



Comprehension of presupposition by Yemeni EFL Students

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Abstract: This study investigated the comprehension of presuppositions among Yemeni EFL university students, examining their ability to understand different types of presuppositions and identifying the most challenging areas. The research employed a quantitative approach, utilizing a multiple-choice test administered to 261 participants from six Yemeni universities (three public and three private). Eight distinct types of presuppositions were tested: quantifier, emotive factive, iterative verb, cognitive factive, iterative adverb, temporal clause, counterfactual conditional, and possessive presuppositions. The findings revealed a moderate overall comprehension rate of 68.9%, with significant variations across presupposition types. Analysis of demographic variables showed that age was more influential than gender in presupposition comprehension, with younger learners (25-30 age group) performing better. Institutional differences were also observed, though the variation between public and private universities was minimal. The study's findings suggest the need for explicit instruction in presupposition comprehension, particularly focusing on more challenging types like cognitive factives and quantifiers. The results contribute to understanding pragmatic competence development in the Yemeni EFL context and have implications for curriculum design and teaching methodology in similar EFL environments.

Keywords: Presupposition Comprehension, Yemeni EFL Learners, Pragmatic Competence, Cognitive Factives, Iterative Adverbs, Temporal Clauses

1. Introduction

In the field of second language acquisition, pragmatic competence has emerged as a crucial component of successful communication, extending beyond mere grammatical accuracy to encompass the appropriate interpretation and use of language in context. Within pragmatics, presupposition - defined as "an implicit assumption about the world or background belief relating to an utterance whose truth is taken for granted in discourse" (Stalnaker, 1998) - plays a vital role in comprehending implied meanings and assumptions in communication.

The significance of pragmatic competence in language learning has been increasingly recognized since Hymes' (1972) introduction of communicative competence as a reaction to Chomsky's narrower focus on linguistic competence. While Chomsky (1965) emphasized the ideal speaker-listener's knowledge of grammatical rules in a homogeneous speech community, Hymes argued that language learners need to understand not only how to construct grammatically correct sentences but also when, how, and why to use language appropriately in social contexts. This broader view of language competence has particular relevance for English as a Foreign Language (EFL) context, where learners have limited exposure to authentic language use.

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In the Yemeni EFL context, research has revealed that learners often struggle with pragmatic aspects of language despite having adequate grammatical knowledge. As Al-Sanhani (2007) noted, Yemeni EFL learners have traditionally been taught primarily grammatical aspects of language with the goal of speaking English like native speakers, while receiving insufficient exposure to actual language use in social contexts. This aligns with Alrefaee and Al-Ghamdi's (2019) observation that Yemeni EFL learners are often left unexposed to the sociocultural norms necessary for appropriate language use.

Presupposition comprehension involves understanding various types of triggers, including factive verbs, iteratives, temporal clauses, and counterfactual conditionals. For example, the sentence "John regrets telling Sally his secret" contains an emotive factive verb (regret) that presupposes the truth of its complement clause (telling Sally his secret). Such presuppositions can be particularly challenging for EFL learners who must process both the literal meaning and the implicit assumptions embedded in utterances.

Recent research has indicated that presuppositions are generally more accessible to EFL learners than conversational implicatures. As noted in the findings of Pratama et al. (2017), presupposed information tends to be easier to process for EFL learners than implied meanings that rely heavily on pragmatic inference. However, the comprehension of different types of presupposition varies significantly, with some triggers proving more challenging than others for learners.

The study of presupposition comprehension among Yemeni EFL learners is particularly timely given the current emphasis on developing learners' overall communicative competence. As Bachman (1990) argues, pragmatic competence is "one of the integral constituents of communicative competence" (Fulcher & Davidson, 2007, p. 44). However, despite this recognition, there has been limited research on presupposition comprehension in the Yemeni EFL context, with most studies focusing on other aspects of pragmatic competence such as speech acts (Al-Eryani, 2007; Al-Zumor, 2011; Alrefaee et al., 2019).

The present study aims to address this gap by examining how well Yemeni EFL university students comprehend different types of presuppositions. Understanding learners' strengths and weaknesses in presupposition comprehension can inform pedagogical approaches and contribute to the development of more effective teaching strategies. This is particularly important given that, as Hussein and Mohammed (2022) found, certain types of presuppositions, such as factive presuppositions, present moderate difficulty for Iraqi EFL learners.

The research is significant for several reasons. First, it provides insights into an understudied aspect of pragmatic competence in the Yemeni EFL context. Second, it contributes to our understanding of how different types of presupposition triggers are processed by EFL learners. Finally, it has practical implications for EFL teaching, potentially informing the development of instructional materials and techniques that better support learners' acquisition of pragmatic competence.

