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**The Misuse of The English Prepositions (In, On, At) by Student of English  
Third Year LMD, University of Mohammed Seddik Ben Yahia as a Result  
of Transfer From Standard Arabic Into English**

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for  
The Master Degree in Language Sciences

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### **Abstract**

This study aims at describing and probing the reality of the phenomenon of the transfer of English simple prepositions particularly (at, in and on) from Standard Arabic into English. The aim then is to check whether this transfer results in the misuse of these prepositions. For the purpose of examining our hypothesis, a test is administered to ninety students of third year English LMD at Mohammed Seddik Ben Yahia University. This test is comprised of twenty sentences and students are asked to fill in each gap with the appropriate preposition or with no preposition. The results of the data analysis demonstrates that transfer occurs positively and negatively. Most of the cases are of the negative transfer from Standard Arabic and the Algerian dialect and very few are of the positive one. This partially confirms our hypothesis and reveals that Standard Arabic is not the only source of transfer.

**Dedications**

To the greatest person in my life “ Mom ” without whom I would not be here today, may  
Allah the almighty reward you for everything you did to me,

To my beloved family and all friends who supported me the whole way,

To all those who encouraged me to reach this step

Thank you so much

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**List of Abbreviations**

CA : Contrastive Analysis

CAH : Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis

EA : Error Analysis

EFL : English as a Foreign Language

L1 : First Language

L2 : Second Language

LMD : Licence -Master-Doctorat

MT: Mother Tongue

N : Number

PP: Prepositional Phrase

SLA : Second Language Acquisition

TL :Target Language

% : Percentage

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## **General Introduction**

### **Aim of the Study**

Prepositions' misuse is a phenomenon that deserves being investigated especially because it affects the Algerian students' English proficiency. Language transfer is a real and inevitable fact, therefore; there is a need to know the reasons that make students resort to it and to determine whether they really rely on their Standard Arabic prepositional knowledge when they use the English one.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Prepositions are one of the eight parts of speech in English, they are connectors that link words to convey meaning. There are about 60 words that can be used as prepositions in English. Due to this large amount of prepositions, a significant number of Algerian students who learn English as a foreign language (EFL) have a lot of problems when they come to use them correctly. Students get confused when they come to use prepositions, especially “at, in and on” because of their overlapping meanings in English, that is why they translate them into Standard Arabic and here transfer occurs.

### **Hypothesis**

Students of English 3<sup>rd</sup> year LMD at the university of Mohammed Seddik Ben Yahia misuse the English prepositions (at, in and on) due to the transfer from Standard Arabic into English.

### **Research Questions**

This research aims at addressing the following questions:

1-Why do students misuse the English prepositions (especially at, in and on ) ?

## 2-Why do students resort to transfer?

### **Means of the Research**

In this research one tool is employed to test the suggested hypothesis. A sample of 3<sup>rd</sup> year English students at the university of Mohammed Seddik Ben-Yahia, department of English, are given a test which contains twenty sentences and are asked to fill in the gaps with the appropriate prepositions.

### **Structure of the Research**

It is divided into two main chapters: a descriptive chapter and an empirical chapter. The first chapter will deal with two pioneer concepts upon which the research is based, which are prepositions and language transfer, this is done through two sections. The first section sheds some light on several concepts related to prepositions: prepositions definition, prepositions which express relationships in space and in time; problems with prepositions, and the different relations that can be expressed by the use of prepositions: at, in, and on. Section two is devoted to the definitions of some notions: errors, error analysis and the types of errors related to prepositions, beside language transfer as a concept; factors which lead to transfer, types of transfer, contrastive analysis hypothesis and a contrastive comparison between English and Arabic prepositions. The second chapter stands for the methodology of research and the data analysis and discussion.

### **Limitations and Recommendations**

Along this study we were be limited to one third of the sum of third year LMD English students because of lack of time. Thus, a wider period of time is needed in future questing for getting a larger amount of information. Only one test was given instead of the pre-test and post-test procedure because of the lack of opportunity of manipulating the grammar module

syllabus. Therefore, an experimental design or other methods may be opt for such works in future. Since students do not master the rules of using English prepositions, a requirement to an extensive teaching for them is very recommended.

## **Chapter One: Prepositions and Transfer**

### **Introduction**

Second-language acquisition, second-language learning, or L2 acquisition, is the process by which people learn a second language. Second language studies are concerned with the process of how target languages are learned, and researchers in this field deal with many topics and phenomena like errors, and language transfer. The latter can be noticed with learners dealing with English prepositions. It is a real source of difficulty for EFL learners generally and for Arab EFL learners particularly who tend to transfer their Arabic prepositional knowledge into English. When comparing the prepositional uses in Arabic and English, we find prepositions in English that have equivalents in Arabic and others that do not. There are structures that are equivalent in both languages and others that are not, furthermore; sometimes English requires using a preposition in a sentence or utterance while Arabic does not and vice versa. Hence, errors are committed and transfer takes place either positively or negatively.

## **Section One: Prepositions**

### **1.1. Definition of Prepositions**

“A preposition is a word which shows the relationship between a noun or pronoun to another word in sentence” (Wise & Buffington, 2008, p. 231). The word or phrase that the preposition introduces is called the object of the sentence. Rutherford (1987, p. 122), stated that the use of prepositions makes semantic relations more clarified and easier to be understood. Kennedy (2003, p. 246), pointed that prepositions represent 8% of the used words in spoken language and 12% of the used words in writing. According to Allsop (1986) , “prepositions are words which show the relationship between the things, people or events” (p. 105). Allsop in this quotation, stated that prepositions can express relationships in space and in time and in other relations such as: purpose, possessions, and result. Celce & Freeman (1999, p. 402) considered English prepositions as free morphemes unlike the other languages where they are considered as bound inflectional morphemes. Kurzon and Alder (2008, p. 53) wrote : “ Many English prepositions are morphemically simple, for example: in, on, with; but many are complex”. The most frequently used English prepositions are: at, by, for, from, in, of, on, to and with, (Grubic, 2004, p. 1-34).

### **1.2 . Properties of Prepositions**

#### **A. Syntactic Properties**

According to Quirk & Greenbaum (1975) , “a preposition expresses a relationship between entities: it indicates a relationship in space (between one object and another), and/or a relationship in time (between events), in addition to other relationships such as instrument and cause” (p. 143). Prepositions can be used with different parts of speech of the same root word. For Hamdallah and Tushyeh (1993), one preposition can be used with the verb form,

another with the objective and still another with the noun form of the word, for example: We are fond of something- We have fondness for it. Celce & Freeman (1999), “ Prepositions can be classified according to their form, function and meaning ”. As far as the form is concerned, prepositions can be simple one-word preposition, or complex (also called two-word, three word)”. Simple prepositions are closed class, that is we do not invent new single word prepositions. However, complex prepositions are open class because new combinations could be invented (Grubic, 2004). In English, there are approximately seventy simple prepositions. According to Grubic (2004), the most frequently used are: at, by for, from, in, of, on. to and with (cited in Abkhoo, Gorjian, & Pazhakh, 2014, p. 443).

For Huddleston (1988, p. 124-25), simple prepositions have the following properties:

**A-Inflection:** They do not enter into inflectional contrasts .

**B-Complementation:** They can take as **a complement a noun phrase (NP)**. For example: He will resign before/towards the end of the year), however; other kinds of complements are allowed as well, for example an interrogative clause).

Or **a tensed declarative clause (TDC)**, for example: He will resign before/unless a vote is taken) [...]. The complement may also be:

- i. **A present participle clause:** He resigned after reading the report
- ii. **An interrogative clause:** it depends on whether we can afford it ?
- iii. **A verbless clause:** ( she stood) with her back to the door
- iv. **An adjectival phrase:** ( we regarded her) as very competent
- v. **A prepositional phrase:** (he emerged) from behind the bush [...]

**d. Modification:** they allow only a modest amount of modification

**e. Function:** prepositions function as head in prepositional phrase structure

Quirk & Greenbaum (1975, p. 146) viewed that a prepositional phrase is made of a preposition followed by a prepositional complement which is a noun phrase (example: at the



bus stop) or a wh-clause (example: from what he said) or v-ing clause (example: by signing a peace treaty). These prepositional phrases may function as:

- 1- Adjunct (example: The people on the bus were singing)
- 2- Disjunct (example: To my surprise, the doctor phoned)
- 3- Conjunct (example: On the other hand, he made no attempt to help the victim or apprehend attacker)
- 4- Post modifier in a noun phrase (example: The people on the bus were singing)
- 5- Complementation of a verb (example: We depend on you)
- 6- Complementation of an adjective (example: I am sorry for his parents)

## **B. Semantic Properties**

In semantic terms, the preposition functions to illustrate a logical, temporal, or spatial relationship between the object of the prepositional phrase and the other components of the sentence.

