In the Name of God

Tarbiat Modares University

Faculty of Humanities

The Effect of Form-focused Instruction on the Iranian EFL Learners' Acquisition and Development of Wh-questions

Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL)

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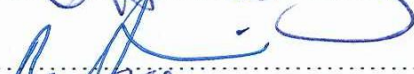
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This thesis is dedicated to my family without whose patience, encouragement and love the completion of this thesis would not have been possible

آیین نامه چاپ پایان‌نامه (رساله)‌های دانشجویان دانشگاه تربیت مدرس

نظر به اینکه چاپ و انتشار پایان نامه (رساله)‌های تحصیلی دانشجویان دانشگاه تربیت مدرس، مبین بخشی از فعالیتهای علمی – پژوهشی دانشگاه است بنابراین به منظور آگاهی و رعایت حقوق دانشگاه،دانش آموختگان این دانشگاه نسبت به رعایت موارد ذیل متعهد می‌شوند:

ماده ۱: در صورت اقدام به چاپ پایان نامه (رساله)‌ی خود، مراتب را قبلاً به طور کتبی به «دفتر نشر آثارعلمی» دانشگاه اطلاع دهد.

ماده ۲: در صفحه سوم کتاب (پس از برگ شناسنامه) عبارت ذیل را چاپ کند:

«کتاب حاضر، حاصل پایان نامه کارشناسی ارشد نگارنده در رشته: اموزش زبان انگلیسی   است که در سال ۱۳۸۸   در دانشکده: علوم انسانی   دانشگاه تربیت مدرس به راهنمایی جناب آقای دکتر: رضا غفار ثمر   مشاوره جناب آقای دکتر: غلامرضا کیانی   از آن دفاع شده است.»

ماده ۳: به منظور جبران بخشی از هزینه‌های انتشارات دانشگاه، تعداد یک درصد شمارگان کتاب (در هر نوبت‌چاپ) را به «دفتر نشر آثارعلمی» دانشگاه اهدا کند. دانشگاه می‌تواند مازاد نیاز خود را به نفع مرکز نشر درمعرض فروش قرار دهد.

ماده ۴: در صورت عدم رعایت ماده ۳، ۵۰٪ بهای شمارگان چاپ شده را به عنوان خسارت به دانشگاه تربیت‌مدرس، تأدیه کند.

ماده ۵: دانشجو تعهد و قبول می کند در صورت خودداری از پرداخت بهای خسارت، دانشگاه می‌تواند خسارت مذکور را از طریق مراجع قضایی مطالبه و وصول کند؛ به علاوه به دانشگاه حق می‌دهد به منظور استیفای حقوق خود، از طریق دادگاه، معادل وجه مذکور در ماده ۴ را از محل توقیف کتابهای عرضه شده نگارنده برای فروش، تامین نماید.

ماده ۶: اینجانب   سارا کابله سوری   دانشجوی رشته   زبان انگلیسی   مقطع: کارشناسی ارشد   تعهد فوق وضمانت اجرایی آن را قبول کرده، به آن ملتزم می شوم.

نام و نام خانوادگی: سارا کابله سوری

تاریخ و امضا:

۹۰٫۳٫۲۵

آیین‌نامه حق مالکیت مادی و معنوی در مورد نتایج پژوهشهای علمی دانشگاه تربیت مدرس

مقدمه: با عنایت به سیاست‌های پژوهشی و فناوری دانشگاه در راستای تحقق عدالت و کرامت انسانها که لازمه شکوفایی علمی و فنی است و رعایت حقوق مادی و معنوی دانشگاه و پژوهشگران، لازم است اعضای هیأت علمی، دانشجویان، دانش‌آموختگان و دیگر همکاران طرح، در مورد نتایج پژوهشهای علمی که تحت عناوین پایان‌نامه، رساله و طرحهای تحقیقاتی با هماهنگی دانشگاه انجام شده است، موارد زیر را رعایت نمایند:

ماده ۱- حق نشر و تکثیر پایان نامه/ رساله و درآمدهای حاصل از آنها متعلق به دانشگاه می باشد ولی حقوق معنوی پدید آورندگان محفوظ خواهد بود.

