

Some Notes On The Grammatical Problems Of EFL Students In Writing Compositions And Suggestions For Solving Them

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Abstract

Most ungrammatical sentences in EFL students' writing probably result from mother tongue interference or an incorrect or incomplete knowledge of the rules or patterns of the target language. It is unlikely that all errors in grammar can be accounted for in this way. This is due to the fact that many errors native speakers make may be attributed to indecision, distraction, generalization, or other factors, and such elements may account for a percentage of the errors made by writers of second languages.

The purpose of this paper is to apply research in second language learning to an area of difficulty that has not been fully and adequately explored. The writer intends to conduct an investigation into the ungrammatical sentences EFL students produce in their compositions.

Within the scope of this paper, the writer felt that it would be necessary to limit this research to the area of ungrammatical sentences. Examples of those ungrammatical sentences found in the writings of Yemeni students are quoted with special emphasis on problems with verbs and verbals, tenses and sequence of tenses. Those samples are analyzed to pinpoint the difficulties encountered by the students in grammar. Finally, the writer offers some suggestions for improving the students' writing.

The subjects of this paper are a number of Yemeni students (48) enrolled in their Fresh man year at the Faculty of Education, Sana'a University. They are English majors who came from different parts of Yemen. They are a mixture of male and female students who came mainly from the public school system, and so they have almost identical instructional language background. The socioeconomic background of the group is virtually the same since all come from middle and lower middle class families, that class of society that includes mainly business and governmental workers. The ages of students are between 20 and 26.

Prior to their acceptance in the Faculty of Education, all the students wishing to be English majors were required to take a written and spoken test. According to the result of the test the students were divided into two groups, each of mixed abilities. In their first year, the programme was planned to help students to improve their skills in speaking, reading and writing. The language the students use in their social and official interaction is Arabic.

The writer collected 48 compositions that were written in class during a fifty-minute period. A variety of topics within the experiential range of students were suggested and the students were given the complete freedom to choose their favourite topic and develop their own ideas. The students were not permitted to use a dictionary or receive any help from the teacher during that time.

Introduction:

We cannot avoid writing. It is as such a part of our lives as eating and breathing. We write letters to our friends, instructions to our children and notes to our parents. Writing is as important in second language learning as it is in first language learning. Unfortunately, writing has been considered the least important of the language skills especially since the inception of the audiolingual movement. The audiolingual method embodies a number of structuralist principles, the most general of which is reflected in the method's name: language is primarily speech, with writing a secondary system of speech representation. Thus, hearing (audio) and speaking (lingual) are the main linguistic skills to be learned in a language class, reading and writing to come later.

Writing, then, is the last, and most difficult, skill students learn. If writing instruction is ever going to receive the attention that speaking and listening have received, more emphasis must be placed on writing as a valuable skill needed by EFL students, especially those who expect to study in an English-language environment. There is no doubt that writing helps second language learners to solidify their grasp of vocabulary and structure and complements the other language skills.

Competence versus performance:

Before we attempt to discuss aspects of EFL students' written work that need special attention, we should define two terms here: 'Composition' and 'writing'. Composition can be defined as the system or aggregate of grammatical rules, lexical items, and rhetorical patterns that are needed to produce a finished text. Writing is the application of these rules to produce a text. This dichotomy is based on Chomsky's notion of competence and performance and de Saussure's earlier distinction between 'langue' and 'Parol'. (Walters, 1983: 17)

The purpose:

In this paper we are not going to discuss the problems intermediate EFL students encounter when they are not able to find the words they need to express themselves or when they choose the correct lexical items to express complex ideas. We also are going to exclude the problems those students face when they start organizing thought and argument into a coherent logical whole and the difficulties they encounter in learning the rhetorical patterns which include, of course, the culturally determined ways of presenting written discourse.

