Markedness Hypothesis: Study of English Dative and Benefactive Alternation

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ABSTRACT

The *Markedness Hypothesis* is based on the idea that some grammatical forms are more restricted in use and thus pose more challenges for learners to master them. In second language acquisition, such a hypothesis normally implies a sequential development claiming that unmarked forms should be acquired before marked ones. The present study aims at scrutinizing the markedness proposals in the realm of argument structures in general, and the acquisition of English dative and benefactive alternation in specific. Following this purpose, three data-collection instruments (translation, sentence-making, & grammaticality judgement) were constructed and the required data was collected from 40 undergraduate Persian EFL learners. The participants were at intermediate and upper-intermediate proficiency levels, and almost all had institute learning experiences. The results of a mixed between-within groups *ANOVA* did not show a significant effect for exposure in the current study. Moreover, the participants showed a high tendency to use the dative verbs in double-object structures more than the benefactive ones across all the three tasks. Although the high production of prepositional-object forms in the translation task could be attributed to the participants' L1; i.e. Persian, the conjecture was later undermined in the sentence-making task. In line with Rappaport Hovav and Levin (2008), the main finding of this study gives rise to 'verb sensitivity' the effect of which was transparent in the three tests. According to the results, verb-class, which is basically meaning-based, turned out as a significant factor in relation to the acquisition of English dative and benefactive double-object constructions.

Keywords: Markedness; dative; benefactive; double-object; verb-class.

1. Introduction

Learning the grammatical features of a second/foreign language is by no means a simple process. It is inevitably affected by many different factors ranging from contextual factors, like explicit / implicit learning contexts, to learner's cognitive diversities and personal preferences. Furthermore, there has been a long-held controversy between those who look into L1 for the possible sources of difficulty in L2 development, and those who shift to the target language to unveil the reasons why L2 learning process is susceptible to erroneous fluctuations. In this direction, Markedness Hypothesis was first introduced by Trubetzkoy (1931) in conjunction with phonological issues. The hypothesis was later expanded and generalized to other fields in linguistic studies including semantics and syntax, and especially second language

acquisition. Generally speaking, 'markedness' is based on the idea that some linguistic features are more natural, easier, and universal; while some other features are less natural, more difficult and restricted in use (Ellis, 2008). The former are basic and general features which are labeled as 'unmarked', and the latter are special features labeled as 'marked'. A pervasive assumption concerning markedness hypothesis is that unmarked features are expected to be easier for L2 learners to master than marked ones. However, some studies in applied linguistics have shown that sometimes a more marked feature is learned more accurately and with less struggle if the L2 marked feature is also present in learners' L1. The recent claim is best explained within the framework of a more detailed version of markedness hypothesis which was set forth by Eckman (1977) called *Markedness Differential Hypothesis* (MDH, hereafter). MDH appropriately takes into consideration the differences between L1 and L2 to account for learnability problems observed in second language acquisition process. Here, being marked or unmarked is not the sole factor; rather, acquisition of a feature is assumed to be hampered or accelerated according to the differences or similarities between the two languages respectively. The main claim made within MDH framework is that those L2 features which are different from their counterparts in L1, and are more marked in L2 than in L1, are more difficult to be learned by L2 learners. In contrast, if a feature is comparable in L1 and L2, and it is more marked in L2 than in L1, then the feature is acquired more easily. The recent conclusion seems perceivably reasonable due to the fact that when a marked feature is more to-the-point and clear-cut in the target language, it is consequently restricted to more specific contexts of use. Ellis (2008) defines Markedness by referring to the so-called Chomskyan distinction of *Core* and *Periphery* rules. Core rules are general and abstract principles supposed to be universal. Periphery rules, on the other hand, are idiosyncratic in each language and certainly not universal. For instance, the structure '*the sooner, the better*' is a language-specific sequence which is produced based on a peripheral rule in English. In contrast, the concept of '*comparison*' between two things relates to a core principle of all human languages. According to this distinction, 'core' rules which are claimed to be universal; i.e., present in almost all languages, are usually unmarked (they could be marked too). In contrary, 'periphery' rules which are meant to be language-specific are marked and hence more difficult for L2 learners to master. Another notable feature associated with the concept of markedness is found in Croft (1990) where Frequency is brought up as a factor distinguishing more-frequent 'unmarked' values from less-frequent 'marked' ones. Therefore, it can be concluded that L2 learners will face unmarked structures more frequently than marked structures when exposed to L2 data. Such an exposure will duly end up with L2 acquirers more proficient in unmarked structures having higher frequencies compared to those of marked ones.

Acquisition of English argument structures in general, and the argument structures which are subject to formal alternation in particular, has been explored by different scholars as English L2 learners show variation in acquiring such alternating structures. White (2003: 206) describes these alternations as "*the same set of arguments with the same theta roles may show up in different syntactic structures*". The best example for such a description is 'Dative' alternation in which there are 'theme' and 'goal' arguments. The former is the 'direct object' usually in Determiner Phrase (DP) form (or the other possible alternatives such as 'pronouns'), and the latter is either Prepositional Phrase (PP) or 'indirect object' without preposition:

    1. a) I have written <u>several letters</u> <u>to her</u>.   DP + PP

         b) I have written <u>her</u> <u>several letters</u>.   DP + DP

Formal alternation can easily be realized looking at the above examples. Example (1.a) which has DP + PP sequence is called dative ('*to*' plus indirect object follows the direct object); whereas, example (1.b), which is called double-object construction, enjoys a DP + DP structure. To justify the double-object construction, some researchers like Green (1974) and Pinker (1989) have argued that such a preposition-less structure is possible when the goal argument (indirect object) tends to be the possessor of the theme argument (direct object). White (2003) calls this a "broad-range possession" rule which constrains the double-object construction. Nevertheless, the rule is not always applicable as it is not the case in the above example (1.b) where the goal argument may not be the prospective possessor of the theme argument. Therefore, there must be other rules and semantic constraints operating in the process of shifting from DP + PP structures to their possible

DP + DP alternation. Such semantic constraints are often instantiated by the sentence main verb governing its internal and external arguments. In short, one can claim that not all dative structures have double-object counterparts without preposition 'to'. For instance, the ungrammaticality of the following examples is due to either 'possession-rule' constraint (2.b) or 'animacy-rule' constraint (3.b).

2. a) I would like to express my sincere thanks to my parents.

   *b) I would like to express my parents my sincere thanks.

3 a) He sent a package to Tehran.

