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Analysis of Preposition of Preposition Errors among EFL Students at Princess Nourah University

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Abstract

The present study aimed at identifying and analyzing prepositions errors and the reasons behind them in essays written by female Saudi students. The study was conducted at the English Department, College of Arts, Princess Nourah Bint Abdulrahman University in Riyadh. The participants were 39 female students enrolled in the fifth level and ten instructors who have been teaching writing courses for a long time. To collect the data, the students were asked to write essays that were analyzed to identify and classify the errors committed. The possible causes of the errors were determined using the error analysis technique. After that, the ten instructors were engaged in semi-structured interview to deepen understanding and interpretation of the results. The data revealed that the students committed errors in the use of English prepositions. Furthermore, the results showed that the most important sources of errors were due to both interlingual and intralingual errors. Finally, on the basis of these results, a group of recommendations and suggestions were presented to help both students and teachers to overcome such problematic areas.

Key words: Syntactic errors, Error Analysis, Interlingual errors, Intralingual errors.

1. Introduction

1.1 Background of the Study

Learning a second language has been the main goal of many studies. This learning process had gone under many investigations including different skills of the target language such as writing. Students' writing in a second language face many challenges related to second language acquisition. Writing has been a problem for Saudi students. They may obtain good competence of the linguistic system of English, but when it comes to performance, they face many difficulties. "Second language learners appear to accumulate structural entities of the target language but demonstrate difficulty in organizing this knowledge into appropriate, coherent structures " (Bhela, 1999, p. 22).

Facing such difficulties makes a challenge for learners acquiring a foreign language. Moreover, the serious challenge is faced by teachers when they predict errors and try to explain them to make learners avoid these areas of default. Corder (1967), cited in Abisamra (2003), believed that systematically analyzing errors made by language learners makes it possible to determine areas of difficulties.

One of the main problems for students learning English as a second language is the interference caused by their mother language. Such interference can cause negative transfers. In this respect, El-Sayed (1982) has assumed that interference from the mother tongue is clearly a major source of difficulty in second language learning. Interference is defined by Skiba (1997) as transferring elements from native language into the language being learned.

Kavaliauskiene (2009, p.5) stated, "Native language use in the classroom can cause students to think that words and structures in English have L1 correspondence, which does not always exist ". So the interference of native language is a main source of syntactic errors. Wilkins (1972, p.199) observes:

When learning a foreign language, an individual already knows his mother tongue, and it is this which he attempts to transfer. The transfer may prove to be justified because the structure of the two languages is similar– in that case we get 'positive transfer' or 'facilitation' – or it may prove unjustified because the structure of the two languages are different – in that case we get 'negative transfer' – or 'interference'.

It is important to mention that the teacher of English as a foreign language should focus on the most common types of error that learners commit and find the reason behind such errors. Al-Buainian (2007) explained that teachers of English as a foreign language face problems in every writing course. Teachers' concerns and efforts to identify these problems and to understand the key issues to EFL writing may help students to write in better English and avoid most of these problems. Each skill has areas of difficulty, and identifying such areas helps students to overcome their weaknesses. Al-Harbi (2010, p. 153), pointed out " Realizing the problematic areas for certain learners will help to make L2 language classes more rigorous which is vital to accelerate learners' English language development ".

1.2 Statement of the Problem

English is taught as a foreign language in Saudi universities. Instructors of writing courses have realized that there is a great deal of syntactic errors in the writings of their students. One frequent area of errors is that of preposition. These errors can be seen as the key to understanding and solving accuracy problems in English writing courses.

As a result of informal discussions with some instructors of writing courses, the present researcher realized that a great deal of syntactic errors in the use of prepositions in Saudi students' writings need to be analyzed. The aim of this study is to investigate whether Saudi female learners of English in PNU commit errors in the area of preposition and the reasons behind these errors. Also, it aims to find out whether the native language structure interferes with students' writing in English.

1.3 Questions of the Study

The study aims to analyze preposition errors committed by Saudi female learners in the use of English preposition. To accomplish the aim of this study, it is intended to answer the following questions:

1. Do the fifth level English Department students at Princess Nourah University commit preposition errors when they write their essays?

2. What are the possible causes of these preposition errors?

1.4 Significance of the Study

This study is one of the first studies that investigate the types of syntactic errors made by Saudi students of the English Department at Princess Nourah University. It is hoped that the findings of this study will help instructors become more aware of the difficulty of English preposition and help students to overcome such difficulties to improve their writing skills. Identifying sources and causes of preposition errors can be used as an aid to improve teaching materials and strategies. It is also hoped that it will help instructors and experts develop better syllabi.

