

# The relationship between the grammar of Persian / Turkish as the first language and the grammar of English for Iranian female high school students

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**Abstract:** Relationship between first and second language effects the learning of the second language. The more the target language is similar to the first language, the better language achievement can be observed. The present study was an attempt to investigate the relationship between the grammar of Persian/Turkish as the first language and the grammar of English for Iranian female high school students. To this end, in the present study 60 high school female students from Marvdasht were selected as the participants. Out of 60, 30 students had Persian as their first language (Group A) and 30 students had Turkish as their first language (Group B). Regarding the aims of the study, Persian students took part in Persian grammar test, the Turkish students took part in Turkish grammar test, and both groups participated in an English grammar test which was a standard achievement test based on students' high school English text book. In this study, statistical techniques as mean, standard deviation, Pearson correlation were used. The result of the correlational analysis indicated that the grammar of Turkish and Persian are related to the grammar of English, but there is positively more relationship between the grammar of Turkish and English.

**Keywords:** Bilingualism, English as a Second Language (EFL), First Language, Teaching Grammar

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## 1. Introduction

Whatever language we speak, English, Chinese, Hindi, or Spanish, it will help us define ourselves personally and identify the community we belong to. But the fact is that we have a language is inextricably bound up with our humanity. To be human is to use a language, and to talk is to be a person (Maghsoudi, 2010).

It allows people opportunities to express their point of view, solve disagreements, and persuade peers to work together. Language is a major means of influencing thinking and behavior of another person or one's own. For language to expand, children need to be given many opportunities to interact. Children learn from speaking. Children need to feel socially competent and accepted to become competent language users. Language is the way children are socialized by adults and the way we communicate with other people and with ourselves (Berk&Winsler, 1995; Lindford, 1991; Tabors, 1997).

The medium by which speakers of a language communicate their thoughts and feeling to others, the tool with which they conduct their business or the government of millions of people, the vehicle by which has been transmitted the science, the philosophy, the poetry of the culture is language. It is reasonable that an educated person should know something of the structure of his or her language, its position in the world and its relation to other tongues, the wealth of its vocabulary together with the sources from which that vocabulary has been and is being enriched, and the complex relationships among the many different varieties of speech that are gathered under the single name of the language. The history of a language is bound up with the history of the people who speak it (Baugh & Cable, 2002).

Iran, a multilingual society, is home to a number of language communities speaking Turkish, Kurdish, Arabic language among others. So, many children learn and speak

their first language at home and study all of the courses in Persian and English through their education.

Turkish grammar is not looked on by the Turks themselves as a Classical Structured Language. They have their own grammar rules which are not based on a classical system as those in Latin or Greek. Most Turkish grammar for foreigners are written by linguists and grammarians, and they tend to use a classical language framework; consequently, most grammars, are peppered with such classic terms as accusative, dative, and locative, together with such tenses and moods as subjunctive, etc. There is also a reflexive genitive in Turkish where both the owner and owned are suffixed. This construction does not occur in classical grammar. So many teachers have resorted to using a Persian name /*izafet*/. Adjectives precede their noun and do not have to agree in number or case. (Akalin&Zengin, 2007).

## 2. Literature Review

Language is a source of communication. Whether this language is Russian, English or even sign language, the importance is that we have some sort of source for human interaction. Knowing many different languages supplies us with enormous possibilities in our contacts and understanding of other people living in other parts of the world, that is, to say bilingualism (Nordlund, 2005).

The concept of bilingualism encompasses individuals who are sophisticated speakers, readers, writers of two or more languages. Bilingualism has been treated both as societal and individual phenomenon (Romaine, 1995). In the world, among the reasons cause bilingualism are various kinds of migration, inter-marriage, and educational/vocational opportunities (Crystal, 2003). Around 70 percent of the earth's population is thought to be bilingual or monolingual (Trask, 1999). Thus, there is a good reason to believe that bilingualism is a norm for the majority of people in the world. Bilingualism is common in some parts of the world, especially those places where there are many ethnic minorities within a culture (Reich, 1986).

Because of modernization, some degrees of bilingualism are typical of most people in the world. Bilingualism is a feature not just of individuals but also of societies. Societies in which two languages are used regularly, or in which more than one language has official status or a recurrent functions, can be called bilingual.

