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ACQUISITION OF ENGLISH UNCOUNTABLE NOUNS BY MOROCCAN EFL LEARNERS

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Abstract

The objective of this study was to investigate the influence of Moroccan Arabic on the acquisition of English uncountable nouns among Moroccan EFL learners and to determine the role of proficiency level in this process. The research aimed to answer two key questions: 1) Does L1, Moroccan Arabic, affect the acquisition process of English uncountable nouns by Moroccan EFL learners? and 2) Does the proficiency level of Moroccan EFL learners play a role in the acquisition process of English uncountable nouns? Correspondingly, the study hypothesized that there is a negative influence of learners' first language, Moroccan Arabic, on the acquisition of English uncountable nouns, and a positive influence of proficiency level on this acquisition process. Data were collected through three tasks: translation, grammaticality judgment, and multiple-choice question, which were administered to beginner, intermediate, and advanced Moroccan EFL learners. The findings revealed that beginner learners frequently made errors in distinguishing countable from uncountable nouns, indicating a strong L1 influence. Intermediate learners showed improvement across tasks, while advanced learners demonstrated high accuracy and fewer errors, suggesting that proficiency level positively impacts the acquisition of English uncountable nouns.

Keywords: L2 Morphology; Countable and uncountable nouns; Proficiency level; L1 interference; Moroccan Arabic.

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Introduction

The acquisition of second language morphology is a complex process (Jiang, 2000; Jiang, 2004; Jiang, Novokshanova, Masuda, & Wang, 2011; Lardier, 2016). Morphological knowledge, which involves understanding the structure and formation of words, plays a critical role in language proficiency. Learners often struggle with morphological rules when these differ from those of their first language (L1). According to Jiang (2000), L2 learners initially acquire formal aspects of words, such as phonological and orthographic forms, before integrating semantic, syntactic, and morphological information. This staged process results in frequent errors in the early phases of learning, though accuracy improves with exposure and practice.

In this regard, the acquisition of English morphology, particularly the distinction between countable and uncountable nouns, poses challenges for learners whose native languages lack comparable systems (Yazici, 2015). Moroccan EFL learners are no exception. Arabic and English differ in their morphosyntactic realizations of uncountable nouns (Sabir, 2019), yet the specific impact of Moroccan Arabic's morphological system on the acquisition of English uncountable nouns remains underexplored. Addressing this gap is essential for designing effective teaching strategies tailored to Moroccan learners' linguistic background.

Therefore, this study seeks to fill this gap by analyzing how Moroccan EFL learners acquire English uncountable nouns. By identifying patterns in their use of these nouns, the study aims to reveal the main difficulties learners encounter. The findings will contribute to theoretical discussions in second language acquisition and provide practical implications for improving English language instruction in Morocco.

By investigating the process of acquiring English uncountable nouns by Moroccan EFL learners, this current study will try to answer the following questions:

1. Does L1, Moroccan Arabic, affect the acquisition process of English uncountable nouns by Moroccan EFL learners?

2. Does proficiency level of Moroccan EFL play a role in the acquisition process of English uncountable nouns?

By handling the questions above, this piece of research puts the following hypotheses:

1. There is a negative influence of the learners' first language, Moroccan Arabic, on the acquisition process of English uncountable nouns.

2. There is a positive influence of proficiency level of Moroccan EFL learners on the acquisition process of English uncountable nouns.

Literature review

The difference between countable and uncountable nouns

It has been demonstrated that many of the world's languages distinguish between two types of nouns, often referred to as countable and uncountable. According to Quine (1960), countable nouns denote entities that can be individually counted, whereas uncountable nouns denote substances or entities that cannot. To capture this difference, the researcher proposes two semantic criteria: cumulative reference, where adding more of something still allows it to be labeled the same (e.g., "water"), and divisibility of reference, where dividing it preserves the label (e.g., "water" versus "cats").

Beyond semantics, morphological and syntactic properties also define this distinction. Chierchia (1998) identifies three key criteria in English. The first one is pluralization in the sense that count nouns can take plural marking, while uncountable nouns typically cannot. The second criterion is numerals. In particular, count nouns combine with numerals, while uncountable nouns do not. The third criterion relates to determiners. To elaborate more, certain determiners pair with countable nouns, while others pair with uncountable nouns. Determiners like "a few," "several," and "many" are used with countable nouns, while "little" and "much" are used with uncountable nouns. Following the main objective, the study focuses primarily on the morphological distinction between countable and uncountable nouns, as discussed by Chierchia (1998).

Nevertheless, the distinction is not always clear-cut. For instance, Link (1998) notes that cumulative reference does not neatly separate the two categories, as plural count nouns challenge the criterion. Similarly, MacDonald and Carroll (2013) observe that while the morpho-syntax of countable and uncountable nouns is widely recognized, its implications for noun semantics remain debated.

overall, research highlights important semantic, morphological, and syntactic differences between countable and uncountable nouns, while also acknowledging complexities and exceptions. Building on this, the present study emphasizes the morphological dimension to explore how Moroccan learners acquire English uncountable nouns. Although some test items may possess count senses, following Drożdż (2020), they are treated according to their primary uncountable meanings.

Number in Moroccan Arabic nouns

Ennaji, Makhoukh, Es-saiydy, Moubtassime, and Slaoui (2004) and Lahrouchi and Ridouane (2016) argue that Moroccan Arabic recognizes two primary numerical categories: singular and plural. Nonetheless, Ennaji et al (2014) note that not all nouns in Moroccan Arabic adhere strictly to these two categories. Specifically, a series of nominals possess solely a singular form, without a corresponding plural form. In addition, specific nominals exhibit a ternary system, attributed to the presence of the dual form alongside singular and plural forms. However, the dual form present in Classical Arabic is absent in Moroccan Arabic (Lahrouchi & Lampitelli, 2014; Lahrouchi & Ridouane, 2016). According to the same researchers, the formation of plurals in Moroccan Arabic typically occurs through infixation, vowel alternation, or suffixation. Ennaji, Makhoukh, Es-saiydy, Moubtassime, and Slaoui (2004) propose that there are three types of plurals in Moroccan Arabic. The first two well-known ones are internal plurals and external plurals. External plurals are generally formed by adding one of the following suffixes to the base word: -in, -a(t), -an. Regarding the suffix -in, Ennaji, Makhoukh, Es-saiydy, Moubtassime, and Slaoui (2004, p. 60) state that "The plural of nouns formed by the suffix -in are less numerous". Additionally, the suffix -in is applied to nouns that denote paired body parts, occupations, or borrowed terms from Standard Arabic. Concerning the suffix – a(t), it is used to pluralize masculine substantives that designate human groups. Similarly, the suffix -at is used for forming feminine substantives that end in -a(t) and for masculine nouns ending in a consonant or the vowel -u. Moreover, the suffix -an plays a significant role in adjective derivation; it is also used in forming plurals with the stem pattern CəCC. Furthermore, Lahrouchi and Lampitelli (2014) claim that the process of external plural formation exhibits a high degree of productivity and constitutes the dominant pluralization method across the majority of noun

