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Syntactic Errors in an Arab EFL Postgraduate Student's Spoken English during a Thesis Supervision Session

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Abstract
This study investigates the syntactic errors in speaking among an Arab L2 post-graduate student in an academic speaking context. Specifically, the objectives are to describe the syntax error patterns committed by the student while engaging in speaking and to explore the contributing factors that may affect the errors. To address these objectives, a qualitative research method is employed. Data was collected through audio-tape recordings and a face-to-face interview with the participant. The recorded data was transcribed and coded based on Noor Hashim's (1996) seven categories of errors. The findings indicate that some of the first language (L1) negative transfer errors fall into five out of seven categories of Noor Hashim's classification; however, new categories are discovered, such as wrong verb choice, noun forms, overly restricted use of pronouns, and omission of necessary complementizers. These errors can be explained by interference from the L1 and another contributing factor is the limited use of some strategies, such as repetition and confirmation. The significance of this study is a direct pedagogical implication to expose post-graduate students to academic spoken English. This is to avoid miscommunication between students and their academic supervisors. It is recommended that future research examine new teaching and learning techniques of academic spoken English to be incorporated into the classrooms.

Keywords: Academic conversation, Arab L2 speakers, L1 interference, syntactic errors, thesis supervision

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Introduction

Speaking involves constructing meaning that involves producing, receiving and processing information (Brown, 1994; Burns & Joyce, 1997). Being proficient in a language, for example English, as a second/foreign language involves speaking it well. Knowing the grammar of the language or the rules of writing or possessing a native speaker-like accent may not qualify one to be a proficient speaker unless one is able to express the intended ideas or meaning clearly, and in turn to understand others. Therefore, to communicate well, one requires both linguistic and communicative competence.

Speaking requires both of the linguistic and sociolinguistic competences. Additionally, spoken language is different from written because it requires specific skills and conventions (Burns & Joyce, 1997; Carter & McCarthy, 1995; Cohen, 1996). A proficient speaker knows when to synthesize these skills and knowledge in order to succeed in any academic exchange. This is important for post-graduate students at the tertiary level to avoid any miscommunication and misunderstanding during academic conversations.

In spite of having linguistic and sociolinguistic competence, students frequently face numerous problems and commit errors regardless of their proficiency level. In a second language (L2) learning situation, linguists like Corder (1967), Selinker (1972), Dulay and Burt (1974), Richards (1971) and James (1998) investigated these errors and how they contributed to our understanding of the language learning. It was found that errors made are the result of using the same patterns from the first language, expanding patterns from the second language and using the same vocabulary and structure to express meanings (Richards et al., 1992). An important feature of speaking is real time. Speech production requires real-time processing, which means there is limited planning time (Thornbury, 2005). The real-time factor is one of the several reasons language learners find speaking difficult regardless of their level. Crystal and Davy (1979) refer to real-time processing as the main factor which differentiates spoken from written language.

This study concerns the syntactic errors made by a post-graduate during thesis supervision session. Generally, Arab L2 students have problems in acquiring fluency in using English, whether in speaking, writing, listening or writing. Rababah (2005) attributes this to the absolute lack of English use in the English as a Foreign Language/English as a Second Language EFL/ESL classroom in Arab schools or colleges. Besides lacking linguistic knowledge, the students also lack self-confidence because of their lack of practice and exposure in using English. They also have little knowledge of different cultures which increases their anxiety level in speaking English with non-Arabic speakers. Factors such as motivation, attitude, self-esteem, anxiety, and experience generally play a role in language learning and are particularly crucial in students' oral production (Brown, 2007; Xiaoyan, 2009).

In addition, the Arabic language has a different language system and orthography from English which could contribute to particular oral speaking issues. Munaif (2012) also asserts that the teaching of English to Arab ESL students tends to focus on grammatical accuracy than on writing and speaking communicatively. The Grammar-Translation method is the dominant approach in the teaching of EFL in some Arab countries, and is still widely used despite the

outdated theoretical basis. This paper seeks to address the syntactic errors of one Arab speaker of English Language in academic conversation.

