

## **The Development of the Copula among Moroccan Learners of English: The Lightness Of Be**

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**Abstract:** Acquiring English grammar is often treated as a direct translation process. Language transfer is a result of this translation. In foreign language learning, when learners fail to understand the structure of L2, they most likely resort to L1 to generate sentences in L2. Working on this assumption, this study aims to determine and account for the copula omission elicited from the speech errors of Moroccan learners of English. The analysis has been carried out within the framework of Error Analysis (EA) and Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis (CAH). This study also explores the sources of making this grammatical error and examines the linguistic environments where learners omit the copula *be*. The data collection instruments are a teachers' questionnaire and a spoken test. In the questionnaire, the targeted subjects are 40 Moroccan teachers of English. As for the test, the participants are 80 Moroccan 1<sup>st</sup> year baccalaureate students of English enrolled at Ibn Abbad High School, Kenitra. The study's qualitative findings, first, reveal that Moroccan learners of English omit *be* while speaking, and more frequently in situations where Arabic does not require the use of the copula, namely the present tense, progressive aspect, and passivization. Second, the main source of this error is the negative transfer from Moroccan Arabic (MA) into English. The study ends with some pedagogical implications.

**Keywords** - contrastive analysis hypothesis, copula, error analysis, interlanguage, language transfer

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### **I. INTRODUCTION**

Second Language Acquisition (SLA) is broad and has been a fertile field for research. Learning processes have been the interest of many scholars. Language learning is often explained by trial-and-error process, in which a learner forms hypotheses, errs to prove them, and makes corrections to adjust them. In language learning, learners encounter some difficulties. This study focuses on making errors as one of the most problematic issues faced in learning. This phenomenon has been approached from various perspectives to explore the sources of errors. The main aim of the present study is then to analyse the "interlanguage" of Moroccan learners of English to explore the sources of copula omission.

The study is conducted within the principles of CA and EA. These two approaches look at errors from different perspectives. Albeit CA and EA are different approaches, they can complement each other. CA centres on the types of errors resulting from L1 transfer "interlingual errors", whereas EA emphasises the errors made by learners of second language "intralingual errors". The former contrasts the mother tongue with the target language(s) and claims that all errors are traceable to the learners' L1 due to the linguistic differences between the languages. The latter claims that L1 interference is just one factor among others such as the overgeneralization of the L2 rules. Through CA and EA, the sources of making errors can be predicted and through analysing these errors, textbook designers and teachers can gain some insights into designing more effective teaching materials.

Previous studies in the Arabic context have shown that the omission of the copula *be* is the result of the negative transfer from the mother tongue as Arabic and English are structurally dissimilar. The present study investigates this linguistic aspect among Moroccan learners of English. It examines whether the interference of Moroccan Arabic (L1) is the source of the copula omission. Unlike the previous studies, which focus on the written form, the present study explores the sources of omission at the level of speech. This choice is motivated by the fact that speaking is spontaneous and more natural, whereas writing is artificial as it necessitates prior thought and actual teaching.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

### 2.1. Second language acquisition (SLA)

SLA is a sub-discipline of applied linguistics. It refers to any language acquired<sup>1</sup> after L1 acquisition. In this sense, SLA is different from L1. The latter is acquired by every normal child before the age of puberty [1]. It takes place in dissimilar conditions from SLA including the context, amount of time available, age, motivation and attitude. By contrast, SLA is an umbrella term that is used generally to cover both processes of SLA: natural acquisition<sup>2</sup> and artificial acquisition [2].

Some applied linguists use “learning” and “acquisition” synonymously, while others maintain a contrast between the two terms. However, learning, on the one hand, denotes a conscious process involving the study of explicit rules of language and monitoring one’s performance, as it is often typical of classroom learning that involves a teacher who guides the process of learning [2]. Acquisition, on the other hand, refers to a spontaneous and non-conscious process of rule internalization resulting from exposure to comprehensible input. Its use is limited to first language acquisition. In this study, the term acquisition and learning are used as synonymous.

### 2.2. Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis vs. Error Analysis

In the middle of the twentieth century, applied linguists were very much interested in the study of two languages in contrast in the areas of syntax, vocabulary, and sound systems. This led to the emergence of new analyses: the Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis and Error Analysis.

CAH is originally developed by Fries [3] and expanded by Lado [4]. It is an area of comparative linguistics<sup>3</sup> that is concerned with the similarities and differences of two languages. Some of its assumptions include the prediction of language learning difficulties by comparing learners’ L1 and L2 linguistic structures; such comparison will reveal the linguistic structures that may comprise more learning difficulty to learners and prolong the process of learning; designing teaching material can rely on CAH’s principles to avoid language transfer. In this regard, Lado [4] posits “the teacher who compares between the foreign language and the mother-tongue of the learners will identify the problems and be capable of showing them (problems) to the learners” (cited in [2] [p.23]). Both L1 and the target language should be contrasted to identify their similarities and differences in phonology, syntax, and morphology, along with their culture. Indeed, the comparison between L1 and target language (TL) and the culture of the learner leads to predict and describe the patterns which cause difficulty in learning. The similarities between L1 and TL facilitate the processes of learning. By contrast, the differences between the two make it difficult.

