

EFL Learners' Incidental Acquisition of English Phrasal Verbs through Enhanced Extensive Reading vs. Unenhanced Extensive Reading

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Abstract

Acquiring vocabulary, as a significant and challenging part of language learning process, has always been consistent with reading. In this study, the researchers examined the effect of enhanced extensive reading on EFL learners' incidental acquisition of English vocabulary, with specific focus on phrasal verbs. Twenty five homogenized participants were selected and divided into two groups of A (experimental group) and B (control group), with 12 and 13 students in each group respectively (N=25). The experimental group received enhanced extensive reading instruction, while the control group received unenhanced extensive reading instruction. After administering a pre-test and a post-test, collecting data and statistical analysis, the results revealed that the learners who received enhanced extensive reading outperformed the ones who received unenhanced extensive reading instruction.

Keywords: enhanced extensive reading, incidental acquisition, phrasal verbs, unenhanced extensive reading

Introduction

Within language study and teaching context, vocabulary has always been counted as an important linguistic feature to instruct. As for the learners, it is a fundamental part of language learning and a significant means of communication. Accordingly, vocabulary growth and language development seem to be challenging for the learners, especially when it is going to be achieved through explicit instruction. It is believed that vocabulary acquisition is a sequential and gradual process. Nation (2001) states that a learner's development of vocabulary knowledge grows with a progression from the receptive level to the productive level.

As an important skill, reading can expand the border of learners' knowledge and lead to the conceptual development in their learning as well as positively affecting different areas of a language. Educators, on the other hand, have been attracted to extensive reading (ER) increasingly as one of the approaches that is a highly effective form of L2 reading instruction. Grabe & Stoller (1997), Horst (2005) and Piagada & Schmitt (2006) emphasize the important role of ER in helping learners to gain fluency in the areas of word recognition, vocabulary acquisition and developing reading comprehension. The researchers claim that vocabulary learning is a demanding task and when it comes to phrasal verbs, it can get even more difficult and challenging. Cornell (1985) & Side (1990) suggest that phrasal verbs create special difficulty for learners because of their diversity both in terms of number and forms.

The Problem

There is no doubt that vocabulary learning is one of the most problematic and time consuming sub- skills to master for language learners. There has been a considerable number of

investigations supporting this belief about reading and indirect vocabulary acquisition (Meister, Nation and Saragi 1978, Jenkins, Stein, and Wyoski 1984 and Anderson, Herman and Nagy 1987. Thesis findings have revealed that children could incidentally learn vocabulary during the reading process. Anderson, Herman and Nagy (1987: 261) claim that the results are beyond reasonable doubt that incidental learning of word meanings does take place during normal reading. Krashen (1989) extends this view to second language acquisition on the basis of his Input Hypothesis. In the present study, since the major concern was providing an appropriate input to expand students' phrasal verb knowledge, the researchers have equipped the learners with enhanced and unenhanced extensive readings for the purpose of answering the following research questions and testing the related null hypotheses:

1. Does enhanced extensive reading significantly affect EFL learners' incidental acquisition of English phrasal verbs?
2. Do enhanced and unenhanced extensive readings have a significant differential effect on EFL learners' incidental acquisition of English phrasal verbs?

Ho1: Enhanced extensive reading does not significantly affect EFL learners' incidental acquisition of English phrasal verbs.

Ho2: Enhanced and unenhanced extensive readings do not have a significant differential effect on EFL learners' incidental acquisition of English phrasal verbs?

Literature Review

According to Gass' (1988) information processing framework, L2 knowledge acquisition consists of five stages: apperceived input, comprehended input, intake, integration, and output. Paribakht and Wesche (1997) used Gass's framework and compared two settings of instruction; Reading Only vs. Reading plus Treatment. According to their study, it was resulted that students in the Reading Plus group improved their vocabulary knowledge significantly better than the ones in the Reading Only group. Zimmerman (1997), Laufer (2003), and Min (2008) studied the effectiveness of 'reading only' with 'reading supplemented with activities' and reported that the second one leads to significant gains and retention. Sardegna and Song (2014), state that 'reading plus activity' approach increases the likelihood of incidental achievements through extensive reading.

In applied linguistics, the cognitive process that is related to the elaboration refers to facing unfamiliar words in a textual input and the incidental learning of those new vocabularies, and that addresses to the "involvement load hypothesis" first proposed by Laufer and Hulstijn (2001). They suggest that the amount of motivational-cognitive involvement is an explanatory and predictive variable in incidental vocabulary acquisition. Krashen's (1985) input hypothesis and (2004) pleasure hypothesis also support extensive reading as an acceptable approach for language learners to acquire language by understanding the message in a low anxiety context. According to Krashen (1989, p. 440) when the language acquisition device is available, learners subconsciously acquire the target language. Incidental acquisition, on the other hand is a theory of language, stating that acquiring one element of the language happens, while the main concentration is to do something else. Coady and Huckin (1999:182) define incidental learning as a "by product" not the "target", of the main cognitive activity. Shintani and Ellis (2011) stated that "incidental acquisition is the learning of one L2 feature without intention while attention is focused on some other aspect of the L2 such as semantic meaning" (p. 608). According to

Krashen (1985), in incidental learning emphasize is on the input or interaction in which the specific words are noticed. Studies regarding the effect of input received by extensive reading revealed that the learners' incidental learning through this approach mostly concerns vocabulary development (Day et al., 1992; Cho and Krashen, 1994; Hayashi, 1999; Rott, 1999; Sheu, 2003; Pigada & Schmitt, 2006; Brown et al., 2008), as well as the other skills such as reading fluency and comprehension.

There are many types of enhancement techniques added to extensive reading employed by researchers such as reading include dictionaries (Cho & Krashen, 1994; Hulstijn et al., 1996; Laufer, 2000) and glosses (Hulstijn et al., 1996; Laufer, 2003). These techniques have made advantageous contribution to incidental acquisition. Similarly, some other researchers resulted partial grammatical gains by testing the syntactic structure of students' writing (Tudor and Hafiz, 1989). However, no studies have been yet conducted to investigate the incidental acquisition of specific vocabulary and grammatical feature as a unit through extensive reading with communicative output activity.

Methodology

Participants

The current study was carried out in three intermediate adult EFL institute classes in Garmsar, Iran. It comprised 37 intermediate adult learners studying New Interchange 2 student's book by Jack C. Richards. The learners attended these classes three days a week receiving two hours of instruction each session, i.e. six hours of instruction each week. The participants were females aged between 20 and 30. The institute administered a placement test to determine the learners' proficiency level, i.e. intermediate level. Then, the homogeneity test was administered. After scoring and calculating the mean and standard deviation, the ones whose score fell one standard deviation below and above the mean were selected as the homogeneous EFL learners available for the study. As a result, 12 and 13 participants were selected for the experimental and control groups, respectively.

Instrumentation

Before commencing the study, the placement test was administered to determine the learners' proficiency level. Then, for the purpose of participants' homogeneity, Nelson Proficiency test was given to them. After the homogeneity test, the test normality test was administered check if the data was normally distributed. Therefore, the parametric statistic method of t-test was used to show the effectiveness of the treatments. Other instruments were a pretest and a posttest.

Before starting the treatment, the learners in both groups were asked to take the same pretest, consisting of 50 questions, mainly "multiple choice" and "fill in the blanks" extracted from the book "English Phrasal Verbs in Use" (Intermediate) by Michael McCarthy & Felicity O'Dell. Prior to the study, in order to ensure the appropriateness of the test difficulty, the test was piloted with 15 intermediate students from another class who did not participate in the study and who were also placed in that level by the same placement test.

The result demonstrated that the pilot participants had the same score range as the main participants. Then, in addition to the regular class instruction, both groups were instructed with texts and stories enriched with phrasal verbs to read extensively in each session. It is to be noted

that the researchers had previously planned a small library to set up at the institute carrying a number of intermediate books with various genres, targeted for the research in order for the participants to choose their favorite books from, on their own choice.

Procedure

The 25 homogenized learners (N=25) were randomly divided into two groups of 12 & 13, class A as the experimental group and class B as the control group, respectively. Those in class A were targeted to receive enhanced extensive reading instruction, while class B received unenhanced extensive reading instruction. A pretest was administered to both groups to measure their proficiency level in comprehension and the use of phrasal verbs. Next, class A and B were provided with the relevant treatment during the research process. The research duration was considered to be ten sessions, two sessions of one hour and a half in a week, five weeks in a row, plus two more sessions to perform pretest and posttest.

During this period, the learners were allowed to read the books which were chosen by them from the institute's library. There was no instructional focus on phrasal verbs. The first week of the program (sessions one & two) was devoted only to group extensive reading in both classes. The purpose of this idea was to get the learners familiar with extensive reading and also heighten their interest to read for pleasure by sharing the book with their peers.

The participants of each class were divided into different groups according to the book genre they chose. Four groups of three learners were available in each class. The 90 minute classes were divided into one hour sustained silent reading (SSR) followed by half an hour of discussion in which the instructor led the discussion by asking questions about the groups' selected books and encouraged them to participate.

This section had two purposes: checking the learners' reading comprehension and making a situation for the learners to internalize the input. From the second week on, the participants of each class started to read individually. Class A was assigned one hour of SSR and half an hour of activity while class B had SSR for one hour and a half. It was possible for the learners to read as many books as they wanted on any topic chosen from the institute's library, but they were suggested to read one book per week.

