# An Error Analysis of Syrian Arabic Speakers' English Using Facebook Posts and Messages as Corpus

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***Abstract***— English is a foreign language to many around the world. This entails unfamiliarity with certain pragmatic and sociolinguistic variables. This paper investigates competence errors committed by a group of second-year Syrian university students. Both interlingual and intralingual errors feature in this research. Phonetically related words are found to be the source of lexical errors. Adjectives contribute to semantic errors. Next on the list are morphological errors, the vast majority of which prove to do with adjective derivation and distribution. Then morphosyntactic errors show in the production of verb groups, relative clauses and conditionals. The research concludes with an evaluation of the errors reviewed and a statement of the factors conducive to them.

***Keywords***—
*Deviant*
*Error*
*Lexical*
*Morph syntactic*
*Semantic.*

## I. INTRODUCTION

While a great many people are born in a speech community where English is spoken alongside their native tongue, others have a limited exposure to it, in which case it becomes a second or foreign language, henceforward referred to as SL and FL, respectively [17]. Despite the fact that English classes at schools and language institutes equip learners with a gigantic linguistic repertoire that consists in phonetic, syntactic, morphological and semantic rules, the learner's level of proficiency falls short of that of native speakers'. Outside a speech community where English is the means of communication, pragmatic and sociolinguistic aspects of the language prove hard to master. Unawareness of certain linguistic codes and conversational norms contributes to the high incidence of errors among learners.

Aptitude, attitude, interference, transfer and proficiency are among the factors posited by applied linguists to be at play in one's mastery of a SL. Sometimes even the most advanced of SL learners commit egregious errors when addressing a professor. The paradox is, mostly they are fully aware of the errors. In a relaxed ambience, things are different. To this effect, Dulay and Burt proposed the concept of an *affective filter* that can be high, hindering the learning process or low, expediting it [12]. Attitudinal factors such as motivation, self-imageand anxiety are relevant.

This corpus-based research investigates the errors committed by second-year Syrian university students, learning English as a second language. The paper examines mainly competence inaccuracies, since they pose serious problems for learners, being reflective of long-term issues. These are explored, as they appear in a corpus made up of Facebook posts and messages collected from a group of 13 learners. They are all students at Tishreen University on the eastern Mediterranean coast in Syria and they all had exposure to English for roughly the same number of years. None of them gets to use English for communication outside the classroom. Argumentative and factual instruments are used in the collection of data. Discussions in posts and messages mainly revolved around the courses students were doing, their social life and academic progress. The participants were not at first informed that their statements would be examined linguistically. They only knew the data would be used for some research. The errors are categorised and an analysis is attempted in keeping with Stephen D. Krashen's model. The analysis reveals that the most common errors are syntactic and preposition-related. The learners are found to heavily rely on skills from their mother tongue in both situations. The research also goes to show the sort of assumptions learners make about SL.

## II. THE CONCEPT OF 'ERROR'

Austin puts forward four types of 'infelicity'. He talks about *gaps*,*misapplications*, *flaws*and*hitches* [1].

Taylor attributes whether a mistake is a *slip* or an *error* to 'the writer's semantic and structural intentions'. The corrigibility of sentences, the fact that a feature of language is learnable and the learner's ability to correct the ill-formed utterance are all crucial. If the learner is willing or able to correct a fault in his output, the fault is a *mistake*. If, however, he is disinclined or unable to rectify it, the fault is an *error*[11]. In support of this view, Corder argues that mistakes are of no interest in such a study since they are not traceable to incompetence, but rather to performance failure [5]. Mistakes are committed by both FL and SL learners, whereas only SL learners produce errors.

A clearer classification is put forth by James later [11]. He speaks of *slips of the tongue, pen or fingers* which can be detected and rectified without aid. *Mistakes*, James argues, can only be rectified by the learner if their deviance is brought to his attention. *Errors* cannot be self-corrected until additional input is provided. Last on his list are *solecisms*- 'breaches of the rules of correctness as laid down by purists and usually taught in schools'.

## III. OVERVIEW OF KRASHEN'S MODEL

After collating data, a process of error identification takes place. Different deviant utterances present themselves to the linguist. Inthis paper, only the most 'grievous' of errors committed by the study group were selected.

Krashen, as cited in [7], lists a series of steps towards an error analysis of any corpus. He talks about identification, description, explanation, evaluation and prevention/correction of errors. Deviations –'creative errors'- observed in child output are perceived therefore as necessary stages in the learning process. The same, he argues, applies to SL learning.

Every learner has access to existing and newskills. When existing skills are transferred onto new ones, the transfer is pro-active. Whenever new skills are transferred onto existing ones, we have retro-active transfer [12]. A distinction more pertinent to this research is that between positive and negative transfer. When the transfer of a skill facilitates the learning of SL due to similarities between the two languages, we have positive transfer. However, when the transfer of this skill hinders the learning process owing to differences between the two languages, learners end up with negative transfer or 'interference'.

Another classification of errorsposited by Krashen distinguishes between deviations caused by the structure of L1 and errors that can be blamed on the structure of L2. The first type is labeled *interlingual.* The latter is said to be *intralingual*. As errors are viewed as natural developmental phases in the learning process, hypotheses are thought to be made by learners. Overgeneralisation of rules is one. Unawareness of rule restrictions and inaccurate application of rules are also vital.

Corder draws the distinction between errors of competence and errors of performance[12].

To understand deviant utterances, the *'plausible interpretation'* method suggested by Corder [6] is adopted, whereby an attempt to infer the intended utterance from the produced utterance, the context and some knowledge about the learners is made.

## IV. CLASSIFICATION OF ERRORS

The data turned out to be rich in errors of competence, despite the frequent incidence of performance errors blamed on anxiety, self-consciousness and indecision. Following the isolation of errors, they have been categorised into four categories: lexical, semantic, morphological and syntactic. In the course of the description, it is indicated whether they are interlingual or intralingual.

## V. DESCRIPTION AND EXPLANATION OF ERRORS

The causes of errors are identified. The errors are explained and analysed. Every section concludes with remarks on the general trends spotted.

### *A. Lexical*

Orthographic errors are often discerned in the writing of SL learners. Now that the script and phonological rules of English are diametrically opposed to those of Arabic, spelling errors are rampant. Some can be attributed to mistakenly spelling words the way they are pronounced- more of a transcription using letters, so to speak.. They are, for the most part, caused by the application of SL rules before these rules have been properly mastered. They are intralingual in nature. Another cause for lexical errors is the similarity in phonetic shape between words in SL. False friends constitute another cause of errors.

#### 1. Misspelling

Phonetic transposition, interchange, reduplication, addition and omission of letters in addition to merging or dividing words lead to utterances being misspelt.

**1.** I do yoga sometime. (Intralingual)

The learner is unaware of the difference between *sometimes* which means 'occasionally' and *sometime* which refers to some indefinite or unspecified time usually in the future, [10]. This error cannot very well be traced back to Arabic since a similar distinction is made between *sometime* and *sometimes* there.

**2.A.** Definitly, alot (intralingual)

**2.B.** beautifull, bauety (interlingual)

Here we have cases of dropping silent (e) in definitely, turning *a lot* into *alot,* using *full* instead of suffix *–ful*, and throwing three consecutive vowels of *beauty* into disarray. Errors in (2A) and (2B) reflect the fact that the learner has not yet grown adept at internalising vocabulary items the way they should be spelt. He seems unable to derive an adverb from an adjective without omitting the final (e) the way he would when adding the past marker *–ed* or the progressive aspect marker *–ing*.

**3.** I found my self automatically, with strong insistence. (intralingual)

The learner seems to have no sound grasp of reflexive pronouns or possessive adjectives. He could be simply unaware of the fact that *'my'* is usually attached to *'self'*.

**4.** Well come.. Unfair vertual reality by you… (Intralingual)

**5.** We find out that what life dectated to us wasn't that bad! (Intralingual)

Misspelling ‘welcome’ and ‘virtual’ in (4) and (5) could be attenuated considering the fact that the student's erroneous versions do approximate to the original. Other misspellingsseem to stem from faultier knowledge of the sound system of English.

It is worth noting that the phonetic inventory of Arabic is not as rich in vowels as that of English. Often the vowels are short and do not manifest themselves in spelling. Arabic can have triconsonantal or quadri-consonant words that would only consist of three or four consonants when spelled. An example would be *ktb*. Despite the fact that it is pronounced as *kataba*, the word isrealised in writing using consonants alone. Perhaps that is what some learners are doing here.

2. **PhoneticRelatedness and Confusing Forms**

Under this heading, words that bear similarity in their sound structure are identified. They are phonetically associated with one another and therefore pose problems for the learner. Kindred forms provide a source of confusion. The following example is of two words that share all sounds except for one vowel:

**6.A.** I don't like grammatical *roles.*(Interlingual)

While discussing the plot of a certain novel, another student came up with:

**6.B.** The striking reversal of rules

Both (6A) and (6B) reflect the case of a learner confusing two words -*rule* with *role*- due to phonetic relatedness. Arabic does not distinguish between long vowel /u:/ and diphthong /əu/ in writing. Therefore, foreign words always get mispronounced as such distinction is alien to the Arabic sound system. Even when learners can articulate such vowels, the orthography bars the realization of them in writing.

**7.** You preserve all the best. (Intralingual)

This is another example of phonetic similarity, but this time, the only difference is in the initial consonants which both belong to the family of stops. The learner substitutes *deserve* with *preserve* choosing the wrong stop.

**8.** Words always lag behind the capability of appraising you. (intralingual)

Now that *appraise* has one more sound than *praise*, they might sound similar to a beginner. Confusion springs from their phonetic similarity. Meaning-wise, the two are different with one meaning 'estimate' and the other 'commend'.

**9.** You can decide whether to love India or not by your will to be loved and affective there. (Intralingual)

Any English teacher in charge of SL learners must have had to clarify the difference between *affective* and *effective*. On the face of it, the first sound in *affective* is a mid-

central schwa and the first in *effective* is a close-front vowel. However, since both are short unrounded vowels, the choice between them becomes tricky. Furthermore, since *affective* which pertains to the affections is not often encountered in common parlance; many learners do not even realise the difference in meaning between the two words.

**10.** My results were disastrously shocking for me; either past with high marks or simply fell. (past: intralingual- fell: interlingual)

Mixing a word up with another also gives rise to lexical errors. However, this learner has done it for all the right reasons!! He seems to have the speaking proficiency necessary to strip voiced /d/ in *passed* of its 'voiced' feature, since it follows voiceless /s/. Actually, the learner spelt the word the way he pronounces it. As for the mispronunciation of word *fail*, Arabic phonetics comes into play once more. In comparison with English, Arabic diphthongs amount to few. Interference might well have caused mistaking /ei/ for /e/ in pronunciation and later in spelling since for beginners pronunciation serves as a guide in orthography.

