

Sources of Syntactic Errors in Yemeni Learners' English Compositions: A Psycholinguistic Analysis

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Abstract

It goes without saying that probing deeply the sources of errors committed by an L2 learner is a psycholinguistic process which is not an easy task. In fact, investigations into learner's errors reveal that English as a Second/Foreign Language (ESL/EFL) teachers expect their students to speak errorless English (Burt, 1975), however, errors keep recurring and recurring and this makes our task as language teachers rather difficult. However, this does not mean we surrender! We have to seek answers to such questions and investigate such errors and their sources setting our ultimate goal to how to make our students comprehend what they learn, and to how to understand their problematic areas so that we could contribute in solving them. Thus, this study aims at providing empirical data for the sources of syntactic errors committed by Yemeni Arabic-speaking University learners of English. 50 learners selected randomly from the third year, Department of English, Ibb University, Yemen participated in this study. To classify the errors, a comprehensive error taxonomy based on James's (1998) and Al-Shormani's (2012) was used. The sources of such errors were classified into four categories, viz. *L1-transfer*, *L2-influence*, *L1&L2* and *unrecognized*. The analysis shows that *L1-transfer* scored (27.90%), *L2-influence* scored (63.73%), *L1&L2* scored (6.99%) and *unrecognized* source scored (1.38%) of the syntactic errors committed in this study. The findings have implications for L2 syntax learning and teaching which could be generalized to other ESL and/or EFL contexts.

Keywords: SLA, Yemeni Learners, Error Sources, L1-transfer, L2-influence

1. Introduction

It goes without saying that a psycholinguistic analysis probing deeply the sources of errors committed by L2 learners requires us to seek answers to many questions as to why, when, how and where such errors come from. This actually puts linguists, SLA researchers, scholars and teachers alike vis-a-vis a problematic phenomenon (James, 1977, 1998; Gass & Selinker 2008; Selinker, 1992, 1993; Corder, 1967, 1973; Dulay & Burt 1973, 1974; Dulay *et al.* 1982; Hendrickson, 1978, 1980; Richards, 1972, 1974; Burt 1975; Duskova, 1969; Taylor, 1975). Such researchers have been long concerned with L2 learner errors diagnosing their sources and seeking appropriate solutions. Error committing tells the researchers and linguists different facts about several issues taking place in the LA process such as the fact that learners are not passive participants in learning process, language is rule-governed, students employ different strategies in LA among other important aspects. Corder (1967) ascertains that errors:

are significant in three different ways. First, to the teacher, in that they tell him, if he undertakes a systematic analysis, how far towards *the goal the learner has progressed*.... Second, they provide to the researcher *evidence of how language is learned or acquired*, ...what strategies the learner is employing in his discovery of the language. Thirdly, ...they are indisputable to the learner himself because we can regard the making of errors as a *device the learner uses in order to learn*. (p.167) (emphasis mine).

Thus, this study seeks to provide empirical data for the different sources of the most common syntactic errors committed by Yemeni Arabic-speaking University learners majoring in English and to account for the psychological strategies the learner makes use of in such a phenomenon. In fact, our aim in this study is to seek answers to such questions as why such errors are committed. Thus, 50 Yemeni learners participated in this study. These participants were asked to write an argumentative composition on some topics related to their families and ambitions. Adopting James' (1998) and Al-Shormani's (2012) error taxonomies, the errors were classified into five categories: **prepositions**, **VP-constructions**, **Articles**, **subject-verb agreement** and **relative clauses**. These categories are in turn classified into subcategories such as *omission*, *addition*, *substitution*, *tense*, *voice*, etc. depending on the errors identified in our data. A simple statistical method of error frequency count was used. The sources of the errors found in this study were classified into four categories; **L1-transfer**, i.e. the source is L1, i.e. Arabic, **L2-influence**, i.e. the source is L2, i.e. English, **L1/L2**, i.e. the source is both L1 and L2 and **unrecognized**, i.e. the source is neither L1 nor L2.

2. Previous studies

Researches and studies on errors have been conducted by a considerable number of linguists, applied linguists, researchers, scholars worldwide (e.g. Ellis 1997, Gass and Selinker 2008, Saville-Troike 2006, Dulay *et. al.*, 1982; James, 1998; Cook, 2003; Chomsky, 1968; Tomasello 2007). Arab linguists, applied linguists and researchers seem to be no exception. In that, several studies have been conducted trying to investigate the errors committed by Arab learners of English (e.g. Noor, 1996; Al-Fotih, 1996; Asfoor, 1978; Ghazal, 2007; Hamdan, 1984; Rababah, 2003; Khatib, 1984; Habash, 1982; Hamdallah, & Tushyeh, 1993; Al-Shormani, 2012; Al-Shormani & Al-Sohbani, 2012; Zughoul, 1979; Mukattash, 1979, 1981; Mahmoud, 2011). However, most of such Arab studies tackle the errors committed by Arab learners of

