

The Interrelationship among L1 Writing Skills, L2 Writing Skills, and L2 Proficiency of Iranian EFL Learners at Different Proficiency Levels

Amir Marzban

Department of English Language, Islamic Azad University, Qaemshahr Branch, Qaemshahr, Iran

Faezeh Esmaeelnia Jalali

Allameh Mohaddes Nouri University, Mazandaran, Iran

Abstract—This research aimed to investigate the interrelationship among L1 writing skills, L2 writing skills, and L2 proficiency of Iranian English language learners at different proficiency levels. To this aim, two groups of advanced and lower-intermediate participants consisting of twenty learners were asked to write on the same topic in Persian and English in one week interval. Subsequently, the compositions were evaluated based on Jacob Composition Profile (1981). Then, the Pearson product-moment correlation was calculated to examine the correlation between the compositions' overall scores in Persian and English in both groups. To determine which variables, L1 writing skills or L2 proficiency, is a more significant predictor of L2 writing at these different proficiency levels, and investigate the difference between them, multiple regression analysis was calculated. The results displayed large correlation between compositions' overall scores in advanced group, but not in lower-intermediate group. Also, L1 writing was a more significant predictor at advanced level; however, at lower-intermediate level, L2 proficiency was a more significant predictor of L2 writing. These findings entail some pedagogical implications for effective language teaching in L2 writing classes.

Index Terms—L1 writing skills, L2 writing skills, L2 proficiency, cross-linguistic transfer, linguistic threshold, linguistic interdependence, common underlying proficiency

I. INTRODUCTION

Writing is considered as an important instrument through which People can communicate with each other by sharing ideas, convincing and persuading one another. For most of the EFL learners, writing in a second language is so difficult, since writing skill has not received enough attention so far. However, the significant role of writing skill and its importance in demonstrating students' learning ability cannot be denied in writing in the first or second language. As a result, any studies that could focus on writing skill and ways to facilitate its learning would be very important.

Similarities can be found between first language writing and second language writing at superficial levels and between the processes that the writers go through (Silva 1993, as cited in Blackmore-Squires, 2010). As a result, enough attention must be paid to the relationship between L1 and L2 writing to find how and in what degree L1 can facilitate the acquisition of the L2. In other words, it must be found when and how positive transfer of L1 skills happens in the language acquisition process. Positive transfer of skills does not occur randomly; it can only happen under right conditions. Based on the Linguistic Threshold Hypothesis (LTH) (Cummins, 2000), if a learner reaches a critical level in L2 proficiency, positive transfer of skills occurs in the L2 acquisition process. In other words, L2 proficiency below this critical level may have a detrimental effect on the development of L2 acquisition. However, based on Linguistic Interdependence Hypothesis of Cummins (1979) only if a learner has sufficient exposure to L2 and motivation to learn it, language skills will transfer from first language to second language.

Following the contention made by LTH (Cummins 1979), this study concentrates on the relationship between Iranian language learners L1 and L2 writing skills at high and low proficiency levels to find if low proficiency in second/foreign language impedes the positive transfer of writing skills from L1 to L2. It also tries to investigate whether or not those at higher levels of language proficiency can positively transfer the skills between languages. The role of L1 knowledge and its influence on L2 acquisition is an important issue in the field of language learning. It is also so important to find the role of L2 proficiency on the relationship between L1 and L2 writing, and the transfer of writing skills between languages.

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

A. Linguistic Threshold Hypothesis

The Linguistic Threshold Hypothesis (Cummins, 2000) asserts that a minimum level in L2 proficiency must be passed before L2 learners can reap any benefits from L1. In other words, they must gain a certain amount of control

over L2 before applying their L1 skills to L2. This certain amount "is referred to as a "threshold level of linguistic competence" by Cummins (1979) or a "language ceiling" by Clark (1979).

