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Investigating Interference Errors Made by Azzawia University 1st year Students of English in Learning English Prepositions

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***Abstract*—**The main focus of this study is investigating the interference of Arabic in the use of English prepositions by Libyan university students. Prepositions in the tests used in the study were categorized, according to their relation to Arabic, into similar Arabic and English prepositions (SAEP), dissimilar Arabic and English prepositions (DAEP), Arabic prepositions with no English counterparts (APEC), and English prepositions with no Arabic counterparts (EPAC).

The subjects of the study were the first year university students of the English department, Sabrata Faculty of Arts, Azzawia University; both males and females, and they were 100 students. The basic tool for data collection was a test of English prepositions; students are instructed to fill in the blanks with the correct prepositions and to put a zero (0) if no preposition was needed. The test was then handed to the subjects of the study.

The test was then scored and quantitative as well as qualitative results were obtained. Quantitative results indicated the number, percentages and rank order of errors in each of the categories and qualitative results indicated the nature and significance of those errors and their possible sources. Based on the obtained results the researcher could detect that students made more errors in the EPAC category than the other three categories and these errors could be attributed to the lack of knowledge of the different meanings of English prepositions. This lack of knowledge forced the students to adopt what is called the strategy of transfer.

***Keywords*—**Foreign language acquisition, foreign language learning, interference system, interlanguage system, mother tongue interference.

I. Introduction

A. General Background

THIS study is motivated by the observed difficulty encountered by Azzawia University 1st year students at the department of English of Sabrata faculty of Arts when learning English prepositions. The main complaint of learners and teachers is that English prepositions are so frequent and involve such varied uses. A special complaint is about the complexity of English prepositions. Since the use of prepositions is almost inevitable in all contexts, the students of Azzawia University make a great number of errors in this area. It was also observed that Arabic seems to interfere with the oral and written production of English prepositions. In reaction to the recent trend toward minimizing the effect of native language (L1) interference on learning a second language (L2), it was my intuition that closed sets of linguistic elements such as prepositions would show extensive effect.

The study attempts to accommodate two opposing trends in the Second Language Acquisition (SLA) theory: The interference theory and the Contrastive Analysis (CA) versus Error Analysis (EA). It is widely believed that language acquisition and learning strategies cannot be exclusively explained in terms of the behaviorist paradigm or the cognitive paradigm [44].

1. Aims of the Study

The general aims of the present study are to show and confirm the extent of Arabic interference in learning English prepositions and the implication of this for the current theories and practices in the field of SLA. Instead of looking into only two possible relations between Arabic and English prepositions, namely similar and dissimilar, the study examines four possibilities, namely (1) similar Arabic and English preposition (SAEP), (2) dissimilar Arabic and English prepositions (DAEP), (3) Arabic prepositions with no English counterparts (APEC), and (4) English prepositions with no Arabic counterparts (EPAC). These categories can be defined as follows:

1. SAEP Prepositions that do not change the meaning of the sentence in which they occur if the sentence is literally translated from Arabic into English or vice versa.
2. DAEP Prepositions that change the meaning of the sentence in which they occur if the sentence is literally translated from Arabic into English or vice versa.
3. APEC Prepositions that exist in the Arabic sentence but the literal equivalent of the sentence in English has no preposition at all.
4. EPAC Prepositions that exist in the English sentence, but the literal equivalent of that sentence in Arabic has no preposition at all [45].

As the classification shows, prepositions in both languages are brought together or connected contextually not in isolation. Thus, the preposition "to" for instance can refer to paradigm 1, 2, or 4 depending on the context in which it occurs. This, of course, requires the learner to be familiar with that context. In other words, language is not contrastively analyzed in terms of separate units, but those units are contextualized and then analyzed.

The general aims of this study can be broken down into answering the following questions:

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1. How do the proposed four categories of prepositions rank according to the percentage of errors in each?
2. To what extent do Arabic prepositions account for errors in the use of English prepositions in the DAEP category?
3. To what extent can English prepositions be deleted in the EPAC category?
4. To what extent are unnecessary English prepositions inserted in the APEC category?

2. Hypotheses

Based on the extensive review of the literature and on the researcher's personal experience as a teacher of English as a Foreign Language (EFL), the researcher hypothesizes that:

1. The lowest proportion of errors is in the SAEP category.
2. The highest proportion of errors is in the DAEP category.
3. The APEC and EPAC categories fall in the middle as far as the frequency of errors is concerned.
4. Errors in the APEC and EPAC categories are mainly inserted and deleted errors respectively.
5. False analogy and overgeneralization errors explain most of the non-interference errors.

3. Significance of the Study

The present study emphasizes an urgent need to work on the current English curriculum in Libya in order to shed more light on the right use of prepositions. Furthermore, it is a fresh area that can trigger a number of subsequent studies. A possible study would investigate the effect of the native language on the target language covering a wider range of close ended questions, such as matching, gap filling and a cloze test as well as open ended questions, such as writing simple essays and articles. Another possible study would be to compare the extent of interference in written versus spoken modes of production.

Because of the poor information in the literature on this particular area and because of the researcher's desire to provide practical information to teachers, students and program administrators in Libya, the primary goal of this study is to focus on the extent of interference in the area of prepositions which is hypothesized to be made by first year university students.

The findings of this study could serve as a means to help teachers concentrate on areas that seem to be problematic for students. It could help students overcome a large number of errors since errors of interference between Arabic and English are very common.

II. Literature Review

A. Introduction

Although prepositions have been studied by MA students at the Academy before, studies on investigating interference errors made by the students have not been conducted yet. The previous studies shed some light on teaching prepositions and on the errors made in the use of English prepositions.

The present study hypothesizes that the topic is difficult for students and meets them at every turn. Therefore, the researcher plans to make the study on interference-related errors in the use of English prepositions. Many references concentrated on teaching prepositions in noun phrases and transferring prepositions from Arabic to English which to some extent Explained the transfer process in general, and in a different side from where the present study focuses on i.e., discovering the interference-related errors in a certain group of students and analyze those errors in details relying on four different relations of prepositions instead of two as many researchers propose.

Previous studies on English prepositions also emphasized the difficulties non-native learners face in using English prepositions. There is a general agreement among teachers of English as a foreign language concerning the difficulty of prepositions [53].

"English language teachers and researchers are well aware that English prepositional usage is one of the most difficult areas for students of EFL" [20]. "Prepositions are an ever-lasting problem for foreign learners of English" [54]

Reference [15] states that English prepositions are difficult for EFL learners because they usually relate them to their L1 equivalents. The difficulty is also caused by the differences in number, meaning and use of the prepositions in the L1 and L2. Verbs and other parts of speech play a great role in the omission, addition and selection of a wrong preposition in English, which may affect the whole meaning of the sentence produced by the learner. In addition to this, idiomatic use of English prepositions makes them difficult to learn even by native speakers of the language.

Prepositions, according to [27], "indicate various relationships between words or phrases in sentences. The relationship includes those of time, points, position, direction and various degrees of mental or emotional attitudes." Reference [1] (2003: 127) describes a preposition as "a word or group of words used with a noun or noun equivalents to show the link between that noun which it governs and another word." The prepositions however are grouped into simple, participial and phrasal types. Prepositions like other parts of speech are frequently misused. This misuse is regarded as an error. It is an instance of deviation from the pattern of correct use [30].

Reference [15] states a common error observed in the writings of the students and in everyday speech is prepositional error. In order for the learner to master the use of prepositions, s/he should have linguistic competence and performance. According to [51], errors in language learning are important and that he points out analyses of errors especially in second language acquisition/teaching situations are very important for learning.

Reference [10] proposes that the effective use of prepositions helps the learner to develop his/her communicative competence and linguistic performance of L2. Many students use prepositions carelessly as if there are no rules that govern them. Rules guiding the use of prepositions are somehow flexible. Language learners produce errors when communicating in a foreign language; if learners' errors are studied systematically, they can help researchers understand how languages are actually learned. Reference [10] also agrees

that studying students' errors can have immediate practical application for language teachers. In his view, errors tell the teachers something about the effectiveness of their teaching.

Reference [46] maintains that transfer occurs in SLA when a learner uses a word or a structure from his L1 when trying to communicate in L2. This transfer affects SLA in two ways, a positive way and a negative way. If the transferred unit is similar to that of L2, transfer in this case is positive, because it enhances L2 learning. On the other hand, if the transferred unit is different from that of L2, transfer is negative, because it hinders learning.

