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An Investigation of Spoken Output and Intervention Types among Iranian EFL Learners

Sasan Baleghizadeh

Associate Professor, Shahid Beheshti University

Arash Saharkhiz

Ph.D Candidate, Shahid Beheshti University

Abstract

This study was inspired by VanPatten and Uludag's (2011) study on the transferability of training via processing instruction to output tasks and Mori's (2002) work on the development of talk-in-interaction during a group task. An interview was devised as the pretest, posttest, and delayed posttest to compare four intervention types for teaching the simple past passive: traditional intervention as the comparison group and three task-based groups were processing instruction, consciousness-raising, and input enhancement. The interviews and the interactions during the treatments were also analyzed qualitatively. Task-based instruction (TBI) proved significantly more effective than traditional intervention and processing instruction significantly outperformed all others on both posttests. Furthermore, processing instruction was the only task-based intervention to retain its improvement till the delayed posttest. Qualitatively, processing instruction led to true negotiation of meaning and deep-level learning, consciousness-raising led to massive negotiation over the function of the target structure and deep-level learning, input enhancement led to enormous unfocused interaction about meaning, and traditional intervention just led to interaction about the forms. It was concluded that a well-planned processing instruction is a promising intervention for focusing on language form; however, due to the strong points cited for the other two tasks, their roles should not be ignored.

Keywords: Input enhancement, processing instruction, consciousness-raising, traditional exercise-based intervention.

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E-mail: sasanbaleghizadeh@yahoo.com

E-mail: saharhiz.arash@gmail.com

Introduction

Tasks, as effective and efficient means to facilitate interactive teaching, have always interested researchers. Some tasks including input enhancement, consciousness-raising, and structured input catering to processing instruction have been investigated in separate studies, but few studies, if any, have attempted to compare them all in one study. Also, there has been much controversy about the differing effectiveness of various approaches to doing research (Duff, 2008). Inspired by the merits of both qualitative and quantitative research methods (Mackey & Gass, 2005), this study concentrates on both approaches to examine the effect of intervention types on learners grammatical acquisition. On the one hand, the study focused on observing, recoding, and analyzing how learners actually interacted while working on tasks, exercises, and tests. On the other hand, there were a pretest, a comparison group, and comparison under controlled conditions through a posttest and a delayed posttest. It is believed that this study can be considered valuable and innovative, in the sense that it will yield a more vivid picture of the actual functions and effectiveness of tasks in helping learners develop more rapidly and interactively in the context of second language classroom.

Background

This research was motivated by VanPatten and Uludag (2011) study which reported a detailed statistical analysis of the data on the passive structure to see whether input practice via processing instruction (PI) which is an input oriented approach to grammar intervention (p.44) is transferable to limited output conditions. However, working only with numerical values does not give us a thorough picture of what actually happens during the implementation of tasks. Mori (2002), through a qualitative conversation analysis, managed to investigate the sequential development of talk-in-interaction in a class of second language learners while the class was working on the pre-task and while-task phases of a task-based group activity. By mixing their foci and methods much more was realized about the effectiveness of different tasks in this study.

Different studies have shown differing results in favor of various tasks. Many of these studies have focused on macro issues such as input versus output (Truscott & Sharwood Smith, 2004), intentional versus incidental learning and intervention versus non-intervention (Tanaka & Kawade, 1982), explicit versus implicit teaching (Tateyama, 2001), and focused tasks versus unfocused tasks (Johnson, 1988; Koike & Pearson, 2005), while many others have investigated the functioning of different tasks (Min, 2008).

Most of the studies conducted so far have proven the superiority of intervention over non-intervention and explicit teaching over implicit teaching. Lyster (1994), for instance, illustrated that pragmatic intervention in politeness resulted in better learning than did non-intervention. Also, Witten s (2000) work on the development of sociolinguistic competence which utilized input enhancement (IE) as the intervention, favored the teachability of the sociolinguistic features of language. In House and Kasper (1981), for example, discourse markers and gambits were shown to be teachable and an advantage was proven for explicit teaching over implicit teaching. Similarly, Nicholas, Lightbown and Spada (2001) found evidence in favor of explicit recasts over implicit recasts for the acquisition of learners. Regarding vocabulary learning, several researchers have found support for the effectiveness of explicit decontextualized vocabulary learning and have illustrated the small gains brought about by its contextualized incidental counterpart (Dempster, 1987; Pitts, White, & Krashen, 1989; Griffin, 1992; Hulstijn, 1992; Dupuy & Krashen, 1993; Laufer & Shmueli, 1997). Harley (1989) also found that learners gained better results through explicit intervention than when they were instructed through implicit teaching.

