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Emergence and affordance in language learning: Using Grammaticalization to teach grammar to Iranian EFL learners

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Abstract

The teaching of grammar plays a central role in every EFL classroom. This paper attempts to study the learning of grammar implicitly through exposing the language learners to as much authentic language as possible in interaction and practices of socialization in order to make grammar a byproduct of communication. It is believed that just by being exposed to lots of explicit grammar rules, the learners may not be able to learn and use correct grammar in everyday communication. In other words, language is not ready-made or ready-given. Language learners should benefit from opportunities for interaction with both the physical and social world, a combination of perception, interpretation, and action, i.e. an active relationship or engagement with the environment, the teacher and their peers through mediation. There are three core elements in the treatment: consciousness-raising (helping to raise students' awareness about grammatical features), practice, and feedback.

Thirty four EFL students participated in the study, seventeen of whom were randomly assigned to the control group and the other seventeen to the experimental group. Both groups also completed a questionnaire on a five-point scale of agreement. The participants of the experimental group who received treatment showed a better result on their posttest. Moreover, the main findings of the study showed a positive attitude of the learners towards implicit grammar instruction in general. This study is hoped to have tangible and practical implications for language teachers and language learners in Iran as well as in other countries.

Key words: Grammaticalization; grammaring; emergence; affordance; semiotic processes; implicit learning

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Introduction

The most basic idea in Socio-Cultural Theory (SCT) is mediation done in three ways: through tools and artifacts, through interaction, and through the use of signs (Ellis, 2003). Ecological linguistics (EL) focuses on “language as relations between people and the world, and on language learning as ways of relating more effectively to people and the world.” (van Lier, 2004, p. 4). Language development is learning how to mean, and because human beings are quintessentially creatures who mean (i.e., who engage in semiotic processes with natural language as prototypical), all human learning is essentially semiotic in nature. “The distinctive characteristic of human learning is that it is a process of making meaning – a semiotic process; and the prototypical form of human semiotic is language” (Halliday, 1993, p. 93).

The three main terms in this study are affordance, emergence, and grammaticalization. The terms emergence and affordance are two central and, at the same time, related concepts in the ecological approach to language learning. The crucial concept is that of affordance which is, in fact, the relationship between an organism (e.g. a learner) and the environment (van Lier, 2004). A wide range of views, variously named constructivist, constructionist, interactionist, experiential, dialogical, situated, sociocultural, and so forth reject the view that language is ready-made for consumption. Rather, language is construed and constructed as we go along (van Lier, 2004). Cognitive psychologists (Forrester, 1999; Gibson, 1979; Halliday, 1978; Neisser, 1987; Peirce, 1998; Shotter & Newson, 1982; Varela, Thompson & Rosch, 1991) have defined ‘affordance’ in different ways, all of which prominently refer to notions such as relations, possibility, opportunity, immediacy and interaction; in fact, affordance refers to “what is available to the person to do something with” (van Lier, 2004, p. 91). When we perceive something, we perceive it as it relates to us; in other words, the semiotic object is what it is to us. Signs are relationships of relevance between the person and the outside world; be it physical, social, and symbolic. In fact, signs are mediated affordances. In terms of language learning, affordances arise out of participation and use, and learning opportunities arise as a consequence of participation and use (van Lier, 2004) which means to the extent the learner participates in the learning process and the semiotic object he/she uses for a better learning. In a sense, the notion of affordance is related to meaning potential (Halliday, 1978), but to be more accurate, it is action potential, and it emerges as learners interact with the physical and social world (van Lier, 2004). Basically, first there is perception then interpretation and finally action.

On the other hand, emergence happens when comparatively some simple so-called organisms recognize themselves into more complex systems. The idea of emergence is that the result of events or activities may be dramatically different from the initial inputs to those events or activities and it presupposes a non-reductive change meaning that the lower-level elements cannot explain the higher-level ones, thus they are qualitatively different (van Lier, 2004).

The next basic term of this study is ‘grammaticalization’. Grammaticalization is basically the idea that the acquisition of grammar occurs “not as a result of an accumulation of explicitly learned rules, but rather as a result of cognitive and/or social activity using the language in meaningful ways” (van Lier, 2004, p. 88). In L1 acquisition, grammaticalization is well documented as a non-linear example of emergence. van Lier (2004) believes this has a one-to-one relationship with learners’ implicit learning. In the case of implicit learning, learners remain unaware of the learning that has taken place although it is evident in the behavioral responses they make. Thus, learners cannot verbalize what they have learned. On the other hand, in the case of explicit learning, learners are aware that they have learned something and they can verbalize what they have learned (Ellis, Loewen, Elder, Erlam, Philp, & Reinders, 2009). The former takes place when the rules of grammar are constructed in interaction and in practices of socialization, whereas the latter occurs when there is a fixed order.

It is worth mentioning that a crucial characteristic of language is the relationship between form and meaning. “According to the emergentist perspective, grammar is not a prerequisite for communication, rather it is a byproduct of communication” (Hopper, 1998).

