L1 TRANSFER IN THE ACQUISITION OF ENGLISH SPATIAL PREPOSITIONS AMONG MOROCCAN EFL LEARNERS; A CROSS-LINGUISTIC COMPARISON

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L1 TRANSFER IN THE ACQUISITION OF ENGLISH SPATIAL PREPOSITIONS AMONG MOROCCAN EFL LEARNERS; A CROSS-LINGUISTICS COMPARISON

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ABSTRACT

L1 TRANSFER IN THE ACQUISITION OF ENGLISH SPATIAL PREPOSITION AMONG MOROCCAN EFL LEARNERS; A CROSS-LINGUISTICS COMPARISON

El Yazid, Iraqi

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The major purpose of this study is to scrutinize L1 transfer in the acquisition of English spatial prepositions (e.g., *in, on* and *at*) among Moroccan EFL learners and to find out whether language transfer (LT) has some impact in the learning process. Two independent variables were tackled in this study; mainly gender and proficiency level. Through a descriptive research design, four different groups (A1, A2, B1 and B2) enrolled in an English preparatory program (N=199) participated in this study. The quantitative data collection instruments used in the study were gathered from fill in the blank test (FBT), grammaticality judgement test (GJTs) and Arabic translation task (ATS). The obtained results demonstrated that Moroccan EFL learners have problems in the use of the preposition '*at*'. The findings also revealed that standard Arabic (L1) influences the use of English spatial prepositions.

Keywords: Language Transfer, Spatial Prepositions, Contrastive Analysis, Error Analysis, EFL

ÖZ

İNGİLİZCE DİLİNDE MEKAN EDATLARININ EDİNİMİNDE ANADİL TRANSFERİ; DİLBİLİMSEL BİR KARŞILAŞTIRMA - FAS ÖRNEĞİ

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Bu çalışmanın ana amacı İngilizceyi yabancı dil olarak öğrenen Faslı öğrencilerin İngilizce zaman ve mekan edatlarının (in, on, and at) ediniminde anadil transferinin öğrenme sürecinde herhangi bir etkisinin olup olmadığını incelemektir. Bu araştırmada temel olarak cinsiyet ve yeterlilik derecesi olmak üzere bağımsız iki değişken araştırılmıştır. Katılımcılar dört farklı öğrenme düzeyindeki (A1, A2, B1 and B2) 119 İngilizce öğrenenden oluşmaktadır. Bu betimleyici araştırma tasarımında, veriler 1) Boşluk Doldurma testi 2) Dilbilgisi Muhakeme Testi 3) Arapça Çeviri Görevi olmak üzere üç araçla toplanmıştır. Elde edilen sonuçlar Faslı İngilizce öğrenenlerde 'at' edatı kullanımında bazı sorunlar olduğunu göstermiştir. Bulgular ayrıca Fas'ta resmî dil olarak kullanılan Arapça aksanının (diğeri Fas Arapçası'dır, resmî dil olmayan) İngilizce zaman ve mekan edat kullanımına etkilerinin olduğunu ortaya çıkarmıştır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Dil Transferi, Zaman Ve Mekan Edatları, Kontrastif Analiz, Hata Analizi, Ingilizcenin Yabancı Dil Olarak Öğrenilmesi



To my beloved family

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Chapter 1

Introduction

This chapter supplies information related to the theoretical background associated with language transfer, contrastive analysis (CA) and error analyses (EA). At first, the chapter starts with the essence of CA as well as EA. Afterward, it explains the practicality behind the use of contrastive analysis and error analysis while investigating language transfer in an EFL framework. Following by the purpose, research questions, and the significance of the current study. Finally, the chapter wraps up with certain key terms used throughout the monograph.

1.1 Theoretical Framework

Decades ago, linguists such as Henry Sweet (1899) and Harold Palmer (1921), among other linguists, suspected that a learner's L1 affects his/her second/foreign language acquisition. This belief was influenced by the Behaviorist theory of learning which is built on the idea that language learning is acquired through imitation and repetition in order to overcome the influence of learners' L1 on their learning of L2 and to achieve competence in the latter (Fries, Foreword to Lado, 1957). From these roots, Charles Fries came up with Contrastive Analysis (CA) approach in the mid-1940s.

1.1.1. Contrastive analysis. The underlying assumptions of CA claim that LA is a matter of habit formation and L1 transfer is the main source of errors made by L2 speakers. This is in line with Fries (1957) who stated that “The basic problems 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”. CA holds that one can account for errors made by L2 learners by taking into account the variances among two languages in contrast, thus, the greater differences, the greater errors possibly to take place (Gass & Selinker, 2008).

Within the framework of CA two versions need to be differentiated; strong and weak versions. In the present study the researcher used the terms the strong and the

weak versions since they are the most mutual expressions in second language inquiry (Torrijos, 2009).

Deeply formed in the behavioristic mental processes and structural linguistics, the strong version of contrastive analysis focused on the notion of the negative language transfer as the main obstacle to second language learning. The strong version had made some rather strong assumptions with respect to foresee the difficulties and errors of second language learners. One of the strongest claims was made by Lado in the preface of his textbook; Linguistics Across Cultures: "The plan of the book rests on the assumption that we can predict and describe the patterns that will cause difficulty in learning, and those that will not cause difficulty, by comparing systematically the language and the culture to be learned with the native language and culture of the student." (Lado, 1956: vii). In the same vein, Banathy, Trager, and Waddle (1966) state that "the change that has to take place in the language behavior of a foreign language student can be equated with the differences between the structure of the student's native language and culture and that of the target language and culture." (P, 37)

On the other side, Wardhaugh (1970) suggested a more defensible 'weak' version of contrastive analysis. "The 'weak' version requires of the linguist only that he use the best knowledge available to him in order to account for observed difficulties in second language learning (p.4) … It starts with evidence to explain the similarities and differences between two systems … reference is made to the two systems [NL and TL] only in order to explain actually observed interference phenomena." (p, 15) The *weak* version is a model with diagnostic and explanatory as opposed to the predictive claim of the 'strong' version. In this version, After L2 learners committed mistakes, the errors will be studied accordingly and exegesis contingent on a contrastive analysis of those domains in question are presented as to why the errors have taken place. However, as it is evident from the above quotation, the *weak* version is more pragmatic and feasible than the *strong* version. In other words, the weak version realizes the significance of negative transfer (interference) across languages and confesses that linguistic strains can be more profitably explained as posterior, i.e., after they have been spotted.

It is worth noting that, despite the widespread of Contrastive analysis with its two versions during the 1960s–1970s of the last century, it was challenged for some shortcomings. According to Odlin (1989) it is clear that many difficulties that L2 learners confront do not always come from variances between two languages in contrast, and many of the errors provoked by L1-L2 differences are not always anticipated by CA. One more criticism directed against the validity of CA is that many errors committed by L2 learners are not always related to the mother tongue. For example, Spanish and English both have the forms of the verb *be*, and it was noted by some researchers (Peck, 1978; Schumann, 1979) that Spanish L2 learners keep omitting the forms of the verb *be* in a sentence like **that very simple* instead of saying *that is very simple* in spite of the existence of such forms in their mother tongue. These errors cannot be directed to L1 transfer, but rather they are developmental or intralingual errors.

Thus, (1) CA predicted some errors but did not anticipate all: L2 data exhibited real errors beyond those in L1 that would not be anticipated by CA. (2) Some errors it predicted were not true: Errors that CA predicted do not occur. (3) Patterns of interference hold for some cases but not others. (4) How to determine difficulty is not always possible; there are problems inherent in comparing languages and the hierarchy of difficulty.

Despite the critiques of CA approach with its two versions, researchers and scholars' interest in the role of L1 transfer continue in employing the contrastive analysis approach since any study of language transfer needs some kinds of contrastive analysis (Ellis, 1994).

1.1.2. Error analysis. As a consequence of the skepticism directed against CA which regards L1 transfer as the major cause of errors made by L2 learners, Error Analysis (EA) was brought to light. EA adopts a different methodological view from CA which elevates the status of errors' inappropriateness to a mean which helps speakers proceed with the process of L2 acquisition (Ellis, 1985). One of the forerunners of EA is Corder (1967) who stated that; the significance of learners' errors can be illustrated in three facts. First to the Instructor, in that, they tell if he/she tackles a systematic analysis, how far towards the aim the learners have advanced, and what

remains for the learners to learn. Second, they supply the researchers with evidence on how languages are learned or acquired and what are the strategies or procedures the learners are utilizing in their discovery of the language. Third, they are absolutely necessary for the learners as it allows them to test their suppositions about the target language.

According to Gass and Selinker (2008), EA classifies errors into two major types: interlingual and intralingual errors. Interlingual errors are the types of errors that are instigated by interference of the mother tongue, whereas intralingual errors are the outcome of the difficulty in the target language itself, not from L1 transfer. Thus, it is apparent that EA provides broader choices of sources of errors than CA does. This is in line with a statement made by Brown (1987) who claimed that "EA separated itself from CA by examining mistakes originating from all potential origins, not just those resulting from harmful language transfer."

However, there are five steps that should be followed in conducting EA research (Corder, 1974, p.48).

1- Gathering a sample of the learners' language.: This simply means specifying the sample that will be used in the study and how to collect the required sample. Ellis (1994) mentioned three types of EA on the basis of sample size, namely, A- Massive sample: This requires obtaining the data from numerous samples representing a massive number of L2 learners. B- Specific sample: Contains one sample collected from restricted number of L2 learners. C - Incidental sample: This type of sample collects the required data only from one L2 speaker.

2- Identification of errors: for the purpose of identifying an error, some respects should be considered. First, to specify the variety of language that should be used as a norm in the study where any deviation from this norm is counted as an error. More precisely, studies that attempt to investigate speakers' written production should select the standard written dialect as a source for collecting the data not the oral dialect. Second, to differentiate between the two terminologies: error and mistake. According to Corder (1967) errors are defined as deviances that arise from the absence of knowledge or incomplete acquisition of L2. On the other hand, mistakes do not appear to be systematic, but they can be corrected when there is enough concentration. As for this particular study, language deficiencies produced by the participants were counted

as errors because the participants were given enough time and they were not under any type of pressure.

Similarly, Ellis (1997) proposed two methods to distinguish between errors and mistakes. First, testing a learner's use of language structures, more specifically, if the learner occasionally uses the correct one and other times uses the wrong one then this is a mistake. But, if the learner always uses the wrong form, then in such case this is an error. Second, to ask the learner to correct himself, if he is able to make the required correction then the deviation is a mistake, whereas if he did not manage to correct his utterances then the deviation is an error.

3- Description of errors: This step includes making a comparison between the utterances uttered by L2 learners and the use of the same utterances in the target language. This step involves classifying errors into different categories.

According to Corder (1973), errors that are committed by L2 learners belong to four categories;

a. Omission errors: absence of necessary items.
b. Addition errors: presence of unnecessary items.
c. Substitution errors: choosing inappropriate items
d. Misordering errors: This type of errors involves incorrect placement of items.

4- Explanation of errors: means determining the source of errors or presenting an explanation of why an error occurs. According to the Richards (1974) two main sources of errors can be distinguished.

e. Interlingual errors: these errors result from negative transfer from mother tongue of L2 learners.
f. Intralingual and developmental errors: this type of errors stem from faulty usage or incomplete acquisition of L2 rather than L1 influence.

5- Evaluation of errors: this involves the impact of errors on the person addressed. This impact can be measured in terms of comprehension of the meaning conveyed by the learner or in terms of effective response to the errors on the part of the addressee. According to Ellis, (1994, p. 48) “many studies do not include step 5 and, in fact, the evaluation of learner errors has generally been handled as a separate issue, with its own methods of enquiry”.

Many researchers such as Abu Naba'h (2011), Jayasundara and Premarathna, (2011), Yousefi, Soori and Janfaza, (2014) utilized the means of EA as the theoretical framework for their studies when investigating the influences resulting from L1 transfer on the acquisition of L2 structures. Yousefi, Soori and Janfaza (2014) examined the most frequent errors in the use of English prepositions. The subject of their study were 35 Iranian EFL students. They were all male pre-intermediate students in a high school in Shiraz, Fars's province of Iran. The researchers employed the means of EA to determine the sources of errors made by the participants as they acquire English prepositions. Following EA procedures, participants' errors were classified into selection, addition, omission and then these errors were grouped into two classes according to their causes: language transfer errors and intralingual errors. The results of their study disclosed that; most prepositional errors were caused by transfer from Persian rather than intralingual interference.

Another study utilized Error Analysis was conducted by Naba'h (2011) who examined the lexical errors made by Jordanian EFL teachers. A total of 50 in-service English language teachers partook in this study. Those teachers registered in the upgrading program at Hashemite University. The data were collected from the papers of the final examinations of the participants in question. Following Error Analysis procedures, the researcher firstly, identified the lexical errors made by the participants, secondly classified these errors and thirdly explained the sources of errors. The results exposed that; language transfer errors constituted 85%, while intralingual errors accounted for 15%.

As any other language acquisition approach, EA is not without shortcomings. Ellis (1994) summarized the criticism of EA in three main points. First, EA was attacked for focusing mainly on errors and leaving out the non-errors. He argued that, to get a complete picture about a speaker's linguistic performance, one needs to know not just what L2 speakers do wrongly but also what they do truly. Second, the majority of studies implemented within the framework of EA are cross-sectional in nature, in the sense that little attention is paid by researchers at breaking speakers' errors into categories showing the stages of development of language acquisition. In other words, EA does not elaborate on how L2 speakers develop their language over years. Third, EA failed to account for avoidance phenomena. This criticism came from Schachter

(1974) who implemented a study on relative clauses related to language transfer by speakers whose first languages are Chinese, Japanese, Persian, and Arabic. The results showed that; the number of relative clauses produced by Chinese and Japanese students was less than those produced by Arab and Persian students. Schachter concluded that EA does not reveal language transfer of relative clauses by Chinese and Japanese students. Thus, the absence of errors does not mean that those students are native-like, but rather they resorted to avoidance strategy because relative clauses do not exist in their NLs.

Despite the serious drawbacks of EA approach, it is still in use and employed by many researchers to analyze the errors committed by L2 speakers. Ellis (1994) commented on the role of EA in SLA saying that, EA is deemed as the foremost endeavor to examine learners' language as to provide an adequate account for how L2 is acquired. He added that EA continues to be used, but now it is practiced examining specific research questions instead of providing a comprehensive explanation for L2 speakers' errors.

Having discussed some issues relevant to CA and EA, it is obvious that the two approaches are not conflicting ones, but rather completing each other. While CA obviously counts L1 transfer as the major cause of L2 learners' errors, EA admits the role of L1 transfer and extends examination to other possible sources that accompany language transfer. This is in line with James (1980) who stated that CA and EA are often regarded as being complementary. Therefore, for a better investigation of errors committed by L2 speakers, both CA and EA should be utilized. This is in support with Ellis who argued that" contrastive analysis needed to be used along with error analysis" (1994, p. 308).

Based on what has been mentioned above, the current study presents an extensive cross-linguistic comparison and sought to look for the similarities and differences among spatial prepositions in English and Arabic languages. Therefore, CA, which holds a cognitive view in studying language transfer, along with EA were employed as the theoretical framework of the current study. The justification for using CA and EA approaches together is that; CA was utilized in order to describe the two prepositional systems of English and Arabic, while EA was adopted to analyze the prepositional errors and to determine their sources based on L1-L2 differences.

In sum, language transfer has an unstable history in which the conceptualization of this notion is different from one approach to another. Obviously, CA which originated from the behaviorist view regards language acquisition as a consequence of habit formation process and L2 learners' errors result mainly from transferring the old habits of L1 into L2. Later on, CA was criticized heavily for these beliefs and as a reaction to these serious critiques, it underwent some changes. More precisely, CA abandoned its past position concerning the role of language transfer, counting it one of many factors influencing the L2 acquisition, but not the only factor at work. This position constituted the most important change in the position of CA. Furthermore, CA is no longer deemed language transfer as a consequence of habit formation process, but rather transfer is seen as a creative process based on thinking and reasoning.

