Errors In Prepositions In EFL Arab Students Spoken Discourse

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Abstract:

A preposition is one of the parts of speech and a member of a closed word class. The linguistic function of the preposition is to refer to the time or the place of the action in the sentence which is quite important to produce well-formed sentences whether in spoken or written discourses. Such part of speech may cause a misuse especially for those bilingual learners. That is why a number of studies have been done in the field of preposition error analysis to point out the sources of these errors and the solution to overcome these errors when happen. This recent study is conducted to examine the syntactic and semantic aspects of errors in using the English prepositions between EFL Arab learners and Science postgraduate students in University of Putra Malaysia (UPM). For this purpose, the study will employ a descriptive design that employs a content analysis to the transcribed recorded data for two groups of subjects. A purposive sample of six (n=6) Arab postgraduate students whose ages ranges between twenty-two to forty years old was selected to participate in this study. They formed into groups with three subjects each. The first group included students from Faculty of Science while the second included students from the Faculty of Modern Languages and Communication. Both subjects study at master level. The findings generally showed that the subjects who study science and use English on a daily basis with their classmates or professors face a problem in using prepositions. These problems are possibly a result of the interference of their first language or the lack of linguistic competence. For the other group who study English as their major, also made similar errors in using prepositions in their daily speech. However, these errors occurred much less frequent than the science group. Their errors were mainly as a result of the first language interference. This study suggested developing and establishing new programs that help EFL students and science students to be better aware of the use of prepositions of the second language.

الملخص

يعتبر حرف الجر احد اجزاء الكلام والصفة النحوية لحرف الجر هي للدلالة عن مكان او زمان الحدث في الجملة بحيث ان وجوده يكون مهما لدوره في تكوين جملة مضبوطة البناء سواء في الكلام المقروء او المكتوب. حرف الجر بالإمكان ان يسبب استخدام غير صحيح لدى الطلاب خصوصا اولئك الذين يتحدثون لغة ثانية. لهذا السبب هنالك العديد من الدراسات التي اجريت في هذا الخصوص والتي بدورها بينت اسباب الاستخدام غير الصحيح

لأحرف الجر وإيضا الحلول الممكنة. هذه الدراسة الحالية كان الغرض منها هو للتحقق من الاخطاء للاستخدام غير الصحيح لأحرف الجر التي يواجهونها الطلاب العرب الذين يتحدثون اللغة الثانية في حياتهم اليومية. وهؤلاء الطلاب كانوا من كليتين ، كلية العلوم وكلية اللغات في جامعة بوترا الماليزية. وكانت اعمار هؤلاء الطلاب تتراوح بين ٢٢ الى ٤٠ سنة وقد تم تنظيمهم في مجموعتين. مجموعة طلاب كلية العلوم ومجموعة طلاب كلية اللغات. وتم تخصيص ثلاث مواضيع لكل مجموعة وكان مستوى المواضيع الثلاث هو مخصص لمستوى الماجستير. اوضحت هذه الدراسة ان مجموعة طلاب كلية العلوم والذين يستخدمون اللغة الانكليزية في حياتهم اليومية للتواصل مع زملائهم واساتذتهم يواجهون مشاكل في استخدام حروف الجر. وقد بينت هذه الدراسة ايضا ان مجموعة طلاب كلية اللغات يعانون من نفس المشاكل لكن بأعداد اقل من اعداد مجموعة طلاب كلية العلوم. ولهذا فان هذه الدراسة اقترحت انشاء وتطوير برامج تعليمية لمساعدة الطلاب في استخدام حروف الجر بشكل صحيح.

1. INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents an introduction to the study of language errors made by nonnative speakers. The chapter begins with the background of the study which provides a briefing on prepositions errors made by Arabs. Next, the statement of the problem, purpose of the study, research questions, significance of the study, and the limitations of the study are presented.

