



# مجلة بحوث

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- أن تكون المجلة مرجعاً علمياً للباحثين في مختلف العلوم.

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- ٧- يلتزم الباحث بألا يزيد البحث على ٢٠ صفحة.
- ٨- ترسل البحوث المقدمة لمحكمين متخصصين، ممن يشهد لهم بالنزاهة والكفاءة العلمية في تقييم الأبحاث، ويتم هذا بطريقة سرية، ويعرض البحث على محكم ثالث في حال رفضه أحد المحكمين.
- ٩- يلتزم الباحث بإجراء التعديلات المطلوبة خلال ١٥ يوماً.
- ١٠- يبلغ الباحث بقبول النشر أو الاعتذار عنه، ولا يعاد البحث إلى صاحبه إذا لم يقبل، ولا تقدم أسباب رفضه إلى الباحث.
- ١١- يحصل الباحث على وثيقة نشر تؤكد قبول بحثه للنشر بعد موافقة المحكمين عليه.
- ١٢- تعبّر الأبحاث المنشورة في المجلة عن آراء أصحابها، لا عن رأي المجلة، ولا تكون هيئة تحرير المجلة مسؤولة عنها.

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## أخطاء الحذف في شكل الفعل في كتابات طلاب اللغة الإنكليزية السوريين

إعداد

أ. غياث الشيخ إبراهيم      د. عبد الحميد معيكل

### ملخص البحث:

تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى تحليل أخطاء الحذف في شكل الفعل في مقالات كُتبت من قبل طلاب السنة الأولى السوريين في قسم اللغة الإنكليزية في جامعة حلب الحرة، في مناطق شمال سورية. من أجل ذلك، استخدمت الدراسة وسيلتي بحث، فلقد جمعت بيانات نوعية من ٤٩ مقالة كتبت تحت ظروف امتحانية، ومن خمس مشاهدات صفية نُفِذت من قبل مدرسين يدرسون اللغة الإنكليزية في مدراس ثانوية في مناطق شمال سورية.

وقد استخدم الطلاب ١٣٢٨ تركيباً فعلياً، ٧٥١ منها (٥٧٪) كانت خاطئة، ومن بين التراكيب الخاطئة كان هناك ٢١٠ أخطاء حذف في شكل الفعل (نسبة ٢٨٪ من مجموع الأخطاء)، وأظهرت النتائج أن حذف اللاحقة (s) الخاصة بالشخص الثالث المفرد وحذف فعل الكون كانا الأكثر تكراراً بين أخطاء الحذف الأخرى، وأظهر تحليل المشاهدات الصفية أن الاستخدام غير المنضبط للغة العربية في غرفة الصف أدى إلى نقص في الممارسة اللغوية، الذي من الممكن أن يكون السبب في ظهور أخطاء الحذف في شكل الفعل، واعتماداً على النتائج التي توصل اليها، وقد قدمت الدراسة بعض التوصيات لكل من طلاب اللغة الإنكليزية ومدرسيها إضافةً إلى اقتراحات للأبحاث القادمة.

**كلمات مفتاحية:** أخطاء الحذف في شكل الفعل، تدخل اللغة الأولى، نقص الممارسة، كتابة في اللغة الثانية، طلاب اللغة الإنكليزية السوريون.



## Omission Verb-Form Errors in Syrian EFL Students' writings

Prepared by:

Mr. Ghiyath Al-Sheikh Ibrahim      Dr. Abdel Hamid Maikel

### Abstract

This study aims at analyzing omission verb-form errors in essays written by Syrian first-year English students at Free Aleppo University, northern regions of Syria. To achieve this aim, this study employed two research instruments. It collected qualitative data from 49 essays written under exam conditions and five class observations conducted by five schoolteachers teaching English at secondary schools in the northern regions of Syria. The students used 1328 verb structures in total, 751 (57%) incorrect, of which 210, or 28%, were omission verb-form errors. The results showed that the omission of the third person singular *-s* and the copular *be* were the most frequent types among other omission verb-form errors, by 32% and 30%, respectively. The analysis of the class observations indicated that the uncontrolled use of Arabic in class led to lack of practice, which possibly stood behind the rise of omission verb-form errors. Based on the findings, the study provided some implications for EFL teachers and students, and it offered suggestions for further research.

**Keywords:** omission verb-form errors, L1 interference, L2 writing, Syrian EFL students

## Suriyeli İngilizce Öğrencilerinin Yazılarında Fiil Biçimindeki Hazfetme Hataları

Hazırlayanlar:

Mr.Gays Şeyh İbrahim Dr. Abdülhamid Maikel

### Özet:

Bu çalışma, Kuzey Suriye'de Kurtarılmış Bölgelerdeki Halep Üniversitesi İngilizce Bölümü'nde birinci sınıftaki Suriyeli öğrencilerin yazdığı makalelerdeki fiil biçimindeki hazfetme hatalarını analiz etmeyi amaçlamaktadır. Bu amaçla çalışmada iki araştırma yöntemi kullanılmıştır. Çalışmada, sınav sırasında yazılan 49 makaleden ve Kuzey Suriye bölgelerindeki liselerde İngilizce öğreten öğretmenlerin yaptığı beş sınıf görüşmesinden nitel veriler toplandı. Öğrenciler 751'i (%57) hatalı olmak üzere 1328 fiil kullanmışlardır. Hatalı ifadeler arasında fiil formundaki 210 hazfetme hatası bulunmakta olup toplam hataların %28'ini oluşturmaktadır. Sonuçlar, tekil üçüncü şahıs ekinin (s) ve olmak fiilinin silinmesinin diğer hazfetme hataları arasında en sık görülen hata olduğunu gösterdi. Sınıf görüşmelerinin analizi, Arapçanın sınıfta yanlış kullanılmasının dil pratiği eksikliğine yol açtığını ve fiil biçimindeki hazfetme hatalarının ortaya çıkmasının nedeninin bu olabileceğini göstermiştir. Elde edilen sonuçlara dayalı olarak çalışmada, gelecekte yapılacak çalışmalara yönelik önerilerin yanı sıra, İngilizce dilinin hem öğrencileri hem de öğretmenleri için bazı öneriler sunulmuştur.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Fiil Biçimi Hazfetme Hataları, Ana Dil Müdahalesi, Pratik Eksikliği, İkinci Dilde Yazma, Suriyeli İngilizce Öğrencileri.



## 1. Introduction

English verb tenses are the major grammatical area in the sentence, as they offer lexical and grammatical meanings to the sentence by clarifying what the subject does or by describing certain state or condition about the subject (DeCapua (2008). These tenses constitute a challenge to EFL learners because they need to understand not only the relationships between time and aspect but also how to represent this relationship in a specific form. In other words, every tense in English has different form which must be produced correctly without any addition or omission in its structure.

Writing requires the learner to master many skills, including good background knowledge of the topic that he/she wants to write about, wide range of vocabulary (Hammad, 2016), cohesion, coherence, and, most important of all, mastering grammatical rules, especially correct verb forms.

Through his long experience in teaching English as a foreign language (as he is now a lecturer of English Language at both Free Aleppo University and Idlib University), the researcher has noticed that many students omit necessary elements from the verb structure. This notice is supported by Dweik & Othman (2017) and Al-Zahrani (1993) who found that their subjects omitted the copular *be* mainly due to L1 interference. In fact, omission causes a real damage to the verb form and negatively affects the students' achievements. Therefore, the researcher thinks that analyzing omission verb-form errors might help Syrian first-year English students find solutions to these errors and, consequently, avoid them in their academic writings.

Thus, the current study will analyze the omission verb-form errors according to their interlingual and intralingual background in attempt to enable the teachers and other educationalists to find better solutions to these errors in their students' academic writings (Al-Sheikh Ibrahim, 2023).

## 2. Literature review

While writing a piece of writing, such as a paragraph or an essay, Syrian EFL students face many difficulties. Mastering English writing skill is a difficult task, as it requires many other skills, such as memorizing vocabulary, good knowledge of coherence and cohesion, and mastering English grammatical rules, especially verb forms and tenses. In fact, avoiding grammatical errors is considered the important mark of a good

piece of writing. In other words, students should not produce incomplete structure such as 'I want say', 'I am write', 'He work', etc.

## 2.1 Omission error

In his Surface Strategy Taxonomy (SST), Dulay et al.'s (1982 p. 154, cited in Wee et al., 2010, p. 17) explains that omission errors take place because of omitting a compulsory element from the verb structure, such as omitting the grammatical morphemes. For example, learners may omit the -ed marker in the simple past tense verbs as in '*Last week, the train crash into a lorry*' instead of '*last week, the train crashed into a lorry*', or omit the -s marker in the verbs after the third person singular noun as in '*He think*' instead of '*He thinks*'. In the current study, students may omit the copular *be* due to Arabic interference, like when he writes '*We sad*' instead of '*We are sad*'.

## 2.2 Error analysis

An error is a deviation from the syntactic structures that a native adult speaker considers grammatically correct (Dulay et al., 1982). The processes of analyzing those errors are called error analysis (EA). In Corder's view (1975), error analysis (EA) is productive because it permits an insight into the learner's language learning process and a measure to tell how far the learner has progressed. From a methodological point of view, James (1998, p. 1) defines error analysis as the procedure of finding out the incidence, nature, causes and consequences of unsuccessful language influence. In this sense, error analysis is a method of finding the errors, explaining their source and specifying their effects on the learners' production.

## 2.3 Reasons of error

The most important point of the error analysis process is the explanation of errors, as the research would be able to find out the mechanism that triggered each type of error (Sanal, 2008, p. 599). Ellis (1994, p. 57) explains that explanation of errors enables the research to establish the processes that is responsible for L2 acquisition. In addition, Ellis explains the psycholinguistic sources of the nature of L2 learners' errors by classifying them as errors of performance and errors of competence. Errors of competence may appear due to the lack of knowledge of the rules of TL, whilst the errors of performance are the result of committing mistakes repeatedly in language use.





