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Exploring the Errors Committed by Arab and Kurd Iraqi EFL Learners in Writing Composition

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1.1 Introduction:

This research investigates the errors made-out by Iraqi Arab and Kurd students of translation department in writing compositions. There are two categories of errors made by EFL students: interlingual and intralingual errors. The first type of errors is resulted from language transfer made by the students' native language (Corder 1973:59). In contrast, the second type of errors are caused by defective or partial learning of foreign language rather than the transfer of the first language.

Accordingly, this study attempts at answering the following questions:

 • Who are more influenced in their mother tongue Arab or Kurd students?

 • Who are more committed intralingual errors Arabic or Kurdish students?

 • What are the most famous generic errors made-out by students in writing their composition?

 To explain the researcher uses two ways to analyze errors: contrastive analysis and Error Analysis.

1.2 Difference between Error and Mistake:

It is essential to differentiate between errors and mistakes because both of them are synonyms to each other. Norrish (1983) defines errors   "as systematic deviation when a learner has not learnt something and consistently gets it wrong". Also he suggests that the errors made by the second language learners systematically caused by not learning the correct form of the second language.

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While Norrish's definition of mistakes is "inconsistent deviation". When the student taught certain form of language, means that he/she used one form sometimes and another contradictory.

Edge (1997,18) defines errors in a simple way "if a student cannot self-corrected a mistake in his/her own English, but the teacher thinks that the class is familiar with the correct form, that sort of mistake an error". James (1998: 34) characterizes errors and mistakes. He argues that errors cannot be corrected by the students themselves whereas mistakes can be corrected if the deviation is directed to the writer or speaker. Richards and Schmidt (2002) define errors "as made by learners while mistakes are made by learners when writing or speaking and they are caused by lack of attention".

Finally, we can say that students mistakes are made by students due to little attention to language system. While error performance can indicate a learner's linguistic competence. Error studies show the importance of explaining the second language students' learning problems and also show the level of students' second language efficiency.

1.3 The importance of learners' errors:

Writing skill is regarded as an important components in language learning. It is an inborn skill and needs to acquire a series of instructional process. During learning process of writing it seems significant for teachers to shed the light on the importance of committing errors by learners.

Corder(1967) noted: " a learner's errors are significant in that they provide to the researcher evidence of how language is learned or acquired, what strategies or procedures the learner is employing in the discovery of the language". Also, Corder (1974:125) states that the studying of error can: (1) give a clear image to the teacher concerning how much information that the students had got. (2) give an evidence to the researcher about how students were learnt language. (3) studying errors can help the learner to find out the roles of language. Corder says that it is important to study errors to investigate   language learning and to know the linguistic development of a learner. (Ibid). Jain (1969: 56) maintains that errors are considerable in two main folds: They are important for

they help students to pay attention to their errors and realized that they should not commit these errors later. Learning errors can also show the important for the acquisition of the second language. Their significance lies in giving second language teachers more insight into the operation of language teaching and learning.

To sum up, studying errors helps teachers to understand that even though errors are abstract, they can make second language learning more easy. In addition, the study of errors helps teachers to recognize errors which helps them to apply the effective techniques to help learners avoid committing errors when writing composition.

1.4 Causes of Errors:

According to the operation of second language acquisition, errors are bound to be made and these are performance activity like writing. Making errors is invetible in the learners' writings. Stenson (1974:76) states that" there are three main reasons for errors, namely, (1) incomplete acquisition of the target grammar, (2) exigencies of the learning/teaching situation, and (3) errors due to normal problems of language performance". Whereas Lott (1983:96) says that there are two cases in transferring errors these are: (1) the misuse of certain item in L2 since learner interferes this item with the L1. (2) the most important problem that faced the learners is :transfer of structure which means utilizing some items which found in L1 rather than L2.

Interlingua errors are those resulted from the L1 interference. Weinreich's (1953 : 7) states that the interlingual errors appear from the influence of the stronger language on the weaker one. He says that any speaker of two languages will engage in the operation of making,i.e he/she wanting to identify the elements that are found in one language such as sounds, words, structures with corresponding elements in the other language. Richards (1974:132) deals with transfer of language as a second language deviation. He states that there are other sources of transferring found in intalingual interferences.

