

## The Acquisition of the English Relative Pronoun ‘Who’ by EFL Arab Learners: a Translation Perspective

**Mohammed Ali Mohsen**

Najran University, Saudi Arabia

**Mutahar Qassem**

Najran University, Saudi Arabia

### **Abstract**

This paper aims to study Arab students’ use of English relative pronoun ‘who’ via translating statements from their mother tongue (Arabic) into the target language (English). Thirty Saudi adult students, aged 18-20 years old, were asked to translate 20 relative clauses from Arabic into English. The results revealed that the students encountered various problematic areas in the use of relative pronoun 'who', viz. use of personal and possessive relative pronoun, position of relative pronoun, presence of resumptive pronouns in Arabic, absence of duality and plurality of relative pronoun “who”, use of relative pronouns with prepositional verbs. Such problematic areas were manifested in various errors of omission, addition, selection, word order, and avoidance. The results also showed that the average of the students’ errors in “avoidance, omission, and selection” were significantly higher than (30 %, 25% and 24% respectively) the average for ‘addition’ and ‘word order’. These errors could be attributed to language transfer, overgeneralization, and ignorance of rules restriction, which were possibly grounded in the lack of exposure to the TL rules and insufficient practice of grammatical activities. Pedagogical implications of this study suggest that instructors should make a good use of the recommendations of contrastive analysis hypothesis (CAH) and Error Analysis (EA). Namely, the students should be made aware of the areas of similarities and differences between English and Arabic practically rather than theoretically. The study stresses the limitations of the findings and directs outlines for future research.

*Keywords:* acquisition, error analyses, relative pronoun, language transfer, Arab learners

## 1. Introduction

Language learning, like any other kind of human learning, involves making errors. In the process of learning a second language, (L2) learners use the system of the first language (L1), second language (L2) and their own strategies in learning L2. In recent years, the focus of research in second language acquisition (SLA) has shifted from teaching perspective to learning perspective (Brown, 1994).

Relative pronouns are one of the crucial areas of the syntactic structure in English and Arabic because of their major role in the developing the structure of a sentence and also due to the need of English as second language learners to master their use. Therefore, this study attempts to unfold the problems as product, (i.e. errors) that encounter the Arab learners of English, when using relative pronoun 'who'. Ellis (1997) states that there are three major reasons for focusing on students' errors. First, they raise the question why do learners make errors? Secondly, it is very useful for teachers to diagnose students' errors. Finally, it helps learners to learn when they correct their errors themselves. In doing so, students can construct a new language system better when they analyze their errors.

This article first outlines the grammatical rules of the relative pronoun 'who' in English and Arabic. It then summarizes the major trends in SLA in terms of language errors. Besides, it accounts for the previous related studies on language errors in general and relativization in particular. It explains then the methods used to investigate the research questions. Finally, it discusses the implications of the findings and suggests areas for further research.

Relative pronoun 'who' in English and Arabic

One of the major reasons for the difficulty faced by Arab learners to acquire the relative pronoun "who" is the structural differences of the relative pronouns in students' MT (i.e., Arabic) and the TL (i.e., English). These differences could be related to three categories; form, use and position. As for the form of relative pronoun 'who', in English, it takes four forms; *who*, *whom*, *whose*, and *whoever*. In Arabic, the relative pronoun 'who' takes eight forms من اللتين اللاتي الذي, التي, اللذان, اللتان, الذين. In doing so, Arabic relative pronouns agree with number, gender and case because it is a synthetic language while in English, it agrees only with case (Ibrahim, Kassabgy, & Aydeliott, 2000). These differences may induce students to transfer their MT rules to TL contexts when using relative pronoun 'who'. As for the use of relative pronoun 'who' in English, it is used with indefinite or definite nouns, e.g.

1. I met the students who studies English in the USA.
2. He helped people who are in need.

In Arabic, The relative pronoun is used only with definite nouns, e.g.

أحمد ساعد الرجل الذي تعطلت سيارته (Ahmed helped the man whose car broke down) .

This may result in students' addition of definite article 'the' with nouns used with relative pronouns 'who' because of the negative transfer of students' MT rules.

In English, prepositions can precede relative pronouns, e.g. *this is the professor with whom I discussed relativization* while the relative pronoun in Arabic cannot be preceded by prepositions, e.g. هذا هو الأستاذ الذي ناقشت معه الرسالة. This may cause students to use the prepositions after the relative pronouns as a result of ignorance of the position of prepositions with relative pronouns 'who' or interference of MT rules. Regarding presence of pronominal reflex, English relative pronouns are not used with resumptive pronouns in relative clauses at all, e.g. *This is the*

*student who (m) I honored.* In Arabic, the resumptive pronouns are used in relative clauses as an obligatory element in the case of indirect object, genitive, object of comparison positions (Zagood, 2012).

