The Efficacy of Explicit Grammar Instruction and its Impact on L2 Rule-Learning

A literature review

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I. Outline

II. Introduction

    A. The focus of the review and its significance

- The focus of the review : The efficacy of explicit grammar instruction

    B. The historical perspective

    C. The goal of the review

III. Methods

- Years covered: 2004 to 2007

- Preliminary Resources: Academic Search Complete M Eric and Google Scholar

- Keywords: "grammar teaching" or "explicit" and "deductive"

- Criteria used: Relevance to the focus of the review

- Rationale for choosing the four articles here

- Reasons for excluding two studies

IV. Results

- Summary of Andrews (2007)

- Summary of Mohamed (2004)

- Summary of Tode (2007)

- Summary of Radwan (2005)

V. Discussion

- Summary of the major results of the review

- Comparing results with previous reviews

- Application toward future research

Table of references

Appendix 1 Table 1: A summary of the four studies reviewed in this paper

I. Introduction

The focus of the review and its significance

It is crucial that foreign language teachers know well what kinds of grammar teaching strategies best aid learning in the classroom in order to adjust their teaching toward a practical and successful approach. Much of the debate about how to help EFL learners achieve grammatical proficiency centers on the implicit versus explicit, or deductive versus inductive grammar instruction dichotomy. The focus of is review is the importance of explicit teaching of grammar and its effect on language learning. This is an extremely important issue in various disciplines in applied linguistics, particularly teaching methodology and second language acquisition (SLA). Finding out whether focus-on-form enhances or impairs learning and/or acquisition of a second language (L2) or foreign language (FL) will influence teachers' deciding on the teaching techniques they adopt to effectively get the target language across to their learners.

The historical perspective

A quick look at the research history in this domain points out that researchers are split regarding explicit versus implicit teaching. For example, White (1987) stresses that teaching grammar is essential because some structure cannot be learned naturally. Krashen (1982) states that grammar is acquired naturally if learners are exposed to enough comprehensible input; consequently, it does not have to be explicitly or deductively taught. Larsen-freeman (1995) states that even if grammar is naturally acquired, instruction is essential to enhance it.

The goal of the review

The goal of this review is to point out the contexts where explicit teaching of grammar could be effective and some of the factors that influence its positive effect on L2/FL learning. The review starts with Andrews (2007), and Mohamed (2004) who view both explicit and implicit teaching as equal in some contexts. The last two studies Tode (2007) and Radwan (2004) show how explicit teaching could be more effective.

II. Method

The studies I review here were written between the years 2004 and 2007; I found these articles through EBSCOhost database service using Academic Search Complete and ERIC. In EBSCOhost, I limited my search to articles that have been published recently in journals and only those that include my search guide words in the abstracts supplied by the authors. The key words that guided my search are "grammar teaching" or "explicit" and "deductive". The search resulted in 32 articles. Whenever I came across any interesting article whose full text is unavailable, I used Google Scholar to locate it. I excluded articles that are irrelevant to explicit grammar instruction, and kept only 6 studies. Although these 6 studies were relevant to the focus of this review, I excluded two of them: Winitz and Sagarna (2007) and Erlam (2003) because their focus was on Spanish and French respectively. I wanted studies that mainly deal with English structures which I am familiar with. This would make it easy for me to follow the studies, besides its relevancy to my major. I finally decided on four studies that varied in their support to this teaching strategy of grammar. The rationale for selecting only these four studies is their relevance to explicit or deductive instruction of English structures to EFL or ESL learners.

III. Results

Andrews (2007)

To reach the main target of the review, the article of Andrews (2007) aims at supplying research consumers and EFL/ESL teachers with empirical data on the influence of implicit and explicit teaching of both simple and complex grammatical structures on the ESL learners' learning of these structures. The ESL learners here are at 3 levels of proficiency. Among the purposes relevant to focus of the review, the researcher sought to discover if a certain structure must match the learner's current level of proficiency. The researcher wanted to find out if one method of teaching is better than others regarding the nature of the structure itself. The study was guided by three questions: the researcher asked whether there is a significant difference between explicit and implicit grammar teaching approaches in learning complex and simple rules the other

two questions are relevant to the effect of language proficiency on the learning of simple and complex structures.

There are 70 participants in this quantitative applied study and they are all teenage L2 learners in intact classes, which means they were conveniently sampled. They were divided into 2 groups, 35 in each group and each group was divided into 3 level groups with a minimum of 11 in each subgroup. The proficiency levels were beginner, intermediate, and advanced. The researcher conducted 2 treatments; the first one is explicit grammar teaching of a simple rule which subject-verb agreement (SVA) and a complex rule which is relative clauses. The other treatment used the same structures and content but adopting the implicit approach. The researcher used instrumental procedures to collect data: a pre-test, a post-test and a delayed post-test. Both groups had identical content and tests; they only difference is the teaching method. As for the findings of the study, after the researcher established the importance of grammar teaching and the difference this form-focused instruction makes compared to being merely flooded by input, she pointed out that the method of teaching did make a difference indicating that explicit teaching of grammar resulted in better learners performance particularly with complex rules, so the variable of structure type is related to the method of teaching grammar. The findings also indicate that there is no difference in learners' performance regarding explicit|/implicit grammar teaching of simple rules. This indicates that explicit grammar teaching is as effective as implicit grammar teaching with regard to simple rules. In interpreting the results of her study, the researcher suggested relevant applications such as urging curriculum designers to heed the importance of L2 learning in college preparation programs.

