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## The Relative Clause Revisited: A Novel Approach to Error Analysis

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# The Relative Clause Revisited: A Novel Approach to Error Analysis

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## Abstract:

Negative interference from a mother language is said to be one of the major sources of errors committed by learners of a foreign language. Due to this interference, it is our belief that mere analysis and finding of differences between the languages concerned are inadequate. Therefore, the present research is engaged in giving a more profound approach to deal with errors in general, and one of the commonest errors committed by Palestinian Arabic speakers learning English, in particular: namely, relative pronoun deletion from the subject position of the relative pronoun. Building on certain linguistic constructs and rules, as well as an enlightened pedagogical account, the absence of the subject relative pronoun is given a new perspective. Our account addresses both teachers' and students' cognitive linguistic knowledge to eradicate the problem at hand. Our approach to the problem which is thus interdisciplinary, helps students in the acquisition of complex structures like that of the relative clause and can be a model to be followed in tackling other problems in foreign language learning and teaching.

Keywords: Constraints; Rules; Relative Clause; C-command.

## مراجعة الجملة الموصولة: مدخل جديد لتحليل الأخطاء

رقية حرز الله، ونبيل علوي

### ملخص:

يُجري التربويون والباحثون دراسات مقارنة بين اللغات، تنظر في الأخطاء التي يرتكبها دارسو اللغة الأجنبية؛ ويسود اعتقاد أن التداخل السلبي من اللغة الأم هو من المصادر الرئيسة للأخطاء التي يرتكبها أولئك الدارسون. وبناءً على هذا الاعتقاد فإن هؤلاء الباحثين يعتقدون أن مجرد التحليل والوقوف عند الفوارق بين اللغات المعنية ليس كافياً. ولذا؛ فإن هذا البحث يقدم مدخلاً أكثر واقعية؛ للتعامل مع الأخطاء بشكل عام، وخاصة تلك التي يقع فيها طلبة اللغة الإنجليزية في جامعة النجاح الوطنية. وهو يركز على خطأ حذف أسماء الوصل، وخاصة في حالة وصفها للمبتدأ في جملة الصلة. وبناءً على بعض التراكيب والقواعد اللغوية، وبهدي من دراية واطلاع على الأسس التربوية؛ فإن معالجة حذف أسماء الوصل قد أعطيت منحاً آخر يختلف عما كان معهوداً. إن هذا البحث يخاطب؛ وبشكل مباشر، القدرة الاستدراكية للطلبة والمدرسين لمعالجة هذه المشكلة واستئصالها. ويقتضي المدخل؛ هنا، مساعدة الطلبة على تعلم تراكيب معقدة، كتلك التي يصادفونها في أسماء الوصل، ومن ثمَّ القياس على هذه التجربة في التعامل مع مشاكل تعلم اللغة الإنجليزية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: ضوابط، قواعد، جملة الصلة، التركيبة المهيمنة.

## J. Introduction

It is a widely held belief these days that our present planet has become a “small village”. The reliance on the social media and the internet as means of communication has created new linguistic, cultural and social realities that we are invited to examine and, perhaps, harness in serving language learning and teaching. Communication through the social media is characterized by deletion, abbreviations and new patterns of communication signs.

If one is to fit nicely in today’s world, one has to be bilingual, if not multilingual. Therefore, foreign language teaching has become an industry in itself. Naturally, errors occur in the learning of foreign languages, and error analysis is the subject of our present paper. The error which we are mainly concerned with is the subject relative pronoun deletion from a relative clause which modifies an indefinite noun of a post-verbal noun phrase (NP) even though the same structure is termed Determiner Phrase (DP) or (AgrP, in more recent works) in a sentence like “Jack is a student  $\emptyset$  doesn’t come late” committed in the written work by Arabic speakers of English as a foreign language.

This error, in addition to other types of errors in English relative clauses, has been observed in many earlier works, some for pedagogical purposes such as that of Yorkey (1977), Scott and Tucker (1974), Schachter (1974), Hamdallah and Tushyeh (1995), while others such as Lambrecht (1988), Chomsky (1995), Duffield (2009), Fox (2003), and Collins (2015), deal with various theoretical aspects of the relative clause since it is a global structure subject to various processes and/or constraints.

Our main concern in this work will concentrate on both the contrastive analyses and the theoretical aspects of the relative clause as they pertain to the problem which our students face, namely the absence of the relative clause subject from English sentences when the relative clause describes an indefinite noun in the post-verbal position of the matrix sentence.

