The Most Frequent Errors in Academic Writing: A Case of EFL Undergraduate Arab Students in Israel

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Abstract

The current study examined the most common types of academic writing errors and the causes of such errors made by 44 tertiary EFL Arab-Israeli students. A methodological triangulation was employed in this research. Results and analyses of errors in the written samples revealed that students made a substantial number of errors in both rating scales. In the generic writing performance scale (the qualitative method), 75% of students' written samples rated poor, and the error frequency rating scale (the quantitative method) showed that the students made 2965 errors, which is a notably large number in proportion to the essay length. The researchers have also inferred that the principal reason for such errors is the triglossic nature of Arabic in Israel. The novelty of this research is that such triglossic nature of Arab-Israelis' language has not yet been investigated in the field. To this end, the results drawn will be utilised in future research as a platform for exploring effective teaching approaches that may enhance EFL students' writing performance.

Keywords: academic writing, errors, tertiary level, triglossia, vernacular

1. Introduction

1.1 Challenges of Academic Writing

Writing is a core academic requirement not only of English Departments worldwide, but of other disciplines as well. As academic prestige encompasses increasing the publication record of scholars, academic writing has increasingly become a tenacious demand. Hence, many tertiary education institutions have expanded their offerings of academic writing courses recently (Smith, 2004; Al-Zubaidi, 2012). Nonetheless, writing is not a stress-free task as it involves codified rhetorical forms and critical thinking skills. In addition, the assessment of writing incorporates many challenges which make the task of writing even more arduous for EFL students who usually lack the competencies needed to fulfill such an undertaking.

The value of academic writing stems from the superior and eminent status it holds in contrast to other types of writing, i.e. non-academic writing. Basically, non-academic writing targets the masses rather than professionals. The written product may as well contain incorrect and even wrong details. It sometimes even includes outdated, prejudiced, and obsolete information. The language used in non-academic writing is ordinary, repetitive, off-the-cuff, colloquial, and most importantly, no reference list is required. Such writing is opinion-induced rather than authentic and factual. In this sense, its authority of publication is mainly restricted to social media networks, magazines and newspapers.

However, in the case of academic writing the chronicle is entirely different as it adheres to evident, unwavering, solid, and universal conventions. Academic writing further entails formality of register and language, impassiveness, objectivity, evidence, explicitness of layout and lucidity of sentence structure, let alone concision and precision (University of Sheffield 2019). Similarly, "Introduction to Academic Language" (Note 1) avows that academic writing uses formal, clear, precise, cohesive, concise, evidence-driven, stepwise, complex, and responsible rather than colloquial, emotional, chatty, descriptive, informal, idiomatic, and clichéd language. Apart from embracing a detached, unbiased, and objective approach, academic writing retains an intellectual and ofttimes a philosophical position. Its essence accounts for reason and deduction and it appeals to systematic guidelines for referencing and citation. Hence, evidence and logic are key components of academic writing.

1.2 Significance of the Study: A Case of Arab-Israeli EFL Students

Unlike the general Arab World phenomenon of Arabic diglossia which, inter alia, generates hardships in academic writing performance, EFL Arab students in Israel (sometimes called Arab-Israelis or 1948 Palestinians) have to surmount another obstacle: triglossia. Ferguson (1959) defines diglossia as a language phenomenon that incorporates two languages: the first represents the main local common dialects while the second exemplifies the Modern Standard Arabic used in formal domains and which is exceedingly complex, classified, systematic, and overlapping. Triglossia, on the other hand involves code-switching and code-mixing and is outlined as "the coexistence of three languages within a speech community" (Garner, 2009, p. 1033). Indeed, in terms of frequency, Arabs in Israel use the vernacular Arabic (daily situations) , Hebrew (daily situations, school and academic spheres), and Modern Standard Arabic (school). Hence, their English leaning is affected by three-faceted interferences. Furthermore (Note 2), Arabs in Israel recurrently fuse the vernacular Arabic with Hebrew. Therefore, it is reasonable to say that they have also to tackle the triglossic deficit which makes the academic writing task even more challenging. Surprisingly, only recently were such cases of intertwined languages considered as a valid practice of contact language (Thomason & Kaufman, 1988).

In this context, interference evokes a double effect for EFL Arab-Israelis since Arabic and Hebrew are substantially different although they are both Semitic tongues. In other words, the interference is subject to two language barriers. One prominent difference between Arabic and English is that Arabic is a Semitic language with non-Roman alphabets. It is rather an abjad and therefore its orthographic system is different from the English one. While English roots are traced back to Indo-European origins, Arabic has grown from Proto-Semitic descent. Contrary to English, in Arabic the stress is on the consonantal root for the lexical meaning. Cook (1997, p. 474) emphasises the orthographic difficulty as one crucial aspect generating poor writing: "Users of an orthographically deep language [such as Arabic] might be expected to have more problems with the phonological route in an L2, users of an orthographically shallow language with the visual route."

It is also worthwhile noting that Arabic-Hebrew bilingualism is mandatory only for the Arab minority in Israel whereas for the Jewish majority it is not. In addition, the status of Modern Standard Arabic is completely absent in the Israeli academic sphere where Hebrew is the official first language and English is second. As a result, the Arab student feels forsaken, outcast, and discriminated against in such a sphere that functions as the main educational environment for Arabs and Jews alike (Amara et al., 2016, p. 7) (Note 3).

2. Literature Review

Various wide-ranging studies about English academic writing were conducted targeting both native and non-native speakers, comparing between them or merely focusing on their national background only to underscore the negative interference of the native language. Whereas Richards (1971) maintains that merely one-third of EFL students' errors result from their first language interference, (Bhela, 1999), Brown (1980), and Nemati and Taghizade, (2013) assert that most of EFL students' errors in the target language can be principally attributed to their belief that L1 and L2 systems are similar. Some studies particularly addressed ESL and EFL students in accordance with their national attribute such as the Chinese, Japanese, Indians, Vietnamese, Koreans, and Arabs (Note 4) just to name a few. Other studies investigated EFL students' writing based on their specialization, i.e. business, (Bacha & Bahous, 2008; Al-Khasawneh & Maher, 2010).

