

## **Fossilization in Inflectional Morphemes by Persian Learners of English**

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### **Abstract**

This paper provides a cross-sectional study of the fossilized endstate L2 English grammar of freshmen and junior university students of English. Results are presented from spontaneous production and grammaticality judgment tasks of two groups of the students, high-level (24) and low-level (19), concentrating on use of 3<sup>rd</sup> person simple present marker (-s), past tense marker (-ed) and pronominal case assignment. Data showed that despite low rate of suppliance of 3<sup>rd</sup> person simple present tense marker (-s) just in spontaneous task, students' suppliance of past tense marker (-ed) and pronominal case assignment is about perfect at both levels and tasks. Syntactic correlates (such as case assignment and presence of overt subject) were completely accurate, suggesting no underlying impairment to functional categories or features. There is some evidence from the L1, which has the person and number features of the subject marked by verbal agreement but usually lacks the third person singular in production task.

**Keywords:** Missing Surface Inflection Hypothesis; Impaired Representation Hypothesis; Fossilization; Case Assignment; Tense; Persian

### **1. Introduction**

The term interlanguage was first proposed by Selinker (1972). She stated that the second language learners' attempts to say sentences of a target language compel us to hypothesize the existence of a separate linguistic system called interlanguage. According to

Selinker there are latent language structures in mind that make language learning possible and successful language learners are those who reactivate these latent structures.

Krashen (1981) refers to hypothesis-testing for explaining how second language learners develop interlanguage. They are in continuous act of testing their hypothesis to improve their interlanguage. Based on the input they receive in the second language, they build their hypothesis. If this is confirmed, they move to another category, otherwise they revise it until they hit the correct option. However this is not always true and sometimes they never reach the correct option. This state to which we will refer to below, is called fossilization.

But perspectives have changed since 1990. Recent researches of Second Language Acquisition (SLA) deal with nature of interlanguage representation. Growing interest in understanding nature of interlanguage led to birth of new hypotheses. These hypotheses include Initial state (Vainika & Young-Scholten 1994), End state (Lardiere, 1998a) as well as developing state of interlanguage (Haznedar and Schwartz 1997). Some of these hypotheses are related to the existence of thematic verbs without inflectional morphology (Tense and AGR) after many years of being exposed to L2 language.

Most of current SLA researchers try to explore the nature of interlanguage representation. They have studied nature of interlanguage both in the early and end states of language learning. Han (2004) distinguishes between global and local fossilization. Globally, it affects the entire interlanguage, making it unlikely that any further L2 learning will occur. On the other hand, fossilization can be seen in local terms, such that one particular subsystem (e.g. syntax) or even a particular feature (e.g. tense markers) can fossilize while development in other areas proceeds unadated. This study addresses the latter. It investigates whether the learners' inflectional morphemes play a role in English fossilization.

## 2. Fossilization

One of hot issues in the field of second language learning is fossilization. Brown (1994) defines fossilization as the relatively permanent incorporation of incorrect linguistic forms into a person's second language competence.

Fossilization is a phenomenon which is commonly observed in second language learners' linguistic and especially in phonological system that is referred to as foreign accent. Fossilized features are indispensable part of language learner's system and do not vanish even after being exposed to target language for a long time.

But why do items become fossilized? To answer this question is not an easy job and needs careful studies and analysis. However some researchers have proposed explanations for its occurrence. Brown (1994) attributes fossilization to affective and cognitive feedback. They state that fossilized items are those ungrammatical or incorrect items in the speech of a learner that gain first positive affective feedback (I like it) and then positive cognitive feedback (I understand it) which reinforce incorrect form and result in fossilization. Selinker (1972) accounts for fossilization through five central processes:

1. language transfer
2. transfer of training
3. strategies of second language learning
4. strategies of second language communication
5. overgeneralization of target linguistics material

The question syntactic features of missed or variable inflectional morphology are present in second language learners' grammar has recently received much attention from SLA researchers. Two frames of thoughts were born out of studies conducted in this respect. Impaired Representation Hypothesis (IRH) which claims that syntactic features related to missed or inflectional morphology are absent or underspecified (inert) in L2 learners' grammar (Meisel, 1997; Eubank, 1994; Beck, 1998). Missing Surface Inflection Hypothesis (MSIH), unlike IRH, states that syntactic feature of missed or variable inflectional morphology are present at L2 learners interlanguage grammar (Lardiere, 1998a; Lardiere, 1998b; Prevost & White, 2000). And this discrepancy between Logical

Form (LF) and Phonetic Form (PF) occurs due to problems other than syntax.

