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The Interaction between Bilingualism, Educational and Social Factors and Foreign Language Learning in Iran

Mojtaba Maghsoudi, Ph.D.

Abstract

The main concern of the present study was to probe the probable differences between Iranian bilingual/monolingual learners of English regarding their syntactic knowledge. It was an attempt to investigate whether bilingual and monolingual learners of English differ significantly in learning embedded question, preposition stranding and pied piping knowledge. To carry out this study, a total of 399 male and female subjects at seven pre-university centers in Arak were randomly selected from among two groups of Turkish-Persian bilinguals and Persian monolinguals. A general English proficiency test, a questionnaire, and a syntactic structure test were administered to both groups. Statistical analyses including ANOVA, t-test, post-hoc Scheffe test, and descriptive statistics revealed the following outcomes:

1. Monolingual and bilingual learners did not differ in acquiring syntactic structure.
2. No significant difference was observed between gender of monolinguals and bilinguals' performances in acquiring syntactic structure.
3. Learners whose parents are in low educational level had significantly lower scores in syntactic structure compared to learners whose parents are in high educational level.

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4. Monolingual participants surpassed bilingual participants in general English proficiency.
5. Learners with high SES had significantly higher scores in general English proficiency than learners from low SES.

Key words: General English proficiency, Socio-economic status, bilingualism, gender and third language learning.

1. Introduction

We all know that language is a source of communication. Whether this language refers to Russian, English, Swedish or Sign Language is irrelevant, the importance is that we have some sorts of sources for human interaction. Knowing many different languages provides us with enormous possibilities in our contact and understanding of other people living in other parts of the world. We may actually draw a conclusion already that knowing many languages is an asset for communication.

This brings us to an important topic, namely, bilingualism which will be studied on closer examination in this paper. There are and has always been a great interest among linguists and psychologists to study bilingualism and how it affects people. There are plenty of theories about bilinguals, and children's psychologists have not always drawn the right conclusions due to results from early studies on bilingualism.

Results from some studies show that children were negatively affected by bilingualism. It claimed that it confused the child (Fromkin et al 2003). Nowadays, the majority of children's psychologists are in favor of bilingualism and see it as an advantage rather than a disadvantage. This paper will examine whether being bilingual may help a person in their additional language acquisition?

All of us know what language is, just like we know the palm of our hands. We all acquired a language early in life. There is no human being, ordinarily speaking, who does not “have” a language of his or her own. There are societies, which do not have a written language, but there is no society, which does not have a spoken language.

The word language is often used to refer to several kinds of human activity, such as the language of music, language of circus, and so on. However, in its ordinary sense, it primarily focuses on the oral and written medium that we use to communicate with one another. We use it especially to refer to human language and thus we tend to distinguish between language and other forms of communication.

1.1. What is Bilingualism?

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Bilingualism is a difficult concept to define, since many theories vary with respect to how much exposure a person needs to become native in a language. There is no general agreement among child language researchers about the 'normal' course of development among monolingual, nor among bilingual children. It is not possible to define the concept of complete acquisition, since it is difficult to define a person's control over a language.

Myers-Scotton (2006) believes bilingualism is the ability to use two or more languages sufficiently to carry on a limited casual conversation, but we cannot set specific limits on proficiency or how much the speaker in question is speaking or demonstrating comprehension of another speaker.

It is important to note that no universally accepted definition of bilingualism currently exists, although numerous definitions have been proposed in the literature. It is clear that the term "bilingualism" is interpreted and defined differently by different people. Baetens-Beardsmore (1999) suggests that rather than attempting to explain a strict definition of bilingualism, topologies or descriptive labels is used.

The following topologies are examples of those documented in the literature and may be useful as the clinician begins to interact with the bilingual patient:

- (a) *Ambilingualism*: equal ability is exhibited in both languages in all domains of activity no influence of one language on the other is noted;
- (b) *Equilingualism*: roughly equivalent ability in both languages is demonstrated, by monolingual norms of reference the equilingual is clearly distinct from monolingual speakers.
- (c) *Functional Bilingualism*: ability to accomplish a restricted set of activities in a second language.
- (d) *Receptive/Passive Bilingualism*: ability to comprehend (in either its spoken or written form, or both) a second language.
- (e) *Productive/Active Bilingualism*: ability to speak and/or write a second language in addition to understanding that language.
- (f) *Natural/Primary Bilingualism*: the acquisition of a second language in the absence of systematic instruction or specific training.
- (g) *Academic/Secondary Bilingualism*: the acquisition of a second language via formal instruction; and (h) *Incipient Bilingualism*: initial unraveling of the patterns of a second language, either at the decoding and encoding level.

1.2. Language and Social Class

Families differ in social prestige, wealth and education. Since language is learned in social interaction, there is variation in child language that correlates with social class. A classic example of this is the study of New York city speech by Labov (1970). He found that different pronunciations of speakers fall into a pattern reflecting social-class differences. The lower the position and state of people in the social-class hierarchy, the smaller the chance that they use standard language forms. In this context it was investigated to what extent the language of children revealed a similar pattern of social stratification. Claims have been made that children from low socioeconomic backgrounds lag behind in language acquisition.

According to Coulmas, (1997) middle-class children develop an exploratory and explicit use of language, whereas lower-class children develop a more expressive and implicit language use. Lower working-class children's speech was characterized by such features as short utterances of little syntactic complexity and frequent use of pronouns instead of nouns. Labov (1970) claims that although there are clear differences in the form and values associated with language use in different social classes, the speech of middle-class children is not superior to that of lower-class children and children of different social classes are equally proficient in language skills.

