

The Influence of the First Language (Arabic) on Learning English as a Second

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Abstract

The present study searches on the effect of first language on the second language and its effect on learning of the English as a second language . The sample of the study consisted of (163). Students of Basic Education College in the academic year 2015-2016. A translation test consisted of (20) items and divided to five areas was constructed to arrive at the objectives of the study and these area are: **Verb to be, passive voice , adjective ,addition to and nominal and verbal sentences**. On the basis of the results, conclusions are drawn and recommendations made.

1. Statement of the problem

English is today the world's most widely used language .English is taught as a foreign language (FL) at school, college and university levels. However, it is not commonly used since Arabic is the native language. Virtually, in all schools and for all academic subjects, from elementary school to tertiary level, Arabic is the medium of instruction and English is considered as a FL. English is only taught as a subject. Thus, there is not much opportunity for EFL learners to speak and communicate in the target language outside the classroom. (Rababah, 2003:12).

Error in language learning and knowledge of grammar has become one of the most important aspects that indicate development of L2 learners' ILG (inter language) system (Lightbown & Spada, 2006). Errors are considered to be the features of the learner's utterances which are in one way or another different from those of the native speakers.

Ellis (1997:33) States that L1 transfer refers to the influence of the learner's first language on the acquisition of L2. This effect is obvious in four ways. First, the learner's first language is a source of errors in language learning. Second, the learner's first language can facilitate second language learning as negative and positive transfer respectively. Third, L1 transfer can result in avoidance strategy. Fourth, L1 transfer can result in the overuse of some forms.

To the best of the researcher's knowledge no investigation has been conducted in an attempt to study the effect of the first language associated with English learning committed by students of Basic Education College of English department. In this sense, it attempts to analyze their errors committed by Iraqi students who learn English as a foreign language and face difficulty in learning different aspects of the English language.

1.1 Aims of the study:

This study aims at:

1. Investigating the influence of the first language (Arabic) upon learning English by Iraqi EFL students of Basic education college.
2. Finding out some solutions and suggestions which reduce the effect of the first language (Iraqi Arabic language) on learning English by Iraqi students.

In order to achieve these aims, this study attempts to answer the following question: 3-Do students make more transfer error in the use of English language due to the effect of the first language (Arabic language)?

1.2 .Limits of the study

This study is limited to the investigation of the first language on learning English language at the students of English Department, Basic Education College Missan University in the year 2015-2016.

2-language Transfer:

Language transfer is considered one of the most problematic phenomena in second language acquisition. It plays a big role in learning of another language. Ellis (1997: 51) refers to interference as 'transfer', which he says is 'the influence that the learner's L1 exerts over the acquisition of an L2'. He argues that transfer is governed by learners' perceptions about what is transferable and by their stage of development in L2 learning. In learning a target language, learners construct

their own interim rules (Selinker, 1971, Seligar, 1988 and Ellis, 1997) with the use of their L1 knowledge, but only when they believe it will help them in the learning task or when they have become sufficiently proficient in the L2 for transfer to be possible.

When two languages become in contact or when a person becomes familiar with two languages, these two languages cannot stay separate. They affect each others in different ways and many processes are taken place Some of the processes are language transfer, borrowing, code switching, etc. According to Odlin (1997: 3), "there appears to be wide spread assumption that language transfer is an important characteristic of second language learner". Language interference or transfer produces different forms of English depending on the speaker's first language. Odlin (ibid:17) also states that language transfer can occur at different levels such as linguistic, pragmatic. etc. According to him, transfer means the influence resulting from similarities and differences between the first language and any other learned or acquired language. Myles(2004:34) the phenomena of language transfer is also known as cross-linguistic influence from the first language. This convey meaning that language transfer is taken as the effect speakers' or writers' first language on the perception of his or her second language. Indirectly, the knowledge of their first language will be used in the second language or target language as a way to acquire the second language itself.

