Grammatical Knowledge of English Cleft Constructions among Pakistani ESL Learners across L2 Proficiency Levels and Learning Styles

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ABSTRACT

The study examines the grammatical knowledge of English cleft constructions among Pakistani ESL learners across L2 proficiency levels and learning styles (field-dependent/independent). Cleft constructions have been found to be problematic and difficult to master for Pakistani ESL learners, across proficiency levels and learning styles. Second language learners may encounter greater difficulty in forming cleft constructions (Chu et al., 2014; Chung & Shin, 2022; Wu & Ionin, 2022). Therefore, the study investigates the contribution of these students' L2 proficiency and learning styles on their accurate judgement of cleft constructions. The study addresses the main research question: "To what extent are Pakistani ESL learners with different L2 proficiency levels and learning styles able to correctly judge English cleft constructions in the grammaticality judgment task?" The research employed the cross-sectional study design. A total sample of 390 respondents with different L2 proficiency levels and learning styles was recruited from the selected institutions of higher learning in Lahore, Pakistan, using stratified random sampling technique. The respondents were further classified in elementary, intermediate, and advanced L2 proficiency levels. There were 130 respondents including 65 field dependent, and 65 field independent in each L2 proficiency (Elementary, Intermediate, Advanced) level. Oxford Placement Test (OPT) and Group Embedded Figure Test (GEFT) were administrated among the respondents. Oxford Placement Test (OPT) was employed to determine the language proficiency levels of the respondents and Group Embedded Figure Test (GEFT) distinguished field-dependent and field-independent learning styles of the respondents. Target data were collected using Grammaticality Judgment Task (GJT) to measure respondents' grammatical knowledge of cleft constructions. A two-way MANOVA was employed to examine a significant mean score difference of GJT across L2 proficiency levels and learning styles. The findings revealed a significant GJT mean score

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difference among L2 proficiency groups and between field-dependent/independent learners. The results also showed a significant main and interaction effect of Language proficiency and learning styles on GJT. Field-independent outperformed field-dependent learners on GJT total score, GJT grammatical, and GJT ungrammatical cleft constructions. The findings have interesting pedagogical implications. English language teachers and syllabus designers should design activities on cleft constructions used in the felicitous and infelicitous context for low proficiency learners.

Keywords: grammatical knowledge; cleft construction; ESL learners; field-dependent/field-independent learning styles; L2 proficiency

INTRODUCTION

Cognitive linguistic approaches agree that the frequency of grammatical constructions in the language use positively impacts their acquisition (Ellis, 2006; Ellis & Cadierno, 2009; Goldberg, 2006). The grammatical constructions which are not frequently used in the target language input, are *it*-cleft, *wh*-cleft and *reverse wh*-cleft *(rwh*-cleft*)* constructions. The *it*-cleft sentence is constructed on the dummy pronoun, it is followed by the copula, the focused expression, and then by a (relative-clause-like) cleft clause which might be introduced by relative pronouns such as which, whom, who or when (Hedberg, 2013; Lahousse & Borremans, 2014). Cleft constructions examples are:

a. The students read the textbook on Introduction to Linguistics. (Canonical SVO),
b. It is the textbook on Introduction to Linguistics that the students read. (*it*-cleft),
c. What the students read was the textbook on Introduction to Linguistics. (*wh*-cleft), and
d. The textbook on introduction to Linguistics was what the students read. (*rwh*-cleft).

Grammatical knowledge of these constructions requires awareness to process learners' linguistic input (Ellis, 2006). Second language acquisition (SLA) studies have examined how awareness of any grammatical construction affects learning product (Schmidt, 2010; VanPatten, 2015). The study examines the effects of L2 proficiency levels and learning styles on cleft constructions. Yousefi (2011) opines that language proficiency, and learning styles affect learning of second language learners. Learning styles are the attributes that exist within learners, affecting their performance (Niroomand & Rostampour, 2014). Field-dependent and field-independent learning styles have received significant consideration in second language research. Filed-dependent learners perceive holistically, tends to get lost in the stimuli while filed-independent learners perceive analytically, analyse and isolate relevant details, detect patterns, and critically evaluate data. Field-independent learners can perceive a particular relevant item or factor from its context of distracting items, while field-dependent learners have difficulty in separating information from its contextual surroundings. Field-independent learners play a major role in the acquisition of linguistic competence.

The rationale for using field-dependent/field-independent as an independent variable in the current study is to test whether field-dependent/field-independent learners are good at grammatical knowledge of cleft constructions. The results of a study by Rezaee and Farahian (2012) proved that field-independent learners play a major role in the acquisition of linguistic competence. It implies that field-independent learners learn the language components well, and are good at

grammatical knowledge of cleft construction. Farsi et al. (2014) reported that field-independent learners are associated with higher level of language proficiency.

Cleft constructions (*it-cleft, wh-cleft and rwh-cleft*) were chosen as the linguistic targets for investigation as they have been found to be problematic and difficult to master for Pakistani ESL learners, across proficiency levels and learning styles. ESL learners have a limited awareness of the appropriate grammatical knowledge of cleft constructions in the target language (Callies & Keller, 2008). Second language learners may encounter greater difficulty in forming cleft constructions (Chu et al., 2014; Chung & Shin, 2022; Wu & Ionin, 2022). The difficulty of cleft constructions is extensively recognized, and it has been found as a prospective challenge for ESL learners (Donaldson, 2016; Zwanziger, 2008). ESL learners struggle to comprehend word order of cleft constructions (Sorace, 2011). According to usage-based theories, frequency of input highly influences language acquisition, and ESL learners are attentive to the frequency with which a specific structure that occurs in the input. Therefore, this study was undertaken to further examine and comprehend the nature of such effects by investigating Pakistani ESL learners' grammatical knowledge of English cleft constructions linked to object focus. Ultimately, Pakistani ESL learners' limited grammatical knowledge of cleft constructions affects constructing grammatically correct sentence structure, furthermore, it also affects their written and oral expressions using incorrect cleft sentences/utterances.

