

Omission Errors in EFL university students' writing: An experimental study

EL Mansouri Hassan

Department of English, Faculty of letters and Human Sciences, IbnTofail University, Kenitra, Morocco
Corresponding Author: Hassan EL Mansouri

Abstract: This experimental study examines university students' written omission errors. To do so, 60 semester one students at the department of English at Ibn Tofail University have been divided into the experimental and control groups. The difference between the experimental and the control groups' errors has been confirmed by qualitative and quantitative measurement including the application of statistical tests, namely the chi-square test and t-test. The study uncovers that students' written sentences involve omission errors it has also confirmed that the inductive teaching method (the treatment) has helped the experimental group to reduce their errors in the posttest.

Date of Submission: 03-02-2020

Date of Acceptance: 18-02-2020

I. INTRODUCTION

It is crystal clear that students' engagement in writing helps them to develop their autonomy and productivity. When students are asked to write, they are given a chance to try their experiences and to solve their language problems. After receiving feedback from their teachers, they become able to understand their problem areas (Harmer, 2004, p.31). Besides, writing helps the students to practice and fix things which they have already learnt. That is, when students write they use the grammatical rules as well as the vocabulary which they have learnt in different situation. So, they try to put these language points together to produce a piece of writing (Harmer, 2004, p.32).

However, the ability to write grammatically correct and contextually appropriate English structures may not be an easy task for Moroccan university students at the department of English. The way written sentence structures are taught often lacks meaningful contextualization. That is, the adopted accuracy-based methods of teaching English written structures do not enable students to learn and practice these structures in real life contexts (Bouziane & Harrizi, 2014). Therefore, EFL students often memorize the language rules which they are directly given by their teachers. By doing so, they forget or mis-use these rules once they are asked to express themselves and share their ideas through writing.

On the basis of this problem, it has been observed that many Moroccan semester one university students at the department of English, at IbnTofail University, make consistent omission errors at the level of their written sentences. Therefore, this study will linguistically and statistically examine these errors, and suggest an alternative solution.

II. REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

2.1. The importance of errors

Students' errors are of paramount importance in supporting teachers to know their students' language problems. That is, they tell teachers about the language areas which constitute challenges for their students in order to work on those areas of difficulty. In the same line of thought, Dulay, Burt and Krashen (1982) point out that errors "Indicate to teachers and curriculum developers which part of the target language students have most difficulty producing correctly and which error types detract from a learner's ability to communicate effectively" (p. 138) Teachers' writing feedback is therefore based on learners' errors.

Being considered as the most challenging skill, writing is best taught through dealing with learners' errors rather just predicting their problems. That is, teachers' effective correction and instruction of writing start from learners' difficulty and deviations. These problems help the teacher to provide his/ her learners with instructions about what goes wrong with their writing, and also "with the right sort of information or data for him to form a more adequate concept of a rule in the target language" (Corder, 1981). [1].

1.2. Omission errors

According to the 'surface strategy taxonomy', learners' errors can be classified into four types: omission errors, addition errors mis-formation errors and mis-ordering errors. (Corder, 1981). Unlike the other types of errors, omission errors refer to the absence of an item that must appear in a well-formed structure. All the words of an utterance are liable to omission; however, some of the words can be more omitted than the other (Krashen, 1982, p. 54). Learners' formed structures are supposed to consist of words that make them complete, otherwise, these structures can be characterized as erroneous.

Words that are mostly exposed to omission are not often the main elements of the structure. That is, nouns, verbs, and adjectives are less liable to omission than the inflections, articles, and modal auxiliaries (Krashen, 1982, p. 55). Differences between languages may cause problems of omission. Consider the following example by Ellis and Barkhuizen (2005), where the verb *be* is omitted:

(1)*My sisters very pretty.

(Ellis & Barkhuizen, 2005, p. 61)

Example (1) above, there is omission of the verb *be* form *are*. This sentence is composed of only two phrases: The NP *my sister* and the AP *very pretty*, but it lacks a VP.

1.3. The inductive approach

The inductive approach is an indirect way of language teaching. The approach has recently gained ground within the realm of education as an attempt to turn the page of traditional way of teaching, deductive way. Teaching inductively starts with providing students with an enough amount of different examples about a language rule and then helping them generalize the rule (Goner, Phillips & Walters, 1995, p. 135) [2]. Intensive practice of a language rule through supplying students with meaningful examples, will enable them deduce the rule as well as develop an understanding of its usage (Rivers and Temperly, 1978, p. 110). [3]. Therefore, the inductive teaching approach is a bottom up process since the inference of a language rule results from students' excessive practice of specific related activities rather than being introduced to it beforehand (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2007, p. 23) [4]. In this context, it is a learner centered approach which is based on trial and error experiments. The discovery of a language rule requires that students try different examples and deal with various situations where they may make errors until they understand and become able to use the rule (Chalipa, 2013, p. 5).[5].

