Language Attrition of Saudi ESL - and EFL-Trained Teachers: Articles and Prepositions

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Abstract. This paper reports the findings of an experiment designed to measure English language article and preposition attrition of twenty Saudi Arabian teachers of English as a foreign language. Ten of the subjects were trained in an ESL environment (the United Kingdom) and ten in an EFL environment (the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia). For each subject, two English-teaching classes were audio-taped. Deviations in the use of articles and prepositions are analyzed. The results indicate: (1) while previous attrition studies had suggested that preposition attrition is more prominent than that of other types of function words, such as articles, this was not the case in this study, where the two categories were attrited at basically the same rate, and (2) whether training environment is ESL or EFL did not appear to affect the manifested attrition of articles and prepositions since incidences and types of article and preposition errors were basically the same for both groups. A tentatively-offered conclusion of this study is that the more semantically-based an item is, the less likely it is to undergo attrition.

Weltens and Cohen write, "There is no question that far more work has been done on the learning of a second or foreign language than on its loss, and yet the loss of such languages is as common a phenomenon as is learning" [1, p. 132]. Language attrition/loss/regression/reversion/erosion (the terms are used interchangeably in the literature) occurs, Olshtain writes, whenever there is "a change in the linguistic environment" or "the termination of an [L2, second language] instructional program," either of which are "usually accompanied by a decrease in [L2] input and consequently in natural positive feedback, which are both necessary in order to maintain full competence in the second language" [2, pp. 151-52]. A country's educational administrators must be cognizant of the phenomenon of language attrition. Their teachers of a foreign language (for instance, of English in Saudi Arabia) are susceptible to manifestations of L2 erosion which will reduce their effectiveness as language teachers. What are some of the recent findings on language attrition which are relevant to educational administrators and L2 teachers?

Since 1980, when the first conference solely devoted to language attrition was held at the University of Pennsylvania [3], researchers have tried to identify the fac-

tors influencing SL/FL (second language/foreign language) regression. Various hypotheses based on empirical findings have been offered:

– No one instructional method, whether grammar/translation, audio-lingual, or communicative, seems to be better in preventing language regression [4].

– Attrition appears to occur more rapidly with young children than with adults [5; 6].

– Attrition is not determined by the original L2 proficiency level [7], although Neisser postulates that once a "critical threshold" of L2 acquisition is achieved, it become basically "immune to interference or decay" [8, p. 33].

– "Productive skills seem to suffer more [attrition] than receptive skills" [1, p. 129], and general language skills attrite less than lower-level language skills [9].

– Contradictory results have been noted concerning the time period after language study has ended when regression is manifested: Bahrick [7] found that attrition was severe during the first five or six years following instruction, and then leveled off, while Snow, Padilla and Campbell [10] and Weltens and Van Els [11] wrote that with high proficiency L2 learners for the first few years after language study has stopped, not much attrition is noticeable.

– L2 areas that contrast with L1 (first language) areas are more susceptible to attrition than those which are L2/L1 homogeneous, Andersen's [12] research revealed.

– Less used, less functional, and marked L2 elements are the first lost [12]; that is, attrition will take place in the peripheral rather than in the core linguistic areas, Cook [13] found.

– Language devices used by L2 subjects after returning to the L1 environment which attest to language attrition are progressive retrieval, the use of a general word, approximation, language switch, language transfer, word abandonment [6], paraphrase or circumlocution [14], and regularizing irregular L2 language features [2].

The most "hotly debated"issue in language attrition, Pons [15, p. 217] writes, is the theory (ultimately derived from Roman Jakobson's [16] classic 1968 study based on his work with aphasia sufferers) that the process of language attrition is the reverse of the language acquisition process. Sometimes termed "the *last learned-first out* hypothesis" [15, p. 217], it posits that "what is acquired latest will be lost earliest" and what is acquired earliest will be lost last [12, p. 97]. That is, attrition, like acquisition, should be regarded as a process that exhibits continuity, gradualness, and direction-

ality, Berko-Gleason [17] writes. However, as Weltens and Cohen state, "little research has actually tested the hypothesis" [1, p. 30].

