



Linguistic Analysis: Errors Encountered in Speaking of Third Semester EFL Students at the
Faculty of Arts, Gharian University

التحليل اللغوي : الأخطاء التي يرتكبها طلاب الفصل الثالث في برنامج اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية بكلية الآداب
بجامعة غريان .

Osama Abdussalam Enajeh

أسامة عبدالسلام عمار الناجح

University of Gharian

College of Arts

Email: Osamaenajeh24@yahoo.com

ABSTRACT

Received: 15-11-2025

Accepted: 22-11-2025

Published: 02-12-2025

Keywords English as a
Foreign Language, linguistic
errors, speaking skill

One of the most challenging skills for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners is often the ability to speak, especially in environments where opportunities for authentic English exposure are scarce. This study focuses on prevalent linguistic errors found in the spoken English of third semester EFL students at the Faculty of Arts, Gharian University. . The three primary types of errors that are examined are phonological, grammatical, and lexical. The study also explores the possible reasons behind these errors, such as first-language (L1) interference, limited English exposure, inadequate speaking practice in the classroom, fossilization, and emotional factors. Students often face difficulties with English phonemes that do not exist in Arabic, as well as with the correct grammatical forms, and suitable vocabulary choices, according to the results. The study emphasizes how important it is to implement focused interventions to improve students' spoken accuracy and fluency. It suggests pedagogical recommendations to enhance the accuracy and fluency of students' spoken English, including increasing the number of opportunities for communicative practice, targeted pronunciation training, and the incorporation of authentic listening resources.

ملخص البحث:

غالبًا ما تُعد القدرة على التحدث إحدى أصعب المهارات التي يواجهها متعلمو اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية، لا سيما في البيئات التي تندر فيها فرص التعرض للغة الإنجليزية في سياقها

الطبيعي. تركز هذه الدراسة على الأخطاء اللغوية الشائعة التي تظهر في اللغة الإنجليزية المنطوقة لدى طلاب الفصل الدراسي الثالث في برنامج اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية بكلية الآداب بجامعة غريان. وتشمل الأخطاء التي تم فحصها ثلاثة أنواع رئيسية هي: الأخطاء الصوتية، والنحوية، والمعجمية. كما تستكشف الدراسة الأسباب المحتملة وراء هذه الأخطاء، مثل تداخل اللغة الأم، ومحدودية التعرض للغة الإنجليزية، وعدم كفاية ممارسة التحدث في الفصل الدراسي، والتحجر اللغوي، والعوامل العاطفية. ووفقًا للنتائج، غالبًا ما يواجه الطلاب صعوبات في التعامل مع الفونيمات الإنجليزية التي لا وجود لها في اللغة العربية، وكذلك استخدام الصبغ النحوية الصحيحة واختيار المفردات المناسبة. تؤكد الدراسة على أهمية تنفيذ تدخلات مركزة لتحسين دقة الطلاب في التحدث وطلاقتهم. وتقتصر توصيات تربوية لتعزيز دقة الطلاب وطلاقتهم في التحدث باللغة الإنجليزية، بما في ذلك زيادة عدد فرص الممارسة التواصلية، والتدريب الموجه على النطق، ودمج موارد الاستماع الأصيلة. الكلمات المفتاحية: اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية، الأخطاء اللغوية، مهارة التحدث

Introduction

Speaking is widely regarded as the most complex of the four language skills because it requires the integration of linguistic knowledge, real-time processing, and sociolinguistic appropriateness (Brown, 2014). For learners in EFL contexts such as Libya, opportunities to use English for communication are often limited, which hinders oral proficiency development. Third-semester EFL students at Gharian University represent a critical stage in language learning, where foundational grammar and vocabulary have been introduced, but spoken competence is still emerging. Their spoken language frequently contains predictable errors that reflect difficulties with pronunciation, grammar, and vocabulary. Understanding and analyzing these errors is essential for designing effective instructional strategies. This research paper aims to identify, describe, and interpret the linguistic errors in the students' spoken English and to propose pedagogical interventions based on the findings.

1. Aims of the Study

The purpose of this study is to identify the common linguistic errors produced by Third-semester EFL students at the Faculty of Arts, Gharian University in their spoken English, categorize them into three major linguistic types (phonological, grammatical, and lexical), analyze the underlying causes of these errors, examine how these errors relate to learners' interlanguage development, and suggest pedagogical recommendations to enhance the accuracy and fluency of students' spoken English.

