

## **Errors and Difficulties Encountered by English for Specific Purposes Learners in using Relative pronouns**

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### **Abstract :**

The purpose of this research is to identify the ESP learners' errors and difficulties in using relative pronouns (who, whom, which, whose and that), and to discover the reason for making errors. The researcher has applied the quantitative analytical method to conduct the study. The sample of the study was 50 students out of 90 students' population, at Al-Nahrain University /College of Political Sciences for the academic year 2018-2019. A written test and student interview were used for data analysis. The written test consisted of three different questions, each question consist of 10 items; 10 items of fill in the blanks and 10 sentence combination test items, and 10 correcting sentence errors, so the total items are 30. Based on the data analysis. Most of the ESP students had problems in using the wrong relative pronoun, especially with "whom" and "that". The researcher recommends that students should enlarge their knowledge in the grammar field, and they should practice well how to use the relative pronouns in sentences. Moreover, teachers must apply modern strategies and techniques in teaching this activity.

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**Keywords:** Errors, ESP, Relative Pronouns

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### **1. Introduction**

English grammar is an important element in mastering English language. It is the way of how words are arranged, joined, and organized to make a meaningful sentence. (Butt at all., 1994, p. 22) .Grammar seems a difficult task for learners, but through using the correct usages of grammar rules it will be easy for them. Mastering grammar can help a writer to make suitable and mature use of the purpose of the language. Penny ur (1996). Grammar is the sound, structure, and meaning system of language. Beverly ( 2000). When learners understand English grammar correctly, they might develop students' confidence in using relative clauses, and they become more conscious in using correct grammar within the sentences. Relative clause is considered as one of the most serious syntactic structures in learning. They are used to define or identify the noun that introduces them. Azar (1993, p. 267) .They are clauses starting with the relative pronouns and combine two sentences into one sentence to form a meaningful sentence. The selection of relative pronouns will be governed by the use of the adjective clause in which it appears in restrictive or non-restrictive clause. Relative pronoun plays a very essential role in learning and teaching, when learners understand English grammar correctly, they might develop students' confidence in using relative clauses, and they become more conscious in using correct grammar within the sentences. The study reveals that many students do not understand how to use relative pronouns (who, whom, which, whose, and that) correctly. Eckersley (1960: 138)

### **2. The Problem**

Most of the EFL/ESL and ESP learner has sophisticated difficulty in acquiring the relative clauses in both reading comprehension and writing. Talking about relative pronoun in writing it is a very essential issue for students because many students in different schools and colleges ultimately do not understand about relative pronoun as teachers in such occasion tend to use an objective task to measure the students' ability, but at the same time, the tasks given for the students appear to be very difficult for them. Relative pronouns are embarrassing to many learners and especially, when it used incorrectly. The definitive, common difficulties happen, in understanding the structure of relative pronouns, choosing the right pronoun (or adverb), using the correct punctuation, and maintaining the subject-verb agreement. In learning English, students generally face difficulties and make errors in

using relative pronouns in writing. The problems refer to the misuse of relative pronouns in construct sentences, especially in writing.

English relative clauses are mostly difficult to undertake for ESP learners, because of their complexity in structure. Paris (1976). Many students face difficulties and they are not able to write English complex sentences because they cannot use the relative clause in the right position for that reason they committed many errors. Relative clauses are often misused; sometimes leading to serious misunderstanding; other times simply displaying poor grammar (Robert, 2003, p: 3).

Selinker (1992, p: 150) stated that the making of errors can be regarded as "a device the learner use to learn". Students mostly were not able to distinguish between the uses of relative. Pronouns if it is subject, object, or possessive or it is for a person or a thing. Kuno (1974) asserted that it is very difficult to generate the sentence structure when the relative clauses disconnect the main sentence when it comes by coming immediately after the subject of the main clause. Corder (1981) stated that "an error is the result of behavior failure". (Stauble, as cited in Celce-Murcia and Larsen-Freeman, 1999, p. 583)

### **3. The Significant**

In English grammar, one of the clauses that important to be learned is the relative clause.

