



Turkish tertiary level EFL learners' recognition of relative clauses

Arzu Koçak^{a 1} 

^a Hacettepe University, Ankara, Turkey

APA Citation:

Koçak, A. (2020). Turkish tertiary level EFL learners' recognition of relative clauses. *Journal of Language and Linguistic Studies*, 16(4), 1637-1655. Doi: 10.17263/jlls.850976

Submission Date: 23/10/2019

Acceptance Date: 30/06/2020

Abstract

This research study investigated Turkish Tertiary Level EFL learners' recognition level of relative clauses. The study also examined the difficulty level of types of relative clause constructions for Turkish EFL learners and the effect of instruction on the learners' acquisition of English relative clauses. The data were gathered from two different tests (a pre-test and a post-test) given to 30 philology students studying at the Preparatory School at Hacettepe University. The data obtained from the pretest indicated that the participants needed remedial teaching; therefore, "relative clauses" were taught to students through six-hour form-focused class instruction. Two weeks later, the post-test was administered to the participants to assess the effectiveness of instruction on students' identification level of relative clauses. The data collected from the tests were analyzed quantitatively using SPSS. Findings showed that although most of the participants are good at identifying relative clauses, it is noteworthy that their recognition level of relative clauses changed significantly according to the various types of relative clause constructions. In addition, the results showed that the explicit instruction facilitated the acquisition of relative clauses to a great extent. Results of this study may provide English instructors and EFL curriculum designers with relevant information about teaching and learning of English relativization, and emphasizes the necessity of form-focused instruction.

© 2020 JLLS and the Authors - Published by JLLS.

Keywords: Relative clause structures; Turkish tertiary level EFL learners; instruction; form-focused instruction; remedial teaching

1. Introduction

Many second language acquisition (SLA) researchers have been interested in second language (L2) learners' acquisition of English relative clauses (ERC). Some researchers tried to express ERC acquisition through language universals, which are claimed to govern the acquisition order of RC types in world languages. Furthermore, it has been stated that there is a relationship between second language acquisition of ERCs and the role of learners' native language (Phoocharoensil, 2010). In addition, in the process of ERC acquisition, L2 English learners generally rely on specific learning strategies which

¹ Corresponding author.

E-mail address: kocaka@hacettepe.edu.tr

include first language transfer. These strategies often lead learners to ungrammatical structures in the target language (Phoocharoensil, 2010).

Compared with some other structures in English, it has been thought that relative clause constructions in English are quite challenging for many foreign and second language students (Celce-Murcia & Larsen-Freeman, 1999). It has been revealed by a number of researchers that first language (L1) influence (Chang, 2004; Gass, 1979; Schachter, 1974), avoidance (e.g. Gass, 1980; Maniruzzaman, 2008; Zhao, 1989), and overgeneralization (e.g. Erdogan, 2005; Schwartz & Sprouse, 1996; Selinker, 1992, White, 1991) pose main problems about acquiring a language for students who try to learn English as a second language.

A number of researchers have examined the acquisition English relative clauses from various angles. It is now in general accepted that three factors – interlingual, intralingual and universal factors-determine the acquisition of relative clauses (Xiaoling & Mengduo, 2010). In addition, with regard to teaching relative clauses, the impact of having different approaches to teaching grammar (form-focused instruction vs. the combination of form-focused instruction and communicative language teaching) on the learners' acquisition of relative clauses has been investigated (Cheng, 2007).

Second language education researchers and educators have focused on relative clause (RC), which is one of the most well-known kinds of subordinate clauses as language learners consider that relative clauses have complex structures and their complexity causes some problems for learners during the instructional process. (Gas & Selinker, 2001). In addition, relative clauses have been studied by linguists since they are widely regarded as distinctive syntactic structures which are grammatically significant. (Rokni & Rahmani, 2012). It is not easy for learners to “produce, comprehend and imitate” RCs (Rokni & Rahmani, 2012, p. 29).

In Turkey, as a part of university entrance exam, students who aim to attend English philology departments have to take a language test. This test includes eighty multiple choice questions designed to assess students' grammar and vocabulary knowledge, and reading skills. The problem is that there is a big gap between the test format of university entrance language test and the assessment techniques used at tertiary level to assess philology students' language proficiency. At the preparatory school, the instructional program aims to evaluate philology students' both recognition and production level of the target language. However, when these students start to attend courses at the Preparatory School, it is seen that although they manage to attend philology departments at a university, they lack of the knowledge of advanced grammar points. Moreover, it is obvious that they have problems not only in recognizing but also producing correct grammar items. These students are used to answering multiple choice questions (recognition of correct grammar items); however, it seems that they generally decide on the correct structure through using some test techniques not through using their grammar knowledge. In this sense, this study investigates to what extent philology students are good at recognizing various types of English relative clauses.

Previous studies have almost exclusively focused on examining the potential problems EFL learners encounter in English relative clause acquisition and the errors they make in the use of relative clauses (Izumi, 2003; Phoocharoensil & Simargool, 2010; Erdoğan, 2005). In addition, the majority of prior research on EFL learners' acquisition of relativization has been carried out with intermediate level students (Erdoğan, 2005; Fridman & Haznedar, 2015; Nosratzadegan, Seifoori & Maftoon, 2017; Phoocharoensil & Simargool, 2010). Moreover, in the Turkish EFL context, some studies were conducted on learners' use of English relative clauses (Erdoğan, 2005; Fridman & Haznedar, 2015; Ordem, 2017). However, there is a lack of research investigating Turkish EFL learners' recognition of relative clauses. Therefore, this study focuses on assessing Turkish tertiary level EFL learners' recognition of relative clauses. The study also examines the difficulty level of types of relative clause

constructions for Turkish EFL learners at level B2 and the effect of instruction on the learners' acquisition of English relative clauses.

1.1. Literature review

1.1.1. Linguistic Universals in Relation to ERC Acquisition

1.1.1.1. The Perceptual Difficulty Hypothesis (PDH)

The Perceptual Difficulty Hypothesis (PDH) was proposed by Kuno (1974) to explain ERC acquisition. The PDH claims that it is perceptually easier to understand and use right-embedded RC, as in example (1), than the center-embedded counterpart, as in example (2).

(1) The doctor ate the apple that was rotten.

(2) The apple that the doctor ate was rotten.