There are two possible ways of explaining the errors. The first one is that errors may take place due to the learner's native language interference, or what Richards (1974) and AbiSamra (2003) call as "interlingual errors". These errors occur when a learner follows the word-for-word translation method from his mother tongue into the target language. The second way is that errors take place due to the lack of knowledge of TL, or what is called by Selinker and Gass (2008, p. 103) as "intralingual errors", such as overgeneralization, ignorance of rule restrictions, incomplete application of rules, and false concepts hypothesized.

## 2.4 Previous studies

Abisamra (2003) analyzed the errors in essays written by Arabic speakers. The analysis showed that the students committed 214 errors in total: 29 grammatical, 35 syntactic, 26 lexical, 3 semantic, and 120 substances (mechanics and spelling) errors. The total percentage of transfer (Interlingual) errors was 35.9%, whereas the total percentage of developmental (Intralingual) errors was 64.1%, which means that the major cause for all of those errors was not only negative L1 interference (negative transfer) but also intralingual reasons.

Mohamed et al. (2004) examined the errors committed by second language learners in English essay writing based on eight selected grammatical items: nouns, pronouns, adjectives, articles, verbs, modal verbs, prepositions and spellings. With reference to the selected grammatical items, the analysis established that respondents faced particular difficulty in the use of verbs, prepositions and spellings. The research further showed that the errors committed by the respondents were due to over-generalization and simplification. It was also found that Chinese learners inclined to generalize and simplify in order to reduce the linguistic burden.

Al-Zoubi and Abu-Eid (2014) examined the writings of 266 high-school Jordanian students. They found that most of the errors made were due to the L1 interfere, and the students committed more transfer errors in the types of verb 'to be' (16.54%), and passive voice (16.24%) than other types of error. In addition, the study showed that the students depended on word-for-word translation method, which caused many grammatical errors resulting from L1 transfer.

This study hopes to contribute to the Error Analysis research by answering the following two research questions:

1. What types of omission verb-form errors do Syrian first-year English students commit in their academic writings?
2. Why do Syrian first-year English students commit omission verb-form errors?

### **3. Methodology**

#### **3.1 Research design**

This study aims at analyzing omission verb-form errors in essays written by Syrian first-year English students studying in the Department of English at Free Aleppo University, northern regions of Syria. For this aim, the researcher followed the qualitative approach to answer two research questions relating to the types and the reasons of omission verb-form errors.

#### **3.2. Participants**

First-year English students are supposed to be 19 years old. These male and female students join the Department of English at Free Aleppo University after they have passed the final exams of the twelfth grade in Syria. They study for four years to get a BA in English Language and Literature.

65 out of 110 students attended the exam of *Writing 2*, where the researcher got 49 essays (75% of the attendants' essays) to be used in the analysis process. Because the period the students spent learning English at school (right before they joined the Department of English) plays an important role in the students' performance levels, the researcher also conducted 5 class observations for schoolteachers teaching English in the context of this study.

#### **3.3 Research instruments**

In order to identify the omission verb-form errors in the Syrian first-year English students' scripts and find out the reasons behind those errors, the study collected qualitative data from two research instruments: Essay and class observation. Creswell and Poth (2016) explain that the aim of qualitative research is to collect extensive details about each participant and that this kind of research is not meant to generalize information but to display what is specific about one phenomenon. Moreover, Creswell (2012)



clarifies that participants in qualitative studies should be selected purposefully in order to help in investigating a certain phenomenon. Thus, this study lends itself to two sources of data in order to identify the omission verb-form errors in the Syrian first-year English students' scripts and find out the reasons behind those errors:

### 3.3.1 Essays written by first-year English students

These essays are written samples used for analyzing omission verb-form errors committed by first-year English students at Free Aleppo University. The researcher analyzed 49 purposefully selected essays written under real exam conditions. According to the study plan of the Department of English, the students take the exam of *Writing 2* at the end of the second term. In the part allocated to the essay-writing question in the exam paper, the examiner (teacher of *Writing 2*) asked the students to write an essay about one of the following topics:

1. How people have changed after ten years of war
2. Trade is better than employment

About only half of the essays contained around 300 words, while some of them did not exceed 200 words, possibly because the first-year English students were still new to essay writing.

### 3.3.2 Class observations

The class observation depended on a class observation form used by the Directorate of Education in Idlib Province. Syrian EFL supervisors use this form in their class visits to evaluate the teachers' performance and control the learning process. The researcher modified this form so that it could meet the needs of this study; for example, he excluded the administrative evaluation items such as teachers' attendance and their collaboration with the administration of the school.

The form, which consists of three main parts, is designed in a checklist method with three degrees of evaluation: poor, good, excellent. The first part examines the teacher's methodology and skills, such as applying the appropriate teaching method, knowing what to correct and what to ignore, using the board and teaching aids, and presenting the target language logically and smoothly. The second part relates to the teacher's language, such as grammar, pronunciation, fluency, mastery of the lesson taught, and

his use of MT and TL. The third part is allocated to the evaluator's feedback, such as the skills the teacher masters greatly and may help colleagues, and some advice on things that should be improved. In all the fields mentioned above, the evaluator has a space where he can write notes and examples.