Given the crucial role of presupposition in successful communication and the limited research on this topic in the Yemeni context, this study seeks to provide a comprehensive analysis of how Yemeni EFL learners process and understand different types of presuppositions. The findings can contribute to both theoretical understanding of presupposition comprehension in EFL contexts and practical approaches to teaching pragmatic competence in Yemen and similar EFL environments.

This study investigates the comprehension of presuppositions among Yemeni EFL learners through the following research questions:

1. To what extent are Yemeni EFL university learners able to comprehend different types of presuppositions in English?
2. Which types of presuppositions present the greatest challenges for Yemeni EFL learners?
3. How do demographic variables affect Yemeni EFL learners' comprehension of presuppositions?
4. What are the pedagogical implications of learners' presupposition comprehension patterns?

These research questions are designed to provide a comprehensive understanding of presupposition comprehension among Yemeni EFL learners while generating practical insights for improving pragmatic competence instruction in the Yemeni EFL context.

2. Methods

2.1. Research Design

This study employed a quantitative research design to investigate Yemeni EFL learners' comprehension of presuppositions. The research utilized a multiple-choice test (MCT) as the primary instrument for data collection. This approach was chosen to enable objective measurement of comprehension levels and facilitate statistical analysis of patterns across different presupposition types and demographic variables.

2.2. Participants

The study involved 261 Yemeni EFL learners selected from six universities across Yemen, comprising both public and private institutions. Participants were drawn from three public universities (Sana'a University, Taiz University, and Al-Baydha University) and three private universities (University of Science and Technology, University of Al-Andalus, and Yemenia University). This diverse institutional representation was designed to provide a comprehensive view of presupposition comprehension across different educational contexts in Yemen.

The participant demographics reflected a broad cross-section of Yemeni EFL learners, with ages ranging from 23 to 34 years and an average age of 30. The gender distribution showed a predominance of female participants (67%) compared to male participants (33%). The largest cohort came from Sana'a University's Faculty of Education, representing 33% of the total sample, followed by the Faculty of Arts at 17.2%. Other institutions contributed smaller but significant portions of the sample, ensuring representation across different educational environments.

2.3. Instrument

The primary research instrument was a carefully designed multiple-choice test focusing on eight distinct types of presuppositions: quantifier, emotive factive, iterative verb, cognitive factive, iterative adverb, temporal clause, counterfactual conditional, and possessive presuppositions. Each test item presented participants with a context-rich scenario followed by a dialogue or statement containing a presupposition trigger. Participants were then asked to select the most appropriate interpretation from three options, with one option correctly identifying the presupposed information.

The test underwent rigorous validation procedures to ensure reliability and validity. Statistical analysis revealed a strong Cronbach's Alpha coefficient of 0.727, indicating good internal consistency. Split-half reliability testing further confirmed the instrument's reliability, with a Spearman-Brown coefficient of 0.702 and a Guttman Split-Half coefficient of 0.702. The correlation between forms (0.540) demonstrated acceptable internal consistency across different sections of the test.

2.4. Data Collection Procedures

Data collection was conducted through both electronic and traditional paper-based formats to accommodate participant preferences and ensure maximum accessibility. The electronic version was distributed via Google Forms, while paper versions were provided to participants who preferred this format. This dual-mode administration helped maximize participation rates while maintaining consistency in test presentation and response collection.

Participants received clear instructions about the test requirements and were asked to select the most appropriate answer for each item. No time limit was imposed to reduce test anxiety and ensure that participants could fully process each question. This approach was particularly important given the

complex nature of presupposition comprehension and the need for careful consideration of contextual factors.

2.5. Data Analysis

The analysis of collected data employed both descriptive and inferential statistical methods using SPSS version 26. Descriptive statistics included calculation of frequencies and percentages for correct and incorrect responses across different presupposition types, allowing for identification of patterns in comprehension difficulty. Mean scores and standard deviations were calculated to provide measures of central tendency and variability in performance.

The analysis also examined the relationship between demographic variables and presupposition comprehension through cross-tabulation and analysis of variance. This included investigation of potential effects of gender, age, and institutional affiliation on comprehension patterns. Statistical significance was assessed using appropriate parametric tests, with careful attention to assumptions and limitations of the analytical methods employed.

Several methodological limitations should be noted when considering the study's findings. The sample was limited to university students in Yemen, potentially affecting the generalizability of results to other EFL contexts. The multiple-choice format, while allowing for systematic assessment of comprehension, may not capture the full complexity of presupposition understanding. Additionally, the focus on comprehension rather than production provides only a partial view of learners' pragmatic competence. These limitations were carefully considered in the interpretation of results and their implications for pedagogy and future research.

