



RESEARCH ARTICLE

AN ANALYSIS OF INTERLINGUAL VS INTRALINGUAL ERRORS MADE BY ARAB LEARNERS OF ENGLISH AND TEACHING STRATEGIES TO REDUCE THE ERRORS

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Abstract

Arabic students learning English as a second language tend to commit several errors. This paper explores some of the common interlingual versus intralingual errors made by Arabic learners of English. The authors consider that by addressing morphological, lexical, and semantic errors, English teachers can help Arabic learners develop a more comprehensive and nuanced command of the English language, leading to improved communication skills in various contexts. The instructional strategies offered in this paper provide insights to English teachers and Arabic tertiary-level students on reducing or eliminating these errors. The teaching tips presented in this paper are also helpful to both seasoned and new teachers to reduce errors made by Arabic students learning English as a second language.

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Introduction:-

Error analysis is a crucial aspect of understanding the challenges faced by language learners. It is also a valuable tool for understanding and addressing linguistic inaccuracies made by learners. It helps educators identify patterns of errors and their sources and, therefore, develop targeted instructional strategies. The aim of this paper is twofold. First, we examine some interlingual versus intralingual errors made by Arabic learners of English, discussed by the authors in a 2022 article (Harttrup, Makarevicius, and Rajan, 2022). Second, we offer instructional strategies to teachers of English to Arabic tertiary-level students on how to reduce or eliminate these errors. The teaching tips presented in this paper will hopefully help both seasoned and new teachers to reduce errors made by Arabic students learning English as a second language.

We will be looking at two categories of errors: interlingual and intralingual. Recall that interlingual errors are caused by the influence of one's mother tongue and are made by incorrectly crossing over from L1 (in this case Arabic) to L2 (in this case English). Intralingual errors, on the other hand, are not based on language transfer but on the incorrect use of the L2's linguistic rules. All the errors looked at in this paper come from the authors' notebooks over a combined 25 years of teaching in the Middle East. The errors are not from any specific group of students assigned a specific task. Both types of errors fall broadly into the following categories: lexical, semantic, morphological, and syntactic. It should be noted that some errors do not fit into any category, and may be considered "ambiguous" (Harttrup, Makarevicius, and Rajan (2022), while others are orthographic, i.e. spelling mistakes. Our analysis will consider morphological errors (relating to the form and structure of the words), lexical

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errors (the chosen vocabulary distinguished from its grammatical aspects), and semantic errors (the meaning of words) in relation to their interlingual and intralingual contexts.

It should be noted that some linguists have emphasized distinguishing between errors and mistakes. (See, for example, Corder, 1981). As he states, errors are systematic deviations from the target language norms, reflecting learners' developing linguistic competence. Mistakes, on the other hand, are considered random lapses in performance (Corder, 1967). In this paper, our focus is on what we consider to be errors, and not on "random" mistakes.

Interlingual Errors

In general, interlingual errors fit within the following grammatical areas:

1.1 Syntax and Word Order: English typically uses a Subject-Verb-Object (SVO) structure:

→ Mary (S) read (V) the book (O).

When using the passive voice, we still 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 Mary (referred to as the agent of the verb).

On the other hand, in Arabic, the "default sentence structure" is VSO. However, there is the option to mix up the order depending on if one wants to emphasize a particular part of the sentence. It is not the structure that is important in Arabic, but the inflection (optilingo.com/blog/Arabic). As such, English teachers to students of Arabic should be aware that emphasis in a sentence can change depending on word order. Teaching correct word order in English sentences to Arabic learners involves specific strategies to address language structure differences (S-V-O, S-O-V, and V-S-O combinations).

Some practical tips for English teachers include the following:

1. Explain the standard word order in English sentences, emphasizing the subject-verb-object (SVO) structure.
2. Provide examples to illustrate how English sentences typically follow this order.
3. Discuss the differences in word order between Arabic and English.
4. Highlight how Arabic often follows a subject-verb-object (SVO) order but may also have more flexible structures.
5. Utilize visual aids, charts, or diagrams to represent the structure of English sentences visually.
6. Create visual comparisons with Arabic word order to reinforce differences.
7. Start with simple and common sentences to reinforce the basic SVO structure.
8. Explain the typical placement of adjectives before nouns and adverbs before verbs in English.
9. Compare this structure with the placement of modifiers in Arabic sentences.
10. Use diverse examples to demonstrate how word order can vary based on sentence types.
11. Integrate interactive language apps or online platforms that allow students to practice and receive instant feedback on word order exercises.

Applying several of these tips on a regular basis should be helpful in reducing syntactic and word order errors frequently made by Arabic students learning English.

