

MERIT OR DEMERIT OF BILINGUALITY IN LEARNING ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE?

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Abstract: In surveys of third language acquisition (L3A) research, mixed results and findings demonstrate that there is no consensus among the researchers regarding the advantages and/or disadvantages of bilinguality on L3A. The main concern of the present study was, thus, to probe the probable differences between Iranian bilingual/monolingual learners of English regarding their syntactic knowledge. It was an attempt to investigate whether bilingual and monolingual learners of English differ significantly in learning embedded question, preposition stranding and pied piping knowledge. To carry out this study, a total of 399 male and female subjects at seven pre-university centers in Arak, Iran were randomly selected from among two groups of Turkish-Persian bilinguals and Persian monolinguals. A general English proficiency test, a questionnaire, and a syntactic structure test were administered to both groups. Statistical analyses including ANOVA, t-test and descriptive statistics revealed the following outcomes: 1- Monolingual and bilingual learners did not differ in acquiring syntactic structure, 2- No significant difference was observed between gender of monolinguals and bilinguals' performances in acquiring syntactic structure.

Key words: bilingualism, monolingualism, syntactic knowledge, general English proficiency, gender

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INTRODUCTION

When we study language we study the manner in which human beings express themselves. We study a system of communication, which enables us to convey feelings and facts to one another, to react and comment, to agree or disagree, to accept or reject. It is in the nature of language systems to change and develop constantly, to adjust to changes in society. Language reflects the social structure, the correctness, and the accepted values of society. Language is therefore personal as well as group-orientated, specific as well as universal. Language cannot be divorced from the context in which it is used. Language is not produced in a vacuum; it is enacted in changing dramas. Communication includes not only the structure of language (e.g. grammar and vocabulary) but also who is saying what, to whom, in which circumstances. One person may have limited linguistic skills but, in certain situations, be successful in communication. Another person may have relative linguistic mastery, but through developed social interaction skills or in a strange circumstance, be relatively unsuccessful in communication.

The ability to speak two languages is often seen as something of a remarkable achievement, particularly in the English-speaking countries. Since as Trask (1999), mentioned 70 percent of the earth's population is thought to be bilingual there is a good reason to believe that bilingualism is the norm for the majority of people in the world. Answers to the questions "Who is bilingual?" and "What is bilingualism?" are not simple. Bilingual or bilingualism is the ability to speak, communicate, and understand two languages. It is not to be confused with biliteracy, which is the ability to read and write in two languages.

Dewaele et al. (2003) believe, the very elastic definition of bilingualism is, the presence of two or more languages, which reflect the awareness of the interdisciplinary nature of studies in bilingualism. It is said that no single definition of bilingualism is

broad enough to cover all instances of individuals who are called “bilingual.” The range can be from native-like control of two or more languages to possessing minimal communication skills in a second or foreign language.

Kandolf (1995) claims that a bilingual is someone who uses two languages on a regular basis. All bilinguals are more dominant in one of their two languages. In her view, the importance is that bilinguals are exposed to both languages regularly. The Oxford English Dictionary agrees with this claim and refers to bilingualism as “the ability to speak two languages; the habitual use of two languages colloquially.” None of the above descriptions of bilingualism separate second language acquisition from bilingual language acquisition. Furthermore, bilingual language acquisition refers to ‘the simultaneous intake of two languages beginning in infancy or before the age of three’.

Calling someone bilingual is therefore an umbrella term. Underneath the umbrella rest many different skill levels in two languages. Being bilingual is not just about proficiency in two languages. There is a difference between ability and use of language. Someone may be quite competent in two languages, yet rarely or never use one of those languages. Such a person has bilingual ability but does not act or behave bilingually. A different case is a person who regularly uses both their languages, even though one language is still developing. Such a person may be hesitant in speaking, finding it difficult to speak with correct grammar or unable to use a wide vocabulary. In practice, that person may be bilingual, although ability in one language is lacking (but improving steadily). Such a distinction between ability in a language and use of a language again shows why the simple label bilingual hides a complex variety beneath its simplicity.

If you ask people in the street what 'bilingual' means, they will almost certainly reply that it is being able to speak two languages

perfectly. Unfortunately, we cannot even describe exactly what speaking one language perfectly involves. No one speaks the whole of a language. Each of us speaks part of our mother tongue. The bilingual does too.

