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Similarities and (Initiation/Borrowing) phenomena in the concepts, words, and phrases used by foreign students studying higher education in Turkey in their native languages

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Keywords	Foreign students, Arabic speakers, Turkish language, native language, target language, interlinguistic transfer, linguistic interference
Abstract	This study investigates the influence of Arabic-speaking students' native language on their process of learning Turkish as a foreign language. Employing a quantitative research design, data were collected through online surveys from 620 Arabic-speaking students enrolled at Akdeniz University TÖMER. The study has been exploring the role of the native language in learners' use of Turkish, the impact of linguistic interference, and the presence of false cognates affecting comprehension and expression. A student questionnaire and a researcher's diary were used as data collection tools. Quantitative analysis revealed that interference from the native language significantly shaped students' linguistic performance, particularly through errors and misunderstandings caused by false cognates. The findings emphasize that such cross-linguistic influences can hinder accurate language acquisition. The study boosts the awareness of interference and borrowing phenomena which essential for developing more effective Turkish language teaching strategies for Arabic-speaking learners.

Titre	Similitudes et phénomènes (d'initiation/d'emprunt) dans les notions, termes et expressions utilisés par les étudiants internationaux poursuivant des études supérieures en Turquie dans leur langue maternelle
Mots clés	Étudiants étrangers, arabophones, langue turque, langue maternelle, langue cible, transfert interlinguistique, interférence linguistique.
Résumé	Cette recherche vise à analyser l'influence de la langue maternelle des étudiants arabophones sur leur apprentissage du turc comme langue étrangère. Bien que le turc et l'arabe partagent certaines caractéristiques lexicales et syntaxiques, ils présentent également des différences structurelles qui peuvent entraîner des interférences linguistiques. Ces interférences se traduisent souvent par des erreurs lexicales, grammaticales ou sémantiques, ainsi que par l'utilisation de mots qui ressemblent à des termes arabes mais qui ont des significations différentes en turc, ce qui peut nuire à la compréhension et à l'expression, tant à l'oral qu'à l'écrit. L'étude adopte une méthodologie quantitative afin de mesurer objectivement l'impact de ces phénomènes. Les données ont été recueillies à l'aide de questionnaires en ligne administrés à 620 étudiants arabophones inscrits à l'université d'Akdeniz : TÖMER, un établissement spécialisé dans l'enseignement du turc comme une langue étrangère. Les outils de collecte de données comprenaient un questionnaire destiné aux étudiants et un journal de bord des chercheurs, permettant de recouper les données statistiques et les observations descriptives. Les analyses quantitatives ont révélé que la langue maternelle a une influence significative sur les performances linguistiques des apprenants. Les résultats indiquent que l'interférence lexicale et syntaxique de l'arabe entraîne des difficultés spécifiques dans la compréhension et la production du turc. Ces phénomènes ralentissent le processus d'acquisition et peuvent affecter la confiance linguistique des apprenants. L'étude souligne également que l'exposition répétée au turc, combinée à la prise de conscience des différences interlinguistiques, favorise une amélioration progressive des compétences linguistiques. Cependant, le développement de la production orale ou la progression communicative n'étaient pas l'objectif principal de la recherche. L'objectif principal était plutôt de mettre en évidence les mécanismes par lesquels la langue maternelle influence l'apprentissage du turc et de proposer des approches pédagogiques visant à minimiser ces effets négatifs. En conclusion, les résultats de cette étude démontrent l'importance d'intégrer des stratégies explicites visant à réduire l'interférence linguistique dans les programmes d'enseignement du turc comme une langue étrangère. Une meilleure compréhension de ces phénomènes permettra de

développer des approches pédagogiques plus efficaces, adaptées aux besoins des apprenants arabophones.

1. Introduction

Throughout history, Turks and Arabs have interacted extensively, influencing each other linguistically and exchanging words. As a result, both languages share hundreds of common (borrowed) words with identical pronunciations. Some of these words, such as “kitap, kalem, hürriyet, din, sabah, etc.,” are used with the same meaning in both languages, while others, such as “hala, fakat, misafir, nar, etc.,” have different meanings.