Committing errors is not only resulted from interference. Ellis (1997:49) argues that errors can appear as a result of generalization of certain rules such as the use of the past tense suffix "-ed" for all verbs. When the students learned to use –ed as a suffix to change

the verb to past this will lead to commit errors irrespective to their mother tongue.   Another example of generalization rules which caused errors is suggested by Keshavarz (2003:624) and Fang and Jiang (2007:11) is that when learners try to use two tenses at the same time in one sentence. For instance, *"he is comes here". It is noticeable that singularity causes errors i.e "is" must be added in present continuous while "-s" is demanded to be added at the end of the verb in simple present tense. In other words, intralingual errors appear as a result of the limited experience with the target language.

Keshavarz(1999 :74) " classifies errors into four distinct categories, namely a) orthographic errors; b) phonological errors; c) lexico-semantic errors; and d) syntactic-morphological errors". The first two types are not tackled in this study. Corder's taxonomy has been followed in this study. Both global and local errors can be categorized according to the taxonomy of Corder . Errors in taxonomy of Corder(1973) are classified according to the ways of how learners committed errors . There are four main cases in Corder's taxonomy: "Omission (omission of some required element), Addition (addition of some unnecessary or incorrect element), Substitution (selection of an incorrect element), and Permutation (disordering of elements) ".

1.5 **Literature Review**

Second language Researchers where interested in learners' errors since they believe that errors can be seen as a valuable sign for learners strategies in second language acquisition. Many researchers conducted different studies concerning analyzing students' errors in writing English. To start with, Kim (1988:59) investigates 11th grade Korean errors of verbs in English with indication to tense, mood and voice. The results of the study showed that Korean students commit frequent errors in English verbs. Also in (2011:48) Kim collected 30 samples written by Korean students from college freshmen to show whether errors were due to the native language of learners or to the system of the second language. He found that the errors committed are intralingual while only a few instances can be characterized to first language interference. Tan (1997:103) conducted a study in which he examined 160 compositions to find types of errors which are written by Taiwanese

students. The findings showed that morphological and syntactic errors are common errors followed by misuse of conjunctions and subject- object complements. Kao (1999:59)   investigates 169 compositions from 53 Taiwanese college students. The results showed that grammatical errors frequency is 66%, semantic errors 18% and lexical errors 16%.   Chuang (2005: 287) seeks 5232 Chinese errors in writing English. The findings revealed that the results of students' occurred into the following ten categories: "determiners , nouns , verbs , prepositions , lexical misconceptions , tense , modals , punctuation , sentence parts, lexical grammatical prepositions and syntactic complementation of a word" .

Abbasi and Karimian (2011:76) conducted a study to investigate Iranian grammatical errors. Their findings proved that most students' errors due to grammatical problems. Abushiba, EL-Omri and Tobat (2011:98) analyzed errors in writing belonging to 62 students who studied English at the department of English Literature and Translation at AL- Zaytoonah private university of Jordan. They classified errors into six categories . It was found that the most problematic category of errors was prepositions 26%.

To examine first language effect on second language learning process, Sarris (2011)   investigated   errors made by 50 undergraduate Pakistani students. Each student was asked to write an essay. The findings revealed that errors resulted by Pakistani learners are due to the effect of their mother tongue on learning. In a similar study, Sattari (2012) analyzed the grammatical errors committed by Persian learner in writing English. His study revealed that the many of errors could be traced to their first language. Likewise, Ying (1987) collected samples of written compositions from 120 Taiwanese EFL learners to examine types of errors committed by them. The findings indicated that   of errors are interlingual as resulted from language interference while (21.1%) are intralingual errors as resulted from the miss use of second language system. `

From the above studies, it is worth mentioning that learners first language is very important factor in learning a new language. The most obvious factor about committing errors by learners at the elementary level is the assumption that both target language and first language operate in the same way in addition to the miss use of

the grammatical system of the second language which has the great effect on student's development.

