

The Performance of Iraqi EFL University Students in Using the Semantic Roles of the Subject and Object Complements

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Introduction

1.1 Problem

Complement is a term used in the analysis of grammatical functions to refer to a major constituent of the sentence or the clause structure. It is associated with **completing** the action specified by the verb. Generally, complement represents all obligatory features of predicate other than the verb, such as, an object and an adverbial. Most of Iraqi EFL university students face difficulties in differentiating between various types of the semantic roles of the subject complement (SC) and object complement (OC). In addition, they encounter difficulties in identifying the subject and object complements.

1.2 Aims of the Study

The study aims at:

1. Presenting a theoretical study about complements in general, their types and subject object complements in particular which can be helpful in identifying their semantic roles.
2. Identifying the Iraqi EFL university students' performance in using the semantic roles of the elements in question.
3. Finding out the subjects' errors and analyzing those errors through the results.

1.3 Hypotheses

It is hypothesized that:

1. Most of Iraqi EFL learners are not able to distinguish the semantic roles of subjects and object complements.
2. Subjects' achievement at the recognition level is expected to be better than their achievement at the production level.

1.4 Procedures

The researcher adopts the following procedures:

1. Presenting the literature relates to complements including definitions, forms ,types and uses.
2. Selecting a sample of EFL university students for conducting a test to investigate their performance in using the semantic roles of subject and object complements.
3. Identifying the learners' errors and analyzing to those errors.

1.5 Limits

The study will be confined to:

- 1- University students of the fourth year, Department of English College of Education, University of Babylon during the academic year 2010- 2011 since they are the most qualified undergraduate learners at the university level.
- 2- Investigating the semantic roles of subject and object complements: locative SC, recipient SC, agentive SC, characterization SC, identification SC, circumstantial OC, qualitative OC, locative OC, identification OC, and characterization OC.

1.6 Value

It is hoped that the findings of this study will be of some value to the researchers, textbook designers and book writers.

2. Complement

Gucker (1966:15) declares that a complement can be considered of any thing that answers the question what after a verb. Eastwood (1994:9) asserts that a complement is an adjective phrase or a noun phrase. Swan (1996:127) states that a complement is a word and an expression which completes the meaning of a verb. Richards and Richards (2002:95) suggest that complement is the part of the sentence which follows the verb and which ,thus , completes the sentence. Peters (2004:118) points out that in the context of modern English grammar the notion of complement begins with whatever serves to complete the verb or the verb phrase. On their part, Richards and Richards (2002:95) add that the commonest complements are (SC) and (OC)

2.1 The Syntactic Features of the Subject Complement

Downing and Locke (2006:64) assert that the subject complement is the obligatory constituent which follows a copular verb and cannot be subject in a passive clause.

- 1- She became *a tennis champion* at a very early age.

According to Quirk et al. (1985:728) subject complement relates the subject and a verb is a copular verb, (i.e.) (be or a linking verb).

- 2- My glass is *empty*.

- 3- She became *a good tennis player*. (Hewings, 2005:42)

(Downing and Locke, 2006:66) add that the form of complement is normally a noun phrase (4) or an adjective phrase (5), but it may be also a noun clause (6).

- 4- Sam is *a very lucky man*. (Noun Phrase)

- 5- She was *ambitious*. (Adjective Phrase)

- 6- He has become *what he always wanted to be* . (Noun Clause)

2.2 The Semantic Features of the Subject Complement

Quirk and Greenbaum (1990:741) report that the typical semantic role of a subject complement is that attribute which can be divided into two subtypes of role:

2.2.1 Identification

Quirk et al. (1985:743) state that identification attributes are normally associated with definite noun phrases. They allow reversal of subject and complement without affecting the semantic relations in the clause, if the copular is (**BE**).

7- Kevin is my brother. (My brother is Kevin).

8-His response to reprimand seemed a major reason for his dismissal.

If the copula is other than (**BE**) we can test for reversal by substituting (**BE**).

2.2.2 Characterization

Characterization attributes are normally used with indefinite noun phrases. They can be realized by adjective phrases.

9- Martha was a good student.

10- Daniel remains helpful.

They (ibid.) add that attribute can be divided into current attribute (with stative verbs),

a- Current Attribute

11- He is my brother.

12- He seems unhappy.

and resulting attribute (with dynamic verbs).

b- Resulting Attribute

13- He felt ill.