2. Literature Review

In recent years, many studies on prepoition error analysis of EFL learners' compositions have been conducted. These studies help EFL teachers become aware of the problems facing their students and consequently help them overcome such areas of difficulties. Salebi (2004, p. 210) stated:

A substantial number of studies on error analysis have been carried out all over the world to ease the errors' problem and to make the EFL teacher's task in the classroom smoother and easier. But errors insist to accompany second language learners' verbal and written performance.

2.1 Significance of Errors

Decreasing the number and range of systematic errors is the goal of teachers to improve their learners' proficiency in learning English as a foreign language. Identifying such repeated errors is hoped to be helpful for both students and teachers. It is beneficial to teacher of English to recognize areas of difficulties and eventually focuses on such areas and offer better training. It is helpful for students as well in understanding the system of the target language.

Corder (1967) argued that error analysis can be used as an effective tool in improving learning and teaching processes. The results of this technique can provide learners as well as teachers with more useful suggestions of how a foreign language can be taught and learned effectively.

In this perception, Corder (1967, p.162) stated:

Out of this would come an inventory of the areas of difficulty which the learner would encounter and the value of this inventory would be to direct the teacher's attention to these areas so that he might devote special care and emphasis in his teaching to the overcoming, or even avoiding, of these predicting difficulties.

Erdogan (2005) indicated that while learning a native language, a child always makes errors. It is also the case in second language learning because a learner of a second language does what a child usually does when he acquires his native language. He argued that teachers must identify and classify their students' errors to find solutions for them.

Hinson & Park (2009) claimed that in order to understand the gap between the students' mother tongue and the target language, finding repeated common errors is a necessary. Identifying such errors will eventually improve learners' proficiency.

2.2 Error Analysis

Error analysis was first coined by Stephen Pit Corder in 1960s. It emerged when contrastive analysis failed to account for all errors. Error analysis is considered an important source of information to teachers to developing more effective teaching techniques. Moreover, errors made by learners can be used as a devise to learn. However, in order to have significant errors, they must be of a frequent type because this characteristic of systematic errors is what distinguishes errors from mistakes. Mistakes could be a slip of a performance that usually occurs under certain circumstances whereas errors reflect learner's default competence of the target language. Corder (1967) defined error analysis as a technique that teachers and researchers use and it involves a number of procedures such as collecting samples of language learners, identifying errors, describing them in terms of their types and causes, and evaluating their seriousness.

2.3 Sources of Errors

Errors are explained in terms of their causes: interlingual and intralingual errors. Sharma (1981) said that learners' errors could be attributed to both interlingual and intralingual sources. According to Selinker (1972) who was the first to present the term interlanguage, interlingual errors are those caused by the negative interference of the mother tongue. In other words, the learner applies the patterns, forms and rules of his native language on the target one. This negative influence of the mother tongue prevents the learner from acquiring the patterns, rules and forms of the target language. Corder (1971) stated that interlingual errors occur when the learner's native language patterns, structures, and rules are carried over.

Kavaliauskiene (2009) asserted that most learners of a second language rely on their mother tongue. He also added that this interference of mother tongue could be positive if the two languages are identical and negative when the two languages are different. Noor (1996) indicated that the most common source of errors is the influence of mother tongue. He added that while Arabic-speaking learners learn English, they tend to adopt structures similar to structures of their native language. Hargett (1991) stated that transfer from the mother tongue is one of the important sources of errors in the second language learning.

On the other hand, intralingual errors are related to the target language being learned, without interference of the native language. Some causes of learners' errors can be attributed to the learner during the process of learning, teaching techniques, overgeneralization, incomplete application of rules, a brake down in mastering the target language rules, and etc.

2.4 Previous Studies

El-Sayed (1982) conducted a study in which he investigated the most frequent syntactic errors made by first year male students in the English program at Riyadh University in 1980. Compositions written by 60 students were collected. After that, syntactic errors were identified, analyzed and discussed by using contrastive analysis approach. There were two groups of students, sociology students and mass communications students. The findings of this study showed that the most important source of errors made by students is the interference of the mother tongue.

According to this study, fifty-six percent of all errors were in the area of verbs and forty-four percent were in the area of articles, pronoun, nouns, adjective and prepositions.