The abundance of common words between the two languages makes it easier for students whose native language is Arabic to learn Turkish, but it can also cause various problems. This is because some of these words have changed their meanings over time for multiple reasons and have created false equivalences between the two languages. When students whose native language is Arabic encounter such words, they tend to use their Arabic meanings and contexts, making serious mistakes in written and spoken expressions. It is important to be aware of such words at the beginning of the learning-teaching process to prevent negative transfer from the learner's native language (Al-Hasan, 2022; Al-Athwary, 2022; Ramadan, 2020).

In the recent years, a large number of students from foreign countries have been going to Turkey for education. The number of foreign students studying at universities in the Republic of Turkey has been increasing every year. While the number of international students enrolled in Turkey in 2018–2019 was approximately 154,000, there were approximately 224,048 international students enrolled in 2020–2021 (Council of Higher Education [YÖK], 2020).

In recent years, the increase in vocational education and the advancement of science have particularly increased the global mobility of international students (Levent & Karaevli, 2013). In addition to the problems experienced by higher education students, issues such as psychological, social, and cultural adaptation and financial support have also become important for international students (Kıroğlu, Kesten & Elma, 2010). According to a meta-analysis, the most significant source of stress or pressure experienced by international students is language proficiency (Smith & Khawaja, 2011).

A review of the literature shows that various scholars have examined how a learner's native language influences the acquisition of a foreign one. Researchers such as Türkoğlu (2004), Şevik (2007), Soral (2009), Ünal (2009), Şimşek (2010), İşigüzel (2012), Sarıca (2014), Şavlı and Kalafat (2014), Arık (2015), and Kurt (2015) have explored different dimensions of this relationship in their studies.

In the context of teaching Turkish as a foreign language, attention has also been directed toward the phenomenon of negative transfer from learners' first languages. Understanding the extent to which a student's mother tongue shapes the process of

learning Turkish, the types of words, concepts, and expressions they transfer from their native language, and how lexical similarities and borrowings influence classroom practices are crucial for designing effective teaching strategies and minimizing linguistic interference.

This research was carried out with the conviction that addressing this topic would offer a novel contribution to the existing body of knowledge. The primary objective of the study was to examine how the native languages of foreign students influence their acquisition of Turkish as a foreign language. In accordance with this objective, the study sought to answer the following research questions:

- How do students perceive the influence of their native languages on learning Turkish?
- In what ways are the effects of students' native languages reflected in their Turkish learning process?
- To what extent do similarities emerge between the Turkish language, and the concepts, words, or expressions found in students' native languages?

2. Literature review

Language is an important factor not only in academic settings but also in terms of social integration. This is because individuals establish their interactions with the academic environment through language, just as they establish their social environment through language. Therefore, students who do not speak the language or even the dialect of the region they are going to are under serious cultural pressure. Furthermore, language should be seen as a fundamental tool that enables individuals to express themselves (Barratt & Huba, 1994).

Using the same language as the surrounding environment is a factor that facilitates an individual's acceptance by the new culture. In this context, it has been observed that individuals who develop foreign language skills during the adaptation process to different cultures have higher levels of self-confidence compared to those who have developed their language skills to a lesser extent (Aliyev & Öğülmüş, 2016). Moreover, students attending preparatory classes or those developing their language skills demonstrate a more comprehensive strategy in the process of adapting to the culture. Learning the language of the country they are going to also contributes to their learning about that country's culture.

The use of the mother tongue in foreign language classes has long been a subject of debate. Prodromou (2000, cited in Gabrielatos, 2001) compares the mother tongue to a “skeleton in the closet,” suggesting that it is often neglected or avoided in the language learning process, while Gabrielatos (2001) describes it as a “bone of contention,” reflecting differing opinions on its role. Despite these debates, the importance of the mother tongue cannot be denied. Learners interpret and understand foreign languages through the conceptual and semantic framework provided by their own language, which inevitably shapes their perception, understanding, and use of the target language.

