THE ROLE OF FORMAL INSTRUCTION THROUGH CLOZE ACTIVITIES AND INPUT ENHANCEMENT ON IRANIAN EFL LEARNER’S CONJUNCTION USE IN WRITING

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ABSTRACT
The aim of this study was to examine the effects of two process-oriented writing tasks on Iranian EFL learner’s ability to produce coherent and well-organized texts by means of three types of conjunctions (coordinating, correlative and transitional). After assessing the group’s homogeneity by using a PET test and a writing task as a pre-test, the researcher randomly assigned them into two comparison groups. One group received model essays in the form of cloze activities (conjunctions were omitted). The other group received an enhanced version of a model essay in which three kinds of conjunctions were bolded and underlined. Both of the treatments were compromised of 8ninety-minute sessions. Upon completion of the treatments, both groups were administered a posttest. The results showed that students who had access to cloze activities improved their writing better than students who had access to input enhancement.

Keywords: Cloze Activities, Conjunctions, Formal Instruction, Input Enhancement, Written Performance

INTRODUCTION
Zamel (1983, as cited in Chastain,1988) states that writing involves the exploration of ideas and thoughts in the process of putting them on paper and the selection of the most appropriate forms to express exactly what one wishes to say. Chastain (1988) states that “Most students, both in their native language and in the second language, have received minimal or no instruction in learning how to write. They receive feedback, - often unhelpful because it is incomprehensible to them- on the product they have submitted for correction and grading, but no one has led them through the process of generating ideas, organizing them into a coherent sequence, and putting them on paper” (p. 251). Escholz (1980) believes that “Students must be permitted to discover their own writing problems, but once they have made that discovery models may be very helpful, demonstrating solutions that others have found and that students can utilize for themselves” (p. 35). Writing is one of the most difficult skills for learners. There are several ways to improve student’s writing which most of them are not effective. However, helping students to discover the correct forms besides formal instruction may be a good method for teaching writing (Marzban and Mokhberi, 2012; Rahimpour and Salimi, 2010; Sahebkheir and Assadi, 2014). So, the researchers in this article tried to improve students writing through cloze activities and input enhancement.

Some studies showed effective role of input enhancement on the acquisition of target forms (Abadikhah and Shahriyarpour, 2012; Bakori, 2007; Khoi and Tabrizi, 2011; Moaiyedi, 2013; Sang-Ki and Hung-Tzu, 2008). Among these studies (Abadikhah and Shahriyarpour, 2012; Bakori, 2009; khoi and Tabrizi, 2011; Sahebkheir and Davatgari, 2014) used input enhancement along with output — a reconstruction task involving learners in the production of input passage as accurately as possible after reading it. Some researches (Sahebkheir and Assadi, 2014; Steinman, 2002; Taylor, 1953) founded the effective use of cloze activities as a teaching instrument for students to practice using context clues as a reading strategy. In their teaching, the methods of teacher-made cloze activities, rational deletion and accepted word scoring were combined with the negotiation of comprehension of the text and discussion of the word choice after the completion of cloze activities. The researcher will discuss the usefulness of input enhancement and cloze activities as an instructional method broadly.
Formal Instruction and Developing Writing