CAH has contributed to language teaching through predicting the difficulties in learning a language. Fries [3] states that “The most efficient materials are those that are based upon a scientific description of the language to be learned carefully compared with a parallel description of the native language of the learner” (cited in [5] [p. 141]). In the process of making a contrastive analysis of two languages, the following are the overall steps that are usually adopted:

- Briefly describing the two languages,
- Selecting specific areas/items of two languages for a detail-oriented comparison,
- Comparing and identifying the similarities and differences,
- Predicting areas that are likely to cause errors,
- Testing these predictions.

However, CAH was subject to criticism. One of its shortcomings is that it “... could not fulfil its promise, and its proponents were obliged to make more modest claims” [5] [p.142]. The criticism results in two versions of CAH: the strong form and the weak one. The strong version argues that all errors can be predicted by identifying the differences between the native and target languages. The weak version, on the other hand, has no more than a diagnostic role; its aim is to provide an explanation of the errors’ sources in language learning. The criticism paved the way to the emergence of EA.

EA, which was developed by Corder in the 60s, made a radical change in the field of applied linguistics in terms of investigating second language acquisition. It is “...an evaluative technique or procedure of teaching and learning” [4] [p.140]. It is associated with the mentalist view. Errors used to be perceived as “flaws” that

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<sup>1</sup>In this sense, the term “acquisition” and “learning” are used interchangeably (as synonyms). Krashen (1981) was the first to maintain a difference between them: “acquisition” refers to acquiring language (mostly L1) in a natural environment, whereas “learning” is related to any language learnt in an artificial or classroom environment (cited in [2]).

<sup>2</sup>In this respect, it refers to acquiring any language after L1 in a non-artificial context where the conditions of L1 acquisition are exhibited. For example, acquiring Spanish by Moroccan immigrants in Spain is a case of second (not foreign) language acquisition, because this language is necessary for survival in this society.

<sup>3</sup>There are two types of contrastive linguistics; firstly, theoretical contrastive linguistics that contrasts the phonology, syntax, and morphology to describe the similarities and differences of two languages; secondly, applied contrastive linguistics is a practical interpretation of the theoretical comparative linguistics. It compares the linguistic and non-linguistic (such as cultural) components of two languages to provide the teacher with insights that s/he needs [5].

must be eradicated. With Corder, the concept of error has taken a new turn. Errors become 'significant in and of themselves'. For learners themselves, errors are 'indispensable' as committing errors is a natural step in the process of language learning. Making errors is a sign of learning. Errors "...are best not regarded as the persistence of old habits, but rather signs that the learner is investigating the systems of the new language" [6] [p.97]. Similarly, Gass and Selinker [7] consider errors as "red flags" that indicate evidence of the learners' linguistic knowledge of target language. Importantly, error analysts claim that making errors is not only traceable to L1 interference, but the result of signs or reflexes of a dynamic learning process as well. Errors have a psycholinguistics basis in the sense that they reveal specific learning strategies such as errors of overgeneralization and errors resulting from the partial applications of specific rules.

Corder [8] makes a distinction between "those errors which are the product of chance circumstance and those which reveal the learner's underlying knowledge of the language to date" [p.10]. The former refers to a mistake, whereas the latter is an error. Brown [9] defines errors as an observable deviation made by a learner who has not mastered yet the rules of the target language. They are errors of competence that reflect the students' gaps in knowledge of language patterns as they refer to learners' competence. A mistake, on the other hand, refers to a performance error; it is a failure of using a known system correctly. It is due to the neurophysiological breakdown or imperfection in the processes of encoding and articulating speech. Unlike errors, mistakes are self-corrected, as the learner is capable of recognizing them. They derive from performance variables, for example, fatigue, lack of attention, hunger, shyness, stress, etc. Gass and Selinker [7] also describe errors as systematic, which are likely to occur repetitively in consistent phonological, morphological, or syntactic environments. Such errors are not recognized by the learner.

### **2.3. Sources of errors**

#### **2.3.1. Interlingual (interference) transfer**

This source of errors results from negative transfer. It is caused by the learners' native language. It is also known as interference in the literature. Richards [10] defines it as "... the use of elements from one language while speaking another and may be found at the level of pronunciation, morphology, syntax, vocabulary, and meaning" [p.36]. It is the transfer of the mother tongue linguistic structures into the target language. For instance, an English speaker learning French produces *\*Elle regarde les* (she is looking at them) following the word order of English, instead of the correct sentence *Elle les regarde* (*\*she them is looking at*).

