Difficulties in Dealing with English Prepositions of Place Encountered by Students with Native Arabic Language Background

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated the errors that Arab EFL learners produce when they use the English spatial prepositions above, among, at, behind, below, between, in front of, on, and under. Also, the role of the mother tongue in producing such errors in using these ten prepositions was under investigation in this study. The participants of this study were 72 Arab students 48 males and 24 females, who study at the Foreign Languages and English Preparatory School, Eastern Mediterranean University. All the participants were Arabic native speakers, and they were from different Arabic countries which are: Libya, Yemen, Egypt, Bahrain, Jordan, Syria, Iraq, Palestine, and Morocco. A test consisted of two parts was used to collect data. The first part was fill-in-the-blank question which contained 30 questions about the ten prepositions of place (three questions for each preposition). And the second part was a picture incomplete sentence which had 20 incomplete sentences (two questions for each preposition). The data obtained from the participants was analyzed qualitatively by checking the answers and scoring the wrong answers for each preposition. Results showed that Arab EFL learners have the problem of substitution in using English prepositions of place. In addition, leaving the question with no answer was employed by the participants. The results about the role of the mother tongue found that negative transfer played a role in the production of these errors. Finally, the study provides implications for Arab EFL learners regarding the use of English spatial prepositions, and some suggestions for further research in this area.

Keywords: Negative transfer, Substitution, Spatial prepositions, Language interference.

ÖZ

Bu çalışma, İngilizcede mevcut olan "above, among, at, behind, below, between, in front of, on, ve under" yer edatlarını kullanırken Arap kökenli öğrencilerin yabancı dil olarak İngilizce öğreniminde yaptıkları hataları araştırmaktadır. Çalışmada ayrıca bu on edat kullanılırken bu tür hataların yapılmasında ana dilin rolü de araştırılmıştır. Katılımcılar, Doğu Akdeniz Üniversitesi Yabancı Diller Okulu İngilizce Hazırlık Programında öğrenim gören 48'i erkek ve 24'ü kadın olmak üzere 72 Arap kökenli öğrenciden oluşmaktadır. Tüm katılımcılar Arap kökenli olup, ana dili Arapçadır. Öğrenciler; Libya, Yemen, Mısır, Bahreyn, Ürdün, Suriye, Irak, Filistin ve Fas olmak üzere farklı Arap ülkelerinden gelmektedir. Veriler, iki bölümden oluşan bir test kullanılarak toplanmıştır. İlk bölüm, bu on edatla ilgili 30 soru (her edatla ilgili 3 soru) içeren boşluk doldurma türünde sorulardan oluşmaktadır. İkinci bölüm ise tamamlanmamış 20 cümleden oluşan boşluk doldurma türünde bir resimdir (her edatla ilgili 2 soru). Katılımcılardan elde edilen veriler, cevaplar kontrol edilerek ve her edatla ilgili yanlış cevaplara puan verilerek niteliksel olarak analiz edilmiştir. Sonuçlar, İngilizce öğrenimi gören Arap kökenli öğrencilerin yer edatı kullanımıyla ilgili sorun yaşadığını göstermiştir. Bazı kısımlarda öğrencilerin, cevap vermekten kaçındığı görülmüştür. Ana dilin etkisi ile ilgili sonuçlar, olumsuz aktarımın bu hataların oluşumunda etkili olduğunu göstermiştir. Sonuç olarak bu çalışma, İngilizcede mevcut olan yer edatlarının kullanımına yönelik olarak Arap kökenli öğrencilere bazı çıkarımlarda bulunmakta ve bu alanda yapılabilecek çalışmalara bazı öneriler sunmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Olumsuz aktarım, Yer edatı kullanımı, Yer edatları, Ana dil müdahalesi.

To My Family

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ix

LIST OF TABLES

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Presentation

This chapter gives an overview of the background on the errors that are committed by language learners and the reasons behind these errors. Also, the chapter presents the statement of the problem, the purpose and questions of the research, and the significance of the study.

1.2 Background

Many researchers discussed the reason of errors that are made by learners of a second language. Linguistic theories like error analysis, contrastive analysis, and interlanguage have motivated many researchers to conduct studies on the acquisition of a second language. These theories aimed at discussing and solving the sources of the difficulties that learners encounter. These difficulties are mostly attributed to the transfer of L1. It is also mentioned that interference of first language emerges in the learning of L2. Further, interference can emerge in all of the language levels (e.g. phonetics, morphology, syntax, semantics and lexis), (Lehiste, 1988 as cited in Dera, 1994). Many researchers including Mukattash (1988) assume that the reason of the huge number of errors that Arab EFL learners commit is due to the Arabic language interference.

The studies that investigated the problems when using English prepositions conclude that Arab EFL learners have problems in using prepositions. These problems are attributed to the native language and to the effect of the target language itself. According to Tahaineh (2010), errors of substitution, for example, are 78% of the errors in using English prepositions by Arab learners. Tahaineh (2010) adds that students add prepositions when those prepositions are not needed. Also, omission of prepositions was used when they were needed.

There are two types of language transfer. The first one is positive transfer which refers to the correct use of first language in a second language context. The second type of transfer is known as negative transfer which is means the wrong use of second language form as a result of using the first language (Gass & Selinker, 2008). Hence, similarities between two given languages lead to positive transfer, and differences between these two languages result in negative transfer.

1.3 Statement of the Problem

When Arabic native speakers start learning English, they face many linguistic problems because of the differences between the two languages. One of these problems is the learning of the prepositions. Using the prepositions in Arabic language differs from using them in English. The focus of the current study is on the Arab EFL learners' errors when using English prepositions of place. The study also concentrates on the role of the transfer of Arabic language in acquiring English prepositions which has been discussed in many studies. These studies reveal that prepositions of place are more difficult than the rest of prepositions; these errors are committed because of the Arabic language interference (Al-Sayed, 1982; Naser, 1983, Bourenane, 1984 and Mukattash, 1985). Thus, the

purpose of the current study is to shed the light on the Arab learners' problems in dealing with the spatial prepositions (above, among, at, behind, below, in, in front of, on, and under), and what the reasons for these problems are.

1.4 Purpose of the Study

The current study attempts to show the problems that Arab EFL learners have when dealing with English spatial prepositions. The prepositions that will be under investigation are: above, among, at, behind, below, between, in front of, in, on, and under. According to Naser (1983), and Bourenane (1984), these prepositions are considered as more difficult than other prepositions to the speakers of Arabic language as a native one. The similarities in the use of the prepositions between English and Arabic are believed to have a great effect. Some Arabic prepositions have more than one equivalent in English, and vice versa. Hence, the Arabic language effect on the English spatial prepositions acquisition is under the investigation of the current study as well.

This study addresses the questions below:

1- What are the most common errors in spatial prepositions that are committed by Arab learners of English?

2- What is the role of the Arabic language in acquiring English spatial prepositions?

1.5 Significance of the Study

This study is significant in terms of identifying the weaknesses that Arab EFL learners encounter when using English spatial prepositions. The results of this study may introduce the prepositions that are most problematic. So, the significance of the study is that it may enhance the students' use of these

prepositions. In addition, the current study may raise the students' attention to the role of the native language in the acquisition of the second language.

1.6 Definition of Key Terms

Error: Due to the lack of knowledge of the appropriate rules of the language, errors occur (Corder, 1967). Errors occur when a linguistic item is used in a way that native speakers of the language consider it as showing incomplete learning or faulty.

Preposition: According to Liefrink (1973), prepositions are a "tenseless set of relationships involving verbs and nouns" (p.46). Also, Allosop (1986: 105) defines prepositions as "words that show the relationship between the things, people or events".

English as a Foreign Language (EFL): according to Brown (2000), EFL is a generic term for English that is learned as a foreign language in a context or country in which English is not commonly used as a language of business, education or government, expanding circle countries (p.323).

Chapter 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Presentation

This chapter starts with giving some definitions of language transfer and elaborates the types of language transfer. Then, it talks about contrastive analysis and its two types: the strong version, and the weak version. After that, it explains error analysis and its objectives. The final section of this chapter discusses various studies that were conducted to investigate the problems that Arab EFL learners encounter when they deal with English prepositions in general, and with spatial prepositions in particular.

