

# An Investigation of the Most Common Global and Local Grammatical Errors in EFL Learners' Story-Telling Task

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## Abstract

Speaking a second or foreign language has always been a challenging skill to master for many ESL/EFL learners. Grammatical errors, either global or local seemingly pose a great challenge to many learners who are struggling to speak a second or foreign language. However, a study on the most common global and local grammatical errors in story-telling task of Iranian EFL learners has evidently received less than adequate attention. To delve into this line of research, 45 Iranian male and female EFL learners at three different levels of elementary, intermediate, and advanced were taken advantage of. They were asked to carefully read a story best-suited to their level of proficiency and present an oral summary of the story to the whole class. Next, their performances were recorded to be transcribed for further in-depth analysis. Finally, learner' most common global and local grammatical errors were identified, analyzed and categorized using a modified version of Corder's (1973) model. Findings revealed that "lack of sentence structure, lack of word order, and run-on sentences" were among the three most global grammatical errors, while "misinformation of simple past verbs, omission of past inflection of verbs, and omission of "the" were three among the most local grammatical errors made by all participants, respectively.

*Keywords:* Global Errors, Local Errors, Grammatical Errors, Story-telling Task, Iranian EFL Learners.

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## Introduction

Speaking is regarded as the most frequently-used means of communicating worldwide (Rivers, 1981). Richards (2008) stated that speaking is the means through which people are able to communicate with one another to achieve specific objectives or to convey their messages, opinions, intentions, hopes and viewpoints. For this reason, communication takes place, where there is speech and without speech, one cannot communicate with the interlocutor.

Speaking is a difficult skill for many learners who often complain that the process of speaking in a foreign language is pain-staking and complicated (Wright, 2010). In separate surveys, Cedar (2004), and Collins (2002) equally affirmed that speaking is a difficult process and, more than that, speaking a foreign language is even far more complicated that often presents the greatest challenge to the students at all stages. Bailey (2003) asserted that speaking is the most difficult skill for L2 learners to master and this difficulty lies not only in producing and organizing ideas, but also in rendering these ideas into legible words in the process of acceptable structure.

In Iranian EFL contexts, the case of making numerous grammatical errors in speaking is noticeable (Molavi, 2013). Teachers of speaking courses generally confront students who have mastered a good amount of English vocabulary and grammatical rules, but they have seldom put that knowledge into actual use (Wachs, 1993). Hence, it can be noted that grammar is a main concern in speaking competency which has not been taken into account in Iran and, accordingly, needs to be thoroughly investigated.

Biber (1988) demonstrated that sources of errors in speaking are numerous and points to the fact that from among them, “grammatical inaccuracy” is what precludes learners from making well-defined utterances and sometimes stops them from speaking. Rivers (1981) announced speaking an intricate process with many complexities and regarded “grammatical errors” as the most significant speaking problems of EFL learners because a substantial number of them have not mastered the syntactic proficiency as expected.

Importantly, errors, whether global or local, can influence perceptions of the quality of ideas in a sentence or utterance. As a result, learners should not ignore them because they show the state of the learners' knowledge or lessons they have received (Graham, Harris, and Herbert, 2011). This can potentially impede meaning-negotiation which might lead to a poor or unclear communication.

Despite the fact that this issue seems to be of paramount importance in the Iranian context, there is a dearth of a criterion in the Iranian EFL contexts to find out the most frequent global and local grammatical errors in Iranian students' spoken language. Achieving such a scale, then they can identify, rectify and remedy students' grammatical spoken errors. Keshavarz (2008) stressed that finding learners' errors can be beneficial because by analyzing them, learners' linguistic difficulties will be discovered and a method for comparing them could be devised. Therefore, a study on the most common global and local grammatical errors in speaking seems fundamental and this study is going to fill this gap.

