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L1 Negative Transfer in Moroccan EFL Academic Writing: A Corpus-Based Analysis Study of ENS-M English Department

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ABSTRACT

L1 negative transfer has long been identified as a source of writing errors in EFL contexts, yet corpus-based investigations of this phenomenon at the Moroccan higher education level remain limited. In this regard, the study at hand investigates the frequency, typology, and cross-proficiency distribution of L1 transfer-based errors in the academic writing of student-teachers at ENS Marrakech, determining whether interlingual errors remain dominant as learners' proficiency increases. It was not the purpose of this study to investigate the reasons behind the occurrence of such errors. Guided by Corder's Error Analysis, a corpus-based research design was adopted. A localized learner corpus of approximately 27,800 words was compiled from 128 argumentative essays across semesters. Participant linguistic profiles were collected via the Language Experience and Proficiency Questionnaire (LEAP-Q), and corpus errors were classified and analyzed using AntConc software.

The analysis revealed 1,630 classified error instances including 914 interlingual errors and 716 intralingual errors. Article omission, preposition errors, and verb tense transfer were the most frequent interlingual subtypes, while spelling errors and wrong verb form selection were predominated among intralingual types. While absolute error frequency declined evidently from Semester 2 (n=854 instances) to Semester 6 (n=306 instances), the proportional ratio between interlingual and intralingual errors remained stable across all three levels, indicating that the proficiency gained reduces error output without restructuring its underlying sources. These findings confirm that L1 negative transfer is a persistent feature of Moroccan EFL writing. In view of this, the study recommends the use of corpus-informed contrastive instruction, discourse-level writing scaffolding, and the integration of concordance tools more systematically into EFL curricula in Moroccan higher education.

Keywords*:* L1 Negative Transfer, Learner Corpus, Error Analysis, Interlanguage, Scriptthesia, Moroccan EFL Writing

1. INTRODUCTION

In the field of applied linguistics and second language acquisition (SLA), L1 (first language) interference in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) writing has long been a subject of concern and debate. Speaking of which, when discussed, Ellis (1997) used the term "transfer", defining it as *"the influence that the learner's L1 exerts over the acquisition of an L2* (second language)*".* In addition, Ellis clarifies that this influence may manifest as errors (i.e., negative transfer) or facilitation (i.e., positive transfer). On a different note, Lado (1957) and Weinreich (1953) suggests that learners experience difficulty whenever they confront structures in the target language that differ from those in their L1.

Accordingly, EFL academic writing provides an empirical window to the study of transfer. Instead of focusing solely on speech, investigations of L2 writing in general and corpus-based studies in particular, are able to pin down produced artifacts of L1 and examine them thoroughly (Al-Ali, 2006; Shalabi et al., 2024). Writing is a slower expressive form of speech, it is more intentional and wound tightly with identity and voice and is considered challenging for all language learners (Shawish, 2010; Erkan & Saban, 2011; Abdel Latif, 2015). Influenced by series of factors, among which learners' mother tongue (Yule, 2014; Salem, 2007), early SLA research of L2 writing largely framed learner errors as a direct consequence of L1 interference. Nemser (1971) interpreted these errors as evidence of insufficient suppression of L1 habits, yet several subsequent research emerged; from Lado's (1957) Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis to Selinker's (1972) Interlanguage Theory, and from Kaplan's (1966) Contrastive Rhetoric to Ellis's (1997) multilayered taxonomy of transfer, recognizing that L1 interference is neither a uniform across all language domains nor a transient phenomenon fading away on a fixed timeline (Bolbekovna, 2025). Moreover, despite the growing international body of evidence it does not appear to be a great deal of corpus-based research on L1 negative transfer in EFL academic writing at the Moroccan higher education level, leaving a significant gap in the literature.

Thus, the present study addresses this gap by investigating the frequency, typology, and cross-proficiency distribution of L1 transfer-based errors in the academic writing of Moroccan EFL student-teachers at the English Department of the École Normale Supérieure, Marrakech (ENS-M), through a corpus-based research design informed by Error Analysis (Corder, 1967) and Interlanguage Theory (Selinker, 1972). The significance of this research lies in its attempt to (1) compile and analyse a localised learner corpus of ENS-M students' argumentative essays; (2) to systematically identify and classify interlingual and intralingual errors using established Error Analysis frameworks; and (3) to examine whether transfer-based errors persist, diminish, or transform across three progressive proficiency levels (1st, 2nd, and 3rd year). This, for example, would provide teachers and curriculum designers with the sort of information that can be helpful in the development of appropriate teaching materials and the adjustment of teaching instructions.

Although there are studies conducted about learners' errors in EFL writing, no study in the regional literature has ever undertaken a corpus-based approach to investigate L1 transfer-based errors in academic writing.

The present study addresses the following research questions:

- What are the most frequent types of L1 negative transfer errors in Moroccan EFL students' writing?
- How does L1 negative transfer manifest at lexical, syntactic, and pragmatic levels?
- To what extent do proficiency level and exposure to English moderate the occurrence of
- L1 transfer errors?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

At the beginning of the study, it is important to define transfer, distinguish between Interlanguage and Intralanguage, then establish the theoretical foundations of language transfer and the related empirical research both at the regional and international literature.

2.1 Transfer or Interference

When reviewed in SLA literature, different words are used to describe and define transfer. Although the words differ such as "Cross meaning Interference" "L1 interference", "Linguistic interference" or "Cross linguistic influence" the same concept persists. One recurrent shared visualization among SLA studies is that language transfer occurs when learners apply rules and forms of their first language to second language production, manifesting as errors (Littlewood,1984; Allen & Corder. 1957) or facilitations (Sprouse & Harling. 2017; Xiaoyu Yang. 2019). Other researchers such as Waterson (1924), Pavlov (1936), Thorndike (1936), Skinner (1957), Odlin (1989) and Ellis (1997) view language transfer as the influence of previously (past) acquired linguistic knowledge and/or habits on the learning and use of another language. As this view complement the previous one, it constitutes the possibility of multiple languages overlapping in terms of transfer; meaning in tracking the genesis of some errors, they may in the case of Multilingual or even bilingual learners steam from two or more languages, given the reason that those languages share some similar properties of writing habits and rhetorical thinking, as exhibited by the findings of Aknouch. & Bouthiche (2022).

Moreover, in his seminal book (Language in Contrast) Weinreich (1953) originally state that interference "is those instances of deviation from the norms of either language" which accruing in the speech of bilinguals as a result of their familiarity with more than one language. In a similar note, Colin Wringe, considered one of the first theorists, alongside Weinreich, to introduce the term "interference" in 1989 when he referred to it as:

"Deviation cases from the rules of either language which occur in the speech or writing of bilinguals as a result of being experienced in more than one language."

