

Language Learnability of the Argument Structures of English Transitivity Constructions by EFL Learners

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Abstract: *Acquisition of verbs and their syntactic properties can act as the core of any sentence across languages. EFL learners encounter learnability problems in the acquisition of transitivity structures manifested by different verbs. The present study intended to explore the fundamental problems Persian EFL learners may face while trying to acquire the transitivity constructions along with the related argument and predicate relationships. The role of cross-linguistic influence and proficiency level were among the other aims of the current study. To this end, 99 Persian EFL learners and eight English native speakers were given a completion test using appropriate internal nominal arguments if needed. The results showed that in the verbs which were optionally transitive in both English and Persian (OEP), the participants had the highest performance in producing transitive structures. Additionally, the role of L1 (Persian) was detected in the acquisition of those verbs which were optionally transitive verbs in English but monotransitive in Persian (OEMP) where the majority of EFL participants preferred to use transitive structures.*

KEYWORDS: ACQUISITION, TRANSITIVITY CONSTRUCTIONS, MONOTRANSITIVE, INTRANSITIVE, PERSIAN.

1. Introduction

The acquisition of English argument structures has been subject to debate for a long time. A number of studies have been conducted on describing the acquisition of English argument structures in general and transitivity constructions in particular (Goldberg, 1992; Marcotte, 2005;

Montrul, 2000). Some have compared and contrasted these constructions across languages and some have investigated their acquisition by the native and non-native speakers of different languages (Krämer&Wunderlich, 1999; Montrul, 1999; Sadler & Camilleri, 2013;VanVoorst, 1996).

The issue of the acquisition of verbal complements including transitive complements can be among the learnability problems faced by L2 learners. The verbs related to each category of transitivity constructions may not have similar distributional properties cross-linguistically.

The categories of intransitive, monotransitive, and optionally transitive verbs are not the same in English and Persian. Because of the gap between Persian and English transitivity constructions, the focus of this study was to find out how Persian EFL learners perceive and produce English transitivity constructions. For example, '*kni*' is an optionally transitive verb in English which can have just one argument as pre-verbal subject; furthermore, it can take two arguments one as pre-verbal subject and the other as post-verbal object. However, its counterpart in Persian which is '*dokhtan*' is a monotransitive verb. As another example, '*pour*' is a monotransitive verb in English allowing just two arguments; one as pre-verbal subject and the other as post-verbal object. However, its counterpart in Persian '*rikhtan*' is an optionally transitive verb which can have just one argument as pre-verbal subject; moreover, it can take two arguments, one as pre-verbal subject and the other as post-verbal object. For more clarification, although '*burst*' in English is an optionally transitive verb, i.e. it can take an object or not, its counterpart in Persian '*tarakidan*' is an intransitive verb.

It seems that different kinds of transitivity constructions, including monotransitive, optionally transitive, and intransitive verbs have not adequately been addressed in the educational system. Furthermore, Persian EFL learners are somehow unaware of the variety of transitivity constructions; they only pay attention to one or some specific aspects of such constructions, resulting in a problematic issue throughout their L2 acquisition process.

Reviewing the previous studies on argument structures, the transitivity constructions seem to be one of the most important issues to focus on. To the best knowledge of the researchers, such a study on transitivity constructions has not been conducted across English and Persian. Therefore, the current study particularly focuses on the number of arguments in transitivity constructions so

as to investigate how Persian EFL learners acquire transitivity constructions across different proficiency levels.

2. Review of the Literature

For second language learners of English, the acquisition of English argument structures is a challenging task. The reason seems to stem from the diversity of these structures which is itself rooted in the behavior of their predicates. The problem is more outstanding when there are big differences between L1 and L2 in the domain of argument structures the two languages apply.

Atay (2010) made an attempt on causative verbs so as to find out the effects of instruction on Turkish EFL learners' acquisition of causative /inchoative structures. In this study, 101 Turkish EFL learners who were freshmen in their English learning were selected as the participants in order to find if there was any difference between the students who received contrastive form-focused instruction and those who received no instruction in terms of their knowledge on transitivity alternations in English. The final results of the study showed that there was a significant difference between the students who received direct instruction and those who did not receive any instruction on causative/inchoative alternations. Therefore, the study indicated that more direct instruction on grammatical features of English argument structures is required.

