

# Investigating the Iraqi Students' Mastery of English Pronouns

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## Abstract

This study investigates the ability of the Iraqi students in recognizing and producing the English pronouns. It examines how far they go in mastering personal, possessive, reflexive and relative pronouns. A test of two parts is constructed to test the students at the recognition and production levels.

The data is obtained and the scores are processed. In the end the paper establishes that the Iraqi preparatory students are weak in using the above mentioned types of pronouns. Furthermore, it claims that they suffer more in producing pronouns rather than in recognizing them.

Grace and Foote, 2000:6) . Wales (1996:6,8) says that the pronouns are useful devices in information processing on the part of both, the speaker and the addressee for the economy of expression and ease of comprehension .

Thus, they have a stylistic function through avoiding repetition (of the noun or noun phrase) and redundancy of expression .

However, things are not that simple. As Stageberg (1981: 180-81) explains the pronouns vary and diverse in accordance with several factors such as : person, number, case, gender and the context in which they occur. That is why we have personal, possessive, reflexive, relative, interrogative, indefinite and demonstrative. Of all these pronouns, the study is concerned only with the first four types.

## 2.1 Personal pronouns

Personal pronouns show a great variety of forms because they are, according to Stageberg (ibid), distinguished by a number. i.e. they can either be singular or plural (as table 1 shows) b case or position in the sentence, i.c. they can be subjective pronouns occurring in subject position; objective pronouns occurring in object position (after a verb or a preposition) ; or possessive pronoun

## 1- Introduction

The pronouns are useful devices of language without which communication will be impossible. Yet, they vary and diverse to the extent that the English learners, especially the Iraqi ones, find it difficult to cope with such diversity. It is assumed that the Iraqi students at the preparatory school face difficulty in recognizing and producing pronouns, especially personal, possessive, reflexive and relative pronouns .much more than in recognizing them.

It claims that the mean of the scores at the production level .the paper aims to investigate the student's ability to recognize and produce these particular types. To achieve this , a test of two parts (recognition and production )is administrated to the students. Then the statistical results are analyzed and the conclusion are drawn at last.

## 2- Definition and function of pronouns

A pronoun is a word which replaces a noun or a noun phrase, e.g., *Jack* is absent because *he* is ill, *The books* are where you left *them* (Lal, 1975:1) (Aarts and Haegeman : 2006:144) .

In the process of Placement, the pronoun carries the meaning of the replaced word which is called the "antecedent" (Hooper,

Possessive Adjectives	Possessive Pronouns	use
My	Mine	Both are used to refer to a thing or things owned by the <u>singular speaker</u> .
Our	Ours	They show ownership of a group of <u>people</u> .
Your	Yours	Both are used to talk about thing or things owned by the addressee or addressees (s).
His	His	Both are used to show the ownership of a singular absent <u>male</u> .
Her	Hers	Both are used to indicate the ownership of a singular absent <u>female</u> .
It	Its	Ownership of a thing or an <u>animal</u> .
Their	Theirs	Both are used to denote the ownership of a group of people, things or animals.

Table (2). Possessive adjectives and pronouns

**Examples :**

- This is *my* bag . It is *mine* .
- This is *our* class . It is *ours* .
- This is *your* book . It is *yours* .
- This is *his* book . It is *his* .
- This is *her* dress . It is *hers* .
- *Its* (the book) cover is blue .
- This is *their* car . It is *theirs* .

**2.3 Reflexive and intensive pronouns**

As Al-Wahab and Al-Jumaily(1997: 58, 59) cite, these pronouns function as follows :

- a) Reflexives which indicate that the doer of the action (subject) is also the receiver of that action (object) .  
Examples :
  - Look out! I you will hurt *yourself* .
  - The students are enjoying *themselves* .
- b) When they are preceded with either "by" or "all by", the expression means "alone" or "without help" . Examples :
  - We can do the work by *ourselves* .
  - The little boy began to walk by *himself* .
- c) As emphasizing pronouns, in that they emphasize the subject. They either follow the subject or the object as the examples show :
  - I answer the phone *myself* .
  - I *myself* answer the phone .

indicating possession . c) person in which case there are: first person referring to the speaker or speakers; second person when being addressed in face-to-face interaction; and third person when the person referred to is absent not present . d) Gender reference showing the sex of persons or neutrality of things . All of these distinctions are shown in table (1) followed by examples for each type :

Person	Gender	Subjective		Objective	
	Reference	singular	Plural	singular	Plural
First	Male and female	I	We	Me	Us
Second	Male and female	You	You	You	You
Third	Male (human)	He	They	Him	Them
	Female (hum.)	She	They	Her	Them
	Neuter (things)	It	They	It	Them

Table (1). Personal pronouns

**Examples :**

- I gave *him* the book .
- *He* took the book from *me* .
- We will help *you* with the work if *you* pay *us* will .
- They are helping *her* because *she* helped *them* in the past .

**2.2 Possessives**

They are used to denote ownership and possession . They are of two kinds . The first is always followed by a noun representing the possessed thing and it is called "possessive adjectives" . The second, however, is used instead of the noun (which represents the owned thing), thus, it is called "substitutional possessives" or "possessive pronouns" . They are shown in table (2) with examples .

commas (Al-Wahab and Al-Jumaily, 1997 63-65)

**Examples :**

- His brother, *who* lives in Basra, is an engineer .
- Amy, whose car had broken, was in a very bad mood .

**3- Data collection**

The study is conducted on the last year students of Al-Wilaya Secondary School in Dhi-Qar with a population of 40 students who are subjected to a test of two parts ; one for testing the recognition skill and another for testing the production skill . Both parts are allotted the same amount of marks, i.e. ten marks for each .

The scoring scheme followed in this study is as follows : one score if the student gives the right answer ; and zero score if he fails to provide the right answer . Here is a table of the distribution of the test scores .

level	No of questions	No of the test items	Marks
Recognition	1	10	10
Production	1	10	10
Total		20	20

Table (4) : The distribution of the test scores .

**3.1 Result analysis**

As table (5) shows, the scores of the students reveal a considerable weakness in the use of the four types of pronouns in general in that the mean of the whole test is 5.475 which is less than the least degree of success in 4.525 .

The Reflexive pronouns are shown in the following table :

Person	Singular	Plural
First	Myself	Ourselves
Second	Yourself	Yourselves
Third	Himself Herself Itself	Themselves

Table (3) : Reflexive pronouns

**2.4 Relative pronouns**

Hooper, Gale and Foote, (2000:7) define them as the pronouns which are used instead of nouns and join two clauses in a sentence . They include : *who, whose, whom, which* and *that* . "*who, whom, whose, that*" have a human reference . "*which, that*" refer to things . Examples :

- Tom Hanks, *who* is the greatest actor, should win the Oscar .
- This morning I met Diane, *whom* I hadn't seen for ages .

The clauses the relative pronouns introduce are of two types, defining and non-defining clauses . Defining relative clauses limit the noun, to which they refer, to one particular noun .

They provide an essential information to define the noun .Examples :

- The house *that* is on the corner is large .
- The man *who* wrote this book is famous .

Non-defining clauses, however, are not essential to the meaning of the sentence . Rather, they give extra information about the nouns they refer to because these nouns are already defined by themselves . That is why the extra information is enclosed within two

student	Correct Responses	Percentage	Incorrect Responses	Percentage
1	11	27.5%	29	72.5%
2	22	55%	18	45%
3	9	22.5%	31	77.5%
4	4	10%	39	90%
5	11	27.5%	29	72.5%
6	20	50%	20	50%
7	26	65%	14	35%
8	17	42.5%	23	57.5%
9	8	20%	32	80%
10	14	35%	26	65%
Total	142	35.5%	258	64.5%

Table (7): The students' performance at the recognition level (question 1).

Item	Correct Responses	Percentage	Incorrect Responses	Percentage
1	2	5%	38	95%
2	24	60%	16	40%
3	6	15%	34	85%
4	7	17.5%	33	82.5%
5	0	0%	40	100%
6	2	5%	38	95%
7	1	2.5%	39	97.5%
8	0	0%	40	100%
9	3	7.5%	37	92.5%
10	1	2.5%	39	97.5%
Total	46	11.5%	354	88.5%

Table (8): The students' performance at the production level (question2).

Tables (9) and (10) indicate that there is a significant difference in the mean of the test scores at the recognition and production levels . The tables reveal that the mean of the recognition level is 4.3, while it goes down to 1.15 at the production level .

Student's No.	Mark	Student's No.	Mark
1	6	21	7
2	5	22	3
3	12	23	5
4	8	24	8
5	7	25	4
6	1	26	2
7	3	27	0
8	5	28	8
9	10	29	5
10	3	30	9
11	8	31	4
12	5	32	10
13	5	33	5
14	7	34	5
15	4	35	4
16	5	36	4
17	2	37	5
18	8	38	6
19	5	39	2
20	8	40	6
Total Marks	219	Mean	5.475

Table (5): The students' raw scores and mean of the test .

The most frequent score in the test is 5 occurring 11 times as is apparent in table (6) which is again less than 10 the degree of success .

Test Mark	Frequency	Test Mark	Frequency
0	1	6	3
1	1	7	3
2	3	8	6
3	3	9	1
4	5	10	2
5	11	12	1

Table (6): The Frequency distribution of the marks of the whole test .

