| **RESEARCH ARTICLE**

Cross-gender Analysis of Iraqi EFL Learners Recurrent Grammatical Errors in English

Iqbaal Majeed Hameed
Ministry of Education, Iraq
Corresponding Author: Iqbaal Majeed Hameed, **E-mail**: iqbaal_m_h@yahoo.com

| **ABSTRACT**

The study attempts to investigate recurrent grammatical errors that hinder Iraqi undergraduate EFL learners` mastery of English grammar. If male-female learners of English are not competent in the structural and semantic bases of tense, they can hardly produce acceptable sentences in the L2/FL. For this purpose, an elicitation test is used to sort out the typical errors of Iraqi male-female undergraduate students (1st, 3rd and 4th stage) of the Department of English Language and Literature in Mustansiriyah University / Iraq, with respect to specific recurrent tense errors reflecting the structure of their transitional competence or what S. Pit Corder (1976, p.15) labels *idiosyncratic dialect*. The justification behind this study is those adopted following Corder (1976, p1), who mentions that two justifications are essentially relevant for the study of learners' errors, one of which is the pedagogical justification, which implies that eliminating any error requires a good understanding of the nature of that error. The research follows a comprehensive analysis methodology. It combines quantitative and qualitative approaches to analyze samples from Iraqi male-female EFL learners. The study found that there are several cross-gender differences concerning the recurrent errors, which might be attributed to several factors, i.e. linguistic and sociolinguistic. The study takes these factors as the building blocks for suggesting pedagogical solutions. The study was originally an attempt to help EFL learners eliminate such recurrent L1\L2 conflicting errors.

| **KEYWORDS**

Tense, learners` errors, second language teaching, error analysis, grammatical rules.

1. Introduction

Within the educational landscape around the globe, the learning of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) has been a subject of great significance as English is increasingly becoming a key tool for academic, professional, and global communication purposes Crystal (2003). This is the case in countries where English is not the primary language. Within this context, one can notice Iraq as a clear example. Directing a special focus on Iraqi male-female EFL university students` specific grammatical errors can enhance the proficiency of their English and help find educational amendments to fill in such serious gaps.

Within the error analysis related literature, it is worth mentioning that there are two types of errors: inter and intra lingual errors. Richard (1974: 6-173) points out that when a mistake is made by the learners of a foreign language in the target language due to the mother tongue, then we say it is an interlingual error. He adds that intralingual errors do not reflect the structure of the mother tongue but in fact reflect some generalization because learners are partially exposed to the target language.

This study is quantitative in nature, using one way ANOVA and TUKEY HSDa post hoc test to measure the student`s scores. It also aims to explore the challenges faced by these learners so that targeted instructional strategies can be devised to address these issues with effective methods. Having a full account of the patterns of errors made by Iraqi male-female EFL learners can contribute to the progress of tailored teaching materials as well as approaches to eventually ensure a more fruitful and efficient language learning experience.

Taking a gender cross-sectional perspective may lend a great hand in inspecting the source of the hypothesized errors. Hence, this paper attempts to serve as a valuable resource that can be relied upon by instructors and curriculum designers in addition to other similar EFL settings. By having a better understanding of the grammatical obstacles faced by Iraqi EFL learners, English language education can witness a good. Additionally, such an attempt can facilitate the creation of more effective teaching programs that provide students with the necessary tools to get over language-related problems during the course of L2 learning.

2. Hypothesis
It is hypothesized that Iraqi male-female undergraduate students, in general, produce the following errors. Thus, the following are four sub-hypotheses:

1. The double marking past as in**: Subject   be   V (past)**
   As in: *He was played football*

2. The unnecessary (be) **[be + V (base) (present)]**
   As in: *He is go to the university*

3. Regularized past   ***keeped***

4. Ungrammatical auxiliary order   **As in   *He have will been studying***

3. Aims
The study aims to:
1. Identifying and categorizing these errors made by Iraqi male and female EFL learners.
2. Exploring the potential linguistic as well as structural factors that lead to these errors.
3. Quantifying the mean frequencies of these errors.
4. Providing insights into the pedagogical implications of these errors so that the development of instructional materials in Iraq is enhanced
.

4. Significance of the Study
The study is set to address a very problematic unvisited issue concerning these typical errors by Iraqi EFL learners. Such errors require a very serious, systematic, practical attempt so that real solutions can be adopted. Unlike the previous studies, the current study prioritizes the elimination of such recurrent Iraqi EFL learners` errors by understanding the nature of such errors from a cross-sectional male-female perspective.

5. Statement of the Problem
The dilemma related to grammatical errors by Iraqi EFL learners in English can be viewed as a multifaceted one. It is deeply rooted in many factors. Such factors can be linguistic, sociolinguistic, and\or educational. The linguistic factors are those related to the interference of the mother tongue (L1) with the target language (L2); in this case, Arabic interferes with English. This is referred to as inter-lingual errors, as stated by Touchie (1986, p.75). The second (sociolinguistic) factor is related to gender; as Schmitt (2013, p.161) states, gender and age are the most important variables that have a direct impact on second language acquisition. The sociolinguistic factor can also be seen in the inadequate exposure to English, which delays the chances for polishing and strengthening language skills. The third factor is that the pedagogical approaches followed are inadequate. The employment of methodological approaches to address EFL learners` challenges in L2 grammar is probably not tangible. As noted by Yangambi (2022, p.367), defective language mastery by students is probably attributed to ineffective teaching methodologies. Having a comprehensive account of the multifaceted nature of such factors is necessary to devise fruitful interventions so as to cope with the problem of typical grammatical errors among Iraqi EFL learners. By considering gender-based and cross-sectional variables together, relevant strategies can be adopted to enhance grammar proficiency as well as overall language competency among Iraqi EFL learners.

6. Literature Review
Within the literature of investigating Iraqi EFL learners, many attempts have been made to identify the various language related obstacles; almost all are gender-neutral. The current study features a special focus on a very specific type of error recurrent among male-female Iraqi undergraduate EFL learners. Below are some of the recent studies that target Iraqi EFL learners` language-related problems.

