



English Grammatical Morphemes Acquisition by Young EFL Learners

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This study explored the grammatical morpheme acquisition patterns of Saudi EFL learners, focusing on their alignment with Krashen's Natural Order Hypothesis (NOH). Conducted in a private primary school in Saudi Arabia, the study involved 11 randomly selected fifth-grade students who wrote essays to elicit morpheme usage. Using a qualitative approach, the analysis revealed high accuracy in progressive -ing and plural -s, supporting NOH predictions. However, third-person singular and possessive -s posed challenges, likely influenced by the learners' first language (L1, Arabic). These findings underscore the interplay between L1 transfer and second language acquisition, highlighting areas where instructional strategies can support learner development. Despite the small sample size, the study offers valuable, context-specific insights into the interplay between L1 transfer and second language acquisition, providing a foundation for targeted teaching strategies. Future research with larger and more diverse samples could validate these patterns and deepen understanding of L1's role in morpheme acquisition. This study contributes to the field by offering insights to inform curriculum design and targeted teaching interventions for young EFL learners.

Keywords: English as a foreign language, grammatical morphemes, morpheme acquisition order, natural order hypothesis, second language acquisition (SLA)

INTRODUCTION

The study of morphemes involves investigating the order of acquisition of grammatical morphemes by first-(L1) and second-language (L2) learners. The central objective of these studies was to determine whether those learners acquire the morphemes in a universal pattern (Algie, 2024; Farid et al., 2023; Akbaş & Ölçü-Dinçer, 2021; Luk & Shirai, 2009; de Villiers & de Villiers, 1973; Brown, 1973). Generally, researchers agree that the existence of grammatical sequences is unsurprising, given that language acquisition is intricately tied to cognitive development (Lin, 2023; White, 2021; Lightbown & Spada, 2013). Contrary to that, language acquisition patterns of L2 learners present compelling arguments that existing linguistics have the potential to

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impede L2 acquisition and shape developmental sequences. However, the learners' L1 is expected to influence the morpheme acquisition order (Kanwal et al., 2022).

In Saudi Arabia, English is taught as a foreign language and has received high positioning from the Saudi government (Alharbi, 2024; Al-Seghayer, 2023; Abu, 2023; Alharbi, 2021; Alkathiri, 2020; Alnasser, 2018). The primary objective of the current study was to ascertain the sequence of grammatical morpheme acquisition among fifth-grade students who were native Arabic speakers and were enrolled in an international school at that time. The study of natural orders was first introduced by Brown (1973), who contributed significantly to the development of L2 acquisition, particularly the acquisition of grammatical morphemes in L1. The second objective was to determine whether students' L1 influences L2 morpheme acquisition order. The assumption based on Krashen's theory is that any use of L1 determines second language learning (Kanwal et al., 2022; Ahmad et al., 2018). Nevertheless, it has been noted that learners' L1 can lead to variations in the patterns that influence L2 grammatical morpheme acquisition order (Seog, 2015; Larsen-Freeman & Long, 2014). Subsequently, the Natural Order Hypothesis (NOH), inspired by Krashen (1985) was established in the field of Second Language Acquisition (SLA) field. While the research on grammatical morphemes of Saudi EFL shows some alignment with Krashen's order, there are some factors leading to a notable difference. Factors such as education, culture, and linguistic background may lead to predictable acquisition patterns among Saudi students (Mohammed & Sanosi, 2018; Al-Nasser, 2015). One significant difference that could lead to a delay in the acquisition of grammatical morphemes is the absence of certain grammatical features, such as verb tenses. Drawing upon the constructivism theory, this study explores Saudi's acquisition pattern of grammatical morphemes.

To the best of the researchers' knowledge, only some studies of grammatical morphemes within the context of Saudi Arabia have been carried out to discover the sequence of morpheme acquisition and the possible influence of Arabic (the learners' first language) on this acquisition. Furthermore, there needs to be more research in Saudi Arabia regarding learners from specific educational contexts. Therefore, this study aimed to investigate the accuracy order of morphemes among Saudi EFL learners enrolled in primary-level private schools and the influence, if any, of their L1 on this acquisition. Therefore, this study seeks to answer the following questions.

- Does grammatical morpheme order appear in students' writing similarly to Krashen's study?
- Does students' L1 influence the order of morpheme acquisition?

Literature Review

The prevalence of the term "constructivism" in education emerges because of its reference to both learning theory and epistemology—the fundamental concepts surrounding how individuals learn and the nature of knowledge. Constructivism is the belief that learners create a new understanding by combining non-traditional information with prior knowledge (Alanazi, 2016).

