Negative Transfer from Arabic as a Major Reason for the Errors Made by Arabic Learners in their Written Production in English as a Second Language

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Independent Project 15 HP

Engelska | Höstterminen 2022

Program
Abstract

The purpose of this research is to investigate the influence of negative transfer from Arabic as the most dominant influential factor among other possible factors that negatively affect Arabic learners resulting in them making errors in their written production in English as a second language. To perform this investigation, the author has collected and analysed 15 texts written by Arabic students enrolled in Grades 7, 8, and 9 of a lower secondary school. Since this study aims to investigate the Arabic influence on Arabic students’ written production, the author has decided to focus on the errors which seem to be most problematic and relevant to the aims of the study. These chosen errors are analysed to determine if the negative transfer from Arabic is the most dominant influential factor among other possible factors that negatively affect Arabic learners resulting in them making errors in their written production in English. Although the available corpus is small, the study also aims to investigate if there are any differences in the number of specific errors made in this limited number of texts produced by students enrolled in different school grades.

The findings show that these students made a lot of errors in different linguistic categories. 175 errors are the total chosen errors which seemed to be the most problematic and relevant to the aims of this study. 133 of these seem to have been made due to the negative transfer from Arabic. The rest of the errors (42) appear to be the ones caused by either the negative transfer from Swedish or the incorrect use of linguistic rules in the target language itself. The findings of this study also show that the error frequency is the lowest in the texts produced by the students in Grade 9, although the corpus was relatively small to make such a comparison.

**Keywords**: Second language acquisition, English, Arabic, language interference, negative transfer, error analysis, contrastive analysis.
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1. Introduction

A lot of research shows that learners who study a new language can be affected by their first language in addition to other possible factors. By using an error analysis approach, this study will investigate the influence of negative transfer from Arabic as the most dominant influential factor among other possible factors that negatively affect Arabic learners resulting in them making errors in their written production in English.

The English language differs in its structure from the Arabic language, which can create a lot of confusion for Arabic learners when they study English as a second language. This confusion is mostly caused by language interference which results in Arabic learners making different linguistic errors in their production of English.

Interference is a term that describes the influence of one of two languages used by a bilingual speaker. Lado (1964) considers interference as the negative influence of the first language on the learning process of the second language. Hence, Arabic learners are usually influenced by this negative influence as they are no exception to the rule. Oldin (1989) believes that the main cause of interference is a transfer which is a process of applying definite linguistic structures from the learner’s first language to the second one. According to Oldin (1989), linguistic similarities and differences between some languages can affect the acquisition of new linguistic structures such as grammar. This might also be used as an explanation for why Arabic learners face many linguistic problems when they usually apply their Arabic structures to English which is considered as the negative transfer.

Errors caused by the negative transfer helped many researchers in investigating new pedagogical methods which can help in developing students’ production. Therefore, many scholars investigated in their studies the effects of the negative transfer on learners’ acquisition of the target language. A lot of research (e.g., Sabbah, 2015; Diab, 1996; Albalawi, 2016; Ali, 2007; S. Khan & M. Khan, 2016; E. Ahmed & Y. Ahmed, 2016; Alzamil, 2020), was carried out regarding Arabic learners’ production of English. The findings in the research showed that Arabic learners often transfer from Arabic to English many grammatical, syntactical, lexical, and writing features such as verb tenses, subject-verb agreement, active-passive voice, word order, coordinating conjunctions, prepositions, definite and indefinite articles, singular and plural forms, countable and uncountable nouns, adjectives and adverbs, relative clauses, lexical items, spelling, and capitalization, which results in them making many grammatical, syntactical, lexical, and writing errors.
According to Sabbah (2015), this negative transfer can be revealed in Arabic learners’ writing with many construction errors reflecting the Arabic interference in their production of English. The current study aims to further investigate the effect of negative transfer on Arabic students’ production of English as a second language. That is, analysing students’ linguistic errors can help teachers to understand the influence of the native language on Arabic learners as one of the most crucial factors that affect their production in English. Hence, teachers can use more appropriate methods in English teaching that help Arabic learners in avoiding these errors.

1.1 Aims and research questions

This research aims to investigate the influence of negative transfer from Arabic as the most dominant influential factor among other possible factors that negatively affect Arabic learners resulting in them making errors in their written production in English as a second language. Hence, this study is going to focus on identifying, classifying, and analysing the most problematic errors made by Arabic students in their written English which are relevant to the aim of this study which is the influence of negative transfer from Arabic on these students. Moreover, the study will investigate if there are any differences in the number of specific errors made in the texts produced by this limited number of students. The findings of this research can help both Arabic learners and English teachers establish appropriate strategies to minimize Arabic-English language interference and enhance learners’ English proficiency. The following research questions are going to be investigated in this study:

1- Which common errors do Arabic learners make in English when they study it as a second language?

2- Are there any differences in the number of specific errors made in texts produced by students enrolled in different grades of the lower secondary school?

3- What types of common errors made by Arabic students in their written English are related to the negative transfer from Arabic? Are there other errors that can be related to other factors?

2. Theoretical background

In this section, theories, and terms such as second language acquisition, language errors, interference, negative transfer, contrastive analysis, and error analysis will be explained concerning the relevant literature.
2.1 Second language acquisition

Many linguistic scholars investigated the aspect of second language acquisition. According to Crystal (1997), second language acquisition is the process of acquiring a non-native language after the mother tongue was already established during an individual’s childhood. According to Ellis (1994), the second language can be constructively learned through formal learning in various educational institutions, or it can be learned informally via social communication. The author believes that acquiring English as a second language is a subject that requires using special methods for teaching. Ellis (1994) recommends using the error analysis approach as a teaching method that helps L2 learners focus on their weak points in the target language since it can help in developing the learner’s second language by identifying and analysing the learner’s errors. Focusing on such errors can raise learners’ awareness which can contribute to avoiding them in the future.

2.2 Language errors

In linguistics, errors were explored by many linguists who often focused on the systematic deviations in the language learning process and the level of learners’ language proficiency.

Norrish (1983) describes an error as a systematic deviation that reflects a learner’s incomplete learning who consequently gets it wrong while errors were considered by Hendrickson (1987) as signals indicating the current learning process which shows that the learner did not reach the adequate linguistic competence in the target language. Similarly, Richards & Schmidt (2002) describes an error as an imperfect use of a linguistic item that reflects incomplete learning. According to Richards & Schmidt (2002), errors are classified into two types: intralingual and interlingual.

The first type is the intralingual error which is caused by the incorrect use of a specific rule in the target language. Richards & Schmidt (2002) classify intralingual errors into six types:

- overgeneralization errors – the learner applies a linguistic rule in a situation where it should not be applied,
- simplification errors – the learner attempts to produce individual linguistic forms which are easier than those that should be used in the target language,
- developmental errors – the learner has already developed some of the linguistic knowledge in the target language but fails in reproducing its rules,
• induced errors – learners’ errors are related to teaching where the teacher explains a rule without mentioning its exceptions,

• errors of avoidance – the learner avoids applying some specific rules as they are difficult,

• errors of overproduction – the learner, who did not yet acquire the required linguistic knowledge of the target language, fails in using some required rules to produce specific structures in this language.