A rich semiotic budget of resources encourages the emergence of language. The most noteworthy point about learning a foreign language is that a learning environment is not one in which a teacher throws linguistic signs around haphazardly. Instead, learners should be taught how the linguistic market works. This is quite a different proposition from teaching pure grammar and vocabulary rules. By combining linguistic and semiotic resources, language learners are able to convey their meanings. In this way, the context provides affordances that can stimulate intersubjectivity. van Lier (2004) calls the availability in the context of things to talk about and the availability of resources to engage with them and stimulate further action which is always a kind of social interaction ‘the semiotic resources of the environment’. After all, language acquisition is very similar to the process children use in acquiring first and second languages. It requires meaningful interaction in the target language – natural communication – in which speakers are concerned not with the form of their utterances but with the messages they are conveying and understanding (Krashen, 1981). Many course books today teach grammar as form, without making clear the relationship between form and function. Learners are taught about the forms rather than how to use the forms to communicate meaning. For example, they are taught how to transform sentences from the active voice into the passive, and back into the active voice, without indicating the communicative ends for which the passive voice in English is deployed (Nunan, 1996).

Grammar has always been part of our language learning experience. We do not see any reason to abandon it completely. The researcher has not seen any reason to do so either, but have we ever had any needs analysis? In

fact, knowledge that is gained in formal lessons in the classroom remains inactive or inert when put into service in communication inside and outside the learning environment. Students can recall the grammar rules when they are asked to do so but they will not use them spontaneously in communication, even when they are relevant. In fact, they “become discouraged when they cannot do anything useful with what they are learning” (Larsen-Freeman, 2003, p. 8). There is no wonder why form (grammar) and use (communication) have so often been separated from each other in textbooks (Farshchi, 2009). The present study has intended to deconstruct the conception of grammar as a static product that consists of forms that are rule-governed.

A very basic and at the same time extremely crucial point that needs to be taken into consideration is that students’ reasons for second language learning affect teachers’ decisions about what and how to teach (Larsen-Freeman, 2003). It should be taken into account who the students are and why they are studying the language. In most EFL classes, EFL learners are studying the language in order to communicate better. Also, grammar is taught in almost all EFL classes. To this end and to see whether EFL learners are satisfied with the current approach to teaching grammar, the researcher has found out the participants’ views points to see how pleased English learners are with the current approach to teaching grammar.

This study is hoped to have tangible and practical implications for language teachers and language learners in Iran as well as in other countries.

1. Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework of the study is the works of van Lier (2004) and those of Larsen-Freeman (2003) both of which are steeped in Ecological linguistics (EL) which focuses on “language as relations between people and the world, and on language learning as ways of relating more effectively to people and the world.” (van Lier, 2004, p. 4). According to the ecological-semiotic perspective, we must first be active and then pick up language information that is useful for our activities. We need assistance or, in fact, mediation such as a textbook and/or a teacher to use and internalize the information. In other words, we must be engaged in activity and have information around that is available to be picked up and used, i.e. access and engagement. A wide range of views reject the view that language is ready-made for consumption. Rather, language is construed and constructed as we go along (van Lier, 2004). To this end, the decision to teach grammar must take into account who the students are, what the students’ experience has been, and what the teachers believe would be helpful to students (Larsen-Freeman, 2003).

Larsen-Freeman (2003) believes that grammar is a skill rather than a body of knowledge. He contends that in addition to the four language skills, reading, writing, speaking, and listening, there is a fifth skill called grammar. Hence, she has coined the term ‘grammaring’. When grammar is viewed as a skill, students are not asked to merely memorize rules and then wonder why

they do not apply them in communication. Rather, skill development takes practice, and so does learning grammar (Larsen-Freeman, 2003).

2. Objective of the Study

This study has focused on grammaticalization, the idea that grammar acquisition does not occur as a result of an accumulation of explicitly learned rules, but rather as a result of cognitive and social activity using the language meaningfully, i.e. a non-linear example of emergence (van Lier, 2004). To this aim, by studying the status quo in EFL classrooms at language institute levels, the researcher found out what EFL learners expect from learning grammar and that whether they are pleased with the current approach towards teaching grammar or not. The researcher then proposed a solution, grammaticalization or grammaring. Finally, the study indicated whether EFL learners were satisfied with the new approach to teaching grammar. In this way, the current study is hoped to have some practical implications for those language teachers who intend to come up with better results in their classrooms. After getting English learners' views, the researcher wants to say that learners should be exposed to a rich variety of authentic discourse and not to artificial models laying out grammatical paradigms, i.e. a pedagogy which makes the relationships between form and function transparent.

3. Review of Literature

The number of studies conducted on emergent grammar and grammaticalization in this century and the past century is not very much. Although there have been many theoretical studies on grammaticalization to account for language phenomena, very little has been done practically to implement it in language classes.

