"I am afraid if my students can't understand me." - A Consciousness-Raising Approach to Teaching the Modal System

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Abstract

Teaching the modal system through Consciousness-raising is a way of educating the learner about grammatical features using form-oriented activities. It can indirectly facilitate L2 acquisition. Through this approach, learners identify modal usage. Ellis advocates that learners transform input into intake to facilitate learner output, increasing the probability that the output will be comprehensible. As Swain points out, output facilitates acquisition by making learners aware of gaps, enabling hypothesis testing, and allowing learners to reflect on their performance and develop linguistic meta-understandings (Swain 1985). The following can elicit learner output: 1) Consciousness-raising for explicit knowledge, 2) feature focus exercises, and 3) focused identifying activities. In line with Ellis' theory, a pedagogical design was created to allow learners to facilitate input into intake. As learners comprehend, they draw upon their general knowledge. Measuring such involves a grammatical Consciousness-raising task on the modal system with a pre and post-test. *Moodle,* a widely available LMS, was the learning management system used for data collection. It is hoped that this approach will highlight a student's implicit and automatic grammatical knowledge rather than explicit and controlled knowledge. Preliminary results will be shared.

Keywords: Consciousness-raising, Hawthorne Effect, Solomon Squares, Moodle, modal system, English grammar, EFL, Japan

Introduction

The title of this paper enshrines a well-worn sentence *I am afraid if my students can't understand me. It is better to say, "I am afraid my students won't understand me." This paper examines the modal system for teaching English to Japanese college students, who may or may not become teachers in the future. Nevertheless, their professional business careers may require English for communication.

Background

After Krashen's Input Hypothesis gained wide acceptance, ways of applying it evolved. In short, Krashen believes that during a period of silence, a child gets massive amounts of comprehensible input, i +1. The child builds up competence as well as confidence through interaction. The more they can understand, the more they will feel comfortable when they begin to speak. Adult L2 learners, however, are not usually given the luxury of a silent period. Adults are asked to produce almost from the first day of the language class, which causes anxiety (Krashen & Terrell, 2011). Krashen argues that forcing learners to produce, be they children or adults, can be counterproductive, so learners revert to their L1 (Krashen, 1984: 27). To answer this problem is Consciousness-raising.

Consciousness-raising (CR) refers to teaching grammar in which instructions in grammar through drills, grammar explanation, and other form-focused activities are viewed as a way of drawing the learner's awareness of the grammatical features of the language. It can indirectly facilitate L2 acquisition. Consciousness-raising differs from traditional approaches in that it accommodates itself to the learner's place on the interlanguage continuum. It is practice-oriented (learner-centered) and not presentation-oriented (teacher-centered). In "The Role of Practice in Classroom Learning," Ellis states that there are two kinds of practice, controlled and accessible. Controlled practice takes the form of various drills, which require the mechanical production of specific language forms. This free practice involves the students engaging in simulated communication which has been set up to provide opportunities for using those forms (Ellis, 1988: 21). Controlled practice can have a delayed effect, especially in light of language's developmental and variational features (Ellis, 1988: 36). Student attitudes and motivational and social factors can explain shortcomings of practice. One factor which may explain why controlled practice appears to work is that the learner has already acquired the structure and the learner, therefore, feels confident and free to practice. And with controlled practice comes language acquisition. When controlled practice is credited with causing learning, it is often a developmental artifact, a positive example of the i +1 Input Hypothesis. What is an effective way of doing this?

In "Interpretation Tasks for Grammar Teaching," Ellis examines an alternative approach to grammar teaching based on interpreting input. This approach has three goals which emphasize helping learners to 1) enable learners to identify the meaning(s) realized by a specific grammatical feature, otherwise known as form-function mapping; 2) notice grammatical features in the input and comprehend their meanings; and 3) compare the forms present in the input with those occurring in learner output, or "noticing the gap" (Ellis, 1995: 94). A pedagogical application of this approach can be realized in a threefold application. In step one, the learners are required to comprehend input that has been specifically contrived to induce learners to attend to the meaning of a specific grammatical feature, in this case, the modal system. In step two, learners are greeted by a task to induce them to pay

careful attention to the critical properties of the target features. And step three is to have them perform a cognitive comparison task (Ellis, 1995: 94).

