

# Effectiveness of Consciousness-Raising in Acquisition of English Dative Alternation

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## Abstract

Three decades of research into form-focused instruction (FFI) have not been sufficient to provide SLA researchers and L2 teachers with a unanimous understanding of the best types of second language instruction. This paper reports a quasi-experimental study of the effectiveness of three different types of instruction on the acquisition of a problematic syntactic structure, i.e. dative alternation for EFL learners. Seventy five Turkish learners of EFL from three intact classes were selected with regards to a grammaticality judgment test (GJT) based on their knowledge of the target structure of dative alternation. Two types of FFI were operationalized as direct consciousness-raising (CR), as intentional endeavor, and grammar CR task and were checked against a control group treated based on zero grammar approach. Data analysis revealed that the direct CR instruction and grammar CR task statistically and practically fostered EFL learners' explicit knowledge of the target structure but the effectiveness of the zero grammar approach was not of a practical significance. The results also indicated greater effectiveness of direct CR instruction and grammar CR task than that of the zero grammar approach. The findings provided empirical evidence for the efficacy of both direct CR and grammar CR task and the inadequacy of zero grammar approach in improving second language learners' explicit knowledge of dative alternation.

**Keywords:** Dative alternation, consciousness-raising, form-focused instruction, zero grammar, explicit knowledge

## Résumé

Trois décennies de recherche sur l'enseignement axé sur la forme (FFI) n'ont pas été suffisantes pour fournir aux chercheurs et aux enseignants ALS (anglais langue seconde) une compréhension unanime des meilleurs types d'enseignement

de langue seconde. Cet article rapporte une étude quasi-expérimentale de l'efficacité de trois types différents d'enseignement sur l'acquisition d'une structure syntaxique problématique, c'est-à-dire l'alternance dative pour les apprenants d'ALE (anglais langue étrangère). Soixante-quinze élèves turcs d'ALE de trois classes séparées ont été sélectionnés pour un test de jugement de grammaticalité (TJG) basé sur leurs connaissances de la structure cible de l'alternance dative. Deux types de FFI ont été opérationnalisés pour la Sensibilisation Directe (SD), effort intentionnel, et la grammaire tâche SD qui ont été vérifiés par rapport à un groupe témoin traité comme basé sur la démarche de grammaire zéro. L'analyse des données a révélé que l'enseignement direct de SD et la grammaire tâche SD a favorisé statistiquement et pratiquement la connaissance explicite des apprenants d'ALE de la structure cible, mais l'efficacité de la démarche de grammaire zéro n'a pratiquement pas d'importance. Les résultats indiquent également une plus grande efficacité de l'instruction directe SD et la grammaire tâche SD que celle de la démarche de grammaire zéro. Les résultats fournissent des preuves empiriques de l'efficacité des deux SD directe et la grammaire tâche SD et l'insuffisance de la démarche de la grammaire de zéro pour l'amélioration de la connaissance explicite des apprenants de langue seconde de l'alternance dative.

**Mots clés:** alternance dative, sensibilisation, enseignement axé sur la forme, la grammaire zéro, la connaissance explicite

## 1. Introduction

Research into instructed second language acquisition (SLA) is only one area of enquiry within second language acquisition research which is usually contrasted with naturalistic SLA (Ellis, 2008:33). One line of enquiry within instructed SLA research which bridges the gap between SLA theory and language pedagogy is form-focused instruction (FFI) research (Long and Robinson, 1998: 14-51). This subfield of study addresses the vexing theoretical issues in instructed SLA and potential challenges in language pedagogy. Spada (1997: 73) defined FFI as 'pedagogical episodes within meaning-based instruction' and Ellis (2001: 36) conceptualized FFI as an all-inclusive term including traditional types of rule presentation (focus on forms) as well as incidental and planned types of form-focused instruction embedded into meaning oriented instruction (focus on form).

The contentious issue of whether L2 grammar should be the focus of instruction, and if so, how it should be instructed effectively has been high on the agenda of SLA research in general and FFI research in particular (Ellis, 1998: 42; Nassaji and Fotos, 2004: 126). Closely related to the conundrum of grammar instruction is the role of explicit instruction and explicit knowledge in SLA. Some approaches to SLA such as

input hypothesis deemphasize the role of explicit knowledge and grammar instruction (Krashen, 1982, 1985, 1992, 1993, 2008). However, according to weak and strong interface hypotheses (Ellis, 1993: 95, DeKeyser 2003: 331), learners can benefit from explicit knowledge indirectly and or directly. Krashen's position has been known as zero grammar option (Ellis, 2008: 843) and non-interventionist approach (Long and Robinson, 1998:14-51). Krashen (1992: 409) claimed that "language is too complex to be deliberately taught and learned and the effect of grammar teaching is peripheral and fragile". Empirical evidence from extreme versions of communicative language teaching, however, provides the testimony for the inadequacy of comprehensible input and the significance of teaching morphosyntactical elements of language (White, 1987).

The investigation of different types of instruction, their overall and relative effectiveness and their theoretical orthodoxy has been the focus of attention in instructed SLA and FFI research. Different types of instruction draw on different theories of learning and the investigation of their effectiveness necessitates an evaluation of their underlying psycholinguistic rationales.

More sophisticated issues are emerging from the study of SLA and FFI. Some researchers are differentiating the acquisition of morphology and syntax in terms of difficulty levels and sequence of acquisition. According to Slabokova (2006; 2008; 2009), inflectional morphology rather than syntax is the bottleneck of acquisition and for the acquisition of syntax and semantics to flow smoothly. In a similar vein, DeKeyser (2005: 1-25), reviewing the research on morphosyntax, contends that morphology is hard to acquire. However, the study reported in this article underscores the difficulty in the acquisition of a syntactic feature, namely dative alternation, demonstrating that acquiring syntactical features does not come very easy to learners.

In the following sections, the article delineates the nature and difficulty of the selected syntactic feature. Then, a brief account of consciousness-raising (CR) and its different types is given which is followed by its relevant literature. Furthermore, the original study including research questions, participants, materials and the procedures of the study are reported. The final section discusses the findings and limitations of the study and gives suggestions for future research and implications. The materials used in the study have also been appended.