Literature review

Syntax errors

Knowing the syntax of a language is defined as having the knowledge of its sentences and structures. In addition, the rules of syntax require a grouping of words into phrases and phrases into sentences. These rules dictate the right word order of a language. English is a Subject-Verb-Object (SVO) language hence a sentence in English is considered grammatical when the words are in the right order and ungrammatical when the words are in the wrong order. Furthermore, another significant role of syntax is, it describes the relationship between the meaning of a specific group of words and its arrangement and the grammatical relations of a sentence, for example the subject and direct object. It shows who is doing what to whom which is vital in our understanding the meaning of a sentence.

Thus, any language production, either written or spoken, that is in disagreement with the syntactic rules is said to have syntactic errors. In other words, it does not possess the structural sentence according to the rules of syntax. Speakers must ensure that their utterances accord with the rules of the grammar of that language (Branigan et al., 2006).

Academic speaking

Speaking in academic contexts is different from speaking in non-academic contexts. It involves interaction that goes beyond basic question-response, and the exchanges require the interlocutors to use more specific and precise language. In an academic exchange, turn-taking may be longer, as planning and processing of information has to be more carefully done. Additionally, its contexts are in semi-public areas such as lectures and seminars where other participants or interlocutors participate in the interaction. A non-academic context is informal; conversations tend to center on personal and social information to maintain the social relationship, with shorter turn-taking (Basturkmen, 2002). In academic contexts, he argues that language use is more complex and indirect due to its features that are not apparent to non-native or EFL/ESL speakers. Second language learners who further their tertiary education in English speaking countries or universities often face difficulties in adjusting and adapting to using English although some of them would have had some years of formal English education or would have attended English medium schools in their home countries. It can be an overwhelming experience moving into a different academic context outside one's home country, having to adjust to a more formal manner of speaking. In a survey of 768 ESL students of different L1 at three different colleges in the United States, focusing on their listening and speaking skills, Ferris (1998) found that only 8% of the students reported that they had no difficulty asking questions in class. This shows that a high percentage of students had problems in listening and speaking in academic contexts even if they had studied in an English speaking country.

Past studies showed difficulties faced by Arab EFL learners in learning the four language skills of English (Mourtaga, 2004; Abdul Haq, 1982; Wahba, 1998; Abbad, 1988; Rabab'ah, 2003). Studies were carried out among these students to investigate words, phonological, and syntactic errors made by Arab EFL learners (Abdul Haq 1982; Wahba 1998; Zughoul & Taminian

1984). In the area of speaking and writing, Abdul Haq (1982), Wahba (1998) and Abbad (1988)'s finding showed that these learners encountered difficulties. Muortaga (2004), Mohammed (2005) and Zahid (2006) conducted studies to investigate Arab learners' syntactic errors and they found that Arab learners were weak in their use of verbs and prepositions. Although these studies were conducted mostly in the area of writing and reading, the findings were connected to speaking as the same errors may occur in speaking. This study seeks to identify the syntactic errors and in academic conversation during thesis supervision.

Accordingly, Hughes (2011) argues that speaking is "fundamentally transient and words are produced within the co-ordinates of a particular place and moment" (p.10), thus, speech is context-dependent. Nunan (2010) defines context as: "The linguistic and experiential situation in which a piece of language occurs. The linguistic environment refers to the words, utterances, and sentences surrounding a piece of text" (p.304).In other words, spoken texts are produced dependently in various environment, situation or listeners. These participants create the final form of a spoken text which makes it easier for the listener to participate in a conversation when the context is further enlarged.

Arabic and English speech conventions are different in terms of language varieties, geographical locations and historical and cultural backgrounds. Present day Arab speaking countries have closed the gap between the Arab and Western worlds. This has led to the importance of communication between Arab and English speakers, and unsurprisingly there is an increase in number of Arabic learners deciding to study English as a foreign language abroad.

