| **RESEARCH ARTICLE**

Linguistic Errors Committed by Iraqi MA Students in Writing Theses

Asst. Prof. Fatemeh Karimi[1] ✉ **Narmeen Abbas Lutfi[2]** ✉ **and Samir Jamal Ibraheem[3]**
[123]English Department, Isfahan (Khorasgan) Branch, Islamic Azad University, Isfahan, Iran
Corresponding Author: Narmeen Abbas Lutfi, **E-mail**: narmeenabbas92@yahoo.com

| **ABSTRACT**

Writing theses is an essential requirement for getting an MA degree in Iraq. MA students are required to produce a formal academic piece of writing concerning a certain assigned subject. A thesis must involve creative inspection of a topic based on the MA candidate's own innovative ideas. As a result, it regularly yields significant and considerable ideas on a certain topic; it must be organized and written in terms of the standards for academic and knowledgeable presentation. However, MA students are frequently witnessed to commit various types of errors, among which are linguistic (syntactic and semantic) errors. Thus, the objective of this study is to analyze the linguistic errors regularly committed by MA students in writing their thesis, focusing on the reasons behind these errors and finding out the pedagogical recommendations which help students to overcome these problems. Based on the grammatical description of Quirk et al. (1985) and Huddleston and Pullum (2005), a qualitative analysis of twenty MA theses is made to provide an explanation and description of the errors committed by students and to detect the causes of these faults in the hope of finding a solution to such problematic issue. The paper concludes MA students' errors occur due to the interference of L1, translation from L1, lack of or having confined awareness of L2 grammatical rules, and maybe students' inattentiveness.

| **KEYWORDS**

Linguistic errors, MA students, Writing theses, syntactic and semantic errors

1. Introduction

At the end of courses given to MA students, they are required to write theses concerning the topics they are taught to complete their master's degrees. A thesis is often defined as "a compilation of research on a specific topic" (*The National Academies Press*, 2011). It is a formal and lengthy piece of writing on a specific topic, particularly the one that is accomplished for an advanced college grade. In fact, it must encompass the original examination of a certain topic as it is based on the MA candidate's own innovative ideas; therefore, it often presents the significant and substantial ideas of a certain topic. Eventually, a thesis must establish creative studentship, viewed as a distinctive input to knowledge. It must be arranged and written in correlation with standards for scholarly and intellectual manifestation and for publishing in the public field. Hence, MA students are required to write their theses in influential language and readable style, devoid of grammatical, stylistic and spelling errors. Nevertheless, MA students are habitually observed to commit various types of errors, among which are linguistic (syntactic and semantic) errors. Thus, this study is devoted to the identification and presentation of the main linguistic errors, supported by some illustrative examples taken from students' theses, focusing on the reasons behind these errors and attempting to establish some pedagogical recommendations in this respect. Theoretically, the key terms revolving around the study are necessarily introduced in the coming pages; they are mainly concerned with writing a thesis, definitions of errors, the distinction between errors and mistakes, as well as error analysis.

2. Research Questions

Based on the given ideas in the above discussion, this paper is intended to give answers to these two research questions:

1. What are the main commonly documented errors MA students commit in writing theses in linguistics?

 2. What are the main causes of these errors?

3. What pedagogical recommendations can be put forward to help students overcome these errors?

3. Writing a Thesis
Considering the main four skills, writing is often regarded as the "most intricate and most complex task." In fact, it is the "most difficult of the language abilities to acquire" (Allen and Corder, 1974, p.177). One way of the most sophisticated and elaborated ways of conveying information to people is writing. It can be described as "a way of sharing personal meanings, and writing courses emphasize the power of the individual to construct his or her own views on a topic" (Hyland, 2003, p.98). In this sense, writing is the means utilized by an individual (an author or writer) to express messages or ideas to other individuals. In most cases, writing is not only presented as an "ongoing process but also a process that is continually modified by many contributors and ultimately creates knowledge about the world" (Albrechtsen, Haastrup, and Henriksen, 2008, p.165). In addition, writing is a kind of practice by which ideas are introduced, organized and communicated. Put differently; it is the process by which knowledge or message can be represented in texts (Johnson, 2008, p. 203).

Before MA students gain any grade in college, they must have a passing degree in thesis writing. In this respect, a thesis is then described as "an end product that students must write after attending several major courses accompanied by English courses". Actually, theses establish monographs which help in communicating information and messages. Nonetheless, the basic goal behind writing a thesis is to prove that "the candidates in an academic organization have the ability to create and drive independent and original research". However, the style and the format of a thesis vary with respect to the scholarly organization necessities (Mohsin, 2020, p. 49).

