

THE NON-REFERENTIAL *IT*
AND
THIRD LANGUAGE ACQUISITION

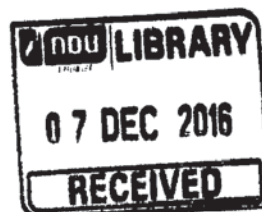
A Thesis
Submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts in
Applied Linguistics and Teaching English as a Foreign Language

by

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Lebanon

Fall 2016



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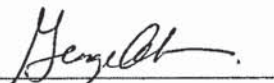
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**The Non-Referential *It*
and
Third Language Acquisition**

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Abstract

Linguists, grammarians and professors seek to come to an apt and final approach to grammar teaching to Foreign Language learners. Studies about language acquisition investigate the non-referential *it* in the theoretical framework of the pro-drop parameter and researchers limit the findings that deal with the non-referential *it* strictly to the English language. . The specific problem this study addresses is how to accommodate the needs of implicit or explicit instruction of grammar of established grammatical approaches to the needs of French L2 students learning intermediate level English as a third language at a French-based university, Université St. Joseph (USJ). Experimentation on the methods used on control and experimental groups of undergraduates through varieties of tasks, analysis of its effects and a detailed study are of particular value to Applied Linguistics and to Teaching English as a Foreign Language. The results of the comparison between direct grammar learners and indirect grammar learners that this study offers seek to reveal the basis of this research: whether explicit grammar learning is better achieved when compared to implicit grammar learning by third language intermediate learners.

Key words: Definition of *It*, Referential *It*, *Non-referential It*, Teaching English as a Foreign Language – TEFL, Second Language Acquisition– SLA, Third Language.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Research is a gradual process of formulating hypotheses, collecting data, and providing data analysis along with interpretation. Quantitative research usually performs data analysis by using numbers and “uncovering facts and truths which” are “independent of the researcher” (Nunan, 2007, pp. 3, 20). In general, the question of first language (L1) and foreign language (FL) learning is of interest to researchers studying language acquisition as well as TEFL. Loewen (2012) maintains that SLA is a term used after L1 is learned, and merges various types of acquisition, such as second language (L2), third (L3), fourth (L4), and fifth (L5) (p. 485).

The topic of the use or absence of overt subject pronouns (“pro-drop”) in English is an interesting issue to examine particularly in relation to different languages. According to Crystal (2003), null, an application in “Generative Grammar” or formal rules, meaning zero or empty, is an adjective. Consequently, a null subject is an empty component (p. 321). English, a morphologically limited language, does not allow null subjects and requires explicit pronouns wherever a recoverable antecedent is present in the discourse. French, similarly to English, is not a pro-drop language. Arabic is sometimes a pro-drop language as some pronoun classes are omitted. Pro-drop languages, such as Spanish, do not require overt pronouns (Zhao, 2007, p. 542). Moreover, English also employs the non-referential *it*, (also called “dummy *it*”, “expletive *it*” and “pleonastic *it*”) (Crystal, 2003, pp. 151, 171, 357) in every sentence in which a subject pronoun is required, regardless of its semantical need. This “dummy subject,” often used in expressions indicating time, distance, or atmospheric conditions (Quirk, Greenbaum, Leech, & Svartvik, 1985, p. 348), is not present in languages like Spanish and poses special problems for second language learners (SLLs).

1.1 Problem Statement

The literature concerning the acquisition of the non-referential *it* is sparse, although some studies recently began to appear in order to examine how English learners acquire null expletives or dummy elements in French as in the case of *ce* referring to *it*. *It* is recognized as an interesting problem in the disciplines of syntax, semantics, and computational linguistics, in the field of second language acquisition, as referred to Denis (2007) who believes that “no human-annotated linguistic information is used in the input” (pp. 236-243). Haghghi and Klein (2007) stated that computation prevents product disclosure and that “the number and gender draws” are “observed, like personal pronouns [...] for which properties” are not “observed (e.g. *it*)”. Because the entity property draws are not (all) observed, the unobserved ones are sampled (pp. 848-855).

Moreover, *it* is usually studied in conjunction with other pronouns, most often third-person singular and plural, within the theoretical framework of the Pro-drop parameter (also known as the null subject parameter). Grammar is a group of mechanisms accepted as “central to language” because a language allows learners to understand its acquisition and its operations in the target language (Michel Swan in James Simpson, 2012, p. 578).

According to John Field, the issue of successfully speaking under strained and limited time stimulates “the traditional notion of a syntax based upon applying elaborate rules” licensing “permissible combinations of words and” excluding “others” (sited in James Simpson, 2012, p. 497).

It is for the reasons that will be described below that the researcher emphasizes the importance of paying attention to this grammatical item, i.e., the nature and the usage of the non-referential *it*.

Until 2008 (Bergsma, Lin, & Goebel, 2008), there were no comprehensive studies about how English L3 learners acquire null expletives or dummy elements in French because both *ce* and/or *il* refer to *it*, although both English and French are essentially not pro-drop languages, except in colloquial speech. The researcher also highlights that most L3 students were unfamiliar with the use of the dummy *it* as an object. The following example “I’m easy to talk to people” was identified as an incorrect sentence by only a few students who were able to correct it to “I find it easy to talk to people.” Similarly, after extensive teaching observations, the researcher’s interests shifted to investigating the reasons why such language misuse occurred and whether language learners needed to know grammar rules to speak the language correctly. To do so, the researchers used L3 as a communication tool along with indirect grammar learning by recasting incorrect sentences and forming target structure.

“Grasping the notion of grammar” through paraphrasing rules for L2 learners is similar to cutting and shaping according to the needs of the learners (Milićević, 2009, p.15). During the researcher’s experiment, both methods of grammar instruction were tried: deduction, or rule explanation, and induction, which involves an active role in hypothesis testing. The researcher observed that L3 French-based college students, who were either aware or unaware of rules, use the non-referential *it*. Thus, the misuse of the non-referential *it* occurs because of a lack of input or explanation and because of a lack of presentation of grammar rules that deal with syntax and morphology. For example, in English, “*It is ten o’clock*” or “*It’s ten o’clock*” was translated into French as “*Il est dix heures*” or “*C’est dix heures*” by English L3 learners whose L2 was French and L1 Arabic. In those cases, *it’s* sounded similar to *is*, and created misconceptions in the usage of the pronoun. The learners, therefore, adopted the lack of usage of the pronoun similar to Arabic, a partially pro-drop language in morphology. Additionally, for L3 English learners and L1 Arabic speakers when

the referential pronoun *it* was used in English and French, it was dropped in Arabic. *It* ran ↔ *Il* a couru ↔ رَكَضَ

In the sentence *It's raining. What's actually raining?* *It* refers to an unknown or a dummy pronoun that is used to make the sentence grammatical, yet whether *it* functions as referential or non-referential in such a sentence to L3 learners is unclear. In English the null subject or the non-referential pronoun *it* is considered to be a necessity, as it is in French, yet in Arabic the subject or the pronoun does not need to be always present in order to form a complete sentence and produce a meaning. *It* rained ↔ *Il* a plut ↔ اَمْطَرَتْ

Language teachers notice the problems in teaching approaches to grammar in English as a foreign language (EFL) that lead to the misunderstanding of messages among English language users. The problem addressed in this study stems from extensive teaching observation of learners who did not use *it* correctly because *it* has a corresponding referential form that behaves differently from its non-referential form.

Twenty years of teaching experience at USJ's TEFL program has led the researcher to notice more of the learners' errors and helped to support the claim of the thesis that the non-referential *it* might pose special problems for FL learners. In many cases, L3 learners at the beginning of the language course had difficulties distinguishing between the two forms which are not stressed in conversation. As a result, unacceptable answers were expected when the grammatically correct usage of the referential and non-referential *it* was concerned. Since the topic under discussion in the narration task was limited to oral narrative, the researcher hopes to hypothesize that most usages of *it* in this task are referential in nature, with the exception of instances of *it* which were used to establish the context of a scene (e.g., prop-*it* time and prop-*it* weather). According to Quirk et al., (1985), Prop-*it* is a term that refers to expressions designating time, distance, or weather conditions, and is "the most neutral and semantically

unmarked of the personal pronouns” because of lack of independent meaning (pp. 348-349). It seemed reasonable that students with higher proficiency should have produced more instances of the non-referential *it* which is not “regularly” taught in lower levels of English instruction. Consequently, these previous considerations make the L3 acquisition of the non-referential *it* a topic worthy of investigation.

For a sensible instruction of *it*, the knowledge of its structures requires pedagogical application. “When the learning challenge” is “how to form the construction”, the training of the objective is basic “in a task-essential way” (Larsen, 2009, p. 527). Thus, direct grammar learning involves the analysis of L3 and the awareness of its linguistic forms and structures.

1.2 Purpose of the Study

The researcher’s motivation to pursue this study stems from the need to enhance an educational finding that was applicable in the teaching of English to L3 learners as it relates to grammar instruction through implicit methods of teaching at USJ in Lebanon. In all its campuses—Beirut, Tripoli, Sidon, and Zahlé—French was adopted as the language of instruction for most major courses.

Speaking English became a necessity in parallel with French after completion of the four English language levels because students needed a minimum of 10/20 as passing grade in “English for Specific Purposes” (ESP) to graduate from USJ. English teaching at USJ was under the supervision of St. Louis University, Missouri, in the United States.

Seeking to understand whether learners require grammatical instruction and rules to be able to utilize the target language correctly, the researcher chose to conduct a study of direct grammar learning as opposed to indirect grammar learning with L3 learners who did not learn grammatical terms to differentiate between the referential and the non-referential *it*.

Thus, the latter learners were not informed of the English grammatical rules of the non-referential *it*. The purpose of this study is to contribute to the process of achieving and properly using *it* in explicit learners.

1.3 Research Questions

The research questions were formulated for the purpose of quantitative investigation. The output was calculated numerically for statistical use and to test the hypotheses of the researcher based on relevant data about the usage of the non-referential *it* and its frequency in intermediate level courses at USJ. (Mujis, 2004):

- a. Does direct grammar learning lead to more production of *it* than indirect grammar learning by intermediate learners of English grammar?
- b. Does the frequency of certain types of the non-referential *it* in narratives differ between direct and indirect grammar learners of intermediate English?

1.4 Hypotheses

According to the formulated questions, this study was carried out to test the following hypotheses concerning the non-referential *it*:

Hypothesis 1: Direct grammar/explicit learners of intermediate English produce more instances of the non-referential *it* than indirect grammar/implicit learners of intermediate English.

Hypothesis 2: More instances of the non-referential *it* occurs in the narrative data of direct grammar/explicit learners of intermediate English than in the narrative data of indirect grammar/implicit learners of intermediate English.

1.5 Definitions of Key Terms

The researcher's explanation of meanings includes words/ phrases/ initials that indicate the concepts relevant to this study. Conceptual key terms are utilized to indicate the paraphrased meanings of the terms from operational terms respectively. Some of the terms were adapted from researchers who created their own terminologies. For this study, the researcher found necessary to use the explanations and definitions of the following terms: Definition of *It*, Referential *It*, Non- Referential *It*, Teaching English as a Foreign Language–TEFL, Second Language Acquisition–SLA, Third Language.

Definition of *it*.

According to a study by Bergsma and Lin (2006) of the non-referential *it* and pronouns in a [+pro-drop] language such as French, the different usage of *it* occurs when the third-person subject pronouns are encoded for gender and number. Due to rich inflection, referents are picked out without resorting to overt subject pronouns. Pronouns are used for emphasis or to make clarifications, but they are omitted in normal usage when the referent is known. Examples of this type of reference both in English and French are as follows:

I did it. → *C'est moi qui l'ai fait.* → *It was me who did it.* (Ballard, 2002, p. 146)

The referential *it*.

According to Boyd, Gegg and Byron (2005), the counterpart of the referential *it* behaved differently than the non-referential *it*. The referential *it* was the third person neuter pronoun used to substitute for a noun phrase (NP) (inanimate) that was introduced in the discourse or for something that was inferred from the context. This “referring it” identified not only inanimate objects, but also non-count substances, events, and even referred to whole

clauses or sentences, singling out referents of various sizes and levels of abstractness. When a pronoun referred directly to something, *it* had reference; consequently, *it* was referential (Boyd et al., 2005).

The following examples were inspired from Quirk et al. (1985):

1. You have a perfect restaurant there. Would you like to visit *it*? (=restaurant)
2. They prepared *some cheese* and sent *it* to the orphans.
3. A: Who said *that he was late*?

B: She said *it*. ('that he was late')

The information changed when the following examples from Just & Carpenter (1987) were taken into consideration:

4. Walter lit the match.
5. *It* ignited Mary's hair.
6. *It* produced second-degree burns.
7. *It* was the last straw leading to their divorce (198).

To include more information, the size of the information encompassed by *it* increased from (5) to (7).

The non-referential *it*.

According to Celce-Murcia & Larsen-Freeman (1999), *it*, in its non-referential usage, was employed as a dummy subject that had no clearly definable antecedent. Although the expletive *it* typically occurred as a grammatical subject, it only appeared in syntactic positions where no theta-role was assigned. Non-referential or expletive uses of *it* were often

found in expressions denoting time, distance, or weather as anticipatory subjects in extraposed clauses (including clefts), or in idiomatic expressions (Crystal, 2003). Celce-Murcia & Larsen-Freeman (1999) note that, “unlike the personal pronoun *it*, non-referential *it* requires no antecedent or anaphoric referent.” Additionally, *it* is used as an implausible referent because “there is often no conceivable referent for the *it* [...] (p. 446).

It is ambiguous whether *it* is truly referential or non-referential, a quality that impacts the way it is understood by L3 learners. Below are some examples drawn from Quirk et al. (1985, p. 348):

1. *It's* ten to one.
2. How far is *it* to Beirut?
3. *It* wasn't warm yesterday.

The non-referential *it* has a corresponding referential form that behaves differently from its non-referential form and is practically never stressed in conversation. The referential *it*, however, receives contrastive stress. This causes *it* to be difficult to notice. Additionally, certain L3 learners misanalyse *it* because of its phonological similarity to expressions in their L2. Finally, it is common to omit non-referential *it* in initial utterance in casual conversation or correspondence (Celce-Murcia & Larsen-Freeman, 1999).

Teaching English as a foreign language (TEFL).

According to Ellis (2015), Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) to those whose First Language is not English and who live in a country where English is not the official language. This term is used for the study of English of Non-Native Speakers (NNS) whose English is not adopted as a language of communication.

Second language acquisition– SLA.

According to Ellis (2015), Second Language Acquisition (SLA) and Second Language Learning (SLL) are processes that contrast at times since SLA is the exposure to a targeted language but SLL is a “subconscious or conscious process by which a language other than the mother tongue was learned in a natural tutored setting” (p. 6). After the mother tongue or first language acquisition is established (L1), SLA is the process of learning both the foreign and second language. It refers to the language which is not the mother tongue but which is used for certain communicative functions in a given society. It is learned after the first language (L1) or mother tongue. The researcher analyzed the participants’ learned English as L3 and French as L2 during early childhood in addition to their L1 mother tongue which is Arabic. In Lebanon, most Lebanese children who learn L1 Arabic as their mother tongue study L2 French when they attend school.