The sufficiency of input for grammatical acquisition has been supported in several studies (Benati, 2005; Benati & Lee, 2008; Ferná'ndez, 2008), while others emphasize the value of output for learning (Izumi, 2002; Swain, 1998). One of the classical studies supporting the sufficiency of input is VanPatten and Cadierno s experimental work (1993) on processing instruction (PI) in which the group receiving PI outperformed those receiving no instruction and those working on controlled to free communicative activities. On the other hand, there have been some studies that have denied this

effectiveness for PI (Keating & Farley, 2008; Qin, 2008). Likewise, many studies have compared input processing with production-based intervention and proven either the superiority of the latter or their equal effectiveness (DeKeyser & Sokalski, 1996; Kim 2001; Salaberry, 1997).

As for different tasks, Jourdenais, Ota, Stauffer, Boyson and Doughty (1995) found support for input enhancement as an implicit comprehension task contributing to increased noticing and use in comparison with a group not receiving input enhancement. In another study, Trahey and White (1993) showed that input enrichment was sufficient for the acquisition of the target feature, but not sufficient for unlearning the ungrammatical structure the participants had internalized before. However, there have been other studies which were not as successful in finding similar results (Alanen, 1995).

Similarly, some researchers have illustrated the effectiveness of consciousness-raising (CR) tasks in helping learners develop explicit knowledge of the target features (Fotos 1994; Fotos & Ellis, 1991). These studies have also supported the potentiality of CR tasks for fostering opportunities for communication and negotiation of meaning. However, some studies point to the liabilities of CR tasks given the age of the learners (Ellis, 1991; Sheen, 1992), their metalinguistic knowledge (Storch, 1999) and their intelligence (Sheen, 1992).

Generally, the lion share of the research work on task-based instruction (TBI) has taken place through quantitative approaches and few studies have followed a qualitative approach and literally no studies have mixed both. This study tried to reconcile these two complementary research methods to broaden our view of the functioning of TBI.

Method

In this study, the differing effects of three tasks on students acquisition and use patterns of the simple past passive structure were compared not only quantitatively but also qualitatively through observation and analysis of their interactions. The purpose was to gain more information than the mere numerical information on various tasks would provide. There was an attempt to see what use patterns

emerged out of students' interactions under different tasks, what made them have different use patterns and different degrees of acquisition, how accurately and fluently they used the simple past passive structure, and whether they used the target structure in authentic interaction more frequently than in traditional activities.

Participants and Categories

The following four groups of students took part in the study: a comparison group receiving the traditional grammatical explanations plus grammatical exercises (TI group), an input enhancement group (IE group) receiving texts enriched with the simple past passive structure, a consciousness-raising group (CR group) working on tasks that increased their explicit consciousness of the target structure through communication and interaction, and a processing instruction group (PI group) receiving explicit information on the target structure plus structured input activities. The last three groups represented TBI as opposed to the comparison group which represented traditional exercise-based language teaching (Ellis, 2003).

The participants were chosen from among lower-intermediate adult foreign language learners of both genders who ranged from 20 to 25 in age. Their proficiency level was established by the paper version of TOEFL[®]. All the participants were Bachelor of Science candidates of engineering at the Shahre Rey Branch of Islamic Azad University in Tehran. Lower-intermediate students are largely unfamiliar with the passive structure, because many textbooks postpone teaching it until the intermediate level. Moreover, the cognitive structures of children and teenagers are not as ready as those of adults for the grammatical explanations in the comparison and PI groups and for the explicit learning in the CR tasks.

