Language Processing in Arabic: Writing Competence Across L1 (Arabic) and L2 (English)

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Abstract : The central aim of this paper is to investigate writing skills in the two languages involved, English and Arabic, and to see whether there is an association between poor writing across languages. That is to say, and it is thought that learners might be excellent in their L1 (Language 1: Arabic) but not in L2 (language 2: English). However, our experimental research findings resulted in an interesting association between L1 and L2. Data were collected from 150 students (chosen randomly) who wrote about the same topic in English and Arabic. Topics needed no preparation as they were common and well-known. Scripts were assessed respectively by ELT (English Language Teaching) and Arabic specialists. The study confirms that poor writing in English correlates with similar deficiencies in the mother tongue (Arabic). Thus, the common assumption in ELT that all learners are fully competent in their first language skills is unfounded. Therefore, the criticism of ELT programs for speakers of Arabic, based on poor writing skills in English and good writing in Arabic is not justified. The findings of this paper can be extended to other learners of English who speak Arabic as a first language and English as a foreign and/or second language. The study is concluded with several research and practical recommendations

Keywords : language, writing, culture, l1

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