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RESEARCH ARTICLE

SOME REFLECTIONS ON WRITTEN ERRORS MADE BY ARABIC LEARNERS OF ENGLISH

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Abstract

English Second Language (ESL) learners naturally make mistakes or errors in second language acquisition. This is also the case with Arabic learners of English. The authors of this paper present their preliminary observations of errors made by Arabic students based on 25 years of teaching experience in the Middle East. They differentiated the errors according to lexical-semantic-morphological, syntactic, mechanical, and ambiguous categories. In addition, they looked at interlingual causes --- direct transfer from their mother tongue to English (i.e., L1 to L2) and intralingual causes based on the fact that the learners do not know the linguistic rules of the L2. The examples observed by the researchers helped to determine the most frequent categories of errors and give practical solutions to teachers to prevent such errors from happening in the future. The study does not focus on specific assignments but on general observations over the years based on students' correspondence.

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Introduction:-

The authors of this paper have spent a combined 25 years in the Middle East --- in Oman, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates --- teaching Arabic speakers English, the Social Sciences, and Mathematics. All subjects were taught in English to post-secondary educated students. Over this period, the authors noted recurring patterns in errors made by their students. This paper presents preliminary observations on the kinds of errors made, why they were made, and how to minimize the frequency of recurring error patterns. The examples given in this paper represent general observations and are not taken from any specific group of students assigned a specific task. Further research will be conducted on specific groups of students performing specific tasks to form a more accurate error analysis study aimed at helping teachers reduce and eliminate certain types of commonly made errors.

Literature Review:-

The literature on error analysis for second language learners (L2s) is not only immense, but it is also very much still in vogue. Since the American linguist Stephen Pit Corder's 1960's contributions to the field of applied linguistics, and to error analysis in particular, studies have been done on error analysis on adult and children L2s focusing on several languages.

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For example, Kato (2006) did an error analysis study of Japanese to English L2s in which she analyzed essays written by 148 high school students. She found that most errors made were syntactical, followed by lexical. With regards to lexical errors, Kato's study showed that "first year students did not have sufficient vocabulary while the second and third-year students did not use it accurately" (p. 5).

An error analysis of Spanish to English L2s was carried out by Gurtubay (2009) on 67 university students who were asked to write on any topic a maximum of 125 words in 30 minutes. Her focus was on lexical errors, and most occurred because of the transfer from the mother tongue to English.

In the case of Arabic speakers, N. Ali investigated the process of second language acquisition to gain insight into the cause of language errors of Arab learners when communicating in English. The more frequently seen errors include spelling, grammatical, syntactic, or pronunciation errors. The primary cause of errors committed by second language learners was associated with the intervention of the mother tongue, problems with teaching techniques, or issues in the target language. The difference in the learning and writing system between English and Arabic may cause constraints for native Arabic learners. While Arabic is written from right to left, the opposite is true in the case of English. There is a distinct variation between upper- and lower-case letters in English; such is not in Arabic. Similarly, there are variations in the system of learning. The vowel system, pronunciation, and article use differ significantly in English and Arabic. These variations make it hard for native Arabic learners to learn English, leading to erroneous language use (Ali, 2007).

This is echoed by Al-Zoubi and Abu-Eid in their 2014 study. They found that among 266 high school students in Jordan, the percentage of errors committed by students was more than the correct forms. The most frequently occurring error was related to the improper use of verbs. The first language also tended to interfere with the proper use of conjunctions and the active/passive voice.

More recently, Harrison (2021) examined the spelling accuracy, error patterns, and related cognitive and linguistic factors among 112 third-grade students from five elementary schools in Canada. The students included both L1s and L2s. There were no significant variations in spelling accuracy, cognitive measures, and error patterns between the L1s and L2s as the exposure to Canadian social and cultural contexts of both the first and second language learners had similar levels of written language skills. However, it was found that the L2s had significantly lower oral language skills and syntactic knowledge than the L1s. The learners' vocabulary and syntactic knowledge were found to be key factors in determining their verbal skills and competencies.

A study by Adeyemi, Mary, Adebola & Clarion (2021) in the Nigerian context reveals that errors in sentence structure are the most common errors students commit in their English essays. Syntactical errors are the most common type. Students tend to use the wrong words, prepositions, and connectors. They also tend to commit spelling errors and get confused with subject-verb agreement. The authors noted two primary reasons for English language errors in Nigerian schools: poor teaching techniques adopted by the teachers and the interference of students' native language when learning the English language system.

