IN THE NAME OF GOD

THE COMPASSIONATE,

THE MERCIFUL

UNIVERSITY OF GUILAN

University Campus 2

Second language Acquisition of That-Complement Clauses by Persian Learners of English

A thesis submitted to the University Campus 2, University of Guilan, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the M.A. Degree in Teaching English as a Foreign Language

By

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Dedicated

To my husband Reza, my daughter Sana and my son Sobhan whose beings gave a particular meaning to my attempts, and to my (English) professors for their invaluable help and insights.

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Abstract

Second Language Acquisition of That-Complement Clauses by Persian Learners of English

Maryam Hadaeghi Azad

The present study has concentrated on Universal Grammar approach which theoretically plays the strongest linguistic role in second language acquisition research and more specifically aims at investigating Persian Learners' acquisition of That-complement clauses in English as L2 at three levels of proficiency. The idea that adult L2 acquisition might be similar in nature to L1 development and the question that there is access to UG in L2 acquisition like L1 acquisition have been controversial in the last decades. There have been proponents (e.g. White, 1998, 2003) for access to UG in L2 acquisition and opponents (e.g. Bley-Vroman, 1989, 2009; Clahsen, 1995) in which they believe that there is a fundamentally different rout in adult L2 acquisition. On the other hand, a number of researches (e.g. see Dulay et.al., 1982; Cook, 1997) believe that L2 learners systematically pass through developmental stages similar to children in acquiring the L1. However, some researchers (Mitchell & Myless, 2013) believe that L2 development is partly systematic. Therefore, the present study reports the results of the Persian learners' responses to a Grammatical Judgment Test (GJT) and a Cloze test investigating six linguistic variables associated with Complement Clauses: 'complement in finite/ non-finite clauses, small-clauses, exceptional-clauses, that-trace effect in clauses and subcategorization of two verbs (i. e. want and let)'. The responses were given by 50 Persian learners of English divided into three proficiency levels: Elementary, Intermediate and Advanced. The division of participants was on the basis of their Oxford Placement Test (OPT) results. Two main statistical analyses were carried out: parametric test (i.e. ANOVA flowingly Post Hoc Scheffe Test for variables which turned out to be significantly different between groups) and nonparametric tests (i. e. Kruskal-Wallis test). The statistical analyses revealed that by increasing the participants' level of proficiency their judgment of grammatical and ungrammatical items was improved whereas the differences between groups were also significant. The results can indicate that the development of the *complement* acquisition in L2 is generally systematic; language process of Elementary and Intermediate levels of proficiency are compatible with the approximative system and the Advanced learners' grammatical system is well guided by UG. In addition, by carrying out syntactic analyses on the sentences which participants produced at three proficiency levels, one can conclude that as predicted by UG, Persian learners did not use any wild grammar at any level of L2 acquisition. The above findings are generally in harmony with the view that L2 learners attain the unconscious knowledge that goes beyond what they receive as L2 input. Finally, the findings are argued to have implications for language learning/teaching as they deep the understanding of the nature of L2 acquisition.

***Key Words*:** Second Language Acquisition, That-Complements, Clauses, Developmental stages, Systematicity, Universal Grammar, Wild Grammar, Complementizer.

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Abbreviations

Agr: Agreement

ANOVA: Analysis Of Variance

AP: Adjective Phrase

CC: complement Clause

Cl: Clause

Comp (C): Complementizer

CP: Complementizer Phrase

CPH: Critical Period Hypothesis

CT: Cloze Test

DP: Determiner Phrase

ECM: Exceptional Case Marking

ECP: Empty Category Principle

FAH: Full Access Hypothesis

FDH: Fundamental Different Hypothesis

FLL: Foreign Language Leaning

GB: Government-Binding

GJT: Grammatical Judgment Test

IL: Interlanguage

ILGs: Interlanguage grammars

IP: Inflectional Phrase

KST: Kolmogrove-Smirnove Test

L1: First Language

L2: Second Language

LAD: Language Acquisition Device

LF: Logical Form

LSC-system: Language-Specific Cognitive system

M: Modal

MT: Mother Tongue

NNS: Non Native Speaker

NL: Native language

NP: Noun Phrase

NPD: Non-Pro-Drop

NS: Native Speaker

OPT: Oxford Proficiency Test

P & P: Principle and parameter

PD: pro Drop

PLD: Primary Linguistic Data

PP: Propositional Phrase

PSC-system: Problem Solving Cognitive system

PT: Parameter Theory

QSB: Questionnaire on subjects' Background

RC: Relative Clause

S: sentence

S0: initial state in L1

Si: initial state in L2 (i.e. First language grammar SLA)

Ss: final steady state in L1

St: terminal state in L2

SC: Small Clause

SLA: Second Language Acquisition

TL: Target Language

TP: tensed Phrase

UG: Universal Grammar

V: Verb

VP: Verb Phrase

Acronyms

INFL: Inflection

PRO: Pronoun

Spec-IP: Specifier of Inflectional Phrase

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1. Preview

The systematic study of how people acquire a second language (L2) is a fairly recent phenomenon which belongs to the second half of the twentieth century (Ellis, 2003). People have had to learn a second language not just as pleasing pastime, but often as a means of obtaining an education or securing employment in the time of 'global village' (ibid.). L2 acquisition can be defined as "the way in which people learn a language other than their mother tongue, inside or outside of a classroom" (Ellis, 2003, p. 3). L2 learners bring an enormous amount of knowledge to the task of learning a second language. They have already learned a language (their mother tongue) which they are expected to transfer in the process of L2 learning. They also possess general knowledge about the world which they can draw on to help them understand L2 input as well as communication strategies that can help them make effective use of their L2 knowledge.

