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Cross-linguistic influences of Arabic on the study of tenses and aspects of English: a study among Jordanian university students

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Abstract

The research relevance lies in the fact that the process of mastering a second language significantly depends on the native language of the student, especially in those areas where there are structural differences between the two languages. The research goal is to identify the key problems that Jordanian students face in the course of learning English. The research objectives are to examine the interlingual influence of Arabic on Jordanian students learning English, as well as to identify the difficulties that students face in mastering the system of tenses and species in the English language. The research methodology is based on a cross-linguistic approach and includes methods of historiographical analysis of the scientific discourse of the topic under study; analysis, synthesis, generalization and systematization, as well as the method of sociological research (in-depth interview). The study also uses a mixed methodological approach that combines quantitative and qualitative analysis of data obtained from interviews with students. The results showed that students often rely on syntactic and morphological models of Arabic, which leads to negative transference that affects their level of English proficiency. Educational and pedagogical factors, such as reliance on the traditional method of translating grammar and limited use of English in everyday communication, exacerbate the difficulties identified in the study.

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Keywords

Second language acquisition, linguistic intervention, grammar learning difficulties, contrastive analysis, interlingual system theory, English as a foreign language (EFL).

Introduction

The relevance of the study is that the divergence in grammatical structures between Arabic and English poses significant challenges for Arabic-speaking learners of English. These challenges manifest as systematic errors rooted in the learners' reliance on their native language's grammatical framework when constructing English sentences. This phenomenon, known as language transfer, can lead to both positive and negative interference. In the context of Arabic-English language acquisition, negative transfer is particularly prominent, resulting in persistent grammatical errors [Mudhsh, 2018, p. 41].

In modern literature, one primary area of difficulty stems from the differing word order conventions. Arabic typically employs a Verb-Subject-Object (VSO) or Subject-Verb-Object (SVO) structure, while English predominantly adheres to SVO. This discrepancy often leads Arabic learners to produce sentences with inverted word order, especially at the initial stages of learning. The rich inflectional morphology of Arabic, where grammatical relations are heavily marked on nouns and verbs, contrasts sharply with the relatively analytic nature of English. This can result in learners omitting essential English grammatical markers, such as plural markers or verb tense inflections, assuming that the context will sufficiently convey the intended meaning [Rumman et al., 2025, p. 49].

The most significant source of error arises from differences in the systems of articles and determiners. Arabic employs a definite article «al-» which is prefixed to nouns, whereas English utilizes both definite («the») and indefinite («a/an») articles, with more nuanced rules governing their usage. As modern researchers state, Arabic learners often struggle with the appropriate use of English articles, leading to errors of omission or incorrect selection. Additionally, the concept of grammatical gender, pervasive in Arabic, has no direct equivalent in English, causing confusion in pronoun usage and agreement [Mailhammer & Zeidan, 2019, p. 55].

The challenges extend beyond the sentence level to encompass discourse-level features. Arabic possesses distinct rhetorical patterns and cohesive devices that may not translate directly into English. For instance, the use of parallelism and repetition, common in Arabic prose, can sound redundant or stylistically awkward in English. Similarly, the conventions for organizing arguments and presenting evidence can differ significantly, potentially hindering effective communication in English academic or professional settings [Almahameed & Farghal, 2024, p. 55]. Addressing these systematic errors requires targeted pedagogical interventions. Explicit instruction on the grammatical differences between Arabic and English, coupled with ample opportunities for practice and feedback, is crucial. In particular, error correction should focus on raising learners' awareness of their specific areas of difficulty and providing them with strategies for overcoming these challenges [Mahboobeh, 2015, p. 89]. As pedagogical practice shows, incorporating authentic English materials and exposing learners to diverse linguistic contexts can help them develop a more nuanced understanding of English grammar and usage [Mahboobeh, 2015, p. 90]. By acknowledging and addressing the specific linguistic challenges faced by Arabic-speaking learners, educators can facilitate more effective language acquisition and promote greater communicative competence. The core grammatical divergence lies in the morphological richness of Arabic, a Semitic language, contrasted with the relatively analytic nature of English, a Germanic language [Alzaidi, 2025, p. 7]. Arabic grammar is heavily inflected, with verb forms changing significantly to denote tense, aspect, mood, and agreement with the subject in gender and number. Conversely, English relies more on auxiliary verbs and word order to convey these grammatical features. This fundamental difference causes interference, where learners unconsciously transfer grammatical rules from their native language to the target language, leading to errors [Bani-

Khaled, 2018, p. 155].