### 3.4 Data collection procedures

The researcher took the consent of the dean of the Faculty of Literature and Humanities at Free Aleppo University to have access to the Examination Department of the faculty, where he purposefully selected 49 essays as a requirement of *Writing 2*. After the students' essays were collected, the researcher organized a chart, designed in a table form, to collect data about the omission verb-form errors. In fact, all the errors were categorized as omission errors, a category of Dulay et al.'s (1982) Surface Strategy Taxonomy (SST) that classifies the errors into omission, addition, misinformation, and misordering errors.

The chart mentioned above first contained three rows to get totals of the verb structures used, the correct verb structures, and the incorrect ones. The analysis chart also contained space to collect data about the omission verb-form errors: the omissions of auxiliary verb, -ing marker, -ed marker, 3<sup>rd</sup> person singular -s, to-infinitive, copular *be*, subject, and necessary preposition. Every category in the analysis chart has a blank space where the number of occurrence of certain type of omission verb-form errors was to be written, which made the process of manual data collection easier (Al-Sheikh Ibrahim, 2023).

After stapling the chart mentioned above to every essay paper, the researcher started the stage of analyzing the students' omission verb-form errors.

The researcher believes that the stage of learning English at school, before Syrian first-year English students join Department of English at Free Aleppo University, constitutes the base or the background of their current language performance level. Therefore, the researcher decided to be much closer to what was taking place in classroom by carrying out class observations for some EFL schoolteachers to collect data related to the second research question. Cohen et al. (2007), for example, point out that



classroom observation can be a beneficial tool to researchers because it assists in gathering live data from naturalistic site.

The researcher managed to conduct 5 class observations. Before the class observations started, the researcher explained the aim of the class observation to the teachers in order to avoid any possible embarrassment that could happen due to his presence in the classroom.

Every class observation lasted for 45 minutes, which was the formal time decided by the Directorate of Education in the northern regions of Syria. The researcher closely monitored every stage of the lessons and wrote notes and examples about the teachers' performance. Then, he collected the class observation forms to examine and use in the data analysis stage.

### 3.5 Data analysis procedures

This section explains the procedures of the data analysis process.

#### 3.5.1 Analysis of omission verb-form errors

In order to answer the first research question, the researcher analyzed the omission verb-form errors by identifying and describing the types of these errors in the students' essays.

The researcher read the essays twice, took notes, listed the types of omission verb-form errors in the students' essays, and categorized these types into the analysis chart mentioned in 3.4 above. Here are examples taken from the students' essays showing the methodology followed in identifying the types of omission verb-form errors:

- (1) *I am teaching in a town which called Afrin.*
- (2) *This problems must be solve.*
- (3) *Trade in Syria better than before.*

In sentence (1) above, the student omitted the auxiliary 'is' from the verb structure. He should have written it as 'which is called' instead of 'which called'. In (2), the student omitted the -ed marker; he should have written 'must be solved' instead of 'must be solve'. In (3), the student omitted the copular *be*; he should have said 'Trade in Syria is better than before', instead of 'Trade in Syria better than before'.

After saving the data on his computer, the researcher quantified it through an Excel spreadsheet to calculate the number of occurrence and percentage of each type of omission verb-form errors and organize the data into tables. He also used the Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) to display that data in figures.

### 3.5.2 Data analysis of the class observation

A class observation form, adopted by the Department of English Language Supervisory, Directorate of Education in Idlib Province, was employed to collect data about how verb tenses are taught in EFL classes in the northern regions of Syria. The form is designed in a checklist method with three degrees of performance for every item: poor, good, excellent and has space where the observer can write notes and examples about the teacher's performance.

None of the classes observed was a speaking or a listening class. However, the classes observed were in relation to the following:

- Grammar (passive voice), 12<sup>th</sup> grade, by Miss L.
- Writing about a picnic, 9<sup>th</sup> grade, by Miss Sh.
- Writing about a news story based on a headline, 10<sup>th</sup> grade, by Mr. M.
- Reading (The Silk Road), 9<sup>th</sup> grade, by Mr. A.
- Grammar (Revision of present simple and present continuous), 11<sup>th</sup> grade, by Mr. H.

Taking the teacher's permission, the researcher entered the class, showed all kinds of friendliness to both the students and the teacher, and had a seat at the end of the classroom. He observed and took notes of all the lesson events, which included the following:

- Lesson stages (warm-up, presentation, and evaluation) and procedures
- Teacher's linguistic performance
- Teacher and students' use of MT and TL
- His/her error correction and motivation strategies
- The relevance and effectiveness of questions
- Students' participation and pair/group work



- Students' ability to understand the lesson

After the researcher conducted the class observations, he quantified the data. In other words, he studied the evaluation forms carefully, calculated the ticks in every field and wrote notes for the highly frequent items.

#### 4. Results and discussion

This chapter presents the findings of this study and provides a detailed description and discussion of the data in relation to the research questions.

