

## Think twice before you translate: What is read is not always said<sup>1</sup>

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### Abstract

One of the most difficulties Algerian learners of English encounter is the ignorance of the cross-linguistic differences between the first language (L1) and English. Students, whose first language is Arabic and majored in English do not necessarily excel at translation or interpretation in their written and oral productions; that is to say, being proficient in a foreign language does not guarantee the ability to translate into the native language. Accurately, it is widely maintained that what precedes any act of translation/interpretation is contrastive analysis (CA) and Error Analysis, i.e. it is believed that contrasting and comparing languages require greater cognitive depth, force attention, promote noticing; raise the learners' awareness of the L1-L2 differences and provide practice in the areas of these differences. What aggravates the situation is that French as a second language in Algeria may interfere as an additional language which can boost or hinder the translation process. In this paper, we will spotlight the importance of CA and Error analysis in translation, and then illustrating how language interference can hinder the translation process. Finally, some recommendations and suggestions about the betterment of learning and translation process will conclude this paper.

**Key words:** Contrastive analysis, error analysis, translation, written production, oral production.

## Tercüme etmeden önce iki kere düşünün: Okunan şey her zaman söylenmez

### Öz

Cezayirli İngilizce öğrenenlerin en güçlüklerinden biri, birinci dil (L1) ve İngilizce arasındaki dilbilimsel farklılıkların cehaletidir. İlk dili Arapça olan ve İngilizce olarak okutulan öğrenciler, yazılı ve sözlü üretimlerinde çeviri veya yorumlamada mükemmel olmazlar; Yani, yabancı bir dilde yetkin olmak, ana dile tercüme etme yeteneğini garanti etmez. Kesin olarak, herhangi bir çeviri / yorumlama işleminin önceliğinin, karşıt analiz (CA) ve Hata Analizi olduğu, yani, dilleri zıt ve derinlemesine daha fazla bilişsel derinliğe, dikkati zorlamaya, dikkati yaymaya ve teşvik etmeye inanıldığı; Öğrencilerin L1-L2 farklılıklarına ilişkin farkındalıklarını arttırmak ve bu farklılıkların bulunduğu alanlarda pratik yapmak. Durumu daha da kötüleştiren şey, Cezayir'de ikinci bir dil olarak Fransızca'nın, çeviri sürecini hızlandırabilecek veya engelleyebilecek ek bir dil olarak müdahale edebileceğidir. Bu yazıda, çeviri işleminde CA ve Hata analizinin önemini belirledikten sonra, dil etkileşiminin çeviri sürecini nasıl engelleyebileceğini göstereceğiz. Son olarak, öğrenme ve çeviri sürecinin iyileştirilmesi ile ilgili bazı öneriler ve öneriler bu belgeyi sonuçlandıracaktır.

**Anahtar kelimeler:** Karşılaştırmalı analiz, hata analizi, çeviri, yazılı üretim, oral üretim.

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## Introduction

The birth of linguistics as the scientific study of languages has changed our conception vis-à-vis languages. The language has become for the first time an object of study. In this perspective, language is considered as a system; a linguistic system that has an internal organization. Linguistics continues its development through time and works in linguistics abound giving rise to new theories and approaches. Over time, linguists are beginning to question the mechanisms acquisition and learning of language systems.

The term acquisition refers to the term of learning a language. In this framework, we often speak of the acquisition of mother tongues and the learning of foreign languages. In the second case the learner puts in contact at least two linguistic systems; the first is compulsorily acquired while the second is to be acquired through a learning process. Indeed, the confrontation of languages in learning and negative influences that can be transmitted on each other is one of the hypotheses of contrastive linguistics. This idea is not arbitrary since linguists belonging to this field of study found that indeed, it is the differences between the different linguistic systems that are causing the difficulties observed during the written/Spoken production of foreign languages.

### 1. Contrastive linguistics

Contrastive linguistics is not the only discipline which is generally interested in errors that may be the result of interference between languages. Indeed, it's inevitably for the learner learning any foreign language to commit mistakes and errors. Generally speaking, the level of skills is measured in relation to their occurrence. So it is estimated that there is a negative correlation between mistakes made and the level of learners; a reduced number errors implies high competence and vice versa. Now, it seems clear that error has a crucial and indispensable role in the learning process.