The second type is the interlingual error which is caused by the linguistic interference of the learner’s mother tongue, and which comes into existence through the application of the previous L1 linguistic knowledge to the linguistic structure of the target language, which is referred to as the transfer.

2.3 Language interference and negative transfer

Interference according to Gass & Selinker (1983) usually occurs when a learner transfer parts of the structures from the first language to the target language. The authors consider the concept of language interference is perceived as being a transfer in which transferring linguistic structures from the learner’s first language to the target language can produce interference.

Several decades ago, Lado (1964) considered interference as a kind of decline in L1 performance accompanied by some lack in L2 acquisition. The author suggested making “a comparison of the grammatical structure of the foreign language with that of the native language to discover the problems of the students in learning the foreign language” (Lado, 1964,19). This comparison can help to detect the difficulties that learners face which are caused by language interference. Gass & Selinker (2001) also referred to the importance of comparing L1 with L2 in understanding the hypotheses of language transfer phenomena. Many linguistic researchers consider transferring a major obstacle in second language acquisition as the transfer can be negatively applied by transferring many rhetorical conventions from the learner’s first language into the new language (Alkhateeb, 2019). According to Lado (1964), interference can be positive and helpful when both language structures match so that transferring is positive. On contrary to that, interference can cause linguistic problems when both languages differ in their structures so that transferring becomes negative. In her research, Sabbah (2015) defines both types of transfer. She considers the transfer positive if a bilingual learner applies similar structures from L1 to the target language. This application turns into a negative transfer if the learner applies the L1 structure to the L2 structure if both language structures do not match
each other. In another research, Diab (1996) also claims that negative transfer was the cause of interference problems that affected the production of Arabic students who studied English at university. The findings in the study of Diab (1996), which were obtained using the contrastive approach, show that applying Arabic grammatical structures to English writing resulted in making several grammatical errors in students’ essays that included errors in subject-verb agreement, plural forms, and prepositions.

2.4 The contrastive analysis approach

Arabic and English have many systemic differences since they come from different language families. These differences involve the major linguistic components including form, content, and use. Those differences also include sub-components involving syntax, morphology, phonology, and grammar. Grammar is the most problematic sub-component involving many several differences in its rules between Arabic and English. The most convenient method for identifying these structural differences is the use of a contrastive analysis approach.

The contrastive analysis hypothesis is concerned with comparative linguistics in which two or more languages are compared to find out the similarities or differences between those languages for different theoretical or analytic purposes. This approach, which dominated in the 1950s, considered first language interference as a major influence that negatively affects learners’ production in the target language (Anefnaf, 2017).

Lado (1957) believes that acquiring a new language is easier if there are many similarities in both the structure of the learner’s first language and the new language. Contrary to that, it would be more difficult for the learner to acquire a new language if there are many differences between the L1 structure and the structure of the target language. The author believes that the more differences there are between L1 and L2 structures the more linguistic problems will occur in the target language because of the interference between these languages which, in turn, negatively affects the production of the new language. Lado (1957) suggests using the contrastive analysis approach to predict those linguistic difficulties that learners experience during their acquisition of the new language. Fang & Xue-mei (2007) believe that interference is the main obstacle through which the first language system negatively affects the new language system. Therefore, contrastive analysis helps in comparing the structure in both languages, which enables us to distinguish and predict many linguistic problems. Gass & Selinker (1994, 2001) claim that comparative analysis study between languages helps scholars in linguistics in their investigations regarding the hypotheses of language transfer. The authors
believe that the contrastive analyses approach helps in identifying those errors learners usually make because of the interference between their first language and the target language.

Therefore, the interrelationship between the contrastive analysis hypothesis and error analysis approach is crucial in detecting and predicting interference problems regarding the negative transfer from L1 to the target language.

2.5 The error analysis approach

The Error analysis approach developed in the 1960s aimed to identify the errors in the learner’s language to analyse them systematically and search for the causes of such errors.

Ellis & Barkhuizen (2005:51) defined error analyses as a series of “processes for recognizing, describing, and clarifying learner errors”. Corder (1967) believes that errors are an essential aspect of a learning process. Hence, error analysis can help identify the “nature of learner’s knowledge at the point in time in their learning career” so that the teacher can focus on what must be learnt (Corder, 1974:257). According to Gass & Selinker (1994), errors are red flags that reflect a learner’s level of knowledge of the target language. Therefore, it is particularly important in second language teaching to make an errors analysis to identify and analyse those kinds of errors which can help detect their causes so that they can be avoided. According to Corder (1967), error analysis is particularly important in making teachers know their learners’ language level so that these teachers can provide them with suitable feedback that makes them learn from their errors. In addition to that, many researchers in linguistics can benefit from error analysis in their research regarding second language acquisition since they can investigate the problems and determine the procedures which can be applied in this field. Richard (2002) believes that the aim of error analysis is first to identify and investigate the causes and motives behind learners’ errors. Secondly, to get information about learning common difficulties to be able to choose appropriate teaching methods. Thirdly, to find out the appropriate approaches and strategies which can be used in language learning and teaching. Ellis & Barkhuizen (2005) believe that the error analysis approach is an extremely useful method in evaluating learners’ errors which can increase both learner-and teacher’s awareness of the causes of the errors so that more appropriate strategies and teaching methods can be used to avoid language interference problems.

To conduct an error analysis Corder (1974) suggests implementing it through specific procedures that follow a model consisting of five stages: Collecting the data, identifying the errors, describing the errors, explaining the cause of the error, and finally evaluating and
correcting the errors. In another model Ellis & Barkhuizen (2005) recommend implementing the procedures of error analysis in five stages which are performed as follows:

1. Collecting relevant data concerning the objects of the research,
2. identifying and classifying the type of errors,
3. describing the errors according to their three principles by which: the first principle describes errors of substitution in which a linguistic item is replaced with an incorrect linguistic item. The second principle describes errors of addition in which a linguistic item is added where it is not needed. The third principle describes errors of omission in which a linguistic item which is necessary for forming a linguistic structure is omitted,
4. analysing and explaining the reasons for the errors,
5. discussing the results and evaluating the process of error analyses to conclude the findings.

In this research, the second approach which is recommended by Ellis & Barkhuizen (2005) is going to be applied to analysing students’ texts considering the results of analysing Arabic students’ common errors in a lot of previous research as references to this study.

2.6 Common L1-related errors made by Arabic learners documented by previous research

A lot of research was carried out regarding the impact of the negative transfer on Arabic learners’ production of English. The results of the previous research show that most Arabic learners usually make common errors that are related to the influence of their first language on their English performance. Alzamil (2020) claims that more than 50% of the errors made by Arabic students can be classified into three categories: spelling, articles, and capitalization. The author argues that his findings show that interference problems are the reason for the difficulties that Arabic students face in their English writing. In another study, Ahmed (2016) investigated grammar and spelling errors in Arabic students’ writing. The author found that the errors of these learners were caused by three factors: Arabic-English interference, the lack of practice in the techniques of writing, and because of the failure to follow up on students’ writing performance. Khan (2016) considers the negative transfer made by Arabic students to be the main cause of grammatical errors, in addition to other problems which are related to the cohesion in students’ texts. This implies, according to the author, a lack of pedagogical attention from the teachers' side.
The findings in the study of Albalawi (2016) showed that the errors made by the Arabic were in grammar and syntax because of the negative transfer from Arabic to English. This concerned some grammatical features such as active and passive voice, plurality, articles, verb tenses, and prepositions. The results show that subject-verb agreement was the most frequent error in these categories. The author claims that the writing skills of these students can be developed with the use of some pedagogical recommendations that are related to her findings.

