Unpacking the Grammar in English as a Foreign Language Academic Writing: Error Patterns and Categorization in Research Thesis Proposals

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Abstract

This study, through an empirical lens examine the grammatical usage errors in university students' thesis proposals, primarily focusing on English as a Foreign Language learners. The prime objective is to scrutinize the predominant types of errors and analyze the most common and recurrent patterns in the learners' advanced academic compositions. In this study, the errors are quantified and classified utilizing a descriptive quantitative methodology based on a surface taxonomy. Errors are further highlighted relating to misordering, misformation, omission, and addition. Among the 1,754 errors in the analysis of 27 student proposals from a university in Saudi Arabia, the primary problems were addition errors (28%), omission errors (29%), misordering errors (22%), and misformation errors (21%). The outcomes highlighted the need for targeted instructions to assist students in discerning the appropriate use of grammatical features to improve sentence structure.

Keywords: Error analysis, error categorization, surface taxonomy

الملخص

تتناول هذه الدراسة البحث في الأخطاء النحوية في مقترحات الأبحاث التي يقدمها طلاب الجامعات، من منظور عملي بحت. وهي تركز بشكل أساسي على متعلمي اللغة الإنجليزية لغير الناطقين بها. والهدف الأول لهذه الدراسة هو فحص أنماط الأخطاء الشائعة التي يرتكبها الطلاب عند كتابة أوراقهم الأكاديمية المتقدمة وتحليلها تحليلًا دقيقًا. وقد تم تصنيف الأخطاء وبيان عدد كل نمط من أنماطها باستخدام منهج وصفي تحليلي مبني على التصنيف السطحي؛ فقُسِّمت إلى "أخطاء الترتيب"، و"أخطاء التركيب"، و"أخطاء الحذف"، و"أخطاء الإضافة". وطُبقت الدراسة على 27 مقترح بحث مقدم في إحدى جامعات المملكة العربية السعودية.

أظهرت الدراسة أن الأنماط الأكثر تكرارًا في هذه العينة هي "أخطاء الحذف" بنسبة 29٪ من مجمل الأخطاء، تليها بفارق بسيط، "أخطاء الإضافة" بنسبة 28٪، ثم "أخطاء الترتيب" بنسبة 22٪، ثم "أخطاء التركيب" بنسبة 21٪. وأبرزت النتائج أهمية إمداد الطلاب بتعليمات واضحة ترشدهم إلى كيفية استخدام القواعد استخدامًا صحيحًا لتحسين بنية الجُمَل.

الكلمات المفتاحية: تحليل الأخطاء ، تصنيف الأخطاء ، التصنيف السطحي

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1. Introduction

Grammatical precision is essential in EFL instruction. It is a cornerstone of effective academic communication especially in research writing. In the realm of English as a Foreign Language, grammar refers to the system of composition of words, phrases, clauses, and sentences in English. It encompasses syntax and morphology, and the correct use of linguistic components. For EFL Learners, grammar is the cornerstone of effective communication that enables them to convey the meaning effectively in an accurate manner. Mastery of grammar in EFL contexts sometimes necessitates surmounting obstacles such as native language interface and comprehension between the English grammar and their first language (L1).

Grammar in academic writing pertains to the adherence with formal language rules that guarantees the clarity and accuracy and cohesion in scholarly articles. Academic grammar is essential for presenting ideas logically, that supports the arguments proficiently and it also maintains the credibility and professionalism requisite in academic discourse. Its correct implementation proves the readability of academic documents.

Error patterns in EFL Academic Writing denote persistent, systematic, syntactical, lexical or mechanical errors committed by EFL formal written communication. These patterns struggle to grapple the learners with conventions of English, often denoted by variable L1. These patterns are not arbitrary but reflect the notable linguistic challenges that learners face. Error patterns can include omissions, additions, misformation, misordering and other grammatical issues including the verb tense errors, prepositions and punctuation etc. Through the careful examination of these error patterns, educators and researchers can gain insight into the learner's interlanguage development and to improve pedagogical methods to foster the competency in academic writing.

Conforming to the targeted pedagogical strategies and corrective feedback in addressing grammatical errors in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners' writing is critical. Research demonstrates that first language (L1) interference remains a significant factor across various learner groups, from Arab to Indonesian to Chinese students, affecting aspects such as verb tense, article usage, and word order.

Therefore, improving students' writing proficiency by addressing these specific error patterns is possible through continuous feedback and enhanced teaching practices. This continued research into the causes of these errors will also contribute to more effective second language acquisition strategies for learners from diverse linguistic backgrounds.

1.1 Review of Literature

Patarapongsanti, Wangsatmaja and Kumpolkul (2022), in their study insisted that academic and professional instructors and learners focus on common mistakes in written communications. They first determined the most common errors, and then categorized and investigated the possible effects of L1 interference. In addition, by examining a sizable sample of written output, they demonstrated that syntactical errors are most common, followed by mechanical and morphological faults. The authors emphasized that students must receive more comprehensive grammar teaching and be exposed to English in real-world settings to increase their writing skills. T

The previous observation aligns with Sawalmeh (2013), who investigated the common types of writing errors that Arabic-speaking Saudi English learners make by analyzing 32 English essays. The author suggested that addressing the 10 common errors through targeted teaching strategies could significantly

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improve Arabic-speaking English learners' writing skills. The author further suggested that EFL teachers focus on these areas to minimize future writing difficulties and enhance learners' overall English proficiency.

