

Contrastive analysis for non-Arabic-speaking teachers: the basics that you need to know to help your students

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1. Introduction

Native English speakers with little to no knowledge of Arabic---and specifically of Omani dialects of Arabic---are at a disadvantage in teaching L1 Arabic students. They can identify student errors, but have no direct way to help students reverse the lifelong habits of Arabic pronunciation, grammar, semantics, and pragmatics that cause them, nor can they articulate precisely what is different between a given feature of English and the relevant Arabic one.

This is particularly problematic in that only our departmental majors are required to have the benefit of the Contrastive Analysis course. Students outside the department, such as those in our English 1/2 and Communication Studies courses, have just as much need to become aware of basic systematic differences between Arabic and English, but currently, they can only get this help if the teacher also happens to be an Arabic speaker.

In this talk, then, I will present a brief overview of some of the most salient and recurrent English language errors I have observed among our students, from phonology all the way to pragmatics, and clarify the L1 Arabic (or interlanguage) component of these errors.

The specific goal is to make it possible for even non-Arabic-speaking teachers to appeal to students' L1 knowledge of Arabic to better understand the nature of their errors and how to correct them, by highlighting the primary error phenomena and providing richly exemplified explanations for use in the classroom.

Despite the title and topic, this talk will be of interest to L1 Arabic teachers of English as well, in that I will offer a native speaker's perspective on just which particular types of L1 Arabic-driven error sound most egregious to the native speaker's ear, and which are less severely irritating. This information can help students prioritize which of their recurrent errors they should spend the most immediate effort on correcting.

The discussion will proceed by examining first phonological issues (§2), morphosyntactic/semantic ones (§3), and finally pragmatic concerns (§4), with an overview of general recommendations in (§5). Overall the primary recommendation of this paper will be this: that we incorporate basic components of contrastive analysis directly into all our EFL classes, specifically teaching students to develop a conscious and constant attention to key differences between Arabic and English. With this, students can become active learners of the language, rather than mere passive recipients of instruction.

2. Phonological matters

2.1 The problem with /p/ vs. /b/: a quick suggestion

I doubt I even need mention the fact that most dialects of Arabic (Iraqi Arabic is a notable exception) lack /p/ as a sound contrasted from /b/. And I am sure that most of you know that the contrast is, roughly speaking, that of voicing, that is, vibrating the vocal cords during the lip closure to get voiced [b], versus simply whispering through it to get voiceless [p]. Old hat.

Telling students this, however, does not immediately solve the problem. So here I offer the beginnings of a

principled approach to teaching students how to actually make the distinction themselves. We borrow from the fact that Arabic does have a voicing contrast in the form of voiceless /t/ vs. voiced /d/, and exploit this as follows.

First, have the students simply say this nonsense word a few times:

[abda]

Then have them say

[abta]

Some, at least, will be pronouncing the [b] as a [p], as it tends to lose its voicing in anticipation of the upcoming voiceless [t].

Almost all the students will produce [p], however, when you lop off the final vowel and have them say

[abt]

It will pretty likely come out as [apt], as clusters of consonants before silence are have an even stronger tendency to be voiceless. Indeed, a real-vocabulary example of this is /as-sabt/ 'Saturday', typically pronounced [as-sapt] (Al-Rawahi 2010).

From here it is just a question of nudging the students to pick up on the whispered quality of the [p]-sound here, vs. the sung quality of the [b]; a contrast they can also see exemplified in the simple [t] vs. [d] contrast itself. Modeling [t] vs. [d], then [p] vs. [b], and highlighting the similar components of the contrast helps greatly. In a pinch, [s] vs. [z] is also good to illustrate and practice control of the voiced vs. voiceless, but the fact that this is a pairing of fricative rather than stop sounds means that transferring the skill back to the stop pair of [p] vs. [b] is not terribly direct.

The crucial point for students here is that you can show them that they actually CAN and indeed DO pronounce the sound [p]: they just need to learn to control it independently.

2.2 The "langwig" problem

Another difficulty for students is the /g/ versus /dʒ/ distinction---i.e. what we might familiarly call the "langwig" problem.