According to Paltridge and Starfield (2007, p. 6), theses are typically employed to signify "research submitted to get an advanced degree. They are submitted as a requirement for fulfilling a master or doctorate degree". In particular, students are required to submit a thesis to gain a MA degree. In this respect, gaining an MA degree involves "the students to submit a thesis". Ultimately, a thesis is considered as the characteristic sign of graduate research which must contain an innovative contribution to understanding. At that point, a thesis refers to "a formal document whose sole purpose is to prove that you have made an original contribution to knowledge. Failure to prove that you have made such a contribution generally leads to failure." Furthermore, the main goal of writing a thesis is to provide students with the chance to inspect or research a certain problem relying on the philosophies and procedures established in general language studies.

In brief, a more detailed definition is offered by Chandrasekhar (2008, p.70), who affirms that a thesis is seen as "a written record of the work that has been undertaken by a candidate. It constitutes objective evidence of the author's knowledge and capabilities in the field of interest and is, therefore, a fair means to gauge them". Though thesis writing may be noticed as an unpreferable requirement on the way to a grade, the discipline it prompts may have lifetime advantages. Therefore, writing a thesis is an effort to transfer. A thesis is consequently not only "a record of technical work, but is also an attempt to communicate it to a larger audience". All in all, an MA thesis is a considerable and innovative contribution to studentship, for instance, via the detection of knowledge, the construction of theories or the original re-interpretation of the existing data and recognized ideas.

4. Error
An error repeatedly takes place when an Iraqi EFL student writes something. It can occur due to the fact that students utilize English as an FL. That is, they are not able to master English properly and appropriately. One of the most prominent types of errors are those associated with grammar. An error then is considered as "a deviation from the adult grammar of native speakers which signifies the inter-language capability of the language learners. The procedure of resulting the "occurrence, nature, reasons, and effects of unsuccessful language" is known as "errors analysis" (James, 1998, p. 1)

A lot of attempts have been made in the history of language teaching to account for "What an error refers to?" and come to the conclusion that errors are faults committed by L2 learners while acquiring L2, particularly productive activities (Gayo and Widodo, 2018; Pasaribu, 2021). According to Harmer (2003), errors are mostly linked to two aspects of writing "inter-lingual and intra-lingual". In the same vein, Norrish (1983, p. 7) describes an error as a sort of "systematic deviation that occurs when the learner has not learned something of the language and gets it wrong regularly because he has not learned the correct form".

Focusing on the notion of nonconformity, Brown (1994) defines an error as perceptible deviations from mature grammar replicating the interlanguage knowledge of language learners. Moreover, Dulay and Burt (1974, p. 130) affirm that "error making" is anticipated and that "it would appear necessary and essential to language learning. In fact, it is a clear sign to show language learners actually develop and internalize the rules of the language." In the same vein, Coder (1991) adds that errors arise not only due to interference in L1 but they also echo particular strategies employed by second language learners in the practice of the improvement of L2

acquisition. Such strategies are important for scholars interested in L2 acquisition, as they provide basic principles for how children acquire their L1 and how adults approach and learn L2. But now, to understand what an error means, it seems necessary to distinguish between an error and a mistake.

5. Error and Mistake

In the study of "error analysis", a discrepancy between "error and mistake" is made. One attempt is made by Allen and Corder (1974, p.24), who expounds that an error reveals "gaps in the learner's target language". He (ibid) adds that "errors of performance (mistakes) will be characteristically unsystematic and errors of competence, systematic". Consequently, learners are incapable of correcting a fault by themselves ("self-correction"), whereas mistakes are frequently "slips and lapses in performance". This means that learners know the correct form, but they commit mistakes due to "nervousness, tiredness or fatigue"; thus, they are capable of correcting the mistake by themselves. By the same token, Brown (1980, p.165) illustrates that a mistake is a "performance error", i.e. either an accidental guesstimate or a slip. A mistake is usual between learners of L2 and L1 speakers, but an error is not as problematic as it appears for L1 speakers. That is, native speakers are capable of recognizing their mistakes.   Dulay et al. (1982. P.138) defined error as " the flowed side of learner speech or writing.

Additionally, Brown (1994 mentioned in Petter, 2000) describes mistakes as unsuccessful employment of "grammatical rules or structures", which entails that learners systematically investigate the grammatical structures of language, but they "fail functionally" when utilizing these structures. This failure is recognized "as a mistake while errors are results of obvious deviation from the adult grammar of a native speaker, reflecting the interlanguage competency of the learner"(p.6).

