

Reemergence of Translation and Explicit Grammar Teaching: The Case of Iranian EFL Learners' Reading Skill

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ABSTRACT

The current study aimed at investigating the effect of explicit and implicit teaching of grammar on the grammatical competence and impact of translation in the teaching process of reading comprehension on EFL learners' reading comprehension performance. There were 26 Participants from whom 14 belonged to the experimental group and the other 12 belonged to the control group. Researcher made use of two intact classes assigned as experimental and control group by chance. Initially the two intact classes took the pretests of grammar and reading comprehension. Explicit grammar teaching and translation were included in the teaching of grammar and reading comprehension in experimental group, respectively. The explicit teaching of grammar in this group unfolded based on Stern's (1992) characteristics of the techniques associated with explicit teaching. According to him, the main characteristics include: explanation, observation, trial-and-error, and monitoring. As for translation, in the experimental group the teacher made use of Persian to remove any ambiguities regarding reading comprehension teaching. The control group on the other hand received an implicit teaching of grammar and there was no translation in the teaching of reading comprehension. No use of mother tongue or Persian was used in this class and all the instructions were given in English. Upon finishing the treatment phase, the learners took the posttests of grammar and reading comprehension. The results of Analysis of Covariance run on the scores of the grammar and reading comprehension tests indicated that the explicit teaching of grammar led to the enhancement of the participants' grammatical competence.

Keywords: Translation, Explicit Grammar Teaching, Implicit Grammar Teaching, EFL Learners, Reading Skill.

1. Introduction

Holding EFL classes regarding reading comprehension, the main focus has been mostly on not applying native language. However, following this point of view can result in some deficiencies. With surveying some classes, it is notable that students are not allowed to use their mother language, thus translation plays no role in those classes. On the other hand, not being familiar with the linguistic structures used throughout the passages can stop comprehension process. Students studying with no attention to the form and meaning may have fluency in some areas, but they mostly lack the required accuracy. Some scholars

believe that while communicative activities and fluency are important, they are not enough for language learning and explicit instruction is also an important piece of language teaching puzzle (Dekeyser 1998; Ellis 1998; Lightbown and White 2005). The other main problem that occurs here is that neglecting form and meaning can confuse learners' understanding about the exact meaning of the structures which lead to misinterpretation. Applying mother tongue of the learners in the class can take the joy from the class, as the aim of those classes is not to study the mother tongue, but to learn a foreign language with some new and enjoyable strategies in order to command the required needs. However, it should be considered that learning a new language can be really troublesome in some extent and much work should be done on it and sometimes it is costly and time consuming. As a result, so many strategies have been proposed to lessen the responsibility of this complicated issue. Considering all the above mentioned points, mastery on one of the most important skills- reading- which is the theme of this thesis is not also an easy point. Most of the time, students studying the original texts written in English find them very hard both reading fluently and understanding the meaning of the text. This thesis intended to investigate the issue by naturally and academically held classes regarding the controversial analysis of the above mentioned skill and finds some better solutions in order to eradicate this delicacy.

Bottom-up theories hypothesize that learning to read progresses from children learning the parts of language (letters) to understanding whole text (meaning). Much like solving a jigsaw puzzle, bottom-up models of the reading process say that the reading puzzle is solved by beginning with an examination of each piece of the puzzle and then putting pieces together to make a picture. Two bottom-up theories of the reading process remain popular even today: One Second of Reading by Gough (1972) and A Theory of Automatic Information Processing by La Berge and Samuels (1974). Gough's (1972) One Second of Reading model described reading as a sequential or serial mental process. Readers, according to Gough, begin by translating the parts of written language (letters) into speech sounds, and then piece the sounds together to form individual words, and then piece the words together to arrive at an understanding of the author's written message. In their reading model, LaBerge and Samuels (1974) describe a concept called automatic information processing or automaticity. This popular model of the reading process hypothesizes that the human mind functions much like a computer and that visual input (letters and words) is sequentially entered into the mind of the reader.