**11.** This is life with all it's roughness and for me its waiting for Godo. (Intralingual)

Not only did the learner misspell words *Godot*, *its* and *it's*, but he also exhibited a lack of understanding of the concepts of possessive adjectives and personal pronouns. Another example was mistakenly using '*their'* for *they're*. This latter utterance was produced by a different student. The pronoun system of Arabic is far removed from that of English and therefore could not have influenced the student's choice.

**12.** You'll always be our inspiration and aspiration as well. (Intralingual)

Closely related words whose orthographic and phonetic forms show similarity are mistaken here for having correspondence in meaning. No matter how talented and accomplished a teacher might be, she will never be anyone's "aspiration"!

3. **False Friends**

Also known as *faux amis du traducteur* -which literally translates from French as 'false friend of a translator'- these utterances denote word pairs known as doublets from different languages which in spite of similarity in form have different meanings [3].

**13.** The lecture programme is published. (Interlingual)

In addition to his inability to use tenses properly -the present perfect in the passive in this example- apparently the SL learner is influenced by the very common usage of the word *programme* in his mother tongue to refer to *timetable* or *schedule*. This is, therefore, an interlingual error par excellence.

Many other examples of 'false friends' can be found in everyday conversation, but unfortunately in this Facebook-based corpus, others were not encountered. The word *makhzan* which means 'store' in Arabic is sometimes mistaken by Arab learners for English *magazine*. At one point in time, they were cognates. The shared etymology might account for the error here.

Homonymy as a source of false friends is common among languages belonging to the same language family.

In summary,misspellings manifest themselves in the shape of transposition of letters (bauety), merging two words (a lot), deletion of letters (sometime), dividing a word into two parts (my self) and using the wrong letters (vertual). The source of the gravest errors seemed to be the use of wrong letters, as it implied either a change in meaning or the creation of non-existing words.

Despite many examples in which the Arabic sound system contributes to the confusion between phonetically related English words (rules/roles), the general trend was for learners to mix up between words that only exist in English and are made up of sounds peculiar to the language (*affective*/*effective*). Another observation was, similar-sounding words with different consonants are as frequently encountered as those with different vowels, both creating problems for learners.

'False friends' do cause errors, yet they are always understood by speakers of both languages.Actually phonetically related words seem to be the major source of lexical errors.

### *B. Semantic*

This section deals with the words/phrases at the level of denotation, connotation and reference, with particular emphasis on denotation. The meanings of a set of adjectives, nouns, an adverbial and a noun phrase are looked at from the perspective of the student and as they are presented in the dictionary.

**14.** And I feel shy for being so lazy. (Interlingual)

It is likely that the learner here has not yet acquired a word which means 'embarrassed' and consequently resorts to *shy* which in English refers to the quality of being 'self-effacing'. Arabic has one word for both meanings, so this could also be an interlingual error, with the learner thinking he has another example of homography:

ʔinnahafatatunxajoola…. Innahaxajoola-t-un mimmafaʕalat

She girl NOM-IND shy... she shy-FEM-NOM-IND from did-3P

‘She is a shy girl ……. She is ashamed of what she did.’

**15.** Thank you a lot my harsh teacher. I really appreciate your *notices*. (Interlingual)

Here we have an example of semantic relatedness at the level of nouns. *Notice* which could mean 'attention' in *that escaped my attention* or 'information sheet' in *the notice on the board*, among other things might have been confused with *note*, in which case we have an intralingual error. Another interpretation would be that both *notice* and *observation* are expressed using oneword in Arabic. Not being part of the learner's repository of lexemes, *observation* fails to appear and *notice* is mistaken as a possible replacement.

**16.** He says that he feels like I'm the boy and he is the girl… a *feminine* issue. (Intralingual)

Again, we have a case of failing to assimilate the difference in meaning between adjective feminine –connected with women- and adjective *feminist*- connected to feminism or the advocacy of women's rights. By and large, this is an intralingual error, as the Arabic equivalents for both terms are the same word- /*Nasawiya*/.

**17.** We all will be proud of u our great futuristic professor. (Intralingual)

The learner seems to think that the suffixes *–ist* and *–ic* would not affect the meaning. Perhaps he does not have future as an adjective in his repertoire. He also seems to lack the knowledge that *Futuristic* refers to that which is ultra-modern or predicted for the future. In fact, *futurist* refers to an adherent of futurism in art or a person interested in the study of the future. It is never used in the context of wishing a future professor well.

**18.** I was to ask you about it but didn't want to be *curious*. (Interlingual)

Another example of semantic confusion at the level of adjectives due to mother-tongue interference is '*curious/nosy*'. Now that both *curious* which means 'inquisitive' and *nosy* which means 'prying' are expressed in Arabic using the same word, the learner again chooses the wrong one in the wrong context. In Arabic, /fudu:li/ is used in both senses and words.

**19.** I hope to achieve all your *tracing* wishes. (Intralingual)

From the context of the chat,it is clear that by *tracing wishes*, she meant ‘the dreams to be pursued’. A similar construction does not exist in Arabic, making it unlikely for interference to have caused the error.

**20.** U are as you were too much beautifull. We miss U too much. (Intralingual)

It is common sense that *too beautiful* would be acceptable in a context where, for example, the speaker was addressing a girl he fancied, as in 'You are too beautiful for me.' *Too* here functions as an intensifier, augmenting the degree to which the girl is pretty. *Much*, however, is usually used as a quantifier. The use of *too much* in 20 results in a rather strange utterance that would sound unnatural to a native English speaker. The

learner is unable to make out the subtle nuance *too much*bears i.e. beyond what is bearable or over the top. Moreover, he cannot see that it is not possible to use it before an adjective.

