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English-Speakers' Errors in Arabic as L2 Writing System: A Teacher Perspective

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Abstract
Errors are significant in terms of understanding the acquisition, competence, difficulties, and development of L2 writing. Within the framework of second language writing system (L2WS), this study investigates teacher perspectives on Arabic writing errors made by English-speaking learners in L2 classes. The results suggest that numerous difficulties seem to face the English-speaking learner of L2WS Arabic, as mentioned by the interviewees, such as the move from a fairly dot-free system into a dot-full system. Nine categories emerged and described by the interviewees as the common writing errors; namely 1) letter shape including teeth and size; 2) direction, 3) dots, 4) phonological issues, 5) spelling issues, 6) letter connecting, 7) letter doubling, 8) letterforms, and 9) other errors. According to the interviewees, the reasons of making these errors in such a context are mixture of phonological differences; orthographic differences, spelling error causes; and other reasons. Several suggestions also were voiced by the interviewees in order to develop the teaching methods of Arabic as L2WS.
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Keywords: Writing Systems; Arabic Writing System; L2 Writing; L2 Writing Systems; Error Analysis; Phonological Errors; Orthographic Errors.

1. Introduction

Errors are valuable in terms of knowing how they are made, and what causes them. In the SLA realm, describing and interpreting the learner's linguistic competence is ultimately the researcher's job. This obviously would help develop teaching methods, learning strategies, and ultimately raise the educational output of L2 classes. In spite of the importance of writing as a language skill in the linguistic field and as a means to encode knowledge, the interest in writing and more specifically in the linguistic topic 'Writing Systems' seemed to be neglected until about fifty years ago (Penn and Choma, 2006). Writing is merely the use of visible marks as a means to recording language (Bloomfield, 1935). In the WS typology, English is described as alphabetical, whereas Arabic is considered consonantal writing system. As the categories imply, the phonological differences/difficulties are heavily involved while English-speaking learners are composing in Arabic, shifting from their first language writing system (L1WS) to their second (L2WS).

While this is essential to know and to research, L2WS Arabic literature lacks the richness that other language (e.g. English) enjoy, either within the same writing system, or as opposed to another writing system. This attempt then was carried out as a contribution to fulfil the need in research and in applications of teaching Arabic as foreign language (TAFL). Interview was adopted as a research instrument which was designed and directed to teachers of Arabic as a second or foreign language. I outline the Arabic WS characteristics including some WS terminology, along with a brief of difficulties and the position of English-speaking learners of Arabic as L2WS, before I explain this study's methodology and lay out its results.

2. The Arabic Writing System

It is essential here to differentiate between three WS terms: writing system, script, and orthography. Even though they are used interchangeably, 'writing system' is neither another word for script nor orthography. Writing system is 'the use of graphic marks to represent specific linguistic utterances' (Rogers, 2005, p. 2). A script on the other hand is only 'a device for making examples of a language visible' (Sampson, 1985, p. 21); while 'orthography' is the collection of rules and grammar which guide to correct spelling in a given language. English language, for example, has an *alphabetical* WS in which it exploits the *Latin* script along with certain *spelling* rules (i.e. orthographic system) to mark its spoken form. Arabic conversely is *consonantal* WS utilizing the *Arabic* script in addition to a distinctive pack of *orthographic* rules. What we mean by alphabetical and consonantal is that the former provides a character/letter for almost each sound in the language; whereas the latter is mostly concerned with consonants and not vowels (cf. DeFrancis, 1989; Daniels, 1996; Coulmas, 2003; Cook and Bassetti, 2005). The term *Abjad* (which comes from the historical order of the Arabic alphabet) is used side by side with *consonantal* or *consonantary,* a less-used term (Karan, 2006), to describe these systems in general. With regard to classifications in general it seems that the phonetic element is the key factor in which the link between a language sound and its written representation (e.g. symbol) is studied and accordingly classified.

Several characteristics embody the Arabic WS. Both the script, which has been used by more than 168 languages, and the direction, which flows right-to-left, are foremost. Arabic is written cursively (joined) from right to left in both machine and handwritten text on a single baseline with no capital letters. Further, the Arabic WS consists of 29 letters, all consonants but one – Alif <ا>. Two letters (<و> and <ي>) however operate also as long vowels (/w/ and /j/). Three short vowels are represented by optional diacritics. Each letter mainly has three letterforms depending on its position in the word. All the letters are obligatorily joined except the six non-connecting letters which join only the preceding letters. The letter dots form an integrated part of the dotted letter in which they are not considered optional diacritics. Diacritics on the other hand, are optional superscript bound graphemes which denote short vowels, tanween (nunation), and shadda amongst other trivial functions.