This problem, the fact that it is almost impossible to compare an individual's abilities in two different languages because we are not measuring the same things, is central to all discussion of bilingualism, and shows why the person in the street's 'definition' just will not do, except in very rare circumstances. Some definitions, which researchers have suggested, are mentioned.

Lam believes bilingualism is the phenomenon of competence and communication in two languages... A bilingual society is one in which two languages are used for communication. In a bilingual society, it is possible to have a large number of monolinguals.... provided that there are enough bilinguals to perform the functions requiring bilingual competence in that society. There is, therefore, a distinction between individual bilingualism and societal bilingualism (Lam 2003).

Bilingualism is the ability to use two or more languages sufficiently to carry on a limited casual conversation, but we cannot set specific limits on proficiency or how much the speaker in question is speaking or demonstrating comprehension of another speaker (Myers-Scotton 2006).

Researchers in the field have discussed the advantages and disadvantages of bilingualism or multilingualism. Most earlier studies suggest that bilingualism is associated with negative consequences (see, for example, Printer and Keller 1922, Saer 1923, Anastasi and Cordova 1953, Darcy 1953 and Tse 2001). These studies support the idea that bilingual children suffer from academic retardation, have low IQ and are socially maladjusted as compared with monolingual children and also believe that our brains are just

like our stomachs: To have room for dessert, we can not overeat. Just like an expanding balloon, some believe, our brains can only hold so much, and if we fill it too fully with the heritage language, there will be no room for English. This misconception leads many parents and teachers to advocate arresting development of the native language to leave sufficient room for the new language.

Contrary to these claims, many researchers have found that bilingualism has a positive effect on foreign language achievement (Lerea and Laporta 1971, Cummins 1979, Eisenstein 1980, Ringbom 1985, Thomas 1988, Valencia and Cenoz 1992, Zobl 1992, Klein 1995, Sanz 2000, Hoffman 2001, Richard-Amato 2003, and Flynn 2006). J. Thomas (1988) for example compared the acquisition of French by English monolinguals and English-Spanish bilinguals. Her study yielded striking differences between the two groups, with the bilinguals outperforming the monolinguals. She concluded: Bilinguals learning a third language seem to have developed a sensitivity to language as a system which helps them perform better on those activities usually associated with formal language learning than monolinguals learning a foreign language for the first time.

Mixing results of studies on the consequences of bilinguality caused some scholars to conduct experiments with more controlled variables. The findings of some of these studies led to a neutral attitude toward bilingualism. In their studies, Lambert and Tucker (1972) and Barik and Swain (1978) examined the performance of large samples controlled for sex and age, and found no significant difference between monolinguals and bilinguals in terms of their intelligence, mental development and school achievements. Nayak et al. (1990:221), comparing the acquisition of a grammatical point by monolingual, bilingual and multilingual students, reported that although the multilinguals showed superior performance under certain conditions, they generally showed “no clear evidence that they were superior in language learning abilities”.

The aim of the present research is to shed some light on the blurred issue of the bilingualism in learning an additional language. Therefore, the following hypotheses are formulated:

H1: There will be a significant difference between monolingual and bilingual learners in syntactic structure scores.

H2: Gender of mono/bilingual learners has impact on their performance in acquiring syntactic structure.

METHODOLOGY

A. Subjects

Based on consensus among researchers regarding, the larger the size of the sample, the greater its precision or reliability, the present researcher invited 399 pre-university students both male and female with the age range of 17 to 19 at 7 pre-university centers from different districts of Arak (one of the industrial cities of Iran) to participate in present study. The researcher had to exclude 11 participants from this study because they were not involved in this range of age and the remainders (N=388) were categorized through a background questionnaire as follows:

- 89 Turkish / Persian female bilinguals
- 101 Persian female monolinguals
- 93 Turkish / Persian male bilinguals
- 105 Persian male monolinguals

All the participants were from the families who had taken residence in Arak more than 5 years. Some of them had acquired both languages (Persian and Turkish) simultaneously at home whereas some others had learned their second language, Persian, at later age in their schooling years.

The researcher elicited some demographic information about the participants through a background questionnaire in order to match

them as closely as possible for socioeconomic status to minimize the effect of social class. Accordingly the participants were classified as middle class.