Cummins's (1981) states that transfer of skills between languages is only possible after a learner has achieved a threshold level of L2 proficiency. He contends that for an effective language transfer, a minimum level of linguistic competence is necessary, and the better the L2 proficiency level of the learners, the higher transferability of the L1 writing skills to L2 writing could be.

B. Linguistic Interdependence Hypothesis

Linguistic Interdependence Hypothesis is the other perspective through which Cummins (1979) has examined L2 acquisition. In this hypothesis, Cummins (1979) proposed that "only if a learner has sufficient exposure to L2 and motivation to learn it, language skills will transfer from first language to second language." Based on Cummins (1984), the "underlying cognitive/ academic proficiency," which is common across languages allows the cognitive/ academic or literacy related skills to be transferred across them.

This Hypothesis reveals the relationship between L1 and L2 learning and indicates how L1 affects learning of another language. In other words, first and the second language are dependent on each other despite the differences between them. According to this hypothesis, certain L1 linguistic knowledge and skills can be positively transferred during the process of L2 acquisition, and transfer happens automatically (Cummins, 1979).

C. Common Underlying Proficiency

Common underlying proficiency (Cummins, 2000) provides the base for the development of both the first language and second language. The term CUP has also been used to refer to the cognitive/ academic proficiency that affects performance in both languages (Cummins, 2000). The relationship between first and second language literacy skills suggests that effective development of L1 skills can provide a conceptual foundation for long-term growth in L2 literacy skills. As Cummins (2000) asserts, "Conceptual knowledge developed in L1 makes input in the L2 comprehensible." He states that when a student learns a set of skills in one language, he/she can transfer these skills when learning another language.

D. Related Studies

There is a growing interest about the possible relationships among first language and English as foreign/ second language and language proficiency level. As a result, a number of investigations have been done about the interrelationship between L1 and L2 writing quality and L2 proficiency in recent years.

De Jesus (1984) studied the relationship between L1 and L2 writing quality of 344 Spanish-speaking university students learning English in Puerto Rico. Finally, his correlational analysis revealed a moderate correlation between students' Spanish and English writing score.

Other investigations about the relationship between the students' L1 (Japanese) and L2 (English) writing skills were conducted by Hirose and Sasaki. The two studies of Hirose and Sasaki (1994) on 19 EFL university learners, and Sasaki and Hirose (1996) on 70 EFL university students also revealed that there is a significant relationship among students' L1 and L2 writing scores. Thus, they concluded that students' compositions in English and Japanese are similar in quality. Similarly, Kamimura (2001) studied the correlation between L1 and L2 writing skills of 45 Japanese EFL students and found that there is a significant relationship between the skills in both languages.

In contrast to these quantitative analyses, there are some studies which did not reveal a significant correlation between L1 writing skills and L2 writing skills. For instance, Carson, Carrell, Silberstein, Kroll, and Kuehn (1990) examined the correlation between first and second language writing performance of 57 Japanese students and 48 Chinese students Japanese. The results of their study revealed a weak but positive correlation between writing skills of Japanese students ($r = .23$) but they did not find a positive relationship for Chinese students' composition skills ($r = -.19$). Pennington and So's (1993) case study also revealed data that did not support the L1-L2 positive significant writing relationship. They studied the writing performances of six university students and found only a weak correlation between their L1 (English or Chinese) and L2 (Japanese) writing performance. Similarly, Abu-Akel (1997) studied the relationship among writing quality of 55 Arabic students and 45 Hebrew students. Finally, he found a weak but positive correlation for Arabic students but the correlation between writing quality of Hebrew students was non-significant.

Ito (2004) in his study of 262 Japanese EFL students examined the interrelationship among their L1 and L2 writing skills, and L2 proficiency. Finally, he concluded that there is a significant correlation among participants' L1 and L2 composition scores, and their L2 knowledge. He also found that participants' L1 writing skills are a more significant predictor of their L2 writing skills than their L2 proficiency.

