The Effect of Arabism of Romanic Alphabets on the Development of 9th Grade English as a Foreign Language Students' Writing Skills at Secondary School Level

Ahmad Zuhair

Dept. of English Language and Literature, Mu'tah University, P.O. Box: 7
Mu'tah, Al Karak, Jordan

Abstract

  This paper aims at investigating the effect of Arabization of Romanic Alphabets on the development of 9th Grade English as a Foreign Language students' composition writing skills at secondary school level. This experimental study includes 25 secondary school students in their 9th Grade in which English is taught as a foreign language at Al-Husainieh Secondary School for boys. The finding of this study indicates that students usually tend to write and compose English language sentences through Romanizing Arabic letters. This may be related to different reasons such as their weakness in writing and lack of awareness about specific aspect of sentence structures and lack of vocabulary deposit, but even good students tend to use the romanic alphabets in writing. This study recommends that students should be familiar with the meaning of English words.
Key Words: Arabization, Romanic, Alphabets, Writing.

1. Introduction

  English is the language of the modern era. It is the most common language used in different parts of the world. As some countries speak English as a second language besides their mother tongue. Therefore, people must learn how to write, read and speak the language in order to be able to identify and access other sciences such as economy, trade, tourism and aviation (Gen, 2010:1). Currently, English is considered the language of teaching and research in all the Jordanian universities. It is found in a large number of disciplines that are taught in many academic institutions around the world including universities and schools. So, some attention should be provided to teaching English language at schools in particular (Bakir etl., 2013:1). But there are some problems that face English language teachers that could be reflected in their future learning. These problems include the use of Arabism. The word Arabism comes from the process of blending the words "Arabic " and " Inglizee "[the Arabic word for English] (Attwa, 2012:10). Students use Arabizi not only because of their weakness in writing composition, but even good students tend to use the romanic alphabets in writing compositions. This refers to Arabic written form that uses Romanic Alphabets as an alternative orthographic form of Arabic (Aboelezz, 2009). As a result of this combination, Arabism has become very common phenomenon in most spheres of life. The word Arabizi means Arabic text that is written using Romanic Alphabets and used to represent modern standard Arabic or Arabic dialects (Darwish, 2014). It is not a formal way that students could use in their EFL writing's class, but it is widely spread in informal setting such as social media sites and social networking. This affects the achievement of school and college students and the way of teaching. In this regard, the researcher intends to investigate the effect of Arabism of romanic alphabets on the development of 9th Grade English as a Foreign Language students' writing skills at secondary school level.

2. Literature Review

 According to Aboelezz (2009), Arabic written form that uses Romanic Alphabets as an alternative orthographic form of Arabic is called Latinised Arabic. He also concluded that latinised Arabic and Romanization refer to the same phenomenon which is Arabizi. He felt that latinisation of Arabic is not something new, because there are some evidence that it is dated back to 1880. According to Al –Khasawneh (2010), the lack of vocabulary is the main problem facing Arab students when they are engaged in written composition. This is because of the lack of the necessary vocabulary where the students find it difficult to express their own ideas in the correct way. The researcher also stated that there is a problem with grammar which is very important to students in order to progress in their academic writing. Also, he mentioned that while writing an English composition the students make serious errors. These errors occur because of their weakness in English language. Such errors appear in using vocabulary in a new style.
Nazzal (2013) stated that people in Arabian countries tend to use English language widely in their life, and as a result of this usage a new style of writing has appeared. The emergency of a new alphabets dubbed Arabizi that uses English characters to phonetically spell Arabic words has sparked the concern among educators. The researcher felt that the new phenomenon (Arabizi) will affect the usage of both, English and Arabic language, since Arabizi became a new style of writing among people. According to the researcher people believe that the foundation of this new style of writing makes their life easier and saves the time.
In Malaysia, Hameed etl. (2015) conducted a research on the use of Arabizi in English texting by Arab

postgraduate students at UKM. The study emphasizes that the main reason for using Arabizi in English writing is code switching, which is very common in communication nowadays. The researchers also felt that code-switching is affected by some sociolinguistic functions, for example students tend to switch to English language when they want to express greeting and quoting someone. The researchers stated that the main reason for preferring the use of Arabizi is prestige and filling gaps existing in their language.