B. Instruments

The following instruments have been used in this paper:

1) A background questionnaire:

In order to elicit information about participants, a background questionnaire was developed by the researcher. It covered issues such as the subjects' age, gender, linguality status, number of members in each family, the subjects' parents' socio-educational status, occupations, monthly income, their levels of education and duration of their residency in Arak. No standard instrument for determining SES (socio-economic status) in Iran was available, so after consultation with a sociologist, subjects were categorized into three classes, upper, middle and lower, based on a set of socially made indices of the type commonly used in social science research. This comprised issues as, subjects' parents' socio-educational background, occupation, their monthly income and finally the number of members in a family. These characteristics have been elicited in order to determine the social position of the students in that particular society, because according to Michell Maiese (2004), social position is the position of an individual in a given society and culture. That is, these features can be at play in determining one's social status. Accordingly, from SES point of view the participants were classified as:

- *High*
- *Middle*
- *Low*

To have homogeneous participants and to prevent the effect of some interval variables such as social class just those who have been

categorized as middle class have been invited to participate in the present research.

2) *General English Proficiency Test:*

English Nelson test, (series 400 B) was utilized as the pedestal for assessing the participants' level of proficiency in English. This test comprised 50 multiple-choice vocabulary, grammar, and reading comprehension items.

The researcher piloted the test with 15 students with the same level and similar characteristics to those of participants of this study and then it was correlated with an Achievement Test developed by the Ministry of Education for pre-university centers. The correlation coefficient calculated between these two (Achievement Test and General English Proficiency Test) appeared to be .67. Hence, the General English Proficiency Test was found to be appropriate for the participants performing level.

For ensuring the participants homogeneity, having administrated General English Proficiency Test, the researcher included those students in this project who scored between one standard deviation below and above the mean score.

It is worth noting here that the reliability of General English Proficiency Test estimated by KR-21 (Kudar Richardson) formula appeared to be .63.

3) *The Grammatical Judgment Test:*

The Grammatical Judgment Test (GJT) is one of the most widespread data-collection methods that researchers use to test their theoretical claims. In these tasks, speakers of a language are presented with a set of stimuli to which they must react. The elicited responses are usually in the form of assessments, wherein speakers determine

whether and / or the extent to which a particular stimulus is correct in a given language.

In order to examine the participants' syntactic structure and to find out the probable differences in their performances in this area a Grammatical Judgment Test was developed by the current researcher. The test was found on two of the grammatical points covered in English textbook designed for pre-university level. One grammatical point is related to what Radford (2004) calls *Preposition Stranding and Pied piping*, and the other grammatical point is related to what Adger et al., (2001) calls *Embedded knowledge*.

C. Procedure

In the process of carrying out the study, the researcher took the following procedures to achieve the objectives of the current study. All the procedures including the development of the background questionnaire, grammatical judgment test, general English proficiency test and their administration are explained in details below:

At the first step of the research, the researcher developed a *background questionnaire* in order to elicit some personal information about participants such as: their bi / monolinguality status, gender, age, educational qualification of parents, parents' monthly income and the number of members in their family.\

In order to prevent any possible misunderstanding or confusion on the part of the participants and to ensure maximum understanding, the background questionnaire was developed in English along with its translation in Persian. After doing the sampling procedure and choosing subjects randomly 388 students (89 female bilinguals, 101 female monolinguals, 93 male bilinguals and 105 male monolinguals) were initially requested to participate in this study. Then testing was conducted in the respective schools by the

researcher with the help of the school staffs. The conditions for testing were strictly followed as far as possible. The administration of the tests has been completed in two phases:

Phase 1: The background questionnaire and General English Proficiency Test (GEPT) in 55 minutes (the first 15 minutes was allotted to fill up the background questionnaire and the rest was allotted to GEPT); and

Phase 2: Grammatical Judgment Test (GJT) in 25 minutes.

Subjects' scores based on General English Proficiency and Grammatical Judgment Tests range from 0 to 50 and 0 to 30 respectively. It is important to mention that prior to the administration of the General English Proficiency Test it was piloted with 15 students of the same grade with similar characteristics to those of subjects of this study and it was found to be appropriate for the subjects' proficiency level in that particular given time. That is, the reliability of General English Proficiency Test estimated by KR-21 (Kudar Richarson) formula appeared to be .63, which was appropriate enough to go on.