   *b) He sent Tehran a package. (But, '*He sent his uncle a package*' is grammatical)

A formal alternation very similar to what happens in dative constructions is 'Benefactive' alternation. In this type, however, the direct object plays the 'theme-argument' role and the indirect object is said to be 'benefactive-argument' which follows preposition '*for*'. Levin (1993) explains that the benefactive alternation is often used with verbs implying either 'obtaining' or 'creation'; especially the second one. Furthermore, she spotlights an important point in relation to the double-object form of benefactive structures by saying that the first object (indirect object) is less object-like compared to the first object in the double-object variant of dative structures. Although dative and benefactive alternations are very similar, the verbs participating in each category are usually not used in the other category since the underlying meanings for datives and benefactives are different. In dative structures, the 'goal-argument' seems to be an essential part of the sentence without which the sentence is incomplete in both meaning and form; whereas in benefactive structures, usually the benefactive-argument can be omitted with still having a grammatical sentence.

4. a) She has poured a cup of tea.   SVO (single-object structure)

   b) She has poured a cup of tea for me.   DP + PP ('*for*' + benefactive object)

   c) She has poured me a cup of tea.   DP + DP (double-object construction)

Aside from the differences between dative and benefactive structures with respect to their preposition-less alternations as well as the semantic features of the verbs participating in each category, the above-mentioned points about 'Markedness' hypothesis and 'Markedness Differential' hypothesis are worth of consideration. In the case of dative/benefactive constructions, the proponents of Markedness hypothesis have highlighted the fact that not all dative/benefactive structures have preposition-less (i.e. DP + DP) alternated forms. Consequently, it is judicious to deduce that the original and unmarked form of dative/benefactive structures is the one with preposition; it means, DP + PP form. The backup for this deduction is the high productivity of DP + PP sequence compared to DP + DP alternation which is more restricted and marked. Studies in L2 acquisition process during the last decades have proportionally proved the idea that the markedness proposals cannot be ignored as their generalizations seem appealing and tenable. In the following section, some of the related studies along with their main findings are reviewed with the hope to set the ground for the main motivation behind conducting the present study.

2. Literature Review

As mentioned earlier in the previous section, the proponents of markedness hypothesis (Eckman, 1977; Zobl, 1983b; Mazurkewich, 1984 & 1985; Hawkins, 1987; Croft, 1990, among others) argue that the acquisition of second language grammatical features is influenced by their productivity and frequency in the target language. Accordingly, the more general and productive a grammatical feature is in a language, the less-marked that feature will be; and consequently, more frequently the grammatical feature is used by native speakers of that language. Likewise, the very feature would be acquired by second language learners with less struggle. The claims brought up so far will be further addressed later in the 'Discussion' section. The rest of this section is dedicated to some studies carried out in the field of English dative/benefactive alternation beginning with the descriptive studies with a non-participant design followed by the practical (participant-based) ones. Afterwards, the detected gaps in the literature are spotlighted as the main impetus behind the conduct of the present study.

2.1. Descriptive studies of English dative/benefactive constructions

Rappaport Hovav and Levin (2008) studied the English dative alternation with an emphasis on verb sensitivity suggesting that a verb's own meaning has a significant function in the formal sequence of the arguments coming with that verb. They try to challenge the dichotomy of 'double-object' (caused-possession) and 'to-dative' (caused-motion) constructions, and to approve that this classification is not always true. Accordingly, they show how the caused-possession meaning is not limited only to double-object variant. In their explanations, it is truly suggested that when one construction is possible but the other is not, that is because the two structures do not have the same meaning. For example, both (5.a) and (5.b) are grammatical since they have the same meaning. Contrary to this, example (6.b) is not grammatical for the simple reason that its meaning is different from that of (6.a). Another justification for rejecting (6.b) is related to the abstractness of the theme-argument '*pleasure*' in this sentence.

5. a) John gave me his own pen.

    b) John gave his own pen to me.

6. a) The song gives me pleasure.

    *b) The song gives pleasure to me.

Jackendoff (1990, cited in Rappaport Hovav & Levin, 2008) takes a semantic-based analysis and sets forth a distinction between those verbs which inherently denote a 'change-of-possession' meaning, and those verbs which imply the act of '*throwing*'. The first category is called give-type verbs (e.g. *give* & *pass*), and the second category is labeled as throw-type verbs (e.g. *throw* & *kick*). Give-type verbs are suggested by Jackendoff to operate on a possession-path starting from a source towards a goal and leaving the recipient (the goal) with the theme:

DP1 (agent) + *Give*-type Verb + DP2 (theme) + *To*-DP3 (recipient)

In this regard, Rappaport Hovav & Levin (2008) assert that give-type verbs are different from throw-type verbs in the sense that the former have only caused-possession meaning while the latter may have both caused-motion and caused-possession meaning. They also claim that give-type verbs trigger change-of-possession but not change-of-location; whereas, throw-type and send-type verbs (e.g. *mail* & *send*) bring about change-of-location but not change-of-possession. In conclusion, Rappaport Hovav & Levin believe that the English dative alternation happens for different reasons in the case of give-type verbs on the one hand, and throw/send-type verbs on the other hand.

Nisbet (2005) studied and demonstrated how double-object benefactive constructions are generated in English. In his attempt, Nisbet tries to resolve the dilemma whether 'beneficiaries' (the indirect objects capable of following preposition '*for*') are either 'optional' indirect objects in the form of 'adjunct', or benefactive arguments added to a structure by some semantic-based rules. To this purpose, a noteworthy difference between 'double-object' and 'prepositional' benefactive is highlighted by Nisbet with this explanation that the former is resistant to 'wh-fronting' whereas the latter allows it.

7. a) He bought <u>his mother a necklace</u>.   (double-object benefactive)

    *b) Who did he buy a necklace?

8. a) He bought a necklace <u>for his mother</u>.   (prepositional benefactive)

    b) Who did he buy a necklace for?

In contrast to some other researchers, Nisbet (2005) tends to prove that benefactive arguments are different from dative-arguments in several aspects. For instance, he states that some dative verbs such as '*lend*' and '*pass*' imply a recipient even if the recipient is not present in the sentence; it is a part of the core meaning of the verbs. For benefactive verbs such as '*buy*' and '*open*', however, it is not necessary to imagine an unmentioned beneficiary; the meaning is still complete without it. Moreover, the notion of 'transfer' is an inseparable part of the above-mentioned dative verbs, but not of the benefactive ones.