#### **2.3.2. Intralingual (developmental) transfer**

Another source of errors is intralingual transfer or overgeneralization. It is perceived to be the negative counterpart of interlingual transfer. Brown [9] defines overgeneralization as "... a process that occurs as the second language learner acts within the target language generalizing a particular rule or item in the second language ... beyond legitimate bounds" [p.83]. The overgeneralization of rules also occurs in acquiring the native language. For instance, a child, at a particular level of acquiring English, overgeneralizes the rules of the inflectional morpheme of the past tense +ed to irregular verbs such as *\*goed* and *\*flied*.

#### **2.3.3. Context of learning**

Context refers to the "classroom situation". Within the context of classroom, the teacher or the textbook can be the source of errors. As Brown [9] puts forward "students often make errors because of misleading explanation from the teacher, faulty presentation of a structure or word in textbook, or even because of a pattern that was rotely memorised in a drill but not properly contextualised" [p.180]. The term context of learning is also referred to as "false concepts", Richards [11] and "induced errors", Stenson [12].

#### **2.3.4. Strategies of communication**

Errors are made as a result of this source when a learner utilizes, while communicating, the available means for transmitting a message due to the lack of appropriate means of the target language to express a particular idea. Strategies of communication are techniques used by learners to overcome the difficulties that impede them in expressing an idea.

### **2.4. Types of errors**

The analysis of learners' errors does, first, necessitate the classification of errors. Errors are generally classified into four main categories as stated by Corder [13] "... errors of omission, addition, substitution and word order" [p.64].

Omission errors refer to the absence of certain item(s) that should be present in a grammatical utterance. They occur due to learners' unfamiliarity, ignorance and incomplete application of the second language rules. The absence of the auxiliary *be* in *\*he playing tennis* is an instance of omission errors.

Another type of errors is addition errors. This error is indicated by the occurrence of an item that should not appear in a grammatical sentence. It occurs when a learner of a second language overuses particular grammatical rules of the target language. It is the addition of unnecessary elements such as overgeneralizing the inflectional morpheme +s of the plural or +ed of the past tense as in: *\*informations* and *\*thoughted*, respectively.

As far as substitution errors are concerned, Dulay et al. [14] define them as “the use of wrong form of the morpheme or structure” [p.158]. This type is sub-classified into (1) regulation in which a regular marker is substituted by an irregular one, (2) archi-forms in which a plural form is used instead of its singular, for example *\*one criteria is...* instead of *one criterion is...*, and (3) alternating forms in which a learner mistakenly utilizes some forms as alternatives, such as *this boys, those man*.

Misordering errors occur when a learner uses the right form in the right context but in incorrect or ungrammatical order. They result from relying on L1 structure. For instance, a Moroccan speaker may produce *\*ate John the apple* based on his/her mother tongue word order (VSO) instead of the correct English order *John ate the apple* (SVO).

### 2.5. Contrast between the copula *be* in English and *kan* (be) in Moroccan Arabic

Copula refers to the verbs that link a subject to its complement; it is also known by linking verbs, Afkinich [15]. The copulas *be* in English and *kan* (be) in MA are used distinctively. *Be* is the salient copula in English language. There are other verbs that are considered as copulative verbs. For instance, *taste, become, grow, look, remain, turn, smell, resemble, sound, stay* are used copulatively:

**TABLE 1.** Some English copulative verbs

a.	<i>They <b>look</b> mad / They <b>are</b> mad.</i>
b.	<i>The weather <b>sounds</b> hot / the weather <b>is</b> hot.</i>

The use of copula *be* is twofold: (i) as a main verb and (ii) an auxiliary. Moroccan learners sometimes misuse it, whether it is as a main verb or an auxiliary. It may be avoided or retained. For example, Moroccan learners may omit it in *Fatima here* but not in *Ahmed **was** sick*, relying on their mother tongue: *Fatima hna* (independent verbless sentence) and *kan ahmed mrid*, respectively.

#### 2.5.1. English use of *to be*

Cele-Murcia and Freeman [16] claim that *be* functions in English both as a copula and as an auxiliary depending on its context of occurrence.

##### 2.5.1.1. The use of *to be* as a main verb

It serves as a main verb carrying a tense and linking the subject with the complement when it is a copula. Quirk et al. [17] point out that *be*, when functions as a main verb, is followed by an adjective phrase, a noun phrase, or an adverbial phrase:

**TABLE 2.** Examples of the phrases that *be*, when functions as a main verb, takes

a.	Adjective phrase:	<i>She is <u>smart</u>.</i>
b.	Noun phrase:	<i>John and Laura are <u>friends</u>.</i>
c.	Adverbial phrase:	<i>His birthday is <u>in October</u>.</i>

Notice that *be*, also, acts as the main verb of the existential *there*. It is the main verb in this context as in: *there are two boys* and *there is a bird in the cage*.