### **B.1. Spatial Meanings**

Leung (1990) maintained that: “the function of spatial preposition is to locate spatially one object with reference to another object” (cited in Hasan and Abdullah, 2009, p. 605). In the sentence: My friend lives in a small village, there is a spatial relationship between “my friend” and “small village” through the use of the preposition “in”. Bennett (1975, p. 12) saw that any comprehensive account of spatial uses of English prepositions assigns a prominent place to the distinction between locative sentences, such as “Gyneth is at the supermarket”, and the directional sentence, such as “Trevor went to the post-office”. Hence, locative sentences show clearly where something is located while directional sentences describe a change of position (that is to say: from one position to another). According to Close (1981, p. 148), in using spatial prepositions, we are concerned not so much with objective measurement, i.e. with the actual dimensions of the things to which we are referring, as with

how we imagine them to be at the time of speaking. Thus we can imagine a town as a point on the map, as a surface to go across, or as a space we live in, or walk through. This quotation shows clearly the distinction made between the three prepositions: in, on and at. These prepositions and others locate along dimensions which are used to locate objects around us.

Examples:

1-The car is at the cottage.

2-There is a window on the cottage.

3-There are two beds in the cottage.

In the first sentence, using “at” makes cottage a dimensionless location, just a point in relation to which the car’s position can be indicated. In the second sentence, with the use of “on” , the cottage becomes a two dimensional area, covered by a roof. In the third sentence, with “in”, the cottage becomes a three dimensional object which in reality it is. “On” is also capable of use with a one dimensional object (example: Put your signature on this line). “In” is also capable of being used with objects which are essentially two dimensional (example: The cow is in the field, where field is considered as an enclosed space). (Quirk & Greenbaum, 1975, p. 147). This is a list of the most important prepositions that express relationship in space:

At, Above , across, against ,along, among, around, behind , below, beneath, beside, between, beyond, by, down, from, in, inside, into, off, near, on, onto, over, past, to, outside, round, through, towards, under, under, up, next to, underneath, in front of, opposite, out of.

## **B.2. Temporal Meanings**

Many prepositions like: at, on, in, to, from, about and for can be used to describe both place and time. Driven (1993) stated:

Extensions of meanings of a preposition from physical space via time into more abstract domains do not occur in any haphazard way but follow a path of gradually increasing

abstractions, whereby, the link with each prior meaning remains obvious and many account for most, if not all co-occurrence restrictions between trajector and landmark.

(p. 76)

In other words, spatial meaning can be extended metaphorically from physical to mental space. There are two sub-types of time enclosure: The first indicates a period of time such as in the afternoon, in the early 1990s, in the 21st century, in summer...etc, whereas the second sub-type indicates duration such as length of time. Example: promised to come back in a few hours ( Hasan & Abdullah, 2009, p. 605). Quirk & Greenbaum (1975, p. 54) referred to “at” and “in” as prepositions of “time, when” because they are used to answer the question “when?”, “At” is used for points of time mainly clock-time (at ten o’clock, at 5:30 p.m., at noon...etc), for holiday periods (at the weekend, at Christmas, at Easter) and for phrases (at night, at the/that time...etc). “On” is used with phrases referring to days (on Monday, on the following day...etc). “In” is used to indicate periods of time such as: in the evening during holy weeks, in August, in the months that followed, in the eighteenth century....etc . Other prepositions of time are for (in addition to others that express duration), between, by...etc. The prepositions before, after, since and until/till occur almost exclusively as prepositions of time, and are followed by a temporal noun phrase (example. before next week), a subjectless v-ing clause (for example: Since leaving school), or a noun phrase with adverbial noun or some other noun phrase interpreted as equivalent to a clause. Examples:

- Until the fall of Rome (that is to say: until Rome fell)
- Before the war (that is to say: before the war started or took place). (Quirk &

Greenbaum, 1975, p. 155).

The usage of “at, in and on” with different descriptions of time in the following table which based on Murphy’s summary (2002, p. 242) can be demonstrated in the following table:

Table 1

*Usage of “at, in and on” with different units of time based on Murphy (2002, p. 242)*

On	In	At	Description of time
On Sunday		At 6	Clock +Time
On Saturday morning			Day+ part of the day
	In the afternoon	At night	Parts of the day
On Christmas day			Special day
On May 16, 1999			Dates
	In April		Months
	In six months		
	In 2005		Year
		At breakfast time	Mealtime
		At Easter	Festival
	In Spring		Season
	In the middle ages		Long periods of time

The most important prepositions which express relations in time are:

At, after, before, between, by, during, from, for, in, since, on, past, to, towards  
through (out), until (or till), Within

### 1.3. Problems With Prepositions

Prepositions are highly polysemous words. The traditional view considered that all the senses of a preposition were highly arbitrary and were not related to one another. Consequently, both dictionaries and grammars used to provide long lists of unrelated senses for each preposition and its possible uses in different contexts. The problem grew even worse

when it came to the study of verb-particle constructions, where the contribution of the particle to the meaning of the whole is crucial, to the point that one can find compounds where the weight of the meaning lies in the particle whereas the verb provides a mere perspective of the event (go/come down, put/take out,...etc). In these constructions, the combinations of verbs and particles seemed to happen absolutely at random. In addition, prepositions and phrasal verbs do not translate well to other languages, which apparently supported the idea that their range of senses was arbitrary. This position was also manifest in teaching grammars and textbooks and consequently, students of English strived to find any logic that help them to understand and learn English prepositions and phrasal verbs (cited in Dolores, 2007, p. 727).

Prepositions are one of the most problematic issues in English because of different factors. According to Langendon (1970, p. 86), “the same relation may be introduced by a variety of prepositions and that the same preposition may be used to introduce many different relations”. That is to say, the description of one meaning seems to be achieved by the use of many prepositions, and at the same time, the use of one preposition seems to be appropriate to describe different meanings. Another problem caused by prepositions is that even short prepositions are provided, some try to use long and complex ones which are called “verbose prepositions” for instance; “for the purpose of”, “prior to”, “in the course of ” which have simple equivalent prepositions which are: “to”, “before” and “during” respectively. Chalker (1984, p. 217) said that: “at, by, for, from, in, on, to and with are the most frequently used prepositions in English”.

#### **1.4. Idioms that Begin With Prepositions**

An idiom is a group of words which, as a whole, has a different meaning from that of the individual items out of which it is composed. That is, the meaning of an idiomatic expression is not the sum total of its constituent parts taken together. So, idioms are already confusing and when they contain prepositions their meanings become far difficult to

understand. Here is a collection of some idioms that contain prepositions taken from Your Dictionary Website.

- **At**

at any rate: whatever happens or is happening.

at one's disposal: available for one's use.

at fault: causing a problem or accident.

at first: in the beginning.

at last: finally, after some delay (connotes a feeling of exhaustion after a long period of waiting).

at a loss: unsure of what to do or say; speechless.

- **Behind**

behind the scenes: influencing events secretly; unseen.

- **Beside**

beside the point: irrelevant.

- **By**

by accident: not on purpose.

by all means: by any possible method.

by hand: without the use of machinery.

by heart: from memory.

by mistake: accidentally.

by oneself: alone.

by the way: incidentally (used to introduce a new, unrelated topic).

- **For**

for good: permanently.

for a living: as a profession.

for one thing: because of one reason (out of several).

for sale: intended to be sold.

for sure: definitely.

for now/ for the time being: until some other arrangement/decision is made.

for a while: for a period of time.

- **From**

from scratch: from raw ingredients/materials; without anything pre-made.

from time to time: occasionally.

- **In**

in advance: before something begins; early.

in any case: whatever happens.

in charge: in command; responsible for.

in common: shared by two or more people.

in danger: likely to be harmed (opposite: out of danger/out of harm's way).

in a daze: unable to think clearly; confused.

in debt: owing money (opposite: out of debt).

in demand: wanted by many people.

in the end: after everything is finished (describes a final outcome).

in fact: in reality; really.

in a hurry: doing something quickly.

in itself: without anything else.

in the long run: in the end; eventually.

in mint condition: perfect; as though brand-new.

in a minute/moment/second: soon; quickly (used to tell how much longer it will be until something happens).

in no time: very soon; very quickly (used to tell how quickly something happened).

in season: (fruit or vegetables) ripe and available for sale at that time of year  
(opposite: out of season).

in trouble: blamed or punished for doing something wrong; in a difficult situation  
(opposite: out of trouble).

in vain: without success.

in the wrong: responsible for an error; guilty.

- **Inside**

inside out: with the inner side out.

- **Of**

of course: certainly; as one would expect; as everyone knows.

- **Off**

off and on: (describes a situation that exists at some times, but not others, over a period of time).

- **On**

on account of: because of.

on the air: in the process of broadcasting (on radio or television).

on all fours: (people) on hands and knees; (animals) on all four feet.

on demand: when requested or demanded.



on fire: burning; in flames (not burning as in turning black from staying in the oven too long).

on hand: available; in stock.

on the lookout: watchful.

on the one hand: (used to introduce the first side of an argument).

on one's own: alone; without assistance.

on the other hand: alternatively (used with “on the one hand” to introduce a contrasting side of an argument).

on purpose: deliberately.

on sale: being sold at a reduced price.

on second thought: after thinking further.

on a shoestring: with very little money.

on the spur of the moment: spontaneously; on a sudden impulse.

on time: at the correct time.

on the verge of: very close to (an achievement).