Relative Clauses:

The use of relative clauses is another area where interlingual errors are often made when transferring from Arabic to English. Research by Johnson (2016) suggests that "Arabic speakers may struggle with the use of relative clauses and often omit them or create overly complex structures." This could result in complex sentences that can be challenging for native English speakers to follow. Part of the reason for this is the use of or non-use of commas in English. For example, in the following examples, the use of the comma in the first sentence is used to de-emphasize the importance of the relative clause attached to the subject. In the second sentence, the removal of the commas helps to further define the subject – the little girl:

→ The little girl, who is friend's with my little brother, is learning how to skip rope.

→ The little girl who is friends with my little brother is learning how to skip rope.

Arabic learners of English must learn to differentiate between the two types of sentences and understand the function of relative clauses.

The following tips are helpful in addressing difficulties with relative clauses:

1. Provide clear explanations and examples of relative pronouns (e.g., who, which, that) and their role in connecting clauses.
2. Contrast the use of relative pronouns in English with their counterparts in Arabic to highlight differences.
3. Design exercises that specifically target the formation and use of relative clauses.
4. Compare and contrast sentence structures in Arabic and English, focusing on linking ideas using relative clauses.
5. While it is not always easy for students to grasp relative clauses and the correct use of punctuation, applying the above tips should be helpful in reducing errors going from L1 (Arabic) to L2 (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. Examples of errors we have noted include the following:

- 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!
- You are do a good work instead of You are doing good work.

Teachers of English to Arabic tertiary students can help reduce or eliminate these errors by considering the following:

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

Article Usage: Article usage is a very common interlingual error made by students going from Arabic to English. (Indeed, errors using or not using articles are some of the most common errors made by students going from most L1s to most L2s). Arabic lacks definite and indefinite articles like "the" and "a/an." As such, Arabic students frequently omit or misuse articles in English. The following are but a few examples highlighting the incorrect use of errors:

- 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)

Helping Arabic learners navigate the use of articles in English requires targeted strategies. Here are some practical tips for teachers:

1. Provide clear explanations of when to use definite (the) and indefinite (a/an) articles in English.
2. 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.
3. Explain that articles are often used differently in English depending on the context and situation.
4. Illustrate how articles can indicate whether a noun is being introduced (indefinite) or is already known or specific (definite).
5. Compare sentences in both languages to emphasize the role of articles in English.
6. Include activities where learners identify and insert the appropriate articles in sentences.

Perfecting article use can take years of practice. Hopefully, the above teaching tips along with numerous drills, can reduce this common interlingual error.

Intralingual Errors

We shall now turn our attention to intralingual errors. The most common intralingual errors fit within the following grammatical areas:

Overgeneralization of Grammar Rules:

Intralingual errors occur when 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" (Williams, 2021). 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 confidently and correct does so for the verb, but neglects to do so for the modal. Similarly, the following speaker wanted to express the future, but incorrectly used the simple form of the verb: I willnot came tomorrowinsteadof I will notcome tomorrow.

Addressing the overgeneralization of grammar rules in English learners, particularly those whose native language is Arabic, involves targeted teaching strategies. Here are some practical tips for English teachers:

1. Provide explicit rule exceptions. Communicate any exceptions or nuances associated with grammar rules. Point out situations where the rule may not apply.
2. Illustrate instances where overgeneralization can lead to errors and explain the correct usage.
3. Use contrasting examples. Offer side-by-side examples that demonstrate when a grammar rule is applicable and when it is not, i.e., demonstrate both common usage and exceptions.

Overgeneralization of grammar rules is considered an intralingual error based on language transfer but on the incorrect use of the L2's linguistic rules.

Simplification:

Simplification is a prevalent factor leading to intralingual errors. Learners tend to simplify complex linguistic structures to make them more manageable by omitting or replacing elements of the language to create more straightforward sentences, often leaving out auxiliaries, for example. It is common to observe sentences such as:

- 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!

Addressing simplification as a factor leading to intralingual errors in language learners involves targeted teaching strategies. Here are practical tips for English teachers to help students avoid unnecessary simplification:

1. Clearly explain the importance of maintaining the complexity and accuracy of linguistic structures.
2. Emphasize that simplification may lead to loss of meaning or unintended changes in communication.
3. Model and exemplify complex linguistic structures in various contexts.
4. Show how native speakers naturally use complex structures in real-world situations, such as literature, academic writing, or professional communication.
5. Encourage students to vary their sentence structures, incorporating simple, compound, and complex sentences.

Lexical Errors:

Arabic learners sometimes opt for English words that resemble their Arabic counterparts in spelling or pronunciation but have different meanings. This results in vocabulary errors, such as using "library" instead of "bookstore" (Johnson, 2020).

