

# An Analysis on Common Syntactical Errors in an Arabic Speech Discourse: A Case Study in International Islamic University Malaysia

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The aim of this paper is to investigate the causes of errors which hinder the development of the students of Arabic for the international communication undergraduate programme while applying the syntactical rules of Arabic language during their practical persuasive speech course. The respondents were purposively selected from 23 students who were taking this practical course in an academic semester in their first year of study. The data were collected from students' presentation and the analysis of the speech discourse was conducted during the second semester of the academic year 2013-2014. The students were requested to present a group presentation on a certain topic by creating a video project via Youtube®, which consists of their speech practical discourse. The findings revealed that the major errors occurred in the application of inflectional parsing during the speech for persuasion among the first year students. In general, the data from the mean analysis revealed that the major errors occurred in the application of inflectional parsing during the speech for persuasion among the students. Based on the syntactical analysis from observation, the researchers found that the most frequent errors were inflectional parsing (22.07%), followed by the least mistake, which was the omission of "Fa" after the word "Ammaa" (1.5%). Other mistakes were found in using the gender of Arabic words (20.7%); singular, dual, or plural forms (19.4%); particles (13.5%); definite article "Al" (12.9%); relative nouns (5.1%); and the use of "an" of gerund after imperfect verb (2.5%). In general, this paper has contributed to a list of syntactical topics that need to be emphasized by teachers in a speech and persuasion course in order to produce quality students for Arabic communication after graduation and to fulfil the needs of market workplace based on descriptive findings and a checklist of observation in persuasive speech.

*Keywords:* speech and persuasion, Arabic syntax, Arabic language learning, language for communication, error analysis

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## Introduction

Arabic is gaining its importance in today's globalized modern world. Spoken in many countries, it is growing in popularity for social communications, business interactions, and religious purposes. Acknowledging its importance, numerous Arabic as a second or foreign language courses have been offered by public and private colleges. Adult learners are taking these courses and they often expect to be proficient in the language within a short period of time.

Any language cannot be acquired without constant application in speaking and writing. Therefore, practical language production is considered important for the learner. The relationship between speaking skill and persuasion is very pertinent as the ability helps someone convince listeners on a certain issue or topic. It has been obviously observed that people speak sometimes for the purpose of persuading others and convincing the audience to accept a particular point of view in terms of language. Hence, it could be noted that there is a strong relation between the use of language either in speaking or writing and the functional syntax. Yet, there is not much analysis that has been done on the common errors made by learners of Arabic when information of learners' problems is essential for effective teaching. As Corder (1981) asserted, only after systematically analyzing learners' errors that teachers can determine the areas to reinforce. With the lack of information currently available to Arabic instructors, it was the objective of this study to analyze the errors commonly made by a group of Arabic learners in the International Islamic University Malaysia (IIUM). The study focused on the syntactical errors frequently made in a speech.

### The Importance of Persuasion as a Language Skill

A persuasive speech is a specific type of speech in which the speaker has a goal of convincing the audience to accept his/her point of view. The speech is arranged in such a way as to hopefully cause the audience to accept all or part of the expressed view. Based on Lee (2012), there are five elements for persuasive speaking, which are correctness of diction, rhythm, accumulation of argument, analogy, and wild extravagance. In delivering a persuasive speech, Parker (2001) has suggested nine important aspects of presentation to be kept in mind, which are body language, articulation, pronunciation, pitch, speed, pauses, volume, quality, and variance. Two of the aspects—articulation and pronunciation—will be adapted by this paper in analyzing the students' presentation in a persuasive speech course in addition to their syntactical errors. This is because students of language and communication need to adapt to the grammatical rules and principles of the language in terms of accuracy, coherence, and cohesion.

Though the overarching goal of a persuasive speech is to convince the audience to accept a perspective, not all audiences can be convinced by a single speech and not all perspectives can persuade the audience. The researchers in this issue notice that many students who study Arabic are facing a problem of communication in the class. Thus, this study plans to investigate whether or not students at the Kulliyah of Languages and Management (KLM) of the IIUM have any problems when they communicate. And if yes, why? Above all, this research aims to investigate the factors behind the students' errors in Arabic language persuasive speeches. Therefore, this research investigates the errors frequently committed by the current students of Arabic for international communication of the KLM while speaking to persuade. The students also should be aware of using correct Arabic syntactical rules during their speeches and other various language activities. Likewise, teachers are encouraged to emphasize functional syntax and guide the learners on the best methods of errors identification and correction.

