



## **The Linguistic interference between L1 and L2 in EFL Moroccan Classes: Negative transfer of Grammatical rules**

### **L'interférence Linguistique Entre L1 et L2 Dans Les Classes Marocaines EFL : Le Transfert Négatif Des Règles Grammaticales**

**SADOUK LAILA**

Faculty of Letters and Human Sciences , Fez  
Sidi Mohamed Ben Abdellah University , Morocco

**[laila.sadouk@usmba.ac.ma](mailto:laila.sadouk@usmba.ac.ma)**

**Date de soumission :** 07/ 01/2020

**Date d'acceptation :** 28/02/2020

**Pour citer cet article :**

SADOUK.L (2020) «The Linguistic interference between L1 and L2 in EFL Moroccan Classes: Negative transfer of Grammatical rules», Revue Internationale du chercheur «Volume 1 : Numéro 1» pp : 260 - 272

## Abstract

The purpose of this research is to identify the extent to which students' first language (Arabic) grammar affects their second language (English) writing. The effects of first-language interference on second-language learners have been the subject of a great deal of research. One of the most common causes of poor writing by second-language students is the introduction of words and structures from the original language into their work (Lightbown & Spada, 1999). When discussing interference, Ellis (1997) uses the term "transfer," which he defines as "the impact that the learner exercises on the learning of an L2." The goal of this study, which used a mixed-methods survey research methodology, was to investigate the impact of L1 linguistic items on the English (L2) writing of 30 students at a chosen high school in Marrakech. The study found that incorrect syntactical order was often used in the L2 writing examples. Literature reviewed for this essay reveals that Arabic and English have distinct syntactical orders and different grammatical rules. Almost the whole class was found to have employed Arabic syntax in their L2 writing, according to our analysis of the data, there is a huge interference between L1 and L2 when producing a written piece by Moroccan students.

**Key words:** interference of languages , L1, L2, learning process, positive transfer, negative transfer

## Résumé

L'objectif de cette recherche est d'identifier dans quelle mesure la grammaire de la première langue (arabe) des étudiants affecte l'écriture de leur deuxième langue (anglais). Les effets de l'interférence de la première langue sur les apprenants de la deuxième langue ont fait l'objet de nombreuses recherches. L'une des causes les plus courantes de la mauvaise qualité de l'écriture des étudiants en langue seconde est l'introduction de mots et de structures de la langue d'origine dans leur travail (Lightbown & Spada, 1999). Lorsqu'il parle d'interférence, Ellis (1997) utilise le terme " transfert ", qu'il définit comme " l'impact que l'apprenant exerce sur l'apprentissage d'une L2. " L'objectif de cette étude, qui a utilisé une méthodologie de recherche par enquête à méthodes mixtes, était d'examiner l'impact des éléments linguistiques de la L1 sur l'écriture en anglais (L2) de 30 étudiants d'un lycée choisi à Marrakech. L'étude a révélé qu'un ordre syntaxique incorrect était souvent utilisé dans les exemples d'écriture en L2. La littérature examinée pour cet essai révèle que l'arabe et l'anglais ont des ordres syntaxiques distincts et des règles grammaticales différentes. D'après notre analyse des données, il y a une énorme interférence entre la L1 et la L2 lors de la production d'un écrit par des étudiants marocains.

**Mots Clés :** interférence des langues, L1, L2, processus d'apprentissage, transfert positif, transfert négatif



## Introduction

Even with varied experiences, English language learners have challenges while attempting to master the language. However, it has been shown that even native English speakers have problems with the correct use of articles in their language. Because of the Arabic article system and its impact on Arabic English learners, this is discovered to be the case. Mother-tongue influence is identified as the root source of such perplexing problems. The influence of the learners' mother tongue on their second or foreign language acquisition is referred to as "mother-tongue interference." Therefore, it is concluded that Arabic poses a barrier to Arab English language learners, particularly in the area of grammar. This is because the Arabic and English syntactic systems are fundamentally different. All of these issues are catalogued here along with explanations, discussions, and analyses.

This study focuses primarily on how native-language grammatical conventions influence second-language (L2) composition. The emphasis of this investigation is on the way in which Arabic grammatical norms affect written English. In addition, the purpose of this research is to identify whether aspects of L1 grammar and the national language are shared by L2 English writing by Moroccan school pupils. In addition, it attempts to identify the most important grammatical features that shape the grammar across languages.

### 1. A brief History and comparison of the Arabic Language and English language

In order to create Arabic text, a grammar in the Arabic language is required. While all languages serve the same purpose that of conveying ideas and concepts their grammatical structures vary greatly. To better understand the similarities and differences between Arabic and other languages, it would be helpful to have a quick overview of Arabic language features, especially Arabic grammar. As an added bonus, such a description would provide the groundwork for the theorizing required to create the first draft of an Arabic systematic grammar. Morphology and syntax are the two main branches of Arabic grammar. Morphology is the study of how words change shape and how that affects their meaning. Word order and case endings are two aspects of language that are studied in syntactic analysis. Words make up a phrase in Arabic. The term may function as a particle, a noun, or a verb. Words might end in one of two ways: with a pronounced structure or a pronounced declension. Structure words have ends that are always the same, no matter what their function is in the phrase. Declined words take different ends depending on their function in the phrase.



The verb system in Arabic is different from the English one. There have been several studies conducted over the last thousand years comparing the Arabic verb system to that of other languages (Eisele, 1990; Zollmann et al., 2006). Many legends surround the Arabic language. An inflectional, derivational, and templatic language. Arabic may be classified as a theme pro-drop language because it places the markers for tense, aspect, and modality on the verb rather than the subject or object, and because it indicates person, number, and/or gender agreement. Every conceivable verbal form is quantified in a unique manner. To that end, this study examines discharges and conjugates in their syntactic context to disclose features that may be utilized to construct a corpus, and it also aims to provide light on the morphemic composition and forms of Arabic and English verbs.

Arabic verbs are built from a variety of different patterns, each of which requires the addition of a root consisting of anywhere from three consonant letters **فعل** / f'1 to four **فعلل** / f'11 to create the final word. These templates are then used to attach the appropriate suffixes and prefixes to the appropriate verbs in order to determine the appropriate number, person, and gender in the linear structure. The root takes the active/passive voice and the ideal tense/aspect (Truck, 2010). The term "inflectional affixes" refers to prefixes and suffixes added to words to specify their grammatical role, as defined by Abdul-Halim et al. (2015, p. 139). And they point out that although English has certain characteristics with inflectional languages, Arabic is one of them. While English has sixteen different tenses, Arabic only has two (Gadalla, 2006). Both the derivational and inflectional morphological categories play crucial roles in the Arabic verb system. Arabic verbs use the laws of inflectional morphology to determine tense and aspect (Al-Saleemi, 1987).

Given that Arabic is the native dialect; it is naturally given special emphasis in Moroccan classrooms. English is being emphasized as a crucial language for success in Morocco's schools. Beginning in their last year of middle school, Moroccan students should be able to create basic paragraphs comprised of many phrases to demonstrate that they have acquired the mechanics of writing, as outlined in The Curriculum Specification for English addressing writing and speaking abilities. Teachers should encourage students to compose works in response to a wide range of topics and contexts, such as those presented in class discussions, assigned readings, and personal experiences. The best way to get pupils to start writing on their own is by mentors in the field. However, when students are still struggling to write on their own, instructors should assign guided writing assignments in which the level of supervision is progressively reduced.



## 2. Statement of the problem

Recently, educators in Morocco have been discussing the state of English language instruction and education in the country's schools. While there has been much discussion about student achievement throughout Morocco's educational spectrum, the challenges faced by the country's secondary schools have received less attention. The primary causes of language acquisition failure must be investigated. There has to be extensive focus on fields like cross-linguistics and pedagogy.

It is quite possible that pupils' learning of their native tongue and other national languages will be impacted by the fact that kids in Morocco must study more than two languages in their vernacular schools. Therefore, it is crucial to do extensive research in this field.

This research was undertaken with the expectation that it would contribute to the solution of language barriers in Moroccan educational institutions, and more specifically at the high school where I teach.