2. Significance of the study

Libyan university students studying EFL make many errors in their speaking assignments or in the class. Some of these errors are often made any English language learner; however, many errors are specific to Libyan university students.



Therefore, this study tried to shed some light on these errors and trace the causes behind them in order to suggest an appropriate pedagogical remedy to this problem.

The study highlights the specific linguistic areas phonological, grammatical, and lexical where learners face the most difficulty. This information provides teachers with a clearer picture of the challenges students encounter when attempting to communicate orally in English.

3. Literature Review

Speaking is considered one of the most important productive skills in language learning. In the context of English as a Foreign Language (EFL), speaking enables learners to communicate ideas, express feelings, and interact with others. However, many EFL learners experience difficulties when speaking English due to limited vocabulary, grammatical inaccuracies, pronunciation problems, and interference from their first language. Consequently, linguistic errors frequently appear in learners' oral production. Investigating these errors is essential because it helps teachers understand the learning process and design appropriate teaching strategies to improve students' communicative competence.

The study of learner errors has become a significant area of research in second language acquisition (SLA). Through linguistic analysis, researchers can identify the types of errors learners produce and determine the underlying causes. Error analysis therefore plays an important role in understanding the development of learners' interlanguage and improving language teaching practices.

- **Error Analysis in English as a Foreign Language**

Error analysis emerged in the 1960s as an important approach in applied linguistics. It focuses on identifying, describing, and explaining the errors produced by language learners. One of the most influential scholars in this field is **S. P. Corder**, who emphasized the importance of learner errors in understanding the language learning process. Corder argued that errors provide valuable information for teachers about learners' progress and reveal the strategies used by learners when acquiring a second language.

According to Corder (1967), learner errors are not merely signs of failure but evidence that learning is taking place. They reflect the learner's current stage of language development and indicate the gap between the learner's existing knowledge and the target language system. Therefore, analyzing these errors can help researchers gain insights into the internal mechanisms of second language acquisition.

Error analysis generally involves several steps, including identifying errors, classifying them, explaining their causes, and evaluating their seriousness. Researchers apply these procedures to analyze learners' spoken or written language production in order to identify patterns of errors and understand their sources.

- **Types of Errors in EFL Speaking**

EFL learners often make various types of linguistic errors when speaking English. These errors may occur at different linguistic levels, such as phonology, grammar, vocabulary, and discourse.

- **Grammatical Errors**



Grammatical errors are among the most common errors in EFL learners' speech. These errors may involve incorrect verb tenses, subject–verb agreement, word order, or misuse of articles and prepositions. Studies have shown that many learners struggle to apply grammatical rules accurately during spontaneous speech because speaking requires immediate processing of language structures.

A study analyzing grammatical errors in EFL students' speaking performance identified four major types of grammatical errors: omission, addition, misformation, and misordering. Among these categories, misformation errors were the most frequent, indicating that learners often possess partial grammatical knowledge but have difficulty selecting the correct form during communication.

Similarly, research on Arab EFL learners indicates that grammar-related errors—particularly in verb tenses and agreement—are among the most frequent linguistic problems in language production.

- **Lexical Errors**

Lexical errors occur when learners use inappropriate or incorrect vocabulary items. These errors may include incorrect word choice, misuse of collocations, or literal translation from the native language. Limited vocabulary knowledge and lack of familiarity with contextual word usage often lead to lexical errors in speaking.

Lexical errors are common among EFL learners because vocabulary acquisition is a gradual process. When learners lack appropriate vocabulary, they may rely on approximation, paraphrasing, or direct translation from their first language, which often results in inaccurate expressions.

- **Pronunciation Errors**

Pronunciation errors are another major challenge for EFL learners. These errors may involve incorrect articulation of sounds, stress patterns, intonation, or rhythm. Pronunciation problems frequently arise when the sound system of the learner's native language differs significantly from English.

Research on university-level EFL learners found that pronunciation errors constitute a significant portion of speaking errors, often caused by interference from the learners' first language.

Such errors may affect intelligibility and hinder effective communication, making pronunciation an essential area of focus in speaking instruction.

