

Effects of Language Proficiency and Learning Styles on the Acquisition of Conditions and Violations of It-Cleft Constructions

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Abstract

This paper studies the effects of language proficiency and learning styles on the acquisition of conditions and violations of it-cleft constructions. Pakistani ESL learners encounter difficulties in constructing grammatically accurate conditions sentences and in avoiding violations of it-cleft constructions. Hence, the study examines the conditions and violations of it-cleft constructions in relation to L2 proficiency and learning styles. This study seeks to answer the main research question: “How well do Pakistani ESL learners with varying degrees of second language proficiency and learning styles accurately identify conditions and violations of it-cleft constructions?” The study utilized a quantitative approach. A sample of three hundred and ninety participants with varying degrees of L2 proficiency and learning styles was selected from certain universities in Lahore, Pakistan. The study applied a stratified random sampling technique to draw the required sample size. The participants were additionally categorized into elementary, intermediate, and advanced levels of L2 proficiency. Each L2 proficiency included 130 respondents. The Grammaticality Judgment Task (GJT) was administered to assess participants’ grammatical understanding of the conditions and violations of it-cleft constructions. A bivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was used to investigate a significant variation in the mean scores of the GJT across different levels of second language proficiency and learning styles. The results indicated a notable variation in average scores in GJT among different L2 proficiency groups and also between learners who are field-dependent and those who are field-independent. The findings also indicated a substantial main and interaction effect of language proficiency and learning styles on GJT. FI learners scored better than FD learners on conditions and violations of it-cleft constructs. The results reflect intriguing

educational ramifications. ELT educators and curriculum developers would create instructional exercises focused on cleft constructions specifically tailored for learners with limited language proficiency.

Keywords

Cleft Construction, It-Cleft *with* “*That*” and “*Who*” Pronoun, Agreement between Noun and Embedded Verb, It-Cleft *without* “*That*” and “*Who*” Pronoun, Disagreement between Noun and Embedded Verb, Field-Dependent Field-Independent Learners, L2 Proficiency Levels

1. Introduction

Based on cognitive linguistics techniques, the regular utilization of grammatical structures has an impact on the process of language learning for ESL learners (Ellis, 2006; Ellis & Cadierno, 2009; Goldberg, 2006). The target language input rarely utilizes conditions and violations it-cleft constructions. The it-cleft sentence is formed by using a dummy pronoun, headed by the auxiliary verb, a cleft phrase. A cleft is a type of sentence structure that includes two clauses and is used to emphasize a certain element. It often consists of a cleft pronoun, a linking verb, a cleft phrase, and an embedded relative clause (Biber et al., 2002: p. 419). It is called cleft because it divides a sentence in two parts. A cleft sentence begins with the empty pronoun *it* and emphasises noun phrase. If the first clause begins with *who* or *what* it follows helping verb or a form of *be*. A cleft sentence is a type of complicated sentence that highlights a specific feature by altering the usual word order of a simple statement using a placeholder word, such as “*it*” or “*that*”. This reordering permits the highlighting of a particular segment within the text. A second language learner constructs grammatically correct it-cleft sentence if he fulfills its condition, and violation of grammatical conditions results in grammatically incorrect cleft construction.

Here are some instances of conditions and violations of it-cleft constructions:

Condition 1: It was Biology that Mary taught at Harvard University.

Violation 1: *It is chocolate contains a high level of blood glucose.

Condition 2: It was Chomsky who introduced Universal Grammar.

Violation 2: *It was the skipper Ahmad put the team united.

Condition 3: It is him who encourages me.

Violation 3: *It is her who stimulate me.

Second language acquisition (SLA) studies investigated the impact of knowledge of syntactic constructions on the learning outcome (Schmidt, 2010; VanPatten, 2015). This study investigates the impact of second language (L2) proficiency levels and learning styles on the occurrence of conditions or violations of it-cleft constructions. Yousefi (2011) found that language proficiency and learning styles have a substantial impact on the process of acquiring a second language. Learning styles refer to the individual characteristics that impact the learning abilities of

ESL learners (Niroomand & Rostampour, 2014). Field-dependent learners have a tendency to see information as a whole, often becoming overwhelmed by the various stimuli. On the other hand, field-independent learners have a tendency to perceive information analytically. They are skilled at analyzing and isolating significant features, detecting patterns, and critically evaluating data.

