
| RESEARCH ARTICLE

Impact of First Language Transfer on the Use of English Prepositions by Arab English Learners

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| ABSTRACT

This study aims to investigate the overuse of English prepositions by Arabs caused by first language transfer among high school, university, and graduate-level students who study English as a foreign language in Saudi Arabia. The researcher developed the research tool of multiple-choice questions to be responded to by the study participants, including five hundred thirty-one persons of the mentioned research community. It has been found after the analysis of responses of the study participants that the greater the students' competence level, the less impact the first language transfer has on second language acquisition. In this study, the researcher recommends that the student should be taught more about the different meanings and usage of prepositions in English and Arabic. In addition, more comparative linguistic research between English and other languages, such as Arabic, should be encouraged to help students understand how prepositions are used in each language.

| KEYWORDS

First language (L1), second language (L2), prepositions, language transfer.

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1. Introduction

Many academics believe that prepositions are difficult and perplexing for language learners. Prepositions in English, for instance, have a variety of meanings, some of which are difficult to grasp and utilize by second language learners at the early stages of learning the language. Such language differences might be regarded as a primary cause of difficulties while teaching a second language's prepositional system to second language (L2) students. It gets even more confusing when students' native language has a prepositional system that shares similar features to the English prepositional system. Because of such overlap, students might rely on their native language prepositions knowledge to utilize the second language, which potentially can cause them to commit mistakes as a result of "negative language transfer". In this regard, research has shown that when learning a second language, transfer plays a significant role in the second language learning process, and this role can be either positive or negative (Gvarishvili, 2012). Positive in a way that students benefit from their first language (L1) experience to grasp the new concept of the L2, and negative in a way that students may mistakenly transfer skills from the L1 that do not appropriately work in the L2.

2. Study Problem

Arabic and English are members of the same language family; as a result, it is reasonable to predict asymmetries in the usage of prepositions that can make learning English prepositions difficult for Arab second language learners. Arab students find learning English prepositions challenging for various reasons, according to Tunaz (2016) and Al-Qudah (2013). Tunaz explains the reason for the difficulty in mastering English prepositions by Arabs is because of the "false assumptions of semantic equivalence between the first and second languages may ". According to Abbas (1961), there are only 20 prepositions in Arabic, while there are over 100 in English. The different number of prepositions between the two languages and different users may cause some confusion among Arab learners.

3. Study Significance

Second language teaching and learning have become a necessity in the current days (Warsono, 2016). In Saudi Arabia, for instance, speaking only one language is considered insufficient. As a result, many Saudi colleges train their graduates to be competent English learners. Individuals in Saudi are also interested in strengthening their English skills by enrolling in summer language programs overseas or at language centers abroad.

Because teaching prepositions to non-English native speakers can be complicated, this study provides teachers (both Arabic and non-Arabic speakers) with a better grasp of the causes of difficulties Arab students face when learning English prepositions. It explains both prepositional systems in Arabic and English and illustrates the possible cross-linguistic disparities between the two languages.

4. Literature Review

Most of the studies that have been conducted to study the language transfer by Arab learners have focused on three common error types caused by language transfer: the overuse, the omission, and the misuse of English prepositions. According to several studies (Tahaine, 2010; Loke, Ali, & Anthony, 2013; Tunaz, Muyan, & Muratoglu, 2016; Al Khotaba, 2013), the overuse of prepositions refers to the redundancy of using English prepositions, omission refers to the omission of English Articles when needed, and the misuse of English prepositions refers to the incorrect usage of prepositions. The domain of the selected studies is primarily concerned with second language learning pedagogy as well as the effect of first language interference.

In an attempt to investigate the source of the incorrect uses of prepositions, Kharma and Hajjaj (1997) reported in their study conducted on Arab EFL learners that the majority of the students' errors are in English syntax. In their study, they asserted that prepositions are the most difficult syntactic element of English to learn. This confirms what Hamdallah and Tushyeh (1998) found in their contrastive analysis study that concluded that English prepositions are very difficult for Arab second language learners to learn, especially for those who study English in their home country (EFL learners). They explained that the reason for such difficulty is due to the fact that Arabic prepositions are fewer and used differently in comparison to English prepositions.

Similarly, Alayesh (2012) investigated the effect of understanding Arabic prepositions on the use of English prepositions. The study results showed that language transfer is a major factor in the misuse of English prepositions. Lakkis and Abdel Malak's (2000) study examined the extent to which Arab students rely on their L1 prepositional knowledge in their understanding of the usage of English prepositions. From the students' writings, a test was constructed to measure whether students transferred their prepositional knowledge from L1 to L2. The results showed that:

- When verbs do not take prepositions in the Arabic equivalent contexts, like *compete*, *wait*, *result*, *collide*, and *engage*, students tend to omit the preposition.
- In the cases where verbs use different prepositions in their L1 and L2, students tend to rely on their L1 knowledge positively. For instance, 18 participants realized that *speak to* is an acceptable form in English, but in Arabic, it is *speak with*.
- Since there is no equivalent to the preposition *at* in Arabic, students were confused about which preposition to use. They used either *in* or *on* instead of *at*.
- When two English prepositions are able to be used, at least 60% used the one that is closer to their L1, even if the other possibility is more frequently used in English.

In his contrastive rhetoric study that he conducted by analyzing free compositions written by 162 students, Tahaine (2010) found that participants use the proper English prepositions when they are equivalents to the ones in Arabic, select the improper prepositions when equivalents are not used in students' L1, omit English prepositions if equivalents are not required in their L1, and redundantly add prepositions if they are required in their L1. Similarly, Al Khotaba (2013), Shakir and Yaseen (2015), and Tahaine's (2010) findings revealed that students' L1 transfer is the major cause of EFL learners' errors.