**21.** I was an athlete myself *someday.* (Intralingual)

This error lies in the choice of adverb. *Someday* which means 'at some time in the future' [10] is out of place in this sentence that locates the state in the past time. The learner could have used 'one day', 'once upon a time' or any other adverbial that has reference to the past time.

**22.** No one of them has your lovely smile. (Interlingual)

In this utterance, the learner employs a noun phrase to express the meaning encapsulated in *none.* Perhaps *None* has not yet been acquired. In either case, the learner borrows a colloquial Arabic expression /walawahidminun/ and translates it. The problem is, it does not sound idiomatic in English.

The previous data reveals that both interference from Arabic and incompetence in English cause errors. The errors involve overextension in both production and comprehension [14]. Five cases were intralingual and four constituted interlingual errors. However, the interesting part is the part of speech with which students were most likely to commit errors. In six out of nine errors, adjectives were used inaccurately giving rise to errors. Nouns came next on the list of problem areas, meaning-wise.

### *C. Morphological*

Morphology deals with the internal structure of words. Word category and word formation are two fundamental offshoots.

#### 1. Word Category

Also, known as word class or part of speech, this refers to the classification of the words of a given language according to form and meaning criteria. Noun, verb, adjective, article, pronoun, preposition, adverb and conjunction are the categories in English. These categories differ in their morphology, as some are inflected or derived while others are not. They also vary with regard to syntax as some combine with articles and others do not. Semantics also plays a role in the classification. Some like nouns express 'substance'. Verbs express 'process'. Prepositions express 'relation'. The following are errors related to word category.

**23.** We can infer how indispensable and prerequisite friends are in everybody's life. (Intralingual)

Here the learner uses a noun instead of an adjective to modify another noun. The learner is said to have overextended the use to noun prerequisite to cover that of an adjective. Of

course, an adjective such as 'important' would have solved the problem. Sometimes, however, students prefer to use grandiloquent language with the aim of impressing the reader in mind. The equivalent construction in Arabic also requires an adjective.

**24.** I've never thought it would be that difference. (Interlingual)

Another noun is used in the place of an adjective. This time, the adjective can be derived from the same noun. Both have the same root. The error lies in selecting the wrong part of speech in this particular construction- *difference* instead of *different*. Although the equivalent construction in Arabic slightly differs from the one here, the bottom line is that a noun is used –

ʕalahaazaalqadri mina al-ʔixtilaaf

on this much of difference-DEF-SG

'that different.'

**25.** People that will never forget your sweety kind nature. (Intralingual)

The learner replaces *sweet* with *sweety*. Since the derivation process in Arabic differs from that in English, this error seems to have its roots in SL. Sometimes adjectives like 'shady' are derived by adding suffix *–y*. At other times, they require no such addition. The hasovergeneralised the application of the derivationrule.

**26.** I'm so *panic* that I couldn't do it. (Intralingual).

Deriving *panicky* might have been difficult at that stage since, although the learner can add *–y* to certain wordsto derive adjectives, she might have tried and ended up with **panicing* which has a different pronunciation altogether. Therefore, she chose not to perform any morphological operation on the word with the meaning of which she seems familiar.

**27.** In this terrible *hot.* (Intralingual)

Unlike the previous examples, this utterance shows how the learner is unable to derive the noun *heat* from adjective *hot.* It could also reflect ignorance of the internal structure of a prepositional phrase (PP) - Preposition + NP. Another possibility is, *heat*was notyet acquired. The corresponding Arabic construction also has a noun as the head of the NP which serves as the object of P in the PP. Hence, this seems purely related to the learner'sSLskills and is therefore an intralingual error.

**28.** You have revived my *asleep ambitious*. (Intralingual)

An intralingual error manifests itself here in the shape of a predicative adjective used in place of an attributive one. A predicative adjective usually appears in the predicate of the sentence following a copular verb. Attributive adjectivesserve to assign attributes to the

noun they precede and modify. In (28), predicative adjective *asleep* is used instead of attributive *sleeping*. Additionally, in this example, adjective *Ambitious* is used as the head of an object NP instead of noun *ambitions*.

2. **Inflection**

Inflection is a modification in the form of a word by means of affixation or vowel change to express a grammatical function such number, tense or mood. Here we have two cases of overgeneralising inflectional morpheme-*ing*.

A famous dichotomy frequently observed in the speech of native Arab speakers of English is between the present and past participle. 'Interesting' and 'interested' are invariably mixed up at early stages. The following is a similar example.

**29.** Are you boring? (Intralingual)

It goes without saying that she was not *bored*; considering the chat lasted two hours! Here the learner seems unaware of the difference in meaning between present participle *boring* and past participle *bored*. While both function as modifiers, the *–ing* form usually describes feelings or opinions [8]. In this example, the interpretation is, the interlocutor bored her. The *–ed* form however is used to describe a feeling that someone experiences [8].What she meant to ask is whether the interlocutor was experiencing boredom. Now that Arabic has a completely different inflection system, this seems to be an intralingual error caused by the fact that the learner has not yet assimilated the difference between English present and past participles.

**30.** I am looking forward to do post graduating studying. (Intralingual)

It seems to have escaped the learner's notice that the verb after *look forward to* has to be in the present participle. The learner has not converted the verb into an*–ing*participle. This structure with its constraint on the word following the phrasal verb *look forward to* is unique to English and is therefore intralingual.Moreover, *graduate* requires no suffix to function as an adjective in the phrase 'postgraduate studies'.

