An Analysis of Intralingual Errors in the Writing of Saudi EFL Learners: A Comparison of Intermediate and Advanced Proficiency Levels

تحليل الأخطاء التطورية اللغوية لدي الطلاب السعوديين الناطقين باللغة الإنجليزية كلغة ثانية أو أجنبية في مهارة الكتابة للمستوي المتوسط والمتقدم

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الملخص:

تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى تحليل الأخطاء التطورية اللغوية بين الطلاب السعوديين الناطقين باللغة الإنجليزية كلغة ثانية او أجنبية في مهارة الكتابة لمستوين مختلفين من اللغة الإنجليزية وهما، المستوي المتوسط والمتقدم. شاركت في هذا البحث ٦٠ طالبة سعودية جامعية في السنة الأولى من دراستهن للغة الإنجليزية في إحدى الجامعات السعودية. تم إجراء فحص لأخطاء الكتابة لدى الطالبات. تم منح المشاركين واجبات كتابة أسبوعية كجزء من خطط تقييمهم، وتم تصنيف وتحليل الأخطاء التالية: التبسيط، والعمومية، والأخطاء الناتجة من صعوبة اللغة والتصحيح المفرط. والأخطاء الفرضية. كشفت النتائج أن الأخطاء الفرضية كانت الأكثر تكرارًا في كلا المجموعتين، ولكن الأخطاء الناتجة من صعوبة قواعد اللغة كانت الأقل تكرارًا. قام المتعلمون ذو المستوى المتوسط بارتكاب أخطاء أكثر في قواعد التبسيط والعمومية في كتابتهم مقارنة بالأخطاء الفرضية للطالبات ذوات المستوي المتقدم. تكمن أهمية هذه الدراسة في مقارنتها لأنماط الأخطاء اللغوية في مهارة الكتابة للمتعلمين على مستويين مختلفين من المهارة اللغوية، ويوفر تحديد هذه الأنماط قيمة للمعلمين ومدرسين اللغة في تطوير أساليب وطرق التدريس والمساعدة في اكتساب اللغة الإنجليزية لدي الطلاب السعوديين وفقاً لمستواهم اللغوي. بشكل عام، تسلط هذه الدراسة الضوء على التحديات اللغوية التي تواجهها الطالبات السعوديات المستخدمين للغة كلغة ثانية أو أجنبية وتقدم الدراسة اقتراحات لتعزيز منهجيات تعلم واكتساب اللغة الإنجليزية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: دراسة مقارنة، تحليل الأخطاء، أخطاء لغوية، مهارة الكتابة بلغة ثانية، متعلمون سعوديون.

Abstract:

The aim of this study is to investigate intralingual errors among Saudi second language (EFL) learners at intermediate and advanced proficiency levels. Sixty female Saudi undergraduate students in their first academic year of studying English at a Saudi Arabian university participated in this research. An error analysis was conducted to examine the students' writing errors. Participants were given weekly writing assignments as part of their assessment plans, and the following errors were categorised and analysed: simplification, overgeneralisation, hypercorrection, fossilisation, avoidance, and false hypothesis errors. The findings revealed that false hypothesis errors were the most frequent errors in both groups, but fossilisation errors were the least frequent. Intermediate learners made more simplification and overgeneralisation errors in their writing than false hypothesis errors at the advanced level. This research sheds light on the linguistic challenges faced by Saudi L2 learners and makes suggestions for enhancing language learning and teaching methodologies. Overall, the study identifies the different patterns of writing errors which provides valuable insights for educators in developing targeted interventions and effective language instruction for EFL writing. In conclusion, this study highlights the common use of false hypothesis errors among Saudi EFL learners at intermediate and advanced proficiency levels, revealing distinct patterns of intralingual errors in writing, and advocates for tailored pedagogical strategies to address these challenges and enhance language learning outcomes.

Keywords: Optimism, Pessimism, EFL Learners, Positive Psychology, Language Proficiency.

Introduction

Writing has long been recognised as a primary productive skill for English second language (L2) learners and vital for enabling them to communicate proficiently (1). L2 writing skills also play an essential role in academic success (2). However, writing skills are complex, and mastering them takes effort, even for native English speakers. However, L2 or English as a foreign language (EFL) learners face additional difficulties when composing paragraphs on various topics (1).

Native Arabic-speaking EFL learners, including those from Saudi Arabia, often struggle to construct grammatically accurate and coherent sentences and effectively convey their thoughts and ideas in English, which hinders their writing ability, despite possessing basic comprehension of the English language (3). Alkubaidi (4) (p152) emphasised "the lack of linguistic competence among these students, which adversely affects their overall writing proficiency and leads to various types of errors".

Since writing is one of the most complex and demanding aspects of language acquisition, language learners frequently face difficulties in writing and make errors during the early stages of learning (5). Examining learners' errors can pinpoint gaps in their linguistic competence and provide valuable insights into the areas in which they require further instruction (6). Moreover, learners' errors can indicate their developmental progress and reflect improvements in their writing and communication abilities (7). Ababneh (8) supported this idea by explaining that writing involves multiple interlinked stages and cognitive processes that must all work harmoniously to produce successful writing.

Since the late 1960s, L2 learners' errors have been a focus of interest because examining error types can provide greater insight into their nature and sources(9). Numerous research studies, including studies across Arabia and in Gulf countries such as Saudi Arabia, have investigated and analysed EFL learners' errors to shed light on learners' learning and cognitive processes. Some of these studies will be discussed further in the literature review. However, to the best of the author's knowledge, no studies have been conducted to investigate types of developmental errors, specifically intralingual' errors, in Saudi learners' writing and/or to compare the errors at two English language proficiency levels to overcome the challenges faced by L2 learners. Thus, in the current study attempts to investigate and analyse the types of developmental and intralingual writing errors made by Saudi female learners who were studying English as a core module at the university level. The study findings may prove useful for supporting ESL teachers in modifying teaching materials and developing appropriate teaching strategies based on learners' individual needs. Overall, we aimed to improve Saudi L2 learners' writing abilities while providing them with more positive language learning experiences.

