Chapter 2

**Sources of EFL writing difficulties in general and to Arab learners in particular**

Based on the natural order hypothesis (Krashen, 1983), writing is generally the last obtained skill of the four language skills. In general, writing has been described by many researchers as a complicated cognitive task since it requires writers to have careful thought and concentration (Widdowson, 1983; Smith, 1989; White, 1987).

Writing, in general, is important for learners (Gorospe & Rayton, 2022) since they use it as a medium for learning other courses, doing home assignments and projects, communicating with their instructors (Kasem, 2017), and handling daily life issues (Niño & Páez, 2018). Many researchers (Li, 2012; Choi, 2013; Olanezhad, 2015) emphasize the importance of the role of writing in the history of humanity because it allows people to express their feelings, achievements, thoughts, and points of view. In addition, writing connects people from different ethnic, linguistic, and cultural backgrounds.

In addition, it is challenging for native speakers (NS) and non-native speakers (NNS) alike because writers must balance multiple issues such as content, organization, purpose, audience, vocabulary, punctuation, spelling, and mechanics such as capitalization. Writing is especially difficult for nonnative speakers (Ahmed, 2010; Al Shammari, 2018; Alsahafi, 2017; Seitova, 2016; Tahaineh, 2010) because they are expected to create written products that demonstrate mastery of all the above elements in a new language. In addition, mastering all the rules of punctuation, spelling, grammar, and style would not be enough to be fully competent in writing for communicative purposes (Krashen, 1984). Moreover, academic writing usually requires students to use “an elaborate structure and an extensive range of vocabulary” (Al-Mansour, 2015, p. 95) to develop their thoughts, following certain governing rules and practices of mechanics such as aspects of punctuation, grammar, and spelling since they are used to show clarity of thought and content (Swales, 2005). In addition, learners in writing classes should investigate and analyze experiences and beliefs, reading texts in depth to discover the important information and the hidden meaning.

 Furthermore, academic writing requires writers to plan and organize their ideas and
experiences following a formal order or structure that includes an internal division such as a beginning, middle, and end and to support them by sources (Al-Mansour, 2015). While the beginning is the introduction that informs readers about the topic, the middle is the body that explains the topic. The end is the conclusion that wraps up what had been discussed. The prominent features of academic writing are the following: “a proper outline or summary, formal tone, a precise language, presentation of the point of view in the third person, analysis of the facts presented, deductive reasoning, avoiding slangs and abbreviations, referencing, and shaping ideas and concepts in a concrete language with apt words and phrases” (Al-Mansour, 2015, p.96). Writing goes through several developmental processes (Inayah & Nanda, 2016), which require special attention for learning and teaching it from the early stages of language development (Fareed et al., 2016).

Writing in a second language is even more demanding because it is “a complex, challenging, and difficult process” (Alsamadani, 2010) since writers are expected to produce writing samples that are syntactically accurate, semantically acceptable, and culturally appropriate.

The level of teachers’ qualifications and effectiveness also affects the students’ writing (Fareed et al., 2006). If the teachers are not well-trained and employ ineffective teaching methods, their effect will be adverse.

L1 interference has a huge impact on ESL/EFL students’ writing, causing negative transfer. Many research studies in the world indicate that. For example, Seitova (2016) examined common errors committed by 32 Kazakh and Russian speakers in English, analyzing their compositions. Findings show the seven most common mistakes, which were categorized as the following: pluralization, subject-verb agreement, omission or misuse of articles, wrong choice of words, omission or misuse of prepositions, spelling, and misuse of like+Ving form. Previously, Bennui (2008) analyzed the L1 interference in students’ paragraphs in the final exam at three levels: words, sentences, and discourse, employing contrastive analysis, error analysis, interlanguage analysis, and contrastive rhetoric. Data analysis shows strong L1 interference in the three levels. The students use the literal translation of Thai words into English and borrow Thai structural patterns such as word order, subject-verb agreement, and noun determiners.

An earlier study conducted by French (2005) investigated errors in Japanese students’ written products in English at Chukyo University, aiming to determine the level of acceptance among teachers regarding these errors. Results showed a little acceptance of the third person singular (s), article and plural errors in student writing. However, there is a high degree of acceptance of errors regarding sentence combining and sentence fragments, omission of the subject, generalizing or obscuring of subjects, and omission of expected superlatives.

Another study was conducted by Dipolog-Ubanan (2016)to investigate the common errors committed by Chinese students in the English Language and Communication Department at UCSI in Malaysia, whose main difficulties are writing in English. The author analyzed the paragraphs of 30 Chinese students, categorized the types of their errors, and interviewed 10 of them to solicit their views on the writing difficulties they encounter. Data analysis revealed that the most common errors were in word choice and word form, spelling, tenses, use of articles and determiners, number, and agreement of subject and verb. The analysis of the interviews showed that these students were aware of their first language interference in their writing in English and talked frankly about their tendency to translate from L1 to English when they write in English.

