

The Effect of Resumption as a Local Cue on the Production of Pseudo-clefts in L2

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Abstract

This study investigated the effect of resumption as a local cue on the production of pseudo-clefts in second language (L2). Eighteen female Persian speaking students, aged between 15 and 18 years, were recruited from a secondary school using a sentence repetition task. The test consisted of 27 items including 10 object pseudo-clefts with resumptive pronoun (OP), 5 object pseudo-clefts without resumptive pronoun (O), 5 subject pseudo-clefts (S) and 7 fillers. The obtained data was analyzed by conducting a One-Way Repeated Measure ANOVA. The results indicated that the presence of resumptive pronoun significantly reduced the accurate and complete production of object pseudo-clefts in L2. The results were also discussed with reference to some theories of resumption.

Keywords: pseudo-cleft, production, resumption, transfer

INTRODUCTION

According to Lewis (1993, p.151) "the cleft construction in English is a particular kind of predicate complement construction that serves to focus (one) part of the sentence". Lewis believes there are two kinds of cleft construction and names them cleft and pseudo-cleft "the cleft has it as its subject and something like a relative clause at the end". (2) is a cleft sentence:

- (1) The man saw a dog.
- (2) It was a dog that the man saw.

On the other hand, pseudo-cleft is defined as a sentence which has something like a Wh-clause in subject position. (3) is a pseudo-cleft:

- (3) What the man saw was a dog.

Resumption is a strategy used in English as in other languages like Irish and Lebanese Arabic. But the difference is in the acceptability of this strategy and the frequency of its utilization. When speakers cannot convey their intended meaning because of syntactic

ambiguity they use resumptive pronouns (Heestand, Xiang & Polinsky, 2011). Her in (4) is a resumptive pronoun:

(4) She's the teacher that everyone likes her.

The primary purpose of the current study is to examine the effect of resumption on the production of pseudo-clefts in L2. The participants were 18 female L2 learners aged 15 to 18 years. They were tested during a sentence repetition task consisting of 27 items including subject pseudo-clefts (S), object pseudo-clefts (O) and object pseudo-clefts with resumptive pronoun (OP) to elicit their production ability. Following Mc Kee and Mc Daniel (2001); Arnon (2005); Hofmeister and Norcliffe (2013); Rahmany, Marefat and Kidd (2013) it was predicted that resumption would facilitate the production of English pseudo-clefts.

Second and fourth graders' comprehension of complex sentences was investigated by Richgels (1983), using a picture selection task. Sentences were clefts and pseudo-clefts either passive or active and their noun-verb-noun relations were either according to children's expectations (typical) or against their expectations (atypical). The results showed that 1. The performance of fourth graders was better than that of second graders. 2. Active sentences were easier than passive sentences. 3. Sentences according to children's expectations were comprehended significantly better than those against their expectation. 4. No significant difference was found in cleft and pseudo-cleft comprehension.

McKee and McDaniel (2001) investigated the distribution of English resumptives in a series of sentences in adults and children by the use of two elicited production and one grammatically judgment experiment. The results of the two production experiments indicated that English speaking children's production patterns resembled those of adults but the use of resumptives by children was significantly higher in comparison to adults. The grammaticality judgment task revealed that children's acceptance of resumptives was also higher than adults. The interpretation of these findings was that there is a close resemblance between the grammar of children and that of adults. On the other hand, it was interpreted that the difference between the performance of adults and children in the judgment task was the reflection of the children's working memory capacity limitation. The higher rate of resumptives production and acceptance by children as McKee and McDaniel (2001) argued was attributed to differences in parsing and earlier shunting of complex clauses out of children's active memory in order to reactivate the referent.

Four to five-year-old children's comprehension and production of subject and object RCs was investigated by Arnon (2005) in Hebrew which is a true resumptive pronoun language using comprehension and elicited production. The results of the study showed that the children who produced the highest rate of resumptive pronouns in the elicitation task performed very poorly on gapped object RCs in the comprehension task. Subsequently the children who performed poorly on the comprehension task of the main study were tested administering a picture selection task involving gapped object

RCs and object RCs with resumptive pronouns. The presence of a resumptive pronoun remarkably increased comprehension and significantly reduced errors associated with thematic role assignment. Finally, it was suggested that the use of resumptive pronouns in production is associated with difficulty in comprehension of gapped object RCs, while their presence in the input makes comprehension more easily by helping thematic role assignment.

