

Extensive Reading & Grammar Acquisition

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Outline

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Introduction

Controversies on the teaching of grammar

1. Whether to teach it or not?
2. What to teach first?
3. An explicit versus an implicit view of grammar instruction.

Introduction

1. Whether to teach it or not?

- For thousands of years, grammar was the center of language pedagogy.
- The nature of this controversy: Whether grammar instruction helps language learners gain competence and proficiency in the target language?
- Many researchers now believe that grammar teaching should *not* be ignored in second language classrooms.

Introduction

2. *What to teach first?*

- The natural order hypothesis states that the acquisition of grammatical structures proceeds in a predictable order.
- General educational principles suggest we start with the simple and move toward the more difficult, but structures that seem uncomplicated may in fact be quite difficult for some students to internalize.
- Although there have been some attempts to identify a “difficulty” or “acquisition” order in English, the resulting sequence usually deal only with elementary structures and cannot possibly account for every structure in the language.

Introduction

3. An explicit versus an implicit view of grammar instruction

- Some theorists advocate formal and systematic attention to isolate linguistic features.
- Others reject such techniques but in favor of target language experiences much like those encountered by young children acquiring their first language.
- Teachers are also split into two camps: those who believe that classroom learners will develop all the grammatical competence they need from exposure to appropriate input and those who insist that some explicit discussion of structure is necessary.

Introduction

Current practice of grammar teaching in mainland China

- Importance of grammar in the national ELT syllabus
- High profile of grammar in the highest-stakes test: the National Matriculation English Test (NMET)
- GTM: the dominant ELT method

Introduction

Table 1. Grammar in the national ELT syllabuses

Syllabus	Guidelines for teaching grammar
1978	The students are expected to have a command of basic phonetics and grammar rules .
1986	Give detailed instruction of basic language knowledge .
1988	Strengthen basic language knowledge and training.
1990	The same as the 1986 syllabus.
1993	Consolidate and expand students' basic language knowledge
2000	The same as the 1993 syllabus.

Introduction

Characteristics of the Grammar-Translation Method

- The GTM focuses on teaching grammar and practicing translation as its main teaching and learning activities.
- A high priority was given to accuracy and the ability to construct correct sentences.
- It usually consists of an explanation of a grammatical rule, with some example sentences, a bilingual vocabulary list, a reading section exemplifying the grammatical rule and incorporating the vocabulary, and exercises to practice using the grammar and vocabulary.
- Most of these classes are taught in the students' first language.

Introduction

Merits of the Grammar-Translation Method

- Translation is the easiest way of explaining meanings or words and phrases from one language into another.
- Learners acquire some sort of accuracy in understanding synonyms in the source language and the target language.
- Since most of the classes are taught through the medium of the mother tongue, communication between the teacher and the learner does not cause linguistic problems. Even teachers who are not fluent in English can teach English through this method.

Introduction

Inadequacies of the Grammar-Translation Method

- Grammar teaching is viewed as a deductive and linear presentation of these rules. It rather attempts to teach language through rules and not by use.
- It provides little opportunity for acquisition and relies too heavily on learning. According to language professionals, acquisition is more important than learning.

Introduction

Purpose of the study

The study aims to examine the effects of second language input by means of extensive reading on language proficiency in general and grammar competence in particular.

Findings from this study will provide insights into the debate on explicit versus implicit grammar instruction.

Introduction

Areas of inquiry

1. What is the significance of acquiring grammar through comprehensible input by means of extensive reading?
2. What is the value of learning grammar through explicit instruction?

Literature Review

Theoretical framework

1. Input is central to acquiring a second language.
2. Extensive reading has been investigated as a source of comprehensible input for L2 acquisition.

Literature Review

Benefits of extensive reading

- build up knowledge of vocabulary and structure
- enhance background knowledge
- improve comprehension skill
- encourage a liking for reading
- develop good reading habits
- develop automaticity
- promote confidence and motivation

Literature Review

Empirical studies on significance of extensive reading on grammar acquisition

Reading and English Acquisition Program (REAP)

- REAP was an integrated whole-language approach implemented in two phases:
 - ‘shared book’ approach
 - modified language experience approach
- The post-REAP test results showed that the REAP participants were significantly better than the non-REAP participants on grammar.

