Jordanian Learners' Acquisition of English Nominal-Phrase Premodification

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ABSTRACT

This paper aims at investigating Jordanian learners' acquisition of nominal phrase premodification. The predominant concerns in this piece of research were to identify the problems that Jordanian learners encounter in their acquisition of English premodification and to identify some plausible causes of such problems. One special problem lies in the fact that English imposes certain rules and conventions on the sequence of premodifiers in nominal phrases, while Arabic offers its users more flexible strings. The findings revealed that Jordanian learners of English are confronted with a difficulty during their acquisition of the sequences of premodifiers in terms of recognition, correction and production. Statistical evidence was provided to prove the validity of the presumed hypotheses. As far as the causes of errors are concerned, the study revealed that the learners' errors are caused by interlingual and intralingual transfer. Additionally, the researcher attributes some errors to the context of learning which does not place proper emphasis on the semantic and psycholinguistic aspects of the phenomenon.

Keywords: Premodifiers, Second Language Acquisition, Nominal Phrase, Modification.

Introduction

On 3ʳᵈ December, 1943 Edward R. Murrow, the news broadcaster who reported the story of Berlin night bombing, said:

"We went out and stood around the big, black four-motored Lancaster. There was a red, sullen, obscene glare."

Premodifiers, part of which is adjective sequences in attributive position, cannot be varied freely but rather tend to follow a fixed order according to the rules or patterns of English language. The following two examples illustrate how premodifiers follow a definite order in accordance with the rules of the language:

- The black, smiling, American chocolate supplier is my friend
- The smiling, American, chocolate black supplier is my friend

If one is to consider the above sentences and the way the modifying words 'black, smiling, American, and chocolate' were sequenced before the head-noun 'supplier' in sentence (a), one might decide that this is an acceptable string which is ordered according to the rules and conventions of English. It can also be inferred that any change in this order renders the sentence unacceptable e.g., sentence (b). Depending on their qualities, premodifiers in English follow a specified sequence. The present study is intended to delineate what constraints confront Jordanian EFL learners of English in the acquisition of the sequence of premodification constructions. Unlike Arabic which offers its users flexibility in the use of adjective modifiers, English has certain rules and conventions that govern the order in which premodifiers have to be ordered in a sentence. Therefore, Arab learners of English are expected to confront difficulties to acquire marked structures such as the sequences of adjective and noun premodifiers.

- **Research Objectives and Research Questions**

The researcher has observed that Jordanian learners of English, including university students, encounter a difficulty to acquire English premodification constructions. It is also observed that Jordanian college students of English do not succeed in sequencing a number of premodifiers in a nominal phrase in accordance with the rules and patterns of the language.

Therefore, the present study will attempt to find answers for the two following research questions:

First: Do Jordanian college students fail to recognize the sequences of premodifiers which are acceptable from those which violate the rules and patterns of English word order? And whether the students are able to correct the erroneous constructions?

Second: Do Jordanian college students perform better in the recognition of erroneous constructions than in correcting such constructions?

Therefore, the present study will attempt to achieve the following objectives:

1. To test whether Jordanian EFL learners of English have problems in acquiring the attributive sequence of adjectives before a head noun.

2. To detect the sources of difficulty which Jordanian university learners of English encounter in their acquisition of premodification in English.

3. To provide some pedagogical insights on how acquiring premodification in English can be enhanced.

- **English Nominal-Phrase Premodification**

There are a number of studies which have been conducted to investigate the use of adjective premodifiers in English (Nelson 1976) and in other languages (Harris 1986). Recent studies in the field have only focused on the development and acquisition of predicative or attributive adjectives by young children (Gelman and Markman, 1985; Ninio, 2004; Feist, 2012). Hill (1958) argued that premodifying items within a nominal phrase have fixed positions. He also illustrated that the difference in the class among the premodifying items does matter and affect the sequence, conversely words which belong in the same class fit in the place of one another without affecting sentence grammaticality. Additionally, Hill called for surveying the use of language to discover the position of premodifying items in a noun phrase. Quirk, Greenbaum, Leech and Svartivik(1972: 925)illustrated the relative positions of premodifiers taken up in a selection of nominal phrases presented in Table (1):

Table (1): Positions of Premodifiers according to Quirk at al., (1972)

Determiners	General	Age	Colour	Participle	Provenance	Noun	Denominal	Head
The	hectic						Social	Life
the	extravagant					London	Social	Life
A				Crumbling	Gothic	church		Tower
A			gray	Crumbling	Chinese	church		Tower
Some	intricate	old		Interlocking				Designs
A	small		green	Carved		jade		Idol
His	Heavy	new					Moral	Responsibilities

In their later work, Quirk et al., (1985) identified four positions or zones within which noun phrase premodifiers occur; these were called 'modification zones'. The authors' theorization of the four zones was based on syntactic tests as well as on the Survey of English Usage to surpass a level of adequacy. This was a clear response to the calls for deriving new characterizations for the sequence of premodifiers from more tangible empirical research rather than depending on intuition. Their argument about the four positional slots was based on the following: there is an implicit correlation between the four zones and the semantic classes. Still, the term 'zone' does not provide predictions about the qualities of the items that may occur in each slot, this pushed some other researchers (such as: Paradis, 2000; Halliday, 2004) to use terms that better describe the content of the 'zone':

- Zone I was named 'reinforcers' i.e., adjectives that describe the most important quality.

