Arab EFL Learners' Perspectives on L1 Influence: Factors and Constraints

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ABSTRACT

This paper aims at examining the factors that cause L1 influence from the perspectives of adult native-Arabic speaking learners of English. It also reports on the possible constraints on L1 influence and further delves into the role of Psychotypology. Despite the recognition of the importance of L2 learners' perspectives regarding the influence of their L1 and the factors contribute to such influence; this topic is an understudied area in the context of native-Arabic speaking learners of English. A semi-structured interview and a rewrite test were conducted with 40 undergraduate students at a public university, Jordan, where they were classified into two groups of 20 students each: beginner group and advanced group. The findings indicate that there are various causes of L1 influence including the peculiarity and complexity of some L2 structures/features as well as L1 –L2 structural differences. Learners' psychotypological assessment of what is a similar, different, marked and unmarked structure across L1 and L2 is one of the restrictions on L1 influence. Moreover, Learners' psychotypological assessment also varies depending on the learners' L2 proficiency levels. The findings of this study can provide important insights into the research that considers various factors of the overall process of second language acquisition.

Key words: L1 influence, Language Distance, Markedness, Psychotypology

INTRODUCTION

Early second language research was conducted within the perspective of structural linguistics and behaviorist psychology theories (Pica, 2005) while more recent research on second language acquisition has been shaped by theories on universal principles of language, from a linguistic point of view, scrutinize the constraints that characterize L2 learners' interlanguage, with a principled interest in the role of L2 learners' native language. These language universals assume similarities in surface features shared by world languages. Such universal features vary depending on, for example, their level of simplicity and their frequency across languages. The struggle to acquire certain L2 linguistic features has continued to challenge researchers. Non-target productions might be due to lack of knowledge of the L2 system (e.g., learners are unable to recognize L1-L2 differences) or to difficulties with the implementation of L2 procedures (e.g., learners apply their L1 procedures to the L2) (Pozzan, 2011) and can be affected by any number of internal and external factors such as the frequency and markedness of an L2 feature as well as the communicative and cognitive demands of the learning situation.

Among the most influential factors that appear to heighten the learners' acquisition of L2 is L1 influence. L1 influence could be a result of an interaction of pre-existent acquired linguistic and/or conceptual knowledge with the new learning experience to facilitate the learning process or could result from the effect of the similarities and differences between L1 and L2 across different domains. L2 learners are often entrapped in the options allowed by their L1 and fail to make the necessary adjustments in case of variation between L2 and L1. Additionally, L1 influence could be positive in that the use of L1 structure or form is correct or appropriate in an L2 utterance and accordingly aid the process of learning and reduce the amount of difficulty that L2 learners may have. While it could be negative when the use of an L1 structure or form in an L2 utterance is incorrect or inappropriate and considered an error. Although L1 influence has been a controversial topic for almost a century, its significance has been re-evaluated several times in recent years. Recently, some researchers have placed the study of L1 influence within a cognitive approach which gives a central role to the learner as someone who makes a decision as to what should or should not be transferred to L2 learning (Gass, 2000). Therefore, L1 influence has been seen as a learner-driven process similar to any other processes involved in L2 acquisition. In this view, in addition to L1-L2 differences and similarities, factors such as learner's perspectives and preferences are important factors affecting the role of L1 influence in the process of L2 acquisition. According to White (2009), the focus has shifted from the question: "is there access to UG (Universal Grammar)? can parameters be reset? to which linguistic properties are subject to transfer and why transfer is persistent in some cases but not others?"

Literature Review

It has been found that L2 leaners make use of various transfer strategies. Although these transfer strategies, which are used as backups for the lack or insufficient L2 knowledge, are unlimited, they are subject to a number of constraints including language distance and degree of markedness. Language distance represents the extent to which languages differ from each other (Chiswick & Miller, 2005). It refers to the overall similarities and differences between L1 and L2. Even though Corder (1967) argued that L1 and L2 acquisition processes are not different, Corder later developed the hypothesis of language distance where native and other previously learned languages have a facilitating effect. Corder (1981: 101) suggested that, "where the mother tongue is formally similar to the target language, the learner will pass more rapidly along the developmental continuum (or some parts of it) than where it differs". Likewise, Oldin (1997) stated that language distance is a crucial factor for determining the time learners need to master a language. Ellis (1994: 338) pointed out that "language distance can affect L2 learning both positively and negatively".

