Macrothink Institute™

International Journal of Linguistics
ISSN 1948-5425
2012, Vol. 4, No. 2

L1 Transfer in Recognition and Production of A/Telic Sentences

Mohammad Falhasiri (Corresponding author)
Dept. of English Language, University of Isfahan, Isfahan, Iran
Tel: 98-917-805-2690 E-mail: Falhasiri@yahoo.com

Manijeh Youhanaee
Dept. of English Language, University of Isfahan, Isfahan, Iran
E-mail: Youhanaee_m@hotmail.com

Hossein Barati
Dept. of English Language, University of Isfahan, Isfahan, Iran
E-mail: H.barati@gmail.com

Received: January 14, 2012 Accepted: January 29, 2012 Published: June 1, 2012
doi:10.5296/ijl.v4i2.1552 URL: http://dx.doi.org/10.5296/ijl.v4i2.1552

Abstract

This study investigates L2 acquisition of telicity, in particular, how the Persian EFL learners interpret a/telic sentences comparing with English native speakers. To the mentioned aim, 70 EFL learners of English assigned to four groups of elementary, low intermediate, high intermediate and advanced speakers were asked to contribute to the present study. In task one the participants were to judge whether some telic and atelic sentences in Persian were compatible with the given context or not. Task 2, was a task of translation to evaluate the participants' production power and task 3 was a task of telicity in English based on Persian. The results revealed that Iranian EFL learners were more successful with telic structures both in translation and recognition task comparing with the atelic ones. The results on telicity in Persian revealed that the markers of telicity in English and Persian are different. Where languages had different markers of telicity, participants were influenced by L1 in all groups but advanced.

Keywords: Telicity, Telic/Atelic, First language transfer

1. Introduction

A major task for the first language (L1) acquirer is to arrive at a linguistic system which accounts for the input, allowing the child to build linguistic representations and to understand and produce a certain language (White, 2003). UG is proposed as part of an innate biologically endowed language faculty (e.g. Chomsky, 1965; Pinker, 1984), which permits the L1 acquirer to arrive at a grammar on the basis of linguistic experience (exposure to input). The outcome of first language acquisition is almost always a success: at about 5 or 6 years of age, normally developing children mostly acquire the grammar of the language that surrounds them (Slabakova, 2005). By contrast, adult second language acquisition results in different degrees of success, with some speakers performing on a variety of linguistic tasks like native speakers and others diverging considerably from these.

There are certain similarities between first and second language acquisition. In L2 acquisition, learners are faced with a similar task to that of the L1 acquirers, namely the need to arrive at a system accounting for L2 input (White, 2003). L2 learners are also faced, at least potentially, with a logical problem of language acquisition, in that there are abstract, complex and subtle properties of grammar that are underdetermined by the L2 input (Schwartz & Sprouse 2000a, b; White 1985).

L2 learners, however, already have a means of representing language, namely the grammar of the mother tongue which L1 acquirers lack. Thus, it might be that there is, in fact, no under determination problem: if L2 learners demonstrate the relevant kind of subconscious knowledge, it might be the case that they are drawing on the L1 grammar, rather than on UG itself, as is for L1 learners (Schachter, 1990).

This contrast between L1 and L2 acquisition has led some researchers to support the view that L1 and L2 acquisition are different epistemological phenomena: L1 acquisition is regulated by UG while L2 acquisition utilizes general-learning inductive procedures (Bley-Vroman, 1989; Meisel, 1997). Possessing a language by L2 learners has led some researchers (Schwartz & Sprouse, 1996) to claim that according to the “Full Transfer Full Access hypothesis”, L2 learners start out with their L2 development by utilizing their LI grammar (i.e., the so called 'LI transfer'). Evidence for LI transfer, especially at the initial state of L2 acquisition, has been provided by many studies (Gass & Selinker, 1994; Schwartz & Sprouse, 1996, 2000) in various linguistic domains, such as the overt morphology-syntactic level (Hazneder, 1997) and the covert semantic level such as telicity and aspect (Slabakova, 2005; Gabriele, 2005, among many others). As opposed to Full Transfer Full Access hypothesis, Epstein, Flynn & Martohardjono (1998), on the other hand, proposed that UG is directly accessed and “transfer is not part of the acquisition model itself (White, 2003). As shown, the source of L2 acquisition is a controversial issue among researchers.

Montrul & Slabakova (2002) and Shirai (2002) pointed out that many of the aspect studies in second language acquisition have failed to take the L2 learners’ native language into account. Despite some studies, the field is still far from an explanatory theory of *why* L2 learners have apparent difficulty acquiring aspectual notions in a second language (Gabriel2005).

Slabakova (2002) outlines some of the gaps in this body of research: First, many studies have failed to take the L2 learners' native language into account. She contents that one can formulate much more precise research questions if properties of the first language is considered and if they investigate properties that differ in first and second language. Secondly, researchers have collected a wide body of mostly production data. While this data is informative, it has been observed that learners who are able to produce aspectual morphology may still not have acquired the subtle semantics of the morphology; in other words, it has been suggested that learners acquire the *form* before the *meaning* (cf. Bardovi-Harlig, 1992, 1995; Montrul and Slabakova, 2002). Therefore, more researchers need to investigate how learners *interpret* forms that encode aspect (cf. Montrul & Slabakova, 2002, 2003; Slabakova, 1997, 2001).

2. Telicity in Persian

To the best of the researcher's knowledge, there have not been many studies on telicity in Persian. Folli, Harley & Karimi (2005), in their study of complex predicates in Persian, proposed that the nonverbal component (NV) is the sole determiner of telicity in the complex verbal construction. Megerdoomian (2008) claimed that the data from some verbs in Persian, however, refute this proposal. Folli et al. (2005) argued that telicity in complex predicates is determined by whether or not the NV denotes a definite endpoint or a result state. For instance, the complex predicate *bedonya amædæn*(to world come = 'to be born') is telic because the NV is a prepositional phrase marking an endpoint to the event. Complex verbs with an eventive noun as in *shekæst dadæn* (defeat give = 'to defeat') are also telic. Megerdoomian (2008) claims that the nonverbal component alone is not responsible for determining the telicity of the complex predicate. The properties of the light verb and potentially the structural relation between the NV and the light verb should also be taken into account in determining verbal aspect.