Here the issue is a bit different. The basic fact is that in most colloquial dialects of Arabic spoken in Oman, there is no distinction between /g/ and /dʒ/. In fact, there simply is no /dʒ/ sound at all, and only a /g/. Students may likely have heard the /dʒ/ sound, however, as the letter they regularly pronounce as /g/ is standardly and in Quranic recitation pronounced strictly as /dʒ/. This is the letter ج, pronounced /dʒiim/ by those who can manage the standard pronunciation, and as /giim/ by many who cannot.

It is therefore in part a measure of a student's education in standard and Quranic Arabic pronunciation if they can pronounce /dʒ/ at all. In my experience, I rarely ever hear /g/-dialect-speaking Omanis use the formal /dʒ/ at all. A further complicating factor is that much television/media uses a third sound, /ʒ/, rather than standard /dʒ/ as a quasi-formal pronunciation: this is often reflecting media from natively /ʒ/-using dialects like those spoken in Lebanon, among others. Several of my students use /ʒ/ and struggle to contrast it clearly with /dʒ/, as the distinction requires attention to the rather fine detail of adding a short /d/-like sound before the /ʒ/ they already

familiarly produce.

But even if a student is completely familiar with /dʒ/ as the standard, and /g/ as the colloquial, therein lies a further problem. No one ever pronounces a single word half in colloquial pronunciation, and half in standard. That is, if our friend "langwig" was an Arabic word, it would be "langwig" in colloquial pronunciation, and "lanjwɪj" in standard.

In short, even if students can handle the /g/ vs. /dʒ/ distinction at all, they do not expect to ever use both at the same time. Which is of course what you must do to pronounce "language" correctly.

This state of affairs, then, is something we must make clear to students, and work them through.

2.3 The "shayng" problem

Numerous students struggle also with the English "ch" sound, i.e. /tʃ/. Most Omani Arabic dialects, unlike many other Gulf-area dialects, systematically lack this sound, and you likely have heard students substitute in the next closest sound they do have, namely, "sh" /ʃ/, e.g. pronouncing "change" as "shange"---or, as I have heard it, combined with the previous problem to get "shayng".

Arabic does, however, permit the sequence of two consonants /tʃ/, and essentially, telling students to put /t/ plus /ʃ/ together is one way to get them on the road to pronouncing /tʃ/ properly. However, you will notice for many students that they really still do internalize "ch" not as a unitary sound but as a sequence of /t/ followed by a separate /ʃ/. Listen to how some of your students break down "teacher" into syllables: for many, it will sound like "teet-sheer", reflecting this restructuring.

2.4 The "nekist" problem

The fact that "ch" /tʃ/ is internalized as a cluster of two sounds ties into the next issue. With limited exceptions, colloquial Omani and standard spoken Arabic systematically disallows clusters of three consonants in a row, particularly in word-final position. Thus an English word like

(1) scrimps /skɪmpz/

will likely come out as [sɪkrɪmpɪs] for many students: both the initial three consonants /skɪ/ and the final three consonants /mpz/ are too much for the Arabic system, and so a short /i/ vowel ([i~ɪ]) is inserted to break up the cluster into more manageable, Arabic-pronounceable chunks. The same sort of thing happens with words like "next", where the fact that the cluster /ks/ is written as one symbol ("x") does not change the fact that the final /kst/ needs to be split up. Hence the common student pronunciation [nɛkɪst]. Similarly, the fact that "ch" /tʃ/ is treated as two consonants together by many learners means that a word like "watched", standardly /wɒtʃt/ in my dialect of English, comes out as /wɒtʃɪt/, or even more likely due to the common reinforcing effect of spelling pronunciation of the "-ed", as /wɒtʃɪd/.

So far I know of no particular way to stretch our students' systems from maximum two consonants to at least three, but I do find that simply drawing their attention to this Arabic-driven feature of their pronunciation is often enough.

