

# Error Analysis of Translated Written English: A Case Study of Translation Major Undergraduates at Al-Iraqia University

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## ARTICLE INFO

## ABSTRACT

Errors are an inevitable part of any learning process. They provide a rich area for designing and developing educational programs. Errors are made by the students while translating sentences offer a great insight into their weaknesses. This paper concerns itself with third grade students in Department of Translation, College of Arts at Al-Iraqia University. Fifty students were asked to translate ten sentences from English into Arabic. The translated sentences were intentionally chosen to be simple in an attempt to eliminate any possible involvement with complicated content. Their products have been analyzed and classified in terms of Abi Samra's (2003) discussion of errors. It has been hypothesized that most undergraduate Iraqi students at Al-Iraqia University have difficulties in: 1) the use of concord (i.e. subject- verb agreement and specifically third person singular -s); 2) the translation of nominal sentences from Arabic to English and; 3) most errors come as a result of negative transfer (interlanguage). It has been concluded that: 1) around 75% of students suffer from the correct use of copular verbs while translating nominal sentences from Arabic; 2) the grammatical errors (articles and pronouns) are more common than syntactic and semantic ones.

**Key words:** Error Analysis, interlanguage errors, intralingual errors, grammatical errors, negative transfer.

## 1. Introduction

According to Brown (2000), errors are part of any learning process. Humans need to make mistakes in order to acquire the desired knowledge. This is mainly because mistakes can provide a better understanding of how language is learned. Moreover, the mistakes can lead the "researcher", the teacher in our study, to analyze the weaknesses of the students (Corder 1967 in Brown 2000). Brown made a famous distinction between "errors" and "mistakes." The former, on the one hand, refers to the imperfect production of "known systems." This means that the student knows the correct option, but has failed to utilize it. The latter, on the other hand, refers to the lack of knowledge in a specific area of language which leads to incorrect production.

## 2. Statement of the problem

Through my experience teaching contrastive grammar to third grade students at Al-Iraqia University, I have noticed that students in the Department of Translation make many mistakes while translating sentences. Since they still have one more year to finish their academic degree, it could be the best timing to identify errors and, accordingly, modify the educational course so as to target their needs. This linguistic juncture is critical to the university students at this age because the errors may cause fossilization. Such fossilization not only hinders further language development but also jeopardizes intelligibility, preventing effective communication and comprehension in both academic and professional settings. Therefore, close attention and analysis of translation errors, along with providing consistent feedback and correction, will ensure linguistic growth and development and may prevent fossilization.

### 3. Aims of the study

With that said, this study aims at answering the following two questions: a) what are the most frequent errors that students make when they attempt to translate simple sentences from Arabic into English? B) what are the reasons behind those errors? To answer those questions, it has been hypothesized that: a) the most frequent error among Iraqi students is the omission of 3<sup>rd</sup> person singular -s and those errors come as a result of interlanguage interference; b) most of the errors are interlanguage rather than intralingual. It is worth mentioning that the research has been conducted in accordance with the Declaration of Helsinki 2013.

### 4. Literature Review

Error analysis has been approached by many researchers since it provides a rich input for designing and developing educational programs. Aboud (2009) closely analyzed the errors made by students in the use of concord (i.e., the agreement between two elements in a sentence). His study is interesting in the sense that it pinpoints the very problem that Iraqi students struggle with. His aim in error analysis is to illuminate the syllabus' designers and instructors to highlight areas of weakness and design their programs accordingly.

Ridha (2012) analyzes the written products of 80 college students in Basrah. She finds that the students heavily depend on their first language to express their thoughts. Also, she observes that grammatical and mechanical errors are really common among learners.

Kareem (2017) takes the discussion of error analysis among Iraqi learners a level up when he analyzes the errors made by MA candidates. He concludes that errors in the verb-phrase is more common than errors in the noun-phrase. Kareem also concludes that the intralingual errors are more frequent than interlingual ones.