One way of testing the *last learned-first out* hypothesis is by contrasting the attrition of elements of language which are learned early with the attrition of those which are learned late. This study set out to measure the attrition of two functional "closed-system items" [18, p. 19] of English as manifested by Arabic-native-speaking teachers of English in an Arabic-dominant environment. One of these, the article system, is componentially relatively simple and is acquired early, while the second, the preposition system, because of its complexity, is mastered late. On day one of their training, ESL/FL (English as a Second Language/Foreign Language) learners are typically introduced to the English article system, "the membership of which is so extremely small," Quirk and Greenbaum [18, p. 19] write. Furthermore, because of the pervasiveness of articles in English, students never escape from reinforcement of its four-part systematicness, *a, an, the, ϕ*, or of its two-part distinction between definiteness and indefiniteness [19].

However, the prepositional category in English lacks such numerical simplicity. Excluding archaic prepositions, such as *ere* and *saving*, there are "115 prepositions or phrases that act as prepositions" in common use in English, Hall [20, p. 4] writes, but these 115 have at least 347 different meanings (my compilation from Hall); for instance, the preposition *around* can mean *on all sides of, here and there, in the area of,* or *on the basis of,* all of which meanings an ESL/FL student must learn. Furthermore, English prepositions may be paradoxically "postponed," may be "simple or complex," may be subject to "metaphorical or abstract use," and may be divided into at least twenty-six semantic types: place, direction, position, destination, passage, orientation, time, duration of time, absence of preposition of time, cause, reason, motive, purpose, goal, source, manner, means, instrument, stimulus, accompaniment, support, opposition, subject matter, ingredient, respect, and reaction [18, pp. 143-65]. Not just their number and variety make the English prepositional category difficult, but prepositions are "especially troublesome to [an ESL/FL] student," Thompson and Martinet write, because "a certain construction in his/[her] own language requires a preposition, whereas a similar one in English does not, and vice versa" [21, p. 91]. Thus, while facility in use of a few English prepositions is frequently manifested early ["Those in greatest use are, in order of frequency, *of, in, and to,*" Stageberg [22, p. 169] writes], most are acquired gradually and many of these late, including distinctive uses of some of the earlier-acquired common prepositions such as *of, in* or *to*.

Richards' seminal study of errors made by ESL students during acquisition of the language found preposition errors to be very prominent: "From a class of 23 with mixed language background [Japanese, Chinese, Burmese, French, Czech, Polish, Arabic, Tagalog, Maori, Maltese, and the major Indian and West African lan-

guages], no fewer than 13 produced sentences" with preposition errors, even after extended language training [23, p. 208]. While acquisitional studies have shown the difficulty which non-native students of English have in acquiring proficiency in the use of English prepositions, an attritionist Olshtain found that for her subjects "the largest category of function words suffering attrition ... is the category of prepositions," and she used this finding as support for the *last learned-first-out* hypothesis [2, p. 160]. One aspect of this study would thus focus on the question: Will an early-acquired, relatively simple functional category of English (articles) manifest less attrition than a late-mastered, very complex functional category of English (prepositions)?

A second issue addressed in this study of article and preposition attrition is the effect of the training environment on language regression. Again there has been "relatively little research attention" by language attritionists into the effect of "the conditions under which the language skills have been acquired," Weltens and Cohen [1, p. 128] write. Burling [24], Olshtain [2; 25], and Van Els [4] deal with the relationship of language attrition and such environmental factors as learning method, natural vs. instructional learning, the influence of the age of the subjects, and the status of the L2 in the L1 environment. A previous study of mine [26] examined another environmental factor: the effect of two different types of language training environment, one ESL and the other EFL. This study showed that there is significantly less phonological regression as measured by incorrect phoneme addition, phoneme omission, phoneme substitution, and stress, for Saudi subjects who received their English training in an ESL environment, the United Kingdom, than those who received their English training in an EFL environment, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Thus the second question which this present study set out to answer was whether similar attrition results would be found in the use of English articles and prepositions by ESL-trained and EFL-trained subjects.

