Multiple WH – Questions and Their Acceptance by Native & Non-Native Speakers of English.
A Case Study of Iranian B.A. General English Students.

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Abstract:- This study investigates the knowledge of multiple WH – questions and their acceptance rate by non-native speakers of English whose first language is Persian. Persian grammar is known to license a wider range of such questions who ate why? For example. But this is not the case for English grammar. It means such questions are not all acceptable in English. Acceptability judgements were obtained on 6 different types of such questions. Acceptability of English examples was rated by both native and non-native speakers of English, but Persian examples were only judged by Persian speakers of English. The results for native speakers judging their own language were generally in accord with expectations. The non-native speakers of English were divided into two groups through proficiency test of grammar (OPT). Both groups significantly were different from native speakers in their ratings of these sentences. But the advanced level students were better than the intermediate level ones in judging these questions.

Keywords:- Multiple WH-questions, - acceptability – Judgements – non-active speaker – proficiency test.

I.   INTRODUCTION

Language is the center of human life. It is one of the most important ways of expressing our love or our hatred for people; it is vital to achieving many of our goals and careers; it is a source of artistic satisfaction or simple pleasure. We use language for planning our lives and remembering our past; we exchange ideas and experiences through language; we identify ourselves with people who speak the same language (cook, 1996) knowing other languages may mean getting a job, a chance to get educated; the ability to take a fuller part in the life of one's literary and cultural horizons; the expression of one's political opinions or religious beliefs. It affects people's careers and possible futures, their lives and the very identifies. In a world when propably more people speak two languages than speak one, language learning and language teaching are vital to the everyday lives of millions(cook, 1996).

Becoming bilingual is a way of life. Your whole person is affected as you struggle to reach beyond the confines of your first language and into a new language, a new culture, a new way of thinking, feeling and acting. Total commitment, total involvement, a total physical intellectual and emotional response is necessary to successfully send and receive messages in a second language (Brown, 1994).

One view of second language acquisition holds that adult SLA and Child language development are the same in being guided by the UG. This is sometimes called the 'full access' hypothesis. Under this view, one would predict that naturalistic second language (12) positive evidence must also be able to result in successful learning by adults in these cases (Epstein et.al 1996). The 'full access' view thus leads to the expectation of successful learning of these UG-governed aspects of the target language by adult l2 learners possibly from quite early stages of acquisition, and native- like performance by non-natives is certainly to be anticipated. Variants of the full-access view suggest that the initial state for SLA is the first language (L1) grammar. If this is the case, then SLA will differ from child language development in ways which are partly the result of this initial transfer. (SC Wartz and Sprouse, 1996). Other view of SLA would suggest that the mechanism that guides child language acquisition is not available to adult language acquisition or interfered with by other factors. If UG does not guide adult language learning as it does child language development, then, success in these areas should not be achieved(Vroman, 2000).

Regarding transfer, there have always been two justification proposed for the study of learner's errors. The Pedagogical, namely that a good understanding of the nature of error is necessary before a systematic means of eradicating them could be found, and the theoretical justification, which claims that a study of learner's errors is part of the systematic study of the learner's   language which is itself necessary to an understanding of the process of SLA (Corder, 1981).

II.   REVIEW OF THE RELATED LITERATURE

Yusa(1999: 289) believes WH- movement has been at the forefront of generative linguistics since its beginning, at the same time some research has been devoted to perceiving WH-questions (including multiple Wh-questions). In the case of SLA, also, WH-movement has been the focus of various studies, specially those with the question of UG availability (eg. Bley-vroman, Flexi, and Ioup, 1988; Gass, 1992; Marto hadjono, 1993; Martohardjono and Gair, 1993; Uziel, 1993; Li, 1998; White and Juffs, 1998; cited in Yusa, 1999.

Chomsky (1980) defines Universal Grammar (UG) as "the set of properties, conditions or whatever that constitute the 'initial' state of the language learner, hence the basis on which knowledge of language develops" (Chomsky, 1980, cited in Mc Laughlin, 1987:91). Also, Flynn and O'Neil(1988) point out that the goal of the theory of universal Grammar is to explain the uniform and at the same time, rapid development of language despite the fact that the input received is assumed to be limited (P.8) This idea has been formulated as "Plato's problem" (Chomsky, 1988), or "the problem of the poverty of stimulus". Male (1988), citing Chomsky(1986), explains this problem and indicates that how come people know as much as they do about their native languages when the observable evidence for this knowledge is so impoverished" (Hale, 1988: 26).