The common aspect in these previous studies is the use of error analysis in their investigation process, which will be used as a method in this study as well, as this one proves useful in understanding why Arabic learners make those common kinds of errors in their English writing.

3. Method

3.1 Materials and data collection

The primary data used for this research was 15 written texts produced by Arabic students, which is relatively limited in number as they were the only available data suiting the aim of the study that could be obtained by the author. These students were native Arabic speakers studying in three different grades in a Swedish lower secondary school in Stockholm. The mean ages of these students who were 9 boys and 6 girls ranged between 13 and 15 years old. Those students had already studied in Arabic schools in their Arabic countries between 4 and 6 years. The total period of learning English for these students in their Arabic countries was also between 4 and 6 years, while the total period of learning English and Swedish for these students in Sweden was between 1 and 3 years. This means that these students were at various levels of education in Arabic, English and Swedish, which affects their English proficiency. The task given to the students was proportional to the academic level of these students and their school grades based on the Swedish curriculum and the objectives of this research. The students were divided into three groups, with five students in each, representing the 7th, 8th and 9th grades. All the students in these grades were asked to write a text of 200-300 words about their previous experience in learning the English language titled ‘Your experience in learning English’. Thereafter, students’ texts were analysed in terms of three theories: The first one was the interference theory which is based on L1 transfer. The second one was the contrastive analysis theory, in which two languages are usually compared to explain the similarities and differences between
them. The third one was the error analysis theory, which was conducted to identify the cause of the errors. Using these three theories, this analysis is expected to show which common errors Arabic students usually make in English during their learning process and the role of negative transfer from Arabic as the most dominant influential factor among other possible factors that negatively affect Arabic learners, resulting in them making errors in their written production in English as a second language.

### 3.2 Methods and procedures

Since this research is conducted by a native-Arabic speaker who possesses knowledge of Arabic as a first language, English as a second language, and Swedish as a third language, errors made by the students through the negative transfer from Arabic were easily detected. This quantitative and qualitative study was performed by the author conducting an error analysis in which each of the errors was analysed with the aid of the contrastive analysis theory. The purpose of using the contrastive approach was to discuss the similarities and differences between students’ mother tongue and English. By analysing the most problematic and relevant errors, the author could reveal the real cause of those specific errors, which were most relevant to the aims of the study, to find out whether they were interlingual or intralingual errors. Consequently, the error analysis and the contrastive analysis approach were used as methods in this research because they were crucial in identifying and analysing what caused these errors. Murphy’s grammar book (2019) was also used as a grammatical reference in analysing specific errors to determine whether what was assumed to be an error was one. This type of analysis allowed the researcher to draw relevant conclusions which can contribute to increasing both students’ and teachers’ awareness of such problems.

The error analysis approach used by Ellis & Barkhuizen (2005), who recommend implementing the error analysis procedures in five stages, was adopted in this study. Of these five stages, four of them (1-4) are presented in the Results section, and Stage 5 is presented in the Discussion and Conclusion sections. These stages were applied as follows:

In the first stage, the relevant data, which is students’ texts, were collected and divided into three groups representing students' school level `7th, 8th, and 9th grades``. In the second stage, the most problematic errors that were seen as relevant to the aims of this study were located, they were assigned to categories according to their type and their frequency...
rates were calculated. These errors were categorised according to the taxonomy of error analysis designed by James (1998) used to record errors made by Arabic learners in English. The errors were categorised as follows:

- grammatical and syntactical errors such as word order, tenses, concordance, possessive case, and reported speech,
- lexical errors such as the choice of the word,
- writing errors such as spelling, capitalization, and punctuation,

In addition to the assignment of errors to their categories, a comparative analysis of the three levels of students was done, although this corpus is rather small to make such a comparison. This comparison aims to investigate if there are any differences in the frequency of some specific errors made by individual groups consisting of a limited number of participants.

In the third stage, the errors were described according to Ellis & Barkhuizen's principles of categorizing the errors under their three types: errors of substitution, errors of addition, and errors of omission).

In the fourth stage, the errors were analysed and discussed according to the criteria presented in the relevant literature mentioned in the Theoretical Background section. The contrastive analysis approach was implemented in analysing each error in this stage. The reason for using this approach was to compare and discuss whether the error might be caused by negative transfer or not. The analysis of each error was implemented with the aid of the prescriptive approach, which provided a common standard of English grammar usage so that an error was verified with the aid of a standard grammar-related source.

In the final stage, the results which are presented in the next section were discussed and evaluated by the author to draw a relevant conclusion considering the findings of this study as well as the use of error analysis and contrastive analysis as research methods.

4. Results

The results of this study are presented in this section under four sub-sections which represent Stages 2-4 in the error analysis procedure. In the first sub-section, students’ errors are identified and assigned to their linguistic categories as well as counted to calculate their frequencies. In the second sub-section, error frequencies are compared according to students’ grades. In the
third sub-section, the errors are described and classified according to their three types: errors of substitution, errors of addition, and errors of omission. In the fourth sub-section, the errors are analysed within their grammatical, syntactical, lexical, and writing categories. Some relevant examples from students' texts are discussed to illustrate how and why the errors have been made.

4.1 Errors identification and classification

By investigating the 15 texts written by the Arabic students the analysis has revealed that the Arabic students made a lot of errors, 175 errors of these were chosen to be analysed as they were the most problematic and relevant to the aims of the study. The taxonomy of error analysis designed by James (1998) was used to classify the errors into four main linguistic categories: Grammar, syntax, lexicon, and writing. These three main categories were further broken down into 9 sub-categories in which the errors were identified and counted according to their occurrence as follows: verb tense errors, subject-verb agreement errors, active-passive voice errors, coordinating conjunction errors, prepositions errors, word order errors, lexical errors, spelling errors, and capitalization errors.

