The Effect of Using Oxford Dictionary Grammatical Patterns on Iranian EFL Learners' Knowledge of English Verb Patterns

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ABSTRACT

The present study aimed at investigating the effect of using Oxford grammatical patterns on Iranian EFL learners' Verb knowledge. Having homogenized the participants by an OPT, they were divided into two thirty-student groups, one as experimental and the other as control. Afterwards, they were given an objective test of grammar as pretest. Then, the subjects in the experimental group received teaching grammar on the basis of grammatical patterns of Oxford dictionary as treatment, while the subjects in the control group received teaching grammar of Modern English I & II (1972) by M. Frank; moreover, two groups were provided with a posttest of grammar to check the effectiveness of the treatment. Analysis of data by one way ANOVA and two-way ANCOVA measurements indicated that the learners' grammar knowledge in the experimental group outperformed the control group, thus the treatment was effective and consequently the linguistic knowledge of experimental group enhanced.

KEYWORDS: Grammar, Teaching grammar patterns, Linguistic knowledge.

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1. Statement of the Problem

Teaching grammar has been always under discussion in so many works. The point is that whether to teach grammar or not. The idea of Pienemann about Teachability Hypothesis is one of them stating that while certain developmental sequences are fixed and cannot be altered by grammar teaching, other structures can benefit from instruction any time they are taught (Lightbown & Spada, 1990). Positive effects of grammar instruction is another evidence coming from a large number of laboratory and classroom-based studies as well as extensive reviews of studies on the effects of instruction over the past 20 years (R. Ellis, 1985, 1990, 1994, 2001, 2002a; Larsen-Freeman & Long, 1991; Long, 1988, 1991) that shows the importance of teaching grammar. Another reason for teaching grammar has been stated by large body of research pointing to the inadequacies of teaching approaches where the focus is primarily on meaning-focused communication, and grammar is not addressed. Extensive research on learning outcomes in French immersion programs by Swain and her colleagues showed that, despite substantial long-term exposure to meaningful input, the learners did not achieve accuracy in certain grammatical forms (Harley & Swain, 1984; Lapkin, Hart, & Swain, 1991; Swain, 1985; Swain &Lapkin, 1989).

Regarding the influence of grammar patterns on English as a second language/foreign language (ESL/EFL) linguistic knowledge (Hunston & Sinclair, 2000) and given the close relationship between ESL/EFL learners' linguistic knowledge command and their understanding of English grammar pattern, researchers have been searching for ways to effectively enhance students' knowledge of grammar by the use of teaching pattern.

In short, it can be said that pattern grammar is a novel way of describing the syntactic structure of sentences. It does not assume a hierarchical structure, but instead is based on a sequential/linear model where patterns follow each other or even flow into each other (Hunston& Francis, 2000).

The goal of this study is to investigate whether using Oxford dictionary grammatical patterns affect Iranian male and female EFL learners' knowledge of verb patterns. Accordingly, two null hypotheses were considered:
1. Using Oxford Dictionary Grammatical Patterns does not affect Iranian male EFL Learners' Knowledge of Verb Patterns.
 2. Using Oxford Dictionary Grammatical Patterns does not affect Iranian female EFL Learners' Knowledge of Verb Patterns.

1.2. LITERATURE REVIEW

In this section, some concepts about the traditional and cognitive grammar, the reasons to teach or not to teach grammar, etc were defined. Traditional grammar where the syntax of a language is described in terms of taxonomy (i.e. classificatory list) of the range of different types of syntactic structures found in the language makes its central assumption underpinning syntactic analysis in a manner that phrases and sentences are built up of a series of constituents (i.e. syntactic units), each of which belongs to a specific grammatical category and

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serves a specific grammatical function. Traditional grammar in short is the collection of prescriptive rules and concepts about the structure of the language.

In short, It can be said that traditional grammar is prescriptive because it focuses on the distinction between what some people do with language and what they ought to do with it, according to a pre-established standard . . . . The chief goal of traditional grammar, therefore, is perpetuating a historical model of what supposedly constitutes proper language. (Williams, 2005).

On the other hand, Chomsky takes a cognitive approach to the study of grammar. For Chomsky, the goal of the linguist is to determine what it is that native speakers *know* about their native language which enables them to speak and understand the language fluently: hence, the study of language is part of the wider study of cognition (i.e. what human beings know).