White (1989) points out that Chomsky is more concerned with adult native speaker's knowledge and child Li acquisition, (See also Mclaughlin, 1984; Ellis, 1994), but many researchers have been trying to answer these questions (Chomsky's universal and second language acquisition questions : a) What constitutes knowledge of language? B) How is such knowledge acquired?   C) How is such knowledge put to use?) particularly the second one, in SLA, as well.

White(1995), based on the principles and parameters frame work (Chmosky, 1981a and b), points out that as far as principles are concerned, much research in the last two decades considered the question of UG availability in non-primary acquisition and whether interlangauges are natural languages, constrained by principles of UG. Also, Felix(1988) believes that the question whether the process of L2 acquisition is controlled by the same 'natural' principles that seem to operate in Lr acquisition has been one of the most controversial areas among SLA researchers (eg. Dulay and Burt, 1974; Eckman, 1977; Dulay, BNurt and Krashen, 1982, Rutherford, 1982; Wode, 1982, cited in Felix, 1988).

At the same time, Flynn(1988) indicates that the systematic investigation of L2 acquisition among adults within UG paradigm is important for linguists as well as Psychologists (p.76).

-Multiple WH – Questions

Multiple WH-questions contain two or more WH-phrases, all of which are used to request information. Thus, in response to "Who ate What?" an appropriate answer would be Tom ate an apple, Many ate a banana and John ate an orange ; this answer supplies information for booth who and what. Sometimes there are more than two WH-questions , and languages differ in their treatment of these kinds of sentences. For example in typing to answer the questions what moves where, when in which language and why? Many linguists have been busy over the years. With the growth of generative linguistics and an increasing amount of research into language other than English, these answers have started to provide very interesting evidence for the debates concerning universal Grammar and language typology. In this study, the researcher contributes to an analysis and constrast of two-WH-questions in both Persian and English.

III.   METHODOLOGY PARTICIPANTS

The overall population in this study consisted of 40 participants. On one side, 30 participants were a small population of Ghaemshahr Azad University (North of Iran) studying English as a foreign language (EFL). They were randomly selected. English proficiency of these learners was measured by grammar test of OPT (Oxford Placement Test). The learners might have linguistic backgrounds; some were Arabic educated, some were English or other languages educated. For all of them, the L1 was Persian. Because these students had different levels of English, we grouped them according to the results of a placement test they took. As a result of this grouping we had two levels of L2 students. The students at the advanced level who were half standard deviation above the mean and the intermediate level students who were half standard deviation below the mean. On the other side, there were ten native speakers who were randomly selected from internet or among those coming to our country as tourists or those living here as residents. Because of the difficulty in finding native speakers of English, the number of this group is ten and they were selected according to the stratified sample test.

-Instrumentation

- Proficiency test

To begin with, the 3D Persian subjects took the standard test of English grammar (Oxford Placement Test – Grammar). On the basis of this test, they were formed into two groups: the advanced and the intermediate levels. Those who were half standard deviation above the mean were grouped as advanced and the other as intermediate. This test consisted of 100 multiple choice items.

- Test of Multiple WH- questions

 This test material consisted of four tokens of each of six types of multiple WH-questions (a total of 24 items). There were two translation equivalent versions of this test embodying grammatically judgement items. One in English and one in Persian. The test consisted of some instructions followed by some pages of test materials. At the end, there was a space for voluntary comments or opinions. All of the Persian and English subjects were asked to rate the acceptability of the sentences. Besides, Persian equivalent of the test. In this test, a seven point rating scale was used, ranging from -3 to +3, 'completely impossible' to 'completely possible'.

Examples of the types of multiple WH-questions used in the study are shown here.

i. Who said what? What type
ii. Who went where? Where-complement type (where C)
iii. Who studied where? Where adjunct type (Where A)
iv. Who woke up when? When type (when)
v. Who went how? How type (how)
vi. Who ated why? Why type (Why)

-Procedures

 Near the end of the winter 2012, two weeks before the final exams, the three test were administered to those two advanced and intermediate level students. To begin with, the proficiency test of English was administered to the subjects during the first session. Instruction were carefully read and explained to the subjects. On the neat stage and during the neat session tests of multiple WH-questions, first the English equivalent test and neat the Persian one were administered to the Persian learners of English. The English equivalent test of the multiple –WH-question was administered to native speakers of English; all Persian speakers completed both the English and Persian test. Following the standard practice, the Persian subjects took the English test first, then the Persian test. This avoided any direct carry over from Persian Judgements to English. There was no time limit.

