

The Study of Grammatical Errors in Iranian EFL Learners' Spoken Discourse: A Linguistic Analysis

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Abstract

A convenient means of identifying learners' linguistic abilities is the study of the grammatical errors in the sentential constructions in their spoken outputs. In so doing, this cross-sectional qualitative study aimed to examine the spoken syntactical constructions produced by the young EFL institute learners in light of the accuracy level and types of errors. Linguistic error analysis was used to chart grammatical knowledge of the learners and assess aspects of grammatical deviances that unfolded in their productions. Findings indicated that the learners' grammatical errors, in most cases, adhered to their misuse and misapplication of the rules and linguistic patterns learnt. However, most of the errors committed were local; that is, they did not disrupt understanding, including tense marking, omission, misformation, and disordering errors. Misapplication of verb-word, concordance violation, and the use of double verbs and pronouns, as well as tense-marker, alternating forms, and regularization, were the frequent errors observed in the samples of the participants' discourse. Eventually, pedagogical implications and applications ensued, which are dispensed to provide insight into the materials development and instruction for the enhancement of grammatical competency and proficiency in speaking skills in EFL programs.

Keywords: EFL context, error analysis, linguistic study, spoken discourse, syntax

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1. Introduction

Errors make their own way to success if attended to in their own right time and term. To make errors and mistakes is an inherent aspect of the language acquisition journey (Kamlasi, 2019) and is an inevitable and positive part of the learning process (Fauziati, 2009). According to Tahaineh (2010), it is natural to commit errors in the process of second language learning. Studies on errors endorse that the language learner is constantly making mistakes in the process of learning and mastery of the target language (Cheng, 2015). These errors are logical and self-contained in the limited language system of second language learners (Ellis, 2012). To enhance teaching quality is to find the best ways to correct the errors, which comes only by the careful analysis and distinction of different characteristics and categories of errors (Tarone, 2012).

It is crucial for language instructors to approach mistakes over which their students are to gain mastery (Hidalgo & Delgado, 2021). As Tarawneh and Almomani (2013) point out, most Jordanian English students are unable to speak English accurately despite mastering a great deal of grammatical knowledge and vocabulary. A second indicator of children's acquisition of the grammatical rules is their speech errors, providing valuable clues to the way the acquisition process works.

According to Krashen (1982), to advance the language acquisition process is to provoke output. Long (1981) states that the input is the linguistic forms consisting of morphemes, words, and utterances. The string of sounds (babbling) is the first thing babies produce (O'Grady & Cho, 2016). The first thing that is observed is the phonological development, followed by lexical (one-word stage), morphological, syntactic (full sentence stage), and finally pragmatic development (O'Grady & Cho, 2016).

For effective communication, grammar, as a basic component of language, needs to be mastered (Rao, 2018). According to Gunn and McCallum (2005), grammar is an important and necessary skill that students must know. Grammar knowledge helps accuracy and expedites second language learning and acquisition (Ebsworth & Schweer, 1997). However, in grammar learning, learners face two difficulties: namely, the difficulty in understanding grammatical rules/features and the difficulty in internalizing grammatical features so that they are able to use them correctly (Ellis, 2006). According to Loubazid (2012), difficulties faced by English as a foreign language (EFL) learners in speaking English are due to the lack of vocabulary,

pronunciation, and grammar. Notably, recalling English grammar rules sometimes is easy for Indonesian students, but applying them in speaking is difficult (Astrid, 2011).

Grammar, besides vocabulary, pronunciation, accuracy, and fluency, is one of the four components of speaking skills (Brown, 2004). There is an assumption that the stages of speakers' language as well as grammar development are the same (Fromkin et al., 2008), though not widely supported (Georgiou, 2020). The process of acquiring syntax starts with word combinations. When children's multi-word combinations include a verb, it is typically nonfinite (verb stem or infinitive) and positioned at the end of the utterance (Kauschke et al., 2024).

Error studies are done for enabling experts to have a clear picture of the learners' learning process and strategy employment (Lungu, 2003). Error analysis can be used to determine what a learner still needs to be taught (Vahdatinejad, 2008). It is a procedure of gathering models of the learner's language, detecting any errors in the models, labeling these errors, categorizing them according to their hypothesized sources, and weighing their significance (Ellis, 2008). It aims at identifying, analyzing, and classifying errors in order to find out learners' language development (Brown, 2014).

