THE ROLE OF L1 TRANSFER ON L2 LEARNING: SOME REFLECTIONS ON ALGERIAN LEARNERS

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Abstract
Learning English as a second language (L2), in our context, is sometimes characterised by the students' use of their first language (L1) as a facilitating means for effective communication in the classroom. This indicates that the influence of L1 on the learning of L2 is not only an inevitable phenomenon, but also an important aspect that must be taken into consideration. The belief that L1 is a significant factor influencing the acquistion of a second language dates back to the 1950s when Behaviourism was dominant in the domain of linguistics ; however, thoughts and positions had changed with the advent of Chomsky's generativistic approach to language study. Chomsky argued that like L1, L2 learning is conducted by universal innate principles or rather inborn capacities that enable the human being to acquire any language. By reviewing some related literature and, at the same time, relying on our modest experience as EFL teachers at the tertiary level, where students are exposed to both theoretical and practical issues, this communication aims to investigate the different insights and attitudes towards the natural and justifiable interference of L1 in L2 acquisition (learning).
Key words: First language (L1), second language (L2), Behaviourism, Chomsky's generativistic approach, EFL teachers, insights and attitudes.

I. Demystifying Basic Terminology
I.1. First Language

A first language (also native language, arterial language, L_1, mother language, or native tongue) is the language (s) a person has learnt from birth, or within a critical period, or that person speaks the best and so is often the basis for sociolinguistic identity.

The term mother tongue or mother language is used for the language that a person learnt as a child at home (usually from their parents). According to this definition, children grow up in a bilingual homes can have more than a mother tongue, or a native language.

The term mother tongue should not be interpreted to mean that it is the language for one's mother. Mother, in this context, is originated from the use of "mother" to mean "origin" as in motherland.

One can have two or more native languages, thus being a native bilingual or indeed multilingual. For instance, a French-speaking couple, who live in an English-speaking country, might have a daughter who learnt French first, then English, as well as, she would be likely to be proficient in English. Examples are of India, Pakistan, and South Africa, where most speak more than one language.

Defining a mother tongue requires some criteria such as:
- Based-on origin; the language (s) one learnt first (the language (s) in which one has established the first long-lasting verbal contact).
- Based-on internal identification: the language (s) one identifies with/as a speaker of;
- Based-on external identification: the language (s) one is identified with/as a speaker of, by others.
- Based-on competence: the language (s) one knows best.
- Based-on function: the language (s) one uses most.

The first language of a child is part of their personal, social, and cultural identity. It is responsible for differentiating the linguistic competence of acting.

I.2. Second Language

A second language (L_2) is any language learnt after the first language, or the mother tongue (L_1). According to some researchers, the defining difference between a first language (L_1) and a second language (L_2) is the age the person has learnt the language. For instance, the linguist Eric Lenneberg viewed that a second language is used to mean a language consciously acquired or used by its speakers after the critical age. In most cases, people never achieve the same level or fluency and comprehension in this second language as in their first language (Saville-Troike, 2008).

A second language may also be referred to as target language. A target language is a language that is the focus or end result of certain processes:

In applied linguistics and second language pedagogy, the term "target language" refers to any language that learners are trying to learn in addition to their native language.

In translation, the term "target language" is applied to the language that a source text is being translated into.

In computer sciences, a target language is the computer language that a compiler translates source code into.

I.3. Foreign language

A distinction is often made between "Second language" and "Foreign language". The distinction is said to be of a pedagogical interpretation. Generally, a foreign language is learnt for

use in area where that language is spoken. For example, English in countries such as India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, the Scandinavian countries can be considered for many of its speakers a second language, because they speak it frequently and use it regularly, whereas in Algeria, this language is regarded to be a foreign language due to the lack of a number of characteristics, such as: historical links, media, opportunities for use, similar vocabulary, and common script.

The distinction between acquisition and learning was first made by Stephen Krashen (1982) in his Monitor Hypothesis Theory. According to him, the acquisition of a language is a natural process, whereas learning is a conscious one. In the former, the person needs to partake in a natural communicative situation. In the latter, error correction is present, as in the study of grammatical rules isolated from natural languages. Not all educators in second language agree to this distinction.