Al-Obaydi (2019) conducted an experimental study in which the researcher taught a group of 12 students to use the dictogloss technique, which required twelve lectures. In every lecture, the researchers used a new authentic text with a new focus on a specific

grammar role. The study attempted to discover the effect of using the dictogloss technique on Iraqi EFL undergraduate students' knowledge of grammar, the process which determines the effect of using the dictogloss technique on their improvement in writing and meaning comprehension. In this study, four measurement tools were employed: an achievement test, a reflection sheet at the end of each lecture, a questionnaire, and finally, the teacher's daily observation. The study found that a positive impact exists with respect to the dictogloss technique and the three variables: grammar knowledge, writing and meaning comprehension.

Khalil (2020) investigated Iraqi EFL learners` grammatical errors in writing English composition in the academic year 2019-2020. A random sample of 75 3rd year students was analyzed using a quantitative research design. The researcher used an eclectic model of grammatical errors encompassing Brown (2000), James (1998) and Corder (1967). The study found that omission, which is an interlingual error, is the most frequent error among Iraqi undergraduate students.

AbdulGhafoor (2021) investigated the extent to which online discussion affected the grammar knowledge of Iraqi EFL university students. The study also attempted to sort out factors that make online discussion influential to university students. The researcher used the mixed-mode quasi-experimental research design employing various English grammar tests. The study found that online discussion has facilitating effects on the process of learning grammar by Iraqi EFL university students.

Mohammed (2022) examined the interaction of motivation and English grammar learning ability in 100 high school female students. All the female participants who responded to the questionnaire were from Wasit high school. Several criteria were followed to ensure the validity of the structure of the designed questionnaire. The study revealed that a positively significant relationship exists between motivation and the grammar ability of the learners.

Salman (2022) focused on Iraqi first-year undergraduate students` problems in English grammar. This study attempted to identify the nature and scope of such syntactic errors like tense, modals and subject-verb concord. The respondents in this study are 23 first year students at Al Hamdaniya university\Iraq. The respondents` writing abilities were examined via a composition writing test. The study found that students made many types of syntactic errors, the most frequent of which are mis-formation (wrong morpheme form) as well as omission errors.

6. Methodology
6.1 The Subjects
The subjects are Iraqi undergraduate students in the Department of English Language and Literature at Mustansiriyah University / Iraq, distributed over the 1st, 3rd and 4th stages. 20 males-20 females represent each stage, which makes 40 subjects for each stage.

6.2 The Test
The test involves two elicitation techniques; in the first one, students are asked to put the verb between brackets in the correct form. The second technique is the exemplification of sentences, where students are asked to exemplify tenses as required. Concerning the design of the test, in the first question, data will be elicited out of twenty questions. These questions are distributed randomly with respect to the tense they carry, enabling the researcher to go stealthy into the student`s inter-language. The second exemplification test includes 10 points representing the tenses in question. The researcher`s objective is to identify and count the errors in question so that they are fed into the ANOVA test for statistical analysis. This means the higher the score, the less the errors.

Each test paper will include information about the respondents: gender, study stage if he/she has ever been exposed to English, whether abroad or in local courses and the period of exposure. Gender and academic stage are the main variables upon which the study is based. The purpose of the results is to track inter and intra significant developmental differences both among stages and among male-female scores.

6.2.1. Methods
6.2.1.1 Verb Identification\Correction Test
In this test, the testees are required to put the verb between brackets in the correct form. In this way, the researcher can identify whether the testees can do target language options, and eventually, he will have a full account of the student`s competency level.

6.2.1.2 Exemplification test
This kind of technique involves, to a great extent, both the learners` production as well as comprehension; therefore, it is very important as a source for eliciting the type of data required by the researcher. What is required by this task evokes the subject`s inter-language; hence, they will engage with freedom using their own rules in their attempt to produce correct structures.

As learners of English, they are supposed to be acquainted with the concept of tense and aspect throughout the course of their school and academic learning. However, this is not what the researcher noticed in the students` performance; thus, the researcher is interested in describing and explaining such errors and consequently suggesting available tangible pedagogical solutions. The test is composed of 10 sentences. They are all presented in a target-like form or in a form similar to the learners` stages of development.

6.2.1.3 Data Collection
The elicited samples of Iraqi male and female EFL learners are gathered. Appropriate sample size for each error category is ensured in order to achieve statistical significance.

6.2.1.4 Data Coding
The elicited samples are carefully coded to identify each specific error type. The frequency of errors for each learner in each error category is assigned a numerical value.

6.2.1.4 Grouping
The learners' data are grouped based on the four types of errors: the double marking past, the unnecessary BE, the regularized past and the ungrammatical auxiliary order.

6.1.2.5 ANOVA Test
A One-Way ANOVA test is conducted using a statistical software package (SPSS). The independent variable is the type of the error, while the dependent variable is the frequency of the error.

7. Statistical Analysis
For the statistical part, SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Sciences) 26th edition is used, more specifically, the one-way ANOVA test (Analysis of Variance), in order to reach precise numbers and percentages. The analysis is conducted first for each gender group across the academic stages 1st, 3rd, and 4th and then for female students likewise. Finally, both male and female students are contrasted based on the statistics. The reason why not all the academic stages are involved is that statistically, between the first and the fourth stage, only one stage is required to show the developmental pattern of students` errors via the ANOVA analysis.

7.1 Male Students
7.1.1 Production
This section involves the statistical analysis of the male students` elicited answers to the production test. It involves tables and figures that present the mean frequency (mf) and significant differences of the errors in question.

Table (1) the ANOVA analysis of male cross-sectional production of typical errors

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
The_double_marking_past	Between Groups	28.033	2	14.017	10.775	.000
	Within Groups	74.150	57	1.301		
	Total	102.183	59			
The_unnecessary_be	Between Groups	25.733	2	12.867	8.608	.001
	Within Groups	85.200	57	1.495		
	Total	110.933	59			
Regularized_past	Between Groups	50.700	2	25.350	42.624	.000
	Within Groups	33.900	57	.595		
	Total	84.600	59			
Ungrammatical_auxiliary_order	Between Groups	60.700	2	30.350	46.819	.000
	Within Groups	36.950	57	.648		
	Total	97.650	59			

