

The Impact of Input Enrichment in Long Text vs. Short Texts on Grammatical Accuracy in Writing Among Elementary Language Learners

Soleimani, Faeze*

faeze.soleimani@gmail.com

Teaching English, Human science , Islamic Azad University ,Garmsar Branch, Iran

Abstract

This study was conducted to investigate the influence of teaching accurate grammar in writing via enriched long text and short text for the elementary students at Shokouhe_Farhang institute. The homogenized subjects were divided into two groups of 18 and 17 participants. Using a writing exam as a pretest in order to check the students' knowledge in English past tense. The control group received the instruction through short texts and the experimental group received instruction through long text activity. Short and long texts enriched with past tense and past progressive tense presented in ten sessions of instruction and at least learners took part in a writing exam as posttest .Comparing the result through statistical analysis showed that there is a significant difference between the performances of both groups. It was concluded that using long text instruction is more influential in using accurate grammar in writing than short texts.

Keywords: grammar, input enrichment, writing, long text, short text

Introduction

Writing is known as one of the most important language skills in a second or foreign language teaching and learning. As oppose to oral skills, in writing, we do not meet our readers. Therefore, the writing must be accurate enough to prevent any kinds of confusion for the reader. There are a lot of EFL learners who face difficulties in producing a piece of writing which is linguistically accurate. In order to improve language learners' writings, a good provision of input has a fundamental role. Since different writers have different needs, providing them with an appropriate input is essential. In addition, the focus on writing is one of the fundamental processes in learning a language.

An important and difficult instructional issue in second language writing courses is the place of grammar and language development. On the other hand, second language students' limited control of the syntax and lexicon can be a major inhibitor in their writing development, leading to errors (Ferris cited in Burns & Richards, 2012).

As Ferris (2002) claimed, writing class should not become a grammar class, and there is "ample evidence from composition research that simply teaching grammar in isolation does not necessarily improve the accuracy and effectiveness of students writing" (Burns & Richards, 2012 p.230).

Furthermore, teaching grammatical accuracy in writing should follow an integrated approach in order for the learners to acquire language more systematically and achieve automaticity in target language. Therefore, the input, which is used, plays a significant role in teaching a second language.

Learners' grammar needs are determined on the basis of task performance rather than through predetermined grammar syllabus (Badri& Nazari,2015). Input enrichment technique is a kind of focused task, which is designed to primarily cater implicit learning that is intended to develop awareness at the level of 'noticing' rather than understanding, like conscious raising tasks (Ellis, 2003, P. 163).

According to Willis (2007), focus on meaning gives no attention to the forms and the focus of classroom activity is on communication of meaning only. Focus on language, in contrast, includes drawing the students' attention to grammatical forms in a communicative context; how to express themselves in a given communication situation (Badri& Nazari,2015).

Input hypothesis

In Krashen's view comprehensible input containing $i+1$ is both necessary and sufficient for second language acquisition. However, in spite of initial and intuitive appeal of the input hypothesis, years of SLA research has accumulating evidence indicating that merely providing comprehensible input does not necessarily guarantee the case that learners will attain a high level of L2 proficiency (Ellis, 1994; Freeman and Long, 1991; Gass and Selinker, 1994; Long, 1996). What is currently needed is a more understanding of the way the learners proceed or interact with input to develop their inter language competence.

L2 learners are exposed to different types of input. A distinction is drawn between positive and negative evidences. Positive evidence is defined as the L2 utterances to which the L2 learner is exposed. As an example, based on exposure to simple declarative English sentences, a learner of English will receive evidence of the SVO structure of such sentences and will come to know that in English one says my dog eats fish, and not my dog fish eats. By contrast, negative evidence refers to what is not grammatical in L2 and requires explicit instruction and corrective feedback (Schwartz, 1993). All L2 learners require and indeed receive exposure to positive evidence. In the classroom context, L2 learners are also exposed to negative evidence to a greater or lesser degree, depending on the teacher's approach to L2 teaching. However, mere exposure to evidence, whether positive or negative is not sufficient for language acquisition to take place; so-called 'noticing' that is initially needed to take place.

Noticing

Tomlin and Villa (1994) also claim that learners must be ready to process information before alertness (which is their term for "noticing") and that this processing of information can significantly contribute to SLA (as cited in Robinson, 1996). This implies that L2 teachers must consider the fact that, in order for a learner to benefit from noticing, they must be able to process what was noticed. For instance, for a learner to process the English passive form, he/she needs to initially notice the form in the input and then have the knowledge of English word order in active, declarative sentences.

Robinson summarizes the importance of noticing in SLA as follows:

(1) Noticing is consistent with the consciousness hypothesis of Schmidt (1990) which claims there is no learning without awareness at the level of noticing.

(2) Noticing is consistent with one interpretation of claims by Reber (1989) and Krashen (1981& 1982), stating that learning is the result of both explicit and implicit information processing that requires conscious attention to form at input.

Focus-on-meaning instruction

The FonM approach to L2 teaching involves L2 learners' exposure to rich input and meaningful use of L2 in context, which is aimed at implicit or incidental L2 learning (Norris & Ortega, 2001). According to Ollerhead and Oosthuizen (2005), FonM is widely used as method of L2 instruction in contemporary English Language classrooms. Meaning in L2 context might, however be influenced by conceptual system L1 which means that the acquisition of an additional Language may be incomplete. In this regard, Slobin (1996), states that every native language "trains" its users to respond to events and experiences around them in specific ways when referring to them. This training is instilled in every L1 user during childhood and is exceptionally resistant to restructuring during L2 acquisition, especially after the onset of puberty (Slobin, 1996). Slobin's statement relates to the Chomsky's Universal Grammar (UG) (as cited in Cook and Newson, 2007), which refers to a mental faculty that is part of human beings' genetic endowment that makes it possible for children to acquire L1 grammar on the basis of exposure to the language. (See section 3.3 for a discussion of an argument underlying Chomsky's proposal for UG).

Form-focused instruction (FFI)

Ellis (2001) defines form-focused instruction (FFI) as "any planned or incidental instructional activity that is intended to induce language learners to pay attention to linguistic form". According to Ollerhead and Oosthuizen (2005), FFI serves as a generic term for "analytic teaching", "focus on form", "focus on forms", "corrective feedback /error correction" and "negotiation of form"; it is further referred to as an approach to L2teaching where attention to form arises from activities that are primarily meaning-focused. FFI has its origins in two approaches to L2 teaching, namely (1) approaches based on artificial syllabi ("artificial" here means that school syllabi are meticulously planned and therefore not natural, as opposed to contexts in which a communicative approach to teaching is applied) and (2) other, more communicative approaches (cited in Long and Robinson 1998). FFI in L2 teaching comprises two subcategories, namely focus-on-form (FonF) and focus-on-formS (FonFS) instruction that will be discussed individually.

As the instruction of language structures subject to the following criteria, Norris and Ortega (2001) describe FonF as (1) That learners engage with the meaning of a structure before attention is paid to its form through activities that ensure that target forms are crucial to the successful completion of such activities;(2) That learner needs are analyzed firstly and then addressed in the instruction of a particular form; and(3) That learners' attention is drawn to a specific form in a brief but noticeable manner, resulting in the achievement of a balance between unobtrusiveness and salience.

FFI involves strategies that include clarifying the meaning of the target structure in context; for example, a learner must understand that negation is used when one does or does not want to do something, otherwise teaching negation would hold no meaning in the real world for L2

learners. This would then require a particular teaching strategy from the teacher, which may involve the use of real life like modeling (during role-play, for instance) of negation to learners of L2. Only after the meaning of negation in context is grasped by learners, can L2 teaching start focusing on the correct application of negation (such as in the correct context) through various strategies applicable to FFI, such as input enhancement.

Input Enhancement

Sharwood Smith (1991) describes consciousness raising, now referred to as “input enhancement” (Sharwood Smith 1993), and argues that for acquisition to take place, learners of a L2 need to consciously notice forms and the meanings they represent in the input. This holds that enhancing the input (viz. highlighting aspects of the L2 grammar) will most likely increase the noticing of the relevant aspects, which will subsequently lead to correct use of such aspects by the L2 learner. In this research, it is investigated the viability of input enhancement to establish whether it will increase learners’ correct use of English past progressive instructions in writing.

Although second language teaching has experienced various approaches and schools of thought, our classroom textbooks are presented in grammar translation method. Long lists of new rules have been written at the end of every lesson and students are required to memorize them, which is against communicative regulations.

In fact, every language learning method that introduces discrete and microscopic study of linguistic features out of context has been rejected in communicative era. Then, it is vital to revise our course books and introduce grammar rules to the learners in meaningful context as it is used in natural context. In addition, application of new findings and making use of mental ability and potential in designing course books and activities is suggested. Clarification of this point is also necessary that research in the field of attentive grammar learning is so rare in our country that many relevant works like present study is needed critically.

Exposing learners to the most accurate input is the instructors’ major job. In this respect, enhanced input will greatly increase the benefits of the intake in producing the language. The aim of enhanced input is to highlight some certain aspects of the grammar of a language for learners. According to Ellis (1998), acquisition occurs when learners attend to the new structure in input rather than when they produce it. This implies that the learners must notice and attend to the new aspect of language in order to internalize the new language information. Time and practice will carry the language knowledge into the long-term memory and make it a part of the learners’ interlanguage first proposed by Selinker (1972). The term “interlanguage”; refers to the linguistic system of a L2 learner who is not yet completely proficient in L2. Having said that, noticing is known as the mechanism by which learners, after sensitization to a particular structure, “spot” such structure in natural input and by a surge in the number of encountering the target element in the source, it will be eventually noticed and naturally acquired. Noticing is seen as a prerequisite for language processing, the latter leading to the eventual acquisition of the noticed structure (Fotos 1993:386). In this regard, Corder (1981) and Smith (1994) define intake as “that part of input which has actually been processed by the learner and turned into knowledge of some kind”, whereas input, is defined as the language data having the potential of being processed, made available to the learner” (Sharwood Smith 1994). Simply put, the noticing hypothesis as posited by Schmidt

(1990) holds that nothing can be learned unless it has first been noticed. Lightbown & Spadae (2006), state that noticing in itself does not result in actual language acquisition.

The findings of this study can help the instructors provide the learners with the most useful type of instruction to ensure the improvement in using accurate grammatical structures in writing. Additionally, this study seeks to discover the most effective type of input of the various types to lead EFL learners' in writing skill.

Research question

The research question of this study will reveal itself as the following:

Q: Is there any significant difference between input enrichment in short vs. long text in improving the writing accuracy of Iranian elementary learners?

Method

Design

Since the participants were not selected randomly, and elementary learners were the focus of this research, the design of this study was considered to be intact group pretest and posttest, involving one experimental and one control group. The experimental group received long texts as an extra class activity, while sort texts were given to the control group.

As it was explained in advance, Shokouh-e-Farhang Institute's placement test specified the learners' proficiency level. To homogenize the subjects of the study, the researcher administered Nelson proficiency test. Next, the pretest was used to check the learners' proficiency level in English past tense. After ten sessions of instruction, a posttest was administered to students in order for the effectiveness of the two treatments to be measured, analyzed and compared. The independent variable considered in this study is the texts (enriched input) and the dependant variable is the grammatical accuracy in writing. The schematic representation of the selected design is presented as follow:

Class A: Pretest X Posttest

Class B: Pretest X Posttest

Participants

The study started in two elementary classes, in Shokouh-e-Farhang institute, in Mazandaran, with 45 students in total, studying New Interchange 1, by Jack C. Richards. The learners take part in these classes two days a week, receiving two hours of instruction in each session, i.e., four hours of instruction each week. The participants comprised of males and females aged between 18 and 25.

Procedure

Firstly, the present research employed the placement test of Shokouh-e-Farhang to determine the learners' proficiency level. Then for the purpose of participants' homogeneity, Nelson

Proficiency test was administered to the participants.(see appendix A & B) .After scoring and calculating the mean and standard deviation, the participants whose score fell one standard deviation below and above the mean were selected as the homogeneous EFL learners available for the study. As the result, 35 homogenized subjects remained in the study.

In this respect, the researcher randomly divided the learners into two groups of 17 and 18, class A and B, respectively. Class A was randomly named experimental group receiving long texts instruction and class B was named control group receiving short texts instruction, although the other teaching materials stayed consonant in both classes. Before giving the instruction of any kind, the subjects were asked to take the pretest in order for their knowledge in English past tense to be checked .in this case the learners in both groups were asked to write about the same topic given to them by the researcher. Then the participants' writings were checked and scored by three different raters in order for its reliability to be tested and confirmed. Then, in addition to the regular class instruction, both groups were instructed with short and long texts enriched with past tense and past continuous verbs to read in each session. The texts and stories were chosen by the researcher (See Appendix D for the texts). Class A was assigned to read long texts, while class B was provided with short texts to read. After 10 sessions the same posttest assigned to two groups to compare the effectiveness of the two treatments. After 10 sessions of instruction, the learners took part in a posttest, by which means the subjects had been involved in the study for 12 sessions in total. . The same writing topic was given to the subjects. Then three different raters checked and scored the writings. Then the result of pretest and posttest were compared and the effectiveness of each treatment was specified.

Analysis and Result

Table 1 reports the number of participants, the minimum, maximum, mean, and standard deviation for different groups (pre control, post control, pre experimental, post experimental, proficiency test of control group, and proficiency test of experimental group). As table 4.1 shows, pre tests of both control and experimental groups have the lowest minimum (11.33). In the third column, proficiency of control group has the highest value in the case of maximum (35.00). In the fourth column, proficiency of control group has the highest mean (30.35) and pre experimental group has the lowest mean (14.19). In the last column, post experimental group has the lowest value (1.08) and proficiency of experimental group has the highest Std. Deviation (3.31).

Descriptive Statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Pretest control	18	11.33	17.00	14.4611	1.56087
Post control	18	13.00	17.33	15.0911	1.12400
Pretest experi	17	11.33	17.33	14.1918	1.67826
Post experi	17	15.66	19.66	17.7806	1.08044
Profiexperi	17	26.00	34.00	29.3529	3.31552
Profi control	17	26.00	35.00	30.3529	3.01954
Valid (listwise)	N 17				

Table 2

Independent Samples Test

	t-test for Equality of Means								
	F	Sig .	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
								Lower	Upper
proficiency	1.256	.271	-.919	32	.365	-1.0000	1.08764	-3.2154	1.2154
			-.919	31.724	.365	-1.0000	1.08764	-3.2162	1.2162

As Table 2 indicates, there is no significant difference between the means of proficiency test of control and experimental groups.

Table 3

Independent Samples Test

	t-test for Equality of Means								
	F	Sig .	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
								Lower	Upper
Pretest	.261	.613	.492	33	.626	.26935	.54750	-.84454	1.38323
			.491	32.442	.627	.26935	.54866	-.84765	1.38634

As Table 3 shows, there is no significant difference between the mean of pretest of control and experimental groups.

Table 4

Independent Samples Test

	t-test for Equality of Means								
	F	Sig .	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
								Lower	Upper
Posttest	.082	.776	-7.209	33	.000	-2.68948	.37307	-3.44849	-1.93047
			-7.218	32.982	.000	-2.68948	.37263	-3.44761	-1.93134

As Table 4 shows there is significant difference between the means of post test of control and experimental groups ($t=-7.00$, $P<.05$). The performance of post experimental group is higher than control group so, the treatment is influential.

Table 5

Paired Samples Test

	Paired Differences					t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence				
				Lower	Upper			
Pair 1	-3.58882	1.34470	.32614	-4.28020	-2.89744	-11.004	16	.000

Table 5 shows that there is a significant difference between the pretest and posttest of experimental group ($t=-11.00$, $P<.05$).

Discussion

The current study included several goals. First, it aimed to investigate statistically the comparison between pre tests of both control and experimental groups. Second, the relationship between the means of posttests of both control and experimental groups has been taken into account. Third, this study was conducted to explore the scores obtained via proficiency tests of both control and experimental groups. Moreover, this study was conducted to investigate the scores obtained via pretest and posttest of experimental group in order to observe the probable changes of treatment. The findings of the present study were analyzed based on two models of t-test analysis; independent t-test and one paired sample t-test.

35 EFL learners from Shokouh-e-Farhang institutes took part in this study. They were asked to write about past. All the participants were in elementary level.

Regarding the difference between means of pretests of both control and experimental groups, the findings of the result shows that there is no significant difference between the means of both aforementioned groups. Respecting the difference between means of posttests of both control and experimental groups, the findings of the result shows that there is significant difference between the means of both aforementioned groups. The findings show that experimental group outperformed control group and as the result the treatment was effective on teaching learners. As considering the theoretical standpoints of literature on teaching

grammar in second language acquisition, researchers found out a number of various influential factors on learning different aspects of language such as grammar perspective.

The most well-known is Krashen's Input Hypothesis which argues that comprehensible input is the most important factor on language learning which contains language information that is slightly beyond the learners' current level of competence or "i+1", where "i" is representative of the learner's current level of development and "+ 1" is representative of the next level (Krashen, 1985). Input at "i+1" level will consist of words, grammatical forms and pronunciations which are slightly beyond the learner's current level of development. Krashen views comprehensible input containing i+1 as both necessary and sufficient for learner's second language acquisition. However, a vast SLA research documented that a better understanding of the way the learners interact with input to develop their inter language competence is required.

Another important factor in SLA research is noticing. Schmidt considers noticing as the start point of language learning process, but mentions that noticing in itself does not contribute to actual language acquisition (Lightbown and Spada, 2006). He claimed that learners' attention to input as paramount to notice certain perspectives of the target language. In this vein, Tomlin and Villa (1994) argued that learners must be ready to process information before alertness (which is their term for "noticing") and that this type of processing of information can enrich SLA (as cited in Robinson, 1996). The implication of it indicates that L2 teachers must consider the fact that, in order for a learner to benefit from noticing, they must be able to process what was noticed. As an example, for a learner to process the English passive form, he/she needs to initially notice the form in the input and then have the knowledge of English word order in active, declarative sentences.

Krashen's Affective Filter Hypothesis claims that L2 learners who are exposed to large amount of comprehensible input, do not necessarily acquire L2 completely. He applied the affective filter as a metaphorical barrier that is said to be "up" when students are anxious, demotivated or bored and "down" when they are relaxed, motivated and interested.

White (1987) states that only the learner recognizes his/her current level of linguistic competence, which causes difficulties for any teachers to offer comprehensible input. She argues that few learners are aware of their precise level of linguistic knowledge, at least in a way that can positively help L2 teacher to determine the learner's correct "i+1". This has the implication that the teacher cannot rely on the learner's help to determine which kind of input is required to progress in the L2 acquisition.

Some researchers carried out the empirical studies in teaching grammar. For example, Badri and Nazari (2015) explored the role of focused-task on learners' grammar acquisition. For this aim, they chose two intact groups each with 15 learners for teaching the targeted structures (present perfect; used to; modals; in order to vs. in order for, in spite of vs. although, because vs. because of and so on) through input enrichment approach. The results showed the experimental group outperformed during the post-test. The findings are in line with the claims concerning the importance of focused task-based instruction in grammar learning (Badri and Nazari, 2015).

Conclusion

The current research was conducted to investigate the influence of teaching using accurate grammar in writing via short text and long texts. The findings obtained from t-test analysis and documented that teaching grammar via long text has a better effect learners' performance. There is no significant difference between the means of pretest of experimental group and control group. There is significant difference between the means of post test of experimental group and control group. Finally, some limitations and suggestions for future research were provided.

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