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Linguistic transfer example from Arabic users of English

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Abstract

Linguistic transfer has been a field of many studies. This could be attributed to the strong association between linguistic transfer and both second language acquisition and linguistic errors. This paper aims at adding evidence about the effect of first language on mastering a second language and to fill a gap in linguistic studies of transfer. It will shed light on the problems which Arabic native speakers encounter when dealing with the usage of 'wish'. There have been few explicit studies addressing the grammatical transfer issue between Arabic and English directly. It has been recognized that the Arabic native speakers encounter serious problems when dealing with 'wish'. The usage of 'wish' in English is one of the most difficult structures for English learners. It turns out that the problems which they face when dealing with 'wish' result from applying their knowledge in Arabic language to answer the questions about 'wish' in English.

Keywords: Arabic, English, problems, Linguistic, transfer, Users, languages, etc.

1. Introduction

Language interference or transfer produces different forms of English depending on the speaker's first language. Some well-known examples are: Chinglish (Chinese + English), Japlish (Japanese + English) Franglais (French + English) Spanglish (Spanish + English), etc. The phenomenon of language transfer has attracted many people, linguists and non-linguists. It has been receiving much attention and different interpretations according to the researcher's academic backgrounds. Linguistically, transfer means applying or generalizing of the learner's knowledge about their native language (L1) to help them to use and understand a second language (L2). Recently, language transfer has been an important issue in applied linguistics, second language acquisition, sociolinguistics, and language teaching. [1] 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 [2]. Point out that "a learner's previous linguistic knowledge influences the acquisition of a new language in a principled, if not straightforward, contrastive way." This influence could be positive or negative. It is considered positive when the learner's knowledge of L1 enhances his ability to understand L2. Negative transfer, on the other hand, means that the learner's knowledge of L1 deteriorates his ability to understand L2. Accordingly, many scholars [45], (among others) assume that language transfer is considered a source of errors among second language learners in cross-linguistic and cross-cultural studies. However, this doesn't mean that transfer is the only source of errors [3]. Errors result from transfer affect all aspects of language, phonetics, word-formation, syntax, semantics, etc.

2. Review of Literature

Generally, all Arab students confused the English since Arabic has one bilabial letter [4]. Associate transfer with lexical borrowing. Many scholars provide studies in which they show that transfer has its effect in the second language word formation. The effect of the grammar of the first language on the formation of the grammar of the second language has been reported by many scholars [5]. They associate the grammatical mistakes of second language with the grammar of the learner's first language [6]. Report cases of grammatical mistakes

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encountered by Thai learners of English as a result of variation of expressing tense in both languages. The verb in Thai does not inflect for first or third person and it shows no difference between past and future tense. Moreover, Thai language has no articles. For instance, Thai speakers say '*tomorrow he go see movie', instead of the English sentence 'tomorrow he is going to see a movie'. Accordingly mastering English grammar is a very difficult task. "we are most aware of transfer in SLA where the L1 and L2 differ on a particular property, because this leads to patterns in the speech of the non-native speaker not found in the speech of the native speakers" [7]. The use of the verb 'wish' indicates that the speaker wants reality to be different. As in unreal conditionals, the use of a past or past perfect tense verb indicates that the situation is impossible or unlikely. Arabic native speakers face many difficulties when dealing with English tenses. This difficulty is especially evident in complex sentences when there is a difference between time and verb form. One of these difficulties is the usage of tenses with the verb 'wish'.

2.1. Language Transfer

In Webster's Third New World International Dictionary (1986) transfer, derived from the Latin word transferred, means to carry, to bear or to print, impress or otherwise copy from one surface to another. It also means the carry-over or generalization of learned responses from one type of situation to another. This meaning from the dictionary shows clearly that transfer is a neutral word in origin and nature since it does not indicate whether what is carried over is bad or good [58]. Behaviorist's views considered transfer in terms of habit formation. In other words, the habits of the NL would be carried over into the FL [8]. Makes that clear when he says:

"Individuals tend to transfer the forms and meanings and the distribution of forms and meanings of their native language and culture to the foreign language and culture both productively when attempting to speak the language and to act in the culture, and receptively when attempting to grasp and to understand the language and the culture as practiced by natives."

