

## **THE EFFECT OF USING NATIVE LANGUAGE ON GRAMMAR ACHIEVEMENT AND ATTITUDES TOWARD LEARNING OF BASIC STAGES EFL STUDENTS IN JORDAN**

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### ***Background***

Throughout the twentieth century, English language teaching tradition has been a subject to a great change in various adaptations in language classrooms all around the world. The use of native language in foreign language classroom resulted from one of the longstanding controversies in the history of language pedagogy; the effect of the first language in the second language teaching is still being debated, though most of the language teachers are against the use of native language in the foreign language classroom even in Jordan, many teachers are teaching English grammar by using the second language without any reference to Arabic language. However, when the native language of the speaker is used appropriately, there can be no doubt that it will be helpful to learn the foreign language. As Mackey (1965) states that “the learning of one language in childhood is an inevitable process; the learning of second language is a special accomplishment”.

Throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century, translation method offered an insight into the grammatical rules of translating from the foreign to the native language. Translation grammar method is still one of the most accepted and preferred method of language teaching, which has been rather in previous to educational reforms, remaining a standard methodology. At the same time as direct method saw no place at all for the first language in the classroom, the grammar translation method used the mother tongue so widely and at the expense of target language practice that, even today, translation is in many instances regarded as an unlawful practice because of its relationship with this method.

Teachers who call the monolingual approach suggest that the foreign language should be the only medium of use, believing that the obstruction of the mother tongue would maximize the efficiency of learning the foreign language. However, many teachers believe that the use of the native language can be useful in explaining structural grammar rules. They consider that teachers who know the students' native language have more advantages over the ones who do not. Advocates of native language use, though, are also eager to point out that "mother tongue use should be selective and not seen as just as easy option" (Hawak, 2001). The key for the teacher seems to be using the mother tongue appropriately and avoiding the over use which will make learners feel that they cannot comprehend the input of the foreign language until it is translated into their native language (Athinson, 1987).

Studies confirm that complete removal of native language in foreign language classrooms is not appropriate. Freeman (1991), Nation (2003), Schweers, (1999). They emphasize that when the mother tongue used appropriately, the use of L1 can be very beneficial. Brown (2000) claims that “First language can be a fascinating factor and not just interfering factor”. Schweers (1999) calls teachers to integrate the mother tongue into lessons to influence the classroom dynamic, and suggests, "Starting with L1 provides a sense of security and validates the learner's lived experiences, allowing them to express themselves". Much research has been published in the field of teaching foreign language by using monolingual approach in ESL teaching.

According to Verghese (1989) “A knowledge of grammar is perhaps more important to a second language learners than to a native speaker”. Because of the procedure of acquiring the language is different; the native speaker has creatively internalized the grammar of the language while the second language learner has to make a conscious effort to master those aspects and parts of the language grammar.

A great number of studies attempted to show the impact of the Arabic language (native language) in the process of English learning, taking variables for their studies specific feature of English system. In this study the researchers investigate the effect of using the native language (Arabic Language) on grammar achievement and learning attitudes of basic stage EFL Jordanian students. So the related literature will include some of the studies which investigated specific purposes will be shown later.

Ho (1985) reserved a four- month diary of her own different secondary L1 remedial English classes of the same school. In which she insisted on using English only in class A while allowing Cantonese in class B whenever she felt necessary. The researcher started off with a strong confidence that English Lessons should be taught through English only. Her thoughts changed by the end of the experiment, she began to like and believe using Cantonese in English class. In the United States, a research unit at George Mason University in Virginia has monitored results at twenty three primary schools in fifteen states since 1985. Four out of six different curriculum involved were partly conducted in the native language. The study shows that, there is a direct connection between academic results and time spent learning in the native language. Those who do best in secondary school have had a bilingual education.

Al Naimi (1989) has explained the problem of Arabic EFL learners emphasized on the contrastive and error analysis. The study consisted of (150) students enrolled in the classes of the orientation program of the language center. The sample of the study is English learners. This study indicated that there is an effect of transfer regarding committing errors in adjectives formation, selection, and comparisons from the mother tongue to the second tongue. In his study, Migdadi (1997) investigated the errors made by first and second year students in the English department at Al Yarmouk University, in their learning of English relative clauses. His findings identify that the majority of all types of errors committed by the students in the formation of the English relative clauses could be accounted for in terms of wrong transfer from Arabic, and it was found that male students committed more errors than females in the formation of the English relative clauses.

This study will investigate the effect of using the native language (Arabic language) on teaching English grammar. Grammar is the base of the language; it provides students with the structures and rules they need in order to organize their messages and ideas. Since students cannot convey their ideas to their full extension without a good control of the basic grammar patterns. So, teaching grammar by using the native language can be helpful. For example translation exercises may be perfect practice when there is a grammar point that is causing difficulty to students. The importance of this study lies in presenting a full scale analysis about achieving new grammar rules and structure in English language by using code switching model. This approach determines the best way of teaching English grammar, either by using English without any reference to the native language or by using English supported by Arabic. To determine also students' attitudes towards using the native language in learning English grammar.