الولد الذي أعطيته الكتاب رجع (*The boy to who (m) I gave the book came back.*)

الرجل الذي سمير أطول منه فاز. (*The man who is shorter than Sameer won.*)

AL-Okaili's (1990) and Zagood (2012) find that the Arab students' use of resumptive pronoun (i.e., repetition of the object of the relative clause as in *I met the students whom you taught them*) in English was a result of negative language transfer of the students' MT rules.

Regarding the position of the relative pronoun 'who' in English, it is used in the middle of a sentence, after the antecedent it modified, e.g. *the children who played hide-and- seek are my cousins*. In some cases, it can be a headword with a change in of the form of relative pronoun as in 'whoever' Kharma, & Hajjaj, (1997). As for Arabic, no restriction for the position of relative pronouns in Arabic, e. g.

1. اللاتي يحترمن أنفسهن نساء فاضلات

(*The women who respect themselves are good.*)

2. الولد الذي أعطيته الكتاب رجع

(*The boy to who (m) I gave the book came back.*)

3. هذا هو الطالب الذي أكرمته

This the student who (m) I honored

The students' placement of the relative pronoun 'who' in the head position might constitute a problem for them namely in the head position because the relative pronoun 'who' is not commonly used in the head position. If it is used in the head position, there should be a change in the form of the relative pronoun 'who' (i.e. whoever instead of who').

It is clear now that the differences in the form, use and position may induce students to commit errors because of overgeneralizing the rules of the MT to the TL when learning relative pronoun "who".

## 2. Theories of language Acquisition

Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis (CAH) was the prominent trend in explaining the learners' SLA. Based on the behavioristic and structuralism approaches, CAH proposes that the main barrier to SLA is the interference of first language system (Brown, 1994). It also hypothesizes that the study of languages in terms of similarities and differences has a great role in facilitating the language teaching and learning. In other words, the concept of positive and negative transfer helps a lot in predicting the areas of difficulty that second language learners face. CAH was criticized for ascribing all learner's errors to L1 interference because most of learners' errors are outside the CAH's predictions. L2 learners use many types of knowledge that are available to them while learning L2; knowledge of the L2, L1, knowledge about communicative function of language. Brown (1994) argues that "learners order the linguistic chaos that confronts them by making a use of the systems available to them" (p. 67). CAH has failed to explain the sources of all errors that adult learners commit in their production of L2. Besides, serious criticism was raised on account of its structuralism and behaviorism on which it is based (Kim, 2001). Therefore, its generalizability is questionable.

Due to CAH's failure to account for most of learner's errors, Error Analysis (EA) emerges with a comprehensive view. Despite old appearance of ER, it is still deemed as an effective way

to promote English language acquisition and skills (Presada & Badea, 2014). EA attempts to describe learners' errors objectively, ascribing learner's errors to the L2 itself (interlanguage), taking into account the L1 interference. EA, proposed by Corder (1981), views errors as evidence of the learners' strategies in acquiring L2, rather than deviant forms. Errors reflect the transitional competence of the learners. Therefore, it is viewed as a valuable tool in dealing with the learners' linguistic competence and its diagnostic function (Corder, 1981). The major achievement of EA is that it provides an efficient tool in interpreting the errors and identifying their sources. In other words, there are many sources of errors other than the L1 such as transfer of training, strategies of second language learning, strategies of second language communication, and overgeneralization of TL linguistic material Gass and Selinker (2008).

Richards (1971) refutes the notion of L1 transfer through conducting a comprehensive study, including learners from different backgrounds (Japanese, Chinese, Burmese, French, Czech, Polish, Tagalog, Maori, Maltese, and Indian and West African Languages). His study shows that most of the students' errors are due to the L2 itself. The students of different languages committed the same errors that were ascribed to L1 interference by CAH. According to his study, the students' errors are categorized into:

1. Interference errors: when the student apply his/her L1 in learning L2.
2. Intralingual errors: this is due to general characteristics of rule learning such as overgeneralization, incomplete application of rules and failure to learn conditions under which rules apply.
3. Developmental Errors. Learners attempt to build up hypotheses about the TL on the basis of limited experiences.

Dulay and Burt (1974) classify learners' errors into three broad categories:

1. Developmental Errors: they are similar to L1 acquisition.
2. Interference: errors that reflect the structure of the TL.
3. Unique Errors: errors that are neither developmental nor interfere.

However, as Schachter and Celce-Murcia (1977) point out, the distinction between intralingual and developmental errors is fuzzy. It is difficult to determine whether these errors are intralingual or developmental. In other words, it is often difficult to distinguish the cause of the error – interlingual or intralingual, teacher induced, or overgeneralization, etc.

In spite of some flaws in EA in accounting for students' errors, it remains capable of explaining most of the students' errors. It provides a comprehensive method for identifying, classifying and interpreting errors. Gass and Selinker (1994, p. 67), cited in Abi Smara (2003), identify six steps followed in conducting error analysis: collecting data, identifying errors, classifying errors, quantifying errors, analyzing source of error, and remediating for errors.

