The Acquisition Order of Cohesion Connectives in Jordanian Spoken Arabic: A Contrastive Study

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ABSTRACT

The present study tries to investigate the acquisition order of cohesion connectives in Jordanian Spoken Arabic (JSA). Cohesion connectives are considered cognitive elements rather than merely discourse markers because they depend on cognitive and mental analysis (Spooren and Sanders, 2008). The study compares the results with their counterparts in English language, therefore, it is a contrastive study. In English, the acquisition order of cohesion relations has been examined by Bloom et al. (1980) who identified the order of acquiring the cohesion relations as follows: additive< temporal<causal< adversative. For example, and> and then< because<but. Moreover, the order shows that the more complex cohesion relations will be acquired later than simple relations. This order will be compared with the one at the end of the study. The study will focus on cohesion markers in JSA such as: wa (and)> baʕdein (and then)> li?annu (because)> bas (but) and other coherence markers which will be extracted from the results.

Keywords: cohesion, connectives, first language acquisition.

1. INTRODUCTION

Contrastive studies have been pervasive among researchers. Different areas of linguistics have been the core of contrastive studies such as phonology, morphology, syntax, semantics, etc. Moreover, psycholinguistics and the issues of language acquisition have also been a field for contrastive studies. Comparing and contrasting certain levels of language need to be referred to language universals and language specific features because all languages have things in common which are universal, and they have also certain features that are language specific. Therefore, researchers investigate the common features of languages as well as the specific features that are specific for a certain language and this is the prominent advantage of contrastive studies.

Spooren and Sanders (2008) proposed an analysis of the acquisition order of coherence relations and their linguistic expressions. Their analysis shows the cognitive complexity of acquisition since children start to acquire the less complex relations before the more complex ones. Bloom et al. (1980) summarized the order of relations acquired as follows: additive< temporal<causal< adversative, and linguistic markers that represent these relations such as: and> and then< because<but. Therefore, Spooren and Sanders (ibid) present an explanation for this order from a psycholinguistic perspective. In their analysis, coherence relations are considered cognitive entities that need mental analysis and the order of acquiring them is compatible with the supposition that simple forms are acquired before complex ones.

Therefore, the present study tries to test the order of acquisition of the cohesion connectives and their relations in JSA children, whose ages are between 6-7 and 11-12 years. Thus, the present study tries to answer the following questions:

1. What is the order for acquiring cohesion connectives in JSA?
2. Does this order go in line with that of Spooren and Sanders (2008)?

In order to answer the study questions, the researcher first refers introduces the concept of cohesion. Then, a review of previous studies is introduced. After that, the methodology and participants are presented to show the basis of this study. After that, the data is analyzed, and the results and discussion are presented. Finally, conclusions are drawn to answer the study questions in the last section.

2. COHESION

Cohesion concerns the ways in which the components of the surface text, i.e., the actual words we hear or see are mutually connected within a sequence. Among the cohesive devices are: reference, recurrence, ellipsis, and conjunction. Reference items include pronouns and demonstratives. These items can be anaphoric, exophoric, or cataphoric. Anaphoric reference means that the referents are established by looking back in the text. In exophoric reference, referents are confirmed outside the text, i.e., the context. Cataphoric reference means that a word in a text refers to another word later in the text and one needs to look forward to understanding. Anaphoric and cataphoric references can be compared in the direction of looking for the word.

Recurrence entails the exact return of materials. It is used to assert or affirm one's viewpoint. It can be complete or partial. Complete recurrence requires repeating the exact words while in partial recurrence the same basic word components are used while shifting them to a different word class. Conjunctive elements are cohesive not in themselves but indirectly, by virtue of their specific meaning; they express certain meanings which presuppose the presence of other components in the discourse. Finally, ellipsis which is simply substitution by zero.

Coherence concerns the ways in which the components of the textual world, i.e., the configuration of concepts and relations which underlie the surface text are mutually accessible and relevant. A definition of coherence by Van Dijk (1979: 275) includes that coherence is a semantic property of discourse formed through the interpretation of each individual sentence relative to the interpretation of other sentences, with interpretation implying interaction between the text and the reader.

Halliday and Hasan (1976) refer to transition words as phrases or words that are used to connect ideas and to order them as in a relationship between an argument and its support. Transitions are divided into four main types:
1. Additive: which refers to adding ideas to the text such as the use of and, moreover, similarly and additionally as well as other additive connectives.
2. Adversative: which signal contrast, conflict and contradiction such as: but, while, whereas and on the contrary.
3. Causal: which signal cause, effect and result such as: because, as, as a result etc.
4. Sequential: which refers to chronological or logical sequence such as: first, then, next, finally, lastly and others.