To both cater to the statistical aspects of the study and keep the study manageable for a qualitative analysis, 15 students per group would be justifiable. A qualitative study necessitates the *natural* observation of events in intact classes. Since there was a comparison group and the groups were pretested, instructed under experimental conditions, and posttested, the experimental assumptions of the study were believed to have been taken care of. However, if the students had been assigned randomly we would have totally ruined the naturalness

of the ecological contexts of the target groups. Therefore, the researchers decided not to assign the participants randomly to the classes, but to account for the experimental side of the coin at the same time the four intact classes were randomly assigned to one of the four intervention types.

Pretesting and Treatments

Based on the foregoing discussions, the study was guided by the following research questions:

1. Is there a significant difference between TBI and traditional intervention regarding their effect on the use of the simple past passive structure?
2. Is there any qualitative difference between TBI and traditional intervention regarding their effect on the use of the simple past passive structure?
3. Are there any significant differences among the effects of different tasks on the use of the simple past passive structure?
4. Are there any qualitative differences among the effects of different tasks on the use of the simple past passive structure?

As the pretest, a semi-structured interview with a main oral item was devised which read:

Describe 10 activities which were done at your home yesterday. You must avoid mentioning the people who did the activities (using your knowledge of passive sentences). You've got 2.5 minutes.

As the cut-off point, it was decided that the students who gained any score amounting to more than 10 percent (to account for chance scores) of the total score (i.e. $X > 1$) be excluded. The analysis of the pretest through a One-way ANOVA revealed that there was no significant difference among the four groups with respect to their knowledge of the target structure: $F(3, 56) = .72, p > .05$. Thus, the final four groups, each consisting of 15 students, were shaped.

The participants were asked to produce paragraphs rather than phrases through using the word *describe* in the stem and if the researchers observed any students beginning their talk with phrases,

they would be encouraged to use sentences. It was believed that ten sentences would suffice to offer representative samples of their performances. Also, by using phrases such as *yesterday* and *you should avoid mentioning the people who did the activities* the researchers guided them to use the simple past passive structure. Besides, by determining a time limit the researchers probed to observe their performances in real time to evaluate fluency in their speech. In addition to the main item, the interview contained a warm-up and a wind-down to prepare the learners both affectively and cognitively for the interview and thus avoid the probable error variance. The interview was piloted with intermediate adult learners prior to the study and it successfully elicited the target structure, hence the validity of the instrument. Moreover, since it was open-ended, it could alleviate the practice effect for the two posttests. The delayed posttest was held three weeks after the first posttest.

The passive structure as the target object of the intervention lends itself well to all intervention types due to its lack of complexity and to the stages and goals of PI (Van Patten & Uludag, 2011). VanPatten's First-noun Principle (FNP) of his Input Processing Model (VanPatten & Cadierno, 1993) is a central reason for the difficulty of processing the passive structure. According to this principle, learners, by default, consider the first (pro) noun in an utterance as the agent.

According to Ellis (2003), focused tasks are activities in which learners' incidental attention is focused on a structure while their focal attention is led toward communicating meanings. Exercises, on the other hand, are activities in which learners' focal attention is concentrated on the target structure and they are aware of the focus of the activity. Following Ellis (2003), tasks are contrasted with grammar exercises in the sense that in focused tasks learners are not informed of the specific linguistic focus and therefore treat the task in the same way as they would an unfocused task, i.e. pay primary attention to message content (p.141). In what follows, it will be explained why each treatment type is considered as either a task or an exercise.

Five fifteen-minute treatment sessions were allocated for the learners to reach the expected level. All the sessions were taught by the second researcher. In the TI group, the students were initially given explicit grammatical explanations on the simple past passive

structure followed by traditional grammatical exercises. The students answered the exercises in pairs and they were not allowed to use their first language (L1). From the second session on, the teacher answered the students' problems with the structure, they reviewed it together, and next they worked on new exercises in pairs.

