

Linguistic Error Analysis (Syntax and Semantics) in the Writing Skills of Arabic Language Education Students at STIT Bustanul Ulum Lampung Tengah

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ABSTRACT

Writing skills (*mahārah al-kitābah*) are among the productive skills in Arabic language learning that require mastery of vocabulary, grammar, sentence structure, and accurate meaning construction. In practice, Arabic Language Education students still encounter various difficulties in producing written texts that conform to Arabic linguistic rules. This study aims to analyze syntactic and semantic errors in students' Arabic writing and to identify the factors underlying these errors. This study employed a descriptive qualitative approach using the *error analysis* method. The participants were 30 fourth-semester students of the Arabic Language Education Study Program at STIT Bustanul Ulum Lampung Tengah who were enrolled in the *Insyā' II* course. The data consisted of students' Arabic compositions on the theme *Al-Lughah al-'Arabiyyah fī 'Aṣr al-Thawrah al-Raqmiyyah* and were collected through documentation, observation, and interviews with 10 students and the course lecturer. Data were analyzed through the stages of error identification, classification, description, and interpretation. Data validity was established through methodological triangulation and expert judgment. The findings revealed 142 linguistic errors, consisting of 88 syntactic errors (61.9%) and 54 semantic errors (38.1%). The syntactic errors mainly involved violations of *na'at-man'ut* and gender agreement, inaccurate application of *i'rāb*, inappropriate use of *ḥurūf al-jarr*, and errors in *idāfah* constructions. Meanwhile, semantic errors included Indonesian language interference through literal translation, inaccurate word choice, and the use of expressions that were inappropriate to the context. The factors underlying these errors included interlingual transfer, intralingual transfer and overgeneralization, as well as limited exposure to authentic Arabic texts. These findings highlight the need for Arabic writing instruction that integrates error analysis, contextualized grammar instruction, and the enrichment of Arabic vocabulary and collocations to improve students' syntactic and semantic accuracy.

Keywords: Error Analysis; Mahārah Al-Kitābah; Syntactic Errors; Semantic Errors; Arabic Language Education Students.

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INTRODUCTION

Arabic writing proficiency (*mahārah al-kitābah*) is one of the productive language skills that requires learners to integrate vocabulary, grammatical knowledge, sentence structure, and the ability to convey meaning accurately and coherently (Mughni, 2005; Mahyaddin et al., 2024). Unlike receptive skills, writing requires learners to construct linguistic forms independently and monitor the accuracy of their language production (Corder, 1981). Therefore, mastery of Arabic writing is not limited to the ability to produce grammatically correct sentences but also involves the ability to organize ideas and select linguistic expressions that are appropriate to the intended context (Hyland, 2003; Mughni, 2005). For students of

Arabic Language Education, writing proficiency is particularly important because they are expected to develop both academic competence and pedagogical competence as prospective Arabic language teachers (Mahyaddin et al., 2024).

Despite its importance, Arabic writing remains challenging for many learners, particularly at the university level. Students frequently produce linguistic deviations involving grammatical structures, word selection, sentence construction, and meaning. Recent studies have reported that Arabic learners experience various syntactic and grammatical problems, including errors in sentence structure, case endings (*i'rāb*), gender agreement, *idāfah* constructions, and the use of prepositions. Such errors may arise from both interlingual transfer, in which learners transfer patterns from their first language, and intralingual processes, in which learners incorrectly apply or overgeneralize rules of the target language (Corder, 1981; Kholison, 2021).

From a linguistic perspective, errors in Arabic writing can occur at different levels, including syntax and semantics. At the syntactic level, learners may experience difficulties in applying agreement between *na'at* and *man'ut*, gender agreement, *i'rāb*, *hurūf al-jarr*, and *idāfah* constructions. These difficulties are particularly relevant for Indonesian learners because Arabic and Indonesian differ substantially in their grammatical systems. Arabic, for example, has grammatical categories such as gender, case marking, and specific agreement patterns that do not operate in the same way in Indonesian (Kholison, 2021). Consequently, differences between the first and target languages may contribute to recurring syntactic errors in students' written production.

At the semantic level, errors may occur when students select words or expressions based primarily on their literal meanings without considering contextual appropriateness and lexical collocation (Najah & Agustina, 2020). Learners may also construct Arabic expressions by transferring Indonesian patterns directly into Arabic. Such transfer can result in expressions that are formally understandable but pragmatically or lexically inappropriate in standard Arabic. Research on written Arabic among non-native speakers has demonstrated that recurring deviations in syntax, preposition use, and lexical patterns may reflect the development of an interlanguage system in second-language acquisition (Corder, 1981; Mughni, 2005).

Error analysis provides an important framework for investigating these linguistic deviations. Corder's error analysis approach views learner errors as valuable evidence of the processes involved in second-language learning rather than merely as failures that should be corrected. Through systematic identification, classification, description, and interpretation of errors, researchers can determine the linguistic patterns that learners have not yet fully mastered. In the context of Arabic writing, this approach can therefore provide both a linguistic description of students' difficulties and a pedagogical basis for developing more targeted writing instruction.