 Like many students in the world, Arab students face tremendous difficulties developing syntactically and semantically acceptable sentences, and well-written paragraphs in English in terms of fluency, content, organization, and accuracy using acceptable grammatical patterns, punctuation, and spelling. In addition, they tend to translate their thoughts from
Arabic into English, as instruction is primarily in Arabic (Al-Khasawneh, 2010; Alghizzi, 2017). Moreover, their attitudes are negative toward their writing skills in English. Different researchers conducted their studies on the attitudes of Arabic-speaking students who learn English at the university level. For example, Alkhairy (2013) conducted a study on the academic writing problems faced by Saudi students, who were majoring in English at Taif University. The 75 subjects completed a 32-item questionnaire about whether they face difficulties in writing in English. They reported having weak writing skills. Similarly, Javid and Umer (2014) conducted a study on 194 university-level Saudi EFL learners to investigate their views regarding their writing skills. Analyzing the answers to the 40-item questionnaire revealed that students had a negative view of their writing skills. Alharbi (2018) conducted another study on 55 Saudi students. The participants of the study were 55 students majoring in English to examine the writing difficulties in English among these students. Besides the questionnaire, semi-structured interviews were conducted to gather data. The results showed that the participants faced difficulties in English writing. These difficulties were attributed to the complexities of the language’s syntax and morphology.

They tend to translated their thoughts from Arabic into English (Al-Khasawneh & Saleh, 2010; Alghizzi, 2017) and to write long sentences, repeat themselves, use presentation and elaboration for persuading the reader, and use semantic and phonological parallelism (Monassar, 2014). Many research projects concerning problems of Arab learners of English have concentrated on word and sentence levels following the structural approach of error and contrastive analysis. Other studies focused on the syntactic level such as the excessive use of the definite article “the” or the omission of the copula, the verb to be. However, this study focuses not only on the error sentence level but also the paragraph development in terms of including a topic sentence, a concluding one, and supporting details that are usually expressed implicitly in long clauses with excessive use of “and”, “also”, “which” and “that”.

Qaddumi & Walweel (2018) examined the most common errors among university Palestinian students at Al Istiqlal University in Jericho, Palestine, selecting 22 (12 males and 10 females) students randomly from the modern languages department to take a standardized test in writing in English, examining their compositions’ content, organization, mechanics, language use, and vocabulary. Results show that spelling the words correctly is the major problem among these students (14% of the total number of errors). Semantics comes next (11%) and followed by language (10.3%) and vocabulary (9.2%).

In terms of language use, they not only did not differentiate between the use of present simple tense from continuous tense but also failed to have a subject-verb agreement in their sentences. Based on previous research studies, the researchers attributed these errors to several factors like fossilization, first language interference, and overgeneralization of language rules in English. Sawalmeh (2013) conducted a study on 32 male Saudi students enrolled in a preparatory year at Hail University. Analyzing the students’ essays showed that the use of verb tenses, spelling, and articles was among the most commonly committed. Al Mubarak (2017) reviewed the graduation projects completed by 15 Sudanese EFL learners to examine their writing ability. The researcher concluded that the subjects had poor writing skills and that using prepositions and punctuation marks were the most committed mistakes. Althobaiti (2014) carried out a study on 60 university-level Saudi students at Taif University. Thirty participated in a preparatory program, which supports them academically to help them cope with academic demands before starting studies in their majors by offering courses in computer and information technology, communication skills, and English. The other 30 subjects were English-major students in their second year. The former student group was asked to write paragraphs of around 100 words, whereas the latter wrote essays of around 200 words. The findings showed the following: the first group made the highest number of errors in verb tenses, followed by spelling and word order. The advanced group made the highest number of errors in the use of articles, followed by verb tenses and prepositions.

Al-Khatib (2017) and Mallia (2015) attribute difficulties of EFL writing in general and to Arab heritage students in particular to a number of factors: 1) reader-writer responsibility expectations; (ii) the learners’ developmental stage (interlanguage); (iii) rhetoric, text features and their relatedness to specific genres, and (iv) aspects of positive and negative transfer. Al-Khatib (2017) adds culture-specific schemata. Others attribute the problems of Arab EFL learners to linguistic incompetence, lack of rhetorical structural mastery of English texts, transfer of first language and cultural patterns, and outdated teaching methods (Abu Rass, 2011 & 2015, Al-Khuweileh and Al-Shoumali, 2000; Al-Hazmi and Schofield, 2007; Fitze and Glasgow, 2009). In summary, it can also be seen that some of the challenges of Arab students writing in academic English can be attributed to Arabic culture, educational practices, and discourse (Al Khuweileh & Al Shoumali, 2000; Al Hazmi & Schofield 2007), particularly regarding the organization of thoughts (Al-Khasawneh, 2010), which are often a product of successful cohesion. Khatter (2019) adds the tendency of learners becoming more and more digital and visual as another difficulty that EFL teachers might face in teaching EFL students how to write well in English. She also mentions the reluctance of Arab students to write in their L1, which affects their confidence negatively in their ability to write in English as the target language.