In another study Dweik and Abu Al Hommos (2007) studied on writing skill of 20 bilingual students studying English in Jordan. They found that Arabic writing skills can be transferred positively to English despite the differences between two the languages. Likewise, Alsamandani (2010) investigated the relationship between Saudi university students' writing competence in Arabic and English and found a strong correlation between them. The study also examined the relationship between students' self-regulatory abilities and their L1 and L2 writing competence and revealed that those who scored high in L1 or L2 writing had high self-regulation abilities.

In another study, Ito (2009) investigated the existence of the threshold level in L2 writing quality of 317 Japanese university students and found that the participants' essays in L1 and L2 were similar in quality. He also found that participants' low English proficiency has a detrimental effect on their L2 writing.

Yigzaw (2013) also tried to find whether grade 11 students' L1 (Amharic) writing and their L2 (English) proficiency could significantly predict their L2 writing. He also studied whether the students' L2 vocabulary knowledge, grammar, and reading could significantly determine their L2 writing. The results indicated that all the independent variables significantly correlated with the dependent variable (L2 writing); however, only students' L1 writing, first semester overall English and reading test scores were significant predictors of their L2 writing.

In order to examine the transfer of writing skills between Persian and English few researches have been done. Two cases of these studies are conducted by Zia Houseini and Derakhshan (2006) and Javadi-Safa, Vahdany, and Khalili (2013).

Ziahosseini and Derakhshan (2006) examined the correlation between Iranian university students' L1 and L2 writing skills. Thus, the participants wrote argumentative and narrative essays in Persian and English, and the essays were evaluated based on ESL composition profile (Jacobs, Zinkgraf, Wormuth, Hartfiel, & Hughey, 1981). Finally, they concluded that there is a significant relationship between students' L1 and L2 writing tasks.

In a similar study Javadi-Safa, et al., (2013) investigated the relationship between Persian and English writing skills of upper-intermediate learners. His study not only examined the relationship between overall scores of compositions but also investigated the transfer of each of five major components of ESL composition Profile (Jacobset al., 1981). For this purpose, the students wrote two different argumentative essays one in Persian and one in English. Then, the essays were evaluated based on ESL compositions profile. Finally the results showed a significant correlation between the overall scores of the compositions and also between the five writing sub-skills in both languages.

As reviewed so far, a number of investigations have been conducted throughout the world about the possible relationship between L1 and L2 writing quality and L2 proficiency of language learners. However, there is not a clear agreement on the relationship among these three variables in L2 writing researches. As a result, there is a need to continue investigating the relationship among these variables. Moreover, most of these studies did not take in to account the role of L2 proficiency and only investigated the relationship between the participants' L1 and L2 writing skills, and examined the strength of positive transfer of skills between languages at high proficiency levels. As a result, there is a need to examine the role of L1 on L2 writing and transfer of skills between the two languages at different proficiency levels. Thus, this study tries to respond to the following research questions:

1. Is there any significant relationship between Iranian advanced learners' overall proficiency in L1 (Persian) writing skills and L2 (English) writing skills?
2. Is there any significant relationship between Iranian lower-intermediate learners' overall proficiency in L1 (Persian) writing skills and L2 (English) writing skills?
3. Are Iranian EFL learners' L1 writing skills a more significant predictor of L2 writing skills than their L2 proficiency at advanced proficiency level?
4. Are Iranian EFL learners' L1 writing skills a more significant predictor of L2 writing skills than their L2 proficiency at lower-intermediate proficiency level?

III. METHODOLOGY

A. Participants

A total of seventy-eight (54 females, 24males) Iranian EFL students studying at a private English Institute in Babol comprised the population of this study. They have been studying English for some years at the Institute and they all have already passed some English writing courses and were familiar with academic writing. Some of them were also university students studying English Translation; as a result, they have also passed some English writing courses at the University. The participants were both females and males between the ages of 17 to 25. Then a version of Oxford Placement Test was administered to all the volunteer students who took part in this exam to find two groups of participants needed for the study. Based on the result of OPT, twenty (15 females, 5 males) participants who scored between 30 to 39 out of 60 were considered as "lower-intermediate" level and twenty others (17 females, 3 males) who scored between 48 to 54 out of 60 were considered as "advanced" level.

