

Dhi-English: Influence of Dhivehi language features on the English narratives of Maldivian ESL learners

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Abstract

This qualitative descriptive study explored the influence of Dhivehi, the first language (L1) of the Maldivian students on learning English, their second language (L2). The questions raised in this paper enabled to identify morphological, lexical and syntactic transfer errors present in the narratives written by thirty-three students at secondary level from three schools in Male', the capital of the Maldives. Transfer Analysis was used to analyze errors present in the English narratives written by Maldivian ESL (English as a Second Language) learners. The analysis uncovered negative transfer of Dhivehi linguistic features in their written English at morphological, lexical, as well as syntactic levels. The findings provide invaluable pedagogical implications for second language learning in the Maldivian context. Thus, it is recommended that ESL teachers as well as curriculum developers in the Maldives take into consideration the possibility of the influence of students' mother tongue or Dhivehi linguistic features on the process of learning English.

Keywords: Dhivehi influence, ESL learners, morphology, lexis, syntax

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1. Introduction

Cross-linguistic transfer or the influence of L1 structures on the acquisition of L2 has been a theme widely discussed in the field of Second Language Acquisition (SLA) and bilingual education for the past several decades (Bennui, 2008; Ellis, 1997; Khoshsima & Banaruee, 2017; Larsen-Freeman & Long, 1991; McLaughlin, 1987). However, researchers have not been able to reach a consensus on the type and extent of the influence of L1 on L2 acquisition. The existing theories such as Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis (CAH), Error Analysis (EA) and Universal Grammar (UG) have different propositions about L1 transfer in L2 acquisition and learning. According to Odlin (1989), transfer is “the influence resulting from similarities and differences between the target language and any other language that has been previously (and perhaps imperfectly) acquired” (p. 27). A controversy also exists in whether L1 transfer is constructive (positive) or destructive (negative) in learning the target language. The present study focused on examining only the negative transfer of Dhivehi in English writing of Maldivian secondary school ESL learners.

Although English is a taught subject as well as the medium of instruction for Maldivian students throughout their formal schooling, the performance of students at national level examinations is a cause of concern. For instance, the mean score of English language at Grade 4 and Grade 8 in the national assessment of learning outcomes was recorded as thirty-two percent and twenty-nine percent, respectively (World Bank, 2016). Therefore, it is vital to explore factors that influence the process of learning English for Maldivian students so that ESL teachers can find ways to facilitate the learners. As stated by Lado (1964), the ease or difficulty in acquiring some features of the target language (in this case ESL) may crucially depend upon how similar or different the target language is to their mother tongue. As there are some differences in linguistic features of Dhivehi language and English, ESL teachers should not ignore the possibility of the influence of Dhivehi, the mother tongue of the Maldivian students on learning English as a second language.

In spite of the importance given to English in the Maldives, there is a paucity of research in ESL in the Maldivian context. This is specifically true for language transfer studies as L1 transfer in L2 writing is a locally ‘unasked’ question in the Maldivian context. Writing is one of the language skills in which students score low marks. However, there seems to be a dearth of research that has attempted to explore the reason why Maldivian learners consistently produce the same errors in their writing. Therefore, research in this area is imperative to raise consciousness of such errors and to facilitate acquisition and learning of English for the Maldivian students. Hence, this study examined errors present in the written English and identified lexical, morphological, and syntactic errors made due to the influence of Dhivehi linguistic features. Morphological transfer occurs at the level of morphemes or word formation mainly in relation to bound morphemes and affixation. Lexical transfer includes transfer of L1 at word level. This

consists of loanwords, lexical borrowings, coinages, 'false cognates', and calques or literal translation of L1 words and expressions. Syntactic transfer involves influence of L1 linguistic features on the sentence structure of L2 such as word order, negation or the use of relative clause.

2. Literature review

2.1 Language transfer

Language transfer was a term coined by Lado (1957) when it was generally agreed that learners' errors could be predicted by systematically comparing and contrasting the grammars of their native and target languages. This belief, rooted in behaviourist theory of language learning, equated learning with habit formation. This meant that the existing habits of first language were believed to be transferred to the newly-learned habits of second or foreign language. For decades, the influence of mother tongue on learning a second language has been an area of interest for researchers of SLA (Ridha, 2012; Watcharapunyawong & Usaha, 2013; Zulianti, 2017).

This behaviouristic view of language transfer was criticised for a number of reasons among which included being inadequate in predicting all the errors made by the learners. The critiques of the behaviourist views believed that L2 was learned in the same way as one's L1. So, a vast majority of the errors made by L2 learners were explained in developmental terms rather than in terms of L1 influence.

The current thinking related to the SLA does not disregard the phenomenon of language transfer. Transfer, on the contrary, is viewed as a more complex phenomenon because it is neither seen as the only reason for error nor does it always lead to error. These two assumptions related to transfer resulted in differentiating between interlanguage and intralanguage errors (Kaveera, 2013; Khoshima & Banaruee, 2017; Long & Hatcho, 2018; Mehmood, Farukh, & Ahmad, 2017; Phuket & Othman, 2015; Sattari, 2012) and positive and negative transfer (Murad & Khalil, 2015; Wang & Xiang, 2016), respectively. Further research in cross-linguistic influence led to the surfacing of terms such as 'substratum transfer' and 'borrowing transfer' based on the assumption that transfer is not always the influence of L1 on L2 (forward), but it can also move from L2 to L1 (backward) as well (Meir, Walters, & Armon-Lotem, 2017).

2.2 Interlanguage vs. intralanguage errors

Transfer errors are mainly divided into interlanguage and intralanguage errors. The former is the occurrence of errors due to the influence of the learners' first language (Chan, 2004;

Chapetón, 2008; Farthing, 2015) and the latter occurs due to overgeneralizations, faulty or partial acquisition of the target language rather than language transfer. The present study focuses only on interlanguage errors as it explores the influence of mother tongue on learners' L2 written production.

The term 'Interlanguage' was coined by Larry Selinker in 1972 (Selinker, Swain, & Dumas, 1975). Interlanguage is a type of language produced by second language learners which is considered as a hybrid between their L1 and L2. More precisely, the term is used by McLaughlin (1987) to refer to 'the interim grammars constructed by second-language learners on their way to the target language' (p. 60).

2.3 Positive vs. negative transfer

Interlingual or transfer errors can be either positive or negative. Positive transfer from L1 to L2 is based on the theory of Common Underlying Proficiency (CUP) by Cummins (1981). Hui (2010) explains Cummins' 'dual-iceberg' analogy to describe the positive transfer from first to second language:

L1 and L2 proficiencies overlap with the common sector, which is below the "surface". In the separate sectors we find the surface features of the respective linguistic structures of L1 and L2. As the double iceberg indicates, superficially, L1 and L2 are separated proficiencies, but in essence, they overlap and share certain abstract universal principles and constraints common to all languages. (p. 98)

This explanation reveals the existence of common and shared linguistic features among all the languages as postulated by the nativist, Noam Chomsky when he came up with the term Universal Grammar. So, according to CUP, the similarities between L1 and L2 linguistic features result in positive transfer or facilitation.

In contrast, L1 influence on L2 is considered to be a negative one based on theories in favour of L1 interference such as Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis (CAH). CAH has a psychological and linguistic aspect. While the psychological aspect is based on behavioural learning theory, linguistic aspect is grounded in structuralist linguistics (Hui, 2010). The former argues that interference caused by differences in the native and target languages can cause errors or difficulty in learning. The latter considers transfer from L1 to L2 inevitable and often negative. In addition, this aspect also emphasises on prediction of learning difficulties based on the linguistic difference between the two languages. The present study explored only the negative transfer of L1 in L2 writing.