Almost without exception, humans have the ability to perform more than one task at a time (computer specialists sometimes call this "multitasking"). Because each computer (and by comparison the human mind) has a limited capacity available for multitasking, attention must be shifted from one job to another. If one job requires a large portion of the available computer's attention capacity, then capacity for another job is limited. The term "automaticity" implies that readers, like computers, have a limited ability to shift attention between the processes of decoding (sounding out words) and comprehending (thinking about the meaning of the author's message in the text). If readers are too bogged down in decoding the text, they will not be able to focus on the job of comprehending the author's message.

Teaching grammar and also the way of teaching it has been a controversial issue among the language scholars with different interests. Is it acceptable to teach it explicitly? Or only referring it superficially known as "implicit instruction" will suffice the needs of the learners? These are some of the example questions that this study investigated in order to find some persuasive answers for them. The other critical point which was considered here was the role of explicit grammar teaching on better understanding of the reading passages. Significantly looking into these questions it is believed that, being familiar with the grammatical structures and understanding the roles of the words among the sentences and logical connections between them can facilitate the process of decoding and therefore the passages can be understood with their precise meanings while reading.

As a result, this study originated from the belief that having mastery on grammatical structures and knowing the exact equivalents of the words and phrases in L1 can facilitate the learning of L2. To this end, the purpose of this study was to find a logical connection between explicit grammar instruction and using L1 equivalents in one hand and better understanding of the context on the other hand, as reading just for reading cannot fulfill the desires of the learners and they need to deeply understand the linguistics structures and equivalents in order to command and understand the text precisely.

This study was a significant addition to the body of literature as it added another piece to the puzzle at hand and therefore provided a better picture. This is a very important attitude toward the agreement on what translation and explicit instruction of grammar can be composed of and on what degree they can be beneficial. The place and kind of the grammatical instruction has been facing abundant challenges during the last 40 years (Ellis 2001). Thus agreeing unanimously on it can be a quite long story. We needed to explore whether to apply explicit teaching in general and grammar teaching and translation in particular in our classes or not and also be clear enough about their effects in learning process. Keeping these in mind and considering the issue as a fact, this study was worthwhile as it can shed some more light on the ambiguities in the field and paves the way for the other studies. It can also be used as an ace for the coming researchers.

The present study aims to find answer to the following questions:

- 1) Do learners exposed to explicit teaching of grammar develop better grammatical competence than learners who are implicitly taught?
- 2) Does including translation in the teaching process of reading comprehension significantly influence the learners' reading comprehension ability?

This study was based on the following hypotheses in order to find a rational correlation between the explicit grammar teaching and translation and efficiency of the English learners.

- 1) Learners exposed to explicit teaching of grammar do not develop better grammatical competence than learners who are implicitly taught.
- 2) Including translation in the teaching process of reading comprehension does not significantly influence the learners' reading comprehension ability.

2. Method

The current study aimed at investigating the effect of explicit and implicit teaching of grammar on the grammatical competence of Iranian EFL learners. Moreover, the study sought to explore the impact of translation in the teaching process of reading comprehension on EFL learners' reading comprehension performance. This chapter discusses the main framework of the study including the participants, design, instrument and materials as well as procedure and data analysis.

2.1 Participants

Participants of the present study were 26 Iranian EFL learners at the intermediate level of proficiency. 14 participants belonged to the experimental and the other 12 belonged to the control groups of the study. They were selected by convenient sampling, as it was easy to access them. They were both males and females and their age ranged from 17 to 37. Native language of the majority of the participants was Turkish. Although their level was the same, they had varying degrees of English language exposure prior to the study and were from different educational backgrounds. Since both classes had been tested by class exams and teacher's evaluation, it was presumed that they were in the same level. They had different degrees and range of age.

2.2 Design

Since pure randomization was not possible in the study- it was supposed that the participants ought to be selected by mixing the whole names and choosing them randomly, but as they had limitations to attend the class on a different day, they had to be arranged based on their own existed class time-researcher made use of two intact classes. One class was used as the experimental and the other as the control group. So the present study adopted a quasi-experimental design with two groups assigned as experimental and control group by chance.