ماده ۲- انتشار مقاله یا مقالات مستخرج از پایان‌نامه/ رساله به صورت چاپ در نشریات علمی و یا ارائه در مجامع علمی باید به نام دانشگاه بوده و با تایید استاد راهنمای اصلی، یکی از اساتید راهنما، مشاور و یا دانشجو مسئول مکاتبات مقاله باشد. ولی مسئولیت علمی مقاله مستخرج از پایان نامه و رساله به عهده اساتید راهنما و دانشجو می باشد.

تبصره: در مقالاتی که پس از دانش‌آموختگی بصورت ترکیبی از اطلاعات جدید و نتایج حاصل از پایان‌نامه/ رساله نیز منتشر می‌شود نیز باید نام دانشگاه درج شود.

ماده ۳- انتشار کتاب، نرم افزار و یا آثار ویژه (اثری هنری مانند فیلم، عکس، نقاشی و نمایشنامه) حاصل از نتایج پایان‌نامه/ رساله و تمامی طرحهای تحقیقاتی کلیه واحدهای دانشگاه اعم از دانشکده ها، مراکز تحقیقاتی، پژوهشکده ها، پارک علم و فناوری و دیگر واحدها باید با مجوز کتبی صادره از معاونت پژوهشی دانشگاه و براساس آئین نامه های مصوب انجام شود.

ماده ۴- ثبت اختراع و تدوین دانش فنی و یا ارائه یافته ها در جشنواره‌های ملی، منطقه‌ای و بین‌المللی که حاصل نتایج مستخرج از پایان‌نامه/ رساله و تمامی طرحهای تحقیقاتی دانشگاه باید با هماهنگی استاد راهنما یا مجری طرح از طریق معاونت پژوهشی دانشگاه انجام گیرد.

ماده ۵- این آیین‌نامه در ۵ ماده و یک تبصره در تاریخ ۸۷/۴/۱ در شورای پژوهشی و در تاریخ ۸۷/۴/۲۳ در هیأت رئیسه دانشگاه به تایید رسید و در جلسه مورخ ۸۷/۷/۱۵ شورای دانشگاه به تصویب رسیده و از تاریخ تصویب در شورای دانشگاه لازم‌الاجرا است.

«اینجانب: سارا کابله سوری   دانشجوی رشته: اموزش زبان انگلیسی   ورودی سال تحصیلی: ۱۳۸۵   مقطع: کارشناسی ارشد   دانشکده: علوم انسانی   متعهد می شوم کلیه نکات مندرج در آئین نامه حق مالکیت مادی و معنوی در مورد نتایج پژوهش های علمی دانشگاه تربیت مدرس را در انتشار یافته های علمی مستخرج از پایان نامه / رساله تحصیلی خود رعایت نمایم. در صورت تخلف از مفاد آئین نامه فوق الاشعار به دانشگاه وکالت و نمایندگی می دهم که از طرف اینجانب نسبت به لغو امتیاز اختراع بنام بنده و یا هر گونه امتیاز دیگر و تغییر آن به نام دانشگاه اقدام نماید. ضمناً نسبت به جبران فوری ضرر و زیان حاصله بر اساس برآورد دانشگاه اقدام خواهم نمود و بدینوسیله حق هر گونه اعتراض را از خود سلب نمودم»

