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# The role of input enhancement on using conjunctions in Iranian EFL learners' written performance

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**Abstract:** The aim of the present study was to examine the impact of the input enhancement of three types of conjunctions on Iranian EFL learners to produce coherent and well-organized texts. Experimental group received an enhanced version of a model essay in which three kinds of conjunctions were bolded and underlined. Students were supposed to read these enhanced models and write summaries. Control group had the same materials without typographical modifications (i.e. there were no changes made to the text). The treatment was an eight session program. The researcher uses the mean number of conjunctions per T-unit for measuring the cohesive ties density both in the pre-test and post-test. In the post-test both groups wrote about the same topic. The results show that the experimental group outperformed the control group.

**Keywords:** Conjunctions, Input Enhancement, Summarizing, Writing Skill

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## 1. Introduction

The question of whether or not grammar should be taught has been debated in the fields of language pedagogy and second language acquisition. Some scholars (e.g. Ellis, 2003; Krashen, 1982; Long & Robinson, 1998) are against form-oriented language instructions because they state that grammar is acquired naturally if students are exposed to the sufficient input so there is no need to be taught. Others (e.g. Larsen-Freeman, 1995) have an opposing opinion, focusing on the inclusion of formal grammar teaching. They argue that instruction is necessary, as some grammatical features cannot be acquired. In other words, instructions can use different ways to enhance the acquisition of grammar, and help speed up the process. Sharwood Smith (1981, 1991, and 1993) suggests that the term 'input enhancement' (first known as 'consciousness-raising') is another way of discussing the role of grammar in second language teaching. Input enhancement was defined as 'the process by which language input becomes salient to learners' (Sharwood Smith, 1991, p. 118). In other words, input enhancement can be used to draw learners' attention to the target forms by using special techniques such as, bolding, *italicizing* and CAPITALIZING.

The study conducted here focuses on learners' knowledge of the conjunctions (coordinating, subordinating, and transitional) in English. The goal of this study was to

determine whether the implementation of Input Enhancement (IE) would draw learners' attention to a target form and they can produce English conjunctions correctly.

## 2. Review of Literature

### 2.1. Input Enhancement and Consciousness Raising (C-R)

Input is the 'potentially processible language data which are made available, by chance or by design, to the language learner' (Sharwood Smith, 1993, p. 167). It is an essential component of second language acquisition, simply because learners use it 'in order to construct a mental representation of the grammar that they are acquiring' (VanPatten, 1996, p. 13).

Sharwood Smith (1981) proposed the term 'consciousness raising' (C-R), which refers to increasing or raising learners' conscious awareness of particular linguistic structures, altered by input; hence, 'all input is intake'.

Sharwood Smith (1991, p. 118) defines input enhancement as 'the process by which language input becomes salient to learners'. In other words, input enhancement could be an approach to second language teaching, and refers to a deliberate attempt to make the target form in this input enhanced by visually altering its appearance in the text. Sharwood Smith (1991, 1993) suggests many techniques which may be used in order to make input salient, such as colour coding, bold-facing, using error flags, stress, 'intonation and gestures', as well as

pointing out and explaining construction using metalinguistic terminology. For example, grammatical English morphemes (third person's singular *s*) could be bolded, or underlined. Using one or all of these techniques could draw learners' attention to the target language form. This kind of input enhancement is known as 'visual or textual enhancement.'

## 2.2. Attention and Noticing

Attention and noticing are important parts of language learning. For input-based language learning to work, and for Krashen's language learning hypotheses to be true, we have to notice what happens in the language. Many scholars (e.g. Schmidt, 1994) argue that attention and noticing are necessary for learning to take place. Schmidt (1994, p. 30) also states that 'people learn about the things that they attend to and do not learn much about the things they do not attend to'. Furthermore, Schmidt (1994) points out that learners may consciously notice a target feature in the input, and if it is noticed, it might become intake. In other words, when learners consciously notice or attend to input and make 'form-meaning connections', this input will likely become intake.

A major component of input enhancement can be seen as one of focusing learners' attention on features of a second language (which are induced by highlighting techniques) in order to promote their acquisition.

## 2.3. Previous Studies of Input Enhancement

This section will review a number of studies which have employed input enhancement. There are a few studies which have attempted to assess or otherwise examine whether input enhancement (visual or textual enhancement) is effective in relation to drawing L2 learners to pay greater attention to a target feature (especially conjunctions) or to otherwise making second language features more noticeable to L2 learners.