In previous centuries, Piaget recognized children's play as a crucial component of students' cognitive growth and supported his stance with scientific evidence (Piaget, 1964). The pioneers who influenced constructivism include John Dewey (1859–1952); Maria Montessori (1870–1952); Władysław Strzemiński (1893–1952); Jean Piaget (1896–1980), Lev Vygotsky (1896–1934); Heinz von Foerster (1911–2002); Jerome Bruner (1915-); Herbert Simon (1916–2001); Paul Watzlawick (1921–2007); Ernst von Glasersfeld (1917–2010) and Edgar Morin (1921-). It is crucial to refer to some of them and indicate how their thinking affects theory.

One key figure in constructivist theory is Jean Piaget. He suggested that through the processes of accommodation and assimilation, individuals construct new knowledge from their experiences (Zajda & Zajda, 2021). When people assimilate, they add new experiences to their existing understanding without altering them. Accommodation, on the other hand, involves adjusting one's mental representation of the outside world to fit new experiences. Accommodation can be viewed as a way of learning from failure, whereas we learn from our own or other people's failures by adapting to new experiences and reframing our understanding of how the world operates (Netti et al., 2016).

Piaget's theory of cognitive development examines the different stages of children's development. Although he did not directly link his research to education, his theory is significant for learning (Ahmedi et al., 2023). Constructivism is not a specific teaching method. Rather, it explains how individuals learn, irrespective of whether they comprehend lectures based on their experiences or assemble a model airplane, according to the following instructions: According to constructivism theory, learners develop knowledge by constructing it from their experiences in both scenarios. However, constructivism is often associated with pedagogical approaches that promote active learning through learning-by-doing (Zajda & Zajda, 2021). In this study, the findings contribute to the broader field of second language acquisition by indicating the last morphemes acquired by Saudi EFL students to indicate practical pedagogical approaches to promote students' acquisition of some morphemes.

Vygotsky (1978) believed that social interaction played a crucial role in the acquisition of knowledge. When people work with others, they create shared understandings with their peers. This helped them adapt their subjective interpretations and become socially accepted. Vygotsky believed that culture plays a significant role in cognitive development. People are born with basic abilities that are enhanced through interactions with others. These abilities eventually develop into sophisticated mental processes. For example, a child is born with the ability to memorize information. However, this ability improves through interactions with the environment and peers. If a child is in a learning environment that emphasizes the use of flashcards, they use similar methods of repetition to improve their memory.

Although Piaget's theory asserts cognitive development, Vygotsky (1978) theory of social development emphasizes the importance of learning with the help of a More Knowledgeable Other (instructor). Figure 1 shows that the instructor offers the most support in the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), the area between what the student

already knows and a new concept that cannot be mastered without the help of the instructor.

A Graphic Displaying the Pieces of Vygotsky's Social Development Theory

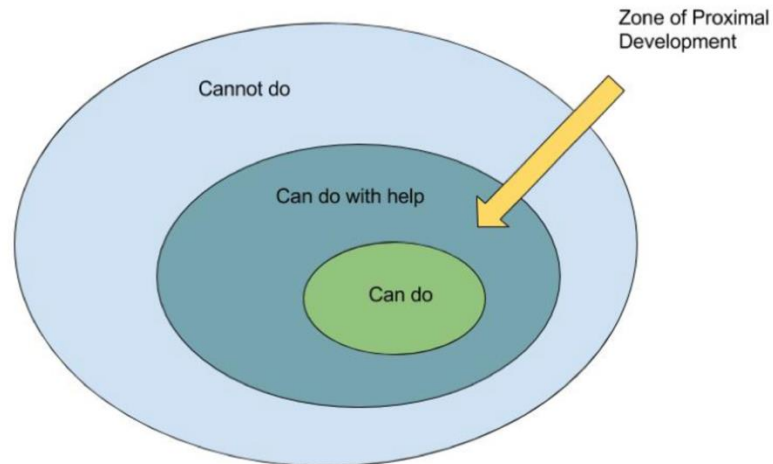


Figure 1

Illustration of the Zone of Proximal Development ZPD Doolittle (1995, p. 25)

John Dewey's perspective combines Piaget's focus on the cognitive aspects of constructivism with Vygotsky's focus on social learning. Dewey stated that learners who engage in real-world activities can demonstrate higher levels of knowledge through creativity and collaboration (Behling & Hart, 2008; Cook & Cook, 1993; Odlin, 1989). One of Dewey's most recognized quotes is: "If you have doubts about how learning happens, engage in sustained inquiry: study, ponder, consider alternative possibilities and arrive at your belief grounded in evidence" (Reese, 2013, p. 320).