##### 4.1. Types of omission verb-form errors in the students' essays

Before analyzing omission verb-form errors, the researcher obtained the number of all the verb structures used by the students, the number and percentage of correct verb structures, and the number and percentage of incorrect ones. Table 1 shows these totals in detail:

**Table 1**

##### *Totals of Correct and Incorrect Verb Structures*

Total of verb structures	Total of correct verb structures	Total of incorrect verb structures	Omission verb-form errors
1328	577	751	210
Percentage	43.44%	56.55%	28%

Table 1 above shows that the students used 1328 verb structures in their essays, 577 (43.44%) correct and 751 (56.55%) incorrect. Obviously, the students' incorrect verb structures were more than the correct ones. This indicates that first-year English students still have real problems in their language performance levels. The above results also show that the students committed 210 omission verb-form errors (28% of the total number of the incorrect verb structures).

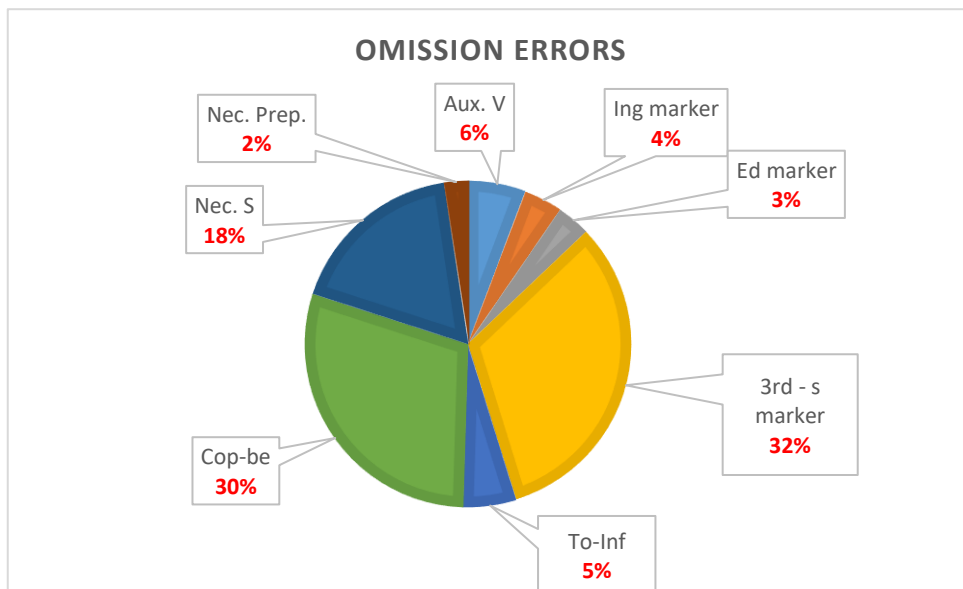
The students' omission verb-form errors appeared in eight categories: auxiliary verb, -ing marker, -ed marker, 3<sup>rd</sup> person singular –s marker, to-infinitive, copular *be*, necessary subject, and necessary preposition. Table 2 below shows the total number of occurrence of each type of error mentioned above:

**Table 2**

### Totals of Omission Verb-Form Errors

Total	Aux. V	-ing marker	-ed marker	3 <sup>rd</sup> -s marker	To-Inf	Cop-be	Nec. S	Nec. Prep.
210	12	8	7	68	11	62	37	5

Table 2 above shows that the students committed 210 omission verb-form errors in total. 3<sup>rd</sup> person singular –s omission, copular *be* omission, and necessary subject-omission constituted the major part by 68, 62, and 37 errors, respectively. However, the other types of omission verb-form errors occurred less: auxiliary omission 12 times, to-infinitive 11, -ing marker 8, -ed marker 7, and necessary preposition only 5 times. Figure 1 below shows the percentages of these errors:



**Figure 1. Percentage of omission errors**

Figure 1 above shows that the students committed many types of omission errors, of which the omission of the 3<sup>rd</sup> person singular –s was the most frequent, making up 32% of the omission errors (68 out of 210). For example, the students produced sentences like ‘*he need a safe place*’, ‘*the country that allow individuals*’, ‘*when a dealer want to sale goods*’, etc.

Although Syrian EFL learners are taught how to add the 3<sup>rd</sup> person singular –s correctly since their early learning stages, they still omit it on a large scale in their writings. In line with Mohamed et al. (2004), the researcher thinks that reducing the linguistic burden might be one reason of the





omission of the 3<sup>rd</sup> –s in the present simple tense. Mohamed (ibid) argues that the omission of the 3<sup>rd</sup> –s happens because of “the way learners store English linguistic items for later retrieval. Instead of storing both the singular verb and the plural verb, they lighten their learning load by focusing on the verb stem, which holds the core meaning needed” (p. 89). In other words, the students might have found it easier to memorize ‘need’, ‘allow’, and ‘want’ than to memorize ‘need/needs’, ‘allow/allows’, and ‘want/wants’, thus omitting the 3<sup>rd</sup> –s in the examples above.