In the terminology adopted by Chomsky (1986a, pp. 19-56) " when one studies the grammatical competence of a native speaker of a language like English he is studying a cognitive system internalized within the brain/mind of native speakers of English". His ultimate goal in studying competence is to characterize the nature of the internalized linguistic system (or I-language, as Chomsky terms it) which makes native speakers proficient in English. Such a cognitive approach has obvious implications for the descriptive linguist who is concerned to develop a grammar of a particular language like English.

Accordingly to Chomsky (1986a, p.22) a grammar of a language is 'a theory of the I-language ... under investigation'. This means that in devising a grammar of English, one is attempting to uncover the internalized linguistic system (= I-language) possessed by native speakers of English – i.e. He is attempting to characterize a mental state (a state of competence, and thus linguistic knowledge).

Chomsky's ultimate goal is to devise a theory of Universal Grammar/UG which generalizes from the grammars of particular I-languages to the grammars of all possible natural (i.e. human) I-languages. He defines UG (1986a, p.23) as "the theory of human I-languages ... that identifies the I-languages that are humanly accessible under normal conditions". (The expression 'are humanly accessible' means 'can be acquired by human beings'.) In other words, UG is a theory about the nature of possible grammars of human languages: hence, a theory of Universal Grammar answers the question: 'What are the defining characteristics of the grammars of human I-languages?'

There are a number of criteria of adequacy which a theory of Universal Grammar must satisfy. One such criterion (which is implicit in the use of the term *Universal Grammar*) is *universality*, in the sense that a theory of UG must provide us with the tools needed to provide a descriptively adequate grammar for any and every human I-language (i.e. a grammar which correctly describes how to form and interpret expressions in the relevant language). After all, a theory of UG would be of little interest if it enabled us to describe the grammar of English and French, but not that of Swahili or Chinese.

In short, Universal Grammar is the system of categories, operations, and principles shared by all human languages and considered to be innate. Taken together, the linguistic principles of Universal Grammar constitute a theory of the organization of the initial state of the mind/brain of the language learner--that is, a theory of the human faculty for language. (Crain & Thornton, 2000).

About the principles and parameters of Universal Grammar, it's to be mentioned that the language faculty incorporates a set of universal principles which guide the child in acquiring a grammar. However, it clearly cannot be the case that all aspects of the grammar of languages are universal; if this were so, all natural language grammars would be the same and there would be no grammatical learning involved in language acquisition (i.e. no need for children to learn anything about the grammar of sentences in the language they are acquiring), only lexical learning (viz. learning the lexical items/words in the language and their idiosyncratic linguistic properties, e.g. whether a given item has an irregular plural or past tense form).

But although there are universal principles which determine the broad outlines of the grammar of natural languages, there also seems to be language particular aspects of grammar which children have to learn as part of the task of acquiring their native language. Thus, language acquisition involves not only lexical learning but also some grammatical learning.

Now, better to have a look at the basic theory of pattern grammar which rests on two simple but powerful observations, both of which stem directly from the empirical analysis of large-scale corpus data. The first is that the different meanings of polysemous words are signaled by different patterns, and the second is that words which share aspects of the same meaning share the same pattern.

In general, the pattern grammar argument is that the phraseological whole is semantically much more than just the sum of its parts. Furthermore, it is claimed—and here we turn to the second of the two observations stated above—that other adjectives which have a meaning related to the notion of validity will also have the it v-link ADJ that pattern, and adjectives having a meaning related to the notion of difficulty will also have the pattern it v-link ADJ to-inf.

A reason for renewed interest in grammar instruction is a large body of research pointing to the inadequacies of teaching approaches where the focus is primarily on meaning-focused communication, and grammar is not addressed. Extensive research on learning outcomes in French immersion programs by Swain

and her colleagues showed that, despite substantial long-term exposure to meaningful input, the learners did not achieve accuracy in certain grammatical forms (Harley & Swain, 1984; Lapkin, Hart, & Swain, 1991; Swain, 1985; Swain & Lapkin, 1989). This research suggested that some type of focus on grammatical forms was necessary if learners were to develop high levels of accuracy in the target language. Thus, communicative language teaching by itself was found to be inadequate (also see Celce-Murcia, Dornyei, & Thurrell, 1997; R. Ellis, 1997, 2002b; Mitchell, 2000).