9. a) I bought her <u>some flowers</u>, but she didn't accept <u>them</u>. (No transfer of the theme)

    *b) I lent her <u>my car</u>, but she didn't accept <u>it</u>. ('*lent*' implies transfer has happened)

The English double-object benefactive was also investigated by Basilico (2008). In his analysis of dative/benefactive structures, Basilico describes the double-object sequence as a construction in which the verb takes a 'small clause' (i.e. verb complement) which is headed by an unmentioned (silent) '*have*' predicate. Therefore, the double-object construction must denote a possessive meaning on the part of the indirect object. Basilico claims that such a small clause headed by a silent '*have*' is applied to the dative double-object constructions not the benefactive ones. This is because unlike the benefactives, the datives usually result in an actual possessive state (implied in the meaning of '*have*') as the consequence of a causative act.

10. a) John sold his car to me.

   b) John ~agent~ sold ~dative~ [me ~recipient~ (*have*) his car].

Nevertheless, there are some benefactive double-object constructions which seem to operate a caused-possession relationship between the act of the agent and the end-result for the beneficiary (indirect object). Of course, as Basilico (2008) affirms, the possessive end-state is not necessarily realized with benefactive verbs. Consider the verb '*built*' as a benefactive verb in these examples (11a & b).

11. a) They built a room for us.

   b) They ~agent~ built ~benefactive~ [us ~beneficiary~ (*have*) a room]. ('*a room*' will be for '*us*')

Basilico (2008) also analyzes English dative and benefactive constructions so as to highlight their differences especially in double-object form. He distinguishes the constructions by stating that datives may allow inanimate causes as subject, but benefactives in majority of cases don't accept inanimate causes; instead, they prefer agentive subjects.

12. <u>The sudden accident</u> offered Einstein a new thought. (dative with inanimate cause)

13. *<u>The wind </u>opened us the door. (benefactive resists inanimate cause)

2.2. Acquisition of English dative and benefactive constructions

The acquisition of English dative/benefactive double-object constructions by Korean and Japanese L2 learners was explored in an attempt by Oh and Zubizarreta (2005). Their main goal was to understand if the leaners' L1 had a significant role in the acquisition of the above-mentioned English structures. So as to fulfil this aim, a grammaticality judgement task was carried out and it was revealed that Korean and Japanese verbal morphology played a role in the acquisition of English double-object constructions with benefactive verbs. Additionally, the researchers concluded that their participants rejected English benefactive double-object constructions more strongly than the dative double-object constructions. Relying on their findings, the researchers then took a *transfer-based* stance while claiming that *frequency-based* paradigm is insufficient to account for their results. It seems plausible to mention that the transfer-based paradigm boosts the role of L1 whereas the frequency-based model assumes more frequent structures ('*dative double-object*' in this field) to be learned more easily than less frequent ones (here, '*benefactive double-object*' forms). Finally, Oh and Zubizarreta concluded that English dative double-object is unmarked while benefactive double-object is marked. Their explanation is based on the idea that dative verbs take inherently two internal objects but benefactive verbs basically take one internal object (the beneficiary is '*sentence adjunct*' not '*verb object*'). The recent generalization forms their last hypothesis according to which the participants accepted the dative double-object more than benefactive double-object because the former is unmarked and the latter is marked.

Rezai (2010), in turn, studied the acquisition of English dative alternation by Persian EFL learners. In order to collect the required data and answer the study questions, he conducted a grammaticality judgment task across three proficiency groups along with a native-speakers control group. His findings left him with the support to the '*poverty of the stimulus*' hypothesis introduced first by Chomsky. The results obtained in his endeavor then gave rise to the confirmation of the Chomskyan 'UG-access' perspective. Rezai distinguishes English and Persian by reminding the fact that Persian grammar does not allow any double-object sequence with dative verbs. This reminder can expectedly hypothesize the inclination of Persian L2ers of English to use the DP + PP sequence more than DP + DP (the so-called double-object) construction with dative verbs.

Not surprisingly, The results of his study confirmed the commonplace role of learners' proficiency as a significant factor with regard to the acquisition of English dative alternation. Furthermore, a conclusion (which is normally expected) was made approving that there was a significant difference between the learners' performance on double-object datives on the one hand, and prepositional datives on the other hand. The same process happened for '*recipient*' double-objects and '*beneficiary*' double-objects where the learners showed a much better performance on the former. Broadly speaking, Rezai (2010) tries to support the proposal that L2 learners, having access to UG-knowledge, can acquire dative/benefactive double-object constructions even if those constructions are lacking in their L1.

Cuypere, Coster and Baten (2010) investigated the acquisition of the English dative alternation by Russian foreign language learners. Their study was aimed at exploring whether Russian learners of English transfer their L1 preferences to the 'ditransitive' (double-object) constructions in English. To this end, two acceptability judgment tests were administered based on the results of which no significant role for '*transfer*' was found. Consequently, the learners' preference of English 'to-datives' over double-object datives was attributed to '*Processability Theory*' (Pienemann, 1998) which concentrates on acquisitional order of grammatical features in terms of how they are processed cognitively. The recent comment triggered by 'PT' may bring up, once again, the markedness claims saying that less-marked to-datives are acquired sooner and easier than the marked double-object datives. This is because in the DP + PP sequence of dative/benefactive constructions, the presence of preposition '*to*' or '*for*' (*to*-dative & *for*-benefactive) makes it easier for learners to process the verb and its arguments in terms of their thematic roles. This process of '*case marking*', which is easier and clearer with the DP + PP structure, helps English L2 learners to better make sense of the sentence-meaning in order to rate it as grammatical.

Having reviewed some studies in conjunction with English dative and benefactive constructions, it seems useful to look into the premise through another perspective; i.e., the acquisition of such structures by English native children. Such a work was conducted by Campbell and Tomasello (2001) by analyzing the spontaneous speech of seven children during their pre-school years. The researchers wanted to uncover the acquisition order of dative/benefactive constructions, especially, the double-object and preposition-object alternations. The main finding obtained in this study was sort of surprising as most of the children acquired double-object dative/benefactive structures sooner than the prepositional ones. The finding was then attributed to the greater frequency and saliency of double-object constructions in the data the children were exposed to. Nonetheless, there seems to be a paradox in the mentioned claim because the higher frequency of double-object datives/benefactives can be in sharp contrast with the markedness proposals. In other words, the earlier emergence of double-object datives and benefactives compared to their prepositional counterparts (as Campbell and Tomasello came up with) may overwhelm us in deciding which pattern is less marked to be first learned by acquirers.

