

The Second Language Influence on Foreign Language Learners' Errors: the Case of the French Language for Algerian Students learning English as a Foreign Language

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Abstract: Various researchers have concentrated on those errors which demonstrate the influence of one's native language to second language acquisition. Some would consider them as inhibitory while others pointed out that they are facilitative. The present study shed light on another sphere of interference errors that occur in tri-lingual societies. The scope of the study was narrowed to focus on the role performed by the French language in the frequency of errors made by the Algerian students in their English as Foreign Language (EFL) learning. The study adopted a contrastive approach to discover whether this role is inhibitory or facilitative. The plain task was to give students a text to translate from French to English(version A) .The students were then asked to translate the same text from Arabic to English(version B).A chart was designed to compare the frequency , the type and the degree of severity of errors in both versions of translation. The analysis of the results in the chart showed that the students made less number of errors in the version (A) translation compared with version (B).Hence, the role of the French language in The EFL learning for Algerian students seems rather facilitative.

1-Introduction:

Language transfer (also known as L1 interference, linguistic interference, and cross meaning) refers to speakers or writers applying knowledge from their native language to a second language. There has been much debate upon the importance of the second language interference. Scholars still argue if this interference is beneficial for both teachers and learners or not. According to some scholars, the transfer can be positive when knowing one language can aid in developing skills for a second language. Alternatively, others claim that the transfer can be negative when understanding one language complicates the understanding of another language. The present paper will make the scope larger when it tests the learners' competence that would exceed one second language learning or what is best described as *multilingual acquisition* , i.e. "the acquisition of languages other than the first or second" (Cenoz, 1997).More precisely the study is devoted to depict the interference of both Arabic (students' mother tongue) and French(students' second language) in English (students' foreign language) in the case of Algerian EFL students .The study contrastive analysis hypothesis postulated the existence of positive transfer, resulting from similarity between languages(French and English), and negative transfer , stemming from difference between languages (Arabic and English).

2. Theoretical development of error analysis

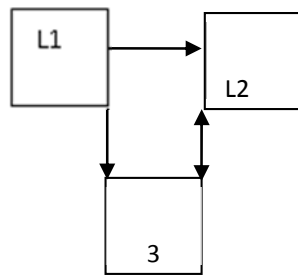
Before tackling the practical side of the study scope we find it important to highlight some theoretical issues that have characterised the development of error analysis since the introduction of the Second Language Acquisition approach.

2.1. Acquisition of multiple languages

Chomsky brought to the fore the notion of *universal grammar* claiming that human learning in general and language acquisition in particular are explainable in terms of an innate human capacity aiding the generation of an infinite number of sentence patterns. Hence, the innate learners' rule formation capacity is resorted to in another language acquisition, i.e. the learners form hypotheses about target language rules and test them in practice. Cenoz (1997) points out that although multilingual acquisition is often considered as a variation of bilingualism and SLA, it is in fact more complex than the latter because it depends not only on the factors and processes involved in SLA but also on the interactions between the multiple languages being learned. It is upon that "bridge" of such interactions that target surface or deep structure of the multiple language influence and get influenced either by negative or positive change. Moreover, Cenoz(1997) explains that there is also more diversity and complexity in multilingual acquisition if we consider other factors such as the age when the different languages are acquired, the environment in which each of the languages is acquired, or the typological distance among the languages involved .More importantly the interactions between the L1 ,L2 and L3, which may be envisaged as a triad ,are reciprocal; whereas, those between L1 and L2, L1 and L3 are probably best visualized as unidirectional if L1 is the learner's native language because whatever influence L2 and L3 might exert on the mother tongue it might be less significant when compared to the influence of L1 on L2 and L3.

Multilingual acquisition of language

According to Cenoz (2000) there are at least four possibilities with L3 acquisition orders: i) the three languages are acquired one after the other (L1→L2→L3); ii) L2 and L3 are acquired simultaneously after L1 (L1→L2/L3); iii) L1 and L2 are acquired simultaneously before L3 (L1/L2→L3), and iv) the learner is in simultaneous contact with the three languages L1/L2/L3).The present paper aims how the four orders affect the Algerian students' learning process of English as an L3.