Likewise, Ellis (1997, p.17) explains that an error is "a reflection of the gap in the learner's knowledge; that is, error production as a result of the fact that the learner cannot distinguish what is correct and incorrect." Conversely, a mistake is a reflection of the learners' inadequate performance and occurs because learners are not able to perform what they previously recognize properly. Similarly, Jie (2008, p. 36) observes that "a mistake occurs as the result of processing limitations rather than the lack of competence while an error is the breaches of the code", whereas an error happens owing to the absence of essential knowledge of learners' language., they make errors in their grammatical features.

Focusing on the importance of errors committed by learners, Corder (1967, p.167) contends that errors committed by "the ESL/EFL learners are significant" as these researchers indication of how a certain language is acquired or learned and what processes or strategies learners use to discover language. Alongside, James (1998) agrees with Corder's idea asserting that "the learners' errors are a register of their current perspective on the target language" (p.7).

6. Error Analysis

Error analysis is required to draw students' weaknesses in performing skills. It recognizes the occurrences, characteristics, causes, and sequences of failed languages (Harmer, 2009). (2000, p. 217) maintains that "students do make errors can be observed, analyzed, and classified to reveal something of the system operating within the student, led to the study of the student's error", known as 'error analysis'. He adds that the students' errors in language learning are regularly perceived by the teachers. Errors can be "analyzed and classified" to identify the ways and strategies by which learners learn a language. Put it another way, learners commit different types of grammatical errors that provide strong evidences about how well they conceive and use grammar properly. Crystal (2003, p. 165) describes error analysis as "identifying, classifying and systematically interpreting the unacceptable forms produced by someone learning a foreign language, using any of the principles and procedures provided by linguistics".

Error analysis signifies the procedure which designates errors made by learners in learning FL. In this sense, Richards (1971, p.1) describes error analysis as "dealing with the differences between the way people learning a language speak and the way adult native speakers of the language use the language". It studies the kind and quantity of errors, particularly in applied linguistics. Errors are generally classified into three major types, including "overgeneralization, incomplete rule application, and hypothesizing of false concepts that differ from one learner to another as reflected in learner's competence at a certain phase" (Rustipa, 2011, p. 18).

Researchers have, in general, proclaimed that errors could be produced by the interference of L1. For instance, James (1998 quoted in Heydari & Bagheri, 2012, p.1585) expounds that the "interlingual and intralingual; interlingual errors are influenced by the first language interfering with the second language learning and intralingual errors are caused by the second language itself."

7. Stages of Errors Analysis

It is essential to notice that implementing error analysis involves more than only detecting and discovering errors but also endeavoring to realize why they take place. Variety of means for collecting data for studies on how L2 learners perform is

suggested. One ideal way of accounting for the steps of error analysis is proposed by Ellis & Barkhuizen (2005, pp.57f), who present the following steps when directing an error analysis:

1. Collecting data from participants
In the first stage, the researcher is required to collect data coming from the learners' errors. He/she stipulates the sample she/he aims to gather to capture the data. When gathering data, a researcher must first inspect the study's objectives and research questions and then try to gather data that are pertinent to those objectives and questions.

2. Identifying errors
In the second stage, the researcher detects the variances between learners' sentences and the formula that has been reconstructed. The difference between sentences produced by the learners and those produced by native speakers in the same environment is what points to the identification of errors.

3. Describing errors
In the third stage, the differences between learners' sentences and those of the native speakers can be categorized in terms of a linguistic classification or surface structure classification.

4. Explaining errors
In the fourth stage, to provide an explanation for "why errors of learners of a foreign language were made", it is crucial to identify their sources. It is a known fact that L2 learners commit errors since it is problematic for them to have access to their L2 knowledge in communication; hence evidently, they commit errors. Additionally, researchers utilize a number of features to classify the different kinds of learners' L2 errors in an attempt to explicate these errors. Here, two types of errors are identified.

a. *Transfer errors,* these types of errors cover errors in which the L2 learner employs his/her L1 to build a sentence led to an error.

b. *Overgeneralization errors*, such errors when learners frequently use a similar grammatical structure or rule, leading to improper grammatical constructions.

5. Evaluating errors
The last stage is concerned with the process of the evaluation of errors. This stage comes after the identification of errors which implicates evaluating the significance of numerous faults so as to regulate which ones that should be directed with instruction.

8. Methodology
The present paper is based on a qualitative research method (including explanatory and descriptive procedures) which elucidates the kinds of errors MA students commit while writing their theses. This research method illustrates how its application is made fruitful to usual phenomena. That is, a qualitative method focuses on a "qualitative phenomenon which investigates the reasons for the behavior of humans (why people do certain things)" (Kothari, 2004, p.3). Practically, a quantitative method is preferred to investigate the difficulties Iraqi MA students encounter and the types of linguistic (syntactic and semantic) errors they commit, highlighting the causes behind these errors. The data of the paper comprise 20 MA theses in English linguistics (2018-2021). The data analysis is carried out based on Quirk et al.'s (1985) and Huddleston and Pullum's (2005) treatments of grammatical constructions. The analysis is grounded in the researchers' identification of the MA students' common grammatical errors, specifying their types, describing them, finding reasons for committing them and attempting to construct remedial suggestions and pedagogical recommendations.

