

THESIS

COPULA OMISSION BY EFL ARAB LEARNERS

Submitted by

Abdullah S. Alshayban

Department of English

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Master's Committee:

Advisor: Douglas Flahive

Fabiola Ehlers-Zavala

Mohammed Hirchi

## ABSTRACT

### COPULA OMISSION BY EFL ARAB LEARNERS

Copula omission is found to be one of the major and most frequent errors that Arab EFL learners make when writing in English. Several studies have examined copula omission by Arab EFL learners. Most of those studies have concluded that copula omission is the result of negative transfer from Arabic to English since Arabic and English are structurally far different. The present study investigates the phenomenon of copula omission by Saudi EFL learners. It also examines whether the negative transfer from Arabic to English leads to copula dropping by Arab learners.

Data were collected from 100 Saudi students at Qassim University in Saudi Arabia. The participants were 100 Saudi male students of whom 50 were enrolled at the intermediate level, or the 3<sup>rd</sup> level, at the English department at Qassim University and the other 50 were enrolled at the advanced 7<sup>th</sup> level at the same department. The participants were asked to write an essay describing themselves, their family members, where they were born, the city they grew up in, how old they were, how old their parents and siblings were, the city they lived in currently, and also about their ambitions and plans for the future.

The results of this study revealed that the participants made errors by deleting the English copula. The statistical analysis showed that the copula omission was more frequent in the present and past tenses. The findings also revealed that intermediate

students make more errors than the advanced students. There was a significant difference between the advanced and intermediate participants as regards the number of errors in the present and future tenses. The study ends with pedagogical implications, limitations, and suggestions and recommendations for future research.

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## DEDICATION

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

This thesis focuses on the phenomenon of copula omission by Arabic-speaking learners of English. I assume for the purposes of this thesis that copula refers to forms of the verb “be.” For instance, *is* is the copula in *The boy is walking*. Arabic-speaking English learners frequently produce forms such as *Her name Layla* and *He here*. Explicit verbal copulas are absent in the present tense in Arabic (Benmamoun, 2000) and this mother tongue influence affects their English language use seriously. This work intends to demonstrate that the frequent omission of English copulas by Arabic speakers is a common form of negative transfer that seriously affects Arabic learners in their efforts to learn English.

When the study of a second or foreign language is undertaken, the setting where learning takes place has a tremendous impact on the learning process. An environment that encourages greater use of the new language, such as a classroom setting where only the new language is allowed to be spoken, forcing the student to practice their new language skills. Moreover, having the opportunity to visit a country or region where the language is spoken, are extraordinarily effective for both the learning and retention processes.

There are two distinct linguistic methods for achieving second language skills: language learning and language acquisition. This distinction is made on the basis of the underlying psychological process, that is, how the ability to use a language has been achieved. L1 learning, or the acquisition of the speaker’s original language, is an unconscious effort that helps the learner to acquire a language in an informal situation. This is a natural process, which does not

require the use of books, learning of grammar rules, or a teacher. Contrary to L1, L2 learning, or the study of a second language, is a conscious effort on the part of the learner in a formal situation with the help of books, rules of grammar, and a teacher (De Bot, Lowie & Verspoor, 2005).

According to De Bot et al. (2005), there are two types of learning: implicit and explicit learning. The implicit learning process relies on intuition, whereas explicit learning presupposes that people understand the definition and nature of something, and specifically seeks to discern the underlying structure of the information presented. Through the language acquisition process, the learner acquires implicit knowledge about the language, which endows him or her with the ability to pick up the language from the environment. Implicit learning or acquisition also refers to the type of learning which occurs without any conscious effort and it is, as Troike (2006) considered it as the process through which most people acquire their first language.

Classroom instruction offers a special benefit in that teaching carried out in a classroom setting usually utilizes both forms of second language learning processes, natural acquisition and classroom learning. Hunt et al. (2009) stress that one of the factors in effective teaching is correct and detailed instruction (i.e., the teacher's ability to explain exactly what students are expected to do and how they can successfully fulfill their tasks). Although it is difficult to draw clear differences between instructed languages and acquired ones, the implications of language acquisition through classroom teaching versus non-classroom learning are easily recognized.

Hall and Verplaetse (2000) argue that classroom learning is effective largely because of the teachers, as they play a crucial role in increasing the proficiency of language learners. Teachers act as motivators, providers of accurate language models, needs analysts, material developers, and evaluators. Further, Hall and Verplaetse (2000) suggest that in every society,

individuals feel the need to learn a second or foreign language for various reasons. They report that in an environment where individuals are not exposed to the native community directly, language learning depends upon language teaching. Language teaching refers to those activities that are intended to bring about language learning and has to be carried out by trained teachers. The teacher has an important role to play – he or she has to be able to shift the learner’s mind from the first language system to the new language system. A new language may possess a different sentence structure, a completely different phonetic system, and a different morphology, and it is precisely these shifts that make learning a second language such a challenge. A properly designed language course should be followed to enable effective language teaching.

Corbett (2003) suggests that the task of teaching is important in language learning because only a teacher can identify the learners’ status, needs, and demands, and help them to learn a language that fits their requirements. Teachers in a classroom create parole situations, where speech acts are performed in accordance with guidelines about the subject matter, to encourage students to learn.

According to Corbett (2003), language teaching requires the preparation of lesson plans, focusing on how the students should be trained to learn a new language. Many factors affect these plans, such as the mother tongue of the learners, a student’s reason for learning the new language, and the comparison of and differences between L1 and L2. The main focus of these lesson plans is to deal with language transfer (Viaggio, 2006). Both L1 and L2 are taken into account to determine how the transfer of the language system from one language to the other can be facilitated. For example, if a learner’s mother tongue is Arabic and he or she is trying to learn English, this transfer from Arabic to English includes the learning of definite and indefinite articles, which differ in both languages.

To understand the transfer and shift from one language to another, experts and teachers use contrastive analysis. Contrastive analysis has been defined as “an inductive investigative approach based on the distinctive elements in a language” (*Glossary of Linguistic Terms*, 2004). According to Howatt and Widdowson (2004), this analysis is used in Applied Linguistics to understand the differences and similarities of sentence structures between two or more languages. This theory suggests that every language has some common features, based on the historical development of the language and its dialects and their respective genealogies. Johnson and Johnson (1999) reported that language teaching has been influenced through the Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis (CAH). The CAH claims that difficulties in language learning derive from the differences between the new language and the learner's first language, and that errors in these areas of difference derive from first language interference. These errors can be predicted and remedied by the use of Contrastive Analysis (CA). Even though, contrastive analysis goes back to the 1960s and early 1970s but it is still relevant to this study as a method of investigating why some characteristics of a language are more difficult than other features.

CA is important for teachers, as it helps them to compare the foreign language with the native language so that the teaching methodology can be tailored to meet the needs of the individual student (Byram, 2000). Contrasting both languages is of fundamental significance in teaching language. CA benefits teachers in understanding the difference between the basic grammars of the two languages, and based on these analyses, teachers are able to predict errors or difficulties. The expected errors are given more importance and careful teaching as they could impede the learning of a new language. Contrastive analysis will be discussed in detail with examples in Chapter 2.

The first language has a dual role in Second Language Learning (SLL) – it either facilitates or impedes SLL. In general, the role of the first language in SLL is referred to as language transfer, as learners tend to apply knowledge and structures from their mother tongue to the second language. If the two languages are similar to some extent, there will be facilitation. However, if the two languages are dissimilar, there will be interference (Gluth, 2003).

The issue of first language (L1) transfer to the second language (L2) has been widely examined in second-language research. Chan (2004) specified that language transfer – the influence of the learners' L1, or prior, linguistic knowledge – can be positive or negative, based on the result of their L2 learning. When an appropriate unit or the overarching structure of two languages is similar, interference can occur that results in the accurate construction of a language; this is termed positive transfer. It is called accurate because the language would be as if it were spoken by natives, with few errors. Negative transfer, on the other hand, occurs when learners introduce incorrect structures into a new language, due to differences in grammar between L1 and L2 that are not understood by the learner.

When the differences in structures are great, there is the likelihood of making a larger number of negative transfers. The impact of positive transfers is generally overlooked and, as a result, they are not discussed extensively. However, the results of transfers and their impact on language learning could have a monumental impact on the learners (Liceras, 2010). Due to the process of globalization and the rapid advance of contemporary technology, the world has become smaller to a great extent, and people are able to easily connect with or physically move from one region or country to another for better job, education, business, and health prospects. This creates problems in communication because of the differences in culture and language.

Writing is the most challenging and intricate task and requires an ability to seamlessly complete the language transfer from one language to another (Corder, 1974).

An example from the Arabic language can be used to better understand positive and negative transfers – that of the copula omission frequently made by Arab learners. According to the *Encyclopedic Dictionary of Linguistic Terms* (2004), *copula* is defined as an intransitive verb that links a subject to a noun phrase, an adjective or any other constituent that expresses the predicate. For example: The girl *is* working. Here, *is* is the copula. Verbless sentences are considered to be one of the unique aspects of the Arabic language syntax. The verbless sentence can be defined as a sentence with the absence of an explicit verbal copula in the present tense (Benmamoun, 2000). Abu-Jarad (2008) and Ibrahim et al. (2000) point out that errors with respect to auxiliaries and copulas are very common among Arab learners of English, especially the omission of the copula, considered to be a negative transfer. (Positive and negative transfers are discussed more thoroughly in Chapter 2.). Copula omission specifically tends to occur when the speaker ignores a helping verb or interjection.

Ignoring the helping verbs “is”, “are”, etc., occurs when translating Arabic into English because of the syntactical differences in the languages – copulas do not exist in Arabic. This is, therefore, considered a negative transfer from L1. The following examples demonstrate the dropping of copulas in sentences made by Arab learners:

My name is Ali -----→ My name Ali.

They are there -----→ They there.

Sentence structures in Arabic and English usually differ as a result of copula omission. Students tend to forget the addition of a linking verb because the entire syntax differs from the syntax of their mother tongue. Although negative transfers in the case of Arab students learning

English have been subjected to several studies, the dropping of the copula in the English used by Arab students has not found sufficient research attention. This study undertakes to examine how the characteristic copula omission by Arab students has a serious impact on their learning of English. Here copula omission is taken as the predominant example of negative transfer.

There are many differences between Arabic and English, which can best be demonstrated through contrastive analysis. These differences include the use of definite articles, passive structure, sequence of the tense while using verbs, and repetition of the subject. Another significant difference is the writing system, since writing in English reads from left to write while writing in Arabic reads from right to left. Housen and Pierrard (2005) observe that most Arab students' errors are due to performance mistakes, mother-tongue interference, or false intra-language analogy. According to Elgibali (2005), Arab learners tend to make substitution errors by using the definite article "the" in place of the indefinite articles "a" and "an," as in the following examples:

- I take the English class.
- They rent the flat near the town.

Furthermore, the articles used in English — a, an, the, and zero article — are considered to be a source of great trouble for those individuals who are learning English as a second/foreign language, no matter what the original language they speak. This is especially true in cases where the first language either does not use articles at all or does have articles or article-like morphemes but they are used differently from English articles (Celce-Murcia & Larsen-Freeman, 1999). English and Arabic structures will be compared in Chapter 2.

The primary purpose of this research is to explain the causes of copula omission in certain linguistic settings by Arab learners of English. There have been reasons for the choice of

this topic for my research. As a nonnative speaker, I personally encountered this problem when I was a student in elementary and high school. Furthermore, during my experience as an English teacher in Saudi Arabia, I observed many Arab students who dropped copulae, both while writing and speaking. Being an English teacher, I wanted to investigate these omissions in order to find some solutions for the issue. More investigation for the omission of copula by Arab ESL/EFL learners will be presented in chapter II.

### **1.1 The research questions to be taken into account in this thesis are:**

1. Why do Arab EFL learners omit the English verb *to be*?
2. In which linguistic environments do Arab EFL learners omit the English verb *to be*?
3. Is there a significant difference between advanced and intermediate EFL learners in omitting copulas?

### **1.2 Hypotheses: Research Hypotheses:**

- Omission of copulas by Arab learners of English is a result of negative transfer or interference from Arabic in those situations where Arabic does not require the verb *to be*.
- Since Arabic does not require copula verbs in the present tense, Arab EFL learners omit the present tense verbs when writing in English.
- Advanced Arab EFL learners make fewer copula errors than students at the intermediate proficiency level.

Arabic is not at all similar to English in those linguistic environments.

To find out if this hypothesis is valid or not, I will perform two tasks: Firstly, I will contrast the English verb *to be* with *kana*, the Arabic equivalent of “to be”. The analysis will include the English *to be* and the Arabic *be (kana)* when they are used either as main verbs or as auxiliaries.

Secondly, I will analyze some English sentences where the English *to be* is regularly omitted by Arab learners.

The data used in this research came from a collection of writing samples from two groups of Saudi students. The first group consisted of 30 Arab students enrolled in the 3rd level in the English at a university in Saudi Arabia. The proficiency level of these students regarding their English skills was considered intermediate. The second group was the 7<sup>th</sup> level students at the same English department at that University. The chosen students were assigned to write an essay describing themselves and their family. The resulting sentences in which the English copula *be* was omitted were analyzed.

This thesis is structured as follows: Chapter 2 includes overviews of the literature on contrastive analysis and on the omission of the English copula *be* by learners of Arabic and other language backgrounds, as well as an overview of Arabic syntactic structures and an analysis of the salient structural differences between Arabic and English. The review will also include empirical studies that have been conducted on the same issue. Chapter 3 describes the methodology used in this research and how the data were gathered and analyzed. Chapter 4 gives data analysis and the findings of this research. Finally, Chapter 5 presents some recommendations for future research.

## **CHAPTER II**

### **REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

This chapter examines related literature related to this thesis. Section 2.1 describes general contrastive analysis between English and Arabic, the definition of CA, and related matters. In 2.2, the phonological differences between Arabic and English are presented. 2.3 covers interlanguage influence versus intralanguage influence. In 2.4, I go over language transfer terminology and definitions. 2.5 discusses the causes of language transfer. In 2.6, I deal with conscious and unconscious transfer. 2.7 presents the various types of language transfer in detail. In 2.8, I analyze the verb “to be” in English and Arabic and 2.9 reviews some studies on the analysis of errors made by Arab learners of English, specifically the omission of the copula.

#### **2.1. Contrastive Analysis**

According to Gass and Selinker (2008), contrastive analysis is a research method that helps language teachers understand important differences and similarities between an individual’s first and second languages. The authors state that this helps the determination of the rate of performance and language development; it also specifies which aspects of the target language will be facilitated and which aspects might interfere. It may result in negative and positive language transfer.

##### **2.1.1 The Beginning of CAH**

When we consider language transfer, we should also discuss the contrastive analysis hypothesis (CAH). Fries (1945), in his famous book *Teaching and Learning English as a*

*Foreign Language*, states that the most useful materials are the ones that are entirely based on a methodical description of any language that is to be learned. It should also be cautiously compared with a parallel description of the native language spoken by the learner. But, Selinker identified that “Fries has not undertaken any specific CA’s himself, and this is the reason why the histories of CA and SLA fail to mention him” (1992, p).

### **2.1.2 The CAH as it Later Evolved Based on Two Assumptions**

(1) An L2 feature is easy to understand if a similarity exists in the learner’s L1.

(2) An L2 feature is difficult to learn if it is entirely different or doesn’t exist in the learner’s L1 at all.

The result of the above two hypotheses is that the first scenario results in a positive transfer, while the second results in a negative transfer. The followers of the above hypotheses describe language as habit formation and believe that second language acquisition (SLA) develops a new set of habits. SLA errors are diagnosed as a result of the transfer of “habits” from L1 to L2. Skinner, who was a popular behaviorist, argued for this view in the 1950’s, and it eventually led to the development of the audio lingual method of teaching (Huthaily, 2008). Gass and Selinker (1994, pp.96-97) list the following six principles as the basis for CAH:

- (1) Contrastive analysis is always based on the theory of language. It claims that language is a habit and its learning involves the creation of a completely different set of habits.
- (2) The contributing source of error in the production or reception of any second language is the native language.
- (3) Errors can be accounted for by considering differences between the L1 and L2.
- (4) As a natural consequence, the third assumption supports the theory that most errors occur when the differences are great.

