

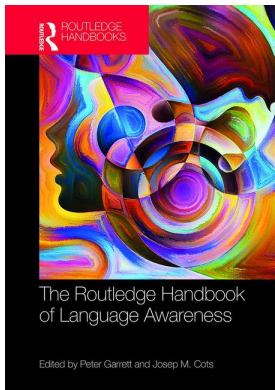
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Form-Focused Instruction

Leila Ranta and Roy Lyster

Introduction

How can language awareness (LA) influence second language (L2) learning? One answer to this question can be drawn from second language acquisition (SLA) in the body of research on form-focused instruction (FFI), defined as a type of L2 instruction that “involves some attempt to focus learners’ attention on specific properties of the L2 so that they will learn them” (Ellis, 2008: 963). Because FFI is sometimes confused with decontextualized grammar teaching, this chapter will clarify its role as complementary to communicatively oriented or content-based approaches to second and foreign language teaching. Emphasizing such an integrated approach to FFI, this chapter will outline its effects on a range of linguistic features by reviewing the relevant literature on instructed SLA. We begin with a brief review of prominent concepts in the literature and reiterate some of the arguments that have been put forth in support of the importance of FFI. Next is a critical survey of proactive and reactive FFI techniques, with reference to relevant studies for illustration. These techniques are organized under headings that reflect the stage of acquisition that they target: input enhancement, metalinguistic explanation, practice, and feedback. Our final section considers the integration of FFI within communication-oriented lessons, either content-based or task-based. The final section shifts to consider FFI as a topic within the domain of LA. Given that there are many excellent reviews of FFI available, the goal of this overview is to provide a succinct synthesis of theoretical concepts and research findings for the benefit of the L2 practitioner and to clarify the relationship between SLA and LA perspectives of FFI.

Background

Naturalistic and communicative L2 teaching methods flourished in the 1980s, based on the premise that implicit acquisition drives L2 performance and obviates the need for explicit L2 teaching (e.g. Krashen, 1985). At that same time, however, Canadian studies of L2 learners in content-based programmes such as French immersion (e.g. Swain, 1985) and intensive ESL programmes based on communicative language teaching

(Lightbown and Spada, 1990) began revealing that students in these programmes exhibited high levels of communicative ability but lower-than-expected levels of linguistic accuracy. This led scholars in the 1990s to argue for the integration of form-oriented and meaning-oriented approaches to maximize the effects of L2 teaching. For example, Stern (1990, 1992) submitted that *analytic* and *experiential* instructional options needed to be viewed as complementary, not as dichotomous. He characterized analytic strategies as those that focus on language form, emphasizing accuracy and “rehearsal” of L2 skills. Experiential strategies focus on meaning and fluency, entail themes and topics as content, and engage students in purposeful tasks and authentic L2 use. He called for more systematic integration of analytic strategies in contexts of immersion and content-based instruction, and more emphasis on experiential strategies in traditional programmes where the target language is taught as a subject.

At the same time, Long (1991) put forth the notion of *focus on form* in which teachers “overtly draw students’ attention to linguistic elements as they arise incidentally in lessons whose overriding focus is on meaning” (p. 46). He considered optimal L2 teaching to include an implicit focus on form operationalized as incidental asides and unobtrusive focus on language during negotiation for meaning (see also Long, 1996). From the learners’ perspective, incidental learning is generally defined as learning without the intent to learn (or the learning of one thing when the learner’s primary objective is to do something else; see Schmidt, 1994).

Narrative and meta-analytic reviews alike have since concluded that instruction targeting explicit learning (i.e. awareness of what is being learned) is more effective than implicit treatments (DeKeyser, 2003; Goo, Granena, Yilmaz and Novella, 2015; Norris and Ortega, 2000; Spada, 1997; Spada and Tomita, 2010). Thus, there is insufficient evidence from classroom research to support implicit focus on form operationalized as incidental asides and unobtrusive focus on language. A more promising approach is FFI, which Spada (1997) defined as “any pedagogical effort ... used to draw the learners’ attention to language form either implicitly or explicitly” (p. 73). Such a flexible instructional approach that ranges from implicit to explicit is important for two reasons. On the one hand, classroom learners can learn many L2 features and functions implicitly if they are exposed to sufficient quantities of rich input. On the other hand, an exclusively incidental focus on the L2 in classroom settings is arguably too brief and too perfunctory to convey sufficient information about certain grammatical subsystems.

