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Navigating Linguistic Structures: The Journey of Arab Learners Towards Mastering English Syntactic Gaps

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ABSTRACT

The paper examines the learning of syntactic dependency gaps in English by Arab learners. It focuses on students in particular at the University of Duhok. The model adopted in this study is represented by adopting a mixed-methods research model; it uses qualitative research and quantitative research methods. Appropriately, a mixed-methods research model is used in the research of a phenomenon to ensure its effective exploration from varied dimensions and, in return, to be analyzed and understood from a more significant perspective. The quantitative part represents the the syntactic judgment tests and gap-filling exercises through the measures and numerical data on the appropriateness of recognizing and using syntactic gaps; the qualitative aspect is represented through structured interviews that provide insight into the personal experience and cognitive strategies as well as learners' perception that quantitative measures can fail to show. This study can be termed a mixed-method research design in that the study combined both syntactic judgment tests, gap-filling exercises, and structured interviews to establish the strategies learners use and the obstacles they face in mastering English syntactic structures. Our analysis turned up a significant influence by the native language on the

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capability of the learners to recognize and use gaps in English syntax. We also found that this capability is impacted by proficiency levels. The study provides plenty of evidence for the utmost significance of tailored teaching techniques, based on the specific linguistic backgrounds of Arab learners, through the interconnection of both quantitative data from the tests and qualitative insights from the interviews. This does not only add to the general conversation on L2 acquisition but also gives more concrete pedagogical insights on the importance of improvement in proficiency level and individualized instructional intervention in growing into the acquisition of the syntactic gap for Arab learners of English.

Key Words: Arab Learners, English Syntax, Syntactic Dependency Gaps, Second Language Acquisition, Language Teaching Strategies.

التنقل في البنى اللغوية: رحلة المتعلمين العرب نحو إتقان الفجوات النحوية في اللغة الإنجليزية

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المستخلص

يتناول البحث دراسة فجوات التبعية النحوية في اللغة الإنجليزية لدى المتعلمين العرب. ويركز على الطلاب بشكل خاص في جامعة دهوك. ويتمثل النموذج المعتمد في هذه الدراسة باعتماد نموذج البحث متعدد الأساليب، ويستخدم البحث النوعي وأساليب البحث الكمي. وبشكل مناسب، يتم استخدام نموذج بحث متعدد الأساليب في البحث عن ظاهرة ما لضمان استكشافها الفعال من أبعاد متنوعة، وفي المقابل، ليتم تحليلها وفهمها من منظور أكثر أهمية. ويمثل الجزء الكمي اختبارات الحكم النحوي وتمارين سد الفجوات من خلال المقاييس والبيانات العددية حول مدى ملاءمة التعرف على الفجوات النحوية واستخدامها، حيث يتم تمثيل الجانب النوعي من خلال المقابلات المنظمة التي توفر نظرة ثاقبة للتجربة الشخصية والاستراتيجيات المعرفية بالإضافة إلى تصور المتعلمين بأن المقاييس الكمية قد تفشل في إظهارها. وهكذا يمكن تسمية هذه الدراسة بتصميم بحثي مختلط الأساليب حيث جمعت الدراسة بين اختبارات الحكم النحوي وتمارين ملء الفجوات والمقابلات المنظمة لتحديد الاستراتيجيات التي يستخدمها المتعلمون والعقبات التي يواجهونها في إتقان الهياكل النحوية الإنجليزية. أظهر تحليل البيانات تأثيراً كبيراً للغة الأم على قدرة المتعلمين على التعرف على الفجوات في بناء الجملة الإنجليزية واستخدامها. كما وجدنا أن هذه القدرة تتأثر بمستويات الكفاءة. وتوفر الدراسة الكثير من الأدلة على الأهمية القصوى لتقنيات التدريس المصممة بناءً على الخلفيات

اللغوية المحددة للمتعلمين العرب، من خلال الترابط بين البيانات الكمية من الاختبارات والرؤى النوعية من المقابلات. وهذا لا يضيف إلى المحادثة العامة حول اكتساب اللغة الثانية فحسب، بل يقدم أيضاً رؤى تربوية أكثر واقعية حول أهمية تحسين مستوى الكفاءة والتدخل التعليمي الفردي في النمو في اكتساب الفجوة النحوية لمتعلمي اللغة الإنجليزية من المتحدثين باللغة العربية. الكلمات الدالة: فجوات التبعية النحوية، اكتساب اللغة الثانية، المتعلمون العرب، بناء الجملة الإنجليزية، استراتيجيات تدريس اللغة

1. INTRODUCTION

1.2 LITERATURE REVIEW

Syntactic dependency is a pertinent relationship of one element to another within a sentence or among them, which makes the meaning manifest (Chomsky, 1981). Some of the most salient features of such dependencies are gaps in the position of some element taken for granted within a sentence but not pronounced. It is very common in wh-questions and relative clauses (Gass & Selinker, 2008). This is the core mechanism of comprehension and production: the process is impossible unless the learners have to infer the missing information based on syntactic cues. Thus, in the sentence "The book that the student read _ was fascinating," the blank indicates the place of the direct object of "read," implicitly but not overtly stated.