2.3 Instruments

The instruments used in the present study included Preliminary English Test (PET) and Oxford Placement Test (OPT) a description of which follows:

2.3.1 Preliminary English Test (PET)

Preliminary English Test (PET), the Cambridge Preliminary English Test, or PET for short, is a qualification in English as a Foreign Language awarded by Cambridge ESOL. The test has these sections:

A-[Reading Writing](#) are taken together - 90 minutes

B-[Listening](#) - 30 minutes

C-[Speaking](#) - an interview, 10 minutes

Since one of the main objectives of the present study was investigating the effect of translation on the reading comprehension performance of the participants, the reading section of PET was drawn on to measure the participants' reading comprehension performance. The reading sections extracted from two versions of PET (2009) and (2011) were employed as the pre and posttests of reading comprehension. The reading section of PET contains 35 items. The reading sections of these two tests were piloted on 10 participants to assure the reliability of the test for the purposes of this study.

2.3.2 Oxford Quick Placement Test (OPT)

As a proficiency test, OPT contains 60 items which test the English learners' proficiency through grammatical items in 30 minutes. The participants' performance is measured through their scores which may show their level of language proficiency from beginners to high advanced as follows:

1-17 (Beginner)

18-27 (Elementary)

28-36 (Pre-intermediate)

37-47 (Intermediate)

48-55 (Upper-intermediate)

56-60 (Advanced)

This test was used as the pre-test and post-test of grammar in the present study. This test was also piloted on ten participants.

2.4 Procedure

Initially, the two intact classes took the pretests of grammar and reading comprehension at the outset of the study (PET version 2009). One of these two classes in the study was determined as the experimental group. Explicit grammar teaching and translation were included in the teaching of grammar and reading comprehension in this group, respectively. The explicit teaching of grammar in this group unfolded based on Stern's (1992) characteristics of the techniques associated with explicit teaching. According to him the main characteristics include: explanation, observation, trial-and-error, and monitoring. Based on these characteristics the grammar was taught in the experimental group as follows:

Regarding explanation, the grammatical points were elaborated on by the teacher. In this regard efforts were made to thoroughly talk about the grammatical structures and how and when they are used.

Concerning observation and monitoring, learners were asked to use the grammatical structures strategies in some hypothetical situations provided by the teacher. The other learners were required to pay attention to these sentences and give suggestions concerning the correctness of these sentences.

With respect to trial and error, learners were required to keep a diary and write down some sentences using the grammatical points and requested to get those sentences to class and check them with other classmates and the teacher.

As for translation, in the experimental group the teacher made use of Persian and sometimes learners' mother tongue (Turkish) to remove any ambiguities regarding reading comprehension teaching. To this end, all the equivalents for the unknown vocabulary items in the texts were given to the learners. Moreover, the teacher asked the learners to translate all the reading texts sentence by sentence and compare with other peers in class.

The control group on the other hand received an implicit teaching of grammar and there was no translation in the teaching of reading comprehension. To this end, in this group the grammatical structures were not elaborated on and the learners were only given sentences in which the intended grammatical structures were embedded. Moreover, they were just exposed to some texts in which those grammatical points had been used. No use of Persian or mother tongue was made in this class and all the instructions were given in English. The definitions of the unknown words and explanations related to reading comprehension were also all conducted in English. The treatment lasted for 6 weeks for about 12 sessions, 90 minutes each.

Upon finishing the treatment phase, the learners took the posttests of grammar and reading comprehension the results of which were used to investigate the research questions.

2.5 Data Analysis

In order to answer the research questions, the researcher used the Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA) twice to analyze the data. As Ary, Jacobs, Sorensen and Walker (2013) state, ANCOVA is a statistical technique used to control for the effect of an extraneous variable known to be correlated with the dependent variable. In the present study the students' grammar and reading comprehension level before the study were variables that might have certainly related to the dependent variables of the study i.e. their grammatical and reading comprehension performance levels after the teaching.