People learn a new language within the framework of their native language's grammatical features because they think according to those features. Since the foreign language learning process is built upon the native language, it is important to take advantage of these common elements. Language learners develop a perspective on the language in proportion to the relationship they establish between the target language and their own language. Learning a foreign language is largely dependent on the native language and differs from the process of acquiring the native language. There are similarities and differences between the native language and the target language. Similarities facilitate foreign language learning, while differences make it more difficult (Türkoğlu, 2004). The closeness between languages also determines the quality of transfer between languages. Languages that are close to each other have a high degree of similarity in vocabulary, which is a great advantage for students.

The weak relationship between a learner's native language and the target language often results in distinct vocabularies, requiring learners to acquire the meaning and usage of words from scratch (Odlin, 1989). Additionally, differences in the pronunciation and orthographic systems of the two languages significantly influence the learning process (Swan, 1997). Factors such as linguistic kinship, structural similarities, geographical distribution, and historical or social interaction between languages further contribute to their similarities and differences. Research indicates that once learners begin studying the target language and recognize these conceptual differences, they tend to actively compare their native language with the target language. In doing so, they may transfer rules, concepts, and patterns between the two languages, which can either facilitate or interfere with language acquisition (Soral, 2009).

Interlingual transfer plays a crucial role in shaping target language acquisition. Learners' production in the target language is influenced by the structures and meanings of their native language, both linguistically and culturally (Soral, 2009). According to Soral (2009, citing Gass & Selinker, 2008), transfer is determined by how learners organize their native language, their awareness of structural differences between the native and target languages, and their knowledge of the target language. Transfer may be positive, when similarities facilitate learning, or negative, when differences lead to interference, with negative transfer being particularly common among foreign language learners.

Errors resulting from negative transfer are more common among learners with limited language proficiency. Such deficiencies often lead to confusion in learning the grammar of the target language, as learners tend to think in their native language and apply their own interlanguage rules when facing difficulties (Tiryaki, 2014). Beginners, in particular, frequently rely on their native language, which increases the likelihood of negative transfer (Öksüz, 2014). Early identification of potential conflicts between the native and target languages can help prevent these issues (Bölükbaş, 2011).

Arabic-speaking learners of Turkish often experience greater difficulties in reading and writing compared to other foreign students. This is primarily due to differences in the alphabet, including the absence of vowels in the Arabic script (Kara, 2010). Şengül (2014) found that students using the Arabic alphabet struggle to write unique Turkish characters correctly. Consequently, when designing language programs for foreign students, it is essential to consider the learners' native language and its linguistic family, as this can help minimize negative transfer (Biçer, Çoban & Bakır, 2014).

3. Research methodology

This section outlines the research methodology, with relevant topics presented and discussed under appropriate subheadings.

3.1 Research model

This study aims to determine the impact on the process of teaching Turkish as a foreign language to Arabic native students that has been studying at Akdeniz University 'TÖMER'; this study has been designing for quantitative research methods.

3.2 Sample size

Surveys serve as a quantitative data collection method, where all participants respond to standard questions. This technique enables researchers to efficiently collect a large amount of data in a relatively brief period and is frequently utilized to obtain information from study samples (Creswell, 2014).

To choose the study sample, stratified sampling, which is a probability sampling method, was employed to consider important characteristics such as gender, age, and nationality. This technique entails segmenting the population into homogeneous subgroups, or strata, based on these traits, from which individuals are then randomly chosen.

3.3 Study group

The study group for this research consists of 620 foreign students at the B2 level on Turkish language at Akdeniz University TÖMER (Turkish Language Teaching Center) as Arabic native.

4. Purpose of the study

The aim of this study is to examine whether similarities and instances of borrowing exist among the concepts, words, and expressions used by foreigner students learning Turkish at the B2 level at Akdeniz University TÖMER. This research is not an intervention study; although some participants may have experienced improvements in speaking skills; the development of oral proficiency is not the focus of this investigation.

5. Data collection and Evaluation

This study assigned a quantitative research design to examine the influence of

similar words and false cognates between Arabic and Turkish on the process of learning Turkish as a foreign language. Data were collected between January and June 2025 through an online survey distributed via email and WhatsApp. A total of 700 responses were received, of which 620 valid responses were analyzed.

The survey consisted of two sections with a total of 10 questions: the first section concerned with collecting demographic information, while the second section with investigating participants' experiences with lexical similarities and false equivalents between Arabic and Turkish. Therefore, the study started by selecting the targeted students and ensured the clarity of the questions.

