

Yes/No Questions and Structure-Dependency in Syrian Arab L2 Users of English

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□ ABSTRACT □

Testing the structure-dependency principle in second language acquisition research means showing if the structure-dependency in question is part of second language learners' interlanguage or not regardless of whether learners' L1 has a syntactic movement or not.

This research aims to investigate whether Syrian Arab learners of English can detect the structure-dependency principle in English yes/no questions; a question structure in which the structure-dependency does not operate in Syrian Arabic.

This research adopts the descriptive approach (Neuman, 2014) and its empirical work on the grammatical phenomenon in the analysis using SPSS. In this research, a group of second language learners (SLLs) of English have been asked to judge if 6 sentences are grammatical or not, using the *Oxford Placement Test 2* (Allan, 2004) grammaticality judgement test. The sentences are yes/no questions, some of which violate the structure-dependency principle and the others are grammatical. The study has been conducted on SLLs of English in Tishreen University, Syria.

The results of the study show that the two groups perform differently. The pre-intermediate learners achieve a higher frequency of appropriate answers compared to beginners' appropriate answers. Although the pre-intermediate group performs better, the results revealed in the data will be used to investigate the role of Chomsky's concept of Universal Grammar (UG) in Second Language Acquisition (SLA).

Keywords: structure-dependency, generative linguistics, second language acquisition, yes/no questions, Universal Grammar

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أسئلة (نعم/لا) والتبعية-البنوية للعرب السوريين مستخدمي اللغة الإنكليزية كلغة ثانية

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□ ملخص □

معنى اختبار مبدأ التبعية البنوية في أبحاث اكتساب اللغة الثانية هو إظهار ما إذا كانت التبعية البنوية في السؤال جزءاً من اللغة البنوية لمتعلمي اللغة الثانية أم لا، بغض النظر عما إذا كانت اللغة الأولى للمتعلمين فيها انتقال نحوي أم لا.

يهدف هذا البحث إلى معرفة ما إذا كان المتعلمون العرب السوريون للغة الإنكليزية يمكنهم اكتشاف مبدأ التبعية البنوية في اللغة الإنكليزية لأسئلة (نعم / لا) كون مبدأ التبعية البنوية ليس جزءاً من البنية النحوية باللغة العربية. يعتمد هذا البحث المنهج الوصفي وإجراءاته في الوقوف على الظاهرة النحوية في التفسير والتحليل باستخدام البرنامج الاحصائي SPSS. فقد طُلب من مجموعة من متعلمي اللغة الإنكليزية كلغة ثانية، تقرير فيما إذا كانت 6 جمل نحوية أم لا، باستخدام اختبار الحكم النحوي في (Oxford Placement Test 2 (Allan, 2004)؛ الجمل عبارة عن أسئلة (نعم / لا)، بعضها ينتهك مبدأ التبعية وبعضها الآخر نحوي. أجريت الدراسة علمتعلّمين للغة الإنكليزية في جامعة تشرين، سورية.

تظهر نتائج الدراسة أن أداء المجموعتين مختلف، إذ يحقق المتعلمون ما قبل المتوسط نسبة تكرار أعلى من الإجابات المناسبة مقارنة بالإجابات المناسبة للمبتدئين. وعلى الرغم من أن المجموعة ما قبل المتوسط تؤدي أداءً أفضل، فإن النتائج التي تم الكشف عنها في البيانات استخدمت للتحقيق في دور مفهوم تشومسكي (النحو الكلي UG) في اكتساب اللغة الثانية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: التبعية البنوية، اللغويات التوليدية، اكتساب اللغة الثانية، أسئلة (نعم / لا)، النحو الكلي

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1. Introduction:

Humans have been distinguished from other animal species by the use of a complex language system. This language capacity has been questioned throughout the history. What is that thing that enables humans to speak? How is it formed? Why is it easy for children to use this complex system although they do not have complex reasoning and enough cognitive abilities to analyze language patterns? One of the most controversial arguments that appeared in the early 1960s is the poverty of stimulus argument (POS); it proposed that part of our linguistic knowledge is innate and that there is an inbuilt language faculty, called the Language Acquisition Device (LAD), which is the focal factor of the process of first language acquisition (FLA).

2. Literature Review:

Chomsky (1957) in his POS argument proposes that most of our linguistic knowledge is structured by inbuilt constraints, Universal Grammar (UG), which include the similarities among languages, called principles, and the systematic variations between languages, called parameters. Thus, people know more about language than they could have learnt from their environment.