To conclude, the analysis of morphological errors reveals that the overwhelming majority of them -7 out of 8- were the result of misapplication of L2 rules. The learner appeared to lack the necessary proficiency in English. 6 of the errors had to do with deriving adjectives from nouns or verbs. Therefore, the derivation of adjectives, their distribution in the phrase and the morphological changes a noun like *panic* undergoes when turned into an adjective all seem to constitute a trouble spot for Arab learners of English.

### *D. Morphosyntactic*

This set of errors pertains to the representation of syntactic features using morphological means as well as 'the combinatory processes that indicate the syntactic features of a linguistic expression' [3].

#### 1. Word Order

Also known as topology, word order refers to the linear arrangement of words and phrases within larger units like sentences. Rearrangements can trigger grammatical or semantic changes.

**31.** Ate Lara her lunch early. (Interlingual)

This is an example of a deviation in word order. Arabic is a VSO language whereas English has a SOV word order. The learner who produced this error, it transpired later, scored low on the proficiency test. The point is, this order is not very common.

#### 2. Innovation by Way of Overgeneralisation

Sometimes, speakers extend an existing word to take on a new meaning. An affix is productively applied to new items. Overgeneralisation can take place at the lexical, morphological or syntactic level[2].

**32.** I like ur clothe.

**33.** You can give advices about things you don't know their subject matter!

**34.** Wish me a good luck. (all Interlingual)

The learner seems unaware of the count/mass distinction in English, singularising*clothes,* adding plural marker '–s' to non-count *advice* and treating *luck* as a countable noun. All three cases exist in Arabic the way the learner put them in English, hence, the errors are most likely interlingual.

#### 3. Tense and Sentential Structure

Tense is defined as a 'grammatical (morphological) category of the verb which expresses the temporal relation between a speech act (S) and the state of affairs or event (E) described in the utterance' [3].

**35.** I liked your hair color, it quite suits you. (Interlingual)

Here is an interlingual syntactic error related to the use of tense. It is primarily caused by interference. Even though the state of liking something does not date to some past period, the past tense marker still appears on the verb.

**36.** My little daughter pressed enter before I say I miss u. (Interlingual)

This is an interlingual error. That is the exact sequence of tenses Arabic speakers would use in such a sentence. If a sentence is located in the past time, the past tense is used; yet, following a subordinator like *before*, the clause takes the simple present as follows.

Daghatatibnati enter qabla an aqula I miss u

Press 3PAST-FEM daughter enter before say.1PRES I miss u

'My daughter had pressed enter before I said I miss you.'

**37.** Especially for so lovely and sociable person like you. (Interlingual).

Fragments like this are common in the English of Arab learners. The punctuation system in Arabic allows such statements that lack verbs or are dependent on other clauses.

4. **Relative Clauses**

These are subordinate clauses introduced by relative pronouns. They refer to a noun in the main clause, either identifying it or adding extra information.

**38.** What many people may consider as a superficial view is actually an essential way to reveal others' qualities, and a mirror reflects their traits. (Interlingual)

**39.** "Am I that naive to fall for her beauty with no reference to her capacity?!" were the three questions used to blow into my mind. (Intralingual)

Both (38) and (39) diagnose a problem the learner has with relative clauses. He treated dependent clauses *reflects their traits* and *used to blow into my mind* as verb phrases, turning the NPs into full-fledged sentences. The interesting part is that in Arabic (38) would be sanctioned.

In the Arabic equivalent of (38), *mirror*is followed by *reflects* without any relative pronoun. However, the equivalent of (39) contains a relative pronoun and yet the learner chose not to use one in the English sentence (39). The learner seems to have overgeneralised the rule of omitting relative pronouns that can be found in some Arabic sentences and applied it to all English relative clauses. Here again we have an interlingual error.

**40.** I read the book that you recommended it. (Interlingual)

This is by far the most commonly encountered example of interference among undergraduate English literature Syrian students. This structure is borrowed from Arabic where a pronoun is added to the verb in the relative clause to refer back to the noun the clause modifies –clitic doubling. This takes place regardless of whether the relative pronoun is overt.

5. **Embedded Questions**

Embedding is a syntactic process that has its origins in transformational grammar. In it, an independent sentence becomes dependent in the 'matrix' sentence and is said to be a constituent of it.

**41.** She explained why *did she study* English in the first place. (Intralingual)

Ironically, such a structure does not exist in Arabic. The learner's 'faulty' syntactic knowledge on reported speech is to blame for this error. He lacks awareness of the inversion, omission and other operations involved.

**42.** What are you doing now and in each stage you are? (interlingual)

The learner treats the second question as embedded; hence, the inversion. This could also be an interlingual error since verb 'to be' is missing in Arabic and only the personal pronoun is used.

6. Errors in the Production and Distribution of Verb Groups

This section explores the different ways in which verbs combine in the writing of Arab learners of English. Examples related to aspect and mood are discussed.

**43.** I am totally believe in you to do the best. (intralingual)

Verb 'to be' is used along with a lexical verb that expresses a mental state. English necessitates that such verbs be used in the simple present, ruling out the possibility of having them in the progressive aspect. It is striking that even if the learner wished to use the progressive, he seems unequipped with the formula of the verb required (be + v –ing). Arabic does not have such aspect or auxiliaries for that matter. Hence, the error seems to be due to the misapplication of L2 rules.

