

RETHINKING THE ROLE OF THE FIRST LANGUAGE IN SECOND LANGUAGE ACQUISITION

With Reference to Yemeni-Arab Learners of English*

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Abstract: An important aspect of today's research agenda is still to understand better the phenomenon of first language (L1) interference, especially in learning situations where students' exposure to the second language (L2) is confined to a few hours per week of formal classroom instruction. To address the issue, this paper takes data that are indicative of the influence of Arabic in Yemeni-Arab learners of English to both rethink the role of the L1 in second language acquisition (SLA) and to argue against assertions that such a role is marginal or nonexistent. The paper is organized in two parts. In the first part, the notion of L1 interference is explicated, its origins in behaviourist learning theory are traced, its significance for SLA research is examined, and finally criticisms levelled against it are discussed. In the second part, L1 interference is contrasted to a new succession of notions arguing for more cognitive and sociocultural interpretations of SLA. This involves challenging the ways in which these notions view the role of the L1, and accounting for the reappraisal of the role of the L1 in SLA. Finally, L1 Arabic is highlighted as an important determinant of the SLA of English.

1. Introduction

Everyday experience suggests that the learner's first language (L1, hereafter) plays more or less a pervasive role in the acquisition of the second language (L2, hereafter). But how is the role of the L1 perceived at all? Is this role perceived as positive or negative? Or is it denied totally? Such a matter has exercised generations of psychologists, linguists, and Second Language Acquisition (SLA, hereafter) researchers, who have uncovered layers of complexity in apparently straightforward questions. A simple answer is certainly not possible, but at least we can be clear about the main factors which gave rise to complications.

As far as SLA is concerned, views on the role of the L1 seem to fall into two extremes. First, there is the hypothesis that L2 acquisition is strongly influenced by the learner's L1. At the opposite extreme, there is the hypothesis that both the L1 and L2 co-exist in the learner peacefully, that is,

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with no one having explicit influence on the other. Broadly speaking, there was a shift in emphasis in SLA from a pre-occupation with the behaviourist notion of L1 interference, which attached great importance to the role of the L1, to an interest in a new succession of notions which argued for more cognitive and sociocultural interpretations of SLA under the influence of such disciplines as psycholinguistics and sociolinguistics. Where these notions and perspectives are concerned, the role of the L1 is either denied totally, or at least minimized. In my view, the truth seems to lie somewhere between these two positions.

Taking such disparity in views into consideration, this paper attempts to rethink the role of the first language in second language acquisition by focusing on Yemeni-Arab learners of English, and by bringing in linguistic as well as non-linguistic data that are indicative of the influence of L1 Arabic on L2 English. For the purposes of the study, attention is paid to the various hypotheses that have concerned themselves in one way or another to address this aspect of SLA. These hypotheses are 'Contrastive Analysis,' 'Universal Grammar,' 'Error Analysis,' 'Contrastive Pragmatics,' 'Contrastive Discourse Analysis,' and 'Contrastive Rhetoric.' Overall, the paper attempts to develop these theoretical stances, linking them to the major question of the role of the L1 (Arabic) in the acquisition of the L2 (English)¹; it argues that the principle of comparing or contrasting languages is potentially a 'correct one'; it advocates the need to reconsider the assumption about the relationship between L1 acquisition and L2 development²; and it finally suggests a shift towards involving more pragmatic issues in Contrastive Analysis. But, before the paper launches into a discussion of these issues, two important points must be made clear. First, the paper, due to the limitation of space as well as its theoretically pluralist and suggestive orientation, will not give a detailed account of the issues it incorporates, nor will it attend to the clarity of concepts used hereafter.³ Second, in the context of this type of SLA research (i.e. comparative research), the norm has often been to control the comparison by maintaining

¹ Some of the remarks adopted in this paper draw on the author's observation, intuition and experience of teaching English in Yemeni schools and colleges; in other words, they are conjectural and require more scientific support. As Wardhaugh (1970: 127, qtd. in Brown, 1980: 157) noted that contrastive analysis "has intuitive appeal," and that teachers and linguists have successfully used "the best linguistic knowledge available...in order to account for observed difficulties in L2 learning."

² See e.g. Sajavaara, 1981; Ellis, 1986; Cathercole, 1988; Odlin, 1989; Gass and Selinker, 1983, 1994; Mahmoud, 2000, 2002a, b; Al-Shamiry, 2004.

³ Interested readers, however, are referred to the major works done in this domain, some of which have been mentioned in the *Bibliography*. For instance, beside the paper's condensed but hopefully systematic account of the theoretical foundations (i.e. stages and theories) of SLA, more detailed reviews can be found in other sources, e.g. Dulay *et al.*, 1982; Ellis 1986, 1997; McLaughlin, 1987; Selinker, 1992; Gass and Selinker, 1994, 2001; Smith, 1994; Cook, 1996; Mitchell and Myles, 1998.

identically the two levels of both the L1 and L2 all through.⁴ For example, in the present study, we should not compare Standard English (SE, hereafter) with colloquial Arabic or Standard Arabic (SA, hereafter) with colloquial English. This may be justifiable as long as the SLA literature is concerned: description rendered in this way is believed to lead to systematic, generalizable and predictable conclusions. However, the claim held in this paper is that comparing parallels in the sense suggested above is not an absolute, definitive rule, and that comparison can also be made either way, that is, to compare modern standard or (necessarily) colloquial L1 with the L2. The reasons are many and varied. First of all, it goes without saying that syntactic features of the standard language, and those of most colloquial languages are similar; nevertheless, there is no dearth of evidence that in other areas of language, such as phonology, morphology and vocabulary, differences do apparently exist.⁵ In the course of L1 acquisition, it is these colloquial properties that remain persistent in the speech of L1 users, making them (i.e. L1 users) linguistically distinguishable from each other. For example, the Arabic letter 'ذ' as in *هَذَا* /hada/ (= 'th' as in *this* in English) has three distinct phonological realizations, depending on whether it is used in SA and/or its colloquial versions. These are illustrated as follows:⁶

(1)	Arabic Letter	SA	Colloquial Arabic
	'ذ'	/ð/	/ð/ (e.g. Ibb Arabic)
		--	/d/ (e.g. Aden Arabic)
		--	/z/ (e.g. Egyptian Arabic) ⁷

Obviously, the use of alternative colloquial sounds, namely /d/ and /z/ is what distinguishes both Aden and Egyptian dialects from SA as well as other Arabic dialects. Interestingly enough, it is these dialectal properties (rather than those of SA), which Arab learners readily transfer into the L2 (English): they often pronounce the English sound /ð/ (as in *this*) as /ð/, /d/ or /z/ (hence /ðɪs/, /dɪs/ or /zɪs/).

The issue of the role of L1 dialects in L2 acquisition can also be raised to question the eligibility of using standard language as the only source of descriptive data for comparing the two languages in question. For example, it has been a common practice among the researchers comparing the phonetic systems of both Arabic and English to cite the Arabic consonant letter 'ج' as being phonetically similar to the English sound /dʒ/ (as in *job*),

⁴ Fries, 1945: 9.

