

The Syntactic Aspects of the Subject which Cause Difficulty to the Undergraduate Students of English at Anbar University

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Abstract

The present study aims at finding out whether the syntactic aspects of the subject cause difficulty to the undergraduate students of English at Anbar University for the Academic year 2013 -2014 . It is hypothesized that there is no significant difference between the mean score of the students' achievement and the theoretical mean score of the test . Also it is hypothesized that there is no significant difference in the achievement between male and female according to the variable of sex . The researchers used a test as the main instrument to collect the necessary data . The sample of this study includes (40) students (20 male and 20 female) . These students are chosen randomly from the fourth stage , Department of English , College of Education for Humanities to be representative of University of Anbar. The test has been applied on the sample . The collected data has been analyzed by using T – test formula . The findings arrived at revealed that there is no significant difference between the mean score of the students' achievement and the theoretical mean score of the test . Also the results revealed that there is no significant difference in the achievement between males and females according to the variable of sex . On the basis of findings , the study arrives at certain conclusions .

1- Introduction

1.1 The Problem of the Study and Its Significance

Studying grammar is essential in learning any Language . Its important is undeniable because it is considered as the backbone of any Language . To learn English , syntax , as part of grammar , needs to be studied besides the other components of Language . Students who study English as a foreign Language at the University of Anbar , as noticed by the researchers of the present study , may face difficulties in studying and mastering the syntactic aspects of English , among them , the ones that concern the subject . This needs to be investigated to find out whether they really cause difficulty to them . So , this study is significant because it sheds light on the syntactic areas of the subject . In addition ,it discovers statistically whether the syntactic aspects of the subject cause difficulty to the undergraduate students of the university or not .

1.2 Aim of the Study

This study aims to find out whether the syntactic aspects of the subject cause difficulty to the undergraduate students of English at Anbar University or not.

1.3 Hypotheses of the Study

It is hypothesized that there is no significant difference between the mean score of students ' achievement and the theoretical mean score of the test on the level of significance (0.05) . Also , it is hypothesized that there is no significant difference in the achievement between males and females according to the variable of sex .

1.4 Limits of the Study

The study is concerned with the syntactic aspects of the subject in English . The students involved are from the fourth grade , Department

of English of the College of Education for Humanities during the academic year 2013 – 2014 . The syntactic aspects of the subject in this study are adopted from Quirk et al (1985) model .

1.5 Definitions of the Subject

As defined by Fries(1952:174), "The subject of the sentence is that word or group of words about which something is said or asserted" .This definition can be applicable in such sentences as the following :

- 1- Ali broke the window.
- 2- All the old women like talking .

It is clear that ' Ali 'and' women 'which are the head of the noun phrases in sentences (1 and 2) above are the subjects of the sentences since they represent those things about which something is said or asserted. But Fries's words are dissatisfying in the following example:

- 3- The headmaster gave the clever student a present .

Since this sentence does not say something about " the headmaster only but about " the clever student " and " a present " as well .

- 4- What hurt the baby ?

In the above sentence ,'the baby ' is not the word of which something is said or asserted. So it is clear that this common definition of the subject is not applicable in all cases.

According to Onions (1971:2), the subject cannot be defined alone without predicate . Both of them form the major elements in the analysis of a sentence .He states that "the subject represents the person or the thing about which something is said by means of the predicate"

Halliday (1985:33)defines the subject by mentioning three points which are as follows :

- That which is the concern of the message .
- That of which something is being predicated.
- The doer of the action .

In certain cases , the subject can embrace all these three points in one sentence as in the following example :

5- The president gave the brave soldier his hat.

Crystal (2003:441)defines the subject as "A term used in the analysis of grammatical functions to refer to a major constituent of sentence or clause structure , traditionally associated with the doer of an action ,as in "The cat bit the dog " but he refers to the complexity involved in this notion ,distinguishing between the grammatical subject and underlying or logical subject . He mentions the following sentence to clarify this difference:

6- The cat was chased by the dog .

In the above sentence , the cat is the grammatical subject and the dog is the logical one .

The definition introduced by Onions (1971:2) is preferred by the researchers in terms of which the subject is defined as the person or thing about which something is said by means of predicate . This is because the subject does not necessarily represent the doer of the action denoted by the verb , it may be associated with different meanings other than the doer of the action.

2- Review of Literature

According to Quirk (1985 :724), there are four types by which the subject can be identified from other clause elements. These are as follows :

1- Form 2 – Position 3 – Syntactic Function 4 – Semantic Role

The focus will be on the first element because the latter three elements are not concerned with the present study .

2-1-Form

Normally, the form of the subject is either a noun phrase or a nominal clause.

2.1.1- A Noun Phrase

This category can perform certain grammatical functions as subject, object, and complement of prepositional phrase. It always contains a nominal which can be a pronoun, a proper noun or a common noun. For example:

7- She is my sister .

8- Huda is my sister .

9- The young girl is my sister .

According to Stageberg (1981 :260), the noun phrase consists of head together with all the modifiers that may come before or after the head which is an obligatory element in the structure of noun phrase .

10- Our garden fence is very high.

The word 'garden' according to modes of classification is noun in form, modifier in function and adjectival in position. It is a pronominal modifier .

11- A woman old and gaunt stood at the door .

The two words 'old' and 'gaunt' are adjectives in form, post nominal modifiers in position and modifier in function .

2.1.2 –A Nominal Clause

The subject may be a nominal clause . The nominal clause falls into the following categories :

2.1.2.1 -That - clauses which may occur in the normal position of the subject

12- That she worked hard for the whole term pleased her parents .

Sometimes , 'that' can be preceded by the following expressions , the fact , the idea , the evidence and ' the belief ' . For example:

13-The fact that the economic growth rate is lower than the population growth causes problems .

The conjunction ' that ' cannot be omitted from the structure because this will cause the clause to be misinterpreted as a main clause and the result will be ungrammatical one :

14-That you do not know English is a point of weakness.(grammatical)

15-You do not know English is a point of weakness. (ungrammatical)

However , 'that ' is frequently omitted when the subject of that clause is extra posed ,e.g:

16-That he is still alive is reasonably certain.

17-It is reasonably certain (that) he is still alive .

(Roberts , 1954 : 335)

2.1.2.2- A Subordinate Interrogative Clause

The subject can be written in the form of wh-interrogative clause as in the following sentences :

18-How the book will sell depends on the reviewers.

19-How the question will be answered depends on the students themselves.

(Quirk et al ,1985 : 1050)

2.1.2.3-A Nominal Relative Clause

Nominal relative clauses are introduced by a wh - element as wh - interrogative clauses .In some aspects , nominal relative clauses resemble NP since they can be abstract or concrete . They can refer to persons ; therefore , they can be replaced by NP as in the following examples :

20-Whoever phoned us did not let the phone ring long enough .

21-Who your ancestors were makes no difference to me .

22-What happened on ninth April , 2003 , will never be forgotten in our country.

23-Whoever did that should admit it frankly .

[the person who did that ----]

(Ibid : 1056)

2.1.3 To - infinitive Clause

To - infinitive clause can function as a subject as in the following example :

24-To be neutral in this conflict is out of the question .

To distinguish subjective and objective cases , a subject in a to infinitive must be preceded by "for".

25-For your country to be neutral in this conflict is out of the question .

(Ibid:1061)

2.1.4 Bare Infinitive Clause

This form is very limited in its functions . It indicates a subject with the presence of ' what ' and subject complement of a variant pseudo- cleft sentence , where a NP of a general sentence replaces ' what ' as in the following examples:

26-Mow the lawn was what I did this afternoon .

27-Turn the tap was all I did .

(Ibid :1067)

2.1.5 ING Clauses

They are traditionally called gerundial phrases which do not differ in function from the simple gerund because they can be the subject of the sentence e.g,

28- Drinking is dangerous .

29- Drinking unboiled water is dangerous .

(Roberts , 1956 :365)

Nominal - ing clauses may function as:

Subject: 30- Watching T V for a long time hurts the eyes.

Subject complement : 31- His first hobby had been collecting stamps .

Adjectival complementation: 32- They are busy repairing the car .

Prepositional complement : 33-Theyare responsible for drawing up the budget.

