

To What Extent Do Advanced Arabic Speakers Of English Continue To Make Errors In Third Person Singular-S?

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ABSTRACT

Speaking is a complicated procedure even when it's done in one's native language. Therefore, it becomes more complicated when it's done in the second or foreign language. This research is focused on whether Arabic advanced learners of English language are still continuing to make errors in present simple tense sentences particularly in using the third person singular -s. The pre-constructive approach in the second section shows that errors were not tolerable, and it is a sign of inadequate learning process which might result in receiving disciplines. It also shows that the first language acquisition affects the learning process of the second or foreign language and results in making errors. Researchers identified that writing or speaking are the main skills for the second language learners to commit common language errors while using them. Thus, with the provided writing and speaking samples in the third section, it shows that advanced Arabic learners of English language do make errors in their writing using the second or foreign language in regards of neglecting the third person singular -s more than in speaking the target language.

Keywords: Advanced learner, Third person, Arabic, English, Errors.

SECTION ONE: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

This piece of research will concentrate on the use of the third person singular –s in present simple for a specific group which they are Arabic speakers of English language. This research is divided into a descriptive section and an empirical section.

In the literature review section, we are going to deal with per-contrastive analysis and contrastive analysis to see what the literature said about error analysis also we will highlight some definitions about error analysis according to some scholars and researchers such as Ellis 1985, Corder 1973. At the end we will contrast how the third person singular –s is used in Arabic and English language.

In the practical section, an analysis of the collected data of writing and speaking samples will be highlighted. As a first step, the procedure of collecting these data will be mentioned. Then the analysis, results and key findings will be discussed.

1.2 Aim of the research

The aim of this research is to find out whether Arabic speakers of English language are still making errors in the use of third person singular –s in present simple or not.

SECTION TWO: LITRETURE REVIEW

2.1 Literature Background of error analysis

Human uniqueness cannot be defined without mentioning language. Thus, language errors should be identified as the core of human uniqueness. On a temporary basis, errors might be identified as unsuccessful pieces of language. Errors are phenomena which appear in second language learning and foreign language as well. In fact, many teachers complain about their students' committing errors of various kinds in language learning. Attempts to account for this phenomenon have progressed over time.

According to the pre-contrastive approach, making errors were probably a bad aspect to suffer from. Crystal (1985) mentions that during the 17th Century, a high level of correctness was kept in language learning, particularly in pronunciation. For instance, the Benedictine rule was to punish those children who made mistakes in Latin classes (Crystal,1985). In the 1940s, an attempt made to collect the common errors that have been made by learners with a number of languages (Crystal,1985). Ellis (1985:51) states that “error analysis consisted of little more than impressionistic collections of common errors and their linguistic classification. Also, the goals of traditional Error Analysis were pedagogic—errors provided information which could be used to sequence items for teaching or to devise remedial lessons.” According to Corder (1975) the production of errors was useful as a sign of insufficient learning and a lack

of mastering the rules, thus, the beneficial cure for the errors was considered to be in re-teaching it.

From the 1940s to the 1960s, a decided change in the error analysis approach was presented. This approach was known as Contrastive Analysis. This approach considers the impact of the learners' mother tongue on the error production of Lado's pioneering work *Linguistic across Culture* (James, 1980). Contrastive analysis progressed due to the practical need to teach a second language effectively (Ellis, 1985). A teacher who makes a comparison between the target language and the students' native language will identify what the actual limitations are and can provide solutions for teaching them (Lado, 1957). This was a reflection of comparing two languages in order to identify the areas of learning difficulties (Ellis, 1985).

Therefore, the basic aim of contrastive analysis is to show the differences and similarities between languages. As we are dealing with error production, contrastive linguistic studies are justified in the predictive power (James, 1998). Thus, regarding to contrastive analysis hypothesis, what have been resulted from the comparisons and differences between the learners' mother language and the target language is regarded as a second/ foreign language error (Ellis, 1985). In other words, the first language of a learner will have a crucial impact on the learning of the second language and the errors that a learner makes in the second language will interfere significantly from the first language. Thus, the learners' difficulties must be analysed by comparing the two different languages that are involved in the learning process. However, analysing both languages in different linguistic ways for instance semantic, syntax, phonetics and phonology, will be clearly different from what influence might a speaker have of one language in learning the other. This combination of contrastive analysis linked with the structural linguistics led to the Audio-Lingual method (Richards & Rodgers, 2011).

