

I. Introduction

A. The Statement of the Problem

Teaching and learning English have always been a vital part of the educational system of Iran. During the past two decades, the demand for graduates with an acceptable mastery of English has rapidly accelerated, and in parallel with these efforts, the need for proficient experts in this field is felt more than before. As one of the solutions, English language courses with a variety of objectives were established so as for the graduates to pursue the given objectives belonging to the field. However, the graduates of these courses so far have obtained only partially the qualification to fill the gap. These learners have revealed their weaknesses in using English in general and in some of the language skills in particular. One of these skills, having already achieved its importance in Iran, is writing and the areas belonging to it. For two major reasons, the Persian English learners (PELs) have failed to come to a reasonable level of proficiency in this area. The first is that writing appears to be the most difficult skill to master, and the second is overcoming the intervening hurdles that have active inhibiting roles which block the learner's progress in diverse ways. These factors, having already been significant to the researchers and language teachers are the main goal of some research work in Iran in order to facilitate the acquisition of writing. Besides, the data is suggestive enough to confirm the fact that the rate of success in writing skill

is lower than in other skills although the learners' partial success does not equally mean mastery of the skill to the extent that they obtain the ability to apply it for utilitarian purposes. In other words, class activities, if there are any, do not always provide the learners with sufficient ability to use their knowledge for a practical purpose. It is even plausible to claim that writing is one of the most unpopular and forgotten skills from which both the teachers and the students escape. This subject has lost its relevance and importance most specifically at high school and to a lesser degree as a major subject at universities. There are some reasons which give rise to the establishment of a negative attitude towards this skill and its subsequent abolition:

1. Teaching writing and practicing it have been formally excluded from the high school curriculum. Additionally, language teachers refrain from teaching it even at sentence level. The learners, thus, having little notion of writing, enter universities. In their new situation, they have to struggle with serious difficulties related to this area. However, the new situation and the given time is too limited for them to struggle to compensate for what they have failed to achieve before.
2. Besides, language teachers do not show any explicit inclination to apply the techniques and procedures which may lead their learners to the mastery of the skill. One plausible interpretation is that the teachers themselves suffer from this deficiency, and they can not provide the required motivation for their learners to approach writing more positively.
3. The assigned textbooks at high school level have given no or little attention to the practice of writing, and contrary to other language skills, which have relatively been emphasized, writing has perfectly been disregarded. Spelling as a sub-component of writing is the only area which is minimally presented.
4. Another likely reason is the over-application and popularity of discrete-point tests, especially multiple-choice test forms which are actively used at various levels and for different purposes. These testing devices, having been introduced by structuralists and developed by the proponents of audiolingualism, suffer

from two major pitfalls: they encourage meaninglessness and de-contextuality¹. Furthermore, audiolingualism gives maximum attention to oral skills and the minimum to writing ones and consequently in a situation like this, the elimination of writing seems plausible.

5. However, when these learners finally set to writing, they inevitably produce various types and numbers of deviant syntactic errors as a result of violating invariably the rules of the English grammar and syntax. The causes of these deviations can be attributed to different sources. On the one hand, they have to suffer from the problem of the transfer of the L2 grammar and syntactic rules, and on the other hand, they have to struggle with the errors produced as a result of the negative interference of their L1 rules. Meanwhile, as it has been observed, the latter causes influence PELs more deeply and effectively because the syntactic errors which they commit is clearly a reflection of the Persian grammar with almost the same consistency. There are other traceable obstacles such as the teaching techniques, the teaching effects, ignorance, avoidance, etc. which any of them in turn has its own contribution to make the acquisition of writing an insurmountable task.

The primary concern of this study is to scrutinize the causes of the problems that PELs have to deal with in their attempt to overcome this obstacle and the areas of this skill. These problems, their causes, and their assumed sources will be discussed and brought into focus by analyzing the collected deviant forms extracted from the learners' writings.