The connection between culture and rhetoric is not a new concept. In fact, it was raised by Oliver (1965), who stated that:

Rhetoric is a mode of thinking or a mode of finding all available means for the achievement of a designated end….Cultural anthropologists point out given acts and objects appear vastly different in different cultures, depending on the values attached to them. Psychologists investigating perception are increasingly insistent that what is perceived depends upon the observer’s perceptual frame of reference (p.x -xi).

The Focus on surface-level writing errors at the expense of written discourse and genre analysis may be one of the key causes. Additionally, insufficient training of teachers may be a substantial underlying factor, with emphasis being given to product- and process-writing, but perhaps less so at the text level.

When L1 and L2 are similar, it will be easy for language learner to learn the L2 (Celce-Murcia and Larsen-Freeman (1999) and Cook (1999). They added that when L1 and L2 are different, it will be difficult for language learner to learn L2; they encounter more difficulties in their writing (Timina, 2013) Since Arabic language is different from English Language, Arab learners of English, young as well as adults, commit many mistakes and errors (Mourssi, 2013).

Besides the above-mentioned problems, some scholars pointed at methods of instruction as one of the problems that hinders English learning effectively among Arab students since in many cases and situations, instruction emphasizes writing as a product rather than a process. Therefore, teachers emphasize grammar and punctuation rather than decisions about the content and the organization of ideas. As many EFL learners in the world, Arab students share similar problems in learning to write well in English. For example, they are exposed to the rules of writing and grammar from the outset without developing their ability to express their ideas. The employed teaching methods and strategies might not be appropriate since writing examinations include inappropriate questioning techniques such as multiple-choice, short answer and matching in addition to providing learners with topic sentences that should be elaborated (Khatter, 2019). In addition, they lack motivation and practice in and out of the classroom (Al-Khsawneh, 2010; Khatter, 2019). Ezza (2010) adds that Arab EFL learners’ writing fail “to handle a variety of assignments as prescribed by the syllabus that has constituted their language training” (p. 33). In a more updated work, Ezza (2014) claims that although some graduates have developed paragraphing competence, it is noted that they could not write curriculum vitae and application letters or at least not in a least professional way. He mentions that recent writing instruction in tertiary level in the Arab world does not follow the developments of the linguistic theory such as contrastive rhetoric, discourse analysis, and genre analysis. In addition, most writing courses adopt pedagogy of the 1950s and 1960s that controlled composition with lexicon and grammar practice were the norm. Ezza's review to writing courses in four Arab universities, King Saud University in Saudi Arabia, Birzeit University in Palestine, Qatar University in Qatar and An-Najah University in Palestine, revealed that the focus in these courses was on lexicon and grammatical exercises. Despite the fact that the offered writing courses to students who are majoring in EFL from their first year of their studies to the third address paragraph and essay writing, introducing the components of the paragraph such as the topic, thesis statement, supporting sentences, the concluding sentences and transition words, the focus is mainly on grammar exercises.

Some researchers extended their investigation of the writing errors made by Arab EFL students administering questionnaires and conducting interviews with writing instructors as well as their students. For example, Ahamed (2016) who analyzed the writing errors that Saudi EFL university students of College of Science & Arts, Tanumah at King Khalid University, included a questionnaire asking the 20 participants who participated in the research to respond to 46 questions, seeking their perceptions and evaluation to their writing abilities. He conducted a structured interview with the writing teachers, aiming to explore their opinion about their learners' performance in academic writing. Results reveal that 90% consider writing as a major problem for students; 80% think that writing lessons are difficult for them and 60% think that it is the least important language skill for them. Despite that, 80% agree that writing improves their academic achievement and 75% think that it strengthens their critical thinking. In addition, 90% of the participants think that the two-hour weekly writing lessons are not enough and 80% don't think that they write on a regular basis. Regarding types of errors, 85% of students consider spelling as a serious problem. English grammar is a major challenge when writing an essay. When students write essays in English, 75 % cannot identify the topic sentence, and 90% of students cannot provide enough relevant ideas. 85% expressed their inability of writing cohesive texts. A similar percentage expressed their difficulty in writing right spelled words and in organizing their ideas. Similarly, a high percentage (90%) of students struggle with including the right punctuation and linking sentences together. 80% have their difficulty in expressing their ideas easily when writing an essay.