classes. They argue, for instance, that uncountable nouns opt for the '-at' suffixation, especially when used with numerals, as illustrated in the following examples: ħut 'fish' / 3u3 ħutat 'two fish', xubz 'bread' / 3u3 xubzat 'two loaves of bread'. On the other hand, internal plurals maintain the same root, yet the stem undergoes a complete transformation. This category is exemplified by: suq (market) → swaq (markets); fumm (mouth) → fmam/ffam (mouths); xal (uncle) → xwal (uncles). Besides external and internal plurals, Ennaji et al. (2004) argue that there is a third type of plural in Moroccan Arabic known as mixed plurals. The latter resembles an internal plural, with the key difference being the addition of a suffix to the internal plural form. In other words, Mixed plurals emerge through a fusion of the mechanisms employed in both external and internal plurals. The following examples showcase this type of plural formation: kas (cup) → kis-an (cups); bab (door) → bib-an (doors); ɣar (cave) → ɣir-an (caves). It is also important to state that collective nouns in Moroccan Arabic do not generally undergo the process of pluralization (Ennaji et al., 2004). Simply put, collective nouns operate as singular units because they refer to a group of individuals or things as a single entity. However, it should be noted that when this class of nouns is used in the plural, the plural form is served to emphasize the degree of intensity.

Number marking in English nouns

According to Allen (1980), English distinguishes between two sets of nouns: countable and uncountable. Countable nouns, such as 'car', can be quantified directly (e.g., one car, two cars). In contrast, uncountable nouns, like 'lightning', cannot be counted in the same manner, hence one does not say 'one lightning' or 'many lightnings'. Yang (2022) argues that countable nouns display a singular/plural distinction. To indicate plurality, a plural marker must be added. Most regular English nouns form their plurals by adding -s or -es to the stem, while irregular nouns undergo specific changes. For instance, the plural form of many countable nouns is created by suffixing -s (Mohamed Salleh, Rabiah Tul Adawiyah, Satomi Kawaguchi, Caroline Jones, & Bruno Di Biase, 2016). In addition, some irregular nouns use suffixes like -i, -ae, and -a (e.g., cacti, formulae, phenomena) or -(r)en (e.g., oxen, children, brethren). In contrast, uncountable nouns in English are formally singular (Allen, 1980). For example, one says "The information is accurate" rather than "The information are accurate." Countable nouns, however, have both singular and plural forms, adjusting their verb

agreement accordingly: "The book is on the table" (singular) versus "The books are on the table" (plural).

Furthermore, high countability nouns are used with numerals (e.g., one woman, three dogs), whereas low countability nouns are paired with a measure word rather than a numeral (e.g., one glass of water, two pounds of sand, three plumes of smoke) (Salleh et al., 2016). Notably, research shows that both children and adults rely on number rather than mass when making judgments about object-uncountable nouns, highlighting a cognitive preference for numerical distinctions even in cases where mass semantics might be expected (Thomas-Wilhelm & Pérez-Vidal, 2018). In addition, MacDonald and Carroll (2013) argue that English uncountable nouns generally do not take a plural suffix. In other words, the plural morpheme -s is not typically added to uncountable nouns, as they are treated as singular in form (e.g., "information" rather than "informations").

The Impact of L1 on second language acquisition

The influence of L1 on L2 vocabulary acquisition

Research has shown that second language acquisition is strongly influenced by the learner's first language (L1) (Zhanming, 2014). Giacobbe (1992) notes that L1 functions as a prior system, allowing learners to participate in L2 discourse even before fully mastering the target language. Villanueva (1990) adds that L1 can have a positive effect when L1 and L2 are similar, but a negative effect when they differ. For instance, Sabbah (2015) shows that Arabic-speaking learners frequently treat English uncountable nouns as countable, demonstrating a clear case of negative transfer where differences between L1 and L2 result in systematic errors in vocabulary use. Similarly, Yahya (2024) reports that Arabic interference extends beyond vocabulary to phonological and syntactic aspects of English, further illustrating the pervasive impact of L1 on L2 development. In addition, Yahya (2024) stresses the fact that Algerian learners' limited vocabulary is closely tied to the dominance of Arabic in their daily communication, as they often translate English words directly into Arabic rather than inferring meaning from the broader context. This phenomenon, referred to as transfer (Ellis, 2017), can facilitate learning by providing familiar structures but may also lead to interference and errors (Baxter et al., 2022). For example, speakers of highly inflected languages like Russian may incorrectly apply inflectional

patterns in English, where word order is more crucial (Al-Ahdal & Aljabr, 2023).

Moreover, the influence of L1 extends to L2 vocabulary acquisition, where lexical and conceptual knowledge plays a dual role. Milton and Masrai (2015) argue that learners with well-developed L1 vocabularies are better equipped to form robust L2 lexical representations. Similarly, Wolter (2006) emphasizes that while L1 knowledge can aid L2 word integration, it may also cause errors in word selection, as when Japanese learners choose "wide" or "narrow" instead of "big" or "small." Learners' L2 proficiency further modulates this effect, with higher proficiency reducing L1 interference. Milton and Masrai (2015) suggest that learners apply relabeling of existing L1 concepts while developing new concepts for words not represented in their L1. Overall, a strong L1 lexical network can support accurate L2 collocations, although the precise extent of its influence remains under investigation.

The influence of L1 on the acquisition of L2 Morphology

Second language learners often face challenges in acquiring morphology, as they tend to use L2 morphological features in non-target-like ways. Jiang et al. (2011) note that grammatical morphemes, such as tense, gender markers, and plural forms, are particularly difficult for L2 learners.

The acquisition order of grammatical morphemes has been a focus of L2 research (Jiang et al., 2011). Murakami and Alexopoulou (2015) explain that studies aim to identify whether a universal pattern of morpheme acquisition exists. While Dulay and Burt (1974) suggest that L2 learners follow a similar acquisition pattern, they argue that L1 does not influence this order. In contrast, Luk and Shirai (2009) highlight that L1 can affect when a learner acquires specific morphemes, depending on whether the L1 has similar features.

Jiang et al. (2011) further argue that learners acquire L2 morphemes more easily if they exist in their native language. Congruent learners, whose L1 has corresponding morphemes, are more likely to achieve native-like proficiency, while incongruent learners may face significant challenges, potentially limiting their attainment of native-like competence. Additionally, Sabbah (2015) demonstrates that Arabic-speaking learners frequently misapply English plural markers to uncountable nouns, reflecting the influence of Arabic noun morphology on their L2

morphological development. Yahya (2024) stresses the fact that such interference extends to broader morpho-syntactic patterns, as Arabic learners often transfer structural features from their L1 into English, resulting in persistent errors in agreement and pluralization.