However, there is a scarcity of research evidencing the linguistic development of beginner learners in the Iranian EFL context. The need for obtaining spontaneous speech production in the Iranian context is much more felt to yield a more ecologically valid representation of Iranian EFL learners' patterns of linguistic competence and performance and progress during their schooling period. Diagnosing the patterns of grammatical errors in the utterances of Persian EFL learners bridges the gap in the studies on language development regarding speaking competency and proficiency and instruction in Iranian EFL programs. The present study is significant to the improvement of the teaching practice and materials development programs in the Iranian EFL setting. Thus, this study took the initiative to explore the actual construction knowledge of Iranian EFL learners in their act of speaking performances, using spoken essays of 180 students of three different proficiency groups. This study aimed to identify the errors of Iranian EFL beginner learners in a natural setting of an EFL program at a private institute in Iran. The study aimed to answer the following research question:

What are the commonly occurring types of syntactic errors in the Iranian EFL learners' spoken discourse?

2. Review of Literature

The process of speaking is speedier than that of writing when it comes to the act of real communication, regarding the availability of time to say something. Thus, making utterance poses the greater difficulty for learners to deliver a discourse which is grammatically accurate, as interlocutors are in such a shortage of time to think and access grammatical rules and vocabularies. Given the complex nature of English grammar and syntax, EFL learners often exhibit common error patterns. However, understanding error patterns enables teachers to identify the cognitive and linguistic challenges their students encounter during the process of language learning and consequently narrow their targeted instructional interventions addressing specific areas of need.

Pawabutra and Sutakote (2024) analyzed grammatical mistakes in the spoken English of 43 first-year English for Business Communication students learning General Listening and Speaking courses, Thai EFL university students, while identifying and comparing the frequencies of lexical errors and sentence structure errors by gathering and transcribing recorded impromptu speeches on randomly assigned topics. The findings showed 158 grammatical mistakes in total, consisting of misformation errors as the most prevalent one, plus addition, omission, misordering, and tense misformation errors. These results indicate that Thai EFL learners have significant difficulty in utilizing appropriate grammatical usages in spoken English, particularly in verbal concordance. Indari (2024), using interviews, documentation, and speaking tests, evidenced that 20 students from XI-IPS at SMA Bintang Langkat had difficulty with grammar, pronunciation, and comprehension. Purba et al. (2024) analyzed speeches of Nadiem Makariem on the YouTube channel. The findings indicated that omission, misformation, addition, and misordering were the most grammatical and lexical errors, respectively.

Sene (2023) analyzed the students' conversation performances of the eleventh-grade students. The findings demonstrated omission as the most common type of grammatical error committed by the students, besides addition, misformation, and misordering. Dewi and Fitria Hardini Rangkuti (2021) analyzed grammatical errors of 95 fourth-semester Indonesian EFL

students at the Institute of Technology and Business in conversation practice using descriptive qualitative research. The findings yielded the omission error as the most dominant one, followed by misformation, addition, and misordering, respectively.

Pratiwi et al. (2022), analyzing the sixth-semester ELT students' speaking in the final exam at Indo Global Mandiri University, found that the most dominant errors were omission (55.5%), followed by addition (22.49%), misformation (18.66%), and misordering (3.35%). The error-making sources were intralingual and interlingual interference. Meanwhile, the intralingual one was considered the major cause of the students' errors. Karisma and Bulan (2022) evidenced four errors encountered in the speaking of students of the STKIP Yapip Dompu English Education Study Program, namely omission, addition, misformation, and misordering. Damaiyanti (2021) disclosed that the highest grammatical errors among twelve IAIN Takengon department students were omission, followed by overgeneralization, intralingual, misformation, misordering, and addition. Overuse of prepositions and incorrect word order were accounted for by the interlingual factors of misordering and addition, based on their first language transfer.

Rahmanu et al. (2020) conducted a descriptive qualitative study to analyze 20 tourism trainee students' grammatical utterance errors. The results showed that students ignore the rule of an interrogative in asking a question. Most of the students were dubious about expressing the statement and question during the conversation. Alvareza (2020), in a descriptive-qualitative study, investigated the errors committed by Chavacano learners in learning Spanish as a foreign language in a conversational context. Results showed that the informants committed the deviation of language forms, namely, omission, addition, misformation, and misordering. Mashoor and Abdullah (2020) investigated structural errors of thirty-one 10th and 11th-grade secondary school Jordanian EFL students in spoken English language from four public and private schools. The findings revealed that the students committed some errors of omission, addition, misformation, and misordering. The teaching techniques and lack of vocabulary, motivation, and practice were the causes of the errors.

Kamlasi (2019), in a qualitative study, examined the grammatical errors in the spoken discourse of 25 students in the English education program at Timor University by giving an oral test and using videotape recording. The results of data analysis revealed that the omission

included 40.87 percent of the errors. The addition error was found to be 31.74 percent, while the misformation was 15 percent. The lowest recording of the errors was for the misordering at 12.30 percent. The preposition error presented 17 percent, and the pronoun errors 14 percent. The conjunction and article categories presented eleven percent of the errors in the spoken samples. The singular/plural and negation categories yielded ten percent of the errors. The lowest number of errors was the word order, presenting eight percent. The findings showed that the students still made errors in the linguistic category. The interesting finding was that the students were inclined to use verb-ing instead of the main verb in spoken English.

Putri et al. (2018) studied twenty second-grade students' grammatical errors made by the students in speaking at Jambi, and found that the most mistakes were misformation errors. Indro (2017), analyzing eight video recordings in the Public Speaking class, found out the verb phrase errors were omission, addition, misformation, and misordering (58.88, 25.68, 17.43, & 9.17 %, respectively), caused by the influence of Bahasa Indonesia's structure, overgeneralization, and context of learning. Phettongkam (2017) explored the grammatical errors of Thai University learners' spoken English in a communicative business English course. Half of the total errors made were omission errors, followed by the misformation, addition, and misordering. The three most occurring errors included plural form, article, and verb form.

Safrida and Kasim (2016) analyzed the speaking errors of Indonesian third-semester students at Syiah Kuala University on their 5-8 minute short story outputs. The result showed that the most dominant errors were omission, followed by misformation, addition, and misordering (55, 29, 13, & 3 percent, respectively). The intra-lingual and inter-lingual interferences were considered the major causes of the students' errors. The participants had difficulties with omission of noun inflections, irregular past tenses, and misformation of auxiliaries.

Sastra (2014) explored thirty-seventh-semester students of English at Brawijaya University to identify the types of errors and find the most frequent error in the students' speech transcripts, using a descriptive qualitative approach and document analysis. The results divulged that the errors are omission, addition, misformation, and misordering (37, 27, 35, & 1%, respectively). Ting et al. (2010) examined the grammatical errors in simulated oral interactions of 42 Malaysian tertiary university students taking part in five role-play situations

during the 14-week semester. Error analysis of 126 oral interactions of the ESL learners showed that the majority of the grammatical errors were misinformation and omission, with the addition of elements or misordering being less frequent. The errors committed by the learners were on the prepositions, question making, determiners, plural nouns, subject-verb agreement, and tense markers.

Muhamad et al. (2013) carried out a study on the students' errors in performing oral presentations in an EAP (English for Academic Purposes) course. Results showed that misinformation accounted for most of the students' errors, followed by omission and addition. Linguistically, students made the most errors in verb form, word form, and article. Haji Saad and Sawalmeh (2014) investigated errors in role-plays of less proficient second language learners. The most prominent type of error occurring was omission, while the most frequently occurring ones in the presentations were misinformation.

Noh (2015) analyzed the productions of 12 female tour guides who specialized in English and worked in tourism for more than 10 years. The results revealed that misinformation errors were 45% of all the errors, followed by omission (28.2%), addition (18.1%), and misordering errors (8.7%). Grela (2003) reported cases of subject omissions in a story completion task by children aged three to four. Loeb and Leonard (1991) exploited play activities and storytelling about picture sequences, and reported considerable variability in the use of third-person subject pronouns (i.e., *he* and *she*) for eight children aged 2.11 to 3.4 years. The errors were substitutions of object case pronouns for subject case pronouns (e.g., *him* for *he*). The findings showed that the majority of the errors involved substitution of object for subject case pronouns, although there were also substitutions of object for genitive pronouns and a small number of errors.

To know language is to produce it correctly (Zaim & Anwar, 2020). This study aimed to identify and analyze the common error patterns among Iranian EFL learners to help inform more targeted and effective teaching strategies tailored to the linguistic needs of this learner group. The focus on observable errors allows researchers and educators to pinpoint areas of difficulty, whether in verb tense, subject-verb agreement, word order, or article usage, and to track learners' progression over time.

3. Method

3.1. Study Design

The objective of this descriptive qualitative research was to study errors in the spoken productions of Iranian EFL learners. This study applied error analysis as the analytical framework. The syntactic errors were analyzed by adopting an error analysis approach using Surface Strategy Taxonomy (Dulay et al., 1982).

