



Form-meaning-use framework in grammar teaching: Research on noun clauses in writing skills

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Abstract

Based on Larsen-Freeman's (2001) three-dimensional (form-meaning-use) framework of grammar teaching, this study aimed to investigate which type of clause (noun, adjective or adverbial) was the most challenging for second/foreign language (L2) learners in writing skills. Depending on the results of a diagnostic test prepared in accordance with the form-meaning-use triangulation, Noun Clauses (NCs) were found to be the most challenging type for students studying in the Department of English Language Teaching at a state university in Turkey. Determining NCs as the most challenging type, a NCs test grounded on the same framework was given to the students as the pretest to examine their available knowledge of NCs. After the pretest, the students went through a nine-hour intensive treatment phase consisting of three sessions to instruct NCs with regard to the form-meaning-use framework. The treatment stage was followed by the posttest to examine the progress that students had made during the treatment phase. The quantitative analysis of the obtained data revealed a remarkable improvement in the students' knowledge of NCs in writing skills. Based on this finding, it can be concluded that the form-meaning-use framework enables effective and efficient instruction in the language classroom.

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1. Introduction

In second/foreign language (L2) learning, the use of clauses is perceived as hurdle to deal with in all four skills, including reading, writing, listening and speaking because clauses (noun, adjective, and adverbial) involve the application of complex grammatical rules. With this fact in mind, Gass and Selinker (2008) assert that L2 learners tend to use simple linguistic structures over complex ones by highlighting the significance of a key concept to account for this tendency: *avoidance*. Since L2 learners feel uncomfortable with using complex structures, they tend to avoid using such structures in the target language. However, the use of these structures becomes an essential grammatical subsystem for L2 learners as they advance in the process of L2 learning and try to express themselves "in depth using complex, multiple-clause sentences as opposed to simple, single-clause sentences" (Yabuki-Soh, 2007,

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p. 220). Therefore, teaching and learning these structures through effective and appropriate approaches and methods becomes a fundamental phenomenon in the language classroom.

In this regard, the current study implements a three-dimensional (form-meaning- use) framework suggested by Larsen-Freeman (2001) to investigate the most challenging type of clause (noun, adjective and adverbial) in writing skills for the students who study in the English Language Teaching (ELT) Program at a state university in Turkey. In line with this particular aim, it also seeks to examine what effect this framework has on the teaching and learning of the most challenging type of clause in English. At this point, it is necessary to provide a brief description of clauses in English and Larsen-Freeman's dimensions of grammar teaching in order to establish a clear framework for the subsequent analysis of the target linguistic structure in writing skills.

1.1. Types of Clauses in English

In English, different types of clauses are identified to form sentences. These clauses are classified into two different categories while forming sentences in English (Azar, 2003; Demirezen, 1993; Maurer, 2012): *independent (main)* and *dependent (subordinate)*. Berry and Brizee (2010, April) define the independent clause as “a group of words that contains a subject and verb and expresses a complete thought”, whereas they define the dependent clause as “a group of words that contains a subject and verb but does not express a complete thought”. While the independent clause functions as a sentence, the dependent clause does not function as a sentence and is usually marked by a dependent marker word. The dependent clause is further categorized into three types (Azar, 2003; Demirezen, 1993; Maurer, 2012): *noun*, *adjective*, and *adverbial*.

Given this classification, a diagnostic test (DT) grounded on Larsen-Freeman's (2001) three-dimensional framework of grammar teaching was employed to determine the most challenging type of clause for ELT students. The findings of the DT indicated that Noun Clauses ($M=13.33$) followed by Adverbial Clauses and Adjective Clauses respectively ($M=18.21$, $M=19.41$) formed the most complicated type for the students (see Results and Discussion part for a detailed analysis of the DT). Regarding these statistical data, it is important to provide further information about how Noun Clauses (NCs) are formed (see Table 1) and what functions they fulfil in a sentence (see Table 2).

Azar (2003) and Maurer (2012) identify three subtypes of NCs: (a) NCs beginning with a *question word*, (b) NCs beginning with *whether* or *if*, and (c) NCs beginning with *that*. In the first type, a question word (e.g., who, what, which, when, and so on) precedes the clause, in the second type the word “whether/if” and in the third type the word “that” precedes the clause. These markers make the clause act as a noun in the sentence in different positions with various functions.

Table 1. Formation Noun Clauses (based on Azar, 2003; Maurer, 2012)

NCs beginning with a <i>question word</i> (Information Questions)	I don't know <i>where he lives</i> . Do you know <i>when they left</i> ?
NCs beginning with <i>whether/if</i> (Yes/No Questions)	I don't know <i>if Eric is at home</i> . I don't know <i>whether Eric is at home (or not)</i> .
NCs beginning with <i>that</i>	Mary realizes <i>that she should study harder</i> . I dreamed <i>that I was on the top of a mountain</i> .

NCs are posited to have a number of functions in a sentence. These functions are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Functions of Noun Clauses (built upon Azar’s (2003), Demirezen’s (1993), & Maurer’s (2012) classification)

Function	Example
NCs in subject position	<i>What you do</i> does not concern me.
NCs in direct object position	I don’t know <i>what his profession is</i> .
NCs in both subject and object position	<i>What you see</i> is <i>what you get</i> .
NCs as complement-objective complement	I can tell you <i>what your problem is</i> .
NCs as complement-indirect object	The committee will give <i>whoever wins</i> a prize.
NCs as the object of infinitive	She would like to know <i>how old you are</i> .
NCs as the object of gerund	Believing <i>that my girlfriend will return one day</i> is a great comfort to me.
NCs as the object of participle	Seeing <i>how busy you are</i> , I will not detain you long.
NCs as object of preposition	She worries about <i>how ill her daughter is</i> .
NCs as appositive	The fact, <i>that you are innocent</i> , is very obvious.