2.6 Data Collection

The required data answering the research questions was collected in two phases:

1. Through the learners' scores in reading and grammar tests administered as the pre-test.
2. Through the learners' scores in reading and grammar tests administered as the post-test, after being exposed to one of the two ways of teaching as the treatment.

3. Results

3.1 Pilot Studies of PET and OPT

As mentioned in the previous chapter, in order to measure the participants' reading comprehension performance before and after the treatment, the reading sections of PET from two versions were used. Prior to the main administration of these tests they were piloted on ten participants with similar characteristics of the target sample to estimate their reliability and analyze the items. Tables 1 and 2 present the descriptive statistics of the two versions of PET pilot administration.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of PET Version (2009) Pilot Administration for Pretest

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation	Skewness	
	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Std. Error
Pilot PET Reading	10	17.00	28.00	22.00	4.50067	-.065	.427
Valid N (list wise)	10						

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics of PET Version (2011) Pilot Administration for Post-Test

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation	Skewness	
	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Std. Error
Pilot PET Reading	10	18.00	29.00	21.00	4.80067	-.075	.523
Valid N (list wise)	10						

Tables 3 and 4 demonstrate the reliability estimate of the two versions of PET in pilot administration.

Table 3. Reliability Statistics of PET Version (2009) Pilot Administration for Pretest

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.780	35

Table 4. Reliability Statistics of PET Version (2011) Pilot Administration for Post-test

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.786	35

The statistics, as can be seen in Tables 3 and 4 showed suitable reliability indices also, item analysis proved no malfunctioning items as all of them had acceptable item difficulty and facility indices.

As described in chapter three, in order to measure the participants' grammatical knowledge before and after the treatment the Oxford Placement Test (OPT) was administered to the participants in both groups prior to and after the main study. The OPT was also piloted on ten participants with similar characteristics of the target sample to estimate its reliability and analyze the items. Table 5 illustrates the descriptive statistics of the OPT pilot administration.

Table 5. Descriptive Statistics of OPT Pilot Administration

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation	Skewness	
	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Std. Error
Pilot OPT	10	32.00	46.00	36.00	8.23300	-.048	.758
Valid N (list wise)	10						

Table 6. Reliability Statistics of OPT Pilot Administration

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.832	60

The statistics in Table 6 showed a suitable reliability index. Moreover, item analysis proved no malfunctioning items as all of them had satisfactory levels of item difficulty and facility.

3.2 PET and OPT Main Administration

Upon ensuring the reliability of the samples of PET and OPT, they were administered to the participants of the study once before and another time after the treatment. As mentioned earlier in chapter three the total number of participants was 26. Fourteen participants belonged to the experimental and the other twelve belonged to the control groups of the study. Tables 7, 8, display the descriptive statistics of the experimental and control groups' scores on the reading comprehension of PET before the treatment, respectively.

Table 7. Descriptive Statistics of the Experimental Group's Scores on the Reading Comprehension of PET before the Treatment

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation	Skewness	
	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Std. Error
Pre-test PET Reading	14	16.00	28.00	23.00	3.23235	-.081	.584
Valid N (list wise)	14						

Table 8. Descriptive Statistics of the Control Group's Scores on the Reading Comprehension of PET before the Treatment

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation	Skewness	
	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Std. Error
Pre-test PET Reading	12	15.00	27.00	20.00	2.42002	-.068	.741
Valid N (list wise)	12						

Tables 9, 10, illustrate the descriptive statistics of the experimental and control groups' scores on the reading comprehension of PET after the treatment, respectively.

Table 9. Descriptive Statistics of the Experimental Group's Scores on the Reading Comprehension of PET after the Treatment

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation	Skewness	
	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Std. Error
Post-test PET Reading	14	21.00	34.00	27.00	5.60201	-.054	.356
Valid N (list wise)	14						

Table 10. Descriptive Statistics of the Control Group's Scores on the Reading Comprehension of PET after the Treatment

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation	Skewness	
	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Std. Error
Post-test PET Reading	12	18.00	29.00	23.00	6.00201	-.083	.498
Valid N (list wise)	12						

As mentioned previously OPT was administered to the participants in both groups prior to and after the main study to measure their grammatical knowledge. Tables 11 and 12 depict the descriptive statistics of the experimental and control groups' scores on the OPT before the treatment, respectively.