Carter (2006; 2) stated that grammar is related to how the constituent units of sentences (morphemes, words, phrases, and clauses) are put together to form sentences. The use of relative pronouns relies on what we are indicating. (Leech and Svartvick,(2002, p. 386) .Besides, Azar (2002:267) said that "a relative clause is a dependent clause that adjusts a noun; it describes, identifies, or gives further information about noun". In learning English for specific purposes learners have difficulties in their learning and committed errors, so it is important to analyze these errors by the teacher, and trying to know what they should teach and how to teach. According to Brown (2000, p. 219), "error Analysis can hold us to closely concentrate on specific languages rather than viewing a universal part of the language. "It is very important for all English learners in general and ESP learners in particular to be aware of the usage and functions of relative pronouns and should know how to use relative pronouns correctly and easily.

### **4. The Aim of the Study**

The present study aims at:

1. Investigating the difficulties encountered by Iraqi ESP learners at Al-Nahrain University /College of political sciences.
2. The factors that cause these difficulties.

### **5. Hypotheses of the Study**

The study tries to test the following hypotheses:-

1. Iraqi ESP students do not know the real utilization of relative pronouns within their right position.
2. Iraqi ESP students have little knowledge of the relative pronouns functions, and how to use them correctly.

### **6 The Limits of the Study**

This study is limited to

1. ESP Third grade students at Al-Nahrain University /College of political sciences. The study will be conducted during the academic year 2018-2019.
2. The study limited the problem only to the students' errors in using relative pronouns (which, who, whom, whose, which and that)

## **2. Theoretical background and Related Studies**

### **2.1. What Is a Relative Pronoun?**

A relative pronoun is a word that relates to a relative clause and it can refer to singular or plurals. It is a pronoun that marks a relative clause within a larger sentence. It is used to join two sentences, or to give more information about something. Murphy (2000, p.168) states that a relative clause informs us which or what kind of person or thing the speaker means. They refer to singular or plural, and there is

no difference between males and females. Relative pronouns are used to join two sentences. They are known as clauses introduced by Wh-words, used to modulate nouns or pronouns to distinguish people and things, or to give more information about them” (Swan 2005, p. 477).In the English language, there are a few relative pronouns. The most popular, are *which, that, whose, whoever, whomever, who, and whom*. Leech and Svartvick (2002, p. 386). The Wh-relative pronoun are who, whom, which, whose, that, and the zero construction (Johansson & Lysvåg, 1986, pp. 150-153; Quirk et al., 1985, p. 366) .They reflect the personal/non-personal gender of the antecedent.” The use of those relative pronouns depends on what we are referring to. The Wh-words are known as relative markers or relativizes, which are of two main kinds (Cowan 2008)

**2.1.1. Types of Relative Clauses**

- a. Defining clauses (Restrictive clauses): A defining (restrictive) clause is fundamental to the sentence. They identify the word it modifies. It is not set off by commas.
- b. A non-defining or (Nonrestrictive clause): A non-defining (non-restrictive) clause is not fundamental and can be removed from the sentence. It is set off with commas.

**2.1.2. The Usage of Relative pronouns**

Relative pronouns in English are *who, whom, whose, which, and that*. They are used to describe something more about a person or a thing and it refers to singular or plural.

The relative pronouns comprise two kinds according to (Cowan 2008).

- a. Relative pronouns with Wh- element (including indefinite relative pronouns): who, whom, whose, which, what, “that”, and “which”. etc.

Table 1.The Usages of the relative pronouns

Relative Pronouns	Usages	Example
	subject/object used for (people)	The man, who called yesterday, wants to rent the house.
<b>which</b>	subject/object used for things and animals (not people)	Maria wore the skirt which she bought in London.
<b>which</b>	Used for possession of people ,animals	I don’t know whose book is this.
<b>whose</b>	object (people) used for people when the person is object of the verb	The man whom you met yesterday is a professor.
<b>whom</b>	Subject/object used for people, things and animals	I heard news that was not true at all.
<b>that</b>	subject/object used for (people)	The man, who called yesterday, wants to rent the house.

b. Relative adverbs

Relative adverbs are adverbs (*where, when, or why*) that are being used to introduce the relative clause.