Typological closeness increases the probability that one language will influence the acquisition of another. There is a general belief that languages that are related and in which transfer is possible, are easier to learn than others (Odlin, 1989). Kellerman (1977) observed that when an L2 learner has a point of reference, especially in closely related languages, transfer is more likely to play a role. In the 1980's, Ringbom conducted a number of studies on native speakers of Finnish and Swedish learning English as a second language under the same conditions in Finland. The results showed that a native language related to a target language can act as a facilitator, especially during the early stages of second language acquisition. Ellis (1994) argued that in addition to language distance, the transferability of different features depends on their degree of markedness. Markedness, according to Ellis, refers to the idea that some linguistic structures are exceptional or less common or less basic than others. An unmarked form in any language is typologically more frequent, more basic or general, uses less structure and can be acquired with fewer difficulties compared to its corresponding marked form in that language or any other language (McCarthy, 2007). L2 learners may transfer unmarked features of their L1 when the target features they are acquiring are marked. L2 features that are distinct or unavailable in L1 will be learnt with less difficulty if they are unmarked.

On the other hand, Crystal (1987: 371) proclaimed that "The structural closeness of languages to each other has often been thought to be an important factor in FLL (foreign language learning). If the L2 [the foreign language] is structurally similar to the L1 [the original language], it is claimed, learning should be easier than in cases where the L2 is very different. However, it is not possible to correlate linguistic differences and learning difficulty in any straightforward way, and even the basic task of quantifying linguistic difference proves to be highly complex, because of the many variables involved". Therefore, there has been a need to include other non-linguistic constrains to gain a full understanding of the process of L1 influence on L2 acquisition. Typological relatedness and the degree of markedness are not the only predictors for transfer except when they are connected to other factors such as Learners' perspective of the markedness of L1or/and L2 structures and their perceptions of the L1-L2 shared similarities and differences (Psychotypology).

Psychotypology is the assumed knowledge that an L2 learner has regarding the typological relatedness of their native and target language. In other words, it is the learners' interpretations regarding the distance between the target language and their native language, which will influence the probability of transferring L1 structures into L2 (Maier, 2010). It is usually related to the learners' understanding of structural similarities and differences between the two languages. The real or assumed similarities activate learners to make an association between their L1 and L2 (Jarvis and Pavlenko, 2008). Linguistically, Psychotypology refers to the real degree of difference between L1 and L2 while pscyolinguistically, it is the learners' perception of this difference (Ellis, 1994).

Psychotypology was introduced for the first time by Kellerman (1978) as a result of his study of L1 Dutch learners of L2 German and L2 English. The results demonstrated that learners transfer the L1 structures that they thought were transferable. Kellerman claimed that L2 learner's concept of transferability depends on the difference they perceive between the second language they are learning and their native tongue and their knowledge of L2 structures. He observed that when L2 learners believe there was a great typological difference between L1 and L2, they used alternative strategies such as generalization. The learners' unconscious judgment that a structure in L1 and L2 is similar may, or may not, correspond the actual linguistic relatedness. Furthermore, Kellerman (1983) applied the concept of markedness to second language research to predict the influence of L1 and the role of Psychotypology in such influence. The less regular a feature is, the less likely it is to be transferred. Kellerman argued that if a feature is "perceived as infrequent, irregular, semantically or structurally opaque, or in any other way exceptional, what we could in other ways call psycholinguistically marked then its transferability will be inversely proportional to its degree of markedness" (Kellerman, 1983:117). Learners tended to transfer more from their L1 in the contexts of perceived marked L2 structures.

A number of studies (e.g., Ringbom, 2001; Jarvis, 2000; Cenoz, 2001) found out that the amount of language transfer can be expected to be great in linguistic areas that L2 learners assumed to be most similar between L1 and L2. Yuan and Zhao (2005) researched the interpretation of resumptive pronouns in L2 Chinese by English and Palestinian L1 speakers. Using the psychotypological distance proposed by Kellerman (1978,1983), they found that the English speakers outperformed their Palestinian counterparts even though the Palestinian learners were more advanced than the English learners and resumptive pronouns are found in Arabic but not in English. Yuan and Yang Zhao pointed out that the English learners perceived that English and Chinese were

very distant concerning the use of resumptive pronouns and that prevented them from using their L1 structures.