2.4 Vowels

Colloquial Omani Arabic, and indeed most regional pronunciations of standard Arabic, distinguish five long vowels /i: u: e: o: a:/ and three short vowels /i u a/. Given that most English dialects distinguish at least a dozen or more vowels, this is a recipe for difficulty.

In the midst of this mess, I suggest focusing most on the low vowels of English, however. Two related frequent error patterns are, I think, the most deserving of pedagogical focus, in that the vowel contrasts they conflate are ones that both carry a heavy load in the pronunciation of English, and also rather stick out as common and noisome errors to the native speaker ear.

These are the [æ~ɛ] and [ɑ~ʌ] contrast, exemplified in the following forms, whose pronunciation here is from media standard North American English, but which is basically similar in most major dialects of English:

- (2) had /hæd/
head /hɛd/

hod /hɑd/ (for some North American speakers, this is /hɒd/)
hud /hʌd/

Positioned in the front and back of the mouth respectively, both pairs of contrasts are the same kind: the first is the lowest possible vowel, while the second has a slightly higher tongue position from there.

(One of the most obvious effects of conflating the [æ~ɛ] contrast is students' constant conflation in writing of the letters "a" and "e". Encouraged in no small way by the indifferent use of each in transliterating Arabic names (Ahmed = Ahmad, Asma = Esme), we see this in errors like "massage" for "message" (here with several other vocalic and consonantal contrasts also missed) and "togather" for "together"; the champion example I have seen for this is "beagger" for "beggar".)

One can work students through the [æ~ɛ] contrast by demonstrating the English word "yeah" dragged out extremely slowly: this moves from the highest possible front vowel [i] all the way down through the successively lower ones ([e], [ɛ]...) down to the lowest, i.e. [æ]. Emphasizing the last transition, i.e. from [ɛ] to [æ], will clarify the distinction. Here the fact that you are asking students to notice a clear transition, rather than simply contrast isolated vowel examples, should help them perceive the difference.

Looping down and then back up through vowel transitions may not be the most dignified of performances---and some of your students will struggle with how silly they sound in this exercise---but nothing I know of works better than physically running the tongue and the attentive ear through these paces to clinch this otherwise elusive contrast.

A comparable approach for the [ɑ~ʌ] contrast can be reached by dragging out "wah" (or better "wauw"): it is a bit trickier, as there is an additional factor of lip-rounding that can confound/distract the learner's attention. Forcing a smile helps remove any rounding, and allows students again to focus on the fact that the [ɑ] sound has the lowest tongue position, and [ʌ] is just a bit above it, the next step up.

2.5 Stress

Most students do come out of their earlier English courses with a clear sense that stress in English is, unlike in Arabic, as distinctive, contrastive, and unpredictable a feature of an English word as anyconsonant or vowel. In local dialects of Arabic, word-stress is quite different: it is simply predictable primarily by the length and open/closed status of the endward syllables of the word; in a few cases, grammatical factors are also involved.

To introduce students who are unaware of contrasts like

- (3) 'insult : in'sult
'permit : per'mit

we can point students to local colloquial and semi-standard pronunciations, which have a limited contrast of this sort, also of a systematically grammatical nature:

- (4) 'shaafuu 'they saw'
shaa'fuu(h) 'they saw him'

Where stress and rhythm may be most helpful to students, however, is in a much simpler yet extremely powerful way. In reading aloud from written text, students often stumble over and struggle with the longer words of English, even after the teacher models them aloud. If, however, we model both the word and its rhythmic stress pattern first, i.e. model the word

recombinatorics

and then its stress pattern,

dih-DAH-dih-dih-DAH-dih

and then instruct the students to focus first primarily just on producing that rhythmic pattern, we find that they produce even the longest words with much more fluency and far less fractured hesitation. In short, treat the one thing we DON'T write---the stress, the rhythm, the prosody---as the foundation of pronunciation, and take the vowels and consonants as secondary, and coughing up long words then becomes far easier for students.