Bilingualism is often the product of second language learning after the first language has been acquired, either through non-tutored exposure or through instruction. Individuals can become bilingual at any age, depending on when they need to learn a second language or when instruction becomes characteristic of a child's earliest language system. Children growing up with parents who speak a minority language may also be bilinguals. English as a second language refers to the process of producing bilinguals by teaching English as a second language (ESL) to learners in an English-speaking context. By ESL, one means the instruction is delivered in a context where English is not

used regularly outside the classroom, using the instructional techniques and the intensity of instruction required to achieve success. The term English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) is meant to encompass both ESL and EFL. Given the importance of English in the modern, globalized economy, ESL is a large field of practice supported by considerable bodies of research and many curricular resources. English is an international means of communication, used by 1.5 billion people around the world for both instrumental and integrative purposes (Alptekin, 2002; Griffier-Brutt, 2002; Crystal, 2003).

In an increasing number of universities around the world there are seminar recordings on the uses of English in international contexts, or on how effective methodologies can be developed for teaching an international language i.e. English and what can be done to train future users of such a global language. According to Nayar, (1997) there are clarifications of the terminology on English language teaching in different geographical regions of the world such as English as second language (ESL) as opposed to English as foreign language (EFL) as well as English as an additional language (EAL).

In Iran Many children learn and speak their first language at home and study all of the courses in Persian through their education (Khadivi&Kalantari, 2011).

Learning grammar has been important in the process of English language learning as a criteria, particularly for English knowledge. Through English, individuals can attain their goals such as getting a job or passing an examination. To this end, the ability to reach at the high level of proficiency in learning grammar has become the first and most important requirement for students throughout the world (Carrvell, 1989; Grabe, 1991; Lynch & Hutson, 1991).

Every body's first language influences the way one learn his/her second language (Liszka, 2004). Many linguists from diverse contexts are in fact, in favor of having an acceptable amount of first language before second language acquisition, arguing that it can work as an important pedagogical tool to learn the grammar of another language (Anton & Dicamilla, 1999; Celik, 2008; Cook, 2001; De la Calina & Mayo, 2009).

Some people may feel comfortable using both languages in the same setting, and many switch from one to other easily. There is now a world-wide recognition of the social, personal and cognitive advantages of bilingualism. A sound foundation is the language of home which increases people's self-esteem and confidence, enhances motivation for learning, increases cognition, strengthens family relations supplies as a strong basis for learning the second language.

When people expand their abilities in two or more languages, they catch a deeper understanding of language and use it effectively. They put more practice in processing the language, especially when they gain literacy in both, and they are able to compare and contrast the ways in which their two languages organize reality. Research has indicated that bilingual children may also develop more flexibility in their thinking as an outcome of processing information through two different languages (Commins, 2001).

De la Compa and Nassaji (2009) conducted a study with

two indicators teaching German at a university located in western Canada, with their classes for pedagogical and social reasons, including translation, comparing and contrasting both languages, paraphrasing students' ideas, and making jokes. Both the experienced and novice instructors have positive attitudes toward the exploration of first language in that it enhances learning.

Another study, the focal concern of which is the function of teachers' code-switching belongs to Gulzar (2010), who conducted a survey with 406 teachers in Pakistan EFL classrooms. The findings of the study indicated that teachers employ code-switching to their first language for eleven functions including clarification, ease of expression, giving effective instruction, creating a sense of belonging, checking understanding, translation, socializing, emphasis, repetitive, function, topic shift, and linguistic competence in the same vein of thought.

Another study was conducted with four English teachers at a two after-school private language institutes in Cyprus by Copland and Neokleous (2011). Their transcriptions of the observed class showed that teachers made use of L1 for a total of eleven functions, including organizing the course, giving explanations, most notably grammar, giving instructions, asking and answering questions, reprimanding (Macaro, 2001), making jokes, praising, translating, using it as markers, giving hints and opinions to the students. However, the qualitative analysis of the interviews with the teachers indicated that all were critical of the use of Greek in language classes, even though they did not overuse it. Therefore, Copland and Neokleous (2011) concluded that there are contradictions between the actions and beliefs of teachers because bilingual teachers have a sense of guilt when they teach L2 with L2. They also stated that the more the target language is similar to the first language, the better language achievement can be observed.

Considering the effects of first language on learning the second language and regarding the importance of the relationship between two languages causes some researchers question whether this relationship can affect the students' learning. The present study is an attempt to investigate the relationship between knowing Persian as a first and Turkish as a second language and the knowledge of English as a foreign language grammar.