The development of metacognitive skills and metacognitive awareness fosters the development of Psychotypology. Cenoz (2001) proposed that Psychotypology and the perception of transferability can be more influential on the selection process than real language distance. In her study, older participants with higher metacognitive awareness who knew that English and Basque were more distant than English and Spanish transferred fewer structures from Basque into English. They viewed Spanish as their base language when learning English, unlike younger learners who tended to transfer from both Spanish and Basque because they had not developed higher metacognitive awareness. Similarly, a number of studies have acknowledged the importance of L2 proficiency as a crucial factor in L2 acquisition and as one of the constraints on L1 influence (e.g., White & Genesee, 1996; Montrul & Slabakova, 2003; Steinhauer et al., 2009). Cases of native-like attainment are detected among L2 late learners with advanced proficiency levels. However, Prentza (2014) doubted that even very proficient L2 learners, who perform better than less proficient L2 learners, still perform significantly less accurately than native speakers because the cross-linguistic differences between L1 and L2, especially incompatible syntactic features can result in lingering learnability problems that are practically impossible to redress.

A straightforward relation between L1 influence and Psychotypology is not guaranteed due to the fact that Psychotypology is not an actual unified measurement as it is a subjective belief held by individuals and due to being unstable as it can be subject to change during the process of language acquisition. L2 learners' level of proficiency and metalinguistic awareness may change their perception and reduce or increase the psychotypological distance. Accordingly, it is expected to observe different degrees of L1 influence among L2 learners belong to the same language background (Xia, 2017).

Research Rationale

Administrating tests such as judgment, filling in gaps, translations as well as assessments of similarities, most of the studies on the influence of Psychotypology in L1 influence have been conducted within the context of genetic-related languages such as the European languages (e.g., English, Spanish and German). Less investigation has been done in the context of L2 learners of English who are native speakers of languages such as Arabic. To the best of our knowledge, specific studies on the role of L1 in L2 acquisition and the effect of Psychotypology have rarely been conducted on native speakers of Arabic learning English as a second language particularly in the area of syntax.

Arabic and English have distinct structures that feature a number of syntactic aspects such as, negation, interrogatives, tense and word order. Therefore, the structure of Arabic language can act as a transfer source in L2 acquisition. Moreover, native speakers of Arabic may perceive the distance between their L1 and other languages independently of the relative typological similarity of the languages involved. In addition, the structures that were selected in this study (i.e., auxiliary verbs, negative sentences, yes-no questions and wh-questions) exhibit profound structural differences between Arabic and English, however, the importance of such structures in everyday speech is an indicator of their significance for second language learners of English.

Testing learners' perspective on the factors lead them to use their L1 in acquiring L2, what is transferable or non -transferable and how their perceptions of L1-L2 similarities and differences play a role in the acquisition process are the aims of this study. The degree of L1 influence may vary due to different psychotypological distances between L1 and L2. Native speakers of Arabic may exhibit varied degrees of L1 influence depending on their perception of the structural similarities and differences between Arabic and English. Such varied degrees of L1 influence may also depend on what they perceive as marked structure versus unmarked one in their L1 and L2. Learners' level of proficiency may to some extent influence the role of Psychotypology plays in L1 influence.

METHODOLOGY

Two groups of undergraduate students, in a variety of academic disciplines, at a public university in Jordan participated in the study (N = 40). They divided into two groups based on their performance in the University placement test. Both, the beginner group (N = 20) and the advanced (N = 20) are native speakers of Arabic aged between 18 to 20 years old. The instruments used in this study are a semi-structured interview and a rewrite test. The test includes 45 sentences that are equally distributed among the three structures and the three auxiliary verbs. The learners were presented with prompts with and without auxiliary verbs and were required to produce negative sentences and questions using the given prompts. The semi-structured interview was conducted with the students to discuss some of their answers on the test. It was the main instrument in this study while the data of the test was used to elucidate and elaborate the data gained from the interview.