2.4 Borrowing vs. substratum transfer

Odlin (1989) distinguishes the terms borrowing transfer and substratum transfer:

Borrowing transfer refers to the influence a second language has on a previously acquired language (which is typically one's native language). ... Substratum transfer ... involves the influence of a source language (typically, the native language of a learner) on the acquisition of a target language, the "second" language regardless of how many languages the learner already knows. (p. 12)

The present study is limited to substratum transfer or the influence of mother tongue on L2 acquisition even though borrowing transfer is also believed to be an important area that requires further exploration.

2.5 Error types

Error description is imperative for any study that involves analysis of learner errors. The two taxonomies used in this study to explain transfer errors are Linguistic Category Taxonomy and Surface Strategy Taxonomy developed by Dulay, Burt, and Krashen (1982). As emphasized by James (1998), a combination of both taxonomies can facilitate a more thorough understanding of the errors analysed.

Linguistic Category Taxonomy. Error, in Linguistic Category Taxonomy, is classified based on the language component as well as the particular linguistic constituent that the error affects (Dulay, Burt, & Krashen, 1982). Hence, it is required to begin the process of analysis with the identification of some general linguistic categories such as morphology, lexis, syntax, phonology, pragmatics, or discourse. Next, each general category is broken down into further levels of subcategories. For instance, the morphological system is subdivided into the plural morpheme '-s' and the present participle affix '-ing'. In the present study, language components are limited to morphology, lexis, and syntax only.

Surface Structure Taxonomy. Surface Structure Taxonomy is used in error categorisation to describe how the surface structure is altered. As detailed in Table 1, the most commonly cited error categories are based on the surface structure taxonomy developed by Dulay, Burt, and Krashen (1982), which includes four main error categories, namely omission, addition, misinformation, and misordering of target language structure

Table 1: Surface Structure Taxonomy

Category	Description	Example
Omissions	The absence of an item that must appear in a well-formed utterance.	*She sleeping.
Additions	The presence of an item that must not appear in well-formed utterances.	*We didn't went there.
Misinformations	The use of the wrong form of the morpheme or structure.	*The dog ated the chicken.
Misorderings	The incorrect placement of a morpheme or group of morphemes in an utterance.	*What daddy is doing?

3. Methodology

Qualitative descriptive approach was used in this study to identify and describe transfer errors present in the written English of Maldivian learners. According to Sandelowski (2000), "qualitative descriptive study is the method of choice when straight descriptions of phenomena are desired" (p. 334). Hence, this approach enabled to describe interlanguage errors and to categorise them into morphological, lexical and syntactic transfer errors.

3.1 Research questions

This study focused on the following research questions:

1. What are the morphological errors produced due to Dhivehi language influence on the English narratives written by Maldivian ESL learners?
2. Which lexical errors in the English writing of the Maldivian learners can be attributed to Dhivehi language influence?
3. What is the influence of Dhivehi linguistic features on the syntactic errors in the written English of the ESL learners?

3.2 Method

Consent. Data collection process began with the approval of the Human Ethics Committee of Villa College and the Ministry of Education, Maldives. Formal contact with the management of the schools was made by sending an information sheet about the present study and a letter to the head of school, asking for the consent to conduct the study at the school. Access to participants was sought with the help of leading teachers and English teachers at each school. Informed consents were gained from all of the students as well as their parents before data was

collected at each school.

Participants. The participants of this study were thirty-three Maldivian ESL learners at Grade 8 level from three secondary schools in Male', the capital of the Maldives. The schools were chosen based on convenience sampling as no attempt was made at generalising the findings of this study to the population of ESL learners in the Maldives. This study used purposive sampling to select participants based on their performance in the first term final examination of Grade 8 (see Table 2). According to Creswell (2014), selection of participants purposefully enables the researcher to get a better understanding of the problem as well as the research question. The reason for including participants from three categories (High, Average, and Low) was to ensure collection of rich data. Comparison of errors produced by the students from the three categories was not an aim of the present study. Even though four students were selected for each category from the three schools initially, only thirty-three students participated as three students withdrew from the study on the day data was collected.

