

Noun Position Errors Among Iraqi Arabic-Speaking Learners of English: A Contrastive and Error Analysis

الأخطاء الشائعة في موقع الاسم لدى الطلبة العراقيين دراسي
اللغة الإنكليزية كلغة ثانية: دراسة تقابلية وتحليل أخطاء

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ABSTRACT

The present study investigates Iraqi Arabic-speaking undergraduates' mastery of noun position in English clause structure, with the aim of identifying the types, frequency, and sources of errors produced by learners whose first language exhibits significantly different syntactic and distributional patterns. Drawing on frameworks from Second Language Acquisition (SLA) — particularly Contrastive Analysis (Lado, 1957) and Error Analysis (Corder, 1981; 1982) — the study examines how cross-linguistic influence from Arabic affects learners' production of English noun phrases and their syntactic placement within the sentence.

Data were collected through a 20-item diagnostic test comprising both objective and productive tasks designed to measure students' ability to determine and generate correct noun positions in varied English sentence types. The participants were 34 fourth-year students in the Department of Translation, College of Arts, Mustansiriyah University. Both quantitative and qualitative procedures were employed following EA's four analytical stages: (1) identifying erroneous structures, (2) classifying errors according to noun-position categories, (3) analyzing error sources (interlingual, intralingual, and developmental), and (4) determining error frequency and distribution.

The findings reveal that omission is the most prevalent error type, followed by mis-ordering and overgeneralization. The results further indicate that interlingual transfer — arising from differences between Arabic and English noun phrase placement, definiteness systems, and modifier order — is a primary contributor to error production. Intralingual factors, such as incomplete rule acquisition and overgeneralization within the developing interlanguage system, also play a significant role. The study contributes to the understanding of how Arabic native speakers negotiate English syntactic structures and highlights pedagogical implications for improving grammar instruction in Iraqi university contexts.

الخلاصة

يهدف هذا البحث إلى دراسة مدى إتقان طلبة البكالوريوس العراقيين من الناطقين بالعربي لوظيفة الاسم وموقعه في الجملة الانكليزية، وذلك من خلال تحديد أنواع الأخطاء التي يرتكبونها في مواضع الاسم وتحليل مصادرها. اعتمدت الدراسة على مناهج اكتساب اللغة الثانية، ولا سيما التحليل التقابلي (Lado, 1957) وتحليل الأخطاء (Corder, 1981; 1982)، للكشف عن مدى تأثير النقل اللغوي من العربي — بما يتسم به من بنى تركيبية مختلفة ونظام توصيفي مغاير — في إنتاج المتعلمين للعبارة الاسمية الانكليزية وتحديد مواقعها داخل البنية النحوية للجملة.

تم جمع البيانات عبر اختبار تشخيصي مكون من ٢٠ فقرة، اشتمل على أسئلة موضوعية وإنتاجية لقياس قدرة الطلبة على تحديد الموقع الصحيح للاسم في أنواع مختلفة من الجمل الانكليزية. وشارك في الاختبار ٣٤ طالباً من المرحلة الرابعة في قسم الترجمة، كلية الآداب، جامعة المستنصرية. وقد جرى تحليل البيانات كمياً ونوعياً وفق المراحل الأربع المتبعة في تحليل الأخطاء: (١) تحديد الأخطاء، (٢) تصنيفها بحسب نوع خطأ موقع الاسم، (٣) تحليل مصادر الأخطاء (بين - لغوية، داخل - لغوية، ونمائية)، و(٤) وصف تكرارات الأخطاء ونسبها.

أظهرت النتائج أن الحذف هو أكثر أنواع الأخطاء شيوعاً، يليه سوء الترتيب والتعميم المفرط. كما بيّنت الدراسة أن النقل اللغوي بين العربي و الانكليزي — خاصة في ترتيب مكونات العبارة الاسمية، ونظام التعريف، وتسلسل الصفات — يمثل العامل الأكثر تأثيراً في وقوع الأخطاء. وتُعد العوامل داخل - اللغوية مثل القواعد غير المكتملة والتعميمات المفرطة في نظام اللغة الوسيطة من العوامل المؤثرة أيضاً. وتقدّم هذه الدراسة إسهاماً مهماً في فهم كيفية تعامل المتعلمين الناطقين بالعربي مع البنى الاسمية الانكليزية، مع طرح توصيات تربوية لتحسين طرائق تدريس القواعد في السياق الجامعي العراقي.