As for the rationale of the study, syntactic divergence between Arabic and English makes the study of Arab English learners quite informative. This stands in stark contrast to Arabic, with a totally different landscape in syntax through the richness of its morphological system and the freeness of its word order. This is in contrast to poor morphological English and the rigidity with which the word position determines order (Ouhalla, 1991). This contrast therefore makes the acquisition of syntactic dependencies in English ripe for investigating both cross-linguistic influence and learning strategies.

1.3 OBJECTIVES

This paper embarks on an exploratory trajectory that tries to open up how Arab learners, particularly those enrolled in the College of Languages at the University of Duhok—Departments of English and Translation—negotiate the complexities associated with learning English syntactic dependencies that include gaps. That brightens the way the Arabic learners would acquire those syntactic structures and, therefore, becomes salient in understanding the cognitive mechanisms Arab learners develop when confronted by syntactic phenomena which are inexistent in their mother tongue.

This is, therefore, the reason for which this study seeks to establish the specific problems and strategies that Arab learners of English at the University of Duhok use to understand and produce sentences with a syntactic dependency gap. The present study seeks, therefore, to add a contribution to the larger discourse on second language acquisition (SLA) and provide pedagogical insights that may inform targeted instructional approaches through this linguistic interface.

2. THEORITICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 SYNTACTIC DEPENDENCY GAPS

Syntactic dependencies are an understanding of sentence structure with reference to the relationships with the constituents that are required for meaning (Chomsky 1981: 120). Another critical aspect of such dependencies is the creation of gaps—a position in the sentence at which an expected element is not overtly presented, but rather is 'filled' from some other point in the context. This construction, therefore, features a gap, within a relative clause in English. For example, in the sentence "What did you eat _ last night?," the blank represents the object of "eat," which is being questioned.

Arabic, on its part, uses a wholly different strategy in the engagement of resumptive pronouns, dealing with the same syntactic positions. A resumptive pronoun is such that it is an overt pronoun in the position of the gap, retaining the sentence's integrity (Aoun, Benmamoun, and Choueiri, 2010). A simple translation of that sentence from the English to Arabic will bring in a pronoun that will stand in for the gap: "ما الذي أكلته الليلة الماضية؟" (What did you eat it last night?), where "it" stands in for the resumptive pronoun.

This represents an underlying difference with which the Arab learners of English have to grapple, in that English prefers to leave gaps while Arabic needs to use the resumptive pronoun.

2.2 SECOND LANGUAGE EQUATION THEORIES

Thus, The Input Hypothesis (Krashen, 1982) becomes very useful in the light of the concept of Interlanguage (Selinker, 1972) with reference to the ways learners of Arab descent come to acquire the syntactic gaps in English. The Input Hypothesis states that input just above the level of learners' present knowledge of the language—i.e., "comprehensible input" is the condition for acquisition. Thus, it may be the case that exposure to English sentences containing syntactic gaps may serve only to help facilitate the acquisition of this structure by learners.

Interlanguage theory implies that the learner develops a changing system of language partly based on the native language and partly on the target language. This system reflects not only the learners' current stage of linguistic knowledge but is also a chrysalis,

often with elements derived from each language and unique rules developed by the learner. Therefore, the development of an interlanguage would explain how Arab learners of the English language may at first find it difficult to cope with the structural differences in Arabic and English that are connected to the concept of the syntactic gap.

2.3 CONTRASTIVE ANALYSIS

The Contrastive Analysis (Lado, 1957) may serve as a handy tool to bring forth some of the most striking syntactic differences between Arabic and English, particularly those that pertain to sentence structure and dependency. The approach zeroes in on structures giving rise to gaps in English of a syntactic nature and their counterparts in Arabic. Arabic, being surprisingly flexible in word order and in restorative pronouns, provides a very different way to keep the syntactic relationships intact from the stiff English with its gaps. In other words, the differences form part and parcel of identifying particular challenges in learning by Arab learners, and therefore relevant teaching approaches are developed.

The contrastive analysis of both syntactic structures in Arabic and English accords very deep insights into the problems associated with acquiring the two languages that face Arab learners of the English language. English syntactic dependencies show themselves, more often than not, as gaps, particularly in relative clauses and wh-questions, together with topicalization structures that are key to maintaining coherence and fluency of discourse (Chomsky, 1981).

2.3.1 RELATIVE CLAUSES

In English, relative clauses frequently employ gaps to imply the position of a noun that is contextually understood. For instance, in the sentence "The book that John read _ was fascinating," the blank leaves the place for "the book" as the object of "read." This enables a more concise sentence without having to repeat the noun.