Shook (1994) chose two target features of Spanish language in his study: the relative pronouns (*que, quien*) and the present perfect. Participants in this study were Spanish learners, who were divided into three groups. In the first group, the subjects received enhanced passages (where all target forms were enhanced using a larger character size and bolding them), and were explicitly told to pay attention to the enhanced forms. The second group received the same enhanced versions of reading texts, but they were not told to pay attention to the enhanced target features. The participants in the third group (the control group) received the same materials without typographical modifications, and they also were not explicitly told to pay attention to anything in particular. Findings from this study show that subjects in the first two groups, who received the enhanced passages, performed significantly better than the third group (the control group), the members of which read unenhanced versions of all the assessment tasks. Shook subsequently states that textual enhancement made a difference, and gave

the participants the ability to recognize and produce the target forms. He also points out that there were no significant differences between the first group (who were told explicitly to pay attention to the enhanced forms) and those who did not receive this explicit instruction. This means that reading the enhanced versions was enough for subjects to make improvements in their production without explicit direction.

White (1998) investigated whether input enhancement (visual enhancement) is effective in getting language learners to pay attention to the target form (English third-person singular possessive determiners, i.e. *his* and *her*). The target form was typographically enhanced through underlining, *italic*, bolding and text enlargement. The participants were 86 Francophone learners of English, and were divided into three groups: one group received input enhancement and extensive reading and listening tasks; the second group received only input enhancement; the third group, on the other hand, received no input enhancement.

She found that all groups 'improved in their ability to use' third-person singular possessive in 'an oral communication task'. The post-tests scores for the two groups (which received enhanced forms) performed better than those of subjects in the unenhanced group. The results for the delayed post-tests (five weeks later) showed that the enhanced group continued to use the target form (*his/her*) in situations that called for their use, compared with other groups. This suggests that subjects in the enhanced group may benefit from their treatments; however, the differences were not significant.

Other researchers showed the implicit way to draw learners' attention to forms by using input enhancement (Izumi, 2002; Jourdenais et al., 1995; Lee, 2007; Leow et al., 2003; Radwan, 2005; Robinson, 1997; White, 1998; Wong, 2003). Results of these studies cast considerable doubt on the efficacy of input enhancement since most of the studies reported that input enhancement does not induce desired learning effects as intended by the researchers. Consequently, they concluded that providing learners with input enhancement alone is too implicit to both draw their attention to form and affect their learning. Few studies showed effective role of input enhancement on the acquisition of target forms (Abadikhah & Shahriyarpour, 2012; Bakori, 2007; khoii & Tabrizi, 2011; Moaiyedi, 2013; Sang-Ki & Hung-Tzu, 2008). Among these studies (Abadikhah & Shahriyarpour, 2012; Bakori, 2009; khoii & Tabrizi, 2011) used input enhancement along with output — a reconstruction task involving learners in the production of input passage as accurately as possible after reading it. Output, as Swain (1985) puts it, has been viewed not only as an end product of learning but also as an important factor that can promote L2 learning. It is argued that producing output provides learners with great opportunities for a level of processing (i.e. syntactic processing) which may be necessary for the development of target-like proficiency or accuracy (see Izumi & Bigelow, 2000; Pica et al., 1989; Shehadeh, 2003; Song & Suh, 2008; Swain & Lapkin, 1995). By being "pushed" to produce output, learners are required

to pay attention to syntactic features of their language in order to formulate precise, meaningful and appropriate language. Furthermore, during the production of output, they formulate and test hypotheses about the accuracy of their language. It is argued that while producing output, learners are forced to process language more deeply than during input processing. In an experimental study, Izumi (2002) demonstrated that input enhancement, without any additional instructional technique, may assist learners only in the detection of highlighted target forms, but with an output task, it was adequate for engaging learners in further cognitive processing. The present study is an attempt to investigate the role of input enhancement on using conjunctions in written performance.

### 3.1.1. Research Question

1) Will the enhancement group (who received input enhancement) perform better on the posttest than the control group? Sentence: "Equation (1) is . . ."

