

# Major L1 Interference Issues with the Productive and Receptive Skills for Saudi EFL Learners

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## Abstract

There are tremendous efforts presently to make the English language as the lingua franca in many Arabic speaking countries especially in the Gulf (Zughoul, 2003). However, the acquisition of the TL (Target Language) is not easy for Arab students, due to the huge differences between the L1 and L2 (Noor, 1996; Al-Bouq, 1988). The role of the mother tongue has an integral part in the SLA (Second Language Acquisition) (Stern, 1992). This study focuses on both; the productive and the receptive skills (Speaking, Writing, Reading, and Listening) to show how L1 interference enters the Saudi L2 learners' classroom and the effects it has on L2 acquisition. As L1 interference or language transfer (Gass & Selinker, 1983) is a significant topic in applied linguistics and TESOL and has played a major role in SLA (Stern, 1992 and Ellis, 1985). From the result of the interview, all the participants had agreed that L1 interference is affecting the acquisition of the TL.

**Keywords:** Language Transfer, Target Language, Foreign, L1 Interference, L2, Saudis, Linguistic

## Introduction

Decades ago, language transfer studies were mainly conducted within the framework of behavioristic psychology and were generally concerned with the effects of previous learning on new learning task and habit formation (Jin, 2000). However, today L1 transfer is studied differently from the past, and it is due to the widespread of foreign language learning and the effect the learners' L1 has in those languages. Language transfer is among the major factors that are responsible for a slow progression of the TL (Norris, 1987; Kharma and Hajjaj, 1989) in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Therefore, this study is meant to explore the major L1 interference issues with Saudi EFL learners.

## Background of Study

EFL was introduced in 1985 in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (Al-Ahaydib, 1986), however, since it was established until today, the Saudis EFL learners have been facing many challenges. However, from all those challenges they are facing the worst is L1 interference (Hajjaj, 1989). L1 Interference in general affects Saudis L2 learners' productive and receptive skills or linguistic ability and results to a slow L2 progression and development of the TL (Target Language) in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Grami (2010) cited the results of the IELTS exam, he reported that Saudi EFL learners have performed very poorly in both the receptive and

productive skills. A recent report was published by the Cambridge Examination Center in 2009 about the proficiency level of Saudi learners which has ranked them 39th of the 40 nations who participated in both academic and general training, tests (Cambridge ESOL: Research Notes, 2010 cited in Al-Seghayer, 2011, p. 45). There are many scholars who are of the opinion that language transfer can be an asset for L2 learners (Atkinson, 1993); on the other hand, there are others who believe that it can affect language growth and progression (Harmer, 2001). However, for learners in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, for whom the L1 is the Arabic language, the disadvantages are much more than the advantages when learning the TL. In fact, it can be classified as an 85% disadvantage and 15% advantage.

### **Problem Statement**

This research is intended to explore the effects of L1 interference faced by EFL learners in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, as it is a widespread phenomenon in most EFL countries but to a limited standard, however in the Kingdom, it is overcoming almost every EFL learner and leads to many negative outcomes. Learners would start an EFL course or take multiple courses and would attend for months or even years, yet they will not have been able to acquire the TL, or their language would not have reached a level where it can be assessed according to the CEFR (Common European Framework of Reference).

Ahaydib (1986) had stated that the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has undergone great political, social, and economic development, so to enhance those developments and growth, the Ministry of Education (MOE) has introduced EFL in schools. Even though EFL was officially introduced in 1985 (Al-Ghamdi & Al-Saddat, 2002), after many decades EFL had introduced in the Kingdom, EFL learners are still facing difficulties in acquiring the TL (Al-Khairi, 2013). The learning process has been through many stages, various discourses and methodologies were implemented, but the results were almost the same. So, what are the problems and challenges that are causing hindrance towards EFL learning?

