Developmental Clustering of the Properties of Non-Pro Parameter in EFL Learning

Masoud Khalili Sabet *
Assistant professor, University of Guilan, Iran
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Abstract

This experimental study investigates Persian learners’ clustering acquisition of the properties associated with non-pro-drop parameter in English as L2. Research has indicated that there are certain correlations between superficially unrelated linguistic phenomena in L1 acquisition that are interpreted as the clustering effects of one on the others within the Principles and Parameters framework. For instance, in German L1 acquisition, there is evidence for a clustering acquisition of subject-verb agreement and the decrease of (incorrect) null subjects (Clahsen, 1995; Clahsen et al, 2004). Likewise, there are general arguments that the same processing mechanism happens in L2 acquisition. Thus, the present research will report the results of a Grammaticality Judgment Task (GJT) investigating the clustering appearance of L2 syntactic features related to non-pro-dropping parameter; such as obligatory overt subjects, V-S constraint and that-trace filter; in 60 Persian learners of English divided into two proficiency levels. Furthermore, each level consists of two different kinds of learners in term of the start age of L2 acquisition. They are referred to as early-starters who started L2 acquisition at the age of 7-8 and late-starters who first attended English classes at age 12-13. Our findings revealed that the three syntactic phenomena related to non-pro-dropping parameter cluster almost perfectly in post-intermediate learners indicating that proficiency level has a major influence on how bilinguals process L2 linguistic input. Moreover, we observed no difference between the performance of early and late starters with respect to clustering emergence of the above syntactic variables.

Key Words: Clustering Effects, Developmental Correlations, Parameter (Re)Setting, Parametric Variation, That-Trace Filter, V-S Constraint, Fundamental Difference Hypothesis (FDH).

* Tel: 0131-6690280, Fax: 0131-6690280, E-mail: Sabetma2002@yahoo.com
Introduction

The assumption that L2 acquisition might be similar to L1 process has exerted noticeable impact on SLA research over the last two decades (Schwartz & Sprouse, 1994; Felser & Roberts, 2004). Although there is a consensus on the clustering effects of the linguistic phenomena in L1, related issues are more controversial in L2 research (Clahsen & Muysken, 1989; Clahsen et al. 2004). One way to resolve the problem in L2 acquisition proposed by Clahsen & Hong (1995) involves three requirements. First, two or more syntactic properties connected in a UG parameter must be studied where one of them is the trigger for the clustering acquisition of the other. Secondly, research should have indicated that these phenomena developmentally correlate in L1 acquisition. Finally, these phenomena must not exist in the mother tongue of the learners in our study. It follows that if under these three conditions, the two or more syntactic phenomena correlate in that group, then it is logically concluded that the process of clustering effects is also functioning in L2 acquisition. For a group of Persian learners of English, therefore, the following grammatical phenomena would create the above conditions. In fact, the following parametric features constitute three main areas of syntactic differences between Persian and English.

Obligatory/Null Subjects

Whereas Persian is a pro-drop language which allows empty subjects in main and embedded clauses, English is a non-pro-drop language in which inflectional possibilities do not license pro. These empty arguments can be identified by inflectional suffixes. According to Rizzi’s (1986), two parameters are assumed to account for the distribution of null subjects: (1). licensing of pro, and (2). identification/recovery of the content of pro. The licensing of the null subjects can be accomplished through government by inflection or agreement. In English which is a non-pro-drop language, inflectional possibilities do not license pro; whereas in Persian and Italian it does.
Verb-Subject Constraint

Secondly, declarative sentences in English, which is a non-pro-drop system, follow the subject-verb order and inversion is not allowed for them. Persian that belongs to null-subject category can have the order of verb-subject even in declarative sentences. So, in pro-drop languages one have sentences equivalent to ‘Played the children in school.’ meaning ‘The children played in school’. It is, therefore, important for a theory of L2 acquisition to investigate how learners of English as L2 with a pro-drop linguistic background process and produce this distinct parametric value.

That-Trace Filter

Finally, in non-pro-drop systems sentences such as ‘* Who did Ali say that bought the car?’ are considered ungrammatical while its corresponding structure as ‘Who did Ali say bought the car?’ is argued to be well-formed. It is, therefore, legitimate to generalize that in non-pro languages such as English the subject of the subordinate clause may be questioned just if the complementizer ‘that’ is absent. The main argument is that the first type of sentences in English are ungrammatical because they violate a principle of grammar termed as ‘empty category principle’ by movement from the subject position if the complementizer is present (Radford, 1998). While in Persian the first type of sentences would be permitted because movement is possible from post-verbal position in the inverted sentence form.