### ***1.1 English Dative Alternation***

Out of numerous morphosyntactic features in English, dative alternation was selected as the linguistic focus of the study. The choice of this syntactic feature was

both theoretically and practically justifiable for the present study. From a pedagogical and practical perspective, the researchers' own experience with Turkish learners of EFL revealed that learners were especially at pains to use dative constructions in their speech and writing. The following example has been observed as a generic error for Turkish EFL learners at pre-intermediate and even higher levels at the context of the study.

\**Can I ask a question **from** you?*

As the example shows, learners seemed to have a tendency to use a preposition for the indirect object assuming that it should be separated from the direct object. Learners' practical difficulty with dative alternation provided the more significant theoretical justification for the choice of this feature. Furthermore, as Ellis (2008: 838) argues, the problematicity of the acquisition of a language feature may warrant FFI and the rationale for investigating the efficacy of different types of FFI.

To further clarify the problem, the following examples extracted from (Williams, 2003: 52) illustrating prepositional (1) and double object patterns (2) can be taken into account.

- |     |                |              |                   |                       |
|-----|----------------|--------------|-------------------|-----------------------|
|     | <i>Agent</i>   | <i>theme</i> | <i>goal</i>       |                       |
| (1) | <i>The boy</i> | <i>sent</i>  | <i>the horse</i>  | <i>to the donkey.</i> |
|     | <i>Agent</i>   | <i>goal</i>  | <i>theme</i>      |                       |
| (2) | <i>The boy</i> | <i>sent</i>  | <i>the donkey</i> | <i>the horse.</i>     |

As demonstrated, a dative verb may allow either for a double object or a prepositional pattern or even both of them depending on the verb itself. Anglo-Saxon dative verbs (such as *take*, *sell*, *send*, and *tell*) can be used with prepositional as well as double-object datives. However, Latinate verbs (such as *donate*, *explain*) are used in the prepositional pattern only.

In example (1), the word order (agent-theme-goal) in the prepositional pattern is iconic with the structure of event which involves the agent acting on the theme and then transferring it to the goal. However, in example (2), the double object dative with its non-iconic agent-goal-theme order is more difficult to learn, (Williams, 2003: 52).

Ellis (2006: 431-436) empirically demonstrated that it was problematic for L2 learners to acquire dative verbs explicitly. It is likely that learners do not readily internalize the dativizability of each dative verb that they try to learn. Distinguishing which datives allow for dativizability and for what reasons is something which learners acquire late after misusing dative alternation for a considerable period of time.

## **1.2 Dative alternation in L1 Acquisition**

Dative alternation creates a learning problem for English L1 learners due to its complex syntactic nature (Ellis, 2006), as it involves both direct and indirect objects which may or may not be switched. In other words, child-directed speech such as ‘gave the pencil to her’ and ‘gave her the pencil’ would trigger overgeneralizations such as ‘\*I donated the library the book’ in children. This marks the learning difficulty of the structure not only for EFL learners but also for English as L1 learners. Such overgeneralizations are later tailored mainly based on frequency of the input, and “it is therefore not surprising that the acquisition of the lower-frequency structure [Sub + Verb +In. Direct Obj. + Direct Obj.] takes some time to master,” (Demuth et al., 2005:441).

On the other hand, case marking plays a major role in construction of double object structures in Turkish as L1. In general, two dative case markers –i and –e are used to indicate both to and for in Turkish. Direct and Indirect objects, benefactors, and the semantic goals are signalled by these markers in sentences. Precisely, indirect and direct objects are indicated by these two case markers. For example:

- a. Sara kitab-i Ali-e verdi.  
Sara the book-ACC Ali-DAT give-PAST THIRD PER SING  
‘Sara gave the book to Ali.’ [NP PP with to]
- b. Sara Ali-e kitab-i verdi.  
Sara NOM Ali DAT-for CASE MARKER the book ACC give PAST.  
Sara gave Ali the book.

In terms of acquisition of the dative alternation, it is speculated that Turkish speakers might swap the positions of direct and indirect objects simply by attaching to/for prepositions wherever they wish which does not work in similar English constructions.

## **1.3 Consciousness-raising: Teacher-centered and task-centered**

Rutherford and Sharwood Smith (1985: 285) defined consciousness-raising (CR) as an intentional endeavor to draw learners’ attention to specific grammatical features of a language which worked as a potential facilitator in improving learners’ competence. They used CR as a superordinate term to talk about a variety of instructional techniques differing from each other in terms of degrees of elaboration and explicitness. Giving a rule of thumb or linguistic rule, the use of typographical conventions and increasing the frequency of a feature in discourse are examples of CR.

Basically, CR differs significantly from practice on a number of grounds. First and foremost, they differ from each other in their orientation and theoretical rationales. Ellis (2002: 169) distinguished CR and practice arguing that “while practice is primarily behavioral requiring repeated production, CR is essentially concept forming in orientation.” He argued that any type of grammar instruction requires some sort of CR.

Interestingly, there have been a number of attempts to realize consciousness-raising of problematic structures through task-based learning. Direct CR activities take a deductive approach while indirect CR and grammar CR tasks take an inductive approach obliging learners to discover linguistic facts. Grammar CR tasks also vary from traditional CR activities in that they require learners to communicate about a language feature and they have specified product and process outcomes (Ellis, 2003: 163). The product outcome of the task is the procedure through which learners complete the task while the process outcome or the pedagogical purpose of such a task deals with the noticing of the structure and gaining explicit knowledge. Grammar CR-tasks are one type of focused tasks which are based on explicit learning and are designed to develop “awareness at the level of understanding rather than awareness at the level of noticing” (Ellis, 2003: 162). Such tasks and activities are an investment for the future and not a shortcut to instant acquisition (Tomlinson, 2007: 178).

Most of the studies into the efficacy of different types of CR have frequently used grammaticality judgment tests (GJT), as is the case with the present paper, in order to provide information on learners’ morphosyntactic knowledge. In the majority of the studies cited below, researchers have used a GJT to study the effectiveness of CR and compare different varieties of CR with one another.