FFI has been operationalized as either *proactive* or *reactive* (Doughty and Williams, 1998; Lyster, 2007). Proactive FFI involves planned instruction designed to enable students to notice and to use target language features that might otherwise not be used or even noticed in classroom discourse. Reactive FFI occurs in response to students’ language production during teacher-student interaction and includes corrective feedback as well as other attempts to draw learners’ attention to the target language.

Because FFI is intended to create opportunities for students to attend to target language features in the context of content-based or meaning-oriented tasks, it is different from traditional language instruction, which isolates language from any content other than the mechanical workings of the language itself. By definition, traditional language instruction emphasizes memorization of forms out of context, and so does not promote actual language use and does not foster *transfer-appropriate processing*. In accordance with transfer-appropriate processing (Lightbown, 2008; Segalowitz, 2000), the context in which learning occurs should resemble the context in which the learning will be put to use, because memories are best recalled in conditions similar to those in which they were

encoded. This means that, on the one hand, language features learned in isolated grammar lessons are remembered in similar contexts, but hard to retrieve in the context of communicative interaction. On the other hand, language features noticed during interaction driven by substantive content are more easily retrieved in similar contexts of real communication. The notion of transfer-appropriate processing provides a convincing rationale for FFI that highlights form/meaning mappings in the context of purposeful exchanges and activities rather than only in isolation.

The purpose of FFI is to strengthen students' linguistic accuracy through metalinguistic awareness in classrooms whose primary focus is on meaning and communication. Metalinguistic awareness serves as a tool for students to detect linguistic patterns in meaningful input and communicative exchanges, and is thus essential for supporting their continued language growth. But what types of language features and patterns should be targeted by FFI? Learners in communicative classrooms certainly pick up a great deal of language through purposeful interaction and meaningful input, including structural patterns that are congruent with their L1, high-frequency vocabulary, and items that are phonologically salient (i.e. easy to notice in the stream of speech because of intonational stress) (Harley, 1993). With respect to L2 features that classroom learners find difficult simply to pick up from communicative input and that are thus propitious for FFI, Harley (1993) identified features that: (a) differ in non-obvious or unexpected ways from the L1; (b) are irregular, infrequent or otherwise lacking in perceptual salience; (c) do not carry a heavy communicative load.

Other features that warrant FFI are: (d) those in which there is a misleading similarity between the L1 and L2 for expressing the same meaning, because such features are those that L2 learners "are most likely to have long term difficulty acquiring through communicative interaction" (Spada, Lightbown and White, 2005: 201); and (e) those in which a single form in the L1 is manifest as two or more in the L2 (Ellis, 1986), because learners, for the sake of economy, may adopt one form at the expense of the other (e.g. informal and formal second-person pronouns in Romance languages versus the single form *you* in English). Many prime candidates for FFI thus fall within the realm of morphosyntax, which has long been recognized as the most difficult for L2 learners, owing mainly to low salience (Goldschneider and DeKeyser, 2001; Mackey, 2006) and lack of communicative value (Han, 2004). Especially in languages that are highly inflected and morphologically complex, many morphosyntactic features are redundant because they do not convey additional meaning and are thus prone to slipping under the radar in classrooms whose primary focus is on meaning. Accordingly, much of the research on FFI has targeted grammatical features, but there is a growing number of FFI studies targeting other domains such as pronunciation (e.g. Saito and Wu, 2014), vocabulary (e.g. Laufer and Girsai, 2008) and pragmatics (e.g. Nguyen, Pham and Pham, 2012).