2.2. Contrastive analysis

In the 1950s, American linguist Robert Lado began to study errors systematically and developed theories about errors via contrastive analysis. Contrastive analysis hypothesis stated that the principal barrier to second language acquisition is the interference of the first language system with the second language system and that a scientific, structural comparison of the two languages in question would enable people to predict and describe both of the problems and the supporting aspects of the second language learning. Such theories were deeply rooted in behaviourism and structuralism and, thus; they held that human language learning was to change old habits and to build new habits. Moreover, errors occur when learners could not respond correctly to a particular stimulus in the second language. Since an error may serve as a negative stimulus which reinforces “bad habits”, it should not be allowed to occur. So, in the classroom teaching, they placed more emphasis on mechanical pattern drills and attempted to correct any errors or mistakes wherever they occur.

2.3. Interlanguage and its features

Although it proved some efficiency in detecting the second language learners’ errors, the contrastive analysis had some weaknesses in that it emphasises the interference of the outer environment of language study, but the language learners themselves are totally neglected. While interlanguage intended to explore learning strategies based on the learners’ errors, and it has become the basis of error analysis.

What is interlanguage? The term was firstly adopted by Selinker(1972) from “interlingual”. It refers to the separateness of a second language learners’ system that has a structurally intermediate status between the native and target language learners. A number of terms have been coined to describe the perspective which stressed the legitimacy of learners’ second language system. Corder (1971) used the term “idiosyncratic dialect” or “language learners’ language”. Nemser(1971) called it “approximate system”. Despite labelled differently, each of these designation share the concept that second language learners are forming their own self-contained independent linguistic systems. This is neither the system of the native language nor the system of the target language, but falls between the two. In the interlanguage legitimate system the learners are no longer looked on as producers of malformed, imperfect language replete with mistakes, but as intelligent and creative beings proceeding through logical, systematic stages of acquisition creatively acting upon their linguistic environment. Another important feature is that this system is dynamic and it is based on the best attempt of learners to produce order and structure to the linguistic stimuli surrounding them. Finally, it is a linguistic system which reflects the psychological process of learning and the psychological process of foreign language learning in particular.

3. Error analysis and treatment:

In order to analyze learners’ errors from a proper scope, it is crucial to make a distinction between “mistake” and “error”. Errors are made when learners of L2 produce incorrect language because they do not know the correct form, while mistakes are made when learners produce incorrect language although they know the correct form. Learners can correct their own mistakes, but by definition, they cannot correct errors. According to Brown (2000), a “mistake” refers to a performance error in that it is a failure to utilize a known system correctly. While an “error” is a noticeable deviation from the adult grammar of a native speaker and that reflects the interlanguage competence of the learner. This recognition process is followed by the error description process. We compare learners’ sentences with the correct sentences in target language, and find the errors. Then we come to the next step which is the stage of finding the sources of errors.

4. Categorization of learners’ errors

The following perspective is an overall presentation of the main types of errors that may occur in learners’ language transfer. The learners’ errors can be categorized in terms of various criteria. One type of that categorization is what Corder refers to as *expressive* and *receptive errors* which are manifestations of expressive and receptive behaviour and depend upon knowledge of the “formation rules” of a language. “*Inadequate knowledge of these rules will therefore show itself in both sorts of behaviour. But it is much easier to detect imperfect knowledge in the case of expressive behaviour. Expression leaves traces transient, but recordable, in the case of speech, permanent in the case of writing.*” (Corder, 1973: 261).

Generally speaking, language errors can be classified according to: a. linguistic levels (i.e., pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, and style), b. form (e.g., omission, insertion, and substitution), c. type (systematic errors/errors in competence vs. occasional errors/errors in performance), d. cause (e.g., interference, interlanguage), e. norm vs. system and f. modality (i.e., level of proficiency in speaking, writing, listening speaking).

To delve into deeper issues, three main processes interfere in the errors that EFL learners make: a. *transfer of rules* from the mother-tongue, b. *redundancy reduction* by omitting elements and c. *overgeneralization* of foreign language rules.

4.1. Transfer of rules

Language transfer (also known as L1 interference, linguistic interference, and cross meaning) refers to speakers or writers applying knowledge from their native language to a second language. It is most commonly discussed in the context of English language learning and teaching, but it can occur in any situation when someone does not have a native-level command of a language, as when translating into a second language. In transfer rules errors the EFL learners tend to use their previous mother tongue experience as a means of organising the foreign language data. Such rules deriving from existing habits prevent correct speech from being established. Transfer errors are “interlingual” since they come from the interaction between the first and second or foreign language.

