

“Some Linguistic Problems Facing Arab Learners of English”

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1. The Importance of Error Analysis

It is only comparatively recently that researchers have begun to develop hypotheses about the process of second language acquisition. This work would help teachers to analyse students' errors by using certain techniques. They can also attribute a cause to an error with some degree of precision and find out whether, for example, mother tongue interference, or teaching techniques or problems in the target language are the major cause of their students' error. So, error analysis actually deals with errors committed by learners of a second language. deals with errors committed by learners of a second language. This study could be of significance to the foreign language learners. Error evaluation makes learners aware of the importance of communication in language learning and thus aware of the more serious types and consequently may try to avoid them.

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2. *Types of Errors*

The purpose of this work is to discuss briefly types of errors and the causes of these errors. Much of the discussion is directed to linguistic interference from Arabic into English in the area of spelling, pronunciation and some syntactic features. Some pedagogical implication about errors are given.

Linguists have drawn a distinction between competence errors and performance errors, which might be likened to Corder's "systemic" and "post-systemic" errors respectively (1973: 246). Performance errors are not serious as they are made when learners are tired or hurried. Competence errors, on the other hand, are comparatively more serious than performance errors since they reflect inadequate learning. Competence is the ability to speak and understand a language while performance is the actual application of this ability in language behaviour (Chomsky; 1965: 4).

3. *Causer of Errors*

There are two major causes of errors. The first major cause is interlingual, i.e., interference from the first or native language of the learners. Lado (1975) and Fries (1974) emphasized interlingual errors. The second major cause of errors is intralingual, i.e., the difficulty comes from the second language itself (c.f. Dulay and Burt, 1974: 23). Intralingual errors are manifested by the following phenomena:

- a. Using simple structures instead of more complex ones, for example: the use of the simple present tense instead of the present progressive tense.
- b. Using a structure where it does not apply. Example: *gived, *comed.
- c. The unnecessary correction. Example: *pird instead of bird.
- d. Errors stay in use for a long time as in producing a sentence like: *he go to bed.
- e. Error caused by bad teaching.
- f. Learners sometimes avoid difficult structures. Kleinmann (1977) stated that Arab learners of English avoid, for example, the passive voice.

- g. It has been found that some learners think that (is) is the marker of present tense as in *John is works as an engineer. Similarly, those learners think that (was) is the marker of the past tense.

In what follows, I shall concentrate on the first major cause of errors made by Arab learners of English, namely, the interlingual errors or interference from Arabic. Scott and Tucker (1974) suggest that interference in written English by Arab learners comes from the high variety (الفصحى) while interference in spoken English by learners results from the interference of colloquial Arabic (العامية).

4. Areas of Errors

4.1. Writing System

As for writing system Arab learners of English find more difficulty in learning the system of English because the Roman alphabet is different from that of Arabic. Arabic has twenty-eight consonants (Scott, 1962: 10) while English has twenty-six. Moreover, in Arabic there is no distinction between print and script and also between upper case letters and lower case letters. Unlike English, Arabic is written from right to left. Finally, Arabic is written by a series of strokes rather than

continuous flow. These differences, in fact, important in speed of reading and writing.

4.2. Spelling and pronunciation

Owing to spelling and pronunciation, there is a general agreement that most of the English words in English have regular spelling. Never the less, a number of spelling rules are followed and the exceptions of these rules are considerable. The rule, for example, that says “write the ki before the e except after the c has several exceptions: leisure, weird, seize, Fein and Keith. Errors that are serious to Arabic learners of English include the following categories:

1. Inconsistency in spelling weak vowels, e.g., *chambur, *prignant.
2. Errors caused by difference between the sound systems of English and Arabic, such as the substitution of the letters (b) for (p) as in beoble and bubil.
3. Errors attributed to analogy, such as *languidge (compare Knowledge), *maney (compare money).
4. Inconsistent spelling in English word derivation, such as high/hight and speak/speech.

5. Over generalization of spelling rule.
6. Errors caused by difference in the orthographic representation of the common vowel sounds in the two languages, e.g., Mohammed, Mohammad, and muhammad from Arabic mhmd.

Concerning vowel system, Scott (1962) states that vowel system of Arabic is totally different from that of English. Arabic has three long vowels. aa, uu, and ii, and three short vowels: a, u, and i, (figure I). The English vowel system, on the other hand, is much more complex (Rouch, 1983: 10). It is represented in Figure II.

	Front	Central	Back	
High	ii i		uu u	High
Mid		α		Mid
Low		αα		Low

Figure I: The Arabic Vowels

	Front	Central	Back	
High	i: i		u: u	High
Mid	ε e	ο	o: o	Mid
Low	æ		D d	Low

Figure II: The English Vowels

In addition, there are many diphthongs in English such as αu , $i o$, $o o$, $u o$, εo , but there are two diphthongs in Arabic: αw and αy (Ibid).