Table 11. Descriptive Statistics of the Experimental Group's Scores on the OPT before the Treatment

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation	Skewness	
	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Std. Error
Pre-test OPT	14	30.00	44.00	35.00	6.40020	-.028	.668
Valid N (list wise)	14						

Table 12. Descriptive Statistics of the Control Group's Scores on the OPT before the Treatment

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation	Skewness	
	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Std. Error
Pre-test OPT	12	31.00	44.00	32.00	5.00120	-.048	.758
Valid N (list wise)	12						

Tables 13 and 14 demonstrate the descriptive statistics of the experimental and control groups' scores on the OPT after the treatment, respectively.

Table 13. Descriptive Statistics of the Experimental Group's Scores on the OPT after the Treatment

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation	Skewness	
	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Std. Error
Post-test OPT	14	33.00	47.00	39.00	9.20200	-.078	.218
Valid N (list wise)	14						

Table 14. Descriptive Statistics of the Control Group's Scores on the OPT after the Treatment

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation	Skewness	
	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Statistic	Std. Error
Post-test OPT	12	30.00	45.00	34.00	6.30021	-.098	.515
Valid N (list wise)	12						

3.3 Investigating the First Null Hypothesis

In order to test the first null hypothesis of the present research and to see whether learners exposed to explicit teaching of grammar developed better grammatical competence than learners who were implicitly taught, an ANCOVA was run on the posttest scores of OPT belonging to the control and experimental groups. Before doing so however, there were some assumptions which needed to be checked so that running the ANCOVA became legitimate. The first assumption was the reliability of covariate, OPT here, which was an acceptable index of ($r=.832$) according to Table 4.6. The next assumption was the homogeneity of regression slopes which concerns the relationship between the covariate and the dependent variable for each of the groups. Table 15 presents the results.

Table 15. Tests of Between-Subjects Effects

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Corrected Model	39642.625 ^a	1	13214.207	11.986	.000
Intercept	26368.084	1	26368.084	23.917	.475
GP	24505.675	1	24505.675	22.228	.738
Pretest OPT	25328.340	1	25328.340	22.974	.000
GP * Pretest OPT	24577.857	1	24577.857	22.293	.816
Error	61738.338	24	1102.470		
Total	10595022.640	26			
Corrected Total	101380.959	25			

As the output generated shows the sig level of interaction term (GP*Pretest OPT) as $.816 > .05$, the assumption is not violated. The final assumption was Levene's test of equality of variances the details of which are presented in Table 16.

Table 16. Levene's Test of Equality of Error Variances

F	df1	df2	Sig.
12.891	1	24	.601

According to the output, the sig value is $.601 > .05$ showing that the assumption was not violated and that the error variance of posttest scores was equal across our two groups. Having met all assumptions, the researcher ran the ANCOVA to see whether the null hypothesis would be rejected. Table 17 details the output.

Table 17. Tests of Between-Subjects Effects

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Corrected Model	15064.765 ^a	1	7532.382	4.974	.010	.149
Intercept	44011.302	1	44011.302	29.063	.000	.338
Pretest of OPT	14851.194	1	14851.194	9.807	.003	.147
GP	29.752	1	29.752	.020	.009	.000
Error	86316.194	24	1514.319			
Total	10595022.640	26				
Corrected Total	101380.959	25				

a. R Squared = .149 (Adjusted R Squared = .119)

Considering Table 17, it could be seen that the sig value corresponding to the GP line i.e. the independent variable, turned out to be smaller than the critical value of .05 ($F(1,24) = .020$, $p=.009$, partial eta squared=.00). Therefore, the first null hypothesis of the study was rejected and it can be concluded that learners exposed to explicit teaching of grammar developed better grammatical competence than learners who were implicitly taught.

