



Avoidance of Complex Grammar by Senior High School L2 English Students: Motivations and Cognition

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Abstract

This study investigates the motivations and thought processes behind grammar avoidance in senior high school second language (L2) English learners during grammar learning. Twelve suburban public school intermediate proficiency L2 English learners were selected. Data was collected through qualitative semi-structured interviews and thematically analyzed. Using Bourdieu's sociological theory, the following themes emerged from the data analysis: (i) Strategic Simplification: Navigating Linguistic Capital and Habitus for Effective Communication, (ii) Strategic Avoidance: Navigating Complex Sociolinguistic Forces to Optimize Communication, (iii) Managing Perceived Communication Risk, and (iv) Strategic Avoidance as Temporary Adaptation: Ambivalent Linguistic Simplification. Cognitively, limited working memory hindered processing and producing complex syntax, while avoidance helped manage high cognitive load. Insufficient explicit grammatical knowledge also prevented consolidating new structures. Avoidance allowed time to acquire the declarative knowledge needed. The findings suggest grammar avoidance balances complexity and accuracy, motivated by affective and cognitive constraints. Implications include building confidence, knowledge, and skills to enable early practice with complex constructions rather than prolonged avoidance. The study recommends that further research is required to determine optimal thresholds for avoidance and levels of optimal challenge for introducing complex grammar.

Keywords: Grammar; structure; motivation; avoidance; cognition; senior high school; L2 English learners/students

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1. Introduction

Over the past decade, research has provided valuable insights into grammatical avoidance behaviors exhibited by second language (L2) learners and the factors influencing these strategic decisions. Studies show grammar avoidance, that is, the circumventing of certain complex linguistic structures is commonly observed among high school students learning English as an additional language (Dörnyei & Ryan, 2015; Choi,

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2017). Understanding the motivations and cognition underlying avoidance is key for moving learners forward. This study aims to investigate why senior high school L2 English students avoid complex grammar and how cognitive processes shape these behaviors.

In avoidance situations, L2 speakers consciously choose to sidestep grammatical forms perceived as difficult by using alternate expressions or simplifying output (Dörnyei, 2014). For senior high secondary learners, complex structures often avoided include relative clauses, passive voice, and subordinating conjunctions that pose processing challenges (Bashir AbdAllaAdam, 2021). Studies identify several motivational factors driving avoidance decisions. A primary influence is anxiety stemming from a desire to avoid embarrassment over errors with intimidating grammar (Alrabai, 2014; Djeghaidel & Bouzeria, 2020). Learners also avoid due to negative self-perceptions of competence with structures viewed as too demanding (Lou & Noels, 2020). Additionally, avoidance can reflect a lack of self-confidence in readiness to produce emerging linguistic skills (Dörnyei, 2015).

Cognitive dimensions further shape avoidance behaviors. Models suggest that working memory constraints make processing resource-intensive grammar difficult, leading learners to opt for low-complexity forms (Skehan, 2015). Inadequate explicit knowledge of grammatical rules compounds these difficulties by preventing consolidation of unfamiliar structures (DeKeyser, 2020). From this cognitive load perspective, avoidance functions as an adaptive strategy for managing task demands. However, overuse of avoidance to reduce pressures impedes implicit acquisition from meaningful practice (DeKeyser, 2020).

While prior studies have examined avoidance in isolation, few have investigated motivational and cognitive factors in tandem to understand their interrelation (Alrabai, 2014). Additionally, recent research on secondary learners remains limited with most focusing on adults. However, further study is needed on adolescent avoidance behaviors as this group faces distinct motivational challenges during critical developmental phase (Dörnyei & Ryan, 2015). This study aims to address these gaps through an in-depth qualitative investigation of secondary English learners' avoidance motivations and metacognition. In other words, the aim of this study is to uncover why learners avoid and how they think about it, leading to pedagogical tools for building confidence, knowledge, and skills to tackle grammar challenges. Understanding motivational and cognitive avoidance mechanisms can inform teaching practices to promote learning of complex grammar. The findings of this study could point to affective interventions for reducing anxiety as well as scaffolding techniques to develop declarative and procedural knowledge for difficult structures. Ensuring an optimal challenge point where students are stretched but not overwhelmed may encourage engagement rather than avoidance.

This section has provided a brief introduction into the grammatical avoidance behaviors exhibited by second language (L2) learners and how understanding the motivations and cognition underlying avoidance is key for moving learners forward in their English language learning. This study argues that although the avoidance of

complex grammatical structures can function adaptively, persistent overuse can impede the linguistic development of learners. The subsequent section will explore the findings of existing literature regarding the avoidance of complex grammar by English language learners.

2. Literature review

The avoidance of complex grammar structures by second language (L2) learners of English has been a widely studied phenomenon in the field of second language acquisition (SLA). This review will examine the existing literature on the motivations behind grammar avoidance by senior high school L2 English students, as well as the cognitive factors that influence this behavior. As described in the introduction section of this study, in the context of grammar, avoidance manifests as learners opt to use simpler grammatical structures in place of more complex ones that they have not fully acquired. For senior high school students learning English as an L2, avoidance of complex grammar may stem from multiple motivations, both internal and external. Cognition also plays a key role, as learners' cognitive capabilities shape their ability to process and produce complex L2 grammar. This review will be structured in three parts. The first will explain what motivations that lead senior high school L2 English students to avoid complex grammar. The second part will describe individual differences in cognition which impact avoidance behaviors. The third will present the implications of grammar avoidance for L2 teaching and learning.

