

The Cross-linguistic Influence of Iraqi Arabic on Acquiring English Grammar

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Abstract

This study examines one of the most frequent problems, which is the cross-linguistic impact of first language (henceforth L1), in acquiring the grammar of the foreign language (henceforth F2). An experimental investigation, which took more than three months, was undertaken on 85 ILEs . An analysis of the data of present simple tense formulae was conducted on 315 excerpts produced by ILEs. The scenarios from each topic were extracted in four stages of the study. A quantitative analysis reveals the cross-linguistic influence of Iraqi Arabic on obtaining linguistic elements of English in general, and particularly in acquiring present simple tense.

Keywords: First language; second language; interlanguage; Iraqi Arabic; language transfer.

التأثير اللغوي المتبادل للغة العربية العراقية في

اكتساب قواعد اللغة الإنكليزية

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المستخلص

تبحث هذه الدراسة في واحدة من أكثر المشاكل شيوعاً ، وهي التأثير اللغوي المتقاطع للغة الأولى في اكتساب قواعد اللغة الثانية. تم إجراء دراسته تجريبية ، استغرقت أكثر من ثلاثة أشهر على ٨٥ طالب عراقي يدرسون اللغة الإنكليزية كلغة اجنبية. تم بعدها إجراء تحليل لبيانات الزمن المضارع البسيط على ٣١٥ مقطعاً أنتجها العراقيون الدارسين للغة الإنكليزية. تم بعدها استخراج السيناريوهات من كل موضوع في أربع مراحل من الدراسة . بين التحليل الكمي عن التأثير اللغوي للغة العربية العراقية في تعلم العناصر اللغوية للغة الإنكليزية بشكل عام ، وخاصة في اكتساب المضارع البسيط.

الكلمات الداله: اللغة الأولى؛ اللغة الثانية؛ التداخل .

العربية العراقية ؛ نقل اللغة.

1. Introduction

Odlin (1989: 6) states “the study of transfer, or crosslinguistic influence, is peculiar among language acquisition and the phenomenon of language use”. Moreover, Jarvis and Pavlenko (2008:4) discuss the point that the cross-linguistic impact of languages indicates the reciprocal effect of one language on another in people's minds. In addition, they highlight many fields of meaning and cross-linguistic impact not previously considered. They provide motivating results after analysing the correlation between second language acquisition and language transfer. According to Odlin's (1989) arguments and Jarvis and Pavlenko's (2008) outcomes, the research will examine the function of L1 in gaining a present simple tense appropriate for ILEs. This is going to be discussed in the second section, and in more detail in the fourth section. In summary, there are mainly four aspects that enhance the function of language transfer in interlanguage, namely native languages, mutual grammatical rules, mother tongue language transfer, and distinction.

This research includes six parts: The first one is an introduction, the second

section reviews the literature, the methods used in this study are presented in the third section. Section four provides a detailed description of the data collection and analysis methods that were utilised in the present study. Section five discusses the conclusions, and this is followed by references in the last section . The next section presents the literature review.

2. Literature Review

This section provides the theoretical background for the present study. I introduce the notion of interlanguage as it has a significant influence on the the acquisition of a Second Language. I start by providing a definition of interlanguage as this concept is studied and discussed differently by many researchers. Finally, I examine how Interlanguage might be different between L1 and L2, concentrating on the function of language transfer from a cross-linguistic perspective.

2.a. Inter-language model

Following the groundbreaking research presented by Selinker (1969), most second language acquisition scholars now realize that learners of foreign/ second languages go through some procedures during learning the languages, and this is named

interlanguage. Interlanguage study might focus on how learners of English as a foreign language improve their grammar. Firstly, we have to take into account that it is not an easy task to directly investigate competences between languages. Only indirect information about the nature of language proficiency can be obtained. This may take place by examining interlanguage performance data that come in the form of written texts, grammatical formulae, and speech in natural settings, as Laksmanan and Selinker (2001: 393) argue.