Keywords الكلمات المفتاحية

التحليل التقابلي، تحليل الأخطاء، أخطاء موقع الاسم، الناطقون بالعربي، متعلمو الانكليزية كلغة أجنبية

Contrastive Analysis, Error Analysis, noun position errors, Arabic native speakers, EFL learners, language transfer

Received
استلام البحث
19/10/2025

Accepted
قبول النشر
20/11/2025

Published online
النشر الإلكتروني
13/12/2025

1. INTRODUCTION

The ultimate goal of learning a second language is to achieve effective communication through both receptive (listening and reading) and productive (speaking and writing) skills. Language learning, therefore, is not merely the accumulation of vocabulary and grammatical rules but a complex cognitive and social process through which learners reconstruct meaning using a linguistic system different from their first language. Widdowson (1978) emphasizes that the aim of language learning lies in enabling learners to use language functionally through interaction rather than mastering isolated forms. He further argues that learners do not acquire entirely new communicative abilities but rather re-express pre-existing conceptual knowledge through a new linguistic code. This process necessarily involves cross-linguistic transfer, where elements from the first language (L1) influence the acquisition of the second language (L2).

Within the framework of Second Language Acquisition (SLA), this transfer has been extensively examined through Contrastive Analysis (CA) and Error Analysis (EA). Contrastive Analysis, as formulated by Lado (1957), assumes that areas of structural difference between L1 and L2 constitute major sources of learning difficulty, while areas of similarity may facilitate learning. Error Analysis, advanced by Corder (1981, 1982), shifted attention from predicted difficulty to actual learner performance, viewing learner errors as systematic, meaningful, and reflective of an evolving interlanguage system. From this perspective, errors are no longer seen as mere failure but as evidence of active rule construction during language development.

For Arabic native speakers learning English as a foreign language (EFL), the issue of syntactic transfer is especially significant due to the fundamental structural differences between Arabic and English. Arabic allows for greater flexibility in word order and relies heavily on definiteness, agreement, and morphological marking, whereas English depends more strictly on fixed syntactic positioning, particularly in relation to the noun and its modifiers. One of the most sensitive domains where such cross-linguistic influence becomes visible is the position of the noun within the sentence and the noun phrase, especially with respect to pre-modifiers, post-modifiers, definiteness markers, and adjectival order.

In English, strict ordering rules govern the placement of nouns and their modifiers, including determiners, adjectives, possessives, and relative structures. In contrast, Arabic exhibits different modifier positions and agreement mechanisms. This structural mismatch frequently results in negative transfer, leading Arabic-speaking learners to produce deviant forms in English noun placement. Consequently, learners may commit errors of omission, misordering, overgeneralization, or misformation, particularly when attempting to map Arabic syntactic patterns onto English structures.

The pedagogical value of analyzing such errors lies in the fact that learner errors provide direct insight into learning strategies, developmental stages, and sources of difficulty. As Souadkia (2017) points out, the classification of learner errors helps teachers understand how learners internally organize linguistic input. Similarly, Keumala and Idami (2022) demonstrate that surface strategy taxonomy — comprising addition, omission, misordering, and misformation — offers a reliable framework for diagnosing both interlingual and intralingual sources of learner difficulty. Interlingual errors arise from direct L1 influence, whereas intralingual errors stem from incomplete rule acquisition, overgeneralization, and faulty hypothesis testing within the L2 system itself.

Within this theoretical and applied context, the present study focuses on noun position errors in English among Arabic native-speaking EFL learners at the university level. The study is situated within Iraqi higher education and examines the written and productive performance of undergraduate students specializing in translation. By adopting both Contrastive Analysis and Error Analysis, the study seeks to identify (1) the most frequent types of noun position errors, (2) the relative contribution of interlingual and intralingual factors, and (3) the pedagogical implications of these findings for English grammar instruction in Arabic-speaking contexts.

