

**Grammar Tasks and the
Learning of English as a
Foreign Language:
A Case Study**

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Abstract

This article attempts to compare the effects 'Grammar Tasks' and 'Grammar lessons' on the acquisition of English tenses by Algerian students in terms of gains in explicit knowledge, grammatical accuracy, interaction, autonomy and motivation in the classroom. The results of the study demonstrate that learners following the new approach outperform those following the traditional one in all these terms.

Introduction

As learners who are taught under Traditional Grammar (TG) for many years carry on making grammatical errors which usually persist in spite of teachers' attempts to eradicate them, we believe that there is something wrong with this approach and that 'Grammar Consciousness-raising Tasks' with their emphasis on *the use of language* may be more effective. In this experimental study, a control group will follow traditional grammar lessons and an experimental group will perform grammar tasks. The net effects of these two approaches in terms of grammatical explicit

ملخص

يسعى هذا المقال إلى مقارنة الآثار المترتبة عن استعمال مقاربتين مختلفتين في تدريس قواعد الأزمنة الإنجليزية: مقاربة "المهام النحوية" ومقاربة "دروس القواعد" من قبل طلبة جزائريين، وذلك من حيث تعزيز المعرفة الجلية والدقة النحوية والمحادثة والاستقلالية والتحفيز داخل القسم. وقد بينت النتائج تفوق المنهج الجديد على كل هذه المستويات.

knowledge, accuracy, negotiated interaction, autonomy and motivation will be revealed through this paper.

1. Grammar Consciousness-raising Tasks

Grammar consciousness-raising tasks (GCRTs) are the result of integrating task-based language teaching (Prabhu, 1987) and grammar consciousness-raising (Rutherford, 1987). This integration involves student-student interaction about grammar and includes a variety of co-operative learning techniques where learners are divided into groups and handed different parts of teacher-taught materials to teach them to each other. It is reminiscent of the jigsaw method defined by Johnson (1995: 114) as a method “in which teachers divide the academic content to be learned into parts and delegate individual parts to each group member. Thus, group members are responsible for learning only one part of the content and then teaching that part to the rest of the group”.

A GCRT is an activity which is found to be very successful for enhancing communicating about grammar. As Fotos (1994: 325) states:

[A GCRT] provides learners with grammar problems to solve interactively...it is communicative and has an L2 grammar problem as the task content. Although the learners focus on the form of the grammar structure, they are also engaged in meaning-focused use of the target language as they solve the grammar problem. They develop grammatical knowledge while they are communicating.

Foreign language learners (FL) are very keen in studying grammar. They often ask their teachers to teach them the essentials of the FL grammar that allow them to codify the chaos of linguistic data into a reduced set of rules. After all, human beings are endowed with a cognitive ability that allows them to establish relations about linguistic entities and to absorb the TL through reasoning and analogical undertaking. As Servan-Schreiber and Anderson (1990: 592) argue “the world is regular, and people are efficient regularity detectors”.

GCRTs help learners discover the rules for themselves, build up their explicit knowledge, and promote their grammatical accuracy. Hood (1994: 28) maintains that “Drawing the learners’ attention to the linguistic patterns and providing them with the underlying rules and principles can enhance the learning process since learners usually try to discover rules from the language data for themselves.” So, even though teachers do not provide learners with grammatical rules, learners will look for the rules for themselves. This individual endeavour, however, is time-consuming and too demanding upon learners. It is likely to be confusing for it may lead learners to deduce wrong hypotheses about the complex structures of the target language (TL). GCRTs accommodate students who study grammar as a subject grammar; that is, those who want to learn about grammar for academic purposes, and not those who want to use the language for survival or pure communication, as is the case with people who want to use the language for the sake of trade or tourism.

GCRTs are quite compatible with Second Language Acquisition (SLA) research and how people learn languages. They are in tune with Krashen’s comprehensive input hypothesis (1981) in their endeavour to expose learners to meaning rather than to submit them to Traditional Grammar Lessons (TGLs). They are in symbiosis with Long’s interaction hypothesis (1983b) which emphasizes interactional activities among learners to allow them to negotiate meaning through the use of comprehension checks and clarification requests. They are also in conformity with Swain’s output hypothesis (1985) which acknowledges the role of comprehensible output for promoting grammatical competence, expressing efficient meaning, developing syntactic processing, and testing out hypotheses about the TL. These hypotheses complement each other, present real opportunities for learners to work in groups and to interact in order to gain accuracy as well as fluency in the TL. GCRTs are also corroborated by skill-building theories which insist on the move from declarative knowledge to procedural knowledge or from knowing to using (Bialystok, 1982).

