Investigating the Extent of the Interference of English Language in Learning Arabic Language in Bridgewater State University (BSU) from Students' Perspectives

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Abstract

The study aimed at finding out the extent of the effect of English Language in Learning Arabic Language for Undergraduate Students in Bridgewater State University (BSU) in USA from the Students' Perspectives. The study consisted of 40 students for the two levels (101,102) of Arabic language for Undergraduate Students in (BSU) in USA. The researcher developed a questionnaire including (20) items distributed into five domains. The validity of the instrument was checked and the reliability was computed through test-re-test and internal consistency. It was (0, 90&0,86). The results indicated that there are effects for English language in learning Arabic language and this could be noticed in the interference of the two languages.

Keywords: positive transfer, negative transfer, facilitation, markedness, acquisition

Abbreviations

BSU: Bridgewater State University
Fl: foreign language
CA: contrastive analysis
L1: native language
L2: second language
ESL: English as a Second Language
SFH :Selective Fossilization Hypothesis

Introduction

For the reason of   technology development, the world became as a small village. This imposes on every human to learn at least a foreign language (L2) in order to communicate with other people from different nationalities either in the area of work, learning,……..etc. The question arises is: which language should one learn?

The logical answer is that, one should learn the language which is considered as an international one to be able to communicate with a large sector of people in the world. According to most of Arab countries and even other countries who are non-native speakers of English language considered English language to be taught in their institutions as a foreign language (FL) for the reason that it is an international language .

Ellis (1994) assumed that foreign language learning is different from the first language learning. Regardless whatever Ellis or others wrote, the judgment on the process of learning a language as the owners of behavioral and cognitive theories is according to the output of learning. That means they cannot prove the way of how learning takes place since it is a mental process.

Since Arabic language is the 5th most commonly spoken native language (L1) in the world and it is one of the official languages of the united nations, the Arab league, the Organization of Islamic Conference and the African Union, many countries in the world considered this language to be taught for the non-native speakers of Arabic language.

The policy of education in USA tends to consider Arabic language to be taught   in several institutions for the following reasons:

First, economic reason: The area of Arab countries is wealthy in natural resources mainly oil. In addition to the fact that, the Arab countries are considered as the big consumer market for the industries of USA

Second, military reason: After the invasion of Iraq, the USA decision makers awarded that the soldiers are in need for Arabic language in order to facilitate their tasks in the field and to be able to communicate with the people of Iraq who are native – speakers of Arabic language.

Third, liturgical reason: Arabic is the language of Holly Quran. This reason encourages Christians and Jews to read the source of teachings of Islam especially after the events of 11th September in USA

Finally, cultural reason: It becomes very necessary for American people to understand the culture of Arabs in order to be able to deal with big numbers of immigrants to USA

It also helps tourists from USA to Arab countries of how to deal with the people of these countries.
For these apparent reasons and other hidden ones, the institutions in USA adopted Arabic language to be taught for non-native speakers of it.

The program of Arabic language was adopted in BSU in USA in 2007. It started with level 101 for 15 undergraduate non- native speakers of Arabic language. Currently   the program includes two levels (101,102) and the level (151) will start sooner, which means that it is a successful program and the students are   enthusiastic to learn this language for it may serve their purposes in future.

In learning a foreign language, It was assumed in 1950s and 1960s that the L1 influences the acquisition/ learning of the L2, whether positively (if there are similarities between them which is called transfer) or negatively(if they are different which is called interference).

Despite the myriad of transfer studies that had been conducted over the past four decades, there still remains a surprising level of confusion and uncertainty in this field concerning when, where, in what form(s) and to what extant L1 influence manifests itself in the L2 learners use of the target language(Jarvis, 2000).

Previous Literature

Many studies were conducted in this area but until now there is no clear cut point of view for how learning/acquisition of a language takes place because it is a mental process.

Hashim(1994) indicated what (cf. Van Eks et al., 1986:49)have included that positive transfer or facilitation is the transfer of skill or part of the native or any previously acquired language(x) which facilitates the learning or has a positive influence on the command of a skill or part of the target language (y) because of similarities between the skills. Negative transfer or interference is the transfer of a skill(x) of differences between both skills.

