



Concord Errors in the Written English Composition of Libyan University Undergraduates

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Abstract

The global spread of English has positioned it as a dominant lingua franca across domains such as education, science, business, and international communication. In the Arab world, including Libya, English functions primarily as a foreign language; yet, many learners encounter significant challenges in mastering its grammatical structures. This study investigates concord errors in the written English compositions of Libyan undergraduate students from Fezzan University and the University of Tripoli. Drawing on Error Analysis Theory, Interlanguage Theory, and aspects of Systemic Functional Grammar, the study identifies, classifies, and explains patterns of concord errors in students' essays. Data were obtained from 2,800 essays written in response to the topic "The Pros and Cons of Globalization." Using both qualitative and quantitative methods, 2,828 concord errors were identified across five categories: subject–verb agreement, pronoun–antecedent agreement, modifier–noun agreement, notional concord, and proximity concord. Subject–verb concord errors were the most frequent (41.2%), followed by pronoun–antecedent errors (22.7%) and modifier–noun errors (18.0%). A comparative analysis across the two universities revealed similar error patterns, indicating common challenges in English language learning within the Libyan EFL context. The findings suggest that many errors stem from first language transfer, intralingual factors, and incomplete mastery of English grammatical rules. The study highlights the need for targeted grammar instruction and integrated writing practice in Libyan university EFL classrooms.

Keywords: Concord, Composition, Errors, Interlanguage, Undergraduate, writing.

Introduction and Previous Studies

Introduction:

The status of the English language as a global language has been well-established in the literature of English sociolinguistics. Perhaps the most detailed treatment of the subject is found in Crystal (2003: 3-4), who describes a global language thus:

A language achieves a genuinely global status when it develops a special role that is recognized in every country.... Such a role will be most evident in countries where large numbers of the people speak the language.... To achieve such a status, a language has to be taken up by other countries around the world. They must decide to give it a special place within their communities, even though they may have few (or no) mother-tongue speakers. There are two main ways in which this can be done in such domains as government, the law courts, the media, and the educational system. Firstly, a language can be made the official language of a country, to be used. Secondly, a language can be made a priority in a country's foreign-language

teaching, even though this language has no official status as a medium of communication.

As a global lingua franca that has traversed the globe, it has emerged as a global and cross-cultural communicative platform, the dominant global lingua franca that operates in varied domains like foreign relations, international politics, intra-national politics, education, science, business, information technology and others. The ascendancy of English as a global language is explained in terms of two major phases: colonial expansion and American influence.

A number of theoretical models have explained the global spread of English. The major ones include key frameworks: Kachru's Three Circles Model, Schneider's Dynamic Model, Strevens' World Map of English, McArthur's Circle of World English, and Phillipson's Linguistic Imperialism Theory. Kachru (1985) explains the globality of English in terms of three concentric circles—the inner, outer, and expanding. The inner circle represents the geographies where English exists as a native language. The inner circle includes the United Kingdom, the United States of America, Canada, about 3% of South Africa, New Zealand, and Australia. The outer circle comprises countries that use the English language in institutional capacities. Most of such countries are former colonies of Britain and they use English as a second language (ESL). Examples of countries in the outer circle are Kenya, Ghana, Nigeria, Singapore, the Philippines, and India. The expanding circle contains countries where English is deployed as a foreign language and for international communication (Block & Cameron, 2002; Seidlhofer, 2011). Some countries in the expanding circle are Russia, China, Japan, Brazil, Saudi Arabia, Indonesia, Libya, and others.

Countries in the Arab world belong to the expanding circle. This means that Libya is also a member of the circle. The earliest contact of the Arab world with English was facilitated by trade and missionary activities from the 18th to the 19th centuries. During this period, the British consolidated their presence in the Middle East in places like Egypt and Lebanon and even established missionary schools there. The influence of English was expanded in the late 19th and early 20th centuries through British colonialism. This manifested significantly in countries like Jordan, Palestine, Iraq, and Egypt. During this epoch, English emerged as the predominant language in the domains of education, administration, and public governance. At this time, English co-existed in the formal domains with Arabic (Mazrui, 1997).

However, the central position of the English language underwent some decimation following the Second World War, as a good number of countries experienced decolonization and became independent. At this point, Arabic emerged as the national and cultural symbol of independence and identity. The post-war events informed the various policies that promote Arabization. These policies abated the influence of English and other cultural indexes of British colonialism, but the English language has not disappeared from the Arab world. It still continues to function as a foreign language that drives international relations, science, and technology. It continues to be taught as a foreign language in the educational sector (Hourani, 1991). In more contemporary times, at least from the later part of the 20th century, the place of English as a foreign language has been consolidated by globalization. The markers of globalization include trade, multinationalism, and expanded international media. In the educational domain, numerous Arab universities have adopted the English language as the language of instruction, and it has also been used as a means of attracting international students into Arab universities (Graddol, 2006).

English continues to thrive in the Arab world, and many Arabs aspire to speak and write the English language efficiently. One of the areas of difficulty in learning the English language for Arabs is grammar. The grammar of a language is its very core. This explains why Crystal (2003) sees grammar as “the structural foundation of our ability to express ourselves.” Grammar refers to the body of rules that govern the structure and usage of a language. It encompasses the syntactic and morphological rules of a language. The morphological aspect of grammar accounts for word formation processes, inflection, and derivation. It serves as the interface between grammar and vocabulary development. The syntax part of grammar covers sentence structure, clause and phrase structures, relations among sentence parts, sentence types (both structural and communicative), and grammatical judgment of acceptability and grammaticality.

Because of the seemingly inherent difficulties in acquiring the grammatical rules of English, especially in an English as a Foreign Language (EFL) context, grammatical errors ensue. Corder (1974) describes grammatical errors as systematic deviations from the established grammatical rules of a language, especially in second language learning contexts. Grammatical errors indicate levels of underlying competence. In the same vein, Brown (2007) refers to grammatical errors as “noticeable deviations from the adult grammar of a native speaker.” There is an expanding body of literature on the nature of grammatical errors in the written compositions of Arab undergraduates. This body of work is divisible into four categories. In the first class are studies that examine the constant pattern of errors in the written English of Arab university undergraduates. In this class are studies that explicate the common areas of grammatical errors. They include the usage of tense, prepositions, articles, subject-verb concord, and word order (Al Khasawneh, 2000; Bataneh & Al Tweissi, 2002; Alghazo & Alshraideh, 2020; Omer, 2024; al-Dhubaibi, 2025). The second group of studies focuses on first language transfer and interlanguage features in the writing of Arab undergraduates (Dulay et al., 1982; Eid, 1996; El Garras & Ait Bella, 2025; Alsweed et al., 2025). The third class of research advocates communicative and form-focused instructional strategies to reduce the frequency of errors (Al Jarf, 2013; AlDulaimi, 2025). The fourth group advances the point that error identification should be grounded in the integration of grammatical rules and academic writing skills (Alzahrani, 2025).