Addressing lexical errors among Arabic learners of English involves specific strategies to enhance vocabulary accuracy. Here are practical tips for English teachers:

1. Identify and highlight English words that look or sound similar in Arabic and English but have different meanings.
2. Give your students a list of commonly confused words and discuss their correct meanings and usage.
3. Provide real-life examples and scenarios where misusing certain words could lead to misunderstandings and encourage students to discuss and analyze these examples in class.
4. Encourage your students to consider the contexts in which words are used to determine their appropriate meaning.
5. Design interactive exercises that target the correct use of words often misused by Arabic learners.
6. Encourage students to use bilingual dictionaries and online resources to verify the meanings and usages of words.

Preposition Usage:

Arabic has a limited number of prepositions compared to English, and their usage varies. As Al-Salman rightly points out, "Arabic learners tend to misuse prepositions in English sentences, leading to errors in their sentence structures" (2012).

The following are common errors we observed that were made by native Arabic speakers. (We do not consider them to be mistakes as they did not appear to be "random lapses in performance"):

- 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 For this reason

The incorrect preposition in each case is an example of an intralingual error. In Arabic, the prepositions are similar for in, at and on and the students are confusing the prepositions because of their lack of a solid knowledge of the English prepositional phrases.

Helping Arabic learners of English master the correct usage of prepositions like 'on,' 'in,' 'at,' 'for,' and 'of' involves targeted instructional strategies. Here are practical tips for English teachers:

1. Teach specific preposition meanings; explain the meanings of 'on,' 'in,' 'at,' and 'of' and their common uses.
2. Provide examples demonstrating the specific spatial or temporal relationships conveyed by each preposition.
3. Show how 'on' and 'in' are often used for space and time, while 'at' is primarily used for specific points in time.
4. Integrate prepositions into contextual learning activities like dialogues, stories, or scenarios.
5. Encourage students to use prepositions in sentences that reflect real-life situations.
6. Teach common collocations and expressions that involve specific prepositions.
7. Emphasize how certain words naturally pair with specific prepositions; focus on preposition combinations with certain verbs.
8. Design targeted exercises that allow students to practice using prepositions.
9. Review and analyze common errors made by Arabic learners with these prepositions.
10. Conduct interactive group activities where students collaborate to use prepositions correctly in discussions or presentations.
11. Illustrate the differences between the two prepositions with similar meanings.
12. Utilize visual aids, diagrams, or illustrations to depict the spatial relationships conveyed by different prepositions.
13. Emphasize the importance of context when choosing the correct preposition.
14. Provide real-life examples and scenarios where the choice of preposition significantly impacts the meaning of a sentence.

To avoid making such errors, intense practice must be given orally and in writing on correct prepositional use. By implementing these tips, 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 morphological, lexical, and semantic aspects is crucial for Arabic learners of English as it addresses various levels of language proficiency and promotes more accurate communication.

Correct morphological understanding ensures learners use words in their proper forms, reducing errors that may affect sentence structure and overall clarity. Teaching the difference between verb tenses (e.g., present, past, future) and the correct use of affixes helps learners construct grammatically accurate sentences. Addressing morphological, lexical, and semantic errors enhances learners' ability to communicate accurately and precisely in English. Proficiency in morphology, lexicon, and semantics is crucial for academic and professional communication, allowing learners to express themselves with clarity and sophistication.

Enhancing lexical skills enables learners to choose the most appropriate words for specific contexts, avoiding misunderstandings and miscommunications. Addressing common lexical errors, such as selecting synonyms, collocations, and idiomatic expressions, helps learners express themselves more precisely and effectively. Proficiency in lexicon and semantics is crucial for academic and professional communication.

Improved semantic understanding helps learners choose words that align with their intended message, reducing the risk of confusion or misinterpretation. Focusing on word connotations, denotations, and figurative language aids learners in using words with precision, considering cultural and contextual nuances.

Conclusion:-

In conclusion, the analysis of interlingual and intralingual errors made by Arabic speakers of English provides valuable insights into the challenges learners face in acquiring a second language.

It is essential to continue this line of research to address the specific needs of Arabic speakers learning English. We can further refine our understanding of effective language teaching practices by investigating individual differences, the role of language transfer, and the impact of pedagogical interventions. Moreover, advancements in technology-assisted error analysis offer exciting opportunities to enhance our ability to identify and address interlingual and intralingual errors more efficiently. By addressing morphological, lexical, and semantic errors, English teachers can help Arabic learners develop a more comprehensive and nuanced command of the English language, leading to improved communication skills in various contexts.

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