



## L1 INTERFERING AND L2 DEVELOPMENTAL WRITING ERRORS AMONG IRANIAN EFL LEARNERS

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### Abstract:

This study aimed to investigate common writing errors among Persian EFL Learners. The focus of the study was to identify Persian interfering and developmental errors based on the four rubrics of sentence styles, mechanics, grammar and punctuations. To achieve this, 80 students and 3 teachers from Iran Language Institute were asked to participate in this study. The instruments for data collection were a proficiency test to test the level of their homogeneity, as well as a written test in which students were asked to write a narrative passage. The content analysis approach was used to analyze students' writing errors. Afterwards the most representative samples from the narrative texts were categorized based on their lexico-semantic and syntacto-morphological features. The results from this study indicated that English grammar and vocabulary were the linguistic areas that suffered the highest level of L1 language interference. The most common Persian interfering error was the word choice a subtype of grammar and the least common Persian errors were various subtypes of punctuations. The most common developmental error was spelling a subtype of mechanics of writing and the least one was the negation a subtype of sentence style and clarity. A list of common interfering and developmental errors from Iranian intermediate students was provided.

**Keywords:** transfer, interference, inter-language, intra-language, interfering error, developmental error

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## 1. Introduction

Considering several decades of study, linguistic researchers have not reached consensus on the role of first language in the learning of a foreign language. Different theories take different stances on the role of L1 transfer on the acquisition and learning of L2. Contrastive Analysis and Contrastive Rhetoric hold that L1 interferes with L2 acquisition when L1 and L2 show differences. The Constructive Underlying Proficiency Hypothesis maintains that L1 facilitates L2 learning. The Creative Construction claims that L1 has no effect on L2 acquisition, and takes error analysis into account for providing evidence in support of their hypothesis.

Ellis (2003) indicated three good reasons to study learners' errors. First, they tell us why learners make errors and provide us with useful information on learner language. Secondly, the types of errors learners make can help teachers. Thirdly, *"paradoxically, it is possible that making errors may actually help learners to learn when they self-correct the errors they make"*. Brown (2000) believes that the occurrence of errors in L2 learners' production is inevitable. He further stated learners' acquisition process will be hindered if they neither make errors nor receive any feedback on them.

Dessouky (as cited in Mahmoud, 2011) utters that error analysis is an invariable issue in research area and will remain so because learners will encounter errors as long as they involve in a language learning process. Every analysis needs thorough investigation and inspection of the issue and without detecting and identifying sources of errors, treatment of EFL learners' errors might be full of hindrances. Among different error sources, interfering and developmental errors have been considered as two major sources of EFL learners' errors, but researchers have not reached a unanimous contention on the key role of one of these two error sources with respect to EFL learners' errors.

Brown (2007) defines errors identifiable alterations of the grammatical elements of a native speaker, which present the learners' competence in the target language. Nunan (as cited in Harmer, 2004) indicated that writing helps students to express their ideas in written form and to achieve a high level of communication, yet producing a coherent, fluent and extended piece of writing is the most difficult activity to do in language learning, especially in a second or a foreign language. This means that, writings must be error free.

Analyzing EFL learners' errors in their written performance could be beneficial for teachers to become aware of the types and sources of these errors to employ more efficient teaching methods and techniques so that EFL learners could acquire English writing better and enhance their writing competence besides providing learners with effective recommendations to prevent further errors. Moreover, awareness of the type

of error is significantly beneficial in strengthening particular language components. This awareness contributes in effective teaching as different types of errors should be treated differently (Banaruee & Askari, 2016). There is therefore the need to investigate these types of errors in learners' writings and their implications on the development of students' writing proficiency. This study aimed to investigate and identify common Persian interfering and developmental errors in the writings of young adult EFL learners.

## 2. Literature Review

The history of Error Analysis abounds with investigations of writing errors, yet there is a big gap in the study of writing errors among young adults. Some scholars pinpoint reasons to investigate errors. Studies done in different learning contexts have revealed significantly different results. Several research studies have been carried out to investigate errors made by the learners from different countries and some found that the learners' native language was the main source of errors in writing, whereas some studies emphasized on the developmental errors.