- Zone II was called 'epithets' as this slot should be filled with expressive adjectives used to characterize a person or a thing.

-Zone III was titled 'descriptors'; the adjectives that occur in this slot have descriptive meanings and not referential words.

- Zone IV was termed 'classifiers'; the adjectives used in this slot classify or sub-classify the premodified head.

- **Semantic and Psycholinguistic Interpretations for Premodifiers Characterizations**

Explanations for the sequence of premodifiers were not limited only to the syntactic explanations; Brown (1965) was among the first scholars to adopt the idea of

the 'semantic' order of premodifiers:

characteristic + size + shape + temperature/humidity+ age + color + origin + noun + head noun (1965: 281).

Dirven (1999: 57) observes that in English, "adjective sequences in attributive position tend to follow a fairly

rigorous order". Figure (1) below was presented in (ibid, 58) to reflect on how the structural approach observes the sequence of the various categories of attributive adjectives.

Figure (1): Attributive adjectives order according to the structuralist approach.
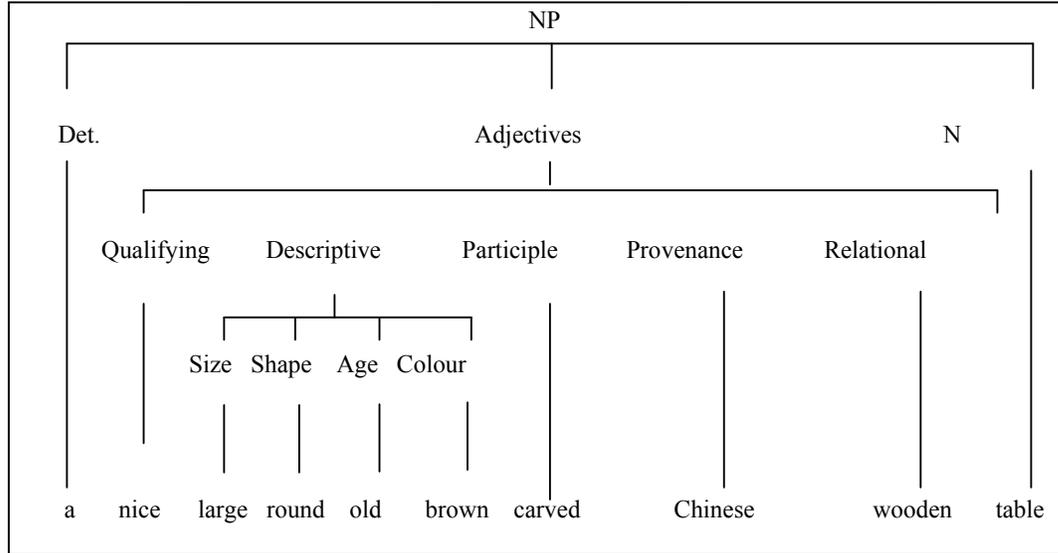
Investigating the cognitive motivation beyond such characterization, Dirven explicated the conceptual motivation beyond such sequence saying that there are syntactic-semantic reasons beyond setting up such characterization. In other words, he argued that syntactically speaking, the last three categories are exclusively attributive adjectives and semantically, they are in a very close relationship with the modified noun. Differently, the other two categories i.e. qualifying and descriptive are labeled, according to Dirven as: 'freely attributive adjectives'. That is to say, these can be used as predicative or attributive adjectives. Still, Dirven confirms the need for more tangible tools that account for the semantic link between the different categories and sub-categories of attributive adjectives. In his opinion, we should go ahead and analyze the semantic roles in terms of semantic configurations. With regard to the last three exclusively attributive adjectives, which Dirven called 'Role-based adjectives', he argues that these incorporate a very strong link with the modified noun and thus are syntactically closer to it. Explaining how (Participle, Provenance, and Relational) adjectives are semantically more attached to the premodified noun, Dirven (1999)

claims that the roles of (agent/patient, source and essive) are very helpful in describing the underlying relationships between these types and the head noun. In simple words, the past participle adjective 'carved' incorporate a transitive relationship between an agent who performed the action of 'carving' and a patient that went through this action. Then, the provenance adjective 'Chinese' is in a source relation with the noun i.e., the table was made after a model from China. Last, the relational adjective – its name suggests a relation to the noun it modifies- has an essive role i.e., the table is in fact wood and underwent a process of change. Dirven (1999) concluded that two principles should come into play when trying to identify the cognitive motivation for the sequential ordering of attributive adjectives:

1. The principle of proximity: What is conceptually more strongly related to the noun is syntactically closer to it.

2. The principle of saliency: Humans perceive according to sets of priorities in their minds, that is size before shape and these two properties before age and all before colour.