Review of the Related Literature

Certain theoretical hypotheses have been adopted on the nature of the ability to process the linguistic input for L2 acquisition (Brown, 1973; Bloom et al. 1975; Clahsen & Hong, 1995; Carroll, 2001; Gregg, 2003; Hulstijn, 2002). Yet little has been revealed about how language learners comprehend or produce different domains of language (morphology and syntax) in real life situations. A number of SLA researchers (Epstein, et al, 1993b) argue for a strong UG or Full Access Hypothesis (FAH) claiming that UG in its entirety constraints language acquisition.
While a second group of psycholinguists (Felser & Roberts, 2004) support a weak UG or Fundamental Difference Hypothesis (FDH) claiming that L2 acquisition is governed by cognitive faculties that are distinct from the domain-specific language faculty termed as UG. In fact, the latter group attributes the empirical differences between child and adult language processing to other factors such as the child's limited memory span and cognitive resources. Along the same line, they believe that some striking differences exist between non-native (adult L2) and native speakers in terms of sentence processing. They suggest that these differences can be explained by presupposing that the syntactic representations computed by L2 learners during comprehension are shallower and less detailed compared to those of native speakers.

Research evidence from English L1 acquisition confirms an initial stage of omitting subjects and inflections (Gregg, 2003). Epstein et al (1993b) report developmental relationship between some tense inflections and obligatory subjects. Clahsen & Hong (1995) also claim that in German L1 acquisition, there is evidence for a clustering appearance of subject-verb agreement and the use of obligatory subjects. As for L2 acquisition, research has resulted in controversial findings and conflicting suggestions with respect to the clustering effects of syntactic variables. Hilles (1991) found statistically significant correlations between inflectional suffixes and the increase of overt pronominal subjects in some of the Spanish learners of English. The reliability of Hilles’ findings, yet, may be criticized as the role of L1 transfer is not clear in her study. Along the same line, Vainikka and Young-Scholten (1994) carried out a research on developmental clustering effects in the acquisition of German by 6 Korean and 11 Turkish learners. The findings indicate that the acquisition of subject-verb-agreement paradigm is developmentally correlated to the correct obligatory subjects in advanced (stage 3) level. They further conclude that what they found in the acquisition of German as L2 is parallel to what has been found for German child language acquisition. However, since this correlation is what they could observe just in advanced learners, it might be logically argued that the two linguistic structures appeared in the learners as a result of their separate learning rather than developmental clustering effects.
On the other hand, certain studies have suggested counterarguments against the clustering effects in L2 acquisition. Lakshmanan (1991) carried out a longitudinal study on null subjects and subject-verb agreement in the performance of three learners of English with different L1 backgrounds. The results show that the development of correct use of obligatory subjects is not well accompanied by using correct subject-verb-agreement paradigm. Moreover, Clahsen and Hong (1995) carried out an experimental study to evaluate the clustering effects of null subjects and subject-verb agreement in 33 Korean learners of German as L2. The reaction time software records the subjects’ grammatical judgments as well as the time spent on each item. The results indicate that 20 subjects did not demonstrate good correlations of the two linguistic phenomena, in fact, they acquired either just one of them or none. Meanwhile, 13 subjects connected the two phenomena indicating that they have acquired both of them. In spite of their findings, the researchers conclude that the correlations of the phenomena do not provide sufficient evidence for the clustering effects.

**Research Questions and Hypotheses**

1. Do the properties of non-pro parameter cluster in the interlanguage systems of Persian-speaking learners of English?

   Hypothesis: Persian-speaking learners of English cluster the properties of non-pro parameter in their interlanguage systems.

2. What is the relationship between clustering process of the properties of non-pro parameter and proficiency levels in L2 acquisition?

   Hypothesis: There is no relationship between L2 proficiency levels and the clustering of the properties of non-pro parameter in L2 learning.

3. Is there a significant relationship between the start age of L2 learning and the clustering effects of the parametric non-pro features?

