

The Comparative Effect of Using Visual and Auditory Input Enhancement on the Use of Cohesive Devices in the Writing of Iranian EFL Filed-dependent and independent Learners¹

Mohadeseh Fani*²
Mohammad Hashamdar³

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Abstract

Writing has been a troublesome skill for Iranian EFL learners as it needs accurate planning and acceptable coherence. The current study aimed at investigating the comparative effect of visual and auditory input enhancement on the use of cohesive devices in the writing of Iranian EFL learners. Participants of the study were 60 field dependent and 60 field independent language learners at intermediate level of language proficiency. The study adopted a pretest posttest design and data were ana-

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² MA, Department of English Language and Literature, Science and Research Branch, Islamic Azad University. (Corresponding author); mohadeseh.fani@yahoo.com

³ Assistant Professor, Department of English Language and Literature, Karaj Branch, Islamic Azad University. mohamad.hashamdar@kia.ac.ir

lyzed through employing statistical test of ANCOVA. Results of statistical analysis showed that visual input enhancement was significantly more effective than auditory input enhancement in terms of their effects on the use of cohesive devices in both field dependent and field independent language learners. Results were discussed and implications of study were also presented.

Keywords: Cohesive devices, input enhancement, L2 writing, Visual and auditory input enhancement.

Introduction

Writing is considered an important skill in the area of language teaching and learning (Leki, 2003). Al-Meni (2008) believes that all over the world, English writing has a vital, multicultural, and traditional role in the setting of business and governmental initiatives. Leki (2003) states that writing is considered as a crucial element of education, labeled as a vital path of language learning.

Moreover, Leki (2003) declares that writing has an important influence on the development of occupation. Leki further states that learning writing serves as an evidence, specifying that one has become proficient in a language. Furthermore, imperfect command of lexical items and grammar causes problems for L2 learners when they try to express their thoughts and feelings. Learners are usually inclined to use pre-fabricated written expressions as they struggle with partial level of vocabulary in addition to poor amount of knowledge of grammatical elements (Al-Meni, 2008).

Accordingly, many L2 teachers have tried a lot to find active ways to improve the writing process and the learners' writing skill. The use of cohesive devices is considered as one of the significant facets of writing (Zainal & Husin, 2011) and consequently, many recent studies (e.g., Crossley, Kyle, & McNamara, 2016; Khodareza, & Ashouri, 2016; Mohammed, 2015; Moini & Kheirkhah, 2016; Rostami, Gholami, & Piri, 2016) have concentrated on this key facet. As Basturkmen (2002) believes, one of the main reasons stimulating the learners' efforts to make a comprehensible text is learners' failure to pay attention to sentence cohesion.

Dueraman (2007) defines cohesion as "how words and expressions are connected using cohesive devices which can be categorized into five groups: reference, substitution, ellipsis, conjunction, and lexical cohesion" (p.5). Coherence is defined by Castro (2004, cited in Ghasemi, 2004, p. 1616) as "the link in a text connecting ideas and making the flow of thoughts meaningful and clear for readers". Halliday and Hasan (1976, cited in Ghasemi, 2013) declare that coherence is focused on the internal fundamentals of a text. Coherence and cohesion in a text are important features for improving the quality of writing and writing process of non-native speakers (Dueraman, 2007). Input enhancement is one of the main techniques which may assist learners increase the use of different language elements including cohesive devices in their texts (Han, Park &

Combs, 2008). Smith (1993) defines input enhancement as a technique making some aspects of a text salient in order to bring them to the attention of the learners. Smith (1993) presents the idea of input enhancement (IE) with the purpose of emphasizing the teaching methods used by L2 teachers to explain the essentials of the second language achievement. Input enhancement is also in line with the use of traditional methods in teaching grammar (Smith, 1993).