The notion of similarity between L1 and L2 does not mean that the two languages are exactly the same. If two units in two different languages are similar, this means that they have a general similarity and some kind of differences in specific areas. So, similarity of this kind might enhance the chances for either positive or negative transfer. Linguists like [46] maintain that in order for transfer to take place, there must be some sort of similarities between the learner's L1 and L2, which [46] describes as 'a crucial similarity measure'. If the learner's L1 is very different from L2, the occurrence of transfer is not probable.

The type of environment in which SLA is carried out is very important for the occurrence and frequency of transfer. The SLA environments are of two types: a host environment and a foreign environment. The host environment is the environment where the learner learns L2 in a country where this language is native (e.g. English in the USA). On the other hand, a foreign environment is the one in which the learner learns an L2 in a country where this language is considered foreign (e.g. English in Libya). It is well-known that transfer occurs more frequently in foreign environments than it does in host environments. The reason behind this fact is that in foreign environments the learner tends to translate literally from L1 to L2 in order to communicate, because he or she does not encounter L2 as intensively as in host environments. Moreover, most teachers in foreign environments rely on translation as one type of classroom activities, although many linguists discourage teachers from referring to the learner's L1 [11].

III. Theoretical Framework of the Study

This chapter introduces contrastive analysis (CA) and error analysis (EA). Then, it defines the phenomenon of interference. This is due to their interrelationship and their deep effect on the field of foreign language (FL) teaching and learning. It also presents the theories of language acquisition (behaviorism and mentalism). Finally, it introduces the five hypotheses of Krashen's Model.

A. Contrastive Analysis (CA)

Reference [49] CA is a way of comparing learners' L1 and L2 to analyze possible difficulties that the learners might encounter in an L2 learning situation. CA assumes that when learners learn L2, the patterns and rules of L1 cause difficulties to their L2 learning. Therefore, L2 teachers can have a better understanding of students' different types of learning difficulties caused by their different linguistic backgrounds.

CA was used widely in the field of SLA in the 1960s and early 1970s as a method of explaining why some features of L2 were more difficult to acquire than others. According to the behaviorist theory which was prevailing at the time, language learning is a matter of habit formation, and this can be reinforced or obstructed by existing habits. Therefore, the difficulty in mastering certain structures of L2 depends on the difference between the learners' L1 and the language they are learning [49].

1. The Strong Version of CA

According to [49], there are two versions of CA; the strong version and the weak version. The strong version claims that interference from the learner's native language is the main problem in SLA. When the difference between the native language and the target language is great; the learning process will be more difficult and these difficulties can be predicted with the help of CA, and the result of the analysis can be used as a source for the preparation of teaching materials, course plans and classroom techniques. This version of CA has a number of shortcomings which have been mentioned in the literature. The major criticism is that CA is strongly associated with behaviorism, which lost credibility since the appearance of [6] review of Skinner's Verbal Behavior. On the other hand, the weak version of CA suggests that linguists are able to use the knowledge available in order to explain the observed difficulties in SLA.

2. The Weak Version of CA

As an attempt to make up for all of the shortcomings of the strong version which was criticized of being more of a guess, [49] supports a weak version of CA in which the emphasis of the hypothesis was shifted from the prediction of the relative difficulty to the explanation of the observable errors. It is necessary to have a comparison between two language systems to predict some learning difficulties, but these predictions could become useful after they are empirically checked with actual data about the learners' errors. Later on, this version was developed into EA. While CA is deductive, EA is inductive. It is the real data from the learners' performance that makes EA more descriptive than CA. EA is also more credible, as it makes less demands of contrastive theory than the strong version.

B. Error Analysis

The development of EA resulted in the change from a teacher-centered approach i.e., the teacher being a controller of the language process to a learner-centered approach [4].

In this regard, [14] points out that:

EA is a procedure by both researchers and teachers. It involves collecting samples of learner language, identifying the errors in the sample, describing these errors, classifying them according to their hypothesized causes, and evaluating their seriousness.

EA, offered as an alternative to CA, has its value in EFL research. Whereas CA, which may be least predictive at early

stages of language learning [4], it allows for prediction of the difficulties involved in acquiring an L2 [35].

Reference [4] maintains that the initial step in EA requires selecting the language to be analyzed followed by the identification of errors by making a distinction between a mistake (i.e. caused by lack of attention, carelessness or some aspect of performance) and an error which is caused by a lack of knowledge. The next step after giving a grammatical analysis of each error, is explaining the different types of errors that correspond to different processes.

1. Classification of Errors

Reference [9] identifies three sources of errors: language transfer, overgeneralization and methods or materials used in teaching (teaching-induced errors), as outlined below.

- Interlingual/Transfer Errors

Interlingual errors are attributed to L1. When a learner's L1 habits (patterns, systems or rules) interfere or prevent him/her, to some extent, from acquiring the patterns and rules of the L2 [8]. Interference (negative transfer) is the negative influence of L1 on the performance of a learner's L2 [26]. It is "those instances of deviation from the norms of either language which occur in the speech of bilinguals as a result of their familiarity with more than one language" [50].

- Intralingual/Developmental Errors

These errors are due to the language being learned independent of L1. According to [34] they are "items produced by the learner which reflect not the structure of the mother tongue, but overgeneralizations based on partial exposure to the L2". The learner, in this case, tries to "derive the rules behind the data to which s/he has been exposed, and may develop hypotheses that correspond neither to the mother tongue nor to the L2" [33].

- Induced Errors

They result more from the classroom situation than from either the student's incomplete competence in English grammar (intralingual errors) or L1 interference (interlingual errors) [43].

2. Interlanguage Theory

Reference [6] states that before the 1960s, language was not considered to be a mental phenomenon. Like other forms of human behavior, language was learnt by processes of habit formation. A child learns his mother tongue by imitating the sounds and patterns he hears around him/her. Language cannot be a verbal behavior only, since children are able to produce an infinite number of utterances that have never been heard before. This creativity is only possible because a child develops a system of rules. A large number of studies have shown that children actually construct their own rule system, which develops gradually until it becomes similar to the system of the adults.

There is also evidence that they pass through similar stages acquiring grammatical rules. Through the influence of cognitive linguists and L1 acquisition research, the theory developed is that L2 learners could be viewed as constructing rules from the data to which they are exposed and that they gradually adapt these rules in the direction of the L2. However wrong and inappropriate learners' sentences may be in regard to the TL system, they are still grammatical since they are a product of the learner's own language system. This system gradually develops towards the right system of the L2. The various shapes of the learner's language competence are called interlanguage (IL).

Reference [42] suggests that one of the principal contributions by IL theory is its claim that the learner's knowledge is to be seen as a complete unit in which new knowledge is integrated with previous knowledge of the learner. Reference [13] states the term "IL" implies that the learners' language system is neither that of his mother tongue nor that of the L2, but contains elements of both. Therefore, errors should not be seen as signs of failure only, but as evidence of the learner's developing system.

Reference [39] suggests that the term 'IL' refers to the systematic knowledge of an L2 which is independent of both learner's L1 and the L2.

Reference [4] suggests that "IL is neither a representation of the system of the L1 nor a representation of the system of the L2, but instead falls between the two; it is a system based upon the best attempt of learners to provide order and structure to the linguistic stimuli surrounding them. By a gradual process of trial and error and hypothesis testing, learners slowly and boringly succeed in establishing closer and closer approximations to the system used by native speakers of the language".

Reference [39] points out three processes to create IL, that is, activities learners adopt in order to help them acquire the language: Language transfer, overgeneralization and simplification.

- Language Transfer

Learners use their own L1 as a resource. This used to be looked upon as a mistake, but it is now recognized that all learners fall back to their mother tongues, particularly in the early stages of language acquisition (LA), and that is a natural process.

- Overgeneralization

Learners use an L2 rule in situations where a native speaker would not it. For instance, a learner in the early stages may use nothing but the present tense.

- Simplification

In both syntactic and semantic simplifications, the learner uses speech that is similar to the very young children. This may be either because they cannot produce the target forms yet, or because they do not feel sure of them.

3. Strengths and Weaknesses of EA

Reference [3] believes that EA can easily replace CA, as only some of the errors a learner makes are attributable to the mother tongue; also learners do not actually make all the errors that CA predicts they should, and that learners from

different language backgrounds tend to make similar errors in learning the same TL.