Only a few of these studies (Bataneh and Al-Tweissi, 2002; Hussein and Abdalla, 2017; Alghazo & Alshraideh, 2020; Omer, 2024) have examined concord errors in the writing of Arab students. Furthermore, these studies have focused only on one aspect of concord errors: subject-verb agreement errors. They have not extensively explicated other aspects of concord errors in the written composition of Arab university students. In addition, they have studied subject-verb concord errors in the written tasks of undergraduate Arab students in Morocco, Algeria, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Sudan, and Jordan. They have not examined concord errors in the written compositions of Libyan university undergraduates. It is in this regard that this study extensively investigates concord errors in the English written compositions of Libyan undergraduate students from two Libyan universities: Fezzan University and the University of Tripoli. The objectives of the study are as follows:

- i. to determine the categories of concord errors in the written English of selected Libyan undergraduates;
- ii. to examine the causes of the identified concord errors in the written English compositions of selected Libyan undergraduates; and

- iii. to interrogate the pedagogical implications of the found concord errors on the teaching and learning of English as Foreign Language (EFL).

Libya is an Arab nation in northern Africa that has been historically shaped by varied civilisations, including British colonialism. Since the prehistoric epoch, Libya has existed as a centre of trade and nomadic pastoralism. Later, it emerged as an important geography in Mediterranean civilisation. By the 7th century, it had become a colony of the Ancient Greece, and it later emerged as a colonial outpost of the Roman Empire. When the Roman Empire declined, Libya became a part of the widespread Arab Muslim Conquest of North Africa which was marked by the introduction of Arab culture and Islam. Libya later became a part of the Ottoman Empire until 1911 when it was established as a territory of Italy. It gained independence from Italy in 1951. Though it is largely culturally Arabic, English is used in Libya as a foreign language (Vandewalle, 2012).

Libya has twelve public universities and a number of private universities. In the Libyan higher education ecology, English occupies a central position, especially in international academic communication, despite the eminent placement of Arabic as the instructional language. English is widely presented as a foreign language that aids international communication, especially in academic and professional communication (Abdulhamid, 2014). In some of the Libyan universities, English is made compulsory during undergraduate studies. The contents of English in Libyan universities are typically English for Academic Purposes (EAP) or General English and the foci are on improving speaking, listening, writing and reading skills (Pathan et al., 2018). In specialised domains, particularly science, technology and medicine, and academia.

Concord in English Grammar: An Overview

Concord is a fundamental principle in the grammar of English. It is an agreement among different constituents in an English sentence. Concord is built on the concept of syntagmatic relations which was introduced into modern linguistics by Ferdinand de Saussure. It simply means the relationships between linguistic elements which occur sequentially in a construction. It is about how elements combine to form larger units that are grammatical. In concord, the form of an element in a phrase, clause or sentence is determined by the form of another element. These elements are ultimately syntactically related. Concord in English accounts for agreement among elements in a sentence based on number, person, gender or case (Corbett, 2006).

As a grammatical category, number applies to nouns, pronouns and verbs. It is used to indicate whether a noun, pronoun or verb is singular or plural. Number is a morphologically marked inflection in English grammar. Plurality is usually marked on nouns with the suffixes: ‘-s’ and ‘-es’ (Yule, 2020). Verbs are marked for singularity by ‘-s’ and ‘-es’. In the pronominal system, number is not marked by suffixes but some pronouns are inherently singular, while others are plural. Number applies to concord because subjects (which are either nouns or pronouns) agree with verbs in sentences. This accounts for why the very foundational rule of concord states that a singular subject requires a singular verb, while a plural subject requires a plural verb. As an example, (a) “The book is neat” and (b) “The books are neat” follow this rule. “The book” is a singular subject in (a). This accounts for why it takes “is”, a singular verb. In (b), “The books” is a plural subject, while “were” is a plural verb.

Another grammatical inflection critical to the subject of concord in English is person. Person defines the roles that participants take in speech situations. It concerns whether the noun occupying the subject position designates the speaker,

listener or another participant. In English, three forms of persons are identifiable: the first person, which refers to the speaker; the second person, which is the addressee and the third person, which is the entity being referenced. The pronominal system represents the three persons mentioned. The first-person pronouns in English are “I, me, we and us”. The only second-person pronoun is “you”. The third-person pronouns are “he, him, she, her, it, they and them. Person also influences the choice of verbs, especially in the context of pronouns in the third-person singular which take singular verbs in the present tense (Huddleston & Pullum, 2002).

Gender is a grammatical inflection that categorises nouns and pronouns in terms of masculinity, femininity and neuter gender. Gender is not marked on the surface structure. Rather, gender distinctions are mainly marked by pronouns. Apart from the pronominal system, some nominal lexical pairs, like ‘princes’ and ‘princesses’, denote gender. However, in modern English, gender-neutral terms are being used to replace gender-specific terms, mostly in the context of political correctness. Case, as a grammatical category, shows the grammatical role that nominal elements in sentences perform. These roles include the subject, object, complement, and possessive forms (Huddleston & Pullum, 2002).

To achieve syntactic dependency in sentence structures, concord is emphasised as a prerequisite mechanism. According to Biber, Johansson, Leech, Conrad, and Finegan (2018), concord represents the core of sentence organisation. Though marking concord in English is simpler, compared to some languages like Arabic and Spanish, concord still occupies a central position in English grammar. In the literature, three major forms of concord are recognised: grammatical, notional and proximity. Grammatical concord represents agreement among sentential elements, especially number agreement between the subject and the verb. Grammatical concord encompasses some rules. The first one is that a singular subject takes a singular verb, while a plural subject takes a plural verb. This is exemplified by these two sentences: a. “The boy loves the girl” and b. “The boy and the girl love the man”. Swan (2016) underscores the point that grammatical concord stands as the most consistent form of agreement in English. Some other rules under grammatical concord are these:

- i. An appositional coordinated subject takes a singular verb (e.g. *The President and Commander-in-Chief* decides on the matter);
- ii. A non-appositional coordinated subject takes a plural verb (e.g. *The principal and the proprietor of the school* are travelling to Toronto next week);
- iii. Collective nouns may take singular verbs when the group acts as a unit (e.g. *The committee* has made its decision);
- iv. Indefinite pronouns take singular verbs (e.g. *Someone* has a car);
- v. Generic nouns take plural verbs (e.g. *The poor* also smile occasionally).

For notional concord, agreement is predicated on the notion that the verb agrees with the conceptual number implied by the subject. This means that agreement is based on context and semantic interpretations. The rules of notional concord feature more in the treatment of collective nouns, quantity expressions and other phrases of measurement. Some of the rules of notional concord are stated below and exemplified:

- i. Collective nouns may take plural verbs when referring to individual members (e.g. *The army* have blocked the road);
- ii. Phrasal determiners like ‘A number of’, ‘All of’ and ‘Both of’ agreement take plural subjects and verbs (e.g. *A number of students* were here yesterday);

iii. Expressions referring to amounts of time, distance, or money may take singular verbs when treated as a unit (e.g. *Ten kilometers* is a long distance).

iv. Non-count nouns like 'news' and 'information' take singular verbs despite (e.g. *The information* was correct).

Proximity concord concerns the agreement of subjects and verbs based on contiguity. The verb agrees in number with the subject that is closest to its position. An aspect of proximity concord relates to the use of the correlative conjunctions: "either...or" and "neither...nor". This form of agreement often occurs when subjects are connected by any of the correlative conjunctions. In such constructions, the verb agrees in number with the nominal element that immediately precedes it. An example is "Either the teacher or the students are responsible". Here, the choice of the plural verb, "are" is determined by the number of the noun that is most contiguous to it which is "the students". Another rule in proximity concord is that, in inverted sentences beginning with "there", the verb agrees with the real subject following it. An example is "There are many books on the table".