Constructivism follows a building block learning approach. When learners use their previous knowledge to construct new meanings, they develop new learning processes. Vygotsky emphasizes the importance of social interactions during this process. The principles of constructive theory are as follows:

- Knowledge is actively constructed through interactions.
- Learning is an organizational, individual, and social process.
- Learning is based on personal experiences.
- The concept of reality is based on individual interpretation.
- Learning is socially situated and enhanced through meaningful context.
- Language plays an essential role in learning (sharing as knowledge sharing occurs through communication).
- Motivation is key to learning.

Schools of Constructivism: In the Following Figure Is Clarification of Schools' Constructivism

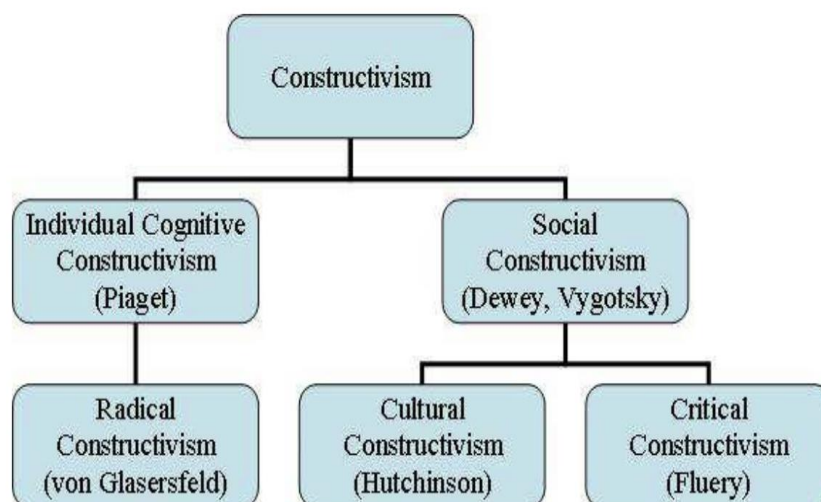


Figure 2
School of constructivism (Brown, 1973)

There is widespread misunderstanding of the constructivist approach, which assumes that teachers do not impart information to students. However, according to constructivist theorists, all new knowledge is built upon prior knowledge regardless of the method of instruction. Therefore, even when listening to the teacher, students actively construct new knowledge (Zajda & Zajda, 2021).

Studies of morpheme acquisition show that L2 learning is a gradual process of acquiring target language rules and structures over an extended period (Mansouri, 2009; Jarvis, 2002). The following sections discuss the fundamental concepts and perspectives of Morpheme Order Acquisition (MAO) studies.

In *A First Language: The Early Stages*, Brown (1973) studied 14 grammatical morphemes of L1 English acquisition in three children. He found that the development patterns were similar among the three children. Likewise, de Villiers and de Villiers (1973) conducted a similar study of these morphemes. Importantly, their findings are similar to those of Brown (1973). These two studies provide powerful support for the hypothesis of a universally predictable MAO.

However, several studies of grammatical morphemes have been conducted to investigate the grammatical factors of L2 learners. Three studies by Dulay and Burt (1972, 1973, and 1974) investigated the universal regularities in child SLA. Regardless of their first language background, children similarly reconstruct English syntax (Ellis, 2006; Dulay & Burt, 1974).

Krashen grouped the morphemes with similar accuracy scores into a single rank. Based on his analysis, he proposed the concept and termed it the “natural order hypothesis” (Krashen, 1982, p. 12). Figure 3 illustrates the order in which English L2 learners acquired grammatical morphemes.

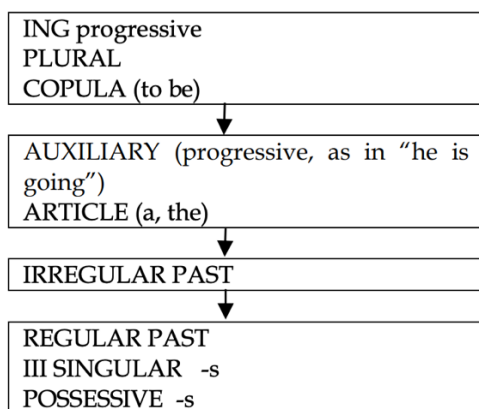


Figure 3

Average order of acquisition of grammatical morphemes for English as a second language (Children and adults) Source: Krashen, 1982, p. 13.

As it is noted, Krashen (1982) categorized morphemes into boxes and suggested that those in the same box are typically acquired before those in the next box. However, he does not make any assertions regarding the order of acquisition within the same box. Consequently, this sequence appears to be more adaptable and produces comparable outcomes in subsequent studies.

From a critical point of view, Bakti and Ali (2023) asserted that while Krashen’s framework offers a useful structure, it is limited in its scope, neglecting how learners’ L1 and other linguistics phenomenon may influence the L2 acquisition.

