

The Effects of Visual Input Enhancement on the Acquisition of the English Passive Form

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Abstract:

This study was set up to investigate the potentially facilitative effects of using visually/textually enhanced materials on the acquisition of the English passive form. Sixty students majoring in Economics at Larbi Ben M'hidi University-Oum el Bouaghi, were randomly assigned to two groups: a control group and an experimental group. The experimental group received five authentic texts in which the passive forms were textually enhanced, so to promote their salience. The control group received the exact same texts, but with no typographical interventions on them. The results indicate that using visually enhanced materials significantly helped the students learn the target form; this has been statistically proven through different statistical tests both descriptive and inferential.

Keywords:

Input - intake - input enhancement - textual input enhancement - noticing hypothesis.

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اثر استخدام التأثيرات البصرية المحسنة للنص على تعلم صيغة المبني للمجهول في اللغة الانجليزية

الملخص

تم إعداد هذه الدراسة للتحقيق في التأثيرات البصرية المحسنة للنص على تعلم صيغة المبني للمجهول في اللغة الإنجليزية، وقد تم توزيع 60 طالبا يتخصصون في علم الاقتصاد في جامعة العربي بن مهيدي، بشكل عشوائي لمجموعتين: مجموعة مراقبة ومجموعة تجريبية. تلقت المجموعة التجريبية خمسة نصوص أصيلة تم فيها تعزيز صيغة المبني للمجهول، لتحسين جودتها تلقت المجموعة المراقبة النصوص نفسها، ولكن دون تدخل مطبعي عليها. تشير النتائج إلى أن استخدام التأثيرات البصرية المحسنة للنص يساعد الطلاب بشكل كبير على تعلم النموذج المستهدف؛ وقد ثبت هذا من الناحية الإحصائية من خلال اختبارات إحصائية مختلفة وصفية واستقصائية على حد سواء.

الكلمات المفتاحية:

التأثيرات البصرية المحسنة للنص - الاستيعاب - محسنات النص - نظرية الملاحظة.

Les conséquences de l'utilisation des effets visuels pour l'amélioration du texte pour l'apprentissage de la forme passive en anglais

Résumé

Cette étude est réalisée pour investiguer les conséquences possibles de l'utilisation des effets visuels améliorant un texte pour apprendre la forme passive. Un échantillon de soixante étudiants des sciences économiques de l'université d'Oum el Bouaghi sont répartis aléatoirement dans deux groupes: en groupe d'étude et un groupe témoin. Les étudiants du groupe d'étude ont reçu cinq textes où la forme passive a été visuellement améliorée. Les étudiants du groupe témoin ont reçu les mêmes textes sans aucune modification. Les résultats obtenus montrent que l'utilisation des effets visuels a aidé les étudiants à apprendre la forme passive. Ces résultats sont validés par des méthodes statistiques.

Mots clés:

Amélioration de l'entrée - amélioration textuelle - Théorie de l'Observation.

1. Introduction

In the field of second language acquisition (SLA), the role and type of grammatical instruction have always been a controversial issue. Over the past two decades, most second language (L2) studies on grammar teaching have yielded different, sometimes even conflicting, results supporting either an explicit or an implicit approach to grammar instruction. The explicit approach to grammatical instruction is based on the assumption that an explicit focus on language form is necessary for SLA to take place. However, this approach has been questioned by a number of researchers who see the L2 acquisition as an essentially implicit process similar to first language (L1) acquisition through the sufficient exposure to a rich linguistic input which is provided in highly contextualized social interaction (Dulay & Burt, 1973; Krashen, 1981). Krashen (1981) suggests that the formal instruction may only result in an increase in consciously-learned competence, which he considers can serve only as a monitor to what the L2 learners produce.

Other researchers (Smith, 1993; Long, 1996; Van Patten, 1996), on the other hand, argue that input alone is not enough and it has to be enhanced so that the language learners can notice it, and eventually convert it into intake. Schmidt (1990) states that features of the target language cannot be learned unless they have been noticed. Schmidt considers noticing, which he defines as paying attention to the input received, a necessary condition for converting input into intake. Emphasizing the indispensability of attending to input, Smith (1990) argues that not all grammatical forms are easily noticed and input has to be manipulated in a way that makes the less salient grammatical forms more noticeable for L2 learners. The process by which language input becomes salient to the learners is called input enhancement. The major aim of input enhancement is to either draw or direct learners' attention to the problematic language features. This unobtrusive pedagogical intervention employs different techniques to promote the perceptual salience of the target forms such as: the use of *italics*, **boldface**, CAPITALIZATION, underlining, etc.

