

Textual Enhancement as a Strategy for Communicative Grammar Teaching: A Study Carried Out on Senior Secondary ESL Learners

Dr. Anupam Dutta

Associate Professor

Department of English

Barbhag College

Kalag, Nalbari, Assam, India

danupam1974@gmail.com

Abstract

Even in a classroom that uses Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) methodology, strategic teaching of grammar, sometimes, finds a backseat, which may hinder acquisition of desirable language competence by the learners. Grammar should, therefore, ideally be taught following the basic principles of CLT methodology in a communicative language classroom. This paper seeks to find out if grammar can be taught effectively, using textual enhancement as a strategy, in a communicative classroom. The methodology adopted revolves round an experiment conducted on a homogeneous sample of fifty ESL learners of 12th standard class. The students are divided into two equal groups. One group is imparted textual enhancement based grammar instruction, while the other group is given a similar instruction on grammar for the same length of time, but without textual enhancement. Both the groups were then made to give an achievement test to measure their progress in comparison with each other. The group which received grammar instruction based on textual enhancement was found to show comparatively more progress than the other group. This leads us to the conclusion that textual enhancement as a strategy for communicative grammar teaching may yield desired outcome in an ESL classroom.

Keywords: ESL, textual enhancement, communicative grammar.

1. Introduction

It can be said to be a kind of success for advocates of methodological language teaching that Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) has become one of the popular methodologies in vogue over the last four decades as far as teaching of English as a second or foreign language is concerned. However, what is not encouraging is that it is often observed fluency of speech, rather than accuracy of language usage, often remains the only objective of all classroom interactions. As such, in a communicative ESL or EFL classroom, teaching of grammatical forms often loses focus, and grammatical accuracy is compromised for fluency. But mere fluency of speech with little grammatical accuracy should not be the objective of a communicative language classroom. So, both teachers and learners need to develop fluency with grammatical accuracy.

Common observation would reveal that both in traditional ESL/EFL classrooms, when it comes to teaching learning of grammatical forms, there is a tendency to fall back on traditional grammar teaching methods with decontextualised teaching of forms. Often, the reason is that teaching grammar communicatively is thought to be difficult. Teaching grammar using communicative activities may, for many teachers, appear more challenging than developing speech fluency without grammatical inaccuracy.

With a view to finding a way out of the aforesaid problem of teaching grammatical forms communicatively, this study seeks to investigate the effectiveness of input enhancement in teaching grammatical forms to the learners. One of the common ways of providing input enhancement is by textual enhancement. Textual Enhancement is a strategy whereby target grammatical forms are made prominent within the input text and the learners are made to notice these forms. Subsequently, the learners, through set types of classroom interactions that make them to pay more and more attention to the target forms, are led to imbibing these forms. The researchers feel the need to conduct an experiment to find out the

effect of using textual enhancement for on the learners receiving instruction on grammatical forms in an ESL classroom. The present study uses reading texts to give instruction to target learners on Passive Voice by giving Focus on Form through textual enhancement. This study also aims at understanding if Textual Enhancement, as a strategy to teach grammar, is more effective than traditional techniques of grammar teaching. In view of the above, the objectives of the study are formulated as:

1. To investigate the short and long term effect of Textual Enhancement Instruction on developing grammatical knowledge of students.
2. To find out the comparative effectiveness of traditional teaching techniques and Textual Enhancement in teaching grammatical forms.

Based on what were discussed above, this study sought to answer the following research questions:

The following research questions were framed and sought to be answered:

1. Can Textual Enhancement influence learners' intake of Passive Voice in English?
2. Is Textual Enhancement based instruction more effective than traditional instruction in teaching grammatical forms to learners?

In order to address these research questions, this study attempted to reject the following null hypotheses:

H (1): Textual Enhancement does not help in the learners' intake of Passive Voice in English.

H (2): TE doesn't have higher effect than traditional instruction on the learners' intake of Passive Voice in English.

2. Literature Review

For the last more than two decades researchers have been carrying out different studies to understand the effect of textual enhancement on second language teaching-learning (Han, Park and Combs, 2008 and Lee & Huang, 2008). Textual Enhancement was found to

be an effective way of drawing learners' attention to forms and paved the way for systematic noticing (Doughty, 1991; White, 1998; Jourdenais, Ota, Stauffer, Boyson and Doughty, 1995; Simard and Foucambert, 2013). However, there are also studies that found input enhancement ineffective in facilitating learners' noticing and intake (Leow, Egi, Nuevo, & Tsai, 2003).