Luk (2012) carried out a cross-linguistic study in which the focus was on causality for transitive and intransitive constructions between English and Japanese. Although intransitive verbs are defined based on just one argument which is the agent of the sentence in some languages like English, other languages such as Japanese define it with two arguments, including agent and patient. Such a difference in causality was the main aim of the present study. For clarifying the objectives, two experiments were conducted. In the first experiment, pairs of sentences were distributed among 20 native English speakers and 20 native Japanese speakers to rate how logical those structures were based on their knowledge. In the second experiment, 42 native English speakers and 46 native Japanese speakers were asked to read the equivalent sentence pairs and answer to causality of each of them one by one. The time of each answer was calculated with E-prime software. The findings showed that the rate of agent-implying intransitive verbs was much higher than that of non-agent-implying intransitive verbs.

Furthermore, the taken time for non-agent-implying verb pairs was faster than that of agent-implying verb pairs.

Montrul (2000) carried out a study on transitivity alternations in L2 acquisition; this study was a cross-linguistic one in which the effect of L1 and universal principles were detected on three languages, including Turkish, Spanish, and English. The study was organized so as to explore the influence of universal grammar (UG) and L1 on the acquisition of L2 transitivity alternations (causative/inchoative). The results showed that although L1 and UG had an influence on L2 acquisition, the amount of effect of each of them was not the same on L2 acquisition.

Having reviewed several studies carried out on transitivity constructions and the related issues, it is revealed that most of them have focused on one aspect of the topic neglecting the other properties which were closely related to it. This study, in contrast, concentrated on different structures closely related to the concept of transitivity in order to find the interaction among these issues in terms of the learnability problems.

Given the above, the present study attempted to explore the acquisition of transitivity constructions by Persian EFL learners. Therefore, it addressed the following research questions:

1. Can Persian EFL learners acquire the properties of English transitivity constructions?
2. Does L1 transfer influence the acquisition of English transitivity constructions?
3. Does L1 intransitive verbs hinder the acquisition of English optionally transitive verbs?
4. What kind of transitivity constructions are particularly problematic for Persian EFL learners?
5. What is the role of proficiency level on the acquisition of English transitivity constructions?

3. Methodology

3.1 Participants

For the present study, 107 participants divided into two groups took part. Ninety-nine students, majoring in English Language and Literature at Yazd University were randomly selected based on convenient random sampling method. Sixty-six students were undergraduate students who were studying English language and literature, and 33 were postgraduate students who were studying Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL). Based on the scores in the Oxford

Quick Placement Test (Allan, 1992), the learners were divided into three levels of proficiency (33 learners per group): elementary, intermediate, and advanced. Furthermore, 8 native English speakers within the age range of 25 to 35 from Ohio State of America acted as the native control group.

3.2 Instruments

A standard Oxford Quick Placement Test (Allan, 1992) was utilized in this study. The test consists of three integrated parts with 60 multiple choice items which measure the learners' knowledge of grammar and vocabulary as well as reading comprehension.

In order to find out how Persian EFL learners acquire transitivity constructions, including a) monotransitive b) intransitive and c) optionally transitive verbs, a completion task comprising 24 items were prepared and administered. This test covered eight items for those verbs which were optionally transitive in English but intransitive in Persian (OEIP) (e.g. *burst*), five items for those verbs which were optionally monotransitive in English but transitive in Persian (OEMP) (e.g. *knit*), three items for those verbs which were monotransitive in English but optionally transitive in Persian (MEOP) (e.g. *add*), and eight items for those verbs which were optionally transitive in both English and Persian (OEP) (e.g. *melt*). (See Appendix I for the contents of the Completion task)

3.3 Procedure

The following steps were taken to collect the necessary data: First, the Oxford Quick Placement Test was given to 130 BA and MA students of Yazd University after which 99 participants were selected and classified into three levels of proficiency, including elementary, intermediate and advanced groups.

Next, the Completion Task was administered to measure the participants' production of the argument structure of transitivity constructions. In this test, the participants had to supply the answer required by completing the given sentences. Clear instructions were given in the test paper. The potential problem in this regard was that some participants used some English collocations or expressions which were not related to the main goal of the current study, thereby making the process of data analysis difficult.