امضا

تاریخ: ۹۰،۳،۲۵

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Abstract

Grammar instruction has been one of the most important areas in language teaching. This study tries to investigate the effect of form-focused instruction on the acquisition and development of three types of wh-questions in an EFL setting (i.e. inversion, do- support, and embedded wh-questions). In the present study, the participants were 60 Iranian EFL intermediate learners between the ages of 12 and 14. Right after the pre-test, they were divided into two groups of 30; an experimental group (EG) and a control group (CG). They participated in the present study for six weeks. In each week a two-hour session was hold.Learners in EG received the implicit focus on form instruction (i.e. input enhancement) while the CG received no special instruction in the same way. They were just exposed to the input provided by some texts containing the target forms. Just after the treatment period both groups were post-tested. The results of this study indicate that while form-focused instruction was effective for Iranian EFL learners' acquisition of wh-questions, its effect on the development of three types of the wh-questions was not the same. It was mostly effective regarding the development of the simple inversion wh-questions, but it was less effective in relation to two other types (do-support and embedded questions). Considering the results of data analysis and comparing to the developmental stages of wh-question in both first language acquisition and ESL,Iranian EFL learner's developmental stages were in a rather different order. That is, the learners showed the most development in inversion questions, and then embedded questions were influenced by the form-focused instructions. At last, learners showed the least development in do-support questions. The results of the study also offer some evidence that while UG plays an important role in first language acquisition or early SLA, it may have no crucial role in FL learning.

Key words:wh-question, wh-development, form-focused instruction

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Chapter I

Introduction

1. Introduction

Looking back into the history of language teaching in the past decades, we find that many developments in foreign language syllabus design, course book compiling methodology, and testing reflect the tension between the desirability of communicative use of the target language in the classroom and the need for a focus on linguistic form in language learning (Long, 2001). In the 1970s, Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) began to hold in the language classroom. The Communicative Approach to language learning has its theoretical support from Hallidays' functional account of language use and Chomsky's theory of "Universal Grammar" which is accepted by some linguists as the best perspective from which to understand SLA (Lightbown&Spada, 1999). According to Chomsky, much of human language use is not imitated behavior but it is created a new from underlying knowledge of abstract rules (cited in Richards & Rodgers, 1986. p.59).

Equally influential in supporting CLT has been Krashen's "monitor model" (1982, cited in Lightbown&Spada, 1999; Richards & Rodgers, 1986). According to Krashen, there are two ways for adult second language learners to develop their knowledge of the second language acquisition and learning. Language learners acquire the target language (TL) as they are exposed to samples of the language without conscious attention to language forms whereas they learn via a conscious process of study and attention to form and rules. The learner's language system would automatically develop without language–focused instruction (1985, cited in Skehan, 1996) and an error correction is a "serious mistake" (1985, cited in Ellis, 1994). Thus, in the 1980s the SLA/FLT profession experienced the anti –grammar movement (Hedge, 2002).Van Patten (1990) claims that in second language processing, meaning will take priority, with the result that fewer resources will be available to attend to form (cited in Skehan, 1998). Nunan, a strong

advocate of task-based instruction, states that communicative tasks involve learners in comprehending, manipulating, producing or interaction in the TL while their attention is principally focused on meaning rather than form (1989).

However, Long (1988) argues that form needs to be important in the instructional materials and in the learner's mind, and without these conditions, fossilization and slower progress might be found. Skehan (1996, 1998) states that learners tend to gain fluency at the expense of accuracy and second language use in itself does not reliably lead to change in inter-language system, and so they must pay attention to form.

Having cited the recent research findings by some researchers, Lightbown and Spada (1999) conclude that second language learners benefit from form–focused instruction and corrective feedback provided within communicative contexts. According to Long (1998 cited in Long, 2001) there have been some beneficial effects of focus on language form. He states that although form-focused instruction is not likely to alter sequences of development, it appears to accelerate the rate of learning, help learner in their language processes, and raise the ultimate level of attainment.

The rapid social and economical development has promoted learning English in Iran. Iranian English Language Teaching (ELT) professionals' dissatisfaction with the traditional Grammar-translation Method caused them to pay more attention to the interactive nature of language and giving plenty of opportunities to language learners for language use to achieve communicative objectives. Thus communicative Approach to language teaching has been adopted and practiced in ELT in Iran.