In spite of the fact that literature is replete with studies undermining grammar-based teaching and questioning the importance of grammar in second language acquisition, very little research has been conducted on emergentism and grammaticalization and the significance of sign making in language learning. As for producing language, van Lier (2004) believes that language does not just 'grow' with minimal triggering from the environment, which is in fact the Universal Grammar (UG) perspective proposed by Chomsky. Nor does language have to be learned rule by rule, by dint of instruction and practice – the traditional grammar perspective – and this is exactly what the researcher believes to be true of teaching grammar. Unlike Chomsky (2000), who believes something cannot come from nothing, emergentists like Piaget (1978) and Vygotsky (1986) contend that something new and different can indeed come, perhaps not from 'nothing', but from something quite different emerging from quite different premises (van Lier, 2004).

In L2 acquisition, grammaticalization has long been a part of certain approaches to second language acquisition (SLA), like Krashen's input

hypothesis (1985). In Krashen's view, "just by being exposed to a lot of comprehensible input, the learners will subconsciously acquire the complex structures of the language. In fact, Krashen argues that explicit teaching of grammar is virtually useless since it only produces learned knowledge about language that is not usable in everyday communication" (Krashen, 1985). Also, as Levine states, "In pedagogical terms, grammar is not something learners swallow like a pill and then have for use, rather it emerges over time" (Levine, 2014, p. 339).

Another grammaticalization process quite well known in SLA is the restructuring that occurs in information-processing theories (McLaughlin, 1987). In this view, "incoming information or the input is processed in the brain and interacts with existing mental representations, and the new information causes restructuring in the mind" (van Lier, 2004, p. 89). In a sense, restructuring is another term for cognitive emergence. Nonetheless, one of the problems with this information processing approach is a lack of attention to social interaction, and the assumption that language is a fixed code (van Lier, 2004).

Despite the advances that have been made in discourse analysis and the development of functional grammars, a decontextualized view of grammar persists in the popular imagination, in many textbooks, and in a great deal of pedagogical practice. Nunan (1996) argues that "the linear approach to language acquisition, which has dominated pedagogy, is problematic, and does not reflect what is currently known about processes of acquisition" (Nunan, 1996, p. 65). He rather argues for an 'organic' approach, and suggests that "such an approach is more consistent with what we know about second language acquisition than the linear approach" (Nunan, 1996, p. 65). According to Nunan,

the linear approach to language learning is based on the premise that learners acquire one language item at a time, for example, that in learning English they master the simple present, move on to the present continuous, progress to the simple past, and so on. In this sense, learning another language is like constructing a wall. (Nunan, 1996, p. 65).

Nunan believes that the adoption of what he calls 'organic' perspective is central to our understanding of language acquisition and use. The organic metaphor would see second language acquisition more like growing a garden than building a wall. From such a perspective, learners do not learn one thing perfectly at a time, but learn numerous things simultaneously and imperfectly. In fact, acquisition occurs through active engagement in discursive encounters, and that out of such encounters linguistic mastery at the level of the sentence emerges. In other words, it is out of discourse that grammar emerges, not vice versa (Nunan, 1996).

Earlier here, the term 'affordance' was defined. Regarding affordance and its expanded meanings, Reed (1988) distinguishes between natural and cultural affordances, the latter having to do with "historically specific meanings and values" (Reed, 1988, p. 310). Shotter and Newson (1982)

include all sorts of linguistic “enablements and constraints” in the notion of affordance. Forrester (1999) adds a further dimension, the detection of controversial affordances as part of making sense of talk in interaction. These might include turn taking signals, back channels, intonation patterns, and various attitudinal markers. In similar ways, McArthur and Baron (1983) discuss the notion of social affordances in which they include various kinds of attunements such as those that signal compliance, various kinds of emotion perception, impression management, and so on (van Lier, 2004). None of these definitions, however, mention the relations of possibility between language users, i.e. the relationship between a person and a linguistic expression such as a speech act. Indeed, affordances are action potential, being acted upon to make further linguistic action possible. Finally, in a study on materials in the classroom ecology, Guerrettaz and Johnston (2013) draw on the notions of affordances and emergence. They contend that “affordances are conceptualized as the potential starting point of the meaning-making process” (p. 782); They conclude that artifacts such as classroom materials can function to mediate classroom discourse and learning, curriculum, discourse patterns, and “relationships among teacher, learners, discourse processes, and learning” (Guerrettaz et al. p. 792).

Moritoshi (2000, p. 2) rejects the accumulation of grammar or as he calls it “accumulated entities” view. He speaks of ‘consciousness-raising’ (C-R) and claims that with regard to the teaching of grammar, proponents of C-R generally agree that some instruction in L2 grammar is necessary though none are prescriptive on the quantity or choice of required structures. The ‘accumulated entities’ view of language learning advocated, for example, by proponents of orthodox grammar-translation, assumes that language can be learnt in discrete packets, each distinct and separate from the next and that these ‘building blocks’ can be learnt sequentially, until the student has amassed sufficient units to produce meaningful target language.

