

The Interference of Arabic Syntax in EFL Learning

Ahmad Hasan

Assistant Professor, Dept. of English,
Faculty of Arts, Kuwait University.

Abstract

The phenomenon of first language (L1) interference in the learning of a foreign language has been extensively discussed; however, most of the accounts that approach this problem are unsatisfactory as they fail to explain this issue systematically.

In this paper, I address one aspect of L1 interference in learning a foreign language, namely the interference of arabic syntax in the learning of English by Arab students. I demonstrate how errors in grammar resulting from L1 interference have been dealt with from the "error analysis" and "contrastive analysis" perspectives. However, I argue that these two models are actually inadequate as they both fail to attain explanatory power. As an alternative, I argue that Chomsky's (1981, 1986, and 1995) model of grammar, as presented in the Government and Binding theory, is adequate not only to describe but also to explain these errors. Furthermore, I show how the account which I adopt enables us to explain the predictability of these errors in that it predicts which errors are likely to occur as a result of Arabic interference in learning English as a foreign language. More significantly, I show how the Government and Binding framework, through its principles and parameters, offers more insight into what happens in the learner's mind than the other models do. I believe that such a conclusion is worth pursuing.

I. Introduction

Although the phenomenon of first language (L1) interference in the learning of another language (L2) has been extensively investigated in the linguistic literature, there is no general consensus among scholars as to how to account for it. As a result of disagreement among linguists with respect to linguistic interference in general, it was natural that a number of approaches emerged hoping to account for the interference that is manifested in the form of different types of errors. This study focuses on three of the most prominent approaches and highlights their strengths and weaknesses. In particular, it seeks to address one aspect of L1 interference in learning a foreign language, namely, the interference of Arabic syntax in the learning of English as a foreign language by Arab university students. First, I present the models of 'Contrastive Analysis' (CA) and 'Error Analysis' (EA) as two potential approaches accounting for interference errors. Then, I show how both models fail to attain genuine explanatory power, the reason for which they are rejected. After that, I argue in favour of Chomsky's (1981, 1986, and 1995) theory of Principles and Parameters (P&P) as a more satisfactory framework. I demonstrate that this model not only describes but also explains foreign language errors in a principled manner. More significantly, I show how the P&P framework offers more insight into what happens in the learner's mind than other models do. I conclude the paper by considering some pedagogical implications of this analysis.

To start, a few points need to be clarified. First, although the terms "foreign language" and "second language" are occasionally used interchangeably, this has no significant bearing on the discussion in this work. I maintain the distinction between the two terms along the lines of Ellis (1994). A second language is one that has an institutional or social role in a bilingual community. This is the case of English in India and in the African country, Nigeria. Foreign language, on the other hand, has no major role in the community as such and is only taught in the classroom, as is the case of English in Arab countries.

Another point that should be clarified relates to the data used in this paper. The data are taken from assignments and exam papers of third and fourth year students of English at the English Department in two Syrian universities, namely, Tishreen and Al-Baath. However, I assume that it is plausible to extend the argument presented in this work to accommodate similar syntactic errors made by Arab university students elsewhere, because they all have the same linguistic background, especially in the constructions investigated in this paper.¹

2. Contrastive Analysis Model

Now I move on to discuss some of the approaches that are meant to account for errors made by L2 learners in terms of identification, clarification, predictability as well as explanation. One of these approaches is Contrastive Analysis (CA). This model is based on the idea that the two languages involved in the contrastive study (i.e., the native/source language and the foreign/target language) should be compared in a systematic way, due to the points of similarity and difference between the two languages. Such a contrastive analysis was motivated on the basis that it would result in a more effective pedagogy, because, it was argued, linguistic differences would help in predicting learning difficulties.

Lado (1957) a proponent of CA argues that through a detailed and systematic comparison of L1 and L2, the problematic areas in L2 for speakers of L1 would be predictable and this would enable the teachers of L2 to provide the best teaching materials to emphasize those points of difference. According to this model, individuals would transfer the forms and meanings of their native language to those of the foreign one. If the two languages were similar, the interference would be positive, whereas if they were different, there would be what is referred to as "negative transfer." However, Carl James (1980: 45) emphasises that interference occurs only when L1 rules differ from rules of L2 in applicability. An example of this would be the rule of adjective proposing in English but not in Arabic. In all cases, the intrusion of L1 is something beyond the control of the L2 learner.