English trying only to classify these errors without probing deeply their reasons, sources and/or consequences. However, there are a relatively few studies which tried to investigate the sources of Arab learners' errors (e.g. Al-Shormani, 2012; Al-Shormani & Al-Sohbani, 2012; Mahmoud 2011) but these studies did not tackle the sources of syntactic errors because their scopes were something different. However, there are a number of studies done by non-Arab researchers which have tackled the sources of syntactic errors committed by L2 learners whatever their L1s are. In fact, identifying or classifying errors is a linguistic phenomenon whereas identifying the source of an error is a psycholinguistic one which is not that easy task. As far as the scope of this study is concerned, we will try to review some of those studies related to the study at hand. Dulay & Burt (1973) have done a study where they identified four sources the syntactic errors can be ascribed to. In another study, namely, Dulay & Burt (1974), they analyze the errors committed by 179 Spanish-speaking children. They concluded that 87% of the errors committed were caused by L2, i.e. English, 4.7% of the errors were ascribed to L1, i.e. Spanish and 8% were unique. Wang and Wen (2002) did a study examining the source of adjective errors committed by Chinese learners of English. They concluded that 62% of errors were caused by L2 and 28% of errors were caused by L1 among others.

Flick (1980) conducted a study examining the error types committed by Adult SL learners and their reasons. In fact, Flick (op.cit.) supports Dulay & Burt's (1974) conclusion that errors can be ascribed to different sources the major of which is L2 regardless of what their L1s are. In addition, Grauberg (1971) has done a study analyzing the syntactic errors committed by German First-Year University learners of English. In his study, Grauberg attributes the errors identified to different sources. Dulay, *et al.* (1982) opine that there are different sources the syntactic errors committed by SL learners can be ascribed to. They are of the view that there are four major sources of errors, viz. L1, L2, both L1 and L2 and no identified source. They state that only 8-23% errors at the case of adults can be ascribed to L1. They also attribute the majority of errors to L2 due to the lack of the sufficient knowledge in L2 linguistic system, faulty conceptions, ignoring rule restrictions etc. Both L1 and L2 as a source of some errors come as a result of identifying some errors in their data where both L1 and L2 contribute in making such errors. The fourth source concluded with by Dulay *et al.* (op.cit.) is unknown or unidentifiable. "Unidentifiable" in the sense that there are some errors which can neither be ascribed to L1 nor to L2. Accordingly, they classify errors into four types as far as the source is concerned, namely, *interlingual*, *intralingual*, *ambiguous* and *unique*. Chen (1998) ascribed the difficulties faced by Chinese learners in acquiring English tenses to the absence of verb conjugation in Mandarin Chinese.

Mamoud (2011:28) has done a study where he analyzes the vocabulary errors committed by L2 learners of English. Based on this study, he proposed "a strategy-based teaching technique" to teach vocabulary. His focus, however, was to examine the interlingual and intralingual transfer as a strategy used by SL learners in vocabulary learning. The notable issue in this study is his use of the terms "L1-based" and "L2-based." Al-Khresheh (2011) conducted a study where he tried to examine the extent to which the errors committed by Jordanian EFL learners in using the syntactic category "and" being equivalent to "wa" can be ascribed to Arabic. He concluded that his subjects committed "a huge number of errors with respect to the coordinating conjunction 'and' ...[and] interlingual interference might be the main cause of committing this huge number of these errors" (p.426). Al-Shormani's (2012) has done a study on the EG of syntactic and semantic errors committed by Arabic-speaking learners where he

examines the sources of syntactic errors classifying them into four sources, viz. *interlingual*, *intralingua*, *ambiguous* and *unique*. Al-Shormani & Al-Sohbani (2012) have done study examining the sources of semantic errors committed by Yemeni University Arabic-speaking learners *per se* where they ascribe such errors to two major sources, viz. L1 and L2 within each of which, there are many sources.

3. The Present Study

The study at hand focuses on identifying the possible sources of syntactic errors committed by University Yemeni third year Arabic-speaking students majoring in English. This study aims to help university EFL teachers choose and use the appropriate technique(s) in presenting the syntactic categories to their students based on their observations of the students' errors.

3.1 Method

3.1.1 Participants

This study involves 50 Yemeni Arabic-speaking learners of English selected at random from the students of the third-year, department of English, Ibb University, Yemen, in the academic year 2010-2011. They aged between 23-26 years though some of them may be older but not younger than that. They were male and female, viz. 33 female and 17 male but factors such as age and sex were not considered in this study. They have studied English for about nine years (six years at school and three at university). At the university, they have studied, among other courses, four courses of academic writing, namely, Writing I, Writing II, Writing III and Advanced Composition.

3.1.2 Procedure

The participants of this study were asked to write an argumentative composition (of about 250-300 words) on a topic related to their families and ambitions in a 2-hour time. The total words were 16499 and the mean length of the 50 compositions was 329.98 words (SD= 62.38, min= 243, Max= 484). The number of participants involved in this study (50) allowed for a comprehensive analysis of such participants' syntactic weaknesses in their English composition.