From a grammatical perspective, the noun constitutes the core carrier of reference and meaning in sentence structure. The term *noun* derives from the Latin *nomen*, meaning “name,” and refers to a class of words denoting entities, concepts, and abstractions (Yule, 2010). While nouns exist in all human languages, their distribution, agreement patterns, and syntactic positions vary considerably across linguistic systems. In English, nouns are marked for number and case (common vs.

genitive), while gender is largely absent morphologically. In Arabic, however, nouns are marked for number, gender, definiteness, and case (in formal varieties), resulting in a more morphologically dense system. These typological differences directly affect how learners map Arabic noun structures onto English and often lead to recurrent positional errors.

Accordingly, this study does not treat noun position errors as isolated mechanical mistakes, but rather as systematic manifestations of syntactic transfer and interlanguage development. By anchoring the analysis in both contrastive linguistics and SLA-based error analysis, the study contributes to the broader goals of the *Mesopotamian Journal of Arabic Language Studies (MJALS)* by foregrounding Arabic as a source language in cross-linguistic inquiry and by addressing the pedagogical challenges faced by Arabic-speaking learners in acquiring English syntactic structures.

1.1. Statement of the Problem

Despite many years of formal instruction in English, Iraqi EFL university students continue to exhibit persistent grammatical difficulties in both written and spoken production. Among the most recurrent and pedagogically disruptive of these difficulties are errors related to noun position in English sentence structure, as illustrated in the following learner-generated examples:

- *The office lost Grey keys;*
- *The room have you decorated looks great!;*
- *Those cakes look good enough to eat them!;* and
- *If you need a new racket, can get you very cheaply.*

These ill-formed constructions reflect systematic deviations in noun placement, modifier order, and argument structure. Such errors are not random but reveal deep-rooted problems in syntactic mapping between Arabic and English. While Arabic allows for relatively flexible noun positioning and extensive post-modification, English operates with rigid syntactic ordering and fixed pre-modifier structures. This structural mismatch generates persistent negative transfer, which manifests in recurring misordering, omission, addition, and misformation errors.

Arabic–English contrastive research strongly supports this explanation. AbiSamra (2003) demonstrates that Arabic sentence structure favors coordination, rhythmical balance, and post-modification rather than the hierarchical noun phrase ordering required in English. As she notes, “Arabic favors coordination over subordination,” and “adjectives follow noun” in Arabic syntactic structure (AbiSamra, 2003, Appendix 5). These typological differences account directly for systematic violations of English noun phrase order among Arabic-speaking learners.

Viewing these deviations merely as surface mistakes obscures their deeper cognitive and linguistic significance. As Sandra Thompson Issa (Issa, 2015) argues, treating such constructions as noun position errors provides a unifying analytical framework that captures multiple grammatical violations within a single syntactic domain. This perspective aligns with the principles of Error Analysis (Corder, 1981, 1982), which interpret learner errors as indicators of interlanguage development rather than signs of failure. AbiSamra (2003) similarly emphasizes that learner errors are “systematic” and “not recognized by the learner,” serving instead as diagnostic evidence of the learner’s internalized linguistic system.

The Iraqi EFL context further intensifies this problem. Arabic is the official language of education and public life, while English remains a foreign language largely confined to classroom instruction. Traditional English teaching in Iraqi schools and universities has long relied on grammar memorization, bilingual word lists, and isolated rule repetition, with minimal emphasis on communicative sentence construction. A structurally parallel situation is documented by AbiSamra (2003), who observes that students “have been studying English their whole lives and still, their errors are numerous,” while continuing to rely primarily on Arabic in home and peer communication.

This situation is not unique to Iraq. Al-Khershah (2010) reports similar outcomes in Jordanian EFL contexts, where long-term instruction fails to produce basic sentence-level accuracy. Rabab’ah (2003) likewise identifies systemic weaknesses across Arab universities, including inadequate linguistic screening and cumulative fossilization across phonology, morphology, and syntax. These entrenched error patterns obstruct learners’ academic progress and communicative competence.