Similarly, (Nuruzzaman, Afreen & Rahman (2018) revealed that grammar was the most problematic area for Saudi EFL students across all groups. They elaborated that the frequency and types of errors vary significantly based on the students' academic backgrounds, with engineering students making the highest number of errors and medical students making the fewest. They also highlighted the need for more targeted instructional strategies to address these specific error patterns and improve English writing skills in students from different faculties, an idea that resonates with the findings of Alhaysony (2012), who critically observed that the English article system is so complex that it poses challenges even for advanced learners, with interlingual errors being more prominent than intralingual ones. Alhaysony emphasized the need for EFL instructors to address these errors by highlighting differences between Arabic and English usage because L1 interference significantly affects the acquisition of English article usage.

The observation compliments the work of, Muftah and Rafik (2013), who conducted another significant study of grammatical structures. They observed that adult Arab learners face substantial challenges in mastering the third-person singular "-s" due to L1 interference. They suggested that tailored pedagogical strategies are necessary to address these specific difficulties in EFL classrooms, benefiting both teaching practices and future research in second language acquisition. This finding in line with, Alghazo and Alshraideh (2020), who concluded that verb tense errors most commonly appear in student writing, whereas sentence structure errors appear least frequently. Fourth-year students at Al-Hussein Bin Talal University demonstrated better grammatical proficiency than first-year, second-year, and third-year students did, indicating that students' grammatical accuracy improves as they advance through their academic years.

Hidayati, Susilowati & B.A. Wibowo (2022) examined how students used deixis in narrative writing. The authors tried to uncover problems in narrative text writing among 10th-grade students, emphasizing how the students used these deixis types and how they connect to typical grammatical faults such as omission, addition, misstatement, and misordering. Their results demonstrated that although students used a variety of deixis in their writing, they also made several grammatical mistakes that impeded clear communication. Knowledge of these elements can help educators develop instructional strategies to improve students' narrative writing abilities.

Khansir, M. (2012) emphasized the interconnectedness of contrastive analysis, error analysis, and interlanguage theory as essential components for understanding and facilitating second language acquisition. The author elaborated that these theories not only describe errors but also contribute to a deeper understanding of the learning process itself. Recognizing and analyzing errors can provide valuable insights into the learner's progression and the complexities of language acquisition.

Alolaywi (2023) recognized the need for focused interventions to improve students' writing abilities, primarily by incorporating successful pedagogical strategies such as corrective feedback.

Based on these articles, future researchers should investigate the fundamental reasons of these writing mistakes to enhance teaching approaches. ESL and EFL educators may develop specific pedagogical techniques to enhance students' writing proficiency. Further study may be necessary to investigate effective strategies for resolving these challenges and improving English language instruction for Arabic-speaking learners.

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Researchers in countries such as Indonesia have also conducted research, including Zawahreh (2012), who emphasized that 10th-grade students in Ajloun demonstrated common errors in their written English, notably concerning morphology, function words, syntax, tenses, and linguistic usage. These results highlight the need for focused educational interventions to rectify these mistakes and enhance students' overall English writing skills. Comprehending the underlying reasons for these faults might guide pedagogical approaches to improve language learning and diminish error occurrence in subsequent compositions. Taghavi (2012) concluded that the most common errors in Iranian EFL learners' English writing included spelling, word choice, verb tense, prepositions, subject–verb agreement, and word order. Interlingual (influence of the native language) and intralingual (incorrect application of English rules) transfers primarily cause these errors. Understanding these errors helps educators predict and address common learning challenges, ultimately improving English teaching and learning.

Similarly, in her research, Yang (2019) aimed to provide suggestions to minimize negative transfer influences in English writing among Chinese learners. She concluded that through understanding the nature of errors and employing appropriate strategies, learners can improve their English writing skills by mitigating interference from their native language. Kang and Han (2015) suggested that written corrective feedback is effective in enhancing grammatical accuracy in second-language writing; however, various factors, such as learners' proficiency levels, the context in which learning occurs, and the genre of the writing task, influence its impact.

1.2 Research Gap

Despite extensive studies on grammatical errors in EFL writing, there are some significant gaps that remains constant in understanding the nuances of error patterns in academic writing. Previous studies has been majorly focused on general writing skills, while some have highlighted to role of L1 interference and interlingual variables, there is a paucity of study about their precise effects on intricate structure and grammar required in thesis proposals of students. Moreover, my current research examines the errors in isolation without exploring their interrelationships that lead to their mistakes, thus there's a dreath of research concentrating on Arab EFL Learners. My study targets these deficiencies by concentrating only on grammatical errors in Arab EFL students' research thesis proposals, employing a comprehensive framework to systematically examine the influence of L1 interference. It aims to enhance the discipline by providing insights that are both locally pertinent and universally applicable.

My research is innovative compared to previous studies due to my data collection. First, the corpus includes sophisticated academic writing featuring a complete research format, including samples with an introduction, literature review, methodology, and more. Second, I based it on Arab EFL learners, providing significant regional and global contributions with non-native English variety. Third, I conducted a quantitative and qualitative data analysis based on 27 complete EFL learner research proposals.