Considering the classification of noun, adjective and adverbial clauses, numerous studies focused on the acquisition of *adjective clauses* when compared to the other two types (e.g., Hamilton, 1995; Izumi, 2003; Yabuki-Soh, 2007) along with the studies focusing on the impact of L2 instruction on teaching linguistic items (e.g., Aarts & Schils, 1995; Ammar & Lightbown, 2004; Doughty, 1991; Izumi & Izumi, 2004). Regarding the influence of L2 instruction, pedagogical concerns have evolved around the questions of (a) what should be taught, (b) how it should be taught, and (c) to what extent instruction aids L2 learning (Richard & Renandya, 2002; Yabuki-Soh, 2007; Han, 2004). The rationale behind these questions is noted as facilitating effective acquisition of the target linguistic structure(s) (Yabuki-Soh, 2007).

1.2. Role of Instruction in L2 Learning

The role of instruction in L2 learning has long been disputed in L2 research. Han (2004, p. 126) asserts that no matter on what theoretical orientations the researchers ground their arguments, they seem to support “overtly or tacitly” that instruction plays a significant role in L2 learning. In line with this notion, numerous studies have yielded positive results regarding the role of instruction in L2 learning (Lightbown, 2000; Long, 1983; Norris & Ortega, 2000; Spada, 1997). In their synthesis and meta-analysis of 49 experimental and quasi-experimental studies of the effectiveness of L2 types of instruction, Norris and Ortega (2000) concluded the positive effects of L2 instruction as follows:

- Focused L2 instruction enables the acquisition of target-like gains;
- The effectiveness of explicit types of instruction overwhelms that of implicit types;
- Interventions related to Focus on Form and Focus on Forms ensue equivalent and large effects; and
- L2 instruction has a durable effectiveness.

As is obvious in Norris and Ortega’s study, positive effects have been continuously and consistently reported for L2 instruction in general. However, various standpoints have been advocated by different scholars in the field with regard to how instruction should be carried out (e.g., Krashen, 1982; Gregg,

1984; Schmidt, 1995; R. Ellis, 1994). The mode of instruction (explicit or implicit) has been a long-term focal point of debate among scholars (Han, 2004). In his Monitor Theory, Krashen (1982) favors implicit instruction (inductive via a stipulation of $i+1$ comprehensible input) over explicit instruction (deductive via explanation and application of rules). This notion results from three basic assumptions: (a) Since explicit instruction involves a conscious process, it fails to correspond to the complex nature of the target language. (b) No relation exists between explicit knowledge and implicit knowledge. (c) Acquisition (leading to implicit knowledge) but not learning (leading to explicit knowledge) counts for attaining knowledge of the target language.

Unlike Krashen, in his Noticing Hypothesis Schmidt (1995) underscores that subjective experience of noticing is a necessary and sufficient condition for converting input into intake. In addition to noticing, an equally important concept in teaching and learning a given language is pointed out as language awareness (James & Garret, 1991, 1992; Garret & James, 1993). Defined as “a person’s sensitivity to a conscious awareness of the nature of language and its role in human life” (Donmall, 1985, p.7), language awareness is noted to benefit along five domains in L2 teaching and learning, including affective, social, power, cognitive, and performance (Garret & James, 1993). Based on these underpinnings, it can be asserted that explicit (intentional) learning, including the attempt to form and test conscious hypotheses, is crucial for noticing, becoming aware of, and learning some features of natural languages but not others. Along the same line, R. Ellis (1994) maintains that explicit knowledge is a source for implicit knowledge (but not totally). He further adds that “explicit knowledge derived from formal instruction may convert into implicit knowledge” (p.88-89) as long as learners are developmentally ready for accommodating new linguistic features. R. Ellis also highlights the significance of “whether formal instruction directed at a specific linguistic feature results in the use of that feature in spontaneous communication” (p. 88), in which he draws attention to (a) the proceduralization of declarative knowledge and (b) the facilitative role of explicit instruction in converting explicit knowledge into implicit knowledge.

The importance of instruction in L2 learning is further supported by the findings obtained in the Canadian French immersions programs (Harley & Swain, 1984; Swain, 1991; Kowal & Swain, 1997). Despite Krashen’s emphasis on ideal environment for comprehensible input which is imperative for L2 acquisition, it was observed that after 6 to 10 years in the immersion programs, early immersion students could “develop a native-like receptive ability yet their productive use of the second language still differ[ed] considerably in grammatical and lexical ways from that of native speakers” (Harley & Swain 1984, p. 291). Similarly, Swain (1991) found that while immersion students showed similar scores on listening comprehension and reading tests to that of native-speaking (French) students, their performance in speaking and writing tests overwhelmed that of native students. With this difference in mind, Swain adds that this lack could be overcome by providing “more focused L2 input which provides the learners with ample opportunity to observe the formal and semantic contrasts involved in the relevant target subsystem” and by facilitating “increased opportunity for students to be involved in activities requiring the productive use of such in meaningful situations” (p. 98).

