

Language interference in pupil's Written performances in English

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ملخص:

تطرق هذا البحث إلى تدريس اللغة الأجنبية وتأثير اللغة أو اللغات التي تم تلقينها من قبل على تعليم اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية. وتم التحري في هذه القضية من خلال المقاربه الوصفية بالاعتماد على استبيان وتصميم تقييم الاداء الكتابي للتلاميذ كادوات جمع البيانات. وتتضمن عينه منه السنه الثانيه من تلاميذ القسم الادبي واساتذة الإنجليزيه بتانويه عائشه، بمدينة باتنه.

ويستخلص من هذه الدراسة ان المقاربات المعمول بها تتوافق مع تدخل اللغة الام في تعليم اللغات الاجنبية. وسواء تشابهت اللغة الثانيه او تظهر كلغه اجنبية، فإن حضورها في مسار التعليم اصبح حقيقه ملموسه. وقد كشف ايضا تحليل الاداء الكتابي للمتمدرس عن تواجد هذا المشكل وان التلاميذ لم يكونوا على قدر من الوعي بها، كما انهم لم يتأثروا باللغة الفرنسيه فقط وإنما العربيه ايضا و غيرها من اللغات التي عادة ما تؤدي إلى الكثير من الأخطاء.

Abstract

This study deals with foreign language teaching and investigates the influence of the previously learned language(s) on learning English as a foreign language. We investigated the issue following a descriptive approach based on a questionnaire; we have designed an evaluation of pupils' written performances as data gathering tools. The sample consists of second year literary streams pupils and teachers of English at Aisha Secondary School, in Batna.

We concluded that the existing approaches seem to agree on the involvement of the mother tong in learning second and foreign languages. Whether the mother tong resembles the second language or looks like the foreign language, its presence in the steps of learning is highly felt. The analysis of learner's written performances revealed that this problem exists and that pupils are not aware of it. Pupils are influenced by French language alone, but even Arabic and non-Arabic languages interfere to shape many inter-lingual errors.

Introduction :

English is taught as a second foreign language in the Algerian educational context. It is introduced at the middle school starting from the 8A.F. Pupils at the secondary school are supposed to have attained a considerable training time in the foreign language. In theory, these learners have attained a certain level of language mastery that enables them tackle secondary school courses with more ease and less constraints. In other words, this simply means that they master the basic skills of the foreign language and are able to demonstrate it in understanding oral messages, reading simple passages and developing short paragraphs. In the field, when it comes to practice the learned language, students' performances indicate that most of their teachers' expectations remain at the level of theory. Teachers themselves are at loss: instead of going on with the new material as a continuation of the already learned one, they feel urged to have frequent backward brushing up of the expected acquired linguistic background. Pupils at secondary schools are familiar with the fact that French and English languages use the same roman script, but in different structures. Seven academic years of studying French make secondary school pupils acquainted with its vocabulary, word representation and graphemic symbols. Any other foreign language pupils will learn will be compared to French in terms of form and function. They have difficulties to write correctly words and sentences in English. With the same difficulty, stemming in our view from language interference, these learners fall into errors when writing compositions and even short paragraphs. Learners' linguistic incompetencies appear when the same words exist in the two languages, even with different lexical meanings.

Our experience of teaching English allowed us to witness this phenomenon among our learners, and made us in a position to assert that the interference of the previously learned languages has a considerable effect on students' written performances and causes most of the difficulties they encounter to write in English. We have also noticed that this phenomenon is widely significant among second year literary stream

classes, as these learners are in a transitional phase from the first year which emphasizes more grammar and structure practice to the third year which treats themes and general topics more than simple discrete points in the language. Moreover, at this stage and during the second year, learners, especially those in literary streams are encouraged to perform more in the productive skills. In writing, for instance, they learn ways of organizing paragraphs and sometimes essays through both guided and free writing. It is mainly in the free writing phase of their performances that most language interference appears, and this is the point we want to investigate.

The main hypothesis we set here is to what extent, the previously learned languages have direct influence upon pupils actual way of writing in English. We also ask the question whether language interference is the only factor from which inappropriate learning of writing originates ?

Throughout this study, we will be assuming that most significant mistakes pupils of 2A.S.literary stream make when writing in English stem from the impact of French being the first foreign language with roman scripts students have been learning. Mistakes of intralanguagel types also exist, but remain of a secondary value.

