Fawzia Al-Seyabi

Factors affecting students' oral participation in university level academic classes within the Omani context

The purpose of the present study is to identify, describe and analyze different types of contextual factors that affect students’ oral participation in their academic classes in the College of Commerce and Economics, Sultan Qaboos University, Sultanate of Oman. Previous research done in this area was mainly focused either on ESL/EFL classrooms or content-area classrooms in English speaking countries. Contexts where English is used as a college’s medium of instruction in a non-English speaking country have not been investigated yet. Therefore, it was perceived to be important to examine the role which context (including the socio-cultural dimension of it) plays in classroom interaction in academic classes within the Omani context.

The present research adopts a holistic ethnographic approach to investigation. Therefore, the main research issue, identifying and describing contextual factors was not viewed in isolation. Two more issues that were believed to be major components of the context of the study and which fed into the main issue were looked at: 1) description of communicative events where oral participation takes place and the oral participation itself, and 2) students’ perceptions towards oral participation in the classroom and their perceptions towards the participation of other students.

Data was collected through a variety of instruments. These were: (1) observation, (2) interviews with students and lecturers, and (3) a questionnaire.

Observations of classes revealed four types of communicative events: lectures presenting new material, revision sessions, general classroom discussions and case study discussions.

Concerning factors affecting students’ oral participation in the classroom, three major categories were disclosed: 1) student factors, 2) social factors, and 3) pedagogical/educational factors. Student factors included students’ perceptions, attitudes, language factors, learning styles, background of students and personal affective factors. Examples of social factors were the gender of other students in class and nature of community feelings in a group. Pedagogical/educational factors were subdivided into ones that had to do with the lecturer, the course in general, the topic and the nature of inquiry or point. Moreover, it was argued that many of the aforementioned factors had a socio-cultural interpretation which revealed the role which “context” played in classroom interaction and students’ decisions to take active part in it.

References


Dealing with vocabulary problems in the process of EFL writing

While composing EFL writers come to a meaning to be expressed, often they search their mental lexicon, find a proper word, write it and the writing goes on. However, the process of finding an appropriate word does not always go on so smoothly, there are always problems from limited lexical knowledge. EFL learners might not know a word or may have mastered some of the word properties but not the others. Besides, there are always words that learners know in the sense of knowing what they mean when they meet them in certain contexts, but are not capable of using them productively.

The aim of my study is to find out the answers to the following main questions:

1) What sorts of vocabulary problems appear in the process of EFL writing?
2) How do EFL learners Deal with these problems?

In order to find the answer to these questions 36 subjects major in English and studying in their sixth or seventh term of University in Iran participated in a think aloud procedure. They were asked to write a composition on a given topic and to think aloud simultaneously. The subjects were trained in advance and the think aloud session was done in language lab, so all the subjects did their task at the same time. The language of think aloud was chosen by the subjects and they had one hour to complete their composition.

The think aloud tapes were transcribed and analysed. Only the units of the protocols that were related to vocabulary were extracted and analysed. Next, the vocabulary related units were categorised into three basic categories. The first category is no word, where the subjects are stuck for any word to express their meaning. To get stuck for a word occurs in two situations, that is, either the subjects think they know the word but have forgotten it which leads to a recall procedure or they are convinced that they do not know the word and try to find a solution. The subjects of this study have used seven different solutions to overcome the problem of no word. The second category is one word in which the subject retrieves a word but is not certain about one or some aspects of the word. In other words, their knowledge of the word is partial. The problem with a partially known word can be related to meaning, grammar, style or spelling. The third category is word choice in which subjects retrieve more than one word for a meaning and they have to choose one of them. Due to time constrains, only the third category, word choice, will be presented in this seminar.

