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A GENDER-WISE ANALYSIS OF CORRELATION BETWEEN SOCIAL CLASS AND COGNITIVE DEVELOPMENT OF SYNTAX IN PAKISTANI EFL LEARNERS

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Abstract- Gender has always been relevant to sociolinguistic research as researchers have wanted to explain language development as well as variation along the lines of gender. This research, which is a part of doctoral research thesis, studies the variance in syntax score among male and female Pakistani EFL learners. Alongside the study of correlation between social class and cognitive development of syntax, it also studies gender as extraneous variable, to see whether this social variable also influences development of syntax in both genders or not. It employs T-test. The results do not reject null hypothesis, proving that development of syntax in Pakistani male and female learners of EFL is same in both gender, or is not affected by gender as a social variable.

Keywords: Gender, SYNTAX, EFL learners

I. INTRODUCTION

Researchers in the field of education have always been interested to study difference of academic achievement in male and female learners. The differences due to gender are obvious not only in academic achievement in general but also in other sub-areas of learning such as language learning. This article aims to present gender-wise differences of syntactic development in Pakistani EFL learners. It is based on the study of 'gender' as an extraneous variable in a doctoral research that aimed to explore the influence of social class (the main variable) on cognitive development of syntax. The key premise of the research was that the development of language in general, and syntactic development in particular, are cognitive processes, and that cognition does not develop in a vacuum but is always affected by social factors such as social class, gender, and so on. The reason for studying language development of EFL learners as a sub-area of academic achievement can be traced in the light of 'acquisition vs learning' dichotomy as the former differs from language development in children which occurs naturally rather than happening as 'learning' in adult students.

In the beginning of this article, certain theoretical points need to be clarified. First of all, the relationship between cognition and language, particularly syntax, needs clarification. After that, the question of how cognitive development of language is affected by various elements of society would require clarification. Thirdly, the link between social class and language would be detailed, before we finally moved onto the main area of discussion, which is 'gender-wise differences in cognitive development of syntax in Pakistani EFL learners'.

Let us now discuss these points one by one. Regarding the first of these points, which is the 'link between language and cognition', Costly & Nelson (2013) while explaining the cognitive view comment that "native speakers are born with an innate ability to develop language because they are born with a cognitive sense of language" (p. 5). Cognitivists thought that cognition is a pre-requisite for existence of language in a child's brain. Chomsky (1959) believed that language acquisition occurred in children due to an inborn capacity which allows them to acquire language as a process of maturation. He believed that this capacity is universal. Chomsky pointed to the aspect of 'creativity' by which he means "the ability of human beings to produce and comprehend an infinite number of novel sentences". (Al-Jasser, 2012, p. 6). Syntax is a component of language that deals with how sentences are constructed, and any connection of cognition with language could, hence, be interpreted as a connection between cognition and syntax. Syntax evolves in cognition as a part of 'language' which is one cognitive function of many. Therefore, all theories of link between cognition (or social cognition, as would be discussed below) and language must be equally relevant to 'syntax' which is part of the system called 'language'.

As opposed to the cognitive view of language, Vygotsky (1986), a key figure of modern pedagogy, views human cognition and learning as a social and cultural phenomenon rather than an individual one (cited by

Kozulin, 2003). Similarly, Halliday (2007) emphasized that language is a means by which we draw boundaries of the societies that share similar linguistic features due to their shared beliefs about and shared attitude towards a language. According to him, this is the reason why we give certain names to certain language communities as they share an attitude towards a particular language that they call their own. For example, we call English language as British, or American, or Indian, or African, and so on, because among other factors, language is one important factor that gives a sense of nationhood to people living in a particular area or a country (p. 06). The understanding of all learning being a social learning and all cognition being social cognition by Vygotsky and the understanding of Halliday that language is what forms societies, draw our attention to the possibility of language being more of a social than individual, autonomous or innate phenomenon. The relationship between language and the elements of society such as gender, age, ethnicity, and race is well established, and the sociolinguists try to find out how these social factors affect and cause variation in the language spoken by different speakers. The link between social class and language is also well established as so many studies have ventured out to trace a connection between the two by finding out systematic pattern of language variation among the speakers belonging to different social classes. Snell (n.d) presented an evidence of the studies of relationship between language and social class. She referred to the studies of Block (2013), Hymes (1996), Chakrania and Huang (2012), Huygens and Vaughan (1983), Lai (2010), Bex and Watts (1999), Crowley (1989), Mugglestone (2003), Collins (2009) who have explored the relationship between language and social class in their respective research studies. Further link between language as a cognitive phenomenon and the learner as a social being was traced by Serafica (1981). As cited by Rymel (2008), Serafica asserted that "Both 'mind' and the 'self' evolve in a social context" (p. 01). The elements of social class affect cognitive development that takes place in mind, in their own way, which, in turn, affects language development. Social class, which is the main variable studied in this research for its correlation with cognitive development of syntax, has been defined by Vitt (2007) who calls it a "stratification system that divides a society into a hierarchy of social positions" (p. 553). He has further explained the concept of social hierarchies and suggests that it is "a method of social ranking that involves money, power, culture, taste, identity, access, and exclusion" (p. 553). The relationship of social class with the language of the members of given social classes was first explored by Labov (1966), who, according to Callary (2009), "found that the distribution of the five phonological variables investigated was highly correlated with the social class of the informant" (p. 05).

