IN THE NAME OF GOD

PDF created with pdfFactory Pro trial version www.pdffactory.com

University of Isfahan

Faculty of Foreign Languages

Department of English Language

PhD Thesis

Syntactic Properties of the pro-drop Parameter in L2 English of Persian Speakers

Supervisor

Dr. Manijeh Youhanaee

Advisor

Dr. Mansoor Tavakoli

By

Ahmad Alibabaee

July 2010

PDF created with pdfFactory Pro trial version www.pdffactory.com

کلیه حقوق مادی مرتبت برنتایج مطالعات ابتکارات و نوآوری های ناشی از تحقیق موضوع این پایان نامه متعلق به دانشگاه اصفهان است.

PDF created with pdfFactory Pro trial version www.pdffactory.com

دانشگاه اصفهان

دانشکده زبان‌های خارجی

گروه زبان انگلیسی

پایان نامه ی دکتری رشته ی آموزش زبان انگلیسی آقای احمد علی بابایی

تحت عنوان

ویژگی‌های نحوی پارامتر ضمیرانداز در زبان بینابین فارسی زبانان فراگیر زبان انگلیسی به عنوان زبان دوم

در تاریخ 1389/4/13 توسط هیأت داوران زیر بررسی و با درجه عالی به تصویب نهایی رسید.

۱- استاد راهنمای پایان نامه	دکتر منیژه یوحنایی	با مرتبه ی علمی استاد یار	امضا
۲- استاد مشاور پایان نامه	دکتر منصور توکلی	با مرتبه ی علمی استاد یار	امضا
۳- استاد داور داخل گروه	دکتر احمد معین زاده	با مرتبه ی علمی استاد یار	امضا
۴- استاد داور داخل گروه	دکتر سعید کتابی	با مرتبه ی علمی استاد یار	امضا
۵- استاد داورخارج از گروه	دکتر منصور کوشا	با مرتبه ی علمی دانشیار	امضا
۶- استاد داورخارج از گروه	دکتر علی اکبرجباری	با مرتبه ی علمی دانشیار	امضا

امضای مدیر گروه

PDF created with pdfFactory Pro trial version www.pdffactory.com

Acknowledgements

Before I begin to appreciate the help of many professors and friends who have assisted me in one way or another to bring this work to completion, I should thank my God for giving me the chance to attend a PhD program at the University of Isfahan and for providing me the wisdom and courage to complete this task. When I felt overwhelmed, He made me realize that I am not alone, and that He is with me as always, helping to make everything right. Without Him, I would not exist and, thus, this dissertation would not exist either.

As regards the people who have contributed to this dissertation, first and foremost, my deepest thanks go to Dr. Manije Youhanaee, my supervisor, for her meticulous supervision, warm encouragement, unfailing support, and much-needed guidance. Her immense knowledge of Syntax and Second Language Acquisition have tremendously influenced and shaped my general views in these fields. Her teaching first opened up to me the field of SLA, and her frank suggestions and astute guidance went into the creation of this dissertation's initial proposal.

I am also greatly indebted to Dr. Mansoor Tavakoli, my advisor, for his careful review of the study, invaluable comments, and sincere help. He has always been very generous with his time and I have deeply benefited from every discussion we have had. Appointments with him have been always stimulating and constructive, which I have truly enjoyed.

Special thanks go to all the academic staff members in the English departments of the University of Isfahan and Sheikhbahaee University for their constant support and care during my PhD career.

PDF created with pdfFactory Pro trial version www.pdffactory.com

For help with data, I would like to thank my research participants, the undergraduate and graduate students of the two aforementioned universities who helped me with the data collection.

On a more personal level, immeasurable thanks are also due to my family for helping me through the long experience this dissertation represents. Finally, I wish to deeply appreciate the efforts of my closest friend — my wife. More than anyone, she was most directly affected by my decision to pursue this goal, and she endured the process with unusual grace.

PDF created with pdfFactory Pro trial version www.pdffactory.com

I dedicate this dissertation to a man in my academic life,

being the wind beneath my wings:

Professor

Mohammad Hassan Tahririan

PDF created with pdfFactory Pro trial version www.pdffactory.com

Abstract

This study was set out to investigate the acquisition of the syntactic properties associated with the pro-drop parameter as well as one subject-related syntactic issue (PRO) by Persian speaking L2 learners of English to examine the (un)attainability of native-like knowledge and (in)accebility of UG in adult SLA. It also aimed to test the idea of L2 structure misanalysis (Tsimpli & Roussou, 1991) through scrutinizing its claims. The study was a cross-sectional study which tracked learners through developmental stages seeking to find out the extent to which Persian speaking L2 learners of English conform to English native speakers regarding their knowledge of the pro-drop syntactic properties. 152 participants were assigned into different levels of L2 knowledge based on their performance on the Oxford Placement Test (2001), a 60 item test, which was decided to serve the discriminatory purpose for this research. A 60-item Grammaticality Judgment Test (GJT), and a 40-item translation test (TT) were designed, developed and validated in this study to get insight into the state of the learners' competence at various stages of acquisition, and to elicit production data with respect to the syntactic properties under investigation, respectively. The final number of the L2 participants who took all three tests was 33 in the elementary, 36 in the intermediate, and 23 in the advanced group which were totalled 92 L2 learners. Besides, functioning as a control group, 6 English native speakers participated in the study. As to the obtained results of running one-way ANOVAs and Tamhane's T2c test, the general performance on all types of obligatory subjects evidenced that the advanced L2 learners and not the other two groups could converge with the natives. The performance on verb-subject inversion illustrated that just the advanced learners recognized the ungrammaticality of the L2 structures with such sequence. The third pro-drop

PDF created with pdfFactory Pro trial version www.pdffactory.com

associated syntactic property, that-*trace* constraint, proved the most difficult for the L2 learners in this study, since none of the L2 groups could recognize, at natives' level, the ungrammaticality of the presence of *that* when a wh-subject was extracted from the complement to a verb. Regarding the overall performance on all the pro-drop syntactic properties, the Persian speaking L2 learners of English failed to converge with the natives. With respect to PRO, the advanced and not the elementary and intermediate L2 learners' performance on PRO conformed to the natives' performance both in grammatical and ungrammatical items. Regarding the possible pattern this study sought to investigate, the following hierarchy of difficulty may be presented based on the analyses of the elicited performance: referential subjects > expletives > PRO > verb-subject constraint > quasi subjects > that-trace constraint. Finally, the elicited performance showed that the proposal of L2 structure misanalysis was not verified empirically. All the L2 groups performed well on negations and adverb placements and the intermediate and advanced learners performed well on question formations. As far as the intra-paradigmatic accounts of the findings are concerned, the findings of this study evidence that native-like attainment of unselected L2 syntactic features is unlikely at advanced stages, but it is logically possible that Persian-speaking L2 learners of English attain native-like knowledge of [-pro-drop] at very advanced or near-native stages of L2 acquisition.

Keywords: Expletive subjects, Parameter resetting, Quasi subjects, Referential subjects, that-trace constraint, verb-subject constraint