- (5) It is necessary for an individual to understand these differences to learn a second language.
- (6) Commonalities can be promptly neglected, because no new learning is involved. Instead, dissimilarities between the two languages must be learned.

### **2.1.3 Purpose of Contrastive Analysis**

The motivation for carrying out a contrastive analysis was to develop optimal teaching materials. This special hypothesis suggested that prior to preparing any teaching material, one should match L1 and L2. The aim of Fries (1945) was to develop teaching materials that are language-specific, and mainly for adults. These materials would help them master both the sound and the structural systems of L2 as unconscious and automatic habits. This purpose is quite clear in Fries's preface to his book *Teaching and Learning English as a Foreign Language*: "Teaching a language is always an act of teaching a particular 'foreign' language to students who have a specific 'native' language background" (1945, p. 6).

Native Language vs. Foreign Language:

As noted previously, the CAH started with Lado's work (1957); it was developed for instructive purposes. Lado suggested that both native and target (foreign) language should be compared to determine similarities and differences. These relationships included phonology, morphology, and syntax, along with the culture of each language.

This theory's objective is that if L1 is similar to L2, effective learning will be facilitated. If L1 is different from L2, learning will be more difficult: a negative transfer (interference). Lado made clear the CAH's academic purpose. Selinker (1992) believes that the newest and the most significant aspect to consider while preparing teaching materials is nothing but the comparison of

native and foreign language (English) and culture. This is to find the problems/obstacles that have to be overcome in teaching.

The overall goal of the contrastive analysis is to understand the linguistic difficulties experienced during the acquisition of a second language. Lado (1957) suggests that the difficulties in acquiring a second language are derived exclusively from the differences between the new language and the native language of the learner. The errors that are prone to be made by the learners of a second language can be more or less completely predicted from the interference by the native language. A phenomenon like this is usually known as negative transfer (interference). As per the error analysis (Corder, 1967), this was observed as the only kind of error – in either inter language or interference errors. The other types were intralingual and enhanced mental errors, but these are not specific to the native language (Richards, 1971). Any two languages can be compared in terms of their phonology, syntax, vocabulary, and writing systems, along with cultural behavior. According to Gass and Selinker (as cited in Huthaily, 2008, p. 26) the following are the points that are usually followed when doing a contrastive analysis (CA):

- (1) A brief description of the two languages
- (2) Selection of specific areas/items of two languages for a detail-oriented comparison
- (3) Comparison and identification of similarities and differences
- (4) Prediction of areas likely to cause errors
- (5) Testing the predictions

#### **2.1.4 The Arabic Language**

Arabic, a south-central Semitic language, is spoken by more than 422 million people worldwide (Huthaily, 2008). Furthermore, it is also spoken as a first language (L1) in almost

every country of the Arabian Peninsula: Bahrain, Kuwait, Iraq, Jordan, Lebanon, Oman, Palestine, Israel, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Syria, UAE, and Yemen.

Arabic is also the first language (L1) in Arab countries of Africa: Algeria, Djibouti, Egypt, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco, Somalia, Sudan and Tunisia. Because the inhabitants (natives) speak Arabic as L1, the aforementioned countries are referred to as the *Arab world*. In certain countries of Asia and Africa, Arabic is spoken as a second language. These include Iran, Pakistan, India, Indonesia, Chad and Nigeria.

There are differences in both the sounds and the writing systems of Arabic and English. Since Arabic is always written from right to left Arabic books are constructed with their spines on the right side.

#### **2.1.4.1 English and Arabic Basic Sentence Structures**

In the process of second language learning, familiarity with the sentence structure of the target language plays an important role. To be able to produce correct sentences, the learner should know how to construct the correct word order. While the basic sentence structure in English follows SVO (subject-verb-object) order, the usual word order is VSO (verb-subject-object) in written Arabic. The basic word order in *spoken* Arabic is SVO (subject-verb-object) (Mohammad, 2000).

In Arabic, the basic sentence structure follows the pattern of a subject and predicate (in a nominal phrase) or a verb and subject (in a verb phrase) (Ryding, 2005). The basic grammar of the spoken Arabic language differs considerably from English. Most noticeable are the differences in word order (Randall, 2007). For example, adjectives come after nouns: *the pizza tasty*, not *the tasty pizza*.

#### 2.1.4.2 Sentence Structure and Language

Most problems Arab learners face arise when building a sentence in English. An English sentence is sometimes built according to Arabic structure, but in most cases, the structure differs (Ryding, 2005).

For example:

*I speak Tagalog*

(Subject) (Verb) (Object)

The simple sentence above displays the basic sentence structure in English: the subject followed by the verb, and then the object. In Arabic this sentence will be translated as:

*Atakullum attaqalo*

*Speak-1s.pres. tagalog*

*(I-Speak) (Tagalog)* (Holes, 2004, p. 265)

#### 2.2. English and Arabic Phonological Differences

Phonology can be defined as the study of the sound system of a language. Arabic language is considered as one of the famous Semitic languages. Most Arabic sounds are shared with English sounds, with some differences. Arabic consists of three vowels [i], [a], and [u], that can be found in English as “ya” as in *Yankee*, a as in *Canada*, and wa as in *Washington*/, but these vowels have short and long forms in Arabic. Moreover, Arabic language lacks the two English vowels [e] and [o]; so what we pronounce in English as Cairo, would be pronounced in Arabic as *Qahirah* / *qæhiræ*/ or *Kahirah* (Abushihab, 2010).

As noted earlier, most Arabic consonants are similar to those in English. The Arabic language lacks some consonants, such as *p* /p/, *v* /v/, *g* /g/ and /ŋ/. There are also some sounds in Arabic that are not found in English, such as *Ayn* (ع), *ḏʿaa* (ظ), and *dʿaad* (ض). These sounds are

very problematic for nonnative Arabic speakers. Additionally, some sounds in Arabic are pronounced at the back of the mouth (Abushihab, 2010).

### **2.3 Interlanguage vs. Intralanguage Influences**

Several grammarians have made in-depth analyses of cross-linguistic influence. They have provided sufficient evidence to show a clear differentiation between the way our mother tongue influences us to acquire various structures and the way it influences how we learn another language.

The former can be called intralanguage influence, because the influence is felt within the same language, whereas the latter is termed interlanguage influence, because it denotes the influence of one language on another.

Intralanguage influence is mostly experienced by children. It does not usually force adults to make mistakes. However, there cannot be any distinct relationship between age and the process of learning a language. It may be observed that even adults may make mistakes in language structures on account of the influence of rules operating in their own mother tongue (interlanguage influence) (Cortes, 2006).

Interlanguage influence varies depending on the number of years that language has been studied and on the contact with that language in more realistic situations. A learner is likely to make fewer errors in the new language if he or she has studied it for a longer period or learned it in an environment conducive to learning that language. In that situation the learner suffers less from negative language transfer and will have a better command of that second language (Cortes, 2006).

Second language learners should be reminded from time to time that they make mistakes because of their mother tongue influence. If they are not reminded of this, they will revert to the

use of their mother tongue very often, such as whenever they fail to identify a specific grammatical rule or a particular word of the second language. They have to be told that a language is not merely the sum of a few words and expressions. A language also includes characteristic concepts and words, expressions, and grammatical principles vary from language to language.

They will understand that literal translation may not work in all cases. They might also understand that reality can be seen from several different perspectives and that our minds formulate concepts in different and unique fashions. They will realize that their mother tongue works differently from the second language they are learning. That will most probably induce them to become familiar with the structures of the second/target language (Cortes, 2006).

Researchers have different views about the definition of language transfer. The various definitions of language transfer are given in the next section.

#### **2.4. Language Transfer: Terminology and Definitions**

From the 1940s through the 1960s, scholars were particularly interested in language acquisition and showed deep interest in evaluating similarities and differences in native and target languages.

Linguists and scholars use various terms to refer to the influence of L1 on SLA: *transfer*, *mother tongue influence*, *interference* and *crosslinguistic influence*. There are many theories related to the process of language transfer (Meriläinen, 2010). Various aspects of language transfer phenomenon can be seen in what is called interlanguage: an independent language system of L2 learners that occurs between L1 and L2. Language transfer is a transitional system that affects the learners' existing second language awareness (Yuan-ying, 2010). However, to

explain the process effectively, we shall first consider the different ways it has been defined by scholars.

*Transfer* is considered a general term for various kinds of influence from languages other than the target language. Therefore, the study of transfer comprises the study of errors made by learners (negative transfer), facilitation (positive transfer), the avoidance of target language forms, and the overuse of the same (Ellis, 1994). A positive transfer occurs if the earlier learning experience was positive. A negative transfer occurs if the earlier learning experience obstructs new learning (Jianhua, 2007).

According to Ellis (1994), language transfer is merely the incorporation of the “features of L1 into the knowledge system of L2, which every learner is trying to build.”

This happens in one of the following two forms:

**(a) Positive transfer (facilitation):**

This occurs when there is a commonality between L1 and L2, leading to correctness. It also assists in the acquisition process.

**(b) Negative transfer (interference):**

This occurs when there is a disparity between L1 and L2, leading to incorrectness.

Researchers have experienced great difficulty in defining transfer; Different scholars define the concept differently. Corder (1983) defines language transfer as the influence of the mother tongue. He believes that learners might discover the target language by comparing the features of L1 and the target language and views it as the influence of transfer. According to Odlin, “Transfer is the influence resulting from the similarities and differences between the target language and any other language that has been previously (and perhaps imperfectly)

acquired” (1989, p. 27). Kellerman (1983) describes language transfer as the outcome of learners’ perception of the nature of L2. For example, transfer from L1 to L2 will occur if learners pick out the target language as being close to their L1.

Lado (1957) believes that learners of a target language are likely to transfer the features and meanings of their mother tongue to the target language and culture (James, 1980). In the view of Gass and Selinker (1989), transfer can be defined as “information or communicative strategy.” This clearly shows that in learning English as a foreign language, learners use their L1 to facilitate the process of learning. Similarly, Gass and Selinker (1983) consider learners’ perceptions of the target language as a major factor in language transfer. This thesis investigates the copula omission by Arab EFL learners. Copula omission is believed to be a negative transfer from Arabic to English. The following section will deal with the causes of language transfer.

## **2.5 Causes of Language Transfer**

### **2.5.1 Language and Cultural Variations**

Language and culture have a dialectical relationship: every language is an essential part of a culture; it serves and reflects cultural requirements. Even the apparent arbitrariness of languages can be explained within the context of a culture’s specific needs. We can say a language is shaped by culture and continuously influenced by it. Hence, language cannot be regarded merely as a passive reflector of culture (Jianhua, 2007). Jianhua (2007) also states that language can be viewed as the symbolic representation of a very nation, embracing its historical and cultural backgrounds, its ways of life, its customs, and so on. The way people live influences the language of a particular nation. We can view the legends and myths of a nation as the reservoir of the innumerable idioms and sayings found in its language. Conversely, many idioms spring from famous literary works. For instance, the Bible and Shakespearian plays have

contributed expressions such as the ‘apple of the eye’, ‘entertain an angel unawares’, and ‘to paint the lily’. Such idiomatic expressions have been handed down through generations, so they cannot be altered freely. If students translate certain Chinese idioms and use them in English, they will not be understood. They will remain only as Chinglish. Therefore, Chinese students who try to learn English must learn to use native expressions and also attempt to understand the cultural background. That will automatically improve their ability to write in the new language (Jianhua, 2007).

### **2.5.2 Different Modes of Thinking**

Jianhua (2007) argued that language and thought are strangely interconnected. It is language that facilitates and reflects thought. It is through language that people perceive and understand the world. Additionally, people express their emotions and thoughts and communicate with others using language. It is language that reflects our views of the world, our modes of thinking and even our psychological states. Therefore, we can say that the way one thinks necessarily modifies one’s mode of expression.

There we come to interesting differences. People trained in a Western cultural background dissect things into components and then analyze their relationships. On the contrary, people brought up in a Chinese cultural background will tend to synthesize various parts into one and then examine the whole. While the dissection facilitates the growth of logical thinking by abstract reasoning, the synthesis helps one to think through images and acquire intuitive insight (Jianhua, 2007).

### **2.5.3. Teaching Strategies**

#### **2.5.3.1 Strengthening the Knowledge of Language**

Another factor in language transfer, as stated by Jianhua (2007), is teaching strategies. It is universally acknowledged that writing is the most trying language skill because it necessitates thorough knowledge of grammar as well as discourse patterns. In China, college students learn English for about six years. They usually experience no trouble in daily conversations and in writing simple sentences. Nevertheless, when it comes to writing coherent paragraphs or essays, there are serious handicaps or hurdles that must be addressed urgently. We should suspect that teachers have either ignored them or failed to sympathize with the students over the years (Jianhua, 2007). As for the copula omission by EFL Arab learners, teaching methodologies and strategies play important factor in either prevent or accelerate the dropping of copula. Most English learning books that are taught in Saudi Arabia do not illustrate the differences and similarities between English and Arabic. Therefore, it is the English teachers' task to show such similarities and differences between the two languages' structures.

In this context, we must realize that good knowledge of language is the foundation of good writing. Therefore, teachers must pay heed to the imparting of basic knowledge as regards language structures and their use.

### **2.6 Conscious and Unconscious Transfer**

Conscious and unconscious language transfers have not been dealt with thoroughly in the field of SLA. On the other hand, conscious and unconscious learning have been of great interest to many language researchers. Language transfers can occur at two levels – a conscious or an unconscious level. Odlin (1989) stated that linguistics knowledge can be either conscious or unconscious. Kormos (2006) reasons that “Conscious transfer is a subtype of communication

strategies and is applied to compensate for lack of knowledge in L2, whereas unconscious transfer is the effect of L1 on L2 of which the speaker is not or is only partially aware” (p. 25). The two main types of transfer – positive and negative – must be dealt with more elaborately.

## **2.7. Types of Language Transfer: Positive and Negative**

The concept of transfer was raised during the period of Contrastive Analysis. Language transfer was associated with behaviorists’ views of structural linguistics and language learning (Franch, 1998). Both positive transfer and negative transfer in the context of language learning denote automatic and subconscious utilization of old behavioral patterns in novel learning situations.

These terms are often used to designate semantic and syntactic transfer, an integral component of language acquisition. However, Corder (1983) recommended the use of a better term, because he viewed *transfer* as something brought in from the school of behaviorist theory. Corder suggested using the term *mother tongue influence* instead of *transfer*. Sharwood Smith (1986) went a step further and named it *crosslinguistic influence*, which naturally takes into account the influence of L3 on L2 when another learned language (not L1) has an effect on the acquisition of L2. There is also the possibility of having L2 influence on L1.

### **2.7.1 Positive Transfer**

Positive transfer occurs when knowledge of the mother tongue does not lead to linguistic errors. Transfers from the learner’s native language that do not lead to misunderstanding or errors are called positive transfers. When L1 and L2 have the same features, positive transfer will occur. Positive transfer accelerates the learning process, while negative transfer deters it.

Positive relationship was investigated by Torres and Fischer (1989). Their study was on Hispanic-speaking students whose overall proficiency in native language is correlated with L2

(English language) development. This study further proved that being fluent in one's own native language increases the chances of becoming proficient in another language. For native Spanish speakers, English acquisition is strongly related to native language proficiency.

The situation is quite different with Arab learners. Researchers assert that Arab learners do not receive positive transfer from their first language in vocabulary because there are limited similarities between English and Arabic (Wahba, Taha, and England, 2006).