EFL acquisition is on a constant rise, but it has been a well-known fact that EFL learners' proficiency level is very low in the Kingdom (Elyas & Picard, 2010). We are in 2022 and the view of Elyas, and Picard are still applicable, as EFL learners are still poorly preformed. Despite the efforts, the government is putting into the EFL industry and the huge budget that is allocated to the education sectors (Alrabai, 2016), the performance and achievements are still low and unacceptable (Rajab 2013).

### **Research Objectives**

There is a common notion that exists in the Kingdom that EFL students are weak and cannot grasp or easily comprehend SLA (Second Language Acquisition). Many advocates of this notion have stated several reasons to support their claims. However, most of their claims may be real factors or challenges for poor achievements. However, one of the factors that was given; L1 interference; may mainly contribute to the poor achievements and should be sighted as a substantial factor. Therefore, this research is meant to explore the following points: The Major L1 Interference issues with Saudi EFL Learners.

- The Major L1 Interference issues with Saudi EFL Learners with the reading skills.
- The Major L1 Interference issues with Saudi EFL Learners with the writing skills.
- The Major L1 Interference issues with Saudi EFL Learners with the listening skills.
- The Major L1 Interference issues with Saudi EFL Learners with the speaking skills

**Research Question**

As Saudi EFL learners are facing many SLA challenges, it is important to note that the main variable for most of the challenges is L1 Interference. Therefore, the research is intended to answer the one pivotal question. What are the major L1 Interference issues with Saudi EFL Learners?

**Definition of Terms (L1 interference)**

Language Interference also known as L1 interference (Parker & Riley 2005), language transfer (Dulay, 1982), interlingual (Silinker, 1972), linguistic interference and cross meaning have many meanings and definitions. It may refer to learners who use their productive and receptive skills to apply knowledge of their first language (L1) into the second language (Corder, 1993; Yule, 2006). There are many definitions, and they all have the same meaning generally, however, there are some slight differences in the strength of the meaning between the advocates of L1 interference. Dulay (1982) states that it is an automatic transfer due to the habit of the surface structure of the L1 in the surface structure of L2. Karshen's (1982) definition is almost the same as Dulay's. However, this definition is debatable and may not completely apply to Arab learners. If there were similarities between the TL and the learners L1, the definition would apply, but there are huge differences between the two languages. Albert and Obler (1978) claim that learners show more lexical interference on similar structure and form. So, languages with a similar structure like English and French are more susceptible to beneficial interference than languages with lesser similar features like Arabic and English or Japanese and English.

On the other hand, Ellis (1997) refers to language interference as 'transfer', which he describes as 'the influence that the learners' L1 exerts over the acquisition of the L2'. Ellis argues that transfer is governed by learners' perceptions about what is transferable at the stage of development in the TL, and in acquiring the TL learners construct their own interim rules. Ellis's (1997) definition and understanding of the subjects are more compatible for Arab L2 learners; it is more applicable to them due to the complexes on the mother tongue. Lott (1983) has a similar definition that may apply to the Arab learners as he added, errors in the learners' use of the TL that can be traced back to their L1. Can this definition be applied to the language that is like the TL? Yes, but it would have very little effect.

**Advantages of Using L1 in the Classroom**

This topic can be viewed and divided into three parts, and they are all vital importance since they are very prevalent in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

1. Learners use their L1 in whatever way they see fit in acquiring the TL.
2. Teachers use the learners' L1 for teaching the L2 (non-native speakers).
3. Teachers teach the L2 using L2 (native speakers).

These scenarios are all in existence in Saudi Arabia. They can either be beneficial, harmful, or they can be both.

The benefits of the learners using their L1 are numerous as Atkinson (1987) stated, he claims that L1 might be useful for the following reasons: in the translation of the L2 which is preferred by learners, and through which negative transfer may be avoided. L1 gives them a sense of humor and it helps them to reveal their feelings. It helps the learners to be aware of the differences between the L1 and the TL. L1 is also beneficial in eliciting, checking comprehension, giving instructions, cooperating among learners, discussions of classroom

methodology, presentation, reinforcement of language, testing, development of useful learning strategies and saving or minimizing the classroom time for more useful tasks.

