

# Error analysis of Syntactical errors and style errors in scientific articles submitted for publication in Iraqi biological journals

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## **Abstract**

Most of the Iraqi researchers in the biology field write their scientific articles in English although it is not their native language. Linguistic errors can be expected in these articles particularly in verbs, tenses, conjunctions, adverbs, adjective, punctuation marks, spelling, pronouns, and plurals. Hence this study investigates linguistic errors in scientific articles written by those researchers, and published in Iraqi biological journals. The main aim of this study is to promote the level of their scientific writing in linguistic aspects and the linguistic difficulties they face in this genre of writing. The linguistic errors were identified and analyzed in 24 scientific articles from two issues of Iraqi journal of cancer and medical genetics. These scientific articles are not linguistically reviewed. This study focuses on certain syntactical errors and other errors involved punctuation ,capitalization, spelling of writing The results show that errors are committed including verbs forms ,tenses ,active and passive, adverb and adjective, conjunction, auxiliaries, down to spelling punctuation and capitalization, articles , preposition, pronouns, and finally the misuse of plural. Although there are variations between these ,on basis of, of analyzing result data that there are errors committed in these scientific articles.all samples have errors. Some errors are recurrent in forms of tenses, passive voice, and active, adverb, adjective, spelling, punctuation, etc. A big observation was recorded that some researchers strongly need to improve their English level when they write their articles.

Keywords: scientific writing, Error Analysis, biological Journals.

## **Introduction**

David Crystal (1992: 106) in his Encyclopedic Dictionary defines English as an international language, “the use of language for purposes of international communication, as encountered especially among people who do not have the language.” Writing is one of the four skills in learning any

## **Error analysis of Syntactical errors and style errors in scientific articles submitted for publication in Iraqi biological journals .....**

Huda .D. Salman

language especially, English. Scientific writing is one of the genres of writing Swales,(1990: pp137-165). It is a type of informative writing; its fundamental purpose is not the mere presentation of information and thought but, rather it is actual communication of the useful material to the reader. Communication of the findings should be clear so that, research is essential to the growth and development of science and professional practice Hoogenboom and Manske (2012). This applies to the whole of the scientific articles. There is no intention to amuse or entertain. Actually, an amusing piece of scientific writing would be refuted and described “unprofessional” (Zall, 1963: 4). The writer should be aware of several important factors to give his writing a shape. Andrews and Blickle (1978:4) mention some factors that might make the good scientific writing. They suggest that scientific writing should be accurate means it presents facts as they are without distortion; should be clear, and this factor is very important because the writer's ideas are worth nothing if the readers do not understand them. Yukna (2012: 512–517) describes writing as “an exercise in maintaining clarity”, the meaning should be easily understood, containing no obscurities and no ambiguity that might mislead the reader to the intended meaning. Scientific writing should be concise which means avoiding embellishment with unnecessary words or phrases. The last factor of the scientific writing should be appropriate, which means “appropriate knowing, when to say something and how to say something it for the best effect”(Zall, 1963:3).

English in Iraq is considered as a foreign language and taught in schools according to the Iraqi educational system (primary, and secondary). Generally, in the Iraqi society, English language is considered very important, and the educated person should have a good knowledge of it. However, there are certain fields of sciences and technologies that largely depend on English language.

Researchers in those fields should have sufficient English skills especially in writing process in order to communicate with others, to disseminate their ideas, and to make their works well known by others. Barras( 1978:63) mentions that writing an article should follow standard guidelines for scientific writing. Accordingly, each scientific article must involve introduction, methods, results, discussion, conclusions and recommendations henceforth (IMRDC) according to UNESCO (1983) guidelines. (Gubanich,., 1977) , Fahy, 2008, Ortinau, 2011, Lin and Evans,., 2012). Scientific paper; is a written published report describing original research results. “The scientific paper has the following elements: Title,

## **Error analysis of Syntactical errors and style errors in scientific articles submitted for publication in Iraqi biological journals .....**

Huda .D. Salman

Abstract, Introduction, Methods, Results, Discussion, and Literature Cited. The actual words "Introduction", "Methods," etc. are used to head the sections of your paper. Begin a new page for each section. Tables and figures are placed at the end of the text” McMillan (1988:43).