Al- Tamari (2019) analyzed the spoken product of 44 students in a Saudi university. He followed Corder's (1974) framework of error analysis. He reached to the conclusion that the errors of his students are either in pronunciation or grammar. Adopting a quantitative research methodology, he found out that (91%) of the pronunciation errors are committed due to interlanguage transfer. However grammatical errors are either the result of interlanguage transfer (one-third of the students) or intralingual factors (two-third of them). He also had another classification labeled as "unique errors" which had the least frequency among other types of errors. In (2021), Yang and Jianguo studied the spoken errors of first grade university students. They classified the errors into competence and performance-based errors. The former refers to errors in terms of semantics, pragmatics, grammar and phonology. The latter refers to false starts of the students and self-corrections. They concluded that the reasons of errors can be attributed to "interlingual transfer, intralingual interference, cognitive and affective factors and communicative strategies."

Honrado and Biray (2022) analyzed the spoken product of students in a high school. They used Mann-Whitney U Test together with other criteria. They found out that students mainly made syntactic errors in verbs, prepositions and nouns. In terms of phonology, their errors were in consonants more than vowels. In addition to this, they struggled with the placement of the correct morphological inflection on the verb that fits the subject. They recommended to focus on teaching grammar and phonology.

This study confines itself to analyzing the errors made by third grade university students. It attempts to identify the most frequent types of errors and then make use of the results in order to modify the educational course for the fourth grade in a way that will address those errors. This specific grade is chosen because they are in a position which should have a well-formed knowledge of the language, yet have enough room for development and improvement in the upcoming year.

### 5. Methodology

Error analysis is of great value to teachers because they measure the students' ability to achieve learning goals. Candling (2001) believes that the analysis of errors leads to the establishment of a tailored educational program that will address the students' needs. Another importance lies in the fact that errors help researchers analyze language learning difficulties. In this sense, Corder (1967) believes that error analysis is an essential part of language learning and it should be welcomed by teachers not only does it pinpoint the areas of difficulties, but also it helps the students develop their language.

Corder (1967) establishes a model for error analysis. He believes that any analysis should go through three main stages: collecting the data, recognizing the data, and finally explaining those data. Brown (2000) puts them in other words and holds the view that the stages of doing error analysis are:

- 1- Observation:** in this stage, the researcher or the teacher identifies or observes the mistakes. The types of mistakes are crucial because they will affect the analysis. For instance, spoken data should be analyzed differently than the written ones because various factors affect the errors in each area and they all should be taken into consideration.
- 2- Analysis:** the researcher or the teacher analyzes the mistakes and attributes them to their sources. At this stage, a comparison should be made between the data under analysis and the original one that is expected to be produced by the native speaker. This step will ensure that the analysis goes to the perfect direction.
- 3- Classification:** this is the most important stage where the teacher classifies the mistakes. At this stage, it is necessary to determine whether the errors can be described as repetitive patterns related to the learner's mother tongue and therefore a linguistic *transfer* or they are the result of *overgeneralization* (i.e., applying one rule to forms that shouldn't be treated using that rule).

In this sense, the students' production will be first observed and documented. Then, it will be analyzed in terms of its possible sources. And finally, the errors will be classified in terms of Abi Samra's (2003) classification.

### 5.1 Sources of mistakes

Richards and Schmidt (2010) made the following classification:

- 1- **Interlanguage errors** that refer to "a natural language" that differs from the first language of the learner and the second language that he is trying to learn. It comes from transferring some of the features from the first language to the target language.
- 2- **Intralingual errors** come from the target language itself, away from the mother tongue. It comes as a result of confusion between two or more rules in the second language. The student then transfers something he learned "partially" to one of his productions.

### 5.2 Types of Errors

In this paper, Abi Samra's (2003) classification will be adopted in so far as types of errors are concerned. This is mainly because he dealt with writing errors. He classified them into the following types:

- 1- Grammatical errors include those made with the appropriate use of prepositions as well as articles.
- 2- Syntactic errors include errors at the level of pronouns, the omission of elements or the addition of some.
- 3- Lexical and semantic errors include those referring to word choice and issues of literal translation.
- 4- Substance errors, which refer to mechanics and spelling. These include issues with punctuation and capitalization.

## 6. Analysis of Errors:

### 6.1 Data Collection:

In order to analyze the students' errors, 50 students were chosen randomly. They were informed about the purpose of the study and they participated willingly. The sentences were various in the sense that some of them were verbal, and others were nominal. They were designed in such a way that the students' knowledge about the target language would have been examined. The sentences are transliterated below with their meanings.

