



## The Effect of the Interference of L1 into L2 in the Usage of Prepositions

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### Abstract

This scientific paper investigates how the interference of L1, affects the students, ability in using English prepositions. The aim of this scientific paper is to verify that the students, whose mother tongue is Arabic, make common errors in using English prepositions, due to the interference of L1, (Arabic) into L2 (English). The method used was a test which consisted of 15 questions; the subjects were 50 students of secondary level, 25 boys and 25 girls. Their age were about 15-16 years old, the time of the test was 15 minutes.

Key words: common errors, English prepositions mother tongue.

### المستخلص

تبحث هذه الورقة العلمية : كيف أن التداخل من اللغة الاولى يؤثر على مقدرة التلاميذ عند استعمالهم لحروف الجر الانجليزية, إن الهدف من هذه الورقة العلمية هو اثبات ان التلاميذ الذين لغتهم الأم هي العربية يرتكبون اخطاء شائعة عند استعمالهم لحروف الجر الانجليزية, هذه الاخطاء تعود الي التداخل من اللغة الاولى (العربية) في اللغة الثانية (الانجليزية). استعمل الباحث طريقة الاختبار لاجراء الدراسة و يتكون الاختبار من خمسة عشر سؤالاً. كانت العينة خمسون من طلبة المستوى الثلوي خمسة وعشرون ولداً وخمس وعشرون بنتاً تتراوح اعمارهم بين الخامسة عشرة والسادسة عشرة, وكان زمن الاختبار خمسة عشر دقيقة.

### INTRODUCTION:

#### Background:

Learning a second language is considered as one of the most difficult tasks in the area of learning and teaching operation, Learners are accustomed to certain linguistic habits (i.e., first language - Arabic). This scientific paper investigates how the interference of L<sub>1</sub> affects the student's ability in using English prepositions.

**Statement of the Problem:** The aim of this scientific paper is to verify that the students whose mother tongue is Arabic, make common errors in using English prepositions; these errors occur due to the interference of L<sub>1</sub>, (Arabic) into L<sub>2</sub> (English)

#### Objectives of the study:

This study is an attempt to investigate how the interference of L1 affects the students' ability in using English prepositions.

#### Question of the study:

The study sets out to answer the following questions: Is the interference of L1 into L2 affects students ability, in using English Prepositions?

#### Hypotheses of the Study:

The native language (L1) can have negative effects on the L<sub>2</sub> acquisition. L1, interference into L2 is one of the several sources of errors learners make. **Significance of the Study:**

The study emphasizes that the interference of the mother tongue (L<sub>1</sub>) into L<sub>2</sub>, is considered to be the dominant cause leading to errors of prepositions rather than any other cause.

**Methodology:** The method used was a test, consisting of 15 questions, and involves eight prepositions: on, in, at, over, by, with, from, and for. The subjects were fifty students of secondary level, 25 boys and 25 girls.



### Literature Review The Concept of English Prepositions:

Preposition is a word that expresses a relationship between a noun or pronoun, as well as an adjective and adverb. Randolph (1989: 143) say: (( In the most general terms, a preposition expresses a relation between two entities? one being that represented by the prepositional complement of the various types of relational meaning, those of place and time are the most prominent and easy to identify. Other relationship such as instrument and cause may also be recognized, although it is difficult to describe prepositional meaning systematically in terms of such labels. Some prepositional uses may be best elucidated by seeing a preposition as related to a clause; e.g.: the man with the red beard: who has red beard; my knowledge of Hindi ~ I know Hindi's).