The justification of employing field-dependent/field-independent learning style as an independent variable in the present study is to examine the proficiency of field-dependent/field-independent learners in grammatical understanding of cleft constructions. The study conducted by Rezaee and Farahian (2012) demonstrated that individuals who are field-independent learners significantly contribute to the development of linguistic competence. Field-independent learners excel in acquiring language components and possess a strong command of grammatical information pertaining to cleft construction. In their study, Farsi et al. (2014) found that individuals who are field-independent learners tend to have a better degree of language proficiency.

The identified conditions/violations of it-cleft constructions were selected for investigation because to their troublesome and challenging nature. ESL learners possess a restricted understanding of the syntactic aspects of cleft constructions. (Callies & Keller, 2008). Second language learners experience difficulties in accurately creating grammatically correct cleft structures (Chu et al., 2014; Chung & Shin, 2022; Wu & Ionin, 2022). The complexity of cleft constructions poses a formidable obstacle for ESL learners (Donaldson, 2016; Zwanziger, 2008). ESL learners find it difficult to understand the arrangement of words in cleft formations (Sorace, 2011). Pakistani ESL learners are presumed to have a deficiency in their understanding of the grammatical rules governing conditions and violations of it-cleft constructions. Field-independent learners outperform field-dependent learners in accurately assessing conditions/violations in grammaticality judgment task. The study has utilized cognitive linguistics and construction grammar as foundational theoretical frameworks. The study has a wide range of focus; it is connected to the acquisition of cleft constructions in a second language across different levels of proficiency and learning styles in the Pakistani context. Hence, the research makes a valuable contribution by presenting empirical support for the significance of cognitive linguistics and construction grammar in second language acquisition (SLA).

The study aims to assess the grammatical knowledge of Pakistani ESL learners about conditions and violations of it-cleft constructions through a grammaticality judgment Task.

The study investigated the research question in the following manner.

How well do Pakistani ESL learners with varying proficiency levels and learning styles accurately identify conditions and violations of it-cleft constructions that involve:

- 1) *with/without* “*that*” pronoun?
- 2) *with/without* “*who*” pronoun?
- 3) *agreement/disagreement* between noun (antecedent of *who*) and embedded

verb?

The research question led to the formulation of the following null hypotheses:

H₀1: There is no significant main/interaction effect of L2 proficiency levels and FD/FI learning styles on it-cleft construction *with/without* “*that*” pronoun.

H₀2: There is no significant main/interaction effect of L2 proficiency levels and FD/FI learning styles on it-cleft construction *with/without* “*who*” pronoun.

H₀3: There is no significant main/interaction effect of L2 proficiency levels and FD/FI learning styles on *agreement/disagreement* between noun (antecedent of who) and embedded verb.

2. Literature Review

Several research on the acquisition of cleft structures in second language acquisition (SLA) are discussed. Thornton et al. (2018) investigated the cognitive capacity of children to comprehend cleft sentences by employing the Truth Value Judgment Task. He conducted an empirical investigation, with a total of twenty children participating in the study. The findings indicated that the participants had grammatical proficiency in understanding cleft structures. In their study, Lobo et al. (2019) examined the grammatical proficiency of Portuguese learners in English cleft sentences. The truth value judgment task was utilized to assess learners’ understanding of different sorts of clefts. A notable distinction was seen between *pseudo clefts* and it-clefts. Aravind et al. (2017) investigated the understanding of it-clefts and pseudo clefts in English-speaking youngsters by using the truth-value judgment task to assess their syntactic knowledge. The comparison was made between it-clefts and *pseudo clefts*. The findings revealed that the participants did not demonstrate their understanding of grammatical cleft structures. Karami (2013) conducted a comparison between Persian head nouns and English cleft structures. A sample of 68 Iranian male and female respondents was selected for the study. An observed correlation between word order and the comprehension of English cleft sentences was discovered among EFL learners. İrgin (2013) conducted a study to investigate the level of challenge posed by cleft sentences for Turkish students in their first year of learning English as a foreign language (EFL). Data was collected from 61 respondents. The findings indicated that there were variations in the students’ awareness levels for different types of cleft structures.