As the present study considers count versus mass nouns as the determiners of telicity, and also it considers the role of L1 in the acquisition of telicity, what follows are some points on count, non count, mass, singular/plural and definiteness in Persian from Ghomeishi (2003), Ghaniabadi (2005).

Ghaniabadi (2005) states that number markers in Persian encode both cardinality and definiteness. Plural marking cannot appear with numerals+classifiers. Plural marking in Persian, unlike in English, is not located within a syntactic projection such as Number Phrase. It meets some of the criteria for being a derivational rather than inflectional affix.

Based on consideration of the differences that exist between the two languages, Gomeishi (2003) makes several claims. First, with respect to the internal syntax of noun phrases, Persian lacks a NumP projection and that number marking is instead connected to the DP layer. Second, with respect to the external syntax of noun phrases, Persian allows bare NPs in argument positions while English arguments must minimally be NumPs.

3. The Role of L1

There is a debate in the L2 literature as to the role of the native language (L1) (Eubank

1993/4, 1996; Schwartz & Sprouse, 1994, 1996; Vainikka & Young-Scholten 1994, 1996; Epstein, Flynn & Martohardjono, 1998, White, 1996). Although research on second language acquisition has been concerned with L1 transfer from the very beginning of its existence, the productive discussion of this phenomenon is far from over (Slabakova, 2001). Slabakova (2000) states that it is still debated whether L1 transfer exists and what constitutes transfer. According to the Full Transfer Full Access hypothesis (Schwartz & Sprouse, 1996), L2 learners start out with their L2 development by utilizing their LI grammar (i.e., the so called 'LI transfer'). Evidence for LI transfer, especially at the initial state of L2 acquisition, has been provided by many studies (Gass & Selinker, 1994; Schwartz & Sprouse, 1996, 2000). This LI transfer phenomenon has been observed in various linguistic domains, such as the overt morphology-syntactic level (e.g., LI transfer in word order in child L2 acquisition, see Hazneder, 1997; LI transfer at the DP level in adult L2 acquisition see Liceras, Valenzuela & Diaz, 1999) and the covert semantic level (e.g., the acquisition of the semantics of Russian aspect by Slabakova, 2005 and Japanese by Gabriele, 2005, among many others).

As opposed to Full Transfer Full Access hypothesis, Epstein, Flynn & Martohardjono (1998), on the other hand, propose that UG is directly accessed and “transfer is not part of the acquisition model itself” (Gair, 1998), a hypothesis referred to as Direct Access Hypothesis (White, 2003).

Acquiring telicity marking is not a trivial task for Persian learners of English since there is no explicit classroom instruction on the abstract features of Det/Num morphology or on how to compute English predicate telicity.

In the previous studies on the acquisition of telicity, researchers have examined whether learners realize that the morpho-syntactic form of the direct object is important with respect to the calculation of telicity. The primary focus has been on the contrast between Germanic languages, which encode telicity in the direct object noun phrase, versus Slavic languages that do not. There have not been any studies on Persian EFL learners.

Montrul & Slabakova (2002) and Shirai (2002) pointed out that many of the aspect studies in second language acquisition have failed to take the L2 learners’ native language into account. Despite some studies, the field is still far from an explanatory theory of *why* L2 learners have apparent difficulty acquiring aspectual notions in a second language (Gabriel2005).

Slabakova (2002) outlines some of the gaps in this body of research: First, many studies have failed to take the L2 learners’ native language into account. She contents that one can formulate much more precise research questions if properties of the first language is considered and if they investigate properties that differ in first and second language. Secondly, researchers have collected a wide body of mostly production data. While this data is informative, it has been observed that learners who are able to produce aspectual morphology may still not have acquired the subtle semantics of the morphology; in other words, it has been suggested that learners acquire the *form* before the *meaning* (cf. Bardovi-Harlig, 1992, 1995; Montrul and Slabakova, 2002). Therefore, more researchers need to investigate how learners *interpret* forms that encode aspect (cf. Montrul & Slabakova, 2002, 2003; Slabakova, 1997, 2001).

Not only can this study reveal if Persian EFL learners of English distinguish the differences between the two languages with regard telicity, it can also shed light on interlanguage development i.e., it can discuss the linguistic property of interlanguage grammars, namely, at what level(s) the learners come to notice the differences between the two languages and at what level they actually come to acquire them to the level of native speakers, if they ever do. It has been claimed that investigating both the linguistic property of interlanguage and the developmental property is necessary to gain a deeper understanding of the mechanism of L2 acquisition (Carroll, 1999 a, b; Felix, 1986; Gregg, 1996; Klein and Martohardjono, 1999; Schwartz & Sprouse, 1994).

The findings could possibly have valuable implications for educators, teachers, curriculum designers and material developers. The study also elaborates on telicity in Persian which is done for the first time which can help the linguists find the differences between the two languages with regard to telicity markers.

4. Research Questions and Hypotheses

The present study is an attempt to answer the following questions and null hypotheses:

1) Does Persian speakers' L1 interfere with their judgment of a/telic sentences?

2) Does Persian speakers' L1 interfere with their production of a/telic sentences?

The research questions above, led to the following hypotheses.

H1: There is no interference between Persian EFL learners' L1 with their judgment of a/telic sentences.

H2: There is no interference between Persian EFL learners' L1 with their production of a/telic sentences.

5. Literature review

Since adult L2 learners already have their mature LI grammar, it has been proposed that L2 learners use their existing knowledge (e.g., morpho-syntactic structure, functional categories, semantic principles, etc.) to learn an L2 language grammar (Haznedar, 1997; Schwartz & Sprouse, 1996, 2000; Slabakova, 2000; White, 1985, 1986). This phenomenon, the fact that L2 learner use LI knowledge in the target language, is referred to as "LI transfer". LI transfer is a well-established phenomenon and a concept that has been used extensively. Quite a few numbers of researchers have been involved with the role of transfer in L2 acquisition. For instance, we can see an example of LI transfer at the morpho-syntactic level in a study by Liceras, Valenzuela & Diaz (1999). They examined the acquisition of the feature number by L2 Spanish learners. Results showed that there was a difference in the incorrect use of bare singular noun (bare-sg) among L2 learners who had a different LI value with respect to the nominal system. In particular, it was found that bare-sg mistakes were never produced by LI Romance language speakers, English speakers and other language speakers whose native languages overtly mark Number and Agreement in their morphology.

