

## The Effects of Informal Language on Reading Comprehension of Iranian English Language Learners

Goodarz Shakibaei

Islamic Azad University, Branch of Baghmalek, Baghmalek, Iran  
[goodarzshakiba@yahoo.com](mailto:goodarzshakiba@yahoo.com)

**Abstract:** This study aims at investigating the impacts of informal language instruction on improving foreign language learners' reading comprehension. The following procedure was taken to prove or reject the hypotheses. First sixty learners in language institutes in city of "Ahvaz", Iran were selected. Next; they were divided into two groups, (experimental and control groups) then the two groups were instructed in two different ways. That is, experimental group learners were provided with informal language reading texts in about 12 weeks and each week three sessions, whereas, control group learners were not exposed to such kind of treatment. After the period of instruction, the post-test covering the pedagogical materials of the study was administered to two groups. Statistical analysis of participants scores on the post-test indicated that informal language instruction does not have significant effect on learners reading comprehension ability, but it was of significant importance in developing learners reading comprehension in reading informal language text.

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### 1. Introduction

When you want to talk or write, you have something in mind that should be expressed. Normally, you select from your vocabulary list those expressions that in your opinion best communicate your thoughts to others. But as an EFL learner, you should be careful that usage depends upon your considerations of place, time occasion, and the circumstances of who is speaking (or writing) to whom and about what. In other words, the impression should be "appropriate" in a given situation. The words we use in talking with a friend or classmate might be inappropriate in conversation with a teacher, doctor, or a parent. The word used in an informal and highly personal letter to a friend may be inappropriate if used in a formal paper prepared for class.

#### What are informal and formal languages?

Informal language is the type of speech used in every day, informal situations when the speaker is not paying particular attention to pronunciation, choice of words or sentence structure. It's not necessarily non-prestige speech and should not be considered as substandard. Educated native speakers of a language normally use informal speech in informal situations with friends, fellow workers, and members of family. (Richards, J.C. 1985, Dictionary of Language of Applied Linguistic).

In formal environments L2 learners are encouraged to focus on form of L2 and are often corrected. Input is selective.

It is a type of speech used in situations when the speaker is very careful about pronunciation and

choice of words and sentences structure. This type of speech may be used, for example, at official functions, and in debates and ceremonies.

Informal Standard English is much more widespread than the formal standard. It's the language most people use most of the time in telephone conversations, personal letters, in many newspapers, and radio and television interviews. It employs fewer difficult words than does formal standard.

### 1.2. Statement of the Problem

The present study aims at investigating the effects of informal language and slang on narrative reading comprehension of FLLs of Iran.

The research therefore, seeks to answer the following questions:

Does the informal language have any effects on the narrative reading comprehension?

Does teaching informal language have any effects on improving foreign language learners' proficiency?

1. Research H0: Using of informal language dose not have any effect on narrative reading comprehension.

2. Research H1: Using of informal language has effects on narrative reading comprehension.

3. Research H2: Using of informal language has positive effect, on narrative reading comprehension.

### 1.3. Significance of the study

So far several studies have been exercised to investigate the effects of informal language in

language learning. But these constructions suffer from the lack of sufficient studies in academic places. This study intends to investigate this problem and needless to say that the findings of this study can be used in course books for academic purposes and specifically in teaching reading comprehension.

Therefore, the priority of this study is for investigating informal language in narrative reading comprehension of students of Iran.

Because of the importance of the informal language in SLL, many researchers have been conducted in this field.

## 2. Background

Cholmondely, S. (1996) conducted a research in UK. In this research, which conducted in Thanet area, revealed that a distinct lack of interaction between students and native speakers, which may be a contributory factor to the lack of acquisition, and the relative unimportance attached to slang by the students. More than half had "natural" feeling about it. Furthermore, the fact that the mean score on the test was 48% is particularly significant.

Over a four year period Cholmondely, S. (1996), became increasingly aware that many EFL students who were reasonably proficient in English and who had been studying in the UK for Three months or more strangely seemed to have little understanding of many common items of everyday informal language.

Another research by Roth, R, M. (1998) examined whether L2 Learners of English rely on their L1 when attempting to comprehend an idiom in English and whether the student's level of proficiency has any effect on L1 use.

The work concluded with a suggestion that metaphor instruction be used to teach L2 idioms since a student can not get very far when relying solely on his L1.

Marije Geld and Annette ten Teije investigated the relationship between informal medical guideline and its formal counter part. This study has been carried out within the Protocur project ([www. Protocure. Org](http://www.Protocure.Org)), a European project which aims to evaluate the use of formal methods for quality improvement of medical guidelines.

They found that the links can be either explicit or implicit and they can appear at high or low level.

Baurbara law and Mary Eckes (1996) carried out a research in the field of second language proficiency and strategies used by students, and informal language. This research has been done in Canada and the subjects were Albertans who are not fluent in English.

Finally they stated that language is learned via meaningful experiences and social contents and learning strategies are interdependent with language and content and are common to all subject areas.

## 3. Methodology

### 3.1. Introduction

This chapter dealing with the methodology of research includes four parts. The first part is concerned with subject selection procedure, the second, the instrument. The third, the procedure and the last the summary of the data analysis procedure.

### 3. 2. Subjects

Sixty foreign language learners (FLLS) studying in Language institute in the city of Ahvaz ,Iran participated in this study. These learners were intermediate in terms of language proficiency. Through administering a pre-test. (Containing 50 multiple-choice items related to English structures and Vocabulary) it was estimated that the learners were homogenous (there was no significant difference between the means of the two groups).