With regard to the psycholinguistic perspective,

Martin published a paper in (1969) proposing a theory of a preferred order. For him, a 'definite' adjective i.e., an adjective that denotes a constant meaning independently from that of the head it modifies, is more accessible than an adjective whose meaning vary as a result of being used with different nouns. For instance, the adjective Jordanian is more constant than the adjective good and consequently according to Martin, the former is more accessible than the latter. Martin's (1969) hypothesis is that the sentence a good Jordanian man was originally a Jordanian good man; the adjective Jordanian was placed first until the speaker/ writer evokes the qualifying adjective good. When the sentence is produced, its word order is reversed. Martin reiterates the role of syntax and semantics in determining the order of adjectives. Meanwhile, he believes that the psychological considerations are essential too. Recently, Tribushinina (2011) published an online article in which she highlighted the role of cognitive, pragmatic and linguistic factors involved in the acquisition of adjectives' order. According to her, semantic diversity is a crucial booster in the formation of adjective category; children need to identify at least six different semantic categories before the morphosyntactic properties of adjectives start to appear in their speech. Tribushinina (2011) also claims that contrast plays a role in the acquisition of adjective category. In simple words, contrastive situations motivate children's understanding of adjectives; once an adjective category is recognized, contrasts are made in the background.

Methodology

- **Subjects and Research Instrument**

The sample of the study consisted of 100 (80 females, 20 males) fourth-year college students studying English at the Department of English Language and Literature, Faculty of Foreign Languages, University of Jordan. The subjects' mean age is approximately 21 years old; all are native speakers of Arabic. It is worth noting that the rationale beyond choosing senior students to participate in the study was motivated by the researcher's assumption that such students are expected to have good command of English along with an appropriate syntactic exposure to the studied phenomenon. The students were enrolled in the second semester of the academic year 2011-2012.

In order to find answers to the research questions which had already been posed (cf., section 2), the researcher constructed a test that probes into the subjects' proficiency in the studied phenomenon i.e., their ability to recognize and correct the sequences of premodifiers in nominal phrases. A test consisting of two parts was prepared and used as the instrument of data collection (Appendix 1 is a full copy of the test). The first part was an Acceptability Judgment Task (AJT), while the second part was a translation task. The AJT consisted of twenty four sentences divided into three categories according to the number of premodifiers contained in each sentence:

- Category 1: 8 Sentences containing two premodifiers; four acceptable and four unacceptable.
- Category 2: 8 Sentences containing three premodifiers; four acceptable and four unacceptable.
- Category 3: 8 Sentences with containing more than three premodifiers; four acceptable and four unacceptable.

The twenty four sentences, representing the three abovementioned categories, were randomly scrambled in the AJT. The respondents were asked to put a tick (✓) next to the sentences they thought were acceptable and a cross (χ) next to the sentences they thought were unacceptable. They were also asked to insert their suggested changes that may make the erroneous ones sound acceptable. Below is an illustrative example taken from the test, Item number (17) in the AJT; it contains three premodifiers before a head noun (Category number 3).

They had lunch at a large, gorgeous, hamburger, American restaurant.

(   ) Acceptable

(   ) Unacceptable. Correction:………………………….

Accurate responses will render the previous sentence as follows:

They had lunch at a large, gorgeous, hamburger, American restaurant.

(   ) Acceptable

(X) Unacceptable. Correction: They had lunch at a large, gorgeous, American, hamburger restaurant.

The second part of the test was a translation task in which the subjects were asked to translate ten sentences from Arabic into English. The ten sentences followed the same distribution of categories which was identified in the AJT. The following sentence is item number (5) in the translation task, Category 2. It is extracted for exemplification purposes. This sentence contains three

adjectives:

احمد   شابٌ   أردنيٌ   طويلٌ   شجاعٌ

brave   tall   Jordanian   guy   Ahmad

Crucially, the testees had to translate the ten sentences into English, awarding special attention to the sequence of premodifiers in the translated version.

- **The Validity and Reliability of the Instrument**
Test Validity

Validity is "the degree to which a test measures what it claims or purports to measure" (Brown 1996: 231). To verify the validity of the test, the researcher surveyed a number of reference books of grammar which provided authentic characterizations of the studied phenomenon, for example Quirk et al., (1972 & 1985). Before the final version of the test was administrated, its validity was ensured through submitting it to a panel of experts; two of them are university professors teaching at the Department of English Language and Literature, University of Jordan, while the third is a native speaker holding a Ph.D. in English. The juries were asked to assess the test and to judge its coverage of the investigated phenomenon. The three juries commented on the test items and suggested modifications in both content and wording. In addition, one of the juries recommended distributing the test to a group of native speakers to further ensure the researchability of the aspect in question. The researcher, then, distributed the test to 10 American native speakers teaching English in an American educational center in Amman. Since the second part of the test was a translation task, the native group was handed only the first part. The natives' judgments proved to be similar in the majority of the sentences with an average mean that exceeds 80% (cf., section 6.3). As far as the second task of the test is concerned namely, the translation task, its items were revised by two Arabic professors teaching at the Department of Arabic Language and Literature, University of Jordan. The two professors confirmed the grammaticality of the sentences and agreed that its items fairly represent the topic in question.

Test Reliability

Brown (1996: 196) defined test reliability as: "the extent to which the results can be considered consistent or stable". One month before the final version of the test was administrated; a pilot test was applied to a group of 10 randomly selected fourth year students at the Department of English Language and Literature, University of Jordan. This tryout aimed at three main points. First, to ensure that the testees encounter no difficulty in knowing what the two tasks require. Second, to make sure that the allotted time is enough to complete the test. Third, to make modifications in case any problems came up during the test. If repeated in similar circumstances, a reliable test is expected to provide similar results. Harris (1968: 23) lists a wide variety of methods to assess the reliability of a test amongst these are: the split half method, the test retest procedure, Cronbach alpha and the Kuder-Richardson 21 formula. The researcher believes Kuder-Richardson formula 21 coefficients can best verify the reliability of the test of the present study. Here is Kuder-Richardson's 21formula:

$$R = 1- \frac{M (n-M)}{ns2}$$

R stands for reliability
M stands for the mean
n stands for the number of items in a test
s is the standard deviation (i.e., dispersion from thearithmetic mean)

Applying the above formula to the scores of the subjects of this study gave a reliability estimate of 91% which is a relatively good test ratio and confirms the reliability and consistency of the test.
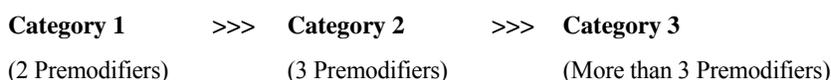
- **Procedures and Test Administration**

As pointed out previously, the test of the study took place during the second semester of the academic year 2011-2012. The subjects were made aware that the researcher is interested is in their initial responses and were asked not to change their minds about the judgments they make. The researcher presented two illustrative examples to ensure that everyone understands what is required to perform the two tasks, and then the subjects were asked whether they need any further explanation. All expressed their readiness to start the tasks and were directly handed the test. Furthermore, it was taken into consideration that the respondents should feel very much comfortable while answering the test. Thus, the subjects were told that anyone who felt unable to do the test could leave the class, only one did. In order to take the test seriously, the subjects were asked to write their names on

the test-papers. In addition, they were informed beforehand to do their best since those who perform well will be rewarded. The students were given one full session (a 50-minute lecture) to complete the test, this period turned out to be sufficient and all test-papers were submitted within the prescribed time. With regard to scoring and statistical treatment, a previously prepared scoring system was adopted in an attempt to increase the reliability and objectivity of the conducted test. Each test paper was scored out of (36), allocating (24) marks for the acceptability judgment of the items and (12) marks to the correction of the (12) unacceptable items.

Results and Discussion

- **General Results**

Out of the 3600 responses which the subjects of the present study made, only 1744 were accurate (i.e., 48.4%) which is a quite low performance mean. To be more precise, in the AJT only (53) of the total subjects managed to get at the pass mark of (18) out of (36). That is, the subjects total performance mean of accurate responses was (49%). Such performance reflects mediocre acquisition of the phenomenon at question (i.e., the sequence of premodifiers in a nominal phrase). In the second task of the test, that is the translation task, the subjects scored only (31%) as an overall mean of their accurate responses. These resultant rates presented in the next sections show that the students of English at their fourth-year level are far away from drawing close to acquiring the structure of premodification in English.

- **AJT: Statistical Means and Acquisition Rates**

As it has already been said, the AJT consisted of twenty four sentences divided into three categories (cf., section 5.1). Table (2) below shows the percentages of accurate responses obtained in all categories in terms of recognition as well as correction:

Table (2): Percentages of Accurate Responses in All Categories

Category	Percentage of Accurate Responses (Recognition)	Percentage of Accurate Responses (Correction)
First Category	67.88 %	50.75 %
Second Category	55.63 %	38.75 %
Third Category	43.38 %	21.5 %

First, Table (2) above might inform us that the subjects encountered less difficulties to judge the acceptability of the sentences corresponding to the first category if compared with those which correspond to the second and third. Second, it is apparent that the more premodifiers the sentence includes the more difficulty it poses to the learners. On the basis of the relative weight of the subjects' accurate responses whose percentages are presented in Table (2), one may be able to draw a hierarchy for the difficulty involved in the acquisition of the three categories of premodifiers by Jordanian L2 learners of English language:

Category 1	>>>	**Category 2**	>>>	**Category 3**
(2 Premodifiers)		(3 Premodifiers)		(More than 3 Premodifiers)

According to this hierarchy, the more premodifiers a sentence involves, the more difficulty it poses to the acquirer. Therefore, the above hierarchy can be interpreted as follows: since the first category involves the use of less number of premodifiers, its acquisition is expected to appear prior to the acquisition of the second category and so forth. The first category corresponds to sentences (1, 4, 5, 9, 10, 14, 18, and 21). Just to remind the reader, all sentences in this category included only two premodifiers preceding a head noun in a nominal phrase. However, the eight sentences were fairly distributed into acceptable sentences and unacceptable ones. Table (3) below shows the percentage of accurate responses in the first category in terms of recognition as well as correction:

Table (3) above shows that the mean of accuracy rates in terms of recognition is (67.88%). In addition, this table further shows that high percentages of accuracy were achieved in these eight items with the highest score in sentence number 21 (Mean: 79%). In terms of correction the overall mean of accuracy for the first category stood at (50.75%). In general, the percentages provided in the previous table indicated that the subjects achieved the highest acquisition rates of all categories especially in terms of recognition. The researcher attributes such finding to the fact that the items in this category

contained only two premodifiers which made the choice easier for the subjects. In other words, more than 50% of the students managed to provide accurate responses in terms of recognition for all items in this category except for item number (1). In the second category, the accurate responses of the subjects were lower than those obtained in the first category both in correction and in recognition. Table (4) below provides the percentage of accuracy for sentences (2, 7, 8, 12, 15, 16, 20, and 23) which correspond to the second category.