##### 2.5.1.2. The use of *to be* as an auxiliary

As an auxiliary, *be* is used with another “main” verb in a sentence. Broadly, it helps in passivization and progressive aspect. According to Quirk et al. [17], the continuous aspect is formed by the auxiliary *be* and the addition of +*ing* morpheme to the main verb, whereas the passive voice consists of *be* and the past participle of the main verb, as in the following:

**TABLE 3.** Examples of *be* as an auxiliary

a.	Present progressive:	<i>They <b>are</b> reading.</i>
b.	Past progressive:	<i>She <b>was</b> singing.</i>
c.	Passive form:	<i>The book <b>is</b> edited by Richards.</i>
d.	Future progressive:	<i>He will <b>be</b> watching TV when she arrives.</i>

2.5.2. Moroccan Arabic (MA) use of to be

2.5.2.1. The use of *kan* (to be) as an auxiliary

MA is characterised by the absence of the auxiliary in the present progressive, simply, because the progressive aspect is less likely to exist in MA system. On the other hand, the auxiliary *kan* is needed to express a progressive action in the past, as follows:

**TABLE 4.** The use of *kan* (to be) in the progressive aspect

Sara kant <sup>4</sup> ta-ktəb mən wsal-na.
Sarah was she-writing when arrived-we.
Sarah was writing when we arrived.

MA learners, therefore, are likely to omit *be* in the present progressive but retain it in the past and the future progressive.

Similarly, the auxiliary *kan* is not necessary in passivization in MA. It is ungrammatical to use *kan* in the passive aspect as shown below:

**TABLE 5.** Passivization construction in MA

MA	Literal translation	Gloss
a. *kanu tharsu l-kisa:n	were broken the glasses	The glasses were broken.
b. *kant tsarqat saʔti	was stolen watch-my	My watch was stolen.

The correct form is: *tharsu l-kisa:n* or *l-kisan tharsu*, without the epenthesis of the auxiliary *kanu* (were). MA learners, thus, err in the construction of passive voice due to L1 transfer, as the auxiliary in MA is not used in formulating the passive voice. This agrees with Bryan [18] that "...omission takes place both when the copula is an auxiliary part of the present progressive aspect or of the passive voice: \*what to happen about transportation; \*I asking him ..." [p.46].

2.5.2.2. The use of *kan* (be) as a main verb

*Kan* in MA is used differently from the English copula *be*, especially in the present tense. Unlike English, neither Standard Arabic (SA) nor MA uses the present form *kan* as a main verb, as shown below:

**TABLE 6.** The absence of *kan* (be) in MA and SA

MA:	Hiya muhandisa.
SA:	Hiya muhandisatun.
Literal translation:	*She engineer.
English equivalent:	She is an engineer.

This is because in SA and MA, the nominal (verbless) sentence is permissible. On the other hand, English does require the presence of *be* in such a sentence. *Yakunu* is the present tense of *kan* (be) in SA. However, it is ungrammatical to add *yakunu* as in:

**TABLE 7.** The ungrammaticality of *yakunu*

*yakunu-ahmədun-maridun.
is-Ahmed-sick
Ahmed is sick.

The Moroccan Arabic copula *kan* (be) is mostly used in simple past tense, which is the same case for SA, such as *kan ahməd mrid* and *kana ahmədun-maridun* (Ahmed was sick), respectively. That is why, Moroccan EFL learners, in particular, and Arab learners, in general, frequently omit the copula *be* in the simple present tense and less frequently in past and future. This claim aligns with Al-Zahrani's research [19]. The general conclusion is that students omit the copula *be* in the present tense more frequently than in past and future.

The MA copula *kan*, in simple past tense, serves as the English copula. It is used as the main verb, referring to the completed actions or events in the past, and followed by a noun phrase, an adverbial phrase, or an adjective phrase as in:

<sup>4</sup> Here, *kant* is one form among others (i.e. *kanu*, *k-kəna*, *kənti*, *kəntu*), of *kan*; it refers to singular female, and it is formed by the addition of +t to the base *kan*.

**TABLE 8.** The use of the MA copula *kan* (be) in simple past tense

a.	Adjective phrase:	<i>Kant sara mrida</i> (Sarah was <b>sick</b> ).
b.	Noun phrase:	<i>Kan ahmād ustad</i> (Ahmed was a <b>teacher</b> ).
c.	Adverbial phrase:	<i>Kanu drari f l-qism</i> (children were <b>in the classroom</b> ).

The claim that Moroccan learners are supposed to omit the English copula in the present tense more than in other tenses is demonstrated by Bryan [18], who argues that the omission of *be* is more frequent in the present tense in all different syntactic conditions. Analyzing the composition of Arab students of English, he remarks: “One of the most language-specific problems faced by ESL students of Asian origin is the tendency to leave out the frequent English linking verb to be. Arabic does not regularly employ the copula; this verb is reserved only for special emphatic contexts, negative forms, and past or future tense” [p.46].

Omitting *be*, in present tense, is an instance of *negative transfer* as neither SA nor MA requires the copula *kana* and *kan* (be) in this tense.

Table 9 below summarizes the distribution of copula in MA in past tense and future “aspect” (note that the present tense is not listed because MA does not require the copula in this tense). In other words, in the present tense, MA has no equivalent for the English copula *be* (*am*, *is* and *are*). Moroccan learners, thus, are supposed to omit it in simple present tense and retain it in past tense. They typically do not omit the English copula in past tense because the copula is present in their L1. Retaining the copula, in past tense, is an instance of *positive transfer*, from L1 into English.