Cordor(1981 a:101) emphasizes positive transfer if there exist similarities between L1 and L2: "Where the mother tongue is formally similar to the target language, the learner will pass more rapidly along the developmental Continuum (or some parts of it) than where it differs."

Gass & Selinker(1992:7) indicated that there is overwhelming evidence that "language transfer is indeed a real and central phenomenon that must be considered in any full account of the second language acquisition process."

In addition to language transfer and the theory of contrastive analysis (CA) another theory underlying those is the theory of markedness (Eckman, Moravcsik, and Wirth, 1986; Seliger, 1991). The core of this hypothesis of markedness theory concerns with correlations, i.e. pairs of "marked"(least distributed) and "unmarked"(more distributed) structural entities in the language. According to this theory, those linguistic phenomena in the target language which are more marked than the corresponding phenomena in the native language will be more difficult to learn.   However, there is a problem to apply the markedness principle to cross-linguistic analysis, which makes it problematic to predict which structures in L2 would be more likely substituted with the corresponding structures in L1(Isurin,2005). Many specialists traced one another to investigate the reality of transfer. Some of them took the domain of phonology and speech, others concentrated on the factors that may affect the transfer, such as; content, learner, environment….etc.

Zhang (2006) indicated that the variables affecting L1transfer in L2 acquisition are three:

1-Learner-based variables, where the age and affection play an important role in transfer.

2-Language –based variables including markedness, language distance and cultural distance, and L2 proficiency.

3-Socio-linguistic variables, where he argues that the social context can influence the extent to which transfer occurs.

Ueyama (2000, p. 1) states that the interference indicates that there is the first language (L1) background that is involved in learning a second language (L2). This background can be illustrated by the characteristics of L1 especially the structures which influence the L2. For instance, when adults, who typically have an accent, learn to pronounce or speak L2, their accent will sound as foreign accented

Carrell (1987) involved in his study (28) Muslim Arabs and (24) Catholic Hispanic ESL students of high-intermediate proficiency enrolled in an intensive English program at a Midwestern University. Each student reads two texts, one with Muslim-oriented content and the other with Catholic-oriented content. Each text was presented in either a well-organized rhetorical formal or an unfamiliar, altered rhetorical format. After reading each text, the subjects answered a series of multiple-choice comprehension questions and were asked to recall the text in writing. Analysis of the recall protocols and scores on the comprehension questions suggested that schemata affected the ESL readers' comprehension and recall. Participants better comprehended and remembered passages that were similar in some way to their native cultures, or that were deemed more familiar to them.

Upton (1997) indicated in his study that the students relied heavily on the L1 when confronted with unknown vocabulary or the idea conveyed in the text. He added that, the use of L1 was prominent in many of strategies utilized by the students as they struggle with unknown words and to understand the whole sentence.

According to Day & Barmford's model (1998:23),one of the factors influencing L2 reading attitude is the first language (L1)reading attitude. They remark, "Assuming that students are already literate in their first language, one source of attitudes toward second language reading is the attitude that students have toward reading in their native language,

Bhela(1999) conducted a case study based on an observation of four adult second language learners. His major concern of his paper has been with the observable features of interference of L1 and L2 and what its effects are on the syntactic structure of a written task of second language learners. He concluded that the learners have used some L1 structures to produce appropriate responses in L2, producing semantically acceptable texts. Subsequently, the learners have also used L1 structures interchangeably with L2 structures, producing inappropriate L2 responses, indicating   interference of L1 onL2.

According to the Selective Fossilization Hypothesis (SFH)(Han, 2009: 137),indicated that it is the interaction of first language (L1) markedness and L2 input robustness taking place in the learner's mind that determines how acquirable or fossilizable certain linguistic features will be. To this end, conceptual, theoretical, and empirical evidence from L2 initial, developmental, and end-states has been cited to support the SFH. He adds that, the L1 serves as "the source language that provides the initial building materials to be gradually blended with materials taken from the TL [target language])", and it is this interaction that subsequently results in the selective restructuring of the L2 grammar. During the process of conceptual restructuring from the L1 to the L2, L2 input is likely to be modulated by L1 interference or influence through the L1-based semantic and conceptual system. This interference from the learners' native language is putatively one of the main causal factors of fossilization.