### **1.1 Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of the study is to investigate the effect of using students' native language (Arabic language) on teaching English as a foreign language grammar achievement, and attitudes of the Ninth grade EFL Jordanian students towards learning English grammar.

More specifically, it seeks to:

1. Assess the effect of incorporating the use of students' native language in teaching English grammar in EFL classroom.
2. Find out attitudes of Ninth grade EFL students towards using the native language in learning English grammar.

### **1.2 Statement of the Problem**

The mother tongue is often seen by English teachers in Jordan as a negative feature of the L2 classroom in Jordan, and the decision about whether to use the first language L1 is amongst the most common dilemmas that language teaching in monolingual classroom encounters, the low levels of students in grammar achievement is the evidence for the existence of this problem. This intends to determine whether the use of the mother tongue in English classroom in the field of teaching grammar and structure, is negative or positive, and to determine the Ninth grade students' attitudes towards using the native language in teaching grammar rules and structure in the EFL classroom.

## **Methods and Procedures**

### **3.2 Sample of the Study**

The sample of the study consisted of Ninth grade EFL students enrolled at Eskan Al Jubaiha secondary school in second directorate of Amman in Jordan in the academic year 2010- 2011. The sample of the study included 80 female students in the Ninth grade, distributed over two sections: one section was assigned randomly to comprise group (1) as an experimental group, while the other section was assigned randomly to comprise group (2) as a control group.

### **3.4 The Instrument**

The researcher developed two-research instruments:

#### **1. Grammar achievement test**

An achievement test was prepared by the researcher. Students were pre- tested to see if there are any differences in their achievement in grammar. (See Appendix 1) All the items of the pre test were chosen from the covered material depending on the table of specification, taking into consideration the main objectives of Action back 9 second semester text book. After conducting the experiment, students were post tested on the three units, which they have been taught.

#### **2. Questionnaire**

An attitudes questionnaire was applied by the researcher to measure the attitudes of the students towards using English language supported with Arabic if necessary or using English language without any use of Arabic (only English language) in teaching English grammar for Ninth grade EFL Jordanian students.

### **3.5 Procedure**

The aim of this study is to investigate the effect of using the native language (Arabic language) on grammar achievement and learning attitudes of basic stage EFL Jordanian students. The researcher followed the following steps in collecting the data for the study:

1. The pre test was prepared to measure potential differences in students` achievement in grammar. The sample was randomly grouped into two classes; these classes were randomly selected as follows: one class for group 1, which is the experimental group, and the other class for group 2, which is the control group. The two methods of instructions were randomly assigned to the two groups.
2. the researcher taught group 1 the grammar material for six weeks using the bilingual method (English + Arabic) in the following situation:
  - a. Explaining the complex exercises in the grammar when the teacher felt that students were unable to answer the exercises in English.
  - b. Explaining language rules, accent and spelling.
  - c. Interpreting difficult English words, phrases, questions and information.
  - d. Asking or giving managerial information of grammar, and allowing students to ask and answer in Arabic when necessary.
  - e. Checking understanding of grammar function.
  - f. Remarking on some grammatical and structural forms when the teacher felt that the students will improve reaction.
  - g. Helping weak students by translating in Arabic if the teacher found that helpful.
  - h. Encourage good students to clarify some different structure rules to their classmates who did not comprehend.
3. The researcher also taught group 2 the same material for six weeks by using English only.
4. The researcher applied the post test for both groups. The purpose of the post test was to measure the differences in students` achievement in both groups.
5. The researcher provided students in both groups with the attitudes questionnaires to measure the attitudes towards using the native language (Arabic) or the target language (English) the in learning English grammar rules.

### **Results of the Study**

To test the equivalence of the groups before conducting the experiment, a pre test was conducted so that any difference after conducting the experiment could be attributed to the effect of the instrumental method.

The probability value (significant value) was greater than (0.05) suggesting no significant mean differences between the two groups (experimental and control) in the pre measure. As a result, a conclusion of equivalence between the two groups in achievement in pre measure is made.

The results of the study according to the Questions; the results related to the first question:

1. Are there any significant differences ( $\alpha=0.05$ ) in grammar achievement of the Ninth grade students attributed to the teaching method (Bilingual or Monolingual)?

Table (1) shows the results for achievement between the two groups on the post test. This significant level value (0.00) aligned with the calculated of (f) value (34.85) indicates significant differences between the two groups in the post test, it was less than (0.05), and this difference was in favor of the experimental group which has a mean of (21.25), while the control group has a mean of (16.0).