- 1- Taamal hiya fi al-hagli.  
"She works in the field."
  - 2- Tamal maryam fi al-masnaa.  
"Maryam works in the factory."
  - 3- Natharat albintu ila nafsiha.  
"The girl looked at herself."
  - 4- Raat algitta nafsiha fi almiraat  
"The cat looked at herself in the mirror."
  - 5- Alwaladu almujtahidu  
"The boy is hardworking."
  - 6- Waladun mujtahidun  
"A boy is hardworking."
  - 7- Lidayya sadiqun esmuhu ahmad.  
"I have a friend; his name is Ahmed."
  - 8- Endi sayara hamraa jadida.  
I have a new red car.
  - 9- Almanzil qarib min almustashfa.  
The house is near the hospital.
  - 10- Hunaka manzilun muqabil almustashfa.  
There is a house in front of the hospital.
- The students were given 45 minutes and were asked to translate them into Arabic. Then, their products were analyzed and classified.

### 6.2 Data Analysis

The following section highlights the students' errors as they are presented in their papers. The incomplete fragments that make no sense have been excluded since they do not offer any insight regarding the type of error. The number mentioned at the end of each sentence between parentheses refers to the number of times that each error occurs. The asterisk means that the sentence is incorrect.

#### 1- Grammatical Errors:

##### a- Prepositions

Some students struggled with using the correct prepositions. Consider the following:

- 1) she look to herself \* (3)

Three students translated the third Arabic sentence as sentence (1) shows. According to Spear (2005), there is a difference between "look to" and "look at." The former, on the one hand, is used if someone is *expecting something from someone* and is not used in the sense conveyed by the original sentence. The latter, on the other hand, is used when *someone is examining something*. The same error can be seen in the following example:

2) The girl look to her self \* (13)

Thirteen students made the above mistake.

Another student used the verb “look” without any preposition. Consider:

3) he girl looked herself \* (1)

The preposition “look into” is used in another situation, which means *gazing into something* (Spear, 2005).

4) the girl looked into herself \* (1)

The students interchangeably used “in front of”, “opposite”, and “against” in the tenth sentence. According to the Cambridge Online Dictionary (n.d.), “in front of” means being “close to the front part of something,” while “opposite” means “facing” or “being in a position on the other side.” The preposition “against” is seen to be used in abstract situations refereing to *something that disagrees with something else*, and it is rarely used with directions.

5) there is a house against the coffee house \* (1)

One student chose the preposition behind instead of “opposite” in the following sentence:

6) There is house behind the coffee \* (1)

Some students used the incomplete form of the preposition, as in the following:

7) There is a house in front the cafe \* (2)

The student in example (7) missed the “of” part of the preposition.

Other students drop both “in” and “of,” Consider:

8) There is a house front the hospital \* (7)

The errors related to prepositions are interlanguage.

## B- Articles

I have noticed that there is a difficulty among undergraduate Iraqi learners at Al-Iraqia University to use the English articles in the right position. This may come from the way they link Arabic to English articles. Consider this sentence:

9) I have friend his name is Ahmed \* (21)

Twenty one students out of fifty missed the indefinite article before the noun “friend.” Taking into consideration the Arabic counterpart, this will be classified as a mistake since the students lack the knowledge that the nunation that appears on “sadiq” is in fact the indefinite article “a”.

The noun “house” in the tenth sentence has been translated without the indefinite article by many students (regardless of other mistakes in other parts of the translation):

10) There is house in front the coffee \* (8)

Although the above sentence requires an indefinite article, only eight students missed the correct form. This can be attributed to the fact that the existence of “there” at the beginning of the sentence paved the way for the use of the article, in contrast to example (9). This may explain why students missed the article in sentence (9) more than sentence (10).

Also consider the following sentence:

11) She is work in field \* (5)

In the above example, the noun “field” has no definite article before it, which is syntactically incorrect. The same can be seen in:

12) Mariem works in factory \* (3)

13) She works at farm \* (2).

14) The cat saw itself in mirror \* (13)

The same is seen with the translation of the eighth sentence:

15) I have new red car \* (5)

Below are some other errors made by students regarding the use of articles.

16) There is a house against hospital \* (1)

17) There is hose behind the coffee \* (1)

18) She works in field \* (1)

19) she works in farm \* (1)

20) Maream works in factory \* (1)

Issues related to the use of the articles are interlanguage errors.

