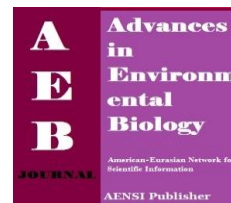




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### The effect of Text Reconstruction on Grammar Ability of Iranian EFL Learners

Vahid Esmaieelzade

Islamic Azad University, North Tehran Branch, Tehran, Iran.

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#### ABSTRACT

The most recent researches on grammar teaching advocate the use of collaborative conscious-raising tasks for teaching grammar to ESL/EFL learners. In line with this new trend, the purpose of the present study is to investigate the effect of text reconstruction as an inductive method of teaching grammar on grammar ability of Iranian EFL learners. To this end, two different task types of cloze exercise and text reconstruction (dictogloss) were selected accompanied by explicit instruction to the participants on acquiring grammatical structures included articles (definite and indefinite) and verb tense/aspect choice and formation (in particular, simple present, simple past and present perfect). The exercises were designed based on the text of the English book of grade fourth by the researcher. These grammatical items were chosen due to inaccurate use in the students' essays on the placement tests. The participants of the study were 50 low-intermediate male high school students of English in Karaj, Iran. They were divided into two groups of experiment (doing text reconstruction exercise) and control group (completing the cloze exercise). The data were analyzed using one-way ANOVA and t-test. The results indicated that the experimental group outperformed the comparison group concerning the acquisition of grammatical structures.

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### INTRODUCTION

Through the long history of teaching English, different methods and approaches have been suggested to language teachers from the classical teacher-centered methods to more student-centered approaches to teach grammar [6]. However, teachers of English as a Foreign Language have always faced with the question of how to teach grammar or improve the grammar ability of their students.

One of the traditional methods of teaching grammar which has received a lot of criticism in terms of being useful for learning EFL is cloze exercise. However, some other researchers such as Farhady, Jafarpour and Birjandi also believed that cloze exercise can be instructionally effective. Furthermore, most teachers complain why the students have not understood the grammatical instruction already being taught. After the time of classical form-oriented model [2], language teachers were encouraged to follow the objectives of communicative competence and fluency and considered grammar as not related to the communicative competency [4]. However, soon it was known that meaning oriented instruction do not suffice for accurate production of target language [11]. According to Pica [5] learners must pay attention to form as well as meaning. Since receiving grammatical instruction through communicative opportunities was not sufficient for internalizing the grammatical roles a new syncretic method of teaching grammar was needed. Conscious-raising was one of the methods which was applied to collaboratively improve the grammatical knowledge through discussion. According to Ellis [1] the purpose of conscious raising tasks is to obtain an explicit understanding of some linguistic structures of the target language. In addition, researchers such as Kowl and Swain [3] have suggested the use of collaborative tasks for teaching grammar through drawing the learners' attention on grammatical accuracy in a communicative context. They believe that the collaborative tasks may be of a significant help in developing learners' grammatical competence since they integrate the productive and reflective methods of learning. One of the activities suggested in this method of teaching is text reconstruction task (dictogloss). The gaps in the text reconstruction tasks make the student to reflect and then provide verbal or written production [11].

In line with the recent debates in the domain of grammar teaching through task-based or conscious raising activities, the present study set out to investigate the nature and effect of conscious raising activity of text reconstruction task on learning grammatical structures by Iranian EFL learners through comparing it with the

**Corresponding Author:** Vahid Esmaieelzade, Islamic Azad University, North Tehran Branch, Tehran, Iran.

classical method of cloze exercise. While it was observed that the learners were more motivated and enthusiastic to participate in doing text reconstruction activities, the extent to which it was helpful in learning grammatical structures compared to the cloze exercise activity had to be practically confirmed.

## 2. Research Questions:

Keeping with the purpose of the study, following questions are addressed in this research:

1. What are the effects of different tasks of text reconstruction and cloze exercise on the acquisition of grammatical structures?
2. Are there any differences among the two task types with regard to retaining the grammatical structures after two weeks interval?

## 3. Method:

### 1.1. Participants:

The participants were 50 low-intermediate male high school students of English in Karaj, Iran. They were in grade four of high school aged from 16-18. The participants had been learning English for five years in Junior and senior high schools. Some of them had studied English out of school in language institutes. They were randomly divided into two groups of experiment (text reconstruction) and control (cloze exercise)

### 1.2. Instruments:

A placement test was designed by the present researcher to find the grammatical structures mostly used incorrectly by the participants. Then, two different language tasks were used in this study including cloze exercise and text reconstruction since they represent the type of exercise the students face in English language classes. Cloze exercise represents the most traditional exercise and text reconstruction represents the new productive conscious raising tasks. The grammatical structures included articles (definite and indefinite) and verb tense/aspect choice and formation (in particular, simple present, simple past and present perfect). Replacement test, Cloze test exercise and text reconstruction were all based on the text of the English book of grade fourth which was taught in the class to the participants.

### 3.3 Procedure:

First, all the participants took part in placement test to recognize the more frequently incorrect grammatical structures. Then, the participants were randomly divided into two groups of 25 students to take the cloze exercise and text reconstruction exercise. Each exercise session was started by instruction of how to complete the tasks and followed by the exercise and totally lasted for 50 minutes. Group one took the cloze exercise task as control group and the second group took the text reconstruction tasks. Each exercise is comprised of some gaps or missing words of the target grammatical structure. In control group, the study was required to complete a cloze exercise. Then, after one practice session of a text reconstruction task for participants' acquaintance with this type of activity, the students in experiment group completed a text reconstruction task. The same procedure was repeated after two weeks interval to examine each exercise effect on retaining grammatical structures.