While previous studies highlight the challenges learners face in acquiring English morphology and the role of L1 transfer (Sabbah, 2015; Yahya, 2024), it is also important to consider the stages of lexical development proposed by Jiang (2000). According to his model, morphological information is absent in the first two stages of lexical development and becomes integrated only in the final stage, the L2 integration stage. Therefore, Moroccan EFL learners' potential errors with uncountable nouns can be interpreted as a natural consequence of their position in these initial stages, where morphological specifications have not yet been fully consolidated. This theoretical perspective helps explain why learners may consistently misapply plural markers to uncountable nouns, beyond mere L1 interference.

The role of proficiency level on second language acquisition

The influence of proficiency level on L2 vocabulary acquisition

In second language acquisition, fluency significantly influences L2 vocabulary knowledge (Milton, 2009; Nation, 2001; Van Hell & Kroll, 2013; Wolter, 2006). Kroll and Stewart (1994) argue that advanced bilinguals tend to use the conceptual mediation route, accessing L2 word meanings directly, while less proficient learners rely on lexical mediation, depending on their L1 for comprehension.

As proficiency increases, learners develop stronger connections between L2 words and their concepts (Van Hell & Kroll, 2013). However, even highly fluent L2 learners may still rely on L1 translations when encountering new vocabulary (Jiang, 2002). Jiang (2000) emphasizes that the ability to infer L2 word meanings from exposure and context distinguishes learners at the integration stage from those at earlier stages of lexical development.

Thus, advanced bilinguals can grasp L2 word meanings directly, while less proficient learners depend on L1. The gradual shift from reliance on L1 to context-based comprehension marks a key milestone in L2 vocabulary acquisition.

The influence of proficiency level on the acquisition of L2 morphology

Having mentioned the significant influence of learners' first language on second language morphology, researchers in second language acquisition have investigated factors that may mitigate this influence (Li, 2021). Proficiency level emerges as a crucial determinant. For example, Hwang and Lardier (2013) find that native English speakers' accuracy in Korean plural marking improved with higher proficiency, approaching native-like performance. Similarly, Azaz (2019) reports that advanced L2 Arabic learners rely less on L1 transfer when producing generic plurals, whereas beginners depend heavily on their L1.

However, some researchers argue that adult learners may struggle with L2 inflections regardless of proficiency (Li, 2021). The Shallow Structure Hypothesis suggests that advanced L2 speakers process only shallow representations of inflections (Clahsen & Felser, 2006). Jiang et al. (2011) and Aaronson and Ferres (1986) similarly note that even highly proficient learners may make inflectional errors and lack sensitivity to L2 morphological mistakes.

These findings indicate that while proficiency can reduce reliance on L1 in L2 morphology, its effectiveness is limited. The interaction between proficiency and L1 influence is complex, warranting further research into the mechanisms underlying this relationship.

Review of previous studies

Before embarking on this section, it is important to mention that the focus will be on a few studies that are directly related to the topic under investigation.

First, Kumare (2003) explores the acquisition of countable and uncountable nouns by Sinhalese and Japanese learners of English, investigating three key variables: the influence of context, the impact of proficiency level, and the effect of the first language. This summary focuses on the latter two variables as they are central to the current research. Regarding proficiency level, Kumare (2003) finds that proficiency significantly affects acquisition. University students from Sri Lanka and Japan demonstrate a higher accuracy rate on a grammaticality judgment test compared to high school students from both countries. This indicates that higher proficiency levels correlate with better performance. In terms of first language influence,

Kumare (2003) concludes that Sinhalese learners outperform Japanese learners at both the high school and university levels on the same test. He attributes this to the positive influence of Sinhalese grammar on acquiring countable and uncountable nouns, suggesting that L1 grammar plays a significant role in learning these distinctions in English.

Second, Hua and Lee (2005) examine the acquisition of the English countable/uncountable distinction by Chinese ESL learners, finding that university learners have higher accuracy rates than senior high school students in their judgments of countable and uncountable nouns. Similarly, Snape (2008) uses a grammaticality judgment test to assess Japanese and Spanish learners' ability to distinguish between English countable and uncountable nouns. The study involves 75 participants, including native speakers of Spanish, Japanese, and English. Snape (2008) finds that proficiency level significantly impacts acquisition, with intermediate groups of Japanese and Spanish learners showing significant differences from native English speakers, while advanced groups did not.

Furthermore, Choi et al. (2018) investigate the acquisition of the English uncountable/countable distinction by L1 Mandarin Chinese and L1 Korean L2 English learners. They argue that L2 learners' judgments are influenced by a semantic universal rather than L1 transfer. Conversely, Köylü (2019) finds that L1 influence affects the acquisition of the uncountable/countable distinction by Turkish learners, particularly at advanced levels of L2 proficiency. Turkish learners inconsistently treat object uncountable nouns, such as 'jewelry,' unlike the native control group.

Moreover, Sabir (2019) studies the L2 acquisition of uncountable/countable nouns with 45 intermediate Arab English learners and 20 native English speakers. The findings indicate that Arab L2 learners often treat uncountable nouns as countable nouns, evidenced by their reluctance to use indefinite singulars in appropriate contexts. These persistent errors align with Jiang's (2000) Lexical Representation Model, which posits that morphological information is not incorporated until the final stage of lexical development. Thus, Arab learners' tendency to treat uncountable nouns as countable may reflect their reliance on earlier stages of lexical development, where morphology has not yet been fully integrated into their L2 representations.

In addition, Pattanapongpitak (2020) examines the L2 acquisition of the countable/uncountable distinction by Thai learners, involving 118 participants divided into three proficiency groups: intermediate, upper intermediate, and advanced. His findings from a grammaticality judgment task show high accuracy rates in differentiating between uncountable and countable nouns. Specifically, Thai learners correctly judg count nouns 75.92% of the time and uncountable nouns 73.66% of the time. Furthermore, Pattanapongpitak (2020) notes that accuracy rates improve with increased proficiency, with advanced Thai learners performing comparably to native speakers, indicating successful acquisition of the English noun phrase structure.

To conclude this section, these studies highlight two main factors: proficiency level and first language influence. First, higher proficiency levels consistently correlate with better performance in distinguishing countable and uncountable nouns. Studies by Kumare (2003), Hua and Lee (2005), Snape (2008), and Pattanapongpitak (2020) all demonstrate that advanced learners exhibit higher accuracy rates. Second, the learners' first language significantly impacts the acquisition process. For example, Kumare (2003) notes that Sinhalese learners outperform Japanese learners, likely due to positive L1 transfer. Köylü (2019) and Sabir (2019) also emphasizes the role of L1 grammar, with Turkish and Arab learners showing distinct patterns in their treatment of uncountable and countable nouns. Conversely, Choi et al. (2018) argue that L2 learners' judgments are influenced more by semantic universals than by L1 transfer.

In contrast to the aforementioned studies, the present research will shed light on a different morphological system, namely that of Moroccan Arabic, and will examine its potential influence on the acquisition of English uncountable nouns.