Input enhancement is assigned into two main classes of visual and auditory input types. The most commonly used method in visual input enhancement is to make the language forms or vocabulary items more salient through employing a combination of methods including bolding, capitalizing, underlining, and coloring the font; while, in some cases these might be followed by an explicit instruction especially in case of grammar (Han, Park & Combs, 2008). Auditory input enhancement, in contrast, involves variation in the listening materials. These variations may consist of bringing the target items to the attention of the learners by inserting a short pause before and/or after the targeted items (Gascoigne, 2006). Through “auditory input enhancement”, intonation, stress or gestures might also be used (Gascoigne, 2006). Auditory and visual input enhancement are usually employed to make the task of language learning less challenging (Smith, 1993).

According to Ellis (2008), second language learning is a complex procedure with too many related elements. To define the elements that can affect a person’s language capability in learning and their consequence, researchers focus on the consistent features such as age, sex, native language and predispositions comprising motivation, attitude, ambiguity tolerance, and cognitive style (Jamieson, 1992). Moreover, Jamieson declares that understanding the predispositions of language learners (mainly cognitive styles) helps teachers to make a basis for progress both for classroom and computer labs.

The term cognitive style is defined as the connection between personality and cognition that affects how we learn things overall and the particular approach we adopt when dealing with problems (Brown, 1994). Theoretically, many cognitive styles may be present. However, in recent years, only a few kinds of cognitive styles have received attention from L2 scholars. Among these cognitive styles, Field-Independence/ Dependence (FI/D) can be named. Field-Dependence (FD) is among the types of cognitive styles in which one tends to explore a learning task that comprises many items and has problems in learning a specific item when it happens within a field of other items (Littlemore, 2001). The field may be perceptual or it may be abstract such as a set of ideas, opinions, or feelings. In contrast, Field-Independence (FI) is a cognitive style in which a person can identify or emphasize specific items and is not distracted by other items in the circumstance or the background (Brown, 2000).

So far, some studies have been conducted (e.g., Altun & Cakan, 2006; Ghon-souly & Eghtesadee, 2006; Littlemore, 2001; Vahabi, 2006) concerning the variances between field-dependent and field-independent learners and the way they observe and act within the learning situation. FD learners are more likely to be influenced by the learning situation and more simply receive structure or

idea of instruction in comparison to FI learners (Shi, 2011). Furthermore, Chappell and Robert (1986) conclude that there is a correlation between the FI style and language success. However, none of these studies to date, seems to have explored the effect of auditory input enhancement and visual input enhancement in terms of their effects on the use of cohesive devices by Iranian EFL Field-dependent and independent learners.

Clearly, there are differences between field-dependent and independent learners. According to Littlemore (2001), individuals who are more Field-independent are good at identifying objects or details that have surroundings which might obscure their view. Field-independent individuals tend to see objects or details as discrete from their backgrounds. On the other hand, field-dependent individuals are less able to view things separate from the overall environment and are more affected by the prevailing field or context (Littlemore, 2001). Thus, it can be hypothesized that visual and auditory input enhancement may affect the use of cohesive devices by field-dependent and independent EFL learners differently. Therefore, the current study aimed at answering the following research question:

RQ: Is there any significant difference between auditory input enhancement and visual input enhancement in terms of their effects on the use of cohesive devices by Iranian EFL field-dependent and independent Learners?

Methodology

Participants

The participants of the current study were 120 Iranian EFL learners aging within the range of 17 to 25. All were studying general English at intermediate level as reported by the language school in which they were studying. All the participants had passed 18 semesters of English classes prior to the study and had been exposed to about 550 hours of English instruction. Sixty of these participants were field-dependent and the other sixty field-independent who had been screened out of the available intermediate students through employing Group Embedded Figures Test (GEFT). All participants were female students as the policy of the language school did not allow coed education. Field-dependent and field-independent students were divided into two equal groups (30 students in each group) for receiving either visually enhanced input or auditory enhanced input. Accordingly, there were two groups of field-dependent and two groups of field-independent students.

