Analysis of Errors in Constructing Arabic Sentences among MPU22362 Students, Sultan Idris Shah Polytechnic

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
	This study investigates students' errors in mastering two fundamental Arabic sentence structures, namely *Jumlah Ismiyyah* and *Jumlah Fi'liyyah*. The study aims to identify students' ability to distinguish between the two sentence types, analyse syntactic errors in constructing basic nominal sentences, and examine morphological errors during the transformation of *Jumlah Ismiyyah* into *Jumlah Fi'liyyah*. A qualitative error-analysis design was employed involving 24 students from a DIF3B class enrolled in the MPU22362 *Arabic for Muamalat* course. Data were collected through a written diagnostic test consisting of sentence identification, sentence transformation, and basic sentence construction tasks. The findings indicate a moderate level of overall ability, with 75% of students correctly identifying sentence types. The most dominant syntactic error involved misuse of *Ma'rifah* and *Nakirah* forms (54.2%), while the most critical morphological error was the failure to apply correct verb subject agreement in verbal sentences, particularly the use of singular verb forms when the subject follows the verb. These results suggest persistent difficulties in the practical application of grammatical rules rather than isolated errors. In conclusion, the study indicates that students' grammatical errors reflect limitations in integrating syntactic and morphological knowledge in practical language use. The findings highlight the pedagogical value of emphasising integrated ṣarf–naḥw analysis, guided sentence transformation exercises and corrective feedback to strengthen learners' mastery of basic Arabic sentence structures. Future research incorporating qualitative methods is recommended to explore learners' cognitive processes in greater depth.

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1. Introduction

Arabic is a language characterised by highly systematic grammatical and morphological structures. Mastery of correct sentence construction constitutes a foundational skill that underpins effective communication and the development of higher-level language competencies. Two primary sentence structures in Arabic are *Jumlah Ismiyyah* (nominal sentences beginning with a noun) and *Jumlah Fi'liyyah* (verbal sentences beginning with a verb) [1]. Although these structures are introduced at an early stage of instruction, non-native learners continue to demonstrate persistent difficulties in distinguishing, constructing, and transforming these sentence types.

Previous studies suggest that such difficulties may be associated with syntactic differences between learners' first language patterns and Arabic, particularly in distinguishing subject–predicate relationships from verb–doer relationships [2]. Recurring grammatical errors such as confusion between sentence types, mismatches in gender and number between *mubtada'* and *khabar*, and inaccuracies in verb (*fi'il*) agreement indicate gaps in learners' structural understanding rather than isolated mechanical mistakes. These weaknesses can impede grammatical accuracy and restrict learners' ability to produce more complex sentence forms.

Furthermore, mastery of morphology (*ṣarf*) has been identified as a key predictor of accurate Arabic sentence construction, as incorrect word forms often result in semantic ambiguity or misinterpretation [3]. In the Malaysian context, several studies have reported that learners frequently transfer Malay syntactic patterns into Arabic, which may influence their interpretation and production of Arabic sentence structures [4]. Consequently, pedagogical approaches that emphasise active engagement such as sentence analysis, guided practice, and self-correction are recommended to support learners' understanding of sentence structure and grammatical agreement [5].

Error analysis has been widely recognised as an effective diagnostic tool for identifying learners' weaknesses, particularly in morphological and syntactic domains such as verb conjugation and agreement [6]. By systematically examining learner errors, educators can gain insight into recurring patterns that signal underlying conceptual or instructional gaps. Accordingly, this study aims to identify, classify, and analyse students' errors related to *Jumlah Ismiyyah* and *Jumlah Fi'liyyah*, with the intention of informing more targeted instructional strategies. While the study focuses on observable error patterns, interpretations regarding their underlying causes are framed cautiously and situated within existing literature.

