THE INFLUENCE OF FIRST LANGUAGE SYNTAX ON THE ACQUISITION OF ENGLISH RELATIVE CLAUSES AMONG UZBEK EFL LEARNERS

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Received: 03.11.2025
Revised: 04.11.2025
Accepted: 05.11.2025

Keywords:
First Language influence, syntax, English relative clauses, Uzbek EFL learners, L1 transfer, language acquisition.

Annotation. This study investigates the impact of first language (L1) syntax on the acquisition of English relative clauses by Uzbek learners of English as a Foreign Language (EFL). The research examines how the syntactic structures of Uzbek, particularly relative clause formation, influence the learners' comprehension and production of English relative clauses. Data were collected through written and oral tasks administered to intermediate-level Uzbek EFL learners. The findings indicate that L1 transfer affects both the accuracy and complexity of English relative clauses, with learners often applying Uzbek syntactic patterns in English. The study highlights the importance of understanding first language influence in EFL teaching and suggests pedagogical strategies to help learners overcome L1 interference in mastering English relative clauses.

Introduction. The acquisition of English relative clauses among EFL learners has long been a focus of second language acquisition research, as relative clauses play a crucial role in expressing complex ideas and maintaining cohesion in both spoken and written English. For learners whose first language (L1) differs structurally from English, such as Uzbek, the influence of L1 syntax can significantly affect the comprehension and production of these clauses. Uzbek, as an agglutinative language with a subject-object-verb (SOV) word order, presents syntactic patterns that are distinct from English's subject-verb-object (SVO) order, and these structural differences often lead to L1 transfer phenomena in learners' English usage. Relative clauses in English, which can be restrictive or non-restrictive and involve relative pronouns such as who, which, and that, require learners to grasp both syntactic positioning and semantic relationships within the sentence. Previous studies have shown that L1 transfer can manifest in various ways, including incorrect placement of the relative clause, omission of relative pronouns, or simplification of clause structures, which may impede learners' ability to produce grammatically accurate and semantically clear sentences. This study aims to investigate the specific ways in which Uzbek learners of English are influenced by their native syntactic structures when acquiring English relative clauses, focusing on both accuracy and complexity

in comprehension and production tasks. Understanding the role of L1 syntax in English clause acquisition is essential not only for theoretical insights into cross-linguistic influence but also for developing effective pedagogical strategies that address specific learner difficulties, reduce negative transfer, and promote mastery of English relative clauses. By examining the patterns of L1 influence among Uzbek EFL learners, this research contributes to a more nuanced understanding of second language acquisition processes and provides practical implications for English language instruction in Uzbek contexts.

Literature review. Research on the acquisition of English relative clauses has consistently highlighted the significant role of learners' first language (L1) in shaping their comprehension and production of these syntactic structures. Studies by Gass and Selinker (2008) emphasize that L1 transfer is a pervasive phenomenon in second language acquisition, affecting both grammatical accuracy and sentence complexity, particularly when the syntactic structures of the L1 differ markedly from those of the target language. In the context of English relative clauses, learners whose L1 exhibits different word order patterns or relative clause formation strategies often demonstrate specific transfer errors, such as misplacement of the clause, omission or misuse of relative pronouns, and simplification of complex sentence structures. Research focused on Turkic languages, including Uzbek, by Ismailova (2015) and Karimov (2017), indicates that Uzbek EFL learners frequently apply SOV-based patterns when producing English SVO relative clauses, which results in non-target-like structures in both written and spoken outputs. Moreover, studies by Ellis (2013) and Bardovi-Harlig (2012) underline that while explicit instruction can mitigate some transfer errors, learners still rely on their L1 syntactic intuitions when processing complex relative clauses, particularly in tasks demanding real-time production or comprehension. Cross-linguistic comparative studies further demonstrate that the degree of L1 influence varies depending on factors such as learners' proficiency level, exposure to English input, and frequency of use of specific relative clause types. In the case of Uzbek learners, previous research suggests that restrictive relative clauses with subject gaps are generally acquired earlier and more accurately, whereas object gaps and non-restrictive clauses pose persistent challenges due to structural differences and L1 interference. Collectively, the existing literature highlights the necessity of examining both syntactic and semantic aspects of L1 influence in relative clause acquisition, emphasizing that understanding these patterns is crucial for designing effective pedagogical interventions tailored to the specific challenges faced by Uzbek EFL learners.

Research methodology. This study employed a mixed-methods approach to investigate the influence of first language (L1) syntax on the acquisition of English relative clauses among Uzbek EFL learners. The research participants consisted of 60 intermediate-level Uzbek university students enrolled in English language courses, representing a balanced sample in terms of gender and age. The primary materials included written comprehension and production tasks, as well as oral elicitation

exercises specifically designed to target English relative clauses, including both restrictive and non-restrictive types, with subject and object gaps. In addition, a questionnaire was administered to gather information about participants' L1 background, prior exposure to English, and self-reported language learning experiences. The methodology involved several stages: first, learners completed a written task requiring them to identify and produce English relative clauses within sentences and short paragraphs; second, oral tasks were conducted in controlled settings to elicit spontaneous relative clause production; third, participants' responses were analyzed to identify L1 transfer patterns, including errors in relative pronoun usage, clause placement, and structural simplification. Data analysis followed a descriptive and comparative framework, employing both quantitative measures, such as accuracy scores and error frequencies, and qualitative examination of syntactic patterns and semantic appropriateness. The research also incorporated inter-rater reliability checks to ensure consistency in coding and evaluation of the collected data. Ethical considerations were addressed through informed consent, confidentiality of participants' identities, and voluntary participation. This methodology allowed for a comprehensive assessment of how Uzbek learners' L1 syntactic structures influence their acquisition of English relative clauses, providing insights into both common transfer errors and the effectiveness of existing instructional approaches.