Literature Review

Empirical studies on significance of extensive reading on grammar acquisition

Fiji's Book Flood Project

- Fiji's Book Flood Project was a whole-language approach, with two possible options
 - (1) the shared-book treatment.
 - (2) the sustained silent reading treatment
- In the open-ended English structures test, the two experimental groups outperformed the control group significantly in terms of grammar competence ($p < 0.01$).
- There was no statistically significant difference between the two experiment groups.

Literature Review

Implications of findings of previous studies

1. Extensive reading does have a role to play in grammar acquisition.
2. Differences in extensive reading treatments did not seem to significantly affect the effect of extensive reading on grammar acquisition.

Design & Implementation

Objective

The purpose of this study is to investigate the significance of extensive reading for English language teaching in Chinese secondary schools, with grammar being one of the research concerns.

Design & Implementation

Research hypothesis

- The participants acquire grammar incidentally when they are exposed to considerable amounts of comprehensible input by means of extensive reading.
- Acquired, as opposed to learned, grammar will produce superior results in the actual language use while taking grammar tests.

Design & Implementation

Participants

- 99 senior high school students ranging from 15 to 16 in age
- Native speakers of Chinese
- Randomly selected in gender categories on a voluntary basis

Design & Implementation

The pre-test

1. The pre-test was the stratification test, aiming to establish three identical groups for this study, namely two experimental groups and one control group.
2. The test was composed of six sections of 100 points in total: grammar (10 points), cloze (30 points), reading (30 points), translation (10 points) and writing (20 points).

Design & Implementation

The mid- and post-test

1. The first and second final term test served as the mid- and post-tests.
2. They were large-scale standardized test developed by the Test Bureau of the school district in Shanghai.
3. They were divided into the following sections: listening comprehension (20 points), grammar (20 points), vocabulary (9 points), text comprehension (26 points), translation (15 points) and essay writing (10 points).

Design & Implementation

The EPER Placement Test B

1. It is a standardized international reading test for general proficiency developed by Edinburgh Project on Extensive Reading (EPER).
2. This test is recommended as a standard measure of general proficiency in reading and is used as a placement test to decide the reading level of learners.
3. The test is basically a cloze test where a series of twelve reading passages are arranged in order of increasing difficulty.

Design & Implementation

The three groups in this study:

1. Explicit Instruction Group (EI)—control group
2. Extensive Reading Group (ER)
3. Explicit Instruction plus Extensive Reading Group (EIER)

Design & Implementation

Explicit Instruction (EI)

Participants in this group were explicitly taught the grammar rules in class by their English teacher. They had to finish their grammar and translation exercises after school, but they did not read extensively. In other words, they were taught using the Grammar-Translation Method, and were not given additional comprehensible input other than their textbooks.

Design & Implementation

Extensive Reading (ER)

As required in the teaching syllabus, grammar was a crucial part in teaching content in Mainland schools. Absence of explicit instruction of grammar was strictly prohibited. Participants in this group were explicitly taught the grammar rules in class by their English teacher. However, they did not do any grammar or translation exercises after school; instead, extensive reading was their daily assignment, and they read about 5,000 words every day after school.

Design & Implementation

Explicit Instruction plus Extensive Reading (EIER)

Participants in this group were explicitly taught the grammar rules in class by their English teacher. They had to finish their grammar and translation exercises after school, and read out of class when they had time. There was no specific amount of reading required.

Design & Implementation

Table 2 Timeframe of the extensive reading program

Group	Aug 2010	Sept 2010- Jan 2011	Jan 2011	Feb 2011 –Jun 2011	Jun 2011
ER	Pre-test	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Explicit instruction ● Extensive reading 	Mid-test	The same.	Post-test
EIER	Pre-test	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Explicit instruction ● Grammar and translation exercises ● Extensive reading 	Mid-test	The same.	Post-test
EI	Pre-test	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Explicit instruction ● Grammar and translation exercises ● No extra reading 	Mid-test	The same.	Post-test