14- He turned traitor.

A subject complement may be realized by a genitive noun phrase:

15- That writing must be Tom's. (Subjective genitive)

16- That newspaper is mine. (Possessive genitive)

17- The idea was Kathy's. (Genitive of attribute)

In sentence (15), the complement has **agentive role**, (i.e.) (that writing must be by Tom), in (16 and 17) the **role of recipient** (i.e.) (that newspaper belongs to me) and (Kathy had that idea). (ibid.)

Downing and Locke (2006:66-86) point out that complement is analyzed as **locative** when (be, remain, stay) are followed by expressions of location in space and time.

18- The National theatre stands near the river. The complement is analyzed as a **goal** when it refers to the destination or end point.

19- She went to the work .

2.3 The Syntactic Features of the Object Complement

Downing and Locke (2006:38) claim that the object complement is the constituent that competes the predicate when certain verbs such as (find, make, and appoint) lead to specify some characteristics of the direct object.

20- He appointed Ruth secretary. (Stageberg: 1971:187)

Quirk et al. (1985:728) postulate that the object complement relates to the object and implies a relationship between the object and the complement which can be expressed by means of corresponding *SVC* with a copular verb (be) if the object complement is a current attribute and (become) if it is a resulting attribute.

21- We find them very pleasant.

22- Joshua and Peter became her assistant.

Quirk et al. (1985:728-9) denote that the object complement is a noun phrase or an adjective phrase, but it may be a nominal clause.

23- His friends considered him a genius . (Noun phrase)

24- A sleeping pill will rapidly make you drowsy. (Adjective phrase)

25- Dye your hair whatever colour you like.(Finite nominal clause)

26- The authorities had the demonstrators placed under house arrest.

(Non-finite clause)Stageberg (1971:186) adds that the object complement can be a pronoun, an adverb of place, a verb present participle, and a verb past participle.

27- I think the caller you.

28- We supposed him upstairs.

29- I imagined him eating.

30- I believed him seated.

2.4 The Semantic Features of the Object Complement

Quirk and Greenbaum (1990: 741) assert that the typical semantic role of an object complement is that attribute which can be divided into two subtypes :

2.4.1 Identification

Identification attributes are normally associated with definite noun phrases. The subject complement reversal cannot take place, but we can test for its possibility by forming a clause from the object and the complement.

31- The teacher called their daughter Edna.

- Their daughter is Edna.

- Edna is their daughter.

32- We made him our representative. (Quirk et al. 1985:742)

2.4.2 Characterization

Quirk et al. (1985:743) suggest that characterization attributes are normally used with indefinite noun phrases. They can be realized by adjective phrases.

33- The teacher called their daughter a good student.

34- She made them comfortable.

Attributes can be subdivided into current attributes (with stative verbs).

a-Current Attribute

35- They consider me *their closet friend*.

36- I prefer my coffee *black*.

And resulting attribute (with dynamic verbs).

b-Resulting Attribute

37- They elected him *president*.

38- The heat turned milk *sour*.

Downing and Locke (2006:67) add that object complement can be characterized by a **qualitative attribute** , a **substantive attribute** expressing the name or the status of the object referent.

39- Police found the suspects *unwilling to cooperate*. (qualitative)

40-They have elected *captain of the golf club*. (substantive)

41- The burglars left the house *in a mess*. (circumstantial)

3- Test and Data Analysis

Brown (1987:219) believes that a test is a method that has the purpose of measuring the learner's ability in certain area. For Genesee and Upshur (1996:14), a test is a task or a form of measurement that elicits certain information from the test taker. It is generally agreed upon that errors are indicators of difficulties encountered in certain structures and the percentage of errors shows the degree of that difficulty (Johanson, 1975:225). Accordingly, the present test is constructed to investigate the performance of Iraqi EFL university students in using semantic roles of SC and OC. The researcher chooses a sample of fifty fourth year students for simple statistical formula from Department of English ,College of Education , fourth. The test includes two questions. The first of which measures the students' responses at the recognition level, it is of ten items. The highest percentage of the correct answers is (76 %) in (item 10) , the students answer this item correctly because they are exposed to many chances to deal with the structure used in forming this item , whereas the lowest percentage of the correct answer is (18 %) in (item 2). The low rate of correct responses reflects the students' insufficient training and ability to deal with this item as they are incompetent in recognizing suitable role of the object complement. The students' answers are shown in the Table (1).The second question is constructed to measure the students' responses at the production level. It also includes ten items , the highest percentage of the correct answers is (76%) in (item 1) such a high percentage in answering this item may be caused by the students' exposure to such construction or it could be heavily included in their previous syllabus, whereas the lowest percentage of the correct answers is (4%) in (items 7 and 8). The low rate of the correct responses shows that the students are unaware enough to deal with the constructions used in forming these two items. This indicates that most of the students face difficulties in forming sentences of requested object complement and subject complement. The students' answers are shown in the Table (2).