The semi-structured interview method was chosen due to being an excellent method for accessing the participants' internal thoughts and opinions and for eliciting their impressions regarding Arabic and its influence on their acquisition. The interview consisted of eight open-ended questions focused on eliciting their opinions regarding factors that may cause Arabic interference when making negative sentences and questions in English and ascertained the roles played by the learner's L1 according to its ability to either facilitate or hinder the acquisition of the structures in question, in addition to its influence on the learners' perception of the difficulties caused by these structures.

The participants took the test first then they are invited to participate in the interview. The interviews were conducted outside lecture hours in one of the lecturer's office to avoid disturbing the participants' study routines. The topic and format were explained to the interviewees before they were asked if they required further clarification prior to the interview. This was to help the participants fully understand the interview questions, so that they could reflect

on the questions and give more substantive responses. The questions were written in English, but Arabic was used by the interviewer to ask questions and by the students when they provided their answers to ensure the production of accurate answers and well expressed responses. The process began with one question being asked at a time. Follow up and probing questions were asked to obtain better answers when necessary. Furthermore, the participants were allowed to continue as long as they had something to say and were interrupted only if there was a need for further clarification or more information, or to keep the pace during a pause. The forty participants were interviewed individually. A PhD holder in Linguistics verified and compared the original interviews in Arabic and the back-translated interviews for accuracy. The data collected from the semi-structured interview were analysed qualitatively while the responses to the test were scored in terms of correct and incorrect answers and analysed quantitatively.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The data from the semi-structured interviews show that there are three main factors that cause L1 influence. These factors include the inherent complexity of L2 structures, the differences as well as the shared similarities between L1 and L2. The lack of or insufficient knowledge of L2 structures goes with along each of the three main causes.

Results of the Beginner Group

The majority of respondents in the beginner group claimed that they made use of English structures and rules when forming questions and negative sentences, but Arabic remained a strategy they used to facilitate their understanding and production. The majority confirmed that the most common reason for using Arabic was the inherent complexity of some English structures followed by the differences between Arabic and English structures. Nine out of twenty respondents asserted that the difficulty of English structures was the main and most effective trigger of using Arabic in forming the given structures. Four respondents revealed that both the difficulty of English structures and the differences between English and Arabic structures of negation, interrogatives and auxiliary verbs were the major factors that activate using Arabic. Moreover, two respondents considered Arabic-English differences as the main factor that caused reliance on Arabic whilst similarities between Arabic and English structures represented the chief prompter of resorting to Arabic as mentioned by another two learners. On the other hand, three learners found thinking in Arabic as the main reason using Arabic structures. They were unable to switch their L1 off while they were processing the English sentences and questions. Additionally, the majority confirmed the influence of Arabic in situations where their knowledge of English grammatical structure was inadequate.

Translation from English into Arabic and back into English was the strategy that the majority of learners in the beginner group employed in forming L2 structures. Accordingly, the influence of Arabic structures exerted over the beginner group's production and performance. The respondents revealed that

they often relied on translation when constructing English sentences. They tended to compare their L1 and L2, contemplating similarities. They employed what is called 'word-by-word' approach as illustrated in the following excerpt.

(Beginner 1): My Knowledge of the English grammar of how forming negative sentences and questions. If I felt that something was wrong, for example, 'who is going to school' 'man dahaba ila madrasah' I resorted to the Arabic order. Who "man" going " dhahaba" to " ila" school " madrasah".

The learners in the beginner group translated the sentences word by word or putting the sentences and questions into Arabic grammatical forms before producing them. They did so to confirm their understanding, to facilitate their production or to check their answers. For example, most of the learners in the beginner group revealed that they relied on the subject, whether it was singular or plural, to choose the auxiliary verbs regardless of the form of the verb (past or present). It is obvious that using Arabic as a means of translation might affect learners' analysis of L2 structures and it unconsciously directed their understanding of L2 structures and features. According to Barkhuizen and Ellis (2005), translation from L1 into L2 leads to extensive transfer. Learners' underlying representation of L2 structures and features exhibited inconsistencies. They fluctuated between correct or incorrect L2 representation depending on the surface word order and their perception of the similarities and differences between L1 and L2 structures.