Table (3): Percentages of accuracy for the first category

Sentence Number	Percentage of Accuracy (Recognition)	Percentage of Accuracy (Correction)
S 1	46%	
S 4	68%	57%
S 5	71%	
S 9	65%	47%
S10	58%	49%
S 14	75%	
S18	63%	
S 21	79%	50%
Overall Mean	**67.88%**	**50.75%**

Table (4): Percentages of accuracy for the second category

Sentence Number	Percentage of Accuracy (Recognition)	Percentage of Accuracy (Correction)
S 2	53%	41%
S 7	69%	37%
S 8	43%	
S12	31%	28%
S 15	66%	
S 16	73%	
S 20	49%	
S 23	61%	49%
Overall Mean	**55.65%**	**38.75%**

Obviously, the overall mean of the accurate responses in this category at the level of recognition was (55.65%), with the highest rate of accuracy in answering sentence 16 (its mean score: 73%). However, not all testees who recognized the unacceptability of certain sentences were able to rearrange them according to the grammatical sequence of premodifiers before a head noun. The third column in the above table shows the percentages of those who succeeded to re-sequence the premodifiers in ways that render the sentences grammatical; only (38.75%) of the subjects were able to correct the erroneous sequences of premodification in the second category. As far as the third category is concerned, it is worth noting that the percentages obtained on the accuracy of responses in the third category were quite low at both levels; recognition and correction, though in correction, it was more apparent. This observation here is informative for a simple reason; it shows that all responses appear now to be predictive of the degree of difficulty in relation to the numbered categories. The percentages of accuracy for the third category in the two levels i.e., recognition and correction are shown in Table (5) below:

Table (5): Percentages of accuracy for the third category

Sentence Number	Percentage of Accuracy (Recognition)	Percentage of Accuracy (Correction)
S 3	49%	23%
S 6	29%	
S 11	43%	
S 13	56%	27%
S 17	27%	19%
S 19	72%	
S 22	39%	
S 24	32%	17%
Overall Mean	**43.38%**	**21.5%**

Table (5) clearly shows that the percentages of accurate responses in terms of recognition were very low in this category. The recorded overall mean of accurate responses for this category in terms of recognition was (43.38%). Again, this might tell us that this category posed a greater challenge to the subjects. Similarly, it indicates the lowest level of correction in all categories with an overall mean score of (21.5%). The low frequencies of accuracy obtained in this category may be attributed to the insufficient exposure to such constructions. It should be noted that although the arrangement of premodifiers in nominal phrases constitutes an integral part of English language system, Jordanian learners are not exposed to situations in which they are required to use many premodifiers at a time,

rather they can compensate for such use by other means of expression with short sentences in which one premodifier is used at a time.

A close look at all tables above indicates that the mean scores at the two levels viz., recognition and correction, were relatively low and most of the time did not reflect a sufficient level of acquisition. The overall percentage of accuracy in the three categories was (55.63%) in terms of recognition and (44.75%) in terms of correction. This implies answers to the two questions raised in this study. A glance at the percentages of accurate responses shows that the subjects failed to achieve acceptable accuracy rates in terms of recognition and correction. It also shows that correction poses a greater difficulty to the subjects. Percentages of accurate

responses provided evidence that the level of acquisition is higher in recognition than in correction.

- **Native Speakers' Responses**

A thought-provoking contention related to the native speakers' responses could ensue**:** To which extent English native speakers master the sequence of premodifiers in nominal phrases? And if their mastery is not perfectly complete, are we supposed to expect that Jordanian learners would easily acquire premodification constructions? No doubt, as it is hinted at in Section 3.4, native speakers succeeded to sequence a number of premodifiers before a head noun at all levels. Table (6) below shows the native speakers' scores in the AJT in terms of recognition and correction:

Table (6): Native Speakers' Scores in the AJT

Student No.	Accurate Responses (Recognition)	Percentage of Accurate Responses %	Accurate Responses (Correction)	Percentage of Accurate Responses %
1	22	91.6	10	83.3
2	21	87.5	10	83.3
3	19	79.1	9	75.0
4	23	95.8	11	91.6
5	17	70.0	8	66.6
6	22	91.6	11	91.6
7	20	83.8	10	83.3
8	21	87.5	10	83.3
9	18	75.0	8	66.6
10	20	83.8	10	83.3
Overall Mean	**20.3**	**84.5 %**	**8.08**	**80.79**