Corder (1992) refers to this phenomenon as "mother tongue influence", and by recognizing L1 influence on foreign language production, he stressed the fact that learner's cultural experience will also interfere with the learning of L2 patterns that function differently in the learner's culture.

We can simply yet accurately define "Transfer" as the act of taking something from "x" situation and transmitting it to "y" situation where the context is different. In other words, "transfer is the negative-unparallel transmission of distinct linguistic properties from a L1 to a L2". This view is further supported by Lado (1957), as he clearly says:

"Individuals tend to transfer the forms and meanings, and the distribution of forms and meanings of their native language and culture to foreign language and culture to foreign language and culture-both productively when attempting to speak the language and to act in the culture, and receptively when attempting to grasp and understand the language and culture as practiced by natives."

2.2 Interlanguage versus Intralanguage

In the process of learning a second language, learners produce utterances (i.e., spoken) which are ungrammatical and sometimes semantically fluctuated, let alone writing in target language (Huei-Chun Yuan. 2014., Sari et al., 2021). Mainly, EFL learners struggle to convey the style of other languages (Erkan & Saban, 2010) since it is a difficult endeavor that incorporates a number of factors (Niamah, 2018). Corder (1987, p.66) argued that, a learner has a unique dialect (Language) which is regular, systematic, dynamic, and meaningful, and it is its independent system that has a communicative purpose and specific features. Also, Corder (1981) states that EFL learners possess a degree of competence in second or foreign language learning which called "Transitional competence" (p, 10) which means that, interlanguage is like any independent system.

However, Nemser (1960) refer to it as "Learner's independent language"; that emerged at a particular moment in their learning sequence, and it is neither native language, nor a TL. Also, he pointed that interlanguage is a unique language within its own system: grammar, lexicon…Therefore, the learner's rules of his/her interlanguage cannot be found in their own mother tongue nor in the TL, it is a language system on its own, hence interlanguage is considered as "The approximate system", or what he mentioned as the "Deviant learner language" which refers to a learner's speech at a given time, and it is the patterned product of a linguistic system distinct from mother language and target language and it is internally structured. Furthermore, Larry Selinker (1972), defines interlanguage as; "the state of language learner in between the L1 and L2 as an intermediate state (see figure 2), whereby, the learner go through different steps and phases from L1 to acquiring the L2 (see figure 3).

In one of his latest articles on negative transfer, Lei Lei (2025), included that "the interlingual error is always a result from the disturbance of mother tongue, cultural diversity and inappropriate learning strategy, which has relationship with the negative transfer of L1".

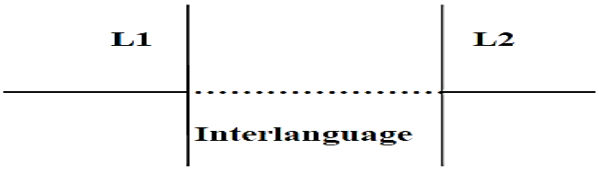


Figure 1: Interlanguage Scope (Cited in Temmimi & Asema. 2009

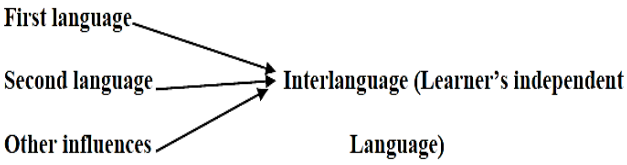


Figure 2: Representation "Interlanguage" Adopted from (Ellis, 1994)

Moreover, another important source of errors is Intralanguage, which results from faulty or partial learning of the target language, rather than from language transfer. In other words, it is developmental and tied to learners' language proficiency. For instance, the sentence *"She must goes"* is incorrect, and the error might be made as a result of blending structures (grammatical) learned early in the learning process. In the above sentence, both the modal verb and the standard third person singular "-s" suffix are used. This sentence illustrates the overgeneralization of the rule which states that in the present simple there are no suffixes except for the third person singular. Moreover, there are numerous errors caused by overgeneralization, take this sentence for example: *"Today's news of troubles in the middle East are very disturbing"*. While looking at the "s" in the word "news", the learner used "are" unconsciously without knowing that "news" is a singular collective noun. Therefore, the correct sentence should be like this: *"Today's news of trouble in the Middle East is very disturbing"*. This kind of error is typical because of overgeneralizing the rules. Another example is *"The police is investigating the case and hope to make an arrest soon"*. The learner may be sure while using "is" as the changing form of the verb "be" since in his mind "police" is a singular noun judged from the surface. Actually, "police" is a plural noun and as a result, the right expression is *"The police are investigating the case, and hope to make an arrest soon"* (Deng. R. 2019). For further examples and illustrations see (Sabbah, 2015).

language is not merely a tole that exist in isolation but rather an interactive accumulation system, deeply rooted in cultural, social, and psychological regulations that guide and shape language production (Sadouki. 2020). Speaking of which, when learners of a different language pursue the acquisition of a subsequent language to their mother tongue, they bring with them their L1 properties by which they try to use (like a script or manual) in order to make sense of and the L2. As a result, they often form a mediated system that serves as a parallel state until full distinction of L2 is established. On this stance, several terms have been coined to describe the perspective which stressed the legitimacy of learners' second language system (XIE & JIANG. 2007). Coder (1971) used the term "idiosyncratic dialect" or "language learner' language" (1978), Nemser (1971) called it the "approximate system", and XIE and JIANG (2007) the learner's self-contained mediated linguistic system.

As Brown (2000) puts it, "as the learner progresses in the target language, his previous experience, and his existing subsumers begin to include structures within the target language itself" (p.174).

In the Moroccan EFL context, where learners operate within a complex multilingual environment involving Arabic, Tamazight, French, Darija, English and others, the genesis of individual writing errors cannot always be attributed to a single L1 source with analytical certainty, presenting a difficulty of tracing the origins from which errors steam. Yet, the occurrence of errors can be explained by referring to learning theories and language theories (Sabbah, 2015). However, the study is only concerned with identifying and listing the types and frequency of errors. In this respect, Error Analysis was employed. Richards and Schmidt (2002:184; as cited in Sabbah, 2015) define "error analysis as the study of errors made by L2 learners, with the purpose of identifying these errors." Researchers suggested different taxonomies for error analysis, such as inter-lingual errors: phonological errors, morphological errors, grammatical errors, lexo-semantic errors, and stylistic elements Keshavarze (1994). Also, James (1998:304) has designed a Taxonomy of Error Analysis that has been used by many researchers to record all the errors made by Arab learners of English.

