



## Analysis of Syntactic Errors Made by Intermediate English Learners and the Impact of their Treatment on the Learning Progress

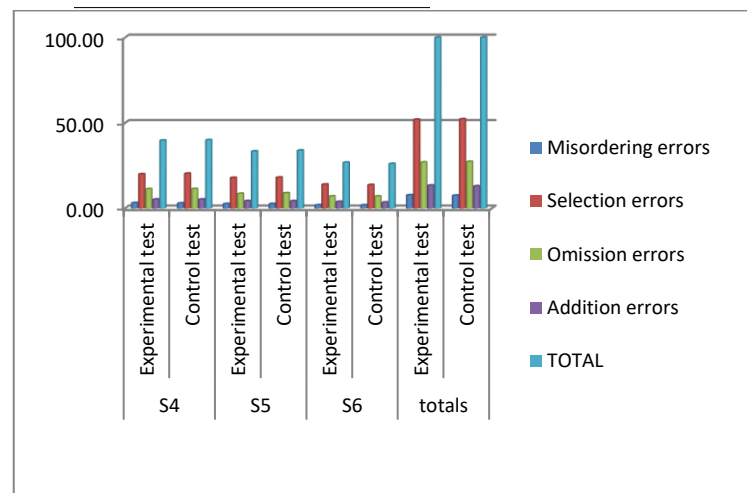
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### RESEARCH HIGHLIGHTS

- The most dominating and frequent syntactic errors that are visible in the intermediate learners' language are classified under 4 dimensions: selection, omission, addition, and disordering errors.
- Major sources of the syntactic errors include among others rules overgeneralizations, language transfer, inherent natural complexity of the language, error treatment approach and lack of motivation.
- A change in attitude towards syntactic errors is vital and their punishment should be held back and replaced by adequate language pedagogy that emphasises peer and independent correction.

### GRAPHICAL ABSTRACT



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### ABSTRACT

This study is an extension of previous researches on fundamental syntactic errors which intermediate English learners make in their English writing. It aims at investigating sources of syntactic errors and how they affect the language learning progress. 82 secondary school students were subjected to two free written 350-word essay tests to back up possible sentence structure errors they make. The questionnaire was also administered to elicit opinions as to what are the error causes and reactions to error treatment strategy. 3647 syntactic errors were pinpointed and classified under four categories: selection, omission, addition and ordering errors. The findings reveals that selection errors outrank the forefront occurring frequently more than other errors (51.93%). Omission errors position on the second (26.92%). The next error category visible in learners' English writing is addition

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errors cover 13.40% out of 3647 errors computed. The last category is misordering errors (7.73%). The most predominant errors in all language areas are wrong verb form, wrong choice of verb tense, tense marker omission or unnecessary tense marker addition as well as subject-verb agreement errors. It appears that tenses and verbs are the major problematic areas. Yet not all syntactic errors are the same for all English learners. The major sources of the above errors include rules

## 1. Introduction

Among the studies that have been conducted, it was revealed that within the process of second language learning, errors are inevitable. (Krashen, & Ngangbam, H., 2016) Within the realm of language study, in the second language learning processes, the error has always been regarded as something negative which must be avoided. As a consequence, teachers have always adopted a repressive attitude towards it (Corder, 1971). Likewise, errors were considered to be a sign of inadequacy of the teaching techniques. Ngangbam, H (2016) in his paper article published in "European Journal of English language, Linguistic and Literature,(p1-13) states, "Many of the teachers complain that their students are unable to use linguistic forms that they are taught. This concept justifies the teacher's false impression that output should be an authentic representation of the input".

Additionally, an error has been regarded as indicators of failure and an agent obstructing progress. It was therefore punishable. The idea was especially supported by the behaviorists such as (Watson, 1910) and others. They believed that when errors occur they are to be remedied by providing correct forms and over-teaching. This behaviorists' view was strongly criticized by error treatment theory and elimination of their punishment. A different conception by mentalists believed that without error there is no progress. Chomsky & Keshavars & Dela, et al (1957), the mentalist, came up with an idea of how the error promotes progress and improvement in learning. Thanks to this new conception, the error was finally seen as something positive and not as a problem. Subsequent researches have proven that error production which has for long been viewed as an indication of language communication inability, turned into an indicator of a certain ability in language learning stage. "That children learning the second language make plenty of mistakes is a natural part of language acquisition process"( Krashen,1982).

The ultimate outcome of such a controversy was that the theory of error production was to be used to discover how language learning occurs and stages a language learner has to go through. Instead of avoiding them only we can learn from our learners' errors and rather try to deal with them. "The primary focus of error analysis, therefore, is on the evidence that learner's errors provide with an understanding of the underlying process of Second Language Acquisition (SLA)"( Keshavars ,1997).

Brown (2000) has indicated, "Some teachers still manifest negative attitude towards syntactic errors committed by their students, and this leaves students victimized and impacts on inner motivation for language learning mastery". So, the aims of this research isn't to avoid these errors no matter serious they appear, but (1) to try to sort out their

over-generalizations, language transfer, poor motivation and practices, inherent natural complexity of the language, problem of language input and most importantly error treatment among others. The implications for language teachers are obvious. There is need for a change, for instance, in the techniques with which learners should be exposed to language input, predictable order of materials in Language teaching and new approaches to error treatment.

categories, (2) identify their root causes and understand why they really resist and ultimately (4) to suggest how they should be treated for better learning improvement of the language. (5) The study is also concerned with sizing up how syntax errors might result into poor language learning progress of the learners at an alarming rate. Surface structure taxonomies have recently described and classified syntactic errors. For instance Krashen (1982) among others noted that learners might omit necessary items or add unnecessary ones; they might misform items or misorder them. James (1998) preferred five divisions into omissions, overinclusions, misselections, misorderings and blends. More other different categories for describing errors have been identified. Corder (1973) classifies the errors into four categories: omission of some required element; addition of some unnecessary or incorrect element; selection of an incorrect element; and misordering of the elements.

Richards (1974) offered a new classification of Interlingual and Intralingual errors: According to him, "Intralingual errors consist of errors reflecting general characteristic of rule learning such as faulty generalisation, incomplete application of rules and failures to learn condition under which rules apply"; whereas he viewed interlingual errors as "...Errors caused by mother tongue or external interference as well as language transfer phenomenon". Interlingual errors, a result of interference from the native language, were therefore differentiated from intralingual errors, occurring for example when a target language rule is applied to areas where it is not applicable".

An error may also vary in magnitude and may be viewed as being either global or local (James, 1998). As Brown (2000) also puts it, "Global errors hinder communication. They prevent the message from being comprehended". They can affect overall sentence organization (for example, wrong word order). On the other hand, 'local errors' do not prevent the message from being understood because there is usually a minor violation of one segment of a sentence that allows the hearer to guess the intended meaning. In Ferris' classification (2005), syntactic errors are considered global errors. Mechanical and lexical mistakes, on the other hand, are local errors. Morphological errors can be global errors.

According to Delay (1967), linguistic errors reflect a limited linguistic competence of TL learner whereas communicative errors refer to errors due to limited abilities of speakers to use both linguistic system itself and the functional aspects of communication. When the learner is communicating, he/she encounters some difficulties. To overcome them, the learner adopt some communicative strategies like avoidance and reduction strategies, literal translation; substitution, word-coinage, etc. For instance, in avoidance strategy, the learner veers away from

unfamiliar word and avoids using it and replaces it. This is where he/she makes an error.