Cook (1991, cited in Cook, 2003) summarizes the main points of this argument:

To use the poverty-of-the-stimulus argument to show the innateness of a particular aspect of syntax means going through the following stages:

- A. demonstrating that a native speaker knows this aspect of syntax;
- B. showing that this aspect of syntax was not learnable from the language evidence typically available to all children;
- C. arguing that this aspect of syntax is not acquired from outside the mind, say by correction or explanation by the child's parents;
- D. concluding that his aspect of syntax is therefore built-into the child's mind. (202)

A similar argument applies to second language (L2) users: second language learners (SLLs) have Universal Grammar in their minds that helps them know more than they could have acquired either from the language input they are exposed to or from the first language (L1) they already know. Supporting this argument means that SLLs already know some aspects of L2 syntax, which is not learnable from the language evidence available to them. This, they have built-in L2 syntax in their minds. (Cook, 2003)

However, the issue of second language acquisition is far more complicated under the UG theory than it is in the case of first language acquisition. Mitchell & Myles (1998) mentioned many factors that can play a role in SLA. For example, SLLs are cognitively mature; they already know at least one other language. "In fact, even if the Universal Grammar hypothesis is correct for first language learning," Mitchell & Myles (1998, 78) states, "there are still a number of logical possibilities concerning its role in SLL." The problematic question that many linguists try to answer is: what is the role of UG in SLA? In addition, SLLs know their mother tongue. This leads linguists to another question about the role of L1 in SLA.

To answer the first question, linguists propose three main theories concerning the role of UG in SLA. These theories are *the full access position*, *the indirect access position*, and *the no access position*:

- *The full access hypothesis* postulates that UG is an important causal factor in second language acquisition, although not, of course, the only one; it is fully available. UG is as involved in L2 acquisition as in L1 learning. Those adopting the full access view (e.g., Flynn, 1987, Krashen 1982) claim more than that the L1 UG affects the second language learning process. They claim that principles not applicable to the second language learners'

L1, but needed for the L2, will constrain the L2 learners' interlanguages. Like first language acquisition, L2 acquisition is an implicit process in the mind: learners are not aware of what they are learning and pay no conscious attention to it. They do not need anything other than positive evidence to set the values for parameters and to instantiate principles.

- Some linguists (Bley-Vroman, 1989) claim that UG is dead after first language acquisition process is over (the *no access hypothesis*). In other words, UG is unavailable in SLA. Hence, L2 learning may be, not just an implicit process, but also an explicit one in which features of language are presented to learners and acquired by them through conscious attention, or in which teachers correct particular mistakes in the learners' speech, i.e. in which negative evidence has a role to play. Therefore, learners do not reset the parameters because resetting is not available, but they use other means and mechanisms.

- The third position is the *indirect access to UG via L1* (Mitchell & Myles, 1998). This position postulates that UG is not available to L2 acquisition except through the L1 grammar. The learner can make use of principles already instantiated in the first language but cannot use those that the L1 has not taken up.

The role of L1 in SLA is discussed in different positions. The role of L1 in SLA, called Language Transfer, "refers to speakers or writers applying knowledge from one language to another language" (Weinreich, 1953). In other words, learners might use their mother tongue to produce a second language appropriate or inappropriate structures when they face some difficulty; they tend to transfer their first language knowledge and apply it to SL structures. However, there is no agreement among the linguistic theories about the effect of language transfer. Some linguists claim that there is *full transfer* (Schachter, 1996, Schwartz & Sprouse 1996, White, 1985), others go with *partial transfer* (Eubank, 1993, Pienemann & Håkansson, 2007), yet some others (Weinreich, 1953) argue that there is *no transfer*. Selinker (1972) indicated that language transfer is a process that shows the demonstration of the rules and subsystems of L1 in the performance of L2 learners – their interlanguage. According to Selinker (1972, 214) *interlanguage* by definition is "a separate linguistic system based on the observable output which results from a learner's attempted production of a target language (TL) norm". The learner's interlanguage at any stage of development has rules that belong to FL rules that belong to SL, and idiosyncratic rules that belong to neither of them. The role of FL is at its highest level in the initial state of learning, and it decreases as the SLA process increases. (ibid) These interlanguages are variable, differing from one learner to another. In addition, they are dynamic and constantly changing, as SLLs are developing new rules at every stage of development that they apply to their second language utterances. All in all, the most fundamental different property is that SLLs possess a grammar of their mother tongue, incorporating the principles of UG and setting a value for the parameters.