The researcher (a native speaker of Arabic, Yemeni Arabic) corrected the students' manuscripts consulting an experienced teacher of English (an Indian Professor of Applied linguistics) and almost they both agree to such identification. When there was a problem of identification, the researcher consulted an experienced University teacher of English (American). In fact, the students' compositions contained other error types such as word order, negation, etc. but such errors were not very recurrent and hence, excluded. Other types of errors were identified such as spelling, lexical, collocational etc. but because such errors are not within the scope of this study, I excluded them. There were errors not counted because they were counted in other categories. For instance, those counted in *VP-constructions* category were not counted in *subject-verb agreement* category. Here, it is so important to admit that there was some kind of category overlap but everything necessary has been taken into account to make error count as accurate as possible. To differentiate between "errors" and "mistakes," only those recurrent ones were counted and identified as errors. As far as the sources of the errors identified in this study are concerned, those whose source was L1 were counted in terms of *L1-transfer*. Those whose

source was L2 were counted in terms of *L2-influence*. Those whose source lied within both L1 and L2 were counted as *L1&L2* and those which had no identified source were counted as *unrecognized*.

4. Syntactic Error Classifications

SLA researchers (e.g. Lennon, 1991; Ellis, 1997; Gass & Selinker, 2008; James, 1998; Dulay *et al.* 1982; Dulay & Burt, 1973, 1974; Corder, 1967, 1973, 1975, 1981; Burt, 1975; Olsson, 1972, 1973, 1974; Noor, 1996; El-Saed, 1982; Al-Shormani, 2012) classify errors into general categories like *articles*, *subject-verb agreement*, *prepositions*, *tense forms*, *word order*, etc. which are in turn classified into *omission*, *substitution*, *addition* etc. based on the errors identified in such studies. This type of classification was not satisfactory for some SLA researchers such as James (1998:102-114) who classifies errors into taxonomies including feature taxonomy, linguistic category classification taxonomy, the surface structure taxonomy and combined taxonomies pinpointing that each taxonomy is suitable for a group of errors. Thus, bearing in mind such taxonomies and classifications of syntactic errors and based on the errors identified in this study, I classified the syntactic errors committed by the subjects of this study into five major categories *prepositions*, *VP-constructions*, *articles*, *subject-verb agreement* and *relative clauses*. These major categories are in turn classified into subcategories including *addition*, *omission*, *substitution*, *tense*, *voice*, etc. depending on the errors identified in the learners' compositions. A summary of the error classification followed here is presented in figure 1 below:

Figure 1: Summary of Syntactic Error Taxonomy

- I. Prepositions
 1. Substitution
 2. Omission
 3. Addition
- II. VP Constructions
 1. Verb Formation
 2. Tense
 3. Voice
- III. Articles
 1. Substitution
 2. Omission
 3. Addition
- IV. Subject-Verb Agreement
 1. Number Agreement
 2. Person Agreement
- V. Relative Clauses
 1. Substitution of Relative Pronoun
 2. Omission of Relative Pronoun
 3. Addition of Resumptive Pronoun

5. Results and Discussion

To diagnose the sources of the errors committed by the subjects of this study and on the basis of the error taxonomy employed, I will examine every category and subcategory of the errors separately for the sake of clarity and in-depth analysis.

5.1. Prepositions

Table (1): Error Source of Prepositions Errors

Source	Category					
	Substitution		Omission		Addition	
	F	%	F	%	F	%
L1-transfer	7	1.78%	17	7.35%	137	54.80%
L2-influence	372	94.89%	189	81.81%	58	23.20%
L1/L2	13	3.33%	21	9.09%	48	19.20%
Unrecognized	0.00	0.00%	4	1.75%	7	2.80%
T	392	100%	231	100%	250	100%

5.1.1 Substitution

As shown in Table (1), **L2-influence** causes the highest number of errors. It includes 372, i.e. (94.89%) errors. **L1-transfer** causes fewer errors, viz. 7 i.e. (1.78%). L1&L2 causes 13, i.e. (3.33%) errors. This category does not include **unrecognized** errors.

Examples:

L1-transfer: **My father bought a new watch to me*

Here, the learner substitutes the prep **to** for **for**. Arabic is considered the source. The Arabic equivalent to this sentence is *?abi ?ištara sa:ʔat-an jadi:dat-an li* (literally: my father bought new watch to me) where the Arabic prep *l* exactly means **to**. What the learner does here is just transfer his/her knowledge of Arabic into English and hence committing such an error.

L2-influence: **My first day in college was my ambition.*

Here, the learner substitutes the prep **in** for **at**. The reason why such an error is ascribed to English is that had it been a transfer from Arabic, the noun *college* must have been accompanied with the article **the** because in such a context, Arabic does allow such a construction.

L1/L2: **In my free time, I help my mother in home.*

Here, *in* has been used instead of *at*. This error can be ascribed to *L1-transfer* because in Arabic, there is only one prep equivalent to *in* in English which is *fi*. It can be ascribed to *L2-influence* in the sense that *at home* is an idiom which has not been acquired by the learner yet and he/she is still internalizing the article system of English.

5.1.2 Omission

As shown in Table (1), there are 17, i.e. (7.35%) errors caused by *L1-transfer*. In this category, *L2-influence* causes 189 errors constituting (81.81%) of the omission errors. 21, i.e. (9.09%) errors were ascribed to *L1&L2* and 4, i.e. (1.75%) errors were *unrecognized*.