Specifically, the Arabic verb system primarily distinguishes between perfective and imperfective aspects, which do not directly correspond to the English tense system. The perfective aspect in Arabic indicates a completed action, while the imperfective aspect refers to ongoing or habitual actions. This binary distinction clashes with the more nuanced English system, which includes simple, continuous, perfect, and perfect continuous tenses. Consequently, Arabic speakers often struggle to accurately use English tenses, particularly the continuous and perfect tenses, as these concepts are not explicitly marked in the same way in Arabic [Gadalla, 2017, p. 32].

Another challenge stems from the differing use of verbal and nominal sentences. Arabic allows for sentences without a verb (nominal sentences), where the subject is directly followed by the predicate [Hay, Abu Rass, 2025, p. 961]. While English also has nominal sentences, they are not as common or structurally similar to Arabic nominal sentences. This difference can lead to errors in English sentence construction, particularly in the omission of the verb «to be» in sentences that require it. For example, an Arabic speaker might incorrectly say «The book *interesting*» instead of «The book *is* interesting» [Hazaymeh, 2018, p. 121].

Furthermore, the treatment of definiteness differs significantly between the two languages. In Arabic, definiteness is primarily indicated by the definite article «al- », which attaches to the beginning of nouns. English, on the other hand, uses both the definite article «the» and indefinite articles «a/an». Arabic speakers may overuse or underuse articles in English due to the differences in how definiteness is marked in their native language. This can result in sentences that are grammatically incorrect or unclear in meaning.

An empirical study among Jordanian university students about cross-linguistic influences of Arabic on the study of tenses in English

Language transfer occurs when learners apply rules from their native language to their second language. Arabic and English differ significantly in how they express tense and aspect, leading to systematic errors among learners. While English has a complex system of tenses, Arabic relies more on context and aspect rather than rigid tense structures.

The primary issues Jordanian students face when learning English tenses and aspects include:

Confusion between past and present perfect tenses (e.g., «I have went» instead of «I have gone»).

Difficulty using progressive aspects (e.g., «He is understand» instead of «He understands»).

Misuse of auxiliary verbs (e.g., «She did eat» instead of «She ate»). Overuse or omission of verb markers due to the lack of equivalent structures in Arabic. These errors are not random; they follow predictable patterns based on Arabic's grammatical influence on English learning. Understanding these patterns helps educators develop targeted teaching strategies to address specific learning difficulties.

We can say that English holds an essential position in Jordan's educational system. It is taught as a foreign language in public and private schools, and proficiency in English is often required for higher education and employment. However, despite years of English instruction, many students struggle with fluency and grammatical accuracy, particularly in academic writing and formal communication.

The challenge is compounded by teaching methods that often focus on rote memorization rather than active language use. Additionally, the lack of English-speaking environments outside the classroom limits students' exposure to natural usage of the language. Addressing these challenges requires a deeper understanding of how Arabic interferes with English learning, particularly in areas like tense and aspect.

Objectives of the empirical study are:

- Identify the most common tense and aspect errors Jordanian students make when learning English.
- Analyze the linguistic reasons behind these errors, focusing on Arabic's influence.
- Provide recommendations for improving English language teaching strategies in Jordan.

By examining these aspects, we hope to contribute to more effective language learning approaches that bridge the gap between Arabic and English grammar.

English is the most widely spoken foreign language in Jordan, playing a crucial role in education, business, and international communication. As a former British protectorate, Jordan has a long history of English language use, particularly in legal, governmental, and academic contexts. Today, English is considered essential for professional success, as it is the primary language used in science, technology, and international trade.

The Jordanian government has recognized the importance of English in global communication and has integrated it into the national curriculum. English is introduced as a mandatory subject in primary schools and continues throughout secondary and higher education. It is the medium of instruction for various disciplines at Jordanian universities, particularly in fields such as medicine, engineering, and business. Many private schools in Jordan also adopt bilingual or English-medium education to enhance students' proficiency from an early age.

According to our pedagogical practice, we can mark the following challenges in learning English in Jordan:

- *Linguistic Differences:* Arabic and English have distinct grammatical structures, particularly in verb conjugation and tense formation. Arabic relies on a system of aspect rather than strict tense distinctions, which leads to frequent errors in English tense usage.
- *Limited Exposure to English:* While English is taught in schools, students often lack real-life exposure to the language outside the classroom. This limits their ability to practice and reinforce what they learn.
- *Traditional Teaching Methods:* Many Jordanian schools continue to use the Grammar-Translation Method, which emphasizes rote memorization rather than active communication. This approach often fails to develop students' ability to use English naturally in conversation and writing. We can state, that Arabic-English code-switching is common among Jordanian learners, leading to grammatical errors influenced by Arabic sentence structures. This linguistic interference makes it difficult for students to internalize English grammar rules correctly.