1.6 *Contrastive Analysis and Error Analysis*

The major claim of contrastive analysis was presented by Robert Lado in his book "Linguistics Across Cultures" (1957). He suggested that it is possible to find the areas of similarities and differences by comparing the foreign language and the native language ,and cultures systematically. He showed that if the two languages are similar in their systems the process of learning will be more facilitate than if their systems are different. In other words, learning difficulties will not be expectable if there are similarity between the two languages and cultures .

Accordingly, contrastive analysis is the study between the L1 and the L2 to show their structural differences and similarities. The main practice in contrastive analysis is comparing and contrasting the systems of the two languages in order to find out similarities and differences between them.

The supporters of contrastive analysis think that the interference is the obvious process in L2 acquisition. Odline (1989:111) defines "transfer as the influence of the similarities and differences between the target language and other language(s) that has been previously acquired". According to him all linguistic systems are affected by transfering. Brown (2000: 208) confirms that " the principle barrier to the second language system is the interference of the first language system with the second language system". Johnson (2001:78) states that there are   positive and negative transfer which he characterizes each one and he called this case as interference. However, the goals of contrastive analysis are: to make the second language learning more effective, and to find out the differences between the first language and the target language. These goals based on the assumptions that the foreign language learning is based on the mother tongue in which the similarities facilitate learning (this is known as a positive transfer), whereas the differences causes problems (this is known as a negative transfer).

According to contrastive analysis not all problems are predicted and considered in the curriculum.   On the other words, some

problems are predicated by contrastive analysis but others are not. A similar-theory of contrastive analysis is error analysis.

Error Analysis is a technique used to identify, describe, and explain the errors committed by a learner. It is considered as one of the important topics in second language learning that the teachers should focus on it.

Brown (1987:55) defines error analysis as "the process to observe, analyze, and classify the deviations of the rules of the second languages and then to reveal the systems operated by learner." Error Analysis is focusing on analyzing learners' errors by comparing the way of acquiring rules with second language norms and identifying errors(James1988:97). For Crystal(1999:108)" Error Analysis in language teaching and learning is the study of the unacceptable forms produced by someone learning a language, especially of a foreign language".

Corder (1973:32) states that "the most obvious practical use of the analysis of errors is to the teachers. Errors provide feedback, they tell the teacher something about the effectiveness of his teaching materials and teaching techniques, and show him what parts of the syllabus, he has been following have been inadequately learned or taught and need further attention. Also, views errors as valuable information for three beneficiaries: for teachers, it clues them on the progress of the students; for researchers, it provides evidence as to how language is acquired or learned; for learners themselves, it gives them resources in order to learn.

1.7 *Methodology:*

The primary concern of this study is to explore the kinds of errors made by a group of Arab and Kurd students at university level in their written work. More specifically, the study seeks to answer the following question: what are the most common errors that students commit in their composition? However, this section presents the research methodology used in this study and gives information about the population and the sample. It also describes the data collection instruments and procedures.

1.7.1 Population and Sample:

The study population has been limited to the first class students of Translation Department, College of Arts, University of

Mosul. The total number of students was (50). 20 students have been chosen and classified to 10 Arab and 10 Kurd students.

1.7.2 Procedure:

The major source of data used to find answers to this study's question is the written composition of (50) participants of the first year students. The topics given in composition were general but argumentative in nature.   All of the (50) participants were required to write on one of the five following topics: your home, Education, A flower, Your best friend, My favorite season. They were asked to write approximately 150 to 300 words within a period of one hour. Also, they should pay attention to the unity, coherence, cohesion, grammar, vocabulary, and organization of the written work. The participants were informed that they had to start with an outline, then a first draft and a final draft. The students did not know that their writings are going to be under investigation.

1.7.3 Reliability and Validity:

a. **Reliability:**

Polit and Hungler (1993: 445) refer to reliability as the degree of consistency with which an instrument measures the attribute it is designed to measure. This study was conducted through selecting (50) students randomly. The students were asked to write a composition by choosing one of the five topics. Accordingly, the students' results showed consistency in the answers.

b. **Validity:**

The validity of an instrument is the degree to which an instrument measures what it is intended to measure (Polit & Hungler ,1993,p.448). In this study, the researcher employed method of trustee's validity. This means that a panel of judges consisting of four academic college instructors was asked to evaluate the given topics. They approved that topics were taken from material appropriate to students' standard and suit their ages.

