
| RESEARCH ARTICLE

Universal Grammar and the Acquisition of English Regular Inflections: A minimalist Approach

Muneeb Yehya Alshawsh¹ and Mohammed Q. Shormani²

¹PhD Student, Ibb University, Yemen

²Professor of Linguistics, Ibb University, Yemen

Corresponding Author: Muneeb Yehya Alshawsh, **E-mail:** alshawshmuneeb@gmail.com

| ABSTRACT

This article aims to study the acquisition of English regular inflections by L1 Yemeni Arabic speakers and the role of UG in this acquisition, adopting a minimalist approach. 30 students were recruited as participants of the study. They are selected randomly from level three and four students, studying at the Department of English, Faculty of Arts, Ibb University, Yemen. The study has been carried out in two years in two Stages: Stage 1 has been conducted while the participants are at level 3, in 2023, and Stage 2 when they reach level four, 2024. The same group participated in both Stages. The results show that students' ill-form performance is of various types including L1 transfer, L2 influence and unique errors. The study concludes that UG is still accessible to L2 learners as evident by the improvements the learners achieve in Stage 2.

| KEYWORDS

Inflection, Universal Grammar, Minimalism

| ARTICLE INFORMATION

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1. Introduction

Language acquisition is seen as the most crucial, controversial and hot-debated subject matter where various and different types of theories have been introduced trying to study its nature and process (Shormani, 2014a & b). It is only in Chomsky's (1957) *Syntactic Structure* and his subsequent works, linguistics and language acquisition have been studied as a natural phenomenon, and this is more evident in Chomsky's (1980-1992) **Principles** and **Parameters Framework** (henceforth, P&P). This framework is biological in nature (Shormani, 2024). It studies any linguistic phenomenon scientifically. Shormani (2024) argues that as far as syntax is concerned, and specifically within the generative framework, "biological in nature, and neurological in orientation, it has been assumed that syntax resembles natural phenomena" (p.36).

The P&P framework views first language (henceforth, L1) acquisition as a matter of parameter setting, and second language (henceforth, L2) as parameter resetting. L2 learners are tasked to reset the pre-set parameters, L1 parameters, according to L2 to which they are exposed. This setting and resetting of parameters are judged by the acquisition of inflectional categories unlike the case in minimalism. Along these lines, Shormani (2024) argues that in P&P, selected items are mapped from the lexicon onto syntax "uninflected onto ready-made chunks (i.e. phrase markers), and then on syntax they get inflected for all features" (p.59) whereas the contrary is held in minimalism. Items are selected and mapped onto the (core) syntax inflected "in a step-by-step fashion, and in a bottom-up manner" (p. 60).

However, minimalism sees language acquisition as acquisition of features. Chomsky (1995, *et. seq*) proposes the minimalist approach for economy purposes, economy of derivation and representation where language is viewed as an optimal solution for legibility conditions and linking sound to meaning (Chomsky, 2005). Chomsky's (2005) study refines earlier minimalist notions.

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Language can be captured by i) UG or the *Initial State* of the Faculty of Language (henceforth, FL), ii) the primary linguistic data, and iii) the general properties of organic systems. This minimalist simplification also includes the elimination of the notions *government*, *AGR*, *binding*, *Case* and θ -assignments from the grammar. Shormani (2024) views UG in minimalism to comprise “only the primitive apparatus necessary to describe a language” (p.64).

In this study, we aim to investigate how L1 Yemeni speakers of Arabic acquire English regular inflections. We also aim to pinpoint the role played by UG in this acquisition. 30 students were recruited as participants of the study. They are male and female, studying at the Department of English, Faculty of Arts, Ibb University, Yemen. The study has been carried out in two years in two Stages: Stage 1 has been conducted while the participants are at level 3, in 2023, and Stage 2 when they reach level four, 2024. The same group participated in both Stages. The paper is organized as follows. In section 2, we address the nature of inflection of both Arabic and English. In section 3, we tackle acquisition of inflection in both P&P and minimalism. In section 4, we present the methodology adopted. In section 5, we present the study results. We also discuss these results in this section. In section 6, we conclude the paper, providing related pedagogical implications. In section 7, we provide the study limitation and recommendations for further research.

2. The nature of inflections

Human beings use various and different languages to communicate messages; these languages do not belong to the same ancestral language, and hence, they have different procedural systems. For example, Arabic language belongs to the Semitic group whereas English belongs to the Indo-European group, and each has its own linguistic system. This is adequately and scientifically addressed in minimalism (Chomsky, 1995 *et seq*) by the parametric variation. Given that syntactic and semantic properties are universal that all natural languages have, parametric variation is located in the acquisition of functional categories (Slabakova, 2016). Slabakova adds that acquiring these categories with all of its features bundles “secures the skeleton of L2 grammar”. More importantly, these inflections/functional features can never be dispensed with simply because no sentence meaning is complete without these inflections, i.e., the sound-meaning interface can never converge without considering these inflectional categories.

2.1. Arabic

Arabic language uses the root-and-pattern inflectional morphology to inflect Arabic words/lexical items, and hence, to realize/express the grammatical meaning. The root is defined as a morphemic abstraction consisting of consonant letters mostly and long vowels in rare cases, whereas the pattern is defined as a template of characters that surround the slots of the root letters. This system is the most difficult and complex one due to the richness of its inflections in that it uses both concatenative and non-concatenative morphology. Because of this, Arabic is grouped with the analytical languages type where all affixation elements; viz., prefixation, infixation and suffixation are used. Moreover, Arabic inflectional categories are exhibited in the lexical categories of nouns, pronouns, verbs, and adjectives. Watson (2021) maintains that there are two types of inflection in Arabic: inherent inflection and contextual inflection. The contextual inflection is obviously realized in syntactic context surrounding the word as in case assignment that is fully governed by the governing head whereas the inherent inflection “is relevant to syntax and may affect the inflectional categories of agreeing or governed elements” (p. 413). Basically, Arabic exhibits the inflectional categories: number, gender, person, mood, voice, aspect, tense, definiteness, case, and degree, which will be the focus of the following sections.

2.1.1. Number

In Arabic, number is divided into three categories, singular, dual and plural. The singular is the base unmarked form, and the dual is realized by the addition of the dual suffix to the unmarked base-form whose function is governed by the case with which it agrees. As for dual, it is characterized by the addition of the suffix *-aan*, to the end of the lexical items be a noun, or an adjective regardless of gender or how the plural is formed. Its morphological *Spell-out* varies in that it is realized with *-ain* in the accusative and genitive case forms. More importantly, this plural type is subdivided into regular, formed by the addition of the suffix to the noun stem/singular base form, and this type can be captured with gender feature, masculine regular and feminine regular and irregular subdivided into three sub-types: shortened noun, extended noun, and defective noun (see Almansor & Ansari, 2019).

