

The Use of Arabic in Classes of English as a Foreign Language (EFL)

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Abstract: The purpose of this study was to investigate the effect of using Arabic in EFL classes. To achieve this purpose, the researchers distributed a questionnaire about the use of Arabic in EFL classes to the teachers and students of ordinary-level English at Rawdet Al-Ma'aref School in Amman, Jordan. The results of the study showed that 100% of the students and 90% of the teachers felt that Arabic should be used in their EFL classes. The respondents emphasized the fact that cultural and religious concepts should be taught by referring to Arabic in EFL classes. A noticeable percentage (85%) of students and (75%) of teachers agreed that Arabic should necessarily be used to introduce grammatical rules. The findings of the study should be taken into consideration by teachers of English as a foreign language as well as textbooks writers and curricula designers. (Keywords: EFL, Arabic, English, Classes)

Introduction: Where there was once a consensus on the "right" way to teach foreign languages, many teachers now share the belief that a single right way does not exist. It is certainly true that no comparative study has consistently demonstrated the superiority of one method over another for all teachers, all students and all settings (Gina, 1994). Originators of most of the methods aim to enable students to communicate using the target language. However, many methodologists emphasize the importance of the first language (L1) in understanding the second language (L2) (Lado, 1964 and 1978; Khalil, 1985; Hamdallah, 1990; Tushyeh, 1988; Kharma, 1987; William, 1999; Alexander, 1994; Asher, 1982; Mahmoud, 1997; Mukattash, 1986; and Bawcom, 2002, among others).

A contrastive analysis (CA) between the students' native language and the target language will reveal the area where a teacher should expect the most interference. CA is a comparison of two languages for the purpose of predicting errors made by the learners of a target language and designing teaching materials that will take account of the anticipated errors.

استعمال اللغة العربية في تدريس اللغة الانجليزية لغة أجنبية

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ملخص: هدفت هذه الدراسة الى تقصي أثر استعمال اللغة العربية في تدريس اللغة الانجليزية لغة أجنبية. ولتحقيق هذا الهدف وزع الباحثان استبانته تحتوي على أبرز استراتيجيات استعمال اللغة الأم في تدريس اللغة الأجنبية على طلبة اللغة الانجليزية ومعلميها في مدرسة المعارف في عمان -الأردن، بينت هذه الدراسة أن الطلبة جميعهم ونسبة عالية (90%) من المعلمين شعروا بوجوب استخدام اللغة العربية في حصص اللغة الانجليزية مؤكدين أثر استخدام اللغة الأم في توضيح المفاهيم الثقافية والدينية. وأن نسبة 85% من الطلبة و 75% من المعلمين قالوا بضرورة استخدام اللغة العربية في حصص اللغة الإنجليزية لتوضيح المفاهيم الصعبة وقواعد هذه اللغة. وقد أوصى الباحثان بضرورة أخذ نتائج الدراسة بعين الاعتبار في تدريس اللغة الانجليزية لغة أجنبية، وفي تصميم المناهج والكتب المدرسية. (الكلمات المفتاحية: العربية، تدريس، الإنجليزية، لغة أجنبية)

CA has application in predicting and diagnosing a proportion of the errors made by L2 learners with a common L1 and in the design of testing instruments for such learners.

There seems then to be three things that CA can predict: it can predict what aspects will cause problems; it can predict difficulty; and it can predict errors.

As far as course design is concerned, CA also carries suggestions about selecting target language items (what to teach) and grading these items (when to teach). The learner, for example, must be allowed and encouraged to transfer his suitable L1 knowledge to L2 usage. This means that those L2 structures that match L1 structures must constitute part of the materials.

Lado (1964) stated that a student who learns a foreign language will find some of its features quite easy and others extremely difficult. The features that are similar to his native language will be simple for him while those which are different will be difficult. Lado added that since it is a universal principle of education that learning should proceed from the simple to the difficult, simple elements of L2 should be taught first.