Theoretically, there are two types of knowledge at any learner's disposal: explicit and implicit. One can draw upon knowledge consciously or automatically. In "A Theory of Instructed Second Language Acquisition," Ellis assembles a theory of language acquisition that takes place in a classroom that is input based on the overall goal of automatizing L2 knowledge that had been explicit indirectly into implicit L2 knowledge (Ellis, 1994: 99).

In short, input has to become intake for the linguistic information to interact with the learner's interlanguage and facilitate output. The learner's interlanguage constitutes all the implicit knowledge of the L2 the learner has at their disposal. The role of explicit knowledge indirectly affects the transformation of input to intake and the probability of the learner generating comprehensible output. Explicit knowledge is consciously analyzed and exists independently of actual instances of use. Explicit Knowledge is knowledge about language. For the output to be made from a learner, Ellis argues in favor of a weak interface position. Under some conditions, explicit knowledge can become implicit. A learner is only capable of features compatible with the current or next development phase. Therefore, when learning implicit knowledge, the learner is involved in conscious attention to forms in the input (noticing and then comparing) to change that input into the intake. Learners must also integrate what they notice and compare into their interlanguage systems (integrating); this is likely to occur unconsciously. In short, the automatization of L2 knowledge, both implicit and explicit, can happen through controlled practice.

When learners practice, they need to produce language. Output has a role to play in this theory. According to Swain, output pushes learners to process language more deeply with more mental effort than input. Students' meaningful production of language should then have a potentially greater significant role in language development (Swain, 2000). It may force the learners to move from semantic processing to syntactic processing (Swain, 1985: 252). Swain suggests output aids acquisition in that it promotes noticing the gap, enables hypothesis testing, and learners may reflect on their output and thereby develop a meta-lingual understanding. For eliciting learner output, the following can be used: 1) Consciousness-raising for explicit knowledge; 2) feature focus exercises, such as interpretive tasks; and 3) focused communication activities.

As for the particular task or treatment, the preferred scheme for structure-based comprehension tasks is that found in Loschky and Bley-Vroman's "Grammar and Task-Based Methodology" (Crookes and Gass, 1993: 152). They argue that useful grammar has a task-utility of a particular structure. In other words, a grammatical structure will be helpful if it has a function in the learner's grammar. They claim the learner has to be in control of the task, both for comprehension and production. Therefore, they developed a scheme for structure-based comprehension tasks. Input

comes, and the learner has to notice the target and other distractors, then contextualize the features that distinguish its referents. Finally, there needs to be negotiated interaction and feedback in the feature context (152).

In the treatment section, learners facilitate input into intake. Through comprehension, learners are to draw upon their general background knowledge, a selected episode from Lewis Carroll's Alice in Wonderland (Carroll, 1994). In the short excerpt, Alice and the irate queen argue using many target modals. The student is to identify all the modals. Then, the next section focuses on the contextual features that distinguish referents. In the section after that, some sentences from the text have been altered, and others have been made up. The learners are to negotiate using their contextual features. The pedagogical design reflects a systematic and focused approach and application to Consciousness-raising for input to become intake.

Methodology

Data collection in SLA, ESL/EFL research falls into two paradigms: qualitative and quantitative. These represent more than two relative extremes but terminals on the qualitative-quantitative continuum of research methodologies. A qualitative paradigm concerns understanding the acquisition of a second language from the learner's frame of reference. Data are collected from naturalistic settings, and there is no control group. Therefore it is highly subjective. On the other side is the quantitative paradigm that seeks to objectively quantify the facts or causes behind the facts of behavior with minimal emphasis on the role of individuals or conditions beyond the researcher's control. This way, the researcher is removed from the data and willingly maintains an outsider's perspective.

This study takes a quantitative approach, albeit with limitations. Here, causation is sought between control and treatment groups. The independent variable manipulated is whether or not a Consciousness-raising approach differs from a more traditional approach to teaching the Modal System as reflected on the dependent variable or the outcome. The results will be compared against the control group's performance. It is important to remember that the participants come from preselected classes. That being said, the overall structure may look experimental, but the generalization of results is limited due to a lack of complete randomization.

Pedagogical Design

The design of this Consciousness-raising task is experimental, with the null hypothesis being tested. The null hypothesis holds that there is no difference in students' understanding and use of the modal system between those who received Consciousness-raising treatment and those who received explicit, teacher-fronted instruction.