**TABLE 9.** The distribution of Moroccan Arabic copula in past tense

Sing/plural	Number, masc/fem	kan (be)	meaning
Sing	1 masc and 1 fem	kənt	I was
Sing	2 masc and 2 fem	kənti	you were
Sing	3 masc	kan	he was
Sing	3 fem	kant	she was
Sing	3 masc	kan	it was
Sing	3 fem	kant	it was
Plural	1 masc and 1 fem	kənnā	we were
Plural	2 masc and 2 fem	kəntu	you were
Plural	3 masc and 3 fem	kanu	they were

The future of *kan* in MA is formulated by the addition of the prefix *ʔa-* or the modal *ʔadi* (will) with some changes to the base form. These are approximately analogous to the English future formulation, in which the infinitive *be* is preceded by *will*. Consider Table 10 below:

**TABLE 10.** The distribution of the Moroccan Arabic copula in the future

Sing/plural	Number, masc/fem	kan (be) in future	meaning
Sing	1 masc and 1 fem	ʔankun/ʔadinkun	I will be
Sing	2 masc	ʔatkun/ʔaditkun	you will be
Sing	2 fem	ʔatkuni/ʔaditkuni	you will be
Sing	3 masc	ʔaykun/ʔadiykun	he will be
Sing	3 fem	ʔatkun/ʔaditkun	she will be
Sing	3 masc	ʔaykun/ʔadiykun	it will be
Sing	3 fem	ʔatkun/ʔaditkun	it will be
Plural	1 masc and 1 fem	ʔankunu/ʔadinkunu	we will be
Plural	2 masc and 2 fem	ʔatkunu/ʔaditkunu	you will be
Plural	3 masc and 3 fem	ʔaykunu/ʔadiykunu	they will be

On the basis of the earlier illustrations and examples, MA seems to be similar to English in the requirement for the copula *kan* as a main verb in simple past and future. Additionally, the complements of the English and MA copula are similar. However, the copula is used distinctly in present tense; it is not used in MA, whereas it is compulsory to appear in English.

### III. METHODOLOGY

#### 3.1. Research questions

This study addresses the following research questions:

- What are the main sources of omitting *be* at the level of speaking?

- In which linguistic environments do Moroccan learners of English omit the English verb *be*?

### **3.2. Research hypotheses**

- Moroccan learners of English omit the copula *be* as a result of the interlingual transfer.
- Moroccan EFL learners omit *be* more frequently in linguistic situations where MA does not require the use of the copula such as in present tense.

### **3.3. The significance of the study**

The findings of this study could provide researchers and Moroccan teachers of English with valuable insights into language learning processes. The study findings could be better exploited by applied linguists to conduct further comparative studies between Moroccan Arabic and English. Once the causes of committing such error (copula omission) are identified, then it is possible to provide remedial instructions. As this study focuses on the interlanguage interference between Moroccan Arabic and English, conducting such study may help Moroccan teachers of English become more familiar with the concept of interlingual interference, the contrast between the two languages and how the mother tongue affects the foreign language learning.

### **3.4. Research design**

The research design adopted in data collection is of two types: (1) quantitative and (2) qualitative. The former is used to quantify how frequent errors of copula occur, whereas the second is used to determine the reasons or sources of this error. In an attempt to generate an exploratory descriptive research, nominal data is gathered through a questionnaire delivered to EFL teachers in Rabat-Sale-Kenitra region. This quantitative method (teachers' questionnaire) is based on nominal scale in which yes/no notation is used to record the responses of teachers. Thus, most question items in this questionnaire have no arithmetic value. To generate interval data, a speaking test is used to identify (1) the main sources of the copula omission and (2) the linguistic environments in which Moroccan EFL learners omit the English *be*. The results are presented in percentages using the Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) and Microsoft Office Excel 2007.

### **3.5. Participants**

The population under investigation in this study concerns Ibn Abbad secondary high school students. The target population is 1<sup>st</sup> year Baccalaureate students. The informants' number is 80 divided into two groups.

As far as the questionnaire is concerned, it was distributed to 40 Moroccan high school teachers of English, namely from the cities of Rabat-Sale-Kenitra region such as Rabat, Sale, Kenitra, HedKourt, Souk Larbaa, and Dar Elgadari.

### **3.6. Instruments**

In order to answer the research questions, a corpus of relevant data needs to be collected through relevant instruments. This paper has opted for testing and the questionnaire.

A speaking test in the form of an interview with students was conducted to collect samples of copula omission errors. It is classified into three main sections. The first section is concerned with personal information about the participants. The second tends to generate information about their parents and siblings. In the third section, the participants are required to describe the city where they are living. The speaking test items require responses using the copula *be* within its various linguistic contexts: simple present, simple past, future, progressive aspect and passivization.