Drummer and Felser (2023) conducted a study on pseudo clefts in German L1 and L2 learners who are skilled in Russian. The results confirmed the idea that pseudo cleft sentences are difficult for second language learners (L2) compared to native speakers (L1). Park and Sung (2023) investigated the process of gaining cleft verb argument in written texts. An inventory of verb arguments was administered to assess essays authored by L2 learners at different levels of proficiency. The study showed that the advanced second language (L2) learners acquired a greater variety of verb argument forms compared to the elementary learners. Ylinärä et al. (2023) investigated the phenomenon of object clefting in the Finnish and Italian languages. The study investigated the use of cleft constructions in their original position and when moved to the front of the sentence in order to quantify the

occurrence of verb clefts. The findings reflected that the technique of comprehending clefts in situ language is most preferable. Faghiri and Samvelian (2021) conducted a study that analyzed cleft constructions in Persian using a corpus-based approach. The researchers examined and analyzed phrases with cleft and cleft-like structures that were taken from newspapers. The study discovered previously unrecorded instances of headed pseudoclefts. Zaidi et al. (2023) conducted a cross-sectional study to measure Pakistani ESL learners' grammatical knowledge of *it-cleft*, *wh-cleft* and *reverse wh-cleft construction* regarding proficiency levels and field-dependent/independent learning styles. A sample of 390 respondents was recruited employing stratified sampling technique. The target data was collected using the GJT. The finding indicated that the advanced proficiency and field-independent learners scored greater mean in correctly judging the *it-cleft*, *wh-cleft* and *reverse wh-cleft construction*.

3. Methods

The study utilized a cross-sectional design to gather data at a specific point in time (Creswell, 2012) from individuals with varying levels of L2 proficiency and learning styles. The target population consisted of 600 Pakistani ESL learners at the graduate and post-graduate levels, selected from universities in Lahore, Pakistan. To ensure representation, a sample of three hundred and ninety individuals with diverse levels of L2 proficiency and learning styles was chosen from certain universities in Lahore, Pakistan. The study utilized a stratified random sampling technique to select the necessary sample size. The participants were additionally categorized into 3 levels of language proficiency and 2 learning styles. There was a total of 130 respondents in each proficiency level. Additionally, there were 195 respondents in each learning style category, specifically field-dependent and field-independent. Consequently, this study included a sample of 390 Pakistani ESL learners. The uniformity of samples was also ensured. To verify the accuracy of the findings, the sample consisted of individuals with the same degree of skill in their second language and with either a field-dependent or field-independent learning style. This was done to prevent any biased judgments from an atypical informant from affecting the results. The Oxford Placement Test, developed by Allen (2004), assessed the language proficiency levels of the participants. Additionally, the Group Embedded Figure Test (GEFT) was used to identify whether the participants had a field-dependent or field-independent learning style. The Grammaticality Judgment Task (GJT) was utilized to assess participants' grammatical knowledge in identifying correct and incorrect usage of conditions/violations of *it-cleft* formulations. The GJT is frequently employed to assess the linguistic proficiency of second language (L2) learners (Ellis & Roever, 2021). In order to prevent any potential influence of the sequence in which the test items were presented, a random presentation method was employed (Mackey and Gass, 2016). The participants were assessed using a rating scale that allowed for comparison, rather than using a scale that only allowed for absolute or binary judgments such as grammatical or ungrammatical.

4. Data Analysis

A bivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was used to analyze the main and interaction effects and to determine a significant difference in mean scores in the conditions and violations of it-cleft constructions in GJT. This included the total score for: 1) It-cleft constructions with or without the pronoun “that”, 2) It-cleft constructions with or without the pronoun “who”, 3) agreement or disagreement between the noun (antecedent of “who”) and the embedded verb.

5. Results

5.1. Conditions and Violations of It-Cleft Constructions

There are six instances of conditions and violations related to cleft constructions. Below are the conditions and violations of it-cleft constructions, along with research question and hypotheses.

5.2. Research Question

How well do Pakistani ESL learners with different L2 proficiency levels and FD/FI learning styles accurately identify conditions and violations of it-cleft constructions that involve:

- 1) *with/without “that”* pronoun?
- 2) *with/without “who”* pronoun?
- 3) *agreement/disagreement* between noun (antecedent of who) and embedded verb?