According to Ellis (2003), [i]nput enrichment involves designing tasks in such a way that the targeted feature is (1) frequent and/or (2) salient in the input provided (p.158). In the IE group, the students read passages enriched with the target structure (boldfaced only for IE) individually and silently. The texts were about arts, hobbies, sports, parties and meetings, and college. They were asked some general and specific comprehension questions and next, they had reading aloud followed by the clarification of the vocabulary and the difficult sentences in the text. Further sentential examples for the new vocabulary were provided by the teacher. In the end, the students gave oral summaries of the passage which were prepared in pairs. This way, it was believed, they would be guided to use the target structure in their summaries. After the summary was over, they were only corrected on those lexical and grammatical errors which were unrelated to the simple past passive structure.

In the CR group, the procedure in each session consisted of three parts. First, they read simple past active and passive sentences and distinguished the differences between the two structures in pairs. In the second part, they read an enriched passage and underlined all the examples of the simple past passive structure. Last, they were asked to work out rules for using the target structure in pairs. In the first two parts, they were not corrected or guided by the teacher, but in the last part their rules were corrected and completed by the teacher in the end. Each session they worked on one aspect of the target structure. A sample of the first part follows:

Read the sentence pairs below in pairs and tell the class how the two sentences in each pair differ? What do they begin with? How are the verbs different?

The dog bit the man.

The girl kissed the babies.

The man was bitten by the dog. The babies were kissed by the girl.

The police caught the robber. The rain made them wet.

The robber was caught. They were made wet.

Whether CR tasks possess the features of true tasks has been put forward and explained by Ellis himself (2003):

⌘ whereas the previous types of task were built around content of a general nature, for example, stories, pictures of objects, ⌘ , CR tasks make language itself the content. In this respect, it can be asked whether CR tasks are indeed tasks. They are [tasks] in the sense that learners are required to talk meaningfully about a language point using their own linguistic resources. That is, although there is some linguistic feature that is the focus of the task learners are not required to use this feature, only think about it and discuss it. The taskness of a CR task lies not in the linguistic point that is the focus of the task but rather in the talk learners must engage in in order to achieve an outcome to the task. (p. 163)

In the PI group, in the first session, the students received explicit instruction in their L1, namely Persian and L2 with examples on the simple past passive structure and on a processing problem accompanied by structured input activities. In the structured input activities, they were not asked to produce the target structure and did not receive any further explicit explanation (VanPatten & Uludag, 2011). During the next four sessions, the students only worked on more structured input activities. A processing problem refers to a mistake students make when trying to comprehend a particular kind of sentence and then [they] are given examples to show why their default processing strategies may not work (VanPatten & Uludag, 2011, p.45). Actually during this explicit part of the instruction, learners are provided with information on why they process a structure incorrectly as a result of a default way of processing sentences and taught how to overcome this problem. The further argue that structured input tasks contain input manipulated in particular ways to push learners away from less-than-optimal processing strategies

(p.45). Learners are asked to interpret sentences containing the target structure and this leads to altering their default processing strategies. Ellis (1995) calls such activities *interpretive tasks* and defines them as a task which consists of a stimulus to which learners must make some kind of response (p.98). According to Ellis, the stimulus and the response can take various forms, but the response must involve the least amount of language possible. Also, as in any task, the main focus is on meaning and the peripheral attention is to the form and function of the grammatical structure, and finally error identification (p.98) and there is also some form of personalization. In this study, the PI learners were presented with five referential structured input activities, each including 20 items. Each item presented them with an L1 sentence for which there were two English translation options. In fifteen of the items in each activity, the passive translations were the correct answers and in the other five sentences the active translations were the right ones. An example follows:

Choose the correct English translation for the Persian sentence:

- 1) *The man saw the woman.*
- 2) *The man was seen by the woman.*

The precise translation of the above sentence is *The woman saw the man*.

Results and Discussion

For the quantitative analysis, the number of grammatically accurate and semantically appropriate productions of the simple past passive structure in the interview was counted and one score was assigned to each. For the sake of reliability, the interviews were rated by the second researcher and another colleague simultaneously, yet independently. The correlation between the two ratings showed an inter-rater reliability of .97, which is an acceptable index for the scoring procedure. All the data were analyzed using SPSS 17.0, except for eta squared value for the two posttests, which was calculated manually.