These changes in the position of CA are regarded as the new trend in the second language acquisition's inquiry. This agrees with Gass and Selinker (2008, p. 135) who argued that "adopting a cognitive view and incorporating a strong role for the NL is the prevailing view in current SLA research". Whereas EA takes into consideration the role of intralingual transfer alongside L1 transfer as the chief sources of errors made by L2 learners. EA attempts to demonstrate that; L2 learners' errors do not arise only as a result of transfer from L1 but rather, there are other universal processes that interact with language transfer in a complex manner.

1.2. Statement of the Problem

Though limited in number, English locative prepositions are highly problematic for EFL learners in general (Abd & Shah, 2014; Erarslan & Hol, 2014; Galleguillos, 2013; Hariri, 2012; Jalali & Shojaei, 2012; Yousefi, Soori & Janfaza, 2014) and for EFL Arab learners in particular (AbiSamra, 2003; Al-Hassan, 2013; Al-Qudah, 2013; Hasan & Abdullah, 2009; Tahaineh, 2010; Terdjat, 2012). The difficulties that Arab EFL learners confront when acquiring English locative prepositions stem from complexity between Arabic and English (Hasan & Abdullah 2009). These variances, between Arabic and English prepositions, are best exhibited by the lack of the relationship between English and Arabic prepositional system. More precisely, English language comprises some prepositions that do not exist in Arabic or do not have equivalents in Arabic. One more aspect is that; prepositions in English can be

grouped as complex and simple, while Arabic does not have such classification where all prepositions are simple. In addition, the difficulties in learning English can also be seen from the use of prepositions among Arab EFL learners. Prepositions such as; *at*, *on*, and *in* that can be used to express place and time might trigger the confusion of the learners.

Moreover, Moroccan EFL learners, in particular, have many struggles in the use of English propositions (Elkhadiri & Khouya, 2019). Such difficulties stem from students' incompetency to deal with prepositions. Standard Arabic is one of the problems that Moroccan EFL learners encounter while using spatial prepositions and this due to the interference from standard Arabic. Hence, Arab EFL learners tend to unconsciously impose their prepositional system to the target language specificities. Another source of difficulty is that many prepositions that are present in English language cannot be treated as prepositions in Arabic, but adverbs such as the prepositions *above, over, under,* below. *Also,* some English prepositions are combined with particular nouns, verbs and adjectives, making their use highly problematic for Arab EFL learners. As a consequence of such differences between English and Arabic prepositional systems, Arab EFL learners perpetrate a considerable number of errors due to transfer from their native language (Hasan & Abdullah 2009; Tahaineh 2010).

1.3. Purpose of the Study

In light of what has been said thus far, the aim of this study is to scrutinize L1 transfer in the acquisition of English spatial prepositions among Moroccan EFL students and to find out whether language transfer (LT) has some impact on Moroccan EFL students while learning English locative prepositions and whether or not gender and language proficiency have an impact while learning English locative prepositions. However, the current study is informed by following objectives;

Firstly, locative prepositions are one of the important tools in which language learners need for successful interaction with other language users (e.g., Hamdallah and Tushyeh; 1993). Also, prepositions represent a problematic lexical category for Moroccan students in particular (e.g., Elkhadiri and Khouya; 2019).

Secondly, few studies have tackled only locative prepositions, and most of these studies either tackled them in relation with other elements, e.g., articles or relative

clauses (e.g., Al-Qudah, 2013; Bdour, 1989; Tahaineh 2010). Therefore, most of the previous studies that reported the improper application of English prepositions by Arab EFL learners did not examine the acquisition of prepositions per se (Al-Hassan, 2013; Chelli, 2013; Kharma & Hajjaj, 1997; Mohammed, 2005; Mourtaga, 2004; Zahid, 2006). These studies investigated syntactic, grammatical, morphological, and phonological errors in general. To be more specific, in spite of the substantial role of prepositions in building well-formed L2 sentences and the continuity of their faulty usage among the Arab EFL learners, the emphasis placed on the English prepositions in the Moroccan context is scant (Al-Qudah, 2013; Bdour, 1989; Tahaineh 2010).

Finally, to the best knowledge of the researcher, only few studies have been carried out in the Moroccan setting. Therefore, the current study is an endeavor to bridge a gap in the literature by investigating the acquisition of English spatial prepositions among Moroccan EFL students.

1.4. Research Questions

The present study addresses the following research questions:

1. Are Moroccan EFL learners competent in the use of English spatial prepositions?
2. Do awareness manifest among Moroccan EFL learners while using English spatial prepositions?
3. Does L1 (standard Arabic) have any impact of the use of L2 (English) spatial prepositions among Moroccan EFL learners?
4. Are there any significant differences among English language proficiency levels (A1, A2, B1 and B2) in their use of spatial prepositions?
5. Are there any significant differences between genders in terms of language transfer when acquiring English spatial prepositions?

1.5. Significance of the Study

First, English prepositions are amongst the most difficult structures for the EFL learners in general (Abd & Shah, 2014; Erarslan & Hol, 2014; Galleguillos, 2013; Jalali & Shojaei, 2012) and for the Arab EFL learners, in particular (Al-Hassan, 2013;

Al-Qudah, 2013; Hasan & Abdullah, 2009; Tahaineh, 2010; Terdjat, 2012). The difficulty arises from the differences in usages between English prepositions and their Arabic counterparts. The present study hopes to highlight these difficulties and analyze the errors that Moroccan EFL students tend to commit in their use of English spatial prepositions. It is hoped that, the analysis of the errors resulting from the improper use of English spatial prepositions will help the English language instructors and the Moroccan EFL learners. Such analysis of errors provides English language instructors with insight into the nature of problems that the EFL learners encounter in acquiring English spatial prepositions. This would help in finding remedial solutions for these problems. Analyzing errors also could raise the awareness of the Moroccan EFL learners about the challenging areas when acquiring English spatial prepositions. More specifically, the analysis of errors would give the EFL learners insight into the most difficult usage of prepositions as well as the most problematic ones.

Second, the present study compares three usages of spatial prepositions (*in, on* and *at*) in the two languages. Such comprehensive comparison could help in pinpointing the areas of similarities and differences between locative prepositions in both English and Arabic language. Determining such similarities and differences would help in predicting with more accuracy when EFL learners are expected to commit errors.

Third, this monograph attempts to unveil the aspects influencing the acquisition of L2. Therefore, it is anticipated that the findings of this research would help in understanding the role of one of these factors namely, transfer from L1, and as a result minimizing its negative effects. Therefore, reducing the influence of negative transfer would lead to a better acquisition of English locative prepositions because the number of errors will diminish.

1.6. Definitions

First language transfer: The influence resulting from the similarities and differences between the target language and any other language that has been previously (and perhaps imperfectly) acquired (Odlin, 1989, p. 27).

Intralingual errors: Errors that reflect the general characteristic of rule learning such as faulty generalization, incomplete application of rules and failure to learn conditions under which rules apply.

Interlanguage: The language produced by a non-native speaker of a language (i.e., a learner's output). Refers to the systematic knowledge underlying learner's production (Gass & Selinker, 2008).

Modern Standard Arabic: The language of today's Arabic newspapers, magazines, periodicals, letters and modern writers. It is also used as a medium of oral communication in formal speeches and on television and radio broadcasts (Belkredim & Sebai, 2009, p. 1)

Negative transfer: The use of the first language (or other languages known) in a second language context resulting in a non-target-like second language form (Gass & Selinker, 2001, p. 457).

Positive transfer: The use of the first language (or other languages known) in a second language context when the resulting second language form is correct (Gass & Selinker, 2001, p. 457).

Prepositions: A preposition expresses a relation between two entities, one being that represented by the prepositional complement, the other by another part of the sentence (Quirk, 1985).

Chapter 2

Literature Review

2.1. Introduction

The present chapter compromises of 3 sections. Section one introduces the definitions and types of language transfer. Second two, outlines some factors affecting language transfer; this includes L2 proficiency level and gender. Last section is devoted to review some studies related to the acquisition of English spatial prepositions among Arab EFL learners.

2.2. Definitions and Types of Language Transfer

As a result of lack of agreement among linguists on the extent to which language transfer affects L2 acquisition, various terms were presented by linguists in referring to first language transfer such as language mixing (e.g., Selinker, 1972; Kellerman, 1985), language transfer (e.g., Lado, 1957; Odlin, 1989), cross-linguistic interference; (e.g., Ringbom, 1987) and the role of the mother tongue (Master, 1987; Jarvis, 2000). It is noteworthy that throughout the present study the term language transfer is used.

Lado (1975) was one of the earliest scholars who attempts to define language transfer, this latter argued that language transfer is the influence resulting from the old habits of the mother tongue of L2 learners. Selinker, Swan and Dumas stated that language transfer is "the application of native language rules to target language forms" (1975, p. 134). Krashen referred to language transfer as "falling back on first language knowledge" (1982, p. 29).

Moreover, Schachter (1992) presented one more definition of language transfer as "a constraint on the learner`s hypothesis testing process" (p. 32). Istvan (2000) described language transfer as "any kind of movement or influence of concepts, knowledge, skills, or linguistic elements (structures, forms) in either direction between the L1 and the subsequent languages" (p.8). One of the recent definitions was presented by Gass and slinker (2008) who contend that language transfer is

“the use of the first language (or other languages known) in a second language context” (p. 519). It is apparent that language transfer was defined in different ways in accordance with the point of each researcher. Odlin (1989) attributed the lack of agreement among linguists on a unified definition of language transfer to the long existence of this phenomenon.

In this matter, Odlin (1989) elaborated on the numerous definitions of language transfer given by the aforesaid linguists and presented critiques of each definition. First, Odlin criticized the behaviorist position by stating that “transfer is not simply a consequence of habit formation”. Second, Odlin (1989) used the word interference to refer to language transfer because this latter means no more than negative transfer (NT).

Additionally, language transfer can act as a facilitator between L1 and L2 if they are similarities between the two languages, and the positive transfer takes place. Third, Odlin objected to defining language transfer as “falling back on the native language”. This definition was proposed by Krashen (1983) who described language transfer as "the result of falling back to the old knowledge, the L1 rules, when there is a lack of the new knowledge" (p. 143).

After providing a detailed description of some previous definitions, Odlin (1989) defined language transfer as “The influence resulting from similarities and differences between the target language and any other language that has been previously (and perhaps imperfectly) acquired” (p. 37).

2.2.1. Behaviorist view of language transfer. Behaviorists regarded language transfer as a habit formation, which was based on stimuli and responses. During the 1940s and 1950s, behaviorists and structuralists believe that:

a. Stimuli and response reinforce language learning.
b. simulate target responses and correct non-target ones.
c. facilitate learning by splitting the language system of L2 into components.

Meanwhile, they argued that language acquisition challenges were proportional to how close or unlike the target language was to the native language. If two languages are similar or identical, positive transfer from the original language promotes SLA; if the two languages are dissimilar, negative transfer from the native language impedes

target language learning. Lado (1957, p.23) proposed the Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis (CAH) on the basis of this assumption:

Lado (1957, p.23) proposed the Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis (CAH) on the basis of this assumption:

a. The level of difficulty experienced by learners will be directly related to the degree of linguistic differences between L1 and L2.

b. Difficulty will manifest itself in errors: the greater the difficulty, the more frequent the errors.

As a result, proponents of Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis (CAH) advanced the hierarchy of difficulty (Lado, 1957; Stockwell, 1957). They thought that language faults and learning difficulties were caused mostly or entirely by the native language. It was able to predict and explain learners' errors and learning problems by comparing and contrasting the similarities and differences between two languages and by establishing a hierarchy of difficulty.

Behaviorist view of transfer was limited to overt correspondences between the grammatical structures of L1 and L2. Transfer was highly dependent on the degree of similarity or dissimilarity between the native and target languages. Although behaviorists recognized the importance of native language in SLA, they exaggerated L1 impacts and overlooked other variables impeding SLA, such as learner differences. Meanwhile, CAH's capacity to foresee errors was questioned. As a result, it is unsurprising that the behaviorist view encountered significant opposition from the mentalist view.

2.2.2. Mentalist view of language transfer. Noam Chomsky established, in the early 1050s, the theory of Nativism (Mentalism). The theory believed that humans beings are born with prior knowledge of the language thanks to LAD (language acquisition device), learners start to be able to develop a full competency of a language through Universal Grammar (UG). Besides, Dulay and Burt's study (1974) compacted that children did not rely on language transfer, but they rely on their competency to build their own L2.

The conclusion unleashed a scathing attack on CAH. Dulay and Burt (1974) advanced their Creative Construction Hypothesis (CCH) in response to the mentalist

and UG influences. The CCH endorsed the L1=L2 hypothesis. Additionally, Dulay, Burt, and Krashen (1982) disputed native language transfer entirely and maintained that language acquisition ability was solely dependent on UG. However, these linguists were impatient to reach a conclusion. Ellis (2000) objected to the fact that their conclusion lacked empirical support. As a result of this limitation, mentalists began to investigate the link between native language transfer and UG in the 1980s. According to Zobl's (1980) transfer hypothesis was defined by the formal features of L2 and universal developmental principles. While mentalists are no longer able to completely refute native language transfer, they continue to face criticism for their theory's lack of empirical basis.

2.2.3. Cognitive view of transfer. In the late 1970s, the disadvantages of the mentalist view spur the growth of the cognitive view towards language transfer. According to Kellerman (1977) the cognitive view of language transfer consisted of four types of knowledge:

a. Perception.
b. Memory.
c. Problem-solving.
d. Information processing.

In cognitive view, "It is generally acknowledged that typological similarity or difference cannot on its own serve as a predictor for transfer but interacts with other (linguistic) factors" (Faerch & Kasper, 1987, p.121). Moreover, second language acquisition researchers emphasized on the issues that caused by language transfer. Language distance is one of these factors that influence L1 transfer.

Linguists believe that distance can be a linguistic term or a psycholinguistic term. Corder (1981) pointed out that language distance led to positive language transfer;

> Other things being equal, the mother tongue acts differently as a facilitating agency. Where the mother tongue is formally similar to target language, learners will pass more rapidly along the development continuum than where it is different. (p.101)

Although Corder (1981) only emphasized on positive transfer, language distance actually led to both positive and negative transfers. Corder (1979, p.28) commented, “The greater the degree of difference/distance, the larger the learning task, or to put it another way, the longer the learning path to be traversed between L1 and L2.”

To sum up, in cognitive view, markedness, psychotypology and language distance would trigger language transfer. Therefore, Gass (1983) suggested that: “transferability is mainly determined by language universal and their interaction with variables such as the surface correspondence of structures in L1 and L2, the perceptual saliency of the transferred feature, and its explicitness and conformity to the underlying logical structure” (as cited in Faerch & Kasper, 1987, p.121). Cognitive linguists realized that “transfer is not simply a consequence of habit formation, nor is simply interference or a falling back on the native language. Nor is it always native language transfer” (Odlin, 1989, p.25-27).

2.3. Factors Affecting Language Transfer

Jarvis (2000) identified a range of factors that influence the transfer of L1 structures to L2. Language attitude, age, motivation, amount of target language exposure, target language proficiency, language distance, and gender are among the factors listed by Jarvis.

Llach (2009) pointed out to some issues that have influences on lexical transfer such as L2 proficiency level, L1 background, motivation and gender. Jarvis and Pavlenko (2008) assess which external considerations should be included and which should be omitted based on the study's goals, analysis questions, and data collection viability. They went on to say that if any of these considerations were relevant to the study's goal, the researcher should focus on the ones that were found in the literature to interact with language transfer in a specific language subsystem.

Within the context of the present study, two factors interacting with language transfer were investigated namely; L2 proficiency level and gender. Based on literature, the relationship between language transfer, L2 proficiency and gender is still a matter of controversy; therefore, examining these factors would help in getting more insight into the extent to which language transfer, L2 proficiency level and gender interacting when acquiring L2.

The use of L2 proficiency level as an external factor in this analysis can be explained by the fact that the relationship between language transfer and L2 proficiency level is a controversial topic among linguists, suggesting that no general agreement has been reached. In order to obtain a sufficient understanding of the relationship between L2 proficiency level and L1 transfer, this research looked into L2 proficiency level. Acquiring adequate information can be viewed as a first step toward resolving the linguists' disagreement on this subject. There are two opposing viewpoints on the relationship between language transfer and English proficiency level, as will be seen in the following section.