Instruments

Group Embedded Figures Test (GEFT)

Field-dependence and independence cognitive styles were identified by Group Embedded Figures Test (GEFT) developed by Witkin, Oltman, Raskin, and Karp

(1971). Witkin, Oltman, Raskin, and Karp (1971) reported a Spearman-Brown reliability coefficient of 0.82 for their instrument. GEFT is a 25-item test that requires participants to identify more simple figures out of complicated figures. The ability to identify the simple figures is an indication of field independency. The maximum possible score in GEFT is 18 and the minimum is 0. According to GEFT instructions, those with scores up to 11 are classified as field-dependent and those above 11 are classified as field-independent people. In order to make sure about the reliability of GEFT, it was piloted on a sample of 15 language learners and Cronbach's Alpha was calculated for the obtained scores. The results of reliability analysis indicated an index of 0.78 which is an acceptable index of reliability.

Writing (Pretest & Posttest)

A writing task was also administered to the participants of the study before and after the treatment. In this writing task, students were asked to write an essay on a given topic related to the themes they had covered in their earlier courses. The uses of cohesive devices were identified using a cohesive device list by Hinkel (2001) as follows:

Phrase-level/coordinator: Also, and, both.....and, but, either.....or, neither.....nor, nor, not only.....but also, or, (and) then, yet

Sentence transitions:

Enumerative; First(ly), second(ly), third(ly), fourth(ly)....., next, then, in the first/second/third.....place, first/second/third.....of all; for one thing.

Additive: above all, additionally, (once) again, in addition, likewise, similarly, in the same way, by the same token, even worse, furthermore, moreover, also, besides, then, still, yet, nevertheless, again, then (again), (distinguished from phrase level coordinator).

Summative: all in all, altogether, in sum, therefore, thus, to summarize, to sum up.

Resultive: accordingly, as a result, as a/in consequence, consequently, hence, now, (and) so.

Concessive: after all, all the same, anyhow, anyways, at any rate, at the same time, besides, else, however, in any case/event, for all that, nevertheless, nonetheless, on the other hand, still, that said, though, then/yet.

Other: as a matter of fact, by the way, conversely, incidentally, in contrast, in fact, meantime/while, in the meantime/while, eventually, originally, on the contrary, otherwise, rather, somehow, subsequently.

Logical/semantic conjunctions/prepositions: as well, because of, besides, despite, except, for that reason, in contrast (to/with), in spite of, instead of, in place of, in that case, in the event of, in this/that way, like, too, unlike.

The occurrences of cohesive devices were counted and used as scores indicating the extent of the use of cohesive devices by the language learners.

Procedure

After choosing the participants based on convenience sampling, they were divided into two field-dependent and two field-independent groups based on GEFT scores. Following that, a writing task was administered as the pretest. All of the groups were instructed to write an essay on the topic of “advantages and disadvantages of the internet”. They were also instructed to explain their claims while writing so that the use of cohesive devices could be more apparent. The essays were collected and the number of cohesive devices correctly used by the learners was counted and used as the scores for the use of cohesive devices. In the next step, one field-dependent and one field-independent groups received visually enhanced materials which included sample readings for the target writing tasks; while, another set of field-dependent and field-independent groups received exactly the same materials, but this time auditory enhanced. Visual enhancement was done drawing on Norris and Ortega (2000). Visual enhancement included underlining, boldfacing, italicizing, capitalizing, and other strategies such as color coding or using different font sizes or types for the use of cohesive devices in the reading samples. On the other hand, auditory enhancement was done drawing on Dahl (1981) and Håkansson (1986). Therefore, the instructor read aloud the sample readings and paused before and after the cohesive devices in the text for a few seconds. In addition, the cohesive devices were read aloud several times and at times with a different pitch and a funny voice. Each session students wrote one essay after studying the visually enhanced reading samples or listening to the auditory enhanced texts. After the 10 sessions of treatment, participants wrote another essay as the posttest on the topic of “advantages and disadvantages” of public transportation” with similar instructions as in the pretest. The posttest essays were scored in terms of the use of cohesive devices again by counting and summing up their number. It should be noted that the essays were scored by the researcher and a colleague with an MA in TEFL with more than 10 years of teaching experience. To assure that the scoring procedure was reliable, the scores of the two raters were correlated using Pearson correlation coefficient and the yielded index was .79 which is a satisfactory level of reliability.