Within this broader pedagogical crisis, noun position errors represent a critical yet under-researched syntactic domain, particularly from a contrastive Arabic–English perspective. The present study responds to this gap by systematically identifying, classifying, and explaining noun position errors among Iraqi EFL undergraduates. In doing so, it operationalizes Lado’s (1961) hypothesis that “learning the problems is learning the language,” thereby treating syntactic difficulty as a gateway to instructional reform rather than an obstacle to be ignored.

2. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The present study is significant on three interrelated levels: pedagogical, theoretical, and learner-centered.

From a pedagogical perspective, the systematic analysis of noun position errors enables instructors to move beyond intuitive correction toward evidence-based grammar instruction. Error patterns provide teachers with diagnostic insight into

learners' interlanguage systems, allowing them to design targeted remedial exercises rather than relying on generalized grammar review. AbiSamra (2003) explicitly affirms this pedagogical function of error analysis, stating that the systematic analysis of learner errors makes it possible to determine which areas require instructional reinforcement. This directly supports Harmer's (2001) position that effective teaching requires continuous critical evaluation of classroom practice.

From a theoretical perspective, the study contributes to SLA research on cross-linguistic influence and syntactic transfer by offering empirical data from Arabic-speaking learners—a population that remains underrepresented in contrastive syntax research. AbiSamra (2003) situates learner errors squarely within interlanguage theory, emphasizing that error analysis reveals the structure of the learner's internal linguistic system rather than random performance failure. By focusing specifically on noun position errors, the present study advances understanding of how Arabic syntactic organization interacts with English noun phrase structure within the learner's evolving interlanguage.

From a learner-centered perspective, awareness of systematic noun position errors empowers students to monitor their own syntactic development. When learners recognize recurring deviations in their production, they become active participants in reshaping their interlanguage rather than passive recipients of correction. AbiSamra (2003), drawing on Corder's foundational theory, affirms that learner errors are "indispensable" to the learning process, as they represent the learner's hypothesis-testing activity. This orientation aligns with the principle of learner-centeredness articulated by Zheng and Park (2013), in which instruction adapts to learner needs rather than imposing rigid prescriptive expectations.

Ultimately, the significance of this study lies in its contribution to improving English grammar instruction in Iraqi higher education through contrastive-informed diagnostics, while also fulfilling the mission of the Mesopotamian Journal of Arabic Language Studies (MJALS) in foregrounding Arabic as a central language in cross-linguistic inquiry rather than a peripheral background system.

3. RESEARCH METHOD

3.1 Research Design

This study adopts a quantitative–qualitative Error Analysis (EA) design, grounded in Corder's (1981; 1982) framework and supported by principles of Contrastive Analysis (Lado, 1957). The research focuses on identifying, classifying, and interpreting noun position errors produced by Iraqi EFL learners.

3.2 Participants

The participants were 34 fourth-year undergraduate students enrolled in the Department of English Language and Literature, College of Arts. All participants are native speakers of Arabic and have studied English as a foreign language throughout their academic careers.

3.3 Instrument

Data were collected using a diagnostic grammar test specifically constructed to elicit noun position errors. The test consists of two main questions:

- Question One includes three parts (A, B, C), each with five items:
 - Part A targets addition errors, where an unnecessary noun is inserted.
 - Part B targets misordering errors, where word order is deliberately disrupted.
 - Part C targets integrated noun position use, requiring students to insert bracketed nouns into their appropriate syntactic positions.
- Question Two consists of 10 sentence-completion items, requiring students to select an appropriate noun and place it correctly within the sentence. This section tests selection, omission, addition, and ordering errors simultaneously.

3.4 Procedure

Students completed the test under controlled classroom conditions. Their responses were then analyzed following Corder's four-stage EA model:

- Error Identification
- Error Classification
- Error Explanation (Source Analysis)
- Error Quantification (Frequency and Percentage)

Errors were further classified as interlingual (resulting from Arabic transfer) or intralingual (resulting from overgeneralization, rule simplification, or incomplete acquisition).