The plural is also divided into sound and broken morphemes. The acquisition of the former is conditioned by many constraints like gender feature that is further divided into masculine, formed by the addition of *-uuna* to the singular base unmarked form in the nominative case, and *-iina* in the genitive case as in ‘*mudarris*’ (teacher-M) → *mudarrisuuna* (teachers-M) or *mudarrisiiina* ‘teachers-M’, and the feminine realized with the addition of *-aat* to the singular base unmarked form as in ‘*mudarrisa* (teacher-F) → *mudarrisaat* (teachers-F). The latter, broken plural, is formed by breaking the singular form apart and reshaping the root in accordance with the matching plural pattern as in ‘*kitaab*’ (book-sg-F) → ‘*kutub*’ (book-Pl-F). Additionally, genericity, and intimacy features plays crucial role in forming plural best seen in the use of the singular pronoun ‘*-hiya*’ with the plural form ‘*kutub*’ in ‘*Haḍīh haya ʔal-kutub ʔal-Jadidah* → ‘these are the new books’, and hence, the plural form ‘*kutub*’ would choose the feminine singular adjective ‘*jadiida*’.

'The boys were playing in the park'

c- ḍahba ṭalawlad-u ṭila ṭalhadiqati

Went-Perf-3MP the- boys-Nom to- prep the-park-Gen

The boys went to the park'

From (3), all instances are expressed in the past tense (3a, b, & c) but they differ from each other in terms of aspects. For example, in (3a), the perfective aspect describes the completion of the action with no goal to reach the end point, whereas in (3b) the imperfective aspect is signaled by the particle '*Kaana*' indicates that the event is still in progress and its end point is not yet identified. In (3c), the perfective aspect describes the completion of event whose end point is identified and hence, reached. Thus, it is concluded that the prefix form of the imperfective aspect on the verb of Arabic sentences signals tense (present), person, and gender, whereas the suffix form signals number, person, and gender.

2.1.5. Mood

Mood in Arabic is basically realized in the imperfect verbs. It is divided into five types; each type is used to express a specific meaning: the indicative (elkhabarii) expresses any fact or to form a question and hence, uses the declarative clauses, the imperative (alamer) carries commands or an order, and prohibition, and it is derived from the jussive mood by removing the initial prefix (see e.g., Watson, 2021; Medjedoub, 2022). The subjunctive (alharti) expresses non-factual statement, wish, suggestion, and exhortation, and it is realized after the following particles *-ṭan*, *-ṭallaa*, *-li*, *-lan*, *-ḥatta*, and *-likayy* 'to mean to, not to, to/in order to, shall/will not, so that, and in order to', respectively. The jussive (almajzuum) carries a negative command, and it is placed after *-laa* to mean "don't" as an order or command (Watson, 2021; Medjedoub, 2022,). And finally, the energetic adds force to the indicative, subjunctive, or jussive moods (see Albalushi, 2015, p. 46).

2.1.6. Voice

Arabic is a Semitic language whose verbal system is variable and rich morphologically. It utilizes two types of voice, viz., active voice whose main focus is on the agent of the action positioned in the subject position, and passive voice whose sole concern is the action than its doer. Both voices are utilized in the perfect and imperfect tenses, but their manifestations are realized differently by having different vocalizations. For example, the active voice has the basic word order VSO (see Shormani, 2015a, 2017a & b, 2018; Alesawe, 2015).

2.1.7. Degree

Degree is an Arabic inflectional category realized on adjectives in terms of a comparative form to add a Stage of graduation to the basic meaning of the adjective form and a superlative form to express the highest degree or level of a quality or attribute. Its derivation is rule-based depending on distinctive templatic pattern formed according to the consonant root of the adjective. If the consonant root of adjective is biliteral, the comparative form will be derived according to the templatic pattern, aCaCC as in *muhimm* 'important' → *ahamm* 'more important' (see Watson, 2021). Also, the superlative or relative formation is rule-based in that the adjective base and then inserting them into a template pattern. For example, *afḥal*, as in *qaliil* 'a little' → *ṭaqal* 'the least' (Watson, 2021, p. 419).

2.1.8. Definiteness

Definiteness is an Arabic inflection best realized morphologically via the addition of the *il-* or *al-* or *l-* in case of assimilation, but this variation does not entail agreement in terms of gender, number, , etc. It is an inherent property in (proper) nouns, pronouns, and demonstratives (Watson, 2021). This inflection is prefixed to the indefinite adjective and nouns it makes them definite. Now, let us turn to discussing infections in English in the subsequent sections.

2.2. English

Unlike Arabic, English is concatenative in nature, the inflectional system of which is mainly based on suffixation to produce regular forms. , etc.It solely belongs to the fusional language type, but that is not to say that English does not manifest any instance of agglutination, synthesis, analysis, etc., which is beyond the scope of this paper.

2.2.1. Number

Number (henceforth, Num) is a morphosyntactic feature used to express distinction in counting as one, two, three, , etc. Unlike Arabic, English manifests only two number properties, viz. singular and plural. The former is the unmarked base form from which the plural form is formed by adding the invariant suffix morpheme *-s* to the singular base. This feature is explicitly realized with

the 3rd person sg in subject-verb agreement as in 'Ali is a good teacher, and he loves his students, this girl feels sick, but these boys are fine'.

2.2.2 Gender

Given that most languages are classified according to the grammatical gender system as it is the case in Spanish and French, English does not show any grammatical gender in the classification of lexical items specifically in classifying nouns. Instead, it shows natural gender specifically with the choice of some nouns and pronouns such as 'woman vs man, daughter vs son, husband vs wife, he vs she, etc.

2.2.3. Person

In English, person feature is best realized in the classification of the seven English personal pronouns categorized into three categories: first person, i.e., the person speaking, second person, i.e., the person spoken to, and third person, i.e., the person spoken about. Each personal pronoun has a paradigm of four forms, namely, personal nominative, personal accusative, determiner possessive and nominal possessive (*I, me, my, mine*). This feature is grammaticalized morpho-syntactically via the attachment of -s to the third person singular masculine and feminine as in 'He loves his wife and she likes to go to her work on foot' indicating that this is an inherent lexical feature of 3rd singular masculine and feminine.

2.2.4. Tense and Aspect

Tense, in English, is a functional category grammaticalized morphologically to mark the present and past events by the addition of a suffix morpheme to the main verb of a finite clause. Comrie (1976) defines tense as a temporal deictic that relates a situation or an event to the time of speaking. Thus, English has only two tenses, present and past. Unlike tense, aspect in English is formed with the help of an auxiliary. More importantly, it can be distinguished from tense semantically in that "aspect as a linguistic category whose concern is with showing how a situation is viewed based on its inception, continuation, and completion (Comrie, 1976; emphasis added). Consider (4).

(4) a- Ali is reading a book.

b- Ali was reading a book.

c- Ali read a book last Friday.

In (4), it is noticed that the difference between (4a) and (4b) is in tense, as both sentences describe the situation (state, event or process) in relation to the moment of speech time. However, the difference between (4b) and (4c) is of perfectivity as in (4c) where the action of reading is viewed as completed and hence is expressed in its entirety and of imperfectivity as in (4b) that views the internal temporal situation by the speaker, i.e. the action of reading in (4b) focuses on phases.

2.2.5. Possessiveness

Possessiveness is an inflection feature solely used to express a possession relation between a possessor and possessee/possessum. In English, this feature is basically realized with the addition of the variant suffix -'s or s' to the possessor, and this addition should be in **possessor-possessee/possessum** word order as in 'Ali's car, the teachers' bus and My father's house' (see also Shormani, 2016a & b). It can also be realized via a pronoun in both prepositional and non-prepositional contexts, but such a realization can only be manifested as far as a learner, i.e., L1 or L_n learners, fully acquire the morpho-syntax-discourse interface as in 'My father loves his car', and 'Huda and a friend of hers met with Professor Shormani' (see Marinis, 2016,). Important to illustrate is the recursiveness nature this inflection manifests in its formation as in 'Her father's house's window'.

2.2.6. Degree

Degree is an inflectional feature utilized to indicate a Stage of graduation to the basic meaning of the adjective form. It is realized in two forms, the comparative (it signals a comparison between two entities) and the superlative (it signals a comparison between more than two entities) . These forms are rule-governed by the following structure: lexical item + adjective/adverb + er + than + another lexical items for comparative form as in *tall+er* → taller, *great+er* → greater, , and lexical item + adjective/adverb + -est +... for superlative form as in *tallest*, but with a lexical item/word with more than two syllables, the addition of the word 'more' before the adjective/adverb is required as in 'He is more generous than her'.

3. Acquisition of inflections

3.1. P&P framework

As alluded in section 1, language acquisition in P&P is a matter of parameter setting or resetting (Shormani, 2014, a, b &c; Lardiere, 2008, 2009, Slabakova, 2003, 2008, 2016; Jensen et al., 2020). According to the parameter resetting view, what L2 learners really need is rest the preset parameters according to the L2 value, Lardiere (2008) argues that attributing morphological variability to “the parametric (non-)selection of features is too simplistic” (p. 4). The author, here, intends not to reject Chomsky’s (1980, 1995, 2001) conceptualization of parameter resetting. Rather, she holds that though parameter resetting in the feature-selection sense is very important, it would never be sufficient or near sufficient alone. This insufficiency is most evidently observed with the failure of L2 learners to develop the morphological competence enabling them to know “precisely which forms go with’ which features” (p.4). Such competence would enable L2 learners to have awareness on “the ways in which grammatical features are morphologically combined and conditioned may well affect their acquirability and overt realization in SLA” (p. 4). As a result, she argues that the parameter resetting conceptualization needs to be enriched with “an adequate description of feature- reassembly in addition to feature-selection” (p. 26).

Furthermore, the very crucial and substantial concept of the P&P is that every human being is capable of acquiring any language of the world beside his/her language but sufficient and efficient exposure to the linguistic input of that language is provided (Radford, 2009; Shormani, 2014a & b, 2024). More importantly, this capacity is characterized by the existence of a mental ability, Universal Grammar (henceforth, UG) that comprises the tacit, genetic and innate knowledge of language with which every human being is predisposed. This UG is composed of principles, universal rules all languages possess, and they are invariant and parameters, language-specific rules, i.e. two choices rules, and they are variant (Shormani, 2014a, b & c).

In L2 acquisition, the **representational deficit approach** (see Hawkins 2003, Hawkins & Liszka 2003, Tsimpli 2003; Tsimpli & Roussou, 1991; Hawkins & Chan, 1997 is a resetting parameter-based conceptualization where language differences are viewed as a matter of “the different selections among optional syntactic features” languages make (Hawkins & Liszka, 2003, p. 25). Morphological variability is seen as “a failure in the selection of parameterized formal features (Lardiere, 2008, p. 3). Lardiere adds that if the uniform interpretability across languages in the LF (e.g., Chomsky 2001: 4) is considered “then the necessity for selecting new *interpretable* features in the L2 is not at all self-evident; presumably these will already be present in some way in the L1, and thus the FFFH/representational deficit approach would have little to say about them” (P.3). Lardiere adds that, in adult L2 acquisition, uninterpretable parameterized formal features present in the L2 grammar, but not selected by the L1 grammar would be “unacquirable” due to some sort of critical period effects” (p.3). Moreover, She maintains that Chomsky (2004) leaves unexplained how these features should be realized “is it in the form of bound or free grammatical morphemes or embedded within various lexemes”(p.3), and how such features are “idiosyncratically assembled” and manifested, i.e., is it by an inflection, lexical item, overtly expressed or not? because such specification can adequately determine the crosslinguistic variation let alone the very complicated problems encountered by L2 learners.

3.2. Minimalism

In minimalism, language acquisition could be basically understood in terms of **Feature Reassembly Hypothesis** (Lardiere, 2008, see also Shormani, 2015b). In L2 acquisition, this minimalist account necessitates L2 Learners to acquire the morphological competence of, for example, English inflections. Otherwise, failure would be the ultimate result, which is best realized in the remapping process where learners are encountered with learning difficulties. To acquire English inflections, according to our minimalist account, the parameter values resetting alone can never be sufficient; instead, features acquisition of these inflections is what importantly matters as such features will provide L2 learners with knowledge (morphological competence) about what constitutes the formal features, how they are constrained and conditioned in their contexts, what constitutes an obligatory context for these features, , etc. (Lardiere, 2008, 2009). To concretize this, Lardiere’s (2008) presents a learning problem, viz., the grammaticalized formal feature **+past** and its meaning load in English, Irish, and Somali, faced by L2 learners. Based on her example, she holds that the assembly of the **+past** feature in these languages varies in terms of the condition, factors, and contexts in its encoding. This supports that the resetting parameters in the feature selection sense as “inadequate” to account for such variation (see Lardiere, 2008, pp.7-8, see also Shormani, 2015b).

Unlike P&P, minimalism views L1 acquisition to be just a matter of *feature selection, and assembly* (Chomsky, 2001, Lardiere, 2008, 2009, 2011, 2016) in a sense that a language acquirer either a child in L1 or adult oL2 learner is set in a task where s/he needs to select from the available innately universal set of features the ones that match the surrounding linguistic input to which s/he is exposed. This is consistent with Chomsky’s (2001) view that as far as the substantial features are selected, the particular functional categories and lexical items are assembled. Then, parameter setting is just a matter of feature selection and its assembly, and this is best explained in L1 acquisition, whereas parameter resetting is just a matter of feature mapping and feature reassembly if L1 and the L2 diverge/mismatch, and this is articulated by the Feature Reassembly Hypothesis (Lardiere, 2008, 2009) where the L2 learners need to reconfigure the already-configured features, L1 features, onto the L2 counterpart ones.

4. Methodology

This study is to a large extent longitudinal in nature; it takes place in two different years and two Stages: the first Stage (henceforth, Stage 1) takes place when the participants were at level three of their university course. The second Stage (Henceforth, Stage 2) is conducted when they (the same learners) are at level four. Stage 1 is primarily set to examine L1 transfer role in L2 English inflection acquisition, while Stage 2 is focused on examining the UG role.

