

Spoken Grammar Features: Does the Way of Teaching Make a Difference?

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to investigate the effect of competitive and cooperative explicit and task-based instruction of spoken grammar features of heads, tails and ellipses on Iranian EFL learners' awareness of these features. To this end, 90 female pre-intermediate EFL learners of Ghane Language Institute in Tehran were selected through convenience sampling. The participants were randomly assigned to four experimental groups, receiving explicit and task-based instructions in competitive and cooperative contexts. Prior to the treatment, a pretest was given to check the participants' level of awareness of the spoken grammar features. After a 10-session instruction, a posttest was administered. The collected data were processed using the two-way ANCOVA procedure. The results indicated that competitive and cooperative contexts were equally effective on raising learners' awareness of spoken grammar features. Moreover, there was a statistically significant interaction effect between type of instruction and the context of instruction. These findings have important theoretical and pedagogical implications.

Keywords: Competitive Learning, Cooperative Learning, Ellipses, Explicit Instruction, Heads, Spoken Grammar, Tails, Task-Based Instruction

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1. Introduction

Preparing students for communication via another language has been a major concern of language teaching practitioners since the advent of Direct Method (Larsen-Freeman, 2011). A fundamental element of successful communication in a second language (L2), is the knowledge of grammar (Ellis, 2006), which can be developed through both explicit learning and communicative tasks. Several authors (e.g., Batstone, 2012; Ellis, 2003; Nunan, 2004) have called for the integration of TBLT into grammar teaching, asserting that specific types of tasks may result in the communicative production of learnt forms.

Brown and Yule (1983) distinguish between written and spoken grammar and emphasize that spoken grammar instruction can have significant effects on language production. In a study carried out by Goh (2009), many teachers stated that learners need to be aware of spoken and written language differences, and that having the knowledge of spoken grammar increases learners' awareness of these differences. Mumford (2008) echoes a similar concern and claims that knowledge of spoken grammar features and the ability to use them decrease learners' communicative problems. This implies that familiarity with features of spoken grammar may be as important as, if not more important than, written grammar. Despite this, Timmis (2005) notices that there has been little attention to the way spoken grammar is taught or even if it needs to be instructed. Aside from debates over the necessity of raising learners' awareness of spoken grammar, the question of how the features must be instructed is also controversial. Research suggests that there are still arguments for explicit teaching of grammar within the framework of task-based teaching (Yildiz & Senel, 2017). Whereas Timmis (2005) claims that tasks are among the most appropriate ways of teaching spoken grammar features, Mowlaie and Mirzaei (2017) focus on teaching those features via explicit instruction.

Moreover, grammar instruction may take place in competitive or cooperative contexts (Delicarpini, 2008). Both contexts have been shown to have their own benefits. According to Regueras et al. (2009), recent studies have paid more attention to collaborative learning ignoring the positive effect of competitive learning on students' success in the learning process, whereas Hung, Yong and Lin (2015) point out that competitive learning positively affects learners' progress.

This study aims to explore how competitive and cooperative explicit or task based instruction of spoken grammar features affect Iranian learners' awareness of the target features. It is aimed to answer the following questions:

1. Are there any significant differences between the effects of competitive and cooperative explicit and task-based instruction on Iranian EFL learners' awareness of spoken grammar feature of *heads*?
2. Are there any significant differences between the effects of competitive and cooperative explicit and task-based instruction on Iranian EFL learners' awareness of spoken grammar feature of *tails*?
3. Are there any significant differences between the effects of competitive and cooperative explicit and task-based instruction on Iranian EFL learners' awareness of spoken grammar feature of *ellipsis*?

2. Literature Review

Thornbury (1999) describes grammar as a controversial aspect of language teaching. According to Carter and McCarthy (1995), many grammatical models are based on written grammar, whereas Biber, Johansson, Leech, Conrad, and Finegan (1999) believe that grammar of conversation stands for spoken language. In spite of the fact that most teachers have a tendency toward formal and written language grammatical rules, they agree that learners need to be exposed to features of spoken grammar (Cullen & Kuo, 2007; Timmis, 2005).

At times, attempts have been made to develop frameworks for teaching spoken grammar. For instance, Timmis (2005) introduced a framework for teaching spoken grammar in line with Carter and McCarthy's (1995) Illustration- Induction- Interaction paradigm. In his approach, he discusses the 'shape of spoken data' and suggests that spoken grammar features be integrated in authentic texts rather than simple sentences. The rationale for the need to address spoken grammar as distinct from written grammar is that spoken language corpora have revealed remarkable differences between written and spoken language (Ruhlemann, 2008).