All these errors are presented according to their linguistic classifications, frequency, and frequency percentages in the following table:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Errors Categories</th>
<th>Errors Sub-categories</th>
<th>Error Frequency</th>
<th>Errors Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Grammar</td>
<td>Verb tense</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Subject-verb agreement</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 1 Classification of the errors
### Comparison of error frequency based on the learners’ level

The error frequencies were compared to find if there are any differences between the three proficiency levels. The statistics related to the error categories showed that the frequency of errors was lower in the texts of students who study in higher grades. In contrast, the students who study at a lower level in school indicated the highest error frequency. The following table lists the totals for each level and category. The following table indicates the highest error frequency in students who study at Level 1, i.e., the 7th-grade students, and the lowest error frequency in students who study at Level 3, i.e., the 9th-grade students.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Total Errors</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Active-passive voice</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coordinating conjunctions</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prepositions</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Syntax</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Word order</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lexicon</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lexical</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spelling</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Capitalization</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total errors</td>
<td>175</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2 Errors frequency differences between the three levels

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Errors Categories</th>
<th>Errors Sub-categories</th>
<th>Level 1 Error Frequency</th>
<th>Level 2 Error Frequency</th>
<th>Level 3 Error Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Grammar</td>
<td>Verb tense</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Subject-verb agreement</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Active-passive voice</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Coordinating conjunctions</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Prepositions</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Syntax</td>
<td>Word order</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lexicon</td>
<td>lexical</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing</td>
<td>Spelling</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Capitalization</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total errors</td>
<td>86</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The results presented in Table 2, come from a rather small corpus in which three groups of 5 students are compared. The individual differences in these groups can cause different results as each person represents 20% of the whole group. However, as one can see in Table 2, the statistics related to the error categories in the individual proficiency groups show that the students at Level 1, have the highest score of errors among the three levels of students in seven categories, mainly in the categories of verb tense, prepositions, and spelling. In contrast,
students at Level 3, make the fewest errors in all the categories. Regarding students at Level 2, they mostly make fewer errors than those at Level 1 except for those in the capitalization and the lexical categories, which appear to be the most frequent error type of all the three levels. All students’ errors were also classified into three-type-classification of errors, i.e., of substitution, addition, and omission, in the next subsection.

4.3 Errors three-type-classification

All the errors in this study were classified according to Ellis & Barkhuizen's principles in describing the errors under their three types: errors of substitution, errors of addition, and errors of omission. The results of this sorting showed that 42% of the most frequent errors, were of the substitution type while 40% of the errors were made in the omission type. The rest of the errors 18% were of lower frequency and were made in the addition type. The following table shows the differences in error frequencies according to their three types.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Error types</th>
<th>Errors of substitution</th>
<th>errors of addition</th>
<th>errors of omission</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Errors Percentage</td>
<td>42 %</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>40 %</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.4 Grammatical, syntactical, lexical, and writing errors analysis

In this section, which represents Stage 4 in the errors analysis procedures, the chosen errors are analysed within their grammatical, syntactical, lexical, and writing categories. The purpose of this analysis is to reveal whether most of the students’ errors are, as the previous research shows (e.g., Sabbah, 2015; Diab, 1996; S. Khan & M. Khan, 2016; E. Ahmed & Y. Ahmed, 2016; Alzamil, 2020), caused by negative transfer from Arabic. In the coming subsections, both the intralingual and interlingual errors are analysed and discussed with the aid of some relevant examples taken from students to interpret the cause of the error.
4.4.1 Grammar errors

4.4.1.1 Verb tense errors

Verb tense is considered one of the most frequent problems that Arabic learners face. The reason for this erroneous use of verb tense is mentioned by Sabbah (2015). According to her, Arabic has only three simple tenses which are present, past, and future. In contrary to that, verbs in English are used in a more complicated structure. English verbs have three tenses which can be combined with two verb aspects which are the progressive and the perfective aspects (Ali, 2007). The complicated structure of English tenses seems to affect Arabic students, so they make errors in this area often. The analysis shows 25 errors 14% in this category, which were made by students’ incorrect use of tenses. Most of these errors are related to the continuous and perfect aspects which do not exist in Arabic grammar. In addition to that, some of the students’ errors made in the continuous aspect can also be related to the influence of Swedish as L2 or L3, because the continuous aspect does not exist in verb tenses in Swedish as well. This problem is illustrated in the following two examples:

Example 1

I don’t speak English very good because I studied in Arabic when my family decided to come to Sweden. (Incorrect)

I don’t speak English very good because I was studying in Arabic when my family decided to come to Sweden. (Correct)

In this example, the negative transfer seems to be made either from Arabic or from Swedish, because in both languages the continuous aspect is not used with verb tenses. This can be seen as a reason for the error as the student uses the simple past tense in describing an action which was underway in the past while being interrupted by another event. If we interpreted this error as being made by transferring from Arabic, this interpretation would be in line with the previous studies (Sabbah, 2015; Ali, 2007), also mentioning that Arabic does not have perfect and continuous tenses, so the simple past tense is used in describing all kinds of actions that took place in the past. Otherwise, the Swedish influence can be interpreted as a reason for this transfer since the continuous aspect does not either exist in verb tenses in Swedish. On the contrary, in English grammar, the past continuous tense, as Raymond (2019:12) points out, should be used when “something happened (past simple) in the middle of something else (past
continuous). In this example, the verb studied should be used in the past continuous tense was studying because the family decided to travel in the middle of another action that was taking place.

**Example 2**

I already studied some English when I arrived to Sweden. (Incorrect)

I had already studied some English when I arrived in Sweden. (Correct)

Another instance of negative transfer from Arabic can be seen as a reason for the error in this example. The student used the Arabic simple past structure to describe two successive actions that happened in the past which is incorrect in English Grammar. According to Raymond (2019:12) simple past, as arrived in this example, is used to “talk about something that happened in the past. Then, if we want to talk about things that happened before this time, we use the past perfect (had …)” which is had studied in this example. The reason for this negative transfer is that time sequence in Arabic does not affect the use of verb tense which is in line with what was mentioned in the study of Sabbah (2015) as the perfect and the continuous tenses do not exist in Arabic so that only simple tenses are used.

These differences in the use of verb tenses between the two languages seem to result in Arabic learners, mainly those who lack experience in English tenses, making errors since they apply Arabic grammar to the English structures while writing in English.

**Example 3**

I understood everything in English but I did not speak it. (Incorrect)

I understood everything in English, but I did not speak it. (Correct)

In Example 3, the student added the suffix -ed to make the past form of the verb understand, which is incorrect. This is a different kind of error because it does not seem to be an interlingual error caused by Arabic interference but rather it is classified as the intralingual type of error.

The analysis showed that this error can be viewed as an overgeneralization error because the student has applied a syntactic rule, regarding regular verbs, in a situation where this rule does not apply. This type of overgeneralization error is caused “by extension of target language rules to inappropriate context.” (Richards & Schmidt, 2002:185).
4.4.1.2 Subject-verb agreement errors

The agreement between subject and verb is more complicated in Arabic than in English which can cause interference for Arabic learners. That is, verbs in Arabic do not agree with the subject if they precede it, while they do when they follow it as in the word order in English `SVO`. Moreover, verbs in Arabic agree with their subject in number, gender, and case (M. Abu & O. Abu, 2012). On the contrary, verbs in English must agree with their subjects only in number so that both the subject and its verb should be in the singular form or both in the plural form. The analysis shows 11 errors 6% in this category, two of which are illustrated in the following two examples:

**Example 1**

In my country students starts to study in English in class 7. (Incorrect)

In my country students start to study English in class 7. (Correct)

**Example 2**

In Sweden teachers gives us more time to work with each other. (Incorrect)

In Sweden, teachers give us more time to work with each other (Correct)

