



## Consciousness–Raising Tasks vs. Input Enrichment Tasks on Iranian EFL Learners’ Grammar Acquisition

Abbas Badri Eyle zoleh<sup>1\*</sup>, Golnaz Badri<sup>2</sup>, Maryam Badri<sup>3</sup>

1-English language department, Payame nour University, Kangavr, Iran

2,3-Alzahra high school, Kangavar, Iran

\*Badri5678@gmail.com

Received: January 2020

Accepted: February 2020

### Abstract

The present study was an attempt to investigate the effects of consciousness–raising tasks and input enrichment tasks on learners’ grammar acquisition. To this purpose, two intact groups (number of each was 17) were chosen. One group was considered as the experimental group and the second group was considered as the control group of the study. Some grammatical features were taught through consciousness–raising tasks to the experimental group and the control group was taught the grammatical structures through input enrichment tasks. The results of statistical procedures and Independent pair T-test showed no significant difference between the means of the groups. The findings support the arguments regarding the importance of both tactics in grammar learning but they had different impacts on learners. Consciousness-raising involves an attempt to equip the learners with declarative or explicit knowledge. Input enrichment task equipped learners with procedural or implicit knowledge. The researchers suggested other researchers and teachers applying these approaches in order to promote learners’ grammar and to achieve further findings.

**Key words:** Consciousness–raising tasks, input enrichment, grammar acquisition, declarative knowledge, procedural knowledge.

### 1- Introduction

The role of tasks has received more support from some researchers in second language acquisition (SLA), who are interested in developing pedagogical applications of second language acquisition theory (e.g., Long & Crookes, 1992). An interest in tasks as the basic unit of second language teaching began when researchers turned to tasks as SLA research tools in the mid- 1980s. SLA research has focused on the strategies and cognitive processes used by second language learners. The research has reassessed the role of form-focused teaching. It is assumed that there is no evidence that formal grammar teaching leads to the ability to communicate outside the classroom. Engaging learners in tasks provides a better context for the activation of learning processes than formal grammar teaching (Richards & Rodgers, 1986, P. 223). The purpose of the present paper

was to investigate the effects of explicit versus implicit grammar instruction on augmenting Iranian learners' grammar acquisition. To accomplish this end the researchers applied 'consciousness-raising task to the experimental group and input enrichment task to the control group of the study.

### 1-1- Task definition

Long (1985) defines a task as a piece of work undertaken for oneself or for others, freely or for some reward ... in other words, by a task it is meant the hundred and one thing people do in everyday life, at work, at play and in between. 'Tasks' are things people will tell you they do if you ask them and they are not applied linguists.

Skehan (1996a) defines task as 'an activity in which: meaning is primary; there is some sort of relationship to the real world; task completion has some priority; and the assessment of task performance is in terms of task outcome'.

Lee (2000) believes that a task is (1) a classroom activity or exercise that has: (a) an objective obtainable only by the interaction among participants, (b) a mechanism for structuring and sequencing interaction, and (c) a focus on meaning exchange; (2) a language learning endeavor that requires learners to comprehend, manipulate, and/or produce the target language as they perform some set of work plans'.

Bygate, Skehan, and Swain (2001) consider a task as 'an activity, which requires learners to use language, with emphasis on meaning to attain an objective' (as cited in Ellis, 2003, p. 5).

### 1-2-Unfocused vs. focused tasks

Ellis (2003) noted that unfocused tasks may predispose learners to choose from a range of forms but they are not designed with the use of specific form in mind. In contrast, focused tasks are tasks aimed to predispose learners to process, receptively or productively, some particular linguistic feature, for example a grammatical structure (Ellis, 2003, P. 16). Of course this processing must occur as a result of performing activities that satisfy the criteria of a task, i.e. that language is used pragmatically to achieve some non-linguistic outcome. Therefore, focused tasks have two aims: one is to focus on communicative language use; the other is to target the use of a particular, predetermined target feature.

Ellis (2003) claims that, there are two ways in which a task can achieve a focus. One is to design the task in such a way that it can only be performed if learners use particular linguistic features. The second way of constructing a focused task is by making language itself the content of a task like consciousness-raising tasks.

### 1-3- Statement of the problem: Importance of grammar teaching

Celce-Murcia (2001) suggests that it is not helpful to think of grammar as a discrete set of meaningless, decontextualized, static structures, nor it is helpful to think of grammar solely as prescriptive rules about linguistic form, such as injunctions against splitting infinitives or ending sentences with prepositions. Grammatical structures not only have (morpho-syntactic) form. They are also used to express meaning (semantics) in context-appropriate use (pragmatics).

Swan (1998) claims that there are two good reasons for teaching grammar: comprehensibility and acceptability (as cited in Richards & Renandya, 2002, P. 151).

Comprehensibility. Knowing how to build and use certain structures makes it possible to communicate common types of meaning successfully. Without these structures, it is difficult to make comprehensible sentences. Therefore, we are supposed to identify these structures and teach them well.

Acceptability. In some social context, serious differences from native-speaker norms can prevent integration and provoke prejudice- a person who speaks 'badly' may not be taken seriously, or may be considered uneducated or stupid. Students may thus want or need higher level of grammatical correctness than is required for mere comprehensibility. For these reasons, the researchers applied two tactics to improve this important subskill. To achieve the end, they utilized 'consciousness-raising task' to the experimental group and 'input enrichment task' to the control group of the study.

#### **1-4- Implicit vs. explicit grammar**

In recent years, the degree of implicitness and explicitness of grammar instruction has received so much attention. According to Ellis (2009), implicit instruction aims to provide learners with conditions under which they can infer the rules without awareness. The result will be internalizing the pattern without having their attention focused on it.

Dekeyser (1995) suggests that explicit instruction in the other hand, involves teaching a certain rule during the learning process and encouraging the learners to develop metalinguistic awareness of that rule (as cited in Ellis, 2009).

#### **1-5- Consciousness-raising vs. Input enrichment task**

According to Ellis (1991) these are the main characteristics of consciousness-raising activities:

1. There is some attempt to isolate a specific grammatical feature for focused attention.
2. The learners are provided with data which illustrate the targeted feature and they may also be supplied with an explicit rule describing or explaining the feature.
3. The learners are expected to utilize intellectual effort to understand the targeted feature.
4. If there is a misunderstanding of the grammatical feature by the learners, the teacher clarifies it.
5. The learners may be required to produce the rule describing the grammatical structure.

'Input enrichment' involves designing tasks in such a way that the targeted feature is (1) frequent and/or (2) salient in the input provided (Ellis 2003, P. 158). He (2003) argues that input enrichment technique is a kind of focused task which is designed to cater primarily to implicit learning, that is, it is intended to develop awareness at the level of 'noticing' rather than awareness at the level of understanding, like conscious raising tasks.

#### **1-6- Research question**

The present study aimed to answer the following question:

- 1- Does a consciousness-raising task have any significant effects on learners' grammar acquisition?  
Regarding to the research question a hypothesis was made.

HA: A consciousness-raising task does not have any significant effects on learners' grammar acquisition.

## **2- Methods**

### **2-1- Participants**

The participants in this study were 34 intermediate female teenagers. They were studying in Safir institute, in Kangavar, Iran. The participants had a mean age of 17 and had been studying English for 8 semesters in Safir institute. All groups were randomly selected from 8 intact classes consisting of 136 students. The treatment lasted for two month, two days a week, 60 minutes a day in the institute.

## 2-2- Design

The present study was a quantitative research and a quasi-experimental design, with the pre-test, post-test and a control group. After selecting the whole population (N=136), Oxford Placement Test was administered by the researchers and based on the results of the test, two groups (Number of each was 17) whose scores were one standard deviation above or below the population mean were selected as target subjects for the study. The groups were randomly assigned as the experimental group and the control group of the study.

## 2-3- Instruments

Three instruments were utilized to achieve the purpose of the study: Oxford placement test. The Oxford Placement Test measures a test taker's ability to communicate in English. It provides information about a person's language level. This test is comprised of 60-items. The test is reliable (consistently grading test takers at the right level) and valid (having a strong theoretical basis). Parallel grammar tests (as pre-test and post-test of the study) were administered. Parallel tests are the ones which measure the same construct and have the same mean and standard deviation (Bachman, 1990, P.168).

## 2-4- Procedure

In summary, the present study was a quantitative research and a quasi-experimental design, After selecting the whole population (N=136), Oxford Placement Test was administered by the researchers and based on the results of the test, two groups (Number of each was 17) whose scores were one standard deviation above or below the population mean were selected as target subjects for the study. The groups were randomly assigned as the experimental group and the control group of the study. To assess their initial knowledge in grammar a pre-test of grammar was administered. It was a test of grammar consisting of 50 multiple-choice items taken from Nelson English Language Tests book.

Then the treatment started. The researchers gave consciousness-raising tasks to the experimental group and input enrichment task to the control group.

The treatment lasted for two month. Afterward, all participants were given post-test of grammar. The test was extracted from Nelson English Language Tests book. Finally, the results of both pretest and posttest were compared for data analysis.

## 3- Results

This study was an attempt to investigate the effect of consciousness-raising tasks on Iranian EFL learners' grammar acquisition. To fulfill the purpose of the study, both descriptive and inferential statistics were used. As mentioned above, 136 learners participated in this study. The participants were female studying English at Safir Institute in Kangavar, Iran.

**Table 1 - Descriptive Statistics for all participants (Oxford placement test)**

	N	Range	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
placement	136	36.00	19.00	55.00	35.7353	8.95440
Valid N (listwise)	136					

All the data including mean, maximum score, minimum score, range, and so on were shown in Table 2. As can be seen the number of participants was 136.

### 3-1- Independent Paired T-test

First of all it is worth noting that Independent Paired T-test is used to determine whether there is any significant difference between the means of two independent groups. Since there were two groups in the present study, the researcher used Independent Paired T-test to compare the means of groups.

**Table 2- Descriptive Statistics for two groups in post-test**

	N	Range	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
input enrichment task	17	5.00	8.00	13.00	11.0625	1.34009
consciousness	17	6.00	8.00	14.00	11.1875	1.75950
Valid N (list wise)	17					

Table 3 provides useful descriptive statistics for the groups. The data include the mean, the standard deviation, minimum and maximum scores. The table shows that there was statistically no significant difference between the means of the groups.

**Table 3- Output of the Independent Pair t-test analysis for two groups in pre-test**

	Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		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	
control	1.31	.26	-.226	32	.823	-.12500	.55293	-1.25	1.004	
Equal variances assumed										
			-.226	28.0	.823	-.12500	.55293	-1.25	1.007	
Equal variances not assumed										

\*The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

Table 4 indicates the output of the Independent Paired T-test analysis and whether there is any significant difference between the means of two independent groups. As can be seen in this table the significance level for the groups is above 0.05. Therefore, there was statistically no significant difference between the groups at the beginning of the study.

**Table 4- Descriptive data for two groups in post-test**

	N	Range	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation	Variance
input enrichment task	17	7.00	11.00	18.00	15.4706	1.84112	3.390
consciousness	17	8.00	11.00	19.00	15.5882	1.97037	3.882
Valid N (list wise)	17						

Table 5 provides useful descriptive statistics for the groups. The data include the mean, the standard deviation, minimum and maximum scores. The table shows that there is statistically no significant difference between the means of the groups.

**Table 5- Output of the Independent Pair t-test analysis for two groups in post-test**

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		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
input enrichment task	Equal variances assumed	.107	.746	-.18	32	.858	-.11765	.65404	-1.44	1.214
	Equal variances not assumed			-.18	31.8	.858	-.11765	.65404	-1.45	1.214

\*The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

### 3-2- Reporting the output of the Independent Paired T-test

As the data tabulated in table 6, it can be seen that, there was statistically no significant difference between groups as determined by Independent Paired T-test. The table reveals that the mean difference between the groups is not significant. In other word, There was statistically no significant difference between consciousness-raising and input enrichment task ( $p= 0.85$ ). From the data it was concluded that, both activities were effective.

## 4- Discussion

Regarding the research question posed in this study, Ellis (1991) argued that consciousness-raising, involves an attempt to equip the learners with understanding of a specific grammatical feature-to develop declarative rather than procedural knowledge.

Ellis (2003) noted that, the value of C-R tasks lies not just in whether they are effective in developing explicit knowledge and subsequently promoting noticing but also in the opportunities they provide for learners to communicate-it leads the negotiation of meaning (Ellis, 2003, P. 166). Ellis (2003) argues that C-R tasks seem to be an effective means of achieving a focus on form while at the same time providing chances to communicate.

There are some limitations to consciousness-raising. It may not be appropriate for young learners. Some learners who don't develop enough knowledge or those who like to learn by doing rather than studying. It can be used with beginners if the learners' first language is utilized. However, the alternative in such situations is not input enrichment task. Rather, it is to provide chances for meaning- focused language use. All learners, even those are suited to a consciousness-raising approach, will need a lot of such opportunities. Consciousness-raising is not an alternative to communication activities, but a supplement. The researchers assume that since the content of the task was language itself the learners' grammar dramatically changed. It is assumed that consciousness-raising tasks catered for metacognitive knowledge. In other words, the main purpose of consciousness-raising is to develop explicit knowledge of grammar or it is intended to develop awareness at the level of 'understanding' rather than awareness at the level of 'noticing' like input enrichment task. (Ellis, 2003, P. 163). In contrast, the main purpose of input enrichment task is to

develop implicit knowledge of grammar. One of the most important facets of this technique is that it promotes learners' grammar by providing them with plenty of opportunities to notice specific form in the written text. Other important aspect of this technique is that it triggers learners' conscious mind by providing them with a lot of communicative activity while their subconscious mind picks up linguistic features non-thoughtfully. When the learners were asked to repeat the task during post task activities, their fluency and the number of the targeted forms they uttered were dramatically increased. Finally grammatical features are highlighted and automatically attract learners' attention and there is no need to compel them to pay attention to them. It could be claimed that it is a similar to peripheral learning.

## 5- References

1. Anderson, J. (1993). *Rules of the Mind*. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.
2. Anderson, J. (2000). *Learning and memory: An Integrated Approach*, revised edition. New York: John Wiley and Sons.
3. Bachman, L. 1990. *Fundamental considerations in language testing*. Oxford University Press.
4. Breen, M. 1989. 'The evaluation cycle for language learning tasks' in R. K. Johnson (ed.): *The second language curriculum*.
5. Bygate, M., P. Skehan and M. Swain(eds.). 2001. *Researching Pedagogic Tasks, Second Language Learning, Teaching and Testing*. Harlow: Longman.
6. Ellis, N. (1994). *Implicit and Explicit Learning of Languages*. London: Academic Press.
7. Ellis, R. (1991). *Second Language Acquisition and Language Pedagogy*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matter.
8. Ellis, R. (2003). *Task-based language learning and teaching*.
9. Ellis, R., Loewen, Sh., Elder, C., Erlam, R., Philp, J., & Reinders, H. (2009). *Implicit and Explicit knowledge in second language learning, testing and teaching*.
10. Lee, J. 2000. *Tasks and communicating in language classroom*. Boston: McGraw. Hill.
11. Long, M. (1985). 'A role for instruction in second language acquisition: task-based language teaching' in K
- 12.. Hyltenstam and M. Pienemann (ed.): *Modelling and Assessing Second Language Acquisition*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.
13. Long, M. and G. Crookes. (1992). *Three approaches to task- based syllabus design'*. *TESOL Quarterly* 26/I:27-56.
14. Loschky, L. and R. Bley-Vroman. (1993) 'Grammar and task-based methodology' in G Crookes and S Gass 1993a (eds.).
15. Marianne Celce– Murcia. (2001). *Teaching English as a second or foreign Language*. Third Edition.
16. McLaughlin, B. and R. Heredia. (1996). ' Information processing approaches to research on second language acquisition and use' in R. Ritchie and T. Bhatia (eds.): *A Handbook on Second Language Acquisition*.
17. Nunan, D. (1989). *Designing Tasks for the Communicative Classroom*. Cambridge.
18. Prabhu, N. S. (1987). *Second Language Pedagogy*. Oxford.
19. Richards, Jack C. and Renandya, Willy A. (eds.). (2002). *Methodology in Language*

20. Richards, C. R., and T. S. Rodgers, (1986). Approaches and methods in language teaching: A description and analysis.
21. Richards, J., J. Platt, and H. Weber. (1985). Longman dictionary of Applied Linguistics. London.
22. Shrifin, R. and W. Schneider. (1977). 'Controlled and automatic processing II. Perceptual learning, automatic attending and a general theory.' Psychological Review 84: 127-90.
23. Skehan, P. (1996a). 'A framework for the implementation of task-based instruction' Applied linguistics 17: 38-62.
24. Underhill, Nic (1987). Testing Spoken Language: A Handbook of Oral Testing Techniques. Cambridge University Press. ISBN 978-0-521-31276-9.
25. Ur, P. (1988). Grammar input enrichment task activities. Cambridge.
26. VanPatten, B. (1996). Input Processing and Grammar Instruction in Second Language.
27. Willis, D. & Willis, J. (2007). Doing task-based teaching.