2.1 Negative Transfer

Negative transfer is a term used to define the use of prior knowledge in the production of the second language that results in unacceptable forms. This negative transfer hinder or blocks the learning and the accurate performance of appropriate target language forms. As Corder (1983:22) said that any native language influence would "actually inhibit, prevent or make more difficult the acquisition of some feature of target language . James(1998:14) states negative transfer as the forms and meanings of their native language and culture to the foreign language and culture. Finally James (ibid:39) mentions that interlingual error(mother –language interference) is one of four causes of errors. These errors are influenced by the native language which interferes with target language learning ,learners' translating word by word idiomatic expressions, vocabulary and even the grammatical rules of the learners' first language to the second language.

3. Population and Sample Selection

The total number of the involved sample is 163 male and female. This sample has been selected randomly from its original population whose total number is 163 students. The sample is distributed as follows: two of the students are excluded because they are absent. Ten of the students are reserved for the purpose of obtaining test reliability . After excluding the ten students the total subjects is 151.

3.1 Instrument of the Study

A translation test should be constructed as a major instrument to achieve the goals of this study .A suggested test of twenty sentences written in eloquence Arabic. Students should be asked to translate these sentences into English .The duration of the test is three hours. The following question is applied for gathering data about this study.

Q1: Translate the following sentences into English language?

1- السيارة كبيره

2- الحاسبة قديمه

3- بيتي هنا

4- صديقي محبوب

5- عندي بيت جميل

6- اشتريت سيارة بيضاء

7- هذه الحديقة خضراء

8- عيون المرأة زرقاء

9- ضرب الطفل

10- سرق البيت

11- قتل الذئب

- 12- شرب الدواء
- 13- مدير المدرسة جديد
- 14- بنطال الطفل قصير
- 15- كتاب التاريخ قديم
- 16- حديقة المنزل جميله
- 17- جاء علي إلى المدرسة
- 18- سافر محمد إلى بغداد
- 19- شاهد زيد المدينة
- 20- باع الرجل بيته

3.2 Pilot Study:

Ten students of second year English department of Basic Education College / University of Missan are chosen randomly in order to find out the appropriateness of the questions items to the field of this study. As a result of this pilot study, a few modifications are made to the questions' items.

3.3 Validity of the instrument :

An instrument validity is a reflection of how well it measures what is designed to measure Bergman's(1981:150) validity of a test is “the extent to which it measures what it is supposed to measure and nothing else” Heaton(1988:159).Face validity is achieved by exposing the test to a jury of specialists in the fields of EFL. In the light of the juror’s comments and suggestions, some items are dropped out, and others are rewritten. The test must be given to a jury of specialist in Arabic and English languages.

3.4 Reliability:

Gronlund (1965:79) states that reliability is an important characteristic of evaluating results. Brown (1987:221) regards reliability as" the careful

specification of analytical scoring instrument that can increase scorer's reliability".

In order to check the reliability of the adopted test ,a sample of students is chosen from the original population of this study. Data obtained by the researcher himself and another observer have been statistically correlated to each other by using person correlation coefficient .The correlation coefficient is 0.85 which is considered a high degree of reliability.

3.5 Administration of the Test:

After the test has gained its validity and reliability qualification, it has been applied to the selected sample which consists of twenty items on the 22th November 2015. The researcher has tested the sample so as to compute the effect of first language upon learning second language.

3. 6 The Statistical Tools:

The following statistical have been used to achieve the aim of this study:

Frequency

1-Relative Frequency= -----

Sum of frequency

2-Percentage of frequency =Relative frequency×100

4. Analysis of Data:

At the end of this study and in order to realize its aims , the collected data have been analysed statistically after the administration of the questionnaire to the sample of this study.