## 3- Significance of the Study

All EFL educators in Morocco believe that the quality of their students' English language skills must improve. Thus, there are current initiatives to improve the quality of English instruction in educational institutions. Learning a second language also benefits educators by providing useful insights into the teaching profession that may be used regardless of one's methodological leanings. That's why the goal of this interdisciplinary research is to identify the specific aspects of Moroccan high school students' L1 grammar that they often use in their L2 (English) compositions. Furthermore, it aims to identify the grammatical components that predominate among languages. It is hoped that this research will provide new nuance to the theoretical discussion around the impact of cross-linguistic grammatical similarities. The findings of this research have important implications for the English education community in Morocco. Teachers in Morocco can better correct grammatical mistakes if they realize the role that students' first language (L1) knowledge plays in their second language (L2) writing. By giving a comprehensive image of the L2 teaching environment in Moroccan schools, this research will similarly enable curriculum designers to adjust the curriculum properly.

#### **4- Research Questions**

The current investigation was conducted with these four research questions in mind:

The first question we need to answer is:

- 1- What words, phrases, or clauses have been transferred from the first language into the second?
- 2- Which parts of speech have been successfully transmitted?
- 3- Which words or phrases were adversely transmitted, and why?
- 4- If there are any additional influences outside the L1 one, what are they?

#### **5- Objective of the Study**

The following are some of the primary goals of this cross-lingual research project:

The first step is to identify the parts of Moroccan students' L1 grammar that they transfer directly into their L2 English writing.

Secondly, we need to identify the core grammatical features that underpin all interlingual communication.

#### **6- Literature Review**

A greater theoretical insight into the impact of cross-linguistic grammatical influences is anticipated from this research. L2 educators may utilize the interference patterns that resulted from this research to assist their students better learn L2 without encountering any cross-linguistic barriers. Interference refers to the process through which a learner's native language influences their progress toward proficiency in a second language. In his defense, he claims that students have the power to direct their own transfer success by shaping their own expectations for what is transferable and how well they do in secondary language courses. When learning a new language, students often develop their own sets of rules based on their prior knowledge of other languages, but only when they are far enough along in their second language study to benefit from doing so. According to Ellis (1997), it is crucial to differentiate between blunders and errors.

In their study, Alkhateeb (2018) looked at how a Saudi bilingual graduate student's L1 (Arabic) writing capabilities transferred to her L2 (English) writing abilities. It is assumed that there is a dynamic interaction between Arabic and English writing abilities, with positive, negative, and neutral transference despite the large linguistic difference between the two languages. Fatimah, the participant in this study, has been observed and interviewed, and her



texts written in both languages have been evaluated in order to demonstrate the dynamic nature of the links between L1 and L2 in composition abilities and the impacts of language transfer in composition skills. The findings show that L2 has the following impacts on L1: first, a backward transfer, which may go in three directions: positively, negatively, or neutrally. Second, they show that first-language competence is correlated with second-language performance, especially in composition. It is intended that students would use this information to become more aware of the influence of L2 on L1 (in this case, composition) and to make the most of the benefits in order to speed up their language acquisition.

For their 2016 study, Murakami and Alexopoulou examined morpheme research to assess the veracity of the long-held assumption for a uniform sequence of acquisition. Six English grammatical morphemes were selected, and the sequence in which they were picked up by second language learners from seven L1 groups spanning five skill levels was studied. The Cambridge Learner Corpus provided the dataset of around 10,000 test scripts. This research casts doubt on the generally accepted belief that there is a universal order of acquisition of L2 morphemes by establishing a clear L1 effect on the absolute correctness of morphemes and their acquisition order. Morphemes encoding language-specific notions were shown to be more susceptible to L1 impact, as was expected from the research.

For their 2018 study, Erdocia and Laka investigated whether or not Spanish-speaking learners of Basque who are also fluent in Spanish process non-canonical word order sentences in Basque (subject-verb-object [SVO] and object-verb-subject [OVS]) in the same manner as native Basque speakers. Notably, whereas OVS orders are not considered correct in either Spanish or Basque, SVO is not considered correct in Basque but is the correct word order in Spanish. The findings revealed that even in highly skilled and early-acquired bilingual populations, L1 traits impact L2 processing. The results showed that monolingual Spanish was used by the Basque speakers to analyze the SVO-OVS word order phrases.

The degree to which the disorder of a negative transfer includes the many infractions made by anybody learning a new language is a matter of some disagreement, and this must be taken into consideration. Several scholars have argued that erroneous assumptions drawn in the target language are more likely to lead to mistakes in interlingual communication than is bullying in the native language. Dewi et al. (2019) investigated the impact of L1 on second language spelling. The purpose of this research was to examine how the Arabic grammatical rules affect students linguistic choices in both speaking and writing. What are the common

mistakes made by Arabs first-language English learners when trying to use English rules that don't exist in Arabic?