## **2. Literature Review**

### **2.1. Overview**

Interactional nature of spoken language requires the speaker's ability to use motor-perceptive skills concerned with correctly using structures of the language by the speakers, namely syntax (Bygate, 1998). Nevertheless, being provided with vast amounts of learning materials, it is evident that learners make considerable errors in their oral utterances which might originate from several reasons including overgeneralization, slip of the tongue, lack of competence, lack of knowledge, lack of attention, and mere ignorance or negligence (Keshavarz, 2008).

Additionally, the classification and analysis of learners' errors can have substantial advantages including acquiring more information about learners' internal constructs, permitting the observation of learner's language production, and preparing field scholars with a framework for investigating learners' language (Lopez, 2010). Keshavarz (2008) maintained that by error analysis, both teachers and learners can benefit from errors they make since they allow them to get feedback from the learning and teaching milieu and afterwards could make remedial modifications to their language.

Going through the literature of studies carried out on features of students' oral performances in Iranian EFL contexts, it seems that the study of grammatical errors is compulsory because their spoken language shows that their vocabulary repertoire enjoys an acceptable standard to some extent, but their actual performance of grammatical rules and regulations is not satisfactory (Molavi, 2013). Besides, avoiding grammatical inaccuracy is a prerequisite to fluency in speaking (Richards, 2008) that seems to be the missing piece in Iranian contexts in speaking courses.

## **2.2. Empirical Studies on Grammatical Errors**

There have been several surveys worldwide on the grammatical errors of learners' oral performances. Lake (2011) discussed five common mistakes made by learners of English as a second language as "misuse of articles, lack of nouns, misuse of regular and irregular verbs, lack of third person pronouns, and subject-verb agreement." More recently, Beltran (2014) did a research on the spoken grammatical errors of Technology students at the Philippines universities and revealed that approximately the most common types of errors are all focused on grammatical errors such as "the wrong use of prepositions, verb tense, articles and subject-verb agreement".

In Iranian EFL contexts, owing to not finding much study on spoken errors in the literature, inevitably, a couple of investigations on writing should be cited. In his study, Azizi (2012) found ten categories of grammatical errors to be the most common which concerned "articles, possessives, prepositions, pronouns, singular/plural, subject-verb agreement, verbs, infinitive 'to', word choice and spelling". Vahdani Sanavi (2014) did research on error gravity in Iranian EFL learners' writing and concluded that "adjectives, subject-verb agreement, verbs, articles, collocations, conditional sentences, and connectors" the most committed errors. Yet, another conducted study by Sadighi and Heydari (2012) was evidence for grammatical errors of Iranian EFL learners that fell into the categories of "articles, prepositions, subject-verb agreement, and verb tenses". Tenses, articles, prepositions, passive voice, part of speech and subject-verb agreement have been reported by a number of researchers like Shokouhi and Mirsalari (2010).

## **2.3. Global and Local Errors**

In relation to global and local errors, Richards and Schmitt (2002) pointed out that in error analysis, the global error is an error in the use of an important component of sentence structure, which causes a sentence or utterance difficult or impossible to understand. For example: 'I like take taxi but my friend said so not that we should be late for school (284)'. But a local error is an error in the use of a component of sentence structure which does not cause any comprehension problems. For example: 'If I heard from him I will let you' (284)'.

The present study aims at answering the following questions:

To achieve the above-stated objectives, the following questions were formulated:

- 1- What are the most common global grammatical errors in the story-telling task of speaking among Iranian EFL learners at three different levels of elementary, intermediate, and advanced?
- 2- What are the most common local grammatical errors in the story-telling task of speaking among Iranian EFL learners at three different levels of elementary, intermediate, and advanced?
- 3- Does the proficiency level have any impact on EFL learners' global and local grammatical errors in the story-telling task of speaking?

### **3. Methodology**

#### **3.1. Participants**

The study was conducted with 45 Iranian male and female students, aged between 15 to 30 years, at three levels of elementary, intermediate and advanced at an English Institute in Karaj. According to the placement test administered by the Institute, their overall proficiency levels were determined and later confirmed by the authorities there. Then, three available classes at elementary, intermediate and advanced levels were taken advantage of.