In the 1980s, EA gradually lost its popularity due to the number of criticisms made against it as an approach and as a method. According to [55]: "Some errors are obvious, but many are either multiple errors (in the sense that they are partly grammatical and partly lexical) or are difficult to categorize in any linguistic way." Another major criticism, was [36] who argues that most of the error analyses just focus on errors and does not deal with avoidance; a learner who, for one reason or another, avoids a particular sound, word, structure or discourse category may be assumed incorrectly to have no difficulty therewith.

Reference [12] summarizes three major weaknesses of EA as follows: (a) the confusion of error description with error explanation (the process and product aspects of error analysis), (b) the lack of precision and specificity in the definition of error categories, and (c) simplistic categorization of the causes of learners' errors.

C. Interference

The interference phenomenon has been the theme of extensive research. The study of this phenomenon has been of great interest to educators, language teachers and linguists dealing with the area of SLA. Reference [25] points out that:

Language is a system of habits of communication. When the communicant attempts to communicate in a foreign language, he transfers the habit system of his native language to the foreign one. And when the transfer occurs, the units and patterns transferred will either function satisfactorily in the foreign language causing no learning problems, or they will not function satisfactorily in the foreign language against which the student will have to learn new units and patterns.

Reference [25] also points out that the units and patterns that do not have counterparts in the native language, or that have counterparts with structurally different distribution or meaning, will be problematic.

When the relevant structure of both languages is the same, linguistic interference can result in correct language production called positive transfer. Language interference is often discussed as a source of error known as negative transfer [16]. Negative transfer occurs when speakers and writers transfer items and structures that are not the same in both languages. The theory of CA proposes that when the difference between the two languages is great, more negative transfer can be expected [2].

The results of positive transfer are less often discussed, although, such results can have a strong effect. Generally speaking, the more similar the two languages are, the more aware the learner is of the relation between them and the more likely positive transfer will occur [40].

Transfer maybe conscious or unconscious. Consciously, learners may sometimes guess when producing speech or text in an L2 because they have not learned or have forgotten its proper use. Unconsciously, they may not realize that the structures and internal rules of the languages in question are different. Such users could also be aware of both the structures and internal rules, but they are not skilled enough to put them into practice, and consequently often resort to their L1 [2].

D. Behaviorism

Traditional behaviorists maintain that SLA is as a result of learner imitation, practice, and feedback on success. Behaviorism is also called the habit formation theory. It describes and explains behavior in terms of an SR-model. A connection is established between a stimulus or stimulus situation (S) and the response (R) to this stimulus. Behaviorism sees learning as a habit formation. The habits are formed by imitation and reinforced by repetition [28].

The school of behaviorism was developed by B. F. Skinner on the basis of his experiments with animal behavior, [41] defines the notion of reinforcement as If a certain action repeatedly leads to a positive or negative result, the probability of occurrence or non-occurrence of this action will increase. Reference [41] states if the action is repeated more frequently, this means that it has to do with positive reinforcement. On the other hand, if the action is not repeated, it has to do with negative reinforcement.

According to [41], language behavior can only be studied through observation of external factors, such as the frequency in which a certain utterance is used in the child's environment. Children imitate the language of their environment to a considerable degree.

Reference [28] defines imitation as: "Word-for-word repetition of all or part of what they hear in their environment". For example, mother: "Do you have your bag?" Child: "Bag." here s/he is practicing by repetition of form. Another example, child: "I can play chess." "She can play chess." "Eman can play chess." Reference [28] also points out children unlike parrots who repeat only the familiar and do not imitate everything they hear. But, children imitate things that are relevant to the present learning situation, and imitate the new words and structures until they master them. Once learned, they move to other new words and phrases, and try to master them too.

Imitation, however, is a strong contributing factor to the language learning process. Thus, the frequency with which words and structures occur in the language of the environment will influence the language development of the child. In addition, reinforcement is needed to arrive at a higher level of language proficiency. For instance, parental approval is considered as an important type of reinforcement in the language learning process, that is to say, when a child produces a correct sentence which is understood by its environment, approval from the parents may reinforce the child mastery for such a sentence. In this way, the environment encourages the child to produce correct sentences, while it does not encourage incorrect ones. Language development is described as the acquisition of a set of habits. It is assumed that a person who learns an L2 begins with the habits associated with the L1. These habits interfere with those needed for L2 speech, and new habits will be formed [26].

However, the forms of language that are used by children cannot be assigned only to imitation and practice [28]. Children create their own sentences by hearing and recognizing patterns in the language then using them in new contexts. Although behaviorism can explain the more basic elements for LA, it cannot explain the acquisition of more complicated structures. As [5] points out, this approach "failed to account for the abstract nature of language, for the child's creativity, and for the interactive nature of language acquisition".

E. Mentalism

Also called rationalism, according to [6] a human being possesses a mind which has consciousness and ideas, and the mind can influence the behavior of the body. These properties are stilled in the mind at birth, and not acquired from the environment. Human knowledge develops from structures, processes, and "ideas". These are responsible for the basic structure of language and how it is learned. This has been used to explain how children are able to learn language, and it contrasts with the belief that all human knowledge comes from experience.

Reference [6] in his review of B.F. Skinner's Verbal Behavior claims that children are biologically programmed for language and that language develops in the child in just the same way that other biological functions develop. For [6], language acquisition is very similar to the development of walking. The environment makes a basic contribution; the availability of people who speak to the child, while the child, or rather, the child's biological endowment, will do the rest. This is known as the innateness position. Reference [6] developed his theory in reaction to the behaviorist theory of learning which is based on imitation and habit formation.

Reference [6] argues that human behavior is more complex than animal behavior. Moreover, language behavior is very specific to humans where it can never be explained through animal behavior.

Reference [6] argues that the behaviorist theory fails to recognize "the logical problem of language acquisition", which refers to the fact that children come to know more about the structure of their language than to learn on the basis of the samples of language which they hear. Children's minds are not blank to be filled just by imitating language they hear in the environment. Instead, children are born with a special ability to discover for themselves the basic rules of the language system.

Reference [7] refers to this special ability as: *Being based on a language acquisition device (LAD). This "black box" prevents the child from being misled in trying to discover the rules of the language. For the LAD to work, the child needs access only to samples of the natural language. These language samples serve as a trigger to activate the device. Once it is activated, the child is able to discover the structure of the language to be learned by matching the innate knowledge of basic grammatical relationships to the structures of the particular language in the environment.*

Reference [7] maintains that the child's innate talent is referred to as Universal Grammar (UG). UG is consists of a set of principles which are common to all languages. If children are born having UG, then they have to learn the ways in which their own language makes use of these principles which may exist in the target language they are learning.

Reference [32] states that this view of the language learning process stresses the mental activities of the language learner itself, and strongly argues the relevance of such external factors as imitation, frequency of stimulus, and reinforcement.

Reference [32] also states that "the debate between behaviorism and mentalism about whether the ability to learn languages is innate or learned was mainly concerned with a mutual criticism of assumptions. Where behaviorism ignored the contribution of the child itself in the learning process, mentalism practically denied that linguistic input and environment play a role in this process."

In sum, behavioristic theory bases itself on observable behavior in the description and explanation of learning behavior, while mentalistic theory bases itself on the structure and mechanisms of the mind for such descriptions and explanations.

Additionally, behavioristic ideas about language learning are based on a theory of learning, in which the focus is on the role of the environment. While, mentalistic ideas about language learning are based on theoretical linguistic assumptions, in which the focus is on the innate capacity of any child to learn any language.

F. Krashen's Model of L2 Development

Reference [22] proposes a theory, consisting of five hypotheses, which he claims were consistent with research findings. Since its introduction, the monitor model (see III *F* 2) has been influential in SLA. The following is a review of his five hypotheses.

1. The Acquisition-Learning Hypothesis

Reference [22] asserts that adults learning an L2 get knowledge of the language in two ways: acquisition and learning. Just as a child naturally acquires a FL, adults learn language which is understood, and learnt by studying rules and forms. Reference [22] believes that only acquired language can lead to fluent conversation, but learning cannot be transformed into acquisition [22].

2. The Monitor Hypothesis

Reference [24] says that the acquired system explains fluency while the learned system works as a monitor to make small changes to the production of the acquired system. He points out that learners only use the monitor when they know the rules and have the time to find them [24].

3. The Natural Order Hypothesis

Reference [24] agrees that L2 learners acquire characteristics of the language in pre-made sequences without regarding the order which they may be learned in the classroom. Rules which seem simple and which are easily explained will not necessarily be the ones the learner learns

first. For example, advanced learners often neglect to add an *-s* to third person singular verbs [24].

