

دراسة حول فهم قواعد اللغة الانجليزية بين طلاب اللغة الانجليزية بكلية اللغات جامعة طرابلس

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ملخص البحث :

إن تحسين مهارات اللغة الانجليزية بمنطقة شمال افريقيا أصبح مطلباً مهماً جداً ، كما أنها تعتبر من أولى الاهتمامات ، خاصة وأن اللغة الانجليزية هناك تدرس كلغة ثانية حيث نجدهم يولون همية كبيرة في تعليمها وتعلمها.

ويعتبر تدريس قواعد اللغة الانجليزية من أهم العناصر الرئيسية في تعلم اللغة الانجليزية لدى الطلاب ، فأغلب نظريات وطرق التدريس أسهمت بشكل كبير في تحسين وسائل مختلفة لتعلم اللغة ، فدقة اختيار الوسيلة والطريقة الجيدة للغة من شأنها أن تسهم بشكل كبير في نجاح تعلم اللغة ، خاصة وأنه من خلال هذه الدراسة تم ملاحظة أن هناك عدداً لا بأس به من الطلاب يعانون من صعوبات في استخدام اللغة نحوياً، ويهدف هذا البحث إلى تسليط الضوء على بعض العناصر الرئيسية المستخدمة في تدريس اللغة الانجليزية في العالم الأفريقي ، كما تهدف إلى تحسين أداء الطلبة عند استخدامهم لهذه القواعد .

إلى جانب ذلك تهدف الباحثة من خلال هذا البحث إلى إظهار مواطن الضعف لدى الطلبة عند استخدامهم لقواعد اللغة الانجليزية حيث تم اختبار عينة من الطلبة بلغ عددهم خمسون طالباً وطالبة للإجابة عن الاستبيان المتكون من عشرين سؤالاً والمتمثل في تمارين خاصة بالكتابة تمكنت الباحثة من خلالها معرفة الأخطاء النحوية التي قد يقع بها الطلاب عند تركيب الجمل ومن ثم مناقشتها وتمكين الطلبة من أخذ بعض الملاحظات التي تمكنهم من تجنب تلك الأخطاء مستقبلاً. كما بيّن البحث أن أغلب الأخطاء التي وقع بها الطلاب عادة تتمثل في كيفية استخدام الصفات والحال والتوازن وعلامات الترقيم والتهجئة.

كما أنه من خلال هذه البحث تنصح الباحثة باستخدام أفضل استراتيجيات التعلم التي تلائم اهتمامات الطلاب واستخدام طرق التدريس المتنوعة كاستخدام الألعاب وقراءة



الجرائد باللغة الانجليزية ومشاهدة العروض و- أيضا- القواميس التي تعتبر أداة مهمة داخل الفصل الدراسي.

A Study on the Understanding of Grammar among English Major Students at the University of Tripoli, Faculty of Languages

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Abstract

This action research, intended to improve the grammar and performance of English major students at the University of Tripoli, presents a review of the current status of English language education, with an emphasis on the need for urgent reforms in the teaching of English in Libya.

In this study, the researcher made an attempt to identify the common weaknesses of English major students in grammar. The researcher tapped 50 students to answer a 20-item test questionnaire on which they would simply correct the sentence construction of the items.

The writing exercise enabled the instructor to be exposed to the grammatical errors in the sentence construction of the students. Some of the striking grammatical errors identified were highlighted and discussed to enable students to take note of the correct forms of the sentences in order to avoid the errors when they are writing. The findings reveal that the students were weak in parallelism, use of modifiers (adjectives and adverbs), capitalization, correct use of punctuation marks, and spelling.

Teaching grammar is one of the important components in learning English for students at school. The theories and methods

of language teaching has developed various techniques of teaching English. The accuracy in the choice of teaching techniques will support the success of language learning. As observed, there are many English language learners who have difficulty in mastering grammar. One study even noted that most foreign students view the learning of grammar as a difficult task.

It is recommended that teaching strategies should be updated to the interest of the second language learners. Innovative methodologies such as games, role play, reading English newspaper, watching English shows, referring to dictionary, should be used as tools in the classroom.