- **Out**

out of the blue: unexpectedly.

out of breath: panting from a shortage of oxygen (usually due to physical exertion).

out of character: different from a person's known character.

out of order: not functioning.

out of the ordinary: unusual.

out of practice: unable to do something as well as one once could because of lack of recent practice.

out of the question: not to be considered; not an option.

out of shape: not in top physical condition because of lack of exercise (opposite: in shape).

out of sight: not able to be seen; hidden (opposite: in sight).

out of town: not in the city/town where one normally resides (opposite: in town).

out of tune: (of music/musical instruments) not at the correct pitch (opposite: in tune).

out of work: unemployed.

- **To**

to a certain extent: partly.

- **Under**

under one's breath: in a whisper; not intending to be heard.

under the circumstances: because of the current situation/circumstance.

under control: able to be controlled or influenced (opposites: out of control/out of hand).

under fire: being shot at; being criticized.

under the impression that: having the idea/belief that.

under the influence of: affected by (usually alcohol or drugs).

- **Up**

up in the air: uncertain (with regard to the outcome of a situation).

- **With**

with the naked eye: without the use of a lens.

with regard/respect to: concerning; about.

with a vengeance: more than usual; angrily.

- **Within**

within reason: that is reasonable.

## **1.5. The Use of At, In , On**

### **1.5.1. At, In, On as Prepositions of Space**

English uses the prepositions “at, in and on” as prepositions of space .According to Driven (1993, p. 76) “at, in, and on are the basic and the most general place prepositions”.

**At:** is used:

- To state a point of orientation. Example: meet me at the corner .
- To describe generally a situation without stating its preceded space.

Example: I ‘am sitting at my desk.

- We use ‘at’ + building when we deal with its purpose. Example: The Browns are at the theatre watching a play. ( Eastwood, 2002, p. 291).
- We use ‘at’ to : say that somebody is at home/at work / at school /at university / at college . Example: I’ll be at work until 5.30 but I’ll be at home all evening. Example: Julia is studying chemistry at university.
- Also at sea (= on a voyage).Example : It was a long voyage. We were at sea for 30 days.
- At a party / at a corner etc: We say that somebody is at an event (at a party/ at a conference... etc ). Examples: Were there many people at the party/ at the meeting ? I saw Jack at a football match / at a concert last Saturday.’ (Murphy, 1994, p. 248).

**In:**

According to Driven (1993, p. 76) :“ ‘in’ denotes the enclosure of the trajectory in the land mark and therefore, views the land mark as two or three dimensional space (a surface or a volume”. We use ‘in’ in names of villages, towns and cities. Example: arrive in London.

According to Eastwood (2002) : “in is three-dimensional” (p. 291). We use it when we see something as all around.” Examples :

I had five pounds in my pocket.

Who's that man in the green sweater?

There was a man sitting in the waiting room.

It was cold in the library. (= inside the building).

We finally arrived in Birmingham.

### **On:**

Driven (1993, p. 76): “On denotes physical contact between trajectory and land mark necessitating viewing the land mark as two or more dimensional spaces (a line) or two dimensional spaces (a surface)”. According to Eastwood (2002, p. 291): “On is two-dimensional”. We use it for a surface. Don't leave your glass on the floor. Examples :

There were lots of pictures on the walls.

We also use on for a line.

Paris is on the Seine.

The house is right on the main road, so it is a bit noisy.

### **1.5.2. At, In, On as Prepositions of Time**

#### **At:**

\_For Eastwood (2002, p. 295) we use “at” in phrases saying when. Example :See you at one o'clock.

\_We use at with a particular time such as a clock time or meal time.

\_at half past five at breakfast (time)      at that time      at the moment

\_We also use “at” with holiday periods of two or three days.

\_at Christmas at Thanksgiving at the weekend

### **On:**

\_With phrases referring to days (on Monday, on the following day...etc).

\_With punctuality: On time.

\_With full dates: On July 5<sup>th</sup> .

### **In:**

The preposition “In” is used to indicate periods of time such as:

“In” the evening during holy week, in August, in the months that followed, in the eighteenth century....etc. (Quirk & Greenbaum, 1975, p. 154).

### **1.5.3. At, In, On to Express Other Relations**

In addition to the relation of space and time, the prepositions at, in, on can be used to describe other relations.

**At:** It can be used to express:

- Reaction especially (emotional). Example : I am amazed at your suggestion.
- Level of suggestion. Example: Good at games bad at remembering faces.
- For giving directions. Example: Go along the road, then turn left at the shop. (Murphy ,2002, p. 244).
- With the name of a particular organization. Example: He worked at the Acme bikes company.
- With meals: Example: One day at lunch, she told me the secret.

**In:** It can be used to express:

- Manners : Example: she replied in the most offensive manner (way).
- The verb “arrive” when we think about the place itself. Example: we arrived in London two days ago.

**On:** It can be used to express :

Subject matter: Example: He spoke on the birds of Christ church harbor .

Means of transportation such as: bus, train, plane. Example: They traveled to France by plane.

With Gerund of some words, mainly of information. Example: On checking, she discovered that the papers were not hers.

## **Section Two: Language Transfer**

### **1.6. The Notion of Errors**

The process of language learning, like any other process of acquiring a skill, involves making a lot of errors. All learners of a second language commit a number of errors. Dulay and Burt (1974) expressed this notion in the phrase "You can't learn without goofing" (p. 1). They see an error or a "goof" as a natural product of the process of L2 learning for which no blame is implied. Before the 1960s, the behaviourist view was the dominant in the field of teaching, it considered errors as flaws that must be eradicated. In behaviourist accounts of SLA, errors were considered undesirable. They were evidence of non-learning, of the failure to overcome proactive inhibition. Some language teaching theorists even suggested that there was a danger of errors becoming habits in their own right if they were tolerated. Brooks (1960, p. 56), for instance, wrote: "Like sin, error is to be avoided and its influence overcome...". However, as errors were the result of the negative transfer of first language habits (that is to say: were habits already), it is difficult to see how they could become habits simply by tolerating them. Errors, according to the behaviourist theory, were the result of non-learning, rather than wrong learning. But in either case there was almost total agreement that errors should be avoided. To this end, attempts were made to predict when they would occur. By comparing the learner's native language with the target language, differences could be identified and used to predict areas of potential error. In this way classroom practice could be

directed on the problem areas in order to help the learner overcome the negative effects of first language transfer ( Ellis, 1985, p. 20-23).

Corder, known as the father of error analysis, was the first to advocate the importance of errors in the language learning process. He presented a completely different point of view through his article entitled “The Significance of Learner Errors” in 1967. He suggested that with the classification of errors, researchers could learn a great deal about the second language learning process because they are believed to contain valuable information on the strategies that L2 learners use. According to him, errors are also indispensable for learners themselves since the making of errors can be regarded as a device the learner uses in order to learn. For Gass & Selinker (2001, p. 78) “errors are red flags that provide evidence of the L2 learner’s knowledge”.

There are different definitions of the word “error” and as Ellis explained “learners make errors in both comprehension and production, the first being rather scantily investigated” (1985, p.53). Children learning their first language (L1), adult native speakers, second language learners; they all make errors which have a different name according to the group committing the error.

### **1.7. Error Analysis (EA)**

Error analysis is a type of linguistic analysis that focuses on the errors learners make. It consists of a comparison between the errors made in the target language (TL) and that TL itself. Corder, (1967, p. 125) who has contributed enormously to EA wrote:

The study of error is part of the investigation of the process of language learning. In this respect it resembles methodologically the study of the acquisition of the mother tongue. It provides us with a picture of the linguistic development of a learner and may give us indications as to the learning process.

### **1.8. Error Analysis Objectives**

According to Corder (1974): “Systematically analyzing errors made by language learners makes it possible to determine areas that need reinforcement in teaching”. Error analysis is a type of linguistic analysis that focuses on the errors learners make. According to Corder (1974), error analysis has two objectives: one theoretical and another applied. The theoretical objective serves to “elucidate what and how a learner learns when he studies a second language” and the applied object serves to enable the learner “to learn more efficiently by exploiting our knowledge of his dialect for pedagogical purposes” (cited in Rohan, 2010, p.98). When errors are analyzed, the nature of difficulties and problems faced by L2 learners is identified which helps teachers to modify their way of teaching and checking their teaching materials.

Corder (1967), for instance, in his influential article, remarked that "they are significant in three different ways. Firstly, to the teacher, in that they show how far towards the goal the learner has progressed. Secondly, they provide to the researcher evidence of how a language is acquired, what strategies the learner is employing in his learning of a language. Thirdly, they are indisputable to the learner himself because we can regard the making of errors as a device the learner uses in order to learn" (p. 161). For Richards and Sampson (1974), at the level of pragmatic classroom experience, error analysis will continue to provide one means by which the teacher assesses learning and teaching and determines priorities for future effort. ” (cited in Rohan , 2010, p. 98).

### **1.9. Sources of Errors and Linguistic Problems**

Thahir (1987) indicated that prepositions can cause a problem for Arabic learners of English. What makes it harder for Arab learners of English to master English preposition usage is that Arabic prepositions are more limited in number than those of English. It is



important to mention that these prepositions exist only in English like: At, of, by, henceforth; they remain problematic (cited in Hamadallah & Tushyeh, 1993, p. 185).