4. The Affective Filter Hypothesis

Accessible language input can be stopped by things such as motives, attitudes and emotional stress. Reference [23] refers to this as the affective filter. When the learner is calm and motivated, the filter will be down and the TL can be learned easily. When the learner is worried, unmotivated or disturbed the filter will be up and will stop the process of learning; children do not seem to have developed this filter [23].

5. The Input Hypothesis

Reference [24] argues that the only way to acquire language is by having exposure to comprehensible input or input which is slightly beyond the learner's level of competence. He believes that the affective filter hypothesis can explain why some adults, while exposed to a lot of comprehensible input, still do not achieve high levels of competence [24].

IV. Methodology of the Study

A. Subjects

The subjects for the study were first year students of the English department, Faculty of Arts, Azzawia University. At this stage, students should have fair knowledge of the prepositions, especially after specializing in English for three years at the secondary school. The sample included one hundred students in order to facilitate calculations. There were fifty-eight females and forty-two males and their age ranged between eighteen and twenty. All were native speakers of Arabic and shared the same educational background. The study was conducted during the academic year 2012-2013.

It is hypothesized that subjects in this research studied Modern Standard Arabic for fairly a long time. Arabic has two spoken forms of the language – colloquial and standard (diglossia). These two different forms of speech live side by side and are used in different contexts.

B. Methods of Data Collection

The test administered for the data collection has been adapted from internet sites (see references). The basic tool for collecting data in the study is a test of English prepositions. The purpose was to test learners' knowledge of the right use of English prepositions. The items were formulated and discussed with many teachers of English, especially with those who had been teaching English for a number of years. Some test items were rewritten and others were leftover based upon the discussion with the teachers. Additionally, the researcher was advised by the teachers to avoid the following:

1. Using MCQ format. Because this could lead the respondents picking an answer they did not have in mind. On the other hand, it could force them to drop a possibility that they had as an answer.
2. Translating from English into Arabic
3. Putting the items of each category together within the test. This could give a key to the answer.

However, for calculation purposes and also for the time allocated for the test, the researcher ended up with 100 items. The test was then divided into six parts that varied in format to attract students' interest. All of the test items were distributed among the four proposed categories; SAEP, DAEP, APEC and EPAC. The different categories of prepositions were shuffled around. In all six parts, the subjects were instructed to fill in the blanks with the correct prepositions and to put a zero (0) if no preposition was needed. Students were given two hours and a half to finish the test.

C. Data Analysis

Data analysis was quantitative as well as qualitative. Statistical tables are used as well as descriptive statistics such as ranks, means, frequencies, and percentages were applied in order to point out the category (SAEP), (DAEP), (APEC) or (EPAC) in which students were likely to make errors. Students' errors were analyzed in terms of their sources of difficulty.

V. A Contrastive Analysis of English and Arabic Prepositions and Its Pedagogical Implications

This chapter presents a brief illustration and classification of English and Arabic prepositions, in addition to a brief presentation of the different types of prepositions (Simple, complex, compound) in both languages. It also sheds some light on the phrasal and prepositional verbs. The general characteristics of English and Arabic prepositions are also discussed. The types of English and Arabic prepositions are discussed with emphasis on the simple and complex prepositions in English on one hand and the separable and inseparable prepositions in Arabic on the other hand.

Additionally, the sources of difficulties and linguistic problems faced by Arab EFL students in learning the English prepositions are also discussed. The types of errors involving English prepositions made by these learners are briefly discussed and illustrated. These types include prepositions omission, preposition substitution, and the redundant use of English prepositions. The CA concludes by offering some pedagogical implications and insights in teaching English to Arab EFL learners.

A. Illustration and Classification of English and Arabic Prepositions

Reference [52] states that: "prepositions are function words that link words, phrases, or clauses to other words in the sentence. They are not inflected, and they express ideas such as location, destination, direction of motion, time, and manner".

Reference [52] gives the following illustration of English and Arabic prepositions with examples:

1. For /li/
   The ball is for them.
   /ʔlkurə təku:nu ləhum/

2. To /?ila/
I went to Tripoli.
/Ðahabtu: ?ila ţarabu:lus/

3. With /maʕa/
I ate with the boy.
/?kəltu: Məʕə ?lwələd/

4. From /min/
I took it from him.
/?XəÐtuha: Minhu:/

5. At (exists only in English)
I am at home.
/?na: fi ?lbyt/

6. In /fi/ (separate), /bi/ (inseparable)
I am in the library.
(in) /?na: bilməktəbh/
(in) /?na: fi ?ləktəbh/

7. On /ʕəla:/
It is on the shelf.
/?inəha: ʕəla: ?rrəf/

8. By (exists only in English)
I will finish it by Monday.
/səwfa: ?ukmiluha: yəwm ?l ?iΘnəyn/

9. Of (exists only in English)
I am proud of him.
/?na: fəxu:run bihi/

B. Simple, Complex, and Compound Prepositions in Arabic and English

1. Simple Prepositions

Reference [17] states prepositions that consist of one word are called ''simple prepositions''. In Arabic as well as English, there are some expressions that contain more than one word, and yet function as a simple preposition. The structure of this type of prepositions is P + NP + P; some examples are '*on account of, to the isolation of*'.

2. Complex Prepositions

Reference [17] states that Arabic complex prepositions are quite limited compared to complex English prepositions and in most of the cases, there is no one-to-one correspondence between the two languages in this respect; a complex English preposition might correspond to a simple Arabic preposition and vice versa. Moreover, if there happens to be complex preposition-to-complex preposition correspondence, the prepositions themselves might be different. Some examples of this are the following:

1. I am writing this in an answer to your letter.
/?ktubu: ha:Ðə Rəddən ʕla:/ risa:lətikə/
/Rəddən ʕla:/ = Answering on

2. In comparison to your case, it is urgent.
/Bilmuqa:rənə məʕa:/ wəðʕukə, ?inəhu: muliĤ/
/Bilmuqa:rənə məʕa:/ = By comparison by

In both examples, the complex English preposition corresponds to a complex Arabic preposition, but the individual prepositions are different.

3. Compound Prepositions

Reference [17] states there is hardly any correspondence between compound prepositions in Arabic and compound prepositions in English. A compound preposition conveys the meaning of its individual components. So, whereas ''*in*'' indicates position and ''*to*'' indicates movement or transfer, ''*into*'' indicates movement inside a location and closure. An example of Arabic compound prepositions is the following:

*/?lkita:b səqəţə min ʕla: ?ţa:wilə/
/min ʕla:/ = from on
The book dropped from the table.

In the example, the compound Arabic preposition /min ʕla:/ corresponded to a simple English preposition (from).

A major difference in prepositions in Arabic and English is in the associative sense of ''of'': it simply does not exist in Arabic. Instead of prepositional marking, the possessed and the possessor are put in sequence and sometimes (in classical Arabic) the possessor receives a special marking at the end. This marker differs according to the number and gender of the possessor noun and its final sound. In colloquial Arabic, this marker is often ignored. Examples:

* /kita:b Ahmed ?la: ?rrəf/
the book of Ahmed is on the shelf.

* /ĥujrət ?l mudərrisi:n nəži:fəh/
the room of the teachers is clean.

* /?ʃiʕət ?ʃʃəms tu?Ði:/
the rays of the sun hurt.

It is clear that both the associative ''of'' and the possessive ''s'' are not treated separately in Arabic. Neither of them exists and the possessive relation is expressed by word order. It should also be noted that what is labeled in English as a compound noun (e.g., child psychology) is treated as possessed-possessor in Arabic.

In the case of the indirect object marker ''to'', there is a perfect correspondence between Arabic and English:

/?ʕtyt ?lkita:b li Ali:/
(I) gave the book to Ali.

A major difference and hence difficulty that faces the Arabic speaker in learning English is not only the greater

number of prepositions, but also the varied uses of each one [17].

C. Phrasal and Prepositional Verbs

A clear morphological distinction between the phrasal verbs and the prepositional verbs is that the object comes either after the phrasal verb e.g., (put on *your jacket*), or in the middle of its two components e.g., (Put *your jacket* on). While, in the prepositional verbs, the object comes only after its components e.g., (She comes from a rich family).

Reference [31] states that English phrasal and prepositional verbs constitute a great difficulty to learners of English. In these constructions the sense of the verb is complemented by the sense of the preposition. There are numerous instances of such construction in English:

* put out (a fire)
* look up (a word)
* put off (an appointment)

The construction can get more complex when the verb is followed by a complex preposition:

* run out of (time)
* keep up with (an opponent)

Reference [31] state that there are three levels of prepositional phrases, and they are as follows:

A. Simple phrasal verb: e.g. look up (a word), put out (a fire).
B. Complex phrasal verbs: e.g. run out of (petrol).
C. Prepositional verbs: e.g. come from (abroad), eat with (friends).