2.2 Language Transfer

According to the behaviorists, transfer is viewed in terms of habit formation. That is, habits of L1 are carried over into L2. Lado (1957) clarifies this by assuming that people transfer the forms and meanings of their native language to the foreign language when attempting to speak the language.

According to Corder (1975), if the L1 pattern and L2 one are identical, the learner could learn L2 easily through positive transfer. However, when the two patterns are different, errors occur as a result of negative transfer. Another definition of transfer is proposed by Ellis (1965) in which he describes transfer as 'the influence of language A on language B' (cited in Adel, 2010: 26).

Gass and Selinker (1983) assume that language transfer refers to a cognitive strategy that an L2 learner employs when approaching a task of second language learning. Almahammed (2016) reviews the definition given by Istvan (2000) who defined transfer as "any kind of movement or influence of concepts, knowledge, skills, or linguistic elements in either direction between the L1 and subsequent languages". Recently, Gass and Selinker (2008) had proposed a definition of language transfer as " the use of the first language" (or other languages known) in a second language context.

These definitions given by behaviorists had been criticized by other linguists. For example, Odlin (1989) criticized the idea that considered transfer as a result of habit formation, stating that "transfer is not simply a consequence of habit formation". In addition, he says that L2 acquisition does not lead to alteration of L1 forms, whereas in the behaviorist view the concept of language transfer involves extension of L1 habits. Odlin (1989) rejects employing the term interference in referring to language transfer since interference means no more than negative transfer, which stems from differences between L1 and L2, causing difficulties to L2 learners. However, transfer can be positive and facilitate learning L2 when there are correspondences between the forms of L1 and L2.

2.2.1 Types of Transfer

This section discusses four types of transfer which are: positive transfer, negative transfer, avoidance, and overgeneralization.

2.2.1.1 Positive Transfer

It is the process where a specific linguistic feature of L1 helps in the acquisition of same feature in L2. Selinker (1983) defines positive transfer as the process

that happens every time as long as the similarities between any couple of entities in both of the languages exist. These entities perform as a kind of parallel control in the two languages (Dera, 1994). Allen and Corder (1975) maintain that "positive transfer helps new leaning, for example, it is easy to learn to pronounce aspirated voice less stops". Positive transfer arises from cross-linguistic similarities between the forms of L1 and L2 (Alamahammed, 2016). Positive transfer helps in L2 acquisition. This happens when L1 and L2 are similar in vocabulary, for instance, which minimizes the time required to enhance L2 reading comprehension skills. Also, when L1 and L2 are similar in phonological system, writing system, and grammar, they give L2 speakers good start in the structures acquisition. Therefore, prior language knowledge is very helpful in learning new language. Odlin (1989) contends that if the differences between L1 and L2 are few, they will be helpful and positive in learning L2. Yule (2006) agrees with this and suggests that similarities between L1 and L2 may facilitate the progress of learning L2 rules and the application.

2.2.1.2 Negative Transfer

It is the transfer of a linguistic skill of NL which has a negative influence on the use of a similar linguistic skill in TL because of the differences between the two languages.

Some linguists, like Weinreich (1953), refer to negative transfer as interference. Further, Weinreich (1953) contrasts the phenomenon of interference to positive transfer assuming that positive transfer occurs when the linguistic phenomena are similar in form, meaning and distribution. Whereas interference is the term used

to describe the dissimilarities between two languages which involve difficulties in the acquisition because of the difference in two structures.

So, this phenomenon is equated with difficulty in L2 learning as an outcome of differences of the structures of the two languages (Asma, 2010). Moreover, Talebi (2014) states that negative transfer occurs if the two languages are different.

2.2.1.3 Avoidance

This strategy occurs when L2 learners aim to avoid using linguistic structures that are different from their L1. Scholars like Corder (1983), and Faerch and Kasper (1983) state that this "semantic avoidance" happens when learners cannot find the exact word or term, so they use a general expression to convey the intended meaning. However, this meaning might not be in the overall sense.

An example of avoidance is found in Schachter's (1974) study in which she examined the use of English relative clauses by Chinese, Japanese, Persian, and Arab students. The author found that Chinese and Japanese students produced few errors in using English relative clauses. This is not because of the fact that the placement of relative clauses in Chinese and Japanese are different from their placement in English. However, it is simply because Chinese and Japanese students produced much lower English relative clauses comparing them with Arab and Persian students. Schachter (1974) suggests that Chinese and Japanese students avoided producing English relative clauses because of the difference between their languages and English.

2.2.1.4 Overgeneralization

It happens when students prefer to use certain L2 forms, rules or words as a result of under production of some difficult structures. A definition of overgeneralization is given by Selinker (1972) who states that overgeneralization is a learning strategy in which the learner extends SL rules to inapplicable contexts. Also, Brown (1987) claims that overgeneralization involves the wrong application of the learned second language material in the past to a present second language context. Moreover, White (1992) states that:

> Learnability theory claims that acquisition can proceed when positive evidence is available but that it is problematic where the learner makes certain kinds of overgeneralizations requiring negative evidence. Applying L1 parameter settings to the L2 in certain cases lead to such overgeneralizations.

Another definition is given by Al-Hassan (2013) in which he states that overgeneralization is associated with redundancy reduction. It may be as a result of the learner reducing his linguistic burden.

2.3 Contrastive Analysis

In the field of second language acquisition (SLA), "contrastive analysis" (CA) is the systematic study of a pair of languages with a view to identifying their structural differences and similarities (Terdjat, 2012). Lado (1957) claims that cross-linguistic differences in second language learning could be determined through contrastive analysis.

According to Brown (2000), "contrastive analysis claims that the principal barrier to second language acquisition is the interference of the first language system with the second language system" (p.219).

2.3.1 The Strong Version

It suggests that L2 learning problems could happen because of the linguistic differences between L1 and L2. Schachter (1979) states that contrastive analysis is considered to be the point by point analysis of the linguistic systems of the two languages. Through the comparison of these linguistic systems of L1 and L2, the similarities and differences between the two given languages could be discovered and analyzed by researchers. Wardhaugh (1970) adds that "strong version arises from evidence from the availability of some kind of metatheory of contrastive analysis" (p.1).

So, the strong version reveals that: if there are linguistic differences between L1 and L2, the chance of learning problems will increase. That is, linguistic differences raise the possibility of interference. During the absence of linguistic differences, the chance of L2 learning problems will decrease. Therefore, absence of differences facilitates L2 learning.

2.3.2 The Weak Version

Wardhaugh (1970) views the weak version as a model with a posteriori explanatory power. Further, Wardhaugh (1970) adds that weak version has certain possibilities for usefulness, whereas the strong version is quite unrealistic and impracticable. Therefore, based on this model of CA, linguists can look at the errors and offer explanations once these errors have been committed. For example, after analyzing large groups of errors, Duskova (1969) concluded that it might be said that while the interference from the native language plays a role, it is not the individual factor that causes the strategy of interference. In addition, Nickel (1971) expresses that not all the mistakes made by learners are due to interference from the mother tongue. According to Wardhaugh (1970), "the weak

version requires of the linguist only that he use the best linguistic knowledge available to him in order to account for observed difficulties in second language learning" (p. 7).

2.4 Error Analysis

Error analysis (EA) is an approach investigates the errors that are committed by language learners. It is generally known as the systematic investigation of the errors that happen when a learner speaks the L2. It is set out to determine if errors could best be explained as the product of L1 transfer or of creative instruction. According to Corder (1981), error analysis 'deals with the investigation of the errors of second language learners' (p. 14).

Errors can be interlingual or intralingual. For interlingual errors, they occur when L1 habits prevent and interfere the learners from acquiring patterns in the TL. However, intralingual errors occur when the wrong items (Richards, 1974) do not reflect the structure of the mother tongue, but based on special exposure to the target language. Errors can be developmental as well. Richards (1974) says that this kind of errors reflect the learner's competence at one stage of language learning continuum.

