Phonological and Grammatical Similarities between English and Kurdish Language: Why English Learning is Easier for Kurdish

Robinson Paulmony[1,*], Shivan Mawlood Hussein[2]

[1]Department of Accounting and Finance, College of Administration and Economics, Lebanese French University, Kurdistan Region, Iraq
[2]Department of English, College of Arts, Knowledge University, Kurdistan Region, Iraq

Abstract Language is a medium used to communicate reciprocally. At this contemporary living, it is a must that any literate has to learn more than one language so as to be able to communicate with people beyond boundaries. English is a widely used language in terms of communication between countries, cultures, races and different lingual people. It is therefore inevitable that people learn and practice it. While learning English Language people need to differentiate between learning it as a Foreign Language and learning it as a Second Language. In Kurdistan, English language is learnt as a Foreign Language. Even though English is learnt as a foreign language by Kurdish learners, they learn quickly and easily due to the existence of similarities between the two languages phonologically, syntactically, grammatically and asymmetrically. This study sets out theoretically to analyze the similarities between the two languages i.e., English and Kurdish and also identify the reason for the quick learning of the English Language by the Kurdish learners.

Keywords Kurdish, English, Language, Phonology, Grammatical Aspect, Lexical Aspect

1. Introduction

The majority of human beings in the world use the sound system or phonemic symbols for communication. The phonemic symbols give us spoken and written language which is different from sign language for the deaf who use visual symbols for communication. The human beings also use the phonemic symbols to communicate. In contemporary living, it is inevitable that human beings must learn more than one language. While looking at learning a new language other than our own native languages most people tend to choose the English Language for its international stature together with its vast familiarity and usages. Moreover, looking back at world history the British Empire had ruled almost the whole world for more than two centuries, which made learning English obligatory not only for the native speakers but for everyone around the globe for all walks of life. (Crystal, 1997)

To learn any new language, the learner has two options: he can learn it as a Second Language Learning or as a Foreign Language. Learning a new language as a second language is comparatively easier. However, for Kurdish people, even though the English language is a foreign language they learn the language with accuracy and perfection (Klaus, 2007). In this research, the author analyses the most common reasons for the Kurdish to be able to learn English accurately. Most of the foreign learners find it difficult as the English language has a complex structure (Despagne, 2010).

Moreover the sharing of a common language for the whole world multiplies people's interaction with each other. The fact that English is used widely makes it easier to learn since it has already achieved international status. According to Harmer (2007), English nowadays has achieved the status of a lingua franca with a common World Language rather than being called as British or American English.

2. Literature Review

Klaus (2007) with his experience of working as a

lecturer in a pioneer university in the Kurdistan region states that many Kurdish people speak English like native speakers, even though they have never travelled to the UK or the USA. Hence we can infer that Kurdish people have a better opportunity to learn English even though the languages are different. The 21st-century learners are well prepared and planned with the learning processes by using innovative scientific methods (Nithyanantam et. al. 2019). When a learner starts to learn a new language there are umpteen numbers of platforms and ways available on the internet. While learning a new language the comparison of the typology between the two languages is a must. Typology is more like the classification of different structural types and studies on different systematic patterns across languages; it deals with cross-linguistic comparisons (Croft, 2002).

In his source, Jung (2001) illustrated that typological analysis undergoes so many processes such as (I) Identification of the phenomenon that has to be analyzed. (II) Typological classifications have to be scrutinized. (III) The construction of the simplification over the arrangement of the language should be considered. And finally, (IV) The description of the oversimplification should be exemplified. The typology is nothing but finding out the similarities between the languages to be learned.

Haegeman (1994) explained the associations among the propagative grammar of languages and then he detailed his method to cross-linguistic distinction. As the languages have the sets of grammatical rules the principles should be made with different parameters. Despite the variances between the two languages English and Kurdish, there are few things whereby the language (Kurdish) falls into the category of human language. It is evident that there is not any proper system to make a specific path that the languages have to be structured. (Muhammed, 2018).

Behaviourists, such as Bloomfield, 1933; Skinner, 1957; Thorndike, 1932; Watson, 1924 (Cited in Mitchell et al. 2013) strongly accept that the learners can learn any foreign language in a mechanical way, which is established on 'Stimulus-Response-Reinforcement', 'repetition, mimicking, or parroting' and finally the 'correction' is followed. Behavioral learning is the process that the Learners normally follow. Further, it is also accepted by them that the process of language learning is the repetition and formation of practices which are clearly evident while a sentence is correctly uttered and formed grammatically. They also argued that while learning a foreign language repetition and practice are considered as vital measures in the process of learning.