2.3 Error Analysis and EFL Academic Writing

Writing is an instrument to transfer messages from the writer to the reader. Hall (as cited in Helimi and Sellami, 2020) points out that writing is an aspirant and wordy skill, but a message comes through. As for Scholes and Comley (1985) they both referred to writing as a tool of communication and a way of collecting thoughts. While White (1986) states that writing is a mean of thinking and not just public communication, McDonough and Shaw (1993) define writing as a private, individual and a solitary activity. Similarly, Gunn and Terasaki (1982) describe writing as a complicated language mode yet it is an essential component of the present world. Upon the researchers' opinions provided above, writing is generally viewed as a way of thinking, sending messages from the writer to the reader and a mean of communication that helps expressing ideas, attitudes and feelings, and it cannot be left itself or just naturally picked up like other language skills (Sidi Youssef El Baghdadi. 2022).

Language teachers usually teach by following a systematic order which starts with listening, speaking, reading and then writing. On the latter, Francis Bacon's The Advancement of Learning (1605) asserts the significant of writing when he declares:" writing makes an exact man". Through

examining written speech, we encounter the interaction between interlingual and intralingual processes in which multiple acquired linguistic systems remain simultaneously active and competing during production (Ellis, 1997), constituting the persisting nature of errors in multilingual contexts like Morocco's. Subsequently, a mediated language system is developed throughout the process of second language acquisition (Ellis, 1994), in which L1 rhetorical preferences, mother tongue structural habits, transferred discourse patterns, and developing target language competence converge into a parallel state of input usage rather than a site of unilateral L1 interference. Therefore, the interaction between "interlanguage" and "intralingual" processes supports the view that EFL learner writing is produced through a hybrid system in which multiple linguistic sources remain active, and actively competing as mentioned earlier.

Therefore, writing cannot stand away from the findings of Error Analysis. Errors analysis is the process of observing, analyzing, and classifying the deviations of the rules of target language and it distinguishes between two major branches: a theoretical branch and an applied one (Corder,1974). The theoretical branch seeks to identify and reveal the processes and strategies that learners make use of while learning a second language. Conversely, the applied branch is concerned with organizing remedial work and devise appropriate materials and teaching methods (Corder, 1974; as cited in Aknouch, & Bouthiche, 2022). Accordingly, investigating learners' errors could be both 'diagnostic' and 'prognostic'. It is diagnostic because it shows the learner's current stage at a given point in the learning process. And it is prognostic since it helps teachers, course designers, and textbook writers to devise appropriate language learning materials and methods according to the learners' areas of difficulty (Aknouch, & Bouthiche, 2022). By the late 1960's Errors analysis developed into a more systematic research approach after it was a generalized collection of common errors and their linguistic classification. Influential articles by Corder (1974) provided the basis or the foundation for errors analysis approach which is now generally known as Corder's reported functions and these functions are both theoretical and practical as mentioned earlier.

Crystal (as cited in Hasyim, 2002) points out that Errors analysis is a method that is used in the interpreting of the inappropriate forms and structures of the target language, as well as in identifying, classifying errors which are produced by second or foreign language learners. To put in another way, Error Analysis is beneficial for effective teaching of writing, as it provides language teachers with significant procedures (see figure 3) for identifying and describing errors displayed in writing. They can be simply classified into the following.

First is Identification of Errors, in his model, Corder (1971; as cited in Aknouch, & Bouthiche, 2022) distinguishes between what he labels 'overt' errors and 'covert' ones. Overt errors are noticed and identified easily because such errors reveal an apparent deviation in form. For example, it would be easy to identify the error in a sentence like 'did he be able to read' from its incorrect form. Covert errors, on the other hand, occur in utterances that appear to be correct but that do not stand for what the learner means to say. Similar to this view, Burt (1975; as cited in Aknouch, & Bouthiche, 2022) distinguished between a 'global' error and a 'local' one. The first one hinders communication and prevents the learner from understanding some aspects of the message, while the latter affects only a particular element of a sentence or an utterance without stopping meaning from being conveyed (Aknouch, & Bouthiche, 2022).



Figure 3: Steps of Error Analysis, Adopted from Xin Chen (2024)

Second, Description of Errors, provides an adequate description of errors. According to Brown (2000), four main categories of errors are to be considered: omission, addition, selection, and ordering. "Omission" can be morphological or syntactical, meaning it is when the learner omits an essential element from a sentence; "addition" involves adding unnecessary or incorrect morphological, syntactic, or lexical elements; "selection" is when a faulty element can occur at the level of morphology or syntax; while "Ordering" is when elements of the target language are disordered at the lexical, morphological, syntactic, or pronunciation levels. The third and last step is Explanation and evaluation of Errors, a challenging step that involves analyzing learners' errors to explain and determine their sources.

as Ennaji and Sadiqi (1987, p. 151; as cited in Aknouch, & Bouthiche, 2022) pointed out that making errors is related primarily to "what takes place in the learners' minds". Generally speaking, there are four primary sources of errors including interlingual transfer, intralingual transfer (See Selinker, 1972 for further information), the context of learning, and communication strategies (Aknouch, & Bouthiche, 2022). This study focuses only on the two initial sources (for further information on other sources of errors read Sabbah, 2015).

2.4 Learner Corpus

The term "Corpus" comes from the Latin word for "body" and can refer to any context in spoken or written form. However, in modern Linguistics, it refers to large collections of texts that represent a particular variety or

usage of language that can be accessed in machine-readable form (Hunston, 2006). A Corpus is an electronic collection of examples of authentic language, usually consisting of full texts or large extracts from lengthy texts. The main objective of a corpus is to test hypotheses about language and to demonstrate how to use a particular sound, term, expression, or grammar structure. Corpus linguistics deals with the principles and practice of using corpora in language study (Crystal, 1992; cited in Shalabi et al., 2024).

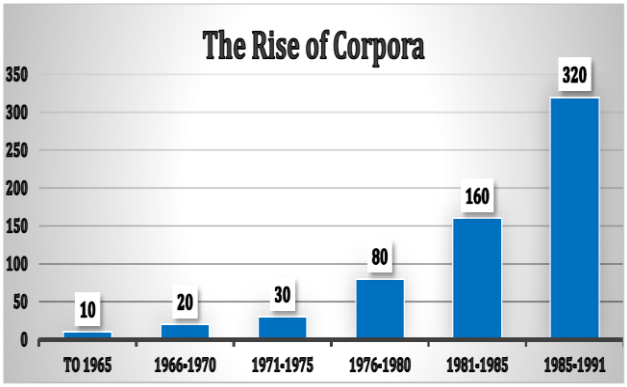


Figure 4: The Rise of Corpora Studies According to McEnery & Wilson (2001)

Learner Corpus Research (LCR) emerged as a response to the limitations of intuition-based and small-scale analyses of learner language. It involves the systematic collection, annotation, and quantitative analysis of large sets of learner-produced texts in electronic form (gaining popularity recently), allowing researchers to identify recurring linguistic patterns and errors with a high degree of empirical reliability (Granger, 1998; McEnery, Xiao, & Tono, 2006). Annotating on the matter, McEnery & Wilson (2001) pointed out that “Thirty years ago, when research of corpus analysis started it was considered impossible to process texts of several million words in length. Twenty years ago, it was considered marginally possible but lunatic. Ten years ago, it was considered quite possible but still lunatic. Today it is very popular” (Shalabi et al., 2024). The figure 4 below demonstrates the rise of corpus studies.

