



Assessing the Degree of Communicative Errors in English by Libyan Students

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Abstract

This case study intends to explore the degree and types of inaccuracy in communicative errors made by the students of Garyounis University Ajdabiya, Libya. The study is entirely empirical as it draws conclusions based on classroom observation. Questionnaire and structured interview were two prime sources of Data collection; whereas, descriptive statistics was used to analyze the data. The study presents six striking findings as to pathetic performance of Libyan students in both spoken and written communication. The study also forwards six remedial measures to overcome the explored areas of communicative errors.

Keywords: Communicative errors

1. Introduction

In Libya English learners fail to learn English to a satisfactory level for several reasons. As a building crumbles due to weak foundations, so happens in the case of teaching and learning English in Libya. Teaching English as a foreign language is generally a very versatile, demanding, interesting, and challenging profession. But more often than not this profession ends at a tragic note when the prescribed course is completed on the prescribed time without producing any significant result. If we look at some of the chief causes of the students' failure in learning English in Libya, we find that the students take English as a subject or simply as a paper in order to pass the concerned examination with some good grades rather than mastering English language in terms of speaking or writing. They learn merely a set of grammar rules, few structures, and few words which are not enough to learn the real English. There is almost no urge among students to learn and practice this language. Most of the students do not see any great use of this language in their present life, so they don't like to use it out of classrooms. Moreover, the course curriculum does not have the right approach towards teaching and preparing lessons according to a particular method of teaching for different levels of students. Most often the students' performance is not measured in a fruitful way rather learning English becomes just a matter of memorizing some text and passing the exam. Whatever be the reason of this disaster, the sheer fact is that English in Libya has not reached to its intended target so far. Anyhow, we cannot blame only the poor receptivity of the students or the existing curriculum or teaching methodologies. But, one of the most important and somehow unheeded reasons is the shortage of competent teachers. Unlike Japan, Korea, Thailand, and many Arab countries like Saudi Arabia, UAE, Jordan, etc. where Applied Linguistics, TEFL, TESL, TESOL, ESOL, CELTA, or DELTA certification is mandatory to be an English Language Teacher apart from being a native speaker, Libya is

deprived of the same except oil companies. As a result, students not only develop faulty accents but also remain unaware of the stylistic and cultural nuances of the native speakers.

In Libya, there are two distinct stages of teaching English as a foreign language. The first stage covers the period of 1943 to 1986. This period was very important because it laid the foundation stones of teaching English in Libya. The second stage was after the year 1992. It is to be noticed that there is a gap between the two dates which was about 6 years. This specific period of time can be viewed as a blank phase in which teaching and learning English at all the levels of schools, institutes and universities were stopped.

In the early stage, students had English textbooks such as '*Basic English*', followed by '*Modern Reader*', which were written by English authors. But in the beginning of the eighties the textbooks were changed, they were written by British and Libyan authors as well, such as '*Further English for Libya*'. The most noticeable point is that all these books concentrated on teaching two skills only, reading and grammar, the teachers who implemented that task focused on these skills and almost they neglected the other skills such as speaking, writing, listening, comprehension, pronunciation and others.

1.2 Objective

The present thesis intends to explore the degree of inaccuracy in communicative errors made by the students of Garyounis University Ajdabiya, Libya. The research explores two main areas of communicative errors: (1) Errors in Spoken Communication and (2) Errors in Written Communication. In this pursuit, the research uses the methodology of case-study by preparing questionnaires. There are two questionnaires: one for finding errors in spoken communication and another for finding errors in written communication.

2. Methodology

The research design of this study is case study. The study is purely empirical in its nature as it concludes the results based on observation. For this it utilizes the methods of case-study using two sets of questionnaires: one for finding errors in spoken communication and another for finding errors in written communication. The questionnaires were given to 50 subjects of the English, Biology, Phonetics-1, Phonetics-2, and Geography. Like any other case-study, the present research also has its own specific instrument to prepare and carry out a task. There are two main instruments of this case-study: (1) a questionnaire, (2) observation and results. The questionnaires were prepared to assess the proficiency spoken communication at word level, sentence level, and comprehension (paragraph) level. The results of the performance have firstly been given in terms of error percentage of each student of five different groups; secondly it shows the average percentage by aggregating the total percentage.

2.1 Results and Discussion

The following are the criteria of giving different grades in spoken test based on the number of mistakes made by the students.

Table-1. The Criteria of Grading

0-2=	Good
3-5=	Poor
6-8=	Bad
9-11=	Very bad
11>=	Horrible
No answer =11	Horrible

Table-3. Average Performance of in Seven Areas Grammar

Sub	NA	VA	Pre	WC	Art	Pro	IF
Phonetics-1	2.2	4.4	1.1	4.2	0.6	0.2	5.3
English	1.2	1.5	0.6	0.7	0.3	0.2	2.2
Phonetics-2	2.5	1.0	0.4	2.0	0.1	0	1.2
Geography	11	6.7	9.7	11	11	11	9.7
Biology	7.2	7.8	6.8	7.1	5.3	8.3	8.7
Average	4.8	4.2	3.7	5.0	3.4	3.9	5.4
Grade	Poor	Poor	Poor	Poor	Poor	Poor	bad

The above table shows some of the striking results of the spoken test in terms of seven types of Error: (1) Number Agreement, (2) Verb agreement, (3) Preposition, (4) Word Choice, (5) Article, (6) Pronunciation, and (7) Ill-formed Construction. The above tabular chart shows the error percentage of above mentioned 7 parameters. It's desirable to add here that error percentage has been graded at six levels, i.e. good, poor, bad, very bad, very bad, and horrible as shown in the table-1 above with their respective values. Based on these parameters, we find the statistical results of the students of five groups. Apart from the separate results of the five groups in terms of seven possible errors, the table also shows the average percentage of these seven possible types of Errors distinctively. It is noteworthy in the table (7) that the grade of total errors in IF (Ill-formed Construction) is bad, whereas the other six areas show poor performance. This definitely is a matter of concern for both the teachers and the students in Libyan academic setup.

2.3 Written Tests and Results

S4

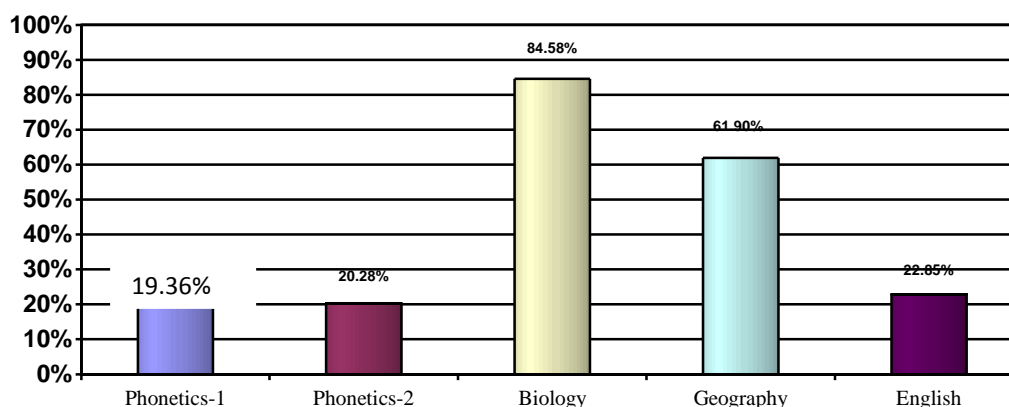


Figure-2 Performance in Written Test (Dictation of Words)

The above bar chart shows some of the striking results of the written test at word level. The chart shows the error percentage of wrong words by the subjects of five different groups. The first group (phonetics-1) shows the minimum percentage of wrong words that is 19.36%. The second group (phonetics-2) has made only 20.28% which is just 1.28% more than Phonetics-1. The third bar, which stands for Biology, shows the highest level of wrong words percentage that is 84.58%. The fourth bar which stands for Geography shows the second highest percentage of wrong words (i.e. 61.90%), whereas the last bar of English

shows that it has made only 2.57% more errors than Phonetics-2. When we tried to get into the depth of the reasons of the horrible performance of Biology group, we found that they are almost nil in terms of writing and speaking English and they didn't have any foundation of English even at school level. On the other hand, Phonetics-1 which gave the best performance is undoubtedly better in terms of their competence of Spoken and Written English than any other groups.

- **Written Test (Dictation of Paragraph)**

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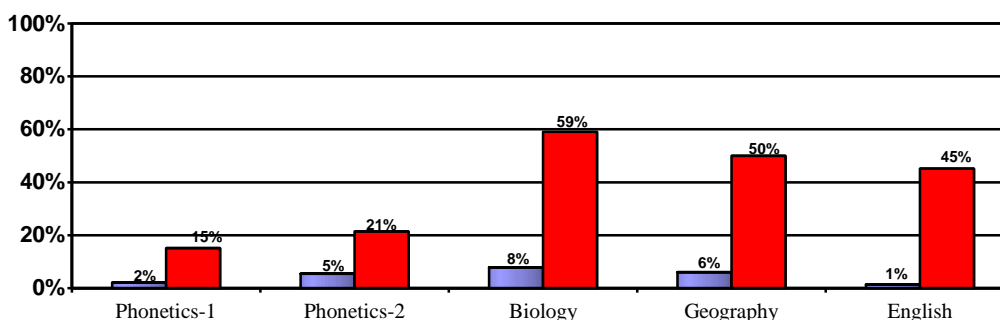


Figure-3 Average Performance of All Subjects

Result Analysis:

The above bar chart shows some of the striking results of the written test at paragraph level. The chart shows the error percentage of missed words and wrong words by the students of five different groups.

The first group (phonetics-1) shows the minimum percentage of missed words indicated by blue bar and wrong words indicated by red bar that is 2% and 15% respectively.

The second group (phonetics-2) has made 5% errors in missed words and 25% in wrong words which are 3% and 10% more than phonetics-1 respectively.

The third bar, which stands for Biology group, shows surprisingly 1% errors in missed words but in wrong words it shows the highest level of errors that is 59%.

The fourth bar which stands for Geography group shows the highest level of errors in missed words that is 6% and in terms of wrong words' errors it shows the second highest percentage that is 50%.

The last bar which stands for English group has made second minimum percentage of missed words that is 1.38% and in terms of wrong words it shows the third highest level that is 45%.

- **Written Test (Translation)**

Table-4: Average Errors in Four Areas of Translation

Sub	Agr	Punc	Spl	WC
Phonetics-1	16	16	100	100
Phonetics-2	5.1	6.9	14.8	14.3
Biology	7.2	16	76.1	93.6
Geography	16	13.9	94	74.8

English	4.3	10.6	9.8	10.4
Average	9.72	12.68	58.94	58.62
Grade	Bad	Very bad	Bad	Bad

The tabular chart (7) shows some of the striking results of the translation as part of the written test. The chart shows the average errors in four major areas of translation (agreement, Punctuation, spelling, and word choice.) by the students of five different groups, i.e. Phonetics-1, Phonetics-2, Biology, Geography, and English. The first group (phonetics-1) shows 16, 16, 100, and 100 as the average errors in agreement, punctuation, spelling, and word choice respectively. Here it is desirable to mention that all the subjects in phonetics-1 refused to go for translation test which shows their incompetence in translating from Arabic to English therefore their performance has been graded as horrible. The second group (phonetics-2) shows 5.1, 6.9, 14.8, and 14.3 as the average errors in agreement, punctuation, spelling, and word choice respectively. The third group (Biology) shows 7.2, 16, 76.1, and 93.6 as the average errors in agreement, punctuation, spelling, and word choice respectively. The fourth group (Geography) shows 16, 13.9, 94, and 74.8 as the average errors in agreement, punctuation, spelling, and word choice respectively. The fifth group (English) shows 4.3, 10.6, 9.8, and 10.4. Now if we look at the average errors of these five groups in terms of agreement, punctuation, spelling, and word choice they are as follows.

- a. The average error in agreement is 9.72 and the grade is bad.
- b. The average error in punctuation is 12.68 and the grade is very bad.
- c. The average error in spelling is 58.94 and the grade is bad.
- d. The average error in word choice is 58.62 and the grade is bad.
- e. In written test specially translation test, it was found that the students have made maximum errors in punctuation followed by agreement, spelling and word choice respectively.
- f. Students also make mistakes in terms of word order of especially between adjective and noun.
- g. Students make mistakes in terms of pronominal choice, e.g substituting *I, he, him* by *you, she, her*, respectively.

3.1 Concluding Remarks

As a part of conclusion, it is desirable to have a glance at some of the major findings of the research.

3.1.1 Findings at a glance

- a. In spoken test, it is noteworthy that the grade of total errors in IF (Ill-formed Construction) is bad, whereas the other six areas, i.e. **noun agreement**, **verb agreement**, **preposition**, **word choice**, **article**, and **pronunciation** show poor performance as in table 7 on page 14.
- b. In the results of the written test at word level which shows the error percentage of wrong words by the students of five different groups, the first group (phonetics-1) shows the minimum percentage of wrong words that is 19.36%. The second group (phonetics-2) has made only 20.28%. The third group (Biology) shows the highest level of wrong words percentage that is 84.58%. The fourth group (Geography) shows the second highest percentage of wrong words (i.e. 61.90%), whereas the English group has made 22.85% which is only 2.57% more errors than Phonetics-2.
- c. The results of the written test at paragraph level show the error percentage of missed

words and wrong words by the students of five different groups. The first group (phonetics-1) has made the minimum percentage of missed words and wrong words which are 2% and 15% respectively. The second group (phonetics-2) has made 5% errors in missed words and 25% in wrong words which are 3% and 10% more than phonetics-1 respectively. The Biology group, has made surprisingly 1% errors in missed words but in wrong words it shows the highest level of errors that is 59%. The Geography group has made the highest level of errors in missed words that is 6% and in terms of wrong words' errors it has made the second highest percentage that is 50%. The English group has made second minimum percentage of missed words that is 1.38% and in terms of wrong words it is 45%.

- d. The results of the translation as part of the written test show the average errors in four major areas of translation (agreement, Punctuation, spelling, and word choice.) by the students of five different groups, i.e. Phonetics-1, Phonetics-2, Biology, Geography, and English. The first group (phonetics-1) shows 16, 16, 100, and 100 as the average errors in agreement, punctuation, spelling, and word choice respectively. Here it is desirable to mention that all the subjects in phonetics-1 refused to go for translation test which shows their incompetence in translating from Arabic to English therefore their performance has been graded as horrible. The second group (phonetics-2) shows 5.1, 6.9, 14.8, and 14.3 as the average errors in agreement, punctuation, spelling, and word choice respectively. The third group (Biology) shows 7.2, 16, 76.1, and 93.6 as the average errors in agreement, punctuation, spelling, and word choice respectively. The fourth group (Geography) shows 16, 13.9, 94, and 74.8 as the average errors in agreement, punctuation, spelling, and word choice respectively. The fifth group (English) shows 4.3, 10.6, 9.8, and 10.4. The average errors of these five groups in terms of agreement, punctuation, spelling, and word choice are 9.72, 12.68, 58.94, 58.62, and the grades are bad, very bad, bad, and bad respectively. It is noteworthy here that the students have made maximum errors in punctuation followed by agreement, spelling and word choice respectively.

When we tried to get into the depth of the reasons of the horrible performance of Biology group, we found that they are almost nil in terms of writing and speaking English and they didn't have any foundation of English even at school level. Moreover, they have weak syllabus of English without any access to language lab and other facilities to improve their speaking and listening in particular. On the other hand, Phonetics-1 which gave the best performance is undoubtedly better in terms of their competence of Spoken and Written English than any other groups. This also shows that current students who come from schools of English specialized schools like 7 April, Hasan Barani, or English Medium schools of Prega are more conversant and active in the usage of English. Another decisive factor was found to be the parental guidance and family environment. For example the students of Prega are more privileged to speak English because their parents speak English and they also have access to native speakers which facilitates them to learn English from the right source and in right form.

It has been found that teachers in Libyan schools focus on Grammar Translation Method (GTM) which teaches the rules of the language, how to translate phrases and sentences from the source language (SL) into the target language (TL) and vice versa. It also requires students to memorize lists of vocabulary. This method does not teach the student how to speak, read and understand the EL; instead, it teaches the student how to talk about tenses. It is also desirable to add that students do not get much exposure to learn and use English language after passing their graduation examinations. They merely get a chance of teaching in schools for four weeks which is not sufficient to improve either the standard of students or themselves.

3.2 Recommendations:

The following recommendations are intended to resolve the common problems of teaching and learning English.

- a. Firstly, a fixed curriculum should be designed and prescribed which could take into account the existing problems of the learners at different linguistic levels, e.g. suprasegmental features, syntactic issues, morphological functioning, etc.
- b. Teachers are supposed to have in-service development courses in teaching English language, e.g. TESL, TESOL, CELTA, DELTA, TEFL, etc. before starting their jobs.
- c. Teachers should also undergo an extensive training to have required expertise of teaching prescribed textbooks and to know how to use language labs.
- d. Frequent changes in textbooks should be stopped as they pose serious threats in stabilizing the tempo of learning.
- e. Classes should contain more practical and interactive components rather than theoretical aspects.
- f. Non-native teachers should not be preferred for teaching English Language as they do not have stylistic and cultural nuances of the language. In addition, they have faulty accents and intonation patterns.
- g. The mode of examination should be changed in order to orient students towards learning and using the language rather than facilitating the students to merely pass examination.
- h. Syllabuses of General department should be changed as they do not meet the overall requirements of learning English language.

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Abbreviation

Agr	Agreement
N	Noun
SPL	Spelling
WC	Word Choice
WO	Word Order
V	Verb
MW	Mixed Word
WW	Wrong Word
NA	Number agreement
VA	Verb agreement
Pre	Preposition
Art	Article
Pro	Pronunciation
Punc	Punctuation
IF	Ill formed
TEFL	Teaching English as a Foreign Language
TESL	Teaching English as a Second Language
TESOL	Teaching English to the Speakers of Other Languages