#### **3.2. Sampling**

Because of the administrative difficulties of randomization, convenient sampling was utilized. Three available classes at three different levels of elementary, intermediate, and advanced were taken advantage of at an English Language Institute in Karaj in Iran.

### **3.3. Instruments**

#### **3.3.1. Story-telling Task**

Ellis (2003) introduced several tasks in speaking; namely role-play, discussion, story-telling, information-exchange task, summarization, and pair/group work task. Story-telling is a controlled task that has long been considered a critical pedagogical exercise (Dalglish, 1988). Gibbons (2002) also believed that stories comprise predicting, guessing and associating new information to former knowledge; they are scaffolding means for the learning procedure; they help learners to improve steadily in their own construction of knowledge. Hence, the researcher placed the focus of the investigation on this task.

#### **3.3.2. Corder's Model**

In order to classify and analyze the most common local errors in this study, an international model of Corder (1973) was implemented. According to Corder (1973), local errors are divided into four main categories: omission, addition misinformation, and misordering.

“Omission” is the category in which particular linguistic forms may be omitted by students owing to their complexity in production. Some examples are provided here by Corder (1973, 28):

- ✓ - A strange thing happen to me yesterday. OR He think it's ok to go out late at night alone.

The second category is “addition” in which learners add extra elements in the sentence or even a word. Some examples are provided here by Corder (1973, 30):

- - I thinks ... OR The books is here

The next category is “misinformation” where students use the wrong phoneme, morpheme, structure or vocabulary item. For instance, the learner can select “est” instead of “er” for comparatives, such as, “My friend is oldest than me” or “I want that he comes here” instead of “I want him to come here (Corder, 1973, 32)”.

The final category is “misordering” that may arise by changing the position of certain phonemes or even morphemes in a sentence. For example, “He's get upping now”, or “He's a friend dear (Corder, 1973, 34)”.

### **3.4. Data Collection Procedure**

First, the students at three different levels of elementary, intermediate and advanced were asked to study one story book which best suited their current level of language proficiency. The elementary students read “Anne of Green Gables”, level 1, the intermediate “the Railway Children”, level 3, and the advanced “the Street Lawyer”, level 6.

Thus, students of elementary and intermediate levels were asked to read two chapters and the advanced level were required to read the whole story at home and present an oral summary of it to the entire class in the following week.

After that, the students’ presentations, which lasted almost 10 minutes, were recorded; however, without their knowing this. Afterwards, the researcher read, analyzed and identified the most common global and local grammatical errors based on Corder’s 1973 model. Subsequently, he categorized all errors from the most to the least common errors. And, from among them, the researcher finally introduced the most common global and local grammatical errors in speaking among Iranian EFL learners at three levels of elementary, intermediate and advanced. What is worth noting is that in order to better analyze the data in length and details, Corder’s model was slightly modified to a new version by the researcher which seems a praiseworthy pattern for analyzing and categorizing local grammatical errors.

### **3.5. Data Analysis**

Having collected the data, the researcher used the latest version of Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) , descriptive statistics as well as the non-parametric analysis of chi-square for the computation of the data. The researcher, then, took advantage of the most appropriate statistical tools to analyze the data. Descriptive statistics and multi-variate ANOVA were employed to compare the groups’ means.

## 4. Results

### 4.1. First Research Question

Regarding global errors, based on the results displayed in table 4.1, it can be affirmed that the elementary students made the highest number of global errors (57.9 %). This was followed by the intermediate (28.9 %) and advanced (5 %) groups. In other words, as the proficiency level increased the number of global errors decreased.

Table 4.1

*Frequencies and Percentages of Global Errors by Proficiency Levels*

		Frequency	Percent	Chi-square	df	p
Proficiency Levels	Elementary	22	57.9	11.73	2	.003
	Intermediate	11	28.9			
	Advanced	5	13.2			
	Total	38	100.0			

The results of chi-square ( $\chi^2(2) = 11.73, p = .003, r = .55$  representing a large effect size) indicated that the frequencies of global errors observed in table 4.1 showed significant differences between the three proficiency levels.