Kuno (1974) states that the difficulty in the center-embedded RC stems from the way it is placed between the matrix-clause subject and the predicate. The processing of the entire sentence is interrupted by such a RC insertion since the RC as the intervening element can easily surpass the speaker's and the hearer's memory span. On the other hand, since the RC in the right embedding occurs at the end of the whole sentence, it is thought to be less complicated. As there is no interruption in the sentence, it facilitates the human memory system. Therefore, it is predicted that the right-embedded RC occurs with higher frequency than center-embedded one. Previous studies have also shown that it is significantly more difficult for second language learners to acquire center-embedded ERC's than right-embedded ones (Abdolmanafi & Rezaee, 2012; Chang, 2004; Chou, 2006; Flanigan, 1995; Izumi, 2003).

1.1.1.2. The Noun Phrase Accessibility Hierarchy (NPAH)

The NPAH was first suggested by Keenan and Comrie (1977) and then it was utilized in SLA as a universal hierarchy established to forecast the difficulty order of RC acquisition. This hypothesis suggests the hierarchy of relativizability of different NP types. Keenan and Comrie (1977) states that all of the languages do not have relative clauses, and languages allowing relativization have the subject relative (SU) as basic. A well-known hierarchy of relativizable grammatical relations for world languages proposed by Keenan and Comrie (1977) are shown below:

SU > DO > IO > OPREP > GEN > OCOMP

(3) That's the man [who ran away]. (SU)

(4) That's the man [whom I saw yesterday]. (DO)

(5) That's the man [whom I gave the letter to]. (IO)

(6) That's the man [whom I was talking about]. (OPREP)

(7) That's the man [whose sister I know]. (GEN)

(18) That's the man [whom I am taller than]. (OCOMP)

(Adapted from Keenan & Comrie, 1977)

According to the above hierarchy, OCOMP (the object of comparative) is the most marked RC type, while SU (the subject relative clause) is viewed as the least marked. With regard to the order of acquisition predicted by NPAH the unmarked ERC types tend to be acquired earlier than the marked ones (Gass & Selinker, 2008). Moreover, such an acquisition order is considered to be equal with an order of difficulty for L2 RC acquisition (Ellis, 1994). That is, less marked ERC types tend to pose fewer problems for learners than those with higher degree of markedness.

As regards the L2 acquisition of ERC's, several research studies have given support to NPAH (Chou, 2006; Eckman, Bell, & Nelson, 1988; Izumi, 2003). These studies have indicated that the learners who have different mother tongues seemed to acquire the ERC types according to the hierarchy in the NPAH. That is, OCOMP (the object of comparative) appeared to be the most difficult and thus acquired the last, while SU (the subject relative clause) seemed to be the easiest and therefore acquired first.

1.1.2. Some Studies on the Second Language Learners' Acquisition of English Relative Clauses

Earlier studies on the acquisition of relative clauses reported in the literature are divided broadly into two categories. The studies within the first group investigate hypotheses which concern the difficulty level of forming and processing different types of relative clauses. For instance, there are two plausible hypotheses that produce specific predictions about RC acquisition: Keenan and Comrie's (1977) Noun Phrase Accessibility Hierarchy (NPAH) and Kuno's (1974) The Perceptual Difficulty Hypothesis.

Hamilton (1994) and O'Grady (1999) accounted for relative clause acquisition regarding the internal construction of RCs. Hamilton (1994) focused on the concept of processing discontinuity, and considered it to damage the process for mastering RC structures successfully. He found two types of processing discontinuity, namely center-embedded RCs and syntactic nodes of phrasal or sentential boundary, which separates a relative pronoun from a noun removed from the RC. He claimed that when a sentence has processing discontinuity, it will be difficult to learn. As Subject-Object (SO) type own some processing discontinuities like verb phrasal or sentential boundaries and center embedding RC, it should be more difficult to process than Object-Subject (OS) type which own only one processing discontinuity, such as sentential boundary between an extracted noun and a relative pronoun. Similarly, O'Grady (1999) stated that the space between a relative pronoun and an extracted noun in relative clauses determines RC processing difficulty. Therefore, RC constructions like SO or OO types are assumed to be more difficult to master than RC structures such as SS or OS types because the former possesses two intervening nodes (i.e., verb phrase and sentence), whereas the latter has only one intervening node (i.e. sentence).

The studies in the second group conducted on RC contains experimental studies testing the theories about the mastery of relative clauses, or investigating L2 learners' acquisition of relative clauses to determine the sequence of particular difficulties in learning different types of RC structures. Some researchers have also strongly supported Keenan and Comrie's (1977) NPAH Hypothesis through providing powerful evidence (Izumi, 2003). For example, in a study conducted by Pavesi (1986) with Italian learners studying English as a foreign language, the participants' formal and informal learning experiences were compared. It was stated that in general, in each learning environment the participants' relativization process is parallel to the order that NPAH Hypothesis proposed. Similarly, Hawkins (1989) asked French English learners to do a cloze activity in which they were required to provide correct relativisers in a variety of sentences and reported that there was a strong connection between the hierarchy of learning difficulty in the acquisition of relative clauses created by NPAH and the level of difficulty the subjects experienced during the completion of the tasks.

On the other hand, some studies supported Kuno's (1974) Perceptual Difficulty Hypothesis. With regard to establishing the ranking of difficulty in mastering different types of RC structures (i.e., SS, SO, OS, and OO types), in a longitudinal study over a tenth-month period, Schumann (1980) investigated ESL learners' use of RC's. He stated that the learners went through the process of forming a relative clause on object position more frequently and more accurately than the process of relativizing on subjects. Correspondingly, Izumi (2003) conducted a study with 61 adult ESL learners who have different native languages and reported that overall, in the course of interpretation and sentence combining activities the participants' formation and mastery of OO or OS types were seen to be more accurate than SS or SO types.

In sum, although a number of studies have been conducted on the RC acquisition in literature, it seems that as regards RC acquisition, little consensus is available. This indicates that the acquisition of relative clauses is a challenging task as it includes dominant elements such as L1 influence, universal principles of the RC and L2-specific features (Gass, 1978). Therefore, it is not easy to explain RC acquisition with any single theory or hypothesis.

1.2. Research questions

1. Is identifying relative clauses a problem for Turkish Tertiary Level EFL learners? If so, to what extent does instruction facilitate the acquisition of relative clauses?
2. What is the rank order of mastery over various types of relative clause constructions for Turkish Tertiary Level EFL learners?

