# Negative L 1 Impact on L2 Writing

**Ali Ahmed Hussein**
English Department
Foundation Program
Qatar University, P.O Box 2713 , Qatar


**Mohammad Fawzi M. Mohammad**
English Department
Foundation Program
Qatar University
P.O Box 2713 , Qatar

## Abstract

*This aim of this study is to investigate the problem of negative L1 impact on L2 writing. In this respect, the focus is mainly on negative L1 transfer, or the transfer of errors resulting from translation during L2 writing.  Three factors are believed to have impact on L1 negative transfer to L2 writing namely, language proficiency, topic and mode. The significance of this study is that it addresses and attempts to find possible solutions to this common EFL writing problem. Moreover, the findings of the study can be of general applicability to other EFL/ ESL settings.This study was conducted on Level 2 Foundation Program students at Qatar University in Spring 2010. Sixteen students whose LI was Arabic were asked to write on three writing modes, namely Process, Opinion and Compare and Contrast .The main findings of this study were: first students resorted to compensatory strategies to overcome this problem in that they tended to compose words and sentences in L1 at first and then translate them into L2 thus making negative transfer. Secondly, it was assumed that proficiency in L 2 would minimize negative L1 transfer to L2 writing, but it turned out from the results of the study that students used L1 in L2 writing irrespective of their language proficiency in L2. Third, topic and mode also turned out to be important factors that affect L1 negative transfer in L 2 writing depending on their familiarity or cultural appropriateness. On the basis of the findings some recommendations have been proposed.*

**Key Words:** Proficiency, Mode, Topic, Negative, Transfer.

## *Introduction*

The researchers, having worked as lecturers of English for several years in Qatar University, have had the opportunity to notice that many students have shown difficulties in producing written texts in English. The problem for most of these students is that they suffer from negative L1 transfer when they write in L2. This problem, however, is not particular to QU students, but can be generalized to the majority of Arabic- speaking learners of English (c.f. investigations carried out by Kaplan 1966, Dudley-Evans and Swales 1980, Karma and Hajjaj 1989, AbiSamra 2003, Bennoudi 2007 and Badri 2009). Such a situation is obvious when an Arab student writing in English attempts to bring his knowledge of the first language to bear on the English  writing  mode .Hence, this study sets out to investigate the impact of using L1 in L2 writing in relation to the following three factors: student's proficiency, writing topic and mode.  L1 in this study will be Arabic (the first language of Foundation students at Qatar University and L2 will be English). It is worth mentioning that the study of the problem of teaching and learning how to write appropriate English texts is of great importance to language teachers, applied linguists, syllabus designers and others whose concerns are related in one way or another to ELT in Qatar University and in other Arab and international universities.

The importance of this study stems from an attempt to discuss and find solutions to problems which are pertinent to specific situations, i.e. Qatar University. Meanwhile the findings of the study can also be of some general applicability. In other words, teachers and learners in other situations who face similar writing problems can also benefit from them.

## *Conceptual Framework*

The first language has long been recognized as an important part in learning the second language. This is due to the fact that second language learners do not come to the classroom with empty minds, but with a great deal of experience of how language is used in communication.

This experience is gained through their mother tongue (c.f. Widdowson 1984, Atkinson 1987, Wolfersberger 2003, Skoog 2006, Bennoudi 2007 and Badri 2009). Therefore, they transfer this experience when they use the second language. In the light of the recent views coming from cognitive psychology, transfer is now considered a major communicative strategy utilized by second language learners in order to achieve a communicative task (Faerch and Kasper 1987). Language transfer (also known as L1 interference, linguistic interference, and cross meaning) refers to speakers or writers applying knowledge from their native language to a second language. It is most commonly discussed in the context of English language learning and teaching, but it can occur in any situation when someone does not have a native-level command of a language, as when translating into a second language.

However, when the relevant unit or structure of both languages is the same, linguistic interference can result in correct language production called positive transfer — "correct" meaning in line with most native speakers' notions of acceptability. An example is the use of cognates. Note, however, that language interference is most often discussed as a source of errors known as negative transfer. Negative transfer occurs when speakers and writers transfer items and structures that are not the same in both languages. Within the theory of contrastive analysis (the systematic study of a pair of languages with a view to identifying their structural differences and similarities), the greater the differences between the two languages, the more negative transfer can be expected (Lado 1957).