Resumptive pronouns, on the other hand, are commonly used in Arabic within relative clauses to maintain the continuity of the reference and, in turn, not to be stranded by a syntactic gap as resumption does in the case of English. The Arabic equivalent sentence will carry an equivalent Arabic pronoun referring directly back to the book and effectively filling in the gap. "الكتاب الذي قرأه جون مثير للاهتمام." (Al-kitab alladhi qara'ahu John muthir lil'ihitimam.), where "هـ" (hu) is the resumptive pronoun.

2.3.2 WH- QUESTIONS

English wh-questions have the syntactic gaps, wherein the questioned element is understood but not present in its canonical position. For example: "What did you buy _

yesterday?" Carrying the direct object of "buy," since it moves to the beginning of the sentence for questioning.

Arabic, on the other hand, prefers to keep the element questioned in its place and, in general, the vacancy left by the moved element is filled with a resumptive pronoun that keeps the structure of the sentence. The Arabic question can be translated to "ما الذي اشتريته" (Ma al ladhii ishtaraytahu ams?), with "هـ" (hu) as a resumptive pronoun, filling in—so to speak—for the space in English.

2.3.3 TOPICALIZATION

The English form often has the element of the sentence brought to the front for topical purposes, the original position being left empty: This book, I have read _ many times. The blank indicates the original position of "this book" as the object of "read."

In Arabic, on the other hand, topicalization prefers the use of a pronoun, as compared to the syntactic gap, so that the clarity and flow from one sentence to another is maintained. An Arabic equivalent would directly include the object, without any gap: هذا الكتاب، لقد قرأته عدة مرات. (Hatha al-kitab, laqad qara'tuhu idat marrat), where "هـ" (hu) again functions as the resumptive pronoun for "this book."

2.4 IMPLICATIONS FOR ARAB LEARNERS

To an Arab, therefore, whose native language syntax favors explicit continuity by means of the usage of resumptive pronouns, English, with its structural reliance on gaps, has a tortuous syntax. With this kind of basic difference, Arab learners are exposed not only due to the lack of overt linguistic marker at the position of the slot but for wider consequences in the understanding and production of coherent English sentences.

This detailed contrastive analysis will, therefore, help in bringing to the study the underlying basic syntactic divergences that may exist between Arabic and English. It is very essential in developing appropriate teaching approaches and assessment tools that suit the different kinds of needs exhibited by Arab learners of English in guiding them towards the bridging of the syntactic gap in SLA.

2.5 PREVIOUS STUDIES

2.5.1 CONTEXT AND GAP IN LITERATURE

The former—resumptive pronouns—and the latter—syntactic gaps—are an important domain of research, particularly in view of SLA and even more so with reference to Arabic speakers learning English. One area that is yet to be empirically pursued in much detail is the fine-grained difficulties Arab learners face when coming to terms with English syntactic structures, especially where it necessitates the negotiation of syntactic

gaps. This justifies focused research into the acquisition of English syntactic dependencies by the L1 speakers of languages like Arabic, which have high rates of resumptive pronouns in the same syntactic constructions.

2.5.2 REVIEW OF RELATED STUDIES

1. Early contrastive linguistic studies, such as Lado (1957), were pioneers in identifying structural differences between languages that might give rise to learning problems. However, these studies often did not delve deeply into the specific realm of syntactic gaps versus resumptive pronouns.
2. Gap and resumptive pronoun in SLA: Several studies, including some informed by Chomsky's (1981) Universal Grammar, have found that learners are born with an idea of the existence of syntactic gaps. Very few, however, have explored whether such a concept would apply universally, specifically when one works with languages that have.
3. Input Hypothesis and Language Transfer: Krashen's (1982) Input Hypothesis and Selinker's (1972) Interlanguage theory offer some frameworks of the possibility of the internalization of the syntactic rules for the learners from the input data. However, specific studies applying these theories to English, by Arab learners, are few.
4. Syntactic Dependency and SLA: Sells (1984) and Aoun, Benmamoun, and Choueiri (2010), respectively, who have given quite a great insight study of the dependency topics in relation to English and Arabic syntactic structures; however, their focus has been more toward the descriptive part, not how the transition of these structures would be modeled by the language learners.
5. Empirical studies of syntactic acquisition: Research with a focus on empirical data collection and its analysis, such as the syntactic judgment tests or gap-filling exercises administered to the study of syntactic dependency gaps (Ellis, 2003; Gass & Selinker, 2008), do not isolate Arab learners as the target population. The leaving of such a group creates a gap in understanding insofar as such a group may have their own learning trajectory.