B. Purpose of the Study

One of the areas of trouble for PELs is committing different and frequent types of syntactic errors in their compositions. In fact, resorting to errors is an inevitable part of the process of second language development, and they can be quantified and used in the total assessment of linguistic competence. In other

¹J. W Oller. 1979. *Language Tests at School*. London: Longman Group Limited, P. 39.

words, if a regular pattern of errors could be observed in the performance of all the learners in a situation, and if a learner was seen to progress through this pattern, his errors should be taken as evidence not of failure, but of success and achievement in learning. One major objective of the study is to benefit from these deviations of the L2 rules by shedding light on the approximative sources of the errors. The study is an attempt to analyze developmental and interference syntactic error patterns of Iranian adult learners of English and their misapplication of the rules of grammar in the light of their invariable errors which are seen to repeat regularly and frequently in their compositions. The study wants to reveal how a *contrastive analysis of the syntactic structure of the two languages, here Persian and English, in the light of the collected errors which are more frequently repeated, can contribute to the eradication of the learners' problems in their attempt to master English.*

Meanwhile, the study, in its development, is going to follow the steps below and restrict itself to them.

1. The primary step is to collect the syntactic errors of the PELs by analyzing their compositions. The data provided in this way represent a corpus of erroneous forms at sentence level, the context of which, the original writings are available for any reference. In fact the errors can be analyzed morphosyntactically on the basis of the contextual application of the rules of English grammar in the learners' compositions.
2. The next step is the categorization of the collected errors. As the researcher anticipates that the L2 learners resort to producing a large number of syntactic errors by misapplying the L2 grammar rules. This requires the researcher to classify the errors into more concrete categories and prepare them for feasible analysis and interpretation.
3. As the major objective of the study, the third step, is working on the classified syntactic errors in order to identify the possible sources of deviant English grammar rules. Up to now, in the course of contrastive analysis (CA) and error analysis (EA), two dominant sources have been identified and

introduced for syntactic errors: inter-lingual and intra-lingual. The study, as a further source, and in the light of the syntactic errors extracted from the learners' compositions is trying to introduce a third source into the field of error analysis, i.e., bi-source errors, or those deviant forms, the sources of which may pertain to both L1 and L2. For example, as it has been observed, PELs commit a large number of errors in applying the third-person singular -s. Deleting -s, as it has been observed, has been regularly repeated at all levels, even by advanced learners. In other words, it is likely to assume that this persistent error is not easily possible to overcome because there are two intervening sources which are the major causes of confusion and deviation. On the one hand, Persian does not use the suffix -s to signal a certain person, tense or aspect, and on the other hand, using this item with the third person singular is an exception in English grammar system. In other words, the grammar rules for using third person -s is inconsistent and this inconsistency causes the learners to resort to the nearest and the most available form to substitute for it. This is presumably a logical and possible interpretation for most bi-source errors, and the study aims at identifying, classifying, and interpreting them.

Consequently, the study will try to bear significant applications both theoretically and pedagogically. By contrasting the syntactic structure of Persian and English, the study will try to anticipate the major difficulties of Iranian language learners in their attempt to learn writing English, the difficulties which are traceable to some sources, the most important of which can be labeled as the interference of the learners' L1 and L2 and their developmental errors. The study can further assist both the teacher and the learner to facilitate the teaching-learning procedures by formulating certain hypothesis based on the results of the study in order to suggest valid and reliable ways of overcoming learner's writing difficulties. The study can additionally bear some practical implications for the teacher as he will know how to begin teaching, where to emphasize, and how to proceed. In the same

manner, the results of the study may contribute material designers to develop the most suitable textbooks with necessary emphasis, additional exercises, and the logical mode of presentation and organization. Moreover, test designers can usefully benefit from the fruitful implications of the study to incorporate the most appropriate focus on certain items of the language.

4. As the by-product of the study is investigating the avoidance hypothesis which is an extremely prevailing phenomenon employed by PELs in order to escape from those syntactic structures which are assumed to be difficult and problematic for these learners. In fact, most language learners, specially beginning and intermediate students, do not take the risk of using those language forms which might send them to committing errors of different types. In other words, learners prefer to escape from applying some language forms either syntactic, phonological, or morphological which may cause them to produce erroneous forms. As a result, the final product is too simple to be able to handle the complicated and sophisticated ideas.

