

## Causes of Students Errors in the Use of English Prepositions : Iraqi EFL Teachers' Perspective

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### Abstract

*English prepositions are grammatically peculiar and hardly follow anticipated pattern, especially in a foreign context. Obviously, they pose more problems to Iraqi EFL students in translating them into Arabic. Hence, most often the EFL students encounter difficulties in achieving accurate mapping between the two languages due to inadequate knowledge and the inability to realize the various usages of the prepositions. In fact, English prepositions do not incline to specific pattern even in similar situation of use. This study determines the perception of EFL teachers on the causes of students errors in using English prepositions in Iraq. Guided by the theory of language errors, data were purposively gathered through teachers' interview and analyses with Nvivo software program. The results revealed seven various causes of prepositional errors by EFL students in Iraq, thus: i) language transfer, ii) specific sociolinguistic situation, iii) wrong application of target language, iv) grammatical, stylistic elements, v) intralingual interference, vi) modality of exposure to the Target Language (TL), and vii) Implementation Errors. Therefore, this paper recommends the teachers to understand that mother tongue interference (Arabic language) has significant effect on efficient use of appropriate English prepositions by the EFL students. The teachers should modernise their approaches in the teaching methodologies. To sum up, the use of technology such as modern visual aids will become handy in teaching the EFL students the use of English prepositions in writing of speaking.*

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### Introduction

Arabic prepositions have significant influence on Arab students, especially those who use or learn English as a foreign language (EFL) (Saed & Yassin, 2017). Prepositions in English are classified among the parts of speech that exist in a language, especially in traditional grammar. Although, there is a difference between prepositions and other parts of speech, specifically in two major things, thus; the composition of each preposition

consists of a small category of words that lacks formal endings. Again, being one of the parts of speech, a preposition signals the syntactic structures (Saed & Yassin, 2017). The role of the preposition is to link words, clauses or phrases of other words within a given sentence. According to Hamdallah and Tushyeh (1988), most often prepositions confuse students due to their vague appearance. For instance, in the process of learning a target language, most students apply certain rules of their first language basically refers to learning transfer. Hence, it creates problems for the students since each language has its peculiar rules of grammar (Hamdallah & Tushyeh, 1988).

On the other hand, teachers of English language strive to make students proficient speakers and diligent writers in English. Meanwhile, for students to obtain effective learning of English as a foreign language (EFL), required collaborative efforts with the teachers. It is also part of the teachers' role to understand the difficulties students encounter for determining the proper approach needed in teaching the target language. This can be achieved by qualified teachers of English. In fact, qualified teachers with distinguished abilities and motivation attract language students to become serious in learning foreign language (Abdullah & Aion, 2002). Hence, this paper feels that both teachers and learners play crucial role in learning EFL. Studies claimed that learners conceived various views on foreign language learning (Schumann, 1977; Abdullah & Aion, 2002) which normally make them commit errors in learning EFL (Al-Bayati, 2013).

Meanwhile,. Brown (1987) contended that human learning is a process involving making errors. Thus, it is expected that during the English language learning process, learners make errors that constitute a problem for teachers. There are many debates concerning the meaning of the item error. Dulay and Burt (1982) argued that errors are the flawed side of learners' speech or writing. James (2013) on the other hand, viewed errors as evidence of the learners' in-built syllabus. It was further believed that errors differed from mistakes (James, 2013). Errors are, therefore, significant as they informed teachers the outcome of what they taught and how learning proceeds. Therefore, exploring the causes of errors

would assist teachers to improve the quality of teaching Iraqi secondary schools' EFL students.

In Iraq, English is considered an important language and compulsory subject in schools. It is taught as a school subject in the fifth level of the elementary stage; it is also taught at the preparatory and secondary stages (Almaloul, 2014). Recently, English is taught as a school subject beginning from the first primary level. English is taught as a second language from grade one or even from kindergarten in many private schools. Other private schools try to teach all school subjects in the English language. It is expected that Iraqi students have achieved a good level in the English language after finishing schools or universities. However, majority of the students lack grammatical proficiency in the use of English language both orally and in writing, especially the functional aspect of grammar, particularly English prepositions. The current paper is prompted to explore the causes via the Iraqi secondary school EFL teachers' perceptions.

### **Problem Statement**

EFL students in Iraq secondary schools exert continuous efforts to learn English language but suffer serious difficulties in the process. In fact, the English teachers refer to this fact on many occasions due to bad results reflecting in the students' examination results. Also, most of the Iraqi EFL students cannot write compositions without making many errors. Generally, EFL students are expected to learn the correct form of sentences. It is also essential for EFL students to learn English grammar in order to use the language effectively (Davies & Elder, 2004). EFL students may use their native language as aid in learning English language. Therefore, errors and mistakes could be unavoidable.

