Allameh Tabataba'i University

Faculty of Persian Literature and Foreign Languages

Department of English Language and Literature

Planned Focus on Form:

Automatisation of the Procedural Knowledge of

Iranian Intermediate EFL Learners

A Thesis Submitted to the Graduate Studies Office in Partial

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(M.A.) In Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL)

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IN the Name of God

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چکیده

الف. موضوع و طرح مسئله (اهمیت موضوع و هدف): هدف این تحقیق نشان دادن تاثیر تمرین هدفمند روی ساختار گرامری خاص بر خودکارسازی دانش رفتاری آن ساختارها می باشد.

ب. مبانی نظری شامل مرور مختصری از منابع، چارچوب نظری و پرسشها و فرضیه ها: این تحقیق بر اساس این نظریه می باشد که دانش زبان مانند هر مهارت دیگری قابل خودکار شدن از طریق تمرین می باشد. خودکار شدن را می توان از طریق کاهش در زمان واکنش و میزان خطا نشان داد.

پ. روش تحقیق شامل تعریف مفاهیم، روش تحقیق، جامعه مورد تحقیق، نمونه گیری و روشهای نمونه گیری، ابزار اندازه گیری، نحوه اجرای آن، شیوه گردآوری و تجزیه و تحلیل داده ها: این تحقیق با دانش آموزان سطح متوسط زبان انگلیسی انجام شده است. شرکت کنندگان بصورت غیر تصادفی انتخاب و دو گروه آزمایشی و مقایسه بصورت تصادفی تقسیم شدند. عملکرد شرکت کنندگان بر اساس توانایی آنها در کاهش دادن زمان واکنش و میزان خطا اندازه گیری شده است. تجزیه و تحلیل داده ها گردآوری شده توسط آزمون ها غیر پارامتری انجام گرفته است.

ت: یافته های تحقیق: این تحقیق نشان می دهد که تمرین ها ارتباطی هدفمند در خودکارسازی توسط دانش آموزان ایرانی زبان انگلیسی در دو روز و دو هفته پس از انجام آزمایش تاثیر مثبت دارند.

ث: نتیجه گیری و پیشنهادات: نتیجه این مطالعه این است که تمرین ها هدفمندند. در کاهش زمان واکنش و میزان خطا موثر هستند.
هرچند که برای نشان دادن این تاثیر تفاوتهای فردی میان شرکت کنندگان نیز باید در نظر گرفته شوند.

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Abstract

The present study is premised on John Anderson's ACT model that proposes declarative knowledge is automatisable through practice. The research examines the extent to which Iranian intermediate learners of English as a foreign language are able to automatise their declarative knowledge of 3 morphosyntactic structures two days after practice and to evince a higher level of automatised procedural knowledge of the targeted structures 2 weeks after practice. The targeted structures include *past simple* (both regular and irregular forms), *present perfect*, and *present unreal conditional*. Twenty intermediate students participated in the study. They were randomly assigned to two groups, namely experimental (G1) and comparison (G2) groups. G1 received rule explanation, mechanical practice, meaningful practice, and planned communicative practice. G2, however, received rule explanation, mechanical practice, and meaningful practice. Mann

Whitney U test and Wilcoxon Matched-Pairs Signed-Ranks test were used for between-groups and within-groups comparisons, respectively. Overall, results show more automatisation measured in terms of reduction in error rate and reaction time on the part of G1than G2. More specifically, G1 has shown more automatisation of present perfect than that of the other targeted forms two days after the treatment. The results obtained two weeks later are not straightforward enough to show any advantage for either group except for G1 on present perfect. The findings can be insightful for teachers who wish to have a communicative class not at the expense of discarding a focus on grammar.

Table of Contents

List of Tables

List of Abbreviations

1. G1 =====================================➔Experimental Group

2. G2 =====================================➔Comparison Group

3. ACT ==============================➔Adaptive Control of Thought

4. FFI ================================➔Form-focused Instruction

5. FOF =====================================➔Focus on Form

6. GJT============================➔Grammaticality Judgement Test

7. UGJT =================➔Untimed Grammaticality Judgement Test

8. P-P-P ===============================➔Present, Practise, Produce

9. P-P =====================================➔Present, Practise

List of Appendices

CHAPTER 1: Introduction

1. Introduction

What does grammar teaching mean? Looking back at the fifties and sixties, one comes up with what is currently called a *traditional* approach to teaching grammar (R. Ellis, 2006, 2009c).This so-called traditional approach is based on structuralist views of language and behavioural views of learning. According to R. Ellis (2006, p. 84), "Traditionally, grammar teaching is viewed as the presentation and practice of discrete grammatical structures." However, a different conceptualisation of grammar teaching is now at work that underlies both theory and practice. Rod Ellis's (2006) definition of grammar teaching is rather representative of this contemporary conceptualisation:

> Grammar teaching involves any instructional technique that draws learners' attention to some specific grammatical form in such a way that it helps them either to understand it metalinguistically and/or process it in comprehension and/or production so that they can internalize it. (p. 84)

What makes this definition distinct from its traditional counterpart is the pronounced emphasis the latter places on contextualisation. Contextualisation in its

broad sense refers to a communicative framework in which learners of a second/foreign language (SL/FL) attend to or are made to attend to certain forms (Long & Robinson, 1998; R. Ellis, 2006). In other words, instead of presenting forms in isolation and discretely, one should establish form-function relationships (Doughty & Williams, 1998; Long & Robinson, 1998; R. Ellis, 2006). This kind of grammar teaching is usually referred to as *form-focused instruction* (FFI) (R. Ellis, 2001) or *focus on form* (FOF/FonF) (Doughty & Williams, 1998).

A body of research confirms the effectiveness of FOF, either explicit or implicit, in SL/FL development (e.g., de Graaff, 1997; Dekeyser, 1997; Loewen, 2005; Mackey, 2006; Abu Radwan, 2005; Williams, 2001; Ziemer Andrews, 2007). Besides, R. Ellis (2005) claimed that the necessity of attention to form for acquisition to emerge is no longer under doubt. He made reference to such theories of L2 acquisition as *noticing hypothesis* proposed by Schmidt (1990) to justify the necessity of formal intervention in SL/FL programmes. According to Schmidt (1990), the key to acquisition is conscious attention to form. However, this conscious attention should occur in a meaning-focused context rather than in isolation.

Doughty and Williams (1998), too, considering adult second language learning as different from first language learning, stated that second language learners are

not able to find form-function relationships of a new language on their own without drawing their attention to such relationships. However, they did not advocate "a constant focus on form on all forms for all learners all the time" (Doughty & Williams, 1998, p. 11).

Agreeing on the effectiveness of instruction in interlanguage development notwithstanding, studies carried out in this line do not agree on the most effective and efficient approach to grammar instruction. This study is, in fact, an investigation of FOF where form complements meaning. However, the way it is construed is different from Long's (1991) and Long and Robinson's (1998) construction. The present study examines an explicit type of FOF based on Anderson's adaptive control of thought (ACT) model of skill acquisition theory (1982; see Anderson et al. for a recent version of ACT and ACT-R, 2004). Summarising Anderson's (1982) ACT model, Dekeyser (1998, 2007) pointed out that knowledge starts as factual information, i.e. "knowledge that", turns into procedural knowledge, i.e. "knowledge how", through practising instances of behaviour, and finally becomes "fine-tuned" or "automatised" gradually. R. Ellis has referred to this kind of FOF that is an attempt to operationalise ACT model of skill acquisition theory as *planned FOF* where certain forms are pre-selected to be presented and practised to be automatised (2001).