3.2. Participants

The subjects for this study were a group of thirteen- and fourteen-year-old students, recruited from a private language institute. Convenience sampling was adopted for the accessibility of the participants, who were homogenized as beginner learners, based on their scores on the Straightforward Quick Placement test (SQP, 2007), one standard deviation above and below the mean. They were all male, aged from thirteen to fourteen. The participants had also undergone English courses for two years in their schools.

3.3. Instruments

The speaking performance test taken by the participants was the main instrument for the data collection. The elicitation technique was used in the guise of the provision of a prompt to collect data. Elicitation method is a commonly used technique to assess the productive language abilities of children (Kauschke et al., 2024). The students' spoken performances were recorded and transcribed to identify and classify the grammatical errors into the specified categories proposed by Dulay et al. (1982). The transcribed utterances were further analyzed and described for the source of the errors.

3.4. Data collection

Data was gathered from the EFL learners' spoken outputs, of which the errors were identified for further analysis. The answers to the questions asked by the teacher, who conducted this study, identified, classified, and discussed the grammatical errors. The main purpose of this procedure was to analyze the spoken production of English in a spontaneous context. An intermediate approach was exploited in the present study in the light of asking children to describe pictures in their own words, without being directed to specific target structures from the outset. To encourage speech output, each picture was introduced by a neutral, open question: 'What is s/he doing?' or 'What do you see in the picture?' Taking notes, throughout

the students' answering of the questions, was for transcribing utterances for analysis. The utterances produced were, then, analyzed using language sample analysis (Kauschke et al., 2024).

3.5. Data analysis

Analysis of data included the examination of students' answers to the questions asked by the teacher for errors in English structures. The errors committed by the learners were identified, categorized, and described for each type. The language instructor evaluated the different students' language mistakes identified and characterized in terms of language use (lexical complexity). Error analysis is the study of unacceptable forms produced by someone learning a language, especially a foreign one (Crystal, 1999). This study was built on the Surface Strategy Taxonomy (Dulay et al., 1982), consisting of omission, addition, misformation, and misordering. Surface Strategy Taxonomy provides a well-defined and systematic benchmark through which deviated forms in the observed discourse can be pigeonholed. Moreover, it is a widely used and validated framework in many second language acquisition studies, which allows researchers to build upon existing knowledge and compare their findings with previous studies. It not only makes a chart for the researchers to look for what types of errors in learners' productions in the process of language acquisition, but also the reason why errors are made.

3.6. Procedure

This study aimed to elicit linguistic errors in the spoken productions of EFL learners. This study implemented a qualitative method to identify and analyze the spoken productions of EFL learners. The main objective of the present research was to identify the type of errors the students made when asked questions by the teacher. Data collection included an in-class exam, as part of the fulfillment of the end-of-term examination requirements of the institute, given to fourteen students. To ensure the validity of the assessment, the specific skill, strategies, and knowledge of the speaking practice were targeted to assess accurately and improve actual learning to have the desired consequences (Nichols et al., 2009). The samples were elicited by teachers asking learners to talk about pictures. To analyze the data, error analysis was used to identify the types of errors and classify the syntactic errors found in their spoken productions when answering questions. In a typical elicitation task, giving a prompt to speak on some

pictures and asking to describe them, the learners' responses are taken for clues about the type of grammatical rules violated.

4. Results

This study attempted to identify the type and range of grammatical errors observed in the spoken discourse of a sample of EFL learners in the context of an Iranian private institute of language teaching. The study focused on the types of syntactic errors in the learners' use of the second language in their spoken discourse. The erroneous constructions fell within the domain of misformation, omission, addition, and misordering. The most frequent errors committed by the learners were the addition of *be*-auxiliary, incorrect subject/verb concordance and omission of prepositions. The students' errors will be elaborated on in what follows.

The error analysis of their spoken outputs revealed misformation errors as the most frequent instances of grammatical errors witnessed in the total sample in the current study. In some cases, the learners uttered the erroneous constructions, such as 'Mustn't ocean' and 'Don't swim' in reply to the question 'What did you do yesterday?'. In another instance, the student stated this sentence, 'I go to English class.' In which he used the present tense to speak about a past action. In another instance, 'I want to English class' was uttered and the student failed to produce the past tense.