2.2 Definitions of error analysis

Error analysis can be defined as a process which scholars and educators tend to use. During this process, there is a set of samples of language learners and the educators and scholars identify the errors in the sample and their categorization according to their hypothesized reasons with assessing it at the end (Ellis, 1985). Also, Corder (1973) explains that error analysis is a relative process in the meaning that there is a comparison of the synonymous speech between the learners' first language and the second one. This is a specific matter of contrastive analysis that deals with two languages also it is considered as a starting point indicating the same message as error analysis.

Lightbown and Spada (2006) state that the contrastive analysis hypothesis cannot identify many areas of the learners' language and scholars began using another approach to analyse learners' errors. This approach was developed in the 1970s and

called Error Analysis, where there is a very clear description and an analysis of the errors that learners of second language make (Lightbown and Spada, 2006). Moreover, error analysis did not predict errors but describes and discovers various types of them therefore it differs from contrastive analysis. Error analysis hypothesis that "like child language, second language learner is a system in its own right-one that is rule-governed and predictable" (Lightbown and Spada, 2006:79-80). Such an idea suggested by Selinker 1972 in his seminal which reflects the model of language learning development in his book *Interlanguage* (Selinker, 1972).

When error analysis became a replacement approach to contrastive analysis, it turned to be a search tool for investigating how learners obtain language. Contrastive analysis takes part in contrasting the native language and the second language. There was a belief that errors were produced due to the negative change resulting from linguistic variations among the two languages (native and second). Nevertheless, contrastive analysis went under attack when some predicted errors by contrastive analysis did not happen or occur while other errors which were not predicted to occur did occurred (Ellis and Barkhizen, 2005).

In this regard, Ellis (1985:53) asserts that "The most significant contribution of Error Analysis, apart from the role it played in the reassessment of the Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis, lies in its success in elevating the status of errors from undesirability to that of a guide to the inner workings of the language learning process". With reference to error analysis scholars, errors are found not only through the assigning of the first language and are not only predicted from the variations among languages. In this form, only several errors are occurred by the mother tongue interference and there are several other resources for their production (Ellis, 1985).

According to the Arabic context, Arabic speakers of English language tend to make errors in spoken and written skills even if the learners are advanced in English language. A reason for this might be because in the grammar of Arabic language some grammatical morphemes do not exist as in English language including possessive –s, past tense –ed, passive and active and third person singular –s. In English, the form of the verb is different according to the person and number of the subject for example *I drink juice* but *he drinks juice*. In Arabic, although the form of the verb differs depending on the number of people forming the subject, no such differences happen regarding the person of the subject. That means, in Arabic there is no morphological inflection of verb forms regarding to the third person singular number. For instance:

I speak Arabic ----- أنا أتحدث العربية

He speaks Arabic ----- هو يتحدث العربية

You speak Arabic ----- أنت تتحدث العربية

Therefore, Arabic speakers of English tend to make errors in speaking as well as in writing. However, during a general communication and speaking you are able to correct your errors in order to be able to deliver your ideas clearly also you have enough time to correct your errors while in writing exam time; you may have more errors since you have a limited time to write your ideas and once you wrote your ideas and the time finishes, there is no chance to correct your errors. This might be an interesting area to develop further researches on but it is beyond the scope of this paper. Thus, in the next section the researcher will focus on the errors of the third person singular –s in present tense that made by Arabic speakers of English language. Also, the researcher will compare speaking and writing samples of Arabic speakers of English language and see whether they make errors of third person singular –s more in speaking or writing.

SECTION THREE: DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

3.1 Data collection

The data collection for this research will deal with writing task samples and a recorded speaking sample. According to the writing task, the essay writing task is designed depending on the purpose of the research which is to find out whether Arabic speakers of English language make more errors of third person singular –s in or not and is it in speaking or writing. The essay writing was carried out according to the Nottingham University ethic procedures where the research has been conducted and before writing the task, an explanation is provided about the aim of the task and the research project in order to make the participants aware of the use of what they are going to talk.