⁵ Qafisheh, 1990: xiii.

⁶ See *Appendices 1 and 2* for transcription of Arabic and English sounds respectively.

⁷ These phonological realizations can be equated with the English sounds /ð/, /d/ and /z/ respectively.

following the SA descriptive conventions. Yet, in actuality other accounts do exist: a closer inspection of colloquial Arabic (e.g. Yemeni Arabic) would practically reveal that the above-mentioned letter is heard and identified as both /ǧ/ and (more commonly) /g/⁸ (a third sound being /j/, but this one is restricted in its use); because of this interfering effect of L1 dialects—*dialectal interference*, if it will—most Yemeni learners of English use both sounds in English interchangeably. Thus, an English word, such as *job* may be pronounced by them as /ǧɒb/, or more frequently /gɒb/. In brief, to ignore the influence of the colloquial dialects, especially those of the L1, on L2 acquisition is to work out of context and to sacrifice authenticity, practicality and consistency of research for the sake of artificial and rigid scientific simplification of comparative linguistic studies. This is not to deny the fact that research into modern colloquial dialects, e.g. Yemeni Arabic, is gaining a lot of currency in the world today.⁹

In what follows, the notion of L1 interference will be examined with stress on its major contribution to SLA, i.e. prediction of potential errors.

2. Is SLA strongly influenced by the L1?

Apparently, the strongest position regarding the influence of the learner's L1 on SLA was the one advocated within the frameworks of 'behaviourism' and 'structuralism.' According to these theories, the role of the L1 is pervasive, and could be seen in terms of 'interference' and 'transfer.' Interference is concerned with the way in which the L1 interferes with the learning of the L2.¹⁰ To put it another way, where there is a structural discrepancy between the L1 and the L2, errors will occur; "such errors are said to be the influence of the learner's L1 habits on L2 production."¹¹ Likewise, language transfer is "the effect of one language on the learning of another."¹² Transfer is of two common types: 'positive transfer' which helps or facilitates learning when both the L1 and L2 "have the same form"; and 'negative transfer,' also known as 'interference' (see above) which is "the use of a native-language pattern or rule which leads to an ERROR or inappropriate form in the TARGET LANGUAGE."¹³ Of the latter type of transfer, H. Douglas Brown (1980) says:

⁸ For this reason, an Arabic word like جميلة (beautiful) can be pronounced colloquially as /j/gamilah/ without changing the meaning of the word.

⁹ E.g. Qafisheh, 1990; Mahmoud, 2000.

¹⁰ Ellis, 1986: 19.

¹¹ Dulay *et al.*, 1982: 97.

¹² Richards *et al.*, 1992: 205.

¹³ *Ibid.*

- (2) ...we commonly observe in second language learners a plethora of errors attributable to the negative transfer of the native language to the target language...English learners from such native language backgrounds as German, French, Spanish, and Japanese, for example, usually can readily be detected by native English speakers by easily identifiable accents [in the spoken or written word]...Consider...Mark Twain's *The Innocents Abroad* (1969: 111), in which the French-speaking guide introduces himself:

If ze zhentlemans will to me make ze grande honneur to me rattain in hees serveece, I shall show to him everysing zat is magnifique to look upon in ze beautiful Parree. I speaky ze Angleesh parfaitmaw.¹⁴

As the above excerpt shows, transfer from the L1 takes place at various language levels: syntactic, semantic, morphological and phonological. The influence of Arabic on the acquisition of English is likely to be most evident in syntax, phonology and vocabulary.

2.1 Transfer of Syntactic Rules

Errors resulting from the transfer of syntactic rules from Arabic are in fact many and varied, affecting both the spoken and written modes of English. For example, a Yemeni learner of English may produce a grammatically incorrect sentence like *She girl beautiful* instead of *She is a beautiful girl*, when attempting to communicate in English, thus flouting the English rules of using the 'copula be,' the 'indefinite article' and the 'adjective-noun pattern' altogether, because of the transfer of the Arabic pattern هي بنت جميلة (hi-ya bint-un jamilah). Another stumbling block for Yemeni learners concerns the use of prepositions in English. Arabic can sometimes utilize one preposition (e.g. 'fi' = 'in' in English) to express both time relationship and place relationship regardless of the noun that follows it. But, in English these relationships are often highly conventionalized; in a simpler term, certain prepositions must go before certain nouns. Here are some examples:

(3)	Time Relationships		Place Relationships	
	<u>Arabic</u>	<u>English</u>	<u>Arabic</u>	<u>English</u>
	fi s-sa'ah al-aširah	at ten o'clock	fi l.madrasah	at school
	fi 2005	in 2005	fi l.hadeeqa	in the park
	fi tani min maris	on the 2 nd of March	fi l.mazra'ah	on the farm

In such a situation, Arabic—essentially a simpler system with regard to prepositions—becomes an ad hoc resource on which Yemeni learners draw to overcome the difficulties arising with the learning of English prepositions. In most cases, however, errors invariably occur due to the irreducible differences in the use of prepositions between the two

¹⁴ Brown, 1980: 149.

languages, viz. Arabic and English.

In fact, the role of Arabic in the acquisition of prepositions in English is no more pervasive than its role in the acquisition of other teasers such as articles, pronouns, tense system, multi-word verbs (e.g. *fork over, rip off, cut down on*), interrogation, subject-verb agreement, inversion, word order, to mention but a few. I wonder how a Yemeni learner—or any other learner whose native language lacks a specific rule for ordering modifying elements before nouns—would be able to re-order the following scrambled phrase:

(4) red glass old lovely a German flower round vase

The aforementioned examples capture some of the observed difficulties in learning the English grammar. The interference of Arabic with English has a negative effect, hence 'negative transfer'; in other words, interference may either prevent optimal English learning leading to what Selinker calls 'fossilization' or delay the learner's mastery of the L2 (i.e. English).¹⁵

2.2 Transfer of Phonological Rules

In popular opinion, the major impact the L1 may have on SLA has to do with the transfer of L1 phonological rules. This is routinely obvious from the foreign accent in the L2 speech of learners. Almost under no circumstances would a foreign learner, say an Indian learner of English, lose a trace of his/her native accent in the L2, whatever level of competence he/she might reach in the L2. Even well-equipped teachers of English can hardly circumvent or escape this interfering effect of accent. If an L2 learner had no direct and early exposure to the new language, phonological errors would perpetuate. Generally speaking, Yemeni learners make most of their errors in this area of the English language. Given below are some problem areas where the phonological rules of English are violated by the Yemeni learner.

2.2.1 Phonemes

A Yemeni learner of English often, but not always, makes no distinction between the following sounds (consonant sounds and vowel sounds), because such phonemic differences are almost non-existent in his/her native language, i.e. Arabic.

¹⁵ It is difficult here to decide which has a more decisive role, SA or colloquial Arabic, for at the syntactic level, differences between the two may seem to vanish.