(Quirk et al , 1985 : 1063)

2.1.6 Pleonastic Pronouns

Radford (1988 : 319) states that 'it' and 'there' are called pleonastic pronouns , traditionally meaning ' redundant ' . They are used when there is no element or constituent acting as subject , an empty subject is used as in :

34-It is raining .

35-There must have been some mistakes .

According to Mathews (1981 : 104) , the subject should be looked at in two different sides . In the first side , there is a subject which is opposed to object as in the following example :

36-Ali met Ahmed .

On the same level ,the subject + predictor as in the following example :

37-The child smiled .

In the second side , a sentence contains one - term structure which is the predictor e .g ,

38-It is raining .

Where the role of 'it' is to supply a subject which would otherwise be missing .

2.1.7- Other Forms

Stageberg (1981 : 218) states that "the positions that bear the functions of SV,SC,DO,IO,OC and OP are frequently occupied by nouns". Any word or word group that occupies them whether it is a noun or not is labeled " a nominal by position , regardless its function or form-class" . In the following examples ,adverbs , adjectives , adverbial prepositional phrases and direct quotations are nominals by position since they stand for the subject in each sentence :

39- Now is the time to study .

40-The prettiest sat in the centre .

41 - Under the pines is the place to study .

42- "I hate her" , is what he said .

3- Procedures of Collecting Data

3.1- The Population and Sample of the Study

The population of the present study consists of three colleges which are College of Education for Humanities , College of Arts and College of Education for Women of University of Anbar, but the first one is chosen to be representative for the three Colleges .The fourth year students of the Department of English are sixty ; forty of them(20 males and 20 females)are chosen randomly to be the sample of the study .

3.2 -The Instrument

To achieve the aim of the study , the researchers constructed a test . It is the main instrument for collecting the necessary data . The successful test construction depends on a clear objective (Valette , 1977 : 17) . So , the test items have been constructed in the light of the aim and within the area of the syntactic aspects of the subject . The test includes ten items . Each item is allotted five marks . The total marks of the test are fifty .

3.3- Validity of the Test

It is essential to check validity of any instrument that is used to collect data . According to Heaten (1988 : 53) , validity of the test means the extent to which it measures what is supposed to measure . There are several types of validity . Face validity has been adopted to find out whether the instrument is valid to achieve the aim of the study or not . Therefore , the initial form of the test has been exposed to a jury of experts . The jury includes eight members . Each juror is requested to point out his remarks about the test . Finally , it is found to be valid since it obtained 90% agreement of the jury members except for some recommendations and modifications which are taken into consideration . The jury members are arranged according to their academic rank alphabetically . See Appendix (2) at the end of the research .

3.4- The Pilot Administration

The instrument has been administrated to a sample of forty students of Department of English of the College of Education for Humanities . The reason behind this is to decide the appropriateness of the test, the time needed to answer the test , determine the level of difficulty and discrimination power of items .

3.4.1- Reliability

When the test gives the same results in different occasions or if it is used by different people , it is considered reliable . So ,reliability in testing is "a measure of the degree to which a test gives consistent results". (Ritchards and Schmidt , 2002 : 454) . Test – retest method is used to find out reliability of the test .

Pearson Formula is used to obtain the coefficient of correlation of the students ' scores between the first and second administration of the test .

It has been found that the correlation coefficient of reliability is 0,89 which is considered a high correlation .

3.4.2 Item Analysis

After scoring the papers of the students of the pilot study , they have been arranged from the highest to the lowest scores . Then , two groups of the test papers have been taken . The upper group included 27 % from students who got the highest scores . The second group included 27% from the students who got the lowest scores .

3.4.2.1- Difficulty Level

Level of difficulty refers to the percentage of wrong answers to a certain question compared with the number of the examined students . The difficulty level of any acceptable item should range between 20 % and 80% (Madsen , 1983 : 180).All the items of the test are acceptable because their level of difficulty ranges between 38 % and 71 % .