4.2. Redundancy reduction

This is a tendency by EFL learners to eliminate many items or add unnecessary items, either by ignorance or intensively, which are redundant to conveying the intended message. For instance, in the case of a learner of English language as a foreign language we may meet utterances, such as: “No understand”, “return back” etc. It is rather a simplified code of communication or reduced language systems used by foreign language learners especially in earlier stages of the learning process.

4.3. Overgeneralization

In the foreign language rules (and where belongs the majority of ‘intralingual’ errors) the learner while trying constructing rules which predict how the different items will behave, sometimes, his/her predictions are wrong, probably for one of two main reasons: a- an exception to the general rule or because b- a new category and rule must be constructed. In either case, the learner’s initial error is due to overgeneralization of the rule which causes the wrong prediction. In the case of overgeneralization, it is his/her previous knowledge of the foreign language that the learner uses. Lee (1990) elaborates on the following classification of learner errors:

- *Grammatical (morphosyntactic) errors* where the stress is on the need for grammatical accuracy in both speech and writing. This may hinder communication but errors at the sentence level often reflect performance “mistakes” for which immediate teacher correction is not necessarily appropriate.
- *Discourse errors* are dependable upon the observance of the rules of speaking and writing and reflect learners’ cultural and pragmatic knowledge of language use.
- *Phonologically-induced errors* are manifested in wrong pronunciation and/or intonation; in the case of English studied as a foreign language such errors necessitate timely correction on the part of the teacher because vowel length, voiced and voiceless last consonants, word stress, etc. may have a meaning-differentiating function, as in *live/leave, leave/leaf, import(n) and import(v)*, and so on.
- *Lexical errors* are linked with errors belonging to the other linguistic levels which may also hamper communication and intelligibility.

As the focus of the present paper will only tackle the linguistic issue of the language transfer, the plain task is to categorize learner errors on the basis of the linguistic levels testifying their manifestation in the different aspects of the language learning interference.

4.4. Phonological interference

Pyun (in Mehlhorn, 2007) claims that language learners’ interlanguage owes phonological knowledge to L1 rules, L2 (first foreign language) rules, L3 (foreign language being studied) rules, and “interrules”, the latter described as “bridges” between the already acquired languages and L3. This is manifested in speaking and reading and is usually indicated by recourse to word stress, intonation and speech sounds typical of French which influence the acquisition of English. This can clearly illustrated in the following examples :

1. The initial “h” is not pronounced, e.g.: *hemisphere* [ˈemisfiə] instead of [ˈhemisfiə], *hotel* [oˈtel] instead of [həuˈtel], etc. Occasionally, the non-initial [h] sound is also omitted, as in *alcohol* [ˈalkool]. In French, the letter “h” is always silent.

2. The “-ure” ending in polysyllabic words is pronounced as [juə], e.g.: *literature* [literəˈtʃuə] instead of [ˈlitritʃə], again with a change of word stress. Compare, for example, with the pronunciation of the French *voiture* (“automobile, car”).

Because the actual contrastive analysis of the present study will be on a written corpus we shall not depict all possible errors that are rooted to the phonological interference since such kinds of errors cannot be depicted in the learners’ target written corpus after all.

4.5. Orthographic interference

This occurs at the level of writing where words’ spelling are altered under the influence of French. The

following examples can illustrate such alteration:

1-The addition of an extra “-e” at the end of words, e.g.: *closenesse* instead of *closeness*, *groupe* instead of *group*, *seniore* instead of *senior*, *Greeke* instead of *Greek*, etc.

2-The adoption of a French suffix such as *-ique*, *-eur*, and *-oire*, e.g.: *electrique* instead of *electric* .

4.6. Lexical interference

It is manifested in speaking and writing and is represented by the borrowing of French words which may or may not be converted to sound more natural in English. Francophone learners of English tend to use French words in order to fill in the existing gaps in their knowledge of English vocabulary, e.g.: *langues* instead of *languages*, *fautes* instead of *mistakes*, *tache* instead of *task* ect ...

4.7. Grammatical interference

L2 influences L3 in terms of word order, use of pronouns and determiners, tense and mood: There are modifications to word order due to the influence of French. , most often illustrated in the placement of adjectives after nouns in noun phrases. In French, most adjectives go after the word they modify. e.g: *factor important* instead of *big factor*, *image clear* instead of *clear image* ect....The use of definite articles with proper nouns is a French language feature which is sometimes transferred by the francophone learners when uttering English words .e.g: *The professor Brackert teaches in Frankfurt*. Among the other kinds of grammatical interference from French to English is also the use of a different tense .e.g: *I study here for a year* or *he has left yesterday* and the wrong use of the relative pronoun .e.g: *Here is the student which you met her last week* or *the people which arrived*.