The social class is not an impossible barrier to access the benefits of bilingualism. Oller et al. (1998, p. 96) arrive at the same conclusion and state, "all the social, political and economic advantages of bilingualism are available to the children." Nonetheless, the penalty of poverty is in the time it takes for advances to occur. Children from more disadvantages backgrounds progress more slowly and more effortfully. This was demonstrated as well in a study by Hakuta, Butler, and Witt (2000) described: Classifying children by socioeconomic status (SES) in two school districts showed large effects of poverty and parental level of education on children's progress in mastering both oral and academic uses of English.

1.3. Language Proficiency and its Impact on an Additional Language Acquisition

Before engaging in a discussion of what it means to be limited English proficient, it is first necessary to understand what language proficiency includes. Unfortunately, it is at this point in the assessment of language proficiency that a lack of consensus begins. Language researchers openly acknowledge this dilemma.

Cummins (1984), for example, states that the nature of language proficiency has been understood by some researchers as consisting of some separate language components and by others as consisting of only one global factor. Valdes and Figueroa (1994) indicate that: What it means to know a language goes beyond simplistic views of good pronunciation, 'correct' grammar, and even mastery of rules of politeness. Knowing a

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language and knowing how to use a language involves a mastery and control of a large number of interdependent components and elements that interact with one another and that are affected by the nature of the situation in which communication takes place.

According to Stern (1983), proficiency can be looked at as a goal and thus be defined in terms of objectives or standards. These can then serve as criteria by which to assess proficiency as an empirical fact, that is, the actual performance of given individual learners or groups of learners. He states that proficiency ranges from zero to native-like proficiency. The zero is not absolute because the second language learner as speaker of at least one other language, his first language, knows language and how it functions. Complete competence is hardly ever reached by second language learners.

Bachman (1990) defines language proficiency as the language ability or ability in language use. Oller (1983) states that language proficiency is not a single unitary ability, but that it consists of several distinct but related constructs in addition to a general construct of language proficiency.

What does it mean to be limited English proficient? Not surprisingly, there is also no common operational definition used by all states to define what it means to be limited English proficient (Rivera, 1995). However, a limited English proficient (LEP) student is a student whose native language is a language other than English and comes from an environment where a language other than English is dominant; or who is a native resident of the remote areas and comes from an environment where a language other than English has had a significant impact on such an individual's level of English language proficiency; and who has sufficient difficulty speaking, reading, writing, or understanding the English language.

According to *Bialystok* (2006):

First, for general language proficiency, bilingual children tend to have a smaller vocabulary in each language than monolingual children in their language. Nonetheless, their understanding of linguistic structure, called metalinguistic awareness, is at least as good as and often better than that of comparable monolinguals.

Second, the acquisition of literacy skills in these children depends on the relationship between the two languages and the level of proficiency in the second language. Specifically, children learning to read in two languages that share a writing system (e.g. English and French) show accelerated progress in learning to read; children whose two languages are written in different systems (e.g. English and Farsi) show no special advantage, but neither do they demonstrate any deficit relative to monolinguals. The benefit of learning to read in two languages, however, requires that children be bilingual and not second-language learners whose competence in one of the languages is weak.

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Third, bilingual children between four and eight years old demonstrate a large advantage over comparable monolinguals in solving problems that require controlling attention to specific aspects of a display and inhibiting attention to misleading aspects that are salient but associated with an incorrect response. This advantage is not confined to language processing, but includes a variety of non-verbal tasks that require controlled attention and selectivity in such problems as forming conceptual categories, seeing alternative images in ambiguous figures, and understanding the difference between the appearance and functional reality of a misleading object.

1.4. Hypotheses

H1: There will be a significant difference between monolingual and bilingual learners in syntactic structure scores.

H2: Gender of mono/bilingual learners has impact on their performance in acquiring syntactic structure.

H3: Parents with different educational qualifications impact significantly their children's scores on syntactic structure.

H4: Monolingual and bilingual learners differ significantly in their performance on general English proficiency test.

H5: Learners with different SES differ significantly in their performance on general English proficiency test.

2. Methodology

2.1. Subjects

Based on consensus among researchers regarding, the larger the size of the sample, the greater its precision or reliability, the present researcher invited 399 pre-university students both male and female with the age range of 17 to 19 at 7 pre-university centers from different districts of Arak (one of the industrial cities of Iran) to participate in present study. The investigator had to exclude 11 participants from this study because they were not involved in this range of age and the remainders (N=388) were categorized through a background questionnaire as follows:

- 89 Turkish / Persian female bilinguals
- 101 Persian female monolinguals
- 93 Turkish / Persian male bilinguals
- 105 Persian male monolinguals

All the participants were from the families who had taken residence in Arak more than 5 years. Some of them had acquired both languages (Persian and Turkish) simultaneously at home whereas some others had learned their second language, Persian, at later age in their schooling years.

The researcher elicited some demographic information about the participants through a background questionnaire in order to match them as closely as possible for socioeconomic status to minimize the effect of social class. Accordingly the participants were classified as middle class.

2.2. Instruments

The following instruments have been used in this paper:

1. A background questionnaire:

In order to elicit information about participants, a background questionnaire was developed by the investigator. It covered issues such as the subjects' age, gender, linguality status, number of members in each family, the subjects' parents' socio-educational status, occupations, monthly income, their levels of education and duration of their residency in Arak.