Even though the error has been explained with respect to its source which is a negative transfer from Arabic, the error persists: it is the persistence of the error which is one of our major concerns in the present work since it systematically crops up very frequently in the written work of the same student, across students and across years, let alone spoken English. To work towards a solution to this problem, the present work offers ample data which shed light on the seriousness of the problem, tries to give both the theoretical as

well as the pedagogical explanation to the source of the error and finally, gives recommendations which will, hopefully, assist teachers of English as a foreign language in eradicating it. We seek an interdisciplinary approach to both the analysis of/and, hopefully, the solution to the problem

## II. The Relative Clause as a Linguistic Theoretical Construct.

It is the belief amongst linguists that the relative clause is a global structure and its analysis has been a hot subject in theoretical linguistics, especially in the generative model. A relative clause is a simple clause consisting of a subject and a predicate modifying a noun in a preceding Determiner Phrase (DP). A sentence such as:

(1) “This is the man who runs this supermarket” is represented in the Tree-Diagram as follows:

(2) See figure (1)

DP = Determiner Phrase, CP = Complementizer Phrase, IP = Inflectional Phrase, I = inflection

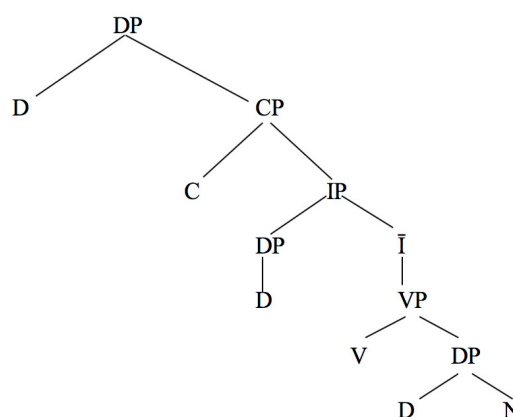
For ease of exposition, however, we follow the traditional tree diagrams and node denotations as represented in the early works of the generative models as follows:

(3) See figure (2)

Even though this is roughly the supposed deep structure of the relative clause, this structure is subject to certain processes and/or constraints in various languages which give various surface structures of the relative clause in those languages. For example, Collins (2015) gives evidence from English which shows deletion of a whole relative clause as in the example:

(4) “At the party, there were more girls who I knew than there were boys,”

figure (1)



derived from:

“At the party, there were more girls who I knew than there were boys who I knew.” (Collins, 2015:1).

What permits the deletion of the second clause is that the deleted relative clause is syntactically identical with the earlier relative clause.

English also optionally allows the deletion of the relative pronoun when it functions as an object of the verb of the relative clause or as the object of a preposition as the following sentences show:

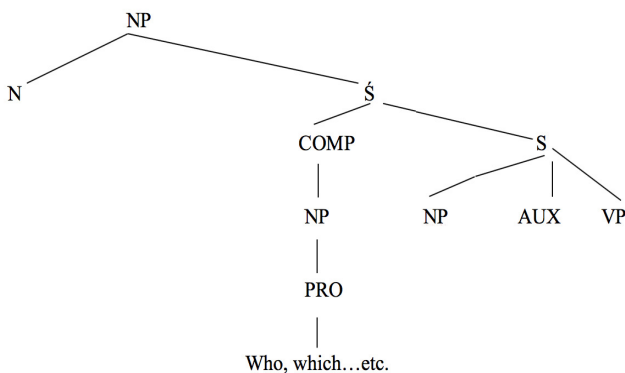
(5) I would like to have a look at the book which you just bought,  
or, I would like to have a look at the book you got this information from.

Moreover, the majority of linguists dealing with the English relative clause seem to support the generalization that English does not allow subjectless relative clauses, i.e., a relative clause without a null subject. The English relative clause should have a relative pronoun as the subject of this subordinate clause. Moreover, Duffield et. al (2009) claim that subject relative clauses are the preferred type of relative clauses cross-linguistically. One explanation which they present is that there are few nodes between the subject relative pronoun and its NP antecedent, something which makes the semantic processing of the whole structure much quicker, or perhaps easier.

Lambrecht (1988), however, presents examples from substandard English which show that subjectless relative clauses do occur in the English language. Here are some sentences quoted from Lambrecht’s data:(absence of a relative pronoun or complementizer represented by Ø).

(6) There was a ball of fire Ø shot up through the seats in front of me.  
There is something Ø keeps upsetting me.  
There is a lot of people Ø don’t know that.

figure (2)



Well, I have a friend of mine Ø called me.

I have a friend in the Bay Area Ø is a painter. (Lambrecht, 1988: 1).

As reported by Lambrecht (1988), subject deletion is “a disallowed linguistic usage in English”. He even implies that such a usage is socially stigmatized. Here Lambrecht (1988) states that university professors would deny the fact that they had used the structure when confronted with their just uttered utterances with instances containing a relative clause with no subject. More will be said about Lambrecht’s data when the case of Arabic deletion of subjects of relative clauses is considered since this kind of deletion is part and parcel of both Classical Arabic and Palestinian Arabic.