Concerning local errors, according to the results demonstrated in table 4.2, it can be asserted that the elementary students made the highest number and percentage of local errors (48.1 %). This was followed by the intermediate (34.9 %) and advanced (16.9 %) groups. In other words, as the proficiency level increased the number of local errors decreased.

Table 4.2, *Frequencies and Percentages of Local Errors by Proficiency Levels*

		Frequency	Percent	Chi-square	I
Proficiency	Elementary	387	49.4	126.893	.



Levels	Intermediate	274	34.9
	Advanced	122	15.5
	Total	783	100.0

The results of chi-square ( $\chi^2 (2) = 126.89, p = .003, r = .383$  representing a moderate effect size) indicated that the frequencies observed in Table 4.2 specified considerable differences between the three proficiency levels.

#### 4.2. Second research question

Table 4.3 displays frequencies and percentages of global errors by proficiency levels in terms of their types of grammatical errors. As it is obvious, “lack of sentence structure<sup>1</sup>” errors were the most frequent global errors at the elementary level (59.1 %) that was followed by “lack of word order<sup>2</sup>” (22.7%) and “run-on sentences<sup>3</sup>” (18.2%).

Table 4.3

*Frequencies and Percentages of Global Errors by proficiency levels and Types of Grammatical error*

		Grammatical error			Total
		lack of Sentence Structure	lack of Word Order	Run-on Sentences	
Elementary	Count	13	5	4	22
	%	59.1%	22.7%	18.2%	100.0%
Intermediate	Count	6	2	3	11
	%	54.5%	18.2%	27.3%	100.0%
Advanced	Count	3	0	2	5
	%	60.0%	0.0%	40.0%	100.0%
Total	Count	22	7	9	38
	%	57.9%	18.4%	23.7%	100.0%

“Lack of sentence structure” errors were, likewise, the most common global errors at the intermediate level (54.5 %) followed by the “run-on sentences” (27.3%) and “lack of word order”

<sup>1</sup> Sentence structure is the way a sentence is arranged grammatically that helps the conveyance of the meaning.

<sup>2</sup> A run-on is a sentence in which two or more independent clauses are joined but one or more components of sentences, for example an appropriate punctuation or conjunction, is missing.

(18.2%). Similarly, “lack of sentence structure” errors were the most repeated global errors at the advanced level (60 %) that was followed by the “run-on sentences” (40%) and “lack of word order” (0%).

### 4.3. Third Research Question

Table 4.4 depicts the frequencies and percentages of local errors at the elementary level. The most frequent local errors were, first, “misinformation<sup>4</sup> of simple past<sup>5</sup> verbs<sup>6</sup>” (27.04), second, “omission<sup>7</sup> of past inflection of verbs<sup>8</sup>” (6.89%) and, third, “omission of “the” (5.54%). Besides, the least frequent local error was “omission of “an” (.26 %).

Table 4.4, *Order of the first ten most Local Errors (Elementary Level)*

Types of errors	Example	N	%
Misinformation of Simple past verb: After that, Marrilla <u>see</u> Anne...		106	27.04
Omission of past Inflection of verbs	Family want to adopt a child...	27	6.89
omission of “the”	He went to () station...	23	5.54
Misinformation of collocations	He took the gentleman a letter...	18	4.32
Omission of Subject pronouns	when () arrive there.../	17	4.11
Addition <sup>9</sup> of “the” before proper noun	the Gilbert...	14	3.27
Omission of main verbs <sup>10</sup>	What’s the meaning of “ <u>باز کردن</u> ”?	12	3.06

<sup>3</sup> Word order is the Subject-Verb-Object order of the sentence.

<sup>4</sup> the use of the wrong form of the morpheme or structure

<sup>5</sup> The story-telling took place only in past tense at all levels.

<sup>6</sup> As stated in the definition, “misinformation” occurs when there is the wrong use a morpheme or structure. Since the narration of the present story-telling was past, we assigned the irregular past verbs as misinformation. Because in irregular past verbs, forms of verbs change and when the learner uses a wrong form, misinformation happens. Example: catch= caught/ stand=stood. But the learner might say caught/standed.