I.4. Similarities and Differences between L_1 and L_2

These are summarized in the following:

a. Speed: acquiring a second language can be a lifelong learning process for many. Despite persistent efforts, most learners of a second language will never become fully native-like in it.

b. Stages: acquiring a second language occurs in a systematic way, through systematic stages.

c. Success: success in language acquisition can be measured in two ways: likelihood and quality. First language learners will be successful in both measurements. For second language learners, success is not guaranteed.

II. Theoretical Background

II.1. Behaviourism

The history of Behaviourism started at the early 20th century when John Watson published in 1913 a book entitled "Psychology as the behaviourist views it". The overall subject matter of this book was to suggest a redefinition of psychology as the study of only observable data to ensure objectivity and scientificity. In Watson's view, most of human behaviour, including language, takes place under external not internal conditions which need to be investigated. Watson's view was sustained and enhanced by several laboratory experiments such as "Pavlov's dogs salivating when a bell rings" in 1927 and "Skinner's rats and pigeons pressing or pecking a lever to obtain pellets of feed" in 1938 (Tennant, 1997, pp.94-95). From these two experiments emerged the behaviourist vocabulary of "stimulus-response, imitation, repetition, reinforcement and generalisation", and the acquisition of stereotyped responses together with the conditions under which they occur became the core interest of Behaviourism.

Following the same considerartions to identify Behaviourism and to introduce it as anapproach to learning, Jordan et.al (2008) pointed out that" behaviourists define learning as a relatively permanent change in behaviour as the result of experience", and that " This change in behaviour is always observable, with some behaviourists proposing that ifno observable change happens, no learning has occurred"(p. 21). Behaviourists, in fact, do not deny that there is a small room for cognitive activity (the fact that learners think), but they have always limited their studies to observable behaviour, and thus their early experiments were all dependable on physical instruction. Watson (1930: 82), who called for the use of scientific objectivity and coined the term "Behaviourism", stated that:

> Give me a dozen healthy infants, well-formed, and my own specified world to bring them up in, and I'll guarantee to take any one at random and train him to be any type of specialist I might select – doctor, lawyer, artist, merchant-chief and, yes, even beggar-man and thief, regardless of his talents, penchants, tendencies, abilities, vocations and the race of his ancestors. (Cited in. Jordan et.al, 2008, p. 23)

Many other people have views that are in support of the above quotation.Postman (1971), for instance, maintained that:

> Learning is a cumulative process. The more knowledge and skillsan individual acquires, the more likely it becomes that his new learning will be shaped by his past experiences and activities. An adult rarely, if ever, learns anything completely new; howeverunfamiliar the task that confronts him, the information and habits he has built up in the past will be his point of departure.Thus transfer of training from old to new situations is part and parcel of most, if not all, learning. In this sense the study oftransfer is coextensive with the investigation of learning. (Cited in. Gass and Selinker, 2008, p.93-94)

Simply put, in the course of learning, individuals depend heavily on their past experiences; i.e. they draw on the habits they have developed to acquire new knowledge and skills. That is, they cannot start anything new unless they use the talents they acquired earlier. This feature has been called transfer of training.

Seifert and Sutton, in addition to the feature of transfer of training, saw that the core of learning lies in the constant line of experiences. An experience, according to them, does not lead to or result in learning if it is not repeated over and over; an experience cannot be considered as a source of learning if it does not last long. Therefore " A key feature is permanence: changes do not countas learning if they are temporary. You do not "learn" a phone number if you forget it the minute after you dial thenumber; you do not "learn" to eat vegetables if you only do it when forced. The change has to last."(2009, p. 19).

