

Arabic

| Category | What the language does | Comments: How English differs and/or how the language will interfere with English | Example or description of errors |
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| Phonology (the sounds that exist in the language) | | | |
| Vowels | Arabic has fewer vowels than English. | This can interfere with pronunciation and spelling in English. | May confuse words like sheep/ship bed/bad |
| Vowels | Arabic does have many consonant clusters ("spl" is "split" for example). | Vowels will be inserted in English words with consonant clusters. This is limited to speech. | split → spilit |
| Consonants | There is no 'th' sound in Arabic, 'f' will often substitute for 'v', and 'b' and 'p' will often stand in for each other. | An English speaker will be able to understand an Arabic speaker in speech, but an Arabic speaker tends to spell word the way the speaker pronounces them. | [See examples below under "Orthography: Spelling rules"] |
| Stress | Stress is predictable in Arabic (although each dialect has its own pattern). For example, the stress may be on the first syllable every time. | English has variable stress. The variability even affects words présent (introduce) and présent (a gift; now). | This mainly affects reading aloud. |
| Orthography (spelling) | [NB: This is the main source of errors.] | | |
| Alphabet | There is no upper and lower case in the Arabic alphabet. | In English, proper nouns begin with capital letters and the beginning of sentences start with capital letters. | An Arabic writer may not capitalize the first letter of a sentence. Or the writer may be inconsistent with capitalizing proper nouns. |
| Spelling | Arabic has a consonant root system which means a series of consonants would be the equivalent to a root word in English. Roots are distinguished by adding vowels which are not letters in Arabic, but diacritics (little markings above or below the consonants). | Arabic speakers may confuse English words that have the same consonant series but different vowels. | beat, bit, bet, bait These words are 'b'+vowel+'t' but are totally unrelated in meaning. |
| Phonetic based spelling | Arabic speakers try to find rules in English spelling when there are none. | phonetic exceptions | husbund, biginner |
| Phonetic based spelling | | b/p substitutions | beoble, hapit |
| Phonetic based spelling | | spell by analogy to another word | languidge (cf. knowledge) |

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| Phonetic based spelling | | when English spelling is inconsistent, Arabic speakers tend to create consistency | high → hight (rather than height) speak → speach (rather than speech) |
| False cognates (words that look similar in both languages, but have different meanings; in reading and writing they may think/intend the meaning of the original language) | Word from the language | Meaning of the word | English word used |
| | Salaam | peace; greeting | peace or greeting (interchangeably) |
| | [NB: There are not many false cognates between English and Arabic. There are false idioms, however. For example, “to see the light” in English means “to begin understanding something”, but in Arabic “to suddenly realize something or to begin having strong religious beliefs.” They may use idioms that are not quite right.] | | |
| Syntax (parts of speech and rules) | [NB: Sentence level errors tend to be restricted to beginners. Spelling and stylistic (see below) issues affect all levels.] | | |
| Verbs (general) | Verbs carry information about person, number, identifying subject from object through various affixes. | This may affect word order or result in unnecessary words in a sentence. | ‘John he works there.’ The ‘he’ would be encoded on the verb in Arabic. |
| Verbs (auxiliary) | Arabic does not have the verbs ‘to be,’ auxiliary ‘do,’ or modals | These verbs might be omitted or overused in English sentences. | From the possible that I am late. (Intended: I may be late.) Do I must do that? (Intended: Must I do that?) |
| Verbs (with prepositions/particles) | There are no phrasal or prepositional verbs in Arabic | In English, there are phrasal: throw out, bring up, fill out, etc prepositional: talk to, help with, go out, etc | This can manifest in many ways from using the wrong particle/preposition to using a different verb that may be stylistically or pragmatically wrong. |
| Verbs (Tense) | Tenses in Arabic only distinguish perfect (completed) and imperfect (not yet completed/ongoing) | This can lead to inconsistent or awkward verb usage. This can even be seen when trying to incorporate auxiliary ‘do’ | ‘The minister arrived (perfect) while he carries (imperfect) an important letter from the president’ with the intended meaning of ‘The minister arrived carrying an important letter from the president.’ ‘I didn’t went to school.’ |
| Nouns | Marking possession with ’s is difficult. A more literal translation into English of Arabic possession would be ‘the X of the Y’. | In English, it’s possible to show possession with “the X of the Y” or with ’s . | The tendency is to use the ‘of’ construction: ‘the book of John’ rather than ‘John’s book’ |

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| Articles | While Arabic does have a marker for indefiniteness (the articles <i>a/an</i> English), it is rarely used in either speech or writing. Instead, indefiniteness is marked by the absence of a definite marker (the article <i>the</i> in English) | There are no hard-and-fast rules about when to use the indefinite article and when to the definite article. Generally, English uses indefinite when something is mentioned that is not specific or the thing is new to the conversation. The definite article is used to mention a specific thing or to refer to something that has already been mentioned in a conversation. | This makes mastery of English articles quite difficult. The indefinite article may not be used at all. The definite article may be used improperly. |
| Adjectives | Adjectives follow the noun in Arabic. | An Arabic speaker may use the Arabic word order although this tends to be limited to beginners. | He had a dog brown. |
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| Style | <p>Redundancy, overassertion, and exaggeration is encouraged in the language, in speech, but especially in writing.</p> <p>In Arabic, directness can lead to misunderstanding even so much as assuming the speaker means the opposite of what is said.</p> <p>Redundancy is considered eloquent and helps stress the main idea.</p> | | |
| | <p>Run-on sentences are joined through commas and using conjunctions rather than subjunctions. Other than commas and periods, other forms of punctuation do not effectively exist.</p> <p>This correlates with the above point. It is considered eloquent to write this way, and it is done in formal settings.</p> <p>For example: 'I was very astonished and a little bit frightened, and when I saw my father and mother a little bit confused, I tried to be courageous, and I went out to see what was happening'</p> | | |
| | <p>Arabic essay and paragraph structure is circular and indirect.</p> <p>English writing style is such that ideas are presented linearly and clearly. This is considered cold and impersonal to Arabic speakers.</p> | | |
| Culture | <p>Speakers of Arabic generally have pride in their language. They see it as a language of prestige as the language has contributed to the Western sciences in math, chemistry, geography, philosophy.</p> <p>They place value on learning English and are generally receptive to the task. However, with fluid volatility in Arabic speaking countries, students from one country may feel differently than students from another. For example, a study from 2010 shows growing negative attitude toward English in Kuwait (stemming mainly from having English <i>in</i> the country).</p> | | |
| | <p>Minorities are identified by their language or religion.</p> <p>Be aware of the complex socio-political relationship among the Arabic speaking countries. Use whatever label the student uses when self-identifying.</p> | | |

Although English learning may start at a young age (the equivalent of 7th grade in America) in Arabic speaking countries, the programs have been shown to be inadequate for proper English language learning. Their skill in reading tends to be the most well developed.

Therefore, years of study does not imply complete proficiency

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