



Wh-phrases and their Interference of Interlingual in EFL Context in Afghanistan

*Mirza Mohammad Borhan**

Badakhshan University, Badakhshan, Faizabad, Afghanistan

Abstract

Acquiring English as L2 and foreign language is different from context to context. It is important to remember that acquiring English needs suitable context and enough input in communication. Understanding of question words in EFL Context, especially the learners who learn English as a foreign language in Afghanistan was the new subject. The main purpose of this study is to characterize Wh-words on the performance of the learners who participated in ESP Courses at Badakhshan University and Borna Higher Education in Faizabad, Badakhshan Province in Afghanistan. Recently, some of these students graduated from Badakhshan University and Borna Higher Education and they occupied different positions in different national and international organization. The main criterion for recruiting of these students these organizations was knowing the fourth skills of English language. In this study, 50 subjects were selected from 150 students who participated in the exam. Among these subjects, 25 were female and who also graduated from different disciplines and participated in ESP classes. The task distributed for all these participants in a special large class and the data were collected. The data were analyzed based on quantitative research. Findings of this research represented wh-words and their movements in the sentences are sometimes complicated for the learners who use English as a foreign language, especially for intermediate level. They faced to challenges that they missed their using with auxiliaries and their movements from NP to CP positions. This paper ends with empirical search to represent the challenges to which the learners face when they use Wh-words in the sentences.

Keywords: wh-words, performance, interlingual, interference, structure and context.

© 2016 IJCI & the Authors. Published by *International Journal of Curriculum and Instruction (IJCI)*. This is an open-access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution license (CC BY-NC-ND) (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>).

1. Introduction

1.1. Introduce the problem

English is used as a foreign language in Afghanistan. At Universities, English for Specific Purposes (ESP) has been taught in different disciplines.

* Corresponding Author: Mirza Mohammad Borhan. ORCID ID.: <https://orcid.org/0000-0000-0000-0000>
E-mail address: mirza.borhan@gmail.com

Students learned it only in the classes and they need to follow the purposes they have had in the lives. Some of them want to do their MA and Phd outside Afghanistan. Others want to learn English only for occupation purposes because they want to find jobs at the international organizations in Afghanistan. This is why English plays a very crucial role in both education and occupations.

1.2. Goal of Research

Using Wh-words in interlanguage was the area of research and it was explored in EFL context to discover the learners' performance. The findings represented that both advance and intermediate learners had progress in using question words correctly in most cases. Some of them had difficulties, especially intermediate learners. In Persian, auxiliary verbs are absent and the learners in some cases violated using them with the question words in different sentences. It was the main purpose to discover the learners' problems in using Wh-words in interlanguage in EFL context.

1.3. Research Questions

Investigating Wh-words on the performance of EFL learners in Afghanistan raised the following questions:

1. Will the learners use Wh-words correctly in EFL Context?
2. Does L1 interfere in the process of learning English in EFL Context?
3. What are the real challenges to which the learners face in using Wh-words?

1.4. Hypothesis

1. EFL learners use Wh-questions correctly.
2. L1 doesn't interfere in the process of learning English in EFL Context.
3. There may be some challenges to which the learners face during learning English as EFL.