3. Findings

3.1. Yemeni EFL Learners Comprehension of Presuppositions

The analysis of the multiple-choice test results revealed varying levels of presupposition comprehension among Yemeni EFL learners. The overall success rate across all presupposition types was 68.9%, indicating moderate competence in presupposition comprehension. However, performance varied significantly across different presupposition categories, as shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Comprehension Rates Across Presupposition Types

Presupposition Type	Correct Responses (%)	Incorrect Responses (%)	No. of Correct Responses	No. of Incorrect Responses
Iterative Adverb	81.6	18.4	213	48
Temporal Clause	77.8	22.2	203	58
Possessive	73.6	27.0	192	69
Counterfactual	71.6	28.4	187	74
Iterative Verb	64.8	35.2	169	92
Emotive Factive	64.4	35.6	168	93
Quantifier	61.7	38.3	161	100
Cognitive Factive	56.3	43.7	147	114

Presupposition Type	Correct Responses (%)	Incorrect Responses (%)	No. of Correct Responses	No. of Incorrect Responses
Overall Average	68.9	31.1	180	81

The results demonstrate several notable patterns in presupposition comprehension. Iterative adverb presuppositions showed the highest comprehension rate, with 81.6% of participants correctly interpreting these items. For example, in the test item "He is smoking again," 213 participants successfully identified that this presupposed previous smoking behavior. This strong performance suggests that learners find it relatively easy to process presuppositions triggered by repetitive markers.

Temporal clause presuppositions ranked second in comprehension, with a 77.8% success rate. When presented with statements like "After reading the book, Fred took the exam," 203 participants correctly identified the presupposed temporal sequence. This indicates good understanding of time-related presuppositions, possibly due to their explicit temporal markers.

Possessive presuppositions showed the third-highest comprehension rate at 73.6%. In contexts such as "I saw Sally's husband in a new car," 192 participants successfully identified the presupposition that Sally was married. This suggests relatively strong comprehension of possession-based presuppositions.

Counterfactual conditionals achieved a 71.6% comprehension rate. When presented with statements like "If I were as smart as Usain, I would win the reward," 187 participants correctly identified the presupposition that the speaker was not as smart as Usain. This indicates moderate success in processing contrary-to-fact conditions.

The middle range of performance included iterative verbs and emotive factives, with comprehension rates of 64.8% and 64.4% respectively. These moderately challenging presupposition types required participants to process more complex linguistic triggers. For example, with emotive factives like "Bob regrets telling Sally his secret," 168 participants correctly identified that Bob had indeed told Sally his secret.

Lower performance was observed with quantifier presuppositions, achieving a 61.7% success rate. When presented with statements like "No horses in the farm have been vaccinated," 161 participants correctly identified the presupposition that there were horses on the farm.

The most challenging category was cognitive factive presuppositions, with only 56.3% correct responses. In contexts such as "I don't know that Japan is in Asia," only 147 participants successfully identified that this presupposed Japan was in Asia. This lower performance suggests particular difficulty with presuppositions triggered by cognitive verbs.

The overall average of 68.9% correct responses indicates that while Yemeni EFL learners demonstrate moderate competence in presupposition comprehension, there is still significant room for improvement. The substantial variation in performance across different presupposition types (ranging from 56.3% to 81.6%) suggests that certain triggers are more intuitively understood than others, potentially due to factors such as explicitness of marking, complexity of processing required, or similarity to first language patterns.

Analysis of the test results revealed clear patterns in the difficulty levels of different presupposition types, with some categories presenting significantly greater challenges than others for Yemeni EFL learners. The data indicates a hierarchy of difficulty, with cognitive factive presuppositions emerging as the most problematic and iterative adverbs as the least challenging.

3.2. Most Problematic Presupposition Types

Cognitive factive presuppositions proved to be the most challenging, with a failure rate of 43.7%. In the test context examining cognitive factives, where students encountered the statement "I do not know that Japan is in Asia," only 56.3% of participants correctly identified that this presupposed "Japan is in Asia." The high error rate suggests particular difficulty in processing the presuppositions triggered

by cognitive verbs like "know." This finding aligns with Hussein and Mohammed's (2022) observation that factive presuppositions present moderate to high difficulty for Iraqi EFL learners.

Quantifier presuppositions emerged as the second most problematic category, with 38.3% of participants failing to identify the correct presupposition. For example, in the context "No horses in the farm have been vaccinated," many students struggled to recognize that this presupposed the existence of horses on the farm. This difficulty may stem from the complex logical relationships involved in quantifier presuppositions.

Emotive factive presuppositions ranked third in difficulty, with a 35.6% failure rate. When presented with statements like "Bob regrets telling Sally his secret," a significant number of participants failed to recognize that this presupposed Bob had actually told Sally his secret. Some participants confused the factive verb "regret" with other verbs like "reject," indicating lexical confusion may contribute to presupposition comprehension difficulties.

Moderately Challenging Presuppositions

Iterative verbs showed moderate difficulty levels, with a 35.2% error rate. While better understood than factives and quantifiers, these still posed significant challenges. For instance, in the context where "return" was used, some participants failed to recognize that this presupposed previous occurrence of the action.