In order to compare the effects of visual enhancement and auditory enhancement, ANCOVA was run once for the field-dependent and once for the field-independent groups of students. In running ANCOVA, writing posttest was considered as the dependent variable and writing pretest was considered as the covariate.

Results

The current study intended to explore the differences in effects of visual enhancement and auditory enhancement on use of cohesive devices among field-dependent and field-independent students. As stated in the Method section, the students’ use of cohesive devices after the treatment was reflected in the posttest. The cohesive device pretest was used as the covariate and accordingly, the

posttest scores were attenuated by taking into account the cohesive device pretest. Table 1 shows the results of the cohesive device posttest while controlling the effect of the pretest.

Table 1.
Estimated Marginal Means

Main groups	Groups	Mean	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval	
				Lower Bound	Upper Bound
field-dependent	Visual	20.863 ^b	.197	20.469	21.257
	Auditory	19.237 ^b	.197	18.843	19.631
field-independent	Visual	23.397 ^a	.309	22.779	24.015
	Auditory	21.103 ^a	.309	20.485	21.721

a. Covariates appearing in the model are evaluated at the following values: Pretest FI = 19.7333.
b. Covariates appearing in the model are evaluated at the following values: Pretest FD = 19.1833

Since the posttest scores were attenuated, the comparison could be safely done between the groups. In field-independent students, the visual group scored 23.39 (SD=0.30); while, the auditory group scored 21.10 (SD=0.30) in the cohesive device posttest. In the same vein, in field-dependent students, the visual group scored 20.86 (SD=0.19); while, the auditory group scored 16.23 (SD=0.19) in the cohesive device posttest. Therefore, it can be seen that those receiving visually enhanced material scored higher than those receiving auditory enhanced material in both field-dependent and field-independent students. In order to decide about the significance of such difference between the effects of the two types of enhancement procedures, a robust test of ANCOVA was run on the cohesive device posttest.

In the first step, comparison was made between visual enhancement and auditory enhancement in field-independent groups. ANCOVA requires certain assumptions to be met among which multicollinearity, equality of variances, linearity and homogeneity of regression slopes are the most important ones. The first assumption, multicollinearity requires that there should not be strong correlation between covariates. Since the present study just included one covariate (cohesive device pretest), this assumption was automatically met. In order to check the equality of variances, Levene's test of equality of variances was utilized.

Table 2.
Levene's Test of Equality of Error Variances for field-independent students

F	df1	df2	Sig.
2.530	1	58	.117

Tests the null hypothesis that the error variance of the dependent variable is equal across groups.
a. Design: Intercept + PretestFI + Groups

According to Levenes' test of equality of variances (Table 2), the groups of field-independent students had equal variances, $F(1, 58) = 2.53, p = 0.11$. Linear-

ity and homogeneity of regression slopes were tested using scatter plot of the pretest and posttest. Figure, 1 shows this scatter plot.

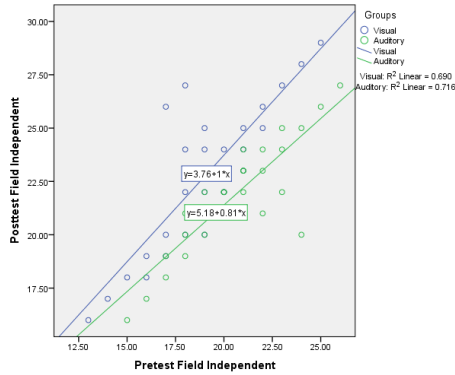


Figure 1.
scatter plot of pretest and posttest for field-independent students

As seen in Figure 1, the lines are in diagonal shape starting in the left bottom corner and ending in the top right corner which is an indication of linearity of the pretest and posttest relationship and also homogeneity of regression slopes (Pallant, 2010). Finally, the results of ANCOVA test was checked which pointed to a significant difference between the visual enhancement and auditory enhancement in terms of their effects on the use of cohesive devices.