Other researchers, such as Al Yaari (2013) and Alajmi (2012), conducted a different technique to investigate the source of the transfer errors. In their studies, Al Yaari (2013) and Alajmi (2012) studied the linguistic differences between Arabic and English by testing the translatability of several sentences from Arabic to English and vice versa. In his study, Al Yaari's (2013) asked a group of EFL Saudi students to translate 10 sentences from Arabic to English and another 10 sentences from English to Arabic that contained the English prepositions *in*, *at*, and *on*. Findings showed that students face problems related to use and usage when transferring simple prepositions from English into Arabic.

Unlike the above-mentioned studies, Al-Marrani (2009) conducted a contrastive analysis study of the English and Arabic prepositions in terms of their use, function, and meaning. The purpose of his study was to find the major similarities and differences

between Arabic and English prepositions. The result showed that there are similarities and differences between these two subsystems of the prepositions in both languages. The similarities between them facilitate the developmental process of learning a foreign language (positive transfer), whereas differences make the learning process of a foreign language difficult, causing Arabic learners to make many mistakes (negative transfer or interference).

Similarly, Khalil (2010) conducted a comprehensive analysis of the prepositions in both Arabic and English. The author compared the similarities and differences between the two systems after studying the English and Arabic prepositional systems. Such an analysis could effectively help second language teachers to understand the reason for students' misuse of English prepositions. Accordingly, Lado (1957) affirms that "the teacher who has made a comparison of the foreign language with the native language of the students will know better what the real problems are and provide for teaching them".

4.1 Prepositions in English and Arabic

Prepositions are one of the most difficult aspects of any language for non-native speakers to master. They are usually short and insignificant looking but have very important functions. "It is difficult to learn to use prepositions correctly in a foreign language" (Swan, 1988). Due to the fact that prepositions in Arabic and English are difficult to comprehend, readers may struggle to understand the root of some errors made by Arab learners. For this reason, this section explains the subsystems of prepositions in Arabic and English. It looks at how they are used and what they signify in both English and Arabic.

4.1.1 English prepositions

4.1.1.1 Syntactic function of prepositional phrases

Prepositional phrases have the following syntactic functions, as indicated by Quirk et al. (1985):

(I) In a noun phrase, a post modifier:

- The passengers **on the bus** were singing.

(II) An adverbial:

- **On the bus**, people were singing.

(III) Adverbial or verbal complementation:

- I'm sad **for his parents** (adjective)
- We were staring **at the picture** (verb)

4.1.1.2 Simple and complex prepositions

In English, there are two sorts of prepositions: simple and complex (Quirk et al., 1985). Simple Prepositions are made up of one word, such as *in, on, at, over, by, for, of, between*, etc. Complex Prepositional sequences may be subdivided into two and three-word sequences. The most numerous category of a complex preposition is the type consisting of three words, as in: Preposition 1+ Noun+ Preposition 2.

4.1.1.3 Prepositional meaning

A preposition, as previously explained, expresses a relationship between two items, which might be nouns or verbs. Despite the fact that prepositions have a variety of related meanings, they shall be classified in this section according to their semantic relationships, as indicated by Khalil (2010).

Spatial relations:

(I) *Prepositions of space*

In English, there are several prepositions that denote space, such as *at, in, on, by, between, among, beside, opposite, around, and about*. Examples:

- My mom lives **in** Paris.
- I put my book **on** the table.

(II) *Prepositions of position*

There are some prepositions in English that denote positions such as *on, at, in, off, over, under, above, below*, etc. Examples:

- He is **at** Harvard.
- There are some books **on** the table.

(III) *Prepositions of destination*

Some prepositions in English denote destination, such as *to, onto, into, away from, off, and out of*. They function as prepositions that indicate moving from one place to another.

Examples:

- John dived **into** the deepest point of the swimming pool.
- She went **to** her house.

Time relations

In English, there are prepositions that denote time. They can be subcategorized into temporal relations (*at, on, in, by*), duration relations (*for, during, over, through, throughout, until, till, up to*), and others that function as conjunctions and prepositions of time (*before, after, since, by*) (Quirk et al., 1985; Khalil, 2010).

(I) *Temporal relations*

- He normally comes home **by** midnight.
- They got married **on** June 26th.
- My appointment is **at** seven o'clock.

(II) *Duration*

- I have been waiting **for** two hours.
- I was preparing for the test **during** the break.
- He has been ill **until** Monday.

(III) *Other prepositions of time*

- They have lived in the U.S. **since** 1996.
- I have been studying in Seattle **for** two years.
- The meeting will take place **after** the ceremony.

Recipient/ goal/ target

Unlike their Arabic equivalents, the English prepositions *for, to, and at* can be used to indicate a goal or refer to a subject.

Examples:

- She laughed **at** me.
- She knitted a sweater **for** her daughter.
- I gave my book **to** my classmate.

Source/ origin:

Prepositions that are used to specify the origin or the source of something are *from, (out) of*

Examples:

- I borrowed this book **from** the public library.
- Tables are made **(out) of** wood.
- This shirt is made **of** high-quality cotton.

Stimulus

It is worth mentioning that some English prepositions can function differently depending on the context. For instance, *at* and *about*, which are labeled by Quirk et al. (1985) as a stimulus, could be used to indicate the direction/ the targeted entity of action.

Examples:

- She was mad **at** him.
- John was worried **about** his son.