The correspondence between the letters and their sounds is said to be predictable. Arabic provides one-to-one grapheme-phoneme correspondence, so words are predominantly pronounced as they are spelled. But because the language is based on word-roots, numerous unvowelised words may seem identical while they offer different meanings, and the fact that it lacks short vowels representation, in which instance the script is considered deep (Cook, 2004; Dai *et al.*, 2013; Levin *et al.*, 2013). Arabic script is also well-known for its aesthetic calligraphic variations. Even though Arabic is thought to be orthographically clear, distinguishing several letter sounds from others can be quite difficult for Europeans. Among a very few irregularities, it is worth noting that some sounds are not represented and some letters are silent.

3. English Learners of Arabic as L2WS

Arabic is less complicated than English in terms of the correspondence between its orthographic and phonological systems, yet learning the AWS has never been easy for English speakers. The foreignness of the script (which entails the letter shape, direction, and the way of writing), the variations of Arabic calligraphy, and the diglossic situation (Modern Standard Arabic opposes numerous dialects) are factors that challenge English-speaking learners of Arabic WS. In terms of learning problems, different factors play significant roles such as the difference between the Arabic sound and writing systems in which we find silent letters as well as unwritten sounds (Alqasemi, 1991) for example. Besides the dialects variations, the Arabic orthographic (i.e. spelling) system is not actually unified throughout the Arabic world. Obviously, native Arabic speakers/writers are affected by these variations too along with other known spelling issues such as Alhamza <ء>, the closed <ة> and open Taa <ت> , the sun and moon Laams <ال>, and Al'alif Almaqsora <ى> (Al-Majed, 1996; Arrajhi, 2000; Alhamad, 2004; Shalabi, 2008; Zayed, 2009).

In case of L2WS learners generally, the continuous switching back and forth between the writer's L1 and L2 during the L2 writing process is rather cumbersome (Wang, 2003). Numerous studies (e.g. Rammuny, 1976; Abu Al-Rub, 2007; Taha, 2013) have shown that writing difficulties of L2WS Arabic learners entail numerous linguistic elements. Masry (1994) and Zayed (2006) point out that these difficulties, that learners of Arabic WS encounter, can be grouped into a number of categories which mainly include phonological and orthographical issues.

4. Methodology

The aim of the study was to know what types of orthographic errors that teachers of Arabic as L2WS think are common amongst English-speaking learners of Arabic. The study approach adopted a semi-structured face-to-face interview. Six teachers, three males and three females, participated at different institutions in the UK. They are PhD-holders aged between 30 and 40 who were purposefully selected based on a sample frame. All the interviewees are native Arabs except one teacher who is an English speaker, born in England. The Arab teachers were born in different parts of the Arab world: two teachers were from Egypt, one teacher is from Yemen, one is Algerian, and one is Jordanian. Three of the participants know other languages such as Spanish, Farsi, and French. All, however, have been teaching Arabic writing to English-speaking learners in their institutions for 4-8 years.

Each interview lasted for one hour approximately. The interviews were recorded, transcribed and then analysed using the approach of thematic analysis. NVivo 10 (a software package helps deeply analyse qualitative data with very rich text-based information) was used as an effective means to analyse the interviews' texts. The teacher views are reported here with the letter T followed by a number 1-6, which indicate the interviewees from teacher 1 to teacher 6.

5. Recurrent Themes

Amongst other minor themes, six salient themes emerged as broad topics in the interviews to which the answers mostly return. Inside each theme there are several subthemes which collectively form the comprehensive architecture of the themes. The six themes are divided into two general subjects: a) teaching/learning Arabic writing, which includes: 1) teaching methods, and 2) learning and teaching issues; and b) writing issues which involves: 3) crosslinguistic Writing Systems, 4) long lasting Arabic writing phenomena, 5) what orthographic

error is common, and 6) why it is common. We will deal with them as they were divided and listed here but with each theme alone.

