

THE STUDY OF SYNTACTIC AVOIDANCE ON THE
WRITTEN PRODUCTION OF PERSIAN UNIVERSITY
STUDENTS MAJORING IN TEACHING ENGLISH AS
A FOREIGN LANGUAGE

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PERSIAN UNIVERSITY STUDENTS MAJORING IN TEACHING ENGLISH AS A
FOREIGN LANGUAGE**

by

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgments	i
Table of contents	ii
List of Tables	viii
List of Figures	xi
List of Symbols	xii
Abstrak (BM)	xiii
Abstract (English)	xv

CHAPTER 1 – INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction	1
1.2 Background to the Study	3
1.2.1 An Overview of the Islamic Republic of Iran	3
1.2.2 The Iranian Education System	4
1.2.2.1 Pre-university Education	4
1.2.2.2 Procedures for University Enrolment	5
1.2.3 Foreign Language Teaching in Iran	5
1.2.3.1 The Goals of Teaching English in Iran	7
1.2.3.2 English for Specific Purposes in Iran	8
1.3 The Importance of Writing as one of the Language Skills	9
1.4 Statement of the Problem	10
1.5 Objectives of the Study	12
1.6 Research Questions	13
1.7 Significance of the Study	14
1.8 A Brief Overview of the Study	16
1.9 Definition of Important Terms	17
1.10 Limitations of the Study	20
1.11 Organization of the Study	20
1.12 Conclusion	21

CHAPTER 2 –REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

2.1 Introduction	22
2.2 Learning Strategies in Second or Foreign Language Learning	22
2.2.1 Background and Definition of Learning Strategies	23
2.2.2 Taxonomy of Learning Strategies	24
2.2.3 Importance of Learning Strategies in Language Learning and Teaching	33
2.3 Communication Strategies	37
2.3.1 What are Communication Strategies?	38
2.3.2 Classification of Communication Strategies	39
2.4 Avoidance Strategy	46
2.4.1 What is Avoidance Strategy?	46
2.4.2 The Effect of Avoidance Strategy	48
2.4.3 Classification of Avoidance Strategy	48
2.4.3.1 Formal Avoidance	49
2.4.3.2 Functional Avoidance	51
2.4.4 Related Studies on Avoidance Strategy	54
2.4.4.1 Emergence of Avoidance Strategy	54
2.4.4.2 Avoidance of Phrasal Verbs in English	57
2.5 Error Analysis	64
2.5.1 What is Error Analysis?	64
2.5.2 Significance of Errors	65
2.5.3 Uses of Error Analysis	66
2.5.4 Errors versus Mistakes	68
2.5.5 Types of Errors Representing Stages of Second Language Learning	70
2.5.6 Criticisms of Error Analysis	73
2.5.7 Sources of Errors	75
2.5.7.1 Interlingual Transfer	77
2.5.7.2 Intralingual Transfer	77

2.5.7.3 Context of Learning	78
2.5.7.4 Communication Strategies	79
2.6 Contrastive Analysis	79
2.6.1 What is Contrastive Analysis?	80
2.6.2 Transfer	82
2.6.3 Different Versions of Contrastive Analysis	83
2.6.3.1 The Strong Version	84
2.6.3.2 The Weak Version	85
2.6.3.3 The Moderate Version	85
2.6.4 English as a Foreign Language (EFL) and Contrastive Analysis	87
2.6.4.1 EFL Environment	87
2.6.4.2 EFL and Mother Tongue Interference	88
2.6.5 Contrastive Analysis of Farsi and English	88
2.6.5.1 A Brief Overview of Farsi	90
2.6.5.1.1 History	91
2.6.5.1.2 Phonology	92
2.6.5.1.3 Writing System	94
2.6.5.1.4 Morphology and Syntax	95
2.6.5.1.5 Verb	98
2.6.6 Criticism and Merits of Contrastive Analysis	102
2.7 Theoretical Framework	105
2.8 Conclusion	107

CHAPTER 3 – METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction	109
3.2 Design of the Study	110
3.3 Subjects	115
3.3.1 Subject Selection	116
3.3.1.1 Results of Grammar Assessment	116
3.3.1.2 Results of Grammar Test	117

3.3.1.3 Comparing the Results of Grammar Test and First Paragraph writing Test	117
3.4 Research Method	119
3.5 Instrumentation	121
3.5.1 Test of TOEFL	122
3.5.2 Grammar Assessment	123
3.5.3 Grammar Test	124
3.5.4 First Test of Paragraph Writing	125
3.5.5 Second Paragraph Writing Test	126
3.5.6 Questionnaire	127
3.5.6.1 Constructing Questionnaire	127
3.5.6.2 Questionnaire of the Study	129
3.5.7 Interview	130
3.5.7.1 Objectives of the Interview	132
3.5.7.2 Construction of Interview Schedule	132
3.5.7.3 The Interview Procedure	133
3.5.8 Piloting the Questionnaire and the Interview	134
3.6 Scoring Procedure	136
3.6.1 Scoring of the Grammar Assessment	136
3.6.2 Scoring of the Grammar Test	136
3.6.3 Scoring the two Paragraph Writing Tests	137
3.7 Analysis of Data	137
3.7.1 Qualitative Data	137
3.7.1.1 Written Exam	138
3.7.1.2 Interview	139
3.7.1.3 Open-ended Item	141
3.7.2 Quantitative Data	142
3.8 Conclusion	143

CHAPTER 4 – DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

4.1 Introduction	144
4.2 Data Analysis	144
4.2.1 Research Question 1	145
4.2.2 Research Question 2	150
4.2.3 Research Question 3	157
4.2.3.1 Difficulty in Learning Adjective Clauses and Reduced Adjective Clauses	158
4.2.3.2 Difficulty in Using Adjective Clauses and Reduced Adjective Clauses	168
4.2.3.3 Choice Selection	177
4.2.4 Research Question 4	182
4.2.5 Research Question 5	190
4.2.6 Research Question 6	200
4.3 Conclusion	205

CHAPTER 5 – SUMMARY AND IMPLICATIONS

5.1 Introduction	207
5.2 Main Findings	209
5.2.1 Persian TEFL learners' Avoided Structures	209
5.2.2 Avoidance Strategy and Grammatical Differences between First Language and Target Language	210
5.2.3 Grammatical Complexity and Avoidance Strategy	211
5.2.4 Grammatical Inconsistencies and Avoidance Strategy	212
5.2.5 Anxiety and Avoidance Strategy	213
5.2.6 Gender and Avoidance Strategy	214
5.3 Implications of the study	215
5.3.1 EFL Teachers	215
5.3.2 Syllabus Designers	217
5.3.3 Test Constructors	218

5.3.4 Error Correction and Attitudes towards Errors	219
5.4 Recommendations for Further Studies	221
5.5 Conclusion	224
Bibliography	225
Appendix A	239
Appendix B	249
Appendix C	251
Appendix D	256
Appendix E	257
Appendix F	270
Appendix G	283

List of Tables

Table 2.1	Farsi Consonants	92
Table 2.2	Traditional Order of Farsi Alphabet	94
Table 2.3	Subject Pronouns in Farsi	96
Table 2.4	Conjugation of Verb in Farsi	100
Table 3.1	Results of the Grammar and First Paragraph Writing Tests	118
Table 3.2	Research Instruments Used in the Study	122
Table 3.3	Themes of the Interview	139
Table 3.4	Themes of Open-ended Question	142
Table 4.1	Avoided Structures by Persian TEFL Learners	148
Table 4.2	Percentage of Avoidance in the area of Adjective Clauses and Reduced Adjective Clauses	148
Table 4.3	Avoidance in the area of Adjective Clauses containing different Relative Pronouns	149
Table 4.4	Subjects' Responses to Statement 1	159
Table 4.5	Subjects' Responses to Statement 2	160
Table 4.6	Subjects' Responses to Statement 3.a	162
Table 4.7	Subjects' Responses to Statement 5.a	163
Table 4.8	Subjects' Responses to Statement 3.c	165
Table 4.9	Subjects' Responses to Statement 5.c	166
Table 4.10	Subjects' Responses to Statement 7	168
Table 4.11	Subjects' Responses to Statement 8	169
Table 4.12	Subjects Responses to Statement 9.a	171

Table 4.13	Subjects' Responses to Statement 11.a	172
Table 4.14	Subjects' Responses to Statement 9.c	174
Table 4.15	Subjects' Responses to Statement 11.c	175
Table 4.16	Subjects' Responses to Question 13	178
Table 4.17	Subjects Responses to Second Part of Question 13	178
Table 4.18	Subjects' Responses to Statement 3.b	183
Table 4.19	Subjects' Responses to Statement 5.b	184
Table 4.20	Subjects' Responses to Statement 9.b	187
Table 4.21	Subjects' Responses to Statement 11.b	188
Table 4.22	Resorting to Avoidance Strategy in the area of Adjective Clauses and Reduced Adjective Clauses in the second writing test	191
Table 4.23	Subjects' Gender in the Second Writing Test	191
Table 4.24	Usages of Adjective Clauses and Reduced Adjective Clauses in the second writing test	192
Table 4.25	Gender and Correct Usage of Adjective Clauses and Reduced Clauses in the Second Writing Test	193
Table 4.26	Gender and Incorrect Usage of Adjective Clauses and Reduced Clauses in the Second Writing Test	194
Table 4.27	Subjects' Responses to the Question Mentioned in the Second Questionnaire	195
Table 4.28	Total Population of Respondents in the First and Second Group Regarding the Factor of Gender	201
Table 4.29	Frequency and Percentage of Respondents and Subjects in First and Second Group	201

Table 4.30	Gender and Number of Respondents in the First Group	202
Table 4.31	Gender and Number of Subjects in the Second Group	203
Table 4.32	Frequency and Percentage of Males in First and Second Group	203
Table 4.33	Frequency and Percentage of Females in First and Second Group	204

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 2.1	A typology of communication strategies in IL Production	41
Figure 2.2	Theoretical Framework of the Study	106
Figure 3.1	Design of the Study	114

List of Symbols

/p/:	Bilabial voiceless obstruent	as in pen	/pen/
/b/:	Bilabial voiced obstruent	as in bad	/bəd/
/t/:	Alveolar voiceless obstruent	as in tea	/ti:/
/d/:	Alveolar voiced obstruent	as in did	/did/
/k/:	Velar voiceless obstruent	as in cat	/kət/
/g/:	Velar voiced obstruent	as in good	/gu:d/
/tʃ/:	Palatal voiceless obstruent	as in chin	/tʃin/
/dʒ/:	Palatal voiced obstruent	as in June	/dʒu:n/
/f/:	Labial voiceless fricative	as in fat	/fət/
/v/:	Labial voiced fricative	as in voice	/vois/
/s/:	Alveolar voiceless fricative	as in so	/so/
/z/:	Alveolar voiced fricative	as in zoo	/zu:/
/ʃ/:	Palatal voiceless fricative	as in she	/ʃi/
/ʒ/:	Palatal voiced fricative	as in vision	/viʒn/
/h/:	Glottal voiceless fricative	as in hat	/hət/
/m/:	Bilabial nasal	as in man	/mən/
/n/:	Alveolar nasal	as in no	/no/
/l/:	Lateral	as in leg	/leg/
/r/:	Alveolar vibrant (retroflex)	as in red	/red/
/j/:	Palatal semivowel	as in yes	/jes/
/ʔ/:	Glottal voiceless obstruent	_____ (Not in English)	
/x/:	Velar voiceless fricative	_____ (Not in English)	
/ŋ/:	Uvular voiceless fricative	_____ (Not in English)	
/q/:	Uvular voiced fricative	_____ (Not in English)	
/ə/:	Open front un-rounded vowel	as in hat	/hət/
/ɑ/:	Open back vowel	as in arm	/ɑrm/
/ə/:	Schwa	as in ago	/əgo/
/ɛ/:	Mid-closed front un-rounded vowel	as in ten	/ten/
/i/:	Closed front un-rounded vowel	as in happy	/həpi/
/o/:	Mid-closed rounded back vowel	as in oil	/oil/
/u/:	Closed back rounded vowel	as in too	/tu/

KAJIAN PENGELAKAN SINTAKTIK TERHADAP HASIL PENULISAN DALAM KALANGAN PELAJAR UNIVERSITI PERSIA PENGKHUSUSAN PENGAJARAN BAHASA INGGERIS SEBAGAI BAHASA ASING

ABSTRAK

Kajian ini menyiasat satu strategi komunikasi yang dikenali sebagai “Strategi Pengelakan”. Mengelak merupakan satu strategi yang digunakan oleh mereka yang belajar bahasa kedua atau bahasa asing apabila mereka menghadapi masalah dalam komunikasi. Apa yang biasanya dielak oleh mereka adalah kosa kata bahasa tersebut, struktur dan kadang-kala bunyi yang dirasakan susah untuk disebut. Mereka sentiasa menggunakan bentuk atau struktur yang dianggap lebih mudah, yang membawa maksud yang sama atau hampir sama dengan apa yang hendak dikomunikasikan. Fokus kajian ini merupakan struktur sintaksis, yang biasa dielak oleh pelajar universiti Parsi yang bermajor dalam Pengajaran Bahasa Inggeris sebagai Bahasa Asing. Kajian ini bertujuan untuk mengenalpasti sebab-sebab pengelakan ini berlaku. Masalah ini telah disiasat berdasarkan enam soalan penyelidikan dengan 20 orang subjek yang merupakan guru pelatih. Data telah dikumpul dengan 3 instrumen yang berlainan iaitu 1) Ujian Penulisan, II) Soal Selidik, dan III) Temuduga. Data yang telah dianalisa menunjukkan pelajar Bahasa Inggeris sebagai bahasa asing Parsi cenderung untuk mengelak Klausa Adjektif dan Klausa Adjektif yang mudah semasa menulis dalam Bahasa Inggeris. Didapati para pelajar mengelak penggunaan jenis struktur ini kerana – I) Perbezaan struktur tatabahasa antara Bahasa Farsi dan Bahasa Inggeris; II) Masalah pembelajaran serta penggunaan kedua-dua jenis struktur ini kerana struktur tatabahasa Bahasa Inggeris yang lebih kompleks dan relevan, peraturan tatabahasa yang tidak konsisten dan kepelbagaian struktur tatabahasa yang merangkumi kedua-dua struktur bahasa tersebut yang boleh mengakibatkan kekeliruan; III) ketidakpastian mengenai ketepatan struktur yang digunakan; IV)

Berasa selamat atau yakin dari membuat kesalahan ketika resah semasa menghadapi peperiksaan. Tambahan pula, unsur jantina tidak bertindak sebagai petunjuk dalam penggunaa serta ketiakpenggunaan Klausa Adjektif dan Klausa Adjektif yang mudah. Berdasarkan data yang dikumpu, didapati kedua-dua jantina menggunakan Klausa Adjektif secara seragam.

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ABSTRACT**

This study investigated one of the communication strategies named “Avoidance Strategy”. Avoidance is a strategy that second or foreign language learners resort to when they face a communicative difficulty. What is avoided is typically a target language word, structure, and sometimes a sound that is thought to be difficult to the learners. What is used instead is an expression or a structure that the student finds easier, which conveys more or less the same content as the expression or structure initially envisaged. The focus of this research was on the syntactic structures, which Persian university students majoring in TEFL avoid while writing in English. This study also primarily attempts to identify the reasons underlying this avoidance. The problem was investigated based on six research questions. The subjects were 20 trainee teachers. The data was gathered by using different instruments which were writing tests, questionnaire, and interview. The analysed data illustrated that Persian TEFL learners tend to avoid Adjective Clauses and Reduced Adjective Clauses when they write in English. In analysing the reasons behind this avoidance, it was found that grammatical differences between Farsi and English with regard to these two structures constituted one of the reasons for the deployment of Avoidance Strategy by Persian TEFL learners. The findings also revealed that Adjective Clauses and Reduced Adjective Clauses are difficult to be mastered by the subjects due to various reasons including the complexity of the relevant grammatical structures, inconsistency of grammatical rules, and the large number of grammatical rules surrounding the two structures that led to confusion. So this difficulty is another reason for avoidance of these structures. The results also revealed that when the subjects were not sure about the correctness of these structures they preferred not to use them in their writings.

The analysis of the results also disclosed that the subjects resorted to avoidance strategy to feel safe from errors mainly in moments of anxiety such as during exams. Finally, gender was determined to be an insignificant predictor on the use and non-use of the Adjective Clauses and Reduced Adjective Clauses as the data revealed that both genders either used or did not use these clauses in equal proportions.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

In Iran, English is regarded as a foreign language. The study of English as a major subject begins in the second year of junior high school. Thenceforth, English is studied at the rate of three hours a week up to pre-university level (Fallahi, 1991). Basically, the textbooks used in the teaching of English predominantly utilised oral-based activities, reading activities and grammar with minimal focus on writing skills, of which the sub-skills of handwriting, spelling, and dictation are prominent (Tajadini, 2002).

Apart from public schools, English is also taught in private language institutes. In these institutes, English is taught to different age groups ranging from six year olds to adults. Most of the courses offered at different levels focus on the four language skills (Yarmohammadi, 1995). Although most private institutes offer English courses of similar content, the teaching standards are higher in some due to the utilisation of contemporary teaching methodologies and the employment of native speakers as teachers. Moreover they also have well-equipped language laboratories and libraries.

Many universities and colleges in Iran also offer specialised courses at B.A., M.A., and PhD levels in English literature and teaching, linguistics, and translation.

The goal of these courses is to produce experts in teaching English and linguistics as well as competent translators. One significant impact of these courses is the entry of experts who possess expertise in teaching and designing English materials (Jahani, 2006; Manzari, 2001; Tajadini, 2002).

The study of English involves the acquisition of the two receptive skills which are reading and listening as well as the two productive skills, speaking and writing. Although writing is an important skill which must be mastered in order to effectively transmit new ideas and concepts, a majority of TEFL [Teaching English as a Foreign Language] students, as will be discussed in Section 1.4, are not able to use this skill effectively (Zahedi, 2005). Narafshan (2003) in her research on TEFL teachers, noted that TEFL graduates experienced difficulties in writing, a finding that is especially worrying as these students will be future teachers of the language.

The mastery of the four language skills by most English language learners invariably involves the utilisation of learning strategies (Macaro, 2006). Basically, these learning strategies are widely utilised by learners in the process of developing their interlanguage abilities towards the attainment of target language proficiency and communicating in the target language (Selinker, 1972; Dornyei and Scott, 1997; Nakatani, 2006). Strategies used to attain communication in the target language include generalisation, false analogy, avoidance and similar strategies that serve to assist the learners in the language learning process. This

research aims to study one of these strategies which is the utilisation of Avoidance Strategy in the writing of Iranian university students majoring in TEFL.

1.2 Background of the Study

This section will provide a background of the education system in Iran before proceeding to delineate the statement of the problem, the objectives of the study, the research questions, and the significance of the study

1.2.1 An Overview of the Islamic Republic of Iran

Iran is located in south-western Asia and covers an area of 1648000 square kilometres. The capital of Iran is Tehran. Iran shares its northern border with Turkmenistan, Russia, Kazakhstan, Armenia, and Azerbaijan. Iran's western frontiers are with Turkey and Iraq. Iran is bordered by the Persian Gulf and the Gulf of Oman in the south while its eastern neighbours are Afghanistan and Pakistan. Iran has a population of about 72 million. Farsi is the official language in Iran while about 90 percent of its population are Muslims who adhere to the Shia sect. Sunni Muslims constitute approximately 8 percent of the remaining population. (Iran 2004).

1.2.2 The Iranian Education System

The Iranian education system consists of pre-university and university education. The school system is under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Education and Training. The two ministries responsible for university education are the Ministry of Health and Medical Education and the Ministry of Culture and Higher Education. The Ministry of Health and Medical Education is responsible for medical training while Ministry of Culture and Higher Education is responsible for the provision of non-medical courses (Manzari, 2001).

1.2.2.1 Pre-University Education

Before being admitted into the university, Iranian students undergo pre-primary education, primary education, middle or junior high school education, and secondary school education. This system consists of twelve years of study which commences at the age of six. The primary phase is designed to provide the basic 3R skills and is of a five year duration. The second phase, middle or junior high school education, is of three years duration while the high school education phase covers a period of four years. This final pre-university period comprises three years of formal upper secondary education while the secondary level comprises three different options i.e., Humanities, Experimental Science, and Mathematics. Each option is divided into various sub-categories. The students, depending on their potential interests and the grades obtained in the junior school period are allowed to choose from one of these options (Jahani, 2006). On completion of the upper

secondary stage, the students precede to a one year period of pre university education. The goal of this compulsory period is to prepare students for their university/post secondary education (Tajadini, 2002). Upon successful completion of this phase, students are awarded a secondary education certificate.

1.2.2.2 Procedures for University Enrolment

After completing their secondary education, students who decide to pursue tertiary education have to go through a college entrance test known as Konkur. Konkur, a nationwide entrance examination measures the candidate's academic competency exclusively on subjects studied during their high school years and is conducted in Farsi except for those candidates who want to study a foreign language. Candidates who pass the Konkur exams are then offered places in the universities (Yarmohammadi, 1995).

1.2.3 Foreign Language Teaching in Iran

Historically, the first European language introduced into the Iranian educational system as a foreign language, was French. The establishment of Daroulfonoon in 1848 in Tehran the capital, marked the beginning of foreign language study in Iran. Consequently, the first group of Iranians sent abroad by the government for further studies, went to francophone countries that were France and Belgium. When these graduates returned, they introduced French into the Iranian institutions where they worked or taught. In addition, a large number of

works were translated from French into Farsi and vice versa. The dominance of French in academia left a lasting impact on the socio-cultural landscape. For example, a large number of French words such as *rob-de-chamber*, *telephone*, *lustre*, *decoration*, *saloon*, *balloon*, were incorporated into Farsi and are still being widely used today (Tajadini, 2002).

The fact that English replaced French in Iran and became a subject in the school curriculum is a direct result of British and American imperialism. This began with the discovery of petroleum in the early 1900s which attracted the attention of the European powers, especially England. In 1909, the Anglo-Persian Company (later British Petroleum) was founded and southern Iran came under British suzerainty. After the Second World War, the United States of America began to play a more active role in Iran in line with its superpower status and its geo-political strategies. As English gained ascendancy as the preferred second language with the expansion of American political, economic and cultural influence in Iranian affairs, its growth in Iran was propagated through organisations such as the US Technical Cooperative Mission. During this period, English became a popular subject to learn and the Iranian government encouraged the teaching of English as it was perceived to be a language of modernity. In this regard, the Iran-American Society and the British Council played pivotal roles as western cultural centres that taught English to Iranians at different levels (Tajadini, 2002). In fact, certain educational centres such as Pahlavi University, now known as Shiraz University, used English as a medium of instruction for all subjects while native speakers of English were invited to teach various courses (Tajadini, 2002).

1.2.3.1 The Goals of Teaching English in Iran

In 1981, two years after the Islamic Revolution in 1979, a high-powered Cultural Revolution Council was set up in the Ministry of Culture and Higher Education to review the curriculum of the different stages of university education (Saffarzade, 1988). In its review, it criticised the English language teaching scenario under the prevailing system. In its conclusions, the council stressed that all university educated Iranians should have a knowledge of English to meet the two following goals (Saffarzadeh, 1988). These goals were:

- 1) Developing the ability of using the scientific and technological information found in English language publications to achieve national self-sufficiency in science and technology.
- 2) Utilising English for cultural exchanges and for the introduction of the Islamic-Iranian culture and teachings to the world.

Based on the recommendations of the Council, the Committee for Curriculum Planning of Foreign Languages proposed that the study of English should ensure the students' mastery of the four basic language skills, i.e., listening, speaking, reading, and writing. It was further recommended that these skills should be taught at the pre-university stage with special emphasis on the reading and writing components (Saffarzadeh, 1988; Tajadini, 2002).

1.2.3.2 English for Specific Purposes in Iran

In order to achieve the goals as mentioned above, the Council recommended the ESP (English for Specific Purposes) approach for university level classes. Based on the specific needs of the learners and their level of linguistic proficiency as well as the type of discourse and the required communicative language functions, three different ESP stages were proposed. They consisted of:

Stage One: A three-credit ESP course of four hours a week, encompassing basic English already taught at the pre-university level. The course was designed to extend students' control over the four skills with greater emphasis on reading and writing.

Stage Two: A three-credit ESP course of four hours a week was designed to provide the students with semi-specialized materials. This course contains reading passages relevant to the students' general field of study, i.e., medicine, engineering, science, etc. followed by comprehension and vocabulary exercises.

Stage Three: A two-credit ESP course of two hours a week was tailored to provide learners with a wide range of specialized materials in their own specific fields. The course was designed to enable students to read and understand specialised academic journals in their respective fields of interest.

Pursuant to these recommendations, textbooks for General English and ESP courses were written for both Arts and Science students. The books were then revised and modified to ensure that they could meet the goals and needs of graduates (Saffarzadeh, 1988).

1.3 The Importance of Writing as One of the Language Skills

The concept of language skills is premised on the fact that language consists of four skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing (Cook, 2001). Among these four skills, listening and reading are categorised as receptive skills while speaking and writing are categorised as productive skills.

Writing is an important productive skill that is fundamental in advancing knowledge. This is because writing involves the composition of new meaning from fresh ideas and existing facts in which sentences have special relationships to each other (Dietsch, 2000).

Axelrod and Cooper (1988) point out that writing is directly related to the way one learns. This is because this skill helps students to be active thinkers and learners through direct involvement in the construction of new meaning.

Hughey et al. (1983) noted that the skill of writing helps students to reinforce vocabulary skills as they search for the appropriate words required in their writing task. Similarly, grammar patterns are also enhanced by writing as when learners

write, they have to make correct decisions on the appropriate syntactic patterns, discourse markers and registers to be utilised in order to convey their thoughts and ideas effectively.

Within the Iranian context, writing has gained prominence due to the special emphasis accorded to it together with reading in most ESP programs at tertiary levels (Saffarzadeh, 1988; Tajadini, 2002). As such, it is incumbent on language practitioners especially TEFL trainers to master the numerous and often complicated structures that underpin the writing component so that they can impart such knowledge effectively to prospective students of the language (Tajadini, 2002). However, the total mastery of complex syntactic structures by Iranian learners in English is open to debate as several previous studies (Tajadini, 2006; Keshavarz, 2003) highlight that most learners use a variety of communications strategies to circumvent the use of problematic structures. This study proposes to examine the use of avoidance strategies by Iranian TEFL learners to alleviate specific deficiencies related to problematic structures as they strive to convey meaning in their written output.

1.4 Statement of the Problem

Iranian learners of English at tertiary level often encounter difficulties in writing especially in the use of complex syntactic patterns (Tajadini, 2002; Yarmohammadi, 1996). This invariably leads to the deployment of a variety of strategies to circumvent this difficulty. One such strategy often utilised is Avoidance

Strategy. Nevertheless, the deployment of such strategies often results in outputs that are structurally limited in variety and lacking the fluidity and coherence often associated with good writing. The lack of structural variety not only hinders coherence but also compromises other elements such as the cogency of ideas and the logical and clear elucidation of facts and argument. This fact is attested to by Tajadini (2006) who observes that the written production of Iranian university students (both male and female) are not structurally well developed owing to their use of Avoidance Strategies when writing. He further points out that Avoidance Strategy, which disguises itself in different shapes and is misapplied for various purposes, introduces negative effects on the learners' performance in general and on their composition in particular. On the other hand, Keshavarz (2003) states that the low frequency of certain errors may be due to the low frequency of diverse grammatical patterns involved thus indirectly implying that Iranian learners in general avoid using complex structures. Similarly, Henning (1978) in his research on Iranian students reports on the propensity of students avoiding certain grammatical structures when speaking or writing in English. Finally, Yarmohammadi (1995) observes that one of the most important strategies which Iranian students utilise in their communication is Avoidance Strategy.

Avoidance Strategy is one of the communication strategies that second or foreign language learners resort to, the moment they come across a communicative difficulty. The difficulty in communication occurs because of several different reasons: differences between the first and target language, grammatical complexities and inconsistencies. Furthermore, language learners use

Avoidance Strategy to feel safe from errors (Schachter, 1974; Kleinmann, 1977; Dagut & Laufer, 1985; Hulstijn & Marchena, 1989; James, 1992; Laufer & Eliasson, 1993; Ellis, 2003).

It can thus be argued, based on the above observations, that the utilisation of Avoidance strategy is a common occurrence in the English language learning process amongst Iranian students particularly in writing. Thus, this study proposes to examine the use of Avoidance Strategy in writing amongst Iranian TEFL learners as it is crucial to determine to what extent the strategy has an effect on the written output of this group of learners who are prospective English language teachers.

1.5 Objectives of the Study

This research aims to study Avoidance Strategy employed in writing by Persian university learners majoring in Teaching English as a Foreign Language. It aims to achieve the following objectives:

- 1) To identify syntactic structures frequently avoided by Persian TEFL University Learners.
- 2) To investigate the influence of grammatical differences or similarities between Farsi as the first language and English as the target language on avoidance employed by Persian TEFL learners.
- 3) To investigate the influence of grammatical inconsistencies on avoidance of the structures deployed by Persian TEFL learners.

- 4) To investigate the influence of complexity of grammatical rules on avoidance of the structures deployed by Persian TEFL learners.
- 5) To investigate the influence of the factor of anxiety during examination that has an effect on the exam results of Persian TEFL learners and resorting to Avoidance Strategy.
- 6) To investigate the influence of gender on the use of Avoidance Strategy by Persian TEFL learners.

1.6 Research Questions

Proceeding from the foregoing objectives, the current study is designed to answer the following research questions:

- 1) What kind of syntactic structures do Persian students of TEFL avoid?
- 2) What is the effect of grammatical differences or grammatical similarities between First Language (Farsi) and Second Language (English) on the deployment of Avoidance Strategy by these learners?
- 3) How do complex grammatical rules in certain syntactic structures affect the deployment of Avoidance Strategy by Persian TEFL learners?
- 4) How do grammatical inconsistencies in the structures influence the deployment of Avoidance Strategy by Persian TEFL learners?
- 5) To what extent do Persian TEFL learners resort to Avoidance Strategy in the examination scripts?
- 6) What is the effect of gender on the deployment of Avoidance Strategy by Persian TEFL learners?

1.7 Significance of the Study

As mentioned in Section 1.3, writing is a very important productive language skill. Since Iranian students of English use the strategy of avoidance and do not use complex structures, they tend to produce written work that is often flawed in meaning.

It is very important for language teachers to understand and recognise the role of Avoidance Strategy in the writing process. This is because any absence of error in one area does not necessarily mean the mastery of that area (Kleinmann, 1977; Brown, 2000). As a result, two problems arise. Firstly, the learner will not improve in that specific area (writing) and secondly, if the errors are overlooked actively, they may become fossilized. This study as mentioned in Section (1.5), tries to investigate structures which Persian TEFL learners avoid. By identifying these structures and introducing them to Persian TEFL learners, they will be able to understand the nature of these structures and use them effectively in writing instead of avoiding them.

It has to be pointed out that many studies have shown the failure of Error Analysis to take into account the use of Avoidance Strategy (Schachter, 1974; Kleinman, 1977; Tarone, 1981; James, 1998). This is because Error Analysis only studies errors which learners commit and not those structures and features which they refrain from using due to certain reasons. Lightbown and Spada (2003) stress that when learners resort to Avoidance Strategy this leaves the analyst without

information about the learners' developing Interlanguage. In this regard Brown (2000) states:

“A learner who for one reason or another avoids a particular sound, word, structure, or discourse category may be assumed incorrectly to have no difficulty therewith” (Brown, 2000: 219)

In addition, errors are indications of the learners' progress and teachers in their task have to anticipate it (Brown, 2000). If students commit errors in their course of language learning they are actually revealing their weaknesses, which will help the teacher to know what to emphasise, identify areas of difficulties, and areas in which learners need more practice. All these can be very helpful in the preparation of textbooks for the learners (Corder, 1986; James, 1992; Keshavarz, 2003). In this regard, Laufer and Eliasson (1993) state that:

“Any description of learner language must account for avoidance. Determining what items or structures are avoided has practical value, for it identifies areas that present learning difficulties and will therefore assist educators in the design of language syllabi and tests. Explaining why avoidance occurs contributes to our understanding of the operating principles that underlie the process of L2 learning” (Laufer & Eliasson, 1993: 36)

Accordingly, test developers can benefit from the findings of this research, since by identifying the structures which Persian TEFL learners tend to avoid, they can focus on these structures in both teaching and evaluation.

Thus, the findings of this research will offer insights to language teachers to emphasise all those structures that are normally avoided by English language learners while teaching and help Persian TEFL learners to use these structures

while writing in English in order to overcome the problem of resorting to Avoidance Strategy.

1.8 A Brief Overview of the Study

This study will be complemented among three areas, namely Contrastive Analysis, Error Analysis, and Avoidance Strategy. In this section, a brief explanation about each of these components and their relationship will be presented.

Contrastive Analysis, which is the comparison of the linguistic system of two languages, attempts to predict the areas of difficulty and non-difficulty language learners face. Contrastive Analysis does this by comparing the linguistic system of the learner's native language with that of the target language. Supporters of Contrastive Analysis assert that those features of the target language which are similar to the learners' native language would be relatively easy to learn, and that those elements of the target language which differ from the learners' native language would be relatively difficult to learn (Brown, 2000; Schakne, 1996; James, 1992; Fisiak, 1985).

Error Analysis, which is the study of errors made by second and foreign language learners, examines empirically the actual errors in the target language produced by second language learners and seeks to explain their causes. Proponents of Error Analysis make no *a priori* predictions of learner's difficulty

based on Contrastive Analysis. Instead, errors in the target language are analysed and where appropriate, are attributed to differences between the native language and the target language, overgeneralisation, false assumptions and other reasons (Brown, 2000; Schakne, 1996).

Avoidance Strategy, as discussed in Section (2.4.1), is one of the strategies learners use when they want to overcome a communicative difficulty. What is avoided is a word or structure in the target language that the learner thinks is difficult and prefers to evade it with a parallel and easier word or structure.

The role of Contrastive Analysis in this study is that it explains similarities and differences between the native and target languages and their role in the deployment of Avoidance Strategies. This study also uses Error Analysis, since Avoidance Strategy is classified and studied in the domain of Error analysis. Both Contrastive Analysis and Error Analysis and their relation to Avoidance Strategy are further elaborated in chapter two.

1.9 Definition of Important Terms

Avoidance: “When speaking or writing a second/foreign language, a speaker will often try to avoid a difficult word or structure, and will use a simpler word or structure instead” (Richards & Platt & Weber 1989: 23).

Error: “The use of a linguistic item in a way which a fluent or a native speaker of the language regards as showing faulty or incomplete learning” (Richards. et al 1989: 95).

Mistake: “Made by a language learner when writing or speaking and which is caused by lack of attention, fatigue, carelessness, or some other aspect of performance” (Richards. et al 1989: 95).

TEFL students: TEFL students in this research refer to students undergoing the Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL) programme.

Competence: “The unconscious knowledge that every speaker has toward his or her language or a person’s internalized grammar of a language” (Fromkin & Rodman. 1998).

Performance: “A person’s actual use of the four language skills (speaking, listening, reading, and writing)” (Fromkin & Rodman. 1998).

Target Language (TL): “The language, which a person is learning, in contrast to a first language or mother tongue” (Richards. et al 1989: 288).

Scoring: “Procedures for giving numerical values or scores to the responses in a test” (Richards. et al 1989: 251)

Interlanguage (IL): “A type of language produced by second or foreign language learners who are in the process of learning a language” (Richards. et al 1989: 145).

Fossilization: “A process (in second or foreign language learning), which sometimes occurs in which incorrect linguistic features becomes a permanent feature of the learner’s second/foreign language” (Richards. et al 1989: 111).

Language Skills: “The mode or manner in which language is used. Listening, speaking, reading, and writing are called the four language skills. Speaking and writing are called **productive** skills and reading and listening the **receptive** skills” (Richards. et al 1989: 160).

Proficiency: “Refers to the degree of skill with which a person can use a language, such as how well a person can read, write, speak, or understand language” (Richards. et al 1989: 159).

Over-generalisation: “A process common in both first and second language learning, in which a learner extends the use of a grammatical rule or linguistic item beyond its accepted uses, generally by making words or structures follow a more regular pattern” (Richards. et al 1989: 203).

Transfer: “The carrying over of learned behaviour from one situation to another” (Richards. et al 1989: 297).

Grammatical Inconsistencies: Refer to the grammatical structures which have a lot of exceptions and do not follow a fixed pattern.

Farsi: The official language spoken in Iran (where the research is conducted).

1.10 Limitations of the Study

One of the limitations of the research is that inherent logistical constraints influence the implementation to EFL learners of all universities in Iran. Furthermore, as this research is descriptive and deals with the skill of writing, only a limited sample was surveyed as the procedural aspects such as correction and scoring, were both time consuming and expensive.

1.11 Organisation of the Study

Chapter One outlines the background of the study, the education system in Iran, the statement of the problem, the objectives of the study, the research questions, and the significance of the study.

Chapter Two contains a review of literature related to the present study. This includes discussions of learning strategies, Error Analysis, interlanguage, Communication Strategies, Avoidance Strategy, and Contrastive Analysis. It also presents the theoretical framework of the study.

Chapter Three provides an extensive description of the methodology and design utilised in the study. It also describes the procedure pertaining to sample selection and data collection instruments.

Chapter Four analyses the collected data and presents the statistical analysis related to the data analysis.

A summary of the whole thesis, its conclusions, implications of the study, and recommendations for further research, the study's contributions and concluding remarks are presented in Chapter Five.

1.12 Conclusion

The preceding discussion clearly illustrates that the study of avoidance, a communication strategy commonly adopted by Iranian students who encounter communicative difficulty, is very important. As many Iranian students resort to Avoidance Strategy when they write, this research aims to study syntactic avoidance among Persian university students majoring in Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL). In the next chapter, discussions about Avoidance Strategy, the relevant literature and the areas related to the strategy as well as the theoretical framework of the study will be presented.

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

2.1 Introduction

This chapter deals with the review of the related literature and has five main sections. In the first section, Learning Strategies in second or foreign language learning are reviewed. Secondly, Communication Strategies are discussed. Avoidance Strategy and the related literature are covered in the third section. Error Analysis is presented in the fourth section while Contrastive Analysis is outlined in the final part with discussions of notions related to it, different versions of Contrastive Analysis followed by criticisms of Contrastive Analysis.

2.2 Learning Strategies in Second or Foreign Language Learning

Since the subjects of the following research are TEFL learners, discussions about learning strategies related to a second or foreign language are presented in this part. It also aims to highlight the importance of language learning strategies in foreign language learning. Moreover, this section summarizes the background of language learning strategies, defines the concept of language learning strategy, and outlines the taxonomy of language learning strategies as proposed by several researchers.

2.2.1 Background and Definition of Learning Strategies

Research into language learning strategies began in the 1970s when developments in cognitive psychology influenced much of the research done on language learning strategies. In most of the research on language learning strategies, the primary concern has been on identifying what good language learners do as they learn a second or foreign language, or, in some cases, observe doing while learning a second or foreign language (Williams and Burden, 1997; Brown, 2000).

The term language learning strategy has been defined by many researchers. Ellis (2002: 76) defines learning strategies as “particular approaches or techniques that learners employ to learn a second language.” Ellis (2002) also contends that learning strategies can be “behavioural” or “mental”. He also states that these strategies are problem oriented. That is, learners employ learning strategies when they face a problem. In contrast, Wenden and Rubin (1987: 19) define learning strategies as "... any sets of operations, steps, plans, routines used by the learner to facilitate the obtaining, storage, retrieval, and use of information." Richards and Platt (1992: 209) state that learning strategies are "intentional behaviour and thoughts used by learners during learning so as to better help them understand, learn, or remember new information." Faerch and Kasper (1983: 67) stress that a learning strategy is "an attempt to develop linguistic and sociolinguistic competence in the target language." According to Stern (1992: 261), "the concept of learning strategy is dependent on the assumption that learners

consciously engage in activities to achieve certain goals and learning strategies which can be regarded as broadly conceived intentional directions and learning techniques." All language learners use language learning strategies either consciously or unconsciously when processing new information and performing tasks in the language classroom. Since the language classroom is like a problem-solving environment in which language learners are likely to face new input and difficult tasks given by their instructors, learners attempt to find easy solutions to overcome these problems.

Language learning strategies used during the act of processing new information and performing tasks have been identified and described by a number of researchers. In the following sections, the various categorisations of language learning strategies will be presented.

2.2.2 Taxonomy of Learning Strategies

Language Learning Strategies have been classified by many scholars (Wenden and Rubin 1987; O'Malley et al. 1985; Oxford 1990; Stern 1992, etc.). However, most of these attempts to classify language learning strategies reflect more or less the same categorizations of language learning strategies without any radical changes in classification. In the following subsections, Rubin (1987), Oxford (1990), O'Malley (1985), and Stern's (1992) taxonomies of language learning strategies will be elaborated upon: