

Open Learning  
Translation Department

Fourth Year  
First Term

# Comparative Linguistics

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Let's study!  
English

## Good afternoon!

Today, it is going to be a practical lecture.

Identify the error in the following sentences:

- My sister goes to others shops to buy some vegetables.

The first step is to identify the error.

**Students:** others

**Teacher:** Okay. Now, we need to classify the error.

**Student:** grammatical error

**Teacher:** Yes. We do not say that it is a syntactic error because it is not related to word order.

Now, we need to explain the error. Here, I need you to think why there is an error. For example, you can say that it is because of lack of knowledge. Then, you can think whether this error is intra-lingual or inter-lingual. When we talk about Arabic language, the adjective is pluralized when the noun it modifies is plural. So, it is related to inter-lingual errors (negative transfer or interference).

This is explanation.

Now, we move to evaluating. We understand the sentence; so, it is a local error.

Correction: *my sister goes to other shops to buy some vegetables.*

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Another example:

- The marriage is a holy ceremony.

**Student:** The

**Teacher:** Very good. There is no need for the article. Can you classify the error?

Grammar (articles)

Explaining: inter-lingual: we use (ال التعريف) in Arabic with all words, but here we did not use the article because it is an abstract word. So, it is a negative transfer from Arabic into English.

Evaluating: local error

Correction: *marriage is a holy ceremony.*

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- They studied geography of England.

We do not usually use (the) with (geography), but here we need to use it because it was specified by (of England). So, it is an inter-lingual error.

Evaluation: local error

Correction: *They studied the geography of England.*

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Now, look at the following phrase:

- The victims of the war

**Students:** We do not need (the).

**Teacher:** which one?

**Student:** both

**Teacher:** No, we actually need the first article. We can say, for example: The victims of the war have been nine. (maybe the number is still increasing)

Which article should we delete now?

**Student:** The second one because it is not the main point; the sentence talks about the victims.

**Teacher:** Actually, *war* here is a general noun; so, we do not need to use (the). For example, if we say: *the victims of the Syrian war*, we must put the article (the) because we specified the war we are talking about. Here, we have a negative transfer from Arabic: ضحايا الحرب. In this example, we are talking about a general war and that is why we do not need to use (the).

It is a negative transfer, and it is a local error (inter-lingual).

So, in Arabic, we use (ال) with all nouns, but in English, we depend on the kind of the noun to add or not to add (the).

Correction: *The victims of war have been nine.*

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- Here are three rule very helpful.

**Student:** We should add 's' to the word (rule).

**Teacher:** This mistake is related to morphology. What else?

**Student:** There is a problem with word order. We should say:

*Here are three very helpful rules.*

**Teacher:** Yes. We did not need to add nor to delete any word in this sentence when we corrected it. Since this error is related to word order, it is a syntactic error.

Let us explain it.

**Student:** It is a literal translation.

**Teacher:** This is number one. What else? In Arabic, we have nouns followed by adjectives. In English, it is the other way around. So, it is inter-lingual error. Also, it is local because you can still understand the meaning.



Note: You should always practice in order to be able to classify the errors.

Everything related to word formation is related to morphology.

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- You said you not tired.

**Student:** You said you are not tired.

**Teacher:** So, we missed (are). In Arabic, we do not have verb to be (popular verbs):

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- My father brought oranges and tomatoes and apples and bread.

**Student:** We do not need to use and several times; we only use it before the last item.

**Teacher:** Yes, in Arabic, we keep using (و), but in English, we do not.

Some students actually make the mistake of not using (و) in Arabic. It is wrong; you need to use it all the time in Arabic.

This mistake is related to coordination => syntax.

Correction: *my father brought oranges, tomatoes, apples, and bread.*

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- Every person almost has a car.

This example is very important. It is a simple sentence. Identify the error.

**Student:** has

**Teacher:** Actually, this is not wrong. After (every), we use the singular form of the verb.

**Student:** the place of (almost) should be at the beginning of the sentence.

**Teacher:** why?

**Student:** because it modifies here (every person) not the verb

**Teacher:** Okay. What is the part of speech of (almost)?

**Students:** It is an adverb.

**Teacher:** Yes, and adverbs modify verbs, adverbs, and adjectives. Adjectives modify nouns. So, its place is right, but the meaning is weird. That is why we should put it before the adjective.

Correction: *almost every person has a car.*

Thus, the adverb here modifies the adjective.

It is an error related to syntax because there was an error with word order.

**Student:** Cannot we consider it semantic since it is related to meaning?

**Teacher:** There is some connection between syntax and semantics, but since we changed the word order to correct the sentence, it is syntax.

**Student:** Can we say it is an intra-lingual error related to overgeneralization?

**Teacher:** What is the rule that was overgeneralized?

**Student:** using adverbs to modify verbs

**Teacher:** Adverbs do modify verbs; here the problem is with competence. It is inter-lingual and a local error.

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• Men and women continue each other.

**Student:** continue, we should use (complete).

**Teacher:** So, we have something called lexical errors, which means not using right words properly. So, it is a lexical error.

It can be considered as a negative transfer because in Arabic, we say (بيكملوا بعض), and when we translated it, we misused the vocabulary.

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• He fell in the fault.

**Students:** we should say: he made a mistake.

**Teacher:** Yes, we say he made / committed a mistake.

It is also a negative transfer, literal translation: وقع في الخطأ.

This is not lexical because you need to change all the words not only one word; it is a semantic error.

It similar to the example of: قطع على نفسه عهداً

When it is translated to: he cut a promise on himself, instead of just saying: he promised himself/ made a promise to himself.

It is an inter-lingual error.

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## Handout 1:

### 1. Comparative Linguistics:

Comparative linguistics (CL) is the scientific study of language from comparative point of view, which means that it is involved in comparing and classifying languages. To compare languages is to discover whether the languages compared have similarities and differences as well as potential areas of learning or translation problems.

Early proponents of contrastive linguistics claim that differences between the languages compared (L1 = the learner or translator's native language and L2 = the target language) cause difficulties for the learner/translator of L2. They also claim that interference (negative transfer) from L1 to L2 is a major source of learning/ translation difficulties or errors.

**Transfer** is the influence resulting from similarities and differences between the target language and any other language that has been previously acquired.



Transfer from L1 to L2 may be either positive or negative. **Positive transfer** occurs when L1 and L2 have similar systems or features. This transfer induces facilitation in learning/ translation. On the other hand, **negative transfer** (interference) occurs when L1 and L2 have different systems or features. This transfer induces difficulties in learning/ translation.

## 2. Competence and Performance

**Competence** in Generative Grammar is the implicit system of rules that constitutes a person's knowledge of language. This includes a person's ability to create and understand sentences, including sentences they have never heard before.

**Performance** in Generative Grammar is a person's actual use of language.

A difference is made between a person's knowledge of a language and how a person uses this knowledge in producing and understanding sentences. For example, people may have the competence to produce infinitely long sentences but when they actually attempt to use this knowledge (to perform), they may restrict the number of adjectives, adverbs, and clauses in any one sentence. They may run out of breath, or their listeners may get bored or forget what has been said if the sentence is too long.

## 3. Errors and Error Analysis

### 3.1. Introduction

Error Analysis is a branch of applied linguistics which is concerned with identification and analysis of errors made by second language learners by applying a system of formal distinction to differentiate between the learner's first language (L1) and target language (L2).

### 3.2. Types of Errors

Researches in the field of applied linguistics usually distinguish between two types of errors: competence errors and performance errors.

Competence errors reflect inadequate learning; they occur because the learners do not know what is correct.

Performance errors reflect usual lapses in performance; they occur if the learners are unable to perform what they know. For example, they may be tired, careless, distracted or hurried. Such types of error are not serious as competence errors that cannot be overcome with little effort by the learners.

It is important to note that researchers distinguish between mistakes and errors. Errors are related to competence of the learner, whereas mistakes are related to the performance of learner.

Other researchers distinguish between local and global errors.

**Local errors** do not hinder communication and understanding the meaning of utterance. Local errors involve noun and verb inflections, and the use of articles, prepositions and auxiliaries.

**Global errors**, on the other hand, are more serious than local errors because global errors interfere with communication and disrupt the meaning of an utterance. They involve wrong word order in a sentence.

Finally, language learning errors involve all language components: the phonological, the morphological, the lexical, the semantic, the grammatical, and the syntactic components. An example of a phonological error is the lack of distinction between the phoneme /p/ and the phoneme /b/ among Arab ESL learners; they say *pird* and *brison*, for example, instead of *bird* and *prison*. An example of a morphological error is the production of errors such as *womans*, *sheeps*, and *furnitures*. A lexical error involves inappropriate direct translation from the learner's native language or the use of wrong lexical items in the second language. An example of lexical errors is: *The clock is now ten*. A semantic error is also related to the literal translation such as *I cut a promise on myself to study*, and finally, examples of syntactic errors and errors in word order, subject-verb agreement, and the use of the resumptive pronoun in English relative clauses produced by Arab ESL learners as illustrated in: *The boy that I saw him is called Ali*.

### 3.3. Causes of Errors

There are mainly two major sources of errors in second language learning. The first source is interference from the native language while the second source can be attributed to intralingual and developmental factors.

The native language of learners plays a significant role in learning a second language. Errors due to the influence of the native language are called interlingual errors. Interlingual errors are also called negative transfer or interference errors.

Intralingual and developmental errors are due to the difficulty of the target language, intralingual and developmental factors include the following:

a. **Simplification:** Errors that result from learners producing simpler linguistic rules than those which exist in the target language. An example of simplification might involve the use of simple present instead of the present perfect continuous.

b. **Overgeneralization:** errors caused by extending target language rules to inappropriate contexts. Examples of overgeneralization include the use of *comed* and *goed* as the past tense forms of *come* and *go* and the omission of the third person singular s under the heavy pressure of all other endless forms as in *he go*.

c. **Hypercorrection:** Those resulting from transfer of training. This type of error is also called induced errors. For example, the zealous efforts of



teachers in correcting the phoneme /p/ prompts learners to always produce /p/ where the phoneme /b/ is required. Thus, Arab EFL learners say *pir*d and *pattle* instead of *bird* and *battle*.

d. **Avoidance:** Errors which result from failing to use certain target language structures because they are considered to be too difficult. Arab EFL learners avoid the passive voice while Japanese learners avoid relativization in English.

e. **False concepts hypothesized:** Many learners' errors can be attributed to wrong hypotheses formed by these learners about the target language. For example, some learners think 'is' is the marker of the present tense. So, they produce: *He is talk to the teacher*. Similarly, they think that 'was' is the past tense marker. Hence, they say: *it was happened last night*.

f. **Fossilization:** Some errors persist for long periods and become quite difficult to get rid of. An example of fossilized errors in Arab EFL learners is the lack of distinction between /p/ and /b/.

g. **Communication-based errors:** Errors that result from communication strategies. An example of such an error is related to expressing the concept indirectly, by allusion rather than by direct reference.

### 3.4. Steps in error analysis

According to linguists, the following are steps in any typical error analysis research:

1. Identifying the errors
2. Describing/ classifying the errors
3. Explaining the errors
4. Evaluating/ correcting the errors

### 3.5. Error Identification and Classification

After collecting samples, the next step is describing and classifying errors into classes: grammatical (prepositions, articles, reported speech, singular/plural, adjectives, relative clauses, irregular verbs, tenses and possessive case), syntactic (coordination, sentence structure, nouns and pronouns, and word order), lexical (word choice), semantic (literal translation), morphological (word forms) and phonological (consonants, vowels, stress, rhythm and intonation).

#### 3.5.1. Grammatical Errors

##### 3.5.1.1. Agreement

Arabic verbs agree with their subjects in person number and gender. Hence, Arab students make few subject-verb agreement errors in their essays except where the subject's number is confusing. However, another kind of



agreement error occurs is that of adjectives or adverbs agreeing with the nouns they modify.

In English, few adjectives show agreement in number with the nouns they modify, such as *this-these* and *that-those*. Other adjectives are used to modify singular as well as plural pronouns. In Arabic, however, the situation is different. Adjectives agree in number with the nouns they modify. As a result, agreement errors of this type occur in the English writings of students. For example, students write the following:

- My sister goes to others shops.

Instead of: My sister goes to other shops.

- The art of paragraphs writing is not difficult.

Instead of: The art of paragraph writing is not difficult.

The underlined words above take the plural form in Arabic.

### 3.5.1.2. Articles

In English, abstract words referring to ideas, attributes, or qualities are used without the article *the* to refer to that idea or attribute, etc. which belongs to everybody or everything. In Arabic, however, such abstract words are preceded by a definite article equivalent to *the* in English. Hence, errors pertaining to the misuse of the article *the* occur. For instance, students write the following:

- The persistence is necessary for the success.

Instead of: Persistence is necessary for the success.

On the other hand, abstract words become specific when they are preceded by the article *the* in English. They become the preposition of a certain person, group, object, etc. The usual way of expressing this possession is by a phrase starting with *of*, *to* or *for*. For example, the following sentences are correct in English:

You must study geography.

But: Tom studied the geography of England.

In contrast, Arabic does not make use of an article before an abstract term when it is the possession of a specific person or object. Rather, the abstract word is rendered by the modifying noun that follows it. It is not surprising then that the students wrote the following sentence:

The victims of the war are many.

Instead of: The victims of war are many.

(war here is general and not specific)

### 3.5.1.3. prepositions

prepositions pose a great difficulty for an ESL learner since there are various prepositions in English that have the same function. For instance, the

prepositions *in*, *at*, and *on* in the following sentences indicate place with subtle differences in usage.

He is *in* the garden.

He is *at* home.

He lives *on* campus.

As a result, when students are not sure which preposition to use in a certain sentence, they often compare that sentence with its Arabic equivalence, giving a literal translation of that Arabic preposition in English. However, prepositions seldom have a one to one correspondence between English and Arabic. An Arabic preposition may be translated by several English prepositions while an English usage may have several Arabic translations. Once again, such translations are the cause of errors, especially in the case of *in*. Below are such examples:

I mean *in* this example.

Instead of: I mean *by* this example.

Driving *in* a high speed.

Instead of: driving *at* a high speed.

These two examples take the same preposition in Arabic which corresponds to *in* in English. Other preposition errors are the following:

He is ready *to* the exam.

Instead of: He is ready *for* the exam.

I am *under* your disposal.

Instead of: I am *at* your disposal.

There are structures that are equivalent in both languages and others that are not likewise.

#### 3.5.1.4. Singular vs. Plural Words

An ESL learner is unable to determine whether a certain English word is singular or plural based on its form alone. Some words that end with the plural form *s* are actually singular in number, whereas others indicate a singular or plural number while maintaining the same form. Faced with this complexity of the English number, it is only natural that ESL students resort to literal translation from Arabic when determining whether a certain English word is singular or plural. The following sentences were written by the students:

Statistics *are* often carried out to determine the increase in population.

Instead of: Statistics *is* often carried out to determine the increase in population.

Here, *statistics* does not only end with the plural form, but is also a plural word in Arabic which explains why students often commit mistakes for a plural word in English.



We have a lot of *homeworks* for today.

Instead of: We have a lot of homework for today.

The word homework takes the plural form in Arabic is plural in number.

#### 5.3.1.5. Passive Voice Errors

Examples of errors in the use of passive voice are:

Smoking can be caused man serious diseases. (can cause)

In this example, it can be said the student confuses between active and passive voice. This might be due to the lack of sufficient training and drills on this rule which lead to overgeneralization of the rule.

It can been said that smoking is bad. (can be said)

The misuse of verb to be is peculiar in this example since this verb does not exist in Arabic. This error may be due to intralingual transfer.

#### 3.5.2. Lexical Errors

Due to their limited English vocabulary, ESL learners frequently words from Arabic to express a certain idea in English, unaware of the English collocations (i.e. word 'A' in a certain English sentence coexists with the word 'B' and not with 'C' even though 'B' and 'C' may be synonymous).

In other words, one word in arabic can be translated into English by several words. It remains for the students to determine which word collocates with the meaning expressed in the sentence.

Doctors *describe* medications for their patients.

Instead of: Doctors prescribe medications for their patients.

#### 3.5.3. Semantic errors

Semantic errors occur when students use literal translation to convey in English flowery Arabic expressions, idioms or proverbs. This, they hope, will enrich their essays. The outcome as follows:

I cut a promise on myself.

Instead of: I promised myself.

He fell in the fault.

Instead of: He made a mistake.

#### 3.5.4. Syntactic Errors

Among the frequent syntactic errors are those of word order, coordination and omission of the copula.

##### 3.5.4.1. Word Order

A common syntactic error that students commit as a result of transfer is faulty word order. In English, adjectives usually precede the nouns they modify. However, in Arabic, they generally follow them. As a result, this Arabic grammatical rule leads students to produce the following sentences:

Here are *three rules* very helpful.

Instead of: Here are three very helpful rules.

A similar mistake occurs with the use of adverbs since an adverb that modifies an adjective or another adverb usually precedes that adjective or adverb. Once again, in Arabic, this is not the case. Hence, students write the following:

Every person *almost* has a car.

Instead of: almost every person has a car.

### 3.5.4.2. Coordination

In English, items in a series are separated by commas, and the conjunction 'and' is used just before the last word. On the other hand, in Arabic, each item in a series is preceded by the conjunction 'wa' which is equivalent to 'and.' Accordingly, the following sentence is perfectly correct in Arabic:

My favourite fruits are cherries and peaches and pears and watermelons.

However, it is quite odd in English.

### 3.5.4.3. Omission of Copula

Since Arabic has no copula, students neglect to use those structures in English. For example, students wrote the following:

You said you not tired.

Instead of: You said you are not tired.

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**Thank you very much!**

**See you next week**



Demo Mode

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