In the first two categories, the construction V + P(s) is idiomatic and cannot be predicted from the meanings of its components, whereas in the third category the meaning can be predicted from the components.

D.General Characteristics of English and Arabic Prepositions:

1. English Prepositions

Prepositions in English can express a relation between two grammatical elements, prepositional complement and the object. For example, in the following sentence: *Amena put the sweater on her shoulder,* the complement of the preposition *her shoulder* and the object *the sweater* are related to each other. English prepositions can follow a nominal, a verbal or an adjectival as in the following examples respectively, [17]:

1. The teacher at <u>school</u> is pleasant.
2. He travelled to <u>London</u>.
3. The class was empty of <u>students</u>.

Reference [17] states another characteristic of English prepositions is that different prepositions offer different meanings when used with the same word. The verb + particle construction provides a good example of this: the meaning of the construction *look at* changes completely if we substitute *for, up,* or *after* for *at.*

Moreover, the meaning of a verb + particle is sometimes completely different from the individual meaning of its constituents. For example, *do in* in the following sentence: *Ahmed threatened to do in all his enemies.* means to kill.

English prepositions can be used with different parts of speech of the same root word. We use one preposition with the verb form, another with the adjective and still another with the noun form of the word. For example, we are *fond of* something, but we have *fondness for* it. In English, prepositions are either simple, single words, or complex consisting of more than one word [17].

2. Arabic Prepositions

Reference [18] suggests that Arab grammarians used to classify Arabic words into three classes: nouns, verbs and particles. In the class of particles, Arab grammarians included prepositions which they called *huru:f ?aIjarr.* Reference [17] maintains that Arabic prepositions are divided into two morphological classes:

1. The first class consists of prepositions that have the form of one consonant and one short vowel. These prepositions are inseparable. They occur as prefixes to the complement.

   /bi/ at, by, in, with
   /li/ to
   /kə/ as, like
   /tə/ by (only in swearing)
   /bi/ by (only in swearing)

2. The second class consists of prepositions which are independent and either biliteral or triliteral. These prepositions are separable.

   a. Biliteral
      /ʕən/ from, away from
      /fi/ in, at
      /Kəy/ in order to
      /Min/ from

   b. Triliteral
      /ʕələ/ on
      /ʕədə/ except
      /ʔilə/ to, toward
      /Ĥətta:/ until, up to
      /ləʕəlla:/ perhaps
      /mətə/ when
      /munĐu/ ago, since
      /xələ/ except

Some prepositions in Arabic such as *ʕən, min, ʕələ* are used more frequently than other prepositions such as *xələ, kəy, mətə* [17].

E. Sources of Difficulty and Linguistic Problems

References [38], [52], [19], [21], [37], and [48] all attest to the inherent difficulty and unpredictability of English prepositions.

Reference [48] indicates that English prepositions cause problems for Arab students learning English. They tend to use the Arabic preposition instead of the English one. Therefore, if students are not familiar with certain English prepositions and their meanings such as *of, by,* and at, they may find problems using them.

Reference [52] lists the following sources of difficulty in learning English prepositions. He points out that the first three of these sources are general while the last two are special problems faced by Arab EFL learners.

1. *There are a number of meanings each preposition has which serves as a source of difficulty.*
2. *If different prepositions are used with the same word they may give different meanings. For example, look at, look after, look up.*
3. *According to [47], English speakers are unable to offer a logical explanation for the occurrence of such prepositions or a conceptual guide of their uses.*
4. *Traditional methods of teaching such as the grammar-translation method encourage students to translate in their minds.*
5. *Interference Relates to the problem of translation from the L1 which is Arabic*.

As to the problem of native language (Arabic) interference, [38] indicate that prepositions rarely have a one to one correspondence between English and Arabic. An Arabic preposition may be translated by several English prepositions while an English preposition may have several Arabic translations. In their study, approximately two thirds of the errors in using prepositions seemed to be attributable to the native-language (Arabic) interference and one third to intra-English interference.

Reference [38] also point out that errors of omitting prepositions had their sources in both native-language and English interference. Redundant use of prepositions had its source chiefly in Arabic. Substitution of prepositions stemmed from both Arabic and English forms.

Reference [38] concludes that Arab EFL learners learn the semantic meaning of the English lexical prepositions before they learn all the restrictions on their use.

F. Types of Errors in Prepositions

Errors involving the use of English prepositions by Arab EFL learners can be classified into three categories: substitution errors, redundant errors, and omission errors. Reference [38] defines substitution errors as the use of a wrong word. Redundant errors mean that an unnecessary word was put in or that two or more words were used where only one was required. Omission errors mean that a preposition was omitted where it was necessary.

Reference [38] suggests some examples of these three categories of preposition errors, and they are as follows:

1. Substitution Errors
*a. *in the third day*
*b. *think in the idea.*
*c. *Then he started to kill it by his knife.*
*d. *One from the men sit down below the car to try to repair it.*
*e. *The time was short to us.*
*f. *Each month begins in Saturday.*

2. Redundant Errors
*a. *Judge on things*
*b. *Treating with others*
*c. *I feel with happy.*
*d. *Factories make on litter.*
*e. *They make on illness of people.*

3. Omission Errors
*a. *He came Monday.*
*b. *I was born 22nd of May, 1978.*
*c. *It is bordered from the east Iran.*

In studying preposition errors made by Arab EFL students, [52] concludes that:

1. *In some cases the English preposition corresponds exactly to its Arabic equivalent.*
2. *Sometimes, in expressing an idea in Arabic, we do not need to use a preposition (or any other word) to replace the English preposition.*
3. *Usually students try to memorize one main equivalent for each English preposition. While such one-to-one translation may give the proper English word many instances in a number of cases in which it does not work.*
4. *The English preposition is not always expressed in Arabic by a preposition; its equivalent may be a different part of speech.*

G.Pedagogical Implications

Reference [38] point out that mastery of the use of prepositions is a late acquisition in native-language learning. While prepositions are a frequent source of error, their misuse does not prevent communication.

Reference [52] suggests that one way to help Arab EFL students in mastering the use of English prepositions is to emphasize the following differences between English and Arabic prepositions:

1. Arabic prepositions can be separable and inseparable whereas English prepositions are always separable.
2. English prepositions consist of one word or more, whereas Arabic prepositions mostly consist of one word except for the case of double prepositions.
3. Arabic prepositions have a unique feature. It affects the last vowel of the word, whether it is short or long, by changing it to a short vowel, called *kasrah* or /i/. In English this feature cannot be found.
4. English prepositions are relatively various while Arabic prepositions are relatively limited.
5. When English prepositions precede or proceed verbs or nouns to form units, they may give different meanings.

6. Some uses of the English prepositions, especially *at, in,* and *on* are ambiguous and difficult compared with the Arabic preposition which really replaces those prepositions in meaning.

Reference [52] suggests that the English teacher (a) should begin with situations that are as real and relevant to the student as possible and (b) should see which prepositions and adverbs the student needs in order to communicate effectively, that is, to make himself/herself understood correctly.

An obvious starting point for mastering English prepositions is the classroom situation. Although for the adult this is not a real situation, it is real for the student who spends the greater part of the day in a classroom. To conduct any class, a teacher has to give certain instructions. According to [52], the teacher says things like:

- *Stand up.*
- *Sit down.*
- *Wait outside.*
- *Go to the blackboard.*
- *Sit in front of Mohamed.*
- *Write in ink.*
- *Take off your coat.*

Already, we have far more adverbs and prepositions that can be used in a single lesson, yet each one appears in a real communicative situation, not one invented by the teacher, such as:

- The spoon is in the cup.
- Khalid is going out of the shop.
- Ali is at the barber shop.

Pretended situations have their uses, but real situations are preferable when possible.

