**Research Paper**　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　**Open Access**

# Difficulties of third language learner in Sudan

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## Abstract

The overall objective of the present study was to identify the most common difficulties facing Bedawiet speaking pupils who learn English as a third language as perceived by teachers in Sudan. To attain this general objective, two research questions were generated as follows. What difficulties facing Bedawiet speaking pupils in learning English language as a third language? The second question was: What could be done to overcome these difficulties? A questionnaire was designed in nine common errors, validated, piloted and administrated to the 36 participants who teach English in schools in Red Sea and Kassala States in 2018-2019. The collected data was subjected to descriptive statistical analysis, (means and standard deviations). The results of data analysis can be summarized in the following points. The most common difficulties were successively found to be: induced errors, substitution errors, overgeneralization, mis-ordering errors, compound errors, developmental errors, addition errors, omission errors and ambiguous errors. Teachers also highlighted other psychological and physical difficulties facing the pupils. Based on the findings of this study, it is recommended that educators and curriculum designers should give special attention to the Interlingual and Intralingual errors in areas where English is taught as a third language in Sudan. As the majority of the populations in Sudan are trilingual in some way, the Ministry of Education should play a key role in updating the learning outcomes and the content of the curriculum, besides, equipping the staff with skills related to teaching English language as a third language.

***Keywords:*** *Trilingual in Sudan, Third language learner's errors, Bedawiet speakers, Beja people, Beja languages*

## 1. Introduction

Language is the major means of communication through which people use to communicate and solve their different problems. It is an essential element to make life easy, so that many potential achievements can be accomplished. Languages have complex structural systems. Therefore, learning a language requires allocating time and proper dedication. However, people across the globe are gifted and have varied abilities to learn many languages simultaneously.

Recently, teaching English language in a country like Sudan has revolutionized. A call for updating and specifying English language learning objectives has been raised, as English is progressively becoming a mandatory subject in schools or improving careers for highly skillful jobs and self-upgrading. However, some students still find difficulties to learn English in different stage of their academic lives due to some valid reasons.

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English was given a significant role in Sudan and it was the medium of instruction for schools and government institutions, respectively. The students were highly motivated to learn the language as it was taught by native experienced teachers, who were officially seconded by the British Government to teach English in Sudan. At that time, studying English was not only a wise status, but also considered to be a superior quality with full of fun and motivation.

The majority of people who live in Sudan are multilingual in some ways as some of them are originally from African descended countries though each language has its own characteristic. Furthermore, most of the adults speak local languages beside Arabic. It is quite a strange to find someone who is not a bilingual if he is not a trilingual. This explains how Bedawiet speaking children are becoming multilingual by nature.

Bedawiet language is a component of the culture of the Beja tribes those who have lived in the north-eastern part of Sudan for thousands of years. All tribes are preserving their own culture and languages in the face of outside influence coming from the Red Sea. The resistance of their language to outsides culture is clearly rooted.

During the last two centuries, Bedawiet has scripted in Latin characters, which was discovered by a visitor to the region. Roper (1928) reported that sounds have caused difficulties to learners as the phonemic scripts were different from the existing sounds in their national languages.

 While Bedawiet speaking children begin formal education in schools at the age of 6, they have different levels of knowledge of languages. Some are grown with two languages; however, the majority learns Arabic at school.

This research is an attempt to explore the peculiar difficulties, which are likely to encounter Bedawiet pupils who learn English. The Bedawiet pupils are facing all the problems of learning English as a L2. What is peculiar about their difficulties, are round the fact that they first learn Arabic, then they shift to learning English; thus they face the double task of transfer from Bedawiet to Arabic and then from Arabic to English. In this attempt the researcher was greatly influenced by the writing of the followings.

The researcher is a native Bedawiet language speaker. At school, he suffered to communicate with his classmates due to lack of Arabic Language acquisition. Moreover, he express himself to teachers who themselves failed to support him understanding the lessons due to their limited comprehension of the language. When the researcher taught English in schools and at the tertiary level in the same state, he observed some kind of difficulties facing the pupils in different stage.

During the last five decades, third language teaching had been neglected. Cenoz (2013) diagnosed the complexity of acquiring a third language in comparison to second language acquisition. Therefore, this study generally highlights these challenges as a key objective of this project. In addition, it tries to identify the characteristics of a multilingual learner; taking Bedawiet speaking learners as role model.

The current teaching methodologies in Sudan reflect the negligence of English language teaching. Treating English as other academic subjects in Sudanese curriculum has a drawback on specifying clear objectives of teaching English as a third language (Jessner, 2017).

