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**The Effect of Arabic Verbal and  
Nominal Clauses on the Writing of  
English Composition by the Iraqi  
EFL Learners at the University Level**  
**A B S T R A C T**

This paper tackles specifically the influence of the linguistic interference phenomena of the first language, Arabic, on the Iraqi EFL learners' writings. English nominal clauses have been considered and any phonological and semantic interferences have been excluded. Randomly, 50 subjects from students of the Department of English, University of Mosul, have been chosen. It has been hypothesized that the phenomenon of interference does exist heavily in students' writings and at all grammatical levels. The study is limited to the analysis of students' writings. The study aims at standing on linguistic interference phenomenon of the first language on the foreign language syntactic structure specially on students' writings. Actually, it tries to identify the differences and/or the similarities of both languages. It tries to specify the students' awareness of the syntactic structures and to lessen the errors committed. The analysis depends on the syntactic order of SVO concerning the written sentences following Quirk et al model (1985). The study will increase the students' knowledge of the syntactic structures of both languages in order to overcome any difficulty raised in the learning /teaching contexts.

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**تأثير الجمل العربية الاسمية والفعلية في كتابة الانشاءات الانكليزية لمتعلمي اللغة الانكليزية كلغة**

**اجنبية عند المستوى الجامعي**

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**الخلاصة:**

يعالج البحث تأثير ظاهرة تداخل اللغة العربية الأم على كتابات الطلبة العراقيين المتعلمين للغة الانكليزية بكونها لغة ثانية. تم اعتماد الجمل الاسمية واستبعاد التداخل الصوتي والدلالي. ووقع الاختيار على ٥٠ طالبا عشوائياً من طلبة قسم اللغة الانكليزية/ كلية الآداب/ جامعة الموصل. افترضت الدراسة أن

التداخل اللغوي موجود فعلاً بكثرة في كتابات الطلبة وعلى كافة المستويات النحوية. تهدف الدراسة الى الوقوف على ظاهرة التداخل اللغوية للغة الام على اللغة الثانية الاجنبية فيما يتعلق بكتابات الطلبة. كما وتهدف الدراسة الى تحديد وعي الطلبة فيما يخص التراكيب النحوية وتقليل الاخطاء المرتكبة. اعتمدت الدراسة على منهج (Quirk et al, 1985) فيما يتعلق بتحليل التراكيب النحوية. بالإضافة الى ذلك، ستزيد الدراسة من معرفة الطلبة للتراكيب النحوية للغتين للتغلب على اي صعوبة تطراً في سياقات التدريس او التعليم.

**الكلمات المفتاحية:** التداخل اللغوي، مهارة الكتابة، العربية، الانكليزية كلغة اجنبية، اللغة الام.

## 1. Bilingualism:

Bilingualism is the ability to speak two languages. However, the first language affects the new learned one in all means. Cited in Taylor, (1976: 259) Weinrich states that bilingualism is of two types: coordinate and compound. The coordinate bilingualism expresses two distinct backgrounds and ways of life and two cultures while the compound bilingualism serves to express the background, the same culture (Christophersen, 1973:64). Thus, bilinguals indulge in language analysis, or practice a form of incipient contrastive analysis. They work hard to keep their two languages separate by maximizing their perception of the structural difference. Moreover, bilinguals are more sensitive to linguistic feedback than monolinguals so they are more open to correction (BeenZeev,1977:237). Actually in bilingualism, both language systems exist together in the individual's mind and are independent of one another. When one has a good command of the two languages, there is no interference. In the case of subordinate bilingualism, the second language is not mastered to the degree that the first language is. Here, mother tongue dominates and influences the second language and this leads to interference ( Danchev,2001:177).

## 2. Transfer:

Transfer means the influence or the effect of one language on the learning of another (Richard, 1984:72). Brown (1987:81) defines it as the description of the knowledge or performance to advance (subsequent) learning. According to him,

transfer is either positive and negative. Positive transfer refers to the use of the previous information or knowledge in the second language while negative transfer refers to the disturbance of first language knowledge on the second language performance.

### 3. Interference:

Interference is the linguistic disturbance which results from two languages coming into contact into a specific simulation. Its problem is not something which linguistics could handle (Crystal,1971:201). There is interference of different language levels: phonetic, lexical and grammatical. The extent of its presence is due to the degree of language distinction of both languages (Patev, 1974:199).