### 3. Research Questions

The study is an attempt to answer the following questions:

- 1 Is there any relationship between the knowledge of Persian and English grammar for Iranian female high school students?
- 2 Is there any relationship between the knowledge of Turkish and English grammar for Iranian female high school students?

Which first language grammar, Persian or Turkish, is more related to English grammar?

## 4. Method

### 4.1. Participants

The participants in this study were 60 students of Iranian female high school students who were selected based on availability sampling. Out of 60, for 30 students Persian was their first language (group A) and for the rest, Turkish was their first language (group B). All these students were at pre-university level in high school in Marvdasht. The age range of these students was between 17-19 years old.

### 4.2. Instruments

To fulfill the purpose of this study which was to determine whether there is any significant relationship between the grammar knowledge of Persian and Turkish as first languages and English as a foreign language for Iranian high school students, there were three kinds of tests employed to answer the present research questions.

- 1) A Persian grammar test (test1) which was developed and piloted for reliability and validity, and the content of which was a synthesis of all grammar points Iranian students learn on Persian at school.
- 2) A Turkish grammar test (test2) which was developed and piloted for reliability and validity. This had the same contents as the first test adapted to the grammar of Turkish.
- 3) An English grammar test (test3) which was a standard achievement test based on students' English high school text book.

As for the validity of the first two tests (Persian and Turkish grammar tests), the content was consulted with two teachers who were familiar with high school Persian grammar text books. The Turkish grammar test was also approved as being valid. With respect to the reliability of these two tests, they were administered prior to the actual administration of the test for research purposes to groups similar to the participants of the study. An item analysis revealed an acceptable reliability level through Cronback's Alphas as .67 and .82 respectively. The English grammar test was a standard achievement test based on students' English high school text book. This test was taken from a preparatory test book for the applicants of the University Exam, the items of which has been previously used in Konkoor Examination, and therefore considered both as valid and reliable. The items of each test were 25, and students were took part in Persian and Turkish grammar tests (Persian grammar test for Group A and Turkish grammar test for Group B) for 30 minutes, and then, both groups took the 25- item English grammar test, which has done 30 minutes.

### 4.3. Procedures

Before the administration of the tests, all participants were given an oral description on the objectives and procedures of the study in order to follow the research procedures thoroughly. The three tests were administered in on session. First, the first group whose mother tongue was Persian were

asked to complete the Persian grammar test, and then the participants whose first language was Turkish were asked to answer the Turkish grammar test. They completed them in 25 minutes. Then, the standard English grammar test was given to both Groups A and B. It took about 25 minutes, too. Finally, the scores were obtained to be matched for further data analysis.

#### 4.4. Data Analysis and Design

For answering the research questions, we used a correlational analysis. The SPSS software was used in analyzing the data through correlation coefficient. As the first step of data analysis, mean scores and standard deviations were obtained to describe the data. The relationship among students' knowledge of Turkish, Persian, and English grammar were then examined using Pearson correlation.

## 5. Results & Discussion

### 5.1. Descriptive Statistics for the Participants' Performance in the Three Tests

Descriptive statistics for Turkish, grammar, and English grammar test scores are presented in Table below. It shows that the mean score for participants' scores in Persian grammar is 13.56, in Turkish grammar is 16.20, and in English is 15.90.

**Table 1.** Descriptive Statistics of the Participants' Performance in Turkish, Persian, and English Grammar Test

Variable	N	mean	Standard Deviation
Persian Grammar	30	13.56	2.78
Turkish Grammar	30	16.20	2.92
English Grammar	60	15.90	2.44

### 5.2. The First Research Question

The first research question concerns the relationship between the grammar of Persian as the first language and the grammar of English as the second language. In order to answer this question, Pearson correlation test was used to identify the relationship between the grammar of Persian as the first language and the grammar of English as the second language. The research question was:

*Is there any relationship between the knowledge of Persian and English grammar for Iranian female high school students?*

Table 2 below reveals the correlation coefficient between knowledge of the Persian grammar and the knowledge of English grammar.

**Table 2.** Correlation between Persian and English Grammar Score

Variables	correlation coefficient	Sig.
Persian grammar	0.43	0.016
English grammar		
Total	30	

Based on the obtained results, a correlation was found between Persian grammar and English grammar ( $r=0.43$ ), and as  $P<0.05$ , the relationship between Persian and English grammar scores was statistically significant. Therefore, the first null hypothesis stating that there is no relationship between Persian and English grammar is rejected here.

