

Awareness and explicitness in second language development

Researchers interested in second language (L2) acquisition have explored the independent but related issues of the role of awareness and the effect of explicit conditions on linguistic development. Previous research suggests that explicit conditions lead to higher levels of awareness (Rosa & Leow, 2004; Rosa & O'Neill, 1999) and that higher levels of awareness lead to greater linguistic development (Leow, 1997; Rosa & Leow, 2004). However, linguistic development has also been evidenced by learners trained under implicit conditions (Morgan-Short et al., 2007) and learners who were unaware (Williams, 2004, 2005).

The current study investigated the role of awareness and explicitness on the acquisition of L2 word order and gender agreement structures. Subjects learned an artificial language to advanced levels of proficiency under two training conditions: explicit and implicit. Assessments included judgment tasks for sentences containing word order and gender agreement violations and matched control sentences. Level of awareness was coded based on students' written responses to a written judgment task and a debriefing questionnaire.

Results showed that for gender agreement there was a positive relationship between explicit training and a higher level of awareness. A higher level of awareness, however, did not lead to greater accuracy on judgment tasks. For phrase structure, although no relationship was found between training condition and level of awareness, higher levels of awareness were found to lead to greater accuracy. These findings suggest that there are complex interactions between levels of awareness, type of training and linguistic structure that should be more fully explored by future research.

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