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RESEARCH ARTICLE

The Relationship between Tolerance of Ambiguity and Learning English as a Foreign Language among Graduate Students in the UAE

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Abstract

Linguistic phenomena that are dubious, unusual, and confusing are encountered in our academic studies of any second or foreign language. The original definitions of ambiguity addressed uncertainty in the context of everyday life. This paper aims to study the relationship between tolerance of ambiguity and learning English as a foreign language. The data have been collected from 57 students who is studying professional diploma from educational institution in English as foreign language. The outcome of the study shows that students had an average tolerance for ambiguity when learning a foreign language. The study also showed clear thoughts and positive approach of the students about tolerance of ambiguity. This paper includes a literature review, sampling, data analysis, interpretation and conclusion.

1. Introduction

In our academic if we study any second language or foreign language, the study came across linguistic occurrences that are questionable, unconventional and perplexing. Early definitions of ambiguity firstly focused on uncertainty in real life environment. McLain (1993) defines ambiguity as absence of right and sufficient information about a given condition. Budner (1962) identifies three distinct types of ambiguous situations: new situations, difficult situation and conflicts situations. These correspondent situations where cues are more or incomplete and cues are difficult to differentiate.

Ambiguity tolerance is a psychological term reflects learner's preferences plays important role in understanding the variation between individuals. Within the boundary of second language acquisition, tolerance of ambiguity refers to learner's ability to navigate through unclear and uncertain occurrences during the process of learning. However the ambiguity shows challenges for many individuals leading of feelings of disorientation and confusion, mainly the learner's transfer from high school to college where language and vocabulary are important. In tolerance of ambiguity concept the learners understanding of ambiguity in their surroundings influenced by the difficult, unfamiliar or conflicting thoughts that they come across. There are some origins of ambiguity given by Norton such as inconsistencies, incompleteness, interpretations, uncertainty, vagueness, and contradictions given by Norton (1975).

Ambiguity can be differentiated by its novelty, insolvability, complexity and absence of structure. Ambiguity and tolerance are closely connected terms,. Ambiguity, which refers to incomplete information about situation, can rise to unease and not able to handle it. Tolerance of ambiguity refers an open minded approach to behaviors, viewpoints and cultural elements. In the process of language learning, ambiguity generally coming as both linguistic input and cultural knowledge shows situation having lack

of clarity. The learner face challenges to gain cultural norms, new vocabulary and grammar structure so the learner feels anxiety and frustration. During the successful   language learning tolerate ambiguity is important as it force the learner to cope up unfamiliar terms of the language, uncertainties and knowledge of culture.
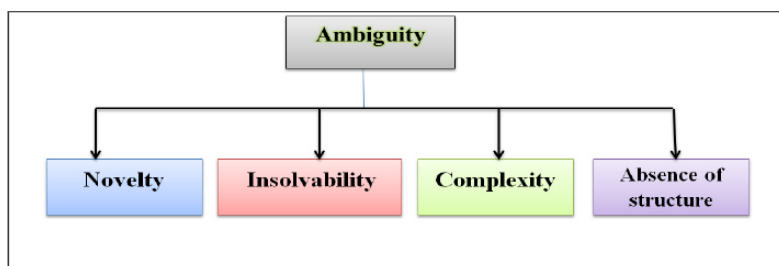

Figure 1. *Ambiguity*

Ambiguity and tolerance are related and connected concepts. Ambiguity is incomplete information about a current situation and cannot easily handle it. To fill the needs of learners with different level of ambiguity tolerance, it is important to establish a helping learning environment, this could be done by correct guidance, reduce ambiguity and support to the learners in navigating uncertain situations, deploying strategies like cooperative learning can help the resolution of confusion and clarify unfamiliar and cultural patterns. Tolerance of Ambiguity raises one of the factors for calculating individual differences; put the lights on the psychological aspects but also students learning priorities, these definitions characterized ambiguity came from the available contextual or stimulus cues.

2. Literature Review

El Koumy (2000) studied how pupils with varying degrees of ambiguity tolerance   differed in their comprehension of reading texts in foreign languages. 150 EFL students who were randomly chosen from the English departments of four Egyptian educational institutions made up the study's sample. The MAT-50 (Norton, 1975) and a TOEFL reading comprehension subtest were the two instruments employed. T-tests and one-way   analysis of variance were used in the data analysis. The results showed that there was a significant difference (f=9.56, p<0.05) in the mean scores between the groups with high, moderate, and low ambiguity tolerance.