2.1 Motivations for Grammar Avoidance

A predominant motivation for grammar avoidance is learners' desire to maintain fluency and avoid errors while speaking or writing in the L2. Existing literature have found that learners consciously avoid complex grammar to reduce cognitive overload and focus their resources on conveying meaning (Atkinson, 2020; Tabari, 2021). This suggest that learners trade grammatical accuracy for fluency to minimize breakdowns in communication. One consideration is the impact of avoidance on communicative competence. Canale (2014) identifies grammatical competence as a key component of communicative ability, alongside discourse, sociolinguistic, and strategic competence. Avoiding complex grammar may enable fluency in the short term but hinder the development of well-rounded communicative skills. In the same vein, Chiknaverova and Obdalova (2022) argue that some avoidance is necessary for effective communication, but excessive avoidance can impede acquisition of the full grammar system.

In addition to fluency, learners are often motivated by anxiety over producing errors. Senior high school students may be self-conscious about making mistakes in front of peers and teachers, leading them to avoid grammatical forms they have not fully mastered (Rehan, 2023). Horwitz et al. (1986) developed the Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale, finding anxiety frequently centered around grammar and fear of negative evaluation. Learners with high anxiety avoid complex grammar to minimize potentially embarrassing errors.

L2 motivation is another factor influencing avoidance. Students less motivated to fully acquire the L2 are more inclined to avoid difficult structures (Lee et al, 2020). Integrativeness, attitudes toward the L2 community, instrumentality, and other motivation constructs have been linked to avoidance tendencies (Straka, 2020).

Unmotivated students often utilize avoidance strategies to succeed in L2 classes with minimal effort.

Finally, the classroom environment and teacher attitudes play a role. Rigid grammar-translation methods and excessive error correction create an environment where avoidance thrives. More communication-oriented approaches may reduce avoidance by putting less pressure on grammatical accuracy (Daymiel et al., 2022). Hence, the level of patience, encouragement, and grammar-focused instruction provided by teachers also impacts avoidance behaviors (Teng, 2023).

In summary, internal motivations relate to fluency, anxiety, and L2 motivation, along with external classroom influences, combine to make grammar avoidance an attractive strategy for senior high school L2 English learners. However, excessive avoidance can limit long-term communicative competence.

2.2 Cognitive Factors in Grammar Avoidance

Cognitive capabilities also influence patterns of grammar avoidance among adolescent L2 learners. There exist two key factors; they are working memory capacity and automaticity. The working memory is critical for processing novel grammatical forms. Learners must hold linguistic information in temporary working memory while parsing the grammar of unfamiliar sentences (Shain et al., 2022). Students with lower working memory capacity struggle to unpack complex grammar in real time, leading them to default to simpler linguistic structures within their grasp (Perea, 2020). This suggests that avoidance enables students to conserve limited cognitive resources.

In the same vein, lack of automaticity in processing basic grammar also promotes avoidance errors. According to Mostafa and Kim (2021), expertise in an L2 develops from controlled processing of structures to eventual automatic processing. Beginners rely on effortful controlled processing of simple grammar, leaving little capacity for complex forms. Ellis (2015) found that senior high school L2 learners avoided complex grammatical constructions that had not yet become automatized, suggesting automaticity may be a prerequisite to using complex grammar productively.

Proficiency level mediates these effects. Beginners avoid grammar complexity broadly, but selective avoidance emerges as proficiency increases (Shin et al., 2020). Learners come to automatically process certain structures but continue to avoid those not yet automatized. Scholars therefore propose a progression from broad avoidance to selective avoidance as linguistic systems develop (Gass et al., 2020; Ellis, 2006).

In essence, capacity limits in working memory and automaticity lead learners to initially avoid grammar complexity across the board. With proficiency, avoidance becomes more selective based on automaticity gaps in specific grammatical subsystems. This underscores the importance of tailoring instruction to build automaticity incrementally to support acquisition of complex grammar. As indicated earlier in this study, the aim of this study is to investigate the motivations and cognitive factors influencing grammar avoidance in senior high second language (L2) English learners with intermediate proficiency. The research questions this study aims to answer are as follows:

1. How do senior high L2 English learners perceive and articulate instances of grammar avoidance in real-life situations, and what specific grammar concepts are commonly avoided?
2. What are the diverse motivations and emotions underlying the decision-making process of avoiding complex grammar structures in English, as reported by senior high L2 English learners, and how do these factors contribute to the overall language learning experience?

3. Theoretical Framework

This study investigates the reasons behind the avoidance of grammar by senior secondary L2 English learners utilizing key sociological concepts from Bourdieu as a theoretical framework. Bourdieu's conceptual tools such as habitus, cultural capital, symbolic power, and reflexivity provide valuable insights for comprehending the contextual influences and social dynamics that contribute to learner avoidance behaviors.