4. Data Analysis

In the Completion task, the participants were asked to complete 24 incomplete sentences. Each sentence covered a verb which was in one of the categories including the verbs which were optionally transitive in English but intransitive in Persian (OEIP), the verbs which were optionally transitive in English but monotransitive in Persian (OEMP), the verbs which were Monotransitive in English but Optionally transitive in Persian (MEOP), and finally the verbs which were optionally transitive in both English and Persian (OEP). In this task, there were different tokens per category, that is 8 verbs which were optionally transitive in English but intransitive in Persian, 5 verbs which were optionally transitive in English but transitive in Persian, 3 verbs which were Monotransitive in English but Optionally transitive in Persian, and 4 verbs which were optionally transitive in both English and Persian were tested.

In the process of data analysis, the sentences were initially analyzed so as to see whether they were correct or not; then for OEIP, OEMP, and OEP four codes were defined: 0 for incorrect use, 1 for correct transitive use, 2 for correct intransitive use, and 3 for unanswered use. And finally for MEOP four different codes were defined: 0 for incorrect use, 1 for incorrect intransitive use, 2 for correct transitive use, and 3 for unanswered use. In the following sections, the descriptive and inferential statistics of each of the four groups of transitivity constructions produced by the three groups of learners as well as native speakers are depicted.

4.1 Optionally Transitive Verbs in English but Intransitive in Persian (OEIP)

Table 1 offers the descriptive statistics for both correct transitive use and correct intransitive use of the participants' answers for OEIP construction. The elementary, intermediate and advanced learners preferred to use two arguments including one external argument which comes in pre-verbal position and one internal argument which comes in post-verbal object position for optionally transitive verbs in English. But the native speakers preferred to use one external argument for such a verb.

Table 1*Descriptive Statistics of OEIP Construction*

	Proficiency level	N	Mean	SD
Correct transitive	Elementary	33	54.17	8.06
	Intermediate	33	48.48	12.4
	Advanced	33	45.45	17.62
	Native	8	46.88	12.93
Correct Intransitive	Elementary	33	37.88	10.11
	Intermediate	33	35.23	15.13
	Advanced	33	43.56	12.93
	Native	8	53.12	12.93

To investigate whether the four groups of participants' performance of correct transitive and correct intransitive production for OEIP constructions was significantly different from each other, two one-way ANOVAs were conducted.

The results showed that there was not a statistically significant main effect for correct transitive OEIP constructions [$F(3,103) = 2.53, p = .061$]. But there was a statistically significant main effect for correct intransitive OEIP constructions [$F(3,103) = 5.40, p = .002$] with a moderate effect size (eta squared = 0.13).

The results for correct intransitive performance using Tamhane adjustment indicated that there was a statistically significant difference between the intermediate learners and native English speakers. Furthermore, Table 2 shows that there was not a significant difference between the other groups in using correct intransitive constructions.

Table 2*Multiple Comparison for Correct Transitive and Correct Intransitive of OEIP Construction*

Dependent Variable	(I) Proficiency	(J) Proficiency	Mean	Std. Error	Sig.
			Difference (I-J)		
Mean of Correct Intransitive Answer	Tamhane	Elementary	2.65	3.16	.956
		Advanced	-5.68	2.85	.271

for Optionally	Intermediate	Advanced	-8.33	3.46	.110
Transitive Verbs in English but Intransitive in Persian	Native	Elementary	15.24	4.90	.071
		Intermediate	17.89	5.27	.031
		Advanced	9.56	5.09	.426

4.2 Optionally Transitive Verbs in English but Monotransitive in Persian (OEMP)

The descriptive statistics for both correct transitive use and correct intransitive use of the participants' performances for OEMP construction is indicated in Table 4. Native speakers, elementary and intermediate learners preferred to use both internal and external arguments for optionally transitive verbs in English. But the advanced learners preferred to use just an external argument for such a verb. Furthermore, elementary learners tended to use transitive structure while the tendency of advanced level learners was more than the other groups in using intransitive constructions