Another major argument for CA, as pointed out by Wardhaugh (1983), is that it enables us to predict and explain errors made by learners of a foreign language.

However, these views about CA are severely criticised by Ellis (1985) on empirical, theoretical, as well as practical grounds. Empirically, there are doubts regarding the ability of the CA model to accurately predict errors. It is quite evident that some errors have nothing to do with L1 interference. They are due to other factors such as the teacher or even the learner him/herself as (1) demonstrates:

(1) *Did he comed?

In fact, Dulay and Burt (1973) show that only a small proportion of all learners' errors result from L1 intrusion. Similarly, Brown (1994) argues that CA was mildly successful only in the phonological component of language because it is impossible to predict difficulty or errors beyond some very glaring phonological differences between the two languages. Of course the phonological type of interference is beyond the scope of this work, as we are concerned merely with syntactic interference. Thus, given that not all

errors are the outcome of interference, a comparison of L1 and L2 can not help to predict, or explain, very much about the process of foreign language learning. Moreover, CA not only failed to anticipate all errors but also predicted some errors that were not borne out, as shown by Dulay and Burt (1973). A further problem in the CA model is the lack of well-defined criteria for establishing which grammatical utterances are the result of language transfer, since it is difficult to distinguish between interference errors and developmental errors, as we will see later.

Theoretically, CA has its own problems. Ellis (1985) argues that it is not feasible to validly compare two languages in accordance with CA. Even if this is done, it will be of little significance to foreign language learning since there are errors that are not due to L1 interference. In fact, this argument also undermines the practical significance of CA, since there is no point in comparing two languages, given that many errors do not result from L1 intrusion. Finally, it has to be mentioned that it is quite difficult to explain non-interference errors within a contrastive analysis perspective where the language learner has no role at all. For all these reasons, the CA account of interference errors is rejected.

3. Error Analysis Model

An alternative to CA was presented in the form of EA in the hope that this new model would, among other things, explain the creative nature of the process of L2 learning. Thus, EA allowed the learner to play a role in the language learning process. The learner is no longer a passive recipient. This was reflected in the form of developing new hypotheses about the structure of the foreign language. As a result, different types of errors were recognised (Richards, 1971). First, there are interference errors (i.e. interlanguage errors). These errors are caused by the intrusion of Arabic (being the learner's mother tongue) in the production of English (being his/her foreign language), as is shown in the following example:

(2) *It needs an antecedent to rely on it.

Here, it is quite clear that the student inserted the pronoun "it" because such a pronoun is usually used in Arabic, which is the student's native language.

Second, there are intralingual errors which originate in the structure of the target language itself, such as overgeneralisation, simplification, incomplete application of rules, or ignorance, on the part of the learner, of the environment of rule application. This is shown in the examples given in (3):

(3) a. *I made him to do it.

b. *It depends on how do we pronounce the word.

In the examples in (3), the student overgeneralised the rules concerned. The verb 'made' is treated on a par with verbs like 'wanted' in (3a) and the auxiliary 'do' is used to make an indirect question in the embedded clause in (3b). The outcome in both cases is ungrammatical.

Third, there are developmental errors which result from the strategies adopted by the L2 learner. These errors are similar to those made by children acquiring their first language, and they are due to incomplete exposure to L2, as in (1) above.

Here, I find it necessary to differentiate between the three types of errors referred to earlier, on the one hand, and mistakes which were defined by Corder (1976) as random performance slips caused by fatigue and excitement and which can be readily corrected, on the other hand. Brown (1994) looks at mistakes as examples of failure to utilise a known system correctly, whether in the native language or in the foreign one. Errors, however, are systematic deviations made by learners who have not mastered the rules of the language. In other words, a learner can not self-correct an error, because it is a product reflective of his/her linguistic development. In fact, such identification and classification of learners' errors helps significantly in learning about the methods and strategies followed by the language learner and, consequently, in learning about the process of foreign language learning.

However, even this modified account of errors has been argued to have its own problems. It is true that the EA framework placed more emphasis on the learner, but still, the focus was only on the errors and how learners made them. Thus, areas where the learner was successful were ignored because the goal of EA was primarily to look for the source of errors. Therefore, there is no complete picture of the process of foreign language learning.

