should mention that this structure is used when the action itself is the focus of attention not the agent, and this is why we present new structures through comprehensible texts.

To sum up, students should become aware that the ultimate goal of languge learning is oral or written communication and if they don't fully realize this point they can come out of the classroom believing that different structures are to make things even more difficult to them. We need approaches that activate students' minds to learn how they can use structures correctly and effectively to interact with others.

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Table 2. T-test for Both Groups on Pre-test

Observed T - Value	Two tailed Probability T Critical Value (α0.05)	Df
0.53	2	61

Students on our two experimental groups were taught certain grammatical items in two different ways which were explained before. At the end of the treatment, the students were required to take a writing test which was in fact our post-test. After runing statistical analysis on the results of the writing test it was found that there was a significant difference between the scores obtained from the two groups (Table 4 and 5). Thus, the null-hypothesis which read: "There is no significant difference between the scores obtained from the two groups" was rejected.

Table 4. Descriptive Statistics for Both Groups' Post-test

Group	$\overline{X}$	V	S	N
A	71.67	124.99	11.18	27
B	56.8	33.52	5.79	36

Table 5. T-test for Both Groups on Post-test

Observed T - Value	Two tailed Probability (α0.05)	Df
7.18	3.49	61

Conclusion and Pedagogical Implication

The present study has two dimensions: Firstly, the effect of teaching grammar via the processing input-based approach has been compared with the traditional approach which is based on direct explanation of grammatical items and subsequent repetition and secondly, the results of dividing students into groups working on texts has been taken into consideration.

Regarding the first aspect of the study, results of this research shows that teaching grammar is more useful when directed at processing the structures by the students. Therefore, traditional approaches are not as effective as the processing input-based approach examined here.

On the other hand, dividing the students into small groups for joint activities would result in better understanding of structures and motivated less talented ones to learn new structures presented through texts.

Thus, the question of whether grammar should be taught in classrooms or not is no longer appropriate, and teachers should go after more procedural input-based approaches that engage students in task-based activities to discover how second langauge structures fit into the context in which they are used. Besides, when students are divided into groups, more knowledgeable students help the others come at a common understanding of how grammar structures are formed, and then after teacher's guiding and explaining new structures, students are asked to use the newly-learned structures in their own sentences.

Put another way, input-based activities should precede productive activities. For instance, so long as students haven't found out how passive voice is constructed, they shouldn't be expected to use them in their own sentences. It is also found that grammar teaching is more effective when besides teaching the form, teachers clarify the contextual appropriateness of each grammatical item; since in actual communication outside the classroom, form and meaning are so closely tied that without knowing their relationship one can hardly choose correct structures. The actual use of linguistic structures are bound to several sociolinguistic elements such as the context, the distance between interlocutors and the purpose of communication. For example, when teaching passive voice, we
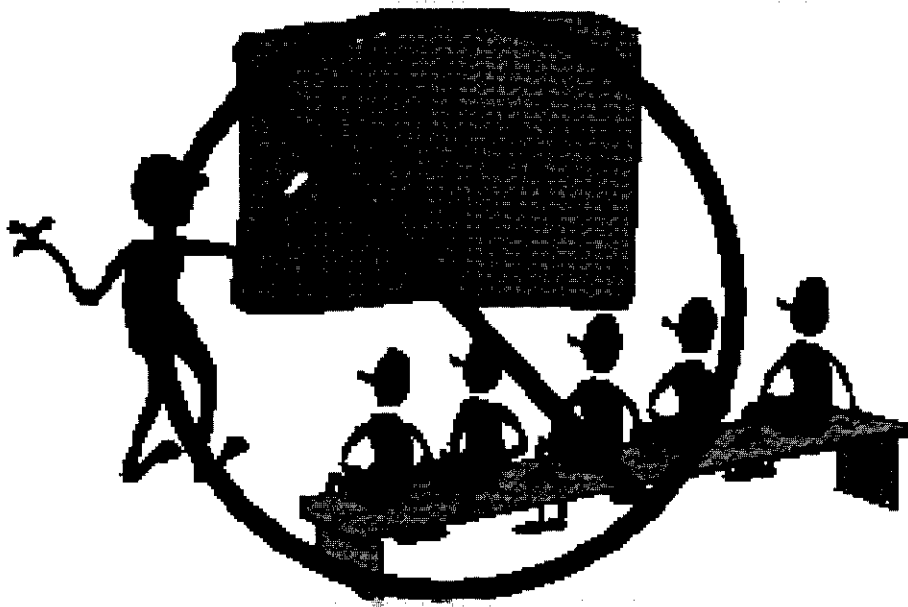
the way the new structure works. After that, the teacher states the correct rule by amending the groups' proposed generalizations. So far, the groups' members have been involved in the process of comprehension, from now on, they are required to produce what they have learned, and this is done by means of "controlled structured activities" which are made up of a number of sentences whose words are jumbled. The students in each group should unravel their disorder according to the newly-learned rule and then connect these separate sentences to make a coherent text.