Considering the findings of Swain’s study, it is obvious that the proceduralization of declarative knowledge - salient particularly in writing and speaking skills – is of great importance. At this point, Larsen-Freeman’s (2001) three-dimensional framework of grammar teaching (form/structure, meaning/semantics, and use/pragmatics) may serve effectively to attain this goal. Therefore, an explication of this triangulation is provided in the next part.

1.3. Form, Meaning and Use Triangulation

Larsen-Freeman (2002) notes that recent perspectives on teaching grammar seek a way “to achieve a better fit between grammar and communication” because grammar is not a discrete combination of “meaningless, decontextualized, static” rules (p. 252). She adds that grammatical structures go far beyond this notion because grammar is not restricted to prescriptive rules about linguistic form, but rather includes a unity of form, meaning and use to be able to utilize it for real communicative purposes. Therefore, she suggests a frame of reference to guide educators in constructing an approach to teaching grammar. She resembles the framework to a pie chart in which she identifies three dimensions to deal with the complexity of grammar: (1) *form/structure*, (2) *meaning/semantics*, and (3) *use/pragmatics* (see Figure 1). She explains that the three dimensions are not in a hierarchical arrangement as in many other conventional linguistic approaches presume, but rather are interconnected and have equal importance. This interconnectedness is represented through the arrows drawn among these three dimensions; thus, a change or alteration in any of these wedges will have repercussions for the other two.

1.3.1. Form

The wedge representing form (structure) concentrates on “overt lexical and morphological forms that tell us how a particular grammar structure is constructed and how it is sequenced with other structures in a sentence or text” (Larsen-Freeman, 2001, p. 252). Given this definition, scholars and researchers assert that meaningful practice of a target linguistic structure can help students proceduralize the declarative knowledge of this particular item (Nunan, 2003; Larsen-Freeman, 2001; DeKeyser, 1998). It is further affirmed that meaningful practice helps students avoid inert knowledge problem (Whitehead, 1929 cited in Larsen-Freeman, 2001) – the “knowledge that can be recalled when students are asked to do so but is not available for spontaneous use, in, say, problem solving, even when the knowledge is relevant to the problem at hand” (Larsen-Freeman, 2001, p. 258). In other words, the knowledge of the target grammatical structure is not available to be transferred from the classroom setting to the real-life situation. Consequently, meaningful practice of the focused grammatical item plays a crucial role in conveying the declarative knowledge of the target linguistic form into procedural knowledge.

1.3.2. Meaning

The meaning (semantic) wedge focuses on what the linguistic structure means, and is suggested to vary between two different patterns: lexical or grammatical. For instance, while the dictionary definition of the preposition “down” exemplifies lexical meaning, the condition and result/outcome meanings conveyed by a conditional exemplifies grammatical meaning (Larsen-Freeman, 2001, p. 252). If the problems that students have with a particular linguistic structure result from the meaning dimension, then the teacher is expected to design practice activities that correspond to the meaning wedge. N. Ellis (1998) asserts that associative learning in which students have opportunities to associate the form and meaning of the target grammatical item can help overcome this challenge. Similarly, Celce-Murcia and Hilles (1988) suggest the use of pictures and realia as a technique to handle the problem with meaning dimension. The use of actions as in Total Physical Response is another example posited by the Larsen-Freeman (2001) to overcome the semantic challenge of prepositions. There are various and diverse ways in teaching methodology that can be applied to handle the problems or challenges with the meaning dimension of grammar teaching.

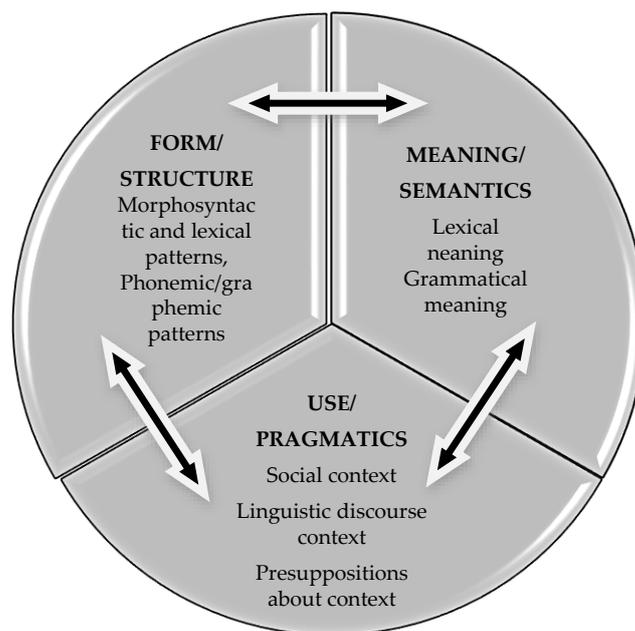


Figure 1. Form-Meaning-Use Triangulation of Grammar Teaching (cited in Larsen-Freeman, 2001, p. 252)

1.3.3. Use

Referring to the definition suggested by Levinson (1983), Larsen-Freeman (2001) describe use/pragmatics as all aspects of meaning not dealt with by semantics. She restricts her definition to “the study of those relations between language and context that are grammaticalized or coded in the structure of a language” (Levinson, 1983, p. 9 cited in Larsen-Freeman, 2001, p. 252). In this definition of pragmatics, the term *context* refers to a social context (e.g., a context formed by interlocutors, time, and place), or to a linguistic discourse context (e.g., the influence of a distinct genre or register of discourse on the use of a linguistic item), or to the presuppositions that one has about the context concerned.

