

## ***GRAMMATICAL MISTAKES IN M.A. STUDENTS' THESES WRITTEN IN ENGLISH: REASONS AND REMEDIES***

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### **ABSTRACT**

The main aim of this paper is to discuss the grammatical mistakes made by M.A. students when writing their theses in English. The paper shows that most M.A. students make a large number of various types of grammatical mistakes in spite of the fact that they have an English course in their first preparatory year of study. This course is supposed to provide them with sufficient and adequate knowledge in English. The discussion of this issue is not based on the assumption that students may make such mistakes when writing their theses, but it is based on concrete evidence represented by samples of these mistakes found in sentences, clauses, phrases and even words extracted from students' theses. It is quite necessary to tackle such a problem and to find the causes and remedies for such mistakes.

The paper consists of two sections. The first section exposes the above issue with samples of different grammatical mistakes taken from M.A. theses written by students in the Dept. of Mathematics, College of Education. These mistakes are classified according to their seriousness, importance and frequency of occurrence to illustrate the main areas where students have more troubles. The second section illustrates the reasons behind such mistakes and presents a number of suggestions as remedies for our problem.

### **Introduction:**

#### **The Problem:**

English language is an important part of M.A. courses in almost all the departments of Iraqi colleges. It is taught to M.A. students to help them understand in their courses and to develop their abilities in writing their theses in particular as well as in different topics. The problems that are associated with this issue which constitute the main idea of this paper include the following:

- Why do M.A. students keep on making a large number of grammatical mistakes though they have an English course in their first preparatory year?
- Why and how is the M.A English course different (or should it be different) from the English courses given to undergraduate students?
- Are there any shortcomings in the English courses taught to the M.A. students which make them keep on making mistakes?

#### **Aims of the Study:**

The study aims at achieving the following objectives:

- Clarifying the significance of the English course taught to M.A. students.

- Diagnosing the main problems facing M.A. students and specifying the areas where they err more.
- Pointing out the main reasons behind students' mistakes in writing.
- Suggesting methods and materials to be used in presenting the lessons of the English course so as to help students make full use of the material taught and thus they will be able to avoid making mistakes.

#### The Hypothesis:

The paper assumes that teaching English to M.A. students is quite advantageous. Teaching must help them master some of the basic rules which help them write English correctly. The paper also assumes that there are certain shortcomings in the methods or materials used to teach the M.A. students or maybe the students themselves have troubles in learning English. It is also assumed that planned and organized teaching of English during the M.A. courses will surely help the students in diagnosing and correcting their mistakes.

#### Procedures of the Study:

The procedures followed in writing this paper are:

- Specifying the main areas where students err more by presenting samples of a number of grammatical mistakes taken from seven M.A. theses before being corrected by the linguistic supervisor.
- Presenting some possible reasons for making mistakes by M.A. students.
- Suggesting a plan to be followed in selecting, arranging and presenting the material which is supposed to be taught to the students in their M.A. courses.

#### Limits of the Study;

This paper limits itself to explain grammatical mistakes made by M.A. students in the Dept. of Mathematics, College of Education. There are many other departments in the college both scientific and literary. The analysis of mistakes is limited to the mistakes made by the M.A. students in the Dept. of Mathematics writing their theses in English as their theses were available to the linguistic supervisor. Moreover, the study is mainly concerned with illustrating those aspects which make students make such mistakes and suggesting methods to be followed by teachers in presenting their material.

#### Significance of the Study:

The study is hoped to be of great importance for both M.A. students writing their theses in English and the teachers teaching them the English course. It is important for students as it helps them identify and correct all types of mistakes students often make in writing and thus avoid doing them in their future writings. The study is also of

significance to teachers as it shows them the main areas where students err more, and thus they will be able to diagnose their students' weaknesses and provide the suitable materials and methods for teaching them. It also presents methods to be used by teachers teaching M.A. students. Applying the suggested methods and procedures will surely help students avoid making most of their grammatical mistakes in writing.

## *SECTION ONE*

### **1.1 INTRODUCTION:**

At university level, English is almost the main language of teaching many subjects especially in scientific departments. This is because:

-Many textbooks, lectures and even books are written in English. It is both good and interesting to use English in teaching, but who ensures the correct and accurate use of English by both teachers (since they are not specialized teachers of English language) and their students. As a result, teachers will focus in teaching on the scientific material they are presenting rather than on the language used to convey and clarify it. Some teachers prefer to translate the presented knowledge into Arabic to make the process of learning easier. One can not deny the fact that there is always a need to make reference to the mother language in explaining and clarifying certain aspects of the material, but it is important to stick to English in presenting most of it.

