

The Effects of Instruction on Acquiring Pronominal Copies' Status

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Abstract: *This study examines the effect of two types of formal instruction on acquiring pronominal copies' status in English restrictive relative clauses by native speakers of Arabic using English for academic purposes. Grammatical judgment and sentence combination elicitation measures were used followed by some pedagogical implications and further research suggestions.*

1. Introduction

There is a debate in the field of second language acquisition (SLA) that instruction either makes or does not make a difference in terms of the acquisition of various aspects of the target language. This paper examines the effects of formal instruction on the elimination of pronominal copies (PCs) in the use of English restrictive relative clauses (RCs) by a small sample of Arabic speakers using English for academic purposes in a technical institution.

There are three lines of research regarding the effects of instruction on the acquisition of various linguistic aspects of different languages. The first line of research is called the *Positive-effect position*. This position assumes that instruction is beneficial for all ages, for all proficiency levels, introduced through various techniques, measured by most means, in different acquisition environments (Long, 1983; Doughty, 1988, 1991; Fotos & Ellis, 1991; Fotos, 1993). Another line of research is called the *No-effect position*. This position assumes that instruction is powerless to prevent developmental errors in second language (L2) learners (Felix, 1981; Ellis, 1984; Weinert, 1987). A third line of research is called the *Detrimental-effect position*. This position assumes that instruction can cause over-learning (Lightbown, 1983; Eubank, 1987). Further research is, still, needed to assess the contribution formal instruction has on the IL development.

2. Research Problem

The target structure of this study is the Noun Phrase Accessibility Hierarchy (NPAH) proposed by Keenan and Comrie (1977, 1979) which suggests six levels of relative clauses; starting from left (i.e., the highest least marked level) to right (i.e., the lowest most marked level). The NPAH suggests a hierarchy of difficulty as shown graphically in Figure 1.

Figure (1): NPAH (Keenan & Comrie, 1977, 1979)

SU > DO > IO > OP > GE > OC

Subject > Direct Object > Indirect Object > Object of Preposition > Genitive > Object of Comparative

higher/least marked>..... lower/most marked > = more accessible than

The NPAH suggests that if a language can relativize on a position, then it can relativize on all positions higher (i.e., to the left of that position). The six types of RCs are illustrated through the following examples:

SU	The boy that ... speaks Arabic came.
DO	The boy that she saw ... came.
IO	The boy that I gave the candy to ... came.
OP	The boy that I sat near ... came.
GE	The boy ... whose ... toy she took came.
OC	The boy that she is shorter than ... came.

On the basis of the NPAH, Hyltenstam (1984, 1990) and Gass (1989) interpret an accessibility hierarchy with regard to pronominal copies. They suggest that there is an inverse relationship between the NPAH and the use of PCs in RCs. This relationship assumes that the lowest positions on the NPAH are the most likely to require PCs, whereas the highest positions on the NPAH are the least likely to require pronominal copies. This relationship can be expressed, on the basis of the NPAH, as shown graphically in Figure 2.

Figure (2): The Pronominal Copies Accessibility Hierarchy (Hyltenstam, 1984, 1990; Gass, 1989)

OC > GE > OP > IO > DO > SU
most marked ... > ... least marked

Based on the Pronominal Copies Accessibility Hierarchy (PCAH) Hyltenstam (1984) and Maghrabi (1997) show that native speakers of Arabic using English retain pronominal copies in place of the extracted noun phrases (NP) when they use English relative clauses. In particular, it is expected that native speakers of Arabic using English will perceive as well as produce ungrammatical English constructions assumed by the PCAH as explained in the following examples:

SU	* The man that <i>he</i> came fell down
DO	* The man that Mike hit <i>him</i> left
IO	* The man that I gave the book to <i>him</i> left
OP	* The man that I sat near <i>him</i> is my uncle
GE	* The man that <i>his</i> father died left
OC	* The man that Mike is taller than <i>him</i> is my brother.