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1. Research variables

Because our research is primarily based on quantitative data, it aims at measuring the relationship between two main variables: the independent variable and the dependent one.

1. Independent variable : The inductive teaching method
2. Dependent variable : Students' omission errors in writing

3.2 Research design

Our research problem targets both nominal and numerical data, so we have adopted a research design which includes qualitative and quantitative data collection and analysis in a parallel form. By using the experimental design, we would like to support and validate the findings of the qualitative data and draw definitive conclusions about the results of the quantitative data.

3.3. Research questions

1. What are the omission errors that Moroccan EFL University students make in their writing?
2. Is there any significant statistical difference between the experimental and control groups' frequencies of the omission errors in the posttest?

IV. DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

On the basis of the qualitative data in table (1) below, the subjects of the study have made omission errors at the level of the adjectives, auxiliaries and articles.

Examples of the most common omission errors	Control group		Experimental group	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	percentage
* It is the important language in the world.	70	32.11%	23	38.98%

*I not spoken it since last year	69	32.09 %	24	38.70%
* it is good language	68	35.60%	23	33,33%

Table1: The experimental and control groups' frequencies of omission errors

Unlike the pretest results, where the experimental and control groups are similar as regards the frequency of their made omission errors, the posttest results have demonstrated that the frequency of the omission errors made by the experimental group is different from that of the control group.

As it is shown in table 1 above, the two groups have made omission errors at the level of their written adjective phrases. For example, in **It is the important language in the world* the adjective important should be preceded by the word *most* for a correct superlative form (see table 1 above). However, the control group has made more errors (70 errors) in comparison to the experimental group who has made only 23 errors. Moreover, the two groups have made omission errors at the level of their written verb phrases. For instance, in **I not spoken it since last year* there is absence of the auxiliary *have* which should follow the subject *I* (see table 1 above). Yet, the control group has made more errors (69 errors) in comparison to the experimental group who has made only 24 errors. Another omission errors in the two groups' written sentences is the omission of indefinite articles. In ** It is good language* the adjective *good* should be preceded by the indefinite article *a* (see table 1 above). However, the experimental group has made fewer errors (23 errors) in comparison to the control group who has made 68 errors.

The qualitative results which the table above demonstrates have been confirmed statistically. The t-test is used to statistically measure the significance of difference between the experimental and control groups as regards the frequency of their posttest errors. Indeed, the t-test results have supported and corroborated the qualitative results in table 1 above. In other words, there is a significant difference between the experimental and control groups' posttest results.

In table 2 below, the sig. value (2 tailed) is less than the alpha level (.05), which means there is a significant statistical difference between the two groups. That is, the experimental and control groups' errors are not quantitatively equal. Hence, it can be concluded that the experimental group has achieved some progress in forming correct English simple sentence, which is most likely owing to the effectiveness of the adopted treatment.

Simple sentences Posttest	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
	F	Sig.	T	Df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
								Lower	Upper
Equal variances assumed	9,579	,003	-14,673	78	,000	-3,20000	,21809	3,63419	-2,76581
Equal variances not assumed			-14,673	65,768	,000	-3,20000	,21809	3,63546	-2,76454

Table 2: T-test results of group differences in writing English simple phrases

In short, the adoption of the inductive approach in teaching the experimental group how to write and form correct English simple sentences has helped this group to reduce their errors in the posttest. Both the qualitative and quantitative results have indicated that the experimental group has successfully made fewer errors in comparison to the control group who has not received the treatment.

V. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The results of the posttest demonstrate that the experimental group has committed less omission errors. On the other hand, the control group has made the highest frequency of errors in their written sentences. Therefore, the difference between the experimental and control groups' results is ascribed to the effectiveness of the inductive teaching method, the treatment, in reducing the amount of errors for the experimental group. On the basis this, it is recommended that language teachers adopt the inductive teaching method in their teaching of English grammatical structures.

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EL Mansouri Hassan. "Omission Errors in EFL university students' writing: An experimental study." *IOSR Journal of Humanities and Social Science (IOSR-JHSS)*, 25(2), 2020, pp. 06-09.