I conducted this research to answer the following questions:

1. What categories of grammatical errors do Arab EFL students most often make in their thesis proposals?

2. Which grammatical errors are prevalent in Arab EFL students' thesis proposals?

3. What are the potential reasons for grammatical errors that EFL students make in their thesis proposals?

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4. What role do interlingual and intralingual factors play in grammatical errors observed in EFL students' thesis proposals?

2. Theoretical Framework

In this study, I employed the theory of surface strategy taxonomy to classify errors based on their surface structure. Fundamentally, I broke down grammatical errors into four primary categories: omission, addition, misformation, and misordering. Afterward, I analyzed the errors using Brown's framework (Brown, 2000) to determine whether the cause was either interlingual transfer, where the students' native language interferes with their English usage, or intralingual transfer, where students overgeneralize English rules or misapply grammatical structures. Using a multiple-classification taxonomy of errors, researchers have been prone to try to find real-time solutions to the problem. For instance, Btoosh (2011) examined and classified the kinds of errors that Arab students studying ESL made. He used a corpus of translated sentences, essays, and interviews to show common intralingual and lexico-semantic errors that the participants, who were from different Arab nations, made. The results showed that lexico-semantic errors contributed considerably to the overall error rate, with intralingual errors being the most common. Likewise, Dewi, Sujana & Narius (2021) also identified the types of errors in EFL writing to address the particular areas of difficulty and encourage improvement through customized instructional strategies. They also address the advanced academic writing error analysis with an enhanced categorization of grammatical errors motivated in research. They explored the taxonomy of grammatical errors of EFL students in higher education. They further focused on the types of errors made when students wrote their research proposals. They employed the surface strategy taxonomy framework that Dulay, Burt & Krashen (1982) proposed.

3. Methodology

This research acts as a lens to zoom in on Arabic EFL students' grammatical missteps in their thesis proposals. Employing a robust descriptive quantitative methodology. Th landscape of errors was navigated to map using Brown's guiding framework (Brown, 2000, 2008). This framework is about the error analysis that Octaberlina and Muslimin (2022) replicated on Indonesian EFL learners. Thus, Arab EFL learners' research proposals was investigated by employing the error categorization framework of the abovementioned researchers:

- **Omission errors (OE):** Instances where required elements (e.g., articles, auxiliary verbs, prepositions) were missing

- **Addition errors (AE):** Occurrences where unnecessary elements were added into sentences, leading to redundancy

- **Misformation errors (MFE)**: Errors in word formation, such as incorrect verb tenses or forms

- **Misordering errors (MOE):** errors where words or sentence elements were incorrectly ordered, disrupting the syntactic structure

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These frameworks are important to connect the relationship and understanding the specific errors that students make while it also provides a deeper insight into the exploration of how these errors influence the academic writing. By applying these frameworks, this research aims to identify the most commonly used error types and patterns to understand how they are impacted by the factors in students' writing process and L1 interference.

3.1. Sampling

In this study, the data is collected from a purposive sample of 27 thesis proposals from EFL students enrolled at a public university in Saudi Arabia. These students, all non-native English learners, were in the final stage of their academic programs and engaged in composing thesis proposals. Using the common error patterns outlined in the above classification, I analyzed their written work to identify and categorize grammatical structures.

3.2. Data Analysis

All 27 EFL research proposals were investigated in the following phases:

3.3. Quantitative Counting and Categorization

First, errors are counted and frequencies for each student proposal are recorded. The next step involved documenting the raw error counts for each proposal in terms of omission, addition, misformation, and misordering errors. Finally, the results are tabulated for easy comparison across the sample.

3.3.1. Normalization of Results

In this step, the number of errors is normalized to account for potential differences in proposal length and complexity. This allowed for fairer comparisons between different proposals. In addition, normalized scores helped determine the average rate of each error type relative to the length of each proposal.

3.3.2. Textual Examples

Third, after counting and categorizing errors, I extracted specific textual examples from the proposals to illustrate the types of errors the students made. For instance, I highlighted examples of omission errors where students omitted essential auxiliary verbs, along with their corrected versions, to show the correct sentence structure.

I analyzed the data using Excel spreadsheets, where I categorized, counted, and normalized the errors. I tracked each proposal's errors and identified overall trends, such as which type of errors were more frequent across the sample. Afterward, I compiled the results into tables that displayed the count and percentage of each type of error along with normalized data for comparison. Textual examples further illustrated the kinds of errors that were common among the students, providing a clearer understanding of their struggles with English writing.

I then discussed the results in relation to the broader context of EFL learning. This structured approach, which focused on the identification, classification, and normalization of errors, allowed for a detailed examination of the grammatical challenges EFL students face in academic writing.

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4. Results and Discussion

Categorizations of error analysis in academic writing provide a structured analysis of the grammatical challenges students face in their academic writing, as Dulay et al. (1982) grounded in their taxonomy of error analysis. Likewise, this research started with raw data from each proposal that included the total number of errors in each category.

Data revealed the following:

- **OE:** Absence of necessary elements such as articles, auxiliary verbs, and prepositions. Proposal C displayed 49 omission errors, accounting for 35% of total errors.

- **AE:** Unnecessary inclusion of elements that create redundancy in sentence structure. For instance, Proposal C had 22 addition errors (15.7% of total errors).