4.1.2 Arabic prepositions

Arabic prepositions can be formally divided into two basic groups: primary and secondary (Abu-Chacra, 2007). The primary prepositions can; moreover, be divided into two subgroups: independent (مِنْ، إِلَى، عَنْ، عَلَى، فِي، مَعَ، حَتَّى، مُنْذُ) and bound or prefixed (لِـ، لَـ، لَـ). The noun governed by a preposition always follows its parent word and is in the genitive case. If the preposition governs an adverb, the latter does not change its form. Abu-Chacra (2007) explained the primary prepositions with their English equivalents as follows:

Figure 1. Primary prepositions with their English equivalents

مِنْ	إِلَى	عَنْ	عَلَى	فِي	مَعَ
min	'ilā	'an	'alā	fī	ma'a
from, of, than	to, until	from, about	on, over, at	in, at	with
حَتَّى	مُنْذُ	(لِ...)	بِ...	كَ...	
ḥattā	mundu	li... (la...)	bi...	ka...	
until, till, to, up to	since, ago, from	for, to because of	by, with, in	as, like	

4.1.2.1 Independent Arabic prepositions:

مِنْ *min*:

min / مِنْ is an equivalent to the English prepositions *from, of, than* with respect to the different meanings it may have depending on the context in which it is used. As explained by Alshamsan (n.d.), مِنْ in Arabic has several functions:

- 1- To indicate a starting point of time.

Examples:

- "لمسجد أسس على التقوى مِنْ أول يوم أحق أن تقوم فيه" The holy Quran (10:18).
"A mosque founded on righteousness **from** the first day is more worthy for you to stand in."

- 2- To indicate a movement from a certain point.

Examples:

- سافرتُ مِنْ مكة إلى دبي
I traveled **from** Makkah to Dubai.

- 3- A function word to indicate a part of a whole.

Examples:

- قليلٌ مِنَ الطلاب أحضروا واجبهم اليوم
A few **from** the students brought their homework today

Explanation:

- A few – قليل (part)
from (of) the students- من الطلاب (whole)

- 4- A function word to indicate a characteristic or distinctive quality of an entity.

Example:

- إذا كان بيتك مِنْ زجاج فلا ترم الناس بالحجر
If your house is made **from** glass, do not through people with rocks.

5- A function word to compare between two or more entities.

Examples:

- أنا أكبر من أخي محمد
- I am older from my brother Muhammed.

إلى *ila*:

إلى *ila* is equivalent in meaning to the English preposition *to*. It has a similar function and virtually the same meaning, yet the uses of *ila* are limited compared to the English preposition *to*. It can only be used in two ways:

- 1- To indicate an ending period of time.
 - بقيت في الملعب إلى نهاية المباراة
 - I stayed at the stadium to the end of the match.
- 2- To indicate the ending point of a destination.
 - قدت سيارتي من أقصى جنوب المملكة العربية السعودية إلى أقصى شمالها
 - I drove my car from the far south of Saudi Arabia to the far north.

عَنْ *an*:

The Arabic preposition عَنْ *an* has several meanings and uses. There is no equivalent to the Arabic preposition عَنْ *an* in English; rather, its meaning can be conveyed in English by using words that have similar functions. عَنْ can have different functions in Arabic as listed below:

- 1- A function preposition to indicate the *passing by, leaving, or stopping* action. The closest English preposition to it, in this case, is *from*.
 - سافرتُ عَنْ البلد
 - I departed from the town
 - أضرِب السجين عَنْ الطعام
 - The prisoner declared a hunger strike (from the food).
- 2- A function word to indicate a replacement. The closest meaning of the preposition in this particular case is "*on behalf of..*" or "*rather than..*".
 - حج عَنْ أبيه
 - He made a Pilgrimage to Mecca on behalf of his father.
 - (واتقوا يوماً لا تجزي نفسٌ عَنْ نفيس شيئاً) The holy Quran (2:123)
 - "And fear a day when no soul will suffice for another soul at all."

على *ala*:

As explained by Abu-Chacra (2007), the basic meaning of the preposition *ala* aligns with the English prepositions *on, over, and at*. Depending on the context, it can function differently. The functions of *ala* vary, as explained below.:

- 1- *ala* is used to indicate a local relation, which is quite similar to the meaning of *on* in English, taking into account the different nouns that it can be used with. In other words, although it has the same meaning as *on*, it pairs with different words in Arabic compared to English.
- 2- It is used as a function word to indicate a preference or comparison. The basic meaning of *ala*, in this case, is to show a preference for something/one over something/one else.
 - أفضل الذهاب إلى المقهى على الذهاب إلى المطعم للدراسة
 - I prefer going to the coffee shop on going to the restaurant when studying.
 - تفضيل طالب على بقية الطلاب قد يسبب عداوة فيما بينهم
 - Preferring a student on others may cause tension in class.
- 3- Used as a function word to indicate a cause or a reason. The literal translation of the prepositions *on* in this context can be substituted with *because of* or *for*.
 - (ولتكبروا الله على ما هداكم) The holy Quran
 - "And to glorify God on what he has guided you to."
 - كافئ المدير الموظف على تفانيه في العمل
 - The manager rewarded the employee on his diligent work.