No standard instrument for determining SES (socio-economic status) in Iran was available, so after consultation with a sociologist, subjects were categorized into three classes, upper, middle and lower, based on a set of socially made indices of the type commonly used in social science research. This comprised issues as, subjects' parents' socio-educational background, occupation, their monthly income and finally the number of members in a family.

These characteristics have been elicited in order to determine the social position of the students in that particular society, because according to Michell Maiese (2004), social position is the position of an individual in a given society and culture. That is, these features can be at play in determining one's social status. Accordingly, from SES point of view the participants were classified as:

-High

-Middle

-Low

To have homogeneous participants and to prevent the effect of some interval variables such as social class just those who have been categorized as middle class have been invited to participate in the present research.

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2. *General English Proficiency Test:*

English Nelson test, (series 400 B) was utilized as the pedestal for assessing the participants' level of proficiency in English. This test comprised 50 multiple-choice vocabulary, grammar, and reading comprehension items.

The investigator piloted the test with 15 students with the same level and similar characteristics to those of participants of this study and then it was correlated with an Achievement Test developed by the Ministry of Education for pre-university centers. The correlation coefficient calculated between these two (Achievement Test and General English Proficiency Test) appeared to be .67. Hence, the General English Proficiency Test was found to be appropriate for the participants performing level.

For ensuring the participants homogeneity, having administrated General English Proficiency Test, the investigator included those students in this project who scored between one standard deviation below and above the mean score.

It is worth noting here that the reliability of General English Proficiency Test estimated by KR-21 (Kudar Richarson) formula appeared to be.63.

3. *The Grammatical Judgment Test:*

The Grammatical Judgment Test (GJT) is one of the most widespread data-collection methods that researchers use to test their theoretical claims. In these tasks, speakers of a language are presented with a set of stimuli to which they must react. The elicited responses are usually in the form of assessments, wherein speakers determine whether and / or the extent to which a particular stimulus is correct in a given language.

In order to examine the participants' syntactic structure and to find out the probable differences in their performances in this area a Grammatical Judgment Test was developed by the current investigator. The test was found on two of the grammatical points covered in English textbook designed for pre-university level. One grammatical point is related to what Radford (2004) calls *Preposition Stranding and Pied piping*, and the other grammatical point is related to what Adger et al., (2001) calls *Embedded knowledge*.

2.3. Procedure

In the process of carrying out the study, the investigator took the following procedures to achieve the objectives of the current study. All the procedures including the development of the background questionnaire, grammatical judgment test, general English proficiency test and their administration are explained in details below:

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At the first step of the research, the investigator developed *a background questionnaire* in order to elicit some personal information about participants such as: their bi / monolinguality status, gender, age, educational qualification of parents, parents' monthly income and the number of members in their family.

In order to prevent any possible misunderstanding or confusion on the part of the participants and to ensure maximum understanding, the background questionnaire was developed in English along with its translation in Persian. After doing the sampling procedure and choosing subjects randomly 388 students (89 female bilinguals, 101 female monolinguals, 93 male bilinguals and 105 male monolinguals) were initially requested to participate in this study. Then testing was conducted in the respective schools by the investigator with the help of the school staffs. The conditions for testing were strictly followed as far as possible. The administration of the tests has been completed in two phases:

Phase 1: The background questionnaire and General English Proficiency Test (GEPT) in 55 minutes (the first 15 minutes was allotted to fill up the background questionnaire and the rest was allotted to GEPT); and

Phase 2: Grammatical Judgment Test (GJT) in 25 minutes.

Subjects' scores based on General English Proficiency and Grammatical Judgment Tests range from 0 to 50 and 0 to 30 respectively. It is important to mention that prior to the administration of the General English Proficiency Test it was piloted with 15 students of the same grade with similar characteristics to those of subjects of this study and it was found to be appropriate for the subjects' proficiency level in that particular given time. That is, the reliability of General English Proficiency Test estimated by KR-21 (Kudar Richarson) formula appeared to be .63, which was appropriate enough to go on.

After collecting the background questionnaires, the General English Proficiency Test was conducted and before the start of this test, the investigator cleared the participants' doubts. The way of answering the question was made clear to the participants and in case of any difficulty they were encouraged to ask questions and they were provided with help. The investigator did the best endeavor to draw the participants' attention to take part in the research stage by giving them necessary information about the nature and purpose of the research.

In the present study the most endeavor was done to ensure the students that their responses will be kept full secrecy and also will not be used for performance evaluation. After collecting the papers of General English Proficiency Test and background questionnaire, those students who had done haphazardly were discarded. Then on the basis of scores, which they received in GEPT, those subjects whose scores fell between 1 standard deviation above and below the mean score were selected to participate in the

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next stage of the project. The reason behind selecting just this group was to include those who were proficient enough to participate in the next stage, which was the vital stage of the study and also to ensure of the homogeneity of the students in terms of English language proficiency. Therefore, these numbers of subjects were students with average knowledge in general English proficiency.

Accordingly the investigator had to exclude 85 participants from this study, therefore, the number of all participants who were allowed to enter the next stage was 303 (64 female bilinguals, 73 female monolinguals, 77 male bilinguals and 89 male monolinguals)

The next stage was to administrate the Grammatical Judgment Test. This test comprised 30 multiple-choice items containing 15 items on the basis of Preposition Stranding and Pied Piping (7 out of 15 items observed in interrogatives and the other 8 items observed in relative clause) and 15 items on the basis of Embedded Questions (7 out of 15 items were in interrogative forms and the rest were in declarative forms).