3.1 Habitus

Central to Bourdieu's theory is the concept of habitus, referring to the embodied systems of dispositions and tendencies that individuals acquire based on lived experiences in various social environments (Bourdieu, 1990a). Habitus consists of durable, ingrained habits, perceptions, appreciations and actions that people adopt through the internalization of external social structures over time. Importantly, habitus operates at a preconscious level as a kind of "feel for the game" that orients practices semi-automatically, without deliberate calculation or reflection. In Bourdieu's words, habitus "is necessity internalized and converted into a disposition that generates meaningful practices and meaning-giving perceptions" (Bourdieu, 2014:139). Habitus thus guides judgments and behaviors in a way that feels natural rather than strategically chosen.

In terms of L2 grammar avoidance, habitus encompasses the cultural norms, previous schooling experiences, family backgrounds, and prior language learning histories that learners internalize through childhood and adolescence. These cumulative experiences shape taken-for-granted dispositions regarding language learning and grammar competence, engendering tendencies toward avoidance or persistence that are enacted without conscious deliberation. As Bourdieu (1977) notes, the habitus acquired in the family underlies the structuring of school experiences, [so that] the habitus transformed by schooling, itself diversified, in turn underlies the structuring of all subsequent experiences. From a habitus perspective, the durable character of grammar avoidance suggests it crystallizes gradually through accumulated experiences over time, eventually becoming an unconscious "feel for the game" that is challenging to undo.

3.2 Cultural Capital

Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital also provides insight into processes of grammar avoidance. Cultural capital refers to competencies, skills, styles, knowledges and other symbolic resources that confer social advantage and status on an individual (Bourdieu, 1986). Certain valued forms of cultural capital such as aesthetic preferences, educational credentials or technical knowledge function as a currency yielding power and opportunity unequally to those who possess them. Essentially, dominant institutions like

schools tend to value and reward possession of cultural capital aligned to elite classes while devaluing capital held by marginalized groups. Thus, cultural capital constitutes a mechanism of reproduction that perpetuates social inequities.

In the context of language learning, grammatical competence and native-speaker proficiency constitute prized forms of cultural capital in academic contexts. L2 learners who lack this capital may feel self-consciousness or inadequacy over their perceived grammar deficits. To cope, students may be inclined to avoid complex constructions to hide their lack of mastery and evade the symbolic “tax” imposed for lacking the dominant capital. According to Bourdieu, a whole dimension of practice is thereby dismissed or marginalized as insignificant or irrelevant by virtue of being perceived through categories that are the product of the incorporation of the necessities and facilities characteristic of another condition” (Bourdieu, 1990a). This suggests that grammar avoidance allows students to navigate language learning according to their available capital though at the expense of acquiring new capital.

3.3 Symbolic Power

Bourdieu’s notion of symbolic power further enriches understanding of grammar avoidance. Symbolic power refers to the ability of dominant groups to impose meanings, impose classifications, and dictate norms that are seen as standard, expected, or superior (Bourdieu, 1991). This power functions symbolically by shaping perceptions, rather than through overt physical force. Symbolic power captures how marginalized groups are often complicit in their own domination by internalizing external standards and judgments about what counts as proper, respectable or “right.” Dominant meanings exert a form of symbolic power when they are misrecognized as legitimate rather than arbitrary social constructs.

In language classrooms, native speaker norms and “standard” grammar rules exert symbolic power by positioning avoidance as an unacceptable deviance. L2 learners experience symbolic violence when they internalize this delegitimization and see their own avoidance practices as deficiencies. This social conditioning occurs below the level of consciousness, discouraging avoidance through implicit social control rather than direct coercion or motivational change.

3.4 Reflexivity

Bourdieu’s concept of reflexivity, or conscious critical analysis of experiences also holds relevance (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). While habitus operates tacitly, reflexivity enables individuals to recognize the social forces imparting meaning to their practices and potentially resist internalized domination.

For L2 learners, consciously examining motivations for grammar avoidance through research interviews represents a kind of reflexive analysis of habitus and capital. By externalizing and objectifying their avoidance behaviors, learners can perceive the social conditions and power dynamics that engender avoidance, opening space for transformative action.

In summary, Bourdieu’s sociological concepts illuminate the contextual forces, cultural experiences and implicit power relations that become crystallized into taken-for-granted dispositions toward grammar competence and avoidance. This study applies

these theoretical tools to critically analyze how broader social processes shape individual motivations, bringing to light contexts of domination that interventions must address to support change. Reflexive elucidation of the conditions underlying habituated practices offers paths to overcome symbolic violence through awareness.