One more interesting aspect of relative clauses which linguists consider is the function of the relative clause in the sentences it is part of semantically. Here people talk about restrictive and nonrestrictive relative clauses and whether a relative clause gives background, marginal meaning or has an assertive, propositional function. Within this framework, Duffield et. al (2009) introduce a subtype of relative clauses which they call the Representation Relative Clause (RRC). This type of embedded relative clause describes an indefinite noun in the post-verbal position of the matrix sentence. Here are some examples given by Duffield et. al which, by the way, are very similar to the erroneous sentences collected from the written work of Palestinian students at An-Najah National University, save for the fact that the subject position of the English relative clause is filled with an overt relative pronoun while the Arabic similar structure has an empty subject.

- (7) 1. You get a guy down the road who comes up, uh, carrying a knife.
2. I like cars that are designed with human beings in mind.
3. They had some guy who was defending himself.
4. And I know some people who have been drug addicted. (Duffield et al., 2009:2-3).

(Duffield et. al.,) 2009 argue that the matrix sentence clause is semantically bleached, has no proposition and that the relative clause is the one which has the assertion of the whole complex sentence, meaning that the relative clause is of a semantic value. We reiterate here that these examples with respect to the noun described by the relative clause are very much similar to the Arabic structure except for the overt relative pronoun demanded in the English examples

but formally disallowed in the Arabic case which seems to be the source of the error in the examples cited under (9), (11), (12) below and others.

### III. Relative Clause Errors

Besides such theoretical aspects of the relative clause constituent, the structure was researched as an area of difficulty in Cross Linguistic Interference (CLI).

Researchers who are engaged in error analysis in relative clause formation by Arabic speakers learning English pointed out three main errors.

One: The use of a redundant pronoun when the relative pronoun is an object of the relative clause. Scott and Tucker (1974), Schachter (1974), Yorkey (1977), and Peterson and Ostendorf (2007), point out the same error calling the redundant pronoun in object position a relater. The following is an example of such an error:

(8) This is the man whom we saw him.

Two: Absence of the relative pronoun when it describes an indefinite noun such as the example we gave in the introduction, namely:

(9) Jack is a student Ø doesn't come late.

Three: The use of a relater in subject position as in the erroneous structure: The girl who she is pretty came. Relative clause errors such as the ones mentioned above especially, lead Thompson Ruzic et. al (1983) following the analysis of relative clauses in Arabic led by Schachter (1974), Yorkey (1977) and Scott and Tucker (1974), to go to the extreme of claiming that Arabic has no relative pronouns but a particle instead, and no relative clause, at all. The claim here is that Arabs co-ordinate sentences instead of forming subordinate ones. Both claims are rejected in comprehensive works on relative clause analysis in Arabic by various scholars and as the present work will amply reveal.

Before we start with our analysis of the relative pronoun deletion which is the main concern of this paper, we add a fourth error type to the other three mentioned above; an error which has not been tackled in previous research, namely the use of the genitive form of the relative pronoun "whose". It is quite often that one encounters an idiosyncratic sentence given by Arab students such as the following:

(10) I talked to a man who his wife works in the library, instead of 'whose wife'.

The error is, of course, due to the fact that Arabic has no one-to-one correspondence with the English

relative pronoun whose. Instead an Arabic speaker learning English would use both the relative pronoun who/which in addition to the genitive personal pronouns his, her, etc.

### IV. The Problem

Going back to the first three types of errors, all previous researchers seem to agree that the deletion of the object redundant pronoun, (a relater / a resumptive pronoun, as it is called by some, or a pronominal suffix as we shall call it in the present work) is the number one error committed by speakers of Arabic learning English as a foreign language. Scott and Tucker (1974) state that object deletion is a late acquisition by Arabic speakers.

Unlike Scott and Tucker (1974), the number one problem we encounter with our students is the absence of the relative pronoun subject from a relative clause defining an indefinite noun. Therefore, this error is the focus of the rest of this paper. In the following section, we present ample idiosyncratic sentences containing the error; in section six we offer a theoretical account of the source of the error; in section seven we give the pedagogical account; in section eight we give some predictions and implications which follow from our theoretical analysis, and in the final section we give our recommendations to teachers of English as a foreign language and students learning the language to work for the eradication of the error.

### V. The Data

As mentioned in the introduction, relative pronoun deletion is a recurrent error in the production of Arab students. The following set of idiosyncratic sentences was collected from the exam papers of students enrolled in a senior linguistics course in the English Department at An-Najah University:

- (11) a. There are syllables begin with a vowel  
 b. It is attached to a syllable begins by "a"  
 c. In Sumerian, there are words begin with a laryngeal  
 d. "ereš" is a pronoun means "to plow"  
 e. "šinšir" is a numeral means "twelve"  
 f. It is a noun in the accusative case means .....
- g. It is a Sumerian word entered the Akkadian language.  
 h. Because there is a pharyngeal has dropped out.....