The role of resumption in the interpretation of object relative clauses (RCs) in Persian speaking children was investigated by Rahmany, et al. (2013). In this study sixty four (N = 64) children aged 3: 2 – 6: 0 were recruited who completed a referent selection task that tested their comprehension of subject RCs, gapped object RCs, and object RCs containing either a resumptive pronoun or an object clitic. The results of this investigation showed that the presence of a resumptive element (pronoun or clitic) facilitates children's processing of object RCs. Moreover, the interpretation of object RCs with every type of resumptive elements were more accurately than gapped subject and object RCs. At last it was suggested that resumptive pronouns facilitate the process of syntactically complex contexts because they provide a local cue to thematic role assignment.

The effect of resumption on the comprehension of Persian object pseudo-clefts was examined by Montaseri and Rahmany (2014). In their study nineteen (N = 19) monolingual Persian speaking children aged between 31 and 79 months were recruited from a kindergarten using a picture selection task. Consisting of 27 items including subject pseudo-clefts, object pseudo-clefts with resumptive pronoun, object pseudo-clefts with resumptive clitic, and gapped object pseudo-clefts. It was found that resumption does not have any significant effect on the comprehension of Persian object pseudo-clefts.

As it was reviewed previous studies have reported contradictory results with regard to the role of resumptives in the comprehension and production of complex sentences. In general it should be noted that most of the previous studies have supported the facilitating role of resumptives in the comprehension and production of language in adults and children, but this effect is more obvious for children. The current study investigated the effect of resumption on the production of pseudo-clefts in L2.

This study addresses the following question:

- Does resumption have any effect on the production of pseudo-clefts in L2?

METHODOLOGY

Participants

In this study 18 Persian-speaking learners of English as a Foreign Language (L2 learners) aged between 15 and 18 years were recruited from a female Secondary School for investigating the effect of resumption on the production of pseudo-clefts in L2.

Materials

The test used in this study included 27 items: 10 items were object pseudo-clefts with resumptive pronoun (OP), 5 object pseudo-clefts without resumptive pronoun (O), 5 subject pseudo-clefts (S), and 7 items were fillers which were applied for distracting participants' attention. This test was a standardized test adapted from Rahmany, Marefat and Kidd (2011). All of the verbs used in the test were in simple past and included pull, wash, grab, kiss and hit which are one part verbs in English, they were selected since their production and comprehension process is more simple than compound verbs. All the noun phrases used in the test were animate including: dog, bear, cow, elephant, horse which are very familiar animals, to prevent animacy effects (Correa, 1995; Brandt, Kidd, Lieven & Tomasello, 2009). As well as the more frequent a word is (like elephant) the easier to process than more infrequent ones (like falcon)(Levelt, Roelofs & Meyer, 1999). The participants' task was repeating the sentence read to them by the experimenter. There was just one experimenter who familiarized the participants with the materials and the procedure of experiment. The learners' response was recorded by a recorder set in order to be able to double check them for certainty (see appendix A for test).

Procedure

Eighteen female L2 learners aged 15–18 years was recruited from a secondary school. They were tested one by one in a quiet room. After greeting and some warm up expressions to reduce stress, the experimenter familiarized the participant with the procedure of testing by explaining one example, so that the experimenter read out one item to her and she was requested to listen carefully and repeat that item and she was told if she could not get the item, it would be repeated just one more time. Then the recorder set was turned on and the experimenter read items out one by one in a balanced intonation, after reading each item the participant was permitted to repeat that item. The complete and structurally correct answer was scored 1 and incomplete or deficient one 0.