Examples:

L1-transfer: **Our exam will begin # Saturday; my ambition is to pass in it.*

Here, the error lies in deleting the prep *on*. This error is ascribed to L1 on the light of its Arabic counterpart which is *?imtiħa:nana: swaf-a yabda?-u ?asabt-a* (literally: our exam will begin Saturday) which is absolutely grammatical in Arabic. Considering Arabic his/her knowledge base, the learner transfers this very structure from Arabic into English and hence, committing such an error.

L2-influence: ... **but I am afraid # my future*

The error here lies in deleting the prep (position) *of*. This error is ascribed to *L2-influence* on the basis of the fact that *afraid of* is one constituent and the learner has not yet acquired this very structure. It cannot be ascribed to Arabic simply because had it been a transfer from Arabic, it would have been *afraid from* whose Arabic equivalent is *xa: ?ef-un min* (literally: afraid from).

L1/L2: **After I put # my clothes, I go to school.*

The error here consists in deleting the prep *in*. This error is *L1&L2* because it can be ascribed to L1 and L2. It can be ascribed to Arabic on the basis of the fact that in Arabic, there is a one-word verb, viz. *yalbas-u* (put on/wear) which does not need a prep. It can also be ascribed to English because *put on* is a phrasal verb consisting of the verb *put* and the prep *on* and the learner seems not to have yet acquired it.

Describing such errors, Dulay *et al.* (1982: 172) state that such errors are committed as a result of faulty conceptions of some structures in English. They add that such errors resemble developmental errors committed by children acquiring English as their L1.

Unrecognized: **my father spends long time to look #his job.*

The error here lies in deleting the prep *for* which has to accompany the verb *look*. The unrecognizedness of this error lies in the fact that it can neither be ascribed to Arabic, because even in Arabic, the phrasal verb *yabħaθ-u ?an* (look for) has to be used as a whole and we cannot use *yabħaθ-u* (look) alone. It cannot be ascribed to English because *look* can be

collocated with several prepositions and if the learner forgot, were not sure of, had a misconception of which prep to choose to use with the verb *look*, he/she would have used another prep here not deleting it at all.

5.1.3 Addition

As can be seen in tabl(1), there are 137, i.e. (54.80%) errors caused by **L1-transfer**. In this category, **L2-influence** causes 58 errors constituting (23.20%) of the addition errors. 48, i.e. (19.20%) errors were ascribed to **L1&L2** and 7, i.e. (2.80%) errors were **unrecognized**.

Examples:

L1-transfer: **I came to school in happily.*

Here, the error lies in adding the prep **in** whose source is purely L1, i.e. Arabic and hence, being of **L1-transfer**. In Arabic, *bi sa'a:dat-in* (in/with happily) is absolutely grammatical. The learner here transfers this very structure from Arabic into English causing such an error.

L2-influence: **He asked to me something.*

The error in the example above is a manifestation of **L2-influence**. It seems that the learner analogizes here the verb *ask* with the verb *suggest* and hence, committing such an error.

L1&L2: **I came back to home.*

The error here can be ascribed to L1, i.e. Arabic on the ground that in Arabic, *?ila ?albait-i* (to home) is grammatical. It can also be ascribed to English on the fact that the English idiom *at home* seems not have been acquired yet and hence, resulting in such an error.

Unrecognized: **Aziza realized of her dream.*

This error is of **unrecognized** source simply because the structure is ungrammatical in both languages, viz. Arabic and English. The Arabic counterpart example **?azi:za ?adrakat min hulmaha:* is ungrammatical and the same thing can be said about Arabic.

5.2 VP-Constructions

Table (2): Error Source of VP-Constructions Errors

Source	VP-Constructions					
	Verb Formation		Tense		Voice	
	F	%	F	%	F	%
L1-transfer	301	72.88	14	9.79	11	7.97
L2-influence	66	15.98	120	83.91	127	92.03
L1/L2	46	15.28	9	6.29	0.00	0.00
Unrecognized	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
T	413		143	100%	138	100%

5.2.1 Verb formation

As can be seen in Table (2), **L1-transfer** scores 301, i.e. (72.88%) errors. **L2-influence** scores 66, i.e. (15.98%) errors. **L1&L2** scores 46, i.e. (15.98%) errors. However, no **unrecognized** error was identified in this category.

Examples:

L1-transfer: ...*and my mother # a great housewife.

Here, the error consists in deleting the copula **be**, namely, **is**. Having Arabic as his/her knowledge base, the learner just transfers this very Arabic structure where **be** is absent in such nominal sentences. In fact, the Arabic verb *yaku:n* (be) is absent in Arabic in S(urface) S(tructure) but it is not in D(eep) S(tructure). Describing this phenomenon, (Ouhalla, 1999) states that the absence of **be** in such nominal sentences constitutes a serious difficulty for Arabic-speaking learners of English.

L2-influence: ...*and my sister can singing very well.

Here, the error lies in the student's inability to provide the infinitive form *sing* as required after the modal *can*. This error is caused by **L2-influence** because it cannot be ascribed to Arabic simply because modals do not exist in Arabic especially in this context. In fact, Arabic speaking learners of English find such constructions rather difficult because Arabic does not have such restrictions on the formation of verbs.