Diverse studies attempted to investigate the root causes of the aforementioned errors: The Dictionary of Language Teaching and Applied Linguistics (1992) proposed interlingual errors as being the result of language transfer, which is caused by the learner's first language. However, Corder (1967) claims, "Possession of one's native language is facilitative". Various researchers have concentrated on those errors which demonstrate the influence of one's native language to second language acquisition. According to Hagege & Benson, C. (2002), "Interference between first language (L1) and second language (L2) is observed in children as well as in adults language. If there is sufficient exposure, then instead of reaching a point where they can no longer be corrected, interference features can be easily eliminated". These errors, though, they are completely natural; we should not expect the child to acquire L2 structures immediately without them.

Richards (1971), while trying to identify the causes of structural errors introduced new error types such as intralingual errors, subdivided into errors due to overgeneralization, or to ignorance of rules restriction and incomplete application of the rules. Intralingual errors result from faulty or partial learning of the target language rather than language transfer. Ngangbam, H. & Ellis (2016) think that "Intralingual errors may be caused by the influence of one target language item upon another". For example, learners attempt to use two tense markers at the same time in one sentence since they have not mastered the language yet. When they say: \* "He is comes here", it is because the singularity of the third person requires "is" in present continuous, and "-s" at the end of a verb in simple present tense. Brown, (2000) considers overgeneralization errors as "Any error which can be attributed to the application of a rule of English in an inappropriate situation." When learners encounter with inherent complexities of target language (TL), they will overgeneralise, analogise and simplify to reduce their learning burden. When they overgeneralise, for instance, they rely on a TL rule of great generic and which they already know; this results in avoiding learning the appropriate rule and inevitably results in errors". Ellis (1997) stated, 'some errors seem to be universal, reflecting learners' attempts to make the task of learning and using the target language simpler'. This also involves some learning strategies by the learner. And these strategies the learners make use are overgeneralization and simplification. The use of past tense suffix '-ed' for all verbs, for instance, is an example of simplification and over generalization for some language learners.

Richards (1974), sees ignorance of rules restrictions as a cause of many of syntactic errors. He defines this ignorance as being the failure to observe the restrictions of existing structures, i.e. the application of rules to the context where they do not apply. He also maintained that when the learner demonstrates his knowledge in a language, he uses the previous knowledge of the TL system where it is not appropriate which results into errors. These errors can also result into the analogy that the student establishes between the rule he has learned and the new situation which he believes can conform to the same rule. This is the misuse case of 'TO' after the modals like in the example: I want to buy – I need to go. The learner therefore can use the same 'TO' in examples such as: \*I must **to** study – \*I can **to** communicate in English.

Syntactic errors have also been attributed to learner's carelessness and lack of motivation. According to Richard (1992), "A learner makes a mistake when writing or speaking because of lack of attention, fatigue, carelessness, or some other aspects of performance". Any method employed by the teacher can encourage or kill the learner's attention and interest if not carefully utilised or always used.

The problem of the language input connected to its inadequate exposure to the learner has also an effect on L2 acquisition and has direct implication for language teachers. Krashen (1982) argues that the learner needs to receive input to acquire language. Language teachers are the main source of input especially in the classroom while keeping in mind the age and the level of the student. However, overwhelming teachers whose input is above the students' language capacity might result in failure to acquire language which becomes source of errors.

Ultimately, diverse principles behind error minimization have been put forward. For instance inadequate error treatment has been revealed to have triggered most of error resistance cases amongst learners: in actual fact, when a learner has made an error, the most efficient way to teach him the correct form is not simply giving it to him, but letting him discover it. According to Hagege (1999), "self correction is even more efficient when it is done with the help of classmates". Hagege (ibid) puts emphasis on the importance of treating errors in a positive way. He noted that it is useless, if not harmful, to treat errors in terms of correction of every error as soon as it occurs. Hagege (Op. Cit) has also stipulated : " immediate corrections is seen as an interruption and this therefore tends to produce negative consequences, even to the less sensitive children. Such consequences include anxiety, fear of making an error, the development of avoidance strategies, reduced motivation for participation in the classroom, lack of interest for learning, reduced will for self correction and lack of trust towards the teacher". Esser (1984), cited in Hagege (1999) also made a similar point: "repetitive and immediate corrections, may cause sensitive children to develop aggressive behaviour towards their teacher". This research therefore seeks to provide insights into ways for minimising syntactic errors in English language among intermediate learners after identifying, sorting them out and tracing their root causes.

## 2. Methods

This study was conducted from January to March 2016 at G.S. de JANJA Saint Jérôme, located in Gakenke District, in the Northern Province. It is a survey research which used descriptive design which the researcher considered suitable to obtain information concerning current status of syntactic error among secondary students in order to describe them with respect to situational variables. (Creswell, J.W., 2012). In order to track the root causes of such errors by measuring casual relationships among variables, analytical design (corpus-based study) involving secondary data (written essay test works by students) helped in this study. With the design, the researcher also drew on Brown's language research model (1980) which consisted of error identification, error classification and error explanation.

Subjects were sampled into a small group of 82 out of 438 applying Yamane formula (1967) for determining the sample size as:  $n = \frac{N}{1+N(e)^2}$  Where: n = Sample Size; N= Total Study Population; e = Level of precision (marginal error) =10%. Given that the total population is 438, and the level of precision is 0.1 equaling to 10%, the calculation of the sample size was as:  $n = \frac{N}{1+N(e)^2} = \frac{438}{1+438(0.1)^2} = 81.4 = 82$ . Besides, considering the population distribution into academic strata, the researcher also used stratified sampling to get the proportional sample for each strata (class levels) in order to determine the representative number of each intake referred to as strata (Blaxter, 2001). Then a simple random sampling technique was applied to pick the representative random number of students in each level. (Op. cit)

For obtention of research data, the researcher distributed and administered a restrictive questionnaire among students and 13 selected teachers the latter being chosen based on judgemental sampling. (Blaxter & Tight & Kalu ,2005) Two written essay tests were also assigned : The first with experimental goal to track possible errors that students are likely to make and the second with control targets to measure and control casual relationships between variables (to measure the extent to which error correction feedback might have been useful or not to learners).

In view of compliance with ethical consideration, the researcher had to assure the respondents of the confidentiality of information given through explanations and clarification of the research targets for them to participate in the study voluntarily. On top of this, an informed consent was obtained from the participants to authorize the use of their provided answers in the questionnaire and essay test copies in the study for research ends.

### 3. Results

#### 3.1. Selection errors screened from students’ essay manuscripts

The errors that were identified from the students’ experimental essay test are sorted out as shown in the table 1 as below:

**Table 1: The frequency of selection errors made by learners**

Types of errors	S4 errors	S5 errors	S6 errors	Total	%
Verb instead of noun	9	4	4	17	0.48%
Noun instead of verb	6	6	4	16	0.45%
Adjective instead of noun	12	10	9	31	0.87%
Noun instead of adjectives	11	12	8	31	0.87%
Adverb instead of adjective	7	6	4	17	0.48%
Adjective instead of adverb	4	7	2	13	0.36%
Wrong preposition	68	66	48	182	5.16%
Wrong article	112	92	91	295	8.36%
Wrong pronouns	47	61	42	150	4.25%
Wrong tense	132	117	98	347	9.83%
Transitive and intransitive errors	28	32	17	77	2.18%

Wrong verb form	82	71	51	204	5.78%
Passive change errors	72	61	51	184	5.21%
Misuse of verb 'BE'	141	117	82	340	9.63%

Source: Field data, G.S Janja, (2016)

Thus the summative statistics of selection errors (51.93%) are shown in the table 2 below:

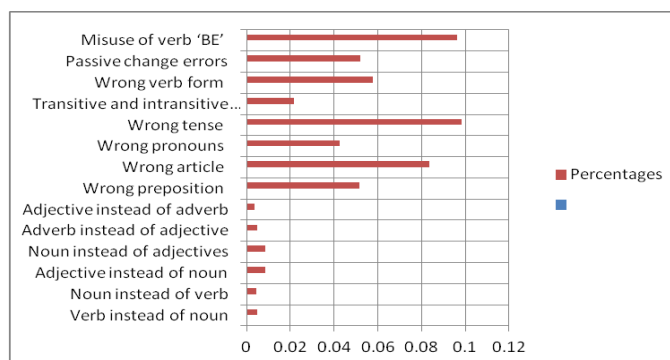
**Table 2: Summary table of selection errors by students from different academic levels**

Types of selection errors	S4	%	S5	%	S6	%	Total	%
Selection errors	731	20.72%	652	18.48%	511	14.48%	1994	51.93%

Source: Field data, G.S Janja (2016)

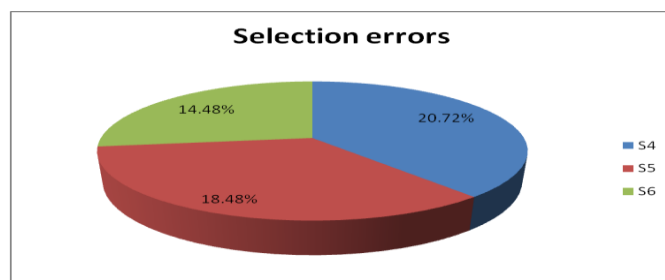
The data of above selection errors are graphically represented and summarised in detailed sub-categories in the manner shown in figure 1 and 2 here below:

**Fig.1: Graphic representation of selection errors**



Source: Field data, G.S Janja (2016)

**Fig. 2: Graphical representation of overall selection errors**



Source: Field data, G.S Janja (2016)

A sample picked from among selection errors that popped up in the same students’ essay test manuscripts as previously computed in table 1 and 2 are tabulated as follows:

**Table 3: A sample of selection errors collected from students’ marked manuscripts**

Error made	Correction
<b>Verb instead on noun</b>	
His <b>communicate</b> can save him a danger.	Communication can save him from a danger.

Noun instead of verb	
When I will <b>employer</b> the people I use communication.	When I <b>employ</b> people, I will make use of communication.
Many people can <b>trader</b> without no problems.	Many people can trade without any problem.
Adverb instead of adjective	
Your job will be <b>easily</b> if communication is used.	Your job will be easy if communication is used.
Adjective instead of adverb	
You can communicate very <b>nice</b> and <b>wonderful</b> .	You can communicate very nicely and wonderfully.
Adjective instead of noun	
The <b>big important</b> of communication is to speak a language.	The big importance of communication is to speak a language.

Preposition/article/pronoun selection errors	
I will be able to call <b>at</b> a phone in <b>work</b> in <b>next year</b> .	I will be able to call on a phone at work next year.
<b>She's</b> language can improve.(wrong pronoun)	Her language can improve.

Verb form misuse/wrong verb form	
Error made	Correction
*For instance to <b>calling</b> with telephone is communicating.	For instance to call on telephone is communicating.
*After that you <b>seen</b> you are able to speak a language.....	After seeing that you are able to speak a language.....
*Communication will help me to be <b>written</b> different letters.	Communication will help me to write different letters.
*Communication will help me <b>communicated</b> though language.	Communication will help me to communicate through language.

Tense misuse (wrong tense)	
Error made	Correction
Present simple instead of present continuous tense	
*While the students <b>study</b> , they need communication.	While the students are studying, they need to communicate.
Past simple instead of present perfect tense	
*.... it was the first time I was <b>finished</b> studying communication...	As it was the first time I've finished studying communication..
Future simple instead of present simple	
*When I <b>will finish</b> to study I will need to communicate in order to get a job.	When I finish my studies, I might need communication to be able to get a job for me.
Present simple instead of past simple	
*While I <b>was study</b> English from S1 up to S3, OL.....	As I studied English from S1 up to S3,OL...
Past continuous instead of past simple	
*We <b>were studying</b> communication skills since.....	We studied communication skills since....

Transitive & intransitive verb errors	
Error made	Correction
When I <b>work</b> my job, I will use language.	'Work' is intransitive verb. Here 'Do' is better: When I <b>work</b> , in my job, I will use language.
Communication can <b>disappear</b> all problems in our life.	Communication can cause all problems <b>disappear</b> .

Source: Field data, GS Janja (2016)

### 3.2. Addition errors

This error category consists of where unnecessary elements are added culminating to component overuse or misuse. The table 4 shows detailed computed sub-types of addition errors as identified in essay

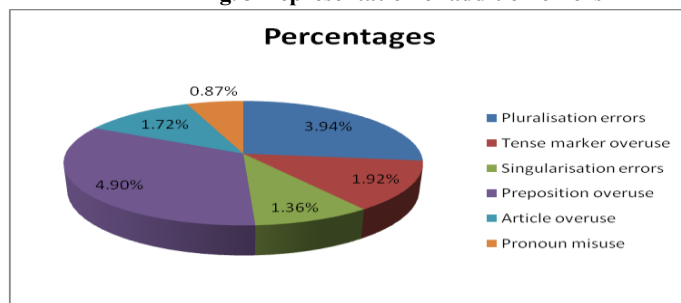
experimental test copies of the students.

**Table 4: Frequency of discerned addition errors**

Source: Field data, G.S Janja (2016)

Types of addition errors	S4 errors	S5 errors	S6 errors	Total	%
Pluralisation errors	57	44	38	139	4.
Tense marker overuse	24	27	17	68	1.92%
Singularisation errors	27	14	7	48	1.36%
Preposition overuse	30	51	61	142	3.89%
Article overuse	21	21	19	61	1.72%
Pronoun misuse	12	8	11	31	0.87%
Total addition errors	171	165	153	489	13.41%

The graph below gives a grasp of the image of the extent at which addition errors have been recurring in the essay test manuscripts by the same students. **Fig. 3 Representation of addition errors**



Source: Field data, G.S Janja (2016)

Picked among addition errors, a sample that popped up from the same students' essay test copies as computed in table 4 are presented as below: **Table 5: Sample of addition errors committed by students**

Tense marker overuse	
*Communication <b>was helps</b> to express oneself.	Communication <b>helps</b> to express oneself.
*That is business that can <b>helps</b> achieve his goal.	That is business that can <b>help</b> achieve one's goal.
* If someone <b>doesn't speaks</b> , he <b>doesn't communicates</b> at the same time.	If someone <b>doesn't speak</b> , he <b>doesn't communicate</b> at the same time
Pluralisation overuse	
*An other <b>things</b> we must know.....	An other things we must know.....
*Some <b>communications</b> are studied at schools in Rwanda.	communication is studied at schools in Rwanda.
Pluralization overuse error	
*Some <b>mens</b> and some <b>womens</b> has good language to communicate.	Some <b>men</b> and some <b>women</b> have good language to communicate.
Subject /expletive overuse	
*In the future, communication <b>it</b> will be very important in our country.	In the future, communication will be very important in our country.
Preposition and article overuse	
Someone can't communicate <b>without to</b> call.	Someone cannot communicate without calling.