1-Table. Common errors of uzbek efl learners in english relative clauses

Error Type	Description	Example (Learner Output)	Correct Form	Likely L1 Influence
Relative Pronoun Omission	Omitting "who," "which," or "that" in relative clauses	"The man I met yesterday is teacher."	"The man who I met yesterday is a teacher."	Uzbek SOV structure does not require relative pronouns in the same way
Misplacement of Relative Clause	Positioning the relative clause incorrectly within the sentence	"The book is on the table I read."	"The book that I read is on the table."	L1 word order transfer (SOV → SVO differences)
Simplification of Clause Structure	Reducing complex relative clauses to simpler forms	"I know girl is singing."	"I know the girl who is singing."	Avoiding complex structures due to L1 syntax habits
Incorrect Use of Object Gaps	Difficulty forming object relative clauses correctly	"The girl who I saw yesterday she is nice."	"The girl whom I saw yesterday is nice."	L1 transfer; Uzbek uses different object marking

Error Type	Description	Example (Learner Output)	Correct Form	Likely L1 Influence
Problems with Non-Restrictive Clauses	Difficulty placing commas or relative pronouns correctly	"My teacher who is kind is helpful."	"My teacher, who is kind, is helpful."	Non-restrictive clauses less frequent in Uzbek syntax

The table illustrates typical patterns of L1 transfer affecting the accuracy and complexity of English relative clauses produced by Uzbek EFL learners. Teachers can use this information to design targeted exercises addressing these specific challenges.

Research discussion. The analysis of the collected data revealed significant patterns indicating the influence of Uzbek L1 syntax on the acquisition of English relative clauses among the participants. In written tasks, learners demonstrated higher accuracy in producing subject relative clauses compared to object relative clauses, which aligns with previous findings on L1 transfer effects. Specifically, many learners applied Uzbek SOV syntactic structures when attempting to form English SVO relative clauses, resulting in misplaced relative pronouns or simplified sentence structures. For instance, errors such as omitting the relative pronoun "who" or "which" were common, particularly in object relative clauses, reflecting the syntactic differences between the two languages. Oral elicitation tasks further highlighted that real-time processing exacerbated the influence of L1, with learners often defaulting to Uzbek syntactic intuitions under time constraints. Moreover, non-restrictive relative clauses posed substantial challenges, as learners frequently struggled with correct clause placement and appropriate punctuation, suggesting that semantic integration of additional information is more difficult when L1 structures do not provide direct analogues. Statistical analysis of error frequencies demonstrated that L1 transfer accounted for a significant proportion of syntactic deviations, with over 60% of the observed errors directly attributable to structural differences between Uzbek and English. Qualitative analysis of learners' responses also revealed that while exposure to English input and explicit instruction helped mitigate some errors, persistent transfer effects remained, particularly in complex relative clause constructions. These findings underscore the importance of recognizing cross-linguistic influence in EFL pedagogy and suggest that targeted instructional strategies, such as focused practice on object relative clauses and explicit teaching of relative pronouns, are necessary to reduce L1 interference. Overall, the study confirms that Uzbek learners' first language syntax significantly shapes their acquisition of English relative clauses, affecting both the accuracy and complexity of their syntactic output, and highlights the need for pedagogical interventions that address these specific transfer-related challenges in both written and oral contexts.

Conclusion. The findings of this study indicate that the syntactic structures of learners' first language, Uzbek, exert a significant influence on the acquisition of English relative clauses, affecting both comprehension and production. Uzbek EFL learners were observed to transfer SOV patterns into English SVO constructions, leading to errors such as misplaced or omitted relative pronouns, simplified clause structures, and incorrect placement of relative clauses, particularly in object and non-restrictive constructions. While subject relative clauses were generally acquired with higher accuracy, object and non-restrictive clauses remained challenging due to structural differences and limited analogues in the learners' native language. The research also demonstrated that explicit instruction and exposure to English input can mitigate some L1 transfer effects, yet persistent difficulties suggest that learners rely on their L1 syntactic intuitions, especially under real-time processing conditions. Pedagogically, these findings highlight the necessity of targeted instruction focusing on object relative clauses, correct use of relative pronouns, and strategies to integrate complex clauses semantically and syntactically into English sentences. Understanding the role of L1 syntax in second language acquisition is essential for developing effective teaching methodologies that address specific learner challenges and reduce negative transfer, thereby enhancing both written and oral competence. Overall, the study confirms that first language influence is a central factor in the acquisition of English relative clauses among Uzbek EFL learners, and that addressing these transfer-related issues through informed pedagogical strategies can significantly improve learners' syntactic accuracy, sentence complexity, and overall communicative proficiency in English.

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