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Table of Abbreviations

L1	First language
L2	Second language
L3	Third language
RC	Relative clause
TL	Target Language
TLA	Third Language Acquisition
CEM	Cumulative Enhancement Model
NSP	Null Subject Parameter
TPM	Typological Primacy Model
DP	Determiner Phrase
SVO	Subject-Verb-Object
SOV	Subject-Object-Verb
DM	Distributed Morphology
TP	Tense Phrase
NP	Noun Phrase
N	Noun
RES	restrictive
NON-RES	Non-restrictive
S	sentence
1SG	First person singular
2SG	Second person singular
3SG	Third person singular
C	Complementizer
CP	Complementizer r Phrase
DP	Determiner Phrase
D	Determiner
TP	Tense Phrase
T	Tense
VP	Verb Phrase
V	Verb

Chapter One

Introduction

1.1 Preliminaries

During the last decade, there has been a boom in the study of Third Language Acquisition (TLA). One of the main issues in this field is the issue of Cross-Linguistic Influence (CLI). CLI has long been an important topic in the Second Language Acquisition (SLA) research. However, during the last decade, this issue has become the major focus of TLA too. CLI is referred to as the effect that previously learnt languages can have on the learning of a new language. From the point of view of CLI, the question arises as to how the three languages interact with one another during the language learning process. The phenomenon of language transfer, a fundamental issue in second language acquisition, has recently been examined from the perspective of multilingualism, or L3 acquisition, as it is commonly referred to. Most studies in the field of L3 acquisition have focused on this phenomena (e.g. Bardel and Falk, 2007; Flynn, Foley & Vinnitskaya, 2004; Rothman and Cabrelli Amaro, 2007, 2010).

Furthermore, studies on multilingualism have proved that learning a third language (L3) is totally different from that of the first (L1) and the second (L2) one. The reason is due to the role of prior linguistic knowledge in both L2 and L3. In fact for L1 acquisition, there is no previously learnt language to interfere, but for the L2 acquisition there is one previously learnt language, that is the L1. However, for L3 acquisition, the matter differs from those of the L2 and the L1 acquisition. The reason is that, for L3 acquisition, there are two previously learnt languages (L1 & L2) that can have a role in it. Several recent studies on L3 syntax have shown that the L2 is one source of transfer in L3 acquisition (Flynn et al., 2004; Leung, 2005, amongst others), and some studies even indicate that L2 seems to take on a stronger

role than the first language (L1) in L3 syntax in the initial state (Bardel & Falk, 2007; Rothman & Cabrelli Amaro, 2010). So an interesting finding of such studies is that during L3 production, the language learner often unintentionally produces the forms that consist either partially or completely of L2 forms.

There are several reasons for choosing this area of research. Also, there are some reasons behind selecting the three languages of Persian, English, and French to be studied. Below are the reasons for this selection.

First of all, this study has been conducted in Iran. Iran is known as a monolingual country and its national language is Persian which is the native language of most of its residents; nevertheless, there are some people living in Iran whose native language is not Persian but other languages like Turkish, Kurdish, Arabic, etc.

Secondly, it should be borne in mind that, English has been taught as a foreign language in this country, especially at schools and universities. All the students in Iran, at schools or at universities, have the chance of learning English as their foreign language.

And thirdly, after English which is considered the main foreign language of the education system in Iran, French has become another widespread foreign language among the Iranians who are enthusiastic of learning foreign languages. Considering French as the Persian native speakers' third language, there seems to be a kind of difference between their learning of English as L2 and French as their L3.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

In linguistics, a relative clause is a clause that generally modifies a noun or noun phrase. In English language grammar, it is introduced by a relative pronoun (*which, that, who, whom, whose*), a relative adverb (*where, when, why*), or a zero relative. A relative clause is a postmodifier, that is, it follows the noun or noun phrase it modifies. As an example of English, in the following sentence '*this is the employer who pays the wages*', the relative clause is '*who pays the wages*' and it modifies its preceding noun which is '*the employer*'.

It is obvious that there are various forms of RC constructions in every language. However, some languages may have similar syntactic and semantic configuration of RC constructions, while in some other languages these are different. These similarities and differences might cause learning problems for multilingual learners.

In this regard, four factors which are prominent in L3 acquisition will be discussed and the role of each factor on the acquisition of the RC constructions will be investigated. These factors are L1 transfer, L2 Status factor, Cumulative Enhancement Model, and proficiency level.

