# L₁ and Second Language Learning: A Non-Stop Debate

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**Abstract**
Many institutions in the Arab world have prohibited the use of L₁ in the classroom which is commonly perceived to be an impediment to L₂ learning.  This pedagogical decision, however, is not fully supported by recent research findings, which suggest that L₁ reduces learner anxiety, plays a scaffolding role in collaborative tasks, and can be a source of cognitive support for L₂ learners.
The present study, first, traces the conceptual history of the notion "language transfer" from its early beginning to its current position within Universal Grammar.  Second, it problematises the exclusion of L₁ from the classroom and supports the notion of incorporating students' input into pedagogical decision making processes. Third, it shows, as an example, how L₁ culture affects the written production of L₂ learners.
**Keywords:**  Native Language, Native Culture, L₂ Learning.

**Introduction**
The last two decades have seen a "mushrooming" of our knowledge about second language learning and teaching. Almost anywhere we turn, we can find textbooks, articles, and workshops on the art and science of teaching and learning a second language. However, we are a long, long way from finding ultimate answers to the many difficult questions we have been asking. We have grown accustomed to the absence of final solution as we discover an overwhelming multiplicity of variables at play in the process of second language learning (Brown, 1988). Specifically, there has been considerable progress in the study of native language influence during the last hundred or so years; however, because of the controversies that have accompanied this progress, the findings of transfer research must be interpreted cautiously (See Bardovi-Harlig, 2006; Brown, 2009).  The subject still arouses partisan feelings, especially amongst those who do not believe in "transfer"; in some cases the result has been a shrill rejection of its significance based on irresponsibly little evidence. In other cases, a more responsible attitude is revealed, as evidenced by research which seeks to determine what precisely constitutes L₁ influence, and under what conditions, if any, it operates. Moreover, although it is true that much uncertainty remains about many issues related to cross linguistic influences, and it is undeniably true that researchers are far from able to predict with full accuracy when transfer will occur, it is also true that skeptics

are far from able to predict when transfer will never occur (Schachter, 1994; Cohen, 2008). To summarize, when one looks at the mass of material that has been presented as evidence for $L_1$ influence, and then the counter-evidence that is brought forward which contradicts it, it will be apparent that a theory of some sort is a necessity. In this regard, Brown (1988: xii) points out that no single discipline or theory or model or factor will ever provide a magic formula for solving the mystery of second language acquisition.

In discussing native language influence on $L_2$ acquisition, we need to keep in mind that there is no single scientific truth, In this connection, McLaughlin (1988: 6), correctly, points out that "disciplines tend to become fragmented into 'schools', whose members are loath to accept, and are even hostile to the views of other schools using different methods and reaching different conclusions. Each group becomes convinced that it has a corner on 'truth'. One philosophical position contends that truth can never be known directly and in its totality. Multiple ways of seeing result in multiple truths. Scientific progress is achieved as we come to illuminate progressively our knowledge in a particular domain by taking different perspectives, each of which must be evaluated in its own right".

## Rationale for the Study

Using students' first language ($L_1$) in an English language classroom is a controversial issue. According to Ntombela & Dube (2010), such controversy stems from two conflicting ideologies, namely monolingual and biolingual approaches: "whilst the biolingual approach accepts the viability of $L_1$ especially in EFL context where English is normally not the medium of communication, the monolingual approach insists on the interference of $L_1$ on $L_2$ and hence argues for an 'English only' policy (p. 76) (See Swift, 2006; Nazary, 2008; Larrea, 2002; Krieger, 2005; Van Diestze et al., 2009; Walker, 2009; Al Hinai, 2006; Kimberly, 2009; Nation, 2008).

Keeping the above in mind, I would like to argue that (1) viewing transfer as the single most important reality of second language acquisition is risky, though no more so than viewing transfer as a negligible factor in $L_2$ acquisition; and 2) the learning of a language must be viewed as a very complex process of which the development of a grammatical system is only one part. Properties of $L_1$ and $L_2$ certainly do have some influence on this process and may account for some aspects of the learner's interlanguage. Other factors especially psychological ones are likely to be of much greater importance for our understanding of the process of $L_2$ acquisition, including linguistic and non-linguistic strategies involved. This view seems to be compatible with Ellis (1985: 40)' view: "While the learner's native language is an important determinant of second language acquisition, it is not the only determinant; however, and may not be the most important. But it is theoretically unsound to attempt a precise specification of its contribution or even try to compare its contribution with that of other factors" (See Beare & Bourdages, 2007; Centeno-Cortes & Jienez, 2004).

## Discussion
### "Transfer" as a Notion
In the terminology of second language research, the term 'transfer' is as problematic as any. Whitney (1881) used the term 'transfer' to refer to cross- linguistic influences, long before any linguists thought of it or linking it to the notion of habit formation. After that,

Thorndike and Woodworth (1901) proposed one of the first, and most durable, theories of transfer. They suggested that transfer from one task to another would occur only if the two tasks contained identical Stimulus Response (S-R) elements.

Much of the dislike of the term "transfer" comes from its traditional association with behaviorism. Behaviorism is now so widely discredited in the field of psycholinguistics that some leading textbooks in that field give no attempt to behaviorist analysis. Moreover, Carroll (1968) makes clear that the behaviorist notion of transfer is quite different from the notion of native language influence. For one thing, the behaviorist notion of transfer often implies the extinction of earlier habits, whereas the acquisition of a second language does not lead to any replacement of the learner's primary language. On the other hand, some scholars such as Corder (1983); Kellerman and Smith (1986) have advocated abandoning the term or using it only in highly restricted ways. More specifically Corder pleads for the abandonment of the term and its replacement by 'mother tongue influence', on the grounds that 'transfer' belongs properly to behaviorist learning theory, and it is better to keep terms to their appropriate domains. Krashen (1983) claims that transfer can still be regarded as padding, or the result of falling back on old knowledge, the $L_l$ rule, when new knowledge is lacking. He further claims that use of an $L_1$ rule is not 'real' progress. It may be merely a production strategy that cannot help acquisition.