3.4 Investigating the Second Null Hypothesis

In order to check the second null hypothesis of the current investigation and to find out whether including translation in the teaching process of reading comprehension would significantly influence the learners' reading comprehension performance an ANCOVA was run on the posttest scores of PET reading comprehension belonging to the control and experimental groups. Before doing so however, some assumptions had to be checked so that running the ANCOVA would be legitimate. The first assumption was the reliability of covariate, PET here, which was an acceptable index of ($r=.780$) according to Table 4.3. The next assumption was the homogeneity of regression slopes which concerns the relationship between the covariate and the dependent variable for each of the groups. Table 4.18 displays the results.

Table 18. Tests of Between-Subjects Effects

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Corrected Model	29632.433 ^a	1	12121.402	10.754	.001
Intercept	32521.251	1	32123.002	21.845	.356
GP	21451.245	1	23123.723	23.654	.258
Pretest PET	32125.121	1	35212.412	20.721	.003
GP * Pretest PET	32123.251	1	25454.882	19.321	.645
Error	52142.269	24	1232.356		
Total	12154650.541	26			
Corrected Total	112154.356	25			

a. R Squared = .384 (Adjusted R Squared = .331)

As the output displays the sig level of interaction term (GP*Pretest PET) as .645>.05, the assumption is not violated. The final assumption was Levene's test of equality of variances the details of which are presented in Table 19.

Table 19. Levene's Test of Equality of Error Variances

F	df1	df2	Sig.
11.723	1	24	.405

According to Table 19, the sig value is .405>.05 indicating that the assumption was not violated and therefore the error variance of posttest scores was equal across our two groups. Having met these assumptions, the researcher ran the ANCOVA to see whether the second null hypothesis would be rejected. Table 20 displays the output.

Table 20. Tests of Between-Subjects Effects

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Corrected Model	12145.659 ^a	1	35232.454	3.325	.015	.175
Intercept	32010.452	1	35865.421	28.752	.000	.457
Pretest of OPT	15124.158	1	12145.214	8.405	.002	.245
GP	30.965	1	28.321	.035	.015	.000
Error	78954.321	24	1652.410			
Total	12196588.478	26				
Corrected Total	154868.352	25				
a. R Squared = .132 (Adjusted R Squared = .112)						

As Table 20 indicates, it can be noticed that the sig value corresponding to the GP line i.e. the independent variable, turned out to be smaller than the critical value of .05 ($F(1,24) = .035$, $p=.015$, partial eta squared=.00). Therefore, the second null hypothesis of the study was rejected as well and it can be inferred that including translation in the teaching process of reading comprehension significantly influenced the learners' reading comprehension ability.

4. Discussion

The present study set out to investigate the effect of explicit teaching of grammar and using translation on the grammatical competence and reading comprehension performance of Iranian EFL learners, respectively. The results of Analysis of Covariance run on the scores of the grammar and reading comprehension tests employed for the purposes of this study indicated that the explicit teaching of grammar led to the enhancement of the participants' grammatical competence. Moreover, the finding revealed that the use of translation and mother tongue also contributed to the improvement of reading comprehension performance. The findings of this study further corroborate the results of other studies revealing the positive impact of L1 on language learning. In fact, in most of the arguments offered by researchers related to the use of L1 in language learning classes, there is a consensus that the L1 provides a familiar and effective way of quickly helping the learners to understand a concept much better (Nation 1978). It is not advisable to discard the proven and efficient means of communicating meaning through L1. To do so as Nation (1978) asserts, it would be equal to saying that pictures or real objects should not be employed in the L2 class. The results of this study are particularly in line with Banos's (2009) study in which he found that the native language has a facilitating role in L2 learning. He said that the use of mother tongue is justified as far as it is beneficial for students. Banos (2009) further maintained that using L1 as long as it is justified has a motivating effect. The results of the present study are also consistent with Stanley's (2002) study in which she carried out an investigation with a multilingual class of learners. She divided these learners into groups with the same L1 so that they could communicate with each other and provide helps to their peers. Stanley only spoke English in the class. The learners who were alone in terms of their first language dropped out quite quickly. The ones with the L1 support groups stayed till the end of the course. The results of the present study can be explained in the words of Schmitt (1997). As he asserted, intralingual strategies are 'pedagogically correct' because they are in line with principles of communicative language teaching and comprehensive input. Therefore, in the present study the students receiving instruction in line might have outperformed the other group since they received comprehensible input. Research has repeatedly indicated that limited and judicious use of L1 in the English classroom does not in essence reduce students' exposure to English, but rather helps the teaching and learning to take place more smoothly. Levine (2003, 356) believes that "despite the prevailing, monolingual principle in U.S FL classes, both the target language and the L1 appear to serve important functions". As Schmitt's (1997) study showed, strategies used by learners within their language (intralingual strategies) are considered appropriate for pedagogical purposes. Yet, there is a relationship between intralingual strategies and other teaching methods including the grammar translation method or contrastive analysis. Many modern teaching methods assume that second language should be isolated from first language even in the case of communicative approach and the audio-lingual method. Accordingly, first language is excluded in these classes.

Within the context of language professions, there is a hot debate over the contributions of first language (mother tongue) to the quality of EFL learning and teaching as well as the application of translation as a language learning/teaching resource. Like other fields, language teaching is always subject to evolvement. As a current controversy within the context of second language teaching, both educators and teachers are discussing whether the use of mother tongue in L2 classes can be beneficial or not. For example, Reineman (2002) supports the use of L1 in second language classes, claiming the application of mother tongue will allow the teachers to convey the abstract ideas. Not using the first language, L2 teachers have to resort to body language, noises, synonyms, and explanation to teach new vocabulary. Those supporting the use of first language in second language classes also assert that fresh teachers can use the first language to facilitate their teaching in classes where all learners speak the same first language. They also advocated the use of first language in L2 classes where beginners are learning the L2. This will help them to feel more comfortably as well as to motivate them to take risks. The same researchers insisted on the use of first language while teaching grammar so that it is possible to check how some learners understood the instruction. Similarly, as mentioned earlier, a review of studies conducted on the role of the first language in L2 classes reveals that there is a consensus that mother tongue offers the learners an effective and useful way whereby they can quickly understand the meaning and content of L2 materials. L2 teachers will miss an effective means for facilitating the vocabulary learning should they disregard this mode of communicating meaning. In the same veins, Nation (1978) believes that excluding the use of L1 in language classes amounts to this claim that images or real objects should not be used in the second language class. All the supporting explanations given for the use of first language can also be applied to the use of images and real objects. The first language should be viewed as a useful tool that teachers are recommended to use as need rises and avoid overusing it. It goes without saying that learners' experiences concerning their first language impact their second language learning as well. L2 learners' L1 proficiency can be different from one learner to another depending on their age, the extent to which they are exposed to their first language outside the school as well as the extent to which they receive formal schooling in their home language. Some learners can use both oral and written skills they have acquired in their first language for various communicative situations, while other learners may only have basic knowledge that helps them to communicate in quite limited social situations, such as family routines. The extent to which L1 impacts second-language word learning may be higher for students with advanced levels of proficiency in their first language than it will be for learners with more limited L1 proficiency. Schweers (1999) carried out a study in which EFL learners and their teachers in a Spanish context participated to examine their perceptions toward the use of first language in the second language classroom. The finding showed that 88.7% of Spanish students learning English were willing for L1 to be used in the class. In fact, they were of the view that L1 facilitates learning. L2 learners also showed that they wanted a considerable amount of class time to be devoted to speaking in L1 (Schweers 1999, 7).

Studies conducted on the effect of L1 on L2 learning indicate that restricted and principled use of the first language in the L2 classroom does not decrease learners' exposure to English. However, it can help in the teaching and learning processes. Besides the previous research carried out in EFL contexts, Levine (2003) conducted a large-scale study in an ESL context with the findings showing the same result. Levine came to conclusion that "despite the prevailing, monolingual principle in U.S FL classes, both the target language and the L1 appear to serve important functions" (356).

