

In the Name of God



Shahrekord University
Faculty of Letters & Humanities
English Department

**Effect of Input vs. Collaborative Output Tasks on Iranian
EFL Learners' Grammatical Knowledge and Willingness to
Communicate**

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
the Degree of M.A. in TEFL

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English Department**

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AMOS	▶▶▶▶	Analysis of Moment Structures
EFL	▶▶▶▶	English as a Foreign Language
FonF	▶▶▶▶	Focus on Form
L2	▶▶▶▶	Second Language
OPT	▶▶▶▶	Oxford Placement Test
WTC	▶▶▶▶	Willingness to Communicate
SEM	▶▶▶▶	Structural Equating Model
SPSS	▶▶▶▶	Statistical Package for Social Sciences

ABSTRACT

This study explored the effect of input vs. collaborative output tasks on Iranian English as a foreign language (EFL) Learners' grammatical knowledge and compared the effectiveness of both tasks on their willingness to communicate (WTC). In so doing, this study constructed input and collaborative output tasks on 5 different English grammatical structures (*used to, too, enough, wish, and past tense*). To achieve the objectives, 50 Iranian EFL intermediate students participated in this study, which used pretest-posttest tests of grammar and WTC questionnaire. The analyses of the paired sample *t* test of the grammar test in the input and collaborative output task groups revealed that both input and collaborative output tasks had a positive impact on the participants' grammatical knowledge. Moreover, the analyses of covariance on the grammar test showed that the collaborative output tasks were as effective as the input tasks instruction in improving the participants' grammatical knowledge. In addition, the participants' WTC in both the input-based and collaborative output tasks did not improve significantly. However, the collaborative output tasks were more effective than the input-based tasks in improving the participants' WTC. The findings draw EFL instructors' attention to focus on form (FonF) and the importance of input and collaborative output tasks with regard to grammatical knowledge and WTC as a way for performing both tasks in L2 teaching environment.

Key Words: L2 Learning, Collaborative Output Tasks, Input Tasks; Focus on Form (FonF), Grammatical Knowledge, Willingness to Communicate (WTC).

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

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1.1. Overview

The role of grammar teaching has been controversial in the field of language pedagogy, and approaches to grammar teaching have undergone three different instructional phases of focusing on grammar, exposing to meaningful communication, and focusing both on meaning and grammar (Nassaji & Fotos, 2007, 2011). Grammar teaching started with exclusive focus on grammar. In fact, it was supposed that teaching grammar was sufficient to support second or foreign language (L2) learners in enhancing L2 learning. Consequently, the grammar translation method, the audiolingual method, and other structure-based methods paid considerable attention to teaching L2 structures (Nassaji & Fotos, 2011). Then, grammar instruction continued as the exposure to meaningful communication. In fact, with the advent of communicative teaching approaches in the 1970s, grammar teaching became unfavorable (Krashen, 1981, 1993). L2 teachers were encouraged to consider grammar instruction as an old-fashioned way of teaching. Some researchers

(e.g., Krashen, 1981, 1993; Krashen & Terrell, 1983) argued that grammar teaching was unnecessary. Finally, grammar teaching emerged as the approach which focused both on grammar and on meaning.

Recent researchers (e.g., Nassaji & Fotos, 2007, 2011) consider the importance of grammar as they find that lack of consciousness in L2 learning is theoretically problematic. Also, empirical evidence has shown that L2 instruction without focusing on grammar is inadequate (Spada, Lightbown, & White, 2005). In particular, researches (e.g., Ellis, 1994, 2001; Long, 1991) have shown that form-focused instruction as the recent development in grammar pedagogy is effective when it is used in meaningful communicative contexts. Consequently, some types of focus on grammatical forms are necessary to improve L2 learners' high level of accuracy in L2. In fact, the goal of L2 is to help L2 learners to communicate both accurately and fluently. According to Nassaji and Fotos (2011), communicative language teaching (CLT) and the previous structure-based methods paid little attention to these aspects, which lead to the advent of a new approach known as focus on form (FonF).

FonF refers to an instructional option which integrates grammar and communication in L2 teaching (Nassaji & Fotos, 2011). Besides, it refers to "how focal attentional resources are allocated to linguistic forms" (Long & Robinson 1998, p. 27). According to Norris and Ortega (2001), L2 instruction that focuses on form leads to substantial gain in L2 structures and the gains are sustained over time. Moreover, according to Lightbown and Spada (1993), FonF instruction within the context of communicative programs is more effective in developing L2 learning than in the programs which are limited to exclusive, separate emphasis on accuracy or

fluency. Loewen (2003) also maintains that FonF makes L2 learners notice linguistic items rather than merely focused-on meaning lessons.

The FonF approach can be applied in different contexts with specific consideration of L2 components and skills. FonF, as one of the effective approaches in teaching grammatical structures in meaningful contexts, can improve L2 learners' ability of learning grammatical structures.

In this study, the main consideration of FonF was on grammar and uses of different kinds of tasks. As Nassaji and Fotos (2011) argue, focus on grammar is divided into input-based options and output-based (i.e., collaborative output tasks) ones. Input-based options refers to “The effect of grammatical structure input tasks on the participants” and “the focus on grammar through engaging learners in activities in which they produce language collaboratively” considers to be collaborative output tasks (Nassaji & Fotos, 2011, p. 30).