2.1 The Causes of EFL Students' Writing Errors

Many writing experts acknowledge that EFL students struggle and scuffle while attempting to write academic essays, and that writing per se can be a source of dejection and anxiety for these students. Such well-documented yet nerve-racking conundrums that challenge EFL students' competence and endurance have multidimensional grounds.

2.1.1 Writing Mechanisms and Styles

There are substantial discrepancies between the writing mechanisms of the first and the target languages. These discrepancies entail different morphological and phonological systems, diverse orthographies, dissimilar scripts, and even utterly diverse writing systems. Huerta et al. (2017) underscores the emotional dilemmas EFL students confront while writing academic essays. Moreover, due to the diverse nature of L1 writing style, L2 writing product can be deficient. Hinkel (1997) contends that the writing style of EFL students is vague, digressive and verbose: "speakers of Chinese, Korean, Japanese, and Indonesian utilised rhetorical questions and tags, disclaimers and denials, vagueness and ambiguity, repetition, several types of hedges, ambiguous pronouns, and the passive voice in greater frequencies than NSs did."

2.1.2 Critical Thinking

EFL students' critical thinking skills could be another hindrance as theirs may differ from those required for English academic writing (Robrtson et al., 2000; Kumaravadivelu, 2003; Haung, 2008). Therefore, the cultural background is an essential element to be considered in this case. Critical thinking is a fundamental asset in writing, and it illustrates students' abilities to "identify issues and assumptions, recognise important relationships, make correct inferences, evaluate evidence or authority, and deduce conclusions" (Tsui, 2002, 743).

Ramanathan and Kaplan (1996) report that EFL students fail to convey the critical dimension in their writing and they encounter grave uneasiness and solemn distress in writing courses Similarly, Atkinson (1997) maintains that even teaching thinking to EFL students is charged with cultural impediments:

In both Japanese and Chinese schools, memorization and choral recitation are promoted as major learning strategies in the classroom, and writing instruction focuses centrally on the memorization and use of various formulaic phrases. Not surprisingly, innovation and individual creativity in writing are strongly discouraged at this level, if not automatically ruled out of court (p. 83).

2.1.3 Plagiarism

The term "academic writing" could be a new notion or a novel requirement for many international students and hence may elicit severe cases of plagiarism. According to Chien (2014), not only do EFL students lack sufficient dexterities in writing scientific essays, but they demonstrate remarkably ambivalent attitudes as to citing references. Such attitudes are fundamentally alien to the western conventions of source acknowledgement. In other words, what might be regarded as plagiarism in the English-speaking countries, might be not so in EFL students' home countries.

2.2 Errors Made by Arabic Speakers in General

Haggan (1991) attributes the errors made by Arabic speakers to the divergent scripts of Arabic and English. Moreover, unlike English, Arabic is spelled as pronounced. In this respect, Richards (1974) classifies spelling errors to "interlingual and false intralanguage analogy." Interlinguality ensues due to language transfer from L1 to L2, whereas intralanguage results from deficient learning of L1, or respectively from lack of practice.

In order to efficiently epitomise the causes of the numerous errors EFL Arab students make in writing, we utilise Zaharna's article "Understanding cultural preferences of Arab communication patterns (1995) whereby she remonstrates the cultural, historical, and social spectrum as a considerable impetus for the disparities between Arabic and English. While she marks the English-speaking societies as the "print" or the "literate," she labels the Arabic-speaking societies as the "oral." In this sense, the latter's language is replete with ambiguity, sentimentality, symbolism, and indirectness while the former's is characterised by directness, accuracy, and authenticity. Moreover, the author maintains that native speakers of English (Americans in this case) idolise doing over being. That is, unlike Arabs, they pay homage to individual achievement rather than to kin-based statuses or lineage. She further affirms that in Arabic, repetition and telling anecdotes are sufficient means of persuasion and are typically viewed as tributes among Arabic-speaking communities. However, for native speakers of English, such media involve unfavorable implications and may regard the written product as prolix, loquacious, and redundant. Along these lines, the cultural effect of Arabic perturbs the writing mission of EFL Arab students who may create a piece of writing that is ornamented, intuitive, overstated, and embellished rather than informational, logical, and analytical, content and evidence-based.

Zaharna adds that "it is not uncommon to find a string of descriptive phrases or words all referring to one phenomenon." This probably explains why EFL Arab students write run-on sentences or overextended, overstated paragraphs, let alone that sometimes one paragraph may make up the entire essay. Above and beyond, EFL Arab students are incompetent writers because Arabic is a non-linear, high-context language, hence the writing is collectivist, multi-thematic, multi-stimulus, metaphorical, suggestive, imaginative, and emotional. Contrariwise, English is a linear, low-context language that emphasises the cruciality of both beginnings and ends as well as documentation. Therefore, it is individual, pragmatic, realistic, provable, monothematic, stepwise, argument-driven, objective, understated, and methodical.

In the same vein, Mahmoud (1982) argues that EFL Arabic-speaking students lack significant parameters of writing: their writing is limited, invariant, and lacks coherence and reasoning. For most of them, academic writing is exceptionally strenuous due to the diglossic nature of the Arabic language. A study conducted by Khuwaileh and Al Shoumali (2000) reveal that "poor writing in English correlates with similar deficiencies in the mother tongue" (p. 174).

One holistic study that targeted EFL Arab students from eight countries -Iraq, Yemen, Syria, Libya, Saudi

Arabia, Sudan, Palestine and Algeria- at Universiti Teknologi Malaysia examined the most common errors made by these students. The results revealed that the students' errors were most frequent in "vocabulary problems, spelling mistakes, expressing ideas, and organizing paragraphs" (Abdulkareem, 2013). By and large, EFL Arab students confront numerous barriers in English writing such as cohesion (Ahmed, 2010), and word patterns and grammar (Elachachi, 2015). According to Qaddumi (1995), Arab EFL students' writing teems with repetitive words, unparalleled, fragmental and incoherent sentences.