4. Methodology

This study employs a qualitative approach to explore the complex motivations and cognitive factors behind grammar avoidance among senior high L2 English learners. The qualitative approach enabled rich descriptions of learners' experiences and perspectives to emerge inductively (Creswell & Poth, 2016). The target population for this study was 20 suburban public high school students learning English and all were senior high L2 English learners. The selection criteria were: (a) aged 12-18 years old, (b) enrolled in grades 10-12, (c) intermediate proficiency in English according to their classroom teacher, and (d) avoidant behavior observed by the teacher regarding complex English grammar structures. The sample size of 20 allowed for reasonable saturation given the interview methodology (Guest et al., 2006). Participants were 57% female and 43% male, with L1 backgrounds including Yoruba, Hausa, and Igbo. Data was collected through qualitative semi-structured interviews lasting 30-45 minutes each. The interviews aimed to elicit participants' motivations for avoiding grammar and the cognitive factors they perceived as influencing their avoidance behaviors. Questions include the following:

1. Can you describe a situation recently where you avoided using a complex grammar structure in English? What was the grammar concept?
2. What motivated you to avoid using that grammar structure? How were you feeling when you decided to avoid it?
3. What other options did you consider instead of avoiding the grammar? Why did you ultimately choose to avoid?
4. Walk me through your thought process when you realized the grammar was complex. How did you decide avoidance was the best approach?
5. Do you think avoiding grammar helps or harms your English learning? Why? When do you think you will feel ready to tackle complex grammar you currently avoid?

The first question aims to identify a specific situation where complex grammar was avoided by the students, including the grammar concept involved. The second question seeks to understand the motivation and emotions behind avoiding that grammar structure. The third question explores other options the learners considered instead of avoidance, and why ultimately avoidance was chosen. The fourth question investigates the thought process when recognizing the grammar complexity, and how the decision to avoid was reached. The fifth question evaluates the perceived impact of grammar avoidance on English learning, reasons for this perspective, and when the learner expects to be ready to tackle currently avoided complex grammar. In summary, the research questions aim to elucidate the metacognition, motivation, decision-making process, and affective factors involved when a learner chooses to avoid difficult grammar structures. The questions will provide insight into the self-regulatory skills and psychological experiences of learners during grammar learning. Answering these questions will help

illustrate the thought patterns and affects learner's exhibit when encountering challenging language concepts.

Follow-up probes elicited deeper explanations when needed. Interviews were conducted individually in the school library to provide privacy and confidentiality. The individual sessions were audio recorded and transcribed for analysis. Transcripts were analyzed using thematic analysis techniques (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Maguire & Delahunt, 2017). The researchers first familiarized themselves with the data through close reading. Next, initial semantic-level coding was performed to identify motifs related to avoidance motivations and cognition. Codes were collated into candidate themes focused on motivational and cognitive factors. Themes were thereafter reviewed for coherence and refined to produce a final thematic structure. Analysis aimed to balance prior concepts from existing literature with openness to new themes emerging from the data.

Several procedures promoted analytic rigor and trustworthiness of this study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The researchers wrote memos during data collection and analysis to examine their own biases and assumptions. Member checking was applied by sending two participants initial themes for review and feedback. A peer debriefer skilled in qualitative research reviewed the coding process. Finally, themes were grounded in verbatim quotes from multiple participants, maintaining a participant-centered analytic lens. The school district ethics review boards approved all study procedures. Student consents were obtained prior to their participation. Interviews were scheduled flexibly to minimize impact on academic activities. Participants were informed they could end the interview or withdraw from the study at any time without any consequences. Audio recordings, transcripts, and signed forms were securely stored to protect confidentiality.

This qualitative study gathered insights into the motivations for and cognitive influences on grammar avoidance among senior high L2 English learners. The inductive thematic analysis of the interview data identified key themes related to affective, cognitive, and pedagogical factors. Rigor and ethical practices were maintained throughout data collection and analysis. The findings offer implications for supporting learners in moving past avoidance and acquiring complex grammatical competence.

6. Analysis and findings

This section presents the thematic analysis of interview responses from 12 English language learners regarding their motivation for avoiding complex grammar structures. By applying Bourdieu's sociological theoretical concepts of habitus, cultural capital, and linguistic field, this analysis illuminates the subtle social logic underlying these linguistic practices. Bourdieu views language as inextricable from culture and power relations. His "sociologically grounded linguistics" provides indispensable perspective for contextualizing language use within shifting social environments and subjective experiences (Uekusa, 2020). The following fundamental themes emerged from the inductive thematic analysis of the interview data of this study: (i) Strategic Simplification: Navigating Linguistic Capital and Habitus for Effective Communication, (ii) Strategic Avoidance: Navigating Complex Sociolinguistic Forces to Optimize Communication, (iii) Managing Perceived Communication Risk, and (iv) Strategic Avoidance as Temporary Adaptation: Ambivalent Linguistic Simplification.

Theme 1: Strategic Simplification: Navigating Linguistic Capital and Habitus for Effective Communication

This interview transcript provides illuminating examples of 12 participants opting to avoid complex grammatical structures in favor of simpler alternatives. The application of Bourdieu's sociolinguistic concepts of habitus, cultural capital, and field reveals the subtle social logic shaping these linguistic choices within diverse contexts. Bourdieu's notion of habitus has strong explanatory value here, referring to embodied dispositions molded by one's sociocultural experiences (Bourdieu, 1991). This generates durable matrices of perception and action that shape social navigation, often subconsciously. For many participants, their habitus appears to engender apprehension around complex grammar forms. As Participant SST1 states, "I sidestepped using the subjunctive mood...and opted for a simpler structure instead." Similarly, SST2 describes "dodging" the passive voice after it "felt intricate." The surface motivations vary, however an ingrained habitus disposition manifests across cases, generating unease with linguistic complexities deemed risky or convoluted. This tacitly held habitus leads many speakers like SST3 to avoid "using the present perfect tense...in a written assignment" and SST4 to refrain from employing conditionals during a debate "to avoid potential confusion." Their strategic avoidance of unfamiliar structures adheres to a habitus that prizes clarity and precision acquired through sociocultural exposure.