1-RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The present study falls onto the educational research. It is concerned with foreign language teaching and investigates some factors which hinder learning .

The phenomenon of French language interference in writing in English is widely seen among pupils of all levels in Aisha Secondary school. Particularly, it is more prominent within 2nd Year literary streams because, starting from this stage pupils are asked to produce free writing. This fact requires them write more and thus make mistakes. Our population is then restricted to 2nd year literary streams and comprises 140 pupils gathered in classes of 42 to 45 learners. The second category of our population consists of the teachers of English at the same school. They are five. Given their small number, no sampling was made and the whole number was taken as respondents.

Being a teacher of English to these learners helps us right at the beginning identify the subjects to whom the problem is significant and select them for the investigation. However to lessen the effect of bias

stemming from our familiarity with students and to raise the objectivity, we thought that a random sampling would be better applied. This technique gives equal chances for students to be selected and minimizes subjectivity which might stem from our personal knowledge of our pupils.

We have then selected 60 pupils from four classes with an average of 15 pupils from each class. The sample represents 46% of the whole population and exceeds largely the ordinary 10 to 15% suggested by researchers. Out of the 60 subjects representing the sample we count 42 girls and 18 boys. This imbalance between male and female respondents is acceptable when we know the female over representation characteristic of Aisha secondary school.

To highlight pupils errors and mistakes in writing requires observing them write. This is what suggests the use of an evaluation grid as one data gathering tool. This grid helps us classify, categorize learner's errors in writing and trace them back to their sources to identify the one stemming from language interference. To consolidate the data we obtain in the observation, we need also teacher's opinions of the issue under study. We have designed a questionnaire of 20 items containing both close and open format, providing respondents with enough space for comments.

2- Language Interference & Communicative Competence:

2-1-Second language Vs Foreign language

Learning a foreign language presupposes the existence of an already first language; a mother tongue. The target language takes different names depending on its position as far as the learner's mother tongue is concerned. When the learned language is not the mother tongue, it is necessarily a second language (L2). The second language has some relation with the learner's linguistic community and culture. In case this relation is absent, the language learned is classified as a foreign language. (Asseburg, 1999).

Wilkins (1976) points at this same dichotomy and adds that when the functions of a national language can be performed by another language

(L2), which has some historical relations with that country, L2 is a second language. L2 then, can encompass a broad range of functions extended to include administration and education. When the target language is not a mother tongue and is not a second language, it becomes a foreign language. A foreign language may be first or second, depending on the number of languages taught before and which have no internal communication functions.

In foreign language education, linguists suggest that, in terms of communication functions, a second language differs from a foreign language in the immediate need and use of the learned language (Gass and Sliker, 1990). While the second language learner needs the language for internal communication and use, the foreign language learner uses the language to communicate abroad or with foreigners within his country.

2- 2-Grammatical Competence and communicative competence.

Within foreign language learning framework, these two competences indicate two different kinds of language knowledge a learner may have. Grammatical competence, attributed to Chomsky, is the speaker's knowledge of the grammar rules which govern a language. Grammatical competence covers the mastery of phonological rules, syntactic rules and semantic ones.

Corder (1981) says that a native speaker must not only be able to produce and understand grammatically well-formed sentences, but also appropriate ones. In this sense, communicative competence has been introduced to cover a learners knowledge of not only internal rules underlying the language system, but also appropriate ways of ordering language to communicate (Hymes,1972). As far as language learning is concerned, teachers are trying to develop in the learner not a simple grammatical competence in the Chomskyan sense, but a communicative ability ensuring appropriate use of the language.

Learners, at early stages of foreign language training, perform well in practice activities in class, but fail to do well outside. This is explained by the fact that they have acquired grammatical competence without

reaching a good level in grammatical performance. Performance, which is the reflection of competence -both grammatical and communicative-, is not perfect, and this explains learners' misuses of language referred to as errors. Radford (1998) emphasizes the fact that any speaker makes occasionally errors in performing or understanding the language, he uses or hears. However, this does not mean that the learner does not have a competence. Simply, it may be explained by non-linguistic factors, which intervene and shape most cases of language misuse. This same author adds that we have to know what native speakers occasionally know about their language and its grammar to understand the effect of extralinguistic factors on communication. Chomsky, in the words of Radford, says that an important indication of a speaker's tacit knowledge of his language is the intuition he has on the grammaticality and interpretation of words and sentences in the language. Newmeyer (1996) clarifies this view stating that intuition about grammaticality is only one part of the native speaker's ability to judge whether utterances are appropriate in a given context. Intuition of interpretation completes the missing part of the individual's communicative competence. Moreover, possessing a knowledge of a grammar of a language does not mean yet being competent, unless the language user shows high skills of selecting appropriateness and interpretation of meaning (Radford, 1998).