2. Review of the literature

2.1. Definition of input

Many researchers in the field of SLA have defined 'input' in approximately the same way. Sharwood Smith (1993, p. 167) defines input as "the potentially processable language data which are made available, by chance or by design, to the language learner". For Lee & VanPatten (2003, p. 25): "input is the language

that a learner hears (or reads) that has some kind of communicative intent". In simple words, input is language data that the learner is exposed to, that is, the learner's experience of the target language in all its various manifestations. It is an essential component of SLA, simply because learners use it 'in order to construct a mental representation of the grammar that they are acquiring' (VanPatten, 1996, p. 13).

2.2. Definition of intake

While there is some kind of consensus about the definition of input, Intake "has taken on a number of different meanings, and it is not always clear what a particular investigator means in using it" (McLaughlin, 1987, p. 13). The reason behind this dissension is the different views towards the nature of intake itself. Corder (1967, p. 165), who considers intake as a product defines it as "a mental representation of a physical stimulus", in other words for Corder intake is that part of input that has been perceived but hasn't yet been integrated in the learner's language system as it is still dependent on an external physical stimulus. Sharwood Smith (1994) who also sees intake as a product defines it as "that part of input which has actually been processed by the learner and turned into knowledge of some kind" (p. 8). Then proceeds to say that if "input is, as it were, the goods that are presented to the customer, including the articles that the customer picks up to look at. Intake is what is actually bought and taken away from the shop, i. e. what passes into the ownership of the customer" (p. 9). In other words, intake is not all the input the learners are exposed to, but only what the learners actually comprehend in terms of form, function and meaning. On the other hand, many researchers have approached intake as a process rather than as a product among which, Chaudron (1985) who defines intake as "the mediating process between the target language available to learners as input and the learners' internalized set of L2 rules and strategies for second language development" (p. 1). Then he carries on,

In speaking of intake we are, in effect, referring not to a single event or product, but to a complex phenomenon of information processing that involves several stages, roughly characterized as (1) the initial stages of perception of input, (2) the subsequent stages of recoding and encoding of the semantic (communicated) information into long term memory, and (3) the series of stages by which learners fully integrate and incorporate the linguistic information in input into their developing grammars. (p. 2).

In contrast, some other researchers assert that viewing intake as exclusively a product, or exclusively as a process has in fact some limitations. Alcon (1998), for example, suggests that if intake is to be viewed as a product, then there will be no explanation left for how that product is created or processed from input. And if intake is to be viewed as a process, then the fact that “a small proportion of the learners’ intake can go beyond the boundaries of the input they are exposed to” (p. 345) is overlooked. Alcon argues that intake is both that part of input the learners perceive and process as well as the end-product after the processing is complete. In other words, for Alcon intake is a product of a process.

2.3. Input enhancement

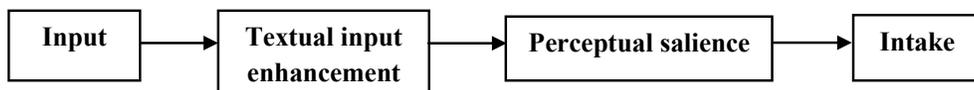
Input enhancement theory is based on the premise that the mere exposure to the less salient features of L2 structures is not sufficient for language acquisition to take place, and learners will fail to perceive them in naturalistic input (Rutherford & Sharewood Smith, 1985). In other words, not all language features are perceived in the same way and in order for the learners to notice the less salient features, input has to be modified in a way so to promote their (less salient features) salience. Sharewood Smith (1991) defines input enhancement as: ‘Input enhancement is the process by which language input becomes salient to the learner. This process can come about as a result of deliberate manipulation, or it can be the natural outcomes of some internal learning strategy’ (p. 118). Smith, clearly distinguishes between the deliberately created input enhancement through the application of specific techniques such as: input flood, input enhancement, output enhancement, error correction, etc., and the internal learning processes by which certain formal properties become salient because the learner is ready for growth in knowledge (Natural development). A more recent definition of input enhancement was provided by Kim (2006), ‘Pedagogical techniques designed to draw L2 learners’ attention to formal features in L2 input.’ (p. 345). Kim, suggests that altering the quality of the available input can result in stimulating the learners’ processing of linguistic materials.