The gender dimension was addressed in this analysis in order to get a better understanding of the relationship between language transfer and gender, as linguists differ about the degree to which language transfer and gender interact. This section reviews extensively the conflicting findings of studies that were carried out on the interaction between language transfer L2 proficiency and gender. The discussion about the external factors examined in the present study starts with L2 proficiency level and concludes with gender factor.

2.3.1. Language proficiency level. LT and L2 proficiency level are thought to have a similar relationship in that they all contribute to the forming of L2 learners' language. Beyond the similarities and distinctions between L1 and L2, Kellerman (1985) reported that language transfer interacts with L2 proficiency level in determining what is transferable and what is not. Odlin (1989) pointed out that, there is an evidence which supports the existence of a relationship between language transfer and L2 proficiency. To date, no agreement has been reached over such relationship. According to some scholars, the effect of L1 transfer declines as the degree of L2 proficiency rises (e.g., Bu, 2012; Chen, 2007; Erarslan & Hol, 2014; Liao, 2010; Phoocharoensil, 2013). Whereas others declare that, L1 transfer either appears at advanced L2 proficiency level more than low level or remains stable across different L2 proficiency levels (e.g., Bhardwaj 1986; Hadadi, Goodarz & Abbasi, 2014; Mohammad, 2011; Klien, 1986; Klein & Perdue, 1993; Salehi, 2009).

Bu (2012) investigated the relationship between native language pragmatic transfer and L2 proficiency. A total of forty participants took part in this report. The

participants were divided into four groups: 1- ten low-level Chinese EFL students, 2- ten high-level Chinese EFL students, 3- ten Chinese native students, and 4- ten English native students. The study's data was gathered using a discourse completion evaluation questionnaire. The study's findings revealed that as L2 proficiency levels rose, migration from L1 (Chinese) was mitigated. In other words, advanced Chinese EFL students were less likely than their low-level peers to focus on L1.

In line with Bu's findings, Corder (1978) argued that, L2 acquisition is a restructuring continuum process. This view hypothesizes that, L2 learners at early stages of acquisition rely on their L1s more than advanced learners. Thus, the starting point for L2 acquisition is L1, which is gradually substituted for L2 as the acquisition process advances. Usually, not the forms of L2 that replace the forms of L1, but rather the strategies that are used by L2 learners replace those of L1. Such utilized strategies are presented in a continuum of strategies employed by native speakers of two languages in contrast.

The role of L1 transfer in the acquisition of English vocabulary, tense, and prepositions was investigated by Erarslan and Hol (2014). A total of 323 Turkish English learners took part in the study. The participants were divided into three groups based on their level of English proficiency: elementary, pre-intermediate, and intermediate. The data for their study was gathered through a translation task and a translation test. According to the findings, study about the relationship between language transfer and English proficiency level, Turkish L2 learners at the elementary level made more L1 transfer errors than advanced learners. The study's findings are consistent with Phoocharoensil's (2013) findings on the effect of L1 on the acquisition of English collocations by Thai EFL learners. The researcher used an essay writing test to assess the participants' ability to produce collocations. The participants in the study were comprised of 90 Thai EFL learners. They were classified into two proficiency levels: low proficiency level and high proficiency level. The researcher concluded that, errors traceable to L1 transfer committed by low level EFL learners were more than those made by high level learners despite the fact that, a considerable amount of transfer errors were found in the production of high-level learners.

Similarly, Chen (2007) investigated the acquisition of information sequencing in Chinese. The sample of the study consisted of 95 participants who were classified into

three groups; 35 native learners of Chinese, 30 English learners of Chinese and 30 Korean learners of Chinese. The English and Korean learners of Chinese were further subdivided into three Chinese proficiency levels; intermediate, high-intermediate and advanced. The instruments used in the study were a sentence-combining task and discourse task. The results of the study revealed that, transfer from L1 (English) was found to be more evident in language of less advanced English learners of Chinese. Liao (2010) published another study that looked at the effect of L1 transfer on the acquisition of English phraseology. There were 265 EFL students who took part in the study. Intermediate, high-intermediate, and advanced EFL students were split into three classes. The findings of the research on the relationship between L1 transfer and L2 proficiency showed that language transfer errors decreased as L2 proficiency increased. The results of the above studies clearly support the idea that L1 transfer is more visible in the early stages of L2 acquisition than in the later stages.

The notion that L1 transfer decreases as L2 proficiency level increases was not shared by some researchers who stated that, reliance on L1 is either more apparent among advanced learners of L2 than less advanced learners or remains stable across varied proficiency levels.

Klein (1986), for example, argued that “as comprehension of a second language increases, the possibilities of conversion increase.” The analysis on L2 learners from various L1 contexts was undertaken by the European Science Foundation to support Klein's research. The analysis of the study results revealed that, all L2 speakers regardless of their L1s showed parallelism in development sequences of L2 at the early stages of acquisition. Thus, no L1 transfer was attested. However, the study revealed that as speakers achieved progress in their L2, they began transferring L1 forms into L2 (Klein & Perdue, 1993).

Other research has found that transfer errors are consistent independent of L2 proficiency. Hadadi, Goodarz and Abbasi (2014) investigated the connection between L1 transfer and L2 proficiency level. The researchers used a variety of tools to gather evidence for the analysis, including classroom observations, video recording, and interviews. The findings of the analysis showed that L1's influence was robust from different contexts and proficiency levels. In other words, L1 transfer was never affected by the extent of L2 proficiency. The findings of a study conducted by Hussein

and Mohammad (2011), which looked at the impact of L1 transfer on English writing, support this viewpoint. The study enlisted the participation of sixteen Arab English learners. Short essays were required of the participants. The researchers arrived at the findings that, Arab EFL learners resorted to transfer from L1 regardless of their English proficiency levels. More precisely, participants from all L2 levels incorporated the patterns of L1 into L2.

In sum, the results of the aforesaid studies have contradicting views regarding the relationship between L1 transfer and L2 proficiency. The first view states that, reliance on mother tongue is more evident among less advanced L2 learners and such reliance on L1 decreases with increase in L2 proficiency (e.g., Bu, 2012; Chen, 2007; Erarslan & Hol, 2014; Liao, 2010; Phoocharoensil, 2013). The second point of view asserts that L1 transfer occurs mostly at advanced stages of L2 acquisition or is consistent across various degrees of L2 proficiency (e.g., Bhardwaj 1986; Hadadi, Goodarz & Abbasi, 2014; Hussein & Mohammad 2011; Klien, 1986; Klein & Perdue, 1993; Salehi, 2009). These studies' contradictory findings can be explained by the fact that they looked at L2 learners from multiple L1 contexts who were learning different language subsystems, so it's not reasonable to assume that there's a connection between migration from two different languages and L2 proficiency levels. For example, the correlation between syntactic transfer from Dutch and English proficiency is not the same as the correlation between phonological transfer from Arabic and English proficiency. Another explanation for the studies' conflicting conclusions were that they used various data collection tools, such as interviews, compositions, grammaticality judgment tasks, translation tests, and sentence-combining tasks, all of which yielded different results due to the essence of each test. For instance, L2 learners who took a composition test showed different results from those who had interviews. In compositions the participants have more time to think before writing and that causes less reliance on mother tongue. Concerning the present study, L2 proficiency factor was investigated for the purpose of gaining more insight into its correlation with reliance on L1 (Arabic) as acquiring English prepositions.

2.3.2. Gender. The second factor that was examined in the present study is gender. According to Llach (2009), gender is one of the most important variables in

identifying L2 learners. Previous studies addressed gender differences among L2 learners had conflicting views. No definitive statement was said in this regard, this is in line with Ellis (1994) who stated that, the findings of studies regarding gender differences in second language acquisition are inconclusive. The analysis of some studies such as Abusaeedi, Asghar and Faezeh (2015), Al Yaari and Almaflehi (2013), Catalán and Alba (2008), Cheng (2001), Li (2004) and Llach (2009a) revealed two main contradicting findings; 1- the existence of gender differences among L2 learners, whether boys are superior to girls in particular L2 subsystem or vice versa. 2- No gender differences are attested, where both boys and girls achieve approximate proficiency in particular L2 structure.

Cheng (2001) examined the development of English by Malay EFL students in a report. The thesis sought to accomplish two major goals. First, it looks into the impact of L1 transfer on Malay learners' English development. Second, it focuses at the role of gender in the acquisition of English as a second language. The participants in the study were 194 students from two Malaysian primary schools. In order to attain the study's goal, the participants were required to complete four sets of writing assignments. The study's results showed that first language conversion has a significant effect on English acquisition. In other words, no gender differences were observed respecting reliance on native language when acquiring English.

These findings corroborate Llach's (2009) research on the position of gender in lexical transfer. The researcher looked for evidence of lexical transfer through grades using written composition. The study's results showed that there were no gender variations in dependence on mother tongue. These findings are in line with those of Abusaeedi, Asghar, and Faezeh (2015), who investigated the origins of errors produced by Iranian EFL learners in their written production. The study's findings showed that errors were caused mostly by intralingual intervention rather than language transfer. The results also revealed that there were no variations in transfer errors between males and females.

However, the results of the studies by Abusaeedi, Asghar & Faezeh (2015), Cheng (2001) and Llach (2009) are not shared by Catalán and Alba (2008) who investigated the acquisition of English vocabulary by male and female EFL students. The study's findings revealed gender differences in the learning of English vocabulary,

particularly in the semantic field. This position is shared by Li (2004) who investigated the pronunciation of English vowels by males and Taiwanese female learners. The study sought to achieve two main purposes, firstly examining any evidence for the occurrence of transfer from L1 when acquiring English vowels. Secondly, understanding the impact of gender on the perception of vowels. The results of the study revealed that, Taiwanese L2 learners faced difficulty pronouncing the English vowels i and u. Such difficulty stemmed from L1 negative transfer. With respect gender differences, the writer arrived at the conclusion that, female Taiwanese EFL learners outperformed their male peers in terms of English vowels pronunciation. This means negative transfer from L1 is less evident among female learners than males.

Similarly, Al Yaari and Almaflehi (2013) implemented a study on the difficulties encountered by 50 Saudi EFL students (25 males, 25 females) when translating the English prepositions at, in and on into Arabic. The researchers concluded that, Saudi EFL learners confronted various problems in translating these three prepositions due mainly to negative transfer from Arabic. The study additionally displayed that, female learners‟ performance in translating the prepositions at, in and on is better than their male counterparts. These findings agree with a study carried out by Stapa and Irtaimeh (2012) on the impact of transfer from Arabic on the acquisition of rhetorical features by Jordanian EFL learners. The results relevant to gender differences revealed that, Jordanian female EFL learners used features of root repetition more commonly than their male peers due to transfer from Arabic.

2.4. A Cross-Linguistic Comparison Between English and Arabic Prepositional System

Prepositions in English have long been a challenge for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) students, regardless of their native tongue (Murcia, 1983, p. 250). One explanation for this is that EFL students often attempt to relate the use of English prepositions to the prepositional structure of their mother tongue (MT). The problem is also caused by the disparity between the number of prepositions and the absence of a one-to-one mapping between the English and MT prepositions. Furthermore, since prepositional use in English can be highly idiomatic (especially in preposition verbs and phrasal verbs), EFL learners sometimes struggle with the complexities of

idiomatic use of English prepositions, and even native speakers are often unsure of the correct type (Gethin, 1983: 161). Furthermore, the difficulties EFL learners have with prepositions are exacerbated by the fact that prepositions are strongly polysemous and constitute a highly semantic ontological group. As a result, EFL learners are often faced with deciding which prepositions to use, since the conceptual mapping in the mother tongue can vary. As a result, prepositions often obstruct EFL learners' ability to achieve grammatical fluency and precision.

Before delving into the comparison between prepositions of the two languages, it is necessary to provide a working definition for prepositions. Quirk (1985) claims that "A preposition expresses a relation between two entities, one being that represented by the prepositional complement, the other by another part of the sentence." (p. 673). With reference to the quotation above, a preposition has the function of linking two parts in a sentence.

Prepositions are regarded as the most difficult subject among Arab EFL students due to cross-linguistic variations between the Arabic and English prepositional systems. Any English prepositions are not present in the Arabic language, which is one of the language basic variations between the Arabic and English prepositional systems When practicing these prepositions, Arabic EFL students often use a small number of prepositions from their mother tongue to transfer their usage of English prepositions, resulting in incorrect English prepositional use and idiomaticity. Cross-linguistic differences may often result in inaccuracies in prepositional use (especially in translation) (Zughoul, 1973).

2.4.1. English prepositional system. English prepositions can be divided into two main types according to the number of words that a preposition consists of. The first type is simple prepositions or single-word prepositions; these prepositions comprise only one word such as under, around, into, in, on, and at. The second type is complex or multi-word prepositions; these prepositions contain two or three words such as according to, on behalf of, and with regard to etc. (Ballard, 2013). Complex prepositions cannot be constructed freely, for example in spite of cannot turn out to be *out spite of. Complex prepositions are treated as open class, indicating that they have

no limited number because new combinations can be created (Grubic, 2004; Macková, 2012).

Concerning the functions that English prepositions perform in a sentence, Vas (2006) stated that, prepositions in English serve to link two different grammatical elements as depicted in the three cases (A, B, and C) below.

A- English prepositions join a noun to another noun to show the relationship between the two as in sentence 1 below:

1- There is a book in the bag.

Here the preposition *in* links the noun book to the other noun bag.

B- English prepositions are also used to connect a noun to an adjective as exemplified in sentence 2 below;

2- Sheila is fond of chocolate.

The preposition of connects the adjective fond to the noun chocolate to show the relationship between the two.

C- English prepositions serve also to link a verb to a noun as in sentence 3.

3- The boy ran to the gate.

Here the preposition to is used to join the verb ran to the noun gate to show the relationship between them.

Quirk et al. (1985) classified the usages of English prepositions as follows; 1- prepositions indicating time (temporal) relationship 2- prepositions indicating spatial relationship; these prepositions are divided into prepositions of location and prepositions of direction, 3- prepositions denoting cause or purpose relations such as cause, reason, motive, purpose, destination or target, 4- prepositions indicating the relation of the means or agentive such as manner, means, instrument, agentive or stimulus, 5- prepositions indicating accompaniment relations 6- prepositions show the relation of support or opposition, 7- prepositions show the relation of concession and respect. These usages have been further defined and discussed by some researchers

(e.g., Celentano, 2008; Cossé, 2005) and will be discussed below briefly with some illustrative examples.

The temporal usage: These prepositions are used to indicate time span within which an action occurs (Hasan & Abdullah, 2009). According to Celentano (2008) the prepositions that express temporal relationship are on, at, in, by, under, within, during, over, since, for, from. The temporal meanings that each preposition expresses are shown below.

As stated by Celentano (2008), the meanings of temporal prepositions vary as follows; the preposition *on* is mainly used with weekdays (on Saturday) and with idiomatic expressions such as on time. *At* is used to denote clock time (at seven), day times such as noon and night and with some expressions like at present. *In* is used with seasons (in summer), a particular month (in January), year and century and also used with day times such as morning, evening and with expressions such as in time. *By*, is used to denote the idea of specified period of time (by ten o'clock). The preposition *within* denotes that something happens at a certain point in time. An operation that takes place in less than a certain amount of time is referred to as under. Over denotes that everything takes place over a longer span of time. During indicates time span within which an action occurred. Since used to refer a specific point/date in time. For denotes an event that began in the past and continues to the present, as well as the amount of time in which something occurs. From is used to talk about the starting time for something to a point in the future. Some illustrative examples on prepositions that express temporal relationship are depicted below (Celentano, 2008)

6- She wakes up several times during the night.

7- I have not met him since 1999.

8- I have been waiting here for two hours.

9- From now on, we will never lose another game our rivals.

10- I am sure the train will be here in under one hour.

The spatial usage: Prepositions that express spatial relationships fall into two types; firstly, prepositions of location, secondly, prepositions of direction. This corroborates Bennett's (1957) observation that "Any comprehensive account of spatial uses of English prepositions assigns a prominent place to the distinction between locative sentences, such as 'Ahmed is at the supermarket', and the directional sentence, such

as ‘Ahmed went to the post-office”. The beginning will be with prepositions of location.

Prepositions of location: These prepositions serve to indicate where something is located. According to Celentano (2008) the following prepositions are used to indicate location: Above, across, after, against, along, among, around, at, below, behind, beside, between, beneath, in, on from, under. Each of the above-mentioned prepositions has a different meaning when expressing the notion of location. Such meanings are shown below as stated by Celentano (2008). Above means higher in position than something (above the table). *Across* means movement from one side to another (across the universe). After has the same meaning of ‘next one’ when talking about the notion of location (the shop is after the bank). Against used to describe something in contact with something else (leaning against the wall). Along means following the boundaries of something (along the river’s edge). Among means being within a group of people or things and usually used with more than two persons or things (among the trees). Around indicates closeness or neighborhood to something (around the house) and used to describe location on the opposite side. *At* used to indicate the place of something or somebody and indicates the location where something takes place. *At* does not mean inside something but in front of it. Behind means at the back of something or somebody. Beside used to describe something that is next to something or someone. Between means within the distance separating two places, things or persons. In is used to describe the place of someone or something within certain area. On used to describe something in contact with or over another object. From, used to talk about the location of departure and to describe the location from which something is seen. Under, beneath and below are used similarly to show that something is lower in position than another thing. Having viewed the usages of prepositions of location, some illustrative examples are displayed below (Celentano, 2008).

- He arrived at the train station at 3 pm
- I will arrive in Tokyo in 4 days.
- The trash is kept behind the building.
- The book is on the desk.
- His feet are below the desk.

Prepositions of direction: These prepositions are used to describe the change of position. According to Celentano (2008) the following prepositions are used to talk about the notion of direction: in, on, at, near, down, towards, across, from, between and to. It is believed that English prepositions vary in terms of expressing the idea of direction as follows: Toward means in the direction of something (toward the museum). In means within particular location or object (in the kitchen). On is used to denote direction towards someone or something (on the left). Near is used to express vicinity (near the train station). Across means from one side to another (across the field). At expresses movement toward something or somebody. Down indicates the direction of something. From denote a position from which a movement begins. To is used to denote destination and between used to indicate having one thing on one side and another thing on the other side. Some examples on prepositions expressing the notion of direction are depicted below (Celentano, 2008)

- You should turn left at Warner Street and you will see the bank.
- The bus comes down the hill.
- From where we stood we got an excellent view of the procession.
- I am going to Edinburgh tomorrow
- The mosque is located between the school and the art gallery.

Beside the temporal and spatial relationships, English prepositions are used to express different meanings as reported by Cossé (2005) who summarized these usages as follows:

Prepositions indicating cause, purpose, target, motive and goal relationships: These prepositions express the cause, purpose and target of happening of something such as (*because of, since, for, to,* and *at).*

Examples:

- Because of the storm all the flights are delayed
- He died for his country
- He made a doll house for his daughter.
- He gave a doll house to his daughter.
- The hunter aimed carefully at the deer.

In addition to the above motioned usages, English prepositional system is distinguished from prepositions in other languages by its preposition combinations,

where a preposition follows a particular noun, verb or adjective. It's worth noting that non-native English speakers have a hard time mastering preposition combination since the use of preposition combinations is extremely idiomatic and inconsistent. In other words, there are no set rules for EFL speakers to obey in order to learn these prepositions, making their usage difficult for non-native English speakers. According to Grubic (2004) preposition combinations can only be acquired as an essential part of the noun, verb or the adjective they accompany (as part of the lexical unit). Some examples on preposition combinations are depicted below.

Examples:

- He is addicted to watching TV
- His love of singing developed when he was a child.
- Children are dependent on their parents.

The present study compared the responses of the respondents concerning the main locative English prepositions (at, in and on) with one another in order to determine which usage poses the greatest difficulty for Moroccan EFL learners. Determining the most difficult usage of prepositions would help EFL teachers in understanding the areas of difficulties in English prepositional system and thus, finding some suggested teaching methods for the benefits of EFL learners. The next sub-section discusses the Arabic prepositional system.

2.4.2. Arabic prepositional system. There are several distinctions between prepositions in English and Arabic. To begin with, there are far fewer prepositions in Arabic than there are in English (Al-Marrani, 2009). There are approximately one hundred prepositions in the English language (Leacock et al, 2014), while there are approximately twenty prepositions in Arabic (Aldahesh, 2013). Second, English prepositions can be grouped into simple and complex (Ballard, 2013) whereas, in Arabic there is no such classification; all prepositions are simple (Al-Marrani, 2009). Third, many of the English prepositions are not considered as prepositions in Arabic but adverbs or semi- prepositions such *as down, beneath, below, up, over and above*. Therefore, complex and English prepositions that are considered as adverbs in Arabic were not examined in the present study. This is because a basic condition of investigating the influences resulting from L1 transfer is making contrastive analyses

between the subsystems of two languages in contrast. As a result of the lack of complex prepositions in Arabic and the use of certain English prepositions as adverbs in Arabic, such a distinction is impossible. The discussion of the Arabic prepositional structure will begin with prepositional forms in Arabic.

According to Saeed (2014), Arabic prepositions can be classified into two primary classes: true prepositions and semi-prepositions. More details on the two classes of prepositions are discussed below.

True prepositions: This class contains the structures of language that function only as prepositions. True prepositions can be additionally subdivided into two types based on the number of letters that each preposition includes.

A- Separable prepositions: These prepositions can be bi-literal or tri-literal as shown in Table 1 below;

Table 1

Separable Prepositions

Arabic	**English**
/fī/	In
/*c*ala/	On
/ ‘ila/	To

Arabic	**English**
/Min/	From\Of
/*C*an/	Away from
/ḥatta/	Until\ Up to
/*Ci*nd/	At
/Maca/	With
/mundhu/, /mudh/	Since\ So far

B. Inseparable prepositions: This type comprises prepositions represented by a consonant and a short vowel. They usually function as prefixes to their complement. These prepositions are depicted in Table 2 below;

Table 2

Inseparable prepositions

Arabic	**English**
/Bi/	By, With, At, In
/Li/	To
/Ta/	By (in oath)
/Wa/	By (in oath)
/Ka/	Like

C. Semi-prepositions: This type is characterized for being multi-functional and comprising language structures that can function as nouns, adverbs and prepositions. Table 3 below includes some semi-prepositions in Arabic;

Table 3

Semi-prepositions

Arabic	**English**
/taḥt/	Below
/Qabl/	Before
/Bacd/	After
/Bain/	Between\ Among
/ḥawla/	Around\ about
/Dakhil/	Inside
/Kharij/	Outside
/Qurb/	Near\Beside

Prepositions in Arabic serve a variety of purposes in sentences. To begin with, they serve to connect a noun to another noun or a noun phrase in order to expose their connection. It's worth noting that the sections of prepositions, their purposes, and how they're used are all explained with English explanations and word-for-word transliteration.

Example:

1- Aḥmed fī ’al-madrasah. Ahmed is in the school.

In the sentence above, the preposition /fī/ links the noun Ahmed to the other noun /’al-madrasah/ (school).

Second, Arabic prepositions are used to link a noun or a noun phrase to a verb in a sentence, revealing their relationship.

Example:

2- qafaztu *ca*n ’alsoor. I jumped over the wall.

In the above sentence, the preposition ‘can’ relates the verb /qafaztu/ (jumped) to the noun ’alsoor (wall) to reveal the relationship between the two. Finally, Arabic prepositions are used to link an adjective to a noun or a noun phrase in order to expose their connection.

Example :

3- ’ana qaliqun min nata’ij ’al’mtiḥanat. I am worried about exams’ results.

In the aforesaid example the preposition /min/ (about) is used to join the adjective /qaliqun/ (worried) to the noun phrase /nata’ij/ /’al’mtiḥanat/ (exams’ results) to show the correlation between the two. Arabic is characterized for the frequent usage of some prepositions such as /min/, /cala/, /maca/, /fī/, /can/, /bi/ and /li/ whereas, other prepositions are rarely used or no longer used in Colloquial Arabic such as /khala/, /kay/ and /mundhu/.

With reference to the comparison conducted between English and Arabic prepositions in this study, it is fitting to say that prepositions in Arabic have some

similarities to their English counterparts in terms of the functions they perform in the sentence and usages. However, since the two languages (Arabic and English) belong to two distinct linguistic groups, the areas of distinction between prepositions in the two languages tend to be greater (Alhaj, 2015). When such variations are combined with a lack of understanding of how to use English prepositions correctly, negative transition from L1 occurs, resulting in further mistakes.

2.5. Studies Conducted on the Acquisition of English Locative Prepositions Among Arab EFL Learners

This section contains research on Arab EFL learners' acquisition of English prepositions. These scholars focused on the causes of errors made by Arab learners while learning English prepositions, whether it was due to language transfer or intralingual intervention.

Habash (1982) conducted research into the most frequent mistakes made by United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) school students in Palestine while using English prepositions. The participants in the study consisted of two samples of 120 students who were in their preparatory level. The students were studying at 14 UNRWA girls‟ and boys‟ schools and spread over different areas of Jerusalem. The instruments that the researcher used consisted of four written compositions and a multiple-choice test comprising 100 items. The titles of the four compositions centered around four main ideas; describing a picture “on the way to Jericho”, writing about oneself, describing their favorite seen and manner of spending a holiday. The time assigned by the researcher to complete each composition is one hour. According to Habash, the composition test was adopted in this particular study in order to give L2 learners the chance to reveal their communicative needs by themselves. This is supported by Pech, (1976) who stated that, composition tests help students to achieve their communicative purposes by themselves not anybody else. For the purpose of analyzing the errors made by the participants, the researcher employed EA. The researcher followed the three measures suggested by Corder while performing EA (1967) 1- recognizing incorrect sentences (error identification), 2- classifying errors, and 3- explaining the errors. The study came up with four major conclusions. 1- The majority of the mistakes made by Palestinian English learners were due to L1

intervention (transfer errors) and other errors were caused by some learning problems. More precisely, errors attributable to transfer from L1 constituted 65.3% of the total number of errors whereas; errors caused by other learning problems were 34.7%. 2- Three types of transfer errors were observed in the study: substitution, deletion and redundancy errors. Substitution errors were the most common errors in both transfer from Arabic and the other learning problems. The study also revealed that most of the errors made by the participants were in the prepositions in, at and to. 58 This is because these prepositions have wide range of meanings and usages in English and have many lexical equivalents to Arabic. 3- Errors attributable to language transfer were influenced by Standard Arabic more than Colloquial Arabic. 4- The main learning problems encountered by the participants in the study were incorrect application of English rules and lack of English knowledge. The researcher concluded that, the faulty usage of prepositions by Palestinian EFL learners reflects weakness in English language in general.

Asma (2010) looked into the impact of Arabic intervention on Algerian EFL students' acquisition of English prepositions. The thesis had one goal: to shed more light on the phenomenon of transfer, i.e., to see whether Algerian English speakers revert to their mother tongue while learning English prepositions. The sample of the study consisted of 30 EFL learners studying at Mentouri University in Algeria. All the participants in the study were native learners of Arabic in their third-year level of study and chosen because they have achieved a good proficiency level in English. The instruments used in the study consisted of twenty sentences fill-in-the-blank test in which the participants were required to provide the suitable preposition that expresses spatial or temporal meaning for each sentence. The participants were asked to put Ø in the event that no preposition is required because there are cases where one language uses a preposition while another does not. The test was divided into three sections, section 1- instances where English and Arabic prepositions express similar meanings, section, 2- instances where prepositions in the two languages have different meanings and section 3- instances where one language uses one preposition while another does not. The researcher utilized CA in order to 59 describe the two prepositional systems of English and Arabic, where an extensive comparison of prepositions in the two languages was carried out in the study.

The study's findings backed the language transfer theory, which stated that when Algerian English learners lacked knowledge of English prepositions, they resorted to transferring from Standard Arabic. The analysis also showed that Standard Arabic was not the only source of transfer; Algerian English learners were also influenced by their Algerian Arabic (Colloquial Arabic) and their L2 language, French. Furthermore, the analysis found that positive transfer from Standard Arabic and French happened more often than positive transfer from Algerian Arabic, and that negative transfer from Standard Arabic was more noticeable than negative transfer from French and Algerian Arabic.

Another study in this area was carried out by Tahaineh (2010) who examined the acquisition of English prepositions among Arab EFL learners. The study attempted to achieve three objectives. First, determining the extent to which language transfer and intralingual interference affect the acquisition of English prepositions by Arab EFL learners. Second, investigating the disparity in errors made by the participants can be attributed to their level of L2 proficiency. Third, investigating if the duration of the composition tasks had something to do with the disparity in mistakes committed by the participants. The thesis included 162 students majoring in English in their first, second, and third years at Al-Balqa University in Jordan. The participants were requested to write free written compositions on different topics. The sampling method utilized in the study was stratified random sampling of equal-sized strata. Each stratum consisted of 54 participant representing different academic year. For the purpose

of examining the different sources of errors accompanying L1 transfer in the acquisition of English prepositions, the researcher employed EA. EA can be distinguished from other language acquisition approaches for it looks into all possible causes of errors made by L2 60 speakers. This is in line with Brown (1987) who argued that “EA became distinguished from CA by its examination of errors attributable to all possible sources, not just those which result from negative transfer of the native language”.

According to Tahaineh's (2010) study, the majority of the participants' errors involved the use of the following prepositions: in, by, on, to, with, of, at, from, for, and 58% of errors were caused by negative L1 transfer. It was also found that intralingual errors such as overgeneralization and misapplication of English rules were

responsible for 42% of total errors. The study also showed that, L2 proficiency level has a significant impact on the errors made by the participants. More precisely, third year students' total number of errors was 381, which is considered the least proportion of errors among the three groups of participants whereas, second year students' total number of errors was 616 and first-year students' total errors was 1293. The study concluded that there was no significant correlation between the length of the composition and the number of errors made by the participants in the sense that, first year students who wrote compositions comprising 193 words in average committed 1293 errors. Second year students who wrote compositions containing 275 words in average made 616 errors and third year students who wrote compositions comprising 433 words in average committed 381 errors.

Ben Khayal (2011) carried out a study to identify some challenges that Libyan students encounter while using English prepositions of time. The researcher devised a questionnaire consisting of five separate questions on the most commonly encountered prepositions of time, such as "at", "in" and "on". Students were asked to either fill in the blanks where no answers were provided or to complete the holes where potential answers were provided. He requested that the exam be administered by one of the English teachers from each of the two schools. Based on the results, Ben Khaya (2011) states that "the preposition errors of time at, in and on are the most frequent errors." (p, 464)

Terdjat (2012) conducted another research on the acquisition of English prepositions, this article focuses on the difficulties Algerian EFL learners face while learning the English prepositions in, on, and at. The study attempted to fulfill two objectives; first, examining the challenges that Algerian EFL learners encounter when acquiring the prepositions; at, in and on. Second, examining the sources of prepositional errors made by the participants in the study. A total of fifty EFL learners participated in the study at Mohamed Khider University of Biskra. All the participants were second year EFL learners at the department of English language. The instruments used in the study were comprised of two tests; fill-in-the-blank test and cloze test. The Fill-in-the-blank test consisted of thirteen items and the participants were requested to fill the spaces in each item with one of these prepositions; at, in, or on. The Cloze test was composed of a short paragraph containing several spaces, where the participants

were involved to add the missing preposition in each space. The researcher arrived at the conclusion that, Algerian EFL learners experienced serious difficulties in their use of the English prepositions; in, on and at. This is exhibited in the fact that, the proportion of wrong responses in the use of these three prepositions, e.g., in, on and at outnumbered the proportion of correct responses. The findings additionally displayed that, Algerian EFL learners' errors were committed basically due to transfer from Arabic and ignorance of the appropriate use of the three prepositions, in, on and at. The researcher explained his findings by two main reasons. First, the use of some prepositions in English language is unpredictable and illogical. In other words, the use of prepositions that accompany particular verbs, nouns and adjectives is highly idiomatic, leading EFL learners to make lots of errors when acquiring them. Second, when dealing with English prepositions, Arab EFL learners wrongly hypothesize one to one relationship. More specifically, Arab EFL learners propose that an English preposition can be exact equivalent to its Arabic counterpart, which creates much language transfer errors

Having reviewed some studies on English prepositions, it was found that studies implemented on the acquisition of English prepositions by Arab EFL learners are only a few and this necessitates more studies to be carried out in order to fully understand the problems that Arab EFL learners encounter when acquiring this area of language. Moreover, the aforementioned studies were not conducted in Morocco. In fact, there has been a lack of research into the acquisitions of locative prepositions among Moroccan EFL learners. This study will be significant because it seeks to fill in the gap in research.