1.1.   Background of the study

Some language teachers and linguists believe that teaching grammar is a very important aspect of the second language acquisition (SLA). Others believe that teaching and learning foreign grammar cannot be explicit. In recent years, studies on this area started focusing on the errors made by learners maintaining that these errors allow for the prediction of difficulties these learners encounter in acquiring a second language. This belief influenced teachers who became more aware of the difficult areas encountered by their students and helped them become able to find solutions to these difficulties. Errors made by learners were ascribed to the language one interference or what is called language transfer. 'Language Transfer' notion posits that errors in the second language

can be all set by detecting the differences between the learner's L1 and the L2 they want to learn. It also has the ability to diagnose the errors made by the learners in the production of the second language. (Gass & Selinker, 2001). Ellis (1996) listed two types of transfer, positive and negative. Negative transfer occurs when the L1 system is different from the system of L2, while positive transfer occurs when the system of the first language is similar to L2 system. According to the strong version, the occurrence of all second language errors can be predicted through the differences between the mother tongue and the L2, while the weak version asserts that not all the errors can be identified through these differences (Wardhaugh, 1970).

1.2. Problem Statement

The acquisition of prepositions is problematic and challenging to the EFL Arab learners (AbiSamra, 2003). This difficulty becomes a real problem among the university students when speaking which consequently affect both their communication with other speakers of language and their achievement scores. This is likely due to the first language interference or the low proficiency level of learners (Zughoul, 1979). Another possible reason of the difficulty is that English and Arabic languages belong to two different language families. While the English language belongs to the Indo-European language family, the Arabic language belongs to the Semitic language family. Being the case, a number of studies in the field of acquisition in general and transfer in particular have been conducted in an attempt to find out the errors the foreign language learners make when they communicate with the speakers of English as a target language. However, little research has been done on the errors the Arab students make when they use the English prepositions in speaking. It is therefore timely to investigate the Arab learners' use of prepositions to fill this gap in literature to find out the errors being frequent made by Arab learners, and propose some pedagogical solutions for this problem.

Methodologically speaking, errors in using preposition have been studied in the literature by collecting data by means on translating tasks or written tests. However, there is a dearth of studies that investigated the errors using a natural occurring spoken data.

Gass and Selinker (2001) stated that errors are systematic. These occur frequently and the learner himself is not aware of the errors he/she makes. Hence, only the researcher or teacher could locate or point to them. They originally take place because the learners do not know what is correct and what is not correct. The intent of this study is to identify the types and the frequency of the errors made in using prepositions to see whether these errors are systematic and are related to the interference of the first language among the EFL Arab learners in University Putra Malaysia (UPM).

1.3.   Research Objectives and Questions

The general purpose of this study is to examine the syntactic and semantic errors in the use of English prepositions between two Arab groups of learners. The first group consists of EFL postgraduates students and the second group consists of Science postgraduate students. It also attempts to determine whether these errors are systematic and related to the interference of the first language or they are related the low proficiency level of the subjects. For these objectives, the following research questions are forwarded:

1. What type of errors in using prepositions the Arab EFL learners make in their spoken discourse?
2. What are the possible sources of errors in using prepositions by Arab EFL learners in their spoken discourse?

1.4.   Significance of the Study

By identifying the errors in using prepositions and the possible resources for these errors in Arab EFL learners' spoken discourse, better understanding to the current linguistic competence of these learners can be achieved, so pedagogical recommendation are proposed. The findings of this study is hoped to encourage English course book designers to customize the preposition exercises and activities to make sure that L2 students are able to use the appropriate preposition.

2. Literature Review

A preposition is one of the parts of speech and a member of a closed word class. It shows the relationship between a noun or pronoun and other words in a sentence. The linguistic function of the preposition is to refer to the time or the place of the action in the sentence which is quite important to produce well-formed sentences whether in spoken or written discourses. Prepositions being an important area of English grammar are generally found difficult by EFL/ESL learners.

Burt (1975, p. 54) noted that "… although interference from a student's first language is the major predictor of phonological errors, interference errors are only one of the types of errors found in the syntax, morphology and lexicon of student speech and writing in the target language" Therefore, the errors that occurred during second language learning process may be not only related to the effect of the first language, but also to the inadequate learning of the new patterns of L2.

Recent research on errors showed that there are two schools of thoughts about the errors the learners develop. The first school maintains that accomplishing perfect methods of teaching errors would never occur. In other words, errors result from the habits of bad teaching techniques. The second school maintains that in spite of the best efforts exerted by second language learners, errors would always occur because we live in a faulty world (Corder, 1973).

