الخصائص النحوية للمبني للمجهول واستخدام الجمل الوصلية في الكتابة لدى طلاب الجامعات العراقيين لتعليم اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية

The Grammatical Features of Passive Voice and Relative Clause Utilization in Writing by Iraqi EFL University' Students

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الملخص:

يستقصي هذا البحث كيفية استخدام طلاب الجامعات العراقيين لتعليم اللغة الإنجليزية كلغة أجنبية (EFL) للمبني للمجهول والجمل الوصلية في الكتابة. بالنظر إلى تعقيد وأهمية هذه التراكيب النحوية في اللغة الإنجليزية، فإن فهم كيفية استخدام الطلاب لها يمكن أن يوفر رؤى قيمة حول كفاءتهم اللغوية والمجالات التي تحتاج إلى تحسين. بالإضافة إلى ذلك، تهدف الأهداف الرئيسية لهذا البحث إلى: تحليل المبني للمجهول والجمل الوصلية في الكتابة وتحديد الأخطاء الشائعة في استخدامها. طبق هذا البحث منهجاً نوعياً لتقييم دقة ومناسبة تراكيب المبني للمجهول والجمل الوصلية في الكتابة. تم استخدام حساب النسبة المئوية لتحديد تكرار أخطاء الطلاب. وجد البحث أن عدداً من العوامل، مثل تقنيات التواصل، وسياق التعلم، والتحويل داخل اللغة وبين اللغات، تساهم في انتشار الأخطاء. يقدم هذا البحث توصيات عملية للمربين لتعزيز تدريس القواعد النحوية. في النهاية، يهدف إلى المساهمة في تحسين مهارات الكتابة باللغة الإنجليزية لدى طلاب الجامعات العراقيين من خلال معالجة القضايا المحددة واقتراح استراتيجيات تدريس فعالة.

الكلمات المفتاحية: اللغة الإنجليزية، الخصائص النحوية، المبني للمجهول، الجمل الوصلية.

Abstract:

This research investigates how Iraqi EFL University Students utilize Passive Voice and Relative Clause in writing. Given the complexity and importance of these grammatical structures in English, understanding how students use them can provide valuable insights into their language proficiency and areas needing improvement. In addition, the primary aims of this research are: to analyze passive voice and relative clauses in writing and to identify common mistakes in their use. This research applied a qualitative method to assess the accuracy and appropriateness of passive constructions and relative clauses in writing. A percentage calculation was used to determine the frequency of student errors. The research found that a number of factors, such as communication techniques, learning context, and intralingual and interlingual transfer, contribute to the prevalence of errors. This research provides practical recommendations for educators to enhance grammar instruction. Ultimately, it aims to contribute to the improvement of English writing skills among Iraqi university students by addressing the identified issues and suggesting effective teaching strategies.

Keywords: English Language, Grammatical Features, Passive Voice, Relative Clause.

Introduction

Writing is the most important skill for learning the English language among university students. Apart from speaking, listening, and reading, students also need to learn how to write correct sentences with proper grammar. There are certain grammatical structures that are commonly used in writing; nevertheless, students may find it challenging to accurately develop or employ these structures in their writing (Hinkel, 2002b, 2004). According to this research, spending more time understanding, recognizing, and creating grammatical elements can help with the acquisition of these elements (Balcom & Lee, 2009; Nassaji & Fotos, 2004; Norris & Ortega, 2002). This research looks at the impact of teaching these grammatical structures in improving the writing of EFL university students. Every year, the English language department in Iraqi universities receives large numbers of students, many of whom do not speak English correctly. Writing academically is a difficult chore for many students as they need to focus on vocabulary, grammatical precision, and rhetorical demands.

Literature Review

English Language

English language is utilized for several purposes such as international communication, business, science, politics, diplomacy, and the Internet. The fact that English is spoken as a mother tongue in the United States, the United Kingdom, Australia, Canada, Ireland, New Zealand, South Africa, and many other countries does not negate the language's global status. More than 100 nations worldwide, including China, Turkey, and Spain, now teach English as their most popular foreign language (Crystal, 2003, pp. 3-4). Geographically speaking, English is more widely used and has a larger user base. However, its proliferation is not accidental. Language pedagogy is one