In these two examples, the same student makes the same error by adding the suffix -s to the verb *start* in Example 1 and *give* in Example 2. These two errors seem to be a result of negative transfer either from Arabic or from Swedish. If this transfer was from Arabic, these errors seem to be related to the use of the Arabic rule in which specific suffixes must be added to the verb to change it into plural if the subject is plural, which is referred to in the study of Abu (2012). In this case, the student has added the suffix -s according to the Arabic rule in which verbs must be pluralized by adding one of these two gender suffixes wna-, or na- to the end of the verb which can be viewed as a negative transfer from Arabic. In line with the study of Albalawi (2016), this type of mistake in the use of subject-verb agreement reflects the strong influence of the mother tongue on students who lack experience in the use of such elements in English grammar. The other possibility is that these errors are related to the transfer from Swedish because in Swedish, the suffix -s is not either used in the simple present tense when the subject is in a third-person singular form. According to English grammar, the use of the verbs in Example 1 and Example 2 is considered incorrect because the suffix -s is only added to a verb in the simple present tense when its subject is in a third-person singular form (Raymond, 2019).
This incorrect use of the suffix -s reflects the student's lack of English grammar knowledge which led to the transferring of Arabic or Swedish rules to the English structure.

**Example 3**

My friends in class helped me in writing the answers because they was very difficult. (Incorrect)

My friends in class helped me to write the answers because they were difficult. (Correct)

The error in Example 3 does not seem to be a negative transfer and thus, it can be viewed as an intralingual error made by the incorrect use of verb-subject agreement in the target language. The students used the auxiliary verb to be in its singular form was, which is incorrect, instead of using its plural form were “which should agree with its subject `answers` in the plural form” (Raymond, 2019:10). This incorrect use of this grammatical rule is related, according to Chomsky (1965), to both students’ inadequate learning and understanding of the target language.

### 4.4.1.3 Active-passive voice errors

The active-passive voice is another syntactic category that most Arabic learners find difficult. Most of the passive voice errors seem to have been made by the students negatively transferring the Arabic grammatical rule of the forming of passive voice to English. As a result of that, 8 errors 4% in this linguistic category were identified in students’ texts, two of which are presented in the following two examples:

**Example 1**

In my country we asked to write the exercises every lesson. (Incorrect)

In my country, we are/were asked to write the exercises in every lesson. (Correct)

**Example 2**

But here we asked to do many activities. (Incorrect)

But here we are asked to do many activities. (Correct)

The same error is repeated twice by the same student by applying the Arabic structure of passive voice to the English one. Passive forms are formed in Arabic by changing the syntactical vowel signs which are usually used above and under the verb because auxiliary verbs do not exist in Arabic syntax. In contrast, passive forms are formed differently in English.
Raymond (2019:84) mentions that the passive voice can be formed as "be (is/was etc.) + past participle". The students in Examples 1 and 2 did not use the auxiliary verb to be before the past participle, which is considered incorrect according to English grammar.

This study, contrary to Albalawi (2016), does not consider the incorrect use of the active/passive voice to be an instance of overgeneralization because the Arabic students seem to be reproducing their grammatical rules of Arabic when they form their sentences in English. This tendency of applying Arabic grammatical rules to English can be viewed as a negative transfer from the Arabic syntax.

**Example 3**

In my class all students are help in English by the teacher and her assistant. (Incorrect)

In my class, all students are helped with English by the teacher and her assistant. (Correct)

In this example, there is no evidence for negative transfer because the student made a mistake which is related to performance. This error seems to be rather an intralingual error in which the student used incorrectly a specific rule in the target language which is not related to language interference. This error occurred because the student omitted to add the suffix -ed to the verb to turn it into the past participle form, which is according to Raymond (2019:84), the correct form of the passive voice rule in this sentence. This intralingual error is classified as the type of overproduction error in which learners make a mistake which is related to the fact that they have not acquired enough linguistic knowledge to enable them to use the rules in the target language correctly (Richards & Schmidt, 2002).

**4.4.1.4 Coordinating conjunction errors**

Coordinating conjunctions do not cause many problems for Arabic learners because of the similarity in the rules governing their use between Arabic and English with some exceptions. The analysis shows 3 errors 2% in this category which does not seem many compared to other categories. These errors seem to be a result of one of those few differences between the two languages in which the students incorrectly used the coordinating conjunctions in their sentences as in the following two examples:
Example 1

I have found new things in my new school which are lunch and screens and computers. (Incorrect)

I have found new things in my new school which are lunch, screens, and computers. (Correct)

As in the study of Diab (1996), a negative transfer from Arabic can be seen as a reason for the error as the student applies the Arabic rule in which the coordinating conjunction *wa*, which is the equivalent to *and* in English, should be used before every element in a series of grammatically equal elements. This sentence is incorrect according to English grammar as the coordinating conjunction should not be used before each element in a series of parallel structures. Rather, the coordinating conjunctions should be only used before the last two elements in a series of elements that are similar in function and construction. Furthermore, the *comma* should be placed between three or more parallel structures connected by the coordinating conjunction in the same series (Raymond, 2019).

Example 2

I use always google translate to translate words in english or swedish or other languages to arabic. (Incorrect)

I always use google translate to translate words in English, Swedish, or other languages into Arabic. (Correct)

The student in Example 2, made some errors one of which is related to the same incorrect use in Example 1. The error was made by applying the Arabic rule which was referred to by Diab (1996) according to which the coordinating conjunction *aw* which is the equivalent to *or* in English, before every element in the series. The use of *or* is also incorrect in this sentence because the same grammatical rule used with *and* is applied to *or* as both are coordinating conjunctions that should be only used before the last two elements in a series of parallel structures. In addition to that, a comma should be placed between three or more parallel structures in the same series.

Example 3

I think I like languages like Arabic, English, Swedish because I can speak all of them. (Incorrect)
I think I like languages like Arabic, English, and Swedish because I can speak all of them. (Correct)

The student did not use the coordinating conjunction *and* in this example, which is not considered to be a negative transfer, though. This error can be viewed as an intralingual error because the student incorrectly uses the rule in English which is, according to Richards (19), attributed to a false concept reflecting the incorrect comprehension of the rule-learning in the target language.

### 4.4.5 Preposition errors

Prepositions are one of the linguistic categories that confuse Arabic learners most when they use them in English for two reasons. The first one is the difference in the use of prepositions which have different forms in both languages mainly in situations where one Arabic preposition can be translated into several prepositions in English but not vice versa (Scott & Tucker, 1974). The second reason is that some English prepositions do not exist in the Arabic language which makes Arabic learners make errors in using them. This fact can represent the reason why the students made 36 errors 21% of this type. This confusion in the use of prepositions among Arabic learners, which is related to the difference between Arabic and English, is illustrated in the following examples:

#### Example 1

In my old school in my country the books and pens are not free and must be bought from students. (Incorrect)

In my old school in my country, books and pens are not free and must be bought by students. (Correct)

In this example, the student makes the error by using the preposition *from*, instead of using the correct preposition *by* which should be used in passive structures as Raymond (2019:256) points out: “We say that ‘something is done by…(passive)’”. The reason for this incorrect use is that the sentence was produced by the student first in Arabic before being translated into English. This student translated the Arabic formulation of the sentence ‘*min kibal al tollab*’ into English ‘*from the side of the students*’ to express the intended meaning. The negative transfer from Arabic can be seen as a reason for the error as the student uses the Arabic preposition ‘*min*’, which is the literal translation of the English preposition *from*, instead of using *by* which should be used in this case.
This incorrect use of prepositions was pointed out in a lot of previous research (e.g., Sabbah, 2015; Ali, 2007; Diab 1996, et.al) in which this type of error can be viewed as a negative transfer from Arabic because Arabic students apply their preposition rules from Arabic to the English structure they are producing.