Groebel (1986) conducted a study in Israel with the goal of investigating the relationship between people's acquisition of a second language and their capacity to accept ambiguity. The purpose of the study was to ascertain whether ambiguity tolerance, IQ, and second language proficiency were correlated. Among the participants were 24 native English speakers from Arizona as well as 100 native Hebrew speakers who were learning English as a second language. Undergraduate students made up all of the participants. In addition, 77 pupils in the Israeli sample provided information on their mental abilities. In an investigation of the relationship between ambiguity tolerance levels and cloze test performance, Vahid, Khashani, and Haddadi (2011) studied 38 third-year high school students in English as a foreign language (EFL) classrooms in Iran. The study measured students' levels of ambiguity tolerance using the Second Language Tolerance of Ambiguity Scale (SLTAS), created by Ely (1995), and evaluated their performance using a standardized English cloze test.

In order to investigate the relationship between students' attitudes toward studying English as a foreign language and their self-concept, tolerance for ambiguity, achievement in English and Arabic, and overall school performance, Lori (1991) performed a study in Bahrain in the spring of 1989. There were 280 pupils in the study sample, drawn from 13 Bahraini high schools. The "Revised Janis-Field Feelings of Inadequacy Scale" was used to gauge students' self-concept, while the Developed Attitudinal Scale was employed to gauge their attitudes toward learning English. The MAT-50 test was used to gauge the students' tolerance for ambiguity, and the schools' accomplishment records in Arabic, English, and other courses were gathered.

In order to determine the degree of ambiguity tolerance among EFL learners and whether or not it affects their vocabulary knowledge, Jowkar, M. and Khajehie, H. (2017) conducted a study. The study also sought to determine whether ambiguity tolerance is related to Iranian EFL learners' self-perceived vocabulary success and whether there are any gender-related disparities in this regard. The sample comprised sixty first-year students who were enrolled in Kazerun Islamic Azad University's   English Language

Teaching Department in Iran. Data were gathered by the researchers using the Vocabulary Levels Test and the Second Language Tolerance of Ambiguity Scale. SPSS version 21 was used to perform a descriptive analysis on the data that had been gathered.

The association between speaking English as a foreign language (EFL) and tolerance of ambiguity (TOA) was examined in a study by Dewaele and MacIntyre (2014). 160 French-speaking university students from Canada participated in the study. The results showed a positive correlation between improved EFL speaking proficiency and increased TOA levels. According to the authors, EFL students who are more ambiguity-tolerant are better able to deal with the difficulties of communicating in a foreign language.
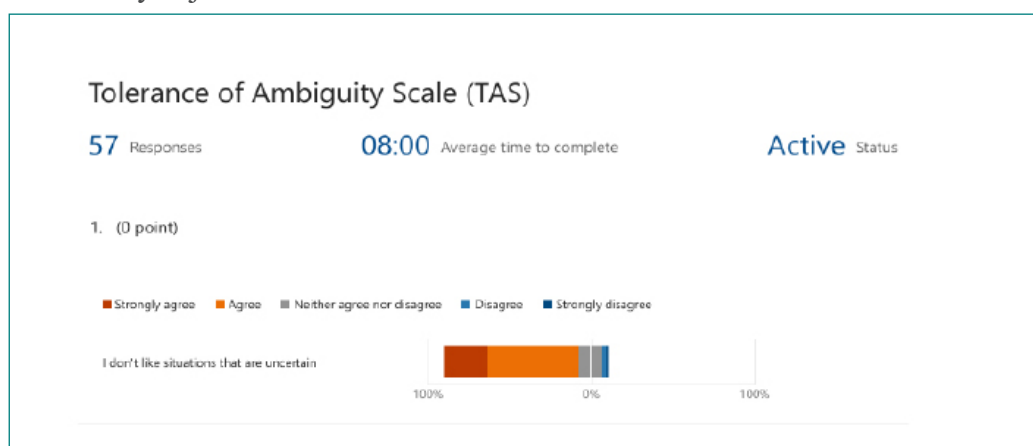
Lee and Kim (2017) looked at the connection between EFL listening comprehension and tolerance of ambiguity (TOA) in another study. 202 high school students in Korea were the subject of the study. The findings showed a positive correlation between enhanced listening comprehension in EFL and higher TOA scores. The authors suggested that more ambiguity-tolerant EFL students are better prepared to deal with the complex and erratic nature of spoken language. All things considered, both findings indicate that EFL learners benefit from having a higher tolerance for ambiguity because it enhances their speaking and listening comprehension skills. Learners can more easily adjust to and understand the

intricacies of a foreign language when they are more accepting of ambiguity.