(5) Consonant Sounds

Sound	Example	(pronounced as)	Sound	Example
/p/	pray	→	/b/	bray
/dʒ/	just	→	/g/	gust ('g' is a colloquial Arabic-restricted sound)
/ɜ/	invasion	→	/ʃ/	inversion
/ŋ/	sink	→	/n/	sin (/ŋ/ is pronounced as /n/)
'dark' l	lull	→	'clear' l	lull (Almost the same pronunciation is assigned to /l/ in both positions.)
/v/	vast	→	/f/	fast
/θ/	three	→	/t/	tree (In the case of Adenese learners of English)
/ð/	then	→	/d/	den (In the case of Adenese learners of English)
/tʃ/	chips	→	/ʃ/	ships (For this very reason, <i>chips</i> , used as a loan word in colloquial Arabic, is being pronounced as <i>ships</i> .)

In addition, Yemeni learners are noted to negatively transfer the Arabic-restricted sound /ʃ/ (or 'ص' using Arabic alphabetic conventions) into English thereby pronouncing words such as *sun*, *some*, *small* as *ʃun*, *ʃome*, *ʃmall*. The other individual consonant sounds /b/, /d/, /h/, /k/, /m/, /n/, /r/ (except when used as a retroflex), /s/, /ʃ/, /t/, /θ/, /ð/, /w/, /z/, and /j/ are common to both Arabic and English, hence relatively easier to recognize and produce.

(6) Vowel Sounds

/e/	ten	→	/i/	tin
/æ:/	aunt	→	/æ/	ant
/u/	put	→	/ʊ/	pot
/ə/	another	→	/æ/	ant
/iə/	here	→	/eə(r)/	hair
/əu/	tone	→	/ɔ:/	torn

(7) Other cases

/və/ as in **poor** will be pronounced as /pu:r/

/eɪ/ as in **make** will be pronounced as /mi:k/ or /mek/

/ɜ:/ as in **first/turn** will be pronounced as /ferɪst/ /tɜ:n/

'mute' r as in **tutor** will be pronounced as /tju:tər/ (This use of r-sound is totally different from the flap used by some native speakers of English.)

The other sounds: /u:/, /i:/, /aɪ/ and /ɪ/ are relatively easier, hence more easily learnable.

2.2.2 Accent, Stress Placement and Intonation

Yemeni learners do not very often recognize, let alone produce, the distinction in accent of the following English words when pronounced as

verbs or adjectives or nouns. Reasons for this phenomenon stem from the fact that Arabic is a highly derivational language in which there is no distinction based on syllabic patterns.¹⁶ Consider these examples:

(8)	<u>Verb</u>	<u>Adjective</u>	<u>Noun</u>
	complete يكمل /yukmil/	'complete مكتمل /muktamīl/kamel/	---
	im'port يستورد /yastawrid/	---	'import استيراد /istiraad/
	perfect يتم /yutim/	'perfect تام /tam/	---
	con'duct يدير /yudir/	---	'conduct إدارة /idarāh/
	ex'port يصدر /yusaddir/	---	'export تصدير /tasdir/
	sub'ject يخضع /yukdi'/	---	'subject خاضع /kadi'/
	in'sult يهين /yuhin/	---	'insult إهانة /ihanah/

We can also add to this the important fact that "Arab tradition insists on very distinct articulation of every letter of the alphabet."¹⁷ And this tends to make Yemeni learners double the pronunciation of English consonants (a phenomenon known as 'consonant doubling'); so /e'fekt/ *affect*, and /e'sei/ *essay* become /e'f-fekt/ and /e's-sei/. They often fail to adopt weak forms and little words in connected speech, e.g. /hi:z bin tə frɑ:ns/ *He's been to France* is often articulated as /hi: hæz bi:n tu: fræns/. They even more often use an intrusive vowel between consonants; thus /θiŋgz/ *things*, /nekst/ *next*, and /lesn/ *lesson* are usually pronounced as /θiŋgɪz/, /nekest/, and /lesn/. They also mispronounce words containing mute elements such as *hour*, *tired*, *resign*, *palm*, *comb*.

Another property of language that causes the 'staccato beat' of Yemenis speaking English is *intonation*. As intonation implies both the attitude of the speaker and the grammatical structures, Arabic and English seem to diverge, particularly with respect to the latter aspect; for example, "whereas order and grammatical words are the major signal for questions in English, intonation is the major signal for questions in Colloquial Arabic."¹⁸ So a question like *what is he saying?* is usually expressed as *what he says* but with a rising pitch, returning to it the lost echo of the original question. However, what Yemeni learners are often unaware of is "the attitudinal role of intonation in speech."^{19/20} And this is why they may sound abrupt and commanding when speaking English.

As has been shown so far, the influence of SA on the learning of English

¹⁶ AlKhuli, 1999: 8.

¹⁷ Kharma and Hajjaj, 1997: 16.

¹⁸ Nasr, 1963: 38.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ In fact, much is still to be understood insofar as comparative studies of Arabic-English intonation are concerned.

phonology is very obvious, and to no lesser degree is that of colloquial Arabic which manifests itself vividly in all aspects of this level of the English language. Considering 'the hierarchy of difficulty' constructed by Clifford Prator (1967) for the linguistic structures of two languages in contrast, one can also describe the transfer of Arabic phonological rules as "the height of interference" of Arabic with English.²¹

2.3 Transfer of Vocabulary

Types of errors and sources of difficulty resulting from the transfer of vocabulary from the learner's native language, namely Arabic, do in fact manifest themselves largely in areas as multiple and varied as these: derivation, inflection, compounding, multi-word verbs, phrases, spelling, idioms, loan words and collocations. For example, in Arabic verb-noun collocations a verb like يلقى /yulqi/ (*to throw or cast away*) has the capacity to be open to partnership with a wide range of nouns, where the equivalent English verb does not fit, thus creating the possibility of the type of error to be referred to as a 'collocational error.'²² Here are the Arabic collocations and their counterparts, in none of which the verb *throw* or *cast away* is used.

(9) Arabic-specific collocations	English-specific collocations
يلقي محاضرة/ درسا (yulqi muhadaratan/darsan)	to give a lesson/lecture
يلقي خطابا (yulqi kitaban)	to make a speech
يلقي عليه للمسؤولية (yulqi 'alayhi al-mas'uliyata)	to place responsibility on someone
يلقي عليه سؤالا (yulqi 'alayhi su?alan)	to ask someone a question
يلقي الرعب في قلبه (yulqi al-ru'ba fi qalbihi)	to strike terror in someone's heart ²³

Similarly, in English you *shred* cabbage, *skin* onions, *shell* nuts, and *peel* fruit. Each verb can be combined with a particular item in the lexical pattern; whereas, in Arabic you only تقشر /tuqašir/ all these items.

It is widely believed that foreign learners (Yemeni learners, in this case) seldom master these collocations under current teaching conditions.²⁴ Furthermore, the learner's L1 "turns out to have a degree of influence that goes far beyond what earlier (small-scale) studies have predicted."²⁵ This situation has been aggravated by the fact that vocabulary, unlike other areas

²¹ Prator, 1967.