### **Literature Review**

Error analysis is emphasized by Johanson (1975) as the best tool for describing and explaining the errors made by language learners. It is the study of the unacceptable forms produced by language learners, especially by those learning a foreign language (Crystal, 1999). This analysis serves three purposes. It provides information on the level of language proficiency that the learner has reached, the common difficulties in language learning, and how people learn a language (Sercombe, 2000). According to Corder (1967), there are two types of errors: performance errors and competence errors. While the first type of error may be done unintentionally, the second reflects inadequate learning. A further distinction of global errors and local errors is made by Burt and Kiparsky (1972). Global errors hinder communication by causing confusion in the relationship between and among the parts of the discourse, e.g., wrong word order in a sentence. Local errors, on the other hand, do not go beyond the clause or sentence level.

Ancker (2000, p. 21) explained that there are many reasons why learners make errors when learning a language. Among the common reasons are interference from the native language, overgeneralization, incomplete knowledge of the target language, and the complexity of the target language itself. Giri (2010) found that undergraduate students in Nepal committed many grammatical errors in the use of the English language. The major errors committed by them were apparently manifested in the application of some grammatical units while constructing sentences and clauses. Also, their errors could be noticed in the use of conditional moods, forms, tenses, main verbs, subject-verb agreement, question formations, word order, and noun phrases. This paper is only analyzing the data of language errors from students' group presentation that were identified, quantified, described, and classified under appropriate units and categories of grammar as mentioned by Corder (1967; 1974). He has identified a particular model for error analysis in three stages that are:

- (a) Data collection: Recognition of idiosyncrasy;
- (b) Description: Accounting for idiosyncratic dialect;
- (c) Explanation: The ultimate object of error analysis.

### **Significance of the Research**

The significance of error analysis was observed by Richard, J. Platt, and H. Platt (1992, p. 127) as they claimed that error analysis could be carried out for the following reasons: (a) to know the strategies which are employed by the learners when learning the language; (b) to specify the causes of errors made by learners; and (c) to get information on common difficulties in language learning, as an aid to teaching or in the preparation of teaching materials. This notion was supported by Corder (1981, pp. 10-11) as he reported that errors are important to a teacher, because errors reflected how far towards the goal his/her learners have progressed, and consequently, what remains for them to learn. Errors also could provide a researcher evidences of how a language is learned or acquired and what strategies or procedures a learner is employing in his/her discovery of the language. Furthermore, errors are necessary to the learner himself/herself, because we can regard making of errors as a device the learner uses in order to learn. It is a way for a learner to test his/her hypothesis about the nature of the language he/she is learning. Based on Yahya (2013), there are three factors that usually affect students' performance in their speaking performance, which are test anxiety, communication anxiety, and fear of negative feedback anxiety. Nevertheless, this paper is not investigating those affecting factors in contributing to the language speaking errors. Relating to this focus of error analysis, a study revealed patterns in rates of

noun- and verb- related errors during the development of proficiency: Verbal errors were firmly associated with lower-level learners, and nominal errors were firmly associated with advanced-level learners (Mariko, 2007). In addition, this paper investigates how the students present their persuasive materials based on a general checklist of observation in persuasive public speaking as mentioned by Gregory (2005), which consists of introduction, body of speech, delivery, visual aids, and conclusion of presentation.

### Types of Language Errors in Speech Delivery

Dagneaux, Denness, Granger, and Meunier (1996) explained the different codes used in the corpus annotation (see Table 1). Random selection of the errors committed by the students for analysis depends on Dagneaux et al.'s (1996) explanation, as shown in Table 1. However, this research adopted codes and types of errors by Dagneaux et al. (1996), as shown in Table 1.