PDF created with pdfFactory Pro trial version www.pdffactory.com

Table of contents

Title **page**

Chapter One: Introduction

1.1. Background 1

1.2. Theoretical foundations 4

1.2.1. Theoretical framework 4

1.2.2. Non-availability of UG 7

1.3. Linguistic assumptions 10

1.3.1. The pro-drop parameter in Persian 10

1.3.2. The pro-drop parameter in English 13

1.4. Statement of the problem 14

1.5. Research questions 17

1.6. Significance of the study 18

1.7. Definitions of the key terms 19

Chapter Two: Review of the Literature

2.1. Overview 21

2.2. Proposals regarding the role of UG and L1 in SLA 21

2.3. Impossibility of native-like attainment 26

2.4. Possibility of native-like attainment 31

2.5. SLA studies on the pro-drop parameter 36

2.5.1. Impossibility of native-like attainment in the pro-drop parameter 38

2.5.2. Possibility of native-like attainment in the pro-drop parameter 43

2.6. The obtained findings in the literature 54

PDF created with pdfFactory Pro trial version www.pdffactory.com

Title **page**

2.7. Conclusion 56

Chapter Three: Method

3.1. Introduction.....58

3.2. Participants 59

3.3. Instrumentation 61

3.3.1. Validity of GJTs 61

3.3.2. Grammaticality Judgment Test (GJT) 63

3.3.3. Translation Test (TT) 65

3.3.4. A pilot study.....67

3.4. Design 68

3.5. Procedure 69

3.5.1. Data collection 69

3.5.2. Data analysis 69

3.5.2.1. Scoring and coding 69

3.5.2.2. Statistical procedures 70

3.6. Summary..... 72

Chapter Four: Results

4.1. Overview 73

4.2. The performance on obligatory subjects 74

4.2.1. The performance on obligatory subject items in the GJT 74

PDF created with pdfFactory Pro trial version www.pdffactory.com

Title **page**

4.2.2. The performance on obligatory subject items in the GJT and TT 76

4.2.3. The performance on obligatory referential subjects 77

4.2.3.1. The performance on the referential subject items in the GJT 77

4.2.3.2. The performance on the referential subject items in the TT 82

4.2.4. The performance on obligatory quasi subjects 84

4.2.4.1. The performance on quasi subject items in the GJT 84

4.2.4.2. The performance on obligatory quasi subject items in the TT 87

4.2.4.3. The overall picture of the performances on the GJT and TT 89

4.2.5. The performance on obligatory expletive subjects 90

4.2.5.1. The performance on expletive subject items in the GJT 90

4.2.5.2. The overall picture of the performances on the GJT and TT 92

4.3. The performance on verb-subject constraint 93

4.3.1. The performance on verb-subject inversion items in the GJT.....93

4.3.2. The overall picture of the performances on the GJT and TT 95

4.4. The performance on subject/object extractions 96

4.4.1. The performance on subject/object extractions in the GJT 96

4.4.2. The performance on subject/object extractions in the TT 101

4.4.3. The overall picture of the performance on the GJT and TT.....102

4.5. The performance on PRO 103

4.5.1. The performance on PRO items in the GJT 104

4.5.2. The performance on PRO items in the TT 107

4.5.3. The overall picture of the performance on the GJT and TT 107

4.6. The distribution of the performance on the pro-drop syntactic properties 108

4.6.1. The overall picture of the participants' performance on the GJT 108

PDF created with pdfFactory Pro trial version www.pdffactory.com

Title **page**

4.6.2. The distribution of the performance in the GJT 110

4.6.3. The distribution of the performance on the GJT grammatical items 113

4.6.4. The distribution of the performance on the GJT ungrammatical items .118

4.6.5. The overall picture of the participants' performance on the TT 122

4.6.6. The distribution of the performance in the TT.....124

4.7. The performance on non-subject pronoun-verb order in the TT 130

4.8. Summary 133

Chapter Five: Discussion and Implications

5.1. Overview 137

5.2. Summary of the findings 137

5.3. Discussion 138

5.3.1. Null subject pronouns 138

5.3.2. Inversion 139

5.3.3. That-trace constraint 140

5.3.4. PRO 140

5.3.5. L2 structure misanalysis 141

5.3.6. The recognized pattern 143

5.3.7. The role of L1 and UG in adult SLA.....145

5.3.8. UG access proposals revisited.....149

5.4. Conclusion 150

5.5. Implications.....153

PDF created with pdfFactory Pro trial version www.pdffactory.com

Title **page**

5.5.1. Theoretical implications 153

5.5.2. Pedagogical implications 154

5.6. Limitations 154

5.7. Suggestions for further research 157

Appendices 159

Appendix I: Tests 159

Appendix II: Multiple Comparisons 172

References 188

PDF created with pdfFactory Pro trial version www.pdffactory.com

List of Tables

Title **page**

Table 3.1 Descriptive statistics for the performance on the OPT 60

Table 3.2 ANOVA results for the OPT 61

Table 3.3 Number of grammatical and ungrammatical items in the GJT 64

Table 3.4 Number of items in the TT for each syntactic property 66

Table 3.5 Levene's test of equality of variance in the GJT 71

Table 3.6 Levene's test of equality of variance in the TT 71

Table 4.1 ANOVA results on the scores of the ungrammatical obligatory subject items in the GJT 75

Table 4.2 ANOVA results on the scores of obligatory referential subjects in the GJT 78

Table 4.3 ANOVA results on the scores of ungrammatical obligatory referential ..... subjects in main clauses in the GJT.....81

Table 4.4 ANOVA results on the scores of ungrammatical obligatory referential subjects in embedded clauses in the GJT.....81

Table 4.5 ANOVA results on the scores of obligatory quasi subject items in GJT 85

Table 4.6 ANOVA results on the scores of ungrammatical obligatory quasi subject items in the GJT.....87

Table 4.7 ANOVA results on the scores of obligatory quasi subject items in the TT..88

Table 4.8 ANOVA results on the scores of obligatory expletive subject items in the GJT..91

PDF created with pdfFactory Pro trial version www.pdffactory.com

Title **page**

Table 4.9 ANOVA results on the scores of ungrammatical obligatory expletive subject items in the GJT 92

Table 4.10 ANOVA results on the scores of verb-subject constraint items in the GJT 94

Table 4.11 ANOVA results on the scores of subject/object extractions in the GJT 97

Table 4.12 ANOVA results on the scores of grammatical subject extractions in the GJT ... 99

Table 4.13 ANOVA results on the scores of ungrammatical subject extractions in the GJT 100

Table 4.14 ANOVA results on the scores of object extractions including that in the GJT 100

Table 4.15 ANOVA results on the scores of object extractions excluding that in the GJT 101

Table 4.16 ANOVA results on the scores of PRO in the GJT 105

Table 4.17 ANOVA results on the scores of the ungrammatical PRO items in the GJT ... 106

Table 4.18 ANOVA results on the scores of the pro-drop syntactic features in the GJT 109