The purpose of this paper is to conduct an investigation into the ungrammatical sentences intermediate EFL students produce in their compositions. Most ungrammatical sentences in those students' writing probably result from mother tongue interference or an incorrect or incomplete knowledge of the rules or patterns of the target language. It is unlikely that all errors in grammar can be accounted for in this way. This is due to the fact that many errors native speakers make may be attributed to indecision, distractions, or other factors, and such elements may account for a percentage of the errors made by writers of second languages. (Walters, 1983: 17)

The subjects of this investigation:

The subjects of this investigation are a number of Yemeni students (48) enrolled in their freshman year at the Faculty of Education, Sana'a University. They are English majors who came from different parts of Yemen. They are a mixture of male and female students who came mainly from the public school system and so they have almost identical instructional language background. The socioeconomic background of the group is virtually the same since all come from middle and lower middle class families, that class of society that includes mainly business and governmental workers. The ages of students are between 20 and 26.

The Procedure:

48 compositions were written in class during a 50-minute period. A variety of topics within the experiential range of students were suggested and the students were given the complete freedom to choose their favourite topic and develop their own ideas. The students were not permitted to use a dictionary or receive any help from the teacher during that time.

The following topics were given to the students to choose from. All the topics were of the descriptive type. These compositions varied in length between 100 and 300 words.

1. My country
2. Marriage In Yemen
3. Life in Sana'a University
4. A Yemeni wedding party
5. The Yemeni family
6. Progress in Yemen after the revolution
7. The rich in yemen.

Methods of analysis:

Since there is no conflict between contrastive analysis and error analysis, the writer decided to use the two approaches in analyzing the data to pinpoint the difficulties the students encounter in grammar. The writer has divided the errors in grammar into categories.

I. Use of the present instead of the past:

1. Sana'a is very small before twenty years ago.
2. The market in the past is not so big.
3. Sana'a was a small town and there are many houses

II. Use of the past instead of the present:

1. Every morning was ready riding the bus
 2. My mother is a housewife. She spent all the day at home (The student describes what his mother does during the day)
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3. I met my father at night only because he businessman (The student describes his father's job and when he meets him every day)

III. Use of present, past simple instead of past perfect:

1. After we found the school, we enter it and the teacher gives the result and every one go to his class
2. I go to my home after finished from my business in the afternoon.

IV. Omission of 'to' before infinitives:

1. The last I hope to my country become very good and please the people come to it
2. If any one want have a wife he bring some mony.

V. Use of past instead of the infinitive with 'to'.

1. I hope served my country

VI. Use of past after 'to' and 'for':

1. The government built universities to taught students
2. The Yemeni family work hard and bring the money to made from their children is life in a good time
3. I go every day to the university for studying English.

VII. Omission of the full verb:

1. My father a teacher
2. I a student

VIII. The omission of the auxiliary 'be' with the present progressive:

1. My father talking about his work
2. They working all the time in very big projects.

IX. Substitution of a form auxiliary 'be' with another form who forming the present progressive:

1. The two men who is sitting on the ground.

X. Wrong form of auxiliary 'be' and omission of 'ing' forms when forming the present progressive:

1. Father and mother is live my home

XI. Using the auxiliary 'be' + simple past to form the present progressive:

1. Many years ago Yemen was nothing, but now it is became very big country

XII. The use of modal auxiliary with two infinitives to form the future simple:

1. If any one will be travel he will be surprise for the development in this city

XIII. Omission of the article 'the'.

1. Easier way to know the society of Yemen

XIV. Omission of the article 'a':

1. Sana'a is very important city.

XV. Addition of 'a':

1. The tower in downtown gives a sweet water

XVI. Addition of 'the':

1. The education in Sana'a is very good

Analysis of the errors:

The errors in categories I&II (the use of the present instead of the past simple and the use of the past instead of the present simple) are most probably performance errors. That means that the students internalized a substitute for a form that was inadequately learned.