There were several important studies that offered different reasons for committing errors by learners of the second language and these include Myles (2002), who indicated the following causes: First of all, learners may interpret and transfer from their native language to perform them in the FL and they may test what they suppose is useful and logical of the foreign language. Secondly, they tend to overgeneralize the rules for stylistic features when

Hence, this paper determines the causes of prepositional errors Iraqi EFL secondary schools' students commit while writing or speaking. To achieve the objective, professional teachers of EFL classes were interviewed

Therefore, a study on the causes of errors would be very helpful to stakeholders, especially the teachers, students, policy designers and curriculum developers. It will assist students to obtain ideas on the trickiest areas of using English prepositions. Again, it will help teachers to acquire further insights on the general problem of teaching English prepositions to EFL students.

### **Related Studies**

Studies showed that the appropriate use of prepositions remain the root of confusion and problem to Arab EFL learners, especially those in the Middle East (Mehregan, 2013). It was argued that the peculiar nature of this problem is not restricted to advanced learners of English, but also to those at the preliminary stage (i.e., secondary school level). In fact, the problem is more glaring in learning the construction of English prepositions corresponding to those in their mother tongue during writing activities (Mehregan, 2013).

English and Arabic are totally two different languages, especially in syntax and usage. These differences are likely to cause difficulties for Iraqi students when learning English and prepositions are not exceptions. Several studies on learning EFL have shown that difficulties accrue in learning English prepositions (Jallili & Shojaei, 2012). Learners in the Arab countries face the challenges of using English prepositions both in writing and speaking (Kharma & Hajjaj, 1997). In Iraq, for instance few studies attempted to explore the learning of English prepositions (Almaloul, 2014). However, there is paucity of attention on the causes of prepositional errors normally committed by Iraqi EFL students.

Generally, prepositions of English are quite problematic for EFL learners, especially to Arab students (Al- Hassan, 2012). The difference in the sentence structure creates problems for Iraqi learners of English. Several scholars attempted to highlight the various types of errors EFL students commit during writing. For instance, Almaloul (2014)

examined the errors committed by Libyan undergraduate students in the use of English prepositions while Al Murshidi (2014) surveyed the errors committed by the United Arab Emirate students. Meanwhile, Hamdallah and Tushyeh (1988) claimed that most often prepositions are vague and baffle users, particularly the ESL or EFL learners. In short, Hattab (2012) claimed that even advanced learners face difficulty in translating prepositions due to the differences between English and their mother tongues. Quite a number of scholars (e.g., Zughoul, 1979) also highlighted the reasons English prepositions pose difficulty to Arab EFL and ESL learners. Zughoul (1979) indicated that English prepositions contain a vast number of meanings and such meanings depends on the context they are utilised.

To this end, (Michael, 1980) concluded that the grammatical ambiguity of English prepositions makes the Arab EFL learners find it difficult for students to use the English prepositions correctly. Since most of the English prepositions have polysemous implications depending on the context of usage, hence they cause an eminent frustration for the students while determining the exact connotation and the appropriate time or place to use them (Koffi, 2010). This could be the rationale Takehana (n.d.) attempted to provide a system of spatial categorisation of English prepositions that could also represent their semantic relationships based on their similarities and differences. Therefore, with the kind of difficulties Arab EFL learners face in using English preposition, it is of great importance to conduct a study that could explore the kind of problems Iraqis secondary final year students face as EFL learners. It is also pertinent to identify the causes of the likely problems and ways to address them. This also prompted the conduct of the present study.

On the contrary, the study conducted by Al Yaari (2013) revealed the difficulties normally experienced by the Saudi EFL learners while translating certain English prepositions especially, "on, in, and at" to the Arabic language. The focus of Al Yaari (2013) was to identify the category of gender that was better in translation among each of the 25 female and 25 male EFL learners used as participants in the research. In the attempt, 20 sentences and phrases containing "on, in, and at" were directed to be translated from English into

Arabic by the participants. He illustrated that the EFL students were unable to provide the appropriate equivalent English prepositions in Arabic and were also not familiar with many English prepositions. It was further concluded that that male students performed less than their female counterparts.

## **Methods**

### **Research Design**

The current paper used a qualitative research design to determine the causes of English prepositional error that are normally committed by Iraqi EFL secondary school students. In the attempt, the paper purposively selected and interviewed six (6) experienced and professional EFL teachers. Damascus and Quteiba Secondary Schools of Dewanyah governorate of southern Iraq were selected and used for convenience. The selection was based on the objective of the paper as rightly recommended by Creswell (2012).

### **Data and Collection Procedures**

The interview was the primary source of data used to examine the perceptions of teachers on the causes of errors often commit by Iraqi EFL students. These interviews were opened ended. In fact, the open-ended questions allowed the interviewees to provide detailed explanations about their experiences of teaching EFL students especially the Iraqis at the secondary level. The method equally permitted the researcher to ask probing questions as means of follow-up. The questions were designed in a flexible manner in such a way that they could accommodate adjustment if the need arises during or after the interview sessions. In line with these, Kajornboon (2005) highlighted that interview guides consist of questions related to topics and issues the interviewer intended to accomplish during the study and these must be clear without any ambiguity. Turner (2010) equally concurred that open-ended interviews are the most common procedures that permit the interviewees to express their experiences and point of views to the fullest.