Fotos and Ellis (1991: 605) investigated the effect of a grammar CR task on intermediate EFL learners’ acquisition of English dative alternation. Based on a GJT as the main data collection tool, they found that the grammar CR task encouraged meaningful communication regarding the dativizability of verbs among learners and also significantly enhanced their knowledge of the structure. Later, Fotos (1993: 385) studied the efficacy of CR on learners’ noticing. She operationalized CR as a direct teacher-centered CR treatment as well as a grammar CR task and examined its effect on EFL learners’ noticing of three grammatical structures, namely dative alternation, adverb placement and relative clause usage in upcoming input. Fotos (1993: 400) came up with the conclusion that grammar CR was almost as effective as traditional CR activity in promoting subsequent noticing of syntactic structures. Likewise, Sheen (1992: 44) found identical results for both direct and indirect CR on a written posttest for Japanese learners of French but slightly better results for direct CR on an oral test which he attributed to practice activities added to direct CR. Mohammed



(2001) conducted a cross-proficiency study into the effectiveness of CR tasks on high and low-intermediate ESL learners. She found that grammar CR tasks were more sensitive to proficiency level than direct CR treatments. However, in a follow-up study, Mohammed (2004: 232) found that “proficiency does not appear to affect learners’ task preference regarding CR”. More recently, Scott and De La Fuente (2008: 110) investigated the impact of L1 use in CR tasks and found that L1 use in a CR task led to more collaboration among dyads and more efficient language processing than a corresponding task where only L2 was used.

To sum up, as Mohammed (2004: 229) argues grammar CR tasks have not been fully researched. Hence, the evidence for the efficacy of grammar CR tasks as form-focused tasks is meager and the relevant literature is far from sufficient for extrapolating findings to language pedagogy.

## 2. The present study

The study aims at finding evidence for the effectiveness of direct CR instruction and grammar CR task on the acquisition of dative alternation. The rationale behind the choice of this syntactic structure as the focus of FFI is that the dativizability of verbs and their corresponding arguments has rarely explicitly been covered in the course materials of Iranian high schools and universities and it has novelty for intermediate EFL learners. The study included three independent groups, two of which received form-focused instruction and the third one received input lacking form-focused instruction (zero grammar approach) and acted as the control group. The research attempted to answer the following questions:

1. Does providing adult learners with direct CR have a significant immediate effect on their acquisition of English dative alternation?
2. Does providing adult learners with a grammar CR task have a significant immediate effect on their acquisition of English dative alternation?
3. Is there a significant difference among direct CR, grammar CR task and zero grammar approach in terms of their immediate efficacy?

## 3. Method

### 3.1 Participants

Seventy five first-year students majoring in Geography at the University of Tabriz, Iran were selected for the study. All the basic information about the participants was

obtained from the head of the department and the teachers. The reason behind the choice of university students with a Geography major was that they seemed to be more homogeneous regarding many demographic variables such as age, L1, cultural background, the general amount of foreign language education and also their willingness and cooperation with the researchers. They had registered for a 12-week two-credit general English course where the main focus of the course was to improve students' reading skill along with a concern for the sub-skills of grammar and essential vocabulary. The participants were attending general English courses at three separate intact classes at the time the study was carried out. They had Iranian nationality and were bilinguals in Turkish as their native language and Persian as their second language and English was the participants' foreign language. The socio-economic background of the participants, according to the head of the Geography department, was around average: most of them lived a comfortable middle class life. Non-native Turkish speakers were excluded from the experiment. Gender was not controlled and hence the intact nature of the three very similar general English classes led to the inclusion of both males and females who were aged between 18 to 25 with an average age of 21.

The learners from the three intact classes were screened in order to select the appropriate participants. The results of the Preliminary English Test administered by the university as the placement test were taken as the initial criterion for the selection of the participants. They were labeled as low-intermediate. Then, the researchers screened the learners specifically with regard to the target structure of the study, namely dative alternation in the form of a grammatical judgment test (GJT). Eventually, the original number of students in each intact class was reduced to the equal number of 25 participants in each class.

### **3.2 Materials**

An untimed GJT with both grammatical and ungrammatical items was used as the data elicitation instrument. The logic behind the untimeliness of the GJT was that it would allow the participants to draw on their explicit knowledge or a combination of both implicit and explicit knowledge, in case of its presence, in order to reflect on the accuracy of each sentence. Ten verbs were included in the GJT. The choice of the verbs was based on the researchers' own experience with Turkish EFL learners and also the studies which focused on the generically misused dative verbs (Fotos and Ellis, 1991; Fotos, 1993; Radwan, 2005). Each verb appeared twice in the test and its direct and indirect objects alternated their positions and depending on the dativizability of the verbs, the test items could be correct or incorrect. The following items were extracted from the test (see appendix A).



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- a. The manager explained us every detail of the project. ....  
Rule/ Reason: .....
- b. The professor explained the problem to the students. ....  
Rule/Reason: .....

The GJT was piloted on learners similar to the targeted participants in order to check its validity and reliability. Three experts were asked to check the content and face validity of the final form of the GJT and their comments helped improve the validity of the instrument.

The participants' judgment of the grammaticality of pretest items was designed to determine which verbs should be selected for the materials. The problematicity of the target structure was proved by the GJT. Consequently, three different teaching materials for the three independent groups of the study were developed on the same target structure. The materials developed for the direct CR group consisted of the two components of explicit instruction and meaningful practice. The materials included reductive rules of thumb which classified dative alternation into two general groups, dativizable and non-dativizable verbs (Robinson, 1996: 231; Radwan, 2005: 73). The rules and formula demonstrated that dativizable verbs may be used in a prepositional or a double object pattern while non-dativizable verbs are used only in the prepositional pattern. The rules were followed by the systematic practice (see appendix B). The integration of systematic practice with explicit rules of thumb was also pedagogically motivated. That is, inasmuch as most types of grammar instruction include both of the components of explicit instruction and practice, the researchers included both of them with respect to their underlying rationale in the direct CR materials. The rationale behind the inclusion of the systematic practice was DeKeyser's (2003: 329) strong interface hypothesis and skill building theory.