As shown in Table (1) there is a significant difference between and within all male groups with respect to the four errors in the production test.
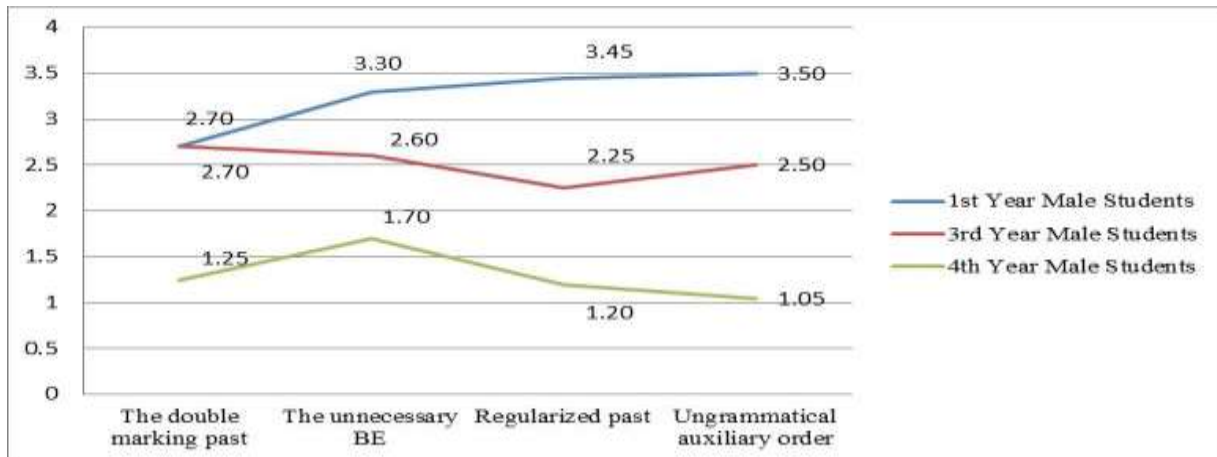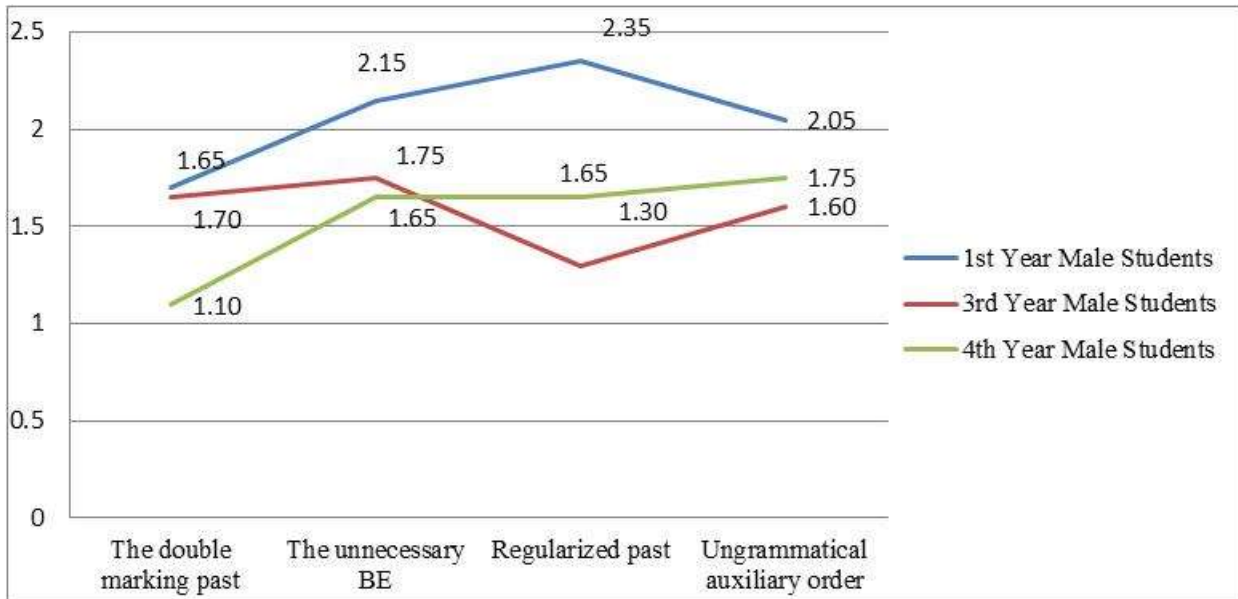

Figure (1) the cross-sectional developmental pattern of male students` production of typical errors

In Figure (1), it can be seen that the higher the academic year, the less the errors. There is a clear positive cross-sectional progress with respect to making these errors in the production test. *The ungrammatical auxiliary order* has the highest score, 3.50, by the first year students, and the same error has the least score, 1.05 mf, by the fourth year students.
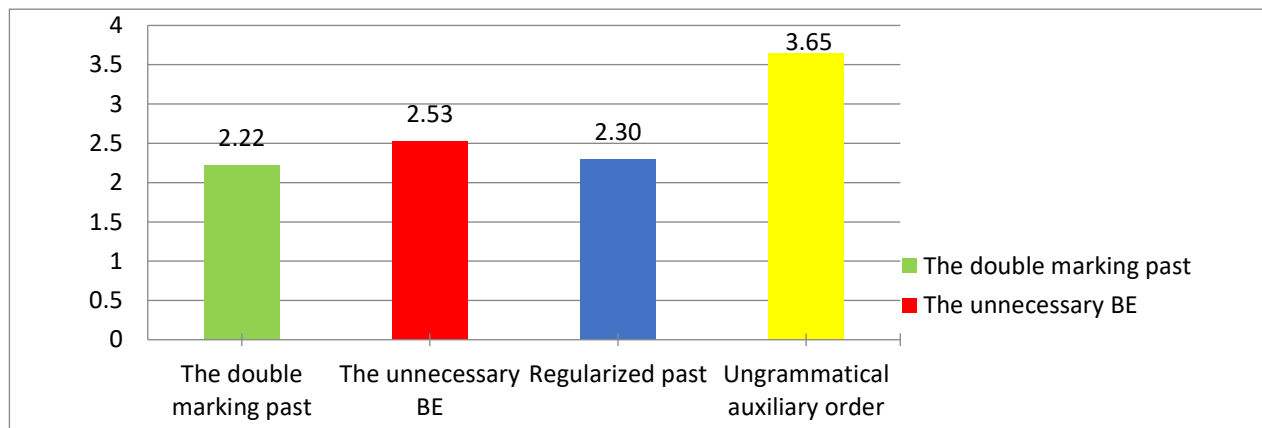
Figure (2) the total mean frequencies of male students` production of typical errors

As shown in Figure (2), *the ungrammatical auxiliary order* is the most frequent error type among the other three errors, 3.65 mf. The least frequent error type is *the double marking past* 2.22 mf.