Writing their own texts, students are actually expressing their unique understanding of their topic or event; that is; each group may write a different version of the story using almost the same words, and so long as the grammar of the language is not violated all scenarios are equally acceptable. The teacher asks the groups to read their texts, listens to everybody's idea about them and gives comments when necessary.

Unlike group A in which students play the most important roles in learning grammar, in group B students are required to listen to the

teachers' explicit explanation on the new structure and then do some decontextualized exercises individually. In other words, they have to produce the new structures mechanically without receiving sufficient input.

Results

As mentioned before, prior to the implementation of two distinct procedures in teaching grammar, students were randomly assigned to group A and group B, respectively comprising 27 and 36 subjects. The pre-test was aimed at making sure that these two groups were homogeneous in terms of their knowledge of English grammar. They were tested through running a 70 item grammar test taken from a battery of Michigan Test and it was found that there wasn't any significant difference between the average score of the two groups (Table 1, 2, 3).

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics for Both Groups' Pre-test

Group	$\overline{X}$	V	S	N
A	45.4	83.72	9.15	27
B	46.77	114.49	10.7	36

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at the beginning of the semester through a battery of Michigan Test (1997) which showed that they were homogeneous in terms of their grammatical competence. Each of the two classes were held twice a week, each session lasting about 100 minutes. In group B, grammar was taught traditionally; that is, in a linear, teacher-fronted manner, and in group A, a Processing Input-Based Approach was adopted that was basically designed to let the students actually get involved in group problem-solving activities to infer grammar structures.

The treatment lasted for the whole semester and consisted of the following grammatical points: tenses, coordinating conjunctions, correlative conjunctions, and conjunctive adverbs. At the end of the semester, a directed writing task was given to the students of both groups to see how well they could utilize the grammar structures they had been taught. The content of this writing task revolved around the importance of learning grammar and the way this could be done best. This writing task had two purposes:

Firstly, it was aimed at eliciting performance from the students and secondly, it was devised to help them express their idea about the course; that is their reflection on grammar. Students' writing were corrected on the basis of ESL Composition Profile taken from Testing ESL Composition: A Practical Approach" by Jacobs, et al, 1981, p. 30.

Procedure

In this study , great importance has been attached to students' social and cognitive abilities. The approach planned for teaching grammar to group A has two phases: comprehension and production. Comprehension comes first, because it is the way we expect grammar structures to be processed and learned before they can emerge in learner's output. This is what happens in L1 acquisition too.

In this approach, students are provided with comprehensible texts, which include certain grammar structures. These texts would act as a trigger for the students' higher order thinking patterns to start working. They are required to read and process the given passages and thereby come up with their own generalizations about the new structures. This way, students are actually involved in a problem-solving procedure whereby they look at each text as a problem to be solved in order to comprehend the idea of the passage and reach at a conclusion concerning the way the new structure is formed. This input-oriented way of teaching grammar is in accord with Van Patten's 1996 "PROCESSING INSTRUCTION" which is specially based on the idea that for the learners to learn the grammar of language, they should first process the input they are exposed to. In other words, unless language is meaningful for the students, they wouldn't be able to form their own hypothesis about the nature of its grammar. Language is made meaningful when it serves a communicative function or conveys an idea to the students, and the logic behind presenting grammar through texts is to make them integrate semantic, syntactic, and pragmatic properties of language.