Secondly, for the grammar CR task group which was a replication of the task used by Fotos and Ellis (1991: 605), the materials consisted of contrived written task cards in the form of discrete sentences and a task sheet designed to elicit learners' judgment. The task cards and task sheet were designed on separate sheets of paper. The materials were designed to be used by student-student dyads and trigger meaningful negotiation of form among the dyads (see Appendix C).

Thirdly, the materials developed for the control group included two general reading passages (see appendix D). Both passages were contrived, being seeded with the same verbs as used in the other materials. However, no attempt was made to visually enhance the input or explain the target structure. The included dative verbs in the texts were not more noticeable than any other structure. The first and the second reading passage were followed by five and four reading comprehension

questions respectively. The appropriateness of the passages in terms of readability and comprehensibility for the low-intermediate participants was established.

### 3.3 Procedures

The developed GJT constructed on English dative alternation was given twice to the participant in the study, once as the pretest and a second time as the posttest after the treatments. The participants were instructed to judge the accuracy of test items and mention a rule or reason for the ungrammaticality of sentences. The materials were given to all groups one week after the pretest was administered.

As for the direct CR group, the two-page handouts including the rules and practice were distributed to the participants. The rules and respective example sentences on dativizable and non-dativizable verbs were put on the board one at a time by one of the researchers. The second phase within the direct CR group consisted of systematic practice and the proceduralization of the explicitly presented syntactic structure which staged from mechanical drills to contextualized and real-life communication. The participants took the grammaticality judgment test (GJT) immediately with a week's interval from the pretest.

The second experimental group went through a grammar CR task. The developed task cards were distributed to the participants who were asked to work in pairs. The CR task involved information gap on the dativizability. The participants were instructed to reflect on the instances of the structure and interact in dyads to negotiate the form and understand the dativizability of the verbs i.e. they were required to fill the information gap throughout their interaction. The time allocated for the grammar CR task was almost equal to that of the direct CR group. The teacher's role was just limited to giving a brief explanation of the task and assigning the dyads to work together at the outset. The participants were instructed to use English as the medium of interaction. However, since they were low-intermediate learners of EFL, they sometimes had difficulty in their form-focused negotiation in L2 (English) and hence were allowed to use their L1 (Turkish) as the last resort to fulfill the task. The researchers closely observed the dyads as they were doing the task. The rest of the procedure was identical across the groups.

Finally, in order to investigate any difference of efficacy between FFI, i.e. direct CR and grammar CR task, and the zero grammar approach, the researchers included a control group in the study. The participants were instructed to read the non-enhanced and non-enriched passages silently to comprehend the meaning. The researchers checked their comprehension of the passages as they asked one student at a time to

paraphrase one or more sentences. Uniformly, the participants took the immediate posttest on the same session as the treatment was completed.

#### 4. Results

Repeated measure design for testing within and between group differences was used. The procedure for testing the first and second hypotheses was based on the pretest and posttest design and for the third one one-way ANOVA was applied. Descriptive and inferential statistics were used to find out whether the participants' knowledge of the target structure was the same across the independent groups (see Table 1 for details).

**Table 1.** Descriptive statistics for grammaticality judgment test as the pretest

Groups	N	Mean	SD
Direct CR	25	11.68	2.657
CR Task	25	11.60	2.986
Zero Grammar	25	11.84	2.867

The assumptions for one-way ANOVA were examined. The p value for Levene's homogeneity of variances was 0.907, which was greater than the level of significance 0.01. This could be interpreted as the homogeneity of the groups. The ANOVA test confirmed that the means of the three independent groups on the pretest were not significantly different. Table 2 shows that mean differences among the groups on pretest scores are not statistically significant; this is confirmed by the p value 0.955, which is far beyond the level of significance 0.01. Therefore, the F ratio of 0.46 is not statistically significant.

**Table 2.** Differences across the groups on the pretest results

	Direct CR	CR Task	Control Group	Sum of Squares	df	F Ratio	Sig
Between Group Comparison	11.68	11.60	11.84	0.747	2	0.046	0.955

*Hypothesis one* (Direct CR group): The first research hypothesis was concerned with the effectiveness of the direct CR within its respective group. Having established the homogeneity of the groups in terms of their knowledge of the target structure, the researchers tested the effectiveness of direct CR on this group. A paired sample t-test

was used to test the hypothesis of no difference between pretest and post mean scores within each group.

**Table 3:** Paired t-test comparing means within direct CR

	Pretest	Posttest	Mean Difference	Std. Deviation	t value	Df	Sig (2tailed)
Direct CR	11.68	17.80	-6.12*	0.881	-34.722	24	.000

\*The mean difference is significant at the 0.01 level.

Table 3 reveals that since  $p$  value is less than 0.01, so the relevant hypothesis is verified with 99% probability of non-chance results.

*Hypothesis two (CR task group):* The second hypothesis was concerned with the efficacy of the grammar CR task. The procedure used for direct CR was applied for testing the effectiveness of the grammar CR task. That is, a paired-sample t-test was used to test the significance of the difference between the pretest and posttest results within the grammar CR task group.

**Table 4:** Paired-sample t-test within the grammar CR task group

	Pretest	Posttest	Mean Difference	Std. Deviation	t value	Df	Sig (2tailed)
Grammar CR Task	1.60	7.28	5.68*	0.476	-59.552	24	0.000

\*The mean difference is significant at the 0.01 level.

As Table 4 illustrates, the  $p$  value of 0.000 is interpreted as the significance of difference between the pretest and posttest means within the grammar CR task group. Hence, the researchers could reject the hypotheses for the first and second research questions and draw the conclusion that both direct CR and grammar CR task significantly improved the participants' explicit knowledge of dative alternation.