of the things that helps this process along (Phillipson, 1992, p. 6). As Troike (1977, as cited in Phillipson, 1992, p. 7) stated, today, the language of the global market is English. There are two primary explanations for why English is a worldwide language: geographical-historical and socio-cultural. The historical dimension pertains to the beginnings of global English, whereas the socio-cultural dimension concerns the present state of English in global spheres like politics, communication, education, and media, and the reasons why learning English has become vital for individuals worldwide in order to ensure their social and economic well-being (Crystal, 2003, p. 29). The origins of the English language worldwide date back to the fifth century, when English was brought to England from northern Europe. After that, it began to spread throughout the British Isles, reaching Scotland and Ireland in the eleventh century following the Norman conquest. However, this travel was limited to the British Isles. It took another 300 years, around the end of the sixteenth century, for English to make the first real headway toward becoming a universal language as Crystal (2003, p. 30) states. Of course, there is a cultural component to the entire English language spread. In industries like media and advertising, entertainment, technology, education, and tourism, it has developed into a global communication medium (Crystal, 2003). The geographical, historical, and sociocultural aspects of the English language make it imperative that one acquire excellent speech and writing skills in this official language.

Grammatical Features

Grammatical features are particular characteristics of words that reveal more about their functions and connections within a phrase. These elements are essential for comprehending and producing meaningful, grammatically accurate sentences. Studies confirm that education in grammar is more

beneficial than input alone (Norris & Ortega, 2002). Longer learning periods and prior experience boost student accuracy (Balcom & Lee, 2009). More teaching and practice time, together with earlier grammatical structure training, can help students utilize language more accurately. Students who spent more time studying and practicing the application of a grammatical structure performed significantly better on a posttest, as demonstrated by Balcom & Lee (2009). Additionally, students who had previously studied that structure are better than those who were studying the framework for the first time. According to Nassaji & Fotos (2004), previous studies "might not have pinpointed the exact kind of grammar instruction—such as form-based, deductive, or explicit—that produces the greatest acquisition results for students; but it's evident that increasing awareness of and attention to target forms, meaning-centered target form input, and expanding opportunities for practice and production are essential prerequisites for acquisition. Numerous academics have argued that teaching grammar more successfully involves multiple approaches rather than focusing on just one (Azar, 2007; Ellis, 2006; Hinkel, 2004).

Passive Voice

Passive voice is used to downplay the agent's role. The past participle of the primary verb and the auxiliary verb "be" are combined to generate it. Although the past participle and the verb "get" can also be used to form passive construction, it has been argued that this construction is fundamentally different (Mitkovoska & Buzarovska, 2012). Both long and short passives can be created by using the auxiliary verbs "be" and past participle with the passive voice. The agent is included in a by-phrase in long passives, while short passives remove the action's agent from the sentence (Biber, Conrad, & Leech, 2002). The active statement "Someone

wrote in this book," for instance, becomes either the long passive "This book was written in by someone" or the short passive "This book was written in." The passive voice is a fundamental component of the English language and, when employed correctly to preserve the work's organic flow and informational presentation, is a crucial aspect of excellent writing. Its purpose is to clarify rather than to hide or obscure, but to preserve stylistic conventions in the information presentation that have become entrenched in the English language over centuries of use for very good reasons (Minton, 2015, p. 9). This having been said, some linguistic scholars, notably Seoane and her collaborators (Seoane, 2006; Seoane & Loureiro-Porto, 2005; Seoane & Williams, 2006), claim to have identified a relatively recent trend, leading to a decline in passive use in scientific writing. According to recent research, the amount of passives in scientific British and American English over the 20th century has drastically decreased (Seoane & Loureiro-Porto, 2005, p. 107). The quantity of passives as a proportion of passivizable finite verbs, or the rate of passives, was shown to be comparatively steady between the early twentieth century and the 1960s. There was a significant drop that was "more dramatic in American English" following that (Seoane & Loureiro-Porto, 2005, p. 109). In British English, the percentage of passivizable verbs used in the passive decreased from 66.4% to 58.7% during 1960–1975 and from 62.2% to 46.4% in American English between 1985–1990. The writers take into account the potential that the shift in passive usage in scientific English is a result of a broader trend towards colloquialism. This doesn't seem to be the case, either, as other colloquialization markers—aside from first-person pronouns, which are closely connected to the shift in passive usage—have not changed in a comparable manner.