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Ana Ribeiro Luis

Incorporated pronouns in European Portuguese

Examples such as (1) illustrate some descriptive problems posed by Portuguese object pronouns:

(1) (i) As crianças não os darão aos pais.
     the children not 3.PL.MASC.ACC give.FUT to the parents
     ‘The children will not give them to their parents’

(1) (ii) As crianças dá-los-ão aos pais.
     the children give-3.PL.MASC.ACC-FUT to the parents
     ‘The children will give them to their parents’

The pronominal in (1(ii)), but not in (1(i)), exhibits a set of peculiar morphophonological properties: a) it intervenes between the verb and the tense/agreement marker, b) it undergoes allomorphic variation (i.e. ‘os’® ‘los’) and c) it triggers idiosyncratic stem allomorphy on the verb (i.e. ‘dar’® ‘dá’). Hence, at first sight, there seems to be a contrast between preverbal and postverbal pronominals: whereas (1(i)) appears to behave like a free standing (pro)clitic, (1(ii)) seems to behave more like a suffix.

This paper argues that pronominals in European Portuguese (EP) are actually affixes in both contexts. It will be shown that their affixal status is further supported by a wide range of data that is highly problematic to syntactic accounts, but expected if the pronominals are analysed as lexically attached morphemes. Such data illustrates that a) they are highly selective with respect to their host; b) they exhibit idiosyncratic co-occurrence restrictions inside the clitic cluster, c) they must be repeated on each conjunct of a coordinated VP, d) they may not be separated from the verb by intervening material.

This leads to the conclusion that forms like ‘dá-los-ão’ constitute one single morphological word. The pronominals are thus verbal affixes realizing morphosyntactic object features (i.e. person, number and gender). Unlike true agreement affixes, though, neither (1(i)) nor (1(ii)) permits ‘clitic doubling’. As shown in (2), the definite Indirect Object may not be ‘reduplicated’ by the pronoun:

(2) (i) *As crianças dar-lhes-ão os livros aos pais.
       the children give-3.PL.MASC.DAT-FUT the books to the parents
       ‘The children will give them the books to their parents’

(2) (ii) *As crianças não lhes darão os livros aos pais.
       the children not 3.PL.MASC.DAT give.FUT the books to the parents
       ‘The children will not give them the books to their parents’

Despite being morphologically part of the verb, it is argued that these pronominals have not yet attained the status of straightforward agreement markers. Following Bresnan & Mchombo’s (1987) discussion of Chichewa verb morphology, a LFG analysis of the Portuguese data will be proposed which treats objects pronominals as incorporated pronouns.

References


Emma Thomas

Second language acquisition of English prepositions

There is evidence that a particular semantic component expressing directional movement (referred to here as PATH), present in a below but not in b, may be subject to limited cross-linguistic variation in the way it is expressed in surface syntax (Jones 1983, Talmy 1985).

a Mary ran to the station
b Mary waited at the station

Possibilities appear to include:

1. expression on the verb root (e.g. Romance, Greek)
   Spanish La botella entró a la cueva (flotando)
   The bottle moved-in to the cave (floating)
   = The bottle floated into the cave

2. expression via Case (e.g. German)
   German Sie ging ins Haus
   She went in the+ACC house
   = She went into the house

3. expression via certain particles (e.g. English, Chinese?)
   English She ran into the bedroom

There are very few studies of the second language acquisition of prepositions. Such studies are needed because, assuming the above variation in distribution patterns, this is a fertile area for examining native language influence in L2 acquisition. Furthermore, it has been suggested (Juffs 1996) that conflation patterns (i.e. which, and how many, semantic elements are expressed by particular syntactic elements) may be parametrised, with rules of combination given by Universal Grammar (UG). If this is so, L2 acquisition of prepositions may shed some light on the issue of whether L2 acquisition is constrained by UG.

This paper reports a preliminary study that attempted to identify some issues for L2 acquisition of English prepositions. 15 non-native speakers of English (5 L1 Greek, 5 L1 German, 5 L1 Chinese) were presented with pairs of sentences that differed only according to the preposition used (at or to, in each case) and were required to judge which one was correct in context. While results are inconclusive and further work is ongoing, a couple of tendencies are evident:

- There were more mixed responses on test items where the verb expresses manner of activity (e.g. run, skip) than where the verb expresses activity alone (e.g. wait, go back).
- There is some evidence to suggest that native speakers of languages that express PATH on the verb root may have more difficulty with the relevant contrast than do speakers of the other proposed language types.