A defining strength of learner corpus research lies in its ability to capture frequency, distribution, and co-occurrence patterns, thereby enabling researchers to distinguish between sporadic mistakes and systematic features of learner language (see Xin Chan, 2024). This methodological advantage is essential for investigating L1 negative transfer, as it reduces the risk of attributing isolated errors to cross-linguistic influence without sufficient empirical evidence. Consequently, learner corpus research aligns closely with contemporary SLA perspectives that emphasize developmental and usage-based explanations of learner performance (Ellis, 2002).

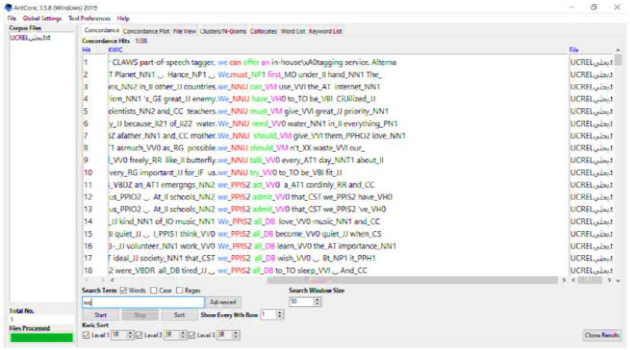


Figure 5: An Example of concordance in AntConc 4.3 Software

The introduction of computers, software tools automate linguistic record extraction where analysts, before computers, had to manually extract linguistic statistics, which is a time-consuming process. The Brown corpus, introduced by Francis and Kucera in 1961, became the first machine-readable corpus of spoken English, establishing a public recognition and exploitation of corpora (Shalabi et al., 2024). Additionally, Corpora and concordances (see the figure 5 below) are crucial tools for teaching and learning second languages. Working with corpus data, whether directly accessible or selected by instructors, can enhance learners' awareness of form and meaning, as well as word-context relationships. Johns' "learner-as-researcher"

metaphor highlights the importance of this approach, as it allows learners to independently discover grammar and meaning, taking on increased responsibility for learning while the instructor serves as a studies coordinator (O’Sullivan, 2007; cited in Shalabi et al., 2024). It emphasizes that a corpus is essentially a computer-stored collection of written, spoken, or mixed texts, offering the advantage of compiling and analyzing large amounts of text with specialized software (O'Keeffe and McCarthy, 2010).

Also, Concordances have proven to be valuable tools in second language acquisition, aiding in the learning of vocabulary, collocations, syntax, and writing styles, as noted by Sun and Wang (2003; cited in Shalabi et al., 2024). Relying solely on intuition in examining transfer-based errors makes it practically impossible and time-consuming, whereas a concordance program can swiftly and efficiently locate and display numerous examples from diverse settings and scenarios using a reasonably large corpus. The Figures 6 & 7 below cited in Shalabi et al., (2024) provides a screenshot of AntConc, illustrating the use of the Concordance Tool.

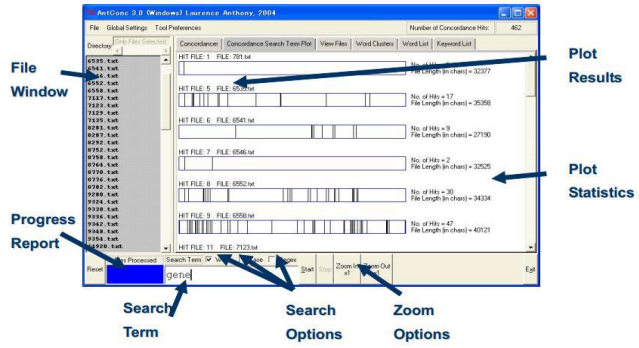


Figure 7: The KWIC Concordance Tool of AntConc software

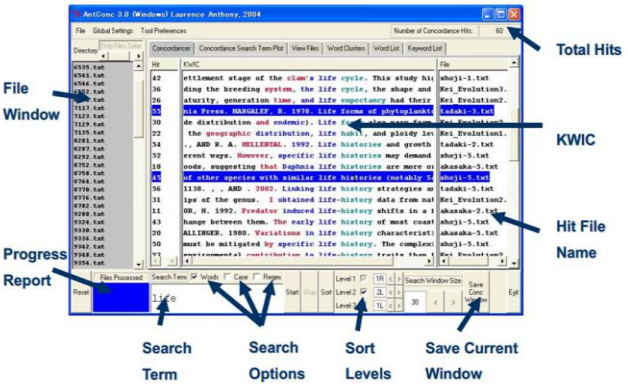


Figure 8: The Concordance Search Term Plot Tool of AntConc software

3. METHOD

The study was designed to observe, classify, and interpret naturally occurring written production errors, namely Interlingual and Intralingual Errors, displayed by EFL learners in controlled academic conditions, using a corpus-based research design supported by quantitative analysis, informed by Error Analysis (Corder, 1967; Ellis, 1997) and Interlanguage Theory (Selinker, 1972). The corpus-based methodology allows for systematic investigation of recurrent linguistic patterns and error distributions across a locally compiled learner corpus, while EA and Interlanguage Theory provide the framework for identifying error origins and nature. The analytical focus was restricted to the identification, classification, and frequency analysis of observable error types; the study does not advance causal explanations for individual error production.

3.1 Participants and Sampling

The participants of this study are undergraduate EFL student-teachers across levels/semesters 2, 4, and 6 at the English Department of ENS-M, selected to represent three progressive stages of academic writing development within a single institutional context. A random sampling approach was adopted, in which participation was based on students' willingness to take part. A total of 128 participants were included: Semester 2 (N=48), Semester 4 (N=36), and Semester 6 (N=44).

3.2 Research Instruments

The study used two primary instruments,

A Language Experience and Proficiency Questionnaire (LEAP-Q; Marian, Blumenfeld, & Kaushanskaya, 2007), was administered in its pencil-and-paper version (see appendix 3) to collect self-reported data on participants' linguistic backgrounds, including demographic information, native language, languages spoken, languages in order of dominance and acquisition, and any reported learning disabilities. LEAP-Q data are used exclusively to document the multilingual profiles of participants and to provide contextual support for the corpus findings.

