Saudi Arabian' Oral and Written Production Processing of English Past Tense Forms as a Second Language

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Abstract

The main mechanisms that represent the morphology of the past tense in English act continue to be discussed. The dual model assumes that the morphology of the English past verb operates in two different mechanisms, regular and irregular. The main aim of this study is to verify the process of acquiring of the English past tense L2 as a second language by Arab learners in Saudi. This investigation in research was to examine the validity of the Dual model through identifying the relationship between acquisition of English language past tense by Arabic learners in Saudi in addition to the repetition and regularity forms in English past tense. (fill in the gaps and speaking task task), two tasks were run on Arabic-Saudi learners of English as a second language (ESL) with eighteen high-proficiency and eighteen low-proficiency, to explain if the level of proficiency has affected the processing of L2 English past tense morpheme or not. The results of this study support the Dual model that there are two basic mechanisms in the brain for learners of ESL to acquire English past tense. Irregular verbs are represented by associative memory and Regular verbs are represented by a rule-control mechanism. Thus, frequency effect was found in the morphology acquisition of the past tense from irregular verbs. However, Saudi learners of ESL do not continuously display the regular and irregular verb forms and inconsistencies in the production of low and high frequency verbs. On other side, the results in this study revealed a high correlation degree between the level of accuracy of English past tense acquisition and the proficiency of Saudi learners. Factors like speaking in English and hours of learning do not seem to have a strong impact on production of past tense.

Keywords: English, Past Tense, Saudi Arabian', Oral, Written, Production Processing, Second Language.

1. Introduction

Second language acquisition is defined as a non-native language learning process after the mother tongue (L1) that non-native language is used (Gass and Selinker 1994). Regardless of whether the language is second, or third, this process occurs in a natural situation or in a classroom environment. Teachers agree, in addition to researchers for the longest period of time, that L2 processes are areas of difficulty not only for L2 learners at low efficiency levels (Vainikka and Young-Scholten, 1996), but for learners who are more efficient (Hawkins and Liszka, 2003). Inflectional morphemes, that implicitly imply a modification of a tense, verb's aspect, number, mood or person without influencing the class or meaning, such as the third person form and the past tense are one of the areas of particular difficulty for learners (Prévost and White, 2000). Teachers and researchers take the form of a simple past, one of the categories in inflectional morphemes, such as the complexity of the SLA, specifically for Arab learners who are trying to learn grammar of English. The simple past tense means something that occurred sometime in the past (Quirk et al. 1985), in addition to other meanings, such as: the "state", "event" and "habitual" pasts.

The past tense types of English are regular verb and irregular verb. The irregular verbs are formed by past personal forms such as sing-sang, bring-brought, while the regular verbs are formed by adding (ed) morpheme to a verb for example look-looked (Pinker and Ullman, 2002). This paper was prepared as follows:

The introductory section presents the phenomenon of research, individual and double models, skill effect, study objective, and the study outline. In addition to research hypotheses and questions are indicated at the end of section one. The second section presents a review of the literature focusing on Organic Grammar, generative grammar, syntactic feature of Arabic and English past tense, Failed Functional Feature, morphological variabilities, hypotheses including failed functional advantage, organic rules, and structure of the modified structure. The third section presents research methodology, participants, tools and procedures for data collection and analysis. The fourth section presents the results of the study and gives details about what the researcher discovered about the study in addition to the questions. The fifth section discuss the results that the researcher then studied and analysed to create meaning and show the achievement of the aims.

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In general, the discussion section provides answers to your search questions. The section of conclusion provides a summary of key findings, limitationa, in addition to some suggestions for more research.

The main objective of this study is to verify the process of acquiring of the English past tense L2 as a second language by Arab learners in Saudi. In addition to, investigate the correlation between the levels of proficiency and the accuracy of acquisition of the English past tense**.**

Research Questions and hypotheses

H1: Based on research objectives, it is predicted that acquisition of high frequency irregular verbs by Saudi ESL learners appears to be easier than low frequency.

H2: The dual model assumes that the morphology of the English past verb operates in two different mechanisms, regular and irregular.

H3: irregular verbs predicate to be less problematic comparing to the regular   verbs.

H4: Referring to the proficiency, it is assumed that Saudi ESL high proficiency learners perform better in acquiring English past tense comparing to learners with low proficiency. Thus, the research questions have been addressed in this study in order to investigate these issues are:

1. Do Saudi Arabian ESL learners display asymmetries in the production of high and low-frequency verbs and regular and irregular verb forms?

