

**SYNTACTIC ERRORS  
OF JORDANIAN SCHOOL CHILDREN IN ENGLISH:  
THE ROLE OF THE NATIVE LANGUAGE**

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*1. Introduction*

The controversy over the role of NL in FL acquisition has tranquilized to a position of softening the claims of the proponents of the theory of NL interference (Fries, Lado, Ferguson, Politzer, Harrison) and the hardline advocates of language acquisition universality, (George 1972; Dulay and Burt 1974; Krashen 1981). It is now well established that as Corder (1981:12) puts it "a large number, but by no means all, of his [the learner] errors, are related to the systems of his mother tongue". It is in this vein of conviction that the present study was conducted.

*2. Purpose and procedure*

*2.1. Purpose*

This paper presents a study on the interlanguage of Jordanian learners of English. It attempts to identify and explain some syntactical errors of 15-year old school children who have had English instruction in government schools for five years 5-6 periods a week. However, it does not cover all aspects of the English language (EL) structure. The ultimate goal, of course, is to contribute to improving the EL teaching/learning process in Jordanian schools.

*2.2. Significance of the study*

The significance of this study emanates from the fact that, unlike other similar studies on the interlanguage of Jordanian learners of EL, it is intended to probe the systematic errors of lower-intermediate learners. Other similar studies on Jordanian English dealt with more advanced adult learner errors (Mukattash 1977, 1978, 1979, 1981; Al-Ayaseh 1983). Besides, the study covers a broad sector of Jordanian school children in different regions of the country. This might give its

findings more credibility about the nature, source and development of Jordanian pupils' interlanguage. In addition, it might provide insights and implications for teachers, curriculum designers and materials writers.

### 2.3. Procedure

The study investigated the syntactic errors of 320 pupils from ten different basic-stage schools in ten districts in Jordan. The schools were randomly chosen from ten districts which constitute almost half the number of the educational districts in the country and represent about two thirds of the school children population.

The study sample incorporated boys and girls in both town and village schools; thus representing different educational environments. No attempt was made to ascertain the difference, if any, in the pupils' proficiency under these four variables since the study aimed at characterizing and interpreting the systematic syntactical errors of this group of learners as well as the extent to which their NL had affected their developmental learning of English, regardless of their sex or region. To be sure, there are some regional differences in Jordanian Arabic (JA), but they are so minimal in the syntactical domain that they can be overlooked (Mukattash 1980:133).

As the process of eliciting free oral and/or written expression is practically not feasible to cover this large number of students in many parts of the country, an objective test requiring the pupils to choose from four alternatives was administered to them at different times. The test was not directly based on their course-books, but was commensurate with the stated objectives of the course. It had been validated through several administrations to students at the English Language Center at Yarmouk University. Originally, the test consisted of one hundred items. As this was judged to be very lengthy and perhaps boring for this level and age-group of pupils, and in order to maintain their interest and perseverance, the test was split into two equal parts, taking odd numbers. Indeed, it is this split that is responsible for the admitted fact that some basic syntactical structures have been missing from the data.

The test was carefully marked and all the deviant responses were spotted and grouped under ten different categories in terms of frequency of error types. Accordingly, the actual erroneous examples, the characterization of errors as well as the number and percentage of pupils who goofed in them were grouped in ten tables. The errors which could not be subsumed under anyone of the ten categories were grouped as miscellaneous in a separate table and discussed at the end. Because the pupils' answers to the stem sentences of the test manifested different error types, they were given the same number within the different tables, to maintain their integrity and to give an overall view of the pupils' responses to the same stem sentence. However, the discussion proceeded in terms of the order of the general categories through a product-process mechanism in which the actual error was both described and accounted for simultaneously.

Moreover, the numbers and percentages of the errors in the main categories and their sub-categories were calculated and summed up in table XII, just to give

the reader a global, intact view of the difficulty order of those categories for Jordanian school children. Besides, the number and percentage of errors which were ascribed to NL interference, or in which NL played a role, were calculated.

Finally, the term error is used in the sense Corder (1981:10) suggests, namely that it signifies any systematic deviation from a grammatically correct syntactic structure.

### 2.4. Transliteration symbols

The symbol // is used to mean 'instead of'. Moreover, the following symbols which represent certain Arabic sounds are used in the transliteration of Arabic words:

- /ð/ voiced interdental fricative.
- /θ/ voiceless interdental fricative.
- /H/ voiceless pharyngeal fricative.
- /ʒ/ voiced pharyngeal fricative.
- /D/ voiced 'emphatic' dental alveolar stop.
- /ʔ/ glottal stop.
- /S/ voiceless 'emphatic' dental-alveolar.
- /G/ voiced uvular fricative.
- /X/ voiceless uvular fricative.
- /T/ voiceless 'emphatic' dental alveolar stop.
- /y/ palatal glide.

## 3. Discussion

### 3.1. Word order

The data show only six citations of errors in word order, constituting 3.95% of the pupils' over-all errors. Table I shows the type and number of errors in this category.

Table I. Word order

No	Type of Error	Examples of Errors	No. of Errors	%
(1)	insertion of <i>was</i> before subj.	I didn't know that a. was the work finished	66	21
	insertion of subj. after verb.	b. was finished the work	43	13
(2)	word order: <i>must you // you must</i>	If you want to go, _____ get ready. a. must you	84	26



(3)		_____ twenty-five students in the class?		
	word order + concord	a. Is there	33	10
(4)		Could you _____?		
	<i>make // do</i> + word order	a. make a favour me	104	33
	word order	b. do a favour me	47	15
Total			377	3.95

As we see, there are no sufficient data to warrant reliable conclusions. However, the errors in (1.a) and (1.b) are clearly influenced by NL word order. Contrasted with English, Arabic word order is not so strict. In JA (1) can be literally (Lit.) rendered as:

- (i) ma: 9arafit ?innu ka:n al-9amal intaha  
(Lit.) didn't know that was the work finished.
- (ii) ma: 9arafit ?innu ka:n intaha al-9amal  
(Lit.) didn't know that was finished the work

It is likely that the pupils chose (1.a) and (1.b) on analogy of their NL structural order. The pupils' erroneous choice of (1.a) or (1.b) reflects their awareness of the fact that their equivalent Arabic forms are free variants. In (2.a) and (3.a) the pupils reversed the subject-verb order although the stem sentences are in the affirmative. This deviant behaviour might have been triggered by lack of concentration. However, whereas the error in (3.a) can be viewed as developmental pertaining to inadequate learning, one might argue that (2.a) is traceable to NL interference. It is plausible that the pupils chose this answer on analogy of the corresponding MSA structure, *viz yajibu 9alayka* (lit.) 'must on you'.