A controlled argumentative essay writing task (see appendix 2), modelled on the International Corpus of Learner English (ICLE; Granger, 1998). Participants were asked to produce an essay of 500–800 words on one of two prompts: (1) "The prison system is outdated. No civilised society should punish its criminals: it should rehabilitate them" or (2) "Should English replace French as the primary foreign language in Morocco?" These prompts were selected for their capacity to elicit extended written production involving argumentation, discourse organisation, and linguistic complexity.

3.3 Data Collection

The Data was collected under controlled examination conditions across two sequential stages. In the first stage, participants completed the LEAP-Q within twenty minutes. In the second stage, participants produced an argumentative essay (i.e., 128 essays) under supervision within forty-five minutes, without any external assistance including dictionaries, mobile devices, translation tools, or large language models (e.g., ChatGPT). This restriction is to ensure that written output reflected participants' own linguistic competence without external intervention. Data from Semesters 2 and 4 were collected on March 25, 2026; Semester 6 data were collected on March 26, 2026.

3.4 Corpus Compilation

All the collected handwritten essays were digitised using Optical Character Recognition (OCR) technology and compiled into Microsoft Word documents with automatic correction features disabled, thereby preserving original learner-produced linguistic forms. Texts were manually verified for transcription accuracy only and no linguistic correction was applied at any stage. The verified texts were converted to plain text format using Notepad to ensure compatibility with AntConc corpus analysis software, producing a localised learner corpus of approximately 27,800 words representing the written production of ENS-M EFL student-teachers. (For further information about developing a linguistic corpus read AHDS's guide, Wynne (2005))

3.5 Data Analysis

The compiled data into the Corpus was examined via Error Analysis in two phases. First, errors were identified manually through close reading of all texts, and then identified errors were categorised according to the established EA taxonomy operationalised in this study (see Table), mainly under two categories: interlingual errors and intralingual errors. Classification was based exclusively on observable linguistic form and documented correspondence with established EA categories; in cases of ambiguous attribution, a conservative approach was adopted and errors were not assigned to predefined categories without sufficient evidence. Frequency counts and percentage distributions of each error type were calculated across the full corpus and across semester levels to enable cross-proficiency comparative analysis, to determining whether interlingual errors remain proportionally dominant or decrease to intralingual errors as learner proficiency advances.

3.6 Corpus Analysis

AntConc (Anthony, 2022) is the primary corpus analysis tool employed in this study to examine concordance lines, frequency lists, and recurring lexical and grammatical patterns within the compiled corpus. Its use supports pattern recognition beyond manual observation, enhancing the reliability and replicability of the error frequency findings across the three cohorts.

3.7 Ethical Considerations

Participants were informed about the study's purpose before data collection, and consent forms were obtained from both students and the supervising professors who facilitated data collection in their respective classes. Confidentiality and anonymity were ensured through numerical coding instead of personal identifiers. All data were handled confidentially and used exclusively for research purposes, in compliance with Moroccan Law No. 09.08 on personal data protection and the institutional guidelines of the Commission Nationale de contrôle de la protection des Données à caractère Personnel (CNDP).

4. Results and Discussions

4.1 Participant Profiles: LEAP-Q Findings

The Language Experience and Proficiency Questionnaire (LEAP-Q; Marian et al., 2007) was administered to all 128 participants prior to the writing task, providing a contextual profile of the learner population's multilingual repertoire. Figure (1) presents the demographic distribution across the three cohorts.

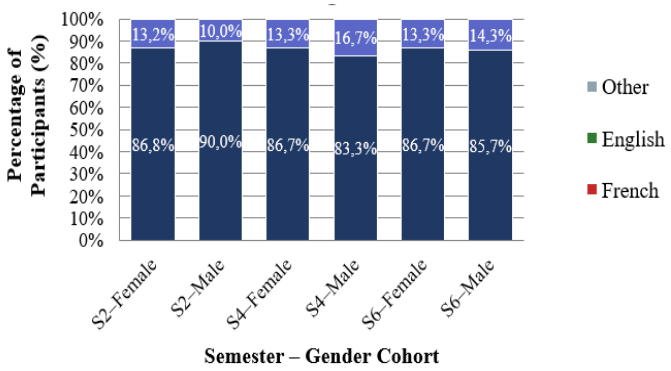


Figure 9: Demographic Data of the Current Study

The pie figure (9) above presents the demographic distribution of participants across semesters, age ranges, and gender. The study involved a total of 128 participants distributed across Semester 2 (48), Semester 4 (36), and Semester 6 (44). The data further reveals a clear predominance of female participants (98) compared to male participants (30). This demographic data provides contextual information about the learner corpus without implying causal relationships with error production.

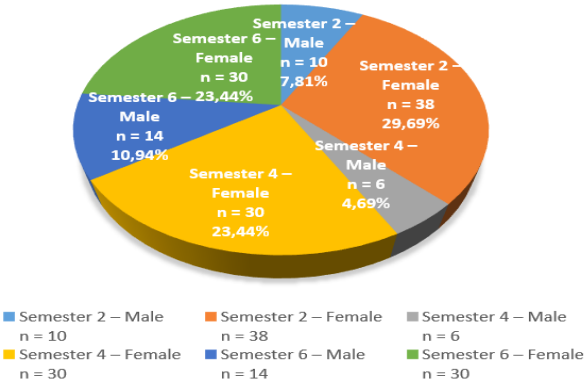


Figure 10: 1st ranked language (most dominant) by Semester–Gender Cohort

The LEAP-Q findings reveal a learner population of marked multilingual complexity as demonstrated in the following.

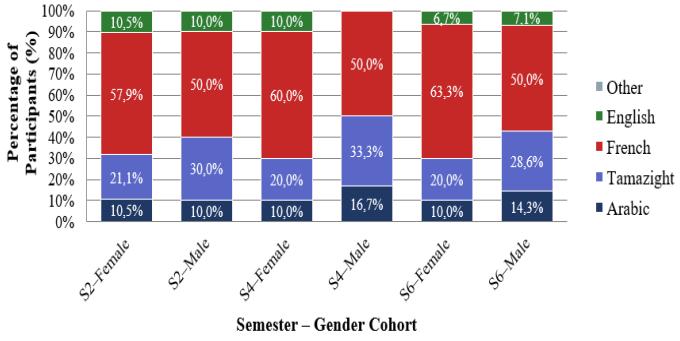


Figure 11: 2nd ranked language (most dominant) by Semester–Gender Cohort

The chart figure (10) shows that Arabic was reported as the primary dominant language by 83.3% to 90.0% of participants across all semester-gender subgroups, confirming its status as the operative L1 frame for the majority of the corpus population. Tamazight occupied the first dominance position for 10.0% to 16.7% of participants across all cohorts, as a proportion that is structurally consistent across all three semesters and both gender groups.