RESULTS

The research question of the current study inquired whether resumption affects the production of pseudo-clefts in L2. To answer this research question, One-way Repeated Measure ANOVA was conducted. Before performing it, the descriptive statistics of the production of the three pseudo-cleft types, object with resumptive pronoun (OP), subject (S), and object (O) structures was computed. Table 1 below displays the related descriptive statistics. As can be seen in the table, the average mean score of object pseudo-cleft ($M = .58$) is more than both subject pseudo-cleft ($M = .50$), and object with resumption pseudo-cleft ($M = .40$). In fact object with resumption pseudo-cleft was the hardest sentence type.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics for the Production of Three Pseudo-Cleft Types

Sentence Types	Age	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Object with Resumption	15-16 Years	.2333	.23979	9
	17-18 Years	.5778	.38333	9
	Total	.4056	.35723	18
Subject	15-16 Years	.4630	.30932	9
	17-18 Years	.5370	.39772	9
	Total	.5000	.34773	18
Object	15-16 Years	.5278	.29167	9
	17-18 Years	.6389	.28260	9
	Total	.5833	.28440	18

The graphical illustration of the results is displayed in Figure below.

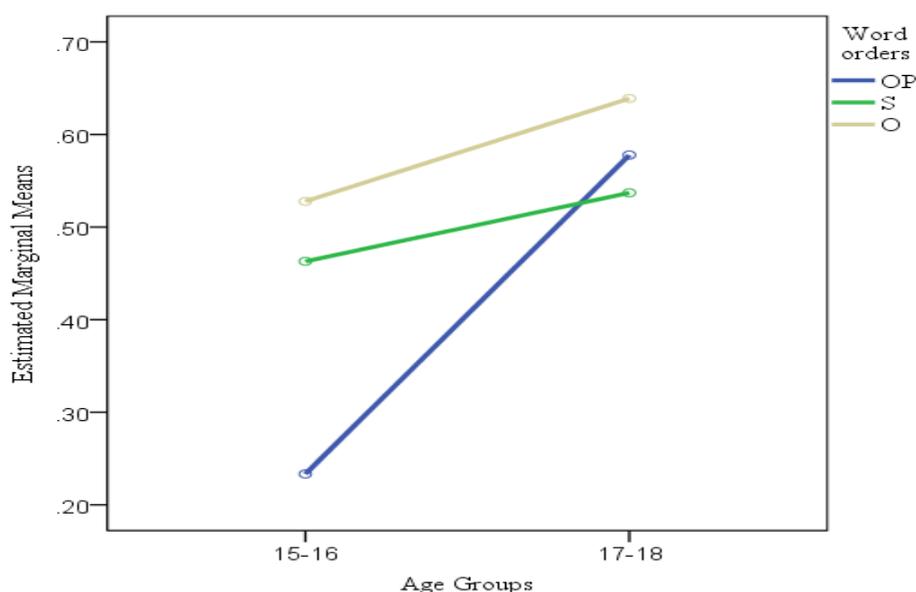


Figure 1. Mean scores of the production of object with resumption, subject, and object pseudo-clefts in L2

In order to see whether the differences were significant or not, a repeated measure ANOVA was performed with word order as within-subject factor and age as between-subject factor. As can be seen in Table 2, ANOVA showed a statistically significant difference in production of the three pseudo-cleft structures ($F(2, 15) = 6.01$, $p = .01$, Effect size = .44), in which p value (.01) was lower than the selected significant level for this study (.05); consequently, it can be asserted that word order affects the production of pseudo-clefts in L2. Besides, the interaction effect of the within and between-subject factors, (i.e., word order-age) effect was not significant ($F(2, 15) = 3.05$, $p = .07$, Effect size = .28). (See Table 2)

Table 2. ANOVA Results for the Production of Two Types of L2 Pseudo-Clefts

Effect	Value	F	Hypothesis d.f.	Error d.f.	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Word order	.555	6.012	2.000	15.000	.012	.445
Word order * Age	.711	3.054	2.000	15.000	.077	.289

As shown in Table 3, Post-hoc pair-wise comparison ANOVA revealed a statistically significant difference in means score just between the OP ($M = .40$), and O ($M = .58$) pseudo-cleft structures ($p = .008$, $p < .05$). However there was not found significant difference between OP and S ($M = .50$) ($p = .53$, $p > .05$), and between S and O ($p = .58$, $p > .05$). Accordingly it can be claimed that resumption with the mean score of .40, which was the hardest, in comparison with S ($M = .50$), and O ($M = .58$) does affect the production of pseudo-clefts in L2.