Arabic learners of English confuse rounded and unrounded vowels, long and short vowels, and high and low vowels. It is to be noted that the vowels /u/, o:/, and /o/ are simply allophone: in Arabic. As a result of this lack of distinction, Arab learners of English mispronounce boot, boat and bought. This is also explains why these learner's write Muslim, Moslem; karan, kuran; Mohammed, Muhammed, Mohammad.

4.3. Syntactic Errors

The syntactic errors committed by Arab learners of English involving some syntactic features, namely, verbs, relative clauses, articles and prepositions.

4.3.1 Verbs

Errors made by Arab learners in the English verb can be stated as in the following:

1. Omission of the third person singular present tense markers, e.g.,
*He give, *She speak.
2. Misuse of verb forms in English.

3. Omission of verb to be, e.g., *your girl friend pretty.
4. In Arabic we only have two tenses the perfect and imperfect (the past and the non-past), where as English has many by conjoining these two tenses with aspects (perfective and progressive).
5. Arab learners of English cannot produce progressive and perfective so easily.
6. Phrasal verbs are very confusing to Arab learners of English.

4.3.2. Relative clauses

English relative clause represents a problem to Arab learners of English. Personal experience in teaching English grammar to Arab students shows that the errors committed by Arab learners of English in this respect can be summarized as follows:

1. Insertion of the resumptive or returning pronoun (in Arabic, al-damir al-Zaaid) الضمير الزائد in the following grammatical positions:
 - a. Subject position: *The girl who she came.
 - b. Direct object: *The man that I met him.
 - c. Indirect object: *The man that I gave a gift to him.

- d. Object of preposition: *The key which I opened the door with it.
 - e. Possessive position: The cat which its tail is long is your.
 - f. Object of comparative position: *The boy that Samir is longer than his.
2. Omission of the relative pronoun: A young lady was wearing a nice dress came in.

In Arabic, if the subject is indefinite, there is no need to use relative pronoun.

- 3. Misuse of who and whom in the relative clauses.
- 4. Subject-verb agreement in relative clauses: *The teachers who is lecturing this morning.
- 5. Misuse of relative pronoun which for human being, e.g., *The man which reads in the library is my father.

4.3.3. Articles

As for article usage, Arabic has a definite article but no indefinite articles. In classical Arabic, indefiniteness is indicated by the suffixal ending of the noun, use of nunation, e.g., Kitaab-un “book”. There are few instances of the omission of the definite article but it is redundantly used by Arab learners of English with

nouns that require the definite article in Arabic but not in English.

Examples:

1. The Saudi Arabia
2. The value of the time.

4.3.4. Prepositions

This study Sheds light on prepositions. In this case Arab learners of English have the tendency to substitute the Arabic equivalent for the appropriate English preposition.

Examples:

1. *In the fourth day.
2. *Think in him.
3. *Judge on things.

5. Pedagogical Implications and Suggestions

Errors are inevitable in learning a second language. They are important for learners, teachers, and researchers. Knowledge of contrastive analysis and error analysis is essential for the training and qualification of second language teachers. The attitude of teachers towards errors should change. Teachers should know how

to deal with errors in the classroom. They should decide whether and when to correct.

Our study could be of value to teachers, learners and textbook writers and syllabus designers. For the teacher, a study of this type may help indicate areas which should be given priority in teaching, grading and testing a foreign language. Error correction when applied, should concentrate on errors which are likely to impede communication.

For textbook and syllabus designers, this study is important in utilizing the results arrived at and emphasize the role of comprehensibility as a language teaching objective.

The following are general guidelines suggested about correcting errors:

1. Teachers should correct errors affecting intelligibility, i.e., global errors.
2. Teachers should correct high frequency errors.
3. Teachers should correct with a high degree of generality.
4. Teachers should correct errors affecting a large section of students.

5. Teachers should be careful and tactful in correcting stigmatizing and irritating errors. They should not despise low varieties of the language.
6. Finally, teachers should correct errors pertaining to pedagogical focus of the lesson. If the main focus of the lesson is the use of the simple present tense, the teacher should not focus too much on correcting errors dealing with articles and prepositions, for example, if he does, then he will distract the attention of the students from the pedagogical focus of the lesson.

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ملخص

بعض المشكلات اللغوية التي يواجهها المتعلمين العرب

للغة الإنكليزية

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تتناول هذه الدراسة المشكلات اللغوية أمام المتعلمين للغة الإنكليزية والغرض الأساس من هذا العمل هو مناقشة وعلى نحو مقتضب أنواع الأخطاء وأسباب هذه الأخطاء. وكثير من هذا النقاش يرتبط ارتباطاً وثيقاً بالتداخل اللغوي بين العربية والإنكليزية وذلك في مجالات الإملاء والتلفظ وبعض السمات النحوية. وتقدم الدراسة بعض المضامين التعليمية بشأن الأخطاء. وهذه الدراسة من الأهمية بمكان خاصة بالنسبة لأولئك التي تكون اللغة الإنكليزية هي اللغة الثانية مما يجعلهم أكثر انتباهاً لتجنب هذه الأخطاء.

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