### Native Language Interference in Learning a Second Language:

Extensive research has already been done in the area of native language interference into the target language, (Dulay, et. at (1982 :200)) define interference as the automatic transfer, due to habit, of the surface Structure of the first language onto the surface of the target language. Lott (1983:256) define interference as (errors in the learners' use of the foreign language that can be traced back to the mother tongue). Beebe (1988: 125) suggests that in learning a second language, L<sub>2</sub> responses are grafted onto responses. The learner is less telltale traces of the structure of L<sub>1</sub>. Carroll (1964: 240) argues that the circumstances of learning a second language are like those of a mother tongue. Sometimes there are interferences and occasionally responses from one language. It appears that learning

is most successful when the situations in which two languages (L<sub>1</sub> and L<sub>2</sub>) are learned, are kept as distinct as possible. To successfully learn L<sub>2</sub> requires the L<sub>2</sub> learners too often to preclude the L<sub>1</sub> structures from L<sub>2</sub> learning process, if the structures of the two languages are distinctly different. Beards More (1982: 245) suggest that many of the difficulties a second language learner has with the phonology, vocabulary and grammar of L<sub>2</sub> are due to the interference of habits from L<sub>1</sub>. The formal elements of L<sub>1</sub> are used within the context of L<sub>2</sub>, resulting in errors, as the structure of the two language are different. That means the relationship between the two languages must then be considered. Albert and Abler (1978: 206) claim that people show more lexical interference on similar items. So it may follow that languages with more similar structures (e.g. English and French) are more susceptible to mutual interference than languages with fewer similar features (e.g. English and Japanese). On the other hand, we might also expect more learning, difficulties, and thus more likelihood of performance interference at those-points in L<sub>2</sub> which are more distant from L<sub>1</sub>, as the learners find it difficult to learn and understand a completely new and different usage. Hence, the learner would resort to L<sub>1</sub> structures for help. ( Selinker, 1979:149).

### Learner language V.S L<sub>1</sub> Interference:

Ellis (1997:200) suggests that learners language serve as a useful way to investigate language acquisition. Learners language, linguistically speaking, refers to "the language that learners produce when they are called on to use L<sub>2</sub> in speech or writing", learners language may consist of errors reflecting the gaps in learner's knowledge.



Errors are systematic and predictable, resulting in the construction of some kind of rule, albeit a rule different from that of the target language. Some errors are common in the speech of all learners, such errors of omission and over-generalization; other errors, on the other hand result from learners, attempt to make use of their LI knowledge. These kinds of errors are called transfer errors.

#### **Inter-language V.S Interference:**

Inter-language, a term first coined by the American Linguist, Larry Selinker, is an intermediate grammar, or linguistic system created by learners acquiring L<sub>2</sub>. Inter-language forms can be viewed as learner's hypotheses about the languages and are believed to be systematic and rule-governed (Park & Riley, 2000:165; Hatch, 1993:150). Learner's L<sub>1</sub>, or the first language, may influence the. Formation of inter-l: language (Larsen-freeman, Diane and Michael H. Long 1990).

**L<sub>1</sub> interference in Second Language Learning:** It is maintained that L<sub>1</sub> interference is one of the several sources of errors learners make (Karashen, Stephen, 1988:260). of the research findings, first language knowledge in complex word order and in word-for-word translation of phrases may lead to errors of .the L<sub>2</sub>learners. L<sub>1</sub>, or the native language, can have negative effects on the acquisition. For one thing, that language share similar features does not account for learners' information in learning a foreign language (Bley-Broman, Robert, 1989). There are features, for instance, that are inconsistent with language universal. Thus languages with marked universals are more difficult for L<sub>2</sub> acquisition than those with unmarked universals. (Park & Riley, 2000: 190). Second language learners appear to accumulate structural entities of the target language but demonstrate difficulty in organizing this knowledge into appropriate, coherent structures. There appears to be a

significant gap between the accumulation and the organization of knowledge. This then raises a critical question: What kinds of language do second language learner produce in speaking and When?-writing' or speaking- the target 'language (L<sub>2</sub>), Second language learners tend to rely on their native language (L<sub>1</sub>) structures to produce a response. If the structures of the two languages are distinctly different, then one could expect a relatively high frequency of errors to occur in L<sub>2</sub>. Thus indicates an interference of L<sub>1</sub> on L<sub>2</sub>. (Decherd, 1983 and Ellis, 1997). **Research Methodology:Sample of the subjects:**The study involves fifty students of secondary school, 25 boys and 25 girls who study at second class. Their ages are between 15- 16 years.