Analyzing the teachers' interviews show that 93% of the EFL university teachers believe that the performance in academic writing of Saudi EFL university learners at the College of Science and Arts in Tanumah is poor, relating mainly to L1 interference and inappropriate teaching methods and strategies. In addition, they think that their learners lack adequate lexical stock as well as enough writing practice. Moreover, these learners don't get suitable feedback and instruction regarding discourse features for writing coherent and cohesive texts.

While Ababneh (2017) recommends EFL teachers to consider some of the causes of errors in the teaching strategies for improving the students' writing skills, Abushihab (2014) emphasizes analyzing interlingual or transfer errors as an important strategy in learning process.

***2.1 Inter-language***

According to Abdulmoneim (2000) and AbiSamra (2003), most of the syntactic errors committed by Arab EFL learners in their written production stem from interference of their first language. Negative transfer occurs in cases of differences between the L1 and L2 (Abdulmoneim, 2000). In the context of learning another language, transfer refers to the influence of the learner’s native language (Bardovi-Harlig & Sprouse (2018). According to Corder (1971), interlingual or error transfer happens when the learner transfers his/her first language habits in terms of patterns, systems or rules, which may prevent him/her from acquiring the patterns and rules of the target language. Negative transfer or interference occurs when the first language influence leads to errors in the use of the target language (Bardovi-Harlig & Sprouse (2018). In contrast, positive transfer or facilitation occurs when the first language influence leads to immediate or rapid acquisition.

Many scholars conducted research in the last century to investigate errors made by Arabic-speaking EFL learners in their writing. Others who conducted recent studies show similar findings concerning Arab EFL students’ serious problems in witting English that would obscure their ability of expressing their thoughts on paper. They mainly stem from first language interference (AbiSamara, 2003; Ridha, 2012) and are also systematic and classifiable (Al-Buainain, 2007). These problems cover many areas such as syntax, morphology and spelling (Al-Buainain, 2007), semantics (Al-Shormani, 2010), and use of prepositions (Tahaineh, 2010). Other problems stem from cultural interference (Abu Rass, 2011) besides other types of errors.

***2.1.1Transferring the stylistics of Arabic***

Regarding syntax, Arab writers tend to use long sentences, repetition, presentation and elaboration (Johnstone as cited in Almehmadi, 2012). In writing long sentences, they use coordination and subordination, two syntactic structures that are utilized in writing in both Arabic and English (Othman, 2004), with a preference to coordination. While English prefers subordination to coordination, Arabic prefers the use of coordination to subordination (Diab, 1996). Othman (2004) conducted a research study to prove or disprove this claim, making use of three types of corpus texts: Texts originally written in English, others originally written in Arabic and, texts translated from English into Arabic, counting the number of occurrences of instances of subordination and coordination, which turned into rations for comparisons. The researcher concluded that the use of subordination and coordination is common in Arabic and in English; however, while the former is less frequent in Arabic, the latter is more common in English. In other words, coordination is the main key for coherences in Arabic like subordination in English. In addition, subordination in English writing is a considered as a sign of maturity and sophistication. The preference for subordination over coordination was obvious in the translated texts from English into Arabic, following the norms of the source language rather than the target language. These texts sounded more English than Arabic.

***2.1.2 Repetition***

Repetition takes place by writing more synonyms in the same sentence (Johnstone as cited in Almehmadi, 2012). For instance, the phrase "demolition and destruction" could be repeated twice in one sentence to convey emphasis, or repeating ideas for the sake of convincing the reader. Therefore, redundancy is also obvious in the writing of Arabic-speaking student. According to Al-Jubouri (1984) repetition is used as strategy employed by Arab students for making arguments at three levels: the phrase, the clause, and the larger discourse.

***2.1.3 Presentation and elaboration***

Presentation and elaboration are features of argumentation in Arabic prose. Thus, Arabic speaking students do not provide different perspectives in their arguments. Also, they often talk indirectly around the topic repeating phrases before stating the main points (Dweik as cited in Alsamadani, 2010). They argue through presentation and elaboration (Johnstone as cited in Almehmadi, 2012).

In addition, they use the coordinating conjunctions “and” and “as” excessively, which are parallel to “wa” and “fa” in Arabic. Al-Kharesheh (2011) claims that Arabic sentences usually start with ‘and’, which is equivalent to “and”, and usually Arab students transfer the stylistic of Arabic into English. When Al-Khreshes (2011) analyzed the composition test of 120 Jordanian students Jordanian schools, located in the south of Jordan, he found the “carryover of Arabic (L1) syntactic structure into English (L2)” (p. 426 ) committing 426 errors, using one English syntactic category, the coordinating conjunction “and”, which is equivalent to “wa” in Arabic. He attributing that to first language interference, interlingual interference and concluded that the subjects of his study used their L1 as a learning strategy in their learning of English in order to solve their learning and communication problems that face them while learning English, depending specifically on interlingual strategy to facilitate their language learning process.

