

IS THERE ANY ORDER FOR LEARNING COMPARATIVE/SUPERLATIVE ADJECTIVES AMONG IRANIAN EFL LEARNERS?

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to shed light on the learning of comparative adjectives and superlatives adjectives in learners of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) whose first language (L1) is Persian. This research has been carried out with the collected data from a total of English learners from intermediate level. Learning of English comparative/superlative adjectives: A comparative study of order of learning adjectives among Iranian Institute EFL learners. Specifically, this paper sought to determine comparative/ superlative adjectives which have the highest and the lowest proficiency level by them. In short, L2 learners' failure to correctly supply comparative/superlative adjectives may be due to misunderstanding of the rule for making adjectives. With that in mind, the purpose of this paper is to explore a set of proposals pertaining to memory, learning and grammar, there phenomena that lay at the heart of both language should be taught, the researcher will try to explore an appearance contribution that these proposals make to understanding why certain things are so difficult. However, more than a lack of salience seems to underlie the difficulty of comparative/superlative adjectives. There are numerous studies concerning the order of learning comparative/superlative adjectives; however, no paper to the knowledge of the authors has explored the accuracy profile and acquisition of grammatical morphemes of Iranian EFL learners in such a way.

Keywords: *Accuracy Profile, L2 Acquisition, Order of Acquisition, Grammatical Morphemes, EFL Learners*

INTRODUCTION

The interaction theories, overall argue that language acquisition is a combination of both these factors. Most researchers now believe acquisition is possible through a combination of both nature and nurture. This chapter will explain general consideration of SLA, acquisition of L2 morphemes, and experiments on the acquisition of L2 morphology. Also, it will reveal the adjectives as a syntactic category, and implicational scaling, and will explain about the comparative and superlative adjectives and the experiments on the acquisition of adjectives in L2. The researcher will then review a range of studies that have investigated children's understanding of comparative phenomena. For each specific topic the researcher addresses, summarize of what we know about learners' acquisition and development of comparatives from a core set of studies, and highlight the open questions that remain.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Methodology

This study attempts to find out if Iranian EFL learners whose native language is Persian follow the same pattern of acquisition at different ages and learning conditions. This study tries to find out if there is a scale of difficulty for Iranian language learners of English as far as grammatical morpheme especially adjective morpheme, comparative and superlative adjective are concerned. Answering to why due to using both modern and classic method some of the learners with great intelligence level were able to make correct answer in multiple choice tests. But, in descriptive test they did inappropriate. The obtained results indicated processing differences both between the L2 participants and the L1 controls and between the higher and lower proficiency L2 participants. It is claimed that these results provide further support for the view that L2 learners tend to rely more on lexical storage and less on computational processes in

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the processing of morphologically complex word forms. Adjective placement varies widely from language to language, particularly in two areas: placement before or after the word modified, and order of each adjective within the adjective phrase. A specific adjective ordering system exists within the English language. This differs from certain other languages which have no specifically correct or incorrect adjective ordering. However, surprisingly little research has actually taken as a starting point questions arising from syntactic and semantic linguistic theory about specific aspects of comparative constructions and asked specific questions about children's comprehension and the path of acquisition. As a result, while we have a fairly good understanding of the relationship between linguistic and non-linguistic tasks of comparison and perceptual factors influencing performance in response to comparative language, at this point we know remarkably little about children's developing semantic comprehension of the full range of comparatives and degree constructions and the universal and/or language-specific factors underpinning the acquisition of these constructions. It will become clear as the researcher worked through the theoretical accounts of comparatives and degree constructions that we might indeed expect to find interesting interactions between the syntax and semantics and between the semantics and pragmatics and that this interplay may help to explain the ostensibly protracted development of these constructions that has been discussed in the literature. Here the researcher used quasi- experimental type of study which compares the accuracy profiles of the mentioned population together to find their level of proficiency. The data were collected in 3 weeks during second semester of 2014-2015 in Sari's high schools and private institutes. To test the hypothesis, statistical procedures of analysis of test and Chi-Square analysis in order to use ANCOVA method was conducted. The evaluation involved identifying both correct and incorrect usage of two targeted morphemes in original sentences produced by the participants. The number of correct and incorrect recognition and productions of the target morphemes were collected and recorded for each student. Additionally, the types of errors made by the students for each morpheme structure and the number of each were recorded for each administration of the testing instrument .