5. Method of data collection and analysis

Our study specifically is based on a survey of university students having French as their second language and studying English as a foreign language in ELT department at Chlef University preparing their first year of Master Degree. The method was simple in that we gave a short passage of about 100 words to 25 students to translate first from French into English; we called that version(A) ,then we asked them to translate the same passage from Arabic to French and we referred to it as version (B).the target students were chosen at random as that we aimed to test their abilities in translation for a short text that dealt mainly with the concept of “bilingualism”; a linguistic issue that would both raise their interest and match appropriately the scope of the study . As we have focused on the written form of the language, we have not dealt with the spoken language e.g. pronunciation, intonation word stress, sentence stress ect... and we wish to target this case in other studies. After that the handouts were collected, we started sorting out errors committed by the students in both versions as it is clarified in the two tables below:

Language Features	Sample transfer error in English	Frequency of errors
ARTICLES <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Definite article used for generalization. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ...that rely on the representations of <i>the</i> individuals... 	(2 times)
NOUNS, PRONOUNS, ADJECTIVES, ADVERBS <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The wrong noun Wrong affixation Wrong adjective Wrong adverb Redundancy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ...built on representations of the <i>persons</i>... <i>Bilinguality</i> additive ...in order to developpe <i>axtra</i> <i>knowledgement</i>.....in Educational powerful <i>programmation</i>..... ...Studies that shows that is <i>necessare</i> to impose.... <i>Bilinguality additive</i> <i>even</i> the conditions does not encourage,the progress of<i>the representations</i> of individuals.... 	(2times) (3 times) (1 time) (4 times) (1time)
SENTENCE FORM , WORD ORDER <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Wrong placement of adjectives 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ...Studies that seem necessary to make <i>available</i> to the education... ...so-called competence <i>additive</i> <i>bilingualism</i>.... ...in Educational <i>powerful</i> <i>programmation</i>.... 	(3 times)

<p>VERBS , TENSES</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Wrong verb agreement • No-ing (gerund) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ...can pave the path to the success of all tasks which <i>has</i>.. • ...who are capable <i>to use</i> two languages.... 	<p>(4 times)</p> <p>(2 times)</p>
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Language Transfer Errors from French into English (version A)

Table 1:

Language Features	Sample transfer error in English	The frequency of errors
<p>ARTICLES</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • No definite article with definite items. • Definite article with words that carry general meanings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ... Arabic/French bilingualism is not ... • ...Which aims to form <i>the</i> bilingual people who... 	<p>(6 times)</p> <p>(4 times)</p>
<p>VERBS AND AUXILIARIES</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Be</u> is omitted. • Wrong verb endings/subject-verb agreement • Placing the verb at the end of the sentence 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ...but also a case study that necessary... • ...large investigation that <i>go</i> beyond this competence..... The progress of bilingual individuals <i>allow</i> individuals.....the conditions <i>does</i> not.....Studies that <i>shows</i>..... • ...that can make any task for language learning <i>succeed</i>..... 	<p>(3 times)</p> <p>(5 times)</p> <p>(4 times)</p>
<p>WORD ORDER AND SENTENCE STRUCTURE</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adjective placement • Redundancy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ... to impose this in <i>Educational powerful</i> programmation....develope competence called Bilinguality <i>additive</i>..... Studies that seem necessary to make <i>available</i> to the education sector..... •develop the efficiency of the language known <i>as double or Bilingual</i> . 	<p>(4 times)</p> <p>(3 times)</p>
<p>NOUNS, PRONOUNS, ADJECTIVES, ADVERBS.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adjective restatement • Mis-use of the possessive case Using an adjective instead of an adverb • Wrong placement of adverbs • Wrong word • Wrong noun 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ...Even if <i>all</i> the conditions needed are not <i>all</i> there.... • ...its impact on Algerian's personality... from the simple notion to <i>her</i> effectness on the Algerians personalities • ...,but also a case study that <i>necessary</i> requires.... • ...the current trend aims to...,<i>also</i> it aims to develop..... • ...The existing <i>tend</i> in Algeria aiming.... • <i>The programmation</i>..... 	<p>(6 times)</p> <p>(4 times)</p> <p>(1 time)</p> <p>(3 times)</p> <p>(1 time)</p> <p>(1 time)</p>

Table 2: Language Transfer Errors from Arabic into English (version B)

It is worth mentioning that we relied on the *Language Guide to Transfer Errors* (Wigan Council) that covers more than twenty languages, including Arabic and French common errors depicted in EFL learners, in sorting out the different students' errors.