Method

Subjects

The subjects for this study were twenty randomly-selected male EFL Saudi intermediate school teachers. Ten of the teachers had completed a four-year B.A. program in English at universities in the Western region of Saudi Arabia; their English training program consisted of 1320 in-class hours (80 academic hours) of instruction in English and teaching methodology. Ten of the teachers had completed a two-year diploma program in teaching English in the United Kingdom; their program entailed about 1400 in-class hours of instruction in areas of English and teaching methodology. All subjects, after completing their training, had taught in public intermediate schools in the Western region for three-to-four years before this experiment, a sufficient lapse of time to measure language attrition [7; 8; 10; 11].

Data Collection

The procedures employed in gathering data involved the audiotaping of the subjects while they taught the first twenty minutes of two English language periods. Taping twenty-minute segments of two periods, instead of all of one forty-minute period, would ensure that the data gathered would be more extensive and varied. Contact with the teachers was limited to making arrangements for the taping (no teacher declined to be taped). Teachers were told simply that two twenty-minute segments of two English language classes would be taped. They were not told that the recording would be analyzed to determine aspects of their English language attrition, the concern of the researcher being that such information might raise the affective filter of the EFL participants in the classroom and thus the class might not be typical.

In actuality, more teachers were taped than the corpus of this paper indicates. It was decided before beginning the experiment that in order to compare and contrast adequately competence in English, Teacher Talk (TT) in English must fall within five-to-seven minutes of each twenty-minute period taped, assuming that between thirteen-to-fifteen minutes would be given over to Arabic talk by teachers, student input in Arabic or English, time consumed in setting up visuals or writing on blackboards, silence, or use of audio-cassette materials by teachers. If TT was principally in Arabic (one teacher whose tapes were discarded talked approximately 90% of the time in Arabic), he was taking few risks; thus his English competence could not be adequately ascertained, and data from these tapes could distort the findings. Similarly, if a teacher talked more than seven minutes in English in each twenty-minute period taped, he would likely make more types of errors and more frequently make them, a result which could again distort the findings.

Hypotheses

The hypotheses were:
(1) Teachers in both groups, the ESL-trained and the EFL-trained, would manifest less article attrition than preposition attrition in confirmation of the *last learned-first out* hypothesis.

(2) Teachers who had been trained in an ESL environment (the U.K.), where their classroom training in English was supplemented by out-of-class reinforcement, would show fewer manifestations of article and preposition language attrition than those trained in an EFL environment (the K.S.A) where such out-of-class reinforcement is basically absent.

Analysis

In listening to the tapes, the researcher coded the data for article and preposition deviations made in TT. Since recordings were made in classroom situations, where there were both inside and outside interference from students' talking at the same

time as the teacher, noise coming from hallways, the teacher being at a distance from the stationary recorder, etc., a native English-speaking University professor of English was asked to code the tapes separately. A comparison of the two sets of coding revealed a .96 inter-rater reliability. The discrepancies were resolved by the two coders' jointly listening to the segments of TT where different data had been collected.

Addendum

This study is not intended to evaluate each teacher's methodological competence. All teachers basically relied on the audio-lingual method. Only two teachers devoted segments of their taped classes to some communicative approach activities. Thus comments on methodology are restricted in this paper.

Results

Articles

The types and incidences of article errors are enumerated by groups in Tables 1 and 2. Three types of article errors were analyzed: (1) the omission of an article where one is needed; (2) the addition of an article where ϕ is needed, and (3) the choice of an incorrect article among the overt forms (*a* or *an* for *the* or vice-versa).