Brown (1994) points out that communicative language teaching tends to be student-centered and meaning–based. Teachers working within the communicative context try to implement "real

life" communication in the language classroom in order to get learners to develop linguistic fluency, not just accuracy. However, there are some misconceptions about form–focused instruction among many teachers and students. Activities focused on the language forms are called traditional or uncommunicative. Dai (2002) points out that fluency without appropriateness is more dangerous as it would cause serious misunderstandings in communication.

1.2. Statement of the problem

A number of research studies on second language acquisition (SLA) have shown that form-focused instruction can result in faster and more successful language learning. (Fotos, 1993; Spada&Lightbown, 1993; VanPatten, 1996; Yip, 1994). But the findings of these studies conflict with some language learning hypotheses. For example, Krashen (1992) claims that unlike the instruction of grammatical structures, comprehensible input plays an important role in language learning. This study aims to get a clear-cut answer in this respect through investigating the effect of form-focused instruction on the Iranian EFL learners' acquisition and development of wh- questions.

There are a few researches that have investigated how the adult learners acquire wh-questions in an EFL setting where the learners are exposed to a small amount of natural input. In addition, Robinson (1996) citing Krashen (1982), notes that "wh-question formation, requiring extensive permutations of word order, is a formally complex rule, in contrast to the supply of the morpheme for third person agreement, which is formally simple" (p.32). The production of ungrammatical examples of wh-questions implies that many EFL learners are not fully developed in the acquisition of wh-questions. Meanwhile, many Iranian EFL learners have often experienced difficulties in acquiring different kinds of wh questions. One hypothesis might be

that English wh-questions are difficult for the Iranian EFL learners to acquire because of the different linguistic features of wh-question formation in the two languages. The word order variation in English and Persian seems to play a significant role in the non-acquisition of English wh questions by Iranian EFL learners. Form–focused instruction might be effective to change the way TL forms are taught.

1.3. Significance of the Study

Brown (2002) claims that grammar teaching has been and continues to be an area of some controversy and debate which have led to the emergence of a new classroom option for language teachers: that of focus on form (as opposed to focus on meaning or focus on forms). Iranian EFL learners are learning English in a non-acquisition environment. Natural acquisition is impossible for them as they do not have many chances for interaction with the native speakers. They mainly rely on language classroom for exposure to the target language. So, the methods and approaches chosen by the teachers can affect their performance and proficiency in different skills and sub skills at a high degree. Whatever methods and approaches the teachers choose, they should keep in their mind that their role is to enable the students to learn effectively. They should consider a balance between meaning-based and form-focused classroom activities which are to be adjusted according to the characteristics of the learners.

The present study is an attempt to investigate the effectiveness of form-focused instruction on the Iranian EFL learners. It seems that the results of the study can help the field of language teaching especially grammar teaching both practically and theoretically.

The practical value of this study is obvious: the question of how to integrate grammar instruction into SL learning is still very important. Knowledge about how L2 learners put knowledge of the second language to use can be of most importance to curriculum design and the

development of instructional materials. The findings of this research can be useful and effective for English teachers as well as those who are involved in materials development. English teachers can help those Iranian EFL learners who often experienced difficulties in acquiring different kinds of wh-questions to decide what and how to teach grammar in EFL especially Persian settings. Material developers can benefit the findings of this study to design course books and to present their contents.

Also, this study may provide us an opportunity to look into the theoretical models of SLA. If the results of the study approve the effectiveness of the form-focused instruction on the Iranian EFL learners, it can contribute to the SLA theories and controversies regarding the grammar instruction, and it can contribute to the SLA theories and controversies by shedding light on developmental patterns, natural order hypothesis, and similarities between L1 and L2.

1.4. Research questions

According to what has been said so far, the following research questions are posed:

1- What is the effect of form-focused instruction on the Iranian EFL learners' acquisition of English wh- questions?

2-What is the effect of form-focused instruction on the developmental sequences of wh-questions? (i.e. inversion, do- support, and embedded questions)