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**Investigating the Interlingual Syntactic Errors Committed by  
EFL Learners in Writing**

The Case of Second Year EFL Students in the Department of  
Letters and English Language at Larbi Tébessi University

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## Abstract

In the light of the overwhelming views about the purpose of second and foreign language pedagogy, learners' ability to achieve syntactic accuracy in writing is of an essential concern; however, learners' background as non-native speakers of the target language prompts them to commit errors. The present study investigated the interlingual syntactic errors made by EFL students in writing. To fulfill this aim, a descriptive design was chosen with a mixed method, combining qualitative and quantitative data. The sample from which data were collected consists of 30 second year students from the department of Letters and English Language at Larbi Tebessi University and 05 teachers in charge of various courses. Manifold data was obtained using a questionnaire and a diagnostic test directly distributed to students and an interview conducted with teachers through telephone calls. Since the main focus of the study was to determine whether or not the most frequent syntactic errors are caused by the negative transfer and which of these errors occurs the most in students' writings, only errors related to L1 interference were addressed. The errors extracted from students' tests were analyzed, following Corder's Error Analysis approach. The collected data provided clear evidence that the most common syntactic errors made by EFL learners when writing are those related to pronouns, tenses, prepositions, articles, word order, subject-verb disagreement, omission of copula, and the use of passive forms, which to some extent confirmed the first assumption. Further, the negative transfer of the Arabic language is the main cause of learners' errors since 292 out of the 459 of the committed syntactic errors were interlingual, most of which involved the misuse of pronouns, prepositions, and articles, which confirmed the second and the third assumptions. In this regard, some recommendations were proposed to help students overcome this type of errors. Teachers, for instance, are advised to train their students to think exclusively in the target language in order to minimize the L1 influence and to help learners understand and apply syntactic rules to their own writing.

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## Dedication

In the name of ALLAH, the most Gracious and most Merciful; all praise to Him alone. I shall pay my deepest gratitude to Graceful ALLAH the Almighty for granting me the power to pursue and to finish the work.

I dedicate this work...

To the pillars of my life: my loving and sympathetic *PARENTS* whose love and support guided my path through success;

To all my brothers, to my sister, *SIHEM*, who has been my source of inspiration and always believed in me and pushed me forward;

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## Dedication

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To my brothers and sisters

To my fiancé and his family

To all my family and friends

To all those who prayed for me and besought God to help me

## List of Abbreviations

**CA:** Contrastive Analysis

**CAH:** Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis

**EA:** Error Analysis

**EFL:** English as a Foreign Language

**FL:** Foreign Language

**L1:** Native Language, or First Language

**NEST:** Native English Speaking Teachers

**NNES:** Non-Native English Speaking Teachers

**SL:** Second Language

**SLA:** Second Language Acquisition

**S.V.D:** Subject Verb Disagreement

**TL:** Target Language

**$\alpha$ :** Cronbach's Alpha

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## General Introduction

### 1. Background of the Study

EFL learners, during the process of acquiring a foreign language, are attentive to how to improve their language skills, especially writing skills, as well as how to use the language properly with a high degree of sophistication. Since teachers can rely on the written productions to evaluate their learners, learners' survival in academic contexts depends mainly on their ability to write accurately. However, different obstacles impede students' willingness to attain their objectives and lead them to perform poorly, especially in writing, which may helm to academic failure. Additionally, students' poor performances may result in some errors at distinct language levels including grammar and syntax, where students sometimes fail in producing an appropriate sentence, let alone arranging the isolated sentences together to create a well-structured utterance. One of the reasons behind these errors' commitment is students' reliance on their mother tongue's system when applying the target language rules, besides students' low performances and the difficulty of the syntactic system of the English language. Many studies (Al-Khresheh, 2015; Brenes, 2017; Chan, 2002; Scott and Tucker, 1974) revealed that the main reason behind students' committed syntactic errors is the divergence between the two languages' syntactic systems because of which students tend to transfer their first language rules and apply them when acquiring the foreign language; this is called *negative transfer*. Bardovi-Harlig and Sprouse (2017) claimed: "When the influence of the native language leads to errors in the acquisition or use of a target language, we say that negative transfer or interference occurs" (p. 1) ), this transfer will necessarily affect the second language learning process negatively in a way or in another.

### 2. Statement of the Problem

Writing is a productive skill that is very challenging and demands a lot of mental work to convert thoughts into well-structured arrangements of words and sentences. Despite the fact

that students reached the undergraduate level, they still exhibit many syntactic errors in their written production, which definitely affects the quality of their writing because of their conscious and subconscious escape to their mother tongue when they opt to express themselves properly. This leads to the production of erroneous utterances in the target language (TL) regardless of the English courses that they had seen in writing and grammar.

### **3. Aim of the Study**

The current study endeavors to elicit the common syntactic errors made by second year EFL learners at Larbi Tebessi University in writing and to determine whether or not the Arabic interference is the main cause of these errors' occurrence. Moreover, one of the study's fundamental concerns is the study of the frequency of the committed interlingual syntactic errors together with proposing some of the possible solutions to overcome students' deficiencies in writing.

### **4. Research Questions and Assumptions**

In order to fulfill a deeper analysis of this work, the following research questions are postulated:

1. What are the most common syntactic errors committed by EFL learners at the department of English at the University of Larbi Tebessi in their writing?
2. Are the syntactic errors made by those learners attributed to the Arabic interlingual interference?
3. How frequently do the syntactic errors caused by the negative transfer occur in students' writing?

In correspondence with the research questions and the main topic, it is assumed that:

- 1- The most common syntactic errors committed by EFL learners at the department of English at the University of Larbi Tebessi could be concerned with the use of articles, pronouns, prepositions, tenses, subject-verb disagreement and word order.



- 2- The interlingual interference of Arabic caused by the variation in both languages' syntactic systems is the main cause of syntactic errors' occurrence.
- 3- The interlingual syntactic errors that are most likely to occur in EFL students' writing are those concerned with the use of pronouns, articles, tenses, and others.

## **5. Methodology and Research Tools**

As this study attempts to examine the most frequent interlingual syntactic errors committed by second year EFL learners in writing, and in order for it to accomplish the target goals, this research study follows a descriptive design with a combination of a qualitative and a quantitative methods to describe, analyze, and then interpret students' most committed syntactic errors in writing, which are attributed to the influence of Arabic as a mother tongue.

For the sake of collecting as much as possible useful data, three different instruments were used, namely: a diagnostic test, a questionnaire, and an interview. The questionnaire which is a part of the measurement procedure is used to provide an accurate representation of the students' behavior in writing, while the diagnostic test is a sort of two tasks; The first one is a translation test which includes some sentences to be translated from Arabic into English, while the second is a written evaluation task in which participants were opted for writing a composition. This diagnostic test will help in exploring students' writing skill and provide us with some evidence to confirm or infirm the already stated hypothesis. In addition, the interview is conducted via phone calls with five teachers whom are in charge of teaching different modules. Their answers were recorded after the teachers' permission and then transcribed.

## **6. Population and Sampling**

The target population of the present study consists of 103 second year English language students from Larbi Tebessi University as well as 16 teachers working in the same department. However, the sample consists of only 30 students who were randomly selected

using the simple random sampling technique so that all the students have the same opportunity to be involved in the study, in addition to five teachers who are in charge of teaching different modules.

## **7. Structure of the Study**

The current study is an investigation in the field of applied linguistics, concerned with learning English as a foreign language, in which the researchers aim to investigate second year EFL students' interlingual syntactic errors committed in writing. It consists of two main chapters.

The first chapter is a theoretical one in which the researchers tackle an extensive review of literature divided under two main sections that are successively related to both the interlingual syntactic errors and the notion of writing; Section one sheds light on the interlingual interference and the transfer theory. Moreover, it deals with some approaches to the study of errors, namely; error analysis and contrastive analysis, as major contributors to error identification in addition to the types of the committed syntactic errors, while section two is concerned with the theoretical concepts related to the notion of writing in addition to the role of syntax in writing.

The second chapter is devoted to an extensive analytical process, and it tests the assumptions that were previously mentioned. This chapter will include the main methods and tools employed in the investigation, as well as the discussion and interpretation of the obtained results. In addition, the implications and recommendations suggested to alleviate the burden of language interference and to minimize students' writing errors are mentioned.

# **Chapter One: A Literature Review of the Interlingual Syntactic Errors in Writing**

## **Introduction**

Teaching or learning a foreign language has always been a problematic task, especially when the mother tongue system shows a variation in multiple levels taking into account syntax, lexis, phonology and morphology. Syntax, for instance, helps teachers to pinpoint and to correct their students' errors and weaknesses in writing since errors are no longer seen as signs of failure, but are rather believed to have a core role in the language learning process. For the purpose of identifying and analyzing the students' errors, error analysis could be the most appropriate theoretical model for describing them. Errors that are committed by EFL learners, mainly those attributed to the interlingual interference at the level of syntax, are our main concern in the present study because syntactic errors may lead to the misunderstanding of the whole utterance. Hence, this chapter is devoted to theoretically cover our topic's main variables' concepts. It is further split into two independent sections; the first deals with the error approaches, specifically the errors analysis approach, in addition to the syntactic errors and the concept of interlingual interference, whilst the second copes with the concepts related to the writing skill.

### **1.1. Section One: The Interlingual Interference and Syntactic Errors**

EFL learners always come across some difficulties in mastering the language. These problems are due to the divergence between the mother tongue and the foreign language which may cause interference between them. Learners usually rely on their previous knowledge of their first language and use its rules to perform in the target language; this phenomenon is called 'transfer' which has been investigated by two basic approaches, namely: contrastive analysis and error analysis, in order to understand and to explain the nature of learners' performance in the target language (Fauziati, 2014, p. 10). The interlingual

interference (transfer) leads learners to create ill-formed utterances, especially in the grammatical sense and more specifically on the syntactic level.

### **1.1.1. The Notion of Errors**

The notion of errors has been defined from different perspectives by many researchers across the time. Corder stated that an “an error would be characterized by any deviation from the norm in the language system relating to the L2 learner’s competence” (1967, p. 9). The notion of errors in a foreign language learning process demonstrates both the learner’s state of knowledge and the way in which the foreign language has been taught to him (Selinker, 1972). Moreover, errors could occur at any stage of a foreign language learning process, reveal learners’ competence in the target language, and cannot be self-corrected (Brown, 2000, p. 127).

Errors could result from the learner’s lack of knowledge about the target language or an incorrect hypothesis about it. The false hypothesis is when the lack of knowledge about the language influences learners to use some linguistic patterns in contexts where they are not appropriate to be used and lead them to commit errors (Keshavarz, 2011 p. 64). For instance, when the learner thinks that *was* and *did* are markers of the past tense, an erroneous sentence will result, such as: “*I was finished my homework*”. The error could be noticed in any stage of learning development, and it is continually happening until the full mastery of the language (Harmer, 2001, p. 100).

### **1.1.2. Distinction Between Errors and Mistakes**

Errors and mistakes are nearly synonyms; people tend to use them interchangeably; however, each concept serves a different context in the learning process. First, Corder stated that “an error is a result of a learner’s lack of competence. However, a mistake occurs when this learner fails to perform his competence” (1967, p. 9). An error is something related to learners’ knowledge of the language. By contrast, a mistake reveals learners’ present level of

language development (Mario, 2015, p. 18). Second, mistakes could be self-corrected, whereas errors cannot be corrected because learners do not have the ability to recognize them (Gass & Selinker, 2008). Third, the term “mistake” is usually used in situations where there is performance deficiencies caused by many reasons, like the lack of attention, anxiety and carelessness (Corder, 1973, p. 295), whereas errors are more serious and occur naturally during the learning process. Finally, errors are usually taken more seriously than mistakes because they work as a device that helps teacher to identify students’ language competence, while, according to error analysis approach, mistakes are not really significant for the learning process since they could be made by both native and non-native learners, and they could be overcome by learners, since they do not occur systematically (Mario, 2015, p. 9).

### **1.1.3. Approaches to Errors**

Over the last forty years, different approaches attempted to define and to understand the notion of error in the language learning process, including both the behaviourist approach and the cognitivist approach to learning.

#### **1.1.3.1. The Behaviourist Approach**

In behaviourists’ traditions, errors are treated as a problem to overcome. Behaviourists believe that errors are signs of failure because they prevent the learning process progression (Richards & Gloria, 1974, p. 4). According to the behaviourists’ learning theory of habit formation, learning a language is a matter of habits, and the learners’ accuracy is a key factor for it (Hulvová, 2017, p. 2017). Furthermore, this approach maintains that errors should be avoided or corrected immediately if they happened. Otherwise, it may become a “bad habit” that is hard to be eliminated later (Hemaidia, 2016, p. 36).

According to Brown (2008), to prevent errors from happening; behaviourists suggested several teaching methods that involve different techniques, including intensive language drilling and overlearning; these techniques are also designed to positively reinforce

the use of the correct forms of language patterns only; he added that the behaviourists' principles of teaching were dominating for a long period of time, and they are seen as the basic theoretical roots of the audio-lingual teaching method.

### **1.1.3.2. The Cognitivist Approach**

A new perception of errors has emerged with the appearance of the cognitive learning theory. This new approach considers errors as essential for learning since they are natural, inevitable and inherent to learning a language (Corder, 1967). Errors are no longer indicators of failure since they naturally occur, even when acquiring the first language, and English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners commit such errors because they are evolving in a new language system (Hemaidia, 2016, p. 36).

Noam Chomsky's idea of innateness is based on the conception of trial and errors (Hemaidia, 2016, p. 36). The infant is born with innate capacities which enable him to construct the grammar of a particular language. Yet, his committed errors can improve his grammar because such errors promote the language learning. Those errors will ultimately enable him to produce correct speech in his native language (Brown, 2000, p. 217). The second language (SL) learning process is not completely the same as the first language (L1) learning in trial and errors' nature (Hemaidia, 2016, p. 37). Errors could be very beneficial for the learning development because of their different kinds of feedback (Selinker, 1972, p.150).

Cognitivists believe that error investigation could be "diagnostic and prognostic" at the same time (Corder, 1973, p. 270). It can be diagnostic for the reason that it can give information about the learner's state of language at a given point of time, and it can be prognostic since it could lead the teacher to organize appropriate language learning materials (Corder, 1973, p. 270).

#### **1.1.4. Approaches to the Study of Errors**

To make learners achieve proficiency, teachers are required to adopt good teaching strategies while learners should intensively practice the rules of the foreign language; however, the learning process is bounded by committing errors. Investigating such errors is done through two main approaches, namely Contrastive Analysis and Error Analysis.

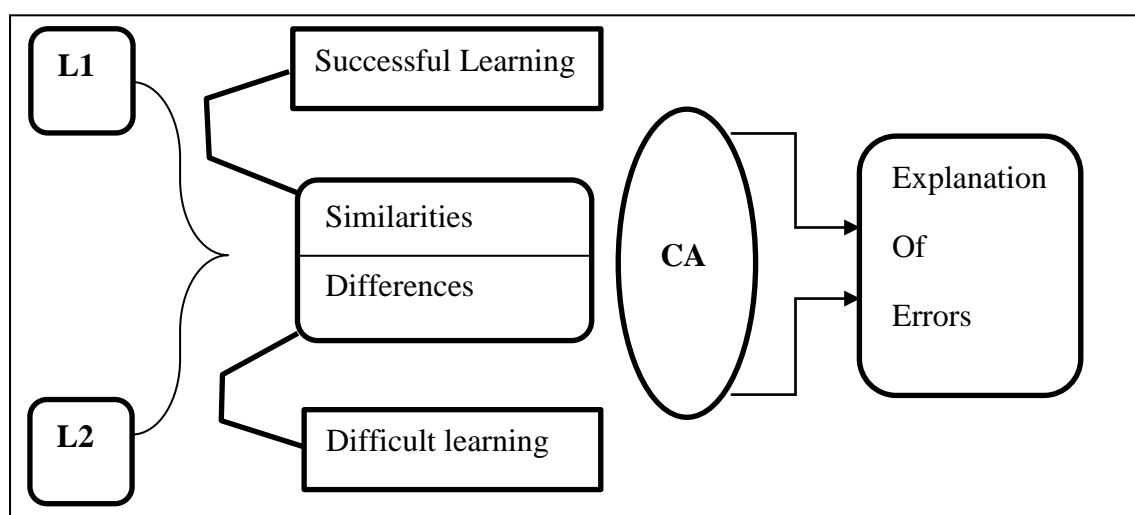
##### **1.1.4.1. Contrastive Analysis**

Contrastive analysis (CA) is the offspring of behaviourism and American descriptivism, which is a setup on believing that successful second language acquisition (SLA), involves the re-writing of L1 habits (Al-Khresheh, 2016a, p.331). When learning a FL, learners' knowledge of the L1 was kept along the process of acquiring the FL. For behaviourists, who are inspired by the ideas of Skinner (1957), FL learners do not adopt new habits, but rather accommodate to L1 patterns to meet their needs. This assumption was clearly stated by Lado in his famous book "*Linguistics Across Culture*" (Keshavarz, 2011, p. 8). Lado, in 1957, introduced the Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis (CAH). The keynote of his claim is the systematic study of the similarities and differences between two languages, mainly the mother tongue and a foreign language, when learners use an old habit to facilitate a new one. Therefore, transfer which is the cornerstone of the CAH takes place (Keshavarz, 2011, p. 8).

As mentioned above, CA can be used to identify the differences and similarities between the native language and the target language; this identification can help in clarifying FL errors. In order to make a systematic comparison, CA can be divided into five steps, which are Selection, Description, Comparison, Prediction, and Verification (Al-Khresheh, 2016a, p. 335). The CAH received a major criticism. Richards, in 1970, shed light on the weaknesses and the drawbacks of CAH in explaining errors; he assumed that all the errors were related to negative transfer while, certainly, it was not only a matter of transfer but rather other reasons

such as overgeneralization and avoidance. Moreover, Johansson, 1973 (as cited in Al-Khresheh, 2016a, p. 335) diminished the significance of CA by assuming that (i) teachers were more interested in knowing errors rather than predicting them, (ii) CA did not rationally precise what elements of one language should be compared with those of the other since languages are made of many interrelated aspects, and (iii) CA cannot precise which differences will lead to difficulties and which will not even if the differences were found.

In the following figure, CA is defined as a pedagogical procedure that implies carrying a comparison between the linguistic systems of the mother tongue and the target language, and demonstrating their differences and similarities so as to explain errors committed by foreign language learners.



**Figure 1: The Procedure of CA (Al-Khresheh, 2016a, p. 334)**

#### **1.1.4.2. Error Analysis**

After criticizing CA as being incompetent enough in explaining errors, a number of linguists started to search for an alternative approach to study errors, an approach which would be, on one hand, more reasonable theoretically and, on the other, pedagogically practical. As a result, the Error Analysis approach has emerged (Keshavarz, 2011, p. 57).

Error Analysis (EA) was established by Stephen Pit Corder and his colleagues in the late of 1970s. In 1967, Corder published “*The Significance of Learner Errors*”, which gained



positive reviews. EA has mainly concentrated on FL learners' committed errors, and claimed that errors are not the result of L1 interference only, but rather they might be caused due to the intralingual interference as well. EA was a great shift in the domain of applied linguistics, and unlike CA, it is not only pedagogically oriented, but it focuses predominantly on the linguistic and cognitive processes (Al-Khresheh, 2016b, p. 50).

The main focus of EA is investigating learners' errors; the interpretation of these errors is considered as a constructive feedback in the teaching and learning process because it reflects whether the learner is progressing or not. Therefore, teachers or researchers should describe the errors linguistically and understand the psychological explanation for their occurrence. In this sense, Corder (1981) defines EA as: "error analysis aims at telling us something about the psycholinguistic processes of language learning" (p. 35). EA attempts to provide a systematic description and classification of learners' speaking or writing errors committed in the FL; this systematic description makes the identification of areas that need reinforcement possible.

Corder identified two fundamental functions of EA. The first one is a theoretical function that checks the validity of theories in order to identify learners' errors and their causes. The second one is an applied function concerned with pedagogical interventions to be a guide to pinpoint learners' deficiencies in FL and hence analyze them and provide a remedy (Al-Khresheh, 2016b, p. 50).

#### **1.1.4.2.1. Significance of Error Analysis**

Error analysis is a systematic method that studies learners' errors. Corder (1967), in his influential article, stated that errors can be meaningful because they help in improving the teaching and learning process. EFL learners' errors are important in three different ways:

- To the teacher: errors reflect the learner's improvement, help the teacher to provide a good framework that learners find constructive in FL learning, and permit the

teacher to trace areas of language where learners produce ill-formed structures that will help him to determine the source of errors.

- To the researcher: errors reveal how learners acquire language and the schemes they use in doing so. Therefore, the researcher may be helpful in developing teaching materials to deal with errors.
- To the learner: errors allow learners to learn through correcting them, which will enable the learners to acquire the correct form of the TL. In simple words, learners may use errors as a learning tool.

#### 1.1.4.2.2. Error Analysis Procedures

Interpreting FL learners' errors arranges through a set of interrelated procedures.

Corder (1974) proposed five main steps of analyzing learners' errors:

##### A. Collection of a Sample of Learner Language

The data collection method differs from a researcher to another. Ellis (1994, p. 49) asserted that there are many factors that influence learners to commit errors; these factors contribute in collecting a representative sample considering the type and the causal factors of the errors that learners produce. The table given bellow explains these factors.

Factors	Description
<b>A. Language</b>	.....
Medium	Learner production can be oral or written
Genre	Learner production may take the form of a conversation, a lecture, an essay, a letter, etc.
Content	The topic the learner is communicating about
<b>B. Learner</b>	.....
Level	Elementary, intermediate, or advanced
Mother tongue	The learner's L1
Language learning experience	This may be classroom or naturalistic or a mixture of the two

**Table 1: Factors to Consider when Collecting Samples of Learner Language (Ellis, 1994, p. 49)**

## **B. Identification of Errors:**

In order to identify errors in the spoken or written production of FL learners, Corder (1981, p. 21) has provided a paradigm. According to his paradigm, “every sentence is to be regarded as idiosyncratic until shown to be otherwise” (as cited in Ellis, 1994, p. 52). Corder, in his model, distinguishes between “overt” and “covert” errors by stating that if a sentence is clearly deviated from the target language (TL) rule, the error is regarded as an overt one; however, a covert error occurs when the utterance is superficially well-formed; which does not mean what the learner intended. The teacher here compares between learners’ errors and standard features of the TL he/she has got (Ellis, 1994, p. 52).

## **C. Description of Errors**

After identifying a list of committed errors, the researcher describes them in terms of four distinctive categories that include the linguistic description of errors. Corder (1973) classifies FL learners’ errors in terms of their deviation from the correct utterance in the TL. Based on that, he classifies errors into four categories: omission, addition, selection and miss-ordering of elements (Ellis, 1994, p. 54).

## **D. Explanation of Errors**

According to Ellis (1994, p. 57), “this stage is the most important for SLA research as it involves an attempt to establish the process responsible for FL acquisition.” This statement signifies that the most important procedure in EA is explaining those errors and linking them to their sources. These errors can be either interlingual or intralingual.

## **E. Evaluation of Errors**

The aim behind error analysis is mainly to help learners acquire foreign languages easily and correctly. In this step, the researcher estimates the significance of errors. Some ill-forms are serious because they affect the whole piece of discourse, and then, learners focus on correcting them after figuring their causes (Ellis, 1994, p. 67).

### **1.1.4.2.3. Limitations of Error Analysis**

Error analysis has been criticized for the lack of statistical inference, and because it is restricted only to ill-formed sentences. Moreover, to get a full image of learners' competence, an investigation into non-errors must be done as well; therefore, looking only for areas where FL learners were competent was not enough because EA was not very successful in doing that (Al-Khreshah, 2016b). When a learner faces an obstacle in using some grammatical rules, they avoid it; hence, avoiding such structures cannot be studied because the main focus is on errors (Al-Khreshah, 2016b).

### **1.1.5. Sources of Errors**

Most of the studies in the domain of error analysis divided errors committed by learners into categories, namely: developmental errors, interlingual errors, and intralingual errors.

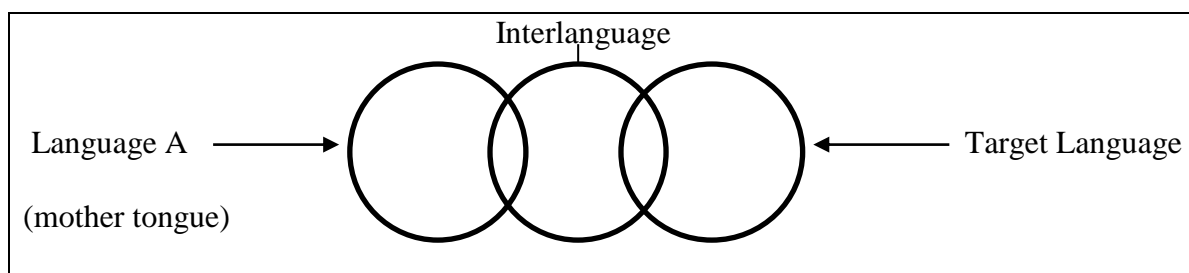
#### **1.1.5.1. Developmental Errors**

Developmental errors reflect the learner's competence at a certain stage of any foreign language learning; they are a result of the influence of some target language items upon its other items, for instance, "He is comes" based on the mixture of "He is coming" and "He comes". Moreover, these errors are similar to the ones produced by monolingual children, and they result from the learner's attempt to construct concepts and hypotheses about the target language based on his/her lack of exposure to the foreign language. Simply, these errors occur because learners have a restricted background of the target language and culture. For example, learners might say "speaked" instead of "spoke" (Keshavarz, 2011, p. 124).

#### **1.1.5.2. Interlingual Errors**

Throughout the foreign language learning process, the learner creates a new language which does not refer to either his mother tongue or the language that he is learning, but rather a separate language called "interlanguage"; this term was first introduced by Selinker (1972 &

1974) who referred to it as an independent systematic knowledge and a transitional process between L1 and FL (Al-Khresheh, 2015, p. 124). Interlingual errors are those caused by the influence of the mother tongue on the foreign language. In other words, according to (Keshavarz, 2011), “interlingual errors are the result of the transfer of phonological, morphological grammatical, lexico-semantic, and stylistic elements to the learning of the target language” (p. 120). Zobl (1980, as cited in Al-Khresheh, 2016b, p. 54) suggested some characteristics of these errors: first, interference produces errors that are not similar to developmental errors; second, these errors could be due to L1 habits; third, they use their native language to hypothesize about FL; and finally, learners employ an interlingual generalization. The interlanguage occurs when the knowledge that foreign language learners’ already have interferes with the new language that they are trying to learn, as illustrated in the figure bellow.



**Figure 2: The Notion of Interlanguage (Adapted from Corder, 1981, p. 17, cited in Al-Khresheh, 2015, p.124)**

### 1.1.5.3. Intralingual Errors

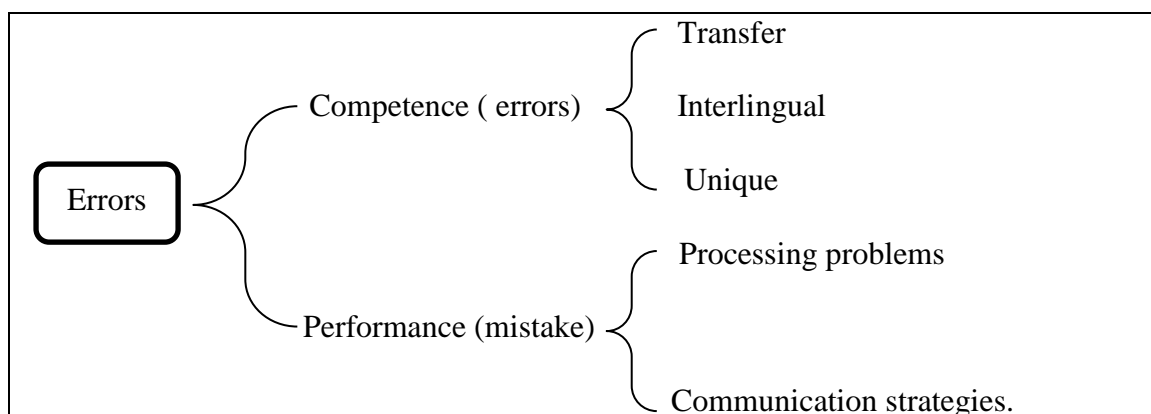
Despite the fact that most of the errors are caused by the interlingual interference, there are still particular errors not caused by L1. Ellis (1994) defines intralingual errors as “the reflection of general characteristics of rule learning such as faulty generalization, incomplete application of rules and failure to learn conditions under which rules apply” (p. 58). This type of errors occurs because of the foreign language itself. Intralingual errors can be subdivided

into four categories, namely: overgeneralization, ignorance of rule restriction, incomplete application of rules and hypothesis of false concepts (Al-Khresheh, 2016b, p. 55).

(Zobl and Liceras, 1994; as cited in Al-Khresheh, 2016b, p. 55) provided the following characteristics of intralingual errors:

- Interlingual errors are identical to those committed by natives.
- Learners create identical rules to those of native speakers.
- Errors reflect learners' competence at a certain developmental stage.
- Learners try to construct a hypothesis about the FL.
- Errors originate from FL.
- Errors reflect general characteristics of acquiring language rules.
- Learners use the strategies of simplification, generalization and reduction of grammatical redundancy.

The following figure illustrates Ellis's explanation of the nature of learners' errors. Errors of competence are the result of applying the target language rules inaccurately because of some linguistic factors that might influence the language learning process such as L1 interference in TL, while errors of performance are the result of committing mistakes frequently in language use.



**Figure 3: Psycholinguistic Sources of Errors (Ellis, 1994, p. 58)**

### **1.1.6. Types of Errors in Language Learning**

Errors are considered as a source of information about learner's language knowledge. Additionally, errors provide evidence that learners are progressing in the learning process, and enable teachers to recognize their students' needs to help them improve their performance (Mario, 2015, p. 18). Those errors are categorized into four main types: omission of some important elements, addition of incorrect elements, selection of wrong elements, and misordering elements (Corder, 1973, p. 277).

#### **A. Omission**

EFL learners may omit some linguistic patterns when they attempt to produce the target language because of their complexity, especially at the morphological level, such as the omission of the third person singular morpheme "s", the plural marker "s", and the past tense inflection "ed" (Allati, 2015, p. 11). Moreover, there is another type of omission which is called "syntactical omission". EFL learners, most of the time, omit important syntactic items that are obligatory in the well-structured utterance, such as an auxiliary, an article, or a preposition.

#### **B. Addition**

EFL learners usually tend to add some unnecessary and incorrect elements when producing language. This type of errors, which is called "epenthesis", can frequently occur in phonetics and phonology (Crystal, 1992, as cited in Hemaidia, 2016, p. 55). EFL Learners may add some vowels that exist in their mother tongue or in their second language when speaking. In the case of Algerian learners, for example, this addition may totally affect their pronunciation of many words that seems to be affected by their French accent (Crystal, 1992, as cited in Hemaidia, 2016, p. 55). Algerian learners tend to add the semi vowel sounds /w/ and /j/ in words like 'bought' /bɔ:t/ and 'energy' /enədʒi/, which are pronounced as [bɔwt] and [ejnədʒi]. Learners also tend not to make the difference between short and long vowels as in

'leave' and 'live'; they usually pronounce both of them as /li:v/ (Hmeaidia, 2016, p. 55). At the morphological level, learners may add some unimportant morphemes such as "s" to irregular plural nouns, as in "My tooths hurt". Learners may also add some part of speech to their utterances, which results in syntactic errors, like "I like listening to the music".

### **C. Selection**

Selection refers to learner's incorrect choice of morphemes which caused different errors in phonology, morphology, and syntax. EFL learners' native language interference may be seen as a crucial factor in their wrong selection especially in phonetics. Algerian Students may substitute some morphemes such as the "p" sound with the "b" sound in words like "problems" due the Arabic interference on their pronunciation. In morphology the learner may select a wrong morpheme instead of the correct one as in cases such using the "-est" instead of the "-er" in comparative as in the example of "My brother is oldest than me" instead of "My brother is older than me" (Hemaidia, 2016, p. 56). Students also may commit syntactic errors if they select the wrong structure when forming sentences for instance "I want that he comes here.

### **D. Ordering**

Errors related to ordering can occur at different language levels, including pronunciation, morphology, syntax and lexis. At the level of pronunciation, misordering errors may occur when shifting the position of certain morphemes by the learner while speaking, as in pronouncing the word significant as "fignisicant" (Lengo, 1995). Usually, learners commit errors of misordring bound morphemes, for example "He is get upping"; in this case, the learner adds the unnecessary inflection "-ing" to the particle of the two-word verb (Lengo, 1995). Syntactic misordering errors could happen when the learner constructs sentences that involve some inversed elements, for instance "He is a friend dear to me".



Similarly, lexical misordering errors are committed as a result of reversing compound word elements, e.g. “key car” instead of “car key” (Lengo, 1995).

### **1.1.7. Language Transfer (Interference)**

Behaviourist theories of SLA emphasized that second language (SL) learners find some obstacles in learning SL patterns; most of the time learners tend to use their L1 patterns. If the patterns were identical, learning could take place easily through positive transfer, but if they were different; negative transfer was likely to occur and learning would be more difficult, which may result in errors in learners written or spoken language (Ellis, 1994, p. 300). Odlin (1989) defines transfer as, “the influence ensuing from similarities and differences between the TL and any other language that has been antecedently (and maybe perfectly) acquired” (p. 27), which means that transfer is the influence of the learners’ native language on the foreign language learning process, if these two languages were similar in some aspects, language transfer would be helpful to the learning process, whereas if they diverge in some aspects this would impede the learning process.

Language interference occurs at all language levels: phonology, morphology, syntax, semantics, stylistics and lexis (Keshavarz, 2011, p. 120). Various illustrations can be given to demonstrate how transfer works. For instance on the phonological level, Egyptians pronounce [θ] as [s], so they say [sink] instead of [think]. On the syntactic level, there is the case of all Arab learners who do not have the natives’ level and do not master the use of articles; they say [I study in Tebessa University] instead of [I study at Tebessa University] because the alternative article of [في] in English is [in]. Transfer is always present when a non-native speaks or writes; most learners are not aware of it; it happens consciously or unconsciously (Weinreich, 1979). As the case of the Algerian learners who face some difficulties in learning English as a foreign language, these difficulties are due to the great divergence between the two languages’ linguistic systems especially the syntactic system.

### **1.1.7.1. Factors Influencing Language Transfer**

Language transfer is an important determinant in second language acquisition. Weinreich (1979, pp. 66-67) suggested some of the factors that may cause language transfer, including, first, the speaker's bilingual background, where the transition between languages opens the door to interference. Second, the disloyalty to TL does cause transfer as it leads to the deviation from the norms of the TL, and therefore compels the bilingual learner to set unprepared patterns of his first language elements. Then, the narrow background that learners have of the TL and target culture leads them to the TL rule violation, i.e. integrating words in sentences in the structures and the sense of the native language; this factor as well increases the probability of language transfer. Moreover, vocabulary is of a great concern when a person wants to perform as the native speakers do. The more vocabulary someone possesses, the better he masters the TL; therefore, the limited vocabulary plays an important role in the occurrence of interference. Similarly, people are usually in need for synonyms, unfamiliar words and prestigious TL to avoid redundancy and to show how intellectual they are; however, employing synonyms in a language contact will cause interference in the form of adoption and borrowing to TL, and the use of prestigious expressions with people who struggle in catching the real meaning of the speech will lead to the appearance of interference.

### **1.1.7.2. Types of Language Transfer**

Depending on the degree of differences or similarities between the mother tongue and the target language, language transfer subdivides into two types, which are positive transfer and negative transfer.

#### **1.1.7.2.1. Positive Transfer**

This type of transfer simplifies language learning and results incorrect utterances (Lu, 2010, p. 11). The learner's mother tongue transfer eases the TL learning process. Positive transfer is the cornerstone of Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis (CAH), since this hypothesis

deals with the study of the similarities and differences of L1 and TL (Ellis, 1994, pp. 302-303). The similarities between the mother tongue and the target language may facilitate and accelerate the learning process in the areas where the two linguistic systems of these languages resemble each other; the facilitation does not lead to ‘interference phenomena’ in the learner’s produced language; in fact it may reduce the number of errors because the errors that are made in this case are developmental, which will diminish by the learner’s progression (Corder, 1973, p. 99).

#### **1.1.7.2.2. Negative Transfer**

Negative transfer occurs when the impact of the mother tongue on the target language leads to errors in the acquisition or the use of the TL. Applied linguistics tends to focus much more on this type of transfer. Negative transfer is related to bad habits inherited from the native language; these bad habits must be seized in order to master the new language (Bardovi-Harlig & Sprouse, 2017). Moreover, it leads EFL learners to commit errors because of the differences between the native language and the TL, unlike positive transfer, which facilitates the learning process due to the similarities.

The differences between the mother tongue and the target language can be summarized in three concepts. First, underproduction (avoidance), and it occurs when learners avoid using some linguistic structures that they find hard to use because of the differences between NL and TL. Second, overproduction (overuse), and it occurs mainly as a result of avoidance; for example, when a learner avoids using compound sentences, this will lead them to overuse simple sentences and link them with conjunctions (Al-Khresheh, 2016a, p. 333). Finally, fossilization, which Selinker (1972, as cited in to Keshavarz, 2011, p. 74) defines as the linguistic structures that do not correspond with the TL forms in the performance of EFL learners despite the persistent use and exposure to the standard form.

### 1.1.7.3. English vs. Arabic Syntax

Each language is categorized with its uniqueness and has its own shaped syntax. Since Arabic and English have contrasting origins and roots and belong to two distinct families, they have two sharply contrastive syntactic systems. One basic difference lies in the types of sentences which are described by Leech (2006, p. 104) as “the largest unit of language that it is the business of grammar to describe”. Standard Arabic (SA), the classical Arabic used in Quran, the holy book of Islam, has two types of sentences, nominal sentences that start with a noun and verbal sentences that are initiated with a verb, whereas English has only one type which is the verbal sentences. Therefore, it is also worth mentioning that the basic word order of Arabic syntax is VSO, a verb that is followed by a subject then an object like in: *اكل الولد تفاحة* [*the boy ate an apple*], contrarily to the English basic order that has a SVO syntactical structure form in which the verb comes in the middle of the sentence preceded by a subject and followed by an object as in: The boy ate an apple.

Arabic has another main distinction from English in its initial words' letters where Arabic has no capitalization as in English. Arabic and English also differ in the formulation of the negative expressions. On the one hand, English speakers have only to add the particle “not,” as in: “*He is not here*”. In some cases the particle “not” should be preceded by an auxiliary like in: “*Ahmad did not find his keys*”. The particle is always after the auxiliary In English. On the other hand, Arabic has multiple substitutions for the particle “not” like (لم), (لا), (لن) that are used before the verb in verbal sentences as in: *لم يجد التلميذ كتابه* [*the pupil did not find his book*] and before the noun in nominal phrases: *ليس كل ما يلمع ذهباً* [*All that glitters is not gold*] Each substitution has its own condition to be used. Moreover, Arabic has no equivalence for the verb “to be”.

### 1.1.8. Syntactic Errors and the Notion of Syntax

Syntax, together with morphology, is considered as a subfield of grammar: an alternative term for it is ‘morphosyntax’ (Van Valin, 2001). To be more specific, it deals with how words are arranged to show connections of meaning within the sentence. For example, combining the word “help” with the pronoun “me” will form a sentence that is syntactically and semantically structured. According to Matthews (1982, p. 1, as cited in Van Valin), “the term ‘*syntax*’ is from the Ancient Greek *syntaxis*, a verbal noun which literally means ‘arrangement’ or ‘setting out together’” (2001, p. 1). According to Radford (2004, p. 1) syntax raises a number of questions such as: What is the structure of a sentence like *who is here?* “And what is the nature of the grammatical operations by which its component words are combined together to form the overall sentence syntactic structure?” Since syntax has been the linguists’ interest in the previous centuries, Cobbett (1818) wrote:

Syntax is a word which comes from the Greek. It means, in that language, the joining of several things together; and, as used by grammarians, it means those principles and rules which teach us how to put words together so as to form sentences. It means, in short, sentence-making. Having been taught by the rules of Etymology what are the relationships of words, how words grow out of each other, how they are varied in their letters in order to correspond with the variation in the circumstances to which they apply, Syntax will teach you how to give all your words their proper situation or place, when you come to put them together into sentences. (p. 17-18)

For Van Valin “syntax is a central component of human language” (2001, p. 1). He adds: “syntax deals with how sentences are constructed and users of human languages employ a striking variety of possible arrangements of the elements in sentences”.

Any disagreement with the syntactic rules in a text or even in a simple sentence leads to what is called “*syntactic errors*” that could simply be defined as the errors committed by learners at the level of syntax.

### **1.1.9. Types of syntactic errors**

Several types of syntactic errors arise when writing in English; some of them are the following:

#### **1.1.9.1. Errors Related to Subject Verb Agreement**

The necessity of having the same subject and verb singularity or plurality in a sentence is called subject verb agreement; there is no way to have a singular subject with a plural verb or vice versa. For instance, in English, the singular subjects together with the third person pronouns take a singular verb with the “s” inflection in the present simple as in “*He plays*”. In the same context, the plural subject and the pronouns I, we, you and they take only the verbs’ stem as in: *I play, they play, etc.*

Though English syntax is carefully taught in the earliest stages of the Algerian school curriculum, EFL learners still commit errors related to subject- verb agreement. Some of the errors occur when students omit the “s” inflection with the singular subject, like in: “*He play football*”, instead of “*He plays football*”. It could also occur when they add the same marker of singularity to plural, as in: “*They becomes more proficient*”, instead of: “*They become more proficient*”. Another case is when the student selects an inappropriate element like in the use of the verb “to be”. The student may say: “*My parents is a blessing*”, instead of: “*My parents are a blessing*”.

#### **1.1.9.2. Errors Related to Tense Usage**

Tenses are the form the verb takes to show the time of an action. Based on the semantic content of a verb, Van Valin defined it as an “action word” (2001, p. 6). In both Arabic and English languages, the systems of time sense are very different (Scott and Tucker,

1974). The most frequent tenses that can be found in the English language are the past, the present and the future. Arabic, however, has two main tenses: the perfect, which is used to mark completed actions, and the imperfect, which marks the incompleteness of the actions (Scott & Tucker, 1974). According to Scott and Tucker these two main tenses roughly correspond to the English past and present.

English contains two types of tenses; the simple and the compound ones. Despite the fact that tenses are one of the main concerns in the English syntax, students still have problems as per how to form tenses and which one of them to use. One reason could be the EFL learner's belief that tenses are considered as the most crucial and difficult part of syntax to master. The following examples contain errors that students may commit when they use incorrect tenses:

- *Last summer, we go to France*, instead of: *Last summer, we went to France*.
- *I brushed my teeth three times a day*, instead of: *I brush my teeth three times a day*.
- *I visit my grandparents this weekend*, instead of: *I will visit my grandparents this weekend*.
- *I was working the whole night*, instead of: *I have been working the whole night*.

Such errors may either give credits to the Arabic and English syntax variation because Arabic and English have two distinct types of tenses that may mislead EFL learners when they use them, or they could be committed because of the learners' English syntax incompetency.

### **1.1.9.3. Errors Related to Prepositions**

According to Yule, "prepositions are words ... used with nouns in phrases providing information about time place and other connections involving actions and things" (2010, p. 82). Based on the number of words that a preposition consists of, English prepositions can be divided into two main types; simple prepositions or single-word prepositions like *around*,

*under, in, on, etc.*, and complex or multi-word prepositions as *on behalf of, in front of, according to, etc.* on the one hand, English and Arabic have one main characteristic they may share concerning prepositions, which is the prepositions' placement. In both languages, prepositions are 'adpositions' that occur before their objects (Van Valin, 2001, p. 7). On the other hand, English and Arabic seldom have one-to-one prepositions' correspondence; "an Arabic preposition may be translated into several English prepositions, while an English usage may have several Arabic translations" (Scott and Tucker, 1974, p. 85).

EFL learners still commit errors when it comes to the use of prepositions. First, some of their errors appear when they omit a preposition in a well-structured utterance, like saying: "*next the living room*", instead of: "*next to the living room*". Second, Students may also add unnecessary prepositions that must not appear in the sentence, like: "*not far in from my house*", instead of: "*not far from my house*". Third, EFL learners could also wrongly select the proper preposition for their utterances, as in: "*There are three horses at the farm*", instead of: "*There are three horses in the farm*". Finally, error could appear when the learner misplaces the element. A student may write: "*Fill the gaps in*", instead of: "*Fill in the gaps*". According to Scott and Tucker, despite being a source of errors, prepositions still cannot hinder any communication (1974, p. 85).

#### **1.1.9.4. Errors Related to Articles**

Articles belong to the category of determiners. The English article system is composed of the indefinite articles "a" and "an" and the definite article "the", with the zero article. Articles are believed to be a source of difficulty for both learners and teachers of English as a foreign language, especially for those whose native language does not have articles nor has articles or article-like morphemes which are used in ways that differ from the English articles (Celce-Murcia & Larsen-Freeman, 1999).



Students may sometimes forget to use articles due to the interference of their L1. For instance, definiteness is expressed in Arabic with the addition of the definite article /al/ at the beginning of nouns, like in البيت [the house], while indefiniteness is expressed with the zero article (Scott and Tucker, 1974). The example اكل الولد تفاحة [the boy ate an apple] is a good one for the Arabic interference. When the word تفاحة [apple] has zero article, it misleads the student to think that it should also be the case in English, so he would write: “The boy ate apple”, Instead of: “The boy ate an apple”.

Adding an article before a gerund, as in ‘the smoking is a bad habit’ could be a good example of the learners’ errors. Another error may appear when dropping out a necessary article, as in omitting “the” before superlative adjectives, like: He is one of best students in the class. Such errors may also appear as a result of the learner’s lack of proficiency and training or the incomplete understanding of rules. Another type of article errors may appear in the students’ wrong selection like using “an” instead of “a” in the following example: “He is an football player”. Another type of error occurs when they wrongly replace the article.

#### **1.1.9.5. Errors Related to Word Order**

To create an appropriate and a coherent utterance that has an accurate meaning, the first main concern should be the word order. In Collins dictionary, “word order is the arrangement of words in a phrase, a clause or a sentence” (2007). The misplacement of one word may lead to the misunderstanding of the whole utterance. EFL learners despite the fact of having English as a compulsory module from the undergraduate stage to the postgraduate, still commit errors related to the ordering of words. One may commit an error in ordering a noun and an adjective while another could have problems in ordering adverbs, objects, complements, nouns and in some cases verbs as well.

- *She bought a dress beautiful, Instead of: She bought a beautiful dress.*
- *How you dare! Instead of: How dare you!*

The first example could be the result of the interlingual interference because in Arabic a noun should always be followed by an adjective, which is not the case in English where the adjective usually precedes the noun. For the second example, an intralingual transfer inhibited the student to produce a correctly ordered sentence.

#### **1.1.9.6. The Absence of the Copula "to be"**

In English the verb “to be” is either used as a main verb or as an auxiliary. The verb “to be” acts like a main verb (copula) when linking the subject and the complement, or functions as an auxiliary when supporting the main verb (Celce-Murcia and Larsen-Freeman, 1983). EFL learners, in their writing, tend to omit or to retain the copula, which leads the copula “to be” to be considered as a problematic issue. This kind of errors can be attributed to the inexistence of the copula in the Arabic language or to the students’ unawareness of the English rules. Examples:

- *The boy clever*, Instead of: *The boy is clever*.
- *I playing handball*, Instead of: *I was playing handball*.

#### **1.1.9.7. Errors Related to Pronouns**

When writing, students always seek alternatives in order to avoid repetition; such alternatives are called pronouns. According to Van Valin, pronouns are defined as the grammatical items that function as substitutions of nouns and noun phrases, or they are known as ‘standing for’ nouns (2001, p. 6), for example: “*John went to the store, and he bought some milk*”. The proper use of pronouns results in the legitimate conveying of the content.

In terms of pronouns, learners commit errors involving a wrong selection of pronouns, the addition of unnecessary pronouns, the omission of necessary pronouns, or the misplacement of pronouns, as shown in the following examples:

- *I enjoyed watching TV with family*, Instead of: *I enjoyed watching TV with my family*.
- *Me and Ahmed must attend the seminar*, Instead of: *Ahmed and I must attend the seminar*.

Such errors could be attributed to the incomplete application of rules or to the student's confusion caused by interference of their L1 rules.

#### **1.1.9.8. Errors Related to the Passive Voice**

Like any other syntactic feature, the passive voice varies between the two languages. In this concern, Arabic and English do not expose similar intentions. In Arabic, the passive voice is less frequent and less used (El-Yasin, 1996). An issue that can be noticed between the two systems is the use of the auxiliary *to be*. When formulating the passive voice, unlike English, Arabic has zero auxiliary, which may affect EFL learners' learning process and lead them to commit some syntactic errors. Another issue is related to the doer of the action, in English passive sentences, the doer is usually mentioned, contrary to Arabic, where there is no way for it to be mentioned. The following are examples of syntactic errors related to the passive voice that students may commit in the process of producing sentences:

- *The television turned on*, Instead of: *The television is turned on*.
- *I employed in a factory last year*, Instead of: *I was employed in a factory last year*.

### **1.2. Section Two: The Writing Skill in EFL Classrooms**

The Ultimate goal of teaching English as a foreign language is to improve learners' basic language skills including the writing skill. Besides academic purposes, human beings always need writing in order to communicate and to express their feelings. For EFL learners, writing in English is one of the toughest tasks to accomplish. Teachers always show the desire to teach such basic skill, and students always have that eagerness to learn and to improve their writing skills. Despite the fact of having negative attitudes towards the skill, Students and teachers still find many difficulties when learning and teaching writing.

#### **1.2.1. The Notion of Writing**

Writing is one of the most important tools of communication; it is used to transmit thoughts, feelings, and ideas in words and phrases. Writing cannot be defined in one single

way; many researchers attempted to define it according to their perspectives and purposes. One of them is Arapoff who defines writing as, “a purposeful organization and selection of thoughts, facts, opinions, and ideas” (1967, p. 33), so writing is a way to properly select and organize your ideas.

According to Salem, writing in a foreign language is a challenging task that requires much mental efforts, so that the message will be conveyed appropriately: he says that when writing, “We engage in many conscious cognitive processes simultaneously” (2007, p. 1). Abu-Rass (2001) believed that for both native and non-native speakers, writing is still a difficult task that needs equilibrium in its several components to master, such as content, organization, purpose, audience, vocabulary, punctuation, spelling and mechanics.

### **1.2.2. Elements of Effective Writing**

Writing has always been seen as one of the most important skills because it reinforces the learner’s grammatical knowledge and vocabulary, and it makes him prepared for effective communication in real life. Therefore, teachers need to offer adequate time in the classroom to develop their students’ writing skill, and teach them how to write effectively. Actually, an effective piece of writing should be well organized, clear, coherent and written with accurate language and effective word choice to gain academic acceptance (Starkey, 2004).

#### **A. Organization**

Writers, while writing, should follow an organized method to present his ideas to the reader in a well-structured format. Following this method, they will be able to guide the readers from one sentence to another and enable them to see how all these sentences work together to support the thesis (Starkey, 2004, p.2). Learners should follow the organizational patterns while writing their essays or papers because logical organization is a key factor in academic writing (Langan, 2003, p. 211). Actually, there are many types of organizational patterns that a learner can follow when writing, such as chronological order in which he

should follow the order of time in describing the events; this type seems to be the easiest. The second pattern is the importance order, in which the writer can mention his ideas from the most important to the least important ones. In the third pattern, that is compare and contrast, he could organize his ideas by listing the similarities and the differences between the story's objects and ideas (Langan, 2003, p. 219). In the last pattern, that is the cause and effect pattern, the writer tends to show the causes and effects of different conditions.

### **B. Clarity**

Clarity is a fundamental element that learners and Writer need to become skilled at in order to produce readable piece of writing (Murray & Hughes, 2008, p. 86). According to Starkey, learners should follow some instruction to achieve clarity in writing. Firstly, the learner needs to avoid ambiguity by using words and phrases that are possible for just one interpretation, and staying away from any grammatical structures that may mislead the reader. Secondly, using powerful, precise adjectives and adverbs is one way to accomplish clarity since they help the learner to convey their messages through a limited number of words that have accurate meaning. Finally, through eliminating unnecessary words and sentences and not repeating the same ideas and information, learners will avoid wordiness and be concise when writing (Starkey, 2004, p. 129)

### **C. Coherence**

Coherence is one of the most important elements in academic writing that enables learners to present their ideas in clear and organized way to the reader. According to Kane (2000), coherence has a crucial role in writing process, since it has to do with the process of linking one's ideas and presenting them in a manner that makes them easily to be understood by the reader. Murray and Hughes (2008, p. 45) stated that a good writer is the one "who sticks his ideas together as links in a chain, each link connecting the one before it with the one after. If any links are missing, the connections become unclear and the argument structure

breaks down”. Thus, the learner needs to link his ideas and to build clear connections between them when he is writing to enable the reader to understand what he is reading (Hamdouch, 2010, p. 13).

#### **D. Word Choice**

Selecting the right words is a way through which the learner could accurately convey his ideas to the reader. According to Starkey (2004), the learner should consider two different aspects while choosing words in writing, which are denotation and connotation. Denotation is the literal meaning of the word, i.e. its dictionary meaning, whereas connotation is the word’s implied meaning, including emotions, cultural assumptions, and suggestions (Starkey, 2004, p. 21). Thus, the learner should consider both types of meaning when making word choice and think beyond the dictionary to confirm that each word used in his writing means exactly what he wants it to mean in order not to confuse his audience.

#### **1.2.3. The Importance of Writing**

Writing is an essential part in any foreign language learning process; it is much more than the production of sentences and paragraphs. Teaching writing as a separate module for EFL students is very beneficial because it involves strengthening language, developing the way they write and most significantly enhancing writing as a skill (Harmer, 2004, p. 79). Additionally, writing promotes EFL students’ learning as through their researches, they gain knowledge, and acquire new information. Writing is regarded as an effective way to reflect one’s thoughts and make them clearer.

Raims (1983, p. 218) focuses on the significance of writing on the learning process, stating three key aspects. First, students’ already-learned vocabulary, and grammatical rules could be strengthened through writing. Secondly, writing is an opening gate for learners to be adventurous with the new language. She further explains that writing does not only permit student to interact with the language; rather, it is a way to learn language.

#### **1.2.4. Teaching Writing at University**

Although writing has always been compulsory for students in all their educational stages, it is still problematic for learners to learn since they lack the knowledge of the language as well as teachers to teach especially in a foreign language setting where they lack motivation (Rajesh, 2017).

Teaching writing in universities as a separate module shows its importance and impact on the language as a whole. Bjork and Raisanen (1997, p. 8), as cited in Sawalmeh (2013, p. 02) said that:

We highlight the importance of writing in all university curricula not only because of its immediate practical application, i.e., as an isolated skill or ability, but because we believe that, seen from a broader perspective, writing is a thinking tool. It is a tool for language development, for critical thinking and, extension, for learning in all disciplines (2013, p. 2).

Because writing is a tool of communication used with both native and non-native speakers to communicate and to share their thoughts and feelings, writing takes a core part of the universities' curricula, and since it is widely used in technology and science, students and teachers should be both involved in the teaching/learning process of this skill.

##### **1.2.4.1. Teachers' Role**

Teachers can be regarded as the most qualified monitors for their students. They should always be present during the whole process of writing to guide their students and to help them organize their thoughts and ideas. They should take multiple roles in order to effectively enhance their learners writing. Teachers, first, should be their students' source of motivation, so that they can speculate an intensive mental energy to accomplish an effective writing; Tanaka (2005) asserted that teachers (being an external factor) through their behaviours and teaching style have a greater impact on students' motivation whether

positively or negatively which consequently will affect students' achievement. Moreover, teachers have to interact with their learners during the writing process so that they can help when needed with providing their students with the missing gaps. Furthermore, they are expected to manage their students in the classroom; they always have that great challenge of finding the suitable methods to activate the students' passive knowledge in a proper way. Teachers should make their students aware of the different writing demands so that they will be ready for any difficulty they may face. In addition, teachers should act as assessors when examining their students' writing to determine their mistakes and errors so that they can help them avoid them in the next activity and become more proficient while working. When teachers are able to perform all the above mentioned roles together, they will be able to boost the task.

#### **1.2.4.2. Students' Attitudes towards Writing**

Being outside the classroom environment does not help in accomplishing the writing task since students do not have many opportunities to write, except when it comes to homework. The classroom setting together with the way the skill is taught has a great impact on the students' attitudes towards writing.

According to Dornyei and Csizer (2002), attitudes, positive or negative, have a vital role on students' performances and determine their success or failure since they either hinder the learning process or accelerate it; Learners with negative attitudes show unwillingness to achieve the task of writing, while others believe that writing is important because it results the ease of learning. Some factors such as the teachers' feedback, the classroom atmosphere, the teaching method and the learning strategy as well as the mother tongue interference can all together shape the students' attitudes towards the writing skill (Jabali, 2018).

According to Jabali (2018), the complexity of writing demotivates learners, so their worriedness and tension about the skill will increase. Students with such negative reactions



mostly find difficulties in approving the task; although they are good enough in other skills. Conversely, other EFL learners believe that having positive attitudes helps and facilitates the learning process.

### **1.2.5. Writing Difficulties**

Writing difficulties could be defined as the common areas where both students and teachers may face challenges in one element of the writing skill or more.

#### **1.2.5.1. Learners' Perspective**

When students are supposed to write in a foreign language, they face a number of problems. According to Raimes (1983), writing is a difficult skill since it demands different language aspects, such as vocabulary, grammar, spelling, punctuation. EFL learners may face problems in one of these aspects. The problem is not limited there, but also may find it a challenging task to construct their ideas into coherent sentences.

##### **A. Grammar**

Grammar is the process of describing the structure of phrases and sentences in such a way that we account for all the grammatical sequences in a language and rule out all the ungrammatical sequences (Yule, 2010, p. 143). Thus, learners need to be aware of the grammatical patterns in order to avoid grammatical problems and difficulties.

According to Rana, Al Owaidh & Al Harbi (2019, p. 29), the majority of the EFL learners still face grammatical problems in:

- Subject-verb agreement errors.
- Verb tenses.
- Word choice and word order.
- Using conjunctions, articles, and connections.
- The misplaced or dangling modifier.
- Constructing meaningful sentences.

- Failing in building sentences by using either active or passive voice.
- The misusing of superlative and comparative adjectives.

## **B. Spelling**

Spelling is the process of forming words with the correct order of letters. The disability of students to form words correctly will ultimately affect their writing. In some cases, EFL learners may be uncertain about accurate spelling, because of the English spelling complexity. According to Gibreel and Babu (2015, p. 32), misspelling occurs because of the irregularities of the English spelling system. Students need much effort for memorizing rules to reach accuracy in spelling. Moreover, EFL learners may face difficulties in spelling because of the absence of an association between the phonemes and the graphemes, i.e. the complete absence of correspondence between the pronunciation and the spelling of the same word. Additionally, the different accents of English may cause incorrect spelling by EFL learners, as the case of the British and the American accents.

## **C. Punctuation**

Punctuation is a necessity in writing that is used to clarify the meaning of the text and to link or separate words, phrases, or clauses. Haretley & Bruckman (2002, p. 209) state: “it is imperative that you use the correct word in the correct instance and with the correct pronunciation. Pronunciation means to say words in ways that are generally accepted or understood”. The use of different punctuation marks seems to be an intricate task for EFL learner. Thus, students need to be familiar with how to use the punctuation and how to learn the function of each mark in order to write a clear and well-organized piece of writing.

## **D. Coherence and Cohesion**

Good academic writing is characterized by the coherence and cohesion features. According to Yule, “cohesion is the tie and connection that exists within the text” (2010, p. 143), while “coherence is everything fitting together well, and it is not something that exists

in words or structure, but something that exist in people”. Many learners come across difficulties in linking their ideas to effective composition. They tend to focus on the grammatical rules rather than cohesion and coherence.

### **E. Vocabulary**

The lexical knowledge is necessary to produce a good piece of writing, and the lack of vocabulary prevents most EFL learners from sharing their thoughts and communicating properly. Actually, the learners’ limited vocabulary is the result of their limited participation in the reading and speaking sessions that allow them to learn and perceive new words. They also may face problems in selecting relevant vocabulary to express their thoughts and ideas to the audience. The mother tongue interference, mainly the transfer of rules, leads students to commit errors that affect their writing performances. According to Gourong (2002, as cited in Li, 2008), many types of errors committed by EFL learners when writing result from their use of word for word translation strategy or from their Arabic mother tongue thinking. Therefore, students should be taught how to think in the target language in order to minimize such errors and to increase their proficiency in writing.

#### **1.2.5.2. Teacher’s Perspective**

As one of the most important language skills, writing is considered as a challenging task. Thus, most teachers usually face problems in the process of teaching writing to EFL learner. According to Almbarek (2016, p. 293), teachers may take a long period of time to discover and understand their learners writing’ problems; this ultimately will prevent the teachers from giving an immediate feedback or correcting the learners’ mistakes. Furthermore, EFL learners may encounter writing difficulties such as lack of vocabulary, lack of grammatical knowledge, or lack of motivation. The lack of these important aspects may form a serious problem that is hard to be handled by teachers and also affect learners’ writing performance. Thus, teachers need to adopt strategies to improve learner’s grammar and

vocabulary knowledge by using the Grammar Translation Method to help students in grammar or to provide them with new words to enrich their vocabulary (Azam, 2014). Furthermore, EFL learners may seem to be not motivated to do writing tasks for the reason that they consider them as complicated ones. Therefore, teachers need to create a good learning environment, and to produce motivating teaching materials to the learners.

### **1.2.5.3. Outside the Classroom Setting**

The learning environment has a tremendous impact on the language learning process. Outside the classroom, most students in non-English speaking countries are exposed only to their first-language with limited exposure to English. According to Nunan (1989), the limited exposure to the daily life language prevents learners from developing their linguistic and communicative competences. He, then, concluded his study with some suggestions; first, teachers need to plan out-of class activities, and make students feel like they are surrounded by English; second, teachers may organize trips on campus in order to visit places where they can find authentic settings of English, such as international business companies or agencies; finally, teachers could ask learners to take notes and to write English words, phrases, expressions, then create an analysis report (Nunan, 1989); this for sure will help them develop their writing proficiency. Teachers should make more efforts to create real-life experiences in the foreign language classroom and stimulate the authentic use of English for learners in order to help them use English the way native speakers do in their daily lives (Guo 2011, p. 248).

### **1.2.6. The Role of Syntax in Writing**

Syntax has a crucial aspect in the writing skill; mastering writing means being able to use syntactic rules in real-life situations. Brown (2007, as cited in Kertous, 2013) said: “Without grammatical structures, the use of language could easily become chaotic and might not be understandable” (p. 11). Therefore, students need it to transfer their thoughts to a well-organized written language and become effective writers). In Hillocks and Smith (1991), as

cited by Chin (2000), the systematic practice in sentence-combining can improve students' acquaintance of syntactic structures as well as enhance the quality of their sentences. Structured written sentence-combining exercises give students more guidance in a way to create the new sentences while unstructured sentence-combining exercises allow for more variation, yet they still require students to create logical and meaningful sentences. Chin (2000) stated that sentence-combining activities encourage students to form sentences in their own writing and lead them to merge their ideas in more sophisticated ways with a syntactic maturity. As students generate more complex sentences from shorter ones, they discover how to arrange correct phrases and clauses without committing syntactic errors.

### **Conclusion**

There is no doubt that the native language affects negatively the learning of a foreign language, which may influence learners to deviate from the rules and commit errors especially in their writings. This chapter has mainly tackled the main variables from a theoretical perspective. It was divided into two main sections.

The first section is related to the interlingual interference and the syntactic errors, whereas the second section is concerned with the writing skill. In the first section, there was a brief account of the notion of errors besides some approaches to errors and the distinction between an error and a mistake. Afterwards, the two main approaches to studying errors were introduced, namely: contrastive analysis and error analysis with its procedure. Thereafter, the main sources of errors were listed, mentioning interlanguage and intralanguage errors, followed by a discussion of the different types of errors before providing a deliberate explanation of the notion of transfer with its two types, positive and negative transfer. Finally, a detailed explanation of the syntactic errors with a well-structured demonstration of the different types of syntactic errors was proposed.

Throughout the second section there is an overview of the writing skill, covering all its basic concepts. First, a discussion of writing, as a skill, was provided. Next, there was a demonstration of the teaching of the skill in universities, taking both teachers and students into consideration, and then there was an emphasis on the importance of this skill. The difficulties related to this skill were also tackled from both teachers' and students' perspectives, besides the exposure to the English language and the writing skill outside the classroom setting. Finally, it was crucial to review the role of syntax in writing to clarify the relationship between the two variables.

## **Chapter Two: Field Work**

### **Introduction**

The current study is based on Corder's error analysis approach focusing on the syntactic errors committed by second year students of English at the University of Larbi Tebessi because of their first language interference in the learning process. Besides a report about the research design adopted for this investigation, the population, sample, and procedures of data collection, the purpose of this chapter is to describe and to discuss students' errors and to give exact statistics related to their frequency of occurrence. The chapter is, then, divided into two sections; the first section is devoted to the methodology whereas the second is reserved for the findings' discussion, analysis and summary, in addition to the recommendations for further research and the limitations encountered while conducting this study.

### **2.1. Section One: Research Method and Methodology**

In this section the nature of the study will be introduced with a description of the methodology used in implementing it. It will also include a full description of the participants, including their ages and gender and identify the research instruments in order to answer the research questions restated as follows:

- 1- What are the most common syntactic errors committed by EFL learners at the department of English at the University of Larbi Tebessi in their writing?
- 2- Are the syntactic errors made by those learners attributed to the Arabic interlingual interference?
- 3- How frequently do the syntactic errors caused by the negative transfer occur in students' writing?

### **2.1.1. Methodology**

The research methodology takes a core part of any undertaken research study. According to Mouton & Marais, the research methodology emphasized on the way in which the research was planned, structured and consummated in order to match with scientific criteria (1996, as cited in, Choubane, 2014). The current study aims at describing the syntactic errors committed by EFL learners and to syntactically discover which one of them are the most frequently made.

To reach the goal of this study, a descriptive approach has been adopted and it aims at obtaining both qualitative and quantitative. In terms of methodology, a mixture of a quantitative and a qualitative design is applied in order to gain insights about the nature of the syntactic errors committed by second year students of English at the University of Larbi Tebessi at Tebessa and to be able to classify them under the four divisions of Corder's types of errors. In this respect, Bell believes that both methods are complementary, stating that "qualitative researchers draw on quantitative techniques and vice-versa" (Bell, 2005, p. 8). Regardless of the type of the research, the research method can be either qualitative, quantitative, or both. All that matters is the research process that best serves the research purpose and helps in finding answers for the research questions (Crotty, 1998, p. 216).

According to Denzin and Lincoln (1994), a qualitative method involves studying "things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense or interpret phenomena in terms of meanings people bring to them" (cited in, Biggan, 2008, p.86), while the quantitative method is "concerned with quantities and measurements such as proportions and numbers" (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994, as cited in Biggan, 2008, p.86). In this research, the qualitative method aimed at capturing a clear picture of the topic's main issue and describing the syntactic errors committed by 30 second year students at the Department of Letters and English language, whereas the quantitative research method was followed to give a numerical data that can



provide a complementary view about their frequency and percentages. In addition, this research is based on an error analysis approach focusing on the interlingual factors behind the syntactic errors in second year students' writings, and following the procedure of the error analysis approach which will facilitate the analysis of the findings.

### **2.1.2. Population and Sampling**

Following Dornyei's (2003) definition of a population, which is a group of people whom the survey is about (p.71), the current research's population is second year students at the department of English at Larbi Tebessi University for the academic year 2019/2020, which consists of 03 administrative groups represented by a total of 103 students. Since it has not been possible for the researchers to work with the entire population, only one group of participants is concerned with this study. This group of participants is called the *sample*, which is "a subset of the population which is representative of the whole population" (Dornyei, 2003, p. 71), and the current one consists of 30 members that were chosen randomly to be a part of the study using a random selection technique, "a bit like drawing numbers from a hat" (Dornyei, 2003, p. 73). This technique enables all the population members to have equal chances to be selected to join the study. This sampling technique has been designed to ensure that this group of participants can represent the whole population and to minimize the effects of any extraneous variables that could affect the results of the study (Dornyei, 2003, p. 73).

The sample consists of both genders, and their age ranges from 17 years old to more than 26 years old. All the participants of the chosen sample have studied English as a second foreign language for at least seven (7) years before the university phase. The sample is selected from second year level because it was assumed that since grammar is a fundamental module for the first two years at university, students have been taught the majority of the main grammatical patterns of the English language and they gained a decent level of English

proficiency; besides, students at this level started dealing with writing compositions and essays. In addition to students, five teachers out of 16 teachers from the same department, who were in charge of teaching different modules, have been selected through purposive sampling, i.e. they have been chosen deliberately because they have been in charge of teaching modules that require writing in their tests and assignments, which are written expression, literature, civilization, psycholinguistics and translation.

### **2.1.3. Data Collection Tools**

For the purpose of obtaining the data needed for this study, a mode of triangulation was utilized, i.e. three main types of data collection tools were combined to examine the study's main issue. The data collection tools used here are a diagnostic test (comprising two tasks) and a questionnaire for students, and an interview for teachers. To affirm the rigor of data and to form strong evidence about them, the use of multiple data collection instruments is typical of many research studies, as Weir and Robert stated (1994):

A combination of data sources is likely to be necessary in most evaluations because often no one source can describe adequately such a diversity of features as is found in educational setting, and because of the need for corroboration of findings by using data from these different sources, collected by different methods and by different people (i.e. triangulation). (p. 137, as cited in Elhabiri, 2013)

#### **2.1.3.1. The Diagnostic Test**

In order to obtain a broad appraisal of the syntactic errors committed by second year students, the first data collection tool utilized is the diagnostic test. Two different tasks were comprised in the test; one of them is a translation task that consists of a number of Arabic sentences that needed to be translated into English because of the usefulness of translation in spotting the interlingual errors directly, while the second task a written production task that aims to tackle the types and the frequency of students' errors during writing since asking

learners to write essays in a target language will reflect their normal and actual performance (Halliday and Hassan, 1976, cited in Darus and Ching, 2009, p. 247), and because writing is one of the study's main variables.

In the translation test task, the test-takers were given eight sentences to be translated from Arabic into English (See Appendix A). They have been instructed to attentively read the sentences before translating them. Taking into account the students' level and the fact that they are taking the translation course for the first time, the choice of the material was based on its simplicity, clarity and easiness to suit the students' level of proficiency. The eight sentences were chosen by the researchers. It should be noted that the aim of the translation task was not to test the students' level; instead, it was designed to directly identify the types and the frequency of the syntactic errors committed by second year students.

The translation test lasted 45 minutes and was collected from 103 second year students from the department of English during the regular session of translation. Each group of students was given the task by their own teacher in order to make sure that they take it seriously, and they were informed that this test is part of a Master degree study. Moreover, the collected task was not anonymous; students were asked to write their names or their registration numbers from the group list because, as it is mentioned above, it was impossible to bring the entire sample together at the same time and place to be tested. The test in a form of a written composition was conducted during the regular sessions of written expression. All the students were required to accomplish the task in the classroom. Later on, the test was collected for data analysis purposes.

Since "the best way to test people's writing abilities is to get them to write" Hughes (1989, p.75), a written production test was designed in order to be analyzed at the syntactic level to identify, describe and categorize the syntactic errors committed by the students so that the hypothesis drawn before will either be affirmed or infirmed. This test also aimed at

exploring students' main concerns when writing, i.e. whether they take syntax and grammar into consideration and whether their committed syntactic errors yield any effects on their performances. Concerning the topics of the second task, students were free to choose either to write about their first experience at university and what they loved the most about it or to write about a personal experience that ended with a valuable lesson (See Appendix B). The topics were chosen by the researchers, and the choice of writing about a life experience is justified by students' preferences for talking about their own experiences, which would enable them to write freely and comfortably because such topics are meaningful to them; Raimes (1983) argues that when students are assigned a meaningful writing task, they will put more ideas, thoughts and efforts into this piece of writing so that they can communicate their ideas and opinions to the reader. Moreover, these topics do not require factual information which would make students opt for using the internet and books. Moreover, students were not restricted by a specific number of lines so that they will not be confused when performing the task.

#### **2.1.3.2. The Questionnaire**

A questionnaire is a research instrument that consists of a series of questions for the purpose of gathering information from respondents, as it is reported by Brown (2001) who claims that "Questionnaires are any written instruments that present respondents with a series of questions or statements to which they are to react either by writing out their answers or selecting from among existing answer" (p. 6). Since questionnaires can give quick and efficient large amounts of information from a large sample of people, and because of its advantages in gaining more time and energy, the given questionnaire was designed. The purpose of this questionnaire is to gather enough data about the students' attitudes towards writing, the difficulties they usually face and the interference of their first language during

their learning process and mainly to discover whether the students are aware of the syntactic errors they commit because of the negative transfer or not.

The questions are a mixture of open-ended and close-ended items, for the purpose of having both the quantitative and the qualitative data. The questionnaire is made of 21 questions that are divided into 3 sections: the first one is a close-ended questions' section that was mainly designed to gather general information about the participants: their age, their gender, and their favourite foreign languages, in addition to the kinds of dictionaries they tend to use since starting to learn the English language. The second section was concerned with the data that are related to the writing skill; it is composed of 8 questions that are a mixture of close-ended questions which require ticking the appropriate box on a provided option list and Likert-scale questions of likelihood (See Appendix C). The last section was all about the interlingual interference and syntax; it is composed of close-ended questions that are a blend of both "yes" or "no" questions and Likert-scale questions of frequency, in addition to two last questions that are purely open-ended items to seek the students' reactions about their teachers' feedback and the issue of losing marks because of the committed syntactic errors that need a full clarification from the students. The students' contribution was considerable insofar as all the questionnaire sheets were filled out and returned. The results of the survey are discussed in the following section.

The questionnaire was given to the whole population, i.e. 103 second year students at the department of English of Larbi Tebessi University because of some obstructions that disabled us from bringing the selected participants from all the groups together at the same time and place. The questionnaire was handed to each group separately during an ordinary session. Students were clearly informed that they are a part of a study and the questionnaire should be answered individually since it requires students' personal views. In addition, they have been told to ask for clarification if they faced any issues in understanding the questions

and the choices. Moreover, students were kindly asked to write their names or their numbers on the group list in order to make the random selection process easier later; they were informed about confidentiality and told that their answers will entirely serve academic needs, which have nothing to do neither with their actual studies nor with teachers' attitudes towards them. Finally, students' collaboration was greatly appreciated and the obtained results from the survey will be discussed in the following section.

### **2.1.3.3. The Interview**

To make the data more reliable and valid, an interview was conducted with teachers to investigate their views about the study's main issues. It is used in conjunction with the questionnaire. Interviews can give clearer data and more reliable information; Bell (2005) declared: "The interview can yield rich material and can often put flesh on the bones of questionnaire responses" (p. 157).

This interview was designed to capture a broader view about the topic, mainly at the basis of the teachers' point of view. It was composed of 10 open-ended questions in order to obtain more useful data and clarifications from the teachers (See Appendix D). The interview starts with two general information questions, while the rest of the questions were settled to cover the other three main variables starting with the writing skill, the interlingual interference to the syntactic errors. This tool was used in order to treat the topic from teachers' perspective and to gather more data that were not available in the written instruments.

Because of the nationwide lockdown circumstances and the restrictions of social distancing, which prevented meetings with teachers, the interview was conducted distantly through phone calls that were recorded then transcribed after taking the teachers' consent. The interview was conducted with five teachers who were in charge of different modules that are as follows: translation, written expression, literature, civilization and psycholinguistics. The

interview lasted from 30 to 40 minutes with each teacher. According to Bell (2005), this way of interviewing can be “most useful because it allows you to code, summarize and to note particular comments which are of particular interest without having to try to write them down during the course of the interview” (p. 164).

#### **2.1.4. Piloting**

Concerning piloting, Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2005) stated that “a pilot has several functions, principally to increase the reliability, validity and practicability of the questionnaire” (p. 260).

##### **A. Piloting the Questionnaire**

The final version of the questionnaire might contain some incomprehensible and inappropriate items that prevent the addressed population from understanding the questions. Wherefore, the acceptability, the validity and the reliability of the questions must be tested through a pilot study to identify any ambiguities. Piloting the questionnaire of the current study required handing it to a smaller sample that consisted of eight participants of the whole population; the participants were asked whether the questions are clear and understandable or not. Moreover, the participants were delicately and constantly observed, and their reactions towards the questions were recorded in order to be taken into account while making adjustments. After that, the items that needed improvements were adjusted.

##### **B. Piloting the Test**

To check the feasibility of the tests, the translation test was shown to a teacher of translation who stated that the content presented in the test is convenient to the students’ level and translation skills. The written composition test was not piloted. The only way to know their attitude and level in writing was to approach their written-expression teacher and request that she assigns the task to the students in class. It was not convenient for her, and she

declined the task, but she offered papers of a previously submitted assignment instead in order to determine students' level in writing which will allow us to choose the convenient topics.

### **2.1.5. Testing Validity**

According to Dorneyi (2003), "reliability and validity are two key concepts in measurement theory, referring to the psychometric properties of the measurement techniques and the data obtained by them" (p. 110).

#### **A. Validity of the Test**

The validity of the test refers to whether or not the test measures what it claims to measure (Dorneyi, 2003, p. 110). The items chosen in both tasks are highly linked to the tests' intended focus. Depending on "content validity", which is a testing validity method defined as the extent to which the items are valid, i.e. the extent to which a test appears valid to examinees who take it, the personnel who administers it and other untrained observers, we can assume that the test is valid and it is linked to the intended focus of the study (Onwuegbuzie et al., 2007, p.118). Moreover, after comparing the sheets given by the teacher to conduct the pilot study with those that students were asked to write, it was revealed that there is a consistency in students' level in writing which signifies that the tests are valid. This method was the only convenient method because the other ones depend on comparing raters observations. In addition to that, both tests were held within the respective sessions of both modules, i.e. translation and written expression sessions, within the classroom settings and by their own teachers for the sake of avoiding any attempt of floating the validity of the tests and in order to make students explore their actual writing skills besides making them more comfortable about treating the tests as regular evaluating tests in regular settings.

#### **B. Validity of the Questionnaire**

As has been mentioned above, that validity expresses the degree to which a tool measures what it purports to measure. The questionnaire's validity has been tested through



content validity and face validity methods in which expert teachers and examinees who took it respectively reviewed the questionnaire and declared that it measures the characteristics of interest and agreed that it is a valid measure of the concept which is being measured. Besides, the comparison between the filled questionnaire used in the pilot study and those used with the real sample revealed that there is a consistency in answers, and students' attitude towards the different items of the questionnaire were the same.

### 2.1.6. Testing the Questionnaire's Reliability

Reliability of a psychometric instrument refers to the extent to which scores on the instrument are free from errors of measurement (Dorneyi, 2010, p.110). Cronbach's alpha test is the most common measure of internal consistency when having likert-scale questions in a questionnaire. Cronbach's alpha ranges between 0 and 1 and can be carried using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) software. The test was conducted on different sections of the questionnaire, involving likert-scale and "Yes/No" questions and the following results were obtained:

Section Two		Section Three		Total	
Cronbach's Alpha	Number of elements	Cronbach's Alpha	Number of elements	Cronbach's Alpha	Number of elements
.863	07	.800	08	.858	15

**Table 2: Reliability Statistics**

Results can be statistically significant if alpha is above or equal to 0.6 ( $\alpha \geq 0.6$ ). In the current study  $\alpha = 0.85$ , which denotes that the data gathered from the questionnaire are reliable.

## **2.2. Section Two: Findings and Discussion**

### **2.2.1. Data Analysis Procedure**

In this section, the captured data is presented, analysed, described and interpreted in a systematic manner as the next step of the research process. Since this study followed a blend of a qualitative and a quantitative method, the gathered data should be analysed using two different procedures that are the content analysis for the qualitative data gathered from the interview, and Corder's procedure for the quantitative data collected from the diagnostic test and the questionnaire.

### **2.2.2. Results of the Diagnostic Test**

The students' tests were full of errors at different levels: syntax, semantic, and spelling, but the main topic of this study is concerned with the investigation of their syntactic errors only, so the other errors were neglected. The interpretation of learners' errors required following an interrelated procedure. In the current study, Corder's error analysis procedure was followed. It implies (1) collecting the test samples that were handed to students previously, (2) identifying all errors found in the students' answers and compositions, (3) classifying them according to syntactic errors' categorization besides Corder's typology, and (4) linking them to their sources.

#### **2.2.2.1. Results of the Translation Task**

For the aim of finding answers to the research questions, second year students at the English department at Larbi Tebessi University were tested through a translation test that contains eight sentences to be translated into English. The analysis of the test showed a frequent occurrence of some syntactic errors. The results were tabulated and categorized to identify the frequency of errors.

All the syntactic errors were counted manually after being revealed, classified according to Corder's typology, and ranked in terms of frequency. The ratio given in the tables below was calculated using the following pattern:

$$X \% = \frac{\Sigma \text{ Frequency of each syntactic error} \times 100}{\Sigma \text{ Frequency of all the committed syntactic errors}}$$

#### A. Sentence One

1- يؤدي الفقر الى تفشي الجريمة

The suggested translation could be as follows: Poverty leads to the spread of crime.

Syntactic errors	Types of errors	Examples	Frequency		Percentage
Articles	Addition	<i>The</i> poverty leads to the spread of crimes The spread of <i>the</i> crime	04	04	44.45%
S.V.D	Omission of final "s"	Poverty <i>lead</i>	02	02	22.22%
Preposition	Selection	<i>In</i> spread	01	02	22.22%
	Omission	To the spread ( <i>of</i> ) crimes	01		
Word order	Ordering	In <i>spread crime</i>	01	01	11.11%
Total			09		100%

**Table 3: Syntactic Errors in the Translation of Sentence One**

In this sentence, students were required to translate the word [الفقر] because the corresponding word for it in English is *poverty*, which is uncountable and does not need an article. In this sentence, it was noticed that many students added the article "the" to identify the word *poverty*. Moreover, word order errors appeared when students used the word *spread* as an adjective before the noun, which is sometimes inaccurate in the English language.

#### B. Sentence Two

2- تعلمت درسا في حياتي، و هو ألا استسلم أبدا.

The suggested translation: I have learned a lesson in my life that is to never give up.

Syntactic errors	Types of errors	Examples	Frequency		Percentage
Tense	Selection	I <i>learnt</i> a lesson in my life.....	19	19	44.19%
Pronoun	Selection	A lesson in my life <i>which</i> is.....	18	21	48.84%
	Omission	In my life ( <i>that</i> ) is to never give up	03		
Preposition	Omission	I have learned a lesson ( <i>in</i> ) my	01	01	2.33%
Copula	Omission	.....that ( <i>is</i> ) to never give up	02	02	4.66%
Total			43		100%

**Table 04: Syntactic Errors in the Translation of Sentence Two**

This sentence is about an experience that implies the use of the present perfect, yet it was noticed that many students used the simple past because they were influenced by the Arabic linguistic system that contains only three tenses. In the second part of the sentence many students committed several types of syntactic errors such as the omission of the copula, saying *that to never give up* instead of *that is to never give up*.

### C. Sentence Three

3- أعرف الكثير من الناس الذين يختلفون عن أولئك الذين تحدثنا عنهم البارحة

The suggested translation can be as follows: I know a lot of people who differ from those whom we talked about last night.

Syntactic errors	Types of errors	Examples	Frequency		percentage
Prepositions	Selection	We talked <i>on</i> them	12	12	27.27%
Pronoun	Selection	I know a lot of people <i>which</i> differ	14	21	47.73%
	Omission	Who differ from ( <i>those</i> ) we talked about	03		
	Addition	That <i>they</i> are different Those we talked about <i>them</i>	01 03		
S.V.D	Selection	I know a lot of people who <i>differs</i> from those we talked about last night	04	04	9.09%
Tense	Selection	Those we <i>have talked</i> about last night	07	07	15.90%
Total			44		100%

**Table 05: Syntactic Errors in the Translation of Sentence Three**

In the translation of the third sentence, many students failed in choosing the appropriate preposition that is equivalent to [عن] in the clause [أولئك الذين تحدثنا عنهم البارحة] as in *we talked on them*; here students relied on their mother tongue to translate [عن] into English and they used the proposition *on* instead of *about*. They also encountered many difficulties in using pronouns because, in Arabic, personal pronouns are often integrated in the verb or the proposition, i.e. certain morphemes are used to indicate what the pronoun does. This made students add unnecessary pronouns like in the examples *that they are different* and *those we talked about them* or omit necessary pronouns like in *whom talked about*, in addition to some other committed errors that are attributed to other sources of errors.

#### D. Sentence Four

4-أعجبني المقال الذي نُشرَ صبيحة اليوم على الانترنت

The suggested translation can be as follows: I liked the article that was published on the internet this morning.

Syntactic errors	Types of errors	Examples	Frequency		Percentage
Prepositions	Selection	Which published this morning <i>in</i> the internet	06	06	11.55%
Articles	Omission	That was published on ( <i>the</i> ) internet	08	08	15.38%
Pronoun	Selection	The article <i>which</i> was published on the internet	14	15	28.85%
	Omission	I liked the article ( <i>that</i> ) published this morning	02		
Tense	Selection	I <i>have liked</i> the article That <i>is</i> published .....	08	08	15.38%
S.V.D	Selection	The article that <i>are</i> posted this morning	02	02	3.84%
Passive voice	Omission	The article that ( <i>was</i> ) published	13	13	25%
Total			52		100%

**Table 06: Syntactic Errors in the Translation of Sentence Four**

The analysis of this sentence revealed that second year students committed many syntactic errors, such as the misuse of articles, the wrong selections or omission of pronouns, in addition to subject-verb disagreement errors where students, most of the time, do not know exactly when to use the singular or the plural form of the verb. Moreover, the analysis of the translated sentence showed that students inaccurately used the passive voice form, as in: “*The article that published*”, where students dropped the auxiliary “to be” and used only the past participle.

### E. Sentence Five

5- هل أنت غاضب مني بسبب ما بدر مني بالأمس؟

The suggested translations can be as follows:

- Are you mad at me because of what I did yesterday?
- Are you angry with me because of what I did yesterday?

Syntactic errors	Types of errors	Examples	Frequency		Percentage
Prepositions	Selection	Are you <i>mad of</i> me Are you Angry <i>from</i> me	13	17	68%
	Omission	Because <i>of</i> what I did yesterday	04		
Tense	Selection	What <i>happens</i> What I <i>have done</i>	02 06	08	32%
Total			23		100%

**Table 07: Syntactic Errors in the Translation of Sentence Five.**

There are two factors that make Algerian learners of English struggle in using English prepositions: first, not every Arabic preposition has a definite equivalent in English and vice versa. Second, not every English or Arabic preposition has a definite usage and meaning. In this sentence, many students wrongly substituted the preposition [من] with *from* and *of* because they tend to use these two prepositions as an alternative for [من]; however, in English *from* and *of* are not the appropriate prepositions that should be used with the adjectives *angry* and *mad*.

## F. Sentence Six

6-صرحت السلطات أن الهجوم قام بتنفيذه مجهولون .

The suggested translation can be as follows: The authorities declared that the attack was carried out by unknowns.

Syntactic errors	Types of errors	Examples	Frequency		Percentage
articles	Omission	( <i>The</i> ) authorities declared that	04	05	27.78%
	Addition	<i>An</i> anonymous persons	01		
Tense	selection	The authorities <i>Have declared</i> ..... The attack <i>Have</i> been executed	06	06	33.33%
S.V.D	Selection	The attack <i>Have</i> been executed	01	01	5.55
Passive voice	Omission	Was made ( <i>by</i> ) unknowns The attack ( <i>was</i> ) made	01	08	44.45%
	Selection	The attack <i>has</i> done	01		
Total			18		100%

**Table 08: Syntactic Errors in the Translation of Sentence Six**

The analysis of this sentence revealed that: first, most of the committed syntactic errors are intralingual errors because the translated sentences proved that students are not competent enough in using English rules; for instance, many students did not identify the word “authorities” possibly because they still have problems in using articles with words that are considered as countable and uncountable nouns. Second, there is a clear difference between the passive voice rules in Arabic and English; in Arabic it comes in the form of one word while in English it comes in the form of an auxiliary + the intended verb + *by*; thence, many students inappropriately used the passive voice rule like in the following examples: *was made unknowns* and *the attack made*.

## G. Sentence Seven

7-عادة ما تلغى الرحلات الجوية حينما يكون الطقس عاصفا .

The suggested translation can be as follows: Flights are usually canceled when the weather is stormy.

Syntactic errors	Types of errors	Examples	Frequency		Percentages
Articles	Addition	Usually <i>The</i> flights canceled	17	17	32.69%
S.V.D	Selection	The flights <i>is</i> cancelled	06	06	11.54%
Word order	Ordering	<i>Usually</i> flights are cancelled	11	11	21.14%
Preposition	Addition	because <i>of</i> the weather is windy	01	01	1.93%
Passive	Omission	...Flights ( <i>are</i> ) cancelled when .....	10	14	26.92%
	Selection	Usually flights <i>cancel</i> .....	04		
Copula	Omission	...When it ( <i>is</i> ) windy	01	01	1.93%
Tense	Selection	It <i>was</i> windy	02	02	3.85%
Total			52		100%

**Table 09: Syntactic Errors in the Translation of Sentence Seven**

In this sentence students were asked to translate [عادة ما تلغى الرحلات الجوية] because, in Arabic, adverbs of frequency do not have a specific position in the sentence, yet it was noticed that students committed errors in using the alternative adverb of frequency of [عادة], which is *usually*. Most of them incorporated it at the beginning of the sentence, which is inaccurate because adverbs of frequency are used mostly in mid-position, i.e. between the subject and the main verb. Moreover, most of the students identified the word *flights*, possibly because the alternative word of it in Arabic carries an article; however, it is not the case in English because *flights* is uncountable. In the translations of this sentence, it was also noticed that they committed many syntactic errors when they attempted to use the passive voice, as it is mentioned in the analysis of the previous examples (Table 6). Besides, one student dropped the copula *is* in the example *when it windy* probably because he/she was influenced by the mother tongue, due to the fact that in Arabic there are nominal sentences while in English every sentence must consist of at least one verb, or because there are no auxiliaries in Arabic.



## H. Sentence Eight

8- عاودت الاتصال بها انا و أمي, لكن هاتفها لا يزال مغلقا.

The suggested translation of this sentence can be as follows: My mother and I recalled her but her phone is still off.

Syntactic errors	Types of errors	Examples	Frequency		Percentage
Tense	Selection	I <i>recall</i> he me and my mother	10	10	12.35%
Pronoun	Addition	I recalled her <i>me</i> and my mother	08	26	32.10%
	Selection	<i>Me</i> and my mother	18		
Word order	Ordering	.... both <i>I and my mom</i> <i>Me and my mother</i>	20	20	24.69%
Copula	Omission	Her phone ( <i>is</i> ) still off Her phone ( <i>is</i> ) turned off	25	25	30.86%
Total			81		100%

**Table 10: Syntactic Errors in the Translation of Sentence Eight**

From the analysis of this sentence, it was noticed that the majority of the syntactic errors occurred when using pronouns or in word order because, first, the pronoun “me” is the objective case of “I”, which means that it is inaccurate to use “me” as a subject, yet the analysis revealed that most of the students did, in *Me and my mother*. From this type of errors, it is assumed that second year students use “me” as a substitute of “I” because they believe that they have the same function. Second, many students, when they attempted to translate the clause [هاتفها لا يزال مغلقا], they omitted the verb “to be” because in Arabic [يزال] is a verb while in English *still* is an adverb, like in *Her phone still off*, where students dropped the copula probably because they believe that “still” is a verb.

After the analysis of the students’ sheets of the translation test, the syntactic errors that were found were counted manually, ranked in terms of their occurrence, frequency and percentage, and linked to their sources. The following table summarizes all the obtained data:

<b>Types of Syntactic Errors</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentages</b>
Pronouns	83	25.86%
Tenses	53	16.51%
Prepositions	39	12.15%
Word order	36	11.21%
Articles	34	10.59%
Passive voice	34	10.59%
The omission of copula	28	8.72%
Subject verb disagreement	14	4.37%
Total	321	100%

**Table 11: Frequency of Students' Syntactic Errors in the Translation Test**

The table revealed that participants committed 321 syntactic errors. These errors are of eight major types: the misuse of pronouns was found to be the most occurring type; it constitutes 25.86% of the entire percentage with 83 errors out of 321. The misuse of tenses errors were the second type that most likely occurred after pronoun's errors, they comprised 16.51% of the entire percentage with 53 errors out of the total number. Prepositions' errors occupied the third positions with a percentage of 12.15% (39 errors out of 321). The chaotic arrangement of words caused 36 word order errors with a percentage estimate by 11.21%. The misuse of passive voice represented with 10.59% of the total percentage besides to the omissions of copula and subject verb disagreement errors which occurred with a low percentage comparing to other types with a percentage estimated by 8.73% concerning the omissions of copula and 4.36% concerning the subject verb disagreement errors.

Based on the errors' sources, the following results were found:

<b>Sources of errors</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentages</b>
Interlingual Errors	217	67.60%
Other Sources of Errors	104	32.40%
Total	321	100%

**Table 12: Frequency of Errors Based on their Sources**

The table demonstrates that the majority of errors extracted from the participants' sheets are linked to the interlingual transfer, i.e. mother tongue interference, with a high percentage estimated at 67.60% (217 errors out of 321), while errors that are attributed to other sources, which are intralingual and developmental errors constituted 32.40% of the entire percentage (104 errors out of 321).

After identifying the most frequent syntactic errors and linking them to their sources, it was possible to classify the most frequent syntactic errors that occurred because of the interlingual interference of the mother tongue, as gathered in the following table:

<b>Syntactic errors</b>	Pronouns	Word order	Passive voice	Prepositions	Omission of copula	Articles	Tenses	Total
<b>Frequency</b>	49	36	33	30	28	21	20	217
<b>Percentage</b>	22.58%	16.59%	15.21%	13.82%	12.90%	9.67%	9.22%	100%

**Table 13: Frequency of Students' Interlingual Syntactic Errors**

The table clearly demonstrates that the misuse of pronouns is the most committed interlingual syntactic error with a percentage estimated at 22.58% (49 errors out of 217), followed by word order errors with 16.59% of the entire percentage (36 errors out of 217). Passive voice errors are ranked in the third position with 15.21% (33 errors out of 217). It was also noticed that the frequency rates of prepositions' errors and the omission of copula errors are close to each other, with 13.82% and 12.90% respectively. Finally, errors related to the use of articles and tenses occurred with a low percentage in comparison to other syntactic errors, with 9.67% and 9.22% respectively.

#### **2.2.2.2. Results of the Written Production Task**

In the analysis of the students' compositions, the procedure followed an error analysis frame work suggested by Corder (1970) not only to extract the syntactic errors, but most importantly to spot the ones caused by the Arabic interference.

The students' written compositions showed a variety of errors, ranging from the misuse of articles and pronouns, to tenses, and others. All the syntactic errors were counted manually after being revealed, classified in terms of Corder's typology, and ranked in terms of frequency. The ratio given in the tables below was calculated using the following pattern:

$$X \% = \frac{\Sigma \text{ Frequency of each syntactic error} \times 100}{\Sigma \text{ Frequency of all the committed syntactic errors}}$$

#### A. Errors Related to Articles

The following table covers all the types of syntactic errors marked in students' compositions in relation to the use of articles:

Types of errors	Example	Frequency	Percentages
Omission	I occupied <i>(the)</i> first place After <i>(a)</i> long period I was <i>(a)</i> bashful person	16	56.26%
Addition	because <i>the</i> ignorance colored with <i>the</i> brown we are <i>a</i> students	11	40.74%
Total		27	100%

**Table 14: Article Errors in Students' Compositions**

The table demonstrates that second year students' most committed errors that are related to articles are those concerned with addition and omission. Students tended to omit the article "a" or "the" when it was necessary with a frequency of 16 errors that are captured with a ratio of 56.26% of the whole, which results ungrammatical sentences. Moreover, errors that were categorized under *addition* were related to the addition of the definite article "the" to uncountable nouns were symbolized with 40.74% of the total number of errors.

#### B. Errors Related to Pronouns

The table below shows all the syntactic errors marked in students' compositions that are related to the use of pronouns:

Types of Errors	Examples	Frequency	Percentages
Omission	...Although ( <i>it</i> ) was a tough experience.... A person that lives ( <i>his</i> ) life to the fullest... I remember about this, ( <i>it</i> ) has taught a lot..	12	48%
Selection	A person <i>that</i> lives life to the fullest ..... A responsible woman <i>that</i> know that ..... ....my experiences..... because of <i>it</i> .....	09	36%
Addition	Responsible women that <i>she</i> know..... The period that I spent <i>it</i> ..... All of us as students <i>we</i> were not .....	04	16%
Total		25	100%

**Table 15: Pronoun Errors in Students' Compositions**

The analysis of compositions allowed the detection of 25 errors related to pronouns; 48% of the total percentage with a frequency of 12 errors was attributed to errors of omission, while 09 of them (36%) were committed because of the inappropriate selection of the intended pronoun, and the other remaining 4 errors (16%) were caused by adding unnecessary pronouns to the sentences.

### C. Errors Related to Subject Verb Disagreement

The table below shows all the syntactic errors marked in students' compositions that are related to subject-verb disagreement:

Type of Errors	Example	Frequency	Percentages
Addition of the "s" Inflection	Many people <i>asks</i> me Life is full of surprises which <i>makes</i> it	07	43.75%
Omission of the "s" Inflection	she <i>know</i> that she never give up The fail <i>make</i> you	09	56.25%
Total		16	100%

**Table 16: Subject-Verb Disagreement Errors in Students' Compositions**

Errors related to subject-verb disagreement are marked with a number of 16 errors. All of them were intralingual errors. Some of the students' essays were marked by either the plural nouns that took singular verbs with the addition of the "s" inflection with a ratio of

43.75%, or by omitting the “s” inflection from verbs with singular nouns with a percentage of 56.25 of the total number of errors.

#### D. Errors Related to Verb Tenses

Table 16 presents the frequency of the errors committed by second year students that are related to the misuse of tenses:

Type of error	Examples	Frequency	Percentages
Selection	Last week.....When we <i>reach</i> the house. She completely <i>changed</i> ....I <i>learnt</i> that the person.....	29	100%

**Table 17: Verb Tense Errors in Students’ Compositions**

Errors related to tense usage are all a matter of inappropriate selection of the proper verb tense. In this regard, 29 errors were committed; only 10 of them, with a ratio of 34.5% of the total, were interlingual errors that are caused by the negative transfer of the Arabic language system, whereas the remaining 19 errors are intralingual and developmental errors.

#### E. Errors Related to the Copula “to be”

Table 18 shows the frequency of the students’ errors that are related to omitting the copula “to be” in addition to some examples that were taken from their compositions:

Types of errors	Examples	Frequency	Percentages
Omission	It** totally other thing One of the most important moments of my life ** the first ..... People around me **rising	06	100%

**Table 18: Omission of the Copula Errors in Students’ Compositions**

The table shows that all the committed errors concerned with the copula “to be” are related to its omission. In 30 students’ sheets, only 06 errors were spotted. Students in their sheets tend to omit the auxiliary to be where it works as a main verb which leads to the production of erroneous sentences as in it totally other thing.

## F. Errors Related to Word Order

Table 19 exhibits the frequency of errors related to word order, which occur when ordering words inappropriately:

Types of errors	Examples	Frequency	Percentage
Ordering	Made me <i>be not</i> able <i>Classroom ordinary</i> <i>Experiences unforgettable</i>	06	100%

**Table 19: Word Order Errors in Students' Compositions.**

As it is seen in the table, only 06 errors were related to word ordering. 67% of these errors were noun and adjective misordering; students tended to put adjectives after nouns, which is the case in Arabic. The other 33% were intralingual errors that have nothing to do with the Arabic interference. Students in most of the erroneous sentences put the nouns before their adjectives, as in "Classroom ordinary" and "experiences unforgettable".

## G. Errors Related to Prepositions

Table 20 shows the frequency of the wrong usage of prepositions with illustrations from students' writing compositions:

Type of Errors	Examples	Frequency	Percentage
Omission	To pass ( <i>to</i> ) new level Since the moment they went out ( <i>of</i> ) the door	04	15.39%
Addition	I remember <i>about</i> this To enter <i>at</i> the university	05	19.23%
Selection	And live <i>in</i> campus <i>On</i> 2016 <i>In</i> school We were looking <i>to</i> her	17	65.38%
Total		26	100%

**Table 20: Prepositions' Errors in Students' Compositions**

The total number of errors related to the use of prepositions was estimated at 26 errors distributed over three types. The first type of errors was related to omission, with 15.39% of the cases; students in their writings tended to omit some prepositions due to some aspects.

Students may omit prepositions because they think they are unnecessary to be added like in: “Since the moment they went out (of) the door”. The second type of errors was that of adding unnecessary prepositions when not needed, with a ratio of 19.23% of the total number, whereas the most frequent errors, i.e. the third type, were those of selection, estimated at 65.38%.

Table 21 is a summary of all the participants syntactic errors marked in their compositions, and it represents the frequency of each one of them:

<b>Types of Syntactic Errors</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentages</b>
Articles	27	19.56%
Pronouns	25	18.16%
Prepositions	26	18.84%
Subject Verb Disagreement	16	11.58%
Tenses	29	21%
Omission of Copula	09	6.52%
Word Order	06	4.34%
Total	138	100%

**Table 21: Frequency of Syntactic Errors Committed in Students’ Compositions**

In all the 30 participants’ compositions, only 138 errors were committed at the level of syntax. Seven major syntactic errors were committed repeatedly. Observing Table 19 reveals that the most frequently committed errors by second year learners at Larbi Tbessi University are those related to tenses, with 21%, then articles with 19.56%, then prepositions with 18.84% and pronouns with 18.16%, which together represent more than the half of the total percentage. The remaining number of errors is spread over other four categories that are subject-verb disagreement with a ratio of 11.58% of the total number, and the rest is divided between the omission of the copula and word order with 6.52% and 4.34% organized in an ascending order respectively.



The categorization of errors was not limited to the syntactic errors' frequency only but also based on their sources too; the following statistics resulted from categorizing errors under their sources:

Source of errors	Frequency	Percentage
Interlingual errors	75	54.3%
Other sources of errors	63	45.7%
Total	138	100%

**Table 22: Frequency of Errors Based on their Sources**

Table 22 reflects the total number of errors that were spotted in the participants' written compositions and gives some detailed statistics about the sources of these errors. Almost 55% of the total errors, which represents more than half of the total number, are made because of the students' mother tongue interference, while the rest of the errors, with a ratio of almost 45%, are attributed to other sources of errors, i.e. intralingual and developmental errors. After identifying the most frequent syntactic errors and linking them to their sources, it was possible to classify the most frequent syntactic errors that occurred because of the interlingual interference of the mother tongue, as gathered in the following table:

Syntactic errors	Articles	Preposition	Pronouns	Word Order	Tenses	Omission of Copula	Total
Frequency	19	13	18	06	10	09	75
Percentages	25.33%	17.34%	24%	8%	13.33%	12%	100%

**Table 23: Frequency of Students' Interlingual Syntactic Errors**

Table 23 reflects the excessive amount of syntactic errors made because of the negative transfer of the Arabic language, which reached 75 errors, that represents more than the half of the total number. The errors mentioned in the table above are the most frequent ones among the participants. The study of students' written compositions exposed the frequency of errors as follows: errors related to articles are repeated 19 times with a ratio of

25.33%, while errors related to pronouns were 18 (24% of the total number). Errors related to prepositions are also considered as the most frequent, with a number of 13 errors (17.34%) in addition to errors related to tenses, which appeared 10 times (13.33%) in all the sample's sheets, The remaining errors are those of the omission of the copula, (09 times, i.e. 12%) followed by 06 errors related to word order (a ratio of 8%). Subject-verb disagreement errors were eliminated because they were all intralingual errors.

The table below summarizes all the statistical data that are obtained from the translation test and the written composition test:

<b>Syntactic errors</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>	<b>Interlingual errors</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Pronouns	108	23.52%	67	22.94%
Prepositions	65	14.16%	43	14.72%
Word order	42	9.15%	42	14.38%
Articles	61	13.28%	40	13.69%
Omission of copula	37	8.06%	37	12.67%
Passive voice	34	7.40%	33	11.30%
Tenses	82	17.86%	30	10.27%
S.V.D.	30	6.53%	/	00%
Total	459	100%	292	100%

**Table 24: Interlingual Syntactic Errors Found in Both Tasks**

After the exclusion of many aspects that were a source of errors, the study was left with the top ranked interlingual syntactic erroneous forms found in the tests, as represented in Table 23. Errors related to pronouns are the most committed ones due to the negative transfer with a ratio estimated at 22.94%, followed by prepositions, and word order errors represented by very close ratios (about 14%). Verb-form/tense errors seem to be very challenging for learners; they committed 37 errors related to the omission of the copula, in addition to 30 errors related the use of tenses with a ratio represented by 12.67% and 10.27% respectively.

The table denotes that the majority of the syntactic errors learners tend to commit because of the influence of Arabic in writing are represented with 292 errors out of 459, i.e. 63.61%.

### **2.2.3. Results of the Questionnaire**

For further clarification, it might better to add questionnaires in addition to interviews as a continuing attempt to understand more about the teaching of composition writing with reference to syntax, taking interlingual transfer from native language into account. The students' questionnaire was done by 30 EFL learners from the faculty of letters and foreign languages at the department of English at Larbi Tbessi University, Tebessa. The quantitative data were presented in tables. Each table provided an indication of numerical scores and percentages of a specific question's answers so that it enables the researcher to offer an analytical description and interpretation of data by means of descriptive statistical procedures. The gathered data from the questionnaire were statistically converted by means of the SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) program.

#### **- Section one: General Information**

##### **Questions 01- 03: Age, Gender, and Foreign language preference**

Section one enabled the researchers to draw a profile of the respondents. Regarding the age range of students, 76.6% of them are aged between 17 and 22, while 13.4% of them are aged between 22 and 26 years old. There are only 3 participants that have exceeded 26 years old. Answers to the question about gender and reveals that 73.4% of the students are females, whereas 26.6% of them are males. In the third question, students were asked what their favourite foreign language was at school, and a large number of them, with a ratio of 66.6%, used to prefer the English language, whereas 23.4% of them selected the French language as their favorite. The remaining seven students who answered with *others* indicated that they used to prefer the Italian language at school.

**Question 04:** What kind of dictionaries have you been using since you started learning English?

<b>Kinds of Dictionaries</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
English-English	22	27.2%
English-Arabic	20	24.7%
English-French	10	12.3%
French-English	04	04.9%
Arabic-English	25	30.9%

**Table 25: Students' Most Used Kind of Dictionaries**

As we can see, 30.9% of the students use Arabic-English dictionaries while 27.2% of the students find that the English-Arabic dictionary is more helpful, and 24.7% of them use English-French dictionaries. A small part of the respondents prefer to use English-French dictionaries, represented by a percentage of 12.3% while there are only four students who declared that they usually use French-English dictionaries. From the obtained results, we can say that a large number of the students tend to use their mother tongue when they try to find the meaning of a difficult word either by using Arabic-English dictionaries or English-Arabic dictionaries.

**- Section Two: The Writing Skill**

**Question 05:** I feel satisfied about my level in writing.

<b>Respondents' Answers</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Not at all true of me	03	10%
Not very much true of me	07	23.3%
Somewhat true of me	15	50%
Fairly much true of me	04	13.3%
Highly true of me	01	3.3%

**Table 26: Students' Satisfaction with their Level in Writing**

Results, here, show that half of the respondents (50%) are not quite satisfied with their level in writing; 23.3% of them declared that they are not really satisfied with their writing level and only three of them 10% do not feel satisfied at all about their level. On the other

hand, 13.3% of the of the respondents report that they feel satisfied about their level in writing to some extent and only one student out of the total number of the participants answered that he is fully satisfied about his writing level.

**Question 06:** When I am asked to write a composition, I feel comfortable and confident.

<b>Respondents' Answers</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Not at all true of me	05	16.7%
Not very much true of me	06	20%
Somewhat true of me	10	33.3%
Fairly much true of me	07	23.3%
Highly true of me	2	6.7%

**Table 27: Students' Confidence when Performing a Writing Task**

As shown above, 16.7% of the students feel frustrated and passive when they are asked to write a composition, while 20% of them chose the option “not very much true of me” to indicate that they feel uncomfortable when doing a writing task. Contrary to the preceding category of students, 33.3% of them stated that they feel comfortable to some extent when they are asked to write a composition, while 23.3% of them reported that they feel motivated when they are assigned to do writing activities. Finally, only 2 students, with a ratio of 6.7%, argued that they actually feel enthusiastic when performing a writing task.

**Question 07:** I believe that writing is the most difficult Skill.

<b>Respondents' Answers</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Not at all true of me	02	6.7%
Not very much true of me	03	10%
Somewhat true of me	11	36.7%
Fairly much true of me	10	33.3%
Highly true of me	04	13.3%

**Table 28: Students' Beliefs about the Difficulty of the Writing Skill**

It has been revealed that student represents 36.7% of the whole participants consider writing as a quite difficult skill, whereas 33.3% of them believe that it is difficult to some extent, while 13.3% of the respondents argued that writing is really the most difficult skill. 10

% of the participants have chosen the statements “not very much true of me” to indicate that writing is not really that difficult. The remaining two students, with a percentage of 6.7%, stated that writing is not that hard skill to accomplish

**Question 08:** I enjoy the written expression session.

<b>Respondents' Answers</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Not at all true of me	01	3.3%
Not very much true of me	04	13.3%
Somewhat true of me	06	20%
Fairly much true of me	12	40%
Highly true of me	07	23.3%

**Table 29: Students Appreciation of the Written Expression Session**

Students are invited to say how they feel about the written expression session, the majority of them, with a ratio estimated at 40%, enjoy the written expression session, while 23.3% of them find it a very enjoyable session and 20% of the respondents chose the statement “Somewhat true of me”, while 13.3% answered with “Not very much true of me” to indicate that they do not find written expression session very enjoyable and 3.3% of them find it a boring session.

**Question 09:** I find the content of the written expression session beneficial.

<b>Respondents' Answers</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Not at all true of me	03	10 %
Not very much true of me	07	23.3%
Somewhat true of me	09	30%
Fairly much true of me	10	33.3%
Highly true of me	01	3.3%

**Table 30: Students’ Beliefs about the Benefits of the Written Expression Session**

In answer to the above question, 33.3% of the students admitted that the written expression session’s content is beneficial, some other 30% believe that it is beneficial to some extent, while only one of the informants (3.3%) believes that it is totally advantageous. The other seven students with a ratio of 23.3% reported that they do not find the content helpful,

while the remaining three students with a ratio of 10% presumed that the written expression session’s content is not beneficial at all.

**Question 10:** I believe that syntax is more challenging than the flow of ideas.

<b>Respondents’ Answers</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Not at all true of me	01	3.3%
Not very much true of me	03	10%
Somewhat true of me	10	33.3%
Fairly much true of me	15	50%
Highly true of me	01	3.3%

**Table 31: Difficulty of Syntax Compared to the Flow of Ideas**

As this table shows, half of the students who participated in this study representing 50% of the whole sample find syntax more challengeable than the flow of ideas when writing, while 33.3% of them assumed that syntax is somehow more difficult, while only one student with a ratio of 3.3% stated that it is definitively more difficult. Another 10% of the respondents think that syntax is not that difficult comparing with the flow of ideas in the writing process, while only one student representing 3.3% of the informants claimed that syntax is for sure not as challenging as the flow of ideas.

**Question 11:** What are the difficulties that you face when you write a composition?

In this question, students are asked to tell which kind of difficulty they face when writing. t 31% of the students opted for the choice of precise vocabulary as the main problem encountered when writing. Approximately 28.2% of the respondents stated that correct syntax can also be seen as a problematic issue they encounter when writing. The next difficulty that students are faced with is generating good ideas when writing it represents 26.8% of the total number of participants followed by the difficulty of spelling as students claimed (14.1%). The analysis of this question shows that all of the students have difficulties in dealing with the different aspects of writing, especially in syntax and vocabulary.

**Question12:** What are the benefits of learning writing?

<b>Respondents' Answers</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentages</b>
Reaching grammar competence	22	23.9%
Organizing my ideas	18	19.6%
Developing my way thinking	15	16.3%
Creating my own style	17	18.5%
Enriching my vocabulary	20	21.7%

**Table 32: Students' Benefits from Learning Writing**

As reported by students, 23.9% of them think that writing is very beneficial to reach their grammar competence. Students represented with a percentage of 21.7% of the total number of participants believe that writing enables them to enrich their vocabulary. On the other hand, 19.6% out of the total number of students stated that they may be able to organize their ideas because of practicing writing, whereas 18.5% of the informants believe that the writing skill is beneficial since it enables them to create their own style. Finally, 16.3% of them agreed that writing is a way to develop their way of thinking.

### **- Section Three: The Interlingual Interference**

**Question 13:** Do you feel that syntax helps in improving your writing skill?

More than half of the students (66.6%) feel that syntax helps in improving their writing, whereas only 33.4% of them think it is not. The majority of the students who answered with "Yes" explained why syntax is a fundamental part in writing suggesting the following points:

- The syntactic rules and grammatical conventions help improve the writing skill.
- Effective writing requires creating coherent and grammatically correct sentences by focusing on the syntactic rules.
- Syntax comes with the ability to arrange words, phrases, and sentences, which leads to form an organized piece of writing.



Only three students out of ten who answered with “No” explained why they feel that syntax is not important in improving their writing skill. They claimed that syntax and writing are two different aspects of language, claiming that their writing skill could be improved only by practicing it.

**Question 14:** Does your teacher give you a brief review of syntactic points to help you when writing?

As much as 60% of the respondents agreed on receiving some of the teacher’s comments on their syntactic errors found in their writing, whereas 40% of the students presumed that they do not receive any feedback on their writing, still we cannot be sure about this results since it is not covered in classroom observational sessions. Some of the informants who answered with “Yes” have provided us with some of the syntactic aspects their teachers remind them with when writing and the comments that help them improve their writings, such as:

- How to choose the right tense needed to describe, narrate, or to explain something
- How to build sentences using phrasal verbs
- Tips for better sentence structure
- The correct order of adjectives in a sentence

**Question 15:** when writing in English I find myself thinking in Arabic.

Respondents’ Answers	Frequency	Percentage
Never	03	10%
Rarely	07	23.3%
Sometimes	13	43.3%
Usually	02	6.7%
Always	05	16.7%

**Table 33: Students’ Thinking in Arabic when Writing**

The question investigated how often the respondents would think in Arabic when writing. Most of the students, exactly 43.3%, have chosen the third option (*sometimes*)

because they tend to do so, while 16.7% of them have chosen the option *always* because they always think in their mother tongue when performing a writing task. The following option (*usually*) had only 6.7% of responses among the participants. The remaining students' answers were divided between 23.3% for the option of *rarely* thinking in Arabic when writing and 10% for the option of *never*.

**Question 16:** I find myself translating my sentences literally from Arabic to English.

Respondents' Answers	Frequency	Percentage
Never	4	13.3%
Rarely	12	40%
Sometimes	10	33.3%
Usually	3	10%
Always	1	3.3%

**Table 34: Students' Translation of Sentences from English to Arabic**

In this question, the majority of the respondents, with a ratio of 40% believe that they rarely think in Arabic and translate their ideas into English, while 33.3% of them have selected the third option, *sometimes*, since they tend to use translation when thinking in their mother tongue. Since some students are always thinking in Arabic and translate their ideas into English, only one student has chosen the first option *always* with a percentage of 3.3%. The last two options were represented by 13.3% for *never* and 10% for *usually*.

**Question 17:** When I learn a new syntactic rule, I compare it to the one in Arabic.

Respondents' Answers	Frequency	Percentage
Never	01	3.3%
Rarely	08	26.7%
Sometimes	12	40%
Usually	07	23.7%
Always	02	6.7%

**Table 35: Students' Comparison of the Arabic and the English Syntactic Rules**

The results in table 34 show that 12 students, with a ratio of 40%, *sometimes* do compare the newly learned English syntactic rules to the Arabic ones, while 23.7% of them

chose the options *usually* because it was not always the case for them. For the option *always*, 6.7% from the participants stated that they always make such comparison between both languages' syntactic rules. However, close to 26.7% of the participants selected the option *rarely*, while 3.3% of them choose the option *never*.

**Question 18:** I find it useful to make this comparison.

<b>Respondents' Answers</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Never	04	13.3%
Rarely	06	20 %
Sometimes	13	43.3%
Usually	04	13.3%
Always	03	10%

**Table 36: The Usefulness of Comparing the Two Languages' Syntactic Rules**

A glance at this table reveals that 43.3% of the whole answers were those related to the option *sometimes*, almost half of the students find it beneficial and helpful to make such comparison, while 13.3% chose the option *usually*, followed by the option *always* which had only 10,0% of votes. On the other hand, 20% of the participants reported that they *rarely* find it useful to do such comparison, whereas 13.3% stated that they do not find it useful at all to compare between the two languages' syntactic rules during the learning process.

**Question 19:** I noticed that Arabic syntax influences my English syntax.

<b>Respondents' Answers</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Never	05	16.7%
Rarely	05	16.7%
Sometimes	11	36.7%
Usually	06	20%
Always	03	10%

**Table 37: The Influence of Arabic Syntax on the Syntax of English**

As seen in the table above, 36.7% of the students said that they can *sometimes* notice that their English syntax is already influenced by their Arabic syntax, whereas 20% of them

have *usually* noticed this influence and only three of them from the total number of participants argued that their Arabic syntax has *always* influenced their English one. The two options *rarely* and *never* had the same number of votes among students, both represented by 16.7% of the answers.

**Question 20:** How do you respond to your teacher's feedback concerning the errors you commit?

The informants reported in this question that they find the teacher's feedback very useful and interesting concerning the errors they commit, and they claimed that they take them into consideration. Many of them stated that they profit from the different comments and therefore improve their writing. Such comments and feedback may attract their attention to some errors that they have never noticed before.

**Question 21:** When you get low marks because of the syntactic errors you commit though you have a good style and flow of ideas, to what extent do you feel it unfair to lose marks?

As far as the last question of the questionnaire is concerned with the student's loss of marks, students are invited to give their views about this issue. The large majority of students believe that it is unfair to receive low marks because of the syntactic errors. They argued that the writing skill is all about the organized ideas and the precise vocabulary, whereas only few participants claimed that they are satisfied with losing marks for the reason of committing syntactic errors when composing.

#### **2.2.4. Results of the Interview**

**Question 01:** "How many years have you been working as a university teacher?"

Among the six teachers engaged in the interviewing process, four have worked for more than 6 years as university teachers, while the two remaining are novice teachers who worked for only one or two years.

**Question Two:** “Which module do you feel more comfortable to teach?”

All the teachers prefer and enjoy teaching their specialty modules, stating that they feel comfortable and find the teaching process when teaching their specialty field modules interesting, as one of them has said: “I find myself comfortable to teach literature.”

**Question 03:** “When performing writing tasks, do you feel that learners are enthusiastic and motivated or rather frustrated and passive?”

Concerning motivation and the feeling of frustration, most teachers believe that it all depends on the writing task itself and its difficulty, besides the nature of the topic itself, like what one of the teachers mentioned: *“It depends on two keys words that are the topic itself and the interest of the student...when the topic is not their interest they feel frustrated and passive.”* According to teachers, most students feel frustrated and passive because they believe that writing is the most difficult task to accomplish due to the difficulties that they may face with several language aspects. One of the teachers added: *“Many students claimed that they find writing a difficult task due to different reasons including lack of ideas about the topic or because of some language problems that they face such as lack of vocabulary and their inability to produce correct grammar.”* On one hand, students may feel passive when it comes to the modules in which they should write about specific topics when they need to be aware of their content as the same teacher stated: *“Given the fact that I am teaching content modules, learners are required to write about something they have been taught in linguistics. Usually learners seem to be frustrated and uncomfortable when they are asked to write. On the other hand, students may feel enthusiastic and motivated when it comes to write about a topic that interests them: “Students when they are asked to write about a topic they are interested in they feel motivated and enthusiastic”.*

**Question 04:** “What are the major difficulties you usually face when teaching EFL learners writing?”

The overwhelming majority of the difficulties that teacher usually face when teaching writing to EFL learners are those related to the selection of the appropriate approach that they should follow, as one of the teachers mentioned: *“I face a difficulty in selecting the appropriate approach to follow when teaching writing”*. Moreover, teachers find many problems in making students aware of the different types of essays, because of the divergence of texts’ genres and contexts, and motivating them to engage in the writing task. One of the respondents stated that the main difficulty that she always faces is *“the starting point”*. She, as mentioned by other teachers, has difficulties with preparing her students, involving them in the writing task, and guiding them to gather all their ideas. Additionally, teachers apprehend their students’ Arabic background when they are engaged in a writing task because, most of the time, they rely on their mother tongue.

**Question 05:** “Tell me about your unconscious L1 interference; do you think it may influence your students’ way of thinking?”

Teachers believe that due to the fact that Arabic is our mother tongue it may unconsciously interfere in the process of teaching the target language, as one of them stated: *“Teachers’ Arabic background may appear subconsciously in their language use whether in speaking or writing, since they have a prior knowledge of the L1 aspects”*. This will consequently affect their students because teachers are the students’ models of learning like what a teacher has mentioned: *“teacher as a whole could influence the learner in many aspects, including the way of thinking and the way of behaving”*; she added: *“This may influence the learners’ way of thinking or even the way they produce language”*. Three teachers out of five never use Arabic; instead, they use alternatives such as the French

language, as one of the interviewees said: *“I am that type of teachers who use French but never Arabic”*.

**Questions 06 and 07:** “According to you what are the main causes of syntactic errors?”

“What about the learner’s Arabic background, does it affect their writing in a way or another?”

Teachers believe that students may commit some syntactic errors because *“Syntax and grammar become a kind of a monster for students”*, says one of the respondents. According to the teachers, students’ fear of producing incorrect utterances together with their lack of concentration and information, as well as their lack of grammar practice, could also be seen as some of the main reasons for their syntactic errors. The wrong usage of the proper method of teaching grammar and the way students are taught the target language also can be counted as some of the main reasons behind their errors since *“the way through which the grammar is taught determines the learner’s performance in grammar”*. In addition, the mother tongue interference could always be deemed as a main cause behind syntactic errors since students translate their ideas together with the rules of their mother tongue, which consequently affects the quality of their writing. An interviewee stated: *“Syntactically speaking, I think L1 interference is one of the problems learners face when building a sentence”*, while one other teacher said: *“It doesn’t affect them that much because Arabic and English are too distinct languages”*.

**Question 08:** “Do you believe that no matter how much learners master the English language, they still think in Arabic and translate their ideas into English in writing?”

Only two teachers believe that students, when reaching an advanced level in learning the language, become more aware of the difference between the target language and the mother tongue, which will reduce the interference of their mother tongue. In this concern, one of the teachers said: *“Once students get more engaged in the target language, and they study its different aspects; they will become constantly in a form of comparisons between their L1*

*and the L2 which enable them to eliminate the L1 interference on the L2*". In sharp contrast to this, the remaining three teachers clearly reckon that no matter what level of proficiency learners have reached, they will always have that issue of interference because they do not use the target language in their daily lives and because they are not English-speaking natives. Arabic is an integral part of their lives and cannot be discarded easily, as one other teacher stated: *"even professional writers and teachers fall in this problem because Arabic is an integral part of our lives that we cannot divide ourselves from it"*. In agreement with this, another teacher commented: *"To some extent, yes, because we are not native speakers. If learners do not use English language everywhere in their daily lives, they cannot be able to think in English."*

**Questions 09 and 10:** "Can you tell me if you take syntactic errors into consideration when evaluating your learners' assignments and tests?" and "How can your feedback (if there is any) towards learners' errors contribute to improving their writing?"

All five teachers agreed that grammar has a crucial role in producing an affective and an accurate piece of writing; this is why all of them take the syntactic errors into consideration when evaluating their students' writing. One of the teachers stated that *"some students lost a lot of marks because of the grammatical mistakes"*. Another teacher added: *"I do believe that grammar is an important aspect of writing, and that accuracy is an obligation for good writing"*. As for the feedback, it is worth noting that all the teachers provide their students with feedbacks. Teachers believe that the feedback *"has a tremendous impact on learners' performance"*. They explained that giving feedback will always lessen the students' errors and teach them how to learn from their mistakes and how to never repeat the same errors again. Concerning the form of feedback, teachers tend to give it in a form of comments or in a form of highlighting the students' errors in addition to some methods of reviewing their



students' papers as mentioned, *"highlighting the error and then providing comments, so that students can find these comments beneficial to correct their mistakes"*.

### **2.2.5. Summary of the Findings**

The analysis of the data obtained from the students' tests revealed that they have many shortcomings in the use of their knowledge about syntax; these involve the misuse of the different parts of speech and the wrong application of many syntactic rules, mainly because of the negative transfer from the mother tongue to the target language. Both tests showed that students have committed 459 syntactic errors that were grouped into four main categories: omission, addition, selection, and miss ordering. These errors were classified under their main sources, with different percentages, where erroneous forms caused by interlingual interference occupied a major percentage estimated at 63.61% (i.e. 292 errors out of 459). The syntactic errors, depicted from both tests, are ranked according to their frequency of occurrence into eight (08) categories: articles, prepositions, pronouns, word order, tenses, omission of copula, passive voice, and subject-verb disagreement.

For the chaotic use of articles, it was found that the students' errors have a very likely to be caused by L1 transfer, rather than an interlanguage developmental order. Both languages have an article system, but since Arabic, unlike English, has definite articles but no indefinite articles (Kharma, 1981), students are unable to differentiate between both languages' articles' system. Because of the absence of an indefinite marker in Arabic, students opted for omitting the article "a" and "an", as in: "I was bashful person". Scott and Tucker (1974) found article errors among the top four types of error among high school graduate L1 Arabic learners; the predominant error was the omission of articles as was found in this study (see Table 14). There is evidence for the reverse situation too, at the level of using definite articles for abstract nouns, where students wrote such things as "the poverty", "the ignorance", and "the fear" (see Tables 02 and 14).

As it was found by Scott and Tucker in their study “Error Analysis and English-Language Strategies of Arab Students”, “An Arabic preposition may be translated by several English prepositions while an English usage may have several Arabic translations” (Scott and Tucker, 1974, p.85). Likewise, the analysis of the collected data bided that students resort to transfer when they are incapable of applying the original rules, so they try to relate each English preposition to an Arabic equivalent, which leads to errors, as in: “*we talked on them*”.

Pronouns as well are the most problematic category for students; their usage was highly influenced by L1 interference, mainly because of the differences between the Arabic and the English pronouns, especially the relative pronouns. This is justified by the fact that the Arabic relative pronouns “الذي” and “التي” are used with persons or objects, depending on the grammatical gender, whereas in English the relative pronoun “who” is used only to refer to persons while “which” and “that” are used to refer to everything else. Consequently, students generalized the use of the pronoun “that” (see Tables 4, 5 and 15).

The linguistic distance between L1 and TL, that is the dissimilarities between them, plays an importance role in processing the TL. In this regard, Isurin (2005), in her study, stated that a change in word order might be attributed to a possible transfer; she also mentioned that the differences between word order patterns in both languages makes it hard to separate pure transfer from any inner language forces, which may eventually produce syntactic changes. In reference to this, the analysis of both tests revealed that 14.38% of the total number of interlingual syntactic errors was concerned with word order, where students opted for following the regular word order of the Arabic linguistic system, especially in using adjectives and adverbs, as in *the classrooms ordinary* (further examples in Tables 8 and 19).

Like any other syntactic feature, the passive voice varies between the two languages (El-Yasin, 1996). In this concern, Arabic and English do not expose similar intentions. In Arabic, the passive voice is less frequent and less used, which justifies the high frequency of

passive voice's errors in the translation test; these errors were performed 34 times, in particular where most of the Arabic sentences were written in the passive voice. For the written composition task, in which there was no single committed error related to the passive, students averted using it because it is quite challenging for them since producing English sentences in the passive voice implies a radical change in the verb form, whereas in Arabic it implies a slight change.

As mentioned in Chapter One, tenses refer to the form that the verb takes to show the time of an action, based on the semantic content of a verb. In this sense, tenses, verbs, and auxiliaries seem to be very challenging, especially for non-native learners who have a prior knowledge of their mother tongue. Unsurprisingly, students committed 30 errors related to the wrong selection of the proper tense. The analysis of the tests also displayed a frequency of 37 out of 292 interlingual errors related to the omission of the copula, mainly because of the Arabic language's lack of an equivalence to the copula "to be", which confuses learners and makes them believe that their utterances are correct, as in: "*it totally other thing*". Moreover, students may commit such errors because they are not skillful enough in using tenses due to many reasons, such as the mother tongue interference, over-generalization, and ignorance of the rule restrictions.

"*The fail make you*" can be deemed as a good example that mirrors students' subject-verb disagreement errors, where students most of the time drop the inflection "s" of the third person singular form with singular subjects. Scott and Tucker (1974), in their study, assumed that since verbs agree with their subjects in person, number and gender in Arabic, there should be no negative transfer (p. 83). This belief may assert the results obtained from the students' tests in which all the errors related to subject verb-agreement were intralingual errors only, yet they should not be neglected in further studies.

All of the formerly mentioned inputs plainly give a lucid response to the first research question by statistically capturing the most common syntactic errors committed by EFL learners in their writing. Furthermore, both acquired quantitative and qualitative information answer the second research question and prove that most of the syntactic errors are caused by what is called *negative transfer*, where students tend to resort to the bad habits of translating and applying the Arabic rules in the English productions. Besides, the findings of both tests exposed some quantitative data that opt to give a statistical answer to the third question that is related to the most frequent syntactic errors committed because of the negative transfer of the Arabic language through which the researchers concluded that the most frequent errors committed by second year EFL students are those related to pronouns, prepositions, word order and articles, which to some extent confirms the third assumption.

The findings of the questionnaire demonstrate the perceptions and attitudes of students toward the writing skill and the accurate use of syntactic knowledge during writing. The analysis of the first section provided a clear image about the sample, tackling the age range, the gender, foreign languages' preference, and the most desirable kind of dictionaries that students use. It has been noticed that the most desirable kind is the Arabic-English dictionary, which denotes that although students are at advanced stages of learning English, they still cannot abandon the habit of relying on their mother tongue. The analysis of the second section of the questionnaire revealed that the majority of students showed a considerable satisfaction with their level in writing though they believe that writing is one of the most complex skills. This indicates that they are facing some serious problems in solving the assigned tasks.

The students' belief of the complexity of the writing task will, as Jabali (2018) mentioned, demotivate them and raise their tension about the skill, which was clear from the students' responses and was confirmed by the teachers' responses of the questions where they emphasized that students are most of the time demotivated and frustrated. According to

(Raimes, 1983), the most common difficulties that students usually face are those related to grammar, vocabulary, spelling, cohesion and coherence, in addition to punctuation. This could be emphasized through the respondents' answers as they assumed that syntax is more challenging than the flow of ideas. Students do confess that using accurate syntax is one of the difficulties they face during the writing process, which matches the fact that students commit several types of errors. In this regard, Yule (2006) stated that syntax forms structural ambiguity; it opens for diverse interpretations by the receptive, and the message could have several understandings. Therefore, the main purpose of syntax is to show the structural distinction between the parties represented in a sentence and enable one to construct sentences that show recursion, something important in the construction of grammatically correct sentences. Hence, without accurate syntax the flow of ideas could not even be transcribed. Despite all that, students find the written expression session interesting, which denotes that they seek improvement for their skills in writing.

Based on the questionnaire findings, students also believe that one of the benefits of practicing writing is to learn how to organize thoughts and ideas, which is believed to be one of the basics of successful writing. Additionally, teachers believe that one of the obstacles that cause serious problems for EFL students and prevents them from progressing in the learning process is the lack of organization. One of the respondents' answers to the fourth question shows that the organization of ideas seems to cause a myriad of difficulties rooted in their Arabic background, which prevents them from learning to write English successfully.

The analysis of the third section of the questionnaire evidenced that second year EFL students frequently make a transfer from Arabic to English. Thus, learners tend to think first in Arabic, especially when they forget the appropriate English words in context, and then translate those ideas literally to English. Besides, they tend to compare between the two languages' rules thinking that it is beneficial and helpful; such interference could be due to the

students' influence of the teachers' unconscious L1 interference, which matches the responses of the teachers on the fifth question of the interview, in which the majority of them stated that they are learners' models. Therefore, students' attitudes in learning reflect their teachers' teaching approaches; however, all participating teachers confirmed that the Arabic language background has a considerable effect on the students' use of English when writing, in a way or another. In this context, Ellis (2006, as cited in Chan, 2004) mentioned that the differences between the target language and the mother tongue is an inevitable consequence of their previous experience, which will lead learners to unconsciously commit several syntactic errors, since syntax is a branch of grammar, and to do a low performance in writing. Nunan (2001) also held a similar opinion when saying: "where the first and the second language rules are not the same, errors are likely to occur as a result of interference between the two languages". These valuable insights gathered from the analysis of the questionnaire about learners' errors sources help in affirming the second assumption.

Although the findings collected in this study confirm that syntactic errors committed by second year EFL students are caused by L1 interference, due to the distinction between the syntactic systems of both languages, a minority of students rejected the idea that they are influenced by their Arabic background; consequently, it affects their productive competence unconsciously. However, the data obtained from the interview and the tests confirm that all the participants are facing problems in achieving the writing proficiency due to the influential patterns and transfer issues of the native language. This transfer occurs because students believe that it simplifies language production, while in fact there are two types of transfer; the positive one, which simplifies the learning process (see Positive Transfer, Chapter One), and the second type, which is the negative transfer that prevents the learning process from proceeding smoothly (see Negative Transfer, Chapter One). Negative transfer is the case of second year students who are not aware of the differences between both syntactic systems and

not conscious that grammar's utility is unique to its own language, i.e. each language has restrictions on how words must be arranged to construct an utterance.

This contradiction between teachers' and students' views probably denotes that EFL learners are committing interlingual syntactic errors unconsciously and are not aware of the seriousness of the issue and the extent to which it hinders the improvement of the learning process. The analyses of the questionnaire and the interview also have provided an answer to the second question of the study, which is stated as follows: "Are the syntactic errors made by Algerian EFL learners attributed to the interlingual interference of Arabic?", but this is based on students' and teachers' beliefs and perceptions of what irritates students in achieving writing competence. However, the diagnostic tests provided statistical evidence that answers the first and the third questions, which are stated respectively as follows: "What are the most common syntactic errors committed by Algerian EFL learners in their writing?" and "How frequent do the syntactic errors caused by the negative transfer occur in students' writing?", and confirms the assumptions.

Teachers and students have to cooperate and try to minimize the occurrence of such errors through providing effective remedies such as a proficient teaching approach in which teachers emphasize students' needs as non-natives. Teachers must opt for raising the students' awareness in order to inhibit the occurrence of errors caused by the previous knowledge of the mother tongue by providing them with tips that may aid in preventing literal translation during writing, in addition to teaching grammatical rules in contexts. This may help in better understanding and eases the retention of rules and makes the learner active during the learning process rather than being a receptive only. Another method that may be beneficial is providing feedback. Since the current study showed a contradiction between teachers and learners', where all teachers stated that they provide feedback while the majority of students declared that they did not receive any feedback, formal feedback is required to be scheduled

in the learning process in which the teacher provides critical observations and highlights the weaknesses accoutered in students' compositions using positive comments with a descriptive tone rather than one-word comments that convey disappointment or frustrations, such as "vague" or "confusing".

### **2.2.6. Pedagogical Implications and Recommendations**

After having a full picture of the most frequent syntactic errors caused by L1 interference for second year EFL learners, the following are pedagogical implications drawn from the current study, along with some recommendations and suggestions.

Since this type of errors is frequently made by EFL learners, teachers should consider error analysis as an effective way to interpret and evaluate learners' errors and motivate their students to quit literal translation of ideas when performing the language; they should also provide learners with thorough feedback about the interlingual syntactic errors that they usually commit in order to help reducing them. Since the writing skill is one of the most challenging skills, teachers are asked to help their students create positive attitudes towards learning in general and writing compositions in particular. Teachers should also motivate their students to help them engage more in the writing tasks and to give them more self-confidence and willingness to write. Besides, teachers should encourage students to improve their writing abilities by providing them with constant assistance concerning the use of grammar points, such as sentence structure and syntax. Moreover, teachers have to focus more on heartening the group work in order to strengthen students' grammar and writing abilities by highlighting the English and the Arabic grammatical differences so their students will be aware of such variations. Furthermore, teachers' practical and pedagogical knowledge has a clear influence on the way grammar is taught, their teaching styles, and the way their students perceive this knowledge. Thus, teachers have to provide their students with some guidance so that they have effective writing. In addition, since grammar is the pillar of the language, teachers



should raise their students' awareness about grammatical rules, especially the syntactic system.

Students, in turn, have to practice more exercises on writing since this skill forms a huge obstacle for them; they should be more exposed to the target language culture and learn how to think in English through reading different works in English, because intensive reading enables them to be familiar with the vocabulary and with the correct use of English rules that good writers employ in their written products. The intensive tasks of grammar and syntax assigned to students by some grammar instructors may help them to identify and correct different errors at the level of sentence structure and to use them in building meaningful sentences. Furthermore, students should pay more attention and be mindful of the teachers' assessment and feedback because it may help to determine the aspects of language points that hinder their ability of producing well-structured utterances. Finally, teachers should think of the best convenient remedial works to help students overcome their deficiencies.

### **2.2.7. Limitations of the Study**

In the light of the present investigation, significant findings have been attained; however, it is vital to shed light on some limitations that were accoutered by the researchers. The most important one was sampling. In this study, the aim was to select 50 students to be a part of the investigation, using the systematic sampling technique through making a list that consists of all the students from the three groups then using the mean to choose 50 students, yet this was not workable because it would be impossible to bring the entire sample together at the same time and place to test them or to ask them to fill in the questionnaire due to the fact that teachers would not tolerate a whole session and students would not accept to miss classes for the sake of participating in the study. Consequently, the sample size may not be representative to the whole population, and this may have affected the validity of the results. Moreover, one of the accoutered limitations is the reliability of tests after being done by

students. In regular conditions, the tests should be corrected by raters and then researchers should calculate the reliability based on the degree of agreement between raters, yet it was impossible to reach and nominate teachers as raters. Eventually, the correction of the test was done by the researchers themselves, resulting in threatening the internal validity of the study.

### **2.2.8. Recommendations for Future Research**

This study aimed at lightening some issues related to negative transfer of the mother tongue during the process of writing and the syntactic errors resulting from it, which should deserve interest for future research. In the light of the aforementioned results, few recommendations can be taken into consideration for possible future research: it is better to use a large sample size in order to obtain more representative data and a large amount of useful information. Also, it is better to opt for an experimental design, i.e. a pretest/post-test procedure, instead of one test in order to extract the issues that mother tongue interference is the major cause behind them and then provide some teaching methods that would be efficient in reducing errors caused by negative transfer. Additionally, it is highly recommended to study a different population, for instance middle school or high school students, in order to make them aware of this type of errors, which would prevent the occurrence of those errors since the early stages of their educational path and make their level improve at early stages.

### **Conclusion**

As this study aimed at investigating how the mother tongue can interfere when learners write, especially second year EFL students in the department of English at the University Larbi Tebessi in Tebessa, and the syntactic errors that they make because of this interference issue, three data collection tools were used in order to obtain as much accurate data as possible, as explained in Chapter Two. This chapter was related to the field work; it is divided into two main sections; the first section deals with the research methodology, while the second section deals with the findings and discussion in addition to some implications and

recommendations. In the first section, all the aspects related to methodology were tackled, starting from the sample and population, in addition to the data analysis tools and the data analysis procedure, whereas in the second section was devoted to the process of analyzing and discussing the data obtained from the three tools. Subsequently, a summary of the findings was constructed and the results obtained were linked to the research questions and assumptions to seek answers and confirmation or refutation. Finally, a set of limitations were revealed to conclude with some pedagogical implications and recommendations for further studies.

## General Conclusion

Writing plays a crucial role in the academic contexts that have led to consider it as a very important and central skill in the field of second language acquisition. At the university level, EFL students are required to master this skill as it is the most common medium to assess their understanding of courses. Although university students have dealt with writing skills for a long period, some of them still face some difficulties in expressing and communicating their ideas correctly in addition to making different mistakes and producing erroneous patterns. The problem, we believe, is mainly due to the learners' Arabic background, which they usually rely on to produce English utterances, and that leads them to commit many different types of errors.

This dissertation highlights the effect of EFL learners' mother-tongue interference in their writing in English. It aims at identifying and analyzing the common errors committed by EFL learners at the level of syntax. According to what has been searched, students usually made some syntactic errors through selecting incorrect elements, omitting required elements, adding unnecessary elements, or disordering some elements. This includes the wrong use of articles, prepositions, pronouns and the inflection of words such as those in verb tenses (Brenes, 2017). Students' questionnaire revealed that most of the students do rely on their first language when writing; they first think in Arabic then make a literal translation for their thoughts into the English language. Furthermore, students sometimes tend to compare between both languages' syntactic rules because they find this comparison beneficial and helpful when learning a foreign language. Thus, it can be concluded that the main reason behind the learners' syntactic errors in writing is the Arabic negative transfer and the interlingual source proved to be the main source of the learners' syntactic errors (Ellis, 1995, p. 25).

To endow the research with more credibility, an interview was held with some of university teachers to benefit from their views about the way their students respond to the writing tasks. In addition, the interview tackled the issue of the students' major causes behind making syntactic errors when writing. Results show that the first language affects the students' writing to some extent because it is an integral part of their lives and because of the students' lack of opportunities to practice English outside the classroom, as explained by the interviewed teachers. In this context, it can be concluded that the main reason behind second-year EFL students committed errors is the negative transfer of their mother tongue.

To benefit from the present study, some implications and recommendations were added. First, teachers should give special attention to students' writing errors by giving effective feedback for the sake of enhancing their students' level in writing. Teachers cannot ignore the importance of error analysis as a tool for evaluating the teaching and learning process. Additionally, teachers have to raise students' awareness about the importance of writing by motivating them to read and use writing strategies to improve their writing abilities. Second, learners must devote more time to improve their writing through reading different types of books in English, and to develop their basic knowledge of grammar so that they can be able to produce a correct piece of writing.

This study has certainly its limitations. Much work is indeed yet to be done in the area of negative transfer, especially in the Algerian context. Therefore, this study's limitations can form a starting point for future researches.





## **Appendices**

### **Appendices**

Appendix A: The Translation Test

Appendix B: The Writing Composition Test

Appendix C: Students' Questionnaire

Appendix D: Teachers' Interview



## Appendix A: The Translation Test



People's Democratic Republic of Algeria



Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research

Larbi Tebessi University -Tébessa

Faculty of Letters and Languages

Department of Letters and English Language

Name: ..... Surname: .....

Your cooperation in this important study of our Master dissertation is highly appreciated. Please read the following sentences attentively before translating them. Be assured that your answers will be kept in the strictest confidentiality.

Translate the following sentences from Arabic into English:

1. الفقر يؤدي إلى تفشي الجريمة.

1.....

2. تعلمت درسا في حياتي، و هو ألا استسلم أبدا.

2.....

3. أعرف الكثير من الناس الذين يختلفون عن أولئك الذين تحدثنا عنهم البارحة.

3.....

4. أعجبتني المقال الذي نُشر صبيحة اليوم على الانترنت.

4.....

5. هل أنت غاضب مني بسبب ما بدر مني بالأمس؟

5.....

6. صرحت السلطات أن الهجوم قام بتنفيذه مجهولون

6.....

7. عادة ما تلغى الرحلات الجوية هو ما يكون الطقس عاصفا

7.....

8. عاودت الاتصال بها انا و امي لكن هاتفها لا يزال مغلقا

8.....



## **Appendix B: The Writing Composition Test**



**People's Democratic Republic of Algeria**  
**Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research**  
**Larbi Tébessi University –Tébessa**  
**Faculty of Letters and Languages**  
**Department of Letters and English Language**

This test is designed for the purpose of collecting data for a Masters dissertation that aims at investigating The Interlingual Syntactic Errors Made by Second Year EFL Students in Writing. We would like you to share your experiences as EFL learners, so you are kindly requested to truthfully take part on this study, and your collaboration is highly appreciated. Be assured that your answers will be kept in the strictest confidentiality.

**Write a composition in which you talk about one of the following topics:**

- University is considered as a transitional stage in a person's life as it opens up a whole new world. Therefore, the first day in university is unforgettable. In a well-structured paragraph write about your first experience at university, and what you loved the most about your experience.
- Everyone has passed through a never-ending life experiences that shaped who they are. In a well-structured paragraph, write about an experience of yours that taught you a valuable lesson.

## Appendix C: Students' Questionnaire



People's Democratic Republic of Algeria  
Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research  
Larbi Tebessi University –Tébessa  
Faculty of Letters and Languages  
Department of Letters and English Language



### Students' Questionnaire

**Syntax is the arrangement of words and phrases to create well-formed sentences in a language.** This questionnaire is designed for the purpose of collecting data for a Master Degree Research that aims at investigating The Interlingual Syntactic Errors Made by Second Year EFL Students in Writing. We would like you to share your experiences as EFL learners, so you are kindly requested to truthfully fill this questionnaire by ticking the appropriate box or providing the appropriate answer when necessary.

#### Section One: General Information

1. To which age range do you belong?

- From 17 to 22  - From 22 to 26  - 26 < ....

2. Gender: - Male  - Female

3. Which of the following foreign languages was your favorite at school?

- English  - French

**Other** (please **precise**)

.....  
.....;

4. What kind of dictionaries have you been using since you started learning English?

**(You can tick more than one box)**

- English – English  - English - French

- English - Arabic  - French - English

- Arabic - English



### Section Three: The Interlingual Interference

13. Do you believe that syntax helps in improving your writing skill?

- Yes

- No

**Please justify** .....

.....

14. Does your teacher give you a brief review of syntactic points to help you when writing? - Yes  - No

**If yes, give some examples** (which one exactly) .....

.....

\*Tick the suitable box

Items	Always	Usually	Somet imes	Rarely	Never
15. When writing in English I find myself thinking in Arabic.					
16. I find myself translating my sentences literally from Arabic to English.					
17. When I learn a new syntactic rule, I compare it to the one in Arabic.					
18. I think it is useful to make this comparison.					
19. I noticed that Arabic syntax influences my English syntax.					

20. How do you respond to your teacher's feedback concerning the errors you commit?

.....

21. When you get low marks because of the syntactic errors you commit though you have a good style and a flow of ideas to what extent do you feel it unfair to lose marks?

**If yes, justify** .....

.....

.....

**If no, justify** .....

.....

## **Appendix D: Teachers Interview**

### **Interview for Teachers**

Dear teachers would you please collaborate by answering the following questions?

1. How many years have you been working as a university teacher?
2. Which module do you feel more comfortable to teach?
3. When performing writing tasks, do you feel that learners are enthusiastic and motivated or rather frustrated and passive?
4. What are the major difficulties you usually face when teaching EFL learners writing?
5. Tell me about your unconscious L1 interference; do you think it may influence your students' way of thinking? Please explain
6. According to you what are the main causes of syntactic errors?
7. What about the learners' Arabic background, does it affect their writing in a way or another? Please explain
8. Do you believe that no matter how much learners master the English language, they still think in Arabic and translate their ideas into English in writing? Please explain
9. Can you tell me if you take syntactic errors into consideration when evaluating your learners' assignments and test?
10. How can your feedback (if there is any) towards learners' errors contribute in improving their writing?

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## Résumé

En vue des diverses opinions sur l'objectif de l'enseignement des langues secondes et étrangères, la capacité des apprenants à atteindre la compétence syntaxique dans l'écrit est une préoccupation essentielle; cependant, leurs antécédents en tant que locuteurs non natifs de la langue étrangère les amènent à commettre des erreurs. Cette étude a examiné les erreurs syntaxiques interlinguales commises par les étudiants d'Anglais dans l'écrit. Pour atteindre cet objectif, une approche descriptive a été choisie avec une méthode mixte, combinant des données qualitatives et quantitatives. Les données ont été collectées auprès de 30 étudiants de deuxième année au niveau du Département des Lettres et de la Langue Anglaise à l'Université de Larbi Tebessi, et de 05 enseignants de divers modules. Les données ont été obtenues à l'aide d'un questionnaire et d'un test diagnostique distribués aux étudiants et d'une interview menée avec les enseignants par téléphone. Étant donné que l'objectif était de déterminer si les erreurs syntaxiques les plus fréquentes sont causées par le transfert négatif et lesquelles de ces erreurs se produisent le plus dans les écrits des apprenants, seules les erreurs liées à l'interférence de L1 ont été interprétées après avoir été analysées suivant l'approche d'analyse des erreurs de Corder. Les données ont clairement prouvé que les erreurs syntaxiques les plus courantes dans les écrits des apprenants sont celles liées aux pronoms, temps, prépositions, articles, l'ordre des mots, l'absence d'accord sujet-verbe, l'omission de la copule (être) et l'utilisation de formes passives, ce qui a confirmé la 1<sup>ère</sup> hypothèse. De plus, le transfert négatif de la langue arabe est la cause principale des erreurs commises car 292 des 459 erreurs syntaxiques étaient interlinguales, incluant un mauvais usage des pronoms, prépositions et articles, ce qui a confirmé la 2<sup>ème</sup> et la 3<sup>ème</sup> hypothèse. Certaines recommandations ont été proposées pour aider les apprenants à éviter ce type d'erreurs; par exemple les enseignants sont invités à former leurs étudiants à penser exclusivement dans la langue cible pour minimiser l'influence de la L1 et de les aider à comprendre et à appliquer les règles syntaxiques à leurs écrits.

## ملخص

في ضوء وجهات النظر المنصبة حول الهدف من تدريس اللغة الثانية و اللغة الأجنبية، تعد قدرة المتعلمين على بلوغ الكفاءة النحوية في الكتابة مصدر قلق أساسي حيث ان المتعلمين ليسوا متحدثين أصليين للغة الهدف مما يدفعهم إلى ارتكاب بعض الأخطاء. عمدت هذه الدراسة الى تحليل الأخطاء النحوية الناجمة عن التداخل بين اللّغة الأجنبية و اللّغة الأم و التي يرتكبها طلاب اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية أثناء الكتابة. و لتحقيق هذا الهدف ، تم اتباع منهج وصفي مع الأخذ بعين الاعتبار كل من البيانات النوعية والكمية و استخلاص البيانات من عينة متمثلة في 30 طالب سنة ثانية ليسانس من قسم الآداب واللغة الإنجليزية في جامعة العربي التبسي بالإضافة الى 05 مدرسين مكلفين بتدريس مقاييس مختلفة. تم الحصول على البيانات باستخدام استبيان واختبار تشخيصي تم توزيعهم مباشرة على الطلاب، بالإضافة الى مقابلات مع المعلمين تم إجرائها عبر مكالمات هاتفية. بما أن الدراسة تتمحور أساساً حول تحديد ما إذا كانت الأخطاء النحوية الأكثر شيوعاً ناتجة عن التداخل السلبي بين اللغات بالإضافة الى تحديد أي من هذه الأخطاء تحدث أكثر في كتابات الطلاب، تمت معالجة الأخطاء المتعلقة بتداخل اللغة الأم حصرياً و تحليلها باتباع منهج تحليل الأخطاء ل كوردر. قدمت البيانات المستخرجة دليلاً واضحاً على أن الأخطاء النحوية الأكثر شيوعاً و التي يرتكبها متعلمو اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية عند الكتابة هي تلك المتعلقة بالضمائر، والأزمنة، وحروف الجر، و أدوات التعريف، وترتيب الكلمات، وحذف الأفعال المساعدة، وبناء المبني للمجهولة والذي إلى حد ما يؤكد الفرضية الأولى. علاوة على ذلك ، فإن النقل السلبي من اللغة العربية هو السبب الرئيسي لأخطاء المتعلمين النحوية حيث أن 292 من أصل 459 من مجمل الأخطاء النحوية المرتكبة كانت بسبب تداخل اللغات ، والتي تضمن معظمها إساءة استخدام الضمائر وحروف الجر و أدوات التعريف ، والتي أكدت الفرضية الثانية و الثالثة. و في هذا الصدد، تم اقتراح بعض الحلول لمساعدة الطلاب على التغلب على هذا النوع من الأخطاء، فعلى سبيل المثال يُنصح المعلمون بتدريب طلابهم على التذكير مباشرة باللغة المستهدفة فقط من أجل تقليل تأثير اللغة الأم ومساعدتهم على فهم وتطبيق القواعد النحوية أثناء الكتابة.