1.8 Data analysis:

The analysis of written composition was based on Corder (1967) method of error analysis. This method had three steps: (1) Collection of sample errors (2) Identification of errors and (3) Descriptions of errors.

Table (1a.)   the frequency and percentage of interlingual and intralingual errors for Arab students:

Error Type	Frequency	Percentage
Interlingual	23	57.5
Intralingual	17	42.5
Total	40	100

The results show that the Arab students whosw arabic is their mother tounge has great influences on learning and writing English. Also, it is obvious that Arab students effectively managed the English language system.

(1b.) shows the frequency and percentage of interlingual and intralingual errors for Kurd students:

Error Type	Frequency	Percentage
Interlingual	13	32.5
Intralingual	27	67.5
Total	40	100

The results show that the Kurd students are less influence in their mother tongue than Arab students in writing English.

Table (2) shows the analysis of grammatical errors based on types of errors, number of errors, and percentage of errors committed by the participants:

Types of Errors	Number of Errors		Percentage	
	Arabic students	Kurdish students	Arabic students	Kurdish students
Tense	28	15	70	37.5
Morphology	29	20	72.5	50
Prepositions	23	27	57.5	67.5
Articles	28	10	70	25
Verbs	27	30	67.5	75
Total	40		100	

The results show that the most common grammatical errors that the Arab students made were in tense (28) and Kurd students were (15) ,morphology (29) for Arab students and (20) for Kurd students , prepositions (23) for Arab students and (27) for Kurd students , followed by articles(28) for Arab students and (10) for Kurd students ,verbs(27) and (30) respectively .

Each type of error will receive a detailed analysis.

- **Verb Tenses:**

Verb tenses were the most problematic area of English grammar for Arab students rather than Kurd students. . The number of errors in the use of tenses was (28) for Arab students which represents (70%) of total errors, whereas for Kurd students (15) which represents (37.5%) of total errors.

Tenses represent a learning difficulty for students. Wrong application of verb tenses can be seen when the students did not apply the correct tense to the verb in the sentences. Some errors can be attributed to the interference from their first language. For example, some errors may be due to the absence of the present perfect tense in Arabic. The students, thus, tended to use the simple past instead of the present perfect.

- My dream is to marry the girl I loved.
- To visit many countries that I never visited.

Whereas Kurd students committed less number of errors in this kind of errors since there is a present perfect tense in Kurdish language.

Another kind of error is subject/ verb agreement in simple present as shown in these examples:

- All over the world **need** English.
- All what he **need**.
- It **allow**.

It can be assumed that some of these errors are due to interference from first language since, unlike English, no 's' affix is added to verbs in Arabic and Kurdish when occurring with specific personal pronouns. Some of the students were not aware of the different rules of tense application. In other words, the students did not seem to fully master the appropriate syntactic rules of verb tenses in English.

Darus & Ching (2009) contend that it is not surprising that second language learners face problems with tenses since English notion of tense is somewhat confusing to the second language learners who regard time as a separate entity by itself.

Look at this example:

- * I forgot tells you, my cousin working at Iraqi air.

- I forgot to tell you that my cousin works in Iraqi air.

It is clear from the example above that there is a lack of agreement between the subject and the verb. Also, wrong use of preposition and wrong use of English tense. All these errors are belong to intralingual errors. The first error is a matter of agreement and this is lacks the agreement between the subject and the verb. The second error the student omitted the preposition from the sentence. In the case of third error, the student has wrongly used present continuous tense instead of simple present tense.

- **Prepositions:**

This category specified another difficult area for the Arab and Kurd students. Most of the students omitted or misused some prepositions. This is not surprise since, as stated by O'Dowd (1998:6), that second language learners faced difficulties when dealing with prepositions since they cannot master them in learning the English language .