Methodology

Sampling

The participants in this current study comprise 73 Moroccan EFL learners, divided into three distinct proficiency groups (see Table 1). All participants are native speakers of Moroccan Arabic. The beginner level consists of 24 first-year baccalaureate students at "Les Orangers High School", who have recently started their journey in learning English. The intermediate group includes 26 second-semester English major students at FLSH Rabat,

indicating a more developed understanding and use of the language. Finally, the advanced group is composed of 23 Master's students specializing in Theoretical and Applied Linguistics, demonstrating a high level of proficiency and academic engagement with English. To establish these three proficiency levels, a two-year learning gap was used as the criterion. Specifically, the gap among the groups is defined by two years of English study. While a standardized proficiency test could have provided an additional measure, it was not administered due to practical constraints related to time, accessibility, and resources. Therefore, the first-year baccalaureate students represent the beginner level, the second-semester English major students at FLSH Rabat represent the intermediate level, and the Master's students represent the advanced level. This clear delineation ensures that the proficiency levels are distinct, providing a robust framework for investigating the acquisition of English uncountable nouns across different stages of language learning.

Table 1. The number of participants and their proficiency level

Proficiency level	Number of participants
Beginner level	24
Intermediate level	26
Advanced level	23

Instruments

The current piece of research employed three quintessential research instruments as its data collection tools: a translation task, a grammaticality judgment task, and a multiple-choice questions task. In addition, participants were asked to indicate their first language, as this study targets students who speak Moroccan Arabic as a first language. It is crucial to note that no background information questionnaire was administered to participants. This decision was made for two primary reasons. Firstly, administering three distinct tasks already imposes a significant cognitive load on the participants. The translation task, grammaticality judgement task, and multiple-choice questions task each require focused attention and mental effort. Adding a background information questionnaire would further increase the cognitive demands on the participants, potentially affecting their performance on the primary tasks. By omitting the

background questionnaire, the research aimed to minimize participant fatigue and ensure more accurate and reliable data collection from the core tasks. However, it must be acknowledged that the absence of such a questionnaire restricts a more detailed understanding of participants' prior exposure to English. Secondly, the primary objective of this study is to investigate the acquisition of English uncountable nouns by Moroccan Arabic speakers. Therefore, the critical piece of demographic information needed is the participants' first language. Collecting extensive background information beyond this essential detail would not directly contribute to the study's primary research questions. Therein lies the rationale: focusing solely on the specification of the participants' mother tongue allows for an efficient data collection process, thereby ensuring that the study remains tightly aligned with its central objectives without the distraction of extraneous information.

Translation task

The task consists of thirteen countable nouns in Moroccan Arabic, prompting participants to translate them into English. Notably, these nouns inherently defy quantification in English. The rationale behind this selection is to investigate whether participants' native language morphology influences their translation choices, and to explore how proficiency levels factor into their decisions.

Grammaticality judgment task

The task also comprises thirteen uncountable nouns in English, which are countable in Moroccan Arabic. Notably, all the selected English uncountable nouns are presented with plural markings, and participants are required to determine whether each noun is grammatically correct or incorrect. The objective is to assess whether participants rely on their native language morphological knowledge in making their judgments, as well as to examine the influence of their proficiency level on these judgments.

Multiple-choice question task

The task includes thirteen sentences, each with a gap that participants are required to fill with an appropriate noun. For each sentence, students are presented with three choices from which they must select the correct answer. This format differs slightly from the one discussed by Meara and Buxton (1987) in that it offers only three options instead of more, aiming to

reduce the cognitive load on the participants and make the task less demanding.

It is important to note that the selected nouns are uncountable in English but countable in Moroccan Arabic. This selection was made to investigate the influence of L1 on the acquisition of English uncountable nouns, consistent with the objectives of the other tasks. By focusing on these specific nouns, the study aims to explore whether participants' native language morphology affects their choices and to assess the impact of proficiency levels on their responses.

The pilot-testing of the three tasks

In order to test the effectiveness of the three tasks, a pilot study was conducted with fifteen students enrolled in a volunteer English program at Moulay Ismail's dormitory. Initially, each of the three tasks consisted of sixteen items. However, feedback from the pilot study suggested that reducing the number of items to thirteen for each task would make them less challenging for the participants. Additionally, the pilot testing revealed that several items in the translation task needed to be changed or revised to ensure clarity. Moreover, the piloting process uncovered an error in the final task, which involved multiple-choice questions. It became apparent that this error needed to be corrected to ensure the validity of the assessment.

Furthermore, the pilot study highlighted the necessity of providing clear instructions for the translation task, as some participants struggled with understanding the requirements. In addition, it was observed that participants occasionally skipped the first task and proceeded directly to the second task, which was the grammaticality judgment task. To address this, the importance of following the task order was emphasized. This feedback was crucial in refining the tasks to better suit the participants' needs and ensure more reliable results. The piloting process stressed the significance of preparation and testing before the final administration of the tasks. Consequently, these adjustments aimed to enhance the clarity and effectiveness of the research instruments. Also, the pilot study provided valuable insights that informed the final design and implementation of the assessment tasks.

Data collection procedures

Following the completion of the pilot-testing phase and subsequent revisions to the primary tasks, data collection commenced. Initially, data was gathered from second-semester English major students at FLSH Rabat. Thereafter, the research instruments were administered to Master's students specializing in Theoretical and Applied Linguistics. Prior to engaging with the tasks, participants received explicit instructions to begin with the translation task, followed by the grammaticality judgment task, and finally, the multiple-choice question task. This structured approach was implemented to ensure consistency across participant responses.

Additionally, participants were briefed on the specific requirements of each task to foster clarity and understanding. In the first task, they were instructed to translate countable nouns from Moroccan Arabic to English. Subsequently, the second task required them to assess the grammatical correctness of underlined nouns, determining whether they were correct or incorrect. Finally, in the third task, students were asked to select the appropriate noun that best completed each sentence by circling the correct answer.

After collecting data from second-semester English major students at FLSH Rabat and Master's students specializing in Theoretical and Applied Linguistics, the study proceeded to include first-year baccalaureate students. These students were respectfully instructed to complete the assigned tasks. Additionally, the students were asked to complete three tasks sequentially. The instructions for each task were explained in both Moroccan Arabic and English. This bilingual approach ensured that all students could fully understand and accurately respond to the tasks, thereby enhancing the reliability of the collected data.

Moreover, data collection from the first-year baccalaureate students spanned two days at "Les Orangers High School", primarily due to their limited availability as they were preparing for final exams. Specifically, on the first day, 10 students participated in the study. On the second day, an additional 13 students took part, bringing the total number of participants to 23.

Data coding

To enter the data into the statistical program, each proficiency group was assigned a number: the beginner level was assigned 1, the intermediate level was assigned 2, and the advanced level was assigned 3. These values do not represent a hierarchical relationship or have arithmetic value; they are simply used to help the statistical program (SPSS) identify each category.