Hopper (1987) proposes the notion of emergent grammar to suggest that structure, or regularity, comes out of discourse and is shaped by discourse as much as it shapes discourse in an ongoing process. He retains that grammar is not to be understood as a prerequisite for discourse. Its forms are not fixed templates, but are negotiable in face-to-face interaction in ways that reflect the individual speakers’ past experience of these forms, and their assessment of the present context, including especially their interlocutors, whose experiences and assessments may be quite different (Hopper, 1987).

The central principle of Vygotsky’s theory is that human consciousness arises through the dialectical unity of our biologically endowed brain and “auxiliary stimuli” appropriated during participation in social practices. The stimuli enable us to intentionally control, or regulate, our mental functioning (Lantolf & Poehner, 2014). Another term used by Vygotsky to describe the capacity humans manifest to regulate not only themselves but each other is mediation. In fact, the self-regulatory capacity is derived from the capacity to

regulate, or mediate, others as well as to be mediated by others (Lantolf & Poehner, 2014). He reasoned that through the meaning making and meaning communication system that we use to mediate the thinking and behavior of con-specifics (Tomasello, 1999) during social interaction, we also mediate our own thinking. “The principle Vygotsky proposed to capture this process of mediation through linguistic means is signification — the process of regulating our mental activity through the use of signs” (Vygotsky, 1997b, p. 59).

Nagaratnam and Al-Mekhlafi (2013) argue that “the need for a shift in focus in teaching from language form to language in use was expressed, placing grammar within context and with content. It was felt that by concentrating on communication and communicative language practice, students would naturally ‘acquire’ the language.” (Nagaratnam & Al-Mekhlafi, 2013, p. 82). Their study was on the pre-service student teachers’ general attitude towards grammar instruction conducted in Oman and they finally conclude that the teachers’ attitude is positive, suggesting they perceive teaching grammar to be important and useful. However, with regard to the method of teaching grammar, the teachers in the study seem to strongly favor the implicit or inductive method over the explicit or deductive one. “They also believe that presenting grammar through real-life tasks would lead to more successful learning of grammar by students. However, some explanation of rules and emphasis on grammar practice is felt to be necessary by the pre-service student teachers.” (Nagaratnam & Al-Mekhlafi, 2013, p. 98). According to Fotos and Ellis (1991), formal instruction and communicative language teaching can be integrated through the use of grammar tasks which are designed to promote communication about grammar. These grammar tasks have two main purposes: first, to develop explicit knowledge of L2 grammar and, second, to provide opportunities for interaction focused on an exchange of information (Fotos & Ellis, 1991).

“They can be completed in teacher directed lessons or they can be used in pair/group work in order to increase opportunities for negotiating meaning. Grammar tasks aim at raising the learner’s consciousness about the grammatical properties of the L2. Such tasks are designed to provide multiple opportunities for producing sentences containing the target features. Any production that occurs will be incidental and not directed at “acquiring” the target features, only at “learning” them.” (Fotos and Ellis, 1991).

In fact, this is the same work done in the present study.

Following Long (1991), two kinds of form-focused instruction can be distinguished, namely focus-on forms and focus-on-form.

“In focus-on-forms instruction the primary focus of attention is on the form that is being targeted. A good example of a focus-on-forms lesson is one conducted by means of ‘PPP’ (i.e. a three stage lesson involving the presentation of a grammatical structure, its practice in controlled exercises and the provision of opportunities to produce it freely). In contrast, in focus-on-form instruction the primary focus of attention is on meaning. The attention to form arises out of meaning-

centered activity derived from the performance of a communicative task.” (Ellis, R., Basturkmen, H., & Loewen, S., 2002, p. 420).

However, in this study, the order of the three Ps were somewhat reversed, i.e. the practice phase was initiated followed by producing authentic language, and finally presenting the grammar rules being used by the learners. Ellis et al. (2002) introduce two types of focus-on-form instruction: **planned focus-on-form** and **incidental focus-on-form**. “The former involves the use of focused tasks, i.e. communicative tasks that have been designed to elicit the use of a specific linguistic form in the context of meaning-centered language use. However, the latter involves the use of unfocused tasks, i.e. communicative tasks designed to elicit general samples of the language rather than specific forms.” (Ellis et al., 2002, p. 420). Since the aim of this study was to teach specific grammar points per session, the former – planned focus-on-form – was adopted.

As Larsen-Freeman (1992) maintains, over the centuries, second language educators have alternated between two types of approaches to language teaching: those that focus on analyzing the language and those that focus on using the language. The former have students learn the elements of language (e.g., sounds, structures, vocabulary), building toward students' being able to use the elements to communicate. The latter encourage students to use the language from the start, however falteringly, in order to acquire it (Larsen-Freeman, 1992). She then claims that it is not helpful to think of grammar as a discrete set of meaningless, decontextualized, static structures. To achieve a better fit between grammar and communication, Larsen-Freeman (1992) proposes a three-dimensional grammar framework which takes the form of a pie chart to make salient that in dealing with the complexity of grammar, three dimensions must concern us: structure or form, semantics or meaning, and the pragmatic conditions governing use (Larsen-Freeman, 1992). However, the framework needs to be taken with a pinch of salt for its feasibility, practicality, and effectiveness in a better L2 communication.