As another endorsement, MacDonald (2007) showed that Japanese learners of English

transferred their LI Japanese telicity marking mechanism in the early stages of their L2 acquisition. Gradually, this LI transfer became less evident, at the intermediate and advanced levels, learners showed progress toward the target-like use of English telicity.

This type of LI transfer phenomena is reported to be present even in the semantic domain. In the following paragraphs, two studies that show LI transfer at the semantic level, an L2 Russian study by Slabakova (2005) and an L2 Japanese study by Gabriele (2005) will be discussed.

Slabakova (2005) examined the acquisition of aspect by English learners of Russian, investigating whether adult English-speaking Russian learners acquire full linguistic competence in the domain of aspect and the relevant semantic-morphology mapping. She showed that low intermediate learners computed Russian aspect by using their LI telicity marking mechanism. The encoding mechanism for aspect in Russian is parametrically different from that of English and Japanese (Pinon, 1995; Verkuyl, 1993, 1999). In Russian, aspectual information can be encoded through affixes that attached to verbs (Brecht, 1984 cited in Slabakova 2001, p. 82). To locate the L1 influence she devised a task asking the participants to read a sentence and choose one of three options offering a possible continuation to the sentence they read. In this task, the participants were to choose the most suitable continuation by determining whether a sentence referred to a complete event or an incomplete event. The results indicated that the interpretation of a sentence by the low intermediate group was influenced by their LI English aspect marking system.

Gabriele (2005) conducted a bi-directional study of the acquisition of grammatical aspect by Japanese learners of English and English learners of Japanese. administering a story compatibility task in both languages (English and Japanese), She concluded that there is L1 transfer in both language groups in aspectual domain.

Results from the studies from Slabakova (2005) and Gabriele (2005) revealed that L2 learners transfer their LI semantic knowledge in the aspectual domain at early stages of L2 development. However both researchers also claim that these LI transfer phenomena are less observable in higher proficiency levels. In fact, Slabakova (2005) reported that LI transfer effect was not found in the advanced and the higher intermediate groups. This means that L2 learners are moving away from their LI aspectual marking mechanism and progressing towards the target-like one.

This study aimed to examine the markers of telicity in Persian, as presently there are not any studies on them. Since L1 of the learners should be taken into account (Slabakova, 2002) a task of telicity based on Persian was designed to account for the L1 influence. These were tasks evaluating the comprehension ability of learners (Montrul and Slabakova, 2002, 2003; Slabakova 1997, 2001); a task of translation assessing productive skill.

6. Methodology

6.1 The Pilot Study

Before embarking on the actual study, a task of translation was designed composing of twelve

sentences, six telic and six atelic, using bare singular nouns, bare plural and defined count nouns. The test was given to basic, elementary, intermediate, high intermediate and advanced learners (these are the different levels at the Iran Language Institute). The pilot study revealed that the tasks were too demanding for basic levels and it was better to start with elementary levels and since this study intended to find the acquisition process, the intervals between the elementary level with the next level from which the participants were chosen was 6 levels, as a results, levels 6, 12 and 18 were chosen for the population of the study. The pilot study helped the researcher devise translation task of a/telic sentences and the English compatibility judgment task for telicity based on the Persian more accurately. Having given the translation tasks, the researcher found that some words were difficult for students; therefore, for the actual study, it was tried to choose among the words studied at Iran Language Institute's books.

6.2 Participants

The population from which the participants were selected included the students of Iran Language Institute (Isfahan branch) who had enrolled in English classes in the winter semester in 2011. The ILI courses are composed of 18 levels which are made of six main levels i.e. basic, elementary, pre-intermediate, intermediate, upper intermediate, and advanced. There are three sub levels in each one of the main proficiency levels which make a total of 18 levels. Levels, 6, 12, 18 i.e. Elementary 3, Intermediate 3, and advanced 3 respectively were chosen for the placement test. The rationale behind choosing elementary 3 as the initial level for the prospective participants was a pilot study and the OPT (Oxford Placement Test) which was administered a month before the study. Participants were told that the results of the study are for educational purposes and were asked to write their names so that they would take the tasks seriously. The task was taken in the presence of the researcher and the class teacher. Participants were both male and female whose ages ranged from 15 to 25. Even though the students were studying in the levels titled elementary, intermediate, and advanced, to confirm the homogeneity of each member of a group and to determine the proficiency level, an OPT (Oxford Placement Test) had been administered before the study was carried out. Out of a 97 student population, 82 were chosen for the study and this number was later narrowed down to 64, by excluding the ones who completed the tasks carelessly or not completely. 4 students were also randomly excluded because the researcher intended to have 20 participants for each group. The careless test takers were identified by insertion of a repeated item or the ones who had not answered the tasks completely.

Having administered the OPT, the researcher divided the participant into three proficiency groups: elementary (N=20) those who scored (18-29), lower intermediate (N=20) OPT scores of (30-39), upper intermediate (N=20) OPT range scores of (40-47) and advanced (N=10) within 55-60.The advanced learners were English language teachers who held Master's degree in TEFL. All of the students in each class took the tasks regardless of the OPT results; nevertheless, papers of heterogeneous ones were discarded and not included in the study.

6.3 Materials

6.3.1 The Persian Compatibility Judgment Task for Telicity

Owing to the fact that there has not been a study on telicity in Persian, a task was devised for Persian native speakers so that the markers of telicity in Persian can be identified. In this task, six telic and atelic situations were followed by two sentences, one with bare singular and the other with defined plural noun. The participants were supposed to determine whether one or both of the sentences following the story were compatible by circling (yes) and not compatible by circling (no). In each category, there were 6 examples and 7 fillers which made a total of 19 items. Below you can find one example from telic and one from atelic situation.

نرگس تایپیست است. او قرار بود 10 نامه را تایپ کند و همه را قبل از ساعت 5 تایپ کرد. (Telic)

Narges is a typist. She was supposed to type 10 letters and she typed all of them before five.

الف. نرگس نامه تایپ کرد. بلی خیر

Narges typed letter.

ب. نرگس نامه ها را تایپ کرد. بلی خیر

Narges typed the letters.

احمد مکانیک است. او باید روزی 10 ماشین را تعمیر کند. دیروز 8 ماشین تعمیر کرد، ولی زود به خانه رفت و دوتای دیگر را تعمیر نکرد. (Atelic)

Ahmad is a mechanic. He is supposed to fix 10 cars a day. Yesterday, he fixed 8 cars but left early and did not fix the other 2.

الف. احمد ماشین تعمیر کرد. بلی خیر

Ahmad fixed car.

ب. احمد ماشین ها را تعمیر کرد. بلی خیر

Ahmad fixed the cars.

6.3.2 The Translation Task of A/Telic Sentences

In this part, participants were asked to translate nine sentences from Persian into English. The task included three examples of atelic situations with bare singular noun and three telic situations with defined count noun as well as three fillers. One example from each category is provided below:

Atelic

رضا مترجم بود و برای یک ناشر کار میکرد. او فقط کتاب ترجمه میکرد.

Reza was a translator and worked for a publisher. He only translated book.

Telic

احسان طراح لباس است. او لباسهایی را که ما سفارش داده بودیم طراحی کرد. احسان لباسها را طراحی کرد.

Ehsan was a designer. He designed the clothes we had ordered. Ehsan designed the clothes.

This task could help the researcher find the L1 role in different proficiency levels as well as learners' ability to produce telic and atelic structures. In all verbs in telic context, there was "می" which in this context shows an action the agent did regularly in the past. This task can indicate whether or not this "می" can help the participants to notice that the action is not completed and could continue.

6.3.3 The English Compatibility Judgment Task for Telicity Based on the Persian Task

This task was devised specifically to detect the L1 effect. The sentences included four atelic as well as four telic situations. In atelic contexts, there were two examples of bare plural nouns, acceptable in English, but the literal translation of which sounded odd and rather ungrammatical to native Persian speakers (it was determined by a pilot study taken a month before the actual study) and two bare singular nouns, acceptable in Persian because they are kind referring but unacceptable in English. In telic part, as in atelic section, there were two examples of defined plural nouns, acceptable in Persian, and two bare plural nouns.

Atelic

John was a translator. He translated for a company and translated from English to Persian.

John translated books. √ * …….....

Telic

John was a painter. My father asked him to paint all rooms in our house.

He painted the rooms. √ * …….....

The data were collected over two months in nine different classes at the ILI, girls and boys adult department, during winter semester 2011. For the translation items, the participants had at least 75 seconds (a total of 11 minutes) to translate each item from Persian into English. The Persian sentences were composed of words that students had already studied in their books and even if they had any problems, they were allowed to ask and the researcher would write the word on the board. To avoid chaos in data collection in this part, the researcher read each item and asked if any words sounded unfamiliar and then asked them to translate and proceeded to the next ones. Due to the pilot study, the researcher identified the words the learners had problems with.

The task of compatibility based on L1, the participants had 9 minutes. The third part was the compatibility task in Persian which took approximately 10 minutes for the 19 items that is an average of 30 seconds for each item. since it was a task of Persian, data collection was not demanding for the researcher and a simple explanation on the task helped the participants get started.

7. Data Analysis

All of the tasks were graded by the researcher and an assistant. Each item was either grated as correct that is 1 and incorrect i.e. 0.

To address the research questions, SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Sciences) Version

16.0 was used to perform all the statistical analyses in this study.

A number of statistical analyses were conducted; firstly, the mean score of each level in each task was calculated. Then, the ANOVA was run on each dependent variable to see whether there were any statistically significant differences across the groups. Lastly, the Pos hoc scheffe was carried out to locate the between groups differences.

7.1 The Persian Compatibility Judgment Task for Telicity

As mentioned in the previous chapters, this study investigates acquisition of telicity and the role of first language on performances of participants with different proficiency levels. A compatibility judgment task in Persian was devised and the participants were to determine whether certain sentences matched the given situations. The purpose of this task was to determine how telicity is marked in Persian. This task was specifically devised to see if Persian native speakers consider "ها" as a telic marker, and if they consider generic bare singular compatible with both telic and atelic context, as opposed to English, and finally whether they consider defined plural noun incompatible with atelic situation. The results of all groups are summarized in Figure 1.

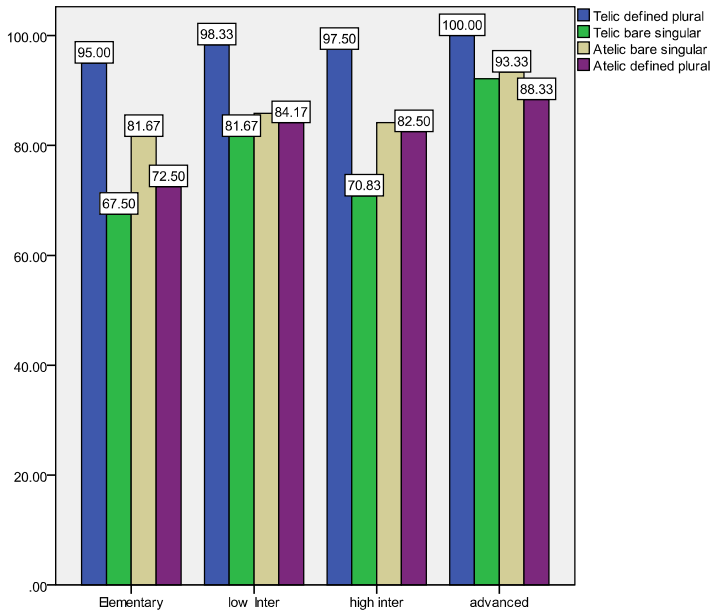

Figure 1. Mean scores on telicity in Persian

As can be seen, all groups performed almost similarly on each one of the categories of the Persian task of telicity. In order to answer the questions regarding markers of telicity, total mean scores and the standard deviations of all participants on the different categories are presented in Table 1.

As can be seen in Table 1, Persian native speakers considered defined plural nouns compatible with telic situation with almost 97 percent. Bare singular use with telic situation, an unacceptable point in English, is considered as acceptable with 76 percent, supporting the differences in telicity markers between these two languages. Moreover, Persian native

speakers accept bare singular as compatible with atelic situations with 85 percent, marking another difference between these two languages. However, they judged the defined count plural as unacceptable with atelic situation (80 %). The results of this task would further help understanding the L1 influence in different levels. The result of the ANOVA did not show any significant difference between groups.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics for telicity task in persian

	N	*Minimum*	*Maximum*	*Mean*	*Std. Deviation*
Telic defined plural	*70*	*66.67*	*100.00*	*97.3810*	*6.73618*
Telic bare singular	*70*	*.00*	*100.00*	*76.0237*	*37.30156*
Atelic bare singular	*70*	*.00*	*100.00*	*85.2380*	*28.87349*
Atelic defined plural	*70*	*.00*	*100.00*	*80.9523*	*29.93359*
Valid N (listwise)	*70*				

7.2 Translation Task of A/Telic Sentences

To make sure if the participants could produce telic and atelic structures correctly, a task of translation was devised to evaluate participants' knowledge of translating telic and atelic contexts. They were asked to translate three atelic situations with count bare nouns and three telic ones with defined count plurals. Figure 2 summarizes the mean scores of all groups.