Features of academic speaking

Spoken language is different from written language for many reasons. One important reason is that it needs to be understood instantly whereas written language can be read and re-read. Academic speaking and academic writing share similar features as both are linear, explicit, centers on a main idea and uses standard language. Moreover, academic spoken style is formal, explicit, hedged, and responsible. Unlike written language, it is less complex and more objective. In a formal situation, the speaker should avoid colloquial words and expressions. Although academic spoken English is less formal than academic written English, in general in a formal academic presentation, colloquial words and expressions like *stuff, a lot of, thing, sort of* and two-word verbs like *put off* and *bring up* are avoided. The speaker's responsibility is to be clear to the listener by using connections which can be made explicit by using different signal words. Thus, being precise is important in an academic context. Hedging is another feature the speaker uses as different speakers use hedges differently. In academic speaking, the speaker is accountable for, and must be able to provide proof and justification in making claims. Academic speaking employs specific words with narrow specific meanings unlike general English thus it is less complex than written language.

Previous researches have shown that ESL students experienced difficulties in learning English at various levels and with different skills (Hoffman, 2001; McCardle & Hoff, 2006). However, most of them referred to the Commonwealth experience not the Arab region where English is a foreign language (Seargeant & Swann, 2011; Mayor & Allington, 2012; Tagg & Hewings, 2012). Al-Shormani (2010) investigated semantic errors and the causes of L1 and L2 errors made by Arabic speaking learners of English. He posits that "the sources of these errors

vary between following different strategies such as translating from Arabic as in the case of some categories in lexical choice and collocation errors, applying Arabic rules to English as in derivativeness, the Arabic sound system as in the case of the absence of /p/ and /v/ in distortion due to spelling errors, among others" (p.26). He also found that it is the lack of knowledge Arab students have about the L2 semantic system caused such errors. Although his study focused on semantics, it gives us an understanding of the role of syntax in giving meaning.

At present, many Arab students in universities outside of their own countries are experiencing problems with speaking and writing in the English language. Fadi (2010) noted, unsurprisingly, that "Like any second language learners, Arab learners face many problems in acquiring and communicating in English." (p.2)

Generally, standard Arabic and standard English share some linguistic features in phonological, morphological, syntactical, semantics, and pragmatics. The syntactical systems are diversely different. There are two major types of English and Arabic Basic Sentence Structure: *nominal* and *verbal*. One of the major differences between Arabic and English grammar is that English has verbal sentences only whereas Arabic has both nominal and verbal sentences. Even in the simplest sentences in English there should be at least one verb: In *Ahmed is a teacher*, the verb is, but in Arabic it is enough to say *Ahmed teacher* indicating the same meaning.

In Arabic, the nominal sentence does not have any verb. In general, it consists of two parts, the first is called 'Subject' (المبتدأ), and the second is called 'Predicate' (الخبر).
To understand sentence structures in the English language, we should first have a general understanding of the types of words used to structure the sentences. Any English sentence consists of three basic components or parts. The basic structure of the English sentence is (S + V + O/C) as follows:

S= Subject: the person or the thing that does something. He eats cake. ("he" is the subject, and it is a pronoun, functioning as a noun)
V= Verb: a word that expresses an action, occurrence, or a state of being. ("eats" is the verb) O= Object: the person or the thing that receives the action of the verb. ("cake" is the object).

Arabic has different types of sentences and different structures. The four types of Arabic sentences are: verbal sentences (الجملة الفعلية), nominal sentences (الجملة الاسمية), functional sentences (الجملة التي لها محل من الاعراب) and, non-functional sentences (الجملة التي ليس لها محل من الاعراب).

The structure of the Arabic verbal sentence is (V + S + O/C). So while the order is different from an English sentence, the components are the same. There are variations on verbal sentence types in Arabic like the 'kaanna' sentence, the conditional sentence, the imperative sentence, and so on. The structure of the nominal sentence is (Topic + Comment), without a verb. Also there are variations on nominal sentence types in Arabic like the 'Inna' sentence, the prepositional sentence, the adverbial sentence, and the fronted comment and belated topic sentence. The verb in verbal sentences usually precedes the subject but when it follows the subject, the sentence is a nominal one.