## 4. Results and Data Analysis:

The data were analyzed applying both descriptive and inferential statistics. One-way ANOVA was also employed to compare the means of each exercise.

### A. Investigating the First Question:

“What are the effect of text reconstruction and close exercises on acquisition of grammatical structures? “

The results of the student's performance on the exercises were compared to see if two types of exercises of Cloze and text reconstruction were different in terms of the produced results. Table 1 represents the descriptive statistics for the pre-test.

**Table 1:** Descriptive Statistics for the Pre-tests of Cloze and Text Reconstruction.

Group	N	Mean	SD	Min	Max
Text Rec.	25	25.77	1.424	24	27
Cloze.	25	24.39	1.322	23	26

As it is seen in table 1 above the means of two exercises (tests) are different. One-way ANOVA was applied to compare the means i terms of statistical significance.

**Table 2:** One-way ANOVA for the Pre-tests.

Source	SS	df	MS	F	Sig.
Between groups	82.563	3	54.321	38.532	0.000
Within groups	54.232	47	1.760		
Total	136.795	50			

As can be seen in table above, the F value is significant at the probability level of 0.000 ( $F= 38.532$ ) which indicates the statistically significant difference between two groups. However, Scheffe test was employed for finding the exact difference. The results of Scheffe test are shown in Table 3 below.

**Table 3:** The Results of Scheffe test for Pre-test.

Groups		Mean Difference	Sig.
Text Rec.	Dict.	2.16	0.32
Dict.	Text Rec.	-2.16	0.32

Based on the information in table 3, it can be understood that the difference between text reconstruction group and Cloze exercise group is significant and the performance of the first group has been significantly better than the second group (mean difference= 2.16,  $p= 0.032$ ). So, question one can be positive answered that there is a significant difference between two groups in terms of acquiring grammatical constructs or targeted items.

#### B. Investigating the Second Question:

“Are there any differences among the two task types with regard to retaining the grammatical structures after two weeks interval?”

After two weeks interval, the participants took the same tests (post-test) but in different item orders to find if the participants could retain the learned material similarly or differently. Descriptive statistics, one-way ANOVA and Scheffe test were presented and employed for analyzing the data and finding differences or similarities.

**Table 4:** Descriptive Statistics for the Post-test.

Group	N	Mean	SD	Min	Max
Text Rec.	25	25.08	1.320	23	27
Cloze.	25	23.60	1.312	21	25

It can be seen from table 4 that the means of two groups are different. One-way ANOVA is applied for further and clearer understanding of statistical significance of the difference. Table 5 shows the results of the ANOVA.

**Table 5:** One-way ANOVA for posttest

Source	SS	df	MS	F	Sig.
Between groups	80.530	3	52.734	30.690	0.000
Within groups	48.058	47	1.356		
Total	128.588	50			

The difference of 30.690 is significant at the probability level of 0.000 indicating the statistically significant difference. As mentioned before, one-way ANOVA is necessary but not sufficient for finding out the exact era of differences. So, the Scheffe test was applied. Table 6 presents the results of this test.

**Table 6:** The Results of Scheffe test for Posttest

Groups		Mean Difference	Sig.
Text Rec.	Dict.	2.16	0.30
Dict.	Text Rec.	-2.16	0.30

The results of the table 6 indicate the difference between text reconstruction group and cloze group as significant. As it can be seen, the former group has performed better than the latter (mean difference= 2.16,  $p= 0.30$ ). so, the second question regarding the differences among different task types with regard to retaining the grammatical structure after one week can be answered positively. That is, the students taking different task types retained grammatical points differently after one week and text reconstruction group outperformed the cloze group in both pre-test and posttest.

#### 5. Discussion:

The present study was an effort to study the effectiveness of two specific tasks that is cloze exercise and text reconstruction on Iranian EFL learners' acquisition of articles (definite and indefinite) and verb tense/aspect choice and formation (in particular, simple present, simple past and present perfect). The data was analyzed using one-way ANOVA and Scheffe tests and it was revealed that the acquisition of targeted grammatical structures improved through text reconstruction exercise as a task-based activity.

The analysis in the present study has shown that text reconstruction group outperformed the cloze exercise group both in pretest and posttest. The results of the present study have been in line with the study of Storch [10] who compared three types of grammatical exercises and concluded that text reconstruction task positively

affects the overall grammatical accuracy. In addition, Kowal and Swain [3] suggested the use of text reconstruction tasks as advantageous considering grammatical accuracy within a communicative context. Considering the text reconstruction task as pre-test exercise, the results have shown that the experiment group outperformed the control group and this type of task affected the participants' acquisition of targeted grammatical items. Furthermore, the analysis of the results related to posttests indicated that text reconstruction task is a plausible and effective method of teaching grammar since this type of task promotes conscious acquisition of targeted grammatical items. Moreover, according to Storch [9] the tasks which require production and give the learners more choices result in grammatical accuracy while the language exercises with more overt focus on grammatical decisions such as cloze exercise reduce the accuracy of grammatical items [8].

Generally, based on the results of the present study, the text reconstruction task enhances the acquisition of the targeted grammatical structure and task-based method of teaching grammar is more effective than the traditional methods. However, the scope of the present study was limited to some grammatical items and the result cannot be generalized to development and acquisition of grammatical structures in long term.

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