Findings & Discussion

Table 3 Quantification of students' extensive reading

Group	No of books read	Reading Quantity
ER	113.7	1,141,248
EIER	25.9	226,732

Findings & Discussion

Table 4 Test results of the grammar section

Tests	Group	N	Mean	SD	F	Sig.
Pre-test	ER	33	3.61	1.20	0.96	0.39
	EIER	33	3.97	0.95		
	EI	33	3.73	1.10		
Mid-test	ER	33	14.15	2.62	2.16	0.12
	EIER	33	15.15	2.55		
	EI	33	13.97	2.27		
Post-test	ER	33	15.88	2.67	2.68	0.07
	EIER	33	16.64	2.22		
	EI	33	15.03	3.44		

Findings & Discussion

Table 5 Multi-comparisons in the post-test

Dependent Variable	(I) Group	(J) Group	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.
Post-test	ER	EIER	-0.76	0.69	0.28
		EI	0.85	0.69	0.22
	EIER	ER	0.76	0.69	0.28
		EI	1.61	0.69	0.02
	EI	ER	-0.85	0.69	0.22
		EIER	-1.61	0.69	0.02

Findings & Discussion

Table 6 EPER test results of the ER group

Reading Level		A	B	C	D	E	Total
Headword		2200	1900	1600	1200	800	/
Pre-test	Number	/	5	15	12	1	33
	%	/	15.16	45.46	36.37	3.03	100.00
Post-test	Number	2	17	12	2	/	33
	%	6.06	51.52	36.36	6.06	/	100.00

Findings & Discussion

Table 7 EPER test results of the EIER group

Reading Level		A	B	C	D	E	Total
Headword		2200	1900	1600	1200	800	/
Pre-test	Number	/	9	13	11	/	33
	%	/	27.28	39.40	33.33	/	100.00
Post-test	Number	2	15	11	5	/	33
	%	6.06	45.46	33.33	15.15	/	100.00

Findings & Discussion

Table 8 EPER test results of the EI group

Reading Level		A	B	C	D	E	Total
Headword		2200	1900	1600	1200	800	/
Pre-test	Number	1	5	15	11	1	33
	%	3.03	15.16	45.46	33.33	3.03	100.00
Post-test	Number	1	8	14	10	/	33
	%	3.03	24.24	42.42	30.30	/	100.00

Findings & Discussion

Q 1: What is the significance of acquiring grammar through comprehensible input?

Evidence

1. What the three groups shared in common in their treatments was the explicit instruction of the grammar rules.
2. In the post-test, the statistically significant difference ($p < .05$) appeared between the EIER group and the EI group (the control group).
3. The ER group did not do any grammar and translation exercise; their mean score for grammar was slightly better than that of the EI group, but the difference was not statistically significant (ER=15.88, EI=15.03, $p=0.22$).

Findings & Discussion

Interim summary 1

1. There is a positive relationship between extensive reading and grammar acquisition, as evidenced by the better performance of the EIER group compared to the EI group.
2. This positive relationship was, however, not found between the EI and ER group.

Findings & Discussion

The results suggest:

1. Acquiring grammar through comprehensible input is as effective as the Grammar-Translation Method, but at least has the additional merit of being more interesting.
2. In another part of the study involving pre- and post-tests using the Edinburgh Project on Extensive Reading (EPER) Placement Test B, the ER group outperforms both the EI and EIER group in terms of global language proficiency.

Findings & Discussion

Q 1: What is the significance of acquiring grammar through comprehensible input?

A combination of the Grammar-Translation Method with extensive reading, namely EIER, is a significantly more effective approach for grammar instruction in this context.

Findings & Discussion

Q2: What do the pre-, mid- and post-test tell us?

Pre-test	Mid-test	Post-test
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● verb ● pronoun ● adjective ● tense ● attributive clause ● adverbial clause ● imperative sentence ● compound sentence 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● infinitive ● participle ● tense ● adverbial clause ● object clause ● subject clause ● attributive clause ● predicative clause 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● preposition ● pronoun ● gerund ● infinitive ● participle ● tense ● attributive clause ● adverbial clause ● object clause ● subject clause ● exclamatory sentence ● passive voice ● subject-verb agreement ● inversion

Findings & Discussion

Interim summary 2

1. The pre-, mid- and post-tests are cumulative in terms of levels of difficulty.
2. The three tests provide cross-sectional dimension of this program, although their content and levels of difficulty varied.