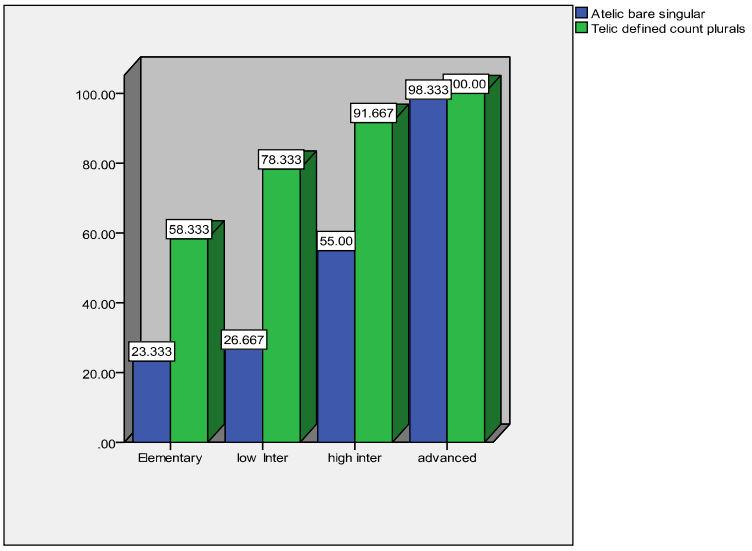

Figure 2. Mean scores on task of translation

As can be seen, advanced participants performed very accurately in translating both telic (M = 100) and atelic contexts (M = 98.3). In atelic category however, the mean scores of all groups are lower than the telic ones.

The ANOVA results, shown in Table 3, was run to see if the differences were significant. Both atelic (F = 13.911, p < .001) and telic (F = 5.509, p = .002) categories show significant differences.

Post hoc was carried out to see where the differences are significant (see Table 2).

Table 2. Post hoc results for task of translation

Dependent Variable	*(I) Level*	*(J) Level*	*Mean Difference (I-J)*	*Std. Error*	*Sig.*
Atelic bare singular	*Elementary*	*low Inter*	*-3.33333*	*10.55490*	*.992*
		high inter	*-31.66667**	*10.55490*	*.037*
		advanced	*-74.99967**	*12.92706*	*.000*
	low Inter	*Elementary*	*3.33333*	*10.55490*	*.992*
		high inter	*-28.33333*	*10.55490*	*.075*
		advanced	*-71.66633**	*12.92706*	*.000*
	high inter	*Elementary*	*31.66667**	*10.55490*	*.037*
		low Inter	*28.33333*	*10.55490*	*.075*
		advanced	*-43.33300**	*12.92706*	*.015*
	advanced	*Elementary*	*74.99967**	*12.92706*	*.000*
		low Inter	*71.66633**	*12.92706*	*.000*
		high inter	*43.33300**	*12.92706*	*.015*
Telic defined count plurals	*Elementary*	*low Inter*	*-20.00000*	*9.88571*	*.261*
		high inter	*-33.33333**	*9.88571*	*.014*
		advanced	*-41.66667**	*12.10747*	*.012*
	low Inter	*Elementary*	*20.00000*	*9.88571*	*.261*
		high inter	*-13.33333*	*9.88571*	*.613*
		advanced	*-21.66667*	*12.10747*	*.369*
	high inter	*Elementary*	*33.33333**	*9.88571*	*.014*
		low Inter	*13.33333*	*9.88571*	*.613*
		advanced	*-8.33333*	*12.10747*	*.924*
	advanced	*Elementary*	*41.66667**	*12.10747*	*.012*
		low Inter	*21.66667*	*12.10747*	*.369*
		high inter	*8.33333*	*12.10747*	*.924*

As shown in Table 2, with regard to translating atelic context with bare singular nouns, advanced learners performed significantly better than all the other groups. It indicates that the improvement in the acquisition of this category surged markedly from advanced level.

The results of telic context with defined count plural nouns, on the other hand, revealed that the differences between low and high intermediate participants with advanced participants was not significant which shows that participants from low intermediate level can produce this category accurately.

7.3 The English Compatibility Judgment Task for Telicity Based on the Persian Task

This task was devised based on L1 i.e. Persian. The Persian task on telicity, mentioned above

(Table 1), revealed the markers of telicity which Persian speakers associate with telic and atelic structures. Based on those tasks, a four section task composing of telic and atelic situations with bare singular noun, telic with defined plural noun as well as atelic with plural nouns was prepared. The results are presented both descriptively (Table 3) and visually (Figure 3).

Table 3. Descriptive statistics of the results of Persian based task of telicity

	N	*Minimum*	*Maximum*	*Mean*	*Std. Deviation*
Atelic bare plural	*70*	*.00*	*100.00*	*80.7143*	*33.28931*
Atelic bare singular ungrammatical	*70*	*.00*	*100.00*	*42.1429*	*45.55274*
Telic defined plural	*70*	*.00*	*100.00*	*86.4286*	*26.81313*
Telic bare singular ungrammatical	*70*	*.00*	*100.00*	*38.7143*	*43.43649*
Valid N (listwise)	*70*				

