

The Impact of Textual Enhancement vs. Oral Enhancement on Learning English Language Grammar

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Abstract—Among features of second language learning, grammar has been given a prominent role. Learning grammar is important and it can affect other aspects of language learning. Learning grammar cannot occur without noticing for EFL learners. Learners should become aware of the rules and internalize those rules. Also, learning grammar should happen in a meaningful context. There are two techniques which may provide the desired conditions. Those two techniques are Textual Enhancement and Oral Enhancement. The purpose of this study was to compare the results of applying these two techniques. As the study followed a non-probability sampling, 92 students were considered as the research subjects. After administering a test of homogeneity, the number reduced to 70. There were two experimental groups in the study. Participants in one group were exposed to textual enhancement, and the participants in another were exposed to oral enhancement. There was a test which became standardized through piloting. And it was administered to the two groups. Detailed statistical analyses were conducted to analyze the obtained data. The results indicated that there was a statistical significant difference between the oral and textual enhancement groups ($t = -6.81, p < 0.05$) regarding their performance on grammar achievement test. In other words, subjects in oral enhancement group outperformed the subjects in textual enhancement group.

Index Terms—consciousness, noticing hypothesis, textual enhancement, oral enhancement

I. INTRODUCTION

In the history of language learning and teaching, there have been changes over teaching grammar. In grammar translation method, grammar rules were analyzed in details and those rules were applied to translate sentences and texts into students' mother language and vice versa. In direct method, grammar was taught in an inductive way. Another example of teaching grammar was the way that audio-lingual method used in which grammar was taught inductively, and they practiced grammar components through different drills (Richards and Rodgers, 2001).

Cowan (2008) states that, grammar is a set of rules that describes how words and group of words can be arranged to form sentences in a particular language. The grammar of English language involves all the rules that govern the formation of English sentences and that are exactly what learners of English want to know. In explicit grammar teaching, the rules are explained to learners, or the learners are directed to find the rules by looking at linguistic examples. On the other hand, as Doughly (2003) states, implicit teaching "makes no overt references to rules or forms" (p. 263). There are some arguments against the explicit teaching of grammar. Hall (2011) states that, knowing grammar does not mean that the learners can use the language in and out of the classroom. It is also stated that the time spent on explicitly teaching grammar can be spent on engaging in meaningful communication.

The question is not whether to teach grammar or not, but according to Ellis (1997) *how* to choose a good way of teaching from among different pedagogical options and how to attract learners' attention to different forms. One way is, input enhancement. Input enhancement relates to noticing. In order to help learners to notice the forms, there are techniques such as: textual enhancement (TE) and oral enhancement (OE) which can help learners notice the rules.

According to Krashen's (1981) input hypothesis, when learners are exposed to a more complex language than their current level of language proficiency, their knowledge of that language increases. Schmidt (2010) rejects the possibility of subliminal or unconscious acquisition of language features. He believes that even comprehensible input becomes intake when it can be used as a basis for development of the learners own second language. According to him, this happens when it is noticed. As Schmidt (1995) argues the notion of consciousness is useful and even necessary in second language acquisition.

Developing a linguistic system needs linguistic data. To get this goal, the role of input enhancement becomes prominent. The role of input is to provide linguistic data. When learners receive input, they give the data to a linguistic

system and the linguistic system starts processing acquisition. Wong (2005) mentions that without input, successful language acquisition cannot happen. Many scholars in SLA (e.g., Gass, 1997; Van Patten, 1996; Wong, and Simard, 2001) agree that input should be noticeable or attended to, in order for acquisition to happen (qtd. in Wong, 2005).

Input enhancement is a concept which was introduced by Smith (1991) for the first time. He defines input enhancement as any pedagogical intervention which is applied to make specific features of L2 input more salient in order to attract learners' attention to target language features. There are different ways to enhance input, for example: textual enhancement (e.g., bolding, highlighting, and italics). Textual enhancement is mostly used in researches in the field of SLA. Textual Enhancement is used to draw learners' attention to form and meaning. There is an idea behind the textual enhancement. TE's purpose is to make particular features of written input more salient and noticeable. Less attention is usually paid to forms, because learners may not pay attention to target forms which are not enhanced. So the role of input enhancement and more specific one, textual enhancement can be very important in internalizing second or foreign language features.