### 5.3. The Second Research Question

The second question concerns the relationship between the grammar of Turkish as the first language and the grammar of English as the second language.

*Is there any relationship between the knowledge of Turkish and English grammar for Iranian female high school students?*

To answer the question, the Pearson correlation coefficient was performed. According to the below table, there was a positive relationship between the knowledge of the grammar of Turkish and English as it was 0.57 ( $P<0.05$ ). Table 3 shows the results.

**Table 3.** The Correlation between Turkish & English Grammar Scores

Variables	correlation coefficient	Sig.
Turkish	0.57	0.001
English		
Total	30	

As Table reveals, there is a positive relationship between the students' Turkish and English grammar scores. It can be concluded that the higher the scores of Turkish grammar, the higher the knowledge of English grammar. Thus, the second null hypothesis is rejected, too.

### 5.4. The Third Research Question

The last question posed in the present study was:

*Which first language, Persian or Turkish, is more related to English grammar?*

Considering the results of the above Tables the correlation coefficient of Turkish grammar was 0.57, and that of Persian grammar was 0.43. Therefore, we can conclude that Turkish grammar is more related to English than Persian grammar.

Grammar is an important aspect of second language acquisition, and it is the most important language area to be mastered by EFL learners to use the language.

Second language learners appear to accumulate structural entities of the target language but demonstrate difficulty in organizing this knowledge into appropriate, coherent structures. There appears to be a significant gap between the accumulation and the organization of the knowledge. When writing or speaking the target language (L2), second language learners tend to rely on their native language (L1) structures to produce a response (Dechert, 1983, Ellis, 1997).

Phipps and Brog, (2009) examined tensions in the grammar teaching beliefs and practices of three practicing teachers of English working in Turkey. The teachers were observed and interviewed over a period of 18 months. The observations provided insights into how they taught grammar

while the interviews explored the beliefs underpinning the teachers' classroom practices. The analysis indicated while at one level teachers' practices in teaching grammar were at odds with specific beliefs about language learning, at another level, these same practices were consistent with a more generic set of beliefs about learning. The latter, it is hypothesized, constituted the teachers' core beliefs and it was these, rather than the more peripheral beliefs about language learning, that were most influential in shaping teachers' instructional decisions.

The foreign language teaching field is dynamic, and the mother tongue can be a useful instrument in the communicative foreign language classroom. For instance, where English grammar is posing a conceptual difficulty, an illustration of a mother tongue equivalent can be helpful. For many years, using the students' mother tongue in teaching English in monolingual classes as a learning aid. (Georgiana, 2012).

The similarities between the languages enable students to learn a language better. It also help them use their best way possible. This study was an attempt to investigate the relationship between the grammar of Persian and Turkish as the first language and the grammar of English, and to find which one is more related to English grammar. In this part, the results are discussed and the research questions are answered.

The first research question deals with the relationship between the grammar of Persian and English. The correlational analysis for the knowledge of Persian and English grammar was 0.47. As shown in Table 4.2, there was a positive relationship between the grammar of Persian and English.

The finding of this study are consistent with Rashidi and Dastkheyr (2009) who compared L1 (Persian) and L2 (English) organizational pattern in the argumentative writing of Iranian EFL students. The study made within-subject comparison of L1 and L2 compositions in terms of organizational patterns, L1/L2 compositions into analysis. The results showed that a majority of students use deductive organizational patterns in both L1 and L2, but despite similarities between L1 and L2 organizational patterns, L2 organization patterns scores were not significantly correlated with L1 organization scores, and their composition total scores were different to each other.

Based on this study, which points to the similarities between the grammar of Persian and English, and Turkish, certain propositional phrases such as locative and directional prepositional phrases can follow verb. English and Persian follow a head initial pattern in noun-phrases. English and Persian share the Propositional Phrase head feature. The similarities between two languages cause students use the same way in analyzing and investigating the materials and use the same method.

The result of the second question was also investigated. The second research question deals with the relationship between the grammar of Turkish and English. The analysis for the knowledge of Turkish and English grammar was

represented in the Table 4.3. There was a significant positive relationship between the grammar of the Turkish and English. The result of the third question was also investigated. The third question explores which one is more related to the grammar of English, Persian or Turkish. As it was shown above, there was a relationship between the grammar of Persian, Turkish, and English, but Turkish grammar is more related to the grammar of English than Persian.