### 3. Error Analyses and Relative pronouns

There are many studies that investigated the students' grammatical errors in general and relative clauses in particular. In a recent study, Zagood (2012) investigates the problems encountered by fourth-year students in translating relative clauses from English into Arabic and vice versa in terms of translation pedagogy. He finds that some errors committed by the students are attributed to the differences between the structure of English and Arabic and so he recommends to teach contrastive linguistics when teaching a translation course. Abi Smara (2003) conducts a study on students' errors in writing. She finds that the students' developmental

/ intralingual errors are more than Transfer / Interlingual errors. Based on these findings, she concludes that the students did commit errors because of L1 negative transfer; however, their biggest number of errors is due to Developmental / Intralingual reasons.

Hamdallah and Tushyeh (1998) conduct a contrastive analysis of English and Arabic relativization. They discuss the similarities and differences between English and Arabic relativization. In their analysis, they find that the relativization process is basically the same in English and Arabic, which make the use of relativization easier for the students. However, there are some aspects, which are distinct such as differences in forms, gender, case and number, which constitute problems for the students in their use, and so they need special attention from teachers and course designers.

AL-Oqaili (1991) carries out a comprehensive study of learners' errors. He finds that the resumptive pronoun exists in Arabic and not in English, so Arab learners of English would transfer it to English. The use of resumptive pronoun in subject, object and object of comparison positions is an obligatory element in the relative clause in Arabic (AL-Oqaili, 1991). Conversely, the resumptive pronoun is omitted in English relative clause since its grammatical function is left out by the relative pronouns, e.g. *\*this is the student who (m) I honoured him.* He argues that Arab learners of English transfer the resumptive pronouns from Arabic to English sentences. In Arabic, the resumptive pronoun is an obligatory element if it occupies the position of indirect object, object of a preposition, object of a comparison and genitive (AL-Oqaili, 1991).

Fox (1970) studied restrictive relative clause in English, Hindi, and Baghdad Arabic. He analyzed the restrictive relative clause in English, Hindi, and Arabic, attempting to find out the areas of difficulties when a speaker of Hindi or Arabic tries to master the relative clause in English. He found that relativization in English, Arabic and Hindi are remarkably similar and in the case of English and Arabic, they are identical. He recommends giving the area of differences among the compared languages a special attention because it constituted a difficulty for the students

Having introduced the trends and previous studies of English foreign language students' errors, one can find different views of causes of errors. As for CAH, it ascribes errors of English foreign language students to language transfer while EA attributed such errors mainly to developmental or universal errors, i.e. the TL rules themselves and the techniques of introducing them to students, and then language transfer. What can be inferred is that one cannot make ideal generalizations regarding the causes of errors. In other words, errors may be caused by MT interference or the nature and presentation of TL rules. Besides, there are other factors that intervene in students' commitments of errors. Of these factors are the teaching situations of the students, the syllabus and the methods of teaching (Qassem, 2014). Hence, the study goes in this direction, it aims to investigate what might hinder students in using relative pronoun 'who', taking into account the students' teaching situations and the major hypotheses of SLA (i.e. EA & CAH). The most important things that the study aims to consider are the errors and the causes of errors committed by the population of the study. Therefore, this study attempts to answer the following question:

Do the Arab EFL students commit errors in using relative pronoun 'who'? If yes, what are the recurrent errors?

## 4. Methodology

### Participants

Thirty Arab EFL students of Najran University participated in this study. They were classified as intermediate students (B1) based on their performance in placement test of grammar administered by their department. The students scored in the placement test between 10-15 out of 20. All participants were male students due to segregation of male and female students in Saudi universities. Students in this level have studied four courses of grammar in the first two years at the university. The mean score for their performance in grammar courses is 72.63. The population of the study was 61 students who passed the two years study and moved up to the third year. Only, 30 participants were randomly selected by the researchers to take part in this study. To help create an authentic environment, students were not told in advance that they would take a test. In addition, the test had been carried out in their scheduled class time.

### 4.1. The Translation Test

Twenty Arabic sentences of different relative pronouns were created by the authors. Students were asked to translate those sentences into English. As the focus of the task was to write relative pronouns correctly, students were allowed to check dictionaries for translation help when encountering difficulties in the task. Besides, their mistakes in translating words were not considered. Therefore, scores were counted for relative pronouns in every statement. The correct relative pronoun in every sentence got one point and an incorrect relative pronoun received 0 point. The total points were 20. Students were given 45 minutes to complete the translation test and submit their sheets to their instructors.