Zreg (1983) performed a study to investigate the impact of Arabic language on some certain English structure. In this study, the focus was on the use of the English definite and indefinite articles and the verb tense in intermediate-level classes. The sample consisted of students and their teachers of English in Libyan special Teacher-Training Institutes. They were asked to answer questionnaire items. Moreover, a multiple-choice test on the use of definite and indefinite articles and specific verb-tense usage in sentences was prepared by the writer and students were asked to respond to it. According to the findings, errors were caused by many sources such as native language interference, Arabic in this study. Another important source of errors was a break down in mastering the rules of the target language.

Obeidat (1986) carried out a study to investigate syntactic and semantic errors committed by Arab learning English as a second language. Written compositions were collected from 150 students of first and second-year English department at Yarmouk University in Jordan to obtain the data for analysis. Errors were identified and classified into thirteen categories divided to syntactic and semantic errors. These areas of difficulty were discussed and explained. The results of the study showed that mother tongue interference was an important source of error in students' compositions. There were also other sources of errors that the results of this study revealed, linguistic and non-linguistic.

Al-Sindy (1994) performed a study that investigated the syntactic errors committed by first year Saudi students who studied English as a foreign language. These errors were identified and analyzed to find out what syntactic errors occurred more and what causes were behind such frequent syntactic errors. The data was obtained by analyzing 40 compositions written by Saudi students. He used two approaches: contrastive analysis and error analysis. The researcher found out that learners transferred the structure of their native language, Arabic, into the structure of the target language, English. The results also showed how learners committed a huge number of errors in certain grammatical types: tense and tense sequence, prepositions, articles, and copula and auxiliaries.

Kao (1999) presented an analysis study of errors in which he focused on analyzing lexical, grammatical, and semantic errors.

The aim of this study was to examine the most common errors committed by students in Taiwan. The sample of the study consisted of 169 compositions written by 53 English major students in both Soochow University and Fu Hsing Kang College. After analyzing the lexical, grammatical, and semantic errors, the results showed that the category of grammatical errors was the most problematic area for students. The results also showed that 608 errors were grammatical, 165 errors were semantic ones, and only 152 were lexical. According to this study, we can observe that grammatical errors were an important area in learning and teaching process by predicting such errors and eventually trying to avoid them.

Al-Buainain (2007) conducted a study in which she addressed the problem behind students' errors in writing courses, especially Writing I, Writing II, and Advanced Writing. This study was held in the Department of Foreign Languages at Qatar University. Forty exam scripts were written by 40 students of the first writing course to collect data. By using error analysis approach, the researcher managed to identify and classify errors. The findings showed that systematic errors that students committed could be the key to developing students' writing skills. It is the teachers' responsibility to find areas of difficulty in writing among the students and help them to overcome these weaknesses.

Tahaineh (2010) conducted a study that investigated kinds of errors found in compositions written by Jordanian EFL students at the level of university. Compositions were written by a random sample of 162 students. They had the same linguistic, socio-cultural, and educational backgrounds. This study revealed that Arab Jordanian EFL students used improper prepositions if equivalents were not used in their mother tongue. Sometimes, students deleted prepositions if equivalents were not required in their mother tongue and used the proper English prepositions providing equivalents were used in their mother tongue. Therefore, it was concluded that mother tongue interference was the major source of EFL learners' errors (58% =1323) and play outstanding role in the majority of errors by EFL learners. Errors due to the target language itself were a major part of the problem too (42%=967).

Abu shihab, El-Omari & Tobat (2011) conducted a study that aimed at investigating the grammatical errors in the writing of Jordanian students.

Compositions written by 62 students of the Department of English Literature and Translation at Alzaytoonah Private University were classified and analyzed. Errors were classified according to their frequency. These errors were divided first into six categories then to subcategories. The results of this study showed that the prepositions category included the largest number of errors. Then the following categories of difficulties were morphological errors, articles, active and passive verbs and tenses.

AL-Khresheh (2011) stated that making errors was an important step of the learning process because no one can acquire a language without making errors. He conducted a study that investigated compositions written by 120 Jordanian school students. This study aimed at analyzing one syntactic category, which was the coordinating conjunction "and". It also aimed at finding out how frequent did the error of using the conjunction "and" occur and what causes such an error. After analyzing students' compositions, the researcher found out that students committed a tremendous number of errors in using "and". He also found that the main cause for misusing this conjunction was the negative interference of the mother tongue, Arabic in this case. Al-Khresheh (2011, p.428) stated "Interference or transfer from native language could be taken as 'a matter of habit', and negative transfer would be obvious in cases of differences between the L1 and the L2" (p. 428).