Another set of erroneous sentences was collected from the exam papers of junior and senior students

enrolled in a number of literature courses:

- (12) a. Robin is a boy comes from the country to the city
- b. The story is full of laughter demonstrates .....
- c. The Major appears before the crowds live near his house
- d. In our present time, life ceases to give people hope pleases them
- e. He was the oldest man among others believe in his abilities.
- f. Hawthorn is acquainted with sin obsessed many people
- g. Laughter, light and darkness begin the story spread every where
- h. The motif of snow covers the whole story is clear.

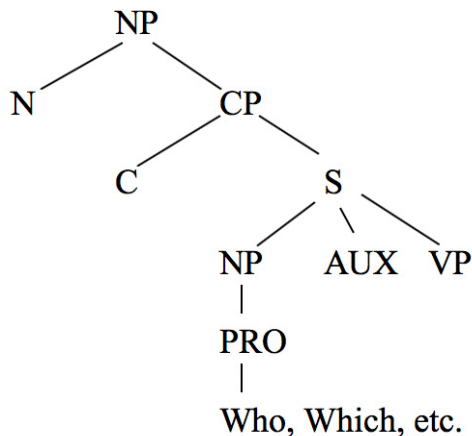
The following set of erroneous sentences was collected from the exam papers of students enrolled in a junior linguistics course, again in the same department:

- (13) a. ....because there is an article "the" corresponds to Arabic "ʔal"
- b. Each of the examples has a meaning differs .....

A reconstruction of each of the sentences under (11) above, according to the English language rules of relative clause formation, will give us the sentences below:

- (14) a. There are syllables which begin with a vowel
- b. It is attached to a syllable which begins with "a"
- c. In Sumerian, there are words which begin with a laryngeal
- d. "ereš" is a pronoun which means "to plow"
- e. "šinšir" is a numeral which means "twelve"
- f. It is a noun in the accusative case which means

figure (3)



- .....
- g. It is a Sumerian word which entered the Akkadian language
- h. ...because there is a pharyngeal which has dropped out

What is particular to all sentences given above (and their reconstructions) is that the verbs of the matrix sentence are the copulas "is" and "are". Therefore, one is likely to conclude that the verb of the relative clause is deleted when the verb of the matrix sentence is a verb to be, i.e., a copula. However, such a conclusion is quickly given up when one encounters sentences of the following type:

- (15) a. They put hypotheses explain the difficulty.
- b. We have no syllable begins with a vowel
- c. When he wants to produce words begin with a vowel.

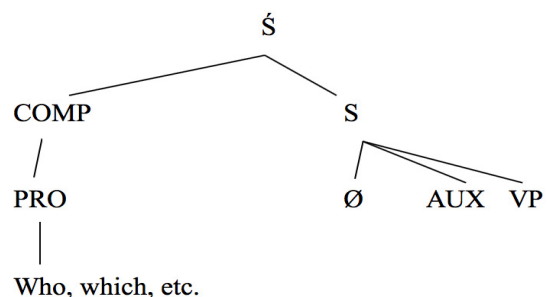
Unlike the verbs of the matrix sentences under (6), here we have the content verbs "put", "have" and "produce" as content verbs of the matrix sentences including the relative clauses under (15a, b, and c), respectively.

Interestingly, the verbs of the matrix sentences in our data of erroneous sentences are very much the same as those given in Lambrecht's data under (6) above. What confirms the fact that the problem persists among students of all levels is that the following erroneous sentences were observed in some written material of our MA students who are assumed to have somewhat error-free syntax:

- (16) a. It means there are two lexical items have opposite meanings.
- b. Phonology is a branch of linguistics deals with sounds.
- c. Bauman and Qasim used other devices serve to compact the surface structure of the text.
- d. The two examples have a specific meaning differs from the meaning.

Before the error of relative pronoun deletion was

figure (4)



explained in the context of negative transfer from the mother tongue in a contrastive linguistics course, the following Arabic sentence was given to 61 students to be translated into English. The sentence was:

(17) أريد دواء يعالج الروماتيزم

ʔuriidu dæwææʔæn yuçææliʃu ʔæl-rumætiizim  
want - I medicine treats it the rheumatoid

"I want (a) medicine which cures rheumatoid"

In which the word "دواء" (medicine) is indefinite, and "يعالج الروماتيزم" (cures rheumatoid) is the relative clause describing the indefinite noun "دواء" (medicine). The result was that only five students gave the correct translation "I need (a) medicine which treats rheumatoid". We ignore deletion of the indefinite article by many students (included between brackets in the example). As for the rest of the translations, they were mainly of two types: type one, and this was the majority, was a sentence with the deletion of the relative pronoun altogether, just as expected:

(18) I need (a) medicine cures rheumatoid,

On the other hand, various structures were given with avoidance of the problematic structure altogether, as the sentence below shows:

(19) I need a medicine to cure rheumatoid

Examples like these and a countless number of others which recur in the daily oral as well as written discourse of our students shed light on the seriousness of this problem where no class of any year seems to be exempt from it. In the following section we offer the theoretical account of this error building mostly on current notions of the generative model of linguistic theory, particularly the Binding Theory in Chomsky (1981),

## VI. The Theoretical Account

The theoretical explanation of subject relative pronoun deletion by Arabic speakers can best be explained if one considers the following generative

syntactic and morphological/theoretical constructs' assumptions:

One: In the generative linguistics literature, we are all familiar with the claim that the relative clause is an  $\bar{S}$  complement of an N within the larger phrasal category NP where the relative clause is, in turn, dominated by  $\bar{S}$  dominating both a COMP(LEMENTIZER) and S constituents. The following tree diagram illustrates these assumptions.

(20) See figure (3)

Two: The relative pronoun is moved into COMP position by the general

Transformational Rule: "Move- $\alpha$ " (Chomsky, 2000: 89-155).

(21) See figure (4)

Three: All movement transformations leave empty traces, formally represented as T. This T is co-indexed with the Moved Constituent, i.e. they stand in an anaphoric relationship.

(22) See figure (5)

Four: The head N of the NP c-commands the node dominating the relative clause. The notion c-command is defined as follows:

(23) A c-commands B (and every node dominated by B) if, and only if, the first branching node dominating node A also dominates B and A itself does not dominate B (Reinhart, 2000).

The following diagram illustrates this kind of relationship:

(24) See figure (6)

Here we are benefiting from theories in generative syntax, especially the Binding Theory as presented in Chomsky (1981); in this view, 'Binding' is defined as follows:

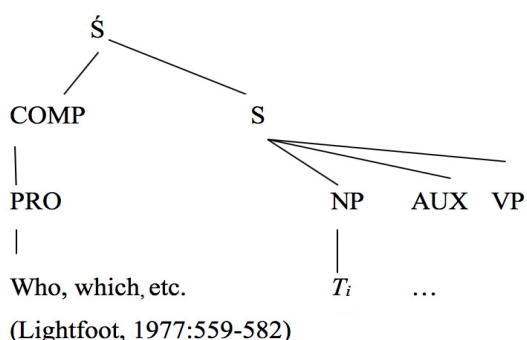
(25)  $\alpha$  binds  $\beta$  if  $\alpha$  and  $\beta$  are co-indexed and  $\alpha$  c-commands  $\beta$

Thus, the Head Noun of the NP both binds and c-commands the embedded relative clause (i. e.,  $\bar{S}$  and all items under  $\bar{S}$ , including COMP and what it dominates):

(26) See figure (7)

Five: Arabic relative pronouns are marked for definiteness. We claim that the Arabic relative pronouns are decomposed into a prefixal ʔal- and a base which has the vowel melody morphs [i, and i-a] appearing in such forms as [ʔallathi, ʔallathiina..etc..] in Classical Arabic and [ʔil-] of the uniform [ʔilli] in PA.

figure (5)



Moreover, an affix is the head of the complex word structure and the head percolates its features to the whole NP phrasal category. We build our conclusions here on the works of Williams (1981a, 1981b), Di Sciullo and Williams (1987) and Selkirk (1982) where it is stated that affixes are heads of the words of which they are part just as lexical categories are the heads of their phrasal categories, e.g., N is the head of a NP, V is the head of the VP and so on. By the same argument, a [+definite] prefix characterizes a word by its features, and so does a suffix, the outermost suffix or affix to be more exact. In other words, the affix percolates its syntactic features to the whole word, as Katamba (1993) points out.

(27) [ʔal] Noun ] +definite

Six: An indefinite N within a complex sentence is indefinite on first mention, but on its second mention it is [+definite], building on the notions New and Given of the Functional Sentence Perspective. The second mention of the noun (or a PRO replacing it) is, of course, [+definite] and co-indexed with its antecedent NP. Such a feature-changing process is not totally novel in the generative model. Fox (2003) following Chomsky (1995) introduces a syntactic rule which he calls "trace conversion" which converts the lower copy of a NP into a [+definite] description. Moreover, the fact that the subject gets deleted with no loss in the processing of the semantic representation of the sentence is that Arabic verbs are more morphologically complex than English verbs especially with respect to such syntactic features as number, person, and gender as in the verbs naktub, yaktubuu, ʔaktub "she writes, they (masculine) write, I (masculine) write, respectively".

In addition to these assumptions and notions, we make the following claims about Arabic:

First: [+definite]/[-definite] are internal morphological lexical properties of the Arabic word, not syntactically decided, i.e. not represented with a free function

figure (6)

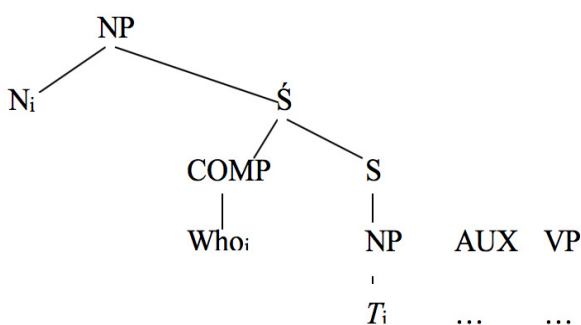
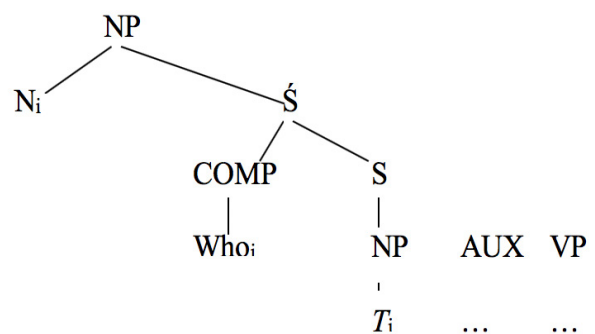


figure (7)



word. In Classical Arabic, the definite Article /ʔal-/ is prefixed to the word thus making it definite (ʔal-walad "the boy") while Tanwiin, waladun marks a word as indefinite. (Note that the two are mutually exclusive). In PA indefiniteness is a Ø (zero) morph. On the other hand, the indefinite articles "a, an," and the definite article "the" are free function words in English. This is illustrated by examples under (28) while the examples under (29) illustrate the situation in the PA colloquial:

(28) ولد في الشارع يسأل عنك

[[walad]un] fi [š [šariç]i] [yasʔal]u] [çan]ka  
 boy a in the street asks he about you  
 A boy in the street is asking about you

رأيت ولدا في الشارع

[[raʔay]tu] [[walad]an] fi [š [šariç]i]  
 Saw I boy (acc.) in the street. (gen.)  
 I saw a boy in the street

سمعت بولد اسمه علي

[[samiç]tu] [bi[walad]in] [[ʔusmu]hu] Ali  
 Heard I of boy (dat.) name his Ali  
 I heard of a boy called Ali

In the given examples under 22, the noun "walad" had three portmanteau morphs [un, an, and in] marking it for both indefiniteness and the nominative, accusative and dative cases, respectively. With the many changes that Palestinian Arabic has undergone from Classical Arabic, these morphs have been obliterated where both indefiniteness and case are unmarked thus ending up with one uninflected form namely walad "boy" as the following reproduction of (28) shows:

(29) ولد في الشارع يسأل عنك

[[walad]Ø] fi [š [šariç]i] [bisʔal]Ø] [çann]ak  
 Boy in the street asks he about you

شفت ولد في الشارع

[[šuf]it] [[walad]Ø] fi [š [šariç]Ø]



Saw I boy (acc.) in the street (gen.)  
I saw a boy in the street

سمعت بولد اسمه علي

[[smiç]it] [bi[walad]Ø] [[ʔism [u h]]] Ali  
Heard I of boy (dat.) name his Ali  
I heard of a boy called Ali

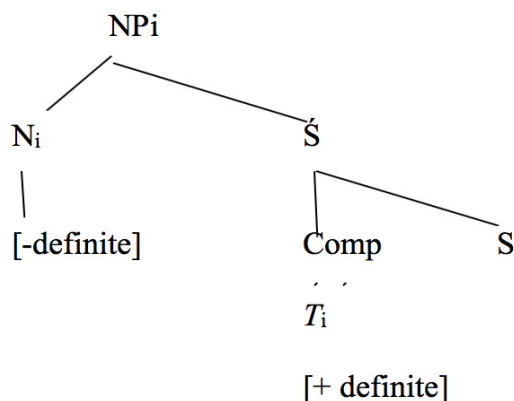
Two: There seems to be a constraint on Arabic derived relative clauses which is the following: A [+definite] subject relative pronoun which is c-commanded by a [-definite] post-verbal NP is not allowed to appear on Surface Structure (SS, henceforth) of a sentence. Before it deletes, however, it leaves a T which is intuitively recoverable, and which functionally represents the deleted subject relative pronoun.

