

The Influence of French on the Writing Skills of Learners of Arabic as a Second Language

An Analytical Study of a Sample of Written Errors among Students at the International School Alexandre Dumas

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Abstract:

This study examines the written errors produced by French-speaking learners of Arabic as a second language through a field study conducted at the International School Alexandre Dumas (Algiers). The written productions of a sample of thirty students were collected and analyzed. The student's errors were classified across linguistic levels, including morphological, grammatical, orthographic, semantic, and structural.

The findings indicate that orthographic errors were the most frequent (44.3%), followed by morphological errors (31.7%), structural errors (14.9%), and grammatical errors (9.1%). These errors are attributed to a range of linguistic and pedagogical factors, most notably first-language interference (French), limited writing practice, and insufficient self-revision skills.

The study concludes by proposing remedial strategies for teachers and curriculum makers, including targeted corrective exercises and the integration of educational technology to enhance learners' writing skills.

Keywords: Influence; French language; writing skills; Arabic as a second language; Alexandre Dumas High School.

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Introduction

Learning Arabic as a second language is a complex linguistic and pedagogical issue, particularly for non-native speakers in foreign educational contexts such as French-speaking international schools. This challenge is especially significant in Algeria, given the coexistence of Arabic and French and the resulting linguistic interference, which affects the acquisition of language skills most notably writing. Writing is a skill that requires strong control of morphological, syntactic, and orthographic systems, in addition to accurate lexical selection that ensures semantic

precision and textual cohesion. However, learners of Arabic as a second language especially in Francophone settings face multiple difficulties stemming from the structural differences between Arabic and French.

Within this context, the present study aims to identify and analyze the impact of French on the writing skill of students at the International School Alexandre Dumas in Algeria, through a field study based on an analysis of a sample of their written productions. The study seeks to uncover manifestations of cross-linguistic influence in their writing at the levels of morphology, grammar, structure, and spelling/orthography, and to interpret these phenomena in light of linguistic, psychological, and socio cultural factors. It also aims to offer pedagogical proposals to reduce French interference and improve Arabic writing skills among these learners.

I. Methodological Framework

1. Research Questions

This study is guided by a central question that is: To which extent French influences the writing skill of learners of Arabic as a second language at the International School Alexandre Dumas in Algeria? From this main question, several sub-questions emerge in order to capture the different dimensions of the phenomenon under investigation

- What are the most prominent manifestations of linguistic interference between French and Arabic in students' written productions?
- What are the main types of writing errors made by learners of Arabic as a second language?
- How do French grammatical and stylistic structures influence sentence building and syntactic patterns in students' written Arabic productions?
- What pedagogical strategies can be adopted to reduce the effect of French and improve Arabic writing skills?

2. Research Design and Method

This research is a descriptive-analytical study with a statistical component. It draws on more than one methodological approach, the descriptive and the analytical methods. The descriptive method was selected for its ability to present the linguistic phenomenon as it occurs in authentic contexts by surveying and describing its nature and prevalence. In parallel, the analytical method was employed to classify and interpret the errors identified in students' writing according to the linguistic levels adopted in the study, thereby enabling a more precise understanding of their characteristics and underlying causes.

3. Study Population

The research population consists of students enrolled at the International School Alexandre Dumas in Algeria. These learners come from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds and learn Arabic within a Francophone school context.

4. Study Sample

A sample was selected using simple random sampling from secondary-level students to ensure adequate representation of the study population. Variation in learners' proficiency levels was taken into account in order to identify both shared and individual writing error patterns.

5. Data Collection Tool

The primary data collection instrument was a written expression task. The instrument included several composition topics that allowed learners freedom of choice in accordance with their interests and linguistic ability, facilitating the observation of writing errors and the analysis of their potential causes. The topics included: Mother, Love of Homeland, A Life Experience, and A Story You Liked.