The difference between a verbal and nominal sentence is that the former refers to an act or event, whereas the latter gives a description of a person or thing. The same English sentence can be translated into Arabic in two different ways: As a Nominal sentence: أحمد يلعب الكرة, it can be translated this way and be grammatically correct. "أحمد here is a topic not a subject. As a Verbal sentence: يلعب أحمد الكرة We change the order of the verb and the subject making the structure: V + S + O Ahmed plays soccer. Although this sentence starts with a noun, this noun is the subject of the verb that comes after but this does not make the sentence Nominal. English has only verbal sentences so this sentence is verbal. The structure, S + V + O is the same in all grammatically correct English sentences. The most common mistake that students make is to translate sentences from Arabic into English in the same order neglecting the rules of English grammar and syntax. Although it is a simple rule that each of them has its own structure and order, students still often make this mistake. For example: the English sentence: Hend studies History, is translated into Arabic this way: Studies Hend History. This is a huge mistake because simply duplicating the Arabic sentence structure makes it incomprehensible. Words should not be literally translated; attention should be paid to the set of rules, or grammar of each language. So, the correct translation is: Hend studies history. S + V + O درس هند التاريخ V + S + O.. Errors occur when learners translate from L1 to L2 (this could be caused by interference). When they speak L2, they apply the rules of L1 and translate either the rules or the content (Moubaiddin et al., 2014). Thus, the different linguistic rules can cause students of a L2 to commit errors in speaking.

When a learner attempts to communicate in the target language, he may use a linguistic system different from the source and the target language. This is called 'interlanguage'. It refers to an independent second language learner's system that has an intermediate link between the first and target language. It is a system based on the best attempt learners use to provide order and structure to the linguistic stimuli surrounding them. Through trials and errors, learners gradually succeed in creating closer approximations to the system used by L1 speakers of the language (Selinker 1972). Thus, interlanguage is a system that compromises and approximates the learner language.

The term 'interlanguage' (Selinker, 1972) refers to the systematic knowledge of an L2 which is independent of both the learner's L1 and the target language. It also refers to the series of interrelated systems which describe acquisition, the system that is noticed at a single stage of development and a particular L1/L2 combination (for example, L1 French/L2 English v. L1 Japanese/L2 English) (Ellis, 1994). Other related terms are the same basic idea of 'approximative system' (Nemser, 1971) and 'transitional competence' (Corder, 1967).

There is a continual process experienced by the learner from L1 in acquiring the target language. For each stage there is an interlanguage, the learner makes attempts to communicate in the target language until he/she creates a system from the source language that represents the frame of the target language.

Conceptual framework

Conceptually, this study concerns the academic exchanges between two people; the student and the supervisor. According to Van Duzer (1997), a successful exchange requires speakers who have good skills and speech habits. This will enable them to participate in anticipated patterns of

academic discourse situations. According to Burns & Joyce (1997) usually these speakers can handle turn-taking, rephrasing, providing feedback, or redirecting because knowing the usual patterns of the exchanges is important to expand further interaction and accumulate knowledge as the exchange progresses. They outline the following features for exchanges to take place. The speaker must be able to:

i. using grammar structures accurately;
ii. assessing characteristics of the target audience, including shared knowledge or shared points of reference, status and power relations of participants, interest levels, or differences in perspectives;
iii. selecting vocabulary that is understandable and appropriate for the audience, the topic being discussed, and the setting in which the speech act occurs;
iv. applying strategies to enhance comprehensibility, such as emphasizing key words.

Methodology

Case studies are defined in different ways depending on the context and background of the research. Merriam (1988) for instance states that: "Case study can be defined as an intensive, holistic description and analysis of a single entity, phenomenon, or social unit. Case studies are particularistic, descriptive, and heuristic and rely heavily on inductive reasoning in handling multiple data sources" (p. 16). Thus, using Merriam's definition of a case study, this study focusses on one participant selected based on purposeful sampling. One of the key aspects of using a case study is the fact that the phenomenon is studied in a context. This allows the researcher to view the reality of speaking of the academic exchanges during thesis supervision (Ferris & Tagg, 1996a, 1996b) and Mason (1995). The time frame for this study was within a semester or fourteen weeks of an academic calendar.