As mentioned by Nassaji and Fotos (2011), input-based options task is divided into three main groups of processing instruction, textual enhancement, and discourse. Processing instruction refers to teaching grammar through processing input or instruction. In the same line, in order to draw L2 learners' attention to a specific structure, textual enhancement highlights that structure. Focusing on grammar through discourse refers to providing L2 discourse. Accordingly, it contains different structures of one specific grammatical input.

Moreover, Nassaji and Fotos (2011) divide output-based option into interactional feedback, structured grammar-focused tasks, and collaborative output task. Interactional feedback refers to focusing on specific grammatical structures by using interactional feedback between L2 teachers and learners. Structured grammar-

focused tasks are concerned with L2 learners' paying attention to the grammatical forms by performing communicative tasks, such as problem-solving tasks, information exchange tasks, and interpretation tasks. Collaborative output tasks involve learners in performing tasks, and encourage them to produce more language. Comparing the influences of input-based options and collaborative output tasks on grammatical knowledge is the main aim of this study.

In addition, another area, which was the subject of this study, is willingness to communicate (WTC), which is considered as an important and effective factor in L2. WTC is defined as "a readiness to enter into discourse at a particular time with a specific person, or persons, using a L2" (McIntyre, Clement, Dornyei, & Noels, 1998, p. 547). The importance of communication and L2 learners' enthusiasm to communicate effectively leads L2 teachers and researchers to design curricula and improve L2 instruction communicatively. In fact, the importance of communication makes L2 learners engage in a communicative context to improve their communicative competence (Savignon, 2005).

McCroskey and Richmond (1987) initially referred to WTC as the native verbal communication and individual's general tendency to talk. Then, it was introduced into communication contexts and L2 instruction by McIntyre, Clement, Dornyei, and Noels (1998). They also introduced the WTC model as the one in which social, affective, cognitive, and situational variables are involved, and can in turn predict one's actual use of that language. In addition, the WTC model is composed of psychological, linguistic, and communicative variables in order to explain L2 communication (McIntyre et al.).

According to Swain and Lapkin (2002), language would be learned effectively in interactive and meaningful contexts in a pragmatic setting, so it is very important to find the variables which help to improve communication and which encourages L2 learners to communicate effectively. Besides, McIntyre et al. (1998) believe that the significant and ultimate aim of L2 learning is to “engender in language students the willingness to seek out communication opportunities and the willingness actually to communicate in them” (p. 547). In fact, the primary goal of L2 pedagogy is to teach individuals to communicate willingly. Considering this statement, the creation of WTC in L2 classes becomes important.

As the main consideration, this study aimed to investigate the effectiveness of input vs. collaborative output tasks in a sample of intermediate L2 learners in Iran in term of grammatical knowledge and WTC of intermediate learners. In fact, this study aimed to investigate the effect of processing instruction, textual enhancement, and discourse, which are input-based options, and to compare their effectiveness with collaborative output tasks in different grammatical structures of (*used to, too, enough, wish, and past tense*). Moreover, this study is concerned with the effect of tasks on L2 learners’ WTC, and it investigates whether the kinds of tasks (i.e., input vs. output-based tasks) improve their WTC effectively.

1.2. Statement of the Problem

Despite the importance of grammar learning in contexts of EFL classrooms and EFL learners’ spending a considerable time and effort on learning grammar, many of the essential grammatical structures have never been learned (Nassaji & Fotos, 2011); hence, many L2 teachers need help with the new methods of grammar instruction, especially in countries where English is taught as a foreign language.

Although there are various techniques to teach L2 grammar, most of them cannot interest EFL learners in learning grammar and the problem might be related to the methods and techniques of L2 grammar instruction (Nassaji & Fotos, 2011). Grammar instruction in most EFL classrooms usually requires EFL students to practice and pay attention to a pack of isolated grammatical structures or perform several relevant tasks and activities individually (Nassaji & Fotos, 2007). In fact, this type of grammar instruction refuses L2 learners' active and collaborative participation and engagement (Nassaji & Tian, 2010). Moreover, there are various techniques to teach L2 grammar, but not all of them can interest EFL learners in learning grammar (Nassaji & Fotos, 2007). It seems that the methods of teaching L2 grammar for most Iranian EFL learners are traditional. The ordinary methods might make EFL students bored and disappointed because they may lack efficiency. Besides, they might not be effective in remembering the meaning or function of grammatical structures (Nassaji & Fotos, 2007, 2011).

However, over the past few years, much attention has been focused on FonF as an effective approach in L2 instruction and learning. In fact, with the advent of FonF, the desire to have a useful L2 learning approach might be satisfied (Nassaji & Fotos, 2011). Thus, more researches on FonF are needed. Attention to FonF leads to its instruction (Nassaji & Fotos, 2007). Ellis (2001) defines form-focused instruction as "any planned or incidental activity that is intended to induce language learners to pay attention to linguistic form" (pp. 1-2). According to Doughty and Vareal (1998), FonF instruction aims at focusing on linguistic structures within the contexts of communication. Thus, in order for L2 grammar learning to take place effectively, EFL teachers need to be in constant exploration of various novel methods of teaching