Regardless of the divide in opinion as to "transfer" as a term or notion, there are a number of reasons for language teachers and linguists to consider the problem of transfer. Odlin (1996) points out that (1) teaching may become more effective through a consideration of differences between languages and between cultures. (2) Consideration of the research showing similarities in errors made by learners of different backgrounds will help teachers to see better what may be difficult or easy for anyone learning the language they are teaching. (3) Research on transfer is also important for a better understanding of the nature of language acquisition in any context and is thus of interest to anyone curious about what is common to all languages; that is; language universals.

In the next section, I will trace the conceptual history of language transfer from its early beginning to its current position within Universal Grammar. It must be kept in mind that serious thinking about cross- linguistic influences dates back to a controversy in historical linguistics in the 19th century. Those who were involved in this controversy were not interested in second language acquisition or language teaching but rather language classification and language change (Odlin, 1996).

**Historical Linguistics. Language Classification, and Language Change**
Language contact situations arise whenever there is a meeting of speakers who do not all share the same language and who need to communicate. The languages learned contact situations may or may not show some kind of language mixing; that is, the merging of characteristics of two or more languages in any verbal communication. If mixing does occur, native language influence is only one of the possible forms it can take. Another kind of mixing is in the form of borrowings from a second language into the native language. Another kind is code -switching in which there is a systematic

interchange of words, phrases, and sentences of two or more languages (Odlin, 1996). Two points must be emphasized in this regard: 1) as Le Page and Keller (1985) point out, any introduction of loanwords or other kinds of language mixing may be viewed either as a kind of linguistic intrusion or as a 'foreign import' sometimes welcome, sometimes not; and 2) as Thomason (1981) states, people tended to associate language contact and mixing with 'contamination'.

In the 19th century, debate about the importance of language contact and mixing intensified. Specifically, two important issues attracted the attention of many 19th century linguists' language classification and language change. Regarding language classification, many scholars believed that grammar was the soundest basis on which to construct classification. This belief was due to their awareness that lexical borrowings (Loanwords) could make classification decisions difficult. Therefore, scholars expected to find in grammar a linguistic subsystem unaffected by language contact and thus a key to distinguish any language. In his survey of bilingualism, Weinreich (1953/1968) shows that the effects of cross-linguistic influence vary according to the social context of the language contact situation. These effects can be distinguished through the use of the terms borrowing transfer or substratum transfer. Borrowing transfer refers to the influence a second language has on a previously acquired language. On the other hand, substratum transfer is the type of cross-linguistic influence investigated in most studies of second language. Such transfer involves the influence of a source language on the acquisition of a target language; the 'second' language regardless of how many languages the learner already knows. In their discussion of both types, Thomason and Kaufman (1988) argue that the differences between them reflect differences in social as well as linguistic factors. Borrowing transfer normally begins at the lexical level; whereas substratum transfer normally begins at the phonological and syntactic levels (Odlin, 1996).

**SLA Research and Learners' errors (1960s)**
There have been at least two significant approaches in the analysis of learner difficulty in acquiring a second language. The first approach is Contrastive Analysis (CA). The second approach is Error Analysis (EA). The next section is mainly concerned with presenting a discussion of the theoretical backgrounds which are of special relevance to the current study. (for more details, See De Keyser, 2003; De Bot et al., 2007; Echevarria et al., 2004; Ellis, 2002, 2005; Ellis, 2006; Eskildson, 2008; Eslami & Fatahi, 2008).
The Behaviorist view of learning provided the psychological bases of the CAH. Behaviorism assumes human behavior to be the sum of its components, and language learning to be the acquisition of all these elements. Similarly, the structural approach provided the theoretical linguistic bases for the CAH. Structural linguists assume that the comparison of descriptions of the two languages in question would enable them to determine valid contrasts between the two languages. Dulay and Burt (1972) have summed up the theoretical bases of the CAH as follows: (1) Language learning is habit formation, (2) Where $L_2$ and $L_1$ differ, the old habit (using $L_1$) hinders the formation of new habit (learning $L_2$).

In the course of the controversy over the viability of the CAH, two versions of this hypothesis have emerged: "The strong vs. the weak" or "predictive vs. explanatory"

versions as proposed by Wardhaugh (1970) or "apriori vs. aposteriori" as proposed by Gradman (1971). The idea of the strong version is that it is possible to contrast the system of one language with the system of a second language. On the basis of the results of this contrast, investigators can discover the similarities and differences between the two languages in question so that they can make predictions about what will be the points of difficulty for the learners of other languages. This version relies on the assumption that similarities will be easier to learn and differences harder. In his evaluation of the strong version of CAH, Wardhaugh (1970) points out that although some writers tried to make this version the basis for their work, it is quite unrealistic and impractical. He made the following points: "At the very least this version demands of linguists, that they have available a set of linguistic universals formulated within a comprehensive linguistic theory which deals adequately with syntax, semantics, and phonology" (p.125).