To extract the role of Psychotypology in L1 influence and what factors impact its role, the learners were asked to judge the given structures and features as easy and difficult and the reasons behind such judgment. First, the learners made a distinction between the auxiliary verbs that having a universal position and being part of the syntactic structure such as auxiliary verb *be* as well as Modals and those that are specific language properties added at the phonetic level such as the auxiliary verb *do*. The majority of learners found a sentence or a question with an auxiliary verb as part of its structure easier to produce than a sentence or a question that did not include any auxiliary verb and required them to add the correct form of auxiliary verb *do*. The problems they experienced when there was no auxiliary verb in the sentence included the inability to select what auxiliary verb to use and when and where to use it. In addition, they had to determine the tense and the number of the subject and they had difficulty conceptualizing the meaning of the auxiliary verb and its function based on the surface structure. Some respondents divulged that auxiliary verbs, like Modals, were easy because Arabic has similar words with similar meanings while those with lower communicative value and which have no equivalents in their L1, such as the auxiliary verb *do,* were difficult as illustrated in the following excerpt.

(Beginner 5): Since they have no equivalent words in Arabic, I find myself struggling with them. Can, will, should are easier because they convey a meaning and Arabic has identical words.

In general, the majority of respondents revealed that the greatest difficulty that they encountered with auxiliary verbs

in general and especially those with no inherent meaning was that Arabic has no auxiliary verbs with the same functions. Consequently, the learners tend to use their L1 in case the structure they deal with is lacking in their L1, marked in L2 and semantically vague. Second, the learners differentiated between auxiliary verbs that are used in negative sentences and yes-no questions from those that are used in wh-questions. They found the use of auxiliary verbs in forming negative sentences and yes-no questions easier and practical while their use in forming wh-questions was not. They presumed that auxiliary verbs in negative sentences and yes-no questions had similar distributional properties to the Arabic negative and question particles. All auxiliary verbs in these structures are independent negative or question elements. The apparent similarity between Arabic negative and question particles in negative sentences and yes-no questions and that of English auxiliary verbs in such structures as they superficially appear to occupy the same positions may encourage learners to establish a one-to-one oversimplified cross-linguistic relationship to reduce the workload. The learners seem to bear the use of auxiliary verbs in such structures a semantic function. For example, during the interview, some learners used the word 'particle' instead of an auxiliary verb. Thirteen respondents stated that linking auxiliary verbs with similar Arabic words, such as negative and question particles, made their learning task easier.

The learners' perception of the similarities between the Arabic structure of negative sentences and yes-no questions made auxiliary verbs consistently parts of these L2 structures and therefore they tended to use them frequently. In contrast, their perceptions of the difference between the Arabic structure of wh-questions and that of English prevented them from making these auxiliary verbs consistently part of English wh-questions as stated below.

> *(Beginner 14): It is complicated to use them correctly in the proper context. Arabic translation doesn't help me properly especially in wh-questions. I can link between auxiliary verbs and negative and question particles in Arabic and sometimes this helps me in negation and yes-no questions.*

According to the learners in the beginner group, auxiliary verbs in wh-questions lack any semantic contribution and have no equivalents even superficially in the corresponding Arabic structure; therefore, they are difficult and not practical. The use of auxiliary verbs in wh-questions is more marked than their use in negative sentences and yes-no questions. The quantitative data extracted from the test confirmed the data from the semi-structured interview. The results of the test (Table 1) exhibit that the majority of the errors made were in the context of questions and sentences that required the use of auxiliary verb *do,* but not with those which included auxiliary verbs such as *be and have.* Moreover, the beginner group correctly produced the auxiliary verbs in negative sentences and yes-no questions more often than they produced them in wh-questions.