**44.** I am work like a turtle in summer. (Intralingual)

Verb 'to be' is used here with a lexical verb *work* that does not undergo any inflection. If the learner meant to use the progressive aspect, she seems to have failed. The combination of verb ‘to be' and an uninflected lexical verb cannot be found in any English tense.

**45.** He is just look like his father. (Intralingual)

In this utterance, the learner uses verb 'to be' with *look like* which means 'resemble in appearance'. The error could be tracked down to the learner being familiar with the construction *He is like his father* in which verb 'to be' precedes *like*. The error seems to have stemmed from mixing up two English constructions.

**46.** How did u found ur beloved Latakia after that long distance. (Intralingual)

Verb *found* is not changed into its bare infinitival form after making this sentence into the interrogative. As the declarative is turned into a question, an auxiliary *did* is used and it

'carries' the tense. *Found* is therefore supposed to be stripped of tense. The Arabic equivalent does not have an auxiliary to form questions or the negative.

It is noteworthy that errors in subject-verb agreement are rampant in data from Arab learners of English. Studies on other languages like Malaysian revealed similar findings [16].

**47.** May God always gives you wellness to give us more & more of your knowledge. (intralingual)

**48.** May your exams are going perfectly. (Intralingual)

In both (47) and (48), again the verb maintains its inflected shape, despite the exclamatory use to express a wish. This type of exclamation takes the form of a question and consequently requires the lexical verb *gives* and auxiliary *are*to be in the bare infinitive since verb *may* is used at the beginning.

**49.** I haven't any words but I have a heart says in all language. Keep on your liveliness as usual. (Intralingual)

Lexical verb *have* which means 'own or possess' is confused with auxiliary *have* which is used to form the perfective aspect. The correct form of the sentence would be, 'I don't have any words, but I have a heart that speaks in all languages…' A relative pronoun is missing. *Language* also needs to be pluralized since it is preceded by quantifier all.

## 7. Exclamations

The exclamatory is a verbal mood described as a statement, question or command. Its primary function is to express a strong emotional state through intonation, interjections and modal particles [3].

**50.** What a wonderful words and picture. (Intralingual)

Here the learner gets the word order right but drops the exclamation mark. At first glance, he seems to have used determiner 'a' with a plural noun.However, then with the word *picture* as a singular conjoin, Things become clearer. Having coordinator *and* combining a plural noun and a singular one causes the learner to be in two minds as to whether an article should be used or not.

**51.** What's a colorful photo...really amazing! (Intralingual)

This student cannot tell the difference between a question and an interjection expressing admiration. The meaning and the punctuation convey the exclamatory message despite the use of verb 'to be',as in questions. Arabic uses exclamatory devices like /ya-lah-u/ which are followed by a PP. This does not seem to interfere with the learner's use of exclamation

in English since the trouble lies in his inability to distinguish between questions and exclamatory statements.

8. **Conditionals**

Conditional sentences consist of a subordinate and a main clause. The tense used in conditionals does not reflect the time to which they refer. Four types of conditionals have been identified:*zero*, *first*, *second* and *third conditional*..

**52.** If I *studied* in Sweden, I *will* be successful. (Interlingual)

Here the learner employs *the past tense* in the if-clause and *(will + bare infinitive*) in the result clause. The situation of the student pursuing a degree in Sweden is likely in the future. Nevertheless, she uses the past tense, which in conditionals indicates an improbable event in the present or future time. Unaware of the different types of conditional sentences in English, she seems to have relied on her Arabic skills. Interference takes place.The Arabic equivalent is:

Iza darastu fi Assuwaidsaʔakoon-u naajihan

If study-1P-SG-PT in Sweden will be-1P-NOM successful

'If I study in Sweden, I will be successful.'

9. **Used to Do vs. Used to Doing**

(Used to + infinitive) is normally used to talk about past actions or past states which no longer obtain.

(Be/get + used to + v –ing) is used to mean "be/become accustomed to" [8]. In the following examples, the learner confuses these English-specific formulae and uses them in reverse.

**53.** We gotta used to such miserable visions of it! (Intralingual)

The correct form: we got used to such miserable visions…

**54.** I used to waking up early at school.

The correct form: I used to wake up early…

*Gotta* is wrongly used by the learner in place of 'got'. The Arabic equivalents use the *–ing* form after 'accustomed' *used to* and the infinitive after 'past actions' *used to*. However, Arabic lacks 'verbs to be' altogether in such constructions. The error seems intralingual.

10. **Hope/Wish**

*Hope* is usually followed by a clause in the *simple present tense* to express one's wish for something to take place in the present or future [13]. *Wish*, on the other hand, when followed by a clause in the *past tense* is used to 'express a desire for something to be

different in the present.' Usually that thing is unlikely. Another scenario is for *wish* to combine with the *past perfect* to express regret about the past or a wish that something different had happened [8].

**55.** I *hope I could* make it out. (Intralingual)

**56.** I *wish they haven't* chosen another. (Intralingual)

The learner seems to have intended to say, 'I wish I could make it out' and 'I wish they hadn't chosen another'. Of course, some would argue that (56) is perfectly grammatical in a context where 'them not choosing another' is located in the future. A job applicant can wish that an employer has not chosen another by the time he arrives in the city. However, this is not the context of the utterance in question, as the learner was talking about apast event.

**57.** I *hope to achieve all your* tracing wishes. (Interlingual)

This is an interlingual error. The corresponding Arabic sentence uses *hope to achieve something* instead of *hope you achieve something.*

***58.*** I *hope you nice times* and successful exams. (Interlingual)

The grammatical construction that follows verb *hope* cannot be a NP. The learner confuses *hope* with *wish* after which we could use a noun phrase such as *nice times*. In Arabic, verb *wish* can be used interchangeably with verb *hope* in this sense.