Reference [52] states the following points in this regard:

1. *Certain descriptively accurate distinctions made by linguists may not have any place in a pedagogical grammar. Thus the adverb and preposition, respectively in Sit down and He ran down the stairs can be taught together with no mention of their labels.*
2. *The student is likely to make mistakes in the use of prepositions, but since communication is the chief goal of language teaching, the teacher would advocate a greater tolerance of errors as long as they do not impede understanding. Instead of correcting all the student's errors, which entails putting him/her on the defensive situation and making him/her hesitant to talk, the teacher should simply use the correct model while commenting, without interrupting the communication.*
3. *The influence of the native language does not need to be all negative. The teacher should make use of similarity between the two languages and give direct translations where they are appropriate and do not likely lead to overgeneralizations. In the classroom instructions listed above, the teacher can translate the prepositions (most of which have direct translations in Arabic).*

Finally, [29] gives the following practical guidelines for teaching English prepositions to Arab EFL students:

1. One way to teach English prepositions would be to take the most common mistakes in the use of prepositions that students make in their work, group similar expressions, and teach a group of three or four prepositions at a time. It is, of course, better to begin with expressions that have a parallel expression in the students' own language. One group would be: *share with, cope with*, and *confer with.* Another group could be: *call up, get up, look up, and take up.* A third group: *cross out, figure out, pick out, and point out;* or: *ask for, call for, look for, and vote for.* It is better to introduce only one group a day. Give several sentences for each expression, have the students give sentences, and have them combine two or more expressions, for example:

Osama set up his alarm clock, got up at seven o'clock and called up Mohamed.

2. Introduce different expressions that are similar in structure and meaning, explain the difference, and give examples of each. For example, *on time, in time, at 8 o'clock.* Then combine them in one sentence:

If you come to class on time, i.e. at eight o'clock, you will in time be a good student.

3. Every once in a while write on the board the verbs that the students have learned: get_____, look_____, take_____, and make them write the preposition that goes with each verb, and then use the expressions in sentences. Or, write a sentence on the board and leave out the appropriate prepositions then make the students complete the sentence:

When I arrived _____ school _____ 8 o'clock, I went _____ the library, looked _____ some books, picked _____ two books, and read them _____ one hour.

If a verb can take more than one preposition, have the students explain the difference in meaning, e.g. looked *at* some books, looked *for* some books, looked *in* some books.

4. Have the students do some activities such as crossword puzzles to vary the procedures and to make them enjoyable.

It is perhaps only when EFL teachers realize that English prepositions must be taught separately then they will enable their students master them.

The researcher suggests the following techniques for teaching English prepositions to Libyan first year university students of English:

1. One way to teach English prepositions is to start with the ones which are most common, i.e. the prepositions used in the classroom settings and in everyday communication.
2. English prepositions are better taught by shedding some light on similar and dissimilar Arabic and English prepositions.
3. Since the use of English prepositions, to some extent, is not rule-governed, a lot of exercises and drills would be of great help for students.

VI. Analysis and Discussion of the Learners' Difficulties in Using English Prepositions

This chapter presents the analysis, findings and discussion of the study. First, the frequencies and percentages of errors in

the four main categories are given; second, the errors made by the subjects are identified in terms of their potential sources.

A. Test Format

After classifying the test items, the researcher put them in a test format. The researcher was advised by some colleagues to avoid the following:

1. Translation from English into Arabic.
2. Putting the items of each category together within the test. This could give a key to the answer.
3. Using MCQ format. This could lead the students to choose a random answer.

The test was divided into six parts that varied in format to attract students' interest.

These six cloze test parts concerning English prepositions were as follows (see appendix 1).

Part one: 19 separate sentences.
Part two: A story that included 13 test items.
Part three: 14 separate sentences about a specific topic.
Part four: A story that included 17 test items.
Part five: 20 separate sentences.
Part six: A story that included 17 test items.

The different categories of prepositions were shuffled around. In all six parts, the students were instructed to fill in the blanks with the correct prepositions and to put a zero if no preposition is needed. The student sample consisted of four groups that were tested at the same time where they had no chance to discuss the contents of the test with each other. The students were very cooperative.

B. Quantitative Results

Correct answers in the four categories were 1765 in SAEP, 1703 in DAEP, 602 in APEC and 511 in EPAC. Dividing the number of correct answers by the number of questions in each category, the researcher got the mean of correct answers. Table I shows the mean of correct answers and the rank order of each category.

TABLE I
MEAN AND RANK ORDER OF CORRECT ANSWERS IN THE FOUR CATEGORIES

Category	# of correct Answers	#of items	Mean	Rank
SAEP	1765	32	55.15	1
DAEP	1703	40	42.57	2
APEC	602	15	40.13	3
EPAC	511	13	39.31	4

The number of unanswered questions differed from one category to the other. Table II shows the number and the mean of unanswered items in each category.

TABLE II
NUMBER AND MEAN OF UNANSWERED ITEMS IN THE FOUR CATEGORIES

Category	#of unanswered items	#of items	Mean of unanswered items	Rank
SAEP	86	32	2.69	3
DAEP	126	40	3.15	1
APEC	39	15	2.6	4
EPAC	36	13	2.77	2

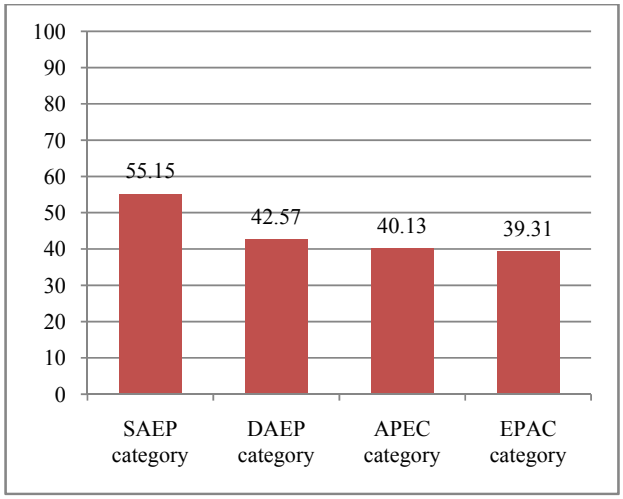

Fig. 1 Mean of correct answers in the four categories

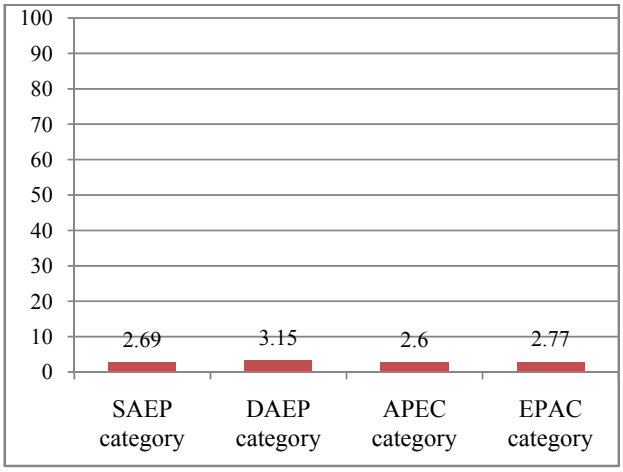

Fig. 2 Mean of unanswered items in the four categories

When calculating the percentage of errors in each category as shown in Table III, the unanswered items were left out. Dividing the number of errors by the number of answers less the number of unanswered items in each category multiplied by 100, the researcher got the percentage of incorrect answers. Table III shows the percentage of errors and rank order of the four categories.

TABLE III
PERCENTAGE OF ERRORS AND RANK ORDER

Category	% of errors	Rank
SAEP	44.55	4
DAEP	57.92	3
APEC	60.41	2
EPAC	61.32	1

The mean of errors in the four categories was obtained by dividing the number of errors by the number of test items in each category multiplied by 100.

TABLE IV
MEAN AND RANK ORDER OF ERRORS IN THE FOUR CATEGORIES

Categories	# of Errors	# of Items	Mean	Rank
SAEP	1349	32	42.15	4
DAEP	2171	40	54.27	3
APEC	859	15	57.26	2
EPAC	753	13	57.92	1

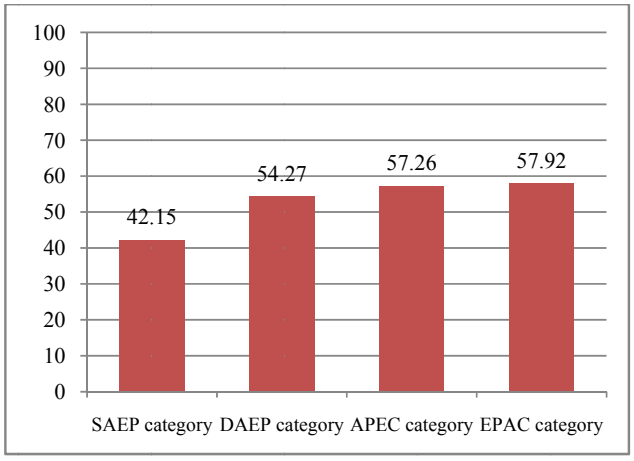

Fig. 3 Mean of errors in the four categories

The above means of errors do not take into consideration the number of unanswered items and since they differ from one category to the other, this can affect the means of errors.