IV.   DATA ANALYSIS

 To address the hypothesis, a one factor repeated measures analysis of variance (ANOVA) was performed for each set of native language data, both English & Persian ones. The one within subjects factor was sentence (What, Where C, where A, when, how and why).

- Research Question

Do native speakers of Persian accept all of these six different types of multiple WH-questions?

- Research Hypothesis

Non-native speakers of English do not accept all of these six different types of multiple WH-questions.

- Results

- Native data

 The results of the ANOVA indicated that the effect of sentence type was statistically significant for English reflecting the fact that there was a clear decline of the acceptability from what type to how and why type (as shown in Table 4.1. The effect of sentence type was also statistically significant for Persian, although there is no slope as the one in English, all sentence types were close to 'completely acceptable' ratings and even the lowest was 0.6

	English (EE)			Persian(PP)		
	Count	**Mean**	**SD**	**Count**	**Mean**	**SD**
What	10	2.775	0.275	30	0.933	1.395
Where C	10	1.550	0.797	30	1.125	1.353
Where A	10	0.625	1.035	30	0.600	1.418
When	10	0.05	0.982	30	0.725	1.612
How	10	-2.275	0.558	30	1.016	1.189
Why	10	-2.575	0.425	30	0.691	1.526

 Table 4.1 Descriptive statistics for English ratings (EE) and Persian ratings(PP) (Note: EE = English native speaker judging English examples, PP= Persian native speakers judging Persian examples).

 The results of the planned comparisons between pairs of adjacent means are summarized in Table 4.2. As indicated in Table 4.2, there seems to be a major break in acceptability in English between why and how types and the rest of the sentence types.

As for Persian, there were no significant differences between any pairs of adjacent means.

	English		Persian	
	F-value	P-value	F-value	**P-value**
What vs Where C	0.337	0.883	4.156	**0.005***
Where C vs where A	2.419	0.462	3.298	**0.018***
Where A vs when	6.686	0.074	6.302	**0.001***
When vs how	2.177	0.208	5.230	**0.002***
How vs why	**0.816**	**0.566**	**2.923**	**0.032**

Note: Significant at P<0.05

Table 4.2: Summary of the planned comparison for native data.

Native English data vs non-native data.

	English (EE)				Persian(PP)		
	Count	Mean	SD		Count	Mean	SD
What	10	2.775	0.275		30	0.200	**1.651**
Where C	10	1.550	0.797		30	-0.216	**1.390**
Where A	10	0.625	1.035		30	-0.466	**1.294**
When	10	0.05	0.982		30	-0.408	**1.352**
How	10	-2.275	0.558		30	-0.266	**1.543**
Why	**10**	**-2.575**	**0.425**		**30**	**-0.483**	**1.430**

Table 4.3: Descriptive statistics for learner's ratings (PE) in comparision to English native's ratings(EE)

	English			Persian	
	F-value	P-value		F-value	**P-value**
What vs Where C	0.337	0.883		1.185	**0.383**
Where C vs where A	2.419	0.462		2.984	**0.022**
Where A vs when	6.686	0.074		7.562	**0.000***
When vs how	2.177	0.208		3.303	**0.020***
How vs why	**0.816**	**0.566**		**1.713**	**0.166**

Note: Significant at P<0.05

Table 4.4 : Summary of the planned comparison for leaner's data in comparison to native English data
Although we saw that the mean ratings for the what type are high, it is worth noting that they are still not as high as those of native speakers, nor as high as the subjects 'own mean ratings for the Persian equivalents. In fact, all their mean rating are lower than those of native speakers of English (except for the how and why types), and their ratings are much lower than their own almost perfect ratings for Persian sentences.

	Advanced level			Intermediate level	
	Mean	SD		Mean	SD
What	2.775	0.275		0.200	**1.651**
Where C	1.550	0.797		-0.216	**1.390**
Where A	0.625	1.035		-0.466	**1.294**
When	0.05	0.982		-0.408	**1.352**
How	-2.275	0.558		-0.266	**1.543**
Why	**-2.575**	**0.425**		**-0.483**	**1.430**

Table 4.5: Mean differences among six types of English multiple WH-questions by two levels of Persian learners of English.

As indicated in table 4.6, since in all these cases the t-observed is lower than the t-value which is 2.201 it rejects the null hypothesis that those two groups have done in the same way on this test of multiple WH-questions. Therefore, we can say the advanced group have performed differently from the intermediate group. Looking at the mean ratings of these two groups show that the advanced level learners have answered slightly better than the other group.