**Table 1: One-way analysis of covariance for achievement between the two groups in the post test**

Source	Sum of squares	DF	Mean Square	F	Sig
Group	453.42	1	453.42	34.85	0.000
Error	1001.82	77	13.01		
Total	2390.75	79	466.43		

In addition, Table (4) shows the results of means, standard deviations and t test value for attitudes between the two groups (experimental and control) in the post test. The probability value (sig value) was less than 0.05 suggesting significant mean differences between the two groups in the post test for achievement. This mean difference was in favor of the experimental group as its mean (21.25) was higher compared to the control group mean (16.0).

**Table 2: Means, standard deviation and t test value for achievement between the two groups (experimental and control) in the post measure**

Variable	Group	Mean	SD	T	Sig
Attitudes	Exp	21.25	5.38	4.83	0.000
	Cont	16.00	4.27		

Which means that students who were taught English grammar rules by using Arabic language showed better achievement than those who were taught English grammar rules without using Arabic language.

The results related to the second question

1. Are there any significant differences ( $\alpha=0.05$ ) in the attitudes of Ninth grade students towards learning English grammar attributed to the teaching method (Bilingual or Monolingual)?
2. Table (3) indicates the values of means, standard deviation and relative importance for each item in the attitudes scale for both groups (experimental and control). Item (15) which states "I can understand most of English grammar rules when teacher uses code switching" has got the first order among the attitudes items ( $4.44\pm 0.93$ ) and satisfies a relative importance percent of (88.75%).
3. While item (31) which states "The teacher translate her foreign language most of the time in grammar class" has got the last order ( $2.28\pm 1.17$ ) and satisfied a relative importance percent of (45.5 %). The overall attitudes mean was ( $3.50\pm 0.41$ ) representing a relative importance percent of (40.06%).

**Table3: Means, standard deviation d and relative importance % for each item in the attitudes scale for both groups (experimental and control. N=80)**

	Items	Mean	SD	%	Order
1	I think learning English grammar by using English makes me lost.	3.78	1.32	75.50	13
2	I prefer learning English grammar by using Arabic language to develop myself.	3.64	1.23	72.75	16
3	I prefer learning English grammar by using English itself.	2.73	1.50	54.50	27
4	I could not understand any rules of grammar by using English itself.	2.93	1.44	58.50	26
5	I find English language is difficult to understand when used only in grammar class.	3.08	1.36	61.50	22
6	I can understand all rules of English grammar when used Arabic in grammar class.	4.01	1.23	80.25	7
7	I find using English language in grammar class is interesting.	3.28	1.32	65.50	21
8	I find using English language in grammar class is boring.	3.08	1.44	61.50	23
9	I feel comfortable and less stressed when teacher used Arabic language in teaching English grammar.	3.94	1.15	78.75	11
10	Learning English grammar by using Arabic helps me pass my examinations.	4.00	1.08	80.00	8
11	Learning English grammar by using Arabic helps me improve other language skills.	4.06	1.14	81.25	6
12	Using Arabic in English grammar class provides me with the opportunity to practice real language.	3.75	1.16	75.00	14
13	Using Arabic in English grammar class provides me with the opportunity to participate and giving example.	3.95	1.11	79.00	10
14	Using Arabic in English grammar class provides me with the opportunity to understand the application of grammar rules.	4.23	0.91	84.50	2
15	I can understand most of English rules when teacher switches language (using both English, Arabic).	4.44	0.93	88.75	1
16	Using English in grammar class helps me interact with teacher and students.	3.04	1.53	60.75	24
17	Using English in grammar class makes me think in English.	3.79	1.23	75.75	12
18	Using Arabic in English grammar class makes me think in Arabic.	3.00	1.18	60.00	25
19	I feel afraid to make mistakes when teacher using English only in grammar class.	3.54	1.28	70.75	19
20	Learning English grammar by using English itself is a waste of time.	2.49	1.41	49.75	29
21	I like my teacher to use Arabic in English grammar class.	3.69	1.15	73.75	15
22	Using Arabic is necessary to help define some new vocabulary items in grammar sentences	4.11	0.86	82.25	4
23	Using Arabic is necessary to explain complex grammar point	4.11	0.91	82.25	5
24	Using Arabic is necessary to explain difficult concepts or ideas in grammar	4.14	0.95	82.75	3
25	Using Arabic is necessary to give instructions in grammar application	3.99	0.97	79.75	9
26	Using Arabic is necessary to motivate students	3.61	1.22	72.25	17
27	Using Arabic should be stopped in grammar class	2.36	1.33	47.25	30
28	Using Arabic in English grammar class should be used as less as teacher can	3.40	1.11	68.00	20
29	Using Arabic in grammar class could make mixing in meaning	2.65	1.20	53.00	28
30	The teacher speaks English language most of the time in grammar class	3.55	1.53	71.00	18
31	The teacher translates her foreign language most of the time in grammar class	2.28	1.17	45.50	31
	<b>Attitudes total</b>	3.50	0.41	70.06	

Table (4) shows the results of means, standard deviation and t test value for attitudes between the two groups (experimental and control) in the post measure. The probability value (sig value) was greater than (0.05) suggesting no significant mean differences between the two groups in the post measure for attitudes.