2. Method

This paper presents research that investigates whether identifying relative clauses a problem for Turkish EFL learners. The participants are philology students studying in the Preparatory School at Hacettepe University. The study also aimed to provide information about which type of relative clause constructions students identify most accurately. In addition, the study aimed at revealing to what extent instruction aids students to acquire knowledge of relative clauses.

2.1. Sample / Participants

This research was conducted at the Preparatory school at a state University in Turkey. The aim of the Preparatory School is to enhance students' language skills and enable them to follow their undergraduate studies in their own department where the medium of instruction is English (%100). Students attend English courses for 25 hours per week in order to reach the required level. According to the results of the proficiency exam and the placement test students take at the beginning of the each academic year, they are placed in classes considering their English proficiency level (A1, A2, B1, B2.).

The participants in this study are 30 philology students (5 male and 25 female) at the Preparatory School at Hacettepe University. The students are at the upper-intermediate level (B2). The participants, aged between 18- 20, study in the same class but they are from different departments (Division of English Language Teaching, American Culture and Literature, English Language and Literature, English Linguistics). At the beginning of the study, the number of participants was 32. However, two of the participants did not attend the remedial teaching course and take the post-test. One of these participants' departments was Translation and Interpreting and the other's department was American Culture and Literature. Therefore, these students were not taken into consideration as participants for the study. The departments in which the participants will study for their subsequent four-year education were categorized into four groups as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. The departments of the participants

Department	The Number of the Students
English Language Teaching	10
English Linguistics	10
American Culture and Literature	7
English Language and Literature	3

2.2. Instruments

The data for this research were derived from two parallel tests (a pretest and a posttest). The researcher prepared the tests. To receive feedback on the questions in the tests and to evaluate the reliability of the tests, before the test administration process, test items were checked by five lecturers teaching English courses in the Preparatory School at Hacettepe University.

2.2.1. Tests

The tests consist of 50 likert-scale items (multiple-choice questions). Each question has five options (ranging from “a” to “e”) which include different types of sentences (simple, compound, complex and compound-complex). The sentences used for options were gathered from Demirezen’s (1998) book “From Sentence to Paragraph Structure”, Corpus of Contemporary American English (COCA) and some grammar books (Swan, 2005; Swan & Walter, 2011; Roberts, 2009; Thomson & Martinet, 2009). In both pretest and posttest, the questions are distributed equally according to the formation and position of relative clauses. The distribution of questions is presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Distribution of questions in pre-test and post-test

Type of Relative Clauses	Number of Questions
Relative pronouns as subject of a verb	10 (1-10)
Relative pronouns as object of a verb	10 (11-20)
Relative pronouns as the object of a preposition	10 (21-30)
Relative pronouns after an expression of time, place, manner, possession and quantity	10 (31- 40)
Relative clauses in cleft sentences	10 (41-50)
(Five types of relative clauses)	(Total: 50)

Some sample test items from the pretest and posttest are as follows:

A sample pretest item:

Which of the following sentences has a relative clause?

- He lacks self-confidence; as a result, he is unlikely to be successful.
- She may be late, in which case we ought to wait for her.
- When it is exposed to water, iron will eventually rust.
- Although I enjoy shopping, I haven't been to the mall in two weeks, and I am broke!
- One of the remotes controlled the stereo, and another controlled the television

A sample post-test item:

Which of the following sentences has a relative clause?

- Capitalism is an economic model that calls for control of the economy by individual households and privately owned businesses.
- Tourists say that travel broadens the mind; but it is very doubtful whether this is so; often, it narrows it.

- c) It is thought that apes, monkeys and dogs have emotions like ours because their behaviors resemble ours in comparable situations.
- d) Before we start counting the votes, the committee will announce the related procedures.
- e) I am sorry, sir, but your three minutes are over; you will have to deposit more money, if you wish to talk longer.

2.3. Data collection procedures

The study was conducted at the Preparatory School at Hacettepe University in the first semester, in October and November, 2013. After the tests were prepared by the researcher and checked by five English instructors to assess the reliability of test items, necessary changes were made in the tests and the study was started with the administration of pretest to participants. Both pre-test and post-test sessions were 60 minutes in length. After the pre-test session, the instructional process was initiated. Relative clauses (the formation and position of relative clauses, restrictive and non-restrictive relative clauses and some advanced points on relative clauses, such as cleft sentences, the use and meaning of “what” acting as noun + relative pronoun) were taught to students through six-hour class instruction using a power point presentation and a worksheet on relative clauses (some sample activities are presented in Appendix A). Students are required to do various activities during the instructional process:

- Watching a short video on relative clauses
(from http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3_tR59hcxwo)
- Underlining the relative clauses in the given sentences & Writing D for defining, ND for non-defining clauses and NO-R if the sentences contain no relative clauses
- Combining two sentences with a meaningful adjective clause in which the relative pronoun functions as the subject, object or object of preposition
- Combining the given sentences into adjective clauses by using when, where, why and as
- Choosing the correct explanation of the meaning of defining and non-defining sentences
- Punctuating the given sentences and adding commas where necessary

Two weeks later than the instruction, the posttest was given to the participants in order to assess the effectiveness of instruction on students' identification level of relative clauses.

2.4. Data analysis

The data gathered from the tests were analyzed quantitatively using Statistical Packages in Social Sciences (SPSS) Version 20. The answers to multiple choice questions were analyzed quantitatively using percentages and frequencies. In addition, to find out whether instruction has a reliable effect on students' knowledge of relative clauses, Wilcoxon signed-rank test was used. Moreover, the effect size was calculated to see the importance of instruction in terms of its effects on identification of relative clauses.

After each item in both pretest and posttest was analyzed using percentages and frequencies, the correct and incorrect items which have the highest frequency were determined to see which type of relative clause constructions are identified by the students most accurately.

3. Results and discussion

In the following section, data gathered from the questionnaire will be discussed separately in relation to the research questions

R.Q.1. Is identifying relative clauses a problem for Turkish Tertiary Level EFL learners? If so, to what extent does instruction facilitate the acquisition of relative clauses?

It was determined that the data gathered from the pretest and posttest were not normally distributed and this was statistically proven in both Kolmogorov-Smirnov and Shapiro-Wilk tests ($p < .05$). Therefore, instead of t-tests, a nonparametric test, Wilcoxon signed-rank test, was used. To answer the first research question, students' total pre-test and post-test scores were compared and analyzed using Wilcoxon signed-rank test to be able to determine whether students have difficulty in identifying relative clauses. In addition, students' answers for each item in pre-test and post-test were analyzed quantitatively using percentages and frequencies. The results concerning the comparison of pre-test and post-test results are shown in Table 3 and the analysis of each item is presented in Table 4.