Previous Studies on Grammatical Errors in the Writing of Arab University Undergraduates

Eid (1996) represents one of the pioneering works on grammatical error analysis of the written English compositions of Arab undergraduates. The study set out to investigate the syntactic errors found in the written essays of selected Egyptian undergraduates. The study appropriated Selinker's interlanguage theory as its theoretical anchor. The theory was introduced to explain the syntactic errors as the natural results of a system that evolves from the interaction of two linguistic systems: the first language and the target language. To determine the forms of syntactic errors, the study analyzed the written essays of the selected students. The findings showed that the grammatical errors in the essays were informed by two processes: first language transfer and intralingual processes. The findings equally underscored the point that the stages of the learners' acquisition determined the kind of errors engaged in as those at the lowest level of writing manifested rule overgeneralization. Though the study is detailed, its explanation of the found theories was less based on grammatical theoretical models and the categorization of errors was significantly weak.

For Al-Khasawneh (2000), the focus is on the identification of the pattern of grammatical errors in written English essays of selected Saudi undergraduates. The theoretical base for the study comprised Selinker's interlanguage theory and contrastive analysis. The methodology used entailed determining the forms of errors in the written compositions and the categorization was based on the grammatical forms of the errors. The study found three major forms of errors: wrong verb forms, sentence fragments and wrong word order. Interlanguage was used to account for the errors but the study is limited because the sample size was too small for any useful generalizations to be made.

ataineh and Al-Tweissi (2002) stand out in terms of their systematicity. They are arguably one of the earliest focused studies on grammatical errors in the written English of selected Jordanian university students. The study's main objective was the identification of the commonest forms of grammatical errors in the students' essays. The theoretical framework for the study was Corder's (1974) theory of error analysis, and the theory was selected because of its position that learners' errors indicate the process of language acquisition. Based on its descriptive research design, the study explicated errors in a corpus of students' essays and reported four classes of errors: tense errors, subject-verb agreement errors, the wrong use of

articles, and the wrong use of prepositions. The authors accounted for these errors in terms of mother tongue interference. The paper has some weaknesses: the theory was not deeply applied, and there were no attempts to explore the pedagogical implications of the errors.

The investigation of grammatical errors in the written English of Algerian undergraduates was the aim of Sorrow (2003). The study sought to discover the areas of difficulty for Algerian university students who were users of English as a Foreign Language (EFL), while the theoretical framework was the contrastive analysis hypothesis. The theoretical base contends that structural differences between a first language and a target language determine the level of learning difficulties. Three categories of errors were discovered—wrong use of articles, incorrect use of pronouns, and verb tense errors, which were tagged as the most common. The study recommended that class instructions should be more explicit and focused, particularly on the areas of structural differences between Arabic and English. But the study did not account for such class-based limitations on language learning as instructional practices and students' proficiency levels.

Bataineh (2005) examined the errors of syntax and discourse in the written compositions of selected undergraduates from Jordan. The paper deployed error analysis and a discourse-oriented model of writing as its theoretical base. The author analyzed the essays of Jordanian undergraduates and identified errors of sentence structure and the wrong application of cohesion. The categories of found errors included sentence fragmentation, the wrong use of clausal linkers, and dangling sentence modifiers. In explaining the sources of errors, the author argued that the found errors were both grammatical and rhetorical in orientation and were largely informed by conventional differences between Arabic and English. The most significant contribution of this study is the expansion of focus from grammatical errors to discourse-level errors.

For Tajin and Hajji (2006), the focus is on the forms and frequency of grammatical errors in the written essays of Moroccan undergraduates. The theoretical anchor was error analysis theory. Written essays of selected students were collected and analyzed, and the categories of grammatical errors found were tense errors, misuse of articles, and the wrong use of prepositions. The work concludes by noting that the errors are reflections of a grounded conceptual distance between the grammar of English and that of Arabic, which is the first language of the respondents. The study is commendable for presenting a very detailed data analysis. However, the application of the proposed theory is limited.

Al-Jarf (2013) explicated the connection between explicit grammatical instruction and the reduction of grammatical errors in the written English compositions of some Saudi university undergraduates. The theoretical background for the study was the form-focused instruction theory of second language acquisition. The research design was experimental; one group of students was treated with the grammar instruction model, and another group was instructed using the traditional curriculum. The study reported that students in the treatment group demonstrated a higher level of accuracy in using articles and tenses correctly than those in the control group. The study is commendable in that it is a focused study on the usage of some grammatical structures, with an experimental orientation.

Kanwal (2015) examined the intersection point between the proficiency of Arab undergraduate learners of English and the frequency of the common grammatical errors found in their usage of the English language. The theoretical grounding of the work is interlanguage theory. It is chosen because of its position that the accuracy

level of learners of English improves as their proficiency progresses. In terms of methodology, the research design is mixed-methods as the written compositions of learners were analyzed, and the frequency distribution of their proficiency was established. The study discovered that the written compositions of Arab students with a significant level of proficiency featured a limited number of grammatical errors, and most of the errors occurred in complex sentences. The study does not categorize the types of errors found but it provides significant results on the developmental patterns of errors in the written English compositions of Arab university undergraduates.

The primary objective in Hussein and Abdalla (2017) is the comparison of the pattern of grammatical errors found in the writing of Sudanese and Egyptian undergraduate students. The theoretical background comprises the theories of error analysis and contrastive analysis. Written essays were collected from university students from both countries and analyzed. The frequencies of errors were compared. It was discovered that the wrong use of articles and prepositions occurred more frequently in the written compositions of the Sudanese learners but, in the written essays of undergraduate students from Egypt, there were more instances of tense and subject-verb agreement errors. The study is highly commendable for its comparative design but it did not account for the social and institutional determinants of differences in the found patterns of errors.

Alhazo and Alshraideh (2020) set out to determine the grammatical errors found in the written English of selected undergraduates from Jordan. The theoretical insights for the study were drawn from theories of error analysis and interlanguage. The research design was descriptive as the analysis examined written essays from selected students of a university in Jordan: Al-Hussein Bin Talal University. The findings were that the studied essays of undergraduate students featured three dominant error types: misuse of articles, wrong word order and tense errors. It was also discovered that undergraduates with higher proficiency levels did not make many errors of usage. The study's strength is its usage of a large body of data but it did not factor in such other determinants of the frequency of errors as the method of teaching and curriculum content.

The aim of Omer (2024) was to analyze the types of grammatical and mechanical errors in the written English compositions of selected Saudi undergraduates. The research used error analysis and interlanguage theories as the theoretical framework. The selected essays were analyzed for errors and the errors were duly categorized. The error types found were subject-verb concord, spelling and capitalization. Based on the results, the paper argued that errors in written compositions occurred at different areas of the language. The major limitation of this study is its focus on error frequency with minimal attention to the instructional environment and learners' demographic variables. Alsoweed, Alharbi and Alqusumi (2025) sought to identify the most frequent forms of grammatical errors in the written essays of selected Saudi university undergraduates who are EFL learners of English. The theoretical background for the study was error analysis theory. The methodology entailed the analysis of a large corpus of written essays. Errors in the essays were later categorized. Two broad categories of errors were found: substitution and omission. Among the subcategories of errors found under these broad classes - tense errors and misuse of articles - were particularly more prominent. Though the study provided a detailed categorization of the errors, the analysis is not fully informed by the theory. Also, more detailed observations of the EFL classroom and in-depth

interviews with the instructors and learners would have informed more nuanced analysis and recommendations.