Research Questions

The study is designed to answer the following questions:
1. What are the most common types of intralingual writing errors that female Saudi EFL learners make?
2. How do the types and frequencies of writing errors differ between female intermediate- and advanced-level Saudi EFL learners?
3. What are the specific causes intralingual errors, made by Saudi EFL learners?

To help answer these questions, this paper will shed light on existing studies on error analysis. Additionally, it will focus on the challenges of analysing academic writing errors in EFL contexts, particularly in Saudi learning contexts.

Literature Review

Before discussing previous research on L2 writing errors and their sources, it is important to shed light on theories of second language acquisition (SLA) and their implications for L2 learners' errors. Therefore, we present a focused review of previous research on L2 writing errors and their causes in general and Saudi EFL contexts.

Overview of SLA Theories and Error Analysis

SLA refers to the process that individual learners undertake to acquire a second or foreign language (10), usually after they have acquired most of the elements and structure of their first language (11). According to Saville-Troike and Barto (11), SLA may involve learning an L2 informally in a social context, formally in classrooms, or combining these contexts and circumstances. Thus, understanding SLA is a means of comprehending how diverse learners acquire a TL in different environments. In addition, SLA comprises several variables that may influence learners' language proficiency, such as the relationships of language competence with cognitive variations, social responsibility, second culture learning, first language interference, the creation of new linguistic systems, the learning of L2 discourse, communicative language functions, and errors produced by L2 learners(12). To understand SLA, a close investigation of each of these factors should be conducted to understand the complexity of L2 learning. Thus, I attempted to understand Saudi L2 learning by closely examining some of the above-mentioned factors and analysing L2 learners' intralingual errors.

Error analysis is essential within SLA for investigating and understanding errors made by L2 learners during the TL learning process. This section provides an overview of error analysis, the key theories related to SLA, and their connection to L2 learners' errors.

Error analysis in SLA means examining learners' errors and their sources, which require further investigation by teachers and language educators. This analytical process creates greater awareness among linguists and learners of the challenges of L2 learning, according to Corder (13) (p35), who asserted that "the

errors that learners make are a major element in the feedback system of the process we call language teaching and learning".

Recent studies on L2 learning have focused on learners' L2 productions, which usually contain errors, especially in the early stages of language learning. Errors are important because they allow language educators and linguists to understand the difficulties of L2 learning and become more aware of the areas that are sources of challenge for learners. Thus, error analysis has become a crucial area of focus for linguists wishing to understand the nature of L2 learners' errors.

In SLA, error analysis is defined as a linguistic approach that focuses on examining the linguistic errors committed by L2 learners and involves contrasting the errors committed by L2 learners in their first language (referred to as L1 transferred or interlanguage errors) with those made in the TL. It may also involve a close examination of errors made in the TL itself, which are commonly referred to as developmental or intra-language errors. Khansir (14) stated that the main objective of SLA error analysis is to analyse the significance of errors made by language learners as they attempt to attain the desired level of language proficiency. However, in L2 learning, errors in L2 production are not limited to interlanguage or intra-language errors but may be influenced by many other internal and external factors. Khansir (14) stated that several factors generally contribute to SLA errors, including the extent of L2 exposure, the difficulties presented by the new linguistic system and structure, and individual variations among L2 learners and their cognitive processes.

Khansir (14) noted that although L2 learners make frequent errors, they do not always recognise them; therefore, teachers or researchers need to identify the sources of the errors. Ellis (15) noted the differences between errors and mistakes. According to Ellis, errors indicate gaps in L2 learning, whereas mistakes represent learners' occasional lapses. Learners who make mistakes can acknowledge and instantly self-correct them or correct them when directly prompted to do so by their instructors; thus, errors do not always reflect a lack of competence so much as slips of the tongue that occur from time to time. However, errors in L2 occur due to various contributing factors that must be identified using appropriate analysis to find practical solutions for improving L2 learners' language proficiency. Ellis (15) clearly distinguished between mistakes and errors, stating that mistakes reflect failures to construct a new language system that may go undetected, whereas errors, including those related to L2 competency, are due to deviations in grammar and L2 rule conventions from the native language. Accordingly, error analysis can be an essential aid when teaching or learning a language in ESL contexts, providing teachers with a valuable tool for evaluating and adapting their methods (16). Corder(5) asserted that the primary aim of error analysis should be to identify what L2 learners know or do not know and to provide linguists and language educators with the data needed to facilitate learners' proper comprehension of TLs as they form accurate understandings of their rules. Before discussing the

different types of errors and recent studies on L2 writing errors, it is worth mentioning briefly the key theories related to SLA and their connection to L2 learners' errors.

Behaviourism and Error Analysis

During the 1940s and 1950s, Skinner's behaviourist views of L2 learning had a great influence on the SLA field. According to Skinner, children learn a language by imitating what they hear around them, and they continue to learn correctly when they are rewarded with positive reinforcement, such as praise or effective communication (17). Thus, children copy language patterns and sounds in their surrounding environments until they form habits regarding the quality, quantity, and reinforcement of the language. This concept of learning considers children's environments to be the major source of their language acquisition. Between the 1940s and 1970s, behaviourist theory greatly influenced both L2 teaching and learning. During this period, L2 learners were typically instructed through imitation and memorisation, but this approach may lead to L2 learning that leans too heavily on habits developed during learners' L1 learning, which can interfere with the formation of appropriate SLA habits. The development of the behaviourists theory led to the contrastive analysis hypotheses (CAH) approach, based on the idea that errors are due to habits transferred from L1 to L2 learning (17). Hence, teachers and researchers used behaviourist techniques to enhance language learners' correction and shaping efforts, including corrective feedback and reinforcement strategies to address language learners' errors. Critics have pointed out that this system oversimplifies SLA while ignoring crucial aspects of L2 learning, even though it is often successful in correcting language problems and forming appropriate behaviours. Since that, the behaviourist approaches to SLA have been largely superseded by more comprehensive theories, such as interlanguage and sociocultural theories. These theories take account of mistakes made while learning, the first languages of learners, the learning contexts, and current teaching methodologies (17). According to Lightbown (17), modern theories provide complete perspectives on the L2 learning process and associated errors, building a foundation for contemporary instructional practices. Skinner's behaviourist theories of language acquisition fostered teaching techniques that emphasise memory, imitation, and reinforcement during L2 learning. However, more modern theories of SLA consider different acquisition language aspects that influence L2 learners' errors, such as interlanguage development and the impact of sociocultural factors on language use and language competence.

