

## **The Function of Conscious Grammatical Knowledge in Second Language Learning**

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### **Abstract :**

The study assesses the role of conscious grammatical knowledge, and the positions taken on it, with respect to the effectiveness of formal instruction and learning a second language. The following issues will be discussed with particular reference to the role of conscious grammatical knowledge: Krashen's acquisition versus learning hypothesis, the Monitor model, the critical reactions to them and the effectiveness of formal instruction.

The study aims to analyze the learners' beliefs and practices concerning conscious grammatical knowledge.

In order to identify the conscious grammatical knowledge by the students in studying English language culture a questionnaire was applied on the second year students, Department of English, College of Education. Also Post and Pre- Tests were conducted to gather the required data.

The results indicate that the appropriate teaching method has the greatest role to activate the conscious grammatical knowledge and this teaching method can be applied with

taking into consideration the learning environment and certainly the learners' proficiency level. In the light of the results certain conclusions have been achieved about this topic.

**Keywords: Conscious grammatical knowledge**

### الخبرة المعرفية النحوية في تعلم اللغة الانكليزية كلغة ثانية

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#### الملخص :

تهدف الدراسة الى تقييم دور الخبرة المعرفية النحوية والمواقف التي يتم اتخاذها وفق ذلك مع الاخذ بنظر الاعتبار فعالية التعليم الرسمي وتعلم اللغة الثانية. وتم بحث مجموعة من المسائل مع الاشارة بشكل خاص إلى دور المعرفة النحوية الواعية ونظرية كراشان مقابل فرضيات التعلم بالاضافة الى نموذج المراقب وردود الفعل المنتقدة لها ومدى فعالية التعليم الرسمي. وتهدف الدراسة ايضا إلى تحليل طريقة تفكير المتعلمين والممارسات المتعلقة بالمعرفة النحوية الواعية. ومن أجل التعرف على المعرفة النحوية عند الطلاب في دراسة ثقافة اللغة الإنكليزية فقد تم توزيع استبيان لطلاب المرحلة الثانية، قسم اللغة الإنجليزية، كلية التربية وايضا اجراء الاختبار القبلي والبعدي للمتعلمين.

وقد اشارت النتائج إلى أن طريقة التدريس المناسبة لها الدور الأكبر في تفعيل المعرفة النحوية الواعية ويمكن تطبيق هذه الطريقة التعليمية عند الأخذ بعين الاعتبار البيئة التعليمية، وبالتأكيد مستوى إتقان المتعلمين للغة. وقد تم استخلاص مجموعة من الاستنتاجات في ضوء ماتم التوصل اليها من نتائج.

**الكلمة المفتاحية : المعرفة النحوية الواعية**

## Introduction

Many researches have maintained that second language learning (SLL) might follow similar processes to those of first

language learning drawing upon the evidence from research on "naturalistic" learning as opposed to formal instruction. This view is mainly based on the results of the morpheme studies of the 1970, which suggested that second language learning sequences appeared to be similar in both formal and naturalistic setting and that SLA could also be dependent on the activation of an innate language learning mechanism.

The results of the morpheme studies also seemed to support the arguments made by Corder (1967:166) for the existence of a "built-in" syllabus, and the need for learner-generated "natural" syllabuses, and by Newmark and Reibel (1968:161) for more attention to be given to language use rather than to detailed study of grammatical rules, indicating that given the necessity and sufficiency of input, the learner can do the analysis for himself.

Dulay and Burt (1973:245) proposes that syntax should not, indeed could not, be taught to children. Krashen (1982:23-43) states that language, first or second, must be "acquired" not taught. Krashen further developed an overall theory of SLA emphasizing the "natural order" of acquisition, the importance of comprehensible input over grammatical analysis, and stressing the acquisition / learning dichotomy in SLA. This paper will focus on the underlying assumptions of Krashen's theory as it relates primarily to the role of conscious grammatical knowledge, learning, and formal instruction.