2.3 Errors Made by EFL Arab-Israeli Students in Particular

This research considers EFL Arab-Israeli students' errors in academic writing rather than in other types of writing. Hence, it goes unmentioned that along with the aforementioned barriers EFL Arab students have to tackle in general, the mission of creating an academic writing piece intensifies the challenge for EFL Arab-Israeli students.

It is common knowledge that Arabic is a metaphorical language, colloquially and formally speaking. Arabic writing, unlike English depends on lexical aesthetic devices rather than logic and reasoning. Hence, -and probably passionate proponents of Arabic will not find this comment flattering- we tend to agree with Kaplan (1966) who defines the Arabic rhetoric as a series of zigzags. Such "zigzags" are exceedingly palpable in the written samples of EFL Arab-Israeli students.

Moreover, the written essays under scrutiny were judged in relevance to academic writing features and, by no means were they mere impromptus. Namely, inasmuch as such essays might be regarded unqualified or inefficient in terms of academic writing, they might be regarded more than satisfactory in other writing domains.

Along these lines, academic writing as an overwhelming skill for EFL Arab-Israeli students involves more than just producing a written piece. Minding the rudiments of writing such as grammar and mechanics, organization, word order, subject-verb agreement, spelling, punctuation, and capitalization is fundamental yet not adequate. Academic writing necessitates vigorous practice that fosters critical reasoning, abstract thought, argumentation, and formal lexis not to mention tackling the triglossic nature of Arabic.

3. Method

To ascertain the reliability and the validity of the research we have employed methodological triangulation using two rating scales to gather data in addition to existing knowledge base.

3.1 Research Design

The research comprised three phases. In the first phase, a total of 44 (19 and 25) students enrolled in two multidimensional academic writing courses were given the same task whereby they were required to write a 300-word essay. This phase lasted two hours. In the second phase, the students' writing skills were tested and assessed utilising two research tools and data were collected successively from both groups. In the third phase, the errors drawn were listed according to their frequency.

3.2 Research Tools (Note 5)

First, a source-based written task that was assessed by the researchers who have long-standing expertise in the field. Second, two rating scales from which the results were amalgamated. Third, the existing knowledge base of related literature was employed to explain the errors and their causes. One rating scale was a quantitative descriptive method and was managed to collect data (number of errors) from the students' written samples. This locally tailored assessment tool was designed to address possible EFL Arab-Israeli students' writing deficiencies and to gauge the accuracy of the essays. This tool included 5 main criteria (formality, sentence structure, grammar, mechanics, and lexis) and divided into 22 sub-criteria. The sub-criteria addressed errors of words, lexis, verb tense, punctuation, language (i.e. idiomatic), sentences (vagueness, fragments), spelling, articles, capitalizations, pronouns, contractions, word order, cohesion, run-ons, parallelism, apostrophe, passive, structure. This tool provided numerical values concerning the frequency of the writing errors. The second rating scale was a generic assessment tool which illustrated features of academic writing and was applied to analyse the errors related to the logical flow of the essays. This Likert-like rating scale ranging from 1-3 indicated the level of students' performance as (1) stood for mastery, (2) for average, and (3) for poor. Moreover, the tool comprised 5 criteria (objectivity, responsibility, organization, explicitness, complexity) divided into 11 sub-criteria illustrating.

3.3 Participants

A total of 44 EFL Arab-Israeli students were recruited from a College of Education located within the Green Line in the Haifa District of Israel. The participating students were juniors enrolled in an English teacher preparation

program at the college. These students were not selected randomly but quite purposely as they comprised almost a perfect sample for the current research. The principal reason for selecting juniors rather than freshmen, sophomores, or seniors is because these students took two writing courses in the past two years, "Style and Composition" and "Written Expression." This being their first "Academic Writing" course, we wanted to evaluate their level in writing so as to unearth the most frequent errors they make and the plausible causes for such errors. We do not mean to claim that the problem will be completely solved but we believe that detecting these errors will help us single them out and address them more effectively so as to mitigate them respectively.

4. Research Questions

In order to unravel the common writing errors and the causes of the errors made by EFL Arab-Israeli students, three research questions were posited for the study:

1) What types of errors do EFL Arab-Israeli students make in academic writing?

2) Is the triglossic nature of first language interference the major cause for errors in the English writings of Arab-Israeli students?

3) What are the most common sources of academic writing errors in students' essays?

5. Results

Three main findings emerged from the current study. First, 44 students made 2965 errors. This is a relatively considerable number in proportion with the length of the essay. Second, according to the first rating scale, the most frequent errors were in explicitness and complexity, while the least frequent ones were in objectivity. Third, according to the second rating scale most frequent errors were in lexis (use of poor lexis and wrong words) and mechanics (spelling mistakes, capitalization errors and punctuation); while the least frequent errors were in formality (use of contractions, directives addressing the reader, informal, slang and idioms, numbered lists and bulleted items).

5.1 Data Collection and Analysis

5.1.1 The Generic Assessment Tool: Logical Flow of Essay

To rank the level of students' writing performance in general, descriptive statistics were used, and they revealed the following:

Table 1. The generic assessment tool

Characterstics	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	SD
Objectivity	44	1.00	3.00	1.78	.51
Responsibility	44	1.00	3.00	2.20	.63
Organization	44	1.40	3.00	2.28	.45
Explicitness	44	1.50	3.00	2.42	.51
Complexity	44	2.00	3.00	2.70	.46
Total	44	1.36	3.00	2.25	.42

As shown in the table above the students had average performance at objectivity (M = 1.78, SD = 0.51), and almost poor performance at responsibility and organization, (M = 2.20, 2.28, SD = 0.63, 0.45) on order, and poor performance at explicitness and complexity (M = 2.42, 2.70, SD = 0.51, 0.46) on order. That is, students make many errors in complexity, and less errors in objectivity. For more details, the mean and slandered deviation of each item are ordered from the lowest (mastery) to the highest (poor) performance table:

Table 2. Sub-criteria of the generic assessment tool

N	Item	N	Mean	SD
1	(Organization): Length of essay is sufficient (around 300 words).	44	1.4091	.65833
2	(Objectivity): Use of third person consistently rather than first and second persons. No use of personal nouns.	44	1.6818	.60127

3	(Objectivity): Description of argument accurately and without loaded or biased language.	44	1.8864	.57933
4	(Explicitness): Appropriate use of transitional expressions	44	2.0682	.72810
5	Responsibility and Academic Conventions	44	2.2045	.63170
6	(Organization): The paper unfolds orderly and logically.	44	2.3864	.57933
7	(Objectivity): Diction is appropriate and not colloquial; the meaning is concise and formal	44	2.4091	.58342
8	(Organization): Well developed, solid and cohesive paragraphs; paragraphs are evidence-based and support the author's opinion.	44	2.4773	.50526
9	(Complexity): Critical, reflective, logical, and creative thinking rather than descriptive or prescriptive thinking; use of concepts that describe abstract ideas	44	2.7045	.46152
10	(Organization): The paper has an introduction, body, and conclusion (organization).	44	2.7273	.62370
11	(Explicitness): Deep analysis of theme, genuine ideas.	44	2.7727	.42392

5.1.2 The Locally Tailored Assessment Tool: Frequency of Writing Errors

To find out the frequency of students' writing errors, descriptive statistics were used, and the results are illustrated in the following table:

Table 3. The locally tailored assessment tool

Characteristics	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	SD
Formality	44	.25	5.75	2.07	1.34
Sentence Structure	44	.00	4.67	2.28	1.22
Grammar	44	.00	5.71	2.74	1.33
Mechanics	44	.00	8.67	3.95	2.09
Lexis	44	1.00	17.00	7.16	3.39
Total	44	.18	6.64	3.06	1.39

Table 4. Sub-criteria of the locally tailored assessment tool

Serial		Valid	Mean	Minimum	Maximum	Sum
22	Use of wrong words	44	8.0909	0	20	356
21	Use of poor lexis/repetition.	44	6.2273	2	14	274
10	Incorrect verb tense/no verb	44	5.9318	0	12	261
16	Punctuation	44	5.0227	0	11	221
19	Use of informal, slang and idioms.	44	4.3864	1	10	193
14	Spelling mistakes	44	3.8182	0	9	168
7	Incorrect subject-verb agreement	44	3.2955	0	8	145
1	Vague and incomplete sentences.	44	3.1136	0	9	137
15	Capitalization errors	44	3.0909	0	7	136
12	Incorrect use of articles/lack of articles	44	3.0682	0	6	135
4	Use of fragments	44	3.0227	0	8	133
11	Indefinite pronouns (without clear antecedent)	44	2.3182	0	6	102
2	Incorrect word order	44	2.1591	0	5	95

17	Use of contractions.	44	2.1591	0	7	95
13	Incorrect use of prepositions	44	2.0909	0	7	92
3	Sentences are not related to the preceding ones	44	2.0682	0	5	91
5	Use of run-ons	44	1.6818	0	5	74
6	Lack of parallelism in a series of items	43	1.6512	0	4	71
9	Incorrect use of apostrophe	44	1.4091	0	5	62
8	Inappropriate use of passive voice	44	1.1364	0	4	50
18	Use of directives addressing the reader.	44	1.1364	0	5	50
20	Use of numbered lists and bulleted items	44	0.5455	0	4	24
	2965					

As shown in tables 3 and 4, students made less errors in formality (M = 2.07, SD = 1.34), few more errors in sentence structure (M = 2.28, SD = 1.22) and grammar (M = 2.74, SD = 1.33), and much more errors in mechanics (M = 3.95, SD = 2.09) and lexis (M = 7.16, SD = 3.39). In other words, the most frequent errors are lexis (use of poor lexis and wrong words) and mechanics (spelling mistakes, capitalization errors and punctuation); while the least frequent errors are formality ones (use of contractions, directives addressing the reader, informal, slang and idioms, numbered lists and bulleted items). For more details, the mean and slandered deviation of each item are ordered from the most frequent errors to the least frequent errors in this table. The results help us to understand students' writing strengths and weaknesses.

6. Discussion

This section addresses the most common errors EFL Arab-Israeli students have made and causes of such errors.

6.1 Triglossia

According to the available results outputted from the data collection tools, the causes of most errors made by EFL Arab-Israeli students can be attributed to the negative transfer from Arabic into English recognised as first language interference. In the case of EFL Arab-Israeli students the triglossic nature of their mother tongue or the tri-lingual interference is the main cause. This is particularly evident as we associate the nature of Arabic as a repetitive, indirect, ambiguous, and multi-thematic language with the deficiency of appropriate lexis or poor lexis. Likewise, the wrong-word error could be attributed to the L1 students' lack of understanding of L2 register and connotation. Perhaps the results shown in the previous section can be best explained by Bhela (1999, p. 22) who maintains that "When writing or speaking the target language L2, second language learners tend to rely on their native language L1 structures to produce a response." That is, when the syntactical structure in the second language is different from that of the first language an error is more likely to occur. This is evident as the most frequent errors are in lexis and grammar, and these criteria have totally diverse systems in English and Arabic. Although capitalization, prepositions and spelling have dissimilar structures in both languages, their lower error frequency here can be attributed to the fact that they are not used as recurrently as lexis and grammar.

6.1.1 Lexis and Grammar

Namely, lexis cannot be viewed as a separate entity from that of grammar, therefore we find that both these categories are oriented in approximate domains successively with respect to the number of errors. In the current study, students' errors in grammar were mainly in the misuse of verb tenses and subject-verb agreement. Such hindrances can be also related to L1 interference. Because the linguistic systems of Arabic and Hebrew are entirely different from that of English, students attempting to apply the rules of the target language end up applying the rules of their mother tongue (Selinker, 1969; Mukattash, 1978). The results show that the other substantial grammatical errors made by the students were spelling, articles, and prepositions.