Again, in an attempt to gain sincere and correct responses, the participants were informed of the aim of the study at the commencement of the interview. The participants were

informed about the confidentiality of their responses. This procedure cleared the minds of the participants and equally enhanced the prospect of sincerity as well as the basic aspect of the informed consent process (Gill, Stewart, Treasure, & Chadwick, 2008). The researcher timed the process of the interviews in accordance with the nature of each question and participants were allowed to express themselves freely.

In the process of the data collection, an audio-visual digital recorder was used with the permission of the participants and captured every detail of their responses. Field note-taking was used as a complement of the recorder in an attempt to obtain authentic and accurate version of the interview data (Yin, 2011). On the other hand, as the interview session was on progress, the researcher took written note of information of each participant's personality, time and place of the interview, reactions of the participant to the questions asked, and other relevant issues raised from the interview.

#### Profile of the Participants

Table 1 below provides the details of the teachers used as participants for this paper.

Table 1  
Profile of the teachers interviewed

S/N	Place of Work	Code Name	Status	Gender	Qualification	Working Experience	Age
1	Damascus Secondary School For Girls	DAMAS-INTER-1	EFL Teacher	Female	Master degree in English language	teaching English Language for 19 years	Adult

2	Damascus Secondary School For Girls	DAMAS- INTER-2	EFL Teacher	Male	BA English language	in Teaching English for 25 years	Adult
3	Damascus Secondary School For Girls	DAMAS- INTER-3	EFL Teacher	Male	BA degree from college of art.	teaching English for more than 39	Adult
4	Quteiba Secondary School For Boys	QUT- INTER-1	EFL Teacher	Male	Master degree of education in English language	Teaching English for 21 years	Adult
5	Quteiba Secondary School For Boys	QUT- INTER-2	EFL Teacher	Male	Master degree in English language and literature	teaching English for about 5 years.	Adult
6	Quteiba Secondary School For Boys	QUT- INTER-3	EFL Teacher	Female	Master degree in ELT.	teaching English for more than 5 years	Adult
Total		6		6			

Source: Developed for the study

As shown in the table 1 above, 3 teachers were selected and interviewed from each of the two schools used in the study. The data were triangulated in the main data of the study.



From the table it is clear that all the interviewed participants were adult experienced teachers of English as a foreign language, ranging from 19-39 years of teaching experiences. The minimum professional experience shown in the table were 5 years. In terms of qualifications, 4 from the 6 teachers interviewed have master degree in English language, Literature and ELT. This suggests that interviewed participants were not only teachers but professionals with adequate skills for teaching English with consciousness. This is in tandem with the fact that the population of any research is largely on the group of participants who reflect the study's interest (Israel, 1992). Hence, the researcher considers these participants as appropriate and suitable to provide sufficient data for the qualitative research of this nature. Furthermore, the system of education is the same everywhere in Iraq and this gives the researcher the privilege and freedom of choosing the desired sample. The rationale is that when the sample is right, the researcher could obtain a considerable amount of accuracy in respective of number (Israel, 1992). In qualitative study as the current paper, the quality of the data is far better than the larger number of participants (Guba, 1978; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The researcher was more concern with the point of saturation. Bogdan and Biklen (1998) further pointed that the saturation point is where the information one obtained becomes redundant. Bauer and Gaskell (2000) also revealed that the researcher should be more concern on the nature of the topic and the relevance of the available resources in selecting the participants to be interviewed for a particular study. Therefore, the paper acquired reasonable sample size appropriate for the study's objectives. The valid size of a sample builds on the target of research and the quality of the participants under focus (Cohen, 1970 & 2005). Thus, the participants are specified and rationalized according to age, experience and qualification. The use of teachers as participants in this paper is to explore the causes of the emergent errors made by the students in their writings and to understand the appropriate methods suitable in teaching the EFL students the English prepositions in Iraq.

Another rationale for employing purposive sampling strategy is to ensure the following criteria which are relevant to the present study: availability, circulation strength, affinity and proximity with the major secondary schools of Dewanyah governorate at the southern

part of Iraq. The admission of students of these schools covered a wide range of the surrounding localities in the governorate and have the attraction of Iraqi students who normally desire to learn English as a foreign language. This is due to their record of academic excellence. Hence, the schools provided the opportunity of obtaining information-rich data for this study (Creswell, 2012; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Patton, 1990). In addition, Dewanyah is located at the centre-south of the country with the estimated population of almost a million and half a million inhabitants (National Population Census, 2014).

In terms of attraction, the governorate has a public university with a number of colleges including nursing, law, education, pharmacy, arts, agriculture and medicine among others. In addition, there are several secondary schools including Damascus secondary school for girls and Quteiba secondary school for boys among others. Students normally come and attend the schools from neighboring provinces and districts as well as the communities of the provinces (Wikipedia, 2017).

### **Data Analysis**

The data for the paper were analysed systematically in accordance with Creswell (2012) guidelines. The transcripts from the responses of 6 interviewees was analysed inductively using Nvivo software.

## **Results**

### ***Causes of Prepositional Errors***

In this paper, the causes of English prepositional errors refer to the generative force that brought about the emergence of the errors. English prepositional errors are likely caused by several probable sources, apart from negative L1 transfer (Brown, 1987). Figure 5.1 below, presents the seven different causes of English prepositional errors (emerging themes) and these involve grammatical and stylistic elements, language transfer, specific sociolinguistic situation, wrong application of target language, intralingual interference, modality of exposure to the Target Language (TL) and Implementation Errors.

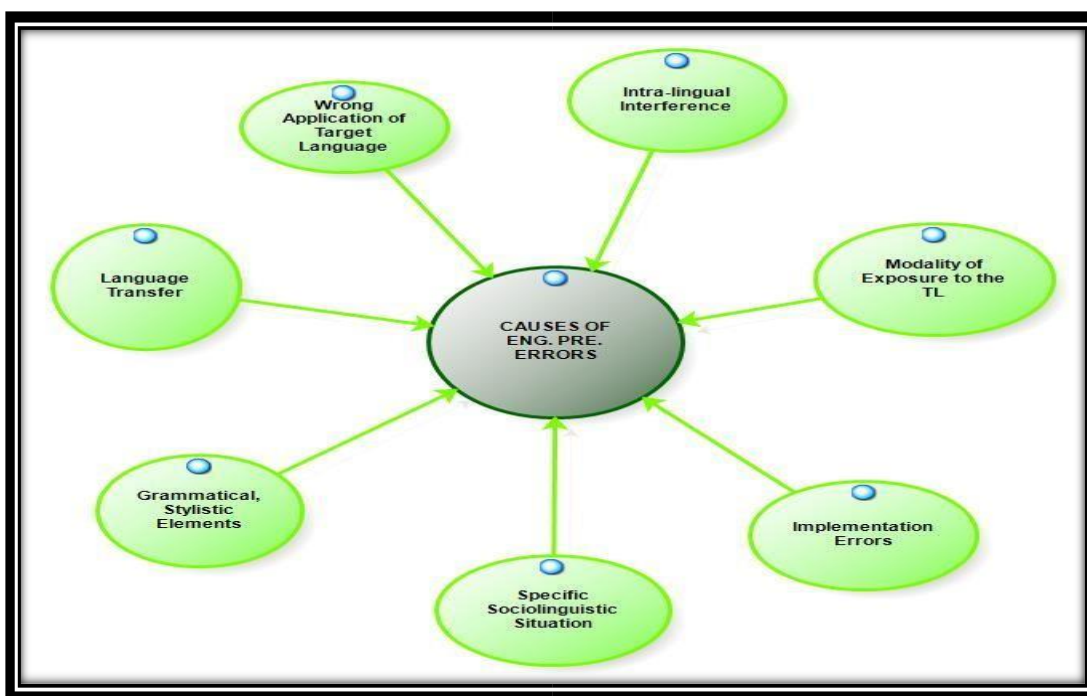


Figure 5.1. Sub-theme: minor themes on the causes of English prepositional errors by Iraqi EFL Senior Secondary Schools Students

### ***Grammatical, Stylistic Element***

Efficiency errors are the results of the wrong application of the target language and implementation errors are due to the mistakes in language use (Bose, 2002). The performance errors take place as false starts, corrections, or slips of the tongue and so on. In this case, one of the major causes of errors expressed by the experienced and professional teachers of Iraqi EFL students is related to the grammatical and stylistic elements. The context of grammatical errors in the interviewees' (DAMAS-INTER-2 and DAMAS-INTER-3) belief refers to the grammatical differences and similarities between Arabic and English language systems. Confirming these claims, one of the interviewees expresses his views by saying: *“There are different reasons that make Iraqi students commit prepositional errors in writing, firstly, the different systems of grammar in both languages”* [DAMAS-INTER-3].

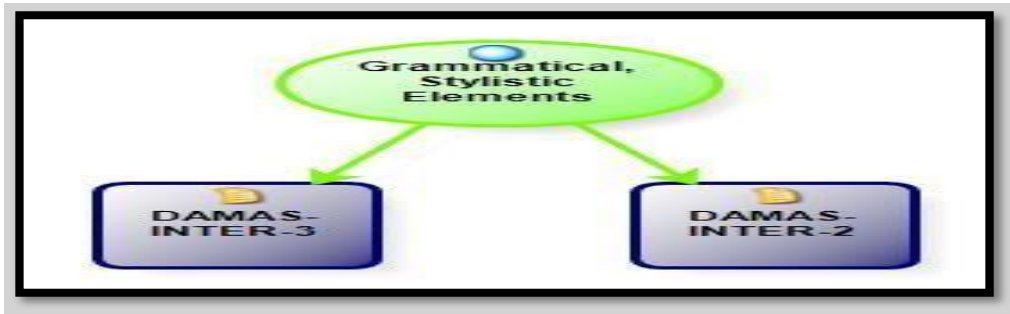


Figure 5.2. Sources Model on Grammatical and Stylistic Elements as a cause of English Prepositional Error