4.1. Participants

This study involves 30 Yemeni Ibbi Arabic-speaking learners of English, studying at the Department of English, Faculty of Arts, Ibb University, Yemen. These 30 randomly selected learners participated twice: first while they are at level 3, i.e. Stage 1 of data collection in 2023. When they reached level four, the same group also participated in Stage 2 of data collection in 2024.

4.2. Inflections Examined

The study at hand examines English regular inflectional morphemes, i.e., **-s** 3rd person singular, **-ed** past, **-ing**, **-s** plural, **-en** (participle), **-’s/s’** (possessiveness), **-er** (comparative), and **-est** (superlative). These inflections have been tested via asking the participants to respond to the written test consisting of four parts: error identification and correction test, plural forming test, free composition test to write a complete sentence expressing factual/habitual event/action on one hand, and past event/action test on the other hand and free composition test in a form of writing a paragraph about any topic of the five given topics (see Appendix I).

4.3. Procedure

In Stage 1, the participants are asked to voluntarily respond to the written tests consisting of four parts. In Stage 2, the participants (the same) were asked to voluntarily respond to the written tests (the same given in Stage 1). The data of each Stage were recorded separately. The responses were analyzed by the researcher and in consultation with the supervisor. The responses are counted utilizing the simple frequency count and percentage. They are categorized into two categories, well-formed and ill-formed. The ill-formed responses/errors are subdivided into four *subcategories*, *omission*, *addition*, *misselection* and *left undone*. The *left undone* category was excluded from the analysis of the data. The study assumes that the well-formed production of inflections by the participants stands for the portion of access they have to UG properties whereas the ill-formed production represents both the L1 transfer and L2 interference, i.e. adoption of learning strategies as overgeneralization of rules/over-suppliance of the rules of specific inflections to the others. The results of the frequency count are further analyzed by SPSS program.

5. Results and discussion

5.1. Results

In this section, we present the results of the study illustrated in Tables (1-3).

Table (1) illustrates the results of Stage 1. We have (8) regular inflections. There are 902 well-formed occurrences of inflections. Additionally, there are 447 ill-formed occurrences distributed as 79 ill-formed instances of *omission*, 20 instances of *addition*, 120 instances of *misselection*, and 228 instances of *left undone*. Here, F stands for the frequency of occurrence, and % stands for the percentage.

Table 1: Results collected from the participants at Stage 1.

Items	Well-formed		Ill-formed							
			Omission		Addition		Misselection		Left undone	
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
-S (3rd persons singular)	308	34.1	37	46.8	9	45	46	38.3	99	43.4
-ed (past)	73	8.1	11	13.9	0	0	45	37.5	59	25.9
-ing	36	4	7	8.9	0	0	10	8.3	10	4.4
-S plural	400	44.3	15	19	11	55	16	13.3	44	19.3

-en (participle)	0	0	1	1.3	0	0	1	0.8	0	0
-S/S' (possessiveness)	37	4.1	3	3.8	0	0	1	0.8	6	2.6
-er (comparative)	25	2.8	3	3.8	0	0	0	0	4	1.8
-est (superlative)	23	2.5	2	2.5	0	0	1	0.8	6	2.6
Total	902		79		20		120		228	

Table (2) presents the results of Stage 2. In this Stage, there are 948 well-formed instances of inflections, and 374 ill-formed instances of inflections distributed as 79 occurrences of omission, 20 occurrences of addition, 120 occurrences of misselection, and 228 occurrences of left undone.

Table 2: Results collected from the participants at Stage 2.

Items	Well-formed		Ill-formed							
			Omission		Addition		Misselection		Left undone	
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
-S (3 rd persons singular)	306	32.3	25	42.4	8	47.1	25	25.3	90	45.2
-ed (past)	108	11.4	13	22	2s	25	51	51.5	47	23.6
-ing	43	4.5	5	8.5	0	0	15	15.2	8	4
-S plural	397	41.9	10	16.9	7	41.2	5	5.1	30	15.1
-en (participle)	1	0.1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
-S/S' (possessiveness)	37	3.9	6	10.2	0	0	0	0	15	7.5
-er (comparative)	26	2.7	0	0	0	0	0	0	4	2
-est (Superlative)	30	3.2	0	0	0	0	3	3	5	2.5
Total	948		59		17		99		199	

Table (3) presents the results of Stage 1 and Stage 2 in order to make a comparison and to identify if there is progress.

Table 3: Comparison of the results at Stage 1 and Stage 2

Inflections	F	Use Inflections				Chi-Square	P-Value
		Stage 1		Stage 2			
		Well-formed	ill-formed	Well-formed	ill-formed		
		308	191	306	148	279.108 ^a	0.000

-S (3 rd persons singular)	%	32.3%	20.0%	32.1%	15.5%
-ed (past)	F	73	115	108	113
	%	17.8%	28.1%	26.4%	27.6%
-ing	F	36	27	43	28
	%	26.9%	20.1%	32.1%	20.9%
-S plural	F	400	86	397	52
	%	42.8%	9.2%	42.5%	5.6%
-en (participle)	F	0	2	1	0
	%	0.0%	66.7%	33.3%	0.0%
-'S/S' (possessiveness)	F	37	10	37	21
	%	35.2%	9.5%	35.2%	20.0%
-er (comparative)	F	25	7	26	4
	%	40.3%	11.3%	41.9%	6.5%
-est (Superlative)	F	23	9	30	8
	%	32.9%	12.9%	42.9%	11.4%
Total	F	902	447	948	374
	%	33.8%	16.7%	35.5%	14.0%

5.2. Discussion

This section discusses the results of the study identifying the source of the error made by Arabic L2 learners of English be they L1 transfer (Interlingual errors), L2 learning strategies (Intralingual errors), unrecognized/ unique errors ((no source).

5.2.1. L1 transfer

L1 Transfer category is subdivided into the following subcategories.

5.2.1.1. -S 3rd person singular

As it is clear from table (1), misselection errors are the most produced ones by the participants as in (9 & 10), then comes errors of omission (7) and finally errors of addition category (8).

- 7- I like the morning scene in old Sana'a especially when the sun **rose**.
- 8- The girls **hopes** for beautiful future.
- 9- In these days, women's education became important.
- 10- He **is speaking** four languages.

The source of the error in (7) is Arabic as the participants misselect the past 'rose' for the present simple tense and this source comes from the fact that Arabic never makes a distinction between facts and non-facts in using tenses (Shormani, 2012a) as in "ʕinḍama ʔalšams-u ʔašraqat" 'when the sun rose'. In (8), the source is based on 'structure, i.e., Arabic forces that number agreement should be respected between the verb and its subject; this results in the addition of the '-s 3rd person sg to the verb. In (9), the

learners misselect the past simple for the present simple; the source of error is interlingual, Arabic, where the meaning of the verb 'ʔsbaħa' (become), the infinitive or base form, can carry the factual meaning as Arabic does not encode a specific form to express factuality, and here, learners overextend such use to English especially the meaning of the verb in Arabic is ʔsbaħa 'become' can encode the intended meaning in English but in its present form. In (10), the learners misselect the present progressive where the present simple is a must and the source of such error is Arabic which manifests two grammatical viewpoints of expressing aspect, namely, the perfective and imperfective (Benmamoun, 2000; Alruwaili, 2014).