Of the ten teachers trained in an ESL environment (the United Kingdom), three made no article errors. Two others had only one incidence of an error: No. 3 said, "The watch fell into drain," leaving out *the*, and No. 5 said, "Try to make question," omitting *a*, but in all other instances articles were used correctly by Teachers 3 and 5. Three other teachers made article errors only with certain types of constructions: Teacher 1 with places ("You buy stamps from post office," where *the* or *a* is omitted); Teacher 7 with colors and time ("It's green color" or "It's quarter to five," where ϕ is used but *a* is needed); and Teacher 8 with quantities of a liquid ("He does not drink a water," where a more specific determiner, "any" or "the glass of water," is needed). The TT of the other two ESL-trained teachers (Nos. 6 and 9) manifested a regression to a "unique interlanguage" [2, p. 153] state where the article system shows variability; that is, the article system will be used correctly in one place but not in another (See my article [27] for the concept of language variability). For example, Teacher 6 said, "Put line under the date," where *the* was used correctly before *date*, but *a* was incorrectly omitted before *line*. At times, Teacher 9 would say the incorrect, "He likes bicycle," and at other times the correct, "He likes the bicycle," or "He likes his bicycle." A second characteristic of the interlanguage state – self-correction – was manifested by Teacher 9. Three times he said, and his students repeated, the incorrect form, "I want money," before he said the corect form, "I want the money," and later he even used an alternate correct form, "I want some money." Thus article variability and self-correction suggest that the article system of Teachers 6 and 9 had undergone significant attrition.

Table 1.   ESL-Trained Teachers: Types and Incidences of Errors in the Use of Articles.

Teacher Ref. No.	Omission	Addition	Incorrect Article Choice	Examples/Comments
1.	7	0	0	You buy stamps from post office.
2.	0	0	0	
3.	1	0	0	The watch fell into drain.
4.	0	0	0	
5.	1	0	0	Try to make question.
6.	12	6	1	You have businessman. They crossed sea. Put line under the date. Beoble [People] travel by a car. We live in a houses.
7.	16	0	0	It's green color. It's quarter to five.
8.	0	0	3	He does not drink a water.
9.	13	0	8	He likes riding motorbike. He likes bicycle. We watched football match in the television. I want money. [After 3 times, the teacher self-corrected himself.] Who can find me a chalk? [Said 5 times, and never self-corrected.]
10.	0	0	0	

Of the ten teachers trained in an EFL environment (the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia), five made no article errors. One other teacher (No. 14) had only one incidence of an error, saying "A large modern building in the world," where the superlative construction necessitated "one of the largest modern buildings in the world," but in all other instances articles were used correctly by Teacher 14. Three other teachers made article errors only with certain types of constructions: Teacher 11 always added an unnecessary definite article before the names of countries ("the England," "the Egypt," etc.), an obvious interference from Arabic; Teacher 15 always omitted an

Table 2.   EFL-Trained Teachers: Types and Incidences of Errors in the Use of Articles.

Teacher Ref. No.	Omission	Addition	Incorrect Article Choice	Examples/Comments
11.	0	11	0	[Only with countries]: the England, the Egypt, etc.
12.	19	14	8	He went to drink a coffee, etc. This is called blanket. etc. This is a Morse Code, etc. What is a smoke? A hundreds of years ago, etc. A drums, etc.
13.	0	0	0	
14.	0	0	1	a large modern building in the world
15.	15	0	0	You give me reason. I've got earache, headache, backache, etc. Have you got earache?, etc.
16.	0	0	0	
17.	0	0	0	
18.	18	0	0	[Only with place words]: I'm going to post office. I'm going to home. I'm going to hospital.
19.	0	0	0	
20.	0	0	0	

indefinite pronoun before ailments ("I've earache, " "I've got backache," etc.); and Teacher 18 omitted an indefinite/definite article before places ("I'm going to post office," "I'm going to hospital," etc.). Of the EFL-trained teachers, only Teacher 12 showed an almost complete attrition in his use of articles: He typically omitted a/an or *the* where one or the other was needed ("This is called blanket," etc.) and many times added an article where ϕ is needed ("This is a Morse Code," "What is a smoke?") and sometimes confused singular/plural article identifications ("a drums," a hundreds of years ago").

Of the types of article deviations, omission errors are much more prevalent than either addition or incorrect article choice errors: seven of the teachers (four ESL-trained and three EFL-trained) had more than one incidence of article omission errors, while only three (one ESL-trained and two EFL-trained) had more than one incidence of article addition errors, and again only three (two ESL-trained and one EFL-trained) had more than one incidence of incorrect article choice errors. No errors involving the use of the a/an discrimination (simply stated, a before a consonant and an before a vowel) occurred.