2.3. Purpose

Reviewing the related literature leaves us with a sizeable amount of studies carried out in relation to English dative and benefactive alternation and the closely related concept of 'markedness'. The descriptive studies have been conducted to analyze different aspects of such constructions with an emphasis on why some verbs license double-object alternation while some do not license such a preposition-less sequence. Other researchers have shown their interest in the dichotomy of '*to-recipient*' and '*for-beneficiary*' and have tried to list some of the factors which distinguish these two alternatives from each other. On the other hand, the practical studies have mainly been carried out to see the learnability problems pertaining to L1 transfer, learners' proficiency, or L2 marked/unmarked manifestations with respect to the acquisition of English dative/benefactive structures. More clearly, the double-object variant of English dative and benefactive verbs have been at the heart of researchers' attention. The current research, though not genuinely divergent, is aimed at studying the acquisition of such grammatical preferences in English from a slightly different perspective. Our main purpose in this study is to investigate what role English verb-classes paly in the acquisition of the afore-mentioned patterns. Additionally, we want to explore the effect of

years-of-exposure to English data on the acquisition of the dative/benefactive alternation. Finally, the markedness proposals are going to be addressed with more details in conjunction with the double-object and prepositional-object constructions. According to the mentioned goals, the following study questions are to be addressed in this study. To meet the requirements of the study, the following research questions were posed:

1. How can the number of years of exposure modify learners' acquisition of English dative/benefactive alternation?

2. Is there a significant difference between learners' production and perception of the above-mentioned constructions in English?

3. What role do English verb-classes play in the acquisition of English dative/benefactive double-object patterns?

4. Where is the position of Markedness Hypothesis in the acquisition of English dative and benefactive constructions?

3. Method

3.1. Participants

Based on the general purpose of the study and the 'markedness' hypothesis which was supposed to form our main framework, totally 40 English-language learners at university level were randomly selected as the participants. All the participants were at intermediate proficiency level (22 learners at intermediate and 18 learners at upper intermediate level), and almost all of them had English learning experience at institute level. An important point to be mentioned upon here is the fact that the participants were assigned to two groups according to their years of exposure to English input, not based on their English proficiency level. Those learners having English language exposure up to 6 years (sum of university & institute learning years) were classified in the same group, and those having more than 8 years of exposure were given the same group membership. Of course, not surprisingly, majority of the participants with intermediate proficiency level were among the learners who were classified in the up-to-six years of exposure, and most of those who were at upper-intermediate proficiency level were put into the eight-plus group. It should be stated that we classified our participants based on their number of exposure years to English language so as to examine the role of exposed input and the related concept of input-frequency. That is because throughout the literature, 'frequency' and 'productivity' were claimed to have a direct relationship with the dichotomy of 'marked' and 'unmarked' which falls at the center of markedness hypothesis. Nevertheless, one can argue that the concept of 'exposure' to input seems alien to EFL contexts where English input is limited to educational settings. While this is true from a sociolinguistic perspective, the 'exposure years' as defined above can be idiosyncratically applied in the present study by referring to the only form of exposure to English input available in such contexts. Furthermore, features such as input frequency and productivity which are associated with markedness need to be meticulously controlled in order to draw conclusions concerning the relationship between input frequency and markedness. This study, however, tries to look into the issue of markedness focusing on verbal semantic and syntactic features mainly, while input-exposure is to be touched upon peripherally. In the meantime, further research can illustrate the role playing by input frequency and productivity in the acquisition of dative and benefactive marked / unmarked structures.

3.2. Instruments

To collect the required data in an attempt to find answers to the pre-determined study questions, three data-collection instruments were designed. A translation test containing 15 short Persian sentences was constructed to see how the Persian EFL learners could produce English dative and benefactive sentences of either double-object or preposition-object form. The important point about the first instrument is that all the sentences used in this task were the translation of some original English double-object dative/benefactive structures extracted from English dictionaries including Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary and Longman Dictionary of Contemporary

English. The Cronbach's Alpha value for the translation instrument was calculated as 0.64 which is an acceptable reliability index. Also, the Alpha value based on 'standardized items' for this instrument was 0.74 suggesting a good internal consistency.

The second instrument applied in this study was a sentence-making test having 15 scrambled double-object dative and benefactive sentences of English. The participants were instructed to unscramble the given words in each item and insert an appropriate preposition ('*to*' or '*for*') whenever they thought a preposition is needed in order to come up with a grammatical sentence. For this instrument, the Alpha value was 0.77 (0.81 based on 'standardized items') which shows a very good internal consistency in the case of the sentence-making instrument.

And finally, each participant was given a grammaticality judgement test containing 24 English double-object dative/benefactive constructions, plus 24 preposition-object dative and benefactive sentences. Also, there were 12 English object-complement structures as fillers which were added at regular intervals among the experimental dative/benefactive sentences. Similarly, the reliability of this instrument was very good with Alpha value equal to 0. 76, and 0.81 based on 'standardized items', that proves a high internal consistency in the GJT as the third instrument.

Dative and benefactive verb-classes used in this study

A sum of 12 English dative and 12 English benefactive verbs were experimented in this study. Referring to Levin (1993), the verbs used in this investigation are categorized into five dative verb-classes and also five benefactive verb-classes. These verb categories along with their corresponding verbs are as follows.

Dative verbs:

1. Verbs signifying acts of giving; they are called *give-verbs* (e.g.: *give*, *lend*, *pass*, *sell*).

2. Verbs denoting a kind of *future-having* (e.g.: *offer* & *promise*).

3. Verbs of *causation of motion* (e.g.: *bring* & *take*).

4. Verbs which show acts of sending; they are labeled *send-verbs* (e.g.: *send* & *mail*).

5. Verbs of *transfer of message* (e.g.: *read*, *write*, *teach*).

Benefactive verbs:

1. Verbs signifying the acts of building; i.e., *build-verbs* (e.g.: *build*, *make*, *cook*).

2. Verbs which imply the act of creating something; or, *create-verbs* (e.g.: *design*).

3. Verbs of preparation; they are called *prepare-verbs* (e.g.: *prepare*, *pour*, *bake*).

4. Verbs denoting acts of performance; they are labeled *performance-verbs* (e.g.: *write*, *play*, *draw*).

5. Verbs showing acts of getting; or, *get-verbs* (e.g.: *buy*, *find*, *keep*, *order*).

In the next section, the main analyses, run in SPSS software, along with their corresponding results are presented so as to walk through the descriptive and inferential statistics obtained in this study.