5.2.1.2. -ed past

As illustrated in Table (1), the participants encountered a difficulty to produce well-formed regular past tense instances in that the ill-formed examples are approximately double than the well-formed ones. Consider (11).

11- All these cases would **considered** from now onward.

In (11), the participants tend to omit the auxiliary verb "be" to produce the well-formed past passive form. The source of this omission is Arabic that has a similar structure lacking the verb "be" as in (12). Moreover, English passive construction uses auxiliaries and word order change whereas Arabic counterpart is just a matter of vowel change without changing the order of the words in a sentence (Abushihab, El-Omari & Tobat, 2011; Shormani, 2017b, 2018).

12- Kul haðih ʔa-ħalaat sa-tuħað baʕin ʔalʔaʕtabaar min ʔalaan waʕaʕadin

All these cases would considered from now onward

'All these cases would be considered from now onward'.

5.2.1.3. -ing participle

As it is clear from Table (1), the participants produce ill-formed instance of -ing inflection in an attempt to convey the progressive meaning. Consider (13 & 14).

13- While Ali and Ahmed **works**, my father came.

14- She is **read** a poetry book now.

In (13), the participants misselect the -s 3rd person sg verb to convey the progressive meaning; the source of this error is interlingual, Arabic, that does not grammaticalize the progressive and habitual aspects of the sentence either inflectionally or lexically as English does. Rather, such progressive meaning can be realized in the same structure, via the present simple tense. The same can be said about (14). Consider (15) from Yemeni Arabic which reflects the the source of these two errors.

15- Haya takuun tiqra kitaab ʔ-ʔaʕr ʔal-ʔaan.

she is read book poetry now

'She is reading a poetry book now'

5.2.1.4. -S plural

As shown in table (1), the plural -s inflection scores the highest rank among the well-formed instance with an overall percentage of 44.3% and still, reasonable number of ill-formed instances are observed in the data. See (16-17).

16- That is why they are great **student**.

17- one of the books **are** yours.

The participants produce syntactically well-formed sentences, but ill-formed morphologically. For example, they omit the -s plural morpheme from the word "student" in (16), and misselect the verb "are" in (17). The source of error in (16) is interlingual, Arabic transfer, that can be realized in the broken plural "طلبة" (students). In Arabic, the singular masculine form and its sound masculine form is "طالب → طلاب" and the singular feminine form and its sound feminine form is "طالبة → طالبات" but when the gender is not identified in the discourse, the broken plural is used to signal the genericity feature. In (17), the source is intralingual as Arabic has the same structure and feature specification that requires the head noun to be plural when it is preceded by a determiner as 'one'. *wahid* واحد or *ħahad* احد stands for masculine and *wahida* for feminine are the Arabic counterparts of *one* in English. The source comes from sentences like (18).

18- ʔihda alkuṭub hiya milquq/ħaquka

one.sg.F the.books is yours

'One of the books is yours'

5.2.1.5. The -en participle

As reflected in table (1), the -en participle seems to be the rarest form of English inflections used by the participants in that no well-formed is observed. Rather, two ill-formed instances are observed as in (19&20).

- 19- While my dream in the life **broke I was hoped become** doctor but I did not accept through three years.
- 20- I have not **went** to Sana'a since my last visit.

The source of errors in (19 & 20) is interlingual, i.e. Arabic transfer. The participants in (19) omit the auxiliary 'had' and misselect the past simple tense verb 'broke' for the past participle 'broken'. This is supported by the second part of the sentence where the participants added the auxiliary 'was' to the past simple tense 'hoped' and then misselect the infinitive verb 'become' for the infinitive verb 'to become' to express the happening of two actions. In Arabic, the verb (كان kaana) and the particle (قد qad) can be used together to form the present/past perfect aspect in Arabic (Shormani, 2013a). Therefore, the participants resorted to the past simple tense instead as the nearest equivalent of the past perfect in English as a knowledge base source (see also Shormani, 2012b). In (20), the participants tend to translate literally from Arabic and use the past simple tense, the nearest equivalent of the present perfect in English as a knowledge base source.

5.2.2. L2 Influence (Intralingual errors)

In this section, the main concern is to identify the source of errors coming from the L2/target language and their types and nature

5.2.2.1. -s 3rd person singular

As alluded in table (1), 3rd person singular is another learning difficulty the participants encounter, and this can be exemplified in (21-25)

- 21- He lets his son **goes** to colleague
- 22- She can **works** in any place and depends of herself.
- 23- who **came** early is to sit in the first bench.
- 24- There **came** a man.
- 25- So, this language which is Arabic language **begin** to lose its vocabularies.

In these examples, the participants produce ill-formed -s 3rd person sg instances. They added the -es, a variant of the -s 3rd person sg to the infinitive 'go' in (21), -s to 'work' in (22), misselect the irregular past form to 'come' in (23 & 24), and omit -s from the verb 'begin' in (30). For example, in (21), the participants successfully produce well-formed construction of subject-verb agreement, '**He lets his son**' in the main clause but they failed to manifest the same awareness with the bare infinitive verb ' *He lets his son goes*'. They overapply -s 3rd sg agreement features to all subject-verb constructions within the sentence. They consider the lexical item '**his son**' to be a subject of the verb '**go**'. This indicates that learners have not yet acquired the full feature specifications of the verb '**let**', they are unaware that the verb '**go**' receives its case inherently by the '**feature inheritance**' principle, in that case marking is marked covertly unlike its overt expression in the main clause. Also, overapplying tense sequence rule application strategy English is mainly characterized by could be another logical reason. Syntactically, learners showed knowledge of syntactic phenomena surrounding English verbs such as nominative case. Thus, they assign the nominative case to the subject '**He**', and they oversupply this knowledge to the bare infinitive verb '**go**' assuming that it should be held in a subject-verb agreement with the presumed subject '**his son**'. In (22), the participants oversupply the subject-verb agreement relation between the subject '**he**' and its verbs '**work** and **depend**', and this comes from unawareness that the modal verb '**can**' can carry this agreement feature implicitly. This implicitness prevents an overt manifestation of the person and number agreement features.

The source in (23) is attributed to English as learners may take "who" as plural, in some positions, though they do not miss this with "is" and may be still internalizing L2 system. L1 transfer from Arabic cannot be the source, had it been so, they would have used "are". For (24), the source is intralingual, i.e., developmental where learners have not yet acquired feature specifications of the expletive subject "there" that lacks the ability to establish a full agree-relation with the verb since it only has person feature. Instead, the verb in (24) **come** agrees with the complement noun 'a man'. Therefore, the participants misselected the past as a last resort or as the default form of the present counterpart.

In (25), the omission error in the verb “begin” comes from the complex structure of the sentence where learners at their first Stages resort to “initially associate inflectional morphology with verb-raising” (Ionin & Wexler, 2002, p.119). This could be accounted for in terms of Guasti and Rizzi’s (2001) proposal pertinent to “morphological feature expression” (Ionin & Wexler, 2002, p. 117). Ionin and Wexler hold that L2 learners are like L1 learners in that they have full access to UG rules but need more time to master “language-specific morphological rules” (p.118), i.e., they need to rest the L1 parameters into the L2 parameters values. Moreover, L2 learners are fully aware that the morphological expression of ‘*be*’ is obligatory to be raised to **Tense** category as to agree and check its unvalued features overtly as in “*which is Arabic language*” but they have not yet mastered “the English-specific rule requiring agreement morphology on unraised lexical verbs in certain contexts (i.e., for 3rd person present-tense singular)” (p. 118).

5.2.2.2. -ed past

The ed-past inflection is another persistent error the participants encounter. Here, we will discuss some instances and identify their sources.

26- I hoped that I did not **found** her.

27- my best place I **visit** is Sana'a. I love it though I visited it in a short period and bad condition.

In (26), the main source of error is intralingual, an instance of incomplete rule application. In this sentence, we have two clauses, the main clause represented by the verb “hope” and the embedded one by the verb “find”. According to (26), it can be concluded that learners are still internalizing the “feature specification” of the -ed morpheme (cf. Shormani 2012a & b). They fail to produce the irregular past form of the verb ‘find’ when preceded by the negative particles, i.e., the auxiliary ‘did’ + not. Additionally, this error signals that learners have acquired the tense form for both the auxiliary and main verb, therefore, they mark the tense on both. They are not yet fully aware of the rule that says wherever an auxiliary is required along with the main verb, it is only the auxiliary verb that must be tensed (Dulay, Burt, Krashen, 1982). As for the error in (27), it is intralingual, an instance of avoidance. This avoidance comes from the lack of knowledge about the avoided structure seen in the transformed/moved structure “**My best place I visit is Sana'a**”. According to Kellerman (as cited in Alesawe, 2015, p. 38), the type of the avoided error takes place “when learners know the target language form but find it too difficult to use in certain circumstances”, i.e., in topicalization construction.

5.2.2.3. The-s plural inflection

The -s plural inflection seems to be another learning problem for the participants specifically when well-formed occurrence is governed by respecting the morpho-syntactic features of that inflection, i.e. agreement features. Consider (28 & 29).

28- One of the books **are** yours.

29- Either Musa or his brothers **was** going to the university.

As it seems clear, the source of the error in (28) is English that stems from the nature of the English multi-word quantifier. This source can be categorized under “attraction errors” category, and this is more witnessed with long-distance agreement than with the local agreement whose errors can be easily attracted (Jensen, Slabakova & Westergaard, 2020). In (29), the source of the error is not of the “attraction error” category as adjacency condition is not respected in that learners still lack access to the “feature specifications” of the indefinite quantifier “either” and hence, are unable to produce the well-formed form of the verb “were”.

5.2.2.4. The possessive inflection - 's/ s'

The -s possessive inflection is another difficult learning task for the participants as they manifest persistent errors in its production. Consider (30).

30- The **students car's** is very expensive.

In (30), the source of the error is apparently English, i.e., developmental. Such an error signals that learners start internalizing the feature specifications of the -s/'s possessive morpheme in that they apply only what they have mastered so far. This error also reveals an incomplete rule application where learners know the apostrophe’s place in the lexical item, but they still need to know how to mark possessiveness relation between plural head, functioning as head/possessor and its possessee/possessum as in “students car’s”, therefore, they avoid and mark the possessee as if it were the possessor.

5.2.2.5. The comparative -er and superlative -est inflections

Inflection of degree is also a challenging learning problem the participants face, and this could be observed in instances as in (31&32).

31- The book is more **large** than that one.

32- Alia was the **shorter** girl in her class.

The adjectives used in the sentences (31&32) are monosyllabic. They are adjectives of size. The source of the error is intralingual, i.e., developmental. Because Arabic has no equivalent counterparts to the English ones, the participants misselect the wrong form, adding the indefinite quantifier 'more' than to add the comparative suffix '-er' to the end of the monosyllabic word 'large'. The same could be said to (32) where learners added the comparative suffix 'er' to the end of the adjective 'short' as a default/underspecified form for the superlative.

5.2.3. UG and Feature Reassembling

In this section, the main concern is to provide empirical evidence for the role of UG properties through discussing and exemplifying Stage 2 data presented in table (2).. Also, a One-way ANOVA analysis was used to identify differences between groups and within groups as presented in tables (3). Moreover, the role of UG properties will be judged by comparing the number of well-formed instances with the ill-formed ones in both Stages in addition to producing well-formed instances in Stage 2 that the participants failed to produce in Stage 1.

As table (3) shows, the UG role is strikingly enhanced in regular inflections, and this is strongly evidenced by the high performance represented by the increase of percentage of well-formed instances in Stage 2 compared to that in Stage 1. For example, as shown in table (3), the frequency and percentage of well-formed instances of regular inflection in Stage 2 is (F 948, 42.9%), which is larger than it is in Stage 1 (F 902, 32.9%). Also, the frequency and percentage of the ill-formed instances in Stage 2 is (F 374, 14.0%) less than it is in Stage 1 (F 447, 16.7%). Apparently, it is clear that learners performed better in Stage 2 than in Stage 1. This suggests that the more they get advanced in their knowledge, the better their performance will be. Put simply, as illustrated in table (3), there is a significant finding between groups, i.e., the well-formed and ill-formed instances of regular inflectional use in both Stages. A one-way ANOVA performed on regular inflections reveals statistically significant differences between groups, Stage 1 and Stage 2, as $p < 0.000$; this suggests that learners have been developing their competence of regular inflections.

Comparing the percentage of well-formed and ill-formed occurrences of regular inflections in Stage 1 to that in Stage 2 as in table (3), and calculating the difference, the role of UG properties in Stage 2 could be obviously observed even if that difference is not as it is expected. This role is best realized via the participants' competence to reset the already preset L1 features (the resetting, here, is in terms of feature reassembly) where the participants in Stage 2 were able to produce well-inflected expressions in a very complex structure. According to the empirical evidence supplied by the participants in Stage 2, it can be observed that the UG role in acquiring the English inflections could be said to be equal to the role played by L1, Arabic in Stage 1 but this is not to say that UG has no role in Stage 1 for regular inflections. Rather, it has a role empirically supported with comparing the percentage of well-formed occurrences to its ill-formed counterparts (cf. tables 1-3). Given that most of the errors made by the participants in Stage 1 are interlingual, L1 transfer, developmental errors, can be assumed to take place. The nature of these L2 errors is seen to be a matter of hypothesis creation and testing (see Shormani, 2012a & b, 2014a) where L2 learners are still internalizing the L2 inflection system, and this internalization signals the initial role of UG. Thus, as L1 transfer plays a vital role in the initial Stages of language development, i.e., the acquisition of English regular inflections in the study at hand, with sufficient and efficient exposure to the surrounding linguistic input, the role of UG is obviously observed via reconfiguring/reassembling the already assembled L1 features onto the L2 configuration (Lardiere, 2008, 2009). That is to say, UG has played its expected role in participants' correct production of English regular inflections. Consider (33-36).