Table (1)Subjects' Performance at the Recognition Level in Question (1)

No. of Q.	No. of Items	No. of correct answers	Percentage	No. of incorrect answers	Percentage
Q1	1	29	58%	21	42%
	2	9	18%	41	82%
	3	23	46%	27	54%
	4	17	34%	33	66%
	5	16	32%	34	68%
	6	28	56%	22	44%
	7	30	60%	20	40%
	8	27	54%	23	46%
	9	18	36%	32	64%
	10	38	76%	12	24%
Total		235	47%	265	53%

Table (1)Table (1) presents the following results:

- 1- The total number of the correct responses is (235, 47%).
- 2- The total number of the incorrect responses is (265, 53%).

It can be concluded that the students encounter difficulties at the recognition level since the highest rate of their incorrect responses is (265, 53%) whereas that of the correct responses is (235, 47%) . This reflects that they lack knowledge about the semantic roles of subject and object complements.

Table (2)Subjects' Performance at the Production Level in Question (2)

No. of Q.	No. of Items	No. of correct answers	Percentage	No. of incorrect answers	Percentage
Q2	1	38	76%	12	24%
	2	20	40%	30	60%
	3	21	42%	29	58%
	4	23	46%	27	54%
	5	5	10%	45	90%
	6	20	40%	30	60%
	7	2	4%	48	96%
	8	2	4%	48	96%
	9	18	36%	32	64%

The Performance of Iraqi EFL University Students in Using the Semantic Roles

	10	20	40%	30	60%
Total		169	33.8%	331	66.2%

Table (2) Table (2) presents the following results:

- 1- The total number of the correct responses is (169, 33.8%).
- 2- The total number of the incorrect responses is (331, 66.2%).

It can be concluded that most of the students have failed to give the correct responses for the items in this question, hence the total number of the correct responses is (169,33.8%), whereas that of incorrect ones is (331, 66.2%). This indicates that most of the students face serious difficulties in forming sentences of requested SC and OC or they may be incompetent enough to produce sentences of such types. Due to the limited exposure to the language or insufficient practice of English language, the students hypothesized wrongly rules about the second language. Inadequate information about subject complement and object complement may be the main reason behind making more erroneous responses in recognizing and producing them.

4- Conclusions

In the light of the preceding analysis, the following conclusions have been drawn:

- 1- Most of Iraqi EFL learners face difficulties in using the semantic roles of subject complement and object complement and they can not differentiate between them.
- 2- The students are unaware of semantic roles of subject complement and object complement and their types in the way that they did not know how to use them in different positions.
- 3- The students cannot differentiate between subject complement and object complement on one hand and their semantic roles on the other hand.

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Appendix A The Test

Q1: Identify the semantic role of the underlined words or expressions in the following sentences according to the following roles:

Locative SC, recipient SC, agentive SC, characterization SC, identification SC, circumstantial OC, qualitative OC, locative OC, identification OC, and characterization OC.

1- Selma is my choice.

2- They left the classroom in a terrible mess.

3-They remain helpful.

4-They imagined him upstairs.

5- We made her our boss.

6-The government found the demonstrators unwilling to delegate.

7- That pike must be Tom's.

8-She made them happy.

9- The idea was Ali's.

10- He was in Baghdad.

Q2: Make an English sentence for each of the following semantic roles:

1-Locative SC

1- Identification OC

2- Recipient SC

3- Identification SC

4- Circumstantial OC

5- Characterization SC

6- Agentive SC

8- Qualitative OC

9- Characterization OC

10-Locative OC

Appendix B The Answers of the test

Q1

1- Identification SC

2- Circumstantial OC

3- Characterization SC

4- Locative OC