The Solomon four-group design, a useful experimental design to investigate a pre-test's main effect and the interaction between the pre-test and treatment (van Engelenburg, 1999), is incorporated. The basic design of the experiment includes a pre-test, treatment, and post-test X_1 T X_2. The pre-test has a grammaticality judgment section - to probe how well the learner can judge the correct usage of the modals. This design would show change within a person. The measure is a Consciousness-raising task on the modal system, with pre and post-testing. This design may be modified into a repeated measures design.

To guard against the Hawthorne Effect does the pre-test itself alert students as to what will be important, the Solomon Squares (van Engelenburg, 1999) design offers a design with two treatment and control groups.

X_1 T_{a1} X_2

Ø T_{a2} X_2

X_1 T_{b1} X_2

Ø T_{b2} X_2

The pre-test between sections one and two are the same, which permits a much more comprehensive null hypothesis while working with intact groups.

H_0 $T_{a1} = T_{a2}$ and H_0 $T_{b1} = T_{b2}$

If this condition can be met, the pre-tests may be dropped altogether, and what remains two experiments in one; a replication is built into the experimental design.

Subjects

Participants included four classes of students enrolled in a university in Northern Japan. All are at the CEFR A-2 or B-1 levels. The treatments were assigned as an online activity. All students, non-English majors, have a positive outlook on their English studies. There were two first-year and two second-year classes. Given the need for four groups, first-year students were members of the control and treatment groups without the pre-tests. The second-year students were given the pre-tests, control or treatment, and post-test. The rationale here is to test for the Hawthorne effect.

Treatments

There were two treatments. The control included a Youtube video about the Modal system (Learn English with Rebecca · engVid, 2017), followed by a worksheet adapted to Moodle that would test for Bottom-up skills with the Modal system (Rosmanitz, 2022, p. 007). The second treatment was a Consciousness-raising lesson based on Alice in Wonderland about the Modal system. Should the null hypothesis for the post-tests of both groups be accepted, the Hawthorne effect can be dismissed where $T_{a1}=T_{a2}$ and $T_{b1}=T_{b2}$.

$X_1\ T_{a1}\ X_2$ N=14 - 2nd Year

Ø $T_{a2}\ X_2$ N=16 - 1st Year

$X_1\ T_{b1}\ X_2$ N=15 - 2nd Year

Ø $T_{b2}\ X_2$ N=13 - 1st Year

The second-year students received the units requiring the pre-test.

The Pre-test and Post-test

The pre and post-tests are the same. About instrumentation: Moodle is a learning management system that can run simple psychology experiments in cognition and applied linguistics. It is handy for devising quizzes and recording the time needed to accomplish a quiz. In short, this experiment is created by administering twenty-five stimuli, each describing an event (sentence), series of events, or linguistic contexts to be presented to the subject. These trials are run randomly.

Pre and Post-Test: Grammar Judgement

Directions: If a sentence is correct, select *Good*. If not, then select *Bad*.

He can to go. *Error: present ability*

Clotilda should not stay. *advice*

Ann said that she must to work. *Error: obligation*

Fred must have heard her say that he could get a raise. *certainty and past ability*

Oh, yes I could very much. Thank you. *Error: request verification*

You may leave the room. *future possibility*

We can should study hard for the exam. *Error: present ability/advice*

I might be able to go to the game. *future possibility*

Should I bring anything? *advice*

I am not able to must go on my tennis club's ski trip. *Error: present ability*

You should buy some salt and pepper. *advice*

It must have be night time. *Error: past certainty*

I'm sorry, you must not to speak Japanese. *Error: obligation*

I must meet Margo at 7:00. *obligation*

Will you like some cake and ice cream for dessert? *Error: request*

May you fix this bicycle, please? *Error: request*

I couldn't pick up the tickets last night. *past ability*

Mike cans help you with your homework. *Error: present ability*

Can you tell me how to get to Martz Chevrolet? *present ability*

We should study lots for that class last term. *Error: advice*

They should have warned us. *advice*

I will prefer to stay. Error: request

I shouldn't have told her. advice

I could read at an early age. past ability

You will can go there. Error: future possibility

Pre and Post-Test: Output

This part is at the end of the pre and post-tests. The three questions cover the modal system's present, past, and future aspects. The manner of grading is relevant to implicational scaling. Moodle's auto-grading essay was used to count words at 40% of the grade and then search for modal words at 10% per item.