*Control group:* In the foregone sections, the hypotheses for the first and second research questions within the first and second experimental groups were statistically tested. As noted earlier, there was a control group in the design of the study intended to test the efficacy of the zero approach and implicit learning of dative verbs within this group. The participants' mean score improved marginally from 11.84 to 13.20. Notwithstanding the close proximity of pretest and posttest means, the t-test illustrated that  $p$  value is 0.000 and thus the degree of improvement within the control group was statistically significant. See Table 5 for details.

**Table 5:** Paired-sample t-test within the control group

	Pretest	Posttest	Mean Difference	Std. Deviation	t value	Df	Sig (2tailed)
Zero Grammar	1.84	3.20	1.360*	.700	9.714	24	0.000

\*The mean difference is significant at the 0.01 level.

A first glance at the pretest 11.84 and posttest 13.20 of the control group shows that the improvement is not remarkable. However, the magnitude of the progress from 11.84 to 13.20 is interpreted as a statistically significant change of mean score and hence a significant effect of the materials given to the control group. A possible explanation for the difference of the control group means would need further consideration, and will be discussed later.

*Hypothesis three* (between group comparisons): The third hypothesis dealt with the comparison of the posttest results across the groups. The purpose for this comparison was to discover which instructional type was more effective. Table 6 summarizes descriptive statistics for the direct CR, grammar CR task and the control groups on the posttest results. The highest mean, 17.80, belongs to the direct CR group and the second highest mean, 17.28, is attributed to the grammar CR task and the lowest mean, 13.20, belongs to the zero grammar approach.

**Table 6.** Posttest results across the three independent groups

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Direct CR	25	17.80	2.000
CR Task	25	17.28	3.021
Zero Grammar	25	13.20	2.380

The requirements for the application of one-way ANOVA were checked and Levene's homogeneity of variances was computed resulting in a p value of 0.92 which is much greater than the level of significance 0.01 and was interpreted as evidence of the homogeneity of the groups.

**Table 7.** One-way ANOVA across the three independent groups on the posttest

	Sum of Squares	ddf	Mean Squares	F	Sig.
Between Group Comparison	349.627	2	174.813	27.211	0.000

Table 7 shows the results for one-way ANOVA across the three independent groups. The p value for between group comparisons is 0.000. That is, the obtained F

ratio of 27.211 illustrates a significant difference between at least two means. Therefore, the null hypothesis of no difference among groups is rejected indicating that at least two group means are significantly different from each other. In order to determine the precise location of mean differences, a post-hoc analysis was applied. The most powerful post hoc-test to find differences if there are only three means is Fisher's least significant difference (LSD) test (Howell, 2002). The researchers applied the LSD test to make pairwise comparisons among the groups.

The significant differences between the groups are marked with an asterisk mark in the second column of Table 8. The results revealed that both direct CR and grammar CR task groups were significantly different from the control group at the 0.01 level of significance and distanced themselves from the control group.

As for the comparison between direct and grammar CR groups, although the mean difference equals 0.4, based on the post hoc analyses, it is not significant.

**Table 8:** LSD post-hoc comparison of results among the groups

Factor 1	Factor 2	Mean Difference	Std. Error	Sig	99% Confidence Interval	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Direct CR	CR Task	0.400	0.716	.956	-1.856	1.936
	Z e r o Grammar	4.600*	0.716	.000	2.703	6.496
CR task	Direct CR	-0.400	0.716	.956	-1.936	1.856
	Z e r o Grammar	4.560*	0.716	.000	2.663	6.456
Zero Grammar	Direct CR	-4.600*	0.716	.000	-6.496	-2.703
	CR Task	-4.560*	0.716	.000	-6.456	-2.663

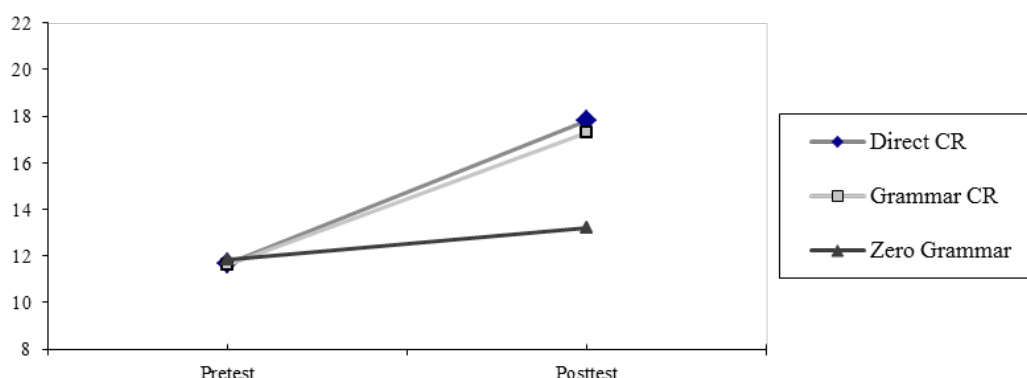
\* The mean difference is significant at the 0.01 level.

The greatest mean difference reached the magnitude of 4.60 between the direct CR group and the control group. The magnitude of mean differences between the CR task group and the control group was 4.08 at the 0.01 level of significance.

In short, Figure 1 demonstrates an overall progress within and between the groups. Direct CR and grammar CR task groups have made similar progress from pretest scores of 11.68 and 11.60 to the post test scores of 17.80 and 17.28 respectively, and have significantly isolated themselves from the control group which made a progress from the pretest mean of 11.84 to the posttest mean of 13.20.



**Figure 1.** Mean scores for three independent groups before and after instruction



## 5. Discussion

The first research question of the study was statistically investigated and the findings showed that the direct CR had a significant effect on adult learners' explicit knowledge of dative alternation. The participants within this group significantly improved their knowledge of the target structure from the mean score of 11.68 on the pretest to 17.80 on the posttest. Although the given type of instruction to the first group was similar to traditional teacher-oriented grammar instructions, the researchers' purpose was to empirically investigate the underlying theories of consciousness-raising (DeKeyser, 2003). The participants within the direct CR group were assumed to convert their declarative knowledge of the target structure into procedural knowledge by means of practice, (DeKeyser, 1997, 2003).