3.5 Error Typology and Interpretation

Following Corder's classification, errors were categorized into:

- Omission
- Addition
- Selection
- Misordering

In addition, following Ellis's distinction (as cited in Al-Khershah, 2016), errors were interpreted as either:

- Competence errors (systematic rule misapplication)
- Performance errors (temporary processing failures)

3.6 Data Analysis

The data were analyzed quantitatively through frequency counts and percentages and qualitatively through contrastive interpretation of Arabic–English syntactic structures. The goal was to determine:

- Dominant noun position error types
- Relative contribution of interlingual vs. intralingual sources
- Pedagogical implications for grammar instruction

As Corder (1982, p. 5–7) notes, the purpose of error analysis is not merely to identify mistakes but to inform remedial pedagogy. Accordingly, this study treats errors as a foundation for instructional reform rather than as indicators of learner failure. As Harmer (2001, p. 100) aptly states:

“When responding to error, teachers should be seen as providing feedback, helping the reshaping process rather than telling students off because they are wrong.”

4. LITERATURE REVIEW

4.1 Error Analysis and the Evolution of SLA Perspectives

Prior to the late 1960s, the dominant concern in language teaching was the strict transmission of grammatical rules, spelling accuracy, and compositional correctness, with the primary instructional goal being the elimination of learner errors. Within this prescientific period of second language pedagogy, errors were perceived as undesirable deviations that needed immediate correction. As Zheng and Park (2013, p. 85) observe, “Learners' errors were of no significance at all in the prescientific era when language teachers concentrated their efforts on the learning of the correct forms of the target language by the learners.”

This rigid view began to shift fundamentally with the emergence of Error Analysis (EA) in the late 1960s and early 1970s, particularly through the seminal work of Corder (1967, 1981, 1982). Corder redefined learner errors as inevitable, systematic, and cognitively meaningful manifestations of language development rather than as signs of failure. From this perspective, errors serve as empirical evidence of the learner's interlanguage system, reflecting hypotheses about the target language that are continuously tested and revised. This reconceptualization marked a turning point in SLA research by relocating errors from the domain of pedagogical deficiency to the center of linguistic inquiry.

Subsequent studies within Arab EFL contexts adopted this perspective to diagnose learning problems and improve instructional design. Al-Khershah (2010) and Rabab'ah (2003) demonstrated that systematic EA provides teachers with crucial diagnostic tools for understanding fossilized grammatical patterns among Arab learners. Similarly, Al-Khershah (2014, p. 108) asserts that “errors are now considered a device that learners use and from which they can learn,” emphasizing the constructive role of error production in language acquisition. Despite early criticism of EA for its descriptive limitations, its methodological value in identifying persistent learner difficulties — particularly in syntax — has remained robust.

Within this modern SLA framework, noun position errors have emerged as one of the most persistent and pedagogically sensitive error types. Issa (2015), in her study of writing instruction, argues that framing grammatical difficulties specifically as noun position errors offers “a framework that encompasses multiple error types” and significantly enhances instructional efficiency when introduced early in the learning cycle. This supports the theoretical shift from isolated rule teaching toward structure-based error diagnosis.

4.2 Taxonomies of Learner Errors

In the literature, learner errors have been classified in various ways depending on their developmental, psycholinguistic, and surface characteristics. A widely adopted framework is the surface strategy taxonomy, which categorizes errors according to how surface structures are altered. Following Corder (1982), Edge (1989), and Kusuma (2013), errors are classified into:

- Omission: absence of a required element
- Addition: insertion of an unnecessary element
- Misformation: use of an incorrect form
- Misordering: incorrect arrangement of elements
- Double marking: redundant grammatical marking

In addition to structural classification, errors are also categorized according to their cognitive source. Ellis (as cited in Al-Kharsheh, 2016) distinguishes between:

- Competence errors, which reflect incomplete or faulty rule internalization
- Performance errors, which result from processing limitations such as fatigue, anxiety, or time pressure

This dual-level classification is particularly relevant to noun position errors, which often reflect both deep syntactic misunderstanding (competence) and processing overload (performance).

While many studies have investigated noun phrases, word order, and general syntactic errors, relatively few have isolated noun position as an independent analytical variable, despite its central functional role in sentence meaning construction. This gap justifies the present study's focused approach.