The main criterion of selecting the statements was that they exhibit many varied problems in the use of relative pronoun 'who'. They were selected on the basis of the linguists' studies of the problematic areas in the use of relative pronouns for Arab learners such as AL-Oqaili (1990) and Richards (1992). The test covered different types of problems in the use of relative pronouns according to linguists' and applied linguists' view of the problematic areas in the use of relative pronouns. These areas were; (a) use of personal possessive relative pronouns, (b) the position of relative pronoun, (c) the presence of resumptive pronouns, (d) the absence of duality and plurality of relative pronoun “who” in English, while it does exist in Arabic, and (e) the use of relative pronouns with prepositional verbs. Table 1 shows the distribution of the five problematic areas of using relative pronouns in the 20 sentences. For the order of sentences see Appendix (A & B).

Table 1 *Problematic areas related to relative pronouns*

No.	Problematic Areas in using Relative Pronouns	No. of Sentences
1.	use of personal and possessive relative pronouns	8,9, 12,19,20
2.	position of relative pronoun	2,5,8,11,15
3.	presence of resumptive pronouns	1,12,16,18
4.	absence of duality and plurality of relative pronoun “who”	3,6,13,14
5.	use of relative pronouns with prepositional verbs	4,7,10,17

A question raise here is that why some problematic areas are represented by more sentences than others, which will the affect the number of quantified errors. The answer is that

the students' errors will not be classified according to these problematic areas. Instead, the students' answers will be classified according to data itself. Besides, the nature of some problematic areas entails more focus in terms of the complexity of its structures and different positions as in the case of the last four problematic areas. Note only that, there are some sentences that have more than one problematic area, which is due to the nature of structure of sentences, which cannot be controlled.

The test was first piloted by 20 students prior to this study. The students were worried about the translation of the words that could affect the face validity of the test. The test was then improved to focus on the use of relative pronouns. Concerning translation problem, students were allowed to look the words up in dictionaries or to ask the instructors about the translation of the unknown words. Moreover, the test has been checked by a panel in language testing to check the validity of the test. Some modifications were done according the remarks of the jury; (1) the layout of the test should be done properly, (2) long sentences should be removed, and (3) the test rubric should be made clear for students.

## 5. Data Analysis and Discussion

Students' errors are analyzed in this section by applying the frequency of errors and the percentages for every category. Indeed, the students' errors are severe in translating the relative pronouns 'who', which is reflected in the frequency of students' errors. The translation test showed that about 89% of the students committed errors in the use the relative pronoun 'who'.

### 5.1. Types of Errors

The students committed different types of errors; tense, word order, spelling, pluralization, preposition, and determiner. However, the focus was on the errors that relate to the area of the study, which is the relative pronoun 'who', which is based on the five problematic areas that were set earlier as a criterion for choosing the 20 sentence texts. Examining the students' recurrent errors, they can be classified into omission, addition, selection, avoidance and addition. This classification is based on Sager's (1983) classification of translation errors with some modifications that match the study's objectives. Table 2 depicts these errors.

Table 2 *Frequency of Errors*

No.	Type	Frequency of Errors	Percentage
1	Addition	42	8 %
2	Selection	130	24%
3	Omission	135	25 %
4	Word order	63	12%
5	Avoidance	162	30%
	Total	532	100 %

To define what is meant by every term mentioned in table 2, Table 3 explains these categories

Table 3 *Categories of errors*

Key of the Table	
Addition	Adding resumptive pronoun, unnecessary relative or personal pronouns
Selection	Wrong selection of relative pronouns (i.e. use of which or who instead of who, whose
Omission	Omission of the relative pronouns
Word order	Placing prepositions after the relative pronoun or wrong order of the relative clause
avoidance	They avoid translating the whole relative clause

### 5.1.1. Addition

The results from Table 2 reveal that around 8 % of the students committed errors of addition in using relative pronouns' who. Table 3 shows some of the most recurrent errors of addition.

Table 4 *Error of Addition*

No	The statement	The Error	Model of Correct Answer
1	الرجل الذي أعطيته الكتاب سافر.	The man to whom I <u>gave him</u> the book travelled.	The man to whom I gave the book travelled.
2	هذا هو الأستاذ الذي ناقشت معه جمل الوصل.	This is the professor I discussed <u>with him</u> relativization	This is the professor with whom I discussed relativization
3	هذا هو الطالب الذي كرمته	This he student whom I <u>honored him</u>	This is the students whom I honored
4	الرجل الذي سمير أطول منه فاز	This is the man <u>who Sameer</u> is taller than <u>him</u>	The man who is shorter than Sameer won.
5	جاء الرجل الذي انتظرته طويلا	I wait for him	The man who I waited for has come
6	الكتاب الذي قرأته مفيد	The book which I read <u>it is</u> useful	The book which I read is useful
7	ساعدت الرجل الذي تعطلت سيارته	I helped the man <u>Who his</u> car broke down.	I helped the man whose car broke down



Table 4 shows that the students' addition of the resumptive pronouns (i.e. him and it) in using relative pronoun 'who'. The students committed this error in all the statements that have resumptive pronouns in Arabic statements, which does not exist in English. This error could be ascribed to the students' influence of their own MT (i.e. Arabic). In Arabic, the existence of resumptive pronouns with relative pronoun is very common, which was detailed in the literature review. It is clear that the students translated the statements from Arabic into English literally, without consideration for the rules of the relative pronoun 'who' in English. This literal translation indicates that the students may not be aware of differences between the rules of relative pronouns in Arabic and English. Based on the errors above, it is evident that the third problematic area (i.e. presence of relative pronouns) are reflected in the students' errors of addition (sentence, 1, 2,3,4,5 and 6).