- 33- He spends money more than he earns.
- 34- Who comes early is to sit in the first bench.
- 35- There seems to be the most appropriate place to sit on.
- 36- She lets everything bad go.

In (33 & 36), the participants show their robust acquisition of tense sequence in English respecting the fi-features (person, number and gender) for both regular and irregular verbs as in (33). In (34), the participants exhibit perfect and complete acquisition of -s 3rd person sg agreement features bundles in complex structure where they add the -s to the end of the verb "come" understanding that such relative clause stands wholly for a singular subject. This knowledge comes from the acquisition of the morpho-syntactic-discourse interface knowledge. In Stage 1, the participants resolve to misselecting the wrong default form 'came' for the correct one 'comes'. For (35), it is the most difficult instance that the participants failed to produce correctly in Stage 1 resolving to the default past form 'seemed' as a last resort. With access to UG role, the learners were able to produce this inflection correctly because they know that the expletive *there* lacks the ability to establish a full agree-relation with the verb since it only has person feature; instead, the verb 'seem' agrees with the complement noun 'to be the most appropriate place to sit on' (see Shormani, 2024). Also, learners know that tense (T) in English has an Extended Projection Principle (EPP) feature entailing the appropriate agreement relation (Lardiere, 1998, 1999, 2008). As for (36), the participants manifest full mastery of the morpho-syntactic knowledge of the verb "let". Syntactically, this knowledge is exhibited in nominative case assignment to the subject 'he'. Unlike the

oversupplying strategy resorted to in Stage 1 the participants become aware that the verb 'go' receives its case inherently via '**feature inheritance**' principle (see Chomsky, 2005, 2006) where case marking is marked covertly unlike its overt manifestation in the main clause.

Another formidable learning problem encountered by participants in Stage 1 is the production of **-ed past** feature. In Stage 2, such a problem was overcome best exhibited in the high performance evidenced in (37).

37- All these cases would be considered from now onward.

The example in (37) tells us that the participants have successfully acquired the morphological competence of the past inflection represented by the agreement features as -ed past morpheme *Spell-out*, case marking assignment for passivized verb, and number feature in quantified expressions (cf. Shormani, 2017a & b, 2018).

Acquiring the aspectual *Spell-out* of the -ing morpheme is another formidable and hard learning task encountered by the participants in Stage 1 but in Stage 2, L2 learners are observed to overcome this problem. They express well-formed instances of the -ing morpheme which means that they have already mastered the syntax-morphology, morpho-syntactic-semantics and semantics-phonology interfaces. consider (38&39).

38- While Ali and Ahmed were working, my father came.

39- She is reading a poetry book now.

In (38&39), the participants show the knowledge of the *Agree* operation where the verbs '*work* and *read*' enter the derivation with an uninterpretable aspectual feature, i.e. progressiveness, and the aspectual head hosts such a feature interpretable located under the *Aspect Phrase Projection* above the *vP*. As a result, an *Agree* relation is established where the uninterpretable feature of the verbs gets valued by the interpretable feature of the aspect head, and hence, deleting the unvalued feature and yielding *v Spell-out* with the suffix -ing (Adgar, 2003; Alruwaili, 2014; Shormani, 2024). For example, Adgar (2003) concludes that the expression of the -ing morpheme is a realization of its interpretable features.

Looking again at table (3), it is obviously clear that the role of UG is significant in all the categories with varying degrees, except the -s 3rd person sg -s plural, and the variant '-s/s' possessive inflections where the participants' performance is somehow low. For the -s 3rd person sg and -s plural inflections, the progress (production of well-formed instances) from stag 1 to Stage 2 is less than 5%, on the one hand, and the same applies to the decrease of ill-formed instances, on the other hand. As for the 's/s' possessive inflection, the learners' performance in Stage 2 remains unchanged compared to Stage 1. If the results illustrated and discussed so far affirm that L2 learners still have access to UG principles and parameters, then, the question is: **why is it that the learners' performance is not the expected one?** (Shormani & AISohbani, 2015). The answer to this question can never be attributed to the absence of UG role in the remapping process. Rather, it can be attributed to "lingering transfer effects" (Lardiere, 2008, p.14), on the one hand, and several linguistic and non-linguistic factors constraining UG role, on the other hand (Slabakova, 2016; Shormani, 2014a & b; Shormani, 2015b; Shormani & AISohbani, 2015).

UG access can be constrained by linguistic aspects as the linguistic input presented to L2 learners (Muñoz, 2014; Shormani, 2014a; Shormani & AISohbani, 2015; Slabakova, 2016). The methods used in its presentation, "input modelizing" (Shormani, AISohbani, 2015), and the L2 linguistic competence of the teacher. The quantity and quality of input strongly constrains access to UG properties, and hence, language development. Slabakova (2016) argues that accumulative exposure along with high-quality input (comprehensible, and non-ambiguous input in a communicative situation) is a good precursor of higher accuracy. Additionally, Shormani and AISohbani (2015) hold that the type of input L2 learners are provided with limits access to UG properties. In case input is authentic/naturalistic, full access to UG properties is highly expected and hence, reaching native or native-like proficiency is more predictable but if that input is nonauthentic/classroom instruction, full access to UG properties is less expected and then, the longer learners will take, the less accuracy rate they will get (see Shormani, 2014a, b, &c). Linguist competence of teacher matters a lot, in that the more linguistically competent the teacher is, the much better the access to UG will be (see Shormani, 2015b; Shormani & AISohbani, 2015). For example, identifying what is hard and what is easy to acquire in addition to awareness on "the particular L1-L2 pairs of their students" (Slabakova, 2016, p.409) is a characteristic of an "efficient teacher" (p.4) as such efficiency stems from determining "what to focus on, process or practice" (p.409) based in the linguistic structure of the L2 (see Shormani & AISohbani, 2015).

Importantly, the choice of teaching approach, method and technique in classroom instruction is a very crucial barrier affecting access to UG. The emphasis on communicative competence (see Canale & Merrill, 1980; Hymes 1966; Savignon 1983) was and still is the prevalent concern of language teachers, Yemeni ones *per se*. L2 learning ultimate goal is meaning-based and not form-based. Slabakova (2016) argues that a focus on meaning alone is insufficient to reach native or native-like proficiency where acquiring the morphological competence is something unexpected and may not occur at all. Additionally, teaching inflections in non-authentic input in the Yemeni schools and university is solely done by practicing drilling, out of context, as it can never be

sufficient to reach native-like or near native-like proficiency, therefore, Slabakova emphasizes that teaching inflections should be in contexts similarly to learning lexical items; this is where both “the syntactic effects and the semantic import of the morphology are absolutely transparent and unambiguous” (p.410). For instance, Yemeni learners of English at the university level are seen able to communicate a message, but its formation may be grammatically poor or sometimes ungrammatical at all, and this is a natural result of the meaning-focused lessons where linguistic features are not intrinsically related to communication.