2- English is needed in almost every aspect of life (not only in teaching in schools or colleges). It is needed as a medium of communication as the world nowadays has become one connected unit due to the modern techniques which join all the parts of the world altogether. Speaking and writing English correctly and adequately have become an urgent necessity for everyone studying, travelling, working or even enjoying himself.

3- English is the language of the world. Most countries use English in teaching. Learners need to use English in their learning. It both enables them acquire their knowledge properly and helps them communicate and share knowledge with others whose language is not Arabic.

This section is going to cover just some of the basic points that often cause problems for foreign learners, specifically M.A. students in the Dept. of Mathematics writing their theses in English.

### 1.2 TYPES OF RULES LEARNERS NEED:

Presenting the following points as the main problems facing students in their writing emphasizes the fact that learning English grammar really helps a learner to use the language better. Grammar means the rules that combine words together in a language. English grammar is a vast and complex body of different rules enabling learners to produce and recognize an infinite number of sentences: grammatical or ungrammatical. O'Dell (1986:27) suggests that one may have knowledge of grammar or a feeling for it (if he is lucky, he may have both). He points out that knowledge of grammar means knowing precisely why, for example, a particular tense is the only possible one in any given case. This knowledge can be acquired by teachers and textbooks. Anyone has a perfect feeling of his native language rather than a grammarian's knowledge of it. One can get a feeling for a foreign language if he surrounds himself with it as much as possible: by listening to it, by living in an English speaking community, by listening to English or American movies....). By doing this, he will be automatically accustomed to the grammatical patterns of English and begin to write and speak accurately.

O'Dell (ibid: 28) adds that learning grammatical rules is not a goal in itself; it is just a method which should help learners to achieve a working knowledge of the language more quickly. Lewis and Hill (1985:78), on the other hand, point out that "the rule is not just a brief verbal description. The rule is "a combination of a wide range of natural examples, verbal description, and, perhaps most importantly of all, the relationship between the verbalization and the examples". Moreover, they add that: "understanding the rule is a *process* in which understanding is deepened through re-cycling examples and explanation".

Students usually make a lot of mistakes when they try to express themselves or paraphrase other writers' ideas by using their own words. It is really a difficult task for them to write quite correctly because one can find a lot of mistakes in the writings of even the students of the department of English. Thus, they must be helped in one way or another to diagnose their weaknesses and know how to avoid them in their present or future writings. Jordan (1997, 100-101) refers to an interesting concept which indicates the borrowing of ideas from books without mentioning the original source. This concept is referred to as 'plagiarism'. He makes a reference to a feature article published in *The Sunday post* (Bangkok, Thailand 18/ 2/ 96) entitled 'Cheating to Get Master's Degree'. This article explored the methods

by which students receive help in writing their theses and concluded by showing how students misunderstand the role of footnotes and quotations in academic papers. This interesting point has been mentioned here to clarify the fact that many types of mistakes may be found in students' papers when they try to express themselves in the abstract, introduction, conclusion and everything written by their own words. But when they copy from reference books or even other theses, one can see that they write correctly without any mistake. Students' mistakes are very useful to show what students have or have not learned. Besides, they show teachers what they still need to teach. Students need to learn the basic rules which govern the arrangements of words and structures in the foreign language. They must be taught the structure system of the language through different examples. Word order, inflections, derivations, and other meaningful features of the language must be clarified to enable them produce meaningful and grammatical sentences.

### **1.3 MAIN AREAS WHERE STUDENTS ERR MORE:**

It is a difficult task for foreign learners to master or even know all types of rules necessary for writing correctly but it is possible for them to master some of the essential ones which may help them do that. Through correcting some of the M.A. students' theses, it has been found that the following points which show the main areas where students err more must be given more attention by teachers teaching M.A. students. These points are cited below with samples of the most common and repeated mistakes made by M.A. students in writing their papers.