Contrastive Analysis and Error Analysis

Following criticism of behaviourist theories, linguists found that errors cannot always be interpreted in terms of habit formation. According to the CAH, L2 learners' errors can be due to the influence of their first languages on the TL (17). However, at the beginning of the 1970s,

thorough investigation in the SLA field revealed that not all mistakes could be explained solely by the transference of L1 patterns or L1 habit formation. Thus, another explanation attributed to SLA errors to learners developing knowledge of complex TL structures, which can better account for the source of many errors (Corder, 18). Therefore, language educators developed error analysis to examine the mistakes made by L2 learners and determine their levels of comprehension. Richards (19) suggested that when learners repeat something they already know, they produce correct sentences, but when these known sentences differ from the TL structure, they provide insight into verbs and patterns that learners currently understand but result in TL errors. The CAH states that L2 errors are caused by the first language influencing SLA, such as via transference from an unrelated subject. Comprehensive error analysis takes other factors into account, such as learners' understanding of TL structures. This approach to error analysis begins with the assumption that L2 learners possess unique, identifiable, rule-driven systems of language use, resembling those of young language learners. It seeks to identify the patterns and rules learners follow, as well as areas of incomplete or incorrect knowledge (17). Such correction of L2 errors aims to empower learners by helping them increase their language accuracy and produce error-free sentences in the TL. Strategies designed to explore errors (metalinguistic explanations and error analyses) help learners recognise and correct errors, leading to increased levels of language proficiency as they practice speaking TLs (18). This fosters learners' improved levels of language proficiency and ability to express themselves fluently without making mistakes, resulting in enhanced language proficiency in the TL.

Sociocultural Theory and Error Analysis

Sociocultural theory was developed by cognitive and developmental psychologists to establish a relationship between language acquisition and children's broader learning contexts through their experiences and interactions (19). This theory states that children learn language by interacting with people and objects in their surroundings, and learning happens because of this interaction and communication. Piaget (20) established this theory based on the assumption that children use cognitive abilities to learn a language, emphasising the influence of children's interactions and play with other people on their language and cognitive development. In addition, linked to interactionist theory, Vygotsky (21) developed sociocultural theory by positing that language is gradually acquired through social interactions, especially within the zone of proximal development (ZPD). This theory assumes that children engage in conversations and socially interact with experienced individuals who provide language scaffolding and support structures, which in turn reshape the learners' knowledge of the TL (17). This perspective is particularly relevant for error analysis, since it holds that errors made by L2 learners result from interactions between individual learners and their sociocultural contexts. Error analysis based on

sociocultural theory examines how social interactions, cultural norms, and contextual factors influence L2 learners' errors, contributing to a deeper understanding of the sociocultural dimensions of SLA. Conversational scaffolding can also be used to correct L2 learners' errors on the basis that such errors indicate how they currently understand their L1 language. By providing the right support and guidance to learners, educators can address errors within learners' ZPDs. This concept assumes that when learners make mistakes in their TL, gaps in their knowledge of the TL system become evident and can be fixed when they receive help that fills the knowledge gaps (22). Thus, sociocultural theory allows for targeted feedback and instruction and enables teachers and language learners to recognise errors and create instructional strategies to maximise language development. This theory also offers insight into the SLA error analysis relationship and how experiences and interactions impact language acquisition and learning processes.

In summary, SLA theories interpret L2 learners' errors from different perspectives. The behaviourist and CAH approaches focus on the role of corrective feedback and L1 interference in shaping learners' errors, whereas sociocultural theory draws attention to the sociocultural dimensions of learners' errors. Understanding these theories can shed light on L2 learners' errors and equip language teachers and linguists with appropriate language teaching practices to meet individuals' learners' needs and language acquisition requirements within L2 classroom environments or learning contexts.

Sources of Errors in L2 Acquisition and Learning

Since SLA studies have started to focus on L2 learners' errors, investigation into the sources of these errors has been on-going. Errors in L2 learning typically arise from two sources, the first of which is interference by the native language (mother tongue or L1), understanding of which developed later in the SLA field and gave rise to the notion of interlingual errors or transfer errors (23). This transfer was initially derived from the CAH approach and was divided into two main types of transfer: 'negative transfer' occurs when the rules of L1 hinder L2 learning (i.e. learners transfer the elements of their L1 to the elements of L2, which results in errors), and 'positive transfer' arises when the elements of L1 facilitate the learning of L2 due to similar structures for both languages (15). The other main source of L2 intralingual or developmental errors, which this study focuses on, relates to the difficulties of L2/TL learning that learners encounter. Modern research tends to prioritise intralingual developmental errors over negative transfer errors due to native language interference. According to Touchie (23), intra-language and developmental errors have different sources, which can be divided into seven categories, and we analysed the frequencies and types of Saudi learners' writing errors based on these categories:

1. Simplification errors occur when learners use

simple forms of the TL or L2 rather than more complex ones. Usually, this type of error is found in the syntactic forms of the L2.

2. Overgeneralisation errors occur when L2 learners expand the use of a certain L2 rule and apply it inappropriately to different L2 structures, which results in errors. This type of error can relate to many different language elements (semantic, syntactic, or phonological; 24).

3. Hypercorrection errors result from the overcorrection of learners' errors by their language instructors. Sometimes, the extreme efforts of L2 teachers to correct their students' mistakes leads to them making more errors, which Stenson (25) called 'induced errors'. This type of error is commonly observed in the phonological and syntactic forms of L2.