The following table shows the frequency of errors related to articles and pronouns and gives the percentage by following the rule:  $part * \frac{100}{whole}$ .

| Types of errors | Frequency | Percentage |
|-----------------|-----------|------------|
| Prepositions    | 29 – 100  | 29%        |
| Articles        | 62 – 350  | 17.7%      |

**Table 1. Grammatical errors**

## 2- Syntactic Errors:

### a- Pronouns

It is possible in English to use the personal pronoun to refer to animals depending on some pragmatic facts as being special or becoming a member of the speaker's family (Zemkova, 2016). That is why many students translate the fourth sentence as the following:

21) The cat saw herself in the mirror\* (9)

22) The cat look at his self in the mirror\* (1)

This is not considered as an explicit syntactic error, but it is a less favorite choice in English. Furthermore, the fact that Arabic does not have a counterpart to the English pronoun "it" can be considered a reason. Therefore, this can be classified as an interlanguage error.

(23) I have friend and name you Ahmed\* (2)

Seemingly, in the above example, the two students wanted to use the pronoun "his" but chose "you" instead.

Some students faced difficulties in choosing the correct reflexive pronoun in the third and fourth sentences. Consider:

24) The girl look to yourself (3)

25) The cat look to yourself in merror

The imperfect choice of the pronoun is an intralingual error.

### b- Addition of Elements

Many students added redundant elements to their sentences. Consider the following example:

26) she works in the fields\* (2)

The student in the above example added the plural -s to the word *field*.

In some other cases, the student added two prepositions in an attempt to fully convey the Arabic meaning. Consider:

27) The house is near from hospital\*.

28) The house is near of hospital\* (2)

In other examples, the student added the pronoun after the proper noun.

29) The boy he is hardworking\*

The pronoun can be added for the sake of emphasis. However, the Arabic fifth sentence does not require any emphasis.

In the following example, the student realized the noun "girl" as plural by adding the plural -s.

30) the girls look to herself\*

In the following example, in addition to the misuse of the verb, the student added the preposition "at" to the verb "saw."

31) the girl saw at herself\*

Adding elements to the translated word is a purely intralingual error because students transfer something they have known from their second language to the same language, as examples (26-31) show.

### c- Omission of elements

In the following sentences, the student added the auxiliary "is" to the verb phrase without inflecting the main verb with *ing*. Therefore, he omitted part of the form of the present continuous which is the "ing."

32) Maram is work in the factory\*

The following example is a typical intralingual transfer that can be seen among learners.

33) She is works in factory\*

The above example shows that the student knows that the singular noun in English requires the verb to be "is" and it also requires the addition of third person singular "-s" in other contexts. However, this student has mixed the two tenses and has come up with the example mentioned in (33).

In some cases, the students omit part of the structure of the verb. That is, they used the -ing form of the verb, but deleted the verb to be in the present continuous Tense. Consider:

34) She working in farm\* (3)

35) The girl looking to herself\*

36) Maryam working in the factory\* (4)

37) the girl looking to herself

A similar problem can be seen in other tenses where the student omitted part of the present perfect tense, which is the use of "has" or "have" and mentioned only the past participle form of the verb.

38) the cat seen herself in the mirrea\*

Some other students omitted part of the preposition, as in:

39) There is a house in front the cafe\*

40) there is house front the coffee\* (2)

41) There is a house next the coffe\*

Another omission can be seen on the level of phrasal verbs, where the student omitted the preposition that follows the verb. Consider:

42) The cat look self in mirror.

43) The girl looks herself

Some students neglected the use of the verb to be in (44) when the sentence is more complex. Consider:

44) I have a friend, his name Ahmed (8).

Some students omitted an important element in the sentence. Consider:

45) The near The hospital

In example (45), the student did not mention the necessary element "the house is...".

One student omitted two words in the eighth sentence.

46) I have cars\*

In the following sentence, the student omitted the last part of the sentence "...to herself" and added a redundant element "girl".

47) she look girl\*

The following sentence has only lexical items with no articles or prepositions.

48) cat look\*

In the following sentence, the student was not able to choose the correct form of the reflexive pronoun and deleted part of it.