#### **1.3.1. WORD ORDER AND SENTENCE STRUCTURE:**

An important aspect of the English system is the use of word order. This aspect shows the order in which words are put and determines the function they have in sentences. As a result, changes in the word order often cause differences in the grammatical function as well as in the meaning of the resulting sentences (Al-Mutawa and Kailaini 1989:78). Moreover, the normal sequence of sentence structures varies depending on the type of the sentence produced. For example, English declarative sentences usually start with a noun phrase as the sentence subject followed by a predicate including the verb and the complements. Besides, there are rules which govern the use of every word used in producing sentences.

Students' attention must be drawn to the different types of rules helping to choose the appropriate words in the appropriate positions. They must also know something about the relationships which hold between the words of the sentence and which determine the presence of a word of a certain class rather than another. The following samples show students' shortcomings concerning the construction of sentences, the order of their elements and the choice of suitable ones in making sentences:

- In general, can write it....
- And from this, can written down....
- The cyclic decomposition as follows:
- P(t) continuous. , -g odd (even). , - It easy.
- We denote they.....
- We have immediately that ....
- We obtained by theorem (3.2.1) .....
- Let n any.... , -Let... is....
- Our interest is in to define....
- .... which denote they....
- these forms which are need them....
- We believe that are many.....

*Notes: they produce incomplete sentences: a sentence without a subject or a verb ; they misuse the correct verb forms in a specific tense; they ignore the correct arrangement of sentence parts to produce grammatical constructions.*

### 1.3.2. VERB TENSES:

One of the most difficult problems for foreign learners of English is the differences between the various forms and uses of English tenses. From lectures or even textbooks, students can learn the particular forms and uses of each tense, but they can neither use the correct forms in writing nor tell how to apply one tense rather than another in actual use. As a result, they keep making different types of mistakes in connection to verb forms and uses in any particular situation.

- This fact satisfied.....
- The following lemma which appeared in.....
- In this paper (in this section), we find... ( apply , compute ,review )
- The story of this equation begins in the early 1870.
- The N-function does not satisfies..... ,
- This is contradicts..... , it is satisfies.....
- We have introduce .... , we having by use table.....
- If we combining .... , we can proved... , we must applying...

- The result be as follows...
- It consisting of....

### 1.3.3. ARTICLES:

The use of articles causes a very big problem for foreign learners. Students must be aware of the basic rules for using articles to help them produce correct sentences. Nouns, on the other hand, can be of different types, mainly countable and uncountable. Learners need to know the different types of nouns, their forms and uses as this facilitates the process of understanding the correct use of articles.

Note the following mistakes:

- positive integer , principal domain , cyclic group
- interior fixed point , prime number
- a zeros , a characters , a class functions , a GN functions
- character table of , cyclic group
- there is a largest element
- non- decreasing a linear.

### 1.3.4. CONCORD OR AGREEMENT:

There are several types of concord in English, but the most important ones include concord of number between subject and verbs, singular and plural forms of demonstratives and adjectives, subject-complement concord of number, subject-object concord of number, person, and gender (Al-Mutawa and Kailaini 1989: 78-79). Note the following samples of mistakes from students' papers

- A and B are similar matrix.
- There exist....
- It follow that... , This yield .....
- Two representation T and T is said...
- a zeros , a characters , a GN functions.
- The values of ..... is an integers number.
- Every values of T .....
- The functions that satisfies.....

### 1.3.5. PASSIVE VOICE:

Passive voice is widely used by students in their papers. But they neither use it correctly nor know the main idea behind using it. Its forms and uses in different tenses must be made clear to students. The following examples show how they mix between using the active and passive voices:

- Using active for passive:

- This thesis entitles....
  - This forms which called ..... and denote by... ( concord and passive)
- The general form is giving by..... -
- The results change by changing.....
  - ..... which display in table.....
- Using passive for active:**
- Lemma which is appeared in .....
  - The following proposition which is appeared in .....
- Wrong forms of the verbs used in the passive voice:**
- It given by..... , ...are give... ,..... is motivate.... , ... is define..... , ....is display..... , .... will be denote.....
  - These forms which are denote by ....
  - The operator induce by.....
  - A lot of work that can done..... , this can done.....
  - It easily seen that.....