Despite the similarities of English and Turkish in noun-phrase construction, noun-phrase in Persian are different and their heads could be a noun or an infinitival verb. Pronouns and proper names may also head noun-phrases, functioning as genitives in complex noun-phrases. In Turkish, Noun Phrase constraints are like English.

In both Persian and Turkish, the infinitival constructions are very similar to the English gerundive. The only difference appears in the word order, where Turkish seems to behave like English more than Persian. In Persian, the head noun is preceded by determiner, the numeral constraints and the quantifiers, and it is followed by the modifiers, which consist of an adjectival phrase. English and Turkish allow the determiners, numeral expressions, quantifiers and modifiers after the head noun except for literacy styles where adverbial phrases can precede the head noun.

Superlative adjectives do not appear in the postponed adverbial phrase, instead, they precede the head noun. Turkish and English share the same feature. If the head noun is the subject or direct object of the relative clause, it is often left. In such cases, the relativized noun may be replaced by a resumptive pronoun in the clause it originated from. The use of the resumptive pronoun usually occurs when the head noun is separated from the relative clause by an intervening Verb Phrase. Turkish and English follow the same rule, too.

Despite the similarities of English and Turkish in noun-phrase constraints. Noun-phrase in Persian are different, and their head could be a noun or an infinitival verb. Pronouns and proper names may also head noun-phrases, function as genitives in complex Noun Phrases. In Turkish, Noun Phrase constraints are like English.

Bialystok (2001) considered the results of several studies as concluded that bilingual children have advantages over monolinguals in tasks which require a high level of control of attention that include misleading, distracting or irrelevant information. For example, logical reasoning in which the participants have to consider several ideas – some of them perhaps irrelevant or misleading – before arriving at a correct conclusion or decision. Bilinguals were better able to control their attention and performed significantly better than their monolingual counterparts on tasks in which they were given misleading information.

Ahangari, (2005) in her investigation stated that transfer of assumptions from L1 writing cansometimes help the process ofwritinginL2. In learning a second language writing skill,learners have two primary sources to construct a second language system: knowledge and skills from the first language and input from the second language. Herstudy wasconducted to investigate the relative impact of first

language on second language writing ability. To carry out the research, sixty EFL students from Tabriz Islamic Azad University were chosen and divided into two groups. After being sure about the groups' homogeneity, they were given two topics to write about: the first group wrote in English about the topics, the second group was asked to write in Persian about the same topics and then translate their writing into English. The data were analyzed by using a t-test and other subsequent analysis. She concluded that the use of L1 may facilitate L2 writing. The findings of her study can be useful for foreign language teachers. They may need to reevaluate their previous assumptions that the transfer of some knowledge from L1 may hinder second language learning.

Learning a new grammar is the challenge to foreign language students, but they can overcome by learning strategies. Learners should then be trained in strategies they lack. To this end, teachers should consider the learners' willingness and think of the most appropriate way to introduce the strategies. Teachers can use these similarities and relationship between the languages. As the grammar of Persian, Turkish, and English

are related to each other, especially Turkish and English, in some points, teachers can benefit these relationships and use them in the process of teaching grammar in foreign language context. The results may help the teachers to reevaluate their views about the role of first language in second language teaching and they must consider transfer in their analysis of second language development.

## 6. Conclusion

Second language learners appear to learn the structural entities of the target language but demonstrate difficulty in organizing this knowledge into appropriate, coherent structures. There appears to be a significant gap between the accumulation and the organization of the knowledge of grammar (Georgiana, 2012).

The role of first language knowledge and its relation to second language, as an important issue in the field of language, causes teachers to investigate some strategies to teach the grammar of second language in EFL classes. This study tried to find the relationship between the grammar of Persian and Turkish as the first language and the grammar of English for Iranian female high school students. As mentioned in Chapter 4, the grammar of Persian and Turkish are related to English grammar, but the grammar of Turkish is more related to it.

Mother tongue can be a useful tool in the foreign language classroom. Where English grammar is difficult for students to learn, using mother tongue can be helpful for them. Using the students' mother tongue in teaching English in EFL classes as a learning aid is a useful way for teachers whom have difficulty in teaching the English especially, the grammar of English. Also, they can use the relationship and similarities in teaching materials and students can use the methods which use in their first language and by comparing and contrasting

two languages, they can benefit their learning and make their learning easy.

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