Differences in how individual EFL learners parse English sentences? The five sentence types

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Parsing is a crucial L2 (second language) processing step, after the input text is perceived and recognized. This study aims to reveal differences in how individual EFL (English as a Foreign Language) learners parse English sentences. The Five Sentence Types, or Five Canonical Clause Structures framework, which has long been used in ELT (English Language Teaching) at secondary schools in Japan, has historically facilitated L2 processing. However, new ELT approaches such as CLT (Communicative Language Teaching) or CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning) place less emphasis on lower-level processing or parsing, than on achieving communication goals. Despite this paradigm shift in ELT, little research has been conducted into how EFL learners now parse input text, and how relevant parsing is at different proficiency levels. These are important and imminent issues, as they will provide insight into how parsing should be taught within new ELT paradigms, as well as how grammar should be taught at secondary schools. This study aims to reveal how Japanese EFL learners today process input text, using the conventional framework of the Five Sentence Types (Research Question 1), how their processing differs according to their proficiency level (Research Question 2), and how their processing differs from that of native speakers of English and Japanese teachers of English (Research Question 3). A pilot study of 248 university students was conducted to verify the unidimensionality of a 36-item diagnosis test. This report presents the results of the main study of 300 university students who completed the diagnosis test. Factor and/or cluster analysis, and correlation analysis on standardized test scores are used to answer Research Questions 1 and 2, respectively. Research Question 3 is answered through comparison and discussion of the results of Research Question 1.

Keywords: processing, parsing, individual difference.