Table 3. The results of Wilcoxon signed-ranks test with the effect size

	M	N	SE	Sig (two-tailed)	<i>r</i> (effect size)
PRE-TEST	78.66	30	24.08	.000	$r = -0.7495$
POST-TEST	96.46	30	7.09	($p < .01$) $Z = -4.105$	($r = +/- .5$ to -1.0 is a large effect)

Note: M: Mean N: Number of Students SE: Std. Error Mean

Table 4. The analysis of pre-test and post-test items

Question	Correct pre-test/post-test	Incorrect pre-test/post-test	Question	Correct pre-test/post-test	Incorrect pre-test/post-test
1	25/30	5/0	26	23/30	7/0
2	27/30	3/0	27	27/29	3/1
3	26/29	4/1	28	26/30	4/0
4	27/30	3/0	29	25/30	5/0
5	24/30	6/0	30	27/30	3/0
6	26/30	4/0	31	25/29	5/1
7	26/28	4/2	32	25/30	5/0
8	28/30	2/0	33	20/27	10/3
9	27/30	3/0	34	22/29	8/1
10	27/30	3/0	35	25/29	5/1
11	26/29	4/1	36	26/28	4/2
12	14/30	16/0	37	26/29	4/1
13	27/28	3/2	38	26/29	4/1
14	14/30	16/0	39	26/30	4/0
15	26/25	4/5	40	22/30	8/0
16	28/25	2/5	41	22/29	8/1
17	28/30	2/0	42	25/29	5/1
18	18/28	12/2	43	24/29	6/1
19	27/30	3/0	44	24/29	6/1

20	12/29	18/1	45	23/29	7/1
21	28/30	2/0	46	26/29	4/1
22	14/30	16/0	47	24/28	6/2
23	19/29	11/1	48	24/29	6/1
24	17/28	13/2	49	14/28	16/2
25	25/27	5/3	50	24/28	6/2
Total	1187/1451	313/49			
Percent	%79.13/96.73	%20.87/3.27			

As shown in Table 3, A Wilcoxon Signed-Ranks Test indicated that post-test scores were statistically significantly higher than pre-test scores, $Z = -4.105$, $p < .001$, with a large effect size

($r = -0.7495$). On average, participants did better on identifying relative clauses at the end of the course ($Mdn = 100.00$) than at the beginning of the course ($Mdn = 85.00$).

As can be seen from Table 3 and Table 4, most of the students do not have difficulty in identifying relative clauses. However, it seems that for some participants, it is still a problem to identify relative clauses although there is a better mean score achieved in the post-test. In spite of explicit instruction on formation and positions of relative clauses, difficulties continued for some of the participants. Moreover, the results gathered from the tests are shown in Figure 1 and Figure 2 considering the number of the students having a passing grade from pre-test and post-test.

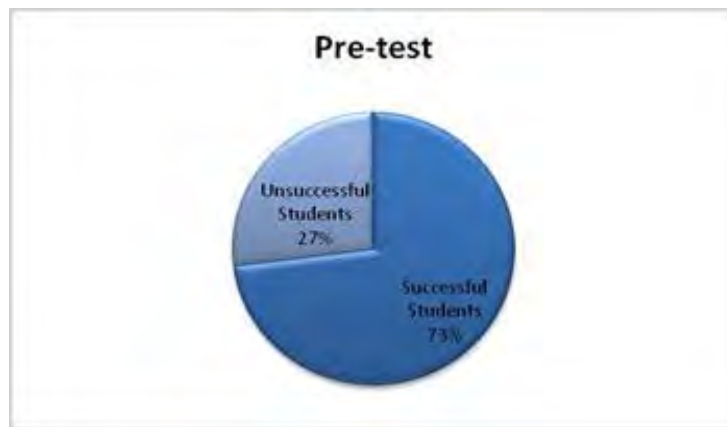


Figure 1. The results of the pre-test

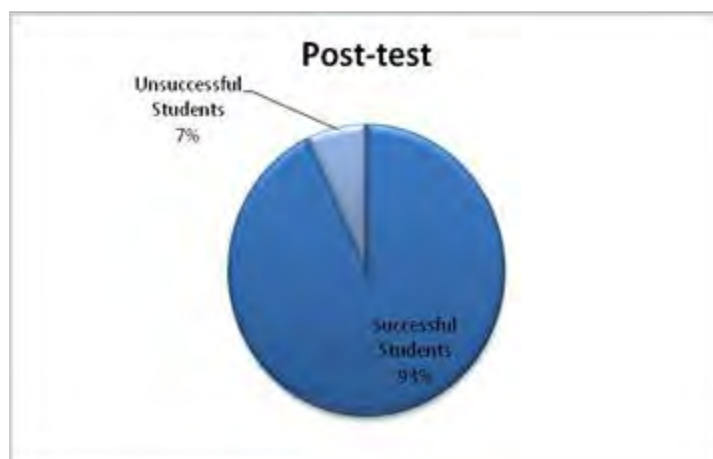


Figure 2. The results of the post-test

As shown in Figure 2 and Figure 3, the data gathered from the pretest indicated that a vast majority of the students (73%) did not have difficulty in identifying relative clauses. In addition, there is a better mean score achieved in the post-test. On the other hand, it seems that for some students (27%), it is still a problem to identify relative clauses. Moreover, it is noteworthy that the participants are philology students at the Preparatory School at Hacettepe University and they will study in various departments such as English Language Teaching, English Linguistics and English Language and Literature offering 100% English-medium instruction. Therefore, these students are expected to be competent at English grammar for their subsequent four year education in their own departments. Furthermore, it is necessary for these students to have mastery over English language since English will be a part of their own profession in the future. Thus, the data gathered from the pretest indicated that due to the prospective profession of the students, it is necessary that the participants minimize the problems with their recognition level of relative clauses. Therefore, the participants were thought to need to have instruction in relative clauses. In others words, the pre-test results revealed that they needed remedial teaching.

With regard to remedial teaching Corder (1974) states that “Remedial action becomes necessary when we detect a mismatch or disparity between the knowledge, skill or ability of someone and the demands that are made on him by the situation he finds himself in” (p.3). Corder (1974) also emphasizes that this broad definition of ‘remedial teaching’ is accepted as valid for all subject areas including language teaching and learning. Considering the demands of the situation which participants are in, remedial instruction on relative clauses was considered to be essential for students. It is obvious that participants have to achieve expected competencies in their field of education.