They are two reasons for selecting these proficiency levels. First, based on the Cummins' LTH (1979) and results of some studies (e.g. Ito, 2009; Behjat & Sadighi, 2010) low proficiency level impedes the positive transfer of writing skills from first language to second language, while based on the results of Ito's (2009) study, EFL learners can positively transfer their skills across languages at intermediate & advanced proficiency levels, and also based on Cummins' (1979) LIH, high proficiency level students can easily transfer their L1 writing skills to L2 while writing in English. According to Ito's (2009) study, this critical level exist somewhere below the intermediate level. Hence, in order to support these hypotheses, and to show that low proficiency level students may face difficulties in transferring their skills from their L1 to L2 while writing in English, but high level students may have few difficulties in transferring skills and do it more easily, this study investigated two groups of lower-intermediate & advanced learners to find whether there is a relationship between their first language (Persian) and foreign language (English) writing skills at

these language proficiency levels. Second, only students at these proficiency levels (advanced & lower-intermediate) were familiar with academic writing and have passed English writing courses at the Institute or at University.

B. Instruments

In order to collect the necessary data for the present study two testing instruments were used, including one English proficiency test and two writing exams. To determine the participants' level of L2 proficiency the Oxford Placement Test (OPT) was administered and those students who scored between 30 to 39 out of 60 on this test were considered as "lower-intermediate" level and those who scored between 49 to 54 out of 60 on this test were considered as "advanced" level.

The second testing instrument included two writing tasks, one in Persian and the other one English. The participants were asked to write an Expository composition on a given topic. The reason for choosing an Expository composition is that most standardized tests often include an Expository prompt and this genre is commonly used as a tool for classroom examination. In addition, since in most of the previous studies the relationship between L1 writing skills and L2 writing skills has been investigated in Argumentative and Narrative genre of essay writing, there was a need to investigate the relationship between these variables in an Expository composition. The Persian topic was the translated version of the same English topic. Like other studies, in order to reduce the variability of the raters' evaluation and also participants' performance from topic to topic, the students were asked to write on the same topic in Persian and English (e.g., Friedlander, 1990; Jacobs, Zinkgraf, Wormuth, Hartfiel, & Hughey, 1981; Reid, 1990).

The compositions were evaluated by two raters in both languages, based on ESL Composition Profile (Jacobs et al., 1981, p. 91) for analytical scoring including 21 analytical subcomponents of five major components of writing (Content, Organization, Vocabulary, Language use, and Mechanics). These five major components were differentially weighted. Content as the first component received 30 points, language use was given 25 points, organization and vocabulary were given 20 points, and mechanics received the least emphasis about 5 points. The concepts represented by the Profile criteria are consisted of four mastery levels of "excellent to very good" "good to average" "fair to poor" and "very poor".

Based on ESL Composition Profile (1981), Compositions were rated through holistic judgment for 21 analytical subcomponents of five major components of writing including:

- 1) Content: knowledge of subject, development of thesis, range of substance, and relevance to assigned topic.
- 2) Organization: fluency of expression, clarity of stated/supported ideas, quality of organization, succinctness, logical sequence of ideas, and cohesion
- 3) Vocabulary: range of vocabularies, effectiveness of word/idiom choice and usage, register appropriateness, and word form mastery.
- 4) Language use: effectiveness and complexity of constructions, and grammatical correctness including: tense, agreement, articles, prepositions, pronouns, number, word order/function.
- 5) Mechanics: few errors of punctuation, spelling, paragraphing, and capitalization.

However, since there is no capitalization in Persian writing it was not taken in to consideration in evaluating Persian compositions.