This paper is part of this movement that places importance on the mistake in order to facilitate the production in the foreign language (English) and hence a successful translation/interpretation. For this purpose, and pulling from my own experience as a teacher of English language at the tertiary level for more than 10 years, I have observed during writing and speaking classes that my students commit serious mistakes when they are required to translate/ interpret a short passage, idiomatic expressions, compound sentences, proverbs...etc. they also fail to give the same meaning of some words or expressions they know in French

The aim of this paper is therefore, on the one hand, to try to understand the difficulties experienced by learners during their writing and speaking through recurrences errors. We will try, if possible, to explain the causes of errors by categorizing them as interlingual errors that result interference between two languages, or as intralingual errors that emerge only as a result of a lack of knowledge of the rules of the target language by providing genuine examples. Before doing so, the subsequent sections will be devoted to a thorough explanation about the position of French and English in Algeria.

### 2. French as a second language in Algeria

Algeria is a French-speaking country because of its colonial past. The history that binds Algeria to France dates back several years. Algeria has been a French colony for 132 years. Recall that France landed in Algeria in the mid-nineteenth century. Following a problem between the two French and Algerian governments, France decided to conquer Algeria. From this time, Algeria becomes a French department,

therefore an integral part of the hexagonal territory. But, unable to support the system to which France has submitted, the Algerians have decided to go to war against France in 1954 (Ageron, 2005). It remained from this period, among others, a cultural heritage of which the French language is a part.

In the aftermath of independence, the main objective of the Algerian authorities in terms of language was to give back to Arabic the place it had lost. Thus, they proceeded to the policy of Arabization . It is a policy aimed at giving back to the Arabic all its rights and proclaiming it a national and official language (Grandguillaume, 1983). As for French, it is given the status of second language. As a result, a series of reforms organizing its learning have been put in place. But since the decision of the state to Arabize the education system the place of French has been reduced in schools. We can say that with each reform, the place of this language narrows like the skin of sorrows of Balzac. Its weekly hourly volume continues to change, from 15 hours per week to 11 hours during the three years of the second (primary) level and nine hours per week during the three years of the third level (high school) (Taleb Ibrahim, 1995).

### 2.1. French status in Algeria

In the linguistic practices of the Algerian speakers, the French language is always present. Nevertheless, these practices are different from one social milieu to another and manifest themselves in various forms. We find in these environments direct loans and integrated loans. It should be mentioned that, as pointed out (Benhamla, 2009), it is not necessarily a matter of necessity borrowing. Often, the borrowed sign keeps its original referent.

Direct loans: the lexical unit borrowed from the French language undergoes no transformation.

Normal Ex: **Normal** to (do)

Especially Ex: **Surout** (do not forget)

Car: (She is in) **Tomobile**

It should be noted that the words between brackets are pronounced by the Algerians in local language; however, those written in bold are pronounced in French language even by illiterate people. Integrated borrowing: the borrowed lexical unit undergoes morpho-syntactic and phonetic modifications in order to adapt to the Arabic language.

La table / tablə /

Le cinema / əssinima /

#### 2.1.1. French in Algerians' daily life

Many signs, billboards are written exclusively in French and that since the law of generalization of the Arabic language. Similarly for the names of the streets, several streets in Algeria bear the names of French personalities.

Examples:

Store signs: cafeteria, boulangerie, boucherie, station, coiffeur, restaurant.

The names of the streets: St. John, St. Cloud, Gambetta, Square, Corniche, Polygon Square. St.Arnaud

Advertising signs: Ifri, carte sim, l'eau, la marque, la société...etc.

### **2.1.2. Types of Francophones in Algeria**

According to Rehal (2001), the Algerian sociolinguistic reality has identified 3 types of Francophones:

1. Real French speakers: people who speak French in everyday life and who communicate in French with those around them.
2. Occasional Francophones: These are individuals who use French in very specific situations (formal or informal) but in this category there is an alternative use of French and Arabic (dialect).
3. Passive Francophones: it is the speakers who understand French but do not speak it.

### **3. English language in Algeria**

The status quo of French and English in Algeria are quite different. While the official language in Algeria is the first language 'Arabic' (precisely Modern Standard Arabic MSA), the first foreign language (or a second language) that is taught in the Algerian schools is French, starting from grade 4 to the tertiary level. English in Algeria is considered as a Second Foreign Language (FL) because it is taught as a subject in schools and exposure to it is only confined to the classroom setting. Outside the classroom, English is not spoken by Algerians in their daily life, as opposed to French, but used for particular academic or professional purposes.