Historically, teaching a foreign language shows ups and downs in the domain of language teaching context. Klein (2003, p. 3), states that language learning is not separate processes standing alone; however, it is interwoven for efficiency. During late 1960s to 1980s the concept of communicative approach had widely spread and its influence in enhancing foreign language teaching strategies was clearly noticeable.

Thomas (1992, p. 53) believed that L3 learners aware of linguistic knowledge much more than L2 learners and they are more sensitive to linguistic input. Learners seem to be more flexible in applying and abandoning strategies. Leung (2002), added Interlanguage (IL), which transfers indirect interference of L1 through the L2 and to the L3. As there are distinctive differences between the structures of these languages, it is expected that learners commit frequent errors in L2 or L3 that happen due to interference of L1 on L2 and L3.

Third language acquisition, -trilingualism-, has become a new field of research that was established during the last few years. Grlessler (2001) refers to speaker's command of more than one language, which does not co-exist as entirely separate spheres, but he adds a huge transfer and interference expected among bilingual or trilingual speakers. He also claims that teachers are responsible for transferring fossilized errors among the pupils (Jessner, 2017).

Bedawiet speaking pupils make a lot of errors while learning English, therefore, this study tries to equip teachers with sufficient information about the causes of these errors; however, recent studies have limited the challenges. The general understanding of these problems has helped teachers overcome these difficulties (Jessner, 2017).

Besides, this study attempts to describe some distinctive features and implications of L3 learning by reporting and discussing the results of the research carried out on L1 and L2. The description based on comparing English sentence structures with Arabic and Bedawiet.

The present study is informative; however, it remains limited in number of ways. It is limited to the errors caused by Bedawiet speaking pupils who learn English as a L3 in Kassala and Red Sea States in Sudan, in the academic year 2018/ 2019. The scope of this paper is limited to the analysis of teachers' responses focusing on their perception about the students' errors addressed in the literature.

## 2. Literature review

### 2.1. First language acquisition

The language that a child acquires from mother and the immediate associated surrounding is called the first language. It is spoken at home and children feel comfortable in using it. This language is also called the children's mother tongue because it is learnt as a native language without being taught in formal situation (Richards, 1992). In this paper, Bedawiet is the first language of the population of this research.

### 2.2. Second language acquisition

Second language acquisition is defined by (Lado's, 1957), It is the structures and the general vocabulary that enables a person to communicate with a normal speed among native speakers of other languages. More precisely, it is the learning of language elements and patterns and using them naturally in second languages.

Studies show 43% of the world populations speaking two languages fluently. In Sudan, there are more than 100 spoken languages beside the Colloquial Sudanese Arabic. Bedawiet is one of these languages, so in this research, Arabic is considered as a second language; however, it is the first formal language used in Sudan.

### 2.3. Third language acquisition

The third language learners are bilinguals who acquire additional language in a school context. The ability to speak more than two languages is involved in comparing bilingual's features to a trilingual in different situations. The person who communicates with more than two languages can be considered as a multilingual whether these languages are active or passive (Cenoz, 2013).

Studies revealed that about 10% of the world populations are trilingual by nature as they live in areas where more than two languages are spoken. Maybe this number will increase in the coming years. This paper refers to English as a third language as Bedawiet speaking pupils learn English as a -(L3)-, before they master Arabic -(L2)-.

### 2.4. Fossilization

Fossilization is a permanent incorrect linguistic feature in learning L2 or L3 that becomes a part of a person's speech or writing. It usually occurs as a result of the teacher's fault in pronouncing or explaining a meaning of a word. It also happens of wrong presentation of grammar items (Richards, 1992).

### 2.5. Interlanguage

Interlanguage is one of the processes of learning a second language by occupying several errors in different ways. These errors occur as the result of borrowing patterns from mother tongue -(Language transfer)-,. It sometimes extends the borrowing patterns from the second language -(TL)-,-(overgeneralization)-, or meanings using the words and grammar -(communication transfer)-, Richards (1992).

### 2.6. Interlingual errors

Richards (1992) believes that interlingual error is the error that is caused by the learner's first language -(L1)-,. For example, the incorrect Arabic sentence ( علي لا يقرأ الآن) = (Ali / not reading now) produced according to the Arabic pattern instead of the English correct sentence (Ali is not reading now).