Exposure to second language (L2) input does not guarantee that native speakers of Arabic are able to discern the deletion status of pronominal copies in perceiving and/or producing English relative clauses. This scenario becomes complex when such errors are caused by different processes and factors. Therefore, exposure to formal instruction highlighting such difficulty should enable those learners to consciously notice this. As a result, such errors would be minimized.

3. Sources of the Learning Problem

Two processes account for the retention of pronominal copies in the perception and/or production of English relative clauses by native speakers of Arabic (Maghrabi, 1997). First, the *Psycholinguistic Constraint process* assumes that the initial dependence on meaning rather than form in early language development or in the inter-language of early language learners. Learners use pronominal copies to make the referential conditions of the relative clause clearer and the semantic relationships between the verb and its arguments more transparent. In other words, pronominal copies are used for psycholinguistic ease-of-processing (Ioup and Kruse, 1977a, 1977b; Tarallo and Myhill, 1983; Hyltenstam, 1984, 1990; Maghrabi, 1997).

Second, the *Typological Influence process* assumes the transfer of L1 form onto the L2 structure (Schachter, 1974; Tadros, 1979; Thompson-Panos and Thomas-Ruzic, 1983; Kharma, 1987; Maghrabi, 1997). One form of this process is exhibited in the transfer of the unmarked L1 features onto the L2 structure (Eckman, 1977, 1985; Gass, 1979; Kellerman, 1983; Hyltenstam, 1984, 1990; Maghrabi, 1997). Another form of this process is exhibited in the saliency of the morpho-syntactic features of highly inflectional languages.

4. Methodology

4.1. Subjects

Two groups of twenty six students of intact classes were exposed to two approaches of instruction. The students, who were Management major, were taking a Business Communication course during summer term 2000. They were asked to voluntarily participate in the study. Each group was randomly assigned to one of the two approaches as explained below.

4.2. Pedagogical interventions

Comprehensible input is certainly necessary for language acquisition (Krashen, 1980, 1985), but not sufficient to bring about successful L2 accuracy. Grammar instruction is an attempt to bridge this gap in learners' competence. White (1987) argues that input alone is insufficient because it does not always provide the appropriate evidence. What needed, of course, is negative evidence that may

trigger this progression of knowledge or learn-ability (White, 1987, 1991, 1993; White et al., 1991).

Therefore, two instructional approaches were considered to examine the effects of formal instruction on the acquisition of the correct status of the pronominal copies in English RCs in order to see (1) if instruction makes a difference, and (2) what type of instruction makes the difference.

Students were instructed in the Object of Preposition (OP) type of the NPAH. Both pedagogical approaches were presented through Power-Point slides as described below.

4.2.1. The traditional approach

In this class, eleven students were exposed to traditional grammar instruction in terms of how a relative clause is formed. Students were presented with pairs of sentences, and they were shown how a relative clause is to be formed by combining each pair of sentences. There was no word on the deletion status of pronominal copies as presented in the example below.

The boy likes pizza. I played with the boy.
 The boy whom I played with likes pizza.

4.2.2. The consciousness-raising approach

Within the consciousness-raising pedagogy (Sharwood Smith, 1981; Rutherford, 1987) learners are exposed to aspects of grammar without necessarily using explicit rules. In particular, students are exposed to positive as well as negative evidence simultaneously in order to trigger accuracy as in this study.

In this class, fifteen students were exposed to consciousness-raising grammar instruction in terms of how a relative clause can be formed from a pair of sentences by raising their consciousness or directing their attention to the deletion of pronominal copies. In other words, students were exposed to positive as well as negative L2 input in which they were informed of the grammaticality as well as the ungrammaticality of some relative clause constructions that involve pronominal copies. In particular, students were presented with pairs of sentences, and then they were shown how a relative clause can be formed by combining each pair of sentences. They were presented with grammatical relative clause constructions (i.e., those containing *no* pronominal copies) and with ungrammatical constructions (i.e., those containing pronominal copies) as presented in the example below.