Third language.

In Pilar & Jordà (2005), the term L3 refers to both foreign and third language. It is used to refer to the language that is learned after the mother tongue. The participants of this study learned English L3 by the process of third language acquisition as a FL, and they learned French as L2 during early childhood in addition to L1 which was Arabic. The process of L3 learning usually started at school and continued through college. L3 was used for certain communicative functions in that society (pp. 9, 49).

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

The analysis of the references related to this study includes the literature review concerning direct/indirect instruction of EFL learners and different approaches established according to different theories. Third language acquisition modified in line with +pro-drop/-pro-drop languages and the non-referential *it*; and insufficient references of implicit/explicit methods of this grammatical item have been retrieved. This review is a critical assessment of the literature about language acquisition and raises questions about the different approaches in the discourse of language instruction.

2.1 Explicit Learning versus Implicit Learning

The review of the literature focused on certain aspects of studies such as the disagreement of implicit/explicit learning to explain successful acquisition. The implicit approach seemed more rational than the explicit approach. The researcher questioned how and when the application and implementation of implicit learning was effective and suitable.

Concerning the acquisition of L1, learners knew a quantity of rules implicitly and were capable of producing correct statements because its grammar worked without requiring thinking about the rules. For those who often produced errors, grammar was intuitive: for example, expressions in simple oral form of L1 children who invented stories at playtime. Subsequently, the explicit method was usually realized particularly in writing. The explicit learners learned the language and grasped the grammatical system but needed to study rules that allowed them to write correctly. It was at that time that the learners experienced explicit learning to identify some grammatical terms. L1 learners knew their languages explicitly

which helped their entry into other languages and benefited large part of the explicit knowledge associated with L1 (Anderson, 2009).

2.2 Second Language Acquisition and Implicit/Explicit Input

Archer and Hughes (2011) describe explicit instruction as “systematic, direct, engaging, and success oriented” (p. 1). Ellis, Loewen, Elder, Erlam, Philp and Reinders (2009) claim that no proof exists “that implicit learning” is “separate from explicit learning” (p. 4). Krashen argues that explicit/conscious learning have achieved a better outcome than implicit/subconscious learning in FL learning. Since the direct input takes place only through some “awareness” of the process, the indirect input is the process of learning without analysis—a process in which learners are unaware of the input process—and are thus unable to initiate what they learned in context because the input was without the involvement of memorization of factual rules. The ability to learn indirectly is best achieved at an early age, yet direct learning is learned at any age. Implicit instruction is “directed at enabling learners to infer rules without awareness” (Ellis, R. et al., 2009, p. 17).

Testing implicit knowledge through elicited imitation under time constraints hinders production that focuses on the meaning of the language since the degree of learners’ language awareness is not a necessity. Yet implicit and explicit knowledge are tested through narration, resulting in free production, and grammaticality judgment task, thus limiting either acceptable or unacceptable items in the target language. Explicit learners focus on the form and not on the meaning of the language (Ellis, et al., 2009). Schmidt notices that the awareness of acquired elements is large on how the input of L2 becomes an intake or how the learner fixes the elements of the acquired language through implicit approach. The acquisition benefits from the two approaches, and explicitly allows the learner to get instruction in the system at any given time. Yet to distinguish between the acquisition of a

child and that of an adult, a child is more inclined towards a situated approach, rather than to explicit language; s/he is not required to reflect on the rules immediately. An adult, however, who is used to manage rules and digest them, is able to enter L2 through a more explicit approach. There is a difference between the system acquisition of language and learning the rules for writing (Maftoon & Shakouri, 2012).

Comparisons between implicit and explicit are sometimes irrelevant. A student seeks to induce rules, knowing that the same rules simply take a clever name later. The explicit approach takes care of the explanation of the rules on certified data without resorting to the grammar school. Since the explicit grammar of L1 is no more on the agenda, it is problematic to demand that learners work explicitly in TEFL courses because students do not have to develop an analytical look into their own language, making the use of the “classic” grammatical exercises unnecessary. But this does not prevent students from acquiring the language in question. The age level of the EFL learner determines the best way to work the suitable elements of the teaching program (Maftoon & Shakouri, 2012).

Subsequent research on the opposition between induction and deduction shows that if the learner builds his own rules from the observation and handling of information and if he has learned through a classical method, the inductive approach seems to promote a more workable SLA because the input is recollected. Other researchers argue that it is better to explain the rules to allow apparent instructions, as is the case with learning to play chess. The learner is empowered by taking charge of the learning and by solving problems. An explicit approach allows the learner to master the essentials and understand the usefulness of the rules, but EFL classes are not composed of such learners. Yet, knowing the rules does not mean being able to use them wisely (Maftoon & Shakouri, 2012).

FL acquisition by Krashen is the theory behind the “natural approach” which maintains that knowledge and learning explicitly play minor roles in the “acquisition” of implicit communicative competence. The quantitative difference between the acquisitions of L2 and L1 is that the contact time with the language at school represents a fraction of time that allows the implicit development of L1. Yet, less time in a language course ensures the “natural” development in L2. The qualitative difference in cognitive task is that a linguistic network exists in the brain of a child learning L2 at school, which is not the case for a child learning a mother tongue at home. Moreover, motivation and social learning context establish the achievements in L2 (Anderson, 2009).

Kihlstrom, Dorfman & Park (2007) define learning as incorporating new information into memory, which is a set of complex structures that work together efficiently. Short-term memory functions, such as span and working memory, recap some long-term memory characteristics. The pre-owned unity of knowledge is the product of all one’s learning. They identify two types of long-term memory: “declarative and non-declarative.” Among these two memory systems of explicit and implicit learning, the most significant characteristics of long-term memory components are one’s conscious recall of facts, events, faces, numbers, and words (Robinson, 2013). Declarative knowledge defines the knowledge of the recognition explicitly of a fact, a face or a place. The acquisition of declarative knowledge comes under explicit processes and creates a new memory in connection, requiring careful effort of the learner (Robinson, 2013). Non-declarative memory, acquired implicitly, contains the programs of a human’s sensorimotor routines in automation at work, such as putting on clothes, and follows the treatment of repetition of the same stimuli in the same contexts (Robinson, 2013, p. 320). The progressive setting is a slow process, since it assumes that brain structures are inflexible.

Repetition is the key to memorization since it is the foundation of learning (Robinson & Ellis, 2008, p. 110). The main element in the development of a skill is practice, a process that does not require immediate accomplishment. Training, repetition and time allotted to performing tasks are essential to the acquisition of a foreign language (Cook, 2013).

The transition from beginner to advanced level is described in terms of a shift in purposeful attempts of the L2 learner, who activates L1 to find the necessary forms in spoken or written production: new sound articulation, word recognition, suitable morphological form retrieval. At a higher level, when the L2 learner becomes attentive to the construction of meaning in the communicative interactions, L2 is used “without thinking” in all the operations in a lower level. Yet not all L2 students acquire a similar cognitive network that exists in the brain of a native speaker. Hence, the teaching staff determines the amount and quality of acquired knowledge for effective language use in real communication situations. Many aspects of L2 are difficult to acquire implicitly. For example, school-contact time is insufficient for L2 implicit acquisition. (Robinson, 2013).

With other researchers, an explicit repetitive work is necessary for the storage of certain L2 elements, such as the basic phonemes and the graphemes (Gass & Mackey, 2013). Repeating a word or a structure in a single context for adequate acquisition is insufficient, yet observing a variety of contexts consisting of either a single word or a longer segment is effective (Rebuschat, 2015).

Finally, in spite of the best tools and techniques available, repetitive training is only the beginning of effective language learning. Verbal interaction, listening, reading and writing repeatedly are essential activities in the classroom. Once the L2 network was rich enough to allow reception of meaning and effective production, basic language skills increased more implicitly (Robinson, 2013).

2.3 Perception and Input Factors of Linguists

In English, *it* has both referential and non-referential usages. Although the non-referential *it* is semantically vacuous, it is obligatory for the production of grammatical English utterances. The term “non-referential *it*” refers to those instances of *it* that do not introduce a new referent (Boyd et al., 2005). Another compound factor is the acquisition of the non-referential *it*. In contrast to other personal pronouns, the neuter pronoun generally does not receive stress. It is accepted in English that “One reason why *it* is rarely stressed is that when a stressed non-personal pronoun is needed, *it* is supplanted by *this* or *that*” (Quirk et al., 1985, p. 348).

To tackle the question of the non-referential *it* two approaches are used, one functionalist, by Kaltenböck, and the other formalist, by Seppänen. The grammar item is presented along with the name of the items in order to make the experimental group aware of the given terminology of the grammatical lesson (Mackey & Gass, 2005).

Linguists debate the nature of the non-referential *it* and its relationship to the referential *it*. Kaltenböck (1999, 2002) places “prop-*it*” which encompasses “wide” reference (“ambience”) on one end of the continuum, and “referring *it*” which encompasses a “narrow” reference (‘single entity’/referent NP) on the other (Kaltenböck, 2002, p. 544). The ‘Anticipatory *it*’ falls in the middle and is believed to ‘refer’ to a ‘state of affairs.’ The Non-referential *it* is not analyzed as devoid of context. Kaltenböck (2002, p. 541) states that the narrative data confirms a contextual approach and that the categorization of *it* is inherently “fuzzy” and concludes that “a view of *it* identifying neatly separated categories in terms of meaningful/referential or not, based on exclusively formalist criteria and isolated sentences was problematic as it failed to take into account the actual use of *it* in context” (p. 549).

The claim that the prop-*it* and the anticipatory *it* (for example, “*It* is useful to study English”) are referential is controversial, especially among those who prefer a syntactic analysis to a more discourse-related approach. Seppänen (2002), among the former, provides a series of syntactic tests (for example, dummy subjects could not have received contrastive stress, or been replaced by other pronouns) to demonstrate why the anticipatory *it* and the prop-*it* are merely dummy subjects. In spoken dialog, the use of the non-referential *it* in spontaneous speech is different from its usage in written text in two respects: it is less structured, comprising more instances of *it* (Gupta, Purver & Jurafsky, 2007). L3 learners perceive *it* with difficulty in conversation, making the perception problematic because it does not make any semantic contribution to a sentence. The contracted form *it's* is difficult for French L2 learners to identify because its pronunciation is similar to the third person singular present form of the verb “to be”, that is “*is*”, which corresponds in meaning to *it is*. Other language groups, such as native French speakers, undergo the same phonological error. Research supports this possibility.

According to Flynn, Martohardjono and O'Neil (2014), phonological interference is at the root of null subject production by children of French L1 learners acquiring English as their L2. Oral data from three English learners from different L1 backgrounds (French, Spanish and Japanese) collected over an eleven-month period of time was studied by Lakshamanan (1991) to verify phonological interference. She noted that the French-speaking child, Muriel, produced very few null subjects and only in constructions with copula/auxiliary “*is*”. Since French is not a pro-drop language and requires overt pronouns, L1 transfer does not contribute for this error. Lakshamanan suggests that phonological interference from French causes *it's* to be omitted or misanalysed as *is*, *ist*, or *iste* (p. 402). Later data samples show the stabilization of the form *is*, but both referential and non-referential *it* continued to be omitted. The Spanish-speaking child, Marta, also replicated a similar phenomenon. Like

Muriel, most of Marta's null subjects occurred with copula or auxiliary "is" in the earliest samples of the collected data (p. 398). However, subsequent samples showed a sharp decline of null subjects. Instances of *it* in the form of the copula began to emerge later (p. 400). Loewen (2012) maintained that the input of the target language matched with what the learner knew, "prior knowledge led to apperception, to actual syntactic and semantic comprehension, and to intake" (2012, p. 504). As Dali (2011) states in the abstract of the article the pronoun *it* is used in a great variety of contexts in contemporary English; the object that is placed by *it* fits "the common memory of the speaker."

In addition to potential difficulties in perception, another factor has impeded the acquisition of the non-referential *it* among language learners. Input to child and adult FL learners was misleading when it came to the acceptable, yet technically ungrammatical utterance and initial omissions of the non-referential *it*. Examples of utterance with omissions of the non-referential *it* are as follows (Valian, 1990, p. 110):

1. Gonna rain tomorrow.
2. Seems like it's gonna rain tomorrow.

"Non-referential *It* in Spoken Dialog Spontaneous Speech" varies "considerably from written text" (Gupta et al., 2007, p. 4). Utterance of initial omissions of subjects, including the non-referential *it*, are acceptable constructions in casual English (Valian, 1990). But such input does not lead children to believe that their language does not require overt subjects; all English L1 children end up acquiring their native language. Because of such misleading input, however, the question of the possibility arises when it is known that Native Speakers (NS) of both (+pro-drop) and (-pro-drop) languages produce utterances without subject. How did L3 learners judge such utterances? This study investigates how L3 learners evaluate constructions containing utterance-initial omission of the non-referential *it*.

Taking into account such ambiguous input, Valian (1990) proposes that both values of the null subject parameter are available to a “child’s parser” in the mental lexicon (p. 118). Children then get adapted to a hypothesis testing procedure to interpret incoming data. To bolster her hypothesis, Valian cites studies suggesting that children are adept at analyzing patterns, frequency, and regularities in language. As for expletives, she concludes that they are not diagnostic in determining whether a given setting of the pro-drop parameter had been acquired. From her own research she notes that NSs produced “very few expletives,” yet they generated “subjects 90 % of the time” (Valian, 1990, p. 115).

Roeper & Weissenborn (1990) also attempted to reconcile how contradictory input affected child language acquisition and the setting of the null subject parameter. Their solution lays in the fact that English subjects are always obligatory in tensed embedded clauses (Roeper and Williams, 1987). For example, a child presented with input as (a) but never as (b):

1. raining out today,
2. I think raining out today (Roeper and Weissenborn, 1990, p. 156)

Although input from the matrix clause was ambiguous at times, evidence from the subordinate clause would provide the child with unmistakable evidence as to whether his or her language was “+pro-drop or -pro-drop” (Roeper, 1990, p. 155). That is, except if a child does *not* hear an overt subject in a tensed subordinate clause that would “trigger” the setting of the grammar to “+pro-drop”. In contrast to Valian’s proposal, which forces the child to interpret large quantities of data and perform distributional and frequency analyses, Roeper & Weissenborn provide evidence from German and French child L1 data showing that “the loss of empty subjects” appears instantly (p. 157).

2.4 The Pro-Drop Parameter and its Acquisition

The researcher briefly examined the theoretical background of the Pro-drop parameter before summarizing various research studies in adult L3, rather than L2, acquisition which examines the non-referential *it*.

As stated by Chomsky (Hofer, 2015), the parameter that is concerned with the obligatory or optional nature of overt pronouns is referred to as the “Pro-drop” parameter in the literature, which as noted by Reuland and Abraham (2012), has interrelated components (Chomsky, 1981). Pro-drop languages show the omission of subject pronouns, free subject verb inversion in declarative sentences and the absence of pronoun effects (White, 2003).