Participants

To draw the study the data for requested situation is elicited from the sample through the participation of 60 EFL learners (female), which was selected from among 80 students, participated in descriptive test. The researcher compared two groups of 60 EFL learners who were studying English in high school, and Shokooh English Institute in Sari. Both groups were 16 to 19. They were Iranian native speakers. None of the participants has the experience of living in English speaking country.

Table 3.1: EFL Participants' information

| Group | Learning setting | Number | Age |
|-------|---------------------------|--------|-------|
| 1 | Shokooh private institute | 77 | 14-17 |

Adjective Teacher Made Questionnaire

It is a valuable tool in education which allows researchers to gather reliable and valid data in a short space and time. In this research, the main objective in designing and administering the questionnaire is to draw out types and the frequency of use of morphemes learning strategies reported to have been employed. In that line of thought, the researcher decided to include additional information regarding the subject. The adjective questionnaire consisted of 25 questions which divided in to 4 parts. In the first part the students have to recognize if the correct form of adjectives (superlative/comparative) was used or not. The next part start from question number 8 followed a fill in the blanks type of questions in which the students have to fill the blanks with the appropriate form of adjectives. On the last part the students face to some wrong sentences which they have to rewrite them in the correct form in the specific part. Participants answered to the question using a tick mark for choosing the wrong items in multiple-choice questions and also in some other questions they had some fill-in-blanks type of questions, and they were required to supply the correct form for sentences. The number of correct sentences is the data for analysis.

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Data Collection Procedures

To conduct the research and to find the correctness of the hypothesis of the research, the following steps were taken to tackle the procedure of group assignment. The feedback from the students resulted that they clearly could recognize the usage of comparative/superlative adjectives. Regarding the framework and questionnaire learners were asked to answer a verity of questions that focus on both the level of understanding morphemes and finding suitable way for more effective usage of morphemes. At the test session the students were informed the tests supported to tap their overall English knowledge and it does not have any negative point after scoring, then mean and standard deviation were calculated. The students took the testing instrument in the classroom during class time. The instrument was incorporated into the regularly scheduled tests for the course both to conceal its function and to make it more closely part of the normal classroom production. The students were permitted to sit in their desks with no assigned seating. They had as much time as they wanted to complete the instrument, but as it was only one part of a larger test, they were forced to budget their time for the later sections of the test. On the test session, the students used roughly 20 minutes of the available time for the testing instrument. In the context of present investigation the factor analysis was used to seek the underlying structure of the whole set of grammatical morphemes learning strategy inventory.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Data Analysis and Findings

A longstanding source of debate in the field of second language (L2) acquisition relates to the nature of L2 morphological processing, which has been found to pose difficulties particularly to late L2 learners. A common point that has often been highlighted in studies of L2 morphemes learning and processing is that L2 learners, notably adult L2 learners who start learning the target language after childhood, have continual problems with morphological structures and tend to omit morphemes and/or use them in rather unsystematic and unstable ways. There have recently been a number of theoretical and experimental attempts to explain the reason why L2 learners fail to perform at a level comparable to adult speakers of the target language, which have led to distinct accounts of the mechanisms involved in L1/L2 processing.

Investigating the Second Research Hypothesis

However the morphological competence is a practical issue that searching about new findings related to learners but considering some parts for studying the role and opinion of EFL teachers about the subject is an influential part for better understanding of the problem in order to emphasize on effective point for improving the level of learners' knowledge in each path of the study. According to this important, the researcher tried the EFL point of view about the priority of inflectional out. Due to this the following question and hypothesis took a place in here:

RQ2. Do Iranian EFL learners follow any order for learning comparative and superlative adjectives or not?

H2. Iranian EFL learners do not follow any order for learning comparative and superlative adjectives.

The first consequence of this proposal is that any differences in usage and meaning between superlative and comparative quantifiers are not attached to the specific forms “at most” and “at least”, but rather those they arise because of the pragmatic implicature and psychological complexity associated with expressions whose underlying meaning is a disjunction.

Geurts *et al.*, (2010) demonstrated a processing preference for comparative over superlative quantifiers, by demonstrating that the former gave rise to a shorter response time. If non-strict comparison is processed as a disjunction, we expect that comparisons involving strict comparison will give rise to longer response times than strict comparisons, even in the absence of any linguistically relevant content (such as comparative or superlative quantifiers). By contrast, if both strict and non-strict comparison is equally demanding, there should be no significant effect of comparison type.