2. Research Hypotheses

The present study builds on the findings of Fotos (1993, 1994) and Ellis (1997, 2003) who claim that GCRTs are more effective than TGLs for improving explicit knowledge and grammatical accuracy, and negotiated interaction. It aims at finding whether GCRTs improve (1) explicit knowledge, (2) grammatical accuracy, (3) negotiated interaction as well as (4) autonomy and motivation. Most task-based SLA research is carried out under laboratory conditions; and for us to feel more secure with the claims made by these proponents, we carried out a classroom experiment on first-year students of English in order to infirm or confirm the following hypotheses:

1. GCRTs are more effective for improving grammatical *accuracy* in the use of English tenses than TGLs.
2. GCRTs are more effective for promoting *grammatical explicit knowledge* about English tenses than TGLs.
3. GCRTs could be more effective for fostering *negotiated interaction* and *comprehensible output* in the study of English tenses than TGLs.
4. GCRTs could drive further students' *autonomy* and *responsibility* for learning, and thus increase their *self-confidence* and *motivation* in comparison to TGLs.

3. Research Design

The study is concerned with almost all the English tenses which have been selected for several reasons. Firstly, they are part and parcel of the first year programme of the Licence degree in English. Secondly, English tenses seem to be a problematic area for Algerian students who are usually confused by the various tense forms and uses for expressing their ideas. Thirdly, students often ask their teachers to provide them with clear rules of thumb to help them use correct forms in speaking and writing without hindering their communication. Fourth, university students of English, in general, follow advanced studies that require a minimum knowledge of the TL grammar and prove readiness for the acquisition of the English tenses.

3.1 Types of Teaching Materials

The types of teaching materials used in this experimental study are TGLs and GCRTs:

TGLs consisted of traditional grammar lessons and written practice. These lessons followed the conventional stages: Presentation and Practice. In the presentation stage, thorough explanations of the forms and uses of the English tense under study were provided. Every tense was presented in the affirmative, negative, interrogative and interro-negative form together with yes/no short answers with all the singular and plural persons. Then, students were presented with four sentences and required to understand their meaning carefully, to underline their verbs, and to find the rule which govern them. This procedure of drawing rules from a set of sentences is known as the inductive approach; it encourages students to observe, analyse, and comprehend the sentences so as to discover the rules by themselves. If the students were not able to do so, the instructor would guide them to find the appropriate rule. Once the rule was given, the instructor drew a time diagram on the blackboard so as to show the students where the action of the verb happened in relation to three main points: past, present and future. At the practice stage, students were presented with an exercise where they had to put the verbs in brackets in the correct form and to provide oral answers. The exercises we opted for consisted of short texts to introduce students to discourse grammar where tenses were used in clear contexts and where devices of coherence and cohesion were tactfully displayed. All the exercises were extracted from Freeman's book (1983).

GCRTs are designed in conformity with the task components proposed by Candlin (1987), Breen (1989), Nunan (1989), and Ellis (1998) including 'goals', 'input', 'procedures', 'setting', 'learner roles', 'teacher roles' and 'outcomes'. They met the main criteria established for any language task by Prabhu (1987: 46-7). First, they were, in essence, 'information-gap activities' which required exchanging information amongst all the members of the group whose

task cards were quite different in content. Second, they were considered as ‘reasoning-gap activities’ in the sense that students were supposed to use their cognitive faculties so as to perceive, reason, and induce rules from a series of sentences. Third, they engaged students in ‘decision-making activities’ through gathering information from each other and reaching a common decision. Likewise, GCRTs developed in this study were in symbiosis with Pica *et al.* (1993: 19-26) criteria for developing real tasks and which included ‘jig-saw’, ‘information gap’, ‘problem solving’, ‘decision making’ and ‘opinion exchange’.

The study is concerned with almost all the English tenses: the present simple, the present continuous, the simple past, the past continuous, the present perfect, the present perfect continuous, the past perfect, the past perfect continuous, the simple future, the future continuous, the future perfect, the future perfect continuous, the present conditional, the perfect conditional, and tenses in conditional sentences. The English tenses were selected for several reasons. Firstly, they are part and parcel of the first- year programme of the Licence degree in English. Secondly, they seem to be a problematic area for Algerian students, and they often ask their teachers to provide them with clear rules of thumb to help them use correct forms in speaking and writing. Thirdly, university students of English follow advanced studies that require a minimum knowledge of the FL grammar and prove readiness for learning tenses. Original models of task directions, task sheets and task cards which were used for teaching the English present simple tense for the experimental group are provided in appendix II.

4. Subjects

The size of the population concerned by the findings of this experiment was a total of 360 Algerian university students of English. The sample consists of 66 Algerian first-year students of English making up two classes: 31 students in the control group and 35 students in the experimental group. The students were randomly assigned to groups of comparatively equal size by the administration in

a sense that the student who came first was enrolled first. This procedure helps us to prevent ‘contamination’ –the possibility that some factor other than the teaching method has brought about the differences in the scores. In addition, both groups were subjected to a pretest and showed ‘homogeneity’ among them. Thus, it may be assumed that the two groups were equivalent and that other variables such as language aptitude, age, intelligence, and motivation existed with equal quantities in both the control and the experimental group. Consequently, the sample under scrutiny could be said to be ‘representative’ of the population, and the results could be generalisable to the whole population.