In the next section, several studies have been reviewed which focused on the acquisition of cohesion connectives. By examining the related literature, the researcher will identify the research gap that is aimed to be fulfilled in the present paper.

3. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

A considerable amount of literature has been conducted on the issue of language acquisition in terms of coherence and cohesion. Such studies focus on the development of cohesion and coherence in children and their first language acquisition. This section summarizes some of these studies that had the same concern of present one to build a base for this study and to show the research gap that is aimed to be filled here.

Evers-Vermeul (2005) investigated the interaction between conceptual and syntactic properties of connectives. The study examined Dutch causal connectives such as: that's why, so, because. The researcher tested these connectives because as mentioned in the dissertation that these connectives represent different syntactic properties. For example, that's why as a connective is used as an adverb. The connective so is used as an adverb and a coordinator. Moreover, because can be used as a subordinate and a coordinator (ibid: 19). In addition, other connectives were examined in the study as and, then and but as a most frequently occurring connectives. The researcher found out that the acquisition of these connectives is not ordered in one direction as maintained by Bloomfield (1980) as additive<temporal<causal<adversative, rather, each connective is defined on the basis of several cognitive primitives. The results show that additive connectives (en 'and' , maar 'but') emerge earlier than causal connectives (want 'for'. Omdat 'because' , daarom 'therefore', dus 'so', doorat 'as a result') and that positive connectives (en 'and') appear before negative ones (maar'but', terwijl 'while').

In their study, Hudson and Shapiro (1991) examined thirty-seven preschool children with a mean age of 4;8. Each child was assigned randomly to one of three narrative conditions named: script, personal narrative and story. During the interviews, each child was asked to produce four narratives describing four occasions: birthday party, doctor's, Halloween and trip. The data were analyzed in terms of type of proposition mentioned before: script, personal narrative and story, tense type and type of cohesive devices used in the participants' speeches. Three types of connectives were examined: conjunction, prepositional phrases and relative clauses and anaphoric

reference. The conjunctions were divided into four main types: simple conjunction (and), temporal conjunction (then, and then, next, first, before and after), adversative (but, except, sometimes, usually, always, though) and causal conjunctions including because, so, if). The results show that children s' personal narratives are more coherent than when they are asked to produce a narrative. Relative clauses, prepositional phrases ae well as additives were among the most frequent used cohesive devices.

Bloom et al (1980) investigated the acquisition of connectives in four children from two to three years whom he visited for approximately eight hours over several days for about six weeks. His analysis focuses on conjunctions, relative pronouns and wh-words. Bloom et al (ibid: 9) proposed the age of acquisition of the coherence relations and gave the age in months, for example, the acquisition age of the additive is 27 months (which is two years and three months, the acquisition age of the causative and temporal is between 31 and 32 months (that is two years and eight months). Adversative relations are acquired at the age of 35 months.

For this study, the researcher follows the study of Spooren and Sanders (2008) in which they study focuses on the acquisition order of the coherence relations by examining children from first grade (6-7 years) and sixth grade (11-12 years) (ibid:2010). The researchers formulated two experiments: in the first one each child is given a task of describing a picture given to them and their speeches were recorded. Then, in the next study, children had to complete forced-choice items. In those items, they had to choose between two possible completions of a discourse fragment. The items were designed in such a manner that the choice reflects understanding of the coherence relation. The results show that additive relations are acquired before causal relations and that positive relations are acquired before negative ones. Moreover, coherence relations involve conceptual relations and not only linguistic ones.

In relation to studies that focus on the acquisition of cohesion and cohesion connectives in Arabic, the researcher found out that Arabic studies focus on the acquisition of second language learners such as undergraduate students' use or failure to use cohesion connectives. Such studies are (Ghasemi, 2013; Darweesh and Kadhim, 2016). Ghasemi (2013) investigated the use of cohesive devices by EFL/ESL students. The researcher found out that certain connectives are used more than others, in addition, students were lacking the ability to use syntactic and lexical tools. Similarly, Darweesh and Kadhim (2016) investigated the problems that face EFL learners in using conjunctions. The main problem that face those students is their lack of understanding of the meaning and the appropriate use of these conjunctives.

