The Impact of EFL Learners’ Mother Tongue (Arabic) Interference on the Acquisition and Use of Some English Prepositions (on, in, at) in Written Production

A Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Master Degree in Language Sciences and Teaching English as a Foreign Language

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Dedication

I thank Allah, the Almighty, for everything

This work is dedicated to

My parents: Thank you for your encouragement and motivation all the way long. Your support and constant love have sustained me throughout my life. Thank you for your never-ending love. Thank you both for all your sacrifice.

Love you both.

My dear brother and sisters: Babi, Abir. Youyou, sissou, and my little angel Loulou. Thank you for offering me the suitable environment to accomplish this work.

My besties: Assoum, Foufa, sarsor and meryouma. Thank you for your emotional support and caring. Thank you for being here whenever I needed you.

I do love you.

Without forgetting Ahlem, Marwa, and Hadjora.

Big thanks to my friends who stood by me through my journey.
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Abstract

Learning the English preposition by EFL students is not without difficulties since the two languages differ in many aspects. This research work aims to investigate the impact of EFL learners’ mother tongue interference on the acquisition and use of some English prepositions (on, in, at) in written production. Based on the assumption that 3rd year students master some grammatical rules that govern the use of prepositions, we hypothesize that errors made by EFL students are due to interference of standard Arabic. In order to check this hypothesis, a test and a questionnaire have been administered to a sample of 20 students. The results show that students have failed to put the correct form of English prepositions and committed some errors which are mainly due to their mother tongue (Arabic) interference. In order to confirm the hypothesized reasons behind such a failure, a questionnaire has been administered to the same sample. The findings of the analysis of the questionnaire have indicated that the primary cause of misusing the English prepositions is due to interference of standard Arabic, and this confirms the hypothesis of this research.
List of abbreviations

CA: Contrastive Analysis.

CAH: Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis.

EA: Error Analysis.

EFL: English Foreign Language.

ESL: English as a Second Language

FL: Foreign Language.

I.e.: It Means

IL: Interlanguage.

L1: Native Language, or First Language (Arabic in this study).

L2: Second Language, or Foreign Language (English in this Study).

MT: Mother Tongue.

SLA: Second Language Acquisition.

TG: Target Language.

%: Percentage
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ملخص
General introduction

1. Statement of the Problem

The necessity of learning English has grown with the enlargement of global connection; theoreticians and linguists have since a quite while ago perceived the crucial role that a mother tongue has on the acquisition of the second language. The motivation behind this study is to look at the degree to which EFL students depend on their L1 prepositional knowledge in procuring a comprehension of prepositional use in English. A long time ago the concept of transfer was first presented in the contrastive analysis theory (CA), which expects that some components in the first language ruin second language acquisition through interference. Etymologists accepted that by differentiating L1 and L2 they could foresee those places in which the students would experience issues. However, after 1960 the part of the native language in learning a second language began to be viewed as facilitative due to the basic similitude of languages. When we talk about the transfer of prepositions from L1 to L2, we should perceive the way that in English, prepositions are hard to learn and teach. As Pittman (1966) depicts, prepositions "have earned notoriety for trouble if not an absolute unconventionality". Beside as Takahaski (1969) declared that the appropriate usage of prepositions is the major issue for EFL students. Therefore EFL learners struggle in using the correct form of prepositions while their written productions in the target language due to the wide occurrence of L1 interference.

2. Aims of the Study

The major aims of this study are:

- To identify the kinds of errors learners make in the use of prepositions in written production.

- To examine the extent to which Arab students rely on their L1 prepositional knowledge.
3. Research Questions

- Why do students misuse the English prepositions (on; in; at) during their written production?

- Why do EFL learners resort to transfer?

- Does the mother tongue (Standard Arabic) have a negative effect on EFL learners’ written production?

Hypothesis

EFL learners of third year LMD at the university of Larbi Ben M’hidi misuse the English prepositions (on, in, at) due to interference with standard Arabic.

4. Research Methodology

The methodological procedure followed in conducting this research is testing. In this test, students will be asked to fill in gaps in twenty English sentences with simple prepositions of time or space.

Moreover, to confirm more the data; a questionnaire for students is implemented to investigate whether learners face difficulties while using prepositions and if their errors are due to negative transfer.

The test upon which our study is based is intended for 20 students chosen randomly from a population of third year LMD students at the English Department at L’Arbi Ben M’hidi’s university because they already have been taught the main grammatical rules of the English language.
5. **Structure of the Dissertation**

The present research basically contains two main chapters, one is theoretical and the other is practical. The former is devoted for the main variables of the present study. It is divided into two sections. The first section will tackle approaches to SLA: Error analysis, contrastive analysis theory, and interlanguage theory. The second section will tackle the definition of prepositions, their types, and their use, and how to overcome difficulties while using them.

The second chapter then will cover the main elements of the practical part. Thus, it includes the questionnaire and the test analysis and the discussion and interpretation of the obtained results.
Chapter One: Literature Survey

Introduction

L1 interference, as to the terms “Cross-linguistic and Language Transfer”, indicates the impact of mother tongue structures on learners’ performance and advancement in the target language. Many investigations were carried to analyze which aspects of a native language transfer to the target language. The contrastive analysis hypothesis undertakes that L2 learners tend to transfer to their L2 utterances the formal features of their L1. However this transfer happens so subtly that students do not know about it unless it is called to their attention. When EFL learners write in the target language, some of their L1 features appear in their written productions because of the closeness of the TL to L1. Taking the Prepositional uses in Arabic and English while any written production, L2 learners tend to transfer the prepositional forms of their L1 into the L2 forgetting that there are prepositions in English that have equivalent in Arabic and others that do not. Thus interference occurs and it may lead to false understanding of the context.

Due to this reason, this chapter will tackle the approaches to second language acquisition and the preposition misuse and because it is an inevitable fact there is a need to know the reasons that make EFL learners resort to transfer.

Section One: Approaches to SLA

1.1.1 Contrastive Analysis and Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis

Contrastive Analysis is an approach to the study of second language acquisition which implies predicting and explaining the problems learners encounter through a comparison of L1 and L2 to find out similarities and differences (Troike, 2006, p. 34).
CA was first developed by Charles Fries (1945). With the publication of Lado’s book “Linguistics across Cultures” in 1957, it emerged as a theory of learning in psycholinguistics, and the structural approach to linguistics. I.e.: The American linguist Robert Lado evolved Fries’s idea more and formulated what is known as ‘Contrastive Hypothesis’. The proponents of CA declare: “The most efficient materials are those that are based upon a scientific description of the language to be learned, carefully compared with a parallel description of the native language of the learner.” (Fries, 1945, p. 9).

We assume that the student who comes in contact with foreign language will find some features of it quite easy and others extremely difficult. Those elements that are similar to his native language will be simple for him and those elements that are different will be difficult. (Lado, 1957, p. 2)

CA which aims at predicting difficulties in the target language emerged in Europe in the fifties and flourished in the USA by the sixties. Until the late 16’s, the prominent theory that was used in the study of L2 learning was the behaviorist theory. It is based on the assumption that learning is a question of habit formation, so the errors occur due to the influence of mother tongue habits.

1.1.1.2 Versions of CAH

Brown (2000, p. 160-163) resumed that contrastive analyses can be supplied in three versions:

1.1.1.2.1 The Strong Version: Fries (1947) and Lado (1957) formulated it. They maintained that it is possible to develop predictions for ESL learners’ errors by comparing two languages. The strong version of CA has been made with two assumptions:
- The first one is that due to negative transfer from the learner’s native language, errors occur (Lightbown and Spada, 2006, p. 78-79).

- The second assumption is that the learner is likely to find it easy to learn since there are similarities between the target language and the native language.

1.1.1.2.2 The Weak Version: It only holds the explanatory power of CA on ESL learner’s errors (It is worth mentioning that the weak version has been evolved into ErrorAnalysis).

1.1.1.2.3 The Moderate Version: It affirms that the source of learning difficulties might be due to the similarities of the two languages.

1.1.1.3 Criticism of Contrastive Analysis

Ellis (2008, p. 360) points out that CAH is too simplistic and too restrictive. From this point, CAH was criticized for the following reasons:

Gradman (1973) points out that CA cannot predict all errors, but just some of them. If CA was a steady approach, it would be able to figure out any errors which would be made and avoid the foresight of any errors which actually are not made.

Another criticism was given by Hamp (1968) who proposes that it is a mistake to act as if that CA is a physical science and it is able to predict totally the errors that will be made as well the accurate reason for them being made. In other words, when errors occur, it is possible to look for the causes, yet it is not possible to say with certainty which ones will happen and why they will happen.
Error Analysis

1.1.2 Definition of Error Analysis

Error Analysis is a branch of applied Linguistics which emerged on the limitations of CA, yet the central focus of the analysis has been limited down. For this reason it moved from the study of the effect of the L1 has on the L2 to the profound description and analysis of learners’ errors and their actual source.