Alhaysony (2012) investigated the types of errors committed by Saudi students in their use of articles. The participants were 100 first-year female EFL students at the Department of English in the University of Ha'il. The students were asked to write on one of six different descriptive topics related to their life and culture. These written samples were analyzed and errors were identified and classified based on the Surface Structure Taxonomies (SST) of errors, The results showed that students' omission errors were the most frequent especially article 'a'. On the contrary, the omission of article 'an' was the least frequent error. On the other hand, the addition of the definite article 'the' was the most frequent. This revealed that mother tongue interference was a main source of error because the definite article is widely used in Arabic. Moreover, there were other sources of errors not relating to the native language. The findings showed that 57% of the errors were interlingual, and 42.56% were intralingual ones.

Hamdi (2012) examined grammatical errors committed by students learning English as a foreign language. To collect data for this study, 18 third year students at the ISEAH Institute in Tunisia were asked to write English essays. The aim of this study was to identify and classify grammatical errors to shed light on problematic areas. The findings showed that the participants committed errors in certain categories as articles, prepositions, tenses, verbs, relative pronouns, and morphology. The results also revealed that the category that included the largest number of errors was verb tenses, which comprises 33.33 % of the total errors. Eventually, teachers should focus on such areas through the teaching process. They can also work on these types of errors to improve students' proficiency.

Sawalmah (2013) conducted a study in which he investigated the main errors made by 32 Saudi learners who joined the Preparatory Year Program at University of Ha'il. Errors were identified in the students' compositions and were classified into groups. In this study, learners committed ten common errors; verb tense, word order, subject-verb agreement, pronouns, spellings, capitalization, prepositions, articles, double negatives and sentence fragments. He added that the influence of Arabic language was obvious in students' writings. The results of the study revealed that most of the students' errors were due to the interference of the students' mother tongue.

Koroglu (2014) examined the grammatical errors committed by Turkish students learning English as a foreign language at Gazi University in Turkey. The sample of this study was 23 fourth-year student. They were asked to write persuasive essays. Depending on error analysis approach, the researcher identified and classified errors in those essays. The findings revealed that participants committed different types of errors such as: intralingual errors, negative transfer from mother tongue especially in the use of prepositions, intralingual errors, overgeneralization, ignorance of rules, and incomplete application of rules. However, the study revealed that the main source of errors was interlingual one.

Yousefi, Soori & Janfaza (2014) conducted a study that focused on investigating errors that Iranian learners committed in the area of prepositions. The area of prepositions has been an area of difficulty for learners of English as a second language. The sample of this study was 35 intermediate students.

To test the students' proficiency in using prepositions, a diagnostic test (35 multiple-choice items) was constructed. The results of the study revealed that the causes of these types of errors were interlingual and intralingual interferences.

To conclude, making errors is a natural step of the learning process. In the previous studies, many researchers asserted the importance of first language interference. While learning a foreign language, the mother tongue interferes causing many errors in students' writings. Other studies highlighted the role of learner's deficiency in mastering the rules of the target language as a reason behind syntactic errors. This extensive review of literature has presented many important areas related to the analysis of syntactic errors including: the significance of syntactic error analysis, the techniques used to analyze syntactic errors, the instruments used to collect data, and a presentation of how to analyze syntactic errors regarding interlingual and intralingual causes.

3. Method

This chapter is devoted to the method of the study and the procedures used to collect and analyze the data. Since errors are an important factor in the process of learning a foreign language, this study aims at analyzing preposition errors to find out the reasons behind these areas of difficulty and eventually to avoid them. It starts with describing the nature of the study. Then it provides details about the sample of the current research. After that, it gives a description of the research instrument, and a brief account of data collection procedures. Finally, the techniques used to analyze data are presented.

3.1 The Nature of the Study

Since this study aims at identifying, classifying, and analyzing preposition errors in the data collected, then it is considered an analytical study. The researcher identified, classified and explained errors. In order to accomplish these steps, all syntactic errors were identified and calculated. Then, the study was narrowed to analyze preposition errors that were committed by the sample of the current study, and narrative essays were chosen to be the source of the data. To apply this kind of analysis, error analysis approach was used.

This was used because it was thought it would find out difficulties that learners of a foreign language normally face by exploring syntactic errors committed by the sample of the current study.