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Florencia Franceschina

Against a deficit in L2 morphology

Some second language acquisition researchers (e.g., LARDIERE, 1998a, 1998b, 2000) have adopted the view that the differences between native speaker (NS) and non-native speaker (NNS) end-state grammars can be explained by proposing a critical period affecting the morphological module that interfaces with the computational system. Divergent NNS production is explained as the result of a breakdown in the mapping between syntax and morphology without having to posit divergent syntactic representations. While this view has the advantage of proposing a unified account of first and second language acquisition insofar as syntactic knowledge is concerned, it runs into problems when faced with certain empirical data. This paper will examine some problematic naturalistic data from Italian near-native speakers of Spanish and it will be shown that predictions that follow from a morphological approach to NS/NNS differences are incompatible with the empirical observations.

Syntactic gender and number features are realised morphologically in similar ways in Italian and Spanish: -o and -a are the word endings for singular masculine and feminine nouns of the biggest inflectional classes in both languages. These languages differ, however, in how they realise plural masculine and feminine forms: -os and -as are the plural word endings in Spanish and -i and -e the Italian counterparts:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>(1)</th>
<th>a. una casa (Spanish)</th>
<th>(1)</th>
<th>b. una casa (Italian)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>a. FEM.SG house.FEM.SG</td>
<td></td>
<td>a. FEM.SG house.FEM.SG</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(2)</td>
<td>a. dos casas two houses.FEM.PL</td>
<td>(2)</td>
<td>b. due case two houses.FEM.PL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(3)</td>
<td>a. un libro a.MASC.SG book.MASC.SG</td>
<td>(3)</td>
<td>b. un libro a.MASC.SG book.MASC.SG</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(4)</td>
<td>a. dos libros two books.MASC.PL</td>
<td>(4)</td>
<td>b. due libri two books.MASC.PL</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

If the problem facing NNSs is restricted to finding the right form to realise the L2 gender features (which are otherwise the same as those of the L1) we would predict that -o and -a will not be problematic whereas -os/ -i and -as/-e might be. A malfunctioning of the morphological module should result in nouns with features encoded by means of the same markings in both languages being more successful than those encoded differently in Spanish and Italian. These predictions are not supported by our data however. The results are particularly interesting when compared to a previous study of an English speaker of L2 Spanish (FRANCESCHINA, 1999) which showed that gender and number mistakes do not pattern according to type of surface realisation but rather according to whether the syntactic feature is instantiated in the L1 or not.

We conclude that morphological differences between the L1 and the L2 do not necessarily lead to divergent NNS performance. We would like to suggest that the data are incompatible with a morphological explanation of NS/NNS differences along the lines of LARDIERE (1998a, b; 2000) while they are compatible with the view that L1 syntactic feature specification plays a major role in allowing/hindering the acquisition of L2 syntactic features.

References


Explaining divergent tense marking in advanced L2 speakers

One of the intriguing features of second language acquisition is that some types of grammatical property appear to be acquired straightforwardly and in a native-like way, while others remain persistently difficult. Lardiere (1998a; b) reports the case of a Chinese speaker with long immersion in L2 English whose ability in spontaneous speech to assign appropriate Case-marking to pronouns is perfect, but who fails to mark the past tense on verbs in two-thirds of contexts where it is required, and fails to mark subject-verb agreement in over 80% of required cases. Such observations are pervasive in empirical studies, and pose an important explanatory problem for a theory of second language acquisition.