Mohamed (2004)

Rather than forming conclusions regarding which is more effective from the teachers or researchers' perspective, the article of Mohamed (2004) aimed at exploring the learner's attitude and preference of the grammar teaching method. This study is an exploratory, applied and quantitative study that used instrumental procedures in form of tests and questionnaire to collect

the data. The research question was what learner's attitudes and preferences are regarding two techniques of grammar teaching: deductive and inductive, therefore, the researcher aimed at finding out which of these grammar teaching techniques appeals to ESL learners. The sample consisted of 53 ESL New Zealanders at the tertiary or university level of education. They were classified according to their language proficiency level, and each level was assigned a different structure to be learned once inductively and another time deductively. To illustrate, *the relative clause* structure was assigned to the lower-intermediate group, the structure of *negative adverbs* was assigned to the intermediate group and the *ergative verbs* structure was assigned to the upper intermediate group. Two treatments were given: a consciousness-raising (CR) task using deductive grammar teaching with 23 students from the 3 different levels and a CR task using inductive grammar teaching 28 students from the 3 levels working in pairs. Both groups were asked to complete a similar grammar activity after completing a different grammar task. The deductive group students did the activity after studying the rule explicitly while the other inductive group predict and form the rule before completing the activity. When the tasks were done, both groups were asked to fill out a questionnaire that aimed at determining their preferences and attitudes .The results indicated that students regard both task types equally effective and useful in language learning. It was also discovered that proficiency does not seem to affect task preference. In interpreting her studies, the researcher recommended the integration of both explicit and implicit teaching procedures with stress on the explicit approach especially with lower-level learners whose attention should be directed to important structure. She also stressed that care needs to be taken concerning generalizing the study findings.

Tode (2007)

The previous tow studies agree that explicit teaching is important but they do not specify whether its impact lasts for a long time or not. The article of Tode (2007) aims at examining the durability of the effect of explicit and implicit grammar teaching on EFL junior high school

learners at the beginning level. The researcher wanted to find out if any of these grammar teaching strategies would make learning the language easier.

The study was guided by four research questions all of which are related to the copular use of *be* which the target structure in this study. The researcher wanted to find out if explicit and implicit teaching strategies have any positive influence on Japanese high school learners' suppliance of the copular *be* before they learn anything about the auxiliary use of *be* in progressive tenses, for example. The researcher also wondered whether the explicit or implicit teaching of grammar would positively influence these learners' correct use of full verbs (FV) that do require the auxiliary be. The last two questions are related the durability of these assumed positive influences after introducing full verbs tenses like present simple tense.

To answer these questions, the researcher conveniently selected 3 intact classes of 7th graders in a junior high school. They were all 89:33 in the treatment group that received explicit teaching , 29 in the other treatment group received implicit instruction and 27 in the control group that received no special instruction The target structure was the copular "*be*" in all these groups .The researcher selected this sample carefully as all these students have rudimentary skills of English, therefore eliminating the different background   effect .Besides, the nature of their school syllabi seem to fit the study perfectly because it was based mainly in teaching structure which are listed separately , this means when they focus on a particular segment in their course the rarely use the previous one . This eliminates the factor of interference of other structures. They were all taught by the same teacher. The researcher used instrumental procedures in this experimental study that lasted for 7 months during which the participants sat for 5 tests: a pretest before the first treatment which was 50 minutes of explicit, implicit and particular type instruct of copular *be* , an immediate post test and another delayed post test three weeks after the second treatment which is the teaching of auxiliary *be* in present progressive , a month later they took test 4 and 2 months later they took test 5 . The tests were the same for the 2 experimental groups and control group.

The results revealed that the first treatment group who received explicit teaching performed better than other groups but the durability of the positive effect of teaching is questionable; therefore, it can not be inferred that explicit instruction is better. With regard to the effect of explicit teaching on learning a certain form after another form is introduced, a significant difference in performance was noticed in the results showing the importance of explicit teaching in this respect. To sum up the results , explicit teaching is really more effective but its influence is not durable .This is due to the context here , because the Japanese syllabus taught structures separately and required no integration , thus eliminating any structures reinforcing the learning of other structures . While interpreting reflecting on the study findings, the researcher recommended some applications such as enhancing noticing of new structures and providing learners with adequate opportunities to practice the new structure and contrast it with previously learned ones. It is noteworthy here that the treatment period in study was only 50 minutes and writing was the only four language analyzed, therefore it was short and artificial affecting the reliability of its results and the possibility of generalizing its findings .

