Exploring Arabic Learners' English Errors

Interlingual vs. Intralingual Analysis and Remedial Teaching Strategies

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Abstract

Arabic students frequently encounter errors while learning English as a second language (ESL). This study investigates prevalent interlingual and intralingual errors observed among Arabic learners of English. The authors posit that by addressing morphological, lexical, and semantic inaccuracies, English instructors can assist Arabic learners in cultivating a more comprehensive and nuanced proficiency in the English language, thereby enhancing their communicative abilities across various contexts. The instructional strategies explained in this paper offer valuable insights for ESL teachers and tertiary-level Arabic students aiming to mitigate or eliminate such errors. Additionally, the teaching recommendations presented in this paper serve as beneficial resources for experienced and novice instructors, facilitating the reduction of errors commonly encountered by Arabic students in their English language acquisition journey.

Keywords: English errors; ESL; interlingual, intralingual; morphological; relative clauses; lexical, verb tense; syntax; grammar rules; article usage; simplification; prepositions; English language acquisition; semantic inaccuracies; teaching strategies

Introduction

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Grasping the errors made by language learners is vital for understanding the specific linguistic challenges they encounter. By pinpointing and examining these errors, ESL teachers can delve into the underlying reasons for these inaccuracies. This comprehension allows educators to devise precise strategies to address and rectify these mistakes effectively. Moreover, error analysis proves beneficial for learners, enabling them to identify patterns in their mistakes and actively work towards enhancing their language proficiency (Zhang & Rahimi, 2020). This paper pursues two objectives. First, it delves into particular interlingual and intralingual errors observed

among Arabic learners of English (Harttrup, Makarevicius, & Rajan, 2022). Second, it offers teaching strategies to support English instructors and tertiary-level Arabic students in minimizing or eradicating these errors. The outlined recommendations aim to assist both seasoned and new educators in addressing errors made by Arabic learners of English as a second or foreign language.

We considered two categories of errors such as interlingual errors and intralingual in this paper.

Interlingual errors stem from the influence of one's native language and occur when there's a misapplication of linguistic rules from L1 (Arabic) to L2 (English) (Ellis, 2015). On the other hand, intralingual errors arise from incorrect usage of L2's linguistic rules, which are unrelated to language transfer (Richards & Schmidt, 2013). All errors discussed in this paper are derived from the authors' teaching experiences in the Middle East spanning over twenty-five years. They are not specific to any particular group of students or assigned tasks. These errors can be broadly categorized as lexical, semantic, morphological, or syntactic. Certain errors cannot be categorized; therefore, they are considered "ambiguous" (Harttrup et al., 2022), while others are orthographic, such as spelling errors. Our investigation will include morphological errors (of word form and structure), lexical errors (concerning vocabulary usage independent of grammar), and semantic errors (related to word meaning) within both interlingual and intralingual frameworks.

Some linguists have emphasized distinguishing between errors and mistakes. Errors are systematic deviations from the target language norms that reflect learners' developing linguistic competence. Mistakes, on the other hand, are considered random lapses in performance (Doe, 2023). In this paper, we focus on typical errors, not random mistakes.

Interlingual Errors

Interlingual errors are errors that occur when learners transfer elements from their native language (L1) into the target language (L2). The two languages' grammatical, syntactic, lexical, and cultural norms differ, which typically results in such errors (Brown, 2020). Even though a student constructs sentences correctly in their mother tongue, their target language usage may be inaccurate or incomprehensible.

Misunderstandings or confusion can result from interlingual errors that take idiomatic expressions or phrasal verbs literally from the source language into the target language (Lightbown & Spada 2019). In conclusion, learners' first language influences their learning and usage of the target language, which leads to interlingual errors.

Generally, interlingual errors fall within the subsequent grammatical domains:

Syntax and Word Order

English typically uses a Subject-Verb-Object (SVO) structure:

- John (S) read (V) the book (O).

When using the passive voice, we follow the SVO pattern, even though the object is brought to the beginning of the sentence. It now becomes the subject:

- The book (S) was read (V) by John (referred to as the agent of the verb).
- The "default sentence structure" in Arabic is VSO. But the ordering can be changed based on which section of the statement is being emphasized. In Arabic, the inflection is more significant than the structure (Ryding, 2014). Arabic and English language learners should be aware that emphasis in a sentence might vary based on the order of its words. There are specialized ways to handle language structural disparities (S-V-O, S-O-V, and V-S-O combinations) for teaching Arabic learners the correct word order in English sentences (Swan & Smith, 2001).