The studies i.e., Habash (1982), Asma, (2010), Tahaineh, (2010) and Terdjat, (2012) have some drawbacks that should be taken into account by any study attempting to provide adequate account for the acquisition of English prepositions and the role of language transfer. First, the studies especially those made by Habash (1982), Asma (2010) and Terdjat, (2012) did not investigate any of the external factors interacting with L1 transfer which is a necessary requirement for any study examining the influences resulting from L1 transfer. In his study, Tahaineh (2010) examined L2 proficiency level as an external factor interacting with transfer from Arabic; however, such examination was not based on a valid ground because he classified the proficiency

level of his subjects according to their academic year. To be more specific, he assumed that third year L2 learners are more proficient in their L2 than second or first year. The accuracy of such assumption is not always guaranteed because it happens that many first and second year L2 learners achieve better L2 proficiency than third- or fourth-year learners. Therefore, this particular study hopes to bridge a gap in literature by examining two external factors interacting with L1 transfer namely, L2 proficiency level and gender. These two factors were particularly investigated in order to gain additional knowledge regarding the relationship between language transfer, gender and L2 proficiency, since this relationship is still a controversial issue.

Second, although Tahaineh (2010) used a written composition test to analyze the errors produced by Arab EFL learners in the use of English prepositions, the research of the current study did not use this test. This is because composition test is time consuming and encourage the respondents to employ avoidance strategy when acquiring English prepositions. In composition tests the respondents are required to write sentences or paragraphs, prompting them to avoid the structures that are very distant from their native language. Conversely, in other tests such as fill-in-the-blank test the respondents are instructed to add only the missing words, which restrict utilizing avoidance strategy. Therefore, the present study employed fill-in-the-blank test to limit avoidance of prepositions to the minimum and consequently any occurrence of negative transfer from Arabic will be evident.

Third, the above-mentioned studies, especially those implemented by Asma (2010), Tahaineh (2010) and Terdjat, (2012) were carried out in a restricted setting. To be more specific, the sample in these studies was chosen from one academic institution which limited the generalizability of the findings. Asma's sample was chosen from Mentouri University in Algeria, Tahaineh's sample was from Al-Balqa Applied University in Jordan, while Terdjat's sample was selected from Mohamed Khider University of Biskra in Algeria. In addition, the sample in Asma's study was rather too small where only thirty subjects took part in the study. Such small sample does not guarantee valid and strong generalizations regarding the acquisition of English prepositions by Arab EFL learners. For the purpose of ensuring maximum representativeness of the sample to the whole population and accordingly increasing the generalizability of the findings.

As a result of the limitations found in the comparisons presented by previous studies, the researcher is compelled to propose his own cross-linguistic comparison between prepositions in English and Arabic. The comparison that is presented in this study covers different issues related to the two prepositional systems. This comparison elaborates on almost most of the usages of prepositions in the two languages with adequate illustrative examples. It is hoped that, the comparison presented in this study is more exhaustive than those presented by previous studies and would be able to pinpoint the areas of differences and similarities between the two prepositional systems.

2.6. Conclusion

This chapter elaborated on the definition of language transfer and its types. This chapter also discussed some of the theoretical views that are linked to language transfer and constituted the theoretical framework for the present study. CA and EA were viewed thoroughly. As it was mentioned, CA clearly supports the position of language transfer as the only factor accounts for L2 learners' errors. As a result, duo to the continuous critiques of CA approach, a modified CA emerged. The most important assumption of the modified CA is that L1 transfer is no longer seen as the only factor influencing the acquisition of L2 but rather it interacts with other factors. Moreover, EA proposes other sources of errors than transfer from L1 such as intralingual interference. The chapter presented the interacting factors with L1 transfer that were investigated in this study; namely L2 proficiency level and gender. The results of studies that were conducted on the relation between proficiency level and language transfer revealed contradicting results. Some studies depicted that, transfer from L1 decreases as learners get progress in their L2 whereas other studies showed that, more instances of transfer from L1 are expected to occur as L2 proficiency increases or the rate of L1 transfer errors remains stable across different proficiency levels. Besides, the studies carried out on the relation between transfer from L1 and gender showed conflicting results. Some studies revealed that, both male and female EFL learners resorted equally to L1 when acquiring L2, whereas other studies showed gender difference with respect to falling back on the knowledge of L1.

The chapter objectively examined several researches on Arab EFL learners' acquisition of English prepositions. These studies' results strongly backed the theory that language transfer is a significant factor in preposition acquisition. The analysis revealed that these findings had certain shortcomings that should be considered in future research. More specifically, most of these experiments did not look at the external influences that come with L1 transfer, and some of them had a sample size that was limited to only one academic institution.

Chapter 3

Methodology

3.1. Overview

Apart from presenting an overview of the study methodology, the paper focuses on exploring the impact of L1 transfer on the acquisition of English spatial prepositions and determining whether language transfer has an impact on the target population. The current chapter describes the study's environment and participants, as well as the protocols used such as; reliability, and validity. Forms of sampling, data collection instruments, data collection techniques, data interpretation, and finally the present study's limits and delimitation are among the procedures. The following research questions can be used to formulate the above-mentioned aims of this thesis:

1. Are Moroccan EFL learners competent in the use of English spatial prepositions?
2. Do awareness manifest among Moroccan EFL learners while using English spatial prepositions?
3. Does L1 (standard Arabic) have any impact of the use of L2 (English) spatial prepositions among Moroccan EFL learners?
4. Are there any significant differences among English language proficiency levels (A1, A2, B1 and B2) in their use of spatial prepositions?
5. Are there any significant differences between genders in terms of language transfer when acquiring English spatial prepositions?

3.2. Research Design

In investigating L1 transfer in the acquisition of English locative prepositions among Arab EFL learners, the current study was designed as a descriptive research design. As Calmorin, et al. (2007) stated that descriptive research usually aims at finding out new facts. These facts can be represented in various shapes as growing

the knowledge about particular phenomenon, increasing the generalization of the findings, gaining more insight into the factors at play, finding out a new causal correlation between variables and providing more accurate diagnosis for the problem to be addressed. The purpose of choosing this research design is because it can describe accurately and systematically a population, situation or phenomenon and also it can answer questions such as what, Does and are. and most of researchers, who have investigated language transfer, have used descriptive research design (Al-Hassan, 2013; Al-Qudah, 2013; Hasan & Abdullah, 2009; Tahaineh, 2010; Terdjat, 2012).

3.3. Setting

As the setting of this research study, the researcher selected a public university located in Morocco, Kenitra. The university has certain features mentioned below; Almost all Moroccan students speak Arabic as their first language, with English as the country's second foreign language (after French). Littlewood (2006) distinguishes between a foreign language and a second language by stating that a second language is one that is used by the group in social settings; The international language, on the other hand, is primarily spoken outside of the country and is usually learned in a school environment (p.2) (as cited in Karabulut, 2013, p. 43). As a result, English is taught and learned in the classroom as the Moroccan nation's second language, and it aids learners in communicating with others whose first language is not Moroccan. As a result, English classes are treated carefully in many Moroccan universities and schools. Parents and students, especially at public universities/schools, have high standards in terms of achieving a higher level of English language proficiency. Since the current university selected for the thesis is also a public university, the English class hours are laborious.

For English courses, the administration hires both native English speakers and Moroccan teachers who are learning English as a second language, and the program is designed accordingly. The aim of this English preparation program is to assist students in acquiring the English language proficiency needed for their undergraduate studies, as well as to assist students in gaining autonomy in language learning through the use of information and communication technology (ICT) resources both in and outside of class, to support students in deepening their knowledge of global problems through

exposure to global subjects, encouraging them to generate vocabulary about these issues, and finally, to assist students in developing research skills through a range of joint assignments, initiatives, and events as part of in-class and out-of-class studies.

This program's academic year is divided into five; five-week modules and five levels: A1 (Elementary), A2 (Pre-Intermediate), B1 (Intermediate), B2 (Upper-Intermediate), C1 (Advanced), and C2 (Upper-Intermediate) (Advanced). Students are placed according to their levels based on the outcome of a test taken at the start of the year and are then expected to successfully complete each corresponding module for an overall grade of at least 70% before advancing to the next. Each degree receives 24 hours of English instruction a week. Two basic classes, a key course (14 hours), and academic skills are included in the curriculum (10 hours). Teachers emphasize pronunciation, vocabulary, comprehension, and listening in the main course, while writing and speech skills are emphasized in the academic skills course. Furthermore, all language-learning skill sets (reading, writing, listening, and grammar) are combined in these courses to satisfy the needs of students and train them for the mastery test, which must be passed in order to join their desired departments.

3.4. Target Population and Participants

According to Furlong et.al. (2000) a population refers to the large group of interest. It is believed that the population comprises the entire group of people to whom the findings of the study can be generalized. This study was conducted with 119 Moroccan EFL students (70 females and 49 male), with an age range between 18-23, enrolled in the English preparatory program during the fall term of the 2020-2021 academic year. They were belonging to different levels; A1 (30 students), A2 (30 students), B1 (30 students), B2 (29 students), the reason of choosing 4 different levels is that language proficiency is one of the independent variables which is tackled in the current study.

3.5. Procedures

This section would go into the study's sampling process, data collection instruments, data collection procedures, and data analysis procedures.

3.5.1. Sampling method. Before beginning an analysis, the researcher must determine which form of sampling would be most appropriate. The sample chosen from the whole population is extremely important in order to generalize the results of study. The convenience sampling type of non-probability sampling was used in this study because it was more convenient to reach the participants in the workplace as the research is working there.

3.5.2. Data collection instruments. For the purpose of obtaining the data required for the present study, three tests were used: (1) Fill-in-the-blank test to investigate Arabic transfer and all other following considerations in the acquisition of English prepositions, such as intralingual interference; (2) Grammaticality judgment task to investigate Moroccan EFL learners' acquisition of English spatial prepositions and (3) An Arabic translation task reveals the various facets of the challenge and how students make errors as a result of a misunderstanding of certain English spatial prepositions. All of the tests were given at the same time.

3.5.2.1. Fill in the blank test (Appendix A). A total of twenty-six items were presented to the respondents in which the English locative preposition in each item was missing. The respondents were requested to provide the appropriate preposition for each item. Three different locative English prepositions were investigated in this test (in, on and at).

The rationale behind using fill-in-the-blank test is that; it was recognized by many researchers as a reliable tool to measure the acquisition of different English structures in general, and to measure the influence of language transfer on the acquisition of English prepositions in particular (Asma, 2010; Blom, 2006; Fion, 2005; Terdjat, 2012). In selecting the items of the fill-in-the-blank test, the researcher consulted a number of books on the usage of English grammar in general, as well as prepositions in particular such as “Understanding Grammar“ (Roberts, 1954), “Remedial English Language“ (Agarwal, 2010) and “English Prepositional Idioms“ (Wood, 1967) and Grammar in Use (2012). The selection of books from which the items of this test were chosen stems from the fact that these books present many

illustrative examples on the use of English prepositions. Therefore, they are the most appropriate for this particular study. Such method of selecting tests' items was also adopted by some researchers such as Liao (2010) who conducted a study about the influence of transfer from Chinese on the acquisition of English phraseology. In selecting the tests' items, Liao looked for collocations found in some English textbooks, previous studies and dictionaries.

3.5.2.2. Grammaticality Judgement Test (Appendix B). GJTs are one of the most popular data collection approaches used by linguists to validate their theoretical arguments (Tremblay, 2005). According to Gass (1983, p. 274) grammaticality judgments "refer to a speaker's intuition concerning the nature of a particular utterance". Gass (1994) indicated that grammaticality judgments vary in three ways: first, some studies require L2 speakers to provide corrections to the sentences that they judged as ungrammatical; second, some researchers need L2 speakers to make a decision on one sentence or to choose one sentence over another.; third, other studies request L2 speakers to give the possible answers they have. Grammaticality judgment and correction task was found by many researchers as a reliable tool to assess the linguistic knowledge of L2 speakers (Chaudron, 1983; El-nabih, 2010; Gass, 1994; Liao, 2010; Tremblay, 2005). For example, Mandell (1999) made a comparison between grammaticality judgement task and dehydrated sentences test (a test that includes only content words such as nouns, verbs and adjectives). The participants in the study were Spanish L2 speakers. The findings revealed that, grammaticality judgment is a reliable tool to measure the linguistic knowledge of L2 speakers. Moreover, grammaticality judgment task is also useful in investigating influences result from L1 transfer. According to Lesniewska and Witalisz (2007) grammaticality judgment task gives a chance to examine the possible influences resulting from L1 transfer because it motivates L2 learners to activate the knowledge of both mother language and target language. The grammaticality judgement test that was administered to the respondents in this study adapted from a previous study which was done by Almahammed (2016). The total number of 15 sentences in which the respondents were asked to give their choice (correct or incorrect).

In selecting the items of the grammaticality judgment test, the researcher referred to some previous studies that investigated the use of prepositions such as (Di, 2006; Kanasugi & Snyder, 2006; Soh, 1997). The items of this test were chosen from the above-stated studies particularly because they present a considerable number of examples on locative prepositions, which gives the researcher a good chance to select the most appropriate items for his study.

3.5.2.3. Arabic Translation Task (Appendix C). This Arabic Translation task test was used to examine whether language transfer plays a crucial role when translating sentences from native language (Arabic) to the target language (English). The reason for using the Arabic Translation task is that it has been recognized by many scholars as a credible method for assessing the acquisition of various English systems in general, as well as for assessing the various facets of the issue and how students make errors due to a misunderstanding of certain English spatial prepositions (Mohammed, et al., 2012; Almaflehi, 2013). This test was taken from a previous study which was done by Almaflehi (2013) which he examined the problem of translating the prepositions at, in and on into Arabic. A test (in the form of a questionnaire) on translating English time and place prepositions at, in, and on was given to the participants of the current research. In the task, participants were asked to translate 15 sentences and phrases that included the target prepositions (8 sentences and phrases about time prepositions and 7 sentences and phrases about place prepositions) (at, in and on). To put it another way, the participant was asked to translate 15 sentences and phrases containing the prepositions at, in, and on in each segment. The aim of presenting these sentences and phrases was to see how well Moroccan EFL students could translate these prepositions into Arabic. As previously stated, the aim of the questionnaire's test was to reveal the various facets of the issue and how students make mistakes as a result of a misunderstanding of certain English prepositions.

3.5.2. Data collection procedures. In implementing the procedures related to collecting the data required for the present study, the directors of the school of foreign languages at the selected university was contacted to ensure participation of the targeted subjects in the study. A letter containing information about the purpose and the nature of the study was sent to the director. After obtaining the required

permissions, the actual procedures of data collection began. The process of selecting the sample and administering the tests the target university was managed by the researcher.

3.5.3. Data analysis procedures. The researcher used the students' scores on the three tests to gather evidence. The results of these experiments were analyzed using the statistical research software IBM Statistical Package of Social Science (SPSS) 22.0. The findings of the three tests were calculated via different statistical analyses i.e., 1- descriptive statistics (percentage and mean) and 2- inferential statistics (t- test and one-way ANOVA). Descriptive statistics were used to explain the properties of a sample or the interaction between variables studied in the research (Rubin & Babbie, 2009). In contrast, inferential statistics utilizes the information drawn from the sample of the study to make generalizations about the whole population (Gravetter & Forzano, 2009).