The three tasks used in this study generated continuous data as numerical scores based on the performance of each proficiency group. The data from each task was coded and analyzed separately.

To ensure the consistency of task scoring, an intra-rater reliability check was conducted. After initially scoring all participant responses, the researcher re-scored a subset of the data after a two-week interval. The scores from the two rounds were compared, and a high level of agreement was observed, confirming that the scoring procedure was applied consistently and reliably throughout the study.

Results

Results of the Moroccan EFL learners' performance on the translation task

Descriptive statistics

This section presents the descriptive statistics for the performance of each proficiency level on the translation task. The statistics include the mean, median, standard deviation, skewness, and kurtosis for each group.

Table 2. Descriptive statistics of the performance of the three proficiency groups on the first task

Proficiency level	Mean	Median	Standard Deviation	Skewness	Kurtosis
Beginner	3.25	3.00	2.57	0.815	0.921
Intermediate	6.50	6.00	2.73	0.191	-0.373
Advanced	9.48	10.00	3.06	-1.126	1.634

In compliance with Table 2, the mean for the beginner level is 3.25, indicating that on average, participants in this group correctly translated slightly more than three targeted nouns. The median score is 3.00,

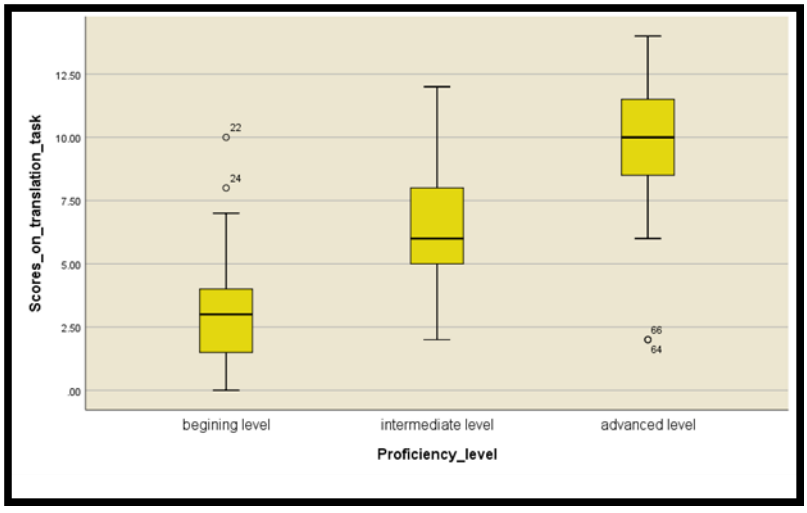
suggesting that half of the participants scored below or equal to this value. The standard deviation was 2.57, showing moderate variability in scores.

According to table 2, the mean for the intermediate group is 6.50, demonstrating a higher average performance compared to the beginner level. The median score is 6.00, and the standard deviation is 2.73, indicating a moderate spread of scores.

At the advanced level, the mean score is 9.48, reflecting a higher average accuracy in translating targeted nouns. The median score is 10.00, indicating that half of the participants scored at or above this value. The standard deviation is 3.06, showing a wider spread of scores.

In addition, the boxplots (Figure 1) for the three proficiency levels on the translation task show that while most data points fall within the expected ranges, there are a few outliers. For the beginner level, there are two outliers. For the intermediate level, there are no outliers. For the advanced level, there are two outliers. In addition, the interquartile ranges (IQRs) are roughly consistent across the levels, satisfying the assumption of homogeneity of variances. However, the presence of a few outliers at the beginner and advanced levels suggests some variability.

Figure 1. Boxplots for the performance of the three proficiency groups on the first task



To conclude this section, we have observed that the assumptions of a normal distribution were not satisfied as indicated by the descriptive statistics. Therefore, a non-parametric test will be conducted.

Inferential statistics

Due to the non-normal distribution of data observed earlier, the Kruskal-Wallis test, a non-parametric test, was used to analyze the differences in translation task scores among three proficiency levels: beginning, intermediate, and advanced.

The results of the independent samples Kruskal Wallis test indicate that there is a significant difference in the distribution of translation task scores across the proficiency levels ($p < 0.05$). This means that the translation scores vary significantly among the three proficiency groups. Therefore, a post-hoc test was used in order to determine which specific groups have means that are statistically different from each other.

Table 3. Post-hoc results of the translation task

Comparison	Sig
Beginner level – intermediate level	.005
Beginner level – advanced level	.000
Intermediate level – advanced level	.022

Following Table 3, the comparison between the beginner level and intermediate level shows a statistically significant difference with a significance value of .005. This indicates that the mean scores of the beginner level group differ significantly from those of the intermediate level group, suggesting a notable disparity in performance between these two groups.

Similarly, the comparison between the beginner level and advanced level yields a significance value of .000. This result signifies a significant difference between the two groups, demonstrating that the beginner level group's mean scores are substantially different from those of the advanced level group.

Additionally, the comparison between the intermediate level and advanced level reveals a statistically significant difference with a significance value of .022. This finding suggests that there is a significant difference in mean scores between the intermediate and advanced level groups.

To conclude, the post-hoc test results of the translation task show significant differences in scores across all proficiency levels. Specifically, the beginner level scores are much lower than both the intermediate and advanced levels,

indicating clear proficiency improvement. Additionally, the intermediate and advanced levels also show significant score differences, highlighting ongoing progress.

Results of the Moroccan EFL learners' performance on the grammaticality judgment task

Descriptive statistics

This section presents the descriptive statistics for the performance of each proficiency level on the grammaticality judgment task. The statistics include the mean, median, standard deviation, skewness, and kurtosis for each group.

Table 4. Descriptive statistics of the performance of the three proficiency groups on the second task

Proficiency level	Mean	Median	Standard Deviation	Skewness	Kurtosis
Beginner	5.66	6.00	2.03	-.314	.456
Intermediate	8.23	9.00	2.71	-.445	-.661
Advanced	11.56	10.00	2.38	-.832	-.209

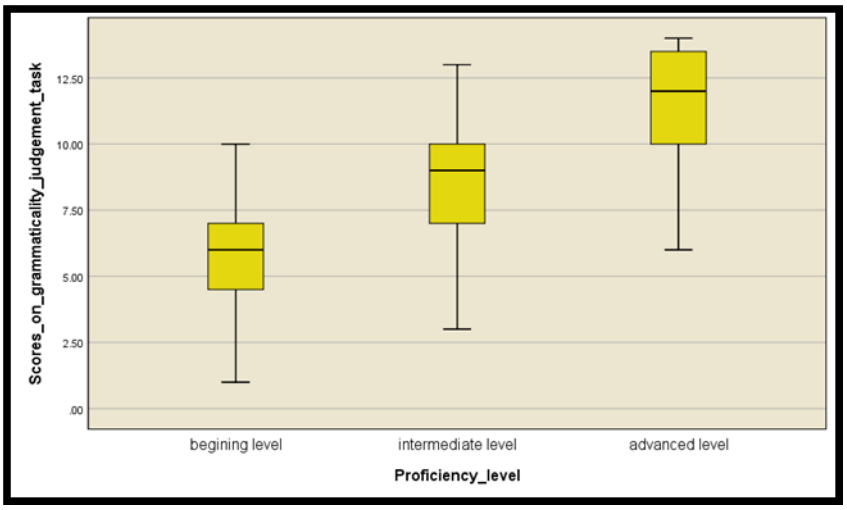
As reported by table 4, the mean for the beginner level is 5.66, indicating that on average, participants in this group correctly judged slightly more than five targeted nouns. The median score is 6.00, suggesting that half of the participants scored below or equal to this value. The standard deviation is 2.03, showing moderate variability in scores.