Tang (2002); Harbord (1992); Sharma (2006) support most of the above points as Atkinson and have stated them as advantages for Language interference. Harbord (1992) also supports these reasons for employing L1 and adds that L1 can enhance and keep the flow of communication. In addition, Butzkamm (2003) has summarized the principles and advantages of using L1 as follows: L1 in the classroom gives a sense of security and helps learners to be stress-free. It is the greatest asset people bring to the task of EFL learning. It gives a foreign language a friendly atmosphere that is best achieved through the selective use of the L1. The use of the L1 saves learners from a feeling of frustration that might have affected their EFL learning. L1 techniques allow teachers to use richer and more authentic texts, which mean more comprehensible input and faster acquisition. All newly acquired EFL items must sink roots in our minds which are eventually deep enough for the items to function independently of the L1.

### **Disadvantages of using L1 in the Classroom**

Harmer (2001) stated that the use of L1 in the classroom can be seen as uncommunicative, boring, pointless, and irrelevant. However, it is very difficult to learn a new language without using the learners' mother tongue but, there should be a limit in referring to the L1, and not to be on the two extremes, which are using it widely and completely abstaining from using it. It should be used sporadically as mentioned by Atkinson (1993); Tang (2002) and others.

The advent of CLT (Communicative Language Teaching) strictly prohibited the use of L1 in the classroom for the following reasons: it hampers the learners' progress; it causes learners to get lazy and complacent of the TL. It invites to a slow learning process; it causes fossilization of the TL and finally learners focus on the mechanical aspects of the L2 and do not focus on speaking the TL freely. Krashen (1981) suggested that comprehensible input should provide opportunities for subconscious and implicit learning, which leads to achieving language competence. Therefore, to acquire language successfully and to maintain the superiority of the TL, it may imply totally abstaining from the learners' L1 in the classroom. Other advocates like Kharma and Hajjaj (1989), concluded that learners' L1 should not be used in the EFL classroom since the aim is to acquire a native-like second language.

### **The Argument for using L2 only**

Many EFL intellectuals argue that successful SLA depends on focusing on the L2 only in the classroom (Harmer, 2002 and Krashen, 1981). This indicates that the aim and goal of SLA are coordinating bilingualism in which the L1 and L2 form distinct systems in the mind rather than compound bilingualism by which they form a single compound system (Selinkar, 1995). This theory for L2 alone was established during the mid-century, such as contrastive analysis (Lado, 1957) which means if L2 depends on L1, then L1 should be removed from the classroom. Krashen and Terrell (1983) who advocate CPH (Critical Period Hypothesis) are of the opinion that L2 can be acquired like L1. Which means without the intervention of other languages. Ellis (1984) stated that many authors are of the opinion that the L1 has no place in the EFL or SLA classroom and too much use of L1 may deprive the learners of acquiring the TL. When CLT was introduced, it called for a classroom free of the L1. Teachers who have followed this approach have innovated many ways to teach the points that were mentioned by Atkinson (1993) instead of using the L1. Teachers would use pictures, role play, shown

signs or mime whatever they wanted to teach. They would even refer to learners who have a strong L2 background to assist in the process. Teachers would do whatever they could to keep L1 out of the classroom (Howatt, 1984).

### Literature Review

Language interference is a very old SLA issue that is sometimes beneficial or harmful. Many general reasons were given for L1 interference that may apply to Arab learners or may not. Lott (1983) stated three factors for language interference: the interlingua factor, the overextension of the analogy and the transfer of structures. Lott (1983), three categories are pretty much applicable to the L2 learners, but I believe that those factors are general and apply to L1 interference as a subject and its reasons.

When examining the interlingua factor, it can be argued, on one hand that it's not the case for L1 learners who are acquiring English, since they are completely different. On the other hand, it can affect language acquisition due to the learner's cognitive ability or behaviorism. As for the other two points, they are directly attributed to Saudi learners. The overextension of analogy and the transfer of structures can be viewed as problems that affect all L2 learners. The overextension of analogy can be defined as the similarities between vocabulary, structure, grammatical rulings, word order, articles, prepositions, and subject and verb agreement. It is a known fact that L2 learners naturally refer to their L1 as a source in acquiring the TL. The learners would try to always find the equivalent in their L1 if they are having difficulties to comprehend the task. This can create either a positive or negative outcome on language acquisition. Dulay (1982) differentiates interference into two parts; psychological and sociolinguistic, which can be classified as a summary for L1 interference. Psychological refers to the influence of old habits when new ones are being learned, whereas sociolinguistic refers to the interaction of languages when two different languages are in contact.

According to David (1987) and Tang (2002), language transfer is considered positive when both languages (L1 and L2) are very similar to each other. Negative transfer, however, refers to those instances which results in errors because of old habitual behaviors which are different from the new behaviors that are being learned. The negative outcome which is considered errors is called interference.

Parker (2005) states that L2 learner may exhibit either negative transfer, which is also known as interference, in which some property of the learners' L1 impedes the acquisition of the TL, or positive transfer, which is also known as facilitation, in which some property of the learners' L1 promotes the acquisition of the TL. The Arabic language is very old in its existence, for it has well-established theoretical studies for more than 1000 years (Al-Muhtaseb, 1984). It is very rich in its nature and is completely different from the English language. L2 learners in the kingdom of Saudi Arabia believe that L1 and the TL are similar and tend to apply it in SLA. During the process, they go away with the wrong understanding of the TL which they use incorrectly and cause language errors that sometimes take learners' years to rectify.

Advocates of L1 transfer have stated several factors that affect language transfer. Odlin (1989) classifies these factors into two types, (1) structural factors, (2) nonstructural factors. These two factors have affected Saudi L2 learners severely due to the structure of the L1 and the learners' CPH and context. Structural factors are those factors that lead to both types of transfer (positive and negative) and include those similarities and differences which occur at the level of the formal structure of the linguistic system of the two languages. Albert and Obler (1978) state Arabic language learners have been affected by this type of factor mainly

in Saudi Arabia due to the differences between the L1 and L2. As many scholars have agreed that the differences between the L1 and the L2 are the main reasons for language errors (Dulay et al., 1982; Selinker, 1985; Corder, 1985). Nonstructural factors are those factors that don't have a direct connection with the mechanical structure of the language itself or variables outside the linguistic system of the language. Odlin (1989) categorized the non-structural factors into three groups: the individual variation, the age of acquisition, and the social context of the learners. These factors have played a major role in language transfer as the structure factors.

There are many advocates who support the use of both languages in the classroom. Atkinson (1993); Macaro (2001); Tang (2002); Beauvillain & Grainger (1987); Cook (1994); Obler (1982); Locastro (1987); Mukattash (2003); Selinker (1972); Harboud (1992), all support the use of L1 in an L2 setting, and state that it enhances the TL, even though they may vary from what type of skills and language points it should be used for in teaching the TL. However, this debate or discussion is a very long one and it is not a case of lawful and prohibits. They all have evidence to prove their case which can be read in the following article.

### **Research Methodology**

Today's qualitative researcher is faced with several qualitative research possibilities as one can choose from a variety of inquiry tactics (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005), inquiry traditions (Creswell, 1998), qualitative approaches (Miller & Crabtree, 1992), and design types (Creswell, 2007). However, this chapter on Research Methodology will specifically highlight how this thesis will be carried out step by step to make it comprehensible and vividly clear of its procedures.

### **Research Design**

Research design is a blueprint that requires systemic planning, procedures and protocols that lead researchers to authentic findings (Vogt & Johnson, 2011). The process produces evidence and establishes the goal of the research (Berends, 2006). This research is qualitative research utilizing an exploratory phenomenology case study approach.

The IPA approaches (interpretative phenomenological analysis) is used; as this approach (IPA) gives a in depth understanding of the world of the participants and their personal experiences in a given area (Willig, 2008; Shinebourne, 2011). There would be a case study that would provide this research with all its data. The case study would be in the form of an unstructured interview. There would also be an analytic approach which involves a detailed description of the case as well as the setting of the case within contextual conditions (Yin, 2003), and a presentation that may or may not be chronological (Ponterotto & Grieger, in press). This case study research will build an insight and a contextual understanding of the case that would depend on multiple data sources (Yin, 2003).

### **Participant: EFL Learners**

The population is needed to be clearly defined before starting the data collection (Stangor, 2011). Therefore, the population that will be targeted is EFL learners, since the topic is EFL in the Kingdom, it would be fitting to focus on learners' right here in the Kingdom. It will be carried out in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia at Al Maarefa University for Medical Science, one of the higher education institutions in the Kingdom which focuses on the PYP (Preparatory



Year Program) for EFL learners, which in conformity with the requirement with IPA, as IPA requires participants to be on the same level to arrive at the best and accurate result or conclusion. The university L2 learners are classified into many categories; there are those who are exempted from the General English Program because they have met the language requirements, either by obtaining the necessary grades requirement in IELTS, TOEFL and STEP examinations. The second group is those who must study the TL in the PY program because of their low English proficiency level. So, this study will be carried out on the second group who must study the TL. It will target Saudi L2 learners aged 18 and above, those who have finished high school, and will be studying at universities and colleges. All these learners have some background or language awareness about the TL based on their previous learning experiences from high schools or other language institutions like Berlitz and the British Council. Most of them have studied EFL for at least five years, but they still have a very low proficiency level in the TL. However, they are not considered young learners who can acquire the TL without much influence of the L1. So, acquiring the TL can be very complex and challenging for them.

### **Instruments**

The case study is of an unstructured interview will be most appropriate for the IPA approach in gathering data. The interview process has followed a few stages; (1) the interview protocols will be prepared, and tested then, (2) The teachers are contacted to arrange with the students or participants, (3) The participants are contacted by phone or WhatsApp to set up the interview venue, date, and time, (4) The follow up stage to get feedback after the interview from the participants about the process.

### **Result**

L1 interference affects the TL across the board for Arab learners. The differences between the TL and the L1 are not only in one skill or rule but rather in all aspects of the language. From the result of the interview Saudi learners tend to use their L1 in all the various aspects of language acquisitions while they are learning the TL. The four skills are generally taught separately in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Many times, when the skills are taught the learners would use their L1 that coincides with that skill and try to compare and comprehend it. As noted earlier, the L1 and L2 are both completely different, so comparing the L1 with the L2 would result in a very slow progression and understanding of the TL. After the data was collected and coded, it was placed into subordinate and main themes, and the themes were used to provide the result and the discussion.

The result has shown the major L1 Interference issues with Saudi EFL learners. All of them have issues with their L1. From the result data, the main themes were based on the following four findings:

1. L1 interference is affecting the L2 learners' reading skills
2. L1 interference is affecting the L2 learners' writing skills
3. L1 interference is affecting the L2 learners' listening skills
4. L1 interference is affecting the L2 learners' speaking skills

All the participants have shown and explained how L1 interference are affecting their productive and receptive skills. The data was very transparent and explicit, the result was extracted very easily and shows the L1 interference on the four language skills.