Table 3

Descriptive Statistics of OEMP Construction

	Proficiency level	N	Mean	SD
Correct transitive	Elementary	33	68.48	21.23
	Intermediate	33	52.12	25.95
	Advanced	33	36.36	25.22
	Native	8	65.00	27.77
Correct Intransitive	Elementary	33	14.55	16.02
	Intermediate	33	16.97	16.67
	Advanced	33	46.67	23.80
	Native	8	35.00	27.77

Two one-way between-groups analysis of variance were conducted to figure out the efficacy of four groups' proficiency on both correct transitive and correct intransitive performance for OEMP constructions. There was a statistically significant main effect for both correct transitive and correct intransitive production of OEMP constructions [$F(3,103) = 10.13, p = .000$], [$F(3,103) = 18.33, p = .000$]. And their effect sizes were large respectively ($\eta^2 = 0.22, 0.35$).

Table 4 indicates that for correct transitive responses there was a significant difference between elementary learners and intermediate ones, advanced learners and elementary ones, and between native speakers and advanced learners. Furthermore, the results for correct intransitive performance indicated that there was a statistically significant difference between the advanced learners and elementary ones and between intermediate learners and advanced ones.

Table 4

Multiple Comparisons for Correct Transitive and Correct Intransitive OEMP Construction

Dependent Variable	(I) Proficiency	(J) Proficiency	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	
Mean of Correct Transitive Answer for Optionally Transitive Verbs in English but Monotransitive in Persian	Bonferroni	Elementary	Intermediate	16.36	6.02	.047
		Advanced		32.12	6.02	.000
	_____	Intermediate	Advanced	15.75	6.02	.062
		Native	Elementary	-3.48	9.64	1.00
		Intermediate	12.87	9.64	1.00	
		Advanced	28.63	9.64	.022	
Mean of Correct Intransitive Answer for Optionally Transitive Verbs in English but Monotransitive in Persian	Bonferroni	Elementary	Intermediate	-2.42	4.89	1.00
		Advanced		-32.12	4.89	.000
	_____	Intermediate	Advanced	-29.69	4.89	.000
		Native	Elementary	20.45	7.82	.06
		Intermediate	18.03	7.82	.14	
		Advanced	-11.66	7.82	.83	

4.3 Monotransitive Verbs in English but Optionally Transitive in Persian (MEOP)

Table 5 contains some general descriptive results of both incorrect intransitive and correct transitive participants' performances for MEOP constructions. The participants' tendency for producing the verbs with two arguments was more than one argument. But the elementary learners produced incorrect intransitive structures more than other learners, and these learners also had more preference for producing two arguments for such verbs than the other groups.

Table 5

Descriptive Statistics of MEOP Construction

	Proficiency level	N	Mean	SD
Incorrect Intransitive	Elementary	33	16.16	18.85
	Intermediate	33	11.11	18.00
	Advanced	33	13.13	18.52
	Native	8	.00	.00
Correct Transitive	Elementary	33	80.80	20.46
	Intermediate	33	70.70	18.17
	Advanced	33	66.66	22.04
	Native	8	100	.00

To investigate whether the participants' performance of incorrect intransitive and correct transitive production for MEOP constructions was significantly different from each other, two one-way ANOVAs were conducted.

The results showed that there was not a statistically significant main effect for incorrect intransitive production of MEOP constructions [$F(3,103) = 1.85, p = .14$]. Nonetheless, there was a statistically significant main effect for correct transitive production of MEOP constructions [$F(3,103) = 7.82, p = .001$] with a large effect size (eta squared = 0.18).

The post-hoc comparison using Tamhane adjustment indicated that for correct transitive responses, there was just a significant difference between the native speakers and the other three groups. Table 6 contains the important elements verifying the aforementioned results.

Table 6*Multiple Comparison for Incorrect Intransitive and Correct Transitive of MEOP Construction*

Dependent Variable	(I) Proficiency	(J) Proficiency	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.
Mean of Correct Transitive Answer for Monotransitive Verbs in English but Optionally Transitive in Persian	Tamhane	Elementary	10.10	4.76	.207
		Intermediate	14.14	5.23	.052
		Intermediate	4.04	4.97	.962
		Advanced	19.19	3.56	.000
		Native	29.29	3.16	.000
		Advanced	33.33	3.83	.000

4.4 Optionally Transitive Verbs in both English and Persian (OEP)

The descriptive statistics for both correct transitive use and correct intransitive use of the participants' performances for OEP construction is indicated in Table 7. The elementary and intermediate learners preferred to use transitive constructions for those verbs which are optionally transitive in both English and Persian. But the advanced learners and native speakers had similar preferences in using two arguments i.e. external and internal or just one external argument for such a verb. Furthermore, the elementary learners tended to use transitive structures while the tendency of advanced level learners was more than the other groups in using intransitive structures.