According to Abu Rass (2015), writing is one of the most difficult skills to master, for both native and non-native speaker, but for non-native speakers writing is very complex and difficult. The researcher also felt that it is not easy for Arab students to acquire the stylistics of English language for developing composition writing skills. This is because they transfer the style of their mother tongue, and this is one of the difficulties that Arab students usually encounter in writing a composition as the result of difference between English and Arabic linguistic. She also stated that it is difficult for students to express their ideas because of the lack of their vocabulary.

3. Statement of the Problem

When using two languages in a particular society, a new style of writing appears as a kind of code-switching between the mother tongue and the target language which is the case of English language and Arabic language. This causes difficulty for most language users, particularly at the writing level (Abu Rass, 2015). That is, one of the problems that appears due to this is a new style of writing. English language teachers at secondary school level state that 9th Grade students face difficulty in developing their composition writing skills due to their dependent on Arabism of English language. During the last few years, the use of Arabizi is highly noticed between them. Many students tend to write compositions using the Arabism of Romanic Alphabets, which is an informal way of writing. Also, it is a big problem that affects their formal academic education in the future. The current study focuses on the reasons that stand behind the use of Arabizi and the reasons that prevent them from developing their writing skills.

4. Objectives of the Research

This research attempts to achieve the following objectives:

i. To investigate why 9th Grade students use Arabism in their English language composition writing.

ii. To analyze to what extent avoiding the use of Arabism in English as a foreign language composition classes helps 9th Grade students improve their writing skills.

5. Questions of the Research

The present study addresses the following research questions:

1. Why does 9th Grade students use Arabizi in their English language composition writing?

2. To what extent does avoiding the use of Arabism in English as a foreign language composition help 9th Grade students improve their writing skills?

6. Methodology

The current study was conducted during the first semester of the academic year 2015 / 2016. The sample of the current study consisted of 20 male participants from 9th Grade students between the age 14 to15 years old. This group of students was selected because of the disparity in their level in the writing skills. This purposeful sample of students was chosen from a public school in Jordan (Al-Husainieh Secondary School for boys). During this study a descriptive and analytical methodology was followed to find out the effect of Arabism of Romanic Alphabets on the development of 9th Grade English as a foreign language students' writing skills at secondary school level. Also, this study is conducted to investigate the reasons behind this use as well as analyze how avoiding the use of Arabism in English as a foreign language composition helps improve the students' writing skills. In order to achieve all these objectives, two instruments were chosen. The first instrument was a composition prompt test in which a topic was selected to check the students' level and knowledge. The topic was selected from their everyday life, so they were familiar with it. It was about "*the advantages and disadvantages of using internet*".

The aim of using this instrument was to check the students' use of Arabism even in topics that they were familiar with. This is also to check how often the students use Arabism in writing a composition, and why. During the test the following ideas are highlighted: unfamiliarity with the equivalent meaning, Arabizi is a kind of prestige and showing themselves. Using Arabizi means that this person is highly educated, using Arabizi in composition makes writing easier, Arabizi became a style of writing that can be understood between students but difficult for teachers who are not familiar with it to understand, Arabizi harms the learning of writing skills of English as a foreign language, and finally, with Arabizi students do not have the chance to learn and acquire new vocabulary.

The second instrument was a questionnaire survey, the questionnaire consisted of two parts. The first part collected personal information about the students. The second part involved ten questions related to the topic, and used five-point type scale (strongly agree, agree, uncertain, disagree, strongly disagree). These questions seemed as an information related to the reasons of using Arabism in writing a composition. The questionnaires were given to 20 male students after they completed the writing prompt test, they began with a title explaining the purpose of the questionnaire then personal information, and finally the questions. The questionnaire was explained to the students. It is related to their attitude toward the use of Arabizi.

7. Findings and Discussions

This part of the research summarizes the findings and discussions of the study. Firstly, the composition prompt test was used to check the students' usage of Arabizi, students were asked to write a composition about the advantages and disadvantages of using internet. Good students could write about it easily, whereas low level students could face difficulties with the meaning of the words. The result of conducting the test showed that both good students and low-level students tended to write using the Arabism of Romanic Alphabets as a style of writing. Also, it showed that the use of Arabism of Romanic Alphabets was very high. It recorded about 75 %.

This usage referred to many reasons that led to these errors while writing. Words were written using the Arabism of Romanic Alphabets were errors. Because Arabizi is an informal way of writing, students can not use it in their formal academic education in the future. This phenomenon affected the students' writing skills at this stage of their learning. The findings of the test showed that there were many reasons for using Arabism of Romanic Alphabets (Arabizi) in writing a composition, such as, what the study mentioned before, unfamiliarity with words, prestige, making writing easier, highly educated person, and a style of writing that can be understood between students.