The researchers considered the strong interface hypothesis as quixotic for the results of the first group in the present study. That is to say, although the participants were provided with intensive practice immediately after direct CR instruction, there could be no guarantee that the limited intensive practice enabled learners to proceduralize their explicit knowledge of dative alternation within a short period of time and even if they had proceduralized their knowledge of dative alternation, it may not be qualitatively and neurolinguistically the same as implicit knowledge (Paradis, 1995). Furthermore, insofar as the linguistic target of the instruction was explicitly hard to learn due to its high conceptual complexity (Ellis, 2006: 457), its conversion from explicit knowledge to procedural knowledge would not be easy at least in the short term. Working on declarative knowledge and its proceduralization may require both intensive and extensive meaningful practice, and it was beyond the scope of this cross-sectional study. Based on the results obtained for the direct CR instruction, the researchers could conclude that insofar as the participants were able to write rules for the grammaticality of sentences on the GJT, they must have drawn upon their explicit knowledge developed by means of the direct CR and explicit instruction. Finally, it

should be mentioned that the results of the first instructional type could be interpreted in terms of the obtained explicit knowledge, and it failed to support the claim that there is strong interface between explicit and implicit knowledge.

The second research question of the study dealt with whether a grammar CR task had a significant effect on adult learners' explicit knowledge of dative alternation as a complex syntactic structure of EFL. The findings related to the second research question were statistically examined. Simply put, the grammar CR task had a significant immediate effect on adult learners' explicit knowledge of dative alternation. In other words, the grammar task helped learners promote their explicit knowledge of the target structure.

The researchers used the grammar CR task as a type of focused task in which the language itself was the content and topic of communication and learners communicated about a specific feature of grammar (Ellis, 2003). The findings obtained from the given grammar CR task concretely acknowledged the immediate efficacy of consciousness-raising in enhancing learners' explicit knowledge. This led the researchers to draw the conclusion that among other factors explicit knowledge could aid learners to develop implicit knowledge by noticing a structure and including it in further input which is in line with the weak interface model of second language acquisition (Ellis, 1993).

Besides the investigation of the efficacy of direct CR and grammar CR task as independent types of instruction, the researchers also scrutinized the effectiveness of zero grammar approach and comprehensible input engaging the control group of the study. The participants' mean score was measured to be 11.80 before the treatment and 13.20 after the treatment. Though statistically significant, the results for the control group do not warrant theoretical and pedagogical significance and practical meaningfulness for the zero grammar approach in SLA. In other words, although such an improvement within the control group may not be due to chance and/or practice effect, the magnitude of the relationship between exposure to comprehensible input as the independent variable and the implicit acquisition of the targeted structure as the dependent variable was not quite convincing for the researchers. If the degree of improvement within the control group had been as great as or even greater than those of other groups, the researchers should have interpreted the findings as evidence for implicit learning based on zero grammar approach in the absence of FFI. However, since the participants within the control group were not informed about the linguistic focus of the reading passages, and inasmuch as the reading passages were not visually enhanced, it is believed that they focused on meaning without shifting their attention to the linguistic focus of the study i.e., dative verbs and they mainly processed the passages for meaning. This could be

considered as a piece of empirical evidence for acknowledging the deficiency of zero grammar approach and the indispensability of FFI. The findings of the present study are compatible with the findings of Fotos and Ellis (1991: 605), Sheen (1992: 44), and Mohammed (2001) and reiterate the necessity of form-focused instruction especially for the problematic and complex structures of EFL.

The final research question focused on the comparative effectiveness of the three different types of instruction between the groups. It addressed the efficacy of the three instructional types in learning the problematic structure of dative alternation. Post-hoc comparisons revealed that the participants in the direct CR and grammar CR task groups outperformed those in the control group. In simple terms, the effectiveness of direct CR intervention and the grammar CR task was significantly higher than the effectiveness of mere exposure to the structure when the target structure was complex.

The results of the study run counter to the zero position advocated by Krashen. Krashen (1992) proscribed direct intervention and insisted that “the best way of increasing grammatical accuracy is comprehensible input and the most effective kind of comprehensible input for grammatical development is reading” (p. 411). Like many studies in the literature on FFI, the empirical evidence from the present study demonstrated that direct intervention and grammar CR task, both regarded as form-focused instruction, improved learners’ explicit knowledge of a problematic structure significantly better than the comprehensible input and mere exposure, zero grammar approach. The first experimental group which received the most explicit instruction achieved the highest explicit knowledge. The second experimental group having the opportunity to interact with each other in order to solve the targeted form-focused problem achieved relatively lower explicit knowledge than the first group. The third experimental group which received input to the exclusion of consciousness-raising and any other type of FFI achieved the lowest degree of improvement in terms of explicit and/or implicit knowledge. The most plausible interpretation regarding the direct CR would be that the teacher significantly underscored peculiarity of the verbs in terms of their dativizability. However, the indirect CR, which was operationalized through interaction, could not yield the same amount of explicit knowledge. Lastly, the zero grammar approach appeared to be the least effective method of enhancing the learners’ explicit knowledge.

Inasmuch as the GJT was untimed, predisposing the participants to draw more on their explicit knowledge and enabling them to justify their judgments on the test, the findings suggest that in both direct CR and grammar CR task the participants were consciously aware of the target structure and their awareness was at the level of understanding rather than noticing. It is clear that the pedagogical rule given to the direct CR group helped learners gain an understanding of the structure. Also,

the grammar CR task provided the participants with an opportunity to reflect on the dative verbs and develop explicit understanding of the syntactic structure. However, it is believed that because the participants in the grammar CR task group were not able to interact efficiently in the L2 due to insufficient command of English, they were not able to communicate perfectly about the target structure and therefore their performance on the GJT fell below that of the direct CR group.

It should be noted that the effects of direct CR and grammar CR task should be interpreted as an impact of form-focused instruction on explicit knowledge and the generalizations cannot be extrapolated on implicit knowledge. Nevertheless, according to weak interface hypothesis (Ellis, 1993) learners' explicit knowledge can affect the acquisition of implicit knowledge indirectly when learners are exposed to further input. The participants of the independent groups must have drawn upon their careful style in judging the grammaticality of sentences since they were able to justify their choice by providing a rule or reason on the GJT. On the contrary, because the treatment within the control group did not provide the participants with any explicit knowledge of the target structure, they must have drawn upon their intuitive and implicit knowledge. This was confirmed by the fact that they were not able to adequately justify their answers by writing a rule or reason for their judgment on the GJT.