In the present study, focal information (contrastive focus) is often associated with the use of the *it*-cleft construction and to a lesser degree with the *wh*-cleft with the reverse *wh*-cleft being, comparatively, the least used constructions. The structure probably becomes fossilized for most L2 learners. Our assumption in this study is that Pakistani ESL learners lack grammatical knowledge of cleft constructions. Learning style has been suggested as one of the most influential factors in language learning (Rassaei, 2015). The investigation of field-dependent versus field-independent learning styles in ESL still has the capacity to be fruitful in second language proficiency (Farsi et al., 2014). The problem under discussion is that field-dependent/independent learning style might strongly influence the acquisition of grammatical knowledge of cleft constructions in English. It is assumed that field-independent learners perform better than field-dependent learners in grammaticality judgment task.

Cognitive linguistics and construction grammar have been used as underpinning theoretical frameworks of the study. The study is broad in scope; it is related to L2 acquisition of cleft constructions across L2 proficiency levels and learning styles in Pakistani context. Looking at different proficiency levels and learning styles, this research gives insights into Pakistani L2 learners' grammatical knowledge of English cleft constructions. Therefore, the research contributes by providing evidence of the role of cognitive linguistics and construction grammar in SLA. The current study examined the effects of L2 proficiency levels (elementary, intermediate, and advanced) and two learning styles (field-independent, field-dependent) as categorical independent variables on the grammatical knowledge of cleft constructions as dependent variables. The study yields the following research objective:

- To examine Pakistani ESL learners' grammatical knowledge of cleft constructions in the grammaticality judgment task across L2 proficiency levels and FD/FI learning styles.

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The study addressed the major research question as follows:

- To what extent are Pakistani ESL learners with different L2 proficiency levels and FD/FI learning styles able to correctly judge cleft constructions in the grammaticality judgment task (GJT) that involves:

  a. Grammatical judgment total score?
  b. Grammatical GJT score?
  c. Ungrammatical GJT score?

Based on this research question, the following null hypotheses were postulated:

H_{01}: There is no significant main effect of L2 Proficiency levels on GJT total score, GJT grammatical, and GJT ungrammatical score of cleft constructions in the grammaticality judgment task.

H_{02}: There is no significant main effect of FD/ FI learning styles on GJT total score, GJT grammatical, and GJT ungrammatical score of cleft constructions in the grammaticality judgment task.

H_{03}: There is no significant interaction effect of L2 Proficiency levels and FD/ FI learning styles on GJT total score, GJT grammatical, and GJT ungrammatical score of cleft constructions in the grammaticality judgment task.

LITERATURE REVIEW

CLEFT CONSTRUCTIONS IN ENGLISH

English Language offers a variety of structures to highlight information. Cleft constructions are complex syntactic constructions, and frequently used in spoken and written discourse. Cleft constructions in English constitute a non-canonical word order (Biber et al., 2002, p. 398), apart from the *wh*-cleft construction. Cleft constructions separate two clauses, namely a cleft clause and a relative-like clause (Biber et al., 2002, pp. 419). Lambrecht (2001) explains cleft constructions as "a complex sentence structure consisting of a main clause headed by a linking verb and a relative clause whose relativized argument is coindexed with the predicative argument of the linking verb".

ACQUISITION OF CLEFT CONSTRUCTIONS

A few studies on acquisition of cleft constructions in SLA are presented. Callies and Keller (2008) examined a group of advanced German L2 learners' grammatical knowledge of English cleft constructions. Reproduction of cleft construction was given in literary text to them. The findings showed that even advanced students had very little grammatical knowledge of cleft constructions. Jebur and Ali (2016) investigated Iraqi EFL learners' performance in producing the different types of cleft constructions by conducting a test. The findings indicated that majority of the respondent's (60%) identified incorrect cleft constructions. Thornton et al. (2018) conducted an experimental study on children's ability to interpret cleft sentences using the Truth Value Judgment Task. Twenty children participated in the experiment. The findings suggested that children demonstrated

grammatical knowledge of cleft constructions for interpretation. Lobo et al. (2019) investigate Portuguese learners' comprehension of subject and object clefts, it cleft, and pseudo clefts in English. An experiment was conducted using the truth value judgment task to test the comprehension of types of clefts. The findings indicated a significant difference between *pseudo clefts* and, *it*-clefts. There were no significant differences between subject and object clefts in pseudo clefts. Aravind et al. (2017) investigated syntactic knowledge of English-speaking children's comprehension of *it*-clefts and *pseudo clefts* employing the Truth-Value Judgment Task. The study examined whether children could interpret cleft using interpretative approach based on word-order. *It*-clefts were compared with *pseudo clefts*. The results revealed that children were unable to demonstrate their syntactic knowledge. Karami (2013) investigated the effects of head nouns with embedding on the processing of Persian and English cleft structures. Sixty-eight Iranian male and female participants were recruited as respondents of the study. The results indicated a significant effect of word order on EFL learners' processing of English cleft sentences. İrgin (2013) studied the difficulty of cleft sentences for EFL first-year Turkish students. A pre-test and post-test design was employed to collect data from 61 first-year students. The findings suggested that there was a significant improvement of the participants' comprehension of cleft structures. There were considerable disparities between students' levels of awareness for each type of cleft structure, with *it*-clefts, because all-clefts being the most confusing for EFL students.