Another recent study by A. Pasaribu (2021) looked at 26 narrative stories of third-semester English students at a private university in Indonesia. The author found three main reasons for errors. In order from the most frequent to the least frequent were the following: L1 interference, poor translation from Indonesian to English, and carelessness.

So, regardless of the languages involved, what are the main causes for errors going from L1 to L2? Are they caused by the influence of one's mother tongue, meaning they are inter-lingual, that is, incorrectly crossing over from L1 to L2? Or are they intra-lingual – not based on language transfer, but based on the incorrect use of L2's linguistic rules? Or are errors caused by what is known as overgeneralization? According to Collins Dictionary, in language acquisition an overgeneralization "is the process of extending the application of a rule to items that are excluded from it in language norm, as when a child uses the regular past tense verb ending – ed of forms like I walked to produce forms like I goed or I rided." Dozens of similar errors are often made by children, but they are also made by adult learners of L2s. Or, finally, are the reasons for the errors unclear, ambiguous, and difficult or impossible to correctly categorize? Obviously, it is natural to make errors when learning a second language, but linguists and teachers of L2 learners often grapple over the actual causes of errors.

Various linguistic models have been utilized to categorize errors when performing error analysis (Corder, 1967; Keshavarz, 1994; Ferris, 2005; et al.). In this paper, we apply our model with the following categories: lexical-semantic-morphological (LSM); syntactic (S); mechanical (M); and ambiguous (A).

Table 1:- Error Category and Description.

Error Category	Description of the Category
Lexical-Semantic-Morphological (LSM)	Wrong choice of words; slang and/or informal language; spelling
Syntactic (S)	Structure; incomplete sentences, run-on sentences; tense; use of passive vs active; subject-verb agreement
Mechanical (M)	Formatting; punctuation; capitalization
Ambiguous (A)	Incoherent; no logical explanation for the error as it does not fit any category

Reflections

The list below comprises some of the most common errors observed by the authors over years of notetaking and observations. In the table below we categorize the errors grammatically, provide the correction of the error and suggest a plausible cause of the error.

Table 2:- Errors observed, Categories, and Possible causes.

Error Observed	Category	Possible Correct form	Cause
Hope you doing well	S	Hope you are doing well	Interlingual transfer: Incorrect use of the present progressive due to the lack of the auxiliary verb in Arabic
I know that you work hard and thanks you for that	LSM	Thank you for that OR thanks for that	Intralingual error: Due to the incorrect mixing of two forms: thanks and thank you
i am very apologize about this	M S	I very much apologize for that	Interlingual transfer: no capital "I" in Arabic; Interlingual error: Incorrectly applying an auxiliary when none is used in English in this case.
Maybe you will had a hard time in this situation	S M	Maybe you will have a hard time in this situation	Intralingual error: Incorrect verb usage; spelling error possibly based on pronunciation
We will try our best to fixed this proplam	S M A	We will try our best to fix this problem	Interlingual error: Possible incorrect use of passive voice; spelling error due to p/b pronunciation difference in Arabic and English
The deadline march 31.	M S	The deadline is March 31	Interlingual transfer: Predicate missing; capitalization error
I'm pleasure to have you work here.	LSM	It's a pleasure to have you work here	Intralingual error: Confusing noun for an adjective.
I hope everyone having a good day	S	I hope everyone is having a good day.	Interlingual transfer: Incorrect use of the present progressive due to the lack of the auxiliary verb in Arabic.
Hope you guys having fun!	S	Hope you guys are having fun!	Interlingual error: Incorrect use of the present progressive due to the lack of the auxiliary verb in Arabic.
We are gonna reply you back.	LSM	We are going to reply.	Intralingual error: The use of slang caused an error in the present progressive.
We look forward to make	S	We look forward to making it.	Intralingual error: Incorrect simple