Arab and Kurd students don't know the meaning of prepositions i.e how to use prepositions in a given context. In Arabic for example, one of the students write " A bird is on the tree" since the tree is not referred to as a container but as a supporting surface. In English however, it is reposition (in) which is used in this context. The Kurd students also did not aware to the suitable meaning of prepositions in their writing. Some omissions or misuse of prepositions are due to a negative transfer from Arabic and Kurdish; others derive from the target language itself. For example:

- **In** this age (instead of at).
- I look **to** life from two sights. (to instead of at).
- ( ) Example, I would like to be more enthusiastic. (for is omitted).

It is worth mentioning that in the first sentence the students have literally translated the Arabic equivalent " fi haadha al- sin" (in this age). They, therefore, used the preposition (in) instead of (at). In the second sentence, the use of preposition (to) instead of (at) can be attributed to a negative transfer from Arabic. The preposition (for), in the third example, was omitted because in Arabic the phrase "for example" requires no preposition "mathalan" (example). Look at the following:

- "*Many times it was a capital of many titles".

- "Many times it was the capital with many titles".

It is noticeable from the above examples that there are incorrect use of articles and prepositions. Both of them are intralingual errors. The error in the first example is caused by the incorrect use of articles where as the error in the second example is caused by the incorrect use of preposition.

▪ **Morphological errors:**

This class constitutes (72.5%) of the total errors and the number of errors is (29) for Arab students, whereas morphological errors constitute (50%) of the total errors (20) for Kurd students.

It is worth mentioning that some students did not realize how to apply the plural suffix "s" to the countable plural noun. Probably, this case occurs for the reason that in Arabic a noun has no plural marker as shown in these sentences:

- To complete my study.
- I like to finish my study.
- I finished my study.

Some students have assumed in English there are plural and singular nouns. However, students were unsure how to use the plural form. In such case , they use plural subject instead of singular one When the verb is singular as shown in these sentences:

- My plans is to have a job.
- My future plans is very important.
- I have not a big dreams or a large plans.

Whereas Kurdish contains a suffix and prefix so that Kurd students pass the problems that faced Arab students in using plural "s".

Babalola & Akande (2002) contend that most English second language students faced difficulties in acquiring English morphology because of the inconsistency in English language. It is generated by the polysystemic English nature. For instance, if the plural of "knife" is "knives", why should not the plural of "chirf" be "*chieves"? . Similarly, the past tense in English "cooked" is the past of cook but "*writed" is not the past of the verb "write". This inconsistency has many implication in the English learning by English second language students, who find it difficult to master all

the morphological rules along with their exceptions in English grammar.

Generally speaking, if we tackle word order of Arabic and Kurdish languages with reference to English language, we find that there is a different in form of both languages. For example, in Arabic language the form is: V S O. whereas in Kurdish language is: S O V. These variations in structure of both languages cause obstacles in writing composition to both Arabic and Kurdish students.

▪ **Articles:**

 In addition to the previous errors, students faced problems in using suitable articles in English. Almost (70%) of the total errors are committed by Arabic students in this category and (25%) of the total errors are made by Kurd students. The number of errors is (28) for Arabic students, whereas for Kurdish students (10).

 Arab students faced problems with using suitable articles in English. This is not astounded since their first language using different rules of article . As Raehan, Chodorow & Leacock (2006: 123) state "mastering the English articles is one of the most daunting tasks facing the non-native speakers especially when first language does not have articles". Some students deleted the articles "a" and "the". Other students wrongly added them. Examples:

- "In ( ) second dream. (omission of the article "the")".
- "Charity for ( ) poor. (omission of the article "the")".
- "Each one of them has ( ) value in his life. (omission of the article "a")".
- To have *a* good relations (addition of the article "a").

It is not easy for EFL learners to fully grasp the subtle usage of English articles. Indeed, some linguists (Raehan, Chodorow & Leacock, 2006) contend that the distribution of articles in English is complex mainly because it shows cases the interaction of many "heterogeneous factors." Some are lexical, such as the countability of the head noun in the NP, which determines the choice of the indefinite article "a" (*a knowledge). Moreover, this property of countability is not "dichotomous." countability in English can be divided into countable and uncountable nouns. The countable nouns can be divided into strong and weak countable nouns as in cake and

beer. Whereas the uncountable nouns can be expressed by the word " knowledge".