Zughoul (1979) classified the sources of difficulty in learning English prepositions. He found that the first three ones are general difficulties, whereas, the last two ones are related to Arab EFL learners:

1-The first source of difficulty is related to the number of meanings that each preposition bears.

2-The use of different prepositions with the same word results in totally different meanings, for instance: look at, look after, look up...etc.

3- English users do not have the ability to provide a convincing description for the use of these prepositions or a clear guide of their usage.

4- The traditional rules of teaching such as: the grammar translation method, give the opportunity for students to translate in their minds.

5- In addition to the problem of translation; the problem of interference from the NL Arabic. (cited in Hamadallah & Tushyeh, 1993, p. 186).

#### **1.10. Types of Errors in the Use of Prepositions (Substitution, Redundant, Omission)**

Errors made by Arab EFL learners can be classified into three types: substitution errors, redundant errors, and omission errors. Scott & Tucker (1974) defined substitution errors as the use of a wrong word; while they defined redundant errors as they indicate that an unnecessary word or two or more words were used where only one was required. Further, they defined omission errors as errors which indicate that a word was omitted where necessary. They affirmed that errors containing omission of prepositions that had their causes in both NL and English interference. Also, the redundant use of prepositions had its cause in Arabic, as well as, the substitution of prepositions derived from both Arabic and English structures. Scott and tucker mentioned that Arab EFL learners acquire the meaning of the

English lexical prepositions, before they acquire all descriptions of their usage (cited in Hamadallah & Tushyeh, 1993, p. 186).

These are examples of these three kinds of prepositions' errors:

- **Substitution Errors**

- \_At the winter the weather is very cold.
- \_He was walking for the path.
- \_Her mom always thinks in her.
- \_He can work anything by money.
- \_It is deprived from several sources apart from diseases and death.
- \_There is no work for everyone on the world.
- \_I'm dreaming by graduation.

- **Redundant Errors**

- \_When I finish from learning I'll start working
- \_She wanted to live on a happy life.
- \_Judge on people.
- \_Treating with children.
- \_Jijel is near from Constantine.

- **Omission Errors**

- \_ It requires knowledge his Mother tongue to deal with foreigners
- \_ He came Sunday.
- \_By the beginning next year
- \_They were born the same day.

In studying preposition errors made by Arab EFL learners. Zughoul ( 1979) achieved the following conclusions:

- 1- Sometimes, there is a correspondence between English and Arabic preposition equivalent.

2- In some cases, in describing an idea in Arabic, we do not require to replace the English preposition.

3- Generally, students attempt to keep one essential equivalent for each English preposition, and this one to one translation can express the proper English word in several cases, this does not work in many instances.

4- The English preposition can be described by different parts of speech, not just by an equivalent Arabic preposition. (cited in Hamadallah & Tushyeh, 1993,p. 187)

### **1.11. Defining Language Transfer**

"L1" in Second Language Acquisition (SLA) studies stands for the speaker's mother tongue or native language in contrast to any additional languages he/she may learn, which are referred to as L2, L3, and so on. According to Liu (2001, p. 1): "Transfer is derived from the Latin word *transferre*, means to carry, to bear or to print, impress or otherwise copy (as a drawing or engraved design) from one surface to another". By linguistic transfer, we mean what the learners carry over to or generalize in their knowledge about their native language (NL) to help them learn to use a target language (TL). Here transfer does not indicate whether what is carried over is bad or good.

The identification of transfer was first discussed by Corder, in 1981, who remarked that it is the duty of both teachers of languages and native speakers of the language to point out the transfer according to the rules of language. Odlin (1989, p. 7) referred to transfer as: "The influence resulting from similarities and differences between the target language and other language that has been previously (and perhaps) imperfectly inquired.". Many behaviourists were interested in the influence of previous learning tasks on the new learning ones, in other words; the new learning task is influenced by the previous learned ones. This led to the "hypothesis of transfer" which Ellis (1965) considers as "perhaps the single important concept in the theory and practice of education." (cited in Carl, 1980, p. 11).

Transfer is also defined as the influence of a language A on language B, as Ellis (1965) stated: "[...] the hypothesis that the learning of task A will affect the subsequent learning of task B". If task A and task B are substituted with L1 and L2 respectively, it will be easy to understand that L1 learning (prior learning) affects L2 learning (subsequent learning). (cited in James, 1980, p. 11)

### **1.12. Types of Language Transfer**

In 1957, Robert Lado claimed that the individuals tend to transfer the forms and meanings, and distribution of forms of meanings of their native language and culture to the foreign language and culture both productively when attempting to speak the language and to act in the culture, and receptively when attempting to grasp and understand the language as practiced by natives (Gass & Selinker, 2001, p. 2). Transfer is the application of knowledge learned in one setting or for one purpose to another setting and/or purpose (Gagne et al., 1993, p. 235). Another explanation was stated by Lado (1957, p. 2) as : "...those elements that are similar to this native language will be simple for him, and those elements that are different will be difficult". Concerning the types, different types of transfer are stated in the definition of transfer given by Ellis (1997, p. 341):

Transfer is to be seen as a general cover term for a number of different kinds of influence from languages other than the L2. The study of transfer involves the study of errors (negative transfer), facilitation (positive transfer), avoidance of target language forms and their over-use.

Jordan (2004, p. 169) stated that Lado went on to suggest that there were two types of language transfer: positive transfer (facilitation) and negative transfer (interference).

#### **A. Positive Transfer**

Also known as facilitation; transfer results in something correct. Positive transfer occurs when knowledge of a native language facilitates the learning of a target language: past

knowledge is accurately applied to present subject matter (Brown, 2007, p. 102). Positive transfer refers to those instances of transfer of old habits resulting from the learners' mother tongues to the target language that results in correct performance because the new behaviours are the same as the old (Dulay, Burt, & Krashen, 1982, p. 100). According to Yule (2006, p. 167) : "if the L1 and L2 have similar features (for example: marking plural at the ends of nouns), then, the learner may be able to benefit from the positive transfer of the L1 knowledge to the L2". Yule in his quotation suggests when the the first language is similar to the second language, this may facilitate the progress of learning the L2 rules and application.

### **B. Negative transfer:**

Also known as interference; refers to those instances of transfer where an error occurs because the old habitual behaviour is different from the new behaviour that is being learned (Duly, Burt, & Krashen, 1982, p. 102). From the definitions above, one can assert that if the two languages have features in correspondence, there will be positive transfer or facilitation; and where the two systems are not in correspondence, the cases of negative transfer will occur or what is called "interference" will happen (Corder, 1971, p. 112). Some researchers claim that negative transfer is more common among beginners, others argue that in order to transfer some L1 features learners may require a certain amount of L2 knowledge. In fact, transfer may occur on all the levels of L2 proficiency, and it can either accelerate or retard development (Ellis, 2008, p. 395).

### **1.13. Avoidance**

When using and L2 either in speaking or writing, the learner is often found to try to avoid using difficult words or structures, and use some simpler words or structures instead. This phenomenon in L2 learning/acquisition is termed "avoidance behaviour " first brought to light by Schachter in 1974. According to Ellis (1985, p. 305) : " avoidance occurs when learners know what the target is but find it too difficult to use in the particular circumstances".

For Kleinman (1977, p. 93-107), avoidance behaviour is a strategy that the L2 learner may resort to when, with the knowledge of a target language word or structure, he/she perceives that it is difficult to produce. Kellerman (1994) distinguished 3 types of avoidance:

1.Learner can anticipate that there is a problem, and has some idea of what the correct form is like.

2.Learner knows the target form well, but believes that it would be too difficult to use in the circumstances in which he finds himself- free-flowing conversation, for example.

3.Learner knows how to use the target form, but will not do so because it breaks a personal rule of behaviour –ready use of “tu” form by a person coming from a culture where formality is highly valued . (cited in Ellis, 1997, p. 305)

#### **1.14. Overuse**

According to Ellis (1997, p. 142) overuse referred to the overuse of some features (for example simple coordinate structures) where some other features (for example relative clauses) is preferred in target-language use. The learner uses an L2 rule in situations in which a native speaker would not. This can occur at a number of levels. This may be a concomitant of avoidance. Students will use the forms that they know rather than try out the ones that they are not sure of. It may also reflect cultural differences – thus, Olshtain (1983) found that American college students, learning Hebrew in Israel, were much more likely to use direct expressions of apology than were native speakers. This also seems to be true for English speakers of French (cited in Boulmarka , 2010, p. 37). According to Ortega (2008, p. 41), avoidance has subsided over the years, perhaps because it implicitly invokes conscious choices that are difficult to prove, the related notions of underuse and overuse in L2 learner language have received much attention in recent SLA research. The hypothesis is that L1 knowledge can inhibit certain L2 choices and prime others, this resulting in the underuse or overuse of certain L2 forms in spoken and written learner’s production. This is what Scott and

Oldin (2002) discovered when they reanalysed the L1 Finnish and Swedish adolescents' written retellings.