- **Sources of Learners' Errors**

Understanding the sources of errors is crucial for explaining why learners make mistakes in language production. Linguists have identified several major sources of errors in second language learning.

- **Interlingual Errors (L1 Interference)**

Interlingual errors occur when learners transfer linguistic patterns from their first language into the target language. This phenomenon is often referred to as **language transfer** or **mother-tongue interference**.

According to Richards, interlingual errors arise when learners apply the grammatical structures or vocabulary patterns of their native language to the target language.



For example, Arabic-speaking learners may produce incorrect English sentence structures because they follow Arabic grammatical patterns. Such interference is particularly noticeable in pronunciation, word order, and preposition usage.

- **Intralingual Errors**

Intralingual errors are caused by difficulties within the target language itself rather than by interference from the first language. These errors often occur when learners overgeneralize grammatical rules or apply them incorrectly.

Richards (1971) identified several types of intralingual errors, including:

- **Overgeneralization**
- **Ignorance of rule restrictions**
- **Incomplete application of rules**
- **False concepts hypothesized**

These errors occur because learners are still developing their understanding of the language system and may apply rules incorrectly while trying to construct sentences.

- **Developmental Errors**

Developmental errors occur as a natural part of language learning. These errors reflect the learner's attempt to formulate hypotheses about the target language. During this process, learners test different linguistic structures and gradually refine their understanding of the language.

Selinker introduced the concept of **interlanguage**, which refers to the evolving linguistic system that learners develop while learning a second language. Interlanguage contains elements from the learner's native language, the target language, and unique structures created by the learner. As learners gain more exposure to the language, their interlanguage gradually becomes closer to the target language system.

- **Previous Studies on Speaking Errors in EFL Contexts**

Numerous studies have examined linguistic errors in EFL learners' spoken production. These studies provide valuable insights into the types and causes of learners' errors.

Similarly, studies investigating grammatical errors in EFL learners' language production have shown that errors related to verb tense, sentence structure, and agreement occur frequently among university students. These findings suggest that grammatical competence remains a major challenge for learners even at higher levels of language education.

Another study focusing on Malaysian EFL learners emphasized the pedagogical value of error analysis. The researchers argued that understanding learners' errors helps teachers identify learning difficulties and design more effective teaching strategies.

Overall, previous studies indicate that linguistic errors in EFL speaking are influenced by several factors, including insufficient knowledge of grammatical rules, limited vocabulary, pronunciation difficulties, and interference from the learners' first language.



In summary, the literature highlights the importance of error analysis in understanding the challenges faced by EFL learners when speaking English. Various types of errors—including grammatical, lexical, and pronunciation errors—commonly occur in learners' spoken language. These errors may result from several factors, such as first-language interference, incomplete knowledge of the target language, and developmental processes during language acquisition. Previous studies have demonstrated that analyzing learners' errors provides valuable insights into the learning process and helps educators improve language teaching practices.

- **Significance of Analyzing Speaking Errors**

Analyzing speaking errors has several important benefits for language teaching and learning. First, it helps teachers identify common difficulties experienced by students and adjust teaching methods accordingly. Second, it enables learners to become aware of their mistakes and improve their language performance. Third, it contributes to the development of effective teaching materials that address learners' specific linguistic problems.

Moreover, error analysis provides researchers with valuable insights into the process of second language acquisition. By examining the patterns and sources of learners' errors, researchers can better understand how learners develop their interlanguage and gradually acquire proficiency in the target language.

4. Research Questions

1. What are the most common linguistic errors that third semester EFL students at the Faculty of Arts, Gharian University produce in their spoken English?
2. How can the phonological, grammatical, and lexical types of these spoken errors be classified?
3. What are the primary origins or reasons behind the linguistic mistakes seen in the students' oral performances?
4. How do these errors reflect the students' interlanguage development and overall level of oral proficiency?
5. What pedagogical strategies can be recommended to help reduce these spoken errors and improve students' oral communication skills?

5. Hypotheses of the Study

1. **Students are expected to produce frequent and predictable linguistic errors** in their spoken English, particularly in phonological, grammatical, and lexical categories.
2. **The majority of spoken errors are likely caused by first-language (Arabic) interference**, especially in pronunciation, word order, and certain grammatical structures.
3. **Students with limited exposure to authentic English input** will demonstrate higher rates of phonological and grammatical errors in comparison to students with greater exposure.
4. **Morpho-syntactic errors, such as tense misuse and subject–verb agreement errors, are hypothesized to be the most common type of error** observed among third semester EFL students.
5. **Learners who lack confidence or experience anxiety during speaking tasks** are expected to produce more errors and exhibit reduced oral fluency.