4. Results

The three data-collection instruments introduced in the previous section were administered in the following order. First, the participants took part in the translation task followed by the sentence-making test in a concurrent administration design. Then after a two-week interval, the grammaticality judgement task as our most comprehensive instrument was conducted. In the next step, the collected data were quantified by changing the participants' responses into statistical codes. Finally, the codes were entered into SPSS software (version 24) and then analyzed. The main results obtained by the three data-collection instruments are presented successively in the following parts.

Translation test

As described before, the translation test contained 15 Persian translation of English dative/benefactive sentences extracted form famous English dictionaries. The participants were instructed to translate those Persian sentences into English in their most natural form. A Mixed Between-Within Subjects ANOVA was conducted to see the performance of the participants with regard to the

Table 1. Descriptive statistics of the translation task

Descriptive statistics			
Exposure_total_years	Mean	Std. deviation	N
Dative verbs_total_mean			
1_to_6 years	1.5859	.23553	22
8_years plus	1.4877	.21267	18
Total	1.5417	.22811	40
Benefactive verbs_total_mean			
1_to_6 years	1.6061	.23874	22
8_years plus	1.6389	.32464	18
Total	1.6208	.27732	40

English dative and benefactive structures as well as the different verb-classes which can be used in both double-object and preposition-object forms. Moreover, the participants' propensity towards either the double or prepositional structures was meticulously considered. Table (1) summarizes the participants' performance related to dative and benefactive structures in the translation task.

It can be seen in table (1) that the participants in both groups (according to their years of exposure) showed their tendency towards using preposition-object sequence for both dative and benefactive verbs in English. It should be mentioned that the nearer the total mean scores are to the maximum score 2, the greater the participants' tendency is towards prepositional structures. Furthermore, the difference between the learners in the two groups with regard to both dative and benefactive verbs is not so outstanding. Accordingly, the mean score of the first group is 1.58, and of the second group is 1.48 in the case of the dative verbs. The recent comparison shows a slightly higher preference of students with more exposure towards using English double-object datives. The case of the benefactive verbs is slightly surprising as the students with more exposure (group 2) showed a little higher tendency towards prepositional benefactives compared to the students of the first group with less exposure (1.60 is the mean of the first group while it is 1.63 for the second group). The results of the translation task also revealed that there was no significant effect for sentence-types (dative & benefactive) with a significance level equal to 0.080. Also, no significant effect was found for the between-subject factor; i.e. exposure-years (sig. 0.620).

In another part of the analyses of the data collected by the translation test, the different verb-classes of English datives were addressed to illustrate the participants' performance on each dative verb-class. Among the five dative verb-classes used in the translation task, the participants showed the highest preference for prepositional datives with *send-verbs* (Mean: 1.85), and the lowest tendency for prepositional datives with *give-verbs* (Mean: 1.28). The results of Multivariate tests showed a significant effect for dative verb-classes (sig. 0.00) with a very large effect size (partial eta squared: 0.74). The interaction effect of dative verb-classes and years of exposure, however, turned out not to be significant with a P-value of 0.180. The between-subjects factor; that is, the number of exposure years, did not play a significant role to distinguish the participants' performance in the two groups (sig. 0.171).

The effect of verb-classes across the experimental groups was also investigated for the benefactive verbs in the translation task. Totally, four verb-classes were studied in this test to know if the within-groups independent factor (benefactive verb-classes) played a significant role. The descriptive results revealed that the subjects used *get-verbs* more than the other benefactive verb-classes in double-object constructions (Mean score: 1.32). The highest mean score among the benefactive verb-classes was for *performance-verbs* with which exactly all elicited sentences were in prepositional form (Mean: 2). Similar to the datives, the benefactive verb-classes , as the within-group factor, turned out to be a significant factor with a P-value of 0.00, and a partial eta squared of 0.69 which shows a large effect size. Once again, like for the dative verb-classes, the interaction effect of verb-classes and years of exposure was not significant (sig. 0.479) in the case of the English benefactives. The grouping variable, the exposure years, did not show a substantial

Table 2. Descriptive statistics of the sentence-making task

Descriptive statistics			
Exposure_total_years	**Mean**	**Std. deviation**	**N**
Dative verbs_total_mean			
1_to_6 years	1.2374	.32763	22
8_years plus	1.2963	.20874	18
Total	1.2639	.27870	40
Benefactive verbs_total_mean			
1_to_6 years	1.5682	.29840	22
8_years plus	1.5278	.38877	18
Total	1.5500	.33800	40

effect as a significant factor with benefactive verb-classes in the translation task (sig. 0.860). The result which resembles that of the dative verb-classes in this task.

Sentence-making test

The second data-collection instrument with fifteen scrambled English dative and benefactive sentences (which were originally in double-object form) was carried out while the participants were asked to unscramble the given words in each item. Meanwhile, the subjects were instructed to add an appropriate preposition ('*to*' or '*for*') if and only if the preposition is needed to make the sentence most natural in the English language. The descriptive results obtained after running a repeated measures ANOVA are presented below. Table (2), which summarizes the descriptive statistics of the sentence-making task, shows that the participants produced more prepositional constructions with the benefactive verbs than the dative verbs (Mean scores 1.55 and 1.26 respectively). In other words, double-object datives had higher frequencies than double-object benefactives in the second test.

Multivariate tests revealed a significant effect for sentence-types in the sentence-making task where the p-value was less than the alpha probability level (sig. 0.00) with a large effect size according to partial eta squared equal to 0. 41. However, the p-value of 0.364 showed that the interaction effect of sentence-types and exposure-years was not significant in the second task. Similarly, the between-subjects independent variable by which the subjects were classified into two groups, i.e. years of exposure, with a p-value of 0.912 did not show a significant effect in the sentence-making task.

In the second part of the analyses of the data collected by the sentence-making test, we analyzed the dative verb-classes and the construction-type more welcomed by the participants. The results introduced *give-verbs* as the dative verb-class with which the participants produced the highest number of double-object constructions (Mean: 1.03). Verbs of *sending*, on the other hand, showed the highest mean score (1.57) which means that the participants used this dative verb-class more in prepositional datives compared with the other dative verb-classes. It may be informative to take a look at all the dative verb-classes used in the second task along with their corresponding mean scores.

Give-verbs (1.03), *Future-having* verbs (1.15), *Causation-of-motion* verbs (1.35), *transfer-of-message* verbs (1.40), and *send*-verbs (1.57).