The Usages of Relative Adverbs2Table

Relative adverb	Relative adverb	Examples
<b>When</b>	It refers to a time expression. It means "in/on	Can you remember the day when my parents travel to France?
<b>Where</b>	It refers to a place. It means "in/at "which	Is there a good school where my children can join?
<b>Why</b>	It refers to a reason. It means "for ."which	Do you know the reason why they met last night?

### **2.1.3. The important of Relative Pronouns**

Relative pronouns introduce relative clauses, **they** are important connecting devices. They combine two clauses and they work as the subject or object of the verb in the relative clause. Without the relative pronoun, the relative clause would not occur. There are different relative clauses that are used for different purposes. "The function of relative pronouns is to sign the relative clause within the construction of a complex sentence." Radden and Driven (2007, p. 178), Bao, (2015) states that a relative pronoun is used to appear the person or thing in the main clause and each relative pronoun has its certain function. Azar (2000 p.267) said that "a relative clause is a dependent clause that modifies a noun, it introduced by the relative words and they can be either restrictive or nonrestrictive.

### **2.1.4. Errors**

In learning and teaching any foreign language, the learners sometimes committed errors and face many difficulties in using the language, whether it is in speaking or writing. The studies of difficulty and errors have a connection because both of them give some donating, on attempts to deal with students' mistakes. Crystal (1999) stated that error analysis refers to the study of the misuse of correct forms generated by a foreign language learner. It is the breaking of rules caused by the lack of language knowledge and how to use this knowledge correctly. Gass and Selinker (2001) define errors as a warning signal; it refers to the failure of how to utilize a certain system correctly. Moreover, According to Brown (2000, p. 219), "error analysis can conclude us to closely converge on specific, languages rather than examine a general aspect of language.

## **2.2.. Review of Related Studies**

Musonah, (2014) the study emphasized the errors analysis committed by students in using relative pronouns .The design of the study was a descriptive qualitative, and a written test and interview were used as instruments. The finding of this study showed that students committed errors in using relative pronouns by describing the frequency of errors in the sequence based on the most to the least frequency of errors, there were: whose, who, whom, and which. Wulandari, (2018) the study tries to distinguish the students' difficulties in using relative pronoun of adjective clause and to detect the reasons and components causing the difficulties in learning adjective clause. The researcher used an interview, and questionnaire for collecting data. The results showed that the students had many difficulties in using awrong relative pronoun, and they had some problems in the comprehension of the adjective clause. Kusdianty, S.R. (2016), this research deals with "The analysis of student errors using relative clause ". It is trying to investigate error types of relative clause and focuses on the error of selected items of the relative pronoun. The research limited on the errors caused by the students in using relative pronouns and the causes of these errors. It was found that the reasons for the errors committed by the learners due to the influences of intralingual transfer by their mother tongue or most of the students didn't understand the material.

## **3. Methodology**

### **3.1. Research Design**

To describe the ESP Students' difficulties in using relative pronouns, the researcher used a descriptive qualitative method to present the data of the study without any treatment.

### **3.2. The Population of the Study**

The population of the study concluded of 90 third-year students who study English for specific purposes at AL-Nahrain University /college of political sciences, third grade for the academic year 2018/2019.

### **3.3 The sample of the study**

The sample in this study was 50 ESP students, who were chosen from two departments to test the errors and difficulties in using relative pronouns during the first semester of the academic year 2018 / 2019.

### **3.4. The Instrument of the Research**

The purpose of this study was to find out the errors and difficulties committed by ESP learners in using relative pronouns and to describe the types and causes of these errors. This includes why they commit those errors and how often these errors occur. The researcher constructed the following instruments.

#### **a. Written test**

The research designed the test concerning relative pronouns. He gave the written test to the ESP students. The test paper was formed into three kinds of questions: filling in the blanks, correcting errors and sentence combination, varied types of question can guarantee data collected is objective and real, and more persuasive, each question contains 10 items, so the total test was 30 items.

#### **b. An interview**

The researcher used the interview to notice the errors and difficulties facing the ESP learners and find the causes for misusing relative pronouns; and reasons for getting these mistakes.

The interview also was held with English teachers specialized to ESP students' difficulties and the factors that cause their difficulties. The researcher has taken his records during the interview as the result of the interview.

### **3.5. The Procedures**

The researcher designed the test. Before he distributed it to the students, he informed them about the purpose of the test to take their agreement and which time is suitable for them to do the test. Then he distributed copies to 50 students. The test was held in the second semester for the academic year 2018-2019.