Taylor (1975:88 ) adds that while learning a language, overgeneralization of the target language rules, reduction of grammatical redundancies, and omission of some rules that have not be learned can be recognized. Learners of the second language face problems and commit errors because they think in their own language when expressing their own opinions in the second language (Blum-Kulk and Levenston ,1983.99).Second language learners tend to rely on their native language (L1) to produce any utterance in the second language. If the two languages' structures are distinctly different, one could expect a relatively high frequency of error occurrences (Ellis, 1997:178).

### 4. Explicit and Implicit Interference:

Explicit inference appears clearly when learners make errors in oral and written foreign language expressions. They transfer language habits mistakenly where expressive and idiomatic expressions lose their aspects but the speech becomes simpler and poorer and it loses its expressiveness .Unlike explicit interference, implicit interference shows lexical notions and grammatical forms which do not have equivalent in the native language(Ellis,1997:201).

### 5. Problems of Interference:

Due to the process of habit-formation, a behavior, through regular repetition, becomes an automatic or habitual in second language learning. (Ellis 1985:93) says that a habit was formed when a particular response linked regularly with a particular stimulus occurred sufficiently and frequently. The learner here goes slowly to constitute a particular level of proficiency in the second language (Dulay et al:1982,102). If the learner went on to master the target language by expanding his repertoire up to the point where all of the well-formed structures of the target language has been acquainted, errors would be overcome considerably (Hoffman 1993:33). Ellis (1994:211) adds that in second language learning, the old and harmful habits were referred to as linguistic knowledge of the first language learning might contribute negatively in the acquisition of the second language.

#### 6. Errors and Mistakes:

Language differences lead to differences that might cause errors. These errors appear clearly in writings as well as to an inappropriateness of presenting ideas in gaining the second language (Cai, 2004:212). Errors are those typically elicited by people who have not yet dominated the linguistic systems of the target language. Mistakes are those failures produced by a known system adequately (Corder. 1978:78 ). Bartram and Walton (1991:319) see errors as those being caused by the learner trying out something completely new and getting it wrong. Mistakes are caused by the learner due to not putting what they have learned into practice. In brief errors when committed, they are corrected by others while mistakes are self-corrected.

Lewis (1933:211) mentions that errors may emerge when students slowly got a partial domain or mastery on linguistic structures of the target language. Errors occur in writing because writing is much difficult than listening, speaking and reading (Dixon and Nessel, 1983:211). Errors reflect gaps in the learners' knowledge. They occur because the learner does not know what is correct whereas mistakes reflect occasional lapses in performance. They occur because, a particular instance, the learner is unable to perform what s/he knows (Ellis, 1997:90).

## 7. Types of Interference:

### A-Linguistic Interference:

Lack of knowledge is what colors the students attempts when they do not recognize the real or standard solutions. For example, some students fail to put adjectives in order only. In the end, they put them in an order correctly depending on i.e. Arabic language. This is called lack of knowledge and not interference of language (Falk, 1978:61).

### B- Grammatical Interference:

English and Arabic have different sets of structured patterns. Therefore, Arabic students tend to use some old habits of their native language when they come to produce any piece of spoken or written forms. The different fields of grammatical interference are :number and gender, noun clauses, hypothetical sentences, collective nouns, prepositions, relative clauses, sentence order.

#### 7.1. Number and Gender:

Arabic is a tripartite language. It has singularity, duality alluding to two persons and plurality which implies the presence of two persons or things (Beeston, 1970:38). English has two number systems only: singular and plural ( Shannaq ,1968 :35). Students commit some mistakes when they come to write sentences like:

The fans in the stadium was a mixture of men and women. Instead of:

The fans in the stadium were a mixture of men and women

Here, interference occurs due to the influence of Arabic on the students' performance (Cantarino, 1974:22). Thus, the students translate the sentence in their minds into English wrongly. They translate the verb (كان) in their minds wrongly as was not as (were).

كان المشجعون في الملعب خليطاً من الرجال و النساء.

#### 7.2. Noun Clauses:

In Arabic, noun clauses are marked by putting "ان" before the sentence whereas in English there is no need for such a thing. Therefore, Arabic students tend to write this sentence:

(1) We believe that this policy to be useful. Instead of writing it as:

(2) We believe that this policy is useful. ( Beeston, 1970:61).

Here, the problem that Arab students face when they come to write any sentence is that they convey the same noun clause and transfer it into English and henceforth interference occurs.