The issue of L1-transfer and hence, errors have been proved true by a considerable number of researchers. For instance, Dulay and Burt (1972:130) confirming this fact state that "[a] well known corollary of the habit formation theory is "negative transfer" in the form of first language interference...[learners] will tend to use (transfer) the structures of their first language when trying to speak the second, and therefore, will make mistakes when the structures of the two languages differ."

L1/L2: ...*If I studied hard, I achieved my ambition

This error can be ascribed to Arabic because and especially in the past, Arabic conditional sentences do not require the word *swafa* (roughly: will). It can be ascribed to English on the basis of the student's weak competence where his/her linguistic competence of English is not that stable to enable him/her to use the modal *would*.

5.2.2 Tense

Regarding tense, **L1-transfer** scores 14 errors, i.e. (9.79%). **L2-influence** scores 120 errors, i.e. (83.91%). **L1&L2** as a source scores 9 errors, i.e. (6.29%) and no **unrecognized** sources were identified as shown in Table (2).

Examples:

L1-transfer: ... **but good students went to school everyday.*

This error is caused by **L1-transfer** because its main source is Arabic. This is simply because Arabic does not differentiate between facts and non-facts and habits and non-habits. Arabs usually commit such errors as **the sun rose from the east.*

L2-influence: **My friends came yesterday to our party and leave immediately.*

The error here lies in that the student does not understand *tense sequence* in English. It cannot be ascribed to Arabic because tense sequence in Arabic is a *must*.

L1/L2: ... ** but in our village cows gave us mile.*

This error is of **L1&L2** nature because it can be ascribed to Arabic and English both. It can be ascribed to Arabic on the ground that Arabic does not distinguish facts from non-facts as stated earlier. It can be ascribed to English on the basis of the fact that the learner committing such an error is still internalizing tense system in English and he/she does not have that competence which enables him/her to use English tenses properly and accurately.

6.2.3 Voice

As shown in Table (2), voice category includes 11, i.e. (7.97%) errors caused by **L1-transfer**. It includes 127, i.e. (92.03%) errors caused by **L2-influence** and it does not contain **L1&L2** or **unrecognized** errors.

Examples:

L1-transfer: **My younger brother sent to USA to study medicine.*

Here, the learner fails to provide the verb **be** required in English *passivized* sentences but he/she provides the *p.p* of the main verb *send* and here lies the role of Arabic. The error may be ascribed to English but since the learner having Arabic as a knowledge base, he/she just transfers this very Arabic structure into English and here Arabic a source prevails.

L2-influence: ... ** and all my future will be gave to my parents.*

The **L2-influence** nature of this error lies in the fact that the learner committing such an error has provided the correct form of **be** but fails in providing the *p.p.* of the verb **give**. The impossibility of ascribing this very error to L1 interference lies in the fact that had it been a transfer from Arabic, the learner would not have written *will be* and hence, English itself as a source of such an error prevails.

5.3 Articles

Table (3): Error Source of Articles Errors

Source	Category					
	Substitution		Omission		Addition	
	F	%	F	%	F	%
L1-transfer	0.00	0.00	52	28.42	39	16.88
L2-influence	319	100	98	52.55	144	62.34
L1/L2	0.00	0.00	12	6.55	33	14.28
Unrecognized	0.00	0.00	21	11.48	15	6.50
T	319	100	183	100	231	100%

5.3.1 Substitution

Table (3) shows that 319, i.e. (100%) errors were caused by **L2-influence**. No errors caused by **L1-transfer**, **L1&L2** nor **unrecognized** sources were identified in the substitution category.

Examples:

L1-transfer: *My first day in an university is my first ambition.*

This error lies in substituting the article **an** for *the*. The learner thinking that the noun *university* begins with *u*, he/she must use *an*. In fact, this error can partly be described as a result of overgeneralization where the learner committing it considers the letter and not the sound. Yemeni learners in this stage lack the sufficient competence that enables them to use the English article system properly. They may have false conceptions about English article system and hence, committing such errors.

5.3.2 Omission

Table (3) above shows that 98 i.e. (52.55%) errors were caused by **L2-influence**. 52 errors, i.e. (28.42%) were caused by **L1-transfer** errors. 12 errors, i.e. (6.55%) were caused by **L1&L2** errors and 21 i.e. (11.48%) had **unrecognized** source.

Examples:

L1-transfer: **I live in Ibb city which is one of # most beautiful places in Yemen.*

The **L1-transfer** nature of this error lies in the fact that the Arabic equivalent of *most*, i.e. *?akθar* is never preceded by the article *?al* (the), particularly in such a context, and so what the

learner does here is just transfer this very structure from Arabic into English and hence rendering such an ungrammatical sentence.

L2-influence: ... **and villagers do not have such # kind of busy life like cities.*

This error is of an **L2-influence** nature simply because the learner may not have acquired the English structure *such a + singular noun*. In fact, this error cannot be ascribed to Arabic simply because Arabic lacks the exact equivalent of this combination/expression.