### 2.7. Intralingual error

Intralingual error is the error that learners make due to the partial learning of an item in second language -(L2)-, (Richards, 1992). In sentences like (She is speaks) learners blend the structures of English (she is speaking), with (she speaks). In

this study, intralingual error refers to all errors which Bedawiet pupils include in a sentence using incorrect Arabic or English rules for various reasons.

### *2.8. Literature related to difficulties of acquiring L2/L3*

Dulay *et al*. (1982) defines interference as a general occurrence of errors as a result of native language features into the target languages. He believes that it happens automatically when the surface structure of the native language -(L1)- transfers onto the target languages -(L2)-. Lott (1983) argues the idea of transferring a language claiming that the errors occur due to implementing rules of mother tongue in foreign languages.

Recently, linguists contributed to improve methods of teaching L2 and L3 to overcome problems causing low competencies and performances. For example, Ellis, (1997) links between the interference, which is the influence of learners' L1 and transfer that occur on the acquisition of L2. Again, he connects learners' expectations in acquiring a language with the probable progress that can happen in learning L2. Second language learners use the knowledge of mother tongue-(L1)-, so that they can construct their own rules until they gradually become proficient in the L2.

The first model is a group of Chinese students speaking -"Cantonese"- (L1), English is their second language (L2) and learning German as is the third language (L3). The 45 German university students completed and submitted a productive task. They were examined in writing and speaking. The results showed the prominent role of L2 in L3 including interlanguage transfer form L2 into L3.

The second model of (Dewaele, 2001), which confirms that trilingualism, is fundamentally different from L2. He approved that L2 learners were considerably competent and used advanced expressions of the target language. They also committed fewer errors than L3 learners.

Hoffmann, (2003) reported strong correlations found between L1 and L2 interaction. He believes that L2 acquisition occurs in adulthood whereas children pick up L1 early. So, the reduction of conflict between L2 and L3 increases the opportunities to interact between L1 and L2.

The focus of these studies was on L1 interference on the L2 and how these processes impact on acquiring a L3. The reviewed studies emphasized on the importance of relating the content of the subject matter with its relevant teaching methods to perform effective teaching.

## 3. Methods

The subjects of this study included EFL teachers who work for the Ministries of Education at Red Sea and Kassala in the academic year 2018/19. Thus, the data for this study was obtained from a random sample of teachers -(N=36)-, from Sudanese Basic Schools. The total number of male was 24 whereas 12 were female. Then the validity of the instrument was tested. The questionnaire was distributed to a group of teachers -(out of the sample)-, to ensure the reliability that coefficient was found to be (0.86).

The study followed a non- experimental design. A questionnaire is used to identify the difficulties that Bedawiet students facing while learning English as a third language. The obtained data were tabulated and analyzed through two types of statistics: descriptive statistics (means, standard deviation).

## 4. Data analysis

The present study aims at finding the difficulties facing Bedawiet speaking pupils who learn English as a third language as perceived by English language teachers. The evaluation was conducted through a questionnaire consisting 39 items about the different type of errors causing difficulties.

To achieve the general objective of the study, a series of research questions were arranged about the different types of errors which can cause difficulties. The questions are rated according to the errors and addressed through descriptive statistics (means and standard deviations). The errors were categorized and the respondents' rate was the difficulties.

Table 1 indicates that Bedawiet speaking pupils' encounter all forms of errors that included in the questionnaire with different degree. The errors are not equally occupied; therefore, the induced error was the most common among Bedawiet speaking pupils whereas the omission error was the least applied. And to see whether male pupils apply the errors as female, two tables were generated to display the applicants' results separately:

Table 2 shows induced and substitution errors were on the top of the difficulties whereas the ambiguous error was applied the least by the male respondents. The significant difference was the low number of overgeneralization errors among the male students.

| S. no. | Error | N O | M | S D |
|--------|-------|-----|---|-----|
| **Table 1: The common errors as perceived by male and female teachers** | | | | |
| 1. | Induced errors | 36 | 2.98 | 2.64 |
| 2. | Substitution errors | 36 | 2.78 | 1.09 |
| 3. | Overgeneralization | 36 | 2.61 | 1.31 |
| 4. | Mis-ordering errors | 36 | 2.56 | 1.14 |
| 5. | Developmental errors | 36 | 2.44 | 1.33 |
| 6. | Addition errors | 36 | 2.41 | 1.29 |
| 7. | Omission errors | 36 | 2.40 | 1.18 |
| 8. | Compound errors | 36 | 2.19 | 1.117 |
| 9. | Ambiguous errors | 36 | 2.64 | 1.073 |

| S. no. | Error | N O | M | S D |
|--------|-------|-----|---|-----|
| **Table 2: The most common errors as applied by male teachers** | | | | |
| 1. | Induced errors | 36 | 2.88 | 0.250 |
| 2. | Substitution errors | 36 | 2.42 | 0.235 |
| 3. | Mis-ordering errors | 36 | 2.71 | 0.259 |
| 4. | Compound errors | 36 | 2.58 | 0.255 |
| 5. | Addition errors | 36 | 2.42 | 0.262 |
| 6. | Omission errors | 36 | 2.25 | 0.225 |
| 7. | Overgeneralizations | 36 | 2.08 | 0.248 |
| 8. | Ambiguous errors | 36 | 2.21 | 0.221 |

Table 3 shows the most common errors, which were occupied by female pupils as perceived by teachers who were rated the induced and substitution errors high as the same as male, whereas the lowest was the ambiguous errors. The table also displays overgeneralization error was the high among the female pupils.

| S. no. | Error | M | S D |
|--------|-------|---|-----|
| **Table 3: The most common errors as applied by female teachers** | | | |
| 1. | Induced errors | 3.17 | 0.505 |
| 2. | Substitution errors | 2.58 | 0.434 |
| 3. | Overgeneralizations | 2.42 | 0.417 |
| 4. | Addition errors | 2.33 | 0.225 |
| 5. | Mis-ordering errors | 2.33 | 0.142 |
| 6. | Compound errors | 2.25 | 0.351 |
| 7. | Omission errors | 2.17 | 0.345 |
| 8. | Developmental errors | 1.92 | 0.358 |
| 9. | Ambiguous errors | 1.72 | 0.250 |

To conclude, male and female teachers who were responded to the questionnaire agreed in identifying the errors occupied by the students. The most significant result among the two samples was the overgeneralization error which was rated high among female pupils.

The majority of the pupils who committed similar errors such as induced error and substitution error. The scale showed higher mean scores for female pupils in the two types of errors, -(3.17)-, and -(2.58)-, than for male pupils, -(2.88)- and -(2.42)-. Ambiguous errors had the lowest mean scores for both male and female pupils, -(2.08)-, and -(1.92)-,.

## 5. Summary of the findings

It is obvious from the results that all types of errors included in the questionnaire stated by male and female Bedawiet speaking pupils as perceived by teachers. However, both males and females yield those errors with different degree. The successive order of these errors is as follow: Induced errors, substitution errors, overgeneralization, mis-ordering, addition, omission, compound, developmental, compound and ambiguous errors. It is clear that the induced error was the most frequent whereas the ambiguous error was the least occupy by the Bedawiet speaking pupils -(male and female)-, as teachers reported. What was remarkable, the ambiguous error that lied towards the end of all lists.

Induced error heads the list of all difficulties. Teachers seem to be influenced by their mother tongue while presenting lessons or maybe they did not model correctly. For example, if a teacher says -"*The weather is more hotter than yesterday*"- ; in this case, the students adopt this kind of error from the teacher and, of course, will reproduce it wrongly. Adopting induced error can be due to young teachers or trainees who were given the responsibilities of teaching the basics of English at schools; however, natives can make similar errors in some way.

Induced errors occur in pronunciation as well grammar and vocabulary; so, if a teacher misleads his students in meaning of a word, the students will definitely use the words incorrectly. Grammar can also confuse the students if the words "*like*" and "*as if*" are used incorrectly. The sentence, -"*He walks like a lion*"- and -"he walks as if he is a lion"- could be acceptable if the word "*like*" and "*as if*" are synonyms. Teachers reported that Bedawiet speaking pupils committed in many errors like these which were taken as a sign of low confidence.

Induced error, substitution and overgeneralization errors are nearly of the same degree of difficulty to all Bedawiet speaking pupils. Furthermore, it is expected that teachers associate Bedawiet sentence structure to the structures of Arabic and English.

Substitution error taps on interaction between linguistic and memory field, so it is more relate to psychology and cognitive abilities that relate to short term memory. Bedawiet students do not hear all Arabic and English sounds as many are not present in Bedawiet. For example, they might produce the sound /s/ instead of /e/, in a word like -"*thin*"-, by substituting with the word, -"*sin*"-, which has a totally different meaning and pronunciation.

Other difficulties such as omission and compound error are less occupied by the students in the report. What is surprising was the place of ambiguous errors. Though it is of paramount importance in comprehension, it seems teachers trained the pupils for this kind of errors. In this vocabulary example, a Bedawiet student may confuse in the meaning of the word -"*bank*"- (river bank), -"*bank*"-, (money), that has more than one meaning. This type of errors can be reduced by putting the word in a context.

It is certain that Bedawiet speaking pupils are likely to build sensible English sentences that teachers do not manage to make use it. Teachers tend to neglect such fruitful abilities though they are providing them with a variety of techniques that improve L3 acquisition.

Our inferential statistics indicate that the groups that responded -(males and females)-, were significantly different on most of the difficulties facing Bedawiet pupils in favour of male pupils. It seems that male pupils were benefited more from the identified difficulties. Thus, they tend to raise their awareness concerning any new hint in tackling any aspects of knowledge.

## 6. Conclusion

The results of this study can be summarized in the following conclusions. The difficulties from the composition data basically are classified into two main types of errors, interlingual and intralingual as follows:

1) Intralingual error proposed to be as a result of double transfer of L1 Bedawiet and L2 Arabic, including both IL forms and IL strategies. It implies the salient influence of the L1 conceptual based and L2 grammar. The questionnaire results indicate that our teachers believe English is far from Arabic and admitted that the Bedawiet speaking pupils were influenced more by Arabic rules in the L3 composition.

2) Interlingual error is proposed to be as a result of the discourse transferring from Bedawiet -( L1)-, and interlanguage transfer of Arabic including IL strategies. Therefore, IL transfer in L3 case, is the transfer of (AIB) namely Arabic interlanguage Bedawiet.

3) The respondents, -(the teachers of English language)-, were generally indicated that the fossilized errors which were transferred to the pupils caused difficulties to Bedawiet speaking pupils. However, the teachers didn't show any reasonable degree of indication with the ambiguous errors.

Overall, the local errors, -(which refer to omission of articles and inflectional morphemes)-, received slightly below-moderate ratings from teachers. However, these types of errors were not hinder composition. Our teachers state that Bedawiet speaking pupils face the above-mentioned difficulties when they communicate.

4) There was a general feeling among the teachers that the errors were not the only difficulties in learning English to Bedawiet speaking pupils. This provides support for decision to think of other difficulties as follows:

a) As far as the script direction and capitalization are concerned, Bedawiet speaking pupils face some difficulties when they first come to write in English. At the early stages of learning English, they might not differentiate between letters such as "b" and "d", "n" and "h", "v" and "u" because the character are similar in appearance.

6) Although, there were errors on which the groups of respondents showed some agreement in their degree of indication, there were others on which the groups varied significantly. When the differences occur, the teacher tend to express an intermediate correlation between the error of induced and substitution.

## 7. Implications and recommendations

The present study basically investigates the difficulties facing Bedawiet speaking pupils who learn English as a third language, in the Basic Stage in Sudan. The results and conclusions have several implications which will be presented in the paragraphs below.

The first category of implications is related to possible future research. One of these implications has to do with kind of errors to be tested. While our study was generally exclusive about the academic and pedagogical aspects it stopped short of covering the full range of aspects. Among the difficulties that could be investigated in future research: (1) the criteria for teachers who work in these areas, and (2) the qualifications and skills of teachers.

Another research-related implication must be with the methodology. While the questionnaire is a respectable technique for our study, it is nevertheless limited. Future research of our Bedawiet speaking pupils' difficulties could go beyond the questionnaire technique and use data sources as texts and interviews.

The most important pedagogical implication of this study is of the induced error, which was improved by training the staff; however, the fossilized errors need to be evaluated.

On the basis of our results, it is recommended the followings.

The recommendations are based on the light of the findings and conclusion of the study. The study recommends that teachers to design pre-teaching activities to maintain the errors.

Researchers are called on to conduct similar studies first, by applying different tools such as a full description of teachers' behavior inside the classroom concerning errors identification. Second, by using equal numbers of samples for each of the variable; the results will not be affected by the differences of numbers of subjects in each cell. Third, by using race as an independent variable, and fourth, by investigating learners' strategies concerning errors and see whether they are interrelated to those teaching strategies.

Finally, it is suggested that Ministry of Education should provide continuing professional development for the staff on the strategies of teaching English as a third language in Sudan. Furthermore, it must send English teachers to English speaking countries for further training.

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## Appendix

| Abbreviations | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| L1 | Mother Tongue/ first language | L3 | Third language |
| EFL | English as a foreign language | IL | Interlanguage |
| EIL | English interlanguage | L1 | Second language |
| ESL | English as a second language | T L | Target language |