Although the number of the unsuccessful students was 27% in pre-test, the number of the unsuccessful students was just %7 in the post-test. The overall results gathered from the tests indicate that the six-hour teaching has facilitated students’ acquisition of English relative clauses to a great extent. In general, during the educational process, the immediate effects of formal instruction (the administration of the posttest just after the instruction) are expected to be positive. It noteworthy that in this study, the positive effects of instruction on students’ recognition level of relative clauses lasted even two weeks later than the explicit grammar instruction. Therefore, it is evident that instruction aids acquisition.

R.Q.2. What is the rank order of mastery over various types of relative clause constructions for Turkish EFL learners?

Students' incorrect answers which have the highest frequency in pre-test and post-test were examined for each type of relative clause constructions to determine the level of difficulty of each type of relative clause in terms of recognition. The results are shown in Table 5 and Figure 3.

Table 5. The difficulty level of relative clause constructions for students

Type of Relative Clauses	PRE-TEST		POST-TEST		TOTAL	TOTAL
	INCORRECT ANSWERS	INCORRECT ANSWERS	INCORRECT ANSWERS	INCORRECT ANSWERS		
Type of Relative Clauses	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
Relative pronouns as subject of a verb	37	%11.82	3	%6.12	40	%11.05
Relative pronouns as object of a verb	80	%25.56	16	%32.65	96	%26.52
Relative pronouns as the object of a preposition	69	%22.04	7	%14.29	76	%20.99
Relative pronouns after an expression of time, place, manner, possession and quantity	57	%18.21	10	%20.41	67	%18.51
Relative clauses in cleft sentences	70	%22.36	13	%26.53	83	%22.93

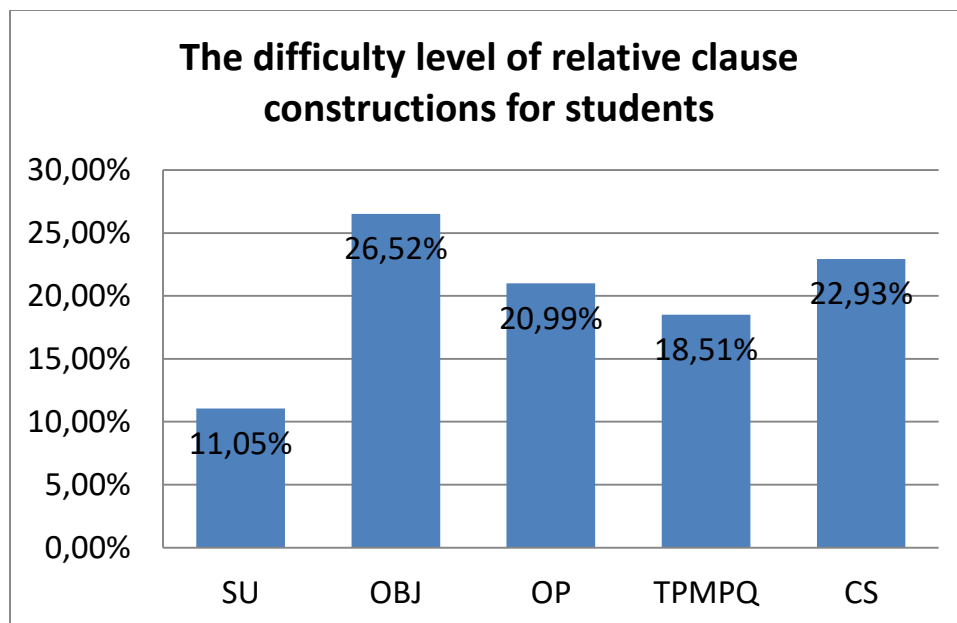


Figure 3. The difficulty level of relative clause constructions for students

As shown in Table 5 and Figure 1, as regards the incorrect answers of students both in pre-test and post-test, the most difficult relative clause constructions for students to identify is relative clauses in which relative pronouns function as the object of a verb (26.52%). The results also indicated that most of the students (53%) had difficulty in identifying contact clauses. It is followed by relative clauses used

in cleft sentences (22.93%). As regards the difficulty level, the third relative clause construction is relative clauses in which relative pronouns function as the object of a preposition (20.99%). It is followed by relative clauses in which relative pronouns function after an expression of time, place, manner, possession and quantity (18.15%). The easiest relative clause construction for students to identify is relative clauses in which relative pronouns function as the subject of a verb (11.5%). In other words, the difficulty level of relative clause constructions for the participants descends in the following order:

1. Relative pronouns as object of a verb
2. Relative clauses in cleft sentences
3. Relative pronouns as the object of a preposition
4. Relative pronouns after an expression of time, place, manner, possession and quantity
5. Relative pronouns as subject of a verb

4. Conclusions

The purpose of this study was to investigate Turkish Tertiary Level EFL learners' identification level of English relative clauses. The study also explored the difficulty level of types of relative clause constructions for Turkish EFL learners. In addition, the study provided information about whether instruction aided the acquisition of relative clauses. Moreover, the study investigated the necessity of remedial teaching for the participants.

The results of the study show that most of the students (93%) do not have difficulty in identifying relative clauses. Nevertheless, it is still a problem for some students (7%) to identify relative clauses despite the explicit instruction and corrective feedback given on the various types of relative clause constructions. As the participants are philology students, they are expected to be competent at English grammar for their subsequent four-year education in their own departments.

Although most of the participants are good at identifying relative clauses, it is noteworthy that their recognition level of relative clauses changes significantly according to the various types of relative clause constructions. As regards the number of incorrect answers given by the students, the results of the study indicate that the easiest relative clause construction type for students to identify is relative clauses in which relative pronouns function as the subject of a verb (11.05%). This confirms Keenan and Comrie's (1977) The Noun Phrase Accessibility Hierarchy (NPAH), which has indicated that with regard to the order of difficulty for L2 RC acquisition, SU seemed to be the easiest and therefore acquired the first as the least marked RC type. The results of the study show that SU type relative clause construction is followed by relative clauses in which relative pronouns function after an expression of time, place, manner, possession and quantity (18.51%). As regards the difficulty level, the third relative clause construction is relative clauses in which relative pronouns function as the object of a preposition (20.99%). This is also followed by relative clauses used in cleft sentences (22.93%). The most difficult relative clause construction for students to identify is relative clauses in which relative pronouns function as the object of a verb (26.52%). The results also indicate that concerning relative clauses in which relative pronouns function as the object of a verb, most of the students (53%) had difficulty in identifying contact clauses.