In Algerian schools, English is introduced in the second year in the middle school as a foreign language after French which is taught in the fourth year at the primary level as aforementioned. Teachers utilize English textbooks designed by Algerian planners and these are used as the official materials in the classroom during two years of English in the elementary school, and three more years at the secondary school.

After completing the secondary schooling and obtaining the Baccalaureate certificate, various options are available for tertiary education according to previous intermediate schooling streams. The least degree is Senior Technician (ST) which is Technicien Supérieur in French version. There is bachelor's level whose duration is generally four years in the classical education system and with the introduction of LMD (Licence, Master, Doctorat) system, bachelor's program has been reduced to three years. In these programs, English may or may not a compulsory subject. It depends also on the specialization. The unsystematic approach in schools towards the teaching of English, the dearth of suitably qualified teachers and the lack of adequate teaching and learning materials have a negative cumulative effect when school leavers congregate at the national institutions for tertiary education.

### **4. Language interference**

Studies on bilingualism or "languages in contact", which have been conducted by Weinreich (1953) gave rise to the term "interference" to reference to all the differences that exist between the speech of a monolingual and a bilingual; In this context, interference is a deviation from the standard of each language spoken by the bilingual and found in his speech. Thus, a bilingual speaker will be able to

interfere as well in his first language than in his second. It is important to point out that in contrastive linguistics, the term interference comes to replace terms such as "negative transfer" which is considered a term conveying a pejorative connotation.

To better understand the interferential phenomenon, it is necessary to approach it from different angles by examining it according to various disciplines. Debyser (1970) outlines the general definitions of the term in psychology, linguistics and pedagogy.

#### 4.1. In psychology

In psychology, linguistic interference is perceived as a Behavioral contamination, an earlier habit that will exert a negative influence on a new habit. The language can be defined, in this context, as a set of behaviors, regarding learned and learned behaviors.

These behaviors are set in linguistic habits. Indeed; there is omnipresent unconscious strength, namely a desire or a pent-up temptation to express oneself in the mother tongue. Indeed, these language behaviors prevent the acquisition of other linguistic behaviors. (Ibid, pp.34-45)

#### 4.2. In pedagogy

In living languages pedagogy, terms are often used, as in the case of "Deviations", "slips", "transfers", "parasites", to qualify interference that is considered to be a particular type of fault, an obstacle that hinders the learning process by the emergence of elements of the language in the target language as a result of habits or structures already acquired. (Ibid: 34-61)

As previously explained by Debyser, the concept of interference is defined differently according to each discipline. However, interference in the target language is the use of elements belonging to another language; the source or target language. This definition is equivocal, since it also refers to the notion of code-switching or alternating code which is the conscious shift from one language to another, while the interference is unintentional and accidental.

The concept of linguistic interference is the pivot of contrastive linguistics. This concept has been framed by linguists to replace the notion of negative transfer, which, as we have already said, has a pejorative connotation. Interference appears when one encounters the target language, the language targeted by learning, unwanted linguistic elements belonging to the source language, or target. The following passage by Sores (2008) summarizes what we have just to express as follows:

“The mother tongue has an influence called *the negative transfer* on learning the foreign language. In order to avoid the negative nuance, the phenomenon also called "interference": a line of L1 appears in L2, or a feature of the "source" language appears in the "Target" language” (p.18)

### 5. Error analysis

Starting from an empirical view, researchers have developed from 1960s, a new approach that is closely related to learning and the acquisition of foreign languages. The error analysis has been developed so to understand the different constraints that hinder the assimilation of target languages

The pioneer of this new approach is the illustrious Pit Corder, who built the bases and principles of this approach based more or less on previously established by other researchers, such as Noam Chomsky, in order to develop certain concepts. In this perspective Corder (1980) explains that: "We have seen in the exhaustive contrastive study of linguistic systems of the foreign language (LE) and L1 of the learner major contribution linguists to language teaching."

He had to take out an inventory areas of difficulty encountered by the learner, this inventory contributing to direct the attention of teachers to areas of care and particular emphasis, in order to overcome, or even avoid, difficulties thus provided. Such a contribution has not always convinced the teachers who are already familiar in their practical experience with these difficulties. So they did not perceive this contribution of linguists as providing new and relevant information. They found, for example, many of the mistakes they were not familiar with anyway provided by linguists.