However, as far as language learning is concerned, Behaviourists highlight two major principles. They believe that speech is primary to writing; i.e. writing is not a necessary stage, and that the meaning of what individuals communicate derives from the appropriate stimuli which lead to formal and correct responses. In other words, in learning language, individuals have to acquire a formal and thematic repertoire of responses. **Bahaviourism (the inductive/stimulus-response theory) of language learning is based on the assumption that verbal behaviour is not different from other behaviour and is acquired in the same way by process of conditioning, imitation, practice, generalisation and reinforcement, and that the infant starts learning with nothing more than the powers he possesses to learn anything.**
II.2. Mentalism

Learning requires the learner to make both physical efforts and mental activity. Learningcannot be done by others for learners. Although instructors prepare exercises and often try to put learners into situations in which learning may take place, passive learners do not or fail to learn effectively. According to Pritchard (2009), wecannot assumethat if we "exert thought and effort, directed towards teaching, then learning will be theinevitable result. Learning requires effort on the part of the learner, and without some effortand some mental activity, it is very

unlikely that learning will take place" (p.29). Ivan Illich (1972: 56) avowed that "…learning is the human activity which least needs manipulation by others. Most learning is not the result of instruction. It is rather the result of unhampered participation in a meaningful setting" (Cited in. Harmer, n.d, p.70). Therefore, Mentalism as a paradigmatic approach to learning rests on the belief that leaning is not always deliberate, and that it entails, in addition to physical actions, undertaking mental activities.

Mentalists advocate the idea that there are similarities and differences among languages,and these are common or universal. The universality of, especially, similarities among languages gave birth to the theory of language universals or universal grammar (UG). The core of this latter is that every adult no matter what language he speaks is grammatically competent; i.e. he knows a set of principles which can be applied to all languages. Universal Grammar has been substituted by the terms Language Acquisition Device (LAD), a device in the human brain/mind that is responsible for language acquisition/learning. **Mentalism (the deductive theory) assumes that language is peculiar to human beings; that they are born with a specific programme for acquiring it; that it is learned by some sort of data-processing device specific to language learning, proceeding by heuristic process of hypothesis and testing; that language is a matter of rule-governed behaviour, not a matter of habit; and that what we learn is not responses but rules for making these responses.**

III. The interference of L1 in L2 learning

One might think that research into this area may not yield valuable pedagogical implications. However, the decisions about what aspects of Second Language (SL) to enhance in the classroom are difficult ones, and are made, at least in part, on the basis of studies (analyses) carried out by applied linguists to find out the causes and the nature of deviations from L2 norms (Error Analysis); to locate areas of language interference or find similarities (Contrastive Analysis); and to describe how some linguistic devices convey unity and coherence in texts (Discourse Analysis).

The interference of L1 in L2 learning in both monolingual and bilingual contexts has always been a theme of paramount importance in psychology, linguistics, and education arenas. However, after decades of investigation, there has been no consensus on whether L1 has positive or negative influence on L2 learning. Therefore, different studies have led to different findings and opinions about this phenomenon. Some studies hold that the influence of L1 on L2 is due to the differences between the two languages. Other studies maintain that L1 use is necessary because it facilitates L2 learning.

In showing that there is an L1 influence on L2 learning, and that this latter is negative, Sabourin and Stowe stated that L1 acquisition is unlike L2 acquisition in terms of fluency because of sensitive period effects. Namely, "L1 interfereswith L2 learning and leads to a less optimal result"(Cited in Spolsky and Hult, 2008, p. 33). Moreover, in support of this view, Krashen (1982, cited in Gass and Selinker, 2008; Ipek, 2009) argued that learners develop knowledge of a second language in two different ways. Like children in a subconscious process, they acquire (1) it. Here, language acquisition takes place informally and implicitly; language acquirers are not aware of the language rules, but they feel they are using something for communication. Learners may also develop competence in a second language by learning (2) it. This is done in a conscious, formal and explicit process; learners are aware of the rules and are able to talk about them. Krashen believes that first language acquisition and second language acquisition are two different processes; i.e. learning cannot be considered to be acquisition in the classroom except for the instances when meaningful interaction, by means of dialogues, role