6.1.2 Spelling

The results show that 44 students have made 168 spelling errors. Olsson (1972) and Hendrickson (1977) maintain that spelling errors of international students could be linked to their lack of lexical competence and incorrect lexical choice, misuse or omission of prepositions and pronouns, omission of verbs, deficient subject-verb agreement.

Ibrahim (1978), organises spelling errors made by EFL Arab students into seven categories. Here we mention six

of them. First, unlike English, Arabic is a phonetic language (laugh: laf; their: their, have: hav), and second, it has a different sound system (P vs. B: problem: broblem - ben: pen). Third, the transitional invented error is often found in EFL students' writing (frys: fries). Fourth, correspondence is another issue to be considered (tend: frend). Fifth, words that challenge classification in English, homophony (need: reed). Sixth, English is incongruent and has random word-formation (hate: hatred but not hatered). Deacon (2017, pp.1-3) presents other five main frequent spelling errors made by EFL Arab learners. The first is "vowel blindness." The second is the consonant doubling error (hopping; writting). The third is silent misspelling (withe, playe); the fourth is the "incorrect vowel graph" (haight: height; organaise, organise), and the last is capitalization. We would like to further elaborate the second error provided by Ibrahim. Although there is an equivalent to P in Hebrew "פ," the problem does not materialise in the Hebrew spelling of EFL Arab-Israeli students but rather in English spelling. The reason for this could be attributed to the diverse magnitude and frequency of practice students receive in both disciplines. The second error provided by Deacon is very common among EFL Arab-Israeli students as Arabic and Hebrew are both abjads and hence do not have vowels but rather nunation.

6.1.3 Articles

Another substantial error made by EFL Arab students is the use of "articles." This situation results from the misapplication of the English article system. According to Hewson (1972, p. 131), "the definite and the indefinite article are among the ten most frequent words of English discourse." Similarly, Celce-Murcia and Larsen-Freeman (1999) avow that English articles are classified within the most common function words. Ionin et al. (2004) contend that Japanese learners overuse "the" in all indefinite specific contexts because their mother tongue lacks an article system. The authors attribute this overuse of articles to what they call "fluctuation." In the same vein, Jaensch and Sarko (2009) reveal that EFL Arab students use the definite article "The" fluctuated between the definite article "The" and the indefinite article "a" in indefinite specific contexts. Kharma (1981) maintains that half of the article errors in writing are ensued using the English "article system" by EFL Arab learners. Scott and Tucker (1974) also argue that EFL Arab students make considerable article errors. Folse (2008) maintains that internalizing the English article system by EFL students is not a trouble-free task as languages like Chinese, and Japanese lack such system. In like manner, EFL Arab learners overuse the article "The." Crompton (2011) concludes that the commonest errors result from the misuse of "The" for generic reference. Andersen (1984) attributes the reason of such quandary to the fact that the English article system is not composed of one-to-one form and meaning relationships.

In this research, articles errors were categorised as grammatical errors. Hence, they constituted 15.9% of this category. There is a piercing disparity between both Arabic and English article systems. Whereas the former demonstrates a dyadic model of defined and undefined nouns, the English system proposes a triadic model. Arabic singular and plural nouns are simply defined or undefined by adding or unadding the definite article Al: The.' To define English singular or plural nouns the definite article 'The' is added, whereas undefined nouns are characterised by adding the indefinite articles 'a' and 'n' for singular nouns and unadding them in case of plural nouns. Hence, in/definiteness in English is indicated by lexical elements such as 'a' 'an' and 'the' while in Arabic it is designated by the prefix 'Al.'

6.1.4 Prepositions

The use of prepositions is another momentous handicap for EFL students who usually attempt to translate English prepositions to their mother tongue (James, 1996) and (Gass, 1983). Therefore, they struggle when using English prepositions (Pittman, 1966; Celce-Muricia & Larsen, 1983). Trujillo (1995) argues that EFL learners have difficulties with the prepositions due to the latter's decidedly polysemous behaviour and idiomatic nature. Whereas spatial and temporal prepositions were studied intensely, other types of prepositions such as instrument, amount and manner are largely unexamined. Prepositions pose a number of challenges for Arab EFL students because of cross-linguistic disparities between the prepositional system Arabic and English. Over and above, there are more prepositions in English than Arabic and there are even prepositions in English that have no equivalents or do not materialise in the Arabic language. Compared to Arabic which has twenty prepositions (Hassan, 1961) English has one hundred fifty prepositions (Essberger, 2012). Such disproportion produces meaningful and myriad preposition-related errors.

6.2 Responsibility

It is evident that EFL Arab-Israeli students have not scored well in the responsibility criterion which could be as well attributed to the fact that Arabic is an anecdotal, metaphorical, collectivist language rather than an evidence-driven one. Only 11.4% of the students acknowledged the provided source properly while the 56.8% partially acknowledged it or insufficiently acknowledged it. That is, some of the students used in-text citations

with quotation marks but did not provide a reference list, or they have not used a proper citation style. The remaining 31.8% have used the source but did not acknowledge it. The reason for this could be ascribed to the fact that "academic writing" in western standards is different from "academic writing" in oriental standards.

7. Research Limitations

Despite the considerably representative results, the present study has limitations that should be taken into account when interpreting the findings. First, though proved efficient, the type of the task is not fully representative for the less common writing sub-criteria such as the incorrect use of apostrophes, lack of parallelism, and passive voice. We noticed that some students did not even use these items because the task was not customised to meet such a goal. Therefore, it would be useful for future research to use other types of tasks in addition to the primary task so as to capture these items. A second issue to be considered is essay length and the time allotted for the writing task. The students were asked to write a 300-word essay and the time allotted for this task was a total of 2 hours. This fact has two implications. First, longer essays will have more errors and more time might alleviate the number of errors. Therefore, had the students written two essays of different lengths or two essays of identical lengths but with varied time spans, the results would have been more effective and more expressive.