A study conducted by Lally (2000) showed that learners who had done a writing task in their mother tongue could get higher scores for text organization. She concludes that thinking in L1 leads to the production of more detailed content in language tasks. Another study carried out by Cohen and Brooks-Carson (2001) showed that the experimental group produced more ideas as well as more clear thinking in L1. Pakzadian's (2012) research indicated that learners being exposed to their L1 definitions were better in terms of learning L2 vocabulary. The findings of this study signaled out that the L1 has a facilitative role. As for the explicit and implicit instruction, the results indicated that overall learners who were exposed to the explicit teaching had better performance than those who had been taught grammar structures implicitly. The former was shown to detect and correct ungrammatical sentences more accurately. One of the reasons might be that learners who participated in this study had already been

exposed to traditional methods of education in Iran. The mainstream teaching method used for teaching English in Iranian schools, in particular with respect to grammar, is explicit teaching strategy. Thus, students' expectations could be met by using an explicit explanation of rules.

The findings showed that when learners focus on the form, it is less likely that they acquire grammar structures more effectively. The results showed that the explicit method appeared to sound not only familiar to the learners, but it also served as a way for organizing and reviewing the material they had already learnt. This production monitoring could emanate from retrieving the knowledge obtained under selective attention and applying a particular rule to that. Studies conducted by Scott (1989 1990), Larry (2005), and Andrews (2007) confirm the results of the present study. Overall, the findings of most studies show that explicit teaching strategy results in more enhancement of L2 grammar of learners of English as a foreign language.

Conclusion

The current study strived to examine the effect of explicit and implicit teaching of grammar on the grammatical competence of Iranian EFL learners. Moreover, the study sought to explore the impact of translation in the teaching process of reading comprehension on EFL learners' reading comprehension performance. The findings revealed that the explicit teaching of grammar led to the improvement of the participants' grammatical competence. Moreover, the finding illustrated that the use of translation and mother tongue also contributed to the enhancement of reading comprehension performance. It is necessary to understand that employing L1 is not taken for granted, but it is used when there is a need for it such as explaining difficult terms and some grammatical points. Atkinson, 1987 (cited in Bouangeune 2009, 186) states that using L1 might be useful for three reasons: Translation is preferred by learners, and it helps them to reveal their feelings. Moreover, building on differences between the L1 and the FL through translation helps to avoid negative transfer. Additionally, it is a valuable technique for exploiting class time. He further identifies the following uses for L1: checking comprehension, giving instructions, enhancing cooperation among learners and improving presentation and reinforcement. Harbord (1992) asserts these reasons for employing L1 and adds that L1 can improve and keep the flow of communication. Butzkamm (2003) gives the following reasons for using L1 in L2 classes: - L1 use gives a sense of security and helps learners to be stress-free. - L1 is the greatest asset people bring to the task of FL learning. - A foreign language friendly atmosphere is best achieved through selective use of the L1. - The use of the L1 saves learners from a feeling of frustration they might have within their FL learning. - L1 techniques allow teachers to use richer and more authentic texts, which mean more comprehensible input and faster acquisition. - All newly-acquired FL items have to sink roots in our minds which are eventually deep enough for the items to function independently of the L1. In fact, there is no rule that you should never use L1 in English learning, nor is there any excuse for using L1 most of the time. To conclude, the researchers have found these words of Butzkamm (2003, 38) most appropriate: " We should finally free ourselves of a fundamental misconception and reestablish the more than 200-year-old productive alliance between the mother tongue and the foreign language."

Despite the fact the findings of the present study showed that L1 contributed to an enhancement in terms of reading comprehension performance, we should draw conclusions cautiously. All the participants in this study spoke Persian as their first language. They all came from the same cultural and educational background. A question of research interest can be whether a study on subjects from different nationalities and with different mother tongues would yield the same results.

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