The weak version which has emerged relies on two assumptions. First, error analysis may help investigators know, through errors the learners make, what the difficulties are. Second, investigators may realize the relative difficulty of specific errors through the frequency of their occurrence (Schachter, 1974: 206-7). The weak version may be easier and more practical than the strong version on the basis that it requires of the linguist that he use his linguistic knowledge to explain the observed difficulties in second language learning. In their discussion of the validity of CAH, Whitman and Jackson (1972) support the idea that CAH is inadequate from the theoretical and practical points of view. Their arguments are based on two justifications: first, contrastive analysis is not reliable to predict the interference problems of a language learner; and second, interference of native language plays such a small role in language learning performance that no contrastive analysis could correlate highly with performance data. However, most of the valid CA evidence seems to be phonological; that is, contrastive analysis may be most predictive at the level of phonology and less predictive at the syntactic level. Present research results suggest that the major impact $L_I$ has on $L_2$ acquisition may have to do with accent, not with grammar or syntax (Dulay, Burt & Krashen, 1982: 96). This may explain the phenomena that people from distinct communities do not speak English in the same way. Arabic native speakers, for instance, may speak English differently from Chinese or Japanese people. Even among Arabic native speakers, there are some differences in the way they produce English. The Egyptian people, for example, do not speak English the same way as those from Jordan or Saudi Arabia or Lebanon do. This may be attributable, in the first case, to the influence of the structure of the $L_1$ phonology and, in the second case, to dialectal differences. It is safe to say, therefore, that mispronunciation on the part of $L_2$ learners may be traceable, in one way or another, to language transfer, i.e., $L_I$ interference (See Conley, 2008; Han, 2005; Jiang, 2007; Hoey, 2007; Kimberly, 2009).

The assumption that similarities between the native and the target languages will be easier to learn and differences harder is rejected by a group of scholars. Pica (1984: 694), for example, maintains that the divergent areas between the learner's LI and the target language do not represent the greatest learning difficulties. She claims that learning difficulties may be attributable to those areas which share considerable similarity. Some differences between languages do not always lead to significant learning difficulties. As Stockwell et al (1965) pointed out, the two verbs Conocer and Saber in Spanish correspond

to different senses of the English verb Know. While this lexical difference poses many problems for English speakers learning Spanish, Spanish speakers learning English seem to have little difficulty in associating two lexical senses with one form. To sum up, contrastive analysis' treatment of errors rests on a comparison of the learner's native and target languages. Differences between the two were thought to account for the majority of an $L_2$ learners' errors. That is, the greater the difference between a structure in "$L_l$ and one in $L_2$", the more difficult it is for the learner.

On the other hand, according to the Error Analysis approach, frequency of errors is proportional to the degree of learning difficulty (Brown, 1980:166). As has been mentioned before, many of the errors could not be explained in terms of $L_1$ transfer. The point which should be clear is that the EA can be characterized as an attempt to account for learner errors that could not be explained or predicted by the CAH. Error analysis research has come under fire. For example, Schachter and Celce-Murcia (1977) have pointed out that it is difficult to be certain precisely what type of error a second-language learner is making or why the learner makes it. The reasons for errors made by L2 learners are numerous: 1) intralingual transfer or the negative transfer of elements within the target language. In this regard, Taylor (1975) found that the early stages of language learning are characterized by a predominance of interlingual transfer, but once the learner has begun to acquire parts of the new system, generalization within the target language is manifested. In his definition of intralingual errors, Richards (1971) points out that these errors can be listed under three headings: A) errors attributable to incomplete application of rules; B) errors attributable to over - generalization or the creation of ill - formed structures based on the speaker's knowledge of the other structures in the second language; and c) errors attributable to failure to learn the conditions under which rules apply.

On the other hand, many studies have shown that developmental factors provide another explanation for some of the errors made by $L_2$ learners. Felix (1980) presents the theoretical assumption of the developmental nature of $L_2$ acquisition. As long as "$L_1$ learners produce ungrammatical structures before they achieve adult competence, $L_2$ learners appear to pass through developmental stages which reflect general regularities and universal processes of language acquisition. These developmental stages are not determined by the structural properties of the learner's first language (See Gass & Mackey, 2011; Hirose, 2003; Robinson & Ellis, 2011; Roca de Larios & Murphy, 2006).

As a reaction to the 'product' orientation of the morpheme studies and error analysis, and the feeling that a more 'process' oriented approach was needed, researchers began to work according to the interlanguage framework, which was developed in the late 1970s and 1980s. So, rather than focusing on the first or the target language, researchers began to develop data analytic procedures that would yield information about the dynamic qualities of language change that made the interlanguage a unique system; both similar to and different from the first and target languages. The next section will discuss the interlanguage framework, and how the issue of language transfer was analyzed by researchers working according to it.

## Interlanguage

Since the early 1970s ''interlanguage' has come to characterize a major approach to second-language research and theory. Unfortunately, the term has taken on various meanings, some authors using it as synonymous with second language learning generally. Researchers working according to the interlanguage framework began to examine transfer as a process, not as a product. The term "interlanguage" was coined by Selinker (1972) to refer to the interim grammars constructed by second - language learners on their way to the target language. The term won favour over similar constructs, such as 'approximative system' (Nemser, 1971) and 'transitional competence' (Corder, 1967).