Procedure

This study involved three sessions of English proficiency test, L1 writing task and L2 writing task which were conducted in one week-interval. At the first session a version of English proficiency test (OPT) was administered to identify the participants' L2 proficiency level and choose the two groups of advanced and lower-intermediate level which were needed for conducting this study. One week after OPT administration the first writing task was conducted. At this session two groups of students took part in the writing task independently. In order to do that, half of the students in advanced group (10 students) were asked to write an Expository essay on a particular topic in Persian and the other half (10 students) were asked to write in English on the same topic. The same procedure was used for the lower-intermediate group as well. One week later which was the third session, the second writing task was administered and those students in advanced group who had written in Persian were asked to write in English and those who had written in English were asked to write in Persian on the same topic. Similarly the lower-intermediate group participated in the second writing test.

For both writing tasks, the participants were not told what topic they were going to write on, and they also did not know that they had to write on the same topic in both languages. During each writing task, the participants had to write at least 250 words in about 45 minutes for each Persian and English composition. Also, half of the participants in each group wrote an essay in English and the remaining half did so in Persian to neutralize a possible order effect of L1 and L2 writing tasks.

After collecting participants' compositions to have more reliable results in the rating scores, the compositions were given to the trained raters to be evaluated. There were two raters for evaluating Persian compositions and two raters for evaluating English ones. The English compositions were evaluated by two qualified English language teachers, based on ESL Composition Profile (Jacobs et al., 1981). Similarly, the Persian compositions were rated by two qualified Persian language teachers, using a Persian counterpart of Jacobs et al., (1981) profile developed by Persian writing specialists. Also, before evaluating students' essays, there was a brief session to explain the scoring procedure to the raters.

The score for each composition was the average of two independent ratings. After collecting data, it was analyzed through SPSS. To examine the interrelationship among participants' Persian and English writing skills, Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient was calculated between the mean scores of Persian and English compositions for both groups of learners at advanced and lower-intermediate level. Following that, to determine which variables, L1 writing skills or L2 proficiency, is a more significant predictor of L2 writing at these proficiency levels, and investigate the difference between them, multiple regression analysis was calculated.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The inter-rater reliability was examined to ensure the consistency of the four raters' evaluations (the two Persian raters and two English raters). The inter-rater reliability indexes were high for both Persian raters (.881) and English raters (.917) in lower-intermediate group of participants. They were also high for both Persian raters (.867) and English raters (.884) in advanced group of participants which indicate a strong correlation and are acceptable for a reliable writing assessment.

Descriptive analysis of compositions revealed higher mean scores for Persian compositions in comparison to English ones for advanced proficiency learners, which indicate that writing in English is more difficult for the students than writing in Persian (Table1). It is because Persian is the students' native language. It is also similar to the results of previous studies conducted by Zia Houseini and Derakhshan (2006) and Javadi-safa et al., (2013) which revealed higher mean scores for Persian compositions. Based on this difference between mean scores, these researchers concluded that transfer of skills between the languages is from Persian to English. Furthermore, they concluded that the smaller value of standard deviation for Persian compositions shows more homogeneity between them which is also similar to the results of the present study (Table1).

TABLE1.
DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS OF THE SCORES FOR L1 WRITING AND L2 WRITING FOR THE ADVANCED GROUP

| | N | Minimum | Maximum | Mean | Std. Deviation | Variance |
|--------------------|----|---------|---------|---------|----------------|----------|
| L1Writing Advanced | 20 | 76.50 | 95.00 | 86.5250 | 5.00717 | 25.072 |
| L2Writing Advanced | 20 | 68.50 | 91.75 | 82.5625 | 5.92934 | 35.157 |
| Valid N (listwise) | 20 | | | | | |

In a similar way, the mean scores of Persian compositions in lower-intermediate learners were higher than the mean scores of English ones, which indicate that writing in English is more difficult for the students, and also this difference must be attributed to the participants' lower proficiency in the second language (Table2). The value of the standard deviation was also lower for Persian compositions in comparison to English ones (Table 2), which suggests greater homogeneity between each of Persian compositions (Table 2). It is worth mentioning that the difference between the mean scores of Persian compositions and the mean scores of English ones is greater for lower-intermediate learners than the advanced learners. This difference is due to the difference in their L2 proficiency level, the lower the proficiency level the greater the difference. It indicates that low proficiency level learners cannot easily transfer their skills from Persian to English.