While teaching or learning a new foreign language the 'drills' are playing a vital role. Ellis (1990), proves that "Language learning is overlearning. Anything else is of no use". Adding to the above discussed, behaviorism strongly proves that the native language's interference is the main reason behind learners' committing errors in the Target Language (TL). Ellis (1997), recites that behaviorism was recognized only because the TL learners' errors were accepted only after explaining the native language interference that during the era the researchers started accepting the behaviorism, New language learners' errors were labelled with 'Native language interference', which stopped the learners to acquire the practices and customs of the new learning language which could cause errors, or simplify learning. To make it simple, native language interference is playing a vital role in acquiring the Target Language.

The Language teachers find that the Contrastive Analysis (CA) system is the most powerful in teaching phonetics. The accent of the first language plays an important role in learning the second languages especially the learners tend to correlate the similarities in the sound system. According to Mirhassani (1983), the problem in learning a new language lies in finding out proper similarities between the native language and the second language.

Nearly 45 million people speak the Kurdish language all over the world especially Kurdish people who live in Iraq, Syria, Turkey, and Iran. According to Bright (1992) and Asher and Simpson (1994) Kurdish language has its roots from the Indo-Iranian division of the Indo-European languages. According to Wikipedia, it is said that "Early Modern English – the language used by William Shakespeare – is dated from around 1500. It incorporated many Renaissance-era loans from Latin and Ancient Greek, as well as borrowings from other European languages, including French, German and Dutch." From the above, we can see that both Kurdish and English have European origin, thus Kurdish English learners are able to correlate many similarities in learning the English language (Hasanpour, 1992).

3. Phonological Similarities

According to the Received Pronunciation, the English language is classified into three major sound systems that are Consonants, Vowels, and Diphthongs. The classification is made based on the origin of the sounds in the respiratory system. The Kurdish language has the similar sounds as the language English.

Massoud and Majid (2011) analyzed the phonological system between the Kurdish and English languages. According to him, all the sound systems used in the English language are being used in Kurdish too with slight variations.

Table 1.   Comparison of English and Kurdish Phonological Symbols

Sounds	English	Kurdish
Plosives	/p/, /b/, /t/, /d/, /k/, /g/, /ʔ/	/p/, /b/, /t/, /d/, /k/, /g/, /q/, /ç/, /ʔ/
Fricative	/f/, /v/, /ð/, /Ө/, /s/, /z/, /ʃ/, /ʒ/, /h/	/f/, /v/, /s/, /z/, /š/, /ž/, /x/, /γ/, /ĥ/, /h/
Affricate	/ʧ/, /dʒ/	/č/, /j/
Nasal	/m/, /n/, /ŋ/	/m/, /n/, /ŋ/
Lateral	/l/	/l/, / ĺ/
Rhotic	/r/	/r/, /ř/
Glide	/w/, /j/	/w/, /j/

From the above table, it can be easily inferred that the Kurdish and English Languages are having the similar sound system. In the Kurdish language, only a few exclusive sound symbols are available like /q/, /ç/ in Plosives, /x/, /γ/ and /ĥ/ in Fricatives and /ĺ/, /ř/ in Lateral and Rhotic respectively. The two exclusive Plosive sounds in the Kurdish language are /q/ and / ç/ and they are post-velar and pharyngeal articulations respectively, in Fricatives /x/, /γ/ are Velar articulations and //ĥ/ is pharyngeal articulation. /ĺ/ in Lateral is palatal and /ř/ in Rhotic is alveolar-palatal articulation.

The English teaching and learning is comparatively easier for Kurdish learners if they can correlate phonetic symbols of both the languages. The syllable system of both Kurdish and English is that of the peak type: there are as many syllables as there are vowels. The Kurdish language syllable structure can be characterized as (C) (C) V (C) (C) (C) which means that the language Kurdish allows clustering three consonants at the end and two consonants at the beginning. It also indicates that a syllable should have at least one consonant and one vowel, but cannot be a single vowel in isolation (Karimi, 1996). The English language's syllable structure is characterized as (C) (C) (C) V (C) (C) (C) (C) phonemically. Thus, the English language allows a maximum of three consonants in a cluster at the beginning and four at the end. It also shows that a syllable may be only a single vowel in isolation (Roach, 2000).

Table 2.   Comparison of English and Kurdish Vowel and Diphthong.