3.4.2.2- Discrimination Power

Discrimination power is used to ensure the items of the test that discriminate between intelligent students and those who are less intelligent ,i .e ., if an item is answered by both intelligent and less intelligent students , it is considered an acceptable because it did not distinguish between them . After applying the formula of the item discrimination power , the results have showed that the discrimination power ranges between 0.41 and 0.74. Therefore ,all test items are acceptable according to Ebel (1972: 376) who determines that the item is acceptable if its discrimination power is 0.30 or more . See table (1) below.

Table (1) Items Difficulty and Items Discrimination Power of the Test

No. of item	Difficulty Level	Discrimination Power
1	0.42	0.45
2	0.60	0.51
3	0.71	0.59
4	0.56	0.45
5	0.70	0.74
6	0.38	0.59
7	0.55	0.55
8	0.68	0.41
9	0.65	0.55
10	0.45	0.61

3.5- Statistics

Difficulty Level : It is used to measure the difficulty level of the items of the test .

$$DL = \frac{HC+LC}{N}$$

Where :

HC = high correct

LC = low correct

N = total numbers of testees

(Madsen , 1983 : 181)

- Discrimination Power : It is used to measure the discrimination power of the items of the test .

$$DP = \frac{N1-N2}{N1/2 \times 100}$$

(ibid , 1983 : 192)

Where :

N1 =The sum of the right answers of the upper group .

N2 = The sum of the right answers of the lower group .

N = The total number of the sample .

One – sample t- test is used to find out whether the syntactic aspects of the subject cause difficulty to the sample of the study .

$$t = \frac{\bar{x} - \mu}{S/\sqrt{N-1}}$$

Where :

 \bar{X} = Mean of scores

S = Standard Deviation

N= Number of Sample

(Guilford , 1965 :185)

t – test for two independent samples is used to test the statistical difference in the achievement between male and female students according to the variable of sex .

$$t = \frac{\bar{X}_1 - \bar{X}_2}{\sqrt{\frac{S_1^2(N_1-1) + S_2^2(N_2-1)}{N_1 + N_2 - 2} \left(\frac{1}{N_1} + \frac{1}{N_2} \right)}}$$

Where : \bar{x}_1 = mean of group 1 \bar{x}_2 = mean of group 2

S 1 = variance of group 1

S2 = variance of group 2

N 1= number of subjects in group 1

N2 = number of subjects in group 2

(Glass and Stanley,1970:295)

- Pearson Correlation Coefficient is used to find out reliability of the test

$$r_{xy} = \frac{N \sum xy - (\sum x)(\sum y)}{\sqrt{[N \sum x^2 - (\sum x)^2][N \sum y^2 - (\sum y)^2]}}$$

Where :

N= number of the sample

$\sum x$ =The sum of x scores

$\sum y$ = The sum of y scores

$\sum x^2$ = The sum of the squares of x scores

$\sum y^2$ = The sum of the squares of y scores

$\sum xy$ = The sum of the products of x and y scores for each students .

(ibid : 181)

4- Results

In order to achieve the aim and verify the hypotheses of this study , the researchers used the mean score of students' achievements on the test which is (30) , and the theoretical mean of the test which is (25) . By comparing both values , it is found that the mean score of students' achievement on the test is higher than the theoretical mean of the test . Moreover , through using one sample t – test , it is found that the computed t – value which is (12 ,42) , is higher than the tabulated t – value which is (2 ,0035) at the degree of freedom (39) on the level of significance(0.05) and with a standard deviation (2,14) . This indicates that there is a significant difference between the mean score of students' achievement on the test and the theoretical mean score of the test . Therefore, the hypothesis is rejected . See table (2) .

Table (2)

Results of One Sample t – test

No. of sample	\bar{x}	SD	D.F.	Theoretical mean	Computed t- value	Tabulated t – value	Level of significance
40	30	2.14	39	25	12.42	2.0035	0.05

The theoretical mean is found by the following formula :

$$\text{Theoretical mean} = \frac{\text{higher score} + \text{lower score}}{2}$$

Concerning the second hypothesis which intends to find out whether the subjects of the sample vary in their achievement in the test according to the variable of sex , the data were analyzed by using t – test for two independent samples . The results revealed that the computed t – test value which is (0.948) is less than the tabulated t – test value which is (2. 026) . This means that there is no significant difference in the achievement between male and female students according to the variable of sex . Accordingly , the second hypothesis is accepted . See table (3) below .