9. Data Analysis
Getting acquainted with the grammatical rules of a language or knowing the rules of writing may not make one a skilful writer unless he/she is capable of expressing the envisioned ideas or conveying the intended meaning obviously, and consequently understanding others. Although Iraqi MA pass through stages in which they take the English language as one topic in their course, they often find difficulty and even commit grammatical errors in writing their theses. Most studies have shown that grammatical errors occur due to the fact that MA students do not use English as L2. That is, they have not mastered English well. A survey of the 20 selected theses has been made to detect the most recurrent grammatical errors that MA students commit. The most frequent errors are the following:

1. Concord: Subject-verb agreement

2. Passive Voice

3. Articles

4. Tense

5. Incomplete sentence

6. Conjunction

7. Parallelism

8. expression

9. Wrong verbs

10. Collocation

9.1 Concord
Concord (or *agreement*) refers to the "relationship between two grammatical units such that one of them displays a particular feature (e.g. plurality) that accords with a displayed (or semantically implicit) feature in the other". In English, the most frequent concord is that of 3rd person number occurring between subject and verb (Quirk et al.,1985, p. 755). Put differently, main verbs (e.g. like) and auxiliaries (e.g. be) show agreement with the subject of the sentence (Huddleston and Pullum, 2005, p. 68):

- *Jim likes history subject.*
- *He is reading a new novel.*

However, MA students are observed to commit various types of errors attributed to the concord between the verb and its subject, as illustrated in the following examples:

-*It is <u>one</u> of the pragmatic concepts that <u>concern</u> both the verbal and non-verbal behaviors to achieve certain communicative purposes and functions.*

- *<u>The current ideas</u> of loyalty <u>has its</u> origins in the English language.*

- *Most of these studies are concerned with the use of language in social settings. Yet, very <u>few takes</u> into consideration the contexts in which that language used.*

All the above examples reveal that MA students fail to grammatically correlate the subjects with their verbs, perhaps, they are misled by the nearest NPs (*concepts, loyalty*) instead of the subjects (NPs: *one, ideas*), or they lack grammatical knowledge about the use of *few* in the third example which takes a base verb (*take* but not *takes*).

9.2 Passive Voice
Passive voice is employed when a change in the focus of the sentence is intended. It is used when the emphasis is placed on the action implied in the verb and the object (experienced the action) instead of the subject of the sentence. In scientific writings, the passive is preferred since the action (the process) is more emphasized than the doer of the action (Quirk et al., 1985, pp. 159-60; Huddleston and Pullum, 2005, pp. 24-242). A survey of the MA theses discloses that students misuse passive construction, either due either to their insufficient knowledge of the passive rules or to their mother language interference.

- *The semantic analysis <u>based</u> on Halliday's (2014) Systemic Functional Grammar, which is the center of attention in the analysis.*

- *The author affirms that implicit encouragement <u>given</u> to his nation to be morally good rather than physically, socially and politically*

- *The following extracts <u>took</u> from the English religious oaths which<u> found</u> in the New Testaments in the Bible.*

A look at these instances shows that MA students are unable to give the right forms of the passive. The reason is either they have not mastered the use of passive (they don't exactly know how to construct the passive BE+ PP of the verb) or their answers have been influenced by their mother tongue (Arabic language), particularly when they write their sentences in Arabic and try to translate them into English. In Arabic, passive can be created by the employment of the verb form supported by the use of diacritics without the incorporation of the verb BE. Oppositely, one common error takes place, in which a passive construction (*be specialized*) is used rather than an active one (*specialize*).

- *He <u>is specialized</u> in applied linguistics.*   (*<u>specializes</u>*)

9.3 Articles
Articles (*a, an* and *the*) are manipulated to identify and determine the NPs following them. et al. (1985, p. 253) illustrate that "different noun classes require different articles". The occurrence of an article is determined by "the count and noncount nouns, the distribution into a number (singular/plural) and definiteness (definite/indefinite)" (ibid). The definite article (the) is employed

to signify the NP it presents as definite, that is, "referring to something which can be identified uniquely in the contextual or general knowledge shared by speaker and hearer" (ibid, p. 266). On the other hand, the indefinite articles (*a, an*) are conceptually the "unmarked article in the sense that it is used (for singular count nouns) where the conditions for the use of the do not obtain". Therefore, the indefinite articles *a* and *an* are characteristically exploited when the referent has not been talked about beforehand and is expected to be unacquainted with the speaker or listener (ibid, p. 272). In other words, indefinite articles do not specify that the depiction in the head NP is defining; this depiction is not introduced as distinctive in the context (Huddleston and Pullum, 2005, p. 92).