1.1 Research Objectives

Objective 1: To identify the students' ability level in distinguishing between *Jumlah Ismiyyah* and *Jumlah Fi'liyyah*.
Objective 2: To analyze the syntactic errors in the construction of simple *Jumlah Ismiyyah* sentences consisting of *Mubtada'* and *Khabar*.
Objective 3: To identify morphological errors in the agreement of verbs (*fi'il*) with their subjects (*fa'il*) during the transformation of *Jumlah Ismiyyah* into *Jumlah Fi'liyyah*.
This study, guided by these three objectives, aims to provide a clear picture of the main weaknesses faced by students in mastering the basic sentence structures in Arabic.

2. Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative descriptive research design grounded in an error analysis framework. The approach focuses on identifying, classifying, and interpreting patterns of grammatical errors evident in students' written responses related to *Jumlah Ismiyyah* and *Jumlah Fi'liyyah*. While the design enables a detailed description of error types and frequencies, it does not directly investigate learners' cognitive processes or learning strategies.

The sample comprises 24 students from a single class (DIF3B) enrolled in the MPU22362 *Arabic for Muamalat* course. Purposive sampling was employed based on the criterion that participants had already been introduced to the relevant grammatical topics in the syllabus. This sampling decision allows for focused diagnostic analysis; however, the findings are interpreted as context-specific rather than representative of all Arabic learners.

Data were collected using a written diagnostic test adapted from existing instructional materials. The test consisted of three sections aligned with the research objectives:

- **Part A:** Classification of sentence types (*Jumlah Ismiyyah* vs. *Jumlah Fi'liyyah*).
- **Part B:** Transformation of nominal sentences into verbal sentences across singular, dual, and plural forms.
- **Part C:** Construction of *Jumlah Ismiyyah* sentences using provided lexical items as *mubtada'* or *khabar*.

The test was administered during scheduled class time following institutional approval. Students were given 20–30 minutes to complete the task.

Data analysis followed a structured error analysis procedure [7]. Responses were examined to identify grammatical inaccuracies, which were then categorised according to sentence-type recognition, syntactic errors, and morphological errors. Syntactic errors were further subdivided into gender agreement, *i'rab*, definiteness, vocabulary choice, and task misunderstanding. Frequencies and percentages were calculated to highlight dominant patterns. While quantitative summaries are presented, interpretations remain descriptive and are cautiously linked to pedagogical implications rather than definitive cognitive explanations.

3. Results
3.1 Objective 1- To identify the students' ability level in distinguishing between Jumlah Ismiyyah and Jumlah Fi'liyyah

Results from Part A indicate a moderate level of ability in identifying *Jumlah Ismiyyah* and *Jumlah Fi'liyyah*. Approximately 75% of students correctly classified sentences based on their initial elements, while 25% demonstrated confusion. The most frequent misclassification occurred when students identified any sentence containing a verb as *Jumlah Fi'liyyah*, regardless of sentence position.

This pattern suggests that some students rely on surface-level cues rather than structural principles. Although this tendency may reflect influence from literal translation strategies or prior language habits, such interpretations are inferred rather than directly measured in this study. Pedagogically, the findings indicate a need for instructional emphasis on sentence-initial analysis and explicit comparison of sentence patterns.

3.2 Objective 2- To analyze syntactic errors in the construction of simple Jumlah Ismiyyah sentences consisting of Mubtada' and Khabar

Analysis of Part C, questions 1 to 5, shows that students' syntactic errors are concentrated in five main aspects, as illustrated in Table 1:

Table 1
The type of syntactic errors

Type of Syntactic Error	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender Marker Errors (Muzakkar/Muannath)	2	8.3
I'rab Errors (Ending Case Markers)	1	4.2
Definite and Indefinite Noun Errors (Ma'rifah/ Nakirah)	13	54.2
Vocabulary Accuracy	3	12.5
Other Errors (Misunderstanding Questions)	3	12.5

According to Table 1, the frequency analysis indicates that "Definite and Indefinite Noun Errors" (use of specific and general nouns) are the main and most dominant challenge. This type of error was recorded 13 times, making up 54.2% of the total errors analyzed. Students failed to understand that the *mubtada'* is usually definite (*ma'rifah*, using ال) whereas the *khabar* is generally indefinite (*nakirah*). This error indicates their weakness in identifying the semantic function of these two basic sentence components.