In the related literature, scholars and researchers suggest various methods and techniques to focus on the “use” dimension of linguistic items. For instance, Larsen-Freeman (2001) points out that role plays can serve effectively to practice speech acts (e.g., making requests) because the teacher can manipulate the sociocultural variables underlying these acts (e.g., adjusting the social distance between the parties). In such activities, students assume various roles in which they practice the target linguistic structure by adjusting their language in order not to violate the sociocultural underpinnings of the speech acts. As can be understood from the literature provided above, teaching grammar cannot be restricted to the apprehension of the form (structure) of linguistic items because it also encompasses meaning (semantic) and use (pragmatic) dimensions. Therefore, teachers are required to enable their students to develop their grammatical competence with regard to these three dimensions.

1.4. Significance of the Study

In grammar teaching, the form-meaning-use triangulation is often neglected because of the disproportionate prominence given to each of these dimensions. In other words, because one or two of these dimensions are generally prioritized over the other(s) and thus limited or no space is allocated for grammar on the neglected dimension(s), effective and appropriate grammar teaching does not take place on the basis of all these three dimensions. In this regard, this research attempted to contribute to language teaching and learning methodology by showing how the form-meaning-use framework could be used in

grammar teaching with particular focus on writing skills. Moreover, this study aimed to shed light on how the form-meaning-use framework can be applied to foster L2 learners' knowledge and performance of using complex linguistic structures (e.g., clauses). The rationale behind this aim lies in L2 learners' tendency to avoid using such structures due to the requirement of applying complex grammatical rules.

1.5. Research Questions

Based on Larsen-Freeman's (2001) three-dimensional framework of grammar teaching, this research aimed to answer the following research questions:

1. Which type of clause is the most challenging for the ELT students - noun, adjective, or adverbial?
2. What effect does the form-meaning-use triangulation have on the ELT students' knowledge of Noun Clauses?

2. Methodology

2.1. Research Design

In this study, "one-group pretest-posttest" experimental research design was employed to collect data. At the beginning of the study, a diagnostic test was applied to determine the most challenging type of clause. Based on the results of the diagnostic test, another test was developed for the most challenging type of clause and was given to the students as the *pretest*. The pretest was followed by a nine-hour *treatment* phase during which the students carried out a number of activities and tasks to practice the target type of clause. One week after the treatment stage, a *posttest* that consisted of the same activities and tasks as in the pretest was administered to scrutinize the progress that students had made during the treatment phase.

2.2. Setting

The study was conducted in the Department of English Language Teaching (ELT) at a state university in Turkey. The ELT Department was considered to serve as an appropriate research setting as the teacher-training program pursued in the department included two courses called "Contextual Grammar I" and "Advanced Writing Skills I", which conveniently allowed the application of a variety of reading, writing and grammar activities for the research objectives aforementioned. It also enabled the researcher to avoid any artificiality bias in the classroom setting and on the data collected because the activities were naturally incorporated into the classroom procedure as extensive studies.

2.3. Participants

33 (18 female and 15 male) freshman ELT students aged between 18 and 22 participated in the study. On average, they had an intermediate level of English language proficiency and had been studying English for nearly eight years at the time of data collection. Moreover, they had passed a very competitive university placement test to get accepted to foreign language departments of universities, hence certifying a minimum intermediate level of English proficiency. The participants were all pursuing the same teacher-training curriculum in order to be teachers of English as a Foreign Language.

2.4. Instruments

In the present study, two different tests built on Larsen-Freeman's (2001) three-dimensional framework of grammar teaching were utilized to examine the ELT students' knowledge and performance of using clauses in writing skills. The activities and tasks in the tests were taken or adapted from four different books in the field: (a) *Active Skills for Reading: Book 4* (Anderson, 2003), (b) *From Sentence to Paragraph Structure* (Demirezen, 1993), (c) *Focus on Grammar 5: An Integrated Skills Approach* (Maurer, 2012), and (d) *ELS English Language Inside: English Grammar Inside and Out* (Öndeş, 2009). The rationale behind using these books was two-fold. First, the activities and tasks in the three books corresponded effectively to the form-meaning-use framework of grammar teaching. Second, for the purpose of minimizing the effects of vocabulary on students' performance in the tests, the activities and tasks chosen in these books were assumed to match with students' English proficiency level.

The first one of these two tests was a diagnostic test (DT) which included 50 items related to Noun, Adjective, and Adverbial Clauses (see Table 3). The test was proofread and double-checked by two scholars in the field in order to achieve internal validity and eliminate any mistakes related to the accuracy and appropriacy of the items. Depending on the suggestions of the scholars, some items were altered or changed and the detected transcription mistakes were corrected.

Table 3. Distribution of Diagnostic Test Items across Form-Meaning-Use Triangulation

Types of Clause	Form	Meaning	Use
		20 sentences in total	5 sentences per type
<i>Noun Clauses</i>		Determining functions	
<i>Adjective Clauses</i>	Identifying the type of clause in the given sentences	Finding antecedents	Rewriting the pairs of sentences by using one of the types of clause
<i>Adverbial Clauses</i>		Meaning matching	

Form (Recognition): In this section, the students were given twenty sentences and asked to identify the type of dependent clause in each sentence. The aim of this part was to examine whether the students could differentiate a particular type of clause from the other two types.