Findings & Discussion

Q3: How did the participants actually acquire their grammar competence?

Theoretical support

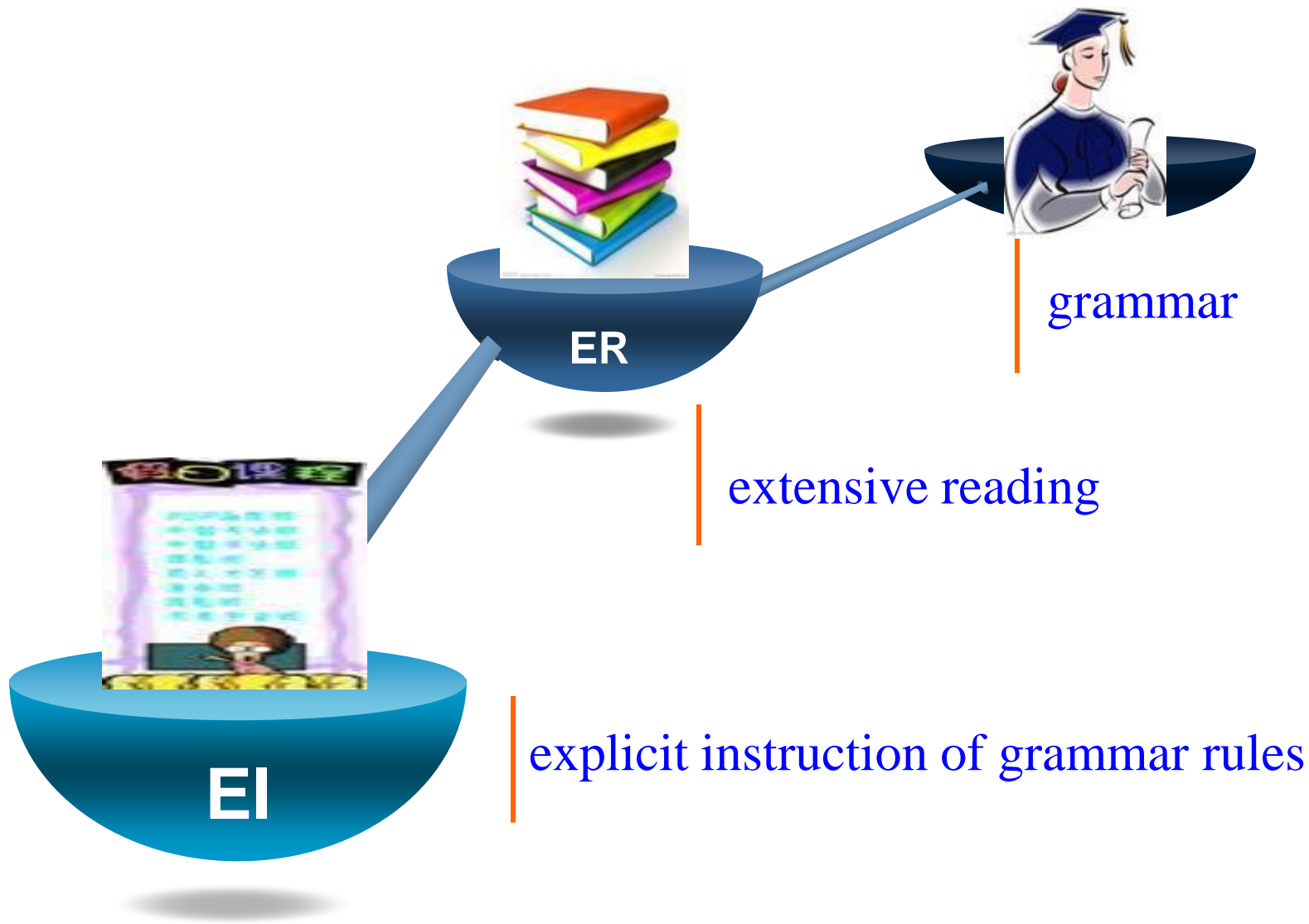
1. Certain assumptions about L1 grammar acquisition:

Input → Grammar

2. L2 learners task is equivalent to the L1 acquisition task:

L2 Input → L2 Grammar

The acquisition task of the ER Group



The acquisition task of the EIER Group

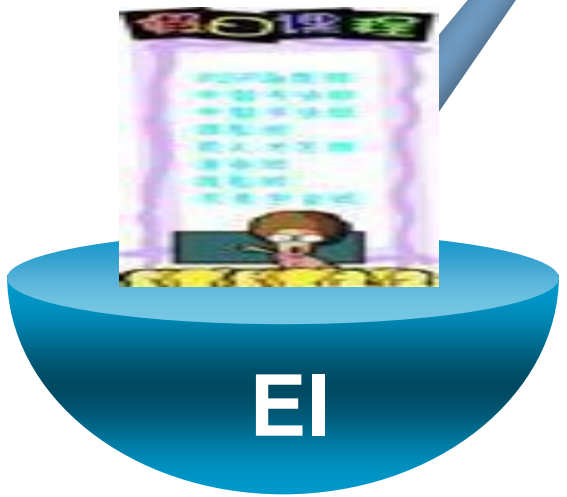


GT+ER



grammar

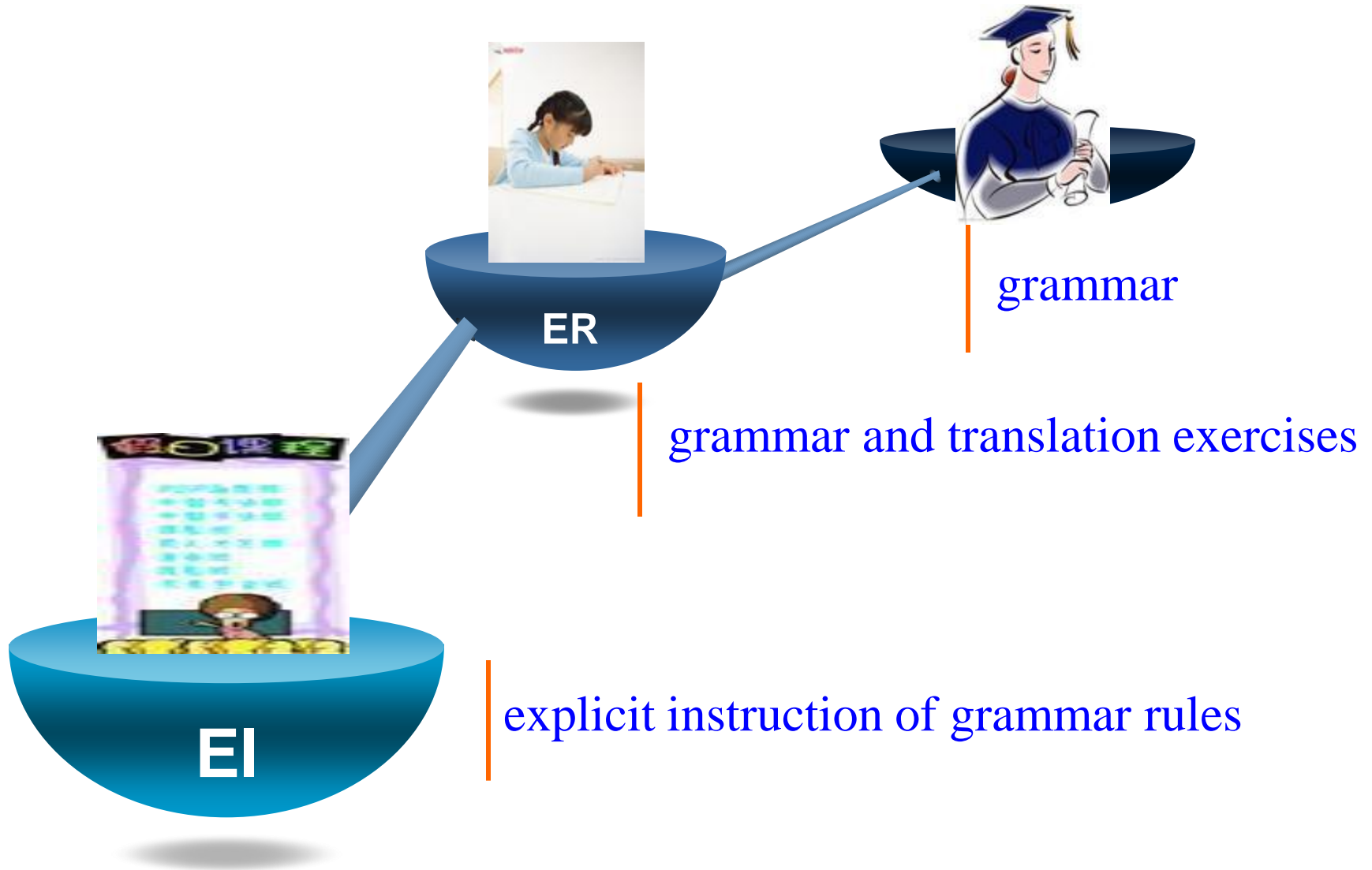
**grammar and translation exercises
+ extensive reading**