7.1.2 Recognition\production
This section involves the statistical analysis of the male students` elicited answers to the recognition\production test. It involves tables and figures that present the mean frequency and significant differences of the errors in question.

Table (2) the ANOVA analysis of male cross-sectional recognition\production of typical errors

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
The_double_marking_past	Between Groups	4.433	2	2.217	4.426	.016
	Within Groups	28.550	57	.501		
	Total	32.983	59			
The_unnecessary_be	Between Groups	2.800	2	1.400	2.054	.138
	Within Groups	38.850	57	.682		
	Total	41.650	59			
Regularized_past	Between Groups	11.433	2	5.717	8.736	.000
	Within Groups	37.300	57	.654		
	Total	48.733	59			
Ungrammatical_auxiliary_order	Between Groups	2.100	2	1.050	1.078	.347
	Within Groups	55.500	57	.974		
	Total	57.600	59			

As shown in Table (2), there is a significant difference of 0.000 between and within male groups with respect to *the unnecessary BE* in the recognition\production test. There is no significant difference among the other groups with respect to the other three errors.

Figure (3) the cross-sectional developmental pattern of male students` recognition\production of typical errors

In Figure (3), it can be seen that the higher the academic year, the less the errors. There is no clear progress with respect to making these errors in the recognition\production test; this can be shown with the third year students` scores of *regularized past* and

ungrammatical auxiliary order. In these two errors, the third year students scored less mf than the fourth year students, 130 to 165 for the former and 160 to 175 for the latter. *The regularized past* has the highest score, 2.35 mf, by the first year students, and *the double marking past* has the least score, 1.10 mf, by the fourth year students.
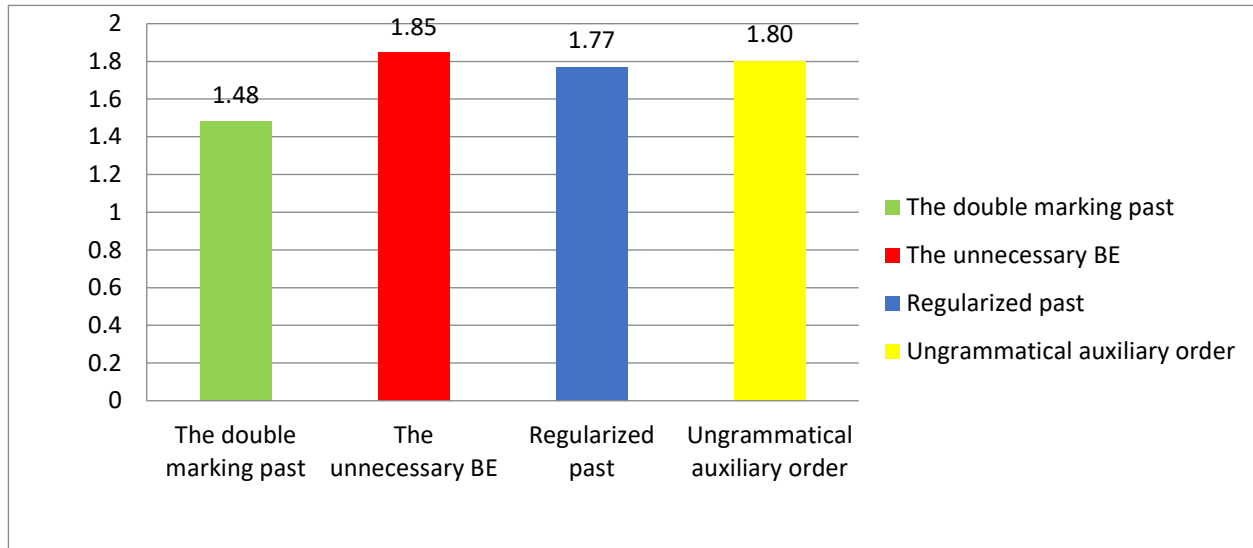

Figure (4) the total mean frequencies of male students` recognition\production of typical errors

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As shown in Figure (4), *the unnecessary BE* is the most frequent error type among the other three errors, 1.85 mf. The least frequent error type is *the double marking past* 1.48 mf.

7.2 Female students
7.2.1 Production
This section involves the statistical analysis of the female students` elicited answers to the production test. It involves tables and figures that present the mean frequency (mf) and significant differences of the errors in question.

Table (3) the ANOVA analysis of female cross-sectional production of typical errors

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
The_double_marking_past	Between Groups	14.700	2	7.350	9.543	.000
	Within Groups	43.900	57	.770		
	Total	58.600	59			
The_unnecessary_be	Between Groups	1.300	2	.650	.446	.642
	Within Groups	83.100	57	1.458		
	Total	84.400	59			
Regularized_past	Between Groups	1.900	2	.950	.906	.410
	Within Groups	59.750	57	1.048		
	Total	61.650	59			
Ungrammatical_auxiliary_order	Between Groups	18.033	2	9.017	5.359	.007
	Within Groups	95.900	57	1.682		
	Total	113.933	59			

As shown in table (3) there is a significant difference 0.000 only with respect to *the double marking error* in the production test.
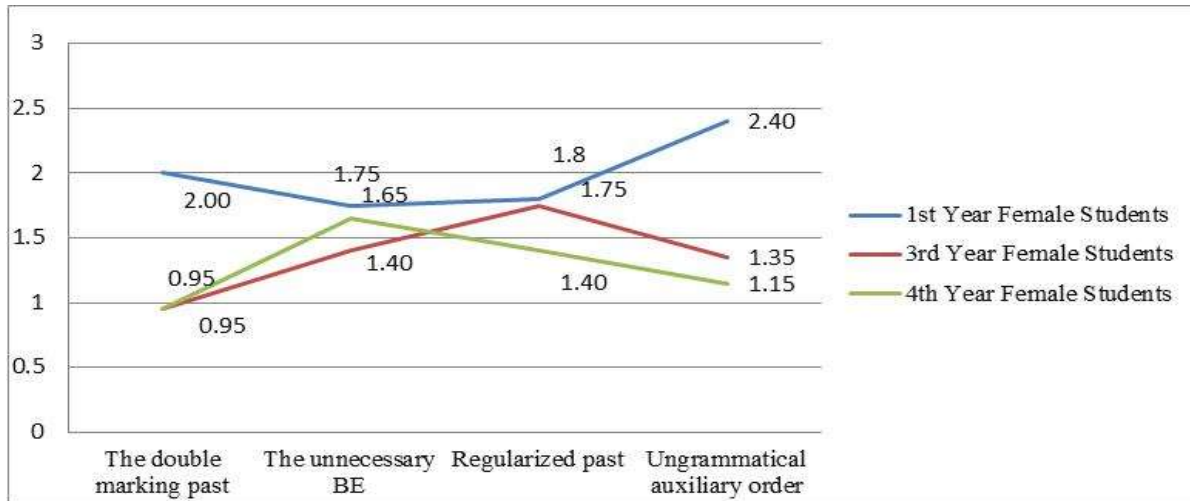