Meaning (Functions): This section consisted of three different parts, each including five sentences. In the first part, the students were provided a box including the aforementioned functions of Noun Clauses (Demirezen, 1993). They were asked to underline the Noun Clauses in the sentences and then match the functions provided in the box with the appropriate Noun Clause. In the second part, the students were given sentences incorporating Adjective Clauses. They were required to find the Adjective Clauses and determine what they described or referred to in those sentences. In the last part, the students were given sentences including Adverbial Clauses and a box which incorporated meanings conveyed by Adverbial Clauses. In this activity, the students were expected to find the Adverbial Clauses in the sentences, write them in the space provided, and match the meanings given with appropriate clauses.

Use (Rewrite): In this section, there were also three different parts, each related to one type of clause. In each part, the students were given five pairs of simple sentences and were instructed to rewrite them by combining each pair to make complex sentences. This was done by converting one of the sentences into a Noun Clause, Adjective Clause or Adverbial Clause as instructed in each part.

The descriptive analysis of the DT scores revealed that students got the lowest mean scores in Noun Clauses ($M=13.33$) followed by Adjective Clauses and Adverb Clauses ($M=18.21$, $M=19.41$)

respectively). Having determined NCs as the most challenging type according to the form-meaning-use framework, the second test was based solely on NCs. The Noun Clause Test (NCT) was also double-checked and proofread by the same two scholars in the field, and all the changes and corrections were made as suggested. In each dimension of the test, there were different activities and tasks that the students were instructed to complete (see Table 4).

Table 4. Distribution of Noun-Clause Activities across Form-Meaning-Use Triangulation

FORM	MEANING	USE
Identifying NCs at sentence level	Determining functions of NCs	Free rewrite activity Rewrite: NCs in object position
Identifying NCs at text level	Sentence completion in multiple-choice format	Rewrite: NCs in subject position Rewrite at text level

Form (Recognition): In this section, there were two different activities – namely, sentence-based and text-based recognition activities. In the sentence-based activity, the students were given twenty-four sentences which included different types of sentences (simple, compound, complex, compound-complex, and so on) and different types clauses (noun, adjective, and adverbial). They were required to identify the NCs in the sentences and write them in the spaces provided. In order to examine the students' knowledge of identifying NCs in different positions in sentences, the NCs embedded in the items were selected according to the functions of NCs introduced by Demirezen (1993). In the text-based activity, the students were given a text which included ten different NCs and asked to find out these clauses (adapted from Öndeş, 2009, p. 257). The rationale behind this activity was to examine whether students could identify NCs in contexts beyond sentence level.

Meaning (Function): The meaning section similarly consisted of two parts, determining functions of NCs and sentence completion in multiple-choice format. In the first part, the students were given a box which included ten different functions of NCs (Demirezen, 1993) and twenty different sentences to be matched with these functions. There were two different sentences for each function. The second part encompassed thirteen multiple-choice questions which had five choices. The questions were taken from the book “*ELS English Language Studies Grammar Inside and Out*” (Öndeş, 2009, pp. 262-263). The aim of the multiple-choice part was to assess whether students could complete the sentences in a meaningful way and pay attention to formation of NCs (e.g., figuring out the difference between an Interrogative Sentence and a Noun Clause).

Use (Pragmatics): The primary focus of this part was to test students' ability to combine to separate sentences and build more sophisticated sentences when writing. In this sense, rewrite activities were considered to be very beneficial to improve students' writing skills since they enable them to use various and diverse linguistic structures to better express themselves (Larsen-Freeman, 2001; Shi, 2012; Yabuki-Soh, 2007). Based on this notion, this section included four different rewrite activities, the first three of which were taken or adapted from Demirezen's book (1993). In the first one, the students were given eight pairs of sentences and were required to combine these sentences in any way they preferred. In the second activity, they were again given eight pairs but were instructed to combine the sentences in such a way that the NCs would function as the object of the main clause. However, in the third activity they were asked to combine the given eight pairs in such a way that the NCs would function as the subject of the main clause. In the last activity, they were given the part of a text adapted from the book “*Active Skills for Reading*” (Unit 5: Business Matters, Chapter 1: Find Your Niche and Stick to It; Anderson, 2003, p. 60) and were asked to rewrite it by using at least nine NCs.

2.5. Data Collection Procedure

In order to collect data, the steps presented in Table 5 were pursued. In the first step, the students were given the DT to determine the most challenging clause for them. Building on the results of the DT, it was concluded that Noun Clauses were the most challenging type for the ELT students. Then, the NCT was administered to the students as the pretest. Following the pretest, the students went through a nine-hour treatment phase (consisting of three different sessions each lasting three hours) in which they carried out some activities and tasks designed according to the form-meaning-use framework of grammar teaching. Moreover, the students were given some assignments in the blog created by the researcher for “Oral Speaking Skills I” course. In these activities and tasks, the researcher aimed to raise consciousness about the target linguistic structure and enable the students to practice these grammatical items with regard to a combination of form, meaning and use dimensions. A detailed description of these three sessions is provided below.