### **1.15. Factors that Cause Language Interference**

Interference is a general problem that occurs in bilingualism. According to Weinreich (1979, p. 64-65) there are many factors that contribute interference which are : First, Speaker Bilingual Background: Bilingualism is the major factor of interference as the speaker is influenced by both of the source and the target language. Second, Disloyalty to Target Language: Disloyalty to target language will cause negative attitude. This will lead to disobedience to target language structure and further force the bilingualist to put uncontrolled structure of his first language elements to output in practicing words utterances both oral and written. Students whose language background of TL is limited tend to put words in sentences or oral in structure and sense of first language.

Third, The Limited Vocabularies of TL Mastered by a Learner: Vocabularies of certain language mostly are about words of surroundings connected to life. Thus, a learner who is willing to master another language will meet new words that differ from his native words. In order to be able to speak as natives of TL, vocabularies take a big role. The more vocabularies someone has, the better he masters TL. Foreign language learner will try to put deliberately his native word to state some points when he cannot find the best words of TL. Fourth, Needs of Synonym: Synonym in language usage plays an important role as word chosen variation in order not to repeat similar word during the communication process (redundancy). Implementing synonym in a language contact will contribute to interference in the form of adoption and borrowing of new words from SL to TL. Thus, need of synonym for certain word from SL to TL is seemingly aimed to intensify meaning. Fifth, Prestige and Style: Applying unfamiliar words (foreign words) during a communication practice which dominant words are languages of both speaker and receiver is something else. Those

unfamiliar words usage is aimed to get a pride. Interference will appear as there are certain words even though the receiver probably cannot catch the real idea of the speech. The usual unfamiliar words usage will become a style of the user. Unfortunately, the user sometimes does not understand the real meaning whether the meaning is denotative or connotative.

For Lott (1983, p. 258 -259) , there are three factors that cause interference :

- The interlingual factor:

Interlingual transfer is a significant source for language learners. This concept comes from contrastive analysis of behavioristic school of learning. It stresses upon the negative interference of mother tongue as the only source of errors. The construction – “I like to read” is uttered as “I read to like” by many Hindi speakers. In Hindi, the verb is pre-positioned while in English it is post positioned. This type of error is the result of negative transfer of L1 rules to L2 system. Corder (1967, p. 19) said that errors are the result of interference in learning a second language from the habits of the first language. Because of the difference in system especially grammar, the students will transfer their first language into the second language by using their mother tongue system.

- The over extension of analogy :

Usually, a learner has been wrong in using a vocabulary caused by the similarity of the element between first language and second language, for example the use of cognate words (the same form of word in two languages with different functions or meanings).

- Transfer of structure :

There are two types of transfer according to Dulay, Burt & Krashen (1982, p. 101), positive transfer and negative transfer. Negative transfer refers to those instances of transfer, which result in error because old habitual behavior is different from the new behavior being learned. On the contrary, positive transfer is the correct utterance, because both the first language and second language have the same structure, while the negative transfer from the



native language is called interference. Interference is the deviation of target language as a result of their familiarity with more than one language. Dulay, Burt, & Krashen (1982, p. 98) differentiated between two parts of interference; the psychological and sociolinguistic. The psychological refers to the influence of old habits when new ones are being learned, whereas sociolinguistic refers to interactions of language when two language communities are in contact. Therefore students will find it difficult in mastering the second language due to the interference, which is influenced by old habit, familiar with mother tongue and interaction of two languages in the communities.

#### **1.16. Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis (CAH)**

Contrastive analysis is a way of comparing languages in order to determine potential errors for the ultimate purpose of isolating what needs to be learned and what does not need to be learned in a second language learning situation. As Lado detailed, one does a structure-by-structure comparison of the sound system, morphological system, syntactic system, and even the cultural system of two languages for the purpose of discovering similarities and differences (Gass & Selinker, 2008, p. 96). Hartman and Stork (1972, pp. 53) defined contrastive linguistics as:

A method of linguistic analysis which shows the similarities and differences between two or more languages or dialects with the aim of finding principles which can be applied to practical problems in language teaching and translation, with special emphasis on transfer, interference and equivalents.

The ultimate goal is to predict areas that will be either easy or difficult for learners. Since even languages as closely related as German and English differ significantly in the form, meaning, and distribution of their grammatical structures, and since the learner tends to transfer the habits of his native language structure to the foreign language, we have here the major source of difficulty or ease in learning the structure of a foreign language. Those

structures that are similar will be easy to learn because they will be transferred and may function satisfactorily in the foreign language. Those structures that are different will be difficult because when transferred they will not function satisfactorily in the foreign language and will therefore have to be changed (Lado, 1957, p. 59).

Charles Carpenter Fries was the first to instigate contrastive research in the 1940s. In 1957, the American linguist Robert Lado developed his idea further and formulated the results in what came to be known as the “Contrastive Hypothesis.” Its main assumption states that “[...] individuals tend to transfer the forms and meanings as well as the distribution of forms and meanings of their native language and culture to the foreign language and culture – both productively when attempting to speak the language and to act in the culture, and receptively when attempting to grasp and understand the language and the culture as practiced by natives (Lado, 1957, p. 2). Hence, the contrastive hypothesis is based on a behaviourist conception of language acquisition, in so far as it is based on the assumption that foreign language learners constantly resort to the “habits” they acquired in the process of first language acquisition: “The basic problems [when learning a second language] arise not out of any essential difficulty in the features of the new language themselves but primarily out of the special 'set' created by the first language habits.” Lado (1957), hold “[...] that we can predict and describe the patterns that will cause difficulty in learning [a second language], and those that will not cause difficulty, by comparing systematically the language and culture to be learned with the native language and culture of the student.” (Lado, 1957, Preface). This means that similarities between the first and second language are supposed to facilitate the process of second language acquisition. By contrast, differences are believed to cause learning difficulties and to represent the main source of errors. Hence, the more a foreign language differs from a learner’s mother tongue, the harder its acquisition is predicted to be.

### **1.17. Versions of Contrastive Analysis**

Brown (2000, p. 160-163) summarized that contrastive analysis can be divided into three versions: the strong version, the weak version, and the moderate version.

#### **A. The Strong Version**

It was formulated by Fries (1947) and Lado (1957), asserted that it is possible to generate predictions for ESL learners' errors by comparing the two languages.

#### **B. The Weak Version**

It only admits the explanatory power of contrastive analysis on ESL learners' errors. (It is worth mentioning that this version of CAH have been developed into error analysis ).

#### **C. The Moderate Version**

Asserts that the source of learning difficulties may result from the similarities of the two languages.

### **1.18. Criticism of Contrastive Analysis**

Empirical studies have shown that foreign language learners made numerous mistakes that were not at all predicted by contrastive studies. On the other hand, mistakes that were predicted were hardly ever made by learners. This applies, in particular, to grammar, but also – to a lesser extent – to phonetics and phonology. Furthermore, only about 50% of all mistakes are due to interference, which shows that there is a variety of factors which are responsible for learning difficulties.

Dulay and Burt conducted an empirical study on 179 Spanish children learning English in the United States in 1974. In this study, they criticised dependence on contrastive analysis in second language teaching on the basis of their findings in which they found that "Out of 513 errors made by 179 children, less than 5% could be classified as interference errors, while 86% were the same type of errors that first language learners make, 9% were attributed to some other factors." (Dulay & Dulay, 1974, pp. 26).

Apart from the points mentioned, the contrastive hypothesis lacks a foundation in learning psychology as well as an empirical basis. A systematic comparison of certain pairs of language had not been realised until the 1970s. This is one of the major points of criticism pointed out by König & Gast (2007) who saw that instead of publishing detailed and comprehensive comparative surveys, linguists mostly made isolated observations about differences between pairs of languages. Contrastive Analysis' claim that what is different is difficult and what is similar is easy was criticized by Corder (1973). He made two important observations: the first one is that there is not necessarily a connection between difference and difficulty. According to him, the fact that difficulty is a psycholinguistic rather than a linguistic matter makes it hard to predict which features in L2 learning are difficult and which are not. The second one is that learners must not only learn the differences between L1 and L2, they have also to discover the similarities (cited in Aarts, 1980, p. 50).

The assumptions made by Lado were, in many ways, too strong, which led many linguists to claim that the contrastive hypothesis has failed: "Languages do not differ from each other without limit in unpredictable ways, statements to the contrary notwithstanding. All natural languages have a great deal in common so that anyone who has learned one language already knows a great deal about any other language he must learn. Not only does he know a great deal about that other language even before he begins to learn it, but the deep structures of both languages are very much alike, so that the actual differences between the two languages are really quite superficial. However, to learn a second language – and this is the important point – one must learn the precise way in which that second language relates the deep structures to its surface structures and their phonetic representations. Since this way is unique for each language, contrastive analysis can be of little or no help at all in the learning task because the rules to be internalized are, of course, unique." (Wardhaugh 1970, pp. 127)

### 1.19. A Contrastive Analysis of Selected English and Arabic Prepositions (By Hamdallah and H.Y.Tushyeh )

- The first class consists of prepositions that have the shape of one consonant and one short vowel. These prepositions are inseparable. They occur as prefixes to the complement.

bi ---	at, by, in, with
li---	to
ka---	as, like
ta---	by (in swearing)
wa_	by (in swearing)

- .The second class consists of prepositions which are independent and either biliteral or triliteral. These prepositions are *separable*.