After collecting the background questionnaires, the General English Proficiency Test was conducted and before the start of this test, the researcher cleared the participants' doubts. The way of answering the question was made clear to the participants and in case of any difficulty they were encouraged to ask questions and they were provided with help. The researcher did the best endeavor to draw the participants' attention to take part in the research stage by giving them necessary information about the nature and purpose of the research.

In the present study the most endeavor was done to ensure the students that their responses will be kept full secrecy and also will not be used for performance evaluation. After collecting the papers of General English Proficiency Test and background questionnaire, those students who had done haphazardly were discarded. Then on

the basis of scores, which they received in GEPT, those subjects whose scores fell between 1 standard deviation above and below the mean score were selected to participate in the next stage of the project. The reason behind selecting just this group was to include those who were proficient enough to participate in the next stage, which was the vital stage of the study and also to ensure of the homogeneity of the students in terms of English language proficiency. Therefore, these numbers of subjects were students with average knowledge in general English proficiency.

Accordingly the researcher had to exclude 85 participants from this study, therefore, the number of all participants who were allowed to enter the next stage was 303 (64 female bilinguals, 73 female monolinguals, 77 male bilinguals and 89 male monolinguals)

The next stage was to administrate the Grammatical Judgment Test. This test comprised 30 multiple-choice items containing 15 items on the basis of Preposition Stranding and Pied Piping (7 out of 15 items observed in interrogatives and the other 8 items observed in relative clause) and 15 items on the basis of Embedded Questions (7 out of 15 items were in interrogative forms and the rest were in declarative forms).

Before administrating this test the researcher made strong effort to ensure of the reliability of the test. The following table provides KR-21 formula (one of the reliability measurements) for Grammatical Judgment Test, that is, Embedded Questions (EQ); preposition stranding (PS) and pied-piping (PiP) and also. SPSS for Windows (version 14-evaluation version) has been employed for calculation of reliability coefficients for Embedded Questions, Preposition Stranding and Pied-Piping and total questions.

Questions	Reliability coefficient
EQ	.6817
PS & PiP	.6431
Total	.6551

It is evident that KR-21 formula obtained for embedded questions, preposition stranding and pied piping and also total questions ranged from .6431 to .6871, which are highly significant. We can definitely say that instruments used in this study are highly consistent. Having ensured of the reliability of the Grammatical Judgment Test, the researcher administrated the test and had to discard 79 subjects' result from data analysis because they had skipped answering most of the questions thoroughly.

The result of the remaining 224 subjects, (49 female bilinguals, 61 female monolinguals, 54 male bilinguals and 60 male monolinguals) were tabulated and codified for the computer analysis.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The independent 't-test' was employed in order to analyze the collected data. The statistical representation of analyzed data is given in the following tables:

As shown in table 1, there is a difference between the bilinguals

Questions	Type	Mean	Std. Deviation	't' value	P value
EQ	Bilingual	4.8846	2.4188	.650	.516 (NS)
	Monolingual	5.1443	2.7810		
PiP and PS	Bilingual	3.0577	1.5938	.262	.793 (NS)
	Monolingual	3.1443	1.6535		

Questions	Type	Mean	Std. Deviation	't' value	P value
Total	Bilingual	6.8077	3.8035	.590	.556 (NS)
	Monolingual	7.0581	4.0175		

Note: NS-Non-significant EQ- Embedded Questions PiP-Pied piping PS-Preposition stranding

Table 1:

Descriptive statistics for bilingual and monolingual learners in syntactic structure with the results of independent samples't test

and monolinguals mean scores on 'EQ' and 'PiP and PS' (6.80 and 7.05 respectively). However, the difference is not statistically meaningful. That is, even though the mean scores of monolinguals on these structural areas were higher than that of bilinguals, indicating that monolinguals outperformed the bilinguals on this structural knowledge. The result of this hypothesis is to some extent a support for Keshavarz et al.'s study (2006). They attempted to investigate whether bilingual and monolingual learners of English differ significantly in learning lexical items and syntactic knowledge. The study aimed further at examining whether bilinguality was an enhancement to learning a third language or a hindrance to it. To carry out this study, they have selected subjects from among two groups of Turkish-Persian bilinguals and Persian monolinguals. Statistical analyses revealed that monolinguals outperformed bilinguals in areas, vocabulary and syntax.