However, avoidance also carries implications regarding cultural capital defined by Bourdieu (1986) as competence yielding social advantage. Sophisticated grammar mastery constitutes valuable linguistic capital and avoidance represents a trade-off, as SST5 acknowledges opting for "simpler alternatives" to complex verbs during an "informal conversation" and SST8 notes eschewing modal verbs for "direct statements" in a "group discussion" (Bourdieu, 1991). While adherence to habitus norms has communicative benefits, avoidance in this case, limits display of grammatical repertoire. Indeed, studies show that avoidance of prestigious vocabulary can shape perceived competence (Henry & Davydenko, 2020). Hence, avoidance indicates a nuanced tension between affirming inculcated dispositions and accumulating valued capital.

Moreover, Bourdieu's concept of field illuminates contextual expectations' role in shaping language practices. Fields denote social spaces governed by specific norms and relationships (Bourdieu, 2018). Several participants describe simplifying grammar based on perceived audience needs. SST6 avoided "complex relative clauses" in a particular presentation they had to convey ideas "concisely", while SST11 opted for "simpler sentences" to avoid "confusing my team members" during a group assignment, attuning language to field priorities like clarity and cooperation. Similarly, SST9 chose "simpler constructions" in an essay "to enhance readability", discerning comprehension as the implicit academic writing goal, consistent with research on context-specific language use (Nawang et al., 2022). However strategic self-presentation is possible in certain fields, as SST10 overrode habitual preferences for simplicity "to convey agency" in a job interview during a school break by deliberately wielding passive voice to construct a capable persona, recognizing the contextual value of particular capital. Consequently, the participants display complex negotiation of varied field positions and objectives through linguistic recalibration.

In summary, the participants exhibit keen sociolinguistic attunement, modulating both tacit habitus tendencies and capital deployment based on implicit field norms and relationships. Their frequent avoidance of unfamiliar grammar reveals deep cultural conditioning that privileges clarity and concision, despite hidden social trade-offs. However, the occasional override of avoidance in high-stakes professional fields points to a capacity for tactical manipulation of language to construct advantageous personas, illuminating the context-dependent nature of linguistic capital.

Theme 2: Strategic Avoidance: Navigating Complex Sociolinguistic Forces to Optimize Communication

For several participants, their habitus galvanizes feelings of anxiety, uncertainty, or fear around complex structures, motivating deliberate avoidance. As Participant SST1 states, “I avoided it because I was anxious about making a mistake.” Similarly, SST2 describes avoidance stemming from a “fear of being misunderstood.” Across multiple participants’ responses, the surface motivation may vary from nervousness about errors to desires for clarity or assertiveness, but at a deeper level, the underlying habitus disposition generates a sense of risk or discomfort with linguistic forms perceived as convoluted or ambiguous. This shared habitus leaning precipitates avoidance to preserve accuracy and directness of expression, qualities valued within their particular sociocultural milieu.

In Bourdieusian terms, language constitutes a form of cultural capital, in that fluency in dominant linguistic codes grants access to educational and social opportunity (Vu & Do, 2021). Thus, sophisticated grammar represents valuable cultural and educational capital. Several participants acknowledge that while avoidance of complex structures adheres to habitus norms of clarity, it also limits their ability to fully demonstrate breadth of linguistic repertoire. As SST5 states, “I felt at ease using simpler vocabulary,” implicitly recognizing a broader store of vocabulary at their disposal despite opting for simplicity in this instance. Likewise, SST8 notes considering “stronger adjectives” before ultimately favoring direct phrasing to communicate “decisively.” This reveals avoidance as a strategic swap, forgoing opportunities to display linguistic capital in order to uphold habitus values of precision and accessibility. As Bourdieu (1991) notes, every utterance transmits social information about the speaker beyond just content; thus, sidestepping complex structures downplays one’s educational background and status. Indeed, studies show that avoidance of prestigious vocabulary can attenuate perceptions of intelligence or competence (Bourdieu et al., 1996). Hence, the participants’ avoidance of unfamiliar grammar adheres to habitus norms of clarity while also subtly shaping their projected identities. Their strategic negotiation reveals the inextricable links between grammar, cultural capital, and social perceptions.

Bourdieu’s conceptualization of field is also salient, as the participants calibrate their language practices across different contextual parameters. In this sense, field refers to social arenas structured around particular norms, relationships, and purposes (Bourdieu, 2018). Many participants note that simplifying language for presentations and group work in academic field, acceding to audience comprehension as the primary objective in such settings. SST6 explains avoiding convoluted structures to avoid “losing the audience’s attention,” while SST11 cites “fear of confusing my team members.” This

adherence to contextual norms aligns with research showing how students adjusted writing to meet perceived expectations across disciplines (Lenz, 2018; Lim & Richardson, 2021). Similarly, participants in this study opt for reader-focused clarity and concision in academic assignments rather than showcasing ornamental grammar, intuiting comprehension as the goal. However, Bourdieu notes the potential for strategic self-presentation within certain fields. Indeed, SST10 acknowledges overriding habitual preferences for simplicity during a job interview, deliberately “showcase[ing] my skills confidently” by utilizing complex grammar to construct a capable persona, illuminating the capacity to recalibrate language for context. Thus, the transcript reveals the participants’ agile navigation of different sociolinguistic fields, selectively adhering to or deviating from habitus dispositions based on implicit field norms and objectives.