Researchers indicate that both schools complete each other. For these reasons, research is necessary, and Error Analysis is the best tool for explaining and describing errors made by speakers of foreign languages (Johanson, 1975). Error Analysis is one of the most useful techniques in analyzing errors. Er (1990) proposed two main concerns in her study; the first concern was the application of errors will enable the teachers to choose the effective teaching materials and teaching techniques. The second concern was related to the study that enables students to be aware of their errors.

2.1. Language Transfer

Language transfer exists in weak and strong versions; the strong version claims that errors in the second language can be all set through finding the differences between the learner's first language and the second language they want to learn. The weak one, on the other hand, claims to have the power to diagnose errors made by the learners in the production of the second language. These two versions are much related to the interference of the concept of the first language.

Ellis (1996) listed two types of transfer (positive & negative). Negative transfer occurs when the L1 system is not like the system of L2, while positive transfer occurs when the system of the first language is similar to the second language system. According to the strong version, the occurrence of all second language errors can be predicted through the differences between L1 and L2, while the weak version asserts that only some of the errors can be detected through these differences (Wardhaugh, 1970).

2.2. Error Analysis

James (1980) stated that the function of diagnosis belongs to error analysis field. Error Analysis (EA) has two functions, practical and theoretical functions. The practical area of (EA) is the function of all that knowledge to beat the differences between the situation and the knowledge of the learner. Whereas the theoretical area describes the learner's knowledge in terms of their second language, so it is important in helping the

researcher to discover the psychological processes and the relation between the learners' knowledge and the teaching they have been received. Corder (1981) stated that the variance or mismatching between languages is the major problem for diagnosis. According to the researcher, the degree of the mismatching is a quantitative measurement whereas the nature of this variance or mismatching is a qualitative measurement. According to Richards (1985, P. 95), the error happen when a linguistic item is used in a way in which a fluent or native speaker of the language considers it as showing faulty or incomplete action.

Gass and Selinker (2001) stated that errors are systematic. These occur frequently and the learner himself is not aware of the errors he/she makes. Hence, only the researcher or teacher could locate or point to them. They originally happen because the learners do not know what is correct and what is not correct.

2.3.   Past research on Preposition Errors

A number of studies have been done in the field of preposition error analysis to point out the sources of these errors and the solution to overcome these errors when happen (Al Yaari & Almaflehi, 2013; Asma, 2010; Fowler & Coe, 1987; Hamdallah & Tushyeh, 1993; Mahmoodzadeh, 2012).

Al Yaari and Almaflehi (2013) conducted a study on the problem of translating the prepositions at, in and on into Arabic among fifty Saudi male and female students. The study aimed to identify the difficulties of translating the English prepositions of place (at, in and on) which Saudi EFL students may face when translating them into Arabic. Translating 20 sentences and phrases from English to Arabic, the results showed that Saudi EFL students faced problems related to the use of English prepositions when transferring them into Arabic. The findings supported the previous research regarding the influence of mother tongue (L1) on (L2). The Saudi EFL cannot separate the two grammatical systems of both Arabic and English. Moreover, the study showed that

females were better than males in their achievements scoring higher than those of males'. The study suggested developing and establishing new programs that help EFL students to better know and be aware of the use of prepositions of the second language.

Mahmoodzadeh (2012) has also conducted a study on the errors made by Iranian EFL learners due to the influence of L1/SL on L2/TL language among (53) Iranian learners studying English at intermediate level at a Foreign Language Institute in Mashhad . The researcher aimed to examine the status of different types of errors of prepositions that learners made due to the transitional constraints between Persian and English languages. By conducting a translational technique, the research collected data and analyzed them. The results showed that most of the errors were related to the wrong use and redundancy of prepositions in comparison with the errors related to the omission of prepositions in L2. The findings supported previous research that the Iranian EFL learners are more likely to suffer from some difficulties concerning the acquisition of second language prepositions due to the process of transfer between L1 and L2.

Although these two studies were conducted in different contexts, they have a similar purpose in finding the sources of preposition errors among second language users. Both articles came to the same conclusion in attributing the errors to the influence of mother tongue or the language transfer. They both suggested developing proper material in adequate learning resources that take in mind the effect of the first language on the acquisition of the second language to keep these errors to the minimum.