49) The cat had seen self in mirror\*

The examples (32-49) show that the students deleted part or parts of the sentences, and this could be classified as an interlanguage error since any omission can be traced back to the effect of the first language.

| <i><b>Types of Errors</b></i> | <i><b>Frequency</b></i> | <i><b>Percentage</b></i> |
|-------------------------------|-------------------------|--------------------------|
| <i>Pronouns</i>               | 16- 150                 | 10.6%                    |
| <i>Addition of Elements</i>   | 8-200                   | 4%                       |
| <i>Omission of Elements</i>   | 31-350                  | 8.8%                     |

**Table 2. Syntactic errors**

### **3- Lexical Errors:**

#### **a- Word Choice**

Most students use the correct translation of the word "alhaql" as "field."

50) She works at the field (27)

Others used the word "farm" instead. Consider:

51) she works in the farm\* (19)

One student chose the word "park".

52) She is working in the park\*

One student chose the wrong lexical item "said" in:

53) the girl said to herself\*

54) the cat said of yourself \*

Other students chose the verb "saw" instead of "looked" keeping the preposition "to":

55) the girl saw to herself\* (3)

In addition to the above-mentioned cases, and regardless of other mistakes in the translation of the fifth and sixth sentences, many students faced challenges while choosing the correct word that corresponds to the Arabic adjective "mujtahid". Consider the following choices:

56) the boy is a hardworker (3)

57) hard work boy\* (4)

58) smart boy\* (5)

59) The boy is popular\* (2)

60) The hardworking boy\* (40)

61) a hardworking kid\* (2)

62) the boy is intelligent\* (13)

63) the boy clear\* (2)

64) The boy is good\* (4)

65) The boy is clever\* (7)

66) hard boy\* (1)

67) the homeworking boy\* (1)

68) a nerd boy\* (2)

69) The boy active\* (2)

70) The success boy\* (2)

Some students chose the plural verb "are" instead of "is" in the tenth sentence, although the noun is singular.

71) there are a house nearby the cafe\* (5)

In the following example, eight students did not inflect the verb in the past form.

72) the cat see herself in the mirror\* (8)

One student chose the preposition around in the ninth sentence.

73) the house around in the hospetar\*

Another student chose the wrong word "reed" instead of "red" while translating the seventh sentence:

74) you have car reed new\*

Some students chose "their" instead of "the":

75) their is a house close to the cafe

Some students preferred to choose the word “home” rather than “house” while translating “manzilun”:

76) there is a home beside the hospital\* (2)

Two students confused the use of third person singular -s and possessive -s. Consider:

77) she work's in the field (2)

The failure to select the suitable word is regarded as an intralingual error.

### **b- Literal Translation**

Literal translation is one of the basic problems in translation. That is, the student tends to keep the structure of the source language as it is in the target language. Consider the following:

78) work she in faield

The student in example (78) tried to imitate the VSO pattern of the original language, that is why she placed the verb before the subject in the target language (Khalil, 1999). The same goes with the following:

79) See Cat himself in

80) See cat yourself

In the above two sentences, the students imitated the original structure which is VSO and kept the verb at the beginning of the sentence to make it a verbal sentence, ignoring the fact that English sentences should have SVO structure (Khalil, 1999). Also consider:

81) Have friend named Ahmed

In the above sentence (81), the phrase “endy” is rendered into “have friend,” which is the literal translation of the prepositional phrase in Arabic. Due to the tendency to stay as close as possible to the source language, the student failed to translate the attached pronoun “alyaa” in “endy”. Such a sentence is grammatically incorrect because it lacks the subject. These kinds of errors are purely interlanguage.

| <i>Types of errors</i>     | <i>Frequency</i> | <i>Percentage</i> |
|----------------------------|------------------|-------------------|
| <i>Word Choice</i>         | 132 – 350        | 37.7%             |
| <i>Literal Translation</i> | 4 – 150          | 2.6%              |

**Table 3. Lexical errors**

## **4- Errors in Mechanisms of Writing:**

### **a- Spelling**

While analyzing the students' products, many spelling mistakes have been found. They are:

82) The cat saw itself in the merror\* (5).