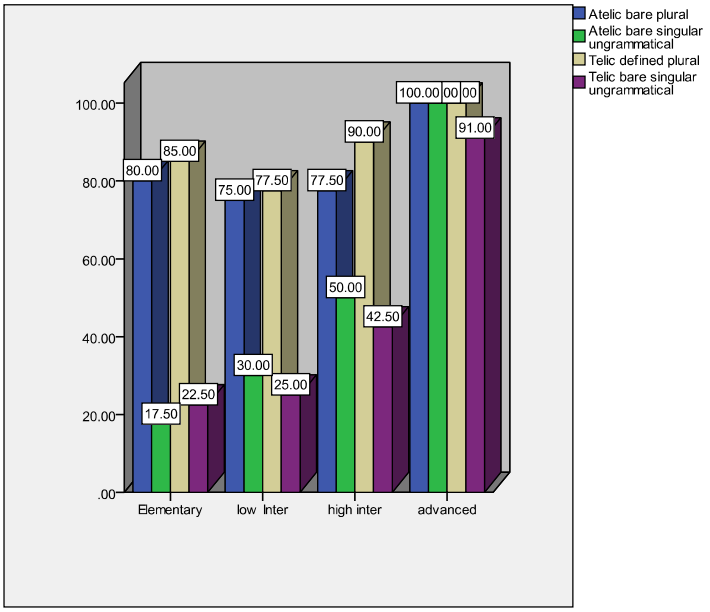

Figure 3. Mean scores of all levels' performance on Persian based task of telicity

As displayed in Table 3, where English and Persian differ with regards to telic markers, the participants did not perform satisfactory. In Persian task of telicity Table 1, 76 percent of the participants considered bare singular nouns as compatible with telic structure, 85 percent as compatible with atelic situations. Consequently, when they were to perform on English tasks, due to the influence of their L1, only 38 percent of the participants marked bare singular use as unacceptable for telic situations and 42 percent for atelic ones. On the other hand, the use of defined plurals with telic situation, which was acceptable for 97 percent of the participants, was considered as acceptable with 86 percent in English task. These results confirmed the fact that Persian participants are influenced by their L1. To see if the differences among different levels were significant, an ANOVA was run, the results of which are shown in Table 4.

Table 4. ANOVA results for the Persian based task of telicity

		Sum of Squares	*Df*	*Mean Square*	*F*	*Sig.*
Atelic bare plural	*Between Groups*	*4589.286*	*3*	*1529.762*	*1.405*	*.249*
	Within Groups	*71875.000*	*66*	*1089.015*		
	Total	*76464.286*	*69*			
Atelic bare singular ungrammatical	*Between Groups*	*49803.571*	*3*	*16601.190*	*11.734*	*.000*
	Within Groups	*93375.000*	*66*	*1414.773*		
	Total	*143178.571*	*69*			
Telic defined plural	*Between Groups*	*3732.143*	*3*	*1244.048*	*1.790*	*.158*
	Within Groups	*45875.000*	*66*	*695.076*		
	Total	*49607.143*	*69*			
Telic bare singular ungrammatical	*Between Groups*	*36644.286*	*3*	*12214.762*	*8.618*	*.000*
	Within Groups	*93540.000*	*66*	*1417.273*		
	Total	*130184.286*	*69*			

Table 4 shows that the performances on two categories, i.e., atelic bare singular ($F = 11.734$, $p < .001$), and telic bare singular ($F = 8.618$, $p < .00$) are significant.

Post hoc result of the significant categories is displayed on Table 5. Post hoc revealed that there are only significant differences between advanced level with the other three proficiency levels; namely, elementary, low intermediate and high intermediate in atelic bare singular category.

With regard to both telic and atelic context with count bare singular, the results showed the same behavior i.e., only the differences between advanced participants comparing with elementary, low intermediate and high intermediate were significant. This piece of information indicates that Persian EFL learners do not acquire this category until advanced levels. The results for both of these two categories indicate that all participants, except for advanced, perform poorly where the two languages differ.

Table 5. Post hoc results for atelic and telic contexts with bare singular

Dependent Variable	*(I) Level*	*(J) Level*	*Mean Difference (I-J)*	*Std. Error*	*Sig.*
Atelic bare singular ungrammatical	*Elementary*	*low Inter*	*-12.50000*	*11.89442*	*.776*
		high inter	*-32.50000*	*11.89442*	*.068*
		advanced	*-82.50000**	*14.56763*	*.000*
	low Inter	*Elementary*	*12.50000*	*11.89442*	*.776*
		high inter	*-20.00000*	*11.89442*	*.425*
		advanced	*-70.00000**	*14.56763*	*.000*
	high inter	*Elementary*	*32.50000*	*11.89442*	*.068*
		low Inter	*20.00000*	*11.89442*	*.425*
		advanced	*-50.00000**	*14.56763*	*.012*
	advanced	*Elementary*	*82.50000**	*14.56763*	*.000*
		low Inter	*70.00000**	*14.56763*	*.000*
		high inter	*50.00000**	*14.56763*	*.012*
Telic bare singular ungrammatical	*Elementary*	*low Inter*	*-2.50000*	*11.90493*	*.998*
		high inter	*-20.00000*	*11.90493*	*.426*
		advanced	*-68.50000**	*14.58050*	*.000*
	low Inter	*Elementary*	*2.50000*	*11.90493*	*.998*
		high inter	*-17.50000*	*11.90493*	*.543*
		Advanced	*-66.00000**	*14.58050*	*.000*
	high inter	*Elementary*	*20.00000*	*11.90493*	*.426*
		low Inter	*17.50000*	*11.90493*	*.543*
		Advanced	*-48.50000**	*14.58050*	*.016*
	advanced	*Elementary*	*68.50000**	*14.58050*	*.000*
		low Inter	*66.00000**	*14.58050*	*.000*
		high inter	*48.50000**	*14.58050*	*.016*

8. Discussion

Participants, in task of Persian telicity (Table 1), considered bare singular compatible with atelic and telic contexts, bare plural, however, was not considered as compatible with atelic usage while it is not correct in English to use bare singular for either telic or atelic contexts and bare plural is grammatically correct in English. All of these results root from the learners' L1. This explanation can account for the finding that the learners performed more accurately on telic context than atelic ones. In telic context they accepted defined plural count noun compatible with telic context very accurately because they accepted it in task of telicity in Persian, too. Nevertheless, once again because of L1 influence, except for advanced learners, all the other groups marked bare singular noun as acceptable with telic context, which is incorrect in English. In the translation task, the learners again proved that they had problems translating bare singulars with atelic context from Persian into English accurately, while they

did translate the defined count plurals in telic context accurately from their L1 into the target language i.e. English. To further account for the claims made above, the results of Persian based task of telicity can be taken into consideration where the participants considered bare singular compatible with both telic and atelic context and bare plural was considered as unacceptable by the majority of learners. On the other hand, as expected, they performed very accurately on defined count nouns with telic context.