4. Faulty teaching can lead to learners making teacher-induced mistakes due to flawed teaching, instructional materials, or sequences of L2 presentation, which resemble the previously mentioned hypercorrection. It is worth noting that some professors are also influenced by their students' errors when they ignore correcting them consistently.

5. Fossilisation occurs when L2 rules are difficult for learners to grasp due to insufficient language competence or L2 proficiency, meaning that they make errors when certain elements of the L2 are not fully understood (23).

6. Avoidance occurs when L2 learners' find some elements of the complex L2 structure difficult to use and therefore avoid using these elements and replace them with simpler ones.

7. False hypothesis errors occur when learners' errors in TL comprehension and use can be attributed to the incorrect hypotheses that learners' form about the TL(17). In an L2 learning context, a false hypothesis is formed based on the learner's mental representation of or assumption about how a certain feature of the language functions, built on the learner's prior knowledge, observations, and experiences with the language. To further explain these categories, the next section will shed light on the most common L2 writing errors and their sources.

Review of Previous Research on L2 Writing Errors and Their Sources

Previous research on L2 writing errors and their causes has contributed significantly to SLA understanding and pedagogy. Many scholars have conducted research to investigate the nature and sources of L2 learners' errors and the factors that cause them because it is widely believed that identifying the causes of errors can contribute greatly to the development of L2 learning and teaching. In this regard, Almurashi (26) conducted a study to examine and compare the types of writing errors made by undergraduate EFL students in India and Iran. The findings revealed that most of the errors they made were due to a lack of competence in language learning, such as spelling and grammar. The author attributed the source of these errors to interference by the L1, which required treatment with corrective feedback to increase L2 language competence. In another study, Khansir (14) examined the sources of semantic and lexical errors in Chinese writing competence and found that the participants in their study made fewer intralingual/developmental errors than interlingual/transfer errors. The learners in this study relied heavily on their formation of L1 habits and rules, which resulted in more interlanguage errors. However, some errors in their writing were related to the overgeneralisation of rules and partial exposure to the new L2 language system. Similarly, Singh (27) investigated grammatical errors in Malaysian undergraduate students' writing and discovered that most of their errors were due to the overgeneralisation of L2 rules, such as the misuse of grammatical tenses. Another source of developmental errors is related to the complexity of the L2 structure, which challenges Malaysian ESL learners. Another study by Ellis (15) examined the most frequent grammatical writing errors in ESL contexts; the findings revealed that most L2 learners' errors were errors of misinformation, addition, omission, and incorrect ordering, which fit into the categories of developmental and false hypothesis errors regarding L2 rules. Pop (28) investigated the types of semantic errors in an EFL academic writing context and revealed that Norwegian L2 learners made both interlanguage and intra-language errors, which contributed to the development of instructional writing materials in Norwegian contexts. The studies presented in this section shed light on several factors that contribute to L2 writing errors, and the next section will briefly discuss some of these writing errors and their sources, particularly in Saudi contexts.

Examination of Studies Related to L2 Writing Errors among Saudi Learners

Research regarding Saudi learners who make L2 writing errors should consider all the linguistic and cultural factors that might impede their writing proficiency. Saudi Arabia boasts a rich Arabic tradition, and English is often taught as a foreign language in schools; therefore, research on this topic often touches upon specific areas of consideration, such as error analysis. Numerous studies have used error analysis as a method of detecting and categorising Saudi learners' errors when writing L2 texts in English. Error analysis can help researchers gain an understanding of error patterns, frequencies, and causes, which commonly relate to grammar, vocabulary, spelling, word order, and tense usage. One study related to the competence of Saudi L2 learners was conducted among male university EFL students to investigate their writing errors (29), which revealed that the Saudi learners' errors in writing English paragraphs fell into four categories: grammar, lexis, semantics, and mechanics. The study tested the common types and frequencies of errors in each

category, and grammatical errors were the most frequent in terms of their numbers and types; however, the study did not identify the causes or sources of these errors. Another study by Ellis (10) examined common types of writing errors in a Saudi context and found that the errors all fell into categories of writing competence in terms of spelling, punctuation, and grammar; however, the study attributed learners' lack of writing proficiency to the teacher's negative criticism and insufficient feedback, and the researchers did not fully identify other causes. On another note, Alsharani (30) examined the role of L1 interference in shaping Saudi L2 writing errors and concluded that a high percentage of learners' writing errors, particularly morphological errors, were interlanguage errors. The study suggested that greater exposure to the TL would benefit Saudi learners in overcoming their L1 interference in writing essays. Nevertheless, a study of the writing errors of arts and science students at a Saudi university conducted by Alsharani (30) found that arts students had difficulty with the mechanics of writing, especially spelling and syntax. The source of their errors was mainly interference by and direct translation of the Saudi L1 Arabic language. Additionally, a recent study conducted by Pop (28) on male Saudi students tested their spelling errors and attributed them mostly to insufficient L2 writing competence, suggesting a need for further investigation of different types of interlanguage and interlanguage errors; considering different language proficiency levels in relation to types of errors would significantly enhance the findings. Overall, the studies presented in this review made various contributions to the Saudi learning context and attributed L2 writing errors (developmental and lack of competence errors) mainly to the interference of L1. Therefore, this study represents a further attempt to investigate the major sources of intra-language errors at two different language proficiency levels to evaluate the extent to which L2 proficiency level can impact the causes of writing errors.

Methodology

Research Design

In this study, I have employed descriptive quantitative methods to analyse data collected through written essays on the different sources of L2 writing errors. Initially, I selected two distinct groups of students with different levels of English language proficiency to participate in the study. Two groups were crucial for investigating the sources and frequency of errors while also assessing the impact of language proficiency on the participants' different types of developmental errors.

I have also divided the participants into two language proficiency levels intermediates and advanced and investigated the frequencies and types of errors (specifically intralingual errors) and their causes, particularly those associated with difficulties in learning a second or target language (TL). By exploring the sources of and differences between advanced- and intermediate-level learners' errors, I have aimed to provide meaningful insights to understand the natures of these errors.