Several studies in Iraq showed that research articles have many technical and grammatical errors. Salman and Yaseen (2013, 2016,) and Yaseen and Salman (2012, 2013a,b) revealed vital technical and structural errors in all chapters of the thesis or dissertations in the biology field. Salman(2009) showed errors in passive voice forms and punctuation marks committed in those theses as well. Another study (Al- Qaraghoolyand sultan 2008) also referred to syntactical-morphological errors in Iraqi research articles. Mohammed (2015) showed grammatical errors committed by Iraqi postgraduates in Malaysia Universities. All that evidences open the way to other studies in this field. Therefore it is expected to find many grammatical errors in research articles in biology field that are submitted for journal for publication. The main aim of this study is to identify syntactical and style errors in biological journal in order to obtain Iraqi research article with acceptable level of writing.

### **Corresponding Address:**

#### **Theoretical Background**

There are terms involved in this study and should be defined or clarified to give full information about them.

**Error:**” A term used in psycholinguistics referring to mistakes in spontaneous speaking or writing attributable to a malfunctioning of neuromuscular commands from the brain. It is thus distinct from the traditional notion of error, which was based on the language user's ability to conform to a set of real or imagined standards of expression. the distinction between errors of production and perception is sometimes hard to draw, however – especially as often the only evidence for the latter is the former –and generally, the term "error" should be used with caution, especially in language acquisition studies, where it can be easily confused with the pedagogical notion of error ( in the context of essay- marketing, etc.” Crystal 2003:165) ,Crystal(2003:166) mentions “error analysis is a technique for identifying, classifying and systematically interpreting the unacceptable forms produced by someone learning a foreign language, using any principles and procedures provided by linguistics. Errors are assumed to reflect, in a systematic way, the level of competence achieved by learners; they are contrasted with errors which are performance limitations that learner would be able to correct”.

**Error Analysis (henceforth EA)**

It can be possible to say that there are no errors Analysis principles till, 1970-80s., real starting for Errors analysis principles related to approach learning language. A number of error taxonomies are proposed later on, in relation to second language literature. Corder (1967: 5, 16) redraws the attention to the language acquisition through errors analysis. Corder refers to that "errors are not only inevitable but also very important without them improvement cannot be possible so are termed as developmental errors" in his paper *'The Significance of Learners Errors'*. There is another way to analyze errors as Lado (1957:2) stated: "In the comparison between native and foreign language lies the key to ease or difficulty in foreign language learning...Those elements that are similar to (the learners) native language will be simple for him, and those that are different will be difficult" (Lado, 1957, p.1-2). That way depends on interference between the first language and second language systems (language acquisition).

It will be acceptable to consider error analysis as a model for the study of second language learners' errors. Richards & Schmidt (2002:73) define EA as a technique for identifying, classifying and systematically interpreting the unacceptable forms of a language in the production data of someone learning either a second or foreign language. Such systematic analysis of errors eventually provides useful insights about the system operating in the learners' mind and reveals the learners' knowledge of the grammatical systems of the target language. By identifying what is exactly lacking in the learners' competence, where is the defect of the learners in using language EA brings the problem areas to the attention of teachers, syllabus designers, and textbook writers, and suggests remedial action to overcome the mismatch between knowledge of the learner and the demands of the situation Tizazu (2014: 69-88).

What are the steps of EA?

Ellis (1985:53) specifies the EA procedures from the production of language learners' activity (their compositions, dialogues, etc.), and any EA activity entails the following procedures:

- Defining a corpus of language
- Identifying errors in the corpus.
- Classifying the errors.
- Explaining the error

Benefits of Error Analysis

Error analysis is significant for all the parts involved in the learning process Corder (1973:124) affirms the significance of identifying errors committed

## **Error analysis of Syntactical errors and style errors in scientific articles submitted for publication in Iraqi biological journals .....**

Huda .D. Salman

by second or foreign language learners. He states that, "The study of error is part of the investigation of the process of language learning. It provides us with a picture of the linguistic development of a learner and may give us indications as to the learning process" (p.125).