2.4. METHODOLOGY

2.5.　Research Design

The general purpose of this study is to examine the syntactic and semantic aspects of errors in using the English prepositions between EFL Arab learners and Science postgraduate students in University Putra Malaysia (UPM). For this purpose, the study

will employ descriptive design that employs a content analysis to the transcribed data recorded for two groups of subjects. This design is suitable for this study because it enables the researcher to identify the errors quantitatively by counting them manually and discussing them qualitatively based on the findings. The students will be asked to discuss a topic freely without the intervention of the researchers. The collected data will be transcribed to prepare for the analysis.

2.6.   Subjects

A purposive sample of six (n=6) Arab postgraduate students whose ages ranges between twenty-two to forty years old was selected to participate in this study. The subjects' first language is Arabic and they study in two different faculties in the University Putra Malaysia (UPM). They formed to groups with three subjects each. The first group included students from Faculty of Science while the second included students from the Faculty of Modern Languages and Communication. Both subjects study at the master level. The subjects were asked to discuss a topic given to them freely without the intervention of the researchers. The selection of the subjects was made purposive to suit the nature of this study in finding the errors made by the subjects based on their experience of using the English language.

2.7.   Data Collection and Analysis

This study adopts Ellis's (1997, pp. 15-20) four steps in analyzing the language errors; selection of a corpus of language, identifying errors, classifying errors, and explaining the dominant types of errors. According to the researcher, the data collected should be examined by (1) identifying the use of propositions, (2) locating the errors, (3) categorizing them into groups, and finally (4) describing them to explain the dominant errors types. These errors can be classified into (a) adding, (b) replacement, and (c) omission. Generally speaking, these three types of errors are predominant among L2 students in their use of language. For this purpose, two discussion groups were created to collect the spoken data.

To answer the first research question (What type of errors in using prepositions the Arab EFL learners make in their spoken discourse?), the data collected by means of the two focused group discussions were first transcribed in an Excel worksheet. Each sentence produced by the subjects was examined for the occurrence of propositions that were used incorrectly by the subjects. In front of each sentence, the error was marked and typed in another column. Next to it, the type of error (adding, replacement, and omission) was decided upon by the three researchers. The possible source of making the error (Transfer / Proficiency) was also written in another column. In the same file of Excel, frequency tables were created to compare the types of errors made by the subjects to prepare for writing the findings report.

This instrument is suitable and convenient as it will enable the researcher to identify the errors, classify the errors, and explain the dominant types of errors as occurring naturally in the spoken discussion of the subjects.

To answer the second research question (What are the possible sources of making errors in using prepositions by Arab EFL learners in their spoken discourse?), the errors collected by means of the focused group discussion and analyzed using Excel were discussed qualitatively by giving examples from the same corpus. This involved describing by explanation the dominant errors types made by the Arab learners in speaking and their possible resources.

3. FINDINGS

This study aimed to find the errors in using prepositions among two groups of learners. The first group consisted of students who study English as a foreign language and the second group consisted of students who study science. Both groups use English as a language of study and communication in their respective faculties in university. In the first and second subsections of this part of study, the errors made by the linguistic group

students will be first introduced followed by the errors made by the science group. This will answer the first research question. In the third and fourth subsections of the study, the errors found in the first and second subsections will be discussed and explained with examples to answer the second research question. The following are the findings and the related discussion.

3.1. Types of Errors Made by the Science Group

The first research question asked for the type of errors in using prepositions as made by Arab EFL learners in their spoken discourse. To answer this questions the first focused group's (Science Group) discussion was transcribed and uploaded to Excel for analysis. The findings showed that the first group in general made a number of errors in using the English preposition of all types including addition, omission and replacement as proposed by Ellis (1997). However, the subjects were also found using another type of errors which was made by inserting another proposition to the existing one.

Based on Table 1 and Figure 1 below, the total number of errors in using English prepositions made by the first group learners was (42). Based on this classification proposed by Ellis (1997) and the added category of insertion, four types of error were found occurring under the first category resulted from negative transfer effect with 29 (69%) of the total errors. The most frequent type of these errors was 'replacement' 16 (38%) in which the subjects used another preposition instead of the correct one. This was followed by 'insertion' 9 (21%) in which the subjects insert a new preposition to the existing one. 'Addition' of a new preposition to the existing one was also found occurring 4 (10%) out of the total. However, 'omission' mechanism did not occur at all under this category of errors.