A One-way ANOVA was used for the posttest and a significant difference was proved in the results: $F(3, 56) = 27.20, p < .000$. This

shows that instruction through different interventions did have an effect on the learners abilities to use the passive structure on the posttest. An eta squared measure of .57 was found for the strength of association. This rather high effect size shows that at least 57 percent of the difference observed was due to the intervention type variable and the other 43 percent has been error variance. Moreover, the results of the Sheffe Test employed to compare each of the two groups on the posttest are tabulated below:

Table1

Sheffe Test of differences across the four groups on the posttest

Group	Processing Instruction Mean=8.33	Consciousness- Raising Mean=6.47	Input Enhancement Mean=4.80	Traditional Intervention Mean=2.93
Processing Instruction	-	1.87* at p<.040	3.53* at p<.000	5.40* at p<.000
Consciousness- Raising	-	-	1.67 at p>.081	3.53* at p<.000
Input Enhancement	-	-	-	1.87* at p<.040

The results show that PI learners significantly outperformed all the other groups. This means that the highest amount of learning occurred in this group. The CR group with the second highest mean could not outperform the IE group with the third highest mean, but with a *p level* of about .08 a trend was shown in favor of the CR group (Hatch & Lazaraton 1991, p.232). Also, the TI group was outperformed by all the other groups, which indicates its lower effectiveness in at least similar contexts.

A One-way ANOVA was run for the delayed posttest and a significant difference was proved in the results: $F(3, 56) = 27.88$, $p < .000$. This shows that instruction through different interventions did have an effect on the learners retention of their abilities to use the passive structure till the delayed posttest. Again, an eta squared measure of .57 was found for the strength of association. This rather high effect size shows that at least 57 percent of the difference observed was due to the intervention type variable and the other 43 percent has been error variance. Also, the results of the Sheffe Test

run to compare each two groups on the delayed posttest have been tabulated below:

Table 2

Sheffe Test of differences across the four groups on the delayed posttest

Group	Processing Instruction Mean=7.60	Consciousness- Raising Mean=5.00	Input Enhancement Mean=3.93	Traditional Intervention Mean=2.53
Processing Instruction	-	2.60* at p<.001	3.67* at p<.000	5.07* at p<.000
Consciousness- Raising	-	-	1.07 at p>.336	2.47* at p<.001
Input Enhancement	-	-	-	1.40 at p>.127

Again the results show that PI learners significantly outperformed all the other groups and the highest amount of retention occurred in this group. As in the posttest, there was no significant difference between the results of CR and IE groups regarding their retention. One change in comparison with the first posttest is that this time only the PI and CR groups significantly performed better than the TI group and there was no significant difference between the IE and the TI groups on the delayed posttest. Furthermore, the difference between the CR and IE groups had decreased compared to their immediate posttest results. All this demonstrates the superiority of PI to all the other groups with regard to the retention of their abilities.

While these two last analyses revealed the preeminence of PI at least in similar contexts, there was also a need to run within-group analyses to find out which group(s) had improved more since the pretest and retained that learning until the delayed posttest. The results of these analyses as well as the descriptive statistics for all the groups on the three tests are displayed in Tables 3 and 4.

Table 3
Descriptive statistics of the four groups on the pretest, posttest, and delayed posttest

Group	Pretest			Posttest			Delayed posttest		
	Mean	SD	N	Mean	SD	N	Mean	SD	N
Processing Instruction	.20	.41	15	8.33	1.35	15	7.60	1.35	15
Consciousness-Raising	.40	.51	15	6.47	1.92	15	5.00	1.73	15
Input Enhancement	.20	.41	15	4.80	2.04	15	3.93	1.79	15
Traditional Intervention	.33	.49	15	2.93	1.44	15	2.53	1.36	15

Table4
Within-group ANOVA results and Bonferroni test of differences across the three tests within each of the four groups

Group	Within-group F	Partial eta squared	Posttest-pretest	Delayed posttest-pretest	Posttest-delayed posttest
Processing Instruction	396.85* at p<.000	.97	8.13* at p<.000	7.40* at p<.000	.73 at p>.085
Consciousness-Raising	143.02* at p<.000	.91	6.07* at p<.000	4.60* at p<.000	1.47* at p<.000
Input Enhancement	65.89* at p<.000	.83	4.60* at p<.000	3.73* at p<.000	.87* at p<.008
Traditional Intervention	38.83* at p<.000	.74	2.60* at p<.000	2.20* at p<.000	.40 at p<.247