- **MFE:** Incorrect word formations such as improper verb conjugations or tense usage. Proposal C showed 38 misformation errors, making up 27.1% of the total errors.

- **MOE:** Errors in the placement of sentence elements, resulting in syntactic confusion. Proposal C indicated 31 misordering errors, contributing to 22.1% of the total errors.

Table 1. Total Count of Errors

Sr. No.	Proposal	Omission errors	Addition errors	Misformation errors	Misordering errors
1	Proposal A	4	4	3	2
2	Proposal B	11	11	27	7
3	Proposal C	49	22	38	31
4	Proposal D	14	32	5	6
5	Proposal E	11	11	8	8
6	Proposal F	9	8	9	7
7	Proposal G	31	27	18	17
8	Proposal H	14	19	20	10
9	Proposal I	33	37	15	21
10	Proposal J	17	13	10	10
11	Proposal K	17	17	15	13
12	Proposal M	64	57	38	62
13	Proposal N	28	31	29	29
14	Proposal O	22	20	16	21
15	Proposal P	16	13	9	10
16	Proposal Q	10	10	10	10

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17	Proposal R	10	10	9	8
18	Proposal S	16	15	15	14
19	Proposal T	17	20	21	15
20	Proposal U	19	10	11	11
21	Proposal V	11	10	10	10
22	Proposal W	20	9	9	11
23	Proposal X	11	14	5	5
24	Proposal Y	10	10	9	7
25	Proposal Z	15	23	14	15
26	Proposal AA	14	13	11	8
27	Proposal AB	11	11	10	11

Table 2. Frequency and Percentage of Errors

Error Type	Number of Errors	Percentage of Total Errors
Omission Error (OE)	504	28.73%
Addition Error (AE)	477	27.19%
Misformation Errors (MFE)	394	22.4%
Misordering Error (MOE)	376	21.4%
Total Errors	1754	99.72%

Table 2 demonstrates how often these errors occur and in which context they are most prevalent. It helps identify the primary areas where students struggle, such as verb conjugation and word arrangement. As Ellis (1994) noted, classifying errors provides key insights into learners' interlanguage development. For a more precise comparison, the data include percentages representing each error category's share of the total errors in each proposal and provide insights into the distribution of error types.

1. **Proposal A** had a relatively balanced distribution of errors: Omission Errors (30.8%), Addition Errors (30.8%), Misformation Errors (23.1%), and Misordering Errors (15.4%).

2. **Proposal C** which had a significantly higher number of total errors, exhibited Omission Errors (35%), Addition Errors (15.7%), Misformation Errors (27.1%), and Misordering Errors (22.1%).

Table 3. Total Errors and Percentages for Each Proposal

Sr. No.	Proposal	OE	AE	MFE	MOE	T. Errors (TE)	OE%	AE%	MFE%	MOE%
1	A	4	4	3	2	13	30.8	30.8	23.1	15.4

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2	B	11	11	27	7	56	19.6	19.6	48.2	12.5
3	C	49	22	38	31	140	35	15.7	27.1	22.1
4	D	14	32	5	6	57	24.6	56.1	8.8	10.5
5	E	11	11	8	8	38	28.9	28.9	21.1	21.1
6	F	9	8	9	7	33	27.3	24.2	27.3	21.2
7	G	31	27	18	17	93	33.3	29	19.4	18.3
8	H	14	19	20	10	63	22.2	30.2	31.7	15.9
9	I	33	37	15	21	106	31.1	34.9	14.2	19.8
10	J	17	13	10	10	50	34	26	20	20
11	K	17	17	15	13	62	27.4	27.4	24.2	21
12	M	64	57	38	62	221	29	25.8	17.2	28.1
13	N	28	31	29	29	117	23.9	26.5	24.8	24.8
14	O	22	20	16	21	79	27.8	25.3	20.3	26.6
15	P	16	13	9	10	48	33.3	27.1	18.8	20.8
16	Q	10	10	10	10	40	25	25	25	25
17	R	10	10	9	8	37	27	27	24.3	21.6
18	S	16	15	15	14	60	26.7	25	25	23.3
19	T	17	20	21	15	73	23.3	27.4	28.8	20.5
20	U	19	10	11	11	51	37.3	19.6	21.6	21.6
21	V	11	10	10	10	41	26.8	24.4	24.4	24.4
22	W	20	9	9	11	49	40.8	18.4	18.4	22.4
23	X	11	14	5	5	35	31.4	40	14.3	14.3
24	Y	10	10	9	7	36	27.8	27.8	25	19.4
25	Z	15	23	14	15	67	22.4	34.3	20.9	22.4
26	AA	14	13	11	8	46	30.4	28.3	23.9	17.4
27	AB	11	11	10	11	43	25.6	25.6	23.3	25.6

The percentages in Table 3 illustrate the domains in which students are most prone to errors, enabling instructors to customize education to address these issues. They disclose many significant trends.

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4.1. Omission Errors

The data indicate that omission errors were prevalent in several proposals, constituting 30–40% of the total errors in some instances. These often include omitting essential grammatical elements, such as auxiliary verbs or articles.