5. Treatment Cycles

The students had two required 90-min period per week of English grammar with an Algerian instructor who was the researcher himself and the regular grammar classroom instructor. Since this could be a bias factor, we acted as a facilitator and respected the two approaches to the letter to avoid what is referred to as the ‘Hawthorne effect’ – showing more attention, devotion and enthusiasm to one treatment and not enough to the other (Benati, 2001: 105-6). The experimental group performed GCRTs dealing with the selected English tenses. Students in this group were randomly assigned into pairs or four-member groups for each task treatment depending on the number of rules for each tense. The control group received TGLs on the same tenses. The contents of the lessons were dictated to the students from the task cards elaborated for the GCRTs. The necessary explanation was provided, and the difficult words were written on the blackboard.

6. Means of research

In order to assess the comparative effectiveness of TGLs and GCRTs, we have recourse to the following means of research commonly used in SLA studies:

1. The proficiency test made up of the multiple choice-questions test to evaluate students’ grammatical accuracy in the use of English tenses and the justification test to assess students’ explicit

grammatical knowledge for their choice of the selected tense options (see appendix I).

2. Classroom observation to assess students' autonomy and negotiated interaction (see section 6.2).
3. The Students' questionnaire to assess students' motivation (see appendix III).
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6.1 The proficiency test

At the beginning of the experiment, the control and experimental groups were administered a proficiency pretest made up of a multiple choice-questions test together with a justification test to investigate respectively whether there were any differences between them in grammatical accuracy and grammatical explicit knowledge. The students were presented with twenty sentences reflecting all the tenses, and they were required to choose one tense from among four alternatives and to provide a grammatical justification for the selected tense. Both groups showed 'homogeneity' among them. In terms of grammatical accuracy, the mean score of the control group in the pretest was 07.90 and that of the experimental group was 07.45. In terms of grammatical explicit knowledge, the mean score of the control group in the pretest was 03.70 and that of the experimental group was 03.54. The student t test was delivered using computer software: MODALISA VERSION: 4, and did not reveal a considerable difference between the pretest score means. After the administration of all the TGLs and the performance of the GCRTs, the two groups took a posttest that was somehow similar to the pretest.

6.2 Classroom Observation

Classroom observation corresponds to Ellis's (1998: 229) evaluation model which consists of: 'a response-based evaluation' based on the researcher's observations about the 'actual' and 'intended' outcomes of the tasks to evaluate whether GCRTs or TGLs enhance negotiated interaction and comprehensible output. Classroom observation is an important research tool used in SLA to aid researchers in their search for information and explanation of teaching techniques and learning

processes. Good observation is a fundamental form of evaluation which consists of objective interpretations and which allows teachers to draw what is extraordinary from what is ordinary, to check learners' input, intake, strategies and attitudes, or collecting information about students' interaction and responses. We opted for Wallace's (1998: 106) method of 'real time observation' which consists in taking notes of the students' performance in the classroom. For gauging students' negotiated interaction, we make use of the following units of analysis: clarification requests, confirmation checks, comprehension checks, repetitions and requests for repetition (Fotos, 1994: 333-4).

6.3 The Students' Questionnaire

For evaluating students' attitudes towards TGLs and GCRTs, we adopted Ellis's (1998: 229) 'Student-based evaluation' to investigate whether GCRTs foster motivation and autonomy. The students were requested to fill in the questionnaire in the classroom and to submit it as soon as they finished. Since the questionnaire was intended to elicit personal answers, students were not allowed to contact each other. They were encouraged to give their own opinions and suggestions to cooperate to an effective assessment of the courses.

7 Analysis of the Results

7.1 Quantitative Analysis of Grammatical Accuracy

For the analysis of the results, we have made use of a statistical package called "Modalisa Version: 4". The proficiency test was administered before beginning TGLs and GCRTs performance. Three months later, the same proficiency test with minor alterations was administered to both the control and experimental groups as a posttest. Grammatical accuracy gains between the pretest and posttest mean scores were calculated for the two treatment groups, and the student t-test was used to examine the significance of differences between them. The mean of the control group grammatical accuracy pretest was 07.90, and its mean in grammatical accuracy posttest was 13.16. The net gain in grammatical accuracy for the control group was 05.26. Furthermore, the mean of the experimental group grammatical accuracy pretest was 07.45, and its mean in grammatical accuracy posttest was 15.02. The net gain in grammatical accuracy for the

experimental group was 07.57. The student t-test was used to examine the significance of differences between the pretest and posttest mean scores between the two treatment groups.

As for grammatical accuracy, given that the student t value calculated: 0.515 is inferior to the t value on the table of t values: 1.96 at 5%, we accept the null hypothesis; therefore, the difference between the two means in the pretest is not significant. Given that the calculated t is superior to the t value on the table: 2.33 at 2%, the null hypothesis is rejected; therefore, the difference between the two means is significant at 2%. GCRTs provide better results in grammatical accuracy than TGLs. Consequently, the first hypothesis, which stipulates that "GCRTs are more effective for improving *grammatical accuracy* in the use of English tenses than TGLs" has been confirmed. The results of the t test lent strong support for a positive answer to this first hypothesis.

