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Interlanguage Errors Awareness in English as a Foreign Language and Arabic as a First Language in a Saudi Context

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Abstract
Developmental errors in L2 Learning are a systemic necessity which is unfortunately interpreted as source of annoyance that could hinder the learning process by the learners. The purpose of the present study is to investigate the degree of awareness of L2 learners of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) and Arabic as Second Language (ASL) of errors they make at comparable proficiencies in the two languages for two groups of students. It is argued that error awareness is commensurate of explicit correction by teachers in the foreign language context, which lacks daily use of the language in a natural context, whereas it is developed through daily practice of the language in both comprehension and production in a second language context. The second context provides acquisition like situations for the learners. The author also hypothesizes that there will be more awareness of errors and an auto-correction in an acquisition fashion in a second language context than in a foreign language one. This research will be quantitative and will use a questionnaire which will investigate the learners' awareness through their opinions and attitudes through explicit introspection about the types of errors, their pervasiveness, and their place in the mind of the learners.
Keywords: EFL, ESL, ASL, Language Acquisition, Language Learners, Interlanguage Errors, Awareness

Introduction
"We live and learn" says a Tunisian proverb. We overtake some learning plans, finish some, fail others and dream on about the rest. A person may like the sounds of a language, the meanings of another, or the coolness of a third one. One may also avoid a language, mimic another sarcastically, or resist the teaching of a language in the education system. We had to wait for linguists to tell us everything about language, teachers to introduce us to languages other than our mother tongue, and Chomsky (1995) to invite us to move alpha.
However, when a student enrolls in a language learning program, he/she has a time limit, an achievement test, and a career development all of which rush him/her into the source of

knowledge, the classroom, i.e., the formal language learning environment. Two populations of learners with different learning objects, English and Arabic, were targeted in the present study. They were not observed for what they did right in the learning process but for what they think they might be doing right or wrong as they try to take over the challenge of acquiring a language other than that language of theirs, for which they never had to worry and that they developed by simply living in the proper social environment for the acquisition to happen,

The first local population is the set of learners of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) mainly in their first or second year on campus at Qassim University, KSA. The second population is a large group of students coming from different countries, like Indonesia, China, Bosnia, Senegal, France, Chechnya, etc. They met in a program called Teaching Arabic to Speakers of Other Languages (TASOL). These to attend daily course on campus, in the same college as the EFL students.

Developmental errors, as proposed by the U-shaped development of language (Plunkett & Marchman, 1993) are a necessary phase in the acquisition of L1 and that is extended to L2 (Kahlaoui, 2013). They are, of course, different in nature from mistakes, which are circumstantial though regular and following some patterns just like errors. The problem with developmental errors in the interlanguage continuum is that l2 learners don't know they are developmental. Neither do they know the difference between mistakes, for which they may hold a good deal of responsibility, and errors. Errors are benign in nature and when they happen it may be beyond the effort and good will of the learner.

To the question of perception of errors, we can add a more important one, the problem of awareness of errors. One can try to set hypothetical degrees of awareness that will look like a Likert scale and it will probably be true of any population of learners but with different distributions. Although learners are reminded, every now and then, by their teachers and through the reaction of their classmates that they do make errors, that would not necessarily indicate their awareness of errors. Teachers also know that some learners are convinced that they are unable of being 'correct' using the language under study even though they never hear them using it.

Thus, we decided to investigate the degree of awareness in a mixed-way using a set of explicit questions and a set of implicit questions about errors in L2. One may say that a proficiency test targeting the quantity of errors that could be recognized – through correction, for instance – would better elicit the problem. We argue that recognizing errors is not a matter of awareness of errors but one of discovering ungrammaticality, misuse, etc. To put it simply, the present research aims at having leaners admit they make errors or declare truthfully they don't make any or just make few, for example. We needed data to compare EFL students' awareness of errors to that of TASOL learners under the assumption that the different types of environments of learning (Ellis, 1997) will affect the degree of awareness of errors. Our expectations were that TASOL students would admit more errors than EFL students, given the nature of the learning environment.

Justifying the Departures
Skinner's child (Skinner, 1953) was ideal in accepting error corrections and awaiting reward for correctness of imitation and repetition. He/she was made aware of errors but was not psychologically affected by failure. Chomsky's child, on the other hand, took matters in this/her

own hands and learned from failure and success. He/she did not seem to need any reward but to call for the activation of the predisposition to develop a language through ups and downs as illustrated by Marchman and Plunkett's (1997)

U-shaped development. The mental inclination of the latter child allowed him/her to construct a linguistic system through Karmiloff-Smith's (1992) re-description of representations and, at the same time, made a psychological being out of the child. That child developed a native language, grew older, and decided to learn another language. Barely coming out of adolescence, our student is too sensitive to remarks about errors and he/she may interpret corrections as denoting refusal from the part of the teacher or even a humiliation triggered by the teacher and seconded by peers.