Teachers cared less about identifying these difficulties as the way of treating them, from where they have rightly felt that linguists ultimately had little information to bring to them. Corder (1980, p. 9)

Indeed, the essentially predicative vision of contrastive linguistics proved to be insufficient, with many shortcomings. However, it is crucial to note from this perspective that error analysis emerged as a new discipline following work in linguistics. In other words, contrastive linguistics precedes the analysis of errors in time. That is to say, it is imperative to resort to contrastive linguistics in order to explain certain mechanisms that contribute to the emergence of certain errors. In the explanatory phases of errors, contrastive linguistics turns out, sometimes, unavoidable.

Indeed, this analytical procedure comes to complement and not to supplant contrastive linguistics. The relationship between these two approaches is therefore reciprocal.

There is simply a change of strategy here: "Researchers working with real material produced by learners could not fail to notice that many of the errors predicted by CA did not appear at all, while many errors appeared without being predicted by CA. In such a situation, it is natural to reverse the procedure by starting genuine hardware, first by describing it systematically, then analyzing possible error causes." (Ringbom, 1994)

## 5.1. Simple categories

We call simple categories those that have only one level linguistic, unlike the combined categories that we will explain by the after. The linguistic levels constituting this part are: errors morphological, syntactic, and semantic.

### 5.1.1. Morphological errors

Morphological knowledge concerns "the way words are constructed from the minimal units of meaning, called morphemes (Bouillon, 1998: 13) They can be whole words like those found in the dictionary, "apple, for example" (ibid.), as they may be parts of words or rather affixes, "for example, anti + or + tion" (ibid.). Affixes become attached to the word; in the beginning, they are called prefixes, and in the end, they are suffixes. Finally, the central part is called root. The following table (ibid.) in a clear way:

Prefix	Root	Suffix
anti	social	ist
	participate	tion
il	legal	
im	possible	ly

From these definitions, we deduced that morphological errors can only concern the form of words or parts of words. The category of morphological errors so includes subcategories that distinguish different types of errors: Derivative errors concerning the bad construction of the word from its affixes, which change the grammatical category of the word. Thus, errors of the canonical form, which concerns the wrong form of the root word, or in other words, the word that does not appear to be identical to the word in the dictionaries.

### 5.1.2. Syntactic errors

Syntactic knowledge "describes how words are combined in syntactically correct sentences and also encode their structural regularity; they make it possible to oppose the sentence (a), syntactically well formed (a) to sentence (b) ill-formed (where, by convention, the asterisk indicates a sentence syntactically ill-formed)" (ibid.: 14)

t. «I study English»

b. "English is studying me"

in our case, SVO (subject, verb, object) pattern in English and French is dissimilar to the syntactic pattern in Arabic which is VSO.

One may translate from Arabic into English: أكل القط الفأر

As \* eating mouse the cat

Syntax is therefore concerned with the location and functions of the elements of the phrase. Syntactic information is subdivided into information categories including the different syntactic categories: noun, verb, pronoun, etc. (ibid.: 36) Thus in sub-category information which "Distinguish different subclasses within categories syntactically, by specifying the syntactic framework in which the word appears. The verbs, adjectives, prepositions and certain nouns differ in fact from according to their argumentative structure, that is, the number and type arguments they require (Grishman, 1990).

The verb could be transitive, intransitive or bitransitive depending on the arguments it

can take, Pierrette (ibid) explains it as follows: "A verb, for example, can take a single argument (verb intransitive), two arguments (a subject and a direct object complement or indirect - transitive verb) or even three arguments (a subject, a complement direct object and an indirect object complement - bitransitive verb). He can too have multiple argumentative structures (like giving which is either transitive or bitransitif)" (ibid.)

From these definitions, we deduce that syntactic errors must be linked only with the wrong location of the elements of the sentence or its constitution in a general way.

Among the errors we have noted are: the addition of superfluous elements to the sentence, the deletion of the mandatory elements such as a subject, verb or preposition, heavy sentences etc.

### 5.1.3. Semantic errors

Semantic knowledge "relates to the meanings of words and the way whose senses combine to form the overall meaning of the sentence ". What it allowed to detect the semanticity of the meaning is in the first place its relationship with the world outside. A syntactically correct phrase like "Orange ideas are popular?". (Ibid. 14) is semantically wrong since in the real world, "the ideas do not designate orange-colored objects (Cann, 1993, pp. 6-7)

So semantic errors are errors that have a strong relationship with the meaning only, provided that the sentence is syntactically correct. If it's not the case, we categorize the error into the category that combines semantics and syntax.