Synthesizing across the responses of student participants, avoidance of unfamiliar linguistic structures appears frequently motivated by embodied habitus tendencies valuing precision and accessibility, even if this entails hidden swap regarding projected social perceptions and identity. Moreover, the participants display a sophisticated attunement to diverse contextual field norms, strategically modulating their language practices to maximize communicative fluency. This flexible recalibration of habitus and capital across shifting sociolinguistic fields, guided by largely tacit social logic, points to complex communicative skills despite avoidance of complexity as such.

In summary, Bourdieu’s theoretical framework illuminates the dynamic interplay between social context, cultural dispositions, and language. The instances presented above reveal speakers with rich sociolinguistic competence navigating the subtleties of diverse speech contexts. Their recurrent avoidance of unfamiliar grammar adheres to an implicit “sense of the game” - Bourdieu’s metaphor for intuiting context-appropriate communication (Bourdieu, 1990b). While habitus cultivated in certain sociocultural environments engenders avoidance of linguistic complexity, this precautions guards against deviations from vital group norms of clarity and precision. Moreover, the participants demonstrate acute attunement to field positions and priorities, calibrating usage strategically. In this sense, recurrent avoidance does not necessarily indicate objective deficiency, but rather a socially conditioned set of perceptual dispositions and strategic practices aimed at optimizing communicative fluency within each context. Viewed through a Bourdieusian lens, the motivation behind avoidance is revealed to be much more than arbitrary personal preference, but rather a complex social calculus.

Thus, Bourdieu’s constructs of habitus, capital linguistic and fields shed critical light on the logic underlying participants’ avoidance of grammar complexity. His sociology of language helps unpack how cultural conditioning and contextual norms shape seemingly individual linguistic choices. Supplemental scholarship provides additional perspectives on the social signaling power of grammar and vocabulary, and how communicators dynamically respond to situated expectations. However, Bourdieu’s main concepts elucidate the rich intersection between biography, culture, context and communication. The cases presented above reveal language as inextricable from identity and power - an insight essential for navigating any social universe.

Theme 3: Managing Perceived Communication Risk

Bourdieu's concept of habitus helps explicate the participants' ingrained dispositions underpinning avoidance. As SST1 states when encountering complexity, "I thought about potential confusion" and prioritized "maintain[ing] the flow." Similarly, SST2 describes complexity triggering "self-doubt," leading to avoidance "to prevent confusion." This reveals a shared habitus that equates complex grammar with potential risks to accuracy and comprehension. The revelation of participants SST1 and SST2 suggest the participants' habitus instinctively associates unfamiliar grammar with uncertainty and miscommunication. SST4 notes complexity "made me anxious about audience comprehension," while SST7 describes it "trigger[ing] uncertainty." Their habitus generates unease around complex forms, motivating avoidance. As Bourdieu argues, habitus operates below conscious awareness to shape practices, guided by a tacit "feel for the game" in navigating social fields (Bourdieu, 1990a:66).

However, avoidance carries tradeoffs regarding cultural capital or competence yielding social advantage (Bourdieu, 1986). Several participants acknowledge bypassing opportunities to demonstrate linguistic range by avoiding intricacies. SST3 states that when realizing complexity, "I considered seeking assistance" but time constraints led them to avoid it to "meet the deadline." Similarly, SST6, SST9, and SST12 describe weighing options for integrating complex grammar before ultimately avoiding it to prioritize "concise delivery." While adherence to habitus norms of clarity has communicative value, avoidance also limits displays of linguistic capital (Bourdieu, 1991). Indeed, existing literature shows the use of sophisticated vocabulary and structures enhances perceived intellect (Khair & Misnawati, 2022). Hence, the above instances reveal nuanced negotiation of inculcated dispositions against accumulating valued linguistic capital.

In addition, Bourdieu's notion of fields illuminates contextual norms shaping avoidance. As SST5 states, in response to complexity they thought about "potential misinterpretations" but "prioritized effective communication over showcasing grammatical intricacies," recognizing audience comprehension as paramount. Similarly, SST8 avoided complex forms to privilege "direct" exchange based on the field's norms. Bourdieu (1984) argues that communication dynamics differ across fields based on structural positions and goals. The participants display strategic avoidance attuned to perceived field constraints, sacrificing opportunities for showcasing linguistic range in favor of adhering to situated expectations for clarity. Their revelations bring into fore the context-dependent activation of habitus tendencies.

In summary, Bourdieu's key theoretical constructs elucidate the understated motivations behind participants' avoidance of linguistic complexity across diverse situations. While faced with unfamiliar grammar, their habitus generates unease and uncertainty, prioritizing comprehensibility over stylistic sophistication, even when this entails hidden costs to demonstrating cultural capital. Likewise, their choices reflect intentional adjustment to perceived field demands, avoiding undue complexity in favor of straightforwardness and accuracy. While avoidance limits display of range, it adheres to cultural conditioning and context-specific communication norms.