According to the same table, the intermediate group has a mean score of 8.23, meaning participants in this group, on average, correctly judged just over eight targeted nouns. The median score is 9.00, indicating that half of the participants scored nine or below. The standard deviation of 2.71 indicates greater variability in scores for the intermediate group compared to the beginner group.

The advanced proficiency group has a mean score of 11.56, indicating that on average, participants in this group correctly judged slightly more than eleven targeted nouns. The median score is 12.00, suggesting that half of the participants scored twelve or below. The standard deviation is 2.38, reflecting moderate variability in the scores.

Furthermore, the boxplots for the three proficiency levels on the grammaticality judgment task show that the data for all groups do not contain any outliers (see Figure 2). It is observed that the median scores increase progressively with proficiency levels, indicating higher performance at advanced levels. In addition, the interquartile ranges (IQRs) are not perfectly equal across all proficiency groups, violating the assumption of homogeneity of variances. In particular, the beginner level has a smaller box, while the advanced level has a larger box.

Figure 2. Boxplots for the performance of the three proficiency groups on the second task



In summary, the descriptive statistics indicate that the assumptions of a normal distribution are not met. Consequently, a non-parametric test will be conducted.

Inferential statistics

Given that the normality assumptions were not met, a non-parametric test, specifically the independent Kruskal-Wallis test, was performed to assess the significant differences among the three proficiency groups.

The independent Kruskal-Wallis test results indicate a significant difference in the distribution of the second task scores among proficiency levels ($p < 0.05$). This suggests that there are meaningful differences in grammaticality judgment scores across the three proficiency groups. To pinpoint which groups exhibit statistically distinct means, a post-hoc test was employed.

Table 5. Post-hoc results of the second task

Comparison	Sig
Beginner level – intermediate level	.015
Beginner level – advanced level	.000
Intermediate level – advanced level	.003

The post-hoc results in Table 5 provide significance values for the pairwise comparisons between the three proficiency levels: beginner, intermediate, and advanced. These values indicate whether the differences in the grammaticality judgment task scores between the groups are statistically significant.

First, the comparison between the beginner level and intermediate level yields a significance value of 0.015. This result indicates that there is a statistically significant difference in the grammaticality judgement task scores between these two groups, suggesting that learners at the beginner level perform differently on grammaticality judgment task compared to those at the intermediate level.

Next, the comparison between the beginner level and advanced level shows a significance value of 0.000. This highly significant result highlights a substantial difference in the grammaticality judgment scores between these two groups, indicating that beginning-level learners and advanced-level learners have markedly different performances on this task.

Lastly, the comparison between the intermediate level and advanced level presents a significance value of 0.003. This significant difference implies that intermediate-level learners also perform differently on the grammaticality judgment task when compared to advanced-level learners.

To conclude, the post-hoc test results reveal that the grammaticality judgment task scores differ significantly across all proficiency level comparisons, indicating the distinct performance variations among beginning, intermediate, and advanced Moroccan EFL learners.

Results of the Moroccan EFL learners' performance on the multiple-choice question task

Descriptive statistics

This section presents the descriptive statistics for the performance of each proficiency level on the multiple-choice question task. The statistics include

the mean, median, standard deviation, skewness, and kurtosis for each group.

Table 6. Descriptive statistics of the performance of the three proficiency groups on the third task

Proficiency level	Mean	Median	Standard Deviation	Skewness	Kurtosis
Beginner	5.87	5.50	2.57	.300	-.864
Intermediate	9.53	10.00	2.48	-.253	-.518
Advanced	12.26	10.00	2.04	-.941	-.337

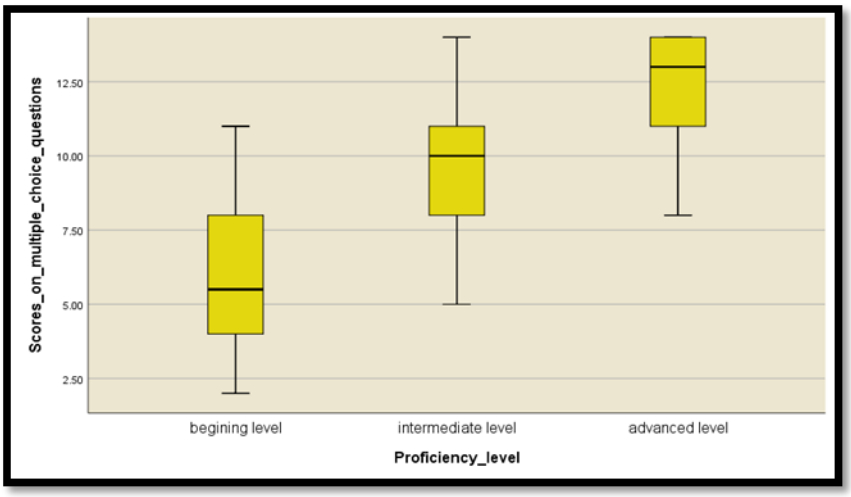
In line with Table 6, the beginner group demonstrates a mean score of 5.87 on the multiple-choice question task, indicating that participants in this group, on average, correctly selected nearly six targeted nouns. The median score is 5.50, suggesting that half of the participants selected 5.50 or fewer correct answers. The standard deviation of 2.57 indicates moderate variability in the scores around the mean.

In accordance with the same table, the intermediate group displays a higher mean score of 9.53 on the multiple-choice question task, indicating that participants in this group, on average, selected correctly just over nine targeted nouns. The median score is 10.00, suggesting that half of the participants selected 10.00 or fewer correct answers. The standard deviation of 2.48 reflects stable variability around the mean score of 9.53.

In contrast to both the beginner and intermediate groups, the advanced group demonstrates the highest mean score at 12.26, accompanied by a median of 13.00. The standard deviation of 2.04 suggests comparatively less variability around the mean score of 12.26.