Prepositions

The types and incidences of preposition errors are enumerated by groups in Tables 3 and 4. Three types of preposition errors were analyzed: (1). The omission of a needed preposition, (2) the addition of an unneeded preposition, and (3) the use of a semantically-incorrect preposition.

Table 3. ESL-Trained Teachers: Types and Incidences of Errors in the Use of Prepositions.

Teacher Ref. No.	Omission	Addition	Semantically Incorrect	Examples/Comments
1.	3	0	0	Open your book page 102, etc.
2.	0	0	0	
3.	0	0	2	Who can speak for Picture Number 9? [about]
4.	0	0	0	
5.	0	0	0	
6.	0	0	0	
7.	0	6	3	After twelve o'clock in the midnight, etc. [in the not needed] We have to be careful for this. [about]
8.	0	0	0	
9.	8	0	5	I want somebody to read page 70, etc. [on] We watched football match in the television. [on]
10.	0	0	0	

Table 4.   EFL-Trained Teachers: Types and Incidences of Errors in the Use of Prepositions.

Teacher Ref. No.	Omission	Addition	Semantically Incorrect	Examples/Comments
11.	0	0	0	
12.	4	8	9	Where did he go back? [*to* omitted] We can say in the same thing. So in a hundred years ago, etc. It has many of different meanings, etc. The past from *walk* is *walked*. *Lit* is the past from *Light*.
13.	0	0	3	Look at the questions on the book, etc. [*in*]
14.	0	0	4	They sat on table 23, etc. [*at*]
15.	0	0	7	Open your book on page 87, etc. [*to*]
16.	0	0	0	
17.	0	0	0	
18.	5	0	0	and so [*and so on*]
19.	3	0	0	Open your book page 20, etc. [*to*]
20.	0	0	0	

Of the ESL-trained teachers, six of the ten always used prepositions correctly. The other four teachers used them correctly except for specific types of constructions: In indicating a place or a point, Teacher 1 three out of the five times used omitted the needed preposition ("Open your book page 102," where *to* is needed); Teacher 9 eight times (all instances) omitted the needed preposition ("I want somebody to read page 70," where *on* is omitted); Teacher 3, in both of the two times he used the construction, confused *for/about*, "Who can speak for Picture 9?"; Teacher 9 confused *in/on* in the sentence, "We watched football match in the television"; and Teacher 7 included unnecessary prepositions in certain time constructions ("After twelve o'clock in the midnight," where *in the* is not needed) and manifested one instance of semantic confusion ("We have to be careful for this," where *about* or *concerning* should replace *for*).

Of the EFL-trained teachers, four made no preposition errors. One other (No. 18) omitted a preposition with only one idiom, indicating *et cetera* by saying "and so"

instead of "and so on," an error which is probably better treated as lexical, not functional. As with the ESL-trained teachers, indication of a place or a point in giving classroom directions produced the most preposition errors: "Look at the questions on the book" (Teacher 13); "They sat on table 23," where *at* is needed (Teacher 14); "Open your books on page 87" (Teacher 15); and "Open your books on page 20" (Teacher 19). Again, as with use of articles, Teacher 12 manifested severe regression in his use of prepositions, sometimes omitting a needed preposition ("Where did he go back [to]?"), adding an unneeded preposition ("We can say in the same thing" and "It has many of different meanings"), or sometimes choosing the semantically-incorrect preposition ("*Lit* is the past from *light*").

Of the types of preposition errors, semantically-based ones are the most prevalent: seven of the teachers (three ESL-trained and four EFL-trained) had incidences of semantically-based preposition errors. Five (two ESL-trained and three EFL-trained) had incidences of omission errors, and only two (one from each group) added an unnecessary preposition. However, a large number of different prepositions (58) and a wide variety of types of preposition (21: place, direction, position, destination, passage, orientation, time, duration of time, absence of preposition of time, cause, reason, purpose, goal, source, means, instrument, accompaniment, subject matter, ingredient, reaction) were used correctly by the subjects.