#### a. Biliteral

9an	from, away from
fii	in, at
kay	in order to
min	from

#### b. Triliteral

9alaa	on
9adaa	except
?ilaa	to, toward
hattaa	until, up to
la9allaa	perhaps
mataa	when
munðu	ago, for

xallaa                      except

Some prepositions in Arabic such as 9an, fii, min, 9alaa are used more frequently than other prepositions such as xalaa, kay, mataa, etc. Like English prepositions, all Arabic prepositions such as bi---, fii---, 9alaa, ?ilaa, l i---, munðu, can occur both spatially and temporally (Hamdallah,1988, as cited in Hamdullah and Tushyeh, 1993, p. 184-185).

Zughoul(1979) classified the prepositions that occur in the classroom phrases into the following three categories :

1. Case Prepositions :

- a. Go with Ali
- b. The cover of the book
- c. It was taken by Samir

2. Lexical Prepositions :

- a. Stand up
- b. Sit down
- c. Wait outside

3. Unit Prepositions:

- a. Turn to lesson 6
- b. At the back of the room
- c. On Monday

Both case and lexical prepositions have direct translations in Arabic.

Case Prepositions	English	Arabic
agentive	by	/min qibali/
instrumental	with	/ibi/
dative	to	/li/
beneficiary	for	/li/ or /li?ajli/

genitive	of	/alʔidafah/ construction
comitative	with	/ma9a/

Lexical Preposition	English	Arabic
	up	/ʔa9la/
	down	/ʔasfal/
	in (place)	/fi/
	on (place)	/9ala/
	to (motion)	/ʔila/
	into	/ʔila dakhil/
	beside	/bijanib/
	in front of	/ʔamama/
	from	/min/
	before (time)	/qabla/
	before(place)	/muqabila/
	after (time and place)	/ba9da/
	behind	/waraʔa/ or /khalfa/
	under	/tahat/
	on top of	/fawqa/

(cited in in Hamdullah & Tushyehh, 1993, p. 183)

**Conclusion**

Language transfer is one of the broadly discussed topics in the field of Second Language Acquisition. Learners of any foreign language exhibit the phenomenon of transfer during a stage or another when their current level of knowledge is not sufficient. The transfer of simple prepositions from Standard Arabic into English, particularly in, on and at, enables students to commit more errors that should be remedied. Contrastive Analysis (CA) and Error Analysis (EA) can be combined to facilitate and improve the processes of teaching and learning foreign or second languages. Teachers will make students aware of the differences and similarities between the Target Language (TL) and their Mother Tongue (MT) especially when using English preposition by learners, and eventually avoid their misuse.



## **Chapter Two: The Data Analysis and Results**

### **Introduction**

This study seeks to confirm or refute our hypothesis which states that third year students of English at the university of Mohammed Seddik Ben Yahia misuse English prepositions (particularly at, in and on) due to the transfer from Standard Arabic into English. The current chapter deals with the research methodology and the data analysis. For this purpose a test is used as a means of data collection .The analysis of the test is based on the answers of the students with a proposed explanation of the correct and wrong answers of each sentence.

### 2.1. The Sample

The sample consists of ninety (90), which represented one third of a population estimated by 300 students. The test uses the simple random sampling technique .The population is English third year LMD students, English department, university of Jijel. This population was chosen because third year students are all supposed to have reached a certain level of proficiency in English language.

### 2.2. Description of The Test

It is an elicitation test. Students are given 20 sentences and asked to fill in the gaps with the appropriate prepositions that express spatial meanings, temporal meanings or other relations. They are also asked to put no preposition Ø when necessary.

### 2.3. Data Collection and Analysis

The analysis of the data is done through the calculation of the sum and the percentage of the correct and wrong usage of prepositions for each sentence. The results are represented in tables and bar charts.

Sentence N 01: The plane leaves at 6:15 p.m.

Table 2

*The usage of the prepositions in the first sentence*

Sentence 1	At	On	Total
Number	78	12	90
Percentage	86.66%	13.33%	100%

Table 3

*The correct VS wrong usage of the prepositions in the first sentence*

Prepositions	Correct usage	Wrong usage	Total
Number	78	12	90
Percentage	86.66%	13.33%	100%

The majority of the test-takers inserted the correct preposition “at” which is used to get the answer of the question “when?”, points of time mainly clock ...etc. But, 13.33% of the test-takers made a substitution error by inserting the preposition “on” instead of “in”. This wrong usage is traced back to the influence of Standard Arabic which uses the prepositions “ala” and “fi” as equivalents of “On” to indicate a positioned point in time and is used with phrases that refer to days and dates. That is to say, students transferred negatively from Standard Arabic.

Sentence N 02: He will be at work later.

Table 4

*The usage of the prepositions in the first sentence*

Prepositions	At	In	Total
Number	51	39	90
Percentage	56.66%	43.33%	100%

Table 5

*The correct VS wrong usage of the prepositions in the second sentence*

Sentence 2	Correct Usage	Wrong Usage	Total
Number	51	39	90
Percentage	56.66%	43.33%	100%

Fifty one students inserted the necessary preposition “at” which is used in this sentence to refer to something as a point in space, while 39 students inserted the preposition “in” which is used with enclosed spaces or three dimensional objects. The reason why students made this substitution error is that they translated the meaning of the sentence into Standard Arabic to find the needed preposition. So, for saying “sawfa yakoun fi elamel lahikan” they inserted “in” instead of “at”. Again, the phenomenon of negative transfer took place.

Sentence N03: They met last Sunday at Linda’s house.

Table 6

*The usage of the prepositions in the third sentence*

Prepositions	At	In	Total
Number	9	81	90
Percentage	10%	90%	100%

Table 7

*The correct VS wrong usage of the prepositions in the third sentence*

Sentence 3	Correct Usage	Wrong Usage	Total
Number	81	9	90
Percentage	90%	10%	100%

This sentence shows another usage of the English preposition “at” which is the place of meeting or where something took place. The vast majority of the test-takers inserted the corresponding preposition “at” which means that they know the rule of using it. But 10 % of the students inserted a wrong preposition “in” to say “iltakaw fi manzil Linda” so they

translated into Standard Arabic and made a substitution error and eventually transferred negatively.

Sentence N04 :Kim slept in bed.

Table 8

*The usage of the prepositions in the fourth sentence*

Prepositions	In	On	At	Total
Number	45	36	9	90
Percentage	50%	40%	10%	100%

Table 9

*The correct VS wrong usage of the prepositions in the fourth sentence*

Sentence 4	Correct Usage	Wrong Usage	Total
Number	45	45	90
Percentage	50%	50%	100%

Half of the students inserted the correct preposition “in” because the bed is perceived as an enclosed space. This is the same case in Standard Arabic “Kim namet fi asariri”, so students who do not know the English rule transferred positively from Standard Arabic. But, the other half of the students inserted wrong prepositions, 40 % substituted “in” with “on” as they are influenced by the Algerian dialect which says “Kim ragdet foug asrir” so they transferred negatively. The remaining 10 % misused the preposition “at” as it is another synonym of the Arabic preposition “fi”. To sum up, negative transfer is due to the Algerian dialect and Standard Arabic in this sentence.

Sentence N05: We sat at the table for lunch.

Table 10

*The usage of the prepositions in the fifth sentence*

Prepositions	At	Around	On	Total
Number	15	54	21	90
Percentage	16.66%	60%	23.33%	100%

Table 11

*The correct VS wrong usage of the prepositions in the fifth sentence*

Sentence 5	Correct Usage	Wrong Usage	Total
Number	15	75	90
Percentage	16.66%	83.33%	100%

Out of ninety (90) test-takers, only 15 inserted the correct preposition “at” to say we sat on a chair pulled up to the table, that is to say; a specific location. The insertion of the preposition “around” by 60 % of the students is due to the use of the corresponding Arabic preposition “hawla” to say “jalasna hawla tawilati elghadaa”. Also, the use of the preposition “on” by 23.33% of the students is traced back to the use of the Arabic preposition “3la” to say “jalasna ala tawilati elghada”. Hence, the substitution errors in both cases are due to the negative transfer from Standard Arabic.

Sentence N06 : I arrived on time.

Table 12

*The usage of the prepositions in the sixth sentence*

Prepositions	On	At	In	Total
Number	48	27	15	90
Percentage	53.33%	30%	16.66%	100%

Table 13

*The correct VS wrong usage of the prepositions in the sixth sentence*

Sentence 6	Correct usage	Wrong usage	Total
Number	48	42	90
Percentage	53.33%	46.66%	100%

In English “on time” expresses the notion of punctuality, that is to say; an exact time while, this was respected by 48 students who inserted “on”. By contrast, the prepositional phrase “in time” means not late or so soon, the test shows that students substituted “on” with “in” assuming that both prepositions can be alternatives. Also, 27 students inserted the preposition “at” instead of “on”. These two substitution errors are results of the negative transfer from Standard Arabic which uses “at” and “in” to mean “fi” that’s to say “ataytou fi alwakt”.