### **The problem**

The English Language learners have real difficulties concerning their abilities to master the grammatical rules and most of the students lack the grammatical competence that enable them to use the language accurately and fluently. Their

capacities to have the conscious grammatical knowledge is not effective and ignored by the different method of teaching that they have been taught by applying them. These lacks of this ability can be seen clearly through the daily activities and tasks and also through the monthly exams, daily quizzes and feedback process that they pass through them.

### **The aims**

The research goals can be illustrated in the following points

1. To analyze the learners' beliefs and practices concerning conscious grammatical knowledge.
2. To explore the teacher's common usage of pedagogical methodology.
3. To explore the learning condition and feedback of the students after receiving the teacher's grammar teaching.
4. To reflect on the effectiveness of the learner's conscious grammatical knowledge after having experienced the instructor's teaching method.

### **Hypotheses**

Based on the above aims the following hypotheses are proposed:

1. EL learners have lacks concerning their abilities to function the conscious grammatical knowledge in learning English as a second language.
2. The teaching methods that are applied in teaching English language ignore to improve the conscious grammatical knowledge for the learners.
3. The new teaching method that will be adopted will influence on the learners abilities positively and activates the conscious grammatical knowledge since new

strategies and techniques will be applied by the instructor.

### **Scope**

The study is limited to assess *language and culture* subject that is taught in English Language departments at the colleges of Education of Salahaddin University. The study is also limited to adopting Krashen's acquisition versus learning hypothesis, the Monitor model, in the process of assessing this knowledge.

### **Participants**

The participants of the study will be the English language learners in English language department/college of Education /Salahaddin University. In particular the second grade students In order to reach an accurate data the selection of the samples will be in this way:

- The total number of the students is 80 mixed between male and female students.

The selection of the students is done by randomization method according to the whole population of the students.

### **Instruments**

Two instruments will be adopted in this research to gather data which are:

1. Pre -test and post-test for the students.
2. A questionnaire for the students that is constructed by designing a coding scheme that includes five alternatives (strongly disagree, disagree, not sure. Strongly agree and agree).

## **The previous Literature**

### **The Acquisition / Learning Dichotomy and the Monitor Theory**

Krashen's (1985:1) non- interface position on the role of conscious grammatical knowledge in SLA views acquisition as a subconscious process and as "being identical in all important ways to the process children utilize in acquiring their first language. It involves implicit knowledge and results from language use for communication, with the focus of attention on message and meaning as opposed to form.

Learning, on the other hand, is seen as a "conscious" process which leads to the development of explicit knowledge about, and awareness of the language and its structures. This, however, does not imply the ability to communicate in that language with any fluency. A learner may well be able to debate the use of the "past simple" in a relatively complicated metalanguage without being capable of producing it in spontaneous speech. In Newmark and Rebel's words, "the classroom student's knowledge of the language may allow him to do everything with the language (1968:156). It should be noted, however, that Krashen is not simply making the equation of classroom equals learning and natural environment equals acquisition. As Mclaughlin (1987:20) points out, Krashen considers that "it is not setting per se, but conscious attention to rules that distinguishes language acquisition from language learning.

Krashen's rather negative view of the role of conscious grammatical knowledge, thus far, does not necessarily suggest that it has no function in SLA at all. As the "Monitor" theory explains, learning is capable of "monitoring" utterances initiated by the acquired system. This "monitor" represents the

consciously learned system, and, as such, has a store of conscious grammatical knowledge which serves as a means of self-correcting potential errors in the learner's output and performance. The use or activation of the monitor, however, depends on certain conditions: sufficient time, focus on form and knowledge of the rule, Krashen (1982, 1985, 1994, and 2001). Krashen also posits three levels of monitor users: the over-users, the under-users, and the optimal user (the learner who applies conscious grammatical knowledge appropriately".

Krashen's (1982, 1994:45-77) most controversial view is that explicit knowledge cannot be converted into implicit knowledge, that there is no "cross-over" or transfer between what he considers are the distinctly separate systems of learning and acquisition. Before examining the positions that have been taken on this particular argument, I shall look at the general criticisms of Krashen's views on the role of conscious grammatical knowledge in SLA.