Table 1

#### *Codes and Types of Error*

Code	Type of error
FM	Form—Morphology
FS	Form—Spelling
GA	Grammar—Articles
GN	Grammar—Nouns
GNC	Grammar—Noun case
GNN	Grammar— Noun number
GP	Grammar—Pronouns
GADJO	Grammar—Adjective order
GADJN	Grammar—Adjective number
GADJCS	Grammar—Comparative/superlative
GADVO	Grammar—Adverb order
GVN	Grammar—Verb number
GVM	Grammar—Verb morphology
GVNF	Grammar—Non-finite/finite verb forms
GVV	Grammar—Verb voice
GVT	Grammar—Verb tense
GVAUX	Grammar—Auxiliaries
GWC	Grammar—Word class
XADJO	Lexico-grammar—Erroneous complementation of adjectives
XCONJCO	Lexico-grammar—Erroneous complementation of conjunctions
XNCO	Lexico-grammar—Erroneous complementation of nouns
XPRCO	Lexico-grammar—Erroneous complementation of prepositions
XVCO	Lexico-grammar—Erroneous complementation of verbs
XADJPR	Lexico-grammar—Adjectives used with the wrong dependent preposition
XNPR	Lexico-grammar—Nouns used with the wrong dependent preposition
XVPR	Lexico-grammar—Verbs used with the wrong dependent preposition
XNUC	Lexico-grammar—Nouns: uncountable/countable
LS	Lexis—Lexical single
LSF	Lexis—False friends
LP	Lexis—Lexical phrase

(Table 1 to be continued)

LCL	Lexis—Logical connectors
LCLS	Lexis—Single logical connector
LCLC	Lexis—Complex logical connector
LCC	Lexis—Coordinating conjunctions
LSC	Lexis—Subordinating conjunctions
WR	Word redundant
WM	Word missing
WO	Word order
R	Register
S	Style
SI	Style—Incomplete
SU	Style—Unclear

*Note.* Source: Dagneaux et al. (1996).

### Methodology

This research used 23 students from the persuasion speech course which were conducted in the second semester of the academic year 2013-2014. The researchers assisted the respondents to choose a topic from the course outlines which the students of this course must prepare presentation at the end of the semester. However, the presentation was recorded through video device for the purpose of extracting data. The lectures played back the video and classified the errors into two categories that were syntax errors, as well as morphological errors. This research adopted the steps by Corder (1974) (as cited in Ellis, 1994, p. 48) to analyze the data, which are collection of a sample of learner language, identification of errors, description of errors, explanation of errors, and evaluation of errors. Above all, this research recorded the errors in each category on frequency basis and the ratio for each item was recorded. The reason for each error was noted.

### Findings

#### Descriptive Findings

Based on the findings, the highest number of errors was observed in inflectional parsing (22.07%), followed by masculine instead of feminine and vice versa (20.7%). Meanwhile, misuse of words on singular, dual, or plural forms was 19.4%, followed by misuse of particle (13.5%), misuse of definite article “Al” (12.9%), misuse of relative nouns (5.1%), and unnecessary use of “an” of gerund after imperfect verb (2.5%); the lowest number of errors was the omission of “Fa” after the word “Ammaa” (1.5%). Above all, the data from the mean analysis revealed that the major errors occurred in the application of inflectional parsing during the speech for persuasion among the first year students in the KLM. Syntactical errors were analyzed in Table 2.

As could be seen from the analysis that the highest number of errors was observed in inflectional parsing (22.07%), this could be due to the lack of grammar knowledge, because the students are still in their first step (first year), as stated by Taylor (1975), Corder (1981), and Ellis (1994, p. 470); the inflectional parsing followed by masculine instead of feminine and vice versa (20.7%), this could be due to the differences between mother tongue and then target language, as stated by Jassem (2000); the misuse of masculine and the misuse of words on singular, dual, or plural forms (19.4%), this may be due to that Malay language does not differentiate between dual and plural, as stated also by Jassem (2000); and the misuse of preposition (13.6%), this could be due to the lack of Arabic knowledge, as stated by Ancker (2000, p. 21). Errors occur for many reasons, for

example, interference from the native language, overgeneralization, incomplete knowledge of the target language, and the complexity of the target language itself. The finding revealed the misuse of definite article “Al” at 12.9% due to the mother tongue interference, as Taylor (1975) stated.