In this paper I will look at the case of simple past tense marking in English in more detail. Evidence will be presented showing that while native speakers of Chinese, Japanese and German who are advanced L2 speakers of English are all successful, under varying task conditions, in using irregular past tense verb forms (ate, bought, stole), there are striking discrepancies between them in their use of regular past tense forms (cooked, decided, chased). Chinese speakers typically alternate between inflected and bare verb stems, Japanese speakers and German speakers use the inflected forms more or less consistently. These results will be used to evaluate three proposals for explaining the persistent difficulty posed by specific grammatical properties for L2 speakers (in contrast to properties which are well-acquired): (a) that it has a morphological source (advanced L2 speakers have difficulty with morphological rules); (b) that it has a lexical source (advanced L2 speakers have difficulty accessing the lexicon under some circumstances); (c) that it has a syntactic source (advanced L2 speakers sometimes fail to establish features on functional categories (like T(ense)) with the result that default lexical items are licensed in derivations where morphologically more complex forms are required by the grammars of native speakers).

I will demonstrate that the results of the experiment appear to be consistent with a syntactic deficit account (c). A speculative explanation will be considered, regarding why L1 speakers of Chinese have persistent problems in marking regular past tense verb forms in L2 English and L1 speakers of Japanese and German do not.

References


Realisation of inflectional morphology and syntactic knowledge: the investigation into use of morphology by Japanese speakers learning English

There is a case-study of an adult Chinese speaker (Patty) learning English on her use of English inflectional morphology (Lardiere 1998a, b). Her IL (interlanguage) grammar is at an endstate. Lardiere found that Patty's use of inflectional morphology lacks consistency, failing to mark verbs on about two-thirds of required occasions, whereas she shows almost perfect knowledge in a variety of syntactic phenomena. Lardiere argues that the inconsistency in realising morphology reflects a problem in mapping from abstract syntactic knowledge to their particular surface morphology. This paper attempts to provide an insight into this issue, investigating past tense assignment to verbs in English by Japanese adult speakers.

It can be argued that Patty has difficulty with inflectional morphology because her L1 does not have a morphological rule similar to English to realise tense and person on verbs. Japanese has a non-past / past tense distinction indicated by a past tense marker -ta. In this paper, however, it is assumed that this tense marker -ta is an auxiliary verb located in Infl, not a suffix like the one in English. If this is the case, it should be argued that in Japanese, as in Chinese, there is not an English equivalent morphological rule: {V + Past}→V + ed. If Japanese speakers show an inconsistent use of English past tense, and it is asymmetric between regular and irregular past tense forms with the latter more successful, this might be because constructing the morphological rule is problematic for them, since a similar rule does not exist in the L1.

In this paper, five Japanese adult speakers were investigated in their use of past tense marking in a retelling task and spontaneous speech. It was found that they did not consistently supply -ed on verbs successfully, in percentages ranging from 41% to 75%, while marking on irregular forms was not a problem for them, correct use ranging from 67% to 96%. Since the learners almost perfectly realised past tense on irregular forms, it can be assumed that tense feature has been specified in their mental grammar. If this is the case, the failure of supplying -ed marker on regular forms should be attributed to the problem in the domain of morphology, mapping -ed marker on syntax, not to the failure to acquire the syntactic representation for past tense.

In addition, this paper investigates the use of ing- and -ed participle to see whether or not the learners have a problem in this morphology. Interestingly, it was found that they supplied those participles successfully when they were required. This suggests that the problem in inflectional morphology is not mandatory, maybe only in the one which has to do with syntactic features in Infl.

References


Antecedent reactivation in Japanese long distance scrambling construction and working memory

Two views have been proposed with respect to processing filler-gap dependencies--- the Trace Reactivation hypothesis, and gap-free accounts. The former hypothesizes that displaced constituents are psychologically reactivated at the purported trace position (Bever and McElree, 1988). The latter assume that the displaced constituents are directly associated with their subcategorizers, the Direct Association Hypothesis (Pickering and Barry, 1991).

Some previous studies (King and Just, 1991) have suggested that working memory (WM) influences the processing of structurally complex sentences. Our test sentences are an example of such; being long distance scrambling constructions (e.g., (1)). We therefore measured WM of individual subjects as well, and investigated whether any difference would be observed in antecedent reactivation.

We report results from experimental studies investigating antecedent reactivation in Japanese long distance scrambling constructions by using the cross-modal lexical priming paradigm for subjects with different working memory capacities.