Krashen's Critics: Mclaughlin (1987:19) has remarked that "Krashen – Bashin" has become a favorite pastime at conferences and in journals dealing with SLA research" ever since Krashen puts forward his views on acquisition and learning, and on the role of conscious grammatical knowledge, as encapsulated in the "Monitor" theory.

Seliger (1979:364) also conducts an experiment to test the "conscious rule" condition, using children and adults learning English as a second language, and assessing their production of the indefinite article ("a" or "an") in an obligatory context. He found that the subjects who got it correct could not give a grammatically sound explanation, some children reverting to such factors as whether the noun in

question was "alive or not"! Seilger's results support Sharwood-Smith's (1981:159-169) observation that learners especially children can make the correct response without being able to verbalize the "conscious" rule.

### **The Interface and non-interface positions in SLA**

The "interface" position, however, claims that conscious grammatical knowledge that results from formal instruction can lead to acquisition. Ellis (1984: 151) outlines the "interface" perspective as follows: "it is through practice that "explicit" knowledge, which is non-automatic, becomes implicit knowledge, which is automatic. Instruction can both provide explicit knowledge and help to convert it into implicit knowledge". Ellis (1984: 81) also underlines the speculative and theoretical nature of the "interface" debate and stresses the inability of either side to produce substantial empirical evidence. Gregg, however, feels that it is Krashen's job "to disprove the intuitively obvious proposition that "learning" can become "acquisition".

If we accept the idea that learning becomes acquisition and as result, conscious grammatical knowledge can lead to, or be converted into, spontaneous communication, then we need to look at the processes by which this is considered possible.

### **Conscious Grammatical Knowledge and Spontaneous Language Use**

The "interface" position keeps up that learnt information brings about obtained learning and sets a "procedure whereby" structures are at first learned with some sort of attention to the learning and then transformed. (Larsen –



freeman and long 1991: 324). This transformation process which may lead to acquisition has been considered by different researchers using different models and terminology to account for conscious grammatical knowledge resulting in spontaneous language use. The following discussion summarizes the processes proposed by some of the main proponents of the "interface" position.

Bialystok (1978:69) distinguishes between "Explicit Linguistic Knowledge" and "implicit Linguistic Knowledge", defining them in terms of their respective functions. The explicit system has a threefold function as a "buffer for new information" before being transferred, a "store for information which is always represented explicitly" and as an "articulatory system". She considers that "functional" practice increases Implicit Linguistic Knowledge, whereas "formal practice, such as formal grammatical study, increases explicit linguistic knowledge. A second function of formal practice, through the use of drills and exercises, is to "familiarize the learner with information he has already learned so that it may be used easily (1987:77). As a result, Bialystok believes that language from the explicit system can be "automatized" and transferred to the implicit system.

As a means to justify their argument, the advocates of the "interface" position see an effective role for formal instruction since it leads to learning. Learning produces conscious grammatical knowledge, which itself, through the various processes of practice, automatization and consciousness – raising, leads to acquisition. The advocates of the non-interface position believe that formal instruction has little or no role in SLA other than simply functioning as a monitor or a checking device with respect to work done by L2 learners.

## **The Effectiveness of Formal Instruction**

As a primary source of conscious grammatical knowledge, formal instruction needs to be looked at from the point of view of just how effective it is. Krashen (1985, 1992, and 1999) Dulay and Burt (1973:250) discard formal instruction as being relatively unimportant in bringing about acquisition. The only credit that Krashen sees for formal instruction is for teaching "easy grammar" rules, maintaining that more difficult aspects of grammar must be acquired. Krashen (1992, 1993, 1999) convincingly argues that the results of studies (e.g. White 1999:68, Williams and Evans 1999:144, jafarpur and yamini 1993:359-369), claiming to show an advantage for explicit grammar instruction, confirm only that grammar study has a peripheral effect on second language competence. Krashen (2001: 8) summarizes the features such studies find to share as follows.