Generally speaking, the term 'interlanguage' means two things: (1) the learner's system at a single point in time, and (2) the range of interlocking systems that characterize the development of learners over time. The interlanguage is thought to be distinct from both the learner's first language and from the target language. It evolves over time as learners employ various internal strategies to make sense of the input and to control their own output. These strategies were central to Selinker's thinking about interlanguage. Specifically, Selinker (1972) argued that interlanguage was the product of five cognitive processes involved in second - language learning 1) language transfer from "Li ; 2) transfer of the training process used to teach the second language; 3) strategies of second - language learning; 4) strategies of second - language communication; and 5) overgeneralization of the target language linguistic material. In contrast to Selinker's cognitive emphasis, Adjemian (1976) argued that the systematicity of the interlanguage should be analyzed linguistically as rule - governed behavior. In this view, the individual's first -language system is seen to be relatively stable, but the interlanguage is not. The structures of the interlanguage may be 'invaded' by the first language when placed in a situation that cannot be avoided, the second - language learner may use rules or items from the first language. Similarly, the learner may stretch, distort, or over generalize a rule from the target language in an effort to produce, the intended meaning. Both processes Adjemian saw to reflect the basic permeability of the interlanguage.

A third approach to the interlanguage notion has been taken by Tarone (1979) who maintained that the interlanguage could be seen as analyzable into a set of styles that are dependent on the context of use. Tarone proposed capability continuum, which includes a set of styles ranging from a stable subordinate style virtually free of first - language influence to a characteristically superordinate style where the speaker pays a great deal of attention to form and where the influence of the first language is, paradoxically, more likely to be felt. For Tarone, interlanguage is not a single system, but a set of styles that can be used in different social contexts. In this way, Tarone added to Adjemian's linguistic perspective a sociolinguistic point of view. However, both Selinker and Adjemian stressed the influence of the first language on the emerging interlanguage.

To conclude, the shift from a product to a process orientation has drawn attention to the more subtle and non-obvious effects of the first language on interlanguage development. It has become apparent that the first language does affect the course of interlanguage development but this influence is not always predictable. In addition, as McLaughlin (1988: 81) points out, more recent work on transfer has made apparent the folly of denying first - language influences any role in interlanguage development. He, further, maintains that '

the bulk of the evidence suggests that language acquisition proceeds by mastering the easier unmarked properties before the more difficult marked ones'. This issue will be discussed next.

**Markedness and Language Transfer**
The notion of markedness dates back to the Prague school of linguistics. Originally, it was used to refer to two members of a phonological opposition, one of which contained a feature lacking in the other. The phoneme carrying the feature was called marked; the other unmarked. In second language acquisition research, the term was used by Kellerman (1983) to predict when transfer is likely to occur from the first language. More marked structures in the learner's $L_1$ (those that are perceived to be more irregular, infrequent, and semantically opaque) were predicted to be less transferable than regular and frequent forms. Other authors distinguish marked or unmarked structures according to their degree of complexity. Unmarked forms are thought to be less complex than marked. Kellerman (1983) reported that learners initially transfer both marked and unmarked features from their $L_1$, but that in the more advanced interlanguage, they resist transferring marked features. This not to imply that beginners will necessarily transfer marked features from their first language. In this regard, Zobl (1984) noted that second language learners at all stages of development tend to avoid transferring marked $L_1$ rules. In Chomskyan thought, the rules of the core grammar are thought to be unmarked and those of the peripheral grammar are marked. Core grammar refers to those parts of the language that have 'grown' in the child through the interaction of the Universal Grammar with the relevant language environment. In addition, however, it is assumed that every language also contains elements that are not constrained by Universal Grammar. These elements comprise the peripheral grammar. Peripheral elements are those that are derived from the history of the language that have been bon-owed from other languages (Cook 1985). Rules of the core grammar are seen to be easier to set than are rules of the peripheral grammar, which are thought to be outside of the child's preprogrammed instructions.

**Sociolinguistic and Social Psychology Perspective**
In the following section the perspective shifts from a purely linguistic analysis of the second - language learning process to one that emphasizes sociolinguistic and social psychology factors as well. While transfer is primarily a psychological phenomenon, its potential effect on acquisition may be large or small depending on the complex variation of the social setting in which acquisition takes place. Specifically, (Lado, 1957: 2) stated that individuals tend to transfer the forms and meanings, and the distribution of forms and meanings of their native language and culture to the foreign language and culture - both productively when attempting to speak the language and to act in the culture and receptively when attempting to grasp and understand the language and the culture as practiced by the natives (See Nunan, 2011).

A number of researchers studying second - language acquisition without formal instructions have been struck by the relationship between social psychological acculturation and degree of success in learning the target language In this regard, Schumann (1978: 5) characterized the relationship between acculturation and second - language acquisition in the following way: "Second language acquisition is just one aspect of acculturation and the degree to which a learner acculturates to the target-

language group will control the degree to which he acquires the second language". In this view, acculturation and, hence, second-language acquisition is determined by the degree of social and psychological 'distance' between the learner and the target-language culture. Social distance pertains to the individual as a member of a social group that is in contact with another social group whose members speak a different language. Psychological distance is the result of various affective factors that concern the learner as an individual, such as resolution of language shock, culture shock, and culture stress, integrative versus instrumental motivation, and ego permeability. It is assumed that the more social and psychological distance there is between the second - language learner and the target - language group, the lower the learner's degree of acculturation will be toward that group. It is then predicted that the degree to which second - language learners succeed in socially and psychologically adapting or acculturating to the target - language group will determine their level of success in learning the target language. More specifically, social and psychological distance influence second-language acquisition by determining the amount of contact learners have with the target language and the degree to which they are open to the input that is available. In a negative social situation, the learner will receive little input in the second language. In a negative psychological situation, the learner will fail to utilize available input. Schumann argued that the early stages of second-language acquisition are characterized by the same processes that are responsible for the formation of pidgin languages. When social and/or psychological distance is great, the learner will not progress beyond the early stages and the language will stay pidginize (See Firth & Wagner, 2007; Larsen-Freeman & Cameron, 2007).