Nation and Wang (1999) suggest that reading one book per week allows learners to repeat and reinforce new input (as cited in Sardegna & Song 2014). The post reading activities for class A were pair book sharing, oral book reports, giving the summary of the book, giving a review of the book, describing the books' pictures, predicting the story by reading the title of each chapter, making a list of favorite quotations and activities alike such as pictorial presentation of the book as suggested by Bamford and Day (2004).

In addition, each week the students of both groups completed a reading log and a short report on the book or chapter they had read during the week. Lastly, after the final draft of instruction, the learners in both groups were asked to participate in the posttest which was exactly the same as the pretest with the same items. Then, the results of pretest and posttest were compared using SPSS package and the effectiveness of each treatment was specified.

Results and Discussion

In this section, the results obtained from the analysis of the data are discussed in connection with the hypotheses of the study as follows:

Testing research hypothesis 1: The first phase was administering a pretest to find out the learners' proficiency level in phrasal verbs. After the test, the papers were corrected, scored and statistically calculated. The results are shown table 1 below:

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics of the Scores Obtained from Pretest

| | | experimental group in pre test | control group in pre test |
|----------------|---------|--------------------------------|---------------------------|
| N | Valid | 12 | 13 |
| | Missing | 0 | 0 |
| Mean | | 72.75 | 73.46 |
| Median | | 73.00 | 73.00 |
| Mode | | 73.00 | 73.00 |
| Std. Deviation | | 1.484 | 1.26 |
| Variance | | 2.20 | 1.60 |
| Minimum | | 71.00 | 72.00 |
| Maximum | | 76.00 | 76.00 |

Table 1 demonstrates the statistical description of the scores obtained from pretest administered to both experimental and control groups, class A and B. According to the results, the scores in pretest are almost the same in two classes.

After ten sessions of treatment, the posttest was administered to both groups. After scoring and calculation, the results were obtained. The descriptive statistics are as follows:

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics of Posttest

| | | experimental group in post test | control group in post test |
|----------------|---------|---------------------------------|----------------------------|
| N | Valid | 12 | 13 |
| | Missing | 0 | 0 |
| Mean | | 79.75 | 75.53 |
| Median | | 79.50 | 76.00 |
| Mode | | 78.00 ^a | 76.00 |
| Std. Deviation | | 2.45 | 1.94 |
| Variance | | 6.02 | 3.76 |
| Minimum | | 76.00 | 72.00 |
| Maximum | | 83.00 | 78.00 |

Table 2 presents the statistics related to the posttest administered to both experimental and control groups. The figures show the mean score, median, standard deviation and other statistical features. They show an increase in the mean score of the participants that is representative of an improvement and the effectiveness of the treatment. In this respect, paired sample t-test was used by the researchers to see whether or not the progress was statistically significant. Tables below illustrate the details of the test.

Table: 3 Paired Samples Statistics

| | | Mean | N | Std. Deviation | Std. Error Mean |
|--------|---------------------------------|-------|----|----------------|-----------------|
| Pair 1 | experimental group in post test | 79.75 | 12 | 2.45 | .708 |
| | experimental group in pre test | 72.75 | 12 | 1.48 | .428 |

Table 3 provides information about the progress the participants made after the treatment. The mean score in pretest and posttest shows that the participants have made a progress by 7 points.

Table 4: Paired Samples Test

| | Paired Differences | | | | | t | df | Sig. (2-tailed) |
|--------|--------------------|----------------|-----------------|---|---|------|------|-----------------|
| | Mean | Std. Deviation | Std. Error Mean | 95% Confidence Interval of the Difference | | | | |
| | | | | Lower | Upper | | | |
| Pair 1 | 7.00 | 3.13 | .904 | Pair 1 | experimental group in post test experimental group in pre test | 7.00 | 3.13 | .904 |

Table 4 above provides information about the effectiveness of the treatment on EFL learners. By looking at the figures, it is observed that sig is 0/000, that is lower than 0/05 (P=0/000 < 0/05). Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected, hence the treatment has been effective and the effect is statistically important.

According to these results, enhanced extensive reading significantly affects the incidental acquisition of English phrasal verbs. This finding is consistent with the studies of Cho & Krashen (1994) and Pigada & Schmitt studies (2006) who investigated the benefits of extensive reading for incidental acquisition of vocabulary. Consequent to the findings of a study by Sardegna and Song (2014) showing the incidental acquisition with a specific focus (English prepositions) through enhanced extensive reading, the findings of this research is another one that shows

incidental acquisition of a specific linguistic feature. Yet again, as stated in Sardegna and Song (2014), these findings also lend support to Min's (2008) and Rott's (1999) claim that reading plus activities leads to more incidental gains in both receptive and productive knowledge.

Testing research hypothesis 2: There was another phase in this research comparing the effectiveness of the two treatments mentioned earlier. As it was previously pointed, due to the scores' normality the parametric statistic method of T-test was used and since at this stage, the scores of two individual groups are about to be compared, independent sample t-test was used. Table 5 below shows the results in detail:

Table 5: Group Statistics

| | groups | N | Mean | Std. Deviation | Std. Error Mean |
|--------|---------|----|-------|----------------|-----------------|
| Scores | Exp | 12 | 79.75 | 2.45 | .708 |
| | Control | 13 | 75.53 | 1.94 | .538 |

Table 5 shows descriptive statistics of the two groups. By comparing the mean score of the two groups, it is observed that the score difference between the two groups is 4.2, and it is thus assumed that the treatment in experimental group was more effective. However to what extent this difference is statistically significant is shown and discussed in the following table.

Table 6: Independent Samples Test

| | Levene's Test for Equality of Variances | | t-test for Equality of Means | | | | | | |
|-----------------------------|---|------|------------------------------|-------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------------|---|-------|
| | F | Sig. | t | df | Sig. (2-tailed) | Mean Difference | Std. Error Difference | 95% Confidence Interval of the Difference | |
| | | | | | | | | Lower | Upper |
| Equal variances assumed | 1.409 | .247 | 4.77 | 23 | .000 | 4.21 | .881 | 2.38 | 6.03 |
| Equal variances not assumed | | | 4.73 | 20.96 | .000 | 4.21 | .889 | 2.36 | 6.06 |

According to table 6, the test probability (sig) is 0/000, that is lower than 0/005 ($P=0/00 < 0/05$). Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected, and the two treatments have had statistically significant differential effect on EFL learners' incidental acquisition of English phrasal verbs.

The beneficial effects of extensive reading have always been investigated. However, this study increases our knowledge regarding these effects by providing evidence suggesting that enhanced extensive reading instruction might lead to greater achievements on incidental

acquisition of English phrasal verbs. According to Sardegna and Song (2014) there are benefits such as increased reading comprehension and vocabulary, frequent encounters with the target element in meaningful contexts, and opportunities for output (i.e. opportunities to use the newly taken input and transform it into intake) that contribute positively to the acquisition of linguistic features. According to these findings, it should be stated that enhanced extensive reading could be an option for language practitioners. As Coady and Huckin (1999: 182) state, it is pedagogically efficient because it helps to develop reading fluency and general reading skills as well as to acquire linguistic forms incidentally.

Findings and Conclusions

According to the findings of the present study, enhanced extensive reading is very influential in improving learners' incidental acquisition of phrasal verbs. The findings completely support Sardegna and Song's (2014) study findings. They performed an after-school enhanced extensive reading instruction in addition to the regular school instruction. They argued that since the experimental group had some extra hours of instruction, it is not surprising that they outperformed another group. The findings of the present study are consistent with their study specially by considering the issue that this research has a specific focus (phrasal verbs) and the two groups have had extra instruction. There are, however, numerous studies investigating the benefits of extensive reading on incidental acquisition of vocabulary (Cho and Krashen, 1994; Pigada and Schmitt, 2006; Nishino, 2007).

The findings also are consistent with Min's (2008) and Rott's (1999) claims that reading plus activities leads to more incidental gains in both receptive and productive knowledge (as quoted in Sardegna & Song, 2014). The output activities after reading extensively give the learners the opportunities to have deeper mental processing of phrasal verbs, which is in line with Gass's (1988) claim regarding the benefits of output activities. Researchers have suggested that extensive reading is generally preferred on the acquisition of English knowledge because it provides the opportunity for the students to expose themselves to the target language (Grabe & Stoller, 1997; Horst, 2005; and Piagada & Schmitt, 2006). Enhanced extensive reading, additionally, provides a chance for the learners to internalize the phrasal verbs they have encountered during the treatment that helps them to produce the words in an appropriate context.

As a final word, this study illustrates some support for the use of enhanced extensive reading rather than the use of the conventional type (unenhanced extensive reading). In fact, applying enhanced extensive reading motivates, encourages, and prepares learners to increase their attention while reading, improve their competence, produce language, revise and redraft it, and finally have the chance to produce the target language by using new linguistic features taken from the texts. Lastly, they can store knowledge in their internalized system much easier, with less effort and use it later when it is needed. The main pedagogical implication of enhanced extensive reading is the instructors' role in motivating the learners to participate in post reading activities and also to make use of accurate language forms and, if necessary, spotting their errors for their improvement in the acquisition of the target element.

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