Table 1
Responses of the Students in the Translation Test

Area	Sample	Right answer		Wrong answer	
		Frequencies	Percentage %	Frequencies	Percentage%
Verb to be					
1-	151	58	38.41	93	61.58
2-	151	49	32.45	102	67.54
3-	151	98	64.90	53	35.09
4-	151	87	57.6	64	42.38
Adjective					
5-	151	88	58.27	83	54.96
6-	151	93	61.58	58	38.41
7-	151	79	52.31	72	47.68
8-	151	87	57.6	64	42.38
Passive voice					
9-	151	34	22.51	117	77.48
10-	151	94	62.25	57	37.74
11-	151	82	54.30	69	45.69
12-	151	45	29.80	106	70.19
Addition to					
13-	151	24	15.89	127	84.10
14-	151	48	31.78	103	68.21
15-	151	97	64.23	54	35.76
16-	151	88	58.27	83	54.49
Nominal and verbal sentence					
17-	151	101	66.88	50	33.11
18-	151	43	28.47	108	71.52
19-	151	66	43.70	85	56.29
20-	151	54	35.76	97	64.23
Total			46.84		54.44

It is clear from table (1) that the percentage of total errors committed by the students sample in all areas exceeds percentage of correct answers, where the percentage of the wrong answers is 54.44%, while the percentage of the correct

answers is 46.84%. This means that the percentage of the wrong answers is slightly more than correct answers, which is a high percentage. This percentage reinforces the hypothesis of existence influence of the L1 (Arabic) on the ability of students to learn the English language as an L2, correctly.

Table 2

Frequency of Each Error Type and Its Percentage in the Translation Test

Area number	Area type	Frequencies	Percentage%
1	Verb to be	312	190.8
2	Adjective	277	169.4
3	Passive voice	349	213.4
4	Addition to	367	244.4
5	Nominal and verbal sentence	340	207.9
		1.635	100

It is clear from table(2) that the percentage errors committed by the students of basic education college for the area of this study are arranged as follow: An addition to has the percentage of 244.9% ,passive voice has the percentage of 213.4% and nominal and verbal sentence has the percentage of 207.9, this means that the three mentioned areas have the highly percentage of errors that committed by students of this study. Whereas the rest of errors which committed by students have the lower percentages, these area are arranged as follow: verb to be has the percentage of 190.8% and adjective has the percentage of 169.4%.

5-Coclusion:

1-Studets make a highly percentage of errors in the area of “ addition to” this is happened because in Arabic the added name appears first and then the genitive name, while in English the situation reversed. Regarding the transfer errors committed in the use of “addition to” , it was found that most of the students’ wrong answers which proved to be the result of their L1 influence in using “addition to” .

2-Students also make a highly errors in the "passive voice" these errors happened because In Arabic, the subject in the passive voice sentence is deleted, and replaced by the object who acts on behalf of the subject. The passive voice comes in the past tense and the present tense and does not come in the order tense; while in English, this deletion does not occur most of the time.

3- Classical Arabic tends to prefer the word order "verb before subject" rather than "subject before verb". However, the word order is fairly flexible, since words are tagged by case endings. The situation in English is different, whereas "subject before verb" is used in all cases. In many cases, the learners may transfer the Arabic word order during their writing.

4- Unlike in English, adjectives in Arabic language come after the noun they qualify and should agree with it in gender, number, and sometimes even in definiteness.

5-Students make less errors in the area of "verb to be"

6-Recommendation

1-Since the students make errors in all area of this study therefore , the education policy maker should be aware of the technical problem in learning English which foremost of it is the influence of the Arabic language on learning the English language.

2- The teachers can motivate the ESL learners to be aware of their errors, how their L1 interferes with their production of the L2, and the differences between their L1 and English. This would sharpen their awareness of the fact that they cannot apply what is in their L1 to the ESL. Consequently, it would help them avoid or at least reduce the amount of their L1 interference on the ESL they are learning. However, ESL teachers should be very careful about the way they do it. It should be done in a way that helps ESL learners develop stronger new learning habits to overcome those existing old learning habits.

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