Previous studies have examined errors in Arabic writing at different educational levels. Rahmafillah and Fahmi, for example, identified syntactic errors in students' Arabic sentence writing and reported both interlingual and intralingual factors. Mahyaddin et al. examined linguistic errors in the writing of Arabic Language and Literature students and found problems involving *nahwu*, *ṣarf*, semantic aspects, and lexical choice. Other research has also documented grammatical errors in Arabic composition and academic writing among university students. These studies demonstrate that linguistic errors remain a significant issue in Arabic writing instruction.

However, several gaps remain. First, many previous studies have focused primarily on grammatical or syntactic errors, while the relationship between syntactic and semantic errors in students' written Arabic has received comparatively less systematic attention. Second, some studies have examined learners at the secondary-school or general Arabic-learning level rather than students enrolled specifically in Arabic Language Education programs at the university level. Third, although interlingual and intralingual factors have been identified in previous research, there is still a need for contextualized analysis that connects the frequency and forms of syntactic and semantic errors with the factors experienced directly by university students during Arabic writing activities.

Therefore, this study investigates syntactic and semantic errors in the Arabic writing of fourth-semester students in the Arabic Language Education Study Program at Universitas Ma'arif Lampung. The study specifically aims to: (1) identify and classify the forms of syntactic errors found in students' Arabic compositions; (2) analyze semantic errors and inappropriate meaning construction in their written production; and (3) identify the interlingual, intralingual, and contextual factors underlying these errors. The novelty of this study lies in its simultaneous analysis of syntactic and semantic errors in university students' Arabic writing and its integration of written-text analysis with interview data to explain the possible sources of the errors. The findings are expected to contribute to the development of more contextual, corrective, and evidence-based instruction in *mahārah al-kitābah* at the university level.

METHOD

This study employed a descriptive qualitative approach utilizing Corder's Error Analysis method to systematically identify, classify, and explain the linguistic errors in students' written works (Corder, 1981; Sutisna, 2021). The research subjects comprised 30 fourth-semester students from the Arabic Language Education Study Program at Universitas Ma'arif Lampung, selected through purposive sampling based on their completion of prerequisite foundational courses, including Nahwu, Sharf, and Kitabah I (Ary et al., 2010).

Data were gathered through a corpus of structured essays consisting of 200–300 words under the unified topic "*Al-Lughah al-'Arabiyyah fi 'Ashri al-Thawrah al-Raqmiyyah*" (Arabic Language in the Digital Era), paired with classroom observations and in-depth interviews with 10 student representatives and the course lecturer to uncover underlying interlingual and intralingual factors (Lodico et al., 2006; Megawati, 2016). The collected data were analyzed through a standardized sequence: error identification, classification into syntactic and semantic categories, explanation based on linguistic rules, and overall evaluation (Corder, 1981). To ensure data validity, technical triangulation across documentation, observation, and interviews was applied alongside expert judgment by an Arabic linguistics specialist (Moule & Hek, 2011).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Based on the analysis of 30 essay documents written by Arabic Language Education (PBA) students, a total of 142 linguistic error items were identified. These errors were categorized into two main domains: syntactic errors (88 findings / 61.9%) and semantic errors (54 findings / 38.1%). The detailed distribution of these errors is presented in Table 1 below:

Table 1. Classification of Linguistic Errors in PBA Students' Writing Skills

No	Error Category	Specific Error Type	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
1	Syntax (<i>Al-Nahw</i>)	Mismatch in <i>Na'at</i> - <i>Man'ut</i> & Gender Agreement	28	19.7%
2	Syntax (<i>Al-Nahw</i>)	Incorrect <i>I'rab</i> Status & Final Vowels (<i>Harakat</i>)	24	16.9%
3	Syntax (<i>Al-Nahw</i>)	Misuse of Prepositions (<i>Huruf Jar</i>) & Relatives (<i>Shilah</i>)	21	14.8%
4	Syntax (<i>Al-Nahw</i>)	Flawed <i>Idhafah</i> Structure & Misuse of <i>Alif Lam</i>	15	10.5%
5	Semantics (<i>Al-Dilalah</i>)	Literal Translation Interference (<i>Language Transfer</i>)	26	18.3%

6	Semantics (<i>Al-Dilalah</i>)	Inappropriate Diction / Word Choice (<i>Ikhtiyar al-Alfadz</i>)	18	12.7%
7	Semantics (<i>Al-Dilalah</i>)	Meaning Ambiguity due to Idiomatic / Contextual Misuse	10	7.1%
Total Errors			142	100.0%

1. Analysis of Syntactic Errors

Syntactic errors constituted the largest proportion of errors committed by the students. The primary dominant error was the mismatch between the adjective and the noun it modifies (*na'at-man'ut*) as well as gender agreement (*tadzkir wa ta'nith*). Many students failed to align the adjective with its preceding noun, particularly when dealing with non-human plural nouns (*jam'u ghair 'aqil*)

Incorrect::