In addition, Al-Khatib (2001) examined Jordanian students’ personal letter writing in English and found that Arab learners’ sentences are very lengthy. Earlier studies show similar findings such as the study conducted by Koch (1983) who analyzed English essays by Arabic-speaking English learners and found that majority of the learners made extensive use of devices such as parallelism and the repetition of the most powerful words and phrases. Koch concluded that Arab learners of English transfer certain features of Arabic discourse, which may influence Arab students to repeat words or phrases in English.

Many researchers note that Arab learners of English tend to write long sentences with coordinating conjunctions (Al-Khatib, 2001; Modhish, 2012; Oshima & Hougeas cited in Almehmadi, 2012). They often talk around the topic and repeat phrases before stating the main points (Dweik as cited in Alsamadani, 2010).

1. *In the last decade we all witnessed some serious developments and changes when it comes to technology such as: new advanced mobile phones that could replace a lot of things like an alarm clock, cameras, notebooks and so much more, in addition to that video games are getting so realistic in terms of graphics and visuals which makes them more appealing, for instance a video game called’’ GTA ‘’ this video game is basically a virtual world that you can do whatever you want in it with your fictional character , this game can seem so realistic that many children are taking it way too seriously ,and it's quite easy to get addicted to it.*
2. *But there are negative qualities about her, like: she is irresponsible person like she doesn’t do her homework for school, doesn’t listen to her parents talk, when she get into trouble she just run away without listening to anyone.*

In addition, the degree of explicitness and implicitness of the message poses another difference between Arabic and English stylistics (Mohamed as cited in Mohamed & Omar, 2000). For instance, Arab writers usually avoid conveying their messages explicitly, assuming that readers are responsible for understanding the message. The following examples of lengthy sentences could be considered as a proof to first language interference.

 ***2.1.4*** ***The use of imagery, metaphors and simile***

Another influence on Arabic writers of English is the discourse style of Arabic, characterized by the “use of imagery, metaphors and simile in a beautiful clear manner,” with modern rhetoric in Arabic often more associated with literature and fiction more than academic writing. (Qaddumi, 1995, p. 158). Regarding Arab academic writing in English, early studies such as Kaplan (1966) observed that speakers of Arabic transfer rhetorical patterns from Arabic into their English writing, citing that Arab students’ paragraph development is based on a complex series of parallel constructions. The Arabic text organization is “circular and non-cumulative.” Arab writers might come to the same point two or three times from different angles so that an L1 English reader “has the curious feeling that nothing is happening" (Allen as cited in Sa'adeddin, 1989, p. 36). In other studies, Koch (1983) noted the transference of Arab stylistics, such as the extensive use of parallelism and repetition of the most powerful words and phrases.

Other researchers claim that Arab writers often transfer long sentences with coordinating conjunctions from Arabic (Al-Khatib, 2001; Oshima & Hougeas as cited in Almehmadi, 2012), talk around the topic, and repeat phrases before stating the main points (Dweik as cited in Alsamadani, 2010). In one study, Khuwaileh and Al Shoumali (2000) analyzed the writing of Jordanian students, reporting a lack of organization of thoughts, without appropriate linking of ideas. This is resonated in research by Lakkis and Abdel Malak (2002), who also studied the writing of Jordanian college students. In another study, Al-Khatib (2001) examined Jordanian students’ personal letter writing in English and found that Arab learners’ sentences are very lengthy and emotionally appealing, thus often clouding cohesion. The features described here stand in contrast to English text, which is usually expected to be linear, coherent, and concise (Sa'adeddin, 1989), and possibly categorize Arabic writing as ‘reader responsible,’ (Hinds, 1987), in that it is up to the reader, not the writer, to construct meaning of writing.

***2.2 Intra-language***

Dulay and Burt (1974) categorized these errors into three groups: interference, intralingual, and unique errors. The results of their study showed that only 5% of the errors were interference while 87% were intralingual and 8% were unique. The researchers concluded that children do not use their L1 habits in the process of learning a new language. Richards (1970) talked about intralingual errors or developmental ones, which are due to the learned second or foreign language. According to Richards (1970), intralingual or developmental errors are “items produced by the learner which reflect not the structure of the mother tongue, but generalizations based on partial exposure to the target language. The learner, in this case, tries to “derive the rules behind the data to which he/she has been exposed, and may develop hypotheses that correspond neither to the mother tongue nor to the target language” (Richards, 1970, p. 6). Richards (1970) classified intralingual or developmental errors into four categories: overgeneralization, ignorance of rule restrictions, incomplete application of rules, and semantic errors.