Carter and McCarthy (1995) contend that second language instruction that aims to foster speaking skills and natural spoken interaction should be based upon the grammar of the spoken language, and not on grammars that reflect written norms. Furthermore, it is true that many language teachers and students believe that grammar consists of arbitrary rules of a language to which speakers must adhere. The reason why grammar is viewed in this way is that language learners are afraid of being penalized for their grammatical mistakes. However, according to Larsen-Freeman (2002), there is another side to grammar; grammar should be thought of having three dimensions: form, meaning, and use.

There is no doubt that traditionally, grammar teaching is viewed as the presentation and practice of discrete grammatical structures (Ellis, 2006). It is certainly true that grammar teaching can consist of the presentation and practice of grammatical items. But, as Ellis (2006) argues, it need not. He

believes that first some grammar lessons might consist of presentation by itself (i.e., without any practice), while others might entail only practice (i.e., no presentation). Second, grammar teaching can involve learners in discovering grammatical rules for themselves (i.e., no presentation and no practice). Third, grammar teaching can be conducted simply by exposing learners to input contrived to provide multiple exemplars of the target structure. Here, too, there is no presentation and no practice, at least in the sense of eliciting production of the structure. Finally, grammar teaching can be conducted by means of corrective feedback on learner errors when these arise in the context of performing some communicative task (Ellis, 2006). These assertions are definitely true and acknowledged; however, the present-practice-produce (PPP) model can be reversed by first making the learners produce the language, then have them practice (practice is still the middle stage), and finally present the grammar.

In a study of a Japanese FLES (Foreign Language in Elementary School) based on the sociocultural point of view led by Vygotsky, Takahashi (1998) found out that the learners were enabled to participate in classroom activities in a more dynamic, student-centered manner by collaboration in scaffolding; and that the way the learners provided mutual assistance reflected the way the teacher offered them assistance, which indicates that the learners' learning and development were largely influenced by the social interaction established in the given classroom environment (Takahashi, 1998). In another study, Sullivan (2000) makes use of playfulness as mediating the interaction between participants (teacher and students) and the language being learned. By 'playfulness', she means using teasing and joking, puns and word play, as well as oral narratives. No matter what/who the mediator is, mediation is of great importance in the social context of language learning.

To conclude, this review shows a need for more research into L2 teaching methods and some contextual factors which could be significant in terms of a better learning and promoting learning opportunities which arise as a consequence of participation and use, i.e., to the extent the learners participate. After all, language is mediated by all the semiotic resources available in the learning environment, including of course in the classroom. Based on the English learners' views on the current methods of teaching grammar, the researcher's goal is to say that the idea that the acquisition of grammar occurs as a result of an accumulation of explicitly learned rules, and that a learning environment is one in which a teacher throws linguistic signs around are not effective. Instead, learners should be taught how the 'linguistic market' works. This is quite a different proposition from teaching pure grammar and vocabulary rules which is currently being practiced in Iran. It is hoped that by combining linguistic resources and semiotic resources, language learners are able to convey their meanings and the researcher hopes this review can be fed into future professional development in Iran.

Research questions

In this study, three research questions were addressed.

1. Are EFL learners satisfied with the current approach to teaching grammar?
2. Will the application of grammaticalization or grammaring as a new approach in this study be a better way to teaching and learning English grammar?
3. Are EFL learners satisfied with grammaticalization approach to teaching grammar when they learn this way?

4. Method

4.1 Participants

The participants of the study were made up of two groups. The first group included 17 freshman university students who were EFL students at a language institute. The second group consisted of another 17 freshman university students who were also EFL students at the same English level as that of the other group. Both groups were randomly assigned to control and experimental groups who also took part in the questionnaire phase of the study. The items of the questionnaire were Likert-type (30 items from 1 for 'strongly disagree' to 5 for 'strongly agree') extracted through a series of open coding, axial coding, and then selective coding procedures. The subjects responded to each statement on the questionnaire. This study was a mixed method research. The selection of the students was done based on purposive sampling (Ary, Jacobs, & Sorensen, 2010). Finally, questionnaires were administered to find out whether all the participants in both groups were satisfied with grammaticalization approach toward teaching grammar.

4.2 Instruments

The instruments were tried out with all the samples until the reliability and validity of the instruments were established. Furthermore, a pretest of grammar questions – a reliable standardized test with multiple choice questions based on grammaticalization and grammaring approach to teaching grammar – was given to both control and experimental groups to assess the subjects' grammar knowledge. After the experimental group received the treatment, both this group and the control group who were taught the grammar points under study based on conventional methods were given a posttest to see how much their grammar had improved.