For the purposes of this study, the researcher focused on the component that concerns the absence of the non-referential pronouns with rich verbal inflection. The following examples are based on examples from White (2003):

Subject omission: Anda muy ocupada → *Is very busy → She is very busy.

Subject-verb inversion: Vino Juan → *Came Juan → Juan came.

Absence of pronoun effects: ¿ Quien dijiste que vino? → *Who did you say that came? → Who did you say came?

2.5 The Non-Referential *it* and Pronouns in a “+Pro-Drop” Language

In Spanish, third-person subject pronouns (él “he” /ella “she” /ellos “they (masculine)” /ellas “they (feminine)” [ello is the neuter equivalent of él and ella, translated as ‘it’ or ‘this’ referring to previous propositions or statements, usage to which is limited,] are encoded for gender and number. Due to rich verbal inflection, referents are picked out

(though not for gender) without resorting to overt subject pronouns, rendering them redundant (hence pro-drop). Pronouns are used for emphasis or clarifications, yet they are omitted in usage where the referent is understood. Since overt subjects and pronouns are not required, dummy subjects are not utilized in Spanish. Examples of non-referential subjects are overt and covert expletives:

1. a. It rained yesterday. (English-overt)
b. *Rained yesterday.
2. a. It is difficult to read this book.
b. *Is difficult to read this book.
3. a. It seems that Maria is tired.
b. *Seems that Maria is tired.
4. a. *Llovió* ayer. (Spanish-covert)
Rained (3 SG) past yesterday.
b. *Lo *llovió* ayer.
5. a. *Es difícil* leer este libro.
Is (3 SG) difficult to read this book.
b. *Lo *es difícil* leer este libro.
6. a. Parece que *María está* cansada.
Seem-(3 SG) that *Maria* is tired.
b. *Lo parece que *María está* cansada.

N.B. (1b) and (3b) are acceptable in casual spoken or written English.

Data (5a) and (6a) from Cowper, 2009, p. 78

Spanish, like English, has semantically empty subjects corresponding to English non-referential *it*. In impersonal expressions *es* is interpreted as “it is” while *parece* corresponds

to “it seems”. Unlike English, they are also phonologically empty of covert. In addition, Spanish overt pronouns are referential while in English, they need not be. Several studies, explored below, examined whether SLLs of Spanish had different mental representations of null referential subjects and null expletive subjects, which on the surface appear to behave in a similar fashion although they possess different syntactic features. Since both behave similarly, they probably were acquired at the same time. In English, in contrast, expletives are acquired at a late stage in a child’s language acquisition. In any case, knowledge about how Spanish SLLs understood null expletives shed light on how these were recognized in English.

Quite as they are in pro-drop languages, overt subjects, expletives, such as *it* or *there*, are absent from early child English. For example, an adult said, “It’s raining”, while a 22 month-old child said, “Raining” (Radford, 1990, p. 256); “Outside cold” meant ‘It’s cold outside’, while “No morning” meant ‘It’s not morning’ cited in Hyams (1986, p. 63). The question “How did children acquire a grammatical item that was meaningless but necessary for native-like competence and performance?” is beyond the scope of this study and remains an item for future research. Still, Hyams (1986) noted that “...lexical expletives” emerged “at the point of which the child” began “consistently using lexical subjects” (p. 93).

Because languages like English require such expletives, learners have to be informed that English is a “-pro-drop” language to cease the use of null subjects. Thus, the consistent use of lexical subjects is a sign to the acquisition of expletives, but the use of lexical subjects does not entail that expletives are produced in obligatory contexts (Valian, 1990, p. 119).

2.6 L2 Research on the Non-Referential *It*

White (2003) experimented on Spanish (+pro-drop) L1 learning English (-pro-drop) to test the components of the pro-drop parameter. She notes that expletive *it* poses problems

when compared with referential pronouns. Lower proficiency learners are more apt to accept sentences with the missing dummy subject as grammatical in comparison with higher proficiency learners. Yet one sentence used in her GJT was problematic because it was accepted by both French and Spanish speakers: (5) Seems that Fred is unhappy.

White correctly notices that this sentence is acceptable in casual spoken English. Both language groups judge it as acceptable despite its ungrammaticality.

Liceras, Fuertes & Fuente (2012) investigate the pro-drop parameter from the reverse angle of White. They examine L1 learners of non pro-drop languages (English and French) studying a pro-drop language (Spanish). Data showed that Spanish L2 learners do not exhibit transfer of non-pro-drop into their interlanguage. Instead, the learners almost uniformly reject constructions with overt expletive pronouns (which Spanish does not have) in GJT while accepting expletive *pro*, such as: a. *Ello hace mucho frío en Canada. "It is very cold in Canadá."
b. [pro] dicen que [pro] va a nevar. "They say it is going to snow".

Hilles examined the spontaneous speech of a 12-year-old Spanish learner of English (Jorge) over a 10-month period. Instances of pro-drop were recorded. She observed that even in Elicitation Tasks (ET), expletives were sometimes omitted and found that with the emergence of expletives, pro-drop notably declined, thus supporting Hyams' hypothesis that the expletive functions as a trigger for the resetting of the pro-drop parameter. Discovering a trigger for re-setting the pro-drop parameter has far reaching effects in current ESL/EFL pedagogy. Yet, White counters Hilles' optimistic statement that the presence of lexical expletives is not a trigger for change because L2 learners missed the ungrammaticality of missing expletives before they identified the ungrammaticality of absent referential pronouns, and they disused lexical expletives using lexical referential pronouns (White, 2003).

Studies in the acquisition of expletives turned to Spanish to determine how English speakers understood sentences containing the phonologically null expletive. Phinney (in Ballester, 2012) hypothesizes that the acquisition of null-referential subjects differs from the acquisition of null-non-referential subjects (p. 228). A different underlying process is at work with respect to an utterance, like *Leemos Muchos Libros* “we read many books” where the 1st person plural subject, *nosotros*, was omitted, and impersonal expressions like *Es difícil* “it is difficult”, despite the fact that both involve a null subject.

Phinney (1987) analyzes data in the form of free compositions by two groups of Spanish speakers learning English (ESL) and two groups of English speakers learning Spanish (SSL). Examining the data of ESL learners for instances of omitted subjects and of SSL learners’ overuse of subject pronouns, she notes that the ESLs are more likely to omit non-referential subjects or impersonal constructions than referential subject pronouns. Notwithstanding, the SSLs produced a high percentage of empty subjects. Phinney notes that, “In the impersonals, there are no instances in which lexical items were used as subjects under interference from English” (p. 234). Phinney suggests that “The impersonal constructions” seemed “to be easier than omitting the referential pronouns” (p.234). She concludes that SSLs had more difficulty “with the impersonal pronouns *there* and *it*”, which was investigated by Suñer (2000) “as being distinct from the referential empty subject case”. Since “using a lexically filled subject” was possible, it was easy “for ESLs to use the lexical pronouns in English” (p.235).

Building on Phinney (1987), Al-Kasey and Pérez-Leroux (1998) hypothesize that several types of ESL-produced ungrammatical sentences were as the following: (i) *Es son* last tres= ‘is are three o’clock’; (ii) *Porque lo es muy viejo [mi coche]* = ‘because it- is very old (my car)’ (p. 166).

Lozano (2001) observe that in Spanish L2 acquisition null expletives and null referential pronouns are acquired at around the same time and learners equally accept constructions containing null and overt referential pronouns.

2.7 The Direct and Indirect Teaching of the Non-Referential *It*

Noting on teaching approaches of direct and indirect grammar instructions of the non-referential *it*, Bergsma et al (2008) “expected to have a beneficial effect on the overall system performance” (p. 294). Hedberg, Gundel & Zacharski (2010) propose that directly exposed activities concerning pronouns “brought into focus” unlike unfocused ones. Smith & Van Patten (2013) explain that explicit grammar learners realize dummy subjects, like *it* or *there*, required in non-referential situations. L2 implicit learners or L1 children learning English do “not get this knowledge from the input or from learning *it* explicitly” (p. 132).

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

The methodology utilized in this experimental study comprises the research questions and the acceptance or rejection of the hypotheses that represent the position of the participants; the experimental method, their validity and reliability; the instruments and the data collection, and the analysis. After designing the study, gathering data, getting facts, analyzing data and interpreting results, the researcher answered questions to assumptions, which were either supported or rejected.

Most tasks were assigned during the same period of time to examine the knowledge and development of language structure of all the learners of the Intermediate English L3. One group was composed of students in a control group, who learned grammar implicitly and the second group was composed of students in an experimental group, who learned explicitly the grammar lesson on the non-referential *it* (Van Patten & Williams, 2015, p. 25).

3.1 Study Investigation

This research utilized the criteria of quantitative study, i.e., the gathering of information in numerical form (Munjis, 2004, p. 3) because it was processed through an experimental design analyzing the data and providing the results on SPSS. Comparisons of score results of students from different groups formed the quantification of collected data which followed the hypotheses (Paltridge & Phakiti, 2015, p. 12).

According to Nunan (2007), the controlled measurement in the outcome of the objective made the study reliable when collecting numerical data for explanation (p. 4) of how much the non-referential *it* was used and its correct frequency occurrence. The

researcher scored these quantitatively achieved points. The findings were interpreted statistically to finalize the rejection or acceptance of the hypotheses. (Lodico, Spaulding & Voegrle, 2010).

The investigation of two approaches of English learning, implicit and explicit was purposeful (Van Patten & Williams, 2015). The results of the experimental group to the control group were measured then compared to each other (Paltridge & Phakiti, 2015).

3.1.1 The experimental method.

Experimental linguistics was designed for theories of linguistic representations to draw conclusions from variations of linguistic expressions based on quantitative evidence (Hemforth, 2013). The theory of explicit grammar teaching was utilized but the quantitative method was altered. The number of participants was sixty, which was acceptable. Coding, scoring, and calculating the data for analysis through statistical tool usage revealed if learning explicit grammar made learners produce higher scores than implicit learners or not. The specific items of *it*, used in the tasks in all its forms were not organized into categories. Whereas the collected data made experimenting the options more efficient, it limited stating variability and development in production with the use of L3 (Mackey & Gass, 2005). The word counts of the occurrence of *it* guided the fair frequency distributions, ranking the least or the most frequent cases of linguistic criteria (Mindt, 2011).

Information was collected through direct contact with the students, with the use of “Elicited Imitation” (Mackey & Gass, 2016) regarding the non-referential *it* and the outcome of the participants’ knowledge about the different or null usage of *it*.

3.2 The Participants

In a language-related field, the sixty participants who were the sources of the researcher's data were first year undergraduates from both genders, between the ages of 18 and 21, in the *Faculté des Langues* (FdL) at a French-based university, Université St. Joseph (USJ), in Beirut. The college students' characteristics, development, opinions, attitudes, knowledge and performance were used to answer the research questions. The history of the participants' language was difficult to define because the learners lived in a multilingual country where English is a used language. The applicants at USJ were fresh high-school graduate students who came from different French-based schools. Yet, all of them had the same language background: their second learned language from childhood other than the Native Arabic (L1) was French (L2), and the third learned language was English (L3).

3.2.1 An academic description of the English classes.

The applicants at USJ sat for Entrance Exam for English, an organized placement test at FdL in Beirut. The results divided learners into different categories: Advanced (Level A in English for Specific Purposes according to the major, 4 European Credits, a 35-hour course), High-intermediate (Level B), Intermediate (Level C), Low-intermediate (Level D), or False Beginner levels (Level E). Each of B, C, D and E consisted of 70 hours of input and output achievements (8 European Credits) and the learners analyzed in this research were placed in a lower than Advanced level to study EFL as L3 until they passed Level C and Level B consecutively to reach Level A. All the participants' target language at USJ was English for Academic Purposes (EAP). Before their graduation they sat for English Proficiency Test (EPT), performed in a language laboratory outside regular class time, under the affiliation of St. Louis University (SLU).

3.2.2 Course description.

The objectives of the courses continued to be the same assigned by the English Department (Appendix A). SLU implemented the objective requirements and required the improvement of the learners' skills. The L3 classes did not adhere to a syllabus. The theme-based academic book, *New Inside Out Advanced Student's Book*, covered main skills: reading, listening, speaking and writing. Grammar was taught indirectly by the use of a few exercises, but neither exercises nor rules on the referential *it* and non-referential *it* were mentioned in the textbook. Instructors addressed these items using the general deductive principles (or techniques) of grammar learning. Because yearly demand of L3 courses increased, they were offered extensively in one or two semesters on Saturdays and intensively during module I and II.

3.2.3 Group Division.

For the purpose of the implicit/explicit non-referential *it* research, this study's 60 learners were equally divided into two groups. And because there was indirect input of grammar instructions, this particular course was suitable for the study.

One of the groups received no instructions in grammar and attended class regularly, the other group was taught direct grammar by the researcher who utilized the inductive approach, which extrapolates from the specific to the general. The intermediate proficiency learners were given different tasks created specifically for this research (See Appendix C). The learners were divided into two groups, control and experimental, composed of 30 students each exposed to different approaches of grammar teaching. Four sections for the control group and three sections for the experimental group performed the tasks designed for the research during regular class time. The researcher assumed that the instructions given to

the participants would be clear because the students at this level are able to communicate and understand instructions in English and therefore make the tasks assigned to them more productive and effective for the study.

3.2.4 The control group.

The control group was formed of implicit students of grammar. During their class time there was no direct exposure to grammar instruction on the non-referential *it*. Following the schedule in Appendix B, the Elicitation Task (ET) was first performed on indirect learners with the purpose of collecting instances of the use of *it* as a reference and subsequently testing the frequency in usage. This group was composed of thirty students who have been prepared for ET. After one week of exposure and after having watched a silent movie, the participants of the control group sat for the narration component of the study. Finally, all students performed a grammaticality judgment task (GJT) and a referentiality task (RT).

3.2.5 The experimental group.

The experimental group was composed of explicit learners who were exposed to grammatical instructions through the Guidelines constructed by Bergsma et al (2008) in Appendix C also following the schedule in Appendix B. The repetition of the planned active process of grammar learning was implemented for this group of students after they have received instructions of explicit grammatical lessons on the usage of *it*. The students were granted permission to take notes and were encouraged to ask questions about any particular lesson on the non-referential *it*. After one week of exposure to direct grammar instructions, thirty students of the experimental group watched the silent movie in order to perform the

narrations' segment of the study. During one final session all participants took both the GJT and RT as part of their final studies.

3.3 The Instruments

The researcher's main instruments were the tools and techniques used to collect data, the elicitation task, the narration task, the grammaticality judgment task, and the referentiality task. The data constituted a type of "appropriate assessment" to the research (Nunan, 2007, p.187), which was constructed for quantitative method—specifically in the case of the usage of the non-referential *it* that was taught to French-based college students.