The directions were given in both their L1 and L2. The three questions are as follows:

Write about your abilities, things which you can do very well, and explain why.

Write about what you enjoyed doing as a child and explain why.

Write about the things you will possibly do in your retirement years and give reasons why.

The Treatments

Two treatments are needed to satisfy the Solomon Squares setup. The first treatment is the control which requires the participants to watch a Youtube video about Modals and then complete two Moodle versions of a Bottom-up worksheet.

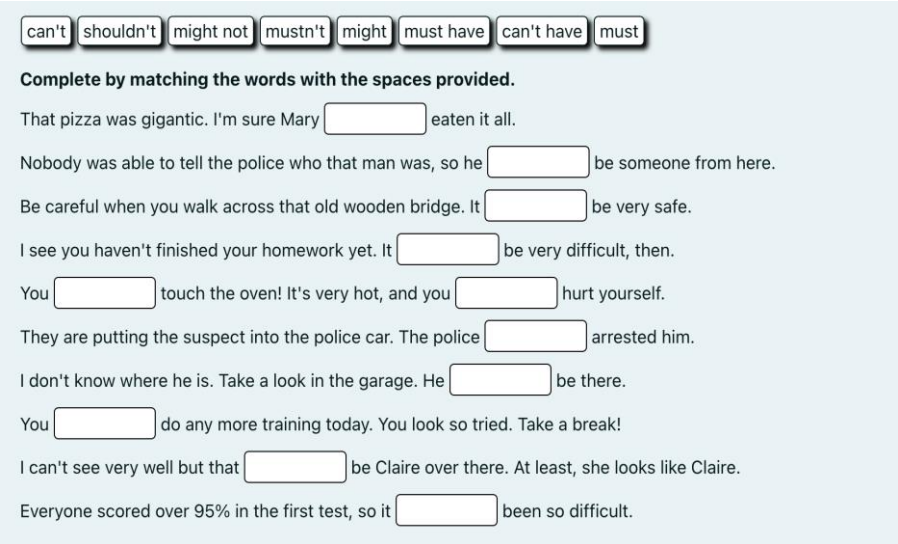

Figure 1. One of two Bottom-up Skills Worksheets for the Modal System

The second treatment is the Consciousness-raising unit designed to elicit learner awareness of the Modal system. The students in this group also watched the same Youtube video but were then to identify all the places about possibility and probability. The aim is to develop an awareness of how the modal system works within a narrow set of parameters. Grammar rules are not taught explicitly. The students can attempt the quiz three times as they wish and receive feedback, receiving an average score on their attempts.

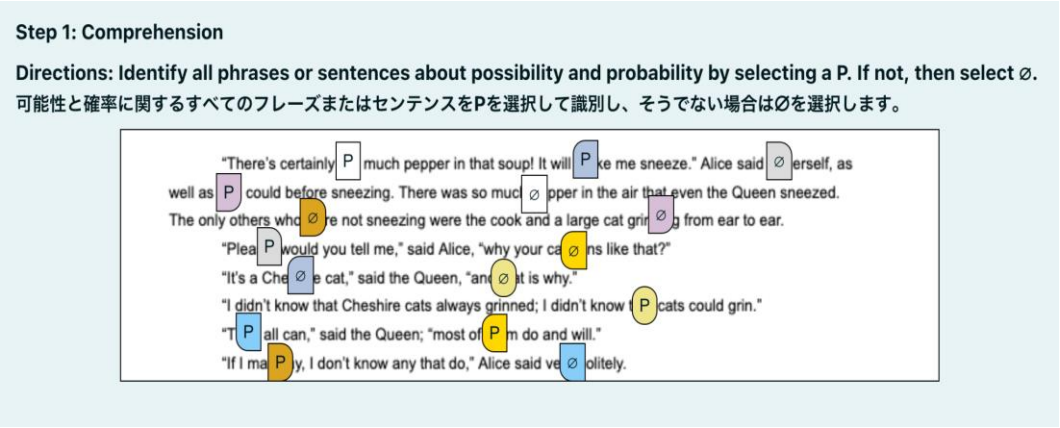

Figure 2. The first of two tasks of identifying possibility and probability.

