LEARNING ENGLISH AS A THIRD LANGUAGE –
A Comparative Study between Indian and Iranian Bilinguals

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Abstract

The acquisition of more than two language systems leads to the development of new skills such as learning how to learn. It also facilitates subsequent additional language acquisition as learners use meta-linguistic awareness to explore the cognitive and linguistic mechanisms underlying language.

In the present study, by employing the Two-way ANOVA, results indicated that Indian bilingual students performed significantly better than Iranian bilingual students in General English Proficiency and Grammatical Judgment Test. It further indicated that the correlation effect between the countries and gender was significant in General English Proficiency Test, while it was non-significant in Grammatical Judgment Test.

Key words: *Bilingualism-third language learning-second language, and foreign language*

1. The Role of Bilingualism in Third Language Acquisition

The main goal of the present study is to investigate the role of bilingualism in third language production, on the one hand, and on the development of pragmatic competence by foreign language learners of English, on the other. A great number of researches to date have been devoted to investigate the pragmatic competence of third language learners.

Third language acquisition may be considered as a relatively young discipline in the field of Applied Linguistics. However, growing research on the topic signals out relevant differences between second and third language acquisition and it also posits peculiar features to third language learning processes.

Clyne (2003) states that learning a third language may share some characteristics with second language learning but in the former case processes are far more complex. In fact, as argued by Cezon (2000), second language acquisition needs to be distinguished from third language acquisition, as the

latter relates to extending the linguistic system of an individual not only quantitatively, but also qualitatively. Following this view, Herdina and Jessner (2002) argue for a dynamic perspective in studying multilingualism phenomena. According to these authors, learning a third language promotes the arousal of new skills and techniques deriving from the learners' previous language-learning experiences.

Current research on third language acquisition has pointed out the advantage of bilinguals in ESL (English as a second language) situation over bilinguals in EFL (English as a foreign language) situation. In ESL, English is considered as the language of instruction for all lessons, while students learning EFL may have one lesson of English per day, but the rest of their lessons are in their native language.

In an ESL situation such as one prevailing in India, it is vital that all teachers regard themselves not only as teachers of their subject but also as teachers of language. An ESL student's language development is influenced considerably by the language learning experiences that he or she has in the mainstream classroom.

2. Hypotheses

In the present study of ESL among Indian learners and EFL among Iranian students are studied to understand whether they differ in learning English as third language.

Therefore, the following null hypotheses are formulated:

H1: Iranian and Indian bilingual students do not differ significantly in their proficiency scores.

H2: Male and female students do not differ significantly in their proficiency scores.

H3: Country and gender will not correlate in proficiency scores.
H4: Iranian and Indian bilingual students do not differ significantly in their GJT scores.

H5: Male and female students do not differ significantly in their GJT scores.
H6: There is no correlation between country and gender for GJT scores.

3. Method

3.1. Participants

The subjects of the present study were 152 bilingual students who were randomly selected from several Pre-Universities. They belonged in two subgroups:

- ✓ 70 Indian bilinguals with the Kannada as medium of instruction from the Karnataka State in India (32 male and 38 female students), and
- ✓ 82 Iranian bilinguals with Farsi as medium of instruction from Markazi Province in Iran (39 male and 41 female students).

All who learn English as third language took the Grammatical Judgment Test (GJT) based on their respective textbooks and also General English Proficiency Test (GEPT).

Having conducted GEPT, the investigator included just those subjects in the present study who scored 1 standard deviation above or below the mean of GEPT scores.

The randomization procedure was employed to guarantee maximum group homogeneity. However, they were heterogeneous in terms of age, proficiency level in English, type of the schools attended by each of the groups, methodology used at schools, number of hours devoted to the teaching of English. From indicators such as parents' socio-educational background and occupation, participants were matched as close as possible for socio-economic background to minimize the effect of social class.

3.2. Instruments

The instruments used for data collection in this study included:

a) General English Proficiency Test:

In order to ensure homogeneity of the students in terms of English language proficiency, a pilot English Transparent Test was administered to a similar group of ten students as the pedestal for assessing the participants' level of proficiency in English. This test comprised 30 multiple-choice on the bases of structure, vocabulary, and reading comprehension. Because of practical restrictions, however, only the aforementioned sections (structure, vocabulary, and reading comprehension) of the English Transparent Test were used for purposes of this study.

b) Grammatical Judgment Test for Iranian pre-university students:

This test, developed by the investigator, is based on the existing English textbook prescribed for Pre-University students in Iran. The Grammatical Judgment Test

utilized as the main tool for data collection for assessing the participant's level achievement in English comprised of 30 multiple-choice vocabulary, grammar, and reading comprehension items.