Table 1. Multivariate wilks’ lambda tests for GJT Condition 1, Violation 1, Condition 2, Violation 2, Condition 3, Violation 3.

Effect	Value	F	Hypothesis df	Error df	<i>p</i>	Partial η^2
Proficiency Levels	0.338	45.55	12	758	<0.001	0.42
Learning Styles	0.719	24.72	6	379	<0.001	0.28
Proficiency Levels*Learning Styles	0.916	2.85	12	758	<0.001	0.04

a. Design: Intercept + Proficiency levels + Learning Style + Proficiency Levels*Learning Style.

Table 1 shows that there were substantial main and interaction effects of language proficiency levels and field-dependent and field-independent learning styles on the combined dependent variables, specifically the conditions and violations of it-cleft constructions. The language proficiency levels were found to have a significant effect, as indicated by $F(12, 758) = 45.55, p < 0.001$. Additionally, the effect size was assessed using Wilk’s lambda, which yielded a value of 0.338. The partial eta squared value was found to be 0.42. The results for learning styles are as follows: $F(6, 379) = 24.72; p < 0.001$; Wilk’s lambda = 0.719; partial eta squared = 0.28. By using the parameters suggested by [Cohen \(1988: pp. 284-287\)](#), an effect size of 0.01 indicates a modest influence, 0.06 indicates a medium effect, and 0.14 indicates a high effect. The results indicate that both language proficiency (Partial

$\eta^2 = 0.42$) and field-dependent, field-independent learning styles (Partial $\eta^2 = 0.28$) had a significant impact on GJT conditions and violations, with a substantial effect size. For additional analysis, a two-way MANOVA test was used to analyze the findings of the dependent variables individually across proficiency levels and learning styles. The results can be found in **Table 2**.

Table 2. MANOVA summary of differences in GJT Condition 1, Violation 1, Condition 2, Violation 2, Condition 3, Violation 3.

Source	Dependent Variables	TS S	df	MS	F	<i>p</i>	Partial η^2
Proficiency Levels	Condition 1	431.92	2	215.96	71.70	<0.001	0.27
	Violation 1	707.52	2	353.76	132.11	<0.001	0.40
	Condition 2	478.62	2	239.31	48.06	<0.001	0.20
	Violation 2	566.71	2	283.35	62.75	<0.001	0.24
	Condition 3	505.85	2	252.92	60.52	<0.001	0.24
	Violation 3	525.48	2	262.74	62.24	<0.001	0.24
Learning Styles	Condition 1	97.50	1	97.50	32.37	<0.001	0.07
	Violation 1	80.33	1	80.33	30.00	<0.001	0.07
	Condition 2	53.91	1	53.91	10.83	<0.001	0.03
	Violation 2	121.86	1	121.86	26.99	<0.001	0.07
	Condition 3	80.33	1	80.33	19.22	<0.001	0.05
	Violation 3	226.18	1	226.18	53.58	<0.001	0.12
Proficiency Levels*Learning Styles	Condition 1	29.12	2	14.56	4.84	0.008	0.03
	Violation 1	9.66	2	4.83	1.80	0.166	0.01
	Condition 2	17.27	2	8.63	1.73	0.178	0.01
	Violation 2	51.45	2	25.73	5.69	0.004	0.03
	Condition 3	19.71	2	9.85	2.35	0.096	0.01
	Violation 3	15.98	2	7.99	1.89	0.152	0.01
Error	Condition 1	1156.58	384	3.01			
	Violation 1	1028.25	384	2.67			
	Condition 2	1912.00	384	4.97			
	Violation 2	1733.94	384	4.52			
	Condition 3	1604.80	384	4.18			
	Violation 3	1620.89	384	4.22			

Key: Condition 1: It with that pronoun, Violation 1: It without that pronoun, Condition 2: It with who pronoun, Violation 2: It with who pronoun, Condition 3: Noun verb agreement, Violation 3: Noun verb disagreement.

The findings presented in **Table 2** indicate that there were significant main and interaction effects of language proficiency and learning styles on the dependent variables when analyzed independently. The following are the conditions and violations of it-cleft constructions:

5.3. It-Cleft Construction with/without “That” Pronoun

Condition 1: It was Biology that Mary taught at Harvard University.