Otoshi (2005) developed a linguistic taxonomy of grammatical errors on five major error categories: verb, noun, article, wrong word, and sentence structures errors. The study revealed that sentence structure was the most problematic area in Japanese EFL learners. Interestingly, verb errors were the least problematic area.

Chen (2006) developed a taxonomy based on structured linguistic error taxonomy. The results indicated that the use of English verbs was a major learning difficulty for all the subjects. Some errors in tenses and subject-verb agreement were found because the students forgot to conjugate verbs. Verbs in Mandarin remain unchanged regardless of the tenses and aspects. Therefore, the use of tenses and aspects in English is challenging for Taiwanese EFL students.

In a recent study, Phuket and Othman (2015) investigated the interfering and developmental errors made by Thai EFL learners. They took the advantage of a rubric of grammar, lexis and mechanic. The results indicated that interfering errors were significantly more than developmental ones. In both interfering and developmental classifications, grammatical errors enjoyed the largest portion, one of the reasons could be that its subtypes are more and includes a good variety. With a closer meticulous analysis it was found that, the translation from Thai among interfering errors and word choice among developmental errors were the most problematic areas individually which both belong to lexis.

## **2.1. Error Analysis in Iran**

Ahmadvand (2008) aimed at analyzing Iranian EFL learners' errors in their written productions. As he reported, omissions, additions, and regularizations were among the most frequent types of errors. Moreover, it was shown that negative transfer accounted for only 30% of all errors and most of the errors were developmental. Consequently, it was shown that interference from Persian to English in written productions is neither the only source of errors, nor the major one.

Nazemi and Najafi (2012) explored that the most frequent error type among Iranian graduate students majoring in English at various proficiency levels. The results revealed ten most frequent error types among the three proficiency groups as; punctuation, lexical choice, spelling, article, verb formation, plurals, preposition, verb tense, clause structure and subject-verb agreement.

Sattari (2012) analyzed grammatical errors in Persian English learners' compositions and exam papers and showed that a great number of errors made by the learners at elementary levels could be traced due to the influence of their mother tongue. Barzegar (2013) carried out an analysis on errors committed by Persian learners of English at intermediate levels and indicated that the majority of errors were developmental.

Beheshti (2015) concluded that the errors made by the subjects are caused by two main factors: inter-lingual (interfering) and intra-lingual (developmental) that in her study at upper-intermediate and advanced levels most of Iranian EFL learners made developmental errors, whereas at the lower level, most of the errors are made due to interference from Persian which is the result of differences in the patterns dissimilar in these two languages. It was found that the most problematic area was the prepositions. Yet, none of the aforementioned studies has paid attention to investigate errors among young adult learners. The present study, thus, aimed at filling the gap.

## **3. Material and Methods**

### **3.1. Design**

This study is a quantitative, quasi-experimental research with a one shot case design. Four classes were non-randomly assigned as indicated by the nonrandom selection in intact classes. Each class consisted of 20 students in intermediate level. All groups were given a proficiency test to indicate the level of homogeneity of the groups under study. The writing was a type of IELTS Writing Task 2 provided to the learners and they were analyzed by the researcher and two other teachers.

This study focuses on the following questions:

1. What are common interfering errors produced by Iranian L2 writing students?

2. What are common developmental errors produced by Iranian L2 writing students?
3. Which type and subtype of error is a better predictor of Iranian L2 writing students?

The focus of this research was to provide a better view of how utilizing classroom materials by predicting the problematic areas can be beneficial in EFL writing classes in young adult departments.

### **3.2. Participants**

The participants of this study were eighty Iranian young adult EFL learners, forty males and forty females, chosen according to convenience sampling from intermediate level classes at Iran Language Institute. They were investigated into four intact groups; each group consisted of twenty learners aging between thirteen to sixteen years old. All eighty participants were homogeneous based on the level they had been already set by the institute and their homogeneity also was proven through the proficiency test given by the researcher.