Long and Robinson (1998) claim that formal L2 instruction should give most of its attention to exposing students to oral and written discourse that mirrors real-life, such as job interviews, writing letters to friends, and engaging in classroom debates, nonetheless, when it is observed that learners are experiencing difficulties in the comprehension and or production of certain L2 grammatical forms, teachers and their peers are obligated to assist them notice their erroneous use and/ or comprehension of these forms and supply them with the proper explanations and models of them. Moreover, teachers can help their students and learners can help their peers notice the forms that they currently lack, yet should know in order to further their overall L2 grammatical development. White (1987) mentioned that formal instruction stems from an effort to strike a balance between structuralism approach which emphasizes accurate production of L2 forms, and the communicative approach which focuses on promoting meaningful communication in real context. Furthermore, she asserts that this attempt has culminated in what has been known as focus on form. A complete lack of attention to form may not be in the best interest of learners. She also believes that when instruction focuses on meaning to the virtual exclusion of formal aspects of language, learners may fail to reach high levels of linguistic knowledge and performance despite extensive exposure to target language input. Lightbown (1985) claims that the purely communicative approach does not serve language learners well enough. Similarly, Swain (1998) claimed that a focus only on meaning provides insufficient input of certain forms and no way to encourage practice of others. Dekeyser (1995) states that focus on form does not need to imply a return to a structural syllabus but, in his opinion, can, for some learners, imply the explicit teaching and systematic practicing of certain forms. According to Poole (2005), it is a type of instruction that, on the one hand, holds up the importance of communicative language teaching principle such as authentic communication and student–centeredness and, on the other hand, maintains the value of the occasional and overt study of problematic L2 grammatical forms, which is more reminiscent of non communicative teaching. According to Crawford (1990) language whether it is input or output, should emerge from the context in which it occurs. That is to say, while deciding to teach the learners formally, the teacher should consider the learners purposes. If the learner’s purpose is to promote their writing skill, teaching the overall structure and grammatical features of the written text seems inevitable in helping learners achieving this goal. Gor and Chernigovskaya (2001) propose that positive role of implicit instruction remains to be proven empirically. In fact, research has failed to show the positive influence of implicit instruction, so far (e.g., Ellis, 1993; White, 1987). However, instruction, which provide explicit instructions of grammar rules, especially simple rules involving transparent form-function relations, proves beneficial to adult learners writing skill (Alanen, 1995; Robinson, 1995; Williams and Evans, 1998). Nunan (2001) proposes that a major challenge for language educators is to investigate different ways of helping language learners produce coherent written discourse. It seems that what stands in the way of producing a coherent text is deficient knowledge of cohesive ties on the part of language learners which is complemented by insufficient practical opportunities to engage in the process of writing within the classroom and under the supervision of the teacher. Such opportunities can be provided in the form of individual pair and group writing activities of different types proceed by explicit instruction of major elements of written discourse. Nazari (2013) investigated the effects of implicit and explicit language instruction on student’s ability to learn grammar and use it appropriately in their writing. To this purpose, two intact classes of 30 adult learners were chosen for teaching the targeted structure (present perfect) through different methods of instruction. The results indicated the outperformance of the participants in the explicit group over the performance of the participants in the implicit group in both productive and receptive modes. Furthermore (Marzban and Mokhberi, 2012; Rahimpour and Salimi, 2010; Sahebkheir and Assadi, 2014) found explicit instruction effective. However, (Ozkan and Kesen, 2009) conducted an empirical study of the types of grammar with 50 participants studying at preparatory classes. The dependent variable was the number of grammatical or correct items over the forms gained out of pre-test, post-test and delayed post test. This study also agrees with Fotos (2002) since the implicit group had better performance than the explicit group of the study. They could not find explicit teaching of grammar effective.
Input Enhancement and Developing Writing

Input is the ‘potentially processible language data which are made available, by chance or by design, to the language learner’ (Sharwood, 1993). It is an essential component of second language acquisition, simply because learners use it ‘in order to construct a mental representation of the grammar that they are acquiring’ (VanPatten, 1996). Sharwood (1981) proposed the term ‘consciousness raising’ (C-R), which refers to increasing or raising learner’s conscious awareness of particular linguistic structures, altered by input; hence, ‘all input is intake’.

Sharwood (1991) defines input enhancement as ‘the process by which language input becomes salient to learner’s. In other words, input enhancement could be an approach to second language teaching, and refers to a deliberate attempt to make the target form in this input enhanced by visually altering its appearance in the text. Sharwood (1991,1993) suggests many techniques which may be used in order to make input salient, such as color coding, bold-facing, using error flags, stress, ‘intonation and gesture’s, as well as pointing out and explaining construction using metalinguistic terminology. For example, grammatical English morphemes (third person’s singular s) could be bolded, or underlined. Using one or all of these techniques could draw learner’s attention to the target language form. This kind of input enhancement is known as ‘visual or textual enhancement.’