The researcher has dealt with six Arabic speakers of English language where their level of English proficiency is 6.0-7.5 according to the IELTS level. The researcher has given them a pre-selected topic because she wanted to have answers on the same subject from all the participants to be able to find the errors clearly. The pre-selected task title is (What are the advantages and disadvantages of Master-Doctorate licence system?) and the reason why the researcher has chosen this topic is because the participants have an idea about the subject. The amount of the writing task was three paragraphs as the researcher mentioned to them and the researcher gave the participants one day to write the task in order to give them more freedom and relaxation to write, read, revise and re-edit the task freely with no pressure. The participants are from different majors, and all are Master students in Nottingham University and they know the grammatical rules and can master them efficiently.

On the other hand, the researcher has also gathered one sample of audio record to be able to compare it with the written samples and see if there is a comparison or contrast with the written task according to the errors made in third person singular –s. The audio record will be between two Arabic speakers of English language which they are

not part of the other six participants also the audio record is based on a pre-selected topic which is (what are the advantages and disadvantages between living in London and Nottingham?), to be able to think about the topic before speaking rather than during the conversation and to have easy and simple conversation since the topic is from everyday life, so the participants are familiar with this topic. Moreover, the researcher followed the University of Nottingham ethical procedures to inform the participants of using the audio records in analysing the conversation in order to gather some data and analyse it. As the written participants, the audio record participants are also having upper-intermediate level and 6.5 IELTS score level also the duration of the record is about two minutes.

Both written and spoken samples will be analysed in the upcoming subsection along with the results and findings of the data collection to find out if Arabic speakers of English language are making errors more in speaking or writing.

3.2 Analysis and results

The findings of the writing task samples show that the area which participants encountered difficulties to master is the omission of the –s of the third person singular in the present simple. According to the errors in the present tense form and from the reported results, there are 12 cases of omitting the –s. This indicates that the learners have a problem with the –s. Several questions would be raised to think about and ask. Between them, why the learners forgot the third person singular –s in the present simple since they know the rule? Thus, the problem might be that the learners ignore the –s because they think it will not affect their writing or many times the learners do not know how and when to use the –s of the third person which make the learners get confused in applying it properly. Also, may be the reason for omitting –s is a matter of awareness and the learners do not pay attention to the –s of the third person when writing an essay or may be because of the different patterns that they have in their mother tongue which make the learners get confused of using it and also it might be of the lack of practice where they were in school.

The Arabic speaker of English language must take these errors into his/her consideration when he/she writes an essay. The omission of the third person singular –s can only be achieved by being aware of the steps of writing first and to the using of the right tense. The normal writing teaching suggests to start writing on a draft paper in order to revise it and knowing which tense to use according to the topic and finally writes it on the task paper (Bergmann, 2010). However, in this case, five of the participants said that they started to write on the task paper and they spend only 30-40 minutes in writing it although the researcher gave them one day to write. This means that they did not follow the writing suggestions. Out of six participants only one participant acknowledged of being aware of the writing suggestions and using the correct tense which made the participant revise and correct the errors of omitting the third person singular –s in the present tense in his essay before writing it on the task paper.

Moreover, selection, addition and wrong form seemed to be less problematic comparing to the omission of the –s, in the sense that there are two errors in selecting the correct tense, one in addition and the other in the wrong form. These errors occurred for the same reason as the omission of the –s. Therefore, if the learners do not consider his/her errors of the omission of –s, they would likely give *is* for *are* or *are* for *is* and *does* for *do* or *do* for *does*.

According to the tense use, there was a small number in misusing the present simple tense which one participant used past simple instead of present simple in one of his paragraphs. This might be the participant was not aware of the using the tense that the topic indicates in using it. From this analysis, it can be noticed that the Arabic speakers of English make errors in using the third person singular –s more than the other errors in writing tasks.