In category III (the use of the present or past simple instead of the past perfect), the error may be explained as a mother tongue interference or an error of performance. Students should be taught that upon encountering sentences indicating two actions in the past with one happening before the other, the first action should be in the past perfect, whereas the second action should be in the past simple. If they get enough drills using this rule and understand the rationale for the drills, then they should be able to eliminate such errors.

The imperfect (simple present) in Arabic corresponds to infinitives both with 'to' and without 'to' in English. This might be the reason why the students in category IV often confuse the two and that results in the dropping of 'to' where it should be used. Thus, those errors are mainly due to the influence of Arabic. However, it would appear that the errors could partly be attributed to the fact that the students do not know that verbs of decision, intent or proposition (i.e. 'decide', 'wish', 'want', 'know', 'hope') are usually followed by infinitives with 'to'. If that is the case, then they are performance errors and the students will be able to identify the errors and correct them. There is a third interpretation for that kind of errors. They may be the result of a confusion between verbs that take infinitives with 'to' and those that take infinitives without 'to'. If that is the case, the errors are 'intra-lingual' errors. Of course, with training the students should be able to sort out that intra-lingual confusion.

The error in category V (the use of past simple instead of the infinitive with 'to') is attributable to the teacher as well as the student. This may not be attributed to inter-lingual interference since in Arabic the present (imperfect) corresponds to the infinitive and the word 'ann' in Arabic corresponds to the word 'to' in English. In this case that error may be an error of performance. A comparison between Arabic and English is useful to bring the error to the attention of the students.

The error in category VI are definitely not inter-lingual error since the infinitive in English corresponds to the imperfect (simple present) in Arabic. Thus, the word 'to' should be followed by the infinitive and not the simple past. The substitution of 'for' for 'to' could be attributed to the fact that both words corresponds to one word in

Arabic. /li/ in Arabic means /to/ or /for/ in English. So whereas Arabic uses one word, English uses two words, 'to' and 'for'.

In category VII (the omission of the full verb) the error is an interference error. The two sentences quoted from the students' writing are common in Arab students' compositions. In fact, Arabic nominal sentences have no verbs as the subject appears first and the predicate second. The subject may be a noun or a pronoun followed immediately by a nominal predicate or adjectival predicate. That means there are no linking verbs in Arabic nominal sentences. That is the reason why we find sentences in Arab students' writing where the full verb is omitted. Although Arabic interference is the prime cause of most errors of this category, the strategy the students use in learning English may be responsible for some errors. Thus, if the students' attention is drawn to those errors, they should be able to correct them. If teachers explain the rule that verbs should often follow subjects in English sentences and then return students' papers for correction, the procedure should help them to detect the errors.

Omission of verb 'have' is common in Arab students' writing and this may be attributed to mother tongue interference. It is evident that a nominal sentence 'I have a car' in English is equivalent to the 'verbless' sentence in Arabic/Indi sayyaara/. So in this context Arabic has no equivalent verb corresponding to 'have'. The omission of verbs other than verb 'to be' and 'to have' may be attributed to fatigue or memory and so the errors are probably performance errors.

In category VIII (the omission of the auxiliary 'be' with the present progressive) the error could be attributed to mother tongue interference. This is due to the fact that Arabic has no auxiliary and no copula.

In category IX (substitution of a form of auxiliary 'be' with another form when forming the present progressive) may be explained as an error of performance since the students think that the relative pronoun 'who' is always used with verbs in the singular.

In category X (wrong form of auxiliary 'be' and omission of 'ing' forms when forming the present progressive) may be explained as a performance error. If attention is concentrated on the kind of auxiliary that should be attached to the plural subject, the error should be easily corrected.

In category XI (using the auxiliary 'be + simple past to form the present progressive) the error is an error of performance. So if the students are told that the present participle follows the auxiliary 'be' to form the present progressive, then they will be able to avoid the error.