As for the last statement, the students combined between the relative pronouns and personal pronouns, which reflect the students' ignorance of the rule of using possessive relative pronouns. It is clear that the students translated the statements literally and so they translated "الذي" as "who" and "سيارته" as his car. The influence of the MT is clear, which might be attributed to students' lack of skills in using possessive relative pronouns.

### 5.1.2. Selection

The students' errors, represented in Table 4, are wrong selection of relative pronouns (i.e. use of which or who instead of who, whose and whoever). The students' errors reach 24%, which reflect that the students' have a severe difficulty in selecting the appropriate pronoun. These errors could be attributed to the students' lack of practicing the use of the relative pronouns. Rote learning and insufficient practice may lie behind such students' of selection the wrong pronouns.

The most recurrent error is the use of 'who' instead of 'whoever' in the beginning of the fourth and fifth statements in the Table 4. All the students committed such an error, which may be attributed to the students' influence of the MT rules of the relative pronouns. In Arabic, no restriction for the position of relative while in English it is only used after the antecedent it modifies. It comes in English in front position if there is a change in the form of relative pronoun 'who' (i.e. whoever).

Table 5 Error of Selection

No	The statement	The error	Model of correct answer
1	هؤلاء هم الطلاب الذين نجحوا في الاختبار	These are the students <u>which</u> pass the exam	These are the students who passed the exam.
2	ساعدت الرجل الذي تعطلت سيارته	I helped the man ( <u>who, which, its</u> ) car broke down	I helped the man whose car broke down
3	أحب الذي تحبه	I love <u>which</u> you love	I love who(m) you love
4	الذي يقرأ القصيدة يسر.	<u>Who</u> reads the poem feels pleased	Whoever reads the poem

			feels pleased
5	الذي درس للاختبار نجح	<u>Who</u> studied for exam passed	Whoever studied for exam passed.
6	الدولة التي عاصمتها الرياض هي المملكة العربية السعودية	The country ( <u>who, which, its</u> ) capital is Riyadh is...	The country whose capital is Riyadh...

Scrutinizing the errors above, one can found that most of the cause of errors in sentences are due the first problematic area (use of personal relative pronoun as in third, fourth and fifth sentences) and use of possessive relative pronoun as in the case of second and sixth sentences.

### 5.1.3. Omission

Around 25% of the students omitted the relative pronoun 'who', which is odd in the system of relative clause in English. In English, the omission of the relative pronoun 'who' is optional if they occupy the object position, (e.g. *this is the girl who (m) I met yesterday*). This type of error might be attributed to students' influence of Arabic rules of relative pronoun as in the second statement in Table 5. In Arabic, the relative pronoun 'who' is omitted in the position of subject and in the case of direct object, it is optional (AL-Okaili, 1991). As for the rest of the statements in Table 5, the students omitted the relative pronouns due to ignorance of relative pronouns rules so the students followed simplification strategy because of lack of knowledge and practice of using the relative pronouns. Note that the students' errors of omission in the third, fourth and fifth statements are closely connected with fifth problematic area that is preset as a criterion for selecting sentences of the test( i.e., use of relative pronouns with prepositions). As for second and seventh statements, the absence of duality and plurality in English relative pronouns lie behind such errors. See Table (6).

Table 6 Error of Omission

No	The statement	The error	Model of correct answer
1	لدي صديق يتكلم الاسبانية	I have a friend speaks English	I have a friend who speaks English.
2	اللاتي يحترمن أنفسهن نساء فاضلات	The women respect themselves are good	The women who have self-esteem are good.
3	الرجل الذي أعطيته الكتاب سافر.	The man who I gave the book travelled	The man to who(m) I gave the book travelled
4	علي الذي فاز بالمسابقة ذكي للغاية	Ali who wins the competition	Ali, who won the competition, is very smart.

5	هذا هو الأستاذ الذي ناقشت معه جمل الوصل.	This is the professor I <u>discussed him</u> relatvization.	This is the professor with who(m) I discussed ...
6	كانت عائشة و فاطمة البننتين الوحيدتين اللتين نجحتا في الاختبار	Fatma an Aisha are the only girls passed the exam	Fatma and Aisha are the only girls who passed the exam.
7	الدولة التي عاصمتها الرياض هي السعودية	The country capital is Riyadh is Saudi Arabia	The country whose capital is Riyadh...