Gabriel (2007) tested the claim that the morpho-syntactic properties of English would serve as a bootstrap into the atelic-distinction. The results of her study showed partial support suggesting that second language learners can acquire telicity but are sensitive to the form in which it is encoded. The findings of the present study is in line with those of Gabriel (2007), what is different, however, is the fact that she did not consider the L1 influence in a/telic distinction. As the results of this study suggest the learners are resorting to their L1 to judge the sentences not the morph-syntactic properties of English.

Slabakova (2000), investigating the role of the native grammar of the learners in the L2 acquisition of telicity by Spanish and Bulgarian learners. In her study, Spanish low intermediate learners of English had acquired the distinction between telic and atelic sentences in the target language in the sense that they prefer atelic sentences in combination with a habitual context to telic sentence, as native speakers do. In this study however, Persian learners considered bare singular as compatible with atelic or in other words habitual context. Slabakova (2000) stated that none of the Spanish individual learners demonstrate a negative contrast between telic and atelic means. She explained that these findings could be explained only if it is assumed that they are aided in their telicity acquisition by their native language. The Spanish learners were equally accurate in judging telic as they were in judging atelic sentences. In this study, however, Persian EFL learners performed better on telic than atelic contexts. The reasons for these experimental results can be sought in the fact that English and Spanish exhibit the same value of the aspectual parameter. If English and Spanish had conflicting ways of marking telicity, the high accuracy of Spanish native speakers in acquiring English telicity marking would be unaccounted for. On the other hand, Bulgarian low proficiency learners did not demonstrate that they had acquired the contrast between telic and atelic sentences in English. They patterned with native speakers on judging atelic sentences but were significantly less accurate in judging telic sentences, a result in sharp contrast with the results of the present study. Slabakova (2000) resorted to L1 transfer issue to account for this dissociation between telic and atelic sentences in the interlanguage of Bulgarian learners. She explains why the performance of the Bulgarian participants differs markedly from the performance of the Spanish participants, although learners in both groups are at a comparable level of proficiency. It was shown that Spanish low-proficiency learners were very accurate in interpreting telicity and atelicity in English while Bulgarian learners were accurate only on atelic sentences. She argued that this differential accuracy is directly related to the L1 value of the parameter instantiated in the learners' grammar at this point. Thus the results support L1 Transfer and argue against Direct Access to UG.

The findings of the reported experiment and the present study suggest that in the area of viewpoint aspect we find the same L1 transfer effects as in the previously studied areas of

second language acquisition, like null subject, verb-raising and others (see Gass 1996 for a comprehensive discussion). The first half of the Full Transfer/Full Access hypothesis (Schwartz and Sprouse 1994, 1996) has received experimental support from a cross-linguistic perspective.

Conclusions

Based on the results reported and the discussions conducted in the previous sections, the following conclusions were drawn.

Firstly, on translation task which elicited the productive skill of the participants for defined count noun with telic context and bare singular noun with atelic contexts, their performance revealed that they had translated the Persian bare singular as bare singular in English which is incorrect; nevertheless, they had translated the defined count plurals in telic context accurately because there is not a difference between their L1 and English with this regard which attests the fact that they are influenced by their L1 even in high intermediate level.

The second result on task of telicity in Persian indicated that, unlike English speakers, Iranian learners of English consider bare singular nouns acceptable with both telic and atelic context. The results determined that markers of telicity with regards to numbering in Persian are more than that of the English language.

Thirdly, task of telicity based on Persian, revealed that the learners marked the sentences with bare singular nouns as acceptable in English for both telic and atelic contexts, proving the fact that their performance was influenced by their L1, even in high intermediate levels.

References

Bardovi-Harlig, K. (1992). The relationship between form and meaning: a cross sectional study of tense and aspect in the interlanguage of learners of English as a second language. *Applied Psycholinguistics*, 13, 253-278. http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/S0142716400005634

Bardovi-Harlig, K. (1995).The interaction of pedagogy and natural sequences in the acquisition of tense and aspect. In F. Eckman, D. Highland, P.W. Lee, J. Mileham, & R. Rutkowski Weber (Eds.), *Second Language Acquisition Theory and Pedagogy*. Hillsdale, N.J.: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Bley-Vroman, R. (1989). What is the logical problem of foreign language learning? In *Linguistic Perspectives on Second Language Acquisition*, Susan Gass and Jacqueline Schachter, (Eds), 41-68.Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Brecht, R. (1984). The form and function of aspect in Russian. In M. Flier & R. Brecht (Eds.), Slavic morpho-syntax (pp. 9-33). Columbus, OH: Slavica Publishers.

Carroll, S. (1999a). Adults' sensitivity to different sorts of input. *Language Learning*, 49(1), 37-92. http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/1467-9922.00070

Carroll, S. (1999b). Putting 'input' in its proper place. *Second Language Research*, 15(4), 337-388. http://dx.doi.org/10.1191/026765899674928444

Chomsky, N. (1965). *Aspects of the Theory of Syntax.* Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Epstein, S., Flynn, S., & Martohardjono, G. (1998). The strong continuity hypothesis: Some evidence concerning functional categories in adult L2 acquisition. In S. Flynn, G. Martohardjono, & W. O'Neil (Eds.), *The generative study of second language acquisition*, Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Eubank, L. (1993/94). On the transfer of parametric values in L2 development. *Language Acquisition,* 3, 183-208. http://dx.doi.org/10.1207/s15327817la0303_1

Eubank, L. (1996). Negation in early German-English interlanguage: more Valueless Features in the L2 initial state. *Second Language Research,* 12(1), 73-106. http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/026765839601200104

Felix, S. (1986). *Cognition and language growth*. Dordrecht: The Netherlands: Kluwer Academic.

Folli, R., Harley,H., &Karimi, S. (2005). Determinants of event structure in Persian complex predicates, *Lingua,* 115(10), 1365-1401. http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.lingua.2004.06.002

Gabriele, A. (2005). *The acquisition of aspect in a second language: a bidirectional study of learners of English and Japanese.* Unpublished doctoral dissertation. The city University of New York, New York.

Gabriele, A. (2007). Interpreting bare nominals in L2 Japanese.Proceedings of the conference *Generative Approaches to Language Acquisition- North America 2,* 92-101.