### 7.3. Hypothetical Clauses:

Cantarino (1974:312) states that Arabic conditional clauses are usually introduced by the conditional clauses ( اذا ). If, one uses the Arabic conditional clauses, one will use the verb either singular or plural according to verb agreement. Whereas in English, this cannot be achieved because English takes a singular verb only. This difference between English and Arabic leads the interference to occur as in:

(3) If he was a doctor, he would treat people freely. Instead of writing it in this way:

(4) If he were a doctor, he would treat people freely.

### 7.4. Collective Nouns:

Al-Jarf (2008:4) states that Arab students find problems in using the correct forms of verbs when they come to deal with collective nouns like: family, team committee, people. Collective nouns in Arabic always take singular verbs. Whereas in English, these collective nouns are sometimes used in plural or singular sense. As a result interference occurs due to this inequality between English and Arabic. Arab students write this sentence in this way:

(5) The team have good players. Instead of writing it in this way:

(6) The team has good players.

### 7.5. Prepositions:

Students find problems or sometimes they commit mistakes in using the prepositions. In other words, sometimes they use a preposition instead of another. Sometimes, they use a preposition when there is no need for preposition or omit it. This is due to the imperfect control of English knowledge (Nasr,1963:91). The students write this sentence: We met the ladies Friday. Instead of:

We met the ladies on Friday.

### 7.6. Relative Clauses:

Relative pronouns in Arabic are used to determine the masculine and feminine. Arabic has (هو) for masculine heads in the sentence due to the Arabic influence on their choices whereas (هي) is used for determining the feminine heads in the sentence. In English, this cannot be achieved since English has no masculine and feminine usage concerning the use of relative pronouns ( Aziz, 1989:152-53). The students fail in choosing the right relative pronoun as between:

(7) I found the book I lost it yesterday.

(8) I found the book which I lost yesterday.

### 7.7. Sentence Elements Order:

English and Arabic have different word orders. Each one has its specific patterns. English has a fixed set of word order in which the speaker cannot put words randomly concerning the grammatical constituents; sometimes the speakers use the pattern of VSO wrongly (Quirk et al , 1985:49-50). Students face two problems. Firstly, they may use the VSO patterns when they come to write any sentence and this is in fact imperfect knowledge of English. Secondly, they may face another problem that is of inputting of the verb "be" in the sentence as in:

(9) The student in the class. Instead of:

(10) The student is in the class.

Or they may write "All students write a sentence in English. This is due to the fact that "All wrote a letter" .... Wrote Ali a letter. Al-Wasti et al (1979: 11). Kharma and Hajjaj (1989:91) show that interference occurs when the Arabic students write a sentence in English. This is due to the fact that word order in Arabic is not important because Arabic is an inflectional language while it is fixed and obligatory in English. Some students write this sentence mistakenly as:

(11) broke Jack the window.      Instead of writing it in this way:

(12) Jack broke the window.

#### 8-Procedure and Data Collection.

The study covers 50 participants (with no male/female distinction) at First Year College, Department of English Language, College of Arts, University of Mosul, for the academic year 2017-2018. The academic book is "College Composition". As an instrument, the participants were asked to write a composition of no more than three paragraphs. The participants' responses have been analyzed statistically illustrated by a means of a table that will explain the results obtained. The study is limited to grammatical interference like :word order, noun clauses ,collective nouns, prepositions, hypothetical clauses, relative clauses, number and gender. It analyzes various sentences showing the influence of the mother tongue on students' choices. It will follow Quirk et al model of 1985. The sentences have been analyzed syntactically. Finally , a table will be considered to show the percentages of errors accurately.

#### 9. Analysis of Data and Discussion of Results:

It is widely known that mostly Arab students commit mistakes when they come to write any piece of composition due to the influence of mother tongue. Their writings are usually colored by negative transfer of habits related to their language. This is due to negative interference.

Since the present study is built on the assumption that interference is clearly seen on students' writings , namely composition at university level, due to the influence of Arabic.

1. "The students learns English in the class".

Out of (50) students, only 17 i.e. (33%) failed to write this sentence correctly. This is due to Arabic in which there is no concord between singular and plural.

2. "Gave the teacher the notes to the students".

Out of (50) students, only 20 students (40%) failed to write this sentence correctly. Here, the influence of Arabic can be seen clearly in which the students started the sentence with the verb as it is the case in the Arabic language.

اعطى المدرس الملاحظات الى الطلاب.