### **2.1 Missing Surface Inflection Hypothesis**

The term MSIH was first proposed by Prevost and White (2000). They used the word 'surface' intentionally to imply that the inflections are absent only at surface level rather than abstract level. MSIH proposes that L2 learners have unconscious knowledge of functional projections and features underlying Tense and Agreement. However learners sometimes have a problem with realization of surface morphology (Prevost and White 2000). This hypothesis assumes that there is dissociation between knowledge of surface morphology and knowledge of abstract syntactic features. The mismatch between these two types of knowledge is related to mapping problem between surface forms and abstract features (Franceschina, 2001).

To test their hypothesis, Prevost and White examined spontaneous speech of two learners of French and two adult learners of German as an L2. None of the subjects have had exposure to L2 before they arrived in the country where it is spoken. They investigated language learners' use of finite and non-finite forms to see whether alternative use of finite and non-finite forms is rule-governed. They predicted that based on MSIH finite forms must occur only in finite position but non-finite forms will sometimes be used as a substitute for finite forms. On the other hand according to impaired representation hypothesis there will be no limitation on occurrence of finite and non-finite forms and finite forms will occur both in finite and non-finite positions. The result of their study showed that almost all of the verbs occurring in finite positions are finite and it is the non-finite verbs that alternate between finite and non-finite positions. This is in favor of MSIH. They proposed that access to the finite forms is sometimes blocked perhaps due to processing or communication pressure (Ionin and Wexler, 2002).

Lardiere (1998a/b) investigated the relationship between surface morphology and knowledge of abstract syntactic features and found that variability in the use of Tense and AGR morphology doesn't

imply impairment of abstract features related to these categories. Lardier (1998a) studied L2 English of Patty Chinese speaker who has lived in the U.S. for more than 18 years and was at the end state of her grammar. He found that although Patty's supply of past tense marker (-ed) is far from standard level (about 35%), she is almost always correct in nominative case assignment, which shows that IP is developed in her interlanguage.

In another study, Lardier (1998b) examined Patty's language for the use of simple present 3<sup>rd</sup> person singular marker (-s) and verb-raising. The result was the same. Suppliance of 3<sup>rd</sup> person morpheme was very low (about 17%) but there was no sign of verb-raising which is another evidence for development of IP.

## **2.2 Impaired Representation Hypothesis**

The idea underlying IRH is in sharp contrast with MSIH. IRH claims that functional categories related to variable forms are impaired or underspecified (Meisel, 1997; Eubank, 1994). They attribute language learners' variability in use of finite and nonfinite verbs to the lack of functional categories or feature strength.

There are two versions of IRH, local and global (Prevost and White, 2000). Proponents of global IRH (Meisel, 1997) believe that functional categories related to variable forms are totally impaired in the abstract level. He studied L2 learners of German and found that they make no distinction between finite and non-finite forms and use them alternatively. On the other hand there are researchers who propose local impairment, which states that functional categories such as Tense and AGR are present at the abstract level of L2 learners' grammar and Variation occurs because feature strength is inert or underspecified (Eubank and Grace 1998).

Under the first view (MSIH), fossilization is the result of interface problem, reflecting difficulties in access or use of underlying knowledge; under the second view (IRH), it is indeed attributable to the nature of the grammar itself.