As explained above, this study was carried out to explore the influence of social class on cognitive development of syntax, and to do so, a five factor index was designed to calculate EFL learners' social class score, and a test consisting of syntax questions was designed to gauge the learners' mastery of English syntax. Syntax is generally described as one of the four elements of language, the other three being phonetics, grammar and morphology. It is defined by Van Valin (2004) as "branch of linguistics dealing with the ways in which words, with or without inflections, are arranged to show connections of meaning within the sentence" (p. 01). This connection could be between words to form phrases, between phrases to form clauses, and between clauses to form sentences. These connections are built by certain devices which help us put these words, phrases and clauses together.

While the research studied correlation of social class and cognitive development of syntax in learners, it also sought to explore a possible connection of the latter with other social variables such as 'gender'. The results obtained by the sample were studied for variance in terms of gender. The syntax score of male learners was studied against the score of females to get an idea of which of the two genders performed better in the identified aspect of language. More about the importance of gender-wise study of this variance follows in the section 1.1.

1.1. Objectives

This researcher had the following objectives in mind while conducting this research:

1. To study the difference among male and female EFL learners of Pakistani universities in cognitive development of syntax

1.2. Research Questione

This study intends to explores the following research questions.

1. Does gender play a role in cognitive development of syntax in Pakistani EFL learners?

1.3. Significance of Research

Apart from other social variables such as social class, ethnicity, age, and so on, gender is also a very important variable, and this is the reason why it has been studied in this research as an extraneous variable.

Carrying out a gender-wise study of the influence of social class on academic achievement, or on language learning, or on development of syntax is important because it is likely to reveal whether / how cognitive development of syntax happens differently in male and female EFL learners in Pakistani context. Whether the influence of social class on cognitive development of syntax is greatly visible in males or it is so in females, the results are likely to enlighten the academia with a view to syllabus design, curriculum development and the policy makers might be informed better as to the state of affairs of this section of learning. The varied learning patterns among males and females, if any, would reveal the tendency of learning syntax among males and females and any possible difference of score might lead us to reach certain conclusions about one gender performing better in this field than the other.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Language and Gender

There is a long history of linguists and sociolinguists researching language development and variation along the lines of gender to trace differences in these areas among males and females. Language reflects not only one's status, but it also reflects who is speaking it in other terms than 'class' alone, that is, whether the speaker is a male or a female, a child or an adult, white or black, and so on. All these differences account for variation in language development and ultimately gave rise to the study of linguistic variation.

Spear (2005) mentions two strands in which the research on language and gender has been divided. First is "the study of how gender is represented *in* the language (the *form* of language) and the second is the 'study of how men and women *use* language (the *function* of language)' (p. 15). Spear explains that the first area is a vibrant one which assumes that language is an 'ideological filter on the world' (Ehrlich and King 1994 as cited in Spear, 2005, p. 03). According to this perspective, "language reflects and perpetuates a sexist and heterosexist version of reality". Among the examples of sexist language are the instances of use of "he" as generic pronoun and "mankind" to refer to humanity and job titles that end in '-man' such as salesman and fisherman etc., and also the address terms for men ('Mr') and women ('Mrs'/'Miss') in which women are defined with reference to men rather than independently. Robin Lakoff (1973, 1975) demonstrated how language is sexist in various ways, and Dale Spender (1980) explored how 'he/man' language has developed. Necessity of gender-based study of language has also been hinted by researchers such as Thomson, Murachver & Green (2004) who remind us about how features of women and men's speech were coded by researchers, and frequency of these recorded features was presented as evidence of the difference between male and female speech. While referring to the studies of Coates, 1986; Holmes, 1995; Lakoff, 1990; and Tannen, 1993, 1994, they assert that "Although there is considerable variation between studies, a number of features have emerged as characteristic of one gender or the other" (p. 556). Further, Palomares (2004) cites Carli (1990) and McLachlan (1991) who opine that similarities or differences in gender based communication are context dependent. In their words, "Certain situations reveal gender-based communicative differences, whereas others reveal similarities" (p. 556).