2. What is the correlation between the levels of proficiency and the accuracy of acquisition of the English past tense?

2. Literature review

The purpose of this section is to provide a theoretical framework for acquiring past tense forms through L2 learners in English.

2.1 Generative Grammar

The generative grammar outlined as a basic method of language acquisition. In successive work, Chomsky has maintained that the comprehension and production of the language happens in an abstract linguistic system (e.g., Chomsky, 1959, 1965). Chomsky used the term of "efficiency" of linguistic comprehension and "performance" of the language we produced (Chomsky, 1959). In the area of first language acquisition, generative grammars have clarified the ability of children to acquire complex language forms through Universal Grammar (UG), which is innate linguistic knowledge.

In a simplistic context, the difference between linguistics languages is expected to arise from the fact-finding of the list of language features in each language. Chomsky (1993) considers the functional category past tense marking, the area defined in this study, as one of the parametric differences between languages. In reference to the acquisition of the acquisition of the past tense by Saudi Arabian ESL, it is important to present the grammatical characteristics of Arabic and English tense.

2.2 Syntactic Features of Arabic and English Past Tense

English has the specified tense verb set as follows: past- and past +. The English past tense has two regular forms formed by an irregular formed by adding -ed and irregular formed by a distinct past tense form. Arabic is used perfect and perfect to distinguish verbal morphology of inflection. To illustrate, the suffix is used to refer to the past tense while the prefix is used to refer to the present tense.

In addition, Arabic is used perfect and perfect to distinguish verbal morphology of inflection. To explain, the prefix is used to refer to the present tense while, the suffix is used to refer to the past tense. The two languages differ in the Arabic language, which does not have irregular form (Mursi, 2012,). In the end, this difference occurs in the grammatical features of the tense forms of the past in both Arabic and English.

2.3 Morphological Variability

Past tense labeling is one of the actual actions that have been generally studied in English, because learners of English as a second language sometimes generate a past tense morpheme, sometimes dropping it (Muftah, 2016). This variability or morphological inconsistency has been clarified as a speech characteristic in marking of past tense (e.g. Anderson, 1978; Makino, 1980). In a recent study carried out by Prévost and White (2000), they found that the learner in Arab produced seventy five percent of the correct inflection of the mandatory contexts and the learner in Portuguese produced seventy.

This finding appears to support the earlier contradiction in the production of controversial provinces. With the emergence of proficiency, Goad et al. (2003), in their study of English morphology, the participants sample was from different proficiency levels of. Nevertheless, participants exhibit a variety of reflex and non-infected acts, and thus, it can be assumed that this change is not only related to a particular stage of development but a continuing problem for some learners (McCarthy, 2008).

Regularity was discussed as another source of morphological change in the past tense in English (Santoro, 2012). To explain, the past tense in has two forms regular verb and irregular verb.

2.4 Failed Functional Feature Hypothesis

Hawkins and Chan (1997) defined Failed Functional Feature Hypothesis (FFFH) as one of the important calculations in the production of the changing reflection. It is suggested that L2 learners acquire only the specific features contained in L1, in other words, this hypothesis attributes the morphological qualities to the lack of features in grammatical grammars. Failed Functional Feature Hypothesis supports the critical period where argue that the features acquired after the critical period become inaccessible to learners L2 (Hawkins and Chan (1997). Thus, the functional attributes are subject to a critical period "where the parameters settings differ between L1 and L2 target, there will be large limitations on the learner's ability to L2 to build mental grammar such as the original language" (Hawkins and Chan, 1997).

2.5 Organic Grammar and Modulated Structure Building Hypotheses

The modern version of the minimum tree hypothesis developed by (Vainikka and Young-Scholten (2005, 2007, 2011 and 2013) is an Organic Grammar (OG). In short, Organic Grammar suggests that L1 should have no effect on the creation of functional classes in L2 as it is limited to thinking about the collaboration between language inputs with UG and is fully available. On the other hand, MSBH believes that L1 plays a reconciling role when it comes to developing these projections.

3. **Research Methodology**

3.1 Participants

In the study, 36 Saudi ESL learners have participated, including thirty females and six males. All participants are Arabic speakers who began to learn English at the age of about 14 years coming to the UK to complete their higher education PhD and MSc or study English. Eighteen participants assessed themselves at the level of English proficiency at a high level because the other 18 participants were at a low level. The question of English proficiency depends on their score of IELTS. The time length of their live in the UK ranged from two month to four years. The average exposure to English was 11 hours per week for general use outside the classroom and 15 hours per week during study.