   Hypothesis: There is no relationship between the start age of L2 learning and the clustering effects of the parametric non-pro features.
Research Design and Methodology

Participants: The present study includes a total of 60 university students who are majoring in English in Guilan University. They were randomly selected from the population of junior and senior students representing two proficiency levels of L2 as intermediate and post-intermediate learners. They all had a TOEFL score of 4500 or above and were given a cloze test to demonstrate their current English proficiency. The cloze test consisted of 60 blanks with each blank worth one point. Those who scored above 45 were placed in the post-intermediate group, 91% were senior students. The rest were placed in the intermediate group. According to a Questionnaire on the Subjects’ Background (QSB), each group was further composed of two equal sub-groups of different start-age of L2 acquisition. The first half, or the early starters, whose start age varies from 5 to 7 were initially exposed to English in a private language institute or in the Primary School. The other half consists of late starters to learn English whose start age varies from 12 to 13. The late starters were first exposed to English in grade 1 or 2 in the Guidance school.

Instrument: A Grammaticality Judgment Task (GJT) with 40 items was constructed to elicit the necessary information about the subjects’ abilities on features associated with English non-pro-drop parameter such as obligatory overt subjects in main/embedded clauses, V-S and that-trace constraints as discussed above. Out of 40 items, 10 are on obligatory subjects (equally divided into main and embedded clauses), 10 on V-S constraint, 10 on that-trace constraint and 10 are also filler items functioning as distractors (Appendix). Here, each item is followed by three choices as G (Grammatical), UN (Ungrammatical) and NS (Not Sure). One or zero points would be awarded depending on the correct judgment of each item made by the testees. In other words, the testees would receive one score for each correct judgment as G or UN, but they would not gain any score for choosing NS choice at all.

Data Analysis: two kinds of statistical techniques are used in this paper to test the research hypotheses. In the first place, a set of factor analyses are performed for different groups to find out whether all properties under question belong to one
underlying trait or not. Secondly, a number of ANOVA and Post-Hoc Scheffe tests are computed in order to capture any difference between the two start-age subgroups in each proficiency level. We established the probability level at .05 to reject the null hypotheses.

Results

In this section, the results of the data analyses will be presented and tabulated as an attempt to find answers to our research questions. Also, the research findings obtained from the Grammaticality Judgment Task (GJT) will be presented in summary tables and graphs. The GJT contained 30 testing items representing three different syntactic properties namely obligatory overt subjects in main/embedded clauses, V-S and that-trace constraints in English. The aim was to investigate whether the subjects who are from two different proficiency levels have clustered all properties or acquired just one or two of the phenomena. In the meantime, we want to discover any difference between the two start-age sub-groups in terms of their competence on properties of L2 non-pro-drop parameter.

As Figure 1 reveals, while the junior learners obtained almost perfect scores with respect to overt subjects in main/embedded clauses and V-S constraint, they
could not show the same performance on that-trace feature.

Table 1: Factor analysis on GJT for junior group

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Initial</th>
<th>Extraction</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Subjects in M/E Clauses</td>
<td>1.000</td>
<td>.996</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subject-Verb Constraint</td>
<td>1.000</td>
<td>.996</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>That-trace Constraint</td>
<td>1.000</td>
<td>.015</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

Table 1 also demonstrates that the third variable does not contribute to the same underlying feature as the first two variables do. In fact, the results of GJT represent a bi-cluster model in terms of the junior learners, competence on the properties of L2 non-pro-drop parameter.

Table 2: Distribution of total common variance of GJT for junior group

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Initial Eigenvalues</th>
<th>Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>% of Variance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2.008</td>
<td>66.920</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>.992</td>
<td>33.080</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

Table 2 illustrates that the third variable, that is that-trace filter, contributed nothing to the common variance of GJT. On the other hand, the first and second components together, that is overt subjects and V-S constraint, gave the total common variance of the task.
According to Figure 2, the senior learners could gain better results with respect to that-trace filter compared to the previous group. In fact, they could answer 80% of the questions on that-trace constraint correctly.