في *fi*:

في *fi* is considered to be one of the most frequent prepositions in Arabic (Iatcu, 2011). Its basic meaning in English is *in* or *at*, and unlike in English, there is no distinction between the use of *in* and *at* in Arabic. Instead, في *fi* is considered to be equivalent to

both prepositions in usage and meaning (Al Yaari, 2013). *fi* can be classified as a time and place preposition, and it can be used in both contexts depending on the contextual meaning of the sentence. Examples of how it is used in Arabic are listed below:

- 1- Used as a place preposition that indicates spatial relations. The equivalent English preposition, in this case, is *in* or *at*.
 - وضع الطالبُ القلمَ **في** حقيبته
 - The student put the pen **in** his bag.
- 2- Used to indicate temporal relations.
 - تعلمت القيادة **في** أربعة أسابيع
 - I learnt to drive **in** four weeks

حتى *hatta*:

حتى *hatta* is considered to be one of the challenging prepositions in Arabic. Native speakers of Arabic find the use of حتى confusing sometimes. Because of the many uses of حتى, the most famous linguist in the Arabic language, Sibawayh (760-796), stated, "I shall die and still have some *hatta* left in my soul". The English equivalents of the Arabic preposition حتى as indicated by Abu-Chacra (2007), are *until*, *till*, *to*, *even*, *as far as*, and *up to*. Due to the uncountable number of حتى uses in Arabic, only the major functions of حتى will be discussed below:

- 1- To indicated a degree of a condition.
 - أخرجت **حتى** أن الجميع لاحظ احمرار وجهي من الخجل
 - I was embarrassed **to the degree that** everyone noticed how my face became red.
- 2- To express something that is surprising or unexpected
 - كان المكان ممتلئاً جداً **حتى** أن من لديهم حجز مسبق لم يجدوا مكاناً للجلوس
 - The place was too crowded. **Even** those who had a reservation did not find a place to sit.
- 3- A function word to indicate a duration of time or distance.
 - انتظرتك **حتى** الساعة السابعة مساءً
 - I waited for you **until** 7 p.m.
- 4- A function word to indicate a reason or a cause.
 - وقفت **حتى** أقدم التحية
 - I stopped **to** say hi.
- 5- A function word to indicate extension to a specified place or point.
 - تسلقت الجبل **حتى** القمة
 - I claimed the mountain **as far as** the ridge

4.1.2.2 Bound (Prefixed) Prepositions

Arabic has five bound (prefixed) prepositions that consist of only one letter. They are:

(ب، ت، ك، ل، و). They need to be attached to a word in order to function properly. Only three bond prepositions out of five were chosen to be discussed in this study. The various functions and meanings of the three bound/prefixed prepositions (ب، ك، ل) are discussed in more detail below.

... ل *li*

As explained by Abu-Charca (2007), the bound preposition -ل *li* functions similarly to the prepositions *for*, *to*, and *because of*. It comes attached to a verb and expresses the following indications:

- 1- To indicate a transition.
 - (وقال الذين كفروا للذين آمنوا) The holy Quran (20:12)
 - "The unbelievers said **to** those who believe."
- 2- To indicate a reason or a cause of something.
 - كافأ الطالبُ المعلمَ **لتأديته** الواجب بالشكل الصحيح
 - The teacher rewarded the student **for** answering the assignment correctly.
- 3- Used to indicate the right of property.
 - هذا المال **ليزيد**
 - This money is **for** Yazeed.

... ب *be*

The basic meaning of the Arabic bond preposition -ب *be* varies depending on the context it occurs. That is, it can be an equivalent in its function to the prepositions *by*, *with*, *in*, and *because of* respect to the different usage depending on the purpose of use. The different functions that -ب *be* may have are listed below:

- 1- To indicate a time or place relation.

- أتى بالوقت المحدد
He arrived **in** the right time

Note: In the previous examples, the -بـ preposition is equivalent to في *fī* in signification (see the explanation of the primary preposition في *fī*)

- 2- An indication of a cause or a reason.
 - (فكلا أخذنا يذنبه)
"Each one of them we seized **for** his crime."
- 3- To indicate the use of an instrument.
 - كتب بالقلب
I wrote **with (by using)** the pen.
- 4- To indicate an adhesion.
 - أمسكت يزيد
I held **on to** Zayd

...ك *ka*

The basic function of ك in Arabic is to indicate a simile or a comparison (Al-Malqi, n.d.). Therefore, *similar to*, *like*, and *as* are considered to be equivalents to the Arabic preposition ك in meaning as well as in function.

- الوقت كالسيف إن لم تقطعه قطعك
Time is **like** a sword. If you do not cut it, it will cut you

5. Methodology

As explained in the previous section, prepositions in Arabic differ from those in English in a way that might make it difficult for Arab EFL students to utilize English prepositions effectively. One Arabic preposition can be translated into many English words, while others do not. This may cause some confusion and ambiguity among pupils whose first language is Arabic. In order to detect the effect of language transfer on Saudi English learners, a multiple choice quiz was given to the participants. The questionnaire was constructed using Google Forms, and participants were prompted to specify their gender, amount of education, and level of English ability. Individuals who did not fulfill the sample requirements were eliminated from the research.

5.1 Participants

The participants of the study include five hundred thirty-one persons from the mentioned research community, Every member of the population in Al-Ahsa city in Saudi Arabia had an equal chance to participate in the quiz.

As shown in table (1), The majority of participants are college students, accounting for 81 percent of the research sample. The number of students who studied overseas is very large. English courses were taken by 20% of the students in English-speaking nations such as the U.S., UK, Australia, and Canada.

5.2 Procedures

The data collecting method took a week, and the test link expired seven days after it was sent out to schools across the UK on 1 March.

The data collecting method took a week, and the test link expired seven days after it was sent out to schools across the UK on 1 March. The features that will be evaluated in this study are shown in Table (1).

Table 1. Participant's characteristics

Educational level	Participants	Percent
High school	67	12.4
College	440	81.2
Graduate	35	6.5
	Participants	Percent
Training courses in English outside Saudi Arabia		
yes	110	20.3
no	432	79.7
Total	Participants	Precent
English level		
Beginner	133	24.5
Intermediate	290	53.5
Advanced	119	22.0
Total	542	100.0

6. Results

6.1 Results related to the study questions:

Question1: How does the English proficiency of learners affect language transfer?