2.3.1. Visual/Textual input enhancement

Textual input enhancement, sometimes also referred to as visual enhancement, is an implicit and unobtrusive means to draw the learners’ attention to form contained in the written input (Doughty & Williams, 1998). In other words, it is the process by which the perceptual salience of certain target structures is increased by the use of some text-editing techniques such as using Boldface, Italics, CAPITALIZATION, and Underlining or a combination of these cues.

The application of such techniques on the input available for the L2 learner increases the chances of the enhanced structures being noticed while the main focus is always on meaning. Textual input enhancement is used either to attract or to direct learners' attention to the target structures; in the former the learners are provided with textually enhanced materials without being told what the purpose of the enhancement is, while in the latter the learners are asked (without excessive guidelines) to pay attention to the enhanced structures.

Visual/Textual input enhancement is a proactive approach to FonF in that the form to be enhanced needs to be decided upon a priori based on various considerations such as learning difficulties and learner needs. The typographical manipulation may involve changing the font style, enlarging the character size, using bolding or italics, highlighting, or employing any combination of these cues. Visual enhancement may be provided without telling the learner the purpose of the enhancement, or the learner may be asked (without excessive guidelines) to pay special attention to the enhanced forms. Despite the difference in the level of explicitness, visual enhancement in both cases aims at integrating attention to form and meaning by engaging the learner in the reading process. Visual enhancement offers many advantages over other FonF techniques in that it can be integrated into different types of instruction and combined with other input enhancement techniques (rule presentation, input flood, etc.). One of these attempts to investigate the effectiveness of combining textual enhancement with other input enhancement techniques was Leeman (1995) who examined the effects of textual enhancement accompanied by feedback regarding the use of the target structure. The subjects were advanced university level L2 Spanish learners who read passages with textually enhanced (underlined and highlighted) target verb forms. The subjects then answered questions based on the passage, discussed the readings, participated in a debate, watched the debate on video, and finally evaluated each other's performance. The results of the participants who read typographically enhanced text and received teacher feedback demonstrated better accuracy when using the target verb form in the debate in contrast to the participants in the purely communicative group. Leeman concluded that the positive effects of focus-on-form instruction seemed to be the result of increased learner attention to the target form.



2.3.2. Noticing hypothesis

In an attempt to better understand the obscure relationship between input and intake, both second language and cognitive psychology researchers have examined the role of attention and the perceptual consciousness in processing input and the learning process in general (Robinson, 1995; Schmidt, 1990, 1995, 2001; Tomlin & Villa, 1994). The most influential attempt to explore the input-intake relationship was Schmidt's (1990) noticing hypothesis in which he claims 'what learners notice in input is what becomes intake for learning' (p. 20). Schmidt argues that a linguistic feature embodied in the input is learnt only if the learner becomes consciously aware of it. In this regard Schmidt distinguishes between two levels of awareness:

- Awareness at the level of noticing: when reading, for example, we are normally aware of the content of what we are reading, rather than the syntactic peculiarities of the writer's style, the style of type in which the text is set, music playing on a radio in the next room, or background noise outside a window. However, we still perceive these competing stimuli and may pay attention to them if we choose (Schmidt, 1990, p. 132).
- Awareness at the level of understanding: understanding is regarded as a higher-level activity than noticing and involves a deeper level of processing information, such as pattern recognition or recognition of rules of a grammar (Schmidt, 1990, p. 133).

Finally, Schmidt determines six factors that may influence noticing;

- Frequency: the more frequently a form occurs, the more likely it will be noticed.
- Perceptual salience if all other conditions are the same, the more the input stands out the more probable that it will be noticed.
- Instruction: instruction must channel learners' attention to parts of input that they would overlook or ignore otherwise.
- Processing ability: there are likely to be individual learner differences in input processing. Good, quick processors tend to notice new forms more easily due to their better working memory qualities including attentional capacity or quicker analytic processes.
- Readiness to notice: it means if the learner has reached the necessary level in interlanguage development, and thereby they are ready or not to perceive the new information and integrate it into their knowledge system.
- Task demands: if the right kind of task is set at the right level this will promote noticing. Schmidt continued to argue that sometimes noticing

alone could not be sufficient and learners must ‘notice the gap’ in order to convert the linguistic features in the input they are exposed to into intake.