²² "Collocation seems to be a language-specific phenomenon; i.e. each language appears to have its own collocation patterns although some of those might be similar in two or more languages" (Kharma and Hajjaj, *op. cit.*: 67).

²³ Adopted from Kharma and Hajjaj, *op. cit.*

²⁴ E.g. Lacey *et al.*, 1990; Lewis, 1993, 1997, 2000; Carter, 1998; Nesselhauf, 2003.

²⁵ Nesselhauf, 2003: 223.

of language, is still a much-neglected area because "little attention has been given to the equally important matter of vocabulary acquisition."²⁶ (We will have no more to say about vocabulary or any other area of language here.)²⁷

Following this reasoning, linguists have sought a comparison of a learner's L1 and L2 in the hope that people working in the field of SLA and SL teaching would attend to the learners' difficulties that may arise as a result of the structural differences between the two languages in question. This very assumption gave rise to the so-called 'Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis,' which from the very outset, was developed as an application of structural linguistics to language teaching. It was also the strongest claim made by the behaviourists and structuralist linguists about the influence of the L1 on L2 acquisition. The enthusiasm for Contrastive Analysis (CA) can be traced to Charles Fries who wrote in his book (1945) *Teaching and Learning English as a Foreign Language*: "The most effective materials are those that are based upon a scientific description of the language to be learned, carefully with a parallel description of the native language of the learner."²⁸ The strongest version of the hypothesis was expressed by Robert Lado (1957) in the preface to *Linguistic Across Cultures*: "The plan of the book rests on the assumption that we can predict and describe the patterns that will cause difficulty in learning, and those that will not cause difficulty, by comparing systematically the language and the culture to be learned with the native language and culture of the student."^{29/30}

However, the Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis declined in the 1970s as research results revealed that:

- i. In neither child nor adult L2 performance do the majority of the grammatical errors reflect the learner's L1.
- ii. L2 learners make many errors in areas of grammar that are comparable in both the L1 and L2—errors that should not be made if 'positive transfer' were operating.
- iii. L2 learners' judgements of the grammatical correctness of L2 sentences are more related to L2 sentence type than to their own L1 structure.
- iv. Phonological errors exhibit more L1 influence than do grammatical errors.³¹

The crisis in the Contrastive Analysis hypothesis gave the lead to new

²⁶ Rivers and Temperley, 1977, qtd. in Al-Assar, 1994: 59.

²⁷ For a fuller account of both Arabic and English, based on the established principle of contrastive analysis, see e.g. Qafisheh, 1990; Al-Assar, 1994; Kharma and Hajjaj, 1997; Alkhuli, 1999, 2000; Mohmoud, 2000, 2002b; Al-Shamiry, 2004.

²⁸ Fries, 1945: 9, cited in Dulay *et al.*, *op. cit.*: 98.

²⁹ Lado, 1957: vii.

³⁰ In fact, many claims, strong, weak and moderate, were made of the Contrastive Analysis hypothesis among language teaching experts and linguists. Most important of these were Randal Whitman, 1970; Stockwell, Bowen and Martin, 1965; Ronald Wardhaugh, 1970; and Oller and Ziahosseiny, 1970.

³¹ Dulay *et al.*, *op. cit.*: 97.

approaches in SLA investigation, viz. the mentalist and sociocultural approaches, which focused their attention on notions other than interference—'learner strategy,' 'language interactions' and 'communication strategies.' The L1 and the L2, according to approaches such as these, are said to nurture peaceful co-existence in the learner. We explore this next.

3. L1 and L2: Peaceful Co-existence

As has been mentioned above, recent approaches in SLA have attempted to explore the question of L2 acquisition by referring to the learner himself (his/her internalized/cognitive knowledge) and to the external reality (his/her externalized/socio-cultural knowledge).³² These gathered momentum under the influence of psycho and sociolinguistics. In the rest of the paper, I will attend to these notions one by one and see how they perceive the role of the L1, and at what point they may intersect with the notion of interference.

3.1 L1 Influence as a Learner Strategy

Learner strategy is apparently a 'mentalist' notion, which differs from interference in that it does not expect error to be a simple result of transferring rules from the L1 (i.e. as an 'interlingual error'), but it would see it as an 'intralingual error,' one that "results from faulty learning of the target language, rather than from language transfer."³³ In other words, this alternative notion seeks to explain SLA on a more cognitive basis, taking into account the active contribution of the learner. According to it, L2 (like L1) acquisition is viewed as a developmental process; and learners are thought to be "processing the second language in its own terms."³⁴ Two important learner strategies are 'overgeneralization' and 'avoidance.'³⁵

Richards *et al.* define overgeneralization as "a process common in both first- and second-language learning" and well known to language teachers, "in which a learner extends the use of a grammatical rule of linguistic item beyond its accepted uses, generally by making words or structures follow a more regular pattern."³⁶ For example, in the process of their L2 acquisition, speakers of many languages may use items such as *mouses* and *womans* instead of *mice* and *women* for the plural of *mouse* and *woman* (following the common rule of forming the plural in English as in *house-houses*): these seemingly deviant items could be described as overgeneralizations in the sense that they are used by L2 (English) learners more often in the early stages of the L2 acquisition of English, and reflect as they do the same

³² Al-Shamiry, *op. cit.*: 33.

³³ Richards *et al.*, *op. cit.*: 187.

³⁴ Littlewood, 1984: 23.

³⁵ See Coulter, 1968; Selinker, 1972.

³⁶ Richards *et al.*, *op. cit.*: 260.

natural data which an English-speaking child produces in the process of learning the plural system of English.³⁷ Similarly, a foreign learner of Arabic (like an Arabic-speaking child) attempting to pluralize words such as باب /baab/ *door*, and امرأة /imraʔah/ *woman*, will first extend the rule for forming the plural to an area in which, according to him/her, it could logically apply, but just does not. So, he/she uses the overgeneralized forms بابات /babaat/, and مرات /maraat/ before he/she is able to produce the correct ones, i.e. أبواب /abwaab/ *doors*, and نساء /nisaʔ/ *women*. At later stages, however, when learners become more familiar with the L2 system, they learn how to master the different uses of a particular grammatical rule, hence overgeneralization.

Data of the type we have dealt with in the above paragraph are often used by researchers as empirical evidence of the way learners acquire their L2. In turn, this explains why people working within this mentalist/cognitive framework of SLA, and supported by findings from First Language Acquisition (FLA) research, regard such errors of overgeneralization as indications of the learner's 'linguistic creativity' or, to quote Corder's (1967, 1971), 'transitional competence' and 'idiosyncratic dialect,' undermining as they do the role of the L1 in L2 acquisition.³⁸ Sridhar, however, points out that "the notions of interference and strategy are not incompatible...and that the learner's first language knowledge can serve as one of the inputs into the process of hypothesis generation."³⁹ In Sridhar's terms, L2 learners, seen as active contributors, may make use of strategies similar to those by which they learnt their L1 as a plan or intentional behaviour in order to better help them learn the L2, sift its data and overcome their limitations in it. As Pit Corder (1978) remarks: "...at least some of the strategies adopted by [the L2 learner] are substantially the same as those by which a first language is acquired,"⁴⁰ and "The learner's L1 may facilitate the developmental process of learning an L2, by helping him [or her] to progress more rapidly along the universal route..."^{41/42} In fact, the use of the L1 in this sense is one manifestation of a very general psychological process.