In El Garras and Ait Bella (2025), the authors investigated the grammatical errors in the written essays of selected Arab undergraduates using tools from corpus linguistics. The study derived theoretical insights from corpus linguistics and the theory of error analysis. The focus was on finding the recurrent pattern of grammatical errors in the compiled corpus. The forms of errors found were wrong use of prepositions, wrong use of articles, and convoluted structure of complex sentences. The major strength of this work is the use of the tools of corpus linguistics to ensure precision in quantitative analysis. But the source of data was restricted to just a university in Saudi Arabia.

Theoretical Framework

This paper combines three theoretical strands: Pit Corder's (1967) Error Analysis Theory, Larry Selinker's (1972) Interlanguage Theory and aspects of M. A. K. Halliday's Systemic Functional Grammar. Corder's (1967) Error Analysis Theory (EAT) accounts for the identification, classification and interpretation of errors found in the written compositions of undergraduates in the selected Libyan universities. This theory is complemented by Selinker's Interlanguage Theory (IT) which provides the sources of the errors found in the written essays. On its own, Systemic Functional Grammar (SFG) explains, in grammatical terms, the nature of the errors.

EAT presents the core argument that errors signal a learner's development in the process of second language acquisition. The forms of errors found in the linguistic data produced by a learner indicate the kinds of hypotheses that they formulate about the internal organization of units in the target language. The advantage of this theory is that it shifts the focus to learners instead of the concentration on comparative analysis found in contrastive analysis. The theory conceives an error as patterned deviations from the rules of the target language, which demonstrate the learners' incomplete acquisition of the target language.

EAT advances some procedures for error analysis: collection of learner language data, identification of errors, description and classification of errors, explanation of errors and evaluation of errors. The most central of them is the description and classification of errors. The categories of errors are interlingual, intralingual and developmental errors. Interlingual errors involve the transfer of features of the first language to the use of the target language. When there is language transfer, the learner produces erroneous forms. For intralingual errors, the learner engages in the misapplication of the rules of the target language. The misapplication may be informed by factors such as overgeneralization, unawareness of rule restrictions, incomplete rule application and false concepts. Developmental errors indicate the state that a learner has attained in the course of language acquisition. Developmental errors often emerge from the limited exposure of learners to extensive language data. Selinker's (1972) Interlanguage Theory explains the linguistic system which underlies errors in the linguistic outputs of learners. In an interlanguage situation, the linguistic system that emerges is not identical to either that of the learner's first language or the first language. Rather, it signals the intermediate point in the learner's process of language development. The intermediate system that emerges, which is also called interlanguage, is marked by certain inherent features. One, an interlanguage contains patterned learners' errors. Two, interlanguage evolves in a dynamic manner, as learners get more exposure to the linguistic data of the target

language. Three, an interlanguage is a combination of a learner's first language and the target language.

The development of an interlanguage is instantiated by a number of cognitive processes: language transfer, overgeneralization, communication strategies, learning strategies and fossilization. Language transfer involves learners' application of rules of their first language while using the target language. Overgeneralization entails instances of learners' wrong application of the rules of the target language in contexts where they do not apply. Communication strategies are developed by learners to address the gaps in their linguistic competence in the target language, especially through simplification of grammatical rules. Learning strategies concern the techniques that learners adopt to acquire the target language. Some of the strategies are experimentation, rule formation and hypothesis testing. Fossilization refers to the consistent errors that are committed by language learners in a target language. In the long run, deficient grammatical forms may get ingrained in the learner's cognitive system.

In the area of grammatical theory, aspects of M. A. K. Halliday's Systemic Functional Grammar (SFG) are deployed. More specifically, concepts within the first model in SFG: scale and category grammar, are utilized. This model within SFG, well-presented in Halliday (1961), advances four major categories of grammar – unit, structure, class, and system. The grammatical units include morpheme, word, group (phrase), clause and sentence. Each of these units has internal structures. This study is focused on number concord in the internal structures of two major units: group (phrase) and clause. Specifically, the focus is on the internal structures of the nominal group (noun phrase), the verbal group (verb phrase) and the clause. The nominal group comprises three core elements: modifier, headword and qualifier. The headword of the nominal group is a noun, a pronoun or any other grammatical element that performs the functions of a noun. The modifier may be a determiner or an epithet. The qualifier comes after the head word to provide additional information about the headword. In the complex nominal group, "These boys who were arrested", the modifier is "These", the headword is "boys" and the qualifier is "who were arrested" (Thompson, 2014).

Concord comes into the picture because the modifier and the headword must agree in number and other regards. For example, the intra-NP concord rule that modifiers and headwords should agree in number is violated in the following structure: "Much distance between the men". Here, "distance" is the headword in the nominal group. It is uncountable nouns. Hence, it takes a singular determiner. This explains why "much" is deployed. Another related aspect of concord is the pronoun–antecedent agreement. The antecedents of pronouns are the nominal elements with which pronouns are in co-referential relations. Here is an example: "The boys cooked the food themselves". Here, the noun is "The boys" and the pronoun to which it serves as the antecedent is "themselves". "Themselves" agrees in number and person with the antecedent, "The boys".

Concord equally applies to the internal structure of the verbal group (verb phrase). The verbal group comprises four elements: auxiliary verb, negator, lexical verb and verbal particle. The headword in a verbal group is the lexical verb. The others constitute its satellites. As an example, in the sentence, "Salamat will not come out today". The verbal group in the sentence is "will not come out". In it, the headword is "come". The verb itself has the extension – "out". Both "will" and "not" are auxiliary and negator respectively. There must also be an agreement between the auxiliary and lexical verb. There is an intra-VP concord error in this example: "I

have being talking about Ramat”. The primary auxiliary verb, “have” cannot select “being”, the present continuous form of “be”. Rather, it correctly collocates with “been”, the past participle form “be”. Within the verbal group too, it is necessary to state that there must also be tense agreement between the auxiliary verb and the lexical verb. In the structure, “I have ran the race”, there is tense agreement error as “have” should be followed by a main verb in the past participle form of “run”. So, the correct form is “I have run the race”. Concord is not limited to the internal organization of the verbal group; verbal groups in different clauses also agree. This is indexed by the tense sequence rule, which states that, in the case of compound, complex and compound-complex sentences, the verbs in such clauses must agree in tense. However, there could be tense shift as a result of changes in the time frame and the tense sequence rule is exempted in the indirect reporting of universal and scientific truths (Bloor & Bloor, 2013).