***2.3 Peculiarities of English as a target language***

English and Arabic differ tremendously due to their different alphabets, sounds, vowel patterns, pronunciation, capitalization style, articles, and the writing style (Shabbir & Bughio, 2009). In addition, "English cohesion is text-based, specified, change-oriented, and non-additive; while Arabic cohesion is context-based, generalized, repetition-oriented, and additive" (Al-Khatib, 2017, p. 75). Moreover, English is written from left to right and Arabic from right to left (AbiSamara, 2003 & Sabbir &Bughio, 2009). AbiSamara (2003) categorized the differences as follows: the written language, sentence structure and word order, nouns and pronouns, verbs and verbals, adjectives and adverbials, and articles. She provided examples for each category. For example, in the first category, the written language, she included three facts: Arabic is written from right to left and spelling is phonetic, and there is no distinction between upper and lower case.

 Furthermore, culturally, both languages are poles apart (Abu Rass, 2011; Ahmed, 2010 & Qaddumi, 1995; Shabbir & Bughio, 2009). Arab learners of English not only transfer the stylistic features of Arabic as their first language (Abdulmoeim, 2000; AbiSamara, 2003 & Diab, 1996, but also cultural modes of thinking (Abu Rass, 2011; Ahmed, 2010 & Qaddumi, 1995) and prior learning experiences (Al-Haj, 1996; Al-Issa, 2005; Eilam, 2002; Sonleitner & Khelifa, 2005). In addition, "the Arabic-speaking community is oralized, collectivist, high-contact, reader-responsible; in contrast, the English-speaking community is literate, individualistic, low-contact, writer-responsible" (Al-Khatib, 2017, p. 75).

***2.4 Contrastive analysis***

Contrasting both languages is significant in teaching the target language since it benefits teachers in understanding the difference between the basic grammar of the two languages. Based on these analyses, teachers will be able to predict errors or difficulties in order to take care of them. Transfer happens in two forms: positive and negative. Positive transfer occurs when the structure of two languages is similar; it results in the accurate construction of a language. Negative transfer, on the other hand, occurs when learners use incorrect structures in a new language, due to grammatical differences between L1 and L2 that are not understood by the learner. An example from the Arabic language that can be used to better understand the negative transfer is the copula omission (Benmamoun, 2000). Employing contrastive analysis in teaching writing is required to remind the learners from time to time that they make mistakes because of the influence of their mother tongue. If they are not reminded of this, they will revert to the use of their mother tongue very often, specifically whenever they fail to identify a specific grammatical rule or a particular word of the second language. They will understand that literal translation may not work in all cases. They might also understand that reality can be seen from several different perspectives and that human minds formulate concepts in different and unique fashions. They will realize that their mother tongue works differently from the second language they are learning.

Housen and Pierrard (2005) believe that most Arab students’ errors are due to performance mistakes, mother-tongue interference, or false intra-language analogy. Therefore, contrastive analysis which has been defined as “an inductive investigative approach based on the distinctive elements in a language” (Glossary of Linguistic Terms, 2004) is a relevant approach in this context. According to Howatt & Widdowson (2004), this analysis is used in Applied Linguistics to understand the differences and similarities of sentence structure between two or more languages. Teachers use contrastive analysis to understand the transfer and shift from one language to another and to compare the foreign language with the native one in order to adopt methods and techniques to meet the needs of the individual student (Byram, 2000; Gass & Selinker, 2008).

 AbiSamara attributes the sentence structure and word order in Arabic to the stylistics of the Qur’an, the holy book of Muslims, which is a main source of the Arabic language. As a result of the influence of the stylistics of the Qur’an, “writers aim at rhythmical balance and coordination, with the split between subject and predicate occurring midway in a sentence” (p. 39). In addition, coordination is preferred over subordination, and sentences usually begin with “and or so”. Regarding word order, Arabic is V-S-O, verb- subject-object. In contrast, the word order in English is S-V-O, subject-verb-object. In addition, Arabic uses a that clause (\*I want that you stay), but English uses infinitive (\**I want you to stay*). Adding personal pronouns to verbs is normal in Arabic. For example, it is acceptable to say or write \**My father he lives in California*. While using relative pronouns, there is no human/nonhuman distinction, and pronoun object remains in a restrictive clause at it appears in the following sentence:\**Here is the student which you met her last week.* In addition, singular noun is used after a numeral above ten: \**He has eleven cousin*.

There are many differences between Arabic and English regarding verbs and verbals. For instance, there is equivalent of auxiliary *do* in Arabic, no verb *be* in present tense, no modal verbs, and no gerund or infinitive forms of verbs. The following errors that follow the classification order of errors appear in the writing of Arab students. \**You have a brother?* ; \*They going to the movies. \*Where the post office?