Based on the most common syntactic errors found in the essays of those students, syntactic errors referred to the following grammatical categories; verb tense and form, prepositions, articles, plurality, subject-verb agreement, and missing subjects. By comparing the number of preposition errors to the number of other syntactic errors, we can decide the degree level of preposition difficulty students face when they write their essays. Furthermore, a semi-structured interview was conducted after the data analysis of errors "to foster understanding and interpretation of the results " Hourani, 2008: p. 23).

3.2 Sample of the Study

The participants in this study consisted of 39 Saudi female students who were enrolled in the fifth level of the English Department, College of Arts, Princess Nourah Bint Abdulrahman University in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. Their ages ranged between 17 and 20 years old. Their native language is Arabic, and they study English as a foreign language. Moreover, ten instructors participated in a semi-structured interview to shed light on the common syntactic errors committed by the students, and to explore the reasons behind them.

3.3 Instrument of the Study

To present more detailed and clearer picture of the common preposition errors committed by Saudi student, 39 randomly-selected students were asked to write English essays to collect data. This study was applied in the second semester, and the sample of the current study wrote these essays as their midterm examination for Writing V course. They were asked to write a narrative essay about a real experience they had. They were informed that their essays should be grammatically correct and they should write from 100-200 words.

After collecting data, the error analysis approach was employed in this study. The researcher corrected the essays. Then, she identified, classified and analyzed preposition errors. These errors were confined only to errors with frequent type. Errors which occurred only once were not counted.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted after the data analysis to a more reasonable and justified analysis of the errors. Interviews can provide more detailed information about the experiences of individuals. Semi-structured interviews encourage people to be open and honest about the topic being discussed. They can provide more valid information that reflects their attitudes, values and opinions. Therefore, a semi-structured interview with 10 volunteer instructors who teach English writing courses in the English department at Princess Nora University was conducted to take their observations about the preposition errors that students usually make when they write in English and the sources of such errors.

3.4 Procedure of the Study

Students were selected randomly depending on their willingness to participate in this study. They were asked to write narrative essays. Their essays were marked and examined carefully by the researcher to identify syntactic errors in the use of preposition.

Explanations of the two main reasons behind such errors were discussed. The first reason is interlingual errors, which are caused by mother tongue interference, Arabic in this study. Intralingual errors are those which caused by the learner's faulty or partial application of the rules of the second language, English in this study. The reasons behind these errors include overgeneralization, lacking knowledge of the second language rules, and improper use of these rules. In the second part of the study, ten volunteer teachers participated in semi-structured interviews to provide a more detailed interpretation of the results. Interviews were first recorded and then transcribed and sometimes instructors were asked for further explanation when it was needed.

3. 5 Validity and Reliability of the Instruments

The major source used to collect data for finding answers to the questions of the current study is students' essays.

Validity of an instrument is the degree to which an instrument measures what it is intended to measure (Connaway & Powell, 2010). Assamawi (2002), cited in Tahaineh (2010), stated that a research instrument can be validated by many ways, one of which is experts-validation.

Hence, to ensure the validity of the instrument in this study, experts-validation method was employed. The subjects who participated in the current research were asked to write about a real experience they had. Four academic college instructors were asked to evaluate the given topic, and it was approved by those experts because they were taken from materials appropriate to students' standards and age.

Joppe (2000), cited in Golafshani (2003), indicated that reliability of a measurement refers to the degree of consistency of the results that the instrument provides. In this study, reliability is the extent to which test scores are consistent. Scorer reliability can be measured by several ways. According to Wang (2009), routine double marking method can be applied to measure the reliability of the essay test instrument. Therefore, every essay was given to two different examiners, and each worked independently. Difference in scoring was not noticeable.

3.6. Data Collections and Analysis

Since the current study aimed at analyzing preposition errors committed by the present participants, it was necessary to have English texts written by Saudi students to carry out this study. The researcher arranged with instructors of the writing courses to supply English texts written by students. Each student wrote one essay as the mid-term examination for a writing course. The researcher made copies of these essays to have two instructors besides the researcher correcting them independently. Then preposition errors were identified by the researcher, and explanation of these errors was presented in terms of interlingual and intralingual interference.

Moreover, the researcher arranged interviews with instructors teaching writing courses for a long time. Their responses were obtained, coded and analyzed for more interpretation for the analysis of the errors.