A similar criticism was presented by Schachter and Celce-Murcia (1983) to the EA model, which requires the extraction of errors from the corpus and the exclusion of the corpus from consideration since attention, is focused on the errors themselves. It is very crucial to know the context of certain errors, otherwise the error will be inexplicable. In fact, it might be essential for the linguist to know the whole structure in which the error occurs. Another weakness in the EA model concerns the classification of errors, as it is sometimes unclear what type of error we have in constructions with an omitted copula, for instance. On the one hand, it may be an interference (interlingual) error if made by Arab students learning English. On the other hand, it is a developmental error if made by English children acquiring English. Furthermore, errors in EA are not genuine

indicators of difficulty in learning L2 because learners always have the option of avoiding the use of constructions they find difficult. For example, Kleinmann (1977) reports that Arab learners of English avoid using passive constructions. For further criticisms of the EA approach, see Schachter and Celce-Muricia (1983).

4. Principles and Parameters (P&P) Model

Having rejected the previous models (i.e., CA and EA) and highlighted their weaknesses, I move to present the P&P model as outlined in Chomsky (1981, 1986). Furthermore, I argue that this framework can adequately account for the errors made by university Arab students of English as a foreign language. The P&P model is crucially dependent on the concept of Universal Grammar (UG), which is taken to be a set of principles and parameters that are characteristic of human languages. It is a theory of general innate and abstract properties or parameters that govern what is possible cross-linguistically. These linguistic parameters, through the limited options they allow, restrict the grammars available in human languages.

A parameter is a linguistic rule that is general enough to allow at least two possible values: a positive (+) value and a negative (-) one. If a language selects the (+) value of a parameter like the head initial/head final parameter, then all phrases in this language are expected to start with the head of the phrase. In fact, this is the case in English and Arabic, where the prepositional phrase (PP), for example, is always introduced by a preposition. Similarly, the same argument also applies to the verb phrase (VP).² However, if the language opts for the (-) value of the same parameter (i.e., head initial/head final parameter), then phrases in this language are expected to behave consistently and end, rather than start, with the head of the phrase. This is the case in Japanese, where the preposition, for example, occurs in the final position of the PP. Hence, it is known as a postposition and not a preposition.

Language acquisition, according to P&P theory, is a process of fixing the parameters of the language concerned by selecting the appropriate value for each parameter. Fixing the parameter in a particular way requires the learner to get input data or "positive evidence" which is accessible to the language learner from the linguistic environment. However, it has been pointed out (cf. Chomsky, 1981) that the input data the child is exposed to is insufficient and degenerate. That is, there is "poverty of stimulus". In fact, this is precisely what motivates the existence of UG. Otherwise, it will be difficult to explain the fact that the learner is capable of forming and comprehending novel utterances. Chomsky illustrates that input is

degenerate in a number of ways. It is marred with performance features such as slips and fragments. Input also does not contain "negative evidence" which is necessary to tell the learner what is not possible in a language. The unavailability of negative evidence, what is important in the performance of the language learner, is the truthfulness of what is said, rather than the way it is said. In other words, ungrammatical output is unlikely to be corrected.

Careful consideration of the contexts of first language interference in foreign language learning reveals that they are typically instances where the rules of L2 are either obscure, or the setting of a particular parameter is idiosyncratic in the sense that it varies from one language to another, giving rise to many possible settings. For example, the position of adverbs in human languages is highly variable. In such a case, the learner of a foreign language where the placement of adverbs differs from his/her own will obviously resort to the principles of his/her native language in order to overcome the problem of learnability. In fact, this is the case in each of the following error types, as they all result from the interference of Arabic syntax in the syntax of English. Now, let us study each of these major errors separately.

4.1. The Use of Nominal Clauses

It is quite common that Arab learners of English produce ungrammatical structures such as (4):

- (4) a- *The sentence still correct.
- b- *The listener will not able to recognise it.
- c- *...decide whether the sentence ambiguous or not.

The ungrammaticality of the examples in (4) is due to the lack of the verb "to be". These sequences show how the student fails to use a copula by opting to the Arabic value of the nominal clause parameter, according to which a language may or may not allow nominal clauses.³ Arabic selects the positive value (+) of this parameter, so it allows nominal clauses. On the other hand, English selects the negative value of the parameter; hence, nominal clauses are prohibited in English. This explains the ill-formedness of the sequences in example (4).

4.2. The Use of a Convert Relative Operator

Now, let us consider the ungrammatical constructions we have in (5):

- (5) a- *A compound verb is a verb consists of more than one word.
- b- *Thee are two elements depend on each other.
- c- *We have more than one adjective comes in the sentence.