Input means what the learners hear or see during classroom instruction which they attend to for its message (Nassaji & Fotos, 2011). It seems obvious, therefore, that input enhancement can play an important role in second language learning as the learners attempt to process meaning from the samples of language they are exposed to. In the second language learning process the learners may be exposed to two types input – interactional input and non-interactional input (Ellis and Gaies, 1997). In interactional input the learners are exposed to target forms in a communicative way, while non-interactional input is used by way of non-communicative action like learners reading or listening to a text. In order to transfer input into intake, noticing is essential (Sharwood Smith, 1993). Noticing implies a conscious process whereby learners store language input in their minds (Nassaji and Fotos, 2011). Thus, it follows that learners' attention must be drawn to the target input in order that the transfer of input into intake takes place.

Input enhancement may happen either internally or externally (Sharwood Smith, 1991). If the learner notices the target-forms himself or herself as a result of a process of internal cognition, it is then internal enhancement. If, on the other hand, the forms are noticed through an external agent, i.e. the teacher, or by way of an externally arranged strategy, i.e., by highlighting the target forms, it would be called external enhancement (Nassaji & Fotos, 2011). Textual Enhancement is an external form of input enhancement where relevant portions in the text are physically manipulated to make the learners notice them. Textual

Enhancement is also in line with Focus on Form Approach as in involves highlighting target forms in order to draw learners' attention.

3. Research Methodology

3.1. Research Instruments

The study employed a series of tests, viz., Pre-Instruction Test, Post-instruction test and Delayed post-instruction test with a view to examining the research hypotheses. Three different teachers were selected as test raters, and the results of the tests were assumed to be indication of the learners' achievement. Authentic reading passages were chosen to teach the target grammar component, i.e, active and passive voice forms, and the selected passages aptly illustrated the active and passive voice forms in English. The questions in all tests were in multiple-choice format and all questions were in the nature of changing sentences of present and past tenses and their different aspects and modes into passive voice forms.

3.2. Research Participants

The study used cluster sampling. A senior secondary school in Nalbari District in the state of Assam (India) was randomly selected to conduct the study, with the participation of 35 male students and 15 female. All of them were studying in the 12th standard in two different schools. Their average age of the students was 17 years. All of them shared the same first language and mother tongue, i.e., Assamese. Thus it was a homogeneous group of learners as far as their linguistic background is concerned. Two groups were formed out of the 50 participating students - group A and group B, each consisting of 25 pupils.

3.3. Study Procedure

The study was performed over a period of one week in two classrooms and the researcher himself gave them instruction in the target grammatical component. For the first three days, each of the two groups was in two different classes. Group A was taught Passive Voice in English through Textual Enhancement in three classes. Group B was taught the

same grammar component in as many classes without textual enhancement following the traditional method of instruction.

The present study is semi-experimental having a design involving Pre-Instruction Test, Class Instruction, Post-instruction test and Delayed post-instruction test. To begin with, the participants were made to appear in a pre-test to see that the research subjects were homogeneous before the classroom instruction as far as their knowledge of passive voice in English is concerned. Group A was taught with the help of textual enhancement in the form of textual passages that illustrated Passive Voice forms marked in bold letters. These were followed by some related tasks for the participants. Group B received instruction in Passive Voice in traditional method without any kind of textual enhancement. Both the groups were given instruction in three classes on three days in the target grammar component. All the student participants were made to take a post-instruction test for an assessment of the immediate (short-term) effects of the instruction on their knowledge of Passive Voice forms. The purpose of this test was to determine the difference between the two groups as far as their improvement of the knowledge of Passive Voice is concerned. Again on the seventh day, a delayed post-instruction test was administered on the students with a view to assessing the long-term effects that the instructions might have created on their knowledge of Passive Voice. The tests were conducted with the help of two English language teachers of the school where the experiment was conducted. The difficulty levels of the three tests administered to each of the groups were similar. All data from the results of pre-test, immediate post test and delayed post-test were collected over the next two days.

3.4. Method of Data Analysis

Simple tools of comparative statistics were used to analyse the data obtained from the experiment. The performance of the two groups at different stages of the experiment was

compared and contrasted in order to arrive at specific findings with regard to the effectiveness or otherwise of the the two different methods of classroom instruction.

4. Results and Discussion

Table 1 shows the individual scores of all the students in Group-A and Group-B, and also the average score of the students in Group-A and that of the students in Group-B. It is found that both the groups are homogeneous as far as the students' knowledge of Passive Voice is concerned. Moreover, both group –A and Group-B consist of students having closely similar average test performance (10.04 and 10.8). Thus, the students selected as subjects of the study have the kind of homogeneity that is required for authenticity of the experiment carried out with them.