On the other hand, the audio recording sample shows that there are noticeable differences in the using of the third person singular –s during speaking. The results show that during a conversation people can recast themselves while speaking in order to make their points clear also, they have time to correct and recast their errors. In this audio record (see appendix 2) the researcher found that the participants are recasting their errors in omitting the –s while speaking more than one time. Might be because the participants are living in UK and the environment helps them to speak more than to write. Also, another reason might be that during a conversation you have time to correct your errors also if you did not correct some less problematic errors, you still can be understood because in a conversation there is turn taking between the speakers which allow them to be understood also give them time to think before speaking and correct their errors. However, not all the errors where corrected which may be because that during speaking, we speak spontaneously without thinking of what rule to use or what tense or how to use it, we just speak naturally.

In conclusion, it can be noticed that comparing the writing and speaking samples to find which one make more errors in third person singular –s in present simple are like comparing two different aspects in Language. It is worth mentioning that these errors whether in speaking or writing are performance errors and the participants know the rule and can self-correct if required. The researcher found that the errors made in writing are more according to the omission of the –s than in speaking (see appendix 3). Appendix 3 shows a table of spoken and written sentences of the participants that contains some correct sentences and some incorrect sentences, and the verbs of the incorrect sentences have been underlined. Thus, in this regard the advanced Arabic speakers of English language are still to a certain extent continuing to make errors in third person singular –s in present simple. Although the level of the participants is upper-intermediate, and they are living in UK for a year but they are still committing some errors in applying third person singular –s.

SECTION FOUR: CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

4.1 Conclusion

The present study aimed at investigating the area of the simple present tense, more specifically the third person singular –s. The purpose was to find out whether Arabic speakers of English language are still making errors in using the third person singular –s or not. The literature shows that errors in the pre-contrastive approach was not acceptable, and it was a sign of insufficient learning which the learners could get punished for making errors. In the contrastive approach the learners' first language considered as an impact to the learning of the foreign language which interfere the language learning process and leads to committing errors.

Through the analysis and comparison between both samples of written and spoken, it was clear that Arabic advanced speakers tend to make more errors during writing in omitting the –s than in speaking which might be because the participants are living in UK and they usually speak more than to write. This means that Arabic speakers are still making errors in omitting the –s of the third person singular.

4.2 Suggestion of the study

Many suggestions can be given for practicing third person singular –s. One of the suggestions can be that the teacher needs to concentrate more in clarifying these simple errors by practicing using some useful exercises, activities, rule playing, tasks and speaking games such as one of the speaking games might be that the teacher gives one card to each student and on the card a name of a well-known person is written, then each student will talk about that person's life which appears on his/her card. This might help them to deduce their errors since it is performance errors and can be corrected.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1:

The writing task sample

Write an essay of three paragraphs about what are the advantages and disadvantages of Master-Doctorate licence system?

Appendix 2:

The Audio record sample

<S01>you know I think I will move to live in London

<S02> ohh why? What's wrong with Nottingham?

<S01> I don't like it mmm I feel like London has more advantages than here

<S02> No, I don't think so because I have a relative there and he say sorry says that living in London is expensive and crowded

<S01> I know I know but I think it will be good for job opportunities also it is a tourist place so I will enjoy it

<S02> Ok, yeah, I agree but in Nottingham too you can find a job if you want to yeah and don't forget living here is more comfortable than London

<S01> yeah, I know why you are saying that but I want to go and have some experiences in living in London, you know

<S02> well, as you like.... oh what's your husband say about this?

<S01> mmmm well, he said he agree to live ...oh sorry agrees to live amm in London but also he thinks he might not get comfortable there

<S02> Do he likes to live in London more or Nottingham?

<S01> [laughs] honestly, he like I mean likes to live in Nottingham because he said I feel more relaxed here

<S02> well, maybe you need more time to make your decision, isn't it?

<S01> ohhhh yeah, I think you right, I don't know

Appendix 3:

The underlined verbs are the errors of the participants in omitting the third person singular-s

Written Grammar	Spoken Grammar
-The system based on credits which <u>mean</u> that	-he say sorry says that.....
-It <u>cover</u> the institutional field.	-he said he <u>agree</u> to live.....
-and <u>contain</u> at least 360 hours of study.	-he thinks he might not.....
-It <u>consist</u> of one to two.....	-he like I mean likes.....
-It corresponds to six semesters.....	
-since it gives more emphases.....	-Do he likes to live.....