### **3.3. Instrumentation**

Instruments used in this study were a proficiency test and a writing task 2 of IELTSs, so as to assure the level of the students before assigning the writing task. The students' writings were analyzed by the researcher himself and two other raters.

### **3.4. Data Collection Procedure**

At first four intact young adult classes in intermediate level in ILI were non-randomly selected. The participants had already been set as intermediate level learners based on their three-year participation in the young adult department in ILI and their homogeneity were proven by a proficiency test. They were provided writing task 2 of IELTSs and the writings were analyzed based on the four rubrics of grammar, sentence style, punctuation and mechanics of writing criteria.

### **3.5 Data Analysis**

This study was based on quantitative method research for analyzing the information which was gathered. To this aim, the written texts were analyzed by counting and classifying the errors into two categories of interfering and developmental errors in order to determine which interference errors were produced by the students. The results were represented as the most frequent interference errors from the written texts were linguistically analyzed by considering their lexico-semantic and syntacto-

morphological features. For the purpose of this study, the most representative sentences with errors were selected and analyzed individually.

#### 4. Results

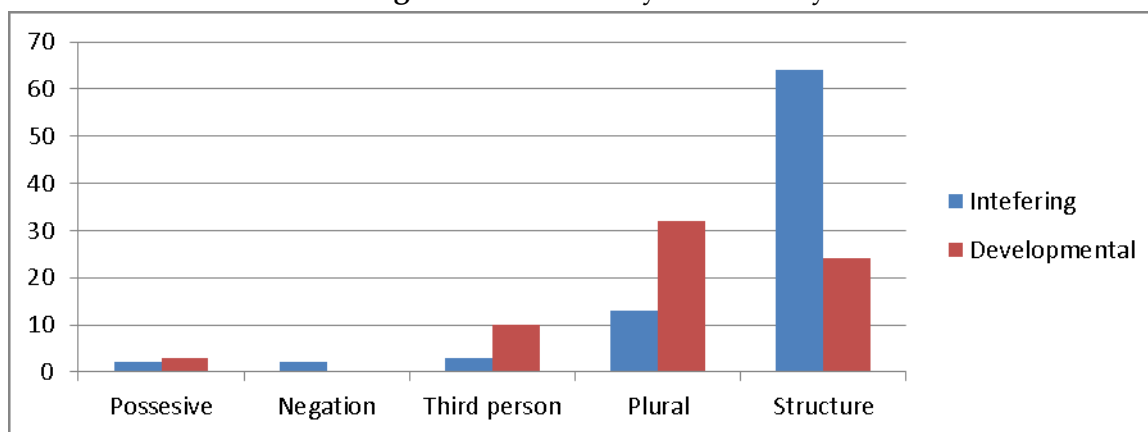
Different subtypes of errors are listed below which, clearly, are representatives of Iranian intermediate young adult EFL learners' writing errors. The total number of errors shows a significant difference between two types of errors and indicates young adult learners are encountered with a big hindrance of developmental errors in their writing.

**Table 1:** Interfering and Developmental Errors and their Frequency

<b>Error</b>	<b>Interfering</b>	<b>Developmental</b>	<b>Error</b>	<b>Interfering</b>	<b>Developmental</b>
<b>Possessive s</b>	2	3	<b>Exclamation mark</b>	1	4
<b>Negation</b>	2	0	<b>Apostrophe</b>	0	10
<b>Third person s</b>	3	10	<b>Hyphen</b>	0	2
<b>Plural s</b>	13	32	<b>Question mark</b>	0	6
<b>Structure</b>	64	24	<b>Colon</b>	0	11
<b>Spelling</b>	2	162	<b>Determiners</b>	0	6
<b>Capitalization</b>	6	192	<b>Adverbs</b>	0	2
<b>Comma</b>	10	136	<b>Quantifiers</b>	8	2
<b>Period</b>	0	50	<b>Conjunctions</b>	16	14
<b>Quotation mark</b>	1	10	<b>Pronouns</b>	12	37
<b>Auxiliaries</b>	4	17	<b>Prepositions</b>	62	26
<b>Articles</b>	31	107	<b>Tense</b>	34	130
<b>Word Choice</b>	146	118	<b>Total Errors</b>	417	1017

