Syntactic Analysis of Word Order between Arabic and English: The Case of English Foreign Language Students' Essays at Setif 2 University, Algeria

التحليل النحوي لترتيب الكلمات بين اللغتين العربية والإنجليزية: دراسة حالة مقالات طلاب اللغة الإنجليزية الأجنبية في جامعة سطيف 2 ، الجزائر

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Abstract:
The current study is concerned with the analysis of the syntactic structures of English Foreign Language learners' essays in word order aspects in relationship with their counterpart structures of Arabic language. It aims at providing some arguments about the sources of errors committed by EFL first year student at Setif 2 University, Algeria. The study relied on the case study design with a questionnaire and an observation checklist operated over 15 students and 8 Written Expression teachers respectively. Ultimately the results show that the influence of standard Arabic on learning English is related to some existent differences between syntactical structures in standard Arabic and English, hence the negative transfer and the difficulty of English syntax are the reasons behind learners' weaknesses in essay writing. On the basis of the results, recommendations are suggested to remedy the existing syntactical deficiencies in the students' essays.

Keywords:

Arabic Syntax; English Syntax; Writing Essays; First Language Interference; Contrastive Analysis

الملخص:

تهتم الدراسة الحالية بتحليل التراكيب النحوية لمقالات متعلمي اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية في جوانب ترتيب الكلمات مع التركيبات النظيرة للغة العربية. ويهدف هذا البحث إلى تقديم بعض الحجج حول مصادر الأخطاء التي يرتكبها طالب السنة الأولى في اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية في جامعة سطيف 2 ، الجزائر. اعتمدت الدراسة على تصميم دراسة الحالة مع استبيان وقائمة تدقيق للملاحظة مع 15 طالب و 8 مدرسين للتعبير الكتابي على التوالي. تظهر النتائج في نهاية المطاف أن تأثير اللغة العربية الفصحى على تعلم اللغة الإنجليزية مرتبط ببعض الاختلافات الموجودة بين الهياكل النحوية في اللغة العربية واللغة الإنجليزية القياسية ، وبالتالي فإن النقل السلبي وصعوبة بناء الجملة الإنجليزية هي أسباب ضعف المتعلمين في كتابة المقالات. بناءً على النتائج ، تُقترح التوصيات لمعالجة العيوب النحوية الموجودة في مقالات الطلاب.

الكلمات المفتاحية:

بناء الجملة العربية ؛ بناء الجملة الإنجليزية ؛ التعبير الكتابي ؛ تدخل اللغة الأولى ؛ تحليل الاخطاء

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1.Introduction

　　English foreign language teachers and students want always to distinguish foreign language features from those of

their native language in regard to the writing aspects. However, rarely does this aim turn into reality, perhaps English syntactical achievements are far more complex than it may seem especially for adult learners. In fact, a much better understanding of both syntactical systems will help them to determine the learners' syntactical performance in the target language and enable course designers, instructors, and learners to structure lessons and procedures that will improve their performance in essay writing.

In this respect, even native language learners meet difficulties in writing tasks in English. EFL learners focus more on developing productive language skills such as speaking and writing, including the Algerian EFL students because they must practice it inside and outside the classroom context. In addition, the complexity of writing and the lack of practice led to poor performance of students in essay redaction. Learning a foreign language requires lexical and grammatical structures knowledge and many other language aspects because writing requires more correctness, grammaticality, and accuracy that is more concrete and reflects explicitly the learners' improvement in the learning of the target language.

As far as foreign language learning is concerned, it is believed that there is a language transfer between the mother tongue and the target language. This interference in learning languages may lead to the emergence or the occurrence of lexical and grammatical errors, punctuation and spelling mistakes in students' paragraphs and essays writing. Universal grammar includes rules and principles which are applied to all languages but there are many variations between different languages such as different subject orders, verb orders, object orders and so on. Each language has its own word order that might be similar to other languages and different from other ones. This area motivated many researchers to work on the

similarities and differences between languages in the domain of learning a foreign language but they put much emphasis on fluency and improvement of speaking skill rather than writing and accuracy. Therefore, it is important to shed light on the reasons behind EFL learners' poor achievement in writing in the Algerian educational institutions and particularly at Mohamed Lamine Debaghine Setif 2 University.