2.1. The Structure-dependency Principle:

Chomsky (1972) presented an example of such innate knowledge, which is the principle of structure-dependency: "all known formal operations in the grammar of English, or of any other language, are structure-dependent" (28). Thus, this principle states that the syntactic operations are defined on hierarchical representations. In other words, this principle stipulates that we operate on structural basis or units not on linear basis. A clear example in English is the structure of yes/no questions, as in the following sentence:

- (1) Is Peter coming?
- (2) Peter is coming.

Structure-dependency requires that the element to be moved must have a specific structural role in the sentence, not simply in a specific place in its linear order. Therefore, question movement rule in English specifies which element in the structure is moved, not which word in the sequence or which type of word. Thus, the rule that has been applied in the previous example is not moving the second word, or putting the auxiliary verb “is” at the beginning of the sentence. Although these suggestions can apply to this example, but they cannot be applied to other examples like:

- (3) The man who is in the garden is happy.
- (4) Is the man who is in the garden happy?
- (5) *Is the man who in the garden is happy?

Thus only the copula “be” in the main sentence can be moved, not the copula in the subordinate clause, so that (3) becomes (4), not (5).

Discussing this principle in the L2 innateness argument suggests the following: L2 learners know structure-dependency; it may not be available to them in the L2 input they could have been exposed to; it is not acquired from their environment or from their first language; it is built-in in their minds. However, Cook (2003) argues that some possibilities suggested in L2 are that SLLs might be taught the structure-dependency principle by their teachers, or it might be part of their first language. He mentions “grammar books never mention structure-dependency, certainly none of those designed for students of English as a foreign language ... L2 users could transfer the principle from one language to another, and it would be no concern of L2 research how it was acquired in the first place” (205).

How can second language researchers get benefit from structure-dependency? Studying structure-dependency in languages which form questions with movement cannot be the clear-cut point if the principle is part of SLLs or not. However, some languages, like Arabic, form questions by inserting question particles rather than moving elements; it does not need the structure-dependency in questions (Carine, 2013). Thus, Arab users of English do not operate this principle, at least in question formation, in their L1, i.e., Arab learners of English could not transfer structure-dependency directly from their L1. Saying this does not mean that structure-dependency is missing from Arabic since it might be involved in many other aspects of the grammar. Modern Standard Arabic forms yes/no questions by inserting the particle /hāl/ or the glottal stop particle /ʔ/ at the beginning of a sentence without involving any movement. Applying this to the examples presented above, one can form Arabic questions saying:

- (1) hāl Peter ādem?
(Is Peter coming?)
- (2) Peter qādem.
(Peter is coming.)
- (3) hālar:adʒol fi alhadiqasaʕi:d?
(Is the man who is in the garden happy?)
- (4) ar:adʒol fi alhadiqasaʕi:d.
(The man who is in the garden is happy.)

In the Levantine dialect, spoken in Syria and other neighboring countries, yes/no questions are formed by changing the intonation from raising-falling to falling-raising (the following examples are written phonetically as spoken in the Latakian dialect):

- Peter ʒaj.
- (1) Peter ʒai?
(Is Peter coming?)

(2) ar:zāljalibēlhadiqamabṣu:t.
(The man who is in the garden is happy.)

(3) ar:zāljalibēlhadiqamabṣu:t?
(Is the man who is in the garden happy?)

Cook (2003) conducted research to investigate whether “all [second language] users know structure-dependency; L2 users with first languages that do not have question movement have more difficulty with structure-dependency than those with first languages that do” (207). The research instrument in Cook's study was a grammaticality judgement test, in which the participants were given a three-way choice of *OK*, *not OK*, *not sure*. His research tested three types of structure-dependency: relative clauses (Type A), questions with relative clauses (Type B), structure-dependency violations (Type C) in which the wrong copula has been moved, which are modelled on the classic Chomskyan examples. The participants were of different L1 backgrounds including Japanese, Chinese, Arabic, Polish, Finnish, Dutch, and English. Japanese, Chinese and Arabic yes/no questions are formed by inserting particles (at the end of a sentence in Japanese and Chinese and at the beginning of a sentence in Arabic) with no movement. The other languages involve some kind of movement (with a particle or an auxiliary needed depending on each language). Cook (2003) mentioned in his findings that “structure-dependency violations are the easiest for all groups” and the results show that the participants with a first language involving movement performed better (nearly 100% to 100%) than those with a first language that doesn't involve such a movement (87.1% for Arabic speakers, 86.7% for Chinese speakers and about 95% for Japanese speakers). Comparing the two groups, he reported that using a Mann-Whitney test, there was no significant difference for type A, some significance for type B ($p < 0.028$) and a high level of significance for type C ($p < 0.001$).