By referring to table 1 and considering the mean scores of bilinguals and monolinguals (6.8077 and 7.0581 respectively) on 'embedded questions' and 'pied piping and preposition stranded', it is obvious that the difference was so small that it could be neglected. In other words, monolingual and bilingual did not differ significantly in mean scores on embedded question, preposition stranding and pied piping as well as in total scores. The obtained t values for embedded (t=. 650; P<. 516), stranded and pied piping (t=. 262; P<. 793) and

total scores ($t = .590$; $P < .556$) were all found to be statistically non-significant. In a short term, monolingual and bilingual learners had statistically equal scores in embedded, stranded and pied piping and also total scores. H1 is rejected, as there were no significant differences among monolinguals and bilinguals in embedded question, preposition stranding and pied piping scores including total scores.

The result of this hypothesis may be well understood by taking the *Threshold Theory* into concern. According to this hypothesis many studies have suggested that the further the child moves towards balanced bilingualism, the greater the likelihood of cognitive advantages (e.g. Cummins and Mulcahy 1978, Clarkson 1992, Cummins 2000b and Bialystok 2001a). Thus the question has become 'under what conditions does bilingualism have positive, neutral and negative effects on cognition?' How far does someone have to travel up the two language ladders to obtain cognitive advantages from bilingualism?

One theory that partially summarizes the relationship between cognition and degree of bilingualism is called the *Threshold Theory*. This was first hypothesized by Cummins (1976) and by Toukomaa and Skutnabb-Kangas (1977). They suggested that the research on cognition and bilingualism is best explained by the idea of two thresholds. Each threshold is a level for a child to avoid the negative consequences of bilingualism. The second threshold is a level required to experience the possible positive benefits of bilingualism. It also suggests that there are children who may derive detrimental consequences from their bilingualism.

As Baker, (2006) expresses the *Threshold Theory* may be described in terms of a house with three floors. Up the sides of the house are placed two language ladders, indicating that a bilingual child will usually be moving upward and will not usually be stationary on a floor. On the bottom floor of the house will be those

whose current competence in their both languages is insufficiently or relatively inadequately developed, especially compared with their age group. When there is a low level of competence in both languages, there may be negative or detrimental cognitive effects. For example, a child who is unable to cope in the classroom in either language may suffer educationally. At the middle level, the second floor of the house will be those with age-appropriate competence in one of their languages but not in both. For example, children who can operate in the classroom in one of their languages but not in their second language may reside in this second level. At this level, a partly bilingual child will be little different in cognition from the monolingual child and is unlikely to have any significant positive or negative cognitive differences compared with a monolingual. At the top of the house, the third floor, there resides children who approximate 'balanced' bilinguals. At this level, children will have age-appropriate competence in two or more languages. For example, they can cope with curriculum material in either of their languages. It is at this level that age-appropriate ability in both their languages; they may have cognitive advantages over monolinguals.

Most of the earlier studies suggested that bilingualism was associated with negative consequences (see, for example, Anastasi and Cordova 1953, Darcy 1953, Printer and Keller 1922, Saer 1923). These studies supported the idea that bilingual children suffered from academic retardation, had a lower IQ and were socially maladjusted as compared with monolingual children.

Ziahosseiny and Mozaffari (1996) investigating the role of transferring the linguistic habit of the two languages (Turkish and Persian) to English, reported that in the area of system, the bilinguals tended to rely heavily on Persian rather than on Turkish, while in the area of vocabulary they relied on their mother tongue. Ziahosseiny and Mozaffari (*ibid*) justified that bilinguals used Persian as medium of instruction at schools and other academic settings, whereas, they

utilized Turkish only at home. Therefore, in academic setting they gave more value to Persian as a sophisticated language, a more prestigious one more over, and the language of Turkish is subconscious, whereas that of Persian is learnt consciously through books, with the help of an instructor describing the rules (cited in Bahrainy 2003).

The finding of this study however didn't present evidence of language transfer because neither Persian nor Turkish permits preposition stranding. This is a crucial factor for arguing that learners in both groups (monolinguals versus bilinguals) had an equal chance to acquire the target construction (Preposition stranding). This requirement pre-supposed that learners in neither group have yet had experience in setting the relevant parameter at the value. Prior language (in this particular case Turkish and Persian) permits *pied-piping* and *embedded knowledge*. This has affected the result as a consequence of transferring. Therefore, both bilinguals and monolinguals in this regard had sufficient experience about them, and the learners' rate of acquisition of these two syntactic structures is presumed to be enhanced hence, in this particular case similar findings are reported among bilinguals and monolinguals. That is, both groups, bilinguals versus monolinguals, indicated nearly the same rate of acquiring these target constructions in English as a foreign language. Finally it can be concluded that bilinguals and monolinguals performed more or less equally on these domains (6.80 vs. 7.05 respectively) with no significant difference.