L1/L2: **There comes friend to help me to choose English department.*

That this error can be ascribed to both English and Arabic is due to its L1&L2 nature. Now, consider its Arabic counterpart example *huna:k-a ?ata ?adi:q-un liusa: ?id-a-ni ?an ?axta:r-a qism-a ?al?injli:z-i* (literally: there comes friend to help me to choose English department) which is absolutely grammatical in Arabic. It can also be ascribed to English simply because of its developmental nature. It resembles those committed by children acquiring English as their L1.

Unrecognized: **We cannot live separately from the world because we live in #Middle East*

The unrecognizedness of this error lies in the fact that we cannot ascribe it either to L1 or to L2. The noun phrase *Middle East* in English requires the article *the*. Its Arabic equivalent, viz. **?sarq ?al?aw?at* has to have the definite article *?al(the)* and the correct Arabic expression is *?a?sarq ?al?aw?at* where *?a(l)* has to accompany the noun *?sarq* (east).

5.3.3 Addition

Table (3) shows that **L2-influence** errors were 144, i.e. (62.34%). 39 errors, i.e. (16.88%) were caused by **L1-transfer**, 33 errors, i.e. (14.28%) were caused by **L1&L2** and 15 errors, i.e. (6.50%) were caused by **unrecognized** sources.

Examples:

L1-transfer: **The life is very nice.*

This error is purely caused by **L1-transfer**. Here, the learner transfers the Arabic structure *?alhaya:at-u jami:lat-un* (literally: the life beautiful) into English except adding the verb *is* and hence, committing such an error.

L2-influence: **My father came **the** yesterday from Saudi Arabia*

Such an error cannot be ascribed to Arabic due to the fact that the Arabic adverb of time *?amas-i* does not take the article *?al*, especially in such a context. However, if it comes with the prep *bi* (*with*) it can. Therefore, it is purely of **L2-influence** nature caused mainly by the confusion in the article use.

L1/L2: ... **and the Ahmed is my younger brother*

This error can be ascribed to **L1-transfer** based on the possibility that in Arabic we can name a person *?al?aħmad*. (e.g. *?alaħmad ?al?abaħ*) (a name of a Kuwaiti family that rules Kuwait).

This error can also be ascribed to English on the basis of the fact that in English, plural names especially when they refer to families can take the article *the* (e.g. *the Johns, the James etc.*)

Unrecognized: ... **I think my ambition is a good*

The source of this error is unrecognized because it cannot be ascribed either to Arabic or to English. It cannot be ascribed to Arabic simply because the indefinite article *a* does not exist. It cannot also be ascribed to English because adjectives in English never take articles.

5.4 Subject-Verb Agreement

Table (5): Error Source of Subject-Verb Agreement Errors

Source	Category			
	Number Agreement		Person Agreement	
	F	%	F	%
L1-transfer	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
L2-influence	341	100%	178	100%
L1/L2	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
Unrecognized	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
T	341	100%	178	100%

5.4.1 Number Agreement

Table (5) shows that 341 errors, i.e. (100%) were caused by **L2-influence**. No errors caused by **L1-transfer**, **L1&L2** nor **unrecognized** sources were identified in number agreement category.

Examples:

L2-influence: * *The number of people speaking English are large.*

Such errors as the above one cannot be ascribed to Arabic simply because Arabic SVO sentences do require any verb, particularly in SS. So such errors are caused purely by **L2-influence**. Dulay *et al.* (1982) ascribe such errors to the lack of sufficient knowledge in L2 since learners, in this stage, are still trying to build systematically a knowledge base about the L2 linguistic system.

5.4.2 Person Agreement

Table (4) shows that 178 errors, i.e. (100%) were caused by **L2-influence**. No errors were caused by **L1-transfer**, **L1&L2** nor **unrecognized** sources in this subcategory.

Examples:

L2-influence: ... *and my father agree with me to travel to USA.

Such an error can never be ascribed to L1 simply because Arabic subject-verb agreement feature, especially in SVO word order is very strong and hence, errors like these are purely L2. Researchers (e.g. James, 1998; Dulay & Burt, 1973, 1974; Gass & Selinker, 2008; Dulay *et al.* 1982) among others are of the view that these errors are similar to those committed by children acquiring English as their L1. Such errors have been termed by many researchers (e.g. Corder, 1981; James 1998; Johansson, 1973; Dulay *et al.* 1982, Moore & Stenning, 2001) among others as developmental. They are so because they reflect the developmental stages through which L2 learners proceed in learning any L2.

5.5 Relative Clauses

Table (6): Error Source of Relative Clauses Errors

Source	Category					
	Substitution of Relative Pronoun		Omission of Relative Pronoun		Addition of Resumptive Pronoun	
	F	%	F	%	F	%
L1-transfer	17	11%	178	72.65%	184	100%
L2-influence	91	59%	55	22.45%	0.00	0.00
L1/L2	46	30%	12	4.90%	0.00	0.00
Unrecognized	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00
T	154	100%	245	100%	184	100%

5.5.1 Substitution of Relative Pronouns

Table (6) shows that 17 errors, i.e. (11%) were caused by **L1-transfer**. 91 errors, i.e. (59%) were caused by **L2-influence**. 46 errors, i.e. (30%) were caused by **L1&L2** and this category does not include **unrecognized** sources.