Another way Cook (2003, 207) used to present his data was by individual, a way of analyzing his data to support the view that “Universal Grammar ... aims to account for the grammar in the mind of an individual, not the social construct of a language shared by a community of speakers”. In his data, the participants who scored at least 5/6 for Type C (the focus is on Type C only now because it is the most significant for this research) are as shown in Table 1 (taken from Cook, 2003, 213):

Table (1). Individual in each group scoring at least 5/6 for Type C (Cook , 2003, 213)

Arabic	Chinese	Japanese	Polish	Dutch	Finnish	English
16 out of 22	20 out of 20	24 out of 27	22 out of 22	26 out of 26	23 out of 23	35 out of 35

Thus, all the participants scored well on structure-dependency, achieving an overall score of 85%, most were above 95%; “all the L2 groups have 80% or more members who meet the 5/6 criterion, 3 having 100%” (214), so “structure-dependency is ... active in all L2 learners, with some residual effects from the L1: L2 users know something which they have not acquired from outside their own minds” (201). The conclusion in Cook's study is that one can agree that “whatever reservations and doubts there may be about interpretation, the experiment clearly demonstrates something at the core of the poverty-of-the-stimulus argument, namely that L2 users know information about language that they are extremely unlikely to have learnt from experience” (218-9). However, some major points should be mentioned here. The first one is that the yes-no question structure is usually taught in schools at a very early stage. Although it is not under the name of

structure-dependency, but students are trained to form questions using movement when taught question formation. Another point is that if such a structure is used by SLLs since it is already part of their UG, they must use it at appropriately all the time; we cannot say that a structure is acquired unless it is unconsciously used as it forms part of their acquired system (Terrell and Krashen, 1983). The third point is the type of items used by Cook (2003). All Type C sentences are structured as “Is + S + is + N + verbless relative clause?”, which means that the relative clause is part of the subject complement not the subject itself. The following examples are used in Cook’s study representing Type C:

“Is Sam is the cat that brown?

Is Peter is the dog that black?

Is Sarah is the woman who early?

Is Joe is the student who late?

Was Bill was the man who French? Was Sarah was the teacher who English?” (219)

One can notice that there is no sentence structured as the relative clause is part of the NP subject, as:

- *Is the cat that brown is Sam?

Thus, how can we decide if his participants rely on their knowledge of the structure-dependency or if they apply a rule stipulating that “Is + N + is ...” is ungrammatical because they have to move the first “is” not the second one.

The last point that seems to be problematic is that the participants were divided into groups based on their mother tongue not their proficiency in English; “since it was not possible to test the English proficiency of all the students, there may be variations between university level English in different countries” (Cook, 2003, 209). As mentioned before, SLLs rely on their FL as the initial state of development and this role decreases as their interlanguages are changing towards the target language. Thus, this study aims to answer the following research questions:

- 1- Can SLLs detect structure-dependency as a principle if it doesn’t operate on a specific structure, yes/no questions, in their L1?
- 2- If yes, does their L1 play any role? If not, what is the role of UG in SLA?
- 3- Is the effect of L1 really greater in the initial stages of development and does this role decrease as they progress on the developmental route?

3. Method:

The research instrument used consisted of two tasks: the first was a grammaticality judgment test and the second was forming yes/no questions of some specific sentences. The grammaticality judgment tests are the conventional method in the UG L2 research domain although it poses some methodological problems since metalinguistic awareness is in itself changed by learning another language (Cook, 1993).

In the format used here, in the grammaticality judgement task the subjects were given a two-way choice of “correct” or “incorrect”. Six sentences were given, four of which are ungrammatical and two are grammatical. The second task contained 3 affirmative sentences and the participants were asked to form yes/no questions.