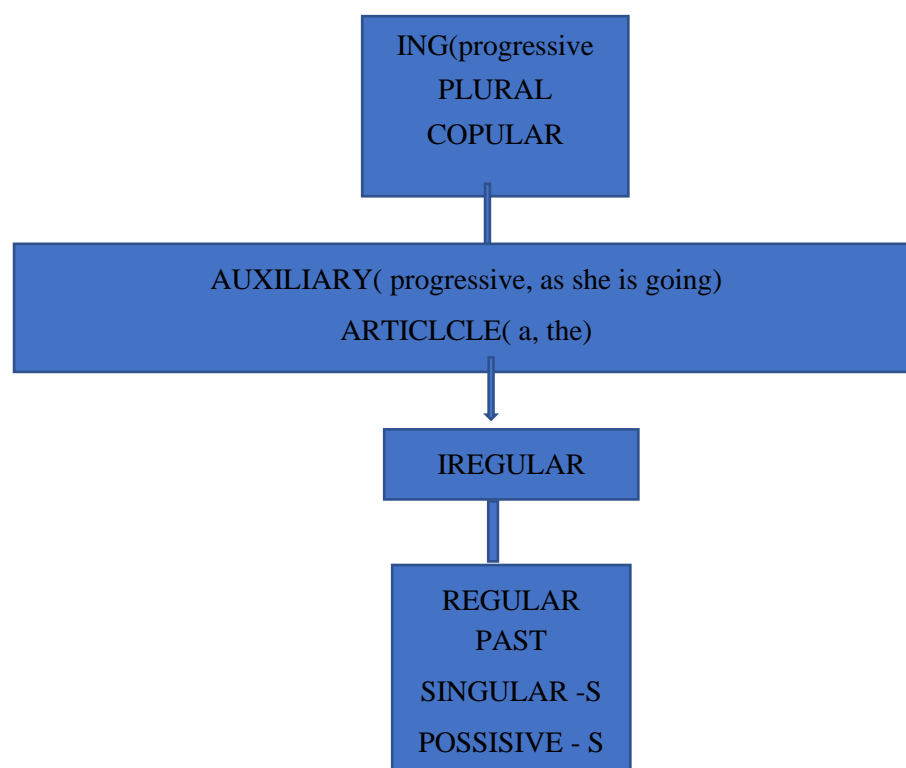
2. Literature Review

It is very common in acquiring L1 that every child should acquire their L1 in subconscious way. According to Chomsky that every child is born with genetic endowment. According to this definition, there is only one language with that the

children are born, but the specific languages that are available in the world are more than 6900 languages. These languages are different from continent to continent, country to country and region to region. In any county, when people are majority, their language will be accepted as dominant. Acquiring L1 in any environment needs input to activate the innate capacity with which the children are born.

Dulay and Burt (1974) stated that the children acquire English as a second language and they also represented natural order for grammatical morphemes regardless of their L1. Krashen represented the natural order in acquiring second language.

Table: **Acquiring English as a Second Language (children and adults).**



The process of acquiring will never let the parents teach their children any linguistic features. In every environment, the children are exposed to input which are given to them. There is no need to correct the children. If the children are corrected, the process is called negative evidence. If the parents don't correct their children, the process is called positive evidence. There is a very interesting example in English language. The child repeatedly said what he believed, not what his mom corrected him. in the process of acquiring a child will make many mistakes and they will correct them gradually.

Child Nobody don't like me.

Mom Don't say, nobody don't like me. Say, nobody likes me.

Child Nobody don't like me.

Mom Say, nobody likes me.

Child Nobody don't like me.

According to Cook and Newson (1996) whether the learners of L2 have access to UG has been the main topic for researchers to apply principles and parameters in learning L2 in any context. As Flynn stated that there are three hypotheses in acquiring L2. No access hypothesis: UG is completely inaccessible to the adult learners of L2. When the learners try to learn English, learning will happen based on non-linguistic learning strategies. Partial access hypothesis: UG is partially available to the learners of L2, only those parametric values representing L1 grammar are available. Full access hypothesis: UG is fully available to the learners of L2; there are differences in the structures of L1 and L2 as far as the learners start acquiring L2.

It is important for the learners who try to learn English as a foreign language in Afghanistan is to speak, read, listen and write different academic paragraphs, letters and essays. English is used as a foreign language in Afghanistan because it is not the medium of instruction, business, and communication. Since 2001, the learners have been very interested to learn English in different academic place.

Wh-movement is very critical in English language, especially for those who are learning English as a second or foreign language. In English, Wh-movement does not have any specific status and it moves from NP to CP. Constrains are linguistic principles which do

not let certain arrangement words, operations, association of sounds and meanings. Violating any sort of rule is not acceptable in any language. Here are some examples in English language.

- (1) a. Who do you wanna invite?
b. Who do want to invite?
- (2) a. When do you wanna go out?
b. When do you want to go out?
- (3) a. *Who do wanna come?
b. Who do want to come?

When the children acquire English as their L1, they make errors but not the certain errors that happened in (3a), which is not acceptable. Through acquiring L1, errors happen in every stage of acquiring, but certain errors will never happen in L1. According to Cook and Newson (1996) whether the learners of L2 have access to UG or not has been the main subject for those who have been interested in exploring principle and parameter theory over the years.

3. Method

3.1. Research Design

This study employed quantitative research at Badakhshan University and Born Higher Education Institute in Badakhshan Province in Afghanistan. The method and design were chosen to investigate the learners' problems when they use *wh*-phrases in EFL context which have remained out in previous researches in Afghanistan.

3.2. Participant

The subjects to this study were two groups of students who from Badakhshan University and Born Higher Education in Badakhshan province in Afghanistan. They were both male and female and they learnt English as a foreign language in Afghanistan. The course they learnt was English for specific purposes and their level of proficiency was

advance and intermediate. In this study, 50 students were selected from 150 participants who participated in the test and it was the combination of intro, beginner, intermediate and advanced courses.