As a result of linguistic competence, the subjects were found making three types of preposition use errors with 13 (31%) of the total number of errors. The use of 'replacement' was the highest occurring error 8 (19%) followed by 'insertion' 3 (7%).

While omission did not occur in previous category of negative transfer, it occurred under this category as a result of linguistic transfer 2 (5%). However, 'addition category' did not occur under this category at all.

Table 1 Frequency of Types of Errors Made by Arab EFL students (Science Group)

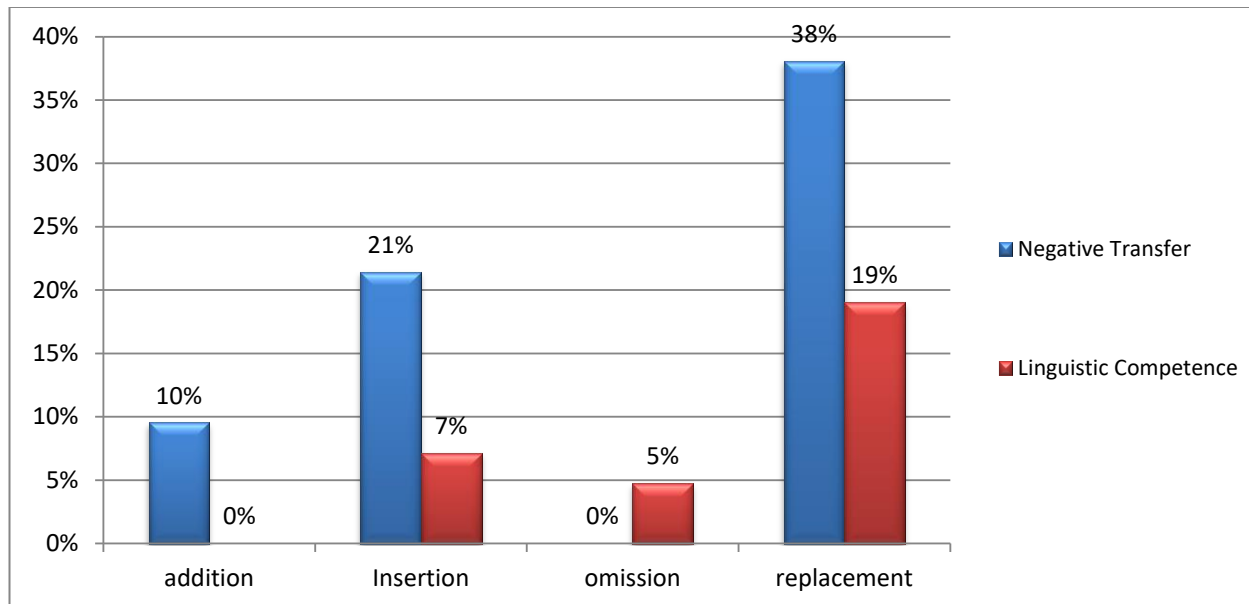| Error Mechanism	Negative Transfer	Linguistic Competence
replacement	16 (38%)	8 (19%)
Insertion	9 (21%)	3 (7%)
addition	4 (10%)	0%
omission	0%	2 (5%)
Total	**29 (69%)**	**13 (31%)**

Figure 1 Distribution of Types of Errors Made by Arab EFL students (Science Group)

3.2. Possible Sources of Errors Made by the Science Group

In previous section, the errors made by the first group were located taking place under two main categories representing the possible sources of error, the negative transfer from L1 and the lack of linguistic competence.

As a result of the negative transfer from language one (Arabic) to language two (English), certain types of errors were found occurring. The final decision about considering the errors belonging to this category was based on fact that these prepositions were translated literally from L1 to L2. At the same time, they do not exist in L2 grammar. Accordingly, the subjects in this group were found making three types of errors; replacement, insertion, and addition.

In replacement error, the subjects did not use the right preposition and replaced it with a new one similar in meaning and usage to the preposition in their first language. In example (1) below, the subject used 'in' with the noun 'homes' instead of using 'at'. This is because in Arabic only one proposition used to indicate inclusion within space while in English 'in' and 'at' are used without an explicit role that help avoid this error.

[1] 'So, when we are speaking about control the children that pushed us to speak about... it is healthy or not healthy? It is good or bad for them, in schools in **homes**, or outside, because this is around of us.

In insertion error, the subjects inserted a new preposition while there was no need for it in the sentence. This was considered belonging to the negative transfer from L1 as the same case is found in student's L1. In example (2) below, the subject inserted the preposition 'on' wrongly as attached to the verb 'control' to indicate a link or association between the verb and its object. In Arabic, the verb 'control' is used along with the proposition 'in' in the same context of this sentence.

[2] The problem is how can **control on** these children?

In addition error, the subjects add wrongly a new preposition to the existing one. This was also considered negative transfer from L1 as the same case is found in student's L1. In example (3), the subject added the preposition 'of' to the existing 'around'. This was mainly used because in Arabic two prepositions are used in this context to express the surrounding of things or persons from all sides.

[3] So, when we are speaking about controlling children….because this is **around of us**.

The second type of errors was found happening as a result of the subjects' low linguistic competence. It was considered so as it did not exist in language one and did not conform to the target language usage.

As a result of the lack of linguistic competence, certain types of errors were also found occurring. The final decision about considering the errors belonging to this category was based on fact that these prepositions did not occur neither in L1 nor in L2. They really occurred because the subjects did not master the English rule and found no equivalent in their own language, so they invented their own usage of preposition. This process resulted on finding out three types of errors; replacement, Insertion, and omission.

In replacement error, the subjects did not use the right preposition and replaced it with a new one not existent in first or second language. In example (4) below, the subject used 'by' with the verb 'suffer' instead of using 'from' to indicate agent or instrumentality. Lacking the knowledge of the use of this preposition and the lack of equivalent in their first language made the subject mix the agent word 'by' with the agent 'from' as both are used to express similar linguistic function.

[4] But you know, most families **suffer by** these social media because the children they more follow these social media…

In insertion error, the subjects inserted a new preposition while there was no need for it in the sentence. This was considered belonging to the lack of linguistic knowledge as it does not exist in first or second language. In example (5) below, the subject inserted the preposition 'of' wrongly as it links the verb 'support' with the noun 'education'. This was used to create a link between the verb and its effect realized on the direct object. In both Arabic and English, there is no need to use such preposition to express this case, so

the subject inserted the new proposition wrongly as a result of his lack of linguistic knowledge of this type of structure.

[5] Sure! In this topic have many advantages. I am agree with you. It can improve education of the teen or younger by using development devices like I pads or phones. All these things can **support of Education** and can increase her mind.

Under this category, the Science Group subjects were found making 'omission' error in using preposition with low frequency, the case which was not found in negative transfer category. By making this error, the subjects remove the preposition from the sentence while it should stay. In example (6) below, the subject had two linguistic options; the first one was to use the gerund 'using' which was not made while the second one was to use the preposition 'of' so the sentence became well-formed. However, the subject did not use either one of them, but chose to omit the preposition from its write place. This indicated that the subject's linguistic competence in this type of structures still needs improvement.

[6] **Use these devices**, actually important but using these devices will increase awareness and in sometimes will reduce the problem and in sometimes will reduce the stress for these children.

3.3. Types of Errors Made by the Linguistic Group

In previous sections, the errors made by the first group (Science Group) were identified and discussed with example taking from their actual usage of preposition. In the coming sections, the errors made by the second group of students who possess a higher level of competence will be identified and discussed.

The first research question asked for the type of errors in using prepositions as made by Arab EFL learners in their spoken discourse. To answer this questions the second focused group's (Linguistic Group) discussion was transcribed and uploaded to Excel for analysis. The findings showed that the second group in general made a number of errors in using the English preposition of all types including replacement and omission as proposed by Ellis (1997). However, addition error was not made and, like in previous

group findings, the subjects were also found using another type of errors which was made by inserting another proposition to the existing one.

Based on Table 2 and Figure 2 below, the total number of errors in using English prepositions made by the second group of learners was (19) which was less frequent than the errors made by the first group. Based on the classification proposed by Ellis (1997) and the added category of insertion, three types of errors were found occurring under the first category of negative transfer with 12 (63%) of the total errors. The most frequent type of these errors was 'replacement' 10 (53%) in which the subjects used another preposition instead of the correct one. This was followed by 'omission' by which the subjects avoid using the preposition and 'insertion' in which the subjects insert a new preposition were also found occurring equally 1 (5%) each out of the total. However, 'addition' did not occur at all under this category of errors.

Table 2 Frequency of Types of Errors Made by Arab EFL students (Linguistic Group)

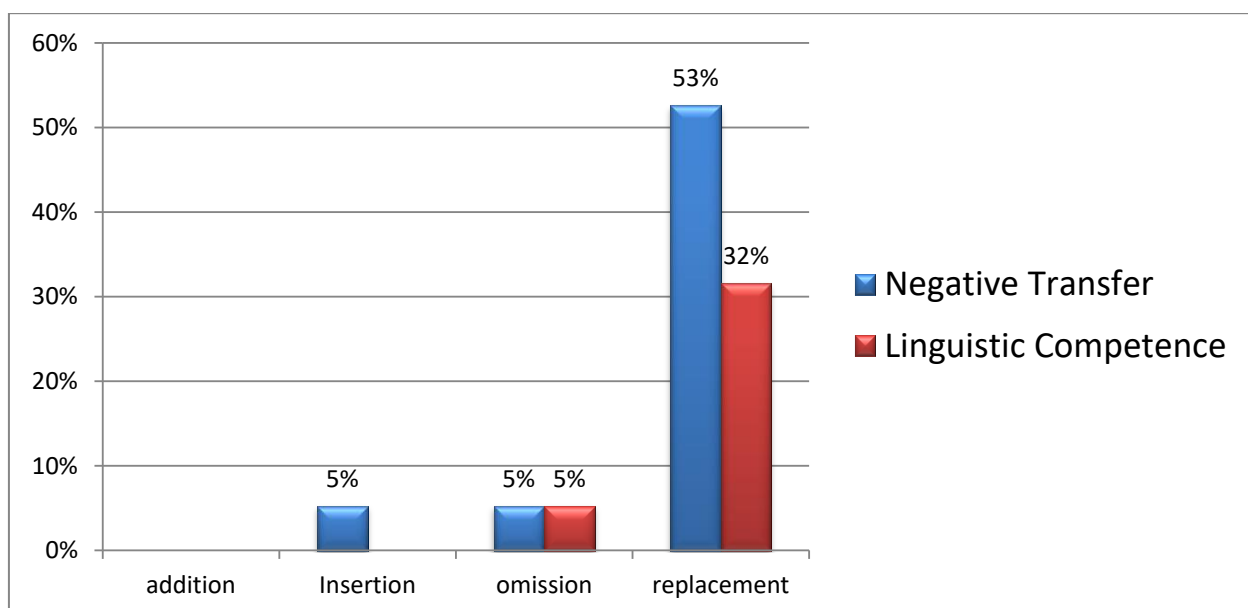| Error Mechanism	Negative Transfer	Linguistic Competence
replacement	10 (53%)	6 (32%)
omission	1 (5%)	1 (5%)
Insertion	1 (5%)	0%
addition	0%	0%
Total	**12 (63%)**	**7 (37)**

Figure 2 Distribution of Types of Errors Made by Arab EFL students (Linguistic Group)

As a result of linguistic competence, the subjects were found making two types of preposition errors with 7 (37%) of the total number of errors. The use of 'replacement' was the highest occurring error 6 (32%) followed by 'omission' 3 (5%). While insertion and addition types of errors did not occur under this category.

3.4. Possible Sources of Errors Made by the Linguistic Group

In previous section, the errors made by the second group were identified as taking place under two main categories representing the possible sources of error, the negative transfer from L1 and the lack of linguistic competence. However, the total number of errors was quite less than the number of errors made by the first group.

As a result of the negative transfer from language one (Arabic) to language two (English), certain types of errors were found occurring. As previously mentioned, the final decision about considering the errors belonging to this category was also based on the fact that these prepositions were translated literally from L1 to L2. At the same time, they do not exist in L2 grammar. Accordingly, the subjects in this group were found making three types of errors; replacement, omission, and insertion. The 'addition' error was not made.

