In the name of God

WE HEREBY RECOMMEND THAT THIS THESIS

BY

MOHAMMAD BARZEGAR RAHATLOU

ENTITLED

How Iranian Adult Advanced Learners Retain Their English Proficiency

BE ACCEPTED IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF ARTS IN TEFL

Committee on Final Examination

………………………… Dr. G. R. Kiany   Supervisor

………………………... Dr. R. Ghafar Samar   Advisor

………………………… Dr. R. Akbari   Reader

………………………… Dr. S. Kaivanpanah   Reader

………………………… Dr. R. Ghafar Samar   Head of TMU English department

Tarbiat Modares University

Tehran, Iran

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آیین نامه چاپ پایان‌نامه (رساله)‌های دانشجویان دانشگاه تربیت مدرس

نظر به اینکه چاپ و انتشار پایان نامه (رساله)‌های تحصیلی دانشجویان دانشگاه تربیت مدرس، مبین بخشی از فعالیتهای علمی - پژوهشی دانشگاه است بنابراین به منظور آگاهی و رعایت حقوق دانشگاه،دانش آموختگان این دانشگاه نسبت به رعایت موارد ذیل متعهد می‌شوند:

ماده ۱: در صورت اقدام به چاپ پایان نامه (رساله)‌ی خود، مراتب را قبلاً به طور کتبی به «دفتر نشر آثارعلمی» دانشگاه اطلاع دهد.

ماده ۲: در صفحه سوم کتاب (پس از برگ شناسنامه) عبارت ذیل را چاپ کند:

«کتاب حاضر، حاصل پایان نامه کارشناسی ارشد/ رساله دکتری نگارنده در رشته   است که در سال   در دانشکده   دانشگاه تربیت مدرس به راهنمایی سرکار خانم/جناب آقای دکتر   ، مشاوره سرکار خانم/جناب آقای دکتر   و مشاوره سرکار خانم/جناب آقای دکتر   از آن دفاع شده است.»

ماده ۳: به منظور جبران بخشی از هزینه‌های انتشارات دانشگاه، تعداد یک درصد شمارگان کتاب (در هر نوبت‌چاپ) را به «دفتر نشر آثارعلمی» دانشگاه اهدا کند. دانشگاه می‌تواند مازاد نیاز خود را به نفع مرکز نشر درمعرض فروش قرار دهد.

ماده ۴: در صورت عدم رعایت ماده ۳، ۵۰٪ بهای شمارگان چاپ شده را به عنوان خسارت به دانشگاه تربیت‌مدرس، تأدیه کند.

ماده ۵: دانشجو تعهد می کند و قبول می کند در صورت خودداری از پرداخت بهای خسارت، دانشگاه می‌تواند خسارت مذکور را از طریق مراجع قضایی مطالبه و وصول کند؛ به علاوه به دانشگاه حق می‌دهد به منظور استیفای حقوق خود، از طریق دادگاه، معادل وجه مذکور در ماده ۴ را از محل توقیف کتابهای عرضه شده نگارنده برای فروش، تأمین نماید.

ماده ۶: اینجانب   دانشجوی رشته   مقطع   تعهد فوق وضمانت اجرایی آن را قبول کرده، به آن ملتزم می شوم.

نام و نام خانوادگی:

تاریخ و امضا:

آییننامه حق مالکیت مادی و معنوی در مورد نتایج پژوهشهای علمی دانشگاه تربیت مدرس

مقدمه: با عنایت به سیاستهای پژوهشی و فناوری دانشگاه در راستای تحقق عدالت و کرامت انسانها که لازمه شکوفایی علمی و فنی است و رعایت حقوق مادی و معنوی دانشگاه و پژوهشگران، لازم است اعضای هیأت علمی، دانشجویان، دانشآموختگان و دیگر همکاران طرح، در مورد نتایج پژوهشهای علمی که تحت عناوین پایاننامه، رساله و طرحهای تحقیقاتی با هماهنگی دانشگاه انجام شده است، موارد زیر را رعایت نمایند:

ماده ۱- حق نشر و تکثیر پایان نامه/ رساله و درآمدهای حاصل از آنها متعلق به دانشگاه می باشد ولی حقوق معنوی پدید آورندگان محفوظ خواهد بود.

ماده ۲- انتشار مقاله یا مقالات مستخرج از پایاننامه/ رساله به صورت چاپ در نشریات علمی و یا ارائه در مجامع علمی باید به نام دانشگاه بوده و با تایید استاد راهنمای اصلی، یکی از اساتید راهنما، مشاور و یا دانشجو مسئول مکاتبات مقاله باشد. ولی مسئولیت علمی مقاله مستخرج از پایان نامه و رساله به عهده اساتید راهنما و دانشجو می باشد.

تبصره: در مقالاتی که پس از دانشآموختگی بصورت ترکیبی از اطلاعات جدید و نتایج حاصل از پایاننامه/ رساله نیز منتشر میشود نیز باید نام دانشگاه درج شود.

ماده ۳- انتشار کتاب، نرم افزار و یا آثار ویژه (اثری هنری مانند فیلم، عکس، نقاشی و نمایشنامه) حاصل از نتایج پایاننامه/ رساله و تمامی طرحهای تحقیقاتی کلیه واحدهای دانشگاه اعم از دانشکده ها، مراکز تحقیقاتی، پژوهشکده ها، پارک علم و فناوری و دیگر واحدها باید با مجوز کتبی صادره از معاونت پژوهشی دانشگاه و براساس آئین نامه های مصوب انجام شود.

ماده ٤- ثبت اختراع و تدوین دانش فنی و یا ارائه یافته ها در جشنوارههای ملی، منطقهای و بینالمللی که حاصل نتایج مستخرج از پایاننامه/ رساله و تمامی طرحهای تحقیقاتی دانشگاه باید با هماهنگی استاد راهنما یا مجری طرح از طریق معاونت پژوهشی دانشگاه انجام گیرد.

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«اینجانب.............................دانشجوی رشته..................... ورودی سال تحصیلی.........................
مقطع .... دانشکده .... متعهد می شوم کِلیه نکات مندرج در آئین نامه حق مالکیت مادی و معنوی در مورد نتایج پژوهش های دانشگاه علمی دانشگاه تربیت مدرس را در انتشار یافته های علمی مستخرج از پایان نامه / رساله تحصیلی خود رعایت نمایم. در صورت تخلف از مفاد آئین نامه فوق الاشعار به دانشگاه وکالت و نمایندگی می دهم که از طرف اینجانب نسبت به لغو امتیاز اختراع بنام بنده و یا هر گونه امتیاز دیگر و تغییر آن به نام دانشگاه اقدام نماید. ضمناً نسبت به جبران فوری ضرر و زیان حاصله بر اساس برآورد دانشگاه اقدام خواهم نمود و بدینوسیله حق هر گونه اعتراض را از خود سلب نمودم»

امضا:.........................
تاریخ: ....

Tarbiat Modares University

Faculty of Humanities

English Department

How Iranian Adult Advanced Learners Retain Their English Proficiency

Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the

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Teaching English as a Foreign Language

By:

Mohammad Barzegar Rahatlou

Supervisor:

Dr. Gholam Reza Kiany

Advisor:

Dr. Reza Ghafar Samar

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Abstract

Using a foreign language is one of the greatest talents anyone can have. However, if it is not required to use a foreign language in everyday life, the risk of losing proficiency is run. Although being in regular contact with native speakers is undoubtedly one of the best ways in which to retain proficiency in a second language, this is not absolutely true for a foreign language due to the setting. There are several practical strategies that can be more helpful in a foreign language setting. Hence, this study mainly aimed at identifying the English proficiency retention strategies which were adopted by Iranian adult advanced English language learners. It also aimed at investigating the effect of gender and education level on L2 proficiency retention.