2.2. Types of Transfer

Different types of transfer are stated in the definition of transfer "Transfer is to be seen as a general cover term for a number of different kinds of influence from languages other than the L2. The study of transfer involves the study of errors (negative transfer), facilitation (positive transfer), avoidance of target language forms and their over-use."

Positive Transfer

It is the transfer of a skill X which facilitates the learning or has a positive influence on the command of a skill Y because of similarities between both skills [9]. Maintain that "positive transfer helps new learning, for instance, it is easy to learn to pronounce aspirated voiceless stops in a second language if the language also has also aspirated voiceless stops". Hence, prior language knowledge can be very helpful in learning a new language.

Negative Transfer

It is the transfer of a skill X which impedes the learning or has a negative influence on the command of a skill Y because of differences between both skills. In the field of

SL/FL learning, it is understood as the systematic influence of the NL on the TL. For some linguists such as [10], negative transfer is referred to as interference. He also explains the occurrence of this phenomenon by contrasting it to positive transfer. He states that "When a process of second language learning takes place, those linguistic phenomena which are similar in form, meaning and distribution are regarded as facilitating the process, and the transfer is seen as positive, if they are dissimilar, the transfer is considered negative and acquisition is viewed as distorted because the two structures differ. The phenomenon involved in these difficulties was called interference" Thus, this phenomenon is equated with difficulty in learning a L2 as an outcome of differences of the two languages structures.

Avoidance

It is a cognitive strategy that results in the absence of certain structures in the TL production i.e., L2 learners avoid using certain structures that are very different from their L1. In a study [11], found that Chinese and Japanese students committed fewer errors in English relative clauses than did Persian and Arab students. It was thought that English relative clauses were less difficult for the Chinese and Japanese students than for the Arab and Persian students because the placement of relative clauses in Chinese and Japanese differs so much from their placement in English.

2.3. Contrastive Analysis and Language Transfer Theory

Challenges to assumptions about the importance of transfer did not have much impact on the history of language teaching until the late 1970s. The challenges that arose in that period were largely in reaction to the claim made [12] that state that the existence of cross-linguistic differences in second language learning could be determined through contrastive analysis. This approach has been the subject of intense debate. Applied linguists and language teachers have expressed divergent views on its feasibility and usefulness.

2.4. Variables Affecting Language Transfer

Language transfer may be affected by a number of factors that decrease or increase its occurrence. These factors can be accounted for in terms of variables, and they can be classified into three groups: learner-based variables, language-based variables and sociolinguistic variables.

Learner-Based Variables

Since the learner is an active participant, he plays a central part in L2 learning.

Age

Transfer takes place among children as well as among adults. Yet, children are less likely to draw their L1 than adult ones. Several studies have shown that children are more likely to achieve a more native-like pronunciation. However, the L1 pronunciation of older learners will be more influential [10]. L2 learning by young children is driven by universal grammar and target language input, and this process is similar to L1 acquisition.

Language-Based Variables

It is an important factor since it can help in determining when transfer may and may not take place. Marked rules are those that are not governed by universal principles, whereas unmarked rules are those that are derived from the general

concept of human language (language neutral) [8]. “Unmarked categories from the native language are substituted for corresponding marked categories in the target language marked structures are seldom transferring, and if they are transferred, they are much more easily eradicated from the target language.” Those parts of one’s language which speakers consider irregular or infrequent are highly marked and consequently are less transferable than frequent and regular forms.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, this study has found that Performance in mid-term and final examinations have statistically significant relationship with the language (99% confidence level). The direction of relationship is negative. So therefore, there are enough evidences to support the claim that there is a statistically significant correlation between the language of instruction and learning level, and teaching in Arabic helps the student learn more and perform better in professional courses than teaching in English. From the open-ended answers, it is clear that participants were favoring the native language over the non-native language for learning content and increasing their understanding of materials and interaction with the instructor. Previous studies also support these findings. Studying in a native language can save students time. He stated that studying in non-native language put a heavy burden on students who needed to relate new information taught in a non-native language to their prior knowledge learned in their native language.

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