3. "Mosul is good and it in the north of Iraq".

Out of (50) students, 10 students (20%) failed to write this sentence correctly. Here, there is an omission of the verb. It can be clearly noticed that the mother tongue has a great effect on the students' choices. They wanted to write the sentence in this way: Mosul is good and it is in the north of Iraq.

4. "I thought that the exam to be difficult".

Out of (50) students, 25 students (50%) failed to write the sentence in a correct way. The students wanted to write "I thought that the exam is difficult ". They committed a mistake which resulted due to the influence of the mother tongue in which there is nominal clauses in contrast to English.

5. "The people of Mosul is good and helpful".

Out of (50) students, (30) students (60%) failed to write the sentence in a correct way. Here, the students committed a mistake when they used the wrong verb in which there is no subject verb concord in concern with singularity and plurality.

6. "My family is good and happy".

Out of (50) students, (40) students (80%) failed to write the sentence in a correct way. The students wanted to write "My family are good and happy". This

error is due to the confusion in using the correct form of the verb which resulted due to the influence of mother tongue in which there is a collective noun.

7."The friends loves me very much".

Out of (50) students, (25) students (50%) failed to write the sentence correctly. Here, the students committed a mistake when they wrote the sentence in this way. In fact, they wanted to write it in this way: "The friends love me very much".

8."The car red is new".

Out of (50) students, (13) students (25%) failed to write the sentence correctly. Here, the students put the adjectives in a wrong order due to the effect of Arabic in which the noun head precedes the adjective.

9." Dijla beautiful and blue" .

Out of (50) students, (20) students (40%) failed to write the sentence correctly. The negative transfer of mother tongue is clearly obvious in the students' writings in which the negative transfer leads the students to omit the verb "be".

10."If I was a teacher, I would treat them simply".

Out of (50) students, (18) students (36%) failed to write the sentence correctly. Arab students committed this error due to mother's tongue influence in which Arabic permits its speakers to use a singular or a plural verb whereas in English this cannot be achieved. As a result , interference occurs. Instead of writing it in this way: "If I were a teacher, I would treat them simply"

11."The city old is beautiful".

Out of (50) students, (30) students (60%) failed to write the sentence correctly. Here, the students committed a mistake when they came to put the adjective before the noun and this is due to the effect of Arabic on their choices.

12."The springs of Mosul wonderful and nice".

Out of (50) students, (35) students (70%) failed to write the sentence correctly. Thinking that this sentence is correct in English led them to write it wrongly. This is due to the influence of mother tongue on the students.

13."My department big and lovely".

Out of (50) students, (29) students (58%) failed to write the sentence correctly. Claiming that English has a nominal clause just like the case in Arabic, the students wrote this sentence in a wrong way.

14."The parents their boys and girls".

Out of (50) students, (30) students (60%) failed to write the sentence in a correct way. Thinking in Arabic leads the students to write this sentence mistakenly. Here, the students omitted the verb "love" claiming in mind that there is no need for a verb since Arabic has a nominal sentence.

15." My classroom has one door and it three fans".

Out of (50) students, (42) students (84%) failed to write the sentence in a correct way. Finding a way to depend on the mother tongue led the students to write it in this wrong way. The right way is " My classroom has one door and it has three fans "

16."The weather nice and attractive".

Out of (50) students, (23) students (46%) failed to write the sentence in a correct way. The inadequacy of using English leads the students to write the sentence in this way instead of writing it in this right way:

" The weather is nice and attractive".

17. "We went to Mosul Sunday".

Out of (50) students, (18) students (36%) failed to write the sentence correctly. The error takes place in which the students omitted the preposition (on). This is due to fact that a preposition does not precede the noun in Arabic as the students believe.

18."The students of my class good and helpful".

Out of (50) students, (27) students (54%) failed to write the sentence in a correct way. Aiming at achieving an accurate ability to write a correct sentence by depending on the information they have in their mother tongue, the students wrote this sentence instead of writing it in this way : " The students of my class are good and helpful".

Here, the student omitted the verb " be" since they thought in their mother tongue which has nominal clauses unlike English.

19. "The children's memory is strange".

Out of (50) students, (37) students (74%) failed to write the sentence correctly. The students committed this error because the difference between Arabic and English might cause the students to convey the same noun clause structure that is found in Arabic into English. Instead of writing it in this right way: "The children's memories are strange".