2.2. Sex vs Gender

Debate on the relationship of gender, as Wardhaugh (2006) feels, has been one of the biggest 'growth' areas within sociolinguistics. He explains how sex and gender are biological and social entities respectively, in that one pertains to genetics and other entails social, cultural, genetic and psychological aspects. He cites Wodak (1997b, p. 13) who opines that 'gender is 'not . . . a pool of attributes "possessed" by a person, but . . . something a person "does" (p. 315). What the person does has to conform to what is expected of him or her from society and it is here where social construction of gender comes into play. Society attributes certain roles to certain sexes and what is expected of men is not expected of women and vice versa. In their use of language, men, for example, are not expected to be speaking 'soft' and 'cooperative' language, which is a very much 'female' trait, as the society around us prescribes. Men are rather expected to be firm and straightforward in their tone whereas women are expected to be indirect and polite, and sometimes overly so. In Wodak's (1997) view, gender is different from one generation to the other, from one religion to the other and from one social or racial background to the other. Gender is one important component of one's identity and that identity is maintained by acting upon or following the norms of behavior expected of the sex one belongs to. Deviating from social expectations is deviating from the norm. Males and females are said to be genetically different as one has two X chromosomes and the other has an X and a Y. These differences are manifest in their voice and different verbal skills. These differences are seen by Philips et al (1987) to result from different 'socialized practices'. Gender, then, is a distinction created by society due to different sexes of individuals of society.

Wardhaugh (2006. pp. 44–112 & 162–207) cites Baron (1986) and Arliss (1991) who find women's speech as different from that of men, but he also notices a bias as he sees that men's speech is considered the norm against which women's speech is judged rather than the opposite. Men's speech is hardly ever judged against the women's speech. The claims of women speech being 'trivial….gossip-laden, corrupt, illogical, idle, euphemistic, or deficient', imprecise, uncultivated, or unstylish and less profane than the speech of men in Wardhaugh's views are highly suspect and lack evidentiary proof (see De Klerk, 1992, and Hughes, 1992 and the denial in Kipers, 1987). Further, Pilkington's (1998) study has been cited, who found out that men gossip as much as women do and the only difference is that they gossip differently. The most famous example in Wardhahugh's views is that of West Indies in Lesser Antilles. As a result of a conquest in which Carib-speaking men killed Arwack-speaking men and mated with the Arwack speaking women, different male and female languages emerged as men spoke Carib and women spoke Arwick and the same languages were learnt by boys and girls from their fathers and mother respectively.

Different languages prescribe different forms of use for men and women within the same language. Wardhaugh (2006) further cites Sapir (1929a), who presented example of the Yana language of California which contains special forms of speech for and to women. Dixon (1971) presented the evidence of a novel gender difference in Dyirbal people of North Queensland, Australia where both genders use Guwal as an everyday language but when mother in law or father in law are present, Dyalºuy will be used as 'mother-in-law' variety.

The talk of women's language being different from men's is valid almost in every society since the norms about male and female versions of language and the stereotyping in this regard is largely the same across cultures. Pakistan is no exception to it. Most of the stereotypes about women's language are as true in Pakistan as anywhere else, and hence this aspect cannot be ignored in linguistic studies which aim to find out the relationship between language and social factors. This is the reason why this study takes into account gender as one of the social influences and considers it relevant enough to be studied as an extraneous variable.

III. Research Methodology

Quantitative research was followed as general methodology in the larger context of the research as it aimed to study correlation between the main variable i.e. social class and the dependent variable, i.e. syntax. Gender, which is another social variable, was considered as extraneous variable, and in order to study the effect of gender on the development of syntax, T-test was employed, which is used to test whether the null hypothesis H_0 is true or the alternative hypothesis is true. To study equal or unequal variance in the groups, Levine's test was studied for F and Significance values, represented by F and Sig. The results of the T-test were checked with the bell curve in order to see whether there is enough evidence to reject the null hypothesis.