In this study, students were divided into different groups so that small-scale societies were provided in the classroom each of which consisting of members with different individual zones of potential growth. Via group problem-solving activities, more competent students aid less competent ones in arriving at a joint understanding of the passage and the new grammar structure. After the formation of different hypotheses by different groups, the teacher reads all the alternatives to every group, and asks them to justify their consensus about
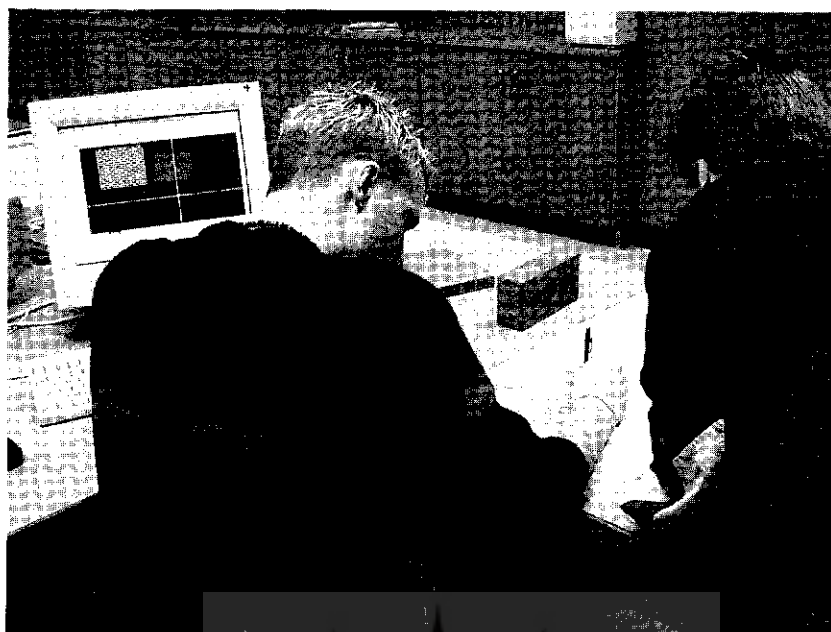
meaning connections might happen compared with what goes on in less controlled situations" (p. 60).

"Structured Input" is the centerpiece of what Van Patten refers to as "Processing Instruction", an approach to grammar instruction that combines a traditional focus on form with comprehensible input in an attempt to "alter the processing strategies that learners take to the task of comprehension and to encourage them to make better form-meaning connections than they would, if left to their own devises" (p. 60).

Paying due attention to social identity of L2 learners, the above-mentioned method has been applied in a study to present new structures. In this approach, learners were provided with controlled situations through giving comprehensible input which had to be read and processed by the students. In this method, L2 grammar is internalized by encouraging subjects to solve grammatical problems in much the same way that a young child solves (constructs) the grammar of his native language. Problem-solving

in this context refers to the induction of grammatical rules by means of explicit analysis of languge samples. It is essentially a discovery procedure involving hypothesis formation leading to the formulation of rules. There is strong evidence to suggest that problem-solving is a valuable strategy for discovering L2 grammar.

Research Question

This investigation is designed to answer this question:

"Does the application of a Processing Input-Based Approach to teaching grammar result in significantly higher performance of university students on a directed writing task?"

Design and Instrumentation

Subjects of this research were 63 first-semester Iranian university students majoring in English translation or English literature. These students comprised group A which consisted of 27 people and group B which had 36 subjects.