Group – A		Group – B	
Student No.	Score/Out of	Student No.	Score/Out of
1	10/25	1	9/25
2	11/25	2	9/25
3	7/25	3	11/25
4	7/25	4	10/25
5	7/25	5	12/25
6	9/25	6	10/25
7	10/25	7	9/25
8	8/25	8	13/25
9	11/25	9	8/25
10	9/25	10	12/25
11	8/25	11	11/25
12	10/25	12	9/25
13	11/25	13	14/25
14	12/25	14	12/25
15	13/25	15	10/25
16	8/25	16	8/25
17	9/25	17	13/25

18	10/25	18	12/25
19	12/25	19	11/25
20	13/25	20	9/25
21	12/25	21	12/25
22	12/25	22	13/25
23	11/25	23	12/25
24	12/25	24	11/25
25	9/25	25	10/25
Average score	10.04	Average Score	10.8

Table 1: Pre-test Performance of the Students

Table 2 shows that the performance of the students in Group - A in the Post-instruction Test has increased substantially and their average score has almost doubled (10.04 as against 19.32). This shows that the students in Group – A have been able to improve their knowledge of Passive Voice in English substantially after they attended three sessions of classroom instruction based on Textual Enhancement. On the other hand, students in Group-B, who also received three sessions of classroom instruction, but without textual enhancement, have not been able to improve their understanding of the Passive Voice forms in English. Their average score in both the tests is identical (10.8 and 11.48)

Group – A		Group – B	
Student No.	Score/Out of	Student No.	Score/Out of
1	20/25	1	12/25
2	19/25	2	13/25
3	17/25	3	12/25
4	17/25	4	12/25
5	18/25	5	15/25
6	20/25	6	10/25
7	19/25	7	9/25
8	18/25	8	13/25
9	21/25	9	10/25
10	19/25	10	13/25

11	18/25	11	10/25
12	20/25	12	9/25
13	19/25	13	12/25
14	17/25	14	13/25
15	18/25	15	10/25
16	19/25	16	9/25
17	19/25	17	14/25
18	20/25	18	11/25
19	22/25	19	11/25
20	23/25	20	10/25
21	19/25	21	12/25
22	21/25	22	13/25
23	20/25	23	11/25
24	22/25	24	12/25
25	18/25	25	11/25
Average score	19.32	Average Score	11.48

Table 2: Post-instruction test Performance f the Students

Table 3 reveals that the average performance of the students in group-A decreased considerably in the Delayed Post-instruction Test compared to that in the Post-instruction Test ($19.32 - 15.72=3.6$). However, the performance of the students in Group-B has been almost the same in the Delayed Post-instruction test as in the other two tests (10.8, 11.48 and 11.52). There is no significant difference in the results of the three test for the Group-B students.

Group – A		Group – B	
Student No.	Score/Out of	Student No.	Score/Out of
1	17/25	1	13/25
2	16/25	2	12/25
3	14/25	3	12/25

4	15/25	4	13/25
5	16/25	5	14/25
6	16/25	6	11/25
7	15/25	7	10/25
8	15/25	8	12/25
9	14/25	9	11/25
10	15/25	10	12/25
11	17/25	11	11/25
12	16/25	12	10/25
13	17/25	13	11/25
14	17/25	14	12/25
15	16/25	15	10/25
16	16/25	16	9/25
17	15/25	17	13/25
18	14/25	18	12/25
19	17/25	19	12/25
20	15/25	20	10/25
21	18/25	21	11/25
22	17/25	22	13/25
23	15/25	23	12/25
24	17/25	24	12/25
25	13/25	25	10/25
Average score	15.72	Average Score	11.52

Table 3: Delayed Post-instruction test Performance of the Students

5. Findings

The significant difference between the results of the Pre-instruction test and the Post-instruction test with regard to the students in Group-A is quite revealing. This reveals that the Textual Enhancement based instruction did have considerable impact on the students and helped them significantly to acquire Passive Voice forms in English. On the other hand, identical results in both the pre-instruction test and the Post-instruction test with regard to the students in Group-B reveal that the traditional instruction did not have any significant impact on the students as far as their acquisition of Passive Voice forms is concerned. However, there is also significant difference between the results of the Post- instruction test and the Delayed Post-instruction test of the students in Group-A. This reveals that their level performance decreased with time and that they were not able to retain everything that they learnt during the classroom instruction. But, the difference between the results of the Pre-instruction test and the Delayed Post-instruction test of the Group-A students is also significant ($15.72 - 10.04=5.68$). So, it confirms that the Textual Enhancement based instruction did have positive impact on the students of Group-A both in long term and in short term, though the students could not retain all the Passive Voice forms in long term.

Thus the findings of the study answer both the research questions: (i) Textual enhancement based instruction does have positive effect on the learners in acquiring Passive Voice forms in English. (ii) Textual Enhancement based instruction is more effective than Traditional Instruction in teaching grammatical forms to students. The findings, therefore, also reject both the null hypotheses.

The identical result of this study with that of Schmidt's study (2001), which found that learning language is considerably boosted up by noticing, is significant here. The findings of the present study also align with White's study (1998) relating to input enhancement, which affirmed that the learners effectively acquire the ability to recognize and produce

grammatical forms correctly if they are meaningfully exposed to a specific language component in course of engaging with some related tasks.