TABLE2.
DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS OF THE SCORES FOR L1 WRITING AND L2 WRITING
AT THE LOWER-INTERMEDIATE GROUP

| | N | Minimum | Maximum | Mean | Std. Deviation | Variance |
|--------------------|----|---------|---------|---------|----------------|----------|
| L1WritingLow | 20 | 78.50 | 96.00 | 87.2750 | 4.87063 | 23.723 |
| L2WritingLow | 20 | 46.50 | 74.75 | 61.0125 | 8.40914 | 70.714 |
| Valid N (listwise) | 20 | | | | | |

In order to answer the first research question about the relationship between advanced language learners' L1 (Persian) writing skills and L2 (English) writing skills, Pearson product moment correlation analysis was run after confirming the normality of distribution scores through a Shapiro-Wilk. The results revealed a large correlation ($r = .926, p < .05$) (Table 3) which indicates a significant relationship between L1 (Persian) and L2 (English) writing skills of advanced language learners. The result is consistent with the Linguistic Interdependence Hypothesis which claims that certain L1 linguistic knowledge and skills can be positively transferred during the process of L2 acquisition, and transfer happens automatically (Cummins, 1979) specially at high proficiency levels which is congruent with Linguistic Threshold Hypothesis. The finding is also consistent with the results of similar studies investigating L1-L2 writing relationship (e.g. De Jesus, 1984; Hirose & Sasaki, 1994; Sasaki & Hirose, 1996; Kamimura, 2001; Ziahouseini & Derakhshan, 2006; Dweik & Abu Al Hommos, 2007; Alsamandani, 2010; Javadi-safaet al., 2013) and suggests that the students' Expository essays in Persian and English are similar in quality. However, it is inconsistent with the studies of Carson, Carrell, Silberstein, Kroll, and Kuehn (1990), Pennington and So (1993), and Abu-Akel (1997) which revealed data that did not support the L1-L2 positive significant writing relationship.

TABLE3.
RESULT OF THE PEARSON PRODUCT-MOMENT CORRELATION FOR THE WRITING OF THE ADVANCED GROUP

| | | L1WritingAdvanced | L2WritingAdvanced |
|-------------------|---------------------|-------------------|-------------------|
| L1WritingAdvanced | Pearson Correlation | 1 | .926** |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | | .000 |
| | N | 20 | 20 |
| L2WritingAdvanced | Pearson Correlation | .926** | 1 |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | .000 | |
| | N | 20 | 20 |

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Following that, in order to answer the second research question, about the relationship between lower-intermediate language learners' L1 writing skills and their L2 writing skills, first the normality of distribution scores was confirmed through Shapiro-Wilk. Then, Pearson product moment correlation analysis was run to examine the correlation between the overall scores of Persian and English essays. The result showed no significant correlation ($r = .009$, $p > .05$) (Table 4) which indicates that there is not a significant relationship between Persian and English writing skills of students at this proficiency level. This finding supports the Linguistic Threshold Hypothesis which states that a minimum threshold in L2 proficiency must be passed before L2 learners can reap any benefits from L1. Based on LTH (Cummins, 1979) low proficiency in foreign language impedes the positive transfer of skills from L1 to L2. The result is consistent with previous studies which indicated that low proficiency level has a "short-circuit" effect on L2 acquisition (Sasaki & Hirose, 1996; Ito, 2004; Ito, 2009).

TABLE4.
RESULT OF THE PEARSON PRODUCT-MOMENT CORRELATION FOR THE WRITING OF THE LOWER-INTERMEDIATE GROUP

| | | L1WritingLow | L2WritingLow |
|--------------|---------------------|--------------|--------------|
| L1WritingLow | Pearson Correlation | 1 | .009 |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | | .968 |
| | N | 20 | 20 |
| L2WritingLow | Pearson Correlation | .009 | 1 |
| | Sig. (2-tailed) | .968 | |
| | N | 20 | 20 |

The third research question was also examined using multiple regression analysis to determine which variables, L1 writing skills or L2 proficiency, is a more significant predictor of L2 writing at advanced proficiency level. In order to run the multiple regression analysis, three assumption of normality for data distribution, independence of observation, and model fit were tested through Normal P-P Plot, Durbin-Watson test, and ANOVA test. Then, a multiple regression was run to predict L2 writing from L1 writing and L2 proficiency. The results showed that L1 writing (1.115) is a more significant predictor than L2 proficiency (-.289) for the advanced group participants (Table5) which indicates that L1 writing skills play a more significant role in L2 writing than L2 proficiency scores at advanced level. This may mean the increase in students' L1 writing scores may increase their L2 writing scores. Conversely, it may mean the less the students' L1 writing scores indicate the less their L2 writing scores would be. This result suggests that at high proficiency levels students' L1 writing skills affect their L2 writing skills development. The result is congruent with Ito's (2004) study which revealed that L1 writing skills were a more significant predictor of L2 writing skills than L2 proficiency ;although, in his study both of the two variables contribute significantly to L2 writing skills. It is also consisted with Yigzaw's study (2013) which indicated that L1 writing significantly correlated with L2writing, and was a significant predictor of student's L2 writing. The finding supports Cummins' (1979) Linguistic Interdependence Hypothesis, and suggests that at high proficiency levels students' L1 writing skills have greater impact on their L2 writing skills than their L2 proficiency levels.

TABLE5.
THE COEFFICIENTS TABLE TO PREDICT L2 WRITING FROM L1 WRITING AND L2 PROFICIENCY IN THE ADVANCED GROUP

| Model | Coefficients ^a | Unstandardized Coefficients | | Standardized Coefficients | | 95.0% Confidence Interval for B | | |
|-------|---------------------------|-----------------------------|------------|---------------------------|--------|---------------------------------|-------------|-------------|
| | | B | Std. Error | Beta | t | Sig. | Lower Bound | Upper Bound |
| 1 | (Constant) | .896 | 15.550 | | .058 | .955 | -31.912 | 33.705 |
| | L1WritingAdvanced | 1.115 | .106 | .941 | 10.475 | .000 | .890 | 1.339 |
| | L2ProficiencyAdvanced | -.289 | .275 | -.094 | -1.049 | .309 | -.869 | .292 |

Dependent Variable: L2WritingAdvanced

Similarly, the fourth research question was tested using multiple regression analysis, after testing three assumption of normality for data distribution, independence of observation, and model fit through Normal P-P Plot, Durbin-Watson test, and ANOVA test. The results showed that L2 proficiency (2.70) is a more powerful predictor than L1 writing(.026) for the lower-intermediate group participants (Table 6). The results indicated that L2 proficiency plays a more significant role in L2 writing than L1 writing skills at lower-intermediate level, and L2 proficiency is a more significant predictor of L2 writing. This may mean the increase in students' L2 proficiency scores may increase their L2 writing scores. Conversely, it may mean the less the students' L2 proficiency scores indicate the less their L2 writing scores

would be. This result implies that at low level of L2 proficiency students' proficiency levels affect their L2 writing skill development. The result supports Cummins' (1979) Linguistic Threshold Hypothesis which states that a minimum threshold in L2 proficiency must be passed before L2 learners can reap any benefits from L1. The finding is consistent with the results of the study of Sasaki and Hirose (1996). Also it is congruent with other similar studies which examined the relationship between L2 writing skills and L2 proficiency (e.g., Pennington & So, 1993; Ito, 2004). However, it is inconsistent with statistical investigations of Sasaki and Hirose (1994).

TABLE 6.
THE COEFFICIENTS TABLE TO PREDICT L2 WRITING FROM L1 WRITING AND L2 PROFICIENCY IN LOWER-INTERMEDIATE GROUP

| Model | Unstandardized Coefficients | | Standardized Coefficients | |
|------------------|-----------------------------|------------|---------------------------|-------------|
| | B | Std. Error | Beta | t |
| 1 (Constant) | -34.028 | 19.000 | | -1.791 .091 |
| L1WritingLow | .026 | .179 | .015 | .147 .885 |
| L2ProficiencyLow | 2.700 | .310 | .904 | 8.706 .000 |

a. Dependent Variable: L2WritingLow

V. CONCLUSIONS

The results of the present study show that there is a significant relationship between L1 (Persian) writing skills and L2 (English) writing skills in advanced group; however, no significant relationship is found in lower-intermediate group. It indicates that the students make use of their L1 (Persian) when writing in their L2 (English) as a tool to facilitate their writing process. In fact, learners transfer their L1 writing skills to L2 writing, and these skills are transferred across languages positively. However, L2 proficiency might mediate the successful transfer of L1 writing skills. Lower proficiency writers may not be able to easily transfer L1 writing skills when writing in a L2. Therefore, advanced learners appear to be better able to use Persian writing skills and are also better able to make use of these skills while writing in English than lower-intermediate learners.

Moreover, based on the findings of the study at higher proficiency level students' L1 (Persian) writing skills are more significant predictor of their L2 (English) writing. Therefore, it can be concluded that at high levels of language proficiency, writing difficulty is due to the lack of writing abilities in language learners, and that they have not received enough instruction in Persian or they are not good at writing even in their L1. In fact, these EFL writers transfer both good and weak writing skills from Persian to English, and weaker writers' failure to produce a well-formed composition in English is based on their failure to write well in Persian. In other words, skills that have never been acquired in their L1 could not be transferred to the L2.

Furthermore, at lower proficiency level, students' L2 proficiency is a more significant predictor of their L2 (English) writing than their L1 (Persian) writing. As a result, it can be concluded that at low proficiency levels, writing difficulty is due to the lack of enough linguistic knowledge, and shows that language learners have limited English proficiency, thus they just need more L2 practice and exposure in their L2. In other words, low L2 proficiency level is an impediment to transfer skills from L1 to L2. Even if language learners are perfect L1 writers, and have the knowledge to produce a well-formed composition by expressing ideas, supporting, and organizing them in Persian, they cannot easily transfer these skills to English. Following the Linguistic Threshold Hypothesis (LTH)(Cummins, 1981) language transfer is possible only after a threshold level of L2 proficiency has been attained, and learners reach a certain level in L2 proficiency.

Based on the findings of the present study, it can be concluded that EFL teachers and curricula developers must pay attention to the relationship between Persian writing and English writing. In fact they should study Persian and English compositions to find their similarities and differences and to acquaint themselves with learners' weaknesses and strengths. Thus, they should take into account teaching how to write in English alongside with Persian to have good results in their L2 writing classes. This indicates that it is better to integrate the instruction of the two languages in EFL textbooks which makes them pedagogically more meaningful and practical. However, based on the findings of the present study at lower-intermediate level, for an effective transfer of writing skills from L1 to L2 a minimum level of linguistic competence is necessary. Therefore, teaching how to write in English alongside with Persian is only effective if the learners have passed a minimum level of linguistic competence.

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Amir Marzban is an assistant professor of TESOL at Islamic Azad University, Qaemshahr branch. His research interests include conversation analysis, L2 reading & writing, CALL, and teacher education. He has published in both Iranian and International journals and also has presented in many international conferences.

Faezeh Esmaeelnia Jalali graduated with an M.A. in Teaching English as a foreign language from Allameh Mohaddes Nouri University, Mazandaran, Iran. She is currently teaching English courses at different language institutes in Iran.