Native language translation is used to make the meaning of the dialogue between the teacher and the students clear. The teacher also uses mother tongue in class when necessary. As the course proceeds, the

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teacher uses the native language less and less (Lozanov, 1982).

Students' security is initially enhanced by using their native language. Native language equivalents to the target language words are given to make their meanings clear and to help students to combine target language words in different ways to create new sentences (McLaughlin, 2003). In later steps, the target language is used interestingly. The native language can also be used to give instructions, especially at the beginning level of proficiency during the feedback sessions. More important, the knowledge students already possess of their native language can be exploited by the teacher of the target language (Gattego, 1972). The teacher assumes that he/she can build upon this existing knowledge to introduce the new sounds in the target language (McLaughlin, 2003).

Arabic-speaking students in the first and second secondary classes leave school with poor performance in spoken as well as written English. This was sounded at the 1995 summer course held jointly by the Palestinian Ministry of Education and Higher Education and Harvard Graduate School of Education. Lecturers and participants agreed that Arabic-speaking Palestinian learners of English should have adequate knowledge of the relationship between their native language and English in order to understand it very well and to overcome the errors that they make in writing and speaking it (Mahmoud, 1997).

Among a considerable number of professionals in the field of second language acquisition (SLA), there appears to be an increasing support that the use of the first language (L1) has a necessary and facilitating role in the classroom of English as a second/foreign language (ESL/EFL). The exploration of the problems in teaching and learning English together with their causes will surely help teachers and learners of English. Corder (1967:167), for instance, noted that "A learner's errors are significant in that they provide the researcher with evidence of how language is learned or acquired and what strategies or procedures the learners are employing in the discovery of the language."

In the process of learning a language, learners make errors many of which are predictable. These errors provide useful insight in understanding the complex process of second language acquisition. As confirmed by Corder (1967), Nemser (1971), Selinker (1969 and 1972), a lot of useful things can be learned from the students' errors; they supply learners and teachers with important data in the construction of a theory of language acquisition.

Thompson-Panos and Thomas-Ruzic (1983) stated that a better and more comprehensive understanding of the language background of Arab learners can help specialists in better addressing the special needs of the learners through supplying them with extra appropriate exercises, drills and questions.

Taylor (1975) described a model of second language learning which considered both processes of

developing learning strategies, such as simplification and overgeneralization of target language rules and language negative transfer, as two manifestations of the same psychological processes; that is, learners rely on prior learning and knowledge to simplify and facilitate new learning.

A second language can be learned appropriately through raising awareness to the similarities and differences between L1 and L2. Besides, using L1 in L2 classes has made learning L2 appear to be less of a threat to its learners. The use of L1 in L2 classes encourages students to learn more about L2. Additionally, the learning of L1 may result in increasing receptivity to the learning of L2 (William, 1999).

In a provocative article, Auerbach (1993) gives a socio-political rationale for the use of L1 in ESL classrooms. In her article, she emphasizes the role of the ideological origins and thus she recommends starting the L2 classes with some of L1 which has the power to enrich the learners' sense of security and the validation of lived experiences.

A learner of L2 might feel that his /her identity threatened if he/she is encouraged to ignore his/her native language (Hopkins, 1988). Both Atkinson (1987) and Auerbach (1993) provide learners a well as teachers of L2 with appropriate situations for the use of L1 in L2 classes. Both emphasize the strong recommendation of using L1 in L2 classes when dealing with presentation of rules governing grammar, phonology, morphology and spelling. Likewise, they also recommend referring to L1 when dealing with cross-cultural issues. According to Terence Doyle (1997), sometimes, up to 90% of ESL class time may be dedicated to the use of L1.

Purpose of the study: The ultimate aim of this study is to find out if using L1 (Arabic) in L2 (English) classes would facilitate or hinder the teaching-learning process from teachers' and students' perspectives. In compliance with this purpose, the study seeks to answer the following questions:

1. How important is using Arabic in English classes for facilitating learning from students' perspectives?
2. How important is using Arabic in English classes for facilitating teaching from teachers' perspectives?
3. In what areas can using Arabic in English classes facilitate the teaching-learning process?