(30) See figure (8)

It should be mentioned here that Arabic abides by rules applicable to the relative clause structure in general, namely replacing the second occurrence of an NP by a proper form of the relative pronoun. As we know, this relative pronoun is co-indexed with its preceding c-commanding Noun. Moreover, the relative pronoun is moved into COMP position, again in accord with the Movement T-rule and Trace Theory (Fox, 2003). However, deletion of the relative pronoun is particular to Arabic, but in English it always surfaces since English has no constraint in this respect at any level of the representation of the corresponding structure. On the other hand, a [+definite] pronoun is allowed to surface since it does not contrast with respect to the feature of definiteness with its c-commanding antecedent i. e. both are [+definite]. This explains why relative pronouns are always there when they refer to [+definite] nouns thus creating a chain of [+definites]. The following examples illustrate these facts

(31) أريد الدواء الذي يعالج الروماتيزم

figure (8)



ʔuriidud-ʔaddawaaʔa ʔallaði yuçaaliju r-rumatizm  
Want-I the- medicine which cures the- rheumatoid  
I want the medicine which cures rheumatoid  
vs

(32) أريد دواء يعالج الروماتيزم

ʔuriidu dawaaʔan yuçaaliju r-rumatizm  
want-I medicine cures the- rheumatoid  
I want a medicine that cures rheumatoid

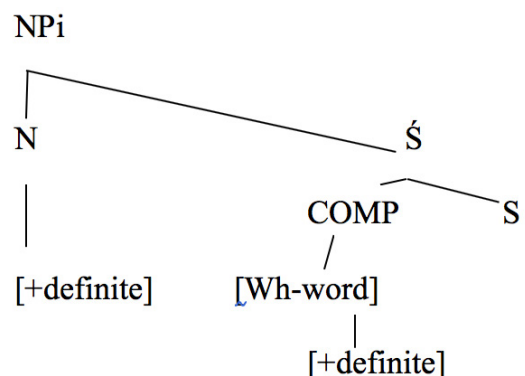
The following derivations exemplify both types of relative clause structure in Arabic, one describing an indefinite noun, the other describing a definite one.

(33) See figure (9)

What can be added in this respect is that the constraint that is part of Arabic grammar in this respect is not a constraint on the Deep Structure of the NP containing a relative clause, nor is it a constraint on rule application, namely the one which replaces the second NP with the proper relative pronoun. Rather, it is a constraint on the representation which is the output of the rule namely, having a relative pronoun in COMP position. Constraints of such type are not unattested in other languages. For constraints on rules and representations for a different linguistic phenomenon (see Broadwell, 1985).

What the theoretical account boils down to is that notions which are part of any syntax course can be used to enlighten both students and instructors to the nature and solution of the problem at hand. Within English language classes, instructors who engage in drawing phonological problems faced by Arabic speakers in learning English like the difference between /p/ and /b/ can also engage in analyzing and teaching syntactic matters like the deletion of a relative pronoun since the structural difference between English and Arabic is a serious one. The syntactic theory was claimed to be of little help to

figure (9)



the teaching of foreign languages, however, see Chomsky (1966), this is totally untrue as we believe that the present problem cannot be solved without some insightful knowledge of parametric variation in languages due to the presence of a constraint or absence of it. Now we proceed to see the pedagogical treatment of the problem

### VII. The Pedagogical Explanation

In the preceding section we have pinpointed the theoretical bases of the problem which reside in the characteristics of the constituents of the Arabic relative clause, its levels of representation and constraints on those levels which are in certain respects different from their English counterparts. In this section we feel that an additional shortcoming related to the context of learning could enhance the production of the error even if its theoretical causes are well-understood. (Stevick, 1994)

One: Lack of the use of 'spiral syllabi' among teachers of English. This problem isn't restricted to the teaching of relative pronouns; it is common among a good number of teachers on all levels. Teachers introduce a grammatical item to their students, say passive voice, in the first week of an English course and they don't come back to it neither for reinforcement through certain exercises nor through spotting examples in a reading comprehension. The result is that students fail to have enough exposure to that grammatical item. Not only do some teachers disregard the importance of a 'spiral syllabus', they violate in many instances the unity of certain textbooks. Many a time there are syllabi which cover some chapters in a textbook in a random manner. Authors of language textbooks usually work out a plan to cover certain language items and envision a progression by which users of such books move in a sequence from one level to

another bearing in mind that a student should master a skill or an item before s/he moves to another. Teachers, however, tend to design their syllabi in a haphazard manner; they begin with chapter one and from chapter one they move to chapter ten lacking any rationale for such oscillation between chapters. We don't claim that the order of chapters in a book is sacred and ought not to be violated; rather, we think that any change in the order of chapters in a textbook must be based on a rationale that is more convincing than that adopted by the author of the book. (Yalden, 1990)

Even when a syllabus doesn't aim at covering a whole text, the choice of material in such a syllabus is supposed to be based on a number of realities. Among these are:

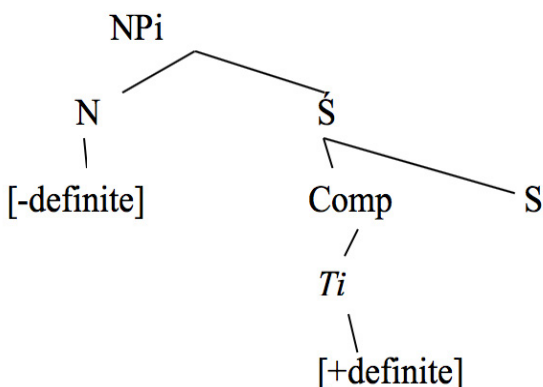
- (35) a. students' level,
- b. students' need,
- c. course duration,
- d. supplementary material used, and
- e. the teacher's education, rationale, philosophy and method.

Two: Sometimes there is a lack of emphasis on contextualized, communicative drills when addressing a grammatical concept such as the relative pronoun deletion. It is worth mentioning that carrying out a drill in a nimble and rewarding manner is a difficult task that requires a fluent and well-trained teacher. Drills are not only exercises at the end of a chapter that students are asked to parrot.

Creative and well-trained teachers can maneuver around in a class and introduce instantaneous drills with a multiplicity of substitutions allowing students to practice certain items with little breaks between their roles. Such procedure in handling drills allows students to acquire the foreign language with a competence which approximates their acquisition of their native language. Unfortunately, many teachers avoid contextualized drills either because of mere ignorance of their value in reinforcing the language skills, or because of some incompetence due to the lack of fluency and confidence in one's oral language skills.

Three: Teacher-centered classroom is another shortcoming of our teaching procedures. The nature of language teaching defies a lecturing setting in which teachers become involved in discussing grammatical issues in complete isolation from a real language environment. One of the major drawbacks in foreign language methodology is the clear indulgence of

figure (10)



teachers in the explication of grammatical issues such as the relative clauses, the passive voice, the reported speech, etc. Such an approach, referred to as the grammar translation approach, offers little or no involvement of students in the teaching process; students end up learning more about the language than the language itself. The general conviction among foreign language teachers and researchers of the present is in favor of an indispensable involvement of students in intensive class activities that are especially designed by teachers to reinforce all language skills that students are introduced to. (Edge, 1993).

In this context, the teaching of relative clauses is not any different. We envision the creation of a language environment in which students practice, through real life drills, the insertion of the relative pronoun in the position where a foreign student is likely to delete it in a sentence. The aim is to bring about cognitive awareness of the structure in the minds of the learners to the extent that the absence of a relative pronoun would sound as an anomaly for a student of English as a foreign language. Hence, a student-centered classroom offers students the opportunity to have the ultimate amount of exposure to the target language. In an authentic environment where s/he becomes able to distinguish wrong constructions without resorting to grammar books for guidance which can be temporary and inefficient. Our claim of a student-centered environment is seconded by the fact that such an environment generates love and attachment to the foreign language once competence of some degree is achieved.

#### VIII. Implications and Predictions:

Now we want to see if the theoretical account suggested above has validity with respect to other areas of the learning of English as a foreign language. In our opinion it does! A major error which most of us, teachers of English to Arabic-speakers, encounter is the absence of the indefinite articles "a" and "an" when required with a countable singular noun. The following data was collected from the exam papers of English majors at An-Najah University.

- (36) a. We have what we call clitic (instead of "a clitic")  
 b. We must use copula in the sentence (instead of "a copula")  
 c. English syllable can begin with vowel sound (instead of "an English syllable can begin with "a vowel sound")

Such idiosyncratic sentences and many others

of their type show that the representation of an indefinite noun without any overt marking in Arabic, PA in particular, is carried over into English. In contrast, English has the overt markers "a" or "an" for expressing indefiniteness. Researchers have benefited from Markedness Theory (Beckman, 1995) in foreign language teaching whereby marked items are difficult to acquire. In this view, since English syntactically marks indefiniteness with a free lexical word and Palestinian Arabic does not, missing the indefinite lexeme in the foreign language is quite natural and expected especially if learners lack native-like competence in that foreign language.

#### IX. Recommendations

In addition to the recommendations given to foreign language teachers in the pedagogical account in section VII above, we should point out that some awareness of certain principles of the linguistic theory is a must with respect to foreign language teachers. Such knowledge arms them with insights as to how to approach a solution to the problems encountered in foreign language learning and teaching. As presented in the theoretical account, we have seen the roots of the error in the relative pronoun deletion in relative clauses. In previous works the source of the error was merely stated as negative transfer from the mother language. In our opinion, such an account is not sufficient. We should go one step further and have some analysis of the rules and principles which exist in both language systems and then see why transfer takes place in the first place. This is exactly what, we believe, has been done in this paper.

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