8. Conclusion

Despite available large-scale studies investigating EFL/ESL students' writing difficulties and most common errors, research examining EFL Arab-Israeli students' in general and writing performance in particular remains scarce or even undone. This can simply be explained as both words "Israeli" and "Arab" insinuate historical and political connotations and are predominantly regarded as antonyms, adversaries, and enemies, i.e. the "Arab-Israeli" conflict. To add, this hyphenated combination of "Arab-Israeli" is rarely viewed as a means of integration or amalgamation as it stands here. Despite the fact that its demographic representation comprises 21% of Israel's overall population (Brookdale, 2018), the Arab-Israeli minority is still highly marginalised and underrepresented (Adala, 2011). Such representation, rather, is squeezed between the Palestinian rock and the Israeli hard place. Therefore, the status of Arab-Israelis has dissipated in each and every aspect, and English learning is no exception.

In this research we attempted to locate the most common errors in the writing of this particular group of students so as to find ways that tackle such specific errors. Nonetheless, EFL Arab-Israeli students undoubtedly constitute an integral part of both the local Arab community worldwide with whom they share the same language and history, and successively, they are also a part of the universal community of EFL students. In this research we have shown the unyielding correspondence between the errors made by EFL Arab-Israeli students and the other two groups. Perhaps the main difference lies in the triglossic nature of the Arabic language used by the former. Hopefully, screening this particular declassed micro-level group will add another valuable and substantial dimension to the macro-level field of English teaching and learning.

Acknowledgments

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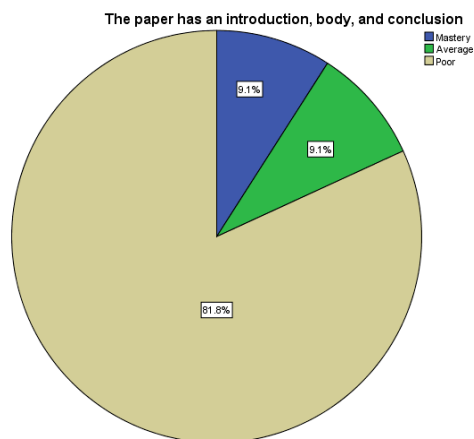
Appendices

Appendix A. Results derived from the generic assessment tool

The paper has an introduction, body, and conclusion (Organization 1)

	F	P	VP	CP
Mastery	4	9.1	9.1	9.1
Average	4	9.1	9.1	18.2
Poor	36	81.8	81.8	100.0
Total	44	100.0	100.0	

F = Frequency; P = Percent; VP = Valid Percent; CP = Cumulative Percent.

The paper has an introduction, body, and conclusion

Appendix B. The paper unfolds orderly and logically (Organization 2)

	F	P	VP	CP
Mastery	2	4.5	4.5	4.5
Average	23	52.3	52.3	56.8
Poor	19	43.2	43.2	100.0
Total	44	100.0	100.0	

The paper unfolds orderly and logically
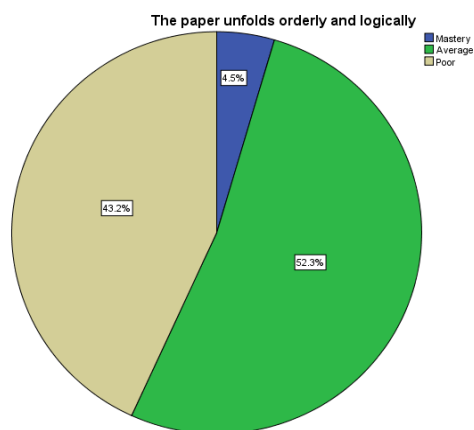
Appendix C. Length of essay is sufficient (Organization 3)

	F	P	VP	CP
Mastery	33	75.0	75.0	75.0
Average	7	15.9	15.9	90.9
Poor	4	9.1	9.1	100.0
Total	44	100.0	100.0	

**Length of essay is sufficient (around 300 words).**
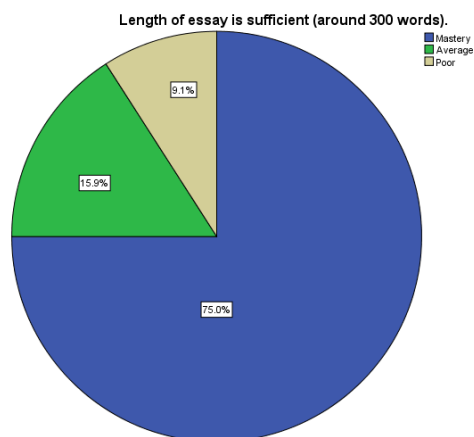
Appendix D. Well developed, solid and cohesive paragraphs; Paragraphs are evidence-based and support the author's opinion with evidence or relevant examples (paragraph level)

	F	P	VP	CP
Average	23	52.3	52.3	52.3
Poor	21	47.7	47.7	100.0
Total	44	100.0	100.0	

Well developed, solid and cohesive paragraphs; Paragraphs are evidence-based and support the author's opinion with evidence or relevant examples
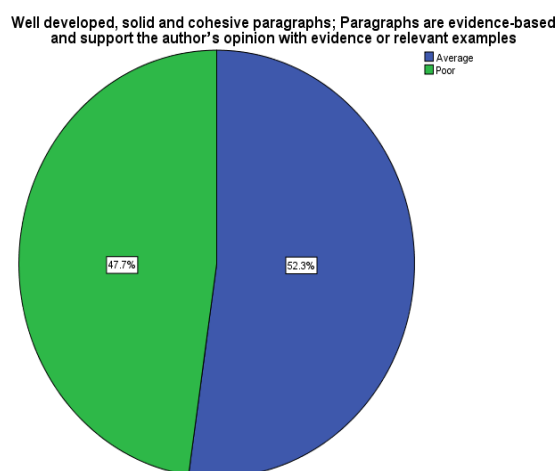