Another possible reason for the omission of the 3<sup>rd</sup> –s might be the little influence which it makes in speaking. In other words, when students drop the 3<sup>rd</sup> –s in the present simple, they feel that their addressees are still able to understand them and that there is no need to stop the flow of communication to add it to the verbs. The repetition of dropping the 3<sup>rd</sup> –s in speaking might be transferred to writing, as we found in the students’ writings in the current study. Moreover, the intralingual factor might be one of the main reasons behind the high frequency of the third person singular –s omission, which is in line with Abisamra (2003) and Perez (2021), as this kind of error emerges from the system of English learning itself. The students almost know the rule of using the singular –s theoretically, but they usually keep dropping it in both writing and speaking, as in ‘*he need a safe place*’ instead of ‘*he needs a safe place*’ above.

Copular *be* omission came second in frequency among the other types of omission verb-form errors by 30% (62 out of 210 errors), followed by subject omission by 18% (37 errors). For example, the students’ essays contained sentences like ‘*people without houses*’, and ‘*can say people not affected in war*’. Agreeing with Al-Zahrani (1993) and Al-Zoubi & Abu-Eid (2014), the researcher thinks that negative transfer from Arabic (L1 interference) appears as the main reason of the omission of copular *be* and the omission of the subject of the verb. In fact, the grammatical surface structure of Arabic does not have a copular *be* in the present tense (Scott & Tucker, 1974; Thompson-Panos & Thomas-Ružić, 1983; Noor, 1996; Marshad & Suleiman, 1991) as in ‘*people without houses*’ (Al nasu bedoon biyout / الناس من دون بيوت). In other words, the absence of copular *be* might be transferred to English, resulting in ‘*people without houses*’ instead of ‘*people are without houses*’.

Moreover, Arabic, unlike English, allows the reduction of the subject into one morpheme attached to the beginning of the verb to make agreement between the subject and the verb. For example, instead of saying 'I/we/you can', Arabic native speakers can say 'Astati'ou / Nastati'ou / Tastati'ou', replacing 'Ana' (I) with 'A', 'Nahnu' (we) with 'N', and 'Anta' (you) with 'T', respectively. Therefore, the reduction of the subject and the absence of copular *be* in Arabic might be transferred to English, leading to the omission of both of them in sentences like 'can say people not affected in war' (Nastati'u annakoul al nasu gairu mota'athireena fil harb: نستطيع أن نقول: (الناس غير متأثرين في الحرب)). This transfer possibly made the student say 'can say people are not affected in war' instead of 'we can say that people are not affected by war'.

In addition, L1 interference, which usually takes place due to word-for-word translation method from Arabic to English, is possibly the main reason behind the omission of auxiliary verb and to-infinitive, though these two types of error were less frequent by 6% (12 out of 210 errors) and 5% (11 errors), respectively, and, consequently, statistically insignificant. However, the student's omission of the auxiliary 'do' in 'people today not like the kind of living' reflects the negative role of L1 in the student's composition. In fact, Arabic does not have auxiliaries in its negative structures; it has only 'la' (not) before the verb, as in 'not like' (la yohebu: لا يحب). This indicates that the student above did not feel certain to include a word (the auxiliary 'do') that does not have an equivalent in his mother tongue, which made him translate literally from Arabic and produce it as 'not like' instead of 'do not like'.

It is convincing that the low frequency of to-infinitive omission (5% of the omission errors) shows the students' awareness of its use, but a sentence like 'they began look for food' shows the negative role that L1 interference plays in the students' composition. In other words, the student might have omitted the to-infinitive after the verb 'began' because he translated literally from Arabic, which does not have this kind of to-infinitive (Bada'ou Yabhathun: بدؤوا يبحثون), thus producing it as 'they began look for' instead of 'they began to look for'.

In addition, the essays showed other less frequent types of omission errors, such as the omission of -ing marker by 4% (8 out of 210 errors), -ed marker by 3% (17 errors), and necessary preposition by 2% (5 errors). For



example, the essays contained verb structures where the compulsory elements mentioned above were omitted, such as in 'Syria *is become* one of the important between countries', 'people *have change* after ten years of war', and 'I *was going my* school', respectively. It is interesting to say that the low frequency of the omission of -ing marker, -ed marker, and the necessary preposition indicates that the students have mastered the use of these grammatical elements to a good extent. However, the researcher agrees with Perez's (2021) that incomplete learning is the reason behind the omission of these elements, making the students sometimes say 'is become', 'have change', and 'I was going my school' instead of 'is becoming', 'have changed', and 'I was going to my school', respectively.

In conclusion, the 3<sup>rd</sup> person singular -s, copular *be*, and the subject of the verb were the highest frequent types of omission errors. This indicates that first-year English students at Free Aleppo University still find it difficult to cope with the verb form mainly because of L1 interference, intralingual factor and incomplete learning. However, the students showed more awareness of the effects resulting from the omission of auxiliary verb, to-infinitive, -ing marker, -ed marker, and necessary preposition on the verb form, as these were the least frequent types of omission errors.