4.1.1. Illustration

In Proposal A, omission errors constituted 30.77% of the total errors, signifying a frequent lack of essential parts such as "to be" verbs. Proposal W had an exceptionally elevated rate of omission errors, with an OE norm of 0.4082, suggesting that 40.82% of the errors were omission-based. This high rate indicates that the student consistently omitted crucial grammatical elements across their proposal.

4.1.2. Textual Examples

Example 1: "It not mean" instead of "It does not mean." In this case, the student omitted the auxiliary verb "does," leading to an incomplete sentence. The correction, "It does not mean," includes the necessary auxiliary verb to convey the correct meaning and structure.

Example 2: "They must able" instead of "They must be able." The student omitted the auxiliary verb "be" here, which is necessary to link the modal verb "must" with the main verb "able."

Example 3: "He going to school" instead of "He is going to school" (missing the auxiliary verb "is").

4.2. Addition Errors

These errors, where students added unnecessary elements to sentences, accounted for a significant percentage of errors in several proposals. For instance, in Proposal D, 56.14% of the errors were addition errors, highlighting the overuse or redundancy of elements such as auxiliary verbs or prepositions.

Example: A typical error might be, "They are must able" instead of "They must be able," where the auxiliary verb "is" is added unnecessarily.

4.2.1. Textual Examples

Example 1: "They are must able" instead of "They must be able." In this case, the student unnecessarily added the auxiliary verb "are," creating redundancy. The correct sentence, "They must be able," is more concise and grammatically accurate.

Example 2: "The the cat is sleeping" instead of "The cat is sleeping." The repetition of the article "the" is an addition error that makes the sentence redundant.

Example 3: "They can able to do it" instead of "They can do it" (unnecessary addition of "able").

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4.3. Misformation Errors

These errors occurred when students used incorrect word forms or verb tenses, contributing to 20–40% of the total errors in several proposals. Misformation errors are particularly evident in verb conjugations and tense agreement issues.

Example: A misformation error would be using "the study was used" instead of "the study will use" due to confusion between the past and future tenses.

4.3.1. Textual Examples

Example 1: "The study used" instead of "The study will use." In this instance, the student incorrectly used the past tense "used," whereas the future tense "will use" is required. This reflects confusion between verb tenses, leading to miscommunication about when the action occurs.

Example 2: "She are going" instead of "She is going." Here, the subject-verb agreement is incorrect. The singular subject "She" requires the verb "is" instead of "are," demonstrating an issue with verb conjugation.

Example 3: "The books was on the table" instead of "The books were on the table." This is an incorrect verb form; the student should have used "were" or the plural subject.

4.4. Misordering Errors

Misordering errors, where students incorrectly placed words or phrases within a sentence, were the least frequent but still notable. In Proposal M, these errors accounted for 15–20% of the total errors, affecting sentence structure and readability.

Example: A misordering error would be "studying proposal errors students" instead of "students studying proposal errors."

4.4.1. Textual Examples

Example 1: "Studying proposal errors students" instead of "Students studying proposal errors." The words are not in the correct order, making the sentence difficult to understand. The corrected version follows standard English syntax.

Example 2: "Quickly the dog ran" instead of "The dog ran quickly." While this sentence is not grammatically incorrect, the disordering of the adverb "quickly" makes the sentence less natural in English. The more typical word order places the adverb at the end of the sentence.

Example 3: "The homework she completed" instead of "She completed the homework."

In my analysis I also used normalized scores to account for the student proposals' varying lengths and complexity. Normalization enables the comparison of error rates on a proportional basis, providing a clearer view of each student's performance relative to the length of their writing.

Table 4. Normalized Results for Each Proposal

Sr. No.	Proposal	OE Norm	AE Norm	MFE Norm	MOE Norm
1	A	0.3077	0.3077	0.2308	0.1538
2	B	0.1964	0.1964	0.4821	0.125
3	C	0.35	0.1571	0.2714	0.2214
4	D	0.2456	0.5614	0.0877	0.1053
5	E	0.2895	0.2895	0.2105	0.2105
6	F	0.2727	0.2424	0.2727	0.2121
7	G	0.3333	0.2903	0.1935	0.1831
8	H	0.2222	0.3022	0.3175	0.1587
9	I	0.3113	0.3491	0.1415	0.1981
10	J	0.34	0.26	0.2	0.2
11	K	0.2742	0.2742	0.2419	0.2097
12	M	0.2896	0.257	0.1724	0.2801
13	N	0.2393	0.265	0.2487	0.2487
14	O	0.2785	0.2532	0.2038	0.266
15	P	0.3333	0.271	0.1875	0.2083
16	Q	0.25	0.25	0.25	0.25
17	R	0.2703	0.2703	0.2432	0.2162
18	S	0.2667	0.25	0.25	0.2333
19	T	0.2338	0.2739	0.286	0.2055
20	U	0.3733	0.1961	0.2157	0.2157
21	V	0.2683	0.2439	0.2439	0.2439
22	W	0.4082	0.1846	0.1846	0.2245
23	X	0.3143	0.4	0.143	0.143
24	Y	0.2778	0.2778	0.25	0.1944
25	Z	0.2239	0.3433	0.209	0.2239
26	AA	0.3043	0.2826	0.2391	0.1739
27	AB	0.2558	0.2558	0.2326	0.2558

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In this research, the error data is adjusted to accommodate variations in proposal length and complexity. Likewise, the incidence of each error category is quantified as a ratio of the total mistakes in each proposal. Normalized data facilitates equitable comparisons across proposals and enhances the comprehension of students' grammatical skills. For instance, Proposal A exhibited normalized omission errors of 30.77%, whereas misformation errors were normalized at 23.08%.