Violation 1: *It is chocolate contains a high level of blood glucose.

H₀₁: There is no significant main/interaction effect of L2 proficiency levels and FD/FI learning styles on it-cleft construction *with/without* “that” pronoun.

The language proficiency levels for condition 1, namely the it-cleft construction with the “that” pronoun, were analyzed and the findings are presented in **Table 2**. The statistical analysis revealed a significant effect, with $F(2, 384) = 71.70$, $p < 0.001$, and a large effect size of partial $\eta^2 = 0.27$. The results for learning styles indicate a significant effect, with $F(1, 384) = 32.37$, $p < 0.001$, and a moderate effect size of partial $\eta^2 = 0.07$. The language proficiency levels showed a partial η^2 of 0.27, indicating a significant effect size. On the other hand, the learning styles had a partial η^2 of 0.07, suggesting a medium effect size. The data indicates that language proficiency levels accounted for 27% of the range in performance, whereas learning styles accounted for 7% of the variation.

The language proficiency levels for violation 1, namely the it-cleft construction *without pronoun* “that”, yielded the following results: $F(2, 384) = 132.11$, $p \leq 0.001$; with a partial η^2 value of 0.40. The results for learning styles indicate a significant effect, with $F(1, 384) = 30.00$, $p < 0.001$, and a moderate effect size of partial $\eta^2 = 0.07$. The language proficiency levels showed a significant impact size, with a partial η^2 of 0.40 indicating a substantial influence. On the other hand, the learning styles had a partial η^2 of 0.07, suggesting a medium effect size. The study found that 40% of the variance in performance of correctly judged it-cleft constructions without “that” pronoun can be attributed to language proficiency, whereas 7% of the variation can be attributed to learning styles.

The results of the study disproved the null hypothesis and shown that there was a substantial main effect of language proficiency levels and learning styles on the use of it-cleft construction, both *with and without* the inclusion of the “that” pronoun. The findings also revealed a notable interaction effect in relation to condition 1. The F statistic is 4.84 with (2, 384) degrees of freedom, and the p -value is 0.008. A partial η^2 of 0.03 revealed a minor effect size, meaning that only 3% of the difference in performance was attributed to the interaction impact of language proficiency levels and learning styles on condition1. Nevertheless, the interaction between language proficiency levels and learning styles had a negligible effect on violation1, excluding the influence of that pronoun. The value of $F(2, 384)$ is 1.80, with a p -value of 0.166. The partial η^2 is 0.01, indicating a small effect size.

5.4. It-Cleft Construction with/without “Who” Pronoun

Condition 2: It was Chomsky who introduced Universal Grammar.

Violation 2: *It was the skipper Ahmad put the team united.

H₀₂: There is no significant main/interaction effect of L2 Proficiency levels and FD/FI learning styles on *it-cleft construction with/without “who”* pronoun.

The language proficiency levels for condition 2, namely the *it-cleft construction with the “who” pronoun*, were analyzed and the findings are presented in **Table 2**. The statistical analysis revealed a significant effect, with $F(2, 384) = 48.06$, $p < 0.001$, and a partial η^2 of 0.20, indicating a small effect size. The results for learning styles indicate a significant effect, with $F(1, 384) = 10.87$, $p < 0.001$. The effect size, as measured by partial η^2 , is 0.03, which is considered a small effect. The data indicates that 20% of the differences in performance can be attributed to variations in language proficiency levels, whereas 3% of the differences in correctly judging *it-cleft construction with the pronoun “who”* can be attributed to differences in learning styles.

The language proficiency levels for violation2, namely the *it-cleft construction without the “who” pronoun*, yielded significant findings. The statistical analysis showed a significant effect, with $F(2, 384) = 62.75$, $p < 0.001$. The effect size, measured by partial η^2 , was 0.24, indicating a considerable influence. The results for learning styles indicate a significant effect, with $F(1, 384) = 26.99$, $p < 0.001$, and a partial η^2 of 0.07, indicating a medium effect size. The data indicates that 24% of the range in performance may be attributed to differences in language proficiency levels, whereas 7% of the variation in correctly judging *it-cleft construction without the use of the pronoun “who”* can be attributed to differences in learning styles.