7.2 Quantitative Analysis of Explicit Knowledge

As for explicit grammatical knowledge, it is in the same proficiency test used in the present study for the analysis of grammatical accuracy that the students were required to provide the appropriate justification for their choice of any particular tense amongst the four tense options provided for each sentence. The objective of this test was to assess the explicit grammatical knowledge that the students were supposed to have already acquired either through TGLs or GCRTs. The difference related to grammatical explicit knowledge in the score means within the same groups and between the two groups was also significant. Within the same group, the control group score mean in grammatical explicit knowledge pretest was 03.71 and in the posttest 09. A gain of 05.29 was obtained. Within the same group also, the experimental group mean score in the grammatical explicit knowledge was 03.54 and in the posttest 12.02. A significant gain of 08.48 was achieved.

Given that the calculated t is superior to the t value in the table: 2.58 at 1%, the null hypothesis is rejected; therefore, the difference between the two means is significant at 1%. GCRTs resulted in better students' achievements in grammatical explicit knowledge compared to TGLs. Therefore, the second hypothesis which stipulates that "GCRTs

are more effective for promoting *explicit grammatical knowledge* about English tenses than TTFGLs" is significantly corroborated.

7.3 Analysis of Negotiated Interaction through Classroom Observation

To analyse students' negotiated interaction, we observed them in TGLs and GCRTs.

7.3.1 Negotiated Interaction in TGLs

In TGLs, we observe that the students are not inclined to negotiate at all. In the presentation stage, a few students asked questions about the spelling of some words. In spite of the instructor's insistence on the students to ask any question on the grammar lessons, they did not do so. Generally, just few students dared ask questions about a particular use of a tense in each session. Hardly any interaction emerged amongst the students or between the teacher and the students. In the practice stage, however, some students had the chance to read their answers. It is obvious that interactions did not emerge because TGLs were not designed in such a way to trigger negotiated interaction; the aim of these lessons was to transmit some grammatical knowledge to learners. Although the teacher induced learners to discuss and interact about grammatical topics, they showed some reticence in communicating about grammar. We believe that future research should compare GCRTs and other types of communicative tasks because TGLs were incomparable to GCRTs in terms of providing opportunities for negotiated interaction.

7.3.2 Negotiated Interaction in GCRTs

GCRTs appeared to allow students to discuss task directions, tense forms and tense uses. They had to negotiate and exchange information in order to find out the correct forms and to discover the appropriate rules together. They had to reach an agreement on each grammar point. This required the collaboration of all members of the group and hence all the class for reaching a final agreement. Negotiated interaction observed in the performance of GCRTs has been categorised according to the following patterns:

(1) “Clarification requests” as in the following examples: ‘What is the exact form? ‘Why have you selected this rule?’ ‘Can you explain more why you have provided this form?’ ‘What is the difference between the first rule and the second one of this tense?’

(2) “Confirmation checks” as in the following examples: ‘the present simple in this series of sentences is used to express the future! Yes? Are you sure?’ ‘Is it the correct interrogative form?’, ‘Is it the right tense?’, ‘Do you think this use is right?’

(3) “Comprehension checks” as in the following examples: ‘Do you understand this rule?’ ‘Do you agree on this? Is it Ok?’, ‘Are you following?’ ‘Have you understood?’

(4) “Repetitions” as in the following examples: ‘Speak slowly, please!’, ‘Could you repeat, please?’, ‘Once more?’ ‘This rule is very long, would you repeat it, please?’

(5) Other questions asked to check the correctness or incorrectness of the answers provided as in these examples: ‘You say this is the right answer; No I do not think so, the correct one is rule number 2’, ‘Is this form Ok?’, ‘Do you think this rule is appropriate?’

In addition to the negotiation of grammar points, the students in the GCRTs group also discussed new or unknown words. If the group did not agree on the meaning of a particular word, they turned to the instructor asking for help. This endeavour enriched their negotiation. Another phenomenon that drew our attention was their attempt to correct each other’s pronunciation of some words. They sometimes disagreed, but the search for correctness also pushed their negotiations further ahead. GCRTs allowed students to produce great quantities of meaningful interaction. Interaction dominated the class from the very beginning until the very end. The third hypothesis which stipulates that “GCRTs are more effective for fostering *negotiated interaction* and *comprehensible output* in the study of English tenses than TGLs” was strongly corroborated.

Furthermore, classroom observation also provided strong support for the fourth hypothesis. We observed that the experimental group students embarked on performing the grammar tasks meticulously and enthusiastically. Through collective interdependence and collaboration, the students eagerly tackled the grammar tasks completing them in less than the time allocated to the TGLs. However, the students in the

control group seemed to be passive recipients relying on the teacher spoon-feeding operations. They were reluctant to do the exercises, and even disinclined to manage without the teacher's encouragement. The students in the experimental group were not dependent on the teacher; they were rather autonomous and responsible for their learning. They prepared their grammar lessons alone with the information they had in their task sheets and task cards without the teacher's intervention. Their enthusiastic attack of the tasks was but a clear indication of the motivation that boosted them up in their endeavour to cope with the tasks.