In category XII (the use of modal auxiliary with two infinitives to form the future simple) the error is an error of performance. If the students are told how to form the

future by using 'will' or 'shall' + infinitive without 'to' and how to form the passive, they should be able to correct those errors.

In category XIII (omission of the article 'the') the error in the sentence 'Easier way to know the society of Yemen.....' is clear. Literal translation from Arabic may be responsible for the omission of the definite article 'the'. However, the omission of the definite article 'the' may be due to the confusion that the students face because some nouns in English are used with the definite article and others are not.

In category XIV (omission of the indefinite article 'a') the absence of an indefinite article form in Arabic causes the students to omit the indefinite article from their sentences in their English compositions.

In category XV (addition of the indefinite article 'a') the error may be attributed to the students unfamiliarity with the function of the Zero article (O) in English coupled with the correspondence of the Arabic Zero article to the English indefinite article and the English Zero article.

In category XVI (addition of the definite article 'the') the error may be attributed to the fact that the definite article in Arabic is prefixed to nouns whether countable or uncountable. Plural countable nouns used in a general (generic) sense do not take articles in English, yet they do so in Arabic. This difference in the use of the definite article 'the' between English and Arabic results in errors such as 'the students in the Sana'a instead of 'students in Sana'a.....'

Findings of the investigation:

Type of Error	Number of category	Probable cause
Verbs and verbals	5	Arabic interference performance
Verbs and verbals	5	
Verbs and verbals	2	
Articles	4	Arabic interference and performance
Total number of categories	16	

As we have seen from the previous table not all grammatical errors are transference errors. It is true that categories that exist in the learner's native language and the target language and display differences in their functions and distribution give rise to many errors (Duskova, 1969: 11-36). However, there are some errors that are attributed to many factors, such as: faulty generalization, incomplete application of rules and failure to learn the conditions to which rules apply. The learner's attempt to build up hypotheses about the English language could cause errors in both speech and writing. Sometimes errors result from the strategies the learner employs in learning English. Errors that come from the mutual interference of items within English itself can be troublesome too (Richards, 1971:172-188).

Apart from the errors in grammar which the writer noticed in the writings of intermediate EFL students, there was a tendency to write long sentences. That long sentences often contain several ideas and are sometimes confusing is clear from the following student's writing:

"As I understand that English is the most important language in the world and it is common in all countries because it is standard and international language in the world, but many students find it is a difficult to understand it that because they have a different dialects that make them cannot learn it in short time and there are many different countries had colonized from the British colonist (kingdom colonist) that reason help them to speak English and the second reason for that when United States had grown in world wide".

Here is another shorter piece (but it is still a somewhat longer sentence) from another student's writing:

"We showed that when the Imam (King of Yemen) watched his cinema and the people who appeared in the film as usual, but he said that the men who appeared in the film his spirit servants and the people was ignorances people".

Some of those freshmen are fond of using the passive voice in their compositions. Most probably they do not know that passive voice sentences tend to be longer than active voice sentences. Those students are not aware of the fact that the active voice is bolder, is more alive, and usually results in fewer words per sentence. Here is an example:

"Universities are looked to by society to provide educational leadership." (passive-10 words).

"Society looks to universities for educational leadership." (active 7 words)

We often come across paragraphs written by freshmen who frame those paragraphs according to their concept of what compositions are like in their native language. So what we tend to get is a grammar of both English and native language. Here is an example from Yemeni Freshmen's writings:

"I think there were not cars since century, so the life was very hard in that time, and the people were travel by donkeys or by horses or by camels, and the traveling was needing full time."

"When I was in the elementary school I was hope to become a teacher like the teacher who was teaches me, when I succeeded to the prep school and I learned English it was a good subject and very easy, but the pupils were say it was hard, then I said them I shall become a teacher for language English."

"I am wanting to study English in Faculty of Education because of my desire

that, I am to be a teacher, and I would like to work in the field of education, so I left the faculty of art and joined to faculty of education."