3.1. Research Hypothesis

There is a significant relationship between the gender of the English learners in Pakistani universities and their cognitive development of syntax.

3.1.1. Null / Ho

The variances of male and female EFL learners of Pakistani universities are approximately equal

Or

There is no significance difference between the Syntax score obtained by male and female EFL learners of Pakistani universities

3.1.2. Alternative, H1

There is significance difference between the Syntax score obtained by male and female EFL learners of Pakistani universities

IV. Analysis

4.1. Gender vs Syntax: T-test Results

Gender is one of the extraneous variables that this study has taken into account. As the data was collected from both male and female EFL learners, it was pertinent to study the influence of all extraneous variables on syntax. The following distribution of gender was observed in the sample inducted for the current study:

Table 1
Gender-wise sample distribution

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Male	24	29.3	29.3	29.3
	Female	58	70.7	70.7	100.0
	Total	82	100.0	100.0	

In the gender table, 24 (29.3 %) of the sample was male, and 58 (70.7 %) was female. This percentage, however, should not be taken as representation of percentage of students who enroll in the EFL related courses in the universities where the data has been collected as it merely reflects the ratio of participation of the learners from both genders.

4.2. What is *T*-test?

The T-test tests hypothesis about a certain population or population groups μ in situations where the value of σ is unknown. The mean difference and the significance value are the indicators of whether the null hypothesis H_0 is true or the alternative one is true. This test is used to test hypotheses about an unknown population mean. T-test provides us with two t-values: one is calculated t value, and the other one is critical t-value. If the calculated t-value is greater in size than the critical value, the Null hypothesis H_0 is rejected.
In order to test whether the variances in the groups are equal or not equal, we study Levine's test, for F and Significance values, represented by F and Sig. For testing the assumptions of the normal data, Q-Q plots can be used. (Garth, 2011, p. 67)
The results of the test can be discussed in terms of the p-value that shows the significance of the statistical findings, the effect size which shows the level of effect in the data. To understand the results of the t-test, it is pertinent to discuss what it means by Cohen's *d*, and the p-value, and why they are significant in the discussion of statistical results.

4.3. What is effect size: Cohen's d?

Walker (2007-8, p. 01) cites Field (2005a; 2005b) who explains that the effect size is a measure used to observe magnitude of the effect. This is a standardized measure and is used across different studies via different scales of measurements. Among these are Cohen's *d,* and Pearson's Correlation coefficient, which measure the effect size of one variable on the other to see the strength of relationship between the two.
The formula to calculate the effect size is:

$$\text{Eta squared} = \frac{T^2}{T^2 + (N1 + N2 - 2)}$$

According to Cohen's formula, effect size for T-test could be calculated according to the following formula:
M2-M1/ *Sd* pooled = Cohen's *d*

$$d = \frac{M_{group1} - M_{group2}}{SD_{pooled}}$$

So, as explained by Walker (2007), "if group 1 has a mean score of 24 with an SD of 5, and group 2 has a mean score of 20 with an SD of 4,

$$SD_{pooled} = \sqrt{(5^2 + 4^2)/2} = 4.53$$

and therefore

$$d = \frac{20 - 24}{4.53} = 0.88$$

which reveals a large value of *d*, which tells us that the "difference between these two groups is large enough and consistent enough to be really important" (p.1).

4.4. What is p-value?

In order to test whether the results of our study are significant or not, we need to look at the *p*-value of our tests. We use hypothesis tests to test the validity of a claim made about a population. P–value can be interpreted in the following ways: small *p* value provides strong evidence against the null hypothesis, and

the null hypothesis is rejected. A large *p*-value is weak evidence against the null hypothesis and the null hypothesis cannot be rejected.

In order to study the variance between male and female EFL learners in terms of their performance in the syntax test, T-test was run in the SPSS to obtain the mean differences of the two groups, with Syntax as Dependent variable and the Gender, labelled as male and female, as grouping variable.

