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Acquisition of the Argument Structures of English Transitivity Constructions by EFL Learners

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Abstract: *Syntactic structures are of great importance in foreign language acquisition (FLA), and throughout centuries the syntax of target language has been of great importance for the researchers (Ionin & Montrul, 2010; Rashtchi & Jalili, 2011). The present study intends to explore the fundamental problems EFL learners may face when trying to acquire the transitivity constructions along with the related argument and predicate relationships. To this end, 99 participants divided into three proficiency groups of elementary, intermediate, and advanced were selected as the participants. Eight English native speakers also participated in the study. All the participants were given a speeded acceptability judgment. The results showed that, there was an incremental progress across proficiency groups. Although the advanced group outperformed the other proficiency groups, their performance was non-target like in the majority of cases. The findings reveal certain pedagogical implications for both curriculum planners and language instructors.*

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

1. Introduction

English as an international language has a systematic, rule-based and relatively fixed word-order structure. Therefore, non-native learners of English are required to pay attention to its well-formed and highly-frequent structures. It is worth noting that one of the main problems of those learners is associated with English sentence-structures and above all English argument structures which are the main focus of this study.

Verbs as a crucial element in a foreign language play an important role in determining the type and the place of argument(s) as well as the number of them. For instance, '*sit*' as a predicate

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requires just one external argument called pre-verbal subject: ' *I sit'*. '*Pour*' in *'Alice poured coffee'* requires two arguments; one pre-verbal subject and one post-verbal object.

Although learners may think that transitive and intransitive constructions are among the simplest structures, this is not the case if they delve deeper into the issue. Many studies have been conducted in this scope of research (Bassac & Bouillon, 2002; Rezai & Ariamanesh, 2012; Hale & Keyser, 2013), but the depth of its structure has not been investigated to the same extent cross-linguistically.

Based on two dissimilar approaches, scholars define transitivity constructions differently. On the one hand, the traditional approach focuses on the semantic view of transitivity construction (Kittila, 2002); according to this approach, just when a transfer of energy happens from one participant to the other in a sentence, we are allowed to call it transitive structure (Luk, 2012). For example *I tore my book* is a transitive construction based on this view, but *I like my mother* is not a semantic transitive structure because there is not any transfer of energy in the second example. On the other hand, the formal approach depends only on the number of arguments a verb takes, and based on these arguments a verb can be transitive (*bring*) or intransitive (*come*).

Lazard (1998) states that transitive verbs need two arguments, called subject and object, but an intransitive one is complete with a single subject. Moreover, some transitive verbs take three arguments named ditransitive verbs. For instance, *I gave a book to John* has three arguments, *I* as a subject and *book* and *John* as direct and indirect objects respectively. Moreover, some verbs can be both transitive and intransitive, namely optionally transitive verbs, in two different situations without any changes in their definitions such as *eat* (Frenck-Mestre & Pynte, 1997).

The present study classifies the transitivity constructions into six categories: those verbs which are both intransitive in English and Persian, those verbs which are optionally transitive in English but intransitive in Persian, those verbs which are optionally transitive in English but transitive in Persian, those verbs which are transitive in both English and Persian, those verbs which are monotransitive in English but optionally transitive in Persian, and finally those verbs which are optionally transitive in both English and Persian.

2. Review of the Literature

Escutia (2008) conducted a study with the central aim of finding errors present in the production of English unaccusative predicates by Spanish learners. Six high intermediate Spanish EFL learners were selected as the participants and the data were extracted from written homework composition of these students. The results of the study showed that L2 learning is not the re-lexicalization of the structures of L1 in L2 words. The general finding of the study is that the acquisition of English unaccusative structures is greatly affected by the first language of the learners and the correct perception and production of such structures are dependent on the correct understanding of these structures in the target language itself not what L1 prefers.