They were then to show their learning, such as forming new rules and experimenting with the input in ways that will provide the most immediate benefit for them. There were two tasks. The first is to read a short explanation of modal

rules and then follow up with a modal identifying task based on Alice in Wonderland.

Directions: The text uses the following verb forms: please study them.

(1) Present simple tense (e.g. 'is')

(2) may/might + verb → noun phrase (e.g., direct object or a prepositional phrase)

(3) can/could + verb → noun phrase

(4) will/would + verb → noun phrase

(5) may, can, will + no other verb (an intransitive verb)

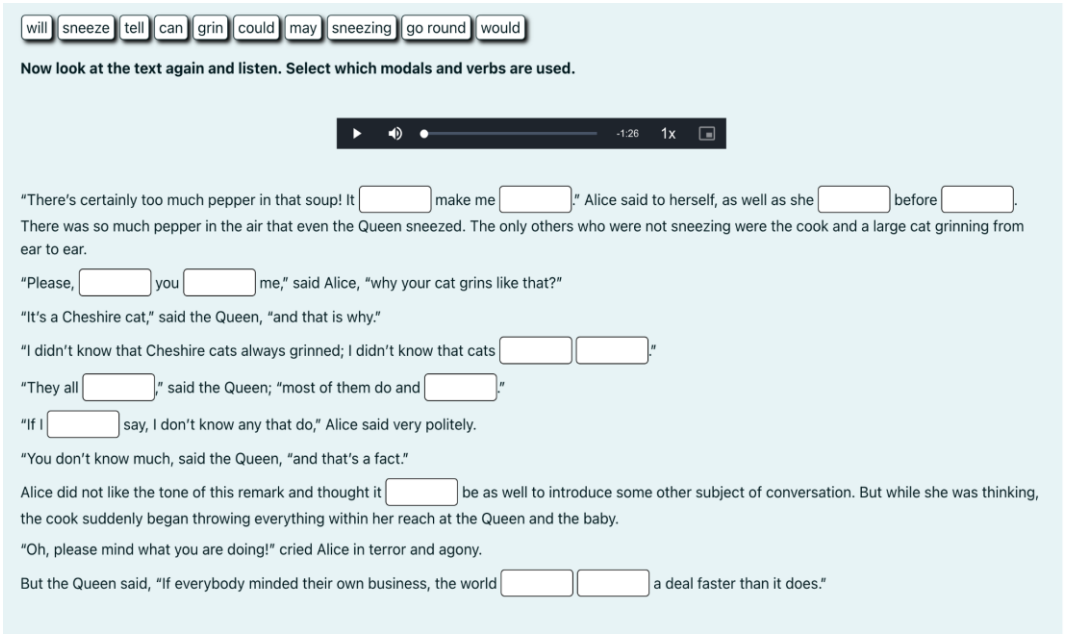

Figure 3. Students determine which modals and verbs go where.

This task asks students to listen, read, and place into position modals and verbs. The Moodle quiz allows students to receive immediate feedback without penalty. That way, they can interact and develop their awareness as they work. The advantage is that their attention is focused, and they can establish their own form-function maps.

Consciousness-raising - Error Identification

The directions ask students to identify errors and ungrammatical.

"It would be an advantage I will add."

"They all can to grin," said the Queen.

"It must have been all that pepper in the air!" said the cook.

"May you stop throwing all those things, please!"

"The world could stop spinning whenever it wishes, but it still spins."

Consciousness-raising

Students are prompted to write about their understanding of when "can/could" and "will/would" are used. The directions were offered in English and Japanese. The rationale is that while they have learned to read, many students' reading abilities have not reached the point where they are dependably reading to learn. By offering instructional language in their L1, the goal is to keep them focused on the tasks for their benefit and not lead to frustration. After this, the post-test was administered.

Evaluation

The rationale is to maintain as much of an experimental design as possible. Randomization of students was limited to intact groups. However, with Moodle, items can be randomized on the pre and post-tests. The written components aim to uncover the students' grammatical knowledge, hopefully, more implicit and automatic than explicit and controlled. The post-test as an assessment is summative in that it appears at the end of the unit. The goal is to evaluate how much students have learned and how effective the unit has been. An Analysis of Variance shows that the second treatment, CR, brought about a more desired outcome than the first treatment, control. Moreover, the Hawthorne effect was not an issue.