The investigation of the articles in the selected MA theses unveils that Iraqi students make a lot of errors in the use of definite and indefinite articles; they use an article when it is not required and vice versa. Often, in titles of tables or figures or even tables of contents, they use the definite article (the) when it is not necessary:

- *The Methodology*   (as a title of chapter three in theses)

-*The Model of Analysis*

- *The syntactic and semantic investigation involves the English and Arabic.*

- *This point is intended to provide definition of the term sectarianism as employed in Obama's inaugural speeches.*

- *One important point is applying the model to selected data of the poems of the two writers.*

The above first three items are instances in which the definite article (*the*) is used when it is not obligatory since the first two represent titles (of a chapter and of a section in chapter two), whereas, in the third, there is no need for the article (*the*), as the two nouns English and Arabic are proper nouns. In the third and fourth items, the two nouns (*definition* and *selected data*) must be preceded by the definite article (*the*) simply because the word *definition* is restricted by the prepositional phrase *of the term* and the phrase *selected data* is previously known to both the researcher and the reader.

Similarly, the indefinite articles are misused by MA students; mostly, they forget to use the articles (*a* and *an*) when referring to unspecified count nouns.

- *Error occurs when the learner does not pay attention to the noun following the adjective.*

- *Communication has been used as way to convey needs, ideas and feelings.*

The two nouns *error* and *way* must be preceded by the indefinite articles *an* and *a*. Here; it seems that MA students ignore the use of the rules of definiteness and indefiniteness in English.

9.4 Tense
According to Comrie (1985, p. 7), the category of tense refers to "the expression of temporality in language, has the function of depicting temporal relations in utterances". The notion of localizing circumstances in time is a closely abstract concept and is "as such potentially independent of the f distinctions made in any particular language" is an arrangement noticeable by "verb inflection or auxiliaries whose basic use is to locate the situation in time: *I liked it* (past tense, past time), *I like it* (present tense, present time)" (Huddleston and Pullum, 2005, p. 307). In English, tense locates an event in time. Different tenses are linked to verb forms. However, in English, two tenses are mainly recognized as past and present, associated with three sorts of time past, present (now) and future (Quirk et al., 1985). However, MA students find difficulty in capturing the suitable tense while conveying their written messages. The two main two types of errors that students encounter in terms of tense are tense shift and present continuous.

a. Tense shift
Numerous errors concerning shifting from one tense into another (specifically from past to present or vice versa) are abundant in MA students.

- *To sum up, image is a mirror, the familiar, the known, and what is asked to read; it gave the voter his own image.*

- *It involves how language comprehension was dependent on the expertise of the speaker. How speakers use and interpret utterances, and how the interactions between speakers and listeners affected the form of sentences.*

In the second instance, the MA student moves from the present (*involves*) to the past (*was*), then employs the present (*use* and *interpret*) and transfers to the past (*affected*). Surely, she is not aware of the differences between these two tenses, neglecting the location of the events in time. Perhaps, she wrote this sentence in Arabic and translated it into English, and the result is this improper sentence.

b. Present continuous

In many cases, MA students are noticed to use present continuous (which is used to indicate instantaneous situations) to refer to facts, factuality, or habitual actions:

- The writer <u>is explaining</u> to the conceptual framework that the study present revolves around.

- This study is intended to give an answer "What <u>is</u> religious language <u>referring</u> to?"

- It can be said that Grice's CP components are obtained by assuming that the maxims <u>are operating</u> together.

In the three examples, the reference is wrongly given to factuality and habitual actions through the use of present continuous, which designates actions that take place around the present time or at the time of speaking. Here, it seems that those students get acquainted with the grammatical rules of tenses, yet they fail to apply them in appropriate situations.

9.5 Incomplete Sentences

Incomplete sentences are those sentences which predict no complete meanings due to the wrong use of an item or the lack of an item. In many cases, MA students resort to incomplete sentences to convey their ideas and opinions. This fault mostly occurs due to the existence of certain conjunctions such as *that, which* and *although,* which must be followed by finite clauses.

- In this line, the Prophet Mohammed advises people through returning to the Glorious Quran and his teaching in Hadiths, which means <u>that</u> implicit encouragement to his nation to be good morally rather than socially and politically.

- Also, the term semiotics is rooted from the Greek word 'semeion', which <u>indicates</u> 'sign'.