Subjects of the Study: The subjects of the study were 600 male students and 30 teachers of English at Rawdit Al-Ma'arif School in Amman. Their grades ranged between the 5th and the 12th (Tawjihi) grades.

Instrument of the Study: A questionnaire was used for data collection. Students and teachers were asked to answer the questionnaire which contained questions about the effect of using Arabic in the English classes. The questionnaire consisted of seven questions: the first was a "Yes/No" question which asked the subjects of the study if they thought Arabic should be used in their EFL classes. The second question asked how much they

thought Arabic should be used in their EFL classes. The third question asked about the purposes of using Arabic in EFL classes. The fourth question asked about the percentage of time Arabic should be used in EFL classes. The fifth question asked how often they thought Arabic should be used in their EFL classes. The sixth question asked if using Arabic in EFL classes would help teachers to teach better and students to learn better. The seventh question was directed to the teachers, and it asked them to list the areas in which they thought Arabic should be used in EFL classes. The complete questionnaire is shown under "Results of the Study" below.

Validity of the Questionnaire: To ensure that the content of the questionnaire is valid, it was handed to a jury of five professional faculty members and school teachers majoring in teaching English as a foreign language. The members of the jury were asked to evaluate the appropriateness of the questionnaire to the whole purpose of the study. Consequently, they sent letters in which they ensured the validity of the questionnaire and recommended some modifications which were taken into consideration.

Results of the Study: The purpose of this study was to find out if the use of Arabic in English classes would facilitate the teaching-learning process from the teachers' and the students' perspectives. Following is the questionnaire with a table showing the subjects' responses to each of its questions:

1. In your opinion, do you think that Arabic should be used in the EFL classes?

Table 1: Subjects' Perspectives of Using Arabic in EFL Classes

Response	Students	Teachers
Yes	100%	90%
No	0%	10%

2. How much do you think Arabic should be used in the EFL classes?

Table 2: Subjects' Perspectives of the Amount of Time of Using Arabic in EFL Classes

Response	Students	Teachers
Not at all	0%	0%
A little	35%	50%
Sometimes	50%	40%
A lot	15%	10%

3. For what purpose do you think it is appropriate to use Arabic in the EFL classes?

Table 3: Subjects' Perspectives of the Purposes of Using Arabic in EFL Classes

Item	Students	Teachers
To explain difficult cultural and religious concepts	90%	80%
To introduce new material, especially grammatical rules	85%	75%
To summarize material already covered	4%	3%
To Test	10%	0%
To joke around with students	15%	10%
To help students feel more comfortable and confident	13%	6%
To check for comprehension	30%	11%
To carry out small group work	3%	2%
To explain the relationship between English and Arabic	N/A	3%
To define new vocabulary items	22%	13%

4. What percentage of time do you think Arabic should be used in the EFL classes?

Table 4: Subjects' Perspectives of the Percentage of the Time of Using Arabic in EFL Classes

Percentage of Time	Students	Teachers
0%	0%	0%
10%	25%	35%
20%	18%	15%
30%	20%	35%
40%	11%	10%
50%	8%	6%
60%	4%	5%
70%	3%	4%
80%	2%	0%
90%	1%	0%

5. How often do you think Arabic should be used in the EFL classes?

Table 5: Subjects' Perspectives of the Frequency of Using Arabic in EFL Classes

Response	Teachers	Students
Never	0%	0%
Very rarely	0%	0%
Sometimes	55%	35%
Fairly Frequently	45%	65%

6. Do you think that using Arabic in your EFL classes helps teachers to teach and students to learn English better?

Table 6: Subjects' Perspectives if Using Arabic in EFL Classes Helps Teachers and Students

