

The Role of Textual Input Enhancement in the Second Language Acquisition of English Passive Voice

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Key words: Textual Input Enhancement, Explicit, the second language acquisition, English passive voice

ABSTRACT

The question of whether or not grammar should be taught has been determinedly debated in the fields of language pedagogy and second language acquisition. Some scholars (e.g. Ellis, 2003) are against form-oriented language instructions such as the Grammar Translation Method, because they state that grammar is acquired naturally if students are exposed to the sufficient input so there is no need to be taught. Others (e.g. White, 1987) have an opposing opinion, focusing on the inclusion of formal grammar teaching. They argue that instruction is necessary, as some grammatical features cannot be acquired naturally. Taking into consideration that both techniques aim to present the input in such way that learners' attention is drawn to the target feature, the research conducted here focuses on how textual input enhancement affected the acquisition of the passive construction in English in the long term that compares traditional 'form-focused' instruction. Sharwood Smith (1991:118) defines input enhancement as 'the process by which language input becomes salient to the learner.'

Ninety Libyan students from one Libyan university participated in the study, were randomly assigned to one of three different conditions; enhancement, explicit and control groups. Participants in the enhancement group received enhanced reading passages in English with all passive forms highlighted; participants in the explicit group received explicit teaching and participants in the control group received no enhanced reading texts or instructions.

An analysis of the participants' responses revealed that participants in the explicit group show better knowledge of English passive than the enhancement and control groups. However, they were unable to show further improvement in the delayed post-test (long term) as the enhancement group did. The results of this study showed that textual input enhancement proven to be more effective in the long term than explicit and no instruction conditions.