Syntaxes have relations only with the elements of the sentence, their functions, and their location. Finally, semantic errors concern the meaning of words and their relations with the outside world.

### 5.2. Pragmatic Errors

In addition to the lexical and semantic meaning at the sentence and word level, learners usually fail to interpret the pragmatic or discorsal meaning beyond the sentence level. Pragmatics and culture are much linked and an ignorance of the target language culture would lead to a communication breakdown; Byram (1989) believes that language is a tool to express speakers' knowledge and perception of the real world. Language, for him, reflects cultural concepts and values. He moves forward arguing that it is impossible to learn a language while neglecting its culture. Kramsch (1998) gives three links between language and culture: language expresses, language embodies and language symbolizes cultural reality.

Idiomatic expressions and proverbs are a typical example of cultural reality of any language. Algerian learners, most of the time, find it challenging to translate or interpret some expressions. The following are the most common examples that led to funny, weird and embarrassing literal meaning:

#### 5.2.1. Discourse Meaning

A: do you fancy a cup of tea?

B: *is the pope catholic?*

#### 5.2.2. Idiomatic Expressions

*It is raining cats and dogs*

*Bob's your uncle*

*Under the weather*

*To be off*

*A clever dick*

### 5.2.3. Sayings and proverbs

*I beg your pardon*

**K.O** (*knocked out: translated as COW, the animal*)

*Tit for Tat*

## 6. False Friends

False friends is a word that is often confused with a word in another language with a different meaning because the two words look or sound similar: False friends have become a real problem for language learners. This paper focuses on false friends and on their role in the interlanguage of Algerian learners of English. From an EFL context, a false friend could be defined as an L2 word that is formally similar to an L1 word in spelling and/or pronunciation but whose meanings are totally or partially different in both languages. In this case, we can say that this definition could not apply on Algerian learners who are occasional francophone speakers and who generally have a rich background of French. That is to say, Arabic speaking learner would commit errors in English due to similar words found, not in Arabic, but in French. The most common errors that my learners frequently commit are the misuse of the following words and expression:

My little brother is **sensible\***, = my little brother is *sensitive*

What a **deception!\*** = what a *disappointment!*

I do not like people who interrupt my **parole\*** = I do not like people who interrupt my *speech*

## 7. Suggestions and recommendations for curriculum designers

- Contrastive and error analysis play a crucial role in language awareness when it comes to dissimilarities between two or group of languages. For this reason, we suggest that contrastive and error analysis should be integrated in EFL curriculum.
- Language typology has become imperative to be taught at the tertiary level.
- CA should be integrated into teacher training programs
- Learners should be aware about the differences between the three languages spoken in Algeria and then there should be a translation/interpretation unit integrated at an early stage of learning; starting from elementary school.
- Learners should be encouraged to switch code at any point of learning.

## Conclusion

This paper illustrated the root of errors Algerians learners of English commit when translating or interpreting from English into Arabic or French and vice versa. The main aim was therefore to identify recurring errors in order to understand the difficulties experienced the learner during the writing and

speaking classes. In this sense, recurrence has the meaning of difficulties. The ultimate goal is then to submit a balance sheet constituting information of educational importance

In order to reach the goal of our research, it was necessary to identify and categorize errors into general types that constitute levels languages adapted to writing: from the introductory book to automatic processing natural languages by Pierrette (1998) and his collaborators, we have could constitute a typology that allows us to put errors into categories and subcategories. This typology was of paramount importance. She told us allowed to organize the information gathered in a more or less precise way, facilitating their statistical processing.

We have subdivided the typology into simple categories (morphological, syntactic and semantic errors). Also, pragmatics errors and the failure to understand the meaning above sentence level are very common in learners' productions. This had often resulted in embarrassing, funny or ambiguous interpretation. And because French is considered as an omnipresent language in Algerians' life, it is also interfering language which may hinder the process of learning and translation. Similar words in French whose meaning is different in English are the most prominent mistakes learners commit.

All in all, the syllabus and curriculum designers are in the best position to implement changes on curriculum content. It is high time learner's knew about difference and similarities between the three spoken languages in Algeria and be aware of the different language origins and how these divergences may affect language learning and acquisition.

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