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Miyagawa and Tsujioka (2004) conducted a descriptive study in which the differences of two kinds of ditransitive verbs, namely *to*- dative and double objective construction (DOC) in English and Japanese were analyzed. In English, double objective construction which is a specifier will be added to VP branches, but the structure of to-dative is not similar to DOC because the argument types of these two constructions are not the same. In Japanese, there is only one structure containing a goal and a theme which is marked with dative and accusative case respectively.

El-Nabih (2010) made an attempt on English causative/inchoative alternation so as to find out the effect of L1 Arabic structures on the acquisition of English for L2 learners. The study aimed to examine the roles of proficiency level, language transfer and universal principles on L2 acquisition. For these objectives, 119 Arab native speakers at different proficiency levels along with 23 American native speakers of English as a control group participated in the research. The results indicated that L1 transfer was a problematic issue for Arab native speaker learning English transitivity alternations; furthermore, learners' proficiency level was not immune to L1 transfer. Additionally, universal grammar was one of the factors influencing the acquisition of causative/inchoative alternation.

Rezai and Ariamanesh (2012) conducted a study on three categories of verbs, including paired ergative, unergative, and unaccusative. They aimed to explore the learnability problems, effect of proficiency level and L1 transfer of Persian EFL learners on the acquisition of these three kinds of structures. The results showed that learners had some difficulty with the acquisition of unaccusative and some types of paired ergative verbs like inchoative and middle. The influence of L1 transfer on the acquisition of unergatives and inchoatives were stronger than other types. Moreover, the acquisition of unacusatives was problematic because of the lack of adequate L2 input**.**

Having reviewed several studies on transitivity constructions and the related issues, it is revealed that most of them focus 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 tied 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. Can L2 learners achieve native-like competence in English transitivity constructions?
3. Does L1 intransitive verbs hinder the acquisition of English optionally transitive verbs?
4. What kinds 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?

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3. Methodology

3.1 Participants

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, eight 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. This type of test which is designed by the University of Cambridge and Oxford University is considered as a good indicator of the learners' general English language proficiency level. 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 developmental speeded acceptability judgment task were prepared and administered. This test consisted of 50 items focusing on both differences and similarities of transitivity constructions between English and Persian structures. The test contained nine items for those verbs which were optionally transitive in English but intransitive in Persian (OEIP) (e.g. *boil*), 10 items for those verbs which were optionally transitive in English but monotransitive in Persian (OEMP) (e.g. *dig*), 10 items for those verbs which were monotransitive in both English and Persian (MEP) (e.g. *carry*), six items for those verbs which were monotransitive in English but optionally transitive in Persian (MEOP) (e.g. *pour*), and 15 filler items. Some examples are presented in the following:

a) You can cook the sauce over a low heat for ten minutes.
b) Melt the butter in a saucepan.
c) Arkansas just lost three games in a row.
d) It was warmer now, and the snow was beginning to melt.

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.

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Next, the test of Speeded Acceptability Judgment was administered so as to gauge their comprehension of the transitivity constructions. For this task, the participants were required to read each sentence on the screen and indicate the acceptability of using each through selecting one of the following items:

a) Acceptable (1) b) Neither Acceptable Nor Unacceptable (2)
c)Unacceptable (3) d) I don't Know (4)

The researcher first clarified the instructions for the participants. Then the participants answered the 60 items which were run on the screen in 10 minutes (less than 10 seconds per item). They marked their answers on the provided answer sheets. All of the sentences in this test were extracted from either monolingual dictionaries or the British National Corpus (BNC).

4. Data Analysis

After the administration of the test, the performance of the participants on the mentioned test was measured and scored. In the present study, the researcher applied SPSS software (version 16) to analyze and interpret the results obtained from the raw data. To analyze the participants' responses to the task, the acceptable responses were coded as (1); if they were neither acceptable nor unacceptable, the responses were coded as (2); if they were unacceptable, the responses were coded as (3), and if the participants did not know about the acceptability or unacceptability of the sentences, they were coded as (4).