There is a negative feature of stress as well. A general feature of our lower-level students is that they assume that English spelling is like Arabic in being primarily phonetic. These students adopt a rather phonetic, spell-it-by-ear approach rather than a graphic this-is-how-it's-written approach. For this reason, the reduced vowels of unstressed syllables are often misspelled---a common problem even for native speakers. This also interacts with the fact that Arabic only writes vowels if they are long or diphthongal: short vowels are simply omitted in normal writing. This appears to be the driving force behind spellings like these:

- (5) mther = mother
engh = enough
Arbic = Arabic [a strangely common error, considering...]
pay ttination = pay attention

While this can affect the writing of any vowel, I have noticed what looks to be a greater tendency for unstressed vowels to be left unwritten.

Needless to say, the phoneticist approach also tends to give short shrift to purely graphic letters, e.g. word-final silent "e", as in the following error, which was systematically repeated three times in the same student paper:

- (6) wak up = wake up

I think that in addition to warning of them of this common pitfall, this tendency to omit vowels, especially unstressed ones, we should be up front with our students about how there is simply no direct way to know the spelling of an unstressed vowel, since it is in fact not /a e i o u/ in actual pronunciation. Of course, related word forms where the vowel becomes stressed can be helpful, but often no such forms exist: this is an opportunity to

highlight for students the crucial understanding that English spelling is to an important degree more graphic than phonetic. Again, this is a point not at all obvious to students beginning from lifelong literacy in Arabic.

3. Morphosyntactic matters

3.1 Introductory points

Depending on how much Arabic you have learned at this point, you may perhaps know some basics of Arabic grammar, e.g. that adjectives follow rather than precede the noun, as in French and Spanish; or that there is a gender system of masculine and feminine nouns. In this section we will delve into some morphological and syntactic features of Arabic that seem to speak most to the problems we encounter in our students' English.

3.2 Zero copula

Just like Russian, Indonesian, Penobscot, Passamaquoddy, and Mohawk, among many other languages (including certain important dialects of English itself), Arabic systematically has a zero form of the verb 'be' in basic present tense/aspect forms:

- (7) *'ana 'ustaadh*
 I teacher
 'I am a teacher'

No doubt you have all seen the results of this mapped over to English. This is one of the more difficult errors for students to avoid, since it requires attending to producing something where the mother tongue asks for nothing. Training students to cultivate this kind of attention is no mean feat, and I have no particular recommendations in this domain.

However, I can offer one point of motivation for students. Namely, that dropping the copula 'be' in standard English dialects is indeed an egregious error. To most speakers, it recalls the famous film dialogue:

- (8) "Me Tarzan, you Jane."

which is commonly used to symbolize childlike, broken, or even mentally deficient use of English. In short, this is not an innocuous error, but one that will completely color a native listener's judgement of the speaker's competence. Our students are on the whole extremely concerned with their self-presentation: knowing that this kind of error is the equivalent of wearing children's clothing to an important business meeting may help motivate them to work especially hard to develop this particular attention.

3.3 Zero indefinite article

For count nouns, English requires the contrast of an overt definite and indefinite article: "the" vs. "a(n)". Like Irish and Welsh, Arabic systematically makes this contrast simply by the presence of of a definite article (= definite) vs. its absence (= indefinite):

- (9) al-kitaab the-book 'the book'
 kitaab ø-book 'a book'

The result of this "zero indefinite article" is the systematic omission of the English indefinite article where it is required:

- (10) I want cup of milk = I want a cup of milk.
 Give me pen! = Give me a pen!

Development of this attention for L1 Arabic learners is further complicated by the fact that English has plenty of nouns that are in fact well-formed without an overt indefinite article, namely, non-count/mass nouns:

- (11) I want milk.
 Give me ink!

And furthermore, the count vs. non-count distinction is systematically used to contrast related but conceptually distinct vocabulary items:

- (12) I heard a speech. ≠ I heard speech.
 They love a song. ≠ They love song.
 I learned a dance. ≠ I learned dance.

Again, when starting from what is simply pronounced as nothing in one's mother tongue, remembering to produce something overt in the same context in new language is very difficult. But again, it is crucial, as this particular omission also has a "Me Tarzan, you Jane"-level degree of egregiousness. Making this error systematically results in a comparably dim native-listener judgement of the speaker's competence in the language, even when other elements (e.g. vocabulary) are strong. This in contrast to, say, errors in forming irregular tensed verbs: these sound a bit off, but are what we expect from and readily "forgive" non-native speakers for. Errors of omission of these crucial grammatical elements, however, are less charitably perceived.

3.4 Number marking on nouns and verbs

A perplexing feature of our students' speech and writing is the recurrent absence or mismatch of number (singular vs. plural) marking for English nouns and verbs. While we are not surprised to find this for, say, native speakers of Chinese, which lacks any surface contrast of this kind, it is surprising indeed given that Arabic has a rich and extensive system of plurality contrasts in nouns and verbs---indeed, in the colloquial language, nouns also contrast a dual (two/pair) number, and the standard language extends that through to verbal number agreement. So if they already have this grammar in spades, why do our students seem to act like these are foreign concepts?

My tentative proposal is that it is because English number marking, besides being rankly confusing ("s" /z/ is plural for nouns, but present singular for verbs), is simply not as salient as it is in Arabic, and so is easily missed. Our students tend to use English quite minimally in their lives, and in particular, the usually weakly-stressed ends of English words exhibit a strong tendency to be mislearned: a consonant dropped here, an incorrect vowel there. This easiest-to-mislearn domain is the home of the English number morphology, be it nominal or verbal.

Contrast this with Arabic. Arabic verbal number morphology (colloquial and standard spoken alike) is quite salient: the most common case is a long -uu suffix:

- (13) a. yishuuf 'he sees'
 yishuufuu 'they see'
- b. shaaf 'he saw'

shaafuu

they saw'

(In the next section we will see an important complication to this picture.)

And the formation of noun plurals is equally salient. Regular plurals of animate nouns take a suffix made of a long vowel and final -n (exactly which vowel depends on grammatical role in the standard language; it's a simple -iin for the colloquial). The combination is not only phonetically long, but also attracts the main stress of the word. In short, it's hard to miss:

- (14) mu9allim 'teacher'
mu9alli'miin 'teachers'

The far more common sets of semi-regular plurals are even more salient: the whole prosodic makeup of the word is reshuffled, with consonants and vowels and the length of each all shunted around, often with various other features also added in, some less predictable than others.

- (15) kitaab 'book'
kutub 'books'
- film 'film'
'aflaam 'films'
- 7ilm 'dream'
'a7laam 'dreams'
- 'insaana 'human, person'
naas 'humans, people'
- sannuur 'cat'
sanaaniir 'cats'
- quTT 'cat'
quTaT 'cats'
- maktab 'office'
makaatib 'offices'
- barnaamaj 'program'
baraamij 'programs'

In short, the singular-plural contrast in Arabic nouns and verbs is in form a generally very substantial one, rather than the simple alternation of zero vs. an "s" /z/ tacked on at the often weakly-stressed end of the word. I think this, combined with the limited frequency with which our students actually engage with English, and their often limited attention to detail therein, conspires to commonly produce errors in this domain, despite the fact that students natively control an otherwise quite similar and arguably even richer relevant grammatical system. Here then, extensive drilling to inculcate an attention to what evidently tends to be missed would seem to be an helpful approach.

3.5 Non-human plural = it [her], and differing conceptualizations of inherent number/countability

A separate factor also affects number marking, especially subject-verb agreement. This is that Arabic systematically only has plural verb agreement for human noun referents. Plural nouns referring to anything else do not use plural pronouns or verb agreement corresponding to 'they/them/their', but instead default to the feminine singular 'she/her'.

- | | | |
|------|-------------------------------------|---|
| (16) | hum katabuu
hiya kharajat
-ha | 'they (human) wrote'
'she went out; they (animals, things) went out'
'her...; their [non-human]...' |
|------|-------------------------------------|---|

I have yet to see students actually translate this pervasive feature of Arabic directly as an English feminine singular. But the effect is clearly there, because I see frequent examples of non-human plurals being pronominalized as 'it' rather than 'they/them', with corresponding effects on subject agreement.