- <u>Although</u> the methods followed in the analysis of the data involve more than one direction, which is based on grounded theory.

The above three sentences reveal that students use non-finite clauses (incomplete sentences) where a finite clause is required. The first should read as ... <u>that</u> implicit encouragement **is given** to his nation..., in the second, the present participle form *indicating* must be changed into *indicates*, whereas, in the third, the dependent clause with *Although* must be completed by an independent clause which is missing here.

9.6 Conjunction

Conjunctions are words and expressions made use of to link "words, phrases and clauses". Two main types are subordinating and coordinating linkers. Subordinators (*but, although, as soon as*,... etc.) are devices used for constituting subordination. Coordinators (and, but, or...etc.) are devices used to show coordination, a relation between components of equal grammatical rank (Huddleston and Pullum, 2005, p. 21). in general, are misused by Iraqi MA students, among which conjunctions such as *whereas, while*, and *as well as* are the most to be erroneous in their theses.

- The text signifies the president personality as a simple person, his appearance in the image indicates his personality as a simple person. <u>Whereas</u> there is no complementary relationship between the image and the text.

 - The writer was so ambitious and so energetic. <u>And</u> he tried to do his best to overcome all troubles.

- <u>As well as</u> the viewer's role is one of the most significant ranges that Barthes concerned with in his studying the signs. The viewer has the most main perception to the object that one views or reads with reason in which the viewer can observe the sign in many various perceptions.

In the first two sentences, the subordinator *whereas* and the coordinator *and* are used as intersentential conjunction (conjoining clauses), but the researcher misuse them and use them at sentence boundaries (sentence connector). In the third example, the researcher uses *as well as*   (which is a preposition) instead of the conjunction *as well*. It is apparent that those MA students have not mastered the use of conjunctions, and therefore, they employ them improperly.

9.7 Parallelism

Parallelism concerns the employment of paired words, phrases, constructions, and clauses, to highlight alike notions in a sentence (Crystal, 2003, p.466). Stylistically, Mathews (2007, p. 286) describes parallelism as an "effect of sentences or other units that are parallel in form." For Rozakis (2003, p.137), parallelism is "the expression of two or more sentence elements in the same grammatical form. It keeps a sentence balanced because these basics are grammatically equal." Yet, MA students are noticed to commit various types of errors associated with parallelism.

- The immortal happiness and pleasure in Heaven is the reward of the people's prayer <u>and asking</u> God for the things in their life.

- The first utterance is rejected when the second speaker notes that having match in London needs more time for training and <u>travelling</u> and <u>to turn back</u>.

- This leads the audience to think about the speaker's intention since he means more than recitation <u>and leaving</u> the Glorious Quran.

These instances reflect the fact that MA students would not pay attention to the balance between the structures in the sentences. The errors committed are primarily attributed to two reasons. First, they lack the grammatical rule of equalization between constructions in sentences. Second, they think of constructing sentences in Arabic and then translating them into English.

9.8 Problematic Expressions

Certain verbs (*let, make* and *commit*) and certain expressions (*be restricted, be devoted* and *be dedicated to*) are problematic to MA students. *Let and make* are followed by Object + Base V, *commit* is followed by gerund (V+ing), whereas the expressions (*be restricted, be devoted* and *be dedicated to*) are followed by NP or V+ing. MA students often commit errors while using these constructions.

- The first is that the friendship between them which <u>lets</u> him <u>to do</u> such thing.

- The main reason behind this difficulty is that counterfactuality has complex meanings and complex structures that would <u>make</u> learners <u>to find</u> difficulties in recognizing and producing them.

- In performing commissives, a speaker must <u>commit</u> himself/herself <u>to do</u> something he/she promises to.

- This study is restricted to <u>analyze</u> the syntactic and semantic behavior of the proverbs of weather in English and Arabic.

- Chapter three is devoted <u>to present</u> the most utilized tools and methods in this study to verify the hypotheses stated at the beginning of the study.

- This section is dedicated <u>to explain and justify</u> of the errors students make in giving answer to sentences containing counterfactual constructions.

Assuredly, MA students' errors are ascribed to their deficient knowledge of the grammatical rules concerning the use of these constructions.

9.9 Collocation

Collocation in English is described as a usual co-occurrence of words that are strictly allied with one another. Or as Sinclair (1991, p. 170) describes it, collocation is "the occurrence of two or more words within a short space of each other in a text". A wider view is taken by Bartsch (2004, p. 76), who identifies collocations as "lexically and/or pragmatically constrained recurrent co-occurrences of at least two lexical items which are in a direct syntactic relation with each other". The most erroneous type of collocation that MA students fail to use is verb + Preposition (e.g. *apply + to, agree + on/with, be interested + in*).