Drummer and Felser (2023) examined German *pseudo clefts* using an antecedent judgment task with L1 German and L2 German learners proficient in Russian. Data was gathered from 39 native German speakers and 39 natives Russian L2 learners. The L1 speakers' judgments exhibited the expected selective Condition C effect, while the L2 speakers' antecedent judgments were dependent on surface-level cues to cataphoric pronoun resolution and were unaffected by the semantic distinctions between the two forms of *pseudo cleft*. These results support the idea that *pseudo cleft* constructions in a non-native language are more challenging than in a native language. Park and Sung (2023) examined the utilization of cleft argument of verb in written compositions using usage-based approaches to language acquisition. It applies a list of verb argument to evaluate essays written by L2 learners of elementary, intermediate, and advanced proficiency levels, and tests the hypothesis that the inventories of verb argument increase with the L2 proficiency levels. Higher-level L2 learners utilized substantially more kinds of verb argument constructions than elementary learners. Significant expansions of verb argument cleft constructions were also observed at various L2 proficiency levels. Espírito Santo et al. (2023) conducted an experiment on learning resumptive pronoun in *wh and reverse wh* cleft construction. A group of Chinese learners of (n = 72) participated in an oral production task, a self-paced acceptability-judgment task, and an acceptability judgment task. In addition, thirty native speakers of EP served as the study's control group. Consequently, 102 individuals (n = 102) participated the experiment. The participants were divided into intermediate and advanced proficiency groups. The study concludes that Chinese ESL learners with intermediate L2 proficiency level faced problems in learning resumptive pronoun in *wh and reverse wh* cleft construction. Ylinärä et al. (2023) explored the grammatical structures applied in object clefting in Finnish and Italian languages. Specifically, the experiment examined cleft in situ and fronting to determine if their selection of use affected by a particular characteristic of cleft including verb category. Results indicated that in both languages, realization in situ is the most favoured cleft technique under all circumstances, whereas fronting is invariably the least preferred and deemed unacceptable. Jourdain (2022) examines the learning of clefts in French to determine if information structure categories arise progressively similar to other language categories and (ii) how children construct information structure categories. It was

accomplished by analysing 256 c'est-clefts made by 3 children between the ages of 2 and 3 years. Results demonstrated that children formed most early clefts who correlate with "it's me". Faghiri and Samvelian (2021) provides a corpus-based account of cleft constructions in Persian. To obtain a more realistic depiction of Persian clefts, the researchers annotated, and analysed cleft and cleft-like sentences derived from a corpus of journalistic relative clauses. The analysis found hitherto unreported forms of cleft constructions, particularly the lexically headed *pseudoclefts*, whose usage is directly related to the prevalence of noun-verb light verb formations in Persian.

FIELD-DEPENDENT/ INDEPENDENT LEARNING STYLES IN SLA

Now a few studies on field-dependent/ Independent learning styles in SLA are reviewed. The correlation studies between field-dependent/field-independent have been extensively conducted in second language acquisition. The studies identified a positive correlation between field-dependent/field-independent and L2 acquisition. Some studies have found that field-independent learners are at an advantage in linguistic competence. Farsi et al. (2014) examined the relationship between field-dependent/independent and proficiency test. Eighty- six freshman female students of English as a foreign language (EFL) at Kerman University, Iran participated in the study. The findings indicated a positive relationship between field-independent and language proficiency of the participants. Field-independent learners performed better than field-dependent learners in language proficiency test. Field- independent learners had high language proficiency than field-dependent learners. Effendi and Bandar (2019) examined a significant effect of students' learning styles on their achievement of English grammar, using grammatical task. The results indicated a significant effect of learning styles on the students' English grammar achievement. Field-independent learners achieved the highest score, and field-dependent learners achieved the lowest score in grammatical task. Agustin et al. (2021) investigated the relationship between speaking ability and grammatical proficiency across field-independent, field-dependent learning styles. Thirty Economics students at Malang, had their argumentative speaking and written grammar scores analysed using a correlational analysis. The results reflected that field-independent learners obtained greater scores in grammar than field-dependent learners. The above-mentioned reviewed studies conclude that learning styles affect learning of ESL learners and field-independent learners performed better than field-dependent learners in learning English as a second language.

METHODS

The research employed the cross-sectional study design as the data were collected at a single shot of time (Creswell, 2012) from different levels of L2 proficiency and learning styles. Cross-sectional research design is used in linguistics to investigate differences between different levels of L2 proficiency. The difference among any group is attributed to L2 acquisition (Ionin, 2012). Following Mackey and Gass (2016), 600 Pakistani ESL learners at graduate and post-graduate level from the selected universities of Lahore, Pakistan were the target population of the study. A suitable sample size was drawn using Bartlett et al. (2001) and Cohen (2018) criteria of sample size, therefore, a total sample of 390 respondents with different L2 proficiency levels and learning styles was recruited using stratified random sampling technique. The respondents were further assigned into three language proficiency levels and two learning styles (Ballou & Lavrakas, 2008). There were 130 (n=130) respondents in each L2 proficiency (Elementary, Intermediate, Advanced) level and 195 respondents in each learning style (Filed Dependent n=195, Field Independent

n=195). The rationale of recruiting large sample size is that large sample size minimizes the chances of sampling error (Creswell, 2012). The homogeneity of samples was also taken care of. The sample in each L2 proficiency level and field-dependent and field-independent learning style was homogeneous to ensure that the judgments of an atypical informant do not distort the findings. The statistical power analysis was executed to confirm the adequate sample size before the task (GJT) conducted. G*Power software (Version 3.1.9.2) (Faul et al., 2007) was performed to calculate the sample size. The test family of 'f-test' and the statistical test of means: ANOVA fixed effects, omnibus, one-way' were used. A post-hoc analysis was then conducted, and the software accepted a size of 390 for a large effect size .40 with a power of 92%. The effect size reflects whether the identified relationship/ difference between the variables is significant and robust or not (Nimehchisalem, 2010). Therefore, this study involved 390 Pakistani ESL learners as sample. To ensure the homogeneity of the participants, the Oxford Placement Test (Allen, 2004) and Group Embedded Figure Test were administrated. The Oxford Placement Test (OPT) determined the language proficiency levels and Group Embedded Figure Test (GEFT) distinguished field-dependent and field-independent learning styles of the respondents. The target data were collected using Grammaticality Judgment Task (GJT) to measure respondents' grammatical knowledge of cleft constructions. GJT requires the respondents to assess the grammaticality of a set of sentences. GJT is commonly used to examine the linguistic competence of L2 learners (Ellis & Roever, 2021). According to Rimmer (2006), GJT is a standard method of determining whether a construction is well-formed. The elicited responses are generally in the form of assessments, wherein the respondents determine whether the sentences are grammatical or ungrammatical in a target language (Tremblay, 2005; Ellis, 2008; Godfroid et al., 2015; Rogers, Révész, & Rebuschat, 2016; Ellis & Roever, 2021). The GJT applied in the current study contained 108 randomly ordered items in total including 72 target items (cleft constructions). Ionin (2012), Mirault et al. (2018) and Plonsky et al. (2020) suggested that there should a balance or an equal number of grammatical/ acceptable to ungrammatical/unacceptable test items in the GJT. Therefore, there were 36 grammatical and 36 ungrammatical test items in the GJT. However, a minimum of 50% filler items are acceptable, as a very low number of filler items might influence the results (Havik et al., 2009)**.** Therefore, GJT also contained 36 filler items, 18 were grammatical, and 18 were ungrammatical. The grammatical stimuli in fillers items used verb rather than cleft constructions. The ungrammatical filler items violated the verb agreement. The fillers were used to distract the participants' attention from the target items (Jegerski, 2014).