Again, the only solution I know for this is to point out this difference explicitly with extensive examples, and then drill students to attend to this difference when producing English forms.

We might also note in passing a certain systematic difference in the conceptualization of certain concepts relative to individualization and countability. English, for example, conceptualizes "information" and "vocabulary" as non-count abstractions, whereas Arabic treats these as a group collections of individual elements. Hence we see the non-human plural ending -aat on the corresponding Arabic translations:

- | | | | |
|------|-------------------------|------------|---------------------------|
| (17) | maʿluumaat
mufradaat | = = | information
vocabulary |
|------|-------------------------|------------|---------------------------|

Students very often map the Arabic plurals over to English literally, giving "informations" and "vocabularies". Often these are also mistranslations of pluralizing the individualized elements, given where English requires "pieces of information" and "vocabulary items"---i.e. phraseologies that individuate the inherent mass/non-count noun. For the same reason, singular individualized elements will often be systematically referred to as "an information" and "a vocabulary", rather than "a piece of information" or "a vocabulary item". This is especially problematic given that "an information" and "a vocabulary" can in fact be well-formed expressions in English---just not the ones that the students are intending. Here again, pointing out the systematic nature of these pitfalls can help students develop a preventive awareness.

3.6 Possession, genitive, and compounding constructions

A final frequent trouble spot for L1 Arabic learners is the possession, genitive, and compounding/attributive-modificational constructions of English. This is simply because the core construction for all of these in Arabic simply does not exist in English---though it does in Irish and Welsh.

Namely, instead of these patterns:

- | | |
|------|---|
| (18) | the hotel's name
the name of the hotel
the hotel name |
|------|---|

Arabic generally has only one pattern:

- | | | |
|------|----------------|-----------------------------|
| (19) | ʾism al-ʾuteel | (adapted from Mace 2008:21) |
|------|----------------|-----------------------------|

literally

(20) name the-hotel

The key feature of this pattern is two nouns, only the second of which can be definite:

(21) NOUN (the)-NOUN

The technical term for this is the construct state---in Arabic, *al-'iDaafah* 'the adding on'---and again, it is hands-down the primary pattern for modificationally linking two noun phrases. Workarounds loosely equivalent to simple prepositional constructions that allow the first noun to be definite, i.e. ones like English

(22) the name OF the hotel

are occasionally found in Arabic (certain dialects have shifted almost completely to this, but these are mostly North African varieties, and so not relevant to the Omani case), but are far less common than the construct state itself.

As a result of this, you will find that students tend to avoid the Saxon genitive (the hotel's name), because the order of its elements is the reverse of the familiar Arabic construct state: same again for attributive noun constructions like "hotel name" and also direct noun-noun compounds.

Students therefore tend to overuse prepositional constructions like "the name of the hotel", as these map closest to the construct state. And here we occasionally see the first "the" dropped (as per the constraint noted above), and even the second, if students view "of" as the equivalent to the notionally linking element "the" in Arabic. Thus explicit training in the fact that the Arabic construct state corresponds to at least three or four distinct constructions, each with its own norms of use, is rather crucial for students hoping to gain effective and natural use of English.

A comparable issue is the prepositional contrast pairs "of/from" and "to/for": each contrast maps to only one basic preposition in Arabic (li- for the first, min for the second): lacking explicit instruction to attend to a distinction not found in Arabic, students tend to overuse the second of each pair to cover both. When in fact the first of each pair is actually more common, and a better bet when in doubt of correct usage.

3.7 Generic definites

Arabic, like French, typically uses a singular definite for a generic reference, where all but the most bookish (= French-influenced) register of English prefers an indefinite plural (for count nouns) or an indefinite singular (for non-count nouns). In short, where it is normative to say

(23) a. Cats are clean.
b. Life is hard.