Problem of the Study

There are differences between English Language and Arabic Language starting in the way of writing. The Arabic Language is written from right to left, whereas; English is written from left to right. There are also differences in alphabet sounds, Word order, derivations…..etc. So the study tends to investigate an answer to the following question: Is there any effect for English Language in learning Arabic Language?

Aim of the Study and Questions

The study aims at finding out the extent of the interference of English Language in Learning Arabic Language for Undergraduate Students in (BSU) in USA from the Students' Perspectives through answering the following questions:

1- what is the extent of the interference of English Language in Learning Arabic Language for undergraduate students in (BSU) in USA from the students' perspectives?

2- Are there any statistically significant differences in the interference of English language in learning Arabic language for the undergraduate students in BSU attributed to the variables of gender and level of the course?

Limits of the Study

The study was limited to the undergraduate students of (BSU) for the two   levels of Arabic language 101&102 since they are the only working   levels in BSU.

Methodology and Procedures

The Population of the Study

The population of the study consists of (40) undergraduate students which forms the whole number enrolled in the program of Arabic Language 101&102 in BSU in USA . Level 101 includes (30) students whereas 102 includes (10) students. Since the whole population is small, it was taken as a sample for the study.

Instrument of the Study

The researcher developed an instrument including (20) items in addition to personal information about the student's level and gender. The instrument also measures some linguistic domains in addition to language skills. It has to be taken into account that the skills of the language mentioned in this study concern with the skills at primary stage of learning a foreign language.

Instrument Validity

The instrument was submitted to a panel of referees from faculties of education in Jordanian universities and BSU to revise it and report their remarks about the instrument items. After taking into account the required modifications, the final version of the instrument consisted of 20 items.

Reliability

The reliability was computed through test-re-test and internal consistency. The conclusion was (0, 90 & 0, 86), which is fit for this study

Variables of Study

Independent Variables

Gender:: male and female.
level:101, 102

Dependent Variables

The extant of the interference of English Language in Learning Arabic Language for Undergraduate Students in BSU in USA from the Students' Perspectives.

Statistical Analysis

The researcher depended on the sample (40 students) for data collection. They were asked to answer the items of the questionnaire, then everyone was given a number. After two weeks, they were asked to answer the items for the second time to make sure of the reliability of the students' responses. By using the statistic packages for social sciences (SPSS),the responses were statistically analyzed.

Descriptive statistics were used to answer the questions of the study by computing: Means and standard deviations, (ANOVA) also was used to determine if there are statistically significant differences for the interaction of the study variables. The description of mean values was based on the following classifications: 1.5 - 2.49 weak value, 2.50 - 2.99 moderate value, 3- 4 high value. The positive items are scaled from (1-5). They are (1,3,4,15),whereas; the negative ones are scaled from (5-1). They are (2,5,6,7,8,9,10,11,12,13,14,16,17,18,19,20).

Results & Discussion

For answering question no. 1 (what is the extent of the interference of English Language in Learning Arabic Language for Undergraduate Students in (BSU) in USA from the Students' Perspectives? .Qualitative statistics(means and standard deviations) were used to achieve this objective.

It is found that, the least affected domain is listening with a mean of (2.15) and a standard deviation of (0.64). This could be attributed to the fact that, on the one hand, the students are enthusiastic and have a high degree of motivation for learning a foreign language, and Arabic Language is an optional subject. On the other hand, listening is a receptive skill. Interference

The other domain which comes next to listening is the domain of reading with a mean of (2.20) and standard deviation of (0.62) This could be attributed to the fact that, there is a big difference between the shapes of the letters in English Language and Arabic Language which causes less interference. The third domain was speaking with a mean of (2.52) and standard deviation of (0.56), and this effect is. medium in learning Arabic Language. This may be attributed to the students' interest in learning a foreign language and their eager for talking Arabic Language especially in the beginning of learning concentrating on the expressions of daily life situations. The interference may result when the student faces a letter ,word or expression which includes unfamiliar sound/s.