Based on test items protocol of Vafaee et al. (2017), the breakup of 72 target cleft constructions included four grammatical and four ungrammatical constructions each in set of *it*-cleft dimensions, *wh*-cleft and reverse *wh*-cleft constructions. The length of the experimental sentences (Cleft construction) ranged from ten to eleven words**.** The test items were randomly presented to ensure that no order effect would be found in the results (Mackey and Gass, 2016). The respondents were evaluated on a comparative rating scale instead of an absolute or binary scale (grammatical/ungrammatical). The GJT was constructed on an ordinal scale; as proposed by Montrul et al. (2011) and Clark et al. (2013) the numbers 1 through 4 on the scale signified, definitely unacceptable, probably unacceptable, probably acceptable, and definitely acceptable. The coding scheme to score the data obtained from the GJT is summarised in the following Table 1.

TABLE1. Scoring Accuracy Judgment of the GJT

Grammatical Items		Ungrammatical Items	
Scale	**Score**	**Scale**	**Score**
1.Definitely unacceptable	0	1.Definitely unacceptable	3
2.Probably unacceptable	1	2.Probably unacceptable	2
3. Probably acceptable	2	3.Probably acceptable	1
4.Definitely acceptable	3	4.Definitely acceptable	0

Determinate answer (e.g., 'Definitely acceptable', 'Definitely unacceptable') was awarded a higher score 3 than an indeterminate answer (e.g., 'Probably acceptable', 'Probably unacceptable') 2 scores, 'Probably unacceptable' 1 score, and 'Definitely unacceptable' 0 score. Judgment on the filler items was not scored. The scoring scheme of grammaticality judgment task was adapted from Wong and Chan, (2005), and Mackey and Gass, (2016).

DATA ANALYSIS

GJT consists of cleft sentences total score, grammatical GJT score, and ungrammatical GJT score. A two-way MANOVA was employed to examine the significant main and interaction effects of proficiency levels and learning styles on GJT total score, GJT grammatical, and GJT ungrammatical score of cleft constructions in the grammaticality judgment task. A two-way MANOVA was also applied to find out a significant mean score difference of GJT across L2 proficiency levels and learning styles.

RESULTS

EFFECT OF LANGUAGE PROFICIENCY AND FD/FI LEARNING STYLE ON GJT TOTAL SCORE, GRAMMATICAL GJT AND UNGRAMMATICAL GJT SCORE

To what extent are Pakistani ESL learners with different L2 proficiency levels and FD/FI learning styles able to correctly judge cleft constructions in grammaticality judgment task (GJT) that involves:

a. Grammatical judgment total score?
b. Grammatical GJT score?
c. Ungrammatical GJT score?

H_{01}: There is no significant main effect of L2 Proficiency levels on GJT total score, GJT grammatical, and GJT ungrammatical score of cleft constructions in the grammaticality judgment task.

H_{02}: There is no significant main effect of FD/ FI learning styles on GJT total score, GJT grammatical, and GJT ungrammatical score of cleft constructions in the grammaticality judgment task.

H_{03}: There is no significant interaction effect of L2 Proficiency levels and FD/ FI learning styles on GJT total score, GJT grammatical, and GJT ungrammatical score of cleft constructions in the grammaticality judgment task.

A two-way MANOVA was conducted to examine any significant mean score difference in grammatical knowledge of cleft construction across three proficiency levels (i.e., elementary, intermediate, and advanced) and two learning styles (i.e., field-dependent and field-independent) among Pakistani ESL learners. Two-way MANOVA also examined the main effect of language proficiency levels and learning styles on the grammatical knowledge of cleft construction among Pakistani ESL learners. In addition, it also examines the interaction effect of language proficiency levels and learning styles on the grammatical knowledge of cleft construction among Pakistani ESL learners. Wilks' Lambda test was reported in Table 2.

TABLE 2. Multivariate Wilks' Lambda Tests for GJT Total, Gram GJT, and Ungrammatical GJT Across Proficiency Levels and Learning Styles

Effect	Value	F	Hypothesis Df	Error df	*p*	Partial η^2
Proficiency Levels	.335	92.64	6	764	<.001	.42
Learning Styles	.866	19.73	3	382	<.001	.14
Proficiency Levels* Learning Styles	.935	4.35	6	764	<.001	.03

a. Design: Intercept + Proficiency levels+ Learning Style + Proficiency Levels * Learning Style

The results shown in Table 2 reject the null hypotheses1 and 2, and it is concluded that there was a statistically significant main effects of L2 proficiency levels and FD/ FI learning styles on the combined dependent variables, GJT total score, GJT grammatical, and GJT ungrammatical score of Pakistani ESL learners' grammatical knowledge of cleft constructions in the grammaticality judgment task. The results shown in Table 2 reject the null hypothesis3 and it is concluded that there was a statistically significant interaction effect of L2 proficiency levels and FD/ FI learning styles on the combined dependent variables, GJT total score, GJT grammatical, and GJT ungrammatical score of Pakistani ESL learners' grammatical knowledge of cleft constructions.

