



Investigating the Role of L1 in the Overpassivization of English Unaccusatives by Iranian English Majors

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ABSTRACT

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This study investigates the role of Persian complex verbs with the light verb *šodæn* in overpassivization of English unaccusatives by Iranian English majors. The participants were assigned to three levels of proficiency based on their performance on an Oxford Placement Test. They were also asked to produce the correct forms of 20 unaccusative verbs in two contexts. In the first context the Persian translations of the target sentences were not provided while, in the second, they were. The analysis of the data revealed that the participants' performance in the two production tasks were significantly different. Language proficiency was a significant factor in the learners' judgment of overpassivization errors, and the learners' ability to judge the more grammatical form of unaccusative verbs did increase when advancing to a higher proficiency level. The conclusion drawn is that morphological marking and argument structure had significant effects on the rate of overpassivization of English unaccusative verbs. It implies that English teachers should pay more attention to English and Persian morphological markings and the important role of the so-called passive light verb *šodæn* in overpassivization of English unaccusative verbs.

KEYWORDS

complex verbs, inchoatives, light verbs, overpassivization, *šodæn*, unaccusative verb

1. Introduction

In the examples of (1) and (2), Zobl (1989) addressed the issue that inappropriate passive morphology (*be* + the passive participle) has been observed in the compositions written by 114 various English L2 learners.

- (1) *The most memorable experience of my life was happened 15 years ago. (Arabic; Zobl 1989)
 (2) *My mother was died when I was just a baby. (Thai; Zobl 1989)

Citing Zobl, a number of studies in second language acquisition research (Bagherian Poor et al. 2015, Balcom 1997, Hirakawa 1995, Ju 1997, Montrul 1997, Moore 1993, Oshita 1997, 2000, Rezaei and Ariamanesh 2012, Sahragard et al. 2010, Yip 1994, 1995) followed the phenomenon of extension of the English passive rules to a kind of intransitive verbs named as unaccusatives and the causes for it. The following are some examples.

- (3) a. *First, the change of life-style will be happened. (Korean; Ju 1997)
 b. *Our offspring will be suffered because we neglect the pollution. (Chinese; Yip 1995)
 c. *You are arrived in the eternity city. (Italian; Oshita 2000)
 d. *The sun was appeared from behind the cloud. (Persian; Rezaei and Ariamanesh 2012)

According to the above studies, second language researchers seem to be in a general consensus that the errors in (3) occur among L2 learners from various L1 backgrounds. So, this overextension of passive arrangement to a particular class of intransitive verbs known as unaccusatives is called overpassivization (Kim 2007).

In English, according to the government and binding approach, an unaccusative verb is defined as one that is unable to assign structural case to its object. Burzio (1986) argued that an unaccusative verb is one that does not take an external argument, i.e., is unable to assign a theta-role to its subject, known as Burzio's generalization (Haegeman 1994). As stated by the Burzio's generalization, the internal argument has to move to the subject position in the specifier position of IP to take case and fulfills the case filter and θ -criterion. Moreover, Levin and Hovav (1995) referred to different subtypes of unaccusatives, alternating and nonalternating unaccusatives. Alternating unaccusatives (e.g., *open*, *melt*, etc.) have transitive counterparts, but nonalternating unaccusatives (e.g., *happen*, *appear*, etc.) do not.

The accounts proposed so far in the L2 literature have shown that second language learners from various L1 backgrounds were in danger of making overpassivization errors because of major sources affecting this phenomenon: namely, transitivization hypothesis (Yip 1994), syntactic NP movement (Balcom 1997, Oshita 1997, Zobl 1989), L1 influence (Montrul 2001a, No and Chung 2006), conceptualizable agent (Ju 2000) and subject animacy (Croft 1995, Ju 2000, No and Chung 2006). In the present study, another possible explanation involving in passivization of unaccusatives is investigated i.e., "transfer of a compound tense/aspect structure in the learner's first language (L1)" (Oshita 2000, p. 293). Specifically, this study tries to test credibility of one of the causes of overpassivization proposed in the literature for Persian learners of English which have not yet investigated in Iran among Iranian English majors. This statement refers to the fact that in many languages with a compound tense/aspect system like Persian; a *be*-type auxiliary verb is favored by the unaccusatives because of the so-called passive construction in Persian that is the light verb *šodæn* (inchoative).

Hubbard and Hix (1988) observed an interesting fact regarding the phenomenon of '*be* + en' structure with unaccusative verbs and related it to morphosyntactic features of the learner's L1 that was transferred to their interlanguage English. According to Levin and Hovav (1995), unergative and unaccusative verbs as two variants

of intransitive verbs are related to a different underlying syntactic structure as illustrated in (4a) and (4b):

- (4) a. Unergative verb: NP [vp V _] (e.g., [Mary [vp laughed]])
 b. Unaccusative verb: _ [vp V NP] (e.g., [Mary i [vp arrived ti]]) (Shan and Yuan 2008, p. 165)

According to some previous studies (Juff 1996, Montrul 2001a, 2001b, 2001c), morphology as a fundamental correspondence in semantics-syntax has an important role in grammatical functions of arguments and argument structure alternation. Furthermore, languages are different in the way they mark argument structure alternation morphologically, so it creates learnability problems for learners. For example, a language like Persian which projects a rich morphological construction is different from English. In other words, Persian learners of English face learnability problems with this relative decrease in morphological marking of semantics-syntax correspondences in their target language. On the other hand, Persian expresses the causative alternation with the morphemes that are marked overtly, which is different from English that does not express the alternation so overtly.

According to this hypothesis, morphology expressing argument structure alternation in Persian is subsumed under a causative marker such as *-kærdæn-* in (6b) and an inchoative marker such as *-šodæn-* in (5a) which is different from English that lacks the morphology expressing the argument structure alternation overtly.

- (5) Dær baz=šod.
 door open=become.PAST.3SG
 'The door opened.'
- (6) pro dær-ro baz=kærd.
 door-OM open=make.PAST.3SG
 'He/she opened the door.'