Another reason behind such an unexpected finding may be that Turkish / Persian bilinguals had acquired their L1 (Turkish) only orally in a naturalistic setting. They did not receive schooling in Turkish and their vehicular language was Persian, which is the language of instruction and the official language of the majority linguistic group. So it can be argued that Persian is the more dominant language among the bilingual learners of English. Therefore,

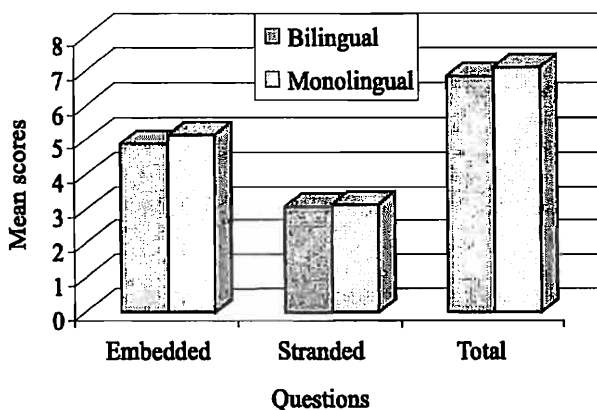


Figure 1:

Mean scores for bilingual and monolingual learners in embedded and stranded and pied piping

receiving no-academic instruction on L1 (in this case Turkish) may have hindered learning an additional language. Consequently, as mentioned above the bilingual learners did not perform as well as monolingual learners did in syntactic structure but the difference was statistically too negligible to be considered.

Regarding the second research hypothesis (Gender of monolingual and bilingual learners has impact on their performance in acquiring Syntactic Structures), the present researcher applied two-way ANOVA for scores of male and female mono and bilingual learners in syntactic structure which are indicated in tables 2 and 3.

As it is indicated in table 2 and 3, no significant difference was observed between monolinguals and bilinguals' *syntactic structure* mean scores as the obtained F value of .960 was failed to reach the significance level criterion ($P < .328$). From the mean values it is evident that scores of monolingual and bilingual learners were statistically similar (means 7.94 and 8.29 respectively). Gender wise comparison also revealed a difference between male (mean 8.05) and female learners (mean 8.31). However, this difference was so small

Linguality	Type	Mean	Std. Deviation
Monolingual	Male	8.23	3.37
	Female	7.60	3.11
	Total	7.94	3.25
Bilingual	Male	7.96	3.21
	Female	8.68	3.78
	Total	8.29	3.49
Total	Male	8.05	3.26
	Female	8.31	3.59
	Total	8.17	3.41

Table 2:

Descriptive statistics for male and female bilingual and monolingual learners in embedded knowledge and preposition stranding and pied piping

Source of variation	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig. (P value)
Questions	11.126	1	11.126	.960	.328 (NS)
Linguality	.137	1	.137	.012	.913 (NS)
Questions * Linguality	30.811	1	30.811	2.660	.104 (NS)

Table 3:

Results of Two-way ANOVA for scores for male and female mono and bilingual learners in embedded knowledge and preposition stranding and pied piping

that it could be neglected and regarded as non-significant along the same line, two-way ANOVA was conducted to compare male and female bilingual EFL learners' mean scores on syntactic structure. As tables 2 and 3 display the interaction effect between linguality and gender was found to be non-significant ($F=2.66$; $P<.104$) indicating that pattern of scoring was the same for male and female learners

irrespective of their linguality background. Therefore, H2 is rejected as there was no significant difference between male and female learners in their total scores (embedded knowledge and preposition stranding and pied piping).

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATION

Multilingual acquisition considered as *'the acquisition of languages other than the first or second'* is becoming a common process in the world. In fact, the increasing links among all countries in world as the result of historical, political, economic and technological development have produced the need to use languages of wider communication, mainly English, which are not always the language or languages of one's own community. Social phenomena such as immigration also contribute to the development of minority communities who need to acquire more than two languages.

