Yazd University

Faculty of Language and Literature

English Department

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts in Teaching English as a Foreign Language

Acquisition of Noun Modifiers by Persian (L1) learners of English (L2) and French (L3)

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By:

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October 2013

In the Name of God

the Compassionate

the Merciful

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کلیه حقوق مادی و معنوی مرتبط بر نتایج مطالعات، ابتکارات و نوآوریهای ناشی از تحقیق موضوع این پایان نامه/ رساله متعلق به دانشگاه یزد است و هرگونه استفاده از نتایج علمی و عملی از پایان نامه/رساله برای تولید دانش فنی، ثبت اختراعات، ثبت اثر بدیع هنری، همچنین چاپ و تکثیر، نسخه برداری، ترجمه و اقتباس و ارائه مقاله در سمینارها و مجلات علمی از این پایان نامه/ رساله منوط به موافقت کتبی دانشگاه یزداست.

To My Unique Family

For their supports and encouragements

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For all his Kindness

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Abstract

The present study focused on the field of third language acquisition and tried to investigate the role of previous languages on the acquisition of a new language. To this aim, some structures in the subcategory of noun modifiers namely, post noun plural numerals and quantifiers, attributive adjectives, and possessive adjectives were selected. The three languages under study were Persian (i.e. L1), English (i.e. L2), and French (i.e. L3). The aim was to determine to what extent the participants referred back to their L1 and L2 in the acquisition of the above mentioned structures in French. First an Oxford Placement Test of French was given to the students. According to the result of the placement test, they were assigned into two groups of lower intermediate and upper intermediate. The participants were supposed to complete two tasks of GJT and translation. The results were analyzed and interpreted through the SPSS software and demonstrated that proficiency had a great role in the acquisition of these structures. The upper intermediate group outperformed the lower intermediate one in all three contexts. However, the result of the lower intermediate group disconfirmed the findings of "L1 Transfer" model and confirmed the "L2 Status Factor" and "CEM". On the whole, it can be concluded that in the acquisition of possessive adjectives (L1=L2≠L3), both proficiency groups resorted to either L1 or L2 and transfer was selective. Moreover, in the acquisition of post noun plural numerals and quantifiers (L2=L3) L2 was used as a dominant source of transfer. However, in attributive adjectives, although the structure of L1 and L3 were similar, there was no significant role of L1 in the lower intermediate group. But, in the upper intermediate group the role of L1 Factor was significant.

Key Words: L3 acquisition, Language Transfer, Attributive Adjective, Post Noun

Plural Numeral and Quantifier, Possessive Adjective

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List of Abbreviations

Adj: Adjective

CEM: Cumulative Enhancement Model

CLI: Cross-Linguistic Influence

EFL: English as a foreign Language

GJT: Grammatically Judgment Test

L1: First Language

L2: Second Language

L3: Third Language

LFH: ‘L1 Factor’ Hypothesis

Ln: Last Language

LSFH: ‘L2 Status Factor’ Hypothesis

SLA: Second Language Acquisition

TL: Target Language

V2: Verb Second

Chapter one

Introduction

1.1 Preliminaries

For many years, SLA has been used as a cover term for third, fourth or other language acquisition. Also primarily, the focus of attention in cross-linguistic influence was on the influence of a native language (L1) on a second language (L2). During the last decades, however, researchers became interested in the newly developed field of TLA (Third Language Acquisition) and made a substantial difference between these two processes of L3 and L2 acquisition. For example, they pointed out that in L3 the learners have acquired two languages as a source of transfer; while in L2 they have only one language, their native language (Bardel & Falk, 2007). Also, according to Cenoz (2000) the process of third language acquisition has different routes of development in comparison with L2. For instance, one can learn L1 and L2 simultaneously or learn L2 after learning the L1. But in case of L3, more different routes have emerged: 1) L1, L2, and L3 can be learnt at the same time, 2) L1, L2, and L3 can be acquired sequentially, 3) L2 and L3 can be learnt parallel with each other after the acquisition of L1, 4) L3 is learnt after the acquisition of L1 and L2, while L1 and L2 had learnt at the same time.

So, with the emerging field of L3 acquisition the role of the previously acquired languages became more important. Many studies identified a prominent role for the native language in the process of language transfer. However, according to Cenoz (2001), in the acquisition of a new language all the previously learnt languages of the learners, native and non- native, can be the source of transfer. This phenomenon of the effect of prior language knowledge in the acquisition of a new language is referred to as cross-linguistic influence.

Since the study of cross-linguistic influence in L3 includes all the processes associated with second language acquisition as well as the complex relationship between the languages acquired by the learner, and because it has more diversity than SLA it is more difficult than the study of cross-linguistic influence in second language acquisition (L2) (Cenoz, 2001). In case of diversity, for example, SLA and TLA can occur in naturalistic, formal or both of these settings; however, in TLA the occurrence of the two settings can increase, for example, in the Basque country where students are taught Basque and Spanish at school, English can be added as a third language (Jessner, 2006) Taking into consideration this complexity and diversity, researchers believe that the study of cross-linguistic influence in third language acquisition is still in its infancy, although some improvements have been made during the last decades.

In this study, three languages of Persian, English, and French are dealt with. There are some reasons in choosing these three languages.

First, this study is conducted in Iran, a monolingual country, and Persian is the native language of the Iranian people. There are some nations in Iran whose native language is not Persian, but they are classified as the minority groups. Second, English has been taught as a foreign language at school and university in Iran. And, all of the students have, to some extent, some knowledge of this language. Third, as communication is improved throughout the world, people have decided to learn other languages as well. There are a lot of institutes in Iran which offer many languages, including French, and many people take part in these classes to learn French besides English, as the formal foreign language instructed at Iranian schools. Since these learners have already acquired a second language, i.e., English, then this may affect the acquisition of French as a third language.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

In grammar, a noun modifier is a structure which modifies a noun. Typically, the modifier can be removed from the sentence without affecting the grammar. For example, in '*this is a red ball*' the adjective 'red' is a noun modifier, modifying the noun ball, and it can be removed from the sentence without affecting the grammar and the meaning of the original sentence' *this is a ball'*.

There are many types of noun modifiers, among which post noun plural numerals and quantifiers, attributive adjectives and possessive adjectives are the focus of this study. These structures are taken into consideration in three languages of Persian, English, and French. The study also tries to determine, the extent to which L1 (Persian) and L2 (English) have an effect on L3 acquisition. The role of the three transfer hypotheses namely, L1 Factor, L2 Status, Cumulative Enhancement Model and the proficiency level of the students, are also examined in these three contexts.

Since every language has its own grammar, there are some structures in each language which are different from the other languages; however, there are also some structures which are similar among different languages. These similarities and differences among the grammars of different languages cause acquisition problems for multilingual people. Since the focus of the study is on the acquisition of noun modifiers in three languages of Persian (L1), English (L2) and French (L3), there may also be some similarities or differences between these three languages, regarding the three structures mentioned above. The reason for explanation of these similarities and differences is to determine the extent to which they help learners in the acquisition of L3 (French). The description of these three structures in the three languages is represented below.