INTRODUCTION

Grammar is a major component of any language in the world. Without grammar, we would have only individual words or sounds, pictures and body expressions to communicate meaning (Azar, 2007). Grammar, as defined by Crystal (2003), is comprised of rules which control the way a communication system works. Clark et al. (2008) define grammar as the systems of a language – phonology, morphology, syntax, semantics, and lexicon – necessary to form and interpret sentences. In another definition (Thornbury, 2005), grammar is a process for making communication clear when contextual information is lacking.

Grammar is an essential aspect to communicate effectively. Learners should study grammar because grammar skills will help them organize words and messages and make them meaningful. Knowing more about grammar will enable learners to build better sentences in speaking and writing performances. A good knowledge of grammar helps learners to make sentences clear enough to understand.



Teaching grammar is to show how language works. Accurate teaching of grammar guides learners how to use the language correctly. Azar (2009) highlights the significance of teaching grammar as: “One important aspect of grammar teaching is that it helps learners discover the nature of language, i.e. that language consists of predictable patterns that make what we say, read, hear, and write intelligibly.”

To establish precise sentences, grammar knowledge is essential. Ellis (2006) mentions “Grammar teaching involves any instructional technique that draws learners’ attention to some specific grammatical form in such a way that it helps them either to understand it metalinguistically and process it in comprehension and production so that they can internalize it.”

Language acquisition without grammar will be confusing. Learners will fail to use the language correctly without grammar skills. People now agree that grammar is too important to be ignored, and that without a good knowledge of grammar, learners’ language development will be severely constrained.

At every level of learning institution, the teaching of grammar is always perceived as the most difficult skill to teach (Brindley, 1984) and the most boring skill to learn (Al-Mekhlafi and Nagaratnam, 2011). In fact, in some non-English speaking countries, any mention of grammar in the classroom gives students anxiety and apprehension.

But most non-English speaking countries have recognized the importance of the English as a second language to be able to compete and be at par with the Western neighbors. They have instituted drastic changes in their curriculum to make the study of

English mandatory in their schooling. In Libya, for instance, have witnessed a very positive and drastic change in the use of English language both in business and education.

The Libyan government, in particular, views English as essential for development and as a lingua franca for their workers to compete in the global knowledge economy. Libya is the fourth largest Arab nation in the world, situated in Northern Africa. It provides free education to its people, from ages six to 15 years and for those who aspire to pursue higher education beyond secondary education.

Part of its educational curriculum is the imposition of English as secondary language (ESL), expecting their students to be able to communicate in oral and written language of English and eventually contribute in the society and in the world. In the tertiary level alone, the university offers English classes to improve the employability skills of the learners.

For this reason, the researcher attempted to focus on the grammatical competence of select college students who are concentrated in the learning of English as a second language as English majors at the University of Tripoli.

Background of the Study

Situated in its capital city, the University of Tripoli is currently the largest university in Libya. From a mere department (Faculty of Science) of University of Libya in 1957, it became an independent university in 1973.

As a separate academic institution, other colleges located in Tripoli such as the Faculty of Agriculture and the College of



Petroleum and Minerals which were once part of University of Libya were enjoined in the new University of Tripoli.

Due to the student unrest in 1973, the University of Tripoli was renamed Al Fateh University. But after the Battle of Tripoli and the downfall of the Gaddafi government in 2011, the university was renamed back to the original name "University of Tripoli."

At present, the University of Tripoli has several colleges and departments; one of which is the Department of English. The Department currently has about four thousand students who are into majoring English.

Problem of the Study

This action research aimed to answer the following questions:

1. What are the grammatical errors usually committed by English major students?
2. What are the difficulties encountered by the students in studying grammar?
3. What interventions can English instructors use to address the students' needs?

Objectives of the Study

The study was intended to:

1. Determine certain areas in grammar where students have difficulty to understand;
2. Find appropriate interventions/methods to address the students' need;

3. Focus on learning activities that can enhance competency level of the students.

Limitations of the Study

The present study is limited:

- The currently enrolled English major students from the Department of Language (SY 2018-2019)
- The use of questionnaire as the main research instrument
- Unstructured interview with select students

METHODOLOGY

This action research aimed to identify and analyze grammatical difficulties of students to give a contribution to the study of linguistics and help teachers in identifying grammatical errors commonly made by second language learners.

Locale and Time of the Study

This study was conducted on the Spring semester of Academic Year 2018-2019 at the Faculty of Languages, University of Tripoli.

The Subject

The action research was centered on the third semester English major students currently enrolled at the Department of English. These students have already completed two English preliminary subjects.