3.3.1 The elicitation task.

A copy of the Elicitation Task (ET) used in Appendix D (based on examples from Mindt, 2011) determined the "elicited imitation" of a number of sentences through the repetition of taped sentences in order to determine the reflection of the learners' internal grammatical system that allows s/he to manipulate the specific grammatical structure that underlies the usage of the non-referential *it*.

Its purpose was to help to find out whether the thirty implicit learners accurately perceived both the referential and the non-referential *it*. The students in the control group who had not yet taken part in the narration study—which was put on hold in order to delay their access to explicit guidance on the usage of the non-referential *it*—listened twice to ten recorded complete sentences produced by an adult NS who provided them with consistent input. The sentences in Appendix D were carefully measured to determine their appropriate length and consisted of phrases containing *it* or its contracted form *it's* in both the referential and the non-referential *it* forms. Each participant in the control group repeated each sentence

immediately after s/he heard it. This task revealed the unconscious or implicit knowledge of the participants because it required a more spontaneous usage of the language.

Tarone, Gass & Cohen (2013) state that “because of memory limitations, the relative positions of items in a serial list” has an effect on how participants’ recollection of information “with the last item being recalled the best, followed by the first item”. Middle items are generally “recalled the worst.” Bley-Vroman and Chaudron suggest that this phenomenon also manifests “itself with regards to the accuracy of items recalled in elicited imitation tasks” (p. 254).

3.3.2 The narration task.

The purpose of the narration task (NT) was to verify whether most instances of the usage of *it* were produced in the oral section and whether the explicit learners produced more instances of *it* compared to the implicit learners. The objective of the NT was to review the students’ practice and to make sure that the grammatical description of “*it*” included additional tasks.

To perform the NT, all the participants in both groups watched the silent comedy. The researcher asked the students to briefly narrate the story of the movie, including its theme. Students then summarized the story in a few sentences at the same time that the researcher transcribed the data and analyzed the number and frequency of their utterances of *it*.

3.3.3 The grammaticality judgment task.

Both the control and experimental groups took part in a grammaticality judgment Task (GJT) (based on Woods, 2015). Its purpose was to verify whether the students correctly accepted grammatical sentences and rejected ungrammatical sentences. To determine whether



the students understood English explicitly or consciously, the GJT (Appendix F) was a controlled task that also included some writing activities.

The fifteen sentences utilized in the GJT were grammatical and ungrammatical and contained the referential and the non-referential *it* or its contracted form *it's* in both matrix and subordinate clauses. Acceptable and unacceptable utterances and initial omissions of *it* were also included in the task. The students were asked to rewrite the sentences to make the unacceptable instances acceptable without determining the grammaticality of the sentences.

3.3.4 The referentiality task.

The referentiality task (RT) was a task named after the meaning of the word referential, which is the act of referring to something. In this study, *it* stands for reference and is used in order to test how implicit learners responded to the RT and compare their responses to that of explicit learners—particularly in instances in which prop-*it* time, prop- *it* weather and prop-*it* distance should be utilized correctly (based on Woods, 2015).

This task, which was composed of fifteen complete and meaningful sentences that contained the word *it*, was administered immediately after the GJT. The participants classified and identified the word *it* in each sentence according to its referential or non-referential function.

This was the final task performed by the students' and indicated their ability to properly manage the usage of the non-referential *it*. The participants were asked to perform the concluding task (Appendix G) and indicate possible instances of the use of the pronoun *it*. They wrote 'none' when *it* had no referent and provided a possible referent in the sentences that contained the non-referential *it*, especially in prop-*it* time and prop-*it* weather type of sentences.

3.4 Validity and Reliability

According to Mackey and Gass (2005), the validity of a research shows how sound the claim of the study is. The researcher should have control over the factors that “threaten” the study’s validity. The internal validity of this study was gauged by the appropriate balance and effectiveness of the following elements: number of participants; time allotted for data collection; instruments utilized and the possibility of misinterpreting the data.

The internal validity of the time allotted for the completion of different tasks by the participants was confirmed by the fact that of the amount of time they had to perform each task was sufficient. The instructions were clear and concise. The scoring of the output of the participants was time consuming and involved focusing on each item elicited per individual performance but it too was functional. Another element that was integral to confirm the internal validity of this study was the interpretation of the data utilized in the research. (Mackey & Gass, 2005).

The external validity is this study which focuses only on undergraduate students (Mackey & Gass, 2016). This is related to this research by the tools that had been previously utilized and practiced by NSs while previously examined and corrected tasks ensured the validity and reliability of the study (Biddix, 2009). The students were encouraged to give original responses and their answers confirmed the reliability of the tasks assigned and of the study as a whole. This research also adhered to Biddix’s (2009) assertion that a study is reliable when the results of the same group do not vary significantly from one another.

To limit the level of difficulty of the elements used to create the tasks and to find out whether each task had been clearly constructed, the researcher conducted a preliminary study on NSs. Four NSs of English handled the material utilized in the research. Three of these NSs

were instructors of TEFL at USJ and helped the researcher to determine the level of difficulty that was adequate for the students at the intermediate level who participated in the research. They identified instances of the usage of the referential and the non-referential *it* in the sentences according to the instructions of the tasks that had been performed by the students.

Reliability is an element that considers both the achievement of dependability and the consistency of a study. The lack of consistency of any given element was kept in check by strictly following the guidelines. Any discrepancy and/or subjective evaluation was monitored by repeatedly assessing assignments, a practice that increased the consistency of the scoring and allowed the researcher to attain a valid judgment (Jonsson & Svingby, 2007)

Because the reliability was not accurately calculated, the observer resorted to the Guidelines for Direction (based on Bergsma et al., 2008) and provided information on how to distinguish between the referential and the non-referential *it*. Additionally, the researcher provided a number of categories that allowed her to classify the different types of the non-referential *it*. Four sample sentences were provided under each subcategory. The researcher had to codify a small, representative sample of data from the narration (= 46 instances of *it*, Appendix C) by using the guidelines to determine which sample sentences more thoroughly approximated the data that was being categorized. The researcher also determined to which categories and subcategories each observation belonged. Instances of the non-referential *it* and its corresponding contracted form *it's* were coded according to the guidelines found in the Guidelines provided in the Appendix C (constructed on Bergsma et al., 2008).

The context in which the utterances took place was carefully examined. False starts, self-repetitions, and exact repetitions of the narration questions were discarded from the analysis. The percentage of agreement of the researcher was calculated twice for accuracy. In

case of high percentage, the reliability was high. When the two calculations that classified the examples did not match, the researcher revised them until an equalizing result was obtained.

3.4.1 The variables.

According to Mackey & Gass (2016), a variable should change from one group to another. An uncontrolled independent variable establishes cause/input relationship. The controlled dependent variable is the effect/output that is measured.

The independent variables of this research are the tasks utilized and the groups chosen to perform them. Each task had independent variables and questions monitored by the researcher. The dependent variables consist of the actual students' responses and of the results of the tasks which were uncontrolled.

The variables of this research include the differences between the control group and the experimental group according to the type of instruction—direct or explicit—offered to the students in the experimental group. The scores the students obtained on each the task constitute dependent variables and are based on the group to which the participants belonged. This approach allowed the researcher to associate different variables at the same time. One of these variables is the educational level of intermediate learners who underwent the control experiment during the English language course. To eliminate unconsidered results, only one variable was administered for each task. An observation was prepared for the non-referential *it* categories to minimize the effects of variables and exclude the effects of the independent variable.

Explicit learning was assigned as an independent variable. The students' utterance of *it* constitutes the dependent variable. The explicit grammar learning procedure in EFL and the proficiency level of the participants constitute the independent variables. The collected scores

from the tasks form the dependent variables of the grammatical aspects of the non-referential *it*, in relation to how much the direct learners acquired the grammatical explanation. In each task, only one variable was administered in order to eliminate unconsidered results. The observation was prepared according to the non-referential *it* categories to minimize the effects of variables, and excluded the effects of the independent variable. The researcher assumed that the scores would be affected by either grammar exposure or no grammar exposure (Paltridge & Phakiti, 2015)

3.5 Data Collection and Procedure

The research questions for this study are constituted by the collection or the reference of *it*. The prepared tasks were tailored specifically for college students at the intermediate level of English L3. The composed ten sentences of ET were recorded on a tape by a NS (Appendix D). Only the control group participants elicited the sentences. The first oral output was recorded on a tape to facilitate the compilation of the non-referential *it*, which was utilized for tracking the students' production of grammatical or ungrammatical usage of *it* and its frequency.

In addition to the data collection from ET—which derived from the recording of the implicit grammar learners' oral production of the non-referential *it* to evaluate if students perceived both the referential and the non-referential *it*—the researcher processed an experimental study that consisted of a section related to the silent movie (Mackey & Gass, 2005, p. 46) the students watched. The input in this task was watching segments from the movie, and the output was narrating the story in few sentences. This task showed the ability of the participants to produce sentences orally and was essential in this study because oral comprehension played an important role in its oral assessment component.

To facilitate the collection of the data from the narration, the narration of each participant was recorded for the compilation of *it* usage in spontaneous production. This task was tested on the sixty learners from both, the control group and the experimental group. This process took approximately four sessions to conclude.

GJT (Appendix F) was used as a widespread method for data collection because the process focused on the assessment that determined whether particular grammatical isolated sentences were acceptable or not and then was used to correct to the unacceptable one(s) (Tremblay, 2005).

RT stood for the reference of *it* and its indication (Appendix G). GJT and RT were performed on paper. The researcher's instruction, supervision and conduct were centered on measuring the learners of the same level across the indirect grammar learners and the direct grammar learners. The researcher also utilized Grammatical terms that helped clarify the differentiations of the word *it*. The Guideline for direction in Appendix C states the main groups, the subgroups, and the role of *it* in this study and provides examples for clarifications.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

The results of the study were recorded immediately after the production of an utterance instead of either before or after the students were given a test. The results are related to the responses to the research questions and its variables. Since the study's tasks were designed to evaluate which of the two groups—the control group or the experimental group—had performed and produced more adequately instances of the non-referential *it*, the research main questions addressed the overall usage of the non-referential *it* by both groups and the occurrence of the non-referential *it* in narratives that conveyed the differences between the two groups and establishing independent variables. The results reflect the performance of the students in each task and synthesize them in a graphic or a table that shows the comparison between the two groups of participants.

4.1 The Elicitation Task

In Table 1 and Figure 1, the total uses of *it* in number (frequency) and percentage in the elicitation task refers to the implicit learners who only produced instances of *it*. 150 instances of the usage of the referential *it* were acceptable for all clauses. The learners scored 78 on the overall usage of the referential *it* clauses. 240 instances of the usage of the non-referential *it* were acceptable for all clauses. The learners scored 170 on the non-referential *it* clauses. The implicit learners produced correctly 248 instances out of 390 instances of *it*.

	Frequency	Percent
Referential	78	52%
Non-referential	170	70.83%
Total	248	63.59%
Total uses of <i>it</i> in the elicitation task	390	100%

Table 1. Total uses of *it* in number (frequency) and percentage in the elicitation task.

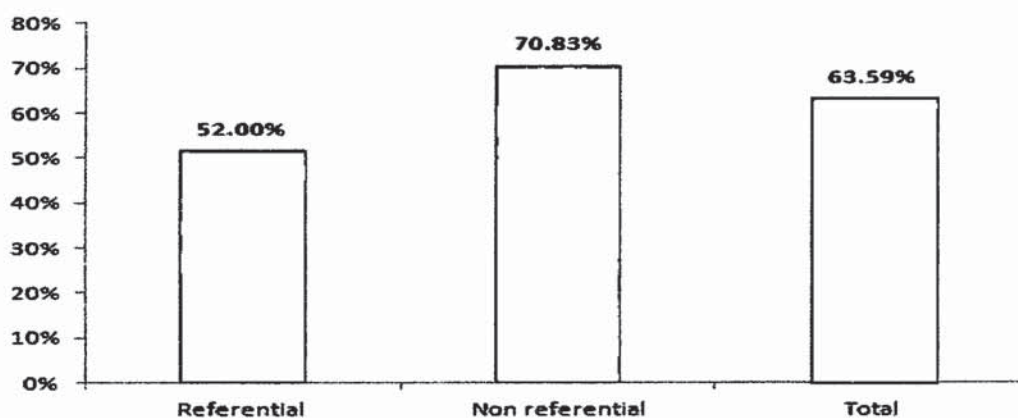


Fig. 1. Total uses of *it* in number (frequency) and percentage in the elicitation task.

Eight instances of production of the non-referential *it* and five instances of production of the referential *it* per ten sentence task are shown in Table 2 and Figure 2 below. Students produced 73.33% of the instances of the non-referential *it* and 52% of the instances of the referential *it* in the total score of the Non-referential and the referential *it* and percentage out of 13 sentences in the elicitation task.

The mean of the referential (2.60) and the non-referential (5.87) *it* with their percentages shown in the table and graphic below analyzes which instances of the non-referential *it* obtained higher percentage because they included more than the referential *it*.

	Number of <i>It</i>	Mean	Mode	Std. Deviation	Min	Max	%
Non referential	8	5.87	7	1.46	3	7	73.33%
Referential	5	2.60	3	0.77	1	4	52.00%
Total	13	8.47	10	1.93	4	11	65.13%

Table 2. Total score of the non-referential and the referential *it* and percentage out of 13 sentences in the elicitation task.

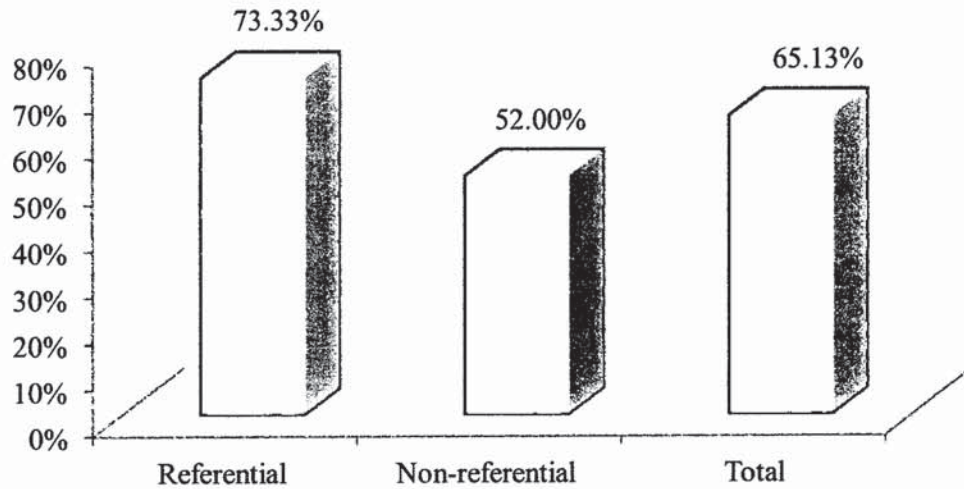


Fig. 2. Total score of the non-referential and the referential *it* and percentage out of 13 sentences in the elicitation task.