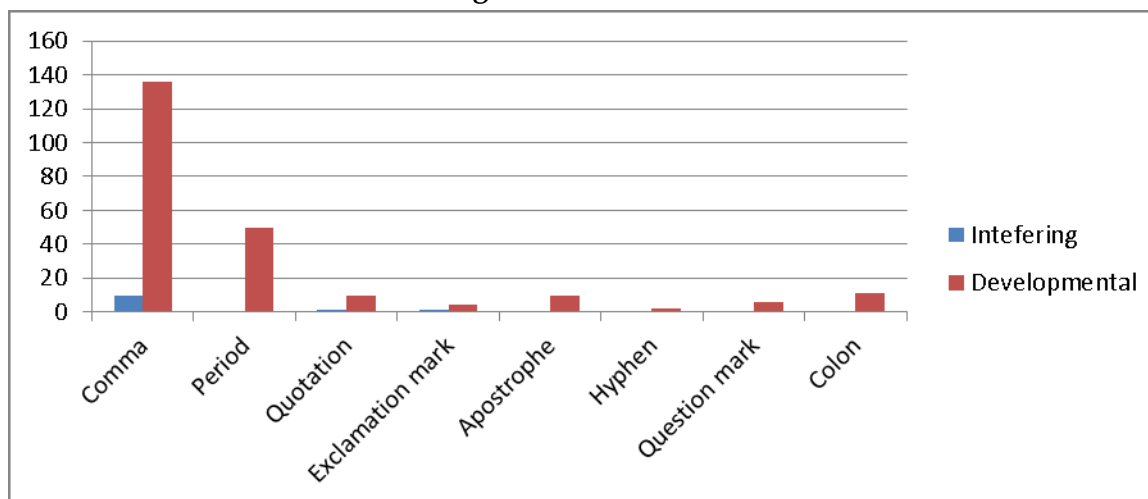
The result is discussed based on the four rubrics of mechanics, punctuations, grammar and sentence style and clarity represented in separate diagrams below in details.

**Diagram 1: Sentence style and clarity**



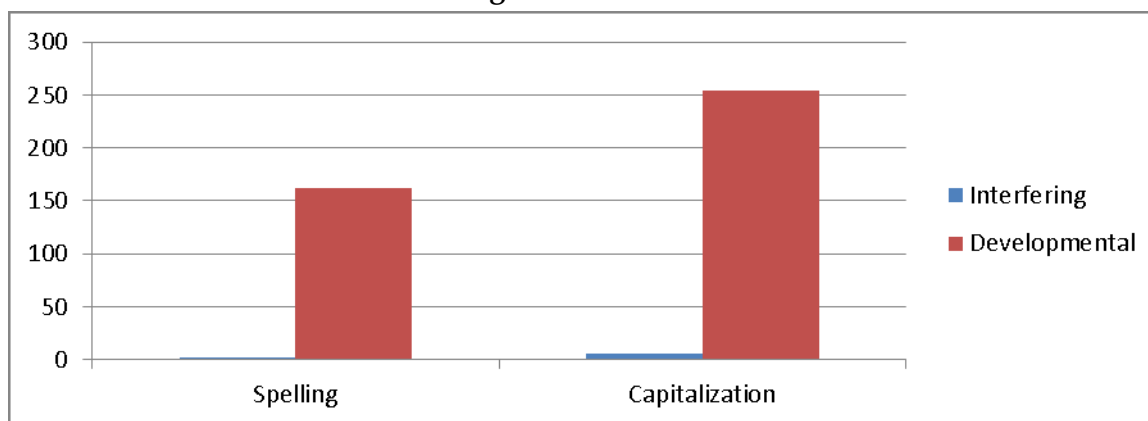
As the results represented in the diagram 1 shows Iranian young adult EFL learners struggle with sentence making and structures because their knowledge of Persian hinders their learning in this area. It was found that using plural S was problematic in two senses; one when learners pluralized the uncountable nouns and the other one when the plurals were missed singular. The typical Persian interference was where the nouns in Persian were countable and in English non-count. The total number of interfering errors was 84 and the total number of developmental ones was 69.