Research Instrument

The 20-item test was designed to identify the common grammatical errors committed by the English major students at the Department of English. The items in the test were analyzed and checked to determine the validity and effectiveness of the

instrument. The test was initially given to a section not included in the conduct of the study to determine the reliability of the test before it was administered to the respondents involved in the study.

A casual unstructured interview was conducted to find out the difficulty the students encountered in studying grammar.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Table 1 - Distribution of Scores

Score	# of Students	Percentage (%)
20	0	0.0
18 – 19	0	0.0
16 – 17	5	10.0
14 – 15	4	8.0
12 – 13	11	22.0
10 – 11	9	18.0
8 – 9	4	8.0
6 – 7	2	4.0
4 – 6	8	16.0
2 – 3	4	8.0
0 – 1	3	6.0
Total	50	100

Table 1 shows the results of the 20-item questionnaire given to the fifty (50) English major students to assess their understanding of grammar. Noticeably, 29 students or 58% of the total population got 10 and higher scores while 21 students or 42% scored below 10.

About 11 students or 22% of the respondents got a score between 12-13, committing only seven to eight mistakes. On the other hand, three or 6% of the students posted a score of one to zero.

This implies that more than half of the English major students were able to identify the grammatical errors in the

sentences provided in the test and were able to correct them properly. However, having 21 students scoring below 10 is an alarming issue because the respondents are majoring English.

Table 2 - Number of Students To Score Correctly and Incorrectly on Each Item

Item Number	# of Students who answered correctly	# of Students who answered incorrectly
1	15	35
2	21	29
3	30	20
4	25	25
5	29	21
6	24	26
7	32	18
8	29	21
9	19	31
10	32	18
11	21	29
12	11	39
13	15	35
14	27	23
15	18	32
16	21	29
17	24	26
18	37	13
19	16	34
20	14	36

Table 2 illustrates the number of students who answered correctly and incorrectly in each item. As can be gleaned from the table, Item #18 got the highest number of students who got it correctly, 37 out of the 50 students answered correctly. Item #18 "look out of the window its snowing" contained four mistakes: first, the beginning letter of the first word in the sentence needs to be capitalized (Look out . . .); second, a missing period to end the first sentence; third, the letter "i" of *its* begins another sentence;



and finally, an apostrophe between "t" and "s" to show that it is a contraction of "It is". This is followed by both Item #7 and Item #10 which 32 students answered them correctly. Item # 7 "The flats are modern all of them have a fitted kitchen" is an example of faulty coordination, while Item #10 "I saw a little people in the hotel" has a problem in word choice. The next sentence to have been corrected by some 30 students is Item #3 "Maria tried hardly to find a job, but she had no luck."

On the contrary, Item #12 "Natasha can play a piano and violin" confused some 39 students or 78% of the population. The sentence is a simple case of parallelism where an article "a" should be placed before the noun *violin*. Six other sentences seemed too difficult for the students. About 36 students or 73% of the total respondents failed to notice the error in Item #20 "He invented a new kind of wheelchair for the disabled people". They could just simply eliminate the noun *people* and disabled could stand alone. In Item #1 "Martin hit the ball highly into the air", 35 students (70%) were not able to correct the adverb *highly* into a simple *high* alone. Same number of people (35) failed to correct Item #13 "That was very good idea of him", which only needs an article "a" before *very* and replace the pronoun *him* to *his* instead. Item #19 "The sick people need to be looked after" has the same mistake as that of Item #20. Some 34 students did not spot the error in the sentence. Item #9 "most people who live around here are foreigners" has an error in capitalization and yet 31 students did not notice that.

Table 3 - Common Language Errors

Language Error	Item Number
Capitalization	#9, #15, #17
Wrong choice of word	#6, #10, #11
Incorrect word form (modifiers)	#1, #3
Subject-verb agreement	#5
Poor sentence construction (parallelism, run-ons)	#12, #16, #18
Incorrect use of article (determiner)	#2, #14
Incorrect use/Absence of punctuation marks	#7, #16, #18
Incorrect verb tense	#4
Misplaced modifier	#8
Incorrect use of pronoun	#13
Incorrect use of modifier	#19, #20
Incorrect spelling	#15

Table 3 itemizes the grammatical errors present in the given sentences. Four common grammatical errors appeared most among the 20 given sentences. These errors are in the use of capitalization, poor sentence construction (including run-on sentence and parallelism), absence of necessary punctuation marks, and wrong choice of word. Some sentences contain more than one error such as Item #4, Item #7, Item #16, Item #17, and Item #18.