Whereas Kurdish students face less difficulty in using articles since articles in Kurdish language are nearly similar to the use of articles in English.

It is worth mentioning that Arabic and Kurdish language have completely different rules of using articles of English language.

Verbs:

Classification of errors in this study shows that errors in verbs account for (67.5 %) of the total number of errors in the corpus which is (27) errors for Arabic students. while, errors in verbs are (75%) of the total number of errors in the corpus which is (30) errors for Kurd students.

Wrong application of the negative form can be noticed when the learners do not apply the right form of negative to the verb in the sentences. There is assumption states that the students were not aware of the various rules for negative applications in English reflected in the following examples:

• They haven't to eat. (omission of the auxiliary "do").

• They haven't any solution. (omission of the auxiliary "do").

The use of the negative "not" with the verbs, however, showed that the students had already learned that the negative form requires the use of "not" form but they did not fully master the complete rules of negation in English , such as the use of auxiliary "do". Hence, it is clear that the reason behind using the negation of verb with "not" only without auxiliary is related to absence of auxiliaries in their first language. Consider the following example:

• "*It don't far from the sea".

• "It isn't far from the sea".

The error in previous sentence is an intralingual error which is caused by the wrong use of verb.

It is concluded that Arab students are more influenced in their mother tongue in writing composition, since that structure of Arabic language differs from English . whereas, Kurd learners are less affected by their first language for the structure of both languages is similar in many points. This is in agreement with the aims and hypothesis of the research.

Conclusion
The following conclusions are drawn from the previous discussion:

❖ This paper has an objective which is to analyze the grammatical errors committed by first-year students of translation department at the university attempted to identify, describe, and categorize Kurd and Arab learners' grammatical errors   in English composition in order to discover the reasons of these errors.

❖ It can be seen that errors found in Kurd and Arab student's writing are mainly influenced by both interlingual and intralingual causes.

❖ The majority of errors of Kurd students are intralingual errors since there is certain similarities between Kurdish and English language . In contrast with Arab students'errors are interlingual because of the interference is caused by the different structures in both languages.

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استقصاء الاخطاء التي يقع فيها متعلمو اللغة الانكليزية العراقيون من العرب و الكرد لدى كتابة الانشاء

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المستخلص

تُعَدُّ نظرية تحليل الأخطاء تقنية لتعريف ،وصف وشرح الاخطاء المرتكبة من قبل المتعلمين بصورة منتظمة. إن الهدف من نظرية تحليل الأخطاء هو لاختبار الأخطاء التي يرتكبها الطلبة العرب الكرد والتي بدورها تساعد الاستاذ لاكتشاف مدى تقدم الطلاب بكتابة الانشاء. تصف وتحلل هذه الدراسة الأخطاء المرتكبة من قبل الطلبة العرب الكرد اثناء كتابتهم للانشاء والتي تتبع من تأثير لغتهم الأم ومن استخدام اللغة الانكليزية لغة ثانية في التعلم. يحاول هذا البحث الاجابة على الاسئلة الآتية: من هم الأكثر تأثراً باللغة الام الطلبة العرب أم الكرد؟ من الأكثر ارتكابا للاخطاء في كتابه الإنشاء في اللغة الثانية الطلبة العرب ام الاكراد؟ ماهي الاخطاء الاكثر شيوعا التي يرتكبها الطلبة في كتابة الانشاء؟ . لتحقيق هذه الأهداف، فإن هذه الدراسة تفترض بأن الطلبة العرب اكثر تأثيرا بلغتهم الام من الطلبة الكرد. جمعت البيانات من خلال كتابة الانشاء لخمسين طالبا . وعليه فإن هذه الاخطاء التي تمت ملاحظتها في كتابات الطلبة يمكن تصنيفها إلى خمسة أنماط: أخطاء في صيغ أزمنة الافعال ، أخطاء في علم الصرف، أخطاء في استخدام الافعال و حروف الجر وأدوات التعريف.

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