Positive transfer from Arabic to English would occur in the case of prepositions. Asma (2010) has examined transfer from Arabic to English in this matter. The researcher used a method of inserting prepositions in sentences that had none. Asma asked 30 students to insert the appropriate preposition in the following sentence: "*St. Antoine was a miserable street \_\_\_\_ Paris.*" Twenty-seven filled in the blank with the correct answer, *in*. Because there is an equivalent preposition in Arabic (*fi*) for the English preposition *in*, the students were able to positively transfer this preposition from Arabic to English.

Because this thesis investigates copula omission, which is marked as a negative transfer among Arab learners of English, the next section will deal with negative transfer from L1 to L2 and particularly negative transfer from Arabic to English.

### **2.7.2 Negative Transfer**

Examining negative language transfer of first and second language learning is central to second language research. Through examining both negative and positive transfer, language learning and teaching could be improved. Negative transfer from the native language to the target is more common than positive transfer, because there typically are few (or no) similar linguistic features among languages. Cortes (2006) defines negative transfer as "the negative influence that the knowledge of the first language has in the learning of the target language due

to the differences existing between both languages” (p. 4). It can be claimed that this transfer obstructs the procurement process, as Ellis (1994) has shown.

He also said that it is not enough to focus only on the production of errors, as there are many manifestations (events) of transfer that will be missed. Avoidance is considered one of the most important manifestations of language transfer that cannot be detected in production. We can say that every learner might avoid using a particular linguistic structure in their L2, as such a structure does not appear in their L1. To put it simply, language transfer avoids the use of an entirely different structure rather than producing errors. Schachter (1974), for example, found that, because of the production of far fewer clauses compared to the whole, Japanese and Chinese learners of L2 English made very few errors in the use of relative clauses than did Persian and Arabic learners (Ellis, 1994).

The statement “no one can learn or acquire any language without making errors” can be considered a universal truth. While learning or acquiring any language, learners do face some problems, such as errors or mistakes. Corder (1986) states that errors made by foreign English learners are part of the learning process. Ranganayki (1983) also states that “the errors are not problems to be overcome or evils to be eradicated”; they are simply a part of the language learning process. It is, therefore, true that one cannot achieve proficiency in any language without making errors. In the same way, Corder (1973) emphasizes that investigation of errors made by these learners can help us understand the levels of learners’ knowledge and identify their further learning requirements.

Various studies have carefully examined possible transfer effects between Arabic and English. Koch (1983) studied English essays by Arabic-speaking English learners and found that majority of the learners made extensive use of devices such as parallelism and the repetition of

the most powerful words and phrases. Her conclusion was that certain features of Arabic discourse are transferred, and this may influence Arab students to repeat words or phrases in English.

Ostler (1990) stressed the fact that the deviant style of Arabic students' writing in English simply reflects classical Arabic style, which differs in many ways from English. This question was posed to Ostler: "Why, when Arabic-speaking students seem to have mastered most English grammatical forms and idioms, do they still produce 'foreign-sounding' essays, and why is it that experienced ESL writing teachers can identify Arabic-speaking students' English essays as having been written by Arabic speakers?" (Ostler, 1990, p. 169).

Ostler made an attempt to answer this question. She also addressed the issue of the effect of the learner's cultural background on the written discourse. She did this by looking at English and Arabic rhetoric from a historical perspective and by giving an account of devices such as balance and coordination.

Most research projects that concern the writing problems of foreign language learners, specifically Arab English learners, have concentrated on word and sentence levels. The majority of researchers in this field looked upon writing problems through a structural approach to error analysis and a contrastive analysis. This proved to be inadequate in describing the actual writing problems of students trying to master the language for academic purposes. Researchers have realized that these writing problems are not restricted to the sentence level.

They have attempted to mention other reasons for the difficulties faced by foreign learners in writing term papers, essays, reports and final theses. Researchers have also begun to analyze other aspects of the writing process. Influences of stylistic, rhetorical, educational and cultural factors are a few notable ones. Researchers and teachers now believe that learning

grammatical structures of a new language is not enough for a foreign student to become a decent writer. Kaplan states: “All foreign students who had mastered the syntactic structures have yet demonstrated an inability to formulate sufficient themes, term papers, theses and dissertations” (1966, p. 3). Kaplan also claims that the paper of a non native student is out of focus because he/she uses a language and flow of thoughts that go against the expectations of the native speaker.

The following paragraphs record the observations made by researchers who have taught Arab students at college level. Holes’s (1984) assertion is that the teacher of academic writing will be familiar with the problem of the advanced Arab learner . According to Holes, the work of an Arab learner is relatively free of grammatical errors, but it has a permanent non-English feel to it. Kaplan (1966) initiated a study of cultural thought patterns in intercultural education and carried out research on contrastive rhetoric.

Dudley-Evans and Swales (1980) gave an account of some sources of students’ problems such as syntactic differences between English and Arabic. They also suggested that certain types of intervention errors can lead to difficulties of comprehension. They have also described the main stylistic features of Arabic paragraphs to conclude that “the transference of features to writing of academic English can lead to the appearance of incoherence” (p. 48) in students’ writing.

A few other researchers concentrated on other wider aspects of students’ compositions, for example, paragraphing, the development of ideas, and organization. According to Tadros (1976), students’ greatest obstacle in developing ideas is in organizing sentences into paragraphs. These studies have focused on the difficulties students have in avoiding the negative transfer of stylistic and rhetorical aspects from L1 to L2.

Many studies have investigated errors made by Arabic-speaking EFL learners in their writing, and their findings show that Arab EFL students have serious problems in writing English. Research by Mahmoud (2005), Abisamra (2003), and others argue that the interference of Arab EFL learners' first language results in the syntactic errors in their writing. Mahmoud's (2005) study further shows that interference or transfer from native language is the major source of EFL learners' errors and is taken as a matter of habit. Negative transfer, as found in the case of English and Arabic, is an obvious outcome of the differences between Arabic (L1) and English (L2).

There are a few researchers like Jackson (1981), Corder (1973), and Jakobovits (1970) who strongly believed that EFL learners will immediately refer to their own native language upon experiencing difficulties in expressing something in a foreign language. This belief was confirmed and stated exceptionally well by many researchers such as Diab (1996), who had conducted her own tests to determine, analyze, and classify the most common writing errors of some Lebanese EFL students. As part of her study she had collected 73 English essays written by the EFL students of a Lebanese university.

Diab eventually found that the Lebanese EFL students made many grammatical, lexical, semantic, and syntactic errors in their writing. These errors were due to their inherent tendency to carry out a negative interlingual transfer from Arabic linguistic structures into the English language.

Kharma (1987) carried out research on Arab students' problems in learning the English relative clause. His study found 14 types of errors, mainly due to negative interference from their native language, Arabic. Kharma further concluded that these were errors of form and did not affect communication.

Miqdadi (1997) conducted an empirical study on the role of the native language, Arabic, in learning English relative clauses. A sample of 100 male and female students was drawn from first-year and second-year students in the English department of Yarmouk University. The analysis of the errors made by those students in the formation of the English relative clauses revealed the clear effect of negative transfer from Arabic into English.

Under the given circumstances, EFL school students from most Arabic communities are likely to make many syntactic, grammatical, semantic, and lexical errors in English as a part of their learning process. This aspect of the problem has not been subjected to much in-depth study with respect to EFL students from specific Arabic communities. Therefore, the present study intends to investigate the carryover of Arabic (L1) syntactic structures into English (L2) by Jordanian EFL learners. That will necessitate a detailed discussion of Arabic and English syntactic structures and their representation in available literature.

Al-Hazaymeh (1994) performed an analytical study on the errors made by secondary students learning English verb tenses. The study was based on a random sample survey of 759 students drawn from secondary schools in the city of Irbid, Jordan. The sample consisted of 587 students from public schools and 172 from private schools. The sample consisted of males and females and science and arts students. The statistical analysis found that the errors made by the students in using the English verb tenses were significantly different for different groups; that is to say, public and private students, male and female students, and science and literature students. The researcher further found that the errors made by the students were mainly due to the interference of their mother tongue, overgeneralization, the complex structures of the English verb tenses, the parallel structure strategy, and lack of awareness of grammatical rules.

Abisamra (2003) studied a group of 10 essays, which were written by Arabic-speaking EFL students in grade nine. After a careful analysis, she was shocked to see a total of 214 errors, out of which 29 were grammatical, 35 were syntactic, 26 were lexical, three were semantic, and 120 were substance errors. She wondered about the reason. She easily concluded that the cause of the errors was not only negative L1 transfer interference but also intralingual interference.

Another significant study was conducted by Mahmoud (2005) where a total of 420 errors were detected in 42 essays. He claimed that some of the errors clearly indicated that EFL students depend on both their interlingual and intralingual strategies to tide over their learning processes. Al-khresheh (2006) also came up with similar results after analyzing 20 essays written by Jordanian undergraduate EFL learners. His study revealed that the students had made a greater number of grammatical, syntactic, and lexical errors. This was because of interlingual interference from their L1. However, he did not stop with that. He also carried out a study on interlingual interference in learning and using English vocabulary. He realized that Jordanian EFL learners made a large number of syntactic interlingual errors. This was with regard to the word order within basic sentence structure. He said that these errors were due to the adoption of L1 habits, which were deeply rooted in the students' minds. Al-khresheh also stated that the subjects were greatly influenced by their L1 knowledge in understanding English sentences.

Many Arab researchers have examined the negative transfer of habits from Arabic to English among Arab learners of English. An empirical study on the use of English idioms was conducted by Mahmoud (2002). He collected data from paragraphs, essays, and term papers written by Arabic learners of English who were second-year university students majoring in English (academic years 1995/96 to 2000/01). In his study he examined 3,220 pieces written by 230 students and found out that students used only 124 idioms. For the reliability of his study, he

excluded binominals and phrasal verbs. Out of the 124 idioms detected, 25 (i.e., 20%) were grammatically, lexically, and contextually correct. His findings indicated that there was a negative transfer of habits from Arabic to English. The participants in his study made grammatical and lexical errors. As a proof of a negative transfer, he pointed out that some participants incorrectly added the definite article *the*. In all positions where *the* was incorrectly used, Arabic uses *al*, the corresponding Arabic form to the English definite article *the*. An example of a grammatical error made by a student was “*the eye by the eye*,” which means “an eye for an eye.”

In Arabic, there is an equivalent to this phrase (*an eye for an eye*). Therefore, the student will try to convey the meaning using the Arabic language structure, and that would be marked as a negative transfer. Another example of a lexical error written by one of the participants was “from time to *another*” (=time). The lexical substitution in these examples could also be marked as a negative interlingual transfer of the Arabic idioms, which have English equivalents. Transferring some idioms from Arabic to English could result in misunderstanding if the reader or the listener does not have a solid background of the Arabic language’s features and culture (Mahmoud, 2002).

To sum up, negative transfer can be defined as transferring some of the mother tongue features to L2 or L3. There are many factors that cause negative transfer. Factors such as the influence of L1, culture, and way of learning are the main aspects that lead to negative transfer. The previous section intensely examined negative transfer from L1 to L2 or L3. Furthermore, negative transfer has been of great interest to many researchers to find out the causes behind this phenomenon. Since there is limited similarity between Arabic and English, negative transfer always occurs among Arab students learning written or spoken English. The next section will

present a contrastive analysis between English and Arabic and shed light on the syntactic differences between English and Arabic.

## **2.8 Contrastive Analysis of Verb “to be” in English and Arabic**

There is an interesting phenomenon regarding the use of the verb *be* by the Arab learners of English, irrespective of whether it is being used as the main verb or as an auxiliary. They may avoid or retain it. For instance, they omit it in the sentence “My name Hassan” but retain it in “Khalid was a great teacher.”

I intend to analyze this irregularity as part of my study of the negative transfer. To explain why this tendency is displayed by Arab learners of English, at least during the early stages of learning English, I wish to present a contrastive analysis of English and Arabic in order to throw light upon the use (or otherwise) of *be*.

## **2.9 The Use of Be in English as a Mean Verb**

Celce-Murcia and Larsen-Freeman (1983) have pointed out that *be* functions in English both as a copula and as an auxiliary verb, depending on the circumstance in which it is being used. As a copula, it acts as the main verb of a sentence, serving as a tense carrier and linking the subject and the complement. According to Quirk et al. (1985), when *be* is used as the main verb, it is followed by one of the following:

- i. An adjective phrase (e.g., Joseph is clever).
- ii. A noun phrase (e.g., Joseph is a doctor).
- iii. An adverbial phrase (e.g., the man is in his study).

*Be* can also function as the main verb following the existential *there*. Celce-Murcia and Larsen-Freeman (1983) point out that *be* happens to be the usual verb in this context; e.g., “There are three books in the bag.”

## 2.10 The Use of *be* as an Auxiliary Verb

English also uses *be* as an auxiliary to support the main verb in the progressive aspect and in the passive voice. In fact, the progressive aspect is composed of the auxiliary *be* and the *-ing* participle of the main verb (Quirk et al., 1985). Now let us compare the progressive aspect (or the continuous aspect) as we find it in English and Arabic.

The objective here is to highlight cases where positive or negative transfer could take place. The following are the different tenses in which the progressive aspect is used in English:

Present progressive: “He is playing cards.”

Past progressive: “He was playing cards when we came.”

Future progressive: “He will be playing cards when we arrive.”

Here, the past progressive signifies an action or situation that was in progress at some known time in the past, while the future progressive denotes an action that will be in progress at a specific moment in the future (Celce-Murcia & Larsen-Freeman, 1983).

According to Quirk et al. (1985), the passive verb form consists of the auxiliary *be* followed by the *-ed* participle of the main verb. That necessitates the use of a particular form of the auxiliary *be* with the main verb. There are three essential steps to be followed to convert an active sentence into its passive form (Leech & Svartvik, 1975):

- i. The active verb phrase must be replaced by its passive form.
- ii. The object of the active construction moves to the subject position in the passive sentence.
- iii. The subject of the active construction is the agent of the passive construction and is preceded by the preposition *by*. However, the agent denoted by the *by* phrase may be deleted when the agent is either unknown or irrelevant (Quirk et al., 1985). Example: “He was welcomed to the gathering.”

## 2.11 The Use of the Arabic Form *Kana* as a Main Verb

When we examine the use of the Arabic word *kana* (the Arabic equivalent of the English *be*) as the main verb, we find a difference between its use in the present tense and in the past (or even future) situations.

To denote a present event or situation, Arabic does not use the present form of *kana*. Ziadeh and Winder (1957) show this in the following example, where the Arabic sentence is actually a nominal (or verbless) sentence:

“Fahadun muhandisun.”

Fahadun engineer

(Fahad is an engineer.)

While English insists on the use of the verb *be* in sentences expressing events or situations in the present (e.g., “Jane is a doctor”), it actually is ungrammatical in Arabic to add *yakunuu*, the present form of the verb *kana*, irrespective of whether it is followed by a noun phrase, adjectival phrase or adverbial phrase. For example:

\*Aliun yakunuu tawilun.

(Ali is tall.)

\*Mahirun yakunuu tabibun.

(Mahir is a doctor.)

\*Tariqun yakunuu fi ilbeiti.

(Tariq is at home.)

Another key point: Unlike in English, the existential *there* of Arabic, *fi*, is not used in conjunction with *yakunuu* in the present. It makes the sentence ungrammatical if *yakunuu* is used with *fi* in an Arabic sentence in the present tense. For example:

\*Yakunuu fih ashrat ashkas fi Imazil.

(There are 10 people in the house.)

The only way the above sentence can be made grammatical is to leave out *yakunuu*, the Arabic *be* verb. There have been studies to document the omission of the *be* verb in the copula. For instance, Abu-Jarad's study (1983) focused on a quantitative analysis of copula omission in the writings of Palestinian students. The study revealed that while such omission is very frequent in the case of the present tense, there is almost no omission in the past and the future tenses.