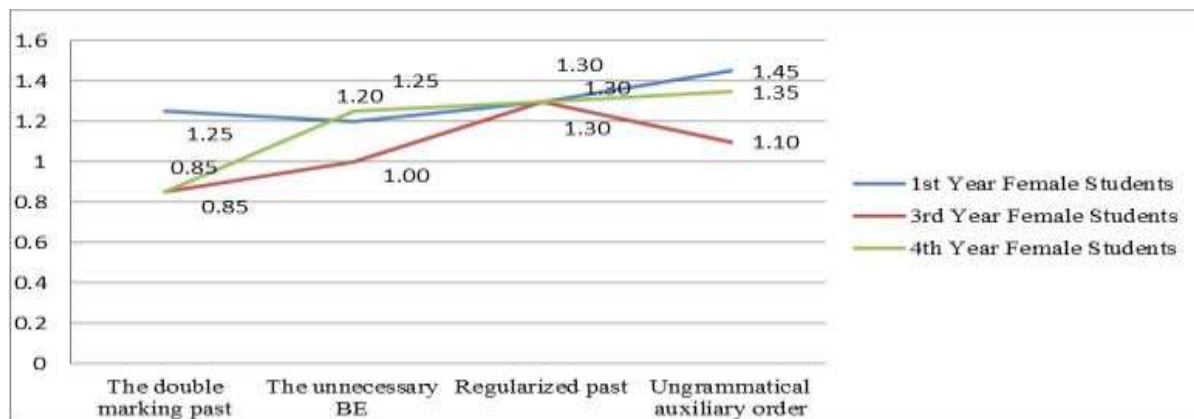**Figure (5) the cross-sectional developmental pattern of female students` production of typical errors**

In Figure (5), it can be seen that the higher the academic year, the less the errors. There is a positive cross-sectional progress with respect to making these errors in the production test. *The ungrammatical auxiliary order* has the highest score, 2.4 by the first year students, while *the double marking past* has the least score, 0.95 mf by the third and fourth year students. The third and fourth year students posit a negative deviance in scoring a higher number of both *the unnecessary* BE and *regularized past* errors, whereas first year students showed a positive deviance with the same errors.
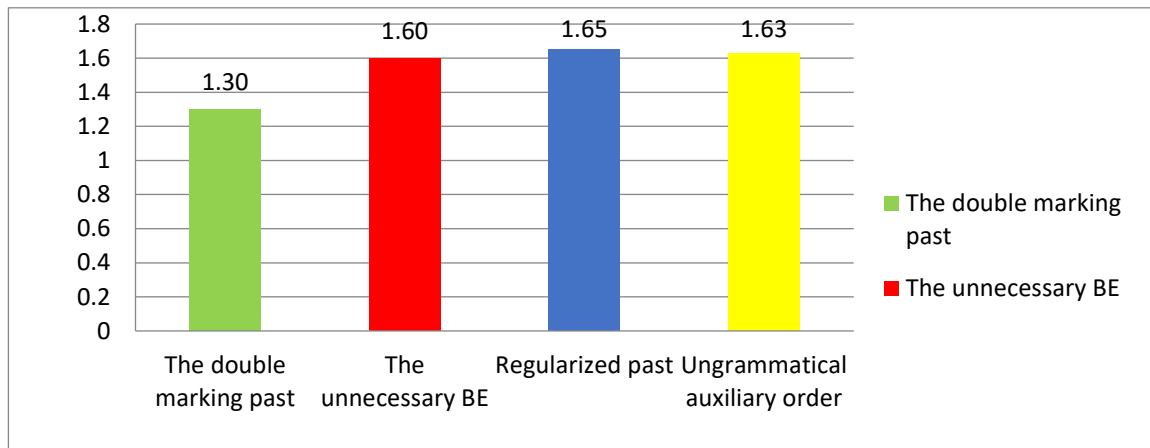
Figure (6) the total mean frequencies of female students` production of typical errors

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As shown in Figure (6), the *regularized past* is the most frequent error type among the other three errors, 1.65 mf. The least frequent error type is *the double marking past* 1.30 mf.

7.2.2 Recognition\production
This section involves the statistical analysis of the female students` elicited answers of the recognition\production test. It involves tables and figures that present the mean frequency and significant differences of the errors in question.

Table (4) the ANOVA analysis of female cross-sectional recognition\production of typical errors

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
The_double_marking_past	Between Groups	2.133	2	1.067	2.916	.062
	Within Groups	20.850	57	.366		
	Total	22.983	59			
The_unnecessary_be	Between Groups	.700	2	.350	.689	.506
	Within Groups	28.950	57	.508		
	Total	29.650	59			
Regularized_past	Between Groups	.000	2	.000	.000	1.000
	Within Groups	20.600	57	.361		
	Total	20.600	59			
Ungrammatical_auxiliary_order	Between Groups	1.300	2	.650	1.050	.357
	Within Groups	35.300	57	.619		
	Total	36.600	59			

As shown in Table (4), there is no significant difference between and within female groups with respect to the four errors in the recognition\production test.