Table 7*Descriptive Statistics of OEP Construction*

	Proficiency level	N	Mean	SD
Correct transitive	Elementary	33	51.52	15.86
	Intermediate	33	50.38	16.68
	Advanced	33	43.18	15.01
	Native	8	45.31	14.84

	Elementary	33	29.92	18.20
	Intermediate	33	33.71	16.67
Correct	Advanced	33	50.00	15.93
Intransitive	Native	8	54.69	14.84

To investigate whether the four groups of participants' performance of correct transitive and correct intransitive production for OEP constructions was significantly different from each other, two one-way ANOVAs were conducted.

The results showed that there was not a statistically significant main effect for correct transitive OEP constructions [$F(3,103) = 1.89, p = .136$]. But there was a significant main effect for correct intransitive OEP constructions [$F(3,103) = 11.17, p = .001$] with a large effect size (eta squared = 0.24).

Table 8 displays the post-hoc results using Bonferroni adjustment. The results for correct intransitive performance indicated that there was a significant difference between all the groups except elementary learners with intermediate ones and advanced learners with native speakers.

Table 8

Multiple Comparison for Correct Transitive and Correct Intransitive OEP Construction

Dependent Variable	(I) Proficiency	(J) Proficiency	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.
Mean of Correct Intransitive Answer for Optionally Transitive Verbs in Both English and Persian	Bonferroni	Elementary	-3.78	4.16	1.00
		Intermediate	-20.07	4.16	.000
		Advanced	-16.28	4.16	.001
		Native	24.76	6.66	.002
		Elementary	20.97	6.66	.013
		Intermediate	4.68	6.66	1.00

4.5 Overall Results of Completion Task

According to the above results, the learners' preference for using transitive construction was more than that of intransitive one.

A mixed between-within subjects analysis of variance was conducted to explore the impact of proficiency and context on the acquisition of OEIP, OEMP, MEOP, and OEP verb types by Persian EFL learners. There was a statistically significant main effect for proficiency [$F(3,103) = 9.78, p = .000$] with a large effect size (eta squared = .22). There was a statistically significant main effect for context [$F(6,98) = 42.48, p = .000$] with a large effect size (eta squared = .72). Moreover, the interaction effect for context and proficiency was statistically significant [$F(18,277.67) = 4.68, p = .000$] with a large effect size (eta squared = .22).

Figure 1 visualizes the general performance of the participants on different contexts in the completion task. The figure clearly shows that the learners have preferred to use transitive constructions more than the intransitive ones in optionally transitive constructions.