5.1 Methods of Teaching Writing

This theme basically collected the answers to the questions of whether the interviewee has a specific method of teaching Arabic writing, and how he/she evaluates this method. Although most of them use textbooks to teach writing, it seems every interviewee has their own method of teaching as well as their own institutional selection of textbooks. In one institution there is Al-Kitaab which was published by George Town University, USA. The students, according to T2, in the beginning of each chapter listen to a story and they would learn new words and how to write them down. According to T1, teachers rely on the textbook as a key source while they exploit other worksheets on writing which precisely facilitate direction and letter ductus (the way in which script is written considering speed, method of execution, and form of letter; (Brown, 1990). In his own practice, T1 had three steps going from using the whiteboard to highlight direction, to intensive training, to presenting films and video clips. In a different institution, the methods fairly remain the same. T4 and T5 reported that they use two main books amongst different textbooks, namely, *How to write in Arabic* (Lahlali, 2009) and *أدوات الربط في العربية المعاصرة* (Hassanein and Al-Waraqi, 1984).

Showing videos, using word-processor or sketching programmes (e.g. MS Word and Paint) in which teachers can *show* them how they would write the letters from the beginning to the end; employing computers seems to have an agreement by the interviewees. However, this would raise the question of whether this is really helpful, or in fact this could be damaging their ability to write by hand. What is probably alarming is that some teachers, according to T4, actually bar students from writing by hand and downgrade their marks accordingly. T6, therefore, urges students to handwrite essays and then type them up. All in all, the interviewees collectively mentioned 9 means to teaching Arabic writing, though, using textbooks appeared to be the main practice. In addition, they mentioned hand-outs, continuous assessments, intensive 2 week writing course, multimedia and the internet, simulation, word-processor programmes, setting writing rules, and writing words from a story.

In their assessment of their methods, strangely only two teachers thought that their methods are very good, whereas the rest of the informants said that they are either imperfect or even defective. The reasons as well as their justification vary as well. The best approach, T1 and T5 thought, is to combine and implement several teaching methods in what they called the 'integrated method'. Designing a special textbook, as T2 prefers, in which it suits their own teaching/learning requirements seems a better way; though it needs teamwork and a dedicated fund. Focussing specifically on handwriting, T5 seems to agree with T6 on the need to using handwriting more often. All however, seem to agree on logistic issues such as minimising the leaning groups, offering numerous activities, with ample time for practice.

5.2 Teaching/Learning Issues

These issues involve language learning, how to learn the correct spelling, and particularly how to teach *Al-hamza* to overcome its spelling problems in a L2WS context. T3 thinks highlighted practical reasons such as the number of students, time, and teacher effort, whereas T1 was concerned about the complete orthographic foreignness. One of the interviewees touched, amongst several issues, on the teacher background and its effect on their teaching MSA which is a very important issue.

Do dictionaries help students with spelling? T5 thought so but only to some extent, as she highlighted that most of the available dictionaries are monolingual, complicated, detailed, and not directed to L2 users or learners. T1 thought that dictionaries would show learners 'the word shape and not how it is written, which is a jump for their language competences'. T2 seems to agree with the T1's last thought as he thinks that electronic dictionaries do not really benefit students because writing differs from typing. Students would not be able to learn the ductus as they only see the word image which could be helpful spelling wise only, T2 argued.

One of the persistent difficulties is Alhamza. The question here is whether teaching/learning can offer solution to this problematic character. T2 simply mentioned that teaching Alhamza is not part of the syllabus and thus students are not taught its rules or how it is written. Similarly, T5 remarked that teaching Alhamza is difficult. 'It is inefficiently taught while the learners don't really get it. The problem is difficult in general', she said. That is why, according to her, teachers normally do not bother to check whether Alhamza is written correctly.

5.3 Crosslinguistic Writing Systems

Obviously, many differences exist between the two writing systems. The question though, are teachers aware of them and are they present on the surface in classrooms? The interviewees seemed aware of these differences as they all agreed on mentioning some of the obvious differences such as direction, dots, joining letters and the sound system or the letter-sound correspondence. T2 said, for example, that learners 'don't have dots in their writing system. It's complicated in Arabic, whether in the position or in the number, in addition to calligraphy

and its variations'.