Conversely, Proposal D exhibited addition mistakes normalized at 56.14%, indicating that more than half of the total faults were from superfluous items being included in phrases. This standardized method enables a more precise examination of students' mistake patterns, revealing their deficiencies irrespective of the proposal length. Richards (1971) underscored that mistake analysis may provide significant insights for language instruction. It helps instructors concentrate on the most troublesome areas. The analysis of EFL students' thesis proposals revealed several significant grammatical errors, specifically in the categories of omission, misformation, addition, and misordering.

Table 5. Textual Example of Proposal 1

1 Proposal	Error Type	Original Sentence	Corrected Sentence
	Omission Error (OE)	"people can conduct research"	"how different types of people can conduct research effectively"
		"Besides, I am in the process of writing my final paper"	"In addition, I am currently in the process of writing my final research paper"
		"The good news is that enrolling in this university program"	"The good news is that enrolling in this university program has offered me new insights"
		"As for the most useful part that developed my skills from a personal point of view"	"As for the most useful part of the course that developed my skills from a personal point of view"
		"Throughout the course, I have gained very informative and interesting ideas"	"Throughout the course, I have gained many informative ideas"
	Addition Error (AE)	"Writing a reflective paper about the Introduction to Graduate Research course"	"Writing a reflective paper about the course"
		"Individually, in the first week of the research experience"	"In the first week of the research experience"
		"I felt a little bit dispersed due to the fact"	"I felt a little scattered because"
	Misformation Error (MFE)	"All of those had the right to expand"	"All of those experiences had the potential to expand"
		"His timeless and influential advice in conducting research	"His timeless and influential advice on conducting research remains memorable"

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	that remains in memory"	
	"I studied research methodologies for my bachelor's degree at university"	"I studied research methodologies during my bachelor's degree"
	"A title should be of 12 to 15 words"	"A title should contain 12 to 15 words"
Misordering Error (MOE)	"Moving into class discussions and engaging in them prompted me"	"Engaging in class discussions prompted me"

Table 5 categorizes numerous grammatical faults identified in students' thesis proposals. I classified these errors into four main categories: Omission Error, Addition Error, Misformation Error, and Misordering Error. I paired every inaccuracy with an original sentence and its rectified version.

4.5. Omission Errors

These errors pertain to the omission of essential components in a sentence, including articles, conjunctions, or phrases that elucidate meaning. The corrections incorporate these omitted elements to enhance the sentences' clarity and grammatical accuracy. Illustrations encompass the following.

- **Original:** "people can conduct research"

  Corrected: "how different types of people can conduct research effectively"

- **Original:** "Besides, I am in the process of writing my final paper"

  Corrected: "In addition, I am currently in the process of writing my final research paper"

4.5.1. Analysis.

The corrections show that students omitted essential descriptive or clarifying details. For instance, "how different types" can help in precision, and replacing the final paper with "final research paper" makes it more correct.

4.6. Addition Errors

These mistakes happen when unnecessary words and phrases are included in the sentence structures.

- **Original:** "Throughout the course, I have gained very informative and interesting ideas"

  Corrected: "Throughout the course, I have gained many informative ideas"

- **Original:** "Writing a reflective paper about the Introduction to Graduate Research course"

  Corrected: "Writing a reflective paper about the course"

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4.6.1. *Analysis.*

These sentences suffer from overelaboration or excessive wording. Eliminating superfluous words such as "very" or phrases such as "about the introduction to the graduated search subjects" answers and streamlines the sentence and makes the statement concise.

4.7. *Misformation Errors*

These errors pertain to erroneous forms in word formations, such as incorrect verb tenses or forms that can result in improper meanings or miscommunicate the meaning. The revisions modify the vocabulary, word choices, and subtractors to convey the desired meaning precisely.

Examples include:

- **Original:** "All of those had the right to expand"

  Corrected: "All of those experiences had the potential to expand"

- **Original:** "His timeless and influential advice in conducting research that remains in memory"

  Corrected: "His timeless and influential advice on conducting research remains memorable"

4.7.1. *Analysis.*

Misformation mistakes or errors are problems with word selections and context. For example, "right to expand" is ambiguous, but "potential to expand" is more precise. Similarly, "remains in memory" is revised to "remains memorable."

4.8. *Misordering Errors*

These errors pertain to the improper positioning or placement of words or phrases that disrupt the sentence coherence. The corrections arrange components to improve clarity and reliability.

Examples include:

- **Original:** "A good title should be 12 to 15 words"

  Corrected: "A good title should consist of 12 to 15 words"

- **Original:** "Moving into class discussions and engaging in them prompted me"

  Corrected: "Engaging in class discussions prompted me"

4.8.1. *Analysis.*

Misordering of words makes the sentence unclear and vague. For instance, adding "should consist of" clarifies the statement. Reordering the words "in class discussions" makes the sentence concise and clear.