### **1.3.6. THE USE OF CLAUSES:**

English sentences are not only composed of a number of simple elements joined together in a certain order to produce grammatical utterances but they are also composed of larger units, like phrases , clauses or even complete sentences to convey more complicated ideas. Learners need to know something about other types of English sentences: compound and complex. From correcting students' mistakes, it has been found that students ignore the differences between types, forms and uses of different sentences, and the fact that verbs may require different types of complements :simple or clausal depending on the class of verb in question .

#### **- Using clauses as complete sentences:**

- That number that satisfies this....
- Using the....., follows.....

#### **-Misunderstanding the form and use of clauses:**

- The matrix whose correspond to.....
- The intersection of..... form an..... is called....
- Suppose E be a .....
- To find....., by using lemma ....
- To find ....., it must be applying.....
- To find the rational.....by theorem ( 3.1.2) be .....
- ..... a rich area in which to explore the....
- The growth estimate above yields.....
- Using this equation, one get ....

### **1.3.7. PREPOSITONS:**

The use of a certain preposition in English rather than another depends on the words which it follows. Prepositions are always followed by either a noun or the gerund. Students sometimes misuse prepositions and the form of the following words. Note the following:

- ..... which obtained by omitted.....
- In the follows steps:.....
- .....consists the elements.....
- .....devoted with.....

### **1.3.8. MISCILLENEOUS ERRORS:**

- Words like *another, forward, inequality, otherwise, therefore, subset...* are written as one unit unlike what some students do: *an other, forwards, in equality.....* Others, like *non-negative, non-zero, non constant*, need to be separated and must not be written as one whole.
- Different types of punctuation mistakes are found in their papers.
- Possession: Artin characters  
Orlicz contribution
- wrong choice of words: *it's rank*  
*Its difficult*
- repetition of unnecessary words:  
In chapter one and chapter two....  
By theorem (2.2.12) , theorem(2.3.5) , and theorem (2.3.11).....

The above brief listing does not obviously cover all the types of mistakes students usually make. There are even many other examples of different types of mistakes which reflect the low standard of students which needs to be improved by using good and practical teaching methods. A number of students' mistakes are considered simple, but this attitude is completely mistaken since the resulting sentence is an ungrammatical or unacceptable sentence of English.

- Note that an example may include more than one type of mistakes.*
- note that the examples given are not complete sentences, we have just extracted out the required mistakes from within the sentences. Moreover, the mistakes taken from the theses are cited together without reference to the titles of the theses as there are many aspects of similarities in the types of mistakes which the students maketed.*

## *Section Two*

### **2.1 Introduction:**

In the first section of this paper, the main types of mistakes maketed by M.A. students have been classified and cited. Their mistakes indicate that they misuse and misunderstand the different forms and

uses of English verbs and their tenses, the correct use and forms of English parts of speech, the correct order of words in producing different types of English sentences and many other important issues related to producing a correct English sentence. In this section, the main reasons which make students make their mistakes will be illustrated and then the essentials required for mastering the writing skill at an advanced level for special purposes will be clarified. This will be done by presenting different techniques for writing sentences and short paragraphs on specific topics, by suggesting ways for correcting their written works and ways for presenting the information necessary for their learning.

### 2.2 Why Do Students Make Mistakes?

Most M.A. students use English in writing their theses. So, it is quite necessary for them to master the essentials of English helping them produce correct and accurate writing. As it has been noticed from correcting students' theses, students make a large number of mistakes when they try to express themselves by using their own words and a few or even no mistakes when they copy literally from different sources. What they need to overcome their weaknesses and problems is to know, understand and make full use of the important English rules helping them improve themselves.

It is widely agreed that language " is a system of rules that the learner has to acquire, and that 'trying out' language and making errors are a natural and unavoidable part of this process" (Doff, 1988 : 187). Students' errors are very useful for showing what they have or have not learnt. So, instead of seeing errors negatively ( as a sign of failure), teachers, as well as students, can see them positively as a mark of what teachers still need to teach clearly, a clue to clarify where students err more and thus what students do not know or misunderstand. This leads to the topic above: why do they make such grammatical mistakes?

- M.A. students as most Iraqis consider English as the most difficult subject they have ever had since their primary learning. This idea has grown inside them due to the little and inefficient teaching given to them in their first years of study. A year after year, they began to find English a very difficult and even fearful subject that they owe when they just hear about it.