Types of Form-Focused Instruction

FFI is not a monolithic concept but rather a cover term for a range of pedagogical techniques. These techniques are either part of the language teacher's traditional repertoire or are innovations derived from SLA or pedagogical theory (see teacher survey results in Ranta and Waugh, 2011). The following overview of FFI techniques is an adaptation of the approach that Ellis (1998) uses to situate grammar teaching options within a computational model of L2 learning. Figure 3.1 provides an overview of the proactive techniques, which consist of input enhancement techniques that aim to promote

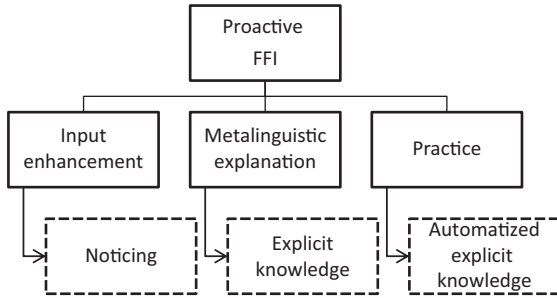


Figure 3.1. Major categories of FFI techniques.

the noticing and consequent processing of targeted forms in the input, metalinguistic explanations to develop explicit knowledge, and practice to develop automaticity for fluent use of grammatical knowledge. In addition to the proactive FFI techniques in Figure 3.1, FFI can also be *reactive* in nature. Reactive FFI is corrective feedback on learners' errors, which serves to promote accuracy during fluent production. Each of these four types of FFI (three proactive and one reactive) are described in turn and illustrative studies are discussed for each type. Most of these studies involve experimental designs in which the outcomes for a treatment group are compared to those of another group who have experienced traditional instruction, an alternative treatment or no instruction. Although all of the FFI techniques described can be used to teach different language domains, for reasons of space we refer here mainly to research targeting grammar development, because this has been the focus of a great deal of research activity.

Proactive FFI

Input Enhancement

The first stage of the acquisition process is input processing and the FFI technique that relates to this stage is *input enhancement*. This type of language teaching technique aims to draw learners' attention to a targeted form or rule, usually by increasing its saliency through typographical devices such as increased size, different font, underlining or bolding, which is often referred to as visually enhanced input. The texts in which learners encounter these enhancements are to be read for meaning, and follow-up activities do not involve overt explanation. For example, in White (1998) French-speaking learners of English L2 read texts in which third-person singular possessive determiners (*his/her*) were enhanced. After reading the text, they were given worksheets in which sentences from the text were extracted and they had to identify the referents for selected pronouns. Thus, as in other input enhancement studies, it was assumed that learners would notice and eventually acquire the target forms incidentally while reading for meaning. Researchers have been especially interested in typographical enhancement on the assumption that this implicit type of FFI will lead to superior learning outcomes because natural processes are involved.

However, reviews of input enhancement studies reveal contradictory findings, which Han, Park and Combs (2008) attribute to the non-comparability of the research designs used. The results of Lee and Huang's (2008) meta-analysis of 12 studies assessing the effects of visually enhanced input revealed very small positive effects on grammar

learning and also a small negative effect on text comprehension. In a more recent study, LaBrozzi (2016) revealed a hierarchy in the effectiveness of different types of textual enhancement, in which increased font size and capital letters were the first and the second most effective, respectively. In his study, contrary to Han et al.'s (2008) findings, visually enhanced input did not hinder learners' comprehension of meaning.

Most input enhancement studies have focused on written input. Much less researched is noticing through listening. Ellis and Gaies (1999) describe their use of the listening cloze technique in their textbook *Impact Grammar* as "listening to notice". That is, learners listen to an audio text and complete a written cloze passage that has blanks where a target grammatical form occurs. The potential of this type of FFI is suggested by the findings from Morris and Tremblay (2002). In their study, college-level ESL students in Quebec had to listen for the unstressed grammatical words in a passage; these words were replaced with a diamond. Here is an example of a sentence from one of the passages:

Student worksheet: *Nasrudin's Keys* ♦ ♦ good example ♦ ♦ stories ♦ simultaneously entertain ♦ teach.

Original text: *Nasrudin's Keys* is a good example of how stories can simultaneously entertain and teach.

Following the listening phase, students worked in pairs to compare answers and complete the cloze passage. Morris and Tremblay's study revealed superior pre- to post-test gains with respect to the length of their texts and grammatical accuracy for the class that experienced this procedure weekly throughout one semester, as compared to a class that followed the regular college ESL programme.