Table 4.19 ANOVA results on the scores of the grammatical obligatory referential subjects in the GJT 114

Table 4.20 ANOVA results on the scores of the grammatical obligatory quasi subjects in the GJT 115

Table 4.21 ANOVA results on the scores of the grammatical obligatory expletive subjects in the GJT 115

Table 4.22 ANOVA results on the scores of the grammatical subject/object extractions in the GJT 116

Table 4.23 ANOVA results on the scores of the grammatical PRO items in the GJT 117

PDF created with pdfFactory Pro trial version www.pdffactory.com

Title **page**

Table 4.24 ANOVA results on the scores of ungrammatical obligatory referential subjects in the GJT.....120

Table 4.25 ANOVA results on the scores of the pro-drop syntactic features in the TT 124

Table 4.26 ANOVA results on the scores of obligatory referential subjects in the TT125

Table 4.27 ANOVA results on the scores of obligatory expletive subjects in the TT126

Table 4.28 ANOVA results on the scores of verb-subject items in the TT 127

Table 4.29 ANOVA results on the scores of the subject/object extractions in the TT128

Table 4.30 ANOVA results on the scores of the PRO items in the TT 128

Table 4.31 ANOVA results on the scores of the question formations in the TT 132

Table 4.32 ANOVA results on the scores of the adverb placements in the TT 132

PDF created with pdfFactory Pro trial version www.pdffactory.com

List of Figures

Title **page**

Figure 4.1 Mean accuracy scores (%) on obligatory subjects in the GJT 74

Figure 4.2 Mean accuracy scores (%) on obligatory subjects in the GJT and TT 76

Figure 4.3 Mean accuracy scores (%) on obligatory referential subjects in the GJT ...77

Figure 4.4 Mean accuracy scores (%) on referential subject items in main and embedded clauses in the GJT 79

Figure 4.5 Mean accuracy scores (%) on grammatical and ungrammatical obligatory referential subject items in the GJT 80

Figure 4.6 Mean accuracy scores (%) on obligatory referential subjects items in the TT 82

Figure 4.7 Mean accuracy scores (%) on main and embedded obligatory referential subjects in the TT.....83

Figure 4.8 Mean accuracy scores (%) on obligatory quasi subject items in the GJT ...85

Figure 4.9 Mean accuracy scores (%) on obligatory quasi subject grammatical and ungrammatical items in the GJT 86

Figure 4.10 Mean accuracy scores (%) on obligatory quasi subject items in the TT ...88

Figure 4.11 Mean accuracy scores (%) on obligatory quasi subject items in the GJT and TT.....89

Figure 4.12 Mean accuracy scores (%) on the grammatical and ungrammatical obligatory expletive subject items in the GJT 90

PDF created with pdfFactory Pro trial version www.pdffactory.com

Title **page**

Figure 4.13 Mean accuracy scores (%) on obligatory expletive subject items in the GJT and TT 92

Figure 4.14 Mean accuracy scores (%) on verb-subject constraint items in the GJT .. 94

Figure 4.15 Mean accuracy scores (%) on verb-subject constraint items in the GJT and TT 95

Figure 4.16 Mean accuracy scores (%) on subject/object extractions in the GJT 96

Figure 4.17 Mean accuracy scores (%) on grammatical and ungrammatical subject/object extractions in the GJT 98

Figure 4.18 Mean accuracy scores (%) on subject and object extractions in the TT . 102

Figure 4.19 Mean accuracy scores (%) on subject/object extractions in the GJT and TT 103

Figure 4.20 Mean accuracy scores (%) on the PRO items in the GJT 104

Figure 4.21 Mean accuracy scores (%) on the grammatical and ungrammatical PRO items in the GJT 105

Figure 4.22 Mean accuracy scores (%) on PRO items in the TT 107

Figure 4.23 Mean accuracy scores (%) on the pro-drop syntactic features in the GJT 109

Figure 4.24 Mean accuracy scores (%) on each syntactic property in the GJT 110

Figure 4.25 Mean accuracy scores (%) on the grammatical items in the GJT 113

Figure 4.26 Mean accuracy scores (%) on the ungrammatical items in the GJT 119

Figure 4.27 Mean accuracy scores (%) on the pro-drop syntactic features in the TT 123

Figure 4.28 Mean accuracy scores (%) on the performance on the syntactic properties in the TT 125

PDF created with pdfFactory Pro trial version www.pdffactory.com

Title **page**

Figure 4.29 Mean accuracy scores (%) on the performance on the non-subject pronoun-verb orders in the TT 130

Figure 4.30 Mean accuracy scores (%) on the performance on question formation, negation and adverb placement in the TT 131

PDF created with pdfFactory Pro trial version www.pdffactory.com