The students achieve the test in the classroom. They are given 30 minutes for completing the test. The researcher calculates the errors using simple statistic formula. Their scores were processed statistically to reveal the results in terms of tables.

### **3.6. The Pilot Study**

To examine the appropriateness of the test items as well as their validity and reliability, the test was applied on a random sample of (30) students; in the second semester of the academic year (2018-2019). The results were registered and analyzed statistically and then the necessary revisions and recommendations were made in the light of the statistical results.

### **3.7. Validity and Reliability**

Validity indicates how well a test measures what is intended to be measured. Bond (2003, p. 179) When the researcher tended to design the test, he consulted the supervisor. The validity of the test is that the tool should measure the exact aim for which it had been designed.

The test was reviewed by two experts in the field of teaching English to guarantee validity. The test items were checked and evaluated by them. The validity coefficient was 0.08. Reliability is essentially concerned with measurement error (McDowell & Newell 1996, p. 37). The researcher calculates the reliability coefficient of the scale used in the test by alpha equation and the results was 0.647

## **4. Results and Discussion**

### **4.1. Data Analysis**

The current study aimed at analyzing the errors and difficulties that encounter the ESP students in using relative pronouns (Who, whose, whom, which, and that).

Based on the test given to the students, there were some errors and difficulties faced by ESP students these errors are identified and classified statistically. After categorizing the errors, they were quantified according to their frequency of occurrence. The following tables show the students response according to the test questions.

Table.4.1. Error Statistics of Fill in the blanks Questions

<b>Item</b>	<b>Types of Errors</b>	<b>Frequency of Error</b>	<b>Percentage of Errors</b>
1	Answer with Who	3	10%
2	Answer with Whose	5	25%
3	Answer with Whom	13	65%
4	Answer with Which	6	30%
5	Answer with That	12	50%
6	Answer with Who	4	18%
7	Answer with Whose	5	25%
8	Answer with Whom	13	65%
9	Answer with Which	7	25%
10	Answer with That	8	40%
	Total	76	36.5%

The result of the table shows the results of student errors on fill in the blanks questions. The total average of error was 76. The lowest averages Percentage errors are seen on the item 1 and 6 in the use of the pronoun "who" with 10%. While the highest average percentage errors were in the use of "whom "with 65%.

Table 4.2. Error Statistics of Sentence Combination Questions

<b>Item</b>	<b>Types of Errors</b>	<b>Frequency of Error</b>	<b>Percentage of Errors</b>
1	Answer with Which	11	50%
2	Answer with Whom	17	80%
3	Answer with Whose	9	55%
4	Answer with who	5	25%
5	Answer with that	10	45%
6	Answer with Whose	9	42%
7	Answer with Whom	17	85%
8	Answer with Who	5	25%
9	Answer with Which	10	45%
10	Answer with That	10	25%
Total		103	53%

The result of the table above shows the result of the percentage of student’s errors in using relative pronouns on sentence combinations questions. From 10 items in question 2, there are 103 errors or in percentage 53%. The students made many errors in these questions and they find many difficulties to join the two sentences by choosing the suitable pronoun especially with "whom".

Table 4. 3. Error Statistics of correcting Sentence errors Questions

<b>Item</b>	<b>Types of Errors</b>	<b>Frequency of Error</b>	<b>Percentage of Errors</b>
1	Answer with Which	5	25%
2	Answer with that	7	30%
3	Answer with Who	5	25%
4	Answer with Whom	11	65%
5	Answer with who	3	10%
6	Answer with Whom	15	70%
7	Answer with Whose	9	55%
8	Answer with Which	8	40%
9	Answer with that	10	55%
10	Answer with Whose	8	30%
	<b>Total</b>	<b>89</b>	<b>45%</b>

The table describes the frequency of students’ errors in correcting sentence errors according to the third question .The highest frequency of errors occurred in using the relative pronoun ": Whom:" with 15 errors the next relative pronoun "which and that" with 10 and 7 errors respectively.