Although essential in the field, such assumptions, that L2 acquisition is developmental or sequential, "are inaccurate accounts, or at least half

³⁷ Dulay and Burt (1973) characterizes overgeneralizations of this type as first (in this case, English) language developmental errors, because such errors are found in first language acquisition data.

³⁸ Errors of this type are also called *creative constructions*, hence non-errors (see Palmer, 1922; Dulay and Burt, 1973, 1974). Selinker (1972) also considers them as part of the learner's 'Interlanguage' (IL), i.e. an intermediate unique stage between the L1 and the L2.

³⁹ Sridhar qtd. in Ellis, *op. cit.*: 37.

⁴⁰ Corder, 1967 republished in Richrads, 1974: 22.

⁴¹ Corder, 1978: 36.

⁴² By 'universal route,' Corder means the route of acquisition common in all languages.

truths.”⁴³ I will argue here that this idea of natural sequence in L2 acquisition could also draw on language transfer as well as transfer of L1 strategies. As the research literature reveals, SLA is such that it depends on a whole host of factors; and if it is “viewed as a developmental process, then the L1 can be viewed as a contributing factor to this development...”⁴⁴ Ideally, any interpretation of the L2 data of learners should take all these factors into consideration. To illustrate, let us look at the well-known example of *This mummy chair*. Corder interprets this incorrect utterance as being “evidence of the state of [a child’s] linguistic development” at a particular transitional stage along his/her idiosyncratic system.⁴⁵ Whilst this is true, many of the “idiosyncratic sentences of a second language learner bear some sort of regular relation to the sentences of his [or her] mother tongue.”⁴⁶ Asking two groups of (Lower and Upper) Intermediate Yemeni learners of English in their mother tongue (Arabic) to provide an authoritative interpretation of the aforementioned example, the following sentences were produced. (The Arabic version of the English example is هذا كرسي امي /hada kursi ummi/, *this chair my mummy*.)

(10) Sentences produced

Lower Intermediate Group

- | | | |
|------------------------------------|--------|--------------------------------|
| a. This chair (for) my mummy. | (1 L) | } Stage 1 (Arabic-restricted) |
| b. This chair mummy. | (3 Ls) | |
| c. This is (the) chair (of) mummy. | (1 L) | } Stage 2 (English-restricted) |
| d. This is mummy’s chair. | (1 L) | |

Upper Intermediate Group

- | | | |
|--------------------------------|-------|--|
| e. This is (a) chair my mummy. | (1 L) | } Stage 1 (Arabic-restricted) |
| f. This (the) chair my mummy. | (1 L) | |
| g. This (my) chair mummy. | (1 L) | |
| h. This chair mummy (mine). | (1 L) | |
| i. This is mummy (a) chair. | (1 L) | } Stage 2 (English-restricted) ⁴⁷ |
| j. This is mummy chair. | (1 L) | |
| k. This is mummy’s chair. | (1 L) | |

As the above data show, 8 out of the 13 sentences produced by the subjects resemble to a large extent the Arabic version of the cited example, i.e. they contain errors that reflect the Arabic structure such as: the omission of the copula *be* in 7 of them; of the ‘s’ on the possessive noun in 11; misordering (noun + possessive noun instead of the English possessive noun + noun) in

³⁸ Cathercole, 1988: 409.

⁴⁴ Ellis, *op. cit.*: 40.

⁴⁵ Corder, 1967 republished in Richards, *op. cit.*

⁴⁶ Corder, 1971, republished in Richards, *op. cit.*: 169.

⁴⁷ L stands for learner; Stage 1, the learners’ sentences that reflect the Arabic structure; and Stage 2, the learners’ sentences that reflect the English structure or are found in its acquisition data. Besides, the parenthesized material can provide evidence of the transfer of learning.

8; and the addition of 'my' in 4. Dulay and Burt (1973) categorizes such errors as 'interference-like errors,' which can be said to reflect the influence of the L1 (Arabic, in this case) in the learners of the L2 (English). However, some of these errors, although they do not reflect the English language structure, are found in English acquisition data as an L1, hence 'L1 English developmental errors.' It is, for example, a common tendency among L1 English-speaking children to omit the copula 'be' and the possessive 's' on nouns in sentences such as the one cited so far. Likewise, the sentences *i* and *j* could be interpreted as being evidence of the state of the respective learners' linguistic development since they resemble to some extent the cited example *this mummy chair*. The remaining sentences, viz. *d* and *k*, reflect the adult English language structure, hence the learners' proficiency in English. For the sake of clarity, the sentences which contain errors reflecting the Arabic language structure would be grouped under the heading 'Stage 1,' and those which either reflect the L2 English structure or contain errors found in L1 English acquisition data under 'Stage 2.' A third stage being the L2 learner's language, which is a hybrid of L1 and L2 features as in *a*, *e*, *f*, *g*, *h*, and *i*. The following figure is proposed by the author to represent the relationship between these stages in the process of L2 (English) development:

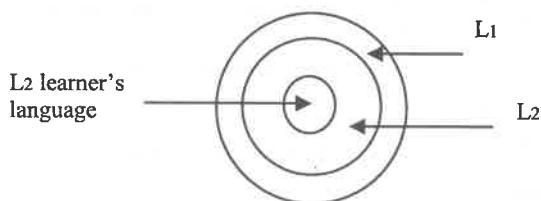


Figure 1: The relationship between the developmental stages in L2 acquisition

According to Figure 1, the developmental stages in L2 acquisition, at least in the examples cited above, can, in part, be coupled with the transitional type, which Corder introduced in his 1971 Model. However, for this transitional competence (particularly in Stage 1) to take place, the learner's knowledge of the L1 has to play a major role; whether this role is seen as being inhibitory or facilitative, it potentially sets the stage for the acquisition of the L2. To quote Corder's own words, recourse to the L1 is "a phenomenon which no one would dispute."⁴⁸ But how this knowledge operates in the learner, i.e. whether it is in terms of language transfer, or data-processing, or hypothesis-forming, is still open to discussion. My own conviction is that all these factors work together in the interface between the learner's L1 and L2, on the one hand, and the idiosyncratic system or interlanguage he/she

⁴⁸ Corder, 1971, republished in Richards, *op. cit.*: 169.

acquires at some stage, on the other hand. This might be a plausible claim, but one which requires much empirical evidence.