The number of correct responses is 142 with a percentage of 35.5% at the recognition level . This percentage is dropped to 11.5% with a total number of 46 at the production level. The number of the incorrect responses at the same level is 258 with a percentage of 64.5% . This percentage rises highly up to 88.5% with a total number of 354 responses at the production level . These results prove that the students' achievement at the production level is much lower than it is at the recognition level as the tables (7) and (8) indicate which confirms the postulated hypothesis of the paper.

number of 31 correct response at the production level.

Objective pronouns, however, have 22 correct responses (55%) at the recognition level; and it drops severely to 3 (3.75%) responses only at the production level. The total number of the correct responses of personal pronouns at the recognition level is 37 (30.8%) and it goes down to 34 correct responses with a percentage of (21.25%) which refutes the postulated hypothesis.

At the recognition level, the total number of the correct responses of the possessives is 57 (47.5%) which drops greatly to only 6 (7.5%) at the production level going along, thus, with the postulated hypothesis.

If the two types of possessives are dealt with separately, the following statistics are revealed: 46 (57.5%) correct responses for the possessive adjectives at the recognition level. This number drops to only 6 (15%) at the production level. The number of the correct responses of the possessive pronouns at the recognition level, nevertheless, is 11 (27.5%) and then it severely goes down to 0 at the production level.

The same thing happens to the reflexive and relative pronouns in that, at the recognition level, both gained 23 (28.75%) and 25 (31.25%) correct responses respectively. But, at the production level, these correct responses decrease greatly to only 3 (3.75%) for both types confirming thus the hypothesis of the paper.

Item	Mark	Student	Mark	Student	Mark
1	5	15	3	29	4
2	4	16	5	30	7
3	7	17	2	31	2
4	7	18	6	32	6
5	7	19	4	33	3
6	1	20	6	34	5
7	3	21	6	35	4
8	4	22	2	36	3
9	8	23	4	37	4
10	3	24	5	38	5
11	7	25	3	39	2
12	4	26	2	40	5
13	4	27	0	Total	137
14	5	28	6	Mean	4.3

Table (9) The mean of the scores at the recognition level

Students	Mark	Student	Mark	Student	Mark
1	1	15	1	29	1
2	1	16	0	30	2
3	5	17	0	31	2
4	1	18	2	32	4
5	0	19	1	33	2
6	0	20	2	34	0
7	0	21	1	35	0
8	1	22	1	36	1
9	2	23	1	37	1
10	0	24	3	38	1
11	1	25	1	39	0
12	1	26	0	40	1
13	1	27	0	Total	46
14	2	28	2	Mean	1.15

Table (10) The mean of the scores at the production level

Tables (11) and (12) deal with the number of the correct and incorrect responses and their percentages in the four types of the pronouns under study; each type is presented in detail separately. The two tables show that number of the correct responses of the subjective personal pronouns is 15 forming a percentage of 18.75% at the recognition level. This percentage goes up to 38.75% constituting a

recognition level which provides a strong proof of the hypothesis of this paper. The results state that the mean of the whole test is nearly 5.47 which is more than the half degree of success (10 marks) in almost 5 marks. Also the mean of the test at the recognition level is 4.3 which is less than the mean of the production level which is 1.15. Furthermore, the number of the correct responses of the production level are much less than those of the recognition level (46 vs 142 correct responses).

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Pronoun type		Correct response	Percentage	Incorrect response	Percentage
Personal	Subjective	15	18.75%	65	81.25%
	Objective	22	55%	18	45%
	Total	37	30.8%	83	69.2%
Possessive	Possessive adjective	46	57.5%	34	42.5%
	Possessive pronoun	11	27.5%	29	72.5%
	Total	57	47.5%	63	52.5%
Reflexive		23	28.75%	57	71.25%
Relative		25	31.25%	55	68.75%

Table (11) : The students' responses and percentages of the four types of pronouns at the recognition level .

Pronoun type		Correct response	Percentage	Incorrect response	Percentage
Personal	Subjective	31	38.75%	49	61.25%
	Objective	3	3.75%	77	93.25%
	Total	34	21.25%	126	78.75%
Possessive	Possessive adjective	6	15%	34	85%
	Possessive pronoun	0	0%	40	100%
	Total	6	7.5%	74	92.5%
Reflexive		3	3.75%	77	96.25%
Relative		3	3.75%	77	96.25%

Table (12) : The students' responses and percentages of the four types of pronouns at the production level .

**Conclusion**

With the aid of the statistical work, the paper concludes that the level of the Iraqi preparatory school students at the production level is much lesser than that of the