Corder (1973) claims that there are two objectives of error analysis: theoretical, and applied. The theoretical objective checks the validity of theories (i.e. the psycholinguistic theory of transfer). Whereas the applied object investigates the pedagogical purposes.

2.5 Previous Studies about Prepositions Between English and Arabic

Rahman (1990) explored the type and cause of errors made by Iraqi EFL learners in using English spatial prepositions. The author used a test which included three parts: fill-in-the-blank part, multiple choice part, and a prepositions translation part. The aim behind the third part as Rahman (1990) states is to test how far the interference phenomenon affects the Iraqi students during the translation of Arabic prepositions to their counterparts of English. About 944 students whose ages ranged between 17 and 30 participated in the test. The study found that Iraqi students answered about 33% correctly, whereas about 67% of the total responses were incorrect. The author concluded that native language interference plays an important role in using English spatial prepositions in the wrong way. Rahman (1990) adds that when students deal with translation, they think of their NL, and this makes them think of direct equivalents.

In another study, Dera (1994) examined the performance in using English spatial preposition by Saudi students. The participants of the study were 83 students who were all studying in the English Language Department in Saudi Arabia. The author used five tests to collect data which are: fill-in-the-blank test; picture incomplete sentence test; a translation test from English to Arabic; a translation test from Arabic to English; and a composition test. The results of the study indicate that 48% of errors committed by Saudi learners in using English spatial prepositions are due to the influence of their first language (L1).

In 1982, Habash investigated the causes of the errors in using English prepositions that encountered Palestinian students. Using a multiple-choice test containing 100 items to test 120 students at the age of 14, Habash (1982) found that errors are made because of the interference of the mother tongue. The most

frequent type of errors found by Habash (1982) was substitution. Also, he concluded that the false application and ignorance of L2 rules were the major learning problems.

 One of the studies that are concerned with investigating the grammatical errors committed by Arab learners was conducted in Tunisia by Hamdi (2005). After tenses and morphology, prepositions were the third problematic feature to acquire by Tunisian learners by 20%. Hamdi (2005) reported that omission and misuse are most frequently found in the learners' errors.

Investigating the prepositions at, in, on, between and among, Adel (2010) targeted the third year students of English in Mentouri University-Costantine, Algeria. The author attempted to shed the light on the factors that lie behind the making errors in using the prepositions of English Arab learners of English. Two exercises in the form of fill-in-the-blank were used for data collection. Adel (2010) found that the examined prepositions represent a problematic issue for Arab EFL students. He assumes that; students face difficulties when they use these prepositions because they think in their L1; tend to transfer; and try to link the prepositions of English to Arabic similar ones. However, this cannot be always true because there are prepositions confined only to one language.

In Iraq, Al-bayati (2013) analysed the errors made by EFL undergraduates in using 30 prepositions. The researcher found that "Because they depend heavily on their L1, Arab EFL students make many interlingual errors" (Al-bayati, 2013, p.54). Al-bayati (2013) adds that there are two particular difficulties for Arabic native speakers in using English prepositions: (1) An Arabic preposition is

equivalent to more than on English preposition, and (2) interference from the native language is related directly to the problem of literal translation from Arabic into English.

Investigating the problem of translating at, in, and on from English into Arabic, Almaflehi & Al Yaari (2013) examined 50 Saudi EFL students in translating 20 sentences and phrases about the three English prepositions into Arabic. Concentrating on the spatial use for these prepositions, the authors found that students committed many errors in using the target prepositions.

Al-Hassan (2013) states that prepositions pose a great difficulty for an EFL learner because there are many prepositions in English which have the same function. As a result, when learners do not feel sure which preposition to use in a certain sentence, they often compare that sentence with its Arabic equivalent, giving a literal translation of that Arabic preposition in English.

To investigate the grammatical competence for Moroccan university students, Bouziane and Harrizi (2014) used Swan and Baker's Grammar Scan Expert tests to 73 students from Faculty of letters and Humanities Ben M'sik Hassan II University. In their academic level, these students attended three-hour grammar classes for 4 semesters. Also, these students studies English for at least three years in high school. However, the students studied two other languages before taking English. These two language are Standard Arabic and French. In both languages, the input was provided from a purely explicit grammar teaching perspective. The results of the diagnostics test shown that Moroccan students encounter problems when they use English prepositions.

In another study conducted to explore the common problems that translation students encounter in writing in Saudi Arabia, Younes and Albalawi (2015) reported that using prepositions was the second grammatical problem after using tenses. Omission of prepositions was 53% of the total errors committed by Saudi students, whereas addition was 17%, and misuse of prepositions was about 30%. The authors state that "Arab students as EFL learners usually try to relate the use of English prepositions to their mother tongue(MT) prepositional system" (p. 13).

Naser (2015) as well, analysed the spoken errors made by EFL students in Iraq at the university level. 40 students who study at the department of English were under investigation. The tool that Naser (2015) used was an audio-recording for lectures in a course of linguistics. Regarding the prepositional errors, Naser (2015) said that EFL learners are not sure of the semantic scope of certain prepositions. The researcher justifies the issue of the prepositions due to the interference from their native language where the mental representation of spatial representation in a given scene is different between Arabic and English. In this study, omission and abundance are the most obvious errors found in Saudi students' spoken form of English.

In 2010, Tahaineh conducted a study to analyze errors committed by Jordanian EFL students in using prepositions. The 162 students were at the university level from first year to third year. The data derived from free compositions revealed that mother tongue influence is a major source of errors for EFL learners with a proportion of 58%. In addition, transfer strategies are considered the second source of errors by 42%. Errors of substitution of prepositions were notably high (78%). As for the errors of addition of addition, the results showed that 15% of

the errors were about addition. The least type of errors in using prepositions was omission. The analysis revealed that 7%= 153 prepositions were omitted from places where they were needed.

Pedagogically, Tahaineh (2010) adds some implications about how teachers can enhance the learners' knowledge about prepositions, Lightbown Spada (1990) state that "learners' errors will enable teachers to infer the nature of the learner's knowledge of the prepositions at a given stage in his learning career and discover what he still has to learn" (as cited in Tahaineh, 2010, p. 97).

 Asma (2010) investigated the problem of transfer of simple prepositions from standard Arabic into English by 30 University Algerian students who study English as a foreign language. The results of the test showed that students do not only transfer from standard Arabic into English, but from French as well.

Sawalmeh (2013) analyzed errors of written English essays for a preparatory year program in Saudi Arabia. According to the results, a great majority of the participants demonstrated confusion for the right usage of prepositions.

In another study undertaken by Almahammed (2016), the acquisition of English preposition by Jordanian EFL learners was under investigation. The main aim of the study was to see whether negative Arabic transfer affects in the acquisition of English prepositions. The author used three data collection tools which are: Fill-in-the-blank-test, grammaticality judgement and correction task, and cloze test. The students who participated in the study were 355 selected from ten Jordanian universities. Almahammed (2016) found that about 35.2% of the errors in using

prepositions are resulted from negative Arabic transfer. Intralingual interference took part in this study as well, since 64.8% of the errors were caused by intralingual interference.

Alkhotaba (2012) examined the Arab postgraduate students at USM (University Sains Malaysia). The researcher found that Arabs committed varied kinds of errors in the use of prepositions. A major error that was repeatedly noted was the substitution. Alkhotaba (2012) assumes that such an error "relates basically to native language interference or the learners' knowledge inadequacy of the target language, or even the multiple meanings and functions of English prepositions" (p. 279).

Terdjat (2012) investigated the problems encountered by 50 second year university students in an Algerian university. The investigation was concerned with the prepositions in, on and at. By using a diagnostic test as a tool for data collection, Terdjat (2012) found that those three prepositions represent a remarkable problematic issue for Arab EFL learners. The author adds that Arab EFL learners do not have a good knowledge about the particular prepositions. Terdjat (2012) concludes that students think of relating each preposition of English to an Arabic similar one and this drives them to commit errors and use negative transfer.