Metalinguistic Explanations

Metalinguistic explanation is the FFI technique that aims to develop learners' explicit knowledge of a given target form. Defined simply, explicit knowledge refers to the facts about a language that a speaker is able to verbalize (see Ellis, 2008 for detailed discussion). Explicit knowledge is contrasted with implicit knowledge, which is posited to underlie a speaker's ability to comprehend and produce language fluently. This intuitive knowledge is generally not verbalizable. A similar distinction is made between declarative and procedural knowledge. In this paper, we will use the terms explicit, metalinguistic and declarative knowledge as equivalent. From an SLA perspective, the development of explicit knowledge is not a goal for its own sake but as a tool or support for the eventual development of implicit knowledge.

In the case of grammar, metalinguistic explanations usually entail the use of meta-language, which may be more or less technical in nature (Basturkmen, Loewen and Ellis, 2002). In the case of pronunciation FFI, this explicit information might include an exaggerated model of the target form followed by explanations of how the tongue and lips are positioned (e.g. Saito, 2013).

Many SLA scholars believe that explicit knowledge of a grammar rule can help a learner to notice a targeted form in the input and thereby eventually acquire it so that it becomes available for spontaneous production (i.e. the weak interface position). This means that the impact of instruction will have a delayed effect rather than an immediate one. In contrast, information processing theory posits that explicit (declarative)

knowledge when practised sufficiently can become automatized and thereby available for spontaneous use (i.e. the full interface position). (See discussion of interface positions in Ellis, 2008; White and Ranta, 2002).

Grammar explanations can be either *deductive* or *inductive*. A deductive approach involves presenting a grammar rule first and then having students observe the application of the rule in examples followed by controlled exercises such as a gap-fill exercise. An inductive approach, in contrast, requires that the learners are first exposed to examples of the target grammar in sentences (or parts of sentences) from which they are guided to a statement of the rule; traditionally, this process is achieved dialogically with the teacher controlling the process. Several studies have compared the effects of inductive vs. deductive grammar instruction and often find superior effects for the inductive approach (e.g. Vogel, Herron, Cole and York, 2011), whereas other studies have found effects in favour of deductive explanations (e.g. Erlam, 2003).

One difficulty in making comparisons across studies is that inductive teaching can take different forms, and experimental designs vary widely, which makes them non-comparable. Consider, for example, the studies by Vogel et al. (2011) and Erlam (2003). In the former, the 40 university students of French in the US were taught five grammatical structures inductively and five deductively; only one structure was taught per class and each lesson lasted no longer than 15 minutes. The operationalization of guided induction in this study consisted of “an interactive, meaning-based, contextualized question/answer oral activity” (p. 359). This activity, basically a form of choral drill, was accompanied by a PowerPoint slide with visual images. Following this drill, the instructor and students collaboratively co-constructed the rule for the targeted structure. Learning was assessed through a written test consisting of limited-response items. In contrast, the study of high school learners of French in New Zealand by Erlam (2003) focused on one particular rule, the direct object pronouns in French. Students in the inductive treatment group focused on the target rule during three 45-minute lessons. They first worked with worksheets that involved matching written sentences with object pronouns to pictures, then they matched aurally presented sentences to pictures on overheads and completed written transformation and error identification exercises. Throughout the treatment, students were encouraged to give reasons for why a particular answer was correct or not, which led to the discussion of the rules. Learning was assessed through listening, reading, oral production and written production tests.

Inductive learning is often promoted in teacher education courses because of its learner-centredness. Thus, it is not surprising that in a questionnaire-based study by Bell (2005), the majority of the 457 foreign language teachers surveyed agreed that inductive teaching was better than deductive (72% vs. 26%). However, learners are often less convinced that inductive is best. Eighty percent of students in Vogel et al. (2011), who had experienced both types of teaching, reported that they preferred the deductive, confirming similar observations in the literature.

Consciousness-Raising Tasks

As an alternative to teacher-guided explanations like those used in Vogel et al. (2011), SLA has added to the traditional pedagogical repertoire the option of a task-based approach. These tasks require learners to work collaboratively to complete a grammatical analysis of some kind, either inductively or deductively. This so-called *consciousness-raising* (CR) task (Fotos and Ellis, 1991) provides both a focus on grammatical form

and an opportunity for learners to communicate while solving a problem and thereby engage in the acquisitional processes that are posited to underlie interaction. A pioneering study by Fotos (1994) illustrates the potential benefits of CR tasks. She used game-like tasks with cards that either guided learners towards formulating rules or working with a given rule. She found that university-level Japanese learners of English who experienced three different CR tasks performed similarly to a group of learners who received traditional grammar instruction on the same structures. In addition, the interactional negotiations produced during the CR task were similar in quantity and quality as those produced during a communicative task performed by a different group of learners. Using a CR task thus allows learners to get two language learning experiences for the price of one.