6. Participants

The participants of this study were third semester students pursuing English as a foreign Language in the Faculty of Arts at Gharian University. 25% percent were males, and 75% were female students. Their English proficiency level was approximately similar since all of them passed their second semester of study and successfully transferred to the third semester in the English Department. Their ages ranged from 19 to 20 years old. These students had completed introductory English courses and were progressing toward more advanced modules. The selection of third semester students was based on their intermediate level, where spoken errors are particularly instructive for understanding interlanguage development. They voluntarily agreed to participate in this study.

7. Data Collection

Data were collected through recorded speaking tasks conducted in classroom settings. Students were asked to participate in short interviews, describe pictures, and engage in pair discussions. These tasks were chosen to elicit spontaneous spoken language that reflects authentic learner performance. Additional field notes were taken by the researcher during classroom interactions.

8. Data Analysis

The recordings were transcribed and analyzed using a qualitative error analysis approach. Errors were categorized into phonological, grammatical, and lexico-semantic types. The analysis focused on identifying patterns and common difficulties rather than quantifying error frequency. Considerations were also given to potential sources of these errors based on comparisons with Arabic linguistic structures and relevant SLA theories.

9. Findings: Linguistic Errors in Students' Spoken English

1. Phonological Errors

Phonological errors were among the most frequent types observed. These errors were largely attributable to Arabic-English sound differences.

1.1. Substitution of English Sounds Absent in Arabic

Students often substituted /p/ with /b/ (e.g., *bicture* for *picture*) and /v/ with /f/ (e.g., *fery* for *very*). Interdental sounds /θ/ and /ð/ were also challenging, frequently replaced with /s/ or /z/ (e.g., *sink* for *think*).

1.2. Consonant Cluster Simplification

Students tended to insert vowels into consonant clusters, producing forms such as *espeak* for *speak* or *estreet* for *street*. Such simplification reflects cross-linguistic influence from Arabic syllable structure.

2. Verb Tense Errors

Students commonly used present tense verbs to describe past events, such as "Yesterday I go to the market" instead of "I went." This reflects incomplete mastery of English tense morphology.

2.1. Subject–Verb Agreement

Errors such as "He play football" were frequent, indicating challenges in applying the English third-person singular rule.



2.2. Article Misuse

Students often omitted the indefinite or definite article or inserted them incorrectly—“*I have idea*” or “*She is a best friend*”.

2.3. Word Order Issues

Arabic-influenced word order was evident in utterances such as “*I to the university went*,” reflecting negative transfer.

3. Lexico-Semantic Errors

Lexical errors reflected limited vocabulary knowledge and heavy reliance on Arabic structures.

3.1. Direct Translation from Arabic

Expressions like “*Open the TV*” (from Arabic *افتح التلفزيون*) were common. Students translated idioms and collocations directly, leading to unnatural expressions.

3.2. Misuse of Synonyms

Learners often confused adjectives such as *bored* and *boring*, saying “*I am boring*” instead of “*I am bored*”.

3.3. Collocation Errors

Common collocational mistakes included *make homework* instead of *do homework* or *strong rain* instead of *heavy rain*.

3.4. Limited Vocabulary

Students sometimes avoided expressing precise meanings due to lack of lexical knowledge, resorting to circumlocution or vague language.

