



Availability of UG and Knowledge of Resumptive Pronouns in ESL Learners

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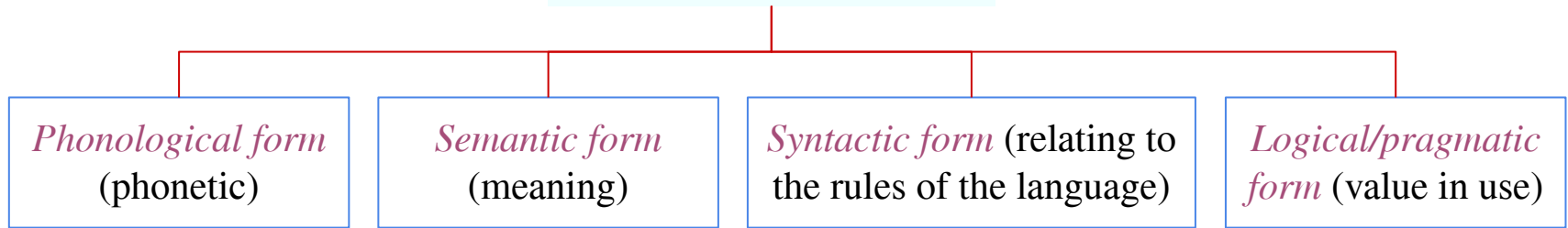
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Overview

1. Introduction
 - Role of UG
 - Target Language input
 - Relative clauses in English
2. The Study
3. Findings
4. Pedagogical Implications
5. References

Linguistic Knowledge



Theory of Universal Grammar (Chomsky, 1964) suggests that acquisition of L1 happens easily because of the innate, genetically determined language faculty present in the human brain that knows all these rules, making it easier for the children to process the language.

'The Fundamental Difference Hypothesis (Bley-Veroman, 1989)

The Fundamental Identity Hypothesis (Schwartz, 1997)

★ Availability of Universal Grammar in SLA

No access position:

There is no such concept as universal grammar.

Indirect access position:

UG is indirectly and the learner has very limited access to it.

Partial access position:

UG is partially available to L2 learners (not the full range parameters).

Full access position:

UG is completely available to L2 learners and plays an important role in SLA.

- ➔ According to full transfer model, the entirety of **L1 grammar is the initial state of L2 acquisition** which explains that the **starting point of a second language acquisition is different from the starting point of their first language** (Schwartz & Sprouse, 1996).
- ➔ A number of external factors along with UG play a role in SLA: Knowledge of L1, Target language input and learner individual factors such as motivation and SES.
- ➔ When the target syntactic structures of L1 and L2 are different, then restructuring of the morpho-syntactic rules occurs with the help of **input** provided to the ESL learners.

