

An Investigation of the Role of Gender in Grammatical Consciousness-Raising Activities

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to investigate the role of Gender in grammatical consciousness-raising activities in EFL classroom settings. Teaching grammar with consciousness-raising activities is useful on L2 learning. To support the proposed hypothesis, 60 students from High School in Babak village, Bilesavar, Ardabil, were chosen randomly as the participant of this study. They were divided into two groups. One group was named control group and the other one was called experimental group. Both groups were given pretest to assure that they are equal with respect to the variable under investigation. Then, the experimental group received the treatment and the control group received the placebo. The treatment was teaching grammatical points by using grammatical consciousness-raising activities. After four weeks of instruction as treatment both groups were post tested. The data were submitted to a T-Test analysis and the results obtained supported the proposed hypothesis.

KEYWORDS: Grammatical consciousness-raising activities, control group, experimental group, treatment, placebo.

1. INTRODUCTION

In second language education, since the 1970s, the dominance has always been with the communicative language teaching or the CLT paradigm. Language-teaching researchers and practitioners hold the view that meaning rather than form has to be given prominence. In this paradigm, which is a radical shift from behaviorist psychology and structural linguistics meaning based view of language, attention is paid to the role of the learner rather than the external stimuli, the learning process rather than the product, diversity among learners, context, a whole-to-part orientation rather than a part-to-whole approach and meaning rather than drills (Jacobs & Farrell, 2003). So the language is so broad and varied in which we can never provide learners with variable and comprehensive description of the language as a whole. But we can provide them with activities which encourage them to think about patterns of language and to draw their conclusions about how the language works. The best known kind of these activities is consciousness-raising (CR). C-R activities have been a part of language teaching for a very long time. Indeed the grammar-translation approach to language teaching accompanied with C-R.

1.1 Grammar – the teaching implications

The questions associated with the teaching of grammar have always preoccupied the minds of students of language and – quite frequently – they have revolved around the main issue of whether to teach grammar or not, rather than how to successfully apply grammar in language teaching curricula. Strange as it may sound, it is an attestable fact that there exist sources (e.g. Kelly 1969) that imply that teaching grammar with a prominent role almost synonymous to formal language instruction dates back to 2,500 B.C. Naturally, in the history of ESL, the importance of grammar teaching has varied depending on the popularity of various methods, approaches and factions. Thus, at the end of the methodology spectrum, with absolutely no emphasis on formal and explicit¹ grammar teaching there is, for example, the Direct Method- and at the other end we find the Grammar translation Method, whose

¹ The distinction between explicit and implicit knowledge is associated with the work of Bialystok (1982) among others. The former being perceived as the unanalysed type of linguistic knowledge while the latter, on the contrary, the analysed grammatical and lexical items that can be joined to form new and original utterances. For more information and a comparison of conscious vs. unconscious knowledge or Krashen's notions on acquisition and learning see Ellis (1994).

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prerequisite is the concentration on form and explicit account of grammatical rules practiced through the medium of translation. Note that the issue valid for this work is that both knowledge and awareness of grammar in foreign language learning might prove to be the main determining factor in the success or failure of the enterprise.

One such approach is the cognitive approach to grammatical instruction known widely as grammatical consciousness-raising,^{1, 2} discussed among others by Sharwood (1981) and Rutherford (1987). Within this approach questions concerning which aspect of grammar require grammatical instruction can be addressed. In turn, in communicative approach grammar is treated as its central role; therefore enabling learners to observe ungrammatical structures and providing them with their correct corresponding items. Additionally, unlike traditional grammar teaching, the approach discussed here focuses on selected features of grammar with an attempt to avoid either the application of the complicated meta-language or purely explicit rules.

Harley and Swain (1984) believe that when accuracy is an issue, C-R can help bridge the gap in the learner's competence. From this culmination of definitions, one understands that C-R is a method of teaching, which provides learners with valuable background information from their first language. The function of this background is to give the learner the ability to solve problems on their own for grammatical pattern transfer, to the second language or L2.

Schmidt (1990) classifies some of the distinctions in the area of consciousness and suggests the different senses of the term consciousness. In every language, consciousness has several senses, and is often used ambiguously. In scientific discussion also, conflicts of opinions are often due as much to terminological vagueness as substantive disagreement.

In order to understand the numerous issues related to second language learning, it is necessary to distinguish carefully several senses of the term; consciousness as awareness, consciousness as intention, and consciousness as knowledge.

2.1 Consciousness as awareness

In both common usage and theoretical treatment of the topic, consciousness is commonly equated with awareness. Many writers have claimed that there are various levels of consciousness. Schmidt (1990) distinguishes three levels of consciousness:

Level 1: perception

Level 2: noticing

Level 3: understanding

2.2 Consciousness as intention

The most common ambiguity in the use of the term consciousness is between passive awareness and active intent. Bailystock (1981) restricts the conscious strategy of practice to deliberate attempts by a learner to increase exposure to language outside the class, excluding practice in the classroom, over which learner has limited control. It is important to maintain the distinction between consciousness as intentional behavior, because the two are often dissociated. Intentions may be either conscious or unconscious (Baars, 1986), and we often become aware of things we do not intend to notice.

2.3 Consciousness as knowledge

White (1982) points out the common assumption that, to know something is to be conscious of it. White argues that experiential consciousness and knowledge is all the same thing. One common distinction between knowledge types helps us to have a better perspective of consciousness as knowledge.