Table 2

*Syntactical Errors Based on Findings*

No	Type	Frequency	Percentage (%)	Example
1	Grammar-articles: Misuse of definite article “Al”; Misuse of particle	20 1	12.9 13.6	1. عندنا الزميل، الصحيح: عندنا زميل 1. أكثر من الناس، الصحيح: أكثر الناس
2	GNC (grammar-noun case): Misuse of words on singular, dual, or plural forms	30	19.4	1. يحيى بن كثير يدعو الله، الصحيح: يحيى بن كثير يدعو الله 2. كل بني آدم هو مخطئ، الصحيح: كل بني آدم هم مخطئون
3	Lexico-grammar: Adjectives used with the wrong dependent; Misuse of relative nouns	8	5.1	1. لأن محبة الأعمال الصالحة هو الذي....، الصحيح: لأن محبة الأعمال الصالحة هي التي 2. الناس الذي....، الصحيح: الناس الذين
4	Prepositions	21	13.6	. يدل إلى، 1 الصحيح: يدل على
5	Grammar error in inflectional parsing	34	22.07	1. استقبال الضيف الكريم ، الصحيح: استقبال الضيف الكريم 2. واتقوا الله، الصحيح : واتقوا الله
6	Masculine instead of feminine and vice versa	32	20.7	1. الملعقة الخشبي، الصحيح: الملعقة الخشبية 2. هذا المراجع، الصحيح: هذه المراجع
7	Unnecessary use of Tanween	154	99.27	1. دليلٌ وجوب، الصحيح: دليلٌ وجوب 2. بأخلاق ذلك شخصٌ، الصحيح: بأخلاق ذلك الشخص

**Qualitative Findings From the Observation Checklist**

Based on persuasive presentation by the students, the researchers have summarized the findings as follows:

**Presentation.** Some students did not have the art of presentation, and this could lead to many defects. Therefore, some of them, due to the time constrain, could not have time to be trained in presenting their topic in front of their colleagues before heading to class, which also could lead to negative aspect in their presentation and many errors in their presentation. For example, a student may read from the paper, he/she may not look at his/her audience, and he/she may keep looking at the board, which could make his/her presentation boring.

**Language errors.** The students’ voice sometimes is not clear, which could lead to misunderstanding and misinterpretation. For instance, the misuse of the vocabulary and grammar may cause the misplacement of object and subject in the use of language structure in Arabic language.

**Lack of confidence.** Some students are shy to present, which could lead to the fear to present.

In general, some students may unable to come with their approval in their presentation, which could need them to have many examples and stories from our history, as well as from our present time to make their presentation very sold and acceptable.

### Samples of Students' Video Persuasive Group Presentation

There are samples of the students' video presentation (see Figures 1, 2, & 3). After each presentation, the lecturer usually asked other students to comment and share their ideas. Students did so while the lecturer himself commented on the video, appreciated the presenter, and commended the contributions of the participants. Furthermore, the lecturer focused on the Arabic language errors and corrected them. It should be noted that the students' attention was drawn to the errors and the corrections.



Figure 1. A sample of students' video persuasive group presentation 1.



Figure 2. A sample of students' video persuasive group presentation 2.



Figure 3. A sample of students' video persuasive group presentation 3.

## Conclusion

As it is apparently noticed, the data analysis revealed that the major errors occurred in the application of inflectional parsing during the speech for persuasion among the first year students in the KLM. Some students may be unable to answer their colleagues' inquiries, which could affect their presentation. Therefore, the research work has successfully revealed the need for more practical training in speech by using the rules of Arabic syntax with special focus on inflectional parsing, which is a unique characteristic of language. Likewise, the department should take initiatives in encouraging students to participate in many language activities to enable them speak accurately, and a completion between our students and other universities in Malaysia or Arab countries should be conducted. The Arabic-speaking camp could be organized by the KLM. The KLM's initiative to students to other Arab countries via the exchange programme should be appreciated and continue to support students' language speaking.

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