playing, and discussion, is highlighted among learners. This gives rise to the idea that L1 acquisition may have a negative influence on L2 learning; that is, learners may make errors at various levels during their second language learning, and these errors (phonological, morphological, syntactic and pragmatic) make it imperative for second language teachers (SLT) toimplement in the classroom focusedinput (courses) and reliable assessment methods so as to advance their learners' competence. SLT should also pay attention to what might be transferred from L1 to L2 by learners in their classroom interaction. According to Cummins (1983), "L1 and L2 are separated proficiencies, but in essence, they overlap and share certainabstract universal principles and constraints common to all natural languages. L2 learners express theirlanguage proficiency in two different modes, i.e. the native language and the second language, but skills,knowledge and concepts developed in L1 can be easily transferable to L2" (cited in Hui, 2010, p. 98). If these transferred skills, knowledge and concepts are not appropriately used by second language learners (SLL), then errors are made; and consequently, teachers are required to provide an immediate and efficient feedback. Appropriateness of "how to correct" is also required because, in one class, individual and group errors are made; errors can be minor as they can be big; some learners make few errors; whereas, other learners make a lot.

Competence in a second language does not always mean that learners must not use their mother tongue (L1). Many studies conducted on this issue have revealed that the use of L1 is vital in the learning of skills such as listening, speaking, and so on. Nazari (2008) stated that "Students' native language plays an important role in teaching language skills and sub-skills and in classroom activities as well. In fact, L1 has a wide range of deliberate functions" (142).Nazari continued to say that thought a second learner's competence is sought in his mastery of the four language skills (listening, speaking, reading and writing), L1 is a decisive factor leading to proficiency and effective performance. He sees that both learners and teachers should use their mother tongue in SL situations so as to enrich the process of L2 learning. Apart from this, the use of L1 in SL situations such as the classroom is looked at as source of knowledge which increases the learners' performance. SLLs use their L1 as input data and then construct new data in the target language (L2), but the "when" and "how" learners use L1 as a basic data depends on several factors, most of which have to do with the features of both languages (Yu, 2011, p. 444).Yu added "In our English teaching, we may find that most of students think in Chinese first and then translate when they learn English, so L1 transfer is unavoidable"(ibid). Therefore, studying the role of L1 is very crucial in finding, solving, and sometimes anticipating problems in L2 learning.

IV. The Status of Languages in Algeria

The situation of languages in Algeria is characterised by a set of features ranging from the linguistic reality of the society to the multilingual nature of the context where a number of languages come to interplay. One of these features is that foreign languages have always been affected by the ferocious competition between, on one hand, Arabic, the national, official language of the country, and French, the inherited language from the colonial era, which is common in the daily communication and practice of a great majority of the Algerians. On this situation, Grandguillaume, (2004:04) says that:

> With regard (to language policy) in Algeria, there are two trends: a trend toward 'Arabization' and a trend toward bilingualism. The trend towards 'Arabization' (and hence monolingualism) aims to place Arabic stamp on Algeria, and to instill a non-western identity. The trend towards bilingualism

does not reject Arabic but remains attached to the idea of maintaining the French language, since not only is the country administered in French at the present, but French also gives Algeria access to modernization.

Arising out of this sensitive reality, it was very intricate for foreign languages to establish their status, and hence failed to gain more consideration within the Algerian society. The result of this situation was that these foreign languages were completely marginalised compared with French.

The other feature is that since the country's independence in 1962, the subject of the foreign languages has been a huge political, social, and ideological issue in Algeria. This situation was maintained by the political decision makers towards the mother languages that are currently spoken in the Algerian society. That is, the Algerian authorities have ever at times rejected the consideration and in the meantime the recognition of those languages, on the ground that this undermines national unity. Benrabah (2007:229) sustains this reality, and notes that:

> When Algeria gained its independence in July 1962, it was linguistically a pluralistic country. This was the result of its heritage including influences from Berbers, Phoenician, and Roman, Vandal, Byzantine, Moor, Arabic, Spanish, Ottoman and French. Its inhabitants spoke Algerian Arabic and Berbére or Tamazight in several local varieties and French. The government`s policy overlooked the country`s linguistic diversity, denied any status to the language spoken in Algeria.

