

# Overcoming Challenges in a Middle-Eastern Writing Center

by

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# **The AUS Writing Center**

**Maria Eleftheriou**

[www.aus.edu/cas/writingcenter/index.php](http://www.aus.edu/cas/writingcenter/index.php)

# Who are we?

## Goals:

- Help students become independent, confident writers through an interactive approach to writing

## Services:

- Offer one-on-one tutoring sessions by appointment

## Locations

- Two locations in the university

## Hours:

- Sunday-Thursday 10:00am to 4:00pm



# Peer-Tutoring Program

- Introduced Fall 2004
- Well-qualified students are selected as tutors
- Tutors go through a semester long course (WRI 221)
- Writing Center has gained popularity



# Our Clientele

Our Writing Center reflects cultural and linguistic diversity of our university

- 52% of AUS students have been educated in a British or American system
- 48% have gone through a non-English system of education
- 84% of these students have been educated in Arabic, 7% in Farsi, 4% in French, and 5% in other languages such as Turkish, Chinese, and Russian



# Challenges:

- **First Language Interference Errors**
- **Cultural Issues**
- **Participation**
- **Misconceptions about the Writing Center**
- **The Facilitative/Directive Approach to Tutoring**



# **Student Participation**

**Ljubisa Djordjevic**

# Participation

- Signs:
  - Non responsiveness
  - Body language
  - Agitation
- Not unique to this region
- Causes?



# New Experiences

- First experience of 1-on-1 tutoring

- Unaccustomed to peer tutoring



- We have to participate!? We contribute!?

- **Solutions:**

- » Introductions are vital
- » Explanation
- » Small-talk



# Embarrassment

- Some are embarrassed about their weak areas
- Constantly on the defensive
- **Solutions:**
  - » Relate to them
  - » Look for answers together
  - » Encouragement



# Misconception of Unimportance

- Most majors appear unrelated to English and writing
- In many educational settings, this belief is reinforced
- Do we really need the writing skills they teach is in class?
- These are “the courses you neglect”



# Misconception of Unimportance

- **Solutions:**

- Explain importance

- Explain how these skills are used



# Forced Visits

- Some teachers require all students to visit
- Some get bonuses by visiting
- Solution:
  - » Finding a way to get them interested



# **Directive vs. Facilitative**

**Celine Bernadette George**

# Directive Approach

- Point out the problem and directly give the solution
- Tutor takes full control



# Facilitative Approach

- Address the problem and help the student to solve it themselves
- Tutee is given full control

# Directive Approach

- **Strengths**

- Very clear and straight-forward for tutee to understand



- **Weaknesses**

- Prevents student from thinking for themselves
- Student could get offended
- Risk of plagiarism

# Facilitative Approach

- **Strengths**

- Forces students to think critically and solve their problems on their own

- **Weaknesses**

- Student could get confused
- Student could get annoyed
- Risk of becoming a “guessing game”



# Balance It Out



- Each tutorial requires *a mix of the two approaches*
- The key is – trying to identify the proportions of the mixture
- Tutors learn this mostly through experience

# Deciding on the mix

Ultimately, it depends on:

- The main concerns of the student
- The student's fluency in English



# **Misconceptions About the Writing Center**

**Raghad Tayeh**

# An A paper?

- **Problem:**

- Students expect to leave with guaranteed grade



- **Solution:**

- Explain that we are unqualified to give grade



# A remedial service

- **Problem:**

- The WC is often viewed as a remedial service



- **Solution:**

- Explain during presentations
- Take other universities as examples



# A proofreading service

- **Problem:**

- Students think writing center is an editing service
- “you know the answer, just give it to me. It would make life easier for the both of us.”

- **Solution:**

- Explain importance of acquiring skills



# Tutors are experts

- **Problem:**

- Some students are surprised if a tutor consults a manual or book for an answer

- **Solution:**

- Remind them that we are also students



# Undeserved credit

- **Problem:**

- you received help and therefore it is not your own effort

- **Solution:**

- WC does not do work for you but helps you improve your own skills



# Only for English courses

- **Problem:**

- Many think that the WC is only for help in writing related courses

- **Solution:**

- Bring awareness in presentations



# Faculty misconceptions:

- **Problem:**

- “He went to the writing center, but there are still mistakes in his paper.”