The distribution of the score for the 8 non-referential *it* and percentage in the elicitation task in Table 3 and Figure 3 appears below. It indicates that two participants scored 3 (6.67%); seven participants scored 4 (23.33%); five participants scored 6 (16.67%) and sixteen participants scored 7 (53.33%).

Score	Frequency	%
3	2	6.67%
4	7	23.33%
6	5	16.67%
7	16	53.33%
Total	30	100.00%

Table 3. Distribution of score for the non-referential *it* and percentage (total = 8) in the elicitation task.

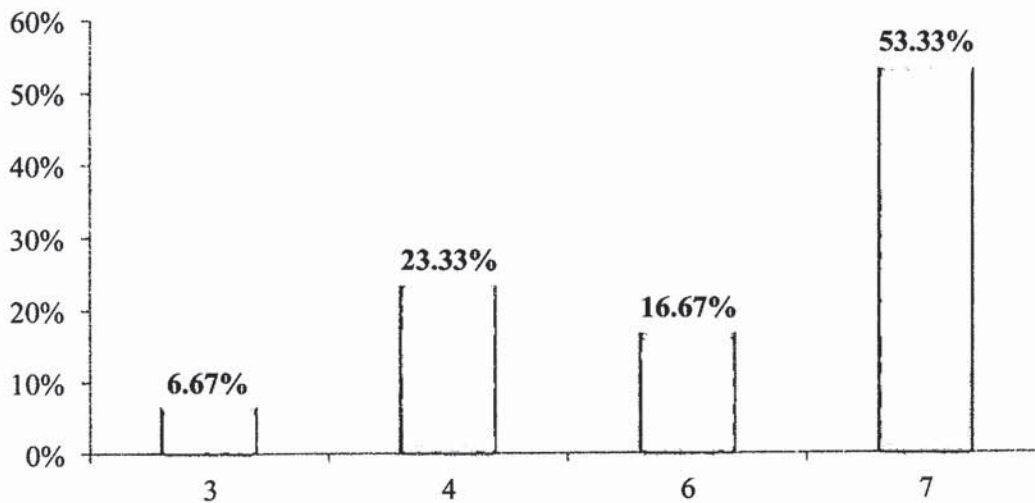


Fig. 3. Distribution of score for the non-referential *it* and percentage (total = 8) in the elicitation task.

The distribution of the score for the 5 referential *it* and percentage in the elicitation task in Table 4 and Figure 4 appears below. It indicates that two participants scored 1 (6.67%); eleven participants scored 2 (36.67%); fourteen participants scored 3 (46.67%) and three participants scored 4 (10.00%).

Score	Frequency	%
1	2	6.67%
2	11	36.67%
3	14	46.67%
4	3	10.00%
Total	30	100.00%

Table 4. Distribution of score for the referential *it* and percentage (total = 5) in the elicitation task.

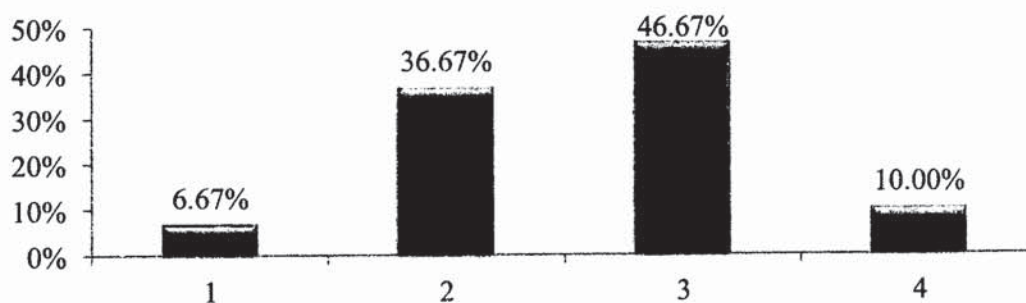


Fig. 4. Distribution of Score for the Referential *it* and percentage (total = 5) in the elicitation task.

4.2 The Narration Task

For the interpretation, the researcher compares Sig (Degree of significance) with α (error ratio = 5% i.e. 0.05).

If $\text{Sig} > \alpha \rightarrow$ the researcher considered the difference insignificant and vice versa.

For any statistical test, we compare Sig or p-value, it is a probability range between 0 and 1, this indicator is compared to an error ratio ($\alpha = 5\%$).

In Table 5 and Figure 5, the result of the narration task is shown in table form and graphic form. Only 116 instances of the use of the non-referential *it* were produced by the implicit learners, while 279 instances of the non-referential *it* were used by the explicit learners, thus more than double the total amount. A Chi-Square test showed a significant difference in the total use of the non-referential *it* between the two groups, Sig = 0.000 < α .

Group		NONANTICIPATORY			ANTICIPATORY			OTHER	Total Non- referential
		Prop "it"			Impersonals	Extra position	Clefts	Idiomatic	
		Time	Distance	Weather					
Implicit	Freq	0	0	12	0	36	27	41	116
	%	0.00%	0.00%	10.34%	0.00%	31.03%	23.28%	35.34%	100.00%
Explicit	Freq	16	0	8	13	98	75	69	279
	%	5.73%	0.00%	2.87%	4.66%	35.13%	26.88%	24.73%	100.00%

Table 5. Classifying the non-referential *it* between implicit and explicit learners: in the narration task.

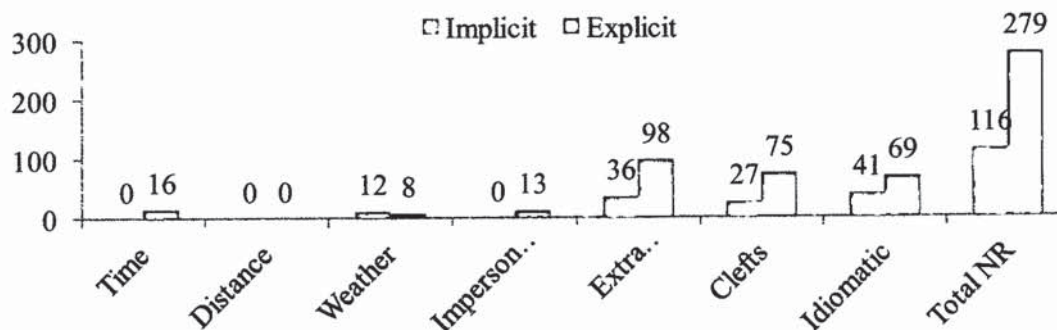


Fig. 5. Classifying the non-referential *it* between implicit and explicit learners: in the narration task.

In Table 6 and Figure 6 (below), T-test was used to compare the means of the rubrics and the mean of the total score for the non-referential *it*, and the significance levels of the mean uses of *it* in the two groups. Time, Impersonal, Extra position, Clefts, Idiomatic and Total of the non-referential were significant. The mean of non-referential for explicit learners was greater than the mean of referential for implicit learners (sig=0.000, difference is significant).

	Means		Sig
	Implicit	Explicit	
Time	0	0.53	0.000
Distance	0	0	1.000
Weather	0.4	0.27	0.281
Impersonals	0	0.43	0.000
Extra position	1.2	3.27	0.000
Clefts	0.9	2.5	0.000
Idiomatic	1.37	2.3	0.008
Total NR	3.87	9.3	0.000

Table 6. Comparison of the means between implicit and explicit learners: in the narration task.

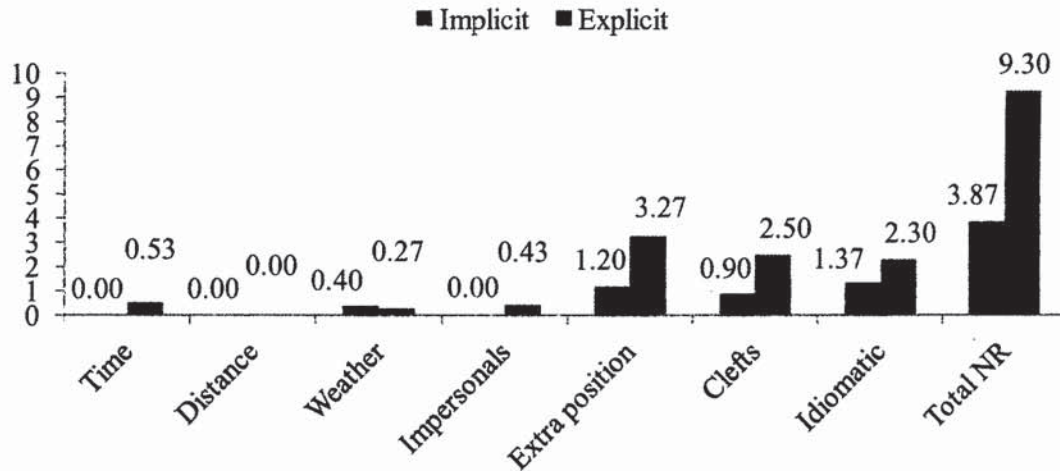


Fig. 6. Comparison of the means between implicit and explicit learners: in the narration task.

4.3 The Grammaticality Judgment Task

As shown in Table 7 and Figure 7 (below), in the comparison of acceptance and rejection of the non-referential *it* between implicit and explicit learners in the grammaticality judgement task, the percentage of explicit group that accepted (49.33%) the acceptable and rejected (41.78%) the unacceptable non-referential *it* in the sentences of the task was greater than the percentage of implicit group that accepted (36.00%) the acceptable and rejected (28%) the unacceptable the non-referential *it* in the sentences.

To compare the results between the implicit and the explicit groups, a Chi-square test was used to compare the percentages. A Chi-Square test showed a significant difference in the total acceptance and rejection of the non-referential *it* between the two groups, implicit and explicit, Sig = 0.000 < α .

	Implicit	Explicit
Accepted Acceptable	36.00%	49.33%
Rejected Unacceptable	28.00%	41.78%

Table 7. Comparison of acceptance and rejection of the non-referential *it* between implicit and explicit learners in the grammaticality judgement task.

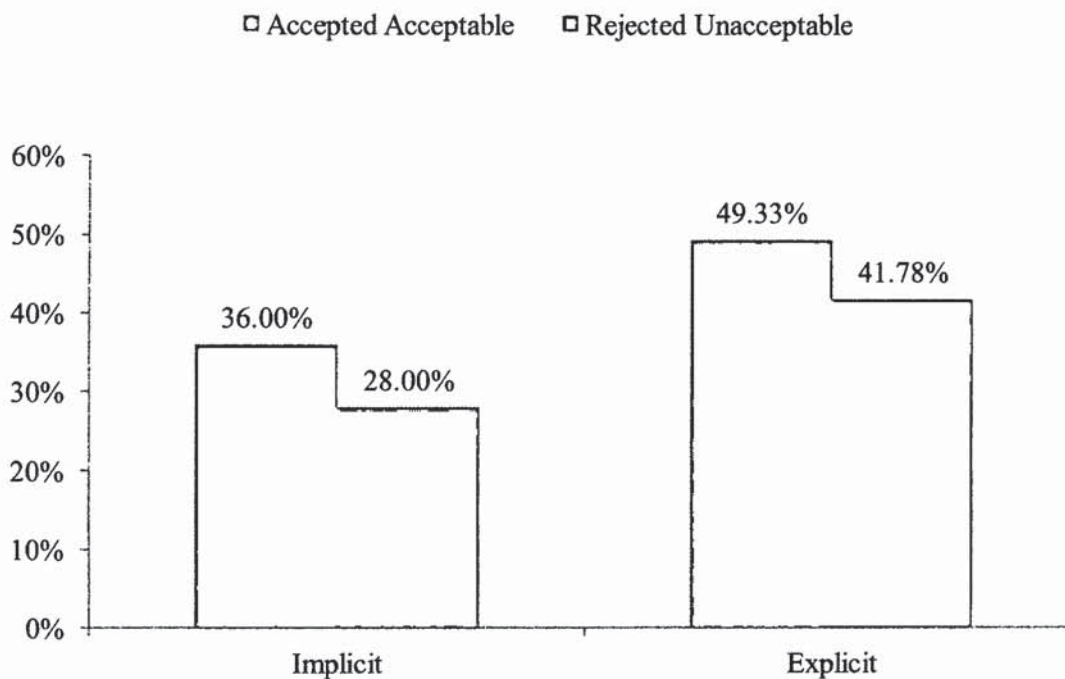


Fig. 7. Comparison of acceptance and rejection of the non-referential *it* between implicit and explicit learners in the grammaticality judgement task.

In Table 8 (below), in order to facilitate the interpretation of Mean, it is converted into percentage by dividing the original Mean by the maximum score, which is 15. The mean of the non-referential (11.63) *it* with the percentage (77.56%) shown in the table below analyzes the 15 acceptable and unacceptable instances of the non-referential *it*.

Mean /15	11.63
Mode	14.00
Std. Deviation	2.32
Minimum	7.00
Maximum	15.00

Table 8. Statistical characteristics of acceptable and unacceptable *it* (total score).

Table 9 and figure 8 (below) show 9.60 as the mean of implicit learners and 13.67 as the mean of the explicit learners in the acceptable and unacceptable instances of production of the non-referential *it* in the grammaticality judgment task. The mean of the explicit group (13.67) was greater than the mean of the implicit group (9.60).

To compare the results and the means between the implicit and the explicit groups, a T-test was used which showed a significant difference in the total acceptance and rejection of the non-referential *it* between the two groups, implicit and explicit, Sig = 0.000 < α .

Group	Mean	Std. Deviation
Implicit	9.60	1.33
Explicit	13.67	0.80

Table 9. Comparison between the means of acceptable and unacceptable *it* for implicit and explicit groups in the grammaticality judgment task.

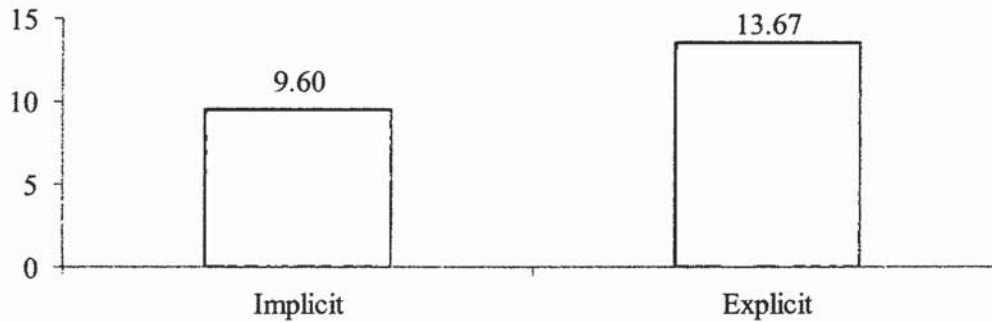


Fig. 8. Comparison between the means of acceptable and unacceptable *it* for implicit and explicit groups in the grammaticality judgment task.

4.4 The Referentiality Task

In Table 10 (below), in order to facilitate the interpretation of Mean, it is converted into percentage by dividing the original Mean by the maximum score, which is 15. The mean of reference to *it* (10.37) with the percentage (69.11%) shown in the table below analyzes the 15 instances of the references to *it*.