Non of the sequences in (5), above, has an overt relative operator such as “**which**” or “**that**”. All these constructions will be grammatical if a relative operator is added in the subject position of the embedded clauses, as in the following examples:

- (5) d- A compound verb is a verb [which consists of more than one word].
- e- There are two elements [which depend on each other].
- f- We have more than one adjective [which comes in the sentence].

This suggests that the constructions (5a, b, and c), which were produced by Arab learners of English, are all ungrammatical because of the absence of an overt (i.e., phonologically realised) relative pronoun or operator.

Here, too, it seems that the student resorts to Arabic, which is his/her native language, and makes use of the parameter value that is appropriate for Arabic, given that Arabic and English select antithetical values of the same parameter. In other words, Arabic does not allow an overt relative pronoun if this pronoun is anteceded by (i.e., refers back to) an indefinite noun phrase as the examples in the paradigm in (6) clearly demonstrate:

- (6) a- zaar-a ?aSdiqaan yuHibbu-hum
visited-he friends he-likes-them
(He visited friends he likes.)
- b- *zaar-a al-?aSdiqaa yuHibbu-hum
visited-he the-friends he-likes-them
(He visited the friends he likes.)
- c- *zaar-a ?aSdiqaan alladiina yuHibbu-hum
visited-he friends who he-likes-them
(He visited the friends who(m) he likes.)
- d- zaar-a al-?aSdiqaa alladiina yuHibbu-hum
visited-he the-friends who he-likes-them
(He visited the friends who(m) he likes.)

In (6a), there is a covert or missing relative pronoun which refers back to “**?aSdiqaan**”, which is an indefinite NP, and the construction is grammatical. Similarly, in (6b), there is a covert relative pronoun, yet the construction is ungrammatical. In fact the only difference between (6a) and (6b) is that the covert relative pronoun in (6a) is anteceded by an indefinite NP, whereas in (6b) it is anteceded by a definite NP. That is, both examples are identical in everything except in the definiteness of the antecedent of the null relative operator. This demonstrates that Arabic does not allow the occurrence of a covert relative pronoun if this pronoun is anteceded by an

indefinite NP, as shown by the fact that (6c), where there is a covert relative operator “**alladiina**” anteceded by the indefinite NP “**?aSdiqaan**”, is ruled out. The same conclusion is further supported by the fact that (6d), where the relative pronoun “**alladiina**” is anteceded by the definite NP “**al-?aSdiqaa**”, is grammatical.

One might be tempted to relate the ill-formedness of the sequences in (5 a, b, and c), above, to the fact that the missing relative operator occupies the structural position of the subject of the relative clause, and English grammar does not permit this kind of deletion rule in this specific context. However, what matters to us here is the fact that a relative operator in these structures is obligatory, as this is the crucial difference between the English example in (5a) and the Arabic one in (6a). In other words, (5a) has no overt relative pronoun and is ungrammatical, whereas (6a) is grammatical although it has no overt relative pronoun. Therefore, in this case, the structural difference between the two languages is responsible for language transfer. I have to add that I have never come across any examples, written by Arab students learning English as a foreign language, where there is a null relative operator preceded by a definite NP, regardless of whether this operator occupies a subject or an object position. Thus, the problem in examples (5a, b, c) is due to the use of an Arabic value of the relative operator parameter to English data.

4.3. Insertion of a Resumptive Pronoun

Another type of error made by Arab students of English can be found in the constructions in (7):

- (7) a- *The result which the writer wanted **it** is the illusion.
- b- *the age they live in **it**
- c- *I want a man to love **him** as a person and not love his money.

In the examples in (7), the student uses an extra pronoun known as a resumptive pronoun.⁴ Of course, this option does not exist in English. “Thus, it is possible to argue for the parameterization of the resumptive pronoun phenomenon cross-linguistically, as there are two strategies involved in such constructions.” (Hasan 1990). In one strategy, the resumptive pronoun is used, as is the case in Arabic, whereas in the other strategy a gap is used, as in English. What happens in (7) is that the student applies the Arabic value of the resumptive pronoun parameter to English data, and the outcome is ungrammatical, given that English selects the gap, rather than the resumptive pronoun strategy.

4.4. Double Subject Constructions:

In fact, there are many other areas in syntax where Arab learners of English make interlingual errors, as the constructions in (8) show:

- (8) a- *Grammatical criteria it is more reliable than the two criterias.
- b- *The word 'cat' it has a specific meaning.
- c- *The prepositional phrase it modifies the action.