The second most frequent error categories, each recorded 3 times (12.5% each), are "Vocabulary Accuracy" and other errors such as "Misunderstanding the Question." This is followed by "Gender Marker Errors (Muzakkar/Muannath)," which occurred twice (8.3%). For example, students wrote "المدرسةُ جميلٌ" whereas the correct form is "المدرسةُ جميلةٌ." This error shows students' weakness in mastering gender agreement between the subject and predicate. Finally, the least frequent error was "*I'rab* Errors (Ending Case Markers)," detected only once (4.2%). Overall, this objective reveals that students' syntactic errors are more focused on morphological issues related to definite and indefinite forms rather than the sentence structure itself. These findings highlight that while students may recognise sentence components, they struggle to integrate syntactic and semantic rules simultaneously. The recommendation to emphasise *tahlil sarfi-nahwi* (integrated morphological–syntactic analysis) is therefore presented as a pedagogical implication rather than a proven remedial solution.

3.3 Objective 3- To identify morphological errors in verb (fi'il) agreement with the subject (fa'il) during the transformation of Jumlah Ismiyyah (nominal sentence) into Jumlah Fi'liyyah (verbal sentence)

Based on the analysis of Part B (questions 1 to 5), it was found that the majority of students failed to adjust the verb form to agree with the subject when transforming *Jumlah Ismiyyah* into *Jumlah Fi'liyyah*, revealing deep weaknesses in Arabic grammar (*nahu*). The main failure was the incorrect use of singular (*mufrad*) verb forms when the subject (*fa'il*) is plural or dual (*muthanna*). This is demonstrated by 100% of students maintaining plural verb forms (e.g., "يبنون المهندسون") and 75% retaining dual verb forms (e.g., "يكتبان الطالبان"). This finding demonstrates widespread difficulty in adjusting verb forms during sentence transformation, particularly in dual and

plural constructions. Most students failed to modify the verb appropriately, indicating limited procedural control over agreement rules in *Jumlah Fi'liyyah*.

The study also found that only 4.2% of students understood this basic rule, although there was a slight difference where students were better at handling regular triliteral verbs compared to defective triliteral verbs. The primary cause of these errors was identified as the influence of the mother tongue (Malay), where verbs typically change according to the number of the subject. Clearly, this is not merely a spelling or memorization error, but a fundamental conceptual error regarding the rules for constructing *Jumlah Fi'liyyah*.

4. Conclusions

This study provides a context-specific descriptive account of common syntactic and morphological errors encountered by non-native Arabic learners when working with *Jumlah Ismiyyah* and *Jumlah Fi'liyyah*. The findings demonstrate that students experience consistent difficulties in sentence classification, definiteness usage and verb–subject agreement, particularly during sentence transformation tasks. These patterns indicate gaps in the practical application of grammatical rules rather than isolated inaccuracies.

While the findings align with previous research highlighting conceptual and agreement-related challenges [12-14], the present study contributes by documenting how these difficulties manifest in structured diagnostic tasks within a specific instructional setting. However, interpretations regarding cognitive causes such as memorisation or language transfer remain inferential due to methodological constraints.

Several limitations must be acknowledged. The small sample size, single-institution context and reliance on written diagnostic data restrict the generalisability of the findings and limit insight into learners' cognitive processes. Future research incorporating qualitative methods such as interviews or think-aloud protocols would enable deeper exploration of learners' reasoning and strategy use.

Despite these limitations, the study offers practical diagnostic value for instructors by highlighting recurring error patterns that can inform targeted instructional design. Rather than generalising to all Arabic learners, the findings should be interpreted as indicative of challenges faced by learners in similar instructional contexts.

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