It may be worth mentioning that the reliability of GJT estimated by Split Half Test at the level of 0.01 appeared to be .79. Therefore the correlation between the tests was significant.

Prior to the administration of the test it was piloted with 10 Pre-University students with similar characteristics to those of participants of this project. It was correlated with an achievement test developed by the Ministry of Education, Iran. For this level, the correlation coefficient calculated between these two sorts of tests appeared to be .69. Hence, the Grammatical Judgment Test was found to be appropriate for the participants' level.

c) Grammatical Judgment Test for Indian pre-university students:

This test was also developed by the investigator on the basis of the existing English textbook prescribed for Pre-University students in Karnataka, India. The kind of test, number of items and also allocated time (35 minutes) for test administration was exactly the same as GJT for Iranian Pre-University students. The only difference between these two tests is that in GJT for Indian students; examine vocabulary, grammar, reading comprehension, and also pronunciation.

The same procedure has been employed to estimate the reliability and correlation coefficient between this test and achievement test developed for this level at the end of each term in Karnataka State in India.

The estimated reliability and correlation coefficient in this test is .71 and .63 respectively.

d) A background questionnaire:

In order to elicit subjective information about participants, a background questionnaire was developed by the investigator. It covered issues such as the subjects' age, linguality status, their parents' socio-educational background and occupation.

3.3. Procedure

For the purpose of determining the subjects' current abilities in English as third language, the investigator administered two different Grammatical Judgment Tests (GJT) based on the participants' respective textbooks, in which subject's scores, ranged from 0 to 30. Therefore, each test comprised of 30 grammatical multiple-choice items, which covered all topics in the participants'

textbooks. The multiple-choice items included in each test had the same level of difficulty as those of the final tests. This was done for purposes of maximizing the correspondence between the two tests since the tests administered were used as a validating tool for establishing validity of the test (GJT) developed by the investigator for purposes of the present study.

All of the 152 subjects of the current study took both the Grammatical Judgment Test and General English Proficiency Tests (for determining the students' sameness level of proficiency). To make the process of test administration for both groups as equal as possible, all the subjects took the two tests (GJT and GEPT) in one testing session and also in a limited range of time.

The administration of the two tests took 60 minutes, which were completed in two phases.

Phase I: General English Proficiency Test in 25 minutes and;
Phase II: The questionnaire and Grammatical Judgment Test (GJT), in 35 minutes.

Employing SPSS for Windows (version 14-evaluation version) for calculation of reliability coefficients for Grammatical Judgment Test questions indicated that Cronbach Alphas obtained for multiple-choice questions was .6871, which is highly significant. Therefore, we can definitely say that the instrument used in the study is highly consistent.

3.4. Result and Discussion

In order to see if the null hypotheses of this study were approved or rejected, the Two-way ANOVA statistics were calculated between the scores obtained by Indian subjects on the GJT and GEPT versus the scores obtained by Iranian subjects on the same tests.

Table 1 indicates mean proficiency scores of male and female bilingual students in Iran and India.

Table 1

Country	Gender	Mean	Std. Deviation
Iran	Male	9.7857	3.3013
	Female	9.8696	3.0449
	Total	9.8235	3.1729
India	Male	15.6000	4.0311
	Female	19.7600	2.8618
	Total	17.6800	4.0479
Total	Male	11.5802	4.4353
	Female	13.3521	5.6038
	Total	12.4079	5.0761

Table 2 indicates results of Two-way ANOVA for mean proficiency scores of male and female bilingual students in Iran and India.

Table 2

Source of variation	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig. (P value)
Country	2062.257	1,148	2062.257	190.377	.000 (HS)
Gender	150.592	1,148	150.592	13.902	.000 (HS)
Country* Gender	138.926	1,148	138.926	12.825	.000 (HS)

Note: HS- Highly Significant

Indian bilingual students (mean 17.68) scored significantly (F=190.377; P<.000) higher proficiency scores than Iranian bilingual students (mean 9.8235). Further, female students scored significantly (F=13.902; P<.000) higher than male students (means 13.3521 and 11.5802 respectively for female and male students) irrespective of the countries. The interaction effect between countries and gender was found to be significant (F=12.825; P<.000), where in Iran there was not much difference in the scores of male and female students, but in India, female students scored significantly higher than male students. Hypotheses formulated for proficiency (H1, H2 and H3) are all rejected, as there was

difference between countries, difference between the gender and significant interaction.

