Lexical Errors in Third Language Acquisition: A Comparative Analysis of Writing Performance in Rabat-Sale and Souss-Massa Regions of Morocco

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ABSTRACT

The comparative study explores the phenomenon of lexical cross-linguistic influence on high school students' writing performance within two distinct regions of Morocco: Rabat-Sale and Souss-Massa. Using James Taxonomy as a framework, written narratives produced by 200 students from both regions were analyzed focusing on their lexical choices and the occurrence of lexical errors. Distinct patterns of lexical errors, including Calque, Prefix, Over-inclusion, Borrowing, and Omission errors, were identified in students' narratives. The results revealed notable differences in lexical errors between the Souss-Massa and Rabat-Sale regions. Souss-Massa students exhibited higher frequencies of Calque (25), Prefix (20), Over-inclusion (35), and Omission (28), indicating a stronger influence from other linguistic sources and potential issues with precision and clarity in their writing. In contrast, Rabat-Sale students showed a higher frequency of Borrowing (28), suggesting a greater tendency to incorporate foreign language elements into their writing. These results have implications for tailored language education and curriculum development in Morocco and emphasize the importance of considering regional linguistic nuances.

Keywords: lexical errors, James Taxonomy (1998), regional variation, Morocco, language proficiency, multilingual contexts, writing skills, Souss-Massa region, Rabat-Sale Region.

1. INTRODUCTION

Language acquisition is a complex and dynamic process that plays a pivotal role in shaping an individual's ability to communicate effectively and navigate diverse linguistic landscapes (De Angelis, 2007; Hofstede,1986). It is influenced by various factors such as geography, culture, and education. In multilingual societies like Morocco, where Arabic and Amazigh languages coexist alongside other foreign languages as a hallmark of everyday life, the acquisition of a third language (L3) is of particular significance (Cenoz & Gorter, 2011). In this context, understanding the lexical errors made by L3 learners is essential not only for educators and language policymakers but also for linguists seeking to unravel the intricate mechanisms underlying multilingualism (Høigilt & Mejdell, 2017; Ennaji, 2005; Redouane,2016).

The present article embarks on a comprehensive exploration of lexical errors in third language acquisition, with a focus on two distinct regions of Morocco: Rabat-Salé and Souss-Massa. The choice of these regions is not arbitrary but rather driven by the fascinating sociolinguistic dynamics at play. While

Rabat-Salé represents the linguistic environment of Morocco's political and administrative capital, where multiple languages, including Arabic, French, and English, coexist and interact daily, Souss-Massa, in the south of Morocco, reflects a different linguistic landscape with its unique set of linguistic challenges and interactions (Ennaji, 2005).

The acquisition of a third language, in this case, English, in these two regions is marked by a myriad of factors such as socio-economic backgrounds, educational systems, and linguistic contact with other languages. As L3 learners navigate this complex linguistic terrain, they inevitably encounter challenges in the form of lexical errors. These errors encompass a wide range of phenomena, from vocabulary choice and word order to pronunciation and usage, all of which have a profound impact on the quality of written expression.

The primary objective of this study is to conduct a comparative analysis of the lexical errors made by L3 learners in Rabat-Salé and Souss-Massa. By shedding light on the specific types of errors prevalent in each region, as well as the underlying factors contributing to these variations, this research aims to contribute to our understanding of L3 acquisition in multilingual contexts. Furthermore, the findings of this study have the potential to inform language education strategies, curriculum development, and language policy decisions, ultimately enhancing the proficiency of L3 learners in both regions. To attain the general objectives, the present study addresses the following research questions:

Research Question: Does regional variation influence lexical errors in high school students' writing in Morocco?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW
2.1. Lexical errors in Third Language Acquisition

Third language acquisition (TLA) refers to the process of acquiring a new language when an individual already possesses proficiency in two other languages. While TLA offers unique challenges and opportunities, it is not immune to errors, particularly in the lexical domain. Lexical errors in TLA are a common phenomenon, and they can manifest in various ways, impacting both receptive and productive language skills. (Bardel & Falk, 2007; Carvalho & Silva, 2006; De Angelis & Selinker, 2001; Dewaele, 2001; Ecke, 2001; Hammarberg, 2001; Jessner, 2006; Trimasse, 2018).

Lexical knowledge is essential for the mastery of any language since it encompasses all information about the conventional usage of certain words and their relationship to convey meaning. Lexical errors are attributed to it. They can vitally be crucial as they result in communication breakdowns (Llach, 2005b, 2007a). Consequently, unlike syntactic and phonological errors, lexical errors are less tolerated as they hinder communication and cause misunderstanding. One of the key factors contributing to lexical errors in TLA is cross-linguistic influence. Learners often transfer lexical items, structures, and meanings from their first and second languages into their third language. A study by Cenoz, Hufeisen, and Jessner (2001) investigated lexical errors in the written production of trilingual Basque-German-Spanish learners. The researchers found that lexical transfer from the first and second languages significantly contributed to errors in the third language. This study highlights the role of cross-linguistic influence in shaping lexical errors in TLA.

Lexical errors in TLA can also be influenced by cognitive factors. A study by Köpke and Schmid (2004) explored lexical errors in German-French-English trilinguals. They discovered that when learners experienced a high cognitive load, such as in complex sentence processing tasks, lexical errors were more

likely to occur. This suggests that cognitive factors, such as working memory capacity and processing demands, can play a role in the occurrence of lexical errors in TLA. Geographical regional differences also play a role in lexical errors within English. A study by Collins and Mees (2003) investigated the differences in vocabulary and pronunciation between British and Australian English. They highlighted distinct lexical choices and pronunciation patterns in Australian English, such as "biscuit" vs. "cookie." Learners of English may encounter lexical errors when using terms or pronunciations typical of one region in a context where another regional variant predominates.

2.2. The linguistics situation in Morocco

Morocco's linguistic situation is complex and reflects the country's diverse history and culture. The use of multiple languages is prevalent in Morocco, and many Moroccans are proficient in several languages. The official languages of Morocco are Modern Standard Arabic and Amazigh. Modern Standard Arabic is commonly used in government, media, and education and is considered an L2 language in the country. However, Moroccan Arabic, also known as Darija, and Amazigh are the most widely spoken languages and are considered L1 languages in Morocco. They are used in everyday communication (El-Amraoui, 2007; Sadiqi, 2006). All of these languages have been present in the country for thousands of years and are an essential part of Morocco's cultural heritage.

French and Spanish, on the other hand, are also spoken in certain regions of Morocco due to the country's history of colonization. Additionally, English has become an important language in Morocco, as it is widely used in business, tourism, and international communication. The Moroccan government has also recognized the importance of English and has made it a compulsory subject in schools starting from primary education. However, having all these languages with special social power can be challenging as well since a language can still be a source of tension between different communities (Sadiqi, 2006). Based on the 2014 population census that was held in Morocco between 1st and 20 September by the High Planning Commission (HPC), the results showed that there were 67.1% of Amazigh speakers in the region and 70.8% of Moroccan Arabic speakers. In general, these are the commonly spoken and utilized languages within Morocco."

Over the past three decades, Moroccan educational institutions have grappled with the emergence of diverse multilingual identities stemming from various language origins. Within this linguistic mosaic, some learners' first language (L1) is Moroccan Arabic, while others identify with Amazigh. In contrasting scenarios, French serves as the primary L1, particularly in regions like Casablanca and Rabat. Simultaneously, English has garnered increasing attention in Morocco, with language policymakers actively promoting its integration across diverse sectors, spanning business, NGOs, regions and academic institutions. In certain schools and higher education universities, English has even been adopted as the medium of instruction (Sadiqi, 2006).

This multifaceted linguistic heterogeneity presents a challenge when striving to establish a uniform approach to teaching English as a third language (L3). Educational institutions stand as the epicenters where diverse identities and a rich tapestry of languages intersect, fostering an environment where multilingualism thrives. Within this complex milieu, the interplay between previously acquired languages and the process of learning English can give rise to errors among learners. Consequently, educators are tasked with the intricate process of pinpointing the origins of these errors, whether they stem from formal language structures or semantic variations. In light of these complexities, this study occupies a central position, seeking to roles of regional differences in the frequency of lexical errors in English writing.

2.3 James Taxonomy

There exist various taxonomic frameworks designed to systematically identify and categorize lexical errors in the field of linguistics (Aghoulid, 2023; Hamdi, 2016; Saud, 2018). One noteworthy taxonomy in this regard is James' Taxonomy, which was introduced in 1998. James' taxonomy primarily divided lexical errors into two overarching categories: formal and semantic. The formal errors category can be further dissected into three distinct subcategories: misselection, misformation, and distortion. Each of these subcategories offers a specific lens through which to analyze and classify lexical errors. Formal misselections are typified by errors in word selection. In essence, learners commit these errors when they choose a word that is not contextually appropriate or accurate within the given language context. This subcategory delves into the nuances of lexical choice, revealing the intricate decisions learners make while expressing themselves in a foreign language (Aghoulid, 2023).

Misformation, on the other hand, pertains to the creation of words that do not actually exist in the target language. These fabricated words are often derived from the learner's native language, reflecting the influence of their mother tongue on their attempts at language production. Misformation errors unveil how learners grapple with the interplay between their first language and the new language they are acquiring. Lastly, distortion errors are associated with word misspellings resulting from similarities in phonemes or graphemes among words. These errors demonstrate the challenges learners face when navigating the intricate phonological and orthographic aspects of a foreign language. Distortion errors underscore the need for learners to master the fine-grained details of word spelling and pronunciation.

Finally, James' Taxonomy (1998) contributes significantly to the systematic analysis of lexical errors by offering a multifaceted framework that aligns with language proficiency levels (Aghoulid, 2023; Hamdi, 2016; Saud, 2018). By distinguishing between formal and semantic errors and further subdividing formal errors into misselection, misformation, and distortion, James' taxonomy provides a comprehensive and structured approach to understanding the intricate nature of lexical errors in second language acquisition. This framework aids researchers and educators alike in their pursuit of effective language instruction and error analysis.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Participants

For this study, a total of 200 high school students from two distinct regions of Morocco were selected as participants. The participants were chosen using a random sampling method to ensure the representativeness of each region. Specifically, 100 students were selected from the Rabat-Sale region, while the remaining 100 students were chosen from the Souss-Massa region. The choice of these two regions was deliberate, as they represent different linguistic and cultural contexts within Morocco, allowing us to investigate potential regional differences in writing performance.

The selection of high school students as participants was based on the assumption that this age group would have a sufficient level of language proficiency and writing skills to produce meaningful narratives. Additionally, high school students often represent a critical phase in their language development, making them an appropriate population to identify and compare lexical errors. The table below represents a division of the participants

Table 1 Sample Participants' Descriptive Statistics

Region	Number of Participants	Mean Age (Years)	Standard Deviation (Age)
Rabat-Sale	100	17.5	1.2
Souss-Massa	100	17.2	1.4
Total	200	17.35	1.3

3.2. Data Collection instruments and procedures

3.2.1. The Linguistic Background Questionnaire (LBQ)

The Linguistic Background Questionnaire (LBQ) serves as a widely employed data collection tool in language research endeavors. This self-administered questionnaire aims to gather information regarding participants' linguistic backgrounds, encompassing details about their primary language, additional languages spoken, as well as their exposure to and proficiency in these languages (Aghoulid, 2023; Peters, 2010). Utilizing the LBQ provides a notable advantage in comprehending how participants' linguistic backgrounds may impact their language production. In this study, specific items from the LBQ were incorporated, addressing inquiries related to participants' first language (L1), second language (L2), and third language (L3), their daily language of communication, and the language of instruction received during their schooling.

3.2.2. Writing

To collect data for this study, a standardized data collection instrument was designed to elicit written narratives from the participants. Each participant was given a prompt instructing them to write an essay about their best moment in life. This open-ended prompt was chosen to allow students to express themselves freely while providing a context for assessing their writing proficiency. The use of a common prompt ensured that the data collected would be comparable between the two regions.

The choice of a narrative essay task is supported by previous research in language proficiency assessment, as it allows for the evaluation of both linguistic and creative aspects of writing. Furthermore, narratives are a common form of written expression in educational settings, making this task relevant to students' academic experiences. To minimize any potential bias or influence, the prompt was carefully crafted to be neutral, open-ended, and relatable to the experiences of high school students. The following prompt was used:

"Please write an essay about your best moment in life. Describe the event, the emotions you felt, and why it is significant to you. Thank you!"

This prompt allowed participants to express themselves freely while providing a common ground for evaluating their writing proficiency. The assistants ensured a standardized administration of the prompt, explaining the instructions clearly and ensuring that students had a designated time frame to complete their essays.

3.3. Data Analysis

In this study, we employed James Taxonomy as the primary framework for filtering and analyzing the written narratives produced by the participants. James Taxonomy (1998) categorizes errors in written language into 2 main types: Formal and Semantic. The choice of James Taxonomy aligns with the research objectives and allows to systematically identify, categorize and quantify lexical errors, providing a clear

framework for analyzing the influence of regional differences on students' writing proficiency. Each of these major categories was further subdivided into three subcategories, as depicted in the figure below:

Figure 3 James' Taxonomy of Lexical Errors (1998)
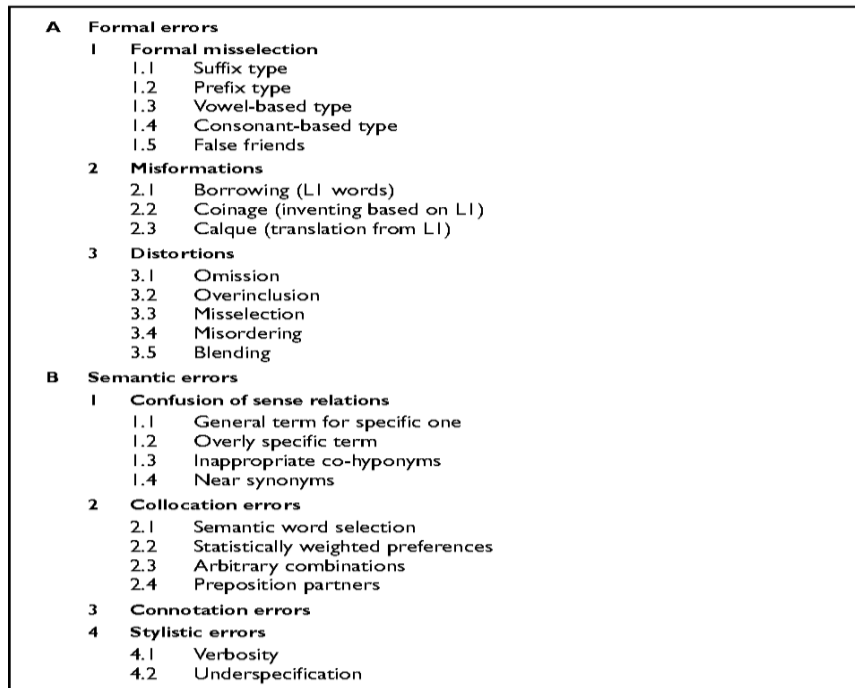
The taxonomy proved to be an effective method for classifying errors and gaining valuable insights into the types of lexical errors and their relationship to CLI (Aghoulid, 2023). Each participant's written narrative was collected in hard copy to preserve the originality of their responses. These handwritten essays were collected immediately after completion and stored securely to prevent any tampering or data loss. The data underwent a thorough analysis process, as outlined below:

Transcription: All written narratives were transcribed electronically to facilitate data analysis.

Lexical Error Identification: We utilized James Taxonomy to identify and categorize lexical errors in the narratives. Lexical errors encompassed incorrect word choices, misuse of idiomatic expressions, and spelling errors. Each error was documented and categorized according to its specific type.

Lexical Choices Analysis: Beyond identifying errors, we conducted an analysis of the lexical choices made by the students. This involved examining the diversity of vocabulary used, the appropriateness of word selection within the given context, and the overall richness of language.

Statistical Analysis: To assess regional differences in writing performance, we quantify and compare the frequency of lexical errors and the quality of lexical choices between the Rabat-Sale and Souss-Massa regions.

3.4. Ethical considerations

The researcher obtained permission from the respective educational authorities in the Rabat-Sale and Souss-Massa regions. Ethical considerations were paramount, and informed consent was obtained

from both the students and their parents or guardians prior to their participation in the study. We ensured that the participants understood the purpose of the research, their rights, and the voluntary nature of their involvement.

4. RESULTS

Our findings reveal significant disparities in lexical errors between the two groups, with the Souss-Massa region students exhibiting a notably higher frequency of lexical errors compared to the Rabat-Sale region students. Additionally, we provide insights into the mean word frequency and the percentage of errors relative to the total number of errors for each region. In this section, we provide a detailed breakdown of the results as suggested in the table below:

Table 2 Frequency, Mean, and Standard Deviation of Common Lexical Errors, Mean Word Frequency, and Percentage of Errors

Lexical Error	Souss-Massa Region	Mean (per student)	Standard Deviation (per student)	Rabat-Sale Region	Mean (per student)	Standard Deviation (per student)
Calque	25	0.25	0.12	15	0.15	0.08
Prefix	20	0.20	0.08	12	0.12	0.06
Over-inclusion	35	0.35	0.14	20	0.20	0.10
Borrowing	22	0.22	0.09	28	0.28	0.13
Omission	28	0.28	0.13	16	0.16	0.08
Total Errors	130	1.30	0.54	91	0.91	0.47
Mean Word Frequency (per student)	400	400	50	500	500	75
Percentage of Errors (%)	27.69%	10.00%	-	23.75%	11.92%	-

Table 2 displays a descriptive analysis of data by providing the frequency of common lexical errors made by students from the Souss-Massa and Rabat-Sale regions. The table offers a comprehensive overview of the differences in error frequencies between the two regions. There are many other errors in the study, but they do not mount to the level of language distortion. Starting with calque errors, Souss-Massa students made a total of 25 calques, with an average of 0.25 per student and a standard deviation of 0.12. In contrast, Rabat-Sale students made 15 calque errors, averaging 0.15 errors per student with a standard deviation of 0.08.

Among the widely identified errors in the writings of the two groups is prefix errors. The students in the study from Souss-Massa region exhibited 20 prefix errors, resulting in an average of 0.20 errors per student, and a standard deviation of 0.08. Meanwhile, their counterparts in Rabat-Sale made 12 prefix errors, averaging 0.12 errors per student, with a standard deviation of 0.06. Regarding over-inclusion mistakes, Souss-Massa students made 35 such mistakes, averaging 0.35 mistakes per student with a

standard deviation of 0.14. Conversely, Rabat-Sale students made 20 over-inclusion mistakes, averaging 0.20 mistakes per student with a standard deviation of 0.10.

The only unique difference in frequency is borrowing Errors. In the Rabat-Sale region, the participants made 28 borrowing errors, resulting in an average of 0.28 errors per student, and a standard deviation of 0.13 which is higher than that counterpart of the Souss-Massa region who produced 22 borrowing errors, averaging 0.22 errors per student, with a standard deviation of 0.09. Another common error category analyzed in this study is omission mistakes. Souss-Massa students made 28 omission mistakes, averaging 0.28 mistakes per student with a standard deviation of 0.13. In contrast, Rabat-Sale students produced 16 omission mistakes, averaging 0.16 mistakes per student with a standard deviation of 0.08.

5. DISCUSSION

The research findings revealed a noteworthy disproportion in lexical error rates between the two regions under investigation. Specifically, the participants from the Rabat-Sale region exhibited a lower frequency of lexical errors compared to their counterparts from the Souss-Massa region. The statistical analysis conducted on the collected data confirmed this discrepancy, with a significant difference observed in lexical error rates. Several factors contribute to this difference including:

5.1. Linguistic Environment

One plausible explanation for the observed difference in lexical error rates is the linguistic environment in each region (Ellis,1988). Rabat-Sale, being the capital of Morocco and a major economic and administrative center, likely exposes its residents to a more diverse linguistic environment. This increased exposure to various languages and cultures may lead to a better grasp of vocabulary and nuances, reducing lexical errors in third-language acquisition (Hyde, 1994). In contrast, Souss-Massa, while culturally rich, may not offer the same linguistic diversity and exposure, which could hinder language learners' lexical development. Secondly, the region's unique exposure to French significantly contributes to its residents' linguistic prowess. As the capital and a major economic center, Rabat-Sale serves as a hub for international interactions and business dealings. This status exposes its residents to a greater influx of French-speaking individuals and opportunities for language immersion (Zouhir, 2013). For instance, the region hosts international conferences, diplomatic events, and multinational corporations, all of which necessitate the use of French as a lingua franca. Consequently, individuals living in Rabat-Sale have more opportunities to practice and refine their French language skills in real-world contexts, ultimately leading to enhanced proficiency levels.

5. 2. Educational Resources and Socioeconomic Factors

The availability and quality of educational resources can significantly impact language acquisition and writing performance. It is conceivable that Rabat-Sale, as a major urban center, has better access to language learning facilities, such as language schools, libraries, and language exchange programs, which can enhance language proficiency and reduce lexical errors. When it comes to socioeconomic factors, including income levels, access to technology, and educational opportunities, they could also contribute to the observed differences in lexical errors (Akhtar & Niazi, 2011; Kormos & Kiddle, 2013). Residents of Rabat-Sale may have higher socioeconomic status on average, granting them better access to educational tools and opportunities for language improvement, including language learning apps and

online courses. In contrast, individuals from the Souss-Massa region might face economic constraints that limit their access to such resources, potentially hindering their language acquisition and resulting in higher error rates.

6. CONCLUSION

This study has explored the phenomenon of lexical cross-linguistic influence in high school students' writing performance in the Rabat-Sale and Souss-Massa regions of Morocco using James Taxonomy as a framework. Our analysis revealed that students from the Rabat-Sale region outperformed their counterparts in Souss-Massa, demonstrating better lexical choices and fewer lexical errors in their written narratives. The study also highlights noticeable disparities in lexical errors, mean word frequency, and the percentage of errors between high school students from the Souss-Massa and Rabat-Sale regions in Morocco. The findings contribute to our understanding of the impact of regional variation on language proficiency and provide valuable insights for language educators and policymakers aiming to enhance writing skills in diverse linguistic regions.

The findings of this study have several implications for language education and policy in Morocco. To address the observed regional disparities in writing proficiency, it is essential to ensure equitable access to quality education and language resources across all regions. Additionally, promoting bilingualism and multilingualism while emphasizing language proficiency in Arabic and Amazigh languages can foster balanced linguistic development among students. Additionally, Further research should delve deeper into the specific linguistic and sociocultural factors that influence writing proficiency among high school students in different regions of Morocco. It is important to acknowledge that this study had some limitations, including the limited sample size and the focus on lexical errors. Future research could overcome these limitations by expanding the sample size and incorporating a broader range of linguistic and sociocultural factors.

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