EA emerged in the 1960’s by S. Pit Corder; he declared that students are involved in the foundation of language, and that errors are crucial in the procedure of learning.

Many researchers have defined error analysis in different ways:

Richards et.al (1985, p. 96) stated that EA is the study of errors made by the second and foreign language learners. It may be carried out in order to find out:

-How well someone knows the language?

-How a person learns a language?

Another concept is given by Brown (1980, p. 166). He defined EA as the process of observation, analyze, and classify the deviations of the rules of the second language and then to reveal the systems operated by learners.

Crystal (1987, p. 67): “EA is a technique for identifying, classifying, and systematically interpreting the unacceptable forms produced by someone learning a foreign language, using any of the principles and procedures provided by linguistics.”

“EA is the process of determining the incidence, nature, causes, and consequences of unsuccessful language.” (James, 1998, p.1)
From the above definitions, we can say that errors committed by people when learning a FL showed patterns of SL development and differences between foreign language acquisition and foreign language learning. As Saville-Troike (2006) annotated that errors made by learners are” sources of insight into the learning process “(P. 38).

**1.1.2.1 Errors Vs Mistakes**

Gas and Selinker (1994) described errors as “red flags” that equipped proofs of the learners’ knowledge about the foreign language. i.e.: errors are valuable because they contain great amount of information. These inputs would provide data about the process and the tactics that learners used to learn a language. (Dulay and Burt, 1974; Richards, 1974; Taylor, 1975)

Ellis (1994) gave a definition of “error” committed by learners in the language use as, “a deviation from the norms of the target language. “(P. 51).

So, according to these definitions, researchers necessitate to know the norms of the TL that they should follow to identify errors.

Corder (1967) gave a differentiation between “errors” and “mistakes”: Errors occurred because of the incomplete mastery of some language’s patterns. In other words, students do not recognize when they make an error because of the lack of competence.

However, mistakes are like slips of the tongue and they occur occasionally, learners do recognize them, they are self-corrected, and they usually happened due to fatigue or lack of performance.
1.1.2.2 Classification of Errors

Corder (1973, P. 277) classified errors into four categories: Omission, addition, selection, and Ordering.

1.1.2.2.1 Omission: Leaving out some linguistic elements. For example: My father is doctor instead of My father is a doctor.

1.1.2.2 Addition: The redundant use of certain elements in a sentence. For example: She was going to home when I saw her.

1.1.2.2.3 Selection: Wrong selection of the wrong morpheme, structure of vocabulary features. For instance: Phonologically French students substitute the /ð/ sound with the /z/ sound; like saying /zi/ dog.

1.1.2.2.4 Ordering: Incorrect word order can occur at the syntactic level in a sentence or in pronunciation. For example: We last night went to the cinema.

1.1.2.3 Sources of Errors

Brown (2000, p. 224) has mentioned two main sources of errors which are interlingual and intralingual.

1.1.2.3.1 Interlingual errors (Interference)

The dictionary of Language Teaching and Applied Linguistics (1992) defines interlingual errors as the result of language transfer, which is caused by the learner’s first language. Yet EA considered this type of errors signs that the learner is internalizing and investigating the system of new language.
The term interlingual was first introduced by Selinker (1972). He used this term to refer to the systematic knowledge of an L2 which is independent of both the learner’s L1 and the TL (Abi Samra, 2003, p. 5). However the term transfer is defined as “a generalization of learned responses from one type of situation to another.” (Webster’s third new world international dictionary, 1986)

Kavalianskienė (2009, p. 4) declared that transfer of errors may happen due to the shortage of the necessary information in second language or the intentional capacity to activate the suitable second language routine.

Ellis (1977, p. 51) refers to interference as transfer; he stated that it is the influence that a native language has on the target language and it is of two types: Negative and Positive.

When two languages have differences i.e.: have areas where they differ, negative transfer occurs; It has a negative impact on the command of rules of L2.

However when there are similarities between L1 and L2, positive transfer occurs. It has a positive impact on L2 learning.

1.1.2.3.2 Intralingual Errors

Intralingual means within language, these kinds of errors happen because of the target language itself. Richards (1971) stated that intralingual errors are those that reflect general features of the rule learning like faulty generalization, incomplete application of rules, and failure to learn the conditions under which rules apply. Erdogan (2005, p. 266) added that when learners tend to formulate concepts and hypothesis based on their limited experience of the TL, intralingual errors occur. Intralingual errors include some sub-categories of errors which are:
A/ Overgeneralization:

Ellis (1997, P. 19) declared that learners convert to overgeneralization because they find it easy to learn. For instance, the use of “ed” -in the past tense form- even with irregular verbs like: “eated” instead of “ate”.

B/Incomplete application of rules:

According to Richards (1974, P. 177) application of rules refers to “occurrence of structures whose deviancy represents the degree of the rules required to produce acceptable utterances.”

Incomplete application of rules happen when the student misuse complex structure and head for simple ones. One example of this type is the use of simple present instead of the present perfect continuous.

C/False concepts hypothesized:

They occur because of the poor progression of teaching items. For example the form “was” may be understood by the learner as the marker of the past tense, so they produce something like “one day it was happened “(Richards, 1974, p.178).

1.1.2.4 Error Analysis Procedure

It exists five steps developed by S. Pit Corder in 1974, it includes: Identification, description, explanation, evaluation, and correction.

1.1.2.4.1 Identification of errors: According to Ellis (1997, p. 15) the first step in the analysis of students ‘errors is to recognize them. At this stage, error analyst must differentiate between learner’s errors and learner’s mistakes i.e.: errors of performance and errors of competence. Recognition of errors is of great importance because it indicates how far the
learner has progressed in his learning and how much knowledge of the L2 rules they have mastered.

1.1.2.4.2 Description of errors: After identifying learner’s errors, the next step is to describe them. As Ellis supposed that errors ‘description is similar to recognizing them by comparing the learner’s sentences with the reconstruction of those sentences in the TL. In other words, description of errors is describing the procedure that produces the error by describing the intentional meaning through the reconstruction of the utterance according to the second language norms (Beghail, 2007, p. 16).

1.1.2.4.3 Explanation of Errors: Ellis (1994, P. 57) stated that the explanation of errors stage is significant for SLA research because it includes an endeavor to establish the operation responsible for L2 acquisition. I.e.: At this stage, researchers or error analyst after identifying, and describing errors, they try to explain the reasons of why such errors happen, and as mentioned before it is due to: Inter-lingual and intra-lingual reasons.

1.1.2.4.4 Evaluation of Errors: According to Ellis (1997, p. 19) evaluating errors means that teachers should give more attention to errors that seem to be serious and can affect communication, and less attention to those which have little effect on the learner’s learning an L2. I.e.: There are errors that are considered to be serious and may change the meaning of the utterance.

1.1.2.4.5 Error Correction: How teachers deal with learner’s errors and the importance of error correction among teachers and learners are the main interests of EA. According to Erdogan (2005) the mechanism of error correction is not just demonstrating to the learners the correct form and presenting it through a series of exercises and activities. On the opposite, the teacher should know the reason behind his learner’s errors to supply them with the suitable
solutions. In other words, the instructor should give to his learners’ time for self-correction and not correcting their errors immediately.

1.1.2.5 Positive and Negative Opinions about Errors

Considering errors as a positive or negative point is debatable. Researchers have split into two sides.

Maicusi et al (2000, P. 168) proclaimed that errors must be avoided during the language learning-teaching process because it shows failure and restrains the development of learning process. This concept has been confirmed mainly by behaviorism in which they consider that errors block the language learning process.

On the contrary to behaviorism, there is the mentalistic approach in which they assured that errors have a great significance and without them there is no improvement.

These thoughts are based on Chomsky’s ideas in which he approved that human being does not learn mechanically, but he has a mental access of knowledge through try and error. In the same line of thought, a number of scholars share the same positive attitude. Richards (1974, p. 89) declared that second language learners’ errors are important for the acquisition of an L2.

Moreover, Corder stated that errors supply information about the strategies that a learner follows while developing his L2 knowledge. He also thought that making errors is a part of the learning process itself. (Cited in Troike, 2006, p. 38-39). Ellis (1997, p. 15) brings the same concept claiming that when learners make mistakes and correct them by themselves, it actually helps them.
1.1.2.6 Significance of Error Analysis

Corder (1967, p. 161-170) talks about the importance of errors for enhancing teaching and learning processes; He declared that errors can be meaningful to the learner, the teacher, and the researcher.