Multilingualism and multilingual acquisition are often considered as simple variations of bilingualism and second language acquisition and 'second language acquisition' (SLA) tends to be used as a cover term to refer to 'any language other than the first' without taking into consideration the number of other non-native languages known by the learner.

Due to the increased number of immigrants to large cities of Iran, we confront a great deal of bilingual learners in our educational system. In this regard the present study was conducted to investigate whether Turkish / Persian bilinguals could be helped in their learning a L3 (English in this case) by their first and second languages. An attempt was made to examine the impact of bilinguality on L3 learning and to investigate whether bilinguality does enhance learning subsequent nonnative languages.

The main concern of the present study was, thus, to probe the probable differences between Iranian bilingual/monolingual learners

of English regarding their syntactic knowledge. It was an attempt to investigate whether bilingual and monolingual learners of English differ significantly in learning embedded question, preposition stranding and pied piping knowledge. The study aimed further at examining whether bilinguality was an enhancement to learning a third language or a hindrance to it. To carry out this study, an ex post facto design was employed. A total of 399 male and female subjects at seven pre-university centers in Arak were randomly selected from among two groups of Turkish-Persian bilinguals and Persian monolinguals. A general English proficiency test, a questionnaire, and a syntactic structure test were administered to both groups. Statistical analyses including ANOVA, t-test and descriptive statistics revealed that there were non-significant differences in the performance of the two learner groups, i.e. monolingual and bilingual participants.

The results and findings of the statistical analyses may be summarized as follows:

1) Hypothesis 1 was rejected, indicating that monolingual and bilingual learners did not differ in acquiring syntactic structure.

It is often believed that early exposure to two languages, either simultaneously or sequentially, is detrimental to language acquisition. This belief rests on an implicit assumption that learning more than one language in early childhood necessarily produces on one hand, confusion and interference between the languages and on the other hand, hindrance to learning a third language.

This hypothesis is in line with results of studies by some scholars who conducted experiments with more controlled variables. The findings of some of these studies led to a neutral attitude toward bilingualism. In their studies, Barik and Swain (1978) and Lambert and Tucker (1972) examined the performance of larger samples controlled for sex and age, and found no significant difference

between monolinguals and bilinguals in terms of their intelligence, mental development and school achievements. More recently, Nayak et al. (1990), comparing the acquisition of an artificial grammar by monolingual, bilingual and multilingual students, reported that although the multilinguals indicated superior performance under certain conditions, they generally revealed 'no clear evidence that they were superior in language learning abilities' (1990: 221).

Magiste (1984) reported an investigation by Balke-Aurell and Lindbad (1982) on the differences between monolingual and bilingual immigrants of varied L1s with Swedish as L2 in learning English as a foreign language. The results indicated no difference between the bilinguals and monolinguals in standardized tests of English comprehension and grammar performance (cited in Keshavarz, 2003).

2) Hypothesis 2 was rejected, showing that no significant difference was observed between gender of monolinguals and bilinguals' performances in acquiring syntactic structure.

This hypothesis supports the findings of Talebi et al, (2007). They concluded that male and female learners have to some degree similar performance in reading comprehension and syntactic structure of an additional language. That is, the interaction effect between bilinguality and gender is found to be non-significant. Indicating that the pattern of reading comprehension scores are similar for male and female students irrespective of the linguality background they have.

One pedagogical and policy implication is that in order to help the bilinguals to learn English, they should be encourage by educators to develop their linguistic capacities and keep informing and advising the parents with the charismatic impact of bilingualism on additional language acquisition if the first two languages are acquired academically, therefore, it may enable them to promote the first language at home.

Therefore, it is suggested that Turkish should also be introduced in formal education in Iran in order to make the learners aware of the differences and similarities between their first and target language and also providing them with the linguistic knowledge of their first language. Therefore, the level of learners' L1 is very important for the further language learning process. Clearly, the more aware learners are of the similarities and differences between their mother tongue and the target language, the easier they will find it to adopt effective learning and production strategies. In order for the pupils to achieve the best results, on one hand, it seems that it is very important for language teachers to be aware of the learners' linguistic starting point in order to give them the best instruction possible on the other hand it is essential for language learners to be familiarized with the strategies and linguistic knowledge of their own first language in order to compare and contrast it with target language while they are acquiring an additional or target language. Because as it was mentioned elsewhere in the current section it is believed that learner's awareness of similarities and differences between their mother tongue and additional language will pave the way for effective learning.

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