- Students may make mistakes because they are unable to understand what is presented to them. This is due to two factors: either to the students themselves who misuse and misunderstand the different and numerous forms and uses of the various English structures and expressions or their teachers who devalue the importance of the serious and efficient English teaching for M.A. students. Sometimes teachers do not really present the lesson in a suitable or serious way which makes students get use of the information given to them or they do not successfully present the suitable material for students' learning.

- Sometimes students understand certain forms and rules given to them and are able to use them in making and analyzing short and simple sentences. However, they have problems when they join sentences to make continuous paragraphs or when they write but do not know if they have made mistakes or have not. Whatever the reasons are, it is a clear and undisputable fact that most English learners have serious and continuous problems in learning English.

### 2.3 How Can Students Avoid Making Mistakes?

#### 2.3.1. Setting out Learning Goals:

Teachers should set out their learning goals clearly before starting to teach anything. They must specify what their students' needs are, why they have their English course and how they can urge their students make full use of the English course given to them. When a teacher sets out his plan for the course, he has to take into his consideration the ability level of his students, their age and educational background. Specifying these elements before starting to teach is necessary to determine the types of material and activities students need to have (Minton, 1997:46).

He (Ibid :48) points out : "Learning goals are always a compromise between what the students feel they want to learn, and the teachers' needs- of what they have to do to pass the assessment, for instance". Since teachers are considered as the centre of the teaching process, it has become quite important for them to undertake such a responsibility.

A distinction must be made between accuracy and fluency practices. Teaching a language must involve the achieving of two important objectives: learning to use the language as an effective means of communication and using it accurately. Lewis and Hill (1985: 35) point out that the two objectives overlap as the students who make too many mistakes will not communicate well. On the other hand, it is usually

possible for some students to communicate effectively even if the message contains a large number of mistakes. Good language teaching must consider the types of activities developing both learners' accuracy and fluency.

### 2.3.2. Correcting Students' Mistakes:

It is a normal matter that students make errors when writing as it is part of their learning process. Without their mistakes teachers can not tell what students have mastered or have not. The question which is raised now is how the teacher deals with their mistakes, that is, how s/he corrects them and helps his students avoid making them later on. The answer to this question mainly depends on the type of activity they are doing and its aim.

Doff (1988: 189) clarifies that there is no single best technique for correcting errors. He points out that

"the most important thing is for the teacher to be flexible and to be aware of the effect on each individual learner of correcting errors. So, a good teacher will use different strategies according to the kind of error, the ability and personality of the student and the general atmosphere of the class."

Written works are also given to students to improve their writing skill and their ability of expression by using English. Writing activities must be given to students as part of their participation. Students must be encouraged to write about different general and specific subjects in the English lesson as their teachers need to know what they have or have not mastered. As a result, students have to be guided and controlled when writing during their first lessons. After finishing writing a piece of work, students' writings must be corrected to evaluate them. This can be done by following one of the following techniques:

First: after writing, students can exchange papers with each other and each tries his best to underlie his colleague's mistakes and then hands back his paper so as to allow him correct his own mistakes. Then, all students hand their papers to their teachers to correct them. The teacher, in his turn, checks his students' papers, evaluates them, then underlies their mistakes to use them as samples for clarifying and explaining on the board. Although this technique is time consuming, it has fruitful results and wonderful effects on students.

Second: teachers must draw their students' attention to the mistakes they make in their presentations to help them avoid doing such mistakes in the future. Teachers may underlie students' mistakes and

for each mistake specify its type, that is, whether it is a mistake related to spelling, tense, wrong form, passive, wrong word order...etc. This technique encourages students to ask and look for the reasons of their mistakes in references, dictionaries and lectures. Doing this will both reinforce the piece of information they have erred in and help them avoid doing it in the future.

Stern (1992:151) emphasizes the importance of error correction as it is part of the grammar learning process. Since error production is inevitable in second language learning, this has encouraged a greater tolerance in teacher's view to students' performance. Teachers, as well as students, should be active participants in correcting errors as it is necessarily required to complete the cycle of the classroom treatment of grammar.

### 2.3.3. What May an M.A. Academic Course Include?

Usually the choice of what is taught to M.A. students is left to the choice and selection of the teacher who is going to teach them the course. This may not ensure the quality of the learning required to improve students' levels as it is known that most students find English very difficult to learn and have little knowledge which is not quite enough to qualify them write well. Teachers may select subjects which can be neither useful nor relevant to the course title. So, what is needed to get to the ultimate goals of teaching English is to arrange a series of chosen topics and subjects which teachers of English find necessary and useful for presenting their lessons.