The association between writing proficiency in English as a foreign language (EFL) and tolerance of ambiguity (TOA) was investigated in a study by Saito and Lyster (2012). Seventy Japanese university students participated in the study. The results showed a positive correlation between increased TOA levels and better EFL writing skills. The authors claim that EFL students who show a greater capacity for ambiguity are better able to handle the diverse and perhaps contradictory requirements of the writing work. According to the study, having a higher threshold for ambiguity is advantageous for EFL writers. More ambiguity-tolerant learners are better able to handle the challenges of writing in a foreign language, such as handling conflicting

3. Research Methodology

When a researcher conducts research, they use a methodical, scientific approach to gather information about a particular issue. Selecting the research approach is crucial before presenting the research paper. The researcher must arrange several stages in order to conduct study on a problem. In this manner, one can approach the issue logically. The size of the sample—the group of individuals selected for the research activity—and the researcher's decision-making process are the foundations of research methodology.

Tolerance of Ambiguity Scale (TAS)

57 Responses   08:00 Average time to complete   Active Status

1. (0 point)

Strongly agree   Agree   Neither agree nor disagree   Disagree   Strongly disagree

I don't like situations that are uncertain

A) Primary Data

Data is collected through structured Questionnaire survey from the students of professional diploma.

B) Tools and Techniques used

Classifications and tabulation of the data and so are collected from the above mentioned sources is used as per the requirements of the study. The data collected is then analyzed and presented by using the

techniques such as:

1. SPSS

2. Microsoft Excel

3. Correlation analysis

C) Period of Study

The data is collected in spring 2023

Table 1. *The relationship between tolerance of ambiguity and learning English as a foreign language*

| opinion	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
I don't like situations that are uncertain	15(26.3%)	32(56.1%)	8(14.0%)	01(1.8%)	01(1.8%)
I dislike unpredictable situations	35(61.4%)	12(21.1%)	6(10.5%)	03(5.3%)	01(1.8%)
I feel uncomfortable when I don't understand the reason why something is happening.	31(54.4%)	20(35.1%)	03(5.3%)	2(3.5%)	01(1.8%)
I don't like to go into a situation without knowing what I'm getting into.	25(43.9%)	25(43.9%)	5(8.8%)	01(1.8%)	01(1.8%)
I feel threatened when I don't know what's going on around me.	11(19.3%)	24(42.1%)	18(31.6%)	2(3.5%)	2(3.5%)
I feel uneasy when I am in a situation where I am not sure what is expected of me.	11(19.3%)	39(68.4%)	3(5.3%)	3(5.3%)	01(1.8%)
I find it frustrating when a situation is unclear	4(7.0%)	07(12.3%)	4(7.0%)	29(50.9%)	13(22.8%)
I feel uncomfortable when information is presented in a way that is difficult to understand	12(21.1%)	38(66.7%)	06(10.5%)	00	01(1.8%)
I find it unsettling when things don't go according to plan	07(12.3%)	29(50.9%)	19(33.3%)	01(1.8%)	01(1.8%)
I prefer working in situations where the rules are clear and fixed.	27(47.4%)	28(49.1%)	02(3.5%)	00	00
I enjoy working on problems that have clear solutions.	15(26.3%)	24(42.1%)	16(28.1%)	00	2(3.5%)
I get nervous when there is no clear solution to a problem.	11(19.3%)	22(38.6%)	16(28.1%)	6(10.5%)	2(3.5%)
I prefer to work in situations where everything is well structured.	21(36.8%)	28(49.1)	8(14.0%)	00	00
I find it uncomfortable when there is more than one interpretation of a situation	4(7.0%)	23(40.4%)	24(42.1%)	05(8.8%)	01(1.8%)
I find it frustrating when there is no clear right or wrong answer.	3(5.3%)	29(50.9%)	04(7.0%)	13(22.8%)	08(14.0%)
I feel uncomfortable when I am unsure about how to behave in a situation	5(8.8%)	29(50.9%)	21(36.8%)	00	2(3.5%)
I feel uneasy when I don't understand the customs and practices of a culture.	4(7.0%)	33(57.9%)	12(21.2%)	6(10.5%)	2(3.5%)
I prefer to work in situations where there is a well-defined hierarchy.	15(26.3%)	29(50.9%)	11(19.3%)	1(1.8%)	1(1.8%)
I feel uncomfortable when I am in a situation where there is no clear leader.	19(33.3%)	22(38.6%)	10(17.5%)	4(7.0%)	2(3.5%)
I prefer working in situations where there are established procedures for doing things.	24(42.2%)	25(43.9%)	08(14.0%)	00	00
I get frustrated when I don't know the rules of a game or activity.	09(15.8%)	31(54.4%)	09(15.8%)	07(12.3%)	1(1.8%)
I feel nervous when I am not sure what is expected of me in a social situation	10(17.5%)	31(54.4%)	10(17.5%)	2(3.5%)	4(7.0%)
I prefer to work in situations where everything is planned in advance.	23(40.4%)	27(47.4%)	6(10.5%)	1(1.8%)	00