Gair, J.W. (1998). Functional categories in L2 acquisition: Homegrown or imported? Commentary on part I. In S. Flynn, G. Martohardjono, & W. O'Neil (Eds.), *The Generative Study of Second Language Acquisition*, Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Gass, S. (1996). Second language acquisition and linguistic theory: The role of language transfer. In W. Ritchie & T. Bhatia (Eds.), *Handbook of Second Language Acquisition* (317-345), Academic Press: San Diego, CA.

Gass, S., & Selinker, L. (1994). *Second language acquisition: An introductory course*. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Ghaniabadi, S. (2005). M/p-echo reduplication in colloquial Persian: an OT analysis. Generals Paper, University of Manitoba.

Ghomeshi, J. (2003). Plural marking, indefiniteness, and the noun phrase. *Studia Linguistica,* 57(2), 47-74. http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/1467-9582.00099

Gregg, K. (1996). The logical and developmental problem of second language acquisition. In W. Ritchie and T. Bhatia (Eds.), *Handbook of second language acquisition* (pp. 49-81). San Diego, CA: Academic Press.

Haznedar, B. (1997). L2 acquisition by a Turkish-speaking child: Evidence for LI influence. In E. Hughes, M. Hughes & A. Greenhill (Eds.), *Proceedings of the 21st Annual Boston University Conference on Language Development* (pp. 257-68). Somerville, MA: Cascadilla Press.

Klein, E., & Martohardjono, G. (1999). Investigating second language grammars: Some conceptual and methodological issues in generative SLA research.In E. Klein and G. Martohardjono (Eds). *The development of second language grammars: A generative approach* (pp. 3-34). Amsterdam: John Benjamins.

Liceras, J. M., Valenzuela, E., & Diaz, L. (1999). L2 Spanish grammars and the pragmatic deficit hypothesis. *Second Language Research*, 15, 161-190. http://dx.doi.org/10.1191/026765899675128586

MacDonald, K. (2007). Acquisition of telicity in L2: A psycholinguistic study of Japanese learners of English. Ph.D. degree in Linguistics: University of Ottawa

Megerdoomian, K. (2008). Parallel Nominal and Verbal Projections. In Foundational Issues in Linguistic Theory; M.L. Zubizarreta, R. Freidin & C. Otero (Eds.). MIT Press.

Meisel, J. (1997). The acquisition of the syntax of negation in French and German: contrasting first and second language acquisition. *Second Language Research* 13: 227-263. http://dx.doi.org/10.1191/026765897666180760

Montrul, S., &Slabakova, R. (2002). Acquiring morpho-syntactic and semantic properties of aspectual tenses in L2 Spanish. In A.T. Perez-Lerouz & J. Liceras (Eds.), *the acquisition of Spanish morpho-syntax: the L1-L2 connection* (pp. 113- 149). Dordrecht: Kluwer.

Montrul, S.,&Slabakova R. (2003). Competence similarities between native and near-native speakers: An investigation of the preterite-imperfect contrast in Spanish. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition*, 25, 351-398.

Pinion, C. (1995). *An ontology for event semantics*. PhD dissertation: Stanford University.

Pinker, S. (1984). *language learnability and language development.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Schachter, J. (1990). On the issu of completeness in second language acquisition. *Second Language Research, 6*, 93-124. http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/026765839000600201

Schwartz, B., & Sprouse, R. (1994). Word order and nominative case in non-native language acquisition: a longitudinal study of (L1 Turkish) German interlanguage. In T. Hoekstra & B. Schwartz (Eds.), *Language acquisition studies in generative grammar* (317-368), Amsterdam: John Benjamins. http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/026765839601200103

Schwartz, B., & Sprouse, R. (1996). L2 cognitive states and the Full Transfer/Full Access model, *Second Language Research*, 12(1), 40-72.

Schwartz, B., & Sprouse, R. A. (2000). When syntactic theories evolve: consequences for L2 acquisition research. In J. Archibald (Ed.), *Second language acquisition and linguistic theory* (pp. 156-186). Oxford: Blackwell.

Shirai, Y. (2002). The aspect hypothesis in SLA and the acquisition of Japanese. *Acquisition of Japanese as a Second Language,* 5, 42-61.

Slabakova, R. (1997). *Zero acquisition: second language acquisition of the parameter of aspect.* Ph.D. dissertation: McGill University.

Slabakova, R. (2000). L1 Transfer Revisited: The L2 acquisition of telicity marking in English by Spanish and Bulgarian Native Speakers. *Linguistics* 38(4), 739-770. http://dx.doi.org/10.1515/ling.2000.004

Slabakova, R. (2001). *Telicity in a second language*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.

Slabakova, R. (2005). What is so difficult about telicity marking in L2 Russian? *Bilingualism: Language and Cognition,* 8 (1), 63-77. http://dx.doi.org/10.1017/S1366728904002093

Slabakova, R., & Montrul, M. (2002). Aspectual tenses in Spanish L2 acquisition: a UG perspective. In Shirai, Y. & Salaberry, R. (Eds.), *Tense-Aspect Morphology in L2 acquisition*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.

Vainikka, A., & Young-Scholten, M. (1994). Direct access to X' theory: Evidence from Korean and Turkish adults learning German. In T. Hoekstra, & B. D., Schwartz (Eds), *Language acquisition studies in generative grammar* (pp. 265-316.). Amsterdam: John Benjamins.

Vainikka, A., & Young-Scholten, M. (1996). Gradual development of L2 phrase structure. *Second Language Research,* 12, 7-39. http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/026765839601200102

Verkuyl, H. (1993). *A theory of aspectuality*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Verkuyl, H. (1999). Tense, aspect, and aspectual composition. In Dimitrova-Vulchanova, M. & Hellan, L. (Eds.), *Topics in South Slavic syntax and semantics* (pp. 125–162). Amsterdam: John Benjamins

White, L. (1985). The pro-drop parameter in adult second language acquisition. *Language Learning* 35, 47-62. http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-1770.1985.tb01014.x

White, L. (1996). Clitics in L2 French. In H. Clahsen (Ed.), *Generative Perspectives on Language Acquisition.* Amsterdam: John Benjamins.

White, L. (2003). On the nature of interlanguage representation: Universal grammar in the second language. In C. J., Doughty, & M. H., Long (Eds.), *The handbook of second language acquisition* (pp. 19-42). Oxford: Blackwell.