In an early review, Long (1988) concluded that grammar instruction contributes importantly to language learning. In later reviews, R. Ellis (1990, 1994, 1997, 2001, 2002a), N. Ellis (1995), and Larsen-Freeman and Long (1991) suggest that, while instructed language learning may not have major effects on sequences of acquisition, it has facilitative effects on both the rate and the ultimate level of L2 acquisition. Similarly, a recent meta-analysis of 49 studies on the effectiveness of L2 instruction (Norris & Ortega, 2000) concludes that explicit instruction (presenting the structure, describing and exemplifying it, and giving rules for its use) results in substantial gains in the learning of target structures in comparison to implicit instruction (usually consisting of communicative exposure to the target form) alone, and that these gains are durable over time.

According to Widdowson (1990, p. 86), " . . . grammar is not a constraining imposition but a liberating force: it frees us from a dependency on context and a purely lexical categorization of reality." Given that many learners – and teachers – tend to view grammar as a set of restrictions on what is allowed and disallowed in language use – "a linguistic straitjacket" in Larsen-Freeman's words (2002: p. 103) –" the conception of grammar as something that liberates rather than represses is one that is worth investigating."

On the other hand, According to Sadeqi Banis (1997), grammar is an important part of the language, especially when EFL students are being dealt with. Foreign learners in their attempts to learn the foreign language highly benefit from grammar in order to come up with generalization and with answering to creativity and productivity. Varied courses of grammar and principal role of grammar in designing the materials also highlight the fact that grammar plays a dominant role in language learning.

Methodologists such as Krashen and Terrell (1983) tell us in their Natural Approach not to teach grammar explicitly and not to correct any learner's errors. Influenced by their viewpoint of grammar, some teachers adamantly insist that teaching formal grammar is useless and even harmful. The anti-grammar tide reached its peak in November 1985, when the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) passed a resolution against the use of isolated grammar and usage exercises not supported by theory and research.

However, this does not mean that grammar instruction is not useful. Rather, what is suggested is that learners must also have opportunities to encounter, process, and use instructed forms in their various form-meaning relationships so that the forms can become part of their inter language behavior (Larsen-Freeman, 2003).

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1. Participants

The total number of students participating in the study was 80. After the group got homogeneous by the OPT, the result was 60 male/female students participating in the population in a way that on the basis of 1SD lower than the mean they were chosen. The mean and the SD were calculated (M≈17.00, and SD≈ 2. 00), thus the scores with 1SD lower than the mean (score=15) were considered as acceptable scores. The age of these students, who studied English Translation at the first year (freshmen), ranged variously between 18 to 26 years old, a mean of 23 years.

2.2. Materials

The material included pretest which was selected from the "*objective Tests in English as a Foreign Language*" by Bloor, Bloor, Forrest, Laird, and Relton (1970). There were 22 items for pre-test that were taken by the students of both control and experimental groups. It should be noted that the pre-test was designed in the format of multiple-choice and all items had just one correct answer which were asked for by clear, to the point and short instruction in the question form. The posttest was as the same as the pretest that was given to experimental and control group both.

2.3. Procedures

Having homogenized the participants by the use of OPT, the pre-test was administered to make sure about the knowledge of grammar. Then the treatment started at this stage and the experimental group received the syllabus on the basis of Oxford grammatical pattern for 20 hours in 24 sessions. The syllabus included the lessons of Grammar along with some tasks in order to improve the student's grammar. The control group received their regular teaching in the freshman classes at the first year of academy on the basis of syllabus designed for them by the university (namely, Modern English I&II) with hours and sessions same as the experimental group.

Afterwards, a post test, the items of which were similar to the pretest was given to the control and experimental group both to check the effectiveness of our teaching procedures.

2.4. Analysis

One-way ANOVA and two-way ANCOVA were used to compare the scores of the two groups and interpret the results. The analysis of pretest and posttest were performed to determine the immediate effect of the treatment. That was the reason to know to what extent a treatment truly resulted in learning. Furthermore, the Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) (version16.0) was used to perform statistical procedures.

3. RESULTS

3.1.1) Descriptive Analysis of the Data

This section focused on the descriptive analysis of the obtained data in this study that can be summarized as followings:

The purpose behind such analysis was to see if the results obtained from experimental groups (both male & female), and control groups (both male & female) were the same or not.