That is to say, Tamazight-dominant learners is a distinct and non-marginal subpopulation within the corpus. The data also reveals that French was reported as the secondary dominant language by 50.0% to 63.3% of participants across all semester-gender subgroups without exception, reflecting its rooted position in the Moroccan educational system and establishing it as a probable secondary source of cross-linguistic influence on English writing production in addition to Arabic, while English was reported the third in order of dominance or lower by the majority of participants across all cohorts, including 83.3% of Semester 4 male participants and over 50% of Semester 6 participants of both genders (see figures 11and 12 below).

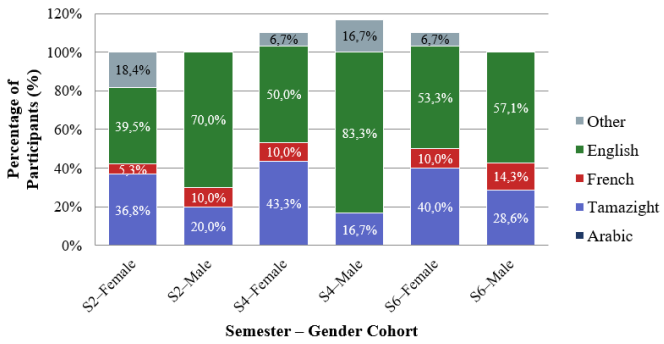


Figure 12: 3rd ranked or lower by Semester–Gender Cohort

The latter data, indicate that for the overwhelming majority of learners, English is the least dominant language, even among students enrolled in an English-medium teacher training programme. The ELAP-Q's data also shows that Arabic and Tamazight were consistently reported as the earliest acquired languages, with French and English acquired at later formal educational stages. English frequently found as the third or fourth acquired language in the learner's developmental trajectory.

These findings collectively confirm the multilingual complexity of these Moroccan EFL learners, as they produce English text through a system where several languages (i.e., Arabic, Tamazight, French, and English) might interact simultaneously and competitively in written utterness. Reported learning disabilities were documented for 37.5% of the total sample, with vision problems constituting the most prevalent category (25.0%), followed by language disability (15.6%), multiple disabilities (9.4%), hearing impairment (8.6%), and learning disability (3.1%). This data is documented descriptively and does not support causal inference about disability resolution through academic progression.

4.2 Corpus Overview

The compiled learner corpus is approximately 27,800 words in total across 128 argumentative essays. A corpus-level finding of independent theoretical significance regarding the word-count shortfall observed across all three cohorts is worth mentioning, meaning that the majority of scripts include only between 120 and 280 words against the prescribed 500/800 word minimum, with the shortfall most pronounced in Semester 2 and tapering, though not substantially in Semesters 4 and 6. This pattern is interpretable through the cognitive load framework of Flower and Hayes (1981) and Kellogg (1996): the simultaneous demands of planning, translating between competing linguistic systems, and reviewing under timed conditions intensify cognitive load in EFL writing beyond what a simple L1/L2 framework predicts, constraining both fluency and output length.

4.3 Error Types and Distribution

Corpus-assisted Error Analysis of the 128 essays included 1,630 classified error instances across 16 error subtypes. Table (1) presents the full distribution of interlingual and intralingual errors across the three semester cohorts.

Table 1: The Distribution of Interlingual and Intralingual Errors Across Semesters and Total Sample

Error Type	Code	Error Category	Attestation Example from Corpus	Semester 2 (N = 48)		Semester 4 (N = 36)		Semester 6 (N = 44)		Total (N = 128)	
				f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
Interlingual	IL-1	**Article Omission/Misuse**	"English is language of word"; "the English should replaced the French"	89	46.9%	52	36.1%	38	27.3%	**179**	**34.2%**
Interlingual	IL-2	**Preposition Errors**	"replace French by English"; "more harder than French in"; "depend of grammar"	76	40.0%	44	30.6%	29	20.5%	**149**	**28.4%**
Interlingual	IL-3	**Verb Tense Transfer**	"English became the language"; "French dominated all the fields since independence"	68	35.8%	41	28.5%	27	19.3%	**136**	**26.0%**
Interlingual	IL-4	**Subject–Verb Agreement**	"many people argues"; "English become"; "the government want"	61	32.1%	33	22.9%	21	15.0%	**115**	**22.0%**
Interlingual	IL-5	**Literal Translation / Calque**	"a language of the colonization"; "we are forced to know it"; "opened doors of opportunities"	54	28.4%	29	20.1%	18	12.9%	**101**	**19.3%**
Interlingual	IL-6	**Definite Article Overuse (French Transfer)**	"the English", "the Morocco", "the society at all"	47	24.7%	26	18.1%	16	11.4%	**89**	**17.0%**
Interlingual	IL-7	**Copula Omission**	"Morocco multilingual country"; "English more powerful than French"	**38**	**20.0%**	**17**	**11.8%**	**11**	**7.9%**	**66**	**12.6%**
Interlingual	IL-8	**Conjunction/Connective Transfer**	"also it is considered"; "but in other side"; "and in addition also"	42	22.1%	22	15.3%	15	10.7%	**79**	**15.1%**
Subtotal - Interlingual Errors				**475**	**55.5%**	**264**	**56.2%**	**175**	**57.2%**	**914**	**56.1%**

Intralingual	**IA-1**	**Double Comparative**	**"more easier", "more better", "more harder"**	**51**	**26.8%**	**27**	**18.8%**	**14**	**10.0%**	**92**	**17.6%**
Intralingual	IA-2	**Incorrect Modal / Auxiliary Use**	"should replaced", "can learning it", "must be thought"	44	23.2%	24	16.7%	16	11.4%	**84**	**16.0%**
Intralingual	**IA -3**	**Wrong Verb Form**	**"it have", "English became the dominant", "she give"**	**63**	**33.2 %**	**35**	**24.3%**	**24**	**17.1%**	**122**	**23.3%**
Intralingual	IA -4	**Plural Overgeneralization**	"informations", "knowledges", "tenses" (of verbs)	38	20.0 %	19	13.2%	12	8.6%	**69**	**13.2%**
Intralingual	IA -5	**False Concept Hypothesized**	"French is a language of colonization so we must not learn it"	29	15.3 %	16	11.1%	11	7.9%	**56**	**10.7%**
Intralingual	IA -6	**Spelling / Orthographic Errors**	"prisson", "goverment", "bussiness", "internation", "languaje"	72	37.9 %	41	28.5%	26	18.6%	**139**	**26.5%**
Intralingual	IA -7	**Tense Inconsistency**	Shifts within paragraph: "Morocco used French. English is now replacing it. France dominated…"	47	24.7 %	26	18.1%	18	12.9%	**91**	**17.4%**
Intralingual	IA -8	**Incomplete / Fragmented Sentence**	"Because it is a language." "Also learning English."	35	18.4 %	18	12.5%	10	7.1%	**63**	**12.0%**
Subtotal - Intralingual Errors				**379**	**44.4 %**	**206**	**43.8%**	**131**	**42.8%**	**716**	**43.9%**
GRAND TOTAL				**854**	**100 %**	**470**	**100%**	**306**	**100%**	**1630**	**100%**

The Table (1) above shows that interlingual errors constitute the dominant error category across the entire corpus, accounting for 914 of the 1,630 total error instances (56.1%), while intralingual errors account for 716 instances (43.9%). Across semesters, the absolute frequency of all error types declines consistently: from 854 total instances in Semester 2 to 470 in Semester 4 and 306 in Semester 6, representing reductions of approximately 45.0% and 64.2% respectively relative to the Semester 2 baseline. This is interpreted as evidence of general proficiency growth across the institutional training programme. However, the proportional ratio between interlingual and intralingual errors remains structurally stable across all three levels: that is 55.5%, 56.2%, and 57.2%. This pattern is noted and discussed in the section below.

