

# The Effects of Method, Time and Their Interaction on Learning Grammatical Cohesive Devices

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**Abstract**—The aim of this study was to find out if Grammatical Cohesive Devices (GCDs) are affected uniformly by explicit, implicit, and incidental teaching methods and if there is any interaction between time and method. Since there were three teaching conditions (independent variables) and four GCDs (dependent variables), a three by four factorial design was used with MANOVA and Mixed Design ANOVA as the main statistical tests. The study used information from 60 intermediate EFL learners randomly assigned to the three teaching conditions. The explicit group was exposed to conscious learning. In the implicit group the learners largely achieved their knowledge from noticing and using GCDs rather than explicit instruction. And finally, in the incidental group, learning took place through reading the selected passages and figuring out the meaning of the texts without any conscious attention to GCDs. After the treatments, the learners took a posttest and the findings revealed that explicit teaching had been the most effective method of all. The interaction effect between time and method was also significant only for ellipsis and substitution.

**Index Terms**—explicit, implicit, incidental, grammatical cohesive devices

## I. INTRODUCTION

Cohesion refers to the quality of a text in which all parts hang together in a logical and smooth way so that the text is easy to read and understand. It is the semantic relation between one element and some other elements in the text that is crucial to its interpretation (Halliday & Hasan, 1976). Knowing how cohesion works is essential for literacy in general and for learning skills in a foreign language in particular. Explicit, implicit and incidental methods of teaching all are known to have significant effects on language learning. However, when the time is kept constant, these methods usually have differential effects. In addition, when there are levels to the dependent variable, usually it is not clear which level is affected more by the teaching method and what the role of time is in relation to that level.

### A. Statement of the Problem and Significance of the Study

This research investigated the effects of Explicit, Implicit, and Incidental teaching methods on intermediate students' performance on GCDs measured by a grammatical-cohesive-devices test. Nurhayati (2012) investigated errors on the use of grammatical cohesive devices in the essays written by 66 students in his study and found more than 12 errors per essay on average. Nurhayati's finding is important because it reveals that grammatical cohesive devices need to be given attention in EFL classrooms. Therefore, investigating which way works better for teaching GCDs or which GCDs need to be given priority in EFL classrooms seems to be a worthwhile endeavor.

Although some studies have already been carried out on the effects of teaching grammatical cohesive devices, most of these studies have focused on just one type of them (Dastjerdi & Shirzad, 2010; House, 1996; Rahimi & Riasati, 2012; Sahebkhair & Aidinlou, 2014). Also, it seems that researches have not adequately investigated whether GCDs are affected by these teaching methods uniformly or differentially. Another issue is the relationship between methods of instruction and teaching time that is felt to be an issue when it comes to learning different forms. These were the problems that this study tried to address.

### B. Types of Grammatical Cohesion

The seminal work of Halliday and Hassan (1976) categorizes GCDs into four basic types. These types come in handy whenever someone wants to find a practical means for dissecting and describing texts. According to Halliday & Hasan (1976), the four basic types of GCDs and their definitions are as follows:

**1. Reference:** Reference relates one element of the text to another for its interpretation. It refers to "specific items within a text/discourse which cannot be interpreted semantically in their own right but make reference to something else" (p. 31).

**2. Substitution:** “Substitution, as another type of cohesive relation, is the process in which one item within a text or discourse is replaced by another. It is a relation on the lexico-grammatical level between linguistic items, such as words or phrases” (pp. 88–89).

**3. Ellipsis:** Ellipsis is the omission of an element that is required by the grammar of language but is not raised because it is understood to be there by the readers or listeners. The process can, therefore, be “interpreted as that form of substitution in which [an] item is replaced by nothing” (p. 88).

**4. Conjunction:** Conjunctions connect elements of a text to each other. The connected elements can be words, phrases, clauses, sentences, or even paragraphs.

### C. Kinds of Learning and Teaching

**1. Explicit learning:** Explicit learning is characterized by more conscious operation where the individual makes and tests hypotheses in a search for structure (N. Ellis 1994).

**2. Implicit learning:** Implicit learning is typically defined as the acquisition of knowledge about the underlying structure of a complex stimulus environment by a process which takes place naturally, simply and without conscious operation (N. Ellis 1994).