Selection of participant

Selecting a sample in a qualitative research is crucial to ensure the validity of the sampling. Purposive sampling method was employed in this study where one post-graduate student who fulfilled sampling criteria was selected as the participant. This was in line with Creswell's (2005, p. 204) "researchers intentionally select individuals and sites to learn or understand the central phenomenon. The standard used in choosing participants and sites is whether they are rich in information." The case was a 42- year-old Arab Jordanian postgraduate student who had been in Malaysia for three years. The participant started learning English formally for a total of eight years with six years at the primary level and two years at the secondary level. In terms of English requirement, the participant's IELTS score was 6.5 which qualified the participant to be admitted to the postgraduate programme at the university. The participant communicated in English only with the supervisor and non-Arabic speakers.

Research instruments

Audio-tape recording

Two types of data elicitation procedures were used: 1) audio-tape recording and 2) face-to-face interview. To achieve the first part of the research objectives, data was collected through audio-tape recording. The primary purpose of carrying out the audio-tape recording was to capture the reality of a case in a natural setting which was the academic exchanges between the supervisee

and the supervisor. Ideally, the researcher wanted to conduct three meetings; however, it was difficult to arrange for the third meeting as the supervisee was not available due to field work. The scheduled meetings took place at the end of April and end of May, and the duration of recording agreed upon by the researcher and the supervisor was 30 to 60 minutes. A digital audio-tape recorder was used to record the conversations throughout the sessions. The first meeting of the audio-taping was completed in 30 minutes and the second was in 35 minutes. The researcher was a non-participant observer during both meetings.

Research Procedure

The data was collected within the time frame of 14 weeks of the second semester as agreed by the supervisor. Before the researcher selected the supervisor for the research, he identified five supervisors at the school using purposeful sampling. These supervisors were approached by the researcher's main supervisor who was their colleague at the school. One supervisor asked his student to participate in the study based on some criteria. A consent form was completed by the selected student in fulfilment of the ethics requirement. A schedule for recording the meetings was then agreed upon. The duration allotted for each session of data collection was 30 to 60 minutes.

Stage 1: Data collection

The two supervision sessions were audio-taped for a duration of between 30 to 60 minutes each. This took place in the month of May. The meetings were held in the supervisor's office at the School. The researcher's role was a non-participant observer throughout the scheduled meetings.

Stage 2: Data transcription

The next stage was data transcription. The researcher transcribed the data immediately after each meeting. Through repeated careful listening, the recorded conversations were transcribed verbatim for closer study. Throughout the transcribing process, the researcher used reduction, interpretation and representation to make the written text readable and meaningful. Using Gumperz and Berenz (1993), the researcher marked out boundaries to indicate different exchanges that took place.

Stage 3: Coding

Next, the data was coded and put into tables based on Noor Hashim's (1996) categories of syntactic errors. Thus, there were seven columns for the seven categories comprising verbal errors, relative clauses, adverbial clauses, sentence structure, articles, prepositions and conjunctions.

Next the portions of the conversations with errors were identified accordingly in each column with a tick. For example, the first type of error which is 'verbal error' was coded as VE. 'Tense' is an error that falls under VE thus, it was coded T, hence any tense error was coded as VE-T.

Stage 4: Frequency count

The errors were identified by ticking each respective category from the seven categories. Using an Excel file, a frequency count was done to find out which types of errors occurred most frequently.

Face-to-face interviews

Semi-structured face-to-face interviews were conducted with the participant. Berg (2007) defines an interview as a conversation with a purpose. Any conversation that aims to gather information

is considered an interview by standard definition (Denzin, 1978; Spradley, 1979; Patton, 2001). Three main questions guided the interview with reference to the conversations and syntactic errors identified: 1) What do you think of this sentence structure? 2) Do you see any problem with this sentence structure? Yes/no? Why? 3) How would you rectify or improve it? These questions were based on Hymes' (1980) Communicative Competence theory. The researcher used a digital audio-tape recorder to record the informal interview which was completed in 30 minutes.