Before administrating this test the investigator made strong effort to ensure of the reliability of the test. The following table provides KR-21 formula (one of the reliability measurements) for Grammatical Judgment Test, that is, Embedded Questions (EQ); preposition stranding (PS) and pied-piping (PiP) and also. SPSS for Windows (version 14-evaluation version) has been employed for calculation of reliability coefficients for Embedded Questions, Preposition Stranding and Pied-Piping and total questions.

Questions	Reliability coefficient
EQ	.6817
PS & PiP	.6431
Total	.6551

It is evident that KR-21 formula obtained for embedded questions, preposition stranding and pied piping and also total questions ranged from .6431 to .6871, which are highly significant. We can definitely say that instruments used in this study are highly consistent. Having ensured of the reliability of the Grammatical Judgment Test, the investigator administrated the test and had to discard 79 subjects' result from data analysis because they had skipped answering most of the questions thoroughly.

The result of remaining, 224 subjects, (49 female bilinguals, 61 female monolinguals, 54 male bilinguals and 60 male monolinguals) were tabulated and codified for the computer analysis.

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3. Results and Discussion

3.1. Comparison between Monolinguals and Bilinguals in Syntactic Structure

H1: *There will be a significant difference between monolingual and bilingual learners in acquiring syntactic structure.*

Table 1
Descriptive statistics for bilingual and monolingual learners in syntactic structure with the results of independent samples't- test

Questions	Type	Mean	Std. Deviation	't' value	P value
EQ	Bilingual	4.8846	2.4188	.650	.516 (NS)
	Monolingual	5.1443	2.7810		
PiP and PS	Bilingual	3.0577	1.5938	.262	.793 (NS)
	Monolingual	3.1443	1.6535		
Total	Bilingual	6.8077	3.8035	.590	.556 (NS)
	Monolingual	7.0581	4.0175		

Note: NS-Non-significant EQ- Embedded Questions PiP-Pied piping
PS-Preposition stranding

As shown in table 1, there is a difference between the bilinguals and monolinguals mean scores on 'EQ' and 'PiP and PS' (6.80 and 7.05 respectively). However, the difference is not statistically meaningful. That is, even though the mean scores of monolinguals on these structural areas were higher than that of bilinguals, indicating that monolinguals outperformed the bilinguals on this structural knowledge. The result of this hypothesis is to some extent a support for Keshavarz et al.'s study (2006). They attempted to investigate whether bilingual and monolingual learners of English differ significantly in learning lexical and syntactic knowledge.

The study aimed further at examining whether bilinguality was an enhancement to learning a third language or a hindrance to it. To carry out this study, they have selected subjects from among two groups of Turkish-Persian bilinguals and Persian monolinguals. Statistical analyses revealed that monolinguals outperformed bilinguals in areas, vocabulary and syntax.

By referring to table 1 and considering the mean scores of bilinguals and monolinguals (6.8077 and 7.0581 respectively) on 'embedded questions' and 'pied piping and preposition stranded', it is obvious that the difference was so small that it could be neglected. In other words, monolingual and bilingual did not differ significantly in mean scores on embedded question, preposition stranding and pied piping as well as in total scores. The obtained t values for embedded ($t = .650$; $P < .516$), stranded and pied piping

($t = .262$; $P < .793$) and total scores ($t = .590$; $P < .556$) were all found to be statistically non-significant. In a short term, monolingual and bilingual learners had statistically equal scores in embedded, stranded and pied piping and also total scores. H1 is rejected, as there were no significant differences among monolinguals and bilinguals in embedded question, preposition stranding and pied piping scores including total scores.

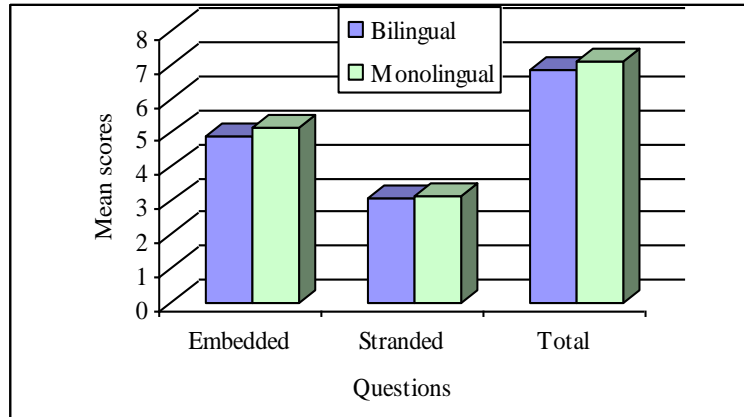
Most of the earlier studies suggested that bilingualism was associated with negative consequences (see, for example, Anastasi & Cordova, 1953; Darcy, 1953; Printer & Keller, 1922; Saer, 1923). These studies supported the idea that bilingual children suffered from academic retardation, had a lower IQ and were socially maladjusted as compared with monolingual children.

The finding of this study however didn't present evidence of language transfer because neither Persian nor Turkish permits *preposition stranding*. This is a crucial factor for arguing that learners in both groups (monolinguals versus bilinguals) had an equal chance to acquire the target construction (Preposition stranding). This requirement pre-supposed that learners in neither group have yet had experience in setting the relevant parameter at the value. On the other hand both languages, Turkish and Persian, permit *pied-piping* and *embedded knowledge*. This has affected the result as a consequence of transferring.