Methodology

The research design for this study is descriptive. Data for the study were collected through a questionnaire. One thousand copies of the questionnaire were distributed to 3,000 Libyan undergraduates from two universities: Fezzan University and the University of Tripoli. 1,500 copies of the questionnaire were distributed in each of the two universities. 2,800 copies of the questionnaire were returned: 1,520 copies were retrieved from undergraduates in Fezzan University and 1,280 were retrieved from students from the University of Tripoli. The respondents came from students in science-based courses and humanities-based courses. The questionnaire had two sections: Section A collected data on the demographic details of the respondents, and Section B was dedicated to essay writing. Students were given the space to write an essay of not more than 250 words on the subject: “The Pros and Cons of Globalization”. As per ethical consideration, the respondents participated in this research voluntarily after they were duly informed of the research purpose before they completed the questionnaire. In handling the data, I ensured that the respondents were anonymized as I did not include their names in any section of the analysis. In addition, I used the essay strictly for research purposes and with full confidentiality. Finally, the contents of the essays were subjected to error analysis, more specifically, the written compositions were analyzed for types of errors. The method of data analysis was both qualitative and quantitative.

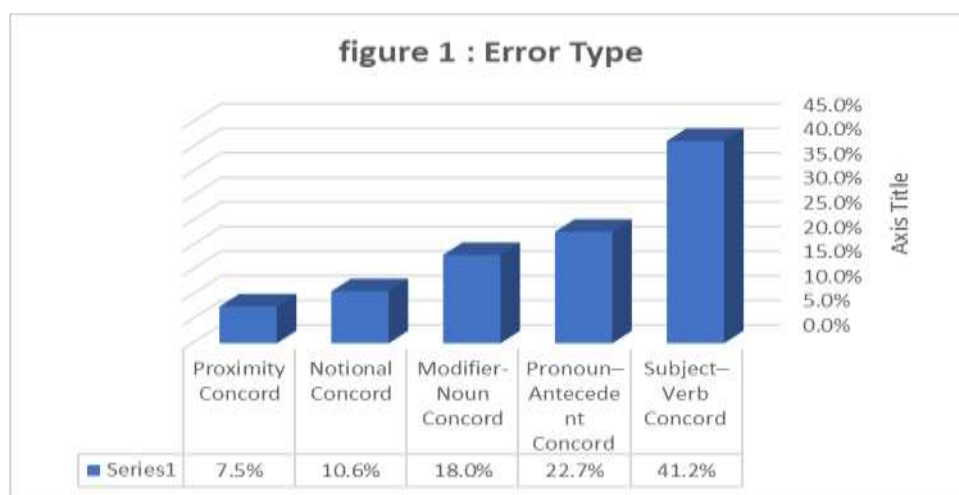
Data Presentation and Analysis

Five categories of concord errors were found in the essay: subject–verb agreement errors, pronoun–antecedent agreement errors, modifier–noun agreement errors, notional concord errors and proximity concord errors. In Table 1, a frequency distribution pattern of the identified categories of concord errors is presented.

Table 1: Frequency Distribution of Concord Errors in the Essays of Libyan Undergraduates

Error Type	Frequency	Percentage
Subject–Verb Concord	1,164	41.2%
Pronoun–Antecedent Concord	642	22.7%
Modifier–Noun Concord	508	18.0%
Notional Concord	301	10.6%
Proximity Concord	213	7.5%
Total	2,828	100%

Source: preparing by researcher, 2026



Source: preparing by researcher, 2026

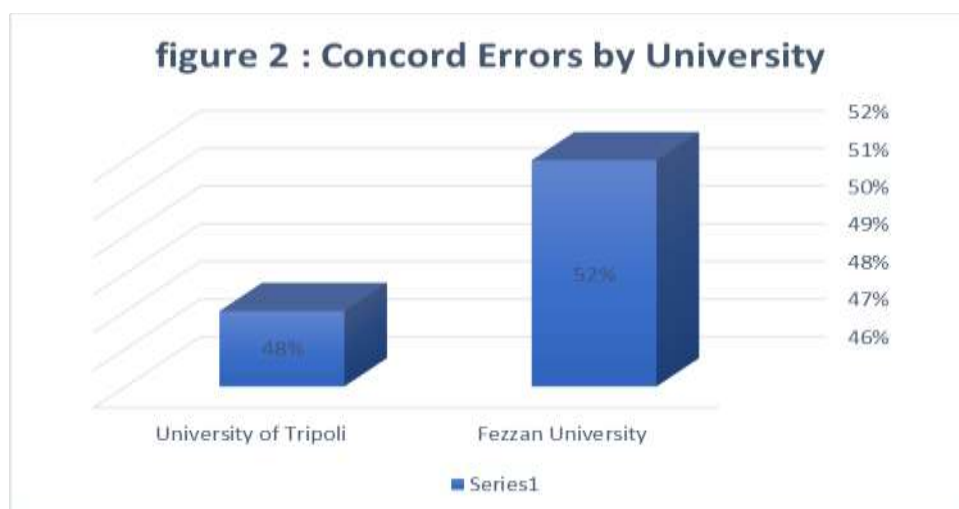
As indicated in the table, of the 2,828 concord errors found, 1,164 were subject-verb concord errors. These constituted 41.2% of the total number of concord errors. Following this closely were pronoun-antecedent errors which were 642 (22.7%) in number. Next were the c concord errors that were 508 (18.0%). Following these were notional concord errors; 301 (10.6%) instances of these manifested in the essays. The last category of concord errors, which is proximity concord, had the least numerical manifestation; only 213 (7.5%) examples were found.

In Table 2, the data presented in Table 1 are further disaggregated according to the universities of the research participants.

Table 2: Concord Errors by University

University	Number of Essays	Total Errors	Percentage of errors	Mean Errors per Essay
Fezzan University	1,520	1,471	52%	0.97
University of Tripoli	1,280	1,357	48%	1.06
Total	2,800	2,828	100%	1.01

Source: preparing by researcher, 2026



Source: preparing by researcher, 2026

From Table 2, one deduces a similarity in pattern between the rate of concord errors found in the essays of university undergraduates in the two selected Libyan universities. This carries the implied meaning that there are generally shared broader challenges with the learning of English as a second language in Libyan universities. From Table 2, we note the percentage of errors in Fezzan University (52%) and University of Tripoli (48%). This means that concord errors in the University of Tripoli are fewer than in Fezzan University. The students in Tripoli are better than the students in Fezzan University because Tripoli University gives more hours of teaching in composition with competent teachers. Qualified teachers prefer to work in capital city universities.

Table 2 indicates that the written English of respondents from the University of Tripoli displayed a slightly higher mean score rate of 1.06 errors per essay, while those from Fezzan University had a mean score rate of 0.97. On the whole, the approximate error rate per essay was 1.01. This means that each essay has, on average, 1.01 errors. Table 3 summarizes exemplifies the categories of errors and their correct forms.

Table 3: Examples of Concord Errors Identified in the Essays

Error Category	Example from Students' Essays	Correct Form
Subject–Verb Concord Error	Globalisation bring many advantages to countries.	Globalisation brings many advantages.
Pronoun–Antecedent Concord Error	Every country must protect their culture.	Every country must protect its culture.
Modifier–Noun Concord Error	This drivers of globalization are strong.	These drivers of globalization are strong.
Notional Concord Error	Some miles are needed to arrive at globalization.	Some miles is needed to arrive at globalization.
Proximity Concord Error	Neither the local culture nor the foreign ones displays this marker.	Neither the local culture nor the foreign ones display this marker.