Mean /15	10.37
Mode	10.00
Std. Deviation	3.29
Minimum	3.00
Maximum	15.00

Table 10. Statistical characteristics referring to *it* (total score).

Table 11 and figure 9 (below) show the mean correct responses to the instances of the non-referential *it* for the implicit and the explicit learners. The mean was higher for the explicit learners' group than for the implicit learners' group. The mean of the explicit group (10.87) was not much greater than the mean of the implicit group (9.87). However, this difference was not statistically significant.

To compare the results and the means between the implicit and the explicit groups, a T-test was used which showed that the difference between the two groups is not significant in the total reference of *it* between the two groups, implicit and explicit, Sig = 0.242 < α .

Group	Mean	Std. Deviation
Implicit	9.87	2.75
Explicit	10.87	3.73

Table 11. Comparison between the means of reference of *it* for implicit and explicit groups in the referentiality task.

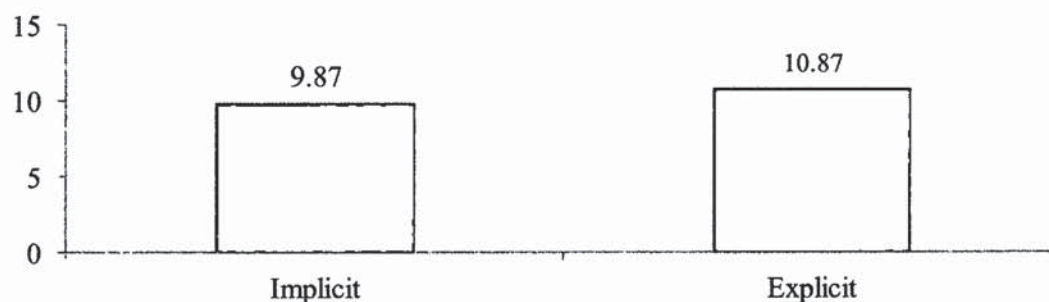


Fig. 9. Comparison between the means of reference of *it* for implicit and explicit groups in the referentiality task.

CHAPTER 5

DATA ANALYSIS

5.1 The Elicitation Task

The analysis of ET is shown in the figures listed under Results. The implicit learners often elicited the ten sentences presented to them differently. Their productions' record shows that their answers varied although they were required to only reproduce the same recorded sentences after they listened to each twice. Some of their sentence productions are displayed in the ET Transcription (Appendix E) as samples of both *it* usages and misusages. The following elements were found in ET:

The ET was employed to determine whether third language learners perceived (measured by production) both the referential and the non-referential *it*. The students in the control group were asked to repeat ten sentences supplied to them - in a tape recording. The responses to oral tasks were tape-recorded and examined to evaluate the students' phonological realization of *it*. In the score of results shown in the Total uses of *it* in number (frequency) and percentage in the elicitation task (See Table 1 and Figure 1 under 'Results'); the utterances were given one point each. If a student produced *it* where no *it* appeared in the original sentence, no point was granted for his/her additional realizations of *it*. Irrelevant semantic content of the subjects' repetitions was disregarded. Table 1 shows the production of *it* in clauses. The participants did not elicit enough sentences to verify whether indirect learners did not require implicit learning of the referential and the non-referential *it*.

The classification of *it* utilized was recorded when *it* was used as referential and non-referential in clauses. The distribution of the scores on the variables was compared and analyzed in tables utilized for organization, and description of the input and indication of the

frequent occurrence of the non-referential *it*. The total score of the non-referential and the referential *it* and percentage out of 13 sentences in the elicitation task, i.e., the distribution of thirteen instances of *it* used in the ET—five of them were referential *it* and eight non-referential *it* each has its respective indication (See Table 2 and Figure 2 under ‘Results’). In relation to the Elicitation section of the study, the researcher noticed that the participants were more likely to produce *it* in clauses in which, following Tarone et al, (2013), it was easier to perceive words.

This research suggests as in Tarone et al, (2013) that the relative positions of items in a serial list has definite effects on the participants’ recollection of last and first items, and the items in between are recollected the least. In the ET the words in the middle were not recalled as much as the first and the last words. The implicit learners in this study recalled the last and the first referential and non-referential *it* the best in the ET.

This study also confirmed that Al-Kasey’s and Pérez-Leroux’s suggestion that the misuse of *it* by EFL learners establishes the lack of knowledge of *it* (1998). Similarly, the implicit learners evaluated in this study misunderstood where to use *it* correctly in each sentence in the ET.

Another problematic instance of *it* was in its usage as non-referential in nature: Only six students produced *it* in the context below:

e. It seems likely that it will rain this morning.

Overall, the participants of the control group produced instances of *it* (See Table 1 under ‘Results’). However, the decontextualized nature of the sentences that contained the referential *it* probably made them more difficult for students to interpret and thus recall them.

The referential *it* contained in both (h) and (j) were particularly problematic for third language learners:

- h. The man told me that *it* ate the bread and flew away.
- i. *It* is possible that *it* died from lack of water.

The very fact that the non-referential *it* was semantically vacuous might have made the examples containing *it* easier to remember. The participants did not have to provide a referential antecedent for *it* in order to make sense of the sentences. In contrast, in examples (h) and (j) it was perhaps necessary to have some concrete possible antecedent in mind in order to have *it* correctly produced. The researcher also ventures to guess that the types of sentences containing the referential *it* devoid of context required an increase in cognitive processing given that a suitable antecedent was not found in the discourse. In (j) the difficulty was also attributed to the word “lack”. Only four students produced “lack” in their responses, which indicated that the majority of students did not understand the semantic content of the subordinate clause and thus had difficulty recalling the complement. It is important to notice that only two of the participants correctly produced these two instances of *it* and their score was the highest, suggesting that these two constructions were of particular difficult comprehension at the participants’ level of English.

The total score of the non-referential and the referential *it* and percentage out of 13 sentences in the elicitation task, the calculations of total scores and their frequencies, and the discrepancy in the scoring of the ET of the participants of the implicit learning group were recorded (See Table 2 and Figure 2 under ‘Results’). Two participants scored 4, three participants scored 6, four participants scored 7, three participants scored 8, seven participants scored 9, eight participants scored 10 and three participants scored 11. The

control group answered questions unsystematically without having prior knowledge of the referential *it* and the non-referential *it*.

The distribution of the score for the 8 Non-referential *It* and percentage in the ET among the students shows that there was no consistency in the scoring of the ET of the implicit grammar learning group who answered to questions randomly without prior knowledge of the usage of the non-referential *it* (See Table 3 and Figure 3 under 'Results').

Similarly, the distribution of the score for the 5 Referential *It* and percentage in the elicitation task among students shows that there was inconsistency in the scoring of the ET of the participants of the implicit grammar learning groups, who answered to questions haphazardly without prior knowledge of the usage of the referential *it* (See Table 4 and Figure 4 under 'Results').

It could be obviously argued that since the majority of the productions of *it* appeared in the sentences of the ET, those instances were more likely recalled and produced by the students. Nevertheless, such instances were unstressed in this environment, and the presence of *is* made *it* even more difficult to perceive, particularly for four students, although they correctly produced instances of the non-referential *it*, where *it* appeared.

The day after this study was conducted, the students were asked for feedback from their regular classroom teacher. Some students indicated that they had problems hearing the elicitation items clearly and others stated that the sentences were too long for them to remember. Nevertheless, these difficulties did not seem to affect their production of *it* although the semantic content of their responses was affected.

After the production of the ET was analyzed, it was tentatively established that instances of *it* in the clauses provided to students was difficult to perceive for implicit

learners. Even though the results obtained for this task do not directly address the research questions, they are important and should be included in the data analysis. In particular, the results made it possible to conclude that the implicit learners were either not aware of the use of *it* or were unable to distinguish its referential from its non-referential uses. It is possible to make this claim based on the results of the ET, which provide an argument for treating the control group as an implicit one—in addition to considering the type of instructions the group was given. The ET had great potential substantiate the research claims.

5.2 The Narration Task

Table 5 and Figure 5 show a classification of the non-referential *it* between implicit and explicit learners in the narration task. Since the context was carefully considered before the classification of the instances of *it*, it was not surprising that there were relatively few instances of the truly non-referential *it* in the narration. The majority of instances of the non-referential *it* fell under the “Anticipatory” category in the narration Task for both learner groups. There were no instances of either prop-*it* time or prop-*it* distance in the narrations of the thirty students in the control group. They generated only twelve prop-*it* *weather*. The thirty students of the experimental group did not produce any prop-*it* distance. They constructed sentences with only eight prop-*it* *weather*, and sixteen prop-*it* time. The expression, “it was like...” accounted for the majority of the instances of the non-referential *it*, classified as “idiomatic,” followed by “how can/do I say it?” and “that’s it.”

Students used *it* even when there was no clear antecedent that could be grasped from their previous utterances. Some students used *it* with the seeming intent of referring to a situation, life in general, or “things”. This usage accounted for the highest instances of *it* classified under “cannot be determined”. Instances of *it* classified under this category often

passed the syntactic tests for the referential *it*. However, it often occurred that a clear antecedent was not definitively determined (See Table 5 and Figure 5 under 'Results').

Since the topic under consideration was constrained in the narration that consisted mainly of relating events from a movie, it is possible that the students did not use *it* as much in its specific case. When talking about their lives and experiences, however, the students used *it* in a wider range and in a non-specific mode as shown in Table 6 and Figure 6, which show a comparison of the means between implicit and explicit learners in the narration task.

Overall, the data contained in the narration provide support to Kaltenböck's claim that the categorization of the non-referential *it* is inherently "fuzzy" (2002), and that context always needs consideration before making any kind of classification. The categories which were used in this part of the study were not as clear-cut as they appear to be. In spite of the guidelines that were developed, it was difficult to code instances of *it*, making it impossible to determine what the speaker had in mind when s/he uttered *it*. For that reason, many instances of *it* were classified under "cannot be determined," even though they were "non-referential".

With respect to research question (b): *Does the frequency of certain types of the non-referential it in narratives differ between direct and indirect grammar learners of intermediate English?* It was clear that the direct grammar learners produced more non-referential *it* than the indirect grammar learners in the oral production. Consequently, hypothesis 2 was confirmed: More instances of the non-referential *it* occurs in the narrative data of direct grammar/explicit learners of intermediate English than in the narrative data of indirect grammar/implicit learners of intermediate English. During the narration task, the explicit grammar learners produced more instances of the non-referential *it* correctly than the implicit grammar learners.

5.3 The Grammaticality Judgment Task

A comparison of acceptance and rejection of the non-referential *it* between implicit and explicit learners shows that the implicit and the explicit learners accepted the instances of the acceptable *it* and rejected those of the unacceptable *it* in the GJT (Table 7 and Figure 7 under 'Results'). The implicit learners accepted acceptable sentences and rejected unacceptable sentences less than explicit learners. Surprisingly, there were some participants from the Experimental Group who accepted phrases that were considered to be ungrammatical in English (see Appendix E). This was due to the task-related effects. The well-known fact that people tend to visually "fill in the gaps" with missing items made sense. It was possible that some of the participants failed to notice the missing *it* which occurred in object position in examples (6) and (12):

(6) The monument is the tallest structure in Holland. Would you like to look at?

(12) Thank you for your present! May I open now?

Nevertheless, the fact that about one third (twelve) of the explicit learners judged the sentences as acceptable was unexpected.

Four of the participants also judged the following sentence as acceptable:

(8) The teacher said that is possible we will have a test next week.

This was also attributed to the "filling in the gap" factor or failure to read the sentence carefully. Additionally, it was possible that these participants supplied the missing *it* in their minds while they were reading. The explicit learners were also evenly split on the acceptability of the sentence (1).

(1) Seems like a good idea to get at least 8 hours of sleep at night.

On the other hand, the implicit learners were clearer on their judgment of the sentences containing missing subjects with 20/30 rejecting sentence (1). It is possible that this group favored the more prescriptive rule, which disallows missing subjects.

Nevertheless, examples (6), (11), and (12) proved difficult for the control group:

(6) The monument is the tallest structure in Holland. Would you like to look at?

(11) How far is from the North to the South?

(12) Thank you for your present! May I open now?

With respect to (6) and (12), it appeared that implicit learners were less sensitive to the requirement of the referential pronoun *it* when it appeared in object position. It is, however, essential to recall that there were explicit learners who also accepted these constructions with object-drop.

The control group seemed to be aware of the necessity of using the non-referential *it* in expressions with time. This could have occurred more as a result of the way in which time is taught in the FL classroom than of any real analysis of this element on the part of the learner. In contrast, expressions containing the non-referential *it* in expressions with distance were especially confusing for the learners.

In the category RU (rejection of unacceptable sentence), 22 implicit learners rejected an ungrammatical sentence for reasons pertaining to the target element. Most of the cases had to do with (1) "Seems like a good idea to get at least 8 hours of sleep at night". Four interesting cases in which two students correctly rejected an ungrammatical sentence and

ungrammatically revised it for reasons pertaining to the target element are discussed below.

In the example below, both cases were produced by student # 5:

(4) Is good that there are many restaurants in the town. Unacceptable

(correct)

There are many restaurants in the town that is good.

(8) The teacher said that is possible we will have a test next week. Unacceptable

(correct)

The teacher said that is possible it we will have a test next week.

In 4, this student demonstrated awareness that the sentence needed a subject and chose an expletive (though not *it*) to head the sentence. But the student's revision semantically changed the meaning of the sentence. In addition, there was no agreement between the noun, *restaurants* and the verb *to be*.

In 8, it is possible that the student used *it* as a complementizer and s/he might have sensed from the rest of the test items that the grammatical item *it* was being tested and decided to include *it* in the response, although this was done in the incorrect position. In particular, this student only scored 5 items correct out of 15. Interestingly, another student who scored 5 items correct out of 15 also performed at the same level. This occurred in spite of the fact that both participants did very well on the ET. Perhaps the ability to perceive and produce *it* does not correlate with the ability to accept or reject sentences based on this item.

Overall, the control group performed at about chance level (51%) with respect to the rejection of ungrammatical sentences for reasons that concerned the target element. The researcher excluded rejections of ungrammatical utterances (RU) in this percentage. The

students' performance was better, however, with respect to the acceptance of acceptable sentences (63%) (See Table 7 and Figure 7 under 'Results').

A comparison between the means of acceptable and unacceptable *it* for implicit and explicit groups in the grammaticality judgment task showed that the explicit learners knew better than the implicit learners what was acceptable and what was not in the sentences where non-referential *it* was used (See Table 9 and Figure 8 under 'Results').

With respect to research question (a): *Does direct grammar learning lead to more production of it than indirect grammar learning by intermediate learners of English grammar?* It was clear the implicit learners were more likely to correctly accept an acceptable sentence than correctly reject an ungrammatical sentence for reasons related to the use of the grammatical item *it*. The direct grammar learning led to more production of *it* than indirect grammar learners by intermediate learners of English grammar. Consequently, hypothesis 1 was confirmed: Direct grammar/explicit learners of intermediate English produce more instances of the non-referential *it* than indirect grammar/implicit learners of intermediate English. In fact, the implicit learners performed the best on sentence types that were classified as "anticipatory", in 4, 5 and 6 (See Appendix F). This was an interesting finding and somehow relates to the way the anticipatory *it* is taught in the language classroom.