#### 5.1.4. Word order

Twelve percent of the students committed an error of word order. To be specific, the problem here lies in putting a preposition immediately after the relative pronouns as in the first two statements in Table 6. It may be attributed to the strategy of simplification. In other words, the students do not know where the right position of the preposition is, so he or she makes his /her own hypothesis by placing the preposition after the relative pronoun. It could be also attributed to language transfer. In Arabic, the preposition is not separated from its prepositional phrases; therefore, Arab learners of English follow a relative pronoun with a preposition, e.g. \**this is the professor whom with I discussed relatvization*. However, in English, a preposition can precede a relative pronoun or follow its verb, e.g. *this is the woman to whom I sent a letter* or *this is the woman whom I sent a letter to*. To sum up, whatever the cause, the lack of knowledge and insufficient practice of TL rules lay behind such an error, which lead the students to use their own previous knowledge of his MTs or guessing.

As for the fifth statements in Table 6, the students' errors lie in student's ignorance of the structural differences between the relative pronoun in English and Arabic. In English, 'who', refers back to a person and cannot refer back to the noun following it while in Arabic the relative pronoun can refer to what follow and precede by using resumptive pronouns, which does not exist in English. To translate the above statements adequately, the students need to modify the translated statements, such as "*the man who is shorter than Sameer won*" or "*Sammer is taller than the man who won*". This case may indicate that the students translated the statement literally without any consideration to the structure and meaning of the statement in English. In so doing, the notion of language transfer is evident in such examples.

In the last statement Table 6, all the students omitted the commas in using the define relative clause, which shows that the students translated the statement literally, which induced them to commit errors of omitting the comma. In Arabic, there is no comma after the relative clause at all and hence the students are influenced by the MTs rules. It can also be ascribed to students' lack of knowledge of the differences between the definite and indefinite relative clause in English and so they apply the rule of indefinite relative clause to definite relative clause (i.e., rules of restriction). In most errors of word order, one can find that the students' problem is the putting the relative pronoun in the right position. This confirms the second criterion for choosing statements of the test (position of relative pronouns). (See Table (7)).

Table 7 *Error of Word Order*

No	The statement	The error	Model of correct Answer
1	الرجل الذي أعطيته الكتاب سافر.	The man who I give to the book travelled	The man to whom I gave the book traveled
2	هذا هو الأستاذ الذي ناقشت معه جمل الوصل.	This is the professor whom with I discussed relativization	This is the professor with who (m) I discussed relativization.
3	الرجل الذي سمير أطول منه فاز.	The man who Sameer is taller than him won	The man who is shorter than Sameer won.
4	اللاتي يحترمن أنفسهن نساء فاضلات	Who respects themselves are good women	The women who have self-esteem are good.
5	علي الذي فاز بالمسابقة ذكي للغاية	Ali who wins the competition	Ali, who won the competition, is very smart.

### 5.1.5. Avoidance

In avoidance, the students left the whole relative clause without translation. It is the most recurrent error, which reach about 30 %. Although, the test maker allowed the students to use the dictionaries and other sources to overcome comprehension problems they face in translating the statements of the test, many of them could not depict the relative clause correctly. The students' avoidance of translating relative pronoun in the statements above reflect the students' inability of using relative pronoun 'who', though relative pronouns are taught in students' scheduled classes. This means that the students have sufficient knowledge of the topic, but the practice is limited, which could be the reason for being unable to use relative pronoun in different contexts. Teacher may focus on theory at the expense of practice in grammar lessons. Besides, the teaching materials are theory-based, with limited exercises that allow students to use grammatical rules in different contexts. Errors of Avoidance are summarized in Table 8.

Table 8 *Error of Avoidance*

No	The statement	Model of Translation
1	اللاتي يحترمن أنفسهن نساء فاضلات	The women who have self-esteem are good.
2	هؤلاء هم الطلاب الذين نجحوا في الاختبار	These are the students who passed the

		exam.
3	هذا هو الأستاذ الذي ناقشت معه جمل الوصل.	This is the professor with whom I discussed relativization
4	جاء الصديق الذي انتظرتة طويلا	The man who I waited for has come
5	الرجل الذي سمير أطول منه فاز.	The man who is shorter than Sameer won.
6	الذي درس للاختبار نجح	Whoever studied for exam passed.
7	الدولة التي عاصمتها الرياض هي المملكة العربية السعودية	The country whose capital is Riyadh is...

In errors of avoidance, it is not possible to detect the student's specific problem in the use of relative pronouns because the students leave the sentences without translation.

## 6. Discussion

The study findings showed that the Arab students committed errors in acquiring the relative pronoun 'who'. For example, they added resumptive pronouns to the translated sentences into the TL because of the negative transfer of MT's resumptive pronouns to the TL —where this type of pronoun never exists in the TL. According to CAH, this type of transfer could help teachers predict students' errors and help them build new strategies to learn a new language input. CAH also hypothesizes that unless to take care of the area of differences between the two languages, students' learning process would be hindered. The students' errors in the category of addition 8% from the total errors percentage (see table 3).

The second category of errors classified by this study was "*selection*". As stated in Table 4, the students failed to choose the appropriate relative pronouns. This goes in line with MT interference hypothesis because of the different grammatical structures of the relative pronouns between the MT and the TL. The students' errors in this category was severe because some relative pronouns in Arabic like masculine "who" and feminine "who" could be used to refer to all the gender they modify regardless whether the modified nouns is human or non-human.

Concerning the third category of error (*omission*), students' errors were also substantial (see table 5). Students tended to apply simplification strategy by choosing simple forms and constructions instead of more complex ones, which goes in consistence with the Intralingual and developmental errors principle. A further possible explanation for that is the ignorance of L2 rules which made them followed the simplification strategy due to the insufficient knowledge of the relative pronoun structure in the TL. Similarly, the fourth category error, *word order*, the students employed the simplification strategy in putting prepositions after the relative pronouns. Additionally, language transfer lies behind committing errors in the word order category. For the *avoidance* category, Students committed 30 % of the total errors, which deemed severe. This type of error could be attributed to lack of knowledge in recognizing the relative pronoun system of the TL and how it differs from that of their MT. The total percentage of the students' errors reach is about 89 %, which indicate that students have sever difficulty in the use of relative pronoun 'who'(see appendix B)

## 7. Pedagogical Implications

This study generates some pedagogical implications for instructors and curricula designers. It is of importance to consider the five problematic areas in the use of relative pronouns, which are preset as a criterion for constructing the test. These problematic areas should be considered in the content of the courses theoretically and practically (See table1). Teachers, they should explain similar and different aspects of grammatical rules in general and the relative pronouns in specific between the students’ MT and the TL. Additionally, teachers are recommended to explain the rule restrictions of the relative pronouns and make students aware of most common errors that could be ascribed to language transfer, overgeneralization and incomplete application of rules. Besides, teachers should avoid applying the rote learning, which focuses on teaching students how to memorize rules rather than to comprehend or practice them. Teachers are also advised to involve students in online grammatical exercises whereby students can get the immediate feedback of their answer in these activities. Therefore, students can identify wrong answer and can redo the exercise to understand the problematic area that may face which could be attributed to differences in grammatical rules between the MT and the TL.

Concerning the implications for curricula designers, students should be given grammar lessons according to their needs by investigating students’ problematic areas in grammar, and courses then should be designed to match their needs. Moreover, the course content should focus more on activities that raise the students’ errors that may occur because of the application of students’ MT strategies to the TL (Qassem & Vijaysarathi, 2015).

## 8. Conclusion

In the process second language learning, the learners utilize many types of knowledge available to them to facilitate their learning. Arab learner of English, like any English second language learner, uses the system of his or her MT, TL and other strategies available to him or her to simplify second language learning. These strategies are the sources of learners’ errors. However, they are evident that learners are learning L2. Therefore; these errors should not be viewed, as deviant forms. Rather, teachers, material writers and syllabus designers should consider them by adopting appropriate methods and techniques that simplify the second language learning that enable student to overcome the intralingual and interlingual problems.

## 8. Limitations and directions for future research.

As for the purpose of this article is to analyze the Arab students’ errors in relative pronoun “who”, the findings of this study may not be generalizable for the other relative pronouns (i.e., which and that as examples). Future studies can investigate other relative pronouns that students may find them difficult to acquire due to the difference in grammatical rules of the TL and students’ first language. The grammatical restrictions of Arabic could limit the study findings to the speakers of Arabic, while speakers of other languages may not face difficulty as our participants because of the varieties of languages systems.

The focus of this study was to analyze the product of the students (i.e., written assignments of the relative pronouns). Indeed, we do not know what strategies students followed to translate the written assignments to the TL. In other words, this study did not consider how the process of the task had been taken place, as it is not a variable of this study to examine the process of the task. We, therefore, recommend future studies to tackle this area by using eye-

tracking software to document how students behave in tasks (Mohsen, 2015). The study did not also investigate the students’ perceptions towards L2 writing or translation and the difficulties they might find. Therefore, future studies are advised to triangulate the data collection methods by asking students about the obstacles in writing or translating from their mother tongue into the target language (Mohsen, 2016; Mohsen & Shafeeq, 2014).

The current study followed a traditional method of analyzing errors (manual calculation of errors). Future studies are advised to make use of modern technology in analyzing errors by applying computer-aided error analysis (MacDonald, García-Carbonell, & Carot-Sierra, 2013) that can easily and accurately identify errors committed by language learners.

#### About the Author:

**Mohammed Ali Mohsen** is an assistant professor of applied linguistics at Najran University, Saudi Arabia. His research interests are computer-assisted language learning (CALL), second language acquisition, multimedia help options, gaming and simulation in language learning. His papers appeared in top-tier journals indexed in Social Science Citation Index (SSCI) such as *ReCALL*, *Computers & Education*, *British Journal of Educational Technology*, and *Journal of Educational Computing Research*

**Mutahar Qassem** is a lecturer at Najran University, Saudi Arabia. His research interest is translation and culture from innovation technology perspective. He published two papers on English- Arabic translation and culture; one of them was published in *Asia Pacific Translation and Cultural Studies*, Taylor and Francis Group and the other was in *the Arab World English Journal*.