Table 5. Procedure Applied in the Study

STEPS	PROCEDURE
Step 1	DIAGNOSTIC TEST (DT)
Step 2	PRETEST: Noun Clause Test (NCT)
Step 3	TREATMENT: Teaching Noun Clauses via Larsen-Freeman’s Three-Dimensional Framework of Grammar Teaching
Step 4	POSTTEST: Noun Clause Test (NCT)

2.5.1. Session 1: Form

In this three-hour session, the students were introduced how NCs are formed in English. In order to present the structure of NCs, the students were given a text titled “*Life with the Tarahumaras*” (taken from Anderson, 2003, pp. 190-192) with some highlighted sentences in it. First, the students carried out a brainstorming activity about the title of the text and one of the students in the class wrote what the other students uttered about the title on the board. Next, the students read the text silently, and the volunteers chosen by the researcher read it loudly. Then they were given a True/False activity to check their comprehension of the text. Following this activity, their attention was drawn to the highlighted sentences in the text and they were asked to identify the independent and dependent clauses in the highlighted sentences. At this point, it was seen that the students had problems with differentiating between independent and dependent clauses. Therefore, they were instructed the difference between these clauses by giving the examples used in the text at hand. Following this instruction, more emphasis was given to the highlighted clauses and their types were identified by the students. Afterwards, the students were introduced the types of NCs more explicitly via a PowerPoint slide and were asked to find the other NCs in the text read. They were also distributed another handout to provide further explicit information about NCs. As for practice, the researcher posted a text from National Geographic (Gorney, June 2011) on the blog he created (the link to the blog is not provided here in order to protect the students’ confidentiality and privacy) and asked them to find out all the NCs in the text and post them on the blog. The name of the blog is not

2.5.2. Session 2: Meaning

At the beginning of this session, the text posted on the blog was projected and the NCs in the text were identified as a whole class in order to check the answers and review the previous session. Later, since the students had the lowest scores in meaning dimension, particularly in determining the functions of NCs, they were given handouts that provided explicit information on the functions of NCs. Before

focusing on the handout, the students' background knowledge of such terms as subject, direct object, and indirect object were examined. Those terms were further explained by the researcher, and the students were asked to give examples from the text projected. Next, the functions of NCs were explicitly studied through the handout prepared by the researcher and another handout was distributed to practice the functions of NCs. The students worked individually and then in pairs to compare and contrast their answers. This activity was followed by a whole-class discussion about the complicated items in the handout. At the end of the session, the students were given a handout and were asked to write the functions of the NCs in the handout on the blog mentioned above.

2.5.3. Session 3: Use

First, the handout given in the previous session was dealt with, and further explanations were provided about the functions of NCs. Following this recap, the students were distributed a handout which included sentence-based and text-based rewrite activities. The sentence-based activities were prepared according to the pretest results; in other words, the researcher prepared the rewrite activities that addressed the items which were found to be very challenging for the students on the pretest. The reason behind this approach was to assist students in their weakest points and help them fulfil the gaps in their knowledge of NCs. In the text-based activity, the students were given a part of the text that they studied in the first session and asked to rewrite it using NCs. After all these activities, the researcher asked the students to orally summarize how NCs were formed and what their functions were.

During this treatment phase, the researcher tried to provide students corrective feedback regarding the three dimensions focused on; however, providing individual corrective feedback to the students was limited due to time constraints. One week after the completion of the treatment phase, the students received the NCT as the posttest in order to examine the progress they had made during the treatment stage.

2.6. Data Analysis

The data were analyzed statistically through SPSS (22.0). The program was used to measure frequency rates, means, and standard deviations of the data obtained. The descriptive statistics was followed by a Paired Samples T-test to determine the significance between the pretest and posttest.

3. Results

As aforementioned, the initial purpose of the current study was to scrutinize which type of clause (noun, adjective or adverbial) was the most challenging one in writing skills for the ELT students regarding Larsen-Freeman's (2001) three-dimensional framework of grammar teaching. Given this aim, Table 6 provides descriptive analysis of the DT to determine the most challenging type of clause. The students had the lowest total mean score in Noun Clauses ($M=13.33$) followed by Adverbial Clauses and Adjective Clauses ($M=18.21$, $M=19.41$ respectively). When the mean scores in the form, meaning, and use dimensions were compared across the three types of clauses, it was observed that the students had the lowest mean scores in all three dimensions of NCs ($M=5.38$, $M=3.31$, $M=4.62$ respectively). In these three dimensions of NCs, they received the lowest mean score in the meaning dimension followed by the use and form dimensions respectively. A detailed analysis of the table indicated that while the students' mean scores in the form and meaning dimensions of Adjective Clauses ($M=7.28$, $M=6.08$ successively) were higher than that of the Adverbial Clauses ($M=6.95$, $M=4.64$ respectively), their mean score in the use dimension of Adjective Clauses ($M=6.05$) was lower than that of the Adverbial Clauses ($M=6.62$).

Table 6. Descriptive Analysis of Diagnostic Test (N= 33)

Type of Clause		Mean	SD
Noun Clauses	Form	5.38	2.82
	Meaning	3.31	2.24
	Use	4.62	2.12
	Total	13.33	5.14
Adjective Clauses	Form	7.28	3.09
	Meaning	6.08	2.69
	Use	6.05	2.32
	Total	19.41	5.44
Adverbial Clauses	Form	6.95	2.98
	Meaning	4.64	2.39
	Use	6.62	2.82
	Total	18.21	5.69

In the light of the analysis of the DT, Noun Clauses (NCs) were found to be the most challenging type of clause for the students. Based on this particular outcome, NCs were further examined by pursuing the pretest, treatment and posttest steps to investigate the effect of the form-meaning-use framework of grammar teaching on the students' knowledge and performance of using NCs in writing skills.

