

## Assessing the Performance of Iraqi EFL University Learners in Using Adjective Complementation in English

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### 1. Introduction

Generally, adjectives modify nouns or pronouns by describing them and they sometimes occur before the nouns they modify (attributive), for example:

1 a big house

And they may occur predicatively, for example:

2 The car is new.

To complete their structure and meaning, adjectives need complementation. So, the adjective takes the complementation which modifies it. According to Richards et al. (1992: 69), complementation is the part of the sentence which follows the verb and completes the sentence. The problem arises from the state that Iraq EFL university students often find difficulty in using adjective complementation because most students do not have the mastery of this topic and they are not aware of the fact that some adjectives can be completed by a certain type of complementation rather than another and adjectives can be followed by more than one type of complementation.

The present study aims at:

1. Investigating the ability of Iraqi EFL university learners in using adjective complementation in English.
2. Finding out the precise area of difficulty in using the topic under investigation.
3. Suggesting the remedies for the alleviation of the difficulties.

It is hypothesized that Iraqi EFL university learners fail to master the recognition and production of adjective complementation in English.

In carrying out this work, the following procedures will be followed:

1. Presenting a comprehensive theoretical study about adjective complementation in English.
2. Selecting a random sample of university students to represent the population of the work for administering a diagnostic test to find out the difficulties they may face in using the topic under investigation.
3. Analyzing the results of the test so that conclusions and recommendations will be suggested.

The study is limited to adjective complementation in English and the test is confined to a random sample of Iraqi EFL university students at their fourth stage in the Department of English/College of Education for Human Sciences/University of Babylon.

### 2. Definitions

Schwartz (2003: 40) mentions that the complementation is the parts that gives more information about the subject. Crystal (2003: 88) states that it is a term used in the analysis of grammatical function to refer to a major constituent of structure. Huddleston (1984: 305) denotes that there are rules to be followed by the user of language in the choice of the type of complementation and the appearance of complementation depends upon the type of adjective. Some adjectives accept no complementation and others can be complemented with more than one type of complementation.

### 3. Types of Adjective Complementation

Grammarians differ in the number and types of adjective complementation. The present work will focus on the following four types of complementation suggested by Quirk et al. (1985: 1220):

#### 3.1 Adjective Complementation by a to-Infinitive Clause

Scheurweghs (1959: 213) mentions that the adjective may be complemented with an infinitive with its active and passive forms:

3 These obstacles were certain to delay our work. (active)

4 Recruits were unlikely to be drawn to any great extent from other classes of society. (passive)

Quirk and Greenbaum (1973: 356) distinguish five constructions in which the adjective is followed by a to-infinitive clause as shown in the following sentences:

Type (1)

5 Bob is splendid to wait .

This type has an analogue involving extraposition :

6 It is splendid of Bob to wait.

Type (2)

7 Bob is slow to react.

This type has an analogue in which the adjective is transformed into an adverbial.

8 Bob reacts slowly.

Type (3)

9 Bob is furious to hear it.

In this type, the head of the adjective phrase is an emotive one and causation is expressed by the infinitive clause:

10 To hear it has made Bob furious.

11 It has made Bob furious to hear it.

Type (4)

12 Bob is hesitant to agree with you.

In this type, the head of the adjective phrase is a volitional adjective.

Type (5)

13 Bob is hard to convince.

In this type, the subject is the object of the infinitive clause which must have a transitive verb. This type has an analogue with the form in which the adjective is complement to the infinitive clause:

14 To convince Bob is hard.

15 It is hard to convince Bob.

A noun phrase can be used as an alternative to the adjective phrase:

16 Bob is a hard man to convince

A to-infinitive clause has indications when it complements an adjective. The first one is to express feeling:

17 She was afraid to seem ungrateful if she refused.

18 They were glad to be relieved of the responsibility.

The second one is expressed by the use of (so+adj+as) before a to-infinitive clause in which the subject of the main clause and to-infinitive clause are the same:

19 They were so fortunate as to escape.

The third one is to the reason:

20 He must be crazy to go on like that. (Zandvoort, 1962: 10)

### 3.2 Adjective Complementation by a that-Clause

According to Quirk et al. (1985: 1222-25), that-clause which complement the adjectives may have:

a. indicative verb: It is used if the adjective is factual:

21 I am sure that he is here now.

b. Putative should: It is used if the adjective is emotive:

22 I was angry that she should ignore me.

c. Subjunctive verb: It is used if the adjective is volitional:

23 I was adamant that he be appointed.

Coe (1980: 64) denotes that when 'so' premodifies an adjective followed by optional that-clause , this form gives the indication that somebody or something has a quality and then a certain result:

24 This food is so salty (that) I can't eat it. (it is so salty for me to eat)

Quirk and Greenbaum (1973: 355) mention that the finite clause is commonly a that clause, but with factual adjectives the wh-clauses are used also:

25 I'm not sure why she came.

26 I'm not clear where she went.

In addition, clauses introduced by 'whether' or 'if' are used with factual adjectives when they have a negative sense:

27 I'm not sure whether/if she is here yet.

Stageberg (1975: 274-75) states that a clear-cut distinction between an adverbial and adjective complementation is not easy to be made. But, in natural speech, adjective complementation is not movable in that it takes its position after the adjective, while the adverbial is usually transposable, for example:

28 They were glad that she was safe.

Here, that clause which is the complementation of the adjective 'glad' cannot take another position:

29 \*That she was state they were glad.

While in:

30 They were glad when she arrived.

The modifier 'when clause' which modifies the main clause, can take another position:

31 When she arrived, they were glad.

### 3.3 Adjective Complementation by a Wh-Clause

A wh-clause may follow an adjective as a complementation:

32 It is marvelous that modern technology can do.

A preposition may be inserted between the adjective and the wh-clause and it is optional, for example:

33 She wasn't clear (about) what we had to do.

A to-infinitive clause may follow a wh-clause which complements some adjectives to indicate some animate being:

34 We are uncertain where to go to choose. (Chalker, 1984: 172)

Quirk et al. (1985: 1225) mention two types of adjectives:

a. adjectives with a subject:

35 I was unsure (of or about) what I should say.

b. adjectives with anticipatory 'it' as a subject:

36 It was unclear what they would do.

### 3.4 Adjective Complementation by an-ing Participle Clause

Chalker (1984: 171) mentions that the use of an-ing participle clause is of unusual structure though it is a common expression. The-ing participle clause may follow adjectives like 'worth' and 'worthwhile' with or without an explicit subject:

37 It is scarcely worth (while) going home.

It can be followed by an-ing participle clause without a subject:

38 It is worth (while) saving the cartons.

## 4. The Test

According to Mousavi (1997: 142), the test is an instrument designed to elicit a specific sample of an individual's behavior.

The diagnostic test is used to locate the area of difficulty faced by Iraqi EFL university students in using adjective complementation and to identify the sources and types of the students' errors.

The random sample of the test consists of (60) learners taken from the fourth classes of the Department of English/College of Education for Human Science/University of Babylon.

The test has two questions and each question consists of ten items. The first question measures the students' performance at the recognition as well as production levels in which they are given sentences consist of adjective complementation and they have to identify whether these sentences are right or wrong and to correct the wrong ones. The second question is designed to measure the students' performance at the production level in which they are given pairs of separate sentences and they have to join them to produce sentences of adjective complementation.

### 4.1 Item Analysis

The most important types of item analysis are the "discrimination index" (DI) which refers to what extent the test do better on the item than the low-scores and the "facility value" (FV) which show how easy or difficult each item of the test is (Heaton, 1998:128)

#### 4.1.1 The Discrimination Index of the Items

The discrimination index of an item can be calculated by subtracting the number of correct responses in the low group from the number of correct responses of the high group and dividing the result by half the number of students. The students with highest scores respond to the most difficult items correctly while those students with lower scores respond incorrectly to these items.

The (DI) of test items of question one is shown in the following table:

Items	DI	Item	DI
1	0.40	6	0.36
2	0.33	7	0.50
3	0.30	8	0.30
4	0.43	9	0.20
5	0.56	10	0.33
Mean	37.1		

The (DI) of test items of question two is shown in the following table:

Items	DI	Items	DI
1	0.40	6	0.35
2	0.33	7	0.46
3	0.33	8	0.30
4	0.40	9	0.50
5	0.26	10	6.26
Mean	37.7		

The above two tables show that no negative (DI) is mentioned for any test item. The (DI) of the items ranges from the lowest rate of (0.20) to the highest rate of (0.56) which emphasizes the individual differences among the students and the mean of (DI) of question one is (37.1) and that of question two is (37.7) which are acceptable according to Mousavi (1997: 69), the acceptable range for (DI) is between (0.20 and 0.90) and this indicates that the items of the test discriminate well.

#### 4.1.2 The Facility Value (FV) of the Items

Richards et al. (1992:192) state that the facility value (FV) of the item shows how easy or difficult the item is. It can be calculated by dividing the number of correct answer by the number of students.

