Input Enhancement and Task-Based Language Learning and Teaching

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Abstract
This research investigated here how textual input enhancement affected the acquisition of the passive construction in English. IE was used as a priming activity and then followed up with communicative tasks that would ultimately push them to process this form more deeply.

Participants (N=24), who were students at the secondary school of Libya, were divided into an enhancement group and a control group. The participants in the enhancement group received enhanced reading passages. While, the control group received the same materials with no typographical modifications.

The findings partially supported this; the effect of textual enhancement was not immediately clear. However, the participants’ productions revealed that textual enhancement seemed to have a facilitating effect on the participants’ use of the target feature. In addition, the results showed that the two groups failed to show syntactic accuracy in the passive voice. It appeared that omission (especially auxiliary verbs) frequently occurred in the production of the both groups.

Keywords: Input Enhancement, Task-Based Language Learning, English passive voice

1. Introduction
The question of whether or not grammar should be taught has been determinedly debated in the fields of language pedagogy and second language acquisition. Some scholars (e.g. Ellis,2003; Krashen,1982; Long and Robinson, 1998) are against form-oriented language instructions such as the Grammar Translation Method, Audiolingual Method because they state that grammar is acquired naturally if students are exposed to the sufficient input so there is no need to be taught. This can happen via communicative tasks such as, ‘Task-Based Language Learning Teaching.’ 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 through communicative tasks only. In other words, instructions can use different ways to enhance the acquisition of grammar, and help speed up the process. Sharwood Smith (1981,1991,1993) 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, 1991:118). 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 passive construction 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 become to produce English passive voice.
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, 1993:167). 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, 1996:13).

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’. It seems useful to mention a little about ‘intake’. Intake has the potential to be ‘internalised’; it happens through exposure to input. In other words, the process in terms of second language acquisition is involved in converting input to intake. This intake is held in working memory and has the potential to be internalised. When this happens, the developing linguistic system will then begin to accommodate a new linguist form. Moreover, once a new form has been accommodated, the developing system changes and is restructured (VanPatten, 1996).

In 1991, Sharwood Smith suggested another term, which is ‘input enhancement’, as another way of discussion on the role of grammar in second language teaching. Sharwood Smith (1991) defines input enhancement as ‘the process by which language input becomes salient to learners’ (118). 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.’ Sharwood Smith also indicates that one of the reasons for drawing students’ attention to the formal features of a second language has been viewed in a negative way is owing to formal teaching having been regularly connected with ‘the pedantic giving and testing of rules and lists of vocabulary items’ (1981:160). This needs to be changed because there are various ways (as mentioned above) of drawing learners’ attention to second language features which do not need to involve details of ‘metalinguistic discussion’.

In this case, input is enhanced in order to make particular L2 forms more salient. Furthermore, Sharwood Smith (1991:119) provides additional information concerning various input enhancement techniques concerning the degrees of ‘explicitness and elaboration’, which are necessary to letting learners access grammatical input. Explicitness refers to the learning and detail of the ‘attention-drawing mechanism’, with the degrees of explicitness being highly or less explicit. On one hand, highly explicit involves a rule explanation; on the other hand, the less explicit might be in the form of seeing the target feature highlighted without giving further information. Elaboration refers to the depth and amount of time that is engaged in applying the enhancement technique, for example ‘the facial gesture’.

2.2. Attention and Noticing in a Second Language

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 (2000:30) 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’.

The concept of noticing is that learners become consciously aware of how their ‘interlanguage form’ differs from the target language. It is argued by various researchers that learners should pay attention to input and have ‘momentary episodes’ (i.e. short-lived) of noticing (‘an occurrence of momentary focal attention directed toward the input’) in order for learning to take place. In this case, learning must be conscious in order to ensure the momentary subjective experience of noticing it. Many scholars (e.g. Sharwood Smith, 1991) mention that noticing a target form in input is a crucial first stage, where L2 learners go through four general proceeding stages: the first step sees certain or new forms presented to learners in the case of ‘processed input’, and they might be noticed, either consciously or unconsciously; the second process involves a comparison being made between a current form or existing linguistics knowledge (also known as interlanguage), and the new input; the third stage is where new linguistics hypotheses are created on the basic of the difference between the current form or the existing ‘interlanguage’ and the new form or structure; and finally, the new form is tested through learners who received new input, which might be confirmed and acquired, with its use being implemented in the production (Selinker, 1972). 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. As many second language acquisition scholars (e.g. Schmidt, 1994; VanPatten, 1996) agree, some kind of attentional process is required in order for input to become intake which would ultimately be available for ‘further mental processing’. Furthermore, Schmidt (1994:17) mentions that noticing is a necessary and ‘sufficient condition’ for the changing of input to become intake for learning.