**Figure (7) the cross-sectional developmental pattern of female students`
recognition\production of typical errors**

In Figure (7), it can be seen that there are many close intersecting points with respect to *the double marking past*, *the unnecessary BE,* and *regularized past*, which means that there is no clear cut cross-sectional progress in making these errors. A clear developmental pattern is only shown via *the ungrammatical auxiliary order*. *The ungrammatical auxiliary orde* has the highest score, 1.45 mf, by the first year students, and *the double marking past* has the least score, 1.10 mf, by the third and fourth year students.
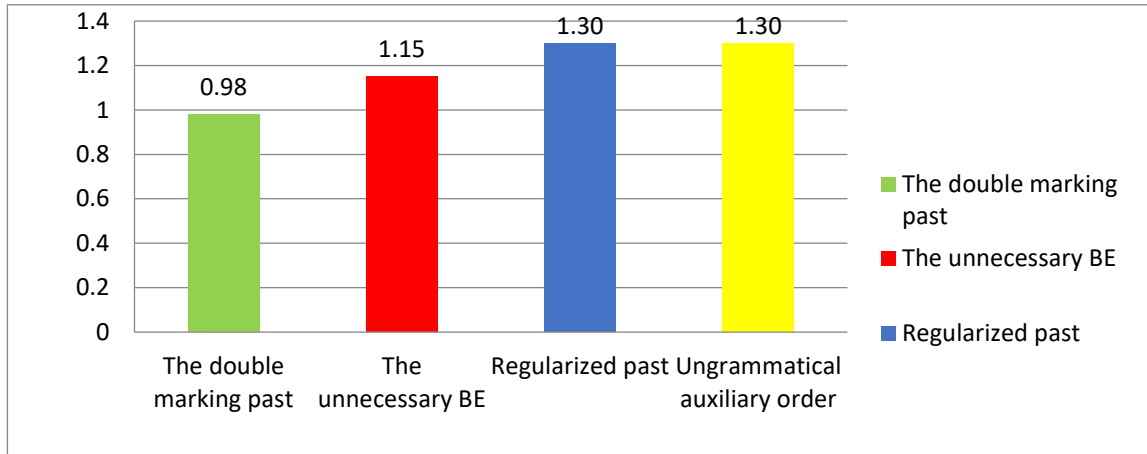
Figure (8) the total mean percentage of female students` recognition\production of typical errors

As shown in Figure (8), *regularized past* and *the ungrammatical auxiliary order* are the most frequent errors among the other three errors 1.30 mf. The least frequent error type is *the double marking past* 0.98 mf.

7.2.2 Results and Discussion

In this section, the implications behind statistical analysis are presented, taking into consideration two factors, gender and academic year.

7.2.2.1 Production

As shown in figure (9), 1st year female students outperformed their male counterparts in *the unnecessary Be* and *regularized past,* whereas the 1st year male students outperformed their female counterparts in *the double marking past* and *the ungrammatical auxiliary order*.
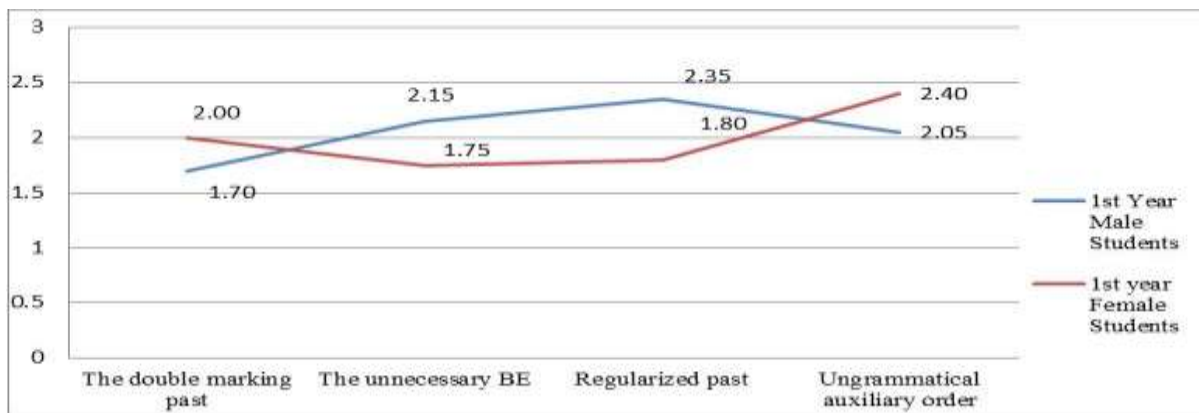
Figure (9) the total mean frequencies of 1st year male-female students` production of typical errors

In Figure (10), 3rd year female students highly outperformed their male counterparts in the score of the four errors in question.
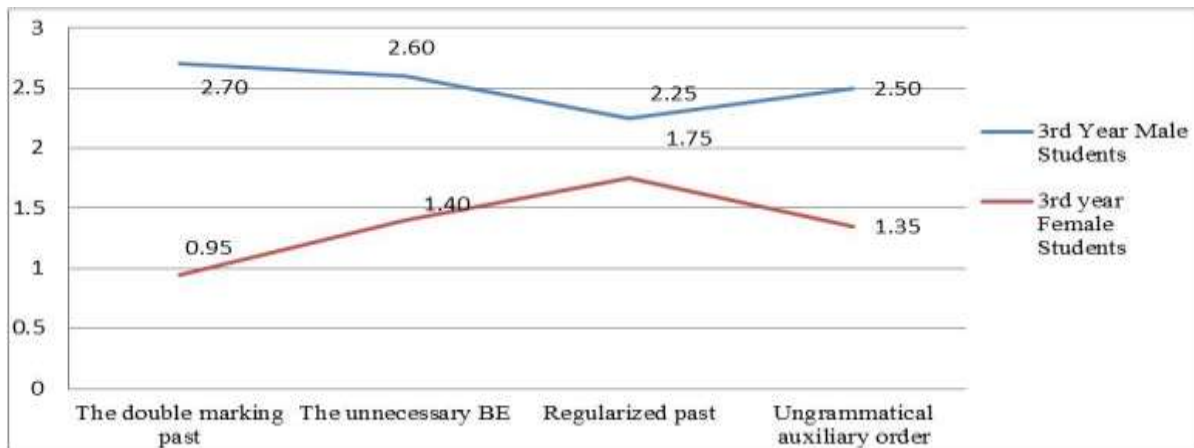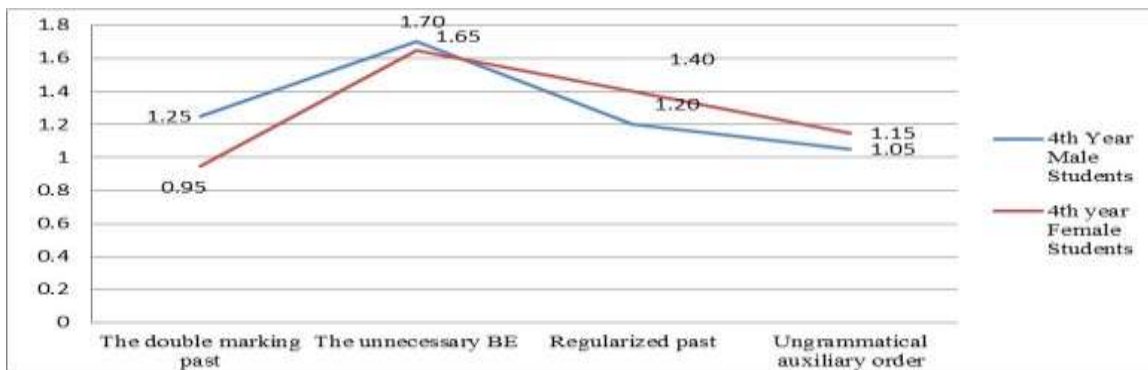