The cross-linguistic hypothesis is defined as the hypothesis which states that language learners have a grammatical system that differs from both the mother language and the second language, but is nonetheless a natural language. In other words, it is assumed that the interlanguage is bound by the same consistent measures as in most languages. Furthermore, Al-Mosawi (2006:14) considers interlanguage as a concept indicating the changing progress whereby an abstract grammatical system is developed. Richard-Amato (2003: 37) explains that "this process reflects the systematic development of grammar, semantics, and pragmatics of the second language and is very similar to the

process followed by first language learners. Throughout, hypothesis testing occurs usually at the subconscious level and predictable errors are made along the way, regardless of what first language the students speak." Gass and Selinker (2008) discuss the concept that first language transfer generally contains elements in overall language acquisition. Moreover, Ellis (1997:33) clarifies that learners' awareness about grammatical rules varies and improves. This awareness gathers and removes grammatical rules to and from their own repertoire as time progresses. In general, when learners begin to learn a certain language, they start learning easy grammar first and then progressively proceed to more complicated grammar. For instance, they firstly begin to learn to use verbs such as "speak" in their simple present tense and then proceed to learn other formulae like spoke, speaking ... and so on.

Crystal (2008: 239) explains that "Interlanguage reflects the learner's evolving system of rules, resulting from a variety of processes, including the influence of the first language ('transfer'), contrastive interference from the target language, and the overgeneralization of newly encountered rules."

Some other scholars' research, such as Spada and Lightbown, 1999, 1998; Williams and Evans, 1998; and Pienemann, 1984, was dependent on developmental sequences and they point out that text books may have supportive effects on second language acquisition but their influences may be bound to learners' willingness to develop, which can also be impacted by transferring first language or other factors based on it.

Furthermore, Cook (2001:14), states that source language elements assist learners in the target language if they have some mutual aspects, but impede them if they are dissimilar. Moreover, the first language can still not be regarded as the main barrier or the only reason for all errors in learning another language. Errors are classified according to some linguists as interlingual errors that are related to either the first language or to the second language (Al-Mosawi and Madhi, 2019: 17), and internal errors that may arise in first language and/or in second language.

The object of the present article is to research the cross-linguistic impact of source language in acquiring the grammar of a target language. To be more specific, the acquisition of the present simple tense.

I assume that the present simple tense formulae adopted by learners seem to be initiated in the target language and occasionally in the mother tongue language.

Lakshmanan and Selinker (2001: 394) argue that “important advances were achieved in relation to L2 developmental sequences based on spontaneous speech samples, gathered longitudinally in the 1970s. However, the use of longitudinal data appears to have declined in popularity in the 1980s”.

According to them (ibid), in the 1990s the situation changed again when second language acquisition researchers started to use longitudinal natural data to obtain authentic facts about mental representations of second language learners. It is noteworthy that the present study took only three months, and therefore could give an incomplete view of the interlanguage levels of ILEs who experienced acquiring the simple present tense, through which the cross-linguistic impact of source language in the acquisition of the second language grammar could be detected.

In interlanguage research, a tool comparing languages that concentrates

widely on second language issues may exert a detrimental influence on the study. Thus, as Adjemian (1976) emphasizes, the significance of studying interlanguage proficiency must be fulfilled without a prejudice for the mother tongue language or second language techniques. In the present study, I attempt to seek out non-target like present simple formulae used by ILEs, whether they were formulated in second language or in first language.

Lakshmanan and Selinker (2001:397) also assert, "an effective comparison of the development of individual interlanguage grammar may be difficult to accomplish". The reason is that the findings could not be entirely applied to all second language beneficiaries. Furthermore, the part that is visible or audible to us (their written and/or spoken production) is usually the subject of frequent errors. Despite the fact that the informants have learned a second language-like shape, there is still a possibility that they will return to previous but non-second language-like methods. Next, I will attempt to highlight a difference in interlanguage.

2.b. The variation

Learners must deal with the remarkable difference in the second language. Two

vocabularies can be produced to refer to a certain similar language function. The instance given below illustrates the way a learner might utilise to swap "no" with "not".

The teacher is not coming.

No comment

Gas and Selinker (2008, 255-261) illustrate that in such contexts, the two lexicons are negatively utilised with no obvious semantic variation between them. Consequently, unsystematic variation is used to make a reference to these two formulae. As learners show some mastery over the language they learn, they begin to anticipate their appropriate methods of non-systematic use.

Fasold and Preston (2007), explain that variation is the essential aspect behind the appearance of second language-like usage. For instance, the learner may in a certain situation utter, "He doesn't" as a second language-like form and "He no" as a non second language-like form in another situation. Researchers explain this noticeable fact depending on two features. The first group believe that the discrepancy is related to what is called "performance errors" because it follows Chomsky's viewpoint of second language acquisition.