Discussion and Conclusions

The first hypothesis of this study was that the subjects, regardless of their training environment, would manifest less article attrition than preposition attrition. This hypothesis is not supported by the findings. Tables 5 and 6 list an evaluation of article, preposition, and phonological attrition, the last from my previous study [26] of the quality of phonological input of ESL-and EFL-trained teachers. As Tables 5 and 6 show, eleven of the teachers showed performance mastery of the English article system, making no errors or in three instances slip-of-the tongue mistakes. However, of the remaining nine, six showed incident-specific regression, such as with places or quantities, but beyond these situations displayed mastery of the article system. Three teachers (Nos. 6, 9, and 12) manifested considerable regression, although all three of these showed mastery of the simplest aspect of the English article system – the *a/an* distinction. Similarly, eleven of the teachers (although not the same ones) showed a mastery of the preposition system, if one includes Teacher 18 whose "and so" for "and so on" was basically not a morphological, but an idiomatic, error. Eight teachers used prepositions correctly except in incident-specific situations, principally involving prepositions of place or of an indication of a point in giving classroom directions. Only Teacher 12 showed marked attrition, but not to the extent of his article regression.

The second hypothesis was that teachers who had been trained in an ESL environment (the U.K.), where their classroom training in English was supplemented by out-of-class language reinforcement, would show fewer manifestations of both article and preposition language attrition than those trained in an EFLenvironment (Saudi Arabia) where such out-of-class reinforcement is basically absent. This hypothesis is also not supported by the findings. One more EFL-trained teacher showed basically no article attrition in comparison with the teachers of the ESL-trained group; the reverse was true regarding prepositions, where six ESL-trained teachers showed basically no attrition, while one fewer EFL-trained teacher fit into this category. These data between the two groups are statistically irrelevant as are the data which were obtained from the other categories: incident-specific attrition and considerable attrition.

The failure of both hypotheses attests to the point mentioned in the introduction of this paper: That there has been little empirical research to justify hypotheses about *last learned-first out* or the effect of conditions (environment) under which language skills have been acquired [1]. Clearly, this study does not support Olshtain's [2] findings that English prepositions are more vulnerable to attrition than other categories of function words; article and preposition attrition was similar with the subjects of this study. Nor does this study support Weltens, Van Els, and Schils' [28] findings that grammatical language skills suffer more attrition than phonological skills; Tables 5 and 6 show that with the subjects of this study, phonological regression is much more prominent than grammatical attrition as measured by the two functional categories of articles and prepositions.

While previous research indicated an expectancy of success for both hypotheses of this study, both failed. What factors might have led to their failure? Concerning Hypothesis One, while the article system in English is numerically simpler (involving only four units *a, an, the, φ*) and in its entirety is earlier learned than the later mastered and numerically more complex preposition system, the two function categories differ in a perhaps more significant area: one is more semantically based and the other is more contextually based. The "meaning" potential of prepositions restricts their occurrences. There is a significant semantic difference between "He was at the football game" (as a spectator) and "He was in the football game" (as a player). A native speaker of English would never say, "He was from the football game" nor "He was among the football game." Thus the semantic "load" a preposition carries may make a speaker be more attentive to his/her use of prepositions, and this attentiveness may account for the less-than-projected preposition attrition which the subjects of this study showed.

However, articles are more contextually based. In each instance of use, a speaker must determine whether to employ the indefinite, the definite, or the φ arti-

Table 5.　Article, Preposition and Phonological Attrition of ESL-Trained Teachers.

	Articles			Prepositions			Phonology		
	Basically No Attrition	Incident-specific Attrition	Considerable Attrition	Basically No Attrition	Incident-specific Attrition	Considerable Attrition	Basically No Attrition	Incident-specific Attrition	Considerable Attrition
1.		X			X		X		
2.	X			X			X		
3.	X				X			X	
4.	X			X				X	
5.	X			X				X	
6.			X	X					X
7.		X			X		X		
8.		X		X			X		
9.			X		X		X		
10.	X			X				X	

Table 6.   Article, Preposition and Phonological Attrition of EFL-Trained Teachers.