As a result of these reasons, the second instrument which was a questionnaire survey was designed to analyze, why did students use Arabizi in their writing of composition?, it was given to 20 male participants from 9th Grade after the composition test. The aim was to investigate the effect of Arabism of Romanic Alphabets on the development of 9th Grade English as a foreign language students' writing skills at secondary school level. This questionnaire consisted of two parts, the first part was personal information (age, gender, grade, and school). The second part consisted of information related to the findings that came from the composition test. Also, it was related to the students' attitudes toward the use of Arabism in writing. The questionnaire used five-point Likert scale (strongly agree, agree, uncertain, disagree, strongly disagree).
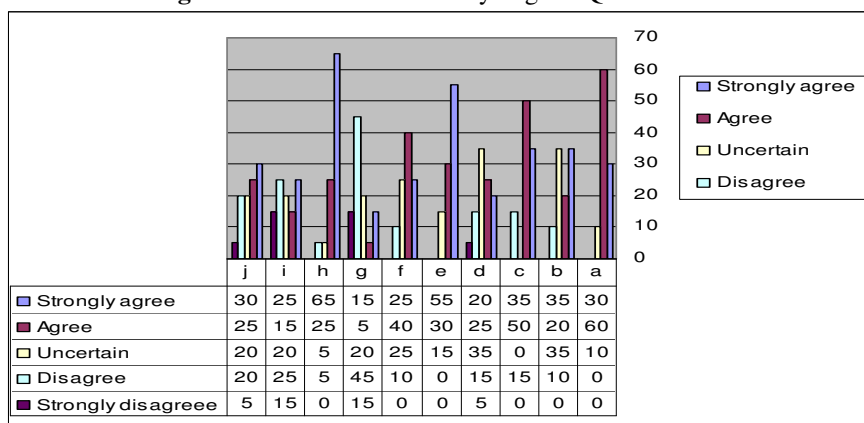
7.1 Findings of the Composition Test which was Used to Design the Questionnaire.

This part of the study provides a discussion on the findings of the data collected from data elicited from the participants. Based on the composition test the following points were concluded:

- The participants' unfamiliarity with the equivalent meaning is the reason of using Arabizi.
- Students use Arabizi because it became as a habit we use it without thinking.
- Using of Arabizi is a kind of prestige and showing ourselves.
- Using of Arabizi means that this person is highly educated.
- Using Arabizi in composition makes writing more easy.
- Students are using Arabizi because there are numbers using as a letters.
- Students are using Arabizi for cheating in exams.
- Arabizi became a style of writing can be understood between students.
- Arabizi makes the learning of writing skills difficult and harms the language.
- Using Arabizi doesn't allow students to learn new vocabulary.

After the students had filled the questionnaire, the following analysis was done depending on the results of the questionnaire. The results were shown in the following figure:

Journal of Education and Practice
www.iiste.org
ISSN 2222-1735 (Paper)   ISSN 2222-288X (Online)
Vol.6, No.36, 2015

Figure.1: The Results of Analyzing the Questionnaire

	j	i	h	g	f	e	d	c	b	a
Strongly agree	30	25	65	15	25	55	20	35	35	30
Agree	25	15	25	5	40	30	25	50	20	60
Uncertain	20	20	5	20	25	15	35	0	35	10
Disagree	20	25	5	45	10	0	15	15	10	0
Strongly disagreee	5	15	0	15	0	0	5	0	0	0

As shown in Figure.1 (a) 30% of the students strongly agreed with the idea that unfamiliarity with the equivalent meaning or words when creating a composition is the reason for using Arabism of Romanic Alphabets. 60% of the students agreed that the lack of background knowledge concerning the meaning of specific words' meaning, which represented the majority of the students on the same point. 10 % of the students are uncertain about this idea while no one disagreed or strongly disagreed with it.

In (b) the percentage of the students who strongly agreed with the idea that students used Arabizi because it became as a habit was 35%. 20% of the students agreed with it. 35% are uncertain, while the percentage of the students who thought that they used Arabizi and did not become a habit was 10%, and no one strongly disagreed on that.