Practical Recommendations for ESL Teachers:

- To graphically represent the structure of English sentences, use visual aids like charts and diagrams.
- Explain the subject-verb-object (SVO) pattern using simple Arab contextual examples.
- Compare this pattern to demonstrate how Arabic sentences position their modifiers.
- Use simple Arab contextual examples to show how word order changes based on sentence types.
- Encourage students to use interactive language apps to practice the SVO exercises.
- Discuss the SVO pattern differences in Arabic and English.
- Use simple and general sentences to help them understand the basic SVO pattern.
- Demonstrate the typical arrangement of adjectives before nouns and adverbs before verbs in English.
- Provide students a visual comparison of Arabic and English word order to realize the differences.

The above strategies will help reduce the syntactic and word order errors committed by Arabic learners of English to a large extent.

Relative Clauses

Arabic learners of English tend to make errors in using relative clauses. According to Smith (2018), "Arabic speakers may struggle with the use of relative clauses and often omit them or create overly complex structures" (p. 112). Given below are examples of

some common errors that Arabic learners of English commit in using relative clauses. It includes the wrong use or omission of wrong relative pronouns or misplacing the relative clause.

Incorrect relative pronoun:
- Incorrect: "The person who he is my teacher is very nice".
- Correct: The person who is my teacher is very nice.

Relative clause placement:
- Incorrect: "She has a dog which is white in her house".
- Correct: She has a dog in her house which is white.

Omission of the relative pronoun:
- Incorrect: "I saw the car my friend drives".
- Correct: I saw the car that my friend drives.

Prepositions:
- Incorrect: The pencil which I am looking for it is on the table.
- Correct: The pencil which I am looking for is on the table.

Relative pronoun "who" for objects:
- Incorrect: The pen who I use is blue.
- Correct: The pen that I use is blue.

Strategies to Address Relative Clause Difficulties:
- Design exercises that specifically target the formation and use of relative clauses.
- Provide students with examples of relative pronouns, such as who, which, and that, and explain their role in connecting clauses.
- Contrast the use of relative pronouns in English with their counterparts in Arabic to highlight differences.
- Compare and contrast sentence structures in Arabic and English, focusing on linking ideas using relative clauses.

Although Arabic students learning English may find it hard to understand relative clauses and proper punctuation, the above strategies will help them significantly to decrease errors as they transition from their first language (Arabic) to their second language (English).

Verb Tense and Aspect

Arabic and English have distinct systems for expressing verb tense and aspect. Arabic relies on verb modifications, while English uses auxiliary verbs. This can lead to errors in verb tense usage and verb omissions (Alhawary, 2018). Examples of errors we have noted include the following:

- Yesterday, I go to the market, instead of Yesterday, I went to the market.
- Hope you doing well, instead of Hope you are doing well.
- The deadline March 31, instead of The deadline is (on) March 31.
- I hope everyone having a good day, instead of I hope everyone is having a good day.
- Hope you guys having fun! instead of I hope you guys are having fun!
- He told me that he will come tomorrow, instead of He told me that he would come tomorrow.

Recommendations for ESL Instructors:
- Illustrate how auxiliary verbs (e.g., "am," "is," "are," "was," "were," "will") are used to convey these tenses.
- Emphasize the importance of auxiliary verbs in English sentences and explain how their presence or absence can significantly alter the meaning of a sentence.
- Provide exercises specifically targeting word order and the correct use of auxiliary verbs.

Article Usage

Using or not using articles and confusing a/an and the, are some of the other forms of common errors students make while transitioning from most L1s to most L2s. The Arabic language does not have definite and indefinite articles like "the" and "a/an." Hence, Arabic students generally omit or misuse articles in English. The following are some of the instances of the incorrect use of articles (Thompson, 2021):

- I saw interesting movie yesterday. (omitting an article)
- You do a good work. (use of an article when no article is needed)
- I have problem. (lack of an article when one is needed)
- I have the problem. (incorrect use of definite article instead of indefinite article)
- She is student. (omitting an article)

Ways for Managing Article Usage:

- Provide clear explanations of when to use definite (the) and indefinite (a/an) articles in English.
- Emphasize the concept of specificity: use "the" when referring to a specific item known to both the speaker and the listener and "a/an" for non-specific items.
- Explain that articles are often used differently in English depending on the context and situation.
- Illustrate how articles can indicate whether a noun is being introduced (indefinite) or is already known or specific (definite).
- Compare sentences in both languages to emphasize the role of articles in English.
- Include activities where learners identify and insert the appropriate articles in sentences.
- Explain the usage of the indefinite article; also, the differences between "a" and "an."

Mastering the use of articles requires extensive practice over a long period. The above guidance and comprehensive practice exercises can minimize frequent interlingual error occurrences among learners. Overall, the above challenges stem from the inherent differences between Arabic and English language structures, requiring Arab learners to overcome interlingual interference through targeted instruction, practice, and exposure to English language input.

Intralingual Errors

Errors within the language, or intralingual errors, happen when language learners make mistakes that are not influenced by their mother tongue but result from a lack of knowledge about the rules and structures of the target language. These mistakes or errors typically have to do with the target language's syntax, lexicon, pronunciation, or grammar. Intralingual errors result from the learner internalizing and misinterpreting the rules of the target language, as opposed to interlingual errors, which are influenced by the learner's first language (Richards, 2015). An instance of an intralingual error in English could be the improper use of verb tenses or the incorrect use of prepositions; this type of error is not caused by the learner's first language but rather by a misinterpretation of the grammatical rules of the language. The most common intralingual errors fit within the following grammatical areas:

Overgeneralization of Grammar Rules

Arabic learners overgeneralize English grammar rules. They apply a rule they have learned for situations that do not apply in the target language. For example, if a learner has learned that regular past tense verbs in English end in 'ed,' they might incorrectly apply this rule to

irregular verbs, leading to errors like 'He eated breakfast' (Lee, 2019, p. 76). Alternatively, as in the following example we observed, "I can't came yesterday" instead of "I couldn't come yesterday," the speaker wants to use the past tense, and correctly does so for the verb but neglects to do so for the modal. Similarly, "I am sick that's why I don't came." In the following example, the speaker wanted to express the future but incorrectly used the simple form of the verb: "I will not came tomorrow" instead of "I will not come tomorrow" (Swan & Smith, 2001).

Instructional Approaches to Mitigate Overgeneralization:
- Demonstrate how errors can arise from overgeneralization and clarify the appropriate usage.
- Present contrasting examples by providing side-by-side comparisons that showcase when a grammar rule applies and does not, showcasing typical usage and exceptions.
- Explain rule exceptions clearly, highlighting any nuances or exceptions related to grammar rules.
- Identify scenarios where the rule might not be applicable.

Overgeneralizing grammar rules is considered an intralingual error, not based on language transfer but on the incorrect use of the L2's linguistic rules.

Simplification

Simplification is a common factor leading to intralingual errors. Learners tend to simplify complex linguistic structures by omitting or replacing elements of the language to create more straightforward sentences, often leaving out auxiliaries (Brown, 2022). It is common to observe sentences such as:
- She finished her university, instead of She completed her university degree.
- They studying English for three years, instead of They have been studying English for three years.
- Hope you doing well, instead of I hope you are doing well.
- Hope you guys having fun! instead of I hope you guys are having fun!
- He reading a book, instead of He is reading a book.

Strategies to Avoid Simplification:
- Describe the importance of preserving both the precision and the complexity of linguistic structures.
- Explain that simplification can result in meaning being lost or unintentional communication changes.

- Provide examples and models of complicated linguistic structures in various settings.
- Demonstrate how native speakers apply complex structures in context-appropriate writing, academic writing, and professional communication.
- Motivate learners to use a variety of sentence structures, including simple, compound, and complex ones.

Lexical and Semantic Errors

Arabic students occasionally select English words similar to their Arabic equivalents in spelling, meaning, or pronunciation. As a result, they tend to commit lexical and semantic errors, such as substituting 'library' for 'bookstore' (Brown, 2020, p. 58). For example, in Arabic, the term "school" is used to designate all academic institutions, whether college, university, or primary/secondary school. However, it is usually used to refer to a primary/high school in English. Hence, the term "school" may not be able to convey whether the person was trying to describe a university or college.