3.1. Subjects:

The same test was distributed to two different groups divided according to their proficiency level in English. The first group includes 18 pre-intermediate learners; the second group includes 21 beginner learners. The division was based on a language proficiency test done at the Higher Institute of Languages or on the learner’s progress from one course to another. All subjects are Syrian Arab learners of English, and they all have studied English

for at least 12 years as part of formal teaching at school; some have studied English at University as one term course, in addition to other informal settings of learning English outside classrooms, such as listening to English songs and watching English movies and YouTube videos

4. Results:

In the first task, all subjects answered the questions; no participant left any single question with no answer. The participants were also asked to leave a question if they are not sure about one. In the second task, some questions were left with no response. The data of the first task were analyzed using SPSS. The subjects were split according to their proficiency level and then each item was presented separately to ensure that no particular sentence presented a huge difference among other sentences. Table 2 shows a summary of the data:

Table (2). a summary of data showing the response of subjects, expected answer, standard deviation, mean, median, percentage of correspondent responses to the expected answers.

Data Summary	Correct	Incorrect	Expected	Std D	Mean	Median	Precent
P-I*/ Item 1	8	10	Incorrect	0.511	0.44	0	55.6
P-I/ Item 2	13	5	Correct	0.461	0.72	1	72.2
P-I/ Item 3	15	3	Correct	0.383	0.83	1	83.3
P-I/ Item 4	4	14	Incorrect	0.428	0.22	0	77.8
P-I/ Item 5	3	15	Incorrect	0.383	0.17	0	83.3
P-I/ Item 6	6	12	Incorrect	0.485	0.33	0	66.7
B**/ Item 1	3	18	Incorrect	0.359	0.14	0	85.7
B/ Item 2	13	8	Correct	0.489	0.62	1	61.9
B/ Item 3	11	10	Correct	0.512	0.52	1	52.4
B/ Item 4	9	12	Incorrect	0.507	0.43	0	57.1
B/ Item 5	9	12	Incorrect	0.507	0.43	0	57.1
B/ Item 6	12	9	Incorrect	0.507	0.57	1	42.9

*P-I= pre-intermediate/ ** B= beginner

The overall percentage of appropriate responses is 73.15% for the pre-intermediate group and 59.51% for the beginner group. The standard deviation of the same item among one group shows that subjects' performance is homogenous, as the highest is 0.512 and the least is 0.359, which shows no significant difference among the individuals of the same group.

Table 3 and 4 show the number of the responses to the expected answers, i.e., the participants who know which sentences are grammatical or not.

Table (3). number of the pre-intermediate subjects who answer 0-6 appropriate answers with their percentage among the pre-intermediate group.

Level = pre-intermediate		Frequency	Percent
Valid	0 correct	1	5.6
	2 correct	1	5.6
	3 correct	5	27.8
	4 correct	1	5.6
	5 correct	4	22.2
	6 correct	6	33.3
	Total	18	100.0

Table (4). number of the beginner subjects who answer 0-6 appropriate answers with their percentage among the beginner group.

Level = beginner		Frequency	Percent
Valid	1 correct	1	4.8
	2 correct	3	14.3
	3 correct	8	38.1
	4 correct	4	19.0
	5 correct	3	14.3
	6 correct	2	9.5
	Total	21	100.0

One can notice that 10 out of 18 in the pre-intermediate group achieve at least 5/6, the criterion that Cook (2003) used as a major criterion in his research, with a percentage of 55.5%. In the beginner group, 5 out of 21 subjects achieve at least 5/6 criterion with a percentage of 23.8%.

As for the second task, 7 out of 18 in the pre-intermediate group gave 3/3 grammatical responses, applying structure-dependency with no errors. Examples (1), (2), and (3) are the answer the participants gave:

- The man who is cooking is a very good chef.
- (1) Is the man who is cooking a very good chef?
- The lady that is near the college is wearing dress.
- (2) Is the lady that is near the college wearing dress?
- The boys who are in the garden are my brothers.
- (3) Are the boys who are in the garden your brothers?

6 out of 18 in the pre-intermediate group gave 0/3 grammatical responses, but identical, seeming to apply a rule of moving the first copula to the beginning of the sentence, as shown in Examples (4), (5) and (6):

- (4) *Is the man who cooking is a very good chef?
- (5) *Is the lady that near the college is wearing dress?
- (6) *Are the boys who in the garden are your brothers?

5 out of 18 in the pre-intermediate group gave 0/3 grammatical responses, seeming not to apply a specific rule. There was no common form they used to form each one of the three questions.

In the beginner group, only 2 out of 21 gave 3/3 grammatical responses, and only 1 out of 21 gave 0/3 grammatical responses, but identical to the 6 subjects in the pre-intermediate group. The other 19 seem not to apply a specific rule. Some of their responses will be discussed in the discussion and conclusion section.