Table 3.
Result of ANCOVA for field-independent students

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Corrected Model	364.607 ^a	2	182.304	66.338	.000	.699
Intercept	19.984	1	19.984	7.272	.009	.113
Pretest FI	352.457	1	352.457	128.254	.000	.692
Groups	72.904	1	72.904	26.529	.000	.318
Error	156.643	57	2.748			
Total	30225.000	60				
Corrected Total	521.250	59				

a. R Squared = .699 (Adjusted R Squared = .689)

Table 3, in the row Groups, clearly shows that there is a significant difference between the two groups of field-independent students, $F(2, 58) = 26.52, p = 0.00$. The same procedure was repeated for the field-dependent students as first, ANCOVA assumptions were checked and then, the results of ANCOVA test were checked. With regard to multicollinearity, there was no room for any concern as there was only one covariate (pretest).

Table 4.
Levene's Test of Equality of Error Variances for field-dependent students

F	df1	df2	Sig.
.156	1	58	.694

Tests the null hypothesis that the error variance of the dependent variable is equal across groups.
a. Design: Intercept + PretestFD + Groups

Result of Levene's test of equality of variances also showed that the groups of field-dependent students had equal variances, $F(1, 58) = 0.15, p=0.69$.

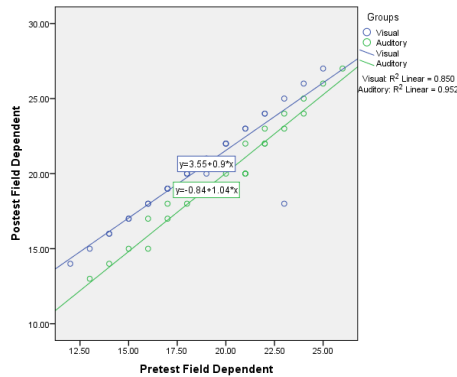


Figure 2.
scatter plot of pretest and posttest for field-dependent students

As seen in Figure 2, the lines are in diagonal shape starting in the left bottom corner and ending in the top right corner which is an indication of the linearity of the pretest and posttest relationship and also homogeneity of regression slopes (Pallant, 2010).

Table 5.
Result of ANCOVA for field-dependent students

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Corrected Model	578.134 ^a	2	289.067	254.600	.000	.899
Intercept	3.367	1	3.367	2.966	.090	.049
Pretest FD	576.784	1	576.784	508.012	.000	.899
Groups	37.912	1	37.912	33.391	.000	.369
Error	64.716	57	1.135			
Total	24763.000	60				
Corrected Total	642.850	59				

a. R Squared = .899 (Adjusted R Squared = .896)

After establishing the ANCOVA requirements for the field-dependent students, ANCOVA output was examined. Table 5, in the row Groups, clearly shows

that there is a significant difference between the two groups of field-dependent students, $F(2, 57) = 33.39, p = 0.00$. According to the statistical analysis, it was concluded that visually enhanced materials have a significantly better effect on the use of cohesive devices by field-dependent and field-independent students.

Discussion

The current study aimed at comparing the effects of two types of input enhancement methods on the use of cohesive devices in the writing of Iranian EFL learners. Two main groups of learners, namely field-dependent and field-independent learners participated in the study. Based on the analysis of cohesive devices pretest and posttest, students, either field-dependent or field-independent made significantly more progress in the use of cohesive devices after receiving visually enhanced material rather than auditory enhanced materials. The findings suggested that both field-dependent and field-independent language learners benefit more from visually enhanced materials rather than auditory enhanced materials.