Among the features of spoken grammar, the features of heads, tails and ellipses are of great importance based on corpus-based studies over the last two decades (Timmis, 2012). Heads, also known as left dislocations or fronted items, occur when items which semantically refer to the subject or object of a clause are located before the subject pronoun (Carter & McCarthy, 1995; Willis, 2003). In this phenomenon, elements are taken from their normal place and are put at the front of their clauses (Paterson, Caygill & Sewell, 2012).

Aijmer (1989) refers to heads or themes as linking devices through which the listener and speaker negotiate information in a clarified and simplified way. He introduces the structure of 'Theme + Predication', in

which the personal pronoun of predication correlates with the theme of the clause. Biber et al. (1998) refer to it as 'preface', which consists of a noun phrase whose co-referent pronoun occurs in its following clause. By breaking complex tasks into parts and establishing the topic first, heads help the hearer to decode what has been said. In fact, heads are found in the beginning of clauses providing listeners with relevant information to shape a knowledge framework so that they can easily respond to a question or statement by knowing their message (Carter et al., 2011). For example:

The house on the corner, is that where they live? (Carter et al., 2011, p.94)

Those marks and Sparks bags, can you see them all? (Cullen & Kuo, 2007, p.366)

Carter and McCarthy (1995) believe that, in parallel with front or topic slots in a clause, there exist final slots, known as tail slots, which may be occupied with whatever information that the speaker prefers. Carter et al. (2011) signify tails as exclusive to spoken language and claim that their use in written English is only to give the written text a spoken character. Biber et al. (1999) define tails as noun phrase tags or right dislocations where the pronoun appears earlier:

I recon they're lovely. I really do, whippets. (Cullen & Kuo, 2007, p.367)

The frequent use of tails in informal contexts highlights their importance. Moreover, because of their emphatic features, tails are believed to be listener-sensitive, at least so far as they involve listeners in getting the message of utterances. Most importantly, tails need to be known by learners to provide a better choice of interactive expression of their attitudes and feelings in real life contexts. The grammar pattern of tails is also of importance. Tails are in fact necessary repetitions presented by a pronoun, a noun and an auxiliary or even a determiner and a noun or pronoun (Carter, et.al, 2011).

Ellipsis, namely structural ellipsis, is one of the most frequent grammatical features occurring when elements that are necessary are omitted in a structure (Carter & McCarthy, 1995). The omission of subjects or subjects and verbs occurs with the assumption that listeners have enough understanding of what the speaker means (Adolphs & Carter, 2003). In fact, ellipsis reveals the shared understandings of obligatory grammar where easily-understood elements are left out from structures which are grammatically wrong but stylistically effective (Carter & McCarthy, 2017). Ellipsis occurs in both speech and writing, but its use and distribution are not the same. Situational ellipsis, in particular, appears mostly in conversations,

and the elements at the beginning of an utterance are affected by this type (Cullen & Kuo, 2007).

A number of studies have been conducted on spoken grammar features. In one such study, Aijmer (1989) investigated the discourse function related to heads and tails in 34 transcribed conversations. He reported that tails are used in 62% of his data, while the coverage of heads in his sample texts was 38%. He concluded that heads and tails make conversation easier for speakers.

In their corpus-based study, Carter and McCarthy (1995) transcribed 30 four-minute extracts to check the frequency of some spoken grammar features including ellipsis, head, tail and indirect speech. They introduced an awareness-based mode of teaching named 'three Is', which stands for Illustration, Interaction and Induction. Through this approach, learners share their ideas by looking at real data and then make their own. They believe that this paradigm is more appropriate than the traditional 'three Ps' (Presentation, Practice and Production) when it comes to spoken grammar instruction.

Timmis (2002) studied learners' and teachers' willingness to learn the features of spoken grammar. The results showed that students were more willing than their teachers to become familiar with these features.

Willis (2003) highlights the vague nature of spoken grammar and notes that this kind of grammar is variable and lacks enough description. However, making learners aware of dynamic spoken grammar features provides them with more opportunities of producing real language.

Timmis (2005) outlined an approach through which pedagogical and sociolinguistic aspects of spoken grammar can be reconsidered. He believed that a reasonable way of introducing spoken language features is including them in authentic and natural, but not too obscure, texts which can provoke learners' interest. In another part of his study, he presented a task-based framework for teaching spoken grammar. He argued that four types of tasks including cultural assessment tasks, global understanding tasks, noticing tasks and language discussion tasks are needed to meet the aforementioned pedagogical and sociolinguistic concerns. He concluded that the approach confirms the necessity, possibility and usefulness of raising learners' awareness of spoken language and its features.