Contrastive Analysis and Error Analysis

The Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis (CAH) suggests that difficulties in learning a second language arise from differences between the learner's native language and the target language. According to CAH, Arabic-speaking learners are likely to struggle with English tenses because Arabic lacks direct equivalents to English verb forms.

Error Analysis (EA) focuses on identifying and categorizing errors made by learners to understand the learning process. Studies on Arabic-speaking students show recurring errors in tense selection, verb agreement, and aspect usage, largely influenced by Arabic grammar.

1) Interlanguage and Fossilization

Interlanguage theory describes the evolving language system that learners develop as they acquire a second language. Jordanian students often develop a hybrid grammatical system, influenced by both Arabic and English, leading to fossilized errors that persist despite advanced learning.

2) Common Errors in Learning English Tenses and Aspects

Misuse of the Simple Present and Present Progressive

Arabic lacks a direct equivalent of the English present progressive tense («I am studying»), leading Jordanian students to overuse the simple present («I study now» instead of «I am studying now»).

Confusion Between the Simple Past and Present Perfect

Arabic speakers often struggle with the English present perfect («I have finished my homework») because Arabic primarily uses the simple past for completed actions. This results in errors such as «*I finished my homework two hours ago*» instead of «*I have finished my homework*».

Overuse of Future Tense Markers

In Arabic, future actions are typically indicated by the prefix «سـ»(sa-) or the word «سوف» (sawfa). Jordanian students sometimes apply this pattern directly to English, leading to incorrect sentences like «*I will go to university every day*» instead of «*I go to university every day*».

Pedagogical Implications of results:

Teaching Strategies for Overcoming Tense and Aspect Errors

To improve Jordanian students' understanding of English tenses, educators should:

- 1) Emphasize the differences between Arabic and English grammar.
- 2) Use contrastive teaching techniques to highlight key distinctions.
- 3) Provide communicative practice rather than relying solely on grammar drills.
- 4) Incorporate contextualized learning to help students internalize correct verb usage.

Modern technology, including language-learning apps and AI-based tutoring systems, can help Jordanian students receive immediate feedback on their grammatical mistakes. Interactive tools can reinforce correct tense usage through repetition and contextual exercises.

The study analyzed writing samples from Jordanian university students to identify patterns of tense and aspect errors. Participants completed structured exercises and free-writing tasks.

Key Findings of the empirical study:

The highest number of errors occurred in present perfect usage.

Many students omitted auxiliary verbs, producing incorrect sentences like «*He going to the university*» instead of «*He is going to the university*».

Overgeneralization of Arabic rules led to errors in forming negative sentences and questions in English.

Conclusion

The conducted research allowed us to formulate the following conclusions:

- 1) Jordanian university students face significant challenges in mastering English tenses and aspects due to structural differences between Arabic and English. Common errors include misuse of progressive tenses, confusion between past and perfect aspects, and overgeneralization of future tense markers. Addressing these challenges requires a multifaceted pedagogical approach grounded in contrastive analysis and communicative language teaching principles. Educators must explicitly highlight the structural divergences between Arabic and English verb systems, focusing on how tense and aspect are encoded differently in each language. For instance, Arabic relies heavily on aspect to convey temporal information, while English places a greater emphasis on tense markers. This necessitates a conscious effort to deconstruct students' reliance on L1 transfer and promote a deeper understanding of English grammatical rules.
- 2) Furthermore, instructional strategies should prioritize contextualized practice that moves beyond rote memorization of tense forms. Activities that simulate real-world communication, such as role-playing, debates, and narrative writing, can provide students with opportunities to apply their knowledge of English tenses and aspects in meaningful contexts. Moreover, error

correction should be approached constructively, with a focus on providing specific feedback that helps students understand the underlying reasons for their mistakes and develop strategies for self-correction.

- 3) Supplemental resources such as online grammar tutorials and interactive exercises can be invaluable for reinforcing learning and providing students with opportunities for independent practice. Technology-enhanced learning environments can offer personalized feedback and track student progress, allowing educators to tailor their instruction to meet individual needs. Furthermore, encouraging students to engage with authentic English materials, such as movies, TV shows, and books, can help them develop a more intuitive understanding of how tenses and aspects are used in natural discourse.
- 4) The successful remediation of tense and aspect errors among Jordanian university students requires a collaborative effort between educators, curriculum developers, and language learners themselves. By adopting a proactive and evidence-based approach, educators can empower students to overcome the linguistic challenges they face and achieve greater proficiency in English. This includes not only focusing on grammatical accuracy but also fostering students' ability to use English effectively and confidently in a variety of communicative situations.