5. Conclusion

The aim of the present study was to investigate the effectiveness of Textual enhancement, as a strategy, on the students' ability to acquire Passive Voice forms in English. The findings confirmed that Passive Voice forms could not be learned through traditional method of grammar instruction. Much better performance of the learners that were given textual enhancement based grammar instruction implied that it is advisable to use input enhancement strategy to teach grammar. Importantly, also, the study showed that textual enhancement was successful, to a great extent, in drawing learners' attention to the target grammatical form. Thus it was found that Textual Enhancement increased the learners' knowledge of an important grammatical form in English like Passive Voice.

Summarising the final findings of the study, it can be said that in order to induce the noticing of target form in the learners and, in turn, to enhance their ability for effective intake of it, Textual Enhancement proves be clearly more useful than the practice of decontextualised teaching-learning in traditional classroom instruction. It is found that enhancing a particular form in a text is most likely to trigger noticing of that form by the learners and its desired intake. Researchers like Simard (2009) also arrived at similar findings. By resorting to textual enhancement, teachers may succeed in involving the learners with grammatical forms by means of meaningful activities.

Teachers and English language teaching practitioners may be benefitted by the findings of this study. The study also has pedagogical implications for ELF curriculum planners and syllabus designers. In view of the proven benefits of textual enhancement, this technique of instruction may be incorporated into the EFL curriculum that requiring a structural syllabus.

Despite the researcher's best efforts to conclude this study in a systematic and scientific manner, it has its own limitations, the obvious limitation being the study not taking into consideration the individual differences of the learners and the possible effects of such differences on their ESL learning performance. Moreover, the sample size in this study is relatively smaller. Therefore, it may lead one to argue that studies with much more complicated research procedures and a larger sample size would be required to establish the undisputable superiority of textual enhancement as a strategic technique in learning grammar by ESL learners with varied levels of proficiency in the language and preferences for learning styles.

Conflict of Interest: The corresponding author, on behalf of second author, confirms that there are no conflicts of interest to disclose.

Copyright: © 2025 by Dr. Anupam Dutta Author(s) retain the copyright of their original work while granting publication rights to the journal.

License: This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License, allowing others to distribute, remix, adapt, and build upon it, even for commercial purposes, with proper attribution. Author(s) are also permitted to post their work in institutional repositories, social media, or other platforms.

References

- Doughty, C. (1991). Second language instruction does make a difference: Evidence from an empirical study of SL relativization. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition*, 13, 431–469
- Ellis, R. & Gaies, S. *Impact Grammar*. Hong Kong: Addison-Wesley Longman. 1997
- Han, Z., Park, E.S., & Combs, C. (2008). Textual enhancement of input: Issues and possibilities. *Applied Linguistics*, 29, 597–618.
- Jourdenais, R., Ota, M, Stauffer, S., Boyson, B., & Doughty, C. (1995). Does textual enhancement promote noticing? A think-aloud protocol analysis. In R. Schmidt (Ed.), *Attention and awareness in foreign language learning* (Technical Report #9) (pp. 182–209).
- Lee, S.K., & Huang, H.T. (2008). Visual input enhancement and grammar learning: A meta-analytic review. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition*, 30, 307–331.
- Leow, R., Egi, T., Nuevo, A., & Tsai, Y. (2003). The roles of textual enhancement and type of linguistic item in adult L2 learners' comprehension and intake. *Applied Language Learning*, 13, 1–16. *74 Language Teaching Research* 23(1)
- Nassaji, Hossein and Sandra Fotos. *Teaching Grammar in Second Language Classrooms Integrating FormFocused Instruction in Communicative Context*. Routledge: New York and London. 2011 [2]
- Schmidt, R. (2001). Attention. In: P. Robinson (Ed.), *Cognition and second language instruction* (pp. 3–32). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Sharwood Smith, M. (1991). Speaking to many minds: On the relevance of different types of language information for the L2 learner. *Second Language Research* 7, 118-132.
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/026765839100700204>

- Sharwood Smith, M. Input Enhancement in Instructed SLA. Cambridge University Press. *SSLA*, 15, 165-169. 1993
- Simard, D., & Foucambert, D. (2013). Observing noticing while reading in L2. In J.M. Bergsleithner, S.N. Frota, & J.K. Yoshikawa (Eds.), *Noticing and second language acquisition: Studies in honor of Richard Schmidt* (pp. 25–38).
- Simard, D. (2009). Differential effects of textual enhancement formats on intake. *System*, 37, 124–135.
- White, J. (1998). Getting the learner's attention. In C. Doughty, & J. Williams (Eds.), *Focus on form in classroom second language acquisition* (pp. 85–113). New York: Cambridge University Press.