The T-test was run to test the following Null hypothesis and the Alternative hypothesis:

Null / Ho The variances of the two groups are approximately equal

Or

There is no significance difference between the Syntax score obtained by male and female EFL learners of Pakistani universities

Alternative, H1

There is significance difference between the Syntax score obtained by male and female EFL learners of Pakistani universities

The following mean and standard deviation were obtained for the two gender groups:

Table 2

Mean and Standard deviation of Gender groups

	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Syntax Score	Male	24	47.0417	14.54970
	Female	58	54.3103	16.26449

The above table sums up the variance of mean and standard deviation of males and females among the samples.

Table 3

Independent Samples Test 1

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		oft-test for Equality of Means	
		F	Sig.	t	df
Syntax Score	Equal variances assumed	.515	.475	-1.897	80
	Equal variances not assumed			-1.987	47.780

Table 4

Independent Samples Test 2

		t-test for Equality of Means		
		Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference
Syntax Score	Equal variances assumed	.061	-7.26868	3.83253
	Equal variances not assumed	.053	-7.26868	3.65807

Table 5

Independent Samples Test 3

		t-test for Equality of Means	
		95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
		Lower	Upper
Syntax Score	Equal variances assumed	-14.89565	.35829
	Equal variances not assumed	-14.62460	.08725

4.5. Interpretation of the T-test

The test revealed the mean difference between the two groups (*M1*=47.0417, *M2*=54.3103) which means that the mean for males is less than the mean of females (See Table 42). Mean difference of the two groups is (*Md* =-7.2686), which is significantly big. But the mean difference is not a conclusive evidence to study variance. This variance of means could be due to the number of the sample in both groups, and could be due to the outliers in any of the groups that create the difference of means. So, in order to study the variance, we need to apply T-test which removes the bias in the reading of the mean differences and tells us the actual variance in the two data sets.

T-test lets us know whether the value it provides is smaller than the critical value or not. The critical value alpha 0.05 means that there is 5% chance that the data is random, and greater than 95 % chance that the data is significant. If the value obtained is greater than 0.05, it means that there is less chance than 95 % that the data is significant and more chance that 5 % of it being random.

In the T-test, homogeneity of variance is one of the major concerns which is given by Levine's test for equality of variance. This test is significant at .475 which means that the variances in the data are significantly different or that the data is 47 % random (as shown in table 46, and should not be pooled. This means that the t reported in *equal variances not assumed* should be read, which is -1.987. This should be compared to the t-value reported in the row *equal variances assumed* which is -1.897.

4.6. Result of the T-test

The test results were found to be statistically non-significant t (80 = -1.978, *p* =.475 > .05) two tailed with the females scoring higher (*M* =54.3103, *Sd* = 16.26449) than the males (*M* =47.0417, *Sd* =14.54970). The magnitude of the difference of the means (mean difference = 7. 26868) was not big.

As the p-value of the T-test reveals, the variations of the two groups are almost equal, so the null hypothesis will not be rejected and will be retained against the alternate hypothesis that assumes unequal variance between males and females.

4.7. Testing with the bell curve

The results of the T-test can be checked with the bell curve in order to see whether there is enough evidence to reject the null hypothesis. In case of the bell curve, the X takes position right on the H_0 if there is enough evidence in favour of it, and takes a position away from the H_0 mark if the evidence is not in favour of the null hypothesis. In such a case, H_0 will be rejected, and the H_a will be retained.