In addition, perspectives of tense and time in Arabic are also different from English. For example, the past perfect is formed with *be*, and the reported speech keeps the original. Simple present tense covers meaning of simple and progressive in English. Therefore, it is not surprising to see these errors that match the order of the three differences. *1.\*They were eat. 2. \*She said she is leaving. 3. \*She working now. \*She working every day.*

While adjectives precede nouns in English, they follow them in Arabic. \**a book interesting long.*

The article system also differs. In Arabic, the indefinite article doesn’t exist (\**He is student.*)

and the definite article (al-) is used for days of the week, some months, some place names and in many idiomatic expressions. \**He went to the Peru. \*He is still in the bed*.

 Ahamed (2016) highlighted the differences between Arabic essays and English regarding the concluding sentence in the paragraph and the concluding paragraph in the essay. The conclusion in Arabic essays should bring something new where in English it should match with the topic sentence. Arab students are not familiar with the circular structure in the English essay where the topic sentence and the conclusion have the same idea since the conclusion in Arabic has to bring something new.

When Muslim Arabs make appointments or contracts, they usually say *insha Allah*, which means with God willing - only God knows the future and is the only one who will determine whether the contract or deal will be carried out. Similarly, often the name of God is placed at the top of pieces of writing, thus attributing everything to God’s will (Al-Khatib, 2001). Qaddumi (1995) illustrates how the culture is manifested in hospitality and making deals and contracts. He explains that at the beginning of such interactions, Arabs offer drinks such as tea and coffee without asking the guests, assuming that guests will accept without hesitation. In this way, both the host and guests play out their assigned roles within this context, which has been dictated by God and requires no explanation. Qaddumi’s cultural illustration resonates with the way in which Muslim Arab learners of English seem to draw on cultural beliefs in their writing (Abu Rass, 2013; Qaddumi, 1995). For example, belief in God is unquestioned, and in a bid to comply with the spirit and morality of the society, Arab writers often assume readers will agree with them on what they write (Derrick & Gmuca, 1985), thus deprioritizing the clarity usually valued in English language writing.

Another influence on Arabic writers of English is the discourse style of Arabic, characterized by the “use of imagery, metaphors and simile in a beautiful clear manner,” with modern rhetoric in Arabic often more associated with literature and fiction more than academic writing (Qaddumi, 1995, p. 158). Regarding Arab academic writing in English, early studies such as Kaplan (1966) observed that speakers of Arabic transfer rhetorical patterns from Arabic into their English writing, citing that Arab students’ paragraph development is based on a complex series of parallel constructions. The Arabic text organization is “circular and non-cumulative.” Arab writers might come to the same point two or three times from different angles so that an L1 English reader “has the curious feeling that nothing is happening" (Allen as cited in Sa'adeddin, 1989, p. 36). In other studies, Koch (1983) noted transference of Arab stylistics, such as the extensive use of parallelism and repetition of the most powerful words and phrases. The following example illustrates the tendency of repeating words to convey messages: *Unfortunately, my bad luck* ***destroys me and affects me so much****, and I wish that it changes (*Al-Khatib, 2017).

The researcher (Abu Rass) has observed that Arab Muslim students in Israel seem to experience the same challenges that have been mentioned by some scholars who examined difficulties faced by Arab students writing in English. In particular, it has been observed that these learners have difficulty in producing cohesive texts, especially linking between the ideas and sentences as well as presenting evidence-supported arguments, often leaving readers puzzled. This is evidenced in the extract below, in which an Arabic-speaking learner in a first-year writing course for future EFL teachers was asked to explain why she chose to study English at the college where she is enrolled:

*English is global language it is used everywhere and it’s the language you’ll be able to use most widely, as it’s spoken in more countries than any other language.*

I love English from childhood I spent all my time at Disney’s channel watching programs and cartoons in English after I grew up I decided to learn English and to raise a society who loves it.

*Actually there is no specific reason that made me to choose XX collage. My sister studied here English courses she advised me in it. I asked about the collage, I saw it and I liked it so I registered in*

The student here responds to the writing prompt with a list of responses: the pervasiveness of the English language, her love for English, and her sister’s advice/own impression of the college. The response is difficult to follow for a number of reasons. Firstly, there is an absence of an overall Hypertheme (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004) to assist the reader in understanding the purpose of Ro’s writing. It seems assumed that the reader should be able to make the connection between the writing prompt and the response. Secondly, in the first paragraph, there no connection is made between the content and the purpose of the response, which is to explain why the learner chose to study English. The reader is left to make this connection on his or her own. Following this, without any transition, the learner explains her love for English, basing it on her childhood experiences, yet the cause and effect are merely implied. The third paragraph is another abrupt transition, in which the learner provides two reasons for selecting this college, though it is unclear whether there is a connection between the two reasons (her sister’s advice) and her own impression. In summary, this essay lacks cohesiveness, both in its overall organization as well as in its logical unfolding.