Table 3. Post-Hoc Comparison for the Comprehension of Three Types of L2 Pseudo-Clefts

(I) Word order	(J) Word order	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval for Difference	
					Lower Bound	Lower Bound
OP	S	-.094	.067	.535	-.274	.085
OP	O	-.178*	.050	.008	-.311	-.044
S	O	-.083	.062	.584	-.248	.081

DISCUSSION

The effect of resumptive pronouns (RPs) on the production of English (L2) pseudo-clefts was tested across this study to examine whether the regularity of resumptive RCs in Persian (Rahmany et al, 2011) as L1 transfer to L2 or not. The results of this study showed that resumption not only does not facilitate the production of L2 object pseudo-clefts but also makes them more difficult since the mean of object pseudo-clefts with resumptive pronoun (OP) is .40 while the mean of object pseudo-clefts without resumptive pronoun (O) is .58 and the Sig. (obtained from post-hoc pairwise comparison) between OP and O is .008 which is less than .05 and indicates the significant negative effect of RPs on the production of object pseudo-clefts. These results are not in line with some forgoing studies like Mc Kee and Mc Daniel (2001) and Hofmeister and Norcliffe (2013). The reasons for disagreement between the finding of this study and the results of previous ones are: 1. the extended attention of L2 learners paid to grammaticality of sentences and their avoidance of ungrammatical sentences (Sells, 1987; Prince, 1990). 2. L2 learners working memory capacity (Chomsky, 1965) because resumption makes the length of sentences longer and it causes the participants failing to remember the end of the sentence. 3. The participants of this study were adult L2 learners while most of the previous studies like Arnon (2005) and Rahmany et al (2013) had been in children. 4. This study had been performed in L2 while most of the previous ones had been done in L1. 5. In every study a specific type of structure had been examined. 6. This study was restricted to elicited sentences while in discourse domain and in unconscious production it would be certainly different. On the other hand the result of this study is the opposite point of comprehension study (Montaseri & Rahmany, 2015) because in comprehension task the presence of RPs provides an opportunity for participants to reactivate the referent in their memory (Mc Kee & Mc Daniel, 2001). Therefore resumption as a local cue is an obstacle for the production of L2 pseudo-clefts although it facilitates comprehension of them. According to the finding

of this study the frequency of resumption in Persian speaking children's language (Rahmany et al, 2013) did not transfer to L2.

CONCLUSION

The results of the current study revealed that resumption as a local cue not only does not facilitate the production of English pseudo-clefts in Persian speaking L2 learners but also significantly makes it more difficult. Pseudo-cleft structure is an uncommon complex kind of RC but the findings can be helpful in linguistics, teaching and overall pedagogical system.

IMPLICATIONS

This study suggests the following implications:

1. As studies on production are fewer than comprehension it is suggested future studies be conducted more on production. 2. Research on pseudo-clefts has also been limited especially in Persian thus they deserve more attention. 3. This study was limited to female L2 learners while gender may be an effective factor therefore it is suggested this investigation be performed on male students, too. 4. Replication of this study is suggested in other countries and other languages of the world.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A

1. What the dog pulled it was the bear.
2. What the cow washed was the elephant.
3. The bear on the tree
4. What grabbed the bear was the elephant.
5. What the bear kissed it was the horse.
6. What the horse hit was the dog.
7. The elephant near the house
8. What the elephant pulled it was the cow.
9. What washed the bear was the elephant.
10. What the bear grabbed was the dog.
11. What the cow kissed it was the elephant.

12. The brown horse
13. What the cow hit it was the dog.
14. What pulled the dog was the cow.
15. The dog on the table
16. What the cow washed it was the horse.
17. What the elephant grabbed it was the horse.
18. What kissed the dog was the horse.
19. The lying elephant
20. What the horse hit it was the bear.
21. What pulled the bear was the cow.
22. The white cow
23. What the dog washed it was the bear.
24. What the elephant grabbed it was the dog.
25. What the elephant kissed was the horse.
26. The bear in the jungle
27. What hit the cow was the horse.

Appendix B

What the horse hit was the dog.