Results

The post-test results would indicate that the treatments for the control, grammar-based, Bottom-up lesson would not differ from the Consciousness-raising lesson. The results are significant.

One Way ANOVA test, using F distribution df (3, 53) (right-tailed)

Source	DF	Sum of Square	Mean Square	F Statistic	P-value
Groups (between groups)	3	55.2636	18.4212	5.2651	0.002972
Error (within groups)	53	185.4318	3.4987		
Total	56	240.6954	4.2981		

Table 1. F table for a One Way ANOVA for the post-tests.

A One Way ANOVA test, using F distribution df (3, 53) (right-tailed) testing for the null hypothesis, $H_{0,}$ was used. It was noticed that the two groups' averages are

considered to be not equal. In other words, the difference between the averages of some groups is big enough to be statistically significant.

The P-value, where it equals 0.00297211, means that the chance of type 1 error, rejecting a correct H_0, null hypothesis, is small: 0.002972, less than 0.3%. In short, the smaller the p-value, the stronger it supports H_1, showing statistically significant differences between the groups. The test statistic F equals 5.265136, which is not in the 95% acceptance region: [-∞: 2.7791] (*Statistics Kingdom*, 2017a).

With a significant difference between the groups, a Tukey HSD / Tukey Kramer was run to compare the means, which indicated that the following pairs were significantly different: the control group with the pre-test differed from the Consciousness-raising group that did not have the pre-test, and Consciousness-raising group that did not have the pre-test differed from Consciousness-raising group that had the pre-test. Conducting a Consciousness-raising lesson, a pre-test, or an introduction to the lesson benefits the students.

Are the pre and post-tests for the control and treatment groups the same or different, and if different, where? Comparing the pre and post-test results indicate that the treatments for the control, grammar-based, Bottom-up lesson does not differ from the Consciousness-raising lesson. The results show a significant difference.

One Way ANOVA test, using F distribution df (3, 56) (right-tailed)

Source	DF	Sum of Square	Mean Square	F Statistic	P-value
Groups (between groups)	3	1595.0802	531.6934	90.8937	4.441e-16
Error (within groups)	56	327.5787	5.8496		
Total	59	1922.6588	32.5874		

Table 2. F table for a One Way ANOVA for the Pre and Post-Tests.

A One Way ANOVA test, using F distribution df (3, 56) (right-tailed) testing for the null hypothesis, H_0, was used. It was noticed that the two groups' averages are considered to be not equal. In other words, the difference between the averages of some groups is big enough to be statistically significant.

By looking at the P-value, where it equals 4.44089e-16, it means that the chance of type 1 error, rejecting a correct H_0, null hypothesis, is small: 4.44089e-16, less than 14%. In short, the smaller the p-value, the stronger it supports H_1, showing statistically significant differences between the groups. The test statistic F equals 90.893677, which is not in the 95% acceptance region: [-∞: 2.7694] (*Statistics Kingdom*, 2017a).

With a significant difference between the groups, a Tukey HSD / Tukey Kramer was run to compare the means, which indicates that the following pair was significantly different: the Consciousness-raising pre-test group differed from the Consciousness-raising post-test group. This illustrates the earlier findings that conducting a Consciousness-raising lesson, a pre-test, or an introduction to the lesson would benefit the students. Regarding the control group, there was no significant difference between student performance on their pre and post-tests.

The Hawthorne Effect

The final consideration is if the Hawthorne Effect influenced the participants in both groups. This was accomplished by conducting a Two-Sample T-Test (Welch's T-test) for each group using the scores from the treatment sections. In both cases, the null hypothesis was confirmed, and the Hawthorne Effect can be dismissed as a moderating consideration.

For the control groups, the null hypothesis, $H_{0,}$ was accepted. The difference between the sample averages of the two groups in the control group was statistically insignificant. The p-value equals 0.5074, (p (x≤T) = 0.7463), which means that the chance of type 1 error, rejecting a correct H_0, is too high: 0.5074 (50.74%). The larger the p-value, the more it supports $H_{0,}$ the null hypothesis. T equals 0.6718, which is in the 95% region of acceptance (*Statistics Kingdom*, 2017b).