Since Fromkin (1971) classical taxonomy of errors, errors have received much attention from researchers interested to different degrees in errors. The interest even resulted in a separate field of investigation called Error Analysis where the knowledge of errors was necessary in order to predict their occurrence during the learning of an L2 and to adjust the teaching methods in accordance. The interest for errors may emanate from an assumption which may see errors as the rock blocking a water source and if one can move it aside waters would flow freely. Likewise, one may assume that errors are the 'bâtons dans les roues' of the learning cycle of language called Interlanguage. The interlanguage concept is built around errors (Selinker, 1972). It is the pidgin that has little chance to be 'nativized'. When errors overwhelm the language classroom, they could paralyze the learners. When they are left unattended (Lesgold & Welch-Ross, 2012), errors could also fossilize (Selinker & Lakshmanan, 1992) and mark learners for life.

Error awareness is less explored than errors taxonomy, error correction, and error sources (VanPatten & Benati, 2010). One important field that looked indirectly into errors is speech perception. Sebastian-Galles (2006) explains that the listener to a foreign language does have the same capacity of compensating for the noise that my hinder comprehension like listeners do when it happens in L1. Neurolinguistics tries to explain the neurological bases of language processing If we build on those findings, we can say that a possible implication for our L2 learner would be the difficulty he/she has to perceive what is otherwise obvious and clear for the teacher. It is normal, then, for the learner to fail to repeat a word or a sentence repeated many times by the teacher. The phonological system, for instance, under construction by the L2 learner may not correspond to the one targeted by the teaching system. Studies on the development of phonotactics in 9 month-old infants concluded that they may be acquired as early as that. How can that bear any relation to our twenty-year old young adult? Utterances in our mother are perceived in time because we use phonotactics – and other tools – to predict, compensate, calculate the possibilities without having to follow the speaker sound by sound, syllable by syllable and word by word. As users of a language, we resort to phonotactic probabilities to be able to recognize word boundaries. If the L2 learners has any difficulties doing that, he/she will have trouble comprehending the utterance and reacting to it in the right way, hence the birth of some types of errors of which the learner cannot be said to be aware.

Awareness of errors is not an easy task for the learner and the awareness of the perceptual sources of errors may not be something instructor can help the learner to overcome. Would the Second language environment offer the setting for the perceptual development of the learner vis-à-vis the L2? Could there be more awareness of errors in the here and now manner of

language use outside the classroom? To find an answer to that question, we need to test the assumption of difference in the awareness of errors in L2 between EFL learners and TASOL learners given the different environment of learning.

Methodology

The present research is set to answer the following question:

Does the difference between the language learning environments for Foreign and Second languages have any effect on the learners' degree of awareness of errors?

Although it is hard to quantify opinions which are categorical data. We used the window of the exception given to educational studies using Likert scale or Likert-scale like measurements to qualify as quantitative and use ratios. We designed a questionnaire about errors in English and – hopefully – idiomatically and faithfully rewrote it in Arabic (see appendices A and B for the two versions of the questionnaire).

Two samples of 70 students from two levels, first year and second year of studies in two target programs were chosen. The EFL samples was chosen on the basis of availability from the population of students in a BA program of English Language and Translation in the Department of English Language and Translation at Qassim University. The necessary permissions were obtained from the Chair of the department and the students after assuring them that the data would be confidential and that the results would have no impact on their normal assessment in the department. A sample of 70 learners of Arabic as a second language was chosen on the basis of availability from the larger population of students enrolled in the program Teaching Arabic to Speakers of Other Languages in the unit under the same name at Qassim University. The necessary permissions were obtained from the head of the unit and students were asked for their permission after the assurance of confidentiality and no-relation to their official program assessment.

The questions targeting the awareness of errors were both direct and indirect. Respondents were given the instruction to tick only one choice among the three: Yes, No, and Uncertain. A Likert scale of five levels would have caused longer thinking time and the spontaneity could have been weaker. Answers were expected to be straightforward in order to avoid hesitation in a field of opinion and introspection. Should the questions be strictly indirect, the Likert scale would have better served our objectives.

Eight of the questions were selected as expressing, either in an implicit or explicit way, awareness of errors. Awareness corresponded either to a Yes answer of a No answer. The sum of targeted answers corresponded to a score of awareness out of eight points.

Two questions targeted an answer to our secondary exploration of the attitude toward the types of errors. The limit of two was set under the assumption that too many questions on types of errors would bias the awareness judgments as they would prime awareness as opposed to unawareness of errors. The four other questions about error correction were meant to investigate any possible correlation between error awareness and attitude towards error correction expecting it to be positive. A score on a scale

of four is calculated

Both EFL and TASOL participants filled the questionnaire with the permission of their instructor to leave the classroom for 10 minutes at the beginning of the lesson. We analyzed using IBM SPSS software which yielded the results to be given below.