"From the beginning I don't like to lengthen my conversation I hope from my God secondly I'm in a better position to struggle in English subject and I'm hopeful to be a teacher in English language hopefully to serve my country without hesitation and if my God helps me in this hobby I will be thankful for him. So my teacher give me a chance to prove my fact to you and from your help and your honesty we are ready to be teachers as well as we will show you our gentleness we are ready to fruitful for our teaching."

"I want to be a teacher because I am a teacher before I came to here learning English and I have friends that can speak English".

"Rich people, they are people who got a lot of money and there are a lot of rich people in Yemen, and some of them have more money than the government, like Hayil Sa'eed he is the richest man in Yemen, and he has about three or four factories, and he has companies in all of Yemen."

"Lot of men in Yemen prefer the housewife than the worker wife, because they want her only to take after the children and to cook, but this is wrong because the worker wife can also cook and take after her children better than the housewife, because she always read and understand every thing about her life."

Interference from the mother tongue is clear in the syntax of the above mentioned sentences. We can quickly discover from those quotations that the writers are Arab from the use of 'and' or 'or'. In Arabic we use 'and' to join sentences, and to begin new sentences. Those quotations are very good examples of run-on sentences.

Pedagogical considerations:

It is clear from this investigation that creating a grammatical competence is required to enable students to write grammatically correct English. However, a theoretical knowledge of grammar is not enough. Too often we find students who have an excellent theoretical knowledge of grammar, students who are able to do the most elaborate exercises in grammar, who can break up someone else's sentences or essays, and who can quote definitions of prepositions and conjunctions, but who have the greatest difficulty in construction simple sentences or combining two or three sentences together. Those students have mastered the elements of grammar but lack the power of turning that knowledge to practical ends-the use of an English which is idiomatic and native and not one which marks the writer as a foreigner. (Campbell, 1962, III-IV).

That does not mean that grammar is useless. There is no conclusive research evidence however, that grammar has no transfer value in developing composition

skill. Research, too, does not justify the conclusion that grammar should not be taught systematically. Beside teaching grammar systematically, one should, indeed, think of ways of securing immediate improvement in the writing of students both in sentence structure and usage. Generally speaking, improvement of usage appears to be more effective through practice of desirable forms than through memorizing rules.

While a great majority of composition teachers doubt that instruction in grammar will increase the native student's writing skill, the general consensus among the foreign language teachers indicates that functional knowledge of grammar is an indispensable tool for the foreign language learner in order to be able to write grammatically correct compositions, that a student would be unable to perform the simplest writing tasks if he were totally unaware of such basic relationships as those between subject and predicate, or those between a pronoun and its antecedent.

Unfortunately EFL freshmen in Arab universities lack the knowledge of the parts and basic patterns of the English sentence. This basic knowledge of the various components of the English sentence is essential. So if we start our writing programme by teaching Freshmen the components of the simple sentence, I am sure those students will be able to achieve immediate competency with a minimum of grammatical complexity and, eventually, they will avoid the use of grammatical structures and also rhetorical patterns from their native language.

We understand that most sentences, however complex, can be reduced to simple sentences. It is taken for granted also that students can never hope to produce satisfactory texts without first mastering the simple sentence. For teaching purposes the simple sentence can be defined as a simple subject and verb plus a predicate; object or optional adverb. Numerous simple sentence patterns can be taught. Here are some samples:

1. Subject+Verb+object
2. Subject+Verb+Indirect Object+Direct Object
3. Subject+Verb+Direct Object+Indirect Object+Adverb
4. Subject+Verb+Indirect Object+Adverb+Adverb
5. Subject+Verb+Adjective
6. Subject+Verb+Object+Complement
7. Subject+Verb+Complement

In learning the above patterns students learn a number of things about the grammatical structure of English. First, they learn that English is an S-V-O type of language: the subject is first and the verb and other elements follow. They also learn that subjects and verbs must agree and that certain parts of speech are acceptable after certain types of verbs.