Moreover, while the error in (4.b) is intralingual (Richards 1971) relating to the target language (TL), the pupils' choice of *make* instead of *do* in (4.a) was partly affected by Arabic. Arab learners of English confuse the uses of *do* and *make* and often use them interchangeably because of their similar semantic coverage in Arabic. (cf. (4.c) in 3.8 below).

### 3.2. Verbal forms

Table II provides data in which pupils erred in verb forms, including the modals. The errors in this scope comprised 14.3% of the pupils' total errors.

Table II. Verbal forms

No	Type of Error	Examples of Errors	No. of Errors	%
(5)		Fuad doesn't _____ milk.		
	V-ing // base ( <i>like</i> )	a. liking	19	6
	V-s // base	b. likes	92	29
	to + V // base	c. to like	18	6

(6)		Don't _____ the street now. A car is coming.		
	to + V // base ( <i>cross</i> )	a. to cross	22	7
	V-ed // base	b. crossed	40	12
	V-ing // base	c. crossing	54	17
(7)		Can Huda _____ to dinner tomorrow?		
	V-s // base ( <i>come</i> )	a. comes	91	43
	to + V // base	b. to come	32	10
	V-ed // base	c. came	59	18
(8)		My car is dirty, so I'm going to _____.		
	<i>make // get</i>	a. make it washed	93	29
	<i>to wash // washed</i>	b. get it to wash	76	24
	<i>have // get + to be washed // washed</i>	c. have it to be washed	47	15
(9)		Did Salim win? 'No, he _____.'		
	<i>loss // lost</i>	a. loss	59	18
(10)		Someone _____ it years ago.		
	V-en // V-ed	a. stolen	41	13
(11)		Do you have to buy that ticket? 'I _____. It's not necessary'.		
	<i>mustn't // needn't</i>	a. mustn't	58	18
	<i>won't // needn't</i>	b. won't	68	21
	<i>need // needn't</i>	c. need	137	43
(12)		You _____ in the forest. You might have started a fire.		
	<i>would // shouldn't</i>	a. would have smoked	70	22
	<i>could // should; also progr. aspect // perfect.</i>	b. could not be smoking	72	23
(2)		If you want to go, _____ get ready		
	<i>'d rather // had better</i>	b. you'd rather	59	18
	insertion of redundant <i>to</i> after <i>should</i>	c. you should to	60	19
Total			1369	14.3

As table II indicates, quite a substantial number of pupils made mistakes in the use of the auxiliary verb forms *does*, *do* and *can* (41%, 36% and 71%, respectively) which should be followed by the base form of the main verb. The pupils scored low on these auxiliaries despite the fact that they were introduced very early in their EL course. This result seems to contradict Nickel's (1971) 'factor of chronology' which stipulates that "patterns learned first have priority over patterns learned at a later date because of the convenient simplicity of these first basic

structures" (in Richards 1974:14). Nonetheless, this is not a striking finding since not all the material introduced to the pupils is learned adequately.

The morphological errors in (5), (6), (7.c), (9.a) and (10.a) are all intralingual, relating to the TL systems. For example, in (9.a) the pupils confused the past verb form *lost* and the noun form *loss*, and thus replaced the former by the latter. However, one would hesitate to regard these errors as persistent or fossilized (Selinker 1974) at this intermediate stage of EL learning. It is more appropriate to consider them transient.

On the other hand, the pupils' errors in (7.a) and (7.b) can be partially attributed to NL interference. In JA (7.a) is rendered as (iii), while in modern standard Arabic (MSA), (7.b) is rendered as (iv). Consider:

- (iii) btigdar huda ti:ji: li-IGada bukra  
(Lit.) Can Huda come to lunch tomorrow.
- (iv) hal tastaTi:9 huda ?an taji:?a liIGada:? Gadan.  
(Lit.) Can Huda to come to lunch tomorrow?

As we can see, the pupils' choice of (7.a) is a direct translation of their NL structure. Moreover, the wrong option of the *s*-form *comes* is likely to have been stimulated because of its proximity of a third person singular subject, viz *Huda*, in spite of the presence of modal *can* at the beginning of the sentence. Likewise, in MSA the verb *tastaTi:9* can be catenated with the subjunctive particle *?an* which corresponds to English *to* as illustrated in (iv). It is highly possible then that the pupils chose (7.b) on analogy of their NL system.

In contradistinction to the above errors, the deviant choices of (8) are more complex. The choice of the incorrect causative verb in (8.a) and (8.b) has incurred the morphological and structural errors in the verb phrases following it. Obviously, these errors are developmental, resulting from the pupils' inadequate learning of the relevant EL rules.

The errors in (11), (12) and (2) belong to the modal verbs. It seems that the pupils still confuse both the uses and forms of these auxiliary verbs. This is not surprising, since the modals are introduced relatively late in the EL course. Generally, the modals constitute a serious difficulty for Arab learners of English.

Most of the deviant modal choices in (11), (12) and (2) are semantic. However, the formal insertion of *to* after *should* in (2.c) reflects, inter alia, the NL system. As illustrated in (7.b) above, the MSA verb which parallels *should* is followed by the subjunctive particle *?an* which is equivalent to *to*. Compare the apodosis of (2):

- (v) fa. yajibu ?an tasta9idda.  
(Lit.) (you) should to get ready.

Thus, it is likely, as a consequence of insufficient learning, that the pupils used *to* after *should* on analogy of its corresponding Arabic *?an*.

### 3.3. Tense, phase and aspect

Table III shows the type and number of errors in tense, phase and aspect which comprised 20.4% of the pupils' overall deviant responses.

Table III. Tense, phase and aspect

No	Type of Error	Examples of Errors	No. of Errors	%
(3)		_____ twenty-five students in class.		
(13)	deletion of copula <i>are</i>	b. There This is the library. _____ very large.	29	9
(10)	deletion of copula <i>is</i>	a. It Someone _____ it years ago.	43	13
	pres. perfect // simple past.	b. has stolen	91	28
(14)	past passive // simple past.	c. was stolen	94	29
		Salma _____ a skirt and scarf yesterday.		
	simple present // simple past.	a. buys	33	10
	pres. perf. // simple past.	b. has bought	90	28
	simple future // simple past.	c. will buy	45	14
(15)		When the teacher was young he _____ football.		
	past progr. // simple past ( <i>used to play</i> )	a. was playing	132	41
	insertion of redundant <i>was</i>	b. was used to play	68	21
	pres. perf. // simple past ( <i>used to play</i> )	c. has played	35	11
(16)		My camera doesn't work, but I _____.		
	present <i>be</i> // <i>did</i>	a. wish it is	57	18
	<i>does</i> // <i>did</i>	b. wish it does	116	36
(17)		If you had a lot of money, what _____ you buy?		
	<i>will</i> // <i>would</i>	a. will	77	24
	<i>do</i> // <i>would</i>	b. do	65	20
	<i>can</i> // <i>would</i>	c. can	74	23
(18)		Huda and Ali _____ at home yesterday.		
	<i>are</i> // <i>were</i>	a. are	47	15



(19)	deletion of aux. <i>is</i> simple past // pres. progr. simple present // pres. progr.	She _____ English now. a. studying b. studied c. study	41 65 160	13 20 50
(20)	<i>had to</i> // <i>has to</i> pres. passive // <i>has to study</i>	My brother _____ mathematics tonight. a. had to study b. is studied	86 43	27 13
(21)	<i>is he</i> // <i>has he been</i> deletion of <i>been</i> simple past // pres. perfect	Fuad is in London. How long _____ there? a. is he b. has he c. was he	86 132 73	27 41 23
(1)	past progr. // s. past	I didn't know that _____ c. the work was finishing.	112	35
(9)	simple pres. // simple past	Did Salim win? 'No, he _____'. b. lose	54	17
Total			1948	20.4

### 3.3.1. Copula deletion

The deviance in (3.b) and (13.a) is due to the deletion of the copula. These are unmistakably interference errors caused by the structure of Arabic nominal sentence. Both JA and MSA allow an NP + NP sentence in the present, but not in the past or the future. Thus, it is possible to attest '*al-ma:ʔ sa:xin*' (Lit.) 'the water hot', but '*ka:na al-ma:ʔu saxinan*' (Lit.) 'the water was hot' or '*sa.yaku:nu al-ma:ʔu sa:xinan*' (Lit.) 'the water will be hot'. It is likely then that the pupils chose (3.b) and (13.a) under the influence of their mother tongue system. Moreover, it seems that the deletion of the copula is a persistent error in the interlanguage of Arab learners of English, even at advanced levels.

### 3.3.2. Tense

As table III shows, the pupils confused the simple present, the simple past, the perfect forms and the progressive forms. A careful scrutiny of these errors shows NL impact on the pupils' erroneous performance in these grammatical categories.

The tense errors in (14.a) and (14.c), (18.a), (19.b), (20.a) and (9.b) cannot be ascribed to Arabic interference, rather they are developmental. They may be accounted for in terms of transfer of learning (Selinker 1972) which is traceable to poor strategies of learning. In contradistinction, the tense errors in (15.b), (16.b), (17.a), (17.b) and (17.c), (19.c) and (21.c) are traceable, inter alia, to Arabic influences. However, in view of this age-group of pupils, these errors cannot be regarded as persistent or terminal at this stage of their learning. Moreover, the re-

dundant verb *was* in (15.b) is probably a direct translation of the corresponding MSA structure which conveys past habit. Consider:

- (vi) \_\_\_\_\_ ka:na mu9ta:dan ʔan yal9aba.  
(Lit.) was (he) used to play.

In English, by contrast, this collocation of *was* + *used to* + infinitive is non-existent.

Furthermore, (16) and (17) present instances of errors in the unreal use of tense with *wish* and conditional constructions. The high frequency of errors in these two forms (54% and 67%, respectively) implies that they constitute a serious problem for Jordanian school children. These categories are introduced late in the Jordanian EL course. As Braine (1971) (quoted in Richards 1974:14) ascertains 'categories expressing abstract or relational ideas [as in these sentences] develop later than those of more concrete reference'. However, while the error in (16.a) is developmental, emanating from EL idiosyncrasy and the learners' inadequate internalization of the respective rules, those in (16.b) and (17.a), (17.b) and (17.c) are clear instances of NL interference. In English, unreal wish requires tense back shift. Contrastively, this rule is lacking in Arabic. Hence, it is highly likely that the 36% of pupils who opted for (16.b) were motivated by the corresponding Arabic rule. Moreover, whereas English conditionals require tense sequence in both the protasis and apodosis, this constraint does not apply strictly to Arabic conditionals. More specifically, unreal English conditionals use a past modal verb in the apodosis, while Arabic conditionals may use any of the forms which are equivalent to the English auxiliary verbs in (17.a), (17.b) and (17.c). Thus, the Arabic rendition of the apodosis of (17) would be:

- (vii) \_\_\_\_\_ fa.ma: da: (a) *sa.tashtari:*  
will you buy  
(b) *tashtari:*  
(you) *buy*  
(c) *tastaTi:9 ʔan tashtari:*  
*can you (to) buy.*

For the formation of the question in (b), the pupils seem to realize that the auxiliary *do* is required in this context. Thus, it is apparent that in the absence of sufficient learning, pupils opted for the erroneous alternatives in (17) on analogy of their parallel Arabic forms.

Similarly, whereas the errors in (18.a) and (19.b) are developmental, that in (19.c) is a striking case of NL interference. The fact that 50% of the pupils opted for this deviant answer tends to lend support to this hypothesis. On face value, this error seems to be one caused by *s*-inflection deletion. However, a deeper, more careful look would unravel an error in tense. In both JA and MSA, the simple present verb form is used to convey both the present habitual and incomplete, simultaneous present meanings. The two meanings are usually detected



by the collocating specifier or by context of situation. Thus (19) is rendered in Arabic as:

- (viii) hiya *tadrusu* ingili:zi: *al.ʔa:n*  
She *study* English now.

The same tense form can express the habitual sense, e.g.:

- (ix) hiya *tadrusu* ingili:zi: *kulla yawm*.  
She *study* English *everyday*.