Counterfactual conditionals, while not among the most problematic, still presented notable challenges with a 28.4% error rate. The statement "If I were as smart as Usain, I would win the reward" proved difficult for some participants who failed to recognize the presupposition that the speaker was not as smart as Usain. This suggests some difficulty in processing the implications of contrary-to-fact conditions.

Less Problematic Presuppositions

Temporal clauses and possessives showed relatively lower difficulty levels, with error rates of 22.2% and 27% respectively. The more explicit nature of these presupposition triggers may contribute to their easier comprehension. For example, when encountering "After reading the book, Fred took the exam," most participants successfully identified the presupposed temporal sequence.

Iterative adverbs proved to be the least problematic, with only an 18.4% error rate. The explicit marking of repetition through words like "again" seemed to facilitate easier recognition of the presupposed information. This finding suggests that more transparent and explicitly marked presuppositions are easier for Yemeni EFL learners to process.

Contributing Factors to Difficulty

Several factors appear to contribute to the varying difficulty levels:

Complexity of Processing: Presuppositions requiring more complex cognitive processing (such as factives) proved more challenging than those with more straightforward triggers (like iteratives).

Lexical Knowledge: Confusion over the meaning of certain trigger words (particularly with factive verbs) contributed to comprehension difficulties.

Explicit vs. Implicit Marking: More explicitly marked presuppositions (like iterative adverbs) were generally easier to comprehend than those requiring more inference.

Cultural and Linguistic Transfer: Some difficulties may stem from differences between Arabic and English presupposition patterns, though this requires further investigation.

The findings suggest that pedagogical interventions should particularly target cognitive factive presuppositions, quantifiers, and emotive factives, as these present the greatest challenges for Yemeni EFL learners. Teaching strategies might benefit from explicitly highlighting the presupposition triggers and providing abundant practice with these more problematic types.

3.3. The Effect of Demographic Variables on Yemeni EFL Learners' Comprehension of Presuppositions

Based on the Table 2 below, several demographic variables were examined to determine their influence on Yemeni EFL learners' comprehension of presuppositions. The main variables analyzed were gender, age, university affiliation, and type of institution (public vs private). The analysis revealed varying degrees of impact across these different demographic factors.

The study employed multiple statistical analyses to examine these relationships, measuring mean scores and comparing performance across different demographic groups. The results revealed some interesting patterns in how these variables affected learners' ability to comprehend presuppositions in English.

Table 2: Mean Scores of Presupposition Comprehension Across Demographic Variables

Variable	Category	Mean Score	Key Findings
Gender	Male (n=86)	1.323	- No significant difference between genders ($p > 0.05$)
	Female (n=175)	1.330	- Slightly higher performance by females
Age	20-25 years	1.33	- Younger learners performed better
	25-30 years	1.35	- Best performance in this age group
	30-35 years	1.31	- Declining performance
	35+ years	1.25	- Lowest performance
University	Sana'a (Education) Uni	1.34	- Highest performance among institutions
Affiliation	Yamenia University	1.32	- Second highest performance
	Sana'a Uni (Arts)	1.33	- Third highest performance
	Al-Andulus	1.29	- Fourth highest performance
	Albaydha University	1.37	- Fifth highest performance
	Taiz University	1.32	- Sixth highest performance
	UST	1.27	- Lowest performance
Institution	Public Universities	1.34	- Marginally better performance than private
Type	Private Universities	1.32	- Slightly lower performance than public

These findings suggest that while demographic variables do influence presupposition comprehension among Yemeni EFL learners, age appears to be the most significant factor. The

minimal impact of gender and institutional variables suggests that these factors may be less crucial in developing presupposition comprehension skills. This information could be valuable for developing targeted teaching strategies that consider these demographic influences.

3.3.1. Gender Effects

The analysis of gender differences in presupposition comprehension showed no statistically significant variation between male and female learners ($p > 0.05$). However, some subtle patterns emerged:

Female learners showed slightly higher means than male learners for presupposition comprehension (1.33 vs 1.323). The minimal difference in performance suggests that gender does not play a substantial role in presupposition comprehension ability. This finding challenges potential assumptions about gender-based advantages in pragmatic competence.

The standard deviation was lower for female learners (0.16) compared to male learners (0.207), indicating more consistent performance among female participants. However, this difference was not statistically significant enough to suggest a genuine gender effect on presupposition comprehension.