L1 Arabic students are likely to say

(24) a. The cat is clean. [al-quTT naDHiif] = the-cat clean
b. The life is hard. [al-7ayaah Sa9b] = the-life difficult

While (24a) is acceptable in that bookish register of English, students should probably be advised to avoid using the pattern in favor of the indefinite plural one (23a), at least until they solidly control the fact that the (23a) pattern is the most common and natural one, even as the more Arabic-familiar one (24a) is not. Notice too that

the bookish register form is not always a reliable strategy: while (24a) is at least possible as a generic, (24b) is not: the singular definite does not work in English with a non-count noun to reach a generic reading. In short, we should instruct our students to drive themselves to avoid what is simply easiest for them, and push for what is less obvious coming from Arabic, but actually much more natural in English.

4. Pragmatic errors: "Teacher, I want my mark."

Phonological and morphosyntactic (and even lexical usage) errors never give a native listener the greatest impression of the speaker, but pragmatic errors are far worse in nature. This is because while even the most inexperienced native listener can readily identify most of the first type simply as non-native speaker errors, they often will not detect any error in a pragmatic gaffe. Instead, pragmatic errors are frequently perceived simply as a different intention on the part of the speaker than the one meant. And this often engenders not just misunderstanding of meaning, but also a misperception of social behavior.

So for example when yet another student comes to my office and says,

(25) Teacher, I want my mark.

my first reaction as a native speaker is that the student is both annoying and rude. Annoying in that they persist in addressing me with a title both lexically inappropriate and culturally superfluous---"Teacher", rather than "Professor" or, as is most normative in English, not using any form of address at all---and impolite in that expressing a direct request with "I want" is something we are all taught not to do from an early age.

Of course, as a language teacher, I know better, and I know exactly why my otherwise resolutely polite students make errors that cause them to come across as thoroughly rude: "Teacher" here is a direct translation of the absolutely de rigueur title and term of address *'ustaadh*; and Arabic does not as intensely require direct requests to linguistically buffer the immediacy of a 'want' verb.

But we are not training students to speak to sympathetic language teachers. We are training them as interpreters to speak to naive native speakers of English, and to know exactly how to put those speakers at ease according to Anglophone cultural norms, showing them respect as it is normatively done in English, and so on. Same again for future English teachers: we are not training them to reinforce students' use of an English reshaped to Arabic pragmatic norms; we are training them precisely to show students those differences, and train them to control both elegantly.

Explicit pragmatic training, both in case-by-case details such as this, and in developing an overall attention to seriousness of the issue, is crucial. In my discourse analysis class exam, I had one student give me

(26) excuse me, I want cup of milk

as an explicit example of a polite-register usage in English. This is in fact rather rude as an utterance. And indeed, students' frequent overuse of "excuse me" as a softening marker of polite attention-getting and requests is a direct translation of Arabic *law sama7t(i)* 'if you will excuse/forgive'. What students do not know is that "excuse me" can often carry a rude or abrupt/impatient quality in English, something evidently absent in the Arabic translational equivalent.

5. Conclusion

In recommending the explicit adoption of components of contrastive analysis into our overall EFL courses, I am

seeking to do more than just improve how students engage with the differences between Arabic and English. Often what comes across as laziness or even blockheadedness is, I think, simply the effects of a basic unfamiliarity with the norms of international academic culture, and particularly, with the fundamental skill set required for being an effective student as we know it. Our students tend to think that they are expected only to absorb the results of methodological analysis, but perform none of it themselves: they wait for the teacher to give and explain everything.

This is a general hindrance for any serious course of study, but its especially problematic for what we teach. Language is fundamentally an applied skill, where all possibilities simply cannot be anticipated and memorized. One *must* develop not just the ability to flexibly apply rules to new contexts, but also to flexibly cope with the unknown, and find ways to know it. This is currently a great weakness of our students, but I am confident they can overcome it, so long as we work with them clearly, directly, and explicitly on the nature of the issue. Incorporating a contrastive analysis approach to basic language learning helps students internalize a methodology that they can use as active agents in their learning, discovering for themselves the answers to many questions, and monitoring their own performance for pitfalls and for improvements. This, then, is one piece of the foundation for giving our students the means to truly educate themselves.

6. References

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