Fifty-seven Japanese native speakers participated in the experiment. Test sentences (e.g., (2)) were auditorily presented in texts, and target words, which were either identical (remo\'n \"lemon\") or semantically unrelated (sona\'t\"sonata\") to the head noun of the scrambled object NPs (remo\'n \"lemon\"), were visually presented at the gap position (^\^) as an experimental condition, or at the pre-gap position (^) as a control. The reaction times for making a lexical decision on the target words were measured.

1) NP-o i [ NP-ga NP-n i [ NP-ga NP-n i ti V]-COMP V]
   -Acc -Nom -Dat -Nom -Dat

2) Suruto, remo-o i, [ futari-me-no hito-ga shikai-sha-ni, [ sono kodomo-ga
   And then, lemon-Acc, [ the second person-Nom M.C.-Dat, [ the child-Nom onna-no hito-ni ti
   nedatte-iru ] to kotae-ta ] female person-Dat ti asking ] COMP answered]

^ ^ ^

Lit. "And then, a lemon, the second person answered to the M.C. that the child was asking the woman for."

Target Words: Identical: remo \‘lemon\’, semantically unrelated: sona \‘sonata\’

Test Points: Pregap position (Early): ^, Gap position (Late): ^ ^

We found shorter reaction times for the identical target at the hypothesized gap position than at the control position in High WM subject groups. This indicates that antecedents were mentally reactivated at the trace position.

Implications for syntactic analyses of the long distance scrambling construction and for syntactic processing will be discussed.

References


Regular and irregular inflection in the French mental lexicon

Within recent years research in Psycholinguistics, and more specifically within the field of morphology processing, has focused on a central issue, the representation and processing of morphologically complex words in the brain.

Within the last decade research in morphology processing focused more specifically on the processing of regular vs. irregular inflection and three main models are competing to account for English past tense formation. The first model, within a connectionist framework, makes the assumption that regular and irregular patterns are processed through a single mechanism, an associative memory system. The second model, a symbolic account, proposes that all morphologically complex words, i.e. regulars as well as irregulars, are generated according to rule-based processes. The third model, the dual-route mechanism, proposes that regulars and irregulars are treated in a qualitatively different way, i.e. a rule-based mechanism for regulars, while irregulars are retrieved from memory by an associative network.

The work presented here investigates which of these models best account for past participle formation in French using a primed lexical decision task allowing to probe lexical access of regular and irregular inflected forms on-line. It has been found in several experiments that when subjects have to decide whether a letter string presented on a screen is a word or a nonword (i.e. to make a lexical decision), their response times (or reaction times) are faster if the same word has been presented previously, e.g. walk followed by walk (lexical decisions are made to the second word). This is called the priming effect. In fact, the first word acts as a prime, and its second presentation facilitates access to its lexical representation in the lexicon. Similar results have been found for morphologically related words. Reaction times to a word preceded by a morphologically related word, e.g. walked followed by walk, are faster compare to response times to a word preceded by an unrelated word, e.g. swim followed by walk. Priming effects are measured by comparing reaction times from a identity (ID) condition (e.g. walk-walk), to a morphologically related (MR) condition (e.g. walked-walk), and to an unrelated or control (CT) condition (e.g. swim-walk). Full priming corresponds to no significant differences between reaction times from ID and MR conditions, but significantly faster reaction times are obtained when both conditions are compared to CT condition. Partial priming refers to the same measures, with the difference that in this case the MR condition is significantly slower than the ID condition, although still significantly faster than the CT condition. In studies of English and German full priming has been found for regulars and partial priming for irregulars.

Following results of the priming paradigm, the experiment presented here investigates priming effects of regular and irregular inflected forms in French. Results show that regularly inflected forms in French, e.g. mangé (past participle of to eat), exhibit full priming. Irregularly inflected forms, on the other hand, e.g. pris (past participle of to take), exhibit only partial priming. These results can be best accounted for within the dual-route mechanism approach as reflecting the qualitatively different lexical organisation of regular and irregular verbs. Results show that the lexical entry for a regular past participle form in French is its stem, while an irregular past participle form has a lexical entry separate from but connected to its stem.