We can cite another instance of the particular uses of generalization in the acquisition of language, one to which SLA research has not given much attention. This particular instance refers to the learner's ability to judge the grammatical correctness of L2 sentences. This intuition about the correctness of the L2 grammar is based on two important considerations: (1) the learner's previous knowledge (competence) of his/her L1 grammar; and (2) the universal features of languages. Chomsky (1957, 1965, 1975, 1981, 1986) theorized the latter phenomenon as Universal Grammar (UG), and characterized it in terms of two types of rules: basic rules (glossed as *principles*), which are common to all languages, and reflect the linguistic endowment that the human child is born with;⁴⁹ and sub-rules (glossed as *parameters*) which entertain surface diversities among languages. Thus, not only differences but also similarities among languages are to be considered in discussions of L2 acquisition. For example, a Yemeni, or any Arab learner of English, however good or bad he/she is at English, could judge the following sentence as violating the rules of natural English word order. He/She does so either by forming hypotheses about the correct word order in English or by matching the English sentence with its equivalent in Arabic.

- (11) The English version
 Incorrect word order: to went yesterday I school
 Correct word order: I went to school yesterday.
 1 2 3 4 5
- The Arabic version
 Correct word order: ?ana dahabtu ila al-madrasa al-bariha.
 1 2 3 4 5
 English gloss: I went to (the) school yesterday.

Both the English and Arabic sentences above are a perfect match in terms of word order. Thus, we can say that both Arabic and English share certain basic rules here: Subject-Verb-Object, or hierarchically NP VP (V PP AdvP). But if we substitute *last summer* for *yesterday* in the above-mentioned English sentence, part of the rule will be violated, at least superficially:

- (12) English: I went to school last summer.
 Arabic: ?ana dahabtu ila al-madrasa al-*seif* al-madi
 I went to the- school the- summer the-last.
 Possible Error: I went to the school the summer last

Structurally, in the SA sentence, the noun *seif* (summer) precedes the

⁴⁹ See also Palmer, 1922; McNeil, 1966.

adjective *madi* (last); in addition, the determiner *al* (the) occurs before both *seif* and *madi*, i.e. before the noun and the adjective. Thus, [the [summer] [the [last]]]] is constructed as a sub-rule or parameter specific to Arabic only. Very often Yemeni learners adopt some part of this sub-rule while learning English, producing the phrase *the summer last* instead of *last summer*. The situation may be complicated even further if colloquial Arabic comes into play: in Colloquial Arabic, the rules which are expected to be similar for both SA and SE (i.e. principles) may also be violated. So *to the school the summer the last* becomes *the summer the last to the school*, some parts of which may be taken over into English: *I went the summer last to the school*. Evidently, these dialectal features of language are beyond the remit of the UG Approach and therefore ignored.

The other area of SLA research that also bears on the question of strategy pertains to 'avoidance.' According to this strategy, the L2 learner will often try to avoid using a difficult word or structure in the L2, and use a simpler word or structure instead. Madden *et al.* comment on the avoiders as ones, who "appeared to avoid responding to items they did not know well and were willing to imitate a sentence only when they felt the likelihood of making errors was small."⁵⁰ This tendency to avoid using difficult expressions in the L2 could be the result of a communication strategy of 'simplification.'⁵¹ For example, a Yemeni learner may prefer to use *proud to overweening*, or *That's the man. His daughter is a politician* to *That's the man whose daughter is a politician* when learning such constructions in English. Another example of this is the common tendency among Yemeni learners to use an alternative 'r-sound' in combinations such as *tired, turn, teacher*, instead of the English flat or American retroflex /r/ sound. Here is a telling instance of simplification. Nevertheless, another argument is also possible. One can argue that the Yemeni learner tends to simplify his/her pronunciation because Arabic does not hold distinction in the pronunciation of /r/: Arabic has only one version (characterized by these features: *voiced, dento-alveolar, central approximation*) that resembles to a large extent the one that Yemeni learners utilize for reconstructing the English /r/.⁵²

To recap briefly, viewing SLA as a developmental process involves attributing to the learner strategies which he/she creatively uses in order to better learn the L2. Such strategies are overgeneralization and avoidance. Errors attributable to the use of these strategies are often believed to

⁵⁰ Madden *et al.*, 1978: 112.

⁵¹ See Coulter, 1968; Selinker, 1972.

⁵² In fact, not much has been published on this account of L2 acquisition, at least on the part of Arab/Yemeni researchers. Two well-known studies of this kind are Schachter, 1974 and Kleinman, 1978. They both emphasized the pervasive role of the L1 in the learning of the L2.

indicate development in the acquisition process and therefore examined in their own right (i.e. with no reference to the learner's L1). Alongside this line of SLA research appeared 'creative construction,' 'idiosyncratic dialect' and 'interlanguage' as evidence of development and 'Error Analysis' replaced CA.⁵³ In the main, these claims seem to be undoubtedly plausible, given the enormous number of empirical studies made to support them. But the L1 is still an important determinant of SLA, which researchers should never ignore. Learner strategies, as we have seen so far, can be coupled with the old habits that L2 learners carry over from the L1 to a new (i.e. L2) learning situation. In other words, learning an L2 recapitulates or "reactivates the processes [or strategies] by which the first language was learnt."⁵⁴ This new (apparently cognitive) formulation of interference has been known in SLA research as "intercession, a strategy for communicating when there were insufficient L2 resources."⁵⁵ However, the problem with this cognitive/mentalist interpretation of SLA is that it ignores (if not denying totally) any reference to the social impact of language on its users.

3.2 L1 and L2 Interactions

The research literature shows that Weinreich (1953) and Haugen (1953) were the first attempts to draw researchers' attention to language interactions, such as 'linguistic borrowing' and 'language switching,' also known as code-switching, thereby providing early evidence for the sociolinguistic effect of language. Linguistic borrowing is defined as "a word or phrase which has been taken from one language and used in another language,"⁵⁶ e.g. the extensive incorporation of French words into English. On the other hand, code-switching may take place when one speaker uses one language and the other speaker answers in a different language, and/or when the same person shifts from one language to another in the middle of his/her speech, or sometimes even in the middle of a single sentence.⁵⁷ Reasons for these two linguistic phenomena are still not obvious. Weinreich and Haugen, however, believe that these take place when the L1 and L2 clearly interact (i.e. **wherever there are bilinguals**), and "signal a linguistic and mental confusion or **interference** that is deleterious to learning."⁵⁸ Weinreich defines interference in this sociolinguistic context as: "Those instances of deviation from the norms of either language which occur in the speech of bilinguals as a result of **their familiarity** with more than one

⁵³ See Corder, 1967, 1971, 1981; Selinker, 1972; Dulay and Burt, 1973.

⁵⁴ McDonough, 1983: 95-6.

⁵⁵ Ellis, *op. cit.*: 40. See also Corder, 1978.

⁵⁶ Richards *et al.*, *op. cit.*: 40.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*: 59.