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 or to otherwise making second language features more noticeable to L2 learners.

Shook’s study (1994) was one of the earlier studies to evaluate visual or textual enhancement in a second language context. He wanted to determine whether or not this kind of input was effective. Two target features of Spanish language were used 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.

Another study conducted on visual enhancement was that of White (1998), which was designed to investigate 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.

When White compared all three language groups, 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.

Furthermore, White states that some subjects showed developmental changes of their interlanguage, where some moved forward (i.e. from a particular stage to another) from the pre-test to ‘immediate and delayed post-tests’. A few subjects did not show developmental changes, but remained at ‘their pre-test stage’ during the study’s entirety. In this study, White describes four stages of the learner’s gradual acquisition of the ability to use the target form, starting from no use of *his* and *her* in their oral communicative task, and gradually trying to use them.

2.4. Task-Based Language Learning and Teaching (TBLLT)

The emergence of task-based approaches to language teaching in the 1990s was owed primarily to the developments in second language acquisition research / second language learning theory in the 1980’s and 1990’s and some disillusion with the results of conventional grammar instruction and P-P-P methodology; what Long has labelled the ‘focus on forms’ approach (Long and Robinson, 1998:15). In particular, the apparent failure of many students who had been taught grammar in the classroom to transfer the knowledge learnt to actual communication under real time conditions not only motivated increasing misgivings about the efficacy of such teaching, but also led to a realisation that if L2 learners were to develop fluency, they needed opportunities to mobilise their language knowledge and use language in real operating conditions. Such opportunities could be found in a ‘meaning-focused task’ (Long and Robinson, 1998: 18).

By the 1980’s a number of researchers/ teachers (e.g. Ellis, 2003; Krashen, 1982) were suggesting that grammar instruction was not helpful in promoting fluent, automatic use of a second language by learners. Instead what was needed was exposure to comprehensible input
and plentiful opportunities to use language in meaningful ways— for example, in carrying out tasks where the focus was not on language (i.e. a linguistic form) but on successful performance of the task.

It seems useful to mention the theoretical rationale for task-based language learning and teaching as well as the rejection of conventional grammar teaching based on synthetic approaches. One of the planks in the rationale of TBLLT was the view elaborated by Krashen that comprehensible input was one of the most important triggers of second language acquisition. One useful source of such input, it was argued, was the ‘interaction and negotiation’ that took place when learners, working in pairs or small groups, attempted to solve a problem (or do a task) whose solution requires the use of a target language. A second argument for meaning-focused task work and for a rejection of explicit teaching of grammar may also be discerned in Krashen’s distinction between learning and acquisition; a distinction which is similar to that between explicit and implicit knowledge. Formal teaching of grammar produces learnt or explicit knowledge. But because this kind of knowledge cannot be accessed readily in real time communication, it has limited value in communication. Acquired or implicit knowledge, on the other hand, is seen as the principle knowledge source drawn on in fluent, real time communication (Krashen 1982). Such knowledge is best developed, through meaning-focused tasks and exposure to plentiful comprehensible input. The main point here is that engagement in task work with a focus on meaning (not form) was believed to provide that experience of language use is more likely to promote implicit knowledge and activate acquisitional processes. Formal grammar teaching, on the other hand, simply provides explicit knowledge.

It is useful to define what a task is and what different types of tasks there are A task has a number of definitions which are all drawn from different scholars (e.g. Ellis, 2003). The broad definition, which is provided by Willis (1996), defines a task as an activity in which students ‘use language to achieve a real outcome’ (1996:53). The activity reflects real life and learners focus on meaning; they are free to use a target language. Playing a game, solving a problem or sharing information or experiences can all be considered as relevant and authentic tasks.