83) The boy is clover\* (2)

84) she workes in field\* (1)

85) she work on feald\* (1)

86) The house is near the hospitle\* (1)

87) The grial looked to herself\* (1)

88) The hous near from hospital\* (2)

89) The house around in the hospetar\* (1)

90) She wake in the fictory\* (1)

91) Mary works in the factor\* (1)

92) the boy is intellegent\* (2)

93) The boy os Claver\* (1)

94) an inteligent boy\* (1)

95) I have a new reed car\* (2)

96) I have a new read care\* (1)

97) the haose is near the hospetal\* (1)

98) There is a house oppezit the hospital\* (1)

99) I have freund his name Ahmed\* (3)

100) I have a fraind the name Ahmed\* (1)

101) the hose arrive the hospital\* (1)

102) I boght a new red car\* (1)

103) She works in former\* (1)

104) I have frend\* (1)

105) The boy intlegent\* (1)

106) The grile looks at herself\* (1)

107) I boght a new red car\*

The sentences (82-107) show spelling mistakes on different levels. These are intralingual errors.

### **b- Capitalization**

Capitalization is one of the most common errors among Arab students because Arabic does not have capitalization. The total sentences are 500 sentences, and there are two proper nouns that should be capitalized.

Ahmed is not capitalized 13 times

Maryam is not Capitalized 8 times

The initial letter of each sentence is not capitalized in 89 position.

Therefore, students missed capitalizing the letter in 102 positions out of 500.

| <b>Types of errors</b> | <b>Frequency</b> | <b>Percentage</b> |
|------------------------|------------------|-------------------|
| <i>Spelling</i>        | 35 – 450         | 7.7%              |
| <i>Capitalization</i>  | 102 – 500        | 20.4%             |

**Table 4. Errors in the mechanism of writing**

### 5- Copular omission

It seems that it is necessary to add a new type of errors due to their frequent occurrence among the students who did the survey, which is the omission of the verb to be (copular verbs). Many of them, as a result of transferring the patterns of their first language, translated the seventh and eighth sentence into:

108) The hardworking boy\* (40)

109) A hardworking boy\* (6)

110) hard work boy\* (4)

111) a smart boy\* (5)

112) The smart boy\* (3)

113) The intelligent boy\* (2)

114) an intelligent boy\* (11)

115) homeworking boy\* (1)

116) the boy the hardworking\* (2)

117) hardworking boy\* (5)

118) a boy good\* (2)

119) the boy good\* (2)

120) the boy popular\* (2)

121) popular boy\* (1)

122) a nerd boy\* (2)

123) the boy active\* (2)

124) the success boy\* (2)

125) There house next to the hospital\* (1)

This is a frequent error because the Arabic sentences in example (7, 8) are nominals with a topic and comment. The English equivalent cannot be the same because the above examples are treated as noun phrases, not sentences. This means that the students tend to force the Arabic nominal pattern into English, which cannot be considered correct.

The same error can be seen in the translation of the tenth sentence. Consider:

126) the house close the hospital\* (1)

127) the house near of hospital\* (4)

128) the house near the hospital\* (7)

129) the house near from hospital\* (5)

130) there a house opposite the coffee\* (1)

131) there a home contrary the hospital\* (1)

In the above sentences (108-131), the students kept the nominal structure in Arabic and transferred the pattern into English. This is an example of an interlanguage error.

| <b>Type of error</b>    | <b>Frequency</b> | <b>Percentage</b> |
|-------------------------|------------------|-------------------|
| <i>Copular omission</i> | 112 out of (150) | 74.6%             |

**Table 5. Copular Omission**

### 6- Omission of Third Person Singular

Due to its frequency among students, another type can be added, that is the omission of third person singular -s (3PLS, henceforth). Consider the following:

132) She work in field\* (27)

133) Mariam work in factory\* (26)

134) a girl see useful\* (2)

135) cat see useful him\* (1)

According to Alshayban (2012), it is not surprising that Arab learners suffer when it comes to the placement of 3PLS. It is a really common error among them. Closely analyzing the sentences (132) and (133), it shows that there is no considerable difference between the omission of -s with reference to its subject. In other words, Iraqi learners omit the -s whether the subject is a pronoun "she" or a proper noun "Mariam". These errors are interlanguage.

| <b>Type of error</b>    | <b>Frequency</b> | <b>Percentage</b> |
|-------------------------|------------------|-------------------|
| <i>Omission of 3PLS</i> | 56 out of (200)  | 28%               |

**Table 6. Omission of 3PLS-s****7- Word Order Issues**

Keeping in mind the traditional English adjective order that goes as follows: opinion, color, and noun as discussed by Carter (1991), the students are expected to translate the sentence as: *I have a new red car*, but they have translated it into:

136) I have a new car red\* (3)

137) I have a car red new\* (1)

138) I have a car new red\* (1)

139) I have red a new car\* (1)

We may add the type of word order issues since some students struggled with using the correct word order concerning adjectives. In the above example, the student misplaced the modification as a result of interlanguage transfer.