On the other hand, when the L2 learner transfers knowledge of L1 into L2 he/she often translates.  Stuart Campbell's (1998) study provides a comprehensive discussion of translation into a second language. The author is primarily concerned with translation as the product of a process of language learning projected onto an inter-language  framework. Therefore ,translation skills should be evaluated according to the state of a learners' inter-language at any stage of its development. This study necessarily raises issues concerning the status of translation into second language in comparison with translation into mother tongue, which has always got the lion's share of attention in applied linguistics and translation studies. It is worth mentioning that many factors can play a role in L1 use during L2 writing such as the writer's proficiency  (Scott 1996), the kind of topic used, and the mode of the essay  (Beare&Bourdages, 2007).

## *Writer's Proficiency*

At lower levels proficiency of writing can be a very complex activity due to difficulties students face in generating ideas in the second language, identifying the linguistic structures and using the appropriate vocabulary. In most cases students refer to their L1 in order to carry out the task. However, it is always believed that at lower levels of proficiency students tend to use L1 during L2 writing more than intermediate or advanced levels of proficiency students. Scott (1996) discusses the issue of lower levels of proficiency students and he suggests allowing them to generate ideas in L1 and then help them to identify the linguistic structures that will transfer their ideas into the L2. Scott (1996) believes that by doing this, lower levels of proficiency students may be able to come up with more ideas as otherwise they are bogged down by the confusion between linguistic information and ideas on the topic.

Wolfersberger (2003) examined the composing process and writing strategies of three lower proficiency Japanese subjects in the L1 and L2. The study found that while some L1 strategies may transfer to L2 writing process, lower proficiency writers struggle in utilizing all strategies that could help their writing in L2. The result suggested several compensating strategies for dealing with L2 issues and facilitating L1 composing process transfer. Finally suggestions for teachers are given so that they can help students discover and utilize existing strategies within the L1 and L2 composing processes as well as compensating strategies to improve their L2 writing. However, one of our main goals in this article is to examine whether there is any impact on the student's language proficiency on the use of L1 in L2 writing. Similarly, Sasaki and Hirose (1996) indicate that weak writers reported translating more from L1 to L2 while writing than good writers. In two subsequent studies Sasaki (2002, 2004) found that novice writers translate more often from L1 to L2 than expert writers. Similarly, Wang and Wen (2002) concluded that lower proficiency writers used L1 far more than higher proficiency writers.  In line with this, Beare and Bourdages (2007) found that highly proficient bilingual writers hardly used L1 at all during L2 writing. On the other hand, several studies reported that high proficiency writers switched more between L1 and L2 than low proficiency writers (Wang 2003). In addition, Cumming (1989) concluded that expert writers used L1 frequently during word searches.

## *Writing Topic*

Sometimes when students are assigned an essay to write, their teacher selects the topic. At other times, teachers may provide a list of topics from which students are to choose one. In some cases, selecting a topic is left entirely up to the students. However, it is believed that use of L1 may take place more when students write about a topic that does not fit the student's interests and knowledge; or is too narrow or too specific, for example writing about Mozart's symphonies. In fact, knowledge of the topic and awareness of cultural factors have a considerable effect on L1 use during L2 writing and text quality (c.f. Akyel 1994 and Friedlander 1990). In line with this, Friedlander (1990) found that writers wrote their best texts on familiar topics, related to their L1 cultural backgrounds, regardless of whether the plans for those texts were in L1 or L2. However, Kraples (1990) also concluded that tasks on L1 related topics generated more L1 use during L2 writing than other tasks.

## Modes of Writing

Modes of writing are sometimes called forms of writing or types of writing. These are different categories for writing. Each mode has a specific purpose. In the literature, there are four traditional modes of discourse: narration, exposition, description and argumentation. Narration is story telling. It involves relating a series of events usually in chronological order. Description tells what things are like according to the five senses. A descriptive essay tells how things look, sound, feel, taste, and smell. Exposition is the kind of writing that is used to give the reader information to understand. Argumentation is presenting reasons and evidence to elicit logical agreement.

However, Smith (2003) identifies five basic modes for discourse: narrative, description, report, information and argumentation, which are realized at the level of the passage. Smith shows that modes have linguistic correlates that differentiate them, and she goes on to analyze the properties that distinguish each mode, focusing on grammatical rather than lexical information.

Kinneavy's (2010), on the other hand, recognizes four basic modes of discourse:

> Narrative – gives "prominence to changes taking place in reality"
> Evaluative – pronounces judgment on a thing or event
> Descriptive – a still, stable "photograph of reality"
> Classificatory – organizes things into categories.

However, it is not the intention of the researchers in this study to classify discourse modes, but to emphasize that the modes of writing have several subtypes, the most common being definition, classification, process analysis, comparison and contrast, cause and effect, opinion, and problem solution. Textbooks written to teach writing in a second language (c.f. Blanchard and Root 2003, Smalley, Ruetten and Kozyrev, 2001) usually deal with the basic and the subtypes of the modes of writing. Studies regarding text modes and use of L1 in L2 writing do not seem to be so popular. However, many other studies have dealt with text types and translation. Chung-ling (2007) conducted research on teaching translation of text types with machine translation error analysis. She acknowledged the relevance of text types to translation and error analysis. However, the question that still requires an answer is whether different modes of writing have a different impact on L1 use in L2 writing.

## Methods of Data Collection and Analysis

In this study, sixteen participants, whose L1 was Arabic, were asked to write on three topics. These participants were level 2 students in the Foundation Program, Qatar University in Spring 2010 They were eleven male students and five female students as students are taught separately according to gender at Qatar University. Their average age was 19. The students in level 2 in the Foundation Program were required to write short essays (250 – 300 words) in three different modes: process, opinion and compare and contrast. Each essay included the students work at the process stage such as brainstorming, prewriting, the first draft and the final product. These students were trained to do the process and product both in class. The students wrote on different topics under each mode . For example under the process mode, the students wrote on ten different process topics such as "how to make a cake" (See table 1 below). This study will focus on the students' final product, but the focus will be on the errors that occur only due to translation or switching between L1 and L2.Based on observation during writing and researchers' L1 which is the same as the students' L1 i.e. Arabic, the data will be analyzed using researchers' knowledge of L1 as well assimple statistics i.e.percentages to help quantify the data.

## *The Data*

The data was first collected and classified in terms of the three modes and the topics students wrote about under each mode as shown in tables 1 below.

| | Process | | Opinion | | Compare and Contrast |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Topic | Title | Topic | Title | Topic | Title |
| T 1 | How to write a CV | T 1 | Smoking should be banned | T 1 | Two cities |
| T 2 | How to bake a cake | T 2 | The Internet… | T 2 | Two cars |
| T 3 | How to use the computer | T 3 | Mobile Phones | T 3 | Two jobs |
| T 4 | How to drive a car | T 4 | Fast Food | T 4 | Two mobile phones |
| T 5 | How to prepare for exams | T 5 | Modern Technology | T 5 | Two friends |
| T 6 | How to open an email account | T 6 | Disadvantages of Adverts | T 6 | Two countries |
| T 7 | How to cook rice | T 7 | TV | T 7 | Two computers |
| T 8 | How to manage your time | T 8 | QU Foundation Program | T 8 | School and university |
| T 9 | How to be an athlete | T 9 | Building train system in Qatar | T 9 | Two houses |
| T 10 | How to prepare for a Birthday | T 10 | X | T 10 | Two vacations |
| T 11 | X | T 11 | X | T 11 | Qatar between present and past |

**Table 1: Students' data**

**Findings**

The data was then tabulated according to the selected factors that were believed to influence L1 use in L2 writing namely, language proficiency, the writing topic and the mode of writing. Instances of L1 use during L2 writing were entered under each topic in each of the three modes (process, opinion, compare and contrast). The instances were classified under the three factors: language proficiency, topic and mode to assess the influence of these factors on this writing phenomenon.

**Process Mode**

Under the process mode, ten topics were chosen by the sixteen students who participated in this study as shown in Table 1 above and Table 2 below. In these ten topics thirteen instances of L1 use during L 2 writing were found. Four instances were recorded in T8 "How to manage your time" , three in T 5 " How to prepare for the exam", two in  T 1" How to write a CV", and only one inT2 and T3 "How to bake a cake" and " How to use a computer" respectively. No instance of L1 use was found for T 9 "How to be an athlete" and two instances were found in T 10 "How to prepare for a birthday. The description of each instance is given in the last column of the table below.

| Topic No | Topic Title | Instances of L1 use in L2 Writing | Classification of L1 use |
|---|---|---|---|
| T 1 | How to write a CV | Say if you're married or not<br><br>How many child do you have? | use of "no" instead of "not"  (vocabulary)<br>how many "child"   (grammar: singular instead of plural) |
| T 2 | How to bake a cake | Divide the dough in halves and let it rest for a few minutes | ..let it "rest"  ( vocabulary) |
| T 3 | How to use the computer | When people used the computer in the first time | "in" the first time (grammar :prepositions) |
| T 4 | How to drive a car | X | X |
| T 5 | How to prepare for exams | he works hard to achieve their dreams<br>You may use a friend to answer your question<br><br>in the day of the exam | ..he ………………..their dream.  (grammar : pronouns)<br><br>you may use a friend          (vocabulary )<br><br>in the day……………          (grammar: preposition) |
| T 6 | How to open an email account | | |
| T 7 | How to cook rice | | X |
| T 8 | How to manage your time | you must create a family..<br><br>pitza it is very popular<br>do not tire yourself<br>many people lose their time | you must create a family  (vocabulary)<br>pitza it is… ( grammar : two subjects noun and pronoun)<br>do not tire yourself ………   (vocabulary)<br>…. lose their time ….          (vocabulary) |
| T 9 | How to be an athlete | | |
| T 10 | How to prepare for a Birthday | I closed the lights<br><br><br>I opened the lights | I  closed the lights… (collocation)<br>I opened the lights (collocation) |

**Table 2: Students' use of L1 in  L 2 writing in the Process Mode**

*The Opinion Mode*

Under the opinion mode, students chose nine topics to write on as shown in Table 1 above and Table 3 below. The reason why students were given the freedom to choose the topics they would like to write on under each mode was that topic was one of the factors believed to influence the use of L1 in L2 .The other two factors were mode  and  language proficiency  In  table 3 below, nine instances of L1 use during L2 writing were found. Three of these were in T2  " The Internet"  and  two in T5 "Modern Technology". No instances were found in T 1 "smoking should be banned", T 3 "Mobile Phones", T 4 "Fast Food", T 6 "Disadvantages of adverts", T 7 "TV" and T 8 ". Qatar University Foundation Program"  Four instances were found in T 10 "Building train system in Qatar" The underlined instances of L1 use during L 2 writing  in Table 4 below can be classified as follows:

| Topic No | Topic Title | Instances of L1 use in L2 Writing | Classification of L1 use |
|---|---|---|---|
| T 1 | Smoking should be banned | X | X |
| T 2 | The Internet… | no <u>bad</u> will happen<br>students and teachers can <u>switch their work</u><br>In the past if you want a ticket or visa , you have to go to an office , but now you can get a ticket or visa <u>from your bed.</u> | .. no bad will happen (grammar/vocabulary: use of adj in place of noun)<br>…can switch their work (vocabulary)<br>… you can get a visa from your bed ( idiomatic use) |
| T 3 | Mobile Phones | X | X |
| T 4 | Fast Food | X | X |
| T 5 | Modern Technology | All the progress return to modern technology…<br>We must know that modern technology has a lot of advantages **and** disadvantage **and** technology plays an important role **and** pivotal role in all societies in the world **and**lead to that some people believe it's dangerous **and**other some believe it useful. | all the progress return to modern technology ( vocabulary)<br>use of "and" several times in a sentence ( repetition) |
| T 6 | Disadvantages of Adverts | X | X |
| T 7 | TV | X | X |
| T 8 | QU Foundation Program | X | X |
| T 9 | Building a train system in Qatar | In my opinion I think it <u>is very good idea</u><br>This --- a very useful project<br><u>This very good</u> for a country<br>The number of cars <u>that causing</u> pollution | In my opinion I think it is very good idea    (missing article)<br>This…  a very useful project ( missing verb to be<br>This …very good for country (missing verb to be)<br>The number of cars that causing pollution ( use of gerund instead of infinitive) |

**Table 3: Students' use of L1 during L 2 writing in the Opinion Mode**

**The Compare and Contrast Mode**

Students chose more topics under this mode compared to the other two modes. They chose eleven topics as shown in Table 4 below. Another thing is that there were more instances of L1 use in L2 writing compared to the instances in the other two modes. There were actually twenty eight instances found; twelve of which were found in T11 "Qatar past and present" , four in both T 4 "Two mobile phones" , and T 6 "Two countries" , two in both 5 " Two Friends" and T 7 "Two computers " , and one instance in each of T 2 "Two cars " , T3 "Two jobs" , T 8 "School and university" and T10 "Two vacations". None were found in both T 1 "Two cities" and T 9 "Two houses".

| Topic No | Topic Title | Instances of L1 use in L2 Writing | Classification of L1 use |
|---|---|---|---|
| T 1 | Two cities | X | X |
| T 2 | Two cars | In differences | ● In differences  ( phrase) |
| T 3 | Two jobs | doctor and teacher are careers | ● doctor and teacher are careers  (vocabulary) |
| T 4 | Two mobile phones | this essay came from new statistics<br><br>each  company has a branch in the whole world<br><br>the size of the nokia is smaller than samusungwhich has a big size<br><br> it is more better than another company | ● this essay came from new statistics (expression)<br><br>● each company has a branch in the whole world (expression)<br><br>● the size of the nokia is smaller than samusungwhich has a big size (redundancy)<br><br>● it is more better than another company (comparatives) |
| T 5 | Two friends | Both of us we like…<br> I have a good body | ● Both of us we like… (double pronoun)<br>● I have a good body(adjective) |
| T 6 | Two countries | In Iraq food is different from Qatar arabic people<br>We speak the similarity language<br>Each continent different and same in many things | ●  In Iraq food is different from ……Qatar (ellipsis)<br>● arabic people  ( Adjective)<br><br>●  We speak the similarity language (vocabulary)<br><br>● Each continent different and same in many things (adjacent opposite adjectives) |
| T 7 | Two computers | The laptop is easy for lifting anywhere<br> I have looked at the one computer desktop and computer laptop | ●  The laptop is easy for lifting anywhere (vocabulary)<br><br>● I have looked at the one computer desktop and computer laptop ( article) |
| T 8 | School and university |  Both increase information students | ● |
| T 9 | Two houses | X | X |
| T 10 | Two vacations | I went to Dubai and sit there for two weeks | ●I went to Dubai  and sit  there for two weeks (vocabulary) |
| T 11 | Qatar past and present |  In the past we learn Arabic and a different thing of them life<br> Didn't had<br> In the past the children learned Arabic just because teachers in the past didn't know how to learn another language…<br> Qatar is very changing between the past and present<br> One else thing<br> Develop countries<br>They are become high buildings<br> It came different before 10 years ago<br> Little change habits<br>26.There are many things that similar but others different<br>27. A lot of things are changed<br>28. But now there's a lot of women go to job | ● In the past we learn Arabic and a different thing of *them* life (adjective prounon)<br>● Didn't *had* (tense)<br>●  In the past the children learned Arabic just because teachers in the past didn't know how to *learn* another language…( wrong verb)<br>●  Qatar is *very* changing between the past and present (use of very before –ing Adj. form)<br>● One *else* thing ( word order)<br>● *Develop* countries ( wrong adjective)<br>●They *are become* high buildings ( present continuous form)<br>●  It came different *before* 10 years *ago* ( use of before + ago in the same sentence)<br>● Little change habits  ( missing prep)<br>●There are many things that similar but others different ( missing verb to be)<br>●  A lot of things are changed ( use of auxiliary verb)<br>●  But now there're a lot of women go to job ( missing relative pronoun) |

**Table 4: Students' use of L1 in L 2 Writing in the Compare and Contrast Mode**

## *Summary and Discussion of Results*

This study set out to investigate L1 impact on L2 writing. As well as being reported in the literature, this writing behavior has also been observed by the researchers who speak the same L1 of the students who participated in this study. Three factors believed to have influence on L1 use in L2 writingwere examined . These factors were the writing mode, topic and students' level of language proficiency. Sixteen students took part in this study: eleven males and five females . Those students were L2 students at Qatar University Foundation Program in spring 2010 when the study was carried out. Although the male and female students are taught separately in Qatar University, Foundation Program, gender is not considered as a factor in this study and the results were analyzed and discussed collectively. Table 5 below shows a summary of the results.

| Mode | No of students | No of Topics | No of instances of L1 use in L2 writing |
|------|---------------|--------------|----------------------------------------|
| Process | 16 | 10 | 13 |
| Opinion | 16 | 9 | 9 |
| Compare and Contrast | 16 | 11 | 27 |
| Total number of instances | | | **49** |

**Table 5: Summary of results**

**Language Proficiency**

As shown in Table 5 above, in the process mode there were 13 instances of L1 use in L2 writing . The majority of these instances (7) of L1 use in L2 writing seemed to be due to lack of language proficiency in L2 and so they were literally translated into L2 . These problems of language proficiency could be vocabulary e.g. use of "no" in lieu of "not" in the sentence, *say if you're married or no ( see table 2 above)* . Significantly most language proficiency problems were due to grammar. Consider the following sentences in table 2 above: how *many "child"* . In Arabic, the singular noun is used in questions starting with "How many" , but in English How many is usually followed by a plural noun . So the use of the singular noun after how many is a direct transfer from L1 as a result of lack of grammar proficiency in L2. Similarly, the differences in use of prepositions in both L1 and L2 can lead to incorrect use of prepositions in L 2 as in the following two sentences: *When people used the computer "in" the first time* and *"in" the day*…………… Another grammatical problem that was recorded as instance of L1 use in L2 writing was the use of two subjects , the noun and its pronoun, as *in pitza it is……* and this happened as it is common to use the subject and its pronoun in the Arabic language. Finally another problem relating to language proficiency was collocation. Consider the following two sentences: *I closed the lights………..* , and *I opened the lights…………* the verb close can collocate with nouns such as door, but not with light. The same holds for the verb 'opens'. In Arabic it is possible for both close and open to collocate with light and this indicates clear use of L1 during writing in L2. In general students tend to make words or sentences in L1 first and then translate them into L 2 and this is typical of low level students. This is supported by the findings of Wenyu Wang and Qiufang Wen (2002) who conducted a study on L1 use in the composing process in L2 and concluded that, lower-level L2 writers form L1 sentences first and then translate them into the L2. This way of translating is parallel to the translation strategy adopted by the strategically less proficient writers in Whalen and Menard's study (1995), who "sought to translate, word by word, the first idea that came to mind in their L1" (p. 409).

In line with Wang & Wen (2002) Sasaki & Hirose (1996) noted that, "Weak writers reported translating more from L1 to L2 while writing than good writers, although the difference between the two groups failed to reach significance". In the opinion mode, nine instances of L1 transfer to L2 were found (see Table 3 above). Consider the following examples: *no bad will happen--* This student was probably trying to say either " no bad thing will happen" or " no evil will happen". In either case this wrong transfer might be due to the student's low proficiency in L2.

- *In the past if you want a ticket or visa, you have to go to an office, but now you can get a ticket or visa from your bed.*

The expression "from your bed" in the above sentence is an idiomatic Arabic expression meaning no effort is required to carry out a specific task. So the student transferred the same expression directly to L2 thus producing a negative transfer.

- *All the progress <u>return to modern  technology</u>*

As for the expression "return to …" instead of "is attributed to" is again due to the Arabic translation of "return to" which was transferred negatively to L 2

- *This --- a very useful project*

The missing verb to be in  the above sentence is probably due to the fact that verb to be does not exist in the Arabic language.One more instance in the opinion mode can be seen in example 4 in (Table 3) :

- *We must know that modern technology has a lot of advantages <u>**and**</u> disadvantage <u>**and**</u> technology plays an important role <u>**and**</u> pivotal role in all societies in the world <u>**and**</u>lead to that some people believe it's dangerous <u>**and**</u>other some believe it useful.*

In this example the repetition of "and" is used in the same way as in Arabic."  In Arabic "and" can be repeated in one sentence to perform addition, reinforcement of the main idea or other functions while the cohesion of the sentence is still maintained. On the other hand, repetition of "and" in the same sentence in English can affect negatively the cohesion of the sentence, and can be considered redundant. This can be another area of differences between the two languages that affects use of L1 in L2 writing. Finally, as mentioned before, the Compare and Contrast mode had the lion's share of L1 use in L2 writing i.e. 27 instances (see Table 4 above). Out of these the following 8 will be examined as examples of negative transfer from L1 to L 2

- *In differences*

The above phrase is common in spoken Arabic, but the correct transfer to L2 could be "regarding the differences….."

- *the size of the Nokia is smaller than Samsung <u>which has a big size</u>*

In the above sentence, the underlined part is redundant. This could be replaced by a possessive s "'s" in L2 i.e. "Samsung's". Once again redundant expressions are common in spoken Arabic and to some extent in written Arabic..

In the example below, the use of "more" before comparative adjectives is very common among Arabic speaking learners of English as a second language. Again the influence of L1 could be a factor in this kind of transfer.

- *it is <u>more better</u> than another company*

The use of a  double pronoun, one object and one subject as in the example below is a very rare transfer from L1 to L2. When it does occur, however, it could be due to the differences in the use of pronouns in Arabic and English

- *Both of us <u>we</u> like…*

The use of "lifting" instead of "carrying" in the example below is again a collocation problem. Both "lifting" and "carrying" have the same meaning in Arabic.

- *The laptop is easy <u>for lifting</u> anywhere*

In the following example "and sit there" is a typical Arabic expression as "sit" and "stay" can be used interchangeably in Arabic.

- *I went to Dubai  <u>and sit  there</u> for two weeks*

Another problem related to the negative transfer of pronouns and which is due to the differences in the pronoun system in both languages can be seen in the example below.

- *In the past we learn Arabic and a different thing of <u>them</u> life*

The following example indicates a lack of proficiency in L2 as "more"  is supposed to be used in lieu of "else". The student here compensated for this by relying on translating  thus making negative transfer to L2

- *One <u>else thing</u>*

Finally, the use of "before" with "ago" in the example below is a typical Arabic expression and in fact this is very common among Arabic speaking learners of English as a second language

- *It came different <u>before 10 years  ago</u>*

To sum up, the analysis shows that lack of proficiency was one of the reasons that contributed to students' negative transfer of L 1 during L2 writing.

**Topic**

Table 5 above shows that students wrote on 10 topics under the process mode in which 13 instances showedL1 use in L2 writing . If we look into Table 2 above, we notice that the majority of these 13 instances were in T 8 (How to manage your time) and T 5 (How to prepare for exams): four and three instances respectively. Although these two topics seemed to be more familiar to students compared to other topics, yet the L1 transfer to L2 was still negative. There were two topics T 6 (How to open an e-mail account) and T 7 (How to cook rice) in which there were no instances of L1 transfer to L2 writing. One or two instances were found for the remaining topics. Under the opinion mode, students wrote on 9 topics as shown in Table 3 above. Only 9 instances of L1 use inL2 writing were found. All these 9 instances were used in 3 topics only: T 2 (The Internet = 3), T 5 (Modern technology = 2 ) and T 9 (Building a train system in Qatar = 4). This leaves us with six topics free from any L1 use in L2 writing. Finally under the compare and contrast mode students wrote on 11 topics in which a large number of L1 transfer instances (27) took place. The distribution of these instances is shown in Table 4 above where nearly half of these instances occurred in T 11 (Qatar past and present). T4 (Two mobile phones) and T6 (Two countries) come next with 4 instances each. The remaining topics either had one or two instances only. It seems that T 11 (Qatar past and present) which received the lion's share of L1 transfer was the most familiar topic given the fact that all the students who participated in this study were either Qatari or have lived in Qatar for quite some time.

**Mode**

As shown in Table 5 above, there were 10 topics under the process mode, 9 under the opinion mode and 11 under the compare and contrast mode. All in all there were 49 instances of L1 use in L2 writing. The distribution of these is as follows:

13 under the process mode = 26.5%
9 under the opinion mode = 18.4%
27 under the compare and contrast mode = 55.1%

The compare and contrast mode had the highest percentage of L1 use in L2 writing compared to the other two modes, and the process mode comes next. The opinion mode received the lowest percentage. The impact of mode or text type on L1 use in L2 writing has been addressed in previous research and comparable results have been found. These results suggested that L1 use has a detrimental effect on text quality (e.g. see Cohen & Brooks-Cason, 2001, p. 180; Knutson, 2006; Sasaki 2002; 2004; Sasaki & Hirose, 1996; Wang & Wen, 2002 &Wolfersberger, 2003).

**Conclusions**

This study set out to investigateL1 impact on L2 writing as manifested in negative L1 transfer to L2 writing. Language proficiency, topic and mode were examined as possible factors that contributed to this process of L1 use in L2 writing. Sixteen participants whose L1 was Arabic were asked to write on three topics. They were required to write short essays (250 – 300 words) in three different modes: process, opinion and compare and contrast. Based on the analysis of the students' writing, the following conclusions can be drawn from this study:

- Language proficiency, topic and mode are three important factors that could affect students' use of L1 in L2 writing in varying degrees.
- Generally EFL students may experience language proficiency problems while writing in English. If problems occur, these are often due to differences between Arabic and English and as a result, students tend to resort to compensatory strategies to overcome this problem in that they try to compose words and sentences in L1 first and then translate them into L2 thus making negative transfer.
- It was assumed that proficiency in L 2 would minimize negative L1 transfer to L2 writing, but it turned out from the results of the study that students used L1 in L2 writing irrespective of their language proficiency in L2
- Topic and mode also turned out to be important factors that affect L1 use during L2 writing despite their familiarity or cultural appropriateness. In other words, students tend to write on topics that are familiar or culturally appropriate to them, but this of course does not prevent negative transfer to L2. A case in point in this study was "Qatar past and present" under the Compare and Contrast mode which was familiar and culturally relevant to the students, yet it received the highest percentage of L1 negative transfer to L2.

**Recommendations**

The picture that has emerged from this study is that L1 use in L2 writing is a complex phenomenon. Many factors could contribute to it, but our study focused only on three of these factors: language proficiency, topic and mode. L1 use appears to be closely related to topic and mode which is also influenced by L2 proficiency and L1 writing skill. This phenomenon appears more clearly among low proficiency level L2 writers (represented in the sample of this study). So the following can be recommended:

- Generally speaking, L1 use in L2 writing does not necessarily have to be discouraged as we can have instances of positive transfer. Rather teachers should do their best to discourage negative transfer from L1 to L2 by exposing their students to L2 authentic texts and by encouraging them to be involved in tasks that lead to the use of authentic language as it is used by native speakers.

- It is also recommended that teachers should introduce their students to contrastive analysis, when needed, in the sense that the students become aware of the similarities and differences between the two languages. That way positive and desired L1 transfer to L2 can be facilitated and negative transfer can be prevented to a large extent.

- Introducing contrastive analysis to the students, as required, should be carried out at all language levels, i.e. linguistic forms, vocabulary and textual cohesion.

- As the compare and contrast mode had the highest percentage of negative transfer of L1 during L2 writing in this study, it is recommended that L2 teachers pay special attention to this problem when teaching writing for this mode.

- Peer correction of L1 negative transfer to L2 writing should be encouraged by L2 teachers. This practice may benefit not only the students correcting negative transfer, but it may promote interaction among L2 students about similarities and differences between the two languages. It is observed that L2 students may be more comfortable discussing their work with their peers than with the second language teacher.

## *References*

AbiSamra, N. (2003). An analysis of errors in Arabic speakers' English writing. Retrieved May 9, 2009, from http://abisamr03.tripod.com/nada/ Languagwacq-erroranalysis.html.

Akyel, A. (1994). First language use in EFL writing: Planning in Turkish vs. planning in English. *International Journal of Applied Linguistics 4*,169–176.

Atkins, D. (1987). The mother tongue in the classroom: A neglected resource? *ELT Journal, 41*(4), 241-247.

Badri, A. (2009). The relevance of error analysis and contrastive analysis. Retrieved April 10, 2009, from www.teaching English.org.uk

Beare, S. &Bourdages, J. S. (2007). Skilled writers' generating strategies in L1 and L2: An exploratory study. G. Rijlaarsdam (Series Ed.) & M. Torrance. L. Van Waes. D. Galbraith (Vol. Eds.). Studies in writing, Vol.20.*Writing and Cognition: Research and Applications*Amsterdam: Elsevier, 151- 161.

Bennoudi, H. (2007). Lost in translation: from Arabic to English and back again. *MED Magazine*. Retrieved March 12, 2009, from http://www.macmillandictionaries.com/med- magazine.

Blanchard, K. & Root, C (2003). *Ready to Write: A first composition text*, London: Pearson Education.

Campbell, S. (1998). *Translation into the Second Language.* New York: Longman.

Chung-ling, S. (2007). Teaching translation of text types with MT error analysis and post-MT editing. *Translation Journal*, 11 (2), 13-23.

Cumming, A. (1989). Writing expertise and second-language proficiency. *Language Learning, 39* (1) 81–141.

Dudley-Evans, T. and Swales, J. (1980). Stuy modes and students from the Middle East. *ELT Document 109*, 91-101.

Faerch, C. and Kasper, G. (1987). Perspectives on language transfer. *Applied Linguistics*, 8 (2)111-136.

Friedlander (1990). Composing in English: effects of a first language on writing English as a second language . B. Kroll (ed.) *Second Language Writing*. Cambridge: CUP.

Kaplan, R. (1966). Cultural thought patterns in intercultural education. *Language Learning*, 16 (1),1-20.

Karples, A. R. (1990). An overview of second language writing process research. *Second language writing research insights for the classroom*. Cambridge: CUP.

Kharma, N. and Hajaj, A. (1989). Use of the mother tongue in the ESL classroom. *IRAL*, 27,(3) 223-234.

Kinneavyy's, J. (2010). Modes of discourse. Retrieved March 7, 2009, from www. ahatter.wodpress.com/…james-kinneavy's- modes-of-discourse/.

Lado, R. (1957). *Linguistics across cultures*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan   Press.

Lay , M. (1982). *Strategies for technical writing: A rhetorical with readings*. New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston.

Sasaki, M. & Hirose, K. (1996). Explanatory variables for EFL students' expository writing. *Language Learning*, 46, 137-174.

Scott. V. M. (1996). *Rethinking foreign language writing*. Boston: Heinle&Heinle.

Skoog P. (2006). Native language and interference: A study of interference pattern in Swedish students' English writing. Retrieved August 12, 2010, from http://www.essays.se/essay/b98633167e/

Smalley, R.L., Ruetten, M.K. &Kozyrev, J.R. (2001). Refining composition skills.   London: Heinle&Heinle

Smith, C. (2003). *Modes of Discourse: The Local Structure of Texts*. Cambridge: CUP.

Wang, L. (2003). Switching to first language among writers with differing second language proficiency. *Journal of Second Language Writing Online,* 12, 347-375.

Wang.W. and Wen, Q. (2002). L1 use in the L2 composing process: An exploratory study of 16 Chinese EFL writers. *Journal of Second Language Writing Online,* 11 (3), 225-246.

Widdowson, H. ((1984). *Explorations in applied linguistics (2)*. Oxford, OUP.

Wolfersberger, M. (2003). L1 to L2 writing process and strategy: A look at lower proficiency writers. *TESL-EJ*. Retrieved March 9, 2—9 from http://www.tesl-ej.org/wordpress/issues/volume7/ej26a6/.