Examples:

L1-transfer: *The man which described my way in life is my father.

The error here lies in substituting **which** for **who** which is a direct translation from Arabic where *?alaði* is used for all types of masculine nouns, animate and/or inanimate.

L2-influence: ... *and my friend that ambition is to be a doctor in the university.

Here, the learner uses the relative pronoun *that* instead of *whose*. The source of such an error is L2 simply because in Arabic, the relative pronoun equivalent to *whose* does not exist. Larsen-Freeman & Long, 1991; Yuan and Zhao 2005) opine that the learner in this stage does not have that much of linguistic knowledge which enables him/her to use the proper relative pronoun in the proper context.

L1/L2: ... **and this is the teacher who I like.*

Here, the error consists in substituting *who* for *whom*. This error can be ascribed to **L1-transfer**. Its Arabic counterpart reads something like *wa haḍa ?a?ustaḍ-a ?allaḍi ?uḥib-hu* (literally: and this is the teacher who I like him). It can also be ascribed to **L2-influence** on the ground that the learner has not been yet able to differentiate between Acc(usative) and Nom(inative) Cases where *who* is used for Nom Case and *whom* is used for Acc Case in English, though recently, in modern syntax, this difference has been ruled out. Many researchers (e.g. James, 1998; Dulay *et al.* 1982; Dulay & Burt, 1973, 1974) describe such errors as developmental resembling those committed by children acquiring English as their L1. In addition, Arabic-speaking learners learning English including Yemenis get confused in using relative pronouns and so they try to avoid using them (Larsen-Freeman and Long, 1991; Yuan & Zhao, 2005).

5.5.2 Omission of Relative Pronouns

As Table (6) shows, 178 errors, i.e. (72.65%) were caused by **L1-transfer**. 55 errors, i.e. (22.45%) were caused by **L2-influence**. 12 errors, i.e. (4.89%) were ascribed to **L1/L2**. This category does not also include **unrecognized** sources.

Examples:

L1-transfer: ... **because there are many people # speak English.*

The error in this example lies in deleting the relative pronoun *who*. This is clear when we consider its Arabic counterpart, viz. *huna:k-a na:s-un kaḥi:r-u:n yatakalam-u:n ?al?injli:ziat-a*. (Literally: there are many people speak English) which is absolutely grammatical in Arabic.

L2-influence: ... **I like the united State # is a developed country.*

Here, the error consists in deleting the relative pronoun *which*. This error cannot be ascribed to L1 because in this context in Arabic, a relative pronoun is a *must*. However, it can be ascribed to L2 simply because the learner is still internalizing the linguistic system of English relative pronouns. He/she has not yet had the sufficient linguistic competence in English relative pronoun system.

L1/L2: ... **many students # study at English department have ambitions.*

The error here lies in deleting *where* which renders the sentence ungrammatical. This error can be ascribed both to **L1-transfer** and **L2-influence** as well. Thus, ascribing it to Arabic comes from its Arabic counterpart, viz. *tula:b-un kaḥi:ru:n yadrusu:n fī qism-i ?al?injli:zi ladai-*

hum tumuħa:t-un which is absolutely grammatical in Arabic. It may also be ascribed to English on the basis of analogy where such expressions like *many students studying at English department have ambitions* where the nonfinite clause *studying at English department* is used as an adjectival clause postmodifying the NP *many students*. Thus, having this in mind, one can argue that the learner analogizes such a use and hence, committing such an error.

5.5.3 Addition of Resumptive

Table (6) shows that 184, i.e. (100%) frequent errors were caused by L1-transfer alone. There are no errors ascribable to L2influence, L1&L2and unrecognized sources. In fact, adding a resumptive pronoun is one of the very recurrent errors in Arab indulging Yemeni learners' writing. This is manifested in our study where resumptive pronoun category scores the highest number in relative pronoun category.

Examples:

L1-transfer: ... **My father is a great man who I like him very much.*

The error here lies in adding the pronoun *him*. The pronoun *him* is called a resumptive pronoun. Such errors are purely caused by **L1-transfer** simply because Arabic allows such resumptive pronouns but only in the object position. The addition of resumptive pronouns has been confirmed by many SLA researchers (e.g. Yuan & Zhao, 2005; Larsen-Freeman & Long, 1991) who have ascribed the addition of such pronouns to Arabic language where using them is allowed. In addition, Schachter (1974) stated that Arab learners of English tend to avoid using relative pronouns in their writing due to their complexity. The avoidance of using relative pronouns by his Arabic-speaking subjects was considerable.