Other researchers showed the implicit way to draw learner’s attention to forms by using input enhancement (Izumi, 2002; Jourdenais et al., 1995; Lee, 2007; Leow et al., 2003; Radwan, 2005; Robinson, 1997; Sahebkheir and Davatgari, 2014; White, 1998; Wong, 2003). Results of these studies cast considerable doubt on the efficacy of input enhancement since most of the studies reported that input enhancement does not induce desired learning effects as intended by the researchers. Consequently, they concluded that providing learners with input enhancement alone is too implicit to both draw their attention to form and affect their learning. Few studies showed effective role of input enhancement on the acquisition of target forms (Abadikhah and Shahriyarpour, 2012; Bakori, 2007; Khoi and Tabrizi, 2011; Moaiyedi, 2013; Sang-Ki and Hung-Tzu, 2008). Among these studies (Abadikhah and Shahriyarpour, 2012; Bakori, 2009; Khoi and Tabrizi, 2011; Sahebkheir and Davatgari, 2014) used input enhancement along with output — a reconstruction task involving learners in the production of input passage as accurately as possible after reading it. Output, as Swain (1985) puts it, has been viewed not only as an end product of learning but also as an important factor that can promote L2 learning. It is argued that producing output provides learners with great opportunities for a level of processing (i.e. syntactic processing) which may be necessary for the development of target-like proficiency or accuracy (see Izumi and Bigelow, 2000; Pica et al., 1989; Shehadeh, 2003; Song and Suh, 2008; Swain and Lapkin, 1995). By being "pushed" to produce output, learners are required to pay attention to syntactic features of their language in order to formulate precise, meaningful and appropriate language. Furthermore, during the production of output, they formulate and test hypotheses about the accuracy of their language. It is argued that while producing output, learners are forced to process language more deeply than during input processing.

Cloze Activity and Developing Written Performance

Taylor (1953) was the first to study cloze activities for its effectiveness as an instrument for determining the readability of materials in the reader’s native language in 1953. After that initial study, it was investigated for its appropriateness as a measure of readability of L1 and L2 materials. The third use of cloze activities in English teaching is as a teaching instrument to help improve learner’s language ability. Many researchers and teachers have used it successfully in improving learner’s language ability. Some purposeful uses of cloze activities in teaching will be discussed here. Helfeldt et al., (1986) mention cloze activities as ‘passage-completion’ technique, which is an informal instrument to determine learner’s instructional reading level. Knowing the actual reading level of the learners, teachers can adjust and give guidance to the learners more properly. Lombard (1990) describes the use of cloze activities in her English second language classes for junior and senior students. She illustrates how cloze activities help solve reading problems of learners and increase their confidence when they receive immediate and
satisfactory feedback. Legenza and Elijah (2001) claim that cloze is effective as a teaching technique especially when teaching is based on an error profile. For example, one such method is using teacher-developed cloze exercises to remedy specific error types, e.g. deleting only one part of speech at a time, which students then have to insert so that the sentences are semantically correct. Steinman (2002) describes her use of cloze activities as a teaching instrument for students to practice using context clues as a reading strategy and to encourage vocabulary improvement in teaching. In her teaching, the methods of teacher-made cloze activities, rational deletion and accepted word scoring were combined with the negotiation of comprehension of the text and discussion of the word choice after the completion of cloze activities. Bachman (1982) reported that certain types of cloze activities, such as the selective deletion cloze, can be used to investigate a subject’s knowledge of written discourse items such as context cohesion, syntax and strategic textual comprehension. Anderson (1979) adds that cloze activities correlate more closely with grammar tests than with reading tests, and according to Bowen et al., (1985), the selective deletion cloze is ideal for testing vocabulary and grammar.