Sentence N07: Hellen works late on Fridays.

Table 14

*The usage of the prepositions in the seventh sentence*

Prepositions	On	At	In	Total
Number	72	6	12	90
Percentage	80%	6.67%	13.33%	100%

Table 15

*The correct VS wrong usage of the prepositions in the seventh sentence*

Sentence 7	Correct usage	Wrong usage	Total
Number	72	18	90
Percentage	80%	20%	100%

As it is well-known, in English we use the preposition “on” with days of the week as in sentence number 07, consequently; 80 % of third year students, who undertook the test, inserted the correct preposition. The remaining 20 % inserted wrongly “in” by 6.67% and “at” by 13.33 % which are used to say “fi” in Standard Arabic: “Hellen ta3mal fi ayam eljomo3a”. Negative transfer is due to Standard Arabic in this case as proved by the substitution error.

Sentence N08: In Britain, people drive on the left-hand side.

Table 16

*The usage of the prepositions in the eighth sentence.*

Prepositions	On	To	From	Total
Number	24	48	18	90
Percentage	26.66%	53.33%	20%	100%

Table 17

*The correct VS wrong usage of the prepositions in the eighth sentence*

Sentence 8	Correct usage	Wrong usage	Total
Number	24	66	90
Percentage	26.66%	73.33%	100%



One of the uses of the preposition “on” is when referring to a specific location like the left-hand side in this sentence, only 24 test-takers inserted the necessary preposition. The remaining students made substitution errors by inserting “to” by 48 students because they translated the meaning into Standard Arabic to say “ila eljiha elyosra” and the same thing done by 18 students who used “from” to say “mina eljiha elyosra”. The students’ lack of the grammatical rule led them to translate and consequently transfer negatively from Standard Arabic.

Sentence N09: You look in a good shape.

Table 18

*The usage of the prepositions in the ninth sentence*

Prepositions	In	At	Ø	Total
Number	60	21	9	90
Percentage	66.66%	23.33%	10%	100%

Table 19

*The correct VS wrong usage of the prepositions in the ninth sentence*

Sentence 9	Correct usage	Wrong usage	Total
Number	60	30	90
Percentage	66.66%	33.33%	100%

This sentence requires the insertion of the English preposition “in” to indicate state the same as in Standard Arabic “fi”. Sixty (60) test-takers used the correct preposition, the ones who do not know the rule transferred positively, while 10 inserted a wrong one. The preposition “in” was substituted by “at” by 21 students who inserted the equivalent Arabic preposition “fi” translated as “at” not as “in”. So, the substitution error is due to the negative

transfer from Standard Arabic. Surprisingly, 10% of the test-takers made an omission error for a necessary preposition, this can be explained by the fact that they translated into the Algerian dialect to say “tben labess” which uses no preposition that is to say; negative transfer is resulted from Algerian Arabic.

Sentence N10: There are many books in the library.

Table 20

*The usage of the prepositions in the tenth sentence*

Prepositions	In	At	Total
Number	78	12	90
Percentage	86.66%	13.33%	100%

Table 21

*The correct VS wrong usage of the prepositions in the tenth sentence*

Sentence 10	Correct usage	Wrong usage	Total
Number	78	12	90
Percentage	86.66%	13.33%	100%

This is another confusing sentence for many EFL learners who get lost between using “in”, as 78 test-takers did, and using “at”. The library is an enclosed space and a specific building with a specific purpose, so we should use “in”, but 12 test-takers inserted “at” instead. When translating this sentence into Arabic we will use the preposition “fi” to say “in” or “at” and this is the reason why some students made a wrong usage. In other words, the substitution error is a result of negative transfer from Standard Arabic.

Sentence N11: There are no prices on this menu.

Table 22

*The usage of the prepositions in the eleventh sentence*

Prepositions	On	In	Total
Number	18	72	90
Percentage	20%	80%	100%

Table 23

*The usage of the prepositions in the eleventh sentence*

Sentence 11	Correct usage	Wrong usage	Total
Number	18	72	90
Percentage	20%	80%	100%

The menu is a two dimensional object which contains papers each paper is a surface, thus; the correct preposition to be used is “on” and only 20 % of the test-takers inserted it correctly. The majority of the test-takers which is 80% made a substitution error by inserting “in”. This error which resulted in a wrong usage is traced back into the effect of Standard Arabic. Students translated the sentence to say “la toujad athman fi hadih el9a2ima” and “fi” is equal to “in”, so they transferred negatively from Standard Arabic.

Sentence N12: I live on the 5<sup>th</sup> floor at 21 Oxford street.

Table 24

*The usage of the prepositions in the twelfth sentence.*

Prepositions	At	In	Ø	Total
Number	27	48	15	90
Percentage	30%	53.33%	16.66%	100%

Table 25

*The correct VS wrong usage of the prepositions in the twelfth sentence*

Sentence 12	Correct usage	Wrong usage	Total
Number	18	63	90
Percentage	30%	70%	100%

The percentage of the students who inserted the correct preposition “at” is 30% , since we have a specific address the corresponding preposition is “at”. But, 70 % of the test-takers inserted two other prepositions than “at”. The 53.33 % who substituted “at” with “in” transferred, as did in the previous sentences, from Standard Arabic into English. The remaining students who represent 16.66 % made an omission error, they omitted a necessary preposition because they also transferred negatively from Standard Arabic which sometimes uses no preposition to refer to a specific address and uses a comma instead: “ana askonou fi atabiki elkhamis, 21 chari3 Oxford”. So, the test-takers transferred two times differently and negatively from Standard Arabic.

Sentence N13 :Write it with a green pen.

Table 26

*The usage of the prepositions in the thirteenth sentence*

Prepositions	With	By	Total
Number	81	9	90
Percentage	90%	10%	100%

Table 27

*The correct VS wrong usage of the prepositions in the thirteenth sentence*

Sentence 13	Correct usage	Wrong usage	Total
Number	81	9	90
Percentage	90%	10%	100%

Though our dissertation focuses on the prepositions “at, in and on” we chose some sentences that need the insertion of other simple prepositions to check whether the transfer occurs when using other prepositions or not. In this sentence the act of writing is done thanks to a tool which is the pen, so the appropriate preposition in the English language is “with”. But, 30% students used the preposition “by” instead of “with”, if we give a translation for “by” in Standard Arabic it will be “bi” the same as “with”. Therefore; the students’ substitution error is traced back to the negative transfer from Standard Arabic.

Sentence N14: I enjoyed Ø the movie.

Table 28

*The usage of the prepositions in the fourteenth sentence*

Prepositions	Ø	From	By	Total
Number	75	9	6	90
Percentage	83.33%	10%	6.66%	100%

Table 29

*The correct VS wrong usage of the prepositions in the fourteenth sentence*

Sentence14	Correct usage	Wrong usage	Total
Number	75	15	90
Percentage	83.33%	16.66%	100%

This sentence does not require an insertion of any English preposition and 75 put Ø as the corresponding answer. But, 15 students made redundant errors by inserting two unnecessary prepositions. Nine (09) students inserted “from” to say “istamtaatou mina elifilmi” and two students inserted “by” to say “istamtaatou bi elifilmi”. These two cases make a relationship between the enjoyment and the film which proves that the students translated the sentence into Standard Arabic and used wrongly the prepositions due to the negative transfer.

Sentence N15: I swear to God.

Table 30

*The usage of the prepositions in the fifteenth sentence*

Prepositions	To	Of	By	Total
Number	39	30	21	90
Percentage	43.33%	33.33%	23.33%	100%

Table 31

*The correct VS wrong usage of the prepositions in the fifteenth sentence*

Sentence 15	Correct usage	Wrong usage	Total
Number	39	51	90
Percentage	43.33%	56.66%	100%

Less than half of the test-takers inserted the correct preposition “to” and more than half inserted two other different prepositions. Thirty (30) students inserted “of ” and twenty-one (21) students inserted “by”. If we translate this sentence to Standard Arabic we will have the following sentence: “oksim bi Allah”. The point is that students conceived swearing in

English as swearing in Arabic and made substitution errors and eventually they transferred negatively.

Sentence N16: Who is the man in the hat?

Table 32

*The usage of the prepositions in the sixteenth sentence.*

Prepositions	In	With	Total
Number	15	75	90
Percentage	16.66%	83.33%	100%

Table 33

*The correct VS wrong usage of the prepositions in the sixteenth sentence*

Sentence 17	Correct usage	Wrong usage	Total
Number	15	75	30
Percentage	16.66%	83.33%	100%

People are “in” clothes not “on” clothes, thus; the corresponding preposition is “in” and 16.66 % students inserted it correctly. But, 83.33 % of the students made the same substitution error by inserting the preposition “with” to say “Who is the man with hat”. The last sentence when translated into Standard Arabic will be “man howa arajoul bi elkobaa? ”, so the students who made the substitution error translated and transferred negatively into and from Standard Arabic.

Sentence 17: Tom was aiming at his target, but he missed it.