**Diagram 2: Punctuations**



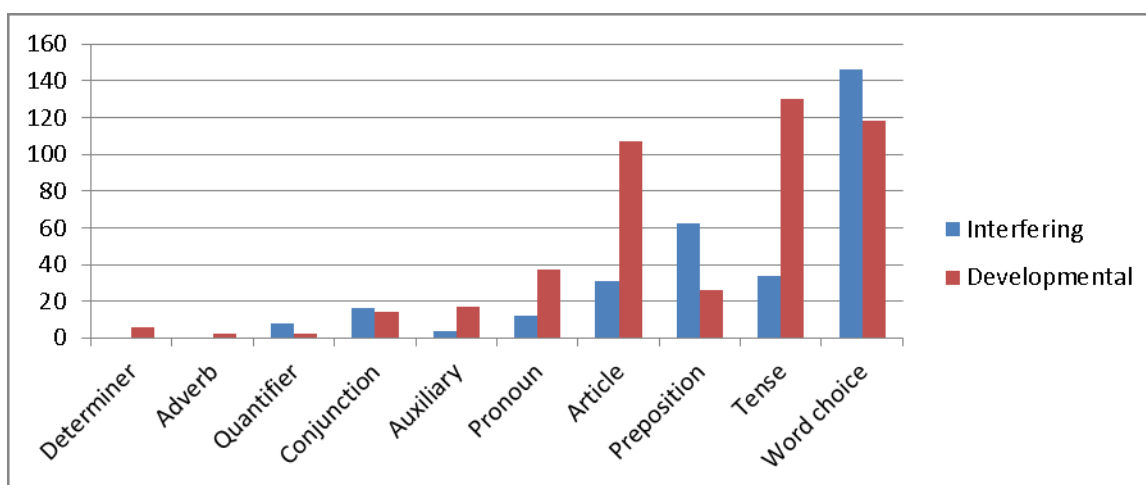
The diagram 2 is steer clear of punctuations which makes the significance of the difference so observable that nearly all errors are developmental, regarding comma few interfering errors are visible which sprang from the form of comma in Persian which is marked as converted comma. The total number of interfering punctuation errors were only 12 and the total number of developmental ones were 235.

**Diagram 3: Mechanics**



The results from diagram 3 indicate actual learning processes in mechanics. In all errors the development of writing is significantly observable due to the ages of the learners. The Persian writing system is thoroughly different from English and this difference is an acceptable logic for the very low of negative transfer which is hardly observable in the learners' spelling and capitalization. The total number of interfering errors was 8 and the total number of developmental ones was 254. .

**Diagram 4: Grammar**



As the results from the diagram above show grammar is the most various and important part of this study and enjoys 10 subtypes. The bars self-explanatory nature show that word choice, tense, article and preposition are the most problematic areas. The most frequent interfering errors were related to word choice where the learners tried to translate from Persian to English. And the learners were encountered with different levels of transfer specifically split, coalescence, over differentiation and under differentiation. The most frequent developmental errors were tense errors. One of the



strains regarding the correct usage of tense was observed as the overgeneralization of past and past participle forms and lack of dominance on all tenses in English. The total number of interfering errors was 313 and the total number of developmental ones was 459.

## 5. Data Analysis, Discussions and Conclusions

The result of the study can be discussed as the analyses in the sections above demonstrated, first it was found that both interfering and developmental errors were essential to be analyzed in Persian learners' writings. As it is shown in table1 both types of errors were found frequent. The most common interfering errors were relatively grammar, sentence structure, punctuations and mechanics. The most common developmental errors were relatively grammar, mechanics, punctuations and sentence styles. In order to clarify the types of errors, they have been defined in various subtypes; in fact, the subtypes are more important to be discussed than the types.

The most interfering errors were; word choice, structure, prepositions, tense and articles. Yet, the most developmental errors were capitalization, spelling, comma, tense, word choice, articles, pronouns and plural s.