Sahebkheir and Assadi (2014) found that using model essays in the form of cloze activity (omitting conjunction in the text) and asking students to complete the models by conjunction can be a good way to improve using cohesive ties. The research findings revealed that the group which received formal instruction and completed a model essay in the form of cloze activities outperformed the control group which just received model essays. Thus this study set out to narrow down the concept of instruction and examine the impact of explicit instruction of conjunction on the Iranian EFL Learner’s writing skill. Regarding the purpose of the study, the following research question was asked:

1. Will using cloze activity improve using cohesive ties (conjunctions) of EFL learner’s writing skill?
2. 1) Will input enhancement improve using cohesive ties (conjunctions) of EFL learner’s writing skill?
3. Which one of techniques "cloze activity or input enhancement improves using cohesive ties of EFL learner’s writing skill better?

MATERIALS AND METHODS
The aim of this study is to find the effect of independent variable, instruction of three types of conjunctions through cloze activity and input enhancement, and the dependent variable i.e. cohesion in the Iranian EFL learner’s written performance.

Subjects
The participants for this study were 40 Iranian EFL learners majoring in English Language Teaching and participating in writing composition course, with an age range of 18-30. Students were chosen after assigning a preliminary English Test (PET) and a writing task (pre-test) for having homogeneous groups. The researcher randomly assigned them as two comparison groups.

Instrumentation:
Different instruments used in the present study involve a preliminary English Test (PET) and two argumentative writing tasks in the pre-test and the post-test. Model essays were used in different forms. Normal Model essays and the same model essays in the form of cloze activities for one of the comparison group and enhanced model essays for the other group were used. In order to teach the selected conjunctions the researcher used Azabdaftari’s (2002) book.

Procedure:
The aim of this study was to examine the effects of a process oriented program, focused on the teaching of three types of conjunctions (coordinating, correlative and Transitional) on Iranian EFL learner’s ability to produce coherent and well–organized texts. The researcher worked on a sample of forty Iranian college learners from Payame Noor university-Tabriz Branch, who were passing writing essay courses. After assessing the group’s homogeneity by using a PET test (those who got 60 or more out of 100 were chosen) and a writing task as a pre-test, the researcher randomly assigned them as two comparison groups. This study does not have control group because in the former studies by Sahebkheir and Davatgari (2014) and Sahebkheir and Assadi (2014) control group did not show any changes from pre-test to post-test. The other comparison group received an enhanced version of a model essay in which
three kinds of conjunctions were bolded and underlined. Students were supposed to read these enhanced models and write summaries. Teacher as the researcher followed a presentation, practice and production (PPP) approach for the comparison group. The treatment was an eight session process oriented program focused on teaching conjunctions. The researcher as the teacher explained about the different usage of conjunctions for one of the comparison groups. Furthermore, this group received a model essay in the form of cloze activity (conjunctions were omitted). Students should complete the cloze activities by using conjunctions. Then they had access to a completed form of those cloze activities and they should summarize the texts and try to use these conjunctions in their writing. For measuring the cohesive ties density-the researcher used Halliday and Hassan’s (1976) approach-the mean number of conjunctions per T-unit- in the pre-test and post-test. The researcher used t-test for comparing the mean scores of the pre-test and post-test.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION
In this section, the results of t-test for proficiency test between two groups, Pearson Correlation for showing the inter-rater reliability between the scores of two raters, t-test for showing the results of pre-test and post-test scores will be presented. Finally, the researcher will discuss the results.

Table 1: Independent sample t-test for proficiency test (PET)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
<th>Std. Error Mean</th>
<th>Sig (2-tailed)</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>df</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pre comparison (1)</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>67.80</td>
<td>(4.77)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.382</td>
<td>.219</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cloze Activity</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>comparison (2) input</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>69.95</td>
<td>(5.35)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>.382</td>
<td></td>
<td>37.143</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: p= .458. The adjusted Standard Deviation is shown in parentheses below the means

Table 1 represents the result of the t-test for proficiency test (PET) between two groups; there has not been a significant difference in scores for the first comparison group (M =67.80, SD = 4.77) and the second comparison group (M=69.95, SD = 5.35), t (38) = .382, P>.05. So, two groups at the beginning of the research are homogeneous. The computed Pearson correlation coefficient for pre-test is (r =.957, p =.000) and for the post-test is (r = .951, p = .000), which indicates that there is a high positive relationship between the scores rated by Rater 1 and Rater 2 in both pre-test and post-test for both groups.