#### 4.2 Why do Syrian first-year English students commit omission verb-form errors?

To answer this research question, the researcher utilized the qualitative data of the schoolteacher's class observations. Four out of five schoolteachers followed the deductive approach of teaching English grammar (Starting with rules then giving examples), and they even followed a teaching approach that was somehow similar to Grammar Translation Method (GTM), where they used Arabic to explain and translate the rules. In fact, most of those teachers introduced their lessons in English, but after about five minutes, they shifted to Arabic, which ended up in a boring class and passive listeners. This uncontrolled use of Arabic in the classroom left the students with little chance to practice using English verb structures within the text. What the teacher explained helped only to do the exercises of the book that asked the students to put the correct form of the verb depending on time references available in the sentences.

Moreover, in three out of five class observations, the teachers did not involve their students in the stages of the lesson because they were almost

preoccupied in presenting their lessons. This led to many negative results, such as lack of practice and absence of motivation and error correction. The students were passive listeners who lost the chance of getting their writing errors corrected and the chance of getting feedback or availing themselves of

their teacher's help, as they were asked to write the paragraph at home.

Depending on the data obtained from the schoolteacher's class observations, the researcher believes that lack of practice of English is the main factor that paved the way in front of all the types of verb errors, including omission-verb errors.

Krashen (1983, cited in Kozhevnikova, 2019, p. 434) argues that teacher's contribution into his/her students' language acquisition can be creating an acquisition – rich learning environment in the classroom, creating so called “English atmosphere” and increasing students' motivation about learning the target language. Unfortunately, the information obtained from the class observations above does not seem to be in line with Krashen's speech about the teacher's role in creating “English atmosphere” in the classroom. The students did not receive enough time of learning, which left them with poor knowledge about how to produce correct verb forms. Therefore, it was no wonder that the student's ignorance of how to complete the grammatical rules led him/her to produce omission verb-verb errors like ‘*we have stay stronger*’, instead of ‘*we have stayed stronger*’, and ‘*war teach people*’ instead of ‘*war teaches people*’.

The researcher also thinks that the absence of appropriate error-correction strategies in the classroom might be another reason for the rise of omission verb-form errors. Spada (1997), for example, argues that correcting the error is more effective than teaching the students about anticipated grammatical problems. When the teacher does not know when and how to interfere to treat the error, the students possibly think of it as correct and, consequently, it fossilizes.

To sum up, the researcher thinks that the main reason behind the omission verb-errors in the current study is lack of practice, which could be a result of the uncontrolled use of Arabic language in classroom.



## 5. Conclusion

### 5.1 Summary of the findings

This study aimed at analyzing the omission verb-form errors found in essays written by first-year students majoring in English language and literature at Free Aleppo University, northern regions of Syria. The researcher raised two research questions relating to the types of omission verb-form errors and the reasons behind these errors. The researcher followed the qualitative approach to collect data (which was quantified later) from 49 essays written by first-year English students and from five class observations for EFL schoolteachers in Northwest Syria.

The results showed that the students committed 210 omission verb-form errors (28%) in 751 incorrect verb structures. Third person singular – omission was the most frequent type of omission errors by 32%, followed by copular *be* omission (30%) and the omission of necessary preposition (18%).

The data of the class observations showed that the schoolteachers used Arabic as the main means of instruction in their classrooms, thus depriving their students of a real chance to practice English, which is possibly the main reason behind the rise of omission verb-form errors in the students' writings.

### 5.2 Implication of the study

The findings of this study offer some significant implications for EFL teachers and students.

1. Using Arabic as the medium of communication by EFL schoolteachers in class may deprive the students of English practice. Schoolteachers should teach English through English so that the students would be in real touch with English and would be better able to see how verb forms are structured within a longer piece of writing.
2. EFL schoolteachers do not often correct their students' errors. Therefore, teachers should put plans to find solutions to their students' errors.
3. In order to practice English, students should write as many paragraphs as possible and show them to their teachers to correct the errors and get

feedback. This would enable them to see where they commit errors and consequently they may avoid them in their writings.

## 5.2 Recommendations for further research

The researcher suggests three research points to be studied by future research:

1. The reasons why schoolteachers use Arabic as the main means of instructions in their classroom.
2. The role Syrian EFL supervisors play in developing the learning process.
3. The impact of extensive writing on Syrian EFL students' proficiency level.