4.3 Importance of Noun Position in Sentence Structure

Nouns and their substitutes constitute the core informational load of sentence structure, serving as primary carriers of reference, agency, and propositional content. Foley and Hall (2003, p. 336) argue that "ordering information is but ordering nouns," highlighting that discourse coherence itself depends fundamentally on nominal organization. Through syntactic rearrangement of noun positions, speakers can manipulate information structure, topicality, and focus, as illustrated by:

- *Bill invited Jim to the conference.* (Bill as thematic focus)
- *Jim was invited to the conference by Bill.* (Jim as thematic focus)

Thus, noun position is not merely a grammatical concern but a discourse-determining mechanism. Lado (1961, p. 142) reinforces this view by emphasizing that "we speak in sentences, not in words," and that sentence meaning depends on structured patterns of word-group arrangement. Consequently, misplacement of nouns directly disrupts both grammaticality and communicative intent.

Algeo (2006, p. 203) further emphasizes that nouns, alongside verbs, form the semantic backbone of sentence construction, as they encode participants, concepts, and referents. Since noun function is position-dependent, any disruption in placement compromises syntactic transparency and interpretive accuracy. This centrality explains why noun position errors remain highly resistant to spontaneous correction among EFL learners.

4.4 Noun Position in Language Teaching

From a pedagogical standpoint, mastery of noun position requires explicit understanding of syntactic roles within the English sentence. Standard English clause structure is organized around functional slots such as Subject (S), Verb (V), Complement (C), Object (O), and Adverbial (A). Nouns occupy multiple obligatory and optional positions within this framework (Aziz, 1989; Adebileje, 2016), including:

- Subject
- Direct and indirect object
- Object of preposition
- Subject complement
- Object complement
- Modifier
- Determiner
- Appositive
- Adverbial nominal

These functional roles are not interchangeable, and incorrect placement often leads to syntactic ambiguity, semantic distortion, or complete breakdown of sentence acceptability. For Arabic-speaking learners, difficulty arises because Arabic permits greater flexibility in constituent order and allows post-modification patterns that are structurally incompatible with English pre-modifier dominance. This typological mismatch increases the likelihood of systematic transfer-based noun position errors.

4.5 Learning Factors and the Role of Interlanguage

Second-language acquisition is mediated by multiple cognitive, affective, and instructional variables, among which motivation and interaction play decisive roles. Yule (2010, p. 192) notes that learners who actively risk error through

communicative engagement are more likely to succeed in L2 development. Corder (1967, p. 73) likewise emphasizes that interlanguage elaboration continues only as long as learners remain motivated to expand their communicative capacity. However, in many Arab university contexts, the imbalance between language and literature curricula has weakened systematic grammar instruction. Zughoul (1983) and Obeidat (1997) observe that literature-dominated programs often assume incoming students already possess adequate language proficiency—a premise strongly contested by Rabab'ah (2003, p. 185), who attributes many fossilized errors to this curricular misalignment.

Beyond pedagogy, first-language interference remains a primary source of learner error. Selinker's (1972) concept of interlanguage identifies learner language as a dynamic, evolving system shaped by both L1 and L2. Corder (1982, p. 67) confirms that learner output exhibits systematic traces of both linguistic systems. For example:

- *I said hi to the man whom I met him yesterday.*

This construction reflects Arabic anaphoric doubling, where resumptive pronouns are grammatically licensed—an operation ungrammatical in English. The result is a **noun position addition error** driven by interlingual transfer.

Likewise, the ordering contrast between Arabic post-modification and English pre-modification yields systematic misordering errors such as:

- *The girl beautiful* (modeled on Arabic structure)

Intralingual causes include overgeneralization, incomplete rule application, and false conceptual hypotheses, as in:

- *When you will come to the meeting?* (Al-Khersheh, 2016, p. 53)

4.6 Cognitive Processing and L1 Dominance

From a neurolinguistic perspective, language processing is distributed across specialized cortical regions, including Broca's area, Wernicke's area, the motor cortex, and the arcuate fasciculus (Yule, 2010). During L2 production, lexical retrieval and syntactic assembly often default unconsciously to L1 processing routines, especially at lower proficiency levels. As a result, Arabic syntactic templates influence how English noun structures are cognitively assembled, reinforcing persistent positional errors at the neural processing level.

5. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The quantitative analysis of the collected data reveals that noun position errors constitute a persistent and systematic difficulty among Iraqi EFL learners. A total of 850 learner sentences were extracted from 34 test papers, which formed the empirical corpus of the study. The analysis shows that more than half of the total responses were grammatically inaccurate, confirming that noun position represents a high-risk syntactic domain for Arabic-speaking learners of English.

The distribution of error types demonstrates a clear hierarchy of frequency. Omission errors emerged as the most dominant category, followed by misordering, then addition, while selection errors occurred with the lowest frequency. This descending pattern is visually represented in Figure (1) and statistically detailed in Tables (1–2)

Such a distribution provides strong empirical support for the claim that learners experience the greatest difficulty in recognizing obligatory noun-related elements within English sentence structure, especially determiners, required noun complements, and syntactically necessary nominal components.

5.1 Omission Errors

The predominance of omission errors indicates that learners frequently fail to supply structurally obligatory noun elements, such as articles, object nouns, or subject complements. From an SLA perspective, this pattern reflects incomplete grammatical representation within the learner's interlanguage system. Arabic differs from English in its treatment of determinacy, article usage, and overt subject realization. As a result, learners often omit elements that are syntactically mandatory in English but optional or recoverable in Arabic. These findings strongly support interlingual transfer as a primary source of omission errors.

At the same time, omission errors also reflect intralingual factors, particularly incomplete rule acquisition and processing overload. Learners may be aware of the need for a certain noun element but fail to retrieve it during real-time production. This dual-source explanation confirms Corder's (1982) view that learner errors are not random but systematic indicators of developing linguistic competence.

5.2 Misordering Errors

Misordering errors ranked second in frequency, reflecting learners' difficulty with the rigid word-order constraints of English noun phrases and clauses. In Arabic, post-modification is common and syntactically licensed, whereas English strongly favors pre-modification in adjectival and determiner placement. This contrast leads learners to transfer Arabic modifier–noun sequencing directly into English, producing structures such as:

- *The girl beautiful* instead of *The beautiful girl*

Such errors represent classic negative transfer, confirming Lado's (1957; 1961) contrastive hypothesis that structural differences are primary predictors of learner difficulty.

5.3 Addition Errors

Addition errors occur when learners insert unnecessary nominal elements, often due to resumptive pronoun transfer from Arabic, as in:

- *The man whom I met him yesterday*

In Arabic, pronominal resumption is a grammatical strategy, whereas it is prohibited in English relative clauses. These errors are therefore interlingual by nature, revealing deep syntactic interference at the level of clause structure and anaphora.

5.4 Selection Errors

Selection errors were the least frequent category but still reflect an important intralingual dimension of learner difficulty. These errors arise when learners choose an inappropriate noun form, often due to overgeneralization, false hypothesis formation, or incomplete lexical-syntactic mapping. Their lower frequency suggests that learners struggle more with structural placement than with lexical choice.

5.5 SLA Interpretation of the Error Pattern

The overall error hierarchy — Omission > Misordering > Addition > Selection — demonstrates that structural absence and positional displacement constitute the core difficulty in English noun syntax for Arabic-speaking learners. This aligns with interlanguage theory (Selinker, 1972; Corder, 1982), which holds that learner language reflects a dynamic system influenced by both L1 structure and evolving L2 rule internalization.

Moreover, the results confirm that noun position errors are not isolated surface mistakes, but rather systematic reflections of deeper syntactic conflict between Arabic and English. The dominance of omission errors further indicates that learners have not yet fully stabilized the functional architecture of English noun phrases, particularly in relation to determiners, complements, and required nominal slots.

6. CONCLUSION

This study has demonstrated that noun position errors constitute a central and persistent syntactic problem for Iraqi Arabic-speaking EFL learners. The findings confirm that these errors arise from the combined influence of interlingual transfer and intralingual developmental processes. The dominance of omission errors indicates a fundamental gap in learners' internalization of obligatory noun-related syntactic elements, while misordering and addition errors reflect direct structural interference from Arabic.

In line with Richards (1984), the results reaffirm that learner errors are not arbitrary deviations but empirical evidence of the linguistic system currently operating in the learner's mind. Errors thus serve as diagnostic windows into interlanguage development, allowing researchers and educators to trace patterns of syntactic restructuring over time. The study therefore supports the theoretical position that errors are indispensable to the language learning process rather than obstacles to be eradicated.