	Mean	SD	t-test	P-value
(advanced)	0.812	1.466		
What			} 1.358	**0.202**
(intermediate)	-0.208	1.528		
(advanced)	-0.08	1.756		
Where C			} -0.041	**.968**
(intermediate)	-0.319	1.192		
(advanced)	-0.208	1.356		
Where A			} 0.604	**0.558**
(intermediate)	-0.694	0.932		
(advanced)	-0.020	1.367		
When			} 1.540	**0.152**
(intermediate)	-0.666	1.098		
(advanced)	-0.041	1.591		
How			} 0.316	**0.758**
(intermediate)	0.0472	1.621		
(advanced)	-0.625	1.737		
Why			}	**0.548**
(intermediate)	**-0.38**	**1.133**	**-0.627**	

Table 4.6: Means standard deviations and p-value and t-test of the advanced and intermediate levels students.

A glance at the figures offered in Table 4.7 reveals the number of the students who judge the why and how types connect as the ones in Persian. It is not difficult to see that these students automatically used knowledge of Persian in English. One can easily relate the Persian equivalents to the English ones respectively. So, the influence of Persian can be detected in syntax i.e. the structure of multiple WH-questions. English makes distinction in case of these sentences that are not made in Persian. The learner of English may attempt to accept these kinds of questions, as the following learners did. The collected data shows that 30 and 50 percent of the learners accepted the English why and how types respectively. This is called native like transfer.

	Intermediate	Advanced
Why	6	3
How	9	6
Total	15	9

Table 4.7: The number of English learners accepting the English *why* and *how* type sentences as correct the ones in Persian

V.   CONCLUSION

The purpose of the current study was to investigate to what extent Persian learners of English have perceived knowledge of English multiple WH-questions and to see whether the level of proficiency has any effect in answering these sorts of questions or not. The result of the study is completely different from that of native speakers in this study.

The Persian knowledge of multiple WH-questions is not the same as that of native speakers. Native speaker judgements largely follow the lines given by grammatical theory. Most notably, native speakers group *what* and complement *whether* together in a single cluster, and the other cases fall off in acceptability, with *why* being worst. The non-native, in contrast, made the major distinction between *what* the other cases; the complement *where* examples are not grouped with direct object.

The non-native speakers tested in this study are somehow advanced. Therefore, it seems implausible that the acquisition device would not yet have been exposed to that simple and readily available data which under the assumptions of UG – based acquisition theory, should suffice for development of the relevant knowledge.

To acquire the grammatically distinctions among these multiple WH-questions, the learner must not only notice WH-phrases, but must also distinguish among kinds of WH-phrases. He or she must distinguish, say between *who* phrases and *what* phrases or between subject phrases or between subject phrases and complete phrases and adjunct phrases.

While it is true that our results showed that Persian speaker's acceptability ratings of the English examples were significantly different from those of native speakers, there are similarities in acceptability judgements at least to a degree. For example, the acceptability judgement of *what* in comparison with the

others is high, that is the Persian learners of English accept it as correct. In part, this similarity might be a result of the input – sensitive, noticing based pattern accumulation mechanisms.

Nevertheless, the Persian speaker's ratings for English might reflect the probably universal pragmatic tendency of the lisk requirement, in that it is easier to presuppose lists of items that correspond to *who* and *what* than to *who & where* which might be easier than *who* and *why*.

VI. SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY

Needless to say, much further research is needed to put complete confidence in the findings of this study. Further more, similar studies can be conducted in this area with a set of different focuses to adequately address the perception of multiple WH-questions by native and non-native speakers of English. The followings mentions some of the domains which call for further research.

1) The interaction of functionally discourse and syntactic factors in sentences of this sort needs to be investigated.

2) The possibility that learners are basing their judgements in part on the patterns which they notice in the input requires both a more elaborated theory of patterns, and more extensive empirical studies of frequency and other factors which may affect noticing. Corpus investigation is obviously indicated.

3) The possibility that UG is guiding acquisition here can only be tested with a more fully-developed theory of the parameter setting mechanisms which could result in the failure of high proficiency non-natives to demonstrate native like judgement clusters.

We are skeptical about the prospects here, especially as regards the need to predict a major split between what and the other types, and the need to develop an account which result in childrens developing the right syntax and in adults jailing to do so, even after many years of input exposure.

4) This study can be replicated in other domains of UG, eg. Subjacency, prodrop and binding parameters.

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