On the pretest, the students' mean scores related to NCs ranged between 28 and 79 out of 100, and the mean score of the group was found to be 57.03. However, on the posttest, their scores ranged between 64 and 99, and the mean score was 77.82. When a detailed analysis was done to reveal the highest and lowest means obtained in relation to the form-meaning-use triangulation, it was seen that the means varied between and within the tests. Table 7 presents the students' mean scores of NCs according to the three dimensions.

Table 7. Mean values of Noun Clauses Test in Relation to Form-Meaning-Use Triangulation (N= 33)

		Mean	SD
Pretest	Form	24.30	4.38
	Meaning	14.94	3.47
	Use	17.97	6.28
Posttest	Form	29.24	2.63
	Meaning	24.06	4.52
	Use	24.42	4.91

As seen in the table above, the students' mean scores of NCs in relation to the form, meaning and use dimensions varied on the pretest. The students had the highest mean score in the form dimension ($M=24.30$) when compared to the other two dimensions ($M=14.94$, $M=17.97$ respectively). As for the descriptive statistics of the posttest results, an increase in students' mean scores of NCs in relation to all the three dimensions was observed. Similar to the pretest results, the students received the highest mean score in the form dimension ($M=29.24$) than those in the other two dimensions ($M=24.06$, $M=24.42$ respectively). However, contrary to the pretest results, their mean scores in the meaning and use dimensions were found to be close. In order to find out whether there was a significant difference between the students' mean scores of NCs on the pretest and posttest, a Paired Samples T-test was carried out (see Table 8).

Table 8. Paired Samples T-test Results of Noun Clauses Test

Test	N	Mean	SD	SE	T	Df	p
Pretest	33	57.03	10.74	1.87			
Posttest	33	77.82	9.46	1.65	-14.799	32	.000

$p < .05$

Table 8 indicates a significant difference between the mean scores of NCs on the pretest and posttest ($p < .05$). The students received higher mean score on the on the posttest ($M=77.82$, $SD=9.46$) when compared to that on the pretest ($M=57.03$, $SD=10.74$). This finding regarding an increase in the students' mean score on the posttest can be attributed to the positive effect of the form-meaning-use grammar instruction that the students received.

4. Discussion

The descriptive data related to three types of clauses (Adjective, Adverb, and Noun Clauses) showed that NCs were the most challenging type for the ELT students. This particular finding confirms the results of several studies which emphasize the importance of the difficulty with learning complex linguistic structures, such as clauses, in a given target language (e.g., Byrnes, Maxim, & Norris, 2010; Mazgutova & Kormos, 2015; Hamilton, 1995; Izumi, 2003; Norris & Ortega, 2009; Ortega, 2015; Yabuki-Soh, 2007). It also underscores the role of subordination (the use of clauses) as an indicator of linguistic complexity in writing at intermediate level (Mazgutova & Kormos, 2015; Norris & Ortega, 2009). Given the difficulty with learning complex linguistic structures like clauses, the use of Larsen-Freeman's (2001) three-dimensional framework to determine and teach the most challenging type of clause in the language classroom supports the findings of several studies that highlight the importance of the combination of form, meaning, use dimensions in L2 instruction (Cadierno & Eskildse, 2015; Ortega, 2015; Robinson & Ellis, 2008; Römer, 2009; Tyler, 2010). This is because form, meaning, and use are considered as inseparable and mutual constituents of language and thus should be taken as a whole in the process of L2 instruction (Ryshina-Pankova, 2015; Vyatkina, Hirschmann, & Golcher, 2015).

Based on the results of Paired Samples t-test, the form-meaning-use framework was found to be significantly effective on teaching and learning NCs in writing skills ($p < .05$). This significant effect can be attributed to the applicability and flexibility of the framework to design various inductive and deductive activities and tasks that enable grammar teaching in more meaningful contexts. In the related literature, scholars and researchers note that grammar teaching on the basis of form, meaning and use dimensions augments students' knowledge of the target linguistic structure (see DeKeyser, 1998; Larsen-Freeman, 2001; Nunan, 2003). For instance, Larsen-Freeman (2001) asserts that teaching form is a fundamental component of grammar teaching and one way to teach grammar is to present the rules to students. However, she cautions that grammar teaching goes beyond form because mere focus on presenting rules causes failure in grammar teaching. Hence, teachers are required to go beyond solely teaching the form of the target linguistic structure and focus on a combination of form, meaning and use dimensions.

In line with the findings of the current study, Norris and Ortega (2000) and Han (2004) contend that effective grammar teaching has positive impacts on students' knowledge of the target language. Likewise learned, R. Ellis (2002) points out that grammar instruction contributes to students' both acquired knowledge and knowledge substantially. It is further supported that naturalistic learning in the classroom (e.g., immersion programs) is not a guarantee for high levels of grammatical competence

(Genesee, 1987; R. Ellis, 2006); therefore, teaching grammar is now considered as a prerequisite in language education. Larsen-Freeman (2001) states that meaningful practice can help almost all students learn the target linguistic structure as it engages students in the learning process. She further adds that since meaningless mechanical drills, like repetition drills, commonly attributed to behaviorist approaches to learning, do not engage students in the process of language learning, it is likely that students' attempts to learn the target grammatical structure will result in failure.