The (FV) of test items of question one is shown in the following table:

Item	DI	Item	DI
1	0.56	6	0.31
2	0.30	7	0.51
3	0.15	8	0.45
4	0.58	9	0.10
5	0.68	10	0.18
Mean	38.2		

The (FV) of test items of question two is shown in the following table:

Item	DI	Item	DI
1	0.40	6	0.56
2	0.26	7	0.46
3	0.18	8	0.15
4	0.43	9	0.65
5	0.13	10	0.23
Mean	34.5		

According to these two tables, the facility values of the items range between (0.10) and (0.68) which are very apart. The mean of (FV) of items of question one is (38.2) and that of question two is (34.5) which are acceptable.

#### 4.2 The findings of the test

The findings of the test of question one and two are shown respectively in the following two tables:

Q1/

Item	No. of Correct Responses	Percentage	No. of Incorrect Responses	Percentage
1	34	56.6	26	43.4
2	18	30	42	70
3	9	15	51	85
4	35	58.3	25	4.7
5	41	68.3	19	31.7
6	19	31.7	41	68.3
7	31	51.6	29	48.4
8	27	45	33	55
9	6	10	50	90
10	11	18.3	49	81.7
Total	231	38.4	365	61.6

Q2/

Item	No. of Correct Responses	Percentage%	No. of Incorrect Responses	Percentage%
1	24	40	36	60
2	16	26.7	44	73.3
3	11	18.3	49	81.7
4	26	43.3	34	56.7
5	8	13.3	52	86.7
6	34	56.6	26	43.4
7	28	46.6	32	53.4
8	9	15	51	85
9	39	65	21	35
10	14	23.3	46	76.7
Total	209	33.81	391	66.19

According to these two tables, the number and percentage of the incorrect responses of the two questions are respectively (365, 61.6 %) and (391, 66.19 %) which are more than those of correct responses which are respectively (231, 38.4 %) and (209, 33.81 %). These results indicate that the students face difficulty in using adjective complementation in English.

### 4.3 Error Analysis

#### 4.3.1 Sources of Errors

Students' errors can be attributed to four factors (Brown, 1987:177):

##### 4.3.1.1 Interlingual Transfer

According to Keshavarz (2001: 102), it refers to the transfer of phonological, morphological, grammatical, lexico-semantic and stylistic elements of the students' mother tongue to the learning of the foreign language. The differences between the mother tongue and the foreign language lead to interference (negative transfer) and the absence of linguistic differences lead to facilitation (positive transfer). The positive interference can be found in the students' correct responses to items (1), (5) and (7) of Q1:

item (1): He is hesitant about signing the contract

item (5): It is important that they attend every day.

item (7): Ask me if you are not sure how to do it.

The items (5) and (7) of Q2 are examples of the negative interference:

item (5): I am ashamed that you should have behaved in that way.

\* I am ashamed why you behaved in that way.

item (7): I am surprised (that) you don't know your programme.

\* I am ashamed how you don't know your programme.

Interlingual transfer accounts for (21%) of all errors in the students' responses.

#### 4.3.1.2 Intralingual Transfer

According to Richards (1974: 6), intralingual errors are produced due to the generalization based on partial exposure to the target language. Four factors of errors can be mentioned in this regard:

a. Overgeneralization: This factor refers to the incorrect application of the previously learned material to the context of the foreign language. The students' responses to the items (2) and (3) in Q1 represent this type:

item (2): It is very convenient to pay by credit card.

\*It is very convenient that he should pay by credit card.

In this item, the adjective "convenient" is complemented with a to-infinitive clause not a that-clause

item (3): It is hopeless trying to convince her.

\*It is hopeless to try to convince her.

In this item, the adjective "hopeless" is complemented with an ing-participle clause.

b. Ignorance of rule restrictions: Which make the learners apply a certain rule to a category to which it is not applicable. The items (10) in Q1 and (9) in Q2 are examples of this factor:

item (10) Q1: John is hard to convince.

\*John is hard to arrive.

In this item, the subject of the sentence is the object of the infinitive clause which must therefore have a transitive verb like convince.

item (9) Q2: My husband is very sorry that he will not be able to attend your meeting

\*My husband is very sorry because he is not able to attend your meeting.

c. Incomplete application of rules: which refers to the failure to learn more complex types of rules. This can be shown in the students' indication of the item (4) in Q1 as wrong while it is correct and their responses to item (8) in Q2:

item (4) Q1: England must win this game to be sure of qualifying for the world cup.

item (8) Q2: It is curious that you should say that.

\*Why are you curious to say that?

d. False concept hypothesized: which results from faulty comprehension of the distinction in the foreign language. The items (9) in Q1 and (10) in Q2 show this type of factors:

item (9) Q1: It is probable that she will be in a bad temper.