To make the point clear, the list below demonstrates an approximate indication of the syntactic items avoided most frequently by learners:

- One. Adjective clauses with of-which patterns
- Two. Object Adjective clauses
- Three. Connected clauses and phrases
- Four. Present and past perfect tenses
- Five. Present and past participles as modifiers
- Six. Reduced adjective and adverb clauses
- Seven. Deletion of relative pronouns
- Eight. Passive participles and infinitive phrases

When these items are frequently neglected by learners of English, their composition will lose its authenticity and look like a piece of work which is simple in form and loose in content. The learners will show their failure to clearly express their ideas and be explicit in their expressions. The study will, moreover, quantify

these avoided items, introduce them, and as an ultimate step, explore the main causes of escape among them.

C. Definition of Important Terms

Asterisk (*) : Designates an unacceptable word or sentence. This is placed before the word or sentences which is supposed to be incorrect.

Approximative System: This is the language or system which is used by second language learner in the process of learning a second language.

Bilingual Acquisition: The acquisition of two languages simultaneously

Bi-source Errors: They are the errors, the source of which are both L1 and L2 like the incorrect use of article *the* for Persian learners of English.

Developmental Error: Errors which do not derive from transfer of another language and they reflect the learner's competence at a particular stage and illustrate some of the general characteristics of language acquisition.

Error Analysis: The study and analysis of errors made by second language learners.

Error : The use of a linguistic item in a way which a fluent or native speaker of the language regards as showing faulty or incomplete learning.

Fossilization: A process which sometimes occurs in which incorrect linguistic features become a permanent part of the way a person speaks or writes a language

Interference: The use of a native-language pattern or rule which leads to an error or inappropriate form in the target language.

Interlanguage: The type of language produced by second- and foreign-language learners who are in the process of language learning.

Interlingual error: An error which results from language transfer, that is , which is caused by the learner's native language.

Intralingual error: An error which results from faulty or partial learning of the target language, rather than from language transfer.

Language Transfer: The effect of one language on the learning of another .

Mistake: A learner when speaking or writing may make a mistake as a result of lack of attention , fatigue, carelessness, or some other aspect of performance.

Mono-source errors: They are the errors, the source of which may be either L1 or L2.

Morphosyntax: An analysis of language which uses criteria from both morphology and syntax.

Negative Transfer: Also known as interference is the use of a native-language pattern or rule which leads to an error or inappropriate form in the target language.

Overextension of Analogy: The misuse of a linguistic item because the item shares features whether phonological, orthographical, semantic, with an item in the native language.

Positive transfer: It is the transfer which makes learning a second language easier and may occur when both the native and target language share the same form.

Second Language Acquisition: The acquisition of another language after having acquired the basis of the first

D. List of Abbreviations

- CA** : Contrastive Analysis
CAH : Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis
DD : Dictionary Definition
E : English Sentence
EA : Error Analysis
ED : Deviant English sentence
ESL : English as a Second Language
ESP : English for specific purposes
FDH : Fundamental Difference Hypothesis
GJT : Grammaticality Judgment test
IL : Interlanguage
ILs : Interlanguages
L1 : First Language
L2 : Second language-Target Language
LL : Language Learner
LLs : Language learners
MDH : Markedness Differential Hypothesis
MV : Moderate Version
NL : Native Language
P : Persian sentence
PEL : Persian English Learner
PELs : Persian English Learners
SL : Second Language
SV : Strong Version
TL : Target Language
WV : Weak Version
UG : Universal Grammar

E. Key to phonetic symbols

No.	Transcription	Pronunciation	No.	Transcription	Pronunciation
1	a	father	16	p	put
2	æ	hand	17	č	chain
3	e	bet	18	š	she
4	i:	fee	19	ž	vision
5	ei	day	20	g	get
6	o	cold	21	n	net
7	u:	moon	22	m	moon
8	u	put	23	s	set
9	b	bet	24	t	hot
10	d	dog	25	v	very
11	f	foot	26	y	yard
12	h	hot	27	z	zero
13	j	joke	28	x*	as dæræxt in Persian
14	k	cake	29	q**	as qom in Persian
15	l	like	30	?***	as sa?i in Persian

Table 1: Phonetic Symbols

* fricative-uvular

** plosive-uvular

*** glottal-plosive