With regard to the necessity of remedial teaching for the participants, it seems that 27% of the participants failed in the pre-test. Since the participants are philology students at the Preparatory School and they will study at different departments such as Linguistics, English Language Teaching, English Language and Literature and American Culture and Literature offering 100% English-medium

instruction, it is surely beyond doubt that they should have mastery over English language since English will be their own profession in the future.

As regards the effect of instruction on learners' recognition of relative clauses, the results show that although the posttest was administered to students two weeks later than the instruction (six-hour remedial teaching), it is clear that formal instruction facilitated their identification level of relative clauses to a great extent. Previous research has also showed that the SLA research studies that compared classroom research with the 'street learners' has given persuasive evidence which confirms the significant contribution of instruction to acquisition (Krashen & Seliger, 1975; Long, 1983). As Han (2004) highlights, "explicit instruction (rule explication and/or corrective feedback) has, potentially, a useful contribution to make the learners' noticing of specific features in the input" (p. 135). Ellis (1994) also recommended that formal instruction improve both the rate of the learning process and the 'route' of acquisition.

4.1. Recommendations and Pedagogical Implications

The study indicates that instruction plays an important role in the acquisition of relative clauses. With regard to the teaching and learning of English relativization, L2 learners' attention to detailed analysis of grammar structures facilitates the recognition and comprehension of RCs. Therefore, in order to improve students' knowledge of the target structure focus on instruction should be integrated into the language classes since they can help L2 learners to achieve higher levels of proficiency as supported by some studies (Kempees, 2011).

The present study aimed at investigating tertiary level L2 learners' recognition level of various types of relative clause constructions. In order to analyze the order of difficulty for L2 RC acquisition, another study which examines learners' production level of English relative clauses should be conducted.

5. Ethics Committee Approval

The author(s) confirm(s) that the study does not need ethics committee approval according to the research integrity rules in their country (Date of Confirmation: December 11, 2020).

Acknowledgements

A part of this study was presented at Boğaziçi University School of Foreign languages 2nd Elt conference, Boğaziçi University, İstanbul, Turkey on 27-28 September 2019 and he paper has not been published previously anywhere.

References

- Abdolmanafi, S. J., & Rahmani, Z. (2012). An investigation of the learnability of relative clauses by EFL learners. *World Journal of English Language*, 2(3), 29-37.
- Celce-Murcia, M., & Larsen-Freeman, D. (1999). *The grammar book: An ESL/EFL teacher's course* (2nd ed.). Singapore: Heinle & Heinle Publishers.
- Chang, Y. F. (2004, May). *Second language relative clause acquisition: An examination of cross-linguistic influences*. Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Association for Applied Linguistics Portland, OR.

- Cheng, Y. (2007). The Effects of Two Teaching Methodologies on the Hierarchy of Difficulty of Restrictive Relative Clauses among Taiwanese Tenth Graders. *Linguistics Journal*, 3(3), 72-105.
- Chou, Y. (2006). *Acquisition of English relative clauses by Taiwanese EFL college students* (Unpublished MA thesis). National Sun Yet-Sen University.
- Corder, S.P. (1974). *Error analysis and remedial teaching*. Paper presented at the IATEFL Conference, Budapest.
- Demirezen, M. (1993). *From sentence to paragraph structure*. Ankara, Turkey: Adım Publishing.
- Ellis, R. (1994). *The study of second language acquisition*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Eckman, F., Bell, L., & Nelson, D. (1988). On the generalization of relative clause instruction in the acquisition of English as a second language. *Applied Linguistics*, 9, 1-20.
- Erdogan, A. (2005). Use of English relative clauses by Turkish learners: A study of errors. Retrieved January 18, 2009, from <http://sunzil.lib.hku/hkjo/view/10/100022.pdf>.
- Flanagan, B. O. (1995). Anaphora and relativization in child second language acquisition. *SSLA*, 17, 331-351.
- Fridman, İ., & Haznedar, B. (2015). Immediate and Long-term Effects of Form-Focused Instruction in the Acquisition of English Relative Clauses: Evidence from Turkish EFL Learners. *Boğaziçi Üniversitesi Eğitim Dergisi*, 21(1), 35-53.
- Gass, S. (1979). Language transfer and universal grammatical relations. *Language Learning*, 29(2), 327-344.
- Gass, S. (1978). An investigation of syntactic transfer in adult second language learners. In R. C. Scarcella & S. D. Krashen (Eds.), *Research in second language acquisition* (pp. 132-141). Rowley, MA: Newbury House.
- Gass, S. (1980). An investigation of syntactic transfer in adult second language learners. In R. Scarcella & S. Krashen (Eds.), *Research in second language acquisition*. Rowley, MA: Newbury House.
- Gass, S.M., & Selinker, L. (2001). *Second Language Acquisition: An Introductory Course*. New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- Gass, S. & Selinker, L. (2008). *Second language acquisition: An introductory course*. New York: Taylor & Francis.
- Hamilton, R. (1994). Is implicational generalization unidirectional and maximal? Evidence from relativization instruction in a second language. *Language Learning*, 44, 123-157.
- Han, Z. (2004). *Fossilization in Adult Second Language Acquisition*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters Ltd.
- Hawkins, R. (1989). Do second language learners acquire restrictive relative clauses on the basis of relational or configurational information? The acquisition of French subject, direct object and genitive restrictive relative clauses by second language learners. *Second Language Research*, 5, 156-188.
- Izumi, S. (2003). Processing difficulty in comprehension and production of relative clauses by learners of English as a second language. *Language Learning*, 53(2), 285-323.
- Keenan, E., & Comrie, B. (1977). Noun phrase accessibility hierarchy and universal grammar. *Linguistic Inquiry*, 8, 63-99.