3.2 Design and Material

The study tools contained three research criteria: basic information, filling gaps and speaking. A collection of data collection has been used to measure both written (a fill in the gaps) and operative production of the past tense by Saudi participants, all data has been collected by the researcher. In order to identify factors that affect the participants' answers, participants were given a short bio questionnaire consisting of some questions about their level of proficiency, their exposure to English, and their early experience in learning English. In the background questionnaire, they answered questions about themselves.

3.3 Data Analysis Procedures

In task one; the verbs were classified in four groups as accurate or not; high-frequency regular (H-F-R), high-frequency irregular (H-F-IRR), low-frequency regular (L-F-R), and low-frequency irregular (L-F-IRR). In task two, the past tense verb that happened were highlighted in the texts used in data collection. The verbs were divided to accurate and inaccurate with each of the two verbs classified either in regular verb or irregular verb.

In both tasks, the inaccurate answers were described as omission easing the inaccurate group's identification or wrongly inflected. By using the SPSS 16.0 program, the processing of the data collected was performed statistically which delivering results in output forma, running tests and eased organization. The SPSS program facilitated the quantitative study methodology that was preferred for this study to promote the dissemination of the results of the study.

4. **Results**

This section discusses the descriptive statistics, the data correlation and the results from two tasks correlated with the data collected about the factors in the questionnaire of bio data, in order to present the study results based on the quantitative approach.

4.1 Correlation of the Data

The correlation analysis reveals the relationship between the data. The correlation is necessary in measuring the strength of the relationship between the types of variables and the existence of a positive and negative relationship that illustrates the nature of the relationship. The closest result to zero correlation indicates a weak relationship, while the near to one indicates a strong correlation between the data.

4.1.1 Task 1 (fill-in-the-gaps)

The results of Task one were presented along with the factors in the questionnaire of bio data, including the level of proficiency achieved in the UK, school hours, the length of living time, and hours spent using English.

The student's proficiency level is one of the factors that clarify in detail the nature relationship existing with task one high frequency regular, high irregular task, low frequency regular and low frequency irregular average distinguishing them as follows.
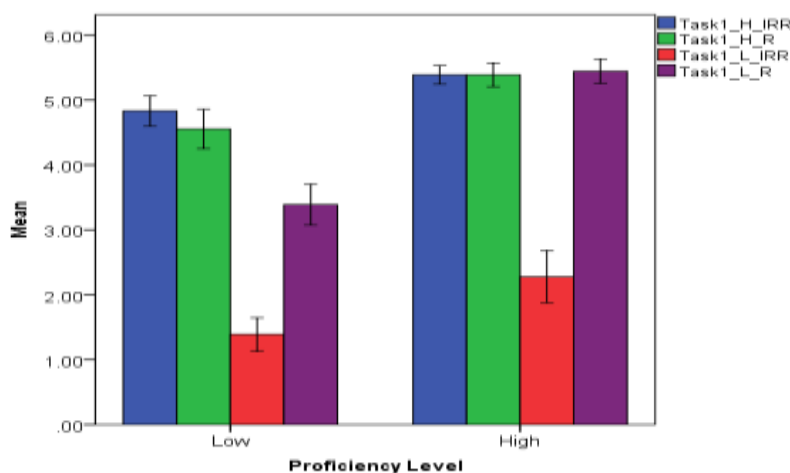

Figure 1: task 1 and proficiency levels

4.1.2 Task two

The results in this study indicate that the hours spent in speaking English at school to assess the irregular verbs and regular verbs detected the Pearson correlation of 0.255 and 0.044, respectively. Thus, the lack of importance in relation to the hours spent in speaking a language as shown in p values of 0.798 and 0.133 was evidence that this variable does not affect the use of the verb. The hours of study are placed in perspective for regular and irregular with both scoring of -0.050 and -0.136 respectively. They also had p values of 0.771 and 0.428> p. This means that the studying hours do not effect of regular and irregular verbs. In the same task, the results in this study show that the time living length in UK scored a $0.431 \leq$ p-value, and was the highest positive correlation for irregular. As well as, the regular verbs scored a $0.218 >$ p-value. These findings suggest that living in the UK is associated with the production of irregular verbs. Finally, the level of proficiency in the participants scored a positive correlation in the irregular verbs at 0.431 and 0.009 p-value, as compared with the regular verbs that scored a correlation between 0.306 and 0.070 p-value, because the level of proficiency in the participants was another important factor in this study.