The researchers believe that results of the study are more compatible with the weak interface hypothesis (Ellis, 1993: 96). The researchers contend that the participants' explicit knowledge could indirectly help them to develop implicit knowledge of dative alternation by means of intaking the features in the future input and bridging the gap between their own knowledge and the one presented in the input.

Drawing any pedagogical implications from the present study should be considered within the context of its methodological limitations. However, a very general implication of the study is that EFL learners benefit from FFI. Injecting FFI deductively in the form of direct CR instruction or inductively in the form of grammar CR tasks can at least enrich second and foreign language learners' judgment and accuracy. In practice, grammar CR tasks deemphasize the overwhelming role of the teacher which is the case with direct CR and in return permeate a fascinating discovery view for learning and teaching grammar. One more pedagogical point is that more implicit types of grammar instruction such as comprehensible input without any direct intervention might be considered as less appropriate and effective for problematic morphosyntactic structures of L2 since they may not sufficiently guarantee learners' attention and hence learning.

With regard to the shortcomings of the study, it should be acknowledged that the researchers could not investigate the efficacy of FFI at longer intervals of time. As

Tomlinson (2007: 186) argues, form-focused discovery activities and tasks may result more in eventual rather than immediate acquisition. Hence, the opportunity to give a delayed posttest to direct CR, grammar CR task and even control groups could reveal the medium and long-term efficacy of different types of instruction and also their durability. Another limitation concerns the nature of the data elicitation instrument. The GJT test used in the study was somehow sensitive in eliciting learners' explicit knowledge due to its untimed nature. However, giving learners a separate timed GJT or another real-time test sensitive to learners' implicit knowledge as well as the untimed GJT might show the differential contribution of different types of instruction to implicit and explicit knowledge.

Further longitudinal studies may provide a more comprehensive understanding of the effects of systematic practice on the development of learners' procedural and implicit knowledge. Future studies may investigate the potentials of FFI on learners' noticing as well as the acquisition of morphosyntactic structures.

## 5. Conclusion

The overall purpose of this study was to address a controversial issue (the efficacy of FFI versus zero grammar approach) in instructed second language acquisition. The findings of the study suggested the effectiveness and necessity of FFI realized as direct CR and grammar CR task and the inadequacy of comprehensible input and zero grammar approach in learning and teaching a complex grammatical structure in the context of the study. Direct CR instruction, operationalized as the explicit instruction plus meaningful practice, and the grammar CR task were not significantly different from each other in promoting the acquisition of the complex target structure of the study. However, the difference between consciousness-raising (both direct CR and grammar CR task) and the zero grammar approach could be, at least partially, explained by means of the problematicity of the structural type and the inadequacy of the comprehensible input. The findings of the present study underscore the significance of direct intervention and FFI and may have pedagogical implications for language teachers.

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## Appendix A

Grammaticality judgment test given to the participants before and after the treatments.

### Grammaticality Judgment Test

Name: ..... Age: ..... Gender: Female  Male

Please read each sentence carefully and decide:

- (1) Whether they are correct or incorrect.
- (2) And for the sentences which are NOT grammatical, write a brief reason or rule describing why they are ungrammatical.

Put a Check mark (/) if each sentence is correct, and a cross mark (x) if incorrect.

1. Yesterday, the teacher asked Ali a difficult question. ....  
Rule/reason: .....
2. The president suggested a solution to the crisis. ....  
Rule/reason: .....
3. He bought Jane a book. ....  
Rule/reason: .....
4. The man reported the police the car accident. ....  
Rule/reason: .....
5. The manager explained us every detail of the project. ....  
Rule/reason: .....
6. We have mailed the document to the professor. ....  
Rule/reason: .....
7. Sarah offered her teacher a chocolate. ....  
Rule/reason: .....
8. She cooked us a wonderful pizza. ....  
Rule/reason: .....
9. He told the story to everybody. ....  
Rule/reason: .....
10. Last week, the teacher asked a question from me. ....  
Rule/reason: .....
11. I bought a jacket for my father. ....  
Rule/reason: .....
12. The car factory repaired the cars for their owners . ...  
Rule/reason: .....
13. The secretary reported his work to the boss. ....  
Rule/reason: .....
14. His mother explained him the situation. ....  
Rule/reason: .....

15. The bank will lend them some money. ....  
Rule/reason: .....
16. He repaired him the TV. ....  
Rule/reason: .....
17. He teaches the students art history.  
Rule/reason: .....
18. The leader described the plan to the members.  
Rule/reason: .....
19. The professor explained the question to the students. ....  
Rule/reason: .....
20. They suggested me a plan. ....  
Rule/reason: .....
21. He lent ten dollars to his classmate. ....  
Rule/reason: .....
22. Beth offered coffee to his boss. ....  
Rule/reason: .....
23. The chef cooked a delicious meal for us. ....  
Rule/reason: .....
24. Mr. Brown teaches French to advanced students.  
Rule/reason: .....
25. Mike mailed his mother a letter every week. ....  
Rule/reason: .....
26. Reza told me his phone number. ....  
Rule/reason: .....
27. The researcher described his findings to his students.  
Rule/reason: .....
28. A technician explained the method to the personnel. ....  
Rule/reason: .....

## Appendix B

Materials for the direct CR group

Dative alternation

Dative verbs are the verbs with two objects, a direct and an indirect object. They can appear in the prepositional pattern (1a) or the double-object pattern (1b). The preposition used in the prepositional pattern may be *to*, *for*, *with* or any other preposition depending on the verb. If direct object is a pronoun, (B) is preferable to (A)

*Type One:* Verbs such as **build, buy, give, mail, take, sell, send, provide**, allow the alternation of direct and indirect objects. Therefore, these verbs can take both of the following word orders (prepositional (A) and double object (B) word orders).

(A) S + V + D.O. + to/for + I.O

She gave **the book to Sue**.

He bought a **present for his mom**.

My father cooks **food for hotel passengers**.

John reported **the problem to the head of the project**.

(B) S + V + I.O + D.O

John gave **a book to Mary**

John gave **Mary the book**.

He bought **his son a bike**.

He bought **a bike for his son**.

*Type Two:* A second group of dative verbs, however, such as **suggest, describe, explain, collect, pronounce, repeat, report, review, select, calculate**, and **review** do not allow the alternation of the direct and indirect objects. These verbs follow the word order illustrated in (A) and hence cannot take the word order in (B).

Consider the following sentences where *suggest* and *explain* allow for the prepositional pattern (2) and (4) but not for the double object pattern (1) and (3) which are ungrammatical.

S + V + D.O + to/for + I.O

(1) \*The clerk suggested **Charlie the wool jacket**.

(2) The clerk suggested **the wool jacket to Cha**

(3) \*The company director explained **the staff the plan**.

(4) The company director explained **the plan for the staff**.

Exercises:

A. Choose the correct order of objects in following sentences.





## Appendix C

### Materials for the grammar CR task

#### Task Cards

There are two pairs of task cards with similar sentences on each pair. The verbs have two objects, a direct and an indirect object. The sentences on each pair differ only in the position of their direct and indirect objects. The correctness and incorrectness of the sentences are related to the position of their objects. Work in pairs. Each student takes one task card from each pair. Each pair of task cards have identical sentences differing only in the placement of direct and indirect objects. Decide whether the verbs allow for the alternation of their objects.

1. Correct: I offer my friend a solution.
2. Incorrect: The students asked questions from their teachers.
3. Correct: Ali lent his brother some money.
4. Incorrect: He explained him the problem.
5. Correct: The car dealer suggested a fast car to us.
6. Correct: She bought a nice birthday present for her husband.
7. Incorrect: The doctor described his patient the importance of regular exercise.

1. Correct: I offered a solution to my friend.
2. Correct: The students asked their teachers questions.
3. Correct: Ali lent some money to his brother.
4. Correct: He explained the problem to them.
5. Incorrect: The car dealer suggested us a fast car.
6. Correct: She bought her husband a nice birthday present.
7. Correct: The doctor described the importance of regular exercise to his patient.

1. Correct: The university department mails students academic articles.
2. Incorrect: The cobbler repaired me my shoes.
3. Correct: Mom cooked a picnic dessert for everybody.
4. Correct: John's sister teaches young children painting.
5. Correct: The hospital reports all car accidents to the police.
6. Correct: Yashar always tells us interesting jokes.

1. Correct: The university department mails academic articles to students.
2. Correct: The cobbler repaired my shoes for me.
3. Correct: Mom cooked everybody a picnic dessert.
4. Correct: John's sister teaches painting to young children.
5. Incorrect: The hospital reports the police all car accidents.
6. Correct: Yashar always tells interesting jokes to us.

## Task Sheet

Please study in pairs the sentences on task cards and work out the rules.. In the following example the verb **write** allows for the alternation of direct and indirect objects. Hence it can have the word order *S + V + Direct Object + Indirect Object* or *S + V + Indirect Object + Direct Object*. *Elli wrote her classmate a letter* And *Elli wrote a letter to her classmate*. However, it is not the case with any verbs and some verbs allow for the former pattern but not the latter one. Working pairs, decide whether the following verbs allow for both patterns or only for the former one.

Verbs:

1. Offer:
2. Ask:
3. Lend:
4. Explain:
5. Suggest:
6. Buy:
7. Describe:
8. Mail:
9. Repair:
10. Cook:
11. Teach:
12. Report:
13. Tell:

## Appendix D

Materials for the control group

### *Passage 1*

**Please read the following passage carefully and answer the questions.**

During the psychology class, a student who was doing a research study reported her experiment to us. She presented a lecture to the students and she explained its topic to everybody. The researcher gave half of the husbands the following information. “Your wife has described a holiday trip to you. One of her friends told it to her. You think that it sounds like a really good idea, so you ask her some questions about the cost.”

The other group of husbands heard the following information. “Your wife has suggested a holiday trip to you. You don’t like it. You believe that it is a really bad idea, so you ask her some questions about the cost.” The researcher didn’t tell the wives what she said to the husbands. She asked the wives to listen to the tape recording of their husbands’ questions and decide if the husbands thought it was a good idea or not. A significant number of the wives couldn’t decide. That was very surprising.

Answer the following comprehension questions according to the passage:

1. What did the researcher report to the students?
2. What did the researcher present to the class?
3. What did the researcher explain to other students?
4. Did the researcher tell the wives what she said to their husbands?
5. What did the researcher ask the wives to do at the end?

### *Passage 2:*

**Read the following passage and answer the questions.**

As time goes by, things get easier. Increasingly, science and technology are bringing human beings more ease and comfort. Technology offers useful facilities to the public and there are so many of them that they are being taken for granted. For example, you can mail a friend a letter within a few seconds through the internet.

A few decades ago, things were much more difficult and there was no computer to provide people countless useful things.

Technology has now reached such a stage where you can buy your friend a present at the mall without carrying any cash and likewise, you can lend him any amount of money by using credit cards. Housewives are enjoying themselves as intelligent microwaves and stoves are cooking them delicious dishes. Mechanics no longer have to bother themselves to repair your car for you because computers are faster and more precise than them at diagnosing the defects. Only if you take a glance around yourself, you will discover that technology offers people much more than you can assume. Computers now play a vital role in modern life and they suggest easy solutions to people's problems. In the near future, you may not attend the class to study your course; computers and the internet may teach you different languages in the privacy of your room. As modern technology advances, it offers human beings more fun and facilities.

**Answer the following comprehension questions according to the passages:**

1. What does technology offer to people?
2. How can a person lend money to a friend without carrying cash?
3. According to the passage, what can suggest solutions to people's problems in modern Life?
4. Who will teach you languages in the near future?