A questionnaire was used to provide data from teachers of English in Rabat-Sale- Kenitra region about the copula omission errors. It generally consists of two sections, which in turn include sub-sections. It tends to generate responses from teachers using open-ended questions.

## **IV. RESEARCH FINDINGS**

After analyzing the data (of the questionnaire and the interview), the main findings are presented in the tables below.

### **4.1.1. Linguistic environments for copula omission among Moroccan learners of English**

The findings are classified according to their linguistic forms (simple present, simple past, future, simple present progressive aspect, and passivization). These distributions are summarized, using frequencies and percentages.

**TABLE 11.** The distribution of *be* omission in different linguistic environments

Linguistic environments		present	past	future	progressive	passivization	Total
Frequency	within omission	226	1	4	31	43	305
Percentage	% within omission	74,1%	,3%	1,3%	10,2%	14,1%	100,0%
	% within linguistic environment	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%	100,0%
	% of Total	<b>74,1%</b>	<b>,3%</b>	<b>1,3%</b>	<b>10,2%</b>	<b>14,1%</b>	100,0%

Table above shows the distribution of the errors, collected from the interview, in reference to the linguistic contexts. Most of the copula omission, 74.1% (226 out of 305 errors) occurs in simple present, whereas only 0.3% out of 100% of copula omission is made in simple past, followed by future (1.3%). The second recurrent linguistic environment in which the copula is omitted is the passivization (14.1%), followed by progressive aspect (10.2%).

#### 4.2. Copula as a main verb and an auxiliary

The copula omission errors are also classified as a main verb or an auxiliary. To generate answers, Moroccan teachers of English were asked the question “*which one is mostly omitted: be as a main verb or as an auxiliary?*”. The informants’ responses are as follows:

**TABLE 12.** English language teachers’ responses to the copula errors as a main verb or an auxiliary

		main verb	Aux.	Total
Teachers	Count	33	7	40
	% within teachers	82,5%	17,5%	100%

It is obvious from the above results that the English copula *be* is widely omitted as a main verb (82.5%). 33 out of 40 informants indicate that the copula *be* is omitted as a main verb, while only 7 claims that *be* is omitted as an auxiliary.

**TABLE 13.** The distribution of the interview elicited copula errors as a main verb or an auxiliary

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	main verb	<b>234</b>	76,7	76,7	76,7
	aux	<b>71</b>	23,3	23,3	100,0
Total		305	100,0	100,0	

Likely, the interview provides similar results to the questionnaire. As demonstrated in the Table above, out of 305 errors, 234 errors occur as a main verb, whereas 71 errors appear as an auxiliary.

#### 4.3. The sources of copula omission among Moroccan learners of English

After classifying this type of errors according to its linguistic environments, the sources of omitting the copula *be* at the level of speech are elicited in two ways: through computing the teachers’ responses in the questionnaire and analysing students’ utterances.

**TABLE 14.** The teachers’ responses to their students’ frequency of interlingual and intralingual errors

What are the reasons of omitting the English copula in speaking?				
		interlingual	intralingual	Total
Teachers	Count	37	3	40
	% within teachers	92,5%	7,5%	100,0%



The findings in Table 14 show a significant difference in the sources of the copula omission: while 37 teachers declare that interlingual is the primary source, only 3 out of 40 subjects point out that intralingual is the reason. The majority agree that omitting the copula is traceable to L1 transfer.

**TABLE 15.** The results of the students’ responses in the interview

		Frequency	Percent
be omission	Interlingual	300	98,36%
	Intralingual	5	1,64%
	Total	305	100%

Table above convincingly shows that interlingual transfer is the main source of the copula omission error. 300 (98.36%) out of 305 of the frequency of the committed errors is traceable to the interlingual transfer. Intralingual error, on the other hand, rarely occurs (5 out of 305 errors; 1.64%). These findings are presented in details in Fig. 1 below:

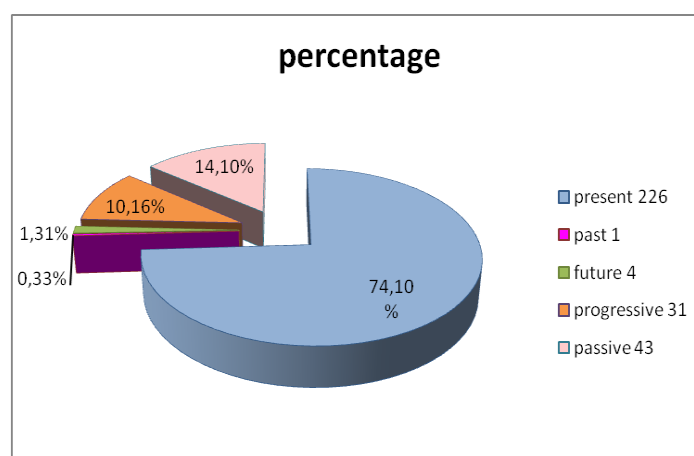


Figure 1: The sources of errors distributed in different linguistic environments

As far as the sources of the copula omission errors in different linguistic environments, Table 17 below presents the elicited results.