Alshammari (2017) examined the spatial acquisition and use of the English prepositions in, on, and at by 42 Saudi ESL learners through an experiment. The participants were divided into two groups: twenty one for the first group, who started learning English before the age of ten; and twenty one for the second

group, who started learning English after the age of fifteen. Alshammari (2017) related the age of starting learning English with the accuracy in using the spatial prepositions in, on, and at. Also, she put into account factors like semantic boundaries, transfer phenomena, and frequency of usage. The results show that when the two languages conceptualize the same locative relation differently, more errors are expected to appear.

In Sudan, Mubarak (2017) analyzed the various problems Sudanese students face while learning and comprehending English prepositions. The results indicated that the difficulties in using English prepositions by Sudanese students are due to the mono-morphemic form, which means prepositions are not derived from other words. Moreover, Mubarak (2017) states that the many functions of prepositions in English language take part in the complications which arise while learners learn how to use prepositions.

In their study, Al-Shujairi and Tan (2017) focused on the written challenges that Iraqi pre-university students face. Concentrating on prepositions, the authors found that the substitution is the most common error. Most of the substitution errors were due to the mother tongue interference.

Abdallah (2017) investigated the difficulties encountering 30 MA students of linguistics in using prepositions in a written text at Sudan University of Science and Technology. A test was selected to be the tool of data collection. The researcher found that Sudanese MA students face difficulties when using prepositions, MA students cannot differentiate between various types of

prepositions, and MA students are not able to use prepositions in a written text correctly which affect the text cohesion.

Alotaibi, Wu, and Alrabah (2018) investigated the challenges in learning English prepositions by Kuwaiti EFL learners. The sample of the study was 80 students who study at the Public Authority of Applied Education and training (PAAET). 40 participants were from College of Business Studies (CBS) (B.A Degree), and the other 40 students were from College of Business Studies (CBS) (Diploma Degree). The authors used a multiple choice test as an instrument for data collection. Alotaibi et al.(2018) concluded that Kuwaiti EFL learners encounter some difficulties in the awareness of prepositions in English. In addition, both groups experience difficulties with English prepositions. The authors add that L1 interference is the most noticeable factor that causes such difficulties. Also, the difficulty in acquiring new L2 patterns when they do not have equivalent in the L1 is another factor in causing such challenges.

Hawamdeh (2019) examined the use of prepositions by Arab students who study at Aligarh Muslim University in India. Hawamdeh (2019) used two Cloze tests to collect data. The results showed that participants have difficulties in applying proper prepositions for place, time, and directions. The difficulties were found in the process of substitution, addition and omission of prepositions.

Shakir and Yaseen (2015) examined the acquisition of English prepositions among 20 Iraqi secondary school students. The authors checked the answers to the given test to investigate the prepositions that are problematic to Iraqi students. The dominance of the mother tongue on English language was the main

reason for all errors. In addition, it was found that Iraqi EFL learners tend to use, in a subconscious manner, their mother tongue's grammatical structures on English language.

2.6 Summary

This chapter explored the some definitions of language transfer. Then it classified the four types of language transfer which are: positive transfer, negative transfer, avoidance, and overgeneralization.

In the second section of this chapter, the researcher reviewed some theories about contrastive analysis and its types: strong version, and weak version. Further, the chapter presents some information about error analysis and its objectives.

The last section of this chapter overviewed various studies about the problems of using English spatial prepositions. These studies were from different contexts in which the participants use Arabic language as an L1. However, it should be mentioned that no study have been found investigating the errors that Arab EFL learners encounter when using English prepositions of place in the context of North Cyprus.

Chapter 3

METHODOLOGY

3.1 Presentation

This chapter describes the methodology used for this research. It starts with describing the design of the research and the questions addressed by the study. After that, it gives some information about the context and the participants of the study. The next section talks about the instrument used for data collection and the procedures followed to do that. Finally, the chapter explains the data analysis procedure.

3.2 Research Design

This study aims at investigating the problems that Arabic native speakers at English Preparatory School of Eastern Mediterranean University have when they deal with English spatial prepositions. In addition, the study intends to explore the role of Arabic language in the acquisition of the spatial prepositions of English.

In this qualitative case study the researcher used a test combining two parts to collect data. The first part is a fill-in-the-blank test involving thirty sentences, each sentence with a missing preposition. And the other part is a picture incomplete sentence question which involves twenty sentences with a missing preposition in each one.

The study investigates ten English spatial prepositions which are: at, on, in, above, below, under, among, between, behind and in front of. According to Dera (1994), these prepositions cause considerable difficulties in their usage to Arab EFL learners.

3.3 Research Questions

The study aims to know the problems that Arabic native speakers have when dealing with English spatial prepositions and aims at knowing the role of Arabic language in the acquisition of those prepositions. The study focuses on the questions below:

1- What are the most common errors in prepositions of place that are committed by Arab learners of English?

2- What is the role of the Arabic language in acquiring English prepositions of place?

3.4 The Context of Study

This study was conducted at Foreign Languages and English Preparatory School, Eastern Mediterranean University. At the Preparatory School, students sit EMU FLEPS English Proficiency Exam Stage 1. Then, students are required to do the EMU FLEPS English Proficiency Exam Stage 2 if they are placed at the highest level in stage 1. The level of the student is determined according to the 2nd stage of the exam. If a student gets less than 50% (departments of psychology, translation and interpretation, and foreign language education require minimum 60%, and departments of medicine, pharmacy, and dentistry require minimum 70%), then s/he will take ENGL 161 and ENGL 162 courses, that is, (A1/2) levels. ENGL 161 is a 1st semester, 1st year English language course, that is designed to help students improve the level of English to halfway towards A1

level. In this course, students are introduced to the English language. Also, this course aims to develop listening, speaking, reading and writing skills. As for ENGL 162, it is a 2nd semester, 1st year English language course, which is designed to help students improve the level of their English to A1 level. ENGL 162 aims to develop the four skills in academic settings.

For those students who get minimum 50% (departments of psychology, translation and interpretation, and foreign language education require 60%, and departments of medicine, pharmacy, and dentistry require 70% minimum), they take ENGL 191 and ENGL 192 courses, that is, (B1/2) levels. ENGL 191 is a freshman academic English course which is taken in the 1st semester, 1st year. It is expected to help students improve their English to B1 level. The course focuses on the development of productive skills (writing and speaking) and the receptive skill (reading) in academic settings. In the 2nd semester of the first year, the students study the freshman academic English course ENGL 192. This course is designed to help students improve their English to B2 level. ENGL 192 course aims to reconsolidate and develop the awareness and knowledge of the students about the academic discourse, critical thinking, and language structures. The incorporation of the use of the technologies that promote self-study and Microsoft computer skills is another aim of the course. The focus of ENGL 192 is on reading, writing, listening, and speaking. In addition, the course focuses on introducing documentation and presentation skills in academic settings.

3.5 Participants

The present study consisted of 72 Arabic native speakers who study at the Preparatory School of Eastern Mediterranean University. 48 of those participants

were males and 24 were females. The ages of the participants ranged between 18 and 21.

The participants were from different Arabic countries which are Libya, Yemen, Egypt, Bahrain, Jordan, Syria, Iraq, Palestine, and Morocco. The table below presents the number of the participants from each country.

Table 3.1: The number of the participants from each country

Country	Number
Libya	13
Yemen	10
Egypt	5
Bahrain	1
Jordan	17
Syria	7
Iraq	2
Palestine	11
Morocco	6
Total	**72**

The participants were from four different levels. The table below shows the number of the participants from each level:

Table 3.1: Levels of the participants of the study

Level	A1	A2	B1	B2
Number	**18**	**21**	**17**	**16**

3.6 Data Collection Instrument

The instrument used for this research was a test combining of two parts. The first part was a fill-in-the-blank question (FTB), and the second part was a picture incomplete sentence/ picture test (PT). The test was adopted from Dera's (1994) study, who tested the performance of the Arabic native speakers in using English spatial prepositions. See Appendix A.

The first question of the test consists of 30 incomplete-sentences, which means three questions for every preposition. Whereas the second question had 20 picture- incomplete sentences, two questions for each preposition.

Before the test, there was a background questionnaire in which the participants had to answer about their nationality, gender, age, and the level that they are studying at.