In the following subsections, the categories of concord errors are further exemplified.

Subject–Verb Concord Errors

Subject-verb concord is an aspect of number concord. It is fundamentally predicated on the notion that nominal elements serving as subjects in clauses should agree in number with the verbs. Structures displaying these errors are presented and explained in this section.

Example 1

One important thing that changes the world today is globalization. It means countries become more close and depend on each other by trade, communication, technology, migration, and culture. In the last few years, better travel, computers, and world trade rules have sped up the process of globalization. (Science-based Participant 63, FU)

There is one instance of subject-verb concord error in the example and it is so highlighted. It is the structure: “One important thing that changes the world today is globalization”. The structure itself is a complex one in which a complex nominal group, “One important thing that changes the world today is globalization”, serves as the subject. The complex nominal group itself has an embedded clause, “that changes the world today” as its qualifier. The concord rule is that the verb in the

embedded relative clause agrees with the headword in the noun phrase before it. In this case, the headword of the preceding noun phrase is “things”. This is a plural noun. Hence, the correct verb should be in the plural form. Hence, the correct structure is “One important thing that change the world today is globalization”.

Example 2

Globalization change the way universities work. It also change how people make knowledge and share it. Students and teachers from different countries meets and work together. Universities now not only help people from their country. They also work with schools and people from other countries. (Humanities-based Participant 34, UT)

In Example 2, the third complex structure is the focus. The structure has one complex noun phrase: “students and teachers from different countries”, which serves as the subject of the two verbs: “meets and work”. The subject is plural since the two headwords: “students and teachers”, are plural. The subject-verb concord error results from following the plural subject with the singular verb, “meets”. In addition, conjoining “meets” and “work” also violates the tense sequence rule. Both verbs should have the same number. “meets” is singular and “work” is plural. The correct form of the sentence is “Students and teachers from different countries meet and work together”.

Example 3

Globalization not only change the economy, it also make technology and communication grow fast in the Arab world. Many people now use the internet, mobile phones, and social media. This change how people talk to each other and how they get information. Computers and internet has enabled Arab citizens to use media from other place. (Humanities-based Participant 61, FU)

The point of discussion here is the last clause: “Computers and internet has enabled Arab citizens to use media from other place”. The form of subject-verb concord error ensues from breaking the concord rule that states that a plural subject should take a plural verb. In the structure, the subject is “computers and internet”. It should take a plural verb. Hence, “has” is the wrong choice. “has” is a singular verb. The correct expression is “Computers and internet have enabled Arab citizens to use media from other”.

Example 4

This experience change what young people like and how they live. Globalization, with other culture things, make Arab culture known in the world by books, movies, food, and art. Arab writers and movie makers use world stage to show culture and talk with people from other countries. (Science-based Participant 237, UT)

The structure that has a subject–verb concord error is the second clause: “Globalization, with other cultural things, makes Arab culture known in the world by books, movies, food, and art.” The applicable concord rule states that, in a complex subject where a parenthetical expression conjoins two nouns, the verb agrees in number with the first noun before the parenthetical expression. In the sentence under analysis, the complex subject is “Globalization, with other cultural things.” It comprises two nouns conjoined by the preposition “with”. The first noun is “Globalization” and the second is “other cultural things.” The first is a singular noun, while the second is a plural noun. The verb has to agree with the first noun. Hence, the verb should be singular too. Therefore, the correct form is “Globalization, with other cultural things, makes Arab culture known in the world by books, movies, food, and art.”

Pronoun–Antecedent Concord Errors

The general principle underlying pronoun–antecedent concord is the idea that pronouns should agree with the nouns they anaphorically or cataphorically refer to in number and person. The instances of pronoun–antecedent concord errors found in the data are exemplified in the extracts below.

Example 5

Globalization helps countries grow, share culture, and use better technology. But it also causes problems like big differences between people and spoil to nature. So, they have good and bad sides. (Humanities-based Participant 667, UT)

In Example 5, the error is in the highlighted part. The personal pronominal form here is “they”. Its antecedent is the noun, “globalization”. It is to “globalization” that it connects. Being a singular common noun, the pronoun which is in a co-referential relation with it should also be singular. Hence, the correct personal pronoun to use is “it”. The correct form of the clause is “So, it has good and bad sides”. In addition to this, being a singular personal pronoun, the verb that should follow “it” is “has”.

Example 6

Globalization helps businesses grow in other countries and make more money. One can now find more opportunities around the world for himself. Poorer countries can benefit because they get money from other countries, new technology, and more jobs. (Science-based Participant 1077, FU)

The pronoun concord error occurs in the sentence: “One can now find more opportunities around the world for himself”. The reflexive pronoun is “himself” and the antecedent is the indefinite pronoun, “one”. This represents a violation of the gender concord rule. The antecedent is gender neutral; however, the reflexive pronoun used in co-reference with it is masculine. The correct form of the reflexive pronoun to use is “oneself”. Therefore, the correct form of the sentence is: “One can now find more opportunities around the world for oneself”.

Example 7

Globalization in university studies can be seen when more students study in other countries. In the last few decades, millions of students travelled to other countries to get better education. Students travel to other countries to find better chances to learn for himself (Humanities-based Participant 1097, UT)

The nature of the error in Example 7 is similar to that in Example 6. The pronominal form in Example 7 is “himself” and its antecedent is the simple noun, “Students”. The antecedent is a plural noun that is gender-neutral. The pronoun does not match the antecedent in number or gender; the pronoun is masculine and singular in form. The correct form is “Students travel to other countries to find better chances to learn for themselves”. “Themselves” is the appropriate pronoun since it is gender-neutral and plural in form.

Example 8

Another part of globalization in university studies is more cooperation between universities in different countries. They work together on research, teaching, and courses. This makes education more international. It become international. (Science-based Participant 1477, FU)

The erroneous instance in Example 8 crosses clausal boundaries. It is from the second clause to the third clause. As a pronominal element, “It” is the subject of the third clause but its antecedent is in the second clause. The antecedent is the plural subject, “universities in different countries”, which is an indirect object of a preposition in the first clause. This is instance of pronoun-antecedent concord error results from a mismatch between the number of the personal pronoun and its

antecedent. The antecedent is plural, while the pronoun is singular. The correct version of the erroneous clauses is “Universities increasingly collaborate with institutions in other countries in research, teaching and curriculum development. Hence, they become international”.

Modifier–Noun Concord Errors

This area of concord is under the general frame of intra-N

P concord. Modifiers should agree with the nouns they modify, especially in number. When this agreement is absent, modifier-noun concord errors occur. The following examples exemplify the instances of modifier-noun concord errors found in the data.

Example 9

Furthermore, several international trade enables countries to focus on making certain goods and services in which they have a being better at something than others. This helps countries use their resources in a better way, leading to increased many productivity. (Humanities-based Participant 1689, UT)

Two noun phrases in the example violate the modifier-noun concord. The first of them is “several international trade”. As an epithet, “several” collocates with only plural countable nouns. In this instance, it is used to modify “trade”. Though “trade” can be used as either a countable or uncountable noun, it is here used as an uncountable noun. Hence, there is no agreement between this sense of “trade” and “several”. A correct form should be “much international trade”. The second modifier-noun concord error is found in the nominal group, “many productivity”. The modifier here is “many”. It is a plural determiner used only with countable nouns. In this expression, it is modifying the noun: “productivity”. The noun is uncountable and uncountable nouns do not collocate with “many”. A correct form of the second phrase is “much productivity”.