**TABLE 17.** The sources of errors distributed according to their linguistic environments

	Present	Past	Future	Progressive	Passivization	Total	Percent
Interlingual	226	0	0	31	43	300	98,36
Intralingual	0	1	4	0	0	5	1,64
Total	226	1	4	31	43	305	100

The results above demonstrate that the copula omission made in simple present (226), present progressive (31), and passive form (43) are attributed to interlingual transfer. On the other hand, the omission errors of the copula in simple past (1) and future (4) are intralingual errors.

## V. DISCUSSION

### 5.1. Linguistic environments for copula omission among Moroccan learners of English

The findings of Al-Zahrani’s study [19] reveal that students omit the English copula *be* in present tense more frequently than other tenses, among Arab ESL learners at both levels: speaking and writing. Statistically speaking, 69,4% of the copula omission is made in simple present tense. Similarly, a study conducted by Butler-Tanaka [20] finds that most of students’ errors are committed in simple present. Interestingly, no omission of *be* is noticed in past tense. Another significant study carried out by Alshayban [20], on copula omission by EFL Arab learners, shows that both intermediate and advanced students omit the copula *be* more frequently in present tense.

The findings of this research are in line with the results of the previous studies. In this sense, 74,1% of the utterances that require the copula *be* is made in simple present tense. Unlikely, only 0,3% and 1,3% of utterances without the use of *be* are found to be in simple past and future aspect, respectively. Hence, retaining the copula in past tense is an instance of *positive transfer*, from L1 into English, as MA requires the use of the copula in simple past.

This claim can be explained by three facts. First, neither Moroccan Arabic nor Standard Arabic requires the use of the copula in simple present, but they do entail *be* in simple past and future. Second, students' mother tongue system is less likely to have progressive aspect. Third, the construction of passive forms in MA does not require the use of the auxiliary *be*. These can be exemplified in the following instances<sup>5</sup>:

**TABLE 18.** Linguistic environments for copula omission among Moroccan learners of English

Linguistic context	Students' utterance	Correct form
Simple present	*my father dead	my father <b>is</b> dead
Simple past	*Kenitra small in the past	Kenitra <b>was</b> small in the past
Future	*Kenitra will pollute	Kenitra will <b>be</b> polluted
Progressive	*I living in Kenitra now	I <b>am</b> living in Kenitra now
Passive voice	*I born in Sidi Sliman	I <b>was</b> born in Sidi Sliman

Most of this omission occurs in linguistic situations where Moroccan Arabic does not require the use of the copula. Students, hence, omit the English copula *be* as a result of the negative transfer. Among these linguistics environments are simple present, progressive aspect and passivization. Here are some examples:

**TABLE 19.** Students' copula omission in simple present, progressive aspect, and passivization

<b>Simple present</b>	1. *I from Kenitra.
	2. *My favourite sport basketball.
	3. *She small.
	4. *Kenitra the beautiful city.
<b>Progressive aspect</b>	5. *I living in Kenitra now.
	6. *We learning English here good.
	7. *Who sitting in the front my friend.
	8. *I wearing white glasses.
<b>Passivization</b>	9. *My school called Ibn Abbad.
	10. *I born in Kenitra.
	11. *I gived watch for gift by my sister.
	12. * She written letter by me.

In the examples above, students omit *be*, which stems from the difference between the sentence structures of MA and English language. For the utterances in which *be* is required in English, the corresponding utterances in MA do not involve the use of the copula. Examples (1), (2), (3) and (4) involve the absence of the copula *be*, as a main verb; however, the difference between these utterances and the other examples is that the copula is required as an auxiliary in the progressive aspect, (5), (6), (7), and (8), and the passive voice (9), (10), (11) and (12).

## 5.2. The sources of copula omission errors

According to the previous researches that have been carried out on the issue under investigation, the main reason behind omitting the copula is revealed to be the negative transfer from the native language into the target language. For instance, the findings of Al-Zahrani's study [19] reveal that Arab ESL learners omit the English copula *be* due to the negative transfer from Arabic into English, as the former does not necessitate the use of the copula in simple present tense. Similarly, Alshayban [20] study's findings reveal that Arab learners omit the English copula *be* because of L1 interference.

These above findings, significantly, confirm the present research results. The omission of *be* among Moroccan learners of English is attributable to the negative transfer of the learners' mother tongue. In the process of learning a language, interlingual transfer is one of the major sources of errors, particularly, copula omission. This can be explained by the fact that EFL learners and Moroccan learners, specifically, rely on the transfer of their mother tongue language structures into the target language. This claim also aligns with Brown's view [9], who points out that the early stages of learning a second language are characterised by negative transfer as learners have not yet been familiar with the linguistic knowledge of the target language. This study reveals that the copula omission among Moroccan learners is basically traceable to their L1 interference. They omit the copula *be* in linguistic environments where MA does not require the use of the copula. Omitting *be* is, therefore, an instance of *negative transfer*. Consider the examples below:

<sup>5</sup> These examples are taken from the interview.