In their survey of 24 EFL textbooks at five levels published in the United Kingdom between 2000 and 2006, Cullen and Kuo (2007) investigated common spoken grammar features and the amount of attention that they are given. They categorized these features into three groups of A, B and C, each containing four types of spoken grammar features represented

and practiced based on Carter and McCarthy's (1995) three I's and Timmis's (2005) task-based approach. Materials were presented as listening texts and the features were explained and discussed. They found that features of category B were more frequent, especially in upper-intermediate and intermediate textbooks due to being easier to teach and learn, whereas in category A, less attention (in just four books) was given to features. In category C, attention was more considerable than category B, but was still less than the first category. They tried to justify the inclusion of these features and suggested that British ELT market include spoken grammar features. Generally, they believe that there should be a better coverage of spoken grammar features, especially Category A (the features which are the focus of this study), in EFL course materials. A similar concern is echoed by Carter, et.al (2011), who acknowledge the significance of spoken language features.

Mirzaei and Mowlaei (2017) studied the effect of explicit spoken grammar instruction on raising EFL learners' awareness. They checked the initial awareness of 23 learners by giving a pretest. Then, learners underwent 10 sessions of explicit instruction of spoken grammar. The posttest showed that applying explicit instruction results in deeper awareness of spoken grammar.

As the goal of this study is to investigate EFL learners' awareness of spoken grammar features in cooperative and competitive contexts through task-based and explicit instruction, a short review of explicit and task-based instruction in learning grammar features seems warranted. Whenever rules are presented prior to any example or practice, explicit (analyzed, deductive) instruction is at work (Dekeyser, 1994; Macro & Masterman, 2006). Macro and Masterman (2006) define explicit instruction of grammar as an attempt to explain rules and then clarifying them in a linguistic context via appropriate examples. This leads to better comprehension of the input and a better knowledge of the target language (Scheffler & Cinciata, 2010).

Explicit learning is a process in which learners intentionally deal with what Rebuschat (2015) calls 'conscious knowledge'. Ellis (2015) believes that explicit learning is a hypothesis making process through which learners consciously look for patterns. This explicit knowledge is defined by Roehr-Brackin (2015) as knowledge that is accumulated declaratively and can be verbalized.

A number of studies have been conducted on various aspects of explicit instruction. Green and Hecht (1992) provided 300 English learning students in Germany with 12 common errors that German students mostly have in their English production; they asked them to correct the mistakes by mentioning the rule that is used mistakenly. They confirmed the

effectiveness of explicit grammar instruction. Similarly, Fordyce (2013) and Scheffler (2014) emphasize that explicit instruction improves learners' acquisition.

Those who argue against explicit instruction usually compare it with task-based instruction and suggest task-based instruction as an alternative. Tasks, defined as the things learners do in the classroom, are considered an influential component of recent language teaching syllabus (Nunan, 2004). One of the main objectives of this study is to apply Task Based Language Teaching (TBLT) in presenting spoken grammar features. Grammar teaching through tasks has been shown to be both communicative and productive (Willis, 1996).

In one of the earlier studies in this regard, Fotos (1994) reported that proficiency and interaction can both be promoted via tasks. Similarly, Ellis (1995) introduced principles based on which 'interpretation tasks' are designed to teach grammar. In another study, Mohammed (2004) examined whether or not learning grammar by using tasks may influence learners' attitudes. It was concluded that the effectiveness of tasks in raising learners' awareness of grammar is undeniable. Batstone (2012) focused on grammar teaching through tasks and showed that integrating tasks influence learning.

Apart from explicit/task-based distinction, the context of instruction (competitive versus cooperative contexts) has also been a source of controversy. On the one hand, Fekri (2016) points out that competitive learning is the foundation of EFL teaching. Ahour and Haradasht (2014) even found empirical evidence suggesting that competitive learning was better than cooperative learning. On the other hand, many studies such as Zarei and Layeq (2016); Hosseini (2014); Murray (2010); Zhang (2010); Johnson and Johnson (2009); DelliCarpini (2008) and many more seem to advocate cooperative learning. Liang (2002) believes that cooperative learning not only affects language learning but also enhances learners' motivation. Of course, there have also been studies (e.g., Sachs, Candlin & Rose, 2003), the results of which have shown that learners' performance in competitive and cooperative groups are not significantly different.

The controversies surrounding each of the variables of this study as well as the paucity of research on the comparative effects of these variables on features of spoken grammar motivated the present study.

3. Method

3.1. Participants

The participants of this study were 81 female pre-intermediate Iranian EFL learners from Ghane Language Institute in Tehran. They were selected

through convenience sampling based on availability. Their age ranged from 17 to 24. The initial number was 90 students; however, after homogenization, 9 of them were excluded from the study.

3.2. Materials and Instruments

The following instruments were used to achieve the purpose of this study. A version of Key English Test (KET), 2014 edition, was used to homogenize the participants. The basic level of KET is A2 elementary, and it measures basic knowledge of participants in the four skills. This test has two versions; namely KET and 'KET for school', both having the same type of questions; however, the content of the latter is of school-aged learners' interest. The researchers used 'KET for school'.

The first section of KET evaluates reading and writing ability. This section contains 56 questions to be answered in 70 minutes. The first five questions are matching items, and items 6 to 15 are in multiple choice format. For questions 16-20, students fill in the blanks while the choices are provided, and questions 21-35 are multiple choice questions checking the participants' reading comprehension by providing two texts. The reading section ends with two more parts. Questions 36-40 are spelling questions, and then students are provided with a cloze passage containing five blanks. The writing section includes six questions: five questions require students to fill in the blanks by deriving information from two provided short texts, and in the last question, the participants have to write a 25-35-word text based on a topic.

The second section of KET consists of 25 listening items and takes approximately 30 minutes (including 8 minutes' transfer time). This section has five parts including multiple choice, matching, and filling the blanks.

The speaking section, the last part of KET, takes 8 to 10 minutes. In the first part of this section, the participants are interviewed for their general communicative ability in meeting people for the first time, introducing themselves, and talking about their daily life, etc. In the second part, two participants have to interact with each other and ask and answer questions based on prompt cards that are provided by the interviewers.

A pretest and a posttest were also used as instruments of data collection. The pretest was composed of a set of transcribed spoken conversations in which students were asked to underline the spoken grammar features briefly defined in the beginning of the test to see if they were aware of the spoken grammar features. The test included 15 tails, 15 heads and 15 ellipses, which were presented in the form of short conversations. The conversations were selected from chapter 19 of the book "a *handbook of spoken grammar*" by Peterson, Caygill and Sewell (2012), chapter 4 of

Tomlinson's (2011) *Materials development in language teaching* (2nd ed.), *Corpus linguistics: Investigating language structure and use* by Mirzaei (2015). The format of the test was also adapted from Mirzaei (2015). This test served as an instrument to measure learners' awareness of these features before instruction.

At the end of the instructional sessions, a posttest was administered. The posttest was the same as the pretest having the definitions of the features removed from the beginning of the test. The validity of the tests was confirmed by two experts (Dr. Timmis and Dr. Mowlaei) on spoken grammar features, and the reliability was estimated using KR-21 to be ($r = .82$). The instructional materials came from the books based on which the pretest and posttest were designed.

3.3. Procedure

Initially, 90 female pre-intermediate Iranian EFL learners with the aforementioned characteristics in eight intact classes were selected. Next, the participants' level of proficiency was checked by administering the KET test. Students had 100 minutes to answer the test. Students' questions were answered before starting a part, but they were not allowed to ask any question during the exam. After having these sections finished, two EFL instructors interviewed the participants for 8 to 10 minutes and scored the participants' speaking ability. The mean of instructors' scores was considered as the final score of this section for each participant. To homogenize the participants, nine of them were excluded from the study because their score was more than one standard deviation away from the mean.

After the participants were selected and homogenized, they were randomly assigned to four experimental groups including *Group A*, receiving explicit instruction in competitive context, *Group B*, receiving explicit instruction in cooperative context, *Group C*, receiving task-based instruction in competitive context, and *Group D*, receiving task-based instruction in cooperative context. Each group contained 19 to 21 students. The classes were held twice a week for 10 sessions. Each session lasted 120 minutes, and the treatment was given during the last 40 minutes of the class time.

Before the treatment, the participants were given a pretest to have their level of awareness of the spoken grammar features checked. The students had 60 minutes to underline the spoken grammar features which were briefly defined on the first page of the test. Then, the treatment began, and the learners received instruction for 10 sessions. Each group received instruction on the same grammatical features in one of the experimental conditions.

In the first session of all groups, the instructor discussed the importance of grammar and asked the participants to talk about the type of grammar they mostly used in their speaking and whether or not it was the same as written grammar. Most of the participants knew little about spoken grammar; they just agreed that the way people talk is somewhat different from written forms. As a result, the instructor brought up the subject of spoken grammar and its features. Moreover, the participants were given a handout containing a brief explanation of spoken grammar features.

In the second and third sessions, the instructor talked about heads, tails and ellipses and provided the students with examples and encouraged the students to make sentences or report if they remembered any example they encountered in their books or even in movies they watched. This was the same in all groups. However, from session four to session seven, the process was different in each group.

In the fourth and fifth sessions, in *Group A*, the teacher wrote up some sentences and distributed handouts among students. Then, she taught spoken grammar features explicitly through these example sentences and made the participants underline them on their papers. In sessions six and seven, the handouts included some blanks, and the process went on the same as the last two sessions. The teacher filled each blank explaining the feature, and the participants had to take note. Throughout these sessions, the participants had to act individually without sharing their handouts or asking any questions from their classmates. Their handouts were checked after the teacher finished the instruction, and they were scored and the best marks were rewarded to encourage the students to pay attention during instruction. In this group, students performed individually in a competitive situation.

In the fourth and fifth sessions, in *Group B*, the same handouts as the ones given to *Group A* were given out, and the students were randomly assigned to 6 groups of 3 or 4, and each student was made responsible for presenting one of the features (e.g. student A presented the heads, student B presented the tails, student C presented the ellipses) in 10 minutes. After each student had done what s/he was assigned to, the students could share their ideas and interact with other students in other groups. Once the assignment was finished, the teacher wrote the answers on the board and talked explicitly about each feature. Then she collected students' handouts and marked them to encourage students to do their share in each group. In sessions six and seven, the handouts included some blanks, and each student was asked to fill in the blanks selected by the teacher. The process went on the same as the last two sessions.

In the fourth and fifth sessions, in *Group C*, the teacher reviewed the features in five minutes by giving examples. The same handouts as those

given to Group *A* were given out. Then, students were asked to underline the spoken grammar features. Students had to perform individually and, if they had any problems in doing the task, the teacher answered implicitly by providing some examples. Having a short conversation with one of their classmates was another task that students had to perform. The teacher chose two students, set the scene, and asked them to have a small talk including at least two features of spoken grammar. The performance of each student was scored individually. During their performance, the teacher wrote down their mistakes, and once the task was finished, she tried to correct the mistakes with the help of each student without having any explicit reference to correct forms. In sessions six and seven, the handouts included some blanks and the process went on the same as the last two sessions.

In the fourth and fifth sessions, in *Group D*, the students were randomly assigned to 6 groups of 3 or 4 and were given the same handouts. The teacher reviewed the features in five minutes by giving examples. Afterwards, she asked the students to read the handouts with each other and to underline the spoken grammar features. The students were allowed to share their ideas before underlining the features. The teacher answered their questions implicitly by providing some examples. The students could have interaction with other groups. Moreover, each group was asked to make a conversation based on the topic provided by the teacher. They were allowed to use as many features as possible, and all the students were rewarded if they cooperated effectively in their groups. Students in each group were responsible for each other's performance. Sessions six and seven went on in the same way. The only difference was that their handouts included blanks, and they had to fill in the blanks following the rules explained in the previous sessions.

In session 9, in all groups, the instructor had a brief review of what learners knew about spoken grammar features and if they could use them in any sentence while they were communicating with their friends.

In the last session, the students took the posttest. This test was the same as the pretest; however, there was no definition of the features. Students' questions were not answered during the test. The test lasted 60 minutes, and the students had to underline any of the spoken grammar features that they could recognize in the test. Finally, the papers were scored, and the obtained data were summarized and prepared for statistical analysis.

3.4. Data Analysis

To answer the research questions, the collected data were analyzed using a two-way ANCOVA procedure for each research question.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. Results

4.1.1. The First Research Question

The purpose of the first research question was to investigate the possible differences among the effects of competitive and cooperative explicit and task-based instruction on Iranian EFL learners' awareness of spoken grammar feature of *heads*. To this end, a two-way ANCOVA was used. Prior to running the ANCOVA, its assumptions including normality, homogeneity of variances, reliability of the covariate, linearity, and homogeneity of regression slopes were checked. Table 1 shows the result of the assumption of equality of variances.

Table 1

Levene's Test of Equality of Variances for Heads

F	df1	df2	Sig.
1.906	3	77	.136

Tests the null hypothesis that the error variance of the dependent variable is equal across groups.
a. Design: Intercept + heads pre + instruction + context + instruction * context

Table 1 shows that the assumption of equality of variances was met.

Table 2

Tests of Homogeneity of Regression Slope for Heads

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Corrected Model	16.074 ^a	6	2.679	1.531	.180
Intercept	2066.614	1	2066.614	1181.09	.000
Instruction	.810	1	.810	.463	.498
Context	.343	1	.343	.196	.659
Headspre	5.164	1	5.164	2.951	.090
instruction * context * headspre	8.618	3	2.873	1.642	.187
Error	129.481	74	1.750		
Total	14706.000	81			
Corrected Total	145.556	80			

a. R Squared = .110 (Adjusted R Squared = .038)

The result of checking the assumption of homogeneity of regression slopes is given in Table 2 which shows that the interaction between the independent variable and the covariate is not statistically significant ($F_{(3,74)} = 1.64, p > .05$). Therefore, this assumption is also met. After checking the assumptions, the ANCOVA procedure was used, the result of which is presented in Table 3.

Table 3

Tests of Between-subjects Effects for Heads

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Corrected Model	18.452 ^a	4	4.613	3.661	.009	.162
Intercept	2371.297	1	2371.297	1881.77	.000	.961
Headspre instruction	11.410	1	11.410	9.055	.004	.106
Context instruction * context	6.694	1	6.694	5.312	.024	.065
Error	1.433	1	1.433	1.137	.290	.015
Total	7.896	1	7.896	6.266	.014	.076
	95.770	76	1.260			
Corrected Total	14917.000	81				
	114.222	80				

a. R Squared = .162 (Adjusted R Squared = .117)

Table 3 shows that the interaction effect is significant ($F_{(1, 76)} = 6.26$, $P < .05$). Moreover, context appears to make no significant difference in the participants' awareness of heads ($F_{(1, 76)} = 1.137$, $P > .05$). In other words, there is no difference between the effect of cooperative and competitive teaching techniques on raising learners' awareness of heads. However, the difference between the two types of instruction is statistically significant ($F_{(1, 76)} = 5.312$, $P < .05$). In fact, explicit and task-based instruction had differential effects on raising learners' awareness of heads. The table also shows that students' performance on the pretest was also a significant covariate of the posttest scores ($F_{(1, 76)} = 9.055$, $P < .05$).

Based on partial eta squared value, seven percent of the total variability between groups is accounted for by the interaction between independent variables and more than six percent of the differences is attributed to the type of instruction and about ten percent is attributed to the covariate.

4.1.2. The Second Research Question

The second research question was aimed to investigate the differences among the effects of competitive and cooperative explicit and task-based instruction on EFL learners' awareness of spoken grammar feature of *tails*. Prior to running a two-way ANCOVA, all its assumptions were checked. Table 4 shows the result of checking the assumption of equality of variances. This table shows that the assumption of equality of variances was met. Table 5 shows the result of the check on the assumption of homogeneity of regression slopes. Table 5 shows that the interaction between the independent variables and the covariate is not statistically significant ($F_{(3,74)} = .748$, $p > .05$). Therefore, this assumption is also met.

Table 4

Levene's Test of Equality of Error Variances for Tails

F	df1	df2	Sig.
2.712	3	77	.051

Tests the null hypothesis that the error variance of the dependent variable is equal across groups.

a. Design: Intercept + tails pre + instruction + context + instruction * context

Table 5

Tests of Homogeneity of Regression Slope for Tails

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Corrected Model	24.374 ^a	6	4.062	2.129	.060
Intercept	2245.108	1	2245.108	1176.55	.000
Tailspre	9.981	1	9.981	5.231	.025
Instruction	1.615	1	1.615	.847	.361
Context	1.888	1	1.888	.989	.323
instruction * context * tailspre	4.284	3	1.428	.748	.527
Error	141.207	74	1.908		
Total	14221.000	81			
Corrected Total	165.580	80			

a. R Squared = .147 (Adjusted R Squared = .078)

Then, the ANCOVA procedure was used; the result is presented in Table 6, which shows no significant interaction effect ($F_{(1, 76)} = 1.35, P > .05$). The result also shows that context makes no significant difference in the participants' awareness of tails ($F_{(1, 76)} = .013, P > .05$).

Table 6

Tests of Between-subjects Effects for Tails

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Corrected Model	16.401 ^a		4.100	3.641	.009	.161
Intercept	1880.002		1880.002	1669.18	.000	.956
Tailspre	9.066		9.066	8.049	.006	.096
Instruction	3.283		3.283	2.915	.092	.037
Context	.015		.015	.013	.909	.000
instruction * context	1.523	1	1.523	1.352	.249	.017
Error	85.599	76	1.126			
Total	14743.00	81				
Corrected Total	102.000	80				

a. R Squared = .161 (Adjusted R Squared = .117)

In addition, the difference between the two types of instruction is also insignificant ($F_{(1, 76)} = 2.91, P > .05$). The table also shows that students' performance on the pretest was a significant covariate of the posttest scores ($F_{(1, 76)} = 8.049, P < .05$). Based on partial eta squared value, one percent of the total variability between groups is accounted for by the interaction between independent variables; about four percent of the differences is attributed to the type of instruction, and about ten percent is attributed to the covariate.

4.1.3. The Third Research Question

The purpose of the third research question was to investigate whether or not there are any significant differences among the effects of competitive and cooperative explicit and task-based instruction on EFL learners' awareness of *ellipsis*. To this end, a two-way ANCOVA was used. Prior to running the ANCOVA, its assumptions were checked. The result of the check on the assumption of the equality of variances is presented in Table 7, confirming that the assumption of equality of variances was met.

Table 7

Levene's Test of Equality of Error Variances for Ellipsis

F	df1	df2	Sig.
1.389	3	77	.252

Tests the null hypothesis that the error variance of the dependent variable is equal across groups.
a. Design: Intercept + ellipsespre + instruction + context + instruction * context

Table 8 shows that the assumption of homogeneity of regression slopes is also met ($F_{(3,74)} = .556, p > .05$).

Table 8

Tests of Homogeneity of Regression Slope for Ellipsis

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Corrected Model	27.086 ^a	6	4.514	2.425	.034
Intercept	2205.27	1	2205.2	1184.64	.000
instruction	.569	1	.569	.306	.582
context	.195	1	.195	.105	.747
ellipsespre	11.905	1	11.905	6.395	.014
instruction * context * ellipsespre	3.103	3	.034	.556	.646
Error	137.754	74	1.862		
Total	14273.000	81			
Corrected Total	164.840	80			

a. R Squared = .164 (Adjusted R Squared = .097)

After checking the assumptions, the ANCOVA procedure was used, the result of which is presented in Table 9. The table shows no significant interaction effect ($F_{(1, 76)} = 1.56, P > .05$). Moreover, context appears to make no significant difference in the participants' awareness of ellipsis ($F_{(1, 76)} = .134, P > .05$). In addition, the difference between the two types of instruction is also insignificant ($F_{(1, 76)} = 1.08, P > .05$). The table also shows that students' performance on the pretest was a significant covariate of the posttest scores ($F_{(1, 76)} = 7.511, P < .05$). Based on partial eta squared value, nine percent of the differences is attributed to the covariate.

Table 9

Tests of Between-subjects Effects for Ellipsis

Source	Type III Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Corrected Model	15.171 ^a	4	3.793	2.170	.080	.103
Intercept	2102.422	1	2102.422	1202.93	.000	.941
ellipsispre	13.127	1	13.127	7.511	.008	.090
instruction	1.897	1	1.897	1.085	.301	.014
Context	.233	1	.233	.134	.716	.002
instruction * context	2.088	1	2.088	1.56	.62	.007
Error	132.829	76	1.748			
Total	14548.000	81				
Corrected Total	148.000	80				

a. R Squared = .103 (Adjusted R Squared = .055)

4.2. Discussion

The findings of the first research question showed a significant interaction effect between context and instruction on learners' awareness of the feature 'head'; however, in the second and third questions there was no significant interaction between context and instruction. In addition, both cooperative and competitive contexts had similar effects on learners' awareness of heads, tails and ellipses. However, the findings of the third research question indicated that learners had a better performance in the cooperative context although the difference was not significant. These findings are in contrast with those of Gunning, White and Busque (2016), who concluded that collaborative approaches raise learners' awareness of reading strategies. These findings also contradict that of Ahour and Haradasht (2014), who reported that competitive context is better than cooperative learning in language classes. Moreover, the findings of this study contradict that of Fekri (2016), who asserts the advantage of using cooperative strategies over competitive ones in learning vocabulary. These findings are also in contrast with those of Liang (2002), who believes that cooperative learning affects learners' motivation and oral communicative

competence. Further evidence against these findings come from Mandal (2009), who concluded that cooperative learning affects writing skills and improves learners' grammar knowledge.

At the same time, these findings are in line with Zarei and Layeq (2016), who reported no significant difference between competitive and cooperative techniques with regard to learners' use of direct strategies. Of course, their study did not include grammar features and was focused on the use strategies. Nevertheless, the part of their findings that was similar to that of this study was no significant difference between competitive and cooperative activities. In the same vein, these findings partially corroborate those of Sachs et al. (2003), who reported no significant difference in cooperative and complete ways of exchanging information among learners.

On the other hand, there was a significant effect of instruction regarding the findings of the first research question. However, due to the significant effect of interaction, part of the effect of the main factor was washed away. Task-based instruction was better than explicit one in the competitive context while in the cooperative context, the result was the opposite. Moreover, the findings of the second and third research questions showed that instruction had insignificant effect on raising learners' awareness of tails and ellipses. In both the second and the third questions, learners' performance was better under task-based instruction, but these differences were not significant.

These findings are in contrast with those of Timmis (2005), who reported that task-based approach is significantly effective in learning spoken grammar features. These findings also fail to corroborate that of Mirzaei and Mowlaei (2017), who reported that explicit instruction was effective in raising learners' awareness of spoken grammar features of heads, tails and ellipses. The findings are also in contrast with those of Galloway and Rose (2014), who reported that listening tasks were effective in raising learners' awareness of global Englishes. Moreover, these findings are in contrast with Tanaka and Oki's (2015) idea of the influence of explicit instruction on learners' pragmatic awareness. Ahn's (2016) suggestion in using games as influential tasks in raising learners' awareness is also in contrast with the findings of this study.