Since there is only one component with four levels, ANOVA was used to address research question four in this way. L2 proficiency is the variable, and there are four levels: A1, A2, B1, and B2. As a result, one-way ANOVA was used to investigate the statistical variations in language transfer between the four levels of students.

Besides, t-test was employed. T-test is normally used to ascertain the statistically significant difference exists between two groups (Biber, Conrad & Reppen, 2004). When using t-test there must be one variable with only two levels or groups such as male/female. In this study, t-test was used because there is one variable (gender) with two groups of learners (males and females) and to see whether gender has an effect on learning English spatial prepositions, i.e., if males outperform females in this area or vice versa. The research questions posed in this study alongside the statistical analyses that were used to analyze the answers of each question are depicted below.

Table 4

Overview of Research Questions and Corresponding Procedures

Research Questions	Data Collection Instruments	Data Analysis
I. Are Moroccan EFL learners competent in the use of English spatial prepositions?	Fill in the Blank Test (Agarwal, 2010; Murphy, 2012; Roberts & Wood, 1967).	Descriptive statistics
II. Do awareness manifest among Moroccan EFL learners while using English spatial prepositions?	Grammaticality Judgement test (Almahammed, 2016; Di, 2006; Kanasugi & Snyder, 2006; Soh, 1997).	Descriptive statistics
III. Does L1 (standard Arabic) have any impact on the use L2 (English) spatial prepositions among Moroccan EFL learners?	Arabic Translation Task (Almaflehi, 2013).	Independent t-test
IV. Are there any significant Differences among English Language proficiency levels (A1, A2, B1 and B2) in their use of spatial prepositions?	Multiple tests (all the aforementioned tests).	One-way ANOVA
V. Are there any significant differences between gender in terms of language Arabic transfer when acquiring English spatial prepositions?	Multiple tests (all the aforementioned tests).	Independent t-test

3.5.4. Validity and reliability. Validity and reliability are critical for a researcher to build trust in a study's results (Ary et al., 2010). Validity refers to the extent to which instruments measure what they intend to measure or how well these instruments achieve their purposes (Kothari, 2004). In the present study both face and content validity of each test were taken into consideration. According to Furlong et al. (2000), face validity is assessed by a jury of experts in the field to see whether the measurement is appropriate for measuring what it claims to assess. Similar to face validity, content validity is assessed by a jury of experts in the area of interest to evaluate the representativeness of the items on the test (Furlong, et al 2000). Both face and content validity of fill-in-the-blank test, grammaticality judgement test and Arabic translation task used in this study were measured by a panel of experts.

On the other hand, external validity refers to how well a study's findings can be applied to different situations and individuals (Brewer, 2000; Robson, 2002). The findings of this analysis are constrained in terms of external validation due to ease sampling. Nonetheless, the results can be extrapolated to populations with similar characteristics to those listed in the methodology section.

Validity is a necessary condition for any measuring instrument; however, validity solely is insufficient because a test must be also reliable. Reliability is defined as the consistency of research measurement over time and it is based on the fact that whether the findings of a study are repeatable (Harats 2010; Nunan, 1992). For the purpose of measuring the reliability of fill-in-the-blank test, grammaticality judgement test and Arabic translation task, the researcher used Cronbach-alpha formula. The rationale for using this formula is that, Cronbach-Alpha is the most commonly used reliability measurement and it is utilized with test items that are scored dichotomously and non-dichotomously. This statement is in line with Cortina (1993, p. 2) who states that “Alpha applies to any set of items regardless of the response scale”.

3.5.5. Limitations and delimitations. The participants in this study were Moroccan EFL students. Future researchers should broaden the focus of this analysis to include EFL learners from various L1 contexts in order to see whether language transfer differs between languages. The presence of EFL learners from different L1s is thought to make a major contribution to the field of second language acquisition.

Moreover, the present study can be extended to include EFL learners from other Arab countries in order to investigate if language transfer differs across various Arabic language dialects. The present study was restricted to EFL learners from one of the schools of foreign languages in Morocco. More studies should be done on various schools and universities in Arabic-speaking countries to compare and contrast the results of each study. Linguists and scholars will gain new insight into the relationship between language transfer and exposure to the target language as a result of this comparison. This study can be replicated on both university Moroccan EFL learners and high-school students. To the best of researcher's knowledge such comparison is rarely conducted in Morocco. Therefore, there is an urgent need to implement comparative studies of this type because they are seldom conducted. This particular study employed fill-in-the-blank test to examine the role of language transfer in the acquisition of English spatial prepositions. Other studies (Habash, 1982; Tahaineh, 2010) used composition test and multiple-choice test. Future researchers are recommended to combine two or more measurement instruments to examine the role that the tests play in the production of language transfer errors when acquiring English prepositions. Lococo (1976, cited in Wiertelak & Pawlak, 2012, p. 12) argued that test type has a major influence on the production of errors by testees. This is consistent with Liao (2010) who investigated the role of language transfer in the acquisition of English phraseology. Liao reached the conclusion that test type had an effect on the performance of the respondents. To be more specific, the respondents achieved better accuracy on the multiple-choice test than grammaticality judgment test. The present study investigated three different usages of English spatial prepositions namely, in, on and at. Future studies could expand the scope of this study by including more usages of English prepositions such as; temporal, spatial and directional. Examining more usages would help in arriving at a deeper understanding of the difficulties that Moroccan EFL learners encounter when acquiring English prepositions.

Chapter 4

Findings

4.1. Overview

This chapter presents the findings of the current study which aims to investigate the effect of language transfer on the acquisitions of spatial prepositions (*in*, *on* and *at*) among Moroccan EFL learners. In the following section, the findings of the Fill in the blank test (FBT), grammaticality judgements test (GJT) and Arabic translation task (TT) are provided respectively.

4.2. Findings about the Competency of Moroccan EFL Learners in the Use of Spatial Prepositions

To display the results from fill in the blank test which aims to measure Moroccan EFL learners' competency in the use of spatial prepositions, the table 5 blow provides 25 items which were analyzed quantitively and separated into three columns: correct, wrong or no answer.

Table 5

Fill in the blank test with number and percentages of students answering each question

items	Correct	Wrong	NA
1. I've been invited to a weeding <u>on</u> 14 February.	93 (80.2%)	21 (18.1%)	2 (1.7%)
2. I last saw her <u>on</u> Tuesday.	101 (87.1%)	9 (7.7%)	6 (5.2%)
3. Said will meet his friend <u>in</u> the national park.	71 (61.2%)	45 (38.7%)	0 (0%)
4. My father came back home late yesterday.	83 (71.6%)	33 (28.5)	83 (71%)
5. I'm busy right now, but I'll be with <u>in</u> a moment.	101 (87.1%)	12 (10.3%)	3 (2.6%)

Table 5 (cond.)

items	Correct	Wrong	NA
6. Mozart was born in Salzburg <u>in</u> 1756.	95 (81.9%)	14 (12.1%)	7 (6%)
7. My brother doesn't have a job <u>at</u> the moment.	107 (92.2%)	9 (7.7%)	0 (0%)
8. I don't like driving <u>at</u> night.	111 (95.7%)	2 (1.8%)	3 (2.6%)
9. We spent few days <u>in</u> Venice.	103 (88.8%)	13 (11.2%)	0 (0%)
10. My father's car will be ready <u>in</u> three hours.	107 (92.2%)	9 (7.8%)	0 (0%)
11. Mom has been waiting for you <u>at</u> the bus station.	87 (75%)	29 (25%)	0(0%)
12. My phone and the doorbell rang <u>at</u> the same time.	100 (86.2%)	16 (13.8)	0 (0%)
13. I want to get home on time to see the game <u>on</u> Time.	74 (63.8%)	42 (36.2%)	0 (0%)
14. The bus was late, but it's usually <u>on</u> time.	89 (76.7%)	26 (22.4%)	1 (0.9%)
15. They always go out for dinner <u>on</u> their wedding,	72 (62.1%)	44 (30%)	0 (0%)
16. We have to get off the bus <u>at</u> the next stop.	61 (52.6%)	54 (46.5%)	1 (0.9%)
17. we have car problems car. We sold it <u>in</u> the end.	57 (49.7%)	59 (50.9%)	0 (0%)
18. The players shook hands <u>at</u> end of the game.	93 (80.2%)	23 (19.9%)	0 (0%)
19. Have you seen the notice board <u>on</u> the door?	84 (72.4%)	29 (25%)	3 (2.6%)
20. You'll fine details <u>on</u> page seven of the book.	75 (64.7%)	39 (33.6%)	2 (1.7%)

Table 5 (cond.)

items	Correct	Wrong	NA
21. It was a short novel. I read it in a day.	102 (87.9%)	13 (11.2%)	1 (0.9%)

Table 5 (cond.)

22. My grandfather was born in Japan.	115 (99.1%)	0 (0%)	1 (0.9%)
23. Saturday night I went to bed at midnight.	106 (91.4%)	10 (8.6%)	0 (0%)
24. My parents arrived at 6 p.m.	116 (100%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)

Table 6

Summary of the results of FBT

Reponses	On	In	at
Correct	72.43%	81.7%	15.39
Wrong	25.85 %	17.14%	84.17%
NA	1.72%	1.16%	0.44%

According to table 6, *in* is the spatial preposition with the largest number of correct answers and the lowest number of incorrect answers, followed by *on* and then *at*. To put it another way, it was discovered that *in* is the simplest preposition for Moroccan EFL students. To be exact, 81.7 % of their answers were right. However, Moroccan EFL students, on the other hand, seem to have less control over the use of *at* than *in* and *on*. To put it another way, the table shows that only 15.39 % of the responses for this preposition were correct, while 84.17% were incorrect. The graph below illustrates Moroccan EFL learners' competency in the use of spatial prepositions:

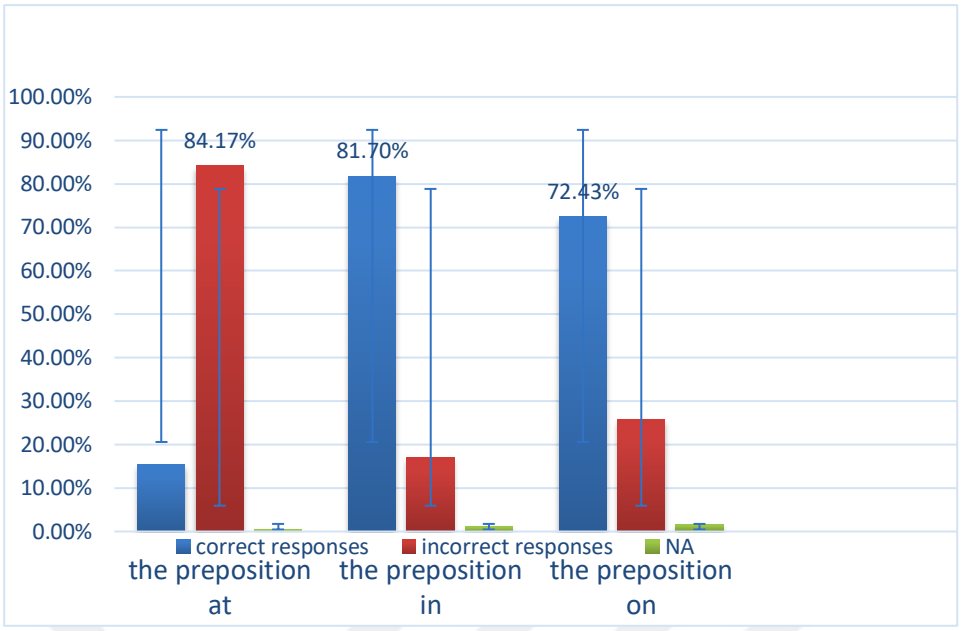


Figure 1 The use of preposition (at, in and on) by Moroccan EFL learners in FBT

4.3. Findings about Moroccan EFL learners' awareness in the use of English spatial prepositions

A grammaticality judgment test (GJT) was used to assess Moroccan EFL learners' awareness of the use of English spatial prepositions. Moreover, the confidence level which ranged from; very low confidence to very high confidence. The Table (7) blow displays the percentages of the correct and incorrect items from the grammaticality judgment test (GJT).

Table 7

Grammaticality judgement task with number and percentages of students answering each question

items	correct	incorrect	Average confidence level
1. I'll mt you <u>at</u> the morning.	20 (17.25%)	96 (82.75%)	High confidence (4)
2. I usually stay home <u>at</u> night.	92 (79.31%)	24 (20.69%)	High confidence (4)
3. I was born <u>at</u> 1970.	19 (16.38%)	97 (83.62%)	Medium confidence (3)

Table 7 (cond.)

items	correct	incorrect	Average confidence level
4. They managed to complete the work on two weeks.	38 (32.76%)	78 (67.24%)	Medium confidence (3)
5. On the moment, I'm doing an exercise.	19 (16.38%)	97 (83.62%)	High confidence (4)
6. He played a trick on me on April Fool's Day.	79 (68.11%)	37 (31.89%)	Low confidence (2)
7. I like to go swimming at summer.	74 (63.70%)	42 (36.3%)	Very low confidence (1)
8. I'm working in my birthday.	38 (32.76%)	78 (67.24%)	Low confidence (2)
9. There are four cats in the roof.	41 (35.35%)	75 (64.65%)	Medium confidence (3)
10. I'll be ready in a few minutes.	84 (72.41%)	32 (27.59%)	High confidence (4)
11. I learned English at the age of 35.	76 (65.51%)	40 (34.49%)	Medium confidence (3)
12. Did you read the news on today's paper?	72 (62.08%)	44 (37.92%)	Low confidence (2)

A close examination of the results of grammaticality judgement task in table 7 reveals that preposition *in* received the highest score as 68.1% which indicated that Moroccan EFL learners are aware of the use of preposition: *in*. Following by preposition on, which receives 63.22%. Moroccan EFL students, on the other hand, seem to be unaware of the use of preposition, which earns 55 % of correct responses. In terms of confidence level. The majority of students were confident about the majority of items as shown above, but when it comes to the preposition at, the confident level dropped dramatically.