Having both interfering and developmental errors added up the first 10 common errors were concluded as; word choice, capitalization, articles, spelling, tense, comma, prepositions, sentence structure, pronouns, and plural s. This finding contradicts with the ten most frequent error types concluded by Nazemi and Najafi (2012) as; punctuation, lexical choice, spelling, article, verb formation, plurals, preposition, verb tense, clause structure and subject-verb agreement.

**Table 2:** A list of errors made by the participants was provided which is represented below

Error Type	D/I	Wrong Sample	Correct Sample
<b>Sentence Style</b>			
Structure	D	She for me brings a chocolate cake.	a cake for me
Structure	I	I fell off the horse and my left arm broke.	broke my left arm.
Plural S			
Omission	D	The weather is hot, especially in summer <b>day</b> .	In summer <b>days</b>
Extra use	I	Today is the second day of <b>holidays</b> .	<b>holiday</b>
Possessive s			
Wrong use	D	Tennis is one of my favorite hobbies in <b>summer's day</b> .	in <b>summer days</b>

Omission	I	The Village name was “Red Mount”.	The <b>village’s</b> name
Negation			
Wrong use	I	I don’t have nothing to do.	I don’t have <b>anything</b> to do.
<b>Punctuations</b>			
Comma			
Omission	D	After some minutes I felt bored with my bedroom.	After some minutes, I felt bored with my bedroom.
Extra use	D	He crossed, the empty, frigid, house.	He crossed the empty, frigid classroom.
Wrong form	I	When I was coming back from swimming class, I knew that the weather will be hot until night.	,
Period			
Omission	D	We lay on the sand and the weather was so hot.	We lay on the sand, The weather was so hot.
wrong us	D	I want to be a psychologist, Because I can help everybody who needs me.	A psychologist, because
Quotation			
Wrong form	I	I said: "Let’s go."	I said: "Let’s."
Extra use	D	She told Sara "to go out tonight."	She told Sara to go out tonight.
Omission	D	They said: Happy Birthday!	They said: "Happy Birthday!"
Exclamation Mark			
Wrong use		I want to be an engineer, an artist or a doctor!	an artist or a doctor.
Apostrophe			
Omission	D	I <b>couldnt</b> study well, because our house was so noisy.	I <b>couldn’t</b>
Hyphenate			
Extra Use	D	I’m interested in making ice-cream.	ice cream
Question Mark			
Omission		What do you want to be why?	what do you want to be? Why?
redundant use		It’s not important where I go?	where I go.
Colon			
Omission		Sara said “how about you?”	Sara said: “how about you?”
<b>Mechanics</b>			
Spelling	D	We went horsebak riding.	Horseback
	I	I have some sterategies.	strategies
Capitalization	D	he ordered sam some food.	He ordered Sam

Capitalization	I	My last name is Moridi Zadeh.	Moridizadeh.
<b>Grammar</b>			
Word Choice			
Wrong use		I was really <b>surprise</b> .	really <b>surprised</b> .
		Bake a cake and some desserts for him.	<b>Make</b> some desserts
	I	In <b>past</b> summer, I took a term off for my English class.	In <b>last</b> summer.
Tense			
	D	I <b>forget</b> to tell you about our house.	I <b>forgot</b>
	I	Some thieves <b>have stolen</b> some expensive things.	Thieves <b>stole</b> ...
	I	Last week a reporter <b>was explaining</b> some information about that night.	... <b>explained</b> ....
Prepositions			
Omission	D	David doesn't agree her	doesn't agree with her
Wrong use	I	I like go to the park.	I like <b>to</b> go to....
Extra use	I/D	I found some children <b>in</b> her age.	children <b>at</b> her age
	I	So I called <b>to</b> my friends.	I called my friends.
	I	I asked from my father.	I asked my father.
Articles			
Extra use	D	I sent her to <b>the</b> prison.	I sent her to prison.
Omission	D	I asked attendant about the sausages.	<b>an/the</b> attendant.
wrong use	I	Last week my Grandma had operation.	had an operation
		<b>A</b> plane which goes to Shiraz on Sundays is full this week.	<b>The</b> plane
Auxiliaries			
Developmental: Instead of "last night?"			
Wrong use	I	They <b>don't</b> interest in playing rugby.	They <b>are not</b> interested in
Omission	D	He asked, "Where she go last night?"	Where <b>did</b> she go
Conjunctions			
Wrong use	D	The teacher was teaching I <b>and</b> my friend were talking about the last night party.	The teacher was teaching, <b>but</b> my friend and I
Omission	D	I can give everybody advice, and talk to them, help them.	I can give everybody advice, talk to them, <b>and</b> help them.
Pronouns			
Missed	I	There were a lot of jellies; blueberry <b>jelly</b> , raspberry <b>jelly</b> , strawberry jelly.	jellies; blueberry, raspberry, and strawberry.
Wrong use	I	Sara and <b>me</b> worked on a practical article.	Sara and <b>I</b> worked