The results of language proficiency level, $F(6,764)=92.64$, $p= <.001$; Wilk's Lambda =.335; Partial η^2=.42. For field-dependent and field-independent learning styles, $F(3,382)=19.73$, $p=<.001$; Wilk's Lambda=.866; Partial η^2= .14. Using guidelines proposed by Cohen (1988, pp.284-287), .01= small effect, .06= medium, .14= large effect size. Both independent variables language proficiency (Partial η^2 =.42) and field-dependent, field-independent learning styles (Partial η^2 =.14) suggested a large effect size. It means that 42% variation in performance was the result of language proficiency levels and 14% variation in performance of GJT Total, Grammatical GJT, and Ungrammatical GJT was the result of learning styles. It also indicated the main effect of language proficiency and learning styles on the dependent variables. Wilk's lambda test reflected the interaction effect of proficiency levels and learning styles. As $F(6,764)=4.34$, $p=<.001$; Wilk's Lambda=.935; partial eta squared= .03, small effect size, which means only 3% variation in performance was the result of combined effects of language proficiency and learning styles on grammatical judgment task total score, grammatical GJT score, and ungrammatical GJT score. A two-way MANOVA test was employed for further analysis to examine the results of the dependent variables separately across proficiency levels and learning styles (Table 3).

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TABLE 3. MANOVA Summary Results of Proficiency Levels and Learning Styles Differences in GJTT Total, Grammatical GJT and Ungrammatical GJT Scores

Source	Dependent Variable	Type III SS	df	MS	F	*p*	Partial η^2
Proficiency Levels	GJT TOTAL	135523.59	2	67761.79	368.46	<.001	.66
	Gram GJT	24281.26	2	12140.63	88.26	<.001	.31
	Ungram GJT	41351.66	2	20675.83	139.08	<.001	.42
Learning Styles	GJT TOTAL	9481.86	1	9481.87	51.55	<.001	.11
	Gram GJT	2864.74	1	2864.74	20.82	<.001	.05
	Ungram GJT	2826.92	1	2826.92	19.01	<.001	.04
Proficiency Levels * Learning Styles	GJT TOTAL	2689.61	2	1344.80	7.31	<.001	.03
	Gram GJT	909.17	2	454.58	3.30	.038	.01
	Ungram GJT	976.44	2	488.22	3.28	.039	.01
Error	GJT TOTAL	70619.10	384	183.90			
	Gram GJT	52820.21	384	137.55			
	UNgram GJT	57084	384	148.65			

The results presented in Table 3 showed the significant mean score difference in the dependents variables separately across proficiency levels and learning styles. Across proficiency levels; total score of grammaticality judgment task on cleft constructions (GJT Total score) as $F(2,384)= 368.46$, $p=<.001$; partial eta squared=.66. Between learning styles i.e., field-dependent and field-independent learners (GJT Total score) as $F(1,384) = 51.55$, $p=<.001$; partial eta squared= .11. Language proficiency partial $\eta^2 = .66$ suggested a very large effect size and learning styles partial $\eta^2 = .11$ suggested a medium effect size, which means that 66% variation in performance of GJT total score was result of language proficiency levels, whereas 11% variation in performance of GJT total score was results of learning styles. The results also indicated a significant interaction effect of proficiency levels and learning styles on total score of grammaticality judgment task on cleft construction (GJT Total score) as $F(2,384) = 7.31$, $p=<.001$; partial eta squared= .03, small effect size.

Language proficiency levels grammatical sentences score on GJT (Gram GJT) as $F(2,384)= 88.26$, $p=<.001$; partial $\eta^2 = .31$. Between learning styles grammatical sentences score on GJT (Gram GJT) as $F(1,384)= 20.82$, $p=<.001$; partial eta squared= .05. Language proficiency levels partial $\eta^2 = .31$ suggested a large effect size, whereas learning styles partial $\eta^2 =.05$ suggested a medium effect size, which means that 31% variation in performance of grammatical sentences score on GJT was result of language proficiency levels, whereas 5% variation in performance of grammatical sentences score on GJT was results of learning styles. The finding also showed a significant interaction effect between proficiency levels and learning styles on cleft construction grammatical sentences score on GJT (Gram GJT) $F(2,384)= 3.30$, $p=.038$; partial eta squared= .01, small effect size.

Language proficiency levels ungrammatical sentences score on GJT (Ungrammatical GJT) $F(2,384)= 139.08$, $p=<.001$; partial eta squared= .42, large effect size. Between learning styles i.e., field-dependent and field-independent learners' ungrammatical sentences score on GJT (Ungrammatical GJT) is $F(1,384)= 19.01$, $p=<.001$; partial eta squared= .04, small effect size. It means that 42% variation in performance of ungrammatical sentences score on GJT was result of

language proficiency, whereas only 4% variation in performance of ungrammatical sentences score on GJT was result of field-dependent and field-independent learning styles. There was also an interaction effect between language proficiency levels and learning styles on ungrammatical sentences score on GJT (Ungrammatical GJT) $F(2,384)= 3.284$, $p=.039$; partial eta squared= .01, small effect size.

Furthermore, in order to determine which proficiency level groups and learning styles i.e. field-dependent and field-independent were significantly different from each other on total score of grammaticality judgment task on cleft construction (GJT Total score); grammatical sentences score on GJT (Grammatical GJT) and ungrammatical sentences score on GJT (Ungrammatical GJT), two post hoc Bonferroni tests were applied (see Tables 5 & 7). The means differences of proficiency levels in GJT Total, Grammatical GJT, and Ungrammatical GJT is presented in the following Table 4.

TABLE 4. Means Differences of Proficiency Levels in GJT Total, Grammatical GJT, and Ungrammatical GJT

Dependent Variable	Proficiency Levels	n	Mean	SD
GJT Total score	Elementary	130	127.01	13.90
	Intermediate	130	149.11	15.53
	Advanced	130	172.66	14.38
Grammatical GJT score	Elementary	130	66.60	14.80
	Intermediate	130	78.46	12.08
	Advanced	130	85.79	8.55
Ungrammatical GJT score	Elementary	130	60.55	14.45
	Intermediate	130	70.44	11.99
	Advanced	130	85.59	10.92

TABLE 5. Pairwise Comparisons for Mean Differences between Proficiency Levels Within GJT Total, Gram GJT and Ungrammatical GJT