One of the controversial issues in L2 acquisition theory in recent years concerns the role of Universal Grammar (UG) and its probable accessibility to second language learners. This research concentrates on L2 learning of complement clauses within Universal Grammar inspired by contemporary linguistic theory, because it has had the strongest linguistic influence on second language acquisition research in recent years, and has inspired a great wealth of studies, articles and books on SLA both empirical and theoretical. While the majority of linguists have no doubt about the presence of UG in L1 Acquisition, its availability in L2 Acquisition in general, and particularly in adult L2 acquisition, is controversial. On the one hand, there are proponents of the access to UG in L2 acquisition (White, 1989, 2003), on the other hand, opponents to the theory who argue against the notion that second language learners have access to UG (Bley-vroman, 1989, 2009; Clahsen, 1995). The idea that adult L2 acquisition might be similar in nature to child L1 development was one of the starting points for the systematic investigation of L2 acquisition in the 1970s. At that time a number of researches (Dulay et al, 1982; Cook, 1997) observed that L2 learners systematically pass through developmental stages, similarly to what had been found for children acquiring their mother tongue (Brown, 1973). It was concluded that L1 and L2 acquisition are parallel in major ways; the extent of the parallelism, however, was controversial.

According to Cook (1997) "UG is a theory of knowledge, not of behavior" (p. 2). UG theory holds that the speaker know a set of principles universal to all languages, and parameters that vary from one languages to another and acquiring a language means learning how these

principles apply to a particular language and which value is appropriate for each parameter (ibid.).

The aims of linguistics are often summarized by Chomsky (1988, p. 3) through following three fundamental questions:

(i) What constitutes knowledge of language?

(ii) How is knowledge of language acquired?

(iii) How is knowledge of language put to use?

The Prime goal of linguistics for the first question is to describe the language content of the human mind whatever it is that they have in their mind when they know any language. In other word the explicit representation, of the speaker's competence of a particular language is the ultimate result of this first goal as well as the distinctive characteristic which make human language different from other system of communication. It also needs to specify in what way individual human language differ from one another (Mitchell & Myles, 1998, p. 43). A second aim is to discover how people acquire this knowledge (i.e., how linguistic competence is acquired by the human mind). The third aim is to see how people use this acquired knowledge in real context of communication. Chomsky is concerned with child first language only. However, these questions can be rephrased to take in knowledge of more than one language for the purpose of second language knowledge and second language acquisition. White (1989) also stated if the questions are posed about second language knowledge and second language acquisition, "the same answers that current linguistic theory offers for first language knowledge and acquisition may prove to be relevant" (p. 1).

1.2. UG and First/ Second Language Acquisition

The main concentration of the argument has been focused on the children's access to UG principles that guide and control their L1 language acquisition. Chomsky (1995a) has conceptualized language acquisition is in term of initial and final 'state' of the mind. The mind of baby who knows no language, termed the initial zero state or S_0. At the end, the final state , the adult native speaker with full knowledge in which adult's competence is essentially complete, is termed the steady state or S_s. " I-Language to be an instantiation of the initial state" (Chomsky, 1995a, p.18). Cook (1997) pointed out that acquiring a language means "progressing from $S_{0'}$, to S_s or full competence" (p. 78). Children hear a number of sentences which they are exposed – the primary linguistic data; they process these data within their black box, called the Language

Acquisition Device (LAD), and they acquire linguistic competence in the language. The UG model is thus with language acquisition in a logical sense (ibid. p. 79). A controversial question will be, whether the same principles are accessible to second language learners. A number of L2 researches propose that there are differences between L1 acquisition and L2 acquisition for some reasons (Schachter, 1989, 1996; and Bley-Vroman, 1989, 2009). They believe that second language acquisition do not function as first language acquisition for following reason: first, few SLA learners can gain a knowledge of L2 equivalent to that of the L1, unlike first language acquisition in which children acquire full L1s (Selinker, 1972; Schachter, 1996; Johnson &Newport, 1989; Cook 1997). Secondly, children progress from an initial state to a final state of knowing everything about a particular language. L2 learners, however, already have the knowledge of L1 (White, 1992). Thirdly, second language learners are occasionally exposed to different types of negative feedback (Mitchel & Myless, 2013). Finally, the achievement of second language learners are influenced by variables such as age, motivation, attitudes, personality factors (Towell &Howkins, 1994). However, some researchers claim that successful second language learners usually attain very unconscious knowledge of the target language, while the linguistic input from L2 is insufficient(i.e. the input underdetermines their L2 linguistic competence) (White, 1985, 2003; Cook, 1997).

1.2.1 Children vs. Adult in Second Language Learning

Although there is an assumption that children are better than adults in learning a second language, there are a great number of observation in which adults learn the syntax of other language perfectly. People who speak second languages so well on the basis of the grammar alone (not the pronunciation), they would be judged native speakers (Steinberg, 1993/2006, p. 135). Lenneberg (1967) proposed a critical period hypothesis (CPH), arguing that language is best learned before puberty after which everyone faces certain constraints in language development. Krashen (1981) also argued that different process involved in L2 development by children and adults. Children utilize innate properties of language acquisition, but adults employ general problem-solving abilities and thus accounting for the differential effect of age. So, he believed that "Young is better". Patkowski's (1980) study which focused on syntactic knowledge of immigrants to the USA who had entered before or after the age of fifteen, showed that those who arrive before 15 years of age scored very high, while those arriving after, scored lower. Johnson's and Newport's (1989) research on native speakers of Korean and Chinese rate