# Analysis Common Errors in the Use of Personal Pronouns Among Students of  English Department, Zawia University

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■ **Abstract:**

This paper presents the results of a research entitled **"Analysis Common Errors in the Use of Personal Pronouns Among Students of English Department, Zawia University"** was conducted on the fifth and sixth Semester in  English, Department at Zawia University, during the academic year 2022-2023. The study aims at investigating, identifying and classifying students' errors into categories that help students and teachers in the field of learning and teaching EFL to be aware of this problem as well as researchers to make further studies. A descriptive quantitative design was used in this study. The researcher applied a recognition test; (multiple-choice) which was conducted on to 140 participants. The test constitutes 25 items which dealt with English personal  pronouns. The results of the study showed that sample of the students made 5 types of errors  with  highest percentages as it is shown on table 2 page (12). The basic results indicate that students  encounter difficulties and problems in using English personal pronouns. Suggestions are put forward to encourage  students and teachers to become more awareness of using and teaching  English  personal pronouns accurately in order  to improve students competence of the basic rules of personal pronouns.

● **Keywords**: Error analysis, English personal pronouns

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■ المستخلص:

تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى تحديد وتحليل الأخطاء الشائعة لطلاب اللغة الانجليزية عند استخدامهم للضمائر الانجليزية الشخصية بالفصل الخامس والسادس بقسم اللغة الانجليزية بكلية الآداب بجامعة الزاوية للعام الدراسي 2022-2023 .

تم تحديد الأخطاء باستخدام امتحان حيث أعطى إلى140 طالب بقسم اللغة الانجليزية و يحتوي الامتحان على 25 نقطة شاملة الضمائر الشخصية الانجليزية. وقد أوضحت نتائج الدراسة أن عينة من الطلبة قامو بعدد خمسة أنوع من الأخطاء عند استخدامهم الضمائر الانجليزية كما هو موضح في الجدول رقم 2 صفحة 12 وهذا يوضح الصعوبة التي يواجهها الطلبة عند استخدام الضمائر الشخصية الانجليزية.

موضحا الصعوبة في التعرف على الضمائر الانجليزية واستخدامها بشكل صحيح. الدراسة تقدم عدداً من النصائح والمقترحات تساعد كلا من الطلبة ومعلمي اللغة الانجليزية على تعلم وتعليم واستخدام الضمائر الشخصية الانجليزية بشكل صحيح ولتطوير كفاءتهم لاكتساب القواعد الرئيسية لضمائر الانجليزية.

● الكلمات المفتاحية: تحليل الأخطاء والضمائر الانجليزية .

## 1. Introduction

Pronouns are among the most frequent lexical items in English language with some forms of the first, second and third pronouns among the top 100 items in many corpus word-frequency lists Leech, Rayson, and Wilson (2001:75). Pronouns have long been described as cohesive elements of discourse Halliday and Hasan (1976:1), helping to hold a sequence of utterances together interconnections.

Being able to convey the meaning in pronouns means mastering particular grammatical rules relating to pronouns. Therefore, a learner has to know the uses, functions and position of pronouns although getting students to understand and be able to apply this knowledge is not always so easy. Because a pronoun is generally a part of speech, without pronouns speaking and writing sound boring. For example:

*Anna left Anna's house, taking Anna's dog with Anna*    Instead of''

*Anna left her house, taking her dog with her.*

**Personal Pronouns Chart (1)**

| Person | Subject | Object | Possessive Adjective | Possessive Pronouns | Reflexive |
|--------|---------|--------|----------------------|---------------------|-----------|
| 1st person | I | Me | My | Mine | Myself |
| 3rd person | She | Her | Her | Hers | Herself |
| 3rd person | He | Him | His | His | Himself |
| 3rd person | It | It | Its | Its | Itself |
| 3rd person | They | Them | Their | Theirs | Themselves |
| 1st person | We | Us | Our | Ours | Ourselves |
| 2nd person | You | You | Your | Yours | Yourself /ves |

Pronouns are almost all very small words; it is a general observation about pronouns in the English language, this fact causes some learners to think that pronouns are unimportant part of the language, but the opposite is true. According to Swick (1987:23) " understanding the various types of pronouns and how they are used is very important for developing accuracy in English."

Nowadays English has become an essential subject of education in Libya. Students learn English  from elementary school up to university level, hoping to have the ability and the confidence to use it. However, some learners face difficulties with English in areas for example, grammatical structures. As Hammer(2007:25) says " The language we speak or write is governed by a number of rules." For this reason students should learn the grammar of the target language. A language cannot be learned without learning its grammar because  it makes meaning in language use. Al-Mutawa and Kailani (1998:22) believe that whatever concept it utilized , grammar remains the internal organization of the language. However, it is not easy to learn any foreign language especially if it is different from the learner's native language, as errors may be made  by the language learner in the learning

process. Consequently, teaching and learning grammar is essential for having fair knowledge of the target language, and avoiding learners' errors.

Ur (1992:45) states that even though grammar does not belong to the four skills in English like listening, speaking , reading and writing, grammar works with those skills. There is no doubt that knowledge, implicit or explicit of grammatical rules is necessary for the mastery of language: on cannot use a word unless the writer or the speaker knows how words should be put together.

Effective written communication relies heavily on the accurate use of personal pronouns, which play a fundamental role in expressing relationships and maintaining coherence within texts. However, students often encounter difficulties in mastering the rules governing personal usage, leading to errors that detract from the clarity and effectiveness of their writing. Understanding the nature of these errors and the factors contributing to them is essential for educators seeking to provide targeted support and instruction to enhance student writing skill

It has been observed that Libyan students , particularly at the university level, face difficulties with using English  personal pronouns. Therefore, teachers of English and researchers are required to study English personal  pronouns errors in order to discover the reasons behind them. The researcher's choice of this subject is based on the importance of English pronouns to learners of English. This importance arises from frequent use of personal  pronouns in coursebooks, everyday life language and writing in general.

### 1.1 Statement of the Problem

My staring point based on my experience as an English language teacher at Zawia University, despite the fundamental role that personal pronouns play in communication, students often struggle with mastering their usage, leading to that can compromise the clarity and coherence of their both speaking and writing. These errors may stem from various factors, including differences in language background, proficiency level, and instructional methodologies. However, there is a lack of comprehensive research addressing the specific challenges students face in using personal pronouns and factors contributing to these difficulties. This study aims to address this gap by investigating the common errors made by students in personal pronouns usage and exploring the underlying factors influencing these mistakes.

**1.2 Research Questions**

The researcher attempts to answer the following research questions:

1- What are the types of errors made by English major undergraduates when using English personal pronouns?

2- Which errors are the most frequent and what are the causes of errors?

3- How can these errors be analyzed in order to assist both students and English teachers in learning and teaching English language to be alert of this problem and find solutions ?

**1.3 Aims of the Study**

The primary aim of this study is to investigate the errors made by students in using personal pronouns in a written exam. Specifically, this study aims to Identify common errors of misuse in personal pronouns usage, explore the underlying factors contributing to these errors and inform instructional practices and curriculum development to enhance student both productive and perceptive skills by addressing identified difficulties effectively.

**1.4 Significance of the Study**

The significant of this study is that to the writer's knowledge, no previous study has addressed the difficulty that Libyan students face in using English personal pronouns. Therefore, this paper can be valuable for lecturers in focusing on the areas of difficulty in future researches. Furthermore, It is hoped that the findings of the study will have a bearing on curriculum design and development. Besides it may encourage researchers to conduct further research on the different types of English pronouns. By addressing common errors in personal pronouns usage, educators can better support students in developing the language proficiency needed for academic and professional success.

**2. Previous Studies**

These studies offer insights into various aspects of errors in personal pronouns usage, such as differences between native and non-native speakers, error patterns in academic writing, and specific challenges faced by learners from different language background. They contribute to a deeper understanding of the complexity of personal pronouns usage among students and provide valuable implications for language instruction and curriculum design.

Many researchers believe that students make a large number of errors in syntax; El-Sayed (1982-73) states that the subjects of his study made 1140 errors: 159 of them are errors in personal pronouns. English personal pronouns also constitutes one of the problematic areas for Yameni learners of English. It was noticed that the total number of errors made by the subjects was 1,583. The errors belonged to five types: subjective pronouns, objective pronouns, possessive adjective and pronouns and reflexive pronouns.

Numerous researchers have examined pronoun errors made by some learners of language. For example, Moore (2001) found that children with meaningful specific language impairment (SLI) produced more errors with third person singular (3PSG) pronouns. The most repeated type of error was replacement of the objective case for the nominative case. More errors were made on the third person feminine pronouns "She" and on the third person masculine pronoun 'He".

In a different study, Anton-Mendez (2010) studied pronouns errors of Spanish and French speakers of L2 English. The researcher found that Spanish speakers produced considerably more errors in gender than any other type of pronouns errors, and significantly more gender errors than French speakers as Spanish is a pro-drop language where many sentences do not necessitate gender to be determined they had been uttered in L1 instead of L2 pronoun error such as "he/she" confusions, by Spanish speakers of L2 English. This could be because of the differences in the information requirements of the speakers of two languages French and Spanish.

Liu, M. (2017) explored specific challenges faced by Chinese EFL learners, such as difficulties with pronoun case and reference. Highlighted the need for targeted instruction in personal pronouns.

Al- Jarf, R.S. (2015) identified common errors such as misuse of pronoun case, agreement discrepancies, and ambiguous reference, found that language background and proficiency level influenced the occurrence of errors.

Jamaludin & Ismail (2013) explored errors in personal pronouns usage among Malay ESL learners, highlighting issues such as inconsistent pronouns reference and confusion between subject and object pronouns. Recommended

targeted instruction and errors feedback to improve proficiency.

Smith, J. (2019) identified common errors in academic writing, including pronoun reference ambiguity and inconsistent pronoun case usage. He found that these errors were more prevalent among non-native English speakers compared to native speakers.

Furthermore,  studies taken related to this research. The first study was conducted by Najib (2015) that found students made five kinds of personal pronoun errors, such as subject pronoun, object pronoun, possessive adjective, possessive pronoun, and reflexive pronoun. The result examined that possessive adjective was the most frequent error made by the eighth students of MTS Yaspuri Malang while the least personal pronoun error was subject pronoun.

The second study was conducted by Saputra (2017). This study discovered that the most common type of error in using personal pronoun made by students was misformation. Students had some difficulty understanding the use and differences of each class of personal pronouns, as evidenced by misformation errors.

The third previous study was conducted by Mustaqim (2018). This study focused on analyzing error in using subject pronoun, object pronoun, possessive adjective, possessive pronoun, and reflexive pronoun. Proceeding, Vol 2, Tahun 2023 Page | 36 2nd International Conference on Education Faculty of Education and Teacher Training UIN Sulthan Thaha Saifuddin Jambi,. The highest frequency of error was using object pronoun while subject pronoun is the lowest one.

Although this phenomenon has given attention all over the world ,on significant study has appeared in Libya and this study tries to shed light on the difficulties on using English pronouns among Libyan students.

**2.2 Causes of Errors**

**Language Transfer**

Learning a second language is not the same as acquisition of the first language or the mother tongue. Learning the mother tongue is not influenced

by other languages; the process of learning English as a foreign language is influenced by their mother tongue and it causes errors in their learning. Making errors is common to happen during the learning process, as Littlwoods (2000:21) says that "current theories of how we lean languages recognize that habit formation is only one part of the process." Therefore, in order to learn English, the students must get through some errors first from which they can.

Brown (1982:138) states that 'errors as noticeable deviation from the adult grammar of a native speaker, reflecting the interlangauge competence of the learner of language." Learner of languages has different competences of level in learning English and automatically that has involved different causes of errors. On the other hand, Harmer(1983:35) states that "error is the result of incorrect rule learning; language has been stored in the brain incorrectly." That error may happen in teaching or learning process, it may be causes by the teacher, he has the lack of grammar competences in English grammatical structures or by students who have different understanding or wrong perception of grammatical structures then they save the wrong rules in their brains for long time and these rules have improved with their English grammar. According to Richard (1974:174) and Littlewoods (2002:21) , learners' errors are attributed to:

### Over-generalization

Over-generalization generally involves the certain of one deviant structure in place of two regular structures. It is an application of some foreign language rules incorrectly to some items within the same language through analogy between different rules, for example over-generalizing the rule of using possessive adjective and possessive pronouns in such items as (this is his book) and (this is his). Students use the same pronoun with a noun although the possessive pronoun should be used without a noun.

### Incomplete Application of Rules

Deviant structures that represent certain degree of the rules required to produce acceptable utterance. For example, the student's response: |(she closing the window) for the teacher's question? (what is she doing?)

### False Concept Hypothesized

In addition to the wide range of intralingual errors, which have to do with faulty rule learning at various level, there is a class of developmental error, which derives from faulty comprehension of distractions in the target

language. These errors are sometimes due to poor graduation of teaching items. For example: learners in the test of this study confuses between the possessive adjective and possessive pronouns (her and hers). They use the wrong choice. One can simply recognize the causes of errors that are made by foreign language learners when using English. However, it is really complicated to attribute certain errors to specific causes. According to Edge (1997:8) '' it is quite easy to think of possible causes of mistakes that learners made when speaking a foreign language, but it is very difficult indeed to say in any one case exactly what caused a particular mistake to occur.''

### 3. Research Methodology

In this paper, the researcher was administered  a  multiple choice test  in order to collect and analyze the data.  From their answers, the researcher can identify the errors which made by those learners when using different types of personal pronouns by conducting an error analysis. They were given 30 minutes to answer the test in order to determine the specific learning problems that may encounter in the use of  personal  pronouns.

### 3.1 Research Instrument

To answer the research questions, the researcher applied a recognition test; (multiple-choice) test  which was designed by the researcher to identify errors made by students while using English pronouns. The test contains 25 multiple choice questions which has been designed and administered by the researcher. The test dealt with  all  English personal pronouns namely ( subject pronouns, object pronouns, possessive adjective, possessive pronouns, and reflexive pronouns).

To test the validity of the test , the researcher administered a brief test to confirm the existence of the problem. Before administrating the test, the researcher explained and gave clear instructions  to the students and explained the reason for doing this test. To test the reliability, the adapted test was presented to a number of experts in the education field to discover whether the test was adequate to its objective or not. The main test of this study was adapted from the grammar book of Swan, Michael.(2005). Practical English Usage and Swan, Michael and Walter Catherine.(2001). The Good Grammar Book. A copy of the test presented in appendix (1)

### 3.2 Data Analysis Procedure

To achieve the objectives of the study, As the subjects finished the test, the exam papers were collected and corrected in order to identify the subjects' difficulties in using English personal pronouns. This part of the analysis presents the incorrect responses to 25 items in the test. The researcher presented the frequency and the percentages of these errors in table. Results are divided into 5 main types of English personal pronouns. The  quantitative analysis was based on statistical package the social sciences (SPSS) descriptive statistics. The data were analyzed manually as follows :

$$F \div N \times 100 = P$$

**P** = Percentage     **F** = Frequency of wrong answer     **N** = Number of subjects

### 3.3 The Participants

The study sample consisted of 140 students from the fifth and sixth semester,70 from each semester and they are mixed of males and females. They were enrolled in the academic year 2022-202 3in the Faculty of Arts in English department at Zawia University. The students ranged in age 20-21 .The participants of this study made some errors in using personal pronouns which were classified into 5 categories such as: error in subjective pronouns, errors in objective pronouns…etc.