It was Bryan (1980) who subjected the compositions of Arab students of English to serious analysis. Bryan easily demonstrated that the omission of the copula is very frequent in the present tense in all the various syntactic conditions. He remarked:

One of the most language-specific problems faced by ESL students of Asian origin is the tendency to leave out the frequent English linking verb to be. Arabic does not regularly employ the copula; this verb is reserved only for special emphatic contexts, negative forms, and past or future tense . . . Omission takes place both when the copula is an auxiliary part of the present progressive aspect or of the passive voice: \*what to happen about transportation; \*I asking him . . . (Bryan, 1980, p. 46).

On this basis, it may be concluded that in the present tense, the omission of the copula is an instance of negative transfer, because Arabic does not have a copula in the present tense form.

Conventional Arabic grammar books tend to divide tense into three parts: perfect, imperfect, and imperative. According to Thatcher (1942), "The verb has two main tenses: the Perfect (al-madi) denoting a finished action, and the Imperfect (al-mudari) denoting unfinished action. To these, the Arabs add as a third the Imperative (al-amr)" (p. 62). Thatcher (1942) then points out that the imperfect of *kana* (*yakunuu*) usually has a future connotation. The following tables make this clear by providing the distribution of the Arabic copula in the present tense.

Table 2.11.1: Single Verbs

Sing./Plural/Dual	Masc./Fem.	Arabic writing	English writing	Meaning
single	3. masc.	يَكُونُ	Yakunuu	he will be
single	3. fem.	تَكُونُ	Takunuu	she will be
single	2. masc.	تَكُونُ	Takunuu	you (m.) will be
single	2. fem.	تَكُونِينَ	Takunina	you (f.) will be
single	1.masc. &1.fem.	أَكُونُ	Akunuu	I will be

*Note.* Adapted and modified from Thatcher (1942, pp. 73-74)

The imperfect of *be* (*yakunuu*) has only a future and not a present tense indication. Hence we may conclude that Arabic has no equivalent for the English copula, *be*, which can be *is*, *am*, or *are*, and so, the Arabic students can conveniently drop it when they use English.

Table 2.11.2: Dual Verbs

Sing./Plural/Dual	Masc./Fem.	Arabic Writing	English Writing	Meaning
dual	3. masc.	يَكُونَانِ	Yakunani	they two (m.) will be
dual	3. fem.	تَكُونَانِ	Takunani	they two (f.) will be
dual	2.mas.&2. fem.	تَكُونَانِ	Takunani	you two will be

*Note.* Adapted and modified from Thatcher (1942, pp. 73-74)

Table 2.11.3: Plural Verbs

Sing./Plural/Dual	Masc./Fem.	Arabic Writing	English Writing	Meaning
plural	3. masc.	يكونون	Yakunuuna	they (m.) will be
plural	3. fem.	يكن	yakunna	they (f.) will be
plural	2. masc.	تكونون	takunuuna	you (m.) will be
plural	2. fem.	تكن	takunna	you (f.) will be
plural	1.masc.&1. fem.	نكون	nakunuu	we will be

*Note.* Adapted and modified from Thatcher (1942, pp. 73-74)

However, when the past is being represented, Arabic requires a past form of *kana* (*yakunuu*), as in the following illustrative example:

kana Saad ghanyan

was Saad rich.

(Saad was rich.)

In this context it may be pertinent to examine how Ferguson (1971) divided languages into two groups, A and B, where group A includes all languages that have the copula in both present and past tenses (for example, Spanish and English) and group B designates all languages having no copula in the present tense (for example, Russian and Arabic). He remarked: In all type B languages there seem to be conditions under which a copula must be used.

The most widespread such condition is when a tense other than the present is called for. Thus, the English phrase ‘My brother was a student’ has Russian and Arabic equivalents with an overt was in Moj brat byl student, Axi kana tilmioan (Ferguson, 1971).

As Ferguson (1971) has shown, because the English terms *was* and *were* have equivalents in Arabic, it is possible to expect that Arab English learners will retain the English copula in their English because the equivalent copula is present in their first language. Therefore, it is a case of

positive transfer to English from their L1, which is Arabic. The fact that the copula is present in the past tense in Arabic has been remarked upon by other researchers such as Thatcher (1942).

Thatcher demonstrates the distribution of the Arabic copula in the perfect tense in the following fashion:

Table 2.11.4: Single Verbs

Sing./Plural/Dual	Masc./Fem.	Arabic Writing	English Writing	Meaning
single	3.masc.	كَانَ	kana	he was
single	3.fem.	كَانَتْ	kanat	she was
single	2. masc.	كُنْتُمْ	kunta	you (m.) were
single	2. fem.	كُنْتِ	kunti	you (f.) were
single	1.masc.&1fem.	كُنْتُ	kuntu	I was

*Note.* Adapted and modified from Thatcher (1942, p. 68)

Table 2.11.5: Dual Verbs

Sing./Plural/Dual	Masc./Fem.	Arabic writing	English writing	Meaning
dual	3. masc.	كَانَا	kana	they two (m.) were
dual	3. fem	كَانَتَا	kanata	they two (f.) were
dual	2.masc.&2. fem.	كُنْتُمَا	kuntuma	you two were

*Note.* Adapted and modified from Thatcher (1942, p. 68)

Table 2.11.6: Plural Verbs

Sing./Plural/Dual	Masc./Fem.	Arabic Writing	English Writing	Meaning
plural	3. masc.	كانوا	kanu	they (m.) were
plural	3. fem.	كن	kunna	they (f.) were
plural	2. masc.	كنتم	kuntunm	you (m.) were
plural	2. fem.	كنتن	kuntunna	you (f.) were
plural	1.masc.&1.fem.	كنا	kunna	we were

*Note.* Adapted and modified from Thatcher (1942, p. 68)

You may note here that the Arabic *kana* is used as a main verb, just as the English verb *be*, to refer to past events or situations. It may be followed by a noun phrase, adjective phrase, or an adverbial phrase as the case may be.

e.g.

1. Kana Majedun mudarrisan

was Majed a teacher

Majed was a teacher.

2. Kana Farisun maridan

was Faris sick

Faris was sick.

3. Kana alawladu fi ilfasli

were the boys in the classroom

The boys were in the classroom.

When we describe the future, we notice that Arabic needs either the present form of *be* or the prefix *sa-* used in conjunction with *yakunnu* to form *sayakunuu*. They are analogous to the English future tense form of *be*. Here, we can also demonstrate the Arabic use in three cases – before a noun phrase, adjective phrase, or an adverbial phrase:

1. Sayakunuu Amerun tabiban

will be Amer a physician

Amer will be a physician.

2. Sayakunuu Basilun ghanyan

will be Basil rich

Basil will be rich.

3. Satakunuu Qamarun huna ghadan

will be Qamar here tomorrow

Qamar will be here tomorrow.

As regards the English existential *there*, Arabic uses *fiḥ*. As shown by Qafisheh (1977), Arabic needs *kana* with *fiḥ* when the reference is to past events or situations and *sayakunuu* when it refers to future events or situations. The following are examples for these uses:

1. kana fiḥ dubbaini fi ilgafasi

were there two bears in the cage

There were two bears in the cage.

2. Sayakunuu fiḥ tesat ashkas fi ilbaiti alsabt algadim

will be there nine people in the house next Saturday

There will be nine people in the house next Saturday.

The above examples help us formulate a hypothesis, which is that Arabic behaves like English as far as the requirement for the verb *be* (*kana*) as a main verb in past and future tenses. In such cases, the complements of the Arabic equivalent *kana*, when it comes as a full verb, appear like those of the English *be*. However, when we come to the use of *be* as a main verb in present events or situations, there is a big distinction – Arabic doesn't take the present form of the copula *kana* (*yakunuu*), whereas English must have the present copula *be*. Another significant difference between the two languages in this context is that in English the verb *be* must agree with the subject that precedes it only in number, while in Arabic, *kana* as well as *sayakunuu* must agree in both number and gender with the subject that follows. In the present study, that distinction is not very pertinent because the Arabic custom of having the verb *kana* or *sayakunuu* agree with the subject that follows both in number and gender has no impact on the learning habits of Arab learners of English. This means that Arab students of English do not omit *be* in such situations and, as a result, come up with ungrammatical sentences in English.

### **2.12 The Use of Kana as an Auxiliary Verb**

Arabic uses only the active participle to denote that an action is in progress (Owens, 1988):

Thamirun daribun Aliun

Thamir hit Ali

Thamir is hitting Ali.

Here, Arabic uses the active participle *daribun* to imply that the particular action is in progress and that it is uninterrupted.

That means there is no need in Arabic for any form of the auxiliary verb *kana* in the present progressive. A present form of *kana*, like *yakunuu*, will make it an ungrammatical construction in Arabic (Qafisheh, 1977).

e.g. Talal yakunuu daribun Alian

Talal hitting Ali

Talal is hitting Ali.

On the other hand, Arabic needs the verb *kana* and the base form of the verb to denote that an action was going on at a certain point in the past. Arabic does not require the active participle along with the auxiliary in this case.

e.g.,

Rayed kana yakktubu risalatan endama wasaltu

Rayed was writing a letter when I arrived. (*Word-by-word translation*)

Arabic makes use of the future form of *kana*, *sayakunuu*, in order to designate future actions. This is followed by the base of the verb rather than the active participle.

e.g. Saleh sayakunuu yaktubu risalatan endama nasilu

Saleh will be writing a letter when we arrive. (*Word-by-word translation*)

Hence it is obvious that in tune with the pattern in Arabic, Arab learners of English are likely to retain the copula in their English in the past and future progressive aspects due to positive transfer, whereas they will tend to omit it in the present progressive due to negative transfer (Al-zahrani, 1993).

Wright (1976) explains that the present passive form in Arabic is created by making an internal vowel change to the present active verb form.

e.g. Tuzra'uu alghahwatu fil Yemen

harvesting coffee in Yemen.

Coffee is grown in Yemen.

If we add the present form of the auxiliary verb *kana* (*takanuu*), the resultant construction will become ungrammatical. Arabic requires that no form of the auxiliary verb *kana* appears in this present passive construction. For example:

(Surigat mahfadati)

pass.pst.steal my.wallet.

My wallet was stolen.

In the past passive construction, we also do not need any form of the auxiliary verb *kana*. If we use the past form of the auxiliary verb in this construction, it will only give rise to an ungrammatical construction. For example:

(Kanat surigat haqebati)

be.pst stolen my bag.

My bag was stolen.

The inference is that Arab learners of English are likely to omit the auxiliary verb *be* in their English passive constructions because of negative transfer from their Arabic as the auxiliary is not present in the Arabic passive form.

With respect to the use of *be* as a main and auxiliary verb in English, and the use of the corresponding Arabic verb *kana*, we may come to certain conclusions about the similarities between English and Arabic:

i. Arabic is similar to English as regards the use of *kana* as a main verb to refer to both past and future actions and situations. In both, the complement can be a noun phrase, an adjectival phrase or an adverbial phrase.

Examples:

Past: Ana kuntu honka. (Arabic)

I was there. (English)

Future: Ana sawfa akunu honaka qada. (Arabic)

I will be there tomorrow. (English)

ii. Both languages behave the same way as regards to the use of *be* or *kana* as the main verb with the existential *there* or *fih* when they refer to the past or future actions or situations.

Examples:

Past: Kana honaka rajolun. (Arabic)

There was a man there (English)

Future: Sayakunu honaka rajolun. (Arabic)

There will be a man there. (English)

iii. In the past, as well as the future, progressive aspects from Arabic behave like English in using *kana* as an auxiliary verb.

Past: Heya kanat taqra endama wasaltu. (Arabic)

She was reading when I arrived. (English)

Future: Huwa sayakunu yaqra endama tasil. (Arabic)

He will be reading when you arrive. (English)

Based on the similarities listed above, we may form the inference that Arab learners of English are likely to show positive transfer in the use of the copula because Arabic is similar to English in this respect. Therefore, the use of *kana* as a main verb or as an auxiliary in Arabic to refer to the past or the future is positively transferred to English because both require the copula

in this context. In terms of whether the verb *be* or *kana* is needed, there is likely to be interference from Arabic in the case of Arab students learning English (Al-Zahrani, 1993).

On the contrary, there are marked differences between English and Arabic with regard to the use of *be* or *kana* as the main verb and as the auxiliary verb. The following are the major differences:

i. Arabic does not require *kana* as a main verb at all, whereas English does use *be* as a main verb in many sentences.

Examples:

Huwa Muhammad. (Arabic)

He is Muhammad. (English)

ii. In the present tense, Arabic does not need *kana* as a main verb with *fih* (Arabic for existential *there*), while English requires it.

Examples:

Fih rajolun honaka. (Arabic)

There is a man there. (English)

iii. Arabic does not permit the presence of *kana* as an auxiliary verb in passive construction and in passive progressive form, but English needs it.

Passive: Arrajolu duriba. (Arabic)

The man was hit. (English)

Passive progressive: Huwa ydrabu.(Arabic)

He is being hitting. (English)

The following section will present empirical studies that have been conducted on copula omission my English learners. It will examine the studies and their results.

### **2.13 Empirical Studies on Copula Omission**

The Table 7 (represents a summary of a number of empirical studies that have examined the above mentioned aspects. The below mentioned studies are descriptive studies while this thesis consists of descriptive and inferential data.

One of the studies that have investigated the copula omission by English learners was a study conducted by Roselind Wee (2009) in order to identify the most common verb-form errors made by Malaysian Malay learners of English. The paper was published in the *European Journal of Social Sciences* in the year 2009.

The researcher randomly chose 50 Malaysian Malay students from a public university in Malaysia; 50 per cent of the samples were female. They were made to write three different kinds of essays – narrative, descriptive and expository essays.

Table 2.13.1: Summary of Empirical Studies in Terms of Copula Omission

Source	Participants	Instrument	Results
Wee (2009)	50 Malay students	Write three different kinds of essays— narrative, descriptive, and expository	Errors of omission, addition, misinformation, and ordering; errors of omission involved the omission of compulsory elements in tense or in aspect.
Butler-Tanaka (2000)	8 Japanese English learners	Speech recording & writing samples	Wrong use of prepositions and pronouns; errors with respect to verb usage, and wrong use of auxiliary and copula omission.
Al-Zahrani (1993)	36 ESL Arabic learners	Writing samples	Students omit the English copula in the present tense more frequently than in the other tenses.
Abu-Jarad (2008)	179 Jordanian students registered in the second semester at Al-Azhar University in Gaza	Grammar test comprising of 59 questions covering 13 problematic grammatical aspects	Errors in the use of wrong articles, use of the correct tense forms, verb formation, and copula dropping.
Kasem (1997)	10 Lebanese students	Writing Samples	Copula omission and incorrect use of the copula.

The narrative essay was designed to test their use of the past tense, while the descriptive essay tested their grasp of the present tense, and the expository essay aimed at testing their

understanding of the future tense. It was stipulated that each essay was to be approximately 150 words in length.

Upon analysis of the written output, the researcher identified the errors made by the writers and categorized them as errors of omission, addition, incorrect formation, and ordering. Errors of omission involved the omission of compulsory elements in tense or aspect. For instance, in the simple past tense, the ‘-ed’ ending was often absent, as was the ‘-s/es’ ending of verbs after the third person singular in the simple present tense.

Another major omission was that of the copula “be” in simple present and simple past tenses. Errors of addition involved the use of redundant tense markers such as the “-s/es” marker after the verb, even when the noun or pronoun was plural in number, or the “-d/ed” marker after the verb, even when it was not necessary. Examples cited by the researcher are “cuted” for “cut” and “puted” for “put.” Double marking was also identified, as in “My neighbor *doesn’t likes* Mary,” or in “The thief *didn’t ran* away.”

The study found that the copula “be” is frequently added to the main verbs where it is redundant. For instance, students wrote sentences like “She *is works* in my school.”