10. Discussion

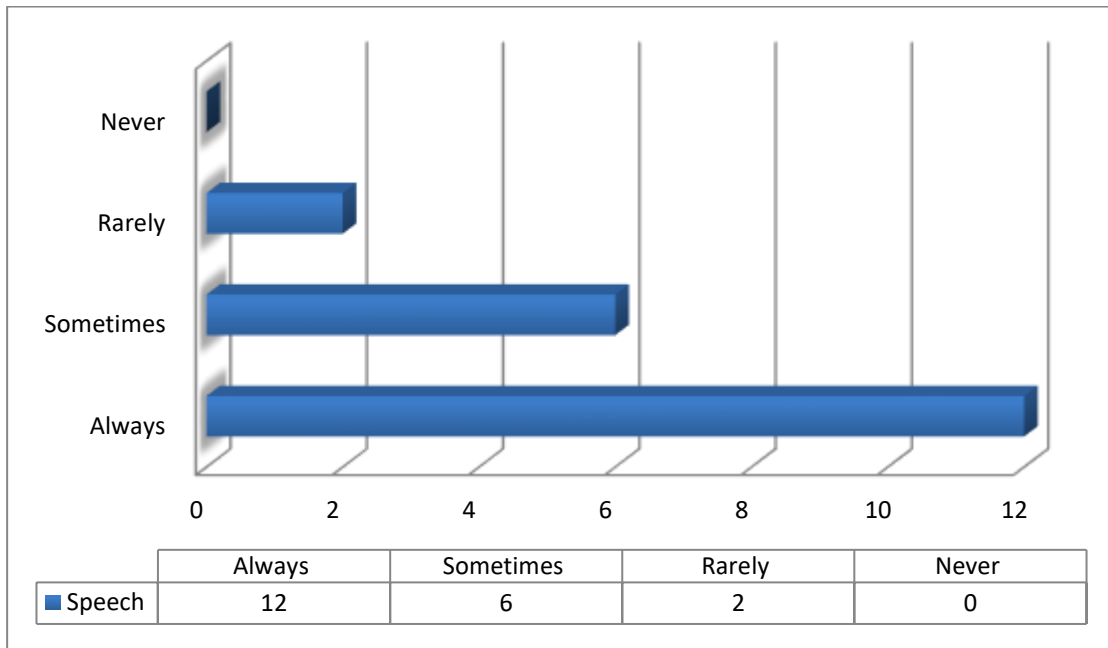
The linguistic errors identified in this research reinforce earlier conclusions in EFL settings. The frequency of phonological errors illustrates the notable phonetic distinctions between Arabic and English. The challenges with sounds such as /p/, /v/, and interdental phonemes are well-documented in scholarly work and emphasize the necessity for specialized pronunciation practice (Gilakjani, 2016).

Morpho-syntactic errors, specifically the misuse of tenses and errors in subject-verb agreement, indicate a lack of thorough understanding of English grammar principles. These mistakes may stem from insufficient exposure to accurate spoken English examples, as students in Libya primarily encounter the language in classroom environments. Furthermore, the phenomenon of fossilization seems to influence, particularly regarding repetitive grammatical errors. Lexico-semantic errors reveal a lack of depth in vocabulary and an excessive reliance on expressions rooted in Arabic. The tendency of students to translate directly from Arabic aligns with Odlin’s (1989) claim that L1 transfer is a significant contributor to learner errors. Since numerous English collocations lack direct counterparts in Arabic, learners require increased exposure to authentic language input.

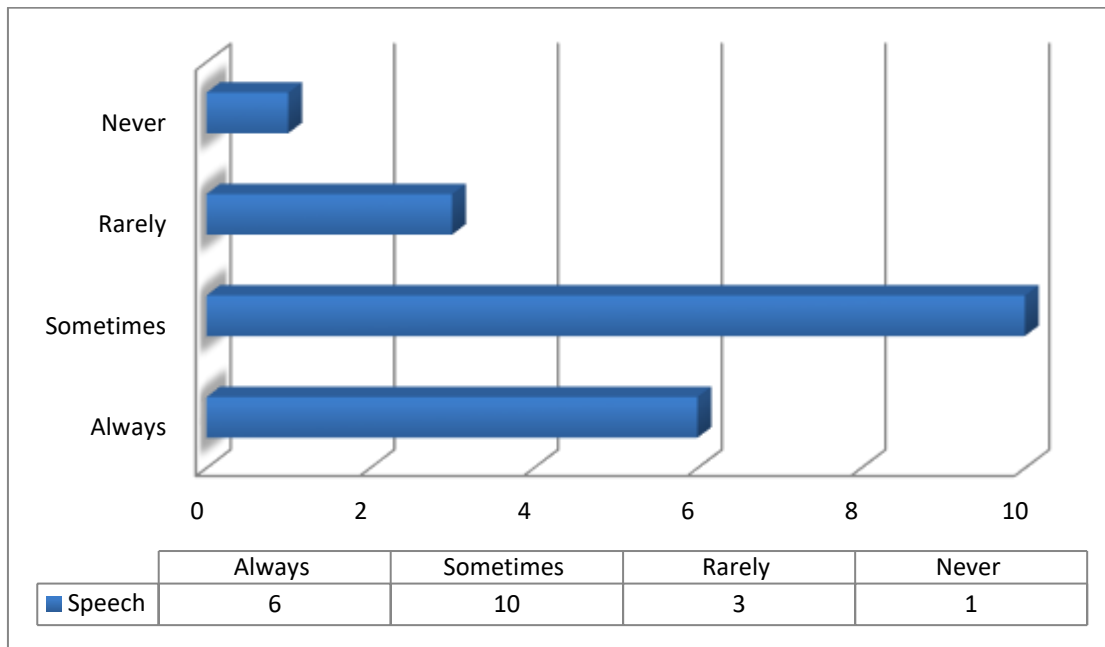
Emotional factors such as anxiety and diminished confidence likely played a role in the hesitations and inaccuracies observed. Learners may shy away from using complex structures due to the fear of making errors, which restricts their syntactic advancement (Lightbown & Spada, 2013).