Amid the interview session, the current study recalled the argument of Scott and Tucker (1974), who claimed the impossibility of having direct correspondence of English prepositions with those of Arabic. In line with this view, the interviewee said: “The big difference between the two languages and few similarities” [DAMAS-INTER-2]. This suggests that the transfer of the grammatical and stylistic elements from the mother tongue (Arabic) to the target language (English) is the cause of prepositional errors (Richard, 1971). Due to this cross-linguistic differences existing between English and Arabic prepositions the EFL students find it challenging and difficult to master the use of prepositions in their English writing skills.

***Specific Sociolinguistic Situation***

With the aid of the Nvivo analysis software, the study revealed three teachers from the participants interviewed claiming a specific sociolinguistic situation as a cause of English prepositional errors their students commit while writing. Figure 5.3 below presents the sources model of the participants who claimed that a specific sociolinguistic situation is a cause of English prepositional error by Iraqi EFL students.



*Figure 5.3. Sources Model on Specific Sociolinguistic situation as a case of English Prepositional Error*

As identified by the interviewees (QUT-INTER and DAMAS), a specific sociolinguistic situation is among the causes of English prepositional errors faced by Iraqi EFL students. In the course of the interview session, DAMAS-INTER-1 claimed that due to cultural differences between the English natives and the Arabs, the Iraqi EFL students, especially at the secondary level, find it difficult to adopt the suitable use of English prepositions while learning writing. Accordingly, DAMAS-INTER-1 said: “besides, culture differs, it affects the choice of the correct prepositions while writing something in English language”. Corder (1981) also notes that sociolinguistic reasons lead to certain kinds of errors.

Similarly, literature review revealed that a specific sociolinguistic situation plays a significant role in causing English prepositional errors by students whose first language is not English (Richard & Sampson, 1974). This is more obvious when the students are EFL, as they battle with the learning of the English due to lack of enough time to learn or the chance of reinforcement is slim due to societal norms on linguistic. “In addition, the absence of practice out of schools, for example, in streets or markets. Since English is taught as a foreign language in Iraq [QUT-INTER-1]. In support of this argument, QUI-INTER-3 pointed out that “translation is the main reason to create such problem. Example, at home, the Iraqi use ‘in’ here as it is used in Arabic, in al beit , .. ‘Fee’ an Arabic

preposition means ‘in’, ‘al beit’ an Arabic word means ‘home’. This reflects the interference between L1 and L2” and it amounts to the clash of linguistic norms between Arabic and English languages.

### ***Implementation Errors***

Implementation error simply refers to the performance errors that normally took place due to false starts, corrections, or slips of the tongue and so on (Bose, 2002). With the aid of Nvivo analysis software, the study revealed two teachers from the participants being interviewed that revealed implementation error among the causes of English prepositional errors Iraqi EFL students faced while learning to write essays in English.

Figure 5.4 below presents the sources model of the participants (QUT-INTER-2 and QUT-INTER1) who claimed that implementation error is a cause of English prepositional error by Iraqi EFL students.

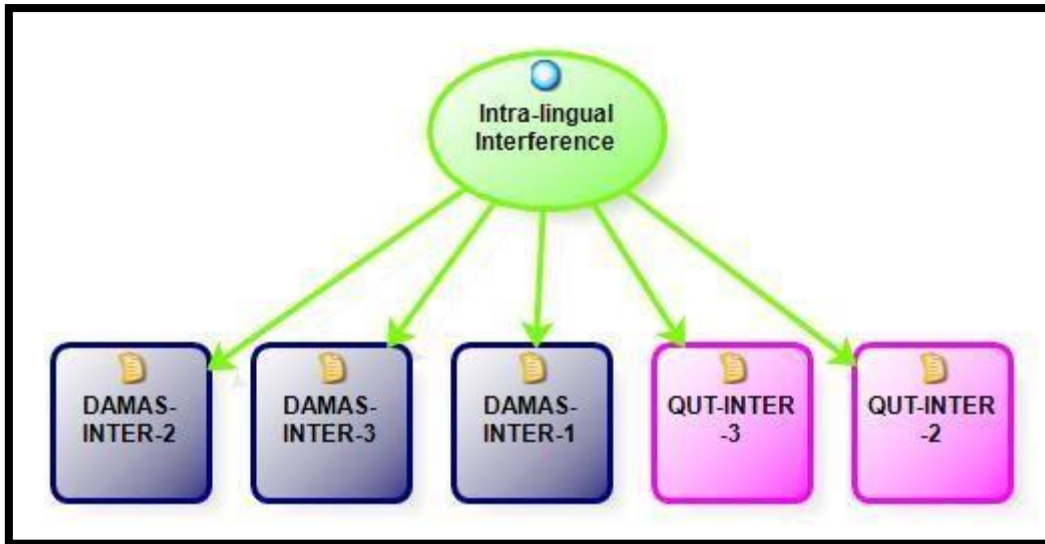


*Figure 5.4. Sources Model on Implementation Error  
as a cause of English Prepositional Error*