7.4 Analysis of Autonomy and Motivation through the Students' Questionnaire

The questionnaire seeks to elicit answers about students' perceptions and attitudes towards grammar instruction under TGLs and GCRTs. Here are some questions and answers:

Q. 1 Did you consider the material about GCRTs interesting? The findings show that 97.15% of the students regarded the task materials as interesting. Only one student (02.85%) did not think so. The general attitude can be regarded as a positive judgement towards the use of tasks in the teaching of grammar. This gives a strong support for the fourth hypothesis which stipulates that "GCRTs drive further students' autonomy and responsibility for learning, and thus increase their motivation and self-confidence in comparison to TGLs."

Q. 2 How much grammar did you learn through GCRTs (a lot, quite a lot, not much, or not at all)? The results show that the large majority (68.57%) of the students affirmed that they learned 'quite a lot' through GCRTs. Grouped together, those who ticked 'A lot' and 'Quite a lot' formed 85.71% against those who ticked 'Not much' and 'Not at all' with 14.27%. This high proportion is a clear indication that GCRTs tasks have good effects on general grammar learning.

Q. 3 Did GCRTs help you interact, negotiate and communicate? The results show that 82.86% of the students affirmed that GCRTs helped them interact and communicate 'quite a lot', and 11.43% said that they helped them 'a lot'. Given the high percentage of the students

who said that GCRTs helped ‘a lot’ and ‘quite a lot’ together (94.29%), GCRTs can be said to be very useful for enhancing negotiated interaction. So, the third hypothesis guiding this study, “GCRTs are more effective for fostering negotiated interaction and comprehensible output in the study of English tenses than TGLs” is confirmed in this questionnaire.

Q. 4 Did GCRTs help you gain autonomy, self-confidence and motivation? The results show that 71.43% of the students affirmed that GCRTs helped them ‘quite a lot’ in enhancing their autonomy, motivation and self-confidence, and 22.86% said that they helped them ‘a lot’. Due to the higher number of the students who said that GCRTs helped ‘a lot’ and ‘quite a lot’ together (94.29%), GCRTs can be said to have very good effects on students’ autonomy, motivation and self-confidence. The fourth hypothesis which stipulates that “GCRTs could drive further students’ autonomy and responsibility for learning, and thus increase their motivation and self-confidence in comparison to TGLs” is confirmed.

Q. 5 Would you like to study grammar in the future through TGLs or GCRTs or both? The reason behind this question is to detect whether the students really like GCRTs and find them useful. The results show that 71.43% of the students would like to study grammar in the future through GCRTs. Only 11.43% of the students would like to study grammar through TGLs, and 17.14% favoured alternation. So, GCRTs are preferable to TGLs, and therefore must have a place in the FL grammar pedagogy.

Q. 6 Please, indicate your general feeling about GCRTs? The results indicate that 74.29% of the students admitted that they were ‘very satisfied’, and 20% of them avowed that they were ‘satisfied’. So, those who are ‘satisfied’ and ‘very satisfied’ form the large majority (94.29%). This lends a strong support for the effectiveness of GCRTs.

Q. 7 What are the advantages of GCRTs? For the sake of brevity, the students’ long answers are concisely reported by the researcher as follows: GCRTs improve understanding, negotiated interaction,

motivation, spelling, vocabulary acquisition, self-confidence, memorization, active work, enthusiasm, autonomy, responsibility for learning, good relationship, competition and students' social status,. However, the disadvantages of GCRTs as listed by few students are reformulated by the researcher as follows: the availability of the information about tenses in the task cards prevents students from making personal investigation, students' explanations do not equal teachers' explanation, no practice, students' bad pronunciation, irresponsibility of some learners, noise problem, students' heterogeneous levels. The results of the students' questionnaire confirm the fourth hypothesis which stipulates that 'GCRTs could drive further students' autonomy and responsibility for learning, and thus increase their self-confidence and motivation in comparison to TGLs'.

8. Discussion

The results of the experiment indicated that GCRTs are more effective than TGLs at all levels. We believe that the same significant results attained in the mastery of the tenses through GCRTs can be attained for the teaching of other grammatical forms and structures in English and other languages. The experiment also demonstrated that TGLs resulted in the emergence of correct grammatical forms, and this is a sound counterargument for those researchers who deny the beneficial effects of grammar instruction whatever its nature. In contrast to TGLs students who have always some grammar practice activities after each lesson, the GCRTs students have not been presented at all with any form of practice. Although practice would have been a bias in favour of the TGLs group, the GCRTs group had achieved better results. The place that practice has enjoyed for a long time seems to fall into disfavour. GCRTs which lay a great emphasis on consciousness-raising proved to be very efficient types of classroom activities.

GCRTs may contribute to language acquisition by allowing students to develop grammatical explicit knowledge that will later facilitate the acquisition of implicit knowledge (Fotos and Ellis 1991: 622). Grammatical explicit knowledge is deemed necessary because it

represents a declarative knowledge which allows skill getting which is vehemently observed in the internalisation of grammatical explicit rules. Procedural knowledge allows skill using which appears in the use of grammatical tenses as shown in the multiple choice-questions test and will later appear in uncontrolled communication.