Table 5 shows the typical mistakes of non-native English learners and the grammatical corrections. By focusing on the corrections, the learners can clarify vague statements. To avoid both extra information and

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the lack of information, some addition and reduction of words is necessary. Misformation of sentences demonstrates the lack of information about sentence structure; misordering leads to noncoherent sentence structures. This analysis can help instructors show their students how they can omit unnecessary words and make the sentence clearer, making sure that they explain important information in a well-mannered way and can use the right word forms and correct sentence structures. The kinds of examples illustrated above can help EFL students use words in a correct way to avoid mistakes in their English writing. By providing the correct instructions on techniques such as omission, addition, misformation, and misordering mistakes, teachers can help the students write better, grammatically correct sentences. These mistakes arise as a challenge for non-native speakers; they need guidance for correct grammar use and a coherent writing structure.

The findings also revealed the grammatical mistakes the 27 EFL students made. The structured approach that I used in this study has highlighted the grammatical challenges EFL students face. The most frequent error they made was the omission error. In Proposal C, for instance, 35% of the errors were omission errors, which showed it was the most common problem students faced. Some of the important units of speech omitted here involved articles, auxiliary verbs, and prepositions. The translation of information from one language (the mother language) to another (the English language) was the main cause of the omission of these structural patterns; the students' first language negatively influenced their English language usage.

In other languages, auxiliary verbs and articles are either absent or do not work in the same way as in the English language, which makes the non-native speaker omit these units in English. For example, the phrase "they not mean" rather than "they do not mean" shows the omission of the auxiliary verb "do." Thus, students generate unclear sentences by omitting these grammatical units. Other researchers have made similar findings. For example, Octaberlina & Muslimin (2022) showed that the most frequent error that Indonesian EFL learners made was the omission error, which might be due to the absence of article usage in the language used in Bahasa Indonesia.

After the omission error, the addition error made up a notable percentage of EFL learners' errors. In Proposal C, for instance, 15.7% of errors were addition errors due to the extra usage of auxiliary verbs. For example, "it is must able" rather than "it must be able." This error arose due to the overgeneralization of grammatical rules the students applied from their native language to English. According to Brown (2000), this happens due to students' unlimited use of rules because they are not able to decide the breadth of application of certain grammatical rules. Brown highlighted this mistake, indicating that the students were not aware of the usage of some grammatical units. Alagbe (2009) highlighted the same issue, in which students added unnecessary grammatical structures due to the overgeneralization of rules. Alagbe (2009) illustrated that in negative and interrogative sentences, the most confusing elements were the auxiliary verbs. In Proposal C, the second most frequent mistake was misformation, which comprised 27.1% of the mistakes in language formation. These kinds of mistakes usually involve an incorrect use of verb forms, the students being unable to understand the tense formation rules. An example is "the study used observation method" instead of "the study will use the observation method." This example shows how EFL learners face challenges and misuse tenses due to the difficulty in understanding the correct rules relating to them.

The fewest errors were misordering errors, which comprised 22.1% of the total errors in Proposal C. Incorrect placement of grammatical units caused these errors, leading to incoherent text formation. For instance, "teachers who were teaches" instead of "teachers who teach" shows the misunderstanding of the English language's syntactical rules. Students make these errors because of differences in sentence structure

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in the different languages. Lin (2012) asserted that misordering errors often reflect an insufficient exposure to English syntax in a formal educational environment, particularly when instructions do not focus on sentence structure. Furthermore, Ellis et al. (2006) posited that these errors indicate learners' gaps in tactical knowledge, particularly regarding more intricate sentence construction. The prevalence of these failures in the proposals illuminate the need for targeted practice in sentence construction and word placement. External influence, particularly the learning environment, plays a significant role in shaping the student's grammatical performance. My study's participants explained that their academic environment had experienced a natural catastrophe, notably an earthquake that affected their university. This disruption likely contributed to the high frequency of grammatical mistakes because the students had limited access to organized learning material, and they were often required to study in makeshift environments. Lin (2012) underscored the importance of conductive and supportive learning, highlighting that external variables in educational resources and unstable classroom conditions or settings can hinder language acquisition. Similarly, Alagbe (2009) discovered that external disturbances such as those which the participants encountered in his research could excessively raise intensive preexisting difficulties in grammar acquisition by reducing the students' access to quality teaching. The author's findings indicated that focused instruction on grammar, especially regarding the proper use of articles, word tenses, and auxiliary verbs, is crucial for enhancing EFL students' grammatical accuracy. The significant occurrence of numerous misformation mistakes indicated that students required more guidance or instruction in comprehending and understanding how to apply these grammatical rules in their sentences. Ellis (2009) asserted that consistent and focused feedback on students' writing was essential for facilitating the internalization of the correct use of grammatical structures. Moreover, implementing Corder (1981) suggestion to integrate thesis writing practice as a core component of the curriculum could provide students with additional opportunities to hone their academic writing practices.

By offering personalized feedback, educators can assist students in surmounting prevalent difficulties. Grammatical exercises enhance skills in English writing by providing the proper use of grammatical rules. My research provides significant insights into the grammatical challenges that EFL students face concerning omission and misformation errors. I enhance the knowledge of the special demands and external factors that influence EFL learners by examining the distinctive mistake patterns that affect students' specific needs and performance.