Data Analysis

The data was prepared for analysis in two ways: categorization based on coding and frequency count and interpretive analysis. For coding, the seven categories as identified by Noor Hashim (1996) comprised: Verbal errors (VE), Relative clauses (RC), Adverbial clauses (AC), Sentence structure (SS), Articles (A), Prepositions (P) and Conjunctions (C). Besides the main headings; a sub coding was created for the sub-headings, hence the researcher used abbreviations to mark the categories as follows (the following two categories shown are examples taken from the seven categories):

i. **Verbal errors (VE)**

Codes

a. Tense T
VE-T

b. Tense sequence TS
VE-TTS

c. Tense substitution TSubs
VE-TTsubs

ii. **Relative clauses** **RC**

a. Interlingua errors of relative clauses IERC RC-IERC

b. Relative Pronoun Deletion RPD RC-IERC-RPD

Findings of the study

To fulfil the first part of the research aim, which is identifying the syntactic errors, data from the transcribed audio-tape recordings was analysed. The results show that the participant committed errors in six categories during the first meeting: sentence structure, verbal errors, prepositions, relative clauses, articles and adverbial clauses. In the second meeting, the participant committed errors in five categories: verbal errors, sentence structure, preposition use, relative clauses and use of articles. For this purpose, a frequency count was done to show the spread of the overall errors as shown in the table below:

Frequency count

Table 1. ***Frequency count of the errors***

Types of errors	Errors occurring in meeting 1	Errors occurring in meeting 2	Total number of errors
Verbal errors	14	25	**39**
Relative clauses	5	2	7

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Adverbial clauses	1	0	1
Sentence structures	25	18	**44**
Articles	3	1	4
Prepositions	8	10	**18**
Conjunctions	0	0	0

Following are some examples taken from the three most frequent errors identified during the first meeting, which are sentence structures, verbal errors and prepositions respectively.

Meeting 1

1. **Sentence structures**

(L007): No, this what according to UKM Gaya (SS-WO)
*No, this one was done according to UKM Gaya.
(L055): What about chapter 5 is ok? (SS)
*Is chapter 5 ok?
(L071: You told the last time that it is the form should fill in. (SS-WOMC)
*You said the last time that it was the form that I should fill in.

Meeting 2

(L016): She said, she told just this the only page you have to print out. (SS-WO)
*She said that it was the only page I had to print out.
(L185): Yah, may be may be one thing I may change it, ok? (SS-WOMC)
*Yah, I might change one thing, is it ok?
(L051): this is I think the part for you, I fill my own. (SS-WO)
*I think that this part is for you. I filled in mine already.

Meeting 1

2. Verbal errors

(L069): I think you. (VE-VFAD)
*I think it is you.
(L147): DM focus in what? (VE-CDTPSM)
*What does DM focus in?
(L149): I read articles for DH. (VE-TTSUBS)
*I have read articles for DH.

Meeting 2

(L018): But all of them the same percentage. (VE-VFAD)
*But, they are all of the same percentage.
(L022): She send me an email, yah, one hour. (VE-TTSUBS)
*She sent me an email, yah, one hour before.
(L039): Yes, in the system, she told me that the similarity in the system.
*Yah, she told me that the similarity is in the system.

Meeting 1

3. Prepositions

(L031): Yah, I put this my computer. (P-PD)
*Yah, I put this on/in my computer.
(L045): I am classic in every day. (P-PR)
*I am classic every day.
(L063: To you, you have sign that and DZ should. (P-PD)
*To you, you and DZ have to sign this.

Meeting 2

(L041): Yah, may be on your paper. (P-PS)
*Yah, may be in your paper.
(L049): Aaaa, this is the final form I have to with the four copes(copies)…(PD)
*Aaa, this is the final form that I have to hand for four copies.
(L189): I found difficulty in convince this participant to take part in my study. (P-PR)
*I found difficulty to convince the participant to take part in my study.