2.5.3 IDENTIFYING LEARNING GAPS

This review has revealed a critical gap in focused research on how Arab learners of English negotiate the learning of the syntactic gap, which forms the core constituent of English syntax but does not exist in Arabic. Specifically, very few empirical studies have been carried out to examine the challenges and strategies learners apply in learning to understand and use the syntactic gaps in English, other than the resumptive pronouns that have been used in their native language. What is more, exact cognitive mechanisms involved in this language developmental phenomenon and pedagogical strategies that

could relieve the learners from overgeneralization to target-like use are largely unexplored.

2.5.4 CONTRIBUTION OF THE CURRENT STUDYS

Against this background, this paper aims to fill this literature gap by providing empirical insight into how Arab learners acquire the understanding and production of syntactic gaps in English. The present research attempts to identify the exact difficulties in question for Arab learners and suggests interventions tentatively, which seem promising in aiding an Arab learner to acquire this all-important syntactic feature. Drawing from a mixed-methods approach of syntactic judgment tests, gap-filling exercises, and interviews, the present study will attempt to identify the specific difficulties in question for Arab learners and make some tentative suggestions for pedagogical intervention.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 PARTICIPANTS

This study was carried out on 40 Arab learners of English at the College of Languages, University of Duhok, in the English and Translation departments. The classification of the subjects into different levels was done through its scores in the English Proficiency Test (see Appendix 1). This categorization will, in turn, help in making a more in-depth analysis of the levels of proficiency regarding the acquisition of the syntactic gap. Demographic span—both sexes (22 females and 18 males); ages 18-25; mix of linguistic backgrounds. All were native speakers of Arabic, and the different dialects spoken by the participants were mostly Iraqi Arabic from Mosul and Baghdad in addition to Levantine Arabic.

Ethical considerations took center stage throughout the research process. The participants were informed of the extent of the study, which includes academic objectives and participant rights that encompass confidentiality and non-punitive withdrawal from the research at any given time. The prior informed consent form was given to all the participants, ensuring that they agreed to the participation of the research, while at the same time fulfilling the ethical principles in linguistic research.

Participants' description is provided in Table 1.

Table 1: Description of Participant Group

Category	Group	Number of Participants	Percentage (%)
Gender	Female	22	55%
	Male	18	45%

Category	Group	Number of Participants	Percentage (%)
Proficiency	Beginner	13	32.5%
	Intermediate	14	35%
	Advanced	13	32.5%
Age Group	18-25	5 (for each year)	12.5% (each)

Table 1 provides the distribution of the studied population by gender, proficiency, and age group, with their respective percentages in each category.

3.2 DATA COLLECTION TOOLS

These included three major data collection tools that the paper chose because of the reliability in exploring the acquisition of syntactic dependency gap.

1. **Syntactic Judgment Test:** In this experiment, sentences containing syntactic gaps were presented. Subjects had to make acceptability judgments on the sentences in relation to a 5-point Likert scale. The varied sentences included structures that are usually gapped in the English language but handled with resumptive pronouns in Arabic, hence presenting an intuition insight by participants into English syntax (see Appendix 2).

2. **Gap-filling exercise:** The participants were given sentences in which a gap had been left. They were supposed to fill the blank, on their own, if need be, from the correct form of a resumptive pronoun. This is an actual test of the ability to apply knowledge of the English syntactic structures in a controlled environment (see Appendix 3).

3. **Structured Interview:** It is one in which the questions are prepared for the target group to have the highest possible insight into the cognitive processes of the learners. It included investigating experiences and problems in learning English syntactic structures, especially those differing from Arabic syntax.

3.3 ANALYSIS APPROACH

In the nature of the data generated from this study, therefore, analyses were based on the triangulation of the data that emanated from the syntactic judgment tests, the gap-filling exercise, and structured interviews. The tests and exercises, therefore, yield quantitative data that would be analyzed statistically to guide tendencies in the acquisition of syntactic gaps by proficiency level. Descriptive and inferential statistics analyses in the paper were completed using SPSS to assess the correlation of proficiency and scores related to the syntactic understanding of levels of proficiency.

The themes that emerged from the content of the structured interviews containing the qualitative data about the learners' cognitive strategies, difficulties, and perceptions of the

English syntactic gaps included. NVivo software greatly enabled the organization and making thematic analysis of the interview transcripts, which made it possible to develop an in-depth understanding of the learners' acquisition process for the syntactic gap.

4. FINDINGS

4.1 LEARNERS' PERFORMANCE

The performance analysis of the learners in both syntactic judgment tests and gap-filling exercises show that it gets reflected in distinct patterns and is highly influenced by their native language (L1) structures and the proficiency level of the target language (L2), which is English.