As aforementioned, the students had an intermediate level of language proficiency based on their university entrance exam scores. However, the results of the pretest indicated that they still lacked thorough knowledge of NCs and thus needed further L2 instruction to be able to use NCs effectively and appropriately. As for the results of the posttest, it was found that the provision of L2 instruction with regard to the form-meaning-use framework enhanced the students' knowledge and competence of using NCs in writing skills. This particular outcome shows clearly that grammar teaching based on the form-meaning-use framework contributes substantially to the instruction provided in the L2 classroom. Similar to these findings, Long (1983) points out that instructional practices are likely to affect or effect the teaching and learning processes. Therefore, he disfavors an either-or or all-or-none approach to assessing the contributions of instruction to acquisition. He further maintains that instruction is beneficial (1) for students at different ages (2) for students at various language proficiency levels, (3) on both integrative and discrete-point tests, and (4) in environments providing rich or poor acquisition. Hence, it can be concluded that teaching grammar with regard to form, meaning and use dimensions has positive effects on students' knowledge of the target language in general and writing skills in particular (Yabuki-Soh, 2007; Han, 2004; Lightbown, 2000; Norris & Ortega, 2000; R. Ellis, 1994).

At this point, it is, however, important to caution that the students' overall L2 proficiency may have a putative causal effect on their use of NCs in writing skills. In the related literature, there are several studies that reveal a significant relationship between students' L2 proficiency and their linguistic knowledge and performance in writing writings skills (e.g., Baba, 2009; Engber, 1995; Koda, 1993; Schoonen et al., 2002, 2003). For instance, Koda (1993) noted that L2 proficiency has a strong effect on writing skills by emphasizing the significance of the interactive impact of various language abilities (e.g., vocabulary) on writing skills. Similarly, Schoonen et al. (2002, 2003) used a componential approach to examine the impact of L2 proficiency (including L2 linguistic knowledge, fluency of linguistic knowledge processing, vocabulary knowledge, and so forth) on writing skills. They found that L2 proficiency had a significant effect on writing skills. Therefore, the impact of L2 proficiency should be taken into consideration in the interpretation of the obtained outcomes.

5. Conclusion and Future Directions

The three types of clauses (noun, adjective, and adverb) focused on in this research constitute a significant area of study in writing skills in English. Of these three types, NCs overwhelm the other two regarding their complexity, and thus require particular attention in grammar teaching to help learners become proficient writers in English. Given this importance, the use of effective and efficient instructional approaches, methods, and techniques occupy central stage in the language classroom. In line with these notions, Larsen-Freeman's (2001) three-dimensional framework of grammar teaching serve effectively to assists learners in developing the mastery of NCs via converting their declarative knowledge into procedural knowledge. This is primarily because the framework provides a combination of form, meaning, and use dimensions when teaching grammar.

Considering the positive impact of the form-meaning-use framework on teaching NCs in writing skills, it can be concluded that this framework can also be implemented to teach other linguistic items.

Moreover, the current research implemented the *rewrite* activities at sentence and text level to measure the students' writing skills in the use dimension of the framework. Considering the plethora of activities and tasks applied in writing skills, different and diverse activities and tasks can be used to examine L2 learners' writing skills effectively. Last but not least, further research with larger sample size can be conducted to examine the impact of L2 proficiency on linguistic knowledge and performance in writing writings skills.

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Dil bilgisi öğretiminde biçim-anlam-kullanım çerçevesi: yazma becerilerindeki isim cümlecikleri üzerine araştırma

Öz

Larsen-Freeman'in (2001) üç boyutlu (biçim-anlam-kullanım) dil bilgisi öğretimi çerçevesine dayanan bu çalışma, ikinci dil öğrencileri için yazı yazmada kullanılan cümlecik türlerinden hangisinin (isim, sıfat veya zarf) diğerlerine göre daha zor olduğunu araştırmayı amaçlamıştır. Bir devlet üniversitesinin İngiliz Dili Eğitimi Anabilim Dalında okuyan öğrencilere yönelik biçim-anlam-kullanım üçlemesine uygun olarak hazırlanan tanılama testinin sonuçlarına göre isim cümlecikleri en zorlayıcı cümlecik türü olarak bulunmuştur. Daha sonra öğrencilere, isim cümlecikleriyle ilgili mevcut bilgilerini ölçmek için aynı çerçeveye dayanan bir isim cümlecikleri testi ön test olarak verilmiştir. Ön testten sonra öğrenciler, üç saatlik dilimler şeklinde ayarlanmış toplam dokuz saatlik biçim-anlam-kullanım çerçevesini baz alan bir öğrenim sürecinden geçtiler. Öğrencilerin öğrenim sürecinde gösterdiği gelişimi ölçmek için ise bir son test uygulanmıştır. Elde edilen bulguların nicel analizleri öğrencilerin yazma becerileri alanında isim cümlecikleriyle ilgili bilgilerinde kayda değer bir gelişme olduğunu ortaya koymuştur; bu da biçim-anlam-kullanım çerçevesinin dil öğretiminde etkili ve verimli bir öğretim sağladığını göstermiştir.

Anahtar sözcükler: ikinci dil öğretimi, biçim-anlam-kullanım çerçevesi, yazma becerileri, cümlecikler

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