Students' English grades are frequently higher than those of beginners or intermediates. When students' English improves, their L1 has a less detrimental impact on their usage of the L2's prepositions. This is visible in a number of queries, such as the first and fifth questions.

Question2: What are the types of potential errors caused by negative transfer in the use of Prepositions in English for Arab students?

Arab learners are more likely than non-Arab speakers to make mistakes in the use of English prepositions, according to a Pew Research survey. The findings revealed that the great majority of respondents correctly answered the question, "I am older (than - than - none) my sister".

Table 2. Frequencies and percentages of incorrect choices by Arabic learners

N	Questions	F & %	Correct answer	Wrong answer	Total
1	I am older (from – <u>than</u> - of – none) my sister	F	475	67	542
		%	87.6	12.4	100.0
2	Mohammed was (in- <u>on</u> - at- none) the bus when I called him	F	154	388	542
		%	28.4	71.6	100.0
3	We agreed to meet (in – at – <u>on</u> - of) Monday the 3 rd of this month	F	365	177	542
		%	67.3	32.7	100.0
4	I was waiting (to- <u>for</u> - toward- none) my friend until he finally showed up	F	377	165	542
		%	69.6	30.4	100.0
5	(When sending an email) You will find a copy of the requested document attached (on- into- at- <u>to</u>) this email.	F	249	293	542
		%	45.9	54.1	100.0
6	My mom was mad (from- to - <u>at</u> - on) me because I did not clean my room	F	232	310	542
		%	42.8	57.2	100.0
7	The teacher got mad and started yelling (<u>at</u> - on- to- onto) the students	F	252	290	542
		%	46.5	53.5	100.0
8	I plan to do my homework (in- of - <u>on</u> - within) the weekend	F	200	342	542
		%	36.9	63.1	100.0
9		F	354	188	542

	My friend is studying (in- at- on- of) the University of Washington	%	65.3	34.7	100.0
10	This product is made (from – of- with- in) advanced quality materials	F	243	299	542
		%	44.8	55.2	100.0

The second result revealed that nearly half of the respondents (45.9%) picked the correct answer "to," while 293, or 54.1%, chose the incorrect responses. For the eighth question: "I plan to do my homework (of-on- within the weekend", the majority of the study participants (342), representing 63.1%, chose the wrong answers. More than half (345) chose the correct Answer "at" for the ninth question, "My friend is studying (in- at- on- of the University of Washington)".

6.2 Results related to the relationship between students' level of English and their errors in the use of English prepositions:

Relationship between the student's proficiency level and choosing the correct answer to the question " I am older (from – than- of – none) my sister" :

Table. 3 Students' proficiency level and their answers to question 1

English level		I am older (from – than- of – none) my sister				Total
		from	than	of	none	
beginner	F	20	87	19	7	133
	%	15.0%	65.4%	14.3%	5.3%	100.0%
intermediate	F	9	270	11	0	290
	%	3.1%	93.1%	3.8%	0.0%	100.0%
advanced	F	1	118	0	0	119
	%	0.8%	99.2%	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%
Total	F	30	475	30	7	542
	%	5.5%	87.6%	5.5%	1.3%	100.0%

Pearson Chi-Square: 87.99 p. value: 0.001

Table (3) shows there is a statistically significant relationship between the respondents' level of English and choosing the correct answer to the question "I am older (from – than- of – none) my sister" the value of Chi-square is (87.99) with a significance level of (0.001).

Relationship between students' English level and choosing the correct answer to the question " Muhammad was (in- on- at- none) the bus when I called him"

Table (4) illustrates the relationship between the students' level of proficiency and the frequency of choosing the correct answer to the question "Mohammed was (in- on- at- none) the bus when I called him"

Table. 4 Students' proficiency level and their answers to question 2

English level		Mohammed was (in- on- at- none) the bus when I called him				Total
		in	on	at	none	
beginner	F	70	45	11	7	133
	%	52.6%	33.8%	8.3%	5.3%	100.0%
Intermediate	F	193	75	18	4	290
	%	66.6%	25.9%	6.2%	1.4%	100.0%
advanced	F	83	34	2	0	119
	%	69.7%	28.6%	1.7%	0.0%	100.0%
Total	F	346	154	31	11	542
	%	63.8%	28.4%	5.7%	2.0%	100.0%

Pearson Chi-Square: 20.54 p. value: 0.001

Table (4) shows that there is a statistically significant inverse relationship between students' level in English and their choice of the correct answer to the question. The value of Chi-square is (20,54) with a significance level of (0.001). Only 25.9% of intermediate respondents were able to choose "on", considered the lowest rate of correct answers.

Relationship between the language level and choosing the correct answer to the question "We agreed to meet (in – at – on- of) Monday the 3rd of this month."

Table (5) demonstrates the relationship between the respondents' level of proficiency and choosing the correct answer to the question "We agreed to meet (in - at - on - none) Monday the 3rd of this month":

Table 5. Students' proficiency level and their answers to question 3

English level		We agreed to meet (in – at – on- of) Monday the 3 rd of this month				Total
		in	at	on	of	
beginner	F	20	46	50	17	133
	%	15.0%	34.6%	37.6%	12.8%	100.0%
Intermediate	F	20	50	215	5	290
	%	6.9%	17.2%	74.1%	1.7%	100.0%
advanced	F	5	14	100	0	119
	%	4.2%	11.8%	84.0%	0.0%	100.0%
Total	F	45	110	365	22	542
	%	8.3%	20.3%	67.3%	4.1%	100.0%

Pearson Chi-Square: 87.40 p. value: 0.001

It is clear from table (5) that there is a statistically significant relationship between the respondents' level of English and choosing the correct answer to the question "We agreed to meet (in - at - on - of) Monday the 3rd of this month". The value of Chi-square amounted to (87.40) with a significance level of (0.001).