A study conducted by Akbaş and Ölçü-Dinçer (2021) on the accuracy order of L2 grammatical morphemes deviated from Krashen (1977) natural order. This study found that both L1 proficiency and overall grammatical proficiency affected the order of grammatical morpheme accuracy. This study supports the findings of previous studies (Sabbilla & Miftachudin, 2022; Suriyapee, 2021; Seog, 2015; Demarta Dabove, 2014).

Another study examined the acquisition of eight English morphemes by L1 Arabic and L1 Indonesian learners speaking English as a second language. The acquisition sequences of the two groups were only partially similar to that of the NOH proposal, indicating an L1 transfer. This deviation suggests a weaker form of NOH, suggesting that the Natural Order only affects specific morphemes. These findings confirm the existence of L1 transfer during L2 acquisition and provide a new perspective on the interplay between L1 and L2 morpheme acquisition. The findings suggested that the Natural Order Hypothesis (NOH) may not apply to all morphemes (Farid et al., 2023; Kidd & Garcia, 2022; Gass et al., 2020).

Similarly, Abbasi et al. (2023) explored the order of the acquisition of grammatical morphemes among young Sindhi ESL students. Using a mixed-methods research design, they integrated exploratory and descriptive qualitative methods to analyze students' essay writing. This study indicates that the acquisition of grammatical morphemes is influenced by L1.

METHOD

Methodology refers to the various methods used by researchers to collect, analyze, and interpret data (Creswell & Creswell, 2017). Hence, the present study seeks to investigate morphemes' order of accuracy by Saudi EFL learners. Data were collected via written essays following a qualitative approach. According to Blaxter et al. (2010), documents can be a valuable methodological tool. The use of a qualitative approach in the current study contributes to the understanding of the patterns of morpheme acquisition, which provides insights into tailor teaching strategies to prioritize what morphemes should be taught and learned in the Saudi context. The data were manually analyzed by the researchers. To determine the scores, the researchers assessed the proper use of morphemes and noted instances of incorrect usage or overgeneralization. Correct responses were assigned a score of 1. A quantitative tool was used to present the percentage of the morphemes to support the qualitative findings.

Sampling

Eleven female students enrolled in grade 5 from primary schools in Saudi Arabia participated in the study. The participants in the present study were selected non-randomly because, as Creswell (2014) indicated, qualitative research follows purposeful rather than random sampling. This technique allows researchers to understand the research questions and problems. The study was conducted during the first semester of the academic year 2023. The students attended an intense English language course, with at least nine classes per week.

Data Collection and Data Analysis Procedures

The major source of data was the students' essays. The essays were collected and manually analyzed by the researchers. Students were asked to write about three familiar topics: the past, present, and future. The reason for choosing a variety of choices was to give students the chance to write freely and achieve accurate results. As highlighted by Creswell (2007), accessing the field of study enables the researcher to stay in touch with the study participants. Therefore, the students wrote their essays during a forty-five-minute class session under the supervision of the researchers. The essay length was optional to ensure that the students freely expressed their thoughts. However, each student wrote about two topics that were one to two pages long. Microsoft Excel was used to create and present the data. The researchers evaluated the data to ensure its validity and reliability. Validity refers to the tools used to investigate the aims of the study. Reliability refers to the consistency of the findings obtained in the study. In presenting the findings, the researchers read the essays twice to familiarize themselves with the morphemes included in the samples. Then, the morphemes were classified under categories as presented in Krashen's order of acquisition.

To determine the order of morpheme acquisition and the percentage of their use, the students' essays were meticulously analyzed. The morphemes were identified and categorized according to the eight grammatical categories based on Krashen's Natural Order Hypothesis: **articles**, **auxiliary**, **-ing progressive**, **irregular past**, **plural -s**, **possessive -s**, **regular past**, and **third-person singular**. The following process was employed to ensure accuracy and reliability:

1. **Identification of Morphemes:** Each essay was thoroughly reviewed to locate instances of grammatical morphemes within the provided text. These morphemes were then classified into their respective categories.
2. **Counting Morphemes:** The total occurrences of each morpheme category were manually counted. For example, all instances of plural -s and auxiliary verbs were noted and tallied across the entire dataset.
3. **Calculating Totals:** After all categories were reviewed, the total count of morphemes across all categories was computed. In this study, the total number of morphemes observed was 454.
4. **Percentage Calculation:** To calculate the percentage of each morpheme category, the number of occurrences in each category was divided by the total number of morphemes and then multiplied by 100.
5. **Representation of Data:** The results were organized in a table format to present a clear overview of the morpheme counts and percentages across all categories. Table 1 below summarizes the data:

Table 1

Morphemes statistics

Categories	Morphemes' count	Percentage
articles	66	14.54%
auxiliary	68	14.98%
ing progressive	89	19.60%
irregular past	77	16.96%
plural -s	78	17.18%
Possessive -s	0	0.00%
regular past	58	12.78%
third person singular	18	3.96%
Grand Total	454	100.00%

FINDINGS

The findings of this study showed that **progressive -ing** was the most frequently used morpheme, accounting for **19.60% (89 counts)** of the total morphemes observed. This was followed by **plural -s**, which constituted **17.18% (78 counts)**, and **irregular past tense**, which made up **16.96% (77 counts)**. **Auxiliaries** and **articles (a, an, and the)** were used with similar frequency, representing **14.98% (68 counts)** and **14.54% (66 counts)**, respectively. The **regular past tense** contributed **12.78% (58 counts)** of the total morphemes. However, **third-person singular -s** was among the least used, with

only **3.96% (18 counts)**, while **possessive -s** was entirely absent from the samples, comprising **0.00% (0 counts)**.

These results indicate that **progressive -ing** and **plural -s** were the most commonly used morphemes, aligning with Krashen’s Natural Order Hypothesis, which predicts that these morphemes are among the earliest acquired. Conversely, morphemes like **third-person singular -s** and **possessive -s** appeared less frequently or not at all, likely reflecting the influence of the students’ first language (L1) and its grammatical structure.

The morphemes were manually identified and categorized into eight grammatical categories. After analyzing all essays, the total number of morphemes across all categories was **454**. Each category’s percentage was calculated as the proportion of its count relative to this total. For example, **progressive -ing** had 89 counts, resulting in **19.60%** of the total morphemes:

Figure 4 and Table 1 present these findings, highlighting that morphemes such as **progressive -ing**, **plural -s**, and **irregular past tense** were consistently used, while others, such as **possessive -s**, were entirely absent. These results emphasize the need for targeted instructional strategies to address less frequently acquired morphemes like **third-person singular -s** and **possessive -s**.

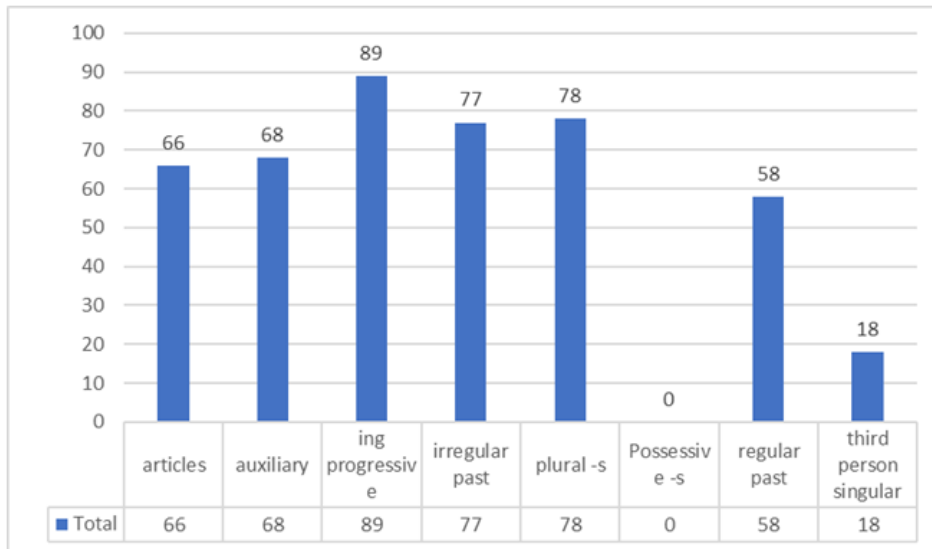


Figure 4
Morphemes Counts used by the participants

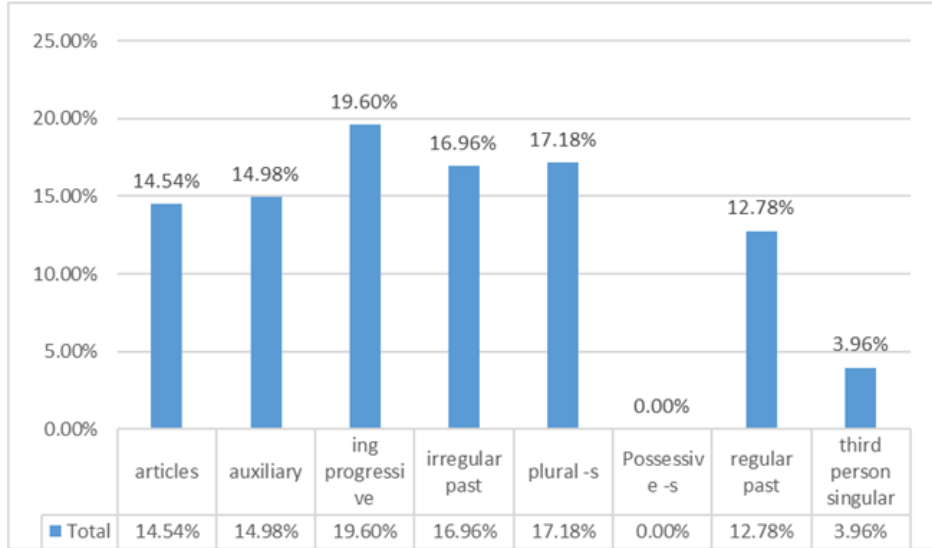


Figure 5
Morphemes percentage used by the participants

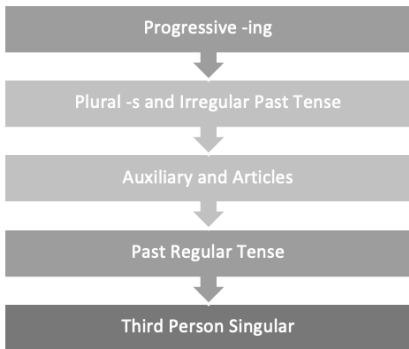


Figure 6
Illustration of the grammatical morphemes counts from the students' samples

As seen in Figure 6, progressive ing indicates ongoing actions. Students used progressive ing in their essays. The results of the present study showed that almost all students used progress in their written samples in correct structures (19.60% with 89 counts). For example:

- Student (A): I love going to the park with my friends.
- Student (G): Playing hide and seek is my favorite.

Furthermore, a large number of the students indicated the correct form of the plural -s (17.18% with 78 counts) and the use of auxiliaries (14.98% with 68 counts) and articles

(14.54 with 66 counts). In English, the plural is constructed by adding -s or -es as singular nouns. An auxiliary refers to a verb when it functions as a helping verb. Articles include a, an, and. The following sentences address the use of the abovementioned morphemes.

- Student (A): I met with my friends. We bought some candies and A lollipop.
- Student (B): My sisters and I goed to the park yesterday. The weather was nice.
- Student (C): She was so annoying. So you know I left early.
- Student (D): ... In the library, and I asked for a story book.

Surprisingly, 16.96% of the samples indicated the correct form of the irregular past tense (77 counts), equal to the use of the plural -s in their samples. Irregular past tense refers to verbs that cannot be formed by adding ed. This high ranking may be due to the intensive nature of the English curriculum in private schools. However, it can be argued that the students acquired the irregular past tense earlier than the regular past tense. However, some mistakes can appear as the learners add to form the past tense, such as goed in their written samples, as in the student (B) sample.

Nevertheless, the final morphemes to be acquired are the possessive -s and third-person singular -s. In the present tense, when the subject of the verb is a singular noun or 3rd person singular, -s should be added to the verb that follows the subject. Only 3.96% of the students demonstrated the use of the third-person singular in their essays (18 counts), and none of them used possessive -s. For example:

- Student (C): Every day, she talks during the classes.
- Student (F): My dad prays at Masjed.
- Student (G): We play together. We share our breakfast.
- Student (E): She play with us every day.... My dad work in bank.

According to the results, the order of the morphemes appeared to be similar to Krashen's order regarding students' previous knowledge. However, the findings also indicated that students' L1 impacted the order of the morphemes. For example, a third singular person is the least common morpheme. Possessive -s usage was absent in all the written samples. Although it consists of the order of morphemes that Krashen suggests, there is a possible impact of learners' L1 on the absence of possessive -s. For example, student (E) could not use the third person singular properly in her sentences (she plays with us every day, my dad works in the bank). Therefore, the transfer of Arabic language into students' writing may hinder their ability to acquire this morpheme. Additionally, Arabic verbs maintain their form regardless of the subject, unlike English verbs, which add -s to third-person singular subjects (e.g., she plays, he works).

Furthermore, the findings reveal significant differences between high and low achievers in the correct order of morpheme acquisition, highlighting the variation in how students process and internalize grammatical rules. High-achieving students demonstrated a more consistent use of morphemes, such as third-person singular and irregular past tense, indicating their ability to recognize and apply exceptions to general grammatical rules. Conversely, low-achieving students frequently overgeneralized regular rules (e.g.,

using "goed" instead of "went") and focused on simpler morphemes like progressive -ing and plural -s (see Figure 7).