Dependent Variable	PL(I)	PL(J)	Mean Diff (I-J)	SE	*P*
GJT Total score	Intermediate	Elementary	22.10*	1.68	<.001
	Advanced	Elementary	45.65*	1.68	<.001
		Intermediate	23.55*	1.68	<.001
Gram GJT	Intermediate	Elementary	11.86*	1.45	<.001
	Advanced	Elementary	19.14*	1.45	<.001
		Intermediate	7.28*	1.45	<.001
UN gram GJT	Intermediate	Elementary	9.88*	1.51	<.001
	Advanced	Elementary	25.03*	1.51	<.001
		Intermediate	15.154*	1.51	<.001

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Post hoc Bonferroni test was applied to compare the mean score difference between proficiency levels on dependent variables. Table 5 indicated a statistically significant mean score difference between proficiency levels on dependent variables. Regarding the correct judgement of cleft constructions on GJT Total score, the intermediate proficiency group got higher mean score (*M*=149.10, *SD*=15.53); *p*= <.001 than the elementary proficiency group (*M*=127.00, *SD*=13.90). However, the mean score of the advanced proficiency (*M*=172.66, *SD*=14.38) group was greater than the mean score of the intermediate (*M*=149.10, *SD*=15.53) and the elementary proficiency groups (*M*=127.00, *SD*=13.90); *p*=<.001. For the correct judgement of grammatical cleft constructions score on GJT, the intermediate proficiency group obtained higher mean score (*M*=78.46, *SD*=12.08); *p*= <.001 than the elementary proficiency group (*M*= 66.60, *SD*=14.80). More specifically, the mean score of the advanced proficiency (*M*=85.79, *SD*=8.55) group significantly differed from the mean scores of the intermediate (*M*=78.46, *SD*=12.08) and the elementary proficiency groups (*M*= 66.60, *SD*=14.80) at alpha value *p*= <.001.

Concerning the correct judgement of ungrammatical cleft constructions score on GJT, the intermediate proficiency group obtained higher mean score (*M*=70.43, *SD*=11.99); *p*=<.001 than the elementary proficiency group (*M*= 60.55, *SD*=14.55). The advanced proficiency group's mean score (*M*=85.59, *SD*=10.92) was greater than the mean scores of the intermediate (*M*=70.43, *SD*=11.99) and the elementary proficiency groups (*M*= 60.55, *SD*=14.55) at alpha value *p*= <.001. The findings of the group's comparison concluded that Pakistani ESL learners with advanced proficiency level correctly judged on GJT total score, grammatical sentences, and ungrammatical sentences of cleft construction better than the intermediate and the elementary proficiency levels learners. The increase in the mean score from the elementary to the intermediate and to the advanced proficiency level indicated that with the proficiency in the target language, the learners' competency in identifying and judging the grammaticality of GJT total, grammatical GJT and ungrammatical GJT score also increase. The advanced proficiency level learners had a better understanding of cleft construction as compared to the intermediate and the elementary proficiency learners.

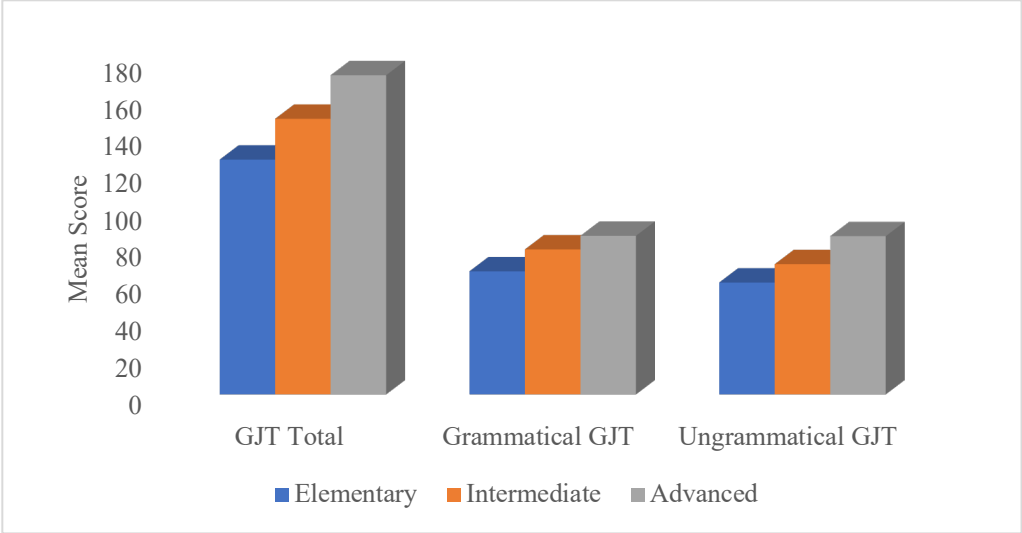

FIGURE 1. Means Differences of Proficiency Levels in GJT Total, Grammatical GJT, and Ungrammatical GJT

TABLE 6. Means Differences of Learning Styles in GJT Total, Grammatical GJT, and Ungrammatical GJT

Dependent Variable	Learning Styles	n	Mean	SD
GJT Total score	Field-dependent	195	144.66	21.87
	Field-independent	195	154.52	24.44
Grammatical GJT score	Field-dependent	195	74.26	13.69
	Field-independent	195	79.65	14.66
Ungrammatical GJT score	Field-dependent	195	69.50	15.29
	Field-independent	195	74.89	16.69

TABLE 7. Pairwise Comparisons for Mean Differences between Learning Styles Within GJT Total, Gram GJT and Ungram GJT

Dependent Variable	(I) Learning Styles	(J) Learning Styles	Mean Diff (I-J)	SE	*P*
GJT TOTAL	Field-independent	Field-dependent	9.86*	1.37	<.001
Grammatical GJT	Field-independent	Field-dependent	5.42*	1.18	<.001
Ungrammatical GJT	Field-independent	Field-dependent	5.38*	1.23	<.001

Post hoc Bonferroni test was applied to compare the mean score difference between learning styles, i.e., field-dependent and field-independent learners on dependent variables. As the results can be seen in Table 7, a statistically significant mean score difference between field-dependent and field-independent learners on dependent variables. Regarding the correct judgement of cleft constructions on GJT Total, field-independent learners got higher mean score (M=154.52, SD=24.44); p=<.001 than field-dependent learners (M=144.66, SD=21.87). The finding reflected that Pakistani ESL learners with field-independent learning style had a better understanding and correctly judged on grammaticality judgment task total score as compared to the field-dependent learners.

