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THE EFFECT OF IMPLICIT/EXPLICIT INSTRUCTION ON LEARNING ENGLISH GRAMMAR

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ABSTRACT

KEYWORDS: IMPLICIT INSTRUCTION; EXPLICIT INSTRUCTION; FOCUS ON FORM; CONSCIOUSNESS-RAISING

Introduction
Previously, one of the most controversial issues about grammar was whether to teach it or not. Some, such as Krashen (1981), assume that second language learning is very much like the acquisition of first language. Krashen argues that comprehensible input is the only true cause of second language acquisition. He recommends that teachers should abandon grammar teaching, and concentrate instead on providing lots of comprehensible input so that learners can acquire a second language naturally, in much the same way they have acquired their mother tongue. According to Richard (as cited in Celce-Murcia, 1988, p.1), the basic assumption of such an approach is that “communicative classrooms provide a better environment for second language acquisition than classrooms dominated by formal instruction.” Richard claims that no actual empirical studies have been conducted proving that communicative classrooms produce better language learners than the more traditional teacher-dominated classrooms.
Today, the idea of not teaching grammar has been discarded, but there is some controversy over how to teach it. Should it be taught explicitly or implicitly? Or a combination of both is sufficient. Some researchers, such as Long and Robinson (1998), Rutherford and Sharewood Smith (1985) agree that explicit teaching methods are more beneficial than implicit ones while others, such as Williams (1999), agree with the opposite of this idea. There are some, such as Lynch (2005) who believe a combination of the two methods are beneficial for optimal learning.

Different attitudes have led to different approaches and methods of instruction in grammar. Two approaches are implicit and explicit instruction. Ellis (2009) states in implicit instruction learners are required to induce rules from examples given to them while in explicit instruction learners are given a rule which they then practice using. It should be noted that implicit/explicit instruction is defined from the perspective of teacher’s, material writer’s, or course designers; while implicit/explicit learning is defined from the learners’ perspective. There is no correlation between them.

**Statement of the Problem**

There are various theories on how a second language is learned, how to implement those theories in the classroom. Two of which are implicit and explicit instruction. In implicit instruction, English grammar is learnt naturally without paying much conscious attention to rules of grammar. The learners are expected to induce the rules. In explicit instruction, it is believed that grammar should be taught explicitly. Learners are given the rules and they practice using them.

This study focuses on comparing these two approaches of instruction in grammar. The grammatical structure that will be taught is prepositions of time and place.

**2. Literature Review**

Ur (2011) argues that implicit teaching requires students to use grammatical forms and meanings without verbalizing the rules. Implicit teaching is similar to inductive teaching which means that students infer the rules from the examples presented to them. They are never taught the actual rules. Ellis (2009) defines the term instruction as “an attempt to intervene in interlanguage development” (p.16). He divides the language instruction into two categories of indirect and direct intervention. He maintains that indirect intervention aims to "create conditions where learners can learn experientially through learning how to communicate in the L2" (p.16). Task-based syllabus is the best type of this instruction. He also defines direct intervention as “the pre-emptive specification of what it is that learners are supposed to learn and, typically, draws on a structural syllabus” (p.16). According to Ellis implicit and explicit instruction are not the same as this distinction but can be mapped onto it. Implicit instruction enable the learners to infer rules without awareness. It provides learners with specific examples of a rule or pattern and they infer the rule or pattern without being focused explicitly on it. It is clear that indirect intervention is implicit in nature but direct intervention can be either implicit or explicit. For example if learners are provided with a specific learning target, such as a grammatical structure, but this target is hidden from them so that they are not aware of that. This type of direct intervention is implicit instruction. According to Ellis in explicit instruction learners are encouraged to develop metalinguistic awareness of the rule.

There have been some methodological models in line with these two approaches. Two of which are focus on form (implicit instruction) and consciousness-raising (explicit instruction).