- Comparison groups experienced impoverished versions of comprehensible input, generally short passages on topics that were most likely of little or no interest to the subjects.
- Measures were form focused. It was very likely that students knew they were being tested on specific structures. Even though some measures appeared to be more "communicative" than others, when tests are given immediately after a treatment in which students are focused on specific rules, it is likely that they are aware that the test is a test of certain rules, and their attention will be on accuracy.
- Advantages of instructed groups were modest and were sometimes nonexistent, despite the fact that treatment

was often extensive and on structures that students often had previously studied in class.

- The impact of explicit instruction, when present, was not long term.
- The results, Krashen maintains, are consistent with the Monitor hypothesis which claims that consciously learnt knowledge is only available as a monitor or editor and only when the performer knows the rule, he/she is focused on form, and has enough time to apply the rule.

Most studies on this issue have shown that natural acquisition orders or developmental sequences cannot be affected by formal instruction in a positive way. This apparent imperviousness has led Larsen – Freeman and Long to say that "acquisition orders may well be immutable" (1991: 307).

Though the route of acquisition cannot be affected, it has been shown that the rate of acquisition can be. When formal instruction is given at the appropriate time, and not in conflict with natural developmental stages, it can help to speed up a process of acquisition, and may also lead to positive results in overall achievement in SLA (Larsen – freeman and Long 1991, Ellis 1985, 1990). Long (1983:374). In response to his own question, "does instruction make a difference?" reviews the available data and empirical research and offers a favorable conclusion as to the effectiveness of formal instruction to SLA. He suggests that "instruction is beneficial for any level (beginners or advanced), any age (children or adults), and in any environment (acquisition – rich or acquisition – poor)". In a subsequent review of the instructed language acquisition researches, Long (1988b:115-141) concluded that instruction is beneficial to learners, particularly in the areas of SLA processes, rate of SLA, and level of

ultimate attainment. Along the same lines, Larsen – Freeman and Long (1991:79-88) suggest that there has been a premature abandonment of instruction and that there are a number of positive contributions that it has to make in SLA.

Applying these finding to the interface debate does not show conclusive support for either view, while the "rate" improvement appears to support the "interface" position, the inability to change "route" provides support for the "non – interface" stance of Krashen.

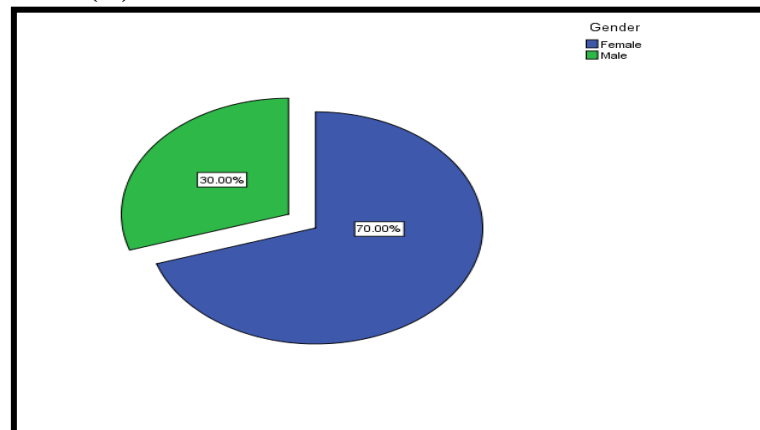
### **The Sample Selection**

The sample that is selected for this study is the students of the second stage in English Language department. The sample includes 6 male and 14 female students. Male students represent 30% while the female students represent 70% of the whole sample. Table (1) and diagram (1) show the distribution of Gender in the sample .

**Table (1) The distribution of Gender in the sample**

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Valid	Female	14	% 70.0	% 70.0
	Male	6	% 30.0	% 30.0
	Total	20	% 100.0	% 100.0

Diagram (1) the distribution of Gender in the sample



### **The application of the instruments**

The researcher has applied two instruments to gather the necessary data for the research. These instruments are:

### **The questionnaire**

The questionnaire is applied to the students of the second stage in English Language department so as to find out if the teaching method that is applied for learning the language and culture of English language enables them to improve their conscious grammatical knowledge and it is resulted that this ability is functional in their performance and effective in an appropriate way.