It is quite clear that the constructions in (8) are ungrammatical because of the occurrence of two subjects in the same clause. It has to be said, however, that there could be other reasons for the ill-formedness of some of these constructions. Therefore, the property of allowing two or more subjects in one clause has to be parameterisable, since human languages can be divided into two classes in terms of double subject constructions. On the one hand, there are languages that permit two or more subjects in one clause, as is seen in Arabic and Japanese.⁵ On the other hand, there are other languages, such as English and French, which do not permit more than one subject within the same clause.

4.5. Insertion of an Infinitive Particle

Another problem that Arab students learning English as a foreign language may face relates to the use of infinitives, as Arabic and English infinitive verbs do not have the same structure. Let us look the following English examples:

- (9) a- *The imagination must to be destroyed.
- b- *The black man can to live as a man without enemies.

It is quite clear that there is an extra infinitive particle in each of the sequences in (9) and this is the source of the problem in these two constructions. English requires the bare infinitive form of the verb after the auxiliaries **must** and **can**. However, the equivalent of these constructions in Arabic requires the infinitive particle **?an**. This explains why Arab students of English produce constructions like these in (9). Again, this may be related to applying the Arabic value of the relevant parameter to English data that require a different setting or value. One might also argue that this discrepancy in the use of an infinitive particle is idiosyncratic in that different auxiliaries within the same language may behave differently due to the differences in their subcategorisation. This may explain, for instance, why **have** and **ought** in English select the particle **to**, whereas **may** and **can** do not. This also explains why Arabic **yajib** (must) and **yumkin** (may) require **?an** as an infinitive particle, whereas **qad** (may) does not.

4.6. Insertion of Unnecessary Prepositions

Misuse of prepositions can also be an indicator of L1 interference. Consider the following examples:

- (10) a- *T.V. entered **to** every house.
- b- *He is studying **in** abroad.
- c- *She needs **to** many days.
- d- *I felt **by** a great pleasure.

- (11) He is studying abroad.

The problem with the constructions in (10) lies in the insertion of an unnecessary preposition. Probably, this misuse has to do with the classification of verbs in terms of subcategorisation. The English verbs in the examples in (10), unlike their Arabic counterparts, do not permit a preposition to follow. Accordingly, the sequences in (10) are ungrammatical. In Arabic, each of these verbs requires a preposition. This suggests that the property of subcategorisation may have to be parameterised in the sense that verbs in different languages may select different categories (i.e., either an NP or a PP in the examples in (10) as objects or complements. Alternatively, this variation in verb subcategorisation in Arabic and English will be idiosyncratic (i.e., language-specific). Otherwise, it will be difficult to explain the fact that the examples in (10) are grammatical in Arabic but not in English, as the data in (10) and (11) show. No matter what the syntactic explanation for this discrepancy is, the problem in the constructions in (10) is one of L1 interference in the learning of L2.

4.7. The Use of Subjectless Sentences

What has been said about the examples (4-10), above, in terms of parametric variation between Arabic and English can be true of a construction like that in (12), for example:

- (12) *Sometimes happens that one element is very important

The problem in this example is that there is a missing expletive subject, which is *it*.⁶ This is another area where Arabic and English are different and this difference can be captured only in terms of parameterisation. That is, languages, cross-linguistically, can be split into two groups. Languages like English belong to the first group which allows the occurrence of expletive subjects (these are subjects that have no semantic content and were called dummy subjects by traditional grammarians). Languages like Arabic which belongs to the other group of languages, do not permit the use of such subjects. In (12), the Arab learner of English used the Arabic value of the relevant parameter to the English data, due to the interference of the syntax of his/her native language in the syntax of the foreign language. The outcome of this intrusion is an ill-formed construction.

4.8. World Order Variation

The final type of errors I want to discuss in this paper are errors related to word order variation as exemplified by (13):

(13) *In that story happened many actions and things.

Clearly, the ungrammaticality of (13) is attributable to the fact that the verb precedes the subject, yielding a VS (i.e., verb followed by subject) word order. It is a well known fact that English almost only allows SVO word order since the use of VSO constructions in this language is very limited indeed.⁷ Arabic, on the other hand, is more flexible and allows a number of possibilities in so far as word order is concerned.⁸ In fact, Arabic is known to be a VSO language as this structure is very basic and is the most common of all structures in this language. Given this, one may argue that word order variation in English and Arabic is also parameterisable. Hence, it is quite natural that the two languages choose two distinct values of the word order parameter. In (13), once more the Arab learner of English has applied the Arabic value (i.e., VSO) of the word order parameter to English data and the outcome is naturally ungrammatical.