⁵⁸ Dulay *et al.*, *op. cit.*: 113.

language, i.e., as a result of languages in contact."⁵⁹ Under such circumstances, **"It is the language of the learner that is influenced, not the language he [or she] learns."**⁶⁰ In fact, the work of Weinreich and Haugen was used by the CA proponents as empirical evidence for the psychological use of interference. On the face of it, this contradicts the CA notion of first language interference, as Dulay *et al.* (1982) hold:

The CA hypothesis, on the other hand, states that interference is due to **unfamiliarity** with the L2...**Further, it is manifested in the language the learner learns, not the first language of the learner...**[and]...applies to quite different circumstances: the less bilingual speakers are, the more interference there will be when they attempt to communicate with speakers of the target language.⁶¹

What Dulay *et al.* want to say is that data of Linguistic borrowing and code-switching are inapplicable to the issue of L1 interference in SLA. For example, they regard it unlikely that the speaker will have recourse to code-switching when he/she is unable to control "the structural systems of the two languages and is mixing them indiscriminately."⁶² On the contrary, they claim, "Code-switching is most often engaged in by those bilingual speakers who are the most proficient in both their languages,"⁶³ and used to serve a number of specific sociolinguistic functions, for example:

- symbolizing ethnic identification
- reporting what someone has said
- highlighting something
- discussing particular topics
- emphasizing a particular social role⁶⁴

In sum, Dulay *et al.* regard linguistic borrowing and code-switching as creative processes that facilitate the total act of communication rather than hinder it.

Nevertheless, my conviction (based on personal observation and experience) is that the claim that the L1 has little or no role to play in this area of SLA, specifically in the case of code-switching, lacks substance for the following reasons. First, code alternation does not necessarily take place in a bilingual situation only: there are still situations where other (i.e. foreign) speakers have recourse to code switching without there being contact at all between the two languages. Second, the domination and/or

⁵⁹ Weinreich, 1953: 1.

⁶⁰ Haugen, 1953: 370, qtd. in Dulay *et al.*, *op. cit.*: 99.

⁶¹ Dulay *et al.*, *op. cit.*: 99-100.

⁶² *Ibid.*: 115.

⁶³ *Ibid.*

⁶⁴ Cook, 1996: 87.

social recognition of the L1 makes it imperative on the part of L2 learners to give prominence to their L1. Finally, even the functions for code-switching cited above show nothing but the pervasive influence of the L1 in learners; that is, we all tend to *symbolize, report, highlight, discuss* and *emphasize* things in our L1, thus minimizing the use of the L2. Take, for example, the following short conversation between two Yemeni teachers of English in their staff room. (Translation of the Arabic bits of the conversation has been provided.)

- (13) A: Good morning. How are you?
 B: Good morning. Al-ham-du lil lah (Praise to God). Kaif halaak inta (How are you? /How about you?).
 A: Tamam (Ok.). How did your teaching go today?
 B: Mmm...(long silence). It was quite good. Bas ba'ad at-tulaab muhmileen giddan! (But some students are so careless!)
 A: Oh! Why? šud 'alai-hum qaleel (Be a bit strict with them). You have to, I think.
 B: I tried, but they are so unconcerned. Allah yehdee-hum (May God guide them).
 A: Yel-lah (Anyway/well). Just don't take it to heart. Everything would be Ok at the end of the day.
 B: In ša'a Allah (God willing). Thank you for your concern.
 A: Ya ragel (O' man). Al-ham wahid (It's the same with all). We ba'a dain (Furthermore) what are friends for!
 B: Allah yi kalik (May God keep you safe).

If either of the two teachers had been conversing with a native speaker of English, he would not have resorted to code-switching as such. Clearly, it is the hegemony of the L1 that makes it imperative to see it in situations such as the one cited above. Furthermore, code-switching is usually used when the learner does not have an apt word or expression in his/her L2; he/she refers to his/her L1 to borrow the needed word or expression.

Like the previous approaches, however, this sociolinguistic approach suffers from some deficiencies, a crucial one being its failure to account for the functional/pragmatic influence of the L1. The following section is intended to go into this aspect of language learning.

3.3 L1 as a Communication Strategy: Its Functional/Pragmatic Influence

Viewing language as a culturally communicative network, it became possible to see whether or not the learner's L1 is an important determinant of SLA. Although there has been little empirical research on this issue, the basic idea underlying it seems to be convincing enough to attract more research into the functional/pragmatic differences between languages. It is in fact at the level of use that languages seem to be most amenable to contrastive analysis (of course, in a new guise). "There is a need, therefore,

to discover whether and under what conditions learners transfer the realizations of a given function in their L1 to their use of the L2."⁶⁵ An interesting example of the transfer of L1 functions among Yemeni learners is the common use of *thank you* to mean both *Yes, thank you* and *No, thank you* when responding to an invitation made in English. Similar to this is what Rod Haden (1985) calls a receptive or 'social' error: "There is a considerable scope for receptive errors here. I have discovered, for example, Arabic-speaking learners of English thinking that the answer 'yes' to the two questions 'Are you coming?' and 'Aren't you coming?' has opposite meanings. Productive errors are just as likely."⁶⁶ Haden also adds, "Most errors in this area involve some misapprehension about an intended illocutionary act and are of special interest as they are not uncommon and have been neglected on the whole."⁶⁷

Another, albeit more confusing, example of the cultural pervasiveness of both the L1 and L2 refers to a simple anecdote encountered by George Yule (1996b) when in Saudi Arabia. It is about the unfamiliar use of the Arabic expression الحمد لله /*al hamdu lil-lah*/ (equivalent to 'Praise to God') by an English person (Yule) wanting to answer questions in Arabic about health (i.e. *kaif halaak/sih-hatak?*). The story follows like this:

- (14) When I first lived in Saudi Arabia, I tended to answer questions in Arabic about my health (the equivalent of 'How are you?') with the equivalent of my familiar routine responses of 'Okay' or 'Fine.' However, I eventually noticed that when I asked a similar question, people generally answered with a phrase that had the literal meaning of 'Praise to God.' I soon learned to use the new expression, wanting to be pragmatically appropriate in that context. My first type of answer wasn't 'wrong' (my vocabulary and pronunciation weren't inaccurate), but it did convey the meaning that I was a social outsider who answered in an unexpected way. In other words, more was being communicated than was being said. Initially I did not know that: I had learned some linguistic forms in the language without learning the pragmatics of how those forms are used in a regular pattern by social insiders.⁶⁸

But this use of *al hamdu lil-lah*, as far as the above example is concerned, is irrelevant to our main focus here for it tends to raise a case about the pragmatic use of expressions specific to the L2 (Arabic, in this case). However, we may postulate that the inappropriateness of the same expression (i.e. *al hamdu lil-lah*) could equally be attributed to the fact that an L2 learner, being linguistically and culturally alien to the L2, should not have recourse to the pragmatics of his/her own native language when

⁶⁵ Ellis, *op. cit.*: 39.

⁶⁶ Haden, 1985: 143.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*: 141.

⁶⁸ Yule, 1996b: 5.

wanting to communicate in the L2. To prove this, let us imagine that the literal meaning of *al hamdu lil-lah*, that is, *Praise to God/Allah* was reconstructed (or transferred) into English by a Yemeni learner as his/her response to the English question, 'How are you?' To what extent would this unfamiliar response be perceived by the English as culturally confusing and adverse, given the fact that most of the English rarely subscribe to any religion (i.e. they are secular), let alone praise God/Allah or make any such reference to Him in their everyday language transactions?

Transfer of discourse patterns from the L1 into the L2 is also significant. In the example cited in 3.1, namely *That's the man. His daughter is a politician*, one may attribute the use of two simple sentences instead of a sentence with a relative clause to rhetorical differences between Arabic—which is characterized by 'parallelism'—and English—which is characteristically 'linear.'⁶⁹ As Oshima and Hogue (1999) also observed:

Arabic...[learners] tend to [speak or write] in a parallel sequence using many coordinators such as **and** and **but**. In English, maturity of style is often judged by the degree of subordination rather than by the degree of coordination.⁷⁰

"This difference imposes an obstacle to the [Yemeni-]Arab learners of English; therefore,...students [should be] fully aware of this difference so that when they [speak or] write in English their [speech or] writing conforms to the English rhetoric."⁷¹ In fact, errors of this type, though "do not usually affect communicative efficiency,"⁷² constitute an area (the whole area of connectives) "where L1 interference seems to account for many errors" and which "would repay further study."⁷³

The study of these different cultural ways of speaking and writing is often referred to as 'Contrastive Pragmatics,' or within SLA research 'Interlanguage Pragmatics,' and 'Contrastive Rhetoric.' Many a researcher has emphasized these areas of investigation to open up new avenues in the study of L2 acquisition in order to come to terms with the interfering effect of the L1, i.e. its 'communicative interference.'

4. Conclusion

This paper has attempted to rethink the role of the L1 in L2 acquisition with both Arabic (as an L1) and English (as an L2) in mind. It began by discussing the behaviourist view of SLA, and then juxtaposed it with other views common in discussions of SLA, challenging the ways in which these

⁶⁹ See Kaplan, 1966; Al-Kaf, 2000.

⁷⁰ Oshima and Hogue, 1999: 32-33.

⁷¹ Al-Maqtri, 2005: 59.

⁷² Haden, *op. cit.*: 146.

⁷³ *Ibid.*: 145.

new views look at the role of the L1 in SLA. Further, data documenting phenomena pertaining to SLA were gathered and used as empirical support for the influence of Arabic in Yemeni learners of English. Upon close examination, it became evident that both Standard and Colloquial Arabic have a substantial influence on the SLA of English; this influence is evident in aspects as varied as the formal features of Arabic and English (syntactic, phonological and lexical differences), learner strategies (overgeneralization and avoidance), language interactions (borrowing and code-switching), and communication strategies (functional/cultural differences). Yemeni-Arab learners seem to transfer, at different levels and in varying degrees, the realizations of these aspects of Arabic to their use of English. As Ellis (1986) has aptly observed:

The L1 is a resource of knowledge which learners will use both consciously and subconsciously to help them sift the L2 data in the input and to perform as best as they can in the L2. Precisely when and how this resource is put to use depends on a whole host of factors to do with the formal and pragmatic features of the native and target languages (i.e. linguistic factors) on the one hand, and the learner's stage of development and type of language use (i.e. psycho and sociolinguistic factors) on the other hand. The influence of the L1 is likely to be most evident in L2 phonology—the foreign accent is ubiquitous—but it will occur in all aspects of the L2.⁷⁴

Or to quote Mahmoud (2002b):

The influence of the mother tongue and the pervasiveness of interlingual transfer is indisputable, especially in learning situations where students' exposure to the foreign language is confined to a few hours per week of formal classroom instruction...Deviations resulting from interlingual transfer have been recorded at all linguistic levels.⁷⁵

It also follows from our analysis of the issues that "the idea of contrasting languages is a correct one"⁷⁶ despite the pitfalls suffered by the methods used to carry out the contrast. Finally, I would personally recommend using contrastive pragmatics and interlanguage pragmatics (under the rubric of 'contrastive discourse analysis'), as these are most fruitful tools, not only because current SLA research draws many of its ideas from them, but also because they touch upon an important, sensitive issue in the study of language(s), viz. cultural differences. One might also want to have an eclectic approach to compare the L1 and the L2, thereby securing maximum benefit and also overcoming, or at least reducing to the absolute minimum, existing shortcomings of various methods, as no method is **final** or **complete**.

⁷⁴ Ellis, *op. cit.*: 40.

⁷⁵ Mahmoud, 2002b. (<http://iteslj.org/>).

⁷⁶ Sajavaara qtd. in Al-Shamiry, *op. cit.*: 38.

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Appendix 1

Transcription of Arabic Sounds

(This follows the symbols used in Kharma and Hajjaj, 1997)

Vowels	Short	Long
a	فتحة ا	ā ا
i	كسرة ي	ī ی
u	ضمة و	ū و
au	أو diphthong	ai أی diphthong

Consonants			
ʔ	همزة	q̣	ض
b	ب	ṭ	ط
t	ت	z	ظ
ʔ	ث	ʔ	ع
j	ج	g	غ
h	ح	f	ف
k	ك	q	ق
d	د	k	ك
ḏ	ذ	l	ل
r	ر	m	م
z	ز	n	ن
s	س	h	هـ
ʃ	ش	w	و (semi-vowel)
ʕ	ص	y	ی (semi-vowel)

Appendix 2

Transcription of English Sounds

(This follows the symbols used in *The Little Oxford Dictionary of Current English*, 1994.)

Pronunciation symbols

Consonants

b	<i>but</i>	n	<i>no</i>	ʃ	<i>she</i>
d	<i>dog</i>	p	<i>pen</i>	ʒ	<i>vision</i>
f	<i>few</i>	r	<i>red</i>	θ	<i>thin</i>
g	<i>get</i>	s	<i>sit</i>	ð	<i>this</i>
h	<i>he</i>	t	<i>top</i>	ŋ	<i>ring</i>
j	<i>yes</i>	v	<i>voice</i>	x	<i>loch</i>
k	<i>cat</i>	w	<i>we</i>	tʃ	<i>chip</i>
l	<i>leg</i>	z	<i>zoo</i>	dʒ	<i>jar</i>
m	<i>man</i>				

Vowels

æ	<i>cat</i>	ʌ	<i>run</i>	ɔʊ	<i>no</i>
ɑ:	<i>arm</i>	ʊ	<i>put</i>	eə	<i>hair</i>
e	<i>bed</i>	u:	<i>too</i>	ɪə	<i>near</i>
ɜ:	<i>her</i>	ə	<i>ago</i>	ɔɪ	<i>boy</i>
ɪ	<i>sit</i>	aɪ	<i>my</i>	ʊə	<i>poor</i>
i:	<i>see</i>	aʊ	<i>how</i>	aɪə	<i>fire</i>
o	<i>hot</i>	eɪ	<i>day</i>	aʊə	<i>sour</i>
ɔ:	<i>saw</i>				