- This approach is <u>applied on</u> the data consisting of English and Arabic political speeches.

- Most scholars and researchers interested in language teaching <u>agree with</u> incorporating communicative language teaching into Iraqi contexts.

- The test can be described as having content validity since it has been submitted to the jury members who <u>are interested with</u> Applied Linguistics and teaching EFL.

Logically, it is apparent that MA students fail to arrive at the appropriate collocations due to their lack of knowledge of how words collocate with others. Possibly, they have less practice of these collocated words.

9.10 Verbs + that clause

In academic writing, there is a tendency towards the use of certain verbs which are employed to introduce certain messages, ideas, quotations or paraphrases. These verbs are realized as reporting (or saying) verbs as they are associated with reporting information; they are therefore followed by that-clause being their direct objects. Reporting verbs (such as *tell, say, inform,* etc.) are used in theses and dissertations to designate or confer others' works in correlation with the researcher's own study to report on others' results and conclusions (Huddleston and Pullum, 2005). Nonetheless, careful choice of reporting verbs can help the researcher to present his/her evaluation of the superiority of what others have thought. In the survey of the selected data, MA students have been noticed to fail to use these reporting verbs accurately, believing that some verbs other than reporting verbs can take that clause and thus functioning as reporting verbs.

- His Red colour hat <u>represents</u> <u>that </u>he is one of the Republican Whig Party, Trump supporters, who are the most people against wearing a mask and a vaccine, consider it looting of their freedoms.

- Dietzmann (2008) <u>exemplifies</u> <u>that</u> images are also encoded twice in the brain, increasing the rate of both memory and comprehension in the same or even shorter amount of time; they can be used to convey more messages than text.

-It <u>involves</u> <u>that</u> the experiment will be performed after the presentation of the theoretical review.

The underlined verbs in the above instances are not reporting verbs simply because they (with their complements) cannot be used to convey the appropriate information. Not only syntactically, but also semantically, those verb cannot co-occur with the clauses.

Importantly, the data analysis of errors in the ten items does not mean that these are the only errors that MA students commit while writing their theses. Other types of linguistic errors are also observed in the data, but they are less common; that is, they occur occasionally. The focus on these ten linguistic errors is due to their frequent occurrences in those students' theses.

10. Sources of Errors
Applying the five stages mentioned above, it becomes necessary to identify the sources of errors committed by L2 learners. of reasons leading to errors can be categorized into four types (Brown, 2000, p.232).

10.1 Interlingual Transfer
Interlingual transfer is an essential basis for errors committed by learners. It takes place owing to the interference of L1. Such errors occur when learners attempt to transfer their L1 grammatical into L2 (ibid). Learners incline to employ the structures of L1 and apply them to L2. This transfer occurs on the basis of the idea that "the familiar patterns will be preferred to new, different ones, and this preference constitute (s) the basis for mother-tongue interference" (George, 1972, p.160). The interference of L1 "can be positive if it can be helped in the process of learning"; yet, if the differences between L1 and L2 occur, "this interference will be negative". It is often noticed that the initial phases of learning L2 are particularly liable to interlingual transfer from L1 or interference. The students are observed to not obviously pronounce some words in English, e.g. the words *she* and *see* seem to have somehow similar pronunciation (Brown, 2000, p. 233). Interlingual errors involve errors such as misuse of modal verbs, word order and verb tenses.

In the data analysis of the twenty MA theses, it has been found that some of the errors committed by MA students are attributed to the interference of L1; students resort to applying L1 grammatical structures onto L2 grammatical structures or sometimes to interpreting or translating into L2. In some cases, it seems that some students attempt to translate the words literally from L1 into L2 without caring about L2 grammatical rules, particularly when the occurrence of a certain sentence is determined by both the syntactic and semantic consideration, such as in the case of articles, tense shift, conjunctions, verbs followed by that-clause and collocations.

10.2 Intralingual Transfer
Intralingual transfer occurs within L2 itself. In the beginning phase of learning FL, learners start to employ a new scheme within L2. Two kinds of "intralingual transfer" can be notable: positive "intralingual transfer and negative intralingual transfer". Positive intralingual transfer" occurs due to *generalization* which specifies the interference of regulation or rule which controls particular cases. "Negative intralingual transfer" is *overgeneralization* which specifies divergent constructions in L2 itself produced by learners, e.g.. "*She comed*", "*Does Timmy can cook*" (Brown, 2000, p.232).