4.3 Data Collection and Analysis Procedure

As it was mentioned earlier in this study, the participants of the study were made up of two groups. The experimental group which included 17 freshman university students who were EFL students at a language institute and received the treatment of the study. A large variety of different grammar points including tenses, conditionals, and modals were taught to them based on

grammaring. The control group consisted of 17 freshman university students who were also EFL students at the same English level as that of the other group. They were taught the same grammar points as those of the experimental group but based on the conventional method. Both groups were given pretest and posttest and their standard deviations were measured. They also took part in the questionnaire phase of the study and their responses to the 30-item closed-ended Likert-type questionnaire were analyzed statistically (t-test and ANOVA).

Research question 1 examined whether EFL learners were satisfied with the current approach to teaching grammar.

Research question 2 examined whether grammaticalization or grammaring is a better way to teaching and learning English grammar (provided that the participants believe the problem exists). In fact, as it was mentioned earlier, a pretest and posttest were administered to find out how effective the treatment had been.

Research question 3 examined whether the same participants as the ones in research question 1 were satisfied with grammaticalization approach towards teaching grammar.

5. Results and Discussion

As mentioned earlier, all the research participants took part in the questionnaire phase of the study which expressed their attitude to the teaching of grammar.

Table 1
Students' Attitude to Grammar Study

	<i>Q_1</i>	<i>Q_2</i>	<i>Q_3</i>	<i>Q_4</i>	<i>Q_5</i>
Mean	3.7	2.5	3.35	2.85	4.35
N	34	34	34	34	34
Std. Deviation	0.93	0.92	1.22	1.18	0.54

With reference to *question 1*, the results reveal, as shown in Table 1, that the students rated the importance of studying and practicing grammar as high with a mean of 3.7059. This suggests that the students' general attitude towards grammar instruction is quite positive. In other words, students generally see studying grammar as being quite important. Nonetheless, with reference to *question 2*, this is in contrast to their preference for studying grammar; i.e. while they believe studying and practicing grammar is important for their language to improve, they generally do not like to study grammar (a mean of 2.5). With reference to *question 4*, the results suggest that the students are not in favor of a more 'formal' study of grammar in the English language class (a mean of 2.8529). The significant point, as shown in Table 1, is with regard to *question 5*, the results of which reveal that the students do believe that grammar study is effective for fostering their writing ability (a mean of 4.3529).

Table 2
Students' Attitude to Grammar Instruction

	<i>Q_6</i>	<i>Q_7</i>	<i>Q_8</i>	<i>Q_9</i>	<i>Q_10</i>
Mean	3.38	3.35	3.26	3.35	4.20
N	34	34	34	34	34
Std. Deviation	1.12	1.25	1.37	1.34	0.94

Table 2 shows that, in general, the students surveyed had a moderately unfavorable attitude towards grammar instruction as being effective for fostering their speaking ability and that they are generally of the view that they should be given more opportunities for communication practice in order for them to naturally understand English grammar. This suggests that, in the perception of the students surveyed, there is not a strong link between one's speaking ability and grammatical knowledge. The high mean for *question 10* (4.2059) suggests the responding students' strong belief that communication practice would naturally lead to an understanding of grammar, a finding strongly supported by other studies (e.g., Carter & McCarthy, 1995; Ellis et al., 2002; Fotos & Ellis, 1991).

Table 3
Students' Attitude to Teacher's Explanation of Grammatical Rules

	<i>Q_11</i>	<i>Q_12</i>	<i>Q_13</i>	<i>Q_14</i>	<i>Q_15</i>
Mean	3.55	3.55	1.97	3.11	4.02
N	34	34	34	34	34
Std. Deviation	0.99	1.13	0.90	0.94	0.62

With reference to *question 11*, Table 3 shows that a degree of importance was cited as students believe they are more able to understand grammar through the teacher's explanations. However, with reference to *question 13* and *question 15* in particular, explanations per se are not helpful; i.e. English learners do not want to get grammar rules as fixed codes in insolation, but rather they believe they can improve their grammatical accuracy through practice of structures in the classroom, a finding which is also supported by other studies (e.g., Nunan, 1996; van Lier, 2004).

Table 4
Students' Attitude to Consciousness Raising, Explicit Discussion of Grammar Rules, and Comparison and Contrast of Individual Structures

	<i>Q_16</i>	<i>Q_17</i>	<i>Q_18</i>	<i>Q_19</i>	<i>Q_20</i>
Mean	3.94	3.94	3.85	3.11	3.88
N	34	34	34	34	34
Std. Deviation	0.88	0.64	1.2	1.17	0.84

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Table 4 suggests that explicit discussion of grammar rules by the students themselves and also being consciously aware of a structure's form and its function are techniques favored by most of the students surveyed as well as by other studies (e.g., Moritoshi, 2000). Furthermore, question 18 (*Comparison and contrast of individual structures is helpful for students to learn grammar*) with a mean of 3.85 shows that the students are in favor of this technique done by the teacher, and this is exactly what it was done by the researcher in all the sessions of the experimental group.