<sup>7</sup> the absence of a necessary item that should appear in a well-formed utterance

<sup>8</sup> As stated in the definition, “omission” occurs when a necessary item does not exist. Since the narration of the present story-telling was past, we assigned the regular past verbs as omission. Because regular past verbs have a fixed form, just by adding (e)d. therefore, to make them past, something should be added and when the learner avoids it and omits an inflection, omission happens. Example: walk=walked/ talk=talked.

<sup>9</sup> the presence of an extra item that should not appear in well-former utterance

<sup>10</sup> The error that learners did not know the verbs, but they asked them.

Omission of TO BE as main verbs	The story () about a girl...	12	3.06
Misinformation of part of speech	you are very <u>freckles</u>	12	3.06
Omission of “a”	We wanted () boy...	11	2.81

Table 4.5 shows the frequencies and percentages of local errors at the intermediate level. The most frequent local errors were, first, “misinformation of simple past verb” (24.42), second, “omission of inflection of past verbs” (7.92%) and, third, “omission of “the” (5.94%). Further, the least common local errors were “omission of “an”, “omission of necessary adverbs”, and “misinformation of past modal verbs” each (.33 %).

Table 4.5, *Order of the first ten most Local Errors (Intermediate Level)*

<b>Types of errors</b>	<b>Example</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>
misinformation of simple past verbs	When they <u>get</u> up in the morning	74	24.42
omission of inflection of past verbs	They want() to carry the coal	24	7.92
omission of “the”	This family went to () dirty house	18	5.94
misinformation of possessive adjectives	They took some coal for <u>her</u> mother	14	4.62
misinformation of prepositions	<u>in</u> home	14	4.62
addition of prepositions	you should never go <u>to</u> near the train	13	4.29
misinformation of collocations	<u>His hand broken.</u>	12	3.96
omission of prepositions	children slept () their bed	11	3.63
omission of “a”	They walked () very long time	10	3.30
Misinformation of part of speech	Peter wants to carry them <u>hardly</u>	10	3.30

Table 4.6 presents the frequencies and percentages of local errors at the advanced level. The most frequent local errors were, first, “misinformation of simple past verb” (26.81), second, “omission of inflection of past verbs” (10.87%) and, third, “omission of “the” (7.25%). The least frequent local errors were “omission of modal verbs”, “omission of object pronoun”, “omission of possessive ’s”, “misordering

of adjective-noun”, “mosordeing of adverb-verb”, “mosordeing of conjunction-subject,” and “addition of unnecessary verbs” each (.72 %).

Table 4.6, *Order of the first ten most Local Errors (Advanced Level)*

<b>Types of errors</b>	<b>Example</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>%</b>
misinformation of simple past verbs	He understand a person wants to help him	37	26.81
omission of inflection of past verbs	he accept() it	15	10.87
omission of “the”	the police officer opens () door	10	7.25
addition of “the” where unnecessary	<u>The</u> first, he wanted to ...	6	4.35
omission of “a”	they started () lawsuit against Drake	5	3.62
omission of plural s	there are some clue()	5	3.62
omission of TO BE in passives	a person () evicted by this company	5	3.62
misinformation of collocations	they <u>tell</u> some money to homelss people	5	3.62
misinformation of pronouns	a black person goes to <u>their</u> office	5	3.62
misinformation of prepositions	a man that had a meeting for a company	4	2.90

## 5. Discussion

The first research question of this study was, “What is the impact of the proficiency level on Iranian learners’ making global and local grammatical errors in the story-telling task of speaking at three different levels of elementary, intermediate, and advanced?” As stated in chapter four, the least proficient level, the elementary, made the highest number of global and local errors and the most proficient level, the advanced, made the lowest number of global and local errors. The advanced level’s utterances were more well-structured and accurate while the other two levels seemed more problematic and awkward. These data showed an evolution at the advanced level than the intermediate level, and at the intermediate level than the elementary level. The results of the study are broadly in line with findings of the researches conducted by Engber (1995) who stressed that manifestation of errors relates negatively to level of proficiency. In other words, the more errors a learner makes, the less proficient they are.

The second research question of this investigation inquired, “What are the most common global grammatical errors in the story-telling task of speaking among Iranian learners at three different levels of elementary, intermediate, and advanced?” Global errors in this study were categorized into three groups that are listed from the most to the least ones as “lack of sentence structure, run-on sentences, and lack of word order”.

Based on the definition of “sentence structure” in this study, the reason this error was assigned the most common can be the fact that while learners were speaking, their major concentration was on negotiating the meaning and trying their best to transfer it. Thus, they might have lost the control of the “sentence structure” and some component(s) of the sentence had been dropped.

Here are a couple of examples of “lack of sentence” from three levels:

- **Elementary:** you should the Gilbert
- **Intermediate:** she will be have a for example make a new friend
- **Advanced:** they killed by air its engineer running and poisoned air killed

The second most frequent error was “run-on sentences,” in which the problem might be with missing e.g. punctuations such as a comma, colon, semicolon, and full stop, or conjunctions like but. Yet, in the spoken form it appears to be trickier because, on the one hand, the role of punctuating symbols should be filled by intonation and if there is no intonation, the sentence might not have a clear meaning. On the other hand, absence of conjunctions can also stop the conveyance of meaning. Findings displayed the tendency of making this error at all levels. This means that it may not have related to the proficiency level very much, but to the care learners should have taken.

Here are a couple of examples of “run-on sentences” from three levels:

- **Elementary:** Marilla that decide to give Anne Shirley
- **Intermediate:** They very clean and the house near the railway
- **Advanced:** a warehouse where owning by a company that whose lawyers are Drake and Sweeney

The least frequent error was “word order,” that is the Subject-Verb-Object order of the sentence. The elementary level had the highest number of this type of error, and then the intermediate level. This can be for the reason that their mental structure of the correct form of the sentence had not been well-shaped yet, or especially for the elementary level, lack of knowledge of the correct form might have been accounted. Expectedly, the advanced level avoided this type of error which means they were competent enough with this pattern. Surprisingly, the researcher could not find any analytical and statistical similar works about global errors to compare them together and what was found were a couple of theoretical researches.

Here are a couple of examples of “run-on sentences” from two levels:

- ✓ **Elementary:** friend’s Marilla
- ✓ **Intermediate:** they early get up

The third research question attempted to find out the most common local grammatical errors in the story-telling task of speaking among Iranian learners. Local errors in this study were categorized into 38 groups that were somewhat the same for all three levels, except for errors not made by learners of a level. Findings suggested that “misinformation of simple past verbs, omission of inflections of past verbs, and omission of “the” accounted for three most common and significant local grammatical errors similarly made at three proficiency levels. Thus, learners at any proficiency levels were likely to commit these three errors more than any other ones.

The cause for occurring the first two errors might be that most of the students had difficulty making correct verb forms at any levels when they could not find the correct form of verb inflections. Based on the definition used in this investigation, “misinformation” occurs when there is the wrong use of a morpheme or structure. Since the narration of the present story-telling was past, we assigned the irregular past verbs as misinformation. Because in irregular past verbs, forms of verbs change and when the learner uses a wrong form, misinformation happens. In this study, some of them either used wrong forms or did not use past forms at all. These results are generally compatible with those of Garrido (2012) who claimed that her students showed problems with the correct use of English tenses in the past.

In most of the oral or written discourses, it has been seen that students, at any proficiency levels, do not know exactly where to use articles, namely “the”, and where not. This might be due to many factors such as slip of the tongue or even lack of knowledge. This can also be looked at from a different angle because in English classes, there is a limited attention to the teaching and practice of “the”. It might be even common among teachers or scholars. As a result, learners lack the knowledge of this important issue and predictably fail to use it properly which is why in most of the researches, one of the most significant errors found is misusing “the”. This tentative conclusion of the investigation is confirmed by Ting (2010) who acclaimed articles as one most frequent error.

Other types of errors were not corresponding at three proficiency levels in terms of frequency and were dispersed separately. Some of them were highly frequent at the elementary level, but not much frequent at the intermediate or advanced levels. This can be owing to the fact that the first level has not gained enough grammatical lessons and points, and as the result, the number of errors they make may be normally higher than the other two groups. Alternatively, some errors took place at the second level more than other two and this was true for the advanced level, as well. The explanation for this might be on account of the structures and points they might have learned at upper levels that the less proficient students have not studied yet.

However, in general, there were numerous errors with somehow an analogous dispersion. A look into the results revealed that “misinformation of collocations” errors were of frequent ones at three levels. That could be due to the learners’ not familiarity of word combinations and the way they are created, that is the study of collocations. Unfortunately, in spite of a number of books regarding collocations, students are not made aware of this really noticeable linguistic theme which seems quite crucial to know to use while speaking or writing a piece of language.

Here are a couple of examples of “misinformation of collocations” from three levels:

- ✓ **Elementary:** He took the gentleman a letter...
- ✓ **Intermediate:** His hand broken.
- ✓ **Advanced:** they tell some money to homelss people

Another greatly common errors comprised “addition of “the” where unnecessary”. One possible answer for this could be because either the speaker thought the hearer would know what the referent was, or it was just an overgeneralization of items. This is supported by the claim made by Thomas (1989), and Murphy (1997), who said that L2-English learners overuse “the” in contexts.

Here are a couple of examples of “addition of “the” from three levels:

- **Elementary:** the Gilbert...
- **Intermediate:** All the days
- **Advanced:** The first, he wanted to ...

“Omission of Prepositions” errors were another category. Amazingly, the number of this error in the intermediate group was higher than the elementary, and elementary was, in all likelihood, more than the advanced group. The explanation for the first statistics might be that the intermediate level was in the middle of the process of development and they had been exposed to a huge number of prepositions in their learning procedure. In addition, they could have been trying to eliminate the Persian rule of adding prepositions after verbs, as it is really normal in Persian. Therefore, while they had been working on this, they might have dropped necessary prepositions in their utterances.

Moreover, the elementary group did not have sufficient corpus regarding prepositions in their mind to be able to employ them and for the advanced level, the number was quite a few to count on. This part of the study appears to be supported by the argument of Lee and Seneff (2012) who affirmed the high presence of omission of prepositions in EFL learners’ compositions. Although, it runs counter to that of Vahdani Sanavi (2014) in whose work there was not any evidence for the frequency of omission of prepositions.

Here are a couple of examples of “Omission of Prepositions” from three levels:

- **Elementary:** arrived () the house...
- **Intermediate:** children slept () their bed
- **Advanced:** Shoot () him



One of the major problems in morphology is “misinformation of part of speech” which was a repeated error in this investigation, too. What can be mentioned for this result is that, on the one hand, probably the textbooks suffered from deficiency in providing part of speech, and/or, on the other hand, teachers may have been in short of time that led to negligence of this essential sub-skill, or simply put, students do not pay adequate attention to learning it as they have to get acquainted with noun/verb/adverb/adjective-making suffixes and prefixes, which seems quite a bit demanding. Nevertheless, the number of this error at the first two levels was high but at the advanced level was quite low. These findings are widely consistent with previous research by Lee and Seneff (2012) who acknowledged that certain parts of speech have been shown to be especially problematic for learners of English.

Here are a couple of examples of “misinformation of part of speech” from three levels:

- ❖ **Elementary:** you are very freckles
- ❖ **Intermediate:** Peter wants to carry them hardly
- ❖ **Advanced:** His marry was not so well

Another common local error made by learners was “omission of “a”. A significant number of learners tend to miss using “a” when they say or write a count singular noun which seems pretty prevalent even among teachers and academics. For sure they all knew that for a count singular noun they needed to use “a” but on account of lack of attention, ignorance, and etc. they might have omitted it. Nonetheless, the first two levels made higher number of this error than the advanced level whose score showed very few. This means that typically advanced-level students had been much proficient not to repeat this type of error many. This study's results were found to be well-matched with those of the research conducted by Abu-Shihab (2014) who found “omission of “a” a prevailing error among learners.