5. Analysis and Explanation of the Data

Having identified a number of errors that result from the interference of Arabic syntax in the syntax of English as a foreign language, I move to give a coherent account for this interference in terms of the framework of Principles and Parameters, as outlined by Noam Chomsky (1995) in "Some notes on economy of derivation and representation."

According to the P&P theory, problems of syntactic interference resulting from structural differences between foreign and native language can be accounted for in terms of parametric variation cross-linguistically, contrary to Zobl's (1984) argument that the influence of the native language on the foreign one is witnessed only in the peripheral or marked rules where there are no linguistic universals involved. Similarly, Ellis (1985) argues that the difficulty of learning a foreign language has to do with whether the rules that are not observed in the process of learning a foreign language are universal or language-specific. However, not only marked but even unmarked constructions can be a source of learning difficulty. Analysis of the data show that the difficulty may arise even in the case of universal rules that are parameterizable cross-linguistically. It seems, then, that whenever the language learner encounters a difficulty, he/she appeals to his/her native language to solve the problem. Hence, transfer problems arise particularly in areas of foreign language which are different from the learner's L1, or relatively more marked than in the L1.

Our explanation of the data (i.e., syntactic errors) presented in this paper is that Arabic and English chose different values for the relevant parameters. Therefore, native speakers of each language fix the relevant parameters differently, in accordance with the appropriate parametric value. In effect, this means that after being exposed to positive evidence, such as constructions with nominal clauses, null operators, double subjects, resumptive pronouns, missing subjects, etc., Arab children fix these parameters by opting to values different from the values that are appropriate for English, because they are exposed to positive evidence that is different from the positive evidence provided by English. When Arabic speakers start to learn English, as a foreign language, they carry on using the same old values of the parameters. These old values are suitable for Arabic but not for English. Therefore, we get errors like those in (4-13). In other words, Arab learners of English fail to re-adjust or modify the parameters in light of the new English data. So the problem lies in resetting the already fixed parameters. Learners of L2 have to reset or re-fix the parameters in accordance with the new type of data which, in effect, function as new positive evidence or a trigger, as argued by Hyams (1986). Thus, the process of learning a foreign language becomes a process of providing new values to the same parameters concerned.

This explanation suggests that interference errors, like those seen in (4-13), above, are actually predictable, assuming that the students are from an Arabic speaking community. It implies that the students would probably not have made these errors, had they not been native speakers of Arabic. It becomes clear, then, that syntactic errors occurring in the process of foreign language learning result from cross-linguistic variation in the parametric values regarding each type of grammatical error. This particularly is what contributes to the predictability of these errors and the understanding of the process of foreign language learning. That is, these errors occur because of the learner's linguistic background in Arabic, as a first language, and its variation or difference from English, which is the foreign language being learned. Our explanation of the mechanism according to which interference of syntactic errors, as demonstrated above, shows how these errors provide a very significant source of information and insight into foreign language learning, as they indicate the way learners construct their own rules and, consequently, grammar on the basis of previous linguistic experience (i.e., knowledge of Arabic rules/grammar). It also shows how learners of L2 readjust these rules of their native language to accommodate the new/foreign rules. Thus, it is evident that the errors made in the process of foreign language learning provide a good picture of what goes on in the mind of the foreign language learner.

Finally, our analysis of the data of this paper, in terms of the P&P account, has pedagogical implications in so far as teaching English as a foreign language is concerned, as this analysis demonstrates and specifies what kind of evidence to which the teacher needs to particularly expose his/her students. Because parameter fixation is slow and because it requires a lot of exposure to relevant experience in the sense of Rizzi (1997), exposing students to a particular type of data repeatedly will enable these students to reset their L1 parameters in the light of this new (i.e., foreign) type of data, which will count as new positive evidence in L2. However, exposing students to the new data may not be sufficient due to various factors, so it has to be accompanied by explicit explanation of rules in order to maximize the possibility, on behalf of the student, of complying with the new data via readjustment. In addition to being exposed to the relevant type of English data, Arab learners of English as a foreign language need to be taught or told that English does not allow overt resumptive pronouns, for instance. On the other hand, they need to be told that this language requires an overt copula in copular constructions and an overt relative pronoun or operator in constructions where this pronoun is anteceded by a definite NP and so on, and so forth. Furthermore, learners should be corrected whenever they fail to re-adjust their parameters in the appropriate way. This may justify the need for a specific grammar teaching in the language laboratory or classroom. We believe that such a measure will help in bridging the gap that results from the lack of positive evidence in L2. Therefore, teaching grammar of the foreign language in this way will trigger the resetting of the parameters concerned.