According to Table 3, the PI group gained the highest mean on both posttests, while it had gained the lowest mean on the pretest beside the IE group. The CR and IE groups were the second and the third on the posttests. In addition, the PI group managed to obtain the lowest standard deviation, a fact which implies more homogeneity as a result of the intervention type. A graph comparing the ratio of SD to mean in each group through all the three tests can better illustrate this fact:

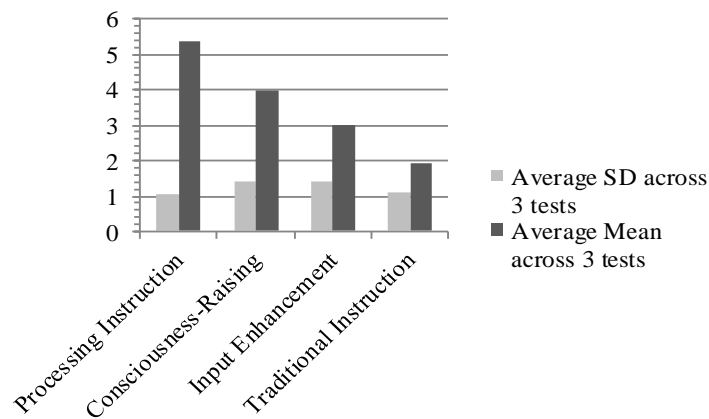


Figure 1. Comparing the ratio of SD to mean in each group across the pretest, posttest, and delayed posttest

According to Table 4, the within-group F was significant for all the four groups, which means that there were significant differences across two or three of the tests within them all. Also the partial eta-squared measures in all the groups proved high which refers to the fact that the improvements within the groups had been largely due to the interventions. Again this measure was highest in the PI group and the CR and the IE groups ranked second and third. Moreover, the results of the Bonferroni post-hoc test show that all the four groups significantly improved on the two posttests compared to their pretest results. Thus, all the interventions brought about significant changes in the ability of their learners to use the simple past passive structure in speaking. In terms of retaining learning from the posttest to the delayed posttest, the PI group and the TI groups were the two groups to succeed. The differences between the two posttests in these groups were not significant which establishes that they had retained learning since the posttest (three weeks earlier). Learning in the other two groups, namely CR and IE, drifted significantly downward from the posttest to the delayed posttest. Although they had improved significantly since the pretest, they did not manage to keep this learning till the delayed posttest. This fact indicates the transient

nature of learning brought about by these two tasks at least in similar contexts. In sum, given that the PI group significantly outperformed all the other groups including the TI group on both posttests, it can be concluded that it had the highest amount of both learning and retention. The learners taught through this task proved to be more successful and homogenous under the contextual features of this study.

By taking all these results into account, we can draw a number of comparisons. First, on the macro level there is the distinction between TBI and traditional exercise-type intervention (Ellis, 2003). All the task-based groups in this study significantly outperformed the comparison group, the TI group, on the posttest and two of the groups (PI and CR), did so on the delayed posttest as well. Although the TI and PI groups retained their improvement till the delayed posttest as opposed to the other two groups, the mean scores of the latter were higher on both tests than those of the TI group. All these can indicate the superiority of TBI to traditional exercise-type intervention at least in similar contexts.

Next, IE was the only intervention type which purely represented an implicit approach to teaching the target structure (Ellis, 2003). The results illustrated that the other two tasks, which were largely explicit in approach, had performed better, while the PI group had significantly done so. Furthermore, although the IE group had improved compared with its pretest state, it did not manage to retain this learning until the delayed posttest. Thus, it could be concluded that an explicit TBI may lead to higher learning than an implicit TBI, again at least in similar contexts.