## Discussion

### **L1 interference is affecting the L2 learners Reading skills**

Reading is done primarily for comprehension, so it is necessary to study reading skills when learning the TL since it plays an integral role in developing the learners' language ability (Walter and Swan 2009). When reading is taught, special attention is given to comprehension, referencing, inference, main idea, and words in context. These may be considered the most important points when focusing on reading as a text to give it a general understanding. The different subskills like scanning, skimming, reading for gist, main idea and detailed reading are strange to the learners. When teaching the TL, these are what the learners need to concentrate on even many researchers like Walter and Swan (2009) questioned the value of these types of tasks. However, these sub-skills (scanning and skimming) are very difficult to the learners since they are not taught in the learners' L1. Rather the learners' L1 is mostly comprehension task which the learners normally use when studying the target language. All the other teaching points for the reading skills are considered strange to the learners. The question arises here; do they exist in the learners' L1? Are they new rules? Or it may be that they do exist, but they have never been taught to the learners.

L2 learners read and process information differently from native English Speakers. Even the structure of their mother language is completely different from the target language. For instance, the learners L1 is written from the right to the left, so they must read as it is written. L2 learners must change their reading pattern from right to left. This is the first major encounter that the L2 learners have faced. This changing process sometimes takes a long while to embed into the learners, especially if the learners are in their late teens and are now learning the TL. This structure itself is very difficult and always confuses the learners.

Learners are also not aware of the different reading skills that are found in the L2 reading skills; they are only familiar with general comprehension questions. Asking for the main idea, supporting, and concluding sentences are very strange and new to the learners. The teachers must spend extra hours teaching these sub-skills and they take a long while for the learners to comprehend and use them. As for the other reading skills like skimming, scanning, referencing, inference, and others, they must be taught as new skills since they are new to the learners.

### **Language interference that affects the L2 learners' Writing skills**

Writing for L2 learners is a great disaster (Abdul Haq, 1982) both physically writing (to hold a pen and write) and writing as a skill (to write or structure a sentence, paragraph etc.). Physically writing means "how the L2 learners literally write". They write from right to left, which is the opposite of English language (Swan and Smith, 2001). Learners find it very difficult to literally write since it is the opposite of what they are used to. Also, Arabic letters can be changed into three different shapes according to the position of the letters in the word. For example, the letter 'BA- ب' at the beginning of the word, it has a special shape as well as the middle and the end of the word. This rule applies to all the Arabic letters.

When it comes to the actual writing skills, they are not familiar with the different writing skills. These skills are not taught to the L2 learners, as a result writing becomes very difficult and most of the time they are stagnated and don't know what to write. L2 learners usually write without any plans so they end up writing whatever information they can think of. They do not



use brainstorming as a plan before their writing. Their paragraphs don't have any topic sentence, supporting sentences or concluding sentence. Their paragraphs are basically one piece of writing without any punctuation, structure, and main ideas, they also do not focus on syntax, coherence, cohesion, punctuation, capitalization, and spelling which make their paragraphs meaningless and incomprehensible.

### **Language Interference that Affects the L2 learners Listening Skills**

Listening is considered the most important skill to promote and assist in SLA. It has a quick and native-like effect on the learners. In the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, listening is highly promoted as a skill to enhance the TL. Apart from listening tasks that are found in EFL textbooks, many other listening tasks are given to the learners due to the effectiveness of listening in SLA. However, Saudi L2 learners are facing difficulties to comprehend many of the listening tasks even though they may be suitable for the learners' level. This is due to many reasons which are given by the L2 learners themselves. They always complain that the listening tasks are too fast, or they can't understand the dialects or the vocabulary is too difficult or due to lexical segmentation, etc., but there are many rules and solutions for these problems. There are many problems that are found in almost all languages. As learners always claim that they can't understand because the sentences sound like one word (lexical segmentation) but this is an invalid point because words merging into each other (Field, 2008) exist stronger in the learners' L1.

They may have some valid points for these reasons, however, after critically examining those points, they are not quite as they have claimed but the real reason is language interference. L2 learners do not have the ability to listen for details and are not accustomed to listening tasks, especially at an academic level. The skills of listening have not been taught to Saudi L2 learners, so introducing it into the EFL classroom seems strange to them and not appropriate according to their belief. Because their comprehension skills are very poor, it eventually affects their listening ability. Learners generally can only listen to a task for the purpose of answering only one question, then listen again to the same task to answer another question, then again for another question. If many questions are given to one listening task it would be very difficult for them to answer them even after they have listened to the track three times.