For the statistical analyses, six one way ANOVAs were conducted to compare the participants comprehension of four categories of speeded acceptability judgment task, including OEIP, OEMP, MEP, and MEOP. Also, for a crystal-clear analysis the data was analyzed by a set of a mixed between-within subjects ANOVAs. The ***p* value** was considered to be .05 through the analysis of the data in accordance with the norms of the field.

In the following sections, a comprehensive process of data analysis and the corresponding results are explained completely. Moreover, the tables and the figures related to the findings of the study are presented in more detail.

4. 1. Optionally Transitive Verbs in English but Monotransitive in Persian (OEMP)

The descriptive statistics for correct transitive and correct intransitive acceptable answers of the participants' performances for OEMP construction are indicated in Table 1. In this construction, all the learners opted for transitive constructions containing two arguments including a pre-verbal subject and a post-verbal object. Furthermore, the advanced level learners outscored the other groups in selecting acceptable answers.

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Table 1

Descriptive Statistics of OEMP Construction

	Proficiency	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Correct Transitive	Elementary	56.36	26.67	33
	Intermediate	67.87	19.96	33
	Advanced	77.57	14.79	33
	Native	100.00	.00	8
	Total	69.71	23.36	107
Correct Intransitive	Elementary	41.81	26.15	33
	Intermediate	56.96	13.34	33
	Advanced	70.30	23.51	33
	Native	95.00	14.14	8
	Total	59.25	25.90	107

To investigate whether the four groups of participants' performance of acceptable answers for OEMP construction was significantly different from each other, a one-way ANOVA was conducted. The results showed that there was a statistically significant main effect for choosing acceptable answers of OEMP constructions [F (3,103) = 23.06, p = .001] with a large effect size (eta squared = 0.40).

The post-hoc results also indicated that all the groups were significantly different from each other.

4.2. Optionally Transitive Verbs in English but Intransitive in Persian (OEIP)

The general mean scores of each of the four groups of participants in OEIP sentences based on the correct transitive and correct intransitive answers are shown in Table 2. The table indicates that the use of transitive construction was more acceptable to the learners. Furthermore, in both constructions, i.e. correct transitive and correct intransitive, the mean score of the advanced learners were among the highest scores whereas the mean score of elementary learners were among the lowest ones in the recognition of this structure.

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Table 2

Descriptive Statistics of OEIP Construction

	Proficiency	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Correct Transitive	Elementary	70.30	21.28	33
	Intermediate	69.09	22.41	33
	Advanced	83.63	12.70	33
	Native	100.00	.00	8
	Total	76.26	20.58	107
Correct Intransitive	Elementary	49.24	26.13	33
	Intermediate	58.33	27.00	33
	Advanced	74.24	26.87	33
	Native	100.00	.00	8
	Total	63.55	29.19	107

The variance in scores for participants' performance in selecting acceptable answers was not similar for each of the four groups ($p<0.05$). To investigate whether the four groups of participants' performance for correct OEIP construction was significantly different from each other, a one-way ANOVA was conducted, the results of which are presented in the following table.

The post-hoc comparisons using Tamhane adjustment indicated that all the groups were significantly different from each other except elementary and intermediate ones ($p = .98$).

4.3. Monotransitive Verbs in Both English and Persian (MEP)

The sentences related to this group of structures were divided into two parts including, grammatical and ungrammatical ones. Each of them is analyzed below.

4.3.1. Grammatical Sentences

The general mean scores of each of the four groups of participants in MEP sentences are shown in Table 3. The table displays that the more the proficiency level, the better the performance is.

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Table 3

Descriptive Statistics of MEP Construction

	Proficiency level	N	Mean	SD
Acceptable Answers	Elementary	33	53.94	20.90
	Intermediate	33	64.85	20.01
	Advanced	33	69.70	22.97
	Native	8	92.50	21.21

The variance in scores for participants' performance in selecting acceptable answers was similar for each of the four groups (P=611). To investigate whether the four groups were significantly different from each other in terms of their performance in MEP constructions, a one-way ANOVA was conducted. The results showed that there was a statistically significant main effect for selecting acceptable answers of MEP constructions [F (3,103) = 7.92, p = .001] with a large effect size (eta squared = 0.18).