Therefore, both bilinguals and monolinguals in this regard had sufficient experience about them, and the learners' rate of acquisition of these two syntactic structures is presumed to be enhanced hence, in this particular case similar findings are reported among bilinguals and monolinguals. That is, both groups, bilinguals versus monolinguals, indicated nearly the same rate of acquiring these target constructions in English as a foreign language. Finally it can be concluded that bilinguals and monolinguals performed more or less equally on these domains (6.80 vs. 7.05 respectively) with no significant difference.

Figure 1

Mean scores for bilingual and monolingual learners in embedded and stranded and pied piping



Another reason behind such an unexpected finding may be that Turkish / Persian bilinguals had acquired their L1 (Turkish) only orally in a naturalistic setting. They did not receive schooling in Turkish and their vehicular language was Persian, which is the language of instruction and the official language of the majority linguistic group. So it can be argued that Persian is the more dominant language among the bilingual learners of English. Therefore, receiving no-academic instruction on L1 (in this case Turkish) may have hindered learning an additional language. Consequently, as mentioned above the bilingual learners did not perform as well as monolingual learners did in syntactic structure but the difference was statistically too negligible to be considered.

3.2. Comparison between Gender of Monolinguals and Bilinguals in Syntactic Structure

H2: *Gender of monolingual and bilingual learners has impact on their performance in acquiring Syntactic Structures.*

Table 2

Descriptive statistics for male and female bilingual and monolingual learners in embedded knowledge and preposition stranding and pied piping

Linguality	Type	Mean	Std. Deviation
Monolingual	Male	8.23	3.37
	Female	7.60	3.11
	Total	7.94	3.25
Bilingual	Male	7.96	3.21
	Female	8.68	3.78
	Total	8.29	3.49

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Total	Male	8.05	3.26
	Female	8.31	3.59
	Total	8.17	3.41

Table 3

Results of Two-way ANOVA for scores for male and female mono and bilingual learners in embedded knowledge and preposition stranding and pied piping.

Source of variation	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig. (P value)
Questions	11.126	1	11.126	.960	.328 (NS)
Linguality	.137	1	.137	.012	.913 (NS)
Questions * Linguality	30.811	1	30.811	2.660	.104 (NS)

As it is indicated in table 2 and 3, no significant difference was observed between monolinguals and bilinguals' *syntactic structure* mean scores as the obtained F value of .960 was failed to reach the significance level criterion ($P < .328$). From the mean values it is evident that scores of monolingual and bilingual learners were statistically similar (means 7.94 and 8.29 respectively). Gender wise comparison also revealed a difference between male (mean 8.05) and female learners (mean 8.31).

However, this difference was so negligible that it could be neglected and regarded as non-significant. Along the same line, two-way ANOVA was conducted to compare male and female bilingual EFL learners' mean scores on *syntactic structure*. As tables 2 and 3 display the interaction effect between linguality and gender was found to be non-significant ($F = 2.66$; $P < .104$) indicating that pattern of scoring was the same for male and female learners irrespective of their linguality background. Therefore, H2 is rejected as there was no significant difference between male and female learners in their total scores (embedded knowledge and preposition stranding and pied piping).

3.3. Comparison among Students with Different Educational Levels of Parents on Syntactic Structure

H3: *Parents with different educational qualifications impact significantly their children's scores on syntactic structure (embedded knowledge and preposition stranding and pied piping).*

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Table 4

Mean scores on syntactic structure test for learners with different educational qualifications of parents with results of ANOVA and Scheffe's post hoc test

Educational qualification of parents	Mean	Std. Deviation	'F' value	P value
Illiterate	7.7333 ^{ab}	2.2733	5.898	.000 (HS)
Primary	7.0964 ^a	3.2558		
Junior	7.6724 ^{ab}	3.0972		
Higher	8.7500 ^{ab}	3.4224		
Graduate	9.2833 ^b	3.6177		
Post graduate	12.3333 ^c	4.2740		
Total	8.1705	3.4082		

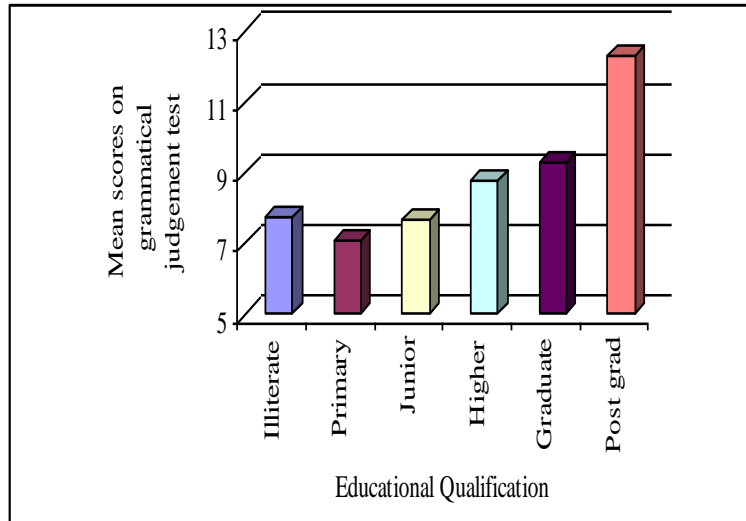
Note: HS- Highly significant

The means with different superscripts are significantly different from each other as indicated by Scheffe's Post hoc test ($\alpha = .05$).