	Articles			Prepositions			Phonology		
	Basically No Attrition	Incident-specific Attrition	Considerable Attrition	Basically No Attrition	Incident-specific Attrition	Considerable Attrition	Basically No Attrition	Incident-specific Attrition	Considerable Attrition
11.		X		X					X
12.			X			X			X
13.	X				X			X	
14.	X				X				X
15.		X			X			X	
16.	X			X					X
17.	X			X					X
18.		X		X					X
19.	X				X				X
20.	X			X			X		

cle. The context of the communication will determine whether one says, "I went to the town" or "I went to a town" or "I went to town," each of which could be correct/ appropriate in a given situation. A native speaker of English has no problem in sorting out these contextualized uses of articles, but for a non-native speaker the very lack of structural options offered by the English article system may lead to confusion in the same way that the few English vowel phonemes/graphemes cause numerous pronunciation/spelling errors for non-native students of English. Thus the English article system, although having considerably fewer items than the English preposition system, may be contextually more complex.

The conclusion here is that attrition researchers should direct their attention less to the issues of *last learned-first out* or numerical *simplicity/complexity and more to the issue of semantically-based versus contextually-based items. This study indicates that attrition for a contextually-based, relatively simple, first-in functional category (articles) may occur at the same rate as for a semantically-based, numerically complex, late-mastered functional category (prepositions). Hypothesis One seems to have failed because it considered two variables *(last learned-first out* and numerical simplicity-complexity) which may not be as important as a third variable (the semantic-contextual contrast).

Concerning Hypothesis Two, as noted earlier, in a previous study of mine [26], using data from the same twenty subjects of this study, training environment had been a significant factor in phonological attrition; those teachers trained in an ESL environment (the U.K.) showed far fewer incidences and types of phonological error than those trained in an EFL environment (the K.S.A.). (See column 3 of Tables 5 and 6 for a cumulative representation of the findings of that study.) Of the six teachers who made no phonological errors, five were ESL-trained (Nos. 1,2,7,8 and 9), while only one was EFL-trained (No. 20). Conversely, seven of the EFL-trained teachers made more than 15 phonological mistakes (an indication of considerable phonological regression) against only one ESL-trained teacher. Such discrimination did not reveal itself in this study, thus negating Hypothesis Two. Manifestations of attrition or of the lack of attrition concerning English articles and prepositions are similar between the two groups. This finding suggests that while phonological regression is influenced by training environment, aspects of morphological attrition, specifically involving function words such as articles and prepositions, are less influenced by training environment.

Why would out-of-class reinforcement affect English phonological performance more than English functional items' performance? Again an explanation may involve a semantic continuum. Although a phoneme signals a difference in meaning, in relationship to the morphological and syntactical levels of English, the phonological typically carries the least semantica relevance. Richards labels as a "fallacy" the insistence of audio-lingualists, with their attendant "fad for minimal pair drills," that

"since phonological distinctions depend on the criterion of meaning, distinctions of meaning must depend on phonological distinctions," and he concludes that "failure to communicate" seldom depends on a failure "to maintain all the [phonological] distinctions" [23, p. 213]. Hurford and Heasley in their book on semantics distinguish between the "phonic act" and the "propositional act." The former is "the physical act of making certain vocal sounds," while the latter is "the mental act of *referring* (to certain objects or people in the world) and of *predicating* (i.e., coupling predicates to referring expressions)" [29, pp. 248-49). Lacking this referential and predicative capacity, the phonological level of a language has reduced semantic potential. An Arabic EFL teacher who says, "He is a habby [happy] student," will undoubtedly be understood despite the phonological error.

At the morphological level, functional classes, such as qualifiers, prepositions, determiners (which include articles), auxiliaries, and pronouns, exhibit more semantic potential than phonemes. (In turn, form-classes, such as nouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs, which Quirk and Greenbaum term as "open-class items" because they are "indefinitely extendable" [18, p. 19], manifest still more semantic extension.) Within the functional classes, there is also a semantic continuum. A teacher who says, "He is happy student," will almost certainly be understood despite the article error since the context will resolve the *solely referential* confusion, whether one single unspecified member or a particular member of a class of individuals is being referred to. However, if a teacher, selecting a semantically-incorrect preposition, says, "He is among a happy student," the misuse of the preposition affects the understanding of the predicate. Thus, prepositions, unlike articles, must be *both referentially* and *predicatively* precise, to use the key words from Hurford and Heasley's [29] definition of the propositional act, or semantic confusion will ensue. Does the teacher mean, "He is with a happy student" or "He is by a happy student" or "He is next to a happy student," etc.? To reiterate: A person who wishes to communicate successfully must be more attentive to the more semantically-based items of a language. This attention means that regardless of training environment, an L2 subject will likely attrite less in a more semantically-based area (such as prepositions) than in less semantically-relevant areas (such as phonology or articles).