The post-hoc results indicated that all the groups were significantly different from each other except the elementary learners with intermediate ones and advanced learners with intermediate ones. Table 4 depicts the main results.

Table 4

Multiple Comparison for Acceptable Answers of MEP Construction

	(I) Proficiency	(J) Proficiency	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.
Bonferroni	Elementary	Intermediate	-10.90	5.25	.241
		Advanced	-15.75	5.25	.020
	Intermediate	Advanced	-4.84	5.25	1.000
	Native	Elementary	38.56	8.40	.000
		Intermediate	27.65	8.40	.008
		Advanced	22.80	8.40	.047

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4.3.2. Ungrammatical Sentences

The descriptive statistics for unacceptable answers for MEP construction is indicated in Table 5. In this construction, all the three groups had a similar performance.

Table 5

Descriptive Statistics of MEP Construction

	Proficiency level	N	Mean	SD
Acceptable Answers	Elementary	33	38.18	22.56
	Intermediate	33	48.48	21.81
	Advanced	33	43.03	25.06
	Native	8	95.00	14.14

A one-way ANOVA was conducted to investigate whether the four groups of learners were significantly different from each other in MEP constructions. The results indicated that there was a statistically significant main effect for choosing unacceptable answers of MEP constructions [$F(3,103) = 13.98$, $p = .001$] with a large effect size (eta squared = 0.29).
The variance in scores for selecting unacceptable answers was similar among each of the four groups ($p=0.265$).
The post-hoc comparison using Bonferroni adjustment indicated that none of the L2 learners had any significant difference from each other, but the native speakers acted differently from all the L2 groups.

4.4. Monotransitive Verbs in English but Optionally Transitive in Persian (MEOP)

The sentences which are related to this group of structures were divided into two parts including, grammatical and ungrammatical ones. Each of them is analyzed below.

4.4.1. Grammatical Sentences

The general mean scores of each of the four groups of participants in MEOP sentences are shown in Table 6. The table displays that the mean score of the advanced learners were the highest score while the mean score of elementary learners were among the lowest one for this structure.

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Table 6

Descriptive Statistics of MEOP Construction

	Proficiency level	N	Mean	SD
Acceptable Answers	Elementary	33	60.61	28.20
	Intermediate	33	73.74	26.03
	Advanced	33	87.88	21.75
	Native	8	100	00

The variance in scores for participants' performance in selecting acceptable answers was not similar for each of the four groups ($p<0.05$).

To investigate whether the participants' performance for acceptable answers in MEOP constructions were significantly different from each other, a one-way ANOVA was conducted The results showed that there was a statistically significant main effect for selecting acceptable answers of MEOP constructions [F (3,103) = 9.51, p = .001] with a large effect size (eta squared = 0.21).

The Post-hoc comparisons using Tamhane adjustment indicated that all the groups were significantly different from each other except the elementary learners with intermediate ones and advanced learners with intermediate ones. Table 7 displays the results.

Table 7

Multiple Comparison for Acceptable Answers of MEOP Construction

	(I) Proficiency	(J) Proficiency	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.
Tamhane	Elementary	Intermediate	-13.13	6.68	.282
		Advanced	-27.27	6.20	.000
	Intermediate	Advanced	-14.14	5.90	.112
	Native	Elementary	39.39	4.90	.000
		Intermediate	26.26	4.53	.000
		Advanced	12.12	3.78	.018

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	(I) Proficiency	(J) Proficiency	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.
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		Advanced	-27.27	6.20	.000
	Intermediate	Advanced	-14.14	5.90	.112
	Native	Elementary	39.39	4.90	.000
		Intermediate	26.26	4.53	.000
		Advanced	12.12	3.78	.018

4.4.2. Ungrammatical Sentences

The descriptive statistics for unacceptable answers of the participants' performances for MEOP construction is indicated in Table 8. In this construction, all the three groups had a similar performance.