**Table 4: Means, standard deviation and t test value for attitudes between the two groups (experimental and control) in the post measure**

Variable	Group	Mean	SD	T	Sig
Attitudes	Exp	3.43	0.41	1.54	0.127
	Cont	3.57	0.40		

### Discussion

The objective of the study is to explore the effect of using the native language on grammar achievement and learning attitudes of Ninth grade EFL Jordanian students. The results of the study revealed that there were significant differences between the two groups, group 1 and group 2 on the post test in the field of achievement. These differences were in favor of students in the experimental group. The results of the first question can be explained by saying that using the native language may help students to formulate hypotheses about language and support them in developing explicit understanding about how grammar operates in the target language.

Similarly, Deller and Rinvoluceri (2002) suggest that the students can profitably use (MT) to make comparisons between the grammar of their first and second languages. As shown clearly in the first question results, the differences between the two groups' achievements in the post test was in favor of the experimental group which had a mean (21.25), while the control group had a mean of (16.0). A possible explanation for this result that the experimental group who were taught English grammar by using English language supported by Arabic language, has complete proof that this method has been proved useful. This is clearly shown in their results with mean (21.25) because they used their grammar in L1 to help them understand their grammar in L2, get the best content instructions while learning English grammar rules in order to avoid mistakes, learn how to invest their previous comprehension, and form new pattern to enable them to apply and use English grammar rules. The results are in agreement with what Cook (2000) conclusion that learners need a bilingual environment with a lot of code-switching and a focus on form and a bit of focus on meaning and use. Nigel, Ross (2006) argues that the real usefulness of translation in the EFL classroom lies in exploring it in order to compare grammar, vocabulary, word order. According to Linder "translation activities should be used and students should be supported by communicative and natural language learning method".

The findings of first question showed quite similar results to previously conducted studies' of (Deller, Rinvoluceri, Cook, Nigael, Ross, and Linder) highlight the importance of L1 in teaching L2.

Results revealed that there were no significant mean differences between the experimental and control group in the attitudes measure. The overall control group attitudes mean was (3.57±0.40) with representing a relative importance percent of (71.45%). On the other hand, the overall experimental group attitudes mean was (3.43±0.41) with representing a relative importance percent of (68.68%). The overall attitudes for both groups were (3.50±0.41) representing a relative importance percent of (40.06%).

The probability value (Sig Value) was greater than (0.05) suggesting no significant mean difference between the two groups in the attitudes of Ninth grade students towards learning English grammar that can be attributed to the type of teaching method.

The overall findings showed that, the majority of both groups (experimental and control) encouraged to use their mother tongue in learning English grammar rule, and they believe in the effectiveness and importance of L1 use.

Finally, the findings of this study showed the importance of L1 use in teaching English grammar in classroom, students need to resort to L1 occasionally to make sure that students only do this when they feel they cannot control grammar understanding in English. This indicates that we should use the native language when there is no way we can get students to understand or recognized through English; therefore the use of mother tongue in the grammar learning process should be used and recommended.

My argument being that use the mother tongue in English grammar classrooms in a fair and judicious way can be helpful and can facilitate in the learning and teaching of English grammar skills. We should finally free ourselves of the old mistaken belief and try to commend the existed connection between the mother tongue and foreign language.

### Conclusion

My research results recommend and point to a careful use of native language when teaching grammar in the English classroom. However, the use of native language in teaching English grammar should be one of the many tools that teacher should use when dealing with grammatical aspects of language.

Using the students' native language in the classroom helping students to raise their awareness and knowledge about the similarities and differences between the two languages, and helping them to discover different methods to practice and to express themselves in the target language. The good teacher should know when and where the code switching is suitable.

### Recommendations

In light of the findings of the study, the researcher recommends the following:

1. The Ministry of Education in Jordan ought to give teachers proper trainings (workshop, seminars) on the role of native language in teaching English grammar for EFL classroom and strategies to improve students' motivation and efficiency by combining Arabic with English when necessary.
2. Teachers ought to deal with students' need and try to use Arabic language when necessary in English grammar classroom.
3. It is recommended for the writers of English courses for the basic stages should make reference for the students' mother tongue (Arabic) whenever suitable.
4. Further research may be conducted to investigate the effect of the use of the native language on reading, writing, and vocabulary separately.

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