3.7 Data Collection Procedure

After taking the permission from the administration of the Preparatory School, the researcher had a list of the Arabic students who study at the Preparatory school. The classrooms that Arab learners exist in were also mentioned in the list. Then, the researcher started visiting the classes on the 15th of May, 2018 during the spring semester. By the beginning of the class, the researcher asked the instructors of the classes to take some of the class time to distribute the test to the Arabic native speaker students. The teachers then checked the list which contains the names of Arabs in the class and explained to them that they are to participate in a study. Some of the students agreed on doing the test and others

did not. Also, some of the instructors claimed that they need the time of the class and cannot ask the students to participate.

During break times, the researcher asked Arab native speaking students to apply for the test in some empty classrooms. The procedures were under the observation of the researcher. The total time that students consumed in doing the test ranged between 20 and 30 minutes. All the participants voluntarily participated in the study and the researcher assured the participants that their identities will not be shown to anyone except the researcher. The last day for data collection was on 24th of May, 2018.

3.8 Data Analysis

The data of this study were qualitatively analyzed. The researcher checked the answers of the participants and made a list of the wrong uses of each preposition. Every preposition had 360 possible answers, (72 participants × 5 questions for each preposition = 360), so the percentage of the wrong use of each preposition was calculated according to the equation (the number of the wrong use × 100 ÷ 360).

3.9 Summary

This chapter started with explaining the research design of the current study. Then it addressed the research questions. The next section described the context of the study and the participants. After that, the information about the instrument of data collection, data collection procedure, and data analysis procedure were provided.

Chapter 4

RESULTS

4.1 Presentation

This chapter presents the results of the study based on the answers of the two research questions presented in the study.

4.2 Research Question1

What are the most common errors in spatial prepositions that are committed by Arab learners of English? According to the results of the two tests, substitution is used to much by Arab learners. Also, learners let some questions with no answer.

4.2.1 The Results of the Preposition "*Above*"

Table 4.1 shows that the preposition of place 'above' is problematic to use by Arab EFL learners. About 50% of the total answers were wrong. The table below indicates the number and the percentage of wrong uses for the preposition 'above'.

Table 4.1: The use of the spatial preposition 'above'

Wrong use	Number	Percentage
Among	29	8%
Between	10	3%
In front of	5	1%
Space	35	9%
Below	10	3%
In	24	7%
On	19	5%
Under	36	10%
At	14	4%
Correct use	178	49%

Total	360	100%

The participants misused 9 prepositions instead of 'Above'. Also, participants left the questions with no answer in 9% of the total answers times. The preposition 'under' was used instead of 'above' in 10% of the total answers, which is the most misused preposition. In item 2 of (FTB) question for example, the participants misused the preposition 'under' 9 times. In addition, item 10 in (PT) was most problematic for the learners. Only 18% of the total responses regarding this item were correct.

The preposition 'among' was the second mostly misused preposition with a proportion of 8% of the total responses. Prepositions like 'between', 'in front of', 'below', 'in', 'on', and 'at' were also found in the students' answers. The percentage of using these prepositions ranged between 1% and 7%. Totally, out of 360 possible answers, 182 answers were wrong.

4.2.2 The Results of the Preposition *"Among"*

The table below indicates the results of the preposition 'among'. About 58% of the participants' answers were wrong. The total number of the errors that Arab EFL learners committed was 210. Table 4.2 shows these uses of the prepositions instead of 'among'.

Table 4.2: The use of the spatial preposition 'among'

Wrong use	Number	Percentage
At	19	5%
In	29	8%
Space	39	11%
Go	1	0.2%

Behind	35	10%
On	10	3%
In front of	5	1%
Between	48	13%
With	24	7%
Correct use	150	41.6%
Total	**360**	**100%**

Obviously, the preposition 'between' is the most used one by Arab English learners by 13% of the total answers. In some items like (FTB 13), the preposition 'between' was found 13 times. Also, item 26 (FTB) was difficult to answer, Arab EFL learners used 'between' instead of 'among' 2.5% of the total answers. In addition, 'behind' was found 35 times in the students' answers. In item 6 (PT), students used 'behind' 17 times which equals 4.7% of the total answers about the answers related to the preposition 'among'.

Also, the prepositions 'in' and 'on' were used 8% for the former and 3% for the latter. Further, the participants used the preposition 'with' 7% of the total answers. All of these 24 uses of "with" were found in the "picture incomplete sentence" part 15 times in item 6, and 9 times in item 17. Moreover, 11% of the answers were empty. The preposition 'among' was also substituted by the preposition 'at' 5%, and by the preposition 'in front of' 1%.

4.2.3 The Results of the Preposition *"At"*

The analysis of the results of the preposition 'at' shows that 61.5% of the total answers were wrong. Table 4.3 introduces the statistical analysis of the errors that were made by the participants.

Table 4.3: The use of the spatial preposition 'at'

Wrong use	Number	Percentage
In	120	33.33
On	48	13.33
Behind	44	12.22
Space	10	3
Correct Use	138	38.3
Total	**360**	**100%**

As the table presents, three prepositions were misused instead of 'at'. The preposition of place 'in' was the most used preposition by 33.33%. In item 1 (FTB) part for example, the preposition 'in' was used 37 times representing 30.8% of the total wrong misuses. In item 9 (FTB) part as well, the participants used the preposition 'on' 29 times. about 86% of the usages regarding the preposition 'behind' are found in item 16 (FTB) part, and item 7 (PT) part. This might be due to the literal translation of both of the sentences. Finally, the participants did not give any answer for the questions about the preposition 'at' 10 times.

4.2.4 The Results of the Preposition *"Behind"*

The results of the preposition of place 'behind' are listed in the table 4.4 below. According to the table, the total percentage of the wrong answers was 45%. The participants in this study substituted the preposition 'behind' by other 8 spatial prepositions.

Table 4.4: The use of the spatial preposition 'behind'

Wrong use	Number	Percentage
On	44	12.2%
Above	10	2.7%
In	15	4.16%
In front of	10	2.7%
At	29	8.05%
Among	5	1.3%
Between	44	12.2%
Before	5	1.3%
Correct use	**198**	55%
Total	**360**	**100%**

The prepositions 'on' and 'between' have the highest percentage of the wrong

answers by 12.2 % for each. The preposition 'on' for instance, was used instead

of 'behind' in item 27 (FTB) in 634% of the total responses regarding this item.

However, the usage of 'between' is mostly found in (PT) items (4, 12). Next, the

participants misused the preposition 'at' which was used 8% of the total

responses. The following misused preposition of place was 'in' which was used

4.16%.

Also, the prepositions 'above' and 'in front of' share the same percentage of the

wrong answers by 2.7% for each one. The preposition 'among' was used in 1.3%

of the total responses. Moreover, the preposition 'before' have the same

proportion like 'among' although it was not under investigation in both of the questions. The 5 usages of 'before' are found in (PT) test.

4.2.5 The Results of the Preposition *"Below"*

The statistical analysis of the wrong answers about the spatial preposition 'below' is listed below. Table 4.5 shows the details of these wrong answers.

Table 4.5: The use of the spatial preposition 'below'

Wrong use	Number	Percentage
Under	66	18.3%
Above	10	2.7%
On	18	5%
At	13	3.6%
In front of	10	2.7%
Space	5	1.3%
With	13	3.6%
Among	5	1.3%
Between	5	1.3
Correct use	215	59.7
Total	**360**	**100%**

As the table presents above, the preposition 'under' is the most misused spatial preposition instead of 'below' by 18%. 'Under' was used in item 8 (FTB) 27 times representing 37.5% of the total usages. The preposition 'on' was also misused 5% by the participants. 12% of the usages of 'on' were in item 30 (FTB). In addition, each of the prepositions 'at' and 'with' were used 3.6% of the total answers.

Furthermore, the participants wrongly used the preposition 'above' 2.7% and the same percentage of wrong answers applies for the preposition of place 'in front of'.

The prepositions 'among' and 'between' were found in the students' answers with the same number of wrong usages. Similarly, the empty answer for the questions about the preposition 'below' was repeated 5 times. The total percentage of the wrong answers about the preposition 'below' was 39.8%.