### **Language Interference that Affects the L2 Learners Speaking Skills**

Speaking is the productive skill which is the focus of everyone who is learning the TL in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and elsewhere, but it is the EFL skill that most Arabs learners are facing many problems with (Harrison & Tucker, 1975). L2 learners need both the receptive and productive skills to enhance their education because many L2 learners are learning the TL for study purposes whether in the Kingdom or abroad. So academic reading and writing are necessities but are not important to learners. They all tend to focus on the speaking skill which is why EFL institutes have been set up to enhance the L2 learners speaking ability only. This can be verified by many L2 learners because when they are asked why they want to learn English, 95% of them would say for speaking purposes. The other skills aren't as important to them.

Even though great efforts are made to improve and perfect L2 learners speaking skills, they are still very weak and not productive in speaking which sometimes takes a long time for them to develop. The main reason for the slow progression is mainly L1 interference. The Arabic language is structured completely differently from the English language, so it creates an

instant interference when L2 learners try to produce the TL. This problem can be clearly recognized after analyzing the structure of the Arabic language. Here are some examples to begin with: the Arabic language has two kinds of sentences. The first type are sentences that begin with nouns and the second type are sentences that begin with verbs. When learners speak about general actions, they tend to refer to their L1 sentence structure that begins with a verb and speak in the TL with the same structure as their L1 without mentioning the subject or putting it in its appropriate place. For example, they would say “play football” or “eat in the evening” etc. instead of “I play football”.

They will also make many structural and form mistakes. They would use the wrong subjects, verb forms, and put the noun before the adjective and many other mistakes which are due to L1 interference. The details of these will be discussed later in this paper. A final point I would like to focus on here, is their pronunciation problems or phonetic interference, which is considered a great obstacle. They have problems in pronunciation, intonation, and stress, which are due to L1 interference (Wahba, 1998). Sawm and Smith (2001) stated that the TL has twenty-two vowels and diphthongs. On the contrary, the Arabic language has only eight vowels. Due to that variation, Arab EFL learners face difficulties in pronouncing words. I tend to disagree with Swan and Smith (2001) with their above statement. Arabic words are pronounced due to the sounds of the letters which are combined to form words. It does not have silent letters or letters that are written in the words and are not pronounced like the English language. For example, “walk” the /l/ is considered silent or “hour” where the /h/ is silent. However, the Arab learners would try to pronounce all the letters. Phonetic interference from the native language may occur at the phonetic level of the TL, especially when the TL shows a different phonetic or phonological system from that found in the L1. In such situations, the L2 learner will have difficulties in acquiring the sounds of the TL (Odlin, 1989). Learners may use their L1 sound or rules to pronounce the words of the TL. In other words, learners substitute the sounds and the phonological rules of his mother tongue when using the TL. This is what helps to give the learners an accent and will not produce correct English pronunciation. Odlin (1989) states “Although cross-linguistic differences in phonetics and phonology have important consequences for perception and comprehension, the most salient consequences of linguistic differences are production errors which result in pronunciation patterns that diverge from those found in the target language.”

Phonetic interference in EFL classrooms takes place when the learners use one of the sounds of Arabic while speaking the TL. When the L2 learners use sound from their L1 when learning the TL, it leads to two types of errors: segmental errors and supra-segmental errors (Odlin, 1989). Segmental errors are those errors which contain the use of vowels and consonants, whereas supra-segmental errors include patterns like stress, tone, intonation, rhythm, form, etc. Saudi learners generally experience both phonetic errors in EFL classrooms.