Results
Research Question 1
The first research question can be decomposed as follows:
Does the difference –in the type of program -- between Foreign Language and Second Language, hence the respective difference -- in the learning environment -- between a strict classroom setting with no community life in the targeted language and a classroom setting paired with a community life in the targeted language, affect learners' error awareness?
    Hypothesis 1
We advance the hypothesis that there will be a positive correlation between the Second language type of environment and error awareness.
    Research question 2
The above hypothesis, if verified, would entail a positive attitude towards error correction. The could be set as follows:
Does the degree of awareness correlate with an attitude towards error correction?
    Hypothesis 2
We pretend that there would a positive correlation between a high score on the awareness scale and the positive attitude towards error correction.
    Research question 3
The third question targets students' attitudes towards two general types of errors: errors at the level of the word and errors at the level of the sentences. The research question for which we sought an answer was:
Do learners exhibit any difference in accepting/tolerating errors given the two types of errors: word level errors and sentence level errors?
    Hypothesis 3
It is hypothesized that sentence level errors would face less tolerance from Second Language learners.

Analysis of the Results
A between-groups t-test was used to compare the means of the two groups measuring the relationship between the type of environment and the score on the awareness of errors measurements. The independent variable representing here the foreign language environment as one which the student does not use, if he/she ever uses the language, outside the classroom and does not have the occasion to hear it outside the classroom as used by speakers of the language in some aspects of his daily life. The Second language environment would be that environment which provides for daily contact with the language outside the classroom as part of the social, administrative or commercial life in the place where the learning of the language is taking place. The dependent variable, which is a level of awareness of errors in the use of the learned language.

Eight of the questions in the questionnaire were addressing the awareness level sometimes by a 'yes' answer, and some other times by a 'no' answer. The sum of the answers which showed awareness in the eight questions represented the score on the awareness scale.
Table 1 shows the means on the awareness scale and the differences between the two samples are evident.

	Program	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Score on awareness scale	English as a Foreign Language	70	3.6143	1.13307	.13543
	Arabic as a Second Language	70	4.3714	1.03799	.12406

Table 1 Means on the awareness scale

In order to measure the significance of the difference between the means, an independent between groups t-test was carried out and the results showed that the difference between the means was significant.

The effect size was then calculated and it gave the following results:

T	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference
-4.122	138	.000	-.75714	.18366
-4.122	136.953	.000	-.75714	.18366

Table 2
Independent groups t-test
Note. Cohen's d: -0.6967795 Which is a moderate to large effect. Then a Partial Eta squared was calculated in SPSS and it amounted to .110.1

An independent- samples t-test was run in SPSS to verify the second hypothesis. The difference in means did not show a significant difference between the two groups. However, when the independent variable representing the years of study of L2 was taken as a factor for the two samples as we wanted to investigate a possible relationship, the results showed a significant difference between learners after their first year and those who have already spent 2 years studying the L2 as illustrated in the table below.

Table 3
t-test for Equality of Means for the overall scores on negative attitude toward error correction

t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
					Lower	Upper
2.065	133	.041	.42717	.20685	.01803	.83631
2.049	103.028	.043	.42717	.20849	.01368	.84066

The third measure tested the third hypothesis. The results in Table 4 below show the percentages of tolerance toward the 'more serious' types of errors, i.e., errors at the level of the sentence. Basically, the results showed more intolerance for sentence-level errors for the two samples. However, the EFL group showed more intolerance toward this type of errors at 56% against 46% for the sample representing the learners of Arabic as a Second Language.

Table 4
Percentages of tolerance for types of errors

	Tolerance word level errors	Tolerance sentence level errors
EFL learners	56	33
TASOL learners	46	36

Discussion

Supported by the results which show a significant relationship between the kind of learning environment and the level of awareness of errors by the learners, one can now try to figure out the factors that seem to enhance the awareness of errors. So what is the second language environment that makes the learner aware of errors more than what the foreign language allows?

If we agree that being aware of errors is better, in some respect, than failing to see them, it would be helpful for the foreign language curricula to provide for those characteristics of the Second Language environment in some way.

So let us spend a day with a Second language learner and on with a foreign language learner in the context of Saudi Arabia. The Learner of Arabic as a second language came to took the decision to travel to a new country for the only purpose of learning the language. The student found himself/herself going to school for 6 hours a day and five days a week. Arabic does not stop at the door of the classroom. It follows the student to the cafeteria, to the street, to the mosque, to the moment he/she turns on the TV set, etc. The only time he/she escapes to Arabic is for the 7 hours of sleep.