6. Conclusion

We conclude this study by emphasizing that the Principles and Parameters framework, through the parametric variations it allows, is more consistent than any of the other models discussed in sections 2 and 3 of this paper (i.e., Contrastive Analysis and Error Analysis), and it obviates any significant role for either of them in foreign language learning. Furthermore, this framework accounts for interlanguage errors and the whole process of L2 learning in terms of a number of principles and parameters that make up Universal Grammar. Needless to say, these principles and parameters are independently motivated. Thus, principles of UG which constitute a significant part of the P & P theory interact with existing L1 knowledge and with input data from L2 to offer a systematic explanation of the cognitive process adopted by Arab university students learning English as a foreign language.

NOTES

1. In fact, I have taught English at different universities in three Arab countries: Syria, Jordan, and Kuwait, and I noticed that many students made the same syntactic errors.
2. However, one has to be cautious as one might be tempted to say that the noun phrase may not have the head noun in initial position when it is preceded by a determiner or adjective, etc., as in: **the man**.

Here, the noun **man** seems not to occupy the initial position of the NP. Our reply to such apparent counter-evidence is that categories of the determiner type are not obligatory elements within the NP. They are optional, therefore they do not count in so far as the head-initial/head-final parameter is concerned. Furthermore, more recent research in phrase structure grammar argues, for existence, of independent phrases or maximal projections for determiners (DET) and other functional elements such as tense (TNS), agreement (AGR), negation (NEG), etc. See in this regard Ouhalla (1988) for evidence from and Hasan (1990) for Arabic.

3. If we consider human languages in terms of the availability of nominal clauses, we may come to the conclusion that some these languages, including Arabic and Berber, allow such clauses, while others including English, French, etc., do not. This is not to say that nominal clauses occur freely in the languages that permit them, as illustrated by the ill-formedness of constructions of the following type:

(i) rajulun fi ad-daari.

a-man in the-house

(A man is in the house.)

On the contrary, the occurrence of a nominal clause is restricted by certain conditions that are manifested in the exact wording of the parameter. For further details on nominal clauses, the reader is referred to Ouhalla (1988).

4. For a detailed classification of pronouns see Sells (1984), who clearly shows the distinction between resumptive pronouns and other types of pronouns.
5. I was informed by a friend of mine that Japanese allows triple subject constructions. If this proves to be the case, then the parameter has to be extended to account for multiple, rather than just double, subject constructions. Further research on this point is needed to clarify the matter. As for Arabic, traditional Arab grammarians would not accept the assumption that there might be more than one subject in clauses like (i):

(i) al-waladu kataba huwa ar-risala

the-boy wrote he the-letter

(The boy wrote the letter.)

(ii) al-waladu huwa kataba ar-risala

the-boy he wrote the-letter

In (i), the first NP **al-waladu** is considered a structural subject or 'mubtadaa', whereas the second one **huwa** is the subject. Regardless of the way we try to handle this situation, the fact of the matter is that (i) has two NPs and (ii) has three: **al-waladu**, **huwa**, and an implied **huwa** between the verb **kataba** and the object **ar-risala**, given that Arabic is a VSO language.

6. Expletives are also called pleonastics. These are NPs, like pronoun **it** and existential **there**, which have no semantic content, therefore, no inherent meaning. In this sense, expletives are similar to the dummy auxiliary **do** when used in negation or question formation. The use of such expressions is motivated only syntactically. Consider (i):

(i) It happened that nobody came to class that day.

The presence of **it** in the subject position of the main clause is attributed to syntactic reasons such as the impossibility of having an English clause that lacks an overt subject.

It is quite clear that the expletive in (i) has no semantic significance as it does not contribute to the interpretation of the sentence. Of course examples like (ii), where the subject is missing, need further research:

(ii) As was argued by the lawyer, the suspect was guilty.

The subordinate clause in (ii) has no subject, yet the sentence is fully grammatical.

The same thing can be said about support *do* in examples (iii) and (iv):

(iii) She does not like fish.

(iv) Do you speak English.