The boxplots for the three proficiency levels on multiple-choice question show that the data for all groups do not contain any outliers (see figure 3). It is observed that the median scores increase progressively with proficiency levels, indicating higher performance at advanced levels. In addition, the interquartile ranges (IQRs) are somewhat consistent but not perfectly equal across the proficiency levels. In particular, the beginner level has a longer box, indicating higher variability, while the advanced level has a shorter box, indicating less variability. This suggests that the variances are not homogeneous.

Figure 3. Boxplots for the performance of the three proficiency groups on the third task



In conclusion, the descriptive statistics show that the assumptions of normality are not met. Therefore, we will proceed with a non-parametric test.

Inferential statistics

As indicated by the descriptive statistics of Moroccan EFL learners' performance on the multiple-choice question, the data deviates from a normal distribution. Consequently, a non-parametric test, specifically the Kruskal-Wallis test, was used to examine the differences in scores for the third task across the three proficiency levels: beginning, intermediate, and advanced.

The results of independent Kruskal-Wallis test indicate that there is a significant difference in the distribution of the multiple-choice question task scores across the proficiency levels ($p < 0.05$). This means that the scores vary significantly among the three proficiency groups. A post-hoc test was used in order to determine which specific groups have means that are statistically different from each other.

Table 7. Post-hoc results of the third task

Comparison	Sig
Beginner level – intermediate level	.001
Beginner level – advanced level	.000
Intermediate level – advanced level	.011

The post-hoc results in Table 7 display the significance values for the pairwise comparisons among the three proficiency levels: beginning, intermediate, and advanced, with regard to their performance on the multiple-choice question task. These values show whether the differences in scores among the groups are statistically significant.

For the beginner level versus intermediate level comparison, the significance value is 0.001. This signifies a statistically significant difference in multiple-choice question scores between these two groups, indicating that the performance of beginner level learners differs from that of intermediate level learners.

In the comparison between the beginner level and advanced level, the significance value is 0.000. This very significant result points to a substantial difference in multiple-choice question scores, demonstrating that beginner level learners and advanced level learners perform very differently.

The comparison between the intermediate level and advanced level has a significance value of 0.011. This also indicates a statistically significant difference in multiple-choice question scores, suggesting that intermediate level learners perform differently compared to advanced level learners.

In summary, the post-hoc results reveal significant variations in multiple-choice question scores across all proficiency levels, emphasizing distinct performance differences among beginning, intermediate, and advanced Moroccan EFL learners.

Discussion

The study's findings indicate that there is a negative influence of learners first language on the acquisition of English uncountable nouns. This is evident in the performance of lower proficiency levels on the three research tasks. For beginners, the strong influence of L1, Moroccan Arabic, appears in their frequent errors in the translation task, where they often used countable forms for uncountable nouns. In addition, their low accuracy rates in the grammaticality judgment and multiple-choice tasks might be attributed to the negative influence of acquirers' first language. In addition, and according to the results, Moroccan EFL learners at the beginning level tend to overgeneralize pluralization based on the morphological patterns of their first language.

For intermediate learners, the findings showed that learners at this level demonstrated improvements across the three tasks, indicating better performance than the beginner level. This clearly indicates that Moroccan EFL learners at this level have begun to internalize some of the morphological knowledge of English uncountable nouns. As a result, and in contrast to Moroccan students at the beginning level, the overgeneralization of plural markers differs, as they are beginning to apply the morphological rules of English. In addition, the positive correlation between production and reception improvements reflects a growing ability to distinguish between countable and uncountable nouns, supporting the idea that intermediate Moroccan EFL learners are moving beyond reliance on L1 lexical/conceptual knowledge.

Furthermore, advanced learners reflected high performance rates across the three-task compared to intermediate and beginner levels of proficiency. In particular, results showed that this group has a mean score of 9.48 in the translation task, and high accuracy in the grammaticality judgment and multiple-choice tasks. As per Jiang's model of L2 acquisition, students at this stage have successfully integrated the morphological aspects of English uncountable nouns. In addition, students at this level made fewer errors and exhibited strong correlation between productive and receptive knowledge of English uncountable nouns. This indicates that the influence of learners' mother tongue is minimal and that there is no negative influence coming from learners' L1. Also, advanced learners' ability to accurately distinguish between English countable and uncountable nouns in both production and reception tasks demonstrates a high level of L2 morphological competence. Therefore, Moroccan EFL learners at this level have an advanced understanding of the morphological system of English and are not overgeneralizing pluralization compared to learners at other proficiency levels.

This also means that proficiency level clearly plays a positive role in the acquisition of English uncountable nouns. At the beginner level, Moroccan EFL learners demonstrate significant difficulties in producing and comprehending the distinction between countable and uncountable nouns in English. This is evident in their consistent errors in the translation task and low accuracy rates in the grammaticality judgment and multiple-choice question tasks. As Moroccan EFL learners advance to intermediate level, there is improvement in their use and understanding of English

uncountable nouns. In addition, Moroccan EFL learners at this level of proficiency start to overcome the negative influence of their L1 as they become more familiar with English morphological rules. Furthermore, Moroccan EFL learners at the advanced level demonstrate a high proficiency rate in handling the distinction between countable and uncountable nouns of English.

It behooves us to mention that the findings of the study align pretty much with what is found in previous studies. In particular, Kumare (2003) found that the first language significantly affects the acquisition of countable and uncountable nouns. Sinhalese learners outperformed Japanese learners due to the positive influence of their L1 grammar, which facilitated the learning of these distinctions in English. Similarly, Moroccan Arabic negatively influenced beginner learners, leading to frequent errors. This mirrors the Japanese learners in Kumare's (2003) study, who also struggled due to the lack of corresponding grammatical structures in their L1. Furthermore, Hua and Lee (2005) examined Chinese learners and found that proficiency level improved their ability to distinguish between countable and uncountable nouns, but L1 influence was still notable. In our study, Moroccan beginners displayed low accuracy in grammaticality judgment and multiple-choice tasks, reflecting a strong L1 influence. Intermediate learners improved, suggesting a gradual overcoming of L1 transfer issues, similar to the Chinese learners who showed better performance with increased proficiency. Moreover, Snape (2008) observed that both Japanese and Spanish learners faced difficulties due to the L1 influence, but advanced learners performed comparably to native speakers. Our advanced Moroccan learners also showed high accuracy and fewer errors, indicating that with higher proficiency, the negative transfer from Moroccan Arabic diminished. This pattern suggests that while L1 influence is significant at lower levels, its impact decreases as learners internalize L2 morphological knowledge more effectively. In addition, Choi et al. (2018) proposed that semantic universals, rather than L1 transfer, influenced L2 learners' judgments of the countable/uncountable distinction. However, our findings contrast with this view. In particular, Moroccan beginners' errors were attributed to L1 transfer, supporting Köylü's (2019) conclusion that L1 influence persists, especially at advanced levels. Turkish learners in Köylü's (2019) study inconsistently treated object uncountable nouns due to L1

influence, paralleling our Moroccan learners' initial struggles with uncountable nouns. Similarly, Sabir (2019) found that Arab learners often treated uncountable nouns as countable, reflecting a similar pattern in our Moroccan learners. The consistent errors in the translation task and the receptive tasks among beginners and also intermediate learners highlight the strong L1 influence, which aligns with Sabir's findings. This indicates that there is a challenge for Arabic-speaking learners in acquiring the English countable/uncountable distinction due to inherent differences in morphological structures. Finally, Pattanapongpitak (2020) noted that Thai learners' proficiency levels significantly impacted their accuracy in distinguishing uncountable and countable nouns. In particular, advanced learners in Pattanapongpitak's (2020) study performed similarly to native speakers, suggesting a reduction in L1 influence. Our advanced Moroccan EFL learners exhibited similar pattern, with high accuracy rates and fewer errors across all the three tasks, indicating successful acquisition of English morphological knowledge of uncountable nouns. This supports the idea that while L1 influence is strong at lower levels, proficiency development helps mitigate its effects.