Second language learners read a lot; they spend more time in the library. But the presence of the language is not the only factor. The manner the language is present plays an important role in this purposeful relationship between the learner and the language. The second language environment offers some here and now situations where the learner is interacting with society and has to negotiate meaning as he/she tries to go further in the interaction with the speaker of Arabic. This is, in fact, the situation where the learner does the tentative recasts by him/herself till he/she reaches an acknowledgment from the interlocutor. The learner goes through errors as incidentally as one would go up some stairs to reach a certain height. He/she is explicitly dealing with errors and for that the learner does not have one, two, or three teachers, He/she has a whole neighborhood of interlocutors.

The 'live' context of use is of great help to the learner as it provides a perceivable world, the real world for the words and sentences. The learner is not in charge of constructing the context and imagining the situation. He/she doesn't have much for that school privilege, as the interlocutor cannot wait.

Another important factor that could play a role is that the second language learner is reaching for the language and not the opposite. No one is trying to teach the learner anything outside the

classroom. People try to get meaning through to him/her. The only person responsible for organizing the pieces of the language puzzle is. then, the learner. That relationship with the language being learner cannot be so different inside the classroom. The learner will continue to go toward the language and the language teacher and will try to mimic the relationship with the native interlocutor. Second Language learners happen to be the ones who ask the question, as opposed to the Foreign Language learners who are there to answer questions. They can be wrong in answering the question and in using the language at the time. Second language learners in the Teaching of Arabic to Speakers of Other Languages (TASOL) program at Qassim University are reported by their teachers to be curious and demanding.

What about the Foreign Language learner, then? He/she has probably chosen the English Language program. This type of learner is certainly willing to a certain extent to learn. But, is there anything in his/her daily life that is devoted to language? Does he/she use the language outside the classroom? Is this language learner willing to use it inside the classroom? Is there any concrete context of use helping him/her to figure out meaning? Does the learner have the time negotiate meaning? Is the language being studied a matter of daily social survival? In other words, does the language learner really have to utter a word in English for the daily life to go on? There is only one single answer to the above question: There is no social life and no real world in the classroom. It is only a good representation of some parts of life. The language classroom is more of a meta society, a metalanguage, or a meta learning process, one might say. Learners may end up developing a meta language and not an actualized language. This, of course, does not amount to a plea to leave the classroom but probably to rethink it.

Recommendations for Future Research
Interlanguage error awareness seems to rise in a proportionate manner to the rise of the presence of the language in the everyday life of the learner outside the classroom. The classroom seems to be suffering from a lack of concreteness. At the same time, the virtual environment of communication is becoming more and more concrete and real as it is, maybe fortunately enough, invading the classroom. Error awareness is probably holding some secrets at the level of its relationship to motivation. It may also be resisting investigation through simple survey tools as it seems to need more experimental measurements.

Conclusion
Having observed the difficulties encountered by learners of Arabic studying English as a foreign language in Arabic first language environments and having noticed a faster pace of learning of L2 in the second language contexts, especially for the learning of English, we assumed that Speakers of languages other than Arabic who are leaning Arabic in Saudi Arabia would be a good test for an assumption that sees a correlation between the foreign/second language environment of learning and the degree of success and speed of acquisition of the learned language. We have chosen, in the present research, to investigate error awareness in two different language learning contexts as a possible factor to successful language learning. We have chosen to look at L2 learning in the following environments:
   a. English as Foreign Language Context
   b. Arabic as a Second Language Context

Results showed a positive effect of the Second Language environment on the degree of awareness as compared to the classroom environment of the Foreign Language.

In a Foreign Language environment, language training starts in the classroom and ends in the classroom whereas in a Second Language context language training starts in the community, goes into the classroom then back to the street. The street – community life – is an active environment where awareness emanates from the immediate need to use the language either in interpreting the huge quantity of L2 from the L2 environment or to produce L2 utterances to be acknowledged by that environment. Unless we find the means of installing aircraft like simulators for community like environments in classrooms, language leaning off the real world will have difficulties producing good language pilots. Classrooms, as they are today, seem to create a passive attitude towards errors and an avoidance strategy on the part of the learners.

Our research has shown that there is more awareness of the social function of language and the continuous need for it in a second language environment. Learners of Arabic of other languages backgrounds in Saudi Arabia seem to benefit a lot from the Arabic speaking environment and be aware of the need for them to be precise and correct in using language in order to ensure communication. On the other hand, learners of English as a foreign language in Saudi Arabia seem to pay less attention to linguistic intricacies and the success of communication as it is not vital for them or for their daily life; as it happens in a closed and harmless context, i.e., the classroom.

We hope this research would help in answering some of the questions language instructors are asking each time a learner makes the same error one minute after its correction. If learners' errors are systematic enough, then, maybe English could learn from its second/foreign learners in the sense of Kachru (1986).

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