Thus, Bourdieusian theory provides a compelling framework for analyzing the strategic motivations behind avoidance of complex grammar. The interview excerpts

reveal participants drawing upon embodied habitus tendencies, making context-dependent appraisals of situational fields, and regulating displays of linguistic capital accordingly. By balancing competing factors, the choice to avoid certain elements enables the enhancement of clarity and brevity, aligning with cultural norms and specific expectations, rather than implying inherent shortcomings. By strategically applying Bourdieu theoretical principles, these superficial language choices reveal underlying social dynamics.

Theme 4: Strategic Avoidance as Temporary Adaptation: Ambivalent Linguistic Simplification

While acknowledging potential drawbacks, the participants frame avoidance as a temporary adaptive strategy, planning to revisit intricate forms once confidence improves. Applying Bourdieu’s sociolinguistic concepts elucidates the subtle motivations behind their ambivalent linguistic choices. As SST1 states, avoidance “eas[ed] social discomfort” amidst complexity. In the same vein, SST2 describes avoidance providing “short-term relief” from intricate structures. The habitus of these two students leans towards simplified language for social ease, reflecting lasting matrices of perception and action derived from their sociocultural position.

However, the participants also recognize avoidance as limiting displays of cultural capital, or competence carrying social advantage (Bourdieu, 1986). SST3 notes that avoidance “may hinder learning as it limits practice,” while SST5 states that it “maintains fluency but limits growth.” Although avoiding complexity adheres to accessibility-oriented habitus norms, it restricts opportunities to accumulate valued linguistic capital. Undeniably, research indicates that mastering grammar enhances the perception of intellectual capability (Fitria, 2023). Thus, the participants display ambivalence, torn between habitus comfort and accumulating capital.

Likewise, Bourdieu’s concept of linguistic markets illuminates the context-contingent worth of different capitals (Pulignano et al., 2023). In some fields, sophisticated grammar carries valuable capital, while in others, forthright communication accrues higher value. The participants frame avoidance as a temporary strategy given their current fields and capital levels, planning to reintegrate complex forms once skills improve. As participant SST4 explains, avoidance aids “in high-pressure situations” but they plan to revisit complexity post-growth. SST8 simplifies “to ensure clear expression” for now but intends to later incorporate refined modal verbs. Their future plans reveal perceptions of field-specific capital values.

In summary, the ambivalence shown reveals a tactical balancing act between sticking to accustomed accessible behaviors and gaining potentially useful skills and knowledge, adapted to match the perceived requirements of the situation. Avoidance temporarily eases the discomfort that comes from unfamiliar complexity in line with internalized standards. Yet participants recognize the dangers to acquiring valued abilities and language-enabled social progress. So, they intend to strategically integrate once the context is suitable. Thus, Bourdieusian frameworks enrich analysis of the multifaceted motivations behind ambivalent avoidance. The interview excerpts reveal individuals leveraging ingrained habitus tendencies, assessing contexts of various fields,

and strategically adjusting displays of capital as skills progress and environments change.

7. Discussion of Findings

The thematic analysis of interview responses from 12 English language learners offers a rich understanding of the intricate interplay between sociological constructs and language choices. Through the application of Bourdieu's theoretical lens, this study unveils the nuanced social logic that underlies the senior high school students' motivation for avoiding complex grammar structures. The first theme illustrates how participants navigate linguistic capital and habitus for effective communication. The participants strategically simplify their language to align with habitus norms that prioritize clarity and precision. This avoidance, however, comes with trade-offs, limiting the display of their grammatical repertoire and, consequently, their cultural capital. The application of Bourdieu's concept of field further highlights students' keen sociolinguistic attunement, as they strategically adjust their language based on perceived audience needs and contextual expectations.

In the second theme, while avoidance aligns with habitus norms of clarity and precision, it restricts the students' ability to fully demonstrate their linguistic range and cultural capital. The findings reveal a delicate negotiation between habitus dispositions and the accumulation of valued linguistic capital. The participants' strategic avoidance is not merely a personal preference, but a complex social calculus influenced by habitus and contextual field norms. The third theme alike further explores the role of habitus in shaping students' avoidance of linguistic complexity. The students' habitus instinctively associates unfamiliar grammar with potential risks to accuracy and comprehension. While adherence to habitus norms of clarity has communicative value, it also limits the display of linguistic capital. The students intentionally adjust their language to perceived field demands, strategically avoiding complexity to align with context-specific communication norms.

In the fourth theme, therefore, the participants frame avoidance as a temporary adaptive strategy, planning to revisit intricate forms once confidence improves. Bourdieu's concepts of habitus and cultural capital elucidate the ambivalence displayed by students. The habitus of these students leans towards simplified language for social ease, reflecting lasting matrices of perception and action derived from their sociocultural position. However, they recognize avoidance as limiting displays of cultural capital and plan to reintegrate complex forms once their skills improve. This ambivalence reveals a tactical balancing act between habitus comfort and the potential benefits of accumulating linguistic capital.