By designing this research to include two different language levels, a comprehensive understanding of Saudi L2 writing errors could be achieved, allowing for a detailed analysis of the sources of errors.

Participant Selection

The study population consisted of 60 female Saudi undergraduate students in their first academic year at a Saudi university in particular, Taibah university, all of whom were studying academic English as a core module to fulfil their academic requirements. It is worth mentioning that access to the Saudi male students were difficult to reach due to a cultural restriction and male students' study in different campus. Thus, female students were divided into two groups and given an English language proficiency test based on the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR).

Based on their test results, the first group reached an intermediate level equivalent to an International English Language Testing System (IELTS) score of 4.4–5.5. The sample for this group was selected accordingly. The second group comprised 30 students with upper-intermediate to advanced levels of English, equivalent to a score of 6.5–7.0 on the IELTS scale. The students' written productions were assessed randomly and anonymously, and their identifications were hidden when the data were analysed. To ensure the validity of the research results, all students were homogeneous in terms of their first language, nationality, and cultural background.

Data Collection Methods

To gather data for this study, writing samples were collected from each group based on their writing assignments throughout the academic semester. The students were all studying English as a core module using Cambridge Reading and Writing Book 2 for the intermediate level and Cambridge Writing and Reading Book 3, for the advanced level. Each book consisted of eight units covering different topics and academic themes. As part of the students' assessments, they were required to submit a writing portfolio consisting of 8 x 150–200-word essays per week on each topic. The essays varied in type, including comparative, argumentative, descriptive, and narrative essays based on the themes of the units.

To ensure that ethical standards were met, I informed the participants that their writing portfolios would be used for this study at the end of the academic semester and that their identities would remain anonymous. I aimed to collect one writing sample from each student in each group. I then reviewed these samples, counted the errors, and categorised them to identify their sources. Subsequently, I collected the data submitted for further examination to identify the different types of errors.

Data Analysis Techniques

To examine the sources of developmental errors outlined in this study, we employed a three-step data analysis procedure, as illustrated by Corder (18), to identify L2 learners' significant errors, which involved 'a collection

of sample errors, identification of errors and description of errors' (34). Following this approach was necessary to ensure the accuracy of the results.

First, we examined each paragraph written by the intermediate group of students to underline and count errors and subsequently classify them. The same process was applied to the second (advanced) group for all the paragraphs evaluated. Second, we then assigned each error to a specific category. Finally, we calculated the types and frequencies of errors, along with their respective percentages. To ensure the validity of the results, we compared the data of the two groups and created a table to illustrate the number of errors and their corresponding frequencies based on the method described by Hubbard (33).

Hubbard (33) analysed errors by identifying the most common errors and organising them into different categories according to their causes. Consequently, we identified and classified errors based on their occurrences and categorised them as developmental (intra-language simplification, overgeneralisation, fossilisation, hypercorrection, avoidance, and false hypothesis) errors.

In addition, to analyse the data accurately, we used Python for statistical analysis in this linguistics study. It allowed us to summarise and gain deeper insights into the data by using t-tests to compare means between groups and to examine categorical data to explore relationships between linguistic variables.

The following section presents the data in tables for each group and then explains the differences according to the linguistic variables and the type of development errors for both the intermediate and advanced groups.

Results

According to the data on Saudi learners' writing errors, there was a significant difference in the number of errors the two groups made. In addition, the data indicated a difference in the frequencies and types of errors according to proficiency level. The following two tables illustrate the frequencies of errors and their types for the two groups.

Table 1 illustrates the frequencies and types of developmental intra-language errors committed by Saudi female learners at the intermediate level. The six categories of errors were determined based on examples of the students' writing.

According to Table 1, the most common type of error in the linguistic analysis for the intermediate-level students was 'false hypothesis' in the 'grammar (spelling)' subcategory (116 errors). In contrast, the least common error type was 'fossilisation' in the 'vocabulary (grammar)' subcategory (39 errors). However, the average frequency was approximately 64.5 errors. Thus, the highest occurrence of errors was in the 'false hypothesis' category, while the lowest was in the 'fossilisation' category. Also, a total of 366 errors were made across all categories in all the pieces of writing produced by learners at the intermediate level.

However, for comparison, Table 2 illustrates the frequencies and the types of writing errors made by advanced-level learners.

As shown in Table 2, based on the analysis, the most common error type observed among advanced-level Saudi learners was 'false hypothesis' in the 'grammar (spelling)' subcategory (82 errors). However, the least common error type was 'fossilisation' in the 'grammar (vocabulary)' subcategory (29 errors). The average frequency was approximately 52.67 errors, indicating that errors occurred less frequently than at the intermediate level. 'False hypotheses' was clearly the category with the highest number of errors for both groups, while the 'fossilisation' category had the fewest errors. The 'grammar (spelling)' subcategory had the highest frequency of errors, whereas the 'grammar (vocabulary)' category had the lowest frequency. These findings highlight the significance of addressing false hypothesis errors as a dominant type of intralingual error at both the intermediate and advanced levels, although improvements were observed, and the error frequency generally decreased as the Saudi learners progressed to the advanced level. Notably, the 'fossilisation' category appeared to be less problematic for students at both levels. In addition, the total number of errors across all categories for this group was 316 compared to 366 for the intermediate-level group, representing a significant decrease in the number of errors made by advanced learners. To facilitate an in-depth analysis, the comparative statistics for the results of both groups, showing the average numbers of errors and the means for each category, are shown in Table 3.