The results rejected the second null hypothesis and determined that there was a substantial main effect of language proficiency levels and learning styles on the use of the *“who” pronoun* in *it-cleft construction*. Nevertheless, the interaction between language proficiency levels and learning styles had no significant effect on condition 2. The value of $F(2, 384)$ is 1.73, with a p -value of 0.178. The partial η^2 is 0.01, indicating a small effect size. The study found a notable main and interaction effects on violation 2. The value of $F(2, 384)$ is 5.69, with a p -value of 0.004. The partial η^2 is 0.03, indicating a small effect size of 3%.

5.5. Agreement/Disagreement between Noun (Antecedent of Who) and Embedded Verb

Condition 3: It is him who encourages me.

Violation 3: *It is her who stimulate me.

H₀₃: There is no significant main/interaction effect of L2 proficiency levels and FD/FI learning styles on *agreement/disagreement* between noun (antecedent of who) and embedded verb.

Table 2 presents the results of language levels for condition 3, specifically the *agreement/disagreement between the noun (antecedent of “who”) and the embedded verb*. The F -value for the statistical test is 60.52 with (2, 384) degrees of freedom. The p -value is less than 0.001, indicating a significant result. The effect size, measured by partial η^2 , is 0.24. The results for learning styles indicate a significant effect, with $F(1, 384) = 19.52$, $p < 0.001$, and a moderate effect size of

partial $\eta^2 = 0.05$. The language proficiency levels showed a partial η^2 of 0.24, indicating a significant effect size. On the other hand, the learning styles had a partial η^2 of 0.05, suggesting a medium impact size. The data indicates that 24% of the variation in performance may be attributed to differences in language proficiency levels, whereas 5% of the variation in correctly judged *agreement between noun and embedded verb* can be attributed to differences in learning approaches.

The language proficiency levels indicate a violation of *disagreement between a noun (the antecedent of “who”) and an embedded verb*. The statistical analysis yielded a significant result, with $F(2, 384) = 62.24, p < 0.001$. Additionally, the effect size was found to be considerable, with a partial η^2 of 0.24. The results for learning styles indicate a significant effect, with $F(1, 384) = 53.58, p < 0.001$. The partial η^2 value of 0.12 suggests a medium effect size. The data indicates that 24% of the range in performance may be attributed to differences in language proficiency levels, whereas 12% of the variation can be attributed to differences in learning styles.

The findings rejected the null hypothesis and concluded that there was a significant main effect, but insignificant interaction effect of language proficiency and learning styles on *agreement between noun (antecedent of who) and embedded verb*. As $F(2, 384) = 2.35, p = 0.096$; partial $\eta^2 = 0.01$ small effect size. There was a significant main effect, but insignificant interaction effect of language proficiency and learning styles on *disagreement between noun (antecedent of who) and embedded verb*. As $F(2, 384) = 1.98, p = 0.152$; partial $\eta^2 = 0.01$ small effect size.

The results of the study refuted the null hypothesis and determined that there was a significant main effect, but an insignificant interaction effect, of language proficiency and learning styles on the *agreement between the noun (antecedent of “who”) and the embedded verb*. The value of F at (2, 384) is 2.35, with a p -value of 0.096. The partial η^2 is 0.01, indicating a small effect size. The study found a notable main effect of language proficiency and learning styles on the discrepancy between noun (antecedent of person) and embedded verb. However, the interaction effect between these two factors was found to be statistically insignificant. The value of $F(2, 384)$ is 1.98, with a p -value of 0.152. The partial η^2 is 0.01, indicating a small effect size. Moreover, to ascertain the major differences between proficiency level groups and learning styles, specifically field-dependent and field-independent, in relation to GJT conditions and violations 1 - 3. Two post hoc Bonferroni tests were utilized, as indicated in **Table 3** and **Table 4**.

Table 3 and **Table 4** demonstrate that the post hoc Bonferroni test revealed a statistically significant difference in mean scores across proficiency levels and learning styles for conditions/violation 1 - 3. Concerning the accurate assessment of condition 1, the advanced proficiency group ($M = 10.38, SD = 1.46$) achieved a higher mean score compared to the intermediate group ($M = 9.03, SD = 1.76$) and the elementary proficiency group ($M = 7.80, SD = 2.16$); $p \leq 0.001$. A comparison of learning styles between field-independent learners and field-dependent learners revealed that field-independent learners achieved a significantly higher mean score ($M = 9.57, SD = 2.01$); $p \leq 0.001$, compared to field-dependent learners ($M = 8.56, SD = 2.07$).

Table 3. Pairwise comparisons for mean differences between proficiency levels within in GJT Condition 1, Violation 1, Condition 2, Violation 2, Condition 3, Violation 3.

Dependent Variable	Proficiency Level (I)	Proficiency Level (J)	Mean Diff. (I-J)	SE	<i>p</i>
It with That	Intermediate	Elementary	1.23*	0.21	<0.001
	Advanced	Elementary	2.58*	0.21	<0.001
		Intermediate	1.34*	0.21	<0.001
It without That	Intermediate	Elementary	1.20*	0.20	<0.001
	Advanced	Elementary	3.26*	0.20	<0.001
		Intermediate	2.06*	0.20	<0.001
It with Who	Intermediate	Elementary	1.68*	0.27	<0.001
	Advanced	Elementary	2.68*	0.27	<0.001
		Intermediate	1.00*	0.27	<0.001
It without Who	Intermediate	Elementary	0.83*	0.26	<0.001
	Advanced	Elementary	2.86*	0.26	<0.001
		Intermediate	2.03*	0.26	<0.001
NV Agreement	Intermediate	Elementary	1.72*	0.25	<0.001
	Advanced	Elementary	2.76*	0.25	<0.001
		Intermediate	1.03*	0.25	<0.001
NV Disagreement	Intermediate	Elementary	1.01*	0.25	<0.001
	Advanced	Elementary	2.80*	0.25	<0.001
		Intermediate	1.79*	0.25	<0.001

* shows the significant mean score differences between proficiency levels within in GJT Condition 1, Violation 1, Condition 2, Violation 2, Condition 3, Violation 3.

Table 4. Pairwise comparisons for mean differences between learning styles within GJT Condition 1, Violation 1, Condition 2, Violation 2, Condition 3, Violation 3.

Dependent Variable	(I) Learning Styles	(J) Learning Styles	Mean Diff. (I-J)	Std. E	<i>p</i>
It with That	Field-independent	Field-dependent	1.00*	0.17	<0.001
It without that	Field-independent	Field-dependent	0.90*	0.16	<0.001
It with Who	Field-independent	Field-dependent	0.74*	0.22	<0.001
It without Who	Field-independent	Field-dependent	1.11*	0.21	<0.001
NV Agreement	Field-Independent	Field-dependent	0.90*	0.20	<0.001
NV Disagreement	Field-independent	Field-dependent	1.52*	0.20	<0.001

* shows the significant mean score differences between learning styles within in GJT Condition 1, Violation 1, Condition 2, Violation 2, Condition 3, Violation 3.

Regarding the correct judgement of violation 1, specifically the use of an *it-cleft construction without the pronoun “that”*, the advanced proficiency group had a higher mean score ($M = 10.21$, $SD = 1.42$) compared to the intermediate group ($M = 8.15$, $SD = 1.63$) and the elementary group ($M = 6.95$, $SD = 1.99$), with a significant difference at an alpha value of $p < 0.001$. Field-independent learners achieved a significantly higher average score ($M = 8.89$, $SD = 1.86$) compared to field-dependent learners ($M = 7.97$, $SD = 2.34$), with a $p \leq 0.001$.

Regarding the accurate judgement of condition 2, specifically the use of an *it-cleft construction with the pronoun “who”*, the average score of the advanced proficiency group ($M = 10.63$, $SD = 1.78$) showed a significant difference compared to the average scores of the intermediate ($M = 9.63$, $SD = 2.05$) and elementary proficiency groups ($M = 7.95$, $SD = 2.82$) at a significance level of $p < 0.001$. A comparison between groups based on learning styles revealed that field-independent learners had a substantially higher mean score ($M = 9.77$, $SD = 2.15$) compared to field-dependent learners ($M = 9.03$, $SD = 2.78$), with a p -value of 0.001.

In order to accurately assess violation 2, which involves the *omission of the pronoun “who” from the embedded clause*, it was found that the mean score of the advanced proficiency group ($M = 10.29$, $SD = 1.93$) significantly differed from the mean scores of both the intermediate ($M = 8.25$, $SD = 2.20$) and elementary proficiency groups ($M = 7.42$, $SD = 2.49$) at a significance level of $p < 0.001$. The mean score of field-independent learners ($M = 9.22$, $SD = 2.30$) was substantially different from the mean score of field-dependent learners ($M = 8.10$, $SD = 2.61$), with a p -value of < 0.001 .

Regarding the correct assessment of condition 3, which involves the *agreement between a noun (the antecedent of “who”) and an embedded verb*, it is worth noting that the mean score of the advanced proficiency group ($M = 10.24$, $SD = 1.45$) was significantly higher than the mean scores of both the intermediate ($M = 9.20$, $SD = 1.83$) and elementary proficiency groups ($M = 7.48$, $SD = 2.78$) at a significance level of $p < 0.001$. A comparison of learning styles between field-independent learners and field-dependent learners revealed that the mean score of field-independent learners ($M = 9.42$, $SD = 2.07$) was substantially higher than the mean score of field-dependent learners ($M = 8.51$, $SD = 2.58$), with a p -value of less than 0.001.

Concerning the accurate judgement of violation 3, there was a *disagreement between noun (antecedent of who) and embedded verb*. The average score of the advanced proficiency group ($M = 10.25$, $SD = 1.78$) showed a significant difference compared to the average scores of the intermediate group ($M = 8.46$, $SD = 2.36$) and the elementary proficiency group ($M = 7.45$, $SD = 2.37$) at a significance level of $p < 0.001$. Field-independent learners achieved a significantly higher mean score ($M = 9.48$, $SD = 2.13$; $p < 0.001$) compared to field-dependent learners ($M = 7.96$, $SD = 2.58$). The increase in the mean score from the elementary to the intermediate and advanced proficiency groups suggests that as the proficiency level increases, the mean score also increases.

6. Discussion

The study has shown that the grammatical knowledge of conditions and violations of it-cleft construction in Pakistani ESL learners is influenced by their language proficiency and learning style. Learners who had advanced proficiency levels and were field-independent earned considerably higher scores in identifying conditions or violations of it-cleft constructs. There was a substantial main effect and interaction effect seen between language proficiency and learning styles.

The findings of the present study corroborate earlier research suggesting that individuals with a field-independent learning style outperform those with a field-dependent learning style in a specific language task (e.g., Griffiths, 2008; Norton & Toohey, 2001; Shoebottom, 2007). Furthermore, it can be elucidated that the advanced proficiency learners and field-independent learners exerted a substantial influence on the language learning process.

In theory, language learning systems that focus on usage and construction grammar align with the findings of the study. Having a strong understanding of the grammatical rules and exceptions related to it-cleft constructions leads to their frequent usage and increased awareness in language learning. Proficiency levels in language and learners who are either field-independent or field-dependent increasingly acquired their grammatical understanding of the conditions and violations in the production of it-cleft sentences. The results align with the cognitive linguistics explanation that the development of interlanguage in L2 users occurs gradually, and their knowledge is influenced by their awareness and exposure to L2 (Ellis, 2002, 2005; Robinson & Ellis, 2008).

7. Conclusion

The study's findings indicate that the grammatical knowledge of Pakistani ESL learners regarding conditions and violations of it-cleft constructions, specifically those involving the *use of the pronoun "that" and the omission of the pronoun "who" from the embedded clause*, is significantly influenced by their language proficiency and field-dependent, field-independent learning styles. Language proficiency levels and learning styles had a substantial main effect, but no significant interaction effect, on the *absence of the "that" pronoun, "who" pronoun, and agreement/disagreement between noun (antecedent of "who") and embedding verb*. The advanced proficiency learners outperformed both the intermediate and elementary proficiency groups. Field-independent learners exhibited superior performance compared to field-dependent learners in accurately assessing conditions or violations of it-cleft constructions. This study has the potential to make a valuable contribution to the fields of Second Language Acquisition (SLA).

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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