For instance, Williams and Hammerberg (1998) studied the role of Proficiency as one major factor in L3 acquisition; Poulisse and Bongaerts (1994) investigated the role of frequency as another factor for transfer of the elements of background languages in L3; Cenoz (2001) conducted a research on the domain of typological similarity of the elements in the background languages to see the effect of this factor among various languages and also its effect on transfer; Håkansson et al. (2002) introduced the term 'L1 Factor hypothesis' for emphasizing the role of

native language as the main source of transfer in L3. On the other hand Bardel and Falk (2007, 2010) studied the role of L2 as the major source of transfer in L3 and coined the term ‘L2 Status Factor’; and Flynn et al. (2004) and Leung (2005) studied all the background languages in the field of L3 and claimed that all of them have an impact on transfer of elements into L3. All the studies mentioned above, have investigated one or more than one syntactic structure or the elements of lexicon in L3 acquisition phenomenon.

1.3 Theoretical Framework

At present time, transfer of syntax is an area under close examination in L3 acquisition research. In this regard, three major transfer hypotheses have been mentioned in this field. For instance, Håkansson et al. (2002) and Na Ranong and Leung (2009), claim that in the acquisition of the third language, the transfer occurs only from the L1. However, Bardel and Falk (2007) stressed on the role of L2 as the source of transfer, and finally Flynn et al. (2004), with the Cumulative Enhancement Model (CEM), and Leung (2005) suggest that both L1 and L2 have an impact on the L3 syntax.

a) **L1 Factor Hypothesis:** this hypothesis claims that in the acquisition of a third language, this is the L1 that has a main role in L3 (Håkansson, Pienemann & Sayheli, 2002). Regarding this hypothesis, the RC structures that are similar in L1 and L3 but different in L2, are transferred from L1 to L3. Unlike English, the French relative pronoun ‘que’, and the Persian relative pronoun ‘ke’ when they function as object, cannot be omitted. However, English relative pronoun ‘that’ can be omitted in

different situations. Example (1) below represents this characteristic across the three languages under study that is Persian, English, and French respectively.

1) a) Persian: poul-dar-tarin zan-I **ke** az ou aks gereft-im

Rich-most woman that from her photograph-1st pl-past we
The richest woman we have photographed.

b) English: the richest woman (**whom**) we have photographed

c) French: la femme la plus riche **que** nous ayons photographiée

The woman the rich-est whom we photograph 1st pl-PP
The richest woman we have photographed.

In the Persian example above, the relative pronoun '*ke*' cannot be omitted, and its omission makes the sentence ungrammatical. This is similar to the French one, because the use of '*que*' as a relative pronoun in this sentence is obligatory and cannot be omitted. But, in the English example above, '*whom*' which is the relative pronoun can be omitted and its omission does not cause any problem.

b) L2 Status Factor Hypothesis: Bardel and Falk (2007) introduced this term to confirm the main role of L2 in L3 acquisition. In this regard, those RC structures which are common in both L2 and L3, but different from L1, are transferred from L2 to L3. French and English syntax contains more than one relative pronoun; however Persian has just one relative pronoun '*ke*'. Examples (2) and (3) below are the indicators of this fact.

2) a) Persian: man ba pedar va mādār-e ou harf zad-am **ke** az qabl ān-hā rā mi-
šenakht-am

I with father and mother- his talk 1st sg-past whom already those
know 1st-sg-past

I talked to her father and mother whom I already knew.

b) English: I talked to his/her father and mother, **whom** I already knew.

c) French: j'ai parlé avec son père et sa mere, **que** je connaissais déjà.

I talk-past with his father and his mother, whom I know 1st sg-past
already.

I talked to his/her father and mother, **whom** I already knew.

3) a) Persian: in hotel-I ast **ke** ou ākhar-in sāl-hā-ye omr-aš rā dar ān gozarānd.

This hotel is that he the last year-s life-his in that spend-3rd sg- past
This is the hotel where he spent the last years of his life.

b) English: this is the hotel **where** he spent the last years of his life.

c) French: voice l'hôtel dans **lequel** il a passé les dernières années de sa vie.

This the hotel in that he spend-3rd sg-past the last year-s of his life
This is the hotel where he spent the last years of his life.