Some MA students commit structural errors categorized as intralingual errors as they occur due to "incomplete application of rules, faulty generalization and failure to learn conditions under which rules apply". They give improper sentences because they have not mastered the grammatical rules and regulations of L2. Most errors made in tenses, concord, passive voice, incomplete sentences, etc., are all ascribed to students' insufficient acquaintance with L2 structures.

10.3 Context of Learning
Context refers to the social environment in which learning takes place, teachers and materials. For instance, in school learning, the context indicates "the classroom with its teacher and its materials in the case of school learning or the social situation in the case of untutored second language learning" (ibid). Errors learners commit occur owing to numerous reasons, e.g. "incorrect presentation of structures or words in the textbooks, confusing explanation about the materials from the teachers, or because of putting patterns in improperly contextualized setting" (Richards, 1971, p.187). In most cases, EFL learners recurrently commit errors because of the materials that do not cover the required information. In this respect, teachers and stakeholders are required to set a healthy environment for learning and teaching L2. In accordance with the situation available for learning, MA students are asked to attend courses specialized for teaching grammatical rules in writing theses. In addition, they need to practice writing while taking courses before embarking on writing their theses.

10.4 Communication Strategies

Communication strategies are defined and linked to "learning styles". Learners clearly employ "production strategies" so as to augment receiving their messages across. This is attributed to the manner teachers give the material to their learners. Learners exploit various strategies to help them when learning L2 or FL. Nonetheless, errors committed by learners might be made by unfitting strategies, e.g. "personal style", that they take to ease the learning process. Oxford (1990, p. 8) expounds that strategies are particular activities taken by learners to "make learning easier, faster, more enjoyable, more-directed, more effective, and more transferable to new situations". Furthermore, Richards (1971, p. 208) argues that most errors learners commit range from the strategies they employ in "language acquisition and the reciprocal interference of the target language items". Correspondingly, teachers are obliged to use strategies which enable their students to write correctly and efficiently. One influential strategy is encouraging students to practice writing before starting their writing of theses.

11. Findings

This section is devoted to giving answers to the research questions placed at the beginning of the paper, which state:

1. What are the main commonly documented errors MA students commit in writing theses in linguistics?

2. What are the main causes of these errors?

In answering the first and the second research questions, the results analysis of the errors in the twenty MA theses reveal that the two most common errors are interlingual and intralingual. Further, there are a lot of causes behind these errors; mainly, these errors are attributed to four factors: interlanguage, intralangauge, context of teaching L2 and strategies utilized by students in learning L2. Students' interlingual errors come from the interference of their mother tongue (Arabic). One reason is that they do not discern the meanings of the words in a structure, and therefore, they cannot know how to grammatically use them properly. They tend to use Arabic to translate these words and consequently apply the grammatical rules of Arabic to English. Another reason is linked to intralingual causes, i.e. students' limited knowledge of the rules of grammar leads them to produce improper sentences. Furthermore, MA students' narrowed awareness of L2 may be a noteworthy source as it encourages them to rely on their L1. This can consequently result in errors that may well create written miscommunication. In certain cases, students' carelessness seems to be the basis of some errors (If they were more careful, they would commit less errors). In brief, the main causes that lead to MA students' errors are interference with L1, translation from L1, lack of or having confined awareness of L2 grammatical rules, and maybe students' inattentiveness.

In replying to research question 3, which states, "What pedagogical recommendations and suggestions can be put forward to help students overcome these errors?", the following recommendations and suggestions are offered:

1. Teachers should always be attentive to realize the most recognized patterns of errors evolving in writing theses and be ready to perform accountable action or involvement in the correction of the MA students' errors, developing their practice.

2. Teachers are also advised to pay more attention to writing theses, particularly grammatical rules and constructions and to help their MA students to be more equipped with strategies of writing and revising their writing. In this respect, courses intended for writing skills are necessarily suggested to help students to better write their theses.

3. Getting acquainted with the prevailing errors is an essential footstep to alert EFL teachers on where to lead their exertions concerning the most difficult part MA students encounter while writing their theses. It also stimulates teachers and scholars to improve a new scheme for classifying the students' errors, subsequently and lead to lessen the quantity of errors in L2 production. Indirectly, it directs teachers towards selecting the most helpful strategies that minimalize the students' errors.

11.1 Limitations and Contribution

This paper is restricted to the investigation of the most linguistic (syntactic and semantic) errors MA students committed while writing their required theses. Only twenty theses were qualitatively investigated due to the scope of this paper. Surely, working on larger data, utilizing both qualitative and quantitative methods, would give more general and reliable conclusions. However, the outcome of this paper would contribute much to the field of writing (particularly of MA theses and PhD dissertations), as it touches upon the most characteristic errors EFL students face and attempts to offer some pedagogical recommendations and suggestions. It endeavors to provide some remedial solutions in this respect.

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