In replacement error, the subjects did not use the right preposition and replaced it with a new one similar in meaning and usage to the preposition in their first language. In example (7) below, the subject used 'with' with the verb 'speak'. This error happened because in Arabic we use a preposition with the same meaning of 'with' when accompanied by the verb 'speak'.

[7] 'But sometimes I feel that they even can't focus when I am **speaking with** them....

In 'omission' type of error, the subjects deleted or avoided using the right preposition in the place it should have been used. In example (8) below, the subject omitted the preposition 'of' as a main constituent of the preposition. This was considered belonging to the negative transfer from L1 as this proposition, which means a head of referring to direction or position, consisted of one word in Arabic.

[8] And don't forget setting them **in front the computer** for example...For a long time

In 'insertion' type of errors, the subjects insert wrongly a new preposition while it should not be any in the sentence. This was also considered negative transfer from L1 as the same case is found in student's L1. In example (9), the subject inserted the preposition 'of'. This was mainly used because in Arabic two prepositions are used in this context to accompany the quantifier 'some'.

[9] How it make **some of** functions of the brain … right?

The second type of errors was found happening as a result of the subjects' low linguistic competence. As a result of the lack of linguistic competence, certain types of errors were also found occurring. The final decision about considering the errors as belonging to this category was based on fact that these prepositions did not occur neither in L1 nor in L2. They occurred because the subjects might not have mastered English rule and found no equivalent in their own language, so they invented their own usage of preposition. This process resulted on finding out two types of errors; replacement and omission.

In replacement error, the subjects did not use the right preposition and replaced it with a new one not existent in first or second language. In example (10) below, the subject used 'According to' instead of using 'for' or 'regarding' as a narrator that introduces the proposition in the following sentence. Lacking the knowledge of the use of this

preposition and the lack of equivalent in their first language made the subject mix the function of the two prepositions.

[10] **According to** negative effects, some studies showed that the overuse of such devices could cause Autism spectrum for children.

The 'omission' type of error was made by the linguistic subjects with low frequency. They deleted the preposition in the place it should have been used. In example (11) below, the subject had two linguistic options; the first one was to use the noun 'isolation' 'which was not made while the second one was to use the preposition 'to' followed by 'be' so the sentence became well-formed. However, the subject did not use either one of them, but chose to omit the preposition from its write place. This indicated that the subject's linguistic competence in this type of structures still needs improvement especially in producing this type of passivation.

[11] I mean that he likes isolated.

The results of the previous four sections would support previous research in this area. The findings are consistent with Al Yaari and Almaflehi (2013) who found that the influence of the mother tongue (L1) on (L2) of the Saudi Arab EFL learners had a direct negative influence on the production of prepositions. The researchers maintained that their subjects could not separate the two grammatical systems of both Arabic and English. Even in foreign context such as the Iranian, the findings of the current study conform to what Mahmoodzadeh (2012) has found. This researcher concluded that the Iranian EFL learners are more likely to suffer from some difficulties concerning the acquisition of second language prepositions due to the process of transfer between L1 and L2. However, in this study, the linguistic level of the subjects was found also an important factor.

3.5. CONCLUSION

This study was conducted to examine the use of prepositions among the Arab learners who study English or science at the post graduate level study. The findings generally showed that the subjects who study science and use English on a daily basis with their classmates or professors face a problem in using prepositions. These problems are possibly a result of the interference of their first language or the lack of linguistic competence.

For the other group which consisted of learners who study English as their major, they also made similar errors in using prepositions in their daily speech. However, these errors occurred much less frequent than the science group. Their errors were mainly as a result of the first language interference.

Based on the results, it can be conclude that the first language has an effect on using the proper preposition. This effect is much greater when linguistic competence of the users is at low levels. This study suggested developing and establishing new programs that help EFL students and science students to be better aware of the use of prepositions of the second language.

This study is very limited in relation to the number of subjects, so the generalization made is only applied to the subjects selected to participate in this study. However, it can be considered as preliminary stage to wider scope research that investigates the use of prepositions in the future. Including other ESL learners from different ethnics and cultural backgrounds to increase the number of participants will definitely give more generalizable results.

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