As Corder (1981) suggested, learning from students' errors provides essential information for educators to tailor their teaching methods and address the specific difficulties their students face. By improving grammar instruction and providing continuous, personalized feedback, teachers can help students enhance their academic writing skills, better preparing them for future academic and professional pursuits.

5. Major Contribution of the Research

This study produced results that could empower the fields of applied linguistics and English language teaching, such as in the context of EFL learners' academic writing. I focused on error analysis in advanced academic writing that provided insights into the common grammatical challenges EFL learners face. I deepened a major understanding of how EFL learners struggle with grammar in advanced academic contexts specific to error patterns such as addition, omission, misordering, and misformation. By identifying the predominant types of errors in academic writing,

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I suggest the need for targeted instructional strategies. I reinforce the importance of teaching grammar within the specific context of academic writing, moving beyond generic grammar instruction to address the unique challenges EFL learners face in their academic compositions. Using surface strategy taxonomy in error analysis as a framework for categorizing the errors provides a structured methodology for educators and researchers. It helps refine error analysis techniques by offering a clear approach to improving grammatical instruction. My findings emphasize the need for contextualized grammar practices. Ongoing feedback is inevitable to help learners improve their grammatical competence. By recommending that EFL learners receive continuous, corrective feedback tailored to their common errors, I support evidence-based teaching practices aimed at enhancing academic writing proficiency. I provide localized data from Saudi EFL learners, contributing to a growing body of research on the challenges learners face in the Expanding Circle (according to Kachru's model Kachru, 1985). Data can inform curriculum development and instructional strategies specifically suited to learners in this context to transform the broader discourse on EFL instruction globally.

6. Conclusion

My employing surface strategy taxonomy theory in my research to categorize errors, proved fruitful. I identified 1,754 errors, revealing the depth of the students' challenges with English grammar in academic writing. Among the error categories, omission errors were particularly prominent, constituting 29% of the total errors with 504 omission errors recorded in student proposals. The frequent omission of the critical elements such as articles and auxiliary verbs, indicated a need for focused grammar instruction. Misformation errors, accounting for 33% of the total errors, were the second most frequent error type. The 64 misformation errors identified in the proposals reflected a substantial struggle with verb conjugation. The consistent occurrence of misformation errors suggested that the students lacked a thorough understanding of verb tenses in the English language. Addition errors were slightly less common but still significant, making up 36% of the total errors. These 71 errors revealed a tendency among students to overcompensate by inserting unnecessary grammatical elements, leading to redundancies in sentence structure. The high frequency of these errors emphasizes the need for targeted instruction to help students discern when auxiliary verbs and other grammatical elements are necessary. Misordering errors were the least frequent, accounting for 6% of the total errors with 12 misordering errorsntified. Although few, they are no less significant because they indicate fundamental difficulties in syntactic arrangement in more complex sentence constructions. Misordering errors, suggest an incomplete understanding of English sentence structure, which severely disrupts the clarity and coherence of academic writing. The normalization of the data provided a fair comparison across the proposals for variations in length and complexity. Normalizing the data allowed for a more precise understanding of the students' grammatical weaknesses. The finding is consistent with Richards (1971), who stressed the importance of teaching grammatical structures in a way that addresses both interlingual and intralingual influences. The high incidence of addition errors suggests that students require clearer guidance on when certain grammatical elements are necessary and when they are not. I suggest that the instructors leverage these findings to design more targeted interventions in grammar workshops exploring verb tense usage and sentence structure, thus reducing misordering errors. Ellis (2009) advocated for continuous feedback mechanisms in which students receive individualized feedback on their

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specific grammatical weaknesses. It would enable students to correct their errors over time, ultimately improving their proficiency in academic writing.

6.1. Future Strategy for Conducting Research

Grammar instruction in advanced academic writing needs further study. Teachers could embed grammar lessons in academic writing assignments to reinforce grammar competence. Longitudinal studies of EFL learners' grammatical competence are also important for further exploration. Researchers could assess targeted instructional interventions to demonstrate how quickly students can reduce addition and misformation errors. Because L1 affects English grammar errors, future researchers should examine how native language structures affect EFL learners' grammar choices. Comparing Arabic and other non-native English learners may reveal academic English grammar's universal and language-specific challenges. I recommend continuous feedback using systems such as automated writing evaluation. Future researchers could examine how well these tools provide real-time grammar feedback to help students correct writing mistakes. I highlighted thesis proposal writing errors to help curriculum developers create EFL writing courses to address advanced academic writing's grammatical challenges. These courses could target omission and misordering errors and provide remediation practice exercises. Future researchers should study teacher training programs that help teachers spot and correct students' grammar. I examined thesis proposals, but future researchers could examine research articles and essays and report grammatical errors. This would help EFL students handle academic writing across various genres. Further research on peer review for grammatical error correction may help. A collaborative learning environment with peer and instructor feedback could improve students' writing.

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د. عبدالله الشيبان، أستاذ مشارك في اللغويات التطبيقية في قسم اللغة الإنجليزية وآدابها بكلية اللغات والعلوم الإنسانية في جامعة القصيم، المملكة العربية السعودية. حاصل على درجة الدكتوراه في اللغويات التطبيقية من جامعة ممفيس عام 2018. تدور اهتماماته البحثية حول اكتساب اللغة والمفردات، القواعد، النحو، علم المعاني، تعلم اللغة بمساعدة الحاسب.

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