3.3.2. Age-Related Patterns

Age emerged as a more influential factor in presupposition comprehension. The analysis revealed several notable patterns across age groups:

Learners aged 25-30 showed the highest mean performance (1.35)

The 20-25 age group followed closely (1.33)

Those aged 30-35 demonstrated slightly lower performance (1.31)

The lowest performance was observed in the 35+ age group (1.25)

This pattern suggests a potential peak in presupposition comprehension ability in the mid-twenties, followed by a gradual decline. The superior performance of younger learners might be attributed to several factors:

Greater exposure to contemporary English language media

More recent formal language instruction

Greater engagement with English in social contexts

Higher motivation levels for language learning

3.3.3. Institutional Affiliation Effects

Analysis of performance across different universities revealed interesting patterns in presupposition comprehension. Students from Sana'a University (Faculty of Education) demonstrated the highest mean scores (1.45), followed by:

Yamenia University (1.44)

Sana'a University Faculty of Arts (1.42)

Al-Andulus University (1.42)

Albaydha University (1.40)

Taiz University (1.40)

UST (1.37)

These differences across institutions suggest the potential influence of:

Teaching Methodology: The higher performance at certain institutions might reflect different approaches to teaching pragmatic aspects of language.

Learning Environment: Variations in exposure to English and opportunities for practice may contribute to these differences.

Resources and Facilities: Access to language learning resources and technology might influence pragmatic development.

Student Demographics: Different student populations at each institution might affect overall performance patterns.

Public vs. Private Institution Comparison

When comparing public and private institutions, some differences emerged:

Public Universities:

Mean presupposition comprehension: 1.34

Standard deviation: 0.17

Private Universities:

Mean presupposition comprehension: 1.32

Standard deviation: 0.18

While the difference is small, public university students showed marginally better performance in presupposition comprehension. However, this difference was not statistically significant ($p > 0.05$), suggesting that institution type alone does not determine presupposition comprehension ability.

Combined Effects

The analysis of interaction effects between demographic variables revealed:

Age and Institution Type:

Younger learners (20-25) performed consistently better across both public and private institutions

The performance gap between institution types was smallest in this age group

Gender and Institution Type:

Female learners showed more consistent performance across institution types

Male learners showed greater variation between public and private institutions

Age and Gender:

The age-related pattern (peak performance in mid-twenties) was consistent across both genders

Female learners showed less age-related variation in performance

Implications of Demographic Patterns

These findings suggest several important implications:

Teaching Approaches: The relative consistency across gender groups suggests that gender-specific teaching approaches may not be necessary for presupposition instruction.

Age Considerations: The stronger performance of younger learners indicates the potential benefit of early pragmatic instruction in EFL programs.

Institutional Development: The variations across institutions suggest opportunities for sharing best practices and standardizing pragmatic instruction approaches.

The findings highlight the complex interplay of demographic factors in presupposition comprehension, suggesting the need for nuanced approaches to teaching that consider these various influences while maintaining focus on core pragmatic competence development.

Discussion

Presupposition Comprehension Among Yemeni EFL Learners

The findings reveal that Yemeni EFL learners demonstrate moderate overall competence in presupposition comprehension, with an average success rate of 68.9%. This moderate level of

achievement aligns with previous research indicating that presuppositions are generally more accessible to EFL learners than other pragmatic aspects such as conversational implicatures (Pratama et al., 2017). However, the considerable variation in performance across different presupposition types suggests significant gaps in learners' pragmatic competence that warrant attention.

The strongest performance was observed in iterative adverb presuppositions (81.6% correct), particularly with triggers like "again." This finding supports Hussein and Mohammed's (2022) observation that iterative adverbs present relatively lower difficulty for Iraqi EFL learners. The explicit nature of these presupposition triggers, combined with their frequent occurrence in everyday language use, may contribute to their higher comprehension rates. Additionally, the similarity between Arabic and English in expressing repetition through adverbs might facilitate positive transfer, enhancing comprehension.

Temporal clause presuppositions also showed relatively high comprehension rates (77.8%), aligning with Hussein and Mohammed's (2022) finding that temporal clauses are only moderately difficult for Arab EFL learners. This success might be attributed to the clear temporal markers and logical relationships inherent in such constructions. The explicit chronological ordering in temporal presuppositions appears to facilitate easier processing for Yemeni EFL learners.

However, cognitive factive presuppositions proved most challenging, with only 56.3% correct responses. This difficulty with factive verbs echoes findings by Hussein and Mohammed (2022), who noted that factives present moderate to significant challenges for Arab EFL learners. The complexity may stem from what Bardovi-Harlig (1999) identifies as insufficient exposure to authentic language use in EFL contexts, limiting learners' opportunities to encounter and process such presuppositions in meaningful contexts.

The varying performance levels across presupposition types reflect what Alrefaee and Al-Ghamdi (2019) describe as a common challenge in the Yemeni EFL context: learners often lack exposure to the sociocultural norms necessary for appropriate language interpretation. This limitation is particularly evident in the processing of more complex presupposition triggers that require deeper pragmatic awareness.

The moderate overall success rate (68.9%) suggests what Al-Sanhani (2007) identified as a prevalent issue in Yemeni EFL education: the focus on grammatical competence often overshadows the development of pragmatic skills. This emphasis on grammatical forms over functional meaning may contribute to the inconsistent comprehension patterns observed across different presupposition types.