In another example, when one of the students was prompted to say what he sees in a picture, he replied, 'He is a photo' instead of 'He's taking photo', using a copula to describe the action. The violation of the agreement rule was also observed in the samples taken from the students' spoken discourse ('The boy touch goat'). Likewise, another student failed to use singular third-person inflection for the present tense. In a similar occasion, when the teacher asked, 'What is this girl doing?' referring to a picture, the students replied 'Pick a flower', again failing to use the third-person inflection form of the verb.

In some other examples, the students used double negation ('He don't have cell phone' and 'He don't hasn't a phone') in his speech. Wrong use of pronouns was also noticed when one student was asked 'Where is the man in the picture?'. Another student made a mistake referring to the object pronoun 'him' by a third person subject rather than a first person pronoun ('I'm between tree').

The learner's answer to the question 'What are they doing?' was 'They buy' failing to apply the correct tense. In another question-answering task, one student replied, 'I sleep' when asked to mention what he did yesterday. The inability of the respondent to make the preterit form is an indicator of the learner's learning difficulty with regards to the past tense. The wrong use of prepositions ('On the gym') conveys the student's incompetence. Using bare verbs instead of progressive form was also documented in this study ('I was write homework').

Inquired by the teacher, 'Why can camels live in the desert?' one of the respondents responded, 'Because camels weekend don't eat water' using the verb 'eat' for that of drink. It is evidence of transferring from the mother tongue. One student observed failed to utter the correct form of determiners ('Camels don't eat very water'). Incompetence in the use of adjectives and adverbs was also noticed (Camels travel easy'). Here, The learner uses an adjective rather than an adverb when describing the action verb.

The use of the double preterit rather than the progressive aspect was also observed in the students' spoken discourse ('I was ate' and 'I was sung in my home.'). Concordance failure was also seen -in the an statement produced by one student ('I was in home and play'). One of the students used past progressive rather than the past tense to report an activity in the past ('I was going to Tehran.'). In another example ('He's long hair') the respondent failed to utter the perfect form of 'has' and instead used the present form of to be verb.

Question-making was found to be the most problematic part of the task of speaking for the learners (as evidenced in 'Did you child go to Tehran', 'Did you child in Tehran' excerpted from the learners' speeches). Another respondent failed to make the progressive aspect of the verb in 'I was write homework.'. In another example, one of the students made grammatical errors at the level of lexicon, uttering 'cooking' instead of 'cookies ('I eat cooking').

The omission errors were the second most frequent instances of grammatical errors witnessed in the total sample of the EFL learners' spoken discourse in the current study. In one instance, when the teacher asked 'What does this sign say?' the student replied 'Don't swim ocean' instead of saying, 'swim in the ocean.'. In another example, when the student was asked, 'Where is this place?' he replied 'in the park' which is an incomplete sentence form. He should have used the dummy subject 'it.' In another case, when asked 'Where were you yesterday?', one of the learners responded 'I running in the park', failing to mention the copula before the

progressive tense. In another example, a student uttered this statement, 'I was played football in yesterday', using the double preterit.

In another example, the teacher asked, 'What are they doing?' and 'What do you put on in the rain? Referring to a picture, the respondents respectively responded 'They are putting dress' and 'I put umbrella', dropping the particle. The absence of a copula is noted in 'Because camels don't tired' in response to 'Why can camels live in the desert?'

The students were asked, 'What things must you not do in the class?' One learner responded 'Must don't use photo' using a null subject, a failure to mention the subject is evidenced. The other responses to that question include similar structure: 'It must don't swim', 'Don't swim ocean', 'I mustn't dancing in the class' and 'We mustn't speaking'. These instances corroborate the finding of the study conducted by Kamlasi (2019) and shows the students' tendency to use gerund (-ing form of the verb) instead of the verb in spoken English.

Absence of the action verb was also noted. It was observed at one of the students' discourses as 'I can in the school.'. The omission of the to-be verb was noted in 'I in the yard play game with my friends' and 'I between in my friend'. The students also omitted prepositions and possessives. For example in 'I did go home grandpa' in which the preposition 'to' after the main verb is missing. With regard to the omission of pronouns, the students also deleted pronouns in their statements. For example, in the sentence, 'Because don't need water' the student failed to use the subject pronoun 'they' as a reference for the name mentioned in the question.

The third most frequent grammatical errors witnessed in the total sample of the EFL learners' spoken discourse in the current study were addition errors. The sentences like 'Between in the car' and 'I between in my friend' exemplify the instances of addition error produced by the students. The use of double prepositions, as in this example, conveys the transfer from the mother tongue. The addition of the auxiliary 'be' was also noticed ('I was played football.'). The use of 'to be' as auxiliary is likewise evidenced in the discourse of the student ('I was yesterday visit my relatives').