I find it unsettling when a situation is ambiguous	09(15.8%)	34(59.6%)	13(22.8%)	00	1(1.8%)
I feel uneasy when I am in a situation where there are no clear guidelines for behavior.	14(24.6%)	30(52.6%)	11(19.3%)	00	2(3.5%)
I feel threatened when I am ina situation where I am not sure what will happen next.	6(10.5%)	29(50.9%)	15(26.3%)	4(7.0%)	3(5.3%)

(source: primary data)

3.1 Data Analysis and Interpretation

The above table shows the relationship between students' attitudes toward studying English as a foreign language and their self-concept, tolerance for ambiguity, achievement in English.56% participant are agree that they don't like situation that are uncertain. 61.4% participants strongly agree and very few participants are disagreeing about dislike unpredictable situations. About they feel uncomfortable when they don't understand the reason why something is happening, maximum 54% participants strongly agrees.43% agrees that "I don't like to go into a situation without knowing what I'm getting into" and maximum 43% agrees and 3.5% disagrees about feel threatened when they don't know what's going on around me.
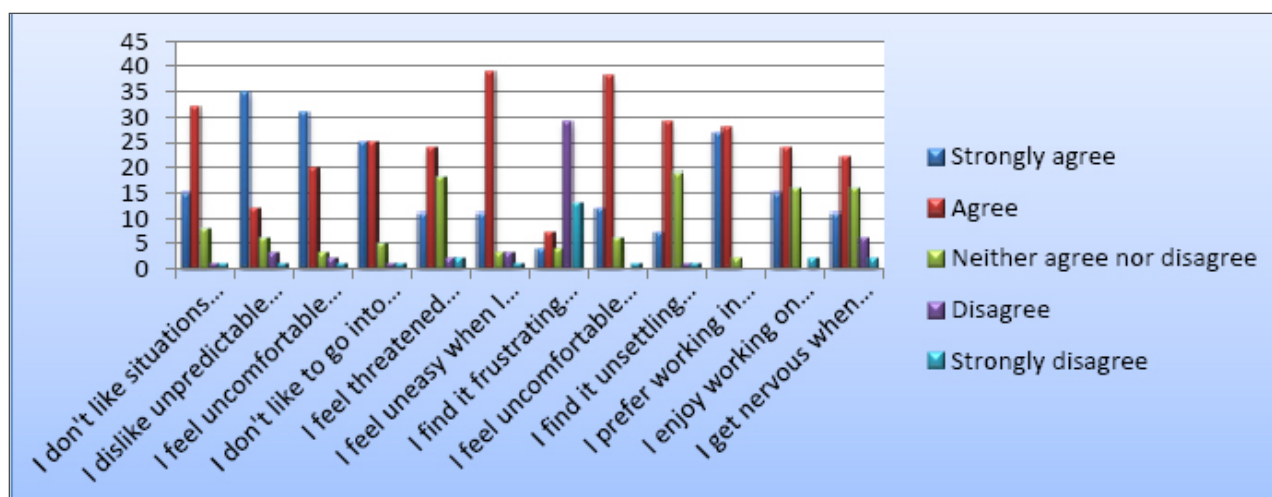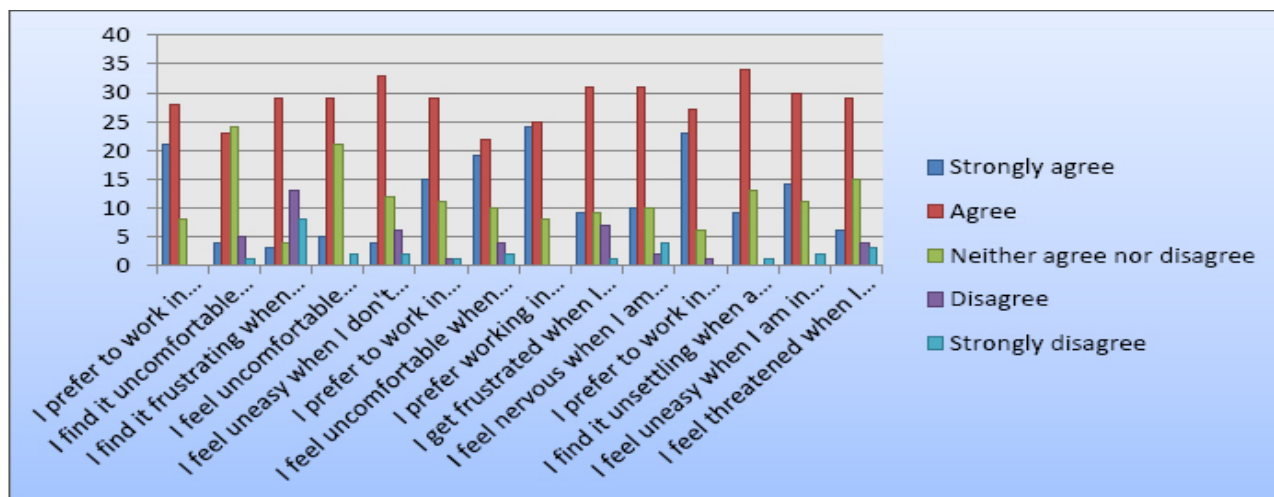