II. Theoretical Framework

1. The Concept and Importance of a Second Language

A second language is a language acquired after the learner has developed competence in their first language. It is used in multiple communicative contexts within the learner's surrounding environment. Second-language learning often occurs in contexts that provide some degree of exposure to the target language, supporting its consolidation and functional use. In Algeria, Arabic constitutes a second language for a considerable number of foreign learners.

2. Writing Skill in Second-Language Learning

Writing is one of the most complex language skills, as it requires control over morphology, syntax, and orthography, as well as the ability to organize ideas and express them in a coherent text. Learners of Arabic as a second language face particular challenges in writing due to structural differences between the Arabic and their own writing systems.

3. Types of Writing Errors

Writing errors made by learners of Arabic as a second language can be classified according to the linguistic level affected. Major categories include morphological errors (incorrect inflection of verbs and nouns), grammatical errors (issues affecting sentence grammar such as agreement and definiteness), orthographic errors (spelling conventions such as "Hamza", punctuation), semantic errors (misuse of vocabulary outside appropriate contexts), and structural errors (sentence construction and word order that negatively affects meaning).

4. Error Analysis Approach

Error analysis is a key approach in applied linguistics. It examines learners' language errors in second-language learning in order to diagnose them, understand their causes, and use findings to improve teaching. Following classic accounts, error analysis typically proceeds through three main stages: identifying the error, describing it (including classification), and interpreting it by tracing linguistic, psychological, or instructional causes. Some frameworks add a final stage focused on remediation and correction.

III. Field Study

1. Overview of the International School Alexandre Dumas

The International School Alexandre Dumas is located in Ben Aknoun, Algiers. It is a distinguished educational institution that adopts a bilingual system in its curricula. Arabic is taught there as a second language within an organized academic framework that takes into account the specific needs of foreign learners. The school welcomes students from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds and promotes multilingualism and intercultural openness through modern teaching approaches that integrate Arabic into meaningful communicative situations.

2. Learner Characteristics

Students at the International School Alexandre Dumas display varied levels of proficiency and diverse cultural backgrounds. Some come from Arabic-speaking families, whereas others begin learning Arabic for the first time in a formal educational setting. Their duration of Arabic learning ranges from one to five years, and their motivations include communicating with relatives or Arabic-speaking communities, academic achievement, and openness to other cultures.

3. Data Analysis

The study we conducted in the field of analyzing writing errors among students of the international school "Alexandre Dumas," from different nationalities, was analyzed according to statistical tables. Through these tables, we were able to interpret and analyze the data based on the results revealed by the statistical process, as follows:

Table 1 shows the nationalities included in the research sample, their number, and their percentage in comparison to the total number of individuals in the sample.

Table 1. Nationalities Represented in the Study Sample

Nationality	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Nigerian	1	2%
French	37	74%
Malian	2	4%
Chadian	5	10%

Canadian	4	8%
Cameroonian	2	4%
Total	50	100%

Source: Prepared by the researchers.

Table 1 shows that the French nationality is the most represented (37 occurrences; 74%). This can be explained by the school's affiliation with France and the dominant use of French in the educational environment. The Chadian nationality ranks second (10%), followed by Canadian (8%), Malian (4%), and Cameroonian (4%). These proportions highlight the school's multicultural composition and support the identification of both shared and individual error patterns in Arabic writing.

Table 2. Writing Topics Selected by Students

No.	Writing Topic	Frequency	Percentage (%)
1	Mother	20	40%
2	Love of Homeland	15	30%
3	A Life Experience	11	22%
4	A Story You Liked	4	8%
Total		50	100%

Source: Prepared by the researchers.

Table 2 indicates a clear preference for the topic "Mother" (40%), followed by "Love of Homeland" (30%). "A Life Experience" ranked third (22%), while "A Story You Liked" ranked last (8%).

Table 3. Distribution of Writing Errors by Linguistic Level

Linguistic Level	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Morphological	204	31.7%
Structural	96	14.9%
Grammatical	85	9.1%
Orthographic	285	44.3%
Total Errors	643	100%

Source: Prepared by the researchers.