More broadly, the findings validate the explanatory power of Contrastive Analysis when integrated with Error Analysis and SLA theory, particularly in typologically distant language pairs such as Arabic and English. By isolating noun position as a focused analytical variable, the study contributes to both applied linguistics and Arabic-based SLA research, fulfilling the core mission of *MJALS* in foregrounding Arabic as a source language in cross-linguistic inquiry.

7. PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

The pedagogical implications of this study are substantial and operate at three interrelated levels: instructional design, curriculum development, and learner autonomy.

7.1 Instructional Design

English instructors must move beyond traditional rule memorization and adopt contrastive, structure-based grammar instruction that explicitly highlights:

- Differences in modifier order
- Obligatory vs. optional noun elements
- Constraints on resumptive pronouns
- Fixed vs. flexible noun slot positioning

Targeted practice on noun phrase architecture, rather than isolated noun definitions, is essential for reducing omission and misordering errors.

7.2 Curriculum Development

Iraqi and Arab university curricula must rebalance the traditional dominance of literature by incorporating:

- Systematic grammatical diagnostics
- SLA-informed remedial modules
- Error-based instructional sequencing

Noun position should be treated as a core syntactic competency, not a marginal grammatical detail.

7.3 Learner Autonomy and Digital Support

Learners should be encouraged to engage in guided self-assessment, supported by:

- Digital grammar platforms
- Automated feedback tools
- Contrastive Arabic–English sentence builders

Such tools can help learners visualize their own error patterns, fostering metalinguistic awareness and independent correction strategies.

7.4 Final Pedagogical Insight

The central pedagogical message of this study is that correct noun positioning is not a peripheral grammatical skill but a structural foundation of English sentence formation. When instructors respond to errors not as failures but as developmental signals, they transform classroom correction into a constructive cognitive reshaping process, echoing Harmer's (2001) view that feedback should support learner restructuring rather than punish deviation.

TABLE I. OVERALL DISTRIBUTION OF CORRECT AND INCORRECT RESPONSES

Response Type	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Correct Answers	302	35.53%
Incorrect Answers	548	64.47%
Total	850	100%

Note. Percentages are calculated from a total of 850 learner sentences produced by 34 Iraqi EFL students. As shown in Table 1, incorrect responses (64.47%) significantly outnumber correct responses (35.53%), indicating that noun position constitutes a major area of difficulty for Iraqi EFL learners.

TABLE II. FREQUENCY AND PERCENTAGE DISTRIBUTION OF NOUN POSITION ERROR TYPES

Error Type	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Omission	236	43.07%
Misordering	160	29.20%
Addition	92	16.79%
Selection	60	10.94%
Total	548	100%

Note. Percentages are calculated from a total of 548 incorrect responses produced by Iraqi EFL learners. As shown in Table 2, omission errors constitute the highest proportion of noun position errors (43.07%), followed by misordering (29.20%), addition (16.79%), and selection errors (10.94%).

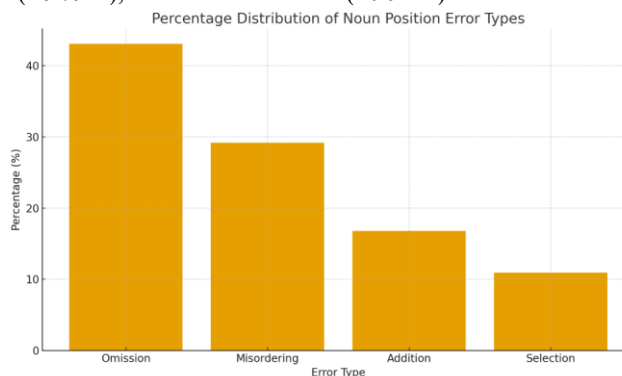


Fig. 1. Percentage Distribution of Noun Position Error Types

Conflicts Of Interest

The author declares no conflict of interest in relation to the research presented in the paper.

Funding

The author's paper explicitly states that no funding was received from any institution or sponsor.

Acknowledgment

The author expresses appreciation to the institution for their continuous support and access to relevant research materials

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