles per hour
- Grade 2 Student: My dad *want* me to be a doctor
- Grade 6 Student: I love my brother and he *love* me

Nurjanah (23) suggests that one main theory behind subject-verb agreement errors is intra-lingual errors. These errors occur when learners, due to incomplete mastery of the target language, employ two tense markers simultaneously in a sentence (Nurjanah 25). Furthermore, Zawiszewski et al. (601-626) explained the theory behind subject-verb agreement errors as part of the Phi-features. It was stated that the person (first, second, third) and number (single, multiple) features of nouns, pronouns, and verbs in a language are indicated by Phi-features. These characteristics are critical in determining agreement and referential linkages within a phrase. The phi-features of a noun or pronoun may be seen in verb agreement when the verb form changes to fit the subject's person and number. In the sentence *He walks*, for example, the verb *walks* agrees with the third-person singular subject *he*. In the sentence *They walk*, for example, the verb *walk* agrees with the third-person plural subject *they* (Zawiszewski et al. 601-626).

4.2. Pronouns

Pronoun errors were seen as recurring in all grades. The children's inadequate ability to create a clear relationship between pronouns and their antecedents is a substantial contributor to these errors. Pronouns, being abstract in nature, often require learners to understand and establish connections between the pronoun and the word or phrase it refers to. However, due to their cognitive and linguistic development, children may struggle to make these connections accurately. Because abstract terms, such as pronouns, lack a real and tactile representation, children struggle to understand their referential meaning (Mahfoudhi 91-100).

This is backed up by Chomsky's binding theory. The binding theory is a linguistic framework within the field of syntax that aims to describe and explain how pronouns and other referring expressions are bound or connected to antecedents within a sentence (Chomsky 1982 4-10). Children's capacity to interpret and create pronouns is impacted by their cognitive and linguistic development (Friederici 1357). According to the binding hypothesis, these areas are critical in understanding and resolving pronoun references (Chomsky 1982 4-10).

4.3. Other Significant Findings

With respect to the number of students encountering the same error type, pronoun errors were more common in lower grades than in higher grades, while subject-verb agreement was the opposite.

Article errors were distributed equally among students, but in total around 12% of all the students made such errors; examples include the following:

- Grade 5 Student: *I like to be doctor*
- Grade 3 Student: *dog love food*
- Grade 1 Student: *I want to be football play*

Article errors, particularly omissions, are recurrent across all grades as shown in Figure 2. This is due to the fact that the Arabic Language lacks indefinite articles since definite prefixes express indefiniteness. This justifies the omission error that younger students committed, as shown in figure 2. Furthermore, it is essential to point out that the Arabic Article System structure leads the students to, unintentionally, drop /a/ and /an/, according to Swan and Smith (cited in Al Qadi 2).

Copula errors were noted in which students mainly omit copulations due to the fact that the use of the copula 'to be' in present simple statements, particularly noted in younger learners, can be attributed to the structural absence of such elements in Arabic syntax. In Arabic, the copula is often implied and not explicitly stated in present

tense, which leads Arab learners to omit it in English sentences. This specific error decreases with age and grade, indicating a learning curve influenced by increased exposure to English language norms and practices. Muftah (7) confirms that the acquisition challenges of the English copula 'be' by adult L1 Arabic speakers arise from the syntactic structures of Arabic, leading to frequent copula omission (Muftah 7).

Another significant finding was noted with Grade 6 students: the WH-structure error; for instance, a student mentioned the following statement:

When I didn't know what I *make* I *drawing*. I love Egypt because my mom go there to *take* the PhD. Lutken (34-47) examined this error concluding that

immature processing mechanisms as it was called, which means the planning and memory or speaking or comprehension of a language, result in such errors. The study agrees with the current discussion that students in this age while acquiring the language will make errors showing asymmetry in performance.

4.4. Analyzing Data Collected from the Observations

The class observation revealed that G1 students used simple sentences, focusing on present tense only, for example, *I like to swimming*. Highlighting the simplification process discussed earlier, Grade 2 students repeated several errors, including the composition of sentences, past, present, and future tenses, subject-verb agreement, using wrong pronouns for nouns, difficulty in differentiating between he/she and when to use each, and article errors, *mainly missing articles* - done by both male and female students. This finding supports the binding theory and the cognitive abilities of students in this stage. G2 is mainly a channel from the primary development stage in Grade 1 to advanced development.

Tense issues were clear with Grades 3 and 4, in addition to irregular sentences; examples include *I see the moon too yesterday*. Grade 5 students showed a good level of fluency but made errors related to advanced grammar like present perfect and past participle. Examples include the following: *I have study yesterday*. Grade 6 students made fewer errors with respect to the rest; this may be better seen as development for the student's level of proficiency.

5. Conclusion and Limitation

The analysis of syntactic errors sheds light on how language develops in a learners' brain. As a sequential process, the development of the human cognitive system goes through several stages, and each

stage caters to the development of independent areas of language, from articulation to discourse. Given this understanding, the present paper explored the common syntactic errors produced by EFL primary school Arab students and their developmental sequences. Findings showed that the most common syntactic errors produced include tense formation, subject-verb agreement, missing articles, conjunctions, pronouns to-infinitive, and word order. In addition to age-related influences, the results of this analysis validate the impact of the structure of the Arabic language on the syntactic development of primary Arab learners of English as a foreign language. This influence is evident in areas such as tense usage, article omission, and copula usage. The study provided a comprehensive analysis of syntactic structure acquisition among children aged 6-12. It would be beneficial to include a larger and more diverse sample of children and adults belonging to different age groups to further improve the accuracy of the findings.

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ANALYSE SYNTAXIQUE DES ERREURS DES APPRENANTS ARABES D'EFL: LE CAS DES ÉLÈVES SAOUDIENS AUX ÉCOLES PRIMAIRES EN ARABIE SAOUDITE.

Pour les élèves du cycle primaire, le processus de l'apprentissage des structures syntaxique paraît confusionnel et complexe; c'est à cause de leur inconscience des erreurs syntaxiques qu'ils commettent à cette période très tôt. Malgré la difficulté de cette question de recherche, les études qui en traitent sont rares au contexte saoudien. C'est pourquoi, notre recherche adopte une méthodologie éclectique en vue d'examiner la hiérarchie synchronique à l'acquisition des règles de la structure syntaxique et de déterminer les erreurs syntaxiques commises par 60 élèves arabes d'EFL dans une des écoles saoudiennes internationales. Pour ce faire, on a recours à ces procédés: les interviews, les tests écrits et l'observation en classe. L'analyse quantitative et qualitative des données a montré que la plupart des erreurs des structures syntaxiques commises par les élèves d'EFL au cycle primaire portent sur la formation des temps verbaux, la concordance entre le sujet et le verbe, l'omission des déterminants, des conjonctions, des pronoms, du mode infinitival et des types de structures syntaxiques des phrases. En plus, on a constaté que les enfants les plus âgés commettent moins d'erreurs que les enfants les jeunes.

En un mot, les résultats de cette recherche sont significatifs cependant on a besoin d'autres études pour pouvoir les généraliser.

Mots clés: Analyse des erreurs, erreurs des structures syntaxiques, hiérarchie synchronique, EFL (anglais langue étrangère).