Graph 1. *The relationship between tolerance of ambiguity and learning English as a foreign language*

About asking "I feel uneasy when I am in a situation where I am not sure what is expected of me" maximum 68.4% agrees and very few 1.8% strongly disagree so the participants having clear thoughts about their feelings. If there is a question about frustration whenever the situation is unclear then maximum 50.9% students disagree it means most students don't hesitate and they have very minimum frustration whenever the situation is unclear & majority of students 66.7% agrees that they feel uncomfortable when information is presented in a way that is difficult to understand. About find it unsetting when things don't go according to plan majority 50.9% of students agree. Maximum 49% agreeing and nobody disagree about they prefer working in situations where the rules are clear and fixed.

3. 2 Data Analysis and Interpretation

From the above table show the clear thoughts and positive behavior with tolerance of ambiguity among university students studying English as a foreign language (EFL).About "I prefer to work in situations where everything is well-structured opinion" maximum 50% students agree and no students disagree indicate students like structured environment. The question about "I find it uncomfortable when there is more than one interpretation of a situation" dramatically maximum 42.1% participants neither agrees nor disagree. Maximum 50.9% agrees and 5.3% strongly agrees that they find it frustrating when there is no clear right or wrong answer.

Graph 2. *The relationship between tolerance of ambiguity and learning English as a foreign language*

About they feel uncomfortable when I am unsure about how to behave in a situation maximum 50.9% agrees and zero participants disagree. 57.9% participant's agreeing about "I feel uneasy when I don't understand the customs and practices of a culture" and 3.5% strongly disagree. Most students like to work in well-defined hierarchy, customs and practices of a culture, structured and positive environment and they supposed to have leader. Maximum 54.4% students agrees and 1.8% strongly disagrees that they get frustrated when they don't know the rules of a game or activity and at the same time they feel nervous in an unclear situation. 47.4% agrees and 40.4% strongly agrees about they prefer to work in situations where everything is planned in advance here Students are too enthusiastic and familiar in planned situation. About "I feel uneasy when I am in a situation where there are no clear guidelines for behavior" maximum 52.6% agreeing and nobody disagree. Maximum 50.9% agrees and 5.3% strongly disagrees about they feel threatened whenever the situation don't know what will happen next.

4. Conclusion

The Sample has been collected from 57 students who are studying Professional diploma in University. The results of an analysis of the data showed that students have an average tolerance for ambiguity when learning English as a foreign language. The study shows the clear thoughts and positive approach of the students about tolerance of ambiguity. Students prefer to work in situations where everything is well-structured, well planned and clear. The results showed that there was no significant correlation between language knowledge and ambiguity tolerance. Students like to work in situations where the rules are clear and fixed; they enjoy working on problems that have clear

solutions. The study also shown that the students frustrated, they feel uneasy, threatened where the situation not clear, so its clear opinion about tolerance of ambiguity.

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