II. THE STUDY OBJECTIVE AND RESEARCH QUESTION

Teachers are likely to be asked more questions about grammar than any other aspects of English. Some of the teachers who lack confidence about their knowledge of English grammar maybe asked about the points that they are not sure of. It can be important to have an accurate, comprehensive knowledge of English grammar in order to feel more confident. It is important for teachers to know how to teach grammar in a way that is useful for students. Furthermore, most of the teachers are looking for new ways of teaching grammar in order to get the best results of their teaching. Thus, the result of the study is beneficial for teachers who like to have a new way of teaching grammar and those who are interested in having an active class as well as teachers who like to engage students in tasks in order to stimulate their minds. Also, it will be important to students who are searching for new ways to get rid of traditional rigid grammar learning. Besides, it will help teachers to draw learners' attention and make grammar points more salient for them.

In the field of second language acquisition, there is an idea that attracting learners' attention to the formal properties of second language can be a good way of acquiring those properties. This has challenged many researchers to investigate the effect of pedagogical techniques, such as: textual enhancement, and textual simplification on learning formal features of the language. Also, most of researches that have been done so far did not use oral mode of enhancement and the researcher presupposed the effect of textual enhancement on learning grammar based on previous researches. This study was designed to investigate the effect of using textual and oral enhancements on learning grammar.

Relating to the purpose of the study, the following research question was posed:

Q- Is there a significant difference between Textual Enhancement and Oral Enhancement techniques in promoting Iranian EFL learners' grammar learning?

Relating the above mentioned research question the following null hypothesis was introduced:

H- There is no significant difference between textual enhancement and oral enhancement techniques in promoting Iranian EFL learners' grammar learning.

III. METHODOLOGY

In various publications, Ellis (2001) has explained that there are methodological options which are beneficial for both teaching grammar and researching the effects of applying different techniques of teaching language skills and components on learning as follows.

Input-based options, for example, manipulation of the input that learners are exposed to, which include: enriched input that is giving many examples of target structures. Enhanced input which involves salient target forms by means of emphatic stress, bolding or an instruction to attend to some specific feature. There is another type of input which has been devised to induce processing of the target feature for meaning. These options are all comprehension-based, and they are for both implicit and explicit learning (qtd. in Ellis et al., 2009).

Textual enhancement is a technique which is used to draw learners' attention to specific forms. Textual enhancement can be used with both written and oral texts. In written texts it is done by typographically highlighting certain target forms by modifying text. That modification includes: underlying, bolding, italicizing, capitalizing, color coding or a combination of these. For example, students can be presented with a reading comprehension text.

A. Participants

The population of the study consisted of intermediate EFL learners in one of the English institutes of Tehran. Regarding the method of sampling, the researchers chose the intermediate learners of the institute based on convenience sampling and conducted their research. In this study, both male and female learners were involved. Participants' first language was Persian. Best and Kahn (2006) believe that "a technique of sampling, consists of those people available for the study". They state that "educational researchers often use convenience sample, because of administrating limitations in randomly selecting and assigning individuals to experimental and control groups (e.g., available classes)" (p. 18).

There were 92 participants in this research. After administering the proficiency test called Preliminary English Test (PET), 70 students were considered as the sample of the research. The PET test was used to select homogeneous students according to the learners' language proficiency level.

B. Instrumentation

This study employed two instruments which were two tests. One of them was in the form of PET, which was administered in order to make sure that all participants were at the same level of proficiency, regarding their knowledge of grammar. The other test was grammar achievement test which was administered after treatment. There were 30 multiple-choice items in grammar achievement test. Before starting the research, the researcher had considered the pilot study in order to see whether the test was reliable or not. There were 40 students in pilot study. All subjects were in intermediate level. In other words, both the pilot group and subjects in the experimental groups were at the same language proficiency level. Cronbach's Alpha analysis was performed to test the reliability of the test. The reliability index for the test turned out to be (0.82), which was a relatively high index of reliability.

C. Design

Regarding the research design, this research employed quasi experimental design. According to Best and Kahn (2006), quasi experimental is a kind of research which "provides a less satisfactory degree of control, used when randomization is not feasible" (p.177). Design of this research included: PET test (Preliminary English Test), Treatment and Grammar Achievement Test. Also there were two experimental groups in this research, and no control group.

IV. PROCEDURE

The study took place in 6 sessions in 6 weeks. The first week was spent on getting the agreement of students and institutes managers and briefing them on the research procedure. The second week was spent on administering PET test and homogenizing students. On the third, fourth, and fifth weeks, students were exposed to different texts. On the sixth week, the grammar test was administered.

As it was noted before there were two experimental groups in this study. One group was reading group and the other one was listening group. The classes met once a week and each session lasted for 90 minutes. However, it is worth mentioning that instruction on reading and listening passages in any of the two groups took 50 minutes in each session. "The American Files" was the main textbook in both of the classes.

A. Piloting

Before starting the study, the researcher considered a pilot group in order to see whether the test was reliable or not. All the learners were in intermediate level. In other words, both the subjects in pilot group and the subjects in experimental groups had the same language proficiency. Moreover, the pilot group consisted of 40 students.

Descriptive statistics of the pilot test such as; mean, standard deviation, standard error of measurement and the item facility index (IF) of the test items were provided. Apart from 3 items which were either too easy or too difficult, the other items enjoyed good facility indexes. Then, Cronbach's Alpha analysis was performed to test the reliability of the test. The content validity of the test was checked by some educators in the field of ELT.

B. Reading Group

In reading group, the material consisted of three reading texts in which, grammatical points were bolded. Students were exposed to one text each week. The teacher followed reading comprehension techniques suggested by, Doff (1988) that were presented as follows:

- Teacher gave a brief introduction to the text;
- She gave one or two 'guiding' questions (orally or on the board) for students to think about as they read;
- Teacher presented some unknown vocabulary which was very difficult to understand the text. Students read the text and try to understand it by the help of the teacher. She did not give any explanation about bolded grammatical points. Students had to understand the rules themselves. After reading the text, there were reading comprehension questions and fill-in-the blank activities (P.59).

C. Listening Group

In listening group, there were 35 students who were presented by 3 comprehension texts. The teacher followed listening comprehension techniques suggested by Doff (1988) presented as follows:

- Topic was introduced to the students;
- Guiding questions were written on the board;
- Students listened for the main idea and answered guiding questions;
- Students listened and teacher paused the listening and students repeated what they heard;
- Through listening, the sentences which contained grammatical points were repeated by the teacher loudly and teacher emphasized on them and attracted learners' attention.

At the end, there were some listening comprehension questions and fill-in-the blank activities in which those enhanced grammatical points were included. Also, there were peers and teachers corrective feedbacks in listening

comprehension group. When teacher asked one student to repeat what had been heard, if the student's repeated sentence was not correct, other students helped him repeat that sentence correctly. If it did not work, the teacher would help students to repeat the given sentence correctly.

V. RESULTS

Before administering the treatments of the study, all participants of the main study ($n = 92$) took part in a proficiency test called Preliminary English Test (PET). The purpose of the proficiency test was to manifest the learner's homogeneity or to show whether the learners' knowledge of English is at the same level.

Too distant scores from below and above the mean were omitted in order to homogenize the participants regarding their level of language proficiency. In this case, the participants whose scores fell within the range of one standard deviation below (53) and above the mean (77) were held in the study, and those who did not were excluded from the study. Regarding this, 22 learners were excluded from the main analysis. Descriptive statistics of selected scores are shown in Table I. The mean are nearly the same, and the values of skewness and kurtosis and standard deviation indicate that the distribution of scores are normal.

TABLE I.
DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS OF THE OBTAINED SCORES ON PET

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation	Skewness		Kurtosis	
	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Std. Error	Statistic	Std. Error
PET	92	31	88	64.93	12.171	-.858	.251	.904	.498
PET (Homogenized)	70	54	77	66.39	5.839	-.098	.287	-.757	.566

The purpose of this study was to find if there was any significant difference between textual enhancement and oral enhancement in EFL learners' grammar learning. The 30-item grammar achievement test was given to 40 EFL learners of the same age and proficiency level in order to ensure its reliability.

The participants of experimental groups took a grammar achievement test after treatment. The results of their performance were illustrated by descriptive statistics in Table II.

TABLE II.
DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS OF PARTICIPANTS' SCORES ON GRAMMAR ACHIEVEMENT TEST

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Grammar Achievement Test (Textual Enhancement)	35	14	26	19.17	3.666
Grammar Achievement Test (Oral Enhancement)	35	19	29	24.51	2.843

In order to test the null hypothesis of the study to see whether there was a significant difference between the oral and textual enhancement groups in their performance on grammar achievement test, an independent sample t-test was performed. The results, as Table III shows, indicated that that there was a statistical significant difference between the oral and textual enhancement groups ($t = -6.81$, $p < 0.05$) in their performance on grammar achievement. Therefore, the null hypothesis was rejected. In other words, oral enhancement outperformed in promoting learners' grammar learning.

TABLE III.
INDEPENDENT SAMPLES T-TEST BETWEEN ORAL AND TEXTUAL ENHANCEMENT GROUPS ON GRAMMAR ACHIEVEMENT TEST

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
	F	Sig.	t	df	Sig.	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
								Lower	Upper
Grammar achievement test ^a	2.572	.113	-6.814	68	.000	-5.343	.784	-6.908	-3.778

* Equal variances assumed.

VI. CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

The main concern of this study was to investigate whether or not there was a significant difference between textual enhancement and oral enhancement on learning grammar. To get the result, there was a pilot study before treatment to make sure that the test was reliable. After the test which comprised 30 multiple choice items, item facility and item discrimination of every item were examined. Weak items were modified or discarded from the body of the test. To assure and determine any significant difference between Textual Enhancement and Oral Enhancement, after receiving the treatments, detailed statistical analysis conducted throughout the research and testing process of the hypothesis of the study was based on the obtained data. To assure and determine any significant differences between two modes of enhancement, after the treatments, an independent sample t-test was run to compare the means of two groups in Textual

Enhancement group and Oral Enhancement group. The result showed that there was a significant difference between the Oral and Textual enhancement groups ($t = -6.81, p < 0.05$) in performance on grammar achievement test. Therefore, the null hypothesis of the study was rejected.

The mean scores of two groups were different. There was a significant difference between the mean score of "Textual Enhancement" group (19.17) and "Oral Enhancement" (24.51). It showed that, oral Enhancement group outperformed the textual Enhancement group.

It is signified that the learners' ability to recognize and produce appropriate forms would increase when the learners' attention is focused on a particular grammatical structure in meaningful and authentic context. Furthermore, the study suggests that for learning grammatical forms noticing and awareness of the target forms are necessary. The results of this study supported the Schmidt's (2001) claim that, "SLA is largely driven by what learners pay attention to and notice in target language input and what they understand the significance of noticed input to be" (p. 3–4). It can be said that, if some aspects of language are noticed before others, is because of their saliency of them in context. In order to investigate the notion of noticing, investigating the notion of saliency is an important phenomenon. As it is stated before, According to Robinson (2003), oral input needs different processing from written one. Written input lets learners have greater processing time than oral input. As Leeser (2004) states, readers comprehend more propositional information than listeners do. The results of this study are not in line with Robinson (2003) and Leeser (2004). Because they show that participants in Oral Enhancement group outperformed the participants in Textual Enhancement group.

Since this study was done in English institutes, the results can be used or re-examined in the classes of language institutes more efficiently.

Language instructors and teachers can make themselves more justified to oral enhancement technique by knowing the effects of this technique on learning grammar. Especially when they use explicit instruction to teach grammatical points which does not lead to immediate acquisition.

Oral enhancement can be an effective way to focus on form especially for learning grammar. The result of the study can help learners to provide further insights into how to use their resources when they face oral enhancement while learning grammar. This technique helps learners to be involved in the classes which enjoy focusing on form techniques in which as Poole (2005) mentions, it focuses on the use of language in communication. So, it is compatible with teachers who prefer using communicative language teaching in the classroom.

Alternative textual enhancement and oral enhancement can be more beneficial in triggering learners' intake and it can be recommended that instructors can combine both techniques for more effective learning.

This study, to some extent, has been successful in exploring the comparison between textual enhancement and oral enhancement on learning grammar and proposing that oral enhancement was more effective than the textual enhancement. With this procedure, teachers can design more oral enhancement activities to promote noticing in the learning.

It seems that knowledge of grammar can influence EFL learners' overall language ability. Knowledge of grammar is very important not only for language accuracy but also for language fluency and communication. EFL teachers should become aware of the problematic areas with knowledge of grammar in order to apply suitable techniques to teach grammar. Also, the nature and importance of knowledge of grammar should be taught to EFL learners in order to prepare them to use it appropriately and accurately in their language production skills

In fact, on the one hand, the findings of this study can be helpful for both English language teachers and learners. On the other hand, it is suitable for English language institutes to solve students' grammar learning problems to have a better system of teaching in English language.

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