### **Competence:**

Crystal defines it as: A term used in linguistic theory, and especially in Generative grammar, to refer to speaker's knowledge of their language, the system of rules which they have mastered so that they are able to produce and understand an indefinite number of sentences and to recognize grammatical mistakes and ambiguities. It is an idealized conception of language, which is seen as in opposition to the notion of performance. (2003:87)

### **Performance:**

A term used in linguistic theory, especially in generative grammar, to refer to language seen as a set of specific utterances produced by native-speakers, as encountered in a corpus; analogous to the Saussure's concept of parole. It is opposed, in this sense, to idealized conception of language known as competence. (ibid,342,343).

Teachers and educators realize that technical reading and writing are important to raise students' performance in oral English in specialized fields. They tend to establish the syllabus and the curriculum according to the grammar and vocabulary of the language used in certain areas.

### **Linguistic taxonomy**

The specialists classified the learner errors on the basis of the linguistic component or item (semantics, grammar, lexicon, discourse, and phonology/orthography) that is affected by an error. This taxonomy improves teaching since it uses well-established grammatical categories which are utilized to organize language lessons in textbooks and workbooks.

### **English for specific purposes (henceforth ESP)**

ESP( English for Specific Purposes) in glossary can be defined as a term that refers to teaching a specific genre of English for students with limited goals. Examples include English for Academic Purposes (students will enter an English-speaking university), business English (for business people), medical English (for nurses, doctors, other health care professionals). ESP can be (as the name implies) very specific to a growing market in English language computer support personnel. "Tree of ELT, Hutchison and Waters (1987:17) the three large categories of ESP are identified:

## **Error analysis of Syntactical errors and style errors in scientific articles submitted for publication in Iraqi biological journals .....**

Huda .D. Salman

- a) English for Science and Technology (EST).
- b) English for Business and Economics (EBE).
- c) English for social sciences (ESS).

Each of these subject areas has been further divided into two branches:

- A) English for Academic purposes (EAP).
- B) English for Occupational purposes (EOP).

There are no limits in using the English language for specific purposes; it depends on society needs and its development to which the language is put in, many fields: law, technology, science, computing, medical field and broadcasting, etc. In consideration that writing scientific articles can be involved of specific English, EST and EAP, so there is a difference between general English and Specific English.

### **English for specific purposes (ESP) VS. General English**

General English can use it by everyone who learn little words and expressions of language which is used in daily life. Simply general English is for no particular purposes, no need to learn specific rules or grammar, structure, or style, etc. On the contrary of the ESP, Special English it covers the learners' needs for specific subject; it is an approach to teaching English to group of learners which has special needs of language, limited grammar, specified vocabulary (Wilkins, 1976:73).

Dudley-Evans and St John (1998) have recognized a number of absolute and variable characteristics. They (ibid: 4) have recognized the following:

- a. Designing ESP to meet specific needs of the learner.
- b. Making use of the underlying methodology and activities of the disciplines it serves.
- c. Focusing on the language skills, discourse and genres appropriate to these activities.

As regards variable characteristics, they have assumed the following points:

- a. ESP may be related or designed for specific disciplines.
- b. ESP may adopt, in certain situations, a different methodology from that of general English (Patzold and Gramercy :1992: 246).
- c. ESP is likely to be designed for adult, intermediate, advanced learners, or even beginners.
- d. ESP courses entail basic knowledge of the language system.

### **Scientific Writing**

As mentioned above scientific writing is a formal genre of writing this study focuses on scientific articles written by Iraqi researchers in biological

## **Error analysis of Syntactical errors and style errors in scientific articles submitted for publication in Iraqi biological journals .....**

Huda .D. Salman

journals, so it meets special needs (grammar, style, etc.) and specified issues. ESP has two main branches according to Robinson (1981:76) English for Academic purposes (EAP) and English for Occupational purposes (EOP). EST has been the main area in EAP. Stevens (1978:92) presents a classification of ESP in which he gives a greater emphasis on EST- courses that need the inclusion of much of the contents of the scientific English. Stevens (1987:19) defines ESP and makes a distinction between 1) absolute characteristics which means that teaching language is designed to meet specified needs of the learners, according to their occupations ,and activities centered on language appropriate to those activities away from general English e.g.( syntax, text, discourse, semantics etc. ) and 2) variable characteristics, ESP may be restricted to the language skills to be learned, e.g. reading; and not taught according to any pre-ordained methodology

### **Methodology**

To achieve the aims of the present study and have a clear idea of the errors made in Iraqi biological journal an error analysis procedure is adopted. The steps of this procedure start with sample. The sample is represented by (one volume) of the Iraqi Journal of Cancer and Medical genetics (Volume 7 released in 2014). This volume has two issues and each issue has 11 articles written in English. All researchers are non-native speakers of English and wrote their articles as foreign language.

This type of samples is called specific sample by Ellis in (1994:49) and consist of one sample of language use collected from a limited number of learners. Each article was read carefully to identify and analyze errors and, then compare them to correct form written by native speakers.

The best results of an error analysis procedure can be extracted from some factors related to language medium (oral or written), genre (a conversation, a speech, an article, etc.), the learner's level, mother tongue and language experience. Cited by (AL- Qaraghooly and sultan (2008:11)

The identification of errors can be recognized by a procedure that the error is a deviation from the norms of the target language. The sample in this study is a formal, scientific one, so, the norm should be standard written dialect and the 1 volume of the journal was surveyed and were detected errors. Usually, the article in this journal must be linguistically evaluated before publishing. These articles are not linguistically reviewed, because most of Iraqi journals are scientifically reviewed only so in this study, the articles were not assessed linguistically.

# Error analysis of Syntactical errors and style errors in scientific articles submitted for publication in Iraqi biological journals .....

Huda .D. Salman

## Data Analysis

The comparison is made between the writer's idiosyncratic writing and a reconstruction of those pieces of writing in the target language. There is a need for descriptive taxonomies of errors. The errors found in this study have a strong relationship with the structure of the word, verb, adverb (the parts of speech) (Misused words); also, there are errors in (spelling, capital letters, etc So, errors can be classified into syntactic and stylistic errors. The procedures of the errors analysis are: identifying, describing and in the last stage trying to explain the errors made by the researchers through occurrence of the errors. Here we should refer that the researcher focused on syntactical errors such as: verbs forms, tenses, active & passive, adverb & adjective, conjunction, auxiliaries, preposition, pronouns, articles, spelling ,and plural).

## Results

This section reveals the findings of this study and explains it in details depending percentage of the highest frequency of errors to the lowest percentage of errors committed by the researchers in their works which intended to be published in the Iraqi Journal of Cancer and Medical genetics. miscellaneous errors are found and the total of these errors is 1413.

Table (1) below shows the total number of errors and the distribution of errors

No.	Types of Errors	Frequency	percentage	Rank
1.	Verbs forms & Tenses	381	26.96	1
2.	Active & passive	293	20.74	2
3.	Adverb & Adjective	133	9.41	3
4.	Conjunction	106	7.50	4
5.	Auxiliaries	99	7.00	5
6.	Spelling Punctuation & capitalization	93	6.58	6
7.	Articles	89	6.30	7
8.	Prepositions	78	5.52	8
9.	pronouns	76	5.38	9
10.	Plural	65	4.60	10
	Total	1413	% 100	

### **Description of Errors**

The syntactic errors are the most of occurring often or recurrent errors in this study

1- Errors in using verbs and tenses the highest percentage of errors (381) is in this field as follows:

- Confusion in using the verb in simple past or present simple, it was noticed that there is a clear confusion in using present verb instead of past verb and vice versa .
- Errors in a greement or concord of the verb with the doer
- the wrong use of tenses
- Omission of copula (be)
- Omission of auxiliary.
- No mastering of adding(- ing) to the verb when it needs .

2- The second rank of presentage of errors is occuppied by using active and passive voice (293 errors). The distribution of errors is as follows:

- Errors in using active voice instead of passive voice , many f sentences were written in an active voice not in passive voice when it is necessary.

- Errors in forms of the passive voice, a lot of errors were made or committed in passive voice forms one of these errors is lacking the auxiliary verbs such as: *is, are , was , were , have , has , will ,be ,can.etc...*

- In some cases, the tenses of the verbs of the passive voice do not match the auxiliary in tense and the main verb is not changed to the past participle.

- Another type of error in passive verb forms is the auxiliary; the passive auxiliary is very important since it affects the whole sentence Burton-Robert, (1997:125). In some cases there is the need to be plural according to the new agent, and in some cases the agent is singular but the auxiliary is plural, and this matter may result in confusion to the reader.

- Another error in passive voice forms, which is found in both theses and dissertations, is in the present progressive form whose form is (Subject + is being + verb) or (Subject + are being + verb) Quirk *et al.*, (1985: 66-67).

Finally in this type of errors, using wrong structure to form passive voice is detected

## **Error analysis of Syntactical errors and style errors in scientific articles submitted for publication in Iraqi biological journals .....**

Huda .D. Salman

3- The third rank of the rankis for using adverb and adjective (133) There are serveral notes that the resercher recordered in using adjectives and adverb , the misuse of adjective with suffix (-ed) which is (-ed) describes the feeling of person and the eother one with suffix (-ing) which is desicribe an effect .Also the adjective with noun or verb does not agree with the noun that they modify. There are errors in using adverb and their position in sentence ; it is noticed that the wrong position in type of errors is detected the other error , there is no need to put it in sentence.

4- Conjunction (106 errors) the fourth percentage of errors is conjunction, linking between two sentences, structurally wrong.

-Coordination

Subordination (nominal clauses, relative clauses, and adverbial clauses)

5- The Auxiliaries (99errors) are the fifth in the rank, many of the errors committed are the mix in using (do instead of does).

6- Spelling , capitalization ,punctuation (93 errors ) there is a big carelessness in using punctuation and affected on their researchers' writing badly ,as well as spelling ,sometimes the wrong printing, , also capitalization errors.

7- Articles: (89 errors) there is problem in using articles. 'The' this is due to the researchers' failure to notice the collocation rules in English. In case of article (a, an) There is a confusion in using them.

8- Prepositions (78 errors): Errors are made in prepositions in cases, such as:

- The wrong choice of preposition: there is a mismatch between English and Arabic in the aspect of prepositions.

- Using the preposition in an excessive way:

9-Prounons (76 errors): the ninth rank occupied by the errors in using pronouns is confusion in the pronouns and lack consistency within the sentence.

10- Plural: the tenth rank and last rank is plurality, grammatically ill-formed. The researchers used an independent morpheme (some, a) instead of the regular morpheme (s) in plural so, they made errors when they apply rules to produce plural.

### **Discussion of the Results**

Errors analysis in this study depends on several scholars, such as Corder (1973) and Ellis (1994). The method of Ellis (1994:58-9) adopted as an attempt to account for the errors committed by the study sample. Generally, errors can be caused by two global reasons, transfer errors and intralingual errors.

## **Error analysis of Syntactical errors and style errors in scientific articles submitted for publication in Iraqi biological journals .....**

Huda .D. Salman

Transfer errors also can be subdivided into three categories:

1. Transfer of structure (compound): when the researchers use some features from native language more than the target language. This category covers the errors in the following: errors of omission of copula (be), may in use articles (a/an), also (the). Using passive voice and ill-formed of the tenses,

2-Interlanguage: manifests when there is no characteristic feature clearly between two languages, as the lack of the third singular, morpheme (s).