Table 34

*The usage of the prepositions in the seventeenth sentence*

Prepositions	At	To	On	Total
Number	15	54	21	90
Percentage	6.66%	60%	33.33%	100%

Table 35

*The correct VS wrong usage of the prepositions in the seventeenth sentence*

Sentence 17	Correct usage	Wrong usage	Total
Number	15	75	30
Percentage	6.66%	93.33%	100%

“Aim at” is to point something, usually a weapon, this is different than “aim to” which means to plan to do something. The test shows that 6.66 % of the students used the correct preposition “at” while 60 % used ‘to’ and 33.33% used “on”. The substitution error of ‘at’ by ‘to’ can be attributed to their confusing between the meaning of “aim at” and “aim” to and it can also be a result of negative transfer from Standard Arabic “Tom kana yasbou ila hadafihi ”. The substitution error of the preposition “at” with “on” is another result of the translation from Standard Arabic “Tom kana yosawib aala hadafihi” which led to negative transfer.

Sentence N18: She doesn’t believe in ghosts.



Table 36

*The usage of the prepositions in the eighteenth sentence*

Prepositions	In	By	Ø	Total
Number	48	24	18	90
Percentage	53.33%	26.66%	20%	100%

Table 37

*The correct VS wrong usage of the prepositions in the eighteenth sentence*

Sentence 18	Correct usage	Wrong usage	Total
Number	48	42	30
Percentage	53.33%	46.66%	100%

The simple preposition “in” inserted by 48 students is the correct one. A substitution error made by 24 students who inserted “by” instead of “in”. This incorrect insertion of the preposition “by” is traced back to the negative transfer from Standard Arabic, where students wanted to say “hia la tomin bi wojoud alachbah”. The remaining 18 students made an omission error, they omitted a necessary preposition because they understood the sentence as “hia la tosadik alachbah”. Two cases of negative transfer from Standard Arabic are demonstrated through this sentence.

Sentence N19: I will thank him for his advice.

Table 38

*The usage of the prepositions in the nineteenth sentence*

Prepositions	For	On	Total
Number	72	18	90
Percentage	80%	20%	100%

Table 39

*The correct VS wrong usage of the prepositions in the nineteenth sentence*

Sentence 19	Correct usage	Wrong usage	Total
Number	72	18	90
Percentage	80%	20%	100%

The corresponding preposition is “for” was inserted by 80% of the test-takers. The remaining 20 % students made a substitution error by inserting “on” instead of “for”. The meaning of the sentence is to “thank him concerning his advice” not “sawfa achkoroho ala nasihatih” as in Standard Arabic. Hence, negative transfer from Standard Arabic occurred.

Sentence N20: They told me about the new procedures.

Table 40

*The usage of the prepositions in the twentieth sentence*

Prepositions	About	On	Total
Number	42	48	90
Percentage	46.66%	53.33%	100%

Table 41

*The correct VS wrong usage of the prepositions in the twentieth sentence*

Sentence 20	Correct usage	Wrong usage	Total
Number	42	48	90
Percentage	46.66%	53.33%	100%

The necessary preposition “about” was inserted by 42 students in this test. The preposition “about” is equivalent to “hawla” or “aan” in Standard Arabic; “akhbarouni hawla/ aan elijraat eljadida”. Thus, more than half of the test-takers made a substitution error by inserting “on” instead of “about” as a result of the interference of Standard Arabic.

The results of the elicitation test showed that students transferred negatively in the vast majority of the sentences, and this transfer was mainly from Standard Arabic beside the Algerian dialect. In addition, there were cases where the students transferred positively from Standard Arabic. The following table illustrates the results of the test concerning the type of transfer in each sentence:

Table 42

*Illustration of Positive and Negative Transfer From Standard Arabic and Algerian dialect in the twenty sentences*

Type of transfer		Positive transfer		Negative transfer	
Sentences		Standard Arabic	Algerian Dialect	Standard Arabic	Algerian Dialect
1				-	
2				-	
3				-	
4		+			-
5				-	
6				-	
7				-	
8				-	
9		+		-	-
10				-	
11				-	
12				-	
13				-	
14				-	
15				-	
16				-	
17				-	
18				-	
19				-	
20				-	

**Conclusion**

The results of the test show that students make three different types of errors depending on the insertion of the preposition .These errors are the result of negative transfer. The first case is when English uses a preposition and Arabic uses a different one, students commit a substitution error. The second case is when Arabic does not use a preposition while English does, students make an omission of a necessary preposition errors. The third case is when English does not use a preposition while Arabic does, students insert unnecessary preposition to commit a redundant error. Beside showing these different types of errors, the results also revealed that students transfer most of the times from Standard Arabic, this transfer is mainly negative and it is positive only when English and Standard Arabic use the same preposition. In addition, students sometimes transfer from the Algerian dialect and this transfer is always negative.

### **General Conclusion**

English preposition are by universal agreement very problematic for learners of English as a foreign language and for non-native speakers in general. The English prepositions differ from the Standard Arabic prepositions in functions and properties which make Arab students more confused when they come to using them. Our research sought to investigate whether the students transfer from Standard Arabic or there is another source of transfer, plus the type of the existing transfer. The analysis of the test's results supported our hypothesis that third year LMD English at the university of Jijel resort to transfer or commit it when using the prepositions "at, in, on" and even the other prepositions. The huge occurrence of transfer gives a hint that students do not master most of the English prepositions' grammatical rules especially those about the temporal and spatial "at, in, on", because these prepositions are polysemous, and that is why students rely on the Standard Arabic. But, Standard Arabic is not the only source of transfer because students rely on the Algerian dialect too. To sum up, the phenomenon of transfer takes place during the course of second language acquisition or second language learning. Learners tend to transfer common features and common meanings. When there are similarities between the first and the second language the transfer is positive, and when there are differences the transfer is negative. This research focused on the transfer of prepositions and revealed that students in the department of English in the university of Mohammed Seddik Ben Yehia transfer positively and negatively from Standard Arabic and the Algerian dialect. Also, it revealed that students have problems with the English prepositions because not every English preposition has an equivalent in Arabic and vice versa, and because prepositions in both languages are polysemous. In addition, the use of the prepositions differs between the two languages depending on the situation and the meaning they are supposed to convey. To conclude, we should say that the errors committed by students need a remedy which is best through intensive exposure and practice of the

different English prepositions especially the simple ones “on, at and in”. Prepositions need to take wider space in English classes so students will achieve better fluency.

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## Appendix

### Student's test

Fill in the gaps with the necessary preposition or use Ø where needed :

1. The plane leaves .....6:15 p.m.
2. He will be ..... work late.
3. They met last Sunday.....Linda's house.
4. Kim slept.....bed.
5. We sat.....the table for lunch.
6. I arrived.....time.
7. Hellen works late .....Fridays.
8. In Britain, people drive .....the left-hand side.
9. You look .....a good shape.
10. There are many books.....the library.
11. There are no prices.....this menu.
12. I live on the 5<sup>th</sup> floor.....21 Oxford street.
13. Write it .....a green pen.
14. I enjoyed .....the movie.
15. I swear .....God.
16. Who is the man .....the hat.
17. Tom was aiming .....his target, but he missed it.
18. She does not believe .....ghosts.
19. I will thank him .....his advice.
20. They told me .....the new procedures.



## Résumé

Cette étude vise à décrire et à sonder la réalité du phénomène du transfert des prépositions simples anglaises notamment (à, dans et sur) de l'arabe standard en anglais. L'objectif est alors de vérifier si ce transfert se traduit par l'utilisation abusive de ces prépositions. Aux fins de l'examen de notre hypothèse, un test est administré à quatre-vingt dix étudiants de troisième année anglais LMD au département d'anglais de l'Université de Jijel. Ce test est composé de vingt phrases et les étudiants sont invités à remplir dans chaque vide avec la préposition appropriée ou sans préposition. Les résultats de l'analyse des données montre que le transfert se produit positivement et négativement. La plupart des cas sont du transfert négatif de l'arabe standard et le dialecte algérien et très font sont du positif. Cela confirme partiellement notre hypothèse et révèle que l'arabe standard n'est pas la seule source de transfert.



## ملخص

هذه الدراسة تهدف إلى التحقيق في ظاهرة النقل اللغوي لأدوات الجر الإنجليزية بالتحديد (على , في, داخل) من اللغة العربية الفصحى إلى الانجليزية .المسعى إذا هو التحقق إذا كان النقل اللغوي هو السبب في سوء إستعمال هذه الأدوات. للتحقق من هذه الفرضية استعملنا إختبار يتكون من عشرين جملة واحدة نحتاج إلى إضافة حرف جر. الإختبار أخذ من قبل 90 طالب سنة ثالثة قسم اللغة الانجليزية بجامعة جيجل .تحليل النتائج المتحصل عليها يظهر أن النقل اللغوي يحدث على شكلين نقل سلبي و نقل ايجابي. النقل السلبي هو السائد والايجابي نادر الحدوث. هذا يثبت صحة فرضيتنا و يظهر أيضا أن اللغة العربية الفصحى ليست المصدر الوحيد للنقل السلبي بل يوجد مصدر آخر يتمثل في اللهجة الجزائرية .