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Teaching English as a Foreign Language

The Role of L1 and L2 Transfer in the Acquisition of L3 Syntax

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In the Name of God

The Compassionate

The Merciful

To My Family

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Abstract

The present study was an attempt to incorporate some insights into the field of third language acquisition. To this end, it investigated the acquisition of L3 German relative clauses by looking into four syntactic properties namely, [OV], null subject, resumption, and null relative pronoun parameters. The study aimed at exploring the role of background languages already possessed by the learners and also the effect of L2 proficiency on the acquisition of these properties. The participants were 40 intermediate German learners assigned to two groups based on their proficiency levels of L2 English up on taking the Oxford Quick Placement Test and the German Placement Test. The first group included German learners with L1 Persian and L2 English at the advanced level, and the second one comprised of German learners with L1 Persian and L2 English at the elementary level. The two groups of L3 learners completed two tests, which were a grammaticality judgment test and a written translation test.

The overall results which were interpreted in terms of the viewpoints of two current models of L3 acquisition, namely, the Cumulative Enhancement Model (CEM) and the Typological Primacy Model (TPM) revealed no dominant role for either L1 or L2 settings in L3 interlanguage grammar, as the two groups did not perform significantly different on the acquisition of German relative clauses ($p< 0.05$). Also, the L2 English proficiency appeared to have influence on the groups' performance. The findings of the study with respect to language transfer gives rise to the conclusion that both L1 and L2 can be considered as the sources of

cross-linguistic influence in L3 acquisition, and this in turn provides evidence in favor of the claims of both the CEM and the TPM.

Key Words: L3 acquisition, Relative Clauses, Language Transfer, Null subject, Null relative pronoun, OV parameter, Resumptive pronoun

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List of Abbreviations

ACC: Accusative

Agr: Agreement

ANOVA: Analysis of Variance

C: Complementizer

CEM: Cumulative Enhancement Model

CL: Clitic pronoun

CLI: Cross-Linguistic Influence

CP: Complementizer Phrase

DUR: Duration

EVO: English VO structure

EZ: Ezafe particle

GJT: Grammaticality Judgment Test

GOV: German OV structure

GPT: German Proficiency Test

I /INFL/ Infl: Inflection

INFI: Infinitive

IP: Inflection Phrase

L1: First Language

L2: Second Language

L3: Third Language

Ln: Languages other than L1, L2 and L3

LSFH: L2 Status Factor Hypothesis

Nom: Nominative

NP: Noun Phrase

NRP: Null Relative Pronoun

NS: Null Subject

OM: Object Marker

OP: Operator

OQPT: Oxford Quick Placement Test

OV: Object- Verb order

PAST PART: Past Participle

PF: Phonetic Form

Pl: Plural

PP: Propositional phrase

PRES: Present

RC: Relative Clause

REL: Relative

RES/ RESUMP : Resumptive Pronoun

SAVO: Subject- Adverb- Verb- Object order

SBJ: Subject

Sg: Singular

Spec: Specifier

Spec CP: The specifier position within CP

Spec-VP: The Specifier position within VP

SVO: Subject- Verb- Object order,

SVOA: Subject -Verb- Object - Adverb order

t: trace

TPM: Typological Primacy Model

V: Verb

VO: Verb- Object order

VP: verb phrase

V2: Verb second

V3: Verb third

vmt: Verb movement

WTT: Written Translation Test

1: 1st person

2: 2nd person

3: 3rd person

Chapter One

Introduction

1.1 Preliminaries

Although the area of research in foreign language acquisition is mostly dominated by the studies on the effect of first language (L1) on second language (L2) acquisition, research on the influence of L1 and L2 on third language (L3) acquisition has just been focused on in recent years. Cenoz and Jessner (2000, p. 257) have stated that "research on specific characteristic of third language acquisition is still in its infancy." This is due to the fact that multilingualism which is becoming a common phenomenon all over the world has enhanced the researchers' interest to investigate cross-linguistic influence (i.e. the effect of L1 and L2) in L3 acquisition. In the last two decades the studies have shown that L2 acquisition is qualitatively different from L1 acquisition, and that the acquisition of L3 differs from the acquisition of L2. This is due to the fact that L3 learners are equipped with the knowledge of two language systems (Rothman & Cabrelli Amaro, 2010) and have knowledge of L2 up to some levels which affects their acquisition of the subsequent foreign languages (Bardel & Falk 2007; Williams & Hammarberg, 1998). It is also claimed that second language and third language acquisition may share the same characteristics but the latter has more complex processes (Clyne, 2003) because of the interaction among factors such as typology, proficiency and recency (Ranong & Leung**,** 2009).

On the other hand, one factor which is believed to determine how a non-native language affects the acquisition of a third language is proficiency (Williams & Hammarberg, 1998). Accordingly, when L3 learners encounter problems in L3 acquisition, they are more likely to use their L2 knowledge rather than their L1, especially if they have a higher proficiency level in their L2.

Since Iran sets an example of those countries in which multilingualism is getting more abundant, investigating the case of multilingualism can be of interest to researchers (Dawwari, 2004; Shooshtari, 2007). In Iran, English is learned as a foreign language at junior high schools as well as high schools but inadequate attention is paid to its communicative use and those who are interested in English for communication should learn it in the formal context of the classroom. French, German, Arabic and in some cases Italian are learned after English and as the third language in the academic settings for communication and business purposes. As such, the main issue which is addressed in this study is the impact of the previously acquired languages (L1 and L2) on the L3 interlanguage patterns and the extent to which the level of proficiency of L2 English affects the formation of German relative clauses (RCs) by L3 German learners. Under the umbrella of RCs the study looks into the OV (Object-Verb order), Null subject / Pro-drop, Null relative pronoun and Resumption parameters in German restrictive object and subject RCs.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

RCs are a type of subordinate clause with a relative pronoun in the structure which modifies the noun in the preceding clause (Radford, 2005). For example, in "*The person who talked to her went out*", the relative clause "*who talked to her*" modifies the noun "*person*" in the subject NP (Noun Phrase) '*the person*'. The word "*person*" which is so modified is the head of the RC.

There are some similarities and differences in the RC structure of German, English, and Persian. The problem is the unknown effect of these similarities and

dissimilarities on the acquisition of L3 German RCs by the learners whose L1 and L2 are Persian and English, respectively. Also, based on the results reported in some previous studies (Koster, 2005; Sağin Şimşek, 2007), one can conclude that the acquisition of L3 German RCs would cause some difficulties for Persian native speakers with low and high levels of proficiency in L2 English due to the influence of their previous acquired languages. The features of RCs in these three languages are enumerated as:

1) **Position of the finite verb in RCs**: In German RCs, the finite verb occupies the clause-final position after all the other sentence elements (Koster, 1975; Koster, 2005; Vander Feest, 2008). Unlike German, in English RCs, the verb does not necessarily occupy the second position. It may also stand in the third position before its complement (Rankin, 2010). On the other hand, with respect to the position of the finite verb, Persian is similar to German in RCs in a way that in Persian RCs, the finite verb occupies the final position (Karimi, 2005). Examples (1) to (3) present this property in the RCs of German, English and Persian respectively.

1) Das Auto, das mein Vater gestern gekauft *hat*, ist kaputt. (German)
The car-REL that my father yesterday buy-PAST PART
have-PRES-3sg be-PRES-3sg broken dow

2) The car that my father *bought* yesterday is broken down. (English)

3) Mašin-i ke Pedærem diruz *xærid* xærab æst. (Persian)
Car-REL that father my yesterday buy-PAST-3sg
broken down be-PRES-3sg