It should be reminded one more time that a higher mean score corresponds with a higher tendency towards prepositional datives, whereas a lower mean score represents a higher tendency for producing dative double-object construction. The multivariate-tests showed a significant effect for both dative verb-classes (sig. 0.00) and the interaction between verb-classes and years of exposure (sig. 0. 038). Partial eta squared values of 0.56 and 0.24 imply a large effect size for both dative verb-classes and interaction effect of the independent factors respectively. Nevertheless, the exposure-years, as the grouping independent variable, did not show a significant effect with a p-value of 0.774.

Table 3. Descriptive statistics of the grammaticality judgement task

Descriptive statistics			
Exposure_total_years	Mean	Std. deviation	N
Dative_double_total mean			
1_to_6 years	.5000	.11501	22
8_years plus	.6111	.18302	18
Total	.5500	.15766	40
Dative_to_total mean			
1_to_6 years	.6705	.17906	22
8_years plus	.7083	.12541	18
Total	.6875	.15647	40
Benefactive_double_total mean			
1_to_6 years	.4205	.17533	22
8_years plus	.4676	.23938	18
Total	.4417	.20517	40
Benefactive_for_total mean			
1_to_6 years	.6553	.23188	22
8_years plus	.8333	.16667	18
Total	.7354	.22160	40

In the case of the benefactive verbs used in the sentence-making test, the descriptive statistics left us with the *build*-verbs (Mean: 1.57), *performance*-verbs (Mean: 1.72), and *get*-verbs (Mean: 1.47). The comparison of these mean scores introduces *performance*-verbs as the benefactive verb-class which the participants used more in prepositional constructions. In this part, both benefactive verb-classes and the interaction between verb-classes and exposure-years were found significant with P-values 0.002 and 0.011 respectively. Besides, partial eta squared 0.27 for the former, and 0.21 for the latter revealed a large effect size for both factors. In contrast, years-of-exposure as the between-groups factor with a p-value of 0.778 was not a significant factor to discriminate the performance of the participants in the two groups.

Grammaticality judgement test

The third test with 48 experimental English dative and benefactive sentences in both double-object and preposition-object forms was conducted after a lapse of time following the first two tests. Table (3) encompasses the main descriptive statistics of the judgment task.

The total mean scores computed for each of the sentence-types experimented in the third task reveal that the lowest mean score is for the benefactive double-object constructions (Mean: 0.44). In the meantime, the dative double-object constructions received a slightly higher mean score (Mean: 0.55). As could be predicted, the '*for-benefactive*' constructions were labeled grammatical by the participants more than all the other constructions tested in this task. The sentence-type factor as the within-groups variable turned out as a significant factor with a very large effect size (sig. 0.00, partial eta squared: 0.57). However, the interaction between sentence-types and exposure-years did not play an effective and significant role with a P-value of 0.078. An interesting finding obtained in this part of the analyses for the grammaticality judgement task was about the between-groups factor (exposure-years) which came out as a significant factor with a P-value equal to 0.015, and a moderate effect size with partial eta squared of 0.14.

In the process of data analysis for the third task, the tendency of the participants to accept double-object constructions with different dative verb-classes was investigated. Accordingly, it was found that the *causation-of-motion* dative verbs had the highest mean score (Mean: 0.77) for double-object constructions; the lowest mean score (0.27) was obtained for *send*-verbs so far as the double-object sequence was at the heart of attention. All the mean scores found in this part are as follows.

Give-verbs (mean: 0.63), *future-having* verbs (Mean: 0.50), *causation-of-motion* verbs (Mean: 0.77), *send*-verbs (Mean: 0.27), *transfer-of-message* verbs (Mean: 0.58).

Furthermore, multivariate tests showed a significant effect for the dative verb-classes in double-object form with a very large effect size (sig.: 0.000, partial eta squared: 0.67). Similarly, the interaction effect of dative verb-classes and years of exposure (the grouping factor) operated as a significant factor with P-value 0.007, and partial eta squared 0.32 which proves a large effect size. Yet, the effect of exposure-years as the between-groups variable was not significant (sig. 0.120).

Like for the dative verb-classes in double-object sequence, the analyses went forth to unveil the participants' judgment related to the benefactive verb-classes in double-object form. The descriptive-statistic results presented us with the following means scores for the five benefactive verb-classes tested in the grammaticality judgement task.

Build-verbs (Mean: 0.30), *create*-verbs (Mean: 0.55), *prepare*-verbs (Mean: 0.45), *performance*-verbs (Mean: 0.30), *get*-verbs (Mean: 0.58).

The results show that the participants had less certainty in accepting '*build*' and '*performance*' benefactive verb-classes as grammatical double-object constructions. As a result, we found the benefactive verb-classes, as the within-groups factor, a significant variable with a large effect size (P-value: 0.000, and partial eta squared: 0.44). The interaction effect of benefactive verb-classes and exposure-years, however, was not significant (sig. 0.171). Also, as an independent factor, the exposure-years did not come out to be a significant factor with a probability value of 0.530.

The last part of the process of data-analysis for the grammaticality judgement test was to explore the behavior of the participants dealing with different dative and benefactive verb classes in prepositional sequence. Looking into the descriptive results left us with the following verb-classes and their corresponding mean scores when these verbs were presented to the participants in preposition-object form.

Dative verbs + *to*-object:

Give-verbs, mean:0.68; *future-having* verbs, mean: 0.55; *causation-of-motion* verbs, mean: 0.45; *send*-verbs, mean: 0.87; *transfer-of-message* verbs, mean: 0.74

Benefactive verbs + *for*-object:

Build-verbs, mean: 0.75; *create*-verbs, mean: 0.82; *prepare*-verbs, mean: 0.58; *performance*-verbs, mean: 0.71; *get*-verbs, mean: 0.78

Before getting to spotlight some interesting points about the prepositional structures, it needs to be noticed that the maximum possible mean score for all the structures tested in the grammaticality judgement task was 1. From the summary of mean scores presented here, we can see the *causation-of-motion* dative verbs in *to*-object sequence were rated grammatical less than the other dative verb-classes. In this part, the *send*-verbs in prepositional form were rated well-formed more than the other dative verbs. In the case of the benefactives in *for*-object sequence, the lowest level of acceptance was for the *prepare*-verbs while the highest was for the *create*-verbs. Also again, the effect of verb-classes for both datives and benefactives in prepositional-object form was significant with P-values 0.000 and 0.004 respectively. Of course, the interaction of verb-classes and exposure-years was not significant for neither the datives nor the benefactives (p-values 0.361 & 0.161). Finally, the grouping factor; i.e., years of exposure, was not a significant factor in the case of the dative to-object structures (sig.: 0.267), whereas it was significant in the case of the benefactive for-object constructions (sig.: 0.009) with a roughly large effect size (partial eta squared: 0.16).