The selected 30 students were asked to write one page essay about their experience in learning and improving English language.

### **7- Research Design**

This study used a mixed methodology combining a survey with in-depth interviews. The major goal of which is to explore the grammatical effect of mother tongue, Arabic language, on the writing of L2 and if the influence, if any, is a positive transfer or a negative one.

### **8- Sampling**

Sampling is the method of picking a representative sample from a larger population in order to learn more about that larger group as a whole. Samples for this study were selected using a straightforward sampling strategy. Lavrakas defines convenient sampling as a subset of non-probability sampling in which respondents are selected only for being "convenient" to the study. Due to the researcher's role as instructor, data collection for this study is simplified by focusing on two baccalaureate-level students. The selected class consists of 30 students. It is located in a city with a wide range of socioeconomic backgrounds, making it a particularly interesting setting for a school. All the students are of Moroccan descent; Arabic is their native tongue and English is their second language at school.

### **9- Instruments**

Analysis of pupils' writings / Worksheets

### **10- Data Analysis**

#### **Analysis of samples essays / Writing worksheets**

The essays were produced by students during a class exercise (worksheets given by their L2 teacher). The blunders made were tallied and sorted by language category. Worksheets used in class were a good source of data on L1 interference in L2 writing (assuming students hadn't just copied their work from the teacher's notes). Consequently, the researcher only looked at student writings that were completed without input from the L2 instructor. A careful examination of the pieces yielded the necessary insights. Tabulated linguistic elements were compared and confirmed to support theoretical claims in the area of language transmission.

I graded all 30 pupils' essays, spotting the common errors that were committed as a result of negative transfer from students mother tongue (Arabic) To their second acquired language (English). Errors included missing capitalization, incorrect Arabic word order, improper



punctuation, and improper Arabic grammatical structure made up the bulk of the faults discovered.

### 10.1 Omitting relative clause errors

**Table 1. Deletion of relative clause**

Linguistic Category	Students errors / Correction	Number of L1 Transfer/ Interference
Omitted relativizer	To begin with , we can talk about various aspects <b>were mentioned before.....</b> Correction: various aspects <b>that were</b> mentioned before...	12
Omitted main verb	The problem <b>that important</b> to us as students.... Correction : the problem <b>that is</b> important to us..	08
Omitted head noun	The learning materials that include <b>content is useful....</b> Correction : the learning materials <b>those content is useful</b>	09
Object resumptives	The effort that we <b>will spend it</b> doing other unimportant activities.... Correction : That will we will spend doing	4

The omission of the main verb from the relative clause is the second kind of L1 transfer mistake. In the data from the four articles, this mistake occurred eight times. In each case, a copular verb served as the primary verb. To eliminate the need for the adjective, eight verbs were taken out of the sentence.



Arabic enables the deletion of entire or portions of relative constructs, which may account for the deletion of relative clause mistake. Furthermore, unlike in English, predicative adjectives in nominal phrases do not need a copular verb. It was previously noted that clausal and non-clausal relative constructions were both possible in Arabic.

The fourth kind of L1 transfer mistake found in the data was the usage of resumptive pronouns, which occurred on four separate occasions. Three of the four resumptive mistakes included the replacement of resumptives for direct object gaps and two involved the substitution of gaps involving objects of prepositions. Table 1 demonstrates that the student decided to utilize the resumptive "it" to alter the referent "effort," the object of the preposition "in." The student's familiarity with relative clauses in his or her L1 is probably played a role here.

### 10.2 The absence of the auxiliary “be” Passive voice errors

**Table 2 : Deletion of the “auxiliary” “be” in the passive form**

Linguistic Category	Students errors / Correction	Number of L1 Transfer/ Interference
Auxiliary « be » omission	Teachers tended to use various methodologies in teaching English. One of those <b>methods can used</b> independently. Correction ..... <b>Can be used</b> .....	<b>21</b>

Table 2 shows that there were 21 cases when the data lacked the auxiliary needed for the passive construction. Table 1 shows an excerpt from a student paper in which the learner removed "be" from the passive construction "can utilized." When the auxiliary was left out, a passive structure was created that did not follow the rules of grammar. Students may overlook to use the auxiliary since Arabic passives are formed by melodic overwriting, which does not need its inclusion.