6. Conclusion and Pedagogical Implications

Table (7): Summary of Sources of Syntactic Errors

Source	Preps	VP-constructions	Articles	S-V Agreement	Rel. Clauses	Total	%
L1-transfer	161	326	91	0.00	379	957	27.90%
L2-influence	646	313	561	519	146	2185	63.73%
L1/L2	82	55	45	0.00	58	240	6.99%
Unrecognized	11	0.00	36	0.00	0.00	47	1.38%
Total	909	694	733	519	583	3429	100%

As presented in Table (7) above, there are a total number of 3429 frequent syntactic errors committed in this study. Such errors vary in category, number, source and percentage. For instance, there are 957, i.e. (27.90%) errors committed as a result of **L1-transfer**, i.e. Arabic interference where the learners having Arabic as their knowledge base transfer such knowledge

into their English as a learning strategy. There are 2185, i.e. (63.73%) errors committed as a result of **L2-influence**, i.e. English influence where the learners having *false conceptions*, ignoring rule restrictions, overgeneralizing a particular rule and/or *still internalizing* the English linguistic system commit such errors (Richard, 1971). In addition, there are 240, i.e. (6.99%) errors whose source is **L1&L2**, where both L1 and L2 are the sources, however the reason. There are also 47, i.e. (1.38%) ascribable to **unrecognized** sources, i.e. those errors whose source cannot be identified.

L1-transfer as a source scoring (27.90%) in our study supports studies done by (Dulay & Burt, 1973, 1974; Grauberg, 1971; Flick, 1980; Dulay *et al.*, 1982; Al-Shormani, 2012) where L1 as a source of errors was 3%, 4.7%, 36%, 31%, 8-23%, 34.63%, respectively. The same thing can be said about other types of sources where our study supports almost all such studies with some kind of slight variation (see Dulay & Burt, 1973, 1974; Grauberg, 1971; Flick, 1980; Dulay *et al.* 1982; Al-Shormani, 2012). In addition, **L2-influence** source scoring (63.73%) of the errors supports the now widely spread belief that the majority of learner errors can under no circumstances be traced to the influence of the L1 *per se* as noted above. In fact, L1 interference and hence, transfer is a reality (Selinker, 1992, 1993) but it does not have that exaggerated amount. Researchers have found that even those areas where the L1 should have prevented the occurrence of errors were not always error-free (see e.g. Mitchell & Myles 1998; Gass & Selinker, 2008).

Since the ultimate goal of any study on learners' errors is to help and provide university and school teachers with significant insights and pedagogical implications about where recognized teaching is greatly needed and where more time and effort should be spent and since language is not rule-memorization but rather rule-formulation, syntactic categories should be taught inductively so as to elicit rules rather than memorizing them. In addition to that, our study helps applied linguists, curricula/syllabi designers and textbooks developers focus on the L2 syntactic materials and how they should be designed, which syntactic categories should be paid much attention to, and which should be paid less attention to. As far as Arabic-speaking learners of English are concerned, *prepositions* should be paid more attention to than *VP-constructions* and so on till reaching *relative clauses*.

Needless to say, recognizing and identifying a source of an error provide us with important insights on why L2 learners resort to L1 or L2 in learning an L2. By doing so, the learner is just using learning strategies Oxford (1994) which sometimes lead him/her to success and sometimes not. By resorting to L1, the learner tries to transfer his/her L1 knowledge to L2 and by resorting to L2, the learner tries to make comparisons, overgeneralize or internalize the L2 linguistic system. These are actually cognitive strategies which help us diagnose the learner's weaknesses. If we understand this, we can exploit the psycholinguistic processes and/or strategies to help him/her overcome the dilemma he/she encounters in the learning process.

As far as *prepositions* are concerned, Arabic-speaking learners should be given a list of the commonly used prepositions and idiomatic prepositional phrases (James, 1998) and asked to use them in sentences of their own. Regarding *articles*, students should be taught much more inductively where they will actively elicit the rules of such a language use. Arabic-speaking learners should be made aware of the fact that while Arabic has two articles namely, the definite *?al* (the) and zero article, though some linguists (see Fassi Fahri, 1993; Al-Shormani (in press))

add that the *-n* attached to the end of indefinite Arabic nouns is the third one, English has four articles, namely, two indefinite, viz. *a, an*, the definite, *the* and the zero article.

Arabic-speaking learners, including Yemenis, need to learn how different kinds of English VPs are formed and how to differentiate between simple and complex VPs. Regarding subject-verb agreement, materials where person and number features are emphasized should be presented to Arab learners. However, a caution should be made here to teachers that linguistic distinctions that learners do not need to know should not be taught and similarities between English and L1 should be highlighted (Zughoul, 1979). Therefore, it is strongly recommended that using Arabic in the classroom should be minimized and that English should be taught in its own right. Arab university teachers are advised to design and prescribe remedy materials after diagnosing the difficult areas where learners face problems. Some researchers (e.g. Celce-Murcia & Hilles 1988, Harmer, 1987) have pinpointed the way such units are to be presented and practiced. For instance, Harmer (1987:10) has suggested that "...[teachers] must teach not only the form, but also one of its functions, and not only *meaning* but also *use*" (emphasis in the original). He also adds that the presentation of the grammar lesson should be clear, efficient, interesting and productive. In addition, Celce-Murcia & Hilles (1988) have proposed a technique in which "discovery" has to play the main role. In that, they have provided four steps in which such a technique is applied: (i) presentation, (ii) focused practice, (iii) communicative practice, incorporating information-gap, choice and feedback, and (iv) teacher feedback. It goes without saying that applying such techniques in the classroom will compensate the learners for the lack of exposure to English.

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