5. Discussion

In light of the results obtained throughout the data-analyses, the study-questions as the main impetus behind carrying out the present study are going to be addressed in this section. In this direction, each of the questions introduced in the 'purpose section' is presented successively along with the related findings for each one. Moreover, some insightful implications triggered by the results are aimed to be added in conjunction with the prevalent claims in the realm of SLA theory in general, and Markedness hypothesis in particular.

Question No. 1: How can the number of exposure years modify the learners' acquisition of English dative and benefactive alternation?

The participants in this study were randomly selected among Persian learners of English at university level, while almost all of them had institute learning experience. Among those 40 subjects, 22 learners had 2-upto-6 experience-years of English learning, and 18 learners had more than 8 exposure-years. The average of exposure years for the first group was 4.81 years, and that of the second group was calculated as 8.55 years. For the purpose of coming up with two distinguishable groups, the students who fell between the two groups (in terms of the number of exposure-years) were discarded prior to running the analyses. Generally speaking, the number of years of exposure to English language, as the grouping factor, did not play a significant role in the current study. Among all the comparisons drawn across the analyses, only two times the grouping factor played a significant role. It was in the grammaticality judgement test when the exposure-years played a significant role once in the case of the total mean scores for dative and benefactive double-object as well as prepositional-object constructions; and the other time, in the case of participants' acceptance of prepositional benefactives. It should be reminded again that majority of subjects in 8-plus group were at upper-intermediate proficiency level, and those in the other group mainly enjoyed intermediate proficiency level. The reason why years of exposure did not discriminate the participants in this study might be rooted in the proximity of the participants concerning the proficiency level. As a matter of fact, there is not a sharp difference between intermediates and upper-intermediates. Of course, what makes the non-significance effect of exposure-years unexpected is the reality denoted by the frequency of dative/benefactive structures in native English data. During their English learning process, learners are normally exposed to double-object constructions both with dative and benefactive verbs. Consequently, it seems reasonable to expect those learners with more years of exposure to be more proficient with dative and benefactive double-object forms. As mentioned earlier in the 'literature review' section, Rezai (2010) in his study of the acquisition of dative alternation by Persian EFL learners came up with a significant effect for proficiency. It does not need to be mentioned that in such studies like that of Rezai, usually proficiency plays a significant role as long as syntax is considered. Despite this, our study focused on frequency of dative and benefactive structures under the superordinate term 'exposure-years'. Similar to our perspective, Campbell and Tomasello (2001) focused on the frequency of dative and benefactive double-object constructions presented to language learners with the difference that they found the effect of frequency significant. An important fact which should not be overlooked is that exposure-years was found significant two times in the grammaticality judgement test in contrast to the translation and sentence-making tests. What can be deduced from this fact? We believe that the frequency of dative and benefactive double-object forms, which is expected to be correlated with exposure-years, affects more the perception of learners than their production. Grammaticality judgement is naturally based on learners' perception while translation and sentence-making tasks are more production than recognition. This claim is further elaborated in the answer to the second study-question.

Question No. 2: Is there a significant difference between the learners' production and perception of the dative and benefactive constructions in English?

In line with the final comments given for the previous question, this study showed some genuine differences between the production and perception of the English dative/benefactive constructions. The differences which emphasize a kind of avoidance strategy applied by the participants to refrain from producing dative and benefactive double-object constructions whenever they were not completely sure if those preposition-less sequences were ever possible. Looking back to the 'results' section provides us with the statistical evidences to prove the claim. In the translation and sentence-making tests, as the production-based tasks, the participants showed a higher tendency to produce prepositional datives and benefactives than double-object forms. In contrast, the grammaticality judgement revealed that the participants showed more confidence to accept double-object datives and benefactives as well-formed structures (mean scores 0.55 & 0.44 out of 1 for the datives and benefactives respectively). An important point which needs to be stated upon here is the role of the participants' L1 (Persian) which can be traced back specifically

in the translation test. Modern Persian is such a language which does not license double-object sequence with any verb. Hence, we were forced to present our participants with prepositional-object sentences to be translated into English. Although the participants were instructed (both in oral and written form) to translate the sentences in a meaning-based and fluent form in English, they were inevitably affected by the presence of prepositions '*to*' and '*for*' in the Persian sentences. The recent finding confirms 'transfer-based' perspective of Oh and Zubizarreta (2005) where they found a significant effect for L1 in the acquisition of English benefactive structures.

Question No. 3: What role do English verb-classes play in the acquisition of English dative and benefactive double-object patterns?

The most important question addressed in this study was to assess the effect of the semantic and syntactic features of different English dative and benefactive verb-classes on the Persian EFL acquirers. Surprisingly in all the conducted analyses, the dative and benefactive verb-classes were significantly effective. In other words, the participants showed substantially different performances in dealing with dative and benefactive verbs with different semantic features. This finding corresponds with the proposal brought up by Rappaport Hovav and Levin (2008) where they explain that 'a verb's own meaning has a significant function in the formal sequence of the arguments coming with it'. This idea is reasonably applicable to the double-object sequence appearing with English dative and benefactives verbs. The current research presented some interesting facts about the participants' behavior with regard to different verb-classes commonly used in dative and benefactive alternating forms. For instance, the translation task showed that the participants produced *give*-verbs (e.g.: *give*, *lend*, *pass*, *sell*) in double-object constructions more than the other dative verbs. Also, they used *send*-verbs (e.g.: *send*, *mail*) more in prepositional datives than double-object datives. In the case of the benefactives, the subjects used *get*-verbs (e.g.: *buy*, *find*, *order*) more in double-object form, and *performance*-verbs (e.g.: *play*, *write*) more in prepositional-benefactive form. Interestingly, the results of the sentence-making task corresponded exactly with those of the translation task. It means that the same dative and benefactive verb-classes got the highest mean-scores in double-object and prepositional-object constructions. This agreement between the two tasks can decrease the role of L1 transfer which was concluded as an effective factor for the previous study-question. The proof for this claim comes from the fact that in the sentence-making task we did not present the participants with prepositions (*to* & *for*) in the test input. But still, the role of Persian (the participants' L1) cannot be ignored according to the language-transfer theory.