Example 10

Another good thing about globalization is that new tools and information move quickly. New tools help people get information and many informations are share in little instances. New ideas from one place can quickly reach other countries. (Humanities-based Participant 2001, FU)

In Example 10, the two instances of modifier-noun concord errors are contained in the highlighted structure. The first is found in the noun phrase, “many informations”. First, “information” is an uncountable noun that should not take the plurality-indicating suffix, ‘-s’. But it is here pluralized. In the same vein, it is preceded by “many”, a determiner meant to be used with only non-count nouns. Hence, there is a modifier-concord error here. A correct version of the phrase is “much information”. In the same clause, there is a modifier-noun error in the noun phrase, “little instances”. “Little” is a determiner used with only non-count nouns. However, “little” is succeeded here by the count noun, “instances”. A correct form of the phrase then is “few instances”.

Example 11

Moving to other country is a problem of globalization. Today many people move from their country to another country. This movement make couple of opportunity and also many problems. In the good side, migration give chance for people to go other country to find better job and better education and good life. (Science-based Participant 204, UT)

In Example 11, the third clause has an instance of modifier-noun concord error. The noun phrase, “couple of opportunity and challenge”, has both a modifier and its headword. The headword comprises two conjoined nouns, “opportunity” and

“challenge”. They constitute the compound that is modified by the phrasal determiner, “couple of”. The correct version of the modifier is “a couple of “. Characteristically, “a couple of” collocates only with plural count nouns. Both “opportunity” and “challenge” are singular nouns. Therefore, the structure has the modifier-noun concord error. The correct form of the phrase is ““a couple of opportunities and challenges””.

Example 12

Education also play very important role to help people and society adapt with world. Many *different cultures* exist in the world today. By develop skills like technology knowledge and communication between different cultures, people can participate better in the world. (Humanities-based Participant 209, FU)

The instance of modifier-noun error in the second sentence is found in the nominal group, “many different culture”. The phrase is fairly complex with “many” and “different” serving as modifiers and the headword being “culture”. “Many” as a plural determiner and “different” as a plural epithet are used with plural nouns. Hence, the headword should be plural in form. This means that the correct form of the phrase is “many different cultures”.

Notional Concord Errors

Notional concord concerns instances in which nouns serving as subjects in sentences do not necessarily agree with the grammatical form of the subject. Rather, the agreement is with the meaning or notion of the subject. This means that the number of the verb is determined by the number of the subject, as determined by the speaker or writer. Examples of notional concord errors are presented in the examples below.

Example 13

In the past few decades, many students go to study in foreign countries. Students travel abroad to find better education opportunity and to see different academic systems. They also want to improve their chance to get good job in the global labor market. Countries like the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada and Australia become popular place for international students because they have many famous university and globally recognized degrees. Also, a number of students goes to these countries every year to study and get better future. (Science-based Participant 495, TU)

The notional concord error is found in the last paragraph of the excerpt. The point of attention therein is the noun phrase: “a number of students goes”. The structure consists of a noun phrase and the verb with which it collocates. The headword of the noun phrase is the common noun, “students”. It is correctly preceded by the phrasal determiner, “a number of”. When this phrasal determiner is used, it selects a plural noun and a plural verb. The error here is the usage of the plural verb, “goes” with “a number of students”. Rather than the plural verb, “goes”, the correct verb to use is “go”. Hence, the appropriate expression is “a number of students go”.

Example 14

Another important thing about globalization in higher education is the increase of study work between countries. Universities more and more work with other universities in research, teaching, and making courses. Few money are need to work with other. International groups allow scholars works from different countries to join their knowledge and tools to solve big world problems like climate change. (Humanities-based Participant 495, UT)

In Example 14, the instance of a notional concord error is found in the expression: “Few money are work with others”. In this structure, the subject is the nominal group, “few money”, and the verb that agrees with it is “are”. The first point of error

is in the internal organization of “few money”. The uncountable noun, “money”, should not be used with “few”. As a determiner, “few” collocates with only plural count nouns. Apart from this, as a non-count noun, “money” cannot be used with a plural verb like “are”. Rather, as a non-count noun, the following verb should be singular noun. The correct version of the sentence then is “Few money is need to work with others”.

Example 15

Another important thing about globalization is migration for study. Many students move to foreign countries for better education and better life. This movement make many opportunities and also many problems. More than thousand jobs are there. Some students find good job but some students face difficulty in new country. (Humanities-based Participant 985, FU)

Example 15 exemplifies another instance of notional concord. This is seen in the highlighted structure. There is an instance of notional concord error here. The subject of this clause is “jobs”. However, it is preceded by two modifiers: “more than” and “thousands”. The rule of concord that applies here states that, where ‘more than’ is used in noun phrases that serve as subjects in sentences, the number of the verb is determined by the number of the noun that follows ‘more than’. Here, the indicated subject, “jobs”, is plural. This means that it should be used with a plural verb. So, the appropriate expression is “More than thousand jobs are there”.

Example 16

Education help people and society to adapt with globalized world. By learning new skill like thinking critically, computer knowledge, and communication with other culture, students can do better in job and life. Education also make students ready to compete in global market. But some universities have lack of tools, teachers, and money. 70% of students is not having right tools. This make it hard for students to get full benefit from globalization. (Science-based Participant 769, UT)

In Example 16, the penultimate sentence is the point of attention. It has a notional concord error. The applicable rule here states that, where a percentage expression takes a prepositional phrase as its qualifier and the preposition has a plural noun or pronoun as is its complement, what follows is a plural verb. The expression under analysis here is “70% of students is not having right tools”. The complex noun phrase serving as the subject here is “70% of students”. In it, the prepositional phrase functioning as the qualifier is “of students”. The headword in this preposition-headed adverbial group is “students”. Therefore, it should be succeeded by a plural verb, not a singular verb. In addition, “have” is a stative verb. This presupposes that it should not be in the present progressive form. The appropriate expression is “70% of students do not have the right tools”

Proximity Concord Error

In proximity concord, the verb agrees in number with the noun which is the closest to its position. It is often associated with the use of the correlative conjunctions: “either...or” and “neither...nor”. Instances in which the proximity principle is unobserved are exemplified in the below-presented extracts.

Example 17

One of the most clear effect of globalization in Arab world is change in economy. Many Arab countries join more and more in global economy by trade, foreign investment, and work in international market. Countries that produce oil in Gulf region, like Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, and Qatar, have big role in global energy market. Either the country or the companies is important in world economy.

Also, neither the government nor the citizens is ready for all changes from globalization. (Humanities-based Participant 10, FU)

In the highlighted sentences, the proximity concord rule is violated. In the penultimate sentence of this extract, “Either the country or the companies is important in world economy”, the subject is a compound one in which both “the country” and “the companies” are conjoined by the correlative conjunction, “either...or”. The closest noun to the position of the verb, “is”, is “the companies”. This is a plural noun. It cannot be collocated with the singular verb, “is”. The appropriate structure then is “Either the country or the companies are important in world economy”. The second structure with a similar error is “Also, neither the government nor the citizens is ready for all changes from globalization”. The subject here is the compound noun phrase: “neither the government nor the citizens”, which comprises two noun phrases, “the government” and “the citizens”. The two of them are connected by the conjunction, “neither...nor”. The point of error is the collocation of the plural noun phrase, “the citizens”, with the singular verb, “is”. This does not conform to the principle of proximity concord. The correct form of the sentence is “Also, neither the government nor the citizens are ready for all changes from globalization”.