The researcher has designed a pre-questionnaire to Second year English students about the interference of Standard Arabic in the target language writing essays and the factors behind the learners' errors and poor achievements.

Accordingly, all the aforementioned elements raise the researcher's attention to analyze the possible factors through the identification of the similarities and differences between Standard Arabic and English syntax. The analysis process could bring some useful results that may help to overcome the existing errors. To come to this end, the researcher is going to make a syntactic analysis of word order between Standard Arabic and English. The current study seeks to describe and understand the interrelationship between Standard Arabic and English in regard to syntactical structures, hence to analyze the interference of Arabic structures on EFL students' writing essays. The purpose of this study is to look into the possible links between Standard Arabic and English and whether the prior knowledge of Arabic syntax has effect on the EFL learners' written production. In addition, it aims at identifying the factors that cease the learners from good achievements in writing and help them to improve their writing as well as to provide instructors with some insights to consider the problem and make use of possible treatment. In the light of the above presentation, this study has generated a number of research questions. The multiple research questions are as follows;

➢ What are the similarities and differences between Standard Arabic and English Structures?
➢ What are the factors that cease Second year EFL students to write correctly?
➢ What are the teachers' perceptions towards the students' essays errors?
➢ What are the syntactical errors committed by EFL students'?

2. Literature Review
2.1. Comparative studies in foreign languages
2.1.1. Contrastive analysis

Contrastive Analysis is a hypothesis in comparative studies which is concerned with different language structures and components; hence it is much related to second or foreign language learning and first language acquisition. Contrastive analysis is the systematic comparison of two or more languages, with the aim of describing their similarities and differences. Moreover, contrastive analysis hypothesis was first developed in the 1940 and 1950 in the United States by Fries and Lado who expanded it to the second and foreign language learning research by comparing English and Spanish. Lado (1957) stated in the preface of his work:

"We can predict and describe the patterns that will cause difficulty in learning, and those that will not cause difficulty, by comparing systematically the language and culture to be learned with the native language and culture of the student. This assumption has come to be known as the 'contrastive hypotheses in its 'strong' or 'predictive' form".

According to Fries (1945), the comparison is made upon the scientific description of the target language, language

learning, and the parallel description of the native language acquisition; this was a comparison between the two languages based on different levels such as phonology, morphology, lexis, culture and syntax.

Furthermore, Positive and negative transfer in the two languages are among the factors which help or inhibit the learners' learning. The first kind is related to the positive transfer, in which similar structures and principles can be easily learnt whereas it is inappropriate to transfer different structures and parameters from the mother tongue to the target language. The second one is the negative transfer which reflects the learners' attempt to make use of their mother tongue features in producing the target language

2.1.2. Error Analysis

Unlike, mistakes which can be corrected by the learner himself, errors require the intervention of the instructor to correct them and to provide explanations related to the right use or usage of a particular item in order to prevent the learner from future fossilization and overgeneralization.

Error analysis is concerned with the description of the errors committed by most of learners in the domain of foreign language learning. The term 'error' is explained in the way of deviation from the right use of the form or the function, Norrish (1987) defines errors as a systematic deviation, when learner has not learnt something and consistently gets its wrong. The systematic deviation is a term used to mean that the error is repeated many times unconsciously and without awareness about the right use of the structure.

The error appears at different levels, the language could be learnt but the error might still exist. The learners may make errors and use the wrong form of words which is considered as a

grammatical error, they may use the wrong function or meaning of the word and use it inappropriately in the sentence or use the wrong order of the sentence. All the aforementioned errors might be a result of interference or a lack of knowledge.

Consequently, the current study relies on sorting out students' errors in their essays and provides justifications related to the syntactical systems and structures of the native (Arabic) and the target language (English).