Thus, it is likely that the pupils chose the tense form in (19.c) on the basis of its Arabic analogue.

On the other hand, the errors in (10.c), (20.b) and (21.a) and (21.b) may have resulted from carelessness or transfer of learning. Teachers often overemphasize structural forms at the expense of their uses. For instance, they often overgeneralize the forms of the passive voice and overlook their uses in appropriate, meaningful contexts. However, while the deviance in (21.a) and (21.b) is developmental, that in (21.c) might have been caused by Arabic. Neither JA, nor MSA has a present perfect form to convey the present relevance of the past. Instead, the simple past expresses this function. The pupils might, therefore, have been motivated to choose the simple past verb *was* in (21.c) in lieu of *has been* by this function of the Arabic past tense. Moreover, it is universally observed that the present perfect, albeit non-existent in Arabic, is a persistent source of difficulty for Arab learners of English. This observation coincides with Duškova's (1969:29), namely that "non-existent categories in NL seem to form a more tenacious source of difficulty than the correlated ones".

### 3.3.3. Phase

Table III includes three citations (10.b), (14.b) and (15.c) of the present perfect in lieu of the simple past tense. As explained in (3.3.2.) above, Arabic does not have a present perfect form. Therefore, Arab learners of English often use the simple past tense instead of the present perfect when expressing the present time relevance of the past. However, the errors cited here show the opposite. Here, it is the perfect form that has replaced the simple past tense. Consequently, they are not justifiable in terms of NL interference.

### 3.3.4. Aspect

Table III also shows three citations of errors in aspect (15.a), (19.a) and (1.c). The first two errors can be traced in some way to NL impact. The pupils' deviant responses in (15.a) are clearly related to Arabic tense forms and functions. Whereas, the English simple past tense may in certain contexts express past reiteration as (15) exemplifies, Arabic uses *ka:n* + simple present '*was* + *v*' to indicate this same function. Thus, the assumption that the pupils chose (15.a) as equivalent to *ka:n yal9ab* 'was playing' stands highly tenable, and is supported by a substantial proportion (41%) of pupils who opted for this answer.

Similarly, the erroneous performance of the pupils in (19.a), namely the deletion of the auxiliary *is* must have been caused, inter alia, by NL influences. Arabic does not possess a parallel auxiliary verb for the present aspect. Incidentally, here one can cite an instance of simplification (Ferguson 1971) which is typical of native-child performance. Thus, it is viable that the pupils overgeneralized the Arabic rule and, consequently chose the *v-ing* form *playing* without the auxiliary. Moreover, it is also possible that the error in (19.a) lies in the verb form where the pupils confused the *v-ing* and the simple present form. Having done so, they might have been motivated by the fact that, unlike English, Arabic uses the simple present form to express the incomplete, simultaneous present action. However, this error which resulted from the pupils' inability to make this formal differentiation between verb forms is developmental caused by inadequate learning.

Moreover, (1.c) represents a complex error which does not lend itself to easy, straightforward explanation. It possibly occurred as a consequence of transfer of learning. Teachers overemphasize the use of *v-ing* after the verb *to be* without pointing out the semantic constraints that might turn out the resultant utterance unacceptable. For example, the semantic nature of the agent (the work) in (1.c) rules out the use of the progressive verb *was finishing*. Moreover, it is also likely that this error was caused by overgeneralizing the rule of the English past progressive aspect of a durative verb with an animate agent (e.g. the man was sleeping/working/etc.) and using it erroneously with a non-durative verb (*finish*) instead of the simple past tense.

### 3.4. Interrogatives

The data contained five questions, one *yes/no* question, two *wh*-questions and two tag questions. The data collecting instrument did not manifest errors in question word order, except in one instance (cf.15.b). Apart from this, all the attested errors were confined to question forms. It was found that the pupils' errors in interrogatives comprised 9.66% of the total errors. Table IV shows the type and number of errors in this area.

Table IV. Interrogatives

No	Type of Error	Examples of Errors	No. of Errors	%
(22)		_____ our teacher speak many languages?		
	Aux. <i>be</i> // <i>does</i>	a. Is	69	22
	<i>do</i> // <i>does</i>	b. Do	174	54
	<i>has</i> // <i>does</i>	c. Has	26	08
(23)		_____ is a bus ticket to Aqaba? 'JD 3.5'.		
	<i>How many</i> // <i>How much</i>	a. How many	70	22
	<i>What costs</i> // <i>How much</i>	b. What costs	40	13
	<i>How far</i> // <i>How much</i>	c. How far	45	14

(24)	_____ is your favorite sport, fishing or tennis?			
	<i>What // which</i>	a. What	169	53
	<i>Whom // which</i>	b. Whom	29	09
	<i>Whose // which</i>	c. Whose	31	10
(25)	Mr. Mufti is a good teacher, _____?			
	<i>is not him // isn't he</i>	a. is not him	32	10
	insertion of redundant <i>he</i> before <i>aux.</i>	b. he isn't he	52	16
	deletion of <i>n't</i>	c. is he	66	21
(26)	You haven't read this story, _____?			
	<i>will // have</i>	a. will you		49
	<i>won't it // have you</i>	b. won't it		36
	<i>is it // have you</i>	c. is it	34	11
Total			922	9.66

The errors in (22.a), (22.b) and (22.c) are all in question markers. Although these question markers were introduced very early and frequently in their EL course, pupils seem even at this stage not to have internalized them yet. About 84% of the pupils sample still confuse the use of the primary auxiliary verbs *to be*, *to do* and *to have*, and more than half of them still confuse *do* with *does*. As a matter of fact, all these English auxiliaries in these responses are translatable by the Arabic question particle *hal*. Here, we may have an instance of underdifferentiation in which NL plays a distinct role. This interpretation is viable as it is supported by a high percentage of deviant answers, especially in (22.b). Likewise, whereas the error in (23.c) is developmental, the incorrect question phrases in (23.a) and (23.b) are likely to have been stimulated, inter alia, by NL. Arab learners of English confuse *how much* and *how many* when referring to quantity. Both forms are translatable in Arabic as *kam*. Thus, learners would use *how many* instead of *how much*, as in (23.a) and vice versa. Besides, the deviant question form in (23.b) can be traced to its JA counterpart, namely *shu:* or *'iesh* 'what'. Consider:

- (x) *shu: bitkallif* taðkirat al-ba:S Ia.19aqabeh  
(Lit.) *what cost* a bus-ticket to Aqaba.