3.3. Material

Materials included a task that administrated to two groups of learners of who graduated from Badakhshan University and Borna Higher Education in Faizabad, Badakhshan Province. The task had three sections: 1. the first part of the task was personal information including the names, occupations and gender. 2. In this part, there were 10 true and false sentences with using of Wh-words. 3. In this section, there were 10 multiple choices Wh-words. 4. Finally, there were 10 pair Wh-questions and the learners could select only one for each pair of Wh-questions.

3.4. Procedure

After administrating the test, based on their performance, they were categorized into intermediate and advance level. I selected a large class for all these fifty participants and the task was given. After distributing the task, I suggested all these participants to read all those four sections of a task. They went through the task and did it 40 to one hour. The required data were collected from true and false questions, matching sentences and pair Wh-questions in the task was administrated in the class to advance and intermediate levels of students.

3.5. Validity and reliability

in order to get enough internal validity for this research, the tasks were reviewed by the experienced researchers who have published many scientific articles in the international journals. In terms of the data analysis, the results were discussed by different researchers at Badakhshan University to remove any political biases in this study, which took place in EFL context in Afghanistan. The data were reliable after the findings represented the facts and realities in this research.

3.6. Results

This research was conducted in EFL Context in Afghanistan and it explored the challenges to which the learners had difficulties in using Wh-words in both

communication and written texts. In this research, both surface and deep structures were given to the learners in order to check their performance. For example, a, *what she said?* b, *where does she live?* In these two examples, the learners even checked *a* as true; however, it does contain auxiliary verb. In English language, when the question is rising, *wh- phrases* will come at the beginning and there will be auxiliary verbs as well. The pair *wh-words* like: a, *You did invite whom to your party?* b, *whom you invited to your party?* In these two examples, the participants checked *a* as ungrammatical whereas *b* as grammatical. This is what most of the learners did in this research.

4. Data Analysis

This research was done in Afghanistan in which English language was used as a foreign language. The current research explored the learners' problems when they apply *wh- phrases* in English. The learners communicate with each other in the class or outside the class; they need to use the *wh-phrases* correctly. The results of this research were represented based on the following charts.

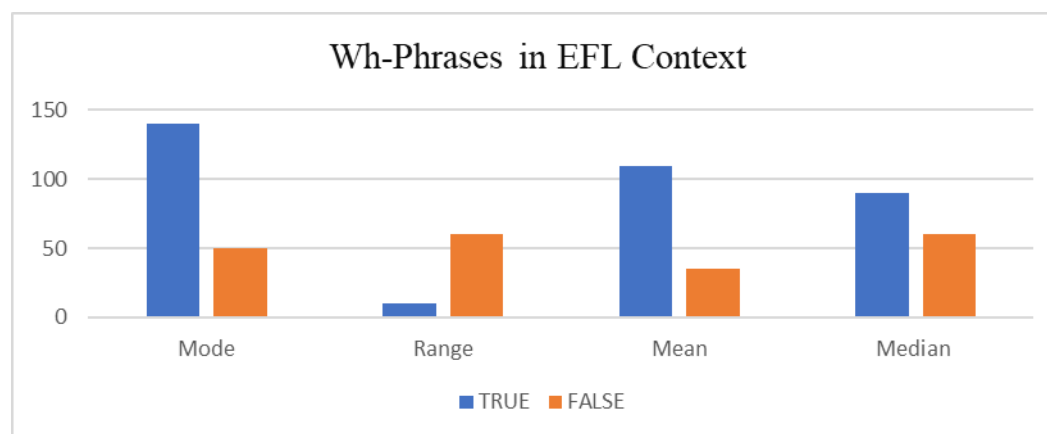
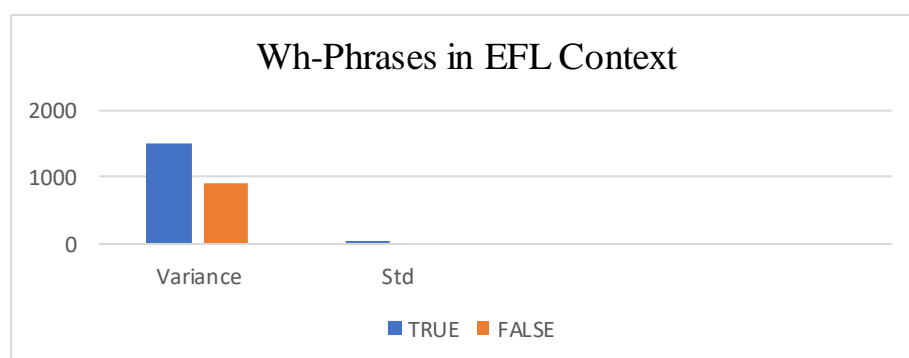
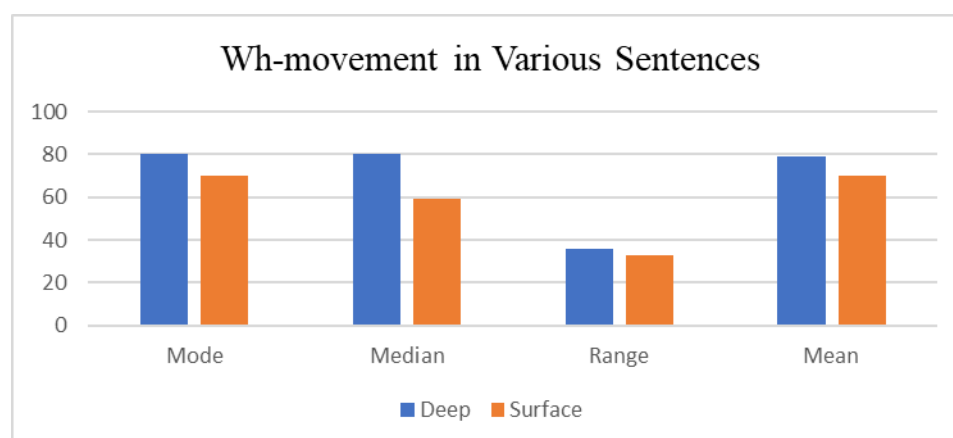