In task two, an assessment of variables Regular verbs and irregular verbs reveals the following summary in the graph.
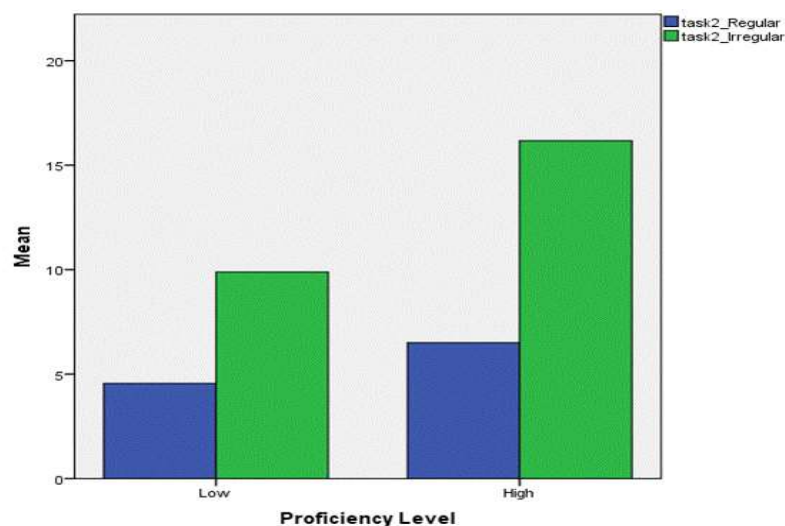

Figure2: task 2 and proficiency levels

5. Discussion

This section discusses the results in the section four to ascertain whether the results support an asymmetry in the production of the frequency verb forms for regular verb and irregular verb. In addition, this study aims to determine whether or not proficiency has an impact on this process.

5.1 Task One

The results of the task one seems to indicate be no significant difference between the production of high frequency regular verbs and irregular verbs. In addition to, the results indicate that the more efficient the kinds of verbs produced by participants in the Saudi ESL program the more accurately the regular verbs. This means that the latter group has a similar relationship to the proficiency level of the participants.

The results seem to support the dual model given the efficiency factor. The other factors that have been taken into account - hours spent in English, studying hours, and living in the UK - seem to have nothing to do with the effects of the frequency forms of past tense.

Nevertheless, efficiency has been regarded as one of the greatest influential factors affecting acquisition of L2 in general, specifically, for marking of past tense. Another argument may justify the fact that speaking hours, study hours and living in the UK do not affect the exact production of past tense verb form (Mourssi, 2012). The author said that the most common strategies of learning with Arab learners are memorization. In this way, the forms of irregular verb can only be learned through memorization and repetition. In addition to, one can claim that the interlanguage is what affects the results we have seen in the study and not any other factor. In other words, speaking hours, study hours and living in the country cannot overcome the interlocking language stage of Learner L2.

5.2 Task Two

The results of task two showed that learners of ESL tend to produce forms of irregular verbs more accurately than regular verbs in the task of speaking. This mean, the production of irregular verbs form seems less problematic than the regular verbs forms. This result can return to the saliency and frequency of irregular verbs forms. In addition, a statistically significant relationship between the efficiency and precise production of the past tense forms of inquiry has been investigated, as highly qualified ESL learners perform better in producing the past tense verb of English in the task of speaking. On the other hand, this relationship did not appear clearly in the task one (fill in the gaps). Lastly, the results seem to support the model of dual in which both regular and irregular verbs in English are represented by the original mechanisms in the learner brain.

6. Conclusion

The current study was conducted to investigate the full acquisition process of English forms of past tense by ESL learners in Saudi. The main aim of this study was to determine whether the level of efficiency affects this process or not. In addition, the aim of this investigation was to explore inconsistencies in the production of high frequency verb and low frequency verb forms of both regular verbs and irregular verbs. Initially, the results may indicate that the differential accuracy in both regular verbs and irregular verbs may be interacting with the learners L1 and the type of task.

However, the results in this study in the other task indicate that Arab EFL learners after they have acquired the past tense form of regular verbs become tend to acquire the morphology of past tense form of irregular verbs (Muftah, 2016). The main factor found in this study affects the forms production of English verb is efficiency; on the other hand, the hours they spend in speaking the language and living in the UK affect the accuracy. Thus, thus, there is a great need for further research to clarify and explain further interactions. Future research should be expanded to include other ESL learners to determine the importance of both L1 and interlanguage, in addition to the important theory effects of dual system. Strengthening this expansion will lead to improve student education in the coming years.

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