In the process of the interview sessions with the study participants, both QUT-INTER-1 and QUT-INTER-2 claimed that implementation error is a cause of English prepositional error committed by Iraqi EFL students while writing. To maintain their opinion QUT-INTER-2 said: “I emphasize that translation used by Iraqi students lead to make prepositional errors”. This claim has long been justified by scholars such as Bose (2002) who stressed that efficiency errors in writing are normally caused by the wrong application of target language and implementation err

### *Intra-Lingual Interference*

With the aid of Nvivo analysis software, the study revealed that five teachers from the participants interviewed claimed Intra-lingual interference as one of causes of English prepositional errors Iraqi EFL students suffer while learning to write essays in English. Figure 5.5 below, presents the sources model of the participants (3 DAMAS-INTERs and 2 QUT-INTERs).



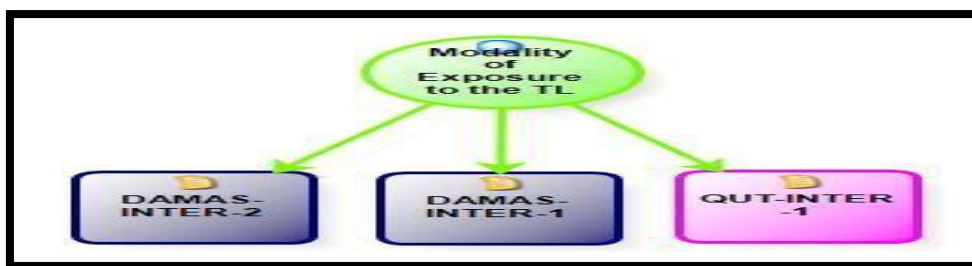
*Figure 5.5.* Sources Model on Intra-Lingual Interference as a cause of English Prepositional Error

According to QUT-INTER-2, “the main reason behind committing errors is interference between Arabic and English which is related to the differences between them. Thus, students commit errors in using prepositions”. This claim was also confirmed by DAMAS-INTER-1 when he said: “Also, interference between the two languages, English and Arabic, contributes to a large extent in making errors while writing essays”. In fact, the responses of all the five participants were in concurrence that intra-lingual interference is without doubt a cause of English prepositional errors by Iraqi ELF students when writing their essays.

Specifically, DAMAS-INTER-2 during the interview session categorically said: “Iraqi students make prepositional errors because of the interference between English and Arabic during the process of learning”. In a similar vein, DAMAS-INTER-3 said” “In fact, the concept of interference...particularly the negative transfer between Arabic and English” while QUT-INTER-3 stressed that: “interference between the mother tongue and the target language is the main cause of committing prepositional errors”.

***Modality of Exposure to English as a Target Language***

With the aid of Nvivo analysis software, the study revealed modality of exposure to the English as a target language (TL) as part of causes of English prepositional errors Iraqi EFL students suffer while writing essays in English.



*Figure 5.6 Sources Model on Modality of Exposure to English as a TL as a cause of English Prepositional Error*

Figure 5.6 above presents the sources model of the participants (2 DAMAS-INTERs and 1 QUTINTER) who claimed that Modality of exposure to English as a TL is part of the causes of English prepositional errors. According to DAMAS-INTER-1, “The main cause is the teacher who should use modern ways in order to distinguish among prepositions”. DAMAS-INTER-1’s argument implies that teachers of Iraqi EFL students lack the technical know-how of imparting the knowledge of how English prepositions operate in sentences. Similar to DAMAS-INTER-1, QUT-INTER-1 also claimed that “the lack of adequate exposure to genuine and authentic English is the one of the causes”. On the other hand, DAMAS-INTER-2 in his response said: “I think that one of the reasons is the great number of English prepositions. There are more than 70 prepositions in English while in



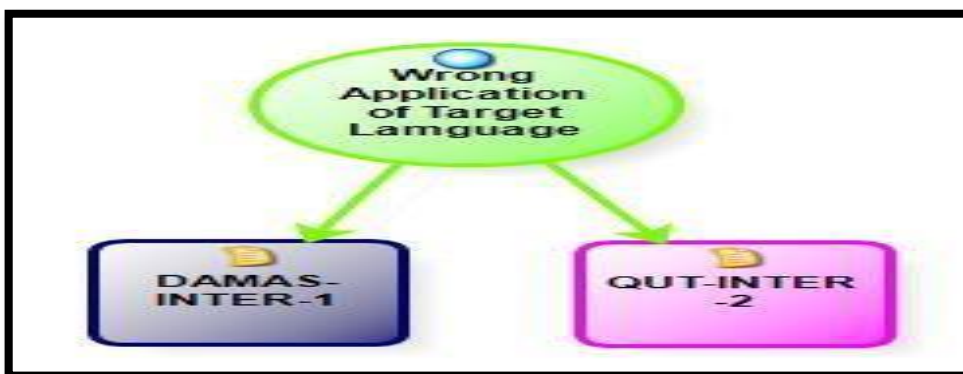
Arabic, there are just 20. I believe this difference leads to create problems for Iraqi students in using English prepositions”.