Source: Field data, G.S Janja (2016)

### 3.3. Omission errors

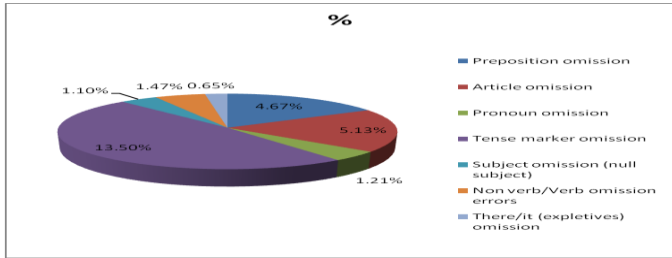
The omission errors gathered from the essays test No1 out of the total errors made are shown in table 6 and graph 4 presented as follows:

**Table 6: Frequency of discerned omission errors**

Types of omission errors	S4 errors	S5 errors	S6 errors	Total	%
Preposition omission	66	48	51	165	4.67%
Article omission	72	57	52	181	5.13%
Pronoun omission	18	11	14	43	1.21%
Tense marker omission	201	159	119	479	13.5%
Subject omission (nonnull subject)	17	12	10	39	1.10%
Non verb/Verb omission errors	22	19	11	52	1.47%
There/it (expletives) omission	16	7	-	23	0.65%
The total omission errors	412	313	257	982	26.93%

Source: Field data, G.S Janja (2016)

**Fig. 4: Graphic representation of omission errors**



Source: Field data, G.S Janja (2016)

Omission errors are sampled from students' essay copies to illustrate cases of this category as follows:

**Table 7: Sampled syntactic omission errors**

**3.4. Misordering errors**

In the table below, misordering error category among syntactic errors as visible shown on test essay copies are shown in Table 8 below.

Errors made	Errors Correction
<b>Subject omission / null subject / null expletives</b>	
*We study communication because(-) is a way of giving his feelings.	We study communication because <b>it</b> is a way of giving our feelings.
*You can learn to do communication because(-) has very importat in our life.	You can learn how to communicate because <b>it</b> has importance in your life.
<b>Verb omission</b>	
After that we (-) seen the role of communication...	After we <b>have</b> seen the role of communication...
When someone – communicating, he can give at the same time message.	When someone <b>is</b> communicating, he delivers at the same time a message.
<b>Preposition/ article deletion</b>	
With language some people can talk - each other.	With language some people can talk <b>to</b> each other.
I must do something to become - trader.	I must do something to become <b>a</b> trader.
<b>Tense marker deletion</b>	
*When someone <b>want</b> the materials....	When someone <b>wants</b> the materials.....
*Communication is a way someone <b>give</b> his/her ideas.	Communication is a way through which someone <b>gives</b> his/her ideas.
<b>Passive voice omission errors</b>	
Any kind of message <b>can communicated</b> by telephone.	Any kind of message can be communicated on telephone.
*Employers <b>are help</b> by the telephone.	Employers are helped by telephones.
*...because a job <b>can asked</b> with the letters.	..because jobs can be asked through letters.
*When letters <b>are been written</b> .....	When letters are written.....

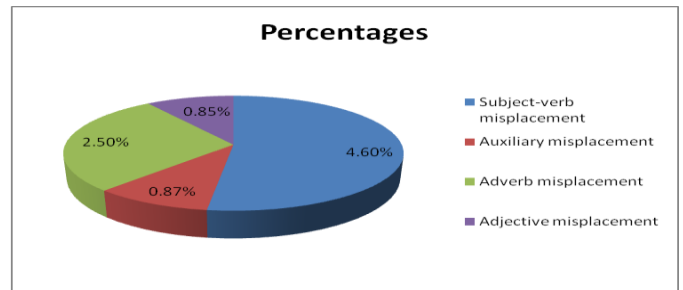
**Table 8: Frequency of misordering errors**

Types of errors	S 4 Errors	S5 errors	S 6 errors	Total	%
Subject verb Misplacement	52	47	31	130	4.6%
Auxiliary Misplacement	12	11	8	31	0.87%
Adverb Misplacement	40	31	20	91	2.5%
Adjective Misplacement	12	8	10	30	0.85%
<b>Total</b>	116	97	69	282	7.73%

Source: Field data, G.S Janja (2016)

In line with the above data table, the graph below therefore shed light on how far misordering errors pop up in students' writing works as a fact shown by the test essay done.

**Fig.5:Graphic representation of mosordering errors**



Source: Field data, G.S Janja (2016)

The misordering (misplacement) errors gathered from students experimental essay test copies are presented in the following table:

**Table 9: sample of identified misplacement Errors**

Error made	Correction
I don't know why <b>do we</b> fail to communicate.	I don't know why we do fail to communicate.
With Communication <b>someone may ask if can he</b> get a job.	With communication, someone may ask if he can get a job.
<b>Adjective misplacement</b>	
*Someone can deliver a <b>message</b> very <b>important</b> .	Someone can deliver a very important message.
<b>Adverb misplacement</b>	
They very well can communicate problem without it.	They can communicate very well without any problem.
<b>Subject-verb misplacement (subject inversion rule violation)</b>	
How I will become a good trade? It is only by using with communication.	How will I become a trader? It will be only by using communication.

Source: primary data, G.S. Janja (2016)

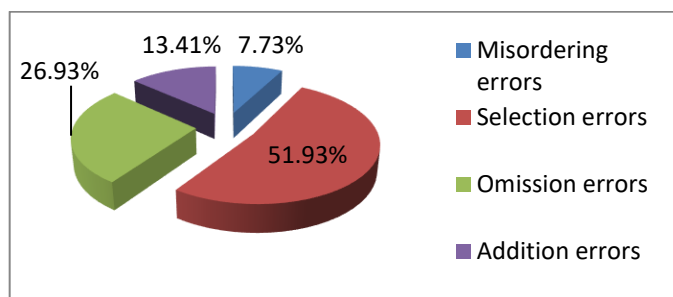
All syntactic error categories that were committed by students were computed. The results made it clear that Selection errors come in the forefront (51.9%). Omission errors come on the second position (26.9%); followed by addition errors (13.4%) and the last (Misordering: 7.7%). The overall statistics in frequencies and percentages are tabulated and graphically represented below for easy comparison and interpretation:

**Table 10. Summary table encompassing all syntactic error categories**

Types of errors	S4	%	S5	%	S6	%	Total	%
Misordering errors	116	3.18%	97	2.66%	69	1.89%	282	7.73%
Selection errors	731	20.04%	652	17.88%	511	14.01%	1894	51.93%
Omission errors	412	11.30%	313	8.58%	257	7.05%	982	26.93%
Addition errors	190	5.21%	157	4.30%	142	3.89%	489	13.41%
TOTAL	1449	39.7%	1219	33.4%	979	26.8%	3647	99.9%

The graphic summarizes the rate at which sub-category errors were visible in students' writing test results manuscripts.

Fig. 6 Graphic representation of overall syntactic error categories



Source: Field data, (G.S Janja, 2016)

### 3.5. Results on causes of syntactic errors

The views elicited from teachers about the potential causes of their students' syntactic errors have been gathered through questionnaire are in the table below:

Table 11: Summary of teachers' views on causes of syntactical errors

Teachers' views about sources of errors	# students	%
I think my students are lazy and careless when it comes to language learning.	2	15.38%
My students are not motivated to learn languages because it is not their domain.	5	38.36%
They don't have time to practice English grammar exercises.	-	-
Because even ourselves don't have time to correct their mistakes in Grammar.	1	7.69%
They have not studied enough English grammar.	-	-
Even ourselves as source of language input are poor in English.	5	38.36%

Source: Field data, G.S Janja (2016)

Student respondents on their part reported similar results as per their teachers with regard to possible causes of syntactic errors while at the same time definitely displaying their attitude toward English learning.

Table 12: Reported students' opinions about their attitude toward learning English

Respondents' answers	# frequency	%
Why should I learn it as it is not my domain ?	81	98.78%
I don't like English.	-	-
Its grammar is complicated and I often fail.	6	7.31%
I'm not interested in learning English.	-	-

Source: Field data, G.S. Janja(2016)

Result also shows little emphasis on grammar practical exercises as source of students' errors.