Table 8

Descriptive Statistics of MEOP Construction

	Proficiency level	N	Mean	SD
Acceptable Answers	Elementary	33	43.43	29.44
	Intermediate	33	42.42	30.35
	Advanced	33	46.46	27.56
	Native	8	95.83	11.78

A one-way ANOVAs was conducted to investigate whether the four groups acted similarly in ungrammatical MEOP constructions. The results indicated that there was a statistically significant main effect for choosing unacceptable answers of MEP constructions [F (3,103) = 8.36, p = .001] and the effect size was large (eta squared = 0.19).

The variance in scores for selecting unacceptable answers was not similar among each of the four groups ($P<0.05$).

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The Post-hoc comparisons using Tamhane adjustment indicated that none of the L2 learners had any significant difference from each other, but all of them acted significantly different compared to the native speakers.

4.5. Overall results of Speeded Acceptability Judgment Task

The descriptive results of the whole contexts in the speeded acceptability judgment task indicated that the advanced learners had a better performance than other learners in the comprehension of the aforementioned six constructions.

A mixed between-within subjects analysis of variance was conducted to explore the impact of proficiency and context on the acquisition of OEIP, OEMP, MEP, and MEOP verb types by Persian EFL learners. There was a statistically significant main effect for proficiency [F (3, 103) = 40.78, p = .000] with a large effect size (eta squared = .54). There was a statistically significant main effect for context [F (5, 99) = 5.26, p = .000) with a large effect size (eta squared = .21). However, the interaction effect for context and proficiency was not statistically significant [F (15, 273.69) = 1.59, p = .074).

Figure 1 visualizes the general performance of the participants on the speeded acceptability judgment task. The behavior of the learners across different proficiency levels is depicted by the lines. The figure clearly shows that the advanced learners had a better performance than the other learners (elementary & intermediate) on the different contexts. Also, the intermediate learners outperformed the elementary learners in the second task. These results confirm the positive role of proficiency.

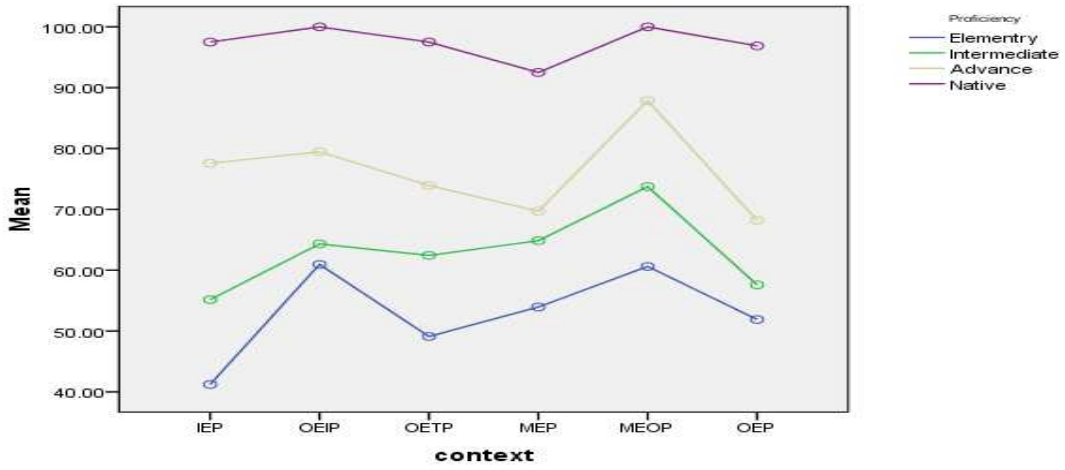

Figure 1. Means' Plot of the Participants' performance in Speeded Acceptability Judgment Task