Thus, the above idea again justifies that the Algerian authorities viewed the matter of the linguistic pluralism with suspicious, if not outright hostility. They remained resolutely opposed to any sort of competing languages. This negative attitude could easily explain the rejection of the policy of the adoption of an efficient linguistic strategy that aims at promoting the practice and use of foreign languages, including English.

A third feature that significantly affected the situation of the foreign languages in general is that the country has been engaged in a process of establishing the national language, Arabic, as the medium of instruction. Reference here is directed to the process of the 'Arabisation'. For the authorities, this process was seen as a fundamental choice that constituted a principle objective to regain identity, ensure personality growth of the young generations and lay the ground for the learning of modern technology in order to eventually cope with economic exigencies of the time, and efficiently participate in the development of the country.

However, though the process of 'Arabisation' intended to accelerate the democratization of schooling and provide the facilities and capital that enable the promotion of the national education system, it failed to yield a high status to foreign language, in that this adopted policy totally devaluated the learning of foreign languages to secondary levels. Hence, French was postponed until grade four as the first mandatory foreign language, and English as the second mandatory foreign language in grade eight. Other foreign languages like Spanish, Italian, Russian, and German were simply dropped to be learnt as optional languages in middle schools.

Contrary to the reality of the terrain and to what has been illustrated so far and switching to a more positive attitude towards foreign languages, other features have come to support the assumption that lays more consideration of those languages in the Algerian society, and therefore, a strong drive to learn them. One of these features is that, for instance, English language can stand as an efficient means of international communication. In this perspective, Hayane, (1989: 45) posits that:

Above all, it had been common that English language has actually gained a very especial and prominent place and status among the Algerians. It is certainly a very prestigious language among students in schools, which is enjoyed because it makes them listen to music and talk to foreigners. It is the language that one can use wherever s/he goes.

In addition to this, the use of English language in various domains like technology and computing can be of usefulness. Cook (2003:25) points out that:

> In the recent years the growth of English has been further accelerated by a startling expansion in the quantity and speed of international communication, the rise of international operation, linked to expanding U.S power and influence, ensures and ever increasing use of English in business, films, songs, television programmes, and advertisement in English are heard and seen in many countries when it is not the first nor ever a second language.

An additional feature to what has been stated before is manifested by the pressures of globalization. Indeed, the philosophical underpinning of this phenomenon has led to a growing international literature on the subject of the foreign languages in both academic and business fields.   This is sustained by the belief these languages would act as a bridge in international affairs and cooperation, and therefore, being beneficial to the country. Hsieh (2010: 20) consolidates this argument and states that:

> A main characteristic of contemporary global society is interrelation between numerous communities. This is reflected especially in the inter-reliance of global economics from which the concept of globalization has developed. In a world where distances of all sorts are much reduced and sometimes eliminated by transportation and communication technology, globalization is becoming relevant to any aspect of human behaviour. In our discussion of the impact of globalization on (foreign) languages education policy, a typical and widely accepted perspective is recognized.

Therefore, at the turn of this age of globalization, the common view of a large portion of Algerians has completely evolved to pay a great importance to the status of foreign languages. In its essence, this positive attitude has turned to be more pragmatically than ideologically oriented. In its practical manifestation, a growing voice of parents insist on the strong need to incorporate foreign languages at early stages of learning in response to eliminate the gap in these languages' competence and respond to economic globalisation demands. Proponents of this claim believe that the earlier children begin to learn foreign languages, the higher level of proficiency they will achieve.

V. Review of L1 Influence on L2 Learning in the Algerian Context

Sample study (1)

In AboubekrBelkaid University–Tlemcen (2011), Mrs. Farah Hassaine carried out a study to explain how students in Tlemcen University context use French and their mother tongue (Algerian Arabic). To gather data, she distributed questionnaires and interviewed a sample of 100 students (different specialties) to get their attitudes and feelings towards the French language. In addition, she compared between the sample of students under investigation and another group of people (30 civil servants) who studied French during and right after French colonialism so as to check the mastery level of French between the two groups (generations).