\*It is probable for her to be in a bad temper.

In this item, the adjective "probable" is not used in the construction which is introduced by "it" with a for-clause.

item (10) Q2: It is true (that) you said that?

\*Was it true to say that?

Intralingual transfer accounts for (58%) of all errors in the testees' responses.

#### 4.3.1.3 Context of Learning

Errors may also result from the influence of learning situation such as the classroom, the misleading explanation of the teacher, or the focus of the textbook writers on some aspects of language rather than others (Ibid.: 178). The students' responses to the items (2) and (3) in Q2 represent this source of errors:

item (2): It is vital that every one should vote on Friday.

\*It is vital to every one voting in Friday.

item (3): It was stupid of him to leave her.

\*It was stupid leaving her.

The effect of context of learning accounts for (2%) of all errors.

#### 4.3.1.4 Communication Strategies

Ellis (1994: 340) states that the learners resort to use a kind of strategy to overcome the problem in communication and to cope with the difficulties they may face. Guessing is one of the strategies used by the students in their responses. The examples of this strategy can be found in students' responses to

some items of Q1 when they indicate whether they are right or wrong. The items (1), (4), (5), (7) and (8) are examples of this strategy. This source of errors accounts for (19%) of students' errors.

## 5. Conclusions

There are certain rules to be followed by the user of language in his choice of adjective complementation and the occurrence of the type of adjective complementation rests upon the type of adjective. This work has focused on the four major types of adjective complementation by a to-infinitive clause, by a that-clause, by a wh-clause and by an ing-participle clause.

According to the results of the test which has been applied to a random sample of Iraqi EFL university learners (60 students) from the Department of English/College of Education for Human Sciences/University of Babylon, the total number and percentage of incorrect responses are (756, 63.9 %) which are more than that of correct responses (440, 36.1 %). The results show that the students face difficulty in using adjective complementation in English which, in turn, confirms the hypothesis of the study which reads:

"It is hypothesized that Iraqi EFL University learners fail to master the recognition and production of adjective complementation in English"

The following sources of errors are behind the poor performance of the students according to their errors:

- a. Intralingual transfer has the majority of students' errors as it accounts for (58%) of the total errors.
- b. Interlingual transfer constitutes (21%) of the errors which is the second rate.
- c. The students' use of communication strategies is the third rate of errors (19%).
- d. The effect of context of learning constitutes (2%) which is the fourth rate.

On the basis of the conclusions drawn above, the following recommendations can be suggested:

- a. A great deal of attention is to be paid in teaching adjective complementation in English to simplify the process of learning.
- b. Due attention should be paid to use different types of adjective complementation through extensive training and more exercises.
- c. For the alleviation of the difficulties, remedial work should be provided to enhance the students' mastery of the subject.

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## Appendix I: The Test

Q1/ Indicate whether the following sentences of adjective complementation are right or wrong and correct the wrong ones:

1. He is hesitant about signing the contract.
2. It is very convenient that he should pay by credit.
3. It is hopeless to try to convince her.
4. England must win this game to be sure of qualifying.
5. It is important that they attend every day.
6. That they were safe he was glad.
7. Ask me if you are not sure how to do it.
8. His poetry is slow in achieving recognition.
9. It is probable for her to be in a bad temper.
10. John is hard to arrive

Q2/ Combine each of the pairs of sentences below so as to produce one single sentence containing adjective complementation:

1. They were successful. They win the contract.
2. Every one should vote on Friday. It is vital.
3. He left her. That was stupid.
4. Samir saw the point. He is quick.
5. Why did you behave in that way? I'm ashamed.
6. You see our point of view at last. We're delighted.
7. Don't you know your programme? I'm surprised.
8. Why do you say that? It is curious.
9. My husband will not be able to attend your meeting. He is very sorry.
10. Did you really say that? Is it true?

#### Appendix II: The Answers of the Test

Q1/

1. right
2. wrong. It is very convenient to pay by credit card.
3. wrong. It is hopeless trying to convince her.
4. right.
5. right.
6. wrong. He was glad that they were safe.
7. right.
8. right.
9. wrong. It is probable that she'll be in a bad temper.
10. wrong. John is hard to convince.

Q2/

1. They were successful to win the contract.
2. It is vital that every one should vote on Friday.
3. It was stupid of him to leave her.
4. Samir is quick to see the point.
5. I'm ashamed that you should have behaved in that way.
6. We're delighted that you see our point of view at last.
7. I'm surprised (that) you don't know your programme.
8. It is curious that you should say that.
9. My husband is very sorry that he will not be able to attend your meeting.
10. It is true (that) you said that.