To find out those who were able to retain their English proficiency and the effect of gender and level of education on English proficiency retention, two IELTS mock exams (IELTS 1 and IELTS 2) were administered to 43 Iranian adult advanced English language learners at 9-month intervals. Then they were requested to write a self-report on strategies they had adopted to retain their L2 proficiency. The self-reports were utilized to develop a Likert-type questionnaire concerning English language retention strategies. For exploring the validity and reliability of the developed questionnaire, some stages mentioned by Dörnyei (2003) were followed. Factor analysis was applied to assess the validity of the questionnaire. To that end, the validity of the questionnaire was examined through Principal Axis Factoring with Varimax rotation. Subsequently, the internal consistency of the extracted factors was assessed with the Cronbach Alpha reliability estimate. Afterward the validated questionnaire was administered to 167 Iranian advanced English learners in some universities and IELTS academies in Tehran and Karaj. The data of this phase of study was analyzed via descriptive statistics (means and standard deviations) to rank order the retention strategies from the most preferred to the least preferred strategies in terms of their frequency of use. The results of the study showed that the frequencies of using strategies were moderate for each skill. The Iranian adult advanced English learners on average used strategies at a medium level rather than a high level in this study.

To discover whether participants' gender and level of education had affected their English proficiency retention, a repeated measure two-way ANOVA was run between participants' scores of "IELTS 1" and those of "IELTS 2". The results showed that only the effect of level of education on English proficiency retention was significant. It means that there was a significant difference between the means of BA/S and MA/S holders in both tests assessing their English proficiency. In other words, MA/S holders performed better than BA/S holders in the tests. On the contrary, the results showed that participants' gender had no effect on their English proficiency retention. That is to say, the performance of female participants was not significantly different from that of male participants on both tests. Furthermore, the interaction effect of Gender * Education level was not significant. The results indicated that there is no significant difference in the effect of level of education on English proficiency retention for males and females.

Keywords: *advanced FL learner, language attrition, language retention*

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Chapter one

1.1. Introduction

Learning a foreign language can be a demanding task for most people who spend a lot of time and energy in order to become proficient in the target language. In response, much research has been conducted to help language instructors assist language learners in the acquisition of new language skills. Unfortunately, even after much language instruction and devotion to learning a second language (L2) or a foreign language (FL), many language learners find that their abilities wane once their environment is no longer favorable to continued use and study of that language. In fact, "language loss affects all of us. It occurs in every corner of the world, taking its toll among young and old alike" (Hansen, 1999, p.3, cited in Köpke and Schmid, 2004). When regular usage of a foreign language is discontinued, even people who have succeeded in mastering that language to a significant degree still are subject to a loss of proficiency in one or more of the basic language skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing). Therefore, understanding language attrition is equally important as studying language acquisition. This understanding can help language learners to not only master a second language, but increase the permanence of their proficiency.

De Bot and Weltens (1995) stress the significance of language attrition studies based on two grounds. Concerning theoretical reasons, studying language attrition deals with understanding human memory and language change in individuals and

groups and elucidating the relation between acquisition and attrition. Hedgcock (1991), regarding the applied reasons, asserts that studying language attrition is to develop " instructional methods that might postpone loss, slow it down or perhaps even ensure against its onset among learners" (p. 50). Another applied reason is that "a deeper knowledge about the nature of the loss of language skills would benefit teachers and researchers because they would be able to strengthen the areas of second language acquisition (SLA) that favor language retention "(Moorcroft and Gardner, 1987, p. 328).

