
RESEARCH ARTICLE

An Investigation of Pragmatic Errors in EFL Students' Writing Skills through Computer-Mediated Communication

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ABSTRACT

This research paper analyzed the pragmatic transfer errors created by Arab students while practicing EFL writing skills in a virtual classroom. This research aimed to identify practical errors related to discourse and contextual components of the target language writing skills. The study took into consideration the negative pragmatic transfer errors made during written communication of EFL students using chat (synchronous) and discussion board (asynchronous) in the computer-mediated environment (CMC) of Blackboard. This research employed a mixed-mode method comprising of observations of students' online interaction (pragmatic transfer error analysis and categorizing them and a questionnaire for students to determine their pragmatic competence. The population of this research was the EFL students of the preparatory year, at Jazan University KSA. A random sample was collected with 381 respondents. The Data was collected and then analyzed with the help of the statistical package SPSS. The results were displayed in tables, charts, and percentages. This research will be beneficial for EFL teachers to improve pedagogy and Arab EFL students alike. This paper also made recommendations for future research.

KEYWORDS

Virtual learning - Pragmatic Transfer /competence- error analysis – LMS- Writing Skills

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I. Introduction

The relationship between a language and its users is called Interlanguage pragmatic (ILP). It underlines a learner's linguistic system when a learner tries to learn second language L2 through unrehearsed communication. It is different from error analysis that references to deviance from TL norms. Interaction analysis is an approach that focuses on the language in the use of people in a group and the meanings of their L2 interactions. This approach analyzes language produced naturally and in a particular setting. E-learning or training in electronic format became a popular choice for higher education institutions due to the newly emerging academic situations created by the global pandemic of Covid 19. This caused language learning to transit from real classrooms to computer-mediated environments. CMC medium is used for modern education using information and communication technology. Virtual learning thrived because it equipped individuals with a vast number of skills and information without time or financial constraints. E-learning resources need a system to manage education or training, which should ideally include a learning content management system (LCMS) and knowledge management system that sorts supporting material

1.2 Background of the Study

Learning Management systems rely on both asynchronous and synchronous learning. Asynchronous e-learning uses the internet as a support tool relying on web forms, email, and message boards that can be accessed offline. These discussion boards allow students to discuss assignments or leave comments for other users to see. Also, students work at their own pace according to their schedules, with individual students finishing the training course at a different time because there are no deadlines. The medium

for delivery of asynchronous e-learning consists of CD ROM/ DVD or internet downloads. On the other hand, Synchronous e-learning occurs with remote students and instructors collaborating in an online course that must be completed according to a specific timetable; students can interact with teachers and peers just like in real life during the online course video conferencing, chat boards, instant messages and ask questions about any concept using text and drawings. Content online with the students along with online courses. The exams are administered online as well at a specific time and date out of the wide range of LMS available, Blackboard previously (known as web CT), founded in 1997, has catered to a vast share of educational and institutional e learner's needs in KSA due to its reliability, flexibility, and interaction tools.

It allows the faculty to conduct virtual lectures, divide students into groups or track their attendance. The Blackboard platform also provides immediate live chats among members of a group and the professor.

1.3 Statement of the problem

ESL Arab university students tend to compensate for their lack of fluency in L2 writing by substituting or transferring some features from their mother tongue (Arabic) to convey their message "(Tavakoli and Salva, 2013) "in the production of functionally and culturally inappropriate sentences which sometimes may lead to "communication breakdown or pragmatic negative transfer." Althawab Meznah, .