Appendix E. Diction is appropriate and not too colloquial; the meaning is concise and formal (Objectivity3)

	F	P	VP	CP
Mastery	2	4.5	4.5	4.5
Average	22	50.0	50.0	54.5
Poor	20	45.5	45.5	100.0
Total	44	100.0	100.0	

Diction is appropriate and not too colloquial; the meaning is concise and formal
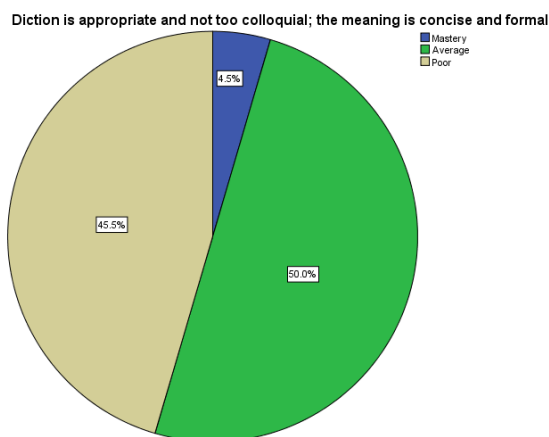
Appendix F. Appropriate use of transitional expressions (Explicitness 1)

	F	P	VP	CP
Mastery	10	22.7	22.7	22.7
Average	21	47.7	47.7	70.5
Poor	13	29.5	29.5	100.0
Total	44	100.0	100.0	

Appropriate use of transitional expressions
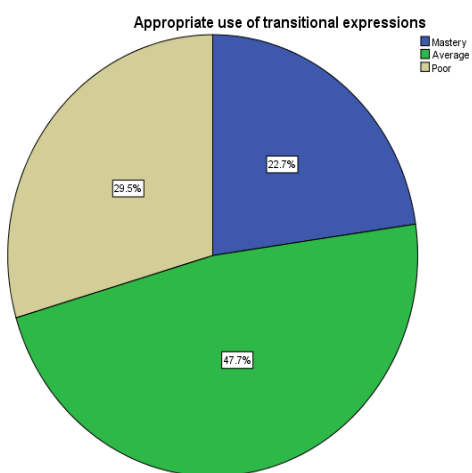
Appendix G. Deep analysis of theme, genuine ideas (Explicitness 2)

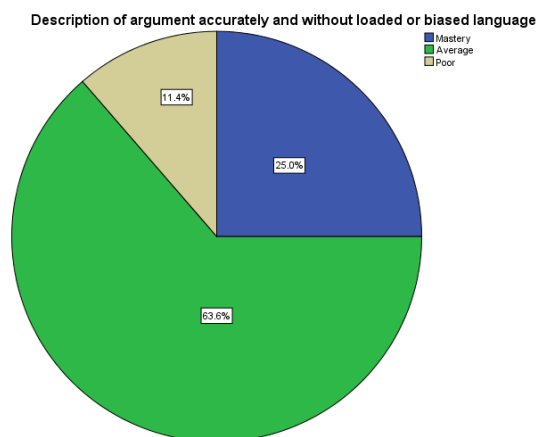|	F	P	VP	CP
Average	10	22.7	22.7	22.7
Poor	34	77.3	77.3	100.0
Total	44	100.0	100.0	

Deep analysis of theme, genuine ideas
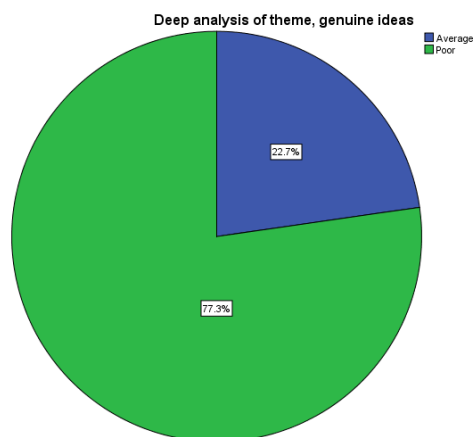
Appendix H. Use of third person consistently rather than first and second persons. No use of personal nouns - (Objectivity 1)

	F	P	VP	CP
Mastery	16	36.4	36.4	36.4
Average	25	56.8	56.8	93.2
Poor	3	6.8	6.8	100.0
Total	44	100.0	100.0	

Use of third person consistently rather than first and second persons. No use of personal nouns (I, you)
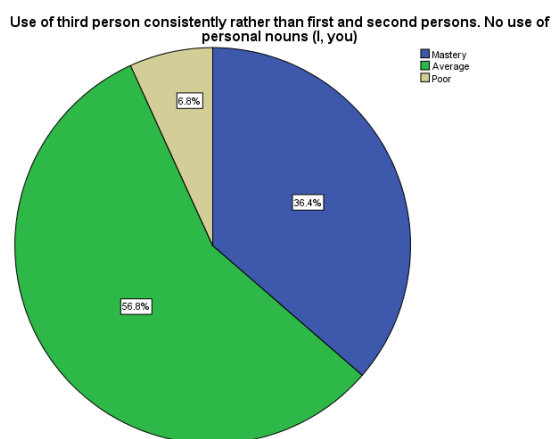
Appendix I. Description of argument accurately and without loaded or biased language (Objectivity 2)

|	F	P	VP	CP
Mastery	11	25.0	25.0	25.0
Average	28	63.6	63.6	88.6
Poor	5	11.4	11.4	100.0
Total	44	100.0	100.0	

Appendix J. Critical, reflective, logical, and creative thinking rather than descriptive or prescriptive thinking; use of concepts that describe abstract ideas