LANGUAGE INPUT

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graph TD; A[LANGUAGE INPUT] --> B[As primary data for language acquisition (Long, 1982; Pica et al., 1987; VanPatten & Williams, 2007)]; B --> C[When provided structured input, children actively engage with the structures in some way (via imitation or act-out or elicited production) which encourage them to notice possible connection between structure and meaning of the sentences so that a sentence can be understood through its form (Valian & Casey, 2003, p.121).];
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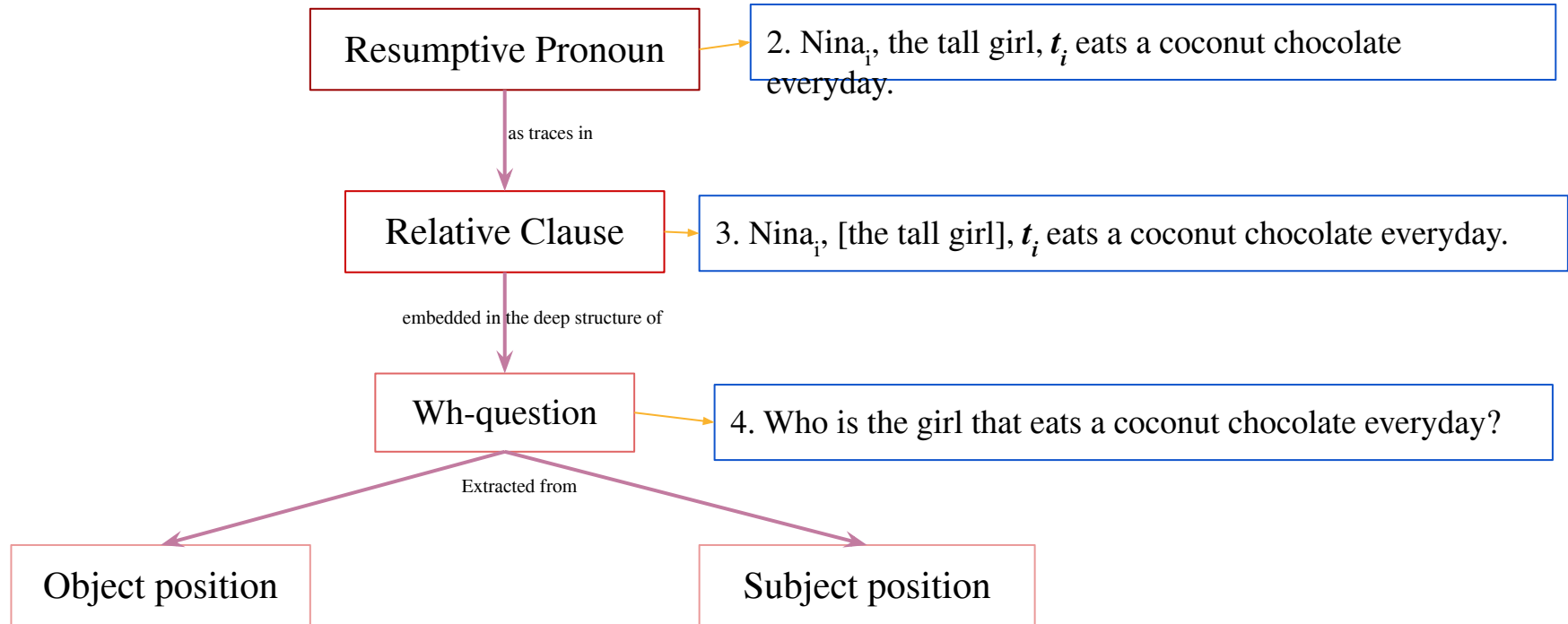
When provided **structured input**, **children actively engage with the structures** in some way (via imitation or act-out or elicited production) **which encourage them to notice possible connection between structure and meaning of the sentences** so that a sentence can be understood through its form (Valian & Casey, 2003, p.121).

In order to understand a complex sentence such as (4) the ESL learner must be able to process the multiple idea units connected to the subject noun phrase (NP).

1. Every day the dog followed him to work, never once harming the white heron that walked in the footsteps of the old man to pick up the worms.

Difficulty in comprehension might occur as two or more successive idea units need to be processed at a time; while utilizing the first idea unit to comprehend the use of the subject pronoun phrase in the second.

Resumptive Pronouns (RP) in English Relative clauses (RC)



5a. Swetha decided to watch an old English movie.

5b. Which movie did Swetha decide that she will watch?

6a. Television announced that a wild monkey ran away from the zoo.

6b. Which animal did the television announce ran away from the zoo?

Asymmetries in subject/object extraction

- Research suggests that ESL/EFL learners find subject extraction sentences more difficult than object extraction (Izumi, 2003; Juffs & Harrington, 1995; Kuno, 1974; Schacter & Yipp, 1990; Tsimpli & Dimitrakopoulou, 2007).
- The difficulties in subject extraction can be explained by the underlying competence of the target language and processing factors involved in comprehending the extracted NP of the RC embedded in the deep structure of a wh-question.
- This leads to processing difficulties as these sentences appear frequently in texts that learners read.

Aim

A study was conducted on Indian ESL learners to understand the level of knowledge with respect to these structures so that the comprehension success of young ESL learners could be predicted.

The Study

The present study tries to answer the following Research Questions:

1. Do ESL learners have mental representations (LF) of using resumptive pronouns in wh-questions?
2. Can differences in the proficiency level give rise to differential knowledge of resumptive pronouns?
3. Does the knowledge of Resumptive Pronouns get influenced by its position of occurrence in the second language?

Participants

- N=76
- Educational level: VII ($n_1=33$; age: 12-13) and IX ($n_2=43$; age:14-15) grades
- Proficiency level: A1-A2 (can identify and use familiar everyday expressions/ basic phrases and form simple connected sentences)
- L1: Telugu
- MoI: English

Task

1. Questionnaire - *demographic details*
2. **Grammaticality judgement task** (*untimed*)



★ +1 is awarded if the grammatical sentences are accepted or 0 otherwise.