Table 13: Students' views on practical language tasks done in class

Responses about tasks given	# students	Percentage
Grammar exercises	2	2.20%
Reading exercises	-	-
Presentation exercises	80	97.5%
Composition writing tasks	80	97.5%

Source: Field data, G.S Janja (2016)

### 4.6. Results on the impact of errors on Learners' performance

To measure the impact of syntactic errors on language learning progress, two written essay tests were used one of which the marks were to be attributed with very little tolerance of errors and the other to prove the evidence of the impact of error treatment undertaken on basis of the prior test. The former was used to testify the outcome from error overcorrection and mainly aimed at sentence grammaticality, whereas the latter was to ensure if the error treatment has contributed to minimisation of errors made in the former. The following table shows the mean calculated from the students' marks in the test.

Table 14: results on scores obtained by students in experimental essay test

Marking criteria	Score over 20 (x)	# students (f)	F(x)
≥ 20 errors	10	27	270
≥ 18 errors	11	21	231
≥ 16 errors	12	15	180
≥ 14 errors	13	13	169
≥ 12 errors	14	4	56
≥ 10 errors	15	3	45
≥ 8 errors	16	2	32
TOTAL (x)		(f) 82	(f)(x) 983
Mean ( $\bar{x}$ )		$\frac{\sum fx}{N} = \frac{983}{82} = 11.9$	

Source: Field data, G.S Janja (2016)

The table below shows a summary report of students' reactions upon the above marks predicting possible impact on their future performance.

Table 15: Students' reactions upon their scores after grammaticality based marking of test 1

Respondets' rections	(f)	%
I didn't agree with the marking criteria. It is overcorrection. Even less significant errors were treated as big issue.	42	51.2%
The scores attributed are very low as if we know nothing and only grammar points were targeted and the ideas have been neglected. I feel like giving up.	22	26.8%
The teacher's intention was to put us to shame. The content was ignored.	12	14.6%
I am proud of the score. I am motivated to minimise errors to the best of my capacity.	3	3.6%
It was the fullest point of my potential. There is nothing more I can do for further improvement.	3	3.6%
I felt somehow angry with the marker. I don't know what to do.	3	3.6%

Source: Field data, G.S. Janja (2016)

### Results of control essay test

By means of Tally method, error frequencies were also computed to measure the improvement after severe error treatment with test 1 marking style.

Table16: Summary results of errors in control test (2)

Types of errors	S4	S5	%	Total # errors	%
Misordering errors	2.97%	2.64 %	1.88%	275	7.50%
Selection errors	20.39%	18.07 %	13.73 %	1912	52.19 %
Omission errors	11.38%	8.89 %	7.01%	1000	27.30 %
Addition errors	5.21%	4.28 %	3.49%	476	12.99 %
TOTAL				3663	99.9%

Source: Control test score field data; GS Janja

## 5. Discussion

### 5.1 Syntactic errors types and their causes

#### A. Selection errors

As per data presented above, selection errors cover more than a half of the total errors made by the students (51.93%). These errors are the result of the failure to carefully choose an appropriate item to fit into a string of sentence components in a way that doesn't violate the collocation restriction rule. Selection errors identified from students' essay works and their possible causes are discussed in depth as follow:

#### (1) Verbs instead of nouns

\* His **communicate** can save him a danger.

√ *Communication can save him from a danger.*

#### (2) Noun instead of verb

\*When I will **employer** the people, I will use communication.

√ *When I employ people, I will use communication.*

\*Many people can **trader** without no problems.

√ *Many people can trade without problems.*

#### (3) Adverb instead of adjective

\*Your job will be **easily** if communication is used.

√ *Your job will be easy if communication is used.*

#### (4) Adjective instead of adverb

\*You can communicate **very nice and smart**.

√ *You can communicate very nicely and smartly.*

#### (5) Adjective instead of noun

\*The big **important** of communication is to speak a language.

√ *The big importance of communication is to speak a language.*

The root causes of errors above are various including mutual interference visible within English lexical items that are similar phonetically. (Ferris, 2005) For instance the words 'important' and 'importance', 'employer' and 'employ'; 'trader' and 'trade'; 'easy' and 'easily' share similar phonetic sounds which is the origin of learner's confusion to select the appropriate item. The truth of the matter is that the learner fails to account for word categories and this signals lack of knowledge as to what positions each word class category occupies in relation to other sentence items. Other typical examples of selection errors picked from the learner's essay copies also include:

#### (6) Wrong choice of preposition

(a)\*I will be able to call **at** a telephone **in work**.

√ *I will be able to call on a telephone at work*

#### (7) Wrong choice of article

(a) \*With **the** phone, there is possible distance communication.

√ *With a phone distant communication is possible.*

#### (8) Wrong choice of pronoun

(a)\***She's** language can improve.

√ *Her language can improve.*

Sentence under (6) presents preposition errors which could be attributed to two sources: mother tongue interference (Interlingual error) and intralingual interference. Intralingual and interlingual errors "reflect the general character of the learning such as faulty overgeneralization, incomplete application of rules and failure to learn conditions under which rules apply" (Delay, 1982). In the example [*in work*], the student wrongly used the preposition "in" where he/she should not use it because it is a literal translation of MT (Kinyarwanda) [*"mu kazi"*] which proves a learning strategy. Sentence (7) also reflects a problem of wrong selection of article "the" before 'telephone'. This type of error could be attributed to the fact that articles are strange phenomena in the learner's mother tongue. As a matter of fact, once a learner has no knowledge about a particular rule and condition in which it applies, they resort to overgeneralization i.e the learner picks a common rule from a linguistic related area and applies to every circumstance he/she meets that he/she feels, according to his/her opinion, can fit into his/her speech. (Delay, 1982) This signals the developmental stage of the learner, and to remedy the error requires careful pedagogical implications.

As far as sentence (8) is concerned, it is clear that the sentence contains a pronoun error which can be explained by the **case theory**. According to this theory, sentence elements are assigned a case: a pronoun for instance is assigned either a nominative (subject) or an accusative case (object). In the same token, a pronoun takes either form based on the case it is assigned. 'She', therefore, in the sentence: [*\*She's language can improve.*] should not occur in subject position. Nor can it occur in



possessive case to stand as **modifier**. Due to faulty or partial learning of the target language or the ignorance of rules of restriction, learners overgeneralizes TL rules. Ellis (1997) thinks that intralingual errors may be caused by the influence of one target language item or rule upon another.

**(9) Tense and verb form selection errors**

(a) \*Communication helped me to **written** a business letter.

√ *Communication helped me to write a business letter.*

(b) \*It is communication which **is to facilitating** me to **calling** with telephone.

√ *It is communication which facilitates me to call on telephone.*

Sentences (a) and (b) present verb form errors whereby the learner selects a syntactic form of verb that doesn't collocate with the items closer to it. For one to be able to recognise if a selected item collocates with others or not, one needs to refer to its form. As can be seen in the sentence (a): [*communication helped me to written*"], the addition of suffixes **-en** to the infinitive is a type of errors of morphology. This type of error can be attributed to the fact the learner might have been influenced by the simple past of the previous verb phrase (VP) *'helped'*. The learner therefore believed that the subsequent VP occurring to the right of the first VP is also to be in a past form. Ellis (1997) put forward, "In the process of acquiring a second language, the child will subconsciously invent structures influenced by knowledge he already possesses." As matter of fact, **'to'** of the infinitive agrees with a finite verb and therefore does not collocate with any word with an inflectional morpheme **-En**. According to Richards (1974), these errors come from a 'faulty comprehension or wrong distinction in the target language culminating into overgeneralization'. Whereas according to Ellis (1997), "This is because many learners take the past inflection [**-en**] as a marker of the past even on infinitive." Richards (1974) names this category of errors 'developmental errors' as they are characteristics of the learning process of the TL structure rules.

**(10) Tense misuse**

These errors consist of using one wrong tense in place of another. Such mistakes, as collected from students' works involve for instance the following:

(a) **Present simple instead of present continuous tense**

\*While the students **study**, they need communication.