The discussion of these findings reveals the depth and complexity of language choices among English second language learners through a Bourdieusian lens. The participants demonstrate a sophisticated understanding of the sociolinguistic landscape, strategically adjusting their language use to navigate habitus norms and contextual field expectations. The study highlights the intricate dance between habitus, cultural capital, and linguistic field, emphasizing that language is inextricably linked to identity and power dynamics.

Bourdieu's theoretical constructs help unpack the motivations behind participants' avoidance of linguistic complexity, showcasing how cultural conditioning and contextual norms shape seemingly individual linguistic choices. The participants' recurrent avoidance of unfamiliar grammar is not a sign of objective deficiency but a reflection of their socially conditioned perceptual dispositions and strategic practices aimed at optimizing communicative fluency within each context. The study contributes to the broader understanding of language as a dynamic social phenomenon, challenging simplistic views of language choices as purely individual preferences.

Moreover, the participants' ability to strategically navigate different sociolinguistic fields highlights the context-dependent nature of linguistic capital. The study adds nuance to the understanding of avoidance, emphasizing that it is not a static behavior, but a dynamic process influenced by habitus, cultural capital, and the specific demands of different linguistic markets. Participants' intentional adjustments to field-specific norms reveal a nuanced negotiation of inculcated dispositions against the backdrop of accumulating valued linguistic capital.

The findings of this study also resonate with broader scholarship on the social signaling power of grammar and vocabulary. By strategically avoiding complex structures, participants shape their projected identities and social perceptions, adhering to habitus norms while sacrificing opportunities to showcase linguistic capital. The participants' ambivalence towards avoidance further underscores the complex interplay between habitus comfort and the potential benefits of linguistic development, emphasizing the need for a nuanced understanding of language learning trajectories.

In conclusion, this study provides an in-depth investigation into the motivations of English second language learners when avoiding intricate grammar structures, employing Bourdieu's sociological theoretical framework. The findings underscore the intricate relationship between habitus, cultural capital, and linguistic field, illustrating how participants adeptly maneuver through the sociolinguistic environment. The subtle balancing act between habitus dispositions and the acquisition of linguistic capital enriches our comprehension of language preferences. This study contributes significant perspectives to the larger conversation on language, identity, and power, underscoring the importance of adopting a comprehensive and sociologically informed approach to language learning and communication.

7.1 Implications for Teaching and Learning

The insights garnered from this study have far-reaching implications for educators working with English second language learners. Recognizing the complex interplay between habitus, cultural capital, and linguistic field, instructors can tailor their teaching approaches to create an environment that not only accommodates the diverse sociolinguistic backgrounds of students but also encourages the development of linguistic capital.

Educators should prioritize cultivating sociolinguistic awareness among English language learners by introducing concepts like habitus, cultural capital, and linguistic field. This empowers students to navigate the sociolinguistic landscape with a deeper understanding, making more informed language choices. In the same vein, instead of discouraging avoidance of linguistic complexity outright, educators should guide students

to understand the strategic nature of language choices. Emphasizing the importance of habitus and field-specific norms helps learners make conscious decisions about when to simplify language for clarity and when to showcase intricate grammatical structures.

Moving beyond isolated grammatical exercises, educators should focus on context-dependent language acquisition. Exposing students to diverse linguistic contexts and helping them understand the varying demands of different fields equips learners with the skills to adapt their language use dynamically. Also, fostering a positive perception of linguistic development is crucial. By framing language acquisition as a dynamic process involving negotiation between habitus comfort and the benefits of linguistic capital, educators can encourage learners to view linguistic challenges as opportunities for growth.

Recommendations

In terms of recommendations, educators should integrate sociolinguistic concepts, such as Bourdieu's theoretical framework, into language curricula. This will provide students with a theoretical foundation to understand the socio-cultural dimensions of language. In addition, utilizing a diverse range of learning materials exposes students to different linguistic contexts and communication styles, broadening their understanding of linguistic diversity and enhancing their ability to navigate various sociolinguistic fields.

Moreover, instructors are advised to create a supportive learning environment that encourages experimentation with language as it fosters a positive attitude towards linguistic development. In the same vein, providing opportunities for peer interaction allows students to practice language in authentic social settings, refining sociolinguistic skills and gaining confidence in adapting language use to different contexts.

Professional development opportunities for educators to enhance their understanding of sociolinguistics enable better support for students' language learning journeys should also be put in place. In conclusion, by incorporating these recommendations into teaching practices, education stakeholders contribute to a more nuanced and sociologically informed approach to language learning, fostering not only linguistic proficiency but also a deeper understanding of the socio-cultural dimensions of language.

Conclusion

This study delved into the complex dynamics shaping language choices among English second language learners through the lens of Bourdieu's sociological framework. The findings reveal an intricate interplay between habitus, cultural capital, and linguistic field, showcasing the participants' adept maneuvering through the sociolinguistic environment. The study underscores the importance of recognizing the strategic nature of language use and cultivating sociolinguistic awareness among learners. In essence, this study contributes valuable perspectives to the broader conversation on language, identity, and power, emphasizing the significance of a sociologically informed approach to language learning and communication. It calls for a thorough understanding of language choices, challenging simplistic views and encouraging a holistic perspective that embraces the intricacies inherent in the sociolinguistic landscape.

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