**Tools of Collecting Data:** The researcher used a 15 questions test with 8 prepositions, (which are: on, at, over, by, with, from, for and in). The most used prepositions. The time of the test was fifteen minutes. **Method of Data Analysis:**The study aimed at analyzing the usage of specific part of language. The result of that analysis is used to make judgments about the status of the L<sub>1</sub> – L<sub>2</sub> interference. So after the students answered the questions of the test, the researcher corrected the papers and calculated the percentage' of the correct answers and the wrong ones. Then he changed the figures into information, benefiting from the previous researches and some references which related to the same subject of the study. The researcher also used Arabic sentences to make comparison and to produce the interference. **Data Analysis and discussion Analysis of the Test:**

The first preposition used was 'On', 80% of the students answered .correctly and 20% of them gave wrong answers. According to **Feticides, (1963:91)** says ("on" is used with the flays of the week or months as;' On Friday, on March, on New Year's Day)



**Thomson & Martinet (1986: 97)**

says((On, also is used in transport for both position and movement as: We walk or go on foot; He was sitting on his case)).

Student whose their mother tongue is Arabic confuse between, on and in, because in Arabic we use 'in' in the position of on and in, to give the same meaning.

The sentence: Imam visited his friends on Monday, in Arabic if we said: Imam visited his friends in Monday, it gives the same meaning. Also in Arabic we can say (Alkitab ala addurg.) = (The book is on the desk).

The second preposition was 'at', 10% of students gave correct answers, while 90% gave wrong ones. Most of the students confuse between overhand UP.

the English sentence: -They - climbed over the wall, most of the students answered it as: They climbed up the wall. In Arabic one uses a word equivalent to up, as in the Arabic sentence: *Tara Alosfuro Fawka Ashagra*. Because of translating the English Preposition into their mother tongue, the students confuse between over and up. The next preposition one used is "by", 49% of the students gave correct answers and 51 % of them gave wrong ones. Quirk & Greenbaum (1989:159) say:"By" is used in transport, as: We can travel by car; by train; by boat, by airplane, also by land; by sea, by air. The thief must have entered and left the house by the backdoor.) Some of the students used from and across instead of by, because they translated the sentence into Arabic. The Arabic sentence: *Dakhalto Wa Kharagto min Albab Al Khalfi*,

**Can be wrote in two ways:**

I entered and left by the back door. I entered and left from the back door. Because "min" in Arabic is equivalent to from in English, but the correct choice is "by" when it expresses the

meaning: ((by means of)).The fifth preposition is (With)" 5-% of the--students gave wrong answers. Quirk and Greenbaum (1989:160) say:

'With" expresses instrumental meaning as-in: He caught the ball with his left hand. With also has the meaning in company with; or together with`.I'm so glad you're coming with us! Jack with several of his friends was playing cards till.11:00 a.m.! The Arabic sentence: *Kharagto "ma'a" Sadeeki*, can be wrote: I went out with my friend, because" with" has the meaning 'in company with'. Students made a lot of errors, most of them wrote 'by' instead of "with", because they tend to rely on their native language (L1) structures to produce a response. The sentence He caught the ball with his left hand, with here expresses an instrumental meaning, but the students wrote by his left hand, they confused between the instrumental meaning of with and the meaning of by when it means 'by means of'.

The six prepositions that one used is "from", 30% of the students answered correctly, while 70% of them gave wrong answers. (The converse of to (= goal) is from (=source) as: Bill lent the book to me, I borrowed the book from Bill. From also used with reference to place of origin: He comes from Austria (= He is Austrian). But for the second sentence: "He comes from Sudan", most of them made errors, when they answered the sentence: "He comes to Sudan" as one means destination the place of origin. In Arabic "min" is equivalent to 'from' so in Arabic say: "*Akhazto Alhikmata min Afwahi Alhukama'a*". The seventh preposition is 'for', 7% of the students gave correct answers and 93% of them made errors.