اللغة العربية هي الوسيلة المهمين في هذا العصر

(*Al-lughah al-'arabiyyah hiya al-wasiylah al- muhimmiyna...*)

Correction :

اللغة العربية هي الوسيلة المهمة في هذا العصر

(*Al-lughah al-'arabiyyah hiya al-wasiylah al- muhimmah...*)

Analysis:

The noun (الوسيلة) is a singular feminine noun (*mu'annats mufrad*); therefore, its modifier must also take the singular feminine form (المهمة), rather than the sound masculine plural form (*jam'u mudzakkar salim*).

he second most frequent syntactic error involved incorrect determination of *i'rab* status and final vowels (*harakat*), especially when using nouns with special markers such as *Asma'ul Khamsah*, *Jam'u Mudzakkar Salim*, and *Mutsanna*. Students frequently applied the nominative case (*marfu'*) in positions that strictly required the accusative (*manshub*) or genitive (*majrur*) cases. Additionally, the misuse of prepositions (*huruf jar*) was prevalent, where students paired verbs with prepositions based on Indonesian grammar rules (e.g., using بحث عن for "discussing about," whereas the Arabic verb is direct-transitive without a preposition).

2. Analysis of Semantic Errors

At the semantic level, errors were predominantly caused by native language interference (*Interlingual Transfer*), where students constructed Arabic sentences using Indonesian thinking patterns. This resulted in semantic shifts or awkward phrasing that sounded unnatural to native speakers (*un-Arabic structure*).

Incorrect: :

يأخذ الطالب دوراً كبيراً في التعلم

The student takes a big role in learning....)

Correction:

(يلعب الطالب دوراً هاماً في التعلم...)(*Yal'abu al-thalib dauran haamman...*)

Analysis:

The phrase "taking a role" was translated literally using the verb يأخذ. In standard Arabic collocations (*al-talazum al-lafdziy*), the appropriate verb to express "playing or taking a role" is يلعب دوراً.

3. Causal Factors of Errors

ased on in-depth interviews with students and classroom observations, the underlying causes of these errors can be categorized into three main factors:

- **Interlingual Transfer (First Language Influence):** Students consistently transferred Indonesian grammatical structures while formulating Arabic sentences. This naturally occurs because Indonesian lacks grammatical case markers (*i'rab*), gender agreement (*tadzkir/ta'nith*), and dual forms (*mutasanna*).
- **Intralingual Transfer & Overgeneralization:** Errors originating from the complexity of Arabic grammar itself. Students overgeneralized grammatical rules without accounting for exceptions (*istitsna'*), or due to incomplete mastery of *Nahwu* and *Sharf* rules.
- **Lack of Authentic Reading Exposure:** Students were rarely exposed to modern authentic Arabic texts, resulting in a limited vocabulary range and unfamiliarity with idiomatic collocations.

In addition to linguistic transfer and limited reading exposure, psychological and affective factors such as writing anxiety and low self-efficacy play a crucial role in compounding student errors during Arabic composition (Aida, 1994; Al-Sawalha & Chow, 2012). When students experience high levels of apprehension, their cognitive processing capacity becomes constrained, causing them to revert to simplified or literal translation strategies rather than actively applying learned syntactic rules like *i'rab* and complex structural agreements (Horwitz et al., 1986). This psychological barrier, coupled with a performance-oriented instructional environment, often prevents learners from experimenting with complex sentence structures, thereby reinforcing systemic syntactic and semantic errors over time (Al-Sawalha & Chow, 2012).

To address these persistent errors, a pedagogical shift toward integrated, process-oriented feedback mechanism is vital (Ferris, 2002; Hyland & Hyland, 2006). Rather than solely assessing final written products through isolated grammar scoring, language instructors should implement direct corrective feedback combined with interactive teacher-student conferences to clarify underlying interlingual misconceptions (Ferris, 2002). Furthermore, embedding authentic Arabic collocations and contextual vocabulary exercises directly into the writing curriculum can significantly reduce native language interference and bridges the gap between theoretical *Nahwu* knowledge and practical communicative competence (Hyland & Hyland, 2006).

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings and discussion of this study, it can be concluded that linguistic errors in PBA students' writing skills remain remarkably high across both syntactic and semantic levels. Syntactic errors were predominantly driven by mismatches in *na'at-man'ut*/gender agreement, improper application of *i'rab* status, and the misuse of prepositions (*huruf jar*). Meanwhile, semantic errors were triggered by a strong interference from the native language through literal translation, as well as inaccurate contextual vocabulary selection. The root of these issues centers on two main factors: interlingual transfer and intralingual overgeneralization, which are further compounded by a lack of exposure to authentic reading materials. The implications of this study recommend a necessary reorientation of *Kitabah* and *Qawa'id* instructional methods in higher education. Grammar instruction should not be delivered in isolation (as pure syntax), but rather integrated into actual writing practice using direct feedback and corrective instruction. Additionally, enriching teaching materials with modern Arabic collocations and adopting contrastive analysis-based learning are highly recommended to minimize native language interference.

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