The study brought to light that **though French and Arabic are used side by side in the daily speech of Algerians (context), French is tightly related to political, educational and social factors**. It also showed that **the first group "first generation" are better at speaking and writing than the second group " second generation"**.

Sample study (2)

In Chlef University (2014), Mr. AissaHanafi wanted to shed light on the influence of L2 on L3 learning in the Algerian context. The study focused largely on the number, types and role of errors made by the Algerian students in their English as Foreign Language (EFL) learning due to the interference of French as a second language. In gathering data for this study, a sample of 25 students was given a short passage to translate from French into English as a first task, and they were asked to translate the same passage from Arabic into English as a second task. In analysing the data, a contrastive approach was used to discover whether French has a positive or negative role. After having categorised the sources of errors, their frequencies and their degree of difficulty, **the results indicated that the students made less errors in the first task (translation from French into English) than the second one (translation from Arabic into English). Hence, the French language has a positive role in EFL learning for Algerian students.**

Sample study (3)

In an attempt to identify and analyse some of the factors which hinder 3rd year students' achievement in writing and suggest ways to remedy the situation, Miss. NaciraGhodbane, in Batna University (2010), conducted a study in which she examined 100 copies of different written productions to localise the frequent errors, and administered questionnaires to 100 students and to the teachers of Linguistics, British and American civilisation, British, American, and Third World Literature to get attitudes towards the present problem. Besides, she administered a third questionnaire to all the teachers of written expression to get insights into the difficulties faced by students. The findings revealed that some teachers needed more training; students needed to be motivated to write; the syllabus needed to be readjusted and enriched; and above all **the effects of L1 together with the lack of reading and practice had to be taken into consideration. That is, students usually use their L1 in thinking and writing (language transfer) which occurs when they write sentences, paragraphs and essays**.

Sample study (4)

MouloudAitAissa (2010), in Ferhat Abbas/Sétif University2, conducted a study on the phonological aspects of Tamazight as a native language (L1) and English as a target language (L2). The study aimed primarily at underlining the difficulties which faced Tamazight students in learning English through a comparison of the phonological systems of the two languages. The differences and similarities would help the researcher to enable students to pronounce easily and properly the sounds of English which pose problems to them. In gathering data for this study, two questionnaires were administered to the teachers of English language and students at Barbacha Secondary School. **The major result of the study indicated that Tamazight students have difficulties in pronouncing some sounds which do not exist in their mother tongue such as the consonant sound /ŋ/, and in pronouncing diphthongs and triphthongs. Other important results of this study consisted in the fact that most of the students'**

difficulties derive from the nature of English as a vocalic language and Tamazight as a consonantal one.

Conclusion

We may conclude the above literature with Sultan Baloch's (2013, p.228) words. In her literature review of a study conducted to observe L1 (Arabic) interference in the learning of L2 (English) in terms of spellings, and in an attempt to clarify what language interference/transfer means, she stated that:

> Language interference occurs when a speaker or a writer applies knowledge of his/her native language to a second language. …Language interference can be positive or negative. It is positive when relevant units or structures of both languages are same and result in correct production of the target language. On the other hand, it is negative when different units or structures of both languages interfere in the learning of the second language. One overlaps with the other and the linguistic interference occurs in polyglot individuals.

In the Algerian context, two situations or realities have been identified. Before Arabisation, French (L2) was dominant and received little influence from L1 (Algerian Arabic and Tamazight). Therefore, transfer was positive. However, after Arabisation, French (L2), to some extent, lost its dominance and transfer turned to be negative. It is then worth mentioning that for those who have a good mastery of French, English language learning has always been easier. However, it is not the case for those who do not master French. That is, The Algerian mother languages and English are two different systems. The analysis of the literature review presented earlier confirms the linguistic reality in Algeria.

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