Table 5
Students' Attitude to Participating in Real-life Tasks with Language

	Q_21	Q_22	Q_23	Q_24	Q_25
Mean	2.38	3.58	4	4.26	3.23
N	34	34	34	34	34
Std. Deviation	1.1	1.13	1.04	0.75	1.15

With reference to *question 23 (Students can learn grammar through exposure to language in natural use)* and *question 24 (Participating in real-life tasks with language is the best way for students to develop their grammatical knowledge)* with a mean of 4.0000 and 4.2647 respectively, as shown in Table 5, the students surveyed are strongly in favor of being exposed to real-life tasks and some authentic language in natural use in order to learn grammar better, a finding supported by other studies (e.g., Krashen, 1985; Takahashi, 1998; Ellis, 2006). Moreover, with reference to *question 22* with a mean of 3.5882, the results show that English learners prefer to figure out the grammatical rules by themselves rather than being formally taught by the teacher.

Table 6
Students' Attitude to Implicit Grammar Instruction

	Q_26	Q_27	Q_28	Q_29	Q_30
Mean	3.47	3.17	2.44	3.73	4
N	34	34	34	34	34
Std. Deviation	0.96	1.33	1.28	1.18	0.92

When it comes to the emphasis on the type of instruction, the findings suggest that implicit grammar instruction received a high rating with a mean of 3.4736, whereas the mean for explicit grammar instruction was 3.1765, and with respect to conventional methods of teaching grammar first teaching the rules explicitly with formulas and then doing some exercises and this helping the learners communicate better (a mean of 2.4412), it shows how strongly the students surveyed disapprove of this method. Statement 30 (*Language learners need to pick up grammar rules while being engaged in meaningful activities and having some assistance be it the teacher, other learners, etc.*) with a mean of 4.0000 places more emphasis on the technique used in this study and it also supports the findings of van Lier (2004). This also suggests that students

strongly believe that “teaching the language should take the form of real-life oriented tasks and not superficial practice exercises that are consciously designed for the purpose of teaching grammar.” (Nagaratnam & Al-Mekhlafi, 2013, p. 94).

Generally, Tables 1 to 6 altogether give a clear picture of the students' preferences in the teaching of grammar. It can be concluded that the students have a strong preference for teaching grammar implicitly over explicit grammar instruction. They believe that it is better for them either to figure out the rules by themselves or by discussing them with their peers, as this would lead to their remembering the rules and retaining them for a long time. They also believe that contextualized grammar would lead to more successful learning. The findings also indicate that the more natural the context, the better the learning due to the fact that the natural exposure itself allows for better language learning. As a matter of fact, real-life tasks are the best means of developing students' grammatical knowledge.

As for the pretests and posttests, both the control and experimental groups took a pretest before having any teaching and a posttest at the end of the course. The control group was taught exactly the same number of grammar points as the experimental group but with the conventional method of teaching grammar rules explicitly first through formulas and then giving the students some exercises. On the other hand, the experimental group received the treatment by teaching the learners grammar rules implicitly. From the very beginning of each session, the learners were first exposed to some authentic language and real-life tasks while becoming consciously aware of what the very grammar point to be taught was along the way. As they practiced the rule(s) with the teacher – the researcher – as well as with their peers, they produced the language and, finally, the rule(s) was/were presented to them. In the end, both groups took a posttest. As shown in Table 7, the result was significant.

Table 7
Paired t-test for Comparing Pretest and Posttest Scores

	<i>Pretest</i>	<i>Posttest</i>	<i>T-value</i>	<i>P-value</i>	<i>Mean Difference</i>
	<i>Mean (Std. Deviation)</i>	<i>Mean (Std. Deviation)</i>	<i>(Degrees of Freedom)</i>		<i>(%95 Confidence Interval)</i>
Score	16.32 (5.68)	18.25 (5.65)	2.68(30)	0.009	1.93 (3.35 to 0.51)

As mentioned earlier in the literature review, the focus-on-meaning (FonM) approach to L2 instruction corresponds with the non-interface view, by providing exposure to rich input and meaningful use of the L2 in context, which is intended to lead to incidental acquisition of the L2 (Norris & Ortega, 2001). In fact, learning grammar means using the target patterns or structures in a meaningful, hopefully engaging, focused way (Larsen-Freeman, 2003).

There are three core elements in the treatment: consciousness-raising (helping to raise students' awareness about grammatical features), practice, and feedback. Instead of Present-Practice-Produce sequence, students first worked on comprehension and production through engagement with meaningful tasks. This initial phase was followed by teacher-supported input and output practice, still meaningful and engaging. Later a consciousness-raising phase took place in which teachers guided learners to induce particular grammatical explanations (Larsen-Freeman, 2003). For example, by putting a sentence containing present perfect tense, which is one of the most problematic tenses among our English language learners who often do not know how and where to use it, on the board and asking the students questions to draw their attention to how to use the tense and make them use the very tense in different sentences as well as in dialogs between themselves, the teacher can make the learners conscious of the grammar point he/she wants to teach. Once a learner's consciousness of a target feature has been raised through continued communicative exposure, the learner often tends to notice the feature in subsequent input (Hinkel and Fotos, 2001).