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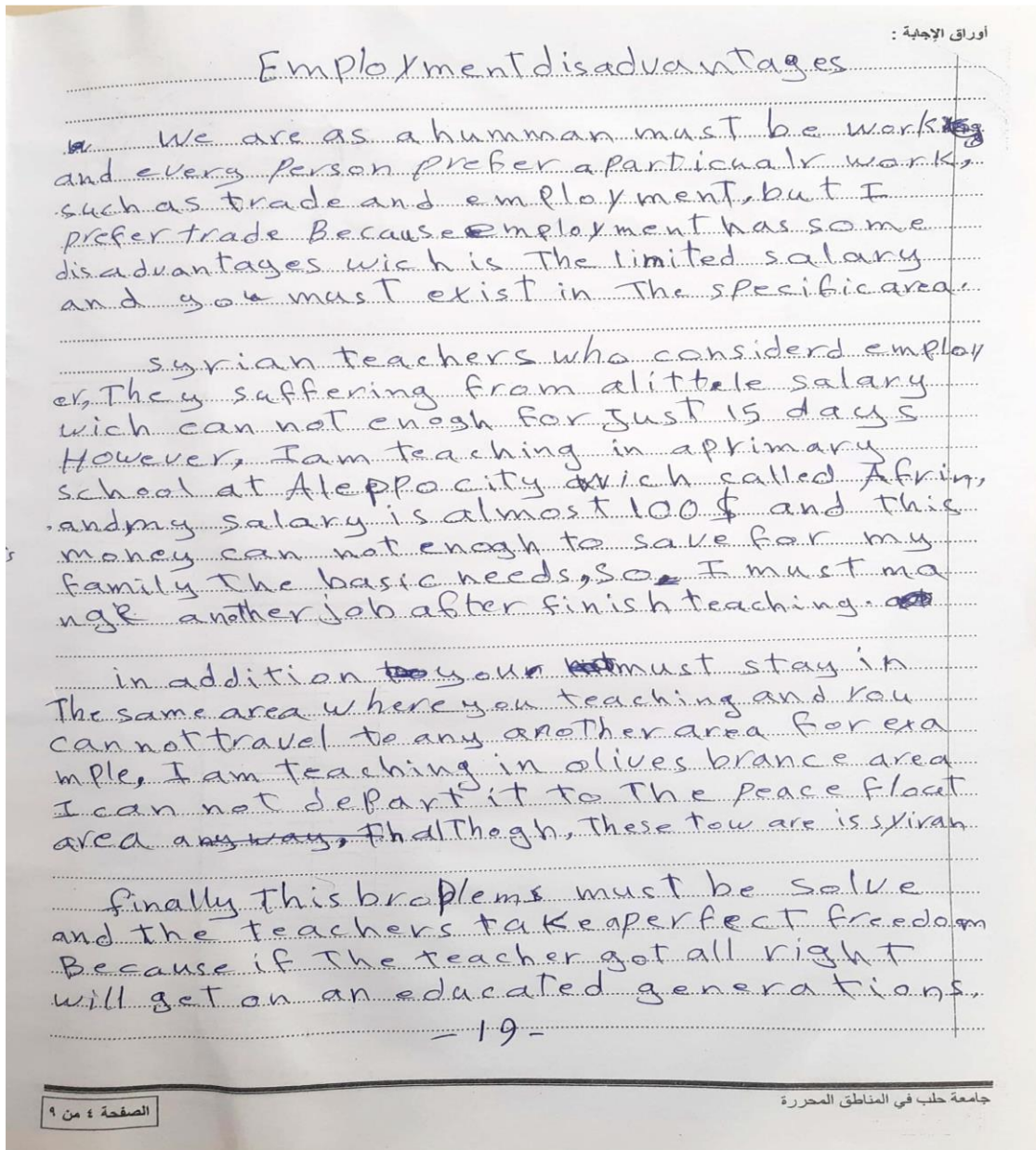
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## Appendixes

## Appendix A



A sample of the students' essays



## Appendix B

### Teacher Evaluation Form

Directorate of Education in Idlib Province

TEACHER: ..... EVALUATOR:  
.....

DATE: ..... CLASS: .....

LOCATION: .....

The teacher starts the lesson with a: warmer                      icebreaker  
task                      none

The start of the lesson is functional:                      Yes                      No

Teacher's Methodology & Skills	Not done	Done poorly	Done well	Not tested	Comment
Providing a pleasant, safe and orderly <i>climate</i> conducive to learning.					
Demonstrating <i>patience</i> and empathy for students.					
Applying appropriate approach.					
Knowing what to correct, what to ignore and promoting <i>self-correction</i> .					
Giving effective <i>encouragement</i> .					
Recognizing and managing <i>different levels</i> .					
<i>Involving</i> all learners.					
Using a variety of <i>learning modes</i> (e.g. see it, hear it, say it, touch it, write it & read about it.)					
<i>Recycling</i> what has already been taught.					
Summarizing and <i>fitting</i> into context what is being taught.					
Effective use of check questions.					



Using <i>teaching aids</i> when needed.					
Using the board effectively.					
Using effective <i>voice, body language, gestures</i> and cues.					
Practicing good management of <i>time</i> .					
Presenting the target <i>content logically</i> and <i>smoothly</i> .					

Use of I1	Overused?		Used wisely?		Needed but not used?	
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**Evaluator's feedback:**

Good points the teacher can make more use of	
Advice on things that should be improved	
Skills the teacher masters greatly and may help colleagues with	

Teacher's Language	Poor	Good	Excellent	Examples
Grammar				
Pronunciation				
Fluency				
Appropriateness for the level taught				
Mastery of the content of the taught lesson				