Example 18

Political problem also make effect on the relation between Arab world and globalization. Some government in the region say they worry about the political result of global integration, especially about spreading democratic ideas, human right talks, and world media influence. Global communication technology makes easier for people to get other source of information and talk about politics. Also, neither the media nor the people knows what to do in some situation. (Science-based Participant 104, UT)

The last sentence in Example 18 is where the proximity concord error is located here. The clause has a compound noun phrase made up of “the media” and “the people”. Both are conjoined by the conjunction, “neither...nor”. The closest of the two noun phrases to the verb in the clause- “knows”- is “the people”. The head word of this noun phrase is plural. Hence, the noun phrase is plural. It should co-occur with a plural verb. Hence, the correct form of the sentence is “Also, neither the media nor the people know what to do in some situation”.

Example 19

Another reason of globalization is free economy. In last many years, many countries make rules to make trade and investment easier with other countries. Governments lower tax, remove limit, and make rules simple that before stop trade between countries. Also, not only the trade companies but also the citizens knows what will happen in future. Agreements between countries and world organizations also help to make world market free. (Science-based Participant 104, UT)

In this example, the violation of proximity concord rules relates to the use of the correlative conjunction, “not only...but also”. The same rule of proximity concord, which is that a verb agrees with the noun which is the closest to its position, applies. In this instance, the closest noun to the verbal position is “the citizens”. In this case, the noun is plural and it should select a plural verb. The correct form of the clause, therefore, is “Also, not only the trade companies but also the citizens knows what will happen in future”.

Example 20

Cultural exchange is another reason of globalization. World media, movies, music, books, clothes, and social media help people from other countries to meet and learn.

People see new ideas and different culture from other countries. Either the music or the movies is popular in many country. Also, neither the people nor the concerned state department know how to keep culture safe. (Science-based Participant 567, UT)

There are two instances of the violation of the proximity concord in Example 20. They are found in the two clauses which are highlighted. In the first, “the music” and “the movies” constitute the noun phrase functioning as the subject of the sentence. The first is a singular noun phrase, while the second is plural. Being plural and closer to the position of the verb means that the verb has to plural in form. Hence, the appropriate form of “be” to be used here has to be plural. Therefore, the correct structure is “Either the music or the movies are popular in many countries”. The last sentence in the extract also has an example of a violation of the principle of proximity of concord. The compound noun phrase functioning as the subject is “neither the people nor the concerned state department”. It is made up of two simple noun phrases: “the people” and “the concerned state department”. The closest of them to the verb is “the concerned state department”, a singular noun phrase. The verb that should follow it should be a singular verb; the verb should be “knows”. The correct sentence then is “Also, neither the people nor the concerned state department knows how to keep culture safe”.

Discussion of Findings

From the analysis, concord errors constitute one of the most frequent types of errors found in the written essays of Libyan undergraduate students. The most frequent concord errors found in the essays are subject-verb agreement errors. This evidences the point that the students have considerable difficulty in the area of subject-verb concord in English clause structures. This finding agrees with the results of earlier studies such as Abdalla (2017), Bataineh & Al-Tweissi (2002), Ramzan et al. (2023), Ayaz, Waheed and Hassan (2024), and Omer (2024). Both researchers reported the prevalence of subject-verb concord errors in the English-medium writing of Arab students. Other error types, in order of frequency, include pronoun–antecedent agreement errors, modifier–noun agreement errors, notional concord errors and proximity concord errors. These error types are explainable with reference to with the structural differences between the students’ mother tongue, which is Arabic, and the English language. This is interlingual interference. The transfer of features from the first language to the second language explains the concord errors. This connects with previous arguments offered by Eid (1996) and Sorrow (2003).

This argument connects well with the one expressed one in Corder’s (1967) Error Analysis. The errors stand as patterned deviations from the grammatical norms which index the learners’ varied stages in the process of second language acquisition. Knowing the stage in the language acquisition process affords researchers and teachers of the English language teaching in foreign language contexts insights into the competence levels and content of the learners. There is also an interface between these patterns of errors and Selinker’s (1972) Interlanguage Theory. The Interlanguage Theory maintains that, in the course of second language acquisition, the language learner develops a linguistic system that is intermediate in nature. The intermediate grammar embodies aspects of the first language and the target language. The noted concord errors constitute an integral part of the intermediate grammar. The classes of errors identified in this study index the Libyan undergraduates’ incomplete learning of the internal organization of grammatical units of the English language.

The errors are also explainable with reference to overgeneralization and incomplete application of rules. One can situate these factors: overgeneralization, complexity of English agreement patterns and incomplete application of rules (Ramzan et al., 2023; Ayaz, Waheed & Hassan, 2024), within the borders of intralingual factors which is largely defined by the incomplete mastery of the grammatical rules of the English language. Overall, the errors result from the above reasons. This suggests that there is a need to develop more focused instructional materials and strategies in the teaching of English as a foreign language in Libyan universities.

Conclusion

This work has examined the range of concord errors in the written English of selected undergraduates in two Libyan universities. A total of 2,800 respondents gave their responses. Five major concord error types were identified: subject–verb agreement errors, pronoun–antecedent agreement errors, modifier–noun agreement errors, proximity concord errors and notional concord errors. From the descriptive statistical analysis, the most frequent class of errors is subject–verb agreement errors. In terms of frequency distribution, the next two are respectively pronoun–antecedent agreement errors and modifier–noun agreement errors. The results suggest that the significant level of challenges that Libyan undergraduates encounter in the learning of English as a second language can be accounted for with references to first language transfer, intralingual errors and incomplete mastery of English grammatical structures. The results of this study underscore the explanatory power of interlanguage theory, error analysis theory and systemic functional grammar. Through its detailed description of concord errors in the written English compositions of selected Libyan undergraduates, this study has made a significant contribution to the literature of the teaching of English as a foreign language to students in the Arab world.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are made based the results of the analysis:

- i. More class hours should be dedicated to the teaching of concord rules in EFL classes in Libyan universities, particularly subject-verb concord and pronoun-antecedent agreement, as concord is a core area for demonstrating competence in the English language.
- ii. A section of English grammar classes should be incorporated into English classes in Libyan universities and the focus of such a session should be on identifying errors in students' compositions and treating them duly.
- iii. Grammar should not be taught in isolation in the EFL classes. Rather, grammar and writing skills should be incorporated into grammar teaching.
- iv. After due contrastive analysis dedicated to developing a contrastive grammar of English and Arabic, such a contrastive grammar should be incorporated into EFL classes. Such a comparative analysis should aid the learners' competence in the English language.
- v. Libyan universities' learners of English as a foreign language should be engaged in continuous writing practice, with an adequate feedback system. The feedback should also be consolidated by the incorporation of peer editing exercises.

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