√ *While the students are studying, they need communication.*

(b) **Future simple instead of present simple**

\*When I **will finish** to master English, I will communicate very easily.

√ *When I finish to master English, I will communicate very easily.*

(c) **Present simple instead of past simple**

\*Because I **am study** English from S1 up to S3, I know English.

√ *Because I studied English from S1 up to S3, I know English.*

(d) **Past continuous instead of past simple**

\*We **were studying** English since 2006. (They are no longer studying it)

√ *We studied English since 2006. (They are no longer studying it)*

The above errors according to Richards (1971) are attributed to incomplete mastery of the target language rules. As it will be noted later, confusion in using tenses is inevitable and is lamentably the most rampant type of error. In actual fact, the intermediate learners have incomplete mastery of conditions to apply each tense and this justifies the reason behind their confusion particularly when they are tempted to use such tenses. This stems from the existing contrast in the use of tenses in TL (English) and L1 (Kinyarwanda). With this linguistic disparity, it becomes a challenge for the learner to overcome error making in using English tenses. Cored (1967) claims, "Possession of one's native language is facilitative. However, wherever there are disparities in syntactic rules between the L1 and L2, the learning of the TL becomes more difficult." As a strategy to overcome this challenge, errors are inevitable.

**(11) Transitive and intransitive errors**

Certain verbs take an object in order to complete their meanings. These are called **transitive verbs**. Verbs that do not need an object are called **intransitive verbs**. Transitive - intransitive errors occur when transitive verbs are not given objects or intransitive verbs are given objects or the use of transitive instead of intransitive and vice versa.

(a) \*If I **work** my job, I will use a language. ('work' is intransitive verb)

√ *If I do my work, in my job, I will use a language.*

(b) \*Communication can **disappear** all problems in our life.

√ *With communication, all problems can disappear.*

In sentences (a) and (b) above, intransitive verbs are given objects. Because "*disappear*" and '*work*' are not transitive verbs and therefore should not accept the objects. Due to ignorance of this rule, the learner fails to recognize the verb '*work*' and '*disappear*' as intransitive. To account for similar kinds of errors, Brown (2000) opined, "When learners encounter with inherent complexities of target language (TL), they will overgeneralise, analogise, simplify etc., to reduce their learning burden. When they overgeneralise, for instance, they rely on a TL rule of great generic and which they already know; this results in avoiding learning the appropriate rule and inevitably results in errors". Conclusively, in certain particular cases, coping with linguistic complexities such as understanding transitive and intransitive verbs simply requires a learner to memorize verbs which take an object or which do not (Ferris, 2005).

**B. Addition errors**

The addition errors identified are presented in the table 5 & 6 with statistics and in Fig 4 covering 13.40%. They include '*pluralisation*' errors, '*tense marker overuse*', '*singularisation*' errors, '*preposition*, '*article* as well as '*pronoun* overuses (subject/expletive overuse) with their percentages such as 3.94%, 1.92%, 1.36%, 4.90%, 1.72% and 0.87% respectively. Addition errors are made when unnecessary elements are present with the use of redundant markers, likewise, putting the [-s] marker on verbs after the plural pronouns and nouns in the simple present tense. These errors can also result from the analogy that the student establishes between the rule he/she has learned and the new situation which he/she believes can conform to the same rule as discussed below:

**(1) Tense marker overuse**

This consists of marking the same feature with two items such as in tense. An example of such error is the addition of a tense morpheme [-s] used together with the inflexional morpheme [Does] functioning as AUX both to mark the present simple tense or using either [Did] or [Was] and [-ed] to mark the past simple simultaneously. Consider the examples as appeared on students' copies:

(a) \*A person who **was studied** communication **can** to socialise with other people.

√A person who studied communication can socialise with **other** people.

(b) \*If someone **doesn't speaks**, he **doesn't communicates** at the same time.

√If someone doesn't **speak**, he doesn't communicate at the same time.

A person who **didn't studied** language **could not communicated** very well.

√A person who didn't study a language could not communicate very well.

A person who **didn't studied** language **could not communicated** very well.

√A person who didn't study a language could not communicate very well.

The examples of unnecessary and double marking of tense given above are [\*someone doesn't speaks] or [A person who didn't studied]. The past tense -s and -ed markers are redundantly added in cases where it is incorrect, for example in *\*didn't studied*. Students also redundantly added [-s] after the main verb which should be put in the base form once the AUX 'does' has been used, for example in *doesn't speaks*. The learner also redundantly placed the past verb 'be' before the main verb, for example, *\*A person who was studied*, double-marking therefore the past tense." Firstly, what is obviously here is that the learner demonstrates their linguistic competence drawn from his/her prerequisite limited knowledge about the TL but where it is not due. Secondly, the learner is believed to have referred to the teacher's previous overemphasis of the rule and in order to avoid error, he/she falls in another. Brown, (2000) considers these errors as the result of avoiding making some errors but resulting into others" thanks to prior inadequate error treatment.

**2) Plularization overuse**

These are syntactic errors consisting of adding the plural morpheme after a noun which does not allow this because it is incontable noun. In addition, these errors stem from the addition of pluralisation marker to the words where it is not required.

(a) \*Some **mens** and some **womens** fail to communicate.

√Some men and women fail to communicate.

(b) \*The **communications are** studied at school in Rwanda.

√Communication is studied at school in Rwanda.

(b) \*The **communications are** studied at school in Rwanda.

(c) \***An other things** we must know is how to communicate with a language.

√Another thing we must know is how we communicate through lan-guage.

At first, the root cause of the errors above is the analogy that the student establishes between the rule he has learned and the new situation which he believes can conform to the same rule. Most of such errors are also

likely to be attributed to the consequence of inadequate error treatment. (Hagege, 1999), Researchers such as Abbot and Mc Keating (1981) have insisted on overcorrection of errors made by a learner. For them, if a teacher emphasises on an item (for example the plural marker '-S'), there comes, in the mind of the learner the erroneous impression that if he doesn't use it, he will make an error. This, therefore, results into an overuse of the emphasised item. As illustration, when the teacher always rebukes his students' errors of -S 3<sup>rd</sup> person tense marker, they will likely have tendency to write the following sentences: *\*He can studies or He cans study*.

**(2) Subject/expletive overuse**

\* In the future, communication **it** will be very important in our country.

√In the future, communication will be very important in our country.

In the sentence above, the learner has repeated the subject by putting a pronoun 'it' which also refers back to the subject 'communication'. The use of 'it' in this sentence sounds quite irrelevant, hence the ungrammaticality of the sentence. This is what Brown, (2000) considers as a result of rule of overgeneralization errors of discourse reference marker. (nominal substitution / nominal replacement).

**C.Omission errors**

Errors of omission are made when compulsory elements are omitted (Krashen, 1982). These errors occur mainly in tense markers or number markers such as the omission of the grammatical morphemes. With reference to the table 7 and fig. 3, it is clear that all omission errors made by the learners cover the percentage of 26.92% of 3647. Omission errors incorporate other sub-categories made by the same students such as 'preposition errors' at 4.67%, 'article omission' at 5.13% and, 'pronoun omission' at 1.21%. In addition, they include other sub-errors such as 'tense marker omission' at 13.5%, 'subject omission 1.10%, verb omission errors at 1.47% and there/ it (expletives) omission at 0.65%.(Table 8) For illustrations a description and discussion of errors made by the same learners are given as follow:

**(1)Preposition deletion**

\*Some people can talk - each other.

√Some people can talk to each other.

**(2) Article omission**

\*I must do something to become - trader like to learn how to communicate.

√I must do something to become a trader and then learn how to communicate.