Generally, in terms of English influence on the learners' Arabic writing, the interviewees pointed to several observations. 'They think in English and they write in English' T4 said. When I interrupted trying to correct the statement 'they think in English and they write in Arabic', she replied 'in Arabic but in English style! This is what they do, and it's not Arabic any more'. Orthographic influence is the question here though. Despite T2 asserting that there are no influences based on that the two languages are fundamentally different, yet he stated that direction is the clearest influence. Although only one informant seemed to notice transferring from L1WS orthographically, he could not give an example. It seems, according to the interviewees, that direction is the only prime influence.

Nonetheless, if we compare the Arabic WS to other WSs put into L2WS context how would Arabic be perceived in second language classrooms? In other words, are the difficulties observed because of the WS itself or they are results of the great difference between Arabic and English WSs? T3 thinks that the foremost difficulty at first is directionality. 'Some of them spend half the term afraid of writing in Arabic so they use transliteration instead' she said. In addition to the direction and transliteration or writing anxiety, T5 acknowledged that students are fairly unaware of the linguistic differences between the two languages. T4 highlighted the big difference between the two WSs in terms of letters (script) and dots which make learners coming from foreign WS confused. The variations of the Arabic calligraphy appear to be challenging as well. According to T3 and T4, the change of how letters are written in different types of Arabic calligraphy (e.g. letter dots in Naskh and in Riqa), which are normally used simultaneously in everyday reading and writing, appears to cause difficulty.

Knowing more languages appear to leave a positive effect on learners, as T2 believes, especially with sounds such as the Arabic sounds /x/ which is found in German and /ɣ/ which is found in French. T5 is convinced that students with more languages are better. She observed that Polish and French languages if they were second languages they make it easy for them to learn Arabic. T4 also remarked that students from Spain as well as Italian-speaking learners are brilliant in Arabic writing. They however offered no obvious explanation. T6 agrees that one can tell that learners who read/write specifically languages using the same script are better especially in handwriting.

5.4 Long Lasting Writing Phenomena

The researcher asked whether the informants noticed some errors that students easily overcome and passed. They seemed uncertain of their answers which also were full of discrepancies. What matters here though is that they did not agree on one error in which learners, either pick up easily the mistakes and learn not to make again, or keep making the same mistake over and over again. Probably every error mentioned in one category (i.e. easily overcome or longer lasting) is also mentioned in the other by the same or a different informant. What it seemed as tendency to be agreed upon is direction not as an error in writing letters or words but as a difficulty in general. There is also no evident disagreement on that learners find more difficulty in dictation because they write from memory or from what they think is correct according to their perception and reproduction ability. None of the informants also refuted the difficulty with Alhamza.

5.5 What Errors are Common?

Nine subthemes were formed from the conversations with the six teachers on this topic. Each subtheme represents a category of similar errors. They were reordered according to their number of mentions and discussions during the interviews. The 9 subthemes are: letter shapes, direction, dots, phonological issues, orthographic issues, connecting letters, problematic letterforms, doubled letters, along with other errors.

Letter shape/ductus seems to receive the lengthiest discussion amongst the teachers. It is obvious, as T1 observed that the letter shape is odd. There is a major emphasis amongst the interviewees on the letter <هـ> /h/ and its shapes and forms. The fact that it comes in different forms in the beginning, middle and in the end (e.g. <هـ>, <ـه>, <ـهـ>) does not make it any easier. On top, it has several acceptable shapes along with calligraphic types. And, it can be very confusing when it becomes too similar with the closed Taa. Other specific problematic letter shapes were mentioned. T6 briefly gathered them in his comment: 'when <خ ح ج> all of those when they end خرج so making that shape, roundish I think they find it difficult sometimes, some of the students. Sometimes <س> at the end or on its own so <س> and <ش> <ص> and <ض> any letters that have cusps'. In addition, T4 as well as T6 think that the sizes of the shapes vary a lot, which changes the look of letters and the adjacent letters. Due to the fact that Arabic script is used in other languages like Urdu, influences could negatively occur. This influence does come with drawbacks 'so <ع> may give them a problem and <ح>…when they're writing محمد', said T6.

Letter teeth problems, which are part of letter shape errors, are specifically thought to be less common. Letter tooth (or teeth depending on their number), in which the inherent teeth look like small tips such as <س>, <ش> and <ص>, is not like the dots problem according to T1. The errors could be either in the number of the

teeth, in their places, or missing the teeth completely, as noticed by T4 and T6. Moreover, learners seem to be confused sometimes so they add teeth for un-teethed letters as if they overgeneralise. In addition, T5 drew the attention to the impact of the different calligraphy types in which some types disregard the teeth.

In terms of directionality, teachers seemed very aware of this issue as a result of observations. 'The effect of direction is pretty obvious' T1 said and added: 'they write Arabic but they write from left to right'. T3, T4, and T2 appeared to say the same. T2 remarked that some of the learners write <ط> /tˤ/ starting from the very base's end to the left going right making the roundish movement to attach it again where they started and then they add the stick above. The flow of writing is undeniably interrupted as a result of failing to naturally compose in right-to-left direction. T6 (who was formerly a learner of Arabic and is currently English-speaking teacher of Arabic) also returned much of the writing difficulty to direction: 'writing is very difficult because of right to left, your mind is not switched to that'. It does not even appear to be fading with intensive practice or at the upper stages as the teachers highlighted. 'I think even with advanced levels, I mean I still have it!' T6 remarked.

Despite that Arabic WS is full of dots and diacritics which makes it slightly difficult to absorb, changing the number or the position of dots or mistakenly forgetting them could change the whole word or the meaning very differently. Some teachers claim that dots are not a big problem but they do acknowledge its persistence. Although learners know the difference between letters in terms of their dots, they tend not to put them on, T3 argued. T2 on the contrary said 'they have a big problem with dots even in the fourth level and when they graduate they forget the dots because it is unusual practice for them'. The rest of the informants also generally agree that dot errors are widely common.

Phonologically, differentiating sounds especially the emphatic sounds or those which are absent from the English sound system is kind of challenging; thus, according to the interviewees, phonological issues are quite common. T2 for example drew the attention to the problem of telling these sounds apart: <ء> /ʔ/ and <ع> /ʕ/; and <هـ> /h/ and <ح> / ħ/, and so they cannot write them down. Differentiating the short and the long vowels, and between phonologically similar letters such as <ذ> /ð/ and <ظ> /ðˤ/ are problematic as well. T4, though acknowledged the problem, she underestimated its size. The short vowels which are not represented in letters but rather in diacritics are known to cause phonetic errors at least in early stages, the interviewees highlighted. Most of the interviewees seemed to agree with all of these problematic sounds which, again, makes it difficult to write from what they hear or pronounce.

Orthographic (spelling) issues such as Alhamza, the article <ال> or *Alqamar lām* and *Ašams lām* (AL of sun and moon), and so forth are problems resulted from either too complicated spelling rules or too foreign system. Alhamza, for instance, is difficult in several aspects. The fact that native speakers or L1WS users make enormous Alhamza errors and find its rules difficult to understand, to remember, and to apply, indicates that the problem lies in the orthographic system and not as a result of the differences between WSs. The interviewees totally agreed on the commonness of Alhamza errors. T3 said 'Alhamza is very difficult for them (English-speaking learners of Arabic WS) in the middle or the end of the word, they don't know how to write it whether on wāw <و> or yāʾ <ي> or ʾalif <ا>'. T6 also said: 'I think conceptually one of the hard things is anything with Hamza, especially if it's medial or in the end…words like بيئة (environment) and شيء (thing)'. Indicating Hamzat-ul-wasl, he also added: 'Hamza where is not needed sometimes they put it there'.

Students are not sometimes able to differentiate Alif Almaqsoura (a type of Alif <ا> which is pronounced as the vowel /a:/ but it is written similarly to the letter ي without dots) from Alif Almamdouda (which is written as <اء> and pronounced /a:ʔ/ with a Hamza right after), probably because they both come at the end of the words. T6 remarked 'Alif Almaqsoura <ى> is a disaster' because learners treat it like a yāʾ <ي> so they put the dots on. Apparently this is a predominant issue for the confusion between the two Alifs. T4 noticed that persistence as she described Alif Almaqsoura errors as 'one of the errors that remain with them'. T6 stated that 'voweling' confuses learners in which they do not add Alif al wiqaya (the guarding 'alif, is used at the end of verbs in the plural form to guard the plural verb from being similar to plural nouns) to the verbs such as ذهبوا (thahabou). Further, Tanween (nunation, is the /n/ sound by doubling the short vowel at the end of a word in which it grammatically functions to indicate indefinite article) is reportedly causing errors as well. Teachers remarked that learners commonly write <ن> instead of the vowel's diacritic.

Connecting letters issues appear common as well at least at the first levels, the interviewees observed. T1 said 'the issue of one-way or two-way connectors is one of the issues that learner faces in which the groups of letters can be connected to the right and to the left or only to the right. This takes time especially in the beginning'. T3 specifically seemed annoyed by the error in connecting dāl <د> to the next letter, while it is one of the non-connecting letters. T6 did also raise the same issue as he said: 'they forget that these الأحرف المستبدة stubborn letters (or non-connecting letters), what they try to do with the dāl <د>, they'd connect the <د> to the next letter as in بدل it would be بلل; so dāl and ḏāl <ذ>'. The positional letterforms seem to be confusing, especially in the middle. 'The shape of <ع> /ʕ/ in the middle for example becomes confusing to them, because they could write it as <م> /m/ in the middle', T1 explained.

In the Arabic WS, geminated consonants (doubled consonants) may cause assimilation and change the

meaning of words involved. If a letter (consonant) was doubled as in خلال /xalal/ (fault) it would be wrong to combine the two consonant in one letter to be خل /xal/ (vinegar). However, if the consonant is assimilated into the preceding letter as in الطّعام /attˤaʕa:m/ (food), it would be a mistake to write two letters as الططعام. This seems to be complicated to English speaking learners as the interviewees reported. T2 said they sometimes cannot differentiate between them and sometimes they add a third letter. T1 however, mentioned the problems with *Alqamar lām* اللام القمرية and *Ašams lām* اللام الشمسية. This type in particular causes some puzzlement for native speakers as well. T6 commented on this particular issue: 'the doubling of lām especially… anything with two lams الليل /ʔallayl/ (night); they make mistakes with those definitely'. Other errors entail handwriting issues, calligraphic errors as in writing in different styles, and writing instead of drawing. The last one indicates the influence of the learners' L1WS (English) which mostly depends on geometric shaped letters (Goodnow *et al.*, 1973) whereas Arabic letter ductus involves actually more drawing than writing.

5.6 Why These Errors are Common

It is probably inevitable that phonetic errors are caused by phonological differences. Either incorrectly perceiving or wrongly producing sounds would cause writing errors of this category. Sounds absent from the English sound system are known to be the first and foremost reason for making these errors as suggested by the interviewees. T3 stated: 'it is the difference between the Arabic and the English system, of course they face new letters that they pronounce for the first time in their lives such as <ح> / ħ/, <خ> /x/, <ط> /tˤ/, <ظ> /ðˤ/, <ع> /ʕ/, and <ق> /q/'. A further reason is the similarity between sounds to the extent that is hard to distinguish and then to write. Probably there is some kind of generalisation as well according to T3. As they learn the sound, they overgeneralise and apply the sound to the similar ones even in English. T3 mentioned that they use the Arabic sounds in writing their own names in act of Arabization, so إدوارد Edward would be إضوارد Edˤward'. They also lighten the emphatic consonant sounds and thus Sad <ص> /sˤ/ becomes Seen <س> /s/ because it is nearer to the English's <S> /s/, T6 remarked. The interviewees observed that teachers' dialects presumably affect learners' writing as well.

It is a simple fact that apart from the small <i> and the small <j> along with rare sporadic words, English does not utilise dots. In Arabic though, T1 says, 'you have groups and pairs of letters <ظ ط ض ص ش س>… as long as it is a simplicity factor it does form a difficulty for them because they are coming from a language that doesn't adopt this addition onto the script and that's a fundamental reason of errors in writing dots'. Furthermore, dots in Arabic has a fairly complicated system whether in their position (e.g. above, below and inside) or in their number (i.e. one, two, or three), in addition to the calligraphy variations in which dots sometimes become hyphen or triangle, interviewees highlighted.

Similarly, many factors are thought to be casing letter shape errors. 'There are details student cannot master unless they take enough time and that is one of the reasons' said T2. The details, T2 indicated, involve the letter size and dimension, letter ductus and cusp, as well as letter teeth. Errors in each aspect could make some ambiguity or completely prevent readers from understanding what is written. T1 thought that letter shape errors are either due to the word size or the interchanging movement between writing horizontally and vertically which causes instability in drawing the shape or grasping the size. It apparently goes down to the roundish loops, cusps, and curves of many Arabic letters. The so-called 'cup letters' are known to be problematic for learners of Arabic script (Alfi *et al.*, 1992). The letter teeth errors are due to poor teaching methods according to most of the interviewees. Another possible reason mentioned by three interviewees is that some learners step ahead and learn another variation of Arabic calligraphy (e.g. Riq?a) which allows the writer to transfer some teeth and dots to hyphens or strokes. Direction errors on the other hand are results of a combination of inefficient teaching, the intense influence of L1WS direction, and psychological and spatial recognition.