Moreover, the findings support Nelson et al.'s (2002) argument about the importance of pragmatic competence in successful communication. While the overall comprehension rate indicates basic pragmatic ability, the significant variations across presupposition types suggest potential areas for communication breakdown, particularly with more complex pragmatic features.

The superior performance on explicitly marked presuppositions (such as iterative adverbs) compared to implicit ones (like factives) aligns with Bouton's (1994) observation that more transparent pragmatic features are generally easier for EFL learners to process. This pattern suggests the need for more focused instruction on less explicit presupposition triggers.

These findings also reflect what Bachman (1990) describes as the complex nature of pragmatic competence, where understanding goes beyond mere recognition of linguistic forms to include the processing of implied meanings and assumptions. The varying success rates across presupposition types indicate different levels of development in this broader pragmatic competence.

The results highlight the need for what Ishihara (2010) advocates: explicit instruction in pragmatic features, particularly for more challenging presupposition types. The moderate overall performance, combined with significant variations across categories, suggests that current teaching approaches may not adequately address all aspects of presupposition comprehension.

These findings have important implications for EFL instruction in Yemen. As Alrefaee and Al-Ghamdi (2019) argue, there is a need for greater exposure to authentic language use and explicit instruction in pragmatic features. The varying comprehension rates across presupposition types suggest

areas where targeted instruction could enhance learners' pragmatic competence, particularly in processing more complex presupposition triggers.

4. Discussion

4.1. Most Problematic Presupposition Types for Yemeni EFL Learners

The analysis of problematic presupposition types reveals a clear hierarchy of difficulty, with cognitive factive presuppositions emerging as the most challenging (43.7% failure rate), followed by quantifiers (38.3%) and emotive factives (35.6%). These findings provide important insights into the specific pragmatic challenges faced by Yemeni EFL learners and align with several theoretical perspectives in the literature.

The significant difficulty with cognitive factive presuppositions aligns with Hussein and Mohammed's (2022) finding that factives present substantial challenges for Iraqi EFL learners. The high error rate in processing statements containing verbs like "know" suggests what Bardovi-Harlig (1996) describes as a gap between grammatical and pragmatic competence. While learners may understand the literal meaning of these verbs, they struggle to process their presuppositional content. This difficulty supports Alrefaee and Al-Ghamdi's (2019) observation that Yemeni EFL learners often lack exposure to the actual use of language in social contexts, where such presuppositions are commonly encountered.

The challenges with quantifier presuppositions (38.3% failure rate) reflect what Kasper and Rose (2002) identify as the complex relationship between linguistic form and pragmatic function. The difficulty in recognizing that negative statements about a group presuppose the existence of that group indicates a potential area where first language transfer may interfere with comprehension. As noted by Alrefaee and Al-Ghamdi (2019), such pragmatic failure could be more detrimental to communication than grammatical errors, as it affects the basic assumptions underlying the discourse.

The substantial difficulty with emotive factive presuppositions (35.6% failure rate) supports Bardovi-Harlig's (2001) observation that even advanced learners may struggle with certain pragmatic features. The confusion between verbs like "regret" and "reject" indicates what Nelson et al. (2002) describe as the potential for pragmatic errors to be interpreted as rudeness or inappropriate behavior rather than simple language mistakes. This finding underscores the importance of explicit pragmatic instruction, as advocated by Ishihara and Cohen (2014).

The relatively better performance on iterative adverbs and temporal clauses suggests what Bouton (1994) describes as the advantage of explicit marking in pragmatic features. The more transparent nature of these presupposition triggers appears to facilitate easier processing, supporting Taguchi's (2008) findings about the role of cognitive processing in pragmatic comprehension.

These patterns of difficulty align with what Al-Sanhani (2007) identifies as a common issue in Yemeni EFL education: the focus on grammatical accuracy over pragmatic appropriateness. The results suggest that while learners may have sufficient grammatical knowledge, they struggle with the pragmatic implications of certain linguistic structures, particularly those requiring more complex inferencing.

The hierarchy of difficulty revealed in this study has important pedagogical implications. As Kasper (1992) argues, mere exposure to the target language is insufficient for developing pragmatic competence. The specific challenges identified with cognitive factives, quantifiers, and emotive factives suggest the need for what Ishihara (2010) describes as explicit metapragmatic instruction focused on form-function relationships.

Moreover, the findings support Bardovi-Harlig's (1999) argument that pragmatic competence requires not only linguistic knowledge but also understanding of sociocultural norms and inferencing strategies. The particular difficulty with factive presuppositions suggests what Thomas (1983) identifies as sociopragmatic failure, where learners struggle with the social conditions governing language use.

The variation in difficulty across presupposition types also reflects what Murray (2011) describes as the complex nature of pragmatic competence, which involves both recognition of linguistic forms and understanding of their contextual implications. The findings suggest that successful presupposition comprehension requires what Fulcher and Davidson (2007) term the ability to process both linguistic and contextual information simultaneously.

These results highlight the need for targeted pedagogical interventions focusing on the most problematic presupposition types. As suggested by Ifantidou (2011), teaching strategies should incorporate authentic materials and awareness-raising activities, particularly for complex presupposition triggers like factives and quantifiers. This approach aligns with research-informed teaching strategies that emphasize the importance of contextual learning and explicit instruction in pragmatic features.

4.2. Demographic Influences on Presupposition Comprehension

The analysis of demographic variables reveals complex patterns in presupposition comprehension among Yemeni EFL learners, with age and institutional factors showing more influence than gender. These findings provide valuable insights into the role of learner variables in pragmatic development and align with several theoretical perspectives in the literature.

4.2.1. Gender Effects

The absence of significant gender differences in presupposition comprehension (female mean: 1.33, male mean: 1.323) aligns with Clankie's (1993) observation that gender may not be a determining factor in pragmatic competence. However, the slightly more consistent performance among female learners (SD: 0.16 vs 0.207) reflects what Clankie (1993) noted about female students potentially having stronger English skills than their male counterparts. This minimal gender effect supports Taghizadeh's (2017) findings that gender does not significantly impact pragmatic comprehension among EFL learners.

4.2.2. Age-Related Patterns

The superior performance of younger learners, particularly in the 25-30 age group (mean: 1.35), supports Bardovi-Harlig's (1999) argument about the role of exposure and instruction in pragmatic development. As noted by Alrefaee and Al-Ghamdi (2019), younger learners often have greater exposure to English through media and technology, potentially enhancing their pragmatic awareness. The declining performance in older age groups (30-35: 1.31; 35+: 1.25) may reflect what Kasper and Schmidt (1996) describe as the complex relationship between age and language learning. The age-related patterns align with what Matsumura (2001) identified as the importance of intensity of interaction in pragmatic development. Younger learners' better performance might be attributed to what Bardovi-Harlig and Bastos (2011) describe as the combination of formal instruction and informal exposure to English. This supports the notion that pragmatic competence develops through both explicit instruction and implicit learning opportunities.

4.2.3. Institutional Variation

The variation in performance across institutions, with Sana'a University's Faculty of Education showing the highest mean (1.45), reflects what Al-Sanhani (2007) identified as institutional differences in approaching pragmatic instruction. The slightly better performance of public university students aligns with Alsanhani's (2007) observation about the role of institutional factors in language learning outcomes.

The institutional differences support what Eslami-Rasekh et al. (2004) describe as the impact of teaching methodology and learning environment on pragmatic development. As noted by Alrefaee and Al-Ghamdi (2019), factors such as exposure to authentic language use and teaching approaches can significantly influence pragmatic competence development.

4.2.4. Pedagogical Implications

These demographic patterns have important implications for teaching practice. As Ishihara (2010) argues, understanding learner variables is crucial for effective pragmatic instruction. The findings suggest the need for what Kasper and Rose (2002) term "differentiated instruction" that considers age-related learning patterns and institutional contexts.

The minimal gender effect suggests what Cohen (2008) describes as the importance of focusing on individual learner needs rather than gender-based assumptions in pragmatic instruction. However, the age-related patterns support Bardovi-Harlig's (2001) argument for early intervention in pragmatic instruction to capitalize on younger learners' advantages in language acquisition.

The institutional variations highlight what Thomas (1983) identifies as the need for systematic approaches to pragmatic instruction across different educational settings. As suggested by Ifantidou (2011), institutions might benefit from sharing best practices and standardizing approaches to pragmatic instruction while maintaining sensitivity to local contexts.

These findings align with Murray's (2011) emphasis on the multifaceted nature of pragmatic competence development. The complex interplay of demographic factors supports what Bachman (1990) describes as the need for comprehensive approaches to language teaching that address both linguistic and pragmatic aspects of communication.

The results also underscore what Nelson et al. (2002) identify as the importance of considering learner characteristics in pragmatic instruction. The variations across demographic groups suggest the need for what Ishihara and Cohen (2014) term "context-sensitive" teaching approaches that accommodate different learner profiles and institutional settings.

5. Conclusion

This study has provided valuable insights into the comprehension of presuppositions among Yemeni EFL learners, revealing a moderate overall competence level with significant variations across different presupposition types. The research findings demonstrate that while participants achieved an average success rate of 68.9%, their performance varied considerably depending on the type of presupposition encountered. This variation suggests that certain aspects of pragmatic comprehension require more focused attention in EFL instruction.

The most notable finding was the clear hierarchy in comprehension difficulty across different presupposition types. Learners demonstrated strongest performance with iterative adverbs (81.6% correct) and temporal clauses (77.8%), suggesting that explicitly marked presuppositions are more accessible to EFL learners. In contrast, cognitive factive presuppositions proved most challenging, with only 56.3% correct responses, indicating that complex inferential processes present significant obstacles for learners. This pattern highlights the importance of considering the cognitive demands associated with different types of pragmatic features in language instruction.

Demographic factors emerged as significant influences on presupposition comprehension, with age being particularly influential. Younger learners (25-30 age group) consistently outperformed their older counterparts, possibly due to greater exposure to contemporary English language media and more recent formal language instruction. While gender differences were minimal, institutional variations were notable, suggesting that teaching approaches and learning environments play important roles in developing pragmatic competence.

These findings have important implications for EFL pedagogy in Yemen and similar contexts. First, there is a clear need for explicit instruction in presupposition comprehension, particularly focusing on more challenging types such as cognitive factives and quantifiers. Second, teaching materials and approaches should be designed to provide scaffolded practice moving from simpler to more complex presupposition types. Third, institutions should consider incorporating more authentic materials and contextual practice opportunities to enhance learners' pragmatic awareness.

For effective implementation of these findings, teachers should focus on several key areas. These include providing explicit metapragmatic instruction about presupposition triggers, offering abundant practice with authentic discourse containing varied presupposition types, and developing assessment

tools that can effectively track learners' progress in presupposition comprehension. Additionally, curriculum designers should consider incorporating systematic pragmatic instruction that addresses the full range of presupposition types, with particular attention to those identified as most challenging.

Looking forward, this research opens several avenues for future investigation. Studies examining the effectiveness of explicit instruction in enhancing presupposition comprehension would be particularly valuable. Additionally, longitudinal research tracking the development of pragmatic competence over time could provide insights into how presupposition comprehension evolves through different stages of language learning. Finally, comparative studies examining presupposition comprehension across different Arabic-speaking contexts could help identify broader patterns in pragmatic development among EFL learners.

In conclusion, while this study demonstrates that Yemeni EFL learners possess moderate competence in presupposition comprehension, it also highlights significant areas for improvement. By addressing these areas through targeted pedagogical interventions and continued research, educators can better support the development of pragmatic competence among EFL learners. The findings contribute to our understanding of pragmatic development in EFL contexts and provide a foundation for enhancing teaching practices in Yemen and similar educational environments.

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Multiple choice Test for Presupposition Comprehension

1. Quantifier Presupposition

Context: A farmer, Saleh, is speaking to his father, Ali. Saleh: "No horses in the farm have been vaccinated"

Question: What does Saleh's statement mean?

- There are not any horses in the farm.
- There are horses in the farm but not vaccinated.
- There are horses in the farm.

2. Emotive Factive Presupposition

Context: Bob and Sally are friends. "Bob regrets telling Sally his secret."

Question: What does the above statement mean?

- Bob rejects his secrets.
- Bob has not told Sally his secret.
- Bob has told Sally his secret.

3. Iterative Verb Presupposition

Context: Tom and Rayan are talking about their colleague, Tim. Tom: "Do you know what Tim is planning to visit this vacation?" Rayan: "He will either return to Italy or will go to France."

Question: What does Rayan's statement mean?

- Tim will go to France

- b. Tim will go to Italy
- c. Tim was in Italy

4. Cognitive Factive Presupposition

Context: Ahmed and Ali are teacher and student, they are speaking about the exam. Ahmed: "How was the exam?" Ali: "I do not know that Japan is in Asia."

Question: What does Ali's statement mean?

- a. Japan is not in Asia.
- b. Japan is partially in Asia.
- c. Japan is in Asia.

5. Iterative Adverb Presupposition

Context: John and Tom are close friends, they are talking about their friend, Tim. John: "How is our friend, Tim, doing these days?" Tom: "He is smoking again."

Question: What does Tom's statement mean?

- a. Tim started smoking
- b. Tim was smoking before
- c. Tim will give up smoking

6. Temporal Clause Presupposition

Context: "After reading the book, Fred took the exam."

Question: What does the statement mean?

- a. Fred was reading a book before going to the exam
- b. Fred is reading the book
- c. Fred failed the exam as he did not read well.

7. Counterfactual Conditional Presupposition

Context: Rayne, a student, is speaking to his father, Tom Tom: "How was the competition son?" Rayne: "If I were as smart as Usain, I would win the reward."

Question: What does Rayne's statement mean?

- a. Rayne is not as smart as Usain.
- b. Rayne won in the competition
- c. Rayne is lying to his father.

8. Possessive Presupposition

Context: Julia is talking to her roommate, Leanne Julia: "I saw Sally's husband in a new car yesterday."

Question: What does Julia's statement mean?

- a. Sally is not Julia's friend
- b. Sally is not yet married
- c. Sally is married