★ +1 is awarded if the ungrammatical sentences are rejected or 0 otherwise.

Maximum score - 22

Minimum score - 0

Task Design

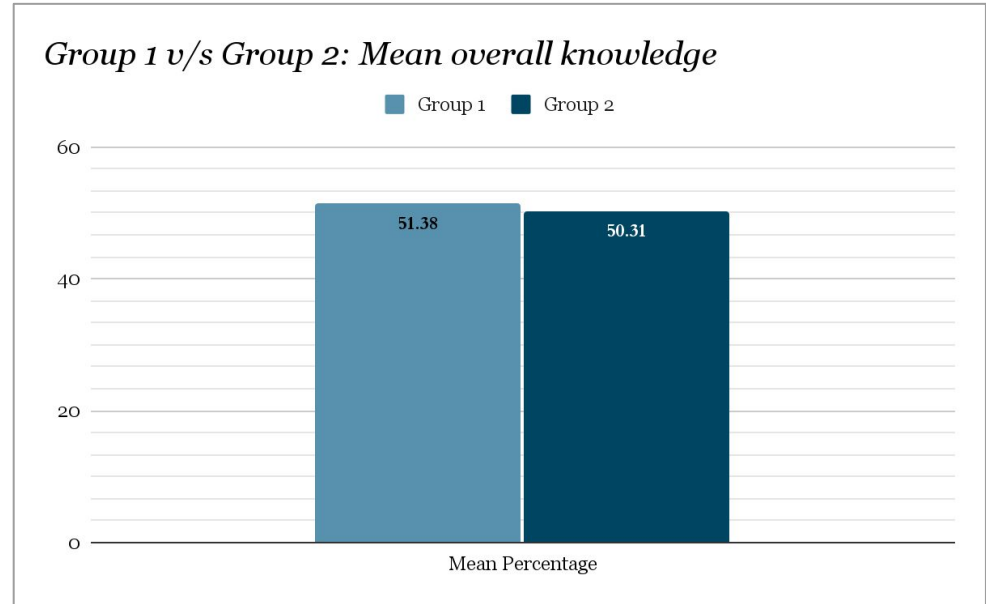
Category	Status	Examples
OBJECT extraction of the relative clause (4+4 sentences)	G*	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Which parcel did you say that Mary sent yesterday? Which movie did Swetha decide that she will watch?
	UG**	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> *Who do you think that Reshma would like him? *Who did Mary say he wanted to study abroad?
SUBJECT extraction of the relative clause (4+4 sentences)	G	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Which animal did the television announce ran away from the zoo? What did the teacher suggest should be announced at the meeting?
	UG	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> *Which book do you remember that it was full of pictures? *What do people think that it makes Hindi cinema popular?
Relativized and small clauses (6 sentences)	G	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> The boy said that he wanted to go to the zoo. The girl wanted to get home early today.

Findings

RQ1: Do ESL learners have mental representations (LF) of using resumptive pronouns in wh-questions?

	Group 1	Group 2
Mean Percentage	51.38 (2.17)	50.31 (2.88)

- Comparatively equal knowledge in both the groups
- A slight difference of 0.3 score units (~1%); not statistically significant [$t(74)=0.38$, $p=0.35$).