The error analysis in both language transfers shows that the students made more errors in the second version of translation (from Arabic into English) than the first one (from French into English). This could be attributed to the similarity of the morpho-syntactic features that both of the French and English language share. Historically speaking, French and English do not belong to the same origin. The former is part of the Romance subgroup of Indo-European languages, whereas the latter belongs to the Germanic branch. Since the two languages have been in contact at different stages of their development and for quite long periods of time, the origin of over 70% of the English vocabulary can be traced back to French and Latin, the ancestor of all Italic languages. At first glance, this simple historical fact suggests that the students are not likely to encounter such difficulties in studying English as a foreign language. This is, however, a superficial idea because it turns out that similarities between languages may actually constitute differences in disguise. In other words, similarity of form does not always presuppose similarity of function. In fact, students still face some difficulties in being more accurate in their English language usage. For instance, lexically speaking, they tend to use French words in order to fill in the existing gaps in their knowledge of English vocabulary (lexical interference) e.g. *necessaire* instead of *necessary*. Furthermore, an error like *programmation* is due a language interference which has a direct relation with one of the French language own way of forming noun by adding the *ation/tion* suffix to the end of some word roots. Concerning grammatical interference, There are modifications to word order attributable to the influence of French, most often illustrated in the placement of adjectives after nouns in noun phrases. e.g. *competence additive*. In French, most adjectives go after the word they modify. Such word order is not typical of English where the adjective often precedes the noun. Concerning word order at the sentence level, the students tend to place the verb before the subject English where the word order is fixed and follows the *subject/verb/object* pattern. With regard to the second version of translation (from Arabic into English), there has been depicted also some features of language interference errors such as using the wrong possessive case in expressions like *its impact on Algerian's personality... from the simple notion to her effectness....*. The use of the pronoun "her" in such a statement is attributed to a sort of Arabic language interference where such pronoun can refer both to the feminine and the neuter gender. Starting the sentence clause with the adverb *even* instead of the conjunction *eventhough* to start a concession or contrast sentence is much attributable to the Arabic language interference.

As part of the teaching role, it is fundamental for the EFL teacher to look for the most efficient ways to bring feedback and correction the students' mistakes and errors. However, the teacher should know when to interfere for such correction. First, we are confronted with a dilemma—fluency versus accuracy. If the purpose is mainly communicative, it is advisable to delay correction. Some teachers believe that the correction is determined by the type of errors committed. For instance, if they are pronunciation or grammatical errors, immediate correction is preferable, for post-correction cannot make learners remember anything. When the whole class is familiar with a word, but only one of them is singled out for being corrected, he or she would feel awkward. So, we can see that when to correct is very complicated. Both of the teachers' intuition and the feedback from the students are equally important. Furthermore, the EFL teacher should know how to correct the students' committed mistakes in a tactful way. According to James (1998), it is sensible to follow the three principles in error correction. Firstly, the techniques involved in error correction would be able to enhance the students' accuracy in expression. Secondly, the students' affective factors should be taken into consideration and the correction should not be face-threatening to the students. Lastly, the class manager should be aware of the type of errors that need urgent and immediate correction. Burt (1975) made a distinction between "global" and "local" errors. Global errors hinder communication and they prevent the learner from comprehending some aspects of the message. Local errors only affect a single element of a sentence, but do not prevent a message from being heard. Thus, the teacher's focus should be much on the correction of global errors.

Conclusion

Despite the limitations of the of the study namely the contrastive analysis in depicting all L2 and EFL learners errors since it focuses only on the outside environment of the learners and neglects the language learners themselves, the focus on learner errors is nevertheless useful to language teachers as a means of enhancing teaching methodology. An awareness of the types of errors learners tend to commit is necessary for language teachers so that they are able to properly and timely correct inappropriate and unacceptable utterances. Concerning Algerian learners of English as a second foreign language, it must be noted that even if orthographic interference is successfully dealt with, by means of dictations or plenty of written assignments, phonologically-induced interference and lexical interference postulate graver problems to the teacher compared with that of the French language. Thus, the teacher should be skillful in managing the correction of the learners' errors. In other words, he or she should know exactly what errors should be corrected, when to correct errors and how to correct them.

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