Syntactic Judgment Tests: On average, therefore, there was a high ratio of these test takers who failed to notice appropriate or inappropriate gaps within English sentences. This difficulty particularly arose in questions that included relative clauses and wh-questions, where the L1 influence of Arabic resumptive pronouns seems to impair correct judgment as to where a gap should be located within the syntax. However, the remaining two-thirds or some 30% of the low level of participants could identify the acceptable sentences having the syntactic gaps, while the intermediate and advanced levels showed slightly better percentages of correct identifications, with 45% and 60% respectively.

Table 2 provides a detailed breakdown of accuracy percentages on grammatical judgment tests across different levels of English proficiency. This analysis shows how participants' ability to correctly identify appropriate and inappropriate grammatical gaps within English sentences varies depending on their level of proficiency – categorized into beginner, intermediate, and advanced.

Table 2: Syntactic Judgment Test Accuracy by Proficiency Level

Proficiency Level	Accuracy (%)
Beginner	30%
Intermediate	45%
Advanced	60%

Gap-Filling Exercises: In the gap-filling exercise, participants performed significantly better than in the exercise requiring them to make a syntactic judgment. This improvement reflects a better application of knowledge when directly involved in constructing or completing sentences. In the intermediate and advanced, the level scored at 65% and 80%, respectively, of the beginners in accurately filling the gaps in the texts, thus clearly indicating the substantial effect of proficiency on performance.

Table 3 presents percentage values of the Gap-Filling Exercise for different proficiency levels.

Table 3: Gap-Filling Exercise Accuracy by Proficiency Level

Proficiency Level	Accuracy (%)
Beginner	50%
Intermediate	65%
Advanced	80%

As can be seen from Table 3, the level of proficiency of the learner in the language shows the percentage of correct responses registered in the gap-filling exercises, where the task performance is well-correlated with proficiency.

In Table 2 and Table 3, the performance discrepancies of the proficiency levels are summarized below as the learners keep increasing in their ability to handle the syntactic gaps properly while their proficiency in language or understanding of English increases.

Such findings go a long way to indicate that the fact it is L1-L2 structural differences which have an impact on learners' ability in understanding and producing syntactic gaps; however, they improve once proficiency becomes higher.

4.2 LEARNERS' PERCEPTION

The structured interviews revealed the extent to which learners were able to perceive and form a concept of the syntactic gap. Most of the participants showed the hardship of adapting to English reliance on syntactic gaps, which was very much in contrast to the Arabic preference for resumptive pronouns. This was often referred to by such expressions as "trying" or "confusing," especially by the beginner and intermediate language users. The advanced users, on the other hand, mainly said that they adapted to such structures gradually and honed such skills by increasing their exposure to English media and literature.

4.3 COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

The data clearly correlate the level of proficiency attained with the ability to negotiate the gaps produced by the syntax of English. Beginners made much struggle, which could have been engendered by their lowered exposure to the English syntax and heavier reliance on L1 structures. Advanced learners, in contrast, displayed more proper understandings and uses of syntactic gaps, benefiting from more exposure to the English language and more developed cognitive strategies in bridging L1 and L2 differences.

That is to say, while L1 influence may pose some initial difficulties in the area of the syntactic gap acquisition, increasing proficiency and L2 exposure serve to then reduce the difficulties. These, therefore, clearly underline the need for targeted instructional strategies to be applied in dealing with the real syntactic contrasts that are presented between Arabic and English, to ensure that Arab learners do truly acquire competence in handling syntactic gaps.

5. DISCUSSION

5.1 INTERPRETATION OF FINDINGS

This research offers profound insights into how Arab learners grasp the concept of syntactic dependency gaps in English, exploring this through the prisms of second language acquisition theories and a detailed contrastive analysis between Arabic and English. The challenges observed in syntactic judgment tests vividly illustrate the profound influence that the structural features of a learner's first language (L1) can have on learning a second language (L2), resonating with Krashen's Input Hypothesis (1982) and Selinker's Interlanguage theory (1972). Theories, of this kind, shed light on how grammatical frameworks carried from learners' native languages may come in the way of accepting new syntactic forms, particularly when they are missing or somehow differently presented from the L1.

The more encouraging performance seen in the gap-filling exercises suggests that hands-on interaction with the language—echoing Ellis's advocacy for Task-based Language Learning (2003)—significantly bolsters learners' comprehension and application of L2 syntactic structures. This finding underscores the critical role of engaging directly with language in a practical context, particularly for syntactic elements like gaps that cannot be seamlessly transferred from Arabic to English due to English's unique syntactic constructions.

5.2 CHALLENGES FACED BY ARAB LEARNERS

Arab learners face notable challenges in adjusting to English's syntactic gaps, chiefly due to the pronounced differences in syntactic structures between Arabic and English (Ouhalla, 1991). Transitioning from a language that predominantly uses resumptive pronouns to fill potential syntactic gaps (as Arabic does) to one that often leaves these gaps unoccupied (as English does) demands a substantial shift in how learners perceive and construct sentences. This shift necessitates learners to adapt their cognitive processes significantly.