**3. Incidental learning:** Incidental acquisition is generally defined as the “learning something as a by-product of an activity not explicitly geared to that learning” (Hulstijn 2001, p. 271).

Obviously, there should be a kind of correspondence between learners’ learning styles and teachers’ ways of teaching. Accordingly, it can be concluded that overall there are three types of teaching: explicit, implicit, and incidental.

### D. Research Questions and Hypotheses

The research questions of this study were:

1. Do all types of teaching (explicit, implicit, incidental) have uniform effects on the learning of GCDs (reference, substitution, ellipsis, and conjunction)?

2. Is there an interaction between time and method with respect to learning different types of GCDs?

The null research hypothesis derived from the research questions were:

**H<sub>01</sub>:** Types of teaching (explicit, implicit, incidental) do not have uniform effects on the learning of GCDs (reference, substitution, ellipsis, and conjunction).

**H<sub>02</sub>:** There is no interaction between time and method with respect to learning different types of GCDs.

### E. Design of the Study

This study enjoyed a three by four factorial design in which the teaching methods were functioning as the independent variables of the study with GCDs functioning as the dependent variables. A schematic representation of the relationship between the variables is given in Figure 1.1 below.

Independent Variables			Dependent Variables
Incidental	Implicit	Explicit	
			Reference
			Substitution
			Ellipsis
			Conjunction

Figure 1.1 Relationship between the independent and dependent variables of the study

## II. REVIEW OF THE RELATED LITERATURE

Taghizadeh and Tajabadi (2013) examined the effects of discourse markers training on the EFL learners’ writing performance. The participants of this study received instruction on how to use metadiscourse markers in writing essays. Analysis of the collected data showed significant improvement in participants’ writing scores.

There have also been some studies on the relationship between the occasions of cohesive devices’ use in a text and its overall quality. Johnson (1992) and Meisou (2000) were unable to establish a relationship between the amount of GCDs’ use and the quality of students’ writings. However, Liu and Braine’s (2005) analysis of 50 argumentative writings found a correlation between GCDs’ frequency of use and students’ quality of writing.

A study by Jalilifar and Alipour (2007) sought to detect the effect of explicit instruction of metadiscourse markers on the reading comprehension of pre intermediate Iranian EFL learners. Three versions of a single text (original, modified, and unmodified metadiscourse-free) were given to the participants. The group with the original text outperformed the group with unmodified metadiscourse-free text; but they were not significantly different from the group with modified text.

Text structure instruction and knowledge have also proved to be facilitative of reading comprehension both in L1 and L2. Two studies that point to this fact are Mandler and Johnson (1977) and Meyer (1979). These researchers also claim that text structure instruction improves recall of information. Both of these findings are in keeping with Britton et al’s (1982) theory that texts’ surface structure might make their comprehension cumbersome.

Teaching methods are also important in the amount of learning that happens irrespective of what is taught. Rahimi and Riasati (2012) investigated the use of discourse markers in spoken language and compared the results of their explicit and implicit teaching. They also compared their findings with the results obtained from a control group. The control group had received neither implicit nor explicit instruction on the use of discourse markers. The comparisons revealed that the participants' use of discourse markers in the control group was not affected by the instruction. In contrast, the frequency of discourse markers' use had substantially increased in the experimental groups with the students in the explicit group using discourse markers more frequently.

A series of descriptive studies have tried to statistically compare the proportions of grammatical cohesive devices used in different text types. Seken and Suarnajaya (2013) study, for example, indicated that the students used all five types of cohesive devices in their study but there was significant differences in the proportions they used them. Reference with 40.84% was the most frequently used cohesive device, with personal references being the most widely used subgroup. Lexical cohesion occupied the second position with 37.99% followed by conjunction, ellipsis, and substitution accounting for 19.60, 1.35%, and 0.29%, respectively. Nga (2012) did the same thing in the context of ESP. The researcher found that the most frequently used cohesive devices in the reading texts, in order of frequency, were reference (43.98%), conjunction (39.72%), ellipsis (21.99%), and finally, substitution (1.42%). The results of these studies and other similar studies imply that cohesion and coherence have to be given emphasis in teaching all kinds of skills.

### III. METHODOLOGY

#### A. Participants

The participants of this study were male and female learners of English in an English language institute in the northwest city of Ardabil in Iran. All of the participants were fluent Persian and Azeri bilinguals. It was suspected that students' proficiency levels might affect the results of the study, so the learners were screened for their proficiency using Oxford Proficiency Test (OPT) and only 60 students of intermediate level with an age range of 14 to 25 were selected.

#### B. Procedure

In addition to the proficiency test, one pretest, three different types of treatments and one post-test were used in this study. The reliability of the proficiency test was calculated using KR-21 formula which returned  $r=.755$ . After administering the proficiency test, the participants were divided into three groups of 20 students each. The groups were then named explicit, implicit, and incidental by taking lots and were given a teacher-made GCD pretest. The pretest consisted of 40 items measuring the learners' knowledge of grammatical cohesive devices (GCDs), 10 items for each subcategory (reference, substitution, ellipses and conjunction). The test consisted of cloze items for reference and conjunction and multiple-choice questions for substitution and ellipses. The time allotted to answering the questions was 80-minutes. After the pretesting was done, each group received 4 sessions of 1.5 hours of instruction. Learners in each group were exposed to a different kind of instruction, i.e., explicit, implicit, or incidental. All of the groups read 11 short modified readings with each of the passages having at least four instances of each GCD. The explicit group was exposed to conscious learning. In this group, one session was allotted to clarifying each type of GCDs and the way they were used in the texts. For example, first the definition of reference and its types were given and then some example sentences such as *I sent him a letter* were pulled out from the text and explained to clarify the matter.

In the implicit group the learners were exposed to bold-face-typed instances of grammatical cohesive devices within the same reading texts. Almost no explanation was provided as to what the functions of the devices were or how they related the sentences to each other. To draw the learners' attention to GCDs, they were only enhanced by boldface typing. For example, possessive adjectives and possessive pronouns within the texts were typed in the following way: *My* book is here / This notebook is *mine*.

In the incidental group the learners were exposed to grammatical cohesive devices without any conscious attention to the processes of learning. During the treatment sessions the learners were asked to read the selected passages and the researchers just helped them figure out the meaning of the texts. At the end of the treatments, all participants were given a posttest to answer. The form of the posttest and the time given for answering the questions were the same as in the pretest.

#### C. Materials

Different instruments were used in conducting this research. The instruments included Oxford Proficiency Test (OPT), Connect 1 and connect 2 textbooks and their workbooks; the third volume of the Interchange 1 by Jack C. Richards (the orange book), its workbook and Practical English Usage.

In order to measure the students' performance in the area of GCDs, a cloze test with 40 items was also developed which was used both at the pretest and posttest stages.

### IV. DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

Since there were four dependent variables in this study, it was clear that the test of choice should be MANOVA. However, there are some assumptions that must be met before running MANOVA. Three of the assumptions of this test apply to almost all parametric tests. According to the first assumption, the dependent variables must be measured at an interval level; the second assumption stresses that the sample selection be random; independence of the observations is the third assumption that should be observed strictly. All these assumptions were met in this study because of the nature of the dependent variables and the sampling procedure that was explained above.

However, there is another important assumption called normality which must be met. But there is a difference in the concept of normality as applied to ANOVA and the concept of normality as applied to MANOVA. In ANOVA normality refers to normality of the distribution of scores in a single dependent variable, that is, univariate normality. But in MANOVA normality refers to the normality of the distribution of all dependent variables' scores collectively, i.e., multivariate normality. Since SPSS does not provide the multivariate normality statistic, Field (2009) recommends that the univariate normality of the distributions of scores in dependent variables be tested. However, Pallant (2013) believes that calculating Mahalanobis distances is enough for checking multivariate normality. Mahalanobis distances are the distances of individual cases from the centroid of all cases. For the multivariate normality to be assumed the maximum Mahal distance should be smaller than the critical value that is calculated for the same number of dependent variables. A small Mahal distance rejects the existence of outliers as well. This value can be calculated using the regression menu in SPSS. Cook's distance, too, shows the overall influence of a case on the model and should not exceed 2. The values for the maximum Mahal and Cook's distances for the data in this study are given in table 4.1. The critical Mahal value for 4 dependent variables in the critical values table is 18.47 which is almost twice as big as the value of maximum Mahal distance in our table. Our maximum Cook's distance is also .134. These two values together mean that multivariate normality had not been violated and that there had been no outliers in our sample.

TABLE 4.1  
TESTS OF MULTIVARIATE NORMALITY AND LACK OF OUTLIERS

<b>Residuals Statistics<sup>a</sup></b>	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Mahal. Distance	.171	9.097	2.950	2.035	60
Cook's Distance	.000	.134	.018	.026	60

a. Dependent Variable: posttest groups

Box's Test of Equality of Covariance Matrices tells us whether the data violated the assumption of homogeneity of variance-covariance matrices. Box's Test correlates all dependent variables with each other and concludes if the correlation matrices are similar. If the statistic is non-significant, it can be concluded that the matrices are the same. In other words, the null hypothesis of covariance matrices' equality in all groups is accepted. The table below reveals that the assumption of homogeneity had been tenable in this study.

TABLE 4.2  
BOX'S TEST OF EQUALITY OF COVARIANCE MATRICES<sup>A</sup>

Box's M	6.782
F	.522
df1	12
df2	15745.154
Sig.	.902

The Multivariate Tests table, which follows Box's table in the SPSS output, helps us to detect if our independent variables (explicit, implicit, and incidental groups) have been significantly different from each other. The Multivariate statistics quoted for the intercept in this table are not important to us because they have nothing to do with our intervention. The important statistical tests for us are the group effects which are given below the intercept. As it can be seen in the following table, all four multivariate test statistics are significant with the *F* ratios as high as 1173.84. If all four Multivariate test statistics reach the criterion for significance, we can reject the null hypothesis of the lack of difference among the dependent variables confidently. However, if one or some of the statistics are above the criterion level, the best choice for accepting or rejecting the null hypothesis is the robust test of Pillai's Trace, because it is the most powerful of all. Fortunately, all four Multivariate test statistics in our table are significant; therefore, we can conclude that the dependent variables had been different from each other but we do not know yet which dependent variable or variables had been different from the others or in which ways the teaching methods affected them. The ANOVA summary table labeled as Tests of Between-Subjects Effects given shortly after the Multivariate Tests table, and the tables that follow it will help us to find answers to these questions.

TABLE 4.3  
MULTIVARIATE TESTS

Effect		Value	F	Hypothesis	df	Error	df	Sig.
Intercept	Pillai's Trace	.983776.754 <sup>b</sup>			4.000	54.000	0.000	
	Wilks' Lambda	.017776.754 <sup>b</sup>			4.000	54.000	0.000	
	Hotelling's Trace	57.537776.754 <sup>b</sup>			4.000	54.000	0.000	
	Roy's Largest Root	57.537776.754 <sup>b</sup>			4.000	54.000	0.000	
Posttest groups	Pillai's Trace	.454	4.041		8.000	110.000	0.000	
	Wilks' Lambda	.553	4.648 <sup>t</sup>		8.000	108.000	0.000	
	Hotelling's Trace	.793	5.256		8.000	106.000	0.000	
	Roy's Largest Root	.776	10.665 <sup>c</sup>		4.000	55.000	0.000	

In the ANOVA summary or table of the Tests of Between-Subjects Effects below, the group of rows of interest to us is the group labeled Posttest Groups. The values in these rows are the values that we would have obtained had we run One-way ANOVAs on individual dependent variables with multi-level teaching method as our independent variable. In these rows any significant results for the Groups means that the type of teaching had a significant effect on the learning of this dependent variable, but a non-significant result should lead us to conclude that the teaching type had no a significant effect on the learning of the GCD in question. Needless to say that, the lower part of the table, which is not very important to us, is deleted for space limitation.

TABLE 4.4  
MANOVA

Tests of Between-Subjects Effects							
Source	Dependent Variable	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	
Corrected Model	posttest reference	13.300 <sup>a</sup>	2	6.650	2.535	.088	
	posttest substitution	47.233 <sup>b</sup>	2	23.617	7.750	.001	
	posttest ellipsis	88.033 <sup>c</sup>	2	44.017	15.473	.000	
	posttest conjunction	2.633 <sup>d</sup>	2	1.317	.562	.573	
Intercept	posttest reference	3792.150	1	3792.150	1445.353	.000	
	posttest substitution	2829.067	1	2829.067	928.364	.000	
	posttest ellipsis	3038.817	1	3038.817	1068.224	.000	
	posttest conjunction	4116.817	1	4116.817	1757.084	.000	
Posttest groups	posttest reference	13.300	2	6.650	2.535	.088	
	posttest substitution	47.233	2	23.617	7.750	.001	
	posttest ellipsis	88.033	2	44.017	15.473	.000	
	posttest conjunction	2.633	2	1.317	.562	.573	

Having talked about the important pieces of information in Table 4.4, when we consider the results for the dependent variables in our study, we see that the results are only significant for substitution and ellipsis with  $F=7.750$ ,  $P=.001$  and  $F=15.473$ ,  $P=.000$ , respectively. We also know that originally we had three groups of explicit, implicit, and incidental teaching. When we put these pieces of information together, the thing that comes to mind is that what makes the students' performance in the three experimental groups different from each other and yields significant results is not their improvement in learning how to use reference and conjunction so much but their learning of how to use substitution and ellipsis. Therefore, the hypothesis that methods of teaching (explicit, implicit, incidental) have uniform effects on the learning of GCDs (reference, substitution, ellipsis, conjunction) is rejected. However, we still do not know if there had been an interaction between time and method or the extent to which the learners' knowledge of each GCD changed over time as a result of method. To find out about this interaction, we have to run a Mixed Design ANOVA which is suited best for finding such interactions. Tables 4.5 to 4.12 show the contrasts that were created and the Multivariate tests that show the main effects of time and method and the interaction between them (time\*method). Of course, the results of four types of Multivariate tests are usually included in Multivariate Test tables in Mixed Design ANOVAs, but since Pillai's Trace is the most commonly reported statistic, other values are deleted from the tables. It should also be kept in mind that all of the assumptions of Mixed Design ANOVA had already been met when we checked for our MANOVA test. The only remaining assumption was Mauchly's sphericity that was met because all of the values calculated for this test were non-significant.

TABLE 4.5  
CONTRASTS BETWEEN TIME AND METHOD FOR REFERENCE IN DIFFERENT GROUPS

<b>Within-Subjects Factors</b>		
Measure: MEASURE_1		
time	method	Dependent Variable
1	1	Pretest reference explicit
	2	Pretest reference implicit
	3	Pretest reference incidental
2	1	Posttest reference explicit
	2	Posttest reference implicit
	3	Posttest reference incidental

TABLE 4.6  
MAIN EFFECTS OF TIME AND METHOD AND THEIR INTERACTION EFFECT IN RELATION TO REFERENCE

<b>Multivariate Test</b>					
Effect		Value	F	Hypothesis df	Error df Sig.
time	Pillai's Trace	.913	198.581 <sup>b</sup>	1.000	19.000 .000
method	Pillai's Trace	.166	1.796 <sup>b</sup>	2.000	18.000 .194
time * method	Pillai's Trace	.173	1.881 <sup>b</sup>	2.000	18.000 .181

Within Subjects Design: time + method + time \* method

TABLE 4.7  
CONTRASTS BETWEEN TIME AND METHOD FOR CONJUNCTION IN DIFFERENT GROUPS

<b>Within-Subjects Factors</b>		
Measure: MEASURE_1		
time	method	Dependent Variable
1	1	Pretest conjunction explicit
	2	Pretest conjunction implicit
	3	Pretest conjunction incidental
2	1	Posttest conjunction explicit
	2	Posttest conjunction implicit
	3	Posttest conjunction incidental

TABLE 4.8  
MAIN EFFECTS OF TIME AND METHOD AND THEIR INTERACTION EFFECT IN RELATION TO CONJUNCTION

<b>Multivariate Test</b>					
Effect		Value	F	Hypothesis df	Error df Sig.
time	Pillai's Trace	.887	148.537 <sup>b</sup>	1.000	19.000 .000
method	Pillai's Trace	.115	1.173 <sup>b</sup>	2.000	18.000 .332
time * method	Pillai's Trace	.161	1.728 <sup>b</sup>	2.000	18.000 .206

Within Subjects Design: time + method + time \* method

TABLE 4.9  
CONTRASTS BETWEEN TIME AND METHOD FOR ELLIPSIS IN DIFFERENT GROUPS

<b>Within-Subjects Factors</b>		
Measure: MEASURE_1		
time	method	Dependent Variable
1	1	Pretest ellipsis explicit
	2	Pretest ellipsis implicit
	3	Pretest ellipsis incidental
2	1	Posttest ellipsis explicit
	2	Posttest ellipsis implicit
	3	Posttest ellipsis incidental

TABLE 4.10  
MAIN EFFECTS OF TIME AND METHOD AND THEIR INTERACTION EFFECT IN RELATION TO ELLIPSIS

<b>Multivariate Test</b>					
Effect		Value	F	Hypothesis df	Error df Sig.
time	Pillai's Trace	.952	380.881 <sup>b</sup>	1.000	19.000 .000
method	Pillai's Trace	.390	5.746 <sup>b</sup>	2.000	18.000 .012
time * method	Pillai's Trace	.720	23.200 <sup>b</sup>	2.000	18.000 .000

Within Subjects Design: time + method + time \* method

TABLE 4.11  
CONTRASTS BETWEEN TIME AND METHOD FOR SUBSTITUTION IN DIFFERENT GROUPS

Within-Subjects Factors		
Measure: MEASURE_1		
time	method	Dependent Variable
1	1	Pretest substitution explicit
	2	Pretest substitution implicit
	3	Pretest substitution incidental
2	1	Posttest substitution explicit
	2	Posttest substitution implicit
	3	Posttest substitution incidental

TABLE 4.12  
MAIN EFFECTS OF TIME AND METHOD AND THEIR INTERACTION EFFECT IN RELATION TO SUBSTITUTION

Multivariate Test						
Effect		Value	F	Hypothesis df	Error df	Sig.
time	Pillai's Trace	.951	371.923 <sup>b</sup>	1.000	19.000	.000
method	Pillai's Trace	.236	2.779 <sup>b</sup>	2.000	18.000	.089
time * method	Pillai's Trace	.627	15.147 <sup>b</sup>	2.000	18.000	.000

Within Subjects Design: time + method + time \* method

Tables 4.6 and 4.8 evidently show that neither methods nor their interactions with time significantly affected the use of references and conjunctions by the learners. The only important main effect with respect to these two dependent variables was that of time effect. All three teaching methods, however, significantly affected the use of ellipsis in addition to time and its interaction with methods. In the case of substitution, as represented in Table 4.12, the main effect of method was again non-significant but the effect of interaction was significant. To sum it all up, the main effect of time was significant for all dependent variables or GCDs; the main effect of method was significant for ellipsis only; and the interaction effect was significant only for substitution and ellipsis. This brings us to the conclusion of partially rejecting the second hypothesis because we have been able to find an interaction effect between time and method in relation to two of the GCDs.

## V. CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

The conclusion that can be drawn from the findings of this study is that attributing success in one class or in a course of study to the teaching method only is a mistake. Although some teaching methods are superior to others, the level of students' prior knowledge, the nature of the materials taught, the age of the learners and so many other factors can impact on the outcome of the instruction.

In the case of this study, with the screening done for proficiency and with respect to the relatively limited age range of the participants, their smaller gains in using references and conjunctions and greater gains in using ellipses and substitutions can be attributed to their lack of knowledge of the two latter GCDs with a high degree of confidence. It is clear that, when students already know about something, which was true about reference and conjunction, the amount of progress will be limited. However, if someone does not know how to apply a particular linguistic structure, in many cases a little help will make a sea change. But in the case of GCDs it is not like skills that improve constantly with more instruction and practice. When the use of any GCD is learned, method ceases to have any determining effect. This means that when we speak about methods, we must apply it for the most part to skills not to elements of language that are learned once and almost forever.

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