As (c) showed the percentage of the students who strongly agreed that using Arabizi in writing was a result of using their social prestige was 35%. While, 50% agreed with that, this meant that prestige was highly affected. No one is uncertain, but 15% of the students disagreed they believed that Arabizi was not a prestige. Figure (1), (d) states that 20% of the students strongly agreed that EFL students who use Arabizi is highly educated in his mother tongue in which it affects his written composition, 25% agreed, and 35% uncertain, while 15% of the students disagreed and believed that the person who uses Arabizi is not highly educated but he lacks the meaning of the words. As displayed in (e) 55% of the students which was the majority, strongly agreed that using Arabizi in writing compositions makes writing easier. This was because of their low-level and the lack of writing skills. 30% of them agreed while 15% uncertain.

In (f) the percentage of the students who strongly agreed that they used Arabizi because there were numbers used as a letters was 25%, which made the writing easier and fast. 40% agreed with this idea, while 25% were uncertain, and10% disagreed with it. No one strongly disagreed. On the other hand, (g) showed that 15% of the students strongly agreed with the idea that students use Arabizi for cheating in exams. This is because the teachers of other subjects could not understand this language which looked like English. 5% of them disagreed, while 20% were uncertain, but the majority of the students disagreed with it, and 15% strongly disagreed.

In Figure (1), (h) which was about the idea that Arabizi became a style of writing that could be understood between students, 65% of the students strongly agreed because of their use of new technology to communicate with each other. This taught them a new style of writing which was reflected on their learning writing skills. 25% of them agreed, 5% were uncertain and 5% disagreed about this but no one strongly disagreed which meant that this was the main reason for using Arabizi.

As shown in (i), the percentage of the students who strongly agreed with the idea that Arabizi makes the learning of writing skills difficult and harms the language was 25%, Arabizi confused the students especially with the English meaning of nouns, fore example, one of them wrote (Al Baher Al Maet) instead of writing (the Dead Sea), and 15% agreed, while 20% of the students were uncertain, and 25% of them disagreed. They believed that Arabizi did not harm the language, only low-level students had this opinion because Arabizi was their way to escape from their unfamiliarity with the equivalent meaning in English.

As (j) showed, 30% of the students strongly agreed with the idea that using Arabizi does not allow students to learn new vocabulary which is another skill of learning how to write a composition. 30% of them agreed, while 20% uncertain and 20% disagreed with it. But only 5% strongly disagreed. The findings showed that Arabizi is widely used between students because of two main reasons. The first reason states that Arabizi makes writing composition more easy and the second reason demonstrates that Arabizi became a style of writing that is understood between students. Based on these reasons, Arabizi will harm the learning of writing skills and make it difficult.

8. Conclusion

The current study focused on the effect of Arabism of Romanic Alphabets on the development of 9th Grade English as a foreign language students' writing skills, which is one of the most writing difficulties faced students at secondary school level. This study attempted to find the reasons of using Arabizi while students writing composition.

The study found that Arabizi was highly used among students for many reasons, not only because of the main reason which was their weakness and lack of writing skills. The study also added that good students used Arabizi, even when they were familiar with the equivalent meaning, because Arabizi become a habit and a style of writing they used it in their everyday life of course. This informal style of writing affects their academic study in the future. This is because they will need formal style in their study at universities. This study has also stated that the use of Arabizi does not allow students to learn new vocabulary, since they tend to use Arabizi to escape from finding the equivalent meaning.

References

Aboelezz, Mariam (2009). Latinized Arabic and connection to bilingual ability. Lancaster University.

Abo Rass, Ruwaida (20150. Challenging face Arab Students in Writing Well-Developed Paragraph in English.

Al-Khasawneh, Fadi (2010). Writing Academic Purposes: Problems Faced by Arab Postgraduate Students of the College of Business. Unpublished M.A Thesis.

Attwa, Mona. 2012. Arabizi: A writing variety worth learning?. The American University in Cairo, School of Humanities and Social Science.

Bakir, Ayda. 2013. Writing Difficulties and New Solutions: Blended Learning as an Approach to Improve Writing Abilities. International Journal oh Humanities and Social Sciences.

Darwish, Kareem. 2014.Arabizi Detection and Conversion to Arabic. Qatar computing Research Institute Qatar Foundation, Doha, Qatar.

Gen, Bilal. 2010. English as a World Language in Academic Writing. Inon University.

Keong Yuen, Hameed Othman, and Abdulbaqi Imad. 2015. The use of Arabizi in English texting by Arab postgraduate students at UKM.University Kebangsaan Malaysia. The English literature Journal.

Mustafa, Ruba. 2011. Sms Code-switching among Teenagers in Jordan. Middle East University.

Nazzal, Noor. 2013 . Arabizi sparks concern among educators. Gulf news.