3 -1- Different Views of Errors.

Throughout the development of Psycholinguistic studies, errors have always been a source of debate. The question: "What is an error, and what causes it?" shaped disagreements among many scholars and educationists. It is, in fact, difficult to state what exactly an error in language learning is.

Within the behaviorist framework, errors had negative connotations. The occurrence of error was believed to be directly linked to the inadequacy of the teaching techniques (Corder 1973). Later on, error started to be given a more positive view and was considered as inevitable. The belief was that errors show how a learner is progressing through the

target language by formulating and testing hypotheses about the nature of the new language system.

In the field of foreign language teaching, researchers have given several interpretations for error. George (1972) has already defined an error as “a form unwanted by the teacher” (P.2). He went further arguing that teachers usually judge a learner’s answer as erroneous not because it is really wrong, but because it is not the answer they expected. The same issue of the difficulty to identify the error was also shown by Chaudron (1986) who believes that: “The determination of errors is clearly a difficult process that depends on the immediate context of the utterance in question.” (P.69). Corder (1973) talked about ‘mistakes’ and ‘errors’, stating that ‘mistakes’ are the random errors that even the native speakers make and are of less value for the learning process. ‘Errors’, however, show how a system works and how does a learner progress through the ‘Interlanguage’. Corder (1974) distinguishes between ‘overt’ and ‘covert’ errors. In his words, ‘Overt’ errors are ungrammatical utterances at the level of the sentence, while ‘Covert’ errors are ungrammatically well formed but are interpretable within the context of communication. This dichotomy matches well with that of Burt and Kiparsky (1974) who identified ‘global’ and ‘local’ errors in the following terms: “Global mistakes are those that violate rules involving the overall structure of a sentence [...]. Local mistakes cause trouble in a particular constituent, or in a clause of a complex sentence.” (P.73).

This means that global errors are those misuses of relations between the constituents of a clause or a simple sentence. Local errors appear as a wrong handling of constituents in a complex sentence .It follows here that what is global in one sentence may become local in a bigger and complex one.

3-2- Contrastive Analysis

Learner’s native language and its effect on further learning of foreign languages was the main issue that led to the development of Contrastive analysis (C.A.). A generally accepted definition of C.A is that

it is a branch of linguistics, which contrasts the structures of the two languages aiming at finding out the differences and use them in the treatment of errors (Corder. 1974, Long. 1991).

Before the 1950's and 1960's researchers conducted contrastive analyses by systematically comparing the two language systems: similarities and differences between the mother tongue and the foreign language are identified. The belief at that time was that a more effective pedagogy of foreign language teaching would be possible when these points are taken into account. Long (1991) believes that the problems of learners of a foreign language are caused by the different structures of the native and target language. For that reason, he maintained that C.A would predict areas of difficulty in order to design appropriate language-teaching materials. Applied linguists of that era based their studies on the Structuralists' findings who were in favor of investigating the observable linguistic phenomenon - performance- and said that the similar elements in the first language will be easy and the different ones will be difficult. Indeed, Lado (1957) assumes that: "... the student who comes in contact with a foreign language will find some features of it quite easy and others extremely difficult. Those elements that are similar to his native language will be simple and those elements that are different will be difficult" (P.59)

When the field of contrastive analysis has shaped most linguists' concern, its supporters suggested two versions to thoroughly investigate the issue : The predictive version, so called the strong hypothesis, and the explanatory version referred to as the weak version.