Relationship between the respondents' language level and determining the correct answer to the question "I was waiting (to- for- toward- none) my friend until he finally showed up."

Table (6) shows the relationship between the respondents' level of English and choosing the correct answer to the question "I was waiting (to- for- toward- none) my friend until he finally showed up".

Table 6. Proficiency level and their answers to question 4

English level		I was waiting (to- for- toward- none) my friend until he finally showed up				Total
		to	for	toward	none	
beginner	F	33	58	15	27	133
	%	24.8%	43.6%	11.3%	20.3%	100.0%
Intermediate	F	25	209	8	48	290
	%	8.6%	72.1%	2.8%	16.6%	100.0%
advanced	F	1	110	0	8	119
	%	0.8%	92.4%	0.0%	6.7%	100.0%
Total	F	59	377	23	83	542
	%	10.9%	69.6%	4.2%	15.3%	100.0%

Pearson Chi-Square: 88.44 p. value: 0.001

Table (6) shows that there is a statistically significant relationship between the respondents' level of English and choosing the correct answer to the question "We agreed to meet (in - at - on - of) Monday the 3rd of this month". The value of Chi-square amounted to (87.40) with a significance level of (0.001).

Relationship between the respondents' language level and choosing the correct answer to the question " You will find a copy of the requested document attached (on- into- at- to) this email"

Table (7) illustrates the relationship between the respondents' language level and choosing the correct answer to the question " You will find a copy of the requested document attached (on- into- at- to) this email".

Table 7. Students' proficiency level and their answers to question 5

English level		You will find a copy of the requested document attached (on- into- at- to) this email				Total
		onto	into	at	to	
Beginner	F	19	45	26	43	133
	%	14.3%	33.8%	19.5%	32.3%	100.0%
Intermediate	F	39	98	31	122	290
	%	13.4%	33.8%	10.7%	42.1%	100.0%
Advanced	F	8	25	2	84	119
	%	6.7%	21.0%	1.7%	70.6%	100.0%
Total	F	66	168	59	249	542
	%	12.2%	31.0%	10.9%	45.9%	100.0%

Pearson Chi-Square: 49.17 p. value: 0.001

Table (7) shows that there is a statistically significant relationship between respondents' level of English and their choice of the correct answer to the question. The value of the Chi-square amounted to (49.17) with a significance level of (0.001) for the English language test.

Relationship between the respondents' language level and choosing the correct answer to the question "My mom was mad (from- to - at- on) me because I did not clean my room".

Table (8) indicates the relationship between the respondents' language level and choosing the correct answer to the question "My mom was mad (from- to - at- on) me because I did not clean my room".

Table 8 Students' proficiency level and their answers to question 6

English level		My mom was mad (from- to - at- on) me because I did not clean my room				Total
		to	from	at	on	
Beginner	F	35	37	39	22	133
	%	26.3%	27.8%	29.3%	16.5%	100.0%
Intermediate	F	50	98	97	45	290
	%	17.2%	33.8%	33.4%	15.5%	100.0%
Advanced	F	1	15	96	7	119
	%	0.8%	12.6%	80.7%	5.9%	100.0%
Total	F	86	150	232	74	542
	%	15.9%	27.7%	42.8%	13.7%	100.0%

Pearson Chi-Square: 98.38 p. value: 0.001

It can be seen in table (8) that there is a statistically significant relationship between the respondents' level of English and choosing the correct answer to the question "My mom was mad (from- to - at- on) me because I did not clean my room". The value of Chi-square amounted to (98.38) with a significance level of (0.001).

Correlation between the respondents' language level and choosing the correct answer to the question "The teacher got mad and started yelling (to- at- onto- on) the students".

The relationship between the respondents' language level and choosing the correct answer to the question "the teacher got mad and started yelling (to- at- onto- on) the students" is illustrated in Table (9).

Table 9. Students' proficiency level and their answers to question 7

English level		The teacher got mad and started yelling (to- at- about- on) the students				Total
		to	at	onto	on	
Beginner	F	42	38	25	28	133

	%	31.6%	28.6%	18.8%	21.1%	100.0%
Intermediate	F	85	121	34	50	290
	%	29.3%	41.7%	11.7%	17.2%	100.0%
Advanced	F	12	93	2	12	119
	%	10.1%	78.2%	1.7%	10.1%	100.0%
Total	F	139	252	61	90	542
	%	25.6%	46.5%	11.3%	16.6%	100.0%

Pearson Chi-Square: 72.01 p. value: 0.001

Table (9) shows that there is a statistically significant relationship between respondents' level of English and determining the correct answer to the seventh question. The value of Chi-square amounted to (72.01) with a significance level of (0.001). There were 93 advanced respondents representing 78% and 121 intermediate respondents representing 41.7% who chose the correct answer "at."

Relationship between the respondents' language level and choosing the correct answer to the question "I plan to do my homework (of- in- on- within) the weekend."