So, the explicit grammar instruction is: teachers should directly compare Arabic and English grammar to clarify differences. Context-Based Learning: Providing real-life examples and conversation-based exercises can enhance tense comprehension. The juxtaposition of Arabic and English grammatical structures within explicit instruction necessitates a meticulous and systematic approach. Specifically, the typological differences between the two languages, such as the verb-subject-object (VSO) word order prevalent in classical Arabic and the subject-verb-object (SVO) structure dominant in English, demand careful consideration. Furthermore, the morphological richness of Arabic, with its intricate system of verb conjugations and noun inflections, stands in stark contrast to the relatively analytic nature of English grammar. Direct comparison, therefore, should not only highlight these fundamental differences but also provide learners with explicit strategies for transferring grammatical knowledge from their native language to the target language, while mitigating the potential for negative transfer.

Context-based learning, conversely, leverages the principles of communicative language teaching (CLT) to foster a deeper understanding of tense and aspect in a more naturalistic environment. By embedding grammatical concepts within authentic conversational exchanges and real-life scenarios, learners are encouraged to infer grammatical rules and develop an intuitive grasp of tense usage. This approach aligns with Krashen's Input Hypothesis, which posits that comprehensible input is crucial for language acquisition. Through exposure to contextualized examples, learners can internalize the subtle nuances of tense and aspect that are often difficult to convey through explicit grammatical rules alone.

The integration of both explicit and context-based approaches, often referred to as a blended learning methodology, offers a potentially synergistic pathway to enhanced grammatical proficiency. For instance, a teacher might begin with explicit instruction on the formation and function of the past perfect tense in English, followed by contextualized activities that require learners to use the tense in narrative storytelling or hypothetical scenarios. This integration allows learners to benefit from the clarity and precision of explicit instruction while simultaneously developing the fluency and automaticity that come from contextualized practice.

The efficacy of these approaches can be significantly enhanced through the use of technology-enhanced learning (TEL) tools. Interactive grammar exercises, online corpora for authentic language examples, and virtual reality simulations for immersive conversational practice can all contribute to a

more engaging and effective learning experience. By leveraging the affordances of technology, educators can tailor instruction to meet the individual needs of learners and provide them with personalized feedback on their grammatical performance.

Effective grammar instruction for learners of Arabic and English requires a balanced approach that integrates explicit grammatical explanations with context-based learning activities. By carefully considering the typological differences between the two languages, leveraging the principles of communicative language teaching, and incorporating technology-enhanced learning tools, educators can create a learning environment that fosters both grammatical accuracy and communicative fluency.

Continuous feedback helps students identify and correct persistent mistakes. Curriculum Improvement: English language courses should integrate more practical exercises focusing on tense and aspect distinctions. Further studies should explore how dialectal variations within Jordanian Arabic influence English learning. Additionally, research on the effectiveness of AI-assisted learning tools for Jordanian students could provide insights into improving second language acquisition strategies.

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Кросс-лингвистические влияния арабского языка на изучение времен и аспектов английского языка: исследование среди студентов иорданских университетов

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Аннотация

Актуальность темы исследования состоит в том, что процесс освоения второго языка значительно зависит от родного языка учащегося, особенно в тех областях, где существуют структурные различия между двумя языками. Цель исследования состоит в выявлении ключевых проблем, с которыми сталкиваются иорданские студенты в ходе изучения английского языка. Задачи исследования заключаются в том, чтобы рассмотреть межъязыковое влияние арабского языка на студентов-иорданцев, изучающих английский, а также выявить трудности, с которыми сталкиваются студенты при освоении системы времен и видов в английском языке. Методология исследования основана на кросс-лингвистическом подходе и включает в себя методы историографического анализа научного дискурса изучаемой темы; анализ, синтез, обобщение и систематизация, а также метод социологического исследования (глубинное интервью). В исследовании также используется смешанный методологический подход, объединяющий количественный и качественный анализ данных, полученных по итогу интервью со студентами. Результаты исследования показали, что студенты часто опираются на синтаксические и морфологические модели арабского языка, что приводит к негативному переносу, влияющему на их уровень владения английским. Такие образовательные и педагогические факторы, как зависимость от традиционного метода перевода грамматики и ограниченное использование английского языка в повседневном общении, усугубляют выявленные в ходе исследования трудности.

Для цитирования в научных исследованиях

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Ключевые слова

Освоение второго языка, лингвистическое вмешательство, трудности изучения грамматики, контрастивный анализ, теория межъязыковой системы, английский как иностранный язык (EFL)

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