Lastly, two of the three tasks in the study (PI and IE) are considered input-based tasks. The former managed to gain the best results on the posttest and retain this learning and its position till the delayed posttest. The latter was also successful at least on the posttest. This reveals the high degree of the effectiveness of input-based TBI despite all the criticisms (Swain, 1998; Izumi, 2002). On the other hand, the superiority of PI to IE in this study could be attributed to the structured input tasks and the explicit approach of PI. Thus, the speculation is that an explicit input-based task is likely to bring about

more fruitful results at least with respect to teaching the passive structure.

The researchers cautiously tried to draw some conclusions based on a couple of statistical analyses, but as mentioned before, without a careful qualitative analysis of the data at hand it would not be possible to know much of the actual functions and effectiveness of different interventions in helping learners develop in the context of second language classroom. Nor can we gain a thorough picture of what actually happens during the implementation of tasks.

The students were observed while they were working on their tasks and exercises, their language use was recorded, and their interactions and uses of the target structure were analyzed. The interviews were also analyzed to look for any patterns in their talks as probable traces of the treatments. This analysis was approached from two angles, namely the comparison between the TI group and the other three task-based groups and the comparison among the three task-based groups themselves. The researchers managed to gain information which could not have been at their disposal from the mere analysis of numbers.

In both the TI and PI groups, the first session started with a grammatical explanation, but the nature of the explanation was different, because in the latter the students also received some information on the processing strategies which caused their grammatical problems in the target structure. During the teacher's explanation in the TI group, there was no interaction among the students. Throughout the exercises and during the students' questions of the teacher, all the interactions and exchanges were confined to negotiations about the correct forms for the exercises. An excerpt from their interactions is provided to exemplify:

A: We must write *is finish*. .hhh uhm₄ No?

B: But I think we must use *was finished*, because it says George was office *YESTERDAY*.

A: Yes yes, *finished*. And it says in the first of the sentence *He WENT home*.

Regarding the interviews, several of the ten sentences spoken by the learners did not sound much like sentences which are naturally made passive. Some examples from their interviews follow:

- *My teeth were brushed.*
- *My clothes were worn.*
- *My little brother was kissed.*

These are not common passive sentences and are mostly artificially made passive. But in the statistical analyses, such examples could not be accounted for, because they were both accurate and meaningful, though not really frequent.

In the IE group, which involved an implicit task, the nature of the interactions containing instances of the target structure was impressively different. During the comprehension question-and-answer exchanges they used the target structure in their responses. That was because the vast majority used the exact sentences in the texts to answer the teachers' comprehension questions. Throughout the clarification of the text, there was no interaction in the class. The main share of the interactions took place during the pair work for the preparation of oral summaries. Again, many of the instances of the simple past passive structure in their summaries were due to their exploitation of the exact sentences in the texts, while there were just rare cases of its original use. During the participants' interactions for the preparation of the oral summaries, the researchers did not witness a considerable number of instances of the target structure. There was a great deal of negotiation of meaning, but this interaction was not focused on the target structure to any substantial degree. Since giving oral summaries was compatible with the task on the two posttests, IE proved to have the potential to give the learners the ability to use the target structure in their interviews. However, the sentences they uttered in the interviews were topically similar to the ones in their texts as can be seen in the examples from their interviews:

- *A few pictures were painted.*
- *My assignments were done.*
- *Some exercise was done at the gym.*

Not unlike the utterances in the TI group, a proportion of the sentences by the learners in the IE group sounded inauthentic. This fact may show that neither a merely explicit task nor a totally implicit one can lead to the production of authentic passive sentences or perhaps any kind of grammatical structure by learners. What more, this group did not retain its learning till the delayed posttest, which may be again due to its one-dimensional approach.

In the CR group, all the interactions containing the target structure were restricted to discussions over it. While discovering the differences between the passive and active sentences, they talked about word order and the probable reasons for dropping the agent. This last point was interesting, because no such true negotiations were witnessed in the TI group. In the underlining part, again the interactions were just limited to diagnosing forms, but in the rule discovery phase they resumed their negotiations. Of course, the nature of the negotiations were different in that they did not negotiate to overcome communication problems, but they explicitly negotiated about the meaning and function of the passive sentence to create a rule for the use pattern of this structure. Nevertheless, they seemed to have gained a deep understanding of the target structure through CR. Excerpts from their interactions can illustrate this point:

A: I think we say passive to:: not tell he do it.