In fact, the teachers’ (interviewees) views concur with Richard and Sampson (1974) reasons why learners normally fail to acquire the perfect use of target language (TL). This is because learning a TL is more practical and realistic, hence for a successful learning process to achieve it is important for EFL teachers to expose their students to the modalities available in the use of English prepositions.

***Wrong Application of English as a Target Language***

Wrongful application of English entails verbatim translation of English into the native language which normally resulted into mixed-up of words positions (Krulj, 2011). Using the Nvivo analysis software, the study revealed the wrong application of English as a target language (TL) as part of the causes of English prepositional errors Iraqi EFL students commit in writing essays in English.

Based on figure 5.7 below, two interviewees (DAMAS-INTER-1 and QUT-INTER-2) hold the view that incorrect application of English as a TL is among the causes of English prepositional errors by Iraqi EFL students

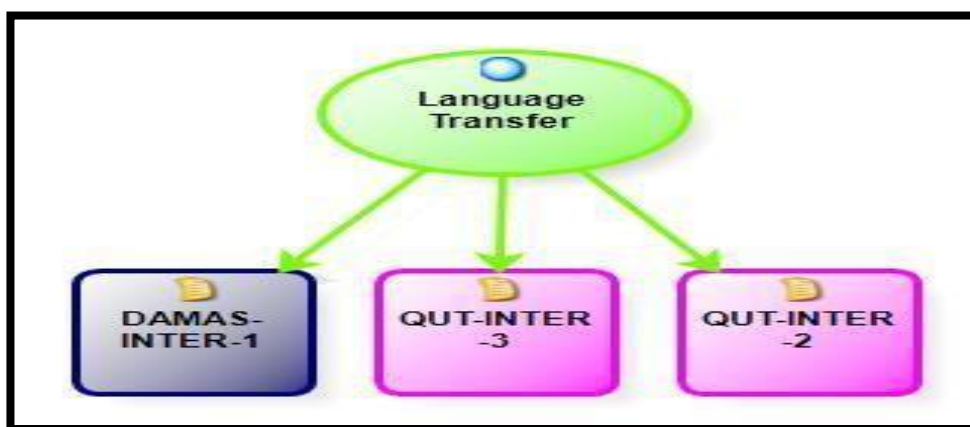


*Figure 5.7 Sources Model on Wrong Application of English as a TL as a cause of English Prepositional Error*

During the interview with the Iraqi EFL teachers used as participants of this study, DAMAS-INTER1 said: “Iraqi student mix between Arabic prepositions and English prepositions that lead to the wrong choice of the correct preposition”. On the other hand, QUT-INTER-2 in an attempt to establish his opinion over the cause of Iraqi EFL students’ prepositional errors in English essay writings said: “I emphasize that translation used by Iraqi students leads to prepositional errors”. In support of these views, literature also revealed the existence of 70 wrong usages of English prepositions and concluded that verbatim or wrongful translation as a serious and most common cause of prepositional error EFL students commit (Krulj, 2011). This implies that the English prepositional errors normally committed by Iraqi EFL students is mostly due to their direct translation of Arabic language prepositions into their writing of English essays. It also implies that teachers of Iraq EFL students have to find a better way of handling the problem of direct translation of Arabic language features into learning English.

### ***Arabic Language Transfer***

Through the use of Nvivo analysis software, it was identified that Arabic language transfer also causes the Iraqi EFL student to commit English prepositional errors in their essay writings.



*Figure 5.8 Sources Model on Arabic Language Transfer in using English as a cause of English Prepositional Error*

As presented in figure 5.8 above, three interviewees (1 DAMAS-INTER and 2 QUT-INTERs) responded over the use of Arabic language transfer as a cause of English prepositional errors by Iraqi EFL students.

The response of DAMAS-INTER-1 concurs with the claim of Selinker (1972) that 'language mixture' is part of error making in learning a target language. This is because the learners normally transfer the knowledge they have of their first language in learning the target language. DAMAS-INTER-1 also pointed out that: "reckless reference to the first language (Arabic) in learning English" plays a serious role in causing the prepositional errors by Iraqi EFL students. In his assertions, DAMAS-INTER-1 further said: "Iraqi student mix between Arabic prepositions and English prepositions..."