- Krashen, S., & Seliger, H. (1975). The essential contributions of formal instruction in adult second language learning. *TESOL Quarterly* 9, 173-183.
- Kuno, S. (1974). The position of relative clauses and conjunctions. *Linguistic Inquiry*, 5, 117-136.
- Long, M. (1983). Does second language instruction make a difference? A review of the research. *TESOL Quarterly*, 17, 357-82.
- Maniruzzaman, M. (2008). Avoidance behaviour in EFL Learning: A study of undergraduates. Retrieved May 9, 2009, from www. Articlebase.com.
- Nosratzadegan, N., Seifoori, Z., & Maftoon, P. (2017). Persian Speakers' Recognition of English Relative Clauses: The Effects of Enhanced Input vs. Explicit Feedback Types. *Issues in Language Teaching*, 5(2), 232-211.
- O'Grady, W. (1999). Toward a new nativism. *SSLA*, 21, 621-633.
- Ordem, E. (2017). Acquisition of zero relative clauses in English by adult Turkish learners of English. *Journal of Education and Training Studies*, 5, 190-195.
- Pavesi, M. (1986). Markedness, discoursal modes and relative clause formation in a formal and an informal context. *SSLA*, 8, 38-55.
- Phoocharoensil, S. (2010). Language Universals and Learning Strategies in L2 Relative Clause Acquisition. *The International Journal of Learning*, 17(2), 95-107.
- Phoocharoensil, S., & Simargool, N. (2010). English Relativization and Learners' Problems. *Journal of Pan-Pacific Association of Applied Linguistics*, 14(1), 109-129.
- Roberts, K.W. (2009). *The Azar-Hagen grammar series. The bank for understanding and using English grammar* (4th ed.). England: Pearson Education Limited
- Rokni, A., & Rahmani, Z. (2012). An Investigation of the Learnability of Relative Clauses by EFL Learners. *World Journal of English Language*, 2(3), 29-37.
- Schachter, J. (1974). An error in error analysis. *Language Learning*, 24, 205- 214.
- Schwartz, B. & Sprouse, R. (1996). L2 cognitive states and the Full Transfer/Full Access model. *Second Language Research* 12(1):40-72.
- Selinker, L. (1992). *Rediscovering interlanguage*. London: Longman.
- Schumann, J. (1980). The acquisition of English relative clauses by second language learners. In R. C. Scarcella & S. D. Krashen (Eds.), *Research in second language acquisition* (pp. 118-131). Rowley, MA: Newbury House.
- Swan, M. (2005). *Practical English usage* (3rd ed.). Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press
- Swan, M., & Walter, C. (2011). *Oxford English grammar course advanced*. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.
- Thomson, A.J., & Martinet, A. V. (2009). *A practical English Grammar. Exercise 2* (3rd ed.). Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.
- White, Lydia (1991). Argument Structure in Second Language Acquisition. *Journal of French Language Studies*, 1, 189-207.
- Xiaoling, J., & Mengduo, O. (2010). Interlingual Factors in Chinese College Students' Acquisition of English relative clauses. *Chinese Journal of Applied Linguistics*, 33(1), 110-126.

Zhao, R. (1989). A discourse analysis of relative clauses in Chinese and English: An error in ‘An error in error analysis’. *IDEAL*, 6, 105-17.

Appendix A. Sample exercises on relative clauses

A. Underline the *relative clauses* in the following sentences. Write **D** for **defining**, **ND** for **non-defining clauses** and **NO-R** if the sentences contain no relative clauses.

1. In America and Europe, here are thousands of doctors who now have learnt how to use acupuncture.
2. She used drugs, principally Marijuana, on which she became increasingly dependent.
3. The teacher gave an admonition to the student who kept coming to class late.
4. I have been learning Japanese since the last two years, yet I cannot speak and write it well.
5. William Shakespeare, who wrote the play King Lear, was a real genius in the field of drama.
6. They invited me to play backgammon, which was very kind of them.
7. The book you bought was printed in England.
8. The range of mountains in Thrace, which is located in parallel to the Black Sea, is called Istranca.
9. I hope you know how important it was what you did for us.
10. In my view, this is an unwise decision, which should be reconstructed right from the beginning.
11. The shop where I had shopped was raided by the thieves who were mostly teenagers.
12. My old sister, Jane, who was going to be married in a few months, had already received some presents, among which was a set of silver teaspoons.
13. He reported that the Persians and Ottomans fought, that the Ottomans won, that the two parties signed up a treaty later.
14. Turkey, which is located between Asia and Europe, is a bridge country between the West and the Middle East.
15. The professor you want to see is on leave this year.
16. He went to Ankara where he found a job as printer's apprentice with reasonable salary.
17. As soon as I sat down in the seat of the bus, I remembered that I didn't lock up the door.
18. The paintings I have advised her Turkish friends to buy were given to the National Museum by their owners.
19. Thus, it is important to study how a visually impaired individual, who cannot use feedback from the camera's viewfinder, can maneuver the camera in order to explore the environment effectively.
20. Specifically, we were not able to find numerous supervisors or administrators who were responsible for the guidance or leadership of technology and engineering education at the state level.
21. While I was sitting on the bus on my way to school, my coat got caught in the door of the bus.
22. To show the applicability of this approach, consider an experimental scenario in which experimenters want to select a broadcast protocol for use in a large-scale WSN deployment.
23. Pregnant women should be advised against rapid weight loss or crash dieting as this could lead to ketoacidosis, which can lead to neonatal death or cognitive impairment later in the child's life.
24. I finally finished the typing of my new book, a chapter of which was already typed by my assistant.
25. I have something you haven't seen before.

B. Combine the following two sentences with a meaningful adjective clause in which the relative pronouns functions as *the subject, object or objects of preposition*. Follow the model below:

I need a suit. I can wear it to the wedding.

I need a suit which/that I can wear it to the wedding.

I need a suit **I can wear it to the wedding.**

1. She is still waiting for the man. She was supposed to marry this man twenty years ago.

2. The girl has gone home. You have been waiting for her.

3. His books are filled with concrete details. He had observed them as a novelist.

4. I want to live among the people. I want to help them.

5. The train delayed. You were waiting for it.

6. This dress doesn't look good. It doesn't fit me anymore.

7. These books are very expensive. They are imported from England.

8. My children need larger shoes. Their shoes are too small.

9. I have a lawsuit against my nieces. They stole all of my property.

10. I would like to visit the Himalayas. They are the highest mountains of the world.

11. What is the subject? They are quarreling about it?

12. Life was teaching me through the people. I came into contact with them.

13. Language is a medium. The child acquires the cultural values of society through it.

14. Life is a stage. Everybody loses on it.

15. Young people are very much influenced by the society. They grow up in a society.

C. Combine the following sentences into adjective clauses by using *when*, *where*, *why* and *as*. Follow the model.

I generally eat at the restaurant. I work there.