Table 1: Types of Developmental Errors and Their Frequencies for Intermediate-Level Students

Category	Subcategory	Frequency	Examples	Correct Sentences	Total
Simplification	(Grammar -word order)	33 + 28	1. My mother go to be a chief. 2. We think business of our.	1. My mother is going to be a chief. 2. We think of our business.	61
Overgeneralisation	(Grammar-spelling)	30+ 28	1. We used two cup of sugars. 2. She teached us.	1. We used two cups of sugar. 2. She taught us	58
Fossilisation	(Vocabulary- (grammar)	17 - 22	1. I have much informations. 2. I have maked pancakes.	1. I have much information. 2. I made pancakes every week.	39
Hypercorrection	(Grammar- punctuation)	18 - 31	1. I'm going to the party with my friend	1. I'm going to the party with my	49

			and I. 2. We'll need to bring <u>food; drinks; sweets;</u> <u>and desserts.</u>	friends. 2. We'll need to bring foods, drinks, sweets, and deserts.	
Avoidance	(Vocabulary- (grammar)	21- 43	1. Wash your hands <u>frequently</u>, especially <u>during,</u> you <u>know,</u> that <u>time,</u> to prevent germs. 2. My sister <u>studied</u> <u>medicine for</u> four years.	1. Wash your hands frequently, especially during the flu season, to prevent the spread of germs. 2. My sister has studied medicine for years.	43
False hypothesis	Grammar (spelling)	60 - 56	1. She don't <u>likes to</u> <u>eat</u> sweets. 2. Corona is very <u>dangeruse deiseases.</u>	1. She doesn't like to eat sweets. 2. Corona is a very dangerous disease.	116
					Total errors: 366

Table 2. *Types of Developmental Errors and Their Frequencies and Occurrences for Advanced-Level Students (Categories and Subcategories).*

Category	Subcategory	Frequency	examples	Correct sentences	Total
Simplification	(Grammar-word order)	21 + 13	1. I have from <u>them</u> <u>beautiful memory.</u> 2. I keep <u>my safe</u> <u>money.</u>	1. I have some beautiful memories from them. 2. I keep my money safe.	34
Overgeneralisation	(Grammar -spelling)	45 + 32	1. I don't <u>cashing a</u> <u>lot</u> of money. 2. I want to be <u>whith.</u>	1. I don't spend a lot of money. 2. I want to be with.	77
Fossilisation	(Grammar -vocabulary)	15 - 14	1. We are different <u>of</u> <u>other</u> companies. 2. My brother <u>is a site</u> <u>designer.</u>	1. We are different from other companies. 2. My brother is a website designer.	29
Hypercorrection	(Grammar- punctuation)	31 - 24	1. My mother <u>she</u> <u>like.</u> 2. <u>Finally, in the</u> <u>future, we will have,</u> <u>many developments.</u>	1. My mother likes 2. Finally, in the future, we will have many developments.	55
Avoidance	(Grammar -punctuation)	17 - 22	1. My brother <u>don't</u> <u>like share plans.</u> 2. <u>Companies owner</u> <u>as follows.</u> First my mother <u>is the.</u>	1. My brother doesn't like to share his plans. 2. The company's owners are as follows: first, my mother is the ...	39
False hypothesis	(Grammar-spelling)	40 - 42	1. He <u>runned</u> a small business. 2. We <u>provid</u> quick <u>deleviery.</u>	1. He runs a small business. 2. We provide quick delivery.	82
					Total errors: 316

Table 3. *Advanced- and Intermediate-Level Learners' Error Rate Frequencies*

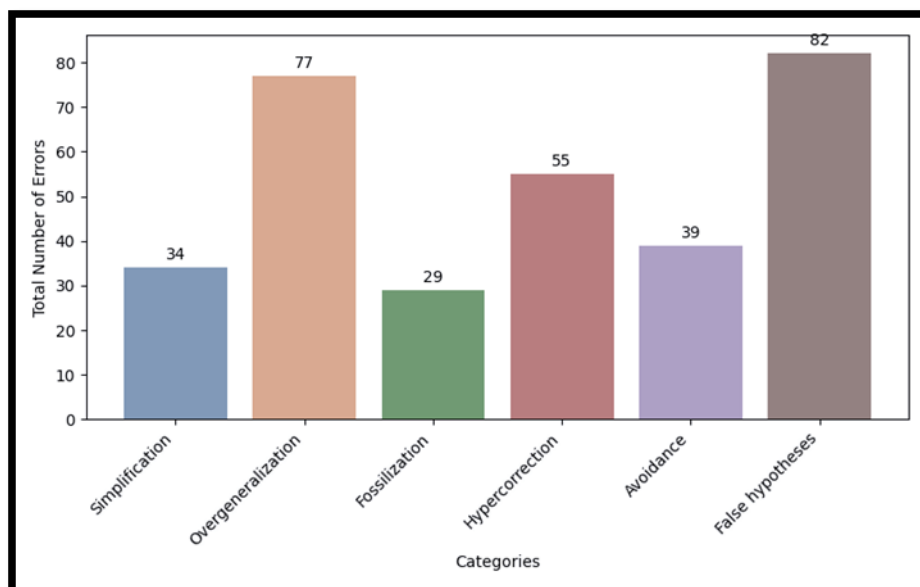|	Intermediate learners'' Frequency of Errors	Intermediate learners' Error Rate	Advanced learners'' Frequency of Errors	Advanced learners' Error Rate
Count	6.0	6.0	6.0	6.0
Mean	64.5	0.16	52.6	0.16
Std.	26.82	0.06	22.5	0.07
Min.	39.0	0.10	29.0	0.09
Max.	116.0	0.29	82.0	0.25

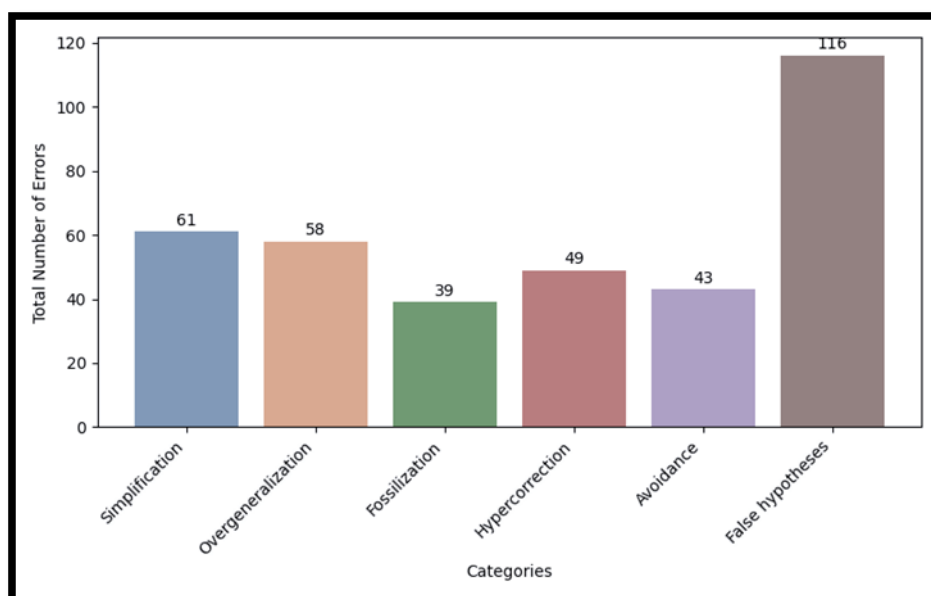*Figure 1. The Different Errors of Intermediate-Level Learners*

Figure 2. The Different Errors of Advanced-Level Learners

Table 3 provides a statistical summary of the data for the intermediate- and advanced-level students. Each row represents a different statistical metric for the frequency and error rate columns for both the intermediate and advanced groups. For example, in the first column, the 'count' represents the number of observed errors in each category, with six observed main categories of errors for both intermediate- and advanced-level students: simplification, overgeneralisation, fossilisation, hypercorrection, avoidance, and false hypothesis. Second, the `mean column' shows the average of all the values in the column. The average frequency of errors for intermediate-level students was about 64.5, whereas the average for the advanced-level students was 52.5, indicating a significantly increased number of errors across the two groups. The standard deviation (Std. Dev.), which measures the amount of variation in a set of values, of the frequency of errors in this study for intermediate-level students was about

26.8 compared to 22 for advanced-level students. It is worth mentioning that the minimum number of errors occurred in the 'fossilisation' category, with 39 errors committed by students at the intermediate level, compared to 29 errors in the same category at the advanced level. However, the largest value for the intermediate level was 116 in the 'false hypothesis' category compared to only 82 of the same type of errors for the advanced level. Figures 1 and 2 illustrate the differences in errors committed by both groups across all main categories.

Discussion

The aim of this study was to investigate the types of intralanguage errors and their frequencies and to compare them across two different English language proficiency levels in a Saudi context. I employed

Corder's (18) taxonomy to assign errors to grammar, lexical, spelling, and semantic error subcategories. Table 1 presents the total number of errors committed by Saudi learners at the intermediate level (316 errors) compared to those in Table 2 committed at the advanced level (366 errors) across all categories and subcategories.

The data in Tables 1 and 2 reveal the frequency of each error type, along with examples of the errors made by students, the corresponding correct sentences, and the total number of errors observed. For instance, Saudi learners at the intermediate level made approximately 61 errors related to the simplification of rules. These errors were mostly related to grammatical structure and sentence construction, such as mixing up the word order or facing difficulties in subject–verb agreement and verb tense usage (e.g. in Example 1 in Table 1, writing 'My mother go to be a chief' instead of 'My mother is going to be a chief'). In this sentence, the student faced challenges with subject–verb agreement and using the correct verb tense. The correct form for the third-person singular subject 'My mother' is 'goes' in the present tense or 'is going' in the present continuous tense. In Example 2, the student wrote, 'We think business of our' instead of 'We think of our business'. In this sentence, the error is related to word order and the use of prepositions. The correct sentence requires the word 'our' after 'business' to show possession, and the word 'of' is unnecessary and incorrect in this context. Saudi students tended to simplify the TL rules instead of using the more complex structures they had learned. Ellis (1996) suggests that such simplification errors are typical of learners at the intermediate stage of SLA. At this level, learners are still grappling with the complexities of verb tenses, subject–verb agreement, and proper word order. However, as learners advance in their language proficiency, they understand and use grammar more accurately. Interestingly, the study showed that even advanced Saudi learners committed simplification errors, although in fewer numbers. This indicates that, while they had progressed, they still found it challenging to use complex structures in L2 writing. In addition, notably, both groups of Saudi learners made overgeneralization errors. Surprisingly, advanced-level learners made more errors in this category, with about 77 errors compared to 58 for the intermediate-level learners, encompassing both spelling and grammar. Overgeneralization errors occur when learners inappropriately apply simplified rules that they have learned. For instance, learners might incorrectly add an '-s' to all verbs to make them third-person singular, even when other forms are required. Examples of these instances are illustrated in Tables 1 and 2.

Thus, the phenomenon of overgeneralization can be interpreted as an intralingual approach to errors or the influence of the learner's other languages (L1 influence). According to Lightbown and Spada (17), advanced-level learners who are bilingual or multilingual have greater exposure to different languages, which may lead to increased TL proficiency. As they encounter various linguistic patterns, they may generalize to other contexts, resulting in the overgeneralization of TL rules.

However, it is worth mentioning that this finding contradicts Alsharani (30), which suggested that errors due to L1 interference, including overgeneralization, are more commonly made by intermediate-level Saudi learners and should improve as they advance in their language proficiency.