Chart 1

In this chart, the performance of EFL learners in the context of Afghanistan was different in terms of their levels. For instance, *you did invite whom to your party?* In this sentence, those who were at intermediate level perceived it as ungrammatical. This chart represented the performance of the learners, especially those who used English as a Foreign Language in Afghanistan based on mode, range, mean and median.

**Chart 2**

The variance and standard deviation of the learners actively participated in this study represented how they have improved their English through the years at Badakhshan University and Borna Higher Education Institute in Badakhshan Province. In every discipline, there was English for Specific Purposes at these two academic places. *Wh-phrases* sometimes in communication is difficult for some learners, especially at the intermediate level.

**Chart 3**

This research was done in a systematic way to really show the knowledge of EFL Learners in Afghanistan in using *wh-phrases* in their daily communication. The learners really had problems when there wasn't any movement in *wh-phrases* in different sentences. For example. *a. He did live where?* *b. Where did he lived?* In *a* there the *wh-word* did not move from NP to CP position, while in *b* the *wh-word* moved from NP to CP position in *b*. Therefore, in EFL context the learners most of them used Persian as their L1 on had

problems if there were surface sentences. Another important point was with *auxiliaries* in interlingual. In English, the auxiliaries will be used in *Wh-question*, whereas in Persian that has been used in Afghanistan the absence of auxiliaries are very common both in writing and communication in different areas.

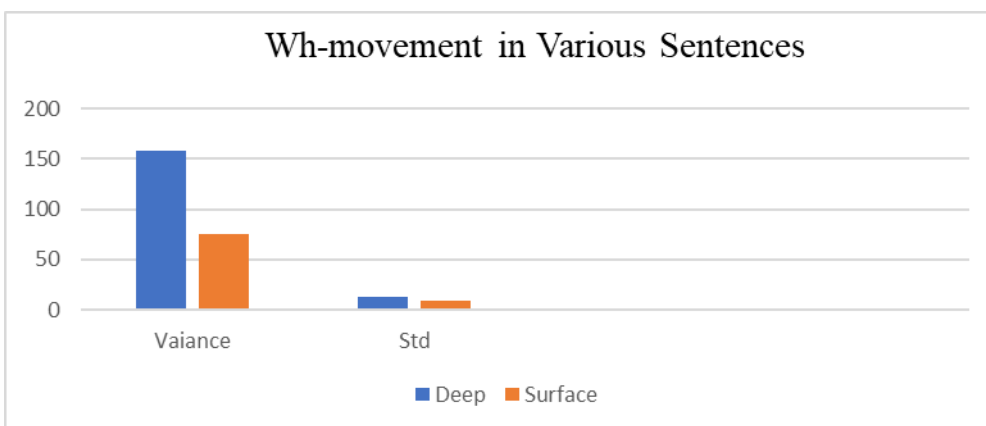


Chart 4

For most of the learners, particularly intermediate did not understand surface sentences whether in writing or communication in EFL context in Afghanistan. The variance and standard deviation in the chart explained the data in the numerical way. This research also explored the learners had difficulties in using *auxiliaries* with *wh-phrases* in different sentences in EFL context.