In terms of negotiated interaction, GCRTs seemed to be invaluable; their comparisons to TGLs were indeed out of equal at all. They allowed students to discuss task directions, tense forms, spelling and pronunciation. Since only one acceptable outcome is possible, students worked hard to understand each other, to request information from each other, to supply each other with the appropriate feedback, and to modify their output to be understood. GCRTs also helped students to develop the four learning skills: listening, speaking, reading and writing. In these kinds of focused tasks, both reception and production are emphasized. If students do not listen attentively, read clearly, speak distinctly, and write correctly, they will fail in the attempt. The development of these skills among the students can be considered as an indication of the success of the task.

GCRTs promote communicating about grammar and negotiating meaning to a greater extent. This will certainly develop implicit knowledge of grammatical rules. As Fotos and Ellis (1991: 622) argue, this type of grammar tasks “may contribute *directly* by providing opportunities for the kind of communication which is believed to promote the acquisition of implicit knowledge.” In fact, under GCRTs, negotiated interaction abounded in the classroom. Individually, each member of the group seemed to be as ‘busy as a bee’. Socially, students proved to be like energetic ants which work hard and which collaborate in an organized society in a very structured way. Negotiated interaction is deemed necessary for natural language development. As the slogan says, "We are talking to learn and not learning to talk." Talking is essential for language acquisition to occur, and interaction is very crucial for automatisisation to take place. How can we imagine learning a FL without interacting and conversing? We

believe that Algerian learners need ample interaction because English is used only in the classroom..

The results of this study indicated that GCRTs generated an arsenal of FL negotiations. The average number of words per FL negotiations ranged from more than three words per negotiated interaction to more than seven words per negotiated interaction. The data obtained were not mechanical; they consisted much more of extensive and original sentences, and much more complex language production. The grammar tasks used in this study required the use of information-gap activities, reasoning-gap activities, and decision-making activities as advanced by Prabhu (1987). The combination of these task features allowed the students to produce a maximum number of negotiations. The first feature forced the students to exchange information in order to fulfil the tasks. The second one made them think and reason about the raw grammatical data in order to induce the appropriate rules. The third feature consisted in reaching a single agreed-upon solution, and this necessitated more discussions to sort out the logical rule. As GCRTs are closed ended tasks that induce learners to provide more precise answers, they have spawned much more negotiation and communication among the students.

In GCRTs, students worked in groups where each was given only part of the information that was necessary for completing the task successfully. They had to communicate about grammar in order to complete the tasks. Three hypotheses entered into play –the Comprehensible Input Hypothesis, the Comprehensible Output Hypothesis and the Interaction Hypothesis. Each student had to listen to the input attentively, to produce a comprehensible output in order to be understood, and to negotiate and interact in order to convince the other members of the group about the rules which governed the various sets of sentences. Thus, the grammar tasks resulted in interactive, dynamic language use that was sufficiently rich to suggest that GCRTS had general benefits to FL learning.

In addition to the fact that classroom observation allowed us to notice that GCRTs enhanced negotiated interaction and comprehensible output, they also enabled us to observe the students' responses to the tasks. The students actually developed some positive psychological traits. They showed a great autonomy and responsibility for learning. They no longer waited for the teacher to provide them with all the bits and pieces of language, but they themselves built up their own lessons from the task cards according to the directions given in the task sheets. They showed self-confidence in dealing with the tasks; they no longer hesitated; they even ceased to expect that the truth comes only out of the teacher's mouth. Their enthusiasm and discussion about grammar without the least vacillation demonstrated that their affective filter (Krashen, 1987: 30) allowed them to work at the lowest anxiety level. They also developed an outgoing tendency to participate and take risks, and generally adopted a tolerant, sociable, friendly and extrovert attitude. They felt that they were in a good company that permitted them to work without fear and bashfulness, to speak spontaneously and to improvise even inaccurately without shyness and hesitation. They disregarded the fact that they might be ridiculed if they committed lexical or grammatical mistakes in front of their peers. We also observed that they developed an analytic orientation in the sense that they preferred conscious learning and the use of metalanguage in order to discover the rules for themselves and to explain them for their peers relying on the TL, without any form of inhibition or first language interference.

As the teacher-researcher played the role of a counsellor and not of a powerful master who said and controlled everything in the classroom, the students found the group as a favourable nest to allow their personalities to hatch out and their quiescent linguistic knowledge to blossom naturally without shaking their inner feelings and disturbing their natural development. Indeed, GCRTs offered a relaxed environment that allowed the students' anxiety level to lower drastically and to reinforce their natural trust and self-confidence. The participation in GCRTs was compulsory: all the students had to talk in

order to accomplish the tasks. If some students may not like GCRTs, it is because they involve cognitive processing and rule formation techniques. This kind of students are fond of gathering data in an implicit way without working out their cognitive abilities such as attention, noticing and intelligence.

Conclusion

The results of the study show that GCRTs are more effective than TGLs in developing grammatical accuracy, grammatical explicit knowledge, negotiated interaction, autonomy, self-confidence and motivation. In order to help students gain accuracy, fluency, autonomy and motivation, we have to make extensive use of GCRTs. They can be recommended as a viable approach to integrate form-focused instruction and task-based language teaching for the teaching of grammar in EFL classes. Indeed, our interest in grammar does not mean that we are seeking a golden age of grammar teaching, but we are only deploring the strong return of traditional grammar to our communicative classrooms on the one hand and the total abandonment of grammar teaching in schools and universities on the other hand.