For the Consciousness-raising groups, the null hypothesis, $H_{0,}$ was accepted. The difference between the sample averages of the two groups in the CR group was not big enough to be statistically significant. The p-value equals 0.09737, (p (x≤T) = 0.04868), which means that the chance of type 1 error, rejecting a correct H_0, is too high: 0.09737 (9.74%). The larger the p-value, the more it supports H_0. T equals -1.7265, which is in the 95% region of acceptance (*Statistics Kingdom*, 2017b).

In short, the Hawthorne Effect was not a factor for both groups, as demonstrated by using the Solomon Squares design.

Discussion

A look at the treatment scores suggests that all learners had limited implicit knowledge of the Modal system. This was also affirmed in the pre-test scores. Their limitations, however, became apparent in the treatment scores for the control groups $\bar{x}$ = 5.546 and $\bar{x}$ = 5.222. Their mean scores indicated an insignificant decline. In the pre and post-test writing component, the treatment groups outperformed their control counterparts with mean scores of $\bar{x}$ = 6.997 and $\bar{x}$ = 7.980, respectively. According to Welch's T-Test, both groups' differences were also insignificant. Yet, in the pre and post-tests, when seen in the aggregate, significant differences were observed, especially in the treatment groups suggesting improvement.

At differing places in the data are mixed results, which ask whether it is necessary to teach grammar. This may be an example of L2 knowledge that had been explicit -

indirectly and is now implicit L2 knowledge. This confirms that L2 acquisition occurs in the classroom (Ellis, 1994: 99). Learners can pick up the Modal system. Krashen has said teachers should provide an i + 1 learning, acquisition-rich environment. In this case, it is inside the i + 1 zone (Krashen & Terrell, 2011). In light of observations made here, it can be said that 1) the L2 learner will learn something, but not everything, about the Modal system and 2) that grammar teaching is an appropriate classroom time. The zero approach to grammar remains an option, but a return to grammar instruction can happen, albeit with qualifications. The structural syllabus and a grammar-translation approach are not recommended, but the task-based communicative syllabus, supplemented with a grammar syllabus that utilizes Consciousness-raising, is (R. Ellis, 1995: 94).

While YouTube tutorials might be better than nothing, an actual hands-on set of tasks is better and, in this case, a Consciousness-raising lesson. To answer the question of what makes a task good, it can be said the Consciousness-raising tasks, which draw upon the learners' existing knowledge and direct their attention to areas of need, were more effective than the Bottom-up materials in the control group.

Are teachers from now to go off and author their own CR units and lessons? Hardly. While some may be up to that monumental task, the main point is for teachers to know and recognize what Consciousness-raising tasks look like in existing textbook materials. With the teacher informed and able to manage such, students will have greater benefits than teachers who cannot tell the difference.

Conclusion

Consciousness-raising tasks can be applied to EFL learners' acquisition of the modal system. It is recommended that further research be done to focus on the output data of this experiment that appears in the pre and post-tests. These contain two parts, 1) the 25-item grammar judgment section and 2) the forced output writing section. As for the present study, pre and post-test scores were handled in the aggregate. But, the question now is to what extent was their variation in the writing component, if any. Moodle offers a systematic approach in that with the two Moodle plugins, the Self Correcting Essay, where expected features such as word length and lexical items are determined for recognition and set for scoring, and the Quiz Section data organizer, where data can be downloaded for analysis that would track learner performance within the writing sections, according to the particular questions, in both pre and post-test environments. The researcher is now at a level to ask how the learners applied their understanding of the Modal system in questions that required past, present, and future writing and then processing the data at the population level. The main point is now, with this approach, the days of manually counting data for the occurrences of the correct usage of the Modal system in present, past, and future contexts can be done digitally. In short, Moodle won't conclude about learner

proficiency in the Modal system, but it can count where learners are correct in its usage.

It is accepted that the Consciousness-raising approach where 1) grammar can be taught through controlled practice; 2) the student has to participate as fully as possible in constructing their own rules, and 3) the student has to produce the targeted structure in an automatic context that would show the structure's place in implicit knowledge aid in learner L2 acquisition to a significant extent. With further study on the writing, it is hoped that new observations will aid in the process of not only L2 acquisition but assist materials writers in creating meaningful L2 educational materials.

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