Radwan (2005)

Similar to the previous study, Radwan (2005) aimed at investigating the influence of the explicit teaching on facilitating language learning. The purpose of this study is similar to the previous and it was guided by three questions. The researcher wanted to find out if the degree of explicitness affects the learning of the target structure, whether this degree affects the learners' awareness and whether the level of awareness correlates positively with the learners' future use of the target structure.

To answer these questions, the researcher randomly selected 42 EFL participants in 2 universities in Washington; he divided them into 4 groups and randomly assigned four learning conditions: textual enhancement, role-oriented, content-oriented and non treatment of grammar teaching in the control group. The target structure was the use of *indirect object* and its position regarding word order. Al participants had a pre-test. The treatment differed in the degree of

explicitness ranging from extremely form focused in the rule oriented group to no focus on form at all in the content group. In addition to using instrumental procedures such as test, the researcher also use observational procedures such think-aloud verbal protocols to gather his data. The participants sat for 2 post tests .The results showed that rule-oriented group whose degree of explicitness is high outperformed other groups of implicit instruction or no instruction at all. The researcher was cautions in interpreting the findings of his study .Although all results point out the importance of explicit teaching, he warned against extended generalizability of results because the sample was small.

IV Discussion

Summary of the major results of the review

Table 1 in Appendix 1 gives a good idea not only about the results discussed below but also about other important parts in the four studies reviewed here. To sum up the findings of the four studies reviewed her, Andrews (2007) found out that explicit teaching of grammar makes a difference only when it comes to complex grammar rules, but explicit teaching is as effective as implicit teaching regarding simple grammar rules. Therefore there are times when both strategies have something in common; this was stressed by the survey carried out by Mohamed (2004) in which students report that both methods are equally important. The findings in Mohamed (2004) are different regarding the role played the proficiency level which Mohamed (2004) claimed to have no effect on the preference of teaching method while Andrews (2007) said it interferes which the efficacy of the particular method. In a trial to distinguish one method instead of equalizing them, Tode (2007) in his findings gave more weight to explicit teaching but the durability of its effect is questionable. Without raising any doubts regarding the effect of explicit teaching, Radwan (2005) pointed out in the findings of his study the superiority of explicit grammar teaching which yield better performance than implicit teaching or no teaching at all.

Comparing results with previous reviews

The current review is partly related to a more comprehensive review carried out by Borg (2003) in which he discussed several points related to teacher cognition and perceptions regarding the teaching of grammar. It was surprising in the findings in this review that many studies claimed that the majority of learners favor explicit teaching while the majority of teachers favor the implicit grammar teaching method. These findings are compatible with Andrews (2007) and Radwan (2005) who also claimed students' preference of explicit rule-oriented teaching particularly in difficult structures, but it contradicts Mohamed (2004) who claimed students view both teaching methods as equally effective. Since the four studies in this review do not tackle teachers' self perception , it can not be inferred that it contradicts Borg (2003) with regard to the teachers' preference of inductive and implicit teaching of grammar.

Application toward future research

The findings of this review reflect the importance of focus-on form and explicit teaching of grammar, but the first two studies seem to find it equally important to other grammar teaching approaches. There is a continuous debate whether being flooded by comprehensible input such through immersion programs that depend mainly on implicit teaching is better than focus on form. As a teacher of EFL, I need more quantitative and qualitative studies to form , if possible, final conclusions concerning which is more effective, explicit or implicit teaching of grammar, deductive or inductive instruction, and which context is ideal for each particular teaching approach.

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Appendix 1

Table 1: A summary of the four studies reviewed in this paper

Study	Participants	Variables and relationships	Results
Andrews (2007)	70 participants all teenage L2 learners in intact classes	IV The implicit and explicit teaching of both simple and complex grammatical structures Learners' proficiency level DV ESL learners' learning of these structures	explicit teaching of grammar resulted in better learners performance particularly with complex rules There is no difference in learners' performance regarding explicit|/implicit grammar teaching of simple rules.
Mohamed (2004)	53 ESL New Zealanders at the tertiary or university level of education.	Learner's attitude and preference of the grammar teaching method	Students regard both task types equally effective and useful in language learning. Proficiency does not seem to affect task preference.
Tode (2007)	89 participants 3 intact classes of 7th graders in a junior high school	IV durability of the effect of explicit and implicit grammar teaching EFL grammar teaching strategies DV learning language easily	EXPLICIT eaching is really more effective but its influence is not durable .
Radwan (2005)	42 EFL participants in 2 universities in Washington	IV explicit teaching and degree of explicitness language learning .	rule-oriented group whose degree of explicitness is high outperformed other groups of implicit instruction or no instruction at all.