Additionally, seven out of the twenty respondents stated that they found the three structures (negative sentences, yes-no questions and wh-questions) more difficult and different from their corresponding Arabic structures and accordingly, they made use of Arabic when generating these structures. Thirteen of the twenty respondents stated that the English structure of wh-questions is more marked than that of Arabic and therefore they used the Arabic structure in place of the English one. The learners assumed similarities between the Arabic structure of negative sentences and yes-no questions and that of English. Hence, the Arabic structure of negative sentences and yes-no questions acted as a facilitator in acquiring the corresponding English structures but not in wh-questions which was associated with more complexity as its corresponding structure in Arabic requires less analysis and few syntactic operations. The learners' perception of the real and assumed distance between Arabic and English structures contributed to the difficulties they experienced with them and what they found transferable and non-transferable structures. Theoretically, it is possible for a learner to reduce the psychotypological distance between his/her L1 and L2, which may not be related, and perceive them to share some similarities in some aspects. This was exactly what the learners in this study did regarding the Arabic and English structures of negation and yes-no questions. As can be seen from Table 1 above, the findings of the test show that the performance of the learners in the beginner group was less accurate for wh-questions than it was for both negative sentences and yes-no questions.

Results of the Advanced Group

The respondents in the advanced group, in contrast to the beginner group, consistently depended on English as the basis

Table 1. Results of Beginner Group: The total correct responses

Context	Auxiliary verb	Correct responses for each auxiliary verb (100 total responses)	Correct responses for each context (300 total responses)
Negative sentences	Do	36	207
	Be	91	
	Have	80	
Yes-no questions	Do	20	107
	Be	41	
	Have	46	
Wh-questions	Do	5	71
	Be	33	
	Have	33	

for their production as illustrated in the following excerpt.

> *(Advanced 14): First, I followed the English grammar that I know. I watch a lot of movies in English and listen to songs in English so I get used to English. I am very good at English so when I hear a sentence or a question I can decide if it is correct or not. It is a cumulative process.*

The majority of the twenty respondents mentioned that they might use Arabic when translating some words, when they doubted their answers, or to confirm their understanding. However, they completely denied using Arabic grammar because it is very different from that of English. In addition, most learners in the advanced group insisted that practice made learning English easier; however, they prefer sentences that include any auxiliary verb like *be* or *have* as stated below.

> *(Advanced 1): A sentence without an auxiliary verb is more difficult than a sentence with an auxiliary verb because it needs more time and analysis.*

Some learners in the advanced group shared the beginner group's tendency about the markedness of English wh-questions and the markedness of using auxiliary verbs in such structure as illustrated below.

> *(Advanced 13): In case of wh-questions, the Arabic structure is more practical. Sometimes, when I am in rush, I prefer the Arabic structure. I just put the wh-word at the beginning of the question. The rules of using auxiliary verbs in English are easy, but practically they have no equal words in Arabic. Sometimes I omit them especially in wh-questions and forget to drop the 's' or change the verb 2 to verb 1.*

Advanced learners were very aware of the structural differences between Arabic and English structures. Their awareness restricted L1 transfer except when it could be purposely used to avoid extra syntactic requirements without obstructing the exchange of information (according to the respondents' assumption). Consequently, nine out of the twenty respondents mentioned that they made use of Arabic when constructing wh-questions, even though there are structural differences between Arabic and English. The L1 option for wh-questions may be more economical syntactically from the perspective of the advanced learners. The test results (Table 2) complement the qualitative data. The use of the auxiliaries shows little variation across negative sentences and yes-no questions and they are employed in a native-like manner. The same was not true for wh-questions, where differences between the auxiliary verbs are more obvious than for both negative sentences and yes-no questions. The auxiliary verb *do* triggers the majority of errors made with this structure. In addition, it seems that the learners in the advanced group found wh-questions the most difficult one among the three structures. The majority of learners in the advanced group tended to omit auxiliary verbs or did not invert them with the subject in wh-questions.