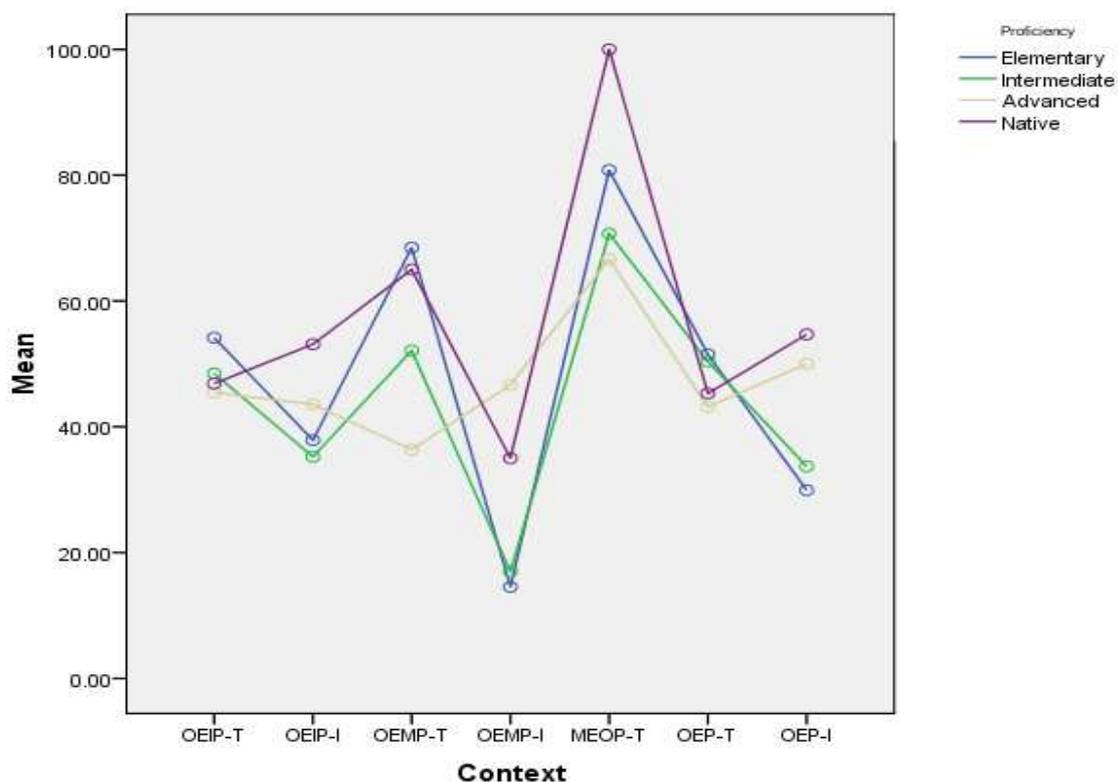


Figure 1 Means' Plot of the Participants' Performance in the Completion Task.

5. Discussion

Having reviewed the main results of the test and their implications, the main study questions are addressed in turn. The following issues can be directly linked to the acquisition of English transitivity constructions by Persian EFL learners.

5.1 Acquisition of English Transitivity Constructions

For OEMP, OEP, and OEIP constructions of completion task, the tendency of elementary and intermediate learners was on using the transitive structures, but the advanced learners' tendency in using transitive structures or intransitive ones was nearly similar. Furthermore, although elementary learners outperformed the other L2 groups in choosing transitive structures, the results showed the performances of the three groups of learners were not significantly different in MEOP constructions. Table 9 reviews the results clearly.

Table 9

Descriptive Statistics of the Completion Task.

Context	Elementary	Intermediate	Advanced
Correct Transitive of OEMP	68.48	52.12	36.36
Correct Intransitive of OEMP	14.54	16.96	46.66
Correct Transitive of OEP	51.51	50.37	43.18
Correct Intransitive of OEP	29.92	33.71	50.00
Correct Transitive of OEIP	54.16	48.48	45.45
Correct Intransitive of OEIP	37.87	35.22	43.56
Correct Transitive of MEOP	80.80	70.70	66.66
Incorrect Intransitive of MEOP	16.16	11.11	13.13

As a whole, in producing all the constructions including OEP, MEOP, OEMP, and OEIP, the learners had acquired the structures although there was not a native-like performance in such constructions.

5.2. The Effect of L1 on the Transitivity Construction

The next question to be addressed was to explore the role of Persian argument structures on the acquisition of English transitivity constructions.

For the first task, although the elementary learners had the most difficulty for choosing intransitive structures in MEOP constructions, the differences between the groups of learners in this part were not significant. This possibility in Persian which is absent in English may encourage Persian EFL learners to use English intransitive structures for transitive form but this wrong use was not significant among EFL learners in this study. Furthermore, the performance of all the learners for the correct transitive answers was similar with no significant difference among any of the groups.

In OEMP construction, the preference of elementary and intermediate learners was on transitivity structures instead of intransitive ones. With regard to the fact that transitive verbs are much more frequent in Persian (Ahmadi Givi & Anvari, 1994), this may prove the high tendency of EFL learners in using two arguments instead of one. Therefore, the influence of L1 may be a good reason for the aforementioned results on both OEMP and MEOP constructions in the completion task.