On the other hand, the errors in (24.a), (24.b) and (24.c) are developmental. It is likely that the pupils' choice of *what* instead of *which* in (24.a) was influenced by the first part of the question. Apparently, the pupils did not capture the latter part which converts the entire sentence into a choice question. This would account for the high frequency of errors made in this sentence. Moreover, a relatively small, but by no means insignificant proportion of pupils confused *whom* and *whose* with *which* in (24.b) and (24.c) although the distinction between these question words was introduced early on in their EL course. Similarly, the errors in (25) and (26)

are all intralingual, aroused by EL ambivalent tag question rules – a phenomenon having no formal parallel in Arabic. Whereas English uses varied forms constrained by factors of subject, number, person, gender and point of orientation (Quirk, et al. 1972:390), each of MSA and JA has one and the same formulaic expression, viz *'alaysa kaða:lik* and *mish heik*, respectively. Either one of these two forms is translatable by any of the various English forms. This is one particular area of English that poses serious problems for Arab learners of English. One cannot claim that this difficulty arose from inadequate focus on this grammatical category in the Jordanian EL course. On the contrary, the pupils had been heavily exposed to it in their formal lessons. It is plausible then that this persistent error which was committed by a sizeable portion of pupils arose as a result of mechanical, meaningless learning, or caused by the pupils' lack of concentration on these test items.

### 3.5. Pronouns

The data contained four different types of pronouns, viz relative, possessive, demonstrative and reflexive. The total errors in this category reached 10.4% of the pupils' overall deviant performance. Table V contains the type and number of the pupils' errors in this area.

Table V. Pronouns

No	Type of Error	Examples of Erros	No. of Errors	%
(27)		Our neighbour, _____ name is Charles, will leave tomorrow.		
	insertion of redundant <i>his</i> <i>of whom // whose</i> <i>who's // whose</i>	a. whose his b. of whom c. who's	45 46 72	14 14 25
(28)		Tom Smith has two sisters. _____ names are Mary and Liz.		
	<i>Her // Their</i> <i>Hers // Their</i> <i>They're // Their</i>	a. Her b. Hers c. They're	66 81 8	21 25 2.5
(3)		_____ twenty-five students in the class.		
	<i>Their // There are</i>	c. Their	14	3.5
(13)		This is the library. _____ very large.		
	<i>Its // It's</i>	b. Its	180	56
(29)		_____ brothers are Bill and Mike.		
	<i>his // apostrophe 's</i>	a. Bob his	60	19



(30)	Look at ____ big animal in that field over there.		
	<i>those // that</i>	a. those	92 29
	<i>these // that</i>	b. these	84 26
	<i>this // that</i>	c. this	75 23
(31)	Who cooked your dinner? 'We cooked it ____.'		
	<i>myself // ourselves</i>	a. myself	62 19
	<i>themselves // ourselves</i>	b. themselves	56 18
	<i>yourselves // ourselves</i>	c. yourselves	54 17
Total			995 10.4

As table V shows, (27.a) and (29.a) are instances of 'cross association' (Jain 1974) in which NL plays a plausible role. Both MSA and JA use a relative pronoun + a genitive construct to express the meaning of *whose*. The MSA form of the relative pronoun is variable according to number and gender, but JA uses a single form *illi*: invariably regardless of person, number or gender of the head noun. Moreover, whilst Arabic permits an annexed possessive pronoun anaphoric to a preceding head noun, English does not. More specifically, Arabic normally has a pronoun joined in the genitive case to the noun following the relative pronoun *allaḍi*: or *illi*:. This annexed pronoun refers to the head noun of the relative clause and agrees with it in person, number and gender. Thus, 'whose name' in (27.a) is literally rendered in Arabic as:

- (xi) *illi ism-u* (JA)  
*allḍi: ismu-hu* (MSA)  
 (Lit.) *who name-his* (who his name, i.e. whose name)

Similarly, Arabic has no form analogous to English apostrophe-*s* to express possession or relationship (cf. (29.b) in table XI). Instead, it uses a genitive construct of the type (a) N+N or (b) N+S, where the subject in S can be joined in a genitive construct to a pronoun referring to the head noun (N) of the matrix sentence and agreeing with it in person, number and gender. Thus, (29.a) can be expressed in Arabic as (a) *ʔixwatu bob* (lit.): *brothers bob* or as (b) *bob ʔixwatu-hu*, (lit.): *bob brothers his*, (i.e. bob his brothers). It is likely then that the pupils who opted for (29.a) were influenced by this latter corresponding Arabic variant.

In addition, further scrutiny of the errors in table V shows that except for (28.c) and (3.c) which may reflect NL impact, all the others are intralingual or developmental. Some of them, however, are errors in person or number concord, such as those in (28.a) and (28.b) (30.a) and (30.b) and (31), and some are errors in form. For instance, in (27.c), (29.a), (3.c) and (13.b) the pupils selected *who's* for *whose*; *they're* for *their*; *their* for *there* and *its* for *it's*, respectively. Obviously, these developmental errors, albeit orthographically distinct, were probably caused by the homophony of the pairs – an effect that may have been produced by transfer of learning. Classroom teaching strategies are often fragmentary, and capitalize on

oral practice at the expense of correct spelling. However, the errors in (28.c) and (3.c) exhibit, additionally, absence of the copula, a phenomenon that is potentially caused by the NL system (cf. 3.3.1. above).

### 3.6. Comparative/superlative adjectives

As table VI indicates, the data include only two sentences on comparative and superlative degrees of adjectives. Arabic rules for the comparative and superlative degrees are morphologically different from those of English. Both MSA and JA use the forms *ʔafḍal\** or *ʔakḍar* + verbal (abstract) noun to express the comparative degree 'adjective + er' or 'more + adjective', and *alʔafḍal* or *alʔakḍar* + verbal noun to express 'the adjective + (e)st' or 'the most + adjective' (depending on the morphological pattern of the source verb). However, the grammatical distribution of these categories is identical in both English and Arabic.

Table VI. Comparative/superlative adjectives

No	Type of Error	Examples of Errors	No. of Errors	%
(32)		Sally is 17 years old. Her sister is 15. Sally is _____ her sister.		
	<i>old // older than</i>	a. old	59	18
	<i>the older // older than</i>	b. the older	53	17
	double comparative: redundant 'more'	c. more older	69	22
(33)		Travelling by plane is _____ expensive way.		
	<i>more // the most</i>	a. more	115	36
	deletion of <i>the</i>	b. most	38	12
Total			334	3.5

A careful look at the errors in (32) and (33) in table VI shows that none of them is translatable by any acceptable comparative or superlative Arabic form. Hence, these errors cannot be ascribed to NL interference; they are rather developmental, pertaining to the TL structure. However, the double comparative error in (32.c) is common among Jordanian pupils.

As we see, although the data involve only five errors in this area, the number of pupils who committed them is proportionally substantial. This entails the need for laying more emphasis on the comparative and superlative adjectives in the learning-teaching process.

### 3.7. Intensifiers/determiners/quantifiers

As table VII shows, about 7.8% of the pupils' total errors were in these categories.

\* *ʔafḍal* is the Arabic morphological pattern for the comparative degree.



Table VII. Intensifiers/determiners/quantifiers

No	Type of Error	Examples of Errors	No. of Errors	%
(33)	<i>so // the most</i>	Travelling by plane is _____ expensive way. c. so	50	16
(34)	<i>so much // such such a // such a such // such</i>	The bank couldn't pay _____ large salaries. a. so much b. such a c. a such	87 92 32	27 29 10
(35)	<i>much // so very // so such // so</i>	The examination was _____ difficult that Salim failed it. a. much b. very c. such	50 156 29	16 49 09
(36)	<i>Anywhere // Nowhere Anywhere else // Nowhere Somewhere // Nowhere</i>	Where did you go last night? '_____. I stayed here'. a. Anywhere b. Anywhere else c. Somewhere	140 56 54	44 18 17
Total			746	7.8

Generally, the majority of errors in Table VII are intralingual. However, some of them are 'cross-associational' in which one can trace some degree of NL transfer. Thus, the deviant responses in (35.a) and (35.b) are complex and reflect both TL and NL influences. While English distinguishes between *much* as an amplifier and *very* as an intensifier (cf. Quirk, et al. 1972:449), and while they have distinct and definable distributions and co-occurrences, they are both translatable by the same Arabic word, namely *jiddan* (MSA) or *ikθi:r* (JA). Thus, it is tenable to say that the pupils' deviant responses in (35.a and 35.b) were influenced by the equivalent MSA of JA form. Consider:

(xii) 1.imtiHa:n ka:n ikθi:r Sa9b \_\_\_\_\_(JA)  
(Lit.) the exam was very/much difficult. \_\_\_\_\_

(xiii) al.imtiHa:nu ka:na Sa9ban Jiddan \_\_\_\_\_(MSA)  
(Lit.) the exam was difficult very/much \_\_\_\_\_.

The pupils might have generalized this translation, namely that either English word (*very* or *much*) would do duty for 'so' in (35). Moreover, it is likely that *such* in (35.c) was also confused with *much* in (35.a) by the pupils who chose the former due to decontextualized learning and teaching strategies.

On the other hand, the errors in (36) cannot be attributed to NL. Arabic has no cognate morphemes corresponding to the indefinite compound quantifiers in

these erroneous responses. Since this is the case, one can confidently hypothesize that these errors resulted from non-contextualized teaching in the classroom. Teachers repeatedly introduce the differential use of these indefinite quantifiers in an abstract, isolated paradigm, that is in assertive contexts *some* is used, but in non-assertive contexts *any* is used. Nonetheless, it seems that the pupils who made these errors did not capture the negative response in the second part of (36). The 62% of them who opted for (36.a) and (36.b) must have been influenced by the interrogative part of this sentence while the other 17% who chose (36.c) could have been influenced by the third part of it.

### 3.8. Lexis

The data in table VIII do not present enough examples to warrant a reliable generalization. The writers could have neglected this area had they not been keen to address all the errors which occurred on the test to give a complete view of their findings. Besides, the number of errors in these simple sentences is appalling, a case which entails paying more attention to the teaching/learning of vocabulary in the EL course.

Table VIII. Lexis

No	Type of Error	Examples of Errors	No. of Errors	%
(9)	<i>won // lost</i>	Did Salim win? 'No, he ____'. c. won	98	31
(37)	<i>public garden // restaurant shop // restaurant bank // restaurant</i>	A waiter usually works in a ____. a. public garden b. shop c. bank	82 76 35	26 24 11
(38)	<i>hotel // hospital museum // hospital theatre // hospital</i>	A person who is very sick is taken to the ____. a. hotel b. museum c. theatre	65 77 28	20 24 9
(39)	<i>Tuesday // Thursday. Monday // Thursday Sunday // Thursday</i>	Wednesday, _____, Friday. a. Tuesday b. Monday c. Sunday	33 17 12	10 5 4
(40)	<i>to house // home house // home</i>	He always goes _____ with an empty bag. a. to house b. house	102 23	32 7
(4)	<i>make // do</i>	Could you _____? c. make me a favour	66	21
Total			714	7.48

Apart from (40.a) and (40.b) all the lexical errors in table VIII are developmental. The errors in (40.a) and (40.b) are somehow traceable to the NL system. Whereas the deletion of *to* is obligatory with the word *home* in this context, the insertion of its MSA equivalent *li* or *ʔila* is obligatory in the same context. Moreover, Arabic *bayt* is translatable by either 'home' or 'house'. Therefore, Arab learners of English often confuse these two words and tend to use them interchangeably. It is plausible then that the pupils who erroneously chose (40.a) or (40.b) thought the two forms were free variants. Besides, English places a distinctive syntactical restriction on the distribution of these two words (e.g: *home*, but *to the house*). Hence, it is viable that the 32% of pupils who chose (40.a) were motivated by the corresponding MSA structure *li.lbayt* or *ʔila l.bayt*. On the other hand, JA may not require the preposition *ʔila* before *al.bayt*. This might have led to the error in (40.b). consider:

- (xiv) huwwa dayman biru:H I.beit \_\_\_\_\_  
 (Lit.) he always goes house/home.