Overall, the learners in the beginner group perceived English as a closer language to Arabic in case of the structure of auxiliary verbs in negative sentences and yes-no questions and accordingly the structures of negative sentences and yes-no questions. The learners demonstrated more significant cross-linguistic influence in cases of auxiliary verbs such as the empty *do* and wh-questions than in cases of auxiliary verbs such as *be*, negative sentences and yes-no questions. Such structures and features (e.g., auxiliary *do*) are exclusively available in L2. Therefore, the effects of L1 are crucial in the acquisition and use of such structures and in establishing native-like interpretation, mainly if other factors such as L2 markedness are in play. Psychotypology influences the likelihood of L1 transfer not the binary parameter: transfer or not (Xia, 2017). L1 influence is more significant, negative and persistent in case of what learners perceived as psychotypologically distant, less frequent, complex and semantically and structurally less straightforward structures. The kind of observed L1 influence is positive in psychotypological close, more frequent, simple and semantically and structurally clear structures (Kresic & Gulan, 2012). The findings indicate that there is a significant relationship between the degree of transferability, that the learners exhibited, and what learners perceived psychotypologically different from what is available in their L1 as well as marked in L2.

The effect of Psychotypology lessens after the learners become more proficient, but it does not disappear. The advanced learners still rely on transfer from L1 in the case of L2 exclusively available and marked structures/features, although the majority of these learners perceive English and Arabic as two distant languages. It seems reasonable to consider the perceived markedness of L2 structures/features as well as the perceived L1/L2

Table 2. Results of Advanced Group: The total correct responses

Context	Auxiliary verb	Correct responses for each auxiliary verb (100 total responses)	Correct responses for each context (300 total responses)
Negative sentences	Do	82	277
	Be	99	
	Have	96	
Yes-no questions	Do	86	280
	Be	98	
	Have	96	
Wh-questions	Do	70	240
	Be	88	
	Have	82	

differences as ones of the major causes of the divergent L2 performance even at the advanced level. Furthermore, they might be the major source of learners' susceptibility to L1 influence.

There is one point that should be highlighted. The researcher did not anticipate how the learners' perspective of the differences and similarities between their native language and the L2 would influence their learning process. The researcher and the majority of ESL/EFL teachers tend to neglect learners' perspective of the differences and similarities between their native language and the L2 and the difficulties they face learning English. Teachers tend to deal with errors in isolation and are not aware that these errors may reflect a learning strategy that a learner deliberately employs to approach the L2 structure. Learners have perceptions of the structures of their own language. These perceptions lead learners to categorize structures as transferable or non-transferable. Such perceptions will also determine what is transferred by the learners. An explanation for deviant and non- native-like performance is required apart from the learners' lack of effort. A learner may continue to make the same error not because he does not make an effort but because he has an inaccurate perspective that prevents him from making any progress. According to the findings of this study, conducting interviews with learners or allowing learners to discuss their difficulties and the reasons lead them to make errors may help overcome these difficulties easily and efficiently instead of spending years learning the same grammatical constructs with no real change for the better. Because this study is the first empirical attempt at addressing native-Arabic speaking learners' perspectives on the role of their native language in English acquisition, no previous results in the context of Arab learners of English are there to compare with. This study confirms the significant effect of some constrains on L1 influence particularly Psychotypology (e.g., Kellerman, 1978 & Yuan and Zhao, 2005).

CONCLUSION

The issue of L1 influence has been an important topic in second language acquisition research. While it is largely accepted that L1 influence plays a role in adult L2 acquisition, the issue is subject to controversy in terms of how, when and where the learners' L1 plays a role. This study mainly reports on the factors that cause L1 influence and the role of Psychotypology in such influence. Different L2 structures receive different degrees of L1 influence based on the learners' psychotypological perceptions. These psychotypological perceptions vary depending on what learners believe to be similar, different, marked and unmarked across L1 and L2. They also vary depending on the learners' L2 proficiency levels. Teachers should identify learners' perspective of these differences and similarities. Learners should benefit from the properties in their L1 that are similar to those of L2. In addition, teachers must be aware of the fact that L2 learners, especially in the early stages, may utilize the same mechanisms and procedures of their L1 while acquiring L2. Theoretically, this study provides evidence for the existence of L1 influence in L2 acquisition. It also explains the failure of achieving an accurate use of some L2 grammatical structures and features because of the perceived inherent complexity associated with them.

This study might be the first empirical attempt at addressing the factors and constraints of L1 influence from the perspectives of Arab EFL learners of English. Therefore, further research may be necessary to address the constraints on L1 influence, particularly Psychotypology, from the perspectives of L2 learners from different linguistic backgrounds.

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