Morpheme Type	High Achievers	Low Achievers
Progressive -ing	✓ Consistent use	✓ Frequent use
Plural -s	✓ Accurate use	✓ Some errors
Third-person -s	✓ Occasional use	✗ Rarely used
Possessive -s	✗ Limited use	✗ No use

Figure 7

Comparison between high-achievers and low-achievers in the use of some morphemes

These differences suggest that high achievers may benefit from advanced, context-driven activities that challenge their understanding, such as error analysis exercises or problem-solving tasks that require distinguishing regular and irregular forms. For low achievers, foundational reinforcement is critical, emphasizing the use of structured, repetitive drills and visual aids to solidify the basics. Differentiated instructional strategies, such as small-group interventions or leveled practice exercises, can help bridge these gaps. By addressing individual learning needs, teachers can create more equitable opportunities for students to progress in their acquisition of grammatical morphemes.

High-achieving students used all morphemes in their writing samples, while low-achieving students used selected morphemes, such as -ing, auxiliaries, articles, and plural -s. However, this finding posits that attention in the curriculum should prioritize certain grammatical structures. For example, as shown in Figures 4 and 5, none of the students attempted to use possessive s.

One remarkable finding is that most students used the past tense accurately. They were able to differentiate between regular and irregular past tenses. Moreover, they were aware of the tense that they had to use. Consequently, they use the past tense to talk about something that happened in the past. In contrast, some of the students used the present tense instead of the past (e.g., "go" instead of "went") like in student (E) essay "Last week I go to the mall" instead of "Last week I went to the mall," or they used regular past tense where irregular past tense should be included. For example, student (B) wrote "My sisters and I goed to the park" instead of "My sisters and I went to the park."

Thus, students may become confused when applying past irregularities to regular verb forms. The complexity of past English forms must be addressed in greater detail in the curriculum. However, this indicates the variables between student levels when using these morphemes.

DISCUSSION

This study investigated the morpheme order used by grade 5 students in essay writing. The students' written essay results correlate with Krashen's (1977) order of use of grammatical morphemes, which shows a consistent pattern in acquiring grammatical morphemes. In addition, the order shown in the results reflects the impact of learners' L1, indicating its significant role in SLA. This aligns with the conclusions of Abbasi et al. (2023) and Farid et al. (2023) regarding the effect of L1 on morpheme acquisition. Additionally, Bakti and Ali (2023) and Wong (2020) highlighted the significant impact of learners' L1 on their SLA. In this regard, while some learners followed predictable patterns, the variation in the acquired morphemes can be related to the students' L1. Meticulously, Arabic does not have equivalent morphemes, which may delay the acquisition of some English morphemes, such as third-person singular.

The high percentage of usage of the irregular past tense, despite its complexity, can be attributed to the learners' educational environment, which involves an intensive English curriculum. In other words, the extensiveness of teaching English in private schools accelerates the development of certain morphemes (e.g., irregular past tense). This significant effect on the acquisition of grammatical morphemes within the educational context is in line with Hulstijn (2015) argument regarding the impact of input type on L2 acquisition. This finding further correlates with Larsen-Freeman and Long (2014) assertion that learners' progress does not only involve developments in their cognitive abilities but also their linguistic background.

In addition, Studies by Kidd and Garcia (2022) and Akbaş and Ölçü-Dinçer (2021) claim that the morphemes acquisition is not fixed and changes according to the educational context. This evidence is further supported by the present study, which shows that the acquisition of a third-person singular and possessive indicates that Krashen's hypothesis may not address the influence of L1, acknowledging the nuanced prospect of the Natural Order Hypothesis.

Luk and Shirai (2009) revealed the acquisition of possessive -s with L1 Japanese and Korean as it has a distinct function in the English language, which, in this way, is acquired earlier than predicted by Krashen's order. This result contradicts the current study conclusion demonstrating the significant difference in structure between Arabic and English languages leading to the delay in acquiring possessive -s. This result was supported by Al-Nasser (2015) who ascertained that the differences between the Arabic language and the English language in areas such as structure and writing system can contribute to the learners' obstacles with the grammatical morphemes learning.

Furthermore, it can be said that the findings of the current study support the assertion that EFL learners sharing the same L1 background and learning environment follow a predetermined order in their morphemes acquisition. This idea is consistent with Mohammed and Sanosi (2018) who indicated that the acquisition of grammatical morphemes, particularly articles, is significantly influenced by Saudi learners' L1, which poses a major challenge as the Arabic language shapes the acquisition patterns.