**Example 2**

I don’t like to study after school so I study in night. (Incorrect)

I don’t like to study after school, so I study at night. (Correct)

In this example, the student uses the preposition *in* instead of *at*, which seems to be a result of a negative transfer from Arabic, as the preposition ‘ifi’, which is translated into English as *in*, is the one used with the word *night* in Arabic. The English preposition *at*, which is translated as ‘inda’ in Arabic, cannot be used with words such as *night* on one hand, but it can be used in many Arabic structures such as in the evening, at the bus stop, upon request, etc., which are translated to *at* in English. This is probably the reason why the student has used the preposition *in* as a literal translation from Arabic (Diab, 1996).

Many English prepositions make Arabic learners confused when they use them because of the big differences in the use of these prepositions between the two languages. Consequently, this confusion affects these learners so that they make many errors when they use prepositions in English.

**Example 3**

In my old school we must listen on the teacher all the time. (Incorrect)

In my old school, we must listen to the teacher all the time. (Correct)

In this example, this error can be attributed to one of two reasons. The first reason is that this error can be attributed to the negative transfer from Swedish because in Swedish the preposition that should be used in this sentence is *på* which corresponds to *on* in English. The second possible reason is that this error can be seen as an intralingual one as no reason for this being a result of negative transfer from Arabic. In this case, the use of the preposition *on* instead of *at* can be considered an incorrect use of prepositions according to English grammar (Raymond, 2019:252). This type of intralingual error
is considered a developmental error which is derived from the incorrect comprehension of the distinctions in the language itself (Richards, 1984).

4.4.2 Syntax errors

4.4.2.1 Word order errors

Word order in English usually represents a problematic area for Arabic learners which is obvious in their texts. These errors seem to be a result of the differences between Arabic word order and English word order. Many sentence elements in the Arabic syntax are used in a different order compared to that used in English. One of these differences results in the incorrect use of adjectives and adverbs in students' texts, which is related to the interference of Arabic rules where adjectives are only used after nouns and adverbs are used after nouns or verbs as post-modifiers. The analysis shows 14 errors 8% in this category in which some students applied this Arabic word order to their English writing as in the following two examples:

Example 1

I expected this difference big between learning in my country and learning here in Sweden. (Incorrect)

I expected this big difference between learning in my country and learning here in Sweden. (Correct)

This example illustrates how Arabic word order is applied by placing the adjective after the noun. The student places the adjective incorrectly because, according to Kinneavy & Warriner (1993), adjectives in English are usually used as pre-modifiers, or post-modifiers if they are preceded by the auxiliary verb *to be*, in addition to some exceptions to these rules such as a court martial, artist manque, etc. In this example, the adjective *big* should be used as a pre-modifier according to Raymond (2019:200), who points out the use of adjectives that” tell us about a noun (somebody or something). We use adjectives before nouns”.

In a similar example, another student applies Arabic rules to the use of adverbs in his text. The student wrote:

Example 2

We leave our school usually at 1 PM. (Incorrect)
We usually leave our school at 1 PM. (Incorrect)

In this example, the adverbial *usually* was placed incorrectly after the object. This incorrect use of the adverbial reflects, as the previous studies also mention (Diab, 1996; Sabbah, 2015; Albalawi, 2016), the negative transfer from Arabic word order to the English structure. However, according to Raymond (2019:220), certain adverbs in English such as usually, often, rarely, seldom, always, etc. should be placed after the subject and directly before the main verb, while in Arabic they are always placed after the verb, the subject, and the object.

There are many other problematic differences in word order between Arabic and English which were pointed out in the study of Sabbah (2015). One of the basic differences is the standard word order in Arabic `VSO`, which is different from the English one `SVO`, in addition to other differences in the word order of many linguistic features such as relative pronouns, relative pronouns, adjectives, adverbs, etc... These differences usually cause a lot of problems for Arabic learners in their production of English, mainly in situations where these learners do not have the opportunity and the time to master English well.

**Example 3**

Our teachers used to give homework to us which we must in one day finish it. (Incorrect)

Our teachers used to give us homework which we must finish in one day. (Correct)

In Example 3, the error is not related to Arabic as the student fails to use the correct word order in English itself. The student has incorrectly used the adverb `of time` *one day*, which should be placed, according to the English word order explained by Raymond (2019:218) at the end of the sentence, which is also the rule in Arabic and Swedish. The error in Example 3 is considered intralingual as it seems to be a result of the incorrect use of the rule in the target language. This type of error is classified according to Richards & Schmidt (2002) under the overproduction errors category in which the learner, who did not yet acquire the required linguistic knowledge of the target language, fails to use some required rules to produce specific structures in this language.

### 4.4.3 Lexical errors

Lexical errors are another category where Arabic learners make a lot of errors. This is due to the substantial difference in the lexicon between Arabic and English. This difference is related
to the fact that an Arabic word can be interpreted or translated into several English words, which makes it difficult for the learner to determine which of these synonyms or collocations must be used to produce the right meaning in the sentence. Therefore, Arabic learners tend to translate their Arabic words literally into English in their production of English, which often results in a negative transfer from Arabic. The Arabic students in this study made 17 errors 10% in the lexical linguistic category. The following two examples illustrate the influence of Arabic interference on students' writing:

**Example 1**

I like to read books even in time of the pause. (Incorrect)

I like to read books even during break time. (Correct)

In this example, the student makes a lexical error by translating the Arabic structure `wakt al istiraha` literally to the English time of the pause. This expression is incorrect in English. The negative transfer from Arabic, as Diab (1996) points out, can be seen as a reason for the error as the student translates the Arabic expression literally into English to convey the intended meaning of the sentence.

**Example 2**

I think English and Swedish continue each other. (Incorrect)

I think English and Swedish complement/complete each other. (Correct)

Similarly to Example 1, the error in Example 2, which appears to be a negative transfer from Arabic, can be viewed as a reason for this error. The student made the error using the word continue, which is a literal translation of the word `tokammel` in Arabic, to express the process of complementation. This word choice can be viewed as incorrect in English, and words such as complement or complete should be used to express the process of complementation.

As (Sabbah, 2015; Diab 1996) say, the reason for making lexical errors is the difficulty that Arabic learners face in choosing the correct English word which suits the intended meaning in the context.