Intervention

The writing exercise enabled the instructor to be exposed to the grammatical errors in the sentence construction of the students. The grammatical errors identified were noted and the scripts given out to the students during the next lesson for them to be part of correcting the errors in their own sentences. Some of the striking grammatical errors identified were highlighted and discussed to enable students to take note of the correct forms of the sentences



in order to avoid the errors when they are writing. The findings reveal that the students were weak in parallelism, use of modifiers (adjectives and adverbs), capitalization, correct use of punctuation marks, and spelling.

The errors were reproduced as worksheets for students to correct, The correction went on alongside with the discussion of why particular sentence constructions constitute errors on modifiers, parallelism, subject-verb agreement, use of articles, use of punctuation marks, coordination and word choice.

The students who took part in the action research disclosed that they were most of the time confused over the grammar rules and were unable to decide which rule to apply in specific context. They indicated that they need more writing exercises (and discussed in class) to improve their understanding of grammar. They also opened up the problem of having a big number of students in the classroom which is another reason why their previous English instructors could not discuss thoroughly the lessons. There were no board work as well.

Using the constructive teaching approach, the teacher initiated writing exercises (starting with short paragraphs), correction of errors in sentences (in paired group), and some word games within the class. Students were likewise asked to read English newspapers and watch Hollywood films as part of the strategy to improve their performance in grammar and language learning. Such activities can compensate for the lack of opportunity to use the language as practice.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The data taken for the purpose of this research were from the second language learners who answered a 20-item test questionnaire on sentence error identification. The data were analyzed in details in order to answer the research question. The results of this research shows that the major grammatical errors committed by the respondents are related to modifiers (adjectives and adverbs), capitalization, and incorrect use of punctuation marks.

Based on the results of research and discussion, the conclusion can be drawn as follows:

1. There are some aspects of grammar that pose problems to the English majors. These include the use of modifiers such as adjectives and adverbs, capitalization, parallelism, and incorrect use of punctuation marks.
2. The students cannot easily grasp their grammar lessons because of certain factors such as the class size, the teaching methods, and lack of opportunities to practice the language.
3. English instructors need to prepare classroom practices and activities that will help improve the quality of language use of learners. They also need to choose more appropriate grammar teaching methods that can improve the students' performance in grammar and usage tests.

Recommendations

1. Teaching grammar rules without providing sufficient practice in their use will not contribute to the learning of a second language. Rules should be taught simultaneous with their uses.



2. English instructors should engage the learners in activities that would let them internalize the English grammar rules so that they would be able to apply them in the construction of sentences. It is also suggested to reduce the standard class size to provide a more conducive learning environment and for the teachers to have more appropriate teaching conditions.
3. English language teachers should provide a reflective practice-based approach, instead of the usual direct method and structural method. The latter approaches do not result in the ability of the learners to apply the grammar rules in the construction of sentences. Constructive teaching and learning activities have been found to be effective in helping learners to discover new things for themselves. The use of constructive teaching and learning activities in this action research has helped the learners to discover some of the English grammar rules for themselves without being told what the rules are.
4. English language teachers need to understand and address the learners' concerns in planning their lessons and classroom activities and use supplementary materials, if necessary, to help learners cope with the difficulties.

APPENDIX

TEST QUESTIONNAIRE

Directions: Each of these sentences has a mistake in it. Write the correct sentence.

1. Martin hit the ball highly into the air.
2. She bought a MP3 to record the lectures.
3. Maria tried hardly to find a job, but she had no luck.
4. I spend the whole weeks studying for the exam.
5. Both the beds is uncomfortable.
6. He plays soccer very good.
7. The flats are modern all them have a fitted kitchen.
8. These are modern wonderful wooden garden seat.
9. most people who live around here are foreigners.
10. I saw a little people in the hotel.
11. I don't know meeting of time.
12. Natasha can play a piano and violin.
13. That was very good idea of him.
14. The woman next door is college student.
15. she was a truely great actress.
16. Safety comes first people's lives shouldn't be put at risk.
17. He has two cars. either of them is in very good condition.
18. look out of the window its snowing.
19. The sick people need to be looked after.
20. He invented a new kind of wheelchair for the disabled people.



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