Table (10) explains the relationship between the respondents' language level and choosing the correct answer to the question "I plan to do my homework (of- in- on- within) the weekend"

Table 10. Students' proficiency level and their answers to question 8

English level		I plan to do my homework (of- in- on- within) the weekend				Total
		of	in	on	within	
Beginner	F	14	67	37	15	133
	%	10.5%	50.4%	27.8%	11.3%	100.0%
Intermediate	F	4	129	109	48	290
	%	1.4%	44.5%	37.6%	16.6%	100.0%
Advanced	F	0	50	54	15	119
	%	0.0%	42.0%	45.4%	12.6%	100.0%
Total	F	18	246	200	78	542
	%	3.3%	45.4%	36.9%	14.4%	100.0%

Pearson Chi-Square: 36.54 p. values: 0.001

Table (10) shows that there is a statistically significant relationship between respondents' level of English and their determination of the correct answer to the question "I plan to do my homework (of- in- on- within) the weekend". The value of Chi-square amounted to (36.54) with a significance level of (0.001).

Relationship between the respondents' language level and their choosing of the correct answer for the question " My friend is studying (in- at- on- none) the University of Washington."

Table (11) analyzes the relationship between the respondents' language level and their choice of the correct answer to the question " My friend is studying (in- at- on- of) the University of Washington"

Table 11. Students' proficiency level and their answers to question 9

English level		My friend is studying (in- at- on- none) the University of Washington				Total
		in	at	on	of	
Beginner	F	44	63	14	12	133
	%	33.1%	47.4%	10.5%	9.0%	100.0%
Intermediate	F	75	195	13	7	290
	%	25.9%	67.2%	4.5%	2.4%	100.0%

Advanced	F	22	96	1	0	119
	%	18.5%	80.7%	0.8%	0.0%	100.0%
Total	F	141	354	28	19	542
	%	26.0%	65.3%	5.2%	3.5%	100.0%

Pearson Chi-Square: 44.84 p. value: 0.001

Table (11) shows that there is a statistically significant relationship between the respondents' level of English and choosing the correct answer to the question " My friend is studying (in- at- on- none) the University of Washington". The value of Chi-square amounted to (44.84) with a significance level of (0.001).

The relationship between the respondents' language level and their choice of the correct answer to the question "This product is made (from – of- with-in) high quality materials" is illustrated in Table (12) of the survey.

Table 12. Students' proficiency level and their answers to question 10

English level		This product is made (from – of- with- in) high quality materials				Total
		from	of	with	in	
beginner	F	36	48	41	8	133
	%	27.1%	36.1%	30.8%	6.0%	100.0%
Intermediate	F	83	134	63	10	290
	%	28.6%	46.2%	21.7%	3.4%	100.0%
advanced	F	41	61	16	1	119
	%	34.5%	51.3%	13.4%	0.8%	100.0%
Total	F	160	243	120	19	542
	%	29.5%	44.8%	22.1%	3.5%	100.0%

Pearson Chi-Square: 18.24 p. values: 0.001

Table (12) shows that there is a statistically significant relationship between the respondents' level of English and the rate of the correct answer to the last question. The value of Chi-square amounted to (18.24) with a significance level of (0.001) in this study.

7. Data Analysis and Discussion

The present section aims to identify the types of errors committed by Arab learners as a cause of first language transfer. High frequencies and percentages of incorrect choices in the multiple-choice quiz are discussed.

Question 1:

The first question participants answered in the quiz was, "I am older (from – than-of- none) my sister". Results showed that the vast majority of the participants answered the question correctly with a percentage of 87.6%. Beginner participants' scores were the lowest among the groups. Such a mistake can be attributed to the fact that beginner learners rely on their L1 when learning an L2. In contrast, only 3.1% of intermediate-level and 0.8% of advanced-level students chose the incorrect answers. This finding supports Alayesh's (2012) conclusion that the better the students' English proficiency is, the less negative effect their L1 has on their L2.

Question 2:

63% of students in a study chose *in* instead of *on* for "Muhammad was (in- on- at- none) the bus when I called him". The use of *in* in this context is a result of negative transfer from Arabic. The literal translation of this sentence in Arabic would be with *in*, which is the equivalent of *في* *fi*.

Question 3:

The third question on the quiz was "We agreed to meet (in- at- on- of) Monday the 3rd of this month". The purpose of choosing such a question was primarily to test the students' ability to correctly use English prepositions that are used with days. The commonly used preposition with days in Arabic is *في* *fi*, which is an equivalent to the English prepositions *in* and *at* (See *في* *fi* explanation). As a result, determining the correct answer would likely be confusing for Arab second language learners, especially those with lower English proficiency levels.

As indicated in table 5, beginners' scores were the lowest compared to the other two groups. Only 37% of the beginner group choose the correct answer *on*. In contrast, 74% of the intermediate and 84% of the advanced learners answered the question correctly.

Question 4:

Due to the fact that the verb *wait* in Arabic does not come with any prepositions, Arab learners were expected to omit the preposition *for* that follows with the verb *wait* in the question "I was waiting (to- for- toward- none) my friend until he finally showed up". Results showed that the correct answer *for* was chosen by most of the advanced learners (92.4%), with only a few hits of the incorrect answer "none" (6.7%). The percentage of the correct answer among intermediate-level students was also considerably high (72%), with more hits to "none" (16.6%) compared to the advanced. Lastly, the percentage of the beginners who selected the correct choice is lower compared to the two higher level groups (43.6%) with the highest number of hits on "none" (20.3%). This validates the conclusion of Lakkis & Abdel Malak's (2000) study, which indicated that the lower the English proficiency level of students, the more they transfer from their native language.

Question 5:

The correct answer *to* for the fifth question, "You will find a copy of the requested document attached (on- into- at- to) this email", was primarily chosen by advanced learners with 70.6%; while only 41% of the intermediate and 32.2% of the beginner level students chose the correct answer. In contrast, "into" was commonly used by the former two groups, with a percentage of 33.8% scored by intermediate and beginner level participants (See table 7). This can be attributed to the fact that *into* is the closest in meaning to the preposition *in*, which is the equivalent to the Arabic preposition *في* *fi*.