Here are a couple of examples of “omission of “a” from three levels:

- ❖ **Elementary:** We wanted () boy...
- ❖ **Intermediate:** They walked () very long time
- ❖ **Advanced:** they started () lawsuit against Drake

“Misinformation of possessive adjectives” errors were a local error that confused learners a lot. This is not just a common ESL error, but one seen in writing or speaking from native English speakers as well. With reference to the findings from this investigation, here comes the surprise that the intermediate level had the highest number whereas the advanced level did not have even one error of this type. Findings of this study are completely in line with those of Mohaghegh, et al. (2011) who implied misuse of possessive adjectives greatly repeated in their research.

Here are a couple of examples of “misinformation of possessive adjectives” from the first two levels:

- ⇒ **Elementary:** Diana gave his book to Anne...
- ⇒ **Intermediate:** They took some coal for her mother

“Misinformation of pronouns” was another type of error that seemed tough for learners maybe because, in general, they are expressed differently in Persian. Reflexive verbs and pronouns, for instance, are formed differently, or Persian language only has one relative pronoun, English has a couple of them, though. On the other hand, this might be down to another possible factor. Like for possessive adjectives, when students inclined to change the persons and pronouns in sentences, they encountered trouble utilizing the best pronouns. This is why the number of this error at elementary and intermediate groups was high, however, for the advanced one, it was not so many. This part of the conclusion is confirmed by those of Beltran (2014) and Abd Karim (2014) who stressed the inevitable attention to the misinformation of using pronouns in their students’ performances.

Here are a couple of examples of “misinformation of pronouns” from three levels:

- ⇒ **Elementary:** Anne said that he won’t come to school
- ⇒ **Intermediate:** We paid him but she didn’t made any supper
- ⇒ **Advanced:** a black person goes to their office

## 6. Conclusion

The study examined the most common global and local grammatical errors in the story-telling task of speaking among Iranian EFL learners at three levels of elementary, intermediate, and advanced. Findings of this study showed that, in general, students developed global and local grammatical accuracy in their oral performances from the elementary to the advanced level.

As understood from the results on global errors, it can be concluded that students should practice elements of speaking a lot so that they can be skilled enough to be able to speak fluently with high attention to transferring the meaning as well as considering the sentence structure.

About local errors, in all grammatical categories investigated, students made fewer errors at second and third levels compared to the first one, with the exception of “Omission of Prepositions, and Misinformation of possessive adjectives” which were made most in the second group. Based on a linguistic description of the errors, “misinformation of simple past verbs, omission of inflection of past verbs, and omission of “the” were three most difficult for all students constituting nearly 28%, 9%, and 7% of total errors, respectively.

Moreover, a general look at statistics of the results proposes the following outcomes:

- According to the number of errors in this type, most learners, regardless of their proficiency level, have difficulty forming past tenses, whether the regular or the irregular forms. But they had a lot fewer errors at the advanced level.
- Learners showed a sense of problem with using articles, whether “the, a, or an”. However, they were noticeably weak to form “the” than “a, or an”.
- Students could not utilize correct combination of words, or “collocations”. In other words, a good number of them used wrong forms of verbs, nouns or adjectives in their presentations.
- Students were still confused in fitting prepositions. Where they did not need to have, for example, they had one, or when they had to employ an appropriate one, they did not do so.
- “Part of speech” was another problematic area where learners were not able to make the correct form of verbs, nouns, adverbs, adjectives, or so in their presentations.
- Amazingly, they did not employ right forms of “possessive adjectives”, especially the intermediate and elementary levels.

- Misapplication of pronouns, modal verbs, and plural “s” were, in turn, of great importance which should be accounted for among teachers and authorities.

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