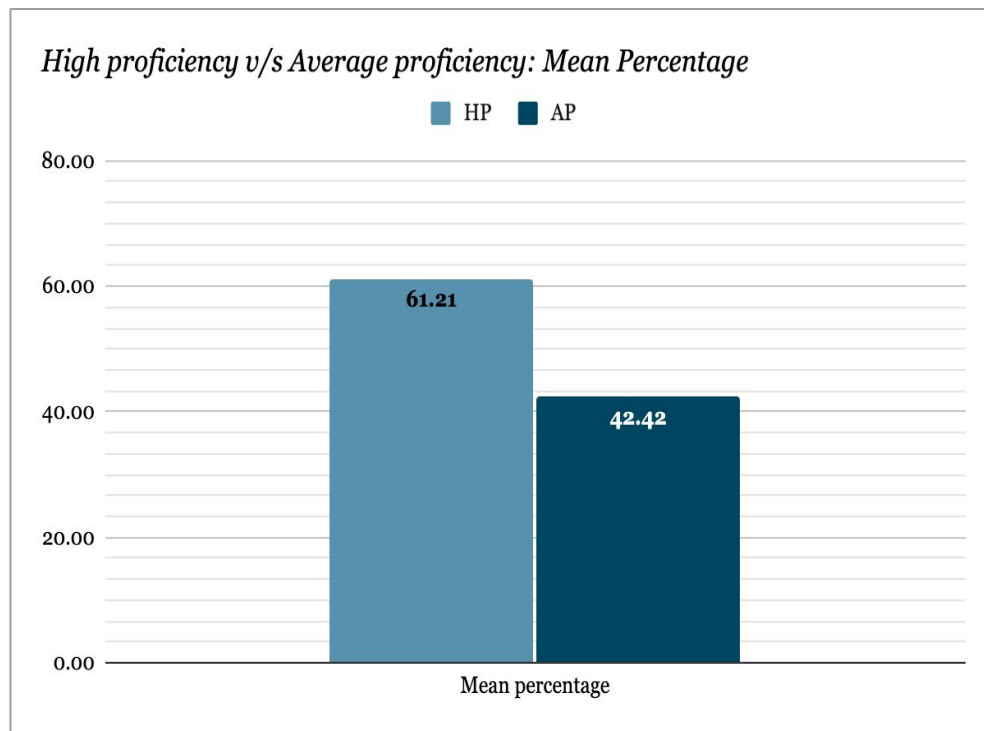


RQ2: Can difference in the proficiency level give rise to differential knowledge of resumptive pronouns?

- The subjects were rearranged into different groups after calculating their z-scores.

	HP	AP
Mean Percentage	61.29 (1.08)	42.42 (1.16)

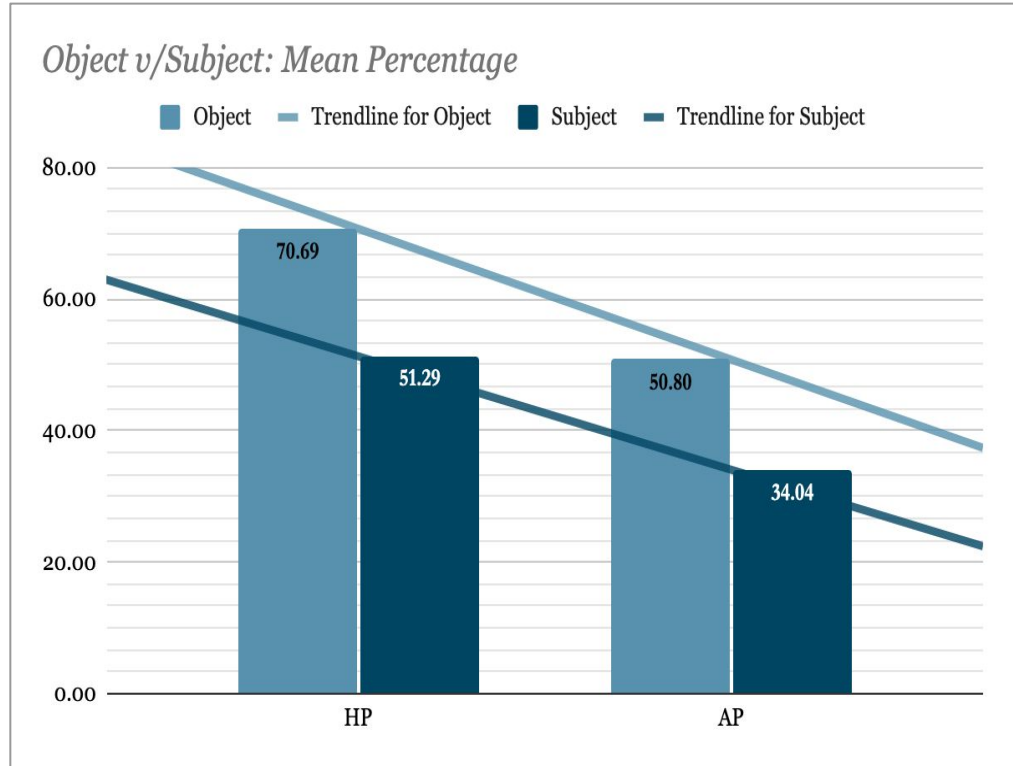
- HP group fared better than AP group
- The difference is statistically significant [$t(74)=11.28^*$, $p=0.00$).