The errors made above relate to preposition and article omission. Such errors stem from the fact that articles are linguistic items that are absent in the learner's L1 (Kinyarwanda), whereas preposition errors result from ignorance of TL structure rule. According to Dulay(1967), the challenge for L2 learners remains to memorise TL structures (Especially those that are absent from MT) which structures call for mastery of correct use of prepositions and articles. This requires frequent exposure of the related comprehensible TL input to the learner. Quoting from Hagege & Krashen (1999), "Certain errors will not become permanent unless the child does not have sufficient exposure to L2. If there is sufficient exposure, then instead of reaching

a point where errors can no longer be corrected, they are easily eliminated.”

### (3) Tense marker deletion

(a) \*Communication is a way through which someone **give** his/her ideas.

√Communication is a way through which omeone **gives** their ideas.

(b) \*When someone **want** the materials, he/she is asked to communicate.

√When someone **is** communicating, they must communicate.

(c) \*When I came to secondary school for the first time, I **communicate** with others.

√When I came to secondary school for the first time, I **communicated** with others.

Most of these errors are caused by intralingual transfer as a result of **faulty or partial learning** of the target language rule. “Intralingual errors occur as a result of learners’ attempt to build up concepts and hypotheses about the target language from their limited experience with it” (Ellis, 1997). This is the case in sentences (a) and (b) whereby the learner, having learnt the form of the verb in present simple (in the 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup> pers. Sing. and plur. and 3<sup>rd</sup> pers. Plur.) which is quite similar to the base form, generalises the rule and applies it even to the **3<sup>rd</sup> pers. Sing.** which is particularly different from other forms of simple present as in the example above. The learner therefore dropped –S to mark the verb form in present simple in the 3<sup>rd</sup> persson Sing. What is obvious here is that the learner is not yet in a position to master most of the rules and their exceptions; and this doesn’t enable him/her to go a long way in minimizing the morphological errors in their English language. The aftermath of this is to resort to overgeneralization and misapplication of restriction rules. The same phenomenon occurred in sentence (c) where the learner dropped the inflectional tense marker –ed, with the influence of the basic form of the verb in present simple tense. The fact here is that the learner fails to master rule of sequence of tenses in complex sentences with time clauses.

### (4) Subject omission or null subject /null expletives

\*We study communication as ( - ) is a way of giving his feelings.

√We study communication as **it** is a way of expressing our feelings.

Without communication[ - ] is no social cooperation among people in the family.

√Without communication **there** is no social cooperation among people in the family.

As such above, the subject [it] and [there] are ommitted. This error of subject omission derives from the fact that while the learner is composing his/her English sentences, he/she tries to think in his/her mother tongue as a repercussion of ignorance of the related rule. Then, he/she translates into the TL transferring L1 structure rules to the target language. Krashen (1982) considers such errors as the result of some linguistic items that are absent represented in MT and which the learner fails to integrate in the TL form. Based on the above sample sentences, the subjects [it] and [there] have not their specific equivalence in the learner’s MT (Kinyarwanda) and this causes the learner to drop them as if, according to their knowledge, they never exist. For this reason, the source of the above errors is attributed to literal translation, hence L1 interference errors (Brown, 2000). In such a phenomenon, frequent

exposure of related input along with much exercise in this field is the only solution to master it.

### (5) Verb omission

(a) After that we ( - ) seen the role of communication, we see that it is good to learn it.

√After **having** seen the role of communication, we find that it is important to learn it.

(b) When someone – communicating, delivers a message in the same time.

√When someone **is** communicating, he/she is delivering a message.....

As seen in the above sentences, present continuous auxiliary [be] is omitted. The omission of the verb “Be” in sentence (a) and (b) is due to L1 interference because similar structures in Kinyarwanda lack the verb “Be”.

### (6) Passive voice errors

(a) \*Any kind of message **can communicated** by telephone.

√Any kind of message **can be communicated** on telephone.

(b) \*Employers **are help** by telephone.

√Employers **are helped** by telephones.

(c) \*In communication, we study letters because a job **can - asked** through letters.

√In communication, we study writing letters because a job **can be asked**.

As seen in sentences (a) and (c) above, passive auxiliary [be] is omitted whereas in (b), the main verb form is not appropriate: it lacks a **past participle marker**. As it is the case in the above sentences, some learners tend to omit the passive auxiliary [be] because of non-presence of it in Kinyarwanda passive construction, while others omit a participle form after the main verb. Both English and Kinyarwanda have active and passive voice with different constructions. English passive construction uses auxiliaries and word order change. Kinyarwanda passive construction is a matter of morpheme insertion within a verb and there is no insertion of any other item in the sentence like English passive auxiliary. Such differences according to Ferris (2005), justify the inherent complexity of TL for the learner which is the cause of errors that are made in this area.

## D. Misordering errors

Misordering errors, as put by Ferris (2008) are sentence segments misplacement, resulting from failure to place sentence items in their proper position violating therefore sentence structure rule. Similar cases were plainly visible in the first students’ writing test as indicated herewith:

### (1) Subject -verb misplacement

a) \*How **I will** become a good trade? It is only by using with communication.

b) √How will I become a good trader? It will be only by using communication.

As it is the case above, the subject inversion rule has been violated. The English structure patterning suggests that an auxiliary should occur before the subject in an interrogative sentence. The mistake, as a matter of fact, springs from the interference of a rule that students

have already internalized which is the structure of a Kernel sentence. (Chomsky, 1957), in his model of transformational-generative grammar maintained that all sentences must conform to a kernel sentence structure including the interrogative ones. Failing to abide by transformational rule by moving the auxiliary to the left of the subject leads to errors. The learner demonstrates here his knowledge in a language using the previous knowledge of the TL system where it is not appropriate which results into errors. What is meant here is that these errors also result from the analogy that the student establishes between the rule he has learned and the new situation which he believes can conform to the same rule.

**(2) Auxiliary misplacement**

(a) \* With communication someone may **ask if can he** get a job.

*(b)<sup>∇</sup> With communication, someone may ask if they can get a job.*

(c) \*I don't know **why do we** fail to communicate despite of our studying English.

*(d)<sup>∇</sup> I don't know why we (do) fail to communicate in spite of our having studied English.*

In sentence (a) the learner attaches the meaning of the verb 'ask' to the concept of a normal structure of a question and therefore refers to the rule of subject-inversion. In sentence (c), the learner wrongly applies subject-verb inversion rule in addition to having wrongly arranged the Auxiliary – Subject design: the learner here makes a diversion in the normal position of an item labeled AUX with a wrong opinion in mind that the sentence is interrogative in [...*why do we fail*] and in [...*if can he get*]. The fact is that the learner relies on words WHY and IF which he/she is familiar with while making questions and as a result applies subject-inversion rule. According to Richards (1974), this stems from a 'faulty comprehension or wrong distinction in the target language'. In addition, the learner confuses the relevant rule which is linked to interrogative and relative pronouns. Interrogative pronouns require inversion while relative pronouns do not (consider sentence c). Students therefore have to learn to distinguish the two structures to recognize that relative clauses with **why** like in (c) do not accept the inversion as it happens in *wh*-questions. Thus, the learners sometimes turn over a *wh*-word before acquiring the distinction forming the general hypothesis of the target language.

**(3) Adjective and adverb misplacement**

a) \*Someone can deliver a **message very important with to use communication.**

*b)<sup>∇</sup> Someone can deliver a very important message through the use of communication.*

c) \* They **very well** can communicate problem without it.