As we have seen the poor performance in these simple sentences in this section is generally attributable to lack of concentration, guessing and/or based on isolated and mechanical drilling, away from meaning and contextualization.

### 3.9. Prepositions and temporal specifiers

Table IX provides data for testing the pupils' proficiency in the use of five prepositions and one temporal specifier. The prepositions tested here are *in*, *between*, *at*, *for* and *to* as in (40.c-44). The total error percentage in these categories reached 7% of the pupils' overall errors. This relatively poor result indicates the need to concentrate on prepositions and temporal specifiers in the learning-teaching process.

Table IX. Prepositions and temporal specifiers

No	Type of Error	Examples of Errors	No. of Errors	%
(40)	insertion of <i>to</i>	He always goes _____ with an empty bag. c. to home	94	29
(41)	<i>to</i> // <i>in</i>	Martha works _____ a good school. a. to	37	29
	<i>on</i> // <i>in</i>	b. on	39	12
	<i>into</i> // <i>in</i>	c. into	30	10
(42)		Sami is on my right and Faud on my left. I am _____ them.		
	<i>before</i> // <i>between</i>	a. before	39	12

(43)	<i>around</i> // <i>between</i>	b. around	48	15
	<i>among</i> // <i>between</i>	c. among	44	14
		What time did the bell ring? _____ five to ten?		
(44)	<i>on</i> // <i>at</i>	a. on	28	9
	<i>from</i> // <i>at</i>	c. from	86	27
		Mrs. Mufti is cooking chicken _____ dinner.		
(45)	<i>to</i> // <i>for</i>	a. to	31	10
	<i>on</i> // <i>for</i>	b. on	51	16
	<i>from</i> // <i>for</i>	c. from	48	15
		I learned how to ride a bicycle two years _____.		
	<i>last week</i> // <i>ago</i>	a. last week	31	10
	<i>since now</i> // <i>ago</i>	b. since now	9	3
Total			667	7

A cursory look at the deviant choices of (41-43), (44.c) and (45.a) and (45.b) shows unequivocally that they are non-interference ones. They are developmental, caused by inadequate learning. However, NL effect on the errors in (40.c) and (44.a) and (44.b) is highly potential. As for (44.a) and (44.b) English prefers the use of the preposition *for* whereas JA permits the use of either *la* 'to/for' or *ʔala* 'on' in this context. Compare:

- (xv) as.sayyida mufti btuTbux d3 a:d3 la.19asha/ʔala al.9asha  
 (Lit.) Mrs Mufti cook chicken to/for/on dinner

It is possible, therefore, that the pupils overgeneralized the Arabic forms and as a result chose (44.a) and (44.b) on analogy of their Arabic counterparts. Moreover, the error in (44.a) was possibly envisaged by the pupils as a stylistic choice since both *to* and *for* correspond to Arabic *la* in this context. Likewise, the error in (40.c) could also be traced to Arabic. This error, however, was discussed elsewhere in this paper (cf. (40.a) and (40.b) in 3.8. above).

### 3.10. Concord

The pupils' deviant choices in table x represent errors in verb-subject concord. Except for (18.b) and (20.c) these errors appeared in tables I and V, but were addressed there from a different perspective. A careful examination of these errors would reveal two types of deviation in concord, namely with person (20.c) and (31.b) and (31.c) and with number (18.b), (28.a), (30.a) and (30.b) and (31.a).

The relatively large number of pupils (5.7%) who goofed in this area implies that it forms a difficulty for those students despite the fact that this simple type of verb-subject concord was introduced quite early on and frequently in their EL course. However, these errors cannot be justified in terms of Arabic interference.



They are likely to be the result of inadequate learning or lack of concentration, or both.

Table X. Concord

No	Type of Error	Examples of Errors	No. of Errors	%
(18)	<i>was // were</i>	Huda and Ali _____ at home yesterday. b. was	75	23
(20)	<i>have // has</i>	My brother _____ mathematics tonight. c. have to study	54	17
(28)	<i>Her/Their</i>	Tom Smith has two sisters. _____ names are Mary and Liz. a. Her	66	21
(30)	<i>those // that</i> <i>these // that</i>	Look at _____ big animal in that field over there. a. those b. these	92 84	29 26
(31)	<i>myself // ourselves</i> <i>themselves // ourselves</i> <i>yourselves // ourselves</i>	Who cooked your dinner? We cooked it _____. a. myself b. themselves c. yourselves	62 56 54	19 18 17
Total			543	5.7

## 3.11. Miscellaneous

Table X shows a number of other structural errors which cannot be subsumed under the previous ten categories. These miscellaneous errors comprise 14% of the pupils' overall errors on the test.

Table XI. Miscellaneous

No	Type of Error	Examples of Errors	No. of Errors	%
(13)	<i>has // is</i>	This is the library. _____ very large. c. It has	34	11
(16)	<i>wish it did // hope it to</i>	My camera doesn't work, but I _____. c. hope it to	56	18
(18)	<i>had // were</i>	Huda and Ali _____ at home yesterday. c. had	19	6

(29)	deletion of apostrophe <i>s</i> <i>has // apostrophe s</i>	_____ brothers are Bill and Mike. b. Bob c. Bob has	80 30	25 10
(45)	<i>old // ago</i>	I learned to ride a bicycle two years _____. c. old	55	17
(46)	<i>Raining // It rains</i> <i>Rains // It rains</i> <i>The sky is raining // it rains</i>	_____ a lot in the mountains every year. a. Raining b. Rains c. The sky is raining	142 69 70	44 22 22
(47)	<i>over // up</i> <i>same // up</i> <i>all // up</i>	I don't really care. It's _____ to you. a. over b. same c. all	73 89 64	23 28 20
(48)	<i>we // let's</i> <i>want // let's</i> <i>on // let's</i>	I am hungry. _____ eat. a. we b. want c. on	15 33 60	7 10 19
(49)	<i>neither spoke // both didn't speak</i> <i>neither spoke // both didn't speak</i> <i>neither // both</i>	Neither one of us spoke at the meeting. We _____. a. neither spoke. b. either spoke. c. neither didn't speak.	67 83 61	17 26 19
(50)	<i>does also // so does</i> <i>too // so does</i> <i>is // does</i>	Sammer draws well, and _____ Salma. a. does also b. too c. so is	52 94 89	16 29 28
Total			1335	14

Table XI shows that apart from (29.b), (46) and (50), all the other errors are developmental triggered by TL structure, transfer of learning, inadequate learning, lack of concentration, or by all of these together. On the other hand, the erroneous answers in (29.b), (46) and (50) can be traced in one way or another to NL interference. These errors, however, have a complex nature. The deviance in (29.b) is unmistakably an interference one. Arabic lacks a morphological marker analogous to the apostrophe *s* to express the possessive or genitive case. Instead, the grammatical structural N+N expresses this function (e.g. *?ixwatu bob* (lit. 'brothers bob'). However, while the pupils at this learning stage seemed to have been aware that in English *Bob* must precede the headword 'brothers', they failed

to realize the need for the apostrophe-s under the influence of the corresponding Arabic system.