Vowel / Diphthong	English	Kurdish
/ î /	beat (/i:/)	žîr (wise)
/ e /	Pet	žer (under)
/ i /	Pit	žin (woman)
/ a/	Barn (/a:/)	dast (hand)
/ â/	Pot	dâs (sickle)
/ û /	Book	kûř (bent)
/ ô /	Born	kôř (forum)
/ei/	Table	peynja (ladder)
/ôy/	Boy	birôyn (let's go)
/ây /	Bite	čây (tea)
/ aw /	Toe	šaw (night)
/âw /	house (/au/)	čâw (eye)
/ûy /	Not in English	čûy (you went)

From the above table, it is inferred that the Kurdish language has eight vowel sounds and six diphthong sounds whereas the English language has ten vowels and eight diphthong sounds. The pattern of articulations of vowels and diphthong sounds in both languages is the same. (Nabaz, 1976).

Table 3. Comparison of English and Kurdish Tense formation

Aspects	English	Kurdish
Perfect	Has, Have / Had + PP I have learned English. He has learned English. She had learned English.	'Fer' is used. Mu Englizi fer bum. Aw Englizi fer bum. Aw Englizi fer bowa.
Progressive	Is, Am, Are / Was, Were + PP She is going to school. They are going to school. I am going to school.	'da' is used. Aw darwa bo q'uatabxana. Awan darwn bo q'uatabxana. Am dachm bo quatabxana.
Perfect Progressive	Has, Have / Had + been + 'verb' ing I have been working since 2002.	------------------------------------

4. Grammatical Similarities

Aspect and tense are associated with the time references of any actions in all the languages. When time denotes the semantic notion the aspect and tense denote grammatical notions. Tense is used to refer an event or action to an unconditional location or time. In both the languages English and Kurdish, the term aspect denotes the way of observing the core understanding of the complete action and indicates the actions' completion or non-completion that is termed by the verb form. In English as well as Kurdish languages, simple, perfect and progressive aspects are distinguished (Mohammadi and Ahmadi, 2013). The only difference between English and Kurdish languages in view of aspects is that, the English language has three grammatically marked aspects like Perfect, Progressive and Perfect Progressive whereas in the Kurdish grammar, the Perfect Progressive is not being used.

While considering grammatically marked aspects, the English language has three:
1. Perfect (has, have/had + PP) – I have learned English.
2. Progressive ('be' form + verb-ing) – They are going to school.
3. Perfect Progressive (has, have/had + been + verb-ing) – I have been working since 2002.

The Kurdish language does not possess a strong grammatical structure. According to Amin's (2004) classification of Kurdish aspectual system, Kurdish language has only two grammatically marked aspects:
1. Perfect – 'fer' is used - Mu Englizi fer bum. (I have learned English)
2. Progressive – the prefix 'da' is used with different suffixes.

Aw dârwa bo ĥuatâbxâna. (She is going to school.)
Awan dârwn bo ĥuatâbxâna. (They are going to school).
Am dâchm bo ĥuatâbxâna. (I am going to school.)

Even though in the Kurdish language the Perfect Progressive aspect is not used like English, it has the conditional aspect. The grammatically unmarked aspects are determined in English and Kurdish as same by Simple aspect. In Kurdish the prefix 'da' is used in two different ways in the Progressive form:

1. As a present tense morpheme prefixing the present tense stem and not considered as an aspect marker, the aspect is realized by the lexical elements like adverbs of time. (dâxÕm – I eat, dâxwÕm – I am eating)
2. Preceding the present tense verb stem (dârwa, dârwn, dâchm) where it determines the time, duration and completion or non-completion of an action.

Both English and Kurdish languages use the tense to denote the time of the action even though the languages are having special words like now, later, etc.

A few linguists have explained foreign language learner's learning language, for instance English, as 'interlanguage'. Selinker (1972, cited in Lightbown and Spada, 2013) first introduced the term 'Interlanguage', which explains that the learners' version of English will be dissimilarly based on their inputs in their native language understanding. The way the learners compare the TL with their native language makes it easier to learn the TL. Compared with English grammar, the Kurdish language has a simple form of grammatical structure. Hence Kurdish learners speaking English tend to make grammatical errors, especially in the tense.

According to Richards and Schmidt (2010) 'fossilization' is not the right way of imbibing the learners' linguistic competence as they may lose their competency in the spoken and written language. Furthermore, they argued that 'de-fossilization' would be impossible in most of the situations. Thornbury (1999) also argued that learners should be provided with the correct and perfect instructions in order to make the language learners learn perfectly. Here when a Kurdish learner learns the English language, if the similarities of English and Kurdish grammatical system are taught with perfection, the learner gets it perfectly.