In terms of the correct judgement of grammatical cleft constructions score on Gram GJT, field-independent learners obtained higher mean score (M=79.64, SD=14.66); p= <.001 than the field-dependent learners (M=74.22, SD=13.69). This means that Pakistani ESL learners with field-independent learning style correctly judged on grammatical judgment task total score better than the field-dependent learners.

Concerning the correct judgement of ungrammatical cleft constructions score on GJT, field-independent learners' mean score was greater (M=74.88, SD=16.69); p= <.001 than the field-dependent learners (M=69.50, SD=15.29). The findings showed that Pakistani ESL learners with field-independent learning styles correctly judged on ungrammatical judgment of cleft construction better than the field-dependent learners.

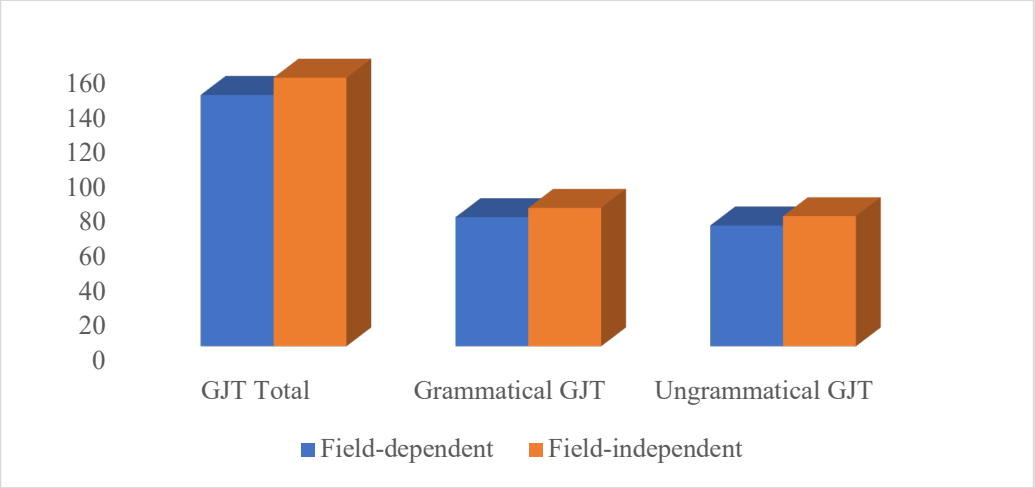

FIGURE 2. Means Differences of Learning Styles in GJT Total, Grammatical GJT, and Ungrammatical GJT

DISCUSSION

The study has evidently indicated that language proficiency and learning style affect Pakistani ESL learners' grammatical knowledge of cleft construction that includes GJT total score, cleft sentences grammatical score, and cleft sentences ungrammatical score in grammaticality judgment task (GJT). Comparing the mean score difference in proficiency levels, the advanced proficiency level significantly obtained greater score in GJT total score, cleft sentences grammatical score, and cleft sentences ungrammatical score in grammaticality judgment task (GJT) than the intermediate, and the elementary level learners. Comparing the mean score difference between field-dependent and field-independent learners, field-independent learners' mean score was significantly higher in GJT total score, cleft sentences grammatical, and cleft sentences ungrammatical score in grammaticality judgment task (GJT) than field-dependent learners.

It is promising to compare these results with the results of the study conducted by Hamzah and Abdullah (2009). Their finding reflected that; more language proficient learners are field-independent learners than the less proficient learners. Furthermore, the results of the current study illustrate the previous studies which reveal diversity of learning styles that the learners applied to perform a specific language task (e.g., Griffiths, 2008; Norton, & Toohey, 2001; Shoebottom, 2007). The findings of these studies reflect that field-independent learning style helps the learners retaining novel information and reinforcing what they have learned (Liyanage et al., 2012; Nisbet et al., 2005; Mohamed et al., 2006). It also renders a pivotal role in arguing their comprehension and learning (Costa, 2001). Similarly, many studies suggested that learning styles can directly affect the learning outcomes of the learners (Bolitho et al., 2003; Eilam & Aharon, 2003; Mokhtari & Reichard, 2002). This discussion might be further explained that field-independent learners play a significant role in language learning process, and their learning style helps them to manage their own learning process. It may result in better test performance, grammatical achievement score, and learning. Furthermore, the current study found significant mean score differences between the advanced proficiency level, intermediate and elementary level, field-dependent, field-independent learners in correctly judged grammatical and ungrammatical cleft construction. However, the findings of the present study are dissimilar with the findings of the study conducted by (Chamot, 2004). He identified that as the language proficiency level increased, use of learning styles decreased. The current study identified that as the proficiency level increased, the mean score of

field-independent learners also increased. The advanced proficiency level performed better than the intermediate, and the elementary level. Field-independent learners outperformed field-dependent learners. Regardless of Language proficiency levels, field-independent learners have grammatical knowledge of Cleft construction. They outperformed their field-dependent peers. Even in each proficiency (elementary, intermediate, and advanced) group, field-independent learners demonstrated a better understanding of correctly judging cleft sentences total score, grammatical and ungrammatical score of cleft construction in grammaticality judgment task (GJT). The study also found the interaction effect between language proficiency and learning styles.

Griffiths (2003) examined the relationship between learning styles and language proficiency. Correlational analyses confirmed the positive relationship between learning styles and language proficiency. She found that higher proficient English learners reported using field-independent learning style.

Findings of the current study are aligned with the previous studies. The results of Effendi and Bandar (2019) study indicated that there was a significant effect of learning styles on the students' English grammar achievement score. Field-independent learners were more influential than filed- dependent learners. Furthermore, the results reflected a significant effect of learning style on the grammatical task. Field-independent learners achieved the highest score in grammatical task, and field-dependent learners achieved the lowest score in grammatical task. Yufrizal et al. (2017) also found that field-independent learners are the most dominant learners in learning language.