4.1 Discussion

English is used as a foreign language in Afghanistan and it was taught at Badakhshan University and Born Higher Education Institute in Badakhshan Province through the years as English for Specific Purposes (ESP) in different disciplines. In this research, the learners' performance was explored to represent whether they can use Wh-words correctly or not. The findings represented that some learners who graduated from Badakhshan University and Born Higher Institute had problems in using questions words in interlingual in EFL context. In English, in most cases, wh-words are using at the beginning of sentences and auxiliary verbs are used after wh-words. For example, whom did you see last night? In this sentence, question word is used at the beginning and the rest of linguistic items are written in the linear order.

Most of the learners both advance and intermediate level observe using question sentences. they differentiated many sentences that are used in different structure.

1. a. When did he come to university?
b. When he come to university?
2. a. How long do you spend time on reading comic books?
b. How long you spend time on reading comic books?

There are many other questions sentences they observed correctly. In the above sentences, the learners could differentiate between (1) a) and b). a) When did he come to university? And how long do you spend time on reading comic books. The learners understood that these sentences are correct.

Some students did not observe auxiliary verbs in question sentences. It is as if their L1 interfered and avoid using them in the sentences. In Persian, auxiliary verbs seem absent. It is important to state that the learners even some advance and intermediate level could not use them correctly. The reason might be the absent of some linguistic features, especially auxiliary verbs.

Wh-words don't have any specific status in English language and they can move from NP to CP Positions. Most of these learners were not familiar with D-Structure and S-Structure. The following sentences were given to the learners to check their knowledge:

- 3, a. You did invite whom to your birthday party?
b. Whom you invited to your party?
4. a. He did live where?
b. Where he lived?

In these sentences, the learners confused to reject both of these sentences. In the first one, they wrote their reasons that we did not see such sentences and they mentioned that such sentences are wrong. On the other hand, they rejected (b) in (3) whom you invited to your birthday party? They also mentioned that they don't have auxiliary verbs and they are not correct.

4.2. Conclusion

After discussing the key points throughout this research, I want to conclude the following issues: English is used as a foreign language in Afghanistan. Persian and Pashto are playing a crucial role in both education and commutation throughout the country. At Universities, English has to be taught in English Department, the core courses and as English for Specific Purposes (ESP) in other disciplines. In most cases, grammar translation method is applying, especially in ESP classes in Afghanistan. From findings and discussion of *Wh-words* in interlingual in EFL context in Afghanistan to empirical conclusion. The learners in EFL context had difficulties in some cases in using these *Wh-phrases*. For example, *whom you invited to you party?* In this sentence, it did not have auxiliary verb and some of the participants accepted it as a correct sentence, while it is ungrammatical. *He did live where?* In this sentence, *wh-phrase* is at the end of sentence and there is no movement. Some of the participants accepted it ungrammatical, while it is grammatical. Therefore, in interlingual, especially in Dari language with *wh-questions* auxiliaries are absent and movement will be in rare cases. It is obvious that L1 has its influences on other languages, especially English was learned and used as foreign language in Afghanistan.

References

- Cook, V. (2007). *Chomsky universal grammar*. Oxford: Blackwell Publisher.
- Cook, V. (1993). *Linguistics and second language acquisition*. New York: St. Martin's press
- Carnie, A. (2001). *Syntax*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Chomsky, N. (1965). *Aspect of the Theory of Syntax*. The MIT: Cambridge.
- Dulay, H. C., & Burt, M. K. (1974b). Natural sequences in child second language acquisition. *Language Learning*.
- Ellis, R. (2000). *The study of second language acquisition*. Oxford, England: Oxford University Press.
- Ellis, R. (2016). *Understanding Second Language Acquisition*. United Kingdom: Oxford Press.
- Haegeman, L. (1994). *introduction to government and binding theory*. UK Oxford University: Blackwell.

Guasti, M. T. (2002). *Language Acquisition and the Growth of Grammar*: London: MIT Press.

Krashen, S. (1982). *Principle and Practice in Second Language Acquisition*.

Lust, B. (2006). *Child Language Acquisition and Growth*. New York: Cambridge University.

Copyrights

Copyright for this article is retained by the author(s), with first publication rights granted to the Journal.

This is an open-access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution license (**CC BY-NC-ND**) (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>).