The boy likes pizza. I played with boy.
 / The boy whom I played with likes pizza.
 X The boy whom I played with the boy likes pizza.
 X The boy whom I played with him likes pizza.

4.3. The elicitation measures

The two types of elicitation measures used were: a grammatical judgement and a sentence combination. First, the grammatical judgement test contained twenty

four items that involved the six types of relative clauses. Students had to judge the grammaticality of each sentence. Second, the sentence combination test contained twenty four items that involved the six types of relative clauses. Students had to combine each pair of sentences by attaching the second sentence into the first sentence by using words like *who/whom* or *whose*. Students were instructed not to use words like *and*, *while*, *when*, *after*, *before*, *although*, *through*, or *because* to combine the pairs (See Appendix A for both tests).

This study follows a pre-test/post-test experimental design. Both the grammatical judgment and sentence combination tests were used as a pre- and a post-test for the two groups. The pre-test was administered immediately before the pedagogical interventions, whereas the post-test was administered the following day after the pedagogical interventions. The researcher exercised the administration of the tests and the pedagogical interventions.

5. Results & Discussion

Table 1 displays the percentage of the pre-test and post-test results of the two approaches of instruction.

Table (1): Percentage of the Pre-test and Post-test

Method of Instruction	Pre-test	Post-test	Difference
Traditional Approach	70	81	11
Consciousness-raising Approach	71	94	23
Difference	1	13	12

As can be seen from Table 1 both groups scored similarly on the pre-test. In other words, though the advanced proficiency level of the subjects, all retain pronominal copies in the perception and production of English relative clauses before the pedagogical interventions (i.e., the traditional approach group scored 70% and the consciousness-raising approach group scored 71%). Also, the results of the post-test of both groups indicate that both groups benefit from instruction in general (i.e., the traditional approach group scored 81% as against 70%, whereas the consciousness-raising approach group scored 94% as against 71% as a result of instruction). Most importantly, the results indicate that the consciousness-raising approach is more helpful in benefiting students than the traditional approach (i.e., 81% vs. 94% with 13% difference).

6. Pedagogical Implications

Ungrammatical L2 constructions can be treated early in the initial phases of those learners' inter-language if care was taken by injecting some negative input. This does not mean providing negative input for all structures in any L2, but it suggests providing some type of negative input for areas where there is a

contribution of many processes and/or factors to the ungrammaticality of the L2 constructions.

Since learners depend on meaning at the early stages of L2 learning, it sounds essential for curriculum designers to inject carefully prepared materials (i.e., explanations and/or exercises) at the early stages of IL. The treatment of PCs in RCs has to be salient in classroom instruction. In addition to consciousness-raising pedagogy, Input Enhancement pedagogy (VanPatten, 1984, 1989, 1990, 1993) would be another approach to consider in which errors are flagged red during the instructional treatment.

Teachers of English grammar who teach learners of various L1s need to be aware of this problematic area and the causes of it. Teachers of English grammar who teach learners whose L1s, in particular, have rich morpho-syntactic systems, like Arabic and Spanish, need to be highly aware of the double processes and/or factors contributing to this ungrammaticality.

7. Suggestions for Further Research

Some further research ideas come out of this study such as the following:

1. The sample size used in this study is small. Having a larger number of populations may give a good picture of this area.
2. Instruction in the OP type of would enable us to see if instruction in a level would project onto other levels of the NPAH. Doughty (1988, 1991) show that instruction in the OP level of the NPAH projects onto other less marked levels in relative clause constructions. Would the same happen with regard to the retention vs. deletion of pronominal copies? This is absolutely needed.
3. Advanced students of the target language participated. Having students of English as a foreign language (EFL) ranging from beginners to advanced would be a good sample to select and test.
4. Assessing short-term and long-term effects of instruction rather than short-term only would enable us to assess the effects of instruction more broadly. Many studies have shown the effects of instruction on the short-term, but only a few have shown that on the long-effect.