4. Results and Discussion

This chapter presents the results, the discussion, and interpretation of these results. It focuses on identifying and classifying preposition errors committed by the subjects. It also focuses on instructors' answers to the interview questions regarding the types and causes of such syntactic errors. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with ten instructors to give more interpretation and support the results. Eventually the results were described and discussed in a way that answers the inquiries of the researcher.

The results revealed that the sample of the current research committed many different types of writing errors in general and preposition errors in particular. The 39 written essays were corrected, and the errors committed by the subjects were identified by the researcher and two instructors who have been teaching writing courses for a long time. A total of 368 syntactic errors were detected. Then the errors were classified under different error categories, and a percentage of error was calculated for each category. The most common syntactic errors committed by the subjects of this study were related to the following six syntactic categories: verb tense and form, prepositions, articles, plurality, subject verb agreement, and missing subject. These common types of syntactic errors were analyzed and discussed to see the degree level of preposition difficulty students face when they write their essays

Table 1: Total Number and Percentages of Interlingual and Intralingual Syntactic Errors

No	Syntactic Errors	Frequency	Percentage
1.	Verb tense and form	240	65.2 %
2.	Prepositions	58	15.7 %
3.	Articles	40	10.8 %
4.	Plurality	16	4.3 %
5.	Subject-verb agreement	11	2.9 %
6.	Missing subject	3	.8 %
	Total	368	100 %

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Figure 1: Total Number of Interlingual and Intralingual Syntactic Errors
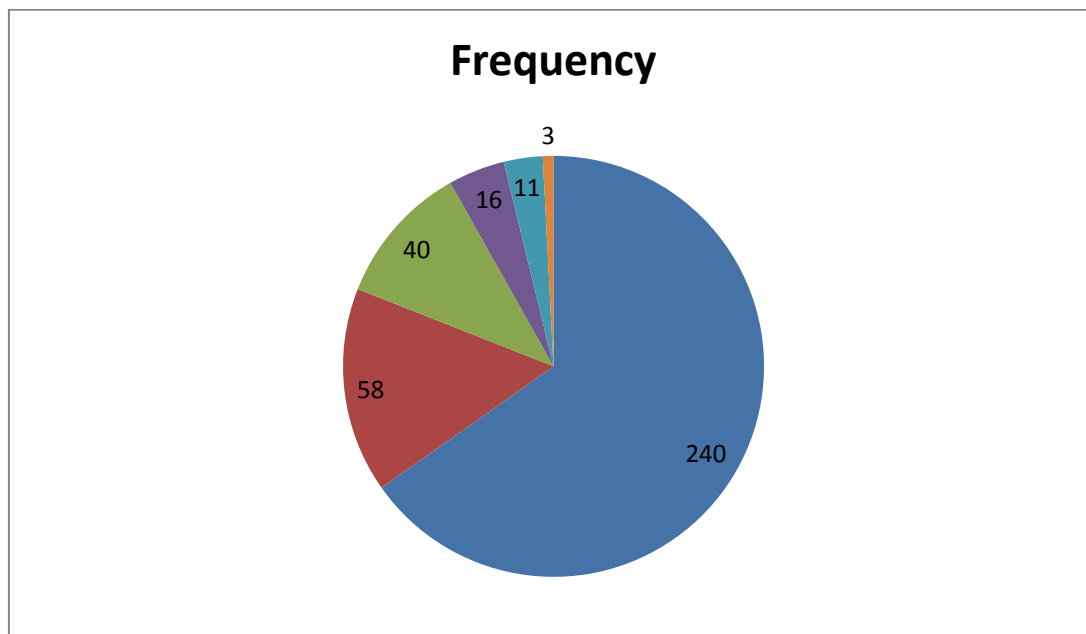

Table 1 shows the frequency and percentage of the different types of syntactic errors. The highest percentage of syntactic errors were in verb tense and form, 240 errors (65.2 %). The second category where the students made a high percentage of errors was the use of prepositions, 58 errors (15.7 %). The other categories were as follows: articles 40 errors (10.8 %), plurality 16 errors (4.3 %), subject-agreement 11 errors (2.9 %), and missing subject 3 errors (.8 %). The analysis and description of the common syntactic errors mentioned earlier led to an answer to the second question of the current research (What are the possible causes of these common types of written syntactic errors?). The findings of this study revealed that the syntactic errors committed by the sample of the current study were due to both interlingual and intralingual causes.

4.1. Error Identification in Students' Essays

Since the aim of this study was to analyze preposition errors found in the essays written by the present sample, an identification of preposition errors and exploring the reasons behind their occurrences was a necessity to overcome this area of difficulty experienced by students.