As is clear, Arabic studies focus on the study of connectives and their acquisition in relation to second language acquisition. Therefore, there is a gap in focusing on child's acquisition of connectives and cohesion. The present study aims at filling this gap by investigating children's acquisition of cohesive connectives. The following section introduces the methodology used in this paper and the kind of participants that had been the focus of this study.

4. METHODOLOGY

4.1. Participants

The study is carried out with twelve children divided into two groups: six children from the first grade and six children from the sixth grade at Ibn Tufail School which is a school in Amman that has preliminary and secondary grades. All children are native speakers of JSA. These age groups are chosen depending on the previous literature because children who are younger than the first grade do not use coherence relations and children who are older than the ones in the sixth-grade use very complex coherence relations (Spooren and Sanders, 2008).

4.2. Procedure

All children will be given the same task which is a description task in which they were asked to tell a story or to talk about their personal stories of anything happened to them. Each child was interviewed individually. The interviews will be recorded. Then, the researcher will analyze the recordings based on the coherence relations used in the children's speech. Moreover, the coherence relations will be divided into the four groups of: additive, temporal, causal and adversative. Then, the researcher will include the frequencies of the coherence relations extracted from the recordings and will compare the results with the previous literature of studies done on English language.

5. DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

The elicited data has been analyzed in light of the cohesion connectives that appeared in the speech of the twelve students. After analyzing the data, it has been clear that children of the first-grade use very little and limited number of the cohesion connectives such as: w(a), baʕdeen, ḥatta, fa. Those are the only types that appeared in the speech of the first-grade children. Examples of these are:
(1) w baʕdeen lagat ?amiira
    and then found (she) a pincess
    and then she found a princess

(2) ijat ḥamaameh la- tiʃrab
     came a pigeon to drink
     a pigeon came to drink

(3) fa saqṭat fil may
     so, fell (she) in water
     so, she fell in water

(4) baʕeen waddani baaba ʕas- suḥseeleh
     and then took (me) daddy to the slide
     and then daddy took me to the slide

(5) ṣaarat tiḥki rayḥa ʕa beet jidditi ʕaʃaan ?aʕṭiiha kaʕkeh
     became saying going to home my grandma to I give her a cake
     she said that she was going to her grandma's home to give her a cake

As is clear, children of the first grade do use cohesion connectives but with a limited number. It seems that children of this age use additive connections to connect ideas and sometimes, they pause for a short period of time before uttering the following statement without using any connective. Therefore, one might conclude that the cohesion connectives are not fully acquired by first- grade children and the number of the acquired connectives are limited in number. Concerning children of the sixth grade, things are different. For this age, it seems that in addition to the connectives that are used in the first- grade age, other connectives appear in the sixth- grade age. Moreover, a more coherent speech appears. In addition to w(a), fa, li, baʕdeen, other connectives appear such as: li?annu, baʕd heek, ḥatta, ?innu, ijiit (as a connective rather than a verb) and bas. Many examples were elicited from the sixth-grade children, some of them are:

(6) kaan fii raʒul ʕaṭʃaan fa waʒad biir
     was in a man thirsty so found (he) a well
     there was a thirsty man who found a well

(7) ʃirib ḥatta ʃibiʕ
     drank until saturated
     he drank until he was saturated

(8) w lamma iṭṭallaʕit
     and when looked I
     and when I looked

(9) bas ija haad il-yoom w qarrarat truuḥ
     when came that day and decided (she) go
     when that day came, and she decided to go

(10) w baʕdeen ija
      and then came (he)
      and then he came

(11) ?ijiit ʃufit zalameh kbiir
      and then saw I a man old
      and then I saw an old man

(12) fa rijʕat mis laana w raḥ tḍal ʕinna
      and came back (she) miss Lana and will she stay with us
      and miss Lana came back and she will stay with us

Based on the data analyzed, it seems that children of the sixth- grade use more cohesive connectives. Basically, they use additive connectives, then, causal connectives come in the second stage based on the number of usage of these connectives. Moreover, as children grow more, their usage of connectives exceed from being only simple words or sometimes prepositions to more complicated lexical items.

6. CONCLUSIONS

The present study tries to investigate the notion of acquisition of cohesion connectives in JSA. Based on the data analyzed and the number of frequencies of each connective examined in the study, the results show that cohesion relations' acquisition order in JSA goes in line with that of Bloomfield (1980) and Spooren and Sanders (2008) which is: additive< temporal<causal< adversative. Therefore, additive cohesive devices seem simpler and easier than the other connectives by virtue of being acquired first. The present study tries to fill the gap of examining this area in JSA. It is hoped that this study has achieved this goal.

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