

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

French culture and civilization was introduced in the Middle East from 1860 to 1914, following the French occupation of the Middle East. During that period, the French language became one of the most important languages taught in the private schools as a second language.

Realizing the importance of languages, the Palestinian Ministry of Education and Higher Education recently introduced other foreign languages besides English. There are presently 14 schools that teach French and two schools that teach German.

The French language became an important foreign language not only in the schools but also in most of the universities in Palestine, for example, Bir-Zet University, An-Najah National University, the Arab American University, and Al-Quds University.

French is an important language in Palestine, because it gives the students the chance to establish social relations with French speakers, and increases students' awareness of other cultures. Further, it can increase employability, due to the large number of French organizations operating in Palestine.

#### 1.1 Statement of the Problem

Morphologically and structurally the Arabic language is different from the French language, for example there is only one past tense in Arabic while in French there are more than four types of past tenses like: the *passé composé*, the *imparfait*, the *plus-que-parfait*, and the *passé simple* in addition to the past tenses in the other modes. French is taught

mainly in private schools, and only in certain public schools; therefore the majority of students do not speak French at an early age and this is the cause of a lot of problems and errors when they learn French later in life.

The learning of the mother tongue is a necessary part of a child's mental and social development within his cultural environment. He receives linguistic immersion every day. His acquisition of the language is unplanned and ongoing. He learns by imitation, association and by trial and error. There is no time schedule set aside for learning. Thus the child is highly motivated to learn his mother tongue; otherwise he will not get his daily needs answered.

Learning a foreign language will not involve the same psychological environment. The learner of a second language usually follows a syllabus, which is examination oriented and set within a certain time frame. If he were motivated by the learning process, his motivation would not be on the same level as that for his first language. Very often too the learner would forget whatever he has learned or acquired once he is out of the formal school environment if he does not have to practise the language.

Some of the habits that the second language learner may use will facilitate the learning process while others delay the acquisition process. Rutherford (1987:7) said that "the learner has to adapt to a new system of speech and a new channel of thinking. This will differ from the one he already knows in ways that are perhaps striking and often even quite spectacular".

Learning a second language grammar is necessary in order to understand the structure of that language and to be able to correctly speak the language. A knowledge of basic expressions without grammar as found in many tourist phrase books is insufficient.

Speaking the language means the ability to vary one's speech pattern every time he uses the second language. A grammatical concept taught has to be applied correctly after it has been understood correctly. Knowledge of the grammar is essential to facilitate speaking, writing, and reading any language. Lim Sep Neo (2001:60) said that "Grammar is not an end in itself but a means to an end".

An important component of grammar is the verbal system of a language. The French verbal system is different from that of the Arabic verbal system, and that could present learning problems to the Arabic learner or at least more effort should be made to understand the new verbal system. The French verbal phrase, which includes the tense, aspect, mood and voice, is one of the most difficult areas of the French language since both the concepts and the terminologies involved are confusing. (Judge and Healy 1983:90)

Arabic, on the other hand has two verbal inflections to show time, one for the past tense and one for the present tense. Other aspects of time are expressed through the use of a set of auxiliary verbs. The past tense in Arabic is represented by taking the infinitive form of a verb and conjugating it to the third person singular.

The structural form of the past tense is one of the easiest grammatical structures in the Arabic language. The verb in the past tense is embedded inside the verb at the infinitive by adding special suffixes to the third singular person form. This form is deprived of the last vowel. So, using *فَعَلَ* (*fa'alah*) as a specimen, we obtain *فَعَلْ* (*fa'al*) (the last vowel (ah) has been removed), and from this form we obtain the different persons of the verb by adding specific suffixes. These suffixes are shown in the table below.

Table 1.1: Suffixes of the Verb in the Past Tense

	Singular (m/f)	Plural (m/f)	Dual (m/f)
1st Person	تُ /tu/	ان /nā/	
2nd Person	تِ /ta/ /ti/	تُمْ /tum/ /tunna/	تُما /tumā/
3rd Person	تِ /a/ /at/	تُوا /ū/ /na/	تُتا /ā/ /atā/

Due to this difference between past tenses in French and Arabic languages, Arab students of French find it difficult to use the French tenses correctly. One area of great difficulty is the use of the past tenses. Besides having to learn the various inflections of the French verbs, students have to deal with the concept of different tenses in the past, which covers both time and aspect.