Even in classes where communicative language teaching is practiced, teachers may introduce a grammar point and then ask students to role play. However, their attempts fail, i.e. students do not speak, or if they do, they may not use the target structure that has just been presented because they have not had enough practice in doing so. Finally, the last phase, feedback, is the evaluative information available to students concerning their linguistic performance. It is worth mentioning that in emergent grammar, there are no discrete set of rules; regularity comes out of use in discourse. Also, data come from actual discourse.

On the other hand, peer work and scaffolding were believed to be crucial in this treatment. As for peer work, in the presence of a more capable participant, the novice was drawn into, and operated within, the space of the expert's strategic processes for problem solving. More specifically, the dialogically constituted interpsychological event between individuals of unequal abilities is a way for the novice to extend current competence (Donato, 1994). Following Vygotsky's developmental theory, it is hypothesized that learners can, in certain circumstances, provide the same kind of support and guidance for each other that adults provide children (Forman and Kraker, 1985). The concept of scaffolding, which derives from cognitive psychology and L1 research, states that in social interaction a knowledgeable participant can create, by means of speech, supportive conditions in which the novice can participate in, and extend, current skills and knowledge to higher levels of competence (Greenfield, 1984; Wood, Bruner, & Ross, 1976). Collaborative work among language learners provides the same opportunity for scaffolded help as in expert-novice relationships in the everyday setting (Donato, 1994).

6. Conclusion

The treatment used in this study was learning grammar implicitly through exposing the learners to as much authentic language as possible in interaction and practices of socialization in order to make grammar a byproduct of communication. As mentioned earlier in the literature review, just by being exposed to lots of explicit grammar rules, the learners may not be able to learn and use correct grammar in everyday communication. In other words, language is not ready-made or ready-given. Language learners should rather benefit from considering participants' orientations to the production and recognition of structural patterns in talk as social affordances (Forrester, 1999). They should benefit from opportunities for interaction with both the physical and social world, a combination of perception, interpretation, and action, i.e. an active relationship or engagement with the environment, the teacher and their peers through mediation. In fact, the teacher, learners, artifacts, and all the semiotic resources available in the learning environment act as mediators (of course under the teacher's supervision) for the grammar to emerge. For language learning to occur, learners need to have access to the information in the environment, and this information cannot just be transmitted to them. They need to pick it up while being engaged in meaningful activities and having some assistance be it the teacher, other learners, etc. In fact, the researcher exposed the learners to as much authentic texts such as dialogs and sentences containing the grammar point to be taught as possible and he made them produce as many clauses as possible. Then, he practiced this grammar point with the students who then practiced with each other (peer work) and then they practiced with the teacher. Finally, the grammar point was presented.

In summary, based on Ecological linguistics (EL) which focuses on "language as relations between people and the world, and on language learning as ways of relating more effectively to people and the world." (van Lier, 2004, p. 4), the researcher has aimed to create a classroom atmosphere in which EFL learners interact with each other as much as possible using whatever artifacts available, such as classroom materials in order to engage in semiotic processes with natural language, not by giving them fixed templates and asking them to use them in their speech, In other words, learners should be able to relate themselves to their environment (van Lier, 2004). Students cannot be passive in the learning environment, getting some grammar rules as fixed codes in isolation, not being able to produce them or use them in everyday conversation in L2. Therefore, the learners must be able to combine linguistic and semiotic resources available to them to convey their meanings. These resources will be provided by the teacher, the materials, and other learners (peers). To this end, the term 'input' has no use here and 'affordance' will be used instead.

As mentioned earlier in the literature review,

"there is an array of interpretive processes that are engaged, including those relating to cognition, social perceptions and goals, and physical reactions, and they include direct, first-level affordances such as signaling attitude, emotion, stance, and so on as well as mediated

signs and sign sequences of many kinds following a variety of semiotic trajectories” (van Lier, 2004, p. 96).

In other words, it is their structure that shapes their discourse and it is shaped by their discourse (Hopper, 1987). As a matter of fact, learners will learn grammar implicitly, through discourse, being unaware of the learning that has taken place; i.e. as Krashen (1985) argues, the learners will subconsciously acquire the complex structures of the language. This grammar, in fact, emerges over time as learners use it in their social interactions with their teachers and peers. It is worth mentioning that the grammar points taught this way were the ones taught in their textbooks, mostly tenses, conditionals, modals, and active/passive voice. Also, the researcher did not opt for changing the classroom materials, but to enrich them.

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To this end, 30 upper-beginner EFL learners (out of a population of 134) were selected by means of an OPT test and were assigned to 2 groups: 1 experimental and 1 group. The participants were selected from among young EFL learners who were between 8 and 14 years old. Based on the units of Backpack books taught in Paya Language Center some stories were prepared and adopted by the teacher/researcher along with a visual presentation using the PowerPoint software. In carrying out the study, the participants were taught the key vocabulary via pictures and gestures. Results of data analysis revealed that the storytelling approach to teaching vocabulary proved effective for the experimental group.