The findings of Abedi et al.'s (2020) experimental study revealed that the experimental groups (field-independent) outperformed the comparison groups (field-dependent) in both narrative and error correction of English definite/indefinite article immediate and delayed post-tests. The findings suggested that learning styles of learners can contribute to the efficacy of learning grammatical knowledge of the target language.

In the same vein, the result of Guo and Yang (2018) study revealed that field-independent learners significantly performed better as compared to field-dependent learners both on the immediate post-test and the delayed post-test in the grammatical written test.

Similarly, Hashemian et al. (2015) examined the relationships field-dependent and field-independent learning styles and L2 grammatical sentence completion task. Results revealed significant positive relationships between field-independence and performance on the sentence completion task. The findings suggested that field-independent learners could be associated with high scores on the grammatical sentence completion task.

The rationale for using FD/FI as a variable is to test whether FD/FI learners are good at grammatical knowledge of cleft constructions. The results of the current study are also aligned with the result of Rezaee and Farahian (2012) study supported the hypothesis that field independent learners play a major role in the acquisition of linguistic competence. It implies that FI learners learn the grammatical constructions well. Field-independent learners in the present study were good at grammatical knowledge of cleft construction. A study by Zimmermann and Onea (2011) employed acceptability judgements only to investigate it-clefts and *wh*-clefts in German-English interlanguage. The results showed that learners' competence in the grammatical restrictions of these two types of clefts is not target -like. The major findings were that L2 proficiency affected the grammatical knowledge and restrictions of *it*-clefts and *wh*-clefts.

Findings of the current study are similar to the study of Drummer and Felser (2023) that *pseudo cleft* constructions are more challenging for ESL learners. Park and Sung (2023) support

the results of the current study that learning of cleft argument of verb in written compositions using usage-based approaches to language acquisition. Grammatical knowledge of cleft verb argument construction increases with the L2 proficiency levels. Higher-level L2 proficiency learners utilized substantially more cleft verb argument constructions than elementary learners. Significant learning of cleft verb argument constructions was also observed at various L2 proficiency levels. The findings of the study indicated that Pakistani ESL learners with low proficiency faced problems in learning resumptive pronoun in *wh and reverse wh* cleft construction. This is in line with the results of Espírito Santo et al. (2023) found that Chinese ESL learners with intermediate L2 proficiency level faced problems in learning resumptive pronoun in *wh and reverse wh* cleft construction. The findings related to fronting it-cleft construction of this study are supported by the findings of Ylinärä et al. (2023), who reported that fronting clefting is invariably the least preferred and deemed unacceptable. Results indicated that Pakistani ESL learners gave maximum grammatical judgment on it-cleft constructions. The same findings are reported by Jourdain (2022), and Faghiri and Samvelian (2021) in their studies on learning it-cleft constructions.

The above discussion supports the findings of the current study. The study concludes that language proficiency and learning styles affect Pakistani ESL learners' grammatical knowledge of cleft construction. Usage-based approaches and construction grammar theoretically support the results of the study. Knowledge results in the frequent use and awareness of these (cleft) construction in the target language. It was hypothesised that different L2 proficiency groups would have different knowledge of cleft construction. The findings of two-way MANOVA accepted the hypothesis and concluded that Pakistani ESL learners with different proficiency levels have significantly different knowledge of cleft construction, as learners at different proficiency levels demonstrated different performance levels. There was a gradual development of grammatical knowledge of cleft construction across L2 proficiency levels and learning styles. The findings are in line with the cognitive linguistic account that L2 users' interlanguage development is gradual, and knowledge is driven from L2 users' exposure and awareness to the target language (Ellis, 2002, 2005; Robinson & Ellis, 2008).

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of the study, it can be concluded that language proficiency and field-dependent, field-independent learning styles have a significant main and interaction effect on Pakistani ESL learners' grammatical knowledge of *it, wh-and rwh*-cleft constructions. This study contributes to the SLA, cognitive linguistics, construction grammar, and learning styles literature. A strength of this study is its specific focus on the dimensions of cleft constructions. Theoretically, according to the usage-based approaches, as L2 learners develop their language skills, they gradually develop their knowledge of grammatical constructions through exposure to L2 and noticing its structure (Ellis, 2002, 2005; Robinson & Ellis, 2008).

The present study revealed that although cleft construction is not frequently used in target language, Pakistani ESL learners tend to realise its functions. We also found that learners' proficiency levels and learning style contribute differences to L2 learners' grammatical knowledge. The advanced proficiency group with field-independent learning style demonstrated significantly different performance from the intermediate, and the elementary proficiency groups, and it supported the assumptions of cognitive linguistic theory of language development (Robinson & Ellis, 2008). Concerning the methodological implications, one of the positive characteristics of the research design is, use of grammaticality judgment task (GJT) as the dependent variable, and

language proficiency and learning styles as the independent variables. Incorporating learning style with language proficiency is a methodological contribution of the present study. Use of GJT, language proficiency, and learning styles allowed a deeper insight into the cognitive linguistic process that the participants employed when giving their acceptability judgment about cleft sentences in grammaticality judgment task (GJT). Future researchers might consider applying this method to examine more dimensions of cleft construction. Further studies could also be conducted with a focus on L2 learners' pragmatic competence.

Based on the results of the present study, some practical implications can be made to helping the L2 learners, especially the intermediate, and the elementary proficiency learners. The intermediate, and the elementary levels learners with field-dependent learning styles performed low as compared to the advanced proficiency levels, and field-independent learners. English language teachers and syllabus designers should design activities on cleft construction for low proficiency learners. Findings of the study could be useful for low proficiency learners to expose them with such activities to enhance their awareness of cleft construction. Callies and Keller (2008) proposed that literary texts are useful stimulus for attracting learners to use 'riskier' sentence types. They also suggested teaching activities on cleft construction with different types of texts (style, register, text types, cohesion, focusing, poem, short stories, letters). The controlled grammatical activities should be designed to practice the new grammatical structure that focuses on ESL learners' L2 proficiency levels and their use in real life context (Yin et al., 2022). The findings indicated that field dependent L2 learners are at a disadvantage in developing their L2 skills. Therefore, particularly field-dependent learners need more attention.

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