Survey responses were initially coded in Microsoft Excel and subsequently analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics 20, employing frequency distribution tables to identify key patterns in the data. This approach allowed for a systematic and rigorous examination of the effects of native language on Turkish language learning on Arab students.

6. Results and Discussion

Within this scope, the study examined how similar words and false cognates between Turkish and Arabic influence the process of learning Turkish as a foreign language among Arab students.

A questionnaire targeting nationalities of Algeria, Palestine, Lebanon, Morocco, Somalia, Sudan, Syria, Egypt, Tunisia, Yemen, Jordan, and Iraq, representing different education levels and age groups, were administered using online survey methods.

The study yielded 620 valid responses out of 700 total submissions, with incomplete or inconsistent surveys excluded from the analysis. Figure 1 presents the distribution of participants by national origin. Respondents from Palestine constituted the largest share (15.1%, $n = 94$), followed by Tunisia (13.0%, $n = 81$). Sudan and Syria each accounted for 10.1% ($n = 63$), while Iraq represented 9.1% ($n = 56$) and Algeria 8.2% ($n = 51$). Participants from Morocco, Yemen, and Jordan each contributed 6.1% ($n = 38$), whereas Somalia accounted for 6.0% ($n = 37$), Egypt for 5.0% ($n = 31$), and Lebanon for 4.1% ($n = 25$).

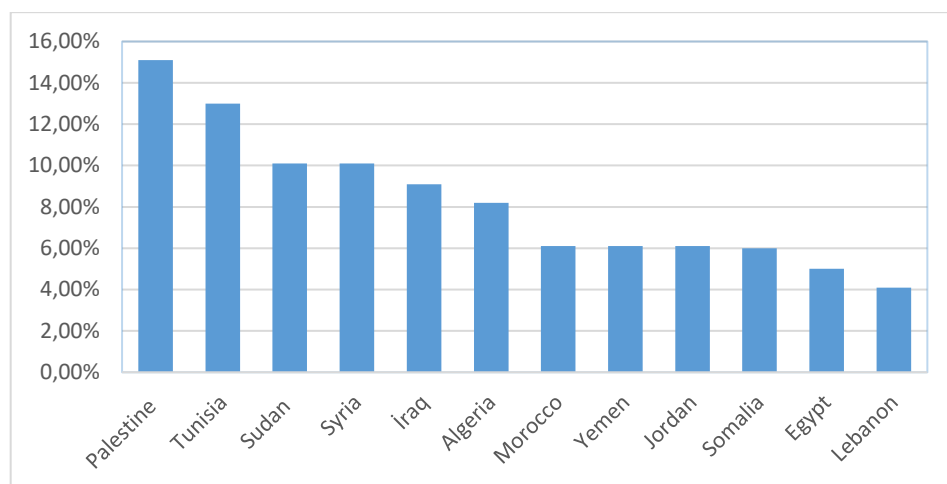


Figure 1: Country classification of participants in the Survey

Survey respondents distributed as shown in Figure 2 based on their gender configuration. The population consists of 48 percent female while 52 percent represents the male gender.