- Interpretation of Quantitative Results

All quantitative results show that similar Arabic and English prepositions (SAEP) come first in the mean of correct answers and come last in the percentage and mean of errors. Although these results are not consistent for the other three categories, the SAEP category is quite consistent. This shows that learners find English prepositions that are similar to Arabic prepositions easier to learn and produce.

The following pie chart shows the distribution of correct answers, errors and unanswered items in the SAEP category.

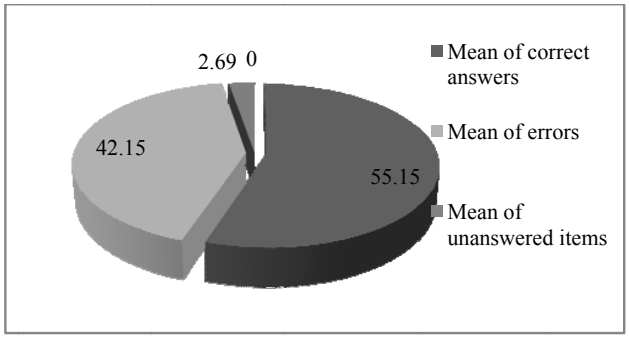

Fig. 4 Means of correct answers, errors and unanswered item in SAEP category

The overall results also show that English prepositions constitute an area of difficulty for Libyan first year university students specializing in English. The percentage of errors in the use of English prepositions ranges from 44.55% to 61.32%. Students made more errors in DAEP, APEC, and EPAC categories than the SAEP category, and errors in the EPAC and APEC categories are still higher than the DAEP category. This shows that the students had a greater difficulty when the English and Arabic prepositions do not correspond at all as in the APEC and EPAC categories. This does not support the notion of interference which predicted that the DAEP category will be the most difficult. The results support that SAEP category will be the least difficult.

There were more unanswered items in the DAEP category than the other three categories. The researcher believes that the unanswered items were too difficult for the students even to guess the answer.

C. Qualitative Results

Qualitative results indicate the nature and significance of errors and their possible sources. In analyzing and discussing the results qualitatively, the researcher adopted some of the students' actual answers to know the possible sources of errors in using the English prepositions, and classify those errors to the three potential sources of errors which are mentioned in chapter three (see III *B* 1)

The influence of Arabic on the use of English prepositions is clear. About half of the errors in the DAEP, EPAC, and APEC categories are due to Arabic interference. In the DAEP category, students translated the Arabic prepositions into English ones. Some examples of this are the following:

1. * He was ashamed from his shabby clothes.
/ka:nə mustəĤiyən min məla:bisihi ʔrrəΘə/
كان مستحياً من ملابسه الرثة.
He was ashamed of his shabby clothes.

2.* You managed to buy the equipment by a very low price.
/nə ʒ əĤtə fi ʃira:ʔ ʔl ʒ ihaz biΘmən rxi:Š iddən/
أنت نجحتَ في شراء الجهاز بثمن رخيص جداً.
You managed to buy the equipment for a very low price.

3.* He convinced me by the idea.
/ʔqnəʕəni bilfikrə/
أقنعني بالفكرة.
He convinced me of the idea.

4.* He is good in basketball.
/Huwə yku:nu ʒ yidən fi kurət ʔsəllə/
هو يكونُ جيداً في كرة السلة.
He is good at basketball.

5.* They emptied my drawer from all its contents.
/ʔfrəġu: dur ʒ i min kulli muĤtəwəya:tihi/
أفرغوا دُرجي من كُل مُحتويات.
They emptied my drawer of all its contents.

In the APEC category, Arabic interference errors are mostly insertion errors. The students use an Arabic preposition in a

sentence where it is not needed in English. Some examples are as follows:

1.* The adventurers reached to the witch's house early the following day.
/ʔlmuġa:miru:n wəsəlu: ʔila: bəyt ʔssa:Ĥira: mubəkirən fi: ʔlyəwm ʔtta:li:/
المُغامِرونَ وَصَلو إلي بيتِ الساحرة مُبكِراً اليَوم التالي.

2.* He wanted to ascertain from the truth of her words.
/ʔra:də ʔn yətəĤəqəqə min ŠiĤĤət kəlima:tiha:/
أرادَ أن يَتَحقق مِنْ صِحة كَلِمَاتِهَا.

3.* I cannot find enough words to express about my gratitude to you.
/ʔnə ʕa: ʒ iz ʕən ʔi: ʒ a:d ʔlkəlima:t ʔlka:fiyə li ʔuʕəbir ʕən ʃukri: ləka:/
أنا عاجِز عن إيجاد الكَلِمَات الكَافِية لِأُعبر عن شُكري لكَ.

4.* They overcame on him.
/təġəlləbu: ʕlyh/
تَغَلَّبوا عَليه.

5.* Do not risk by/with your life.
/la: tu ʒ a:zif biĤəya:tik/
لا تُجَازِفْ بحَيَاتِكْ.

For the EPAC category, Arabic interference errors are errors of deleting a preposition. Because the preposition does not exist in the equivalent Arabic sentence, the student deletes it when s/he uses the English sentence. Some examples of this type of error are the following:

1.* The woman was dressed black.
/ʔlʔimrəʔə ka:nət tərtədi: ʔlʔswəd/
الإمرأة كَانَتْ تَرتَدي الأسود.
The woman was dressed in black.

2.* This stick is six feet length.
/həĐihi: ʔlʕəŠə təkunu: sittət ʔqda:m ṭu:lən/
هذِه العصَا تَكونُ سِتة أقدَام طولاً.
This stick is six feet in length.

Table V shows the numbers and percentages of Arabic interference errors in the DAEP, APEC and EPAC categories. The percentage of errors because of interference from Arabic in the three categories was obtained by dividing the number of interference errors by the number of errors in each category multiplied by 100. And by doing the same procedure with the totals of each column, the researcher got the overall percentage of interference errors for all of the three categories.

TABLE V
PERCENTAGES OF INTERFERENCE ERRORS

Category	# of errors	#of interference errors	%	Rank
DAEP	2171	775	35.7	3
APEC	859	316	36.8	2
EPAC	753	311	41.3	1
Total	*3783*	*1402*	*37.1*	

Table V shows that Arabic interference is responsible for 37.1 of the errors when students tried to use English prepositions. One can see that those errors are related to interference from Arabic. This result goes hand in hand with the idea that native language does affect the acquisition of a second language.

One expects that, interference from Arabic in the APEC and EPAC categories is little, to some extent, but as the results show, these two categories were more open to native language interference than the DAEP category.

The results of the study show that frequently used expressions tend to resist mother tongue interference regardless of their categories. The following are some examples of these expressions and the number of correct answers involving them:

TABLE VI
FREQUENTLY USED EXPRESSIONS WHICH RESIST L1 INTERFERENCE

Category	Sentence	Number
	Ahmed is accustomed to sleeping 8 hours a day.	
DAEP	/ʔhməd muʕta:də ʕlə ʔnəwmi Өma:niyətə sa:ʕa:tin yəwmiyən/	66
	أحمد مُعْتَاد عَلي النوْم ثمَانِيَة ساعاتٍ يومِيا.	
	He is angry with his sister.	
DAEP	/huwə ġa:đibun min ʔuxtihi/	93
	هُو غَاضِبٌ من أُخْتِهِ.	
	It is bad to laugh at people.	
DAEP	/ʔinəhu səyiʔun ʔən təđ Ĥəkə ʕlə ʔnna:s/	86
	إنهُ سَيِّءٌ أنْ تَضْحَكَ عَلي الناس.	
	It is similar to my uncle's.	
EPAC	/ʔinəhə tuʃbihu xa:Šətə xa:li/	89
	إنَها تُشْبِهُ خَاصّة خَالي.	
	The prime Minister emphasized the role of technology.	
APEC	/rʔi:s ʔlwuzəra:ʔ ʃəddədə ʕlə dəwr ʔttiknu:lu: ʒ iya:/	52
	رَئيسُ الوُزَراء شدّد عَلي دَور التّكنولوجيا	

The potential interference errors in the sentences mentions in Table VI are as follows:

1. Ahmed is accustomed to sleeping 8 hours a day.
*Ahmed is accustomed on sleeping 8 hours a day.

2. He is angry with his sister.
*He is angry from his sister.

3. It is bad to laugh at people.
*It is bad to laugh on people.

4. It is similar to my uncle's.
*It is similar my uncle's.

5. The prime Minister emphasized the role of technology.
*The prime Minister emphasized on the role of technology.

Social conventions seemed to be important in the choice of the preposition. The best illustration of this is the sentence:

1. He ate his meal in the shade of a tree.

Although the preposition "in" is similar to the Arabic preposition "fi" in this context, only thirteen students responded with "in" and sixty five responded with "under". The explanation for this is that it is much more acceptable in the Arabic cultural to say "I ate my meal under a tree." than "I ate my meal in the shade of a tree."