1- The first questionnaire item asked the respondents (i.e. teachers) about students' problems in writing?

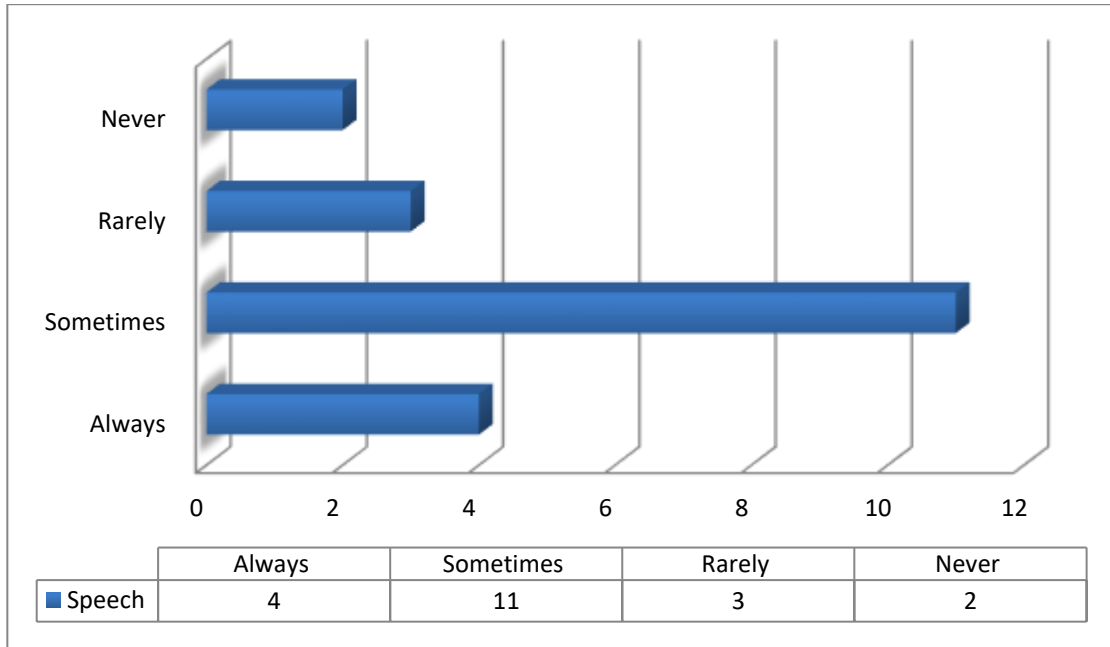
A- Do you find evidences of lack in grammatical structures among students' speech?



(Figure 1) B- Do you find a lot of mistakes among tenses in students' speech?