**Transfer in the Cognitive Theory**
Cognitive theory is based on the work of psychologistics and psycholinguistics. Individuals working within this framework apply the principles and findings of contemporary cognitive psychology to the domain of second - language learning. The theory is, in this sense, derivative. That is, it represents the application of a broader framework to the domain of second - language research (McLaughlin, 1988). Within this framework, second - language learning is viewed as the acquisition of a complex cognitive skill. To learn a second language is to learn a skill, because various aspects of the task must be practiced and integrated into fluent performance. Learning is a cognitive process because it is thought to involve internal representations that regulate and guide performance. In the case of language acquisition, these representations are based on the language system and include procedures for selecting appropriate vocabulary, grammatical rules, and pragmatic conventions governing language use. As performance improves, there is constant restricting as learners simplify, unify, and gain increasing control over their internal representations (Karmiloff -Smith 1986). In this regard, Lightbown (1985) pointed out that second-language acquisition is not simply linear and cumulative, but is characterized by backsliding and loss of forms that seemingly were mastered. She attributed this decline in performance to a process whereby learners have mastered some forms and then encounter new ones that cause a restructuring of the whole system:

> [Restructuring] occurs because language is a complex hierarchical system whose components interact in non-linear ways. Seen in these terms, an increase in error rate in one area may reflect an increase in complexity or accuracy in another, followed by

overgeneralization of a newly acquired structure, or simply by a sort of overload of complexity which forces a restructuring, or at least a simplification, in another part of the system (Lightbown, 1985:177).

In their discussion of transfer, SLA theorists have argued whether bilingual individuals have two separate stores of information in long - term memory, one for each language, or a single information store accompanied by selection mechanism for using the $L_1$ or the $L_2$ (McLaughlin 1988). In this regard, O'Malley et al. (1987) pointed out that if individuals have a separate store of information maintained in each language, they would select information for use appropriate to the language context. To transfer information that was acquired in the $L_1$ to the $L_2$ would be difficult because of the independence of the two memory systems. An individual in the early stages of proficiency in the $L_2$ would either have to translate information from the $L_1$ to the $L_2$ or relearn the L1 information in the $L_2$, capitalizing on existing knowledge where possible (p.291). A contrast to this argument for separate $L_1$ and $L_2$ memory systems, Cummins (1984) has proposed a common underlying proficiency in cognitive and academic proficiency for bilinguals. Cummins argues that at least some of what is originally learned through the $L_1$ does not have to be relearned in the $L_2$, but can be transferred and expressed through the medium of the $L_2$. $L_2$ learners may be able to transfer what they already know from the "$L_1$ into the $L_2$ by (a) selecting the $L_2$ as the language for expression, (b) retrieving information originally stored through the $L_1$ but presently existing as non-language specific declarative knowledge, and (c) connecting the information to the $L_2$ forms needed to express it. Learning strategy research indicates that students of English as a second language consciously and actively transfer information from their $L_1$ for use in the $L_2$ (See Lightbown & Spada, 2006; Loewen et al., 2009).

**$L_1$ Transfer and $L_2$ written discourse**

Most of the research reviewed in the literature has shown considerable evidence of cross-linguistic differences in discourse, but less evidence of cross-linguistic influences. These influences remain only partially understood. However, there is some evidence that negative transfer occurs in certain situations (Odlin, 1996). Odlin, further, points out that some of the best evidence comes from an investigation by Bartelt of repetition in the ESL writing of American Indian students. Koch (1983) also suggests that Arabic discourse may encourage Arab students to repeat words and phrases in English.

To begin with, Arapoff (1967) indicates that native speakers learn their language via a discover and transfer process in which they [native speakers] learn to recognize and to understand differences between sentences, and, in turn, competence comes before performance. Native speakers, therefore, have the ability to produce various sentences in the appropriate context. This ability is what Arab students lack when they write their essays because they think in Arabic when they write in English. Expressions such as Thinking in Arabic' reflect a common belief that learning a particular language requires adopting a worldview which, to some extent, is unique to that language. One implication of this belief is that if learners do not "think in Arabic", for example, they must still be using their native language as a reference point for cognitive activities. It is still, however, an open question just how closely language and thought are related (Odlin, 1996: 71).

Early studies on the influence of $L_2$ learners' first language on their written production focused mainly on the syntactic level and mechanics of writing (See Eldaly, 1986). Recently, new areas have been examined. A number of studies have indicated that, regardless of a language prescription, writers will transfer writing abilities and strategies, whether good or deficient, from their first language to their second language. In other words, students who lack first language strategies may display a similar lack of strategies for writing in their second language. Mohan and Lo (1985), for example, suggest that this deficiency may be developmental; that is, students who have not developed good strategies for writing in their first language will not have appropriate strategies to transfer to their second language. Jones and Tetroe (1987) looked at ESL writers generating texts in their first and second languages. They found that these writers transferred both good and weak writing skills from their first language to English. They pointed out that weaker writers' failure to use writing strategies in English was based on their failure to use these strategies in their first language.

Moreover, it has been reported that if ESL writers retrieve information about a writing topic from memory in their first language and then have to translate into English before writing anything down, this act of translation can lead to an overload of their short-term memory and a diminishment in the equality of the content of their writing. For example, Lay (1988) found that her Chinese subjects tended to switch to their first language when writing about a topic studied or acquired in their first language background. She also reports that their first language served as an aid and not a hindrance to writing, since her subjects used Chinese when they were stuck in English - to find a key word, for example. Lay notes that the greater the number of switches into the first language, the better the quality of the essays in terms of organization and ideas.

In addition to $L_1$ learners' first language as an influencing factor, their overall culture has been suggested to be of an enormous effect on students composing in a second language (See Mongubhai, 2006; Poole, 2005; Reynolds, 2010; Rosenberg, 2009).

**$L_1$ Culture and $L_2$ written Discourse**
There has been a significant revolution in our thinking about writing in recent years, and it has come from learning to view writing as a process that is embedded in a context. In this regard, Hull (1989: 109) maintains that "To say that writing is embedded in a context is to acknowledge that what counts as writing, or as any skill or any knowledge, is socially constructed. It depends for its meaning and its practice upon social institutions and conditions. According to this view, writing does not stand apart from people and communities... And this new understanding carries with it different notions of how writing is acquired and by whom".

It has been recognized that writers from different cultures have learned rhetorical patterns that may differ from those used in academic settings in the United States and that are reinforced by their educational experience in their specific cultures (Turves, 1988). Kaplan (1966) attempted to analyze how one's native thinking and discourse structures manifest themselves in the writing of ESL students. Influenced by the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, Kaplan argued that his subjects revealed evidence of culturally-

influenced styles of thought development that emerge in their writings in ways that can be structurally and stylistically described. In fact, the notions that cultures express concepts and develop perceptions of the word and of relationships of various kinds in different ways are not new. What is new, as Heath (1983) suggests is the current attempt to integrate the study of languages and their uses in society in such a way as to reflect differences in cultural habits and differences in styles of expression in various contents including that of written text. In certain cases, cultural traditions may encourage or discourage certain types of thinking, and those cultural patterns may be reinforced by the structural characteristics of a particular language. It has been widely recognized that culture and language are interrelated and that language is used as the main medium through which culture is expressed.

Scribner and Cole (1981); Heath (1983) examined the relation of culture to discourse and particularly to written discourse. Both studies pointed to the fact that written texts, and the ways in which they are used and perceived, vary according to the cultural group to which an individual belongs. In addition, both studies pointed to two aspects of that variation: the content or what is written, and the rhetorical forms used to encode that content, both of which constitute the surface manifestations of cultural differences. To sum up, both the content and the language to express this content are culturally determined. To be effective, writers have to learn what is expected of them within their own culture. Consequently, differences in cultural expectations are an obstacle for those who are learning to write in a foreign language. Under the influence of the norms within their own culture, they may deviate from the norms of the foreign culture in what kind of material are to be included in a particular variety of written discourse, what style is appropriate, and how the discourse is to be organized. Purves (1988: 19) points out that "... the differences among rhetorical patterns do not represent differences in cognitive ability, but differences in cognitive style. When students taught to write in one culture, enter another and do not write as do the members of the second culture, they should not be thought stupid or lacking in "higher mental processes".

**Pedagogical Considerations: The Place of Native Language in FL Teaching**
The issue of the place of mother-tongue in FL instruction is one of the controversial topics in the field of foreign language teaching. Many arguments have been raised and the various language teaching methods (conventional and non-conventional) hold different fluctuating opinions. Some recommend while others condemn the use of mother-tongue in the FL classroom. There are two extremes which are represented by the Grammar Translation Method and the Direct Method. The former, as its name suggests, makes liberal use of mother-tongue. It depends on translation and considers the first language a reference system to which the foreign language learner can resort so as to understand the grammatical as well as the other features of the foreign language. The latter- (the other extreme)- tries to inhibit the use of mother-tongue. It depends on using the foreign language in explanation and communication in the language classroom and excluding the first language and translation altogether (Mouhanna, & Mouhanna, 2010).

The problem does not lie in whether mother-tongue has a place in FL teaching / learning or not, but in how much of it is permitted. In this respect, it can be said that there are many factors determining the quantity to be used. The quantification will differ according to the

maturity level of the learners and their linguistic level. It also depends on the competence of the teacher, the material to be taught and the availability of teaching aids. Another point is that it is the individual teacher who sensitizes when to switch codes and when not to. It is also the teacher who can decide the pragmatic quantity to be used because what is workable in a certain class may not be so in another.

Those who condemn mother-tongue use view that optimal FL learning can be achieved through the intralingual tackling of the various levels of linguistic analysis as this helps provide maximum exposure to the foreign language. It is true that providing maximum exposure to the foreign language helps a lot in learning that language. But this, with confining oneself to the foreign language only, may be done at the expense of understanding and intelligibility or in a routine and non-creative way. With careful and functional mother-tongue use intelligibility can be achieved and the time saved (by giving the meaning in the mother-tongue) can be used for practice. So, mother-tongue use does not mean wasting time that can be better used for providing maximum exposure to the foreign language. Disregarding the mother-tongue and considering it "a bogey to be shunned at all costs" is a myth. Those who recommend nothing but English in English lesson neglect many important facts. First, they have forgotten that FL learners translate in their minds and think in their own language and this cannot be controlled: "The teacher who says: I forbid the use of the pupil's own language in my class, nothing but English in the English lessons is deceiving himself. He has forgotten the one thing he cannot control - what goes on in the pupil's mind, He cannot tell whether, or when, his pupils are thinking in their own language. When he meets a new English word, the pupil inevitably searches in his mind for the equivalent in his own language. When he finds it, he is happy and satisfied, he has a pleasurable feeling of success" (French 1972, 94).