From the above examples, the frequency of the errors committed might be influenced by many causes and strategy use. It also shows the interference of the first language L1 in interpreting or translating to second language. Interestingly, most errors occur in the 'sentence structure' category. A closer analysis shows that within each category, the participant committed errors in the same *sub category,* for instance, for both meetings, in the 'sentence structure' (SS) category, the sub-category was *word order* (WO) for both. In the 'verbal errors' (VE) category, the sub-category was *tense substitution* (TSubs) for both meetings. Next, for 'preposition' (P) category, more errors were committed in *preposition omission* in meeting 1 but fewer in meeting 2. For 'relative clauses' (RC), more errors were committed at *structural misinterpretation of relative clauses* category – *missing antecedents* (RC-SMRC-MA). More errors in the 'article' category, *redundancy of the indefinite article* (A-DARDA), were committed more at the first meeting.

Face-to-face interview

The aim of the interview was to get the participant's explanation for some of the errors committed based on the transcribed data. When asked about the errors committed, the participant responded as follows:

i. ***"****I keep repeating the mistakes unconsciously, I know that those are mistakes but when I keep speaking something sticks to my mind."*
ii. *"I depend always the easiest way even when mentioning the numbers, there is no need to focus and differentiate between ordinal numbers."*
iii. *"I use some words instead of one other like using (tell) instead of (say) in some positions because I like using that word much more than the other."*

The above samples of the interview data show that the participant was aware of the errors committed but did not have control over making them. This seems to suggest that the errors have been fossilized. The participant resorted to an easy way when referring to numbers which could be a strategy adopted. The participant's preference for certain words could mean that there was confusion between the verb 'tell' and 'say' in English.

Next, the participant was asked whether there was any problem with some of the sentences. The responses were as follows:

i. *"When I speak English, it is obviously that my L1 interferes into the L2."*
ii. *"I keep emphasizing the words to make sure that I deliver my message to whom I talk to."*
iii. *"I use my language according to the state I feel for example when I am worried I keep using the word (worried)."*
iv. *"I skip focusing on the grammar and the right way of speech."*

The above samples show that the participant was conscious of the problems in the sentences but preferred not to correct them as in (c), as it reflected the participant's mental state at the time of speaking. In other words, the errors were committed without concerning about the rules.

The last question asked was whether the participant would rectify the errors in the sentences, and the responses were as follows:

i. *"It would be better if I focused on training in English rather than focusing on grammar."*
ii. *"Grammar focusing way makes us making mistakes, not like when we use the Communicative approach."*
iii. *"I don't care for my language as long as the addressee knows what I talk about although I know the correct way. It is a strategy called "safe plan strategy"."*

The above samples indicate that the participant is critical of the way the participant had learned English which was through the grammar-based approach, and would have preferred to have been taught using the communicative approach.

Discussion

The findings highlight the syntactic errors in two academic exchanges of an Arab EFL postgraduate student with her academic supervisor, this answers the first objective. A face-to-face interview reveals the factors contributed to these errors which answers the second objective. The errors are can be explained by L1 interference on the L2 (English) oral production. The academic exchanges follow the usual conversation patterns which allow both the participant and the supervisor to share the knowledge and information of what being discussed. This can be explained by the shared context as posited by Nunan (2010). Although the participant did not use the grammar structures accurately, some efforts were made by the participant to sustain the interest levels and differences in views of the supervisor. Appropriate vocabulary or choice of words seemed to be a challenge for the participant at times however the participant used some repeated words for clarification to ensure that the communication took place. This concurs with Burns & Joyce (1997)'s description of a good speaker.

Conclusion

Taking this research further on implication for teaching, teachers should give appropriate feedback after checking the inaccuracies in the learner's interlanguage. Unlike the behaviourist approach which advocates the use of drills and considers errors as signs of failure in their teaching methods, the concept of interlanguage does not restrict language teaching and paves the way for communicative teaching methods or CLT. Since errors are considered a reflection of the students'

temporary language system and therefore a natural part of the learning process, teachers could now use teaching activities which do not call for constant supervision of the student's language. Group work and pair work can be incorporated in the classrooms to maximize students' participations. The use of information and communication technologies (ICT) may be adopted in language teaching and learning. In doing so, it can assist students to cope with their academic demands and to perform in their disciplines and professional contexts successfully.

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