One may argue that the use of *do* in (iii) and (iv) fulfills some syntactic functions such as carrying tense and agreement.

7. An example of this is:

(i) Here comes the queen.

In this sentence, the verb comes before the subject. This is also the case in constructions that usually start with a negative element such as: 'not only', 'never', etc. as in (ii):

(ii) Never has he arrived on time.

Such examples constitute marked constructions and they are not very common in English.

8. Arabic, as a matter of fact, permits a variety of word order manifestations, as the following examples demonstrate:

(i) shahada zaydun amran.

saw Zayd-NOM Amr-ACC (VSO)

(ii) zaydun shahada amran

Zayd-NOM saw Amr-ACC (SVO)

(iii) shahada amran zaydun

saw Amr-ACC Zayd-NOM (VOS)

(iv) zaydun amran shahada

Zayd-NOM Amr-ACC saw (SOV)

(v) amran zaydun shahada

Amr-ACC Zayd-NOM saw (OSV)

(vi) amran shahada zaydun

Amr-ACC saw Zayd-NOM (OVS)

In a transformational theory of grammar, one can argue that only one of these constructions is unmarked while all the others are marked. The marked constructions are usually used to express focus or some other interpretation or even as an answer to a particular question.

WORKS CITED

- Brown, H.D. *Principles of Language Learning and Teaching*. New Jersey: Prentice Hall Regents, 1994.
- Chomsky, N. *Lectures on Government and Binding*. Dordrecht: Foris Publications, 1981.
- *Knowledge of Language: Its Nature, Origin and Use*. New York: Praeger, 1986.
- *The Minimalist Program*, Cambridge: MIT Press, 1995.
- Cook, V. "Universal Grammar and Second Language Learning", in *Applied linguistics*. Vol. 6, No. 1. 1985. 2-18.
- Corder, S. "The Significance of Learner's Errors", in *International Review of Applied Linguistics*, Vol. 5, 1976. 161-70.

- Dulay, H. and M. Burt "Should We Teach Children Syntax?" in *Language Learning*, 23. (1973): 245-58.
- Ellis, R. *Understanding Second Language acquisition*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985.
- *The Study of Second Language Acquisition*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994.
- Flynn, S. & W. O'Neil (eds.) *Linguistic Theory in Second Language Acquisition*. Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publisher, 1988.
- Haegeman, L. (ed.) *The New Comparative Syntax*, London: Longman, 1997.
- Hasan, A. "Configurationality and the Syntax of Empty Categories". Diss. Stratchlde1990.
- Hyams, N. *Language Acquisition and the Theory of Parameters*. Dordrecht: D. Reidel, 1986.
- James, C. *Contrastive Analysis*. Singapore: Longman, 1980.
- Kleinmann, H. "Avoidance Behavior in Adult Second Language Acquisition" *Language Learning*, 29. 1 (1977): 93-107.
- Lado, R. *Linguistics Across Cultures: Applied Linguistics for Language Teachers*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1957.
- Larsen-Freeman, D. and M. Long *An Introduction to Second Language Acquisition Research*, New York: Longman, 1991.
- Ouhalla, J. "The Syntax of Head Movement: A Study of Berber." Diss. University College London, 1988.
- Richards, J. "A Non-Contrastive Approach to Error Analysis" in *English Language Teaching*. 25. 3 (1971).
- Rizzi, L. "A Parametric Approach to Comparative Syntax: Properties of the Pronominal System" *The New Comparative Syntax*. Ed. Haegeman. London: Longman, 1997.
- Robinet, B. and J. Schachter *Second Language Learning Contrastive Analysis. Error Analysis and Related Aspects*. ed. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1983.
- Schachter, J. and M. Celce-Murcia "Some Reservations Concerning Error Analysis", *TESOL Quarterly* 11. (1983): 441-51.
- Sells, P. "Syntax and Semantics of Resumptive Pronouns.", Diss. MIT. 1984.
- Wardhaugh, R. "The Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis." *Second Language Learning*. Ed. Robinett and Schachter. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1983.
- White, L. "Markedness and Second Language Acquisition: the Question of Transfer" *Studies in Second Language Acquisition*. 9 (1987): 261-285.
- *Universal Grammar and Second Language Acquisition*, Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 1989.
- Zobl, H. "Cross-language Generalisations and the Contrastive Dimension of the Interlanguage Hypothesis" *Interlanguage*, Davies and Cripser. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1984.

* * *