Given the above-mentioned points, the results of the analysis indicate that L1 transfer does play a role in these constructions. The reason behind such a finding can be traced back to the high performance of the learners in transitive structures instead of intransitive ones even in all the other properties of English transitivity constructions besides those which were mentioned.

In sum, the results of the current study regarding the role of L1 transfer in the acquisition of transitivity constructions indicate that the L1 transfer influences the acquisition of the English transitivity constructions.

5.3 Effect of L1 Intransitive Verbs on the Acquisition of English Optionally Transitive Verbs

The focus of the current study was to compare the way the four groups of participants, interpreted the transitivity constructions across six main categories. One of the categories

investigated was the verbs that were optionally transitive in English but intransitive in Persian (e.g. *burst*).

The descriptive statistics in the completion task for OEIP constructions indicated that all the three groups of learners preferred correct transitive (elementary = 54.16, intermediate = 48.48, advanced = 45.45) than intransitive ones (elementary = 37.87, intermediate = 35.22, advanced = 43.56). Regarding the participants' production of the OEIP constructions, the learners performed significantly better in using transitive structures which were different from their native language than in using intransitive structures. The results indicate that the learners' interlanguage is sensitive to the L2 transitive structures.

5.4 Role of Proficiency on the Acquisition of English Transitivity Constructions

One of the findings of this study, which serves important implications, is that the proficiency factor proved to be significant in general. In the completion tasks, the factor of proficiency turned out to be influential. The results of the mixed between-within subjects ANOVA showed that the effect of the proficiency level of the participants on the production ($p < 0.5$) of transitivity constructions was statistically significant. Therefore, it might be concluded that the more the learners are exposed to the target language input, the better they will perform on English argument structures. In this regard, the current study is against what Can (2009) concluded claiming that the proficiency has a negative effect in the behavior of the L2 learners dealing with one of the aspects of English transitivity structures. Can states that "the more learners know about syntactic positions of grammatical units and the semantic roles that they can bear, the more they avoid the ergative structure and favor the passive" (p. 2836).

As the language proficiency of the EFL learners increases, their ability in producing the six properties of the transitivity constructions will improve as well. One of the key factors in enhancing the proficiency of the learners is the role of input. Input that learners receive in the learning process plays a very important role in the language acquisition. Learners need to be given the opportunity to make sense of what they hear or see, to notice the contexts in which the samples of the language are used, to interact with them as well as to compensate for the

insufficiency. Therefore the more the learners receive input, the better they perform on the properties of English transitivity constructions.

6. Conclusions

The present study aimed to investigate the acquisition of transitivity constructions by Persian EFL learners. To this end, six research questions were proposed the results of which are summarized here:

The first question stated whether Persian EFL learners can acquire the properties of transitivity constructions in English. The results of the completion task showed that the performance of all the three groups of EFL learners were acceptable and they could acquire all the four properties of transitivity constructions which were tested for production task, including OEP, MEOP, OEMP, and OEIP constructions.

Comparing the mean values of the participants' production of the four properties of transitivity constructions, the EFL learners performed better in producing transitive structures than intransitive ones. Even in OEIP constructions in which the probability was on using intransitive structures than transitive ones, the learners' tendency was toward using two arguments instead of just one pre-verbal argument. These results are in line with the high frequency of transitivity structures in Persian. Therefore, this may prove the effective role of L1 in the acquisition of transitivity constructions in English. Hence, L1 has influence on the acquisition of English transitivity constructions.

The interpretation of descriptive statistics of OEIP construction in completion task indicates that the performances of the EFL learners were much better in correct transitive structures than that of incorrect intransitive ones. So the obtained results reveal that the Persian learners can correctly produce English optionally transitive verbs. Thus, L1 intransitive verbs cannot hinder the acquisition of the aforementioned verb types.

The last question stated whether language proficiency has any effect on the acquisition of English transitivity constructions. Based on the obtained results, the language proficiency of the

EFL learners may increase their ability in producing the properties of the English transitivity constructions.

The results of this study may help both English language teachers and learners in Iran in the acquisition of English argument structures and the relationship between different verb types and the related subjects and objects. If L2 learners know that some English verbs cannot be used in transitive or intransitive structures and some of them are used both transitively and intransitively, they will have a better metacognitive awareness leading to a more efficient production when dealing with English argument structures.

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