11. **(The + Adjective + of) Instead of (the + Noun + of)**

In Arabic, an adjective can stand in for a noun in the construction 'the---of'. English disallows such a structure, as the following example reveals.

**59.** The *funny* of that all that I never give up. (Interlingual)

Here is a classic example of an interlingual error. This occurrence is perfectly grammatical and widely acceptable in Arabic.

Moreover, (59) contains no verb, yet it is well-formed in Arabic. Verbless sentences are peculiar to Arabic. They are known as 'nominal sentences' and contain no verb.(59) lacks a verb and is therefore ungrammatical in English. The learner has heavily relied on his FL skills. The downside is, the transfer was negative.

Another similar example of an adjective standing in for a noun comes to mind. The following example is not taken from the Facebook-based corpus and is only used to illustrate the point further. *Who's the responsible?* is often used to mean *who is the one responsible*? It is, in fact, the literal counterpart of the construction usually used in Arabic.

12. **You/Yours**

A pronoun is a part of speech that stands for a noun. All pronouns share the property of deixis and are dependent on the context of utterance.They are of 5 types: subject pronouns, object pronouns, possessive adjectives, possessive pronounsand reflexive pronouns.

**60.** You're a Hollywood and Bollywood blockbuster in this photo. I always leave no comment on a post of you. (intralingual)

The learner does not seem to have come to grips with the difference between object and possessive pronouns. The sentence might sound well-formed to someone unaware of the context. The post was notabout me, yet it appeared on my page. Therefore, he should have said "a post of yours". There is another error which relates to the learner's understanding of the meaning of the word *blockbuster*. To him, a word used to denote a best-selling book or a successful film can apply to accomplished individuals.

13. **Articles**

An article is a grammatical category which contains definite and indefinite members. Articles fall under the broader category of determiners.

**61.** I used to do *million tasks* together. (Interlingual)

Example (61) presents a case of negative transfer. *(Million+ plural noun*), instead of *(a million+ plural noun*), is used.

**62.** What *a* wonderful *words* and *picture***.** (Intralingual)

**63.** After evaluating *presentation*, she will decide on hiring me or not.(Intralingual)

**64.** She may ask to prepare lesson before presenting it. (Intralingual)

Unaware of the different uses and functions of definite article *the*, the learner uses no article in (63) and (64).

Now that both the articles and the usage of them differ between Arabic and English, the Arabic grammatical skills related to them could not have directly influenced the learner's English output. The examples here assert this claim by being mostly intralingual.

Considering the analysis of morphosyntactic errors, it becomes obvious that learners faced problems in the area of producing and distributing verb groups- all of which were intralingual. Relative clauses were a second major predicament they faced. They were neither aware of the formulae nor able to establish the reference. Learners also laboured under the misconception that tenses in conditionals had reference to time. Although there were also errors in the use of pronouns, articles and exclamation, it was (1) verb groups, (2) relative clauses and (3) conditionals which prevailed. Other studies arrived at similar findings [15].

### *E. Other Deviant Utterances*

#### 1. Prepositions

A preposition is a word used to link a noun or a pronoun with other words. It indicates relations of locality, temporality, causality or modality. Interestingly, errors in the use of prepositions are mostly interlingual in nature.

**65.** Students are luky by a teacher like you. (Interlingual)

For lack of a better option and building on his knowledge of the use of adjective *lucky* in Arabic, the learner resorts to the use of preposition *by*. The Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary cites two possible constructions after *lucky*. Those are (to do sth) and (that followed by clause…).Arabic, however, gives us the following:

ʔattullaabumahzuzoona bi-ʔustaazin mithlaki

Students-DEF-MASC-PL lucky-MASC-PL with/by teacher-INDEF-SG like you.

'Students are lucky with a teacher like you.'

**66.** You are the best of all in english department. (Interlingual)

The learner uses preposition *in* instead of *at*, does not capitalise a proper noun English and omits article *the*.

**67.** How do u do? U r the most beautiful one between them. (Intralingual)

The learner has not become aware of the difference between prepositions *between* and *among*. Further, despite frequent social contact for almost a year at the time of the chat, he still used *how do you do* which is normally used when two people meet for the first time. No question mark after the question either!

**68.** I am waiting u (interlingual)

Here the learner omits preposition *for* after *wait*, exactly the way it happens in Arabic. This is a case of blatant interference of his mother tongue.

The progressive aspect is not realised morphologically in Arabic. Rather, it is clear from the context of utterance.

**69.** I long for to seeing you. (interlingual)

Not only is the learner confused as to what preposition he should use following verb *long*, he also ends up adding *–ing* to the verb after *to*. In Arabic, a gerund or a noun usually follow verb *long*.

**70.** We all will miss u especially to urlaughters, reactions and nerviness. (interlingual)

Here the learner uses preposition *to* with verb *miss* and treats *laughter* as a count noun when in reality it is an uncountable one.

**71.** It reminds me with you. (Interlingual)

This English literature student uses preposition *with* instead of *of'* with verb *remind*. Again, in Arabic the equivalent of *with* is employed with verb *remind*.

**72.** You are from the most beautiful girls in syyyyriaaa. (Interlingual)

This is once more an interlingual error. The student's linguistic repertoire appears to lack the construction (one of the+ superlative+ noun). Consequently, he turns to Arabic and employs the structure that would be used in a similar situation.