5.3 STRATEGIES FOR ACQUISITION

The research identified several strategies that learners have found effective in navigating these challenges:

1. **Increased Exposure:** Greater exposure to the language, mostly for advanced learners, particularly through media, literature, and conversation, played a great role in acquainting them with the standards of English language syntax, including gaps.
2. **Personal Application:** The exercises all considered, in most cases, the use of the syntactic gaps; hence, participation in them helped to reinforce learning. This approach aligns with the philosophy of learning by doing, a cornerstone of task-based language learning.
3. **Contrastive learning:** Few students took initiatives of applying the contrastive analysis, in actual search for and then applied the contrasts between English and Arabic syntax through written and oral exercises. This further points out the level of proficiency as a very important factor in achieving mastery of the syntactic dependency gaps. As the proficiency of the learner advances, so is their ability to negotiate and apply even the complex structures of syntax, to include understanding and using gaps effectively.

This line of development, therefore, means that a robust language instruction is developed gradually, and that which is essential in dealing with the syntactic complexities brought about in Arab learners of English. The implication of this study is that it portrays the complex journey Arab learners undertake to master the English syntactic gaps, hence calling for the need for instructional strategies that will propel them to the active linguistic engagement, though at the same time making contrastive analysis conscious.

Future research, therefore, which could design and administer specific pedagogical interventions, will be able to refine our understanding and support in optimizing second language acquisition for Arab learners and those from similar linguistic backgrounds.

6. IMPLICATION FOR LANGUAGE TEACHING

The insights from such research, therefore, tend to have implications that are deeply crystallizing English Language Teaching (ELT) strategies tailor-made for Arab learners, more so for the mastery related to these kinds of phenomena. These findings enrich approaches to teaching and curriculum design.

6.1 TEACHING RECOMMENDATIONS

1. **Direct Instruction on Syntactic Gaps:** ELT professionals are not likely to miss weaving in direct instruction that gives focus to the nuances of syntactic gaps in English. Such instruction might include comparative analysis discussions between

- the salient differences of English syntactic gaps and Arabic use of resumptive pronouns. This approach can provide learners with conceptual scaffolding that helps them make the jump necessary for understanding these syntactic features.
2. **Syntactic Structures:** The gap-filling exercise aids learners in utilizing the applied syntactic gaps to construct sentences. This becomes beneficial for embedding activities that will engage the learners in using applied syntactic gaps to practically construct sentences. This may take the form of sentence reconstruction problems or the nature of translation exercises that seek to change Arabic sentences into English, focusing on the departure from resumptive pronouns to syntactic gaps.
 3. **Authentic materials used:** Authentic English materials, ranging from news pieces to literary works, and dialogues from films or series, featuring the existence of syntactic gaps, are naturally acquiring the learner's acquaintance with the practical use of such structures. It is in this light that classroom discussions and analyses of such resources will be used to demystify what gaps are to students, making these gaps accessible to learners.
 4. **Peer Teaching and Collaborative Learning:** Encouraging an environment for high achievers to coach their colleagues in understanding and using syntactic gaps may be through a supportive learning community. It may be peer-led or to the best study circles among all members, which encourage exchanges of knowledge and growth.

6.2 CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT

1. **Graduated Syntactic Complexity:** It is imperative that the ESL curriculum is structured in a graduated manner, gradually introducing the learners to higher elements of syntactic complexity; that is, in other words, starting with simple sentences and progressing to the complex ones through the introduction of syntactic gaps. This stepwise approach helps to guarantee a firm ground that enables the learners to get involved, step by step, with more complicated syntactic challenges.
2. **Contrastive Analysis:** The curriculum outline must have portions of both contrastive Arabic and English syntactic structures. It also outlines the preparation that those sections can avail of the students in meeting the challenges of those stumbling blocks, for example, the leap from resumptive pronouns to syntactic gaps and helps them find ways of meeting such challenges.
3. **Customize the approaches to the assessment:** the assignments should be designed in a way that will reflect the real usage of language, in testing accuracy with which they are capable of handling the syntactic gaps. It may comprise oral presentations, written tasks, and comprehension exercises that students have to identify, explain, and correctly use the respective syntactic gaps.
4. **Professional Development for Teachers:** Recognizing the peculiarities within the process of acquisition of the gaps of the syntactic elements by Arab learners, a design of teaching programs should be such that it can equip the learner, i.e., the

teacher himself, with the capacity and competency that will enable him to deal with this kind of gap effectively.

This study sheds light briefly on the intricate process that Arab learners go through with the aim of bridging the English syntactic gap, which surely could not take place unless those teaching strategies are, in the same sense, well-defined and are not just vague general ideas. Hopefully, these insights open doors for future pedagogical innovations and may actually make the language learning journey easier, at least for Arab students and possibly for learners in other environments grappling with such similar syntactic difficulties.