Note

An earlier version of this paper was presented in the Assembly of Teaching English Grammar (ATEG) Conference, Park University, Parkville, Missouri, USA, and July 13-14, 2001.

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Appendix: Tests for Arabic-speaking Learners of English

Test I. Grammaticality Judgment (GJ)

Instructions:- Please read each of the following sentences. If the sentence is grammatical, write /. If the sentence is not grammatical, write X. There are 24 items in this test.

1. I saw the girl who likes the cat. _____
2. I met the girl whom John sent a postcard to her. _____
3. I saw the boy whom you hit. _____
4. The man whose baby I helped thanked me. _____
5. The boy who he saw the fire ran away. _____
6. That is the waiter whom I spoke to. _____
7. The boy whom I am taller than him likes fishing. _____
8. The boy whom I hit him called the police. _____
9. I talked to the man whom you told me about. _____
10. I talked to the man who wrote the letter. _____
11. I know the student who his book was lost. _____
12. The woman whom Michael travelled with was his mother. _____
13. The woman who her husband died called the police. _____
14. The students who they studied well passed the test. _____
15. The man whom I am taller than is my brother. _____
16. The girl whom I mailed the book to her was my sister. _____
17. The woman whom I saw her was from Japan. _____
18. I visited the man whom I spoke with him on the plane. _____
19. The friends whom I invited did not come. _____
20. The boy whom you sat next to him drank the milk. _____
21. That is the boy whom I am shorter than. _____
23. I talked to the family whose house was destroyed. _____
22. The students whom I gave my books to didn't come. _____
24. I talked to the boy whom I am bigger than him. _____

Test II. Sentence Combination (SC)

Instructions:- Please read each of the following pairs of sentences. Then, combine each two sentences by attaching sentence (b) to sentence (a). Always start with sentence (a) as written. You can use words like *who/whom* or *whose* to combine each pair. Do not use the words *and*, *while*, *when*, *after*, *before*, *although*, *though* or *because* to combine the two sentences. There are 24 items in this test.

1. a. I saw the man. b. He opened the door.

- I saw the man.....
2. a. I met the teacher. b. Mary invited the teacher.
I met the teacher.....
3. a. I saw the girl. b. Bill gave a flower to her.
I saw the girl.....
4. a. I met the man. b. Mike is stronger than the man.
I met the man.....
5. a. The girl visited the man. b. I spoke with the man.
The girl visited the man.....
6. a. That is the woman. b. Her son is a physician.
That is the woman.....
7. a. I know the woman. b. The woman writes books.
I know the woman.....
8. a. The nurse helped the patient. b. I gave the pill to the patient.
The nurse helped the patient.....
9. a. I don't like the woman. b. Jack met her.
I don't like the woman.....
10. a. I saw the woman. b. The woman's husband is handsome.
I saw the woman.....
11. a. I know Maria. b. Lisa is younger than Maria.
I know Maria.....
12. a. I saw the baby. b. The man sat next to the baby.
I saw the baby.....
13. a. The man married the woman. b. I helped her.
The man married the woman.....
14. a. I helped the baby. b. His toy was broken.
I helped the baby.....
15. a. The boy fell down. b. He ran quickly.
The boy fell down.....
16. a. The woman saw the man. b. I mailed the box to him.
The woman saw the man.....
17. a. The woman visited the man. b. I am older than him.
The woman visited the man.....
18. a. I know the boy. b. I played soccer with him.
I know the boy.....
19. a. The student answered the question. b. The student studied well.
The student answered the question.....
20. a. The man shot the thief. b. The police caught the thief.
The man shot the thief.....
21. a. That is the family. b. I lived with them.
That is the family.....
22. a. Jack knows the man. b. I sent a letter to the man.
Jack knows the man.....
23. a. The man married the girl. b. I am more beautiful than her.
The man married the girl.....
24. a. The man helped the girl. b. The girl's book was missing.
The man helped the girl.....