This table shows that out of 24, the 10 testees scored an overall score mean of correct responses (20.3/24) in terms of recognition and (8.08/12) in terms of correction. Such findings prove that the natives' performance reflects a relative mastery of the studied construction. The native speakers' mastery of the premodification construction stood at (84.5%) in terms of recognition and at (80.79%) in terms of correction. A critical reader of Table (8) may be tempted with alacrity to assume that although the native group succeeded to sequence and correct premodification constructions, such construction posed a relative difficulty to the native speakers themselves due to its internal complexity. Therefore, margin of the natives' errors in terms of recognition and correction fosters the arguments of the complexity of the

construction itself and leaves room for further research to investigate the possibility for its being a fossilized construction based on colossal evidence derived studies that account for different first language backgrounds. One may also be able to argue that the problem may stem from the rules which govern the use of such constructions and this comes in line with the proposal made by Quirk et al., (1985) that premodifiers positions can be seen as strong tendencies rather than restricting rules. As far as the purpose of this study is concerned, the native speakers' responses added to the validity of the AJT. Meanwhile, the researcher believes that their responses revealed a relative complexity of the construction and consequently such finding poses difficulty not only to the learners but also to the teachers who should spend more

time and follow effective strategies to simplify this construction.

• **The Translation Task**

As pointed out earlier (cf., section 5.1), the second task of the conducted test was a translation one. The researcher's ultimate goal from including this task in the test was to use this task as a minor tool to find out if the results arrived at in this task correlate with those recorded in the AJT. Furthermore, this task intended to figure out the performance of the subjects in a form of production task after eliciting their responses in terms of recognition and correction in the AJT. The subjects were asked to translate ten Arabic sentences into English bearing in mind the differences between Arabic and English in the sequence of premodifiers in nominal phrases. For example, the Arabic sentence, ' أحمد شاب أردني طويل شجاع' needs its adjectives to be rearranged when translated into English. A right sequence that makes the sentence an acceptable string could be the following one: Ahmad is a brave, tall, Jordanian guy. Additionally, since this sentence involves the use of two adjectives of the same type i.e., qualifying adjectives, another acceptable string could be: Ahmad is a tall, brave, Jordanian guy.

This seems to be in harmony with Hill's (1958) claim that words which belong to the same class fit in the place of one another without affecting sentence grammaticality. It was borne in mind, when this task was scored, that if the testee provides any acceptable sequence, he/she receives a mark for it. The results of this task were not quite different from those obtained through the AJT. However, the arithmetic mean recorded in this task was a little bit lower than the overall means in the AJT. The overall mean of the testees' responses in this task stood at (31 %). This low performance rate in the translation task may bring to light the possibility that such low rate resulted from the nature of the task itself, that is, it needs more efforts to translate the sentences into English, although such claim can be controversial. Table (7) shows the number of subjects who provided correct responses to each test item in the translation task and the overall percentage of accuracy:

It could be enlightening to discuss the above table in the light of the number of modifiers that were contained in each. Items (2, 3, and 4) contained two modifiers only, items (1, 5, 6 and 7) consisted of three adjective modifiers while in items (8, 9, and 10) four modifiers were included in each.

Table (7): Accurate Responses in the Translation Task

Test Item Number	Accurate Responses
1	39
2	41
3	39
4	46
5	36
6	28
7	23
8	19
9	21
10	18
Overall Mean	**31 %**

• **Error analysis: Possible Causes of Errors**

In this section, an attempt is made to identify the possible causes for the most frequent errors made by the subjects in this investigation. The researcher believes that investigating the subjects' errors can be useful as it helps in detecting effective ways of error treatment as well as in providing some pedagogical insights. This seems to be in harmony with how Corder (1971) views the importance of error analysis. He confirms that error analysis helps in the learning of a second language and enables a more effective learning. He believes that error analysis enables the learner to exploit the analyzer's knowledge of his dialect for pedagogical purposes. Moreover, Corder identified three stages of error analysis which this thesis strive to adopt viz., recognition of idiosyncrasy, error description and explanation. However, Corder views the third stage as the 'ultimate object of error analysis' (1974: 126).

Many types of errors have been seen in the interpretation of the subjects' errors. In fact, mother tongue interference is quite evident based on the difference between Arabic and English in the flexibility and restriction of premodifiers. In the translation task, the subjects showed great dependence on their L1 knowledge to the extent that some testees translated the items into English preserving their original order of modifiers despite the fact that they were alerted to make changes in the sequence by the instructions of the task and by the researcher himself. This means that interlingual errors made by the subjects played a crucial role in hindering the acquisition; thus, it is by far the most important cause of errors. One should highlight that this phenomenon is relatively more marked in English than in Arabic and as