### 4. Hierarchy of Difficulty

The error categories can be arranged in a hierarchical order according to the percentages of errors . The following table shows the classification of the errors according to the highest percentage in each area. In addition, it  shows the percentage of the correct answers.

**Chart (2) Percentages Of The Most Frequency Learners' Errors**

| No | Error categories | Percentage of Correct Answer | Percentage of Incorrect Answer |
|----|------------------|------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| 1 | Possessive Adjectives | 21,2% | 78,%8 |
| 2 | Reflexive Pronouns | 22,3% | 77,7% |
| 3 | Possessive Pronouns | 28,9% | 71,1% |
| 4 | Objective Pronouns | 39,7% | 60,3% |
| 5 | Subjective Pronouns | 56,1% | 43,9% |

**5 .Discussion**

The majority of the previous studies concluded that students whose mother tongue  have different grammatical structures from English have more problems in using English pronouns. The current study's finding have shown that the performance of English department students at Zawia University was insufficient for English language students. The present study have illustrated valuable results regarding learner's performance and

All the errors above with high percentages may due to incomplete application of rules because the students were not able to choose the correct pronouns according to the meaning of  the context. Accordingly, the findings of this study cannot be generalized to all Libyan students in Libya.

In comparison , the results of this study were in line with previous studies in the field. The findings of this study proved the findings of the researches conducted by Wijayanto (2010), Firdausi (2014), and It was found that misformation was the error that the most frequently produced by the students in using different types of English pronouns.

Furthermore the findings of this study asserted the results of Saputra (2017)  who discovered that the most common type of error in using personal pronoun made by students was misformation. Students had some difficulty understanding the use and differences of each class of personal pronouns, as evidenced by misformation errors.

 The results of this study confirm both these previous studies such as: Najib (2015)  and Mustaqim (2018)Which found students made five kinds of personal pronoun errors, such as subject pronoun, object pronoun, possessive adjective, possessive pronoun, and reflexive pronoun. The result examined that possessive adjective was the most frequent error

**6. Conclusion**

Based on the discussions above, it could be concluded that students of English department at Zawia University made some errors when dealing with English  personal pronouns. These errors are attributed to the complexity  of the subject due to the fact that Arabic does not have the same pronoun system as English. There is an evidence that learners' difficulties are attributed to

intra lingual errors, that is, errors that reflect the general characteristics of rule learning such as over-generalization errors, incomplete knowledge of the application of the rules, unfamiliarity with the structure.

The reader can deduce thus, some types of personal pronouns may create problems which teachers should focus on these types more than others. Moreover, students face clearly  numerous challenges in mastering personal pronouns and these challenges correlated to the strategies and teaching methods that lecturers use in their classes. It is suggested that further research may provide a comprehensive overview of the study's contributions to our understanding of students' proficiency in using personal pronouns and possessive adjectives.

### 7. Recommendations

Based on the above conclusion, the researcher presents the following recommendations in the light of the previous results of the study.

1-It is recommended that English department at Zawia university should put in consideration the important linguistics phenomenon of English pronoun by providing more practice foe students in linguistics courses.

2-Enhance the knowledge of grammar, especially those pronouns which had the highest percentage. It should include clear explanations, examples and practice exercises focusing on those personal pronouns.

3-Students engagement in meaningful activities is the best technique to introduce and teach English pronouns. Well designed worksheets can give students independent practice with the use of English pronouns they have already learned.

4-Teachers and coursebooks designers are advised to present the types and the usage of English pronouns in real context in the coursebooks to be more realistic to students.

5-Implement regular assessments to monitor students; progress and adjust instructional strategies as needed. Use a variety of assessment methods , including quizzes, writing assignments, and oral presentations , to evaluate students' proficiency in using personal pronouns .

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