Likewise, the erroneous answers in (46) represent a case of 'cross-association'. One could account for these errors by different factors, including NL. It is possible that these errors are developmental, caused by insufficient learning or inadequate teaching strategies. But it is also equally plausible to say that in (46.a) the pupils intended to say 'raining is' (i.e. they used the gerund form and then deleted the copula). This would mean that their choice of the gerund form was intralingual, but the absence of the copula was triggered by Arabic structure rules which allow a nominal sentence of the type NP+NP. The high percentage of pupils (44%) who opted for this deviant choice would lend support to this claim. Similarly, 22% of the pupils may have erroneously chosen (46.b) on the assumption that 'rains' was a plural noun subject. Here, the copula was also assumed to be non-existent under the impact of Arabic NP+NP structure (cf. 3.3.1.). While English does not use the plural form 'rains' as subject in this sentence, Arabic does. Consider:

(xvi) *al.ʔamTa:ru* kaθi:ratun fi.ljiba:l kulla sanah  
(Lit.) rains a lot in the mountains every year

Moreover, it is also possible that the pupils thought that rains is a verb whose subject was missing. This possibility could also be due to JA. Analogous to English, JA allows a dummy subject in (46) too. In JA it is correct to say:

(xvii) btumTur ikθi:r fi.jba:l kul sanah  
(Lit.) (It) rain a lot in the mountains every year

Furthermore, the deviance in (46.c) is a clear resultant effect of MSA. Whereas MSA uses *as.sama:ʔu tumTir* (lit.) 'the sky rain', English demands the use of the dummy subject *it* in this context. Moreover, this error is complicated by the use of the progressive aspect. Instead of using the imperfect 'rains', the pupils chose the progressive aspect 'is raining'. However, the progressive aspect here cannot be said to have been inspired by the Arabic tense system since Arabic has no morphologically distinctive form for the present progressive aspect. As explained elsewhere (cf. 3.3.4.), the simple present form is used to indicate both present tense and present progressive aspect.

Finally, (50) brings about errors which do not lend themselves easily to straightforward explanation. However, it is likely that the pupils' choices were motivated by their NL. The translation of the second clause in (50) reveals that *too*, *also* and *so* are synonymous with Arabic *ʔayDan* or *kada:lik*. It is possible then that the pupils chose these English words in their deviant answers to (50) on the assumption that they all were interchangeably equivalent to the Arabic words. Nonetheless, the choice of *does* in (50.a) and *is* in (50.c) is reminiscent of overgeneralization which is promoted by the teachers' overemphasis on the use of these two auxiliaries with the third person singular nouns.

#### 4. Conclusions

To sum up, this study has revealed a number of syntactical areas that seem to be problematic for Jordanian school children. Table XII summarizes the numbers and percentages of the pupils' overall errors in those areas. The analysis of these errors disclosed a number of source factors, including NL interference. The findings of the study support the notion that NL transfer is a genuine property of El Arab learners' interlanguage. Moreover, the study has shown that the pupils made 9543 errors of which 30% are attributable to NL interference. In addition, the study warrants the following conclusions and recommendations.

1. If the numbers and proportions of the pupils' errors in the syntactical/grammatical categories in table XII represent a scale of difficulty escalating from the easiest, namely the comparative and superlative forms up to the most difficult, i.e. tense forms, then obviously curriculum designers, materials writers and teachers should draw insights from these findings, and should address these categories accordingly. Consequently, they should present them in the same order of importance.
2. Interference may occur as a result of all the linguistic systems the learner is already familiar with. In this study the interlanguage of Arab school children was influenced by MSA or JA, or both simultaneously (cf. Mukattash 1980:144).

Table XII. Summary of number and percentage of total errors

No	Category	No. of total Errors	%	
(1)	Coparative/superlative adj.	334	3.5	
(2)	Word order	377	3.95	
(3)	Concord	543	5.7	
(4)	Prepositions and temporal specifiers	667	7.00	
(5)	Lexis	714	7.48	
(6)	Intensifiers/Determiners/Quantifiers	746	7.8	
(7)	Interrogatives	922	9.66	
(8)	Pronouns	995	10.4	
(9)	Verbal forms: (Modal verbs)	743 626	7.8 6.6	1369 14.3%
(10)	Tense-related forms: - Copula deletion - Tense - Phase - Aspect	72 1375 216 285	0.75 14.4 2.26 3.00	1948 20.4%
Total		8615	90.29	

3. It is not always feasible to exactly pinpoint a single, unique source of the error. Many factors seem to be associated, including NL interference, transfer of learning, overgeneralization, intricacy of TL, inadequate learning and lack of concentration.



4. Errors committed by the pupils at this stage cannot be claimed to be fossilized. On the contrary, they are still transitional, but of course susceptible to persistence if not remedied during their schooling stage through the implementation of sound, meaning-based teaching-learning strategies.
5. No claim is made that the interference errors of the pupils in this study are unique to Arab children learning English due to Arabic-specific structure. Learners of different linguistic backgrounds have been frequently reported (cf. Dulay and Burt 1974) to manifest similar deviant performance, even those learning their mother tongue.
6. There appears to be no strong correlation between introducing certain structural items early on and frequently in the EL course and the frequency of the pupils' erroneous performance in them. This conclusion is endorsed by Mukattash (1980).
7. The relatively poor performance of pupils in these syntactical categories calls for reconsidering the existing pedagogical practices in teaching English in the Jordanian schools, and consequently, calls for the need to provide the pupils with meaningful and intensive orientation in English in their early stages of learning.

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