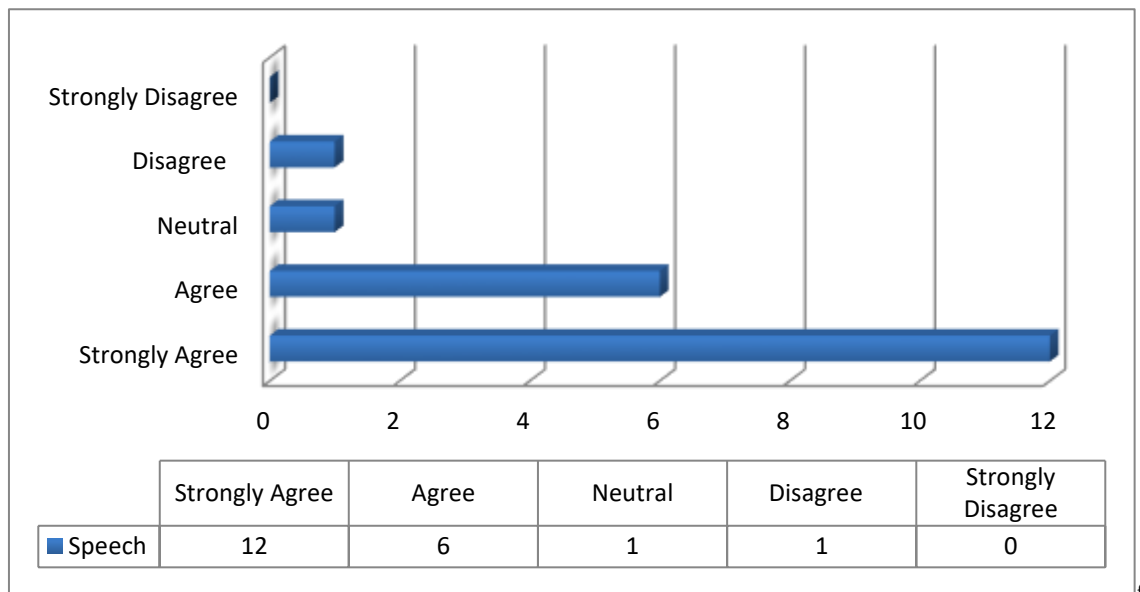


(Figure 2) C- How often do you face pronunciation problems with students?



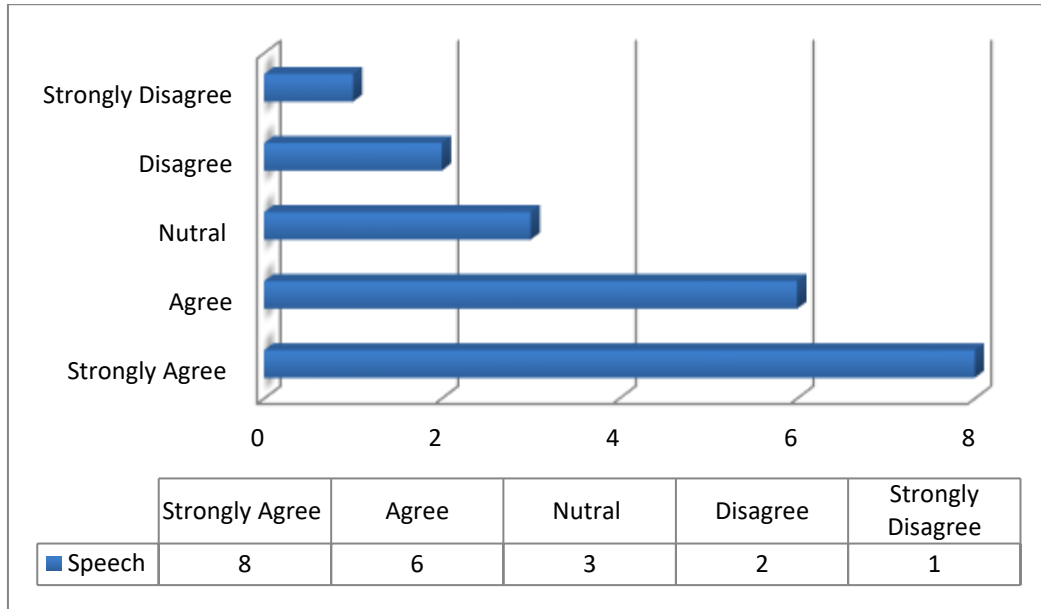
(Figure 3) Q2- Do you agree or disagree with these statements?