While the suffixed and the periphrastic comparative are in complementary distribution for most English adjectives, some adjectives can form their comparative forms in both ways. Traditionally, it has been claimed that the comparative forms of monosyllabic adjectives and disyllabic adjectives ending in y

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(silly-sillier) are formed by attaching the –er suffix, while both forms are possible for disyllabic adjectives ending in-ly (costly - costlier / more costly). The comparative of most other adjectives containing more than one syllable, on the other hand, is formed through the use of the periphrastic form. As it has been mentioned the researcher in this part wants to see if there is any significant differences between the result of this study and Geurts (et al 2010) study is available or not. For proving the hypothesis in this section the researcher focused on some parts of the questionnaire which were about adjective productions Section3 which included of some rewrite sentences and section 4 in which the students were requested to write a paragraph about her sister or cousin and compare her with someone else. The result from applying this test in tables and figures below:

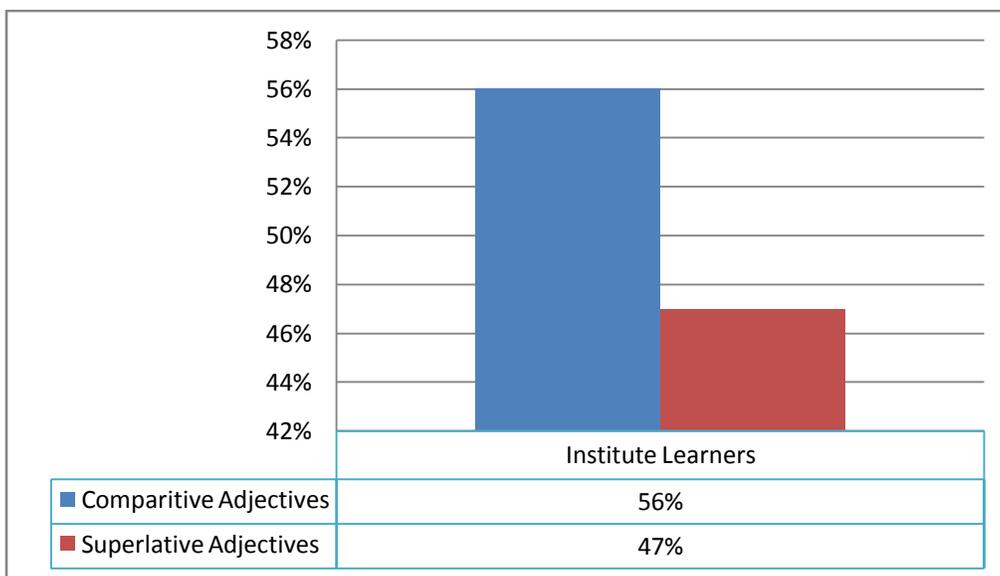


Figure 4.1: The result of proficient section

As it is seen here both institute learners and Secondary school learners have a better result in their use of comparative adjectives than superlative adjectives. And they were unable to use superlative adjectives properly. Based on this the hypothesis of this section is reject and also reveal that the result is similar to what (Geurts *et al.*, 2010) found before.

General Discussion

Mastering the English language grammar is the crucial objects to EFL and ESL learners. To master fluency in any language, essentials of grammar are essential and acquiring another language’s grammar can be difficult. The difference between the speaker’s first language and language being learned as a second language makes some troubles to learners. And this issue would require a great deal of extensive research. Natural acquisition order received much attention during the early 1970s and sparked a great interest among linguists, moving from the behaviorist influenced theories from the 1950s (Gass and Selinker, 2008). According to these studies, morphemes were acquired in a predictable order, regardless of the learners’ first language. According to Brown’s study (1973), these were a similar coherent acquisition order in second language acquisition. Followed Brown, Dulay and Burt (1973) investigated that L1 does not affect the order of acquisition and acquisition of second language is a strikingly consistent order independently of their mother tongue.

Krashen (1977) investigated this issue and suggested that there is an acquisition hierarchy which could explain the slight differences in the order of acquisition. According to Krashen, there was a natural order in the L2 acquisition that remained unalterable and was not affected by the age and the L1. two groups of learners: normal and retarded were studied of Newfield and Schanger (1968). They found that the order of

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acquisition of morphology by the retarded children parallel that of the normal children regardless of time lag between the correct productions of English morphological inflections in both groups.