- **Solution:**

- Remind professors of the time constraints

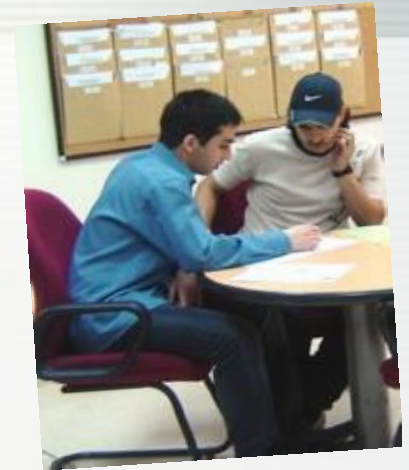


# **Interference Errors**

**Samihah S. Zaman**

# Interference errors- Introduction

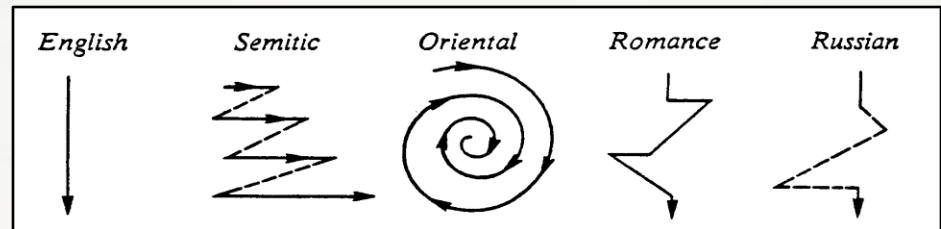
- **Interference of the organizational patterns, syntax and rhetoric of the first language on the second**
- **Common with ESL students and bilingual speakers**



# Higher Order Concerns

- **#1: Organization of ideas**
  - Kaplan: Cultural Thought Patterns in Inter-cultural Education(1966)

- **#2: Development of arguments**



- **Solutions**

- Explain the need for specific, rigid organizational style
- Discuss the content verbally while pointing out possible gaps



# Lower order concerns

- **#1: Article usage**

- Articles not used in many oriental languages
- Leads to incorrect usage, or missing articles



- **Solutions**

- Explain the rules
- Work through exercises together
- Try to consult a tutor who speaks the same language



# Lower order concerns

- **#2: Idiomatic expressions**

- “You’re as beautiful as the moon”
- Interpreting English idioms literally

- **Solutions**

- Encourage tutee to read; gain familiarity
- Explain that idioms cannot be translated, using examples



# Lower order concerns

- **#3: Verb tenses**

- Differences in the structure of verb tenses



- **Solutions**

- Pictorial representation of timeline
- Work through exercises, or sections of tutee's own paper, to demonstrate



# Lower order concerns

- **#4: Run-ons/Fragments**

- Occurs because while

- English focuses on punctuation

- many languages do not

- Leads to improperly-used punctuation, overuse of conjunctions

- **Solutions**

- Solve practice exercises

- Explain sentence structure

- Handouts



# Interference errors - Conclusion

- **Important to explain the difference in syntax, grammar rules**
- **Correcting mechanical errors together is key**
- **Handouts and follow-up exercises can help**
- **Tutor needs to focus on differences between English and other languages**



# **Cultural Issues**

**Farhaana Ismail**

# Culture

- United Arab Emirates is highly multi-cultural
- Importance of sensitivity to culture
  - Offense
  - Understanding
  - Professionalism
- Problems?



# Cultural controversies

- **Taboos**

- Religious
- Expletives
- Controversial topics



- **Solutions:**

- » Try to maintain a professional facade
- » Remain unbiased
- » Remind tutee to think of audience
- » Be tactful



# Comfort zones

- Spatial distance

Too close for comfort?

- Privacy

- **Solutions:**

- » Pick up on cues
- » Try to make the tutee comfortable
- » Remain Professional



# Preconceived notions

- I want a she, not a he!
- Nationality
  - Caucasian more qualified
  - Stereotypical ideas



## • Solutions:

- » Try to accommodate student
- » Can also be beneficial not to accommodate student
- » Praise rejected tutor



# Identity

- Anxiety
- Resentment
  - Identity issues
- **Solutions:**
  - » Case by case basis
  - » Sensitivity
  - » No real solution



**Remember to be tactful and professional!**



# Conclusion