Table (3)

The t – test Value of the Male and Female Students

Gender	No. of students	Mean	Standard Derivation	D.F	Computed t – test	Tabulated t – test	Level of significance
Male	20	28.25	3.87	38	0.948	2.026	0.05
Female	20	31.75	5.88				

4.1 Discussion of Results

As shown earlier in the statistical analysis of the data obtained , there is a significant difference between the mean score of students' achievement and the theoretical mean score of the test . This means that the syntactic aspects of the subject do not cause difficulty to the fourth grade students at the Department of English of the College of Education for Humanities of University of Anbar . Moreover , the results in relation to the second hypothesis revealed that there is no significant difference in the achievement between male and female students in respect to variable of sex . This means that male and female students receive the same training , but females may be more keen about their study than male students .

4.2 Conclusions

In the light of the above results , this paper arrives at the following conclusions :

- 1- Students of English at University of Anbar are well instructed in English Grammar in general and this specific area in particular .
- 2- Both teachers and students are aware of the importance of syntax in learning English or any other language . Therefore, There is concentration on it and this is reflected in the results obtained .
- 3- Students' level in the syntactic aspects of the subject is acceptable and good .
- 4- Since the students investigated , males or females , somehow receive the same training by their instructors at the Department of English , they are almost equal in their achievements .

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Appendix (1)**The Test****(Time : 15 minutes)**

Answer all the items given . Each item is given 5 marks .

Q . Exemplify the following in meaningful sentences .

- 1- 'That' clause as a subject .
- 2- A subordinate interrogative clause as a subject .
- 3- A nominal relative clause as a subject .
- 4- To infinitive clause as a subject .
- 5- A bare infinitive clause as a subject .
- 6- Ing clause as a subject .
- 7- An adverb as a subject .
- 8- An adjective as a subject .
- 9- An adverbial prepositional phrase as a subject.
- 10- A direct quotation as a subject .

(Total Marks :50)

Appendix (2)**The jury Members**

- 1- Assist. Prof . Dr . Hazim Hakkush Al – Dilaimy
- 2- Assist .Prof . Dr .Qais Abdulmajeed Abdullah
- 3- Assist. Prof . Dr. Zeydan Khalif Omer
- 4- Prof . Al'aa Mohammed Khalif
- 5- Prof . Ali Sabah Jameel
- 6- Prof . Jumaa Gadir Hussein
- 7- Prof . Marwan Kadhim Mohammed
- 8- Prof . Suheir Nafi Abdulazeez

الجوانب النحوية للفاعل التي تسبب صعوبة لطلاب الدراسات الأولية في جامعة الأنبار

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المستخلص :

تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى التحقق فيما إذا كانت الأوجه النحوية للفاعل في اللغة الإنكليزية تسبب صعوبات لدى طلبة جامعة الأنبار للعام الدراسي 2013 - 2014 ، ومن أجل تحقيق هذا الهدف افترض الباحثان بأنه لا توجد فروق ذات دلالة إحصائية بين الوسط الحسابي لتحصيل العينة من جهة والوسط الفعلي للاختبار من جهة أخرى . كما افترض الباحثان بأنه لا توجد فروق ذات دلالة إحصائية بين الطلاب والطالبات في تحصيل الاختبار حسب تغير الجنس . استخدم الباحثان اختبار وطبقاه على العينة باعتباره الأداة الأساسية لجمع البيانات عند تحصيل العينة والتي تكونت من 40 طالب وطالبة (20 من الذكور و20 من الإناث) تم اختبارهم عشوائيا من بين طلبة المرحلة الرابعة في قسم اللغة الإنكليزية . ولقد تم تطبيق الاختبار على عينة البحث . عند تحليل البيانات باستخدام معادلة الاختبار التائي ، أشارت النتائج إلى وجود فروق ذات دلالة إحصائية بين الوسط الحسابي لتحصيل العينة في الاختبار من جهة ، والوسط الفعلي للاختبار من جهة أخرى . كما أظهرت النتائج عدم وجود فروق ذات دلالة إحصائية في التحصيل بين طلاب وطالبات العينة حسب متغير الجنس .