4.1.1 Prepositions

According to Longman dictionary, preposition is a word that is used before a noun, pronoun, or gerund to show place, time, direction etc. Since usage of prepositions is different in both English and Arabic languages, Arabic speaking learners of English in this study faced problems in many ways. The subjects of this study made (58) errors in the category of prepositions. Their deviant performance in this area was subcategorized into substitution, omission and addition.

Adding prepositions in English structures where they are not required was one type of making error in this category. The reason that made students commit such errors was direct translating from native language because some Arabic structures need certain insertion of prepositions but it is not the case when these structures were translated into English. However, students continued to add preposition in the English equivalent structure. Knowing that the same sentence structure in Arabic required a preposition clarify the influence of mother tongue interference in terms of unnecessary insertion of prepositions. For example,

a. We went back <u>to</u> home. (back home)

b. She asked me not to allow <u>to</u> him to go out. (allow him)

c. I kept calling <u>to</u> her. (calling her)

In other cases where the preposition was needed in the English sentence, the participants of this study used the equivalent Arabic in the English sentence, influenced by their native language. They used wrong prepositions because their equivalents were not found in their native language. For example,

d. I didn't care <u>on</u> her advice. (care about her)

Interference of the native language and not mastering the target language's rules are both main sources of students' errors in this category (Tahainah, 2010).

Furthermore, the results of the study revealed that the students misused prepositions by deleting them from places where they were required according to the English sentence structure. The subjects of this study omitted prepositions if their equivalents are not required in their mother tongue. Therefore, omission of prepositions can be attributed to mother tongue interference. To illustrate this point the following example is presented:

e. The weather was hot most * the time. (most of the time)

To conclude, students experienced a great difficulty in using prepositions since it comes second after errors in using the appropriate verb tense according to the syntactic errors table (1) with a percentage of (15.7 %). They tended to add preposition if their equivalents were required in their mother tongue, omit prepositions from English structure if the equivalent Arabic structure didn't require the addition of proposition, and used improper preposition by providing the Arabic equivalents. Native language interference was a major source of error in this category.

4.2. Instructors' Perspectives

To have a clear picture of what causes the common preposition errors made by female Saudi students at Princess Nourah University, exploring perspectives of instructors who have been teaching writing courses for a long time was significant.

Ten instructors were interviewed and most of them (8) attributed much of preposition errors made by students to native language interference. Here is what some of them stated regarding interlingual errors. When asked: What do you think the causes of such preposition errors?, one instructor said, "*Mostly they are caused by Arabic Language interference, especially the verb-subject agreement and preposition*" (See appendix 1)

Another instructor said, "*Of course, most of the preposition errors are related to first language interference.*"

Some instructors (7) blamed the students themselves for the weakness of their writing skills by saying,
"*Another reason is caused by the student's sole reliance on the lecture as a source of learning as well as their carelessness in preparing or revising course material. Many get involved in other courses in the schedules and postpone their study of the language course to the following week. The information will be, by that time, long forgotten.*"

Another instructor said, "*Some students' errors are related to students' strategies in learning such as direct translation from L1 to L2.*" A third instructor said, "*But it is also caused by their insufficient knowledge of the English language.*"

According to two instructors, teaching strategies and syllabus design can be considered one important cause of preposition errors. One instructor said, *"Definitely, teaching methodology and syllabus design can improve and develop students' writing skills.*

The second instructor argued,

"Often the teacher is forced to use instructor-based methods because of having too many students in a class room or because she must cover the required syllabus provided for the course. The need of some students for special attention, as a result, is not realized especially if they are shy and discouraged by the occasional class participation of "A" students."

One of the experienced instructors attributed these types of errors to some psychological factors under certain circumstances by saying,

"I think that there are also some psychological factors involved. Some students are shy and feel embarrassed to read what they wrote in a foreign language like English in public because they know their incompetency."

The above discussion with instructors revealed that many factors led to preposition errors in the essays of the participants of this study. These factors were reflected in the answers of the instructors to the interview questions. Eight instructors agreed on one main source of those errors, which is native language interference. Moreover, seven instructors argued that students did not produce enough effort to improve their writing skills. They believed that some students' errors were related to their learning strategies such as direct translation from the native language to the target language. They added that students' reliance on lectures as the only source of learning as well as their carelessness in preparing or revising course material are responsible for committing those errors. Moreover, instructors believed that students do not practice enough to improve their writing skills.