4.3.1 Interlingual Error Types: Frequency and Interpretation

Among the eight documented interlingual error categories, article omission and misuse (IL-1) is the most frequently attested type across the total corpus, yielding 179 instances (34.2%) and a Semester 2 peak of 89 instances (46.9%). This finding is consistent with established Arabic EFL literature documenting the absence of a definite article system in Arabic as a primary source of article transfer errors in English writing (Kharma & Hajjaj, 1989; Alzamil, 2020). The corpus example "the Morocco is multilingual country" is particularly significant: it combines article omission (IL-1; absence of the indefinite article before "multilingual country") with definite article overuse through French transfer (IL-6; the definite article "the" before a proper noun, calquing French "le Maroc"). Preposition errors (IL-2; 149 instances; 28.4%) and verb tense transfer (IL-3; 136 instances; 26.0%) rank second and third respectively, consistent with the structural divergences between Arabic's distinct prepositional system and English (Kharma & Hajjaj, 1989; Sadouki, 2020), and between Arabic's binary tense system and English's sixteen-tense framework (Gadalla, 2006). Subject-verb agreement violations (IL-4; 115 instances; 22.0%) reflect Arabic's verb-initial canonical word order and gender-agreement morphology (Albalawi, 2016).

The frequency of literal translation and calque errors (IL-5; 101 instances; 19.3%) constitutes the most theoretically consequential interlingual finding in relation to Scriptthesia. Corpus examples including "a language of the colonization", a direct calque of the Arabic lughatu al-isti'mar, and "we are forced to know it", a rendering of the Arabic passive of coercion, provide direct empirical evidence of learners actively drawing on their L1 and L2-French writing scripts and rhetorical frames during English text production, producing the literal transposition of Arabic syntactic and discourse structures into the target language. Conjunctive and connective transfer (IL-8; 79 instances; 15.1%), characterised by coordinative discourse patterns such as "also it is considered," "but in other side," and "and in addition also", further confirms the Arabic ‘wa/fa’ coordinative rhetorical structure identified by Kaplan (1966) and documented in the Moroccan context by Khartite and Zerhouni (2018) as a persistent marker of Arabic rhetorical transfer in EFL writing.

4.3.2 Intralingual Error Types: Frequency and Interpretation

Within the intralingual category, spelling and orthographic errors (IA-6; 139 instances; 26.5%) constitute the most frequently attested type across the total corpus, which is partially attributable to the phonologically opaque nature of English orthography relative to the more regular grapheme-phoneme correspondences of Arabic and French. Wrong verb form selection (IA-3; 122 instances; 23.3%) ranks second, while double comparative formation (IA-1; 92 instances; 17.6%) , produced in forms such as "more easier" and "more better", represents a predictable target-language overgeneralization: meaning, learners have acquired the more + adjective comparative rule and apply it globally, including to adjectives that require the inflectional -er suffix, thereby producing double-marked forms. Tense inconsistency within essays (IA-7; 91 instances; 17.4%) and sentence fragmentation (IA-8; 63 instances; 12.0%) are more accurately characterised as reflecting cognitive load limitations under timed writing conditions, specifically the working memory constraints theorised by Kellogg (1996) rather than products of direct cross-linguistic transfer.

4.3.3 Cross-Proficiency Trajectory: Confirming and Complicating Prior Research

The cross-semester trajectory of the corpus findings both confirms and complicates the findings in learner corpus research that intralingual and developmental errors increase proportionally as proficiency advances while overt interlingual errors decrease or become less transparent (Hawkins & Filipović, 2012; Ellis, 2008). The present study confirms the absolute decline component of this trajectory: as total error instances fall from 854 in Semester 2 to 306 in Semester 6, and the absolute frequency of every individual error type decrease across the three levels. Interestingly, the proportional ratio between interlingual and intralingual errors (i.e., 55.5% to 44.4% in Semester 2; 56.2% to 43.8% in Semester 4; 57.2% to 42.8% in Semester 6), however, remains structurally stable across all three proficiency levels, showing no directional shift toward intralingual dominance as learners advance. This proportional stability presents a direct challenge

to the Hawkins & Filipović (2012) and Ellis (2008) trajectory finding. In a multilingual learner population where, multiple languages are simultaneously active as transfer sources, and where English remains the least dominant language in the learner's established linguistic hierarchy even at the most advanced level of the programme, therefore the mechanisms of cross-linguistic influence are not progressively suppressed by proficiency gains. Rather, as absolute error frequency declines, the sources of error persist in their relative proportion, indicating that institutional EFL training of the current scope reduces error output without restructuring its underlying sources. This finding is further supported by Selinker's (1972) concept of fossilization, and with corpus-based evidence from comparable contexts (Yang, 2019; Sadouki, 2020; Sanosi, 2024) documenting the persistence of L1 transfer-based errors even at advanced proficiency stages.

4.3.4 Error Distribution Across Language Profiles

Correlating the corpus error distribution with the LEAP-Q dominance data introduces a further dimension of analytical significance. Participants who reported Tamazight as their first dominant language, ranging between 10.0% to 16.7% of each semester-gender subgroup, exhibit a qualitatively distinct error profile characterised by a higher density of copula omission (IL-7) and a markedly lower density of definite article overuse through French transfer (IL-6) relative to Arabic-dominant participants. This pattern is consistent with the distinction between Tamazight and Arabic in terms of structure. The high prevalence of French-influenced errors across all cohorts, particularly preposition calquing (IL-2) and definite article overuse (IL-6) confirms that French occupies a functionally active secondary transfer role in the corpus that cannot be attributed to Arabic alone, complicating any straightforward application of a simple L1 Arabic transfer to EFL writing.