3. Methodology

3.1. Participants

The participant of the present study were 60 third-year students majoring in Economics at Larbi Ben M’hidi University-Oum el Bouaghi for the academic year 2016/2017, divided into two groups. Although there were initially 65 students, five of them were excluded for different reasons (some skipped either the pre-test or the post-test, some skipped some of the treatment sessions). The two groups were randomly assigned to a control group, and an experimental group. Each group consisted of 30 students who went through the same curriculum for the past three years.

3.2. Design of the study

The present study employed a quasi-experiment design with pre-test, treatment period and a post-test. Both groups were subject to a pretest during the first week of the study. The pre-test consisted of three different activities; a multiple-choice test covering all the aspect of the English passive form structure (tense, aspect, subject-verb agreement and agent). The second activity was a gap-fill production activity where the learners were supposed to fill in the gaps using a provided list of words (All the words in that list were familiar to the students), and finally a grammaticality judgement activity. Each group had five treatment sessions of ninety minutes, and each of those sessions was administered with one-week time interval. The experimental group received five visually enhanced texts upon which different typographical input enhancement techniques were applied. After reading the texts, the learners were asked to answer some comprehension questions, to write a short paragraph; either to elaborate on one of the major points in the texts, or to simply summarize the text. (Reading texts and answering comprehension questions were common in their ordinary classes). On the other hand, the control group received the same texts without any typographical alteration, and as with the experimental group they were asked to answer comprehension questions after reading the texts. During the seventh week, both groups took the post-test which was identically structured to the pre-test, but not with the exact same questions because as Cronbach (1990) says “Administrators should not post-test a student with the same questions they encountered in the pre-test. Doing so can produce invalid data because a student’s progress cannot necessarily be attributed to the skills

they have developed if they are already familiar with the test questions” .

4. Data Analysis

The procedures carried out are common in the field of social sciences. A T-test was used to find out whether providing the learners with visually enhanced materials significantly improve their post-test performance compared to their pre-test performance.

The table below summarizes the descriptive statistics (Mean, Standard Deviation) of the performance of the two groups in the pre-test, immediate post-test and delayed post-test.

Table1. Descriptive Statistics

	Pre-test	Post-test
Control group		
N	30	30
M	16 .6	5 .6
SD	36 .1	85 .1
Experimental group		
N	30	30
M	96 .5	06 .11
SD	67 .1	77 .1

The results from the table reveal no statistically significant difference between the performances of the two groups in the pre-test; where the difference mean (\bar{d}) is: $\bar{d} = \bar{X}_C - \bar{X}_E = 0.2$

which means that the participants in both groups showed approximately the same level of knowledge of the target form, and any measurable changes in the post-tests are unlikely to be due to any preexisting difference in the learners’ knowledge of the target form. As for the post-test, a statistically significant difference could be noticed in the performances of the experimental and the control groups, where a difference mean (\bar{d}) of was recorded. In other words, the descriptive statistical analysis of the obtained data demonstrated that the subjects who received visually enhanced materials outperformed their counterparts who didn’t. In order to better understand whether the recorded differences are due to the pedagogical intervention (visual input enhancement)

the subjects of the experimental group went through, two t-tests were carried out. Since the t-test is a parametric statistical method, it requires that the sample is approximately normally distributed. To make sure of the normal distribution of the sample a Shapiro-Wilk test was carried out:

Table2. Shapiro-Wilk Test

	Shapiro-Wilk		
	Statistic	df	Sig.
Pre-Test	.955	60	.097
Post-Test	.958	60	.128

The results indicate a normal distribution of the scores in both the pre-test and the post-test:

Both significant levels of the pre-test and post-test are greater than (.05)

The T-tests:

- 1- A paired-sample t-test where the null hypothesis reads as follows: Learners who received visually enhanced material will show no improvement in the post-test scores compared to those of the pretest, and the alternative hypothesis reads as follows: Learners who received visually enhanced materials will show a statistically significant improvement in their post-test scores compared to those of the pre-test ones.

Table3. Paired-Sample t-Test

t-Test: Paired Sample for Means

	<i>Post-test</i>	<i>Pre-test.</i>
Mean	11.06666667	966666667 .5
Variance	3.167816092	826436782 .3
Observations	30	30
Pearson Correlation	0.812814691	
Hypothesized Mean Difference	0	
df	58	
t Stat	9.73701396	
P(T<=t) one-tail	4.12768E-14	
t Critical one-tail	1.671552762	
P(T<=t) two-tail	8.25535E-14	
t Critical two-tail	2.001717484	

The results of the paired-sample t-test table reveal that the is larger than the which is enough to reject the null hypothesis; in other words, at a level of significance the obtained results couldn't have occurred by chance. This lend substantial support to the claim that learners who received visually enhanced materials will show a statistically significant improvement in their post-test performance compared to theirs in the pre-test.

2- A two-sample independent t-test where the null hypothesis reads as follows: Learners who received visually enhanced materials (Experimental Group) will show no significant improvement in their post-test scores compared to learners in the control group, and the alternative hypothesis reads as follows: Learners who received visually enhanced materials will outperform learners who did not.

Table4. Paired-Sample t-Test

t-Test: Two-Sample Assuming Unequal Variances

	Post-test E. G	Post-test C. G.
Mean	11.06666667	6.5
Variance	3.167816092	3.431034483
Observations	30	30
Hypothesized Mean Difference	0	
df	58	
t Stat	9.73701396	
P(T<=t) one-tail	4.12768E-14	
t Critical one-tail	1.671552762	
P(T<=t) two-tail	8.25535E-14	
t Critical two-tail	2.001717484	

The results of the two-sample independent t-test reveal that the *tstat* (9.737) is larger than the *critical value* (2.001) which is enough to reject the null hypothesis; in other words, at a level of significance, only of the results could have occurred by chance.

5. Discussion

The present study was carried out to investigate the potentially facilitative effects of visual input enhancement on the acquisition of the English passive form by Algerian students. The results of this study demonstrate that learners who received visually enhanced materials performed better in the post-test than the control group, which provides statistical support to the hypothesis: Learners who received visually enhanced materials will outperform learners who did not. These results comply with the previous studies (Sharewood Smith, 1991; VanPatten & Cadierno, 1993; Shook, 1994; Gass & Selinker, 1994; Jourdenais et al., 1995; White, 1998) which suggest that in addition to attending to meaning, learners have to attend also to the target forms particularly the less salient ones to increase the likelihood that learners would pay attention to them, and eventually assimilate these features into their developing linguistic system. Sharewood Smith (1994) also argues 'The most obvious way to try to affect the the subconscious processes beneficially is by making relevant evidence in the input salient' (p. 178). Shook, (1994) also reports that visual input enhancement has a positive effect on the acquisition of relative pronouns; where learners

who received visually enhanced materials outperformed the control group. The results also adhere to the findings of (Gass, 1997) who insists on the importance of promoting the salience of target forms in the language development. Lee (2007) who studied the effects of textual enhancement and topic familiarity on Korean EFL students' reading comprehension and learning of passive form, comes to the conclusion that textual input enhancement leads to the acquisition of the targeted form, but warned that it also negatively affected comprehension. Finally, it is also worth mentioning that there had been some studies (Alanen, 1995; Robinson, 1997; White, 1998) who found no positive, or at least limited effect of using textual enhancement on the acquisition of certain grammatical features in a meaning focused context. These mixed results might be explained by inconsistencies in the research designs of some studies and by other different factors. For example, while Jourdenais (1995), Shook (1994) have successfully isolated textual enhancement as an independent variable, Alanen (1995), White (1998) have not. Consequently, it is difficult to determine the contribution of this technique to the acquisition of targeted grammatical features. The level of text difficulty can also be considered as a cause of inconclusive findings. Overstreet (1998), for example, suggests that text simplification would reduce the amount of attentional resources needed for text comprehension and would allow learners to better attend to form. In addition, the different types of textual enhancement employed can differently affect the degree of perceptual saliency of the enhanced forms. The effect of textual enhancement may be negatively affected when a combination of several types of text enhancement (for example, underlining, changing the font, and highlighting) are employed in the same treatment. Thus, too many differently enhanced forms could have been too cognitively demanding for the beginner learners in Overstreet's study and could thus explain the negative results of his experiment.

6. Conclusion

This study was an attempt to investigate the possible facilitative effects of using visually enhanced materials on the learning of the English passive form. The results obtained demonstrate that the subjects who received the textually enhanced materials performed better than those who received traditional materials. These results suggest that the typographical modification of input can be an effective technique in promoting the salience of certain linguistic features that have been proven to be problematic for L2 learners while the main focus is always on meaning. Finally, although this study has yielded some promising results regarding the use of textual input enhancement and its effects on the

noticing and learning of the English passive form, we suggest that future research should investigate and compare these results with other input enhancement techniques such as input flood, output enhancement and error correction.

Appendix I (Pre-test)

Tick the correct answer (only one of three alternatives is correct):

Harry Potter and the Goblet of Fire.....by J. K. Rowling.

- wrote
- were written
- was written

The judgeSmith to five years in prison.

- sentenced
- was sentenced
- were sentenced

Over two millions dollars in cash.....
from the Bank of East Asia.

- have stolen
- stole
- have been stolen

The gold..... in a cave near the top of the mountain.

- Discovered
- Was discovered
- Were discovered

The meeting..... until the end of the month.

- have been postponed
- has been postponed
- has postponed

The Picasso paintings..... by John.

- is bought
- were bought
- have bought

Complete the following paragraph with the appropriate form of the verbs:

The Statue of Liberty (give).....to the United States by France. It (be)a present on the 100th anniversary of the United States. The Statue of Liberty (design)by Frederic Auguste Bartholdi. It (complete)in France in July 1884. In 350 pieces, the statue

then (ship)to New York, where it (arrive)on 17 June 1885. The pieces (put)together and the opening ceremony (take)place on 28 October 1886. The Statue of Liberty is 46 m high (93 m including the base). The statue (represent)the goddess of liberty. She (hold)a torch in her right hand and a tablet in her left hand. On the tablet you (see / can)the date of the Declaration of Independence (July 4, 1776). Every year, the Statue of Liberty (visit)by many people from all over the world.

Decide whether the sentences below are GRAMMATICALLY correct or incorrect. (correct the wrong ones)

Letters is delivered by the postman at 8 a. m. every day.

.....

The report will not finish in time if you don't help me.

.....

The stories was misunderstood by most students.

.....

The White House and the Capitol are connect by Pennsylvania Avenue.

.....

Tom were told many times to stop talking in class.

.....

The present given to her by a co-worker.

.....

A new shopping center will be opened in the city.

.....

The meeting hold in the conference room.

.....

Millions of books is bought for students each year.

.....

The White House was build by James Hoban.

.....

Appendix II (Post-test)

Tick the correct answer (only one of three alternatives is correct):

This building..... in the 1930's.

- built
- was built
- were built

The plantwo days ago.

- announced
- was announced
- were announced

No prizes..... by the contest organizers.

- is actually given
- actually give
- were actually given

Paula..... an award-winning essay.

- has written
- was written
- were written

This issue..... .. by the employees during the meeting.

- were discussed
- discussed
- was discussed

Thieves over a million dollars in cash from the Bank of East Asia.

- was stolen
- were stolen
- have stolen

Complete the following paragraph with the appropriate form of the verbs:

The police (announce).....that the National Bank (rob) yesterday. Three men (enter)the bank at 4:30 a. m. with guns in their hands. Customers and bank clerks (ask)to lie down on the floor. Later, one of the bank clerks (order)to fill the robbers' bags with money. After that, the three men (leave) the bank quickly. The police officer Jason Gregson (say) that more than 20,000,000 pounds (steal)yesterday, but nobody (injure) Jason Gregson believes that the robbers (find)soon. The bank (close)since then.

Decide whether the sentences below are GRAMMATICALLY correct or incorrect. (correct the wrong ones)

Volkswagen cars is made in Germany and the Czech Republic.
.....

A number of people have arrested following a demonstration in the Serbian capital, Belgrade.
.....

Two men are being questioned following a robbery this afternoon.
.....

Police are being questioned two men following a robbery this afternoon.
.....

A visitor's center are being built in the Capitol building.
.....

Thousands of airplanes produced by American companies, each year.
.....

Penicillin was discovered by A. Fleming in 1928.
.....

A new school are being built by the local council just now.
.....

The new computer chip will be produce next year.
.....

The energy of steam were discovered by James Watt in 1712.
.....

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