	D	Don't tell me that <b>you</b> have to be an engineer.	Don't tell me that <b>I</b>
Concord			
with a verb group	I	My mom <b>want</b> me to be a doctor.	My mom <b>wants</b>
a noun group	I	I and my mom <b>was</b> in a bad situation.	me and my mom <b>were</b>
	D	Two <b>year</b> ago I suffered from a bad illness.	Two <b>years</b> ago....
Passive voice	D	I chose the Adidas shoes which on the price tag <b>write</b> 200 Rials with 10% off.	<b>was written</b>
Quantifiers	I	We went to a birthday party, when we arrived, they gave us dessert	gave us <b>some</b> dessert.

The findings of the study were in accordance with studies such as, Barzegar (2013) and Ahmadvand (2008), as their findings revealed that the majority of Iranian learners' writing errors were developmental. In the present study, the number of developmental errors was significantly higher than interfering ones and in punctuations and mechanics writing rubrics the dominant problematic area was developmental. The results indicated that only 3 percent of mechanics errors and 5 percent of punctuation errors were interfering.

Such findings contradict with researchers who revealed that L1 interference is the most frequent and problematic area in the development of learners' writing proficiency. Phuket and Othman (2015) indicated that interfering errors were significantly more than developmental ones regarding the Thai learners writing errors. In the current study Iranian young adult learners' writings majority of the errors were developmental. The results also indicated that Iranian EFL learners tended to carry over their L1 collocational patterns to their L2 production. In the present study, the participants translated words from Persian into English without considering their collocation and appropriateness.

The findings are in contradiction with findings from Otoshi (2005). In his study, the most problematic area was sentence structure and the least problematic one was verb errors, while in this study verb errors were very salient and were one of the most problematic areas which enjoyed high level of interfering and developmental errors both. Sentence style was found problematic, yet not the most salient one.

Surprisingly, the findings contradict with contrastive analysis and contrastive rhetoric that hold L1 interferes with L2 acquisition when L1 and L2 show differences. Sattari (2012) analyzed grammatical errors in Persian English learners' compositions and exam papers and showed that a great number of errors made by the learners at elementary levels could be traced due to the influence of their mother tongue. In the

present study the results revealed that the difference in writing systems between the two languages did not emerge as a major problem and 97 percent of mechanics errors and 95 percent of punctuation errors were developmental.

The findings confirmed Brown (2007) definition of errors, where he defines errors as identifiable alterations of the grammatical elements of a native speaker. As significantly observable from the results the grammar errors enjoyed the biggest portion of errors, which affirms Ridha's (2012) study as the grammatical and the mechanical errors the most serious and frequent errors. And accords with Phuket and Othman's (2015) study as in both interfering and developmental errors grammar enjoyed the biggest portion.

It was concluded from the results and findings that English grammar was the linguistic area that suffered the highest level of L1 language interference. The most common Persian interfering error was the word choice a subtype of grammar, where the words were wrongly translated without considering the knowledge of collocation s and the word usage. And the least common Persian errors were various subtypes of punctuation, which indicated because learners started writing from the very first stage of writing in English and practiced a thoroughly different system of writing made errors in this development away from their L1 interference. The most common developmental error was the spelling a subtype of mechanics of writing and the least one was the negation a subtypes of sentence style and clarity.

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