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Appendices

Appendix I

The Proficiency Test

Circle the appropriate tense, and justify your choice for all the sentences.

1. We for a new house now.

- | | |
|--------------|----------------|
| a. look | c. are looking |
| b. will look | d. have looked |

Justification:

2. We you for a long time.

- | | |
|--------------|---------------|
| a. don't see | b. didn't see |
|--------------|---------------|

- c. haven't seen d. hadn't seen

Justification:

3. Don't phone me at seven o'clock, I my supper.

- a. shall eat c. shall be eating
b. shall have eaten d. shall have been eating

Justification:

4. If the weather nice tomorrow, I will come and see you.

- a. is c. will be
b. will have been d. should be

Justification:

5. He usually up about seven.

- a. got c. gets
b. get d. will get

Justification:

6. The French Algeria in 1830.

- a. invaded c. have invaded
b. had invaded d. were invading

Justification:

7. Your eyes are very red.

- a. Are you crying? c. Have you been crying?
b. Have you cried? d. Do you cry?

Justification:

8. He gave me a hand after he

- a. had finished c. finished
b. has finished d. finishes

Justification:

9. If you had invited them, they

- a. would come c. would have come
b. have come d. came

Justification:

10. I am sure that I him.

- a. will recognise c. recognise
b. am recognising d. will have recognised

Justification:

11. I when the telephone rang.

- a. sleep c. slept
- b. have been sleeping d. was sleeping

Justification:

12. By the end of June, students their exams.

- a. will have finished c. finish
- b. will have been finishing d. will finish

Justification:

13. I hoped that you

- a. will succeed c. would succeed
- b. succeeded d. will have succeeded

Justification:

14. He was tired because he for three hours.

- a. has been running c. was running
- b. had run d. had been running

Justification:

15. If you heat ice, it to water.

- a. turns c. will turn
- b. turned d. will have turned

Justification:

16. I hoped that he us before we got back.

- a. informed c. has informed
- b. would inform d. would have informed

Justification:

17. By the end of the year, they here for fifty years.

- a. will live c. will be living
- b. would live d. will have been living

Justification:

18. If we a car, we could get there quite quickly.

- a. had c. have
- b. have had d. would have

Justification:

19. This time last year, Peter with friends in France.

- a. had stayed c. has stayed

- b. was staying d. had been staying

Justification:

20. I usually wear a coat, but I one today as it isn't cold.

- a. don't wear c. hadn't worn
b. didn't wear d. am not wearing

Justification:

Appendix II

A Model of Task Directions, Task Sheets and Task Cards for The Present Simple Tense

Task Directions

I. Objectives

This task should enable you to raise your consciousness and gain an explicit knowledge of the different forms and uses of the present simple as well as to provide you with ample opportunities for interaction focused on an exchange of information.

II. Activities

You are required to consciously analyse the following data in groups of four or two where you first share the results of your analysis with the members of your group and then with the members of the other groups.

III. Organisation of the task

1. Complete the task cards individually.
2. Read them to the members of your group as many times as necessary until they finish
writing them down on the task sheets. Do not show them the task cards.
3. Give them the use of the present simple tense you think corresponds to all the sentences.
4. Discuss with the members of your group the answers until you reach a common decision.
5. Choose one member of your group to report your results to the whole class.
6. Be ready to negotiate with the members of the whole class and to agree on a single
solution.
7. Make the necessary corrections if your answers are wrong.

Note: You should speak only in English during the task.

Task Sheets

The Present Simple

Fill in the following task sheets while one member of your group reads them to you.

I. Forms of the present simple of the verb “to talk”

Affirmative Form

I . . .

You . . .

He/She/It . . .

We . . .

You . . .

They . . .

Negative Form

I . . .

You . . .

He/She/It . . .

We . . .

You . . .

They . . .

Interrogative

. . . I . . .

. . . you . . .

. . . he/she/it . . .

. . . we . . .

. . . you . . .

. . . they . . .

Interro-negative form

. . . I . . .

. . . you . . .

. . . he/she/it . . .

. . . we . . .

. . . you . . .

. . . they . . .

Short Answers

Yes:

Yes, I . . .

Yes, you . . .

Yes, he/she/it . . .

.

Yes, we . . .

Yes, you . . .

Yes, they . . .

No:

No, I . . .

No, you . . .

No, he/she/it . . .

.

No, we . . .

No, you . . .

No, they . . .

II. Uses of the Present Simple

1. Examples from task card one:

(1)

(2)

(3)

(4)

Rule 1: The present simple is used to express . . .

2. Examples from task card two:

- (1)
- (2)
- (3)
- (4)

Rule 2: The present simple is used to express . . .

3. Examples from task card three:

- (1)
- (2)
- (3)
- (4)

Rule 3: The present simple is used to express . . .

4. Examples from task card four:

- (1)
- (2)
- (3)
- (4)

Rule 4: The present simple is used to express . . .

.....