**TABLE 20.** Students' copula omission in simple present, progressive aspect, and passivization

Linguistic context	Students' utterance	Correct form
Simple present	(a)*My name Hiba	My name <b>is</b> Hiba.
Progressive	(b)*I living in Kenitra now	I <b>am</b> living in Kenitra. now
Passive voice	(c)*My brother born in Kenitra	My brother <b>was</b> born in Kenitra.

A first observation shows that these samples violate the grammatical structure (SVO) of English. Verbless sentence is non-permissible in English. Therefore, this structure is attributed to the negative transfer of the learners' mother tongue.

The omission in (a), (b), and (c) occurs in situations where MA does not involve the use of the copula. The absence of *be* in these utterances is not permissible in English system, but it is grammatical in MA system. Samples (a), (b) and (c) are expressed in MA as follows: *smijti hiba*, *tanskon f qnitra*, and *xuja tzad f qnitra*, respectively. Thus, MA does not require the use of the verb *be* in these instances (simple present, progressive, and passivization). It is ungrammatical to say \**smijti tkon hiba*, \**tankon nskon f qnitra*, and \**xu:jay kon tza:d f qnitra*, respectively. These samples lack the "verb" which is one-to-one translation or the application of the grammatical feature of MA. This type of error is caused by the interference of the mother-tongue of Moroccan EFL learners.

A major distinction is made between **overt** and **covert** errors in errors identification. Overt idiosyncratic utterances are unquestionably ungrammatical at the sentence level. They are related to ungrammatical utterances, in terms of the TL rules, produced by the second language learner. On the other hand, covertly erroneous utterances are grammatical, at the level of sentence, but they are not permissible in the TL because they are not interpretable within its rules that govern its system. The omission of the English copula *be* among Moroccan EFL learners is, by definition, overt erroneous utterances, as it is ungrammatical to say *my father soldier*.

As far as the classification of errors is concerned, a difference is made between **global** and **local** errors. The former involves the overall structure of a sentence, whereas the latter is one which affects a particular constituent. Global errors hinder communication because they prevent the message from being comprehended. Local errors, on the other hand, do not prevent the message from being understood because there is usually some minor violation of one segment of a sentence that allows the hearer to guess the intended meaning. Omitting the verb *be* is, consequently, a local error as in the following examples:

- a. \*Kenitra nice city.
- b. \*My favourite sport basketball.
- c. \*I born in Sale, but I living in Kenitra now.
- d. \*My mother housewife.

The message is not really prevented from being understood. The interlocutors still can guess the intended meaning.

In a word, the copula in MA is not used in simple present but it is retained in simple past; the construction of the passive form does not require the use of the auxiliary *kan*, and the progressive aspect is less likely to appear.

## VI. CONCLUSION AND PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

A number of studies have been carried out on copula omission among Arab EFL learners. This study has sought to explore more this problematic issue among Moroccan EFL learners at the level of speech. The present study's findings reveal that Moroccan EFL learners omit *be* more frequently in the linguistic environments where Moroccan Arabic does not require the use of the copula such as in present tense. The main reason of omitting the copula is the negative transfer from MA into English. The absence of the copula *be*, therefore, is an interlingual error.

The findings of this research mainly reveal that the copula omission in Moroccan EFL context is derived from the interference of learners L1 (MA). They negatively transfer the linguistic structures of MA into the English system. This study lists the linguistic environments in which Moroccan EFL learners mostly drop the English copula *be* at the level of speech. As discussed earlier, the omission of *be* appears in the linguistic environment where MA does not require the use of the copula, simple present tense, as an instance. The absence of the copula *be* is an interlingual error. It is a cross-linguistic influence. To this end, language teachers should pay much attention to these cross-linguistic differences to raise learners' consciousness towards the similarities and the differences between their native language and TL. Doing this would enhance learners' learning development and progress.

Being taught the cross-linguistic differences, Moroccan EFL learners would be familiarized with those problematic linguistic environments that have no equivalent in MA, or differ in their formulation. For instance, MA system is less likely to include progressive aspect, and its construction of passive voice does not require the

use of the auxiliary *be*. More practically, students may be given some examples of such errors as a way to enlarge their familiarity and awareness of the copula omission to avoid this error in speaking.

Further, designing teaching materials can rely on these differences and similarities to reduce the effects of the L1 interference. In this sense, the most efficient teaching materials are the ones that are based on a scientific description of the learners' native language and the language to be learned. Syllabus designers may make better use of this claim and produce teaching materials by obtaining a scientific description of the English language in a careful comparison with a similar description of MA.

The findings of this study contribute to language learning and teaching. It reveals that the omission of the copula *be* at the level of speech among Moroccan EFL learners derives from L1 interference. Thus, teachers' methods and teaching materials can be adapted to target the cross-linguistic differences that hinder faster foreign language learning and predict the difficulties that language learners would encounter.

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