Figure1

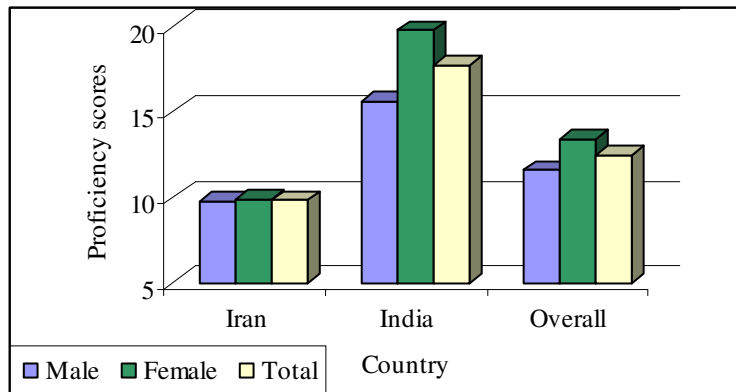Mean proficiency scores of male and female bilingual students in Iran and India

Table 3 indicates mean GJT scores of male and female bilingual students in Iran and India

Table 3

Country	Gender	Mean	Std. Deviation
Iran	Male	8.2321	3.3683
	Female	7.8913	2.8847
	Total	8.0784	3.1487
India	Male	11.4800	3.3056
	Female	11.9600	2.8647
	Total	11.7200	3.0709
Total	Male	9.2346	3.6547
	Female	9.3239	3.4632
	Total	9.2763	3.5550

Table 4 indicates results of Two-way ANOVA for Mean GJT scores of male and female bilingual students in Iran and India.

Table 4

Source of variation	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig. (P value)
Country	447.605	1,148	447.605	45.447	.000 (HS)
Gender	0.162	1,148	0.162	.016	.898 (NS)
Country* Gender	5.634	1,148	5.634	.572	.451 (NS)

Note: HS- Highly Significant; NS-Non-significant

In grammatical judgment test (GJT) also, Indian bilingual students (mean 11.72) scored significantly (F=45.447; P<.000) higher than Iranian bilingual students (mean 8.0784). However, no significant (F=.016; P<.898) difference was observed between male and female students (means 9.2346 and 9.3239 respectively for female and male students) irrespective of the countries. Lastly, the interaction effect between countries and gender was also found to be non-significant (F=0.572; P<.451), where the pattern of scoring for male and female students was the same irrespective of the country they belong to. Hypotheses formulated for GJT (H4) for countries is rejected, as there was a significant difference, H5 and H6 were accepted as there were no significant difference and interaction.

Figure 2
Mean GJT scores of male and female bilingual students in Iran and India
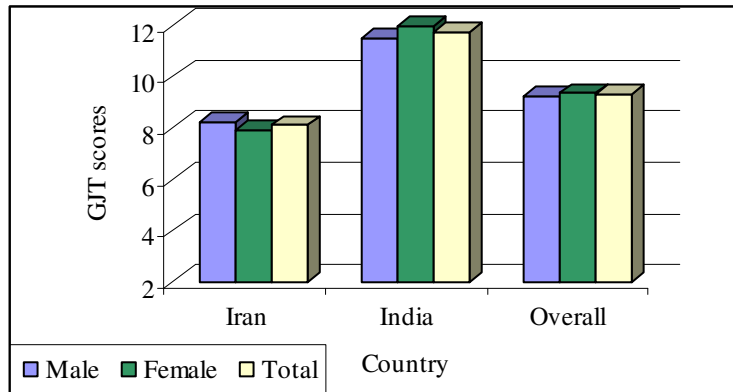
4. Conclusion

Analysis of data vividly shows that there is a significant difference between genders in performing general English proficiency where females scored higher than males. Results of the current study support findings of other researchers such as Burstall (1975), Boyle (1994) and Maghsoudi (2007). Therefore the hypothesis that *Male and female students do not differ significantly in their proficiency scores was rejected.*

Subjects who participated in the present study form two groups

a) ESL learners (bilingual learners in Karnataka State of India)
b) EFL learners (bilingual learners in Markazi Province in Iran)

Data analysis indicated that ESL bilingual students scored significantly higher in English proficiency and also Grammatical English Achievement than EFL bilingual students. Therefore, we can reject the following hypotheses:

➢ Iranian and Indian bilingual students do not differ significantly in their proficiency scores; and

➢ Iranian and Indian bilingual students do not differ significantly in their GJT scores.

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