140) boy hardworking\* (1)

141) I have his name Omer\* (1)

| <b>Type of error</b>     | <b>Frequency</b> | <b>Percentage</b> |
|--------------------------|------------------|-------------------|
| <i>Word order issues</i> | 8 out of (150)   | 5.3%              |

**Table 7. Word order issues****7. Discussion of Results**

The results in tables (1-7) show that most errors are related to copular omissions. The students tend to omit the “verb to be” when their counterparts in Arabic are nominal sentences (i.e., they do not require any verb). As Al-Zahrany (1993) and Alshayban (2012) concluded that the main reason behind this is the negative transfer (i.e., the second language does not match the first language). Speaking from psycholinguistics point of view, the students tend to stay as close as possible to their first language, and they think through their mother tongue when they translate. In other words, the possibility that the first language affects the second language is high. That is, according to Luo and Gao (2011), “Learners do not construct rules in a vacuum; rather they work with whatever information is at their disposal.” This argument supports the result of this paper as it shows the highest percentage of errors in copular omission.

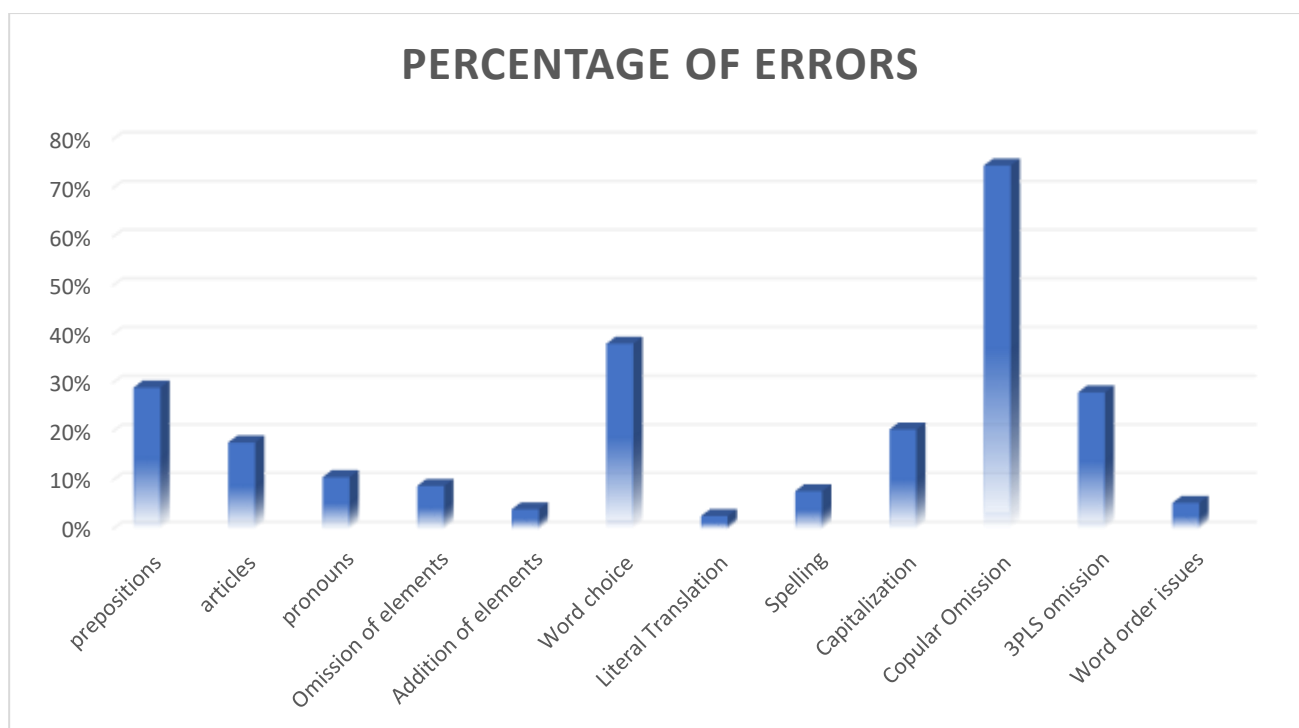
The second area where many stumble on is word choice. Third grade university students at Aliraqia University had difficulties deciding the correct word in simple sentences. They interchangeably use “home” and “house” when they wanted to translate the word “almanzil”. Even though Arabic has separate words to refer to each of them, the students were unable to identify the perfect lexical item that corresponds to the Arabic word. They also confused the words “farm”, “field” and “park” when they attempted to translate the word “alhaql”. In addition to the difficulties in choosing the correct verb, e.g., *look vs. See*.