By examining the data in the previous table, it becomes clear that the writing errors made by students at the Alexandre Dumas International School can be categorized into four levels, as follows:

1. Morphological Errors

These relate to the incorrect inflection or conjugation of verbs and nouns. Their number reached (204) errors out of a total of (643) errors, representing 31.7% of the total.

2. *Syntactic Errors*

These are errors related to deviations from the general structural system of phrases and sentences in Arabic. They are significant at both the grammatical and morphological levels. Upon analyzing these errors within the total number of student errors, it was found that syntactic errors amounted to (92) out of (643), representing 14.6%.

3. *Grammatical Errors*

These involve errors related to case endings ('i'rāb), singular, dual, and plural forms, gender agreement (masculine and feminine), particles, definiteness and indefiniteness, and related grammatical markers. The analysis showed that grammatical errors reached (85) out of (643) total errors, representing 9.1%.

4. *Orthographic (Spelling) Errors*

These involve violations of Arabic spelling rules, particularly in the use of the hamza, punctuation marks in their various types and positions, the distinction between open tā' (ت) and tied tā' (ة), and writing the letter hā' (هـ) at the end of words. Analysis revealed that orthographic errors amounted to (285) out of (643), representing 44.3%.

Thus, orthographic errors ranked first among the errors made by learners of Arabic as a second language, followed by morphological errors in second place, syntactic errors in third place, and finally grammatical errors in fourth place.

At this stage, we relied on the processes of analyzing and classifying the errors, then describing them according to the levels to which they belong, clarifying their various subcategories, and providing examples of the errors made by learners of Arabic as a second language, as follows:

A. Morphological Errors:

Morphology is considered one of the most important and complex components of the Arabic language, as words change according to specific patterns and functional meanings. Experiences in teaching Arabic to French-speaking learners reveal numerous challenges in this area, stemming from structural differences between the two languages and the absence of direct equivalents in many cases.

Table 4. Morphological Errors Observed in the Sample (Selected Examples)

Type	Examples of Error	Possible Cause
Verb inflection errors	هي يذهب، نحنكتب (incorrect agreement)	Insufficient awareness of person/subject agreement

Plural formation errors	كتيون، مدرساتين Incorrect masculine/feminine plural endings	Failure to distinguish masculine vs. feminine plural patterns
Noun derivation errors	مكتبة بمعنى كاتبة Using a derived noun with an unintended meaning	Similarity of patterns and conflation of meanings
Omitting tanwīn or taa markers	معلمة ← معلمه Omitting tanwīn / substituting forms	Influence of French, which lacks tanwīn

Source: Prepared by the researchers.

B. Grammatical Errors:

Table 5. Types of Grammatical Errors

Type of grammatical error	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender (masculine/feminine) agreement	50	24.51%
Definiteness/indefiniteness	50	24.51%
Number (singular/dual/plural)	40	19.61%
Case endings (inflectional markers)	30	14.71%
Verb tense	19	9.31%
Pronouns	15	7.35%
Total	204	100%

Source: Prepared by the researchers.

From Table (5), it is evident that the grammatical errors made by learners of Arabic as a second language varied across six grammatical levels. The most frequent errors were concentrated in the levels of gender agreement (masculine and feminine) and definiteness and indefiniteness, which were equal in both number and percentage. Each category was repeated (50) times, representing 24.51% for each. This was followed, in second place, by errors related to singular, dual, and plural forms, with (40) occurrences, accounting for 19.61%. Next came errors related to case endings (i' rāb), with (30) occurrences, representing 14.70%. Errors concerning verb tense ranked after that, with (19) occurrences, representing 9.31%. Finally, pronoun-related errors ranked last, with (15) occurrences, accounting for 7.35%.

C. Structural Errors:**Table 6. Types of Structural Errors**

Type	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Word order	60	62.5%
Fronting/postponement	26	27.08%
Omission	10	10.42%
Total	96	100%

Source: Prepared by the researchers.