Interlingual can be subdivided as:

-Incomplete application of rules: the errors under this category showed a failure to fully develop a structure, such as wrong use of gerunds, wrong constructions of the verb and the wrong use of infinitives.

- Overgeneralization errors: it can be showed when the researcher followed a deviant structure on the basis of different structures in the target language.

- Ignorance of rule restrictions: includes the application of rules to context where they do not apply. This category may be responsible for the following errors: using passive voice instead of active voice, using present continuous instead of simple present.

3. Excessively of analogy (overextension of analogy): the second category of Errors sources according to Ellis's scheme of error sources , occurs when the researcher may misuse word, verb, and item in native language that shares characteristics , features with an item in target language , such as wrong use of the morpheme (s) ,wrong choice of prepositions and redundant use of it.

### **Conclusion**

On the basis of analyzing result data. It can be conclude this study that there are errors committed in these scientific articles. One of the reasons is the interference between mother tongue and English, another reason lie under incomplete use of rules, overgeneralization using, and ignorance of rule restrictions. Of course there are variations between them but all samples have errors. Some errors are recurrent in forms of tenses, passive voice, and active, adverb, adjective, spelling, punctuation, etc. Lastly A big observation were recorded that some researchers are not masters or not professional in English , so we advise the Iraqi researchers to take an intensive training course of how to avoid linguistic errors in scientific writing or training course how to write successful scientific articles.

## **Error analysis of Syntactical errors and style errors in scientific articles submitted for publication in Iraqi biological journals .....**

Huda .D. Salman

### **Further studies**

- 1- A similar study it can be taken with wider samples with different fields, as Comparative study between them
- 2- The characteristics of scientific writing in English and Arabic: A Comparative study
- 3- Errors analysis in Iraqi medical journal, in aspect of semantic,

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## **Error analysis of Syntactical errors and style errors in scientific articles submitted for publication in Iraqi biological journals .....**

Huda .D. Salman

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Huda .D. Salman

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### تحليل الاخطاء النحوية والاسلوبية للبحوث العلمية المقدمة للنشر في المجالات

#### البيولوجية العراقية

هدى داود سلمان

#### المركز العراقي لبحوث السرطان والوراثة الطبية

#### الخلاصة باللغة العربية

معظم الباحثين العراقيين تكون بحوثهم العلمية باللغة الانكليزية بالرغم من ان اللغة الانكليزية هي ليست لغتهم الام من المتوقع وجود اخطاء لغوية خاصة في الجانب النحوي مثل اشكال الفعل والازمنة والظرف و الصفة وادوات الربط و علامات التنقيط والاطفاء الاملائية والضمائر والجمع. لذلك تتحرى هذه الدراسة عن الاخطاء اللغوية تلك في البحوث المنشورة في المجالات البيولوجية العراقية ز ان الهدف الرئيسي لهذه الدراسة لتسليط الضوء على البحوث العلمية ومستوى الكتابة العلمية من الناحية اللغوية اذا كانت هناك اخطاء او لا والصعوبات التي يواجهونها في هذا النوع من الكتابة . تم تشخيص وتحليل الاخطاء في 24 بحث في عديد من المجلة العراقية لبحوث السرطان والوراثة الطبية و تلك البحوث لم تقيم لغويا . ركزت الدراسة على بعض الاخطاء النحوية والبعض الاخر يندرج في الاخطاء في الجانب الاسلوبي كعلامات التنقيط وكتابة الحرف الكبير والاطفاء الاملائية. اظهرت النتائج ارتكاب الاخطاء وكان في المرتبة الاولى من التصنيف لأخطاء اشكال الفعل والازمنة والفعل المبني للمجهول والمعلوم والفعل المساعد وادوات الربط والظرف والصفات وادوات التعريف والضمائر وصولا الى الاستخدام الخطأ في الجمع .تم وضع الاستنتاج حسب النتائج الظاهرة في الدراسة واتبعت بالتوصيات والدراسات المستقبلية .