## 3.2. Methodology

### 3.2.1. Subjects

The participants for this study were 40 Iranian EFL learners majoring in English Language Teaching and participating in writing composition course, with an age range of 19-23. Students were chosen after a writing task for having homogeneous groups. Their writings were scored according to the Hugh's analytic method for scoring written performance. Those students who got (20 or more out of 30) were chosen for this study. The researcher randomly assigned them as the experimental and the control group.

### 3.2.2. Instruments

Two sets of materials were used. For the experimental group, reading texts (model essays) were selected in order to provide input enhancement, which contained the enhanced target feature. In these texts, model essays were chosen from Zahedi's book (2002).

The researcher modified the enhanced versions in which conjunctions (coordinating, subordinating and transitional) were bolded and underlined in order to make them highly salient. The control group received the same passages, although the target form was not in bold or underlined. Two argumentative writing tasks were used as the pre and post test (appendix A & C).

### 3.2.3. Procedure

The first writing task (pre-test) was used for choosing learners. Treatment lasted about eight sessions. The experimental group in the treatment received an enhanced version of model essays in which three kinds of conjunctions were bolded and underlined. Students were supposed to read these enhanced models and write summaries. Control group had the same materials (the same model essays) without typographical modifications (i.e. there were no changes made to the text). The researcher used the mean number of conjunctions per T-unit for measuring the cohesive ties density both in pre-test and post-test (Halliday

& Hassan, 1976). In the post test both groups wrote about the same topic. The scores of pre-test and post-test are calculated by two raters. One of the raters is the researcher.

## 4. Result

In this section, the results of t-test for showing homogeneity between two groups, Pearson Correlation for showing the inter-rater reliability between the scores of two raters, t-test for showing the results of pre-test and post-test scores will be presented. Finally, the researcher will discuss the results.

Table 1 represents the result of the t-test for showing homogeneity between two groups; there has not been a significant difference in scores for control group ( $M = 21.27$ ,  $SD = 1.44$ ) and experimental group ( $M = 21.15$ ,  $SD = 1.46$ ),  $t(38) = -.218$ ,  $P > .05$ . So, two groups at the beginning of the research are homogeneous.

**Table 1.** Independent sample t-test for showing homogeneity in two groups.

Pre-test	N	Mean	t	F	df
Control group	20	21.27 (1.44)	-.218	.013	38
Experimental group	20	21.15 (1.46)	-.218		37.996

Note:  $p = .910$ . The adjusted Standard Deviation is shown in parentheses below the means

The computed Pearson correlation coefficient for pre-test is ( $r = .927$ ,  $p = .000$ ) and for the post-test is ( $r = .914$ ,  $p = .000$ ), which indicates that there is a high positive relationship between the scores rated by Rater 1 and Rater 2 in both pre-test and post-test for control and experimental groups.

The descriptive statistics of comparing the cohesive density between two groups in the pre-test and post-test are shown in Table 2.

**Table 2.** Descriptive statistics of comparing the cohesive density between two groups in the pre-test and post-test.

group	N	mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Pre control	20	.5270	.07740	.01731
experimental	20	.5575	.09313	.02082
Post control	20	.6305	.11395	.02548
experimental	20	1.4745	.23583	.05273

Table 3. Independent sample t-test of comparing the cohesive density for the pre-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
PRE Equal variances assumed			-1.126	38	.267	-.0305	.02708	-.08531	.02431
Equal variances not assumed	2.402	.129	-1.126	36.770	.267	-.0305	.02708	-.08531	.02437

Table 4. Independent sample t-test of comparing the cohesive density for the post-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
PRE Equal variances assumed			-14.411	38	.000	-.8440	.05857	-.96256	-.72544
Equal variances not assumed	24.057	.000	-14.411	27.413	.000	-.8440	.05857	-.96408	-.72392

As Table 2, 3 and 4 show, scores in the pre-test for the control group are ( $M = .52$ ,  $SD = .077$ ) and experimental group ( $M = .55$ ,  $SD = .093$ ),  $t(38) = -1.126$ ,  $P > .05$ . The mean score shows that the quality of using conjunctions between two groups in the pre-test were the same. In the post-test, scores for the control group ( $M = .63$ ,  $SD = .11$ ) and experimental group ( $M = 1.47$ ,  $SD = .23$ ),  $t(38) = -14.411$ ,  $P = .000$ .

The results show that there is a significant difference between two groups in the post-test. In the post-test, the experimental group outperforms the control group in using conjunctions correctly.