Students in these two groups were pre-tested

Abstract

The linear process adopted in traditional approaches to teaching grammar results in decontextualization of structures presented in textbooks. Learners are given isolated sentences, which are expected to be internalized through exercises involving repetition, manipulation, and grammatical transformation. These exercises are designed to provide learners with formal, declarative mastery, but often don't provide opportunities for learners to explore grammatical structures in context. Hence, they make the task of developing procedural skill–being able to use the language for communication–more difficult than it needs to be, because learners are denied the opportunity of seeing the systematic relationships that exist between form, meaning, and use.

In this study, the Processing Instruction Approach to teaching grammar has been compared with the traditional method of teaching grammar in terms of their effect on two groups of university students' writing ability. The results showed that students who were taught grammar in accordance a processing input-based approach gained a considerably higher level of writing ability.

Key Words: processing instruction, structured input-based activities, writing ability.

Introduction

Rutherford (1987) argues that a fixed, static entity is exactly what most traditional language teachers envisage when they use the term grammar. He refers to the common-place presentation of grammar in foreign and second language instruction as "the accumulation of entities" (p, 17). According to what he says, traditional approaches to teaching of grammar are predicted on the beliefs that language is composed of discrete entities and that the essential characteristics of the entities (e. g., the rules for their formation) can be directly imparted to the learner. (p. 56).

There are many teacher, however, who have grown wary of a traditional, teacher-centered approach to explicit grammar instruction. Rejecting the traditional belief that grammar is acquired through an explicit examination of a rule followed by application of it in the form of a mechanical drill, many teachers have opted instead for a so-called comprehension-based pedagogy in which students come to know grammar through exposure to "comprehensible input" (Krashen 1982).

Although comprehension-based approaches to instruction may vary greatly in how instructors attempt to render the input comprehensible, they are similar in their reduced emphasis on formal grammatical analysis. Consequently, comprehension-based approaches are often described as shifting the pedagogical focus from form to meaning. Today, the terms "focus on form" and "focus on meaning" are frequently understood as a shorthand for two competing ideologies within the foreign language teaching profession, the two extremes of an ongoing debate over the efficacy of grammar instruction.

Van Patten and Cadierno (1993) claim that the debate between traditional and non-traditional approaches to grammar misses the point. The question is not whether grammar should be taught, but how it should be taught.

Based on studies of input processing, the cognitive processes that learners employ to comprehend meaning-bearing input, Van Patten (1996) suggests that instruction be based on "Structured Input Activities" in which learners are given the opportunity to process the input in a "controlled situation" so that better form-

Researches

Classroom Techniques

A Processing Input-based Approach to Teaching Grammar and its Effect on University Students Writing Ability

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چکیده

سبک یکسویه که در روش های سنتی تدریس دستور زبان به کار گرفته می شد، به جداسازی ساختارهای دستوری از متن در کتاب های درسی منجر شد . بدین معنی که به فراگیران جملات مجزا داده می شد که از آن ها انتظار می رفت از طریق تمرین هایی مانند تکرار، تغییر وضعیت و دگرگونی ساختاری، آن ها را ملکه ی ذهن خود کنند . هدف از این تمرین ها این بود که فراگیران تسلط صوری و بیانی پیدا کنند اما آن ها اغلب فرصت های کشف ساختارهای دستوری در متن را پیدا نمی کردند و درنتیجه توانایی پیدایش مهارت های پردازشی ـ قابلیت استفاده از زبان برای برقراری ارتباط ـ از حد معمول مشکل تر می شد . زیرا فرصت دریافت ارتباط اصولی که بین شکل ساختارها، معنای آن ها و کاربردشان وجود دارد ایجاد نمی شد .

در تحقیق فعلی سعی شده است روش پردازشی تدریس دستور زبان با روش سنتی آن از نظر تأثیرشان بر روی دو گروه از دانشجویان مقایسه شود . نتایج تحقیق نشان داد دانشجویانی که به آن ها دستور زبان براساس روش رویه ای و مبتنی بر درونداد تدریس می شود بطور قابل ملاحظه ای توانایی نگارش در سطح بالاتری نسبت به گروه دیگر کسب می کنند .

کلید واژه ها : تدریس پردازشی ـ فعالیت های ساختاری مبتنی بر داده ها ـ توانایی نگارش .