I generally eat at the **restaurant where I work**.

1. My father dies on that day. I got married on that day.

2. I gave detailed instructions to the hotel. I made reservations there.

3. I was in Ankara. I became interested in linguistics there.

4. I have a reasonable reason. I am scared of her.

5. Can you name the city? Architect Sinan buried there.

6. The Turkish Youth should follow the same steps. Kemal Atatürk followed the same steps.

7. You must tell me the reason. You are telling so many lies.

8. I still treasure the day. I met the woman of my life then.

D. Choose the correct explanation of the *meaning* of each sentence.

1. My brother, who lives in Phoenix, works at an engineering firm.
 - a) I have only one brother.
 - b) I have more than one brother.
2. The students who were accepted into the university were very excited.
 - a. All of the students were accepted into the university.
 - b. Only some of the students were accepted into the university.
3. John watched a movie on the DVD player that is in the den.
 - a. John has more than one DVD player.
 - b. John has only one DVD player.
4. The visiting executives, who were from Okinawa and were used to a warm climate, arrived in Chicago during a snowstorm.
 - a. All of the executives were from Okinawa.
 - b. Only some of the executives were from Okinawa.
5. Our wood-burning stove, which is in the corner of our living room, keeps the first floor of the house warm.
 - a. There is only one wood-burning stove in the house.
 - b. There is more than one wood-burning stove in the house.
6. The teacher trainees who are majoring in languages plan to teach.
 - a. All of the teacher trainees plan to teach.
 - b. Some of the teacher trainees plan to teach.
7. Babies, who begin talking at an early age, gain fluency early.
 - a. All of the babies beginning to talk at an early age gain fluency early.
 - b. Some of the babies beginning to talk at an early age gain fluency early.
8. Conifers, which have needles instead of leaves, are plentiful in the forests of the United States.
 - a. All conifers have needles instead of leaves.
 - b. Only some conifers have needles instead of leaves.
9. He threw away tomatoes which were rotten.
 - a. He threw away only the rotten tomatoes.
 - b. He threw away all of the tomatoes.
10. I got into the bus which was parked behind the post Office.
 - a. There was only one bus behind the post office.
 - b. There were more than one bus behind the post Office.

E. Punctuate the following sentences. Add *commas* where necessary. Write “no commas” if you think that *commas are not necessary*.

1. The city of Dubrovnik which is on the Adriatic coast is surrounded by an ancient Stone wall.
2. The instructor who teaches grammar class gives very clear explanations.
3. On our last family vacation we went to Disneyland where we shook hands with Mickey Mouse.
4. People who travel and live in other countries learn to appreciate other cultures and customs.
5. The book that got the prize for best first novel was written by my landlady.
6. Mahatma Gandhi who was a political leader of India was assassinated by a fanatic in 1948.
7. The US President who followed Abraham Lincoln was Andrew Johnson.
8. Animal Farm which was written by George Orwell is an irony on the corruption of political leaders.

9. Wrestling which is a national game for Turks is very popular in Turkey.
10. The US President who followed Abraham Lincoln was Andrew Johnson.
11. The Marriage of Figaro which is one of Mozart's comedic operas is performed regularly on stages around the world.
12. The doctor who saw my mother says she is very fit.
13. A.G.BELL who invented the telephone was an expert on phonetics.
14. The book that I'm reading is from the Everest Public Library where you can borrow books for up to three weeks.
15. I am sorry for people who cannot laugh at themselves.

Yabancı dil olarak İngilizce öğrenen üniversite düzeyindeki Türk öğrencilerinin İngilizce sıfat cümlelerini tanıma düzeyi

Öz

Bu çalışma yabancı dil olarak İngilizce öğrenen üniversite düzeyindeki Türk öğrencilerinin İngilizce sıfat cümlelerini tanıma düzeyini araştırmıştır. Bu çalışma ayrıca öğrenciler için farklı türlerdeki İngilizce sıfat cümlelerinin zorluk derecesini ve öğretimin öğrencilerin sıfat cümlelerini tanıma seviyesi üzerindeki etkisini incelemiştir. Buna ek olarak, çalışmada, öğrencilerin öğrenme seviyelerinin bölümlere göre (İngiliz Dili Eğitimi, Amerikan Kültürü ve Edebiyatı, vs.) nasıl değiştiği araştırılmıştır. Veriler Hacettepe Üniversitesi Yabancı Diller Yüksekokulunda öğrenim gören 30 filoloji öğrencisine uygulanan ön test ve son testten elde edilmiştir. Ön testten elde edilen sonuçlar, öğrencilerin telafi öğretimine ihtiyaç duyduklarını göstermiştir. Bu nedenle, sıfat cümleleri öğrencilere altı saatlik yapı odaklı öğretim yöntemi ile anlatılmıştır. Bu öğretim sürecinden iki hafta sonra, öğrencilere, öğretimin öğrencilerin sıfat cümlelerini tanıma seviyesi üzerindeki etkisini görmek amacı ile son test verilmiştir. Toplanan veriler SPSS kullanılarak nicel yöntemlerle analiz edilmiştir. Sonuçlar öğrencilerinin çoğunun İngilizce sıfat cümlelerini tanıma konusunda başarılı olduğunu, ancak farklı türlerdeki sıfat cümlelerini tanıma seviyelerinde önemli farklılıklar olduğunu göstermiştir. Ayrıca, sonuçlar, doğrudan öğretimin sıfat cümlelerinin öğrenilmesine büyük ölçüde katkı sağladığını ortaya çıkarmıştır. Bu çalışmanın sonuçları İngilizce öğretmenlerine ve müfredat tasarımcılarına İngilizce sıfat cümlelerinin öğretimi konusunda uygulanabilir bilgiler verebilir.

Anahtar sözcükler: sıfat cümleleri; yabancı dil olarak İngilizce öğrenen üniversite düzeyindeki Türk öğrencileri; öğretim; yapı odaklı öğretim; telafi öğretimi

AUTHOR BIODATA

Arzu Koçak is a lecturer at Hacettepe University. She is currently teaching various courses at the School of Foreign Languages and in the department of English Language Teaching (ELT). She graduated from Hacettepe University, department of English Language Teaching. She obtained a MA degree in TEFL from Bilkent University and a PhD degree in ELT from Hacettepe University. Her research areas are integrating technology into foreign language teaching, teaching language skills and testing and evaluation in foreign language teaching.