4.4. Findings about the Arabic Translation Task (ATT)

In an attempt to answer research question number 3, an Arabic translation task was used in which students need to translate 15 sentences from Arabic to English, the findings of the Arabic translation task can be seen below

Table 8

Arabic Translation task with number and percentages of students answering each question

items	correct translation		incorrect translation		NA	
	Males	**Females**	**Males**	**Females**	**Males**	**Females**
1. I'm going to the college at nine.	59	47	1	4	5	3
2. There is a new roof on the house.	44	32	14	18	4	4
3. The boxers are in the ring.	34	39	26	11	4	4
4. I arrived at the hotel.	25	25	36	27	2	1
5. He is standing up at the door.	39	39	20	13	3	2
6. There are three players on the field.	14	16	45	35	3	3
7. Write down on a piece of paper.	52	48	7	4	3	2
8. I read about it in the newspapers.	39	38	20	14	3	2
9. The course ended on July 4, 2021.	43	32	14	20	4	3
10. I will finish the work in ten minutes.	54	46	5	6	3	2
11. He's a doctor at the hospital.	23	18	36	33	4	2
12. I learned to drive in Four weeks.	54	46	6	6	2	2
13. We were at home all weekend.	32	39	27	13	3	2
14. The exam will start on Monday.	52	40	8	12	2	2
15. My aunt will visit us in three months.	47	48	10	6	3	2
Mean (average)	40.8	36.9	18.4	14.8	3.2	2.4

Table 9

Summary of the results for the Arabic Translation Task

Prepositions	**on**		**in**		**at**	
Gender	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
correct	35.34%	28.96%	39.32%	37.42%	30.69%	28.97%
wrong	15.17%	15.34%	11.56%	7.41%	20.69%	15.52%
NA	2.75%	2.44%	2.22%	2.07%	2.58%	1.55%

The students' success in translating English spatial prepositions was below average, as seen in table 9. It is obvious that *in* got the highest percentage of correct answers and the lowest percentage of incorrect answers, followed by *on* and then *at*. In other terms, the preposition *in* discovered to be the simplest for Moroccan EFL students. Precisely, 39.32% of the males and 37.42% of the females translated the prepositions ***in*** successfully. Following by the preposition ***on*** which received 35.34% correct items from males and 28.96% from females. Lastly, preposition ***at*** received the lowest score for both males and females (M=30.69%; F=28.97%). The graph below illustrates Moroccan EFL learners' in translating spatial prepositions:

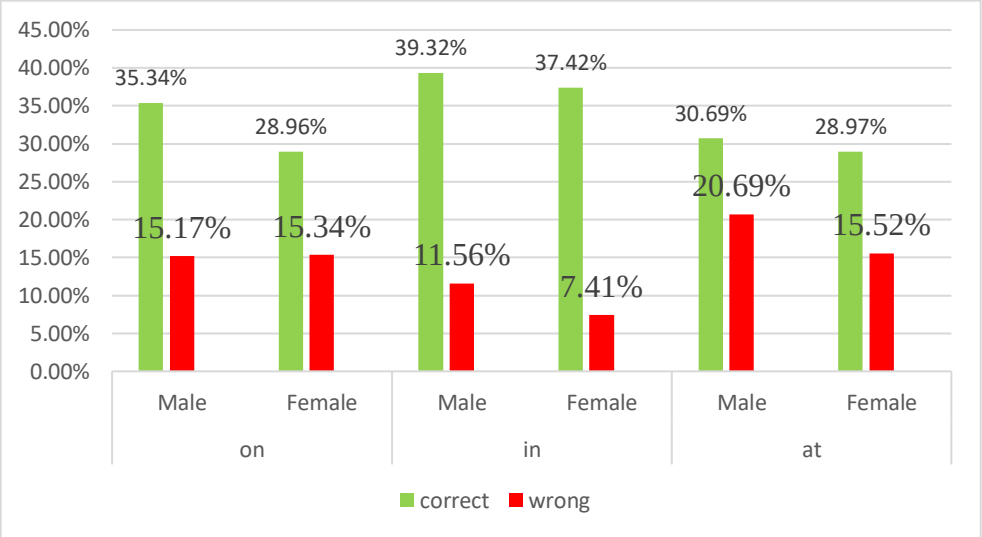


Figure 2 The results of the Arabic Translation Task

4.5. The Finding about the Significant Differences among English language Proficiency Levels in Their Use of Spatial Prepositions

It is argued that L2 proficiency level and the use of spatial prepositions interact in shaping the interlanguage of L2 learners (Kellerman, 1985; Nooshin, Behjat and Rostampour, 2014; Odlin, 1989). A one-way ANOVA was used to see if there were any statistically significant variations between the four proficiency ranges when it came to the use of spatial prepositions. In a research study, a one-way ANOVA is commonly used to measure the significant variations in mean scores achieved by two or more individuals (Phakiti, 2014). The p value must be less than 0.05 to be considered meaningful (Tran, 2010). Table 10 summarizes the results of the one-way ANOVA;

Table 10

One-way ANOVA results of Moroccan EFL learners according to their proficiency levels

	Sum of squares	**DF**	**Mean square**	**F**	**Sig**
Between groups	2.119	2	1.100	**.**135	.859
Within groups	2724.751	114	7.208		
Total	2726.950	116			

The p value is greater than 0.05, as seen in Table 10 (F =.135, p=.859 >0.05). This indicates that there is no statistically significant difference in the use of spatial prepositions among Moroccan EFL learners in levels A1, A2, B1, and B2. In other words, all the respondents regardless of their English proficiency level replied equally to the tests. Table below shows test scores according the four levels (A1, A2, B1 and B2).

Table 11

Average scores by proficiency levels

		in	on	at	Average scores
Proficiency level	A1	65.32%	20.10%	14.58%	33.33%
	A2	69.42%	29.19%	20.56%	39.72%
	B1	72.09%	31.02%	22.50%	41.87%
	B2	78.91%	35.78%	26.08%	46.93%

As can be seen from the table 11; all Moroccan EFL learners respond to the tests equally, to some extent, we can observe only some slightly difference in all average scores which may differ 1.33% among the four levels (A1, A2, B1 and B2).

4.5. Gender and the Use of Spatial Prepositions among Moroccan EFL Learners

Prior to revealing the results of t-test with respect to the differences between Moroccan males and females EFL learners in their use of spatial prepositions, it is appropriate to report on linearity test that was conducted for the purpose of this research question. Linearity is defined as the ability to produce the input characteristics symmetrically and linearly. Linear relationship is best expressed by the closeness of points to the straight line. That is, the closest the points to the straight line, the more probability to conclude that there is a linear relationship. In contrast, the farthest the points from the straight line the less probability to conclude that there is a linear relationship. For the purpose of research question five, linearity test was used to measure the relationship between gender and the use of spatial prepositions.

A close look at figure 3 below shows that it seems there is a linear relationship between the use of spatial prepositions and gender. This is because the points are placed close to the straight line.

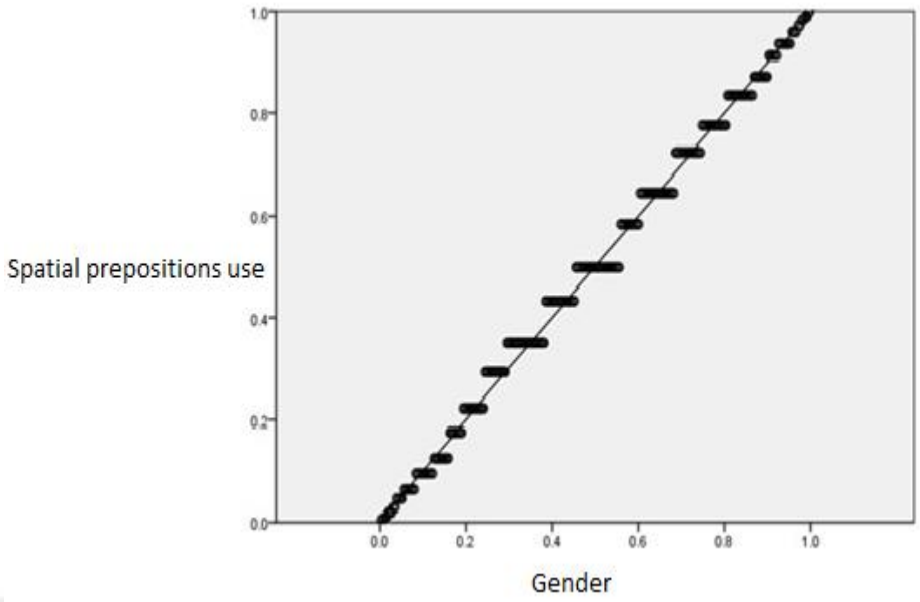


Figure 3. Linearity test about the relationship between gender and the use of spatial prepositions

In order to answer research question number five, the three tests were used. To address this question, males' scores on all tests were relative to females' scores. The researcher used an independent sample t-test to see whether there was a statistically significant difference between males and females in terms of their use of spatial prepositions (see Table 12).

Table 12

The comparison of males and females in their use of spatial prepositions (Independent sample t- Test)

	T value	**Df**	**Sig**
Equal variances assumed	1.529	353	.127
Equal variances not assumed	1.507	315.681	

As seen in Table 12, the significance value is greater than 0.05 (p=.127>0.05), indicating that there is no statistically significant variation in the use of spatial prepositions by Moroccan EFL males and females. Gender has little bearing on the use of spatial prepositions.

4.6. Summary

This chapter revealed the results of the five research questions posed in the present study. Three measurement instruments were designed for the purpose of gaining data from the respondents i.e., fill-in-the-blank test, grammaticality judgment task and Arabic translation task. The main results pertinent to each research question are as below.

For research question one: The analysis of results revealed that *in* is the spatial preposition with the largest number of correct answers and the lowest number of incorrect answers, followed by *on* and then *at*. To put it another way, it was discovered that *in* is the simplest preposition for Moroccan EFL students. To be exact, 81.7 % of their answers were right. However, Moroccan EFL students, on the other hand, seem to have less control over the use of *at* than *in* and *on*. To put it another way, the table shows that only 15.39 % of the responses for this preposition were correct, while 84.17% were incorrect. These findings show that Moroccan EFL students are not similarly proficient in the use of these three spatial prepositions (*in*, *on* and *at*).

For research question two: the results of grammaticality judgement task revealed that preposition ***in*** received the highest score as 68.1% which indicated that Moroccan EFL learners are aware of their use of preposition ***in***. On the other hand, it seems that Moroccan EFL learners are not aware of the use of preposition ***at*** which received 55% of correct answers. In terms of confidence level, the majority of students were confident about the all prepositions but when it comes to preposition ***at*** their confident level dropped immensely.

For research question three: The Arabic Translation task was used to see if L1 (standard Arabic) had any impact on the use of spatial prepositions in L2 (English). Students' success in interpreting English spatial prepositions was below average in this regard. It is obvious that *in* got the highest percentage of correct answers and the lowest percentage of incorrect answers, followed by *on* and then *at*. In other words, Moroccan EFL students have considered *in* to be the most straightforward. Precisely, 39.32% of the males and 37.42% of the females translated the prepositions ***in*** successfully. Following by the preposition ***on*** which received 35.34% correct items from males and 28.96% from females. Lastly, preposition ***at*** received the lowest score for both males and females (M=30.69%; F=28.97%).

For the fourth research question: The findings revealed that there is no statistically significant variation in the usage of spatial prepositions between Moroccan EFL learners in levels; A1, A2, B1, and B2. The findings showed that, to some degree, all respondents, regardless of their proficiency levels, responded similarly.

For research question five, the findings revealed that there is no substantial variation in the usage of spatial prepositions by Moroccan EFL males and females.

Chapter 5

Discussion and conclusion

5.1. Discussion of Findings for Research Questions

This segment begins with a summary of the findings from study question one and ends with the findings from question five. The findings are presented in light of certain previous research in the area of language transfer and English spatial prepositions. Following that, the study's contributions and implications are summarized. Finally, a review and recommendations for future studies are given.

5.1.1. Discussion of the findings of RQ 1: Do Moroccan EFL learners competent in the use of English spatial prepositions? The fill-in-the-blank test was used to find the answer to this question. The findings for question one revealed that *in* is the spatial preposition with the highest percentage of correct answers and the lowest percentage of incorrect answers, followed by on and then at. In other terms, preposition *in* was discovered to be the most straightforward for Moroccan EFL students. 81.7% of their answers were right, to be precise. Moroccan EFL students, on the other hand, seem to have less influence over the use of at than in and on.

This is in line with the finding of Khoya (2018) who state that Moroccan EFL learners have problems with *at* because in Moroccan dialect or Standard Arabic, there is no equivalent or relevant preposition. This complicates the method of comprehending and grasping the use of this preposition. In Moroccan dialect, they have similar identical prepositions for *on* [fuq] and [fi] for *in*. That is, if the students come across a sentence with one of those two prepositions, they use their Moroccan dialect knowledge to come up with a correct answer. However, depending on one's mother tongue isn't necessarily a good thing, since it can lead to intervention and, as a result, incorrect responses.

In a similar way, Rahman (1990) conducted research to identify some of the challenges Iraqi/Arab English learners encounter while using English prepositions of place relation. Iraqi students English as a second language, ranging in age from

from seventeen to thirty, were the subjects of his study. They were examinees from Baghdad's College of Education, College of Arts, and Teachers' Institute, who were selected at random. According to Rahman (1990) “the students were given the idea that the exam was primarily designed to assist them in overcoming difficulties they could encounter by using English prepositions of place reference before taking it.”

In terms of the use of the preposition at, the findings show that 33.69 percent of students correctly answered the item, while 66.31 percent answered incorrectly. It was discovered that 39.66 percent of students correctly used the preposition on, while 60.34 percent incorrectly used the preposition on. When it came to the use of the preposition in, the results found that 23.09 percent of students got it right, while 76.91 percent got it wrong. According to the results, the errors were caused by two major factors:

First, interlingual factors where the interference of their first language affects their performance, and, for him, they are three types. The students sometimes substitute an item with another, sometimes they add certain prepositions when they are not needed, and sometimes they tend to omit the item applying their first language rules.

Second, there are intralingual influences, which he categorizes into three groups. First, errors which are due to the partial learning they had. Second, errors which are inspired by the orthographic similarities hold between the prepositions. And finally, errors which are due to overlapping between prepositions since in English there some preposition which can overlap each other in certain cases e.g., the prepositions *in*.

Another explanation for this finding may be attributed to less exposures to the preposition *at* in Moroccan textbooks. This would undoubtedly have an impact on the student's ability to use this preposition in the appropriate way. That is, students must practice this preposition over and over in order to master it.

5.1.2. Discussion of the findings of RQ 2: Do awareness manifest among Moroccan EFL learners while using English spatial prepositions? The results of this research question revealed that Moroccan EFL learners are well aware in the use of preposition *in* and *on.* In contrast, it seems that Moroccan EFL learners are not well aware of the use of preposition *at*. As mentioned earlier in research question (1) many Moroccan textbooks do not concentrate on the preposition (*at*) because it does not have

equivalent in the Arabic language. As a result, many textbooks' writers ignore this preposition which shapes a barrier to the Moroccan EFL learners in its usage. Additionally, the participants in this study were not well aware of the right use of some prepositions (the case of *at*), therefore they resorted to the knowledge of their native language.

The above-mentioned gap filling process was described by Krashen (1983, cited in Odlin, 1989, p. 26) as "padding". Krashen states that "Transfer… can still be regarded as padding, or the result of falling back on old knowledge, the L1 rule, when new knowledge … is lacking. Its cause may simply be having to talk before ready, before the necessary rule has been acquired".

The results of this research question (2) are in line with a study which was done by Serhan, Abdulhafud and Jasim (2019) who investigate errors in prepositions in EFL Arabic students spoken discourse. Their results revealed that the first language (Arabic) has an impact on using the proper preposition, especially the latter effect is much greater when the linguistic competence of the learners is at low levels.

5.1.3. Discussion of the findings of RQ 3: Does L1 (standard Arabic) have any impact on the use L2 (English) spatial prepositions among Moroccan EFL learners? The findings of this analysis show that Moroccan EFL learners struggle with the use of English spatial prepositions, as they have faced several difficulties in their attempts to correctly insert these prepositions. As previously stated, the target language's basic features play a critical role in students' inability to use spatial prepositions adequately. However, the findings of this study show that standard Arabic intervention causes a large number of errors, the most serious of which is in the use of English spatial prepositions. In other words, due to their lack of mastery and poor knowledge of English, Moroccan students often unwittingly enforce the patterns and constructs of the Arabic prepositional paradigm on English. Needless to mention, the Arabic translation task is widely regarded as the most important tool for assessing the impact of standard Arabic on Moroccan EFL learners' attempts to gain spatial prepositions. Let's look at some specific instances of negative transition from the Arabic prepositional system to illustrate this point.

1. *There are three players ***in*** the soccer field.

In this case, it is clear that students were influenced by the Arabic prepositional system, since the majority of them used ‘in' instead of ‘on.' To put it another way, when students were asked to translate an Arabic sentence into English, the majority of them retained the preposition ‘in,' assuming that English uses the same preposition in that situation.

2. *I learned English *on* the age of 35.

When respondents attempted to translate the Arabic sentence, they used the preposition *on*, which is incorrect in English since the proper preposition in this context is *at*, because the focus is on a certain point in space.

3. *We ate our dinner *on* the table.

In this case, the students' incorrect answer can easily be traced back to negative conversion from standard Arabic, since it is valid to use on in that sense in Arabic, but the correct preposition in English is at. One possible reason for this is that there is no Arabic counterpart for at, which is why most students have substituted on for at.

4. **In* the top of the tab, write your name.

Students who used *in* instead of *at* made a substitution mistake in this case, partially due to their misunderstanding of the prepositional use of *at* in this sense. Furthermore, the Arabic language provides for the use of *in* in this situation; as a result, most students have held in when translating the Arabic sentence into English.

5. *We live *in* the Third Street.