According to the findings, possessive -s, which were absent from students' essays, may receive further priority within English classes. While the irregular past was shown according to the order of morphemes by 16.96% of the samples, some mistakes were indicated in the student samples. However, low-achieving students sometimes inserted a regular form instead of an irregular one when needed. For example, student (B) wrote "My sisters and I goed to the park." The use of 'goed' instead of 'went' in this sentence highlights the varying levels of grammatical proficiency among students within the same classroom. This indicates that while some students have mastered the correct usage of irregular past tense forms, others are still in the process of learning and tend to overgeneralize regular verb conjugation rules. These differences in proficiency levels suggest that students progress at different rates in their language acquisition journey, even when exposed to the same instructional environment. This result is consistent with those of previous studies by Demarta Dabove (2014) and Seog (2015), indicating that proficiency levels affect the order of morpheme acquisition. However, overgeneralization is a normal part of the students' learning process, as they would apply the regular forms before identifying and mastering exceptions.

This study has some limitations. First, the sample size was not sufficiently large to allow accurate statistical measurements, thereby restricting the generalizability of the findings. However, this focused group allowed for an in-depth qualitative analysis of morpheme acquisition patterns among young Saudi EFL learners. The detailed insights gained from this cohort provide a foundation for understanding how first language (L1) influences second language (L2) acquisition in a specific educational and linguistic context. Small-scale studies like this are particularly valuable in highlighting nuanced patterns that may not be immediately apparent in larger, more generalized datasets. By shedding light on specific challenges such as the acquisition of third-person singular and possessive -s, this research contributes meaningful insights to inform teaching strategies tailored to similar contexts." These limitations are consistent with the broader challenges faced by morpheme acquisition studies, as highlighted by Farid et al. (2023). They proposed a more nuanced perspective on the Natural Order Hypothesis. Another limitation is the time constraint. Observing students' writing progress requires adequate time. Short-time research may not capture a nuanced understanding of the learner's development, particularly the least acquired morphemes. Third, this study did not compare student differences in achieving these percentages. Examining students' barriers to language may provide richer insights into how these morphemes are acquired and used. Nevertheless, it is important to acknowledge that some of the students' mistakes are normal, as they vary in their learning process. Hence, the findings may guide future research to consider how low-achieving students differ from high-achieving students in the acquisition of these morphemes. Additionally, educators may focus on certain morphemes, such as possessive -s and third-person singular -s, by implementing various methods, such as interactive exercises to identify these gaps. For example, teachers could design exercises where students describe scenarios involving ownership to practice possessive -s (e.g., "This is Sara's book."). Similarly, daily routines or role-play activities could help reinforce third-person singular usage (e.g., "He plays soccer every afternoon."). Interactive games, like matching objects to possessive phrases or filling in blanks in sentences, may help engage students while

addressing these gaps. By tailoring teaching methods to these specific needs, educators can foster a more inclusive and effective learning environment that accommodates varying proficiency levels.

CONCLUSION

This study examines the grammatical morpheme order acquired by young Saudi EFL students. It provides evidence that Krashen's (1977) order of acquiring grammatical morphemes is verifiable, which indicates the answer to the first research question. Investigating the grammatical morpheme orders in specific educational contexts showed another significant difference in the students' ability to use irregular past tense before the regular past tense in their writings. Regarding the second research question, the investigation of the grammatical morphemes in the present study draws attention to the notable transfer of L1. Studies have suggested that the Natural Order Hypothesis (NOH) may not apply to all morphemes, which is confirmed in the current study in the absence of possessive -s in the written samples. This finding suggests that curriculum designers should consider context-sensitive approaches to address the specific influences of L1, which can enhance language acquisition. Educators can support learners to overcome language-specific challenges. However, this study contributes to existing literature on the Natural Order Hypothesis by highlighting nuanced perspectives incorporating linguistic and cultural contexts.

The findings of the current study suggest that researchers should explore a broader sample of students and investigate longitudinal patterns, which can help understand the dynamics of morpheme acquisition. This study provides valuable insights that can enhance the instructional practices of educators teaching English as a foreign language. By identifying the order of grammatical morpheme acquisition, this study contributes to the knowledge of second-language acquisition among Arabic-speaking students in international schools. However, prioritizing instruction for specific morphemes can offer valuable insights for language educators. The findings of this study underscore the importance of context-sensitive curriculum designs to address morpheme acquisition challenges, particularly the difficulties with possessive -s and third-person singular forms. To enhance learning outcomes, educators are encouraged to implement practical strategies, such as interactive exercises and games, to target these morphemes specifically. For instance, using role-playing scenarios for third-person singular or object-matching activities for possessive -s can make the learning process more engaging and effective. By integrating such activities into English classes, teachers can bridge proficiency gaps and provide students with the tools needed to master these critical grammatical structures. Future research might focus on evaluating the efficacy of such methods to further refine instructional practices.

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