EI

explicit instruction of grammar rules

The acquisition task of the EI Group



Findings & Discussion

Interim summary 3

1. There were differences in the three schemata, but all of them showed that extensive reading was not the sole vehicle for grammar competence.
2. Explicit instruction of the grammar rules is an integral component in the development of the participants' grammar competence.
3. Thus, based on the test results alone, we are unable to identify the proportion that extensive reading accounts for in the development of the participants' grammar competence.

Findings & Discussion

Q3: How did the participants actually acquire their grammar competence?

The participants acquire their grammar competence through a combination of explicit and implicit instruction.

Findings & Discussion

Q4: Does extensive reading provide favorable conditions for grammar acquisition?

Focus of debate:

Graded readers are texts written by means of lexical, structural, and information control. One characteristic of graded readers is that they strictly control grammar for different levels. One criticism of graded readers is that they do not expose the students to a comprehensive range of English grammar constructions to the readers.

Findings & Discussion

Discussion

1. Decoding difficult text is a slow business. Because reading is slow, not much text can be read if the level of difficulty is high, hence there will not be sufficient exposure to language input. In this sense, graded readers provide optimal comprehensible input for EFL learners.
2. A comparison between the syllabus for the Oxford Bookworm (OBW) Graded Readers and the national syllabus for grammar teaching shows that the OBW graded readers do expose students to all the grammar rules they need to know for the national exam. In other words, the participants in this study would be able to encounter all the grammar rules to be tested in public exams.

Findings & Discussion

Q4: Does extensive reading provide favorable conditions for grammar acquisition?

Extensive reading by means of graded readers provides a reasonably wide range of comprehensible input for grammar acquisition.

Findings & Discussion

Q5: What is the role of reading quantity in grammar acquisition?

Focus of debate:

Based on the fact that the ER group read approximately five times as much as the EIER group but made smaller progress, what role reading quantity plays in the acquisition of grammar competence deserves further discussion.

Findings & Discussion

Results of the retrospective interview

1. Being used to the Grammar-Translation Method, some participants said they did not acquire new grammar rules through extensive reading; instead, they consolidated previous grammar rules through extensive reading.
2. Two thirds of the interviewees stated that they sometimes did not understand what the teachers taught, sometimes because of the teachers' unclear explanation of the grammar rules and sometimes because of the complexity of the grammar rules. Extensive reading provided them with an opportunity to digest what they learned in class in a gradual process.

Findings & Discussion

Results of retrospective interviews

3. The variety of sentence patterns in the graded readers exposed the participants to a more diversified set of grammar rules than those presented by the teachers in the classroom.

Findings & Discussion

Q5: What is the role of reading quantity in grammar acquisition?

1. Leisurely reading could be fast or slow; at any rate it need not mean regress. On the contrary, leisurely reading can help to prevent unnecessary confusion and semi-literacy by allowing inefficient readers to read text at a pace that their skills can handle.
2. Given that EIER readers outperform ER readers, even though the EIER readers read less, there is no clear relationship between quantity of reading and grammar competence.

Conclusion

The study aims to examine the effects of extensive reading on language proficiency in general and grammar competence in particular. Results show that there is a positive relationship between extensive reading and grammar acquisition. A combination of the Grammar-Translation Method with extensive reading, namely EIER, is a significantly more effective approach for grammar instruction in this context.

Q&A



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Thank You!



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