From Table (6), it is evident that syntactic errors varied across three levels. Errors concentrated at the level of word order (rank/position) were the most frequent, with (60) occurrences, representing 62.5%. This was followed, in second place, by errors related to foregrounding and postponement (word order shifts such as fronting and delaying elements), with (26) occurrences, accounting for 27.08%. Finally, errors related to omission (ellipsis) ranked last, with (10) occurrences, representing 10.42%.

D. morphological Errors**Table 7. Types of Morphological Errors**

Type of orthographic error	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Punctuation marks	150	53.57%
Hamza writing	60	21.43%
Tied taa (ة) writing	35	12.50%
Open taa (ت) writing	25	8.93%
Word separation/connection	10	3.57%
Total	280	100%

Source: Prepared by the researchers.

Table (7) indicates that morphological errors were distributed across five distinct categories. The most frequent errors were related to punctuation marks, with a total of (150) occurrences, accounting for 53.57% of all spelling errors. In the second place were errors involving the writing of the hamza, which appeared (60) times, representing 21.43%. These were followed by errors in the use of the tā'marbūṭa (tied tā'), recorded (35) times, or 12.50%. Errors concerning the tā'maftūḥa (open tā') ranked fourth, with (25) occurrences, representing 8.93%. Finally, errors related to separation and connection (faṣl and waṣl) were the least frequent, with (10) occurrences, accounting for 3.57%.

IV. Findings and Recommendations

1. Key Findings

1. A common shared difficulty is the limited knowledge of the rules governing hamza writing (hamzat al-qaf' vs. hamzat al-waṣl, and medial hamza), which may be linked to the absence of equivalent features in learners' native languages.
2. Learners frequently confuse alif maqṣūra and yaa', and show segmentation errors (splitting connected forms) as well as vowel-length substitutions (short vs. long vowels).
3. Among the most prominent shared structural errors is transferring French word order into Arabic, such as placing adjectives before nouns or placing the subject before the verb in contexts where Arabic typically prefers verb–subject order.
4. Learners struggle with Arabic letters not present in their first languages (e.g., ط, ظ, ص, ض, خ, ر, ع, غ), which contributes to substitution errors in pronunciation and spelling.
5. Errors are often driven by overgeneralization of target-language rules and negative transfer from the first language, in addition to limitations in learners' Arabic acquisition and overall linguistic competence.
6. Some errors are linked to differences in grammatical systems across languages, such as number and gender agreement patterns, where certain learners' first languages lack comparable rules.
7. Psychological factors (anxiety, fear, low motivation) and cognitive factors (forgetting, inattention, negligence, misunderstanding, and limited practice) may affect accurate acquisition.
8. Teaching and learning strategies play a significant role in the frequency and persistence of writing errors.

2. Recommendations

1. Offer remedial programs and training workshops focusing on Arabic orthography and writing conventions, including hamza rules, sentence structure, word separation/connection, and core grammatical issues.
2. Provide varied educational resources to help learners overcome challenges in writing and pronunciation.
3. Conduct similar studies on larger samples and using multiple tools (e.g., observation, recordings, written journals) to develop a more comprehensive plan for preventing future errors.
4. Use language laboratories and integrate audiovisual materials (videos and films) more actively in Arabic language instruction.

Conclusion

The results of this field study suggest that French being the dominant language of instruction and socialization in the school environment has a noticeable influence on learners' Arabic writing when Arabic is learned as a second language. The

analysis of written productions revealed clear cross-linguistic interference manifested in grammatical, morphological, structural, and morphological errors. While this interference can be understood as evidence of cognitive interaction between linguistic systems, it also highlights the need for teaching strategies that explicitly address the specific challenges arising from French–Arabic differences. Improving Arabic writing proficiency among these learners requires a program that combines contrastive awareness, systematic practice, and continuous teacher development in teaching Arabic to non-native speakers within a multilingual Algerian context.

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