It is clear that the highest effect for English Language in learning Arabic Language was in the domains of pronunciation and writing with means of (4.03, 4.01) and standard deviations of(0.63,0.62) respectively. This could be attributed to the difficulty in writing the letters and words in Arabic Language since they are written from right to left and this is unfamiliar to students. Regarding pronunciation, the big difference between the articulation of Arabic letters and English ones makes it difficult for students to pronounce Arabic letters.

The results are arranged in a descending way (table 1) according to the extent of the interference of English language in learning the skills of Arabic language. Taking into account that the means are the criteria for the comparison between domains.

Table (1): Means and Standard Deviations for the Effect of English Language in Learning the Skills of Arabic Language

Language skill	mean	Standard deviation
Listening	2.15	0.64
Reading	2.20	0.62
Speaking	2.56	0.57
Writing	4.01	0.62
Pronunciation	4.03	0.63

For completing the answer of question number one, table no. (2) shows the means and standard deviations for each item in the questionnaire which indicates the results of the items relating to each domain agree with the previous results in table no.(1) which show the means and standard deviations for the effect of English language in learning Arabic language.

Table (2): Means and Standard Deviations for Each Item

No	Item	means	Std. dev
1	I listen carefully in the Arabic class	2.0	0.65
2	I feel confused when I listen to the pronunciation of Arabic words	1.9	0.68
3	I listen and comprehend the greetings of the instructor in Arabic language	2.1	0.59
4	I listen and comprehend the Arabic words that are used in real life situations	2.3	0.63
5	I pronounce Arabic letters as the same as English letters	4.51	0.61
6	I pronounce Arabic words as the same as English words	4.4	0.62
7	I write Arabic letters from left to right	4.2	0.53
8	I write Arabic words from left to right	4.01	0.54
9	I write English letters instead of Arabic ones	4.2	0.53
10	I write English letters in an Arabic word	3.98	0.56
11	I write the numbers in English instead of Arabic	3.91	0.62
12	I write the word of a picture in English instead of Arabic	4.0	0.60
13	I answer in English when I am asked in Arabic	3.0	0.57
14	I use some English words while talking in Arabic	2.49	0.55
15	I response to the Arabic greetings from the professor in English language	2.52	0.56
16	I pronounce the Arabic names included in the Arabic book as the same pronunciation in English	3.9	0.61
17	I use the same rhythm of English language when reading Arabic language	2.3	0.61
18	I read the Arabic words from left to right	2.17	0.66
19	I write the pronunciation of Arabic words in English language	3.98	0.61
20	I read Arabic numbers (less than one hundred) from left to right	2.3	0.59

It is noticed that, the interference between the two languages is clear in pronunciation domain and writing domain and this may due to the difference between the two languages either in articulation or the way of writing.
Question no.(2):

For answering this question,2-way ANOVA was used as table 3 shows

Table 3 shows that there are no statistically significant differences ($\alpha \leq 0.05$) attributed either to the variables of gender or level of the course neither to the interaction between these variables.

Table 3: 2-Way ANOVA for the Effect of Gender and Level of Course and the Interaction between them

source	Type lll sum of squares	df	Mean square	F	Sig.
gender	.053	1	.053	.464	.500
course	. 669	1	. 669	5.838	.021
Gender * course	.463	1	.463	4.038	.052
error	4.123	36	.115		
total	312.768	40			
Corrected total	5.020	39			

Conclusion

Since the aim of this study is to investigate the effect of English language in learning Arabic language concentrating on the interference between the two languages, It is noticed through the previous results that English Language affects in learning Arabic Language especially in interference between the two languages. The results of the study meet with all the studies mentioned in the article .It is noticed that the interference takes place when the students face a problem in the pronunciation of unfamiliar sounds in Arabic language, so they use their native language as it is easy for them.

Recommendations

The researcher recommends that:

1- Such studies should be conducted taking   different variables and advanced skills in learning FL.
2-It is better for foreigners who like to learn Arabic language to start from early stages.
3-since there are different accents in different Arab countries ,the instructors of Arabic language for non-native of Arabic Language must use the standard language which could be understood everywhere in Arab countries

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