**Example 3**

I like English but I feel Swedish grammar is lighter. (Incorrect)

I like English but I feel Swedish grammar is easier. (Correct)
In Example 3, the error can be interpreted in two ways. The first interpretation is that this error can be seen as a negative transfer from Swedish because the Swedish word *lättare* can correspond to two different English words *easier* or *lighter*. This correspondence can cause some confusion for some students who study both English and Swedish as a second language. The other interpretation is that the student made an intralingual error which is not related to a negative transfer from Swedish. The student, in this case, used the incorrect word lighter instead of using a suitable word such as easier to correctly express the intended meaning of this comparison. According to Richards & Schmidt (2002), the student's incorrect choice of the linguistic item can be viewed as an overproduction error reflecting the lack of the learner's linguistic knowledge that enables this learner to produce correct structures in the target language.

4.4.4 Writing errors

4.4.4.1 Spelling errors

Spelling is the most problematic aspect for Arabic learners because of the big difference in the orthographic representation of some consonant sounds and many vowel sounds between Arabic and English. Vowel sounds in Arabic are represented either in one of the three grapheme letters َ و ِ، which are transcribed into the English sound system as `а: u: i:`, or as signs (َّ ُ) which are put over or under each letter in the word, which are transcribed into English sound system as `а, i, u`.

Most of the spelling errors made by Arabic learners are related, on one hand, to the fact that there is almost no correlation between pronunciation and the spelling of words in English and on the other hand, spelling errors are also related to the lack of experience of these Arabic learners in mastering the spelling of words in English. This led the Arabic students to make spelling mistakes by incorrectly substituting, adding, or omitting specific English letters in their writing. The Arabic students in this study made 42 errors 24% in this category, which is the highest frequency in all the categories. In the following two examples, samples of these errors are presented to illustrate some of these spelling problems:

**Example 1**

I didn't now english is very difficult becaus i thout swedish is more dificult. (Incorrect)
I didn't know that English is very difficult, but I thought that Swedish is more difficult. (Correct)

This student makes many errors which can be related to Arabic interference and the lack of English proficiency. The Lexical errors in this example are omission errors in which letters such as k- in know, -f in difficult, -e in because, and -gh in thought have been omitted from the words. In a similar interpretation of a similar lexical error, Sabah (2015) related the omission of some English letters to the transferring of the Arabic orthographic rules to English writing where in Arabic each pronounced sound must be written in a form of a letter or a sign. This might be an explanation of why the student omitted unpronounced letters because of the negative transfer from the Arabic phonetics and orthographic rules in which pronunciation corresponds with spelling contrary to English.

**Example 2**

I now my broblem in english is riting not speaking. (Incorrect)

I know my problem with English is writing, not speaking. (Correct)

In Example 2, the same student makes also lexical errors in another sentence which are also related to the Arabic interference. The errors in this sentence are of two types: the first is errors of omission, as in Example 1, which are made because of the Arabic influence on the student’s English writing resulting in the student omitting the letters: k- in know and w- in writing. The second type is the error of substitution in which the student substituted the letter b- for the letter p- in problem. This incorrect use is related to the influence of the Arabic sound `b` on the student’s production of the English sound `p`. These findings are in the line with the ones described in the study of Ali (2007), i.e., the influence of the Arabic sound pronunciation led to the misspelling of the letter p, which suggests that this is a result of negative transfer from the Arabic pronunciation and orthographic rules to English.

**Example 3**

I like the way we study in school here when I and my freinds work in groups. (Incorrect)

I like the way we study in school here when I and my friends work in groups. (Correct)

In Example 3, another student made a lexical error through the transposition of two letters -i, and -e when the student wrote freinds instead of friends. The analysis shows that this error does not seem to be a result of the Arabic interference but rather of the intralingual type of errors in
which the student incorrectly used the Writing rules in the target language itself. On one hand, this incorrect spelling can be viewed as an error in performance that occurred during the process of writing. On the other hand, this error can otherwise be viewed as a lack of comprehension of English regular spelling patterns which can be explained in terms of Chomsky’s (1965) research as a lack of learner competence in the target language.

4.4.4.2 Capitalization errors

Capitalization in English is another common error which appears to affect new Arabic learners mostly because of the interference of their mother tongue. The reason for this problem is that the upper and lower cases do not exist in Arabic as in English. All Arabic letters regardless of their position within a word should be written in the same size. Therefore, English capitalization rules can be difficult for both new and inexperienced Arabic learners, which makes them make errors in this category while they write in English. The analysis shows 19 errors 11% in this category. To illustrate this type of error, two of the mentioned examples in the previous subsections, are used in Example1 and 2:

Example 1

I didn't now english is very difficult becaus i thout swedish is more dificult. (Incorrect)

I didn't know that English is very difficult, but I thought that Swedish is more difficult. (Correct)

Example 2

I now my broblem in english is riting not speaking. (Incorrect)

I know my problem with English is writing, not speaking. (Correct)

On one hand, the analysis of these two examples shows a result which is in line with the previous studies (e.g., Sabbah, 2015; Diab 1996), i.e., that the errors concerning capitalization are related to the influence of students' negative transfer from Arabic writing rules to English writing. On the other hand, another factor that seems to be affecting the interpretation of these capitalization errors is that the Arabic students in this study also know Swedish because they study at a Swedish school. Hence, these errors can also be related to negative transfer from Swedish where the name of the language is not capitalized.
Example 3

I think any student can improve himself in English if he tries to do the exercises in his English Book first before reading the right answers. (Incorrect)

I think any student can improve himself in English if he tries to do the exercises in his English book first before reading the right answers. (Correct)

In Example 3, the student makes an intralingual error in which the word Book is capitalized which is incorrect in this case. The word book is a common noun, and these nouns should not be capitalized in English unless it is a name or a title. This incorrect use of capitalization in this example does not seem to relate to a negative transfer from Arabic, but it seems to concern the aspect of competence which reflects, according to Chomsky (1965), the lack of learner’s comprehension of the linguistic rules in the target language.

5. Discussion

The research questions of this study were addressed through the error analysis showing that grammatical and spelling errors were the most common errors in English among Arabic students. On one hand, these errors which mostly appear to be interlingual seem to be related to the negative transfer from Arabic, which is generally in line with the findings of previous studies (e.g., Sabbah, 2015; Diab, 1996; S. Khan & M. Khan, 2016; E. Ahmed & Y. Ahmed, 2016; Alzamil, 2020). These studies consider the negative transfer from Arabic to be the cause of most of the errors in most linguistic categories. On the other hand, a few of those interlingual errors seem to be related to the negative transfer from Swedish. This is because the students in this study are studying in a Swedish school, which also makes Swedish another potential element to the occurrence of some errors because of the negative transfer from Swedish.

The analysis also shows that the frequency of the errors made in texts produced by students enrolled in different grades was highest in Grade 7 and lowest in Grade 9. Although the corpus was relatively small to make such a comparison, these differences in the number of specific errors made by these students reflected that lower-grade students also tend to know less than higher-grade students.

However, contrary to the findings in some of these studies (e.g., Sabbah, 2015; Diab, 1996; Albalawi, 2016; Ali, 2007), several intralingual errors were also identified, which seem to be
a result of the learner's incorrect use of specific rules in the target language. This incorrect use was explained in previous studies (e.g., Chomsky, 1965; Richards & Schmidt, 2002; Richards, 1984) as being a mistake in the performance of the learner, or as a lack of learner’s competence in understanding the linguistic rules of the target language.