One-way ANOVA was employed and it revealed a significant difference among learners with different educational qualifications of parents in their mean scores on *syntactic structure* test. ($F=5.898$; $P < .000$). The mean scores clearly indicated that learners whose parents are in low educational level had significantly lower scores compared to learners whose parents are in high educational level. Therefore, in this stage to confirm this finding Scheffe test was used because according to Girden (1992), the Scheffe test is used with ANOVA (Analysis of Variance) to determine which variable(s) among several independent variables is statistically the most different. Therefore, H3 is accepted as F test revealed a significant difference.

Figure 2

Mean scores on syntactic structure test for learners with different educational qualifications of parents



The result of this hypothesis can be a support for what Drazen (1992) has declared. According to Drazen (ibid), in a study measuring student achievement and its relationship to family socioeconomic standing, the level of a parent's education is a factor that directly affects student achievement. This longitudinal study was conducted in 1972 with 19,000 students and again in 1988 with 25,000 students, in the areas of language achievement. These studies have shown that 75% of the time, level of parent education was the number one factor related to the performance of their children in the areas of language achievement.

Heller and Fantuzzo (1993) indicate a high correlation between the level of parent education and the academic achievement of their children in school. They feel children and schools will benefit by providing parents with programs promoting parent education and awareness. Among parents, already at a disadvantage because of the language barrier, can benefit the most by teaching them how to become more involved in their child's education.

3.4. The Effect of Demographic Variables on GEPT

H4: *Monolingual and bilingual learners differ significantly in their performance on general English proficiency test.*

Table 4

Mean proficiency scores of mono and bilingual learners along with results of Independent samples 't' test

Linguality	Mean	Std. Deviation	't' value	P value
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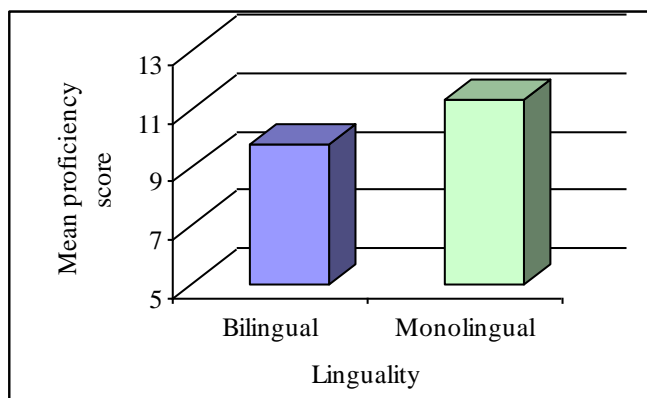
Bilingual	9.79	3.15	3.436	.001 (S)
Monolingual	11.30	3.88		

S-significant

H4 is accepted because as it is clear from table 4 monolinguals scored significantly higher than bilinguals in general English proficiency (means 11.30 and 9.79 respectively). 'T' value of 3.436 was found to be significant at .001 level.

Figure 2

Mean proficiency scores of monolingual and bilingual learners



One probable reason for such an unexpected finding of this investigation may be due to the fact that Persian and English belong to the Indo-European family of language whereas, Turkish belongs to Altaic family of language (As Starostin, 2005 believes: *Altaic* is a proposed language family that includes 66 languages spoken by about 348 million people, mostly in and around Central Asia and northeast Asia). Thus it can be concluded that there is a relationship between the structural knowledge of those languages, which belong to the same language family.

The superiority of monolinguals over bilinguals may be due to the transfer and overgeneralization strategies. Indeed, Turkish / Persian bilingual learners of English possess a positive knowledge of the grammatical structure and vocabulary achievement of their L1 (Turkish) when they begin schooling in Persian, the consciously internalizing the grammatical and vocabulary pattern of Persian may be transferred to the new linguistic system, English in this regard.

3.5. Comparison among Students with Different SES on General English Proficiency Test

H5: Learners with different SES differ significantly in their performance on general English proficiency test.

Table 5

Mean proficiency scores for learners with different SES with results of ANOVA and Scheffe's post hoc test

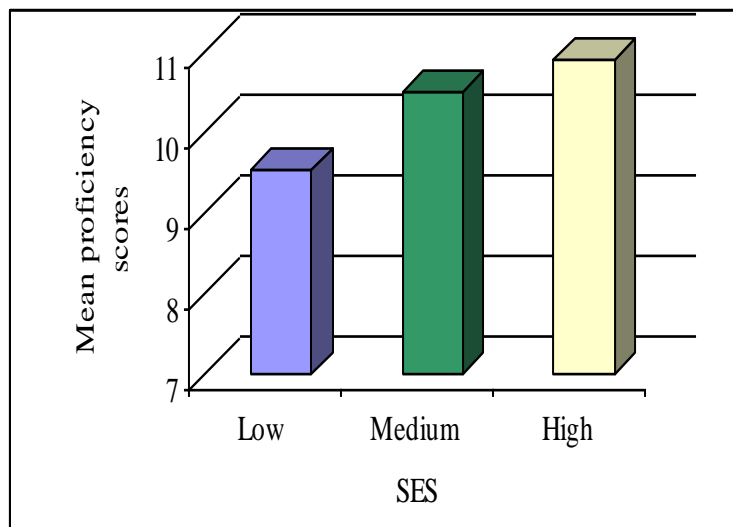
SES	Mean	Std. Deviation	'F' value	P value
Low	9.52 ^a	3.58	4.489	.012 (S)
Medium	10.50 ^b	3.55		
High	10.88 ^b	4.16		
Total	10.29	3.81		

Note: The means with different superscripts are significantly different from each other as indicated by Scheffe's Post hoc test (alpha=. 05).

