

Investigating Syntactic Ambiguity Resolution Strategy Use of EFL Learners in Reading Relative Clauses

Yea-Ru Tsai

Applied English Department
I-Shou University, Taiwan

Abstract

This study investigates resolution strategies used by L2 (English) learners when they are reading syntactically ambiguous sentences containing relative clauses (RC). The participants of this study were 114 learners of English as a foreign language (EFL) in Taiwan. A questionnaire was constructed to gather information concerning the learners' processing strategies. Two grammatical aspects were considered: filler-gap dependency and local syntactic ambiguity between main verb (MV) vs. reduced RC interpretations. In addition, lexical information, such as noun animacy of RC heads, and noun phrase (NP) attachment to the higher or lower noun were also taken into account. Multiple one sample *t*-tests were conducted to investigate the students' performance under various conditions. The results show that there was no significant difference of distribution between strategy use of syntactic and non-syntactic information, indicating that the access to both kinds of information was parallel and interactive. The results are discussed with regard to Shallow Structure Hypothesis in L2 learners (Clahsen & Felser, 2006). The implications of L2 parsing research for the field of SLA are also presented.

Keywords: syntactic ambiguity resolution, resolution strategy, English relative clauses, L2 sentence reading