They argue that it is not related to systematic questions. The second group of researchers link the variability to psycholinguistic or sociolinguistic reasons. They believe that the diversity is a natural feature of learners' language. Thus, learners depend on the relationship between the contextual and the social factors in utilizing one linguistic variable instead of another.

Ellis (1984) conducted a study on 11-year-old ESL Portuguese students. Ellis concentrated on their use of "don't" and "no" formulae and discovered that 'no' accounted for the largest proportion as compared to 'don't'. As learners become more proficient in English, they utilize 'no' less frequently and 'don't' becomes more common in their performance. Furthermore, Gass and Selinker (2008) illustrate that variations consist of two kinds; systematic and free variations. .

Tarone, Bigelow and Hansen (2009) point out that planning is the fundamental factor in improving and extending the use of second language. They (ibid) also discover that learners' performance in writing assignments is much better than in speaking situations, due to the fact that they have plenty of time to plan in writing

while they don't have sufficient time to do so in speaking. Moreover, Mourssi (2012d) found out that when target language learners have adequate time to reuse some information in speaking, their performance becomes better.

In addition, influential elements have an obvious impact on systematized changes. For instance, a learner employs more second language-like formulae when he/she feels at ease. This performance deteriorates when they face difficult conditions, such as taking a difficult test. Hence, social factors might play vital roles in systematized variations. The following section will focus on the significance of transfer in interlanguage.

2. c. The Function of transfer in inter-language

Interlanguage formulae are usually affected by some significant factors such as 'transfer'. Examining this may lead us to complete comprehension of the development and nature of interlanguage. Some scholars are dubious about the transfer issues, but others argue that it is a matter of language acquisition and must be thoroughly considered. Lado (1957) explains that learners tend to fall back on the pragmatic knowledge of their mother

tongue language when they are exposed to a second language. This has also been proven in a pilot study by Mourssi (2012a). Furthermore, Dolay and Bert (1974: 24) discovered that transfer is not directly related to interlanguage.

As I explained earlier, Odlin (1989: 7), and Larsen-Freeman and Long (1991: 5) state that “the study of transfer, or crosslinguistic influence, is peculiar among language acquisition and the phenomenon of language use”. Moreover, Jarvis and Pavlenko (2008: 4) claim that the cross-linguistic impact indicates the effect of one language on other language(s) in a learner's brain. They highlight many semantic fields and cross-linguistic impacts that have not been precisely considered previously. They provide outstanding results on the relationship between second language acquisition and language transfer. According to Odlin's (1989) discussion and Jarvis and Pavlenko's (2008) results, the current research will examine the function of first language in acquiring the present simple tense in ILEs' performance.

Another instance that highlights the interlanguages research into simple present tense formulae is the vocabularies and grammar instance. Mourssi (2013)

investigates in detail the vocabularies and grammar instance and their application in Herschensohn's research. In the following scenarios of ILEs and grammatical acquisition, is demonstrated the significance of some grammatical elements in first language, its influence on learning second language in section (2.3.1), and the six classifications that are believed to exist in the scenarios of ILEs in a present simple tense acquisition in English language (Mourssi, 2012a, and 2012c) in section (2.3.2).

2.d. Iraqi learners in English contexts and grammar acquisition

Mourssi (2012a, 2012d) illustrates that Arabic is different from English in terms of syntactic structures. Moreover, Mansouri (2005:118) sheds light on challenges in acquiring the Arabic language and its unique structure. This insight that a morphological system can be complicated gives ILEs a perception of the grammar of the target language and stimulates them to learn it in a comprehensive way. The present section includes two parts. First in (2.3.1), the significance of grammar in the first language and its effect on the second language will be introduced. In (2.3.2), the

present simple tense acquisition in some ILEs' scenarios will be displayed.

2.f. The significance of grammar in first language and its influence on second language.

Mourssi (2013a, 2013b) states that Arabic scholars believe that grammar is a tool that is solely employed to explain how to use the language. Besides, he sees the traditional grammar of many languages as a combination of regulations, and the first step in language learning is learning its grammatical rules. Furthermore, they argue that memorization is the most frequent and convenient learning method which is embodied in the strategy they use to learn the second language. They believe that the abovementioned method assists first language learners to fulfil the required duties in learning the second language much more effectively than any other method. This influences the teaching strategies used by English language teachers for learners who try to reach the goal of mastering the second language appropriately. Likewise, it influences the technique Arab learners use to acquire English as a target language on

the one hand and target language grammar on the other. This opinion is also embodied in the second language acquisition studies conducted according to patterns gathered from Arabic English speakers.