4.2.6 The Results of the Preposition *"Between"*

Table 4.6 below shows the statistical analysis of the preposition of place 'between'. Out of 360 answers about this preposition, 130 were wrong.

Table 4.6: The use of the spatial preposition 'between'

Wrong use	Number	Percentage
On	18	5%
Space	13	3.6%
Among	35	9.7%
In	35	9.7%
At	5	1.3%
Behind	18	5%
In front of	5	1.3%
Next to	1	0.2%
Correct use	230	63.8%
Total	**360**	**100%**

The table above shows that the preposition 'between' was substituted by 'among' and 'in' 9.7% for each. The usage of the preposition 'among' can be attributed to the similarity of meaning of 'between' and 'among' in Arabic. In item 15 (FTB)

part for instance, the 13 respondents used the preposition 'among' instead of 'between'. Also, item 19 (FTB) received 8 usages of the preposition 'among'. 'Behind' and 'on' have also the same number of wrong use by 5% for each one. The preposition 'behind' was used in 7 responses for item 19 (FTB) part. Also, it was used in 11 responses in item 15 (PT). Leaving the questions about the preposition 'between' without an answer was found in 3.6% of the total answers. Also, the prepositions 'at' and 'in front of' share the same percentage of wrong usages by 1.3%. The preposition 'next to' existed in the participants' answers 1 time in item 18 (PT) part.

4.2.7 The Results of the Preposition *"In front of"*

Table 4.7 lists the results about the spatial preposition 'in front of'. The total number of the errors that were committed regarding this preposition is 100.

Table 4.7: The use of the spatial preposition 'in front of'

Wrong use	Number	Percentage
At	13	3.6%
In	18	5%
On	10	2.7%
Behind	13	3.6%
Among	5	1.3%
Space	26	7.2%
With	5	1.3%
Below	5	1.3%
Before	5	1.3%
Correct use	260	72.2%
Total	**360**	**100%**

The preposition 'in' was used instead of 'in front of' by proportion of 5%. The 18 usages of 'in' are found in the five questions related to 'in front of', which are items (6, 14, 29 in FTB part) and items (2 and 16 in PT part). As for the prepositions 'at' and 'behind', each one was repeated 3.6%. Also, the preposition 'on' was misused with a percentage of 2.7%.

The prepositions 'among', 'with', 'below', and 'before' are among the prepositions that the participants used with the same percentage (1.3%). However, the empty answer scored the highest number with a percentage of 7.2%.

4.2.8 The Results of the Preposition *"In"*

Below, the results of the preposition ' in' are indicated. About 42% of the total answers were wrong. Table 4.8 lists these errors.

Table 4.8: The use of the spatial preposition 'in'

Wrong use	Number	Percentage
On	114	31.6%
Above	10	3%
Behind	5	1.3%
At	5	1.3%
To	5	1.3%
Among	5	1.3%
Space	10	2.7%
Correct use	206	57.2
Total	**360**	**100%**

According to table 4.8, Arab EFL learners have a difficulty in the differentiation between the two spatial prepositions 'on' and 'in'. The total percentage of the wrong answers about the preposition 'in' is about 43%. Out of this 43%, 31% of the wrong answers was for 'on'. In item 4 (FTB), for example, the preposition 'on' was found in 23.6% of the total usages. Also, 'on' is found in item 7 (FTB) part 11.4%, and in item 19 (FTB) part 2.5%. In item 11 (PT) part, the preposition 'on' exists in 35% of the total usages and it exists in item 20 (PT) part 27.5%.

Then the preposition 'above' comes, which was misused in 3% of the total responses. All of 'above' usages are found in item 11 (PT) part. The same number applies for the empty answers was obtained from the participants' responses. The four prepositions 'behind' 'at' 'to' and 'among' were misused 5 times for each.

4.2.9 The Results of the Preposition *"On"*

The results of the preposition 'on' show that 26% of the total answers were wrong. More statistical descriptions about this preposition are found in the table below.

Table 4.9: The use of the spatial preposition 'on'

Wrong use	Number	Percentage
In front of	10	2.7%
Between	5	1.3%
At	13	3.6%
Above	10	2.7%
Space	22	6.1%
In	26	7.2%
Under	5	1.3%
Behind	5	1.3%
Correct use	264	73.3%

Total	360	100%

Table 4.9 shows that the preposition 'in' was the most used one instead of 'on' by 7.2%. In item 3 (FTB) part for instance, the participants used 'in' instead of 'on' in 7 responses representing 26.9% of the total usages. Also, the preposition 'in' exists in item 1 (PT) 42%.

The empty answer was found in 6.1%. In addition, the preposition 'at' was repeated by the participants 3.6%. The prepositions 'in front of' and 'above' share the same number of the wrong usage by 2.7% for each. Also, the table shows that the three prepositions 'between', 'under', and 'behind' were misused 1.3% for each individual preposition.

4.2.10 The Results of the Preposition *"Under"*

Table 4.10 shows the results related to the preposition of place 'under'. In the current study, the total percentage of the wrong answers in using this preposition is 43.2%. The table below provides the details of these errors.

Table 4.10: The use of the preposition 'under'

Wrong use	Number	Percentage
Below	31	8.6%
To	3	0.8%
Between	10	2.7%
On	44	12.2%
Space	26	7.2%
Above	5	1.3%

Behind	22	6.1%
By	1	0.2%
In	6	1.6%
In front of	9	2.5%
Correct use	203	63%
Total	**360**	**100%**

The preposition 'on' is used instead of 'under' 12.2%, which is the highest percentage. The students used 'on' instead of 'under' in item 22 (FTB) part 27 times representing 61% of the total usages. Furthermore, 'in' was used in item 12 (FTB) part 9 times.

The second mostly used preposition is 'below' which was used 31 times. The empty answer was also found in the participants' responses with a proportion of 7.2%. The following high misuse goes for the preposition 'behind' which takes 6.1% of the total wrong answers. The prepositions 'between' and 'in front of' were also found 2.7% for the former and 2.5% for the latter. Also, the participants used the prepositions 'in', 'above', 'to' and 'by' 1.6%, 1.3%, 0.8%, and 0.2% respectively.

After knowing the errors that are committed by Arab EFL learners, the next section discusses the second question of the research which is concerned with the role of the Arabic language in producing such errors.

4.3 Research Question 2

What is the role of the Arabic language in acquiring English spatial prepositions?

4.3.1 Negative Transfer

According to the linguists, negative transfer occurs when a linguistic skill from the native language, which has a negative influence in the use of a similar skill in the target language, is transferred.

In the two tests, negative transfer was employed by the participants. For example, the prepositions 'below' and 'under' have the same translation in Arabic, so students could not distinguish which one to use. Instead of using 'below', the participants wrongly used 'under' 18.3% of the total errors. Vice versa, in the questions related to the preposition 'under', 8.6% of the answers were 'below'.

Similarly, in Arabic, the prepositions 'between' and 'among' have the same meaning. Therefore, it was found that 13% of the answers related to the preposition 'among' were 'between', and 9.7% of the total answers related to the preposition 'between' were 'among'. According to Rahman (1990), language interference plays an important role in using English spatial prepositions wrongly. Also, Dera (1994) and Habash (1982) found that interference of the mother tongue occurs repeatedly. Al-bayati (2013) assumes that Arab EFL learners make many interlingual errors because they depend too much on their L1.

The prepositions "in, on, and at" represent a very problematic issue for Arab learners as well. The participants misused each of these prepositions. For instance, in the questions about the preposition 'at', 33.3% of the answers were 'in', whereas the preposition 'on' was used 13.3%. Furthermore, the preposition 'on' was used instead of 'in' 31.6%. But the percentage of using the 'at' instead of

'in' was only 1.3%. Taking a look at the prepositions used instead of 'on', the preposition 'in' has the highest percentage by 7.2% and the preposition 'at' has 3.6% of the total answers.

Adel (2010) investigated these three preposition (in, on, and at) attempting to discover the reasons behind the difficulties in the differentiation among them. He found that students misuse these prepositions because they think of their mother tongue and tend to match each preposition in English to an Arabic similar one.