Given that this was the first essay (E1) written in the course, it is reasonable that creating cohesiveness would be a challenge for the learners, as they had been exposed to very little writing instruction during secondary school, whether in Literary Arabic (L2), or Hebrew (L3), or English (L4) Amara and Mari’ (2002). In the case, a marked improvement in creating coherence can be seen in the following extract from the first part of her final essay (E2):

*Online education is a convenient way for acquiring education. Online education is a type of educational system that is delivered through the internet to students using their home computers. There is a lot of benefits for online learning such as availability, low-cost, and time-saving.*

*First of all, unlike the traditional education, online courses are easy accessible. Online courses can be pursued by anyone who has access to an internet device from any place of the world. For example, when someone lives in rural areas and he cannot attend the university because it’s probably located tens or hundreds of miles away, online programs will give him the chance to achieve his dream*.

The use of a clear Hypertheme helps the reader understand the purpose of the essay, without having to rely on the prompt, as in E1. The first paragraph describes online education and claims three benefits. The second paragraph sets out to espouse the ‘availability’ of online education, backing up the claim with an example. Overall, it can be seen that Ro has progressed in creating coherence, yet still requires further refinement. For example, in the first paragraph, the reader is first told of the benefits of online education and then is told what it actually is, albeit realized through an awkward repetition of the Theme “online education”, thus obfuscating the relationship between the two sentences. The second paragraph unfolds cohesively, moving from the claim that online courses are “accessible” to the example, clearly signposted by the Themes of “first of all” and “for example”.

***Contrastive rhetoric***

Contrastive Rhetoric (CR) compares discourse structures across
cultures and genres, according to Kaplan (1966). It studies similarities and differences between writing in first and second languages, aiming to understand the influence of writing conventions in one language on the writing of the other (Connor, 1999). According to Richards & Schmidt (2002), the first language and culture usually affect writing in a second language, including discourse structure, topic, audience and register. It is also related to many theories like theories of applied linguistics, linguistic relativity,
rhetoric, text linguistics, discourse types and genres, literacy, and translation (Connor,1999).

***2.5 Error analysis***

Error analysis is defined as “the process of determining the incidence, nature,
causes and consequences of unsuccessful language” (James, 2013, p. 2), and it is accounted for

almost all errors made by second language learners including those that result from the first language learning and others that are not necessarily related to the learners' native language. Diagnosing and identifying errors are the most important steps for understanding the process of second language acquisition and for helping learners learn it better (Saville, 2006). Error analysis is used as a technique to study learners’ errors, indicating sources of errors and making inferences about the language learning process. It helps writing instructors and learners as well. Instructors would learn more about the complexity of the writing process of their learners, and learners will be consciously aware of their problems to overcome them. Thus, they are different from mistakes, which are unsystematic deviations (Coder, 1981).

Some pioneers in second language acquisition conducted research studies in the sixties and seventies of the last century in order to understand errors and their sources. For example, Corder (1967) highlighted that language learners’ errors are important to study because they reflect the state of the learners’ knowledge. Corder added that errors are not just something to be eradicated, but rather can be important in and of themselves, as developing features for language learners. Corder (1974) called for analyzing errors systematically by language learners would help them focusing on areas that need reinforcement in teaching. Selinker (1972) introduced the term interlanguage. It refers to the systematic knowledge of the learned L2, which is independent of the first language of the learner and the target language.

# Conclusion

This chapter discusses sources of EFL college students’ writing difficulties in general and to Arab students in specific. Inter-language refers to first language interference is the main cause of writing problems among EFL learners, especially at early stages of learning English. Negative transfer happens when L2 differs from L1, and EFL learners transfer their first language habits, systems or rules, which affects them negatively in acquiring the rules of the target language. However, positive transfer occurs when the influence of the first language affects the acquisition of the target language positively, leading to immediate acquisition.

Intralingual errors are developmental ones that reflect the structure of the mother tongue and generalizations based on partial exposure to the target language. In this case, the learner derives rules from the language s/he is exposed to and may develop hypotheses that are neither related to his/her mother tongue nor to the target language.

 Another source of errors among Arab students is the huge difference between their first language, Arabic and the target language, English. They differ in their alphabets, sounds, vowels, pronunciation, capitalization, articles, writing style, and cohesion system. In addition, English is left to right, and Arabic has an opposite direction. Moreover, the sentence structure in both languages is different. Other differences include word order, nouns and pronouns, verbs and verbals, adjectives and adverbials, and articles. Moreover, they adopt different cultural patterns and modes of thinking.

 Error analysis is a necessary technique for understanding studying learners’ errors, pointing at their sources and making inferences about the process of language learning. It benefits teachers and students. Similarly, contrastive analysis is vital for understanding the similarities and differences in both languages in terms of grammar, helping learners to predict errors. In addition, it reminds learners of the influence of their first language and culture on their writing. Moreover, it helps them internalize that literal translation does not work in many cases, and they have to understand the context first.

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