Task Card One

I. Form:

Conjugate the verb 'to talk' in the **affirmative** form of the present simple tense.

I . . .

You . . .

He/ She/ It . . .

We . . .

You . . .

They . . .

II. Use:

–Read the following sentences carefully to understand their meaning.

- 1. Pupils usually **go** to school in time.
- 2. Birds **fly**, and **fish** swim.
- 3. My son **plays** all the morning and **sleeps** in the afternoon.
- 4. Housewives **work** very hard. They **cook** the meals, **lay** the table, **clean** the house, **mend** the clothes, and **do** the washing and ironing.

–These sentences show **one use** of the present simple tense. Find out what it is by putting a

tick in the appropriate box below:

- ☐ Eternal truths and facts; i.e. actions for all time.
☐ Planned future actions.
☐ Past related as present or historic present.
☐ Habitual, repeated or permanent actions especially with adverbs of frequency:

often, usually, sometimes, seldom, rarely, always, occasionally, never.

.....
Task Card Two

I. Form:

Conjugate the verb “to talk” in the **negative** form of the present simple tense.

I . . .

You . . .

He/She/It . . .

We . . .

You . . .

They . . .

II. Use:

–Read the following sentences carefully to understand their meaning.

1. Water **boils** at 100°C.
2. Air **contains** oxygen and nitrogen.
3. Honesty **is** the best policy.
4. Wars **solve** no problem.

–These sentences show **one use** of the present simple tense. Find out what it is by putting a

tick the appropriate box below:

- ☐ Eternal truths and facts; i.e., actions for all time.
☐ Planned future actions.
☐ Past related as present or historic present.
☐ Habitual, repeated, or permanent actions especially with adverbs of frequency: often, usually, sometimes, seldom, rarely, always, occasionally, never.

.....
Task Card Three

I. Form:

Conjugate the verb “to talk” in the **interrogative** of the present simple tense, and then provide **short answers**.

Interrogative

Short answer

Short answer

. . . I . . .

Yes, I . . .

No, I . . .

. . . you . . .

Yes, you . . .

No, you . . .

. . . he/she/it . . .

Yes, he/she/it . . .

No, he/she/it . . .

. . . we . . .	Yes, we . . .	No, we . . .
. . . you . . .	Yes, you . . .	No, you . . .
. . . they . . .	Yes, they . . .	No, they . . .

II. Use:

–First read the following sentences carefully to understand their meaning.

1. I **start** work next week.
2. Next Monday **is** my birthday.
3. The Hegira Day **falls** on Wednesday next year.
4. The plane **leaves** at 9 o'clock from Algiers, and arrives in London at 11:30.

–These sentences show **one use** of the present simple tense. Find out what it is by putting a tick in the appropriate box below:

☐ Eternal truths and facts; i.e., actions for all time.

☐ Planned future actions.

☐ Past related as present or historic present.

☐ Habitual, repeated, or permanent actions especially with adverbs of frequency:

often, usually, sometimes, seldom, rarely, always, occasionally, never.

.....

Task Card Four

I. Form:

Conjugate the verb “to talk” in the **interro-negative** of the present simple tense.

- . . . I . . .
. . . you . . .
. . . he/she/it . . .
. . . we . . .
. . . you . . .
. . . they . . .

II. Use:

–Read the following sentences carefully to understand their meaning.

1. Rachid **tells** me that your brothers **are** abroad.
2. Peter **says** he will come.
3. In 1830, France **occupies** Algeria.
4. Mohamed Dib **draws** his characters from the Algerian society.

–These sentences show **one use** of the present simple. Find out what it is by putting a tick in the appropriate box below:

☐ Eternal truths and facts; i.e., actions for all time.

- ☐ Planned future actions.
- ☐ Past related as present or historic present.
- ☐ Habitual, repeated or permanent actions especially with adverbs of frequency:
often, usually, sometimes, seldom, rarely, always, occasionally, never.

Appendix III

The Students' Questionnaire

Dear Student,

This questionnaire is designed to investigate your attitudes towards 'grammar tasks' as performed in the classroom while studying the English tenses.

Your answers will be taken into account for research purposes and will be treated with a great confidence.

Please, fill in the following questionnaire by providing the required information or by putting a tick in the appropriate box.

Thank you in advance for your cooperation.

1. Did you consider the material about GCRTs interesting?

Yes ☐

No ☐

2. How much grammar did you learn through grammar consciousness-raising tasks?

A lot ☐

Quite a lot ☐

Not much ☐

Not at all ☐

3. Did GCRTs help you interact, negotiate and communicate?

A lot ☐

Quite a lot ☐

Not much ☐

Not at all ☐

4. Did GCRTs help you gain autonomy, self-confidence and motivation?

A lot ☐

Quite a lot ☐

Not much ☐

Not at all ☐

5. Would you like to study grammar in the future through:

TGL? ☐

GCRTs? ☐

Both Methods ☐

6. Please indicate your general feeling about GCRTs.

Satisfied ☐

Very satisfied ☐

Dissatisfied ☐

Very dissatisfied ☐

7. What are the advantages and disadvantages of GCRTs?