ESL Writing skills is "a complex, challenging, and difficult process" (Alsamadani, 2010) because English and Arabic linguistic and orthographic systems differ" The pragmatic transfer errors in the production and comprehension of English written text are evident by language exchange done on discussion boards and chats by Arab ESL students during online classroom lectures via Blackboard. defines it as a linguistic system that adult ESL learners develop spontaneously to express meaning using the target language undermining the second language's grammar, vocabulary, or word order. The absence of pragmatic awareness could be a severe cause of miscommunication or correspondence failure. These errors are transferred from L1 due to interlanguage pragmatics (ILP) to the second language production. Also testing techniques and requirements stress producing grammatically correct sentences free of mistakes, undermining the role of teaching communicative competence for ESL students. Also since some of these students rely upon language translation apps to produce written text their communication between their peers or instructors is unintelligible. The knowledge of a discourse community conventions is possible only through collaboration and support from peers and teachers "Abrar Basabrin (2019) a lecturer at King Abdul Aziz University KSA examined the written corrective feedback WCF preferences on Blackboard in a two-way communication process between students and instructors. Other authors findings revealed an increase in language intelligibility and competence of students when micro-analysis was used to access collaborative dialogues in CBC. ESL teachers can exploit content to make students aware of pragmatic transfer errors and help them overcome these errors.

1.4 Objectives of the study

- To identify pragmatic transfer errors in written expressions of EFL Saudi students during synchronous and asynchronous written communication
- To highlight the causes of negative pragmatic transfer among Saudi university students written expression
- To provide remedial pedagogical strategies and to make feasible recommendations for EFLinstructors using Blackboard LMS to improve written communication practice.
- This study also investigated academic writing development by observing written communication of male and female Saudi college students in an interactive virtual environment.

1.5 Research Questions

- How effective is micro interactional analysis in computer-mediated communication via Blackboard in reducing pragmatic errors in writing skills of EFL Prep year university students?
- Is negative pragmatic transfer the main source of errors for Saudi EFL students written interactions in an e-learning classroom setup using chat /discussion options provided by Blackboard?
- How far are Saudi students aware of pragmatic transfer errors?

1.6 Significance of the Study

The major aim of this research is to improve the writing performance of ESL Prep year students of Jazan University. The significance of this research stems from the fact that much of the existing research explores either areas like metacognition or psychological factors like attitude and motivation related to computer-mediated communication or focuses on the teaching of micro-skills or professional writing skills through Blackboard LMS . On the other hand, there is a lack of research about how EFL students develop their academic writing skills and how perceived pragmatic literacy of TL reduces negative transfer. This research give insight to the pragmatic errors of a particular discourse community while performing writing tasks using CMC technology in a language

classroom. This research is beneficial for EFL students teachers and researchers to understand and improve the process of EFL academic writing delivered through a learning management system.

2. Literature Review

English Language teaching in a digital world relies on creating L2 competency through macro skills including receptive (reading and listening) and productive skills (writing and speaking), and developing micro-skills such as vocabulary, spelling, grammar and pronunciation. Productive language skills are complex for students to acquire since these require production as well as comprehension. Mohammad Kassem (2018) studied the effects on writing proficiency of EFL Saudi students utilizing Blackboard instruction and also observed their attitudes towards such instruction. "The researcher used three indicators (accuracy, fluency and complexity) to estimate participants' writing proficiency." Wahyuni (2018) experimented with the effect of blended learning on the students' writing ability by using telegram messenger ". It was also found that the participants' writing performance was affected by the blended learning model used in this study depending on their opinions. The literature reviewed for this research focuses on ESL and EFL domains of teaching of writing skills in the Saudi context. Instructional technology has mediated CMC tools into language learning.) "Across higher education, evaluation of the utility of LMSs applications of learning and teaching process through students' perceptions and use has become established practice" (Al-Dosari, 2011; Dhawan, 2020; Hao, 2020; Yen, 2020). Rawda Bashir Addullah and Amal Musa Mohamad (2020) conducted a research to establish the effect of Blackboard in improving students performance in Al Jouf university KSA. They found that the students in the experimental group showed a preference to activity-based lessons, especially discussion boards. Similarly Ayman Farid Khafaga1 (2021) did a case study of five Saudi universities using Blackboard LMS namely (i) Prince Sattam Bin Abdulaziz University was formerly the University of Al-Kharj, (ii) Shaqra University, (iii) King Faisal University, (iv) Qassim University, and (v) King Khalid University (Abha) to determine the perception of EFL students and teachers towards Blackboard collaborate learning during covid-19 crisis. "He concluded that EFL Students and teachers perceive the use of BCI as a tool that fosters an independent learning process.