The grammaticality judgement task produced the results concerning the dative and benefactive different verb-classes roughly similar to what produced by the first two tasks. This time, the participants accepted the *causation-of-motion* dative verbs (e.g.: *bring*, *take*) as grammatical double-object constructions more than the other dative verb-classes. Yet, the give-verbs in double-object form were rated grammatical as the second highly accepted dative verb-class after the 'causation-of-motion' verbs. Like in the first and second tests, the double-object *send*-verbs were labeled grammatical by the participants less than the other dative verbs. The last two findings of the judgement task are in complete agreement with those of the first two tasks. For the benefactive verbs, once again, the *get*-verbs were accepted as grammatical in double-object form more than the other benefactive verbs. The *performance*-verbs along with the *build*-verbs (e.g.: *build*, *cook*, *make*) got the lowest grammaticality mean score among benefactive double-object constructions. Two other noteworthy points obtained by the grammaticality judgement test seem informative too. First, after the *send*-verbs, the *transfer-of-message* dative verbs (e.g.: *read*, *teach*, *write*) were accepted more than the other dative verbs in *to*-dative form. Second, the benefactive verbs of *creation* (e.g.: *create*, *design*) received the highest acceptance in *for*-benefactive construction. In short, verb category which is determined mostly based on the verb's semantic features has a prominent effect on the learners' choice of either double-object or prepositional-object datives and benefactives. The effect which seems to be in close relationship with 'case-assignment' of the recipient concerning the dative verbs, and of the beneficiary for the benefactives. Similar to Cuypere, Coster and Baten (2010), we can conclude that whenever learners are easy with the recognition of recipient or beneficiary objects in double-object constructions, they prefer this

preposition-less sequence. However, if learners are not sure about the assigned accusative cases of recipient and beneficiary DPs, then the prepositional object form is preferred to eliminate the potential misunderstandings.

Question No. 4: Where is the position of Markedness Hypothesis in the acquisition of English dative and benefactive alternation?

The last study question was a more general and conceptual one. If being marked or unmarked changes the order of acquisition and even ultimate attainment, then how do the results of this study contribute to markedness proposals? An oversimplified and pervasive viewpoint is that double-object datives and benefactives are more marked than prepositional dative/benefactive structures. The claim then gives rise to the idea that prepositional datives and benefactives are acquired by English L2ers more easily than the double-object ones. In the same way, one can say that double-object benefactives are more marked than double-object datives; therefore, the former are more challenging for the acquirers than the latter. Of course, the results of the present survey match the recently mentioned claims. For example, in both the translation and sentence-making tasks, the subjects used the benefactive verbs in prepositional structures more than the datives verbs. In other words, this study confirms that English L2 learners see dative double-object sequence less marked than benefactive double-object form. The grammaticality judgment task, being more detailed, also approved the confidence of the participants to accept the dative DP + DP (i.e., double-object) constructions more than the benefactive DP + DP samples. Unlike Oh and Zubizarreta (2005) though, we do not believe that English dative double-object forms are unmarked while the benefactive double-object ones are marked. Instead, our confident belief is that the double-object constructions are more marked than the prepositional-object forms both with dative and benefactive verbs. Despite this fact, when it comes to the comparison of datives and benefactives in double-object form, English L2 learners find datives less marked than benefactives. The reason is clear as benefactive double-object constructions are mainly more susceptible to misunderstanding on the part of addressees than dative double-object constructions. From a syntactic perspective, the phenomenon is justified by reminding the fact that the indirect object which is capable of coming before the direct object is a necessary complement of VP in the case of dative verbs, while the indirect object is an omissible adjunct in the case of benefactive verbs. The whole process makes the double-object benefactives more marked than the datives in double-object sequence.

The results yielded in this study give rise to the idea that markedness is not an absolute and dichotomous phenomenon. In the case of the present investigation, there seems to be a markedness continuum on which different dative and benefactive verbs fall according to their semantic/syntactic features. One can expect to encounter some benefactive verbs in double-object sequence less marked than some dative verbs in such preposition-less forms. In the same way, some dative and benefactive verbs can be found more marked than other verbs in their corresponding category. For example, the analyses across the three tests revealed that the '*give*' and '*get*' verb-classes are less marked than '*send*' and '*performance*' verb-classes in double-object form. Furthermore, the grammaticality judgement test disclosed the important point that when the learners are exposed to 'causation-of-motion' verbs in double-object form, they accept them as grammatical more than the other dative verb-classes. The finding which may introduce a new concept in markedness proposals as 'receptive/productive' markedness. It means that being marked or unmarked is modified according to whether learners are to produce double-object dative/benefactive constructions or to perceive and make sense of them. In summary, verb's semantic and syntactic features, ease of case-assignment of objects, and frequency of being used in double-object or prepositional object forms are among the most important factors modifying English l2 learners' acquisition of dative and benefactive alternation.

6. Conclusion

This study was aimed at exploring how Persian EFL learners process English dative and benefactive constructions in general, and their double-object forms in particular. Additionally, the role of exposure to English data across learning years, and also the different verb-classes of datives

and benefactives were at the center of our attention. All these were designed to go round the central concept of Markedness Hypothesis to shed some light on the effects the so-called marked and unmarked forms may have on English L2 acquirers. The results obtained in this study, while confirming the prevalent claims in the field, illustrated how different dative and benefactive verb-classes change learners' choice of double-object and prepositional-object alternatives. Meanwhile, the results gave a boost to Markedness Differential Hypothesis (Eckman, 1977) where it was proved that the dative and benefactive double-object forms in English are more difficult to be learnt by Persian EFL learners since these structures are more marked. Unlike English, the contemporary standard Persian generally lacks double-object patterns; the feature which accounts for the main claim made by MDH. From a more fundamental perspective, the outputs of this study can be grounded in the Chomskyan dichotomy of 'core' and 'peripheral' rules mentioned in the 'introduction' section. Ellis (2008: 383) stipulates that when an L2 feature is marked, second language learners transfer their corresponding L1 feature which is less marked. This idea seems axiomatic; nevertheless, what happens when the target language has two alternatives one of which is marked and the other unmarked? We believe that markedness is not a fixed and absolute concept, rather, it is like a continuum along which the acquisition of the afore-mentioned structures develops when learners move from language-specific marked state to some sort of unmarked state. This development happens when language-specific peripheral rules are reset by practice and use. It is argued that, simultaneous with the resetting process, the core rules (which are usually universal) help learners keep moving from resistance to acceptance of new forms which are more marked in L2 than their counterparts in L1.

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