However, intralingual errors occurred in the two tests. One of these errors is found in the results of the preposition 'above', for example. 7% of the total answers were the preposition 'in'. Such an error is not related to the effect of the mother tongue. Also, the preposition 'in' is found in 8% of the total answers about the preposition 'among'.

Intralingual errors occurred as well in the questions related to the preposition 'at' where the preposition 'behind' is found in 12% of the total answers. In addition, the answers about the preposition 'behind' were intralingual. The prepositions 'on' and 'between' share the same percentage of 12.2% of the total answers, and the preposition 'at' is found in 8%.

According to Richards (1974), intralingual errors do not reflect the structure of the mother tongue, but based on special exposure to the target language. Almahammed (2016) found that about 65% of the errors made by Jordanian EFL learners were due to intralingual interference.

4.4 Summary

This chapter statistically analyzed the answers that were obtained from the participants. The analysis was according to the two research questions. The first questions analyzed the ten prepositions that were under investigation in this study. The results found that participants committed obvious errors in using some prepositions. Furthermore, the effect of mother tongue was under investigation in the second question. Negative transfer was employed by the participants.

Nevertheless, some errors were intralingual and do not relate to the effect of the mother tongue.

Chapter 5

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

5.1 Presentation

The final chapter discusses the major findings of the current study followed by the conclusion. Then, it explains the limitations of the study. The next section will pertain to the pedagogical implications in using English spatial prepositions. Finally, there are suggestions for further studies.

5.2 Discussion of Major Findings

The aim of the study was to investigate a) the usual errors that Arabic native speakers make when they use English spatial prepositions b) to investigate the role of the Arabic language in acquiring English spatial prepositions. To collect data, the researcher tested 72 Arabic native speakers who study English at Foreign Languages and English Preparatory School, Eastern Mediterranean University. The following section discusses the major findings of the study based on its aims.

5.2.1 The Common Errors in Using Spatial Prepositions that are Committed by Arab Learners

The results show that Arabic students who learn English as Foreign Language have the error of substitution in using English spatial prepositions. For example, the preposition 'among' was substituted by the preposition 'between' 13%. According to Tahaineh (2010), students overgeneralize the use of 'between' to convey the meaning of 'among' because 'between' is the more frequently used

one. Adel (2015) considers that 'among' and 'between' are from the prepositions that make confusion for the learners since those learners think that the two prepositions have the same meaning. So, they think that they can use one of them instead of the other to give the same meaning.

In addition, the participants used the prepositions 'in' and 'on' 33% and 13% respectively instead of 'at'. Al Yaari (2013), in his investigation of the problems of using 'at', 'in', and 'on' by Saudi EFL students, assumes that the real problem of the learners lies in the fact that they are not familiar with the uses and usages of these prepositions in both languages (English and Arabic). Further, Adel (2015), states that the prepositions 'in', 'on', and 'at' are the most problematic prepositions in English since each of these prepositions describes numerous meanings, and, the three prepositions can describe the same meaning. In addition, Al khotaba (2013) found that Arab ESL learners substitute the preposition 'in' for 'at', and 'in' for 'on' in some contexts. Terdjat (2012) also believes that Algerian students of English language encounter different problems when using the three prepositions 'in', 'on', and 'at'.

The distinction between 'in' and 'on' is a real problem for Arabic native of speakers who learn English as a foreign language. 31.6% of the total answers that require using the preposition 'in' were answered by 'on'.

The prepositions 'below' and 'under' as well represent a kind of difficulty for Arab EFL learners. 18.6% of the answers related to 'below' were for the preposition 'under'. Equally, Dera (1994) found that standard Arabic usage affected English spatial prepositions acquisition and production in the case of the

substitution of 'under' for 'below'. Moreover, the same difficulty is encountered by Arab EFL learners in the questions related to the preposition 'under', 43% of the answers were incorrect. 8.6% of these wrong answers were the preposition 'below'.

5.2.2 The Role of the Arabic Language in Acquiring English Spatial Prepositions

5.2.2.1 Negative Transfer

For the prepositions 'between' and 'among', both of them have the same translation in Arabic, and one word is used to describe interlocutions.

Asma (2010) explains the use of 'in' instead of 'at' as a negative transfer between standard Arabic and English. However, for the use of 'on' and leaving the answer empty, Asma (2010) views this as a result of students' carelessness. Moreover, Adel (2015) says that in "some expressions, there is no convincing description for the use of these prepositions or clear guide of their usage" (p.74).

The effect of the mother tongue appears again in the participants' performance for the preposition 'below'. 18.3% of the answers were the preposition 'under'. Both of 'below' and 'under' have the same meaning in Arabic. The opposite is correct as well, in the questions related to the spatial preposition 'under', 8.6% answers were 'below'. However, regarding the preposition 'under', the participants had many intralingual errors. 12% of the wrong answers were 'on' and 6% were 'behind'. In addition, 6% answers were empty.

Dera (1994) claims that the using 'on' instead of 'in' appears to be a result of Standard Arabic interference. Dera (1994) adds that the choosing 'to' instead of

'in' is governed by the participants' experience of Standard Arabic usage. In this study, the substitution between 'to' and 'in' occurred 5 times. Vice versa, 7.2% of the errors that were made in the use of the preposition 'on' were the preposition 'in'. Also, participants avoided to write the answer about the preposition 'on' in 6% of the total answers.

Intralingual errors are also found in the questions about the preposition 'behind', 45% of the students' answers were wrong, which might be the result of intralingual errors. The reason behind being the errors as intralingual is that there is no relation between the preposition 'behind' and the misused prepositions in Arabic. According to Richards (1974), intralingual errors occur when the wrong items do not reflect the structure of the mother tongue, but based on special exposure to the target language.

5.3 Conclusion

This study aimed at investigating the problems of native Arabic language speakers in using English spatial prepositions. The findings show that learners have many errors of substitution in using prepositions. The substitution of some pairs of prepositions is found in the participants' responses. For example, the learners substituted 'among' by 'between', and 'below' by 'under'. Also, the differentiation among the three prepositions 'in', 'on' and 'at' is problematic for Arab EFL learners.

In addition, the reasons for the problems in using English spatial preposition were under investigation of this study. The results show that mother tongue have a major effect on Arab EFL learners in using English spatial prepositions.

Negative transfer is found in the participants' performance in many cases. However, intralingual errors took part in students' responses. For instance, the use of 'on' instead of 'under', or using 'in front of' instead 'behind'. Further, students avoided providing answers in certain parts.

5.5 Limitations

The current study is limited by number of the participants. The target number was 160 students, 40 students from each level. However, the researcher could get only 72. Also, the two exercises were designed to investigate the error of substitution, so, omission and addition errors could not be under investigation of the current study. Such types of errors require translation exercises.

5.4 Pedagogical Implications

The findings of this study revealed that Arab EFL learners have difficulties in dealing with English spatial prepositions. This means that it is the responsibility of Arab students to be more aware of the differences between Arabic language and English. Instructors also may take part in enhancing the students' production of English prepositions in general and spatial preposition in particular. In addition, the courses that are used in the Arab world should put more effort in clarifying the cross-linguistics between the two languages.

5.6 Suggestions for Further Research

The present study found that Arab students who study at Foreign Language and English Preparatory School at Eastern Mediterranean University have problems in using English spatial prepositions. These problems are due to the effect of the mother tongue and interlanguage. To investigate the problem of omission and addition, the researcher recommends having translation tests to the participants.

Also, it is useful to have a questionnaire for students' attitudes towards English

spatial prepositions.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Consents Form

Appendix A

Informed Consent Form

Dear students

I am writing to kindly ask your participation as a part of collecting data in my MA thesis which explores the errors that Arab native speakers make when using English spatial prepositions and the reasons behind these errors. Please be sure that your names and personal details will not be shared with any other one than the researcher and the collected data will be used for research purpose only. It is not obligatory to participate. So you can easily refuse participating in the test or withdraw anytime you want. For further information, you can contact me or my supervisor.

Thank you in advance.

Name and surname: …………………………

Signature………………………

Date………………………..