A learner’s errors are important in three different ways:

-For the teacher: errors demonstrate the learner’s development, they aid the instructor to suggest the right schemes which they find productive in language learning. In addition, errors enable the teacher to locate areas of English where the student deviates for multiple reasons. So like this the teacher will know which of their learner’s native language system is interfering with the learning of language.

-For the researcher: Errors demonstrate how a language is acquired, and the strategies the learner uses, therefore the researcher may be helpful in evolving teaching materials for dealing with errors.

-For the learner: Errors allow the learners to learn from them (Richards, Plot & Platt, 1992). The correction of errors will enable the learners to acquire the correct form of the TL.

In few words, and as stated by (Caroll 1995, in Corder) is that the student should figure out the correct form by searching for it. Instructors are conscious of the constant errors that learners make and they may use those errors as a tool for learning.

1.1.2.7 Limitations of Error Analysis

Although EA has a great importance in second and foreign language learning, yet it has some limitations. We can summarize them in the following points (Troike, 2006, p. 40):
- Ambiguity in classification: It is hard to say, for example, if a Chinese L1 speaker who excludes number and tense modulations English is doing so due to L1 influence (Chinese is not an inflectional language) or due to a universal developmental process which results in simplified or “telegraphic” utterances.

- Lack of positive data: When focusing only on errors, it does not mean providing information on what the L2 learner has acquired, in addition correct uses may not be taken into consideration. IE: EA concentrates only on the aspects student fails in and ignoring the ones they have studied successfully.

- Potential for Avoidance: When learners avoid difficult structures this will lead to absence of errors in which EA cannot reveal it.

### 1.1.3 Definition of Interlanguage

According to Cook (2008, p. 13) L1 helps learners when the language component of the L2 are similar; in other words, one of the concepts of L2 learning sees important elements as the transfer of aspects of the L1 language to L2. Selinker (1972) viewed interlanguage as an impermanent grammar which L2 students formulate for themselves. Selinker added that IL is a signal that learners do not comprehend the rules of the L2. Due to the gaps in mastering the TL, learners tend to use their independent system which is not the one that has been taught in schools.

### 1.1.3 Interlanguage Theory

#### 1.1.3.1 The Origins of IL Theory:
The term interlanguage was suggested by Lary Selinker in 1972 so as to draw attention to the possibility that the learner’s system can be seen as a unique language variety with its own features and rules (Dtern, 1983, p. 125).

Ellis (1995) has reexamined the origins of IL theory and remarks that it exists two different opinions of SLA. The first one assigned by a mentalist saying that theories of language acquisition claim that the learner acquire L2 in much the same way as L1 and that it is due the inbuilt faculty for language acquisition. The second opinion is grounded on the concept of SLA with environmental elements and L1 interference acquisition.

The mentalist view is widely established on Chomsky’s concept of universal grammar (1959) which maintains that people are born with innate linguistic principles making up the initial state which commanded the form of the sentence of any given language could take (Ellis, 1995).

Studying IL could aid us to comprehend the learners’ problems better and to try to help them to achieve competence. The theory of IL was the first main attempt to explain the process of SLA; it was one of the few theories of that time that did not contradict the critical period hypothesis (CPH). To explain the procedure of SLA better, the IL asks three main questions:

1/What processes are involved and are responsible for IL construction?

2/what is the nature of IL continuum?

3/Why most learners do not achieve the full L2 competence? (Ellis, 1994)

To sum up, the concept of IL is based on the idea that an L2 learner is using a language which is neither L1 nor L2 at any stage of his learning process. It is a third language that
possesses its own rules of grammar and lexicon. The rules used by the learner are not to be found in his mother tongue or in the target language.

1.1.4 Definition of Language Transfer

A number of researchers have provided different definitions for the term transfer. Starting by Odlin (1989, p. 27) who stated that transfer is “the influence ensuing from similarities and difference between the TL and any other language that has been antecedently (and maybe imperfectly) acquired.” As we notice in this definition that Oldin mentions positive and negative together. Another definition provided by Gass (1996, p. 321) who defines transfer as: ” the use of the NL (or other language) data on the acquisition of and L2 (or an additional language).” Here Gass confines the term transfer to positive transfer only.

The contribution of interference as the main source of difficulty was criticized by many scholars. Dulay and Burt (1972) demonstrate the L1=L2 hypothesis, it throws-out the theory of transfer and insists that language learning has to do with the strategies used by the learner. Furthermore, it says that interference is not the only source of errors; errors are caused due to other sources (intralingual and developmental errors).

1.1.4.1 Types of Transfer

1/Positive Transfer: In order to learn specific patterns in the TL, learners tend to use their knowledge about the L1; this situation is called positive transfer. It occurs when two languages are similar, in this case learning process is facilitated (Ellis, 2008, p. 355).

In other words, learning the TL relies on the previous knowledge of L1 that the learners have will be easy since the L1 and L2 are alike. Dulay et al (1982, p. 97) declare that “… Positive transfer is the automatic use of L1 structure in L2 performance when the structure in both languages is the same resulting in correct utterance.” However, similarities are
sometimes deceptive as in the case of “false cognate” or what is called “Les faux amis” in French. Here Ellis (2008) declared that similarities reduce the number of errors. (P. 355).

2/Negative Transfer: Osgood (1949, cited in Ellis, 1997, p. 15) defines negative transfer as “the effect of a specifiable interpolated activity upon the retention of previously learned activity.” It is called as well interference or retro-active transfer. This type of transfer leads learners to make errors and make problems. As we have seen previously that positive transfer facilitates the learning process due to the similarities between L1 and L2, yet this type blocks the learning procedure because of the differences existed in the TL and NL. This type we guess is likely to be the reason of the confusion between Arabic and English prepositions.

The consequences of negative transfer on learning process, according to Oldin (1989, p. 30), can be summarized in two concepts: Avoidance (underproduction) and overuse (overproduction).

1.1.4.2 Avoidance

Ellis (2008, p. 357) describes the phenomenon as follows:

Learners also avoid using linguistic structures which they find difficult because of differences between their NL and their TL. In such cases, the effects of the L1 are evident not in what learners do (errors), but in what they do not (omission).

That is to say that L2 learners turn to omit some of the L2 patterns that do not exist in their L1 when they find themselves unable to use the correct form of the L2 structures.

1.1.4.3 Overuse:

Or overproduction is sometimes the outcome of avoidance; the learner will use other infrequent structures when he avoids using the TL patterns (Ellis, 2008, p.358).
For example, the learner who avoids using relative clauses in English will find himself obliged to use many simple sentences and correct them with conjunctions.

1.1.4.4 **Factors Affecting Language Transfer**

According to Weinreich (1979, p. 64-65) there are many factors that cause interference which are:

1/Speaker Bilingual background: The main reason of interference is Bilingualism. Since the speaker is influenced by both languages (NL and TL).

2/Disloyalty to TL: It causes negative attitude, it leads to disrespect the structure of the TL and therefore force the bilingual to set unplanned patterns of his first language elements. When learners tend to have limited background of TL, they put words in sentences or orally in the structures and the sense of the native language.

3/The limited vocabularies of TL mastered by a learner: When the learner is willing to master another language, he will face new words that are different from his native words. Vocabularies plays a big role when the person wants to speak as target language natives. The more vocabulary someone possesses, the better he masters the TL.

4/Needs of synonyms: People use synonyms in order to avoid redundancy. Implementing synonym in a language contact will contribute to interference in the form of adoption and borrowing of new words from SL to TL.

5/Prestige and Style: Usually when people communicate, they tend to use foreign words. The main aim of using those unfamiliar words is to get pride. So when the receiver cannot catch the real meaning of the speech, interference appears.
Section Two: Prepositions

Explaining prepositions need first to be introduced by the explanation of what a preposition is. This section deals with definition of preposition, features and usages of English and Arab prepositions, then we move to the different uses of “in, on, at” in particular. Finally, types of errors in prepositions and how to overcome difficulties concerning prepositions’ use

1.2.1 Definition of Preposition

There are many definitions for the word “preposition”. The most important ones are:

1/ Zughoul (1979, p. 1) defines prepositions as a covering term used to refer to a group of a small words that come from different sources and have different functions.

2/Richards & Schmidt (2010, p. 452) defines it as a word used to connect words together to express different relationships and different meanings.

3/Nesfield (cited in Zeghoul 1979) points out that prepositions at first are adverbs, they progressively alienated themselves and stand by their own to bond the list f words instead of verbs.

4/According to Hamdallah & Tushyehh (1933) “prepositions are functional words that relates words , phrases , or clauses to other words in the sentence , they are not inflected , they demonstrate such notions as locations , destination , direction of motion , time , manner , and so on. ” (p. 182).

In few words, prepositions are words that relate different group of words, and it can express both time and space depending on their meaning in the context.
1.2.2 Features of English and Arabic Prepositions

1.2.2.1 English Prepositions

According to HamdAllah (1988), prepositions serve to show a relation between different entities; in other words, they are used to link between different grammatical elements to convey a meaning. For example, She put the sweater on her shoulder (cited in HamdAllah, 1988) here we have the complement of the preposition [her shoulder], and the object [the sweater] brought into relation with one another by [ON].

In addition, according to HamdAllah (1988), different prepositions used with the same word convey a completely different meaning, i.e.: Each time we use different preposition with the same word the meaning changes. For example: Look at & Look on.

Another feature is that English prepositions can be used with different parts of speech of the same root word. i.e.: one preposition used with the verb form, the other with adjective or noun form of the word. For instance: we can say We are fond of something, as well as, we have fondness for it. (HamdAlla, p. 184, 1993)

1.2.2.2 Arabic Prepositions

Arab grammarians used to group Arabic words under three classes: Asmaa, afaal, and huruf, which are nouns, verbs and particles (Ibn Hashim 1969, p. 8, cited in Hamdallah). From the group of huruf “Particles”, the Arab grammarians separated prepositions which they called “huruf el-jarr” “particles of attraction”. (HamdAllah, p. 184)

Traditional Arab prepositions are separated into two morphological groups:
1/ The first group composed of preposition that are inseparable, they take place as prefixes to the compliment. For instance: bi -------- at, by, in.

        Li -------- to

        Wa -------- by

2/ Second group made of prepositions which are independent, i.e.: separable, and either bilateral (contains two particles) or trilateral (contains three particles).

        -fi -------- in, at (bilateral).

        - 9alaa------ on (trilateral).

Furthermore, some Arabic prepositions (such as: aan, min, aala, bi, fii, li, and ilaa) are tend to be more frequent than the other prepositions (such as: mata and kay) (Hasan and Abdullah, 2009). Moreover, just like the English prepositions, Arabic prepositions (although Limited) have spacial and/or temporal meaning depending on the context.

1.2.3 Uses of “in, on, and at “

1.2.3.1 “on, in, at “as prepositions of time:

In, on, at are prepositions used for time.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>preposition</th>
<th>Use</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>On</td>
<td>Days of the week</td>
<td>On Sunday.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>On Friday.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td></td>
<td>On the 25th of December 2003.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>On the 14th july 1981.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special occasions</td>
<td></td>
<td>On good Friday.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 01: Usage of ‘at’, ‘In’, and ‘on’ with different Units of Time. (Based on Murphey, 2004)

The table demonstrate that although the three prepositions “on, in, at “express time, yet they have different usages.

1.2.3.2 “on, in, at “as prepositions of space

Prepositions “on, in, at “usually used for different places.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Preposition</th>
<th>Usage</th>
<th>Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>In</td>
<td>Place having some boundaries.</td>
<td>In the garden.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Location</td>
<td>In the room.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------</td>
<td>--------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Towns, countries, states.</td>
<td>In Germany.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>In Notingham.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Car, taxi.</td>
<td>In the car.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>In a taxi.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Picture, world</td>
<td>In the picture.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>In the world.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Book, paper</td>
<td>In the book.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>On the roof.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>On Surfaces of something</td>
<td>On the sea.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>On the line.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positions on streets, roads, etc.</td>
<td>I used to live on Porland street.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attached</td>
<td>The picture on the wall.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For a place with a river</td>
<td>London lies on the thames.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For a certain side (left or right)</td>
<td>On the left</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For public transport</td>
<td>On the bus.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>On the plane.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For television, radio</td>
<td>On TV.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>On the radio.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th>At bus top.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Specific place</td>
<td>At bus top.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meaning next to, by an object</td>
<td>At the door</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>At the station</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For table</td>
<td>At the table</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>For events</td>
<td>At a concert.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>At the party.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Place where you are to do something typical (watch a film)</td>
<td>At the cinema.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>study, work</th>
<th>At work.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>At school.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 2:** Usage of ‘‘at’’, ‘‘in’’ and ‘‘on’’ with some sentences. (Based on Hewings, 1999)

From table 02 is shown that these prepositions are used differently, and they convey different meanings concerning places.

1.2.3.3 **At, In, On to Express Other Relations**

In addition to the relation of space and time, the prepositions “at, in, on” can be used to describe other relations.

**At:** It can be used to express:

- Reaction especially (emotional). Example: I am amazed at your suggestion.
- Level of suggestion. Example: Good at games bad at remembering faces.
- For giving directions. Example: Go along the road, then turn left at the shop. (Murphy, 2002, p. 244).
- With the name of a particular organization. Example: He worked at the Acme bikes company.
- With meals: Example: One day at lunch, she told me the secret.

**In:** It can be used to express:

- Manners: Example: she replied in the most offensive manner (way).
- The verb “arrives” when we think about the place itself. Example: we arrived in London two days ago.

**On:** It can be used to express:

- Subject matter: Example: She spoke on the birds of Christ church harbor.
-Means of transportation such as: bus, train, plane. Example: They traveled to France by plane.

-With the gerund of some words, mainly of information. Example: On checking, she discovered that the papers were not hers.

1.2.4 Types of errors in prepositions

Scott and Tucker (1974) state that errors made by Arab EFL learners can be grouped under three categories: substitution errors, redundant errors, and omission errors.

a/ Substitution errors: It is defined as the use of incorrect word.

For example: -In the third day /

-Think in

- Each month begins in Saturday.

b/ Redundant errors: refers to the use of unneeded word or two or more words where only one is required.

For example: - They make on illness of people.

-Judge on things.

-I feel with happy.

c/ Omission errors: Means the elimination of a necessary word.

For example: - He came Monday.

-He was born 22\textsuperscript{nd} of May, 1978.

-It is bordered from the east Iran.
Zughoul (1979) arrived at the following conclusions when examining the preposition errors committed by EFL Arab learners.

1/ In some cases the English prepositions corresponds exactly to its Arabic equivalent.

2/ Sometimes, in expressing an idea in Arabic, we do not need to use a preposition (or any other word) to substitute the English preposition.

3/ Sometimes one-to-one translation may give the proper English word in some cases, but it does not work all the time.

4/ The English preposition is not always expressed in Arabic by a preposition: Its counterpart might be another part of speech.

1.2.5 How to Overcome Preposition Difficulties

Before determining which pedagogical method is best to overcome preposition difficulties, it is better to shed light first on what makes learning prepositions so hard.

According to many researchers, this issue can be attached to many factors: first, prepositions are said to be Polysemous. Polysemy is “a semantic feature of words that have several meanings”. (Koffi, 2010, p. 299) In other words, most of the English prepositions have multiple meaning depending on the context. So when learners try to determine prepositional meaning and use them properly they become frustrated (koffi, 2010, p. 299).

Second, Lam (2009) stated that prepositions can be difficult to identify, especially in oral speech, since they usually contain very few syllabus. Many English prepositions are monosyllabic like: on, for, or to. Furthermore, prepositions differ in meaning from one language to another and this causes negative syntactic transfer. The same preposition can have immensely diverse meanings in many different languages. Finally, English has 60 to 70 prepositions, an elevated number than most other languages. So this big number may
contribute to their difficulty (Koffi, 2010, P. 297). As a result, it is somehow impossible for learners to systemize English prepositions (Catalan, 1966, P. 171).

In order to overcome preposition difficulties, teachers and students use many approaches:

1.2.5.1 *The Traditional Approach*

This approach relies on teaching certain prepositions in accordance to the meaning and the content of the sentence. (Lam, 2009, P. 3) In other words, the traditional approach concentrates on mastering prepositions in a particular context.

1.2.5.2 *The Collocation Approach*

According to Mueller (2011, P. 484) collocation might be described as words that are found together in a expectable pattern in collocation approach. We supply learners with many prepositions as a unit based on the structure.

For example: - Elderly parents often **depend on** their adult children.

- Do not **panic on** younger kids.

1.2.5.3 *The Pro-type Approach*

It is also known as meaning based method. According to Lindstromberg (1996) and Lam (2009) each preposition has a several meaning with one central meaning, this standing out is being prototypical. In the case of preposition, the special, physical meaning is considered to be the prototype. For example, the preposition “on” has many meanings, but the prototypical definition is “contact of an object with a line of surface.” (Lindstromberg, 1996, P. 229)
Conclusion

As a conclusion to this chapter, language transfer is one of the widely discussed subjects in the field of second language acquisition. EFL learners always reveal the phenomenon of transfer during any stage when their knowledge of the language is not enough. It has been shown that prepositions are a recurrent source of errors. In other words, when EFL learners transfer prepositions from standard Arabic into English—mainly in, on, at—during their written production, they commit errors that should be redressed. Contrastive analysis and error analysis can be mixed to ease and improve the procedure of teaching and learning a foreign or a second language. The concern of CA approach is to clarify the similarities and the differences between a native language and a foreign language, however; EA proposes a set of procedures to be followed either by teachers or researchers to analyze learners’s errors. All in all, SLA approaches help teachers to make their learners aware of the differences and similarities between L1 and L2; especially when using English prepositions by EFL students, and ultimately avoid their misuse.
Chapter two: Fieldwork

Introduction

This study aims at accepting or refuting our hypothesis which states that 3rd year LMD students of the English department at the university of L’Arbi Ben M’hidi misuse some of the English prepositions (on, in, at) due to the negative transfer from standard Arabic into English.

Thus, this chapter is devoted to the practical part. It deals with the research methodology and the data analysis. For this purpose, a test and a questionnaire are used as a means of data collection. The analysis of the test is based on student’s answers with a proposed explanation of both correct and wrong answers of each sentence and the questionnaire is analyzed manually.

2.1 The Sample

The population under scope is constituted of five groups of third year students at the English department of L’arbi Ben M’hidi University for the academic year 2017/2018. Twenty (20) students were chosen randomly from the total number of population because of the limited time and since it is hard to make the study on the whole population. The sample is chosen at this level because we assumed students have been already taught the main grammatical structures of the English language and they are supposed to have reached a certain level of proficiency in English.
2.2 Description of the Test

It is an elicitation test (Appendix A). It is composed of twenty sentences where the test-takers are asked to fill in the gaps with the appropriate proposition (on, in, at). The twenty sentences were divided into two parts:

- First part: Cases where the two languages use the same preposition.
- Second part: Cases where the two languages use different preposition.

However, the sentences denoting these cases are not arranged.

2.2.1 Data collection and analysis

The analysis of the obtained data is done through the calculation of the sum and the percentage of the correct and wrong usage of prepositions of each sentence plus a proposed explanation of the correct and wrong answer of each sentence. The results are represented in tables.

Sentence 01: At the end of the week-end.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Preposition</th>
<th>On</th>
<th>In</th>
<th>At</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>90%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 03**: The Usage of the Prepositions in the First Sentence

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sentence 01</th>
<th>Correct usage</th>
<th>Wrong usage</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td>90%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 04**: The Correct Vs Wrong Usage in the First Sentence
The majority of the participants used the correct preposition “At” which is used to answer the question “When?” However 10% of them made a substitution error by inserting the preposition “in” and this is due to the interference of the standard Arabic which is translated in “Fi nihayet elousbou3.” So, negative transfer occurs.

**Sentence 02:** On 4th July, 1776.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Preposition</th>
<th>On</th>
<th>In</th>
<th>At</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>02</td>
<td>00</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td>90%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>00%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 05: The Usage of Prepositions in the Second Sentence**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sentence 02</th>
<th>Correct usage</th>
<th>Wrong usage</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>02</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td>90%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 06: Correct VS Wrong Usage in the Second Sentence**
90% of the testees inserted the correct preposition “on” since it is used with dates, yet 10% of them used the wrong preposition “in” as it is used in Arabic to say: “Fi 1776.” Again interference is the cause.

Sentence 03: There is a party at the club house.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Preposition</th>
<th>On</th>
<th>In</th>
<th>At</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number</td>
<td>03</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>01</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 07: The Usage of Prepositions in the Third Sentence

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sentence 03</th>
<th>Correct usage</th>
<th>Wrong usage</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number</td>
<td>01</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>95%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 08: The Correct Vs Wrong Usage of the Prepositions in the Third Sentence
Out of twenty students, only one (1) inserted the correct preposition “at”. However 95% got it wrong and instead they used “in” (sixteen students) and “on” (three students).

This is due to the use of the corresponding Arabic preposition “Fi” to say: “Hounaka half fi elnadi.” Hence, the substitution error is caused by the transfer from standard Arabic. Since “Fi” has the meaning of both “in” and “at”, learners resorted to the closer meaning and used “in” instead of “at”.

Sentence 04: He is waiting at the bus stop.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Preposition</th>
<th>On</th>
<th>In</th>
<th>At</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number</td>
<td>02</td>
<td>08</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 09: The Usage of Prepositions in the Fourth Sentence

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sentence 04</th>
<th>Correct usage</th>
<th>Wrong usage</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 10: Correct Vs Wrong Usage in the Fourth Sentence
Half of the test-takers inserted the necessary preposition “at” which is used in this sentence to refer to a specific location, while the other half inserted the wrong preposition (in and on). The reason why students made these errors is that they translated the meaning of the sentence into Arabic to find the needed preposition; so for saying: “howa yantadhiro fi elmahata.” They put “in” instead of “at”. Again, negative transfer took place. Wrong selection occurs for those who used the preposition “on”.

Sentence 05: She lives on the first floor.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Preposition</th>
<th>On</th>
<th>In</th>
<th>At</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>03</td>
<td>02</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 11: The Usage of Prepositions in the Fifth Sentence
Sentence 05: Correct and Wrong Usage of “on”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sentence 05</th>
<th>Correct usage</th>
<th>Wrong usage</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 12: Correct Vs Wrong Usage of the Preposition in the Fifth Sentence

75% of the participants inserted the correct preposition “on” which indicates that they know the English rule that says: “on” is used with surface of something. But 25% of them used the wrong preposition which is a substitution error that shows students opt to Arabic to find the appropriate one. All in all, students substituted “on” with “in” and transferred negatively.

Sentence 06: Get in the car.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Preposition</th>
<th>On</th>
<th>In</th>
<th>At</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number</td>
<td>03</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>00</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>85%</td>
<td>00%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 13: The Usage of Prepositions in the Sixth Sentence
As it is known, in English we use the preposition “in” to indicate a space- in this case the space is a car-. The majority of the students (85%) used the correct preposition “in”. Consequently positive transfer took place. Whereas the remaining 15% inserted wrongly “on”

Sentence 07: Look at the picture on the wall.

Table 14: Correct Vs Wrong Usage in the Sixth Sentence

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sentence 06</th>
<th>Correct usage</th>
<th>Wrong usage</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td>85%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 06: Correct and Wrong Usage of “in”

Table 15: The Usage of Prepositions in the Seventh Sentence

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>First part</th>
<th>Preposition</th>
<th>On</th>
<th>In</th>
<th>At</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>20</td>
<td></td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Second part</th>
<th>Preposition</th>
<th>On</th>
<th>In</th>
<th>At</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 15: The Usage of Prepositions in the Seventh Sentence

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sentence 07</th>
<th>Correct usage</th>
<th>Wrong usage</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
All test-takers inserted the correct prepositions in both the first part of the sentence and the second part. This can be explained in two terms:

First, students might master the rules very well.

Second, since these two prepositions “at, on” have the same meaning in Arabic; “oundhor ila elsorta ala elha2it”; positive transfer took place.

Sentence 08: I like to relax in the evening.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Preposition</th>
<th>On</th>
<th>In</th>
<th>At</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number</td>
<td>00</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>06</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td>00%</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 17: The Usage of Prepositions in the Eighth Sentence

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sentence 08</th>
<th>Correct usage</th>
<th>Wrong usage</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 18: Correct Vs Wrong Usage in the Eighth Sentence
Most of the participants (70%) used the appropriate preposition “in” which is used with time of day; and here it’s “the evening”. However, the other 30% used the preposition “on” instead of “in”. In this case, it might be due to confusion or lack of grammar rules.

Sentence 09: I think she spent the entire afternoon on the phone.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Preposition</th>
<th>On</th>
<th>In</th>
<th>At</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>01</td>
<td>03</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 19: The Usage of Prepositions in the Ninth Sentence

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sentence 09</th>
<th>Correct usage</th>
<th>Wrong usage</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 20: Correct Vs Wrong Usage in the Ninth Sentence
Another similar case where positive transfer takes place, eighty percent (80%) of the testees inserted the correct preposition “on” since it has the same meaning as in Arabic.

However, twenty percent (20%) of them used “in” which is due to the interference of the Algerian dialect; “adhono aneha kadhet koula elmase2 fi elhatif”

Sentence 10: please email me at abc@gmail.com.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Preposition</th>
<th>On</th>
<th>In</th>
<th>At</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number</td>
<td>03</td>
<td>06</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 21: The Usage of Prepositions in the Tenth Sentence

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sentence 10</th>
<th>Correct usage</th>
<th>Wrong usage</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 22: Correct Vs Wrong Usage in the Tenth Sentence
Figure 10: Correct and Wrong Usage of “at”

This sentence also illustrates the case where the two languages use different preposition. Students who put “on” instead of “at” think that it is like standard Arabic since the equivalent of this sentence in our language is (Min fadhlika rasilni ala…). This is the reason behind the wrong usage of “on”. In other words, learners transferred negatively to their mother tongue. Moreover, the rest of the testees who used the preposition “in” instead of “at” can be due to the Algerian dialect in which we say: (raselni fi …). Here “fi” has the equivalent of “in” and that explains why they made this substitution error which is due to interference.

Sentence 11: Many shops do not open on Fridays.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Preposition</th>
<th>On</th>
<th>In</th>
<th>At</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>02</td>
<td>01</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td>85%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 23: The usage of prepositions in the eleventh sentence

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sentence 11</th>
<th>Correct usage</th>
<th>Wrong usage</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td>85%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 24: Correct Vs Wrong Usage in the Eleventh Sentence
The wrong prepositions that were inserted by students are “in” (one student), and “at” (two students). The reason behind the wrong usage is related to negative transfer, in which students translated the meaning into standard Arabic: (kathiron mina elmahalet la yaftahona fi yawmi eljoumoua). So instead of using the preposition “on” them used the preposition “in” and “at”. While 85% of the testees inserted the correct preposition “on” this is used with days of the week. It shows that they have a good mastery of the prepositional rules in English.

Sentence 12: She looks at herself in the mirror.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>First part</th>
<th>Preposition</th>
<th>On</th>
<th>In</th>
<th>At</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number</td>
<td>01</td>
<td>01</td>
<td>18</td>
<td></td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td>05%</td>
<td>05%</td>
<td>90%</td>
<td></td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Second part</th>
<th>Preposition</th>
<th>On</th>
<th>In</th>
<th>At</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number</td>
<td>07</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>00</td>
<td></td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>65%</td>
<td>00%</td>
<td></td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 25: The Usage of Prepositions in the Twelfth Sentence
### Table 26: Correct VS Wrong Usage in the Twelfth Sentence (First Part)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>First part</th>
<th>Sentence 12</th>
<th>Correct usage</th>
<th>Wrong usage</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>20</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td>90%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Table 27: Correct VS Wrong Usage in the Twelfth Sentence (Second Part)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Second part</th>
<th>Sentence 12</th>
<th>Correct usage</th>
<th>Wrong usage</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>20</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td>65%</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>100%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Figure 12: Correct and Wrong Usage of “at”

![Correct and Wrong Usage of “at”](image1)

### Figure 13: Correct and Wrong Usage of “in”

![Correct and Wrong Usage of “in”](image2)
The first part of the sentence:

The preposition inserted by 18 testees is “at” which is the correct one, and it is the equivalent of the standard Arabic “ila”; (hiya tandhoro ila nafessiha). Hence, testees transferred positively this preposition from standard Arabic (the two languages use the same preposition). However, the wrong answers where the rest inserted “in” instead of “on” is due to the Algerian dialect (tchouf fi roha).

The second part of the sentence:

65% of the students who answered correctly transferred positively from standard Arabic, as the preposition “fi” has the equivalent of “in” (fi elmi2ati).

For the other 35%, the appropriate answer was “at”, which is the wrong one. The reason of the wrong usage is related to confusion, in which they considered the mirror as a limited surface. So they opt to “at” as the appropriate one instead of “in”. And for those who used “on”, a possible explanation is that whether they did not understand the sentence, or they did not answer seriously because their choices did not correspond to any preposition in standard Arabic.

Sentence 13: He laughed at my acting.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Preposition</th>
<th>On</th>
<th>In</th>
<th>At</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number</td>
<td>05</td>
<td>00</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>00%</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 28: The Usage of Prepositions in the Thirteenth Sentence
This sentence is equivalent of the standard Arabic one: (Dahika ala tamthili.). 75% of the learners chose the correct preposition “at”, which is a result of positive transfer. Yet 25% chose the wrong preposition “on”. So the inappropriate answer for those students is the result of negative transfer from standard Arabic.

Sentence 14: The paper is on my desk.
Table 31: Correct Vs Wrong Usage in the Fourteenth Sentence

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Correct usage</th>
<th>Wrong usage</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td>90%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 15: Correct and Wrong Usage of “on”

Standard Arabic and English considered a desk as a surface. They make use of the equivalent spatial preposition “ala” and “on”. This explains the correct answer of most students (90%). Yet 10% of the students filled the gap with the wrong preposition “at”. This is the case of negative transfer from Algerian Arabic (Foug elmakteb.).

Sentence 15: I am not interested in buying a new car.

Table 32: The Usage of Prepositions in the Fifteenth Sentence

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Preposition</th>
<th>On</th>
<th>In</th>
<th>At</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number</td>
<td>02</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>01</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>85%</td>
<td>05%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 33: Correct Vs Wrong Usage in the Fifteenth Sentence

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sentence 15</th>
<th>Correct usage</th>
<th>Wrong usage</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td>85%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Figure 16: Correct and Wrong Usage of “in”

Sentence 16: The shop is on the left.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Preposition</th>
<th>On</th>
<th>In</th>
<th>At</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>02</td>
<td>03</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 34: The Usage of Prepositions in the Sixteenth Sentence

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sentence 16</th>
<th>Correct usage</th>
<th>Wrong usage</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td>75%</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 35: Correct Vs Wrong Usage in the Sixteenth Sentence

Figure 17: Correct and Wrong Usage of “on”
In this sentence, “on” is used to indicate a certain side. It is used with the left here. Most of the test-takers (75%) inserted the right preposition “on”. This can be due to two reasons: whether they master the English rules, or they resorted to Arabic and transferred positively. The rest of the participants (25%) inserted “in” and “at” which is a result of negative transfer and at the same time confusion between the meaning of “at”, “on”, and “in”.

Sentence 17: we could go together in the morning.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Preposition</th>
<th>On</th>
<th>In</th>
<th>At</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number</td>
<td>01</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>06</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td>05%</td>
<td>65%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 36: The Usage of Prepositions in the Seventeenth Sentence

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sentence 17</th>
<th>Correct usage</th>
<th>Wrong usage</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td>65%</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 37: Correct VS Wrong Usage in the Seventeenth Sentence

Figure 18: Correct and Wrong Usage of “in”
The simple preposition "in" inserted by 65% is the correct one (positive transfer). A substitution error made by 35% of the students who inserted "on" and "at" instead of "in". This incorrect insertion can be explained by either learners got confused or they did not take it seriously because neither of the answers where they used on, at can't have an adequate explanation.

Sentence 18: They are going to see their grand-parents at the week-end.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Preposition</th>
<th>On</th>
<th>In</th>
<th>At</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number</td>
<td>09</td>
<td>03</td>
<td>08</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 38: The Usage of Prepositions in the Eighteenth Sentence

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sentence 18</th>
<th>Correct usage</th>
<th>Wrong usage</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 39: Correct VS Wrong Answer in the Eighteenth Sentence

Figure 19: Correct and Wrong Usage of “at”
The sentence requires the insertion of the English preposition “at” to indicate when something happens/will happen. Only 40% of the testees answered correct. However, 60% of them inserted in (By 3 students), and on (by 9 students). This incorrect usage is traced back due to the interference of standard Arabic especially for those who inserted “in” to say = (-------fi------).

Sentence 19: In the picture, I can see a woman.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Preposition</th>
<th>On</th>
<th>In</th>
<th>At</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number</td>
<td>05</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>01</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>05%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 40: The Usage of Prepositions in the Nineteenth Sentence

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sentence 19</th>
<th>Correct usage</th>
<th>Wrong usage</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 41: Correct Vs Wrong Usage in the Nineteenth Sentence

Figure 20: Correct and Wrong Usage of “in”
Since “in” here is used for the visual media like: images, photos, drawings; 70% got the correct answer. Yet 30% inserted “on” and “at” instead of “in”. This can have two possible explanations:

- Either they thought that in standard Arabic we say (ala elsora) which explains their use of “on” and ‘at”, or they resort to French (sur la photo), but still not a strong guess.

Sentence 20: He is sitting at a table.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Preposition</th>
<th>On</th>
<th>In</th>
<th>At</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>03</td>
<td>04</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td>65%</td>
<td>15%</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 42: The Usage of Prepositions in the Twentieth Sentence

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sentence 20</th>
<th>Correct usage</th>
<th>Wrong usage</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 43: Correct VS Wrong Usage in the Twentieth Sentence

Figure 21: Correct and Wrong Usage of “at”
The students got confused where to insert the right preposition in the sentence. In Arabic we say: (inaho jalison ila elmaidati.). “ila” has the meaning of “at” here. So 20% of the students inserted it correctly. Yet 80% of the participants used “on” and “in” instead of “at”. This can be due to negative transfer from Algerian dialect or they miss understand the correct form of the sentence in Arabic. So instead of saying (ila eltawila) they say: (ala tawila) which explains their use of “on”.

2.2.2 Conclusion:

The results show that students transferred negatively from standard Arabic when both languages use different prepositions, and they transferred positively from standard Arabic when the English preposition has the same equivalent in Arabic.

2.3 Analysis of the Questionnaire

2.3.1 Description of the Questionnaire

Analyzing the students’ answers in the test has provided us with some data about the learners’ most common errors; we have tried to give a logical interpretation to the reasons behind these deviations in our analysis. So in order to confirm some of these reasons at least from the learners themselves, a questionnaire is administered for that purpose. The informants consist of the same sample of students who already took the test.

The questionnaire consists of thirteen questions, all of which are written in English. It is divided into two parts; the first part is only about their level in English, and the second one is about prepositions and interference. It aims at knowing students’ attitudes towards the use of prepositions and whether they use Arabic as a reference to use and learn them.

Section one: General Information
It consists only of one question aims at gathering data about the learners’ level in English.

**Section two: Prepositions and Interference**

The second part is composed of twelve questions. It aims at investigating students’ attitude toward the use of prepositions and the main reasons behind learners’ errors in the use of English prepositions.

**2.3.2 Analysis of the Data**

**Section one: General Information**

Question 01: How do you evaluate your level in English?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Options</th>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Percentage (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Very good</td>
<td>01</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Good</td>
<td>08</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average</td>
<td>09</td>
<td>45%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor</td>
<td>02</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 44: Students’ Level in English

This question aims at investigating the learners’ level in English. The table represents that the majority (45%) declared that their level is average in English. 40% of the respondents stated that their level is good. However 10% claimed that they have a poor level; and only 5% of them have a very good level. The results indicate that the majority of the students have an acceptable level in English.

**Section two: Prepositions and Interference**
Question 02: Do you consider English prepositions as particularly difficult to understand and use?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Options</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Q 02</td>
<td>65%</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Confusion: 38%
- Interference: 46%
- Polysemous: 30%

Table 45: Students View about Prepositional Use Learning Difficulty

The aim behind asking this question was to know whether English prepositions are hard to understand and use by EFL learners. The table demonstrates that 65% of the students find difficulties in understanding and using English prepositions, and this according to them can be due to confusion (38%), (46%) said it is because of interference, and (30%) claimed that it is because they have many senses (polysemous). All these results indicate that prepositions are hard to use and understand; it is mainly due to interference and because they are polysemous.

Question 03: When using English prepositions, do you systemize them in Arabic or you think directly and immediately in English?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Options</th>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Percentage (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a/Directly think in English</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b/ Firstly think in Arabic</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>20</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 46: The Use of Arabic or English

This question aims to investigate whether EFL learners of 3rd year translate English prepositions before using them or they directly think in English. According to the data presented in the table above, most of the learners (60%) systemize the English prepositions in Arabic before using them, and the rest (40%) they directly think in English. In a nutshell, learners use Arabic in order to figure out the appropriate preposition to be used in English.

Question 04: Do you prefer to have Arabic language sometimes as a mean of instruction during English prepositions teaching?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Options</th>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Percentage (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a/ Yes</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b/ No</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 47: opinions about whether students prefer to have Arabic as a mean of instruction

This question was meant to check whether EFL learners prefer using Arabic language as a mean of instruction in classes during English prepositions teaching. Opinions about this here equal; 50% agreed to have Arabic as a medium of instruction, while the other half 50% disagreed. Therefore, half of the learners prefer to have Arabic as a mean of instruction, and the other half find that using English is more accurate.

Question 05: How often do you translate the English prepositions in Arabic before using them?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Options</th>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Percentage (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a/ Very often</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b/ Sometimes</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>65%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
This question was raised to know how much students translate the English prepositions before using them. The table shows that the majority (65%) responds by sometimes, and (30%) answered by rarely, only (5%) answered by never. These results show that most of EFL learners resort to translation when using the English prepositions.

Question 06: Do you think that the foremost reason in making errors when using prepositions is due to the mother tongue (Arabic) interference?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Options</th>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Percentage (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a/ Yes</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b/ No</td>
<td>05</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The aim behind this question is to see whether the errors that the learners make are due to interference or not. The majority (75%) stated that the foremost reason behind their errors is interference, while only (25%) think that it is not. These results indicate that learners’ errors when using prepositions are due to mother tongue interference.

Question 07: Would you say that the English and Arabic prepositions are governed by the same rules?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Options</th>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Percentage (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a/ Yes</td>
<td>01</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
This question was raised to investigate students’ attitudes about whether the English and Arabic prepositions are governed by the same rules or not. As it is represented above in the table, the majority of the participants (95%) stated that the English and Arabic preposition are not governed by the same rules, and only (5%) said that they are governed by the same rules. The results indicate that English and Arabic prepositions do not follow the same rules.

Question 08: To what extent English and Arabic prepositions are similar?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Options</th>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Percentage (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a/Extremely similar</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b/Moderately similar</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>65%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c/No similar</td>
<td>07</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 51: The extent to which Arabic and English prepositions are similar

This question aims at knowing the extent in which English and Arabic prepositions are alike. None of them said that they are extremely similar, 35% claimed that they are not similar. However the majority (65%) declared that they are moderately similar. Thus, English and Arabic prepositions are moderately similar.

Question 09: What kind of preposition do you find easy to learn and use?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Options</th>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Percentage (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a/ Time</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b/ Place</td>
<td>09</td>
<td>45%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c/ Others</td>
<td>04</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 52: The easiest type of prepositions
This question was raised to investigate students ‘view of the easiest type of preposition when learning and using them. 35% of the respondents stated that preposition of time are the easiest ones, yet 45% declared that prepositions of place are easier; and only 20% who chose others. According to the learners, prepositions of time are the easiest ones to use and learn.

Question 10: Do EFL teachers happen to compare the English prepositions with the Arabic ones?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Options</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Q 10</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>75%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 53: Students’ Attitudes towards Teachers’ Use of comparison

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Options</th>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Percentage (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a/ Extremely often</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b/ Sometimes</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c/ Rarely</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e/ Never</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The aim behind this question was to know if the use of Arabic by the learners is due to their teachers. So the question raised was whether EFL teachers compare the English prepositions with the Arabic ones. The majority (75%) denied it and answered no; while the rest (25%) answered by yes, but it was sometimes to rarely. This implies that EFL teachers do not use comparison between the English and Arabic prepositions.

Question 11: Does your English prepositional knowledge result from your teachers’ instruction or from an instinctive reaction?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Options</th>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Percentage (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a/ I react instinctively</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>65%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b/ It results from the teacher’s instruction</td>
<td>05</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
This question was raised to see whether students’ prepositional knowledge is due to their teachers’ instruction, or it’s an instinctive reaction. Approximately, 65% of the respondents claimed that they react instinctively, while 25% stated that it’s a result of teachers’ instruction; and only 10% said it is from both. This shows that the learners’ prepositional knowledge is a result of an instinctive reaction.

Question 12: How often do you make prepositional errors in your writing?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Options</th>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Percentage (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a/ Very often</td>
<td>01</td>
<td>05%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b/ Sometimes</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c/ Rarely</td>
<td>05</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d/ Never</td>
<td>00</td>
<td>00%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 55: Students’ Attitudes towards Their prepositional errors

The aim behind asking this question is to see how often learners make such errors during their writing productions. The majority (70%) of the respondents claimed that they make errors sometimes; no one of them said that they never make errors. Moreover, just 5% argued that they make errors very often; and 25% opt for rarely. The results show that most learners make prepositional errors during their written production.

Question 13: To what extent these errors affect your writing?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Options</th>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Percentage (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a/ Large extent</td>
<td>03</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b/ somehow</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>65%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Table 56: The impact of errors on learners’ writing

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>c/Poor</th>
<th>04</th>
<th>20%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The last question is about whether these errors affect the learners’ written production. I.e.: To what extent they affect students’ writing. The above table shows that 65% of the participants declared that these errors somehow affect their writing; 20% of them claimed that these errors do not affect their writing; and only 15% stated that making prepositional errors affect their writing in large extent. It can be deduced that prepositional errors somehow affect students’ writing.

#### 2.3.3 Discussion of the Students’ Questionnaire Results:

The data gathered through the questionnaire have shown many results. It was observed that English and Arabic prepositions are not governed by the same rules which explain why they stated that English prepositions are hard to understand. It was also noticed that most of the participants systemize the English prepositions in Arabic before using them. Therefore it confirms that students’ errors are due to mother tongue interference.

The analysis of the questionnaire also revealed that most of the EFL students agree that they find difficulties in understanding English prepositions and it is mainly due interference and confusion.

### Conclusion

The analysis of the results show that English prepositions (on, in, at) exhibit a problematic issue for Algerian learners; and since they do not master their use properly, they tend to transfer them. This transfer can be positive or negative. In most cases, learners tend to transfer negatively. In other words, students resort to transfer when they do not know the rule, and they try to relate each English preposition to an Arabic equivalent. This leads, in most
cases, to transfer negatively and make errors. Furthermore, the results obtained from the questionnaire demonstrate that prepositional errors are due to interference, and it has an effect on learners’ written production.

**Limitation of the study**

The current study faced some difficulties that might affect its results and validity. The most important ones are time constraints and the small size of sample. First, because of the lack of time and the lack of opportunity to manipulate the grammar module syllabus, only one test was given. Second, the small size of sample was attributed to the inconsistence of the absences when handing the test and the questionnaire. Consequently, that sample may not be representative for the whole population to investigate this research.

**Suggestions and Recommendations**

It is better for future researchers to use a large size of the sample in order to be representative and to get a large amount of information. Also, it was preferable to use a pre-test and post-test procedure instead of giving only one test. So, an experimental design or other methods may be used for such works in future. Since students do not master the rules of using English prepositions, a requirement to an extensive teaching for them is very recommended.
General Conclusion

Preposition misuse is a phenomenon that deserves to be investigated especially because it affects the Algerian learners’ English proficiency. The English prepositions differ from the standard Arabic prepositions in functions and properties which make Arab learners confused when using them. Our research aims at investigating whether students resort to transfer when they use English prepositions and to examine the extent to which they rely on their L1 prepositional knowledge. The analysis of the test’s results supported our hypothesis that the misuse of the English prepositions (on, in, at) by third year LMD students of the English department at L’arbi Ben M’hidi university is due to interference from standard Arabic the huge occurrence of transfer gives a hint that learners do not master the English prepositions because they are polysemous, and that is why students rely on the standard Arabic and therefore interference occurs. But in some cases standard Arabic was not the only source of transfer; the Algerian dialect took place too. All in all, learners tend to transfer common features and common meanings. When the two languages (English and Arabic) have similarities, positive transfer takes place. However, when there are differences, the transfer is negative. This research concentrates on the impact of the mother tongue (Arabic), and it revealed that, indeed, the mother tongue has an influence on learners’ prepositional knowledge. In addition, it revealed that students have problems with the English prepositions (on, at, in) because they have not a precise equivalent in Arabic and vice versa. Moreover, the use of prepositions differs between the two languages depending on the situation and the meaning they are supposed to transmit. To conclude, we have to say that the errors committed by EFL learners need a remedy which is best through intensive exposure and practice of the different English preposition especially (on, in, at).
List of References


Cook, V. (2008) Linguistics and second language acquisition: One person with two


Appendix A

Students’ Test

Dear students,

This test is designed as a part of an examination carried out for Master degree in DLE, it aims at investigating the effect of the EFL learner’s mother tongue (Arabic) interference on the use of prepositions (On, In, At) during writing compositions by Third year university students at the English department.

I kindly invite you to take part in this test by completing it to the best of your knowledge and ability.

Your help in completing this test is absolutely needed and it will be greatly appreciated.

Thank you in advance for your cooperation.

Ms. Saadaoui Khadidja Saçia

**Exercise:** Please read each sentence carefully and choose the right preposition (*In, On, At*) to complete the following sentences:

1/ ……… the end of the week-end.

2/ ……….4th July,1776.

3/ There is a party …….the club house.

4/ He is waiting ….. the bus stop.

5/ She lives ……. the first floor.

6/ Get ………the car.

7/ Look …….the picture ……. the wall.

8/ I like to relax …….. the evening.

9/ I think she spent the entire afternoon…….. the phone.

10/ Please email me ……. abc@gmail.com.
11/ Many shops do not open ……. Fridays.
12/ She look ……. herself ……. the mirror.
13/ He laughed ……. my acting.
14/ The paper is ……. my desk.
15/ I am not interested …….. buying a new car now.
16/ The shop is ……. the left.
17/ We could go together ……. the morning.
18/ They are going to see their grand parents …….. the week-end.
19/ …….. the picture, I can see a woman.
20/ He is sitting ……. a table.
Appendix B

Students’ Questionnaire

Dear students,

This questionnaire is designed for the purpose of collecting data for a research project aiming at investigating the main reasons behind third year students’ errors in the use of English prepositions.

You are kindly requested to fill in this questionnaire by ticking the appropriate box according to your point of view.

Thank you in advance for your cooperation.

Ms. Saadaoui Khadidja Sassia

Section One: General information

1/ How do you evaluate your level in English?
   a/ Very good  
   b/ Good     
   c/ Average  
   d/ Poor     

Section Two: Prepositions and Interference

2/ Do you consider English prepositions as particularly difficult to understand and use?
   a/ Yes     
   b/ No      

   -- If yes, what could be the cause?
   a/ Confusion
   b/ Interference with the Arabic language
   c/ Because they are polysemous (Have many senses)

3/ When using English prepositions, do you systemize them in Arabic or you think directly and immediately in English?
   a/ I directly think in English.
   b/ I firstly think in Arabic.

4/ Do you prefer to have Arabic language sometimes as a mean of instruction during English prepositions teaching?

5/ How often do you translate the English prepositions in Arabic before using them?
6/ Do you think that the foremost reason in making errors when using prepositions is due to the mother tongue (Arabic) interference?
   a/ Yes  b/ No

7/ Would you say that the English and Arabic prepositions are governed by the same rules?
   a/ Yes  b/ No

8/ To what extent English and Arabic prepositions are similar?
   a/ Extremely similar  b/ Moderately similar  c/ Not similar

9/ What kind of preposition do you find easy to learn and use?
   a/ Time  b/ Place  c/ Others

10/ Do EFL teachers happen to compare the English prepositions with the Arabic ones?
    a/ Yes  b/ No
    *If yes, how often?
    a/ Extremely often  b/ Sometimes  c/ Rarely  d/ Never

11/ Does your English prepositional knowledge result from your teachers’ instructions or from an instinctive reaction?
    a/ I react instinctively.  
    b/ It results from the teacher’s instruction.  
    c/ Others.  *Please mention ……………………………………………………………………………………………………………………

12/ How often do you make prepositional errors in your writing?
    a/ Very often  b/ Sometimes  c/ Rarely  d/ Never

13/ To what extent these errors affect your writing?
    a/ Large extent  b/ Somehow  c/ Poor
الملخص:

يرتكب طلبة اللغات الأجنبية بصفة عامة وطلبة اللغة الإنجليزية بصفة خاصة جملة من الأخطاء يصعب تصنيف مصدرها إذ كان خطأ شائعا أو بسبب تداخل اللغة الأم للطالب، وعلى هذا الأساس تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى محاولة فهم تأثير تداخل اللغة الأم (اللغة العربية) على طريقة استعمال حروف الجر (on, in, at). بين مفهومها و استعمالاتها في اللغة العربية و تأثير هذا المفهوم على طريقة توظيفها في اللغة الإنجليزية و على هذا الأساس تم اقتراح الفرضية التالية: الأخطاء المرتكبة من قبل طلاب اللغة الإنجليزية فيما يخص توظيف حروف الجر (on, in, at) يعود إلى تداخلها مع قواعد اللغة العربية الفصحي، من أجل التحقق من صحة الفرضية المقدَّرة تم اختيار عشوائيا عينة من طلاب السنة الثالثة ل.م.د. من أجل إجراء اختبار كتبي وهو عبارة عن مجموعة من الجمل تخص الاستعمالات المتعددة لحروف الجر (on, in, at).

كذلك تم تسليم استبيان بنفس العينة المذكورة سابقاً من أجل تأكيد صحة الفرضية.

من خلال تحليل البيانات تبين أن معظم الطلاب فشلوا أو لم يتمكنوا بسبب تداخل قواعد استعمال حروف الجر في اللغة العربية مع قواعد حروف الجر الخاصة باللغة الإنجليزية. و بهذا يمكن القول أن صحة الفرضية قد أثبتت و أن فشل الطلبة في توظيف حروف الجر (on, in, at) يعود أساسا إلى تداخل اللغة العربية و تأثيرها على طريقة اكتساب و تعلم اللغة الإنجليزية.