Grammar could be presented by various approaches in learning English as a first language and as a second language. Hymes (1972) illustrates that speakers of English need to be well acquainted with the grammatical rules of language so that they communicate in that particular language. Dickins Woods (1988: 630) thinks that the function of grammar is to carry and explain the meaning. However, Fuller and Gundel (1987:70) propose that grammatical rules (rules defined by morphologists and syntacticians) are primarily designed to assist people communicate their meanings distinctly and precisely.

Moreover, It has been argued that grammar is fundamental for smooth communication. Lock (1996:267) assumes that people resort to language to communicate and he posits that grammar occurs at the centre of communication rather than being redundant to interaction. Likewise, Leech and Svartvik (1982:5)

show grammar to be the essence of language, and well connected to meaning and phonetics and phonology. Harmer (1991: 23) thinks that mastery of grammar is important for proficient language users. Larsen Freeman and Long (1991) emphasize that grammar is actually one of three interrelated components of language: pragmatics, grammar, and semantics.

As with the views presented by Arabic grammarians, Klein (1986) assumes that in order to be acquainted with the target language, learners must be capable of analyzing the linguistic information in the second/foreign language. Gao (2001: 326) recently refers to grammar as a stimulus for target language proficiency.

Ismail (2010: 143) demonstrates that " Arab learners of English had positive views about the use of the CCCC grammar model, which is presented in four stages: Confrontation, Clarification, Conformation, and Consolidation". In addition, I shed some light on the opinions of some learners about the significance and impact of teaching methods in grammar to learn the idioms and phrases.

Regarding what was previously discussed in the literature review about explicit/implicit grammar and the finding

that implicit grammar is less influential than explicit grammar, it is assumed that it may be the case that explicit grammar is more fruitful and practical for English teachers when the grammar curriculum is difficult to teach according to the proficiency stages of learners, and they employ implicit grammatical items when it is much easier to understand (Mourssi, 2013). This point of view is also enhanced by Cross (1991), Scarcella and Oxford (1992). On the one hand, explicit grammar must be used for beginners. However, implicit grammar must be employed for advanced language learners. In the next section I will present the stages that exist in the present simple tense acquisition in ILEs scenarios.

Six categories exist in ILEs responses in acquiring the present simple tense (Mourssi,2012a, 2012c):

1. Using the past simple tense (came, rang, swum..etc).
2. Exaggerating the use of third singular 's' (e.g. I plays, they sleeps, we catches ...etc)
3. Misusing the second language-like auxiliary (e.g. they has, we is, he were...etc)

4. Using the verb 'be' with the present simple tense (e.g. is work, are draw, was run...etc)

5. Using the auxiliary has or does with a verb + third singular 's' (he does goes, the girl has buys...etc)

6. Using the infinitive followed by present simple verb + third singular 's' (e.g. to eats, to reads...etc)

3. Methodology

This section describes the research design and methodological steps and procedures adopted to conduct this study.

3.a. Participants

Relying on the findings of a pilot study, three stages were selected out of 18 in the English Department. The group of participants consisted of 40 Iraqi students from the University of Misan, studying English as a second language. All participants were Iraqi Arabic native speakers with an age range of 20 to 25. The principal goal of the present study is to explore the crosslinguistic effect of first language on the acquisition of some linguistic items in second language.

3.b. Aims of the study

The present study aims to find evidence of Iraqi Arabic in acquiring some English components of the second language. A further focus of the study is to provide a practical guide regarding the acquisition of present simple formulae to evaluate the hypotheses arising from language transfer and accordingly proceed to the progression of the theory about second language acquisition.

3.c. Methods utilised to answer the research questions

As the experimental study is the main instrument utilised to gain the present study quantitative data, the present simple formulae made by students were maintained in 337 texts. In order to discover interlanguage perspectives and the effect of first language in obtaining linguistic elements from the second language, four texts were elicited from each group. The first written text (A) was obtained after the first three months; the second written text (B) after the first four months. The third written text (C) was obtained when the experiment was over. Written texts were the only method to obtain evidence of a student's internal grammar system. More details will be shown in the next section.