As a suggestion of what an M.A. English course may include, the following areas may be covered and included in the course. Moreover, those who teach at the M.A courses should be well chosen from those who are highly competent and qualified with a long term academic experience.

1-Lesson Presentation and Note-Taking: this area of presenting English highly depends on what and how to present, how much time a teacher needs to present the given material and the time he allocates for his students to take notes.

2-Example, Explanation and Practice: providing the lesson with examples (especially concrete ones) and supporting them with explanation is an essential and important step to be done after presenting the lesson. Moreover, students should be given enough time to practise enabling them understand and comprehend the lesson

presented. Teachers should let their students do both oral practices which concentrate on developing their fluency and written ones which develop their accuracy as the good language teaching program should involve both. Lewis and Hill (1985:79) emphasize the importance of applying example, explanation and practice in a language classroom. They point out: "Understanding is a cycle which involves each of explicit explanation, example, and practice. Each part of the cycle contributes in its own way to understanding." It is not enough for students to understand intellectually, what they understand should directly affect their language performance.

**3-Academic Writing:** the teacher must allow his students to write compositions, reports and even essays about specific chosen subjects. It is preferred that the subjects are chosen by the students themselves as they may choose subjects with rich and familiar vocabulary and ideas. This ensures the flow of ideas concerning a particular subject and enables them to write continuous passages without hesitation.

**4-Seminars:** seminars must be held regularly. Students need to know what they have learnt and what extent of learning they have reached. Seminars show both their ability of writing and expressing themselves orally. Topics to be discussed in their seminars must be related to subjects about the items of the English language they are learning and to specific ones dealing with their specialization or subjects they like to discuss. Questions can be raised to motivate good and fruitful discussion adding interesting and useful atmosphere to the lesson. Moreover, opportunity must be given to each student more than once in the course as this encourages them to search more, write and discuss things about English. This helps them both learn how to avoid making mistakes and increases their confidence in themselves as they find themselves write well and speak fluently.

**5-Reading Comprehension:** by this a teacher can teach his students a lot of things related to mastering a number of learning skills. Students can get some knowledge about English vocabulary, spelling, punctuation marks, pronunciation, rules of writing and even some grammatical structures. Knowing about all these things may help students read well and rapidly, express themselves fluently and as a result write correctly. Materials chosen for reading must be selected carefully so as not to cause students troubles due to long or unfamiliar words or expressions.

#### 2.3.4 Using Texts in Teaching:

Teachers can use different types of materials, methods and techniques in teaching their M.A. students. Good teaching of English does not entirely depend on teaching the language grammatical rules. Texts can also be used to maintain a high degree of learning different language skills. Topics of texts used in teaching M.A. students should vary, that is, they should deal with both general and specific subjects. Specific subject texts mainly deal with students' specialist subject area, written by a specialist for specialists and not for language teaching purpose.

General subject texts can be of great importance when teaching students the language. Reading and discussing texts about different general subjects can help students gain some knowledge about language structures, new vocabulary, word-formation, derivations.... Besides, using general subject texts can develop students' abilities at reading and writing. Later on, specific subject texts (or sometimes they are referred to as authentic texts) can be used to achieve the same required aims but this time students will gain some extra knowledge related to their own specializations. But Jordan(1997 :113-114) thinks that using an authentic text may pose some problems as the texts are removed from their original context and this may mislead students' ideas. Moreover, he wonders about the significance, reasons, relevance and results of using such texts. As a result, he has concluded that it is better to use an adapted text or a specially written one as long as the teacher feels it suitable and necessary for his students. But, this does not mean that authentic texts cannot be entirely used in teaching. Students' own materials(things they study as part of their curriculum) can be used to gain more pedagogical aims related both to their learning of English and their own

Lewis and Hill (1985:28) ,on the other hand, emphasize the importance of using real materials( like a short tape recording of natural speech, a piece of real printed material, menus, letters, lists,etc.) in teaching English. They illustrate that using real materials is supposed to provide a more natural and interesting basis for language learning on all levels. Lewis and Hill (ibid) state:

"Real materials show students that, even at the earlier stages of their learning, what they are learning is useful outside the classroom. They also reassure students that what they are studying is real".