3-3- Errors and Interlanguage

Interlanguage refers to the language variety standing between the learner's mother tongue and the target language. Selinker (1972) suggests that 'Interlanguage' is a result of the learner's attempted learning when the psychological structures latent in his brain are activated. Corder (1973) refers to this same construct as idiosyncratic dialect or transitional idiolect to him: 'a learner's sentences may be deviant, ill formed, incorrect or

erroneous only in the sense that they are not fully describable in the terms of the grammar of his mother tongue or the target language. They are however, presumably well formed in terms of the grammar of his own transitional idiolect at that point in time. In other words, a learner's language during a certain period of its learning takes from both his mother tongue and the target language and stands somewhere between them. Again, Selinker (1972) believes that this variety is likely to contain many errors that delineate the learner's hypothetical stage about the language. The learner is, then, forming hypotheses about the nature of the language and then tests them. This is possible according to what Chomsky (1965) calls language acquisition device. It is the children's natural readiness to acquire the language and which can be applicable to second or foreign language learners. So, as the learner gets into contact with the language, he is already equipped with the ability to acquire it. He progresses through that acquisition process by forming hypotheses that he will test and modify, if necessary, later on. However, the way the learner progresses through the Interlanguage is not easy to determine. Brown (1987) recognizes that 'learners are so variable in their acquisition of a second language that stages of development defy description'.

3-4- Errors and the Monitor Theory.

Among the prominent theories in the field of second and foreign language learning and teaching is the Monitor theory. It is built around five points and the most important ones are three: the learning-acquisition distinction, the monitor hypothesis, and the input hypothesis.

The learning-acquisition theory put forward by Krashen (1987), claims that while there exists a tendency to believe that children acquire and adults learn the language, adults also acquire a second language. Learning and acquisition coexist in one's mind to fulfill complementary tasks. At the time where acquisition initiates a person's utterances in the second language, learning plays the role of monitor that changes the form of these utterances. Error correction has to do with conscious learning

because its essence is to show to the learner the form of the rule that he violated.

As distinct from classroom language learning, parents, as noted by Brown et al (1987) correct only a small portion of the child's language such as pronunciation problems, certain verbs and odd words. They are more concerned with the value of the words than with the form of what the child says. The situation is quite different in the language classroom. Teachers usually tend to be more demanding on the form as well as the content of a learner's production. They are often unaware of the processes when one comes to learn or produce utterances in a foreign language. Krashen who introduced the notion of monitor claims that there are three conditions for it to work: time, focus on form, and knowledge of the rule.

4-Writing

A great number of even highly articulate persons find difficulties in expressing themselves through writing even in their native language (Lynch 1996). This is something which has to do with individual competence in manifesting his command over the language rules and which is never complete. Only a minority of the speakers of any language acquire the skill of writing with degree of finesse. Even after years of training at school, writing remains one of the hardest language types. This is the case of our secondary school pupils who according to Le Programme de l'Enseignement de la Langue Anglaise au Secondaire expect them to:

- write correctly simple sentences and move to complex ones,
- write personal letters,
- build a guided short paragraph, and
- take notes and accomplish written tasks such as filling the gaps and so on.

In listening and reading, pupils need to reach a certain high degree of proficiency. It is in writing and speaking that the foreigner rarely

achieves the same degree of fluency as a native speaker because of language authenticity, which remains a property belonging only to native speakers. However, this does not mean that writing has little contribution to foreign language learning. In fact, it plays a great role and has considerable importance in consolidating the three skills. This is what Kroll (1990) has already discussed and came with the conclusion that: "Differences between L1 and L2 writers relate to composing proficiency rather than to their first language" (P.49).

4-1-Writing activities

Writing is, according to Rivers (1968): 'the act of putting down in conventional graphic forms something which has been spoken' (P242). At this initial level, writing is the correct association of letters with sounds.

This form of writing is called notation. Writing becomes a more complicated process when putting in graphic symbols combinations of words, which might be spoken in particular circumstances in a system accepted by educated native speakers. The ultimate aim of a writer is to express himself in a polished literacy form which requires the utilization of vocabulary and certain refinements of structures so often called composition.

In its more advanced form of composition, writing itself depends on progress on the other skills. According to Gray (1968), the issue is summarized in the following words: "Writing is not a skill which can be learned in isolation. In the apprentice stage of writing which will last for considerable time, the pupils must learn and master the skill of listening comprehension, speaking and reading, with the activity of writing helping to consolidate learning in these areas" (P.50).

Only by hearing and reading a great deal of the language as it is spoken and written by its natives can the foreign language learner feel for the appropriate use of language forms and combinations. He will be unlikely to write with ease what he is unable to say over to himself. Until he has read and heard a great deal, the pupil remains unfamiliar with the way native speakers express themselves for all kinds of purposes in

writing. The most effective writing practice will have a close connection with what is being practiced in other skills..