4. Discussion

Analysis of the present simple formulae performed by ILEs in the four written texts seems to show that Iraqi Arabic has an impact on acquiring the present simple forms, for example who it are, is play, were give, to goes, has draws, and does drives. It is astonishing to discover the paradoxical overlap of the second language in the present study, highlighted by results in the present research, which is the over-generalization of recent grammatical learning systems, where students generalize the second language rules on constructing another linguistic component.

The levels already discussed in 2.3.3 regarding acquiring the present simple formulae in ILEs texts have been noticed to be similar to other researchers' findings. In addition, the coding scheme of interlanguage levels of previous studies were also found to be similar to mine. However, the differences which occurred were probably attributable to the nature of Arabic grammatical rules and its effect on second language acquisition.

It could be contended that two suggested descriptions of present simple formulae that embody the impact of Iraqi Arabic in acquiring the present simple tense in

English are: first, the transfer of first language may be where learners attempt to use some grammatical rules from their native language in their production of the target language; second, it could be because of a lack of mastery in English when they learn the present simple tense, the ILEs attempt to generalize some formulae instead of the present simple tense, for instance 'was' or 'were' + present simple verb, believing that may be the accurate present simple formulae.

The explanations mentioned above prompted me to verify the effect of Iraqi Arabic on the acquisition of English, and the paradoxical overlap of English in the acquisition of Arabic grammar in ILEs texts as second language learners in certain scenarios. In my opinion, it would be logical to suggest two more models for mastering the present simple tense in ILEs textbooks. The two models suggested are: the first language transfer model and the over-generalization of second language model. The following sections will discuss these models.

4.a. First language Transfer Model

One of the models suggested in this research paper is the first language transfer model. One clarification for this model is

the special formulae performed by ILEs which is attributed to the differences between Arabic and English. This model appears to propose two categories: the first category is employing the verb to be + bare verb. The second category is employing to + past participle. The first category is discussed below.

Type one

The following tables illustrate the frequencies of the first language transfer model in ILEs' performance. Table 1 illustrates the application of the first language model to the three chronological productions (type 1).

Table 1: utilising verb to be + bare verb

level	Group 1	Group 2	Total
A	32	17	49
B	2	7	9
C	3	5	8
Tota	37	29	66
1			

Type two

Table 2 illustrates the application of the first language transfer model to the

three chronological productions (type 2), where ILEs employ to + past participle

Table 2: utilizing to + past participle

level	Group 1	Group 2	Total
A	5	8	13
B	2	3	5
C	2	2	4
Tota	9	13	22
1			

4.b. Over-generalization of second language model

The second suggested model might be the over-generalization of second language model, which embodies the paradoxical overlap from the second language. In this model, ILEs employ alternative formulae of the present simple tense, namely the past formulae 8; the past continuous 5; the present continuous 10; the infinitive 21; the present participle 3; and gerunds 4 . ILEs propose that the alternative formulae might have the same function and meaning as the present simple tense in English. It is noteworthy to mention

here that ILEs in both groups employ more alternative formulae in A contexts. However, this is reduced considerably in B and C contexts. The high frequency of the over-generalization of second language model in group A seems to suggest that ILEs' inadequate knowledge of English tenses or the inconstancy in performing the second language-like present simple formulae work well at the beginning of the semester. In addition, after the ILEs had more time learning the present simple formulae, the over-generalization of second language model decreased, as is illustrated obviously in table 3 below. Most of these formulae scarcely exist at levels B and C.

Table 3: employing to + past participle

Leve	Group 1	Group 2	Total
1			
A	12	14	26
B	7	7	14
C	5	6	11
Total	24	27	51

It is noteworthy that the two models added by the author to the acquisition of

the present simple tense in the ILEs scenarios are the same various interlanguage levels that exist for the Arab Learners of English in the acquisition of the present simple formulae and the interlanguage levels existing in other studies (Mourssi, 2012a and 2012c).

CONCLUSION

In summary, most of the present tense formulae employed by the participants in Group 1 and Group 2 seem to refer to the cross-linguistic effect of the first language (Iraqi Arabic dialect) in the process of acquiring the linguistic components of the second language (British English) in the textbooks of Iraqi Learners of English in their undergraduate study. Furthermore, it refers to the two additional models, which are, the first language transfer model and the over-generalization of second language model, which indicates the unique characteristics of ILEs in acquiring the present simple tense in English.

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