4.4 Gender Distribution

The sample expresses a demographic imbalance, with female participants substantially outnumbering male participants across all three cohorts (N=98 female; N=30 male). That is to say, that the error distributions reported in Table 1 primarily reflect female learner writing. No gender-based difference in error type or frequency is claimed, as the male subgroup sizes are insufficient to support valid comparative analysis. Future research with more balanced gender samples should examine gender as a differentiating variable in L1 transfer patterns within this institutional context.

5. PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

The empirical findings of the present study carry several concrete pedagogical implications for EFL writing instruction in the ENS-M institutional context, and more broadly

for Moroccan higher education EFL pedagogy.

5.1 Data-informed error feedback and explicit contrastive instruction.

The high frequency and cross-semester persistence of interlingual errors particularly in the domains of article use (IL-1), prepositions (IL-2), and verb tense (IL-3) suggests that implicit correction alone is insufficient to address transfer-based errors in this learner population. Writing instructors are advised to incorporate explicit, corpus-informed feedback that draws learners' attention to the structural divergences between Arabic, French, and English in these specific domains. Contrastive Analysis, approached not as a predictive tool but as a pedagogical instrument, can be deployed to make visible the L1 structural habits that learners import into English writing, thereby raising metacognitive awareness.

5.2 Argumentation scaffolding and discourse-level instruction.

The prevalence of literal translation and calquing (IL-5), alongside sentence fragmentation (IA-8) and tense inconsistency (IA-7), indicates that learners' difficulties extend beyond the sentence level to encompass discourse organization and rhetorical transfer. Drawing on the Contrastive Rhetoric Hypothesis (Kaplan, 1966; Connor, 1996) and its Moroccan applications (Khartite & Zerhouni, 2018), it is recommended that EFL writing courses at ENS- M explicitly address English argumentation conventions including linear paragraph development, evidence integration, and paragraph unity in contrast to the coordinative and digressive rhetorical patterns associated with Arabic writing traditions. Model texts, genre- based scaffolding, and process-writing approaches (Hyland, 2003) are particularly appropriate vehicles for this instruction.

5.3 Differentiated instruction for Tamazight-dominant learners.

The qualitatively distinct error profile associated with Tamazight-dominant participants, as noted in the discussion above, warrants institutional recognition. Instructors and curriculum designers should be made aware of the linguistic heterogeneity of the ENS-M learner and the fact that a minority but structurally significant proportion of students bring a different L1 configuration to the writing classroom.

Differentiated feedback and supplementary materials addressing Tamazight-specific transfer patterns would constitute a meaningful pedagogical advance.

5.4 Integration of corpus-based approaches in EFL writing pedagogy.

Consistent with the methodological orientation of the present study and with the broader trend toward data-driven learning (Johns, 1991; O'Keeffe & McCarthy, 2010), it is recommended that instructors introduce learners to concordancing tools and learner corpus data as part of the writing curriculum. Exposure to authentic corpus evidence of correct and incorrect usage particularly in the high-frequency error domains identified in Table 6 has been shown to enhance learner awareness of target language patterns and to promote independent error correction (Sun & Wang, 2003; Shalabi et al., 2024).

5.5 Assessment reform aligned with corpus-derived evidence.

The study's corpus findings indicate that current holistic assessment practices which do not systematically distinguish between interlingual and intralingual error sources may obscure the nature and origins of learner difficulties, thereby limiting the diagnostic value of assessment for instructional purposes. It is recommended that assessment rubrics be revised to incorporate a category-specific error dimension that distinguishes transfer-based from developmental errors, enabling instructors to provide more precise feedback and to monitor the evolution of learner writing over time.

6. LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

Although the present study offers valuable insights into the frequency, typology, and distribution of L1 transfer-based errors in Moroccan EFL academic writing, several methodological and contextual limitations need to be acknowledged when interpreting the findings and assessing the extent to which they can be generalized. First, the study relies on a relatively localized learner corpus comprising 128 argumentative essays produced by student-teachers at a single institution, ENS Marrakech, which may restrict the representativeness of the sample and limit the generalizability of the findings to the broader Moroccan higher education context, particularly given the linguistic, institutional, and pedagogical diversity characterizing EFL learning environments across Moroccan universities. Second, the comparison of learners across Semesters 2, 4, and 6 appears to adopt a cross-sectional rather than longitudinal approach and therefore does not necessarily capture individual learners' developmental trajectories or establish how L1 transfer patterns evolve as their actual linguistic proficiency increases.

In this respect, academic semester cannot be considered an unequivocal indicator of language proficiency, since learners within the same academic level may demonstrate considerably different degrees of linguistic competence. The absence of an independent standardized proficiency assessment may consequently weaken the interpretation of the relationship between proficiency development and error distribution.

Third, although the study identifies and categorizes interlingual and intralingual errors, it explicitly excludes an investigation of the cognitive, linguistic, and instructional mechanisms underlying their production. As a result, the attribution of particular errors to L1 negative transfer remains primarily classificatory and does not necessarily establish the precise processes responsible for their occurrence, especially considering that certain error patterns may arise from overlapping sources, including developmental processes, inadequate exposure to the target language, instructional practices, and incomplete acquisition of grammatical structures. Furthermore, the classification of 1,630 error instances into interlingual and intralingual categories may involve a degree of interpretive subjectivity, particularly when distinguishing between errors attributable to cross-linguistic influence and those resulting from the internal development of learners' interlanguage. In this regard, the absence of explicit information concerning independent coding, inter-rater agreement, and reliability procedures makes it difficult to assess the consistency and reproducibility of the classification process. Another potential limitation concerns the reliance on the Language Experience and Proficiency Questionnaire (LEAP-Q) to establish participants' linguistic profiles, as self-reported proficiency and language experience may not always accurately correspond to objectively measured linguistic competence. Additionally, the exclusive focus on argumentative essays restricts the scope of the investigation, since the frequency and nature of transfer-related errors may vary considerably across academic writing genres, communicative purposes, and discourse contexts.

The interpretation of the reported decline in absolute error frequency across semesters also warrants caution, as differences in the number of essays or total word counts produced by each group could influence the overall distribution of error instances. Consequently, reporting normalized error frequencies, such as errors per 1,000 words, would provide a more reliable basis for cross-group comparison. Finally, although the findings indicate a relatively stable proportional relationship between interlingual and intralingual errors across the three academic

levels, this stability should not necessarily be interpreted as definitive evidence that proficiency development fails to restructure the underlying sources of errors, particularly in the absence of longitudinal evidence and more direct measures of proficiency. Future investigations could therefore strengthen the evidential basis of this research by incorporating larger and more institutionally diverse learner corpora, longitudinal tracking of the same participants, standardized proficiency assessments, multiple independent error coders, and complementary qualitative instruments, such as learner interviews, think-aloud protocols, and stimulated recall, to provide a more comprehensive account of both the observable manifestations and the underlying mechanisms of L1 transfer in Moroccan EFL academic writing.

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