It is quite clear now that using authentic texts and real material is both useful and interesting as it makes the lesson acceptable and the class livelier. Moreover, it provides a rich environment for students' mistakes if they are asked to write essays or summaries about the given

topics. This will give the teacher a chance to know more about students' comprehension and abilities and thus teachers will be able to provide suitable remedies.

### 2.3.5. Language Learning Is Cyclic:

It was traditionally assumed that learning a language was linear, the structures of the language were presented in a single sequence. But nowadays, no one believes that language learning is linear. The same language item needs to be studied again throughout a course. Lewis and Hill (ibid: 32) illustrate that there are at least three reasons for doing this:

- a. "Learners forget, so, straightforward revision is necessary from time to time.
- b. Additional uses of a structure need to be studied...
- c. Most importantly of all,...,is that as learners advance they need to deepen their understanding."

It is necessary to teach and re-teach different language items or structures to obtain fruitful language teaching. Learning a language must involve revision, extension of knowledge of the use and forms of the different structures which students have already learnt. Finocchiero (1986:18) reaffirms this point but uses a different term (spiral). She emphasizes the importance of using the spiral approach in teaching by saying: "Any new item of language should be continually re-entered in other larger language contexts with which it can co-occur."

The principle of the cyclic or spiral treatment of grammatical items can be applied not only to teaching grammar but to teaching any other subject matter; however it is important to teaching grammar. Stern (1992: 138) clarifies that this approach has an advantage as "it is unnecessary in designing a syllabus to present a grammatical topic in its entirety at the point where it first appears" (as the teacher will repeat explaining it later on).

### 2.4. Suggestions:

The following suggestions are going to be presented to point out that there may be all sorts of ways in which students can find possible ways for learning English accurately if not perfectly. Some of the given suggestions sum up the above discussion:

#### 1- Supporting students while they are learning:

M.A. students need all types of support during their study and writing their theses. This includes information, advice, guidance,

tutoring and counseling. During their second year of study, M.A. students need far more guidance and help (from all their teachers not only their supervisor) to discover their best learning route.

## 2- Practice and repetition:

All types of learning especially learning skills highly depend on practice and repetition. Minton (1997: 155) points out that one can achieve the skill as long as he clearly understands what it is he is trying to do and sets himself targets. He says "Skills arise from habit – forming practice."

## 3-What can a student do if s/he has made a mistake?

O'Dell (1986: 22) suggests three things that a learner can do if he has made a mistake:

**First:** he must understand what was wrong and why it was wrong. He can be helped by his teachers, grammar books or even his dictionary. Students can consult different English grammar books or references where they can find the answers they need.

**Second:** he can write the correct forms several times (and this what the second point above emphasizes).

**Third:** he must try to use the word or expression correctly in his future writings. The English language teacher can be responsible for this job. He can make his students write the correct forms of their mistakes by letting them write paragraphs, compositions or even essays dealing with subjects they are interested in as such subjects might inspire them with wonderful ideas and familiar vocabulary. Students have to be encouraged to write down all those structures which cause them a lot of troubles. Students who make mistakes do not usually realize that they are doing so. Teachers can let them produce all types of the possible mistakes they may make when they let them write freely.

## 4- Having a small notebook as a reference:

It is an interesting and useful way for students, as well as any learner of English, to have a small notebook to cite in whatever may attract his attention while reading or writing a foreign language: a new word, a strange expression, a specific grammatical structure, a mistake he made...etc. He can classify his notebook into a number of sections depending on the type of things he wants to write down. Writing down his own mistakes is quite helpful as it keeps his eyes open for the mistakes he has already made and he will try his best to avoid making them in the future.

- A useful approach which teachers can follow to help their students avoid making mistakes is writing texts in students' specialization with

a certain number of different types of mistakes the students usually make, e.g. spelling mistakes, mistakes in capitalization and punctuation marks, and grammatical mistake etc. The teacher asks his students to specify the mistakes and try to check them clarifying the reasons of their incorrectness and ways of correcting them.

- Teachers are supposed to be the basic source of information from which students can get their knowledge; however, students must be encouraged to have other sources of information. Students need to have a good grammar book( with exercises) and a good and comprehensive English dictionary. They can read and consult their grammar book or dictionary whenever they feel the need for a piece of information related to a specific structure or a mistake or the need for knowing the meaning or pronunciation of a certain word or expression.