One-way ANOVA revealed a significant difference among learners with different SES in their mean proficiency scores (F=4.489; P<. 012). The mean scores clearly indicated that learners with low SES had less proficiency scores (mean 9.52) compared to learners with medium and high SES (means 10.50 and 10.88 respectively). Further, Scheffe's test also indicated that learners with medium and high SES did not differ significantly in their proficiency scores, but they had significantly higher scores than learners from low SES. H5 is accepted as students from different SES differed significantly in their mean scores.

Figure 3

Mean proficiency scores for learners with different SES



According to Schofield, and Mamuna, (2003) economic dimension plays a crucial role in almost all aspects of life. With respect to children learning English, upper class parents have vastly more resources to devote, in terms of paying for schooling in different schools buying English books, enrolling their children in English institutes and other resources (e.g. satellite, educational video tapes, etc.) for home use, and travel to English speaking countries.

Above all, mostly upper class parents speak English at home and with friends in certain circumstances, and often at work, since the more prestigious jobs often involve the use of English, so for their children this is English as a second or foreign language environment, with plenty of exposure to the target language outside the instructional setting of school. At the other end of the spectrum, lower class parents have no money for any special support in English, may only be semi-literate, and do not themselves know English, their children encounter English only as a subject in school (i.e. a foreign language), and may have to do forms of work out of school that limit the time they can spend on their children's homework and etc.

For these reasons one would expect a strong relationship between SES and English language proficiency achieved by a child in his/her late teens. Second as Wen and Johnson (1997) and Ellis (1994) point out, SES, like sex, is a variable whose effects are unlikely to be direct.

One does not generally imagine that a learner's biological sex has any direct influence on their language learning: rather any effect is via various mediating concomitants of that sex differential attitudes, interests, opportunities etc., largely dictated by society - which we often sum up in the term 'gender'. Similarly we would not probably imagine any effect

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of SES as arising directly from that class categorization itself, but from some concomitants of SES in terms of opportunities, attitudes and so forth.

4. Conclusion and Implications

To carry out this study, an ex post facto design was employed. A total of 399 male and female subjects at seven pre-university centers in Arak, Iran were randomly selected from among two groups of Turkish-Persian bilinguals and Persian monolinguals. A general English proficiency test, a back ground, and a syntactic structure test were administered to both groups. Statistical analyses including ANOVA, t-test, post-hoc Scheffe test, and descriptive statistics revealed that there were sometime significant and sometime non-significant differences in the performance of the two learner groups, i.e. monolingual and bilingual participants.

The results and findings of the statistical analyses may be summarized as follows:

1) The first hypothesis was rejected, indicating that monolingual and bilingual learners did not differ in acquiring syntactic structure.

It is often believed that early exposure to two languages, either simultaneously or sequentially, is detrimental to language acquisition. This belief rests on an implicit assumption that learning more than one language in early childhood necessarily produces on one hand, confusion and interference between the languages and on the other hand, hindrance to learning a third language.

This hypothesis is in line with results of studies by some scholars who conducted experiments with more controlled variables. The findings of some of these studies led to a neutral attitude toward bilingualism. In their studies, Barik and Swain (1978) and Lambert and Tucker (1972) found no significant difference between monolinguals and bilinguals in terms of their intelligence, mental development and school achievements.

More recently, Nayak *et al.* (1990), comparing the acquisition of an artificial grammar by monolingual, bilingual and multilingual students, reported that although the multilinguals indicated superior performance under certain conditions, they generally revealed ‘no clear evidence that they were superior in language learning abilities’ (1990: 221).

2) The second hypothesis was rejected, showing that no significant difference was observed between gender of monolinguals and bilinguals’ performances in acquiring syntactic structure.

This hypothesis supports the findings of Talebi et al, (2007). They concluded that male and female learners have to some degree similar performance in reading comprehension and syntactic structure of an additional language. That is, the interaction effect between

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bilinguality and gender is found to be non-significant. Indicating that the pattern of reading comprehension scores are similar for male and female students irrespective of the linguality background they have.

3 The third hypothesis was not rejected indicating that learners whose parents are in low educational level had significantly lower scores in syntactic structure compared to learners whose parents are in high educational level.

This hypothesis supports the findings of other researchers as: Bee et al, (1982); Haveman & Wolfe, (1995). In their words positive correlations between mothers' educational attainment and children's well-being, and particularly school outcomes and cognitive development, are among the most replicated results from developmental studies. The processes by which maternal education affects children's development may be both direct and indirect. Direct effects may consist of enrichments to the child's home learning environment and mother-child interactions (Richman, Miller & Levine, 1992). Maternal education may also benefit children indirectly by increasing maternal earnings and family income.

An article written by Fehrmann, Keith, and Reimers (1987) from the University of Iowa discussed how parent involvement is a crucial influence on the academic achievement of students. They view parent involvement in many different aspects: 1) expectations of school performance, 2) encouragement of school work, 3) direct reinforcement in improvement of grades, and 4) monitoring activities and educational progress. For example, the authors suggest that even though a parent may not be able to help their child with math they can still be involved by monitoring the amount of TV children watch, how much time they spend interacting with friends, and how much they read each night. Even though parents may not be able to directly assist their children with homework, they can still be involved by instilling studying habits that promote greater academic achievement.