2.2. Conceptual Frameworks Related to Arabic and English Languages

2.2.1. Arabic sentences and word order

A sentence is the largest unit in a language described by grammar (Humboldt, 1988). The sentence in Standard Arabic has different variations on its word order. The word order is "the sequential arrangement of clause elements in a sentence" (Crystal, 1992: 420-21). In fact, it comprises the basic sentence constituents; Subject, Verb and Object. This order is not the identical in all the sentences in Arabic; however the sentence pattern of the nominal sentence and the verbal sentence differs systematically. In Classical Arabic there are two kinds of sentences (Chejne, 1969:33-4):

- *Nominal sentence*: the predicate is a noun or a pronoun. The word order is either subject (s) -predicate (P) or predicate – subject;

- *Verbal sentence*: The predicate is a verb.

Additionally, there are six types of sentence word order in Standard Arabic verbal sentence (Alaqad, 2013:71)

2.2.1.1. Subject- Verb-Object (SVO)

According to Anshen (1968), this order appears in the nominal sentence, the inchoative is the subject and the predicate is the verb and the object. Greenberg (1963) argued that languages that have a dominance of VSO order use SVO as an alternative or as the only alternative basic order. The subject may be in singular or plural, masculine or feminine (gender), the verb follows the rule of the subject but the verb would be conjugated in singular when the subject is singular as in 'Mohammed eats an apple 'but masculine singular differs quietly from feminine singular which is characterized by the ending feminine T 'ت' in the past tense. In plural, when the subject is masculine the verb will be in masculine, and when the subject in feminine the verb would be put in feminine with the feminine noun at the end of the verb as in 'woman prepare dinner'. Moreover, the verb follows the rule of the agent in the case of broken plural, generic nouns and collective agent noun in terms of number.

2.2.1.2.Verb-Subject-Object (VSO)

This order appears in the verbal sentence, the verb, the agent and the object. For instance, 'ate Mohammed an apple, (this order is marked for Standard Arabic), however the majority of languages do not have this order. Moreover, the verb follows the agent in all the cases of number and gender, the verb is attached to the form of the agent in singular 'masculine and feminine' and plural 'masculine and plural', it also follows the rule of the masculine and feminine.

2.2.1.3. Object-Verb- Subject (OVS)

This order appears in the nominal sentence, the object plays the role of 'the inchoative' which is in the nominative case and the predicate is the verb and the subject. For instance, 'the

apple, Mohammed ate it'. There is also another variation for this order when the subject comes in the accusative case as follows'; it was an apple that Mohammed ate'. This syntactic order appears when the speaker or writer gives emphasis on the object; the object precedes the verb and the agent in the verbal sentence when the object is given more attention. The object precedes the subject is permissible. However it seems impossible that the object precedes the verb unless when it is in case of a detached pronoun, as in (Surat Elfatiha-V: 5). 'You (Allah) we worship', in this case the object (the detached pronoun) precedes the verb

2.2.1.4. Subject- Object-Verb (SOV)

This order appears in the nominal sentence, the inchoative is the subject and the predicate is the object, as in 'Mohammed, it was an apple that he ate'. The sentence in Arabic syntax can take this order when the object precedes the verb (Bakir, 1979), as in (Surat Albaqara, V: 24). The subject is a latent pronoun 'you' 'Antoum', the object is 'Annar' 'fire' and the verb is in the passive form' prepared'.

2.2.1.5.Verb- Object-Subject (VOS)

This order appears in the verbal sentence, the object may precede the subject and follows the verb; however the object is placed in the middle between the verb and the subject as (in Suratal-Nissa,V: 78) In the example above, the verb is 'come', the object is, 'one of you' and the subject is, 'death', the death is the doer of the action of coming and the object is 'one of you', the object precedes the subject. Moreover, the sentence takes compulsory this order when the sentence is modified by someparticles such as'only' 'Innama', 'illa' 'exept' and the verb follows the rule of the agent in gender and number (IbnHicham,

1998: 12).