Researcher	**Supervisor**
Abd Alati Abdulnnour	Assoc.Prof. Dr. Naciye Kunt
Email: abannour44@gmail.com	Email: naciye.kunt@emu.edu.tr
Phone: +905338335591	Phone: +903926302616

Appendix B: Test

Part 1: Background information

..............................Age.........   Nationality

Gender: Male ☐   Female ☐

:Level

A1 ☐   A2 ☐   B1 ☐   B2 ☐

Part 2: Q1- Fill in the blank with one of the following prepositions:
ABOVE, AMONG, AT, BEHIND, BELOW, BETWEEN, IN FRONT OF,
IN, ON, UNDER.

1. They are often ………home early in the evening.

2. We live on the first floor and John lives…….. us on the third floor.

3. There is a crack ………the ceiling.

4. He arrived ……….the United Kingdom last week.

5. His coat is quite long. It comes ……..his knees.

6. She spends too many hours……….. the TV screen.

7. They will wait for you……….. the lobby of the library.

8. It's freezing! The temperature must be…….. zero.

9. The children are sitting……… the desk, doing their homework.

10. The house stands on a hill which is about 50 feet ……….the valley level.

11. The policeman could not see the criminal, he was standing.................... the wall.

12. The cat was hiding……… the table.

13. Was Mr. Wood in the meeting? No, he was not…….. the attendants.

14. Adel was sitting……….. me in the mosque; he always likes to sit in the front line.

15. The final competition is……. those two athletes.

.There's someone………. the front door; I heard the bell ring .16

.The doctor asked Sarah to stay……. bed for a couple of days .17

18. Cairo is ……the River Nile.

19. The river flows …….two mountains.

20. The castle stands…….. the trees.

21. There is a red label…….. the bottle.

22. I found my brother's pen……… my bed with some other missing books.

23. Bill looked over his shoulder at the student……… him.

24. The tourists stopped on the bridge to look at the river ……. them.

25. Some fancy restaurants have partitions……… each booth for the customers' privacy.

26. He is…….. many who need help.

27. The boy was hiding……. a big rock.

28. They were flying higher than the clouds, about 200 feet……………….. them.

29. I could not see the speaker, there was a fat man sitting ………me.

30. The young girl is lying……… the branches of the tree.

Q2- In the following test, each **QUESTION** consists of a picture and incomplete sentence.
COMPLETE the sentence with one preposition (word or phrase) which you think will fit the
picture the best

1. There are many apples……..the tree.
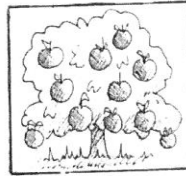
2. There is a vase………. the TV set.
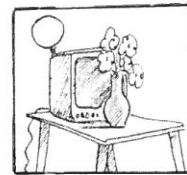
3. John is hiding his face……. the bed cover.

4. John's cat is sitting……. The horse.

5. The mountain peak is seven thousand feet…… sea level.
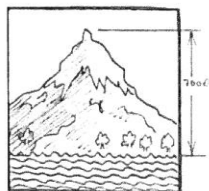
6. The student is standing………his friends.
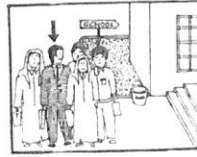
7. Jeff, See who's……. the door, please.

8 . Dan lives on the fourth floor and Sam lives……….
him on the third floor.
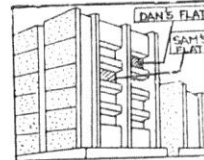
9. The TV set ………. this table is very
small and does not match it.
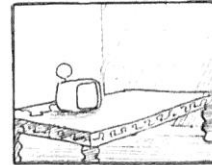
10. The primitive hunters are aiming at the
birds……. them with their arrows.

11. There is a bird hiding………..the tree.

12. Tony is holding a bunch of flowers……..him.

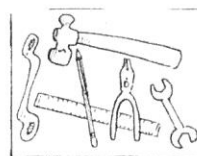13. John was studying…….his desk all night, he must have

a test

14. The airplane is flying…….the clouds.
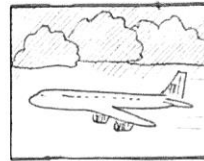
15. The car which is………the house and the tree is my father's.
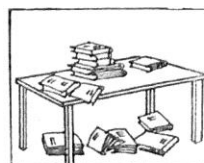
16. Nancy's son is standing…........her.

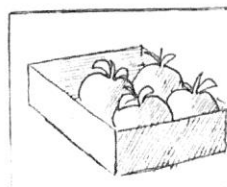17. Do you know who put my pencil………..those tools?

18. Do you know where the alarm clock is?
Yes, Jeff put it……….. the maths and
the English books on the table.
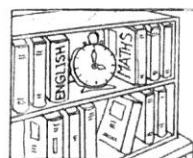
19. Oh, No! Somebody threw these

books……… the table.

20. There are four apples………the box.

Appendix C: Ethical Committee Acceptance

Eastern Mediterranean University
Doğu Akdeniz Üniversitesi
"Uluslararası Kariyer İçin"
"For Your International Career"

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Faks/Fax: (+90) 392 630 2919
bayek@emu.edu.tr

Etik Kurulu / Ethics Committee

Reference No: ETK00-2018-0099   14.03.2018
Subject: Application for Ethics.

RE: Abd Alati Abdulnnour
Department of Foreign Language Education

To Whom It May Concern,

As part of the 2017-2018 Spring Semester, pertaining to Master Thesis questionnaires EMU's Scientific Research and Publication Ethics Committee has granted Mr. Abd Alati Abdulnnour, from the Foreign Language Education Department, to pursue with his survey *Difficulties in Dealing With English Prepositions of Place Encountered by Students With Native Arabic Language Background*. This decision has been taken by the majority of votes. (Meeting number 2018/55-02)

Regards,

Assoc. Prof. Dr. Şükrü Tüzmen
Director of Ethics Commitee

ŞT/sky.

Appendix D: Research Request Form

(logo)	**Eastern Mediterranean University** **Foreign Languages & English Preparatory School**
	Research Request Form

Please fill in the form below and **attach** the necessary documentation (e.g. cover letter, sample questionnaire, interview questions, and consent forms). All documentation should be error free.

Name: Abd Alati Abdulnnour

Contact no: 0533 833 55 91　　　　　　　　　　**Email:** abannour44@gmail.com

Institution / Dept: English Language Teaching　　**Supervisor:** Assoc. Prof. Dr. Naciye Kunt

Title of Research: Difficulties in dealing English preposition of place encountered by students with native Arabic language background.

Proposed period of research (to be checked against the Academic Calendar)**:** 2/4/ 2018

Research to be carried out in:
☒ English Preparatory School (EPS)　　☐ Foreign Languages (FL)　　☐ both EPS & FL
　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　(English taught at Dept. Level)
☐ Turkish Preparatory School

Research to be carried out with:
☐ teachers　☒ students　☐ both　☐ other *(please specify)* _____

Level of students:
☒ EPS 101　　　☒ EPS 102　　　☒ EPS 103　　　☒ EPS 104
☐ other *(please specify)* _____

No. of teachers required: _____　　　　**No. of students required:** 160
Research to be carried out by (2/4/2018 till 31/5/2018)**:**
☐ online questionnaire (…………………….)　☐ paper based questionnaire (………………………..)
☐ interview (…………………….)　　　　　☐ classroom observation (………………………..)
☒ other *(please specify)* A test in a form of fill in the blanks

Aim(s) of Research:
☒ thesis (masters)　☐ thesis (PhD)　☐ conference presentation
☐ other *(please specify)* _____

Any other relevant information:

Upon completion of my research, I agree to submit a copy of my findings to the FLEPS administration and do a presentation if requested. I understand the administration have the right to intervene at any time during my research period and that any further requests on my behalf may not be accepted if I violate the code of conduct and ethics of research.

Date: 19/3/2018　　　　　　　　　　Signature _____

To be completed by the FLEPS Administration
☒ Approved　　　　　　☐ Disapproved (reason):
Comments: with the guidance of Asst. Dir. ipek Merevis it will be done
Date: 30/04/2018　Signature: