

The role of explicit and implicit elaboration of input modification in developing vocabulary retention and recall among Iranian EFL high and low achievers

¹Samira Hassanvand, ²Bahman Gorjian*, ³Abdolmajid Hayati

¹Department of TEFL, Science and Research Branch, Islamic Azad University, Khouzestan, Iran

²Department of TEFL, Abadan Branch, Islamic Azad University, Abadan, Iran

Corresponding author: bahgorji@yahoo.com

³Department of TEFL, Science and Research Branch, Islamic Azad University, Khouzestan, Iran

Abstract- This study reported on the use of bold and underlined words as reading strategies to develop reading skill of intermediate students. This skill is highly affected by the context in which it occurs, so it is helpful to use interesting materials that make students frustrated during reading comprehension. The role of bold and underlined words and their effects on the vocabulary learning and reading skill, as a facilitator of learning is somehow rarely explored in Iranian universities. The reason for this may have been the weak performance of intermediate students in reading as a foreign language (EFL). Thus, these studies investigated the role of bold and underline vocabularies on EFL male and female learners' reading skill. To achieve this purpose, a language proficiency test was administered to one hundred students, and then 90 intermediate language learners were selected. This test was considered as the pre-test of this study. The subjects were instructed to use bold and underline strategies during reading courses at the university. At the end of the treatment period, a parallel post-test was administered to the groups. T-test analysis of the data determined the positive effect of bold and underline strategies on developing vocabulary retention and recall among intermediate EFL learners ($p < 0.05$). Results showed that male and female low achievers outperformed the male and female high achievers.

Key words- Explicit; Implicit; Elaboration; Input modification; Vocabulary retention; recall; Reading comprehension

1. Introduction

Reading comprehension is an important skill and in fact one of the platforms in which a learner can show his ability in a foreign language ([8], [9]). It has its own benefits: a) reading for pleasure like newspapers, magazines, journals and so on, b) reading for educational purposes, literacy in a foreign language or receive educational degrees. Although simplification can enhance comprehensibility for EFL learners, meanwhile it may seriously reduce the utility for language learning in other ways. Consider simplification in complex structures, in spite of this fact simplification can improve comprehensibility, but removal of main linguistic items may result in lack of knowledge about that certain structures [19]. It is an issue which is stated by [13] for the first time and later [5] has developed this idea. They believe that teachers can present materials for better understanding in the classrooms in three ways: explanation, simplification, and elaboration [19]. In the last decades, there has been a shift from strictly communicative methods to methods including focus on form in the communicative language teaching classroom.

Long [12] refers to the topic of focus on form after a long period of denial of teaching grammatical forms. However, the purpose of this change was not to go back to the teaching of isolated and de-contextualized grammatical forms but its main purpose was to include the use of forms in the communicative classroom. Many

language teachers and researchers have shared their concern that the teaching of linguistic forms had to be included in the communicative language classroom ([5]; [11]; [14]). It is a skill which measures the amount of the students' understanding of the passages in the target language. It is used for students who are in ESL or EFL settings. In this situation test of reading comprehension helps the teacher to measure and estimate their learning in second or foreign language.

Although there is a productive and abundant line of research, which Doughty [3] reviews in a comprehensive way into the effects of orally modified input and interaction in L2 comprehension and Second Language Acquisition (SLA), only written simplified and elaborated input will be considered here for a focused study. Modifications to input and interaction in the written mode have been of two types: Simplification and Elaboration. Simplification removes difficult vocabulary items and complex syntactic structures from a text originally written by a native speaker. This results in a simplified text that is made easier to comprehend, since the two major factors determining readability which is reflected in most readability formulae [7], are lexis and syntax. By so doing, the readability of the text could be reduced to a desired level.

Elaboration, on the other hand, differs from simplification in that it retains difficult vocabulary items and complex syntactic structures and, instead, attempts to increase text comprehensibility by way of, for example,

providing definitions of difficult vocabulary items, paraphrasing, and enriching semantic detail. Input modification in the direction of elaboration is preferred on the following grounds: Firstly, elaboration retains the very material that L2 learners need for their SLA. Secondly, it provides non-native speakers with natural native speaker discourse models. Last, but not least, elaboration is generally almost as effective as simplified input in facilitating a higher level of comprehension than unmodified input (e.g. [6]; [16]; [5]).

Previous written text modification studies have been motivated by Long's Interaction Hypothesis. This hypothesis asserts that (a) input modification turns into (b) comprehensible input and the final chain of this process will be (c) language acquisition on the part of the learners [12]. These studies have sought to provide a link, in two steps, between modified text, whether by simplification or elaboration, and enhanced L2 reading comprehension (step 1), and between comprehensible text, as a result of modification, and SLA (of lexis as an often adapted measure of acquisition) (step 2). The majority of these studies, however, have been able to investigate only the first step of relationship ([1]; [15]; [19]).

It has been consistently found that when simplified and elaborated texts are compared to unmodified texts in terms of L2 reading comprehension, simplified texts are statistically significantly more comprehensible than unmodified texts and that there is no statistically significant difference between the comprehensibility of simplified and elaborated texts.

The results of the above studies, except for Urano (2000), show that there is no significant difference in L2 vocabulary acquisition between reading elaborated and unmodified text [17] and between reading elaborated and simplified text [2]. Urano [18] reports a significant difference between lexical elaboration and lexical simplification in the scores of a form-recognition text rather than a meaning-recognition text.

3. Methodology

3.1. Participants

Participants of this study will be 150 male and female college students, ranging from 19 to 39 years old students of Islamic Azad University, Dezfoul Branch, at two levels of primary and advanced level of proficiency. In order to make samples homogeneous, they will participate in a TOEFL test which examines students' reading skill. These homogeneous students then will be divided into six groups, one as a control group and one as experiment for each level of proficiency. In other words, we can call them as follows: three control groups (primary, intermediate, and advanced), and three experimental groups (Primary, intermediate, and advanced). Two groups of primary level will be compared: control and experimental. In the same way two groups of advanced level will be compared.

3.2. Instruments

Three types of instruments will be used in this research. First, a TOEFL test will be used to measure the subjects' knowledge of English at the first step of the research. This test should include 50 multiple-choice items which examines the vocabulary knowledge of students in two levels of proficiency. This test involves five passages; each passage covers 10 items in the examination. Then another examination will be used, one week after the TOEFL test. In this examination researcher uses the simple font for all passages. Once again this examination includes 50 multiple-choice items which examines the vocabulary knowledge of students. At least, the same test after three weeks of treatment will be used again as a post-test. The story is a little different in the last examination. The certain vocabularies will be written in a different way; some of them will be bold and others will be underlined. The researcher wants to understand the possible differences between two groups of participants.

3.3. Procedure

Experimental groups should pass complementary sessions in order to improve their reading strategies such as recognizing bold and underlined words in the passages. The experimental groups (primary and advanced) will take part in a course which researcher calls it treatment. In this course which lasts two weeks and each week three sessions, each session lasts 90 minutes; students will attend in a class which is hold in the university. The teacher teaches them how to understand the meaning of the words which are bold or underlined. The teacher should make enough motivation in the students to use and identify new words by using these techniques.

Three different steps will be done to fulfill the objectives of this study. First, it will be a descriptive analysis of the whole subjects' performance on the TOEFL test to select the homogeneous group. Second, after making sure that our subjects are homogeneous and also after post test, we will have descriptive analysis, we will compare our experimental groups' performance with control group. By this analysis we will find that which group has better performance over others. Finally, we will find that whether there is a difference between our experimental groups' means and our control groups' means. The gathered data were analyzed through One-way ANOVA.

4. Results

To test the research hypotheses, the researcher dealt with comparing language learning strategy regarding, a parametric technique for analyzing the quantitative data. In this study, one of the independent variables was input modification including bold form and the other was underlined words. In this way, the study investigated the role of the independent variables through *t*-test, in order to find out, whether this strategy with bold and underline word influence students' means of reading skill (i.e. dependent variable) of participants, low and high achievers Iranian EFL university students at the intermediate level of English reading proficiency or not.

To do so, students' reading exam was conducted at the first at the end of the semester as the pretest and post-test of reading. Two tests were based on the reading test of modified version of the CELT through which the students' scores were recorded.

To indicate the mean differences between the high group tests, the researchers followed inferential statistics of One-way ANOVA as it is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. One-way ANOVA of High Group (pre, immediate and delayed post-tests)

Model	High group	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Mean Square		10.243	2	5.121	10.867	.000*
Regression on Residual		12.724	27	.471		
Total		22.967	29			

*Significant at ($p < 0.05$)

Table 2. One-way ANOVA of Low Group (pre, immediate and delayed post-tests)

Model	High group	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression on Residual		14.013	2	7.007	40.367	.000*
Residual		4.687	27	.174		
Total		18.700	29			

*Significant at ($p < 0.05$)

Table 1 indicates that the differences between the High group pre-test and immediate and delayed post-test is significant since the F-observed ($F_0 = 40.251$) is greater than F-critical ($F_c = 5.46$).

Then researchers followed inferential statistics of One-way ANOVA as it is presented in Table 2.

Table 2 indicates that the differences between the pre-test and immediate and delayed post-test is significant since the F-observed ($F_0 = 40.367$) is greater than F-critical ($F_c = 5.46$).

5. Discussion and Conclusion

In general, the reading of all groups improved. It indicated that the above mentioned strategies are effective in improving EFL reading skill of university students. This result can be more approved by this evidence that there was a significance difference between the means of pre-tests and post-tests. The means of the post-tests were higher than pre-tests. Also, F-observed were much greater than F-critical. The reason for the better performance of experimental groups in using bold and underlined words strategies might be due to the fact that, these strategies may help them to recognize the meaning of new words in the passages. So these strategies led them go through significant comprehension.

One possible explanation of such result is that positive and correct use of such learning strategies by students helps them to enhance their learning vocabulary and reading skill ([19], [20]). The students would not feel bored with the environment. This would as well lead to greater concentration on learning materials. The results of the present study revealed that though all groups had progress in reading and vocabulary items, the students in the lower achiever group yielded a better performance.

The results of present study are not in line with the study that ([21], [22]) did, it was designed to determine whether a statistically significant difference exists in the extent of language learning strategy use between higher proficiency and lower proficiency EFL students. The study found that higher proficiency EFL students use learning strategies more often than lower proficiency EFL students. The results of the study indicated that there are significant differences among high and low achiever groups and intermediate group's one. Based on these results, researchers found that simple font of words cannot evoke learners' mental processes and they are not able to remember the words after longer time gaps. This fact would be the result of this fact that low achiever group and most of the students in the primary levels of learning other languages use some strategies like memorization and try to remember the memorized materials after short period of time. In general, these students are book-oriented. On the other hand, high achiever group just rely on their knowledge of language and they do perform as "they think they know English"; this faded self-reliance leads them to false insight of learn better than others. Most of these kinds of students learn new materials in the "contextualized" way. They learn vocabulary items in the text and they use their guessing strategies rather than their long-term memory [10].

The performance of low achiever group was better both on retention and recall examinations (immediate and delayed post-tests), while it was true about high achiever and intermediate groups just in retention examination (immediate post-test). It was obvious based on the statistics which are represented in chapter four. With regard to the yield results researcher can claim that above mentioned strategies were useful in the present study. Since the referential statistics indicated the significant

differences among three groups, the research question will be accepted. It means that these strategies (bold and underlined words) can help the learners in order to guess and recognize the meanings of the new words.

Learning vocabulary items is one of the central elements of learning in EFL setting especially in reading comprehension. In EFL teaching, it is an aspect that needs special attention and instruction. In order to provide effective instruction [23], it is necessary for teachers of EFL to examine the factors, conditions, and components that underlie reading effectiveness in the classroom. One of these factors is the level of ability. So this study aimed at understanding the extent that bold and underlined words and the level of ability affect their performance among Iranian intermediate students [24-25].

The purpose of this study was to determine the effectiveness of these strategies (bold and underlined words) designed to assist students in improving learning vocabulary items in reading comprehension course. At the end of the course all experimental groups were administered the post- tests and the result of the tests were compared to find the effect of training. The results of the study confirmed that the vocabulary learning could be improved through instruction in language learning strategies (bold and underlined words) [26].

The studies mentioned above revealed the fact that instruction of reading strategies of bold and underlined words for intermediate language learners among males and females were pedagogically effective and precipitate strategy use. If strategy training to enhance the reading skill is felt advantageous, it should be used to notifying intermediate language learners of reading strategies of bold and underlined words which they have to apply to make them better readers of English. However, the role of other strategies in promoting this skill should not be ignored.

In language classroom settings, it is suggested that language teachers familiarize their intermediate language learners with privileges of cognitive reading strategy of bold and underlined words to sharpen their favor so as to improve their reading ability. Since this study manifested that explicit instruction on cognitive reading strategy of bold and underlined words were useful for intermediate learners of English. It is recommended that language teachers explicitly instruct their intermediate language learners in the use of these strategies, and also leave them to utilize it on their own.

Therefore, it is the duty of language teachers to introduce all kinds of strategies and their use to their students. In addition, encouraging learners to use these cognitive strategies in particular along with other types of reading strategies is fruitful for both teachers and learners. It will help both groups to be successful in their jobs. In addition to important implications and recommendations for foreign language teachers regarding teaching vocabulary, this study also suggests areas that need further research since the study was narrowed to particular learners. Therefore, the following suggestions are made to be taken up as sources of further and supplementary studies. Different situational and learner factors can influence the learners' use of LLSs among which only sex (gender) and subjects' proficiency level

were not investigated in the present research. There are other important variables like subjects' major, motivation, psychological type, and so on not yet investigated among Iranian EFL learners which can serve as interesting areas for future research.

This study investigated the role of one reading strategies (bold and underlined words) in male and female students' reading proficiency and does not consider the other language skills (speaking, writing, and listening) and other strategies (other cognitive strategies, meta-cognitive, social, affective, compensation strategies). The researchers can investigate the above mentioned statements in the future research.

References

- [1] R. L. Brown, A Comparison of the Comprehensibility of Modified and Unmodified Reading Materials for ESL. *University of Hawaii, Working Papers in ESL*, 6, (1985), pp. 49-79.
- [2] H. Chung, *Effects of Elaborative Modification on Second Language Reading Comprehension and Incidental Vocabulary Learning*. Unpublished Master's Thesis. University of Hawaii'i, at Manoa. (1995).
- [3] C. Doughty, Negotiating the Linguistic Environment. University of Hawaii'I, *Working Papers in ESL*, 18, (1991). pp. 47-85.
- [4] C. Doughty, & J. Williams, *Focus on Form in the Classroom Second Language Acquisition*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. (1998).
- [5] R. Ellis, *The Study of Second Language Acquisition*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. (1994).
- [6] R. Ellis, *Task-based Language Learning and Teaching*. Oxford : Oxford University Press. (2003).
- [7] H. Farhady, A. Jafarpour, & P. Birjandi, *Language Skills Testing: From Theory to Practice*. SAMT Publications, Iran. (1994).
- [8] B. Gorjian, A. R. Pazhakh, & K. Parang, An investigation on the effect of critical thinking (CT) instructions on Iranian EFL learners' descriptive writing: A case of gender study. *Advances in Asian Social Science*, 1(1), (2012), pp. 114-118.
- [9] B. Gorjian, A. R. Pazhakh, & M. Naghizadeh, Comparative study of conjunctive adverbials (CAs) in native researchers' (NRs) and non-native researchers' (NNRs) experimental articles. *Advances in Asian Social Science*, 1(2), (2012a), pp. 224-247.
- [10] B. Gorjian, M. Alipour, & R. Saffarian, The effect of multisensory techniques on reading comprehension among pre-intermediate EFL learners: The case of gender. *Advances in Asian Social Science*, 1(2), (2012c), pp. 192-196.
- [11] P. M. Lightbown, Anniversary article: Classroom SLA research and second language teaching. *Applied Linguistics*, 21, (2000), pp. 431-462.
- [12] M. H. Long, Input and Second Language Acquisition Theory. I. S. M. Gass and C. G. Madden (Eds.), *Input in Second Language Acquisition*. (pp. 377-393). Rowley, MA: Newbury House, (1985).
- [13] M. H. Long, & Robinson, P. Focus on Form: Theory, Research and Practice. In C. Doughty and Williams (Eds.), *Focus on Form in Classroom Second Language Acquisition* (pp. 15-41). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. (1998).
- [14] J. M. Norris, & L. Ortega, Effectiveness of L2 instruction: A research synthesis and Quantitative meta-analysis. *Language Learning*, 50, 4, (2000), pp. 617-673.
- [15] S. Y. Oh, Two Types of Input Modification and EFL Reading Comprehension: Simplification versus Elaboration. *TESOL Quarterly*, 35, (2001), pp. 69-96.
- [16] J. Pine, The Language of Primary Caregivers. In C. Gallaway and B. Richards (Eds.), *Input and Interaction in Language Acquisition*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. (1994).
- [17] A. D. Silva, *Text Elaboration and Vocabulary Learning*. Unpublished Master's Thesis, University of Hawaii,i, at Manoa. (2000).
- [18] K. Urano, *Lexical Simplification and Elaboration: Sentence Comprehension and Incidental Vocabulary Learning*. Unpublished Master's Thesis, University of Hawaii,i, at Manoa. (2000).
- [19] Y. Yano, M. S. Long, & Ross, The Effects of Simplified and Elaborated Texts on Foreign Language Reading Comprehension. *Language Learning*, 44, (1994). pp. 189-219.
- [20] Y. Zhang, S. Wang, L. Wu, Y. Huo, Multi-channel diffusion tensor image registration via adaptive chaotic PSO, *Journal of Computers*, 6(4), (2011), pp. 825-829.

- [21] Y. Zhang, L. Wu, G. Wei, S. Wang, A novel algorithm for all pairs shortest path problem based on matrix multiplication and pulse coupled neural network, *Digital Signal Processing*, 21(4), (2011), pp. 517-521.
- [22] Y. Zhang, L. Wu, Crop Classification by forward neural network with adaptive chaotic particle swarm optimization, *Sensors*, 11(5), (2011), pp. 4721-4743.
- [23] Y. Zhang, L. Wu, A novel algorithm for APSP problem via a simplified delay pulse coupled neural network, *Journal of Computational Information Systems*, 7(3), (2011), pp. 737-744.
- [24] Y. Zhang, Z. Dong, L. Wu, S. Wang, A hybrid method for MRI brain image classification, *Expert Systems with Applications*, 38(8), (2011), 10049-10053.
- [25] Y. Zhang, S. Wang, L. Wu, Y. Huo, Artificial Immune System for Protein folding model. *Journal of Convergence Information Technology*, 6(1), (2011), 55-61.
- [26] Y. Zhang, L. Wu, Optimal multi-level Thresholding based on Maximum Tsallis Entropy via an Artificial Bee Colony Approach. *Entropy*, 13(4), (2011), 841-859.



Bahman Gorjian obtained his PhD in TEFL from Research and Science Center of Khurasgan University in Isfahan Province. In 2006, he was appointed Assistant Professor at TEFL Department, Abadan Branch, Islamic Azad University, Abadan, Khuzestan Province, Iran. He is currently working within several research areas covering TEFL, applied linguistics, psycholinguistics, individual differences and teaching and testing EFL. He can be reached at:

bahgorji@yahoo.com,
Cell phone: 00989161310917

Vitae