5. Conclusions

Ortega (2009) argued that the resemblances and dissimilarities between the native language and foreign-language may sometimes simplify or obstruct the learning of TL. Both languages use grammatical terms like Aspect, Tense and Time and they are closely connected as well. When Aspect and Tense are based on the concept of

grammar, Time is a semantic concept. Tense is used to denote the time of action but the aspect is used to denote the length of action.

In the perception of Lado (1957), it is said that "when leaning a second or foreign language, similar items are easy for the learners to learn and different items are somehow difficult for them to understand." Comparison between the native language and TL makes the learners learn the TL easily and wherever they face the difficulties in learning TL they can pay special care and attention too.

The learners can make mistakes while learning the TL. When they correlate the errors with the TL they can understand them better. The learners can analyze the errors and strengths by comparing the native language with the TL. The essential finding of this article is that a remarkable association is found between cognitive and sociocultural linguistics patterns that stimulate the learners' progress. Even though a Kurdish learner finds it easier to acquire the English language due to the above illustrated similarities, the young learners who have been exposed to English acquire better.

REFERENCES

[1] Amin, W.O (2004). A New Horizon of Linguistics. Arbil: Aras Press.

[2] Asher, R. & Simpson, J. (Eds.). (1994). The Encyclopaedia of Language and Linguistics. Oxford: Pergamon Press.

[3] Bright, W. (Ed.). (1992). International Encyclopaedia of Linguistics. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

[4] Croft, William. Typology and universals. Cambridge University Press, 2002.

[5] Crystal, D. (1997). English as a Global Language. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

[6] Despagne, Colette (2010) "The Difficulties of Learning English: Perceptions and Attitudes in Mexico," Canadian and International Education / Education canadienne et internationale: Vol. 39: Iss. 2, Article 5.

[7] Ellis, R. (1990). Instructed Second Language Acquisition: Learning in the classroom. Oxford: Basil Blackwell.

[8] Ellis, R. (1997). Second Language Acquisition. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

[9] Haegeman, Liliane. 1994. Introduction to Government and Binding Theory. 2 ed. Oxford: Blackwell.

[10] Harmer, J. (2007). The Practice of English Language Teaching. London: Pearson Longman.

[11] Hasanpour, A. (1992). Nationalism and Language in Kurdistan. San Francisco: Mellon Press.

[12] Jung, S. (2001). Linguistic Typology: Morphology and Syntax. Pearson: UK.

[13] Karimi Doostan, GH. (1996). the phonemic system of the Kurdish dialect of Sanandaj. Linguistics (In Persian), (10)1, 55-62.

[14] Klaus, I. (2007). Elvis is Titanic: Classroom Tales from Iraqi Kurdistan. New York: Vintage Books.

[15] Lado, R. (1957). Linguistics Across Culture: Applied Linguistics for Language Teaching. Michigan: University of Michigan Press.

[16] Lightbown, P. M. & Spada, N. (2013). How Languages are Learned. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

[17] Masoud, R. & Majid Saedi, D. (2010). A Phonological Contrastive Analysis of Kurdish and English. International Journal of English Linguistics, 1:2, 73-82.

[18] Mirhassani, A. (1983). Pronunciation Problems of Iranian Students Learning English. IRAL, 21:4, 320-330

[19] Mitchell, R., Myles, F., & Marsden, E. (2013). Second Language Learning Theories. London: Routledge.

[20] Mohammadi, O. & Ahmadi, F. (2013). A Comparative Study of Grammatical Aspect in English, Kurdish, and Persian. Elixir Linguistics and Translation, 62 (2013), 17832-17837.

[21] Muhammed, Areen Ahmed. "Identifying and Explaining Some Structural Asymmetries in Kurdish vs. the English Language: Morphological and Syntactic Typology Study." English Language, Literature & Culture 2.6 (2018): 115.

[22] Nabaz, J. (1976). The Unified Language of Kurdish. (In Kurdish) Germany: The National Union of the Kurdish Students in Europe.

[23] Nithyanantham, V., Paulmony, R., & Hasan, S.R. (2019). Self-perspective of 21st Century Educators: A challenge in the globalized educational World. International Journal of Educational Research Review, 4(3), 325-333.

[24] Ortega, L. (2009). Understanding Second Language Acquisition. London: Hodder Education.

[25] Roach, P. (2000). English Phonetics and Phonology. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

[26] Richards, J. C., & Schmidt, R. (2010). Dictionary of Language Teaching and Applied Linguistics. Harlow: Pearson Education.

[27] Thornbury, S. (1999). How to Teach Grammar. Harlow: Pearson Education.