**2.1. Focus on Form (Implicit Instruction)**

Long (1991) suggests three taxonomies for grammar instruction: focus on meaning, focus on forms and focus on form. In focus on meaning the classroom work is wholly concerned with communication of meaning without paying attention to the forms. In focus on forms the primary focus of classroom activity is on language forms rather than their meanings. According to Long, focus on forms is nothing but the traditional structural syllabus. In focus on forms language is broken down into discrete elements (e.g., words, grammar rules, notions, functions), which are then taught item by item in a linear, additive fashion. Focus on form, in contrast “consists of an occasional shift of attention to linguistic code features - by the teacher or one or more students” (Long & Robinson, 1998, p.23). Long (1991) defines focus on form as follows:
Focus on form...overtly draws students’ attention to linguistic elements as they arise incidentally in lessons whose overriding focus is on meaning or communication”(pp.45-46). Long and Robinson (1998) further expanded its definition and claimed that “focus on form often consists of an occasional shift of attention to linguistic code features - - by the teacher and/or one or more students - triggered by perceived problems with comprehension or production (p. 23).

Based on the above definition, it could be argued that focus on form encourages learners to pay conscious attention to certain forms in the input, which they are likely to ignore. Such attention, according to Schmidt (1990), is necessary for acquisition to take place. Therefore, focus on form can be thought of as a useful device which facilitates the process of interlanguage development. In this method some attention is paid to some features which are important grammatically but the main attention is on the communicative meaning. According to Long, in the focus on form, learners’ attention is drawn to the target form as the linguistic forms arise incidentally in a meaningful and communicative context.

As Ellis, Basturkmen and Loewen (2001, pp.411-412) put it, based on this definition of Long, focus on form has the following characteristics

- It occurs in meaning-centered discourse.
- It is observable, i.e. it occurs interactionally.
- It is incidental, i.e. it is not preplanned.
- It is transitory.
- It is extensive, i.e. it attends to several different forms in the context of a single lesson.

Ellis et al. (2001, p.412) state that the study of incidental focus on form requires an approach to research that is necessarily descriptive (i.e., entailing observation of meaning-focused instruction to subsequently identify and analyze the focus-on-form episodes that occur) rather than experimental (i.e., constructing conditions in which focus on form is systematically varied across conditions.

In focus on form the primary focus is on meaning (i.e., on message processing) rather than on form. Focus on form involves an occasional shift of learners’ attention from meaning to a linguistic form and the meaning this conveys while the overriding focus remains on communicating. This shift can be triggered by perceived problems with either comprehension or production, and it can be initiated by either the teacher or students. A key feature of focus on form instruction is that it emphasizes function mapping. (Long, 1991).

Rutherford and Sharewood Smith (1985) provided some practical examples of techniques to draw learners’ attention:

There are many ways of drawing attention to form without indulging in metalinguistic discussion. A simple example would be the use of typographical conventions such as underlining or capitalizing a particular grammatical surface feature, where you merely ask the learners to pay attention to anything that is underlined or capitalized. Another example would be deliberate exposure of the learner to an artificially large number of instances of some target structure in the language on the assumption that the very high frequency of the structure in question will attract the learner’s attention to the relevant formal regularities . (p. 271)

The examples mentioned above are known as input enhancement, which is one of the important methods in the focus on form instruction and is frequently used as a strategy to draw the learner’s attention to a specific linguistic feature. According to Sharewood Smith’s (1991) definition, input enhancement refers to the “deliberate attempt to make specific features of input more salient in order to draw learners’ attention to these features” (p.118). In this method, teachers can do some modification to make the target form, which is a perceived problem, more salient to direct the learner pay attention to the feature. Manipulation of input enhancement, such as *italics, bolding*, enlargement, *underlining*, and input flooding are examples of such enhancement. The first four techniques refer to using typographic tactics to make the target feature more salient, while the last one means increasing number of times of encountering the target feature.

2.2. Consciousness-Raising (Explicit Instruction)

Richards and Schmidt (2002) defined CR as:

- techniques that encourage learners to pay attention to language form in the belief that an
awareness of form will contribute indirectly to language acquisition. Techniques include having students infer grammatical rules from examples, compare differences between two or more different ways of saying something, observe differences between a learner’s use of a grammar item and its use by native speakers. A consciousness-raising approach is contrasted with traditional approaches to the teaching of grammar (e.g. drilling, sentence practice, sentence combining), in which the goal is to establish a rule or a grammatical pattern directly. (p. 109)

Consciousness -raising means teaching particular grammatical feature deliberately involving the articulation of a rule (Ur, 2011). According to Ellis (2002) it involves equipping the learners with an understanding of a specific grammatical feature. The main purpose of it is developing explicit knowledge of grammar. Ellis states the characteristics of consciousness-raising as follow:
1. There is an attempt to isolate a specific linguistic 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. Misunderstanding or incomplete understanding of grammatical structure by the learners lead to clarification in the form of further data and description or explanation.
5. Learners may be required (although this is not obligatory) to articulate the rule describing the grammatical structure. (p.166)

The immediate aim of consciousness -raising tasks is to help learners notice something about the language that they might not notice on their own. They are typically asked to reflect on it, usually by talking to peers. Consciousness -raising tasks can help build their conscious knowledge and understanding of how the language works grammatically.

Willis and Willis (1996) suggest that teachers can provide students with language data either in the form of a single text or a set of examples from familiar sources. Students will then perform certain operations on these samples of language. The outcome of these operations will be an increased awareness of and sensitivity to language. They list seven kinds of operations that students might be asked to perform in the classroom:
1. Identify/consolidate: Students are asked to search a set of data to identify a particular pattern or usage and the language forms associated with it.
2. Classify (semantic, structural): Students are required to work with a set of data and sort it according to similarities and differences based on formal or semantic criteria.
3. Hypothesis building/checking: Students are given (or asked to make) a generalization about language and asked to check this against more language data.
4) Cross-language exploration: Students are encouraged to find similarities and differences between patterning in their own language and patterning in English.
5) Reconstruction/deconstruction: Students are required to manipulate language in ways which reveal underlying patterns.
6. Recall: Students are required to recall and reconstruct elements of a text. The purpose of the recall is to highlight significant features of the text.
7. Reference training: Students need to learn to use reference works - dictionaries, grammars and study guides. (p.69)

Consciousness-raising does not involve the learner in repeated production. This is because the purpose of this kind of grammar teaching is not to help learners to perform structures correctly but to help them to gain some knowledge about it.

In consciousness-raising learners are provided with data about how a particular grammatical structure works in context, and are then prompted to work out the rule by themselves. consciousness-raising tasks will guide the learner to self-discover or notice features of grammar, which they will then structure and restructure as many times as needed through the constant exposure to varied sources of input, testing their hypotheses about how language operates and linking the new elements to what they already know. (Ellis, 2002)
2.3. Objectives of the Study: The objective of this study is:
To investigate whether an explicit or implicit instruction is more effective in teaching English grammar.

2.4. Research Questions
Is there any significant difference between the effects of implicit instruction and explicit instruction on learning grammar?

2.5. Significance of the Study:
The findings of this study will provide useful information to be taken into consideration by curriculum designers, text book developers, language instructors and teachers regarding how to teach grammar effectively.

3. Method
3.1. Participants
The participants in this study were 40 elementary male young learners. They were 12 to 15 years old. They were intact groups of L2 learners from two classes (N=20). One class received implicit grammar instruction with the method of focus on form, and the other class received explicit grammar instruction with the method of consciousness-raising over the target structure.

3.2. Materials
Materials used in this study included the book Top Notch 1A (elementary level). In order to ensure that there was no significant difference between the two groups of participants in terms of their knowledge of target structures a pretest was conducted. Prepositions of time and place (at, on, in) were the grammatical structure that students worked on. These structures were chosen because they are neither too easy nor too difficult for students to understand the rules associated with them.

3.3. Instrument
The instruments of this study were two kinds of tests:
1. A pretest to indicate that participants had not already learnt the target structures.
2. A posttest consisting of a multiple-choice test, a cloze test in the form of an e-mail and three short questions designed to elicit a sentence that requires the use of prepositions of time and place (see appendix). It was used after the instruction.

3.4. Procedure
The "comparison group design" was adopted to carry out this study and there was no control group. The following steps were completed within a 2 session period. At first, the researcher gave the learners a pretest to ensure that the participants possessed knowledge of the target forms at the similar level. In the second step, the two groups received two different treatments. One group was exposed to implicit instruction of grammar. Focus on form was used in this approach. This group received the enhanced material, in which all of the prepositions of time and place were enhanced visually with the technique of bolding. All the prepositions of time and place (at, on, in) in the text were bolded. Participants were given some examples of the target structures, but no explicit teaching was allowed during the instruction to avoid interrupting the flow of the communicative activities. The other group, however, was exposed to explicit instruction of grammar. Consciousness-raising was used as a method of this instruction. Participants were provided with data and asked to construct an explicit rule to describe the grammatical feature which the data illustrate. Then they were supplied with the rule which was used to carry out some task. At times participants' first language (Persian) was used as the medium for solving the tasks.

4. Data Analysis
In order to ensure that there was no significant difference between the two groups in terms of their knowledge on the target structures, a pretest was conducted. Their scores were collected and calculated by the SPSS. As shown in Table 1, the descriptive statistics showed that the implicit group gained a mean score of 13.55, SD = 2.96, while the explicit group gained a mean score of 12.25, SD = 2.51
Table 1.  
Descriptive statistics of pretest scores

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
<th>Std. Error</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Implicit</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>13.55</td>
<td>2.964</td>
<td>.663</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Explicit</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>12.25</td>
<td>2.511</td>
<td>.561</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

An independent t-test was run to confirm the result. The results of the t-test indicated that the two groups were not statistically different from one another in terms of their scores gained from the pretest $t(38) = .149, p > .05$, even though the implicit group ($M = 13.55, SD = 2.96$) scored higher than the explicit group ($M = 12.25, SD = 2.51$). (Table 2)

Table 2.  
Independent Samples Test

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Levene's Test for Equality of Variances</th>
<th>t-test for Equality of Means</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>95% Confidence Interval of the Difference</td>
<td>F</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Upper</td>
<td>Equal variances assumed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equal variances not assumed</td>
<td>3.060</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

To answer the research question, we first look at Table 3, which presents the means and standard deviations of the two groups on the posttest. The mean of the explicit group (M=32.10, SD=3.44) is higher than the mean of the implicit group (M=23.40, SD=3.66).

Table 3.  
Descriptive statistics of posttest scores

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
<th>Std. Error</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Implicit</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>23.40</td>
<td>3.662</td>
<td>.819</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Explicit</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>32.10</td>
<td>3.447</td>
<td>.771</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

An independent t-test was run to see if the mean difference between the two groups is significant or not. (Table 4)

Table 4.  
Independent Samples Test
As displayed in Table 4, the t score -7.73 at 38 degree of freedom is significant at p<0.5. Based on this result it can be concluded that there is significant difference between scores of the two groups on their posttest.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

Before the instructional treatments, the explicit and the implicit group presented their knowledge of target structures at similar level, as measured by the pretest with insignificant difference (as shown in Table 1 and 2). However, after being exposed to two different treatments, the explicit group gained a higher mean score on the posttest than the control did (as shown in Table 3). As well the result showed there was a significant difference between the two mean scores (See Table 4).

There might be some reasons for the outperformance of the explicit group in this study. Participants who took part in this study were all young students who were accustomed to traditional methods of education in Iran. The major teaching approach in Iranian schools, particularly English grammar, is explicit instruction. Therefore, learners’ expectations could be met through direct explanation of rules.

Another reason that can explain the better performance of the explicit group is the test itself. The test contained three parts: a multiple-choice grammar part, a contextualized grammar test (a cloze test in the form of an e-mail), and sentence making. The contextualized grammar test and sentence making are essentially tests of production and require the learners to organize their information first and then retrieve the rules. Since students in the implicit group were never given the opportunity to organize their information under grammatical headings such as "prepositions of time and place, they might have had difficulty producing the right forms. Because, recovering words for blank spaces need conscious attention to grammatical structures. The result suggests that when students concentrate on the content and do not pay attention to form of a message, they are less likely to learn specific grammar structures.

There are some studies such as Scott (1989, 1990), Lynch (2005), Andrews (2007) and Nazari (2012) that approve the results of the present study.

In general, the results of most studies suggest that explicit instruction have a better effect on the improving of L2 grammar of learners of English as a foreign language. However, more research is required to come to the point of certainty.
The results of this study require the teachers to provide the learners with explicit instruction. It is worthy to draw the learners' attention to the rules explicitly.

Moreover, when learners are informed of the grammatical rules, they feel more comfortable, self-confident and motivated in the classroom. Thus, it would be wise for educators, material developers and course book designers to pay attention to this fact and take cautious measures in planning grammar teaching strategies. (Nazari, 2012)

A shortcoming of this study is that this study was conducted with a small number of participants. Therefore, the results may not apply to other populations or grammar points. Another shortcoming of this study is that the duration was too short. The dates of pretest and posttest were too close. Therefore, it is necessary to do a delayed posttest to indicate long-term retention of the target structures.

REFERENCES
Appendix
Posttest

Test on Prepositions of Time and Place

Name: ___________________________ Student number: ____________ Group: ____________

A. Choose the correct answer.

1. I saw her ___ Xmas.
   a) in   b) on   c) at   d) - 

2. I saw her ___ Xmas day.
   a) in   b) on   c) at   d) - 

3. I was born ___ July.
   a) in   b) on   c) at   d) - 

   a) in   b) on   c) at   d) - 

5. He started work ___ Monday.
   a) in   b) on   c) at   d) - 

6. She often goes out ___ night.
   a) in   b) on   c) at   d) - 

7. She often goes out ___ Friday night.
   a) in   b) on   c) at   d) - 

8. It rains a lot ___ spring.
   a) in   b) on   c) at   d) - 

9. I get up ___ 7am.
   a) in   b) on   c) at   d) - 

10. The lessons are ___ the afternoon.
    a) in   b) on   c) at   d) - 

11. It was popular ___ the 1980s.
    a) in   b) on   c) at   d) - 

12. The party is ___ next week.
    a) in   b) on   c) at   d) - 

13. The class is ___ Tuesdays and Thursdays.
    a) in   b) on   c) at   d) - 

14. It was popular ___ the twentieth century.
    a) in   b) on   c) at   d) - 

15. Do you work ___ every Wednesday?
    a) in   b) on   c) at   d) - 

B. Complete the sentences with on, in, or at.

1. The movie is …….. the Cineplex …….. 10:15.

2. ……..the summer, there are concerts …….. the park ……..Friday.

3. The art exhibit is …….. the gallery …….. City Avenue.


5. His talks are tomorrow ……..7:30 …….. the morning and …….. 2:00 Friday afternoon.

6. The play is ……..noon.

C. Complete the e-mail message with prepositions of time and place.
From: Val670@tcalc3m.net
To: Hiroko_une@global.jp

Subject:

Hi Hiroko:

Are you busy........ Monday night? There’s a free concert of African music right near your office........ the Stern Art Center. Sounds like a great show! It starts ..........7:30. I’ll be .......... work until 5:00, but I could meet you ..........5:15 or 5:30 .......... the corner of Grand and Crane. We could have something to eat before the concert. What do you think? The price is right! — Val.

D. Answer the questions. Use your own words. Use in, on, or at.

1. Where is your school?

2. What time is your English class?

3. When are you free this week?