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**Appendix A.** Translation test and frequency of errors

Cause of Errors					Statements	NO
Avoidance	Word order	omission	Selection	Addition		
6		9	6	4	هذا هو الطالب الذي كرمته	1
		24	2		لدي صديق يتكلم الاسبانية.	2
11	5	9	4		اللاتي يحترمن انفسهن نساء فاضلات	3
4	7	16	4	13	الرجل الذي أعطيته الكتاب سافر.	4
7	5	18	4		علي الذي فاز بالمسابقة ذكي للغاية	5
10		4	6		هؤلاء هم الطلاب الذين نجحوا في الاختبار	6
7	18	8	5	10	هذا هو الأستاذ الذي ناقشت معه جمل الوصل.	7
8			21		الذي يقرأ القصيدة يسر.	8
7	1	3	10		ساعدت الرجل الذي تعطلت سيارته	9
9	5	3	5	6	جاء الصديق الذي انتظرته طويلا	10
10	3	5	3		زرت الطالب الذي تميز في أدائه.	11
5	1	7	13		أحب الذي تحبه	12
15		1	3		المعلمون الذين كرموا بالأمس جديرون	13
12		7	4	2	كانت عائشة و فاطمة البننتين الوحيدتين اللتين نجحتا في الاختبار.	14
11	1	5	2	1	قابلت الرجل الذي ساعدك بالأمس	15
11	1	4	3		فاز فريق الصقر الذي أشجعه	16
11	13	1	3	1	الرجل الذي سمير أطول منه فاز.	17
1	1	5	3	5	الكتاب الذي قرأت (ه) مفيد	18
7	1		17		الذي درس للاختبار نجح	19
10	1	6	12		الدولة التي عاصمتها الرياض هي المملكة العربية السعودية	20
162	63	135	130	42	No. of Errors	
0.304	0.118	0.253	0.244	.078	600	TOTAL OF ITEMS
					532	TOTAL No. of errors
					.889	

**Appendix B**

Translation and problematic areas

	Statements	Translations	Problematic area
1	هذا هو الطالب الذي كرمته	This is the student whom I honoured	presence of resumptive pronoun

2	لدي صديق يتكلم الإسبانية.	I have a friend who speaks Spanish.	position of relative pronoun
3	اللاتي يحترمن أنفسهن نساء فاضلات	The women who have self-esteem are good.	absence of duality and plurality
4	الرجل الذي أعطيته الكتاب سافر.	The man to who I gave the book travelled.	use of relative pronouns with prepositional verbs
5	علي الذي فاز بالمسابقة ذكي للغاية	Ali, who won the competition, is very smart.	Position of relative pronoun
6	هؤلاء هم الطلاب الذين نجحوا في الاختبار	These are the students who passed the exam.	absence of duality and plurality
7	هذا هو الأستاذ الذي ناقشت معه جمل الوصل.	This is the professor with whom I discussed relativization	presence of resumptive pronoun
8	الذي يقرأ القصيدة يسر.	Whoever reads the poem feels pleased	use of personal and possessive relative pronouns
9	ساعدت الرجل الذي تعطلت سيارته	I helped the man whose car broke down	use of personal and possessive relative pronouns
10	جاء الصديق الذي انتظرت طويلا	The man who I waited for has come	use of relative pronouns with prepositional verbs
11	زرت الطالب الذي تميز في أدائه.	I visited the student who is excel in his performance.	Position of relative pronoun
12	أحب الذي تحبه	I love who(m) you love	presence of resumptive pronoun
13	المعلمون الذين كرموا بالأمس جديرون	The teachers who were honoured yesterday are competent.	absence of duality and plurality
14	كانت عائشة و فاطمة البنيتين الوحيدتين اللتين نجحتا في الاختبار.	Fatma an Aisha are the only girls passed the exam	absence of duality and plurality
15	قابلت الرجل الذي ساعدك بالأمس	I met the man who helped you yesterday.	Position of relative pronoun
16	فاز فريق الصقر الذي أشجعه	The falcon team, which (m) I encouraged, won.	Position of relative pronoun
17	الرجل الذي سمر أطول منه فاز.	The man who is shorter than Sameer won	use of relative pronouns with prepositional verbs
18	الكتاب الذي قرأت (ه) مفيد	the book which I read is interesting	presence of resumptive pronoun
19	الذي درس للاختبار نجح	<u>Who</u> reads the poem feels pleased	use of personal and possessive relative pronouns
20	الدولة التي عاصمتها الرياض هي المملكة العربية السعودية	The country whose capital is Riyadh is Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.	use of personal and possessive relative pronouns