### 10.3 Errors of the use of Definite Article

**Table 3. Deletion of Definite Article**

Linguistic Category	Students errors / Correction	Number of L1 Transfer/ Interference
Definite Article omission	Learning process should be divided to different steps... Correction .....The Learning process should	14

As we can notice 19 of the publications in the sample set avoided having the definite article inserted. Common examples include the one in Table 3 where the student forgot to include the definite article "the" before the word "process," and the one in Figure 1. Since the definite prefix is used with the noun in Arabic in this manner, the mistake is consistent with the language. Accordingly, we should blame L1 transfer for this slip-up.

### 11. Conclusions and implications

This data from the essays allows us to derive the following conclusions concerning the impact of L1 grammatical rules on L2 writing:

- 1- Students' L1 has an impact on their L2 writing in many ways: (1) syntactical rules, (2) the usage of Arabic grammatical rules, and (3) the failure to apply the English rules.
- 2- 'Negative Transfer' is the most common kind of influence, and it occurs when erroneous usage of grammatical rules from L1 that are absent in L2 is seen in written L2.
- 3- Moroccan students need to be exposed to contrastive studies of some kind so that they may learn to distinguish between their first and second languages.
- 4- Students sometimes resort to using literal translation as a replacement for creative expression when their grasp of the restricted vocabulary of the target language is exhausted in their work.
5. Some or all of the linguistic components in the L1 and L2 should be taught to students in Tamil schools, either directly or indirectly.

No indication of positive transfer from the L1 into L2 writing was found among Chosen Moroccan pupils, as shown by the study findings.

The results of this study make it abundantly evident that students' native language is having a deleterious effect on their compositions, and that this is having an impact on the English



language proficiency of students in Morocco's secondary schools, particularly those in fourth grade. Other variables including insufficient exposure to excellent models of language usage, insufficient reference materials, the employment of improper language learning methodologies, language spoken at home and inadequate chances for professional growth and development of English language instructors. By and large, pupils' performance and ability in the English language in Moroccan schools has dropped. It has been advised by language specialists in Morocco that pupils in middle and high schools should be given equal study time for every foreign language taught in all the three main levels.

Since more hours are spent in English instruction at the secondary school level, it is believed that this research would help educators better understand how Moroccan students acquire English as a second language.

Although the methodology used in the current research is not novel from a theoretical perspective, it may be useful to educators, particularly those who teach English in a language other than English at either middle or high school, provided the results are studied thoroughly. The designers of English curricula for Moroccan schools need to be aware of these problems and adapt teaching methods appropriately.



## References

- Alotaibi, A. M., & Alajmi, H. (2015). The acquisition of the passive alternation by Kuwaiti EFL learners. *International Journal of English Linguistics*, 5(1), 44.
- Alkhateeb, A., Alex, S., Varkey, P., Li, Y., Qu, Q., & Tujkovic, D. (2018). Deep learning coordinated beamforming for highly-mobile millimeter wave systems. *IEEE Access*, 6, 37328-37348.
- Ellis, R. (1997). *SLA research and language teaching*. Oxford University Press, 198 Madison Avenue, New York, NY 10016-4314.
- Erdocia, K., & Laka, I. (2018). Negative transfer effects on L2 word order processing. *Frontiers in psychology*, 9, 337.
- Najimdeen, A. H. A., Amzat, I. H., & Ali, H. B. M. (2021). The impact of service quality dimensions on students' satisfaction: A study of International students in Malaysian Public universities. *IIUM Journal of Educational Studies*, 9(2), 89-108.
- Maniam, M., Samuel, S. J., Madya, S., & Assaiqeli, A. (2020). The influence of L1 (Tamil language) in the writing of L2. *Hamdard Islamicus*, 43(2), 42-54.
- Miller, D., & Biber, D. (2015). Evaluating reliability in quantitative vocabulary studies: The influence of corpus design and composition. *International Journal of Corpus Linguistics*, 20(1), 30-53.
- Murakami, A., & Alexopoulou, T. (2016). L1 influence on the acquisition order of English grammatical morphemes: A learner corpus study. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition*, 38(3), 365-401.