Misordering errors were the least common type of grammatical errors witnessed in the total sample of the EFL learners' spoken discourse in the current study. The deviance in the placement of the elements is seen ('I in the yard play game with my friends', 'I was yesterday

visit my relatives). In another example, the respondent uttered this statement, 'He is faster run among these boys' instead of saying 'He runs faster'.

5. Discussion

The present study aimed to explore the teenage EFL learners' speaking performances studying at a language institute in Iran for the erroneous grammatical constructions. The main objective of the study was to discover the types of errors committed by EFL learners, undergoing two years of exposure to English study at school as part of the compulsory courses and nearly ten semesters of one-month period at a private language institute designated for the development of the speaking skill. Thus, to provide an answer to the research question formulated, this qualitative investigation explored the Iranian EFL learners' accurate applications of grammar rules in their spontaneous utterances to discover the range of grammar accuracy in their spoken discourse. The findings divulged that the most frequent types of errors observed were misformation, omission, addition, and misordering. The findings disclosed that misinformation was the highest and misordering was the lowest type of errors committed by the Iranian EFL learners noted in their speeches.

Misformation errors were the most frequent errors committed by the majority of the students in their speech outputs. The findings were in line with the study done by Pawabutra and Sutakote (2024), Haji Saad and Sawalmeh (2014), and Muhamad et al. (2013), evidencing misformation as the frequently committed error in the Thai EFL university students' spoken English. Lack of linguistic knowledge could be the reason why these errors appeared in the learners' speeches. Regularizing the irregular nouns or verbs is evident in children who learn their L1 (Fromkin et al., 2008).

In a reply to the question 'what did you do yesterday' it was noticed that students used the present tense to speak of the past ('I go to English class'). In another instance ('I want to English class') the student failed to produce the correct past tense form. These findings substantiate the claim made by Wee et al. (2010) that the English be-verb, owing to its inflectional variations and irregularities, is confusing to L2 learners. Talking about the past events was the most arduous part of making a speech for beginners, as they used the wrong form of the preterites.

The respondents also failed to make the progressive aspect of the verb (e.g., ‘I was write homework’). Moreover, the use of ing-form of the verb in the utterance ‘I mustn't dancing in the class’, indicates the learners' inadequate knowledge about English tenses. These errors could appear due to students' lack of knowledge regarding linguistic rules. The incorrect use of the ending is attributable to the overgeneralization of the rule. However, use of bare verbs instead of progressive was also documented in this study (‘I was write homework’). One of the students used the past progressive tense rather than the simple past tense to report his activity in the past (‘I was going to Tehran’).

In ‘He is a photo,’ one student used a copula to describe an action. the agreement rule seems to be a dilemma for the student in ‘The boy touch goat’. Here, the student failed to use the singular s for third-person verb. In a similar case, a respondent used imperative jussive instead of infinitive in ‘Pick a flower’, when asked ‘what is the girl doing?’. This denotes failure of the student to use the third person form of the verb.

In some examples, students used double negation (‘He don't have cell phone’; ‘He don't hasn't a phone’). The wrong use of a pronoun was noticed in the utterance of one student when he was asked ‘Where is the man in the picture?’. Another student made an error referring to himself using a third-person rather than a first-person pronoun (‘I’m between tree’). The use this form shows the learners’ difficulty in using the correct pronoun. Use of the double preterit rather than the progressive aspect is also noticeable (‘I was ate’ and ‘I was sung in my home’). Concordance failure was also noted (‘I was in home and play’).

When the teacher, referring to a picture, asked, ‘What are they doing?’ one student's answer was ‘They buy’, failing to apply the correct tense. In another task, one student replied ‘I sleep’, when asked to mention what he did yesterday. The inability of the respondent to produce the preterit form of the verb is an indicator of the learner’s difficulty in dealing with the past tense usage. The wrong use of a preposition, as in this statement, ‘On the gym,’ conveys the student’s unpreparedness and incompetence in the preposition instruction. An example of transferring from the mother tongue was observed in the student’s statement as follows: ‘Because camels weekend don’t eat water’, mistaking the verb eat for that of drink.