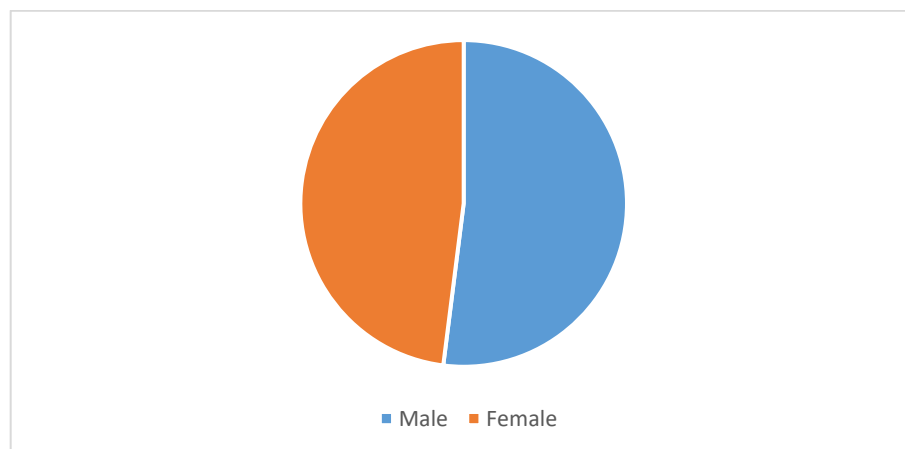


Figure 2: Gender Classification of participants in the Survey

The survey results reveal a significant concentration of participants within the younger adult demographics as Table 1 shown. The 26–32-year age group represents the largest segment of the sample, comprising 49.1% (n = 305) of all respondents. The 18–25-year group forms the second largest segment, accounting for 41.8% (n = 259) of the total. Finally, participants aged 33–38 years constitute the smallest category, representing 9.1% (n = 56) of the overall sample.

Table 1: *Response distribution by age group*

Age	Response Percent	No. of responses
26–32	49.1%	305
18–25	41.8%	259
33–38	9.1%	56

In this section, Figure 3 presents participants' views on similarities between Arabic and Turkish while learning Turkish. Within this scope, 40% strongly agree with this view, 40% agree, 12% somewhat agree, 4% disagree, and 4% strongly disagree.

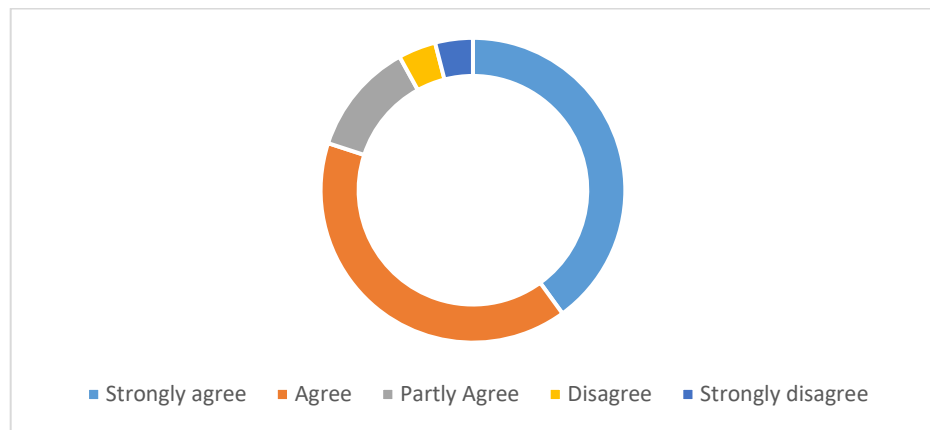


Figure 3: *Similarities between Arabic and Turkish languages*

As Table 2 shown, 60% of participants stated that having many common words in both languages facilitated their effective learning of Turkish, while 24% explained that it enabled them to learn Turkish more quickly, and the remaining 16% stated that it had no effect.

Table 2: *Effects of Shared Arabic-Turkish Vocabulary on Learning Turkish*

It makes learning Turkish easier.	It enables learning Turkish more quickly.	It does not affect
60%	24%	16%

A question was asked to determine participants' views on whether incorrect equivalent words affect the Turkish learning process. Within this context, 32% of participants strongly agreed, 34% agreed, 26% somewhat agreed, and 8% disagreed, while 0% strongly disagreed.