This is what happens so often: while the pupil is using writing to reinforce other skill learning, he will be mastering some technical details of that skill itself. This shapes the cyclic status of foreign language learning. The higher levels of composition will be possible only when the pupils have attained a high degree of mastery in the other skills. In the view of Rivers (1968): “to be able to write in the foreign language, the pupil must be trained systematically through five stages of development”. Whatever form of first language, a learner of a foreign language targets writing through copying, reproduction, recombination, guided writing and composition.

4-2-Writing skills

Teaching writing has many points to reach, but educationists stress three major ones (Hedge 2000): First, its scope must go beyond the artificial unrealistic writing. Second, writing should be as much communicative and functional as possible. Third, writing should not be considered just as an activity of reinforcing grammar and vocabulary lessons, but every writing lesson should aim at teaching those skills.

5- RESULTS OF THE STUDY:

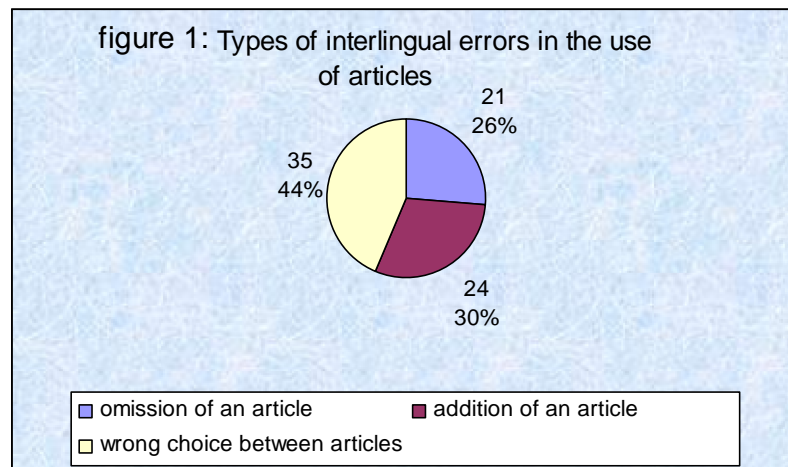
A - Pupils’ written performances

A-i - Errors in the use of articles:

Too many errors occurred in the use of articles and especially when choosing between the definite and indefinite articles. Supplying ‘the’ for ‘a’ poses problems to pupils who often recourse not to French but directly to Arabic. In Arabic indeed, there is only one article, which defines nouns. Learners confuse this with English where we can use ‘a’ instead of ‘the’. To them, all nouns are defined by ‘the’ and this leads them produce sentences like “*the smoking is bad for the health of the persons*” for “*smoking is bad for health.*” On the other hand, omission of the article where it is necessary to occur is another aspect of language interference.

Learners who fall onto this kind of mistakes are those who compare the situation in English to that one in Arabic where the indefinite article equivalent to 'a' does not exist. Instead of substituting 'a' for 'the', pupils prefer not to use the article at all. In their understanding, the noun is not defined and therefore, the article 'a' has no function. Often, this leads them produce sentences like: *"I read article in newspaper about jobs"* instead of *"I read an article in a newspaper about jobs"*. The misunderstanding of the use of articles also explains some other pupils' errors and mistakes.

Learners add mistakenly the letter 'e' to words preceded by 'the' and which are feminine. To students who write this way, French language is the source of errors. What learners do here is the negative transfer which leads them to generalize the rule applied for French words onto English ones.



The results above indicate the type and number of errors encountered when evaluating pupils' writings.

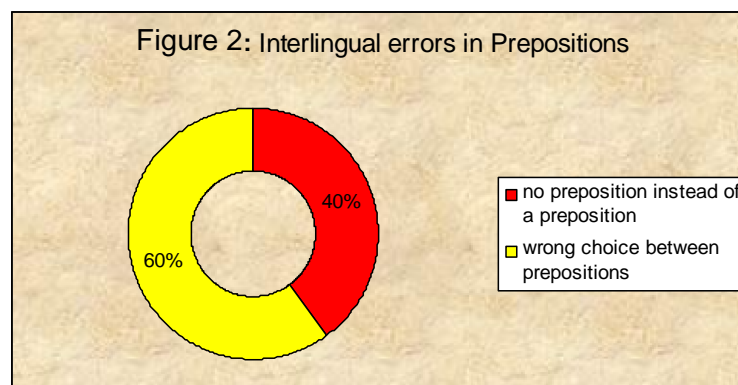
A-2- Errors in prepositions:

Language interference is clearly seen on pupils' performances especially in the case of free writing. English contains lot of prepositions most of them have the same function and differ only in some subtle ways

like ‘in- at’, ‘on-above’, ‘for-to’ and so on. This makes pupils unable to choose the appropriate preposition and therefore, refer directly to Arabic.