RQ 3: Does the knowledge of Resumptive Pronouns get influenced by its position of occurrence in the second language?

	HP	AP
Subject-Mean Percentage	70.69 (1.17)	51.29 (1.08)
Object-Mean Percentage	50.08 (1.11)	34.04 (0.99)

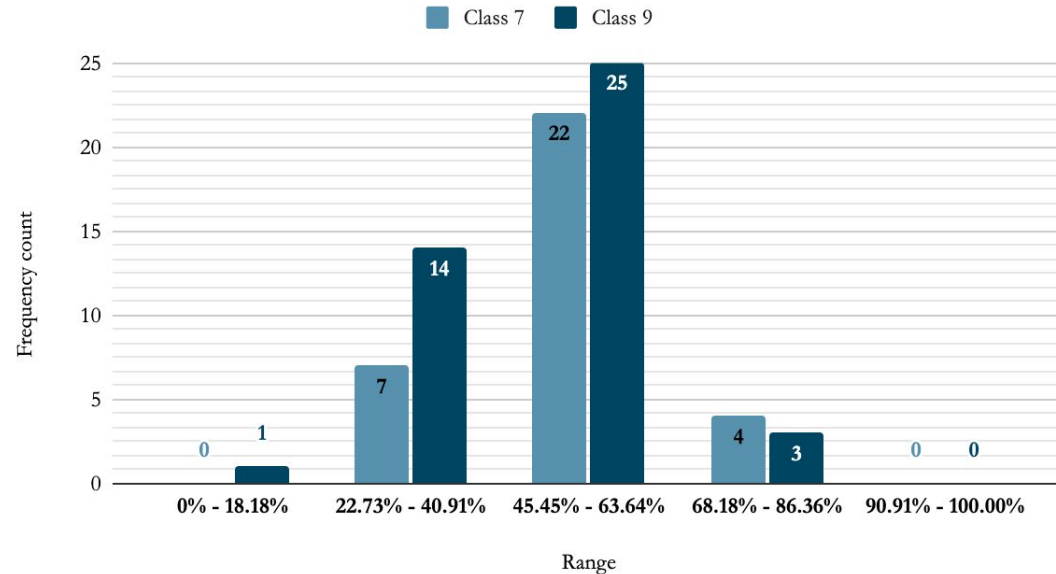
- Performance of both the groups was better when the RC is extracted from the object position.
- The difference between the accuracy of acceptance in both the groups was significant [$t(56)=5.24^*$, $p=0.00$]; $t(92)=6.16^*$, $p=0.00$]



Discussion and Implications

- Large difference between the highest and lowest scores.
- Difficulty in judging grammaticality of subject interrogatives

Grade 7 v/s Grade 9: Overall knowledge (out of 22)



- Although the principles of UG are available, the learning complexity of identifying the grammaticality of a subject/object interrogative sentence still prevails in this group of learners.
- It has been interpreted in the previous research that there is no just one factor that can be attributed to the index point of this learnability problem (Schachter, 1989; Schachter & Yip, 1990; Tsimpli and Dimitrakopoulou, 2007)

What can be done?

Bring learners' focus to concentrate on the sentence form. This can be done through many ways and can be incorporated in classroom activities in a very interesting manner.

- Highlight the text whenever an occurrence of the target language structure is sighted during the practice.
- Ask learners to use it in any (written or spoken) production activity.
- Few other practice activities like role play, dialogue writing etc., will help them grasp the sentence structure easily.

- ➔ Learners can be provided with interesting tasks (comprehension and production) that help them notice these syntactic structures available in their learning material/course books.
- ➔ A few tasks that can be used are: sentence building, cloze test, picture prompt story-writing, crossword puzzles and MCQs for comprehension checks.
- ➔ The tasks allow the students to share their work and invite reviews from the peers while helping the learners' develop their language reception and production more systematically

Scope for further study...

- Along with the reception knowledge of the language structure, production knowledge should also be checked for better understanding of the condition.
- Other variables that play an important role in language acquisition, (especially in this context) like age, linguistic environment and length and quality of exposure can be taken into consideration.

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Thank You 😊