Fotos' tasks are considered to be deductive because rules were given to the students. Most examples of CR tasks in the literature tend to be inductive and text-driven. Such tasks typically consist of a text that students read and discuss for its meaning, before they focus on the target forms. The CR task presented in Ellis (1998) first asks students to underline the time expressions in a text about Mr. Bean. The next step is to complete a chart, which has columns for the time expressions using *at*, *in* and *on*. This chart serves as a scaffold to support learners' analysis and articulation of the rules underlying the choice of preposition, which is the third step. Presumably, this would be followed by a debriefing step in which the teacher ensures that the groups have come up with an adequate statement of the rule. Inductive CR tasks can also be based on a reading or listening text that students have already worked with (e.g. the textual spot-the-difference task described in Pica, Kang and Sauro, 2006).

Technology offers yet another possibility for learner-centred discovery of language patterns through the use of corpora and concordances. This type of CR task is commonly referred to as data-driven learning (DDL). Smart (2014) evaluated the effectiveness of DDL using paper-based concordances drawn from a corpus. The design of the DDL lesson was based on a four-step procedure outlined by Flowerdew (2009):

1. Illustration: students look at the data;
2. Interaction: they discuss and share observations and opinions;
3. Intervention: teacher provides hints or support, if necessary;
4. Induction: students make their own rule for a particular feature.

Smart found the concordance-based task to have had a beneficial effect on L2 learning of the passive in English.

As noted above, CR and DDL tasks are collaborative in nature, leading to interaction and co-construction. Another way of describing what happens when learners engage in these tasks and use their linguistic resources to carry out problem-solving and make sense of their emergent understanding is as *linguaging*, which Swain (2006) refers to as "the process of making and shaping knowledge and experience through language" (p. 98). Evidence in support of the benefits of linguaging are found in Swain, Lapkin, Knouzi, Suzuki and Brooks (2009). They examined university students' verbalizations with respect to the grammatical concept of voice in French (i.e. active, passive, and middle voice). In the study design, learners were given 36 separate explanatory statements about voice features and were prompted to verbalize in their L1 about what these statements meant. Pre- and post-tests revealed that those who were "high linguagers" in terms of quantity and quality of their verbalizations understood the concept of voice

more deeply than the “low languagers”. This finding suggests that CR tasks need to be carefully designed to ensure that learners are given opportunities to externalize their thinking as they grapple with difficult grammatical concepts.

Practice

Although CR tasks have great potential for enlivening form-oriented L2 teaching, the explicit knowledge that is developed does not immediately become available for use in communication. For example, in White and Ranta (2002), one class of francophone learners of English performed a deductive CR task that focused on the rules for appropriate use of the possessive determiners *his/her*.¹ Compared to a similar class that did not do the CR task, the Rule group learners were more accurate in their oral production of the target forms when describing a set of pictures. However, these learners also appeared to produce more self-repairs of the target form (e.g. “he see *the her* girl”) than was the case with the comparison group. This is perhaps not surprising, since they did not practise using the possessive determiners, but rather only talked *about* which form should go into a blank. It is only practice that can make explicit knowledge available for fluent use.

Practice is broadly defined by DeKeyser (1998) as “engaging in an activity with the goal of becoming better at it” (p. 50). In specific reference to grammar, Ellis (2006) argued that the objective of practice is to internalize metalinguistic knowledge through comprehension and production processing. Theoretically, given ample opportunities to practise and the provision of feedback, explicit knowledge can become automatized (DeKeyser, 2001; Lyster and Sato, 2013). Unfortunately, traditional grammar practice consisting of written exercises such as gap-fills and sentence transformation practice cannot serve this internalization process. Written grammar practice exercises are arguably useful for anchoring new knowledge that has been presented deductively (DeKeyