

USING INDUCTIVE CONSCIOUSNESS-RAISING TASKS TO TEACH THE SIMPLE PRESENT TENSE

Ardi Nugroho

Universitas Bunda Mulia, English Department

anugroho@bundamulia.ac.id

Abstract: Teaching English tenses has always been one of the more challenging tasks of teachers in Indonesia. Finding the most effective approach to teach these tenses is another problem that has yet been completely resolved. Many traditional teacher-centered approaches have become less popular nowadays since students often find them demotivating, and teachers consider them tiring as they have to actively give explanations in the class. As a possible solution to this situation, an inductive consciousness-raising approach is proposed, where the teachers are given less active roles, and the learning process is shifted more towards the students. Hence, this study aims to explore the effectiveness of inductive consciousness-raising tasks in the acquisition of the simple present tense. A Grammatical Judgment Test is used for the pretest and posttest which serve as the main data of the research. Lastly, in order to measure the effectiveness of this task, the paired sample T-test is utilized. The result indicates that there is a significant difference between the result of the pretest and posttest, which means that this kind of task is indeed an effective tool for improving students' knowledge of the simple present tense.

Keywords: inductive consciousness-raising tasks, simple present tense

INTRODUCTION

Teaching English tenses has always been one of the more challenging tasks of teachers in Indonesia. Although students have already been taught tenses for years starting from as early as elementary school, it seems that they still have difficulty in fully understanding the grammatical rules of the numerous tenses. Finding the most effective approach to teach these tenses is another problem that has yet been completely resolved. Many traditional teacher-centered approaches have become less popular nowadays since students often find them demotivating. In other words, the students do not find the class interesting when the teachers only explain the lesson while the students passively listen to them. Moreover, some teachers also consider this kind of teaching approach to be tiring as they have to actively give explanations in the class. That is to say, the teachers spend a lot of time and energy preparing and explaining the materials to the students in front of the class without any guarantee that the students understand since the teaching process is only one-way, from the teacher to the student.

As a possible solution to this situation, various methods and approaches have been proposed. For example, a research by Natalia (2006) has revealed that applying interpretation tasks in the teaching of the simple present tense proved to be effective and has improved the students' awareness of the grammatical features of this tense. Another study by Kusuma (2017) investigated the effectiveness of processing instruction and text editing in improving students' acquisition of the English simple past -ed. The findings show that these two techniques can help the learners produce the simple past -ed effectively in both the sentence and text level. Other

researches (Setiono, 2006; and Puspita, 2006) involve the use of consciousness-raising tasks to improve students' acquisition of the simple present tense. Similarly, Gondziola (2013) conducted a study on the effect of inductive consciousness-raising tasks on learning the meaning and use of the present perfect tense. The term consciousness-raising is defined by Rutherford and Smith (1985: 274) as "... the deliberate attempt to draw the learner's attention specifically to the formal properties of the target language." Similarly, Ellis (2002, as cited in Sugiharto, 2006) is of the opinion that the aim of using consciousness-raising tasks is to help learners know about a particular structure or grammar but not to produce it properly. Simply put, the purpose of using this kind of approach is to make learners aware of the specific features of a target language, for instance, raising the awareness of learners of the inclusion of 'to be' before the v-ing in the present continuous tense.

This approach has been given more attention recently as it has been proven to be quite effective in developing learners' knowledge of not only tenses, but also writing (Ameri-Golestan and Nezakat-Alhossaini, 2013) and reading comprehension (Azizifar, Babaei, Jamalinesari, and Gowhary, 2015). For this reason, the researcher has become interested in investigating this approach and how it can improve students' knowledge of English tenses, specifically the simple present tense. This tense is selected as it is one of the most fundamental English tenses, and it is very often used in daily interactions. Despite this, many students still produce sentences in the simple present incorrectly. Furthermore, an inductive approach is also applied, so the teachers are given less active roles, and the learning process is shifted more towards the students. To sum up, this study aims to explore the effectiveness of inductive consciousness-raising tasks in the acquisition of the simple present tense. From this, the following research question is formulated:

- a) How does the use of inductive consciousness-raising tasks improve the students' knowledge of the simple present tense?

METHOD

After describing the background of the research along with the research question, the methodology is going to be described in this section. First of all, the participants are 23 students from the English Department at Bunda Mulia University. The students are all from the first semester, since the focus of the current study is on the simple present tense. As stated above, although this tense can be considered as one of the basic tenses in English, some of the students still fail at using this tense accurately. For example, they sometimes forget to add an -s ending to the verbs for third person singular pronouns, or they often use the auxiliary verb 'do' for sentences without verbs. Therefore, the researcher decided to emphasize on the simple present to make sure that the students are made aware of the grammatical features of this tenses.

Next, the result of the pretest and posttest are used as the main source of data. The pretest is a grammatical judgment test proposed by Ellis (1991, as cited in Sugiharto, 2006) in which the students were asked to determine whether the 20 sentences provided are grammatically correct or not. In total, there are 5 grammatical and 15 ungrammatical sentences. For the ungrammatical ones, the students were asked to identify the error in the sentence, correct it, and provide an explanation for it. All of the sentences are either positive or negative statements. No interrogative sentences are included in the test. For the posttest, the form is also that of a grammatical judgment test, but the sentences have been modified. Similarly, there are 5 grammatical and 15 ungrammatical sentences overall.

Third, an inductive task was given to the students as the treatment for the current study. Basically, the students were divided into groups of three, and they were given a list of 20 sentences in the simple present tense. Just as in the pretest and posttest, the sentences are limited to positives and negatives only, with varying subjects and verbs. However, unlike the pretest and posttest, all of the sentences in this list are grammatical. From these sentences, the groups were asked to study them carefully and try to understand the grammatical features of these sentences in the simple present tense. The students were deliberately grouped together in threes with the hope that they could discuss with their friends regarding the proper form of the simple present tense. Seeing as this is an inductive task, the role of the teacher, in this case the researcher himself, is limited to being a facilitator only, in the sense that the students were not explicitly taught the form of the simple present tense, but they must realize and understand it by themselves by studying the sentences carefully. At the end of the treatment, the teacher had a discussion with each of the groups to make sure that they truly understood the correct form of this tense.

Lastly, in order to measure the effectiveness of this task, the paired sample T-test is utilized. For the data analysis, the researcher employs the SPSS version 23 software to calculate the data. This research does not compare between the results of a control and experimental group, but only analyzes the result of the pretest and posttest of the experimental one. In other words, all 23 students were given the inductive treatment and are treated as the experimental group. It is hoped that if the treatment was successful, there would be a significant difference between the result of the pretest and posttest, meaning that the inductive consciousness raising task is an effective tool for improving the students’ knowledge of the simple present tense. Based on this, the hypotheses of this study are as follows:

- Ho: There is no significant difference between the result of the pretest and posttest.
- Ha: There is a significant difference between the result of the pretest and posttest.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

In this section, we will be looking at the findings of this research along with some discussions. To begin, the descriptive statistics of the pretest and posttest results are presented in the following table:

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics

	N	Range	Minimum	Maximum	Mean
Pretest	23	68	22	90	62.35
Posttest	23	65	35	100	74.52
Valid N (listwise)	23				

Based on the table above, there are several things that we can highlight. First of all, in terms of range, the pretest and posttest are more or less the same, with a score of 68 and 65 respectively. This means that between the minimum and maximum scores of the two tests, the difference is not that much. Although it should be noted that the scores for the pretest are both lower (minimum = 22, maximum = 90) compared to the posttest’s scores (minimum = 35, maximum = 100). To put it differently, there is a slight improvement in terms of minimum and

maximum scores. Moreover, if we look at the mean scores, there is also an increase from 62.35 for the pretest and 74.52 for the posttest. The increase is as much as 12.17 points. Therefore, at a glance it could be said that the inductive consciousness-raising task was somewhat successful in improving the overall scores of the students. Nevertheless, in order to justify this claim statistically, the paired sample T-test must be used. Last but not least, seeing as the minimum score for both tests are quite low (22 and 35), this shows that there are still some students with insufficient knowledge of the simple present tense. They still made a lot of mistakes and were unable to identify which sentences were grammatical or ungrammatical. Nonetheless, for those that do understand, they performed very well for both tests, with some scoring perfect scores on the posttest. As for the average, although there were some very low scores, the overall mean for both tests were quite adequate. A mean of 62.35 indicates that most of the students' overall knowledge is good enough, as it is still somewhat higher than the medium score of 50. The slight increased mean score of the posttest shows that after the treatment, some of the students were able to realize their mistakes and correct them.

Now, we shall try to answer the main research question of the current study by analyzing the result of the students' pretest and posttest using the paired sample T-test. The result of the SPSS calculation can be seen in Table 2 below:

Table 2. Paired Samples Test

	Paired Differences					t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)
	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference				
				Lower	Upper			
Pair 1 Pretest - Posttest	-12.174	18.836	3.928	-20.319	-4.029	-3.100	22	.005

The result reveals that the observed t-test value is 3.100 (ignore the minus sign). In comparison to the t-test table or the critical values, this score is higher than both the 5% level and 1% significance level scores, which are 2.07 and 2.81 respectively. This means that the null hypothesis is rejected, and the alternate one is accepted. Additionally, the sig. 2-tailed score of 0.005, which is lower than 0.05, also supports the rejection of the null hypothesis. To put it simply, the result illustrates that the alternate hypothesis, that there is a significant difference between the score of the pretest and posttest, is accepted. Thus, the treatment or the use of inductive consciousness-raising tasks is proven to be effective in improving the students' overall knowledge of the simple present tense.

Although the result above confirms that using inductive consciousness-raising tasks can successfully enhance students' overall competence in identifying the proper forms of the simple present tense, it should be noted that not all of the students performed better on the posttest in comparison to the pretest. As a matter of fact, 7 out of the 23 students did worse on their posttest. In other words, they scored lower on their posttest compared to their pretest. This means that not everybody was able to benefit from this treatment. Since the treatment was done in groups, it could be possible that not everyone in the group fully took advantage of the inductive consciousness-raising task. That is, perhaps they did not understand or learn anything after doing

the task, but decided to keep quiet and not say anything to their friends as they might be shy about it. Afterwards, they scored lower on the posttest because they basically did not learn anything about the simple present tense from the treatment and were probably confused with the different set of sentences. Nevertheless, there are some students who showed very high improvement from their pretest. For instance, one of the students scored 27 on the pretest but 91 on the posttest, which is a very significant increase. This student and several similar others are probably the reason why the end result is still significant even though there are some students who got a lower score on their posttest.

One last thing worth mentioning is that even though this inductive consciousness-raising task was able to improve the students' result in general, it is important to remember that this is only limited to improvement in terms of awareness. The main purpose of this kind of treatment is to make the students realize or be aware of the grammatical features of the target language (in this case the simple present tense), but it might not necessarily mean that they will be able to produce this tense accurately. Even the pretest and posttest, which are in the form of grammatical judgment test, were more passive tests in the sense that the students only needed to identify the grammatical and ungrammatical sentences and provide explanations for their answers. However, it is not guaranteed that even though they are able to spot the correct and incorrect sentences, they would also be able to produce sentences in the simple present tense accurately because receptive and productive skills are somewhat different.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings and discussion presented in the previous section, it can be concluded that the inductive consciousness-raising task used in this research is effective and was able to lead to overall better results between the pretest and the posttest. Although some students scored worse on their posttest compared to their pretest, the result in general indicates that most of the students gained some knowledge concerning the simple present tense, which is reflected in the significant improvements of their test results. They were able to realize and become aware of the mistakes they made on their pretest and correct them on the posttest after receiving the treatment. Seeing as this consciousness-raising approach has proven to be effective, not only in this research but in many others as well, it would not be an exaggeration to say that this kind of approach should be considered by English language teachers when teaching their students. In other words, perhaps we could start leaving behind traditional teaching methods and techniques that cannot always help our students improve their language proficiency, and to try to employ one such as this. Of course, it should be highlighted that there are limitations to the benefits of this kind of approach as it mainly helps learners increase their awareness of certain grammatical features, but may not necessarily guarantee that they will be able to use this awareness when producing the language in their writing or speech.

To conclude, the researcher realizes that this study is limited in many aspects. Therefore, there are two suggestions that are offered. The first suggestion deals with the limitation in terms of the simple present tense. Seeing as this tense is one of the simpler tenses in English, it would perhaps be better if this kind of treatment is tested on other tenses as well, to see if it would also be effective to teach the other more complicated tenses or other aspects of the English language. Last but not least, since the number of respondents is not that big, i.e. only 23 students, it is suggested that a larger number of respondents are used for future researches as it will definitely lead to more conclusive and valid findings.

REFERENCES

- Ameri-Golestan, A., & Nezakat-Alhossaini, M. (2013). Efficacy of explicit teaching and consciousness-raising in IELTS writing. *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences* 70. 853-858. Retrieved from <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S1877042813001316>
- Azizifar, A., Babaei, M., Jamalinesari, A., & Gowhary, H. (2015). The effect of grammatical consciousness raising task on Iranian EFL learners' reading comprehension. *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences* 192. 252-259. Retrieved from <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S1877042815035077>
- Gondziola, A.R. (2013). Inductive consciousness-raising tasks: learning the meaning and use of the present perfect. (Master Thesis, University of Alberta, Alberta, Canada). Retrieved from <https://era.library.ualberta.ca/items/81663cec-d4d4-4297-9a4f-baae076fe4a6>
- Kusuma, B.H. (2017). The effects of processing instruction and text editing on the Indonesian learners' acquisition of the English simple past –ed. (Undergraduate thesis, Universitas Katolik Indonesia Atma Jaya, Jakarta, Indonesia). Retrieved from <https://lib.atmajaya.ac.id/default.aspx?tabID=61&src=k&id=211218>
- Natalia (2006). Applying interpretation tasks to the teaching of the simple present task. (Undergraduate thesis, Universitas Katolik Indonesia Atma Jaya, Jakarta, Indonesia). Retrieved from <https://lib.atmajaya.ac.id/default.aspx?tabID=61&src=k&id=121677>
- Puspita, D. (2006). Teaching simple present tense through consciousness raising. (Undergraduate thesis, Universitas Katolik Indonesia Atma Jaya, Jakarta, Indonesia). Retrieved from <https://lib.atmajaya.ac.id/default.aspx?tabID=61&src=k&id=88242>
- Rutherford, W., & Smith, M.S. (1985). Consciousness-raising and universal grammar. *Applied Linguistics*, 6(3), 274-282. Retrieved from <https://lib.atmajaya.ac.id/default.aspx?tabID=61&src=a&id=11762>
- Sugiharto, S. (2006). Grammar consciousness - raising and the acquisition of the simple present tense rule: an empirical study. Paper presented at The 6th Malaysia International Conference on English Language Teaching (MICELT), Melaka.