The Arabic students in this study were attending three different school grades which means that they have different levels of English proficiency. Even though most of the students within each of the grade groups were approximately on the same level of English, the evaluation of their texts showed that there were a few exceptions with significantly lower proficiency among them. As the concentration of more advanced students is higher in higher grades, the results show a logical trend, i.e., that the error frequency is highest among the 7th-grade students who are at the lowest proficiency level, and the lowest error frequency was among the 9th-grade students who are at the highest proficiency level. Furthermore, the results have revealed that interlingual errors caused by the interference of students' first language were most frequent, although a few of those errors were caused by the interference of Swedish as an (L2, L3, or Ln). The rest of the errors are intralingual as they do not show any relationship between the Arabic language and the type of error. These intralingual errors seem to have been made due to the incorrect use of the linguistic rule in the target language, which is in line with Richards & Schmidt (2002), and Richard (1984).

However, there are many limitations in this study, some of which are:

- The error analysis and the contrastive analysis approaches, which are presented in the Theoretical Background section, were the only methods used in this study. That is, some researchers (e.g., E. Ahmed & Y. Ahmed, 2016; S. Khan & M. Khan, 2016), argue that students’ errors can also be a result of poor teaching where teachers should phrase their explanations more carefully to ensure that such linguistic errors would not occur,

- this study is based on a somewhat limited number of texts, i.e., 15. This gives a corpus of around 3000-4500 words altogether, which is considered less representative if distributed towards three groups that are divided into 5 essays per level. This corpus seems to be too small for proper conclusions and thus one can claim that this sample is too small for such a study to come to some general conclusions,

- the comparison of error frequencies seems to be not reliable with three groups of five essays. The reason for that is when comparing three groups of 5 people, which is rather a small corpus, the individual differences among the participants can cause different
results so that each person represents 20% of the whole group. Thus, the results of this comparison come from a rather small corpus and therefore the current corpus needs to be larger to allow such a comparison,

- the results cannot be reliable according to the difference in the composition of each group. It is important to know the time of students' arrival in Sweden and the study periods in their home country. It is crucial to know when those students started learning and acquiring both English and Swedish because both are Germanic languages which makes them grammatically close to each other. This can affect the composition and the length of their essays within and among groups. Such information would be crucial, as we need to know the exact proficiency level of the individuals in each group to make a reliable comparison and come to some general conclusions,

- many of the students' errors in this study can be also related to other factors, one of which is that the students involved in it also know Swedish and thus, their errors may also result from their transfer from Swedish. The analysis has shown that some of those interlingual errors seem to be related to the negative transfer from Swedish. This is because the students in this study are part of the Swedish school system, which also makes Swedish a potential confounding element as it is also labelled as a second or third language for these students. Therefore, Swedish, and maybe other previous languages need to be taken into consideration as they can interfere with the error classification quite a lot,

- the native speakers are the most qualified persons to detect the transferred linguistic feature from their mother tongue to English. This makes the precise interpretation of whether the errors are majorly caused by Arabic interference limited to the readers who are acquainted with the formal Arabic language,

- what needs to be assessed as a potential confound is that many linguistic features can be transferred to English from students' linguistic repertoires because it is common for learners to negatively transfer from the other languages they know to English as well,

- errors can be interpreted differently from one person to another. Even there are errors which seem to be extremely problematic because they can have different valid and reliable interpretations that are related to several different factors and each of them is considered correct,
• the errors in this study can probably be also related to several different factors such as linguistic repertoire, educational background, age, gender, culture, motivation, type of teaching, time spent on the study of English, the amount of English consumption in using media, or many other factors, which can be further investigated in other research.

Moreover, it is hard to determine the ultimate causes standing for learners' errors since this field requires conducting more quantitative and qualitative studies for researchers to come to statistically valid conclusions. Some further areas to study in this field might be motivation, teachers' experience, learners’ expectations, measures of success, etc. These types of investigations might contribute to enhancing teaching and thus learners’ development in the future.

6. Conclusion

This study has aimed to investigate the common errors made by Arabic students in their production of English as a second language and to investigate the influence of negative transfer from Arabic as the most dominant influential factor among other possible factors that negatively affect Arabic learners resulting in them making errors in their written production in English as a second language. In addition to that, this study has also investigated if there are any differences in the number of specific errors made in texts produced by individual students enrolled in different grades of a lower secondary school. The errors in this study were investigated by the author through error analysis and contrastive analysis which were applied to identify, classify, and analyse the errors. The findings of this study have shown that the grammar and spelling errors that the students make in their writing mostly result from the Arabic interference in their production of English, which is in line with the results of previous studies (e.g., Sabbah, 2015; Diab, 1996; Albalawi, 2016; Ali, 2007; S. Khan & M. Khan, 2016; E. Ahmed & Y. Ahmed, 2016; Alzamil, 2020).

As for research Questions 1 and 3 ‘Which common errors do Arabic learners make in English when they study it as a second language? ’ and Question 3 ‘What types of common errors are made by Arabic students in their written English can be related to the negative transfer from Arabic? Are there other errors that can be related to other factors?’ , grammatical errors and spelling errors were the most common ones among Arabic students, which is generally in line with the findings of the previous studies (e.g., Sabbah, 2015; Diab, 1996; S. Khan & M. Khan,
These errors, which appear to be interlingual, seem to be mostly related to the negative transfer from Arabic from hand. On the other hand, a few of these interlingual errors could also be related to the negative transfer from Swedish, which is another factor that probably influences students’ production. However, contrary to the findings in some of the previous studies (e.g., Sabbah, 2015; Diab, 1996; Albalawi, 2016; Ali, 2007), the negative transfer from Arabic was not the only reason for all the errors, even though it was the cause of most of the errors in most linguistic categories. The rest of the errors were intralingual ones, which seem to be a result of the learner's incorrect use of specific rules in the target language. These intralingual errors were explained, as in previous studies investigating this aspect (e.g., Chomsky, 1965; Richards & Schmidt, 2002; Richards, 1984), as being a mistake in the performance of the learner, or as a lack of the learner’s competence in understanding the linguistic rules of the target language. This lack seems to be related to the lack of quantitative and qualitative exposure to English because most of the students did not start to learn English at an early age, in addition to the poor teaching of English as a subject in the schools in their home countries.

As for research Question 2, although the corpus was relatively small to make such a comparison, the analysis has shown that there are differences in the number of specific errors made in texts produced by students enrolled in different grades. The frequency of the errors was highest in Grade 7 and lowest in Grade 9 as the students in the lower grades tend to be subject to negative transfers more than those in higher grades.

The findings of this study, in addition to other studies and approaches in linguistics, can support future research that might investigate further the influence of the mother tongue, in addition to other relevant factors, on Arabic learners in their production of English. This type of future research can contribute further to the establishment of new pedagogical and didactical methods which could be applied to teaching to avoid similar linguistic problems in the future.
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