Grammar	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval for Mean		Minimum	Maximum
				lower Bound	Upper Bound		
male exp.	16.9333	1.70992	.44150	5.9864	17.8803	13.00	20.00
male cont.	9.6000	2.22967	.57570	.3652	10.8348	6.00	14.00
female cont.	11.0667	3.73146	.96346	9.0003	13.1331	4.00	17.00
Total	13.5667	4.13897	.53434	12.4975	14.6359	4.00	20.00

Table 1.One Way ANOVA descriptive Statistics of the linguistic knowledge in the post test of control and experimental groups of the study

InTable1The 60 participants of the study were divided into four groups of 15 including male experimental, female experimental, male control and female control. The descriptive statistics for the post test of all four groups were observable. As shown in the table, a higher range of scores between minimum (13.00, 14.00) and maximum scores (20.00, 20.00) of experimental groups than the controls was clear, and respectively the means of experimental male and female groups (16.9333, 16.6667) was vividly higher than the mean scores of control groups (9.6000, 11.0667). Moreover, more variability of scores deviated from the mean, and similarly higher scores in standard error was indicated in the control groups rather than the experimental ones. These significant differences among the scores shown above assured the existing effect of using Oxford Dictionary grammatical patterns on the verb knowledge of the participants.

Dependent Variable: Grammar			
Oxford pattern	Mean	Std. Deviation	
postte st	16.9333	1.709 92	5
pretes t	11.8000	2.833 47	5
Total	14.3667	3.478 84	0

Table 2. One Way ANOVA descriptive Statistics for male experimental group of the study

In the table above the number of male learners participating in the treatment was 15 for whom an outstanding increase in the means of the posttest (16.9333) rather than their pre test (11.8000) was observable which indicated that the male learners of the experimental group performed better after the treatment. Moreover, the deviation of the scores from the mean of the pretest (2.47884) was reduced in the post test (1.70992).Accordingly, it can be concluded that the grammatical patterns of Oxford Dictionary affected the male linguistic knowledge.

Dependent Variable: Grammar			
Oxford pattern	Mean	Std. Deviation	
posttest	9.6000	2.22967	
pretest	9.8000	2.56905	
Total	9.7000	2.36570	

Table 3. One Way ANOVA descriptive Statistics for male control group of the study

In this table the number of male learners in the control group was 15. There was no significant difference in the means of post test (9.6000) from the pre test (9.8000). Also, no significant variability in the deviation of the scores from the means of the post test (2.22967) and pretest (2.56905) was observable.

Comparing the mean scores of the male groups of both experimental and control in table 2 & 3, a significant difference was observable which easily paved the way to the fact that the treatment was effective on male learners, and so the null hypothesis was rejected.

Dependent Variable: Grammar			
Oxford pattern	Mean	Std. Deviation	
posttest	16.6667	2.09307	
pretest	12.4000	2.61315	
Total	14.5333	3.18112	

Table 4. One Way ANOVA descriptive Statistics for female experimental group of the study

As it can be seen in the table, the number of female learners participating in the treatment was 15. There was a significance difference in the means of post test (16.6667) from the pre test (12.4000). Also, the deviation of the scores from the mean of the pretest (2.61315) was reduced in the post test (2.09307).Accordingly, it was clear that the null hypothesis is rejected, and the treatment had effect on the female learners' linguistic knowledge.

Dependent Variable: grammar			
Oxford pattern	Mean	Std. Deviation	
posttest	11.0667	3.73146	
pretest	10.4000	3.92428	
Total	10.7333	3.77773	

Table 5. One Way ANOVA descriptive Statistics for female control group of the study

In this table the number of female learners in the control group was 15. There was no significant difference in the means of post test (11.0667) from the pre test (10.4000). Besides, no significant variability in the deviation of the scores from the mean of the post test (3.73146) and pretest (3.92428) was observable.

A comparison between the mean scores of the female groups of both experimental and control in table 4 & 5 indicated an observable difference leading to the fact that the treatment was effective on female learners of the experimental groups, and so the null hypothesis was rejected.

3.1.2) Inferential Analysis of the Data

3.1.2. a) This section focused of the inferential analysis of the obtained data of the one-way ANOVA. Such analyses were done using the SPSS from which the 'Compare Means', 'Degree of Significance', 'Degree of Freedom', and the 'F value' were obtained.

Grammar			
Levene Statistic		Df2	Sig.
5.278		56	.003

Table 6.Test of Homogeneity of Variances for the posttest of all four groups of the study

In the table 6, concerning the total number of the participants the df2 was to be 56. As it could be seen, the level of significance was calculated as to be 0.03 (Sig.003 < P. value 0.05). This test indicated that there was a significance difference among the groups participating in the post test.

grammar					
	Sum of Square df		Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	643.933	3	214.644	32.770	000
Within Groups	366.800	56	6.550		
Total	1010.733	59			

Table 7.One Way ANOVA for all four groups of the study

In the table 7, the scores calculated for the Mean Square and Sum of Squares of the Between and Within Groups indicated the difference among the test scores of the groups participating in the study. The outstanding obtained scores for the F (F.32.770 > 1), and also the sig. value (Sig.000 < P. value 0.05) provided the right information to show the fact that the experimental and control groups participating in this study differed, and the mean scores of the groups had significant differences, and this couldn't be accidental.

3.1.2.b) Another inferential analysis of data was related to the degree of relationship between the pretest and the posttest in each group which was indicated by calculating through ANCOVA. The results have been illustrated in the following tables:

Dependent Variable: Grammar						
Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Oxford Pattern	197.633	1	197.633	36.090	000	.563

Table 8. Two Way ANCOVA tests of Between-Subjects Effects for male experimental group of the study

In table8 the high score of the F (36.090 > 1) indicated that there was difference between the posttest and pretest of the male experimental groups. Also, the .000 score obtained for the Sig. was lower than the P value (.000 <0.05) indicating the fact that the difference between the posttest and the pretest scores was significant.

Dependent Variable: Grammar						
Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square		Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Oxford pattern	.300	1	.300	052	822	.002

Table 9.Two Way ANCOVA tests of Between-Subjects Effects for male control group of the study

In table9 the low score for the F (.052< 1) indicated that there was not much difference between the pretest and posttest of this group, and the difference is not significant. Accordingly, the Sig. score (.822<0.05) indicated in our control group could not be obtained as the result of the treatment.
Comparing the F and Sig. scores in the tables 8 & 9, it was implied that even if there was even any sort of difference in the scores of male control group, it could be accidental and of no significance.

Dependent Variable: Grammar						
Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Oxford pattern	136.533	1	136.533	24.360	000	.465

Table 10. Two Way ANCOVA tests of Between-Subjects Effects for female experimental group

In table10 the high score of the F (24.360 > 1) indicated that there was difference between the posttest and pretest of the male experimental groups. Also, the .000 score obtained for the Sig. is lower than the P value (.000 <0.05) indicating the fact that the difference between the posttest and the pretest scores was significant.

Dependent Variable: grammar						
Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	PartialEta Squared
Oxford Pattern	3.333	1	3.333	.227	.637	.008

Table 1 Two Way ANCOVA tests of Between-Subjects Effects for female control group

In table11 the low score for the F (.227< 1) indicated that there was not much difference between the pretest and posttest of this group, and the difference was not significant. Accordingly, the Sig. score (.637<0.05) indicated in our control group could not be obtained as the result of the treatment.

Comparing the F and Sig. scores in the tables 10 & 11, it was implied that even if there was even any sort of difference in the scores of female control group, it could be accidental and of no significance.

4. DISCUSSIONS

The current investigation provided support for the value of grammar as an effective teaching method, and the use of grammatical patterns of Oxford Advanced Learners' Dictionary as evidenced by the significant differences found between the learners in the control and experimental groups. So, both null hypotheses were rejected. The debate over the use of grammar has been always a challenging area of discussion over the years, at least from the advent of communicative language teaching. Local grammar patterns as a promising approach to the description of syntactic structures allow a description of language based on re-usable component networks and can be processed efficiently by computer. On the other hand, the phrase structure grammar is supposed to produce grammatically correct sentences and only grammatically correct sentences. The research found through the data analysis that using Oxford grammatical patterns are influential in enhancing Iranian L2 learners' linguistic knowledge.

Patterns being derived from analyzing corpus data are based on actual usage. Therefore, they contain a mixture of actual lexical items (mostly prepositions) and abstract elements (such as noun group, that-clause, etc.). These grammar attempts a broader description of syntactic behavior, which is less lexicalized. Consequently, it seems that being derived from analyzing corpus data, being on the basis of actual usage, and containing a mixture of actual lexical items and abstract elements is the mystery behind of the impact of Oxford grammatical pattern on the Iranian learners.

If the subjects of this research had been chosen from among more diverse age groups and also from among other levels of proficiency in English It could have been of some difference; however, its results could benefit researchers, language teachers, course designers, material writers, and test constructors in that the main variables of the study being grammatical pattern and linguistic knowledge were undoubtedly among the major criteria for designing language courses, developing teaching materials, and testing different language skills.

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