It was found that errors of incorrect formation formed an imposing 63.4% of all errors. For example, the researcher found that the subjects wrote sentences such as “The *men was* here last night,” or “*She have* five children.”

Finally, the students often made errors of ordering, as in the use of correct elements in wrong sequences, like in indirect speech. For example, “They asked me where was the girl.” Yet another example was noticed in the construction of phrasal verbs, such as in “I pick up her.”

Altogether, the 50 students made as many as 1,398 errors in their writings. All the three essay types showed the four errors previously discussed. It was found in the analysis that errors

of misinformation led the list with 63.4%, followed by errors of omission with 29%. Error of addition constituted 7.6%, whereas error of ordering accounted for 0.1%. Detailed analysis revealed that the highest percentage of errors (40.3%) was found in narrative essays. Descriptive essays contained 32.7% of the 1,398 errors, while expository essays had only 27% of all errors.

It was also found that the highest percentage of errors was in the past tense (37.6%), followed by the present tense (33.7%) and the future tense (21.5%).

The main conclusion of the study was that Malaysian students tended to use the stem form of the verb in all contexts, regardless of the tense. They tended to omit the use of “be” because Malay language permits sentences without verbs. Thus the researcher concluded that Malay students have to master the basic grammatical aspects of the English language to improve their proficiency and fluency. This defect has its pedagogical impact as well, and it is the responsibility of teachers to pay more attention to this aspect of English language learning.

In a dissertation submitted to the University of Birmingham , Butler-Tanaka (2000) looked at the general failure of a foreign- or second-language learner to achieve near-native proficiency in the target language, due to the inability to correct persistent errors. The author examines the reasons for this fossilization and concludes that, although it cannot be remedied easily, a consciousness-raising approach can be of much use.

Though there have been several studies on the consequences of negative transfer in the case of Arabic students learning English as a second language, another study is warranted which takes the problem of copula omission by Arabic students of English. Consequently the present study undertook a systematic analysis of the case in different contexts.

The subject of this study comprised eight Japanese learners of English, split equally between males and females. The class took place once a week in a factory in the early evening.

First, the learners were given a questionnaire to elicit information relating to their educational backgrounds, their attitudes toward English when they first started to learn it, their reasons for learning it, the problems they faced while using English in real-life situations, and the learning strategies they employed. As part of data collection, three separate recordings of the lessons were made, and the errors were listed. Three of the eight learners made most of the errors.

After this, the errors were classified into two groups: those related to articles, prepositions, and pronouns, and errors with respect to verb usage. The second category included omission of verbs, inappropriate verb tense, inappropriate verb choice, wrong use of auxiliary verbs, and the use of wrong modals. Most of the errors were with regard to inappropriate verb tense, where errors were made in every tense. It was found that the omission of the copula “be” was prevalent. Three of the participants made a total of seven errors involving the omission of the copula out of a total of sixteen errors made. In fact, the omission of the copula “be” accounted for the largest number of errors in the omission of verbs group. Also, it is to be noticed that one participant was responsible for most of those errors.

A simple conclusion drawn by the researcher was that it was in present tense usage that most of the errors were made. Naturally, more attention should be paid to that area in grammar. The omission of verbs was not noticed in the past tense.

As most of these errors can be put down to first language influence, the remedy lies in de-fossilization. The author examines available literature to see the various solutions suggested for solving fossilization and finds that the general view of scholars is that it is impossible to remedy fossilization. However, the contention of the present study is that learners may be saved from the fossilization impact through consciousness-raising tasks. But, it should be kept in mind that there might be some resistance to the idea of doing grammar tasks every now and then. One

recommendation made here is that consciousness-raising tasks might be more effective with individuals rather than with groups.

Attempting de-fossilization at a class-level may be highly problematic. Thus it is highly recommended that such tasks aimed at improving the efficiency of learning English may be attempted on an individual level for better results. This is particularly significant in the light of the general dislike of regular grammar tasks. It is generally said that there cannot be an ideal learner. Therefore, removing defects in the learning process is often a difficult task, although not an impossible one. Existing research on related topics was scanned to understand which all aspects of the problem have been studied.

Al-Zahrani (1993) conducted a study to measure the omission of the English copula among Arab ESL learners. The subjects of this study were 36 Arabic learners of English in the English Program for Internationals at the University of South Carolina. Various written samples were collected for the primary data of this study. The samples were from the compositions the students wrote at the beginning and end of the EPI sessions in 1991 and 1992.

The oral data for this study were obtained from 15 students whose writing samples were analyzed as part of the study. The oral interviews consisted of a number of questions intended to initiate conversations in an informal setting. The questions were framed in such a way that the answers would require the English copula in different tenses. One example of the questions is “What is your favorite American food?”

Collected data were analyzed carefully and systematically and was computed using a spreadsheet program. During the analysis, the overall number of students who wrote sentences with copula omission was calculated systematically.

The analysis revealed certain common trends. The major finding was that more students omitted the English copula in the present tense more frequently than in other tenses. It was found that the percentage of students omitting the copula was 69.4%, while it was retained by the remaining 30.6%.

Of the 36 students whose written samples were analyzed, 22 students wrote sentences that require the copula in the past tense, with 21 of the 22 retaining the copula. Thus the percentage of students omitting the copula in the past tense was only 4.5%. In the future tense, no student omitted the copula. This indicates that more students tend to omit the copula in the present tense than in all other tenses. It corroborates the basic hypothesis of the study, which states that the omission of the English copula is due to the negative transfer or interference from Arabic, which does not have the copula in the present tense. On the other hand, the retention of the copula in the past and future tenses is due to positive transfer from Arabic, which (like English) requires a copula in these tenses. Quite interestingly, the copula was not omitted in cases that used the existential *there*. The findings confirmed those from the oral interviews.

There was a similar study conducted by Abu-Jarad (2008) with 179 English major students registered in the second semester at Al-Azhar University in Gaza. They were given a grammar test comprising 59 questions on 13 problematic grammatical aspects. The general conclusion from the data analysis is that there is a natural development in the students' control of the grammatical items as they move to upper levels. That shows that more exposure to the language tends to result in a significant reduction in grammatical errors.

The subjects of the study were chosen carefully and at random. Sixty-five per cent of the 179 students chosen were females with similar educational backgrounds. The chosen students were given 59 multiple choice questions designed to test their ability to understand and use 13

problematic grammar aspects. The questions had to be answered in an hour, under the supervision of the researcher and a few colleagues.

Statistical tools, such as frequency percentages, means, and standard deviations were used during the analysis of the data. A one-way analysis of variance to measure the differences in these students' performance with respect to the 13 grammar questions was also done. The possible difference in relation to gender was also studied.

In order to have a clear view of the students' performance, the researcher compared their mean performance scores as determined by the multiple choice test. It was obvious that there were significant differences in the students' performance with respect to their study levels. The more advanced the students, the less frequent were the errors made. It was also demonstrated that females had a much better performance overall for the 13 grammatical categories selected, implying that female students were more motivated than male students to learn English.

The general conclusion was that there were serious mistakes in the students' written responses. The most noticeable mistake happened to be the use of the wrong articles. The inference was that English language teachers must pay more attention when teaching about articles and must compare English articles with the use of articles in Arabic. There were also serious errors in the use of the correct tense forms; hence more emphasis must be placed on the tense. Verb formation and copula dropping were among the major errors that the participants in this study made.

The study recommended that grammar instructors conduct a pretest before they begin their grammar course. The pretest will enable them to identify problem areas and plan the means to help the students solve weaknesses. More situational grammar drills may be given to the learners of English. The study also recommends giving more attention to male students, because

they seem to have less motivation than female students. The final recommendation is to make error management a collective effort.

Kasem (1997) conducted a study which was published in the book *Diversity in Language: Contrastive Studies in English and Arabic Theoretical and Applied linguistics*, edited by Zeinab Ibrahim, Nagwa Kassabgy and Sabiha Aydelott. The basic concern in this study was to examine the manner and order in which English is acquired and developed as a second language – particularly the English copula structure – by the native speakers of Lebanese Arabic in a classroom environment. Another aim was to examine what role the first language (L1) had on the acquisition of English (L2). The basic assumption behind the study was that both L1 and L2 are acquired in the same way. A resultant assumption was that L2 learners' errors are similar to errors made by L1 learners.

Because this was a longitudinal study over a six-month period, it did not have many subjects. The sample for the study consisted of only 10 newly arrived Lebanese-born students randomly selected from Brunswick Language Centre in Melbourne, Australia. Half were female. The criteria were age, ethnographic background, motivation for learning English, and previous experience with the language.

All the subjects were highly motivated and very keen to improve their English language skills so that they could join the Australian school system and communicate more effectively with native speakers of English.

Data was collected through direct interviews and a written questionnaire, as well as through the regular visits the researcher made to the language center. It was generally observed that the subjects tended to use English only when they were talking to non-Lebanese friends or

teachers. The exposure to English was limited, and consequently the number of errors was also very high – especially among females, who had far less exposure.

Written data was collected three times, on a bimonthly basis. A total of 30 compositions were collected and analyzed. The average length of each composition was about 225 words. From the data, it was clear that the English copula was a major problem for all participants. In fact, in Arabic a correct sentence can exist without a verb. Consequently, the copula *be* is not used in the following sentence patterns by the Lebanese students: + *to be* + *noun*, *noun* + *to be* + *adjective*, and + *to be* + *adverb*.

All data was analyzed for instances of copula errors. The submissions had errors of both copula omission and incorrect use. Omissions were noticed in sentences such as: “There four people in my family,” “My sister unhappy in Italy,” and “My husband name Anwar.” Other sentences demonstrated incorrect copula use: “I have four teachers their name is...,” “The boys name is..,” and “There are one Lebanese student in my class.”

The study concludes that omission of the copula was the greatest problem with the subjects’ use of English. There were as many as 208 such errors in 329 cases. The second major problem was the incorrect use of the copula. Errors of this type were found in 77 cases out of 185.

The study also highlighted that as the learners advanced through their English language learning process, the errors they made with respect to the English copula became less frequent. Thus more exposition to the language has a positive impact on the reduction of copula errors among foreign learners of English.

The present study was undoubtedly benefited by the researches that have already been conducted in this area. Care was taken to take up aspects least studied and those which needed

more elaborate and systematic research and analysis. Consequently, much insight has been obtained into the problem of copula omission found among foreign learners of English, especially among Arabic learners of English. That is expected to help those who make plans for more effective learning of English as a second language or as a foreign language.

#### **2.14. Chapter Conclusion**

In conclusion, this chapter looked at the literature related the copula omission by English learners and discussed the problem and reasons why Arab ESL/ EFL learners omit the English copula when writing. Moreover, it also provided a detailed discussion about language transfer; negative and positive transfer, interlanguage and intralanguage. Additionally, this chapter gave contrastive analysis of verb to “be” in English and Arabic language. It also offered a detailed explanation of verb to “be” in Arabic and its structures in different tenses and forms. Furthermore, it presented various studies that have been conducted on the omission of copula. This research is different from other researches in a way it contains both descriptive and inferential data. Moreover, the study examined ESL Saudi learners of English in Saudi Arabia while Al-Zahrani`s study (1993) was conducted on Arabic speakers learning English in the United States. Furthermore, this study examines the negative and positive transfer from Arabic to English as well as to a comparison between the two languages structures. The next chapter, chapter III, will discuss the research methods of this thesis.

## **CHAPTER III: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

This chapter gives a detailed description of how the study was conducted. It also sheds light on the settings in which the study was carried out, who the participants were, what methods were used in this study, and how the data was collected and analyzed. The research questions and hypotheses framed for the study are discussed at the end of the chapter.

### **3.1 Setting**

The study was conducted among Arabic EFL participants enrolled in the English department at University in Saudi Arabia. The participants were drawn from both the intermediate and advanced levels. At the time of data collection the intermediate-level participants were studying at the third level while the advanced-level group was studying at the seventh level. At the seventh level, the students should have already finished advanced grammar courses, while the intermediate group would have studied only a few points of basic English grammar. In order to enroll in the English department at that University, a student must finish and pass the “intensive course,” a six-month preparatory course. A student must get 60% or more in the final exam of the intensive course to pass to the first level. The components of the intensive course cover the four skills of English: reading, writing, speaking and listening. The students attend only two lectures a day of two hours each for four days a week.

### **3.2 Participants**

Since the study was exclusively among English EFL learners in Arabic communities, the data for this thesis were collected only from selected students of the English department at

University in Saudi Arabia. The participants chosen for this study were 100 male Saudi EFL learners in the English department at Saudi Arabian University, aged between 19 and 25. Half of the participants were enrolled at the intermediate level or the third level whereas the other half were enrolled at the advanced level, which is the seventh level in the English department at same University. All the participants had attended a high school in Saudi Arabia before enrolling there. Before collecting the data samples, an approval was obtained from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Colorado State University to conduct the study among the participants.

### **3.3 The Instruments**

Before conducting the actual study, the author conducted a pilot study on four students to test the validity of the chosen instrument. The data collection for this study was through essay writing. Both groups were asked to write an essay describing themselves, their parents, their siblings and the city they live in. The students were told not to write their names or the names of any of their family members. Before choosing this topic, the author had consulted some of the English teachers about which topic to choose to ensure that the participants would write the essay using many copular verbs.

### **3.4 Method**

Once the IRB granted the sanction to conduct the study, the author travelled to Saudi Arabia to collect the data samples. The researcher contacted the faculty members of the English department at that University to choose the best time to collect the data samples without affecting the examination schedule. The data samples were collected at different times. Since there were two classes of the third-level and two classes of the seventh-level, the researcher had to conduct his study in all the classrooms. The data collection was a voluntary task for the students and some students refused to do it while others wanted to do it on a different day. The

author had to go to the school many times to collect data. Before collecting the data, the researcher gave detailed instructions to the students. First of all, I introduced myself and then gave some information about the thesis topic and why I have chosen it. Moreover, the participants were told that the test was voluntary. The researcher reminded the students not to give any personal information such as their names or the names of any family members. The participants were assured that the information would be confidential and that the researcher would be the only one to have access to it. Then the participants were given 50 minutes of class time to write an essay describing themselves, their parents, siblings and the city they live in. Each student was assigned a number, so names did not have to be used. During the test, the students were asked not to use a dictionary, laptop, cell phone or any of their study materials.

### **3.5 Data Scoring Procedures**

After the data were collected, the researcher manually corrected each while counting the total number of sentences in each essay. Then, the researcher manually counted the total number of sentences that required copula as well as the total number of sentences that required copulas in the present tense, past tense, future tense and after “there.” The essays were examined carefully to calculate the number of correct sentences and the number of errors a student made in the present tenses, past tense, future tense, and after “there.” After counting all of the errors, the researcher ran the data through an Excel sheet to get the percentage of errors in the sentences. Finally, the data was analyzed in a SPSS using different types of tests.

### **3.6 Research Questions and Hypothesis**

Research Questions:

1. Why do Arab EFL learners omit the English verb *to be*?
2. In which linguistic environments do Arab EFL learners omit the English verb *to be*?
3. Is there a significant difference between advanced and intermediate EFL learners in omitting copulas?

Research Hypotheses:

- Omission of copulas by Arab learners of English is a result of negative transfer or interference from Arabic in those situations where Arabic does not require the verb *to be*.
- Since Arabic does not require copula verbs in the present tense, Arab EFL learners omit the present tense verbs when writing in English.
- Advanced Arab EFL learners make fewer copula errors than students at the intermediate proficiency level.

### **3.7 Chapter Conclusion**

This chapter provided a description of the methodology adopted for this study and discussed certain basic information such as the number of participants and their educational backgrounds as well as the research questions and hypotheses. Samples of the participants' writings will be provided on the appendix. The next chapter will provide a detailed analysis of the results of this study to see whether the hypotheses mentioned above have been proved or disproved.