it.			form; should be a gerund.
The firstly thing to do is...	LSM	The first thing to do is...	Intralingual error: Incorrect use of adverb as opposed to the adjective.
So, in this date ...	LSM S	So, on this date...	Intralingual error: Incorrect preposition.
In the other hand	LSM S	On the other hand	Intralingual error: Incorrect preposition.
Due this situation,	S	Due to this situation	Intralingual error: Omission the of preposition.
I come baring bad news.	LSM	I come bearing bad news.	Intralingual error: Incorrect homonym.
You are do a good work.	LSM S	You are doing a good job. Or: You are doing good work.	Intralingual and interlingual errors: Incorrect mixing of tenses; Incorrect choice of noun.
Do to this reasons...	LSM	Due to these reasons...OR Due to this reason	Intralingual errors: Incorrect choice of words; single pronoun used for plural noun
As off this reason...	LSM	As for this reason...	Intralingual error: Incorrect preposition.
I hope you find this e-mail well.	A	I hope this email finds you well.	Interlingual error: Incorrect word order.
Tomorrow at morning I will do.	S LSM A	Tomorrow in the morning, I will do it.	Intralingual and Interlingual errors: wrong preposition; no object – incomplete sentence
I don't found it I am trying so much but I don't found.	S LSM A	I didn't find it. I am trying so hard, but I couldn't find it.	Intralingual errors: Incorrect tense; run-on sentence; incomplete sentence -no object
I will not came tomorrow	S	I will not come tomorrow.	Intralingual error: Incorrectly confusing tenses
the first servey I will send was wrong.	M LSM A	The first survey I sent was wrong.	Intralingual error: No capitalization; incorrect spelling; incorrectly confusing tenses.
don't but me absent today Because they will take me out of the material	A M	Don't put me absent because they will take me out of the class.	Interlingual errors: Spelling error due to p/b pronunciation difference in Arabic and English; capitalization not needed; incorrect word choice
I can't came today I don't fell well	LSM S	I can't come today. I don't feel well.	Intralingual errors: Incorrectly confusing tenses; run-on sentence.
I am sick that's why I don't came	LSM S	I am sick. That's why I didn't come.	Intralingual errors: Incorrectly confusing tenses; run-on sentence.
I have problem in the system that's why not works	A M	I have a problem with the system. That's why it doesn't work.	Intralingual and Interlingual errors: Incorrect preposition; run-on sentence; no pronoun and incorrect use of present tense.
I want to be at group A so please would you but me in this group	LSM	I want to be in group A, so please would you put me in this group.	Interlingual errors: Incorrect punctuation; spelling error due to p/b pronunciation difference in Arabic and English
I have problem with quiz 5 it's not works.	S M	I have a problem with quiz 5; it doesn't work.	Interlingual errors: No article used; run-on sentence; incorrect use of tense

Conclusion and Recommendations:-

In our research, we applied a model based on the following categories: lexical-semantic-morphological; syntactic; mechanical; and ambiguous. We also examined whether the error was caused by interlingual, intralingual, or unknown/uncertain reasons.

The confusion between verbs and nouns, transitive and intransitive verbs, nouns and adjectives, and phrasal and non-phrasal verbs should be explained when comparing differences between Arabic and English. Teachers should also be aware of the conceptual gap between English and Arabic when introducing new verbs or nouns to their students. The gap between English and Arabic also applies at the syntactical and lexical levels. L1 interference affects L2 word choice and sentence structure.

Correct writing depends on more than grammatical and lexical accuracy. It also depends on the creativity in context and the logical flow of sentences. To write coherent, well-structured paragraphs, the students must be creative and focus on the content. Teachers can help students raise their awareness of how to organize English writing and how sentence and paragraph units are connected to form meaningful text. By recognizing the importance of (and implementing) coherency in their writing, students should spend more time creating ideas and messages they are trying to communicate. Also, teachers need to admit the fact that the process of writing is more important than the teacher's guiding or talking about writing. Therefore, creating, drafting, planning, reviewing, or editing is paramount to increase the quality of writing of Arabic learners of English.

Another practical approach to improving writing skills is to work on other language skills. All four skills are interconnected. Students can develop their writing skills by extensive reading or listening. Research results show that speech and writing production emerges by focusing on listening and reading. For example, extensive reading outside the class will become a rich source for extensive writing. Exposure to authentic, original articles will help Arabic learners of English to expand their vocabulary and compose well-organized, logical, and cohesive essays, emails, or reports (Krashen & Terrell, 1983).

We also noticed that ambiguous sentence fragments, unfinished sentences, or exceptionally long, wordy sentences occur very often; therefore, teachers should focus on the students' errors at the sentence and paragraph level. They should draw students' attention to the whole sentence structure and how sentences are formed when discussing verbs and other grammar points in class to prevent these errors from happening.

The role of L1 is critical in the learning process of L2 at all stages of learning, be it at the beginning or higher competency levels, as J. Wood has pointed out in a review of 60 language error studies in different regions over the past 40 years. Indeed, most L2 learners think in their first language before they do any activity or task in English. This phenomenon is especially significant in the case of students from Arab countries (Wood, 2017). Many Arabic students make errors either due to carelessness or the incorrect use or knowledge of English grammar rules; that is, they often make intralingual errors. However, teachers must never forget that the chance of errors increases in an inter-language transfer when the differences among languages are greater. Such is the case going from Arabic (L1) to English (L2).

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