We have to realize that learning to write is a step-by-step process where some mastery at one Level is necessary before the student proceeds to the next level

Learning the basic sentence patterns is the first preliminary step; the next step is learning how to amplify these basic patterns; the third step (and this applies to advanced students in EFL classes) is to reach beyond the simple sentence; the last step involves developing cohesive paragraph and multiparagraph texts that adhere to English rhetorical rules.

We understand that sentence structure seems easier to get at than vocabulary especially since the appearance of transformational sentence combining exercises described by Mellon and subsequently modified by O'Hare. Thus transformational grammar is considered a little more effective than traditional and structural grammar in helping the student improve his writing ability.

Indeed the practice of consciously transforming sentences from simple to complex structures (and vice versa), of compounding the parts of sentences, of transforming independent clauses into dependent clauses, of collapsing clauses into phrases or words, all this helps the EFL advanced student cope with complexity in much the same way as finger exercises in piano or bar exercises in ballet enable the performer to work out specific kinds of coordination that must be virtually habitual before the performer is free to interpret or even execute a total composition. (Shaughnessy, 1977:74)

In Mina Shaughnessy's view sentence-combining offers perhaps the closest thing to finger exercises for the inexperienced writers among our EFL intermediate and advanced students. Whereas traditional grammar study classifies the parts of the sentence, sentence-combining requires the student to generate complex sentences out of kernel sentences.

The combining exercises demonstrate that the student has already internalized the syntactical forms he needs for complex sentences. This process of combining sharpens his sense of the simple sentence as the basic subterranean form out of which surface complexity arises and this insight gives him a strategy for untangling any sentence that goes wrong whether simple or complex.

The process of moving from basic patterns to sentence-combining should be gradual. As previously stated, students must learn the basic patterns. The number of patterns may vary according to the teacher's preferences but the fewer patterns students are required to learn, the easier it will be for them. Amplifying these patterns by adding adjectives and adverbs should be the second step. Later students can move from simple adjectival and adverbial additions to compounding, relativization, subordination and more complex ways of developing paragraphs.

Walters (Thiede, 1983: 14-17) stresses the fact that students produce their own sentences from the beginning and do not just manipulate sentences prepared by the teacher. Students should also produce texts from the beginning. This will enable them to begin expressing their own ideas within the framework of English and it will not be necessary to have a transition period later.

Sentence-combining practice ranges from syntactic exercises performed on individual sentences apart from any rhetorical context to composition practice featuring the construction of whole discourses and requiring attention to matters such as transition, cohesion, tone, style and mechanics. The difficulty of the exercises is determined by the number of sentences to be combined, the nature of the instructions for combining the sentences, and the number of possible solutions. The simplest and most basic type is the one in which the student has two sentences with specific directions on how to combine them into one sentence. At the most advanced level students in EFL classes may be given a group of sentences (or they initiate themselves a group of sentences) which can be combined in any way they choose to create an effective paragraph.

Thus the exercises used to teach a given structure could range from easy to difficult depending on the level of the students being taught. For example, students who have just been introduced to relative clauses would first be given highly controlled sentence-combining exercises with only one possible solution. Exercises of this type can also be used for students of more advanced proficiency in order to familiarize them with the methods and goals of sentence-combining exercises as well as to review structures they have already been taught.

Here is an example:

Combine these two sentences into a single sentence. Make the second sentence into a relative clause using the word in parentheses:

- (a) The man is my teacher. (who)
- (b) The man is grading my paper.

Once the students have mastered the highly controlled exercises, they can move to some less controlled exercises that practice the same grammatical structures. Here the students are allowed to choose from a wide range of stylistic variants to arrive at a correct solution. This type of exercises is not 'mechanical' but 'meaningful' because it comes closer to real communication.

Here is an example:

- (a) The man speaks English fluently.
- (b) The man is the head of the English Department.