Relative Clauses

Writing typically uses relative clauses, and reduced relative clauses are frequently utilized to condense material in academic language (Biber, 1988). Nevertheless, because of the refined structure of decreased relative clauses, students may choose not to use them or may use them incorrectly (Hinkel, 2004). The purpose of a reduced relative phrase is the same as that of a full relative clause; nevertheless, it does not lose meaning by leaving out the relative pronoun and the auxiliary verb "be" (Master, 2002). It might not be necessary to reduce a relative clause in a sentence; however, the author may utilize it to summarize their work (Hinkel, 2002b; Master, 2002). A relative phrase can be reduced by using a -ed or -ing participle clause for the relative pronoun.

Examples of full relative clause:

- Obviously, when social entrepreneurs put their capital into companies that are focused largely on resolving issues within the community (-ed participle clause).
- The contentment of the residents who live in such community (-ing participle clause).

Reduced relative clause:

- Obviously, when social entrepreneurs put their capital into companies focused primarily on addressing community issues, this could result in numerous advantages and possible adjustments for communities.
- It is obvious that social transformation affects the well-being of the community as well as the growth of the residents living in that community.

Students may produce poorly constructed sentences because of their lack of understanding of this intricate structure, such as "Also, it can be good factor

to decline in the proportion of students who cheat" (1135AR). Moreover, Russell (2014) discovered that writers frequently used full relative clauses, even though many of those sentences might have been omitted for greater effect. From her research, the following is an example:

"The two biggest aspects that are affected by ecotourism are the environment and indigenous people".

Although this sentence has a complete relative clause, it would have been more impactful if the writer had used a -ed participle clause instead of the relative pronoun. In technical writing, this results in more condensed writing, which is greatly appreciated (Master, 2002).

Subordinate clauses known as relative clauses (RCs) serve to limit the possible subjects of a non-plural noun phrase (NP) by stating requirements that must be met by any subject to which the NP may refer. You can go far with this if you're interested in or have studied logic or semantics.

Moreover, if not, you would most likely be content to accept it at face value. All relative clauses in the English language come after their NP's head noun. They also frequently come before the head; Japanese is arguably the most well-known example, while there are numerous others, including Korean, Chinese, Turkish, and others. The manner that various relative clause construction types handle the open position, often referred to as "NPrel" in grammatical discussions, varies significantly.

These English samples show two of the three most common alternatives:

a. many people who I admire eat fish. b. many people I admire eat fish.

The method of (a) is frequently referred to as "movement" since the word *who*, referred to as a "relative pronoun," is not appearing at the expected position based on its meaning but rather at the head of the relative phrase. Semantic role: NPs and other elements would travel from "deep structure"

places, which determined their semantic roles, to "surface structure" positions, where they appear plainly. This is one of the main ideas of "transformational grammar." However, NPrel simply appears to be missing in (b). However, in (b), NPrel appears to be missing; hence, this tactic is referred to as "Deletion" (Andrews, 2007, p. 2).

Method

The research methodology used is qualitative. Qualitative research relies on narrative findings rather than statistical or quantitative ones (Sidiq & Choiri, 2019). There was no experimentation involved in the data collection or evaluation. The validity of the data analysis was determined by the researcher. This approach sought to gather detailed data regarding students' mistakes and clarify the reasons behind students' difficulties creating passive voice and relative clause sentences. Participants are about 60 undergraduate students in the English departments at Mustansiriyah University/College of Basic Education/Department of English Language, ranging in year from first to fourth. The selection of participants will be based on their desire to participate and ability to reflect a range of English skill levels. A descriptive essay was given to each participant; they consisted of passive voice and relative clause sentences. The model used to analyze errors made by students is Brown (2000). Acknowledge that the findings may not be generalizable to all Iraqi EFL students or to those from different educational contexts.

Data Analysis

After gathering student writings, the researcher examined the mistakes that the students had made. In passive voice sentences, we must first pay attention to the tenses of active sentences.

Here are a few instances where students wrote in passive voice incorrectly. Here are some examples of passive voice and relative clause sentences from essays that were given to the participants:

Examples of passive voice sentences:

1. The lessons were explained by the teacher yesterday.
2. The house was built on July.
3. A man and a little boy were injured.
4. English is spoken all over the world.
5. One of our windows was broken (Idami & Pratiwi, 2021).

Examples of relative clause sentences:

1. Diamonds that sparkle are expensive.
2. The meat that I ate for dinner was overcooked.
3. Adam took his car that had a bad transmission to the mechanic.
4. Peter, who lives in Toronto, works in the banking industry.
5. Jane saw the man whom she met yesterday (Fogarty, 2008).

