The Acquisition of the English Relative Pronoun ‘Who” by EFL Arab Learners: a Translation Perspective

Mohammed Ali Mohsen
Najran University, Saudi Arabia

Mutahar Qassem
Najran University, Saudi Arabia

Abstract
This paper aims to study Arab students’ use of English relative pronoun ‘who’ via translating statements from their mother tongue (Arabic) into the target language (English). Thirty Saudi adult students, aged 18-20 years old, were asked to translate 20 relative clauses from Arabic into English. The results revealed that the students encountered various problematic areas in the use of relative pronoun ‘who’, viz. use of personal and possessive relative pronoun, position of relative pronoun, presence of resumptive pronouns in Arabic, absence of duality and plurality of relative pronoun “who”, and use of relative pronouns with prepositional verbs. Such problematic areas were manifested in various errors of omission, addition, selection, word order, and avoidance. The results also showed that the average of the students’ errors in “avoidance, omission, and selection” were significantly higher than (30 %. 25%. and 24% respectively) the average for ‘addition’ and ‘word order’. These errors could be attributed to language transfer, overgeneralization, and ignorance of rules restriction, which were possibly grounded in the lack of exposure to the TL rules and insufficient practice of grammatical activities. Pedagogical implications of this study suggest that instructors should make a good use of the recommendations of contrastive analysis hypothesis (CAH) and Error Analysis (EA). Namely, the students should be made aware of the areas of similarities and differences between English and Arabic practically rather than theoretically. The study stresses the limitations of the findings and directs outlines for future Research

Keywords: acquisition, error analyses, relative pronoun, language transfer, Arab learners

1. Introduction