This distinction is between declarative (knowledge of fact) and procedural knowledge (knowledge of 'how'), used to perform cognitive skills (Schmidt, 1990). Some (Anderson, 1982) theorize that all knowledge develops from declarative knowledge and requires consciousness-raising in the early stages, while others (Lewicki, et al) do not.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1. Research questions

¹ the process of developing awareness of an unfair situation, with the aim of making people help in changing it. Ellis (1993) draws a distinction between the teaching of grammar through practice and teaching of it through consciousness-raising

1. Do any relationships between genders on learning grammatical consciousness-raising activities in EFL classroom settings or not?

It was hypothesized that:

1. Yes there are considerable relationships between genders on learning grammatical consciousness-raising activities on female learners of English in contrast with male learners of EFL.

3.2 Participants

In order to investigate the relationships between genders on learning grammatical consciousness-raising activities on L2 learners in EFL settings, two groups of students who are studying English in grade 3 in Dr. Hesaby secondary school in Babak village, Billesavar, Ardebil, were chosen as the subjects of my research. There are 30 students in each group.

They are studying English on the basis of ordinary methods such as grammar translation and to some extent communicative program and no English grammar is taught explicitly.

3.3 Instruments

These materials are those which are used in ordinary English classes in my research classes. English textbooks administered by Ministry of Education should be taught in my classes. Beside these kinds of equipments, we can use audio-video devices in order to help the process of teaching. Testing materials are consisting of a pre-test and post-test. A pre-test was administered before the treatment and post-test after the treatment.

3.4 Procedure

We aim to provide learners with language data either in the form of a single text or a set of examples from familiar sources. They will then perform certain operations on these samples of language. The outcomes of these operations will be an increased awareness of and sensitivity to the language.

To support the proposed hypothesis, 60 students from Secondary School in Babak village, Billesavar, Ardebil, were chosen randomly as the participants of the study. They were divided into two groups. One group was named control group (Male students), and the other group was called experimental group (Female students). Both groups were given a pretest to assure that they are equal with respect to the variable under investigation. Then, the experimental group received treatment, and the control group received placebo. The treatment was reaching grammatical points by using grammatical consciousness-raising activities, and by placebo I mean teaching grammatical points by ordinary methods. After six weeks of instruction as treatment, both groups were post-tested.

4. Data analysis

In order to investigate the effect of gender n learning grammatical consciousness-rising activities, sixty male and female students participated as the subject in two groups of thirty in this study. One group named the control group and the other one is called experimental group. Both were given a pretest to assure that they are equal with respect to the variable under investigation. Then the experimental group received treatment and the control group received placebo. At the end both groups were given a posttest. (In the present study experimental group was taught by using grammatical consciousness raising activities, while the control group was taught by ordinary methods, such s grammar-translation method).

After four weeks of instruction as treatment, both groups were post tested. The data were submitted to a T-Test analysis and the results obtained as illustrated in the following tables.

Table 4.2 Case Processing Summary

Cases							
Total		Excluded			Included		Pre CE*Pre Pos
Percent	N	Percent	P	Percent	N		
100.0%	61	1.6%	1	98.4%	60		

Table 4.3 Report Pre CE (Pretest for Control & Experimental Group)

Std Deviation	N	Mean	Pre* Pos
3.05298	30	10.7000	Control
3.61367	30	10.9000	Experimental
3.31816	60	10.8000	Total

Table 4.4 Case Processing Summary

Cases						
Total		Excluded		Included		
Percent	N	Percent	N	Percent	N	
100.0%	61	1.6%	1	98.4%	60	Pos CE Pre Pos

Table 4.5 Report Pos CE (Posttest for Control & experimental Group)

Std Deviation	N	Mean	Pre* Pos
2.69013	30	10.2667	Control
3.61606	30	12.4000	Experimental
3.33785	60	11.3333	Total

In order to determine whether the difference between two sample means is significant or not, t-test procedure was followed.

If the value of t observed is greater than the value of t critical, the null hypotheses will be rejected; implying the difference between the groups is significant. i.e., even though they were from the same population before the experiment, they do not belong the same population anymore.

4.6 T-Test

	mean	N	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pair prepos]	1.5000	60	.50422	.6509
1 difference	.5333	60	1.52345	.19668

Paired Sample Correlation

	N	Correlation	Sig.
Pair 1 prepos & difference	60	.640	.000

Pair 1 prepos-difference	Paired differences				t
	mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
	.96667	1.26178	.16290	lower Upper	
				.64071 1.29262	5.934

The tables show that the mean scores for experimental group in pretest and posttest are clearly significant. (10.90 for experimental group in the pretest and for this group in the posttest the mean score is 12.40). They also provide valuable information. Observed t is 5.934. Fortunately the observed t is significantly great, in order to support the research hypothesis. Because the critical t for the degree of freedom 59 is 2. Probability of zero means that is significant t even less than .05- that is a = 0 rather than .05.

Conclusion

Finally with the help of our experimental study, it is observed that the female students were good on learning grammatical consciousness raising activities with comparison with male students. During the treatment the students expressed their feeling that they enjoyed consciousness raising activities and were extremely satisfied with the treatment. The results and statistical analysis of this research revealed the significant effects of consciousness raising activities in prompting accuracy of students which in this research had been realized on the post test scores of experimental group. In control group the class material was the same, but the subjects were not taught by consciousness-raising activities. In order to analyze the subject's scores in experimental group and control group and making comparison, T-test strategy was applied.

A careful study of tables points out a highly significant difference between the two groups. The amount of observed t (5.93) and comparing it either critical t for the degrees of freedom of 59 which is about 2, revealed the significant relationships between genders on learning grammatical consciousness-raising activities on L2 learners in EFL classroom settings.

Acknowledgment

To my Father and Mother.

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