	F	P	VP	CP
Average	14	31.8	31.8	31.8
Poor	30	68.2	68.2	100.0
Total	44	100.0	100.0	
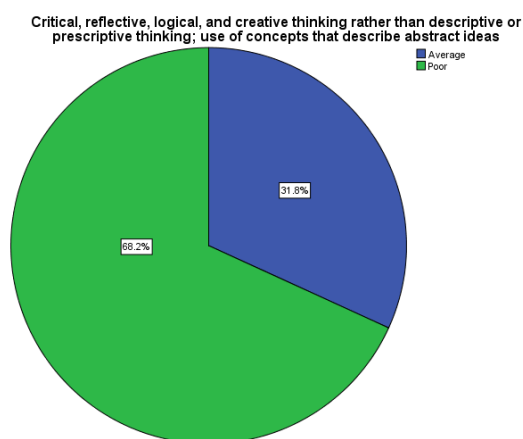
Appendix K. Correct use of referencing; Citing sources in the body of the paper and providing a list of references (Responsibility)

|	F	P	VP	CP
Mastery	5	11.4	11.4	11.4
Average	25	56.8	56.8	68.2
Poor	14	31.8	31.8	100.0
Total	44	100.0	100.0	

Correct use of referencing; Citing sources in the body of the paper and providing a list of references
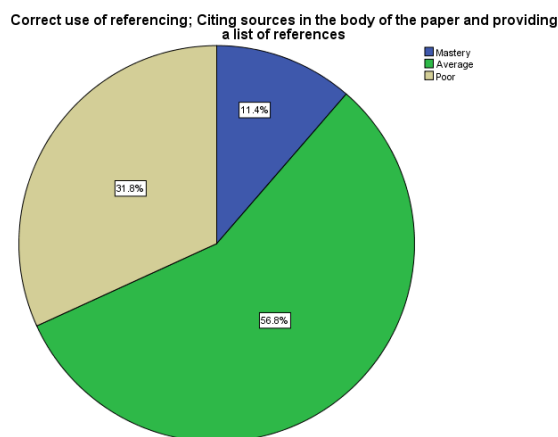
Appendix L. Statistics

	Valid	Mean	SD
The paper has an introduction, body, and conclusion	44	2.7273	**.62370**
The paper unfolds orderly and logically	44	2.3864	**.57933**
Length of essay is sufficient (around 300 words).	44	1.3409	**.64495**
Well developed, solid and cohesive paragraphs; Paragraphs are evidence-based and support the author's opinion with evidence or relevant examples	44	2.4773	**.50526**
Diction is appropriate and not too colloquial; the meaning is concise and formal	44	2.4091	**.58342**
Appropriate use of transitional expressions	44	2.0682	**.72810**
Deep analysis of theme, genuine ideas	44	2.7727	**.42392**
Use of third person consistently rather than first and second persons. No use of personal nouns (I, you)	44	1.7045	**.59375**
Description of argument accurately and without loaded or biased language	44	1.8636	**.59419**
Critical, reflective, logical, and creative thinking rather than descriptive or prescriptive thinking; use of concepts that describe abstract ideas	44	2.6818	**.47116**
Correct use of referencing; Citing sources in the body of the paper and providing a list of references	44	2.2045	**.63170**

Appendix M. Errors
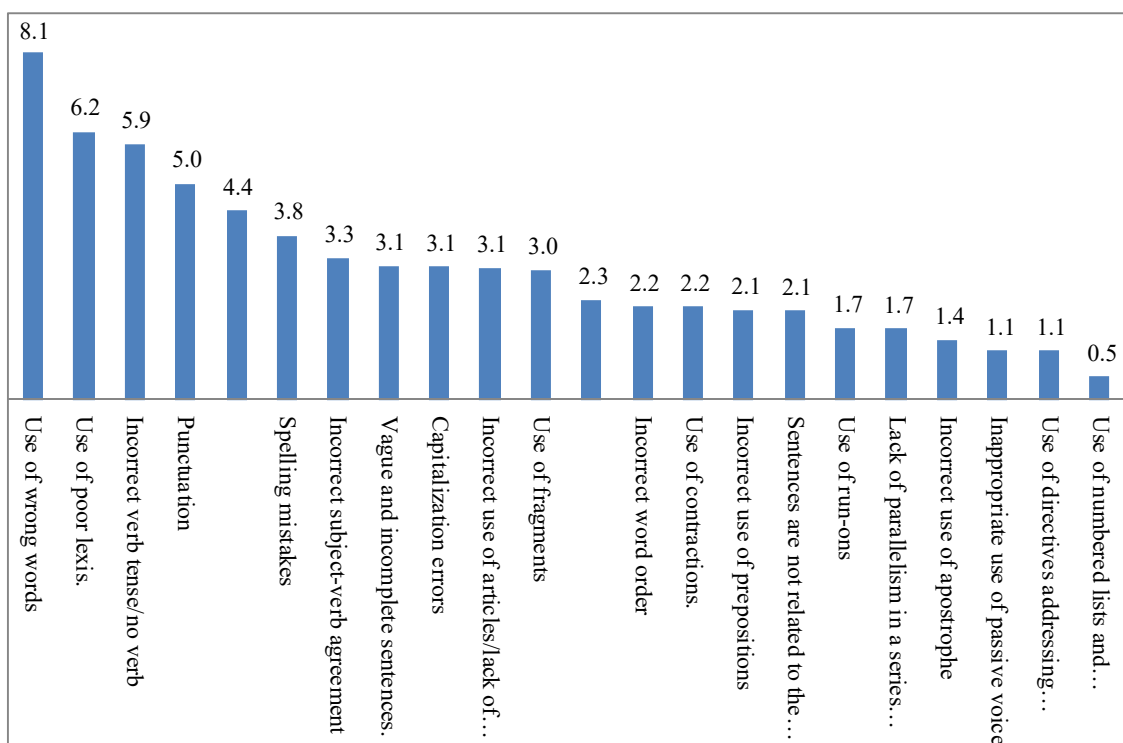
Notes

Note 1. James Hock University Learning Center.

Note 2. Also called language transfer.

Note 3. Translated from Hebrew.

Note 4. Such as Lee, S. N., & Tajino, A. (2008); Chou, L. (2011)

Note 5. The rating scales designed by the researchers were partially adapted from existing.

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