Three reasons mentioned by the interviewees behind making spelling errors. One is the fact that learners are not properly taught the rules (Alhamza is not even part of the syllabus according to T2). The second reason is the fact that some rules (e.g. Alhamza) are complicated in all aspects, its laborious orthographic rules, how to simplify and teach them, and the different opinions and theories concerning them amongst teachers as well as Arabic linguists. The third reason is purely phonological as in the failure in realisation of differentiation between few sounds such as <ء> /ʔ/ and <ع> /ʕ/, the <ن> /n/ and *tanween*, or the article <ال> AL or *Alqamar lām* and *Ašams lām* (AL of sun and moon) etc.

Omission and insertion seem to be very similar to substitution in sense of that the reason is mostly phonological. 'If a student couldn't catch the sound or caught it but is unable to pronounce it would lead to deletion' said T1. Insertion on one hand is probably resulted from exaggerating the short vowel into a long vowel. 'Short vowels are problematic so they would write موحمد Moohammad instead of محمد Mohammad' T3 explained. Omission on the other hand could occur due to adjacent identical letters such as تتكلم Tatakallam (speaks) or الليبيين Allibiyeen (Libyans), so according to T3, they would only write one of the twin letters. Gemination and doubled letter are obviously too difficult for learners, as teachers observed, even in reading. 'I taught them this year the rule of doubled verb such as استعددْتُ /ista9dadtu/ (I'm ready) and استعدَّ /ista9adda/ (he is ready) and they

fail to write it correctly' T3 reported. Direction problems seem to be due to unprofessional teaching methods, the intense influence of L1WS direction, and mind-set. T6 commented on directionality: 'I think even with advanced levels, I mean I still have it'. T1 also remarked that the 'learners come from a language written in a different direction, and that takes a cognitive effort to change'.

6. Summary

At least in Arabic as L2, writing has not been taken seriously by both teachers and researchers, whereas handwriting specifically is almost neglected. This study aimed to understand the sorts of orthographic errors that English-speaking learners in L2 Arabic classes make as perceived by their teacher who were interviewed. The interviews returned six themes: teaching methods, learning and teaching issues, crosslinguistic Writing Systems, teachers' observations, what errors are common, and why they are common.

Chiefly, the interviewees reported that they exploit the textbooks adopted by their institutions besides using other sources such as the Internet, hand-outs, multimedia, intensive rapid starting courses etc. Although they were not all happy about their teaching methods, they reported a consensus for using different methods of teaching writing and switching between them every now and then. Several suggestions have been voiced to develop the teaching methods of writing Arabic such as allowing learners to start writing immediately, teacher training, teaching them handwriting styles, and encouraging researchers to investigate this field. In terms of teaching and learning issues, the informants highlighted a number of aspects like the fact that learners come from a very different WS, and that teachers also come from different Arabic backgrounds, along with general class management and teaching issues.

Given their specialisations, the interviewees appeared to be aware of the errors which relate to differences between the two WSs and those which could be linked to difficulties of the L2WS itself such as Alhamza. As the learners become multi-competent (using two different WS), the interviewees observed that L1WS could affect their L2WS in a few ways where directionality is the clearest influence. In answering the question of what errors are common, the interviewees mentioned and gave examples of 9 categories which are 1) letter shape including teeth and size; 2) direction, 3) dots, 4) phonological issues, 5) orthographic issues, 6) letter connecting, 7) letter doubling, 8) letterforms, and 9) other errors. Each of which, the informants tried to afford explanation as to why these particular errors occur. The reasons according to the teachers are mixture of phonological differences; orthographic differences, spelling error causes; and other reasons. What probably most predominate and persistent in general are direction and Alhamza. In some specific opinions, handwriting ambiguity, (calligraphic) differences, and writing opposes drawing, in conjunction with ways to raise the importance and develop methods of teaching writing were highlighted. It is hoped that this attempt, encompassing teacher views, would afford explanation to the phenomena in question and add insight to the limited literature both linguistically and pedagogically.

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