*d)<sup>∇</sup> They can communicate very well without any problem.*

As it can be seen above, some sentence items (adjective and adverb) have been placed in wrong positions in sentence (a). The resultant errors derive on one part from the learner's mother tongue interference in sentence, (Interlingual error) and on another part, from ignorance of the rule restriction in sentence (Corder, 1967). The constituent structure of English language is such a way that its hierarchical ordering is head-initial unlike the student's mother tongue (Kinyarwanda) which is head-final. I.e the learner here translates the MT sentence constituent structure [*ubutumwa bw'ingenzi*] into TL as [*a message very*

*important*]. Normally the Adj. P. occurs to the left of N.P. By contrast, it is the reverse in Kinyarwanda. Similar misplacement error occurred in sentence (c) whereby the constituent (Adv. P) as adverb of manner comes to the left of (V.P) which it has to modify. Thus such syntactic errors are in fact according to *The Dictionary of Language Teaching and Applied Linguistics* (1992), the learner's translation of L1 structure rules into TL which signals their learning strategy. However, although different misordering errors seem to be common among students, they do not emerge as a big area of difficulty because their percentage is not high.

**4.2. Discussion on social factors of syntactic errors**

**a. Motivation factor**

This study identified causes of syntactic errors made by secondary English learners in their test works and it proved that motivation had a hand in the poor learning of English language. Students responding to the questionnaire (table 12), 97.9% testified poor motivation to push ahead in learning English because its grammar was complicated and indeed it was not their domain. Such a poor motivation justified poor performance manifested in their errors in English Syntax. (Esser & Watson, 1984) Next to the fact that English is not the learner's domain, the majority of the teachers (38.3%) condemn their students not to have motivation to learn language (table 11). Similar rate of 38.3% of teachers also condemn themselves for their poor prerequisite for target language input for their learners and therefore acknowledged to have acted as source of errors.

**b. Learning activities and tasks**

As revealed in the students' opinions (table 13) the opportunities to do grammar exercises is minimal at the rare of 2.20%. Krashen (1982) argues that the learner needs to receive appropriate input to acquire a rule in particular language area. The nature of classroom language tasks as opined by students reveals particular emphasis on one language area and negligence of another: 97.7% of the respondents revealed that '*Presentation exercises*' and '*writing composition tasks*' are the only language tasks given in class at the expense of grammar exercises. This is likely to lead to oblivion and therefore results into poor grammatical language input hence stagnation in this language area. The aforementioned bias in the contents of teaching offers no room for learners to assimilate grammatical input enabling them to improve on language by minimising errors. Krashen (op. cit)

**c. Error treatment impact on language learning progress**

To measure the impact of the feedback in form of error treatment that language teachers provide, the results (see table 14) have shown that having been spotted, errors were penalized in the experimental test. The latter was done out of 20 marks, and the score as per calculated mean ( $\bar{x}$ ) is 11.9. As can be noted, the average of success in the writing test is not satisfactory with the marking style. The reaction to the score after marking has proven evidence that there is correlation between the way teachers treat their students' errors and learning progress.

In light of the opinions elicited from the students, the marking criteria obviously reflected a certain lowest degree of error tolerance otherwise known as error overcorrection (Hagege, 1999). As presented (in table 15), only 3.6% of the respondents declared that they felt encouraged by the marking style and considered the error treatment beneficial to them. Their opinion went on “A foundation will be laid on this error correction feedback to achieve progress in learning”. Freiermuth (1997) sides with the opinion, “Self-confident, capable students can profit from even minor corrections.” However, the percentages of students who felt about giving up was (26.8%), angry with the marker (3.6%), disagreeing with the marker (51.2%) and those feeling put to shame (14.6%) justifying the cause of lack of motivation by learners. Students were never happy with the error correction strategy which proved to be discouraging. Hagege (1999) contributed that serious correction of every error as soon as it occurs is not recommended. He also made a similar point: “Repetitive and immediate corrections may cause sensitive children to develop aggressive behaviour towards their classmates or teacher” (op. cit.)

#### 4.2. Discussion of results after control test

Having done with the experimental test essay, the control test was undertaken to ensure that errors are likely to decrease as a result of error treatment mechanism in experimental test. Surprisingly, similar errors were repeated and the frequency of errors in each category fairly increased rather than decreasing (compare table 10 with 16). As shown with scores from test No1 (table 14) the treatment of errors proved to be hypercorrection which culminated in no improvement in the errors minimisation. This ends in stagnation instead of learning progress. Therefore, serious consideration of errors say overcorrection while marking appeared to be very harmful and discouraging for language learners' motivation.

As a matter of fact, Hagege (1999) has contributed, “Hypercorrection is seen as an interruption and therefore tends to produce negative consequence to the less sensitive learners. Such consequences include anxiety, fear of making an error, the development of avoidance strategies, reduced motivation for participation in the classroom, lack of interest for learning, reduced will for self correction and lack of trust towards the teacher”. According to Freiermuth (1997), when the learner tries to express an idea by using a linguistic form he has not yet acquired, he will most likely make errors. Correcting all these errors will be ineffective and interruption because the learner is not aware of them.

#### 5. Conclusion

Four dimensions characterized categories of syntactic errors made by intermediate English learning students: Sentence item misordering errors, unnecessary addition errors, omission of mandatory sentence items, and inconvenient selection of sentence items with their proper form. Of course the evidence has shown that ill-matched item selection errors dominate. Further analysis has also shown that syntactic errors relating to wrong choice of tense and verb form are the major areas of language difficulty. The causes of the errors were discovered and also discussed. They were categorized under intralingual and interlingual sources, problem of language input and error treatment approach

leading to discouragement of learning. All in all, plenty of mistakes that intermediate English learners make is a natural part of language acquisition process. Conclusively, learners' errors should serve as a basis to discover how L.A. occurs and stages a language learner has to go through rather than being punished.

As remedial attempt, the syntactic errors in the English of secondary school students could be reduced drastically if the following suggestions are used:

Teaching grammar topics to the best maximum should be envisaged among solutions of error minimisation. It is good for teachers to adequately put emphasis on syntactic areas of complication to minimise the students' interlingual errors caused by learning strategies. The best methods should consist of helping the learner overcome the habits of their native language and form the new habits of the TL speaker Chomsky (1957).

The learner needs to receive enough input to acquire language and teachers are the main source. So, enough language practice is vital for a TL mastery and fast progress in language learning. Using input theory to promote language learning is beneficial as long as it aims at the students. And observing predictable order of learning materials for teaching syntactic structures of English language is to be considered (Krashen, 1982) The age and the level of the learner must also be kept in mind.

Teachers should not support that students' errors be punished. Negative attitude towards the students' errors should be replaced by adequate method which is - but not always resorted to - encouraging peer correction and holding the learner accountable for their own style of learning to minimise their errors. (Gedion A. et al., 2016)

Teachers should be tolerant of learner's errors especially while grading their students' written works to avoid killing their motivation in their learning progress. Only major errors that seem to impede communication can be corrected. However, with the learner's advancement, teachers may look at smaller ones. (Krashen, 1982)

It is of great importance to be aware that not all types of error must be treated in the same way. Actually, it should not always belong to the teacher to correct the students' errors. Rather, learners should be motivated to do so by themselves while helping them to become conscious of their errors and give them incentive to try and find for themselves why they have made the error and how they could avoid repeating it (independence and self-correction). By self and peer-correction, students are cooperative and are encouraged to help one another which can sustain motivation for learning. The best way forward is selecting different best students to supply the correct form.

Posters that give grammatical forms of the TL, especially those ones causing a lot of difficulties, should be hung around in the classroom to promote student's self-instruction and must be changed when the forms are internalized and errors corrected.

The provision of a relaxed and comfortable learning environment through adequate error treatment strategies should be envisaged to help

the learner eliminate negative feelings of incapacity towards language improvement. (Lazanov, 2005)

g) The implication for language teachers here is that grammar-related topics should be incorporated into the effective everyday English language teaching mainly in the areas that create more difficulties to most of the learners such as selection errors with particularity on tenses and verb form choice and correct use. This should however go hand in hand with preparing more exercises, of course with enough comprehensible explanation.

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