As this study involved one variable of method of teaching, the learners were divided in two groups known as control and experimental. Therefore, teaching method to control group (CG) was different from the teaching method to experimental group.

### 3. 3. Procedures

First, the learners were homogenized in order to certain that the results of the study are not due to initial differences between the participants, and then experimental group was exposed to treatment which lasted three months. These learners were provided with informal language. That is some materials containing informal language from "Street Talk", "Lion King", and "English Through Idioms" were taught to the experimental group learners.

While students in control group were deprived of such kind of treatment, the formal equivalent of the materials taught to experimental group learners were taught to control group. Finally, after instruction a post-test containing 50 items including 25 items on informal language and 25 items on formal language was administered. Both groups took part in such kind of test. The data were analyzed through computing three different t-tests and three correlation coefficient using Pearson-product Movement (=0.5).

### 3. 4. Instruments

The instruments used in this study were a pre-test, a post-test and a standardized test to calculate the construct validity of the post-test.

Moreover, some materials were used from “Street Talk”, “Lion King”, and “English Through Idioms”.

**3. 4. 1. Pre-test**

The pre-test (50 items from the book “Scientific English Reading”, Book 2) used in this study functioned as a proficiency test and also a device to certain the homogeneity of the learners. It consisted of 50 multiple-choice items covering grammatical points and reading comprehension items suitable for participant’s levels of proficiency. This test was not standardized by its constructors. It was necessary to determine each construct validity; therefore, standardized test (TOEFL) was also administered. The computation of correlation coefficient between the learner’s scores and these two tests indicated that this test was valid. The reliability of pre-test was computed through the application of KR21 method.

**3. 4. 2. post-test**

The post test used in this study functioned as achievement test and based on statistical analysis of participants scores on this test, the questions were answered. The test consisted of fifty multiple-choice items covering reading comprehension items (Twenty five items on informal language and twenty five items formal language).

**3.5. Data analysis**

The data collected through the study were subjected to a series of statistical analysis in relation to the proposed research question. Four t-tests were calculated to compare the mean scores of control and experimental groups on the pre-test and post-test. The KR21 formula was applied to determine the reliability of the two-mentioned test, and also Pearson-Product Movement was calculated to determine the validity of both pre-test and post-test. Moreover, Pearson-Product Movement was calculated to determine the relationship between learners’ scores on formal language and theirs on informal language.

**4. Results**

**4.1. Data Analysis of the Post-test**

A t-test was calculated to compare the means of the two groups on the post-rest and the results are presented in the following table.

As the observed T is greater than the critical T, the results of computed t-test indicate that there is a significant difference between the means of two groups on post-test reading comprehension containing two parts known as formal and informal respectively. That is, subjects provided with informal instruction were more successful in accomplishing

their tasks on post-tests than those deprived of such kind of treatment.

Table 4.1 T-test for Gains on the Post-test

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean
Experimental	30	24	30	38.81
Control Group	30	24	25	33.8

T observed=4.17                                      4.17>2.02  
 T critical= 2.02                                      (a=0.05)

**4.2. Analysis of the two Groups Means on Formal Reading Comprehension**

A t-test was calculated to compare the means of two groups on formal part reading comprehension t-test and the results will be illustrated in the following table.

Table 4.2 T-test on Formal Part of Reading Comprehension

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	SD
Experimental Formal	30	10	25	17.48	3.90
Control Formal	30	12.5	25	18.66	3.69

T observed = 12  
 T critical = 2.02                                      12>2.02

As observed T is less than critical T, the null hypothesis is bravely supported. That is, there is no significant difference between the means of the two groups of formal part of post-test reading comprehension. Therefore, informal teaching is not of much importance in improving foreign language reading comprehension.

**4.3. The Analysis of Informal Part of Reading Comprehension Test Results**

A t-test was calculated to compare the means of participants on informal language reading comprehension and the data are tabulated in the following table.

Table 4.3 the Data of experimental group

	N	Minimum	Maximum	SD
Experimental Informal	30	17.5	25	2.03
Control Informal	30	10	20	2.49

T observed = 12  
 T critical =2.02                                      12>2.02

As observed t-test exceeds critical t, the null hypothesis is rejected. The results of the t-test computed to compare the means of the two groups on

informal section of post-test indicate that there is significant difference between the groups. That is, those provided with informal instruction performed better than those were deprived of such kind of treatment.

Table 4.5 Formal & Informal Proficiency T-test

Group	N	To
Informal Proficiency &	30	-1.517
Formal Proficiency	30	

To = - 1. 517

T c= 2

By regarding to “T c” and “To” we can claim that there is no significant difference between informal and formal groups. That is, the two groups are homogeneous.

So the level of students does not have any effect on their learning.

#### 4. Conclusion and Discussion

The following conclusions can be drawn from the results of the study:

1. Informal language instruction does not have significant effects on improving foreign language learners' formal reading comprehension.

2. Informal instruction has got positive impacts on improving foreign language learners' informal language reading comprehension.

3. There is no significant difference between the means of the two groups of formal part of post-test reading comprehension. Therefore, informal teaching is not of much importance in improving foreign language reading comprehension.

On the basis of the above mentioned points if we provide the students with informal reading instruction, this informal instruction does not have any effects on formal reading comprehension. And there is no significant relationship between informal instruction and formal reading comprehension. It can be said that the experimental group provided with benefits of informal instruction was better than the control group. So, if students would provide with informal instruction their understanding of informal reading is better than those who are not provided with.

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[godarzshakiba@yahoo.com](mailto:godarzshakiba@yahoo.com)

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