Despite the failure of both hypotheses, this experiment indicates an area which language attritionists have neglected: That the semantic load of a structural item must be considered in predicting attrition. Structural items which have less semantic capableness, regardless of which came in first or last or which is structurally simpler or more complex. Although most attrition studies have had a solely structural basis, some attritionists, such as Lambert and Moore [30], have begun to question whether grammatical features in isolation are the proper units of analysis of language attrition. Since the 1970s language acquisitionsts, such as Slobin [31] and Bloom [32], have suggested that sequences of language acquisition are determined more by semantic complexity than by structural complexity. In future studies language

attritionists need to concentrate on this finding of language acquisitionists. This articles and prepositions was not manifested, in its own way reinforces Lambert and Moore's [30] call for a reorientation of language attrition studies. Further studies of language attrition making use of semantic tools, as opposed to structural tools, are needed.

While the limited scope of this study must be acknowledged, its findings certainly have relevance to the foreign language component of a country's educational system. Educational administrators must realize that whether their foreign language teachers are trained in an SL environment or an FL environment, language erosion will occur. They must, as Strevens writes, "tak[e] steps to counter the gradual attrition [of their teachers'] language ability that normally occurs with the passage of time" [33, p. 190]. They must provide regular in-service training programs and academic leave where language teachers can receive full-time re-training [26]. A consideration of the phenomenon of language attrition, Weltens and Cohen write, "may lead to more effective methods for reducing the extent of such loss – both with respect to learning training... and with respect to teacher training" [1, p. 132].

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التـلاشي اللغوي الذي يعتري أدوات التنكير والتعريف وحروف الجر لدى مدرسي اللغة الإنجليزية في المملكة العربية السعودية

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ملخص البحث. يصف هذا البحث النتـائج التي تم التوصل إليها من خلال تجربة أجريت خصيصًا لقياس التلاشي اللغوي الذي اعترى أدوات التنكير والتعريف وحروف الجر لدى عشرين من مدرسي اللغة الإنجليزية في المملكة العربية السعودية، عشرة منهم تلقوا تدريبهم في المملكة المتحدة بينما تلقى العشرة الآخرون تدريبهم في المملكة العربية السعودية. وقد تم تسجيل درسين عمليين لكل مدرس منهم على أشرطة صوتية تم تفريغها فيما بعد، وحللت الأخطاء التي جنح إليها المدرسون ـ موضوع البحث ـ عند استخدامهم لأدوات التنكير والتعريف وحروف الجر. وأشارت النتائج إلى أنه:

١ ـ على حين أثبتت الدراسات السابقة أن التلاشي اللغوي يعتري حروف الجر أكثر من غيرها من الكلمات الـوظيفية، كأدوات التنكـير والتعريف مثلاً، جاء البحـث الحالي بنتائج مغايرة حيث أثبت أن التلاشي يعتري كلتا الفئتين بالمعدل نفسه، وأنه

٢ ـ سواء تلقى المدرسون تدريبهم في بيئة اللغة الأجنبية التي يقومون بتدريسها أو في بلدهم الأم، لا يظهر لذلك أي أثر يذكر في تلاشي أدوات التنكير والتعريف وحروف الجر، إذ تمثل ثلث الأخطاء لدى أفراد المجموعتين من حيث معدل توافرها وأنماطها. وخلص البحث بذلك إلى نتيجة مبدئية مفادها أنه كلما أسندت المادة اللغوية إلى أسس دلالية تقلص معدل التلاشي الذي يعتريها.