Transfer of structures from one language to another is feasible only from the L1 to the L2 (Georgiou, 2020). Unawareness and incompetence regarding the function of the adjective

and adverb were noticed in this example, 'Camels travel easy.' The learner uses an adjective rather than an adverb when describing the action verb. In this example, 'He's long hair,' the respondent failed to use the perfect form of 'has' and instead used the present form of to be. The respondent failed to use the correct form of determiner, as such 'Camels don't eat very water.' The use of the present tense for the preterit is noted, such as, 'I in the yard play game with my friends.' The students faced problems with agreement, as they could not make the subjects and verbs agree because the verbs do not follow their subjects closely, and the number of the subject was unclear. Use of 'to be' rather than the past auxiliary is evidenced in the discourse of the student as such 'I was yesterday visit my relatives.'

The students faced problems with agreement, as they could not make the subjects and verbs agree because the verbs do not follow their subjects closely, and the number of the subject was unclear. Question-making was found to be the most problematic part of the task of speaking for the learners, as these examples, excerpted from their speeches, reveal: 'Did you child go to Tehran,' 'Did you child in Tehran,' which stand as the most ambiguous speeches recorded in this study. When students were asked to make an integrative construction out of a declarative sentence said to them by the teacher, they had difficulty turning a declarative sentence into an integrative one.

Amongst the misformation types of errors calibrated, alternating forms and regularization were the most frequent ones. Ayuningtias and Wenanda (2013) state that misformation errors are often due to the act of rendering a word-to-word translation from the mother tongue to the target language. The high frequency of misformation errors points to the fact that more erroneous structures call for more focused instruction in lessons in contexts that convey meaningful communication. In a rare example, the student wrongly used the word 'cooking' in this statement, 'I eat cooking' instead of 'cookies' at the lexical level.

The omission of the main verbs 'Did you child go to Tehran' and 'Did you child in Tehran?' According to Phettkongkam (2017), omission errors happen when learners drop obligatory elements of a sentence, like a verb, article, or preposition. In the other statements, as follows, 'They are putting dress' and 'I put umbrella,' the respondents dropped the particles of the phrasal verbs. The student left the preposition 'to' in the phrasal verb in the statement 'I did go home grandpa,' missing to enunciate it after the main verb. Concerning the omission

of the pronoun, the students also deleted pronouns in some sentences, for example, in the sentence 'Because don't need water,' the participants failed to use 'they' to refer to the name mentioned in the question.

The inexistence of the copula in the utterance of the learners is documented as such 'I between in my friend,' or 'I running in the park' when asked 'Where were you yesterday?' failing to mention the copula before the progressive tense. Absence of a copula is noted in this statement, 'Because camels don't tired' made by the student. Omission errors related to the auxiliary verb noticed in 'swim in ocean' were for missing the modal verb. The omission of modal auxiliary verbs in the student's spoken English is attributable to the staging of the instruction, where modal and main verbs in the second language converse to their mother tongue, successively.

Asked of the students, 'What things must you not do in the class?' one responds, 'Must don't use photo,' using a null subject, a failure to mention the subject is evidenced. The other responses to that question include similar wrong use of grammatical elements as follows, 'It must don't swim, 'Don't swim ocean', 'I mustn't dancing in the class' and 'We mustn't speaking'. Tendency to use short construction, as in the response 'Coat', when asked 'What do you put on in the rain?' discloses the difficulty in making sentences by the learners. The dropping of the initial subjects appears in some colloquial English registers (Rizzi, 2002).

Addition errors were relatively low, with a limited number of errors. The students added affixes to the verbs where addition is not necessary. As Hikmah (2020) claims, addition error is excessively made by students as unnecessary insertion of prepositions in sentences. Addition of the auxiliary verb 'to be' was notable in the respondents' speeches, as follows, 'I was played football.' This sentence, produced by one of the students, bears witness to the instance of addition error-making in the oral practice of EFL learners. The students insisted on the addition of the copula rather than the auxiliary did. According to Sari (2015), one main cause of committing the addition error is the L1 interference. The insertion of be forms (is/are) is reported in numerous studies (see Hein et al., 2025; Cameron-Faulkner & Kidd, 2007). Erroneous constructions as 'doed,' 'runned,' and 'goed' yield the fact that learners have formulated a general rule that forms the past tense by adding ~ed to the verb stem (O'Grady & Cho, 2001).

The use of the double preterit was observed in one student's statement, as such, 'I was played football in yesterday.' In another example, 'I between in my friend', double prepositions were used, conveying the transfer from the mother tongue. Likewise, the wrong insertion of prepositions in the phrase 'in between tree' and 'between in the car' showcases this kind of addition error in the Iranian EFL spoken discourse. As Sari (2015) purports, the addition of prepositions like 'in here' is attributable to the interference from the first language. When asked of the student, 'Where is that place?' he replies, 'In the park,' which testifies to the intra-lingual error.