Given the importance of studying language attrition, however, it was not until after a conference entitled "loss of language skills" held at the University of Pennsylvania in 1980 that the processes of language loss or attrition were paid attention (Tomiyama, 2000). The aim of this conference was to discuss areas of second language (L2) attrition and to show the possible areas of future research in L2 loss. The conference revealed that attrition is a wide topic covering different types of language loss and that there are many possible reasons for the loss. During the same year, a dissertation was written on how children lose second languages (Hansen, 1980, cited in Köpke & Schmid, 2004). The following year, another dissertation investigated the loss of a foreign language by classroom learners (Godsall-Myers, 1981, cited in Köpke & Schmid, 2004). Since then, researchers continued to explore and extend the study of language attrition. For example, L1

attrition was investigated among immigrants in host countries around the world (de Bot & clyne, 1994; McKay & Wong, 2000, cited in Köpke & Schmid, 2004). Attrition in L2 focused on the loss of a language that had been acquired in classroom contexts (Bahrick, 1984; Hedgecock, 1991) and the loss of L2 among returnees who come back to their own countries after a prolonged sojourn in host countries (Berman & Olshtain, 1983, cited in Bardovi-Harlig & stringer, 2010; de Bot & Stoessel, 2000; Tomiyama, 2008). And most recently, a few studies have been done to establish a theoretically sound basis for future research in first and second language attrition (Bardovi-Harlig & Stringer, 2010; Schmid & de Bot, 2004). For example, Schmid and de Bot (2004) argue for the theoretical models and frameworks available to the study of language attrition and explore the definitions of language attrition in literature to find an uncontroversial definition. Hence, the field has gained momentum with different conferences and workshops at international conferences as well as articles and dissertations since 1980.

As can be deduced, a great deal of research has been done on language attrition, both L1 and L2, and language attrition has taken its status as a field of applied linguistics. However, little research has been conducted on language retention, particularly in foreign language retention. In other words, language attrition studies have focused on "what is lost" to the exclusion of "what is retained" (Schmid & de Bot, 2004, p. 227). On the other hand, there are some

studies that investigate how to retain vocabulary after instruction ceases. In retrospect, lexical attrition/retention has been investigated more than other areas (for example, de Bot, Martens & Stoessel, 2004; Hummel, 2010; Russel, 2005; Sildus, 2006) and very little research has been done on retaining general proficiency in FL/L2 (Murtagh, 2003). None of the studies in the attrition/retention literature has examined those people who are able to retain their foreign language skills and how they do this. The purpose of this study, therefore, is to determine how Iranian adult advanced English language learners are able to retain their L2 proficiency.

1.2. Statement of the problem

Some language learners are more successful than others in second or foreign language learning, and some learners have individual learning behaviors that others do not. Over the past three decades, these discrepancies have created an attractive topic for researchers to pursue in the areas of second and foreign language acquisition. Foreign or second language learning strategies are specific language learning behaviors EFL (English as a Foreign Language) or ESL (English as a Second Language) students consciously use in order to improve their target language. Since the early 1970s, a great deal of research has been conducted on language learning strategies of good language learners (e.g., Chamot, 2005; Oxford and Ehrman, 1995; Rubin, 1975, and Stern, 1975, cited in Anderson, 2005).

As it is lucid, what has been done relates to strategies used at some point in learning a new language that students adopt to improve their target language. Very little research, if any, has been devoted to the strategies adopted by advanced English language learners to retain what they have learned after formal instruction comes to an end. That is to say, lack of research on what strategies with what frequency advanced foreign language learners use in order to retain their FL skills was an incentive for the present research to be conducted.

In the same vein, research on the link between learners' education level and their FL proficiency retention as well as between their gender and FL retention is weak. Thus, the present study also investigates whether participants' education level has any effects on their FL skills retention. Additionally, concerning the paucity of research on the effect of gender on language proficiency retention, the present research purports to find if there is any significant relationship between participants' gender and their FL skills retention.

1.3. Significance of the study

Learning English as a foreign language (EFL) is very popular in Iran. English is valuable in the fields of technology, science, education, business and international communication. In Iran, English is a required subject taught in middle and high schools for six years. When we look back at English in Iran, we will notice that on