### **Segmental Errors in Pronunciation**

When there is a difference in the phonemic “inventories” (Odlin, 1989) in the two languages (Arabic and English), learners substitute the new phoneme with a phoneme from their L1. Parker (2005) says “one situation in particular in which L1 influence is noticeable is when the L2 makes a phonemic distinction that does not exist in the L1.” For instance, EFL Arab learners may have problems in distinguishing and pronouncing the sound /p/ from the sound /b/ because the letter /p/ does not exist in Arabic. They would say ‘bark’ instead of ‘park’ and ‘Bencil’ instead of ‘pencil’. Due to this difference, the sound /b/ influences the sound /p/; and

subsequently, the learner pronounces the two sounds in the same way. The same problem happens to the sound /v/ that could be influenced by the sound /f/ and /n/ with the letter /k/.

### **Supra-segmental Patterns**

Supra-segmental patterns in English play a major role in the language. When examining the stress pattern in the TL and the L1 they have some similarities, but they are still different from each other in the stress form. Arab learners tend to pronounce all the words in the same way without any stress. Arab L2 speakers generally use a flat intonation pattern or a mono-tone when speaking the TL which leads to a very poor and misunderstood language. Odlin (1989) stated that non-native speakers may at times risk giving offense simply from the use of intonation patterns that signal one emotional state in the native language and a different one in the target language. Intonation and different tone make our speech interested and beautiful, however, many Saudi learners don't attribute these characteristics to their speech which led to a negative outcome and are misunderstood by the listeners.

### **Recommendations**

There are many contemporary scholars of SLA who are of the opinion that L1 interference will always play a major role in SLA (Stern, 1992). Therefore, it is important for research to study all the aspect of L1 interference and present the result with viable discussions. One key aspect for researchers to focus on is LI interference with regards to all the Language Tenses.

EFL teachers working with Arab learners should have knowledge of the learners' context. In other words, they should be familiar with the learners' environment, custom, religion, social, and other aspects of the learners' context. For instance, in Saudi Arabia learners are more religiously orientated. Their cultural and social lives are encircled by their religion which is considered very strange and odd to many other EFL learners' contexts. According to Odlin (1989), an EFL teacher should learn and make a simple comparison between the L1 and TL. This will enable and equip the teachers to have a more productive and active classroom. For example, the simple present is used for the routine of a real action in the TL and in the L1 it is used for an action that is taking place now.

### **Contribution of this Study**

L1 interference is a dilemma in the Arab world, learners are spending year with the TL and yet still cannot master it due to L1. This study would help the learners to understand the effects of L1 interference and avoid it. They would have a clear insight of the TL with comparison to their L1. Most importantly, they would learn the language transfer errors and prevent it from affecting them. The long and drawn-out period learners take to acquire the TL can be reduced after understanding the effects L1 has in the receptive and productive skills.

### **Conclusion**

Language interference is a topic that has many pros and cons, and it is a widespread phenomenon in the EFL classroom. If it assists the learners' progression, then that will be considered a positive influence, but if it doesn't, then that is considered a negative influence. As for Saudis learning the TL, it is a negative influence except if it is used to explain the important point and to balance the usage to a very minimal level (Faltis, 1990). It is almost impossible to remove the learners L1 from SLA (Hammerly, 1982). So EFL teachers who have studied and made a comparison of the TL and the learners' L1 will know better what the real

learning problems are and can provide dynamic and better teaching environments for the L2 learners (Odlin, 1989). Learners will always refer to their L1 as a default strategy to SLA. Palmer (1988) stated that we cannot stop the learner from forming bilingual associations if he wishes to do so. EFL Teachers have a great duty to study the learners' context and acquire the general knowledge of their mother tongue to assist the learners in SLA. There is no one best method (McKay, 2002), teachers need to improvise new methods and techniques in the classroom. As Halliday (1994) suggests in his argument for the two types of CLT '*weak version and strong version*' that learners are allowed to use their mother tongue, when necessary, among themselves in class and in group work but must report their result in the TL.

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