## 5. Discussion and Conclusion

Based on the theoretical rationale of input enhancement and on empirical evidence from previous studies (Jourdenais et al., 1995; Shook, 1994; White, 1998), it can be predicted that visual enhancement would make certain parts of the texts perceptually salient and that, consequently, the subjects who received the enhanced reading passages (Visual / textual enhancement) would have closer attention directed to the enhanced passive forms. The data analyses revealed that the subjects in this pilot study gained the target form of the study after exposure to the input passages. In other words, visual enhancement brought about better performance on the production tasks, the subjects in the experimental group who received textual enhancement ( $M = 1.47$ ) outperformed the control group ( $M = .63$ ) who did not receive textual enhancement. Better performance on the post-test after reading and summarizing the enhanced passages indicates

that the subjects were producing more conjunctions in their writing. This finding supports the previous studies (e.g. Abadikhah & Shahriyarpour, 2012; Bakori, 2007; khoii & Tabrizi, 2011; Lee, 2007; Moaiyedi, 2013; Sang-Ki & Hung-Tzu, 2008; Shook, 1994; White, 1998) of textual enhancement that reported positive effects of input enhancement. According to these researchers, participants who received the enhanced passages performed significantly better than the control group that read unenhanced versions on all the assessment tasks. They state that visual/textual enhancement gave the subjects ability to produce the grammatical items. It can be assumed that subjects' interlanguage might be affected by the visual method and started to change from one stage to another. In other words, it refers to developmental changes of subjects' interlanguage (e.g. Selinker 1972). Some subjects showed changes in their interlanguage where they moved from a particular stage to another (i.e. from the pre-test to post-test). To make this point clearer some subjects in this study showed the ability to use the target form starting from few use of conjunctions in the pre-test and then slowly tried to use more conjunctions in the post-test. On the other hand, other subjects in the control group showed no developmental changes, it suggested that those subjects might not have developed their interlanguage and still remained at the early stages of it (i.e. at their pre-test stages). Sharwood Smith (1991, p. 121) mentioned that 'learners may notice the signals; the input may nevertheless be non-salient to their learning mechanisms and hence will have no effect on development.' The key point is that the enhanced form (in the reading texts) may not change learner's internal mechanisms.

The study has shown that input enhancement (through visual manipulation) can result in an increase of the ability to produce the target form. The subjects in this study who received the enhanced passages produced the target form more than those who did not receive input enhancement. This seems to suggest that visual enhancement might lead to a better result in second language production of the target form. The findings can suggest that typographical modification can be an effective method and could be used for enhancing salience of language features that may prove difficult for L2 learners.

This study was tested only a short-term over the period of two months. Long-term effects of the variables under investigation should be examined as long-lasting effects of input. Thus, we need to do another research that document long-term effects of input enhancement on the developing second language interlanguage.

## Appendix A

### Pre-test

Write about this topic.

Write at least 250 words.

*Television has had a significant effect on the culture of different societies. Do you agree or disagree?*

## Appendix B

*Nowadays many students have the opportunity to study for part or all of their courses in foreign countries.*

*While studying abroad brings many benefits to individual students, it also has a number of disadvantages.*

*Do you agree or disagree?*

### Sample Enhanced Model Essay

In recent years there has been a vast increase in the number of students choosing to study abroad. This is partly because people are more affluent and partly due to the variety of grants and scholarships which are available for overseas students nowadays. Although foreign study is not something which every student would choose, it is an attractive option for many people.

Studying overseas has a number of advantages. Firstly, it may give students access to knowledge and facilities such as laboratories and libraries which are not available in their home country. Furthermore, by looking abroad students may find a wider range of courses than those offered in their country's universities, and therefore one which fits more closely to their particular requirements.

On the other hand, studying abroad has a number of drawbacks. These may be divided into personal and professional. Firstly students have to leave their family and friends for a long period. Moreover, studying abroad is almost always more expensive than studying in one's local university. Finally, students often have to study in a foreign language, which may limit their performance and mean they do not attain their true level.

On the other hand, however, the disadvantages of studying abroad are usually temporary in nature. Students who study abroad generally become proficient in the language quite soon and they are only away from their family and friends for a year or two. What is more, many of the benefits last students all their lives and make them highly desirable to prospective employers.

## Appendix C

### Post-test

Write about this topic.

Write at least 250 words.

*Computer has changed our lives completely.*

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