This pair could be combined in two ways. One can say:
The man who speaks English fluently is the head of the English Department.
Or
The man who is the head of the English Department speaks English Fluently.

At the most advanced level students should be given a longer set of sentences and told to combine them into an effective paragraph that includes several relative clauses.

This exercise has the least control and the largest number of possible correct responses. Because it is controlled by the information in it is still considered an exercise in controlled rather than free composition.

As I have mentioned before the obvious prerequisite of sentence-combining exercises is that the students be ready to go beyond the most basic sentence patterns to sentences that include structures such as modifying phrases and clauses, nominalizations and other embedded sentences. Grammatical explanations can be kept very brief since learning takes place primarily through doing rather than listening. Sentence combining practice then becomes the core of the writing programme (Thiede, 1983: 14-17)

Researchers reached the conclusion that a programme of sentence-combining led to a growth in syntactic fluency for EFL students. They reported an increase in both syntactic fluency and grammatical correctness in the compositions of EFL students as a result of sentence-combining practice (Thiede, 1983: 14-17).

The easiest sentence-combining exercises (the mechanical ones) guarantee success. Research in the application of those exercises to EFL students has proved that they guarantee success. Thus EFL students, gain self confidence. The less controlled exercises are more challenging and perceived by students as language puzzles or games. The students are eager to make suggestions and tend to discuss the merits of various solutions. In this way the class becomes involved in a discussion of the grammatical correctness and effectiveness of different solutions.

After mastering the simple sentence and the process of combining sentences, EFL students should be ready to receive instruction in the mechanics of punctuation. Principles of punctuation differ from language to language and most of EFL students, especially university freshmen, do not know how to punctuate in English. This knowledge of punctuation is essential to enable our students to write comprehensively.

Later students, especially advanced EFL students, should be led to recognize that understanding of the 'how' of writing is essential to communicate the 'what'. If they understand this concept, they can easily consider the specific language usages and skills which the writer employs to convey his meaning clear and forcefully. Understanding the balanced sentence, the loose sentence, and then the periodic sentence is essential. It would be a good idea if teachers make sure that students understand these three sentences by giving the duplicated copies of several well written passages in order to identify the structure of the various sentences and discuss the impact of the different kinds and the variation in sentence structure. From consideration of examples from literature, teachers of intermediate and advanced EFL students can teach their students a lot. Indeed using reading as a basis for writing can always open the door for EFL students to understand the power of language.

Unfortunately EFL students make slow progress in writing. This is due to the

fact that they were often denied the support of the written language during the early phases of learning. This is very frustrating to adult EFL students used to learning from written sources in their native language. Moreover, learners who wished to acquire a reading and writing control of the language had to proceed through a lot of spoken practice, due to the influence of the audio-lingual approach, before getting to the written form.

Writing is basically a process of construction. The basic element of any piece of writing is the simple sentence. Our goal as EFL teachers should be to achieve a competence in our students. For beginning EFL students entire patterns of simple sentences should be presented. For intermediate and advanced EFL students sentence-combining is quite helpful to increase their syntactic fluency beyond the simple sentence. Hopefully, our students will be able to make fewer errors. Their grammatical errors should be dealt with carefully and gradually. The goal is to make students avoid their native language and produce texts which are grammatically correct or at least similar to those produced by competent native speakers.

Teachers should view the correction of grammatical errors as an educational process in which they show sympathetic understanding of their students' writing and their problems as foreigners. The principle of self correction should be adopted and implemented by teachers followed by a discussion of the students' errors in a constructive and beneficial manner taking into consideration that to err is human.

Conclusion:

We can not claim that this small scale investigation is an exhaustive analysis of the grammatical problems Arab freshmen students face. The findings in this investigation are tentative and need to be further supported. Additional samplings need to be taken of a larger number of students from different countries of the Arab World to compare their grammatical problems with those studied in the small group cited here from the Arab Republic of Yemen.

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