The third significant problem for the students is choosing the correct preposition, as English sentences (5) and (6) show. Another problem related to prepositions is the difficulty in choosing the correct preposition in the phrasal verb, as English sentences (1) and (2) show. This can be traced back to the fact that Arabic does not use phrasal verbs with the same semantic roles when compared to English (Dhayf, 2019).

Earlier, it was hypothesized that the most frequent error among learners was the use of 3PLS with singular subjects. However, the above results show that this error is not as frequent as is hypothesized. It occurs only 56 times, or 28%. One of the basic reasons can be analyzed from the perspective of cognitive psychology. Students tend to return to the *lexeme* itself when they want to express an idea (Talmy, 2000). It can be argued that their language is not developed enough to enable them to *think in* the target language and therefore choose the correct syntactic form of the verb.

Students did not capitalize the letter that should be capitalized in (102) positions, with a 20.4% percentage. After that, we can see the percentage related to the choice of the article. Students either missed or misused the correct articles by about 17.7%, especially in the Arabic sentences (5) and (6). Pronouns were also a problematic area for the students. They were not able to correctly choose the appropriate pronoun when they translated the Arabic sentences (3) and (4). The percentage of students mischoosing the pronoun is about 11%.

The other type of errors are all under the remainder 10%. They are: omission of elements 8.8%; spelling issues 7.7%; word order issues 5.3%; addition of elements 4%; and literal translation 2%, respectively. The following chart shows the frequency of the errors based on the analysis of data.



**Chart 1. Percentage of errors**

The numbers above provide tangible results which can be used to develop strategies to remedy the problem of negative transfer in translation. This aims to significantly limit fossilization which may lead to unintelligibility.

## 8. Conclusions

### Based on the discussion of the analysis, the following are concluded:

First, the hypothesis that the *most* frequent errors are those related to the subject-verb agreement (3PLS) is refuted. The results show that students had difficulties with copular omission (i.e., omitting the verb to be in descriptive sentences) rather than subject-verb agreement. That is, around 75% of sentences that require a verb to be are erroneous. In contrast to 3PSL usage, which shows a percentage of 28% only.

Second, the second hypothesis, which reads “most undergraduate university students have difficulties in the translation of nominal sentences from Arabic to English” is verified. The results show that 75% of students treated the nominal sentences in Arabic as nominal sentences in English.

Third, the last hypothesis: “most errors come as a result of negative transfer (interlanguage),” is verified. Among the 12 types of errors, 9 of them have been classified as interlanguage errors, and only 5 of them as intralingual ones. This conclusion shows that most students negatively transfer features of their first language to the target language in translation. Once again, it can be said that they think through their mother tongue to produce translated texts.

Fourth, Abi Samra’s (2009) classification of errors can be borrowed, yet some other types can be added due to their frequency among undergraduate Iraqi learners. They are: copular omission. 3PLS omission and word order issues.

## 9. Recommendations

### The results of this study can serve:

- 1- Researchers in the field of syntax can further study the topic using other data, e.g., analyzing the errors in students’ essays or speech. The outcome is expected to give a good overview of students’ errors because the extracts of the data is longer.
- 2- Teachers in the field of language education at universities can get an insight from this paper. The results can help them spot the areas of weaknesses that their students may have. This helps them modify their teaching approaches in a way that will target the areas of difficulties.

It is highly recommended to focus on copular omission issue as it is identified to be the most frequent type of error. Activities should be designed in a way that will force the students to use descriptive sentences in English that match nominal sentences in Arabic. Furthermore, positive feedback has always proved its fruitful influence on students’ performance. Teachers should consistently provide constructive feedback to students’ writing. They should invest in time by highlighting the errors and providing practical corrections. Finally, practice

makes perfect and the key is revision. Students are encouraged to review grammar rules and practice translating sentences from English to Arabic and vice versa under the supervision of qualified teachers.

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