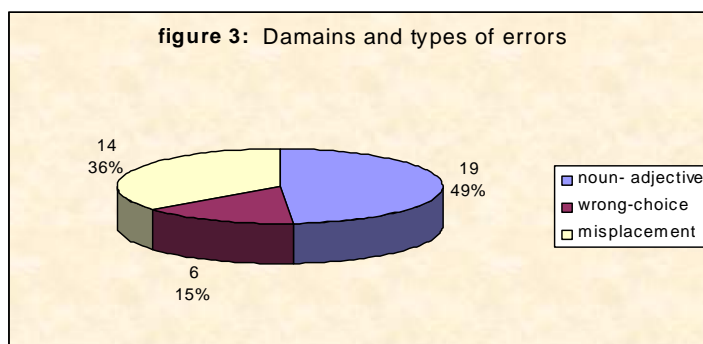
Difficulty in the use of prepositions stems also from the difference of language systems in French and English. In French, for example, ‘*de*’ or ‘*du*’ play nearly the same function as the English preposition ‘from’ but with slight differences. In French, we can indicate someone’s region and say: “*les habitants de Batna*”, or express a distance or direction: “*La poste est proche du marché*”. When writing in English, learners give literal translations of sentences they have already formulated in French and say “*the post office is near from the market*” instead of “*the post office is near the market*”, and “*the inhabitants from Batna*” instead of “*the inhabitants of Batna*”.

In addition, the wrong choice between prepositions stems also from interlanguage errors. In French, the word ‘*pour*’ expresses the meaning of the English preposition ‘to’ but not always. In English, natives feel a difference between ‘for’ and ‘to’, and for can not replace *to* in all sentences. Whatever the case, the fact remains that language interference at the level of small grammatical units is too apparent to deny. Conversely to one of our hypotheses, it is not only French which influences students writing in English, but also Arabic.



A —3 Errors in Syntax:

Errors in word order are mainly caused by negative transfer .A contrast between English and French, and even Arabic, leads learners to opt for the simplest structures they have better understood and memorized. While it is clear that in English, permanent adjectives always precede nouns, in French it is not always the case. It seems that pupils have fixed rules of ordering words in sentences. These rules are strengthened by the fact that the same order exists in both French and Arabic. The same way of ordering words is found in Arabic where the adjective does not precede the noun it modifies, but follows it. Mainly for these reasons, learners find themselves unable to shift from the two models provided by French and Arabic to a reversed model set in English. Some errors occurred in the use of adverbs, but these are fewer than the ones in adjectives. Often in French, adverbs follow verbs and so they do in English. Arabic also allows the use of adverbs after verbs in the same way as the adjective. Learners who made errors that we believe are due to interference, confuse the situation where in English an adverb which modifies an adjective or another adverb comes before that adjective -except for the adverbs of frequency which are movable- with the situation in Arabic which, is not the case. Among other errors which occurred at the level of syntax are the misplacements of subjects and verbs. Learners contrast the English sentence structure with the Arabic one. The two systems use opposite orders. While in Arabic the general rule is that verbs precede nouns except in negative statements, all declarative sentences in English place the subject before the verb. French here does not interfere much because it uses the same word order in subjects and verbs as English.



The table above indicates the type and number of errors encountered when evaluating pupils both free and guided writings. Learners' written performances show that the most occurring errors in syntax concern word order and tenses.