On the other hand, QUT-INTER-2 said: "Iraqi students don't take their subject of English seriously and because of their lack of frequent practice the features of Arabic language influence their appropriate use of English prepositions". Similarly, QUT-INTER-1 claimed that: "...interference between Arabic and English make students commit errors in using prepositions". The argument of both the QUT-INTERs is justifiable when one revisits Lado's (1957) definition of language transfer "as language interference been caused by the influence of the learner mother tongue's rules on learning the second language".

### **Discussion of Findings**

In conceptualising this paper, the results obtained from the analysis has established the existence of several causes of English prepositional errors committed by the Iraqi EFL secondary school students. This in turn is supporting the hypothesis of prominent scholars (i.e., Selinker, 1972; Richard, 1974 & Brown, 2000). Accordingly, it was claimed that errors in the area of grammar could be caused by either interference or learners' interlanguage hindrances in the attempt to construct grammar in the target language (Selinker, 1972; Brown, 2000). In addition, the findings of this paper in not in contradiction with the claim put forward by Richards (1974) and Brown (1981). These scholars believed that EFL students' prepositional errors are originated and occurred

during the process of target language learning, commonly known as “developmental errors” or as “fossilised errors” being permanent and stable sources.

Furthermore, the paper has revealed seven different causes of Iraqi EFL secondary school prepositional errors (as emerging themes). Thus: language transfer, specific sociolinguistic situation, wrong application of target language, grammatical, stylistic elements, intralingual interference, modality of exposure to the Target Language (TL) and Implementation Errors. In line with these findings, Corder (1981) and Myles (2002) further argued that learners commonly interpret and transfer the knowledge of their native languages in speaking or writing the foreign or target language. Myles (2002) further justified the findings of the current paper with the assertion that learners of English as a foreign language tend to overgeneralize the rules for stylistic features during the acquisition of new discourse structures.

In the process of discourse learning of EFL, teachers claimed that Iraqi EFL students recklessly refer to their first language (Arabic) in learning of English. In fact, this causes their errors in the use of English prepositions in writing or speaking. Again, the paper also revealed the Iraqi EFL students normally mixed the features of Arabic prepositions with those of English language which influence their ability to distinguish the two in same context. This is in line with Selinker (1972) opinion who maintained that language mixing deals with the first language transfer in learning a foreign language.

Moreover, the paper revealed intralingual interference as another basic cause of English prepositional error the Iraqi EFL secondary students normally commit. Iraqi EFL teachers feel that in Iraq students often display the lack of seriousness. This frequent practice contributes immensely in causing the English prepositional errors. This paper also revealed interference between Arabic and English language as part of the factors that lead students to commit errors in using prepositions.

In fact, these findings correspond with the views of Richard (1971), Richard and Sampson (1974), Ringbom (1987) and Jarvis (2000) on the causes of errors in using a target language by learners. Hashim (1996) and Samara (1999) further ascribed errors committed in the use of English prepositions to mother tongue interference. According to them, learners employed the strategies existing in their first language to the syntactic structure of their target language. This could reflect the assertion of Lado's (1957) conceptual claim on language transfer. The Iraqi EFL teachers considered language transfer as language interference since both are caused by the influence of the learner's mother tongue rules on learning the foreign language.

In support of Richard and Sampson's (1974) claim, the current paper also presents specific sociolinguistic situation as part of the issues that cause English preposition errors. The teachers further indicated that Iraqi culture, which, of course, differs from the English culture, affects the choice of the correct use of prepositions during writing manuscript in English language. With respect to this finding, Corder (1981) argued that sociolinguistic reasons lead to certain kinds of errors in using another language other than the native language of the user. The teachers further established that lack of practice outside schools' premises causes errors since English is taught as a foreign language in Iraq. On the part of Implementation Errors, wrong application of target language, grammatical and stylistic elements this paper identified Iraqis EFL students of using direct translation from Arabic into English which in turn lead to the English prepositional errors. These results are in line with the inference afforded by Richard, Sampson (1974) and Bose (2002).

To this end, (Michael, 1980) concluded that the grammatical ambiguity of English prepositions makes the Arab EFL learners find it difficult for students to use the English prepositions correctly. Since most of the English prepositions have polysemous implications depending on the context of usage. Hence, they cause an eminent frustration for the students while determining the exact connotation and the appropriate time or place to use them (Koffi, 2010). This could be the rationale Takehana (n.d.) attempted to provide

a system of spatial categorisation of English prepositions that could also represent their semantic relationships based on their similarities and differences.

## **Conclusion**

This paper concludes the existence of seven various causes of prepositional errors Iraqi EFL secondary school students commit. Therefore, this paper recommends the teachers to understand that since mother tongue interference (Arabic language) has significant effect on efficient use of appropriate English prepositions by the EFL students, then they should modernise their approaches in the teaching methodologies. The teaching approaches should include the use of visual aids among the most suitable methods. Students, in the modern world embrace the use of technology to the fullest. Hence, with the aid such gadgets, teachers would find relief and hasten their methods of imparting knowledge (teaching writings and speaking in English) as part of the suitable and available methods in Iraq.

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