## **CHAPTER IV**

### **RESULTS OF THE STUDY**

This chapter shows the statistical analysis findings of the study presented in chapter III. It also provides a detailed description of the data and discusses them in a relation to the thesis. Statistical, descriptive, inferential, and correlation Analysis were used. Moreover, tests of normality and the Mann-Whitney U test were also applied to provide a full description of the data. The data were analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS).

The study samples were divided into two groups of 50 according to their language level (intermediate and advanced), and they were asked to write an essay. The total number of sentences in each student's essay, the number of sentences that used copular verbs in any form (present tense, past tense, future tense, and after "there"), and the number of errors made in each sentence were counted and recorded.

The main objective of this study was to determine which group of students makes fewer mistakes. Another aim of this study was to investigate the nature of the relationship between the number of sentences and the number of errors.

#### **4.1. Statistical Analysis Methodology**

The data analyzed in the SPSS 17.0. Statistical Analysis includes two sections: descriptive analysis and inferential analysis. The descriptive analysis section discusses the distribution of the variables and explores whether each variable comes from a normal

distribution or not in order to determine the type of analysis to be used. This section included a statistic frequency and distribution table, test of normality table, histograms and boxes plot.

The inferential analysis section concentrates more on testing and comparing the two groups of students and the relationship between the variables. Nonparametric statistical tests were used because the variables were found to differ from the normal distribution. In this section Mann-Whitney test was used to test the null hypothesis that the two independent samples come from the same population. Correlation analysis was used to study the relationship between the number of sentences and the number of errors. Spearman's rho was the nonparametric correlation coefficient used to measure the association between both types of variables. Moreover, Levene's test was also applied to figure out if the variances of the two groups are equal or not.

#### **4.2. Descriptive Analysis**

In SPSS, the Frequencies procedure was run; it provided statistics and graphical displays useful in describing many types of variables. Summaries of individual variables provide an important first look at the data. These summaries help determine typical values of the variables, check the assumptions for statistical procedures, and check the quality of the data. The Frequencies procedure was used here to study the distribution of the number of each type of sentence and the number of errors or incorrect sentences. The following "Statistics" table shows very interesting descriptive statistics for all variables; it is followed by a full explanation.

Table 4.2.1: Frequency and Distribution. Intermediate Group

		<i>Statistics</i>									
Student Group		Total	Total	Present		Past		Future		after "there"	
		Sent	Sent Cop Verbs	Use	Omit	Use	Omit	Use	Omit	Use	Omit
N	Valid	50	50	50	50	50	50	50	50	50	50
	Missing	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
<b>Mean</b>		<b>16.46</b>	<b>11.12</b>	<b>8.84</b>	<b>2.66</b>	<b>1.84</b>	<b>.84</b>	<b>.28</b>	<b>.10</b>	<b>.10</b>	<b>.02</b>
Median		15.00	11.00	8.00	2.00	1.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00
Mode		19	12	8	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
Std. Deviation		6.695	4.434	3.437	2.745	1.952	1.267	.454	.303	.303	.141
Minimum		7	4	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Maximum		37	26	24	11	7	4	1	1	1	1
Intermediate	Percentiles	25	11.00	8.00	7.00	1.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00

Table 4.2.2: Frequency and Distribution: Intermediate Group

		50	15.00	11.00	8.00	2.00	1.00	.00	.00	.00	.00
		75	20.25	13.00	10.00	3.25	3.25	1.25	1.00	.00	.00
N	Valid	50	50	50	50	50	50	50	50	50	50
	Missing	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
<b>Mean</b>		<b>12.64</b>	<b>9.54</b>	<b>8.14</b>	<b>1.36</b>	<b>.94</b>	<b>.40</b>	<b>.18</b>	<b>.06</b>	<b>.18</b>	<b>.00</b>
Median		12.00	8.50	7.50	1.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00
Mode		11	6	6	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Std. Deviation		4.780	3.593	3.399	1.626	1.284	.700	.438	.240	.720	.000
Minimum		6	5	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Maximum		28	17	16	6	6	3	2	1	4	0
Advanced	Percentiles	25	9.00	6.75	6.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00
		50	12.00	8.50	7.50	1.00	.00	.00	.00	.00	.00
		75	15.00	12.25	10.25	2.00	2.00	1.00	.00	.00	.00

The *Statistics* table tells us several interesting things about the distribution of variables.

Referring to the first variable: Count of Total Sentences by intermediate students:

- The center of the distribution can be approximated by the median (or second quartile) 15.00, and half of the data values fall between 11.00 and 20.25, the first and third quartiles. Also, the most extreme values are 7 and 37, the minimum and maximum.
- The mean is different from the median, suggesting that the distribution is asymmetric, with some distant values in a positive direction from the center of the distribution.

Other variables can be explored in the same manner. A great visual summary for scale data is the histogram, which summarizes the distribution of the values. The following histograms show the distribution of the counts of the different types of sentences and errors, preceded by test of normality.

Table 4.2.3: Test of Normality

<i>Test of Normality</i>	<b>Student Group</b>	<b>Kolmogorov-Smirnov<sup>a</sup></b>		
		<b>Statistic</b>	<b>df</b>	<b>Sig.</b>
Number of Total Sentences	Intermediate	.126	50	.045
	Advanced	.113	50	<b>.136</b>
Total of Number Sentences Requiring Copular Verbs	Intermediate	.161	50	.002
	Advanced	.166	50	.001
Number of Sentences Requiring Copular Verbs – Present (Use)	Intermediate	.185	50	.000
	Advanced	.176	50	.000
Number of Sentences Requiring Copular Verbs – Present (Omit)	Intermediate	.211	50	.000
	Advanced	.248	50	.000
Number of Sentences Requiring Copular Verbs – Past	Intermediate	.207	50	.000

(Use)	Advanced	.288	50	.000
Number of Sentences Requiring Copular Verbs – Past	Intermediate	.346	50	.000
(Omit)	Advanced	.416	50	.000
Number of Sentences Requiring Copular Verbs –	Intermediate	.451	50	.000
Future (Use)	Advanced	.500	50	.000
Number of Sentences Requiring Copular Verbs –	Intermediate	.529	50	.000
Future (Omit)	Advanced	.539	50	.000
Count of Sentences Requiring Copular Verbs after	Intermediate	.529	50	.000
"there" (Use)	Advanced	.519	50	.000
Count of Sentences Requiring Copular Verbs after	Intermediate	.536	50	.000
"there" (Omit)				

a. Lilliefors Significance Correction

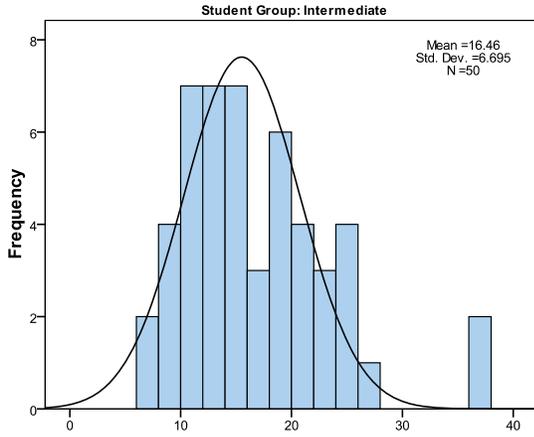
b. Count of Sentences Requiring Copular Verbs after "there" (Omit) is constant when Student Group = Advanced. It has been omitted.

The test of normality (Kolmogorov-Smirnov) overlays a normal curve on actual data to assess the fit. The table above shows a separate panel for each variable and each panel is divided into two groups; namely, intermediate and advanced students groups. Under the Kolmogorov-Smirnov label, we can see three values, which are the statistic, df, and the p-value (or sig.). The test statistic quantifies the discrepancy between the distribution of the data and normal distribution - larger values denoting larger discrepancies. It is not informative by itself, but is used to compute the p-value. The p-value is used to decide whether the test is significant or not. P-values, smaller than 0.05, refer to significant tests. A significant test means the fit is poor. For all of the variables – except the number of total sentences made by the advanced students group,

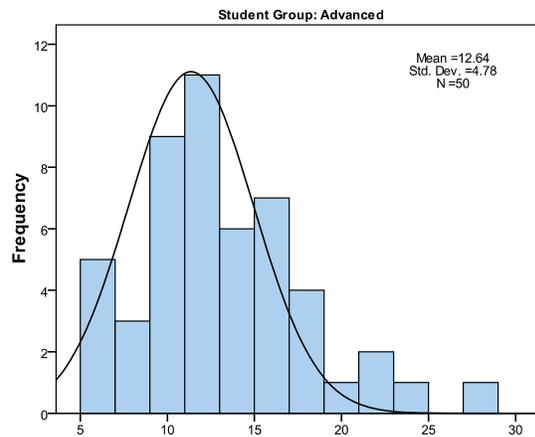
the test is significant; they fit the normal curve poorly. This can be seen in the histograms drawn below.

Table 4.2.4: Histogram

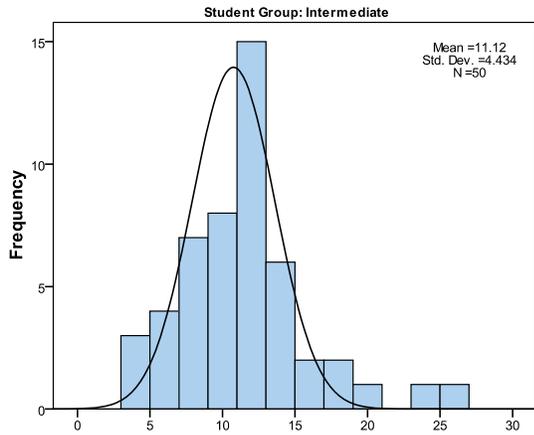
**Total Sentences Count  
Intermediate Group**



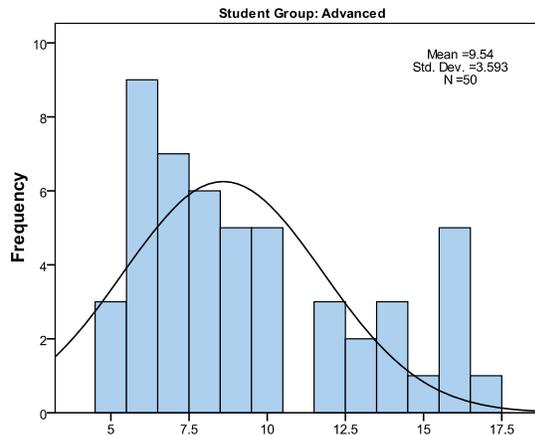
**Total Sentences Count  
Advanced Group**



**Total Sentences Count Requiring Copular Verbs  
Intermediate Group**

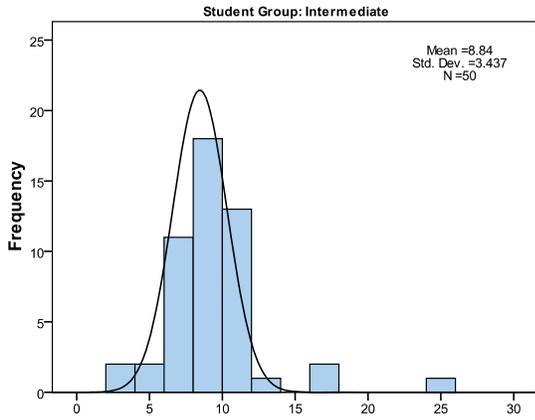


**Total Sentences Count Requiring Copular Verbs  
Advanced Group**

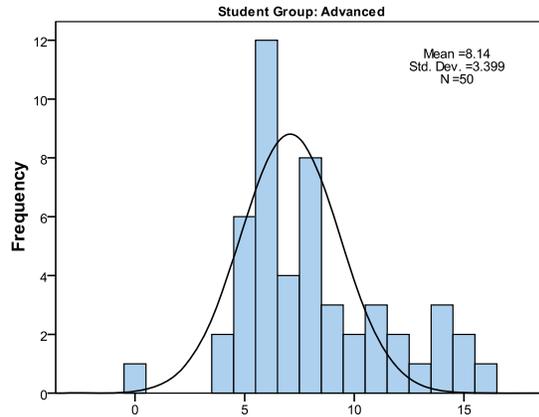


**Total Sentences Count Requiring Present Tense Verbs  
Intermediate Group**

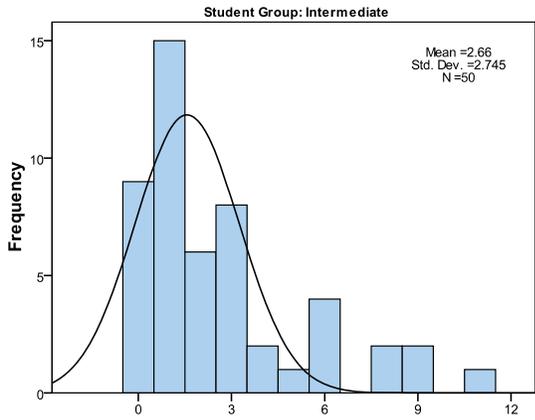
**Total Sentences Count Requiring Present Tense Verbs  
Advanced Group**



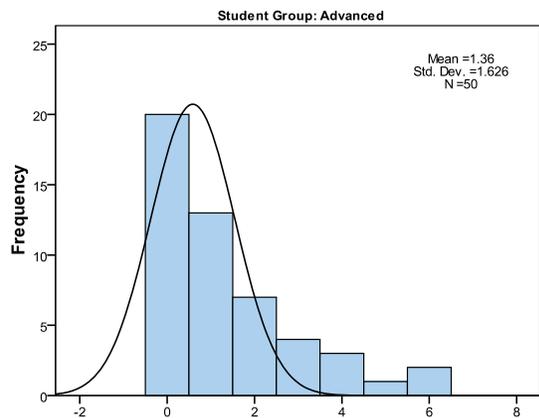
**Total Sentences Count Requiring Present Tense Verbs with Errors**  
Intermediate Group



**Total Sentences Count Requiring Present Tense Verbs with Errors**  
Advanced Group

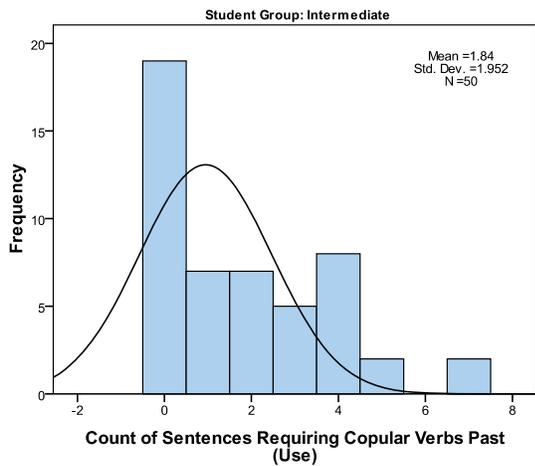


**Total Sentences Count Requiring Past Tense Verbs**  
Intermediate Group

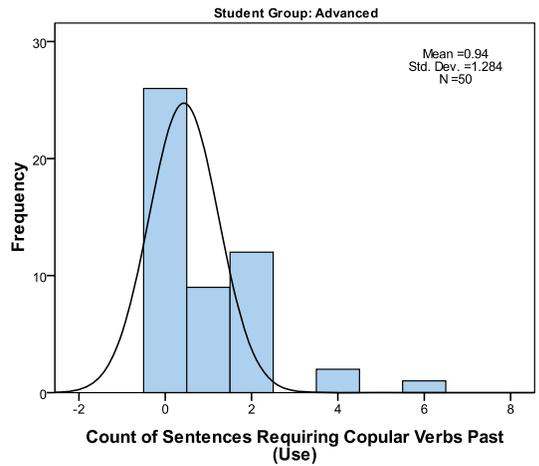


**Total Sentences Count Requiring Past Tense Verbs**  
Advanced Group

**Count of Sentences Requiring Copular Verbs Past (Use)**

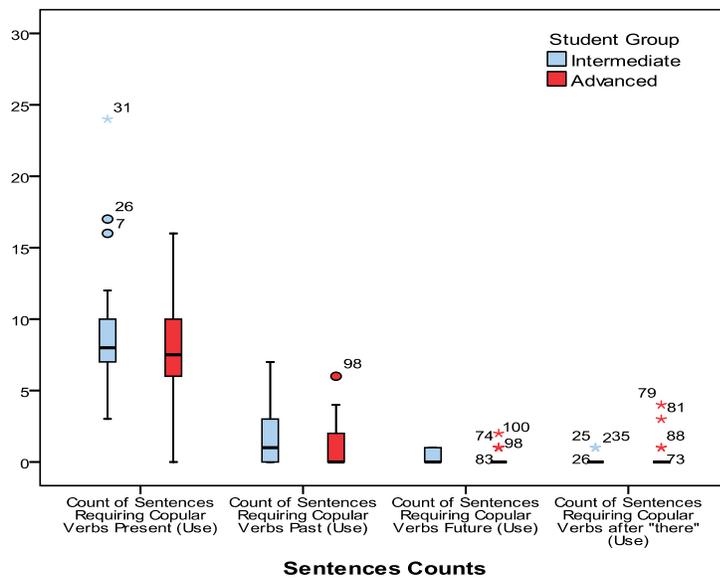


**Count of Sentences Requiring Copular Verbs Past (Use)**



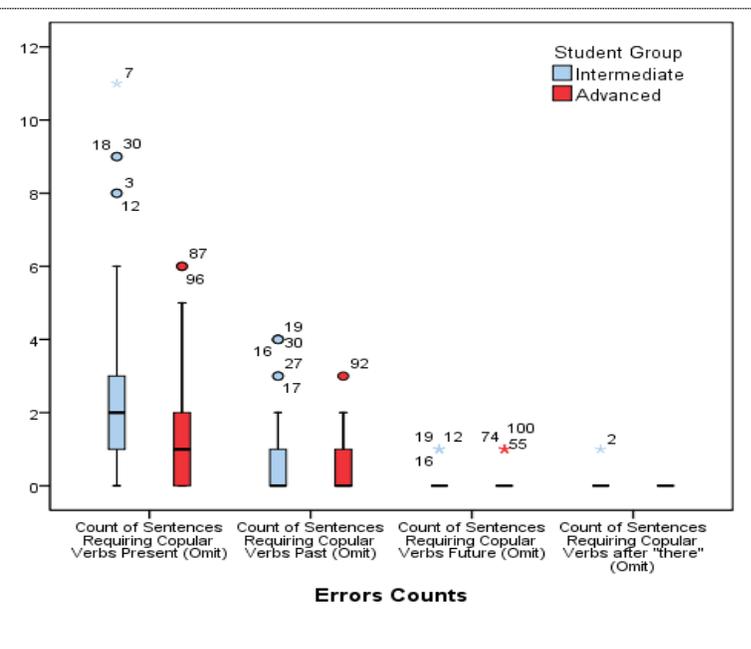
The histograms above show that all distributions are not close to normal curve. This is because higher values (or extreme values) are pulling the mean to the right tail of the distribution, which also inflates the standard deviation values. Many statistical procedures for quantitative data are less reliable when the distribution of data values is markedly non-normal, as is the case with those variables. Sometimes a transformation of the variable can bring the distribution of values closer to normal. The following box plot shows the existence of the extreme values labeled by the number of cases.

Table 4.2.5: Box Plot – Intermediate vs. Advanced: Count of Sentences



The box plot above shows the distribution of the number of sentences in their four forms grouped by intermediate and advanced students. The asterisks refer to the extreme values, and the circles refer to the outliers. Those values cause the distributions to have long right tails. The number of sentences is similar in both groups of students for all forms of sentence tenses.

Table 4.2.6: Box Plot - Intermediate vs. Advanced: Count of Errors



The boxplot above shows that the number of errors made by intermediate students is higher than that of advanced students. The previous exploration procedures showed that the variables are not normally distributed. Therefore, either the variables' values must be transformed, or nonparametric statistical tools must be applied. In applying transformation to these variables, some became normalized (or closer to normal distribution) and others got farther from normality. Therefore, to avoid problems of transformation, it is recommended that non-parametric statistical techniques be used, because they do not assume normality.

### 4.3. Inferential Analysis

To determine which group is better, the Mann-Whitney U test is applied. This test is the equivalent of the parametric t-test used to compare two groups of cases for one variable. The Mann-Whitney U statistic is used to test the null hypothesis that the two independent samples

come from the same population. The following is the main form of the hypothesis we need to test; it is tested for the four tense forms:

$H_0$ : *The number of errors made by intermediate students is equal to the number of errors made by advanced students.*

$H_1$ : *The number of errors made by intermediate students is greater than the number of errors made by advanced students.*

Table 4.3.1: Mann-Whitney Test: Number of Errors (Present Tense)

**Ranks: Number of Errors (Present Tense)**

Errors	Student Group	N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks
Present (Omit)	Intermediate	50	58.04	2902.00
	Advanced	50	42.96	2148.00
	Total	100		

Table 4.3.2: Mann-Whitney Test: Number of Errors (Past Tense)

**Ranks: Number of Errors (Past Tense)**

Errors	Student Group	N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks
Past (Omit)	Intermediate	50	54.16	2708.00
	Advanced	50	46.84	2342.00
	Total	100		

Table 4.3.3: Mann-Whitney Test: Number of Errors (Future Tense)

**Ranks: Number of Errors (Future Tense)**

Errors	Student Group	N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks
Future (Omit)	Intermediate	50	51.50	2575.00
	Advanced	50	49.50	2475.00
	Total	100		

Table 4.3.4: Mann-Whitney Test: Number of Errors (After “there”)

<b>Ranks: Number of Errors (After “there”)</b>				
<b>Errors</b>	<b>Student Group</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>Mean Rank</b>	<b>Sum of Ranks</b>
After "there" (Omit)	Intermediate	50	51.00	2550.00
	Advanced	50	50.00	2500.00
	Total	100		

The Mann-Whitney test is based on the ranks of the original values and not on the values themselves. The *Ranks* table for each test variable is shown above. First, each case is ranked without regard to group membership. Cases tied on a particular value receive the average rank for that value. After ranking the cases, the ranks are summed within groups. Average ranks adjust for differences in the number of students in both groups. If the groups are only randomly different, the average ranks should be about equal. For Present (Omit), the average ranks are over 15 points apart. For other variables, there are point differences of about 7.32, 2, and 1 between the average ranks of the intermediate and advanced groups.

Table 4.3.5: Test Statistics

<b>Test Statistics<sup>a</sup></b>				
	Present (Omit)	Past (Omit)	Future (Omit)	After "there" (Omit)
Mann-Whitney U	873.000	1067.000	1200.000	1225.000
Wilcoxon W	2148.000	2342.000	2475.000	2500.000
Z	-2.667	-1.489	-.734	-1.000
<b>Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)</b>	<b>.008</b>	<b>.136</b>	<b>.463</b>	<b>.317</b>

a. Grouping Variable: Student Group

The Test Statistics table shows three types of statistics. The U statistic is simple (but tedious) to calculate. For each case in group 1, the number of cases in group 2 with higher ranks is counted. Tied ranks count as 1/2. This process is repeated for group 2. The Mann-Whitney U statistic displayed in the table is the smaller of these two values. The Wilcoxon W statistic is simply the smaller of the two rank sums displayed for each group in the rank table. The values displayed here are the rank sums for the advanced group. A nice feature of the Mann-Whitney and Wilcoxon tests is that the Z statistic and normal distribution provide excellent approximations as the sample size grows beyond 10 in either group.

The negative Z statistic indicates that the rank sums are lower than their expected values. Each two-tailed significance value estimates the probability of obtaining a Z statistic that is as extreme or more extreme (in absolute value) than the one displayed, given no true effect of the treatment.

The asymptotic significance values are used to decide which tests are significant. Looking at those values in the above table, we can see that asymp. Sig. or the *P*-value for Present (Omit) is smaller than 0.05 indicating that the test is significant. That is, the advanced group's significantly lower rank sum for errors made in sentences requiring the use of present tense verbs indicates that advanced students make significantly fewer errors in this type of sentence than intermediate students. On the other hand, there was no statistically significant difference between the number of errors made by intermediate and advanced students in sentences requiring verbs in the past and future tenses as well as after "there." Therefore, we can conclude that the advanced group of students is better than the intermediate group in using the present tense verbs; however, both groups perform similarly when using verbs in the past and future tenses as well as after "there."

#### 4.4. Correlation Analysis

The following table is a correlation matrix for the number of sentences and the number of errors made for each form of copular verb.

Table 4.4.1: Correlation Table, Present, Past, Future and After “there”

		<i>Correlation</i>							
		Present		Past		Future		After "there"	
		Sent.	Errors	Sent.	Errors	Sent.	Errors	Sent.	Errors
Present (Sent.)	Spearman's rho	1.000	.178	.272**	.186	-.001	.026	.157	.002
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.077	.006	.065	.994	.794	.118	.986
	N	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
Present (Errors)	Spearman's rho	.178	1.000	.322**	.405**	.141	.250*	-.193	-.025
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.077	.	.001	.000	.161	.012	.055	.805
	N	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
Past (Sent.)	Spearman's rho	.272**	.322**	1.000	.698**	.014	.236*	-.104	-.101
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.006	.001	.	.000	.893	.018	.303	.317
	N	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
Past (Errors)	Spearman's rho	.186	.405**	.698**	1.000	.049	.387**	-.009	-.072
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.065	.000	.000	.	.629	.000	.926	.477
	N	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
Future (Sent.)	Spearman's rho	-.001	.141	.014	.049	1.000	.547**	.078	.187
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.994	.161	.893	.629	.	.000	.439	.063
	N	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
Future (Errors)	Spearman's rho	.026	.250*	.236*	.387**	.547**	1.000	-.093	-.030
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.794	.012	.018	.000	.000	.	.359	.770
	N	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
After "there" (Sent.)	Spearman's rho	.157	-.193	-.104	-.009	.078	-.093	1.000	.312**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.118	.055	.303	.926	.439	.359	.	.002
	N	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
After "there" (Errors)	Spearman's rho	.002	-.025	-.101	-.072	.187	-.030	.312**	1.000

Sig. (2-tailed)	.986	.805	.317	.477	.063	.770	.002	.
N	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

The above table shows some significant correlations. More specifically, there was a significant strong positive correlation (0.698) between the number of sentences requiring the use of past tense verbs and the number of errors made in those sentences. Also, there was a significant strong positive correlation (0.547) between the number of sentences requiring the use of future tense verbs and the number of errors made in those sentences. The number (1.000) represents the correlation between the variable and itself. This is shown as 1 indicating a perfect correlation because the variable is correlated to itself. However, there was a moderate positive correlation (0.312) between the number of sentences requiring the use of after “there” verbs and the number of errors made in those sentences.

#### 4.5. Comparison between Students Groups Errors

A percentage of errors made in each type of sentences is calculated in order to compare the percentage of errors made by advanced students and the percentage of errors made by intermediate students. The percentages by themselves are not helpful unless they are subjected to the t-test.

Table 4.5.1: T-Test

<i>Group Statistics</i>					
	Group	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Present	Intermediate	41	<b>.3744</b>	.28350	.04427
	Advanced	30	<b>.3070</b>	.22903	.04182
Past	Intermediate	20	<b>.7090</b>	.32449	.07256

	Advanced	15	<b>.7613</b>	.28623	.07390
Future	Intermediate	5	<b>1.0000</b>	.00000 <sup>a</sup>	.00000
	Advanced	3	<b>1.0000</b>	.00000 <sup>a</sup>	.00000
After "there"	Intermediate	1	<b>1.0000</b>	.	.
	Advanced	0 <sup>b</sup>	.	.	.

a. t cannot be computed because the standard deviations of both groups are 0.

b. t cannot be computed because at least one of the groups is empty.

The above Statistics table shows basic statistics that help in comparing the two groups regarding the percentage of errors. For instance, we can see that the mean percentage of errors made by intermediate students in present tense sentences is (37.44%) higher than that made by advanced students (30.70%). On the other hand, the percentage of errors made by intermediate students in past tense sentences is (70.90%) lower than that made by advanced students (76.13%). Also, there is no difference between both students groups regarding the percentage of errors made in the future tense sentences.

Table 4.5.2: Samples Test

<b>Samples Test</b>			
Assumptions=Equal variances assumed			
		Present	Past
Levene's Test for Equality of Variances	F	1.438	1.071
	<b>Sig.</b>	<b>.235</b>	<b>.308</b>
t-test for Equality of Independent Means	T	1.071	-.496
	Df	69	33
	<b>Sig. (2-tailed)</b>	<b>.288</b>	<b>.623</b>
	Mean Difference	.06739	-.05233
	Std. Error Difference	.06294	.10549
	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	Lower	-.05818
			-.26695

<b>Samples Test</b>			
Assumptions=Equal variances assumed			
		Present	Past
Levene's Test for Equality of Variances	F	1.438	1.071
	<b>Sig.</b>	<b>.235</b>	<b>.308</b>
t-test for Equality of Independent Means	T	1.071	-.496
	Df	69	33
	<b>Sig. (2-tailed)</b>	<b>.288</b>	<b>.623</b>
	Mean Difference	.06739	-.05233
	Std. Error Difference	.06294	.10549
	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference		
		Lower	-.05818
		Upper	.19296
			-.26695
			.16228

In the above *Test* table, the Levene's Test tests the assumption that the variances of the two groups are equal. The significance value of the statistic is 0.235 (for Present) and 0.308 (for Past). Because these values are greater than 0.10, we can assume that the groups have equal variances in both types of sentences.

The t row displays the observed t statistic for each sample, calculated as the ratio of the difference between sample means divided by the standard error of the difference. The Sig. displays the probability from the t distribution. The values listed are 0.288 and 0.623, which are greater than 0.05, indicating statistically non-significant tests. That is, the differences between the percentage errors made by each students group are not statistically different from each other.

#### 4.6. Chapter Conclusion

This chapter offers explanations of how the data in this thesis were analyzed using different types analyses. The analyses used in this chapter were statistical, descriptive, inferential, and correlation Analysis were used to provide to a full description of the data.

Moreover, tests of normality, the Mann-Whitney U test, sample test and t-test were also applied. The data were analyzed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). The following chapter will provide a discussion and a conclusion for this research. The discussion will go over the findings of this study and offer a detailed explanation. Chapter V will also compare the findings and result of this study with other studies that have been conducted on the omission of copula. It will also discuss the research questions and the hypotheses to see whether the hypotheses were supported or not. Moreover, the chapter will provide a pedagogical implication for EFL learners as well as the limitations of this study. Finally, it will give suggestions and recommendations for further research.

## **CHAPTER V**

### **DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION**

This chapter discusses the results of the research discussed in Chapter IV. Furthermore, it compares the findings of this research with some previous studies that have been conducted on the same issue. This chapter starts with an interpretation of the results of this thesis. The research questions posed in this study will be answered according to the findings. Moreover, the research hypotheses will be discussed to determine whether they are supported or not. Additionally, this chapter presents pedagogical implications for EFL learners. This chapter also shows the limitations of this thesis. At the end of this chapter, some suggestions and recommendations will be offered for further research.

#### **5.1. The Reasons Behind Copula Omission Among Arab EFL Learners**

The first research question of this study is, "Why do Arab EFL learners omit the English verb *to be*?" According to previous research that has been conducted on copula omission, the main reason is that the negative transfer from L1 to L2 plays an important role in copula omission among ESL/ EFL learners. According to Al-Zahrani (1993) the omission of the English copula by Arab learners is due to the negative transfer or interference from Arabic, which does not have the copula in the present tense. The findings of this research indicate that the reason behind the copula omission among EFL Arab learners is a matter of negative transfer from the mother tongue.