Nonlinguistic factors, however, is seen to play a crucial role in constraining or accessing UG properties. Concerning our study at hand, learning setting (see Shormani, 2014a, 2015b), length of exposure (see Blom & Paradis, 2015) and the type of practice (see Slabakova, 2016) are assumed to be very substantial non-linguistic factors delimiting access to UG properties in addition to other factors like age (see Birdsong, 1992; Lenneberg, 1967; Shormani, 2012a 7 b) motivation (see Gass & Selinker, 2008; Han, 2004) and fossilization (see White, 2003; Shormani, 2013b). Given that the only source of input L2 learners are exposed to is the classroom instruction and the role model is a foreign incompetent language teacher (see Shormani & Alsohbani, 2015), reassembling the L1 features into L2 configuration is the most formidable task those learners may encounter. More importantly, length of exposure to the surrounding linguistic input plays a crucial role in strengthening access to UG properties in that the more frequent L2 learners are exposed to grammatical, meaningful, comprehensible, and naturalistic/nonauthentic linguistic input, the much better their language development will get, and hence, the more plausible to have full access to UG and to reach native-like or near-native proficiency. The contrary is the reasonable conclusion of almost all Yemeni university L2 learners of English, our case is part of, where the learning setting is confined to classroom instruction provided by foreign incompetent teacher; the result of which is an inadequate or poor manifestation of inflections. This, in turn, weakens full access to UG properties.

6. Conclusion and Pedagogical Implications

The major aim of this study was to display how much of UG access Arabic L2 learners have in acquiring English regular inflections in both Stages. In Stage 1, the study was mainly focused on identifying and examining the sources of inflectional variability, errors. In Stage 2, the study was concentrated with identifying the role played UG principles and parameters in mapping and reassembling the L1 features onto L2 configurations. Additionally, it attempted to explain the influential linguistic and non-linguistic factors constraining and banning access to UG properties and hence, failure to produce the acceptable inflectional forms. Moreover, the study at hand were concerned with offering some pedagogical implications for classroom instructions and hence, strengthening or compensating the naturalistic input.

As far as the study at hand is minimalist in its nature and methodology, it provides some pedagogical implications to the topic of the study at hand. Given that both L1 transfer, and the UG are crucial and substantial components in L2 acquisition, such components could be utilized for developing the L2 linguistic competence, for example, in helping learners and teachers identify areas of similarities and differences in both languages via the incorporation of a contrastive course, Arabic and English Morphology, in our study case. Accordingly, identifying areas of similarities and differences is invaluable as it identifies where L2 learners converge and diverge, and hence, informs the teacher what is hard and easy for learners to acquire (Slabakova, 2016).

Shormani and Alsohbani (2015) argue that as far as the syllabus developer/designer is done in identifying areas of similarities and differences, it is, then, the teacher’s role to draw the students’ attention to such areas. Similarity of a specific feature in both languages, L1 and L2 never means that feature expresses the same syntactic, morphological, semantic or pragmatic properties in both languages. Rather, such similarity may stem from meaning, or structure. Also, the same goes with identifying differences among languages. The present simple tense, as a meaning-based similarity in Arabic and English, can express future tense conditioning the action is planned for as in English or is highly predicted to happen as in Arabic, and the same goes to the past tense in expressing historical present in both languages (Alesawe, 2015). Therefore, this study highly necessitates the inclusion of the contrastive morphology course from the very early Stages as such course will strongly enable and guide the teachers in that more focus will be given to the structures/forms where difficulties might arise. Also, it can identify where L1 effect can converge and where it can diverge. Additionally, it can show that L1 transfer is very crucial at the early Stages of L2 acquisition, and without which L2 acquisition may not converge at all. Differently put, where L1 transfer ends, UG role begins.

Practice is another source of language learning input, and it is closely interrelated to length of exposure in that the only allotted time of practice is limited to the university campus mostly. The model of this practice may be the teacher or the learners. Slabakova (2016) argues that the perfect practice utilized by the teachers is realized in identifying what is difficult to learn so that more smart practice is given, and what is universal and hence, easy that needs no practice and learners will get it for free. Thus, the low performance of the participants of the study at hand can be attributed to the lack of smart practice that can compensate the three sources of inputs: learning setting/teachers, material, and other learners and reflect perfect sense in language classroom (Slabakova, 2016; Shormani, 2014a, b & c, 2015b). All these factors, linguistic, and non-linguistic, are real barriers for Yemeni L2 learners of English, in our study, to get full and direct access to UG properties, and hence, make it hard to reassemble the L1 features into L2 configurations.

Regarding the teaching methods whose ultimate goal is reaching the communicative competence, the approach of our study, in line with the bottleneck hypothesis (Slabakova, 2016) emphasizes that teachers should be focused on teaching form or language structure where they draw the attention of the L2 learners to the “linguistic features if and when the classroom communicative activities and the negotiation of meaning demand these features” (p. 407). Put simply, grammar instruction should never be taught in isolation. Rather, it should be done in a clear and unambiguous context or discourse, and “intrinsically related to communication” (p. 407), and hence, L2 learners could acquire the “morphological competence” as emphasized by our study’s approach.

The study suggests that teachers utilize developmental models as VanPatten’s Input Processing approach (VanPatten 1996, 2002a & b; VanPatten and Cadierno 1993) to identify whether specific features have been mastered by learners or not particularly those non-existent in the L1 whose nature is communicatively redundant, or those lately acquired (Slabakova, 2016).

To conclude, the learners’ low performance in the use of regular inflections as -s 3rd P sg, -s plural and ‘-s/-s’ possessive can never mean that UG is not available in L2 acquisition. Rather, its access is banned or hindered by the persistent role of L1, little portion in Stage 2, in addition to some linguistic and non-linguistic factors. The features load and their less resilient nature of some inflections as -s 3rd P sg and -s plural can be a reasonable conclusion as their mastery requires higher working memory (McDonald, 2008), and hence, “the more reassembly of features these inflectional morphemes require” (Slabakova, 2016, p. 394).

7. Study limitations and further research

This study has some limitations, however. The first limitation concerns the type of data; it deals only with the acquisition of English regular inflections. A broader study could involve acquiring the English irregular inflections. Another limitation has to do with the university involved in this study, i.e. the study recruits student participants only from Ibb University. A comprehensive study could involve more than one university in Yemen. A final limitation that could be mentioned here concerns the area of investigation. The study targets the acquisition of the morpho-syntactic properties of English regular inflections. A more focused study could also involve the acquisition of English inflections at the morphology-syntax interface. And we leave these issues for future research.

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