Green and Hecht's (1992) findings also contradict those of this study. They reported the effectiveness of explicit instruction of grammar. These findings are also in contrast with those of Scheffler (2014), who asserts that explicit grammar affects the learning of lexical priming. The evidence against these findings comes from Mohammed (2004). He believes that inductive and deductive tasks influence learners' attitudes and raise their awareness of grammar features. Batstone's (2012) findings also contradict

those of this study. He reported that task-based grammar teaching is beneficial in the learning process.

At the same time, these findings are in line with that of Ruhlemann (2008), who believes that effective instruction of spoken grammar features needs to be sought and used in EFL classrooms. Moreover, these are also consistent with Timmis's idea of considering many factors, including sense of perspective and critical curiosity in defining an appropriate approach, in teaching spoken grammar features. Furthermore, Ellis's (2006) notion of the influential effect of both explicit and implicit knowledge of grammar in L2 proficiency confirms the finding of this study, which shows only subtle differences between the effectiveness of task based and explicit instruction of spoken grammar features. The findings of Ellis's (1995) study are also in line with those of this study. Ellis believes that both explicit and task-based instruction of grammar may be essential in learning forms.

There are a variety of factors which may account for the discrepancy between the findings of this study and the ones mentioned earlier. For example, the insignificant difference between competitive and cooperative contexts in all research questions could have been because of students' unfamiliarity with the differences of these two contexts although the teachers tried their best to explain how learners needed to perform in each situation. Teachers' own inadequate knowledge about these two contexts could have been another important reason.

Another important factor may be related to the participants' age and educational background. The participants of this study were between 17 to 24 years old. In many of the aforementioned studies, the participants were older, and in some cases they were teenagers. In addition, due to practical considerations, only 81 participants took part in this study, whereas in some similar studies more than 300 participants were included. In addition, due to the fact that this study emphasized spoken grammar, and intermediate or advanced learners are more confident in speaking, the participants' level of proficiency might have influenced the result.

Finally, in many of the aforementioned studies, task-based language teaching was emphasized and seen as significant. In Iranian teacher-centered classes, the exact principles of this method are not yet established. This could have influenced the findings.

5. Conclusion and Implications

Based on the findings of the present study, there were no significant differences between the effect of competitive and cooperative contexts in raising learners' awareness of spoken grammar features. As a result, it may be concluded that teachers need to avoid being biased toward utilizing any of

these techniques. Cooperative learning is of great interest among many EFL teachers, but perhaps the new is not always the best. The findings of this study revealed that in raising learners' awareness of spoken grammar features, the application of these techniques makes no significant difference. Therefore, sticking to a single method will neither be logical nor effective although the finding of the third research question showed that learners did better in the cooperative context in learning *ellipsis*. It can be concluded that since there is no difference between the effectiveness of these two contexts, it would be highly efficient to be eclectic in the choice of the context of learning because of individual differences between learners. These differences are better to be taken into account while using the aforementioned methods so that learners may benefit from the suitable context based on their personality type.

Furthermore, applying different instructional techniques (task-based and explicit instruction) is of great importance due to the fact that in the first research question, instruction type had a significant effect on the learning process. However, according to this study, it is concluded that teachers need to adopt a flexible stance in choosing any type of instruction due to the fact that the type of feature is also of great importance and choosing a method depends on the type of that feature. This study revealed that in teaching *heads*, care must be exercised in choosing a more influential type of instruction. Additionally, due to the interaction of different types of instruction and the contexts in which they are used, it is important to consider not only the type of instruction but also the context in which this instruction is expected to take place.

The second and the third research questions revealed that task-based instruction was a bit more effective than explicit instruction in raising learners' awareness of *tails* and *ellipses*. Based on these findings, it can be concluded that meaning-focused instruction may be useful in raising learners' awareness. However, it is also important to note that task-based instruction is not always necessarily effective because both the context in which it is taking place and the type of feature are also influential. Overall, sticking to either task-based or explicit instruction, in either competitive or cooperative language learning context seems ineffective; it would be better to act selectively in choosing any type of instruction in any type of context while teaching a special type of feature.

The findings of this study can have implications for learners, teachers, syllabus designers and researchers. They might help teachers to choose an appropriate context and instruction type in making learners aware of the aforementioned features. Learners' awareness of these features can facilitate their learning process. Moreover, they can form better decisions as

to what book they should choose and how they should study. Being aware of these features affects learners' comprehension and production of spoken grammar as well. Syllabus designers can include these features in learners' syllabuses and provide them with related activities to raise their awareness of spoken grammar features. Doing so might also push teachers towards studying spoken grammar in detail and strengthen their own knowledge in this field. Researchers and experts can also be provided with insights to carry out further studies.

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