5.4 The Referentiality Task

Explicit Learners were often divided over whether the non-referential *it* was truly non-referential. With respect to constructions containing prop-*it* time and prop-*it* distance, the clear majority of the participants attributed referentiality to *it*. Some explicit learners replied that *it* referred to "the time" or "the distance". Huddleston & Pullum (2002) note that for

clock time, *it* is replaceable by “the time” (P. 1482); yet, Celce-Murcia and Larsen-Freeman (1999) point that *it* could not be replaced with “the time” in the corresponding *what*-question (p. 445), as in the example, “What time is *it*?” meaning “What time is *the time*?” This instance was consistent with the Experimental Group judgment in this study. In contrast, the implicit Learners were less likely to attribute referentiality to these two constructions.

The data obtained in the implicit learners was, for the most part, unexpected in Comparison between the means of reference of *it* for implicit and explicit groups in the referentiality task (See Table 11 and Figure 9 under ‘Results’). It appears that a good number of participants interpreted referentiality as something exclusive to a particular context. In many cases, it appears that the participants examined each sentence for a concrete possible referent and wrote that down; whereas in the absence of a concrete referent they wrote “none”. For example, this seemed to be the strategy of implicit learner #8 who wrote “none” for all the sentences that contained a referential *it* and where a clear antecedent was not present, as in the following example:

(11) My mom said that it rang so loudly that she couldn’t sleep at all. (“none”)

Interestingly, all eighteen implicit Learners who attributed referentiality to the pronoun *it* in (1) claimed that *it* referred to a movie or the title of the movie.

(1) I saw the movie called: “*It’s a Wonderful Life*”.

There are several possible explanations to account for this phenomenon. First, it is possible that EFL students acquired the understanding that the pronoun *it* generally substitutes for inanimate NPs that appeared earlier in the discourse. Therefore, “movie” was the only NP that satisfied this criterion. In contrast, the majority of the explicit learners interpreted the title of the movie in the form $X = X$ and chose “life” as a possible referent.

This was in line with Huddleston & Pullum (2002) who note that in constructions where *it* appeared as a subject with predicative NPs, there is a stronger degree of referentiality between *it* and the NP as opposed to *it* used as a dummy subject in weather examples: “It was a perfect day” changed to “The day was perfect” and “It’s a wonderful view” transformed to “the view is wonderful” (p. 1483). It should be noted that “It’s a wonderful life” could be reformulated as “Life is wonderful”. Hence, it was expected at eighteen out of thirty explicit learners attributed referentiality to this type of *it*. It is also possible that the implicit learners did not understand the orthographic convention of italicizing movie titles.

The suggestion that all referentiality was familiar to some students was supported by the number of implicit learners (10/24) who claimed that *it* in example (6) referred to nothing:

(6) *It* jumped over the fence and barked at the cat.

The students were technically correct, given the lack of context to interpret the pronoun. The verb *barked*, however, should have informed the students that a dog was being referred to. The explicit learners, however, consistently gave examples of what *it* referred to, despite the lack of context.

There were several interesting responses that are worthy of comment. Several implicit learners attributed referentiality to the non-referential *it*, but afterwards wrote down plural NPs as possible referents:

(13) “How’s *it* going?” Sara greeted Ann. (classes)

(14) The professor made *it* very clear that she would accept no late papers. (papers)

Item (14) might be an example of a student's attempt to find a local NP that could be substituted for *it*, in spite of the lack of agreement, given the fact that the sentence made no sense if *papers* were substituted for *it*. In (13), however, the implicit learner chose an NP that was not present in the discourse and made no attempt to account for agreement. It is possible that this particular student recognized the non-referentiality of this instance of *it* but supplied a context in order to interpret the sentence.

With respect to research question (a): *Does direct grammar learning lead to more production of it than indirect grammar learning by intermediate learners of English grammar?* It was clear that the direct grammar learners were more likely to correctly refer to non-referential *it* for reasons related to the grammatical item *it*. Direct grammar learning led to a few more production of *it* than indirect grammar learning by intermediate learners of English grammar. Consequently, hypothesis 1 was not confirmed by the referentiality task: Direct grammar/explicit learners of intermediate English produce more instances of the non-referential *it* than indirect grammar/implicit learners of intermediate English. The direct learners referred to the non-referential *it* more correctly in referentiality task. This was an appealing observation that resulted in the teaching method used in the experimental group of this research.

In general, the analysis in this study based on the use of *it* and its frequency in English L3 intermediate level at USJ interprets that both research questions are answered. With respect to question (b) *Does the frequency of certain types of the non-referential it in narratives differ between direct and indirect grammar learners of intermediate English?* there is more uses of *it* in the direct grammar learners than the indirect grammar learners, and therefore, hypothesis 2: More instances of the non-referential *it* occurs in the narrative data of direct grammar/explicit learners of intermediate English than in the narrative data of indirect

grammar/implicit learners of intermediate English, is corroborated in the narration task. In terms of question (a) Does direct grammar learning lead to more production of *it* than indirect grammar learning by intermediate learners of English grammar? there was more production of *it* in the direct grammar learners than the indirect grammar learners, and therefore, hypothesis 1: Direct grammar/explicit learners of intermediate English produce more instances of the non-referential *it* than indirect grammar/implicit learners of intermediate English, is supported in the grammaticality judgment task. Nevertheless, there were few more references of *it* according to question (a) in the direct grammar learners than in the indirect grammar learners, and therefore, hypothesis 1 is not confirmed in the referentiality task.

5.5 Conclusion

This research aims to investigate the use of the non-referential *it* as a result of learning method and to contribute to the process of acquiring and properly using *it* in explicit learners of intermediate English L3 at a French-based University (USJ). Furthermore, the exposure of the significance of this study in Third Language Acquisition and the definitions of key terms explain the operational terms that were used in this research with the basic assumptions.

The researcher concludes that in adult English L2 acquisition, learners are more likely to omit the non-referential *it* than referential subjects. This is also the case in English L3 acquisition of implicit learners of intermediate level different from English L3 acquisition of expletives that are acquired better after explicit learning.

5.5.1 Limitations of the study and recommendations for further research.

One of the limitations of this study was the issue of how the implicit learners understood the non-referential *it*. It was uncertain whether the participants claimed that *it* was non-referential due to the lack of a suitable referent in the sentence or because they had real

understanding that *it* technically did not refer to anything. Another limitation caused hesitation in the students' willingness to perform in many tasks. The learners came from different educational backgrounds, thus making the study limited; their attitudes toward tests differed from one participant to another (Mackey & Gass, 2005). Fewer tasks should be performed than the ones used in this study on L3 students of intermediate level in order to withhold hints about *it*. There was a limitation in the time allotted to the experimental group for direct grammar learning.

Leedy and Ormrod (2010) suggest that "Assumptions are so basic that, without them, the research problem itself could not exist" (p. 62). The assumptions of this research were many; one of them was that English is a required language at the university level since it is the most thoroughly used international language; another one was that the undergraduate intermediate English language learners at USJ shared the same academic background because they followed the official Lebanese curriculum at high-schools; it was deduced, therefore, that all students sat for and passed the Official Lebanese Baccalaureate Exams. Moreover, since they were placed in intermediate level in their English entrance exam, it was presumed that the students were made conscious of the learning process of the English language, with the resulting awareness of the language and its use in tasks with a positive approach.

A recommendation for further research on the non-referential *it* in third language acquisition is that direct grammar learning should be implemented on students of intermediate level at an English-based university in order to see if learners produce *it* differently from French-based university students. It is recommended that students benefit from the provided feedback of the tasks. This study brings out the issue of explicit learning; therefore, it is necessary in curriculum designing to investigate direct learning outcomes and implement the best approach for better results in English L3.

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Appendix A

Level objectives that are used at USJ for all English language courses of all levels**Level A Requirements**

3 graded speeches:

- A 5-minute informative speech
- A SLUWE oral interactive speaking and listening
- A 5-minute persuasive speech for the final.

1 TPC grade for listening comprehension and 1 grade for reading comprehension

Writing includes:

5-6 writing grades. You can choose the most appropriate ones for each major from the list below to which you can add any piece of technical writing that you deem necessary for the major you are giving. The ones in red are mandatory for all level As.

- Cover letter and CV (interview techniques orally)
- Business letter
- Informative summary
- 1 SLUWE essay.
- Critique (Evaluative summary)
- Report (lab report, abstract of a report, economic report, feasibility report, case brief elements or any other type of report depending on the major of the students)
- Minutes and agenda
- Memo and fax
- Proposal

The FEP should include all 4 skills: listening comprehension, reading comprehension, a technical piece of writing, and an oral presentation.

Objectives for Level B

Integrated skills following the book

Graded Quizzes: 2 Listening quizzes and 2 reading quizzes

Writing:

4 graded essays plus their second draft.

Before midterm: compare/ contrast and SLUWE Essay

Before final: cause /effect and argumentative

Oral:

4 graded speaking exercises:

One SLU interactive speaking and listening before mid-term and another for the mid-term.

One oral presentation before the final and one for the final.

MEP theme based: 2 skills: SLUWE Essay and interactive speaking and listening (all in all the MEP should not take more than 2 to 2.5 hours)

FEP theme based including 4 skills: oral presentation, reading comprehension, listening comprehension, and essay writing

Objectives for Level C

Integrated skills following the book

Graded Quizzes: 2 Listening quizzes and 2 reading quizzes

Writing:

4 graded paragraphs plus their second draft.

Before midterm: Process and SLUWE paragraph

Before final: cause effect and compare/ contrast

Oral:

4 graded speaking exercises:

One SLU interactive speaking and listening before mid-term and another for the mid-term.

One oral presentation before the final and one for the final mid term

MEP theme based: 2 skills: SLUWE paragraph and interactive speaking and listening (all in all the MEP should not take more than 2 to 2.5 hours)

FEP theme based including 4 skills: oral presentation, reading comprehension, listening comprehension, and paragraph writing.

Objectives for Level D

Integrated skills following the book

Graded Quizzes: 2 Listening quizzes and 2 reading quizzes

Writing:

4 graded compositions plus their second draft.

Before midterm: 2 compositions

Before final: 2 compositions

Oral:

4 graded speaking exercises:

One oral presentation before the mid-term and one for the mid-term.

One interactive speaking and listening TPC before the final and an oral presentation for the final.

MEP and FEP theme based including 4 skills: oral presentation, reading comprehension, listening comprehension, and composition writing

Objectives for Level E

In level E as in all the other levels, we work on 4 skills (reading comprehension, listening comprehension, writing and speaking) in addition to vocabulary skills and grammar covered in the textbook.

Instructors are encouraged to supplement grammar exercises according to the needs of the students by using the students' workbook available in the English Department.

As for vocabulary, students are taught new vocabulary words using flash cards or pictures and are encouraged to use them in their speaking or writing.

Skills to be covered:

- ✓ Reading comprehension, and listening comprehension. Instructors are required to cover minimum 6-8 chapters of the book.

TPC: 1 Reading Comprehension and 1 Listening Comprehension TPCs are to be completed before every Evaluation Project and 3 progress checks minimum.

✓ Speaking :

- 4 graded oral presentations: one minute each
 - 2 TPC:
 - one PP presentation with only pictures to describe, talk about, or compare
 - one presentation in which they talk about themselves
 - one for the MEP (1 minute)
 - one for the FEP (1 minute)

✓ Writing:

- Simple and compound sentences with FANBOYS using target words related to theme they are studying (where appropriate)
- Compositions/free writing using simple and /or compound sentences related to the topics in the units. They could be narrative, informative, descriptive or opinion.

Not to forget that all the writing exercises should be written in 2 drafts in class and their 2 grades should be added and divided.

✓ Grammar rules to be covered:

- Tenses: present simple and continuous
Past simple and continuous
Introduce present perfect and future
- Subject-verb agreement
- Prepositions
- Adjectives
- Adverbs

- Pronouns
- Countable and uncountable
- Modals: can, could, should, would, will, may, might.
-

Level Objectives in Appendix A are the exact duplicates of the objectives of USJ English Department.

Appendix B

Schedule used for organization of time and sequence management of the control and experimental groups

	Sessions	Groups Involved		Activities	
		Control	Experimental	Tasks	Explicit Learning
Week 1	4	x		ET	
Week 1	2		X		Grammar " <i>it</i> "
Week 2	4	x	X	Narration	
Week 2	1	x	X	GJT+RT	

(Constructed on Paiz, Angeli, Wagner, Lawrick, Moore, Anderson, Soderlund, Brizee and Keck, 2014)

Appendix C

Guidelines for direction are to distinguish between referential *it* and non-referential *it* as a guide through questions about the pronoun *it* with examples of each category according to each question (Constructed on Bergsma et al., 2008)

Does the pronoun “it” have a clear, referential antecedent that precedes it in the discourse?

- a. The dog barked and I gave *it* a bone.
- b. Thank you for your present! May I open *it*?
- c. She made some soup and gave *it* to the children.
- d. The death of the student shocked the community; *it* was a horrible tragedy.

(Based on examples from Mindt, 2011, p. 3)

Does “it” refer to an entity that is clear from the situation without having been linguistically introduced?

- a. Isn't *it* lovely? (said by someone looking at a painting)
- b. *It's* pretty but too expensive (said while looking at a ring)
- c. Be careful, *it's* hot! (said while serving food)
- d. *It's* too heavy! (said by someone moving a piece of furniture)

Can “that” be directly substituted for “it”?

- a. I didn't give *it* to the dog- I didn't give *that* to the dog.
- b. *It's* pretty but too expensive- *That's* pretty but too expensive.
- c. *It's* possible I will be late today- *That's* possible I will be too late today.
- d. *It's* getting scary- *That's* getting scary.

(Based on examples from Mindt, 2011, p. 2, 2a)

Can “what” be used to question the content of an utterance?

- a. *I* didn't give it to the dog- *What* didn't you give to the dog?
- b. *It's* pretty but too expensive- *What's* pretty but too expensive?
- c. *It's* possible I will be late today- *What's* possible that you will be late today?
- d. *It's* getting dark out- *What's* getting dark out?

(Based on examples from Mindt, 2011, p.3)

Classification is to distinguish among the subtypes of the non-referential *it* with subdivisions and examples for each subdivision

A. Prop- *It*

1. **Prop *it* time-** in expressions that mention points in time
 - a) What time is *it*? *It's* five o'clock.
 - b) *It's* getting late.
 - c) Finally, *it's* spring!
 - d) Wow, is *it* May already?
2. **Prop *it* distance-** in expressions that indicate distance in space or time
 - a) *It* is long way from here to Canada.
 - b) *It's* been five years since I've last seen her.
 - c) *It* is five kilometers from Dora to my house.
 - d) *It* is only a week until winter break!
3. **Prop *it* weather-** I expressions mentioning weather or atmospheric conditions
 - a) *It's* really hot in Bekaa Valley in the summertime.
 - b) *It* is raining again.
 - c) When *it's* cold outside, I always wear my scarf.

d) *It* can be very foggy in Bikfaya.