such is expected to pose difficulties to L2 learners. Second, intralingual transfer is seen as a natural consequence of the learning process. The learner transfers his/her existing knowledge of the second language rules to instances where such rules are inapplicable. With regard to overgeneralization, the subjects committed errors which are attributable to the overgeneralizations they made based on their performance in previous items. Their undue application of some rules, which they are assumed to have formed while answering some previous items, led the subjects to incorrectly judge others. For example, it was noticed that some testees provided accurate responses in item number (4), David is a/an Australian, handsome singer, but fail to provide accurate responses in items like number (6), I saw a/an enormous young American basketball player. Out of the (64) students who answered accurately item number (4), only (23) responded accurately to item number (6). The researcher attributes the recurrence of errors in this sentence to the assumption that the subjects might have resorted to overgeneralizing a rule such as: adjectives of nationality are placed closer to the head noun. Third, one possible cause of the learners' failure to acquire premodification constructions is that there is no communicative demand for such constructions since these constructions can be compensated for by some other means. For example, instead of using a sentence like: They had lunch at a large, nice, American, hamburger restaurant one may use two sentences which contain less number of premodifiers such as: They had lunch at an American hamburger restaurant. The restaurant was large and nice. Furthermore, the context of learning can also hinder the learning of L2 in case teaching does not place appropriate attention to certain L2 constructions. Owing to the findings of the present study, it may be insightful to consider the effectiveness of teaching such syntactic structures. Low means of performance may be a reflection of grammar instructors' overdependence on a behaviouristic approach that concerns itself with only describing syntactic structures as such. Instead, an effective teaching methodology is expected to exceed the level of describing the rules and structures to cover how these can be taught to achieve successful acquisition. This proposal comes in line with Dirven's (1999) call for a 'role-based' recognition of adjectives. The researcher believes that there is a strong link between the semantic role of a premodifier and its position in relation to the head noun.

Psycholinguistically, it can also be claimed that Martin's proposal of a preferred order may here come into play as the premodifiers which are more constant in meaning appear closer to the head noun. Prior to setting about offering some pedagogical implications, it seems interesting to highlight that the sequences of premodifiers in nominal phrases are abstract and learners are not expected to observe such sequences in their physical world, especially inside a classroom.

- **Pedagogical Implications**

Chaudron (1977) was confident enough to make it explicit that as we learn how to do better research, we will be able to make more confident statements about how instruction contributes to acquisition. This section is an attempt to provide some pedagogical insights on the teaching of premodification constructions. The results obtained urge us to reconsider our teaching methodology. Premodifiers, being marked structures, require much more attention in the syllabus design of syntax classes. In this regard and in an attempt to achieve the third objective of this study, three different but complementary proposals can be made:

1) The acquisition of premodifiers can be facilitated by integrating the hierarchy of the three categories which was formulated earlier in the discussion. These categories can be introduced to the learners respectively starting from the least difficult upwards.

2) Over the past decades, SLA classrooms witnessed a change in emphasis i.e., while the focus was only on language forms, more emphasis is now being put on functional language (Brown, 2007). In other words, language learning started to be performed in communicative contexts. Students should be involved in communicative tasks in the classroom, that is, there is a need to change from 'formal instruction' into 'interaction'. Through personal communication with the subjects after they sat for the test, the students reported that they only memorize the sequence of premodifiers for the purpose of their exams and are not required to be involved in any interactional settings where they have to use these constructions. Grammar instructors are required to place more emphasis on performing extensive communicative tasks which are effective in two aspects:
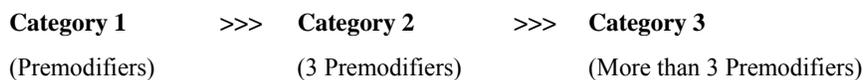
A. Communicative tasks enhance the learners' levels of attainment (Lightbown, 2000).

B. In a communicative contextualized classroom, learners are expected to commit errors and, therefore, give their instructor a chance to treat such errors,

regardless of the kind of treatment (Brown, 2007).

3) It was noticed that grammar books do not support characterizations of premodification constructions by semantic, psycholinguistic and cognitive interpretations that may facilitate the acquisition of the phenomenon by foreign learners. In view of the foregoing, textbook writers and teachers of grammar may wish to reconsider their methodology of overdependence on the syntactic perspective alone. Therefore, psycholinguists are expected to lead teachers in explaining and simplifying grammatical constructions in order to make the good learners achieve successful performance. Simply put, psycholinguists integrate grammar to be used in language performance and thus may be required to find some strategies that facilitate the learning of such complex constructions.

One important psychological factor in language acquisition is memory. Steinberg (1993: 21) posits that: "Without a good memory, language learning would not be possible". Based on such view, it can be inferred that memory plays a crucial role in the learning of grammatical constructions. In order for learners to produce well-formed constructions of premodification, they must remember particular similar instances with which they compare the current instance. Although learners are required to memorize rules and structures, L2 learners need not to 'rote' memorize i.e., without analysis or processing especially in case of adult learners whose rote memory is expected to be weaker than that of young children. The researcher thinks that adult learners should depend more on their long-term memory and should compensate for any weakness through more practice, extensive contextualized activities as well as more exposure to premodification constructions. This claim

that the role of memory is an essential one should not be interpreted as a call for over-dependence on memorization. Rules and sequences that govern the use of premodifiers have to be well understood and then become an integral part of the learner's own system.

Conclusions and Recommendations

• **Conclusions**

Although it is difficult to make firm conclusions regarding the acquisition of a grammatical principle by L2 learners, this section is hoped to provide some insights based on the available empirical evidence. This study has shed light on the acquisition of premodification constructions by Jordanian EFL university learners and the following conclusions can be drawn:

1. Jordanian EFL learners at university level have an overall weakness in the recognition, correction and production of premodification constructions. This is evident from the low percentages of accuracy recorded for the subjects in the tested area. This may be due to L1 interference, intralingual transfer as well as some weakness in the context of learning including inadequate teaching or poor syllabus design.