3. The Study
3.1. The target form: English Passive Voice
One grammatical structure is chosen for the pilot study which is English Passive Voice. The reason for choosing this feature is based on the considerations of difficulty, learnability, and natural occurrence. In other words, passives are problematic for Libyan ESL learners and the particular difficulty that exists for Arab speakers is the TO BE problem (i.e. auxiliary verbs).

3.1.1. Research Question
1) Will the enhancement group (who received input enhancement) perform better on the posttest than the control group?

3.2 Methodology
3.2.1 Subjects
The subjects for this pilot study were twenty-four Libyan learners (aged 18 years), all studying general English as a second language at pre-intermediate level in a secondary school in Traghen / Libya. In this study, we did not do a particular test to see the learners’ knowledge of the English passive voice; we relied on the school’s test (e.g. a placement test). According to the school regulation, all students in this secondary school were required to take an English
exam at the beginning of the school year, the results are then used to place them into one of five basic level classes (e.g. beginner, pre-intermediate, intermediate, upper-intermediate and advance). The pre-intermediate level was chosen to participate in this study. It is worth mentioning here that learners also follow their regular study at school; they study other subjects, such as Maths, History, Arabic language, etc.

3.2.2 Materials/Research Tools
Two sets of materials were used — one set for each treatment session. Two different reading texts were selected in order provide input enhancement, which contained the target feature. The reading passages and activities/tasks chosen for the English passive voice of the study were taken from different English course books: for example, Just right (Harmer and Acevedo, 2006). The reason for choosing the mentioned texts was owing to the number of English passive voice occurrences in many sentences. Notably, we modified the enhanced versions in which all passives forms were bolded and underlined in order to make them highly salient.

Generally, each group (in this study) was provided with two exposure sessions, and all subjects experienced the same passages and tokens of the target form. Subjects in the enhancement group were assigned input enhancement and tasks (as a new teaching technique) involving two different texts, containing 29 tokens, with the time lasting 60 minutes per session. The control group received the same passages and tokens, although the target form was not in bold or underlined.

3.2.3 Procedures
The first treatment session was started on the second day, and each group received a one-hour class. The two groups were given the first reading passage; the enhancement group received an enhanced version in which all passive forms were bolded and underlined. Subjects in each group were divided into three groups at this stage: Group A, Group B and Group C. Moreover, every group knew which text to read. After that, subjects were asked to start reading their texts. Subjects in the enhancement group were asked to read the title and two questions before reading the text. After completing this stage, they started reading their text and answering the questions. When they finished reading, they started discussing their answers in groups; they were also asked to provide a short oral summary concerning the text, which should be similar to the original texts. Each subject gave a short summary (of his/her texts) and, at the same time, the other students listened to him/her. The reason for giving an individual summary was to give learners the opportunity to present an oral summary. As soon as the learners had finished, students were given another task which was ‘an information gap activity’, which had two different versions. Subjects worked together in pairs, and each had different information on their sheets. They had to talk to each other in order to complete the information, and the task also encouraged learners to use the target form when they involved asking questions and answering them so as to fill the gaps. Additionally, it was relevant to the reading text which may highlight the format of a passive question (an information gap activity’ presented in.

The control group had the same material (the same reading text) without typographical modifications (i.e. there were no changes made to the text). They followed the same procedure as the first group (i.e. enhancement group). The second treatment took place on the third day; this session followed the same teaching procedure of the first session, but with different topics.
3.2.4 Data Analysis
We used two tasks for assessing the production of English passive voice. The scoring procedure for each task was as following: three points were given to a correct answer. Sentences receiving three points had a completely correct answer in terms of using the correct form of passive voice, and zero points were given in the case of providing a completely wrong answer. The main reason for assigning three points per sentence was to give the participants at least partial scores even if they had not given a fully correct form (i.e. passive voice).

4. Results
It is worth mentioning that we investigated the using of correct forms in terms of auxiliary verbs, past participle, and phrase by. In the pretest and posttest only the scores of the items which corresponded to the targeted feature of this study were of interest to the researcher. Therefore, all other responses were disregarded.

In order to ensure that the two groups started the treatment with the same level of the ability of using the English passive voice, their pretest scores on all tasks were compared. The first step in the analytic procedure of the research related to the pre-test scores. For the pre-test scores we assumed that the two groups were equal in ability and that any differences that obtained (in the posttest) would be due to the enhancement sessions.