In the examples above, it is obvious that for each and every situation in Persian, the relative pronoun is '*ke*'. However, in the English example (1) above the relative pronoun is '*whom*', while in the English example (2), the relative pronoun is '*where*'. This fact is similar to French, since in the French example (1) above, the relative pronoun is '*que*', while in the third one it is '*lequel*'. This illustrates the fact that there are various relative pronouns in English and French but not in Persian.

c) Cumulative Enhancement Model Hypothesis: According to Flynn et al. (2004), "all languages known (i.e., L1 and L2), may act as a source for transfer, but the L2 only supersedes the L1 when the structure searched for, is not present in the L1; Language learning is cumulative, all languages known can potentially influence the development of subsequent learning" (p: 5). There are some RC constructions that are similar in both L1 and L2; however, they are different in L3. In this regard, there is the RC structure in Persian stating that when a Noun Phrase (NP) which modifies

its relative clause is in the role of indirect object, then its antecedent in the relative clause is a pronoun that modifies the preceding NP. This fact is similar to English; however, in French this is the verb of the relative clause that modifies the preceding NP, not a pronoun. Following is the example (4) for making this statement more tangible.

4) a) Persian: tourist-I **ke** bā ou harf zad-am az Quebec mi-āy-ad.

Tourist-the whom with he/she talk-1st

b) English: The tourist, **whom** I spoke to, comes from Quebec.

c) French: le touriste à **qui** j'ai parlé vient du Québec.

In the Persian example above, '*tourist*' is the NP of the sentence, and this is the relative pronoun '*ke*' that modifies it. Also, in the English example, '*the tourist*' is the NP, and this is the relative pronoun '*whom*' which modifies it. But, for the French one the matter differs. '*le touriste*' is the NP, '*qui*' is its relative pronoun, but this is not the relative pronoun that modifies the NP, rather the verb of the relative clause, that is '*parlé*' plays the role of the modifier of the preceding NP.

d) Proficiency level: the last factor that will be investigated in this study is the role of proficiency in L3 acquisition. According to the free online dictionary, retrieved from <http://www.thefreedictionary.com/>, proficiency in language means “the level of competence in the language, or the state or quality of being proficient”. Proficiency has been considered as one of the most important factors in the studies of CLI. There are contrastive views among researchers about the proficiency level of both the target and the native language and their effect on transfer. Some studies argue that positive transfer happens at the low proficiency level (Hammarberg, 2001; Williams & Hammarberg, 1998), while others have a contrastive view, stating that the more

proficiency in the background languages, the most positive transfer occurs in the L3 acquisition (see, for example, Leung, 2006; Williams & Hammerberg, 1998). This study examines the fact that whether the learners' proficiency level in both L2 and L3 has any impact on the positive transfer of RC construction into L3.

1.4 Purpose of the Study

The aim of this study was to investigate the acquisition of RC constructions by the two groups of the learners with different French proficiency levels in the three languages namely, Persian, English, and French. Another point to be explored in this study is the investigation of the three major hypotheses in the field of Third Language Acquisition (TLA) namely, 'L1 Factor' (Håkansson et al., 2002), 'L2 Status Factor' (Bardel and Falk, 2007; Rothman & Cabrelli Amaro, 2010), and the 'Cumulative Enhancement Model' (Flynn et al., 2004) to help identify the real source of transfer in the field of L3 acquisition. Furthermore, the role of proficiency which is another debating factor in this field was investigated to see whether proficiency level of the learners affects the transfer of RC constructions in the process of L3 acquisition.

This study highlighted this structure in the focused languages, and also the similarities and differences of this structure among the three languages are pinpointed. Furthermore, due to the fact that this study investigates the role of transfer from L1 and L2 in L3 acquisition, the impact of these similarities and differences of the RC construction among the three languages have been investigated to identify whether they cause advantage or disadvantage in acquiring a third language.

1.5 Research Hypotheses

This study attempted to investigate the following hypotheses:

1. The properties of the RC constructions are transferred from L1 (Persian) to L3 (French); (the L1 Factor hypothesis of Håkansson et al., 2002).
2. The properties of the RC constructions are transferred from L2 (English) to L3 (French); (the L2 Status Factor hypothesis of Bardel & Falk, 2007).
3. The properties of L1 (Persian) and L2 (English) RC constructions which are common in L3 (French) are transferred into L3; (the Cumulative Enhancement Model (CEM) of Flynn et al., 2004).
4. The more proficient the learners become in French RC constructions, the more transfer of this structure occurs from their background languages.

1.6 Significance of the Study

There are various studies in the field of TLA each focusing on various aspects of multilingualism. There has been a growing concern throughout the world in the last decade in the field of multilingualism or TLA. Also there are various amounts of studies in this field, most of them focusing on the role of background languages in L3 acquisition process and furthermore, investigating the various factors that can have an impact on the phenomenon of transfer in L3 acquisition.

Despite this growing concern throughout the world, in our country, Iran, multilingualism is in its infancy requiring further investigations on L3 acquisition and to the best of my knowledge, this study is unique in its background, since no one has attempted to investigate the differences of relative clause constructions across the