Table 2: Selection of participants

School	English performance based on the level (high, average, low) obtained in the first term examination of Grade 8			Total
	High (A/B)	Average (C/D)	Low (E/F)	
1	4	4	4	12
2	4	4	3	11
3	4	4	2	10
Total	12	12	9	33

Data collection. Data for the present study was collected using narratives written by Maldivian ESL learners. The participants were asked to write a narrative based on the given picture of a few students waiting at a bus stop. Even though the picture controlled the theme for writing, the genre enabled them to write freely. So, it generated rich data to be analysed for the presence of errors. Familiarity of the genre was imperative to avoid encouraging language transfer.

The task was pilot tested with three ESL learners at Grade Eight level before the participants of this study were asked to write the picture story. Pilot testing was done to find out the time required to complete the task and to identify the amount of data generated. This preliminary data also helped in identifying the effectiveness of the picture chosen for the task.

Students were asked to attend school in the afternoon on a specific day to write the narrative.

The aim was to make sure that they were not tired or in a hurry to go back home. However, at some schools, students were asked to stay back after the school session due to time constraints. Instructions related to the task were given in English prior to the task. The participants were provided with all of the materials required for the task including the picture, a sheet of paper, and a pen. They were given thirty minutes to complete the task and the word limit was not specified so that they were able to write as much as they wanted within the given time frame. The students were allowed additional ten minutes to review their own work for any mistakes or corrections.

Data analysis. The very first step of data analysis for the current study was to mark the thirty-three narratives to identify errors in the written English. Errors were then categorised into morphological, lexical, and syntactic errors. The type of coding used in this study was a priori as the coding categories were developed prior to the examination of data rather than through emergent coding. A priori coding developed by the researcher based on morphological, lexical, and syntactic categories is described in Tables 3, 4, and 5, respectively.

Table 3: Morphological categories

#	Morphemes	English examples	Comparison with Dhivehi linguistic features	Dhivehi example (English translations are given in bracket)
1	copula <i>be</i>	I <i>am</i> a girl.	There is an equivalent in Dhivehi, but does not change for tense and person.	<div> </div> The suffix- <i>akee</i> as in aharenakee anhen kujjekeve (I <i>am</i> a girl)
2	articles	a/an, the	For both 'a' and 'an' Dhivehi uses the suffix-eh. The word e- before a noun can function as the definite article 'the' or the demonstrative 'that'.	<div> hedhumeh (a dress) </div> <div> aafaleh (an apple) </div> <div> e foiy (the/that book) </div>
3	auxiliary <i>be</i>	Ali is eating.	An equivalent does not exist in Dhivehi.	<div> Ali kanee eve. (*Ali eating) </div>
4	plural <i>-s</i> and <i>-es</i> and irregular plural	Bottles/ sheep	Dhivehi has many plural markers that vary depending on the type of noun. Plural marker is not required when the number is specified.	<div> maathah (flowers) </div> <div> 2 maa (*2 flower) </div>

5	irregular past	She taught French last year.	Dhivehi does not have any irregular verbs.	nidhi (slept)	ނިދި
6	regular past	She worked hard.	Though suffix –i is the most common past tense morphemes in Dhivehi, there are a few exceptions to the regular past tense suffix –i.	neshi (danced) liyunu (wrote) kiyevi (studied) dhiya (went)	ނަންނަ ލިޔުނު ކިޔެވި ދިޔަ
7	past participle	She has written the letter	Dhivehi denotes past participle in the form of verb suffix –fi.	nidhaifi (slept) nashaifi (danced) liyefi (written)	ނިދަފި ނަންނަފި ލިޔެފި
8	3 rd person-s	She swims every day.	Dhivehi verbs do not change for 3rd person.	eyna komme dhuvahaku fatha eve. (She swims every day.) emyhun komme dhuvahaku fatha eve. (They swim every day.)	އެނާ ބަނޑު ދުވާ ފަތަ ޒަވާ. އެމްޝަން ބަނޑު ދުވާ ފަތަ ޒަވާ.
9	possessive-s	It is my child's toy.	Possession is denoted in Dhivehi by the suffix –ge. Unlike English, an apostrophe is not required.	dharifulhuge (child's)	ދަހަރިފުހުޖަ (ކުދިން)