2.2.1.6. Object- Subject-Verb (OSV)

This order appears in the nominal sentence as in, 'the apple, Mohammed ate it. The nominal sentence may include some variations, the inchoative may be preceded by demonstrative pronouns, articles or particles, as in, 'the sky is blue', or 'this man', and almost in the normal cases the modifier follows the noun and can be multiplied as in, 'nature is beautiful and calm'. The object may precede the verb subject in some cases, this order is like the simple order SVO, the verb follows the rule of the subject in gender and number, as in, 'the students wrote the lesson', the object is the lesson, the subject or the agent is the students and the verb is 'to write'.

2.2.2. Sentences, phrases and Word Order in English language

The sentence is a set word expressing a statement, a question or an order, usually containing a subject and a verb. In written English sentences begin with a capital letter and end with full stop/period (.), a question mark (?) or an exclamation mark /exclamation point (!)' (Cambridge Dictianary, n.d.) .In English, the sentence often starts with a subject followed by a verb and an object. The smallest unit of the sentence is the word, the words are combined together to form a phrase, the phrases are linked together to form a clause which might be a sentence or part of it. As far as the phrase, there are five kinds of phrases as follow:

2.2.2.1. Noun Phrase

A noun phrase consists of an obligatory Noun and optional determiner, articles, a prepositional phrase and modifiers. The

NP may function as a Subject, Direct Object, Indirect Object, Subject Complement, Object Complement or Object of Preposition.

2.2.2.2.Verbal Phrase

The verbal phrase consists of an obligatory verb; the verb in English might be followed either by adverbial phrase, noun phrase or prepositional phrase. There are certain orders follow the verb and the predicate as follows:

Number	Phrasal Model	Example
1	VNP	Open a package
2	VNP NP	Write a friend a letter
3	VNP NP	Give an excuse to the teacher
4	VAP	Feel lonely
5	VNP AP	Make the dog angry
6	VPP	Jump into the pool
7	VPP PP	Talk about the problem with a friend
Total	7	

Table 1. Examples of word order in English verbal phrase

2.2.2.3.Adjective Phrase

The adjective phrase consists of an adjective which is considered as a modifier as in: John sounded happy. It might be preceded by an adverb which expresses quality, intensity or degree which cannot be modified by another adverb, as in: John sounded very happy. The AP may function as: a modifier of Noun, Subject Complement or an Object Complement.

2.2.2.4.Adverb Phrase (ADV P)

The adverb phrase functions as a modifier, it modifies verbs: he always plays football, adjectives as in very beautiful

and adverbs as in: he runs very quickly. The adverb phrase may function as a modifier of Adjective, a verb or an adverb.

2.2.2.5.Prepositional Phrase (PP)

This category requires a preposition which is the head of the phrase, it might be followed by a noun phrase as in: on the table, or by another preposition as in: from behind the door, or by two prepositions as in: out from under the table. The Prepositional Phrase may function as PP, a modifier of Noun, Subject Complement, Object Complement, Indirect Object, Prepositional Complement of Verb, of Preposition, or of Adjective.

3. Research Methodology

This study is undertaken within a descriptive design. A Content analysis is adopted through checklists and questionnaire to generate the data of this study.

Yen (2000) defines content analysis as "a technique that enables researchers to study human behaviors in an indirect way through an analysis of their communication" (p.65).

3.1.Population and samples

The population of the current study is Second Year English at Mohammed Lamine Debbaghine Setif 2 University. In addition, the researcher used another quantitative data to obtain data from another population which is the Written Expression teachers of English at Mohammed Lamine Debbaghine Setif 2 University.

The sample of the current research is 15 second year English students at Mohammed Lamine Debbaghine University. The students' essays were selected randomly and they were observed and analyzed with reference to the syntactical

perspectives and the analysis of the interference of Arabic as background language of instruction in writing English essays.