2. The low performance percentages obtained in the translation task clearly indicate that the students are unaware of the rule restrictions that govern the use of premodifiers in English.

3. On the basis of the percentages arrived at from the performance of the subjects in the three categories which were established based on the number of premodifiers in a sequence, the following hierarchy can be drawn for the acquisition route of premodification constructions:

Category 1	>>>	**Category 2**	>>>	**Category 3**
(Premodifiers)		(3 Premodifiers)		(More than 3 Premodifiers)

4. The findings of the present study indicated that the subjects did not receive enough exposure to the rules that govern the sequence of premodifiers in nominal phrases. Therefore, one may suggest that maximizing university students' exposure to the premodification constructions might have a positive impact on the development of their proficiency level.

• **Recommendations**

The ultimate goal here is not to give a recipe on how

to teach premodification constructions, but rather to provide some recommendations for establishing a conducive atmosphere that may contribute to effective teaching. On the basis of the previous conclusions and as a remedy to overcome the difficulty that encountered the subjects in the acquisition of premodification constructions, the researcher offers the following recommendations:

1. Instructional work on the sequence of premodifiers should be enhanced paying special attention to the fact

that learners need more exposure to these constructions especially those which are expected to be less accessible and less frequent in the teaching materials. One of the essential topics discussed in SLA is 'Frequency' which refers to: "the number of times a specific word, structure, or other defined element of language draws the attention of a learner" (Brown 2007: 1293). In simple words, learners are expected to acquire the elements or constructions they have more exposure to.

2. Learners should be made aware of the difference between English and Arabic contrastively in terms of the sequence of premodifiers in nominal phrases to avoid the possibility of negative carryover of their mother tongue. In other words, learners are in need of consciousness-raising which can be achieved through comparing and contrasting the two languages showing the different strategies applied to sequence premodifiers in nominal phrases.

3. Explication, Awareness and Noticing Hypothesis: Learners should also be made aware of the studied phenomenon through explicit learning which Hulstijn (2005: 131) defined as: "input processing to find out whether the input information contains regularities and, if so, to work out the concepts and rules with which these

regularities can be captured". In other words, premodification, as many other constructions, may contain affinities and similarities which need to be figured out to help the learners acquire such constructions. Teachers, themselves, may be aware of the fact that Jordanian L2 learners of English do not have enough exposure to the sequence of premodifiers and thus are not expected to acquire it through induction i.e., learners figure out the rules by themselves without being taught about them. Alternatively, explication may be much better. In order for the students to acquire premodification constructions, these constructions have to be converted from input into intake. In a similar vein, Schmidt (1990) proposed a noticing hypothesis in which he stressed the role of awareness to make learners notice language input. The researcher believes that it would be more effective to bring the learners' attention to the relative difficulty of premodification.

4. The semantic and psycholinguistic aspects ought to be accounted for as well. If learners are made aware of these two aspects, their ability to understand the cognitive motivation behind the sequence of premodifiers may enhance their acquisition rates. By this, learners can understand rather than over-depend on memorization.

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اكتساب متعلمي اللغة الانجليزية الأردنيين لترتيب سوابق الاسم في تركيب شبه الجملة الاسمية

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ملخص

تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى التحقيق في اكتساب متعلمي اللغة الانجليزية الأردنيين لترتيب سوابق الاسم في تركيب شبه الجملة الاسمية،كانت المحاور الرئيسة التي يسعى هذا البحث للتمحيص فيها تدور حول استكشاف المشكلات التي تواجه الطلبة أثناء اكتسابهم لترتيب سوابق الاسم في اللغة الانجليزية بالاضافة إلى محاولة التعرف على بعض الأسباب المنطقية الكامنة وراء هذه المشكلات. ويبدو أن أبرز المشكلات التي تواجه الطلبة تكمن في حقيقة اختلاف القواعد التي تحكم ترتيب الكلمات في اللغتين العربية والانجليزية؛ إذ يلاحظ أن الإنجليزية تفرض بعض القواعد والأحكام التي تنظم ترتيب سوابق الاسم في تراكيب شبه الجملة الاسمية، بينما تمنح اللغة العربية مستخدميها مرونة أكثر في هذا السياق، وقد كشفت نتائج هذه الدراسة أن متعلمي اللغة الانجليزية الأردنيين يواجهون صعوبات خلال اكتسابهم لترتيب سوابق الاسم في تركيب شبه الجملة باللغة الإنجليزية من حيث الإدراك والتصحيح والأداء. وقُدمت الأدلة الإحصائية التي تثبت صحة الفرضيات المطروحة.أما فيما يتعلق بأسباب الأخطاء التي وقع فيها الطلبة، فقد كشفت الدراسة أنها تعزى إلى الفروق بين اللغتين العربية والإنجليزية وللمحددات التي تقيض اكتساب الترتيب من قبل الطلبة الأجانب، بالإضافة إلى ذلك، يعزو الباحث بعض الأخطاء إلى مشكلات في سياق التعلم والتي تنجم عن عدم الاهتمام ببعض الجوانب الدلالية والنفسية التي تحيط بهذه الظاهرة.

الكلمات الدالة: اللغة الانجليزية، سوابق الاسم، شبه الجملة.