**Quirk & Greenbaum (1989:158)** say: Duration is expressed by "for", 'We camped there for the summer (i.e. all through). For, also indicating purpose; intended destination and intended recipient: He will do anything for money. Every one ran for shelter. He made a beautiful doll for his daughter.

**Most of the students used "to" instead of 'for' at the first sentence:**

He made a beautiful doll to his daughter. The sentence: He' died for his country, students used 'at' instead of 'for' to indicate the place of death, while we mean the purpose of death. Those errors due to the interference, of L<sub>1</sub> into L<sub>2</sub>, because the students translate the sentences word-for-word' into their language. In Arabic we say: *ishtaraitu khobzan lil-efar* (=I bought bread for breakfast).

The last preposition one used is 'in', 41 % of the students answered correctly, while 59% of them made errors.

**Quirk & Greenbaum (1989:148)** "In, · can be used as a preposition of "time when" as: In the evening, in August, in the month that followed, to indicate periods of time. The opposition between 'at' and 'in' can cause difficulty. "In" used for continents, countries provinces and sizeable of any kind; but for towns, villages, etc, either 'at' or 'in' is appropriate.

**Thomson & Martinet (1986: 98) say:**

*(In also indicates position, we can be in a country, a town....or any place which has boundaries or is enclosed.* Students who made errors, used 'on' and 'at' instead of 'in', as one said when discussing 'on', in Arabic 'in' and 'on' sometimes mean the same; Students also confused between 'in' and 'at'. For example, the Arabic sentence: *Alkitab Dakhil Addurg*, can be wrote into two ways

and give the same meaning: The book is in the drawer. The book is on the drawer.

**Conclusion and recommendations:**

Throughout the identification and analysis of students errors, one discovered that most of L<sub>2</sub> students `errors due to the interference of L<sub>1</sub> into L<sub>2</sub> the students translate word-for-word the English sentences into their language.

Students also make transfer errors, because they attempt to make use of their L<sub>1</sub> knowledge, they resort to L<sub>1</sub> structure for help...

L<sub>1</sub> or-native "language," can have- 'negative effects on L<sub>2</sub> acquisition. L<sub>1</sub>, interference is one of the several sources of errors learners make.

The errors and difficulties that occur in learning and use of a foreign language are greatly caused by the interference of the mother tongue; we expect both difficulty in learning and errors in performance. We can conclude that the interference of the mother tongue is considered to be one of main causes of errors in learning foreign language; therefore the

hypothesis of this study is accepted.

**Recommendations:**

**In the light of the findings of this scientific paper, the researcher would recommend the following:**

- Learners should have adequate explanations of both meanings and use of prepositions, beside intensive practice and consistent reinforcement from the teachers.
- Verbs, nouns or adjective that govern prepositions should be taught and illustrated by examples of prepositional phrases attached to.



- Problematic English prepositions can be related to their Arabic equivalents in order to draw pupils' attention to the fact that literal translation into Arabic may lead errors occurrence.

English prepositions should be taught in

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variety ways. Therefore, teachers should be creative in order to help learners get rid of prepositions problems.

With idiomatic prepositions, pupils should - be continuously exposed to the correct usage.

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**Appendices**

**THE TEST**

1. We go to school ..... foot.
2. Imam visited his friend ..... Monday.
3. He’s a nice chap, but even his children sometimes laugh ..... his stupidity .
4. They climbed .....the wall.
5. He was surprised .....what she said.
6. I usually go to work ..... train.
7. The thief must have entered and left the house .....the back door.
8. He caught the ball..... his left hand .
9. Someone had broken the window ..... a stone .
10. I borrowed the book ..... bill.
11. He made a beautiful doll ..... his daughter.
12. He died .....his country.
13. He comes .....Sudan.
14. There are two beds.....the cottage.
15. The cow is ..... the field.