The researcher used an observation checklist to examine the relationship between the two variables. The second sample is 08 Second year English foreign language teachers at Mohammed Lamine Debbaghine Setif 2 University who are also selected randomly.

3.2. Data Collection Procedures: Checklist Observation and Questionnaire

The researcher used two research methods in data collection, the first research tool is checklist observation which evaluates and describes the students' interrelationship to the subject under investigation. The checklist observation varies in terms of syntactic perspectives and mainly word order. The students' essays were analyzed in terms of the use of appropriateness and adequacy, the right use of sentence patterns.

Another instrument that was used is the questionnaire which is administered to the teachers of Written Expression Module at Mohammed Lamine Debbaghine Setif 2 University. This quantitative method follows a simple procedure starting from questions related to errors' commitment as detailed in questions 1, 2 and 3, followed by questions related to the writing skill and the interference of Standard Arabic on the learners' performance as it is illustrated in questions 4, 5 and 6. The 7th question was allocated to the Role of the syntactic effect of Standard Arabic on students' knowledge exhibited through their English writings. The last question was about the possible solutions the teachers may suggest overcoming the research problem under investigation.

Table.2 bellow summarizes the questionnaire administered to the teachers of Written Expression Module at Mohammed

Lamine Debbaghine Setif 2 University.

itm	Targeted enquiries
1	Errors Commitments in Students' Writing Essays
2	Most Common Syntactic Errors
3	Factors behind the Students Errors
4	Teachers Opinions towards the Effects of Standard Arabic
5	Kind of Transfer between Arabic and English
6	Teachers Evaluation in Regard to the Mastery Syntax
7	The Role of the Students Knowledge on their Writing Essays
8	Possible Solutions to Avoid Syntactical Errors

Table.2. technical sheet of the questionnaire of the study

4.Results and discussion
4.1.Results from the Observation Checklist

The observation checklists consist of orders of parts of speech, the first order is order of articles. The results indicate that learners did not manage to order articles correctly. However, 8, 14% of the total errors committed by students are designated for articles. The definite and indefinite articles and all the determiners should be placed before nouns or adjective phrases, the majority of the students place articles before adjectives.

Concerning the order of nouns, some students (3,49%) misplaced nouns. They place them after verbs but they function as subjects. They also didn't manage to distinguish between the gender and number of nouns. Learners face problems in plural forms but the majority of the students succeeded in ordering nouns correctly.

The order of verbs, the results reveal that the students (17,44%) face difficulties in ordering verbs. The learners place verbs as heads of sentences, this kind of sentences does not exist in English but it exists in standard Arabic. Learners face

difficulties in subject verb agreement and tenses, the majority of them could not conjugate verbs correctly; they use past simple and future in the same sentence.

The fourth element is the order of adjectives; the results indicate that the majority of students committed some errors in ordering adjectives (19, 77%). The learners misplace adjectives in the sentence; however they put them after nouns before verbs and adverbs. This difficulty could be resulted from the interference of Standard Arabic; hence the order of adjectives in standard Arabic is after nouns.

The fifth component is the order of adverbs, the results reveal that a considerable number of students did not manage to order adverbs correctly (16, 28%). They misplace adverbs in the sentence; some of them place adverbs of frequency at the beginning of the sentence while others put them before and after nouns. The nature of this difficult could be resulted from misunderstanding and lack of knowledge.

The sixth component is the order of prepositions, the students committed errors with preposition (16, 28%). Some of them students misplace prepositions and put them at the beginning of the sentence while others did not manage to distinguish between the uses of "at","in" and "on". The majority of the learners put "in" in all the cases, this is transferred from Standard Arabic.