**Table 3: Factor analysis on GJT for junior group**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Initial</th>
<th>Extraction</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Subjects in Main Clauses</td>
<td>1.000</td>
<td>.805</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subject-Verb Constraint</td>
<td>1.000</td>
<td>.805</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>That-trace Constraint</td>
<td>1.000</td>
<td>.735</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

All subtests, according to Table 3, contributed well to the same underlying trait and produced a mono-cluster representation of the senior learners’ competence on this specific parametric variation.
Table 4: Distribution of total common variance of GJT for senior group

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Initial Eigenvalues</th>
<th>Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings</th>
<th>Rotation Sums of Squared Loadings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>% of Variance</td>
<td>Cumulative %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.234</td>
<td>41.136</td>
<td>41.136</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.111</td>
<td>37.037</td>
<td>78.173</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>.655</td>
<td>21.827</td>
<td>100.000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

Table 4 also manifests that all of three variables under investigation contributed to the common variance of GJT. This would indicate that there is one underlying property associated with all three sub-tests in the GJT.

Having performed a set of factor analyses on GJT for junior and senior groups, it is now the right time to compute some ANOVA and Post-Hoc Scheffe test to find out any difference among the start-age sub-groups with respect to the three components of GJT. However, a quick glance at figures 1 and 2 would assure us that there no any significant difference between the start age sub-groups in terms of the first two variables, that is overt subjects in M/E clauses and V-S constraint as the mean percentages range from 99 to 98. As a result, we will just concentrate on the third phenomenon under question termed as is that-trace filter.
Table 5: Homogeneous start-age sub-groups on that-trace filter

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Start Age</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Subset for alpha = .05</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intermediate Late Starters</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>1.08667</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intermediate Early Starters</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>2.0000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-Intermediate Late Starters</td>
<td>15</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>post-Intermediate Early Starters</td>
<td>15</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sig.</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.828</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Means for groups in homogeneous subsets are displayed.

a. uses Harmonic Mean Sample Size = 15.000.

As the Post-Hoc Scheffe test (Table 3) illustrates, two distinct clusters are formed with respect to that-trace filter as a sub-test of GJT. In the first cluster, we may locate two almost identical groups of intermediate late and early starters while in the second cluster there are post-intermediate late and early starters. Yet the important point is that the members of each cluster are significantly different from the groups in the other cluster.

Discussion

The first question of the present research deals with the emergence of syntactic clustering by Persian learners of English as L2. This is certainly a controversial issue in SLA due to contradictory assumptions and research findings. On the one hand, the FDH argues that there is no sufficient evidence to claim that there are clustering effects of the superficially unrelated linguistic phenomena in L2 acquisition (Claassen et al, 2004). In other words, this theoretical position believes that a mere statistical connection between two or more linguistic phenomena by itself does not
indicate that one variable triggered the other ones. On the other hand, the strong version of UG hypothesis claims that the cross-sectional comparisons show some L2 learners have been clustering two or more syntactic phenomena in a developmental process similar to L1 acquisition.

The results of the present study indicate that there is clustering effect between overt subject and V-S constraint for junior L2 learners, while the senior group perfectly clustered the three linguistic phenomena related to L2 non-pro-dropping parameter. Since this experiment is based on the developmental data, we may argue that the findings are compatible with the access hypothesis (Epstein et al., 1998). This is, to some extent, attributable to the design of the present study which is an improvement over the previous ones on L2 syntactic clustering. For instance, although Clahsen & Hong (1995) could observe significant correlations between subject-verb agreement and the correct properties of null subjects in German for a number of the Korean L2 learners, they could not conclude whether these learners acquired the two phenomena at the same time or whether they learned them separately from one another just due to their insufficient cross-sectional data. The developmental syntactic correlations gained at different proficiency levels in our study, however, minimize the danger that our findings are just product-specific artifacts. Thus, in the first place we suggest that the results of the present research can best be explained in terms of the strong UG hypothesis. Most probably, however, proponents of the weak UG hypothesis will offer counterarguments and suggest some alternative explanations.

First, one can, of course, argue that such clustering represents just statistical correlations among some linguistic variables rather than the clustering effects of one phenomenon on the other variables under investigation in the present study. More specifically, they may claim that this is a product-oriented study rather than a process-oriented one. This argument could have been valid and to the point in the case that we had studied just one group of L2 learners at a specific point of time in the process of L2 acquisition. However, notice that we studied L2 learners at different time intervals so that we may observe the developmental process of
learning L2 parametric aspects. This would support the assumption that our research findings are not limited to the learners’ static behavior at one definite point of time. In addition, the results of other studies carried out on L2 acquisition (Vainikka & Young-Scholten, 1994; Clahsen & Hong, 1995; Clahsen et al., 2004; Felser & Roberts, 2004) are consistent with what we observed in the present study. These agreements, also, reduce the danger that our findings are restricted to what the L2 learners acquired rather than to how they acquired it.