-Variety: using variety of methods and/or activities in teaching is required to obtain good teaching results. Hutchinson and Waters (1987: 142) describe variety as the spice of learning. A teacher can achieve a high level of learning if he varies in the use of different methods of preparing and explaining the lesson, activities, exercises, types of material presented. There must be a variety of activities, discussion, questions..etc. to keep the mind alert, keep the class active and enthusiastic and for sure, this allows no time for boredom in the class.

### Conclusions:

This paper deals with the main areas of grammar which M.A. students may misunderstand and misuse in their writings. The samples of errors taken from students' research theses reflect the fact that learners have serious problems in learning English and since English is important and required to be learnt, it has become quite necessary to deal with it seriously and efficiently.

One can learn from his own mistakes not only in learning English but also in doing many things in life. Teachers have the greatest part in helping students avoid making mistakes of all types. They can encourage students to use the new structures deliberately in their speech or writing. Even if they make more mistakes, they can be still guided and encouraged to diagnose them and to learn how to correct them. Teachers can also use different types of techniques which can help make the English language classroom a more enjoyable and effective environment for both learners and teachers. By doing so,

some of the students' difficulties can be overcome by direct instructions and explanations which must be offered by the teacher.

On the other hand, students must be given exercises which require them to think and add something of their own, but these exercises should be guided and controlled so that students do not make so many mistakes. Then,

students need to progress when they master the basic skills of sentence writing: from controlled writing exercises to freer paragraph writing. Students can be encouraged to write down all those structures which cause them a lot of troubles and where they err more. Students do not know that they are going to make such mistakes. Teachers can help them to produce all the possible mistakes which they may make by giving them a chance to write paragraphs or even essays about subjects in their specializations. Therefore, teachers, as well as students, can diagnose the different types of mistakes which students may make in the future and thus be able to put the suitable remedies to avoid making these mistakes.

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## الأخطاء النحوية في رسائل طلبة الماجستير المكتوبة باللغة الانكليزية:

### الأسباب والحلول

إسراء طالب سعد

#### المخلص:

الهدف الرئيسي من البحث هو مناقشة مسألة الأخطاء النحوية التي يقوم بها طلبة الماجستير الذين يكتبون رسائلهم باللغة الانكليزية. يوضح البحث حقيقة إن أغلبية طلبة الماجستير يقومون بعمل الكثير من الأخطاء النحوية بالرغم من كونهم يأخذون فصلا دراسيا كاملا عن اللغة الانكليزية, يفترض أن يوفر لهم هذا الفصل الدراسي المعلومات الكافية والملائمة حول اللغة الانكليزية. إن مناقشة مثل هذه الأخطاء النحوية لا تعتمد على افتراض أن الطلبة يقومون بعمل مثل هذه الأخطاء بل إنها مبنية على أدلة ملموسة متمثلة بجمل وعبارات وحتى كلمات مستخرجة من رسائل الطلبة قبل تصحيحها من قبل المقوم اللغوي. من الضروري معالجة مثل هذه المسألة ومحاولة معرفة الأسباب وإيجاد الحلول للأخطاء التي يقوم بها الطلبة.

يتألف البحث من جزئين: يستعرض الجزء الأول المسألة أعلاه مع نماذج من الأخطاء النحوية المختلفة والمأخوذة من رسائل طلبة الماجستير في قسم الرياضيات اكلية التربية للبنات والمذكورة عناوينها في نهاية هذا البحث. صنفت هذه الأخطاء وفقا لجديتها, أهميتها ودرجة تكرارها من اجل توضيح النقاط الأساسية التي تسبب مشاكل أكثر للطلبة. أما الجزء الثاني فيوضح أسباب قيام الطلبة بمثل هذه الأخطاء ويقدم عدد من المقترحات كعلاج لهذه المشكلة. تتمثل الحلول أو العلاجات الملائمة لحل هذه المشكلة باقتراح ما قد يتضمنه الفصل الدراسي للغة الانكليزية لطلبة الماجستير, وكيفية تقديم هذا الفصل الدراسي, وإرشاد الطلبة خلال دراستهم وكيفية تحسين كتاباتهم وجعلها أكثر دقة.