Question 6 and 7:

In the sixth question, "My mom was mad (from- about- at- on) me because I did not clean my room," language transfer appears to have a negative effect on determining the correct answer. 57.2% chose incorrect answers. This could be due to the influence of Arabic, which *from* and *on* is used in similar contexts in Arabic. Similarly, the correct answer rate to the seventh question, "The teacher got mad and started yelling (on- at- to- onto) the students," among beginner and intermediate level participants is lower compared to the other questions. This also indicates confusion and uncertainty about what can be the correct answer among the four answers. Results showed that *to* and *on* were the most frequently selected incorrect answers by beginners and intermediate level. This can be a result of a negative transfer as well since *on* (*على* *ala*) is the Arabic preposition used in similar contexts.

Question 8 and 9:

The analysis of the eighth question's answers, "I plan to do my homework (of- in- on- within) the weekend," revealed that 63% of the study participants answered the question incorrectly. 45.4% of the participants chose *in*, as it is equal in meaning to the Arabic preposition *في* *fi*. This can be due to the fact that students might have employed their first language's prepositional knowledge to answer this question. By way of explanation, since "on the weekend" is equal in meaning to "في عطلة نهاية الأسبوع", which can be translated to "in the weekend", students used the preposition *in* instead of *on* as a result of a literal translation of the preposition. Arab learners may find it challenging to understand the different mechanisms that the two prepositions *in* and *at* have in English. Another factor that can be a cause of such a language transfer is the frequent use of *في* *fi* in Arabic (Iatcu, 2011).

Accordingly, *in* and *at* have always been confusing to Arabic-speaking students. The fact that *at* does not exist in Arabic, students tend to confuse it with *in* which is the closest in meaning. This is salient in question 9, "My friend is studying (in- at- on- of) the University of Washington," where the most selected answers were *in* and *at*.

Question 10:

For question 10, "This product is made (from- of- with- in) high quality materials", students were expected to choose either *from* and *with*, as they are the two prepositions that are closest in meaning and function to the Arabic prepositions used in similar contexts (من , ب). As anticipated, the most commonly selected incorrect answers were *from* and *with* even by the advanced participants.

8. Conclusion

This study's findings support Lakkis and Abdel Malak's (2000) study that concluded that "when students are not familiar with a preposition, they will choose the closest in meaning to the one in their L1 despite the frequent use of it in English". That was demonstrated in the results of questions 2, 6, 7, 8, 9, and 10, where students' answers revealed how they relied on their L1 prepositional knowledge to answer the questions. Such a finding can be attributed to the fact that students answered the questions based on how close the choices were to their L1 equivalent prepositions. In questions 2, 3, 8, and 9, for instance, some students used *in* instead of *on* and *at* as how it is used in Arabic contexts. Additionally, in question 6, participants found the use of *from* in a sentence like "my mom got mad at me" more idiomatic since *from* is the equivalent English preposition to the Arabic preposition *من* that is used in a similar context. Based on this finding, it is noticeable that students relied heavily on their L1 while answering the quiz. This agrees with Liu's (2008) argument, which asserts that the "L1 is present in L2 learner's mind, whether the teacher wants it to be there or not, and the L2 knowledge that is being created in their mind is connected in all sorts of ways with their L1 knowledge".

This study also showed that students with higher English proficiency levels performed better in answering the questions than those with lower levels, which can be a result of the better awareness that advanced learners have of the English language compared to their less proficient counterparts. Thus, it is logical to conclude that the more advanced a language learner is in the second language, the less of an impact their L1 has on their L2. Additionally, taking into account that prepositions of English are hard to master, especially for those whose first language is not an Indo-European language, it is anticipated that higher level learners would have better control of the amount of information transferred between the two languages. They can determine what L1 features are transferable to the L2.

A pedagogical implication that second language teachers of English to Arabic-speaking students should consider is teaching the similarities and differences between English and Arabic prepositions. In other words, students should be introduced to the contrastive rhetoric approach, where they can learn about how the two languages differ linguistically. Giving examples of how the prepositions of the two languages differ in usage and meaning could effectively reduce the negative transfer influence. Lightbown and Spada (2013), in this regard, arguing that "learners may not always be able to take advantage of similarities unless they are pointed out to them". Such techniques could abate not only the negative transfer but also enhance the possibility of the L1's positive transfer, from which learners could benefit from mastering the L2's linguistic features.

However, since this study only focused on the misuse of some English prepositions caused by transfer, such a suggestion would not be valid unless other studies are conducted to test the validity of this teaching approach. A researcher, for example, can design a course segment according to the contrastive-rhetoric approach and test students' mastery of prepositions before and after explaining the linguistic differences to them. This way, the researcher would know how effective implementing this technique is. It is also important to consider that due to the fact that language transfer can affect different aspects of the L2 language, it was beyond the scope of this study to address all errors caused by negative language transfer. For this reason, this study only focused on the language transfer affecting L2 prepositions. Further research can study the effect of Arabic language transfer on other aspects such as sentence structure, vocabulary choice, or verb tenses. Arabic and English have many differences that a researcher can easily find a topic to conduct a cross-linguistic analyses study on. Lastly, this study only tested the negative language transfer by Arab participants. Other researchers are encouraged to conduct further contrastive linguistic studies between groups of different linguistic backgrounds. For instance, a researcher may develop a similar prepositions multiple-choice questions quiz and use it with students who speak various L1s. Doing so would help identify the sources of errors and help teachers develop teaching techniques that are helpful to L2 students.

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