Table 2: Descriptive statistics of comparing the cohesive density between two groups in the pre-test and post-test

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
<th>Std. Error Mean</th>
<th>Sig (2-tailed)</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>df</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pre comparison (1)</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>.5920</td>
<td>.08980</td>
<td>.02008</td>
<td>.880</td>
<td>1.223</td>
<td>-.164</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post comparison (2)</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>.6145</td>
<td>.09714</td>
<td>.02172</td>
<td>.880</td>
<td>-.164</td>
<td></td>
<td>37.267</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>comparison (1)</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>1.6365</td>
<td>.11553</td>
<td>.05673</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>29.855</td>
<td>-8.559</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>comparison (2)</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>1.3865</td>
<td>.31556</td>
<td>.08021</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>25.689</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The descriptive statistics of comparing the cohesive density between two groups in the pre-test and post-test are shown in Table 2. As Table 2 shows, scores in the pre-test for the first comparison group are (M =.59, SD =.089) and scores for the other comparison group are (M=.61, SD =.097), t (38) =-.164, P>.05. The mean score shows that the quality of using conjunctions between two groups in the pre-test were the same. In the post-test,
scores for the first comparison group (M = 1.63, SD = .11) and the other comparison group are (M = 1.38, SD = .31), t (38) = -8.55, P = .000. The results show that there is a significant difference between two groups from pre-test to the post-test. In the post-test, the first comparison group who uses cloze activities outperforms the second comparison group who used input enhancement in using conjunctions correctly. However this difference is so marginal.

It can be concluded that if the learner’s purpose is to promote their writing skill, teaching the overall structure and grammatical features of the written text seems inevitable in helping learners achieving this goal. Formal instruction and using cloze activities would make certain parts of the texts perceptually salient. Consequently, the subjects who received them would have closer attention directed to the grammatical features (conjunctions). Better performance on the post-test after completing the cloze activities and having access to the correct completed form of those cloze activities and summarizing the passages revealed that the subjects were producing more conjunctions in their writing. This finding supports the previous studies (e.g. Nazari, 2013; Nunan, 1991; Rahimpour and Salimi, 2010) that reported positive effects of formal instruction of grammatical features. It can be assumed that subject’s interlanguage might be affected by the formal instruction and started to change from one stage to another. In other words, it refers to developmental changes of subject’s interlanguage (e.g. Selinker, 1972). Some subjects showed changes in their interlangauge where they moved from a particular stage to another (i.e. from the pretest to posttest). To make this point clearer some subjects in this study showed the ability to use the target form starting from few use of conjunctions in the pretest and then slowly tried to use more conjunctions in the post test. On the other hand, other subjects in the control group showed no developmental changes, it suggested that those subjects might not have developed their interlanguage and still remained at the early stages of it (i.e. at their pretest stages). These findings oppose (Fotos, 2002; Ozkan and Kesen, 2009) that did not find formal instruction effective. The findings can suggest that formal instruction can be an effective method and could be used for enhancing salience of language features that may prove difficult for L2 learners. The implications from the research findings can be applied to practical sides of English language teaching and material development. Teachers who have a challenging role of conducting the classroom activities and learners who are involved in the process of learning how to write will reap the benefits of this study. Conjunctions are the most important parts of discourse which can facilitate both comprehension and production of language data. However, unfortunately, most teachers are unaware of their importance in the process of foreign language learning. It is hoped that the outcome of the following research would motivate Iranian teachers to corporate formal instruction of cohesive ties (conjunctions) to the process of language teaching, especially teaching writing skill. This study was tested only a short-term over the period of two months. Long-term effects of the variables under investigation should be examined as long-lasting effects of explicit instruction. Thus, we need to do another research that document long -term effects of explicit instruction on the developing written performance.

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