Table1 shows the mean and proportion of total passives produced by each group. The mean of production scores of subjects who received input enhancement (M= 2.33 (1.72%), SD=4.37) is similar to that subjects in unenhanced condition (M= 2.08, (1.62%), SD=2.87). An independent t-test was employed. The results of the t-test show no significant differences between the groups’ frequency number of passive at the outset of the study (t (22) = -0.229, p >.05).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Groups</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>Proportion (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Enhancement</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>2.33</td>
<td>4.37</td>
<td>1.72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Control group</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>2.08</td>
<td>2.87</td>
<td>1.62</td>
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The second research of this study is, to investigate the immediate beneficial of visual input enhancement on the subject’s subsequent production. Hypothesis 1, we predicted that the enhancement will performed better in the posttest. Table2 displays the mean and proportion of total passives produced by each group. The mean of production scores of subjects who received input enhancement (M= 6.75, (SD=4.37), pro= .016) is higher than that subjects in unenhanced condition (M= 3.67, (SD=2.87), Pro= 0.09).
Table 2: Descriptive analysis of the Post-test Scores

<table>
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<td>0.09</td>
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The result of the t-test shows there was no a significant difference between the enhancement and control groups in producing passive forms. On average, subjects experienced to textual input enhancement and TBLLT ($M=6.75$, $SE=1.26$) performed more passives in the posttest than the control group did ($M=3.67$, $SE=0.829$). This difference was not significant, $t(22) = -2.019$, $p > .053$.

5. Discussion

Based on the theoretical rationale of input enhancement and on empirical evidence from previous studies (Jourdenais et al., 1995; Shook, 1994; White, 1998), we 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, although such gains were quite small. In other words, visual enhancement brought about better performance on the production tasks, the subjects in the visual/ textual enhancement ($M=6.75$) outperformed than others subjects ($M=3.66$) who did not receive textual enhancement. Better performance on the production tasks after reading the enhanced passage indicates that the subjects were producing more passives. This finding supports the previous studies (e.g. Shook, 1994; White, 1998) of textual enhancement that reported positive effects of input enhancement. According to Shook (1994) participants who received the enhanced passages performed significantly better than the control group that read unenhanced versions on all the assessment tasks. Shook states that visual/ textual enhancement made a difference; it gave the subjects ability to produce the grammatical items.

From our date we can observe that most of the subjects showed an omittance of the auxiliary verbs in their responses to assessment tasks, this might have been due to a language transfer. In other words the differences between the first language (i.e. Arabic) and target language (i.e. English) might have affected learnability of the target form; the Arabic passive voice is different from the English (as mentioned before) ; it does not require the verb to be or special form of the past participle as in English. Subjects in this study might try to transfer from their first language to the target language; most of the time they omitted some elements accidentally (especially an auxiliary verb) in their production. According to Selinker (1972) L2 learners use their first language (L1) as a resource. Where they can use some items, rules of L1 and transfer them to production of a target language. For example, subjects of this study who produced a passive sentence (**the window broke.'), did not include the auxiliary verb and/ or the past participle because their L1 does not require them. It is suggested (e.g. Selinker, 1972) that most L2 learners (especially in the early stage of language acquisition) rely heavily on their mother tongue, in order to form the L2 form. Furthermore, there were a
number of subjects who showed the ability to place the object position into the subject position.

The individual differences (i.e. individual subjects) observed in our data suggest ‘interlanguage, may interact with the way in which subjects process input. We 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 pretest to posttest). To make this point clearer some subjects in our study showed the ability to use the target form starting from no use of passive forms in the pretest in their oral tasks and then slowly tried to use some passives (full or partial forms) in the post test. On the other hand, other subjects 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 pretest stages). Sharwood Smith (1991:121) 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.

This finding supports White’s study (1998) as participants in White’s study showed changes in their interlanguage. White’s study described four stages of the learner’s gradual acquisition of their ability to use the linguistics features, starting from no use (the first stage) of the target features (his/her) in the assessment tasks and gradually trying to use them (the fourth stage).

6. Conclusion
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.

Recommendations for Further Research
This study was tested only a short-term over the period of 5 days. A 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 interlangauge.

References