Interactional competence views language knowledge and ability as locally situated and jointly constructed by participants in discourse. It is the study of how speakers of different languages interact with one another. Interlanguage pragmatics (ILP) emphasizes a learner's linguistic system when they train in spontaneous dialogue to acquire a second language (L2). Compared to error analysis that makes reference to deviations from TL norms

Theoretical framework

3. Conceptual Framework

3.1 Research Methodology

This research depends upon the mixed-mode method. Mixed-mode means that qualitative and quantitative data were investigated in a single study.

3.2 Population

The population of this research was teenage Arab students in KSA using Blackboard LMS

3.3 Sampling

A random sample of 381 (Krejcie and Morgan, 1970) male and female EFL students of preparatory year level 1 of Jazan University KSA studying at Jazan University were taken into consideration.

3.4 Research Instrument

An observation sheet consisting of 50 written exchanges between students and teachers through chat boxes and a discussion board of Blackboard was analyzed. The errors were categorized. The micro-interactional analysis was done for language assessment.

Another research tool consisted of a questionnaire developed for students to determine the student's pragmatic competence /knowledge about negative transfer from L1.

3.5. Instrumentation

• Digital questionnaire-Self-report questionnaire was given with demographic profile-age, gender, marital status, ethnicity, region The variables were based on the five 5 points of the Likert scale

4. Data collection and analysis

A digital questionnaire was made using Google Form and sent to the respondents Specifically, the author asked the university moderator to distribute the questionnaire through Blackboard within university network work environment.

4.1 Reliability test - Cronbach Alpha examined the overall consistency of items being answered, which had been adopted. The coefficient of Cronbach Alpha came as 0.86.

4.2 Data analysis

Data was collected, and results were tabulated on the basis of data analysis in the form of tables/spread sheet. The data was analyzed on the basis of the observation sheet. The observation sheets broke down different types of pragmatic errors. The frequency and the percentage of errors committed by the subjects of this study were calculated. The result suggested remedial pedagogical practices. The results from Google Forms were displayed in the data showed .5% of the respondents didn't respond. 55.14% of the population were unaware of L1 transfer errors and concepts of pragmatics. 20% had slight or little knowledge while only 19.86% had partial knowledge.

Table 1 :Classification of errors in students synchronous chat

Classification of errors	Percentage of errors	Examples from Blackboard synchronous chat
Errors in semantics	16%	"Teacher Blackboard is hanging with me." Here the student wants to refer that blackboard LMS is not working.
Wrong word order	19%	"This is chair red". Typically this type of errors are made because Arabic has vso as compared to English svo
Wrong word choice/substitution	27%	"The teacher is inside a test". The student means to tell other student that the teacher is invigilating an exam. or "The test was beautiful" Student has substituted the word good for beautiful"
Deletion/ Omission	9%	"My book ..outside...home" The student left the book outside the class or probably forgot at home" omission of linking words
Errors in negation	6%	"Teacher you may be thinking there is another lesson and we have no"...unnecessary use of negation
Errors in Grammar/verb tense/preposition	15%	Teacher can you give us your grades" The student wants to know her final grades but replaced our to your hence changing the meaning of the sentence.
Errors in spelling	10%	"Is there Spiking tomorrow" The student wants to use speaking but ends up with the nearest spelling

Figure 1

All these errors especially word order and substitution and omission of copula are attributed to negative L1 transfer and Interlanguage pragmatics (ILP) since Arabic has a different word order (Diab, 1996). Abisamra (2003) stated that the cause of these structural errors committed by Arab EFL learners in their written production is the interference of L1.

5. Conclusion

The conclusion will be drawn on the results of the content analysis, text-based synchronous computer-mediated communication (SCMC). The final data was processed and analyzed, to produce a set of relevant descriptive and predictive analytics as a result. The outcome provides insight into the e-learning process that allowed the educators to take "proactive" action. It showed that most negative transfer errors occurred due to a lack of pragmatic knowledge. Thus this type of e-learning analysis is useful for predicting variables that could impact the teaching writing process. Both students and instructors can use this model to enhance their interactions and to reconstruct their learning and teaching practices in English.

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