Supporting this idea, Finocchiaro (1975: 35) says: "We delude ourselves if we think the student is not translating each new English item into his native language when he first meets it. Second, they have also forgotten that "the unknown (a second language pattern) cannot be explained via something less known (the second language)" (Hammerly, 1971: 504). This idea was supported by Seleim (1995). Third, they have forgotten that the mother-tongue is first in terms of acquisition and proficiency and so FL learners cannot escape its influence: "The mother-tongue is so strongly ingrained that no amount of direct method drill can override its influence. Therefore, according to this line of thought it is better to capitalize on the students' knowledge of (mother-tongue) than to pretend it is not there". (Grittner, 1977: 165). Fourth, they have forgotten that there are individual differences among students and that the weaker students may have difficulties in grasping a point in the foreign language. They don't advise FL teachers what to do in cases where attempts at English-English explanations have failed.

In a study conducted by Latke-Gajer (1984), she tried to look for a solution for what she observed while teaching English. The problem is that students, to understand an utterance in the foreign language, translate each word separately and then add together the meaning of individual words. This is harmful as it does not enable students to grasp the meaning of more complex statements, especially those that contain idiomatic expressions. She decided, in this study, to introduce English-English explanations of new words and expressions. She started the experiment with her advanced students by giving them a list of words to be

explained in English at home and then they compared their explanations with the definition in Hornby''s dictionary. Although the experiment proved successful, especially with advanced students, it was not possible to totally eliminate Polish (as a mother-tongue) from the lessons. It was necessary to use it to explain several difficult and complicated grammatical patterns so that the weaker students could understand. With the beginners it was impossible to use this same method. For them, she suggests using different ways such as: opposition, describing pictures and using games.

In the "Third National Symposium on English Teaching" held in CDELT, Am Shams University, Zikri, (1983) presented an illuminating paper entitled "Employing Arabic in the teaching of English".  In it, she explores the role of the native language in the foreign language classroom and the process of mapping the foreign language onto the native language. She stresses the fact that past experiences should be utilize and exploited by the teacher to the advantage of teaching English and not submerged or neglected. An attempt to distinguish and analyze the situation where Egyptian Arabic can be of optimum utility in teaching English was made. She distinguishes between two situations of use: a) The situation of form b) The situation of content.

Employing Arabic is necessary when clarification of English is required. This clarification is made through comparison with Egyptian Arabic. The clarification may be carried out in English or in Arabic. Besides, employing Arabic can be exploited on the three levels of linguistic analysis: sounds, grammar, and meaning. She concludes by stressing the importance of employing Arabic, more in phonology and syntax than in semantics, to avoid incorrect mapping, to free students from the bondage of their $L_l$ patterns and to make sense out of the new information by relating it comparatively to already known patterns (See Schmidt, 2001; Sharwood-Smith, 2004; Sheen, 2005).  It becomes then clear that the mother-tongue cannot be totally excluded or disregarded. There are many situations in which a few words in the mother-tongue will help clarify something students may not have comprehended in English. It is a myth to believe that "the best criterion for effective target language teaching is the absence of the mother-tongue in the classroom. Although the need for a target language environment in the classroom is controvertible, this does not imply, however, that the mother-tongue has no role to play in effective and efficient language teaching. Where a word of Arabic can save Egyptian learners of English from confusion or significant time lost from learning, its absence would be, in my view, pedagogically unsound." (Altman, 1984: 79).

Absence of the mother-tongue may result in meaningless and mechanical learning situations. This contradicts the recent research findings which stress that the two-way type of communication should be the ultimate goal of instruction and the tool which ensures better teaching results. With total exclusion of the mother-tongue the teaching - learning situations may degenerate into a mechanical process in which "one may memorize (learn how to repeat) a phrase or a sentence in a foreign language, without knowing what it means. In such a case, one could say the person knows it (knows how to say it), but we could also say that the person does not understand what he or she is saying (comprehend its meaning)." (Soltis 1978: 55).  (See Spada, 2006; Spada & Lightbown, 2008; Stigler & Hiebert, 2009; Stubbs, 2007).

It is pedagogically important to emphasize the element of meaningfulness in the teaching learning process. Students become motivated and active if they understand what is involved and if they know what they are doing. So, it is important not to disregard the learners' need for the comprehension of what they learn or exclude the mother-tongue because it is their right that they should make sense in their own terms of what they are learning. It is also important to use the learners' native language so as to avoid misunderstanding and achieve intelligibility. The reasons for using the native language to get meaning across is that it prevents any misunderstanding, saves time and makes the gradation of the language free from physical demonstration.

Mother-tongue plays a vital role in diminishing or at best eliminating the psychological factors that have an inhibiting effect on FL teaching and learning. It has been noticed that the non-conventional methods of language teaching make use of the mother-tongue and translation in FL/SL teaching and learning. They emphasize that mother-tongue employing removes the fear of incompetence, mistakes and apprehension regarding languages new and unfamiliar. One point is that, to overcome the problems of dissatisfaction and avoidance, FL teachers should permit some mother-tongue use. Students, having linguistic inadequacies, can get confused and become hesitant about their oral participation. They may abandon a message they have started because a certain idea or a thought is too difficult to continue expressing in the foreign language. To overcome the feeling of dissatisfaction and psychological avoidance, FL learners should come to terms with the frustrations of being unable to communicate in the foreign language and build up, cognitively and effectively, a new reference system which helps them communicate an idea. This reference system is the mother-tongue which is indeed very important for enhancing the FL learners' feeling of success and satisfaction. Another point is that mother-tongue use helps create a climate that alleviates the learners' tension, insecurity and anxiety. It makes the class atmosphere comfortable and productive and helps establish good relationships between the teacher and his students. However, it must be kept in mind that mother-tongue should be used as little as possible, but as much as necessary. MT should be rule-governed and not be freely or randomly used. The individual is able to switch from one language to another... in a rule-governed rather than a random way.

It is important to emphasize the fact that mother-tongue should not be used in the wrong way. It is desirable in cases where it is necessary, inevitable and where otherwise valuable classroom time would be wasted. We do not want the FL teacher to use the mother-tongue freely and to automatically translate everything on the learners' book. This unlimited use is so harmful that it (a) discourages the learners from thinking in English (the language they are learning) and so it will not be taken seriously as a means of communication. "Translating can be a hindrance to the learning process by discouraging the student from thinking in English". (Haycraft 1979: 12). Students in most cases think in their mother-tongue and lean too much on it. This makes them. (b) acquire and develop the habit of mental translation. They interpose the mother-tongue between thought and expression developing a three-way process in production and expressing their intentions: Meaning to Mother-tongue to English Expression. They always think, while trying to express themselves (in the foreign language), in their mother-tongue and all their attempts to communicate in the foreign language are filtered

through the mother-tongue: "The mother-tongue is not relinquished, but it continues to accompany - and of course to dominate the whole complex fabric of language behavior.... all referent- whether linguisticor semantic - are through the Mothertongue" (Grittner, 1977: 81).

This is pedagogically dangerous as it makes the FL learners believe that, to express themselves in the foreign language, the process is mere verbal substitution of words of the mother-tongue to their equivalents in the foreign language and this is an extremely a tiring way to produce correct sentences in the foreign language and creates no direct bond between thought and expression. The non-existence of this bond results in hindering fluency in speech and proficiency in productive writing. Interposing the mother-tongue between thought and expression hinders the intralingual associative process which is necessary for promoting fluency and automatic production of FL discourse: "The explicit linkage of a word in one language with a word in another language may interfere with the facilitative effects of intra-language associations. Thus, for instance, if a student repeats many times the pair go: aller, the association between the two will become so strong that the French word will come to the student's mind whenever he uses the English equivalent and inhibit the smooth transition from 'go' to the other English words, a skill necessary for fluent speech" (Anisfield, 1966: 113-114).

FL teachers should guard against mental translation. This can be achieved by permitting the learners to express themselves (in speech or writing) within their linguistic capacities and capabilities. This means that the student, for instance, should first practice expressing given ideas instead of trying to fit language to his free mental activities and if he is freed from the obligation to seek what to say, he will be able to concentrate on form and gradually acquire the correct habits on which he may subsequently depend. It is important to familiarize the learners with the fact that no word in one language can have or rightly be said to have the same meaning of a word in another language. FL teachers should provide more than one native equivalent for the FL word; give the meaning on the sentential level and in various contexts.

According to Byram et al., (1994), cultural learning positively affects students' linguistic success in foreign language learning. Culture can be used as an instrument in the processes of communication when culturally-determined behavioral conventions are taught. Tavares and Cavalcanti (1996: 18), further, claims that 'culture shouldn't be seen as a support to language teaching but that it should be placed on an equal footing with foreign language teaching'. Post and Rathet (1996) support the use of student's native culture as cultural content in the English language classroom. In fact, a wide range of studies has shown that using content familiar to students rather than unfamiliar content can influence student comprehension of a second language (Anderson & Barnitz 1984; Long 1990). In other words, unfamiliar information can impede students' learning of the linguistic information used to convey the content: "Why overburden our students with both new linguistic content and new cultural information simultaneously? If we can, especially for lower-level students, use familiar cultural content while teaching English, we can reduce the 'processing load' that students experience (Post and Rathet, 1996: 12). In this regard, Tavares and Cavalcanti (1996) argue that the development of people's

cultural awareness leads us to more critical thinking as citizens with political and social understanding of our own and other communities.

**Conclusion**

1. Because of the controversies that have accompanied the progress in the study of native language influence, the findings of transfer research must be interpreted cautiously:

a) Some scholars have argued for the importance of transfer; some have gone so far as to consider it the paramount fact of $L_2$ learning. Yet other scholars have been very skeptical about the importance of transfer.

b) Researchers are far from able to predict with full accuracy when transfer will occur; and when it will never occur.

c) Philosophically speaking, there is no single scientific truth; truth can never be known in its totality, and multiple ways of seeing result in multiple truths.

2. Based on the above, my discussion of the issue under consideration has been based on the rationale that viewing transfer as the single most important reality of $L_2$ learning is risky, though no more so than viewing transfer as a negligible factor. In addition, $L_2$ learning must be viewed as a very complex process in which $L_1$ transfer is only one factor. Other factors are likely to be of much greater importance for our understanding of the process of $L_2$ learning.

3. Accordingly, in addition to tracing the conceptual history of language transfer from its early beginning to its current position within Universal Grammar, the present study provides a comprehensive view of $L_2$ learning, in which nonstructural factors may operate independently of transfer; and some others may interact with transfer.

4. Many of the points brought up in this article concur with theories of second language acquisition with respect to the inclusion of the $L_1$. The findings of this research also reinforce those of previous research arguing for the inclusion of the $L_1$ in that 'its use reduces anxiety, enhances the affective environment for learning, takes into account sociocultural factors, facilitates incorporation of learners' life experiences, and allows for learner centered curriculum development. Also seen in this article is substantiation of prior research with learners' perceptions that the inclusion of the $L_1$ can raise awareness not only of differences but of similarities between the $L_1$ and the target language, demonstrate the value of and presents less of a threat to the $L_1$, and promote a positive attitude toward learning English. Another view in the literature is that the inclusion of the $L_1$ helps the learner in the development of thinking, of social and interpersonal skills, and even enhances independent study skills (Kimberly, 2009).

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