The seventh and eighth elements are about order of conjunctions and interjections, the majority of learners did not manage the order conjunctions correctly (17, 48%). Some of them use conjunctions to join adjectives with nouns while others put them at the beginning. The results indicate that the sample place conjunctions randomly. The eighth component is about order of interjections, the majority of learners succeeded in ordering them due to the little use and occurrence of this type of
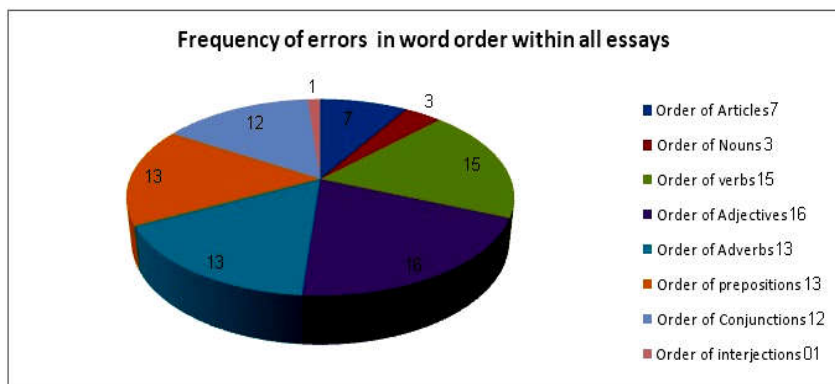
words.

Fig.1. Frequency of errors in word order within all essays

4.2. Results from the Questionnaire for teachers

The analysis of the findings reveals that Standard Arabic syntax has some effects on EFL students' writing performance. The Results sustain the assumption that learners face difficulties in writing because of the mother tongue or first language interference. The learners have been studying and learning standard Arabic for more than ten years; English was not taught until middle school. This situation informs us that the background knowledge between these two languages is not equal. This inequality may foster the Arabic interference on English language. More specifically, negative transfer is the main reason behind learners' errors, it prevents and fossilize the learning process, in contrast positive transfer helps and facilitates learning English.

The results of the underlying study sustain the assumption that learners cannot achieve native like proficiency. The learning process could be fossilized at any time. The results confirm that acquisition and learning process cannot be the same. Learners' always make reference to their mother tongues structures. Their thoughts are always shaped by their native language structures. So it is difficult to establish a new language system within the existence of their mother tongues linguistic device system.

The analysis of the present study shed some lights on the distinctions and differences between languages, unlike Chomsky's claim that all people have an innate capacity and that all people stored rules in their minds. The results of the current study indicate that Standard Arabic and English are different in many aspects such as different structures, grammar and syntax. The rules stored in the learners' minds are not the same rules of the new and target languages.

5. Recommendations

The results of the present study suggest some further implications for researchers, teachers and learners. Acquisition and learning is a broad scope of investigation, teachers should take into consideration the learners' linguistic background, and they have to make a distinction between their native language and English as a target language. The learners may understand through making comparisons and drawing similarities and differences between languages because they could build new ideas and concepts apart from their mother tongue interference.

Syntax is a combination of rules system, the difference between Standard Arabic and English syntax results in students' errors. So teachers should consider the influence of the students' mother tongue or first language on their essay writings. It is too

difficult to make such a distinction unless the student reaches a good level of fluency and proficiency .

6. CONCLUSION

Interference in languages was proved to be a fertile area of interests for both linguists and language teachers alike. Indeed, it becomes vital for language teachers to be aware of related concepts to this field such as positive and negative transfer, interference, error analysis, contrastive analysis and the like.

To improve the teaching of foreign languages in Algeria, the researchers conducted this study which is concerned with the analysis of the word order errors in students' writing essays for first year English foreign language at Setif 2 University Algeria. It aims at exploring the kind of transfer and finding the possible solutions for these errors. The study relied on mixed method using a checklist observation and a questionnaire with 15 EFL students ad 8 written expression teachers respectively as the research samples and population. The empirical section made use of different steps related to the data collection and analyses procedures.

The data analysis suggests that the kind of transfer is negative more than positive and errors in word order occur in all parts of speech with some statistical difference in the rates of errors among parts of speech. Having stated all the research steps and procedures some concluding remarks, recommendations for further research were provided at the end of the research. To conclude, all the procedures of the research from the first steps to the last ones may help the researcher to declare that all the research questions are answered to some extent.

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