As shown in the above examples in (5a) and (6a), such alternation in Persian is observed between the light verb pair *kærdæn* ('do/make') and its unaccusative counterpart *šodæn* ('become'). The light verb *šodæn* ('become') in (5a) sentence is intransitive and expresses a change of state while the light verb *kærdæn* (*do/make*) is replaced, however, it makes the sentence transitive as seen in sentence 6a (Megerdoomian 2001). The complex verbs in Persian like English verbs known as causative alternation verbs (Jackendoff 1990, Levin 1993) *such as open, dry, sink* go through this transitivity alternation. The objects of the transitive clause *door* in (6) are equivalent to the subjects of the corresponding unaccusative constructions. Semantically as well as syntactically, the two variants are clearly linked in which the relation between the two variants of an alternating verb turns back to the fact that the internal structure of the inchoative version is a subset of the structure of the causative alternant as Megerdoomian (2001) proposed. Henceforth, BECOME event combined with a resulting state represented by the lexical root 'open' in inchoative verb. Then, the CAUSE event is added to the inchoative structure to form causative variant of the verb 'open' (Megerdoomian 2001).

Therefore, Sato (2009) introduced the argument structure alternation with overt morphemes as a new light on the phenomenon of overpassivization. He believed that overt morphemes in the argument structure alternation have an important part in creating these errors and thus learners are more likely to make overpassivization errors in overtly marked argument structure alternation events. The assumption of the present study is that Persian learners of English attribute the strong preference of passive forms for the inchoative to the overt morphology in

their L1 argument structure alternation.

For this purpose, the present study addressed three research questions as follows:

1. Are Iranian English majors more likely to overpassivize English unaccusative verbs when the translation context offers them a so-called passive light verb (*šodæn*)?
2. Is there any significant difference in participants' judgment between alternating and nonalternating unaccusatives in terms of overpassivization errors?
3. Is there any significant difference in the performance of the three groups of lower intermediate, upper intermediate and advanced groups when producing and judging English unaccusative verbs?

2. Literature Review

2.1 Studies on Unaccusativity

Inappropriate overpassivization of English unaccusatives is frequently observed among L2 learners' interlanguage systems. The following studies reviews the line of research on this issue.

As stated by Zobl (1989), the Unaccusativity Hypothesis provided the explanation for the nontarget forms. Learners wrongly treated passive and unaccusative verbs in the same way because both have a logical object and lack a logical subject. So, they used '*be + en*' to mark the lack of a logical subject. The assumption proposed by Zobl was that irregular passive unaccusatives arose from the grammatical function of '*be + en*' as an overt marker of syntactic movement. Zobl (1989) also investigated the overpassivization of unaccusatives with a focus on the theme theta-role and the subject position. The results revealed that the alignment of the thematic relation theme to the position of the syntactic subject have been the most problematic for L2 learners.

Other L2 researchers like Yip (1994) have shown that verb alternation causes problems to learners of various languages including Spanish, Hebrew, Korean, Chinese, Indonesian, German, and Greek. Based on the results of GJT, she noted that L2 learners often tended to passivize alternating unaccusatives rather than nonalternating unaccusatives. Yip implied that L2 learners came across the difficulty to distinguish alternating from nonalternating unaccusatives. So, she concluded that L2 learners' difficulties with English unaccusatives stemmed from transitivization because only transitive verbs permit passivization in English. Yip analyzed the errors according to Transitivization hypothesis. The passive of unaccusatives involves adding a causative event to the argument structure of nonalternating unaccusatives and expanding causativization to nonalternating unaccusatives. Yip states that passive unaccusatives involve the expansion of causativization to nonalternating unaccusatives.

From Balcom's (1977) view, which states: much of overpassivization has a lot to do with alternating unaccusatives whose subject was a theme and denoted a change of state. Thereby, leading to two variations in the grammaticality judgment task and cloze test. '*be + en*' was not equally found in the cloze test and grammaticality judgment task, meaning that participants were sufficiently made less errors in the cloze test where the lack of ungrammatical stimuli was, but in contrast they made more errors in the judgment of the language where the presence of ungrammatical stimuli existed. In fact, findings of Balcom study are in line with the Zobl's claim but still something different has been stated in the Balcom's findings. The learners tended to do causativization with nonalternating unaccusatives before passivization occurred, which was opposite to Zobl's hypothesis.

Oshita (1997) discusses some non-target intransitive verbs which can be found in native speakers' essays from different L1 backgrounds. Oshita interprets the phenomenon of overpassivization based on the Unaccusative Trap Hypothesis. From Oshita's view, the Unaccusative Trap Hypothesis states three developmental stages connected to the realization and disappearance of the non-target forms. Furthermore, the first stage refers to learners' disability to distinguish unergatives from unaccusatives, according to Oshita, they assume "Single Argument Linking Rule", which checks the single argument of unergatives and unaccusative verbs as the external. Thereby leading to the second stage, learners project the non-target linking rules and start to produce overpassivization with unaccusatives. Due to the fact, that the single argument is regarded as internal argument not the external. Finally, at the final stage, the wrong assumption is replaced by the correct one.

Researchers such as Montrul (2001a) and Kondo (2005) have claimed that overpassivization is an L1 morphologically transfer phenomenon. This type of error has been taken as evidence that L2 learners are sensitive to L1 morphologically marked verbs. For example, Japanese learners of English preferred the passive form to the zero-derived form with verbs whose intransitive variant was morphologically marked such as break, burn, sell, collapse. It also suggested that these errors were due to the presence or absence of a passive morpheme in the learners' L1 translations of the unaccusatives.

In fact, overpassivization with unaccusatives has quite been addressed observed in English (Balcom 1997, Oshita 1997, Yip 1995, Zobl 1989), in Korean (Ju 2000) and in Persian (Bagherian Poor et al. 2015, Sahragard et al. 2012). The effect of conceptualizable agent in discourse has an important role in passivation (Sahragard et al. 2012). The study focused on Persian-speaking Iranian English majors to discover if the existence of conceptualizable agents in discourse is a significant motivation for the L2 learners to overpassivize unaccusatives in English or not. Furthermore, some researchers have dedicated their time to study various factors affecting L2 overpassivization errors, namely verb alternation, animacy, context type and L1 morphological transfer. But the researcher did not find an adequate literature on the role of L1 (Persian) in overpassivization of English unaccusatives.

Considering Persian learners of English, little research has been done to investigate this phenomenon from the role of L1 perspective, as mentioned earlier. Overpassivization as a universal problem in L2 acquisition and the role of L1 as one reason made the researcher to explore the role in the Iranian English majors' overpassivization of the unaccusative verbs. Furthermore, the researcher provides information of how the participants really produce and judge English target verbs that have the so-called passive light verb *šodaen* in the corresponding L1 verbs. As the role of L1 effect, little research has been done in Iran, so the researcher found this gap and followed it.

2.2 The So-Called Passive Constructions in Persian

The LV *šodaen* ('become') is systematically used in so-called passive or unaccusative constructions. Most linguists believe that Persian has a passive structure. The description of this structure and the issues related to it have been debated among many Iranian and non-Iranian linguists. (Hajatti 1977, Khazai Far 1374, Palmer 1971, Soheili-Isfahani 1976). Dabir Moghaddam (1985) has suggested that the inchoative *šodaen* is not the same as the passive *šodaen*, arguing that Persian does exhibit structural passive constructions. The problem is that the verb *šodaen* used in Persian passive structure has apparently another role. It is a replacement LV in the intransitive verbs for the LV *kaerdaen* in transitive verbs, as in *khošk šodaen* versus *khošk kaerdaen*. With regard to the dual roles of the verb *šodaen*, the determination of the passive structure from the intransitive ones is not apparent from the verb forms.

The apparent duality role of the verb *šodæn* has raised many discussions in the field of linguistics and interpreted in different ways. In the Anglos' point of view, one role of the verb *šodæn* is in making passive verb and the other is the neutral role that is an element of compound verbs in Persian. In Khazae's semantic point of view, it is only possible to explain the role of *šodæn* from the semantics perspective. Consider the following example in (7):

(7) âb tæbxir šod.

Âb is in a change of state. In fact, the nature of the verb (*tæbxir šodæn*) is in such a way that necessarily accompanied by a change in the subject. According to semantics, the event in (7) is inchoative and it is in the nature of event. In other words, the verb *šodæn* in Persian is used in a situation in which the subject is not the agent of the verb but is affected by the verb and as a result, its state has changed, whether the change is in the nature of event or whether it is done by the agent. In light of this, Juffs (1996) and Montrul (2001a, 2001b, 2001c) found that morphology as a fundamental correspondence in semantics-syntax has an important role in grammatical functions of arguments and argument structure alternation. Persian expresses the causative alternation with the morphemes that are marked overtly, which is different from English that does not express the alternation so overtly.

English lacks the morphological marking of the argument structure alternation while Persian has as seen in Example (8b) and Example (9b). Persian has a causative marker such as *-kærdæn-* in (9) and an inchoative marker such as *-šodæn-* in (8).

(8) Dær baz=šod.
door open=become.PAST.3SG
'The door opened.'

(9) pro dær-ro baz=kærd.
door-OM open=make.PAST.3SG
'He/she opened the door.'

Here, the choice of the light verb affects the transitivity of the verbal complex. As shown in the above examples in (8) and (9), such alternation in Persian is observed between the light verb pair *kærdæn* ('do/make') and its unaccusative counterpart *šodæn* ('become'). The light verb *šodæn* ('become') in (8) is intransitive and express a change of state while the light verb *kærdæn* ('do/make') is replaced, however, it makes the sentence transitive as seen in (9). The complex verbs in Persian like English verbs known as causative alternation verbs (Jackendoff 1990, Levin 1993). Henceforth, BECOME event combined with a resulting state represented by the lexical root 'open' in inchoative verb. Then, the CAUSE event is added to the inchoative structure to form causative variant of the verb 'open'.

The following representations for the intransitive and transitive open has been provided by Harley, where the causative event (which projects an external argument) occupies the same position as the BECOME event.

- a. open – intrans. [BECOME [y open]]
- b. open – trans. [x CAUSE [y open]]

The above analysis supports the surface realization of Persian complex verbs, in which the change of state event

is characterized by the light verb *šodæn* ('become') and the causative event is denoted by the light verb *kærdæn* ('make'). The two light verbs are in complementary distribution so they can never occur within the same predicate in Persian (Megerdoomian 2001). Megerdoomian (2001) suggests that the light verb *šodæn* ('become') is replaced by its causative variant and formed the causative/inchoative alternations. The internal structure of the BECOME event combines with the high CAUSE to form the transitive verb.

Intransitive: [y BECOME State]

Transitive: [x CAUSE- BECOME [y State]]

Megerdoomian (2001) proposed two independent structures for the intransitive and transitive alternants. By combining the various components, both verb forms are built in the syntactic structure. The close relation between the alternating forms is obtained from the fact that the internal structure of the intransitive verb is a subset of the transitive verbal structure.

3. Statement of the Problem

The effect of various factors on the overpassivization of the unaccusatives was investigated by a number of researchers. Context type, L1 morphological transfer, subject animacy, syntactic NP movement, transitivization hypothesis, verb alternation were among the factors studied and reviewed. The following authors had the most contribution in the illumination of the effect of these factors: Balcom (1997), Croft (1995), Hirakawa (2003), Ju (2000), Kondo (2000), Montrul (2001a), No and Chung (2006), Oshita (1997), Sahragard et al. (2010), Yip (1994) and Zobl (1989). The conclusion referred to the lack of an adequate literature on overpassivization error and the need for the investigating the issue further.

Considering Persian learners of English, little research has been done to investigate this phenomenon from the role of L1 perspective, as mentioned earlier. Overpassivization as a universal problem in L2 acquisition and the role of L1 as one reason made the researcher to explore the role in the Iranian English majors' overpassivization of the unaccusative verbs. Furthermore, the researcher provides information of how the participants really produce and judge English target verbs that have the so-called passive light verb *šodæn* in the corresponding L1 verbs. As the role of L1 effect, little research has been done in Iran, so the researcher found this gap and followed it.

4. Method

4.1 Participants

A total of 117 students studying English as a foreign language in Bahonar and Vali-e-Asr University during the second semester of the year 2015 took part in the study as the participants. All of the students were at BA level studying English literature and translation. According to the information provided, their ages ranged from 20 to 25 and the average age was 21.11.

The students took an Oxford Placement Test (Allen 1992) and based on the instructions and score ranges provided in the test manual, they were assigned to three levels of proficiency (lower intermediate, upper intermediate and advanced learners of English). Additionally, 27 students whose score were lower than those of

the lower intermediate level or unsuccessful to do the tasks completely were omitted from the study.

The remaining students' data (90) who were 10 males and 80 females were finally analyzed. The test reliability showed an index of 0.81. Table 1 shows this classification more clearly:

Table 1. Participants' Data

Male		10
Female		80
Total number of the participants		90
Age	Min	20
	Max	25
	Average	21.11

4.2 Materials

4.2.1 Oxford Placement Test (OPT)

A 1992 version of OPT was administered to determine the subjects' language proficiency level. The test consisted of 100 multiple choice items divided in two parts. The first part consisted of 25 multiple choice items in separate, numbered sentences and the other 25 items were presented in the second part which was a text on the football game. Based on the test manual, scores of 64 and 73 out of a maximum of 100 were offered as the cut-off points for the placement of the testees at the three different levels. Moreover, all the structures tested in Grammar test Part 1 and 2 of the OPT were based on the test items in standardized tests such as the Cambridge University Examinations Syndicate and the British Council and in all parts of the test, lexis and the level of difficulty had been carefully controlled and balanced, respectively.

Based on the results of the OPT, the participants were divided into three different proficiency levels: the lower intermediate level (the scores ranging from 46-63), the upper intermediate level (the scores ranging from 64-73) and the advanced level (the scores ranging from 74-84). The results of the test are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Oxford Placement Test Results

Groups	N	Minimum	Maximum
Low-intermediate	40	46	63
Upper-intermediate	29	64	72
Advanced	21	73	84

4.2.2 Written production task

The WPT comprised 20 target sentences in English and each sentence was provided with an unaccusative verb in parentheses both alternating and non-alternating unaccusatives. The task was an adaptation of the WPT used by Hirakawa (2000) and the result of its reliability was 0.760 according to Cronbach's alpha. The task included 4 types of unaccusative verb groups, namely, two alternating vs. two non-alternating based on the presence or absence of the so-called passive light verb *sodæn* in Persian translations of each verb. The subjects were asked to use the appropriate form of the verb shown in parentheses in the blank.

The 20 sentences were designed to elicit a total of 4 types of target constructions related to English

passivization. An example of each type is listed below:

- (10) Type 1: non-alternating unaccusative in English that is encoded as marked-passive in Persian
Sara used to have a little cat. She liked the cat very much, so she took good care of it. One morning, the cat (Disappear).
- (11) Type 2: non-alternating unaccusative in English that is encoded as unmarked-passive in Persian
John and Mary kept a red parrot as a pet at their house. Yesterday, the parrot (Escape) through the window.
- (12) Type 3: alternating unaccusative in English that is encoded as marked-passive in Persian
John was very happy when it started snowing Friday afternoon. He decided to go on a ski trip with his friend. But all of the snow..... (Melt) while they were driving.
- (13) Type 4: alternating unaccusative in English that is encoded as unmarked-passive in Persian
The population of the Montreal city was around ten thousand two years ago. But now its population (Increase) greatly.

The aim was to omit the clues from the English target sentences in the WPT in order not to distract the subject to passivize the sentences. In order to mask the focus on unaccusatives, the WPT just included 20 sentences 10 alternating and 10 non-alternating unaccusatives with no transitive verbs.

4.2.2 The translation task

The participants were asked to read a set of 20 sentences carefully and then make judgments about the grammaticality of the sentences based on the presented translation in Persian. There were 4 categories of test structures, i.e., 4 types, in the translation task. The following 4 types are examples of the used test:

- (14) Type 1: non-alternating unaccusative in English that is encoded as marked-passive in Persian.
xærgooš dar dæstân dæljæqæk nâpædid šod.
The rabbit (disappeared/was disappeared) in the clown's hands.
- (15) Type 2: non-alternating unaccusative in English that is encoded as unmarked-passive in Persian
Šæb gozæšte se zendâni æz zendân færvâr kærðænd.
Three prisoners (escaped/were escaped) from the jail last night.
- (16) Type 3: alternating unaccusative in English that is encoded as marked-passive in Persian
John dooš gereft. Zæmâni ke dær hâle xândæn rooznâme bood moohâjæš khošk šodænd. John took a shower. While he was reading the paper, his hair (dried/was dried).
- (17) Type 4: alternating unaccusative in English that is encoded as unmarked-passive in Persian
Rænge moohâje æli kâmelæn taqir kærð.
Ali's hair color (changed/was changed) completely.

The chosen unaccusative verbs were the most frequently overpassivized ones among second language learners as Ju (2000), Oshita (1997) and Yip (1990) reported and the result of the reliability in the translation task showed an index of 0.766, using the Cronbach's alpha reliability formula. The distributions of the four types of unaccusative verbs in the tasks were as follows:

Table 3. Four Types of Unaccusative Verbs

Persian translation	Verb Types	
	Non-alternating unaccusative	Alternating unaccusative
marked	[N, marked]	[A, marked]
unmarked	[N, unmarked]	[A, unmarked]

Note. N = Non-alternating unaccusative, A = Alternating unaccusative, marked = *šodæn* marked, unmarked = *šodæn* unmarked

The feature [A, marked] indicated that the verb was an 'alternating unaccusative' which was marked with *šodæn* in Persian (e.g., *baz šodæn* 'open') and [N, unmarked] represented that the verb was a 'non-alternating unaccusative' which was unmarked in Persian counterparts (e.g., *vojud dâštæn* 'exist'). Each verb was tested two times: once in WPT and once in the translation task. The distribution of the test items is shown in Table 4.

Table 4. Distribution of Test Items in WPT and Translation Task

Verb types	No. of sentences	Verbs employed in the WPT	Verbs employed in the translation task
Nonalternating with L1 marker	10	arrive, disappear, appear, emerge, vanish	<i>Vâred šodæn, nâpædid šodæn næmjân šodæn, zâher šodæn qeib šodæn</i>
Non-alternating without L1 marker	10	die, exist, happen, remain, escape	<i>Fot kærdaæn, vojud dâštæn Etefâq oftâdaæn, bâqi mândaæn, fââr kærdaæn</i>
Alternating with L1 marker	10	melt, dry, start, open, sink	<i>âb šodæn, xošk šodæn, šoru šodæn, bâz šodæn, qærq šodæn,</i>
Alternating without L1 marker	10	increase, change, boil, shake, grow	<i>æfzâješ jâftæn, tæqir kærdaæn, juš âmaedaæn, tekân xordaæn, rošd kærdaæn</i>

4.3 Procedure

Before administering the WPT and translation task, the tasks were piloted with a convenient sample of 24 selected from the target population to obtain the reliabilities of the tasks. The reliability was 0.760 and 0.766 for the WPT and the translation task, respectively. The results of the tasks reliabilities are reported in Table 5 and Table 6.

Table 5. Reliability Statistics for Production Task

Cronbach's alpha	Cronbach's alpha based on standardized items	N of Items
.729	.760	20

Table 6. Reliability Statistics for Translation Task

Cronbach's alpha	Cronbach's alpha based on standardized items	N of Items
.774	.766	20

The subjects were asked to do the WPT first, then the OPT as an interval followed by the translation task. In the WPT and translation, the subjects were asked not to go back and make changes to the previous sentences for which they had given the use and the judgment of the unaccusative verbs.

In the two tasks, the subjects were given clear instructions on how to do the tasks. The total time to finish the whole tasks (including the OPT) was around 50 minutes for each subject.

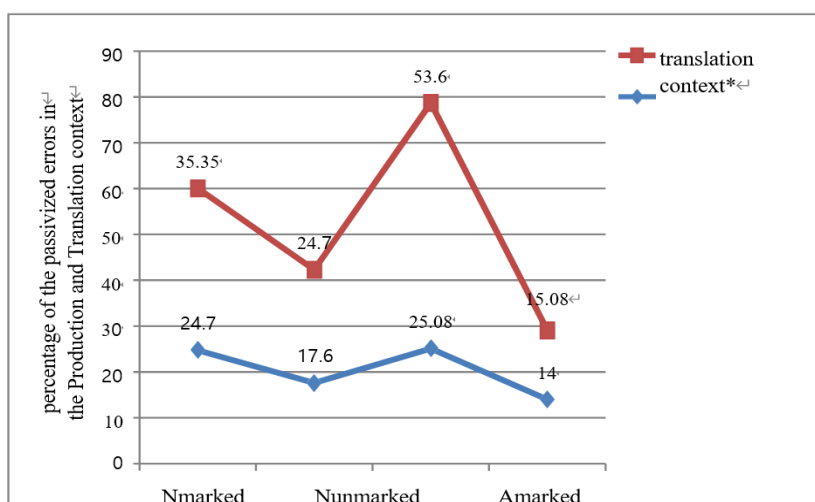
4.4. Data Analysis

For the scoring of the WPT, one mark was given for a target response that was correct and zero mark for a passivized but ungrammatical response. Moreover, in the translation task, a similar scoring method was adopted, that is, zero for a non-target response that was marked in Persian and one for a non-passivized but grammatical response.

Out of 117 learners, 27 were eliminated because they did not complete the task completely. In the end, 90 task papers were available for analysis. Table 7 gives a summary of the errors the participants made in each context and verb category. Figure 1 provides a visual summary of the same data in the production and translation context.

Table 7. Summary of the Passivized Errors in the Production and Translation Context by Iranian English Majors

	Nmarked (5verbs)	Nunmarked (5verbs)	Amarked (5 verbs)	Aunmarked (5 verbs)
Production context	494 (24.7 %)	352 (17.6 %)	516 (25.08 %)	280 (14 %)
Translation context	707 (35.35 %)	494 (24.7 %)	1072 (53.6 %)	316 (15.8 %)



Notes. Nmarked and Nunmarked = Nonalternating marked and unmarked unaccusative verbs in the production and translation context
 Amarked and Aunmarked = Alternating marked and unmarked unaccusative verbs in the production and translation context

Figure 1. Visual Summary of the Passivized Errors in the Production and Translation Context by Iranian English Majors

5. Results

5.1 Are Iranian English majors more likely to overpassivize English unaccusative verbs when the translation context offers them a so-called passive light verb (*šodæn*)?

In order to answer the first research question, As Table 7 shows, the learners' performance on the unaccusative verbs measured in the production context is compared with their performance on the translation. A quick look through the table shows that the learners in the two verb groups made considerable passivized errors in alternating and nonalternating marked unaccusative verbs. As the table shows, the highest mean (53.6%) belongs to the alternating unaccusatives, followed closely with the non-alternating unaccusatives (35.35 %).

The sentences were divided into four groups depending on marked type (marked versus unmarked) provided by the translated sentence and the verb type used in the target sentence (i.e., alternating or non-alternating unaccusative). The mean scores and standard deviations for these four verb groups in the two tasks are shown in Table 8.

Table 8. Total Corrected Scores of Iranian English Majors in Eight Conditions Descriptive Statistics

	<i>N</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Std. Deviation</i>
P N-marked	90	15.0667	3.44719
T N-marked	90	12.9333	5.69013
P N-unmarked	90	16.4889	3.04736
T N-unmarked	90	15.0667	3.93429
P A-marked	90	14.8444	4.80616
T A-marked	90	9.2889	5.45718
P A-unmarked	90	17.2000	3.02499
T A-unmarked	90	16.8444	3.25649
Valid N (listwise)	90		

Note. P = Production, T = Translation, N = Nonalterning, A= Alternating.

Then, the obtained scores in the production and translation tasks were submitted to a repeated measures ANOVA test on SPSS. The results of the initial multivariate analysis have been shown in Table 9 below:

Table 9. Multivariate Tests for Overpassivization of Unaccusative Verbs

	Effect	Value	<i>F</i>	<i>Hypothesis df</i>	<i>Error df</i>	<i>Sig.</i>	<i>Partial Eta Squared</i>
factor1	Pillai's Trace	.701	27.192 ^a	7.000	81.000	.000	.701
	Wilks' Lambda	.299	27.192 ^a	7.000	81.000	.000	.701
	Hotelling's Trace	2.350	27.192 ^a	7.000	81.000	.000	.701
	Roy's Largest Root	2.350	27.192 ^a	7.000	81.000	.000	.701
factor1 * Pscorebinne d	Pillai's Trace	.482	3.720	14.000	164.000	.000	.241
	Wilks' Lambda	.546	4.089 ^a	14.000	162.000	.000	.261
	Hotelling's Trace	.780	4.460	14.000	160.000	.000	.281
	Roy's Largest Root	.708	8.295 ^b	7.000	82.000	.000	.415

a. Exact statistic

b. The statistic is an upper bound on F that yields a lower bound on the significance level.

c. Design: Intercept + Pscorebinned Within Subjects Design: factor1

As Table 9 shows the value for Wilk's Lambda ("the most commonly reported statistic" (Pallant, 2002, p. 199) is .299, with a probability value of .000. The p value is less than .05; therefore, it can be concluded that there is a statistically significant effect for the 8 different verb categories. The results of the differences within subjects are presented in Table 10. The statistical analysis revealed that the light verb *šodaen* provided by the context in translation led to a significant difference in the subjects' performance on the overpassivization of unaccusative verbs in the task with a large *Eta squared* effect size of .701. An interaction effect was observed between the context type and proficiency ($p = .000$). Additionally, there was no significant effect for the between group variable of proficiency ($p = 0.145$) as shown in the Table 10.

Table 10. Results of the Repeated Measures ANOVA

Source of variance	<i>SS</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>MS</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>Sig.</i>	<i>Eta squared</i>
Within-subjects effects	3396.906	7	485.272	*33.227	.000	.276
Between-subjects effects	119.509	2	59.755	1.975	.145	.043

5.2 Is there any significant difference in participants' judgment between alternating and nonalternating unaccusatives in terms of overpassivization errors?

In order to observe if there is any significant difference in participants' judgment between alternating and nonalternating unaccusatives in terms of overpassivization errors, for the second research question, and identify exactly where the difference lies, the data were submitted to a number of paired-samples t -tests. The pairs used were as follows: Pair 1 [P/T Nmarked], Pair 2 [P/T Nunmarked], Pair 3 [P/T Amarked], and Pair 4 [P/T Aunmarked]. Table 11 summarizes the four paired samples t -test results obtained from the software.

Table 11. Summarized Results from Paired-samples t -tests

Pairs	<i>MD</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>Sig.</i> (two tailed)
*Pair1 [P/T Nmarked]	2.133	5.567	3.635	.000
Pair 2 [P/T Nunmarked]	1.422	4.459	3.026	.003
*Pair 3 [P/T Amarked]	5.555	6.106	8.632	.000
Pair 4 [P/T Aunmarked]	.355	3.579	.942	.349

Notes. 1. MD = mean difference

2. *significance at .001

The magnitude of the t -values in pair 1 and pair 3, in Table 11, showed a significant variation in performance of the participants in the two verb categories (alternating and non-alternating marked unaccusative verbs) and in the two production and translation contexts.

Pair 3 [P/T Amarked] showed a significant variation in overpassivization between production and judgment of alternating marked verbs ($t(89) = 8.632, p = .000$). The t value for this pair is the highest among the other three pairs. Tables 8 and 11 show that the participants were more inclined to passivize alternating unaccusative verbs than their nonalternating counterparts when there was the light verb *šodaen* in the translation context. In order to compare the verb categories in pair 3 across the three proficiency groups, a mixed between-within subjects ANOVA was carried out. The results clearly revealed a significant main effect ($F(1, 89) = 64.06, p = 0.000$, Wilk's Lambda = 0.576) with a large effect size (*Eta squared* = .424). No interaction effect was observed between the context type and proficiency. Additionally, there was significant effect for the between group variable of proficiency ($p = 0.005$).

Pair1 [P/T Nmarked] showed a significant difference in overpassivization for non-alternating unaccusatives in the marked verbs ($t(89) = 3.635, p = .000$). It meant that Iranian English majors overpassivized non-alternating unaccusative verbs more in the marked ones. Therefore, a mixed between within ANOVA was carried out. It was concluded that there was a statistically significant main effect for the context ($F(1, 89) = 10.919, p = 0.001, Wilk's Lambda = 0.888$) and the effect size was large (0.112) according to the Cohen (1988, pp. 284-287).

By contrast, Pair 2 [P/T Nunmarked] did not show a significant difference in overpassivization for non-alternating unaccusatives in unmarked event ($t(89) = 3.026, p = .003$). In order to compare pair 2 verb categories, a mixed between-within subjects ANOVA was conducted. The statistical results revealed a significant main effect of context ($F(1, 89) = 8.819, p = 0.004, Wilk's Lambda = 0.908$) with a moderate effect size ($Eta squared = .09$). No interaction effect was observed for proficiency and context ($p = .912$).

In addition, Pair 4 [P/T Aunmarked] did not show a significant difference in overpassivization for alternating unaccusatives in unmarked event. After that a mixed between-within subjects ANOVA was conducted to compare the two verb categories in pair 4 across proficiency groups. The results did not reveal a significant main effect of the context ($F(1, 89) = 1.629, p = 0.205, Wilk's Lambda = 0.982$) with a small effect size ($Eta squared = .018$). No interaction effect was observed between the context type and proficiency ($p = 0.360$). Additionally, there was no significant effect for the between group variable of proficiency ($p = 0.265$).

5.3 Is there any significant difference in the performance of the three groups of lower intermediate, upper intermediate and advanced groups when producing and judging English unaccusative verbs?

In order to answer the third question, the participants were divided into three groups of lower intermediate, upper intermediate and advanced based on their scores in the OPT.

The big difference in the magnitude of the two means Pair 3 [low-interm P/T Amarked] $MD = 6.50$ shows that the lower intermediate group' performance was significantly different ($t(39) = 8.193$). Lower intermediate group performance showed a significant difference in overpassivization for the two verb categories Pair 3 [low-interm P/T Amarked], Pair1 [low-interm P/T Nmarked] unaccusatives ($p = .000, .042 < 0.05$). But they did not show a significant difference in overpassivization in Pair 2 [low-interm P/T Nunmarked] and Pair 4 [low-interm P/T Aunmarked] ($p = 0.076, 0.750 > 0.05$). It means that the lower intermediate group made overpassivization in Pair1 [low-interm P/T Nmarked] and Pair 3 [low-interm P/T Amarked] in the presence of the light verb *šodaen* as Table 12 shows:

Table 12. Summary of the Four Paired-sample t-tests for Lower Intermediate Group

	<i>MD</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>Sig.</i>
Pair1[low-interm P/T Nmarked]	1.90	39	2.098	*0.042
Pair 2[low-interm P/T Nunmarked]	1.20	39	1.820	0.076
Pair 3 [low-interm P/T Amarked]	6.50	39	8.193	*0.000
Pair 4[low-interm P/T Aunmarked]	0.2	39	0.321	0.750

Similarly, the upper intermediate learners showed a significant variation in overpassivization for the two verb categories Pair 3 [upper-interm P/T Amarked], Pair1 [upper-interm P/T Nmarked] unaccusatives ($t = 5.127, 4.928; p = .000, .000 < 0.05$). But they did not show a significant difference in overpassivization in Pair 2 and pair 4 ($p = 0.063, 0.326 > 0.05$). It means that the upper intermediate group made overpassivization in Pair1 [upper-interm P/T Nmarked] and Pair 3 [upper-interm P/T Amarked] in the presence of the light verb *šodaen*. The results are shown in Table 13.

Table 13. Summary of the Four Paired-sample t-tests for Upper Intermediate Group

	<i>MD</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>t value</i>	<i>Sig.</i>
Pair1[upper-interm P/T Nmarked]	4.827	28	4.928	*0.000
Pair 2[upper-interm P/T Nunmarked]	1.65	28	2.117	0.063
Pair 3 [upper-interm P/T Amarked]	6.75	28	5.127	*0.000
Pair 4[upper-interm P/T Aunmarked]	0.55	28	1.000	0.326

But advanced learners did not show any significant difference in overpassivization of the four pair verb groups $p > 0.05$. Table 14 presents the results:

Table 14. Summary of the Four Paired-sample t-tests for Advanced Group

	<i>MD</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>Sig.</i>
Pair1[adv-interm P/T Nmarked]	1.14	20	1.45	0.162
Pair 2[adv-interm P/T Nunmarked]	1.52	20	1.284	0.214
Pair 3 [adv-interm P/T Amarked]	2.09	20	1.759	0.094
Pair 4[adv-interm P/T Aunmarked]	1.142	20	1.451	0.162

The lower intermediate and upper intermediate learners overpassivized the verbs when their Persian translations contained the light verb *šodaæn* (i.e., *arrive, disappear, appear, emerge, vanish, melt, dry, start, open, sink*) than when they are unmarked (i.e., *die, exist, happen, remain, escape, increase, change, boil, shake, grow*).

6. Discussion and Conclusion

Based on the main results of the two tasks (the WPT and the translation tasks), we now would address the main study questions in turn.

Overall, the results of the production task manifested and statistically supported that Iranian English majors had problems both with alternating and non-alternating structures as two variants of unaccusative verbs (based on the results of Table 7). It means that all the groups indeed manifested variability in their performance. The following examples show this phenomenon more clearly:

- (18) *John went to the kitchen to take some food from the refrigerator but nothing **was remained**. (L1 Persian, lower intermediate learner).
 (19) *The cat **was disappeared**. (L1 Persian, upper intermediate learner).
 (20) *The shop **will be opened** at 7 o'clock. (L1 Persian, advanced learner).

The findings of the current study are in line with (*Thai, Arabic*: Zobl (1989), *Chinese*: Balcom (1997), *Korean*: Ju (2000); *Italian, Spanish*: Oshita (2000), *Japanese*: Zobl (1989), in which different L1 languages have problems with unaccusative verbs and passivize them (*are fallen in love, was died*). The results also substantiate Zobl (1989) who concluded that NP-Be-Ven structure (e.g., “*An accident was happened*” or “*The ice was melted*”) was observed in the L2 learners’ production of non-alternating and alternating unaccusative verbs.

Furthermore, the findings about non-alternating and alternating unaccusatives in the production task supported the Oshita’s (2000) Unaccusativity Trap Hypothesis (UTH) which refers to the fact that non-alternating and alternating unaccusatives are not distinct from each other and Oshita (2001) supported this claim. However, the

results in the translation task showed that acquiring alternating unaccusatives was more difficult for Iranian English majors than non-alternating unaccusatives. This difficulty may be traced back to the role of the subjects' L1, but it is in contrast with what Yip (1995) claimed that the acquisition of non-alternating unaccusative verbs poses more difficulty than alternating unaccusative verbs.

Table 7 showed that all Iranian English majors in the translation context accepted non-alternating unaccusative verbs in the NP-Be-Ven structure significantly less often than they did with alternating ones. That is to say, they recovered from the error of passivization of non-alternating unaccusative verbs earlier than that of alternating ones so this finding was consistent with Unaccusative Hierarchy Hypothesis (Sorace 1995) which concluded that there is a hierarchy in unaccusative verbs which ranges from core unaccusative verbs to peripheral ones. Therefore, the core of the hierarchy is a place for non-alternating unaccusative verbs and the prediction is that non-alternating are acquired before alternating unaccusative verbs, which are considered as peripheral. However, the findings in the production context are more in line with Ju (2000), who discovered that there was no variance between these two types of unaccusative verbs, because they were equally passivized by Iranian English majors.

Verb alternation as another cause seems to be effective at the passivization of unaccusatives in the L2. The results from the translation task suggested that the passivization of unaccusatives occurred more with alternating unaccusatives than non-alternating ones by Persian participants of this study (Table 7), as Balcom (1997), Hirakawa (2003), and Yip (1994) pointed out in the previous studies. Their findings showed that there is an increase in the mean rates of overpassivization with alternating unaccusatives as opposed to non-alternating ones. Moreover, the mistaken passivization of unaccusatives in the translation task and production task indicated some variations similar to what Balcom (1997) observed in the grammaticality judgment task and cloze test. The results of the production task clearly showed that the lack of ungrammatical stimuli exerted its influences on the Persian L2 learners of English with respect to the use of passive morphology and made them to commit less errors, but in contrast we found that the availability of ungrammatical stimuli *šodæn* in the translation task was a crucial role in learners' misperception of unaccusative as passive.

Iranian learners' tendency to accept the passivized unaccusatives in the NP-Be-Ven structure could be explained by their sensitivity to the so-called passive light verb in their Persian translations. Thus, our study concluded that the L1 morphological transfer and L1 argument structure as two factors contributed to the error rate of overpassivization. That is to say, the transfer of L1 morphology in L2 English of alternating verbs (see Pair 3) (*dær xod be xod bâz šod as the door was opened*) and non-alternating verbs (see Pair 1) (*xærgooš dar dæstân dælqæk nâpædid šod as the rabbit was disappeared in the clown's hands*) indicated the high acceptance rate of illicit passive sentences and partially provided support for Hypothesis 1.

Another plausible explanation for the learners' performance was the transfer of L1 argument structure. This view argues that L2 learners represent their performance accurately where the argument structure in the L1 and L2 are the same but represent their performance incorrectly where their argument structures are different (Okamoto, 2007). Among all verb types, the strongest L1 effect was found with Pair 3 (e.g., *melt, dry, start, open, and sink*) whose L1 equivalent was causative/inchoative alternations (*šodæn*) unaccusative. This is in line with the explanation suggested by Sato (2009) for the overpassivization errors in English. Thus, Persian learners of English attribute the strong preference of passive forms for the inchoative to the overt morphology in their L1 argument structure alternation. As the following examples have shown:

- (21) Dær baz=šod.
 Door open=become.PAST.3SG
 'The door opened.'

- (22) Pro dær-ro baz=kærd.
 door-OM open=make.PAST.3SG
 'he/she opened the door.'

This finding is in line with the findings of previous studies showing that L1 properties transferred into L2 even in the post-initial states (Inagaki 2001, Juffs 1996). Moreover, the findings of this study confirmed this in that Persian learners showed a tendency to passivize unaccusatives due to the effect of L1 morphological transfer and are in line with Kondo (2003), Montrul (1997, 2001a), and No and Chung (2006) who concluded that these errors associate with the effect of L1 morphological transfer. Remarkably, Montrul (2001c) also reported that the passivization of unaccusatives is related to the morphological realization of L1 and L2, thus making L2 learners behave differently depending on their L1. But this contrasts sharply with the widely reported finding in L2 English by Oshita (2000) who claimed that the L1 transfer analysis is not a good explanation for the 'passive' unaccusative phenomenon. Yet, our finding in this study accounted for this contrast and argued that the availability of passive morphology in their L1 was an essential role in Persian L2 learners' overpassivization. Actually, the current study is consistent with Kim (2010), who found that L1 passive morphological transfer resulted in overpassivization errors. Moreover, it may solve the puzzle reported by Oshita (2000) by inferencing from the findings of the study: that is why the rate of overpassivization errors is different among different L1 learners.

Furthermore, proficiency as a moderator variable proved to be generally significant. Regarding the transfer of L1 morphology, the high acceptance rate of the so-called passive light verb sentences in the translation task (*dær xod be xod bâz šod* as *the door was opened in L2 English) of alternating verbs (see Pair 3) and non-alternating verbs (*xærgooš dar dæstân dælqæk nâpædid šod* as *the rabbit was disappeared in the clown's hands in L2 English) (see Pair 1) has been observed. It showed that the performance of the two L2 groups (lower intermediate and upper intermediate) was significantly worse manifesting little improvement. This result is consistent with the finding of Montrul (2001b). In this case, the level of language proficiency was proved to be a significant factor.

Paired samples t-test indicated that level of language proficiency had significantly affected the participants' performance on judgment of English ungrammatical unaccusative verbs with their correspondent translation in Persian (see Tables 12, 13 and 14). But no proficiency effect was found by Ambridge et al. (2008) and Sahragard et al. (2010) and with regard to acceptance of ungrammatical English unaccusatives, as indicated by the results, the advanced group performed better but the intermediate groups performed worse. These results were in line with Moore (1993), and Rezaie and Aryamanesh (2012), who concluded that proficiency has a positive effect on the learners' performance. Moreover, this result is in line with Montrul (2001b) and Moore (1993) in that overpassivization errors did disappear when advancing to a higher proficiency level. But it is not in line with Lee (2007), who concluded that overpassivization errors were not improved as L2 learners' proficiency level increased.

Based on the results, two implications pertaining to the pedagogical point of view have also been suggested in this study. First, this suggests that the acceptance of grammatical English unaccusatives predicted to be problematic even for college students who received formal English education. So, an attempt should be made to teach the unaccusatives to the Persian L2 learners. The second implication drawn is that morphological marking and argument structure had significant effects on the rate of overpassivization of the unaccusative verbs (Okamoto 2007). Therefore, it seems necessary for teachers to focus on English and Persian morphological markings and teach Persian learners of English the differences between them by considering the importance of the role of the so-called passive light verb *šodæn* (inchoative) in their L1 correspondent translation.

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Examples in: English

Applicable Languages: English

Applicable Level: Tertiary