There are multiple ways to say "to be" in English grammar. These include *am*, *is*, and *are* for the present tense, *were* and *was* for the past tense, and *been* for the past participle, but before using an auxiliary like *have*, *had*, or *has*. *Being* in conjunction with both the subject and the object. As an illustration, consider the lesson that the teacher gave yesterday. The mistake that can be seen in passive statements in the simple past tense is "was," when the proper sentence is: "The lessons were explained by the teacher yesterday," because the word "lessons" is in the plural.

When creating sentences, verbs must be precise since they indicate whether an event is occurring in the present, past, or future. Verbal conjugation is necessary in English to change the tense of a statement. The house was constructed in July. The mistake in the passive sentence in the simple past

tense was "build," which is an "irregular verb" that causes "build" to become "constructed" in the past participle form. English contains both regular and irregular verbs; regular verbs are those that often end in -d or -ed.

Omission is the mistake of leaving out words or grammatical constructions in writing that satisfy precise and good grammatical criteria. For instance, "the teacher is not present." The preceding phrase is incorrect because it omits the word "is" to become "not in proper grammar." True statement: "The teacher is not present."

A mistake in the formatting of the source language into the target language is called misinformation. Example: "A man and a little boy was watching him." This sentence is wrong because "were" is used when the subject is plural and "was" is used when the "subject" is singular.

Phrases that are passive and whose actors or agents are unknown. For instance:

Active: Someone broke one of our windows. Passive: One of our windows was broken.

- Passive sentences with ambiguous or insignificant perpetrators.

English is a language spoken by people everywhere. Passive: English is spoken by people everywhere. It can be difficult to learn the passive voice in a country where English is a second language. A lot of individuals pick up English through watching, listening, and casual conversation; a lot of sentences are in the active form, making the passive voice usage decrease (Agustini, 2017). Since passive sentences are frequently heard and learned, they must have been studied beginning in middle and high school. This is because students are expected to comprehend and correctly construct passive voice sentences. Because scientific articles frequently employ the passive

voice and because passive sentences let students write more easily, they are highly helpful in casual writing.

Table 1. The results of errors in passive voice sentences

Intralingual transfer	Interlingual transfer	Context of learning	Communication strategies
33%	30%	35%	45%

A relative clause, on the other hand, is a clause that is added to an independent clause to provide more information. Restrictive and non-restrictive clauses are the two different categories of relative clauses that most students don't realize and make many mistakes with:

- **Restrictive Clause:** "Diamonds that sparkle are expensive." The kind of expensive diamonds are limited by the restrictive clause ("that sparkle"). Only "sparkly diamonds" are mentioned as being pricey in this statement. A restrictive clause is a particular kind of relative clause that adds details about the independent clause's topic that are essential to understanding the sentence. This indicates that the sentence's meaning would change if the restrictive clause were removed. Restrictive clauses and independent clauses are not distinguished from one another by commas.

- **Non-Restrictive Clause:** Another kind of relative clause that provides information to a sentence that is not necessary is the non-restrictive clause. This indicates that removing the non-restrictive clause would not alter the sentence's main meaning. The non-restrictive clause is separated from the remainder of the sentence by commas. For example, "Diamonds, which sparkle, are expensive." This non-restrictive clause ("which sparkle") adds additional information about

diamonds (that they sparkle) but does not change the meaning of the sentence.

- "The meat that I ate for dinner was overcooked." This sentence is the same as "The meat I ate for dinner was overcooked," both of them are relative clauses. The only difference between them is that "that" is omitted from the latter.

- "Adam took his car that had a bad transmission to the mechanic." It is implied that Adam has multiple cars. Since it describes the vehicle Adam is taking to the mechanic, the restrictive clause ("that has a bad transmission") cannot be removed from the sentence. The relative pronoun ("that") denotes a restrictive clause. "That" can be used in a relative clause to refer to either humans or non-humans. "Adam took his car, which had a bad transmission, to the mechanic." Adam's (single) car is described under the non-restrictive clause as having a poor transmission. It is not required to know that his car has a damaged transmission in order to understand why he brought it to the repair. The relative pronoun ("which") indicates a non-restrictive clause.

- "Peter, who lives in Toronto, works in the banking industry." This uses commas to indicate that a clause is non-restrictive. Peter works in the banking industry; we don't need to know that he lives in Toronto. "That" and "which" are usually replaced with "who" when speaking of a human. Non-restrictive clauses are indicated by commas, and restrictive clauses are shown by their absence.

- "Jane saw the man whom she met yesterday." The man is the object because he is being seen, but Jane is the subject because she engages in the process of seeing. Since the man is the object, "whom" is

employed to describe him. "Whom" is the objective case of "who." That person, then, describes an object rather than a subject. For example, in the phrase "I admire you," "I" is the subject because I am the one who admires, and "you" are the object since you are the one who is admired.

Table 2. The results of errors in relative clause sentences

Intralingual transfer	Interlingual transfer	Context of learning	Communication strategies
15%	12%	22%	32%

Results and Discussion

English grammar is considered a significant challenge for EFL university students that should be learned correctly. Most students struggle with using its rules, which constitutes an obstacle for them in many topics, especially passive voice and relative clauses. Students experienced errors in passive voice in two ways: they made errors in the form of the verb, as well as in omission, misinformation, and misordering. Students made many mistakes in both restrictive and non-restrictive relative clauses. A percentage calculation was used to determine how frequently students made errors. The frequency of each mistake committed by students in each error category was gathered and then multiplied by 100%. Based on the differences in the grammatical structures of the first and second languages, these errors are analyzed and categorized according to Brown (2000, p. 232) into: Interlingual Transfer, Intralingual Transfer, Context of Learning, and Communication Strategies.

Students frequently transfer their first language's constructions to the target language as they tried to translate sentences into their mother tongue to

construct the verb form in both passive voice and relative clauses. George (1972, p. 160) noted, "The familiar patterns will be preferred to new, different ones, and this preference constitute(s) the basis for mother-tongue interference."

The process of intralingual transfer has started to be expressed by students in the target language in many factors, as Touchie (1986, p. 78) mentioned: When students attempt to create simple structures rather than complex ones, simplification takes place. For instance, when asking about an object, students used 'who' rather than 'whom' in relative clauses and the simple present rather than the present perfect in passive voice. The combined percentage of errors for Interlingual Transfer and Intralingual Transfer was 87%.

Regarding the learning context, the percentage of errors in this process was 56%. It's important to note that Iraqi EFL university students commonly make mistakes due to materials that don't widely cover passive voice and relative clauses. To properly understand these important topics, students do not examine them within their context. Conversely, the materials contain only passive voice and relative clauses that are sparsely explained. In addition, a lack of time to study them could be an obstacle to fully understanding them.

When learning a second language, students employ a range of tactics, and these strategies might support them during the learning process. On the other hand, mistakes made by students could result from improper tactics they use, such as their own learning styles, to speed up the learning process. Oxford (1990, p. 8) describes the specific steps a student takes to make learning easier, faster, more pleasurable, more directed, more effective, and more transferable to new settings. The majority of students have created passive

voice and relative clause sentences in their own unique ways. They have thereby created new patterns based on their language. The percentage of errors was 76%.

Conclusion

The research highlights the significant challenges faced by EFL university students in mastering English grammar, particularly in the use of passive voice and relative clauses. The research identified that errors are prevalent due to several factors, including interlingual transfer, intralingual transfer, context of learning, and communication strategies. Firstly, interlingual transfer errors happen when learners translate English grammar from their native language, which frequently results in improper verb tenses and sentence structures. It was discovered that this kind of inaccuracy was very common and accounted for a sizable portion of errors. When students try to simplify complicated structures, they frequently replace more complex forms with simpler ones, which leads to the emergence of intralingual transfer errors. Although this process of simplification is a normal aspect of language learning; however, along with interlingual transfer, it contributed to a noteworthy 87% of errors in sentences with relative clauses and passive voice. Error creation is also significantly influenced by the context of learning. A 56% error rate results from the materials and resources given to students frequently lacking thorough treatment of relative clauses and passive voice. Students' capacity to fully understand these grammatical ideas is hampered by the lack of adequate teaching materials and the short study sessions. Finally, the research looked at how communication strategies affect error rates. Although the purpose of strategies is to aid in learning, their poor implementation might cause students' first language to create new and inappropriate patterns. As a result, there were 76% more errors made while

building relative clauses and passive voice. Overall, the results point to the need for a multimodal strategy to deal with these issues. Better teaching resources that cover passive voice and relative clauses in great detail and with context, as well as specialized techniques that address both intralingual and interlingual transfer problems, are crucial. Furthermore, teaching students excellent communication techniques helps prevent them from developing improper grammatical patterns. Teachers can help EFL students overcome grammatical barriers and improve their English proficiency by focusing on these topics.

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