B. Anticipatory

1. **Impersonals**- especially expressions that contain so-called raising verbs. Expressions like “it seems”, “it appears”, “it’s worth”, “it turns out”, and “it happens” should be classified under this category. Generally, sentences like these cannot be reformulated by omitting *it* and preposing the complement clause without some additional modification (Kaltenböck, 1999 p. 64).

- a) *It* is kind of you to say so.
- b) *It* seems that Grace is happy.
- c) *It* turned out that I met her husband in college.
- d) *It* appears that she has lost her mind!

(Based on examples from Mindt, 2011, p. 14)

2. **Anticipatory (Extraposition)** - *it* is the preform for an extraposed subject. The sentence can grammatically be formulated by omitting *it* and moving the real subject into its place.

- a) *It* is amazing that she can speak seven languages- That she can speak seven languages is amazing.
- b) *It*'s great to have so many friends here at school- To have so many friends here at school is great.
- c) *It*'s useful to study English- To study English is useful.
- d) *It*'s a shame that they lost the basketball game- That they lost the basketball game is a shame.

(Based on examples from Mindt, 2011, pp.19-20,195).

Anticipatory *It* with complement deletion is classified under ‘anticipatory’

In addition, where the pronoun has a co-reference whose antecedent is the linguistic context and there exists a “feeling of ellipsis”, *it* should also be classified under ‘anticipatory’ (Quirk et al., 1985, p. 349).

- a) A: They lost the game.
B: Yes, so I hear. Isn’t *it* a shame (that they lost the game?)
- b) A: Class is cancelled today.
B: Yeah, isn’t *it* great (that class is cancelled?)
- c) The U.S. is going to war without the support of the United Nations. *It’s* unbelievable (that the U.S. is going to war without the support of the United Nations).
(Based on examples from Mindt, 2011, p. 3).

3. Clefts- A cleft sentence is a complex sentence which typically takes the following form (in English): *it* + *be* + *X* + subordinate clause. In general, *X*= (NP, PP, AdvP). Subjects *cannot* be *grammatically* reformulated by substituting the real subject for *it*.

- a) *It* was Gaelle who I met at the university on Friday. – Who I met at the university on Friday was Gaelle.
- b) *It* was Paul that Lynn married. – That Paul married was Lynn. (Huddleston & Pullum, 2002, p. 1415)
- c) *It* was Jane who gave me the book- Who gave me the book was Jane.
- d) *It* was at Oxford where he studied English. –Where he studied English was at Oxford.

Truncated *It* clefts (classified under ‘clefts’) are exemplified for clarifications

The relative clause is recoverable from prior discourse

- a) A: Who finished off the biscuits?

B: I don't know; *it* certainly wasn't me (who finished off the biscuits.)

b) A: Where did you first meet her?

B: *It* must have been here (where I first met her).

c) Someone took my car. I think *it* was Jane (who took my car.)

d) I lost my books! I'm sure *it* was at the library (where I lost my books)

(Huddleston & Pullum, 2002, p. 1417).

C. Other *It* usage are under this category

1. Idiomatic/Ritualistic Expressions

Instances of *it* generally follow a verb and often have ideas of "life in general" (Quirk et al., 1985, p. 349) or "things". Phrasal verbs, where *it* has undergone semantic bleaching, fall under this category.

a) Roughing *it* in the wild is not my idea of a good time.

b) How's *it* going?

c) That's *it*. (Kaltenböck argues that this expression is context sensitive and thus may be considered referential. Still, I have chosen to categorize it as ritualistic or idiomatic.)

d) *It* was like... (used as filler)

e) I had to stick *it* out to be successful at my job.

2. **Cannot be determined**- in expressions where it cannot be determined what *it* refers to. Often "things", "life", or "the situation" could be substituted to make sense of the pronoun. Since it cannot be determined by the hearer what, if anything *it* refers to, instances that conform to this criterion should be classified under this subheading.

a) Her boyfriend broke up with her suddenly. *It's* really strange.

- b) So I had a lot of problems when I came to the college. I was so lonely, I missed my parents, and I had to deal with living with a roommate. Yeah *it* was really difficult.
 - c) It seemed like he wanted to stay in jail because outside *it* would be very difficult for him.
3. **Overuse-** incorrect uses of *it*, especially when it is employed as a presumptive pronoun or used in place of “there is/are”
- a) *It's* many International students at Concordia University.
 - b) The teacher *it* makes all the difference when learning a language.
 - c) Being trilingual, *it's* an advantage since I am open to new worlds.
 - d) In my English class, *it's* five Asian students (Boyd et al., 2005, p. 2).

Appendix D

The list of the 10 recorded sentences that are used for the elicitation task of 8 non-referential *it* and 5 referential *it*

- a. *It* is a good experience to study English.
- b. *It's* fun to go shopping in Beirut with my friends.
- c. You said that *it* is easy to learn English.
- d. He thinks *it's* a shame we lost the game.
- e. *It* seems likely that *it* will rain this morning.
- f. *It* was Jack who broke the vase in the room.
- g. *It* likes to eat the food that falls from the table.
- h. The man told me that *it* ate the bread and flew away.
- i. *It* was heavy so I asked him to carry *it*.
- j. *It* is possible that *it* died from lack of water.

(Built on examples from Mindt, 2011, pp. 195-209)

Appendix E

A sample of the elicitation task transcription of *it* use in the uttered sentences of implicit learners with scores according to the time(s) used and classification of *it* per sentence

NR= non-referential

R= referential

	Score/classification	
Implicit # 1		
1. To study English	0	
2. It's ... to shopping umm	1	NR
3. You said that easy to learn English	0	
4. He thinks it's a shame? game	1	NR
5. It seems likely it rain this morning.	2	NR /NR
6. It's Jack....to table	1	NR
7. It likes to eat food??? The table.	1	R
8. The man told me that eat bread...flew away.	0	
9. It was heavy so ask my him to carry.	1	R
10. It is possible to the like uh water.	1	NR
Implicit # 2		
1. It is good experience to study English.	1	NR
2. It's fun to shop with good? My friends.	1	NR
3. You say too easy to study.	0	
4. He thinks to shame to lost our, we lost game.	0	
5. It seems to likely to rain uh this this raining this morning.	1	NR
6. Jack broke to? to his glasses.	0	

7. It likes to eat food it brought it?? Table.	1	R
8. The man told me to eat that eat bread.	0	
9. It is too heavy so that he to carry.	1	R
10. It is possible to like diet water.	1	NR
Implicit # 3		
1. It's a good experience to study English.	1	NR
2. It's fun to go shopping in Beirut with my friends.	1	NR
3. You said that it's easy to learn English.	1	NR
4. He thinks that's a shame we lost the game.	0	
5. It seems likely that it's gonna rain this morning.	2	NR /NR
6. It was Jack who broke the vase in the room.	1	NR
7. It likes to eat food it? in the table.	1	R
8. The man told me that it eat the bread and flew away.	1	R
9. It was heavy so I asked him to carry it.	2	R /R
10. It is possible die like a water.	1	NR
Implicit # 4		
1. It's a good experience to study English.	1	NR
2. It's fun to go to shopping in Beirut with my friends.	1	NR
3. You said that is easy to learn learn English.	0	
4. (laugh) He think it's a shame to lost the game.	1	NR
5. It seems likely that it will rain this morning.	2	NR /NR
6. It was Jack who broke the glass in the room.	1	NR
7. It likes to eat the pots from on the table.	1	R
8. The man told me that eat the bread and flew away.	0	

9. It was heavy so I asked him to carry it.	2	R /R
10. It's possible to die it from lack a bottle of water.	1	NR
Implicit # 5		
1. It is a good experience to study English.	1	NR
2. It fun to go to shopping in Beirut with my friends.	1	NR
3. You said that it is easy to learn English.	1	NR
4. He think that it change to loss game.	1	NR
5. It seems likely...	1	NR
6. It was Jack who broke the vase in the room.	1	NR
7. It like to be to eat the food on the table.	1	R
8. The man told me to eat the bread and pull away.	0	
9. It was heavy so I asked him to carry.	1	R
10. It is possible that it die with likely water.	2	NR /R
Implicit # 6		
1. It is a good experience studying English.	1	NR
2. It's fun to go shopping with my friends.	1	NR
3. You said that it's a easy to study English.	1	NR
4. He thinks such a shame we lost to game.	0	
5. It seems likely rains this.	1	NR
6. It was Jack who broke the room.	1	NR
7. It likes to eat the food on the table.	1	R
8. The man told me that eat the bread and flew away.	0	
9. It was heavy so I asked my father to carry it.	2	R /R
10. It is possible to die the lack of water.	1	NR
Implicit # 7		

1. This is a good experience to study English.	0	
2. It's fun to shopping at Beirut with my friends.	1	NR
3. You said is easy to learn English.	0	
4. -----		
5. It seem likely no more rain this.	1	NR
6. Is was John who broke vase in room.	0	
7. -----		
8. Man told me to eat.	0	
9. Him to carry it.	1	R
10. It is possible to die from lack of water.	1	NR
Implicit # 8		
1. It's a good experience.	1	NR
2. ? near Beirut.	0	
3. You said? It is easy to learn English.	1	NR
4. He thinks a shame to loss game.	0	NR
5. It's like to rain this morning.	1	NR
6. It's a Jack whose?? Room.	1	R
7. It likes to eat the food the table.	1	
8. The man told that the eat the?	0	R / R
9. It so heavy so him carry it.	2	
10. Is possible to die lack a water?	0	
Implicit # 9		

1. It is a good experience to study English.	1	NR
2. It's fun to go shopping Beirut.	1	NR
3. You said that it's easy to study English.	1	NR
4. He thinks it's a shame to loss games.	1	NR
5. It's unlikely to rain this night.	1	NR
6. It was Jack who broke the vase in the room.	1	NR
7. It likes to eat the food in the? Of table uh?	1	R
8. Did the man told me that...	0	
9. It was so heavy so I asked him to carry outside.	1	R
10. It is possible to die it of water.	1	R
Implicit # 10		
1. It is good experiences to study English.	1	NR
2. is fun to shopping in Beirut with friends.	0	
3. You said that easy to learn English.	0	
4. It is a shame to?? loss game.	1	NR
5. It seems likely that rain will be this.	1	NR
6. It was Jack's broke? in the room.	1	NR
7. It likes to eat the room table?	1	R
8. The man said that eat the bread???	0	
9. It was so heavy him to it carries.	2	R / R
10. ???	0	
Implicit # 11		

1. It is a good experience to study English.	1	NR
2. It's fun to go shopping in Beirut with my friend.	1	NR
3. You said that it is easy to learn English.	1	NR
4. He thinks it's a shame that we lost a game.	1	NR
5. It seems likely that we will have a rain.	1	NR
6. It was Jack who broke the vase in the room.	1	NR
7. It likes to eat the food.	1	R
8. The man told me that eat the bread is	0	
9. It was so heavy that I asked him to carry	1	R
10. It is possible that...	1	NR
Implicit # 12		
1. It is a good experience to study English.	1	NR
2. It's fun to go shopping with my friends.	1	NR
3. You said it is easy to learn English.	1	NR
4. He thinks it's a shame we lost game.	1	NR
5. It seems likely we...	1	NR
6. It was Jack who broke the room.	1	NR
7. It likes to eating food.	1	R
8. The man told me eat bread and blew away.	0	
9. It was heavy so I asked him to carry it.	2	R/ R
10. It is possible to die in the water.	1	NR

Appendix F

The sample of the grammaticality judgment task that is distributed to the students for completion of task by either accepting or rejecting *it* in each sentence

#.....

(On this sheet the number that appears in the blanks should be written on the following task).

Part 1 Acceptable or Unacceptable?

Please, indicate if the following sentences are possible sentences in English by circling "Acceptable" or "Unacceptable".

If the sentence is unacceptable, please, rewrite it to make it an acceptable sentence. When you finish this section, please, hand it in to the teacher to receive part 2.

Practice Questions

A) *I'm gonna go to the movies tomorrow.*

Acceptable

Unacceptable

B) *Went to the park Carla and her sister.*

Acceptable

Unacceptable

PLEASE BEGIN

1) Seems like a good idea to get at least 8 hours of sleep at night.

Acceptable

Unacceptable

2) My mother says that it's usually very sunny in Beirut.

Acceptable

Unacceptable

3) When we left the party, was 10 o'clock.

Acceptable

Unacceptable

4) Is good that there are many restaurants in the town.

Acceptable

Unacceptable

5) I think it is sad that USJ has lost so many basketball games.

Acceptable

Unacceptable

6) The monument is the tallest structure in Holland. Would you like to look at?

Acceptable

Unacceptable

7) It was 5 pm when we arrived at my aunt's house.

Acceptable

Unacceptable

8) The teacher said that is possible we will have a test next week.

Acceptable

Unacceptable

9) She thought was Sunday when we arrived to Canada.

Acceptable

Unacceptable

10) It is my birthday today.

Acceptable

Unacceptable

11) How far is from the North to the South?

Acceptable

Unacceptable

12) Thank you for your present! May I open now?

Acceptable

Unacceptable

13) My dog died. It ran out into the street and was hit by a car.

Acceptable

Unacceptable

14) It was too hot so I waited a couple of minutes before I ate it.

Acceptable

Unacceptable

15) I think that it has been about two weeks since I last called my cousin.

Acceptable

Unacceptable

(Adapted from Woods, 2015, pp. 291-296)

Appendix G

The sample of referentiality task that is distributed to the students for completion of task by referring to *it* in each sentence to the appropriate reference

#..... (Make sure that the number Part 1 of your sheet appears on the top of this sheet in the space provided)

Part 2. What does “it” refer to? (10 minutes)

What, if anything, does “it” refer to in the following sentences? Write your answer in blanks if necessary (e.g. “a book”).

If you think that “it” does NOT refer to anything, please, write “none” in the blank:

1) I saw the movie called: “It’s a *Wonderful Life*”.

2) It was so heavy that I asked my father to help me carry it.

3) “Would you like some more of it or are you full?” my mother asked.

4) It was Gaelle who graduated from school in 2015.

5) It’s a shame that we can’t go to the movies with friends this Monday.

6) It jumped over the fence and barked at the cat.

7) “Be sure to bring an umbrella because it’s raining outside,” my mother reminded me.

8) Ryan said that it's a long way from the house to the school.

9) Grace said, "It's 7:30 and I'm late for class".

10) The death of the student shocked the community: it was a horrible tragedy.

11) My mom said that it rang so loudly that she couldn't sleep at all.

12) After he finished his presentation on The Planets, he said, "That's it!"

13) "How's it going?" Ana greeted the caretaker.

14) The professor made it very clear that he would not accept late papers.

15) Learning another language is difficult. It's not easy for me.

Please, turn this sheet in. You have completed this study.

Thank you again for participating! (Adapted from Woods, 2015, pp. 291-296)