Interestingly, Al-Zahrani's study matches this study and confirms that the first research hypothesis, "Omission of copulas by Arab learners of English," is a result of negative transfer or

interference from Arabic in those situations where Arabic does not require the verb "*to be*" is proven to be correct.

## **5.2. Linguistics Environments for Copula Omission by Arab EFL Learners**

The second research question of this study is, "In which linguistic environments do Arab EFL learners omit the English verb *to be*? Al-Zahrani's study (1993) revealed that the major finding was that more students omitted the English copula in the present tense more frequently than in other tenses. It was found that the percentage of students omitting the copula was 69.4 percent. Another study was conducted by Butler-Tanaka (2000), and he found that it was in present tense usage that most of the errors were made. Naturally, more attention should be paid to that area in grammar. The omission of verbs was not noticed in the past tense. Al-Zahrani's Butler-Tanaka's study's findings correlate with the findings of this study, which shows that the major errors made by both intermediate and advanced students were in the present tense. The asymptotic significance for Present (Omit) is smaller than 0.05 percent, indicating that the test is significant. That is, the advanced group's significantly lower rank sum for errors made in sentences requiring the use of present tense verbs indicates that advanced students make significantly fewer errors in this type of sentence than intermediate students.

On the other hand, there was no statistically significant difference between the number of errors made by intermediate and advanced students in sentences requiring verbs in the past and future tenses, as well as after "there."

The interesting findings of this research validate the second research hypothesis: "Since Arabic does not require copula verbs in the present tense, Arab EFL learners omit the present tense verbs when writing in English," and proves it to be correct.

### **5.3. Copula Omission and Proficiency Level**

The third research question of this thesis is, "Is there a significant difference between advanced and intermediate EFL learners in omitting copulas?" Abu-Jarad (2008) conducted a study on 179 English major students, and they were given a grammar test comprising 59 questions on 13 problematic grammatical aspects. The interesting findings of his study were that most of the students omitted copula verbs. Moreover, Abu-Jarad's study revealed that the more advanced the students were, the less frequently the errors were made. Abu- Jarad's study correlates the findings of this current research in a way that shows that the advanced participant in this research made fewer errors in omitting the English copula than the intermediate students. This can be seen in Table 13 , the boxplot - Intermediate vs. Advanced: Count of Errors, which shows that intermediate students made more errors than advanced students. This result proves that the third research hypothesis, "Advanced Arab EFL learners make fewer copula errors than students at the intermediate proficiency level," is correct.

### **5.4 Pedagogical Implications**

This research proves that a negative transfer from L1 to L2 plays an important factor that leads to English copula omission by EFL Arab learners, particularly in the present tense, where the Arabic language does not require the verb "to be" in the present tense. As discussed earlier in chapter II, Arabic does not require the verb "to be" in the present tense, and hence, much attention should be paid by ESL/EFL teachers to show the similarities and differences between the English and Arabic language structures.

Similarly, teaching the students the structure differences between the two languages will enhance learning development and progression, which will lead to fewer errors in most problematic grammar environments. Moreover, English book designers must be familiar with the

similarities, differences and difficult linguistics areas in L1 and L2 to present excellent learning materials.

Additionally, emphasis should be on other grammar aspects, such as future tense, past tense and the existential *there*. Other grammar areas should also be given more attention, such as definite and indefinite articles and subject-verb agreement when teaching English to Arabic speakers.

Also, important factors that help learners understand the target grammar points are lesson plans. Excellent and well-prepared lesson plans help the ESL/EFL teachers overcome the daunting task of delivering a difficult and complicated lesson. Moreover, well-prepared lesson plans present the similarities and differences between the mother tongue and the target language. Furthermore, ESL/EFL teachers should have enough knowledge about the target language they teach.

### **5.5 Limitations of the Study**

Even though this research answered the research question and supported the research hypothesis, there are some limitations:

- 1- This study did not include the extreme beginner and graduate EFL Arab learners, which might show some interesting results if those students were included.
- 2- The number of participants in this study was not large.
- 3- This study did not investigate other grammar errors among EFL Arab learners, such as definite and indefinite articles, subject-verb agreement and some other common grammar errors.
- 4- The participants in this study were only males. Including females participants might provide other interesting results, as was found in Abu-Jarad's study (2008).

5- The data of this study was collected at an English department at a university in Saudi Arabia. Including participants from other EFL educational institutions might add other noteworthy factors to the results.

To sum up, the above-mentioned limitations might attract other researchers to investigate and develop this study, taking into consideration those limitations. The following section presents some suggestions for further and future studies.

### **5.6 Suggestions for Future Research**

This study has shown some remarkable findings, yet there are other grammar factors to be considered. Here the researcher presents some suggestions for further research.

1- A comparison between the ESL/EFL Arabic learners and English speakers learning Arabic in the area of copula omission might add remarkable factors to the area of negative and positive transfer. Moreover, English speakers learning Arabic might be asked to write an essay in Arabic, and the research will find out whether those learners omit the verb "to be" in Arabic or retain it in the three tenses: present, past, and future, as well as after the existential *there*.

2- A pre and post test could be conducted. One or two weeks of teaching copula to the participants between the pre and post test using different teaching methods might reveal some interesting results. This procedure might investigate what the best ways are to teach copula to nonnative English speakers.

3- Participants from other Arabic counties could be included to show if the problem relies on the English learning materials, teaching methods, educational background or is a matter of negative and positive transfer from Arabic to the target language.

4- An oral test could be conducted on the participants to determine whether the omission of copula exists in speaking and writing.

## **5.7 Conclusion**

Several studies have been conducted on copula omission among Arab ESL/EFL learners. This study sought to examine more about this linguistics problem. The study data shows that copula omission among EFL Arab learners is an issue of negative transfer from the mother tongue to English. Moreover, the data revealed that the advanced students made fewer errors than the intermediate students, yet both groups made more errors in the present tenses than other examined tenses: future, past and after the existential *there*.

In summary, the data showed that the English copula is an area of difficulty for EFL Arab learners. Therefore, English copula omission by nonnative English speakers needs to be investigated in-depth, taking into consideration the similarities and differences between the mother tongue and English language.

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## APPENDIX I: EXPERIMENTAL TEST TASK

الرقم : .....

Number: .....

■ هذا ليس باختبار. سيستخدم هذا المقال في جمع بيانات لرسالة الماجستير. جميع المعلومات الشخصية ستكون سرية للغاية ولن يطلع عليها سوى الباحث. الرجاء عدم استخدام القاموس وعدم طلب مساعدة من احد في كتابة هذا المقال. الرجاء عدم كتابة اسم العائلة واستبداله بالرقم المخصص لك. لديك 10 دقائق للتحضير قبل البدء في كتابة هذا المقال. هذا الاختبار لن يؤثر على دراستك او درجاتك الدراسية.

■ This is not a test. This essay will be used for an M.A thesis data collection. All your personal information will be very confidential. ONLY the researcher will have access to it. Please, do NOT write your first name or surname and instead USE the assigned number for you. Your participation will NOT affect your class grade.

Please, DO NOT use a dictionary and DO NOT ask anyone for help in writing this essay. You have 10 minutes to prepare before start writing this essay.

السؤال : في مقال لا يقل عن صفحة كاملة

1- قدم نفسك وكم عمرك واين ولدت واين نشأت واين تسكن الان واين تدرس وماهي طموحاتك،

2- وتكلم عن والديك وعن اعمارهم وبأي مدينة ولدوا واين يسكنون الان وماهي اعمالهم

3- وتكلم عن اخوانك واعمارهم وبأي مدينة ولدوا واين يسكنون الان وعن ووظائفهم الحالية،

4- و صف المدينة الي تسكن بها او المدينة التي ولدت بها ، كيف كانت بالماضي وكيف هي الان ، وماذا تتوقع ان تكون في

المستقبل؟

الزمن للاجابة (50 دقيقة)

Question: in a whole page,1- introduce yourself, your age , where were you born?, where do you live now? where do you study? and what are your ambitions?

2- And talk about your parents, their age, where were they born?, where do they live now? what are their jobs?

3- and talk about your siblings ( brothers and sisters) , their age, where were they born? Where do they live now? what are their jobs?

4- In details, describe the city you were born in or the city you live in now, how was it in the past? how does it look like now? what do you think it will be in the future? (50

minutes)

## APPENDIX II: INTERMEDIATE PARTICIPANTS' WRITING SAMPLES

### Intermediate

#### Me And My Family

① My name's Raid. And I am about to write about me and my family.  
② I'm 22 years old. ③ My parents are alive. I have three brothers and one sister. We're living in same city, but in different districts.

I study at AlQassim University, in English department.  
It's a modern university and it's about to be the big one in Saudi Arabia.  
I grew up in ~~our~~ a village where my parents and brothers grew in.  
It's so small. We had a wonderful childhood. Because our parents used to take us to picnic, dream land, soccer game and circus. We loved that life. Because now my brothers and my sister got married, and ~~their~~ they're have ~~own~~ their own life. My parents and I live in the same home. I'm glad to be with them most of the time. I've my own friends to spend time with most of them are my friends when I was a child. I live in a city called Burydah. Infact, I don't like it, it's kind of crowded and boring. It ain't like my own village small and you know eachone of them. Sometimes when I got there, I pictured me and my brothers play in the back yard.

I hope to be an English teacher. And my city <sup>to be</sup> ~~is~~ like my village quiet and little crowded. And my brothers visit us more to let ~~their~~ sons and daughters play in ~~our~~ back yard.

## Intermediate

My name is <sup>①</sup> Anas <sup>②</sup> (Anas). I am 19 years ago. I was <sup>①</sup> born in Qassim and I stay ~~with~~ with My parentes. I stay in Qassim and I study in the English department <sup>②</sup> of Qassim University. In the futsure, I want to be <sup>like</sup> same you [researcher]. My ~~family~~ parentes <sup>are</sup> is <sup>not</sup> old. They are <sup>②</sup> staying in Qassim ~~with me~~ and they were <sup>②</sup> born in Qassim. They are <sup>②</sup> teachers. My brothers is 7. <sup>③</sup> ~~At~~ Every one was born in Qassim. They stay in Qassim with me and ~~with~~ with My perantes. The ~~name~~ name for my town is <sup>⑥</sup> Al-Bukaircah. <sup>①</sup> My town is very nice. It have clean air and many ~~for~~ many farm. It was smaller but now it become devloping city and big city. It have 35,000 person. ~~At~~ Finally, I thank you M.K. Abdullah.

# Intermediate

## ① Intermediate

was

My name <sup>is</sup> Saleh Ibrahim ~~M. M. M.~~. I am <sup>2</sup> (age) 20 years. I <sup>was</sup> born in the Baridah and I grew up with my family. and I'm <sup>all</sup> live with my family. I study in the community college Baridah and my ambitions study after university in U.S.A.

My Parents Praise to Allah very nice two person. My Parents (they) age <sup>are</sup> between 50 years to 60. My father <sup>is</sup> age 53 and my mother (she) age 50 years. \* They <sup>are</sup> born in the Baridah and in the daheseh. They live in family house, and my father (he) works in the deken in the street 40 in Baridah. But my mother she don't have job because she not study before. But she <sup>is</sup> new happy butiful live with the children and my father.

My siblings five person <sup>are</sup> three boys and two girls. My brothers The age <sup>are</sup> between 20 to 30 but my sisters their age <sup>are</sup> between 20 to 25. My all siblings <sup>are</sup> born in the Baridah all my family in the Baridah. ~~The~~ My brother <sup>is</sup> married he live in another house and my sisters she <sup>are</sup> still live with me in my house and my family.

My city Baridah (it) is <sup>big</sup> big city and <sup>beautiful</sup> beautiful and I'm born in the Baridah Baradah in the last year it <sup>was</sup> small city and less person but now Baradah (it) is very <sup>big</sup> big and <sup>beautiful</sup> beautiful because it is street wide and it is many souber market and it is have good people. I guess in future it is wide nebor hode and street and many malls. in fact I like my city.

## Intermediate

① ~~my father is a doctor~~ my Age 22

- I study in univarsity Al-Qassim

- Doctor

② Age my father 50

- ~~my father~~ no job

- Age my mother 38

- my mother no job

③ my have von brother

- Age 15

④ I am from city Al-Qassim

~~Present~~

### APPENDIX III: ADVANCED PARTICIPANTS' WRITING SAMPLE

#### Advanced

My name is Nasser, I am 23 <sup>years</sup>, I was born in Al-Qasseem, I live now in Al-Qasseem - Saudi Arabia, I am studying in Qasseem University in English Department, I look for the future for myself to finish the University then (InshaAllah) I will complete master because I don't like for myself to stay in the same position or place.

My father is a teacher but he was fired, my mother is also a teacher, they are between fourteenth and fifteenth, they are live with me in the same place and city.

I have one brother his name is Sultan, he is in I think in Secondary School and he is live with me in the same city, I have six sisters there are some children, and younger and marry, only one of my sisters is have a work but others are studying or in the home and they are live with me. All of my brothers and sisters born in Al-Qasseem also my parents.

I am live in Al-Qasseem in (Riyadh Al-Khobar). It is an town and small city, It is in the Pass with new city. And I think it will improve in the future (InshaAllah).

Good luck for your researcher and best wishes.

Essa

Advanced

Hello my name is Essa I <sup>1</sup>have <sup>am</sup> 25 old

I <sup>2</sup>have <sup>am</sup> born in uniza and I live in some

city. I <sup>3</sup>am English student in Qussim university.

I hope when I finish the study I want <sup>to be</sup>

was A pilot in Saudi Air force.

My father <sup>2</sup>was a teacher in a school.

also my mom they live now my

father <sup>4</sup>has <sup>is</sup> 65 years old and my mom <sup>5</sup>has <sup>is</sup>

45 years old they live in some city with

me. I don't have brothers or sisters.

My city <sup>1</sup>is very beautiful in past but

now <sup>2</sup>is more and more beautiful and it <sup>3</sup>is

big city and we have every thing

in this city.

Advanced

## My Self

My name is Abdul Majeed. I am 22 years old. I'm married. I have three brothers and one sister. I was born in Buraydah, and I still live there. I study in Qassim University, my major is English Language. I hope one day to complete my studying in broad for Master degree. My parents are alive, but they are old. My father was born in Kuwait, and my mother was born in Qassim. My father worked in army Kuwait for 20 years. My mother worked in the house. My parents live Saudi Arabia now after my father left army Kuwait. I and my brothers live in a big house with my family. I am older than my brothers. My sister is 20 years old, she studies at Kuwait, she is married, and live with her husband. My two brothers, one is Omar lives in our house, he is single, and he is 17 years old. He studies at secondary school. Second is Khaled live also in our house, he is 12 years old, he doesn't study because he is suffering from dangerous disease. That is all about me.

Abdul Majeed

# Advanced

My name <sup>1</sup> is Mohammed, <sup>2</sup> i <sup>am</sup> have 22 years old, and i <sup>was</sup> born in Unaizah city, <sup>3</sup> i grow up in Unaizah city ~~and i live~~ and i live in seem city <sup>4</sup> ~~i study~~ <sup>am</sup> studying now in Qassim university, my ambitions is <sup>5</sup> only to complet my education and ~~that~~ to have ~~good~~ a good work.

~~My~~ <sup>1</sup> Parents are from dissikant ~~city~~ cities, my ~~father~~ <sup>2</sup> ~~has~~ <sup>is</sup> 52 years old and my mother <sup>3</sup> ~~has~~ <sup>is</sup> 47 years old.

I have ~~three~~ <sup>4</sup> brothers two are male and one is a female, the first brother ~~has~~ <sup>is</sup> 18 years old, and the second ~~has~~ <sup>is</sup> 14 years old and they are <sup>5</sup> students and they are <sup>6</sup> living in the seem city.