There are several empirical studies that support the advantages of input enhancement (e.g., Jourdenais et al., 1995; Alanen, 1995; & Leeman et al., 1995). Theoretically speaking, input enhancement allows language learners to better notice the target forms which consequently leads to better learning (Smith, 1993). Therefore, more attention paid in the input via visual input enhancement is in line with Noticing Hypothesis proposed by Schmidt (1990). Noticing hypothesis postulates that in order for learning to happen, the target forms need to be noticed by learners. Accordingly, input noticing allows input to change into intake leading to the formation of structure-meaning associations and consequently, the final integration of associations into the language learner's developmental system and general acquisition processes (Schmidt, 1990). Meanwhile, noticing is necessary for moderating input to intake and this phenomenon refers to paying attention to the occurrence of an event and its storage in the memory (Schmidt, 1995).

However, the present study indicated that not all types of input enhancement may lead to the desired outcome as it was found that visual input enhancement led to a more significant progress in the use of cohesive devices than auditory input enhancement. In support of this finding, results of the previous research have also pointed out that memory works better when encountering with visual stimuli for learning vocabulary (e.g. Petterson, 2004; Clark & Lyons, 2004). There is also a claim by Moriarty (1994) that visual language skills develop before verbal language skills. Such evidences imply that visual aids can override the style of the language learners in terms of being field-dependent or field-independent as was the case in the current study. In other words, both field-dependent and field-independent language learners benefited more from visual enhancement rather than auditory enhancement. The main reason behind this might be that most individuals are more visually oriented irrespective of being field-dependent or independent (Moriarty, 1994) and all

the participants have thus benefited more from the visually enhanced materials rather than the auditory enhanced input.

In addition to the theoretical explanation and also support from the previous empirical studies, there are practical argumentations for the better effect of visually enhanced material as input for the use of cohesive devices. The language learners of the current study were intermediate language learners regardless of being field-dependent or independent who might have not developed an acceptable level of listening proficiency to fully attend to the auditory stimuli for noticing the use of cohesive devices. Furthermore, in the Iranian context of language education, students start with reading and textual stimuli which makes them more inclined toward the easier process of textual and visual enhancement rather than auditory enhancement of materials. Moreover, the instructor used his own voice for reading the texts and emphasizing the cohesive devices in them which might not be fully appreciated by some students as the instructor was a non-native English speaker and did not have a standard accent. Most of the Iranian EFL learners prefer to hear the voice of native speakers with American or British accent. In this regard, Pishghadam and Saboori (2011) interviewed Iranian EFL teachers and learners and found out that they think American English is the best and it is superior to other varieties of Englishes. Such attitudes have the potential to disturb students' attention on the cohesive devices read aloud by Iranian teachers.

Findings of the current study contributed to the pedagogical aspects of writing by suggesting the use of visually enhanced materials for encouraging the use of cohesive devices. Cohesion is an essential part of a text and there are lots of studies pointing to the importance of cohesion in writing (Altenberg & Tapper, 1998; Narita et al., 2004; Tapper, 2005; Wei-yu Chen, 2006; & Fei, 2006). Various techniques have been proposed for enhancing the input among which bolding, underlining and italicizing have been frequently mentioned by researchers (Peters, 2012). Such techniques have been used for learning grammar (Izumi, 2002) and vocabulary (Kim, 2006; Barcroft, 2003) and can be used for teaching cohesive devices as well.

Auditory enhanced materials were not found as effective as visually enhanced materials for instructing the use of cohesive devices. However, some methodological issues were involved, including the use of non-native speaker as the instructor and the inadequate listening proficiency of the language learners that might have disturbed the validity of the effect of auditory enhanced materials. Further research with more fine-tuned methodology is needed to more accurately explore the effect of auditory enhanced material for instructing the use of cohesive devices in writing.

Conclusion

The results of the study suggest the use of visual enhancement through bolding, underlining, highlighting etc., for encouraging the use of cohesive devices. It is also implied that visual enhancement has the potential to be used positively for

grammar and vocabulary acquisition as well. Such implications call upon more research on the impact of visual input enhancement on various aspects of language learning. More research with more accurate methodology is also recommended for the impact of auditory input enhancement concerning various aspects of language learning like grammar and vocabulary. Additionally, in future studies, the effect of input enhancement on the use of different components of language such as grammar, vocabulary, etc. can be investigated with the students' learning styles in focus.

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