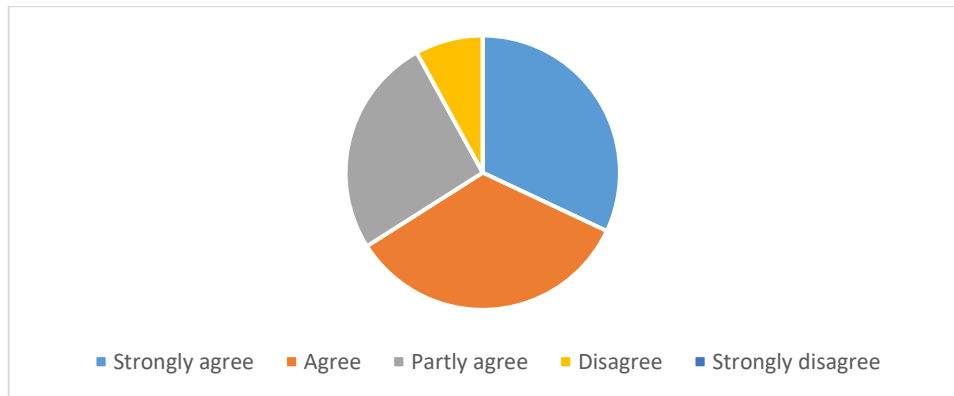


Figure 5: *Agreement on the Effect of Incorrect Equivalent Words*

Participants were asked whether they had experienced misunderstandings. 52% reported that they had experienced misunderstandings, 38% indicated that they had sometimes experienced them, and the remaining 10% stated that they had not.

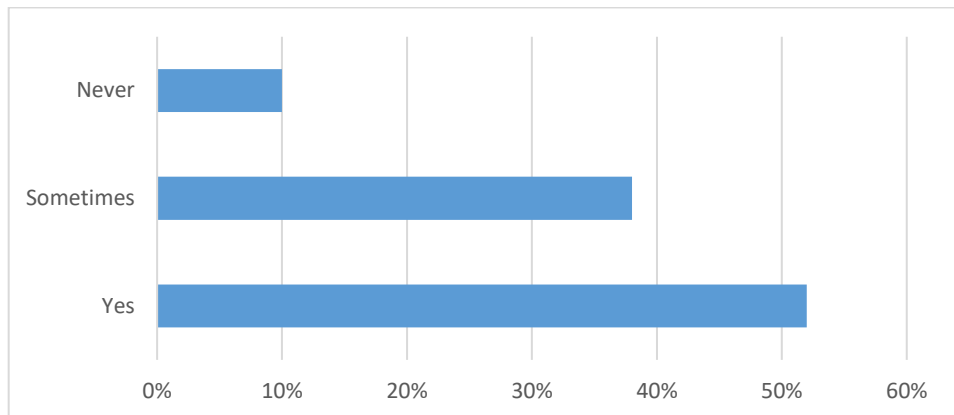


Figure 6: *Experience of Misunderstandings Due to Incorrect Equivalent Words*

7. Conclusion and recommendations

As an Arab student living in Turkey and learning Turkish, I personally encountered misconceptions arising from language borrowing and similarities that led to incorrect equivalents in concepts and expressions. This study further investigates these phenomena and examines their broader impact on the Turkish learning process for Arabic-speaking students. The findings indicate that a significant proportion of participants (80%) noticed similarities between Arabic and Turkish during their learning process. Meanwhile, 76% of students reported experiencing difficulties in pronunciation and sentences construction due to false cognates, which often resulted in incorrect word meanings and misunderstandings. This aligns with Arslan (2015), who emphasized that words with similar forms but different meanings across languages can create confusion and hinder effective communication.

Interestingly, the study also disclosed the presence of many common words

facilitated the learning process for some participants, with 60% considering these similarities as an enhance to their ability to acquire Turkish effectively. These findings suggest that false cognates could have a dual role: some may cause misunderstandings and errors. However, others can serve as facilitators of language learning when correctly recognized and used.

Moreover, the study revealed that participants frequently had encountered misunderstandings stemming from false equivalents, highlighting the need for targeted instructional strategies to mitigate these challenges. The results underscore the importance of raising learners' awareness of false cognates and incorporating explicit guidance into language instruction, particularly for Arabic-speaking students who may transfer linguistic patterns from their native language.

It is important to note that this research is limited to examining the effects of false cognates on Turkish language learning and does not involve intervention methods.

In conclusion, the study demonstrates the significant factor of the false cognates in Turkish learning process on Arab learners, that may aid and hinder acquisition depending on context and usage. Integrating the personal experiences with the collected data emphasizes on the issues' manifestation in real-life learning. Future research could explore instructional interventions, such as targeted teaching of false cognates, vocabulary awareness activities, and error correction techniques, to enhance the effectiveness of teaching Turkish as a foreign language. Additionally, longitudinal studies could investigate the long-term impact of false cognates on language proficiency and communication competence in real-life contexts.

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