It will become clear as we work through the theoretical accounts of comparatives and degree constructions that we might indeed expect to find interesting interactions between the syntax and semantics, and between the semantics and pragmatics and that this interplay may help to explain the ostensibly protracted development of these constructions that has been discussed in the literature.

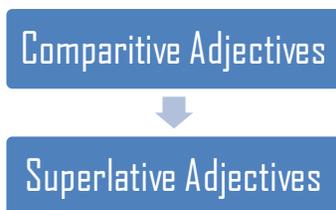
This two kinds of morphemes are considered in this study are “er” for comparative adjective and “est” for superlative adjective. According to Pienmann (2002), grammatical morphemes are acquired in the order of least complex to most complex. According to Pienmann’s theory ESL and EFL learners acquire comparative adjectives of first and after that they learn superlative adjectives.

Variables and Findings

The results comply with the developmental sequence of English morphology postulated in PT, supporting the view that second language acquisition proceeds incrementally in an orderly manner, constrained by L2 processing resources (Pinemann, 1998, 2005). The level of processing resources (procedures) the learners possess is related to the morphological forms they are able to acquire. However, it is beyond the coverage of this study to conclude that the later acquisitions of the different types of grammatical morpheme-s identified in the subject’s samples are not due to this fact. The result of this study shows that learning of plural –s is prior in term of acquisition between inflectional morphemes. During the research it was found that all previous researchers had a common opinion about the effect of L1 on second language acquisition mainly in term of inflectional morphemes. As a matter of fact this opinion failed by the results of this study. Because not only by teachers opinions on interview forms with high percent of mention in their cause of L1 as a key for simplification of teaching L2, but also by scoring students tests result and their own opinion, the effect of L1 on learning English as a second language is undeniable. A good point that there is expectations on the result of this study through previous one in term of effect of L1 on learning L2 is that there is some similarities in Persian language and this essential effect on students’ knowledge for considering and choosing the correct answer in addressing a related subject. It is undeniable through seeking corpus- picture test and it’s result. Teachers’ common points about the priority of learning plural form and effect of L1 available below:

-Helping the students to produce sentences in the teaching environment in order to use comparative adjectives or superlative one in the class through using some sentences in L1 for comparison in low level classes and practicing on several example by students has more affect in this subjects.

-Existence of many kinds of classic and Modern materials (Exam: Flash cards, PPT, Slides) is the other power for better teaching quality enrichment. The achieved result about the range of learning inflectional morphemes which enrich from this study has been designed in the following diagram:



Contextualizing the acquisition outcome against the settings surrounding the learners L2 learning (EFL, ESL, naturalistic exposure), our findings corroborate other studies in that 1) the higher one’s L2 proficiency level is at the time of arrival in the target language environment, the beneficial the environment is for the learners to further develop their L2 morphology development; 2) formal instruction is helpful in promoting a faster and more accurate learning outcome for adult L2 learners.

Conclusion

This study clearly shows that there is indeed an acquisition order when learning English grammatical morphemes by EFL Learners. Returning to the original research questions, this study also provides

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evidence that the acquisition order of grammatical morphemes by English as Foreign Language learners is similar to the order of English as Second Language learners. However, if the goal of language learning is communicative ability, then the students still have many obstacles to overcome in their acquisition of the language.

In addition, this study exhibits support for some differences between researches, and that it does play a role in grammatical morpheme acquisition. This result supports the view that morphological awareness is an outcome of print exposure and experience. It is improved with the development of overall English proficiency. If the goal of language learning includes mere grammar and form, then the students, and by extension, the teaching methods used, have succeeded. However, if the goal of language learning is communicative ability, then the students still have many obstacles to overcome in their acquisition of the language. Further exploration of these ideas holds the promise of substantial progress in understanding the nature of second language acquisition and may ultimately contribute to the more practical pedagogical concerns of teachers and curriculum designers. Based on this research it has clearly shown that there is an implicational scaling for learning comparative/superlative adjectives and it is obvious that as it is mentioned in literature review, learning of comparative adjectives are prior among EFL learners and also it has been discussed that the students learn adjectives but unfortunately they were unable to provisionally use and recognize these two types of morphemes in their competences.

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