“Aspect refers to the stage reached by the action or to its duration. Time is a universal concept. It involves the past, the present and the future but it is a non-linguistic concept. Tense is the correspondence between specific linguistic forms and time is a universal concept. In French, time and tense are combined in the various tense forms in ways which are not always easy to analyze, given that time and aspect are fused”. (Judge & Healey: 90).

To illustrate, let us compare the following sentences:

- *Hier, je travaillais dans le jardin, quand soudain j'ai entendu un cri perçant.*
- *Hier, j'ai travaillé dans le jardin toute la journée.*

Both the sentences above refer to the same time “yesterday” but they describe the action from different angles. The first sentence sees the action as ongoing, while the other sees it as completed. To further illustrate let us look at the following examples:

- *Je jouais au tennis tous les matins pendant les vacances.*
- *J'ai joué au tennis tous les matins pendant les vacances.*

These sentences match each other word for word except for the verb which uses different tenses but both tenses refer to the past. The first sentence uses the *imparfait* while the second the *passé composé*. The use of either the *imparfait* or the *passé composé* depends on what we want to express. The *imparfait* is used here if we want to project ourselves in the past *pendant les vacances* while giving prominence to the repetition of the action *tous les matins*. In the second example, with the use of the *passé composé* the action is viewed from the present. We see the total duration of the repetition of the action in the past *pendant les vacances*.

A comparative analysis of French past tenses and the Arabic past tense is expected to help the teacher to anticipate problems that students might encounter while learning French verbs and also the difficulties that they might find in trying to apply what they have learned. Some linguists have pointed out that the difficulties as predicted by contrastive analysis do not always hold true. However, the author is of the opinion that both the Contrastive Analysis approach and the Error Analysis Approach are complementary. The results of the Error Analysis will be useful in explaining the errors, whether they are interlingual or intralingual in nature. An error analysis of the Arab students use of the French language would help to identify the sources of errors. This study focuses on the kind of errors that Arab students tend to make when trying to use the different types of past tenses in French.

## **1.2 Objectives of the Study**

The main objective of this study is to identify and analyze the errors made by Arab students in the use of the past tenses in French. This study also aims:

- a. To show how past time in Arabic is expressed.

- b. To show how past time in French is expressed.
- c. To find out the nature of these errors
- d. To propose pedagogical measures to deal with the difficulties in the use the French past tenses.

In this study, an Error Analysis is conducted in order to identify the errors made by the foreign language students which will inform the teacher about the effectiveness of the materials and other factors. It will also reveal the mechanisms that come into play as the learner tries to learn the language.

In order to determine whether certain errors are caused by mother tongue interference, a Contrastive Analysis is also conducted with the aim of explaining such errors.

### **1.3 Significance of the Study**

The teaching of French as a foreign language is gaining popularity in Palestine. At present, French is one of the three languages offered in many residential schools. The number of schools having French in their curriculum will increase when more teachers who are at present undergoing undergraduate studies in French graduate from An-najah National University or return to Palestine from overseas.

In the institutions of higher learning, French is also offered as an elective subject in many universities in Palestine. In the An-najah National University, French started as a two-hour elective course offered by the English Department in the Faculty of Arts. In 1999, the Faculty opened a department of French language after they noticed the increasing number of students taking French as an elective course. The Department offers a bachelor degree in French language and literature.

The number of Palestinian students of French has increased tremendously although many students have problems in understanding the French verbal system. Unlike the Arabic verbal system, it is more complicated with its moods, tenses and inflections. As such, the study is undertaken with the hope that it will prove useful to teachers of French in Palestine with regard to the following:

- a. Diagnosing their student's learning problems in French
- b. Preparing remedial lessons.
- c. Designing effective teaching and testing materials.

#### **1.4 Methodology**

In this study, two complementary approaches are used, that is Contrastive Analysis (CA) and Error Analysis (EA). Carl James calls it the CA/EA analysis. First a CA is conducted by describing and comparing the Arabic past tense with the French past tenses. This is followed by an EA on the use of four past tenses in French by Arab learners.

##### **1.4.1 The Structural Model**

In contrastive analysis, selected linguistic features of two or more languages are compared with the aim of finding out the similarities and differences between them.

From the perspective of genealogy and typology, both French and Arabic are different. French is a Romance language, which falls within the Indo-European group of languages. Arabic is a sub-branch of the central group of West Semitic languages closely related to Aramaic languages.

In this research, the French past tenses and the Arabic past tenses are compared using the structural model. Lado gives guidelines for the procedures of comparing language structures:

*We begin with an analysis of the foreign language and compare it structure by structure with the native language. For each structure we need to know if there is a structure in the native language1) signalled the same way, that is, by the same formal device, 2) having the same meaning, and 3) similarly distributed in the system of that language. (1957:66)*

Each structure compared should be in pairs i.e. each L2 structure needs to be analyzed to see if that structure has a form, meaning and distribution which is the same in the L1 structure.

S.N. Sridhar in his article “Contrastive analysis, Error analysis and Interlanguage” says that the main principle in CA methodology is that the structure of both languages needs to be described using the same theoretical model:

*The prerequisite for any contrastive study is the availability of accurate and explicit description of the language under comparison. It is also essential that the descriptions be theoretically compatible. (Sridhar, in Fisiak, 1981: 214)*

#### **1.4.2 Rational for the Structural Model**

In the seventies and the eighties, researchers preferred a transformational grammar model as the notion of “deep structure” and “surface structure” reveals that many structural differences between the source language and the target language are merely superficial. Similar deep structure features in both languages may be expressed differently in the surface structure. (Nickel, 1971:5) But it has been pointed out that it is precisely these “superficial” similarities and differences of source language and target language surface structure that generate errors. Interference causes transfer of features of the source language surface structure to the target language. This generates errors wherever the source language



and the target language surface structures are different. Common deep structure features of both languages are largely irrelevant in this process.

In this study where the task is to compare and contrast the French expressions of past time through the use of 4 past tenses (*passé composé*, *passé simple*, *imparfait*, and *plus-que-parfait*) with that of the Arabic past tenses, the structural approach is chosen as the model.

### **1.4.3 Error Analysis as a Complement to Contrastive Analysis**

Stockwell states that the comparison of sources of interference, that is, contrastive analysis could be approached in two ways:

*...by collecting lists of errors students have made, and then trying to describe the conflicts between the systems that give rise to such errors, or by setting up systematic comparison which scans the differences in structure in search of sources of interference, and predicting that such-and-such errors will occur from such-and such conflicts. (1968:18-19)*

The first approach is EA and the second is CA. Stockwell adopts the second approach but it is somewhat tempered by the first.

James thinks that EA and CA studies should not be presented as two propositions of an alternative choice. They should in fact complement each other:

*...each approach has its vital role to play in accounting for L2 learning problems. They should be viewed as complementing each other rather than as competitors for some procedural pride of place. (1980:187)*

In this study an EA is carried out to collect the errors, which are evaluated and tabulated according to the categories mentioned above. The errors produced are then discussed in terms of negative transfer as well as intralingual and developmental errors. The scores of the subjects are also tabulated and illustrated in graphs to bring out the distributional patterns of the scores.

## 1.5 Scope and Limitations of the Study

This study focuses on the occurrence of linguistic errors in the use of past tense among Arab students through error analysis. This study focuses on the use of the French past tenses of the indicative mood by Arab learners who have already completed three years in the French language and literature program in An-najah National University. A test was conducted for the students at the beginning of the fourth year.

The test did not include the past anterior (*passé antérieur*) as this tense is not covered in the first three years. Thus the use of the tenses covered in the study were the perfect tense or compound past (*passé composé*), the simple past (*passé simple*), the imperfect or progressive past (*imparfait*) and the pluperfect (*plus-que-parfait*).

## 1.6 Definition of Relevant Concepts

In this dissertation, the concepts used are as follows:

- a. Contrastive analysis (CA) - describes the structural differences and similarities of two or more languages. Contrastive Analysis was used extensively in the field of Second Language Acquisition, as a method of explaining why some features of a Target Language were more difficult to acquire than others. According to the behaviourist theories, language learning was a question of habit formation, and this could be reinforced or impeded by existing habits. Therefore, the difficulty in mastering certain structures in a second language (L2) depended on the difference between the learners' mother language (L1) and the language they were trying to learn. (Ellis, 1994:24)

- b. Error Analysis (**EA**) - in the field of applied linguistics, EA is the study of the type and the quantity of errors that occur. It also studies the types and causes of language errors. Errors are classified according to:
  - a. Modality: level of proficiency in speaking, writing, reading, and listening.
  - b. Linguistic levels: pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, and style.
  - c. Form: omission, insertion, substitution.
  - d. Type: systematic errors which means errors in competence and occasional errors which means the errors in performance.
  - e. Cause: interference or interlanguage.
  - f. Norm or system.
- c. First Language (**L1**) - also mother tongue, native language, arterial language, or L1 is the language a human being learns from birth. These terms are used to refer to Arabic language.
- d. Second Language (**L2**) - target language, foreign language- these terms refer to any language learned after the first language (L1). These terms are used to refer to French as language that the subjects are learning formally after English.
- e. Second Language Acquisition (**SLA**) – is the process by which people learn a second language in addition to their native language. Here it is used to refer to the learning of French.

### **1.7 The French Language**

French is one of the many Romance languages which developed from the spoken form of Latin used throughout the Roman Empire. In medieval times the French dialects of the north and centre were known collectively as the *langue d'oïl* and the dialects of the south the *langue d'oc*. (Harris & Vincent, 1988:14)

Some linguists refer to the collection of *oïl* languages in the period of 1300 AD, as old French. The earliest extant text in French is the Oaths of Strasbourg. King Francis I<sup>st</sup> made French the official language of administration and court proceedings in France in 1539, replacing Latin.

The dialect in that period is referred to as Middle French. The first grammatical description of French, the *Traité de la grammaire française* by Louis Maigret, was published in 1550 AD. Many modern French words that originate from other languages were introduced in this period.

The French language in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries is sometimes referred to as Classical French. Many linguists simply refer to French language from the seventeenth century to today as Modern French.

The foundation of the “French Academy” in the seventeenth (1635) century by Cardinal Richelieu created an official body for purification and preservation of the French language. The foundation still exists and contributes to the policing of the language and the adaptation of foreign words and expressions. From the seventeenth to the nineteenth centuries, France was the leading power of Europe and French was the language of educated people.

French nowadays is the language of about 68 million people living in France in addition to the French-based creoles spoken in French overseas departments and territories. It is also an official language in addition to another language in Belgium, Luxemburg, Switzerland, Quebec in Canada and other countries in Africa. It is the official language in another twelve countries in Africa (Harris & Vincent, 1988:14). There are 200 million French speakers around the world in the 70 member states and governments of the international organisation of La Francophonie ([www.francophonie.org](http://www.francophonie.org), 2009).

There is a great deal of diversity today in terms of regional accents and words, but with the ever increasing loss of lifelong attachments to a specific region and the growing importance of the national media, the future of specific "regional" accents is often difficult to predict. The French nation-state, which appeared after the 1789 French Revolution and Napoleon's empire, unified the French people in particular through the consolidation of the use of the French language.

## **1.8 The Arabic Language**

Modern Arabic is considered to be part of the Arabo-Canaanite sub-branch of the central group of West Semitic languages. While Arabic is not the oldest of the Semitic languages, it shares many features with the common ancestor for all Semitic languages in the Afro-Asiatic group of languages: Proto-Semitic whose phonological, morphological, and syntactic features have been determined by linguists. Many linguists consider Arabic to be the most Semitic of any modern Semitic languages in terms of how completely it preserves the features of Proto-Semitic.

### **1.8.1 History of the Arabic Language**

The earliest Proto-Arabic or Ancient North Arabian texts are the Hasaeen inscriptions of eastern Saudi Arabia, from the eighth century BC, written not in the modern Arabic alphabet, nor in its Nabataean ancestor, but in variants of the epigraphic South Arabian alphabet (known as musnad **المُسند**). These are followed by sixth-century B.C. Lihyanite texts from southeastern Saudi Arabia and the Thamudic texts found throughout Arabia and the Sinai, and not in reality connected with Thamud. Later came the Safaitic inscriptions beginning in the 1st century B.C., and the many Arabic personal names attested in

Nabataean inscriptions (which are, however, written in Aramaic). From about the second century B.C., a few inscriptions from Qaryat al-Faw (near Sulayyil) reveal a dialect which is no longer considered "Proto-Arabic", but Pre-Classical Arabic.

By the fourth century A.D., the Arab kingdoms of the Lakhmids in southern Iraq, the Ghassanids in southern Syria and the Kindite Kingdom emerged in Central Arabia. Their courts were responsible for some notable examples of pre-Islamic Arabic poetry and for some of the few surviving pre-Islamic Arabic inscriptions in the Arabic alphabet.

Arabic is a Semitic language with about 221 million speakers. It is the main language in Algeria, Bahrain, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Oman, Palestine, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Syria, Tunisia, UAE and Yemen. Arabic is the Language of the Quraan, the book of Islam. Muslims all over the world learn the Arabic language to recite the Quraan and thus it is also spoken as a second language in Afghanistan, Chad, Cyprus, Djibouti, Eritrea, Iran, Kenya, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Uzbekistan, Somalia, Tajikistan, Tanzania, and Turkey.

### **1.8.2 Dialects**

“Colloquial Arabic” is a collective term for the spoken varieties of Arabic used throughout the Arab world, which differ radically from the literary language. The main dialectal division is between the North African dialects and those of the Middle East, followed by that between sedentary dialects and the much more conservative Bedouin dialects. Speakers of some of these dialects are unable to converse with speakers of another dialect of Arabic from the first interview; in particular, while Middle Easterners can generally understand one another easily, they often found it difficult to understand Moroccan.

One factor in the differentiation of the dialects is influence from the languages previously spoken in the areas, which have typically provided a significant number of new words, and have sometimes also influenced pronunciation or word order; however, a much more significant factor for most dialects is, as among Romance languages, retention (or change of meaning) of different classical forms. Thus Iraqi *aku*, Levantine *fih*, and North African *kayən* all mean "there is", and all come from classical Arabic forms (*yakūn*, *fīhi*, *kā'in* respectively), but now sound very different. The major groups are:

- Egyptian Arabic “مصري”: spoken by about 79 million people in Egypt and perhaps the most widely understood variety, due to the popularity of Egyptian-made films and TV shows
- Maghrebi Arabic “مغربي”: includes Algerian Arabic, Moroccan Arabic, Tunisian Arabic, Maltese and western Libyan Arabic. The Moroccan and Algerian dialects are each spoken by about 20 million people.
- Sudanese Arabic “سوداني”: spoken in Sudan and continued into Chad by about 19 million people
- Levantine Arabic “شامي”: spoken by Western Syrian, Lebanese, Palestinian, western Jordanian and Cypriot Maronite Arabic by about 20 million people.
- Iraqi Arabic “عراقي”: this dialect and Khuzestani Arabic are spoken in Iraq and Iran. There are significant differences between the more Arabian-like gilit-dialects of the south and the more conservative qeltu-dialects of the northern cities. It is spoken by about 14 million people.
- East Arabian Arabic “بحريني”: spoken in eastern Saudi Arabia, western Iraq, eastern Syrian, Jordanian and parts of Oman.
- Gulf Arabic “خليجي”: spoken in Bahrain, Saudi eastern province, Kuwait, UAE, Qatar, and Oman.
- Yemeni Arabic “يمني”: spoken in Yemen to southern Saudi Arabia.

Other varieties include:

- Ḥassānīya “حساني”: spoken in Mauritania, Mali and Western Sahara.
- Hijazi Arabic “حجازي”: spoken in western Saudi Arabia.
- Najdi Arabic “نجدي”: spoken in Najd region of central Saudi Arabia
- Andalusī Arabic “اندلسي”: spoken in Iberia until the seventeenth century.
- Siculo Arabic “صقلي”: spoken in Sicily, South of Italy until the fourteenth century.
- Maltese “ماليطي”: spoken on the Mediterranean island of Malta, is the only one to have established itself as a fully separate language, with independent literary norms. Apart from its phonology, Maltese bears considerable similarity to urban varieties of Tunisian Arabic. However in the course of history, the language has adopted numerous loanwords, phonetic and phonological features, and even some grammatical patterns, from Italian, Sicilian, and English. It is also the only Semitic tongue written in the Latin alphabet.

### **1.9 The Situation of the French Language in Palestine**

The Palestinian National Authority took over the responsibility of education in Palestine in 1994 after the peace process from which the Palestinians gained some civilian authority in their cities of the west bank and Gaza strip. The Ministry of Education and Higher Education was established in the same year.

Foreign languages were introduced into schools and universities besides English. There are presently 14 schools that teach French and two schools that teach German. French has become the second foreign language in Palestine after English. More than 2500 students study French in school (both public and private) and at An-Najah National University in the city of Nablus.

In An-Najah University, the Department of French offers a single specialization in French language and literature. Students wishing to obtain a Bachelor of Arts degree in French must complete successfully 143 credit hours. These include university, college and



department compulsory and elective courses, in addition to six-credit hour "free" courses. For the other three universities in Palestine, French is offered as an elective course in the university three hours a week for four months.

Teaching French is important because it improves the social relations of Palestinian students with French speakers, and increases their awareness of other cultures. This urged some international organizations like the UN, due to local demand, to teach French in Palestine, running on similar principles as the English classes. They ran a trial of French classes in some schools and centres and the follow-up evaluation showed that the students were highly motivated and wanted to continue learning French.