## 10. The Findings:

The Number of Students and the Percentages of their Correct and Wrong Responses

	<u>Sentences</u>	No. of Students	<u>Passed</u>	<u>Failed</u>
1.	The students learns English in the class.	50	33 (77%)	17 (33%)
2.	Gave the teacher the notes to the students.	50	30 (60%)	20 (40%)
3.	Mosul is good and it in the north of Iraq.	50	40(80%)	10 (20%)
4.	I thought that the exam to be difficult.	50	25(50%)	25(50%)
5.	The people of Mosul is good and helpful.	50	20(40%)	30(60%)
6.	My team is good and happy.	50	10(20%)	40(80%)
7.	The friends loves me very much.	50	25(50%)	25(50%)
8.	The car red is new.	50	37(74%)	13(26%)
9.	Dijla beautiful and blue.	50	30(60%)	20(40%)
10.	If I was the teacher , I will treat them simply.	50	18(36%)	32(64%)
11.	My department big and lovely.	50	20(40%)	30(60%)
12.	The springs of Mosul wonderful and nice.	50	15(30%)	35(70%)
13.	The car red is new.	50	21(42%)	29(58%)
14.	The parents their boys and girls.	50	20(40%)	30(60%)
15.	My room has one door and it three fans.	50	8(16%)	42(84%)
16.	The weather nice and attractive.	50	27(54%)	23(46%)
17.	We went to Mosul Sunday.	50	32(64%)	18(36%)
18.	The students of my class good and helpful.	50	23(46%)	27(54%)
19.	The children's memories are strange.	50	15(30%)	35(70%)

The above table shows the number of the sentences and the students. It also shows the passed and failed students' answer and failed percentages of the students. It shows the errors which are omitted by the students.

The table indicates that there are various frequencies of errors and right choices concerning the students' choices in writing down their compositions. These different frequencies come from the fact that there are different levels for the students in mastering of English as a foreign language. The findings indicate that the calculated frequency of right choices is low in some cases while in other cases there is a high frequency of errors and in favor of word order. In other cases, it is indicated that the calculated frequency of errors is low in some cases while in other cases there is a high frequency of errors and in favor of subject verb concord. It has been found that there is no occurrence of relative clauses throughout the whole

compositions, .i.e.no student has used the relative clauses in his/her compositions. It shows high percentages of errors in some cases whereas there are low errors in other cases.

## 11. Conclusions:

In spite of the long period spent in studying English as a foreign language, students continue to commit errors due to their mother tongue. The study concludes that students make more interference errors in grammatical structures when they come to write their compositions. It is also clear throughout the study that some learners have used some L1 structures to write their compositions which led interference to occur. The most occurrence of errors is in grammatical structures like: word order, hypothetical sentences, prepositions, collective nouns, number and gender, adjective order and subject verb concord with different percentages of errors and right choices.

Most of the errors are due to the fact that Iraqi EFL learners think that English , just like Arabic, admits verbless sentences (nominal sentences) which is not true. This made them write many sentences without verbs or with different word order. It has been concluded that most students wrote their sentences without verbs thinking that this can be done in English due to their mother tongue. It has been noticed that most students wrote verbless sentences, i.e. without verbs "Be" or main verbs.

In other cases, the impact of Arabic nominal sentences is clearly seen on the students' writings in which many verbless sentences have been documented. The errors varied between writing verbless sentences due to the nominal impact of Arabic on the students' choices in writing their composition or choosing the wrong word order or omitting the needed preposition.

The findings revealed that (40-70%) failed to write the sentences with a verb thinking that English has a nominal structure just like Arabic. Also results show how students commit errors in building the sentences with a wrong word order. Thus , some students start the sentences with a verb as it is the case in Arabic in which the sentence can be started with a verb. It is also concluded that (40%) of the

students start the sentence with a verb as it is the case in Arabic, in which the verbal impact is clearly seen. Thus, the verbal impact of Arabic has a clear effect on the students when they come to write the sentences with an omission of a preposition or putting the adjectives in a wrong order as it is the case of Arabic in which a different word order is there.

The study concludes that the students' performance is mainly influenced by the mother tongue. First language interference is developed in written activities because students think in the sentences they want to express in their mother tongue first; then they translate them in their minds into the target language and finally write them down on the paper. The study concludes that the mother tongue has established the learners' world and has acquainted students with the problems of language phenomena and therefore it is the mother tongue which will enable them to acquire a new language. The study reveals that mother tongue influences students' poor performance in writing English composition.

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