5. Discussion and Conclusion:

The data collected show that the pre-intermediate group outperforms the beginner group in both the first and the second task with a highly significant difference. As Table 2 shows, the percentage of appropriate responses is 73.15% for the pre-intermediate group and 59.51% for the beginner group. In the second task 7/18 in the pre-intermediate group gave grammatical responses in comparison with 2/21 in the beginner group. Linking these results with the first research question, it seems that 9/39 of the SLLs detect the structure-dependency in yes/no questions. As said before, structure-dependency is a universal principle, and by definition, a principle applies across the board in the grammar, not construction specific. Hence, Arabic as a language doesn't lack structure-dependency but it doesn't require it in yes/no questions; it is part of their prior knowledge since it is already part of their language capacity. However, inappropriate applying of the rule here may be related to the fact that their L1 doesn't require it. Back to the previous hypotheses of the

role of UG, the data seem to support the third position, the indirect access to UG via L1. A slight change can be added to this position, even if a principle is instantiated in the L1 but absent in a construction, it may not be detected in this specific construction. The data seem not to support the full access hypothesis as learner's performance were, to some extent, low to say that they apply the principle correctly. Even the positive evidence they were exposed to in their formal learning didn't seem to be effectively beneficial to apply it in yes/no questions, which leads us to say that even the no access hypothesis doesn't apply here. Formal teaching, positive and negative evidence don't lead the subjects to form yes/no questions correctly.

Another important point that can be concluded from the data is that some subjects seem to apply a rule to form yes/no questions, although the rule is inappropriate, but it is part of their interlanguage. It is mentioned previously that part of the learner's interlanguage is idiosyncratic rules that belong to neither their L1 nor L2 norms. The rule seems to say, "to form yes/no question, move the first copula to the beginning of the sentence." All the ungrammatical sentences in the first task apply this rule and 7/39 (6 pre-intermediate and 1 beginner) subjects applied it in the second task. These rules vanish and are constantly changing as learners progress in the developmental route (White, 2003). This may be the reason why L2 beginner learners fail to apply a specific clear rule in the second task. One interesting rule that can be noticed is adding a third copula or an auxiliary to the beginning of the sentence. This might be considered a particle according to the beginners' interlanguage. As mentioned before, in Arabic we add "hāl" as a particle to form yes/no questions. One can hypothesize that some beginner subjects apply a rule of adding a copula or an auxiliary to the beginning of a sentence to function as a particle. Examples (7), (8), (9), (10) and (11) are taken from the responses of the beginners:

- (7) ***Is** she that is near the college is wearing dress?
- (8) ***Is** the man who is cooking is a good chef?
- (9) ***Does** the man who is cooking is a good chef?
- (10) ***Do** the boys who are in the garden are your brothers?
- (11) ***Do** ishe cooking is a very good chef?

Such examples are recurring in the beginner group responses, which show that they might rely on their L1 and the role decreases as they progress. Only one subject in the pre-intermediate group applied such a rule. However, this cannot be taken as a clear-cut reason as this might only be one stage along with other stages to acquire questions. In second language acquisition research, grammatical morphemes are acquired in a predictable order and in predictable stages (Dulay and Burt, 1973; Dulay and Burt 1974; Bailey et al, 1974, Krashen, 1978, Larsen-Freeman 1975). Thus, all SLLs of different linguistic backgrounds acquire such constructions, including question formation, follow the same route. It could be only one stage on the developmental route that says "add an auxiliary or a copula at the beginning to form yes/no questions." This particular point should be studied more in the future in different linguistic contexts.

Whether it is first language or one stage on the developmental route, one can notice that learners may have been trying to construct rules. They use some structures, whether grammatical, or ungrammatical responses based on their first language or based on their developmental interlanguage, which supports the poverty-of-the-stimulus argument in SLA. Through trial and error, learners construct, apply, and modify rules as needed to form sentences. Thus, language teachers should be aware of the role of rule construction in SLA, and understanding the process of rule construction in SLA can help explain why certain

errors are persistent and difficult to correct. Learners may be relying on rules that they have constructed themselves, which may not be accurate or applicable in all contexts. The poverty-of-the-stimulus argument suggests that there may be innate knowledge of language that guides rule construction in SLA, which has implications for our understanding of the nature of language and the human mind. By investigating the process of rule construction in SLA, researchers can gain insights into how the human brain processes and learns language.

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