Limitations of the study

Before considering the study's findings as foundational and generalizable, readers should be aware of several methodological limitations. First, the proficiency level of participants was not determined through a standardized language proficiency test, which limits the ability to accurately assess and compare learners' English proficiency. Instead, a two-year gap in English exposure was used as a proxy for proficiency, which may not fully reflect participants' actual language abilities. Second, the study included only 73 Moroccan EFL learners, a relatively small sample size that may not adequately represent the broader population of Moroccan learners, thereby limiting the generalizability of the findings.

In light of the aforementioned limitations, future research could address these issues by including larger and more diverse samples, employing standardized proficiency assessments, and adopting mixed-methods designs to provide a more comprehensive understanding of how Moroccan learners acquire English uncountable nouns.

Implications for teaching

Based on the findings, the study offers two major practical contributions for teaching the distinction between English countable and uncountable nouns to Moroccan students. Firstly, teachers should be aware of the strong influence of Moroccan Arabic on their students' acquisition of English uncountable nouns, especially at the beginner level. This influence can lead to frequent errors where students incorrectly use countable forms for uncountable nouns. As a result, teachers can address this by providing explicit instruction on the differences between countable and uncountable nouns in English and by creating exercises that specifically target this area. For instance, designing tasks that help students practice converting nouns from their native language to English, using contrastive analysis to clearly highlight differences between Moroccan Arabic and English noun usage, and incorporating error-focused drills to correct mistakes. Additionally, using visual aids, real-life contextual examples, and interactive activities can help students better understand and retain this morphological distinction. In addition, teachers can implement guided group activities and peer correction exercises to encourage active engagement with noun forms and to reduce L1 transfer errors at the early stages of learning.

Secondly, the study highlights the importance of proficiency level in the acquisition process. As students advance from beginner to intermediate and then to advanced levels, their performance improves significantly. This suggests that continuous practice and exposure to English uncountable nouns in different contexts are crucial for mastery. On this basis, educators should design curriculum and classroom activities that gradually increase in complexity, incorporating step-by-step sequencing of noun instruction that aligns with learners' proficiency levels. For example, the first stage of instruction could focus on raising awareness of L1 influence and introducing basic uncountable nouns with visual aids and simple exercises; the second one could involve controlled practice with error correction and contrastive analysis. As for third stage, it could present uncountable nouns in contextualized sentences and texts with guided productive and receptive tasks; the fourth stage could emphasize independent use in writing and speaking tasks with reduced guidance; and the last one could include cumulative review and reinforcement activities to consolidate learning. It should also be noted that activities should balance both productive tasks

and receptive tasks to reinforce understanding. Moreover, correcting errors consistently and providing targeted feedback can aid students in overcoming L1 transfer issues and internalizing the morphological differences between countable and uncountable nouns of English.

In conclusion, these implications stress the fact that both teachers and curriculum designers need to adopt a structured approach that directly handles L1 transfer issues while gradually developing learners' proficiency in handling English uncountable nouns.

Conclusion

The main objective of this piece of study was to investigate how Moroccan EFL learns acquire English uncountable nouns. In order to better investigate it, the study employed three tasks. These tasks were the translation task, the grammaticality judgment task, and the multiple-choice questions task. The findings of these tasks highlighted the fact that Moroccan Arabic negatively impacts the acquisition of English uncountable nouns at lower proficiency levels. However, as learners' proficiency improves, they become less dependent on their first language, showing better accuracy and understanding of English morphological distinctions. These findings indicate the importance of proficiency development in overcoming L1 transfer issues and enhancing overall competence in English uncountable nouns.

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Appendix

A- Translation task

Translation task

Moroccan Arabic word	English equivalent word
مْعْلوماتْ	
نَصائِحْ	
حُظُوظْ	
بُحُوثْ	
خُبْزاتْ	
لْعْوَاصْرْ	
المَّاكْلْ	
نَّجاحاتْ	
مُجَوْهَراتْ	
مُساعَداتْ	
ضَّغُوطاتْ	
مَعارِفْ	
فْرْمَاجَاتْ	

Grammaticality judgment task

Sentences		Correct	incorrect
1.	We enjoyed the beautiful **sceneries** during our hike.		
2.	We faced a lot of **troubles** completing the project on time.		
3.	She has a lot of **works** to finish before the deadline.		
4.	The audience gave them a round of **applauses**.		
5.	We all deserve more **freedoms** in our lives.		
6.	He felt a pang of **guilts** after realizing his mistake.		
7.	Sarah has a lot of **homeworks** to do.		
8.	Our lives revolved around a lot of **travels** and exploring new places.		
9.	The company conducted a large amount of **trades** this year.		
10.	She lost a significant number of **weights** after following the new diet.		
11.	Her **wisdoms** guided us through difficult times.		
12.	The morning **newses** reported on the recent political events.		
13.	Air and water **pollutions** are major environmental concerns.		

Multiple-choice questions task

Sentences	Choices
1. We need a lot of…… to power our homes.	a. Energy b. Energies c. Energys
2. The car went at high…….	a. Speeds b. Speed c. Speedes
3. Sarah has tons of ……...	a. Golds b. Gold c. Goldes
4. The community is seeking multiple acts of ……	a. Justices b. Justicees c. Justice
5. The …… are full of energy and ideas.	a. Youths b. Youth c. Youthes
6. The storm caused a lot of ……... to the trees.	a. Damage b. Damages c. Damagees
7. We can't keep all this extra ……. in the garage.	a. Stuffs b. Stuffes c. Stuff
8. We need to clean up all the ……. on the floor.	a. Dirts b. Dirt c. Dirtes
9. Recycling helps reduce the amount of……...	a. Garbages b. Garbage c. Garbages
10. We need to protect our valuable……...	a. Land b. Lands c. Landes
11.Many appliances are made from different types of……...	a. Metals b. Metales c. Metal
12. Reading a lot of …… can be inspiring.	a. Poetries b. Poetry c. Poetryes
13. Everyone understands the …… of education.	a. Importances b. Importance c. Importancees