The deviance in the due placement of the sentential elements is seen in the EFL students' statements. The errors were categorized as misordering related to the displacement of the adverb, where the learners put the adverb between subject and verb, like 'I in the yard play game' or 'I was yesterday visit my relatives,' and 'He is faster run among these boys' where the respondent should utter 'He runs faster.'. According to Rispoli (2005), grammatical errors are usual at the syntactical level, characterized by the incorrect placement of the morpheme or group of morphemes in an utterance. The high frequency of misformation errors calls for more focused instruction on meaningful lessons in EFL contexts.

In total, this study shed light on the developmental stages of the Iranian EFL learners in terms of their proficiency. The classified errors provide insights into the challenges they face as they acquire the English language. It provides insight for the materials developers to address the teachability and learnability problems, as well as the grammatical complexities when it comes to the staging and sequencing of the materials in the textbooks to smooth the process of foreign language development and acquisition. The errors found in the conversational practices of EFL learners highlight the possible patterns of acquisition by the learners. The findings contribute to the domain of instructed language acquisition by providing evidence on dissonance and incongruence between input and output. Terrell (1991) presents evidence that direct grammar instruction did not guarantee second learners' ability to engage freely in a spontaneous conversation, though grammatical knowledge is significant in determining overall language proficiency. Proroković and Malenica (2017) maintain that the rendering of the sequencing of the grammatical learning is clear-cut.

Considering the linguistic dissonance and mismatch between Persian and English structure, staging, and sequencing of instructional material could also account for the obviation of the patterns of production errors. As Lightbown and Spada (2006) claim, materials input is a fundamental factor for the development of language acquisition. Similarly, Francis (2022), examining the errors present in the students' spoken English language, revealed that many errors sprouted from inadequate and ineffective learning materials. However, it is a reminder that there is a mismatch between comprehension and production. Dwelling on the distance between these two processes is of much help to EFL learners and teachers, by expediting and facilitating the emergence of language features.

6. Conclusion

The present study aimed to take an appraisal of the learners' range and level of grammatical competency and proficiency observed in their utterances. Thus, Iranian EFL learners' spoken performances were elicited through the speaking test and transcribed to analyze for grammatical errors based on the surface strategy taxonomy. The findings provided information about the students' patterns of grammatical errors made in their speaking discourse. The verb-word misapplication, concordance violation, and use of double verbs and pronouns, and also the use of the ungrammatical tense-marker, regularization, and alternating forms were the frequent errors observed in the samples of the learners' spoken discourse.

Results revealed that the most errors the learners committed were local, though they did not disrupt communication. Inter-lingual errors were the frequent types of errors in this study. The relative proportion of error types within the sample reflected grammatical proficiency patterns prevalent in the speaking skill in the Iranian EFL context. The errors that emerged from the utterances of EFL learners, using a naturalistic type of data collection, provided a great deal of information on the way EFL is dispensed and acquired in the Iranian context.

The findings of this research yielded that the most frequent error committed by the students was misformation, followed by omission and addition, respectively. The participants of the study were observed to add and omit items or elements wrongly in their utterances when they must not have been included based on the correct use of the English language. However, the lowest type of errors was misordering noted in their speaking performances.

This study had some limitations that should be taken into account. Caution is needed to exercise for the interpretation of the results as the performances elicited in this study are subject to miscellaneous factors like inattention, shyness, or expectation failure to understand what is asked (O’Grady & Cho, 2001). To substantiate the reliance on the cross-sectional data as used in the present study, future studies might include longitudinal research to follow diverse trajectories and provide more robust insights into the developmental course. Future studies might take into account the contrastive error analytic study of the spoken English of both bilingual and monolingual speakers across the same age. The upshot of the study supplements the development of the instructional strategies and the improvement of the curriculum designs and planning for the presentation and practice of the materials to enhance EFL learners’ spoken English proficiency development.

Conflict of Interest

The author(s) certify/certifies that they have no affiliations with or involvement in any organization or entity with any financial interest (such as honoraria; educational grants; participation in speakers’ bureaus; membership, employment, consultancies, stock ownership, or other equity interest; and expert testimony or patent-licensing arrangements), or non-financial interest (such as personal or professional relationships, affiliations, knowledge or beliefs) in the subject matter or materials discussed in the present research paper.

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