7. CONCLUSION

7.1 KEY FINDINGS AND CONCLUSION

This study set out on the quest of investigating the journey that Arab learners of English undertake as they accommodate this rather foreign feature of syntactic dependent gaps to their mother tongue, Arabic. Here are the main conclusions from this study:

1. **Learners' Performance:** One very important observation made with the test performance was that of locating with accuracy the syntactic gaps in syntactic English constructs made by the participants. During the exercise of gap filling, a rapid improvement was observed among students, which is of critical importance to the native language structures in learning the second language. It gives out an observation of a phenomenon, showing the hurdles in translating the understanding of syntactic comprehension from Arabic to English.
2. **Learner's Perception:** Learners, through the interviews, were relating what they consider challenges and the mental recalibration it takes in mastering English syntactic dependencies, most of which border on the heavy use of resumptive pronouns in Arabic and the liking of syntactic gaps in English.
3. **Serious Influence of L1:** Learners' first language (Arabic) has a serious effect on the level of appreciating the use of syntactic gaps in the English language. In various abilities and appreciations, serious levels cannot be found in their mother tongue's syntactic constructs.
4. **The impact of the proficiency level** is pretty paramount in the performance of the learners. It has been argued that, with the development of learners, the higher the proficiency level, the better in understanding and using English syntactic gaps; hence, competence in managing the features is acquired.
5. **Effective Instructional Strategies:** An effective instructional strategy in place that will specifically relate to the linguistic background of the Arab learners. These strategies will help to fill the gap between the structural differences of Arabic and English and hence enhance the acquisition of syntactic gaps by learners.

6. Need for Increased Exposure: The more the exposure of students to the English language, especially its syntactic structures dealing with gaps the better for them. Such exposure may be through media, literature, or conversation, that will be instrumental in acquiring the syntactic forms that are not available in Arabic.
7. Empirical Insights for Pedagogy: The study affords worthy empirical insights for pedagogical approaches in teaching English to Arab learners. Hence, the realization of the challenges of these learners provides a place for providing more effective ways and materials in teaching, which would cater to their needs.

These generalizations thus bring forth a definite call for the need for a linguistic background in language education and some special methods of instruction that will follow the distinctive learning paths of the Arab students in acquiring English syntactic structures.

7.2 FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTION

The current findings of the present investigation are definitely a welcome development, as it opens up several promising lines of inquiry that are greatly needed for furthering our understanding of SLA by Arab learners and to enhance our teaching methodologies.

1. Longitudinal studies: This would, therefore, mean that a prospective researcher would take on longitudinal methodologies to document over time the build-up of learners' syntactic proficiency, hence giving insight as to how such learners understand and apply such syntactic gaps from increased exposure and practice.
2. Comparisons: It is, therefore, against the backdrop of such a view that research into how learners coming from linguistic backgrounds other than Arabic cope with the acquisition of gaps in syntactic dependency in English may, in fact, be able to throw more comprehensive light on transfer and adaptation of language.
3. Pedagogic Interventions: There is an urgent need to carry out research that may help or enable to be able to develop and assess targeted pedagogic interventions that may help or enable Arab learners to comprehend syntagmatic gaps. Investigations may evaluate the effect of various methods of instruction, including technological and multimedia aids.
4. The cognitive mechanisms: A further study of the cognitive mechanisms involved in learning the syntactic structures of any language is sure to unveil very precious insights—how learners, for instance, conceive of syntactic gaps vis-à-vis resumptive pronouns.
5. Cultural Factors and their Effect: The recognition and exploration of the very cultural forces in relation to language learning, in terms of motivation, involvement, and the academic environment, might just be meaningfully

influencing developments in culturally responsive pedagogies in teaching Arabic to Arabs.

In brief, these postulate the complex pathway through which Arab learners of English might be learning syntactic dependency gaps. It does this by zoning in on the stumbling blocks entrenched due to L1-L2 structural differences and the role played by linguistic proficiency. It will also greatly contribute to the open area of SLA in charting new grounds for both future scholarly inquiries and pedagogical breakthroughs. It will go a long way to help in narrowing the linguistic gap between Arabic and English, hence making the academic journey easier for the Arab learners.

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Appendix 1: English Language Proficiency Test

Instructions: Please answer all questions to the best of your ability.