4.3. Discussion:

Exploring the types and causes of preposition errors was the main soul of this study. Analyzing essays written by the subjects of this study by using error analysis approach, and instructors' answers to the interview questions were the key to answer the questions of this study.

The researcher paid particular attention to the subjects' essays. By analyzing these essays written by 39 Saudi students, 368 syntactic errors were detected (See table 1). These errors were classified according to common categories, frequency and percentage.

Based on the analysis of the students' essays and supported by the instructors' perspectives, preposition errors committed by the participants of this study were attributed to many sources such as; native language interference, overgeneralization and improper use of the target language rules, and lack of mastering the target language rules.

To conclude, Saudi female students committed a large number of preposition errors. The reasons behind these common errors were due to both interlingual and intralingual sources.

5. Conclusion, Implications, and Recommendations

5.1 Conclusions

The findings of analyzing essays written by the participants of the present study showed a numerous number of preposition errors. After analyzing the errors, it had been found that preposition errors committed by the participants of this study were due to two main sources: interlingual and intralingual reasons. Those errors can be viewed as an important tool to identify areas of difficulty that learners of a foreign language usually face.

Moreover, errors committed due to intralingual causes were noticeable. Improper use of target language rules, overgeneralization of target language rules, and not mastering the target language rules were obvious causes of many preposition errors. These intralingual errors could not be ignored.

According to the answers of instructors to the interview' questions, less number of those errors were attributed to teaching methodology, students' strategies of learning, syllabus design, and lack of motivation.

Focusing on preposition errors and discussing them earlier in writing courses may help students avoid most of them. Furthermore, using modern techniques in teaching writing would be helpful. In addition, syllabus designers should include more writing exercises and drills to motivate students to practice more. The most important thing is making students adopt more effective learning style and focusing on learning the target language through awareness of its rule rather than transferring from native language.

5.2 Implications

There are some pedagogical implications which might be taken into consideration. Identifying syntactic errors in essays written by EFL learners will shed light on the most problematic areas of learning. It will help students to realize their developmental level of learning a foreign language and how much knowledge they acquired of the target language. Therefore, that would lead them to infer the most difficult areas of the target language, and then an attempt to overcome such errors would emerge.

Teachers should give more writing tasks during class time. These tasks should be short and have a direct and focused goal. They should also pay attention to the issue of interference of mother tongue knowledge. Teacher should raise the students' awareness of the differences between the native language and the target language. That would help students reduce their interlingual errors. In addition, syllabus designers should include more tasks to be tackled during writing classes.

5.3 Recommendations

Based on the results of this study, a number of recommendations for further research are suggested:

1. It is recommended that further research be undertaken to investigate other syntactic categories that may be found in the essays written by other sample.

2. Further investigation into interlingual and intralingual errors of writers of other languages is recommended to be carried out.

3. A study investigating another area of the language such as spelling mistakes is strongly recommended as the researcher found lots of spelling mistakes in the essays she corrected.

4. Future research can replicate the present study on male students.

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Appendix (A)

Teachers' Interview

Dear participant,

This is a study of analysis of the common written syntactic errors among EFL students at Princess Nora University. The research is a part of the requirements of the Master's degree .You are kindly requested to reply to the following interview questions regarding your students writing skills. Your responses are highly appreciated and will be exploited to identify the common syntactic errors committed by female Saudi students and eventually improve the teaching of the writing skill of EFL students at Princess Nora University.

Thank you for your precious time.

1. What academic level do you usually teach at princess Norah University?

2. How many times did you teach a writing course?

3. What type of syntactic errors do students usually make in their writing?

4. What do you think the causes of such syntactic errors?

5. Do you think Arabic Language interference is an important factor for such errors?

6. Are these errors due to students learning strategies, teaching methodology or syllabus design?

7. Based on your experience, what are the appropriate methods for tackling these writing problems?

Appendix (B)

Students' Midterm Examination

Question 3: Write an essay of about 150 words about Real Experience you had.

Important notes:

The essay has to be written according to the writing lessons you have taken so far.

Pay attention to Grammar, Spelling, Structure, Capitalization and Punctuation.

Appendix (C)

Panel of Experts:

1. Dr. Mashael AlSudeary   (Professor of English Literature)
2. Dr. Amira Shaker Khayat   (Assistant Professor)
3. Dr. Alanoud Abdulaziz Alganem   (Assistant Professor)
4. Dr. Ebtisam Aluthman   (Assistant Professor)