A- I believe that the errors made by ESL students are made mostly because of the interference o

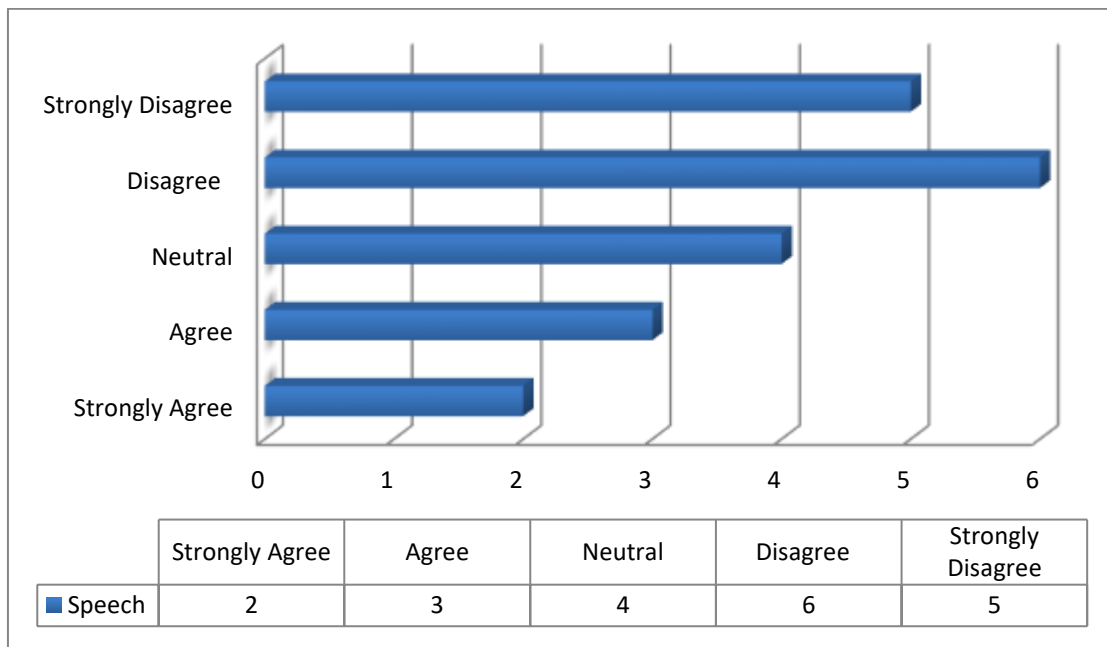


the mother tongue.

(Figure 4) B- I think that the errors made by ESL students are made mostly because of the wrong scaffolding since beginning?



(Figure 5) C- I believe that the errors made by ESL students are made mostly because students start learning English in an old age?



(Figure 6)



11. Limitations of the Study

The study focuses only on third semester EFL students from a single faculty at Gharian University. As a result, the findings may not be representative of all EFL learners in other faculties, universities, or regions of Libya.

12. Conclusion

This research investigated linguistic errors in the spoken English of second-year EFL students at Gharian University. The findings show that students commonly struggle with phonological, grammatical, and lexical aspects of spoken English. These difficulties are primarily influenced by L1 interference, limited exposure to spoken English, fossilization, and affective variables.

To address these challenges, teachers should incorporate explicit pronunciation instruction, increase communicative speaking opportunities, and integrate authentic listening materials into the curriculum. Additionally, integrating pedagogical strategies, such as focused vocabulary teaching and corrective feedback, can enhance learners' spoken accuracy. Ultimately, improving speaking proficiency requires sustained practice, supportive classroom environments, and access to meaningful English input.

References

- Corder, S. P. (1967). The significance of learners' errors. *International Review of Applied Linguistics*.
- Corder, S. P. (1981). *Error analysis and interlanguage*. Oxford University Press.
- Ellis, R. (1996). *The study of second language acquisition*. Oxford University Press.
- Richards, J. C. (1971). A non-contrastive approach to error analysis. *TESOL Quarterly*.
- Richards, J. C. (2015). *Key issues in language teaching*. Cambridge University Press.
- Selinker, L. (1972). Interlanguage. *International Review of Applied Linguistics*.
- Al-Tamari, E. A. (2019). Analyzing speaking errors made by EFL Saudi university students. *Arab World English Journal*.
- Seddik, M. (2023). Error analysis in EFL students' writing skill. *Journal of English Language Teaching and Applied Linguistics*.
- Permatasari, A. A. S., & Ningrum, I. A. F. (2026). An error analysis of grammatical errors in EFL students' speaking performance.
- Al-Halawani, A. (2018). Error analysis: A case study of Malaysian EFL learners.