It is also remarkable that learners sometimes make a double transfer error. For example, the English instrumental "with" corresponds to the Arabic "bi", which is also used in various other contexts. In many cases the Arabic preposition "bi" corresponds to the English preposition "by". In many examples, the English "with" will be found where no instrument is involved. A good illustration of this is the following sentence:

2. *I was surprised with his warm welcome.
/kuntu: mutəfa: ʒ i?ən bitərĤi:bihi ?lĤa:r/
كُنْتُ مُتفَاجِئً بِتَرحيبِهِ الحَار.
I was surprised by his warm welcome.

If the learner used the preposition "from", it would clearly be an interference error, but surely s/he transferred the "bi" (by) from Arabic, then s/he substituted it for the instrumental "with" which also corresponds to "bi".

Another possible explanation for sentence (2) is that the learner does not realize that the preposition differs according to voice (active/passive) of the verb, thus s/he overgeneralizes:

3. He surprised me with his warm welcome. (active)
*I was surprised with his warm welcome. (passive)
I was surprised by his warm welcome. (passive)
/kuntu: mutəfa: ʒ i?n bitərĤi:bihi ?lĤa:r/
كُنْتُ مُتفَاجِئً بِتَرحيبِهِ الحَار.

Arab learners found it difficult to differentiate between "with" and "by" because both of them correspond to one Arabic preposition "bi".

L1 interference can go beyond the use of a particular item instead of another. It can affect the choice of the response even if that response does not reflect direct L1 interference. An example for this is the sentence:

4. He objects to any idea without considering it carefully.

The verb "object" corresponds to the Arabic verb "yəʕtərid" and both are prepositional verbs, but the verb "object" can also correspond to the Arabic "yərfud" (rejects) which is not a prepositional verb. Thus taking the verb to mean "yərfud" leads to forty-four zero (0) answers which refers to the APEC category, whereas only nineteen responded with "to" and nine responded with, an obvious Arabic influence, "on".

In addition to the problem of differentiating between "by" and "for", students seem to have a similar difficulty with "at" and "in" since both correspond to the Arabic "fi". A good illustration of this is the following sentence:

5. He always has eggs for breakfast.

Out of one hundred students, only twenty-three students responded with "for". Arabic interference manifested itself in two forms: "in" and "at"; thirty-six subjects responded with "in" and thirty-four with "at" and, apparently, both groups had the Arabic "fi" in mind.

Another major problem that Libyan students face was overgeneralizing the use of "of". This preposition does not have a literal correspondence in Arabic and its frequent associative use makes Libyan students use it frequently. As a result of that, the researcher got sentences like:

6. *There is a heavy tax of imported goods.
/Huna:kə đəri:bətən ʕa:liyə ʕələ ?lbəđa:?iʕ ?lmustəwrərə/
هُناكَ ضَريبَة عَالِية علي البضائِع المُسْتورَدَة.

7. *Don't risk of your life.
/la: tu ʒ a:zif biĤəya:tik/
لا تُجَازف بحَيَاتِك.

8. *This stick is six feet of length.
/həĐihi: ?lʕəŠa: təkunu: sittət ?qda:m ṭu:lən/
هذِه العصَا تَكونُ سِتة أقدَام طولاً.

9. *He aimed of the guard.
/təwə ʒ ʒ əhə ilə ?lĤa:ris/
تَوجَّه إلي الحارس.

10. *I share a flat of Ali.
/?ʃtəriku fi ʃiqətin məʕə Ali/
أشْتَرِكُ فِي شِقَّةٍ مَعَ علي.

Some other interesting cases of overgeneralization were found in the data. A good number of students over-extended the expression "come to" to "overcome to" producing:

11. *They overcame to him.
/təġəlləbu: ʕlyh/
تَغَلَبوا علَيه.
They overcame him.

This type of over-extension was found to be working forward as well as backward; that is to say, the overextension of a preceding item can cause an error in the following one, and the overextension of a subsequent item can cause an error in the preceding one. An example of this is:

12. *He is capable to staying two nights
/huwə qa:dirun ʕlə ?n yəmkuΘə lylətəyn/
هُو قادرٌ عَلي أنْ يَمْكُثَ لِيْلتين.

13. *He is capable in staying two nights.
/huwə qa:dirun ʕlə ?n yəmkuΘə lylətəyn/
هُو قادرٌ عَلي أنْ يَمْكُثَ لِيْلتين.
He is capable of staying two nights.

In the first example, the students were apparently overgeneralizing "able" with "capable", hence "able to" and "capable to" (forward effect). In the second example, the students are inferring from the "v+ing" form that the construction is parallel to "He succeeded in convincing her", thus producing *"capable in staying" (backward effect).

To summarize, L1 is responsible for a large number of the Libyan first year university students' errors in using English prepositions. Thus, students made the most considerable number of errors in the EPAC category, and the least considerable number of errors is in the SAEP category. Moreover, errors made in the APEC and DAEP categories fall in the middle. In addition to the L1 influence, overgeneralization explains a considerable number of errors that were found in the data. It was also observed that frequently used expressions tend to resist all interlingual as well as intralingual sources of errors.

VII. Concluding Remarks and Recommendations

This chapter provides concluding remarks of this study. In addition, it gives some recommendations that should be taken into account when teaching prepositions. Finally, it shows suggestions for further research.

A. Conclusion

The results of the study indicate that paying attention to the different meanings of English prepositions on the students' part can help them overcome many difficulties in using English prepositions.

Based on the obtained results, the researcher can detect that students' errors could be attributed to the lack of knowledge of the different meanings of English prepositions. This lack of knowledge forced the students to adopt what is called the strategy of transfer.

As for the implications of the present findings for the teaching and learning of English prepositions, there is enough evidence that active expressions which are related to daily life situations or objects which learners often encounter are learnt more effectively. It is the researcher's belief that the learning of English prepositions in situational contexts makes them less vulnerable to L1 interference than learning them in purely linguistic contexts. It should also be noted that special attention must be given to the complex English prepositions and to the idiomatic use of some of them when teaching.

According to this study, it seems that most of students know (and concentrate on) only one meaning of each English preposition to which they know one Arabic equivalent, and that they rely on Arabic whenever they use English prepositions.

B. Recommendations

In the light of the findings of this study, the following recommendations can be made:

Teachers should test students periodically to check areas of weakness in the use of prepositions and to what extent the lessons have been understood. If an already explained lesson or part of it is not understood, more explanation should take place in a different method.

Teachers should teach their students the most common meaning of each single preposition. On the other hand, s/he should not neglect the other meanings of each preposition.

When Arabic interference seems to be the source of error, it can be explained briefly to students.

In order to avoid overgeneralization errors, teachers should teach not only the mechanics of grammatical rules, but also teach the correct distribution and exceptional cases where they do not apply.

It would be very useful to increase the number of exercises and homework during their free time; hence they would be reading a lot of English materials and thinking in English, especially if they have to make oral tasks for their work. In addition, if teachers implement team work in class and get the students to work in groups on their exercises, they will practice their oral tasks together, and speak English with each other instead of Arabic. Besides, they would, hopefully, correct each other's mistakes.

Instead of letting the students make their own comparisons and associations with their L1, perhaps teachers could encourage this when the items to be taught are similar in the two languages. Teachers could elicit comparisons that would help the students learn about the English language.

C. Suggestions for Further Studies

This study was conducted on a relatively small number of students, and also using a limited number of close ended questions. Therefore, the conclusions reached are far from being comprehensive.

Subsequent studies should investigate other stages of learning and could be much more comprehensive, covering a larger number of subjects and a wider range of open ended questions, such as writing simple essays and articles. A longitudinal study using a number of subjects over the period of their university study might be much more valuable, particularly when analyzing both oral and written data.

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