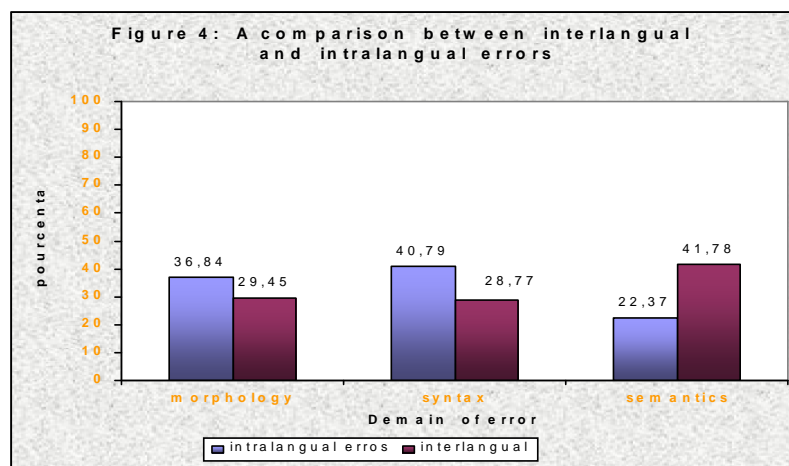
A - 4- Errors of semantics

Pupils' performances indicate that language interference exists not only at the level of morphology and syntax, but also in semantics and writing styles. What should be precised here is that most of the errors occurred because of lone translation of words and even whole sentences. It is clear for the pupil that he should write in English, but it is not yet clear to him that meanings can not be conveyed through literal transfer of statements from French or Arabic to English. The domain of the errors we have noticed concern introductory and concluding sentences in paragraphs. They are more apparent when pupils write on free topics. In this type of performances, learners recourse to their general culture about the issue on which they have to comments. The way sentences express meanings in English is not the same as in Arabic. Word order, components of meanings, semantic features and others are language specificities, which are not shared by all languages. In the corpus we evaluated, many examples were encountered. Some of the ones in which interference is more significant can be stated *here*: “ *This is the first time I raise my pen to write you this letter*”; a sentence by which a pupil begins to write a letter to his penfriend. This statement exists in Arabic, but its translation into English sounds strange. “*I visited my friend because she sinks in family problems*”...In Arabic the meaning of the verb ‘to sink’ suits well this situation and the sentence in Arabic is meaningful. In English, however, the oddness of this sentence lies in the use of the verb sink itself ; other verbs like ‘have’, or ‘face’ are more appropriate. The analysis of pupils' written performances shows that the number and type of interlingual errors is as important as that of intralingual ones. It was not our aim to discuss intralingual errors at depth, but a simple comparison of errors (both interlingual and intralingual ones) indicate, among other things, that language interference stands as one of the major handicaps for

learning writing. It is clear that syntax poses problems to pupils both because of interference and wrong assimilation of rules. In students' performances, the articles and word-order are the domains in which the errors are at their highest rates. Most of the cases where this occurs are due to French interference first, and then Arabic. If Arabic does not interfere in morphology and word formation in English it is, because of the totally different alphabets used in these two languages. The errors encountered there are either due to French influence or to an incomplete mastery of the vocabulary units of English itself.

What we find also important to mention as far as errors in semantics are concerned is that guided writings contain fewer interlanguage errors. This is partly explained by the fact that pupils are provided with hints, key words, phrases and even short sentences which restrict their thinking about the topic.

A simple comparison of errors (both interlingual and intralingual ones) indicates, among other things, that language interference stands as one of the major handicaps for learning writing. The analysis of pupils' written performances shows that the number and type of interlingual errors is as important as that of intralingual ones.



CONCLUSION

We attempted to investigate the issue of language interference on students' writing in English at the level of the secondary school. The investigation seemed to focus on the interference of French more than any other factor. In the early stages of the investigation, we hypothesized that most of our pupils make errors in writing English sentences and paragraphs mainly because they compare English to French as these two languages use the same roman script and alphabet. When reading the literature relevant to the topic of language interference, we concluded that theories seem to agree on the involvement of the mother tongue in learning second and foreign languages.

The situation we have noticed in the case of our pupils in Aisha secondary school differs slightly from what theorists have already concluded. In the case of second year literary stream students, the first conflict concerns the classification of languages in terms of first, second, foreign, second foreign and so on. While the Algerian Arabic stands as the mother tongue of most of the learners, yet not everybody in the classroom has this language as the mother tongue. The mother tongue is an important variable in our work and its control was not fully possible. Excluding learners who do not speak Arabic as a mother tongue from the investigation would have led us to deal only with one category of pupils, who do not represent the entire population, and could have deprived us from some data we found later on useful.

Pupils are not influenced by French alone, Arabic and even non-Arabic languages, interfere to shape many pupils' interlingual errors. The usually repeated criticism made of learners thinking in Arabic and writing in English was proved to be more than a simple impression of the teacher, but a real fact.

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