This study investigates the role of IRH and MSIH in the acquisition of English inflectional morphology (tense and agreement features) by Persian learners of English. There are two research questions presented to be investigated:

1. Are syntactic features associated with missed or variable<sup>1</sup> inflectional morphology present in second language learners' interlanguage grammar?
2. Are syntactic features associated with missed or variable inflectional morphology underspecified (inert) or impaired in second language learners' interlanguage grammar?

### **3. Role of L1**

Since MSIH claims the dissociation between morphology and syntax for a variety of different L1s and L2s (e.g., Clahsen, 1988; Muller, 1998; Prevost and White, 2000), it might appear that transfer plays no role here. Lardier's L1 subject, Patty, was Chinese, a language which is very impoverished as far as overt inflection is concerned. While Patty's performance in L2 English might be attributable to properties of the L1, we have also seen that child L2 learners whose mother tongue have rich verbal inflection (Turkish or Russian), show similar effects, their suppliance or morphology also being variable, although higher than Patty's. We will discuss our subjects L1 has rich verbal inflection although their production of 3<sup>rd</sup> person simple present tense marker (-s), is significantly lower than that of past tense marker (-ed) and pronominal case assignment. The question which may arise is whether it is impossible to determine the extent to which the fossilization that the subjects in the present study exhibit reflect properties of the L1 Persian.

#### **3.1 Projection of arguments in Persian**

Persian is an SOV pro-drop language. Lazard (1992) refers to the subject agreement suffixes as inflectional endings. They are referred to as agreement suffixes here. The paradigm is presented below, with the colloquial versions given in parentheses.

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1. Missed or variable inflectional morphology are those forms (mainly tense and agreement markers) which students fail to use or use them less than standard level in obligatory contexts.

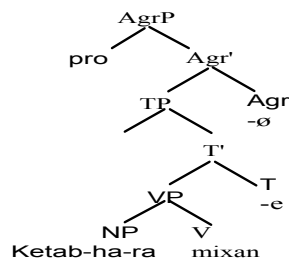
**Table 1:** Present & Past Tenses: Subject- verb agreement

	singular	plural
1	-am	-im
2	-i	-id (-in)
3	present: (∅) <sup>2</sup> [-ad (-e)] past: ∅	-and (-an)

The person and number features of the subject are marked by verbal agreement. The third person singular forms differ depending on the tense of the verb. In the past tense the third person singular is null in both spoken and written forms, while in the present tense it is realized as null in spoken form and as '-ad' in written form.

1. Ketab-ha ra mixand  
Book-PL OM read ∅  
(S)he (is) reads(ing) the books

(1)



<sup>2</sup> It is null for present tense.

#### **4. Participants**

In order to answer the question whether students' variability in the use of inflectional morphology (Tense & AGR) is related to MSIH or IRH, an experimental study was conducted. The characteristics of the subjects, the materials used and the procedures followed are described.

Subjects who participated in this study are freshmen and junior undergraduate English Literature students in Iran at Yazd University. The overall number of the subjects is forty-three both male (23) and female (20) at two levels of high and low proficiency levels that were selected out of 97 students. In order to divide students into two groups a proficiency test was given to them. The test included one hundred lexical and grammatical questions selected from TOEFL sample tests as well as New Headway books designed for students learning English as a second or foreign language. The mean and standard deviation of the test were calculated. The students who had scored one standard deviation above the mean (scored plus 75 out of 100) were grouped as high level group and those who had scored one standard deviation below the mean (ranging from 35-50) were regarded as low level group. Since the focus of the study is on advanced and elementary groups, the students who had scored around the mean, i.e., intermediate group were put aside.

##### **4.1 Materials and Procedures**

This study needs spontaneous as well as naturalistic type of information. To get such a data subjects were asked to perform a retelling task. In this task two episodes of a 5-minute cartoon film of Tom and Jerry was shown for each subject individually while its sound was off. The cartoon was the same for all and each subject was allowed to watch it just for one time. Each subject was asked to watch one episode of the film and to explain "what happened" to refer to the past time. Then every one watched the other episode of the film and while he was watching the film he should explain "what is happening" to refer to present time. Their voices were recorded on an audio-cassette. Then their voices were transcribed.





supplied 180 out of 309 (or 58.25%) existing obligatory contexts. Data related to each group is summarized in the Table 2.

**Table.2:** 3<sup>rd</sup> marking in finite present obligatory contexts

Group	Suppliance/Contexts	%
Low	48/200	24
High	180/309	58.25

To see whether the difference between two groups performance on present simple marker (-s) is significant or not, Independent T-test was carried out. To do this we were obliged to convert each subject's grade into percentage in order to unify the scores and solve the problem related to frequency of sentences and utterances. As we see the number of sentences and utterances, and obligatory contexts and supplied forms (Table 2) used by subjects of high level group is significantly higher than low level group students. So if only supplied forms of each subject was applied for comparison it would show the difference related to suppliance of morphology without taking account of frequency of obligatory contexts available in each person's performance which would result in data distortion. The difference between the low and high group is significant at the stage of (0.000) by taking into account that our level of significance is  $p < .05^3$ .

To determine obligatory contexts for Past tense marking (-ed) the sentences and utterances containing irregular verb forms were excluded from context as well as those verbs in which suppliance of inflectional morphology was ambiguous. In the text below, for example:

<sup>3</sup> The level of significance that we are testing our hypothesis is  $p < 05$

The cat stole the egg and took it to his house .... The duckling ran away to mouse house and woke him up....

The sentences related to underlined verbs were put aside when calculating obligatory contexts for the past tense marking. Obligatory contexts of the low level group subjects were 71 out of which they supplied 67. The number of obligatory contexts available in high level group subjects' performance was 162 out of which they supplied 151.

**Table 3:** Past tense marking in finite past obligatory contexts

Group	Supply/context	%
Low	67/71	94.36
High	151/162	93.20

Unlike 3<sup>rd</sup> person marking (-s), suppliance of past tense marker (-Ed) in both low level (94.360) and high level (93.20) groups is almost perfect. Therefore it seems to be no difference between two groups performance on past tense marking ( $P = .540$ ).

The same procedures were used to determine obligatory contexts for nominative case assignment (subject). All types of subjects in terms of person and number (I, s/he, you, we, they, it as well as here and there) were considered. The only difference is that in calculating obligatory contexts for this category we did not limit ourselves to any specific tense and utterances of all tenses. For instance in the text below:

There was a duck... while she was swimming cat came and saw her egg.... They escape and the cat follow them....

Also comparison was made between advanced and elementary groups' performance with respect to suppliance of simple present and past tense marker as well as nominative case assignment to see whether there is a significant difference between them. 478 and 1003 obligatory contexts were recorded from the low and high level groups respectively. Results show that their suppliance of pronominal is absolutely perfect (100%).

**Table 4:** Pronominal case assignment in obligatory contexts

Group	Suppliance/contexts	%
Low	478/478	100
High	1003/1003	100

Since both groups' performance of nominative case assignment was perfect (100%), the T-test result was not significant.

As we have noticed, as far as spontaneous production is concerned, the subjects' main problem is omission of third person present tense (-s). A written grammaticality judgment task including a story "It never gets you anywhere" was also administered. Verbal inflections and pronouns were underlined asking the participants to judge whether the underlined words are grammatical or not. Some tense forms and nominal cases were changed and some of 3<sup>rd</sup> person singular agreement (-s) of the sentences were deleted to elicit the participants' judgement. The first two paragraphs are given below:

Andrew Smodley *is* a natural worrier. It was something he has inherited from his father — the king of all worriers. But then there are those who are never happy unless them has a problem to solve. Andrew worried about the weather, the state of the pound, his health, the cost of living and once he even worries because he thought he wasn't worrying enough. But that was in the past. Things have changed because something happened to he exactly two years ago.

It was in the spring when leaves appear on trees and nature prepare herself for renewal. Other things happen too — people often fall in love. Now Andrew doesn't have a romantic disposition. He never look up at the leaves starting to grow, sighs and say: «Ah here come the spring!» He simply thinks to herself: «I live in a small village by a little stream and around this time of year lots of creatures start to wake up and make a lot of noise.»

**Table 5:** Accuracy on grammaticality judgment task

	3 <sup>rd</sup> person	past	case
Low Group	475/684(69%)	589/608(97%)	
	570/589(97%)		
High Group	816/864(94%)	768/768(100%)	768/768(100%)

As can be seen in Table 5, the participants were totally accurate in their judgments on agreement, tense and case marking. Although the judgement of the low level subjects in third person simple present context was 69%, that of the high level ones was higher (94%). The difference between the low and high group is significant (0.00) while the difference between the groups was not significant in past tense and case agreement contexts. Although there was not a high percentage of (-s) marker in retelling task in both low (24%) and high (58%) groups respectively, that of grammaticality judgment task was high in low (69%) and high (94%) groups (see tables 2 and 5).

### 5. Results and Discussion

This study examines deficiency in the use of inflectional morphemes with respect to missing surface inflection and impaired representation hypotheses, which have recently received much attention from second language researchers. We chose 3<sup>rd</sup> person singular simple present inflectional morpheme (-s) which is usually missing (deficient) in Persian learners of English and past tense inflectional morpheme (-ed). Besides tense we also investigated subjects' suppliance of pronominal case assignment to provide proof for our claim that we are going to present. This study designed a production task, i.e., a retelling task and a comprehension task, i.e., a grammaticality judgement task to argue whether the (-s) marker is reflecting an underlying morphosyntactic impairment or show considerable sensitivity to associate surface forms. The obtained data were analyzed in the previous section. This section first provides a discussion on above-

mentioned hypotheses based on these data, and then arrives at a conclusion.

### 5.1 Simple Present Tense

As we know the only inflectional morpheme representing present simple tense in finite verbs is 3<sup>rd</sup> person singular (-s). Spontaneous data show that this inflectional morpheme is absent in the language of Persian learners of English as a foreign language. In this study, as we saw (Table 2), the high level group supplied 58% and the low level group about 24% of obligatory contexts of 3<sup>rd</sup> person marker (-s). But the problem here is whether this absence is to be taken as an evidence for MSIH or IRH. As we know both MSIH and IRH allow for the absence of Inflectional morphology in L2 learners' production and they differ only with respect to theories underlying these variations. Mind you that MSIH claims that underlying syntactic features of this omitted inflectional morphology are present and absence or optionality of them is due to performance problems such as communicative pressure or computational problems rather than comprehension problem. On the other hand, IRH attributes these variations to impairment of abstract syntactic features. To find an answer to this problem we examined another tense marker, past tense (-ed). Both groups supplied high percent of the past tense marker. Our prediction is this that if subjects' suppliance of past tense inflectional morpheme is almost perfect, we can conclude that they have developed inflectional features of these variable forms in their interlanguage grammar, for both past tense marker (-ed) and 3<sup>rd</sup> person marker (-s) are related to the same category. In other words presence of past tense inflectional morphology will support MSIH in the face of IRH. On the contrary if subjects fail to use past tense markers this can be construed that inflectional features have not developed in their interlanguage; in other words evidence will be provided for IRH. Furthermore, the groups show greater accuracy in grammaticality judgment task, suggesting that variability is largely confined to spontaneous production.

### 5.2 Past Tense

Spontaneous and grammaticality judgment data in Tables 3 and 5 respectively indicated that subjects' suppliance of past tense inflectional morpheme (-ed) in regular verbs is about perfect. Therefore based on the prediction we made above the INFL categories have fully developed in the grammar of Persian learners of English despite deficiency in the distribution of 3<sup>rd</sup> person singular simple present marker (-s)<sup>4</sup>.

### 5.3 Pronominal Case Assignment

There is one important point about investigation of case assignment that needs to be mentioned here. In this study, we considered 3<sup>rd</sup> person marker first as TP rather than AGRP. In this case the evidence from past tense marker (-ed) examination was enough for the existence of IP features in learners' interlanguage grammar in spite of deficiency in the use of (-s) marker and there was no need to examine case assignment. But taking up 3<sup>rd</sup> person marker (-s) as AGR feature seems to cause problem. One may argue that (-s) is to be included under AGRP rather than TP. To settle this problem we resorted to nominative case assignment. As we know today linguists divide IP into two categories: Tense and AGR phrases (after Pollock, 1988). However, ideas are different about which category, Tense or AGR comes at the top of the other one. Generally speaking there are two possibilities: first to assume that AGRP is located under TP second is to locate TP under AGRP.

First we take the view that AGRP is located under TP in IP (Pollock, 1988). However there are other studies that suggest AGR is acquired before Tense by English L2 learners (Eubank, 1994). In

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<sup>4</sup> One may comment that difference in the present tense and the past tense lies in the function or complexity of (-s), compared with that of (-ed). If one analyzes the incorrect uses of past tense of irregular verbs, he/she may find that past tense may not be that easy, either. However, both (-s) and (-ed) markers are morphosyntactic properties while irregular past form is lexically based. That is, the former markers are syntactic structures whereas the latter is a matter of vocabulary.

this case we can claim for the existence of AGRP by taking into account some aspects of Weak Continuity Hypothesis (Radford, 1994; Vainnikka & Young-Scholton, 1996). According to this hypothesis functional categories are projected into VP successively and existence of higher projection in a syntactic phrase includes acquisition of all lower ones. Therefore one can conclude that AGRP is acquired if TP is acquired. In this case based on results of this study AGRP (-s) is acquired, unlike low rate of its production, for suppliance of past tense marker (-ed) is almost perfect.

Second view is to suppose that AGRP stands above TP in IP structure (Chomsky, 1987). This time the presence of TP cannot account for existence of AGRP. Here is the case theory to help us.

The relation between nominative case assignment and specification of INFL category in minimalist program of Government and Binding theory is well established. According to this theory it is the AGRP that checks out nominative case at syntax level.

Therefore based on Case theory assigning nominative case would be impossible or optional in the absence of AGR feature. On the other hand Perfect distribution of nominative case will make us believe that AGRP is specified in the learners' interlanguage grammar.

Data in both tasks (Tables 4 and 5) showed that subjects' (both high and low groups) distribution of pronominal case is almost perfect. we didn't find any missing or incorrect nominative case. Therefore due to the explanation we pointed out above AGRP is specified in learners' interlanguage grammar despite deficiency in use of its inflectional morpheme. Results obtained from case assignment also support MSIH and reject the idea that deficiency in the production of inflectional morphemes can be construed as an evidence for underspecification or absence of related underlying feature (IRH).

In general what can be derived from the data and the explanations presented above is that IP (TP & AGRP) features are present and specified in the underlying syntax and the reason for apparent deficiency in the use of inflectional morphemes in general



and 3<sup>rd</sup> person singular simple present marker (-s) in particular should be investigated somewhere out of syntax. One can relate this phenomenon to fossilization (see section two). But fossilization itself is a problem which remains to be explained. However some suggestions have been proposed for the occurrence of such a phenomenon but none of them are still approved. One of these suggestions that are also the most prominent one attributes it to problems of mapping from LF to PF.

Lardier (1998b) points out the dissociation of syntax from morphology. She proposes that the relation between syntax and morphology is indirect and we cannot judge on the presence or absence of underlying syntactic categories based on their actualizations in the production data. As we saw in this study there is possibility of missing an inflectional morpheme in the surface (3<sup>rd</sup> person singular simple present marker) despite its existence at syntax.

Our study brings some aspects of Weak Continuity Hypothesis, which is proposed, by Vainikka and Young-Scholten (1996) for second language acquisition under question. They claim that there is a direct relationship between acquisition of syntactic features and their realization in production data. Therefore based on this idea underlying features for inflectional morphemes are not acquired if their production rates don't arrive at a certain level. Findings of this study propose that this claim is not completely true. As we observed here despite low rates of suppliance of 3<sup>rd</sup> person in subjects' production data, especially the low level group, they have developed related syntactic feature (evidence from past tense and pronominal case). Furthermore, grammaticality judgement task, i.e., comprehension data showed that even the low level group could accurately judge 3<sup>rd</sup> person singular (-s).

Findings of this study, to some extent, also confirm Monitor Model Hypothesis proposed by Corder (1971). This model distinguishes between "Acquisition" and "Learning". According to this model learners in natural communication can only use those features that they have acquired (unconscious). Learnt forms (conscious) will turn up only when there is enough time to be checked or monitored before use. As we demonstrated above

subjects have learned 3<sup>rd</sup> person marker but they can't use it appropriately. This might be due to nature of task, which needs spontaneous and naturalistic production and doesn't let monitoring as is mostly associated with written tests. In this case, Krashen's Model is to some extent approved. However conducting a research with naturalistic task along with a comprehension test can be more revealing in this respect.

Finally comparison between the groups performance showed that they have performed similarly with respect to suppliance of 3<sup>rd</sup> person marker (-s), past tense marker (-ed) as well as nominative case assignment. Both groups suppliance of past tense (-ed) and nominative case assignment were almost perfect taken for this study and below it for 3<sup>rd</sup> person marker (-s). Therefore one can claim that (-s) is fossilized, since subjects of both high and low level groups have completely learned syntactic features long time before (end-state of their grammar) and also the high level group's suppliance of (-s) hasn't reached an acceptable level even after using it at least two years or more than the low level group.

The only difference between these two groups is that there is a significant difference between them in (-s) marker suppliance in both tasks. But what can account for this difference if we suppose that this form is fossilized? Replying this question is not an easy task. Here we suggest two possibilities: communicative strategies and methodological problems. Might using some communicative strategies by high level group students leave opportunities for them to consciously check his language. The (-s) marker in comprehension task revealed that both the low and high level groups judged it highly accurately.

The question raised is why absence L1 of overt L2 morphology should lead to problems in L2 production. One recent suggestion is that it is not presence or absence of equivalent overt L1 morphology is at issue but, rather the way in which morphology is presented prosodically (Goad, White and Steel 2003; Goad and White 2006). In this study of Persian speaking learners of English all inflectional markers are marked at the right edge of a prosodic word in

agreement with their English counterparts. We may conclude that lack of phonetic and phonemic representation of 3<sup>rd</sup> person singular in L1 of the subjects' endstate English grammar is constrained by PF rather than LF.

## **6. Conclusion**

As MSIH has demonstrated, discrepancies in accuracy on overt inflection versus related abstract syntactic properties are not just an acquisition phenomenon but an indication of fossilization. The subjects of the present study have proved no exception in this regard. Given the similarity in simple present tense for both low and high level groups, it seems reasonable to suppose that the high level group's grammar is indeed at endstate. While omitting 3<sup>rd</sup> person marker (-s) in retelling task, the high level group nevertheless shows considerable sensitivity to associated syntactic properties: the high level subjects never omit or misuse subject pronoun or past tense marker (-ed). Furthermore, the percentage of 3<sup>rd</sup> person marker (-s) omission decreases in grammaticality judgment task indicating that its deletion occurs in production task. Given such accuracy in both verbal and nominal domain, failure to supply surface morphology in production task is unlikely to reflect a deficit in underlying competence; rather, the results suggest that the relevant underlying categories and features are presented in the interlanguage grammar. Furthermore, the high level group shows greater accuracy in other tasks, suggesting that variability is largely confined to spontaneous production.

Potential L1 effects have been relatively addressed from missing surface inflection perspective. The present data suggest L1 influence. As it was mentioned third person singular is absent in present tense spontaneous production and it is also non-existent in spoken production task while it is existent in written grammaticality judgment task. Since Persian lacks third person subject agreement, it has lasting L1 effects on surface third person present tense in L2.

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