Section A: Multiple Choice Questions (MCQs) (Choose the correct answer)

1. He _____ English for five years now.
 - A) is studying
 - B) studies
 - C) has been studying
 - D) studied
2. If I _____ him, I would have spoken to him.
 - A) saw
 - B) have seen
 - C) had seen
 - D) see

3. They _____ to the cinema every weekend.
 - A) go
 - B) goes
 - C) are going
 - D) have gone
4. By the time we arrived, the meeting _____.
 - A) started
 - B) had started
 - C) has started
 - D) was starting
5. She _____ the book on the table before leaving.
 - A) lay
 - B) laid
 - C) lain
 - D) layed
6. Not only _____ late, but she also forgot her textbook.
 - A) she was
 - B) was she
 - C) she were
 - D) were she
7. I wish I _____ come to your party last night.
 - A) can
 - B) could
 - C) might
 - D) would
8. The teacher asked if _____ the assignment.
 - A) everyone has finished
 - B) had everyone finished
 - C) everyone had finished
 - D) everyone have finished
9. _____ many times, but he still doesn't understand.
 - A) I've told him
 - B) I told him
 - C) I had told him
 - D) I was telling him
10. Before moving to London, she _____ in Paris.
 - A) has lived
 - B) is living
 - C) lived
 - D) was living

Section B: Reading Comprehension

Read the passage and answer the questions that follow.

Passage: In the small town of Greenwood, everyone knows everyone. It's a place where neighbors still greet each other, where the community comes together for every celebration. Last year, the town held its centennial festival, a momentous occasion that brought together generations of residents. Events ranged from parades to pie-eating contests, with the highlight being the unveiling of the Greenwood Time Capsule, buried 50 years ago.

1. What is the main idea of the passage?
 - A) The history of Greenwood.
 - B) Greenwood's centennial festival.
 - C) The geography of Greenwood.
 - D) Daily life in Greenwood.
2. The word "centennial" in line 3 refers to _____.
 - A) a type of tree
 - B) a hundred years
 - C) a community gathering
 - D) a time capsule
3. Which event was NOT mentioned as part of the festival?
 - A) Parades
 - B) Pie-eating contests
 - C) A dance competition
 - D) Unveiling of a time capsule
4. What did the community do for the festival?
 - A) Buried a time capsule
 - B) Unveiled a time capsule
 - C) Moved to a new town
 - D) Visited each other's homes
5. How often does the text suggest such festivals occur?
 - A) Every 50 years
 - B) Annually
 - C) Once a century
 - D) Every five years
6. What does the passage imply about the town of Greenwood?
 - A) It is very large.
 - B) Neighbors rarely talk to each other.
 - C) It has a strong sense of community.
 - D) It is a new town.

Section C: Writing

Write a short paragraph (50-100 words) about your favorite hobby or activity.

Appendix 2: Syntactic Judgment Test

Instructions: Please rate the acceptability of each of the sentences below using the following Likert scale:

1 - Completely unacceptable, 2 - Somewhat unacceptable, 3 - Neutral, 4 - Somewhat acceptable, 5 - Completely acceptable

Relative Clauses

1. "The student who the teacher praised _ won the award."
 - Rating: _____
2. "She's the scientist whose discoveries _ have changed our understanding of biology."
 - Rating: _____
3. "The car that she was driving _ broke down on the highway."
 - Rating: _____
4. "The actor whom the audience applauded _ gave an encore."
 - Rating: _____
5. "This is the poem that won _ first prize in the competition."
 - Rating: _____

Wh-Questions

1. "What did the author write _ became a bestseller?"
 - Rating: _____
2. "Where is the library you said I could find _ the book?"
 - Rating: _____
3. "Who was the woman that _ spoke at the conference yesterday?"
 - Rating: _____
4. "How many cookies did you say _ I could take?"
 - Rating: _____
5. "Why is the movie _ they recommended so popular?"
 - Rating: _____

Topicalization

1. "This topic, I cannot understand _ no matter how hard I try."
 - Rating: _____
2. "These books, she has read _ multiple times."
 - Rating: _____
3. "This secret, nobody should reveal _ even under pressure."
 - Rating: _____
4. "That song, I have heard _ at least a hundred times."
 - Rating: _____
5. "This gift, we have chosen _ for our parents' anniversary."
 - Rating: _____

Appendix 3: Gap-Filling Exercise

Instructions: Each of the following sentences contains a gap indicated by an underscore (_). Fill in the blank with the word or words you feel best complete the sentence.

1. "The person _ called me yesterday wants to buy my car."
 - Answer: _____
2. "What is the name of the song _ was playing at the café?"
 - Answer: _____
3. "_ did she say was her favorite movie of all time?"
 - Answer: _____
4. "The award was given to the actor _ performance was outstanding."
 - Answer: _____
5. "In the meeting, _ was decided that the project deadline would be extended."
 - Answer: _____
6. "I didn't know the reason _ he left the party early."
 - Answer: _____
7. "The book _ you gave me is on the shelf."
 - Answer: _____
8. "She is looking for a roommate _ she can share the apartment with."
 - Answer: _____
9. "The flowers _ were sent anonymously brightened her day."
 - Answer: _____
10. "He couldn't remember the place _ they had their first date."
 - Answer: _____