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5. Discussion

Having reviewed the main results of the test, we will address the main study questions 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

The six categories of transitivity constructions used in the speeded acceptability judgment task included 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 both English and Persian (MEP), and the verbs which were monotransitive in English but optionally transitive in Persian (MEOP). The obtained results imply that the learners had the best performance in the comprehension of MEOP constructions. The descriptive statistics of the different categories showed that the preference of the learners was on transitivity structures i.e. the use of two arguments instead of the intransitive one. Although the advanced learners did not have a native-like performance in none of the categories, they had a satisfactory performance in MEOP, OEIP, and OEMP constructions as the mean scores of those learners in the four aforementioned structures were nearly above 75 (88, 79.5, 77.5, 74 respectively).

The elementary and intermediate learners had a fluctuation in acquiring OEIP, OEMP, and MEP constructions because the mean scores of these learners for the five aforementioned structures were around 50 to 60 which means their acquisition was not stabilized for the learners and they were not certain in choosing the correct choices for the comprehension test. However, the intermediate learners had a good performance in MEOP constructions with an acceptable mean score of 74.

The results of the comprehension task showed that the learners tend to accept the transitive constructions requiring both internal and external argument more than the intransitive structures. As a whole, the performance of the learners in the six categories of transitivity constructions from the most to the least difficult constructions are as follows:

Elementary learners: OEMP > MEP > MEOP > OEIP

Intermediate learners: OEMP > OEIP > MEP > MEOP

Advanced learners: MEOP > OEIP > OEMP > MEP

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5.2. Comparison of L2 Learners and native speakers

Acquisition of transitivity constructions is among the challenges that second language learners are faced with. For this reason, the eight contexts of speeded acceptability judgment task, including MEP, UMEP, MEOP, UMOP, OEMP, and OEIP were analyzed. Table 9 indicates that there was a statistically significant difference for each of the contexts between the advanced learners and the native English speakers.

Table 9

Descriptive Statistics of the Speeded Acceptability Judgment Task

Context	Advanced	Native	Mean Differences	Sig
OEIP	79.46	100	20.54	.00
OEMP	73.93	97.50	23.57	.00
MEOP	87.87	100	12.13	.01
UMOP	46.46	95.83	49.37	.00
MEP	69.69	92.50	22.81	.04
UMEP	43.03	95.00	51.97	.00

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*).

Regarding the speeded acceptability judgment task of transitivity constructions in English, the mean values of the participants' comprehension confirm the tendency of the learners in using transitive structures containing two arguments (elementary = 70.30, intermediate = 69.09, advanced = 83.63) higher than that of intransitive constructions(elementary = 49.24, intermediate = 58.33, advanced = 74.24) for OEIP constructions. Similar to the findings of the completion task, L1 intransitive verbs cannot hinder the acquisition of English optionally transitive verbs in the comprehension task.

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5.4 Role of Proficiency in 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. The results of the mixed between-within subjects ANOVA showed that the effect of the proficiency level of the participants on their comprehension (p<0.5) and 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 calming 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).

Given the above, as the language proficiency of the EFL learners increases, their ability in comprehending 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 more the acquisition of the properties of English transitivity constructions

6. Conclusion

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 speeded acceptability judgment tasks showed that the advanced learners can comprehend all the six properties of transitivity constructions, including MEOP, OEIP, OEMP, and MEP structures. Nonetheless, the only early-acquired construction by the elementary and intermediate learners was MEOP constructions.

Considering the results of the comprehension task, there was a statistically significant difference between the advanced EFL learners and the native English speakers for all the six properties of transitivity constructions. So, based on the obtained results, Persian EFL learners may exhibit an asymmetry in their judgment of such English transitivity constructions.

The interpretation of descriptive statistics of OEIP constructions in speeded acceptability Judgment task indicates that the performance of the EFL learners was much better in correct transitive structures than that of incorrect intransitive ones. So the obtained results reveal that the

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Persian learners can correctly comprehend 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 comprehending 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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