Table 4: Lexical categories

#	Lexical categories	English expressions intended	Explanation of possible L1 transfer	Interlanguage influenced by Dhivehi
1	calques or literal translations	prescription	literal translation from Dhivehi to English	beys sitee (*medicine letter)
2	coinages or adaptations	cod-liver oil	assimilation of phonemes	con'delivaru
3	collocations	Nathasha is eating an ice-cream.	In Dhivehi, the word ice-cream is usually associated with drinking (as in bony) rather than eating (kany).	Nathasha ice-creameh bonee eve. (*Nathasha is drinking an ice-creame.)
4	borrowings	Can you give me the pillow?	Replacement of English word with Dhivehi may be due to lack of appropriate English vocabulary.	Can you give me the baalis

Table 5: Syntactic categories

#	Syntactic categories	English expressions intended	Explanation of possible L1 transfer	Interlanguage influenced by Dhivehi
1	word order	SVO We are playing football.	The difference in the basic sentence structure of English and Dhivehi.	SOV ހަދަނުވަނީ ފުޓްބާލު ކުޅެންނެވެ. aharemen footbaolha kulhenee eve. (* We football playing.)
2	subject-verb agreement	Ahmed and Ali are swimming.	Dhivehi does not require subject-verb agreement.	އަހްމަދު އަލީ ފަތަނީ ވަނީ ވަނީ ވަނީ. Ahmedaai Ali fathanee eve. (* Ahmed and Ali is swimming.)
3	overuse of initial adverbials	I went to the park on Monday.	It is common for Dhivehi sentences to begin with a prepositional phrase even if it is not for emphasis.	އަހްމަދު ދުވަހުގެ ހުކުރުގައި ވަނީ ވަނީ ވަނީ. hoama dhuvahu aharen park ah dhiyaeemeve. (On Monday, I went to the park.)

In the process of data analysis, each instance of error in the written English was examined to determine whether it had any influence of L1 of the learner. Therefore, Transfer Analysis (TA) was adopted to separate all the errors that can be attributed to L1 influence and those that cannot be associated with L1 transfer. Unlike Contrastive Analysis (CA) or Error Analysis (EA), Transfer Analysis compares interlanguage of the learner with L1 and attempts to explain the structures of those errors that can be linked to language transfer (James, 1998). Table 6 indicates the difference between CA, EA and TA. Thus, errors present in the interlanguage (the narratives) of the ESL learners were compared with Dhivehi linguistic features to determine whether there was any influence of the latter on the former. Finally, an explanation of the possible cause of each error was also provided.

Table 6: Comparison of CA, EA, and TA

Type of Analysis	Mother Tongue (L1) Dhivehi	Interlanguage (IL)	Target Language (L2) English
CA	✓		✓
EA		✓	✓
TA	✓	✓	

4. Results

The main aim of the present study was to identify L1 transfer errors present in the written English of Maldivian ESL learners at the three linguistic levels, namely morphology, lexis, and syntax. Errors were analysed based on a priori coding detailed in the data analysis section.

4.1 Morphology

As illustrated in Table 7, transfer errors were found in 5 different morphological subcategories. Most of the errors produced were due to omission of English plural morpheme –s and the least were the errors in the form of missing apostrophes. An apostrophe is required to show possession in English language.

Table 7: Morphological transfer errors

#	Linguistic Subcategory	Surface Structure Category	Errors from the picture stories	Explanation of possible L1 transfer	No of Errors
1	articles	misinformation of articles	*a accident	Dhivehi does not differentiate the indefinite articles 'a' and 'an'.	3
2	auxiliary be	omission of auxiliary be	*They also waiting for bus	Auxiliary 'be' does not exist in Dhivehi.	3
3	plural –s and –es	omission of plural morpheme	*3 bicycle	Dhivehi does not require the plural suffix-thah when number is given.	9
4	3rd person-s	omission of 3rd person –s	*He love her	Dhivehi does not differentiate person.	4
5	possessive-s	omission of apostrophe	*Ahmeds fathers boat	Even though Dhivehi has a possessive suffix-ge, it does not require an apostrophe.	2

4.2 Lexis

It was found that there were quite a few lexical transfer errors due to calques or literal translation and misinformation of collocations in English as evident from Table 8. Interestingly, there were no instances of transfer errors in the lexical subcategories of coinages and borrowings.

Table 8: Lexical transfer errors

#	Linguistic Subcategory	Surface Structure Category	Errors from the picture stories	Explanation of possible L1 transfer	No of Errors
1	calques or literal translations	misinformation of English words	*the cash collector (bus conductor)	This shows direct translations from Dhivehi to English. cash- faisaa (ފަސާ) collector- nagaa meeha (ނަގާ މީހާ) (someone who collects money)	18
2	collocations	misinformation of collocations	*I said him (I told him.)	Dhivehi uses the same word 'bunun' (ބަނުނު) for both said and told.	13

4.3 Syntax

As shown in Table 9, three different linguistic subcategories of syntactic transfer errors were found in the written English of the participants. While majority of the errors were related to misinformation of subject verb agreement, the least were errors in the overuse of initial prepositional phrases.

Table 9: Syntactic transfer errors

#	Linguistic Subcategory	Surface Structure Category	Errors from the picture stories	Explanation of possible L1 transfer	No of Errors
1	word order	Misorderings	I and my family ...	Dhivehi sentences are flexible in terms of the order in which agents appear in the subject of the sentence.	10
2	subject-verb agreement	misinformation of subject verb agreement	we was waiting...	Dhivehi sentences do not require subject verb agreement.	13
3	initial adverbials (overuse)	misinformation of the use of prepositional phrase	In that Island there were only one tent...	It is common for Dhivehi sentences to begin with a prepositional phrase even if it is not for emphasis.	6

5. Discussion

Based on the analysis of errors present in the English narratives of the Maldivian learners, the findings of the present study reaffirm L1 influence on L2 writing (Phuket & Othman, 2015; Ridha, 2012; Sattari, 2012; Watcharapunyawong & Usaha, 2013; Zulianti, 2017). With regard to morphological errors, the present study agrees with the findings of Ridha (2012) who reported the influence of Arabic on the errors found in English essays written by the EFL Iraqi college students. This study also validates the findings of Long and Hatcho (2018) who found L1 transfer a factor in grammatical accuracy of Japanese tertiary students learning English.

The present study revealed that Dhivehi words did not influence all the lexical subcategories identified in this study. Out of the four subcategories, Maldivian learners' written English was influenced only in the form of calques and collocations. There were no instances of coinages and lexical borrowings. The findings of the present study align with Kaveera (2013) who found lexical errors because of the use of literal translations by Thai learners in their English writing. It also confirms Khoshshima and Banaruee's (2017) finding that the most common Persian transfer errors in writing of EFL learners were word choice and collocations. As in the present study, Wang and Xiang (2016) also noted collocation as an area of negative transfer among Chinese learners.

Evidence of syntactic transfer is found in the present study in the form of errors in word order and subject-verb agreement, and overuse of initial prepositional phrase. Hence, this study replicates the findings of the studies on the influence of L1 syntactic features on the acquisition of L2 syntax (Chan, 2004; Chapetón, 2008; Farthing, 2015; Kaveera, 2013; Murad & Khalil, 2015). For instance, Chan (2004) investigated syntactic transfer from Chinese (L1) to English based on data collected from a large sample of Hong Kong Chinese ESL learners at different proficiency levels and concluded that the extent of syntactic transfer was particularly large among learners of lower proficiency.

6. Conclusion

The main aim of this study was to find out L1 negative transfer in the written English of the Maldivian L2 learners. The findings of this study show that Dhivehi linguistic features have some negative influence on the written English of the Maldivian ESL learners at morphological, lexical, and syntactic levels.

In conclusion, this study has provided teachers and learners some insights into the issue of L1 influence on L2 writing in the Maldivian ESL context. It is believed that this study has also opened an avenue for Maldivian and international researchers to have academic dialogues

regarding L1 transfer in learning and acquisition of L2. The result of this research would also be useful in making informed decisions regarding designing and development of ESL curriculums, textbook and instructional methodologies.

7. Recommendations

The present study has shown evidence of L1 influence errors at morphological, lexical and syntactic level. Hence, to minimise such errors, teachers need to explicitly direct students to compare and contrast the similarities and differences in their native and target languages. Such comparisons would, to a great extent, help in reducing morphological errors in the target language. For instance, if the learners realize that they tend to produce ungrammatical expressions such as * 3 bicycle (where the plural morpheme –s has been omitted) because the plural suffix is not required in Dhivehi when a number is mentioned before the noun, they would be more conscious about producing such errors in the written English in the future.

In addition, to minimise lexical transfer errors such as calques and collocations in the written English of Maldivian learners, it is recommended to advise students to learn and memorise English collocations as ‘chunks’ and ensure usage in a variety of contexts. Thus, it is vital to use concordances and corpora to show contextualised examples to the learners and also to expose them to a wide variety of authentic materials such as articles from magazines, newspapers, TV shows, and audio recordings.

Finally, syntactic errors such as inappropriate word order, disagreement in subject and verb, and overuse of initial prepositional phrase can be reduced by overtly teaching the learners these language features through examples and non-examples of English. Non-examples can include all the English expressions produced by the learner that are influenced by their mother tongue and as a result have deviated from the norms of English language. While ‘My family and I’ can be an example, ‘*I and my family’ can be considered as a non-example which may have been influenced by L1 sentence structure. Likewise, ‘we were waiting...’ can be the example while ‘*we was waiting’ can be illustrated to the learners as a non-example and clarified to them that these errors may have been produced due to the absence of the grammatical function, the subject verb agreement, in their mother tongue, Dhivehi.

8. Future research

Even though a widely researched area internationally, L1 influence on L2 has much potential for further research in the Maldivian context. One of the areas for future research is the positive influence of L1 on L2 learning as the present study was only on the negative influence mother

tongue has on learning L2. Such a research might provide insight into how L1 can facilitate and enhance learning L2 as it is believed that transfer can be positive in areas where the two languages are similar.

The present study explored morphological, lexical, and syntactic errors only. Therefore, other linguistic subsystems such as phonology, graphology, discourse, and pragmatics are also potential areas for future research.

In addition, future research is also important on borrowing transfer or the influence of L2 (English) on L1 (Dhivehi) acquisition as the present study focused only on substratum transfer or the influence of L1 on learning L2. In fact, bi-directional studies such as Meir, Walters, and Armon-Lotem (2017) may also prove useful in the Maldivian context.

Moreover, an interesting area for future research could be error analysis of L1 transfer in the written English of different genres as studies conducted by Watcharapunyawong and Usaha (2013). The present study analysed errors in narratives only. For instance, analysis of transfer errors in academic writing could be valuable for L2 learners in the Maldives.

Finally, it is also important to conduct future research on intralingual or developmental errors in addition to interlingual or cross-linguistic transfer errors as demonstrated in the present study. Not all the errors present in the L2 writing can be traced back to L1 influence. Therefore, intralingual studies such as Long and Hatcho's (2018) can provide invaluable information about the developmental errors that Maldivian L2 learners produce.

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