4) The fourth hypothesis was rejected, meaning that monolingual participants, unexpectedly, surpassed bilingual participants in general English proficiency.

Perhaps the most essential reason behind such an unexpected finding is the *developmental interdependency hypothesis*. According to this hypothesis bilingual participants have not acquired literacy skills of reading and writing in their L1, therefore, they suffer from “age appropriate” skills in L2. Hence, they cannot cope with monolingual participants. According to this hypothesis there is a direct relationship between a child’s competence in L1 and L2. If the first language is poorly developed for various reasons, then exposure to L2 impedes a child’s competence in his continued development in L1, which itself has a detrimental effect on the child’s progress in L2 or L3.

The *developmental interdependency hypothesis* predicts that well developed skills in one language will favor the acquisition of good skills in the other; on the contrary, poor skills in one language will impede the establishment of ability in the second. However, it was strongly emphasized that language minority students' educational deficits were a function of inappropriate treatment by the school and that their basic cognitive abilities and command of the linguistic system of their L1 were in no sense deficient.

This hypothesis also supports Bialystok's finding (2006) in which data analysis indicated that bilingual children tend to have a smaller vocabulary in each language than monolingual children in their language and also their understanding of linguistic structure, called metalinguistic awareness, is not so good as that of comparable monolinguals.

5) The fifth hypothesis was not rejected; indicating that learners with medium and high SES had significantly higher scores in general English proficiency than learners from low SES. The following researchers support this hypothesis:

Kalmijn's (1994) analyses show that children with parents with high social-economic status have better chances to achieve well in education because these parents firstly earn high income and are afford to pay for anything needed better schooling and secondly they have high expectations of their children.

Parents with more education and high SES appear to possess more formal knowledge about child development norms and theories and about optimal childrearing practices (Conrad, Gross, Fogg, & Ruchala, 1992; MacPhee, 1981; Palacios, 1990; Parks & Smeriglio, 1986).

Lower-educated mothers are likely to have been poorer students themselves, and they refer to books or other written materials less readily as sources of information about child development and childrearing, whereas middle-SES women report that reading material is their primary source of information (Young, 1991).

Middle-SES, more than lower-SES, parents also seek out and absorb expert advice about child development. Parents in higher socioeconomic strata change more flexibly and more rapidly in response to theory changes in parenting and development than parents in lower socioeconomic strata. Higher education is associated with more stimulating home learning environments (Parcel & Menaghan, 1994).

4.1. Implications

As it was indicated earlier, bilingualism has a charismatic impact on third language achievement when the first two languages are taught formally, on the other hand it was revealed in the present study that there is no significant difference between monolinguals

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and their peers, bilinguals who have acquired their first languages (in this case Turkish) informally, in learning third language. Therefore, it is suggested that Turkish should also be introduced in formal education in Iran in order to make the learners aware of the differences and similarities between their first and target language and also providing them with the linguistic knowledge of their first language.

One pedagogical and policy implication is that in order to help the bilinguals to learn English, they should be encouraged by educators to develop their linguistic capacities and keep informing and advising the parents with the charismatic impact of bilingualism on additional language acquisition if the first two languages are acquired academically, therefore, it may enable them to promote the first language at home.

The implications for schooling are more complex. Children's success in school is strongly dependent on their proficiency in the language of instruction. Children must be skilled in the forms and meanings of the school language and be competent readers of that language. The evidence for that bilingual children are not cognitively handicapped, indicates an important role for schools in providing a means for these children to build up their language skills in the school language so that they can be full participants in the classroom and harvest the most positive benefit from their educational experience.

Therefore, the level of learners' L1 is very important for the further language learning process. Clearly, the more aware learners are of the similarities and differences between their mother tongue and the target language, the easier they will find it to adopt effective learning and production strategies. In order for the pupils to achieve the best results, on one hand, it seems that it is very important for language teachers to be aware of the learners' linguistic starting point in order to give them the best instruction, on the other hand it is essential for language learners to be familiarized with the strategies and linguistic knowledge of their own first language in order to compare and contrast it with target language while they are acquiring an additional or target language. Because as it was mentioned elsewhere in the current paper it is believed that learner's awareness of similarities and differences between their mother tongue and additional language will pave the way for effective learning.

Considering the findings of this paper, we can propose that educational policy makers should be sensitized to the double problems of the bilingual learners of English. As it is known, language skills are well instructed in L1. Since the minority language students in Iran do not receive literacy in their L1, they suffer from what Cummins (1976) calls age-appropriate skills. Hence, they might fall behind their monolingual peers in learning a subsequent language, as the results of the present study indicated. Educational policy makers can design some bilingual education programs for bilingual students especially in elementary level to help these learners to overcome their language barriers. Some extra-curriculum EFL classes for bilingual learners might be fruitful.

According to what was said so far, it is believed that there is a pressing need for a fresh approach to foreign language teaching in Iran. It is noteworthy to repeat that awareness and an understanding of bilingualism are crucial to any curriculum for foreign language teaching.

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Mojtaba Maghsoudi, Ph.D. in EFL
 Faculty
 Shahid Bahonar TTC of Arak
 Vice Chancellor of Payam Noor University of Shazand
 Arak, Iran
maghsudim@yahoo.com

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