Nevertheless, errors that fell into the category of fossilization errors and the subcategories of vocabulary and grammar appeared to be the least common type of error committed by both groups. An example from Table 2 is the error 'My brother is a site designer' instead of 'My brother is a website designer', which can be classified as a fossilization error according to the intralanguage perspective. Fossilization refers to a stage in SLA at which learners persistently produce certain errors even after extensive exposure to the language and formal instruction (33). These errors become ingrained into the learner's language systems, and they have difficulty overcoming them despite increasing levels of language proficiency. Although Zampieri (35), in their study of L2 learners' behavior, assumed that most fossilization errors were due to the influence of L1 on the cognitive system of L2 learning, the findings here suggest that Saudi learners make this type of error because of a lack of exposure to the TL, since no Arabic equivalent exists for the word 'site designer', and 'site' instead of 'website' is the closest translation expressed by the Saudi student. However, errors can occur when learners have limited exposure to natural and authentic language input. If learners primarily encounter 'site designer' instead of 'website designer' in their language environment, they may adopt the former term as their default, even if it is incorrect. Moreover, hypercorrection and avoidance errors were recorded for both groups (49 for the intermediate and 43 errors for the advanced), although advanced-level students made significantly fewer errors in these two areas (55 and 39 errors, respectively) and specifically in grammar and punctuation. Avoidance and hypercorrection are both common phenomena among L2 learners due to intralingual errors that occur within the TL itself (26). Avoidance occurs when language learners deliberately avoid using certain linguistic structures or vocabulary items because they perceive them to be challenging or unfamiliar. Learners may commit this type of error due to a lack of confidence in their ability to use the TL structure correctly or for fear of making mistakes. The learners in this study used simpler forms that were familiar to them instead. Although advanced Saudi-level learners committed fewer errors compared to intermediate-level learners, avoidance was still a prevalent form of intralanguage error.

On the other hand, although hypercorrection errors were less prevalent among advanced-level Saudi L2 students, they still occurred in both groups. Hypercorrection errors can be due to overapplying language rules to increase accuracy (15), thus creating new errors. Intralingual errors were also prevalent; they stemmed from learners' ongoing development and understanding of TLs, whether this meant trying new rules they had learned, avoiding complex structures

they found challenging, or overcorrecting in an attempt to increase accuracy (Ellis 1997). Although Al Ababneh (2017) investigated the main causes of errors in grammar and syntax, attributing them to a lack of reading in English, as well as the influence of Saudi learners' first language, the study neglected the complex nature of the English language, which Saudi learners may struggle with, and which may lead to various different errors.

Finally, the last category to be discussed in this study, which was a significant finding, was that 'false hypothesis' errors were the most frequent errors found in both groups in both subcategories' grammar and spelling. The intermediate-level group made 82 such errors, and the advanced-level group made 65. Although the advanced-level students made significantly fewer errors in this category, the errors occurred when the learners attempted to apply the rules of the TL but made mistakes due to their ongoing learning process and limited exposure to the language. False hypothesis errors are a natural part of language learning and are often made by learners at different proficiency levels (31). This aligns with the findings of Zampieri and Amorim (35). who found that learners trying to express themselves in a new language system experienced particular difficulties in spelling. According to their findings regarding writing errors among L2 learners, spelling and grammar errors based on false hypotheses in constructing the new language were mainly intralanguage errors. Thus, it is essential to understand that false hypothesis errors are a common aspect of the language learning process. As learners progress and receive feedback, they refine their intralanguage competence and gradually approach high-level proficiency.

In summary, the major findings of this study related to common intralanguage errors compared between two different (intermediate and advanced) language proficiency levels of Saudi L2 writing. False hypothesis errors occurred most frequently across both groups, and fossilization errors were the least frequently observed errors in their writing. Notably, the advanced-level students made significantly fewer errors across all categories despite having increased errors in some subcategories compared to the intermediate-level students, such as spelling and grammar. By acknowledging the nature of intralingual errors and implementing appropriate strategies for both advanced and intermediate learners, language educators can promote positive learning environments and support learners in improving their language proficiency. However, the study's limitation to female participants restricts the generalizability of the findings to only this gender, and the results would be more widely applicable if both males and females were included. Since the study focused on participants from a university academic English program, the results may not be representative of other groups of EFL learners in different contexts.

Limitation of the study

However, as this study focuses on a specific context (Saudi Arabian university) with a certain proficiency level (intermediate and advanced), and tests writing as one of the language skills. Considering these limitations, further studies could explore intralingual errors in diverse contexts, across various proficiency levels, and in different language skills such as speaking and listening. This would provide a more comprehensive understanding of learning challenges among Saudi L2 learners.

Conclusion and Implications

The focus of this study is to investigates and compare the most common intralingual errors in Saudi EFL learners' writing at two different proficiency levels: intermediate and advanced. The significance of this study lies in its exploration and comparison of intralingual errors among Saudi EFL learners at different proficiency levels, shedding light on prevalent challenges faced by this particular group in mastering English writing skills. The key finding, revealing false hypothesis errors as the most frequent, highlights a specific learning difficulty that can be targeted for intervention and improvement, whereas fossilization errors were the least common. It is important to note that despite some instances of increased errors in certain subcategories such as spelling and grammar, advanced-level students made significantly fewer errors overall compared to intermediate-level students. By acknowledging the nature of intralingual errors and employing suitable strategies for both intermediate and advanced learners, language educators can create positive learning environments and provide essential support to help learners enhance their language proficiency. For example, educators can address common writing errors through class discussions and peer correction methods, especially at the intermediate level. Language instructors can provide individual feedback sessions during office hours to eliminate developmental errors efficiently.

Thus, this research underscores the need for tailored teaching strategies at the intermediate level to address common errors, emphasizing the importance of class discussions and peer correction methods to enhance writing skills. the study also recognises the significantly fewer errors made by advanced-level students which overall suggests that continues language support in writing contribute to improved proficiency, emphasizing the effectiveness of individual feedback sessions and encouragement of the writing process. Teachers can also encourage students to follow the writing process and, starting with the pre-writing stage, generate ideas and produce more concise writing. Regular writing practice, increased language exposure, and expert guidance can help learners overcome intralingual errors and improve their accuracy and fluency, especially at the intermediate level.

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Conflict of Interest

I confirm that I have no financial interests, affiliations, personal relationships, or other circumstances that might create a conflict of interest in relation to this research.

Data Availability Statement

The data that support the findings of this study are available upon request and the author can be contacted directly. Any additional inquiries regarding the data and its availability should be directed to the author.

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