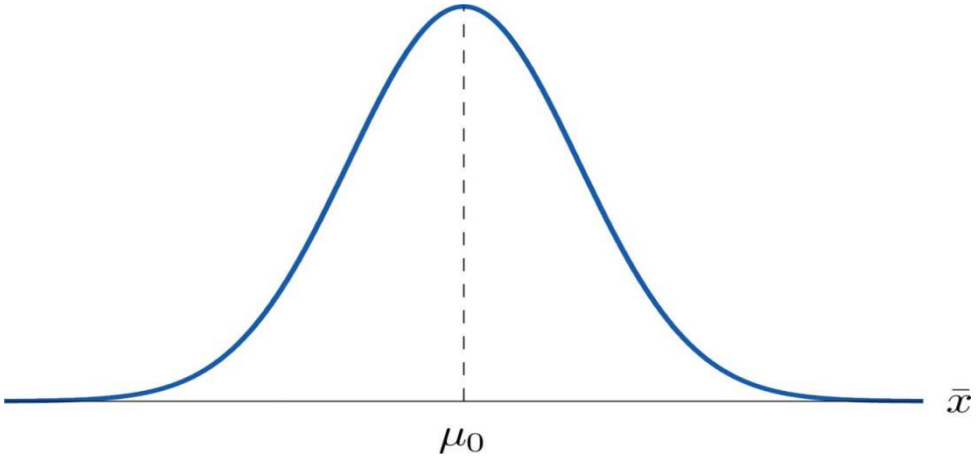

Figure 1: Chapter 8. The Density Curve for X if H0 Is True

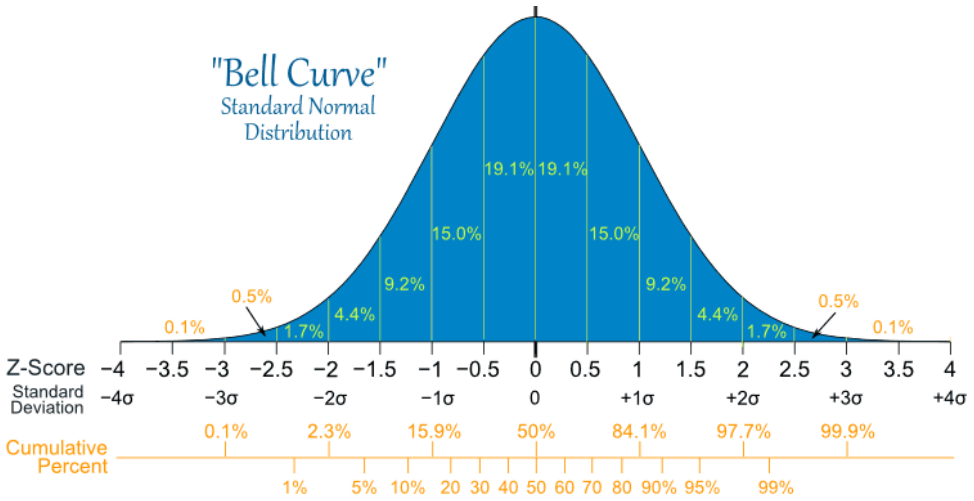

Figure 2: Bell Curve for Standard distribution

Image adopted from *https://www.mathsisfun.com/data/images/normal-distrubution-large.gif*

4.8. Bell Curve for the current T-test

For the current T-test, the *p*-value obtained is 0.475 which is greater than the alpha value 0.05. If we look at the above bell curve of normal standard distribution, we see that the obtained value is removed from the centre towards 0.5 mark on the right. This does mean that it falls near the centre with about as much standard deviation as the test statistics show. This, then, is enough to retain the null hypothesis against the alternate hypothesis.

Results of this study, however, are in contrast with many studies that research the relation between second language acquisition and the sex of the learners regarding cognitive style or strategies of learning or input and interaction. As Saville-Troike (2006: 84 remarks, "There is widespread belief in many western cultures that females tend to be better L2 learners than males" however, he believes that "this belief is probably primarily a social construct, based on outcomes which reflect cultural and socio-psychological constraints and influences". He remarks that differences do appear in language acquisition and processing but the research evidence is generally mixed. For example, he cites (Kimura 1992) who shows that in relation to mental lexicon versus grammar, "women outperform men in some tests of verbal fluency (such as finding words that begin with a certain letter), and women's brains may be less asymmetrically organized than men's for speech Of particular potential relevance to SLA". Also, Kimura (1992) reports that "females seem to be better at memorizing complex forms, while males appear to be better at computing compositional rules (e.g. Halpern 2000). They also point to the possibility of sex differences in the areas of hormonal variables: higher androgen level correlates with better automatized skills, and high estrogen with better semantic/interpretive skills (Mack 1992). Kimura (1992) also reports that "higher levels of articulatory and motor ability have been associated in women with higher levels of estrogen during the menstrual cycle" (Saville-Troike (2006: 84)

V. Conclusion

The study assumed gender as one of the social variables affecting syntax, and it was established that development of syntax is affected by cognitive development of the learners which could be different in different people. The results of the study however, did not reject the null hypothesis or retain the alternative hypothesis which hypothesized that there is significant difference in syntax score among male and female EFL learners. This means that the variance among males and females in the present study was not significant enough to say that cognitive development, which is indicated by syntax score, is different in males and females. In other words, the study concluded that gender did not seem to play a significant role in cognitive development of syntax, as was hypothesized by this research. This research, however, is replicable as the chances of gender revealing difference in learning cannot be totally eliminated on the basis of the results of one particular study.

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