**73.** Beside doing the Intermediate English… (Intralingual)

*Beside* is a preposition meaning 'next to or at the side of somebody/something' whereas *besides* is a transition adverb meaning 'in addition to'. Apparently, the SL learner confuses *besides* with *beside*. This error is intralingual, as Arabic uses completely different words to express the same meanings.

In conclusion,apart from the examples of *between*/*among* and *beside*/*besides* which are peculiar to English, all the preposition-related errors were interlingual. Arabic seems to have a big role to play in the perpetration of errors. Moreover, the wrong choice of preposition (*remind me with you/ lucky by you*) seems more prevalent than the omission (*waiting you*), addition (*miss to your laughter*) or indecision as to what preposition ought to be used (*long for to seeing you*). Linguists who analysed preposition errors committed by Arab speakers of English included Gass&Selinker. They suggested that the 'semantic areas' of these errors ranged from geographical to temporal [9].

## 2. Redundancy

The following examples reflect superfluity of information in the sentence. The reader could understand the message without recourse to the additional repetitive utterances.

**74.** What is your decision you are hesitant about Miss? Forget about your heart and mind and whatever. (interlingual)

In Arabic, when enumerating items on a list, conjunction *and* or *or* (wa or ʔau) must appear after every 'conjoin' except for the last.

Of course, the first sentence is ill-formed, reflecting incompetence when it comes to the use of relative clauses-discussed under morphosyntactic errors above.

**75.** Wish you all a blessed month for you and your gorgeous family. (neither interlingual nor intralingual)

*All* and *you and your gorgeous family* have the same referent and either one of them is, thus, redundant.

### 3. Deletion

In these examples, certain linguistic elements are omitted from the sentence either due to performance variables or because of the unawareness that such items are needed.

**76.** I do want to *see again*; also it's always to bid goodbye. (neither)

**77.** Wish a good evening! (neither)

That (76) and (77) are two typographical errors is highly likely. Neither Arabic nor English condones the use of what are clearly transitive verbs without their objects.

**78.** I'm *fed with* orange; my father has a farm. (Intralingual)

Arab learners of English always face tremendous difficulty with phrasal verbs owing to their absence in Arabic. Arab learners of English use grandiloquent verbs in preference to simpler phrasal verbs. They would use *invoke* and *evoke* for *bring back*, for example.

**79.** It is so exciting to *experience* different places and *people*. (Neither)

One cannot very well 'experience' people. The learner has, maybe, thought it economical to use one verb for both places and people. When two phrases are joined by a coordinator like 'and', we often omit the part of the second clause that has already been mentioned in the first. This phenomenon can be found across all languages and; therefore, the error is not a clear-cut interlingual or intralingual one. The problem lies in the use of verb *experience* with people- a collocation issue.

### 4. Idiosyncratic/Miscellaneous

Some of these errors are again interlingual. Others are neither developmental not interference errors. They come across as unnatural and idiosyncratic.

**80.** Put ur wishes in God and everything will go alright. (interlingual)

This is a case of negative transfer of an idiom frequently encountered in spoken Arabic.

**81.** And she's getting married to Britain. (interlingual)

In Arabic culture, if a girl gets married to someone who lives in the UK or another Western country that is favourably looked upon, she is thought to have been incredibly lucky. The identity of the suitor no longer matters. The only relevant detail is that she will be going to the UK, hence, *getting married to Britain* in colloquial Arabic!

**82.** I get a *difficult cold***.** (intralingual)

*Difficult* and *cold* do not collocate in English, yet they are used to convey a message to the effect of the cold being bad.

## VI. EVALUATION

This research looked into the different types of errors in the English of a group of native Syrian Arabic speakers who belong to the same age group and were at the time of data collection second-year students at university. The study attempted to explore the different types of errors committed as well as shed light on the most common of them and explain the potential causes. Results indicate that out of 83 errors, the vast majority were of a morphosyntactic nature, as the following table illustrates.

The findings of the study disclose that errors were committed at the level of vocabulary items (lexical level) when words were phonetically similar. Meaning-wise, adjectives topped the list of problematic areas. Where morphological errors are concerned, again adjectives posed the problem, in that learners could not go about derivation and distribution properly. As regards the most frequent and gravest of errors encountered all throughout the corpus, verb groups, relative clauses and conditionals were the enigmas that exercised the minds of learners as well as led to their sentences being ill-formed. Of the other deviant utterances, prepositions figured prominently and the wrong choice in English could generally be traced back to Arabic skills in the field.

TABLE I

NATURE AND FREQUENCY OF ERRORS

| Error | Frequency | Percentage |
|---|---|---|
| Lexical | 13 | 15.6% |
| Semantic | 9 | 10.8% |
| Morphological | 8 | 9.6% |
| Morphosyntactic | 34 | 40% |
| Others | 19 | 22.8% |
| Total | 83 | 100% |

The greatest majority of deviant utterances were found to have stemmed from ignorance of, flawed understanding or misapplication of the English language rules. Remarkably, almost 53% of errors were intralingual. Approximately 40% were the result of negative transfer (interference) of L1 skills onto L2, and were therefore interlingual. Only 6% of the deviant utterances straddled the borderline between interlingual and intralingual.

In the light of the previous analysis, pedagogical methods and teaching materials could be designed with the learner in mind. The rules of English syntax could be more thoroughly delineated, perhaps by increasing the amount of drills following the

presentation of rules. Teachers need toalert students to the differences between English and Arabic in all the areas that were shown to cause interlingual errors.

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