Table 4. 4. The Summary of Total Error of the Test

<b>Table</b>	<b>Questions' items</b>	<b>Frequency of Error</b>	<b>The Average Percentage of Error</b>
1	10	76	36.5%
2	10	103	53 %
3	10	89	45 %
	<b>Total</b>		<b>55.5%</b>

This table shows the results of the 30 items for the three questions. The average of error of the first question was 36.5% and the average errors of the second question were 53%, while the total average for the third question was 45.5%.

Table 4.5. Error Statistics of Relative Pronouns for the Three Tables

<b>Total errors</b>	<b>Results of Table</b>				
	<b>4.1</b>	<b>4.2</b>	<b>4.3</b>		
	who	whom	whose	which	that

<b>Frequency of Error</b>	14	46	18	30	34
<b>Percentage of Errors</b>	8%	55.55%	30%	27.5%	40..5%

The table shows the students' error on using relative pronouns for the above three tables. The highest percentage of error is 55.55% on the use of "whom", and 40. % in the use of "that ", and lower than that, there is a 30% percentage in the use of "whose". On the other hand, the lowest percentage can be seen in the use of "who" and "which ", as the percentage errors were 25%, and 27.5% respectively.

#### **4.1.1. Interview Results**

From the interview, it was discovered that the ESP students faced difficulties in using relative pronouns. They were asked a few questions. The questions were based on relative pronouns. Most of the ESP students 'responses showed that the lack of the material in the textbook is of the problems, and the deficiency of background knowledge about relative pronouns causes their awkwardness. They never learn how to use them in their correct position. On the other hand, students get difficulty in learning relative pronouns related to the methods that are used by the teacher, it might be less interesting for them.

#### **4.2. Discussions**

From the explanation of results analysis, the researcher concludes that ESP students' committed many errors in using the relative pronouns.

The students committed errors in all the types of relative pronouns. The extreme frequent problem facing ESP learners, as specified, in the mentioned tables, is the inappropriate use of relative pronouns. Most of the students made errors in the use of "whom" in answering the three questions. The total errors were 46 with a percentage of 55.55% .This percentage of students' errors in using relative pronoun "whom".is the highest percentage of error of all other relative pronouns.

On the other hand, some students used the relative clause "who" at the correct place. The total errors were 14 with 8%, which means that the students have no problem in using the relative pronoun" who" in answering the three questions. In return we found the students committed errors in using "whose", the total errors were 18 with a 30% percentage.

Finally, students were confused about using "which" and "that", they found difficulties in using "that" more than "which". The total errors in using "that" were 30 with 41.4% percentage, while the total errors in using "which" were 18 and 30%percentage.

### **5. Conclusion &Recommendations**

#### **5.1. Conclusion**

This study investigates the error problems that encounter ESP students in using relative pronouns (who, whom, which, whose, that). The researcher put his conclusion about ESP students 'errors and difficulties in using relative pronoun of and the reasons for committing these errors.

After analyzing the errors, it had been found that relative pronouns errors committed by the participants of this study were due to the confusion in using relative pronouns by using the wrong relative pronoun because most of the ESP learners haven't enough knowledge of grammar

Most of the ESP students' errors were in the use of "which" .The average errors of the test are 55.55%., it is the high percentage error committed. Besides, a high percentage of error is also seen on the relative clause "which and that" with the average of errors 40.5%.by using the wrong relative pronoun.

#### **5.2. Recommendation**

According to the findings discussed above, there are some recommendations

##### **For the Students**

1. Students should pay more attention, and practices themselves in using relative pronouns.
2. Students have to learn and understand the concept of relative pronouns carefully.



3. Students should do more exercises and memorizing how to use the function of each relative pronoun (which, who, whom, that, where).

#### **For the teacher**

1. The teachers should pay much attention to the students' difficulties in using relative pronouns.
2. The teacher should give clear idea and more detailed explanation in the each of relative pronouns and enriched students' knowledge with more examples
4. ESP teachers should have a rich knowledge of relative clauses by using different methods in teaching this activity

#### **5.3. Suggestion for Further Studies**

Based on the findings the researcher suggests the followings:-

1. Other studies can be performed on the same object with different levels at schools and colleges.
2. A similar study can be conducted to see the effect of direct correction on errors made by learners in using other activities.
3. A similar study can be made about the types of relative clauses and their functions.

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