Secondly, it might be alternatively argued that the acquisition of the properties of non-pro-dropping parameter in English by our senior L2 learners does not necessarily entail that the input in which overt subjects are obligatory provide the trigger for correctly setting that parameter. At the first glance this is a logical argument because there are other mechanisms available to L2 learners to acquire the target system. The point, however, is that a more careful exploration of the English textbooks for Iranian students, however, would reveal that that-trace constraint is almost never explained or even introduced during their L2 classes. Even in advanced English grammar textbooks rarely can we find any discussion or explanation about the above-mentioned constraint. Moreover, the L2 learners in our study are expected to develop an English grammar that includes the specification ‘the complementizer “that” is optional’ to form questions for both subjects and objects of embedded clauses. Thus, it is justified to conclude that the connections among overt subjects, V-S and that-trace constraints provide evidence for clustering and triggering effects of one property on the other(s).

As for the second research question, according to what we observed in this research, clustering happened for both levels of L2 proficiency. While the perfect clustering was observed in the senior learners, the junior learners revealed some mechanism of developing smaller clusters in which just two aspects of L2 parametric properties are associated. Our findings would support the proficiency hypothesis which claims a positive and systematic relationship between L2 proficiency level and ‘native-like’ acquisition. This is consistent with what Vainikka and Yuong-Scholten (1994) could find for advanced Korean L2 learners of
German who seemed to pattern like native speakers with respect to agreement and null subjects. We may now claim that we could observe an on-going dynamic process of clustering of superficially unrelated linguistic phenomena throughout the period of L2 acquisition. In the meantime, the observed differences between different proficiency groups can be attributed to the extent of clustering rather than to the nature of clustering. More specifically, the junior L2 learners could cluster two properties, that is the overt subject and S-V constraint, almost perfectly. On the other hand, the senior learners’ performance on GJT demonstrated complete clustering of all of the three linguistic phenomena under investigation in the present study. The important point is that the findings here verify developmental correlations among the L2 syntactic properties in different stages of L2 acquisition. This is claimed to be a new achievement as the previous similar studies on L2 syntactic clustering were basically limited to observe just one proficiency level.

Finally, according to the ANOVA data (Table 5), the start-age subgroups at each proficiency level, the early and late starters of L2 acquisition in this study, did not manifest significant differences with respect to the extent and nature of clustering of certain L2 parametric properties. This is in disagreement with the Critical Period Hypothesis (CPH) reformulated by Lenneberg (1967) who assumed that language learning increases in difficulty with age and who linked this difficulty to decreasing cerebral plasticity. The start-age subgroups of two proficiency levels performed almost equally well on GJT in general and on the subtest items in particular. We could find no evidence to indicate any difference between the parallel start-age subgroups with respect to overt subjects and V-S constraint (Figures 1 and 2). Furthermore, the results of the Scheffe test (Table 5) revealed that the two start age groups of the same proficiency level followed the same pattern of clustering on that-trace constraint.

**Conclusion and Pedagogical Implications**

The controversial issue of how linguistic input is processed by second language learners has provoked a number of studies. Yet the findings are contradictory. While
some SLA researchers claim that the processing is fully constraint by UG (Epstein et al., 1993b), other psycholinguists (Clahsen et al., 2004) argue for a fundamental difference hypothesis. Along the same line, we conducted a Grammaticality Judgment Task (GTT) for Persian-speaking learners of English in two groups of junior and senior students to examine the clustering emergence the L2 non-pro-dropping parametric properties such as obligatory over subjects in M/E clauses, V-S constraint and that-trace filter. According to a questionnaire, half of the members in each group were the early-starters who started L2 learning at 5-7 years old and the other half were late-starters who started L2 learning at 12-13 years old. We found that the junior learners could cluster just two variables under investigation, that is overt subjects in M/E clauses and V-S constraint. For senior learners, the correlation showed almost perfect clustering of all of the three variables related to L2 parametric variation. In the meantime, we could not find any significant difference on the extent and nature of clustering the same L2 syntactic aspects between the sub-groups in each proficiency level, the early and late starters. We conclude that our results support the clustering hypothesis according to which processes such as parameter resetting are operative in L2 development in a similar way as L1 acquisition.