B: Yes, maybe if we say, somebody punish him.

A: And in this sentence, almost, because he broke the window.

B: .hhh but some sentences it clear who do it, so we don't tell it. No?

A: No, yes.

This deep-level awareness coupled with the teacher's corrections after their interactions sharpened their abilities to use the structure, because not only did they perform satisfactorily on the posttests statistically speaking, but also their sentences seemed quite authentic. More examples from their interviews follow:

- *The windows were cleaned and the sofas were moved.*
- *The TV was turned off and everybody went to bed.*
- *The bell was rung.*
- *The telephone was answered.*

However, the fact that they could not retain this learning till the delayed posttest complicated the results to some extent. This could have been due to lack of sufficient exposure to the structure. They did not receive as many examples as did the learners in the two input-oriented groups. Maybe they needed either more exposure to or practice with the language to internalize and retain it better.

Throughout the explicit teaching in the PI group, there were no interactions but just a few teacher-student exchanges. During the structured input activities there were some instances of interaction among them, which were largely about the meaning of the utterances and their semantic distinctions. This task seems to have a great potential in fostering purely semantic and pragmatic negotiations of meaning, but that necessitates thorough planning. An excerpt from their negotiations can depict this potential:

A: In the first sentence, the cat saw mouse, but in the second sentence, mouse saw cat.

B: How you understand it?

A: Because it says *the mouse was seen*, not see: *Mouse* is first noun.

B: Aha, you are right. First noun. The teacher said it. Cat see mouse and chase it not another one.

Besides this potential, PI and its corollary structured input seem to give learners an impressively deep understanding of the target structure, because they used quite authentic sentences in their interviews. They said sentences they had never encountered in their class tasks:

- *My small brother was fed, because he was very hungry.*
- *The door was closed suddenly.*
- *The kitchen was cleaned.*
- *The dishes were done.*
- *The food was cooked at three o'clock.*

This deep-level understanding as a result of the task, including the explanations and the type and amount of the exposure, made them able to retain this learning till the delayed posttest.

In short, all the tasks and the one exercise in the study had the potential to foster interaction in the context of the classroom, but the nature of the interactions differed to a great extent.

Conclusion

Given the obtained results, it can be concluded that the PI group was the most effective intervention type in promoting learning the target structure. This group scored significantly highest on the posttests, improved significantly from the pretest to the posttest, and retained its learning till the delayed posttest. This task was also able to foster truly focused negotiation. Furthermore, all the tests were in the form of a semi-structured interview, while PI is an input-based, explicit task. This brings forth the controversial issue of *transfer* claimed for PI by VanPatten and others in different writings (Sanz & Morgan-Short, 2004; VanPatten & Uludag, 2011). This denotes its high potential for transfer of training to spoken and written output in numerous aspects of teaching forms. Of course, all the other intervention groups also improved significantly from the pretest to the posttest. Though, as explained in the treatments, there were varying amounts of output practice in the TI and IE groups and the claim for transferability cannot apply to these two groups. On the other hand, this transferability was proved for the CR group, too, but it was transient, because there was a significant difference between its posttest and delayed posttest results.

Moreover, TBI proved more fruitful than exercise-based intervention. All the three task-based groups significantly outperformed the exercise-based group on the immediate posttest and two of them did the same on the delayed posttest as well. However, the exercise-based group was able to retain learning till the delayed posttest, which was not achieved by two of the three task-based groups, namely the CR and IE groups. This shows that although the capacity of exercise-based intervention to promote learning is more limited than those of other more modern intervention types, the obtained learning is retainable.

Nevertheless, the massive amount of exposure and the oral summary part of the task in IE intervention and the deep-level awareness in the CR task were their strengthening features in comparison with the TI group. There were also enormous amounts of interaction in these two task-based groups but with differing natures. However, these two tasks could not help their learners retain their improvement till the delayed posttest, as opposed to PI.

To sum up, a well-planned PI seems to be a promising intervention for focusing on language form at the disposal of language educators and teachers. However, one should not ignore the role of the other two tasks investigated in this study, despite their lower amount of accomplishment.



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