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The Quality of Second-Language Writing (Hebrew) among Arab Students in Israel

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The level of syntactic complexity of subordinate clauses in argument texts spontaneously produced in Hebrew by Arab female freshmen specializing in the teaching of Hebrew at Academic College of Education in Israel.

Syntactic complexity is examined by means of the relationships between main clauses and various types of subordinate clauses;

- ✓ Logical connections encoded
- ✓ Complexity of the subordinate clause itself

The Status of Hebrew among Israel's Arab Students

The state of Israel has two official languages:

- ✓ Hebrew is the language of the majority.
- ✓ Arabic is considered the language of the Arab minority.

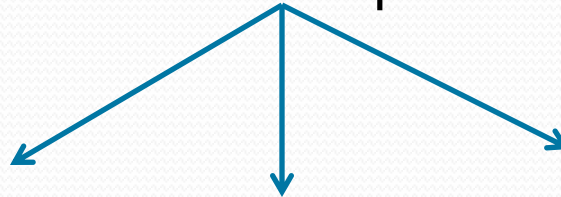
In Israel's Arab school system Hebrew has been taught as a second language whose study is compulsory between the third and the twelfth grades.

Hebrew is also acquired in informal settings.

Writing an Argumentation Text

Argumentative writing – main genres of theoretical discourse

Aristotelian Philosophical Tradition



Claim – Argumentation – Conclusion

Research Question

The study aimed to examine the academic competence of Arabic-students in Hebrew by measuring syntactic complexity of writing their academic writing.

The research questions are:

- ✓ What is the logical-semantic relation between the main clause and the type of subordinate clause?
- ✓ What characterizes the subordinate clause in terms of complexity in writing syntactically of Arab students?

Method

Twenty Arab female freshmen specializing in the teaching of Hebrew at Academic College of Education in Israel.

The instruction: "Whether the psychometric exam should be retained or abolished is an issue that adults are debating. Everyone has their own views on the matter. Think about this subject, the causes and the results, and write a composition that presents your position on it".

Results and Discussion

1. The relationship between the main clause and the type of Subordinate Clause

The subordinating conjunction:

she (=that) (=ψ)

Types of subordinate clauses:

- ✓ Descriptive clauses
- ✓ relative clauses
- ✓ content clauses

1.1 Descriptive Clauses

Causal clause

causal connector is used instead of one denoting result:

Some people pass it without any difficulty and others will not pass it **because** it does not enable them to choose the profession which they think is fitting for them.

*Yesh anashim she-ovrim oto bli qashot, ve-aherim lo ya'aviru oto **biglal she-hu lo me'afsher otam livhor et ha-miqtsoa she-hem hashvu oto mat'im lahem.***

Purpose Clause

There is no thematic connection between the main clause and the clause that begins with the subordinating particle *kedey she* (in order for).

I stress that the psychometric test should be abolished *in order for* the climate to be normal and plenty of time to think before putting down an answer.

Ani madgisha she-ha-mivhan ha-psikhometri hu tsarikh lihyot batul kedey she-ha-avira normalit u-zeman tov lahshov lifney lesamen teshuva

1.2 Relative Clauses

A. *She (=that)* used instead of another complementizer to begin a clause

***She-* instead of the proper particle that introduces a causal clause
(*mi-peney she-*) (because)**

The psychometric test is very important for all students who begin their university studies, ***that*** it divides them according to their level.

***She-* instead of the proper particle that introduces a temporal clause
(*ka-asher*) (when)**

In my opinion this is a weak base ***that*** a college graduate commits himself and to build his future on it and to learn something that he does not like.

B. *She* (=that) after A Parenthetical Phrase

The subordinating particle *she* often appears after an expressed opinion.

The construction in Arabic:

***parenthetical + subordinating conjunction + noun phrase
+ verb***

Unfortunately ***that*** many students do not succeed in this exam.

Le-tsa'ari ha-rav she-harbe talmidim lo matslihim ba-mivhan ha-ze.

1.3 Content Clauses

Low complexity level due to their syntactic function, which merely conveys subcategorized complements needed for understanding the idea that the main clause communicates.

I **see** *that* this entire test does not reflect the student's level of knowledge.

Ani ro'e she-kol ha-mivhan ha-ze eno meshaqef ramat ha-yeda' etsel ha-talmid .

2. Complexity of the Subordinate Clause

Arab students when writing in Hebrew are affected by their native language, whose discourse is built of combinations of parallel lines with very flexible mutual connections.

They repeat connectives in order to validate their arguments, and so create disconnected parallel lines.

A. Sequence of subordinate clauses: Subordination instead of coordination

*The complementizer **she** instead of coordination (logico-semantic linking connector)*

There are many courses and instructions today **that** can help our students improve their grade **that** cost a lot of money.

B. Parallel Subordinate Clauses

In the following main clauses there are sequences of subordinate clauses, each of which is linked to the same main clause through a repetition of the complementizer.

In the examples we find relative clauses that expand a noun phrase functioning as the subject of the main clause (*harbe talmidim* "many students"), following which the student skips the predicate and continues on to a new main clause.


Many students *who* tried to do it a number of times *who* wasted years in order to be accepted into the subject *that* they wanted study at college and in the end they gave up and did not continue and went into subjects *that* they did not want, so in my opinion ...

Harbe talmidim she-nisu la'asot oto kama pe'amim she-bizbezu shanim bishvil lehagia' la-miqtsoa' she-ratsu lilmod ba-mikhlala u-va-sof nishberu ve-lo himshikhu ve-halkhu le-miqtso'ot she-lo ratsu otam az le-da'ati...

Conclusion

The connection between the argumentative genre and syntactic characteristics from a developmental perspective. It takes considerable experience and cognitive effort to produce an argumentation text that is coherent, and containing well-developed logical thoughts.

In many cases the production of subordinate clauses that begin with logico-semantic connectors seems at first glance to create a high degree of syntactic complexity. However, an examination of the subordinate clauses shows that they are unnecessary in accordance to the rules of Hebrew main clause syntax and that syntactic errors are made under the influence of the writer's native language.



As for the subordinate clauses themselves, they were found to contain structures of several content units, but the ideas in these units are not well developed, consisting of unfinished and partial ideas, some quite repetitive, reflecting a kind of brainstorming which the student carries out with himself.



Thank You for Your Attention