Since it is right to insert the preposition in in such a setting in Arabic, most of the subjects in this sentence have used in instead of on. As a result, Moroccan EFL learners have translated the prepositional use of their language into English, assuming that the two languages use the same preposition in that case.

6. **In* the party, I met John.

In this case, it is clear that the respondents have been adversely impacted by the Arabic prepositional scheme, as they have used the incorrect preposition *in* instead of

the right one *at*. To put it another way, the Arabic language permits the use of *in* in that situation. In English, though, the proper preposition is *at*.

As a conclusion from the results chapter, Moroccan EFL learners transfer negatively from standard Arabic. Consequently, most of them have come up with erroneous usages of certain spatial prepositions in different contexts. Nonetheless, the outcome of the present study also shows that Moroccan EFL learners' resort to positive transfer when there are similarities between English and Arabic in the use of a given preposition in specific settings.

In view of the findings, it's possible to conclude that Moroccan EFL students' acquisition of English prepositions is influenced by Standard Arabic. The occurrence of transfer errors in this analysis can be explained in part by the "hypothesis testing process," as described by Schachter (1983), who argues that EFL learners propose some hypotheses and test them based on the input they have received. She adds that transfer errors take place when EFL learners correctly equate the structures of the native language and the target language but mistakenly proposing a hypothesis that is suitable for the L1 but not for L2.

Generally speaking, Moroccan EFL learners correctly equated the English preposition *in* with its Arabic counterpart *[fi]*, but wrongly hypothesized that the preposition *in* is used with weekdays. The use of *in [fi]* with weekdays is correct in Arabic but not in English.

Error committed by EFL speakers are regarded as a reflection of both language transfer and intralingual interference. The results of research question three revealed that language transfer is not the only factor influencing the acquisition of English prepositions. Language transfer interacts with another factor; namely intralingual interference in forming the acquisition process of prepositions. This can be deemed as evidence supporting the moderate position. The findings of research question three showed fewer rates of transfer errors than previous studies conducted on the acquisition of English prepositions among Arab learners of English (Asma, 2010; Habash, 1982; Tahaineh, 2010). Habash (1982) and Tahaineh (2010), for example, looked at how Arab EFL students used English prepositions. The researchers concluded from the results of the two studies that errors caused by transfer from Arabic far outnumbered those caused by intralingual intervention.

To sum up, the results of this research question (3) are consistent with the results of some previous studies conducted on the acquisition of different L2 structures including prepositions (Bataineh, 2005; Castro, 2013; Kim, 1987; Sabzalipour, 2012; Sattayatham & Honsa, 2007). These studies arrived at the conclusion that errors made by EFL learners are mostly attributable to intralingual interference rather than transfer from mother tongue. Ellis (2008, cited in Wiertelak and Pawlak, 2012.) stated that, the majority of errors in the speech of EFL learners are caused by intralingual interference but not transfer from native language.

5.1.4. Discussion of the findings of RQ 4: Are there any significant differences among English language proficiency levels (A1, A2, B1 and B2) in their use of spatial prepositions? For the purpose of answering question four, all tests were used, multiple tests (fill-in-the-blank, grammaticality judgement test and Arabic translation task). The results related to research question four revealed that there is no statistically significant difference among A1, A2, B1 and B2 Moroccan EFL learners while dealing with English spatial prepositions. This implies that the respondents from the four proficiency levels resorted equally to their native language (Arabic) when using English prepositions. Adoption of transfer strategy by the four levels of respondents on an equal footing can be justified by the fact that the respondents in the present study were not disparate to a large extent with respect to their cultural and educational backgrounds and have not practiced English sufficiently as a medium of communication in Morocco. More precisely, all the respondents regardless of their proficiency level have a little exposure to English and their experience with the language is restricted to English classes (Salameh, 2012). The dominant language outside classes is always Arabic, their native language. Therefore, the difference between the four proficiency levels regarding reliance on native language when using English prepositions is statistically insignificant.

The findings of research question four are consistent with some previous studies (Bhardwaj 1986; Hadadi, Goodarz, & Abbasi, 2014; Hussein & Mohammad, 2011; Klien, 1986; Klein & Perdue, 1993; Salehi, 2009) language transfer becomes more evident at advanced stages or stays stable over all L2 proficiency levels.

Language transfer is not always linked to L2 proficiency level, according to Hiki (1995), Hadadi, Goodarz, and Abbasi (2014) who investigated the connection between L1 proficiency and L2 proficiency level. The researchers came to the conclusion that L1 had the same effect at all proficiency levels. This means that there were no gaps in dependency on L1 between A1, A2, B1, and B2 EFL learners.

However, the results of this research question ran counter to the findings of some previous studies (Bu, 2012; Chen, 2007; Erarslan & Hol, 2014; Liao, 2010; Phoocharoensil, 2013). These studies stated that advanced EFL learners made substantially fewer transfer errors than low-level EFL learners. As a result, language transfer is hampered as L2 proficiency levels rise. The conflicting findings among studies revealed that language transfer is present in the language of EFL learners regardless of their proficiency level and the studies showed that, L1 transfer decrease with increase in L2 proficiency level and this could be attributed to two main reasons.

1- These studies have not examined the same L2 structures and have not been implemented on EFL learners from the same L1 background. These studies examined the acquisition of different L2 structures among EFL learners from variety of L1 backgrounds. Therefore, no general consensus has been reached regarding the relationship between language transfer and L2 proficiency level.

2- The aforesaid studies employed disparate measurement instruments to examine the correlation between L2 proficiency level and language transfer. Studies that used composition test or Arabic translation test are not expected to reveal the same results of studies that used fill-in-the-blank or multiple-choice tests because the nature of instruments is different. According to Lococo (1976 cited in Wiertelak & Pawlak, 2012, p.12) the proportion of transfer errors depends on the instrument used by the researcher. For instance, Arabic translation tests motivate the respondents to produce L1-based errors more than any other task.

5.1.5. Discussion of the findings of RQ 5: Are there any significant differences between gender in terms of language transfer when acquiring English spatial prepositions? The data obtained from all tests were used, multiple tests (fill-in-the-blank, grammaticality judgement test and Arabic translation task), to answer

research question five. The results of this question displayed that there is no a significant difference between male and female in terms of L1 (Arabic) transfer when acquiring English prepositions. This is because p value is greater than 0.05 (p=.127 >0.05).

Moreover, these results can be interpreted by saying that both Moroccan males and females are not significantly disparate with respect to their educational backgrounds. The two groups have studied English as a second language for, almost, 6 years before joining the university and had a similar exposure to the language. Therefore, both males and females exhibited similar rates of transfer errors.

In other words, based on the independent sample t-test, it is possible to conclude that gender has no effect on Moroccan EFL learners' learning of spatial prepositions. This may be due to similar exposure to certain spatial words during the learning process. Males and females, in other words, are in the same class and hence generate the same input. Furthermore, spatial prepositions are structure phrases, or grammatical objects, and it has previously been discovered that gender has little effect on learning grammar (Langacker, 1987). Also, the findings of research question five are in line with the results of some studies by (Abusaeedi, Asghar & Faezeh, 2015; Llach, 2009; Cheng 2001). These studies concluded that no gender differences were found with regard to language transfer errors. Finally, both males and females have equal control over the use of all three spatial prepositions.

5.2. Practical Implications

According to Rutherford (1982) the chief purpose of second language research is to reach a deeper comprehension of a specific linguistic phenomenon and suggesting some implications to the field of L2 teaching. This section reviews the theoretical as well as the practical implications of the study. The review starts with the theoretical implications, followed by the practical implications based on the results of the study. Practical implications are divided into two sub-parts. The first part includes implications to textbooks' authors concerning English prepositions, whereas the second part comprises pedagogical implications for teaching English prepositions.

5.2.1. Theoretical implications. The proponents of the developmental position (Bailey, Madden & Krashen, 1974; Dulay and Burt 1973, 1974, 1975; Fathman, 1975) have viewed language transfer as insignificant factor in the acquisition of L2, claiming that the developmental factor or intralingual interference is the most influential factor when acquiring L2. This claim was rejected completely by the advocates of Contrastive Analysis approach on the ground that language transfer is the only factor at work. The results of this study have lent support to the two aforesaid views (supporting views of language transfer and intralingual interference). The findings revealed that language transfer and intralingual interference are closely linked in the formation of English preposition acquisition. The findings elevated the importance of language transfer and intralingual interference as key causes of errors among learners.

Three main theoretical views attempted to explain the relationship between language transfer and L2 proficiency level. The first view asserts that less language transfer errors are expected to take place as learners make progress in the acquisition of L2 (Bu, 2012; Chen, 2007; Erarslan & Hol, 2014; Liao, 2010; Phoocharoensil, 2013). The second view contends that language transfer errors occur among advanced L2 learners more than less advanced learners (Bhardwaj 1986; Klien, 1986; Klein & Perdue, 1993; Salehi, 2009). The third view states that language transfer errors remain stable across different proficiency levels (Hadadi, Goodarz & Abbasi, 2014; Mohammad 2011). The findings of this study backed up the third viewpoint, indicating that respondents' errors were consistent in all three proficiency levels: advanced, intermediate, and poor.

5.2.2. Implications to textbooks' authors. First, based on the researcher's experience during the period of studying English as a target language, it was noted that some English grammar books give a marginal importance to English prepositions. These books focus primarily on structures such as tenses, modals, and passive voice, whereas prepositions are either discussed quickly in the concluding chapter or neglected entirely. Young and Reigeluth (1988) argued that textbooks shape 75% to 90% of students' knowledge about particular subject. This statement is in line with Wang (2006) who stated that textbooks exert immense influence on the acquisition of L2 if EFL learners depend on textbooks as the only source of exposure to the target

language. The lack of focus on teaching English prepositions is best represented by the high proportion of errors prepositions investigated in this study. Therefore, in order to help Moroccan EFL learners learn prepositions more effectively, textbooks' authors in Morocco, in particular, and the world, in general, should place more emphasis on these language structures. Prepositions should be regarded as a significant language item that contributes substantially to shaping the language of Moroccan EFL learners. In addition, prepositions should be explained extensively in grammar books with plenty of examples and drills because their usages cannot be easily learned as indicated by the results of this study.

Second, textbooks' authors can conduct detailed and comprehensive comparisons between prepositions in the native and target languages. For instance, if the textbook is directed to students whose mother language is Arabic, the comparison should be between English and Arabic prepositional systems. Implementing such cross-linguistic comparisons is beneficial to EFL students. These comparisons can supply students with extensive knowledge on the similarities and differences between prepositions in the two languages. Furthermore, comparisons between prepositions in two given languages can be helpful in predicting the areas where EFL learners could commit L1 transfer errors. This is consistent with Odlin (1989, p.2) who stated that "such cross-linguistic comparisons constitute an indispensable basis for the study of transfer". This particular study implemented a cross-linguistic comparison between English and Arabic prepositions. This analogy will be used by language teachers and EFL students to learn more about the distinctions and parallels between English and Arabic prepositions.

5.2.3. Implications for teaching English prepositions. First, English language teachers are advised to teach prepositions according to the usages in which they occur. Thus, if English language teachers teach prepositions based on their usages, L2 students will acquire them much more easily than teaching each preposition individually. For instance, teachers can explain to their students all prepositions that express spatial relationship with some illustrative examples. This process can be followed in teaching all usages of English prepositions. However, if teachers teach their students each preposition independently (not together with its usages) students

will most likely get confused and lost because English prepositions are much in number and their meanings are interrelated. For instance, in teaching spatial prepositions, teachers can tell their students that the following prepositions are used to express the notion of place i.e., *at*, *in*, and *on*. After that, teachers are recommended to put each preposition in a sentence in order to show the students how those prepositions are used when indicating spatial meaning. Finally, teachers can ask their students to give an example on each of the aforementioned spatial prepositions in order to secure that the students well grasped this particular usage.

Second, Moroccan teachers should focus their L2 students' interest on the areas of similarity and distinction between English and Arabic prepositions. It is proposed that linguistic variations between two prepositional structures are the primary cause of EFL learners' errors, while similarities aid in the acquisition of L2 by what is known as positive transfer (Lindstromberg, 2010). As a result, if teachers consciously assist students in becoming more mindful of the distinctions and similarities between English and Arabic prepositions, the incidence of errors in the usage of English prepositions could significantly decrease. Raising the awareness of students can be obtained through exposing the students to plenty of examples and sentences where English and Arabic prepositions are used both differently and similarly. After that, the students can be instructed to compose more sentences containing prepositions so as to ensure they gained some insight into the differences and similarities between the two prepositional systems of English and Arabic. This particular study conducted a comparison between preposition in English and Arabic with the aim of pinpointing similarities and differences between the two prepositional systems.

Third, based on the findings of the present study, which show that transfer from Arabic is an influential factor in acquiring English prepositions, Moroccan EFL teachers are advised to be aware of the instances where negative transfer from native language may take place. Perhaps teachers could show their students some examples from previous studies that exhibit the occurrence of language transfer. Raising Moroccan EFL learners' awareness of the negative role of L1 would help those learners in minimizing or at least avoiding such type of errors.

Fourth, based on the results of the study, which show that the respondents over-generalized the use of one preposition to another, teachers could explain to L2 students

that the meaning of many English prepositions is interrelated. More specifically, two prepositions can be used with slight difference in meaning such as the prepositions *in* and *at* when expressing the notion of space. Thus, teachers can explain to the L2 students the differences between these pairs of prepositions with sufficient illustrative examples to enhance the understanding of Moroccan EFL learners.

Fifth, Moroccan EFL learners should rely on many language materials and resources when gaining knowledge on English prepositions such as grammar books, dictionaries, research papers about prepositions, newspapers, TV shows and audio tapes. Moroccan EFL learners can refer to all these resources in order to understand how to use English prepositions correctly. They can extract some parts from these resources that are related to the use of prepositions and develop drills and exercises with the aid of their teachers so as to enhance their comprehension about the proper usage of preposition.

5.3. Conclusions

The current research adds to the literature by looking at the effects of L1 transfer on the acquisition of English spatial prepositions (at, in and on). The results revealed that the participants both males and females have problems related to the preposition *at* as it doesn't have an equivalent in standard Arabic. Besides, it was demonstrated that students depend on their mother tongue (Arabic) as a result negative transfer takes place.

In summary, the results of this study showed that Moroccan EFL learners are proficient in the use of *in* and *on*, but not *at*, since Arabic lacks equivariant prepositions. In this case, EFL teachers (instructors) should base their lesson plan accordingly and take the concept of language transfer into consideration. Also, they should do a systematical comparison between the two languages as to detect the similarities and differences that these two-languages shared.

5.4. Recommendations for Further Research

The present study was limited to Moroccan EFL learners. Future studies could broaden the focus of this analysis to include EFL learners from various L1 contexts in order to see whether language transfer differs between languages. The presence of EFL learners from different L1s is thought to make a major contribution to the field of second language acquisition. Moreover, the present study can be extended to include EFL learners from other Arab countries in order to investigate if language transfer differs across various Arabic language dialects.

The present study was restricted to EFL learners from different levels belonging to the same institution. Further research can be conducted on different institutions in order to compare and contrast the performance of these participants according to the textbook in which they exposed to. This comparison will provide linguists and researchers with additional knowledge about the correlation between language transfer and quantity of exposure to the target language. This study can be replicated on both undergraduate Moroccan EFL learners and school students. To the best of researcher's knowledge such comparison is rarely conducted in Morocco. Therefore, there is an urgent need to implement comparative studies of this type because they are seldom conducted.

This particular study employed fill-in-the-blank test to examine the competency of Moroccan EFL in their use of spatial prepositions. Other studies (Habash, 1982; Tahaineh, 2010) used composition test and multiple-choice test. Future research is recommended to combine two or more measurement instruments to examine the competency. Lococo (1976, cited in Wiertelak & Pawlak, 2012, p. 12) argued that test type has a major influence on the production of errors by testees. This is consistent with Liao (2010) who investigated the role of language transfer in the acquisition of English phraseology. Liao reached the conclusion that test type had an effect on the performance of the respondents. To be more specific, the respondents achieved better accuracy on the multiple-choice test than grammaticality judgment test.

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