In the first place, our findings about the possibility of clustering effects in L2 acquisition would contribute to better understanding of the nature of L2 learning. The L2 learners in the present study proved to have access to mechanisms similar to those of in L1 acquisition. This, in turn, permits specific predictions about the interaction and relative importance of constraints in English and, ultimately, of the acquisitional route the L2 learners take. Consequently, the application of clustering theory to interactions between parametric variation and L2 syntax development implies a new and potentially productive line of inquiry that may advance our understanding of both L2 learning and grammatical theory.

Secondly, it is also significant for text-book designers and material developers to consider the results of the present and other similar studies. As our findings suggest a clustering theory of L2 acquisition the next step, then, should be devoted
to categorizing the L2 grammatical properties on the bases of their structural similarities and differences to those of L1. In such a structural syllabus, as we would like to call it, each unit serves to expose the learners to target parametric variation in order to help them go through the clustering process more easily. In fact, the transition from one unit to another is intended to enable the learners to develop their present grammatical systems. What we are suggesting as the structural syllabus is fundamentally different from the traditional one. The point is that the modern structural syllabus is based on the parametric variations of the two systems, that is, the source and target systems. For instance, English and Persian are parametrically different with respect to pro parameter. The properties of non-pro parameter, in the first place, should be classified according to certain structural differences. It follows that we would have at least four groups of properties as obligatory referential subjects in main and embedded clauses, quasi and expletive subjects, that-trace filter and PRO. The next step is that the main property of the above categories should be contained in one unit of the structural syllabus. It is our theoretical claim that the modern structural syllabus would enable the L2 learners to trigger the correct parametric value and would facilitate transition from one system to the subsequent one within a comparatively short period of time.

Finally, another dimension of the present study deals with the start-age of L2 acquisition which can be of important implications for policy makers in our educational system in Iran. Age has ever been a controversial issue and people often ask question about the optimal age of L2 acquisition. Summaries of studies on age and rate of attainment in L2 (Krashen et al., 1982) confirm that older children and adults initially acquire many aspects of the L2 faster than younger children. While, with acquisition of pronunciation and influence of the socio-affective filter adults sometimes experience problems with second language acquisition. In general, it is hypothesized that younger acquirers tend to attain higher levels of proficiency in second languages than those who begin SLA as adults. At present, L2 learners in Iran formally start at the age of about 13 (the second grade in Guidance School). The present research indicates that in general there are no significant differences between
the early and late starters with respect to the pattern of clustering acquisition of the target system in L2. The pedagogical implications, therefore, are that we do not need drastic changes concerning the present start age of L2 acquisition in our country.

References


Appendix

**Grammaticality Judgment Task (GJT)**

1. Reza understood that should study more.
2. Usually is a TV set in every classroom.
3. We have to leave for university every day at 7 o’clock in the morning.
4. What did you say that caused the accident?
5. repaired the mechanic my car very well.
6. Ali tried to enter into the room.
7. Who do you believe that likes to work with us?
8. You don’t ever swim, do you?
9. Your son broke the window of our kitchen.
10. Usually, children are afraid of darkness.
11. Drive very carefully the drivers in the crowded streets.
12. Who do you think will win the election?
13. Now don’t remember his name and address.
14. The city council wants to build a large library in this city.
15. Who did you find that can speak French?
16. At that times, often played children out of buildings.
17. Mrs. Rita hopes that will buy a car next year.
18. Bought Daddy some toys for Mary.
19. In summer are a lot of games for children.
20. Did Reza agree to help others?
21. Early in the morning, returned to airport all of the passengers.
22. Who did you see that lifted the purse?
23. The schools were closed because snowed heavily.
24. Who can you guess came to visit us?
25. Most like children the interesting cartoon programs.
26. Her manner is very disappointing.
27. When the Second War ended, was 1945.
28. Didn’t introduce Ali his father to me.
29. Who did you say was waiting at train station?
30. Necessary that each worker does his own work.
31. Who did you hear that married Barbara?
32. Reza is very happy because is his birthday today.
33. Which gift do you think that Ali bought?
34. Who did you say that called me?
35. Had my mother my watch fixed.
36. Dropped this glass of my hand.
37. What do you think that caused your success?
38. The students knew that how long had been in the United States.
39. Up to now, criticized nobody our policy.
40. Who do you know that can type quickly?