### **The Pre -Post Test**

It is believed that these tests are very necessary so as to indicate the progress that appears in their conscious grammatical knowledge when the instructor applied the communicative method of teaching. The results of the two tests are compared to show whether the teaching method can affect the improving of students' grammatical knowledge.

## Discussion of the Results

Through the application of SPSS statistical programmer the following results are achieved:

### The results of the Questionnaire

The students' responses to the items of the questionnaire have scored different ranges according to Likert Scale. This score can be described as: strongly disagree scheme scored 1-1.180, Disagree scored 1.81- 2.60, Not sure scored from 2.61 -3.40, Agree scored 3.41-20 while strongly agree scored 4.21-5. See table (2)

Range	Level (Rating)
From 1 To 1.80	Strongly disagree
From 1.81 To 2.60	Disagree
From 2.61 To 3.40	Not sure
From 3.41 To 4.20	Agree
From 4.21 To 5	Strongly agree

Pearson's correlation coefficient between Learning Process and Knowledge scored 526\*\* at the level 0.01 which means that there is a significant indication between these two processes. Which means that the accurate learning process through applying the suitable method of teaching leads to increase the students' knowledge about the language. See table (3)

**Table (3) Pearson’s correlation**

		Learning Process	Knowledge
Learning Process	Pearson Correlation	1	.526**
	Sig. (1-tailed)		.009
	N	20	20
Knowledge	Pearson Correlation	.526**	1
	Sig. (1-tailed)	.009	
	N	20	20

Most of the students have selected the scheme (Agree) to the opinions that call for using the communicative methods that encourage the students have more opportunities to exercise the language and motivate to use the language and acquire the knowledge. Also they agree to the opinions about the importance of learning through methods that build their proficiency levels. The students are not sure only three opinions of the questionnaire which are about having a fundamental level of grammar that enables them to communicate well by using English language. The second opinion that most of the students are not sure about it is about the instructional activities that help to comprehend the language through communicative contexts. The last item is motivation that they receive when they study language and culture subject. The above three points are very clear and can be considered the core of the instruction so the students need to realize the importance of being introduced to the foreign culture. Also it is obvious that the students are in need to focus more on developing their communicative competence so as their performance to be

progressed. See table (4) about the descriptions of the student's answers to the questionnaire.

**Table (4) Average descriptions of the Questionnaire**

	Mean	Std. Deviation	Rating
The teacher would adopt inductive teaching with communicative approach framework. The teacher would adopt inductive teaching with communicative approach framework.	3.50	1.100	Agree
Exercises and activities can give students more opportunities to practice the language	4.20	1.056	Agree
Error correction is necessary for learners but dependent on the Pedagogical situation.	3.70	.657	Agree
Learning language and culture encourages students' output.	3.85	1.040	Agree
Language and culture learning helps to encourage students to continue their learning through system building and Questioning the system	3.75	.716	Agree
Teachers should be patient with the learners' errors.	4.75	.550	Agree
The teacher should Adjust methods of teaching that develop students' proficiency level	4.25	.851	Agree
Building students' confidence to produce more accurate	3.55	1.276	Agree
It is possible to learn new grammar by simply noticing (while reading or listening) new grammatical structures and forming mental rules about how they work.	3.65	.933	Agree
It is not always necessary or	3.35	.988	Agree



helpful to practice new grammar in speaking or writing about EL culture			
Classes should be focused on real-world contexts so that students are able to use the target language appropriately in real life.	3.95	.945	Agree
The students' learning process is one of the essential components responsible for developing their production and comprehension in order for them to continue Learning the target language beyond the classroom.	3.60	.754	Agree
You can create your own spoken and written discourse using certain grammatical rules.	3.65	.933	Agree
That students cannot communicate well if they do not have a fundamental level of grammar.	3.30	1.302	Not sure
You comprehend instructional activities when they are embedded with communicative contexts.	2.85	.875	Not sure
Language and culture instruction Motivates you to rapidly master grammatical forms and to promote suitable language acquisition	3.30	1.031	Not sure
Learning Process	3.8375	.34674	Agree
Knowledge	3.5625	.43773	Agree

Through the statistical analysis of the students questionnaire. The two important terms that the study is based on them have the following scores: Learning process scored 3.8375 while knowledge scored 3.5625 which means that both processes are connected with each other whenever the learning process goes smoothly it means that the students' knowledge is progressing when the accurate method of teaching is applied for teaching

language and culture. The relationship between these terms is strong positive relationship. It scored 0.276 comparing with factor deviate correlation which is 0.526 means that learning process scores 27.6% of having the grammatical knowledge of the students. See table (5)

**Table (5) The connection between Learning and Knowledge**

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	0.526 <sup>a</sup>	0.276	0.236	0.38261

**Table (6) The connection between Learning and Knowledge by ANOVA<sup>a</sup>**

Model		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	1.006	1	1.006	6.869	.017 <sup>b</sup>
	Residual	2.635	18	.146		
	Total	3.641	19			

The connection between learning process and knowledge is 0.05 which is less than 0.017 which indicates the strength of this relationship. See table (6)

Figure (1)

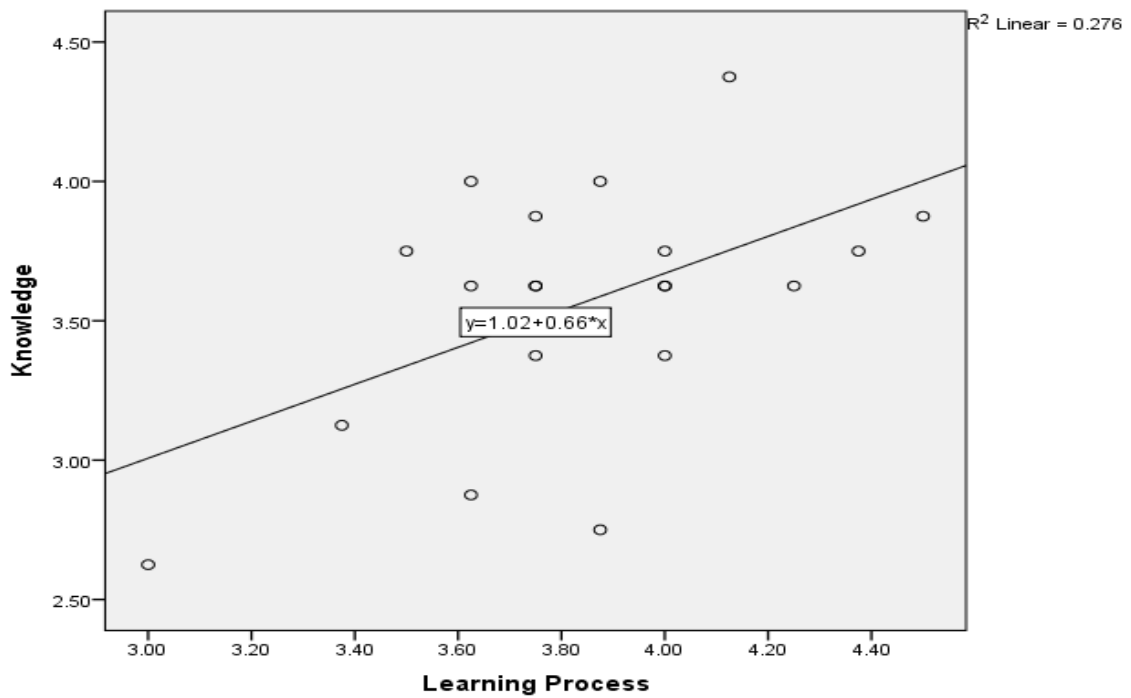


Figure (1) linear regression equation

Normal P-P Plot of Regression Standardized Residual

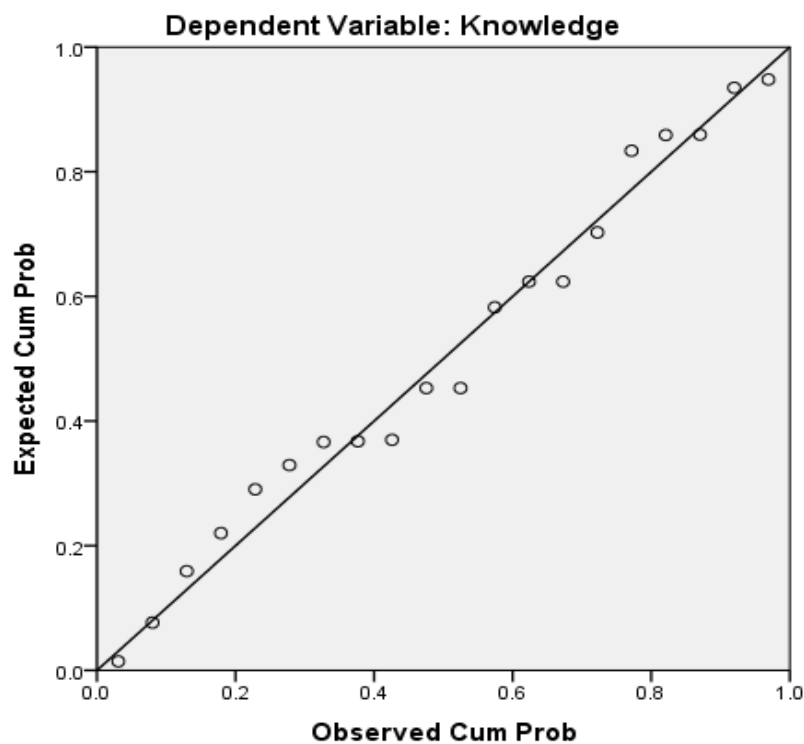


Figure (2) The Reliability and confidence of the relationship

The sample includes 70% female students and 30% male students but the Chi –square Test shows that the gender does not affect the learning process and having the knowledge about the language. According to this test the relationship between gender and learning scored 7.302 which is more than the tabulated degree which is 0.05. See table (5)

**Table (5) the relationship of Learning with Gender**

#		Chi-Square Value	Df	Sig.
1	Gender	7.302	10	.697

Also the ability to have the grammatical knowledge does not depend on gender. According to Chi-Square Value the factor of knowledge scored 8.095 which is higher than the tabulated degree 0.05. See table (6)

**Table (6) the relationship of Knowledge with Gender**

#		Chi-Square Value	df	Sig.
1	Gender	8.095	9	.525

### **The Results of the Pre-Post Test**

The results of these tests indicate that the student’s grammatical knowledge has been activated when the communicative teaching method is applied. Most of the students’ degrees in Post -test became higher than Pre- test and the time that they need to answer the questions also became less. In Pre test they needed between 50-55 minutes to answer all the questions while in the Posttest they needed

between 20-25. These results show that the conscious of grammatical knowledge of the students is functional and effective when they are exposure to new situations in the class.

### **Conclusions**

In the light of the results, the following conclusions have been achieved:

- 1- Most of the students have the attitudes to learn language and know about the foreign culture but they have some lacks concerning this point. These lacks may not be concerned with the teaching methods as well as with other teaching – learning factors such as the teaching materials or the teaching environment.
- 2-The results of the Pre and Post tests have been clarified that the experienced language instructor should adopt the approach that enable the learners to acquire the communicative abilities that they aim through learning the language. The instructor needs to adopt the most suitable techniques and apply the most appropriate methodology for the learner' different objectives, learning style and context.
- 3- Most of the students realize the importance of acquiring the grammatical knowledge and make it effective through practicing different activities and assignments that improve it.
- 4- It is believed that the applied communicative teaching method is fruitful to function the conscious grammatical knowledge of the students but this knowledge requires the update techniques and strategies that keep this skill function appropriately and effectively.

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