Response	Teachers	Students
Not at All	0%	0%
Somehow	10%	15%
A Little	25%	20%
Fairly Much	30%	25%
Very Much	35%	40%

7. In which areas do you think Arabic should be used in EFL classes? (For Teachers Only: List as many areas as you want)

In response to this question, teachers listed the following areas in which Arabic can be used in EFL classes:

1. Eliciting language, especially when dealing with abstract nouns that are difficult to be illustrated by pictures or by using sentences. Sometimes teachers are not good at drawing or acting, thus the use of Arabic becomes necessary
2. Checking and assessing listening or reading comprehension.
3. Giving complex instructions to students of basic levels.
4. Co-operating in groups: Learners compare, analyze and correct answers to questions, exercises, drills and other English activities. In this respect, Arabic plays the role of intrinsic motivation that is based on the needs and desires of students.
5. Explaining classroom techniques at basic levels.

6. Using translation to highlight recently taught language items.
7. Checking for tenses: This is very useful in composition and oral activities; if students say or write something in English that does not make sense, the teacher helps them to translate it into Arabic to realize their errors.
8. Testing: Translation items can be useful in testing mastery of forms and meaning.
9. Developing circumlocutory strategies: When students do not know how to say or write something in English, the teacher may ask them to think of different ways to say something in Arabic, which may be easier to translate.
10. Presentation of rules governing grammar, phonology, morphology, and spelling. This area is rich in aspects that include similarities between English and Arabic.
11. Discussing cross cultural issues.

Discussion: The results of this study showed that all students and 90% of their teachers felt that Arabic should be used in their EFL classes. Most of them emphasized the fact that difficult concepts, especially cultural and religious concepts, should be taught in EFL classes by referring to Arabic. Almost a similar percentage of weak students like to have Arabic in their grammar lessons because they felt that Arabic facilitated their learning of English. In almost all the cases of using Arabic in EFL classes, students responded notably higher than teachers on almost all the items listed in the questionnaire.

The findings of the study showed that in EFL classes, Arabic should be used to some degree. The respondents among the students felt that there are clear cases where Arabic facilitated their comprehension of what was happening in the classroom.

Almost 70% of the students preferred the use of Arabic in their EFL classes sometimes or often. This percentage was almost similar to Doyle's (1997), but higher than William's (1999). Most of the teachers agreed that using Arabic whenever necessary or convenient helped them establish a rapport with their students.

All teachers without exception emphasized the use of Arabic when students were exposed to socio-cultural English texts or issues. This finding is closely related to William's (1999). The researchers consider the lack of using Arabic in certain religious, cultural or political issues and abstract nouns as an overlooking of students' identity, and this in turn will increase their hatred to the foreign language.

Conclusion and Recommendations: There is a lot of harmony between this study and other studies which emphasize the importance of L1 and its great effect in understanding L2. (Lado, 1964; Khalil, 1985; Hamdallah, 1990; Tushyeh, 1988; Kharma, 1987; Kharma and Hajjaj, 1989; Khang, 2002; Mukattash, 1986; Cambridge and Merseyside (1998); Mahmoud, 1997 and 2003, among others).

To those who oppose the researchers' point of view by saying that EFL classes are the only limited vehicle through which students can practice their English with their teachers, the researchers can say that there are other media via which students can use English: Radio, TV and Computer. This does not mean that the researchers are not aware of the fact that English should be looked upon as the vehicle of communication in the classroom, but wise, limited and directed using of Arabic in EFL classes can be useful to both teachers and students. Based on the results of this study, the researchers reaffirm the importance of the following points:

1. In EFL classes, there is a need to explain the main differences and similarities between English and Arabic. These similarities and differences help both teachers and students to get deeper understanding of the target language.
2. The designers of the English textbooks should provide students with material that covers exercises that demand translation from English into Arabic and vice versa.
3. In English classes there is a need to refer to Arabic so as to compare and contrast some religious and cultural concepts.

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