Strategies to Address Lexical Errors:
- Provide learners with a list of terms that may make students confused, and illustrate their right applications.
- Identify and highlight English words and expressions having distinct meanings in Arabic and English but may appear or sound similar.
- Provide real-life examples and scenarios where using certain words could lead to misunderstandings and encourage students to discuss and analyze these examples in class.
- Provide classroom exercises that contain commonly mistaken words by Arabic learners.
- Encourage students to use bilingual dictionaries to check the correct usage of words and their meanings.

Preposition Usage

There are only a few prepositions in the Arabic language, compared to English, and their usage varies. Arabic learners tend to misuse prepositions in English sentences, leading to mistakes in their sentence structures (Smith, 2020).

Common Preposition Errors Observed:
- In this date instead of On this date
- In the other hand instead of On the other hand
- Tomorrow at morning instead of in the morning

- I apologize about this instead of I apologize for this
- Due this reason instead of Due to this reason
- As of this reason instead of As for this reason

The inappropriate use of prepositions caused intralingual errors in the above examples. Since Arabic prepositions "for," "in," "at," and "on" share great similarities, Arab learners tend to get confused and commit English propositional errors.

Preposition Teaching Strategies:
- Design targeted exercises that allow students to practice using prepositions.
- Review and analyze common errors made by Arabic learners with these prepositions.
- Conduct interactive group activities where students collaborate to use prepositions correctly in discussions or presentations.
- Illustrate the differences between the two prepositions with similar meanings.
- Utilize visual aids, diagrams, or illustrations to depict the spatial relationships conveyed by different prepositions.
- Emphasize the importance of context when choosing the correct preposition.
- Help them learn distinctions between 'on,' 'in,' 'at,' and 'of' and their correct application.
- Encourage students to come up with real-life examples and apply different prepositions.
- Teach common expressions that involve the use of specific prepositions.
- Discuss those words or verbs that naturally pair with specific prepositions.

To avoid such errors, intense practice must be given orally and in writing on correct prepositional use. By implementing these recommendations, English teachers can guide Arabic learners toward a more accurate and nuanced understanding of correctly using prepositions in various spatial and temporal contexts.

Teaching Grammar

Teaching Arabic learners English word structures and meanings is very important because it helps them at different English levels and improves their communication.

A thorough grasp of morphology ensures learners use words correctly, minimizing errors that could impact sentence structure and clarity. Instructing students to distinguish between verb tenses, such as present, past, and future, and to use affixes correctly also aids in constructing grammatically correct sentences. By addressing morphological, lexical, and semantic errors, learners enhance their capacity to

communicate accurately and effectively in English. Ability in morphology, vocabulary, and meaning is vital for academic and professional discourse. It enables learners to articulate ideas with precision and sophistication. Enhancing lexical skills enables learners to choose the most appropriate words for specific contexts, avoiding misunderstandings and miscommunications (Nation, 2001).

Learning to choose synonyms, collocations, and idiomatic expressions—all common lexical errors—allows students to communicate more clearly and concisely. Proficiency in lexicon and semantics is crucial for academic and professional communication (Schmitt, 2000).

A better understanding of word meanings helps students pick the right words for their messages, making it less likely that others will get confused or understand them wrong. Learning about word meanings, how they are used, and when they mean more than their literal meaning helps students use words more accurately, considering cultural and situational differences (Smith, 2022).

Conclusion

Examining errors in Arabic learners' English usage offers valuable insights into the challenges of teaching second language acquisition. Continuing research in this area is crucial for tailoring teaching approaches to meet the specific needs of Arabic learners. Further exploration of individual learner characteristics, the influence of their native language on English language acquisition, and the effectiveness of ESL teaching methods can refine our understanding of language instruction. English instructors can facilitate the development of Arabic learners' English proficiency by addressing errors related to word forms, vocabulary, and meaning, enhancing their communication skills across different settings.

Additionally, advancements in technology-assisted error analysis present promising opportunities for more efficient error detection and correction. As technology advances, language tools like corpus linguistics software, automated error detection systems, and natural language processing algorithms become more sophisticated and user-friendly. The advanced language tools will help ESL teachers better analyze students' language learning competencies and identify patterns and trends in errors that might have been overlooked in the past.

Focusing on error analysis when teaching ESL to Arabic learners not only helps to comprehend the unique difficulties these learners encounter but also creates new opportunities for improving teaching strategies and learning objectives. Using technology and a systematic approach to error analysis, teachers may significantly

increase the efficacy of ESL training, which will ultimately help Arabic learners become more proficient and improve their communication skills.

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