Figure (10) the total mean frequencies of 3rd year male-female students` production of typical errors

Following figure (11), 4th year female students outperformed their male counterparts in *the double marking past* and *the unnecessary BE,* while the 4th year male students outperformed their female counterparts in *regularized past* and *ungrammatical auxiliary order.*

Figure (11) the total mean frequencies of 4th year male-female students` production of typical error

Based on the figure (12) female students outperformed the male students by scoring less numbers of all four errors under analysis in the production test.
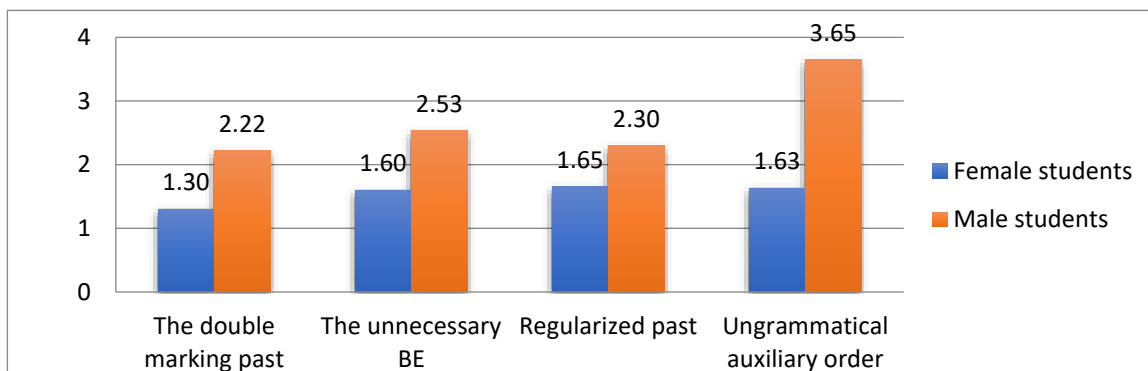

Figure (12) the total mean frequencies of male-female students` production of typical errors

7.2.2.2 Recognition\production
In Figure (13), 1st year female students highly outperformed their male counterparts in the score of the four errors in question.
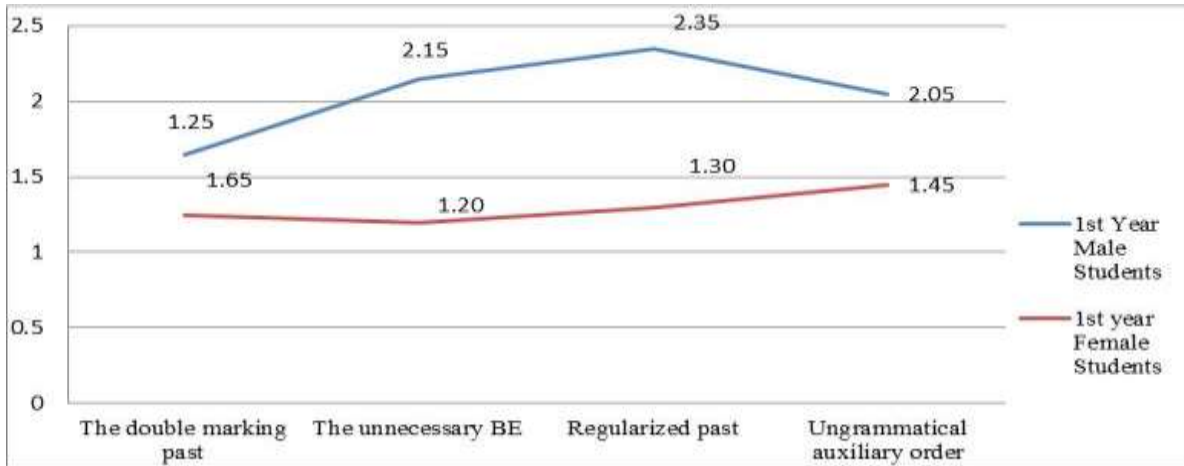

**Figure (13) the total mean frequencies of 1st year male-female students`
recognition\production of typical errors**

In Figure (14), 3rd year female students highly outperformed their male counterparts in the score of the four errors in question.
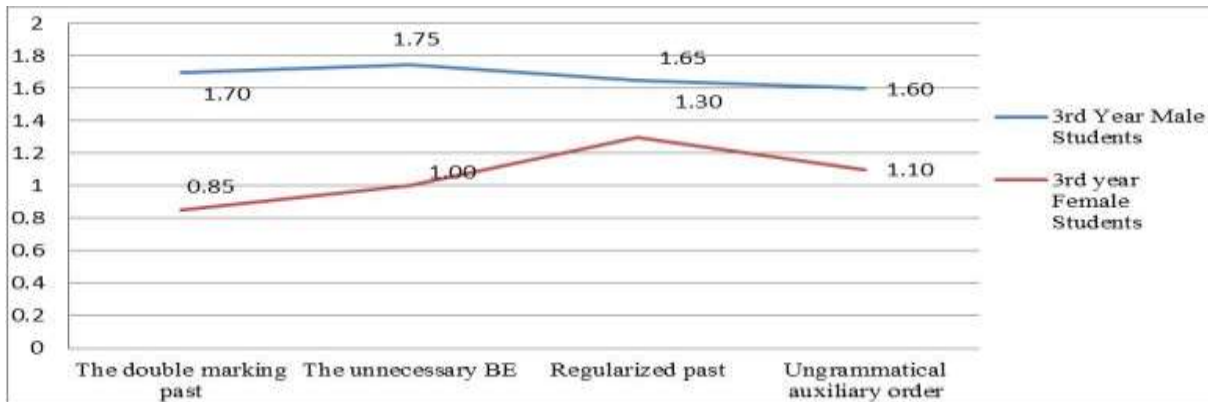

**Figure (14) the total mean frequencies of 3rd year male-female students` recognition\production
of typical errors**

In figure (15), 4th year female students highly outperformed their male counterparts in the score of the four errors in question.
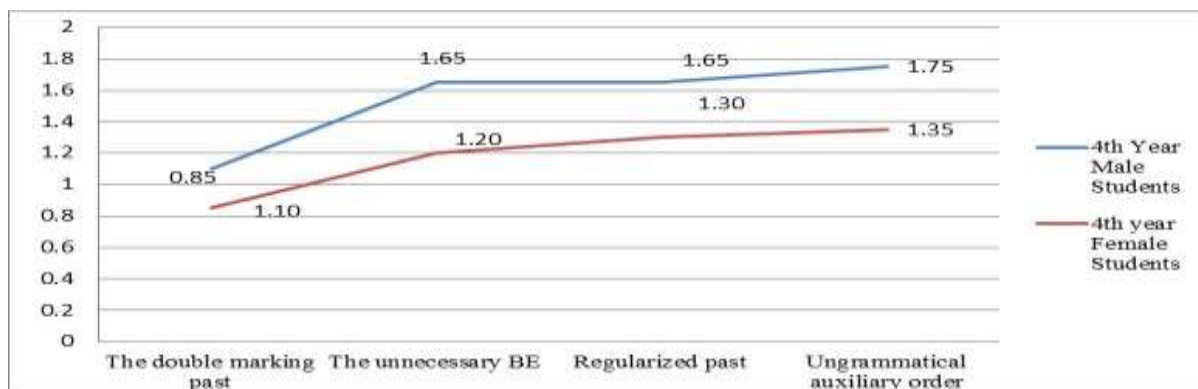

**Figure (15) the total mean frequencies of 4th year male-female students`
recognition\production of typical errors**

Based on the figure (16), female students outperformed male students by scoring less numbers of all the four errors under analysis in the recognition\production test.
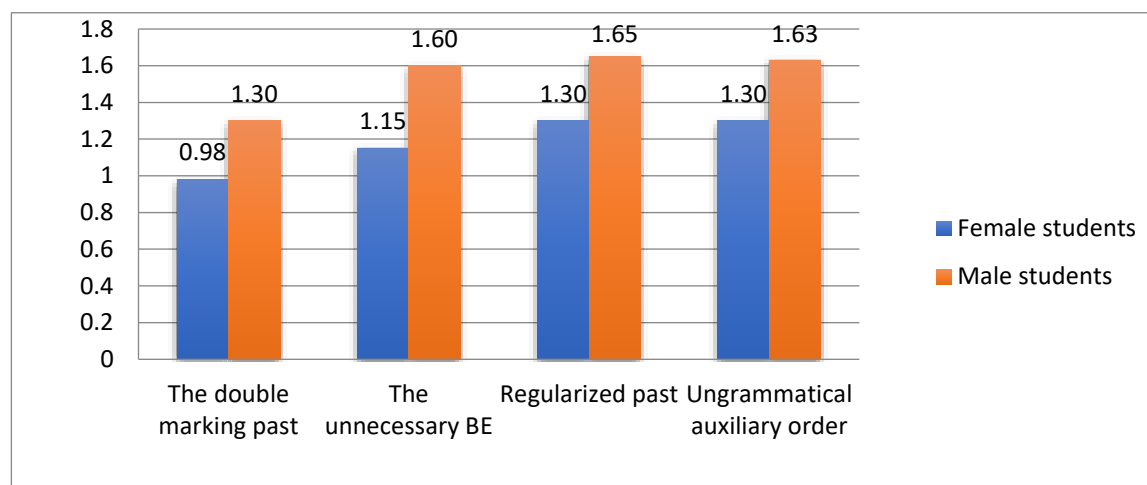

**Figure (16) the total mean frequencies of male-female students`
recognition\production of typical errors**

8. Conclusions

Following the statistical analysis, it can be concluded that female students outperform male students in both production and recognition/production of errors by scoring less numbers of these errors; thus, the research hypothesis is validated. In all of the four errors, there are male-female variational patterns of error scores; thus, all four sub-hypotheses are validated. It can also be concluded that the recurrence of *the double marking past* and *the unnecessary BE* is due to the learners` L1, which is their mother tongue, Arabic. In Arabic, the use of كان، يكون، كانوا is so frequent that it is transferred to the students` inter-language. Learners are also noticed to regularize past as an overextension L2 error, adding the past morpheme –ed irregular verbs. As far as the fourth type of error is concerned, it should be clarified that the fixed auxiliary order (including have+en) is English specific; hence, it is also not a transfer but an L2 error. It also results from the students` poor mastery of English reflected in their inter-language. Female students seem to be more motivated than male students in their course of grammar learning; this can be seen in their relatively lower scores of errors compared to their male counterparts.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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Appendix (1) the Multi-option Test (Recognition)
Read the following sentences carefully and supply the correct form of the verb.

1. The mechanic (try) to fix the car since yesterday. (present perfect)
2. The police (arrest) the criminal last week.   (Simple past)
3. He (live) before he died. (past perfect continuous)
4. Betty (help) her parents to cut the grass right now. (present continuous)
5. When Mr. and Ms. Clark died, they (marry) for fifty years. (past perfect)
6. Tom (watch) TV while the bell rang. (simple past continuous)
7. Some men (block) the way for an hour. (present perfect continuous)
8. I (have) fish every Sunday. (simple present)
9. My money (steal) (present perfect)
10 The soldier (fell) dead. (simple past)
11. I (work) at the company for five years when I got the promotion. (past p. cont)
12. The farmer (sleep) under the tree now. (simple past)
13. She (publish) her first book by the time she was eight.   (past perfect)
14. I (do) my assignment when my father came.
15. The priest (read) the holy bible for 2 hours. (present p. cont)
16.   They (play) chess during curfews. (simple present)
17. She (be) a dentist in a year. (future simple)
18. The flowers (open) by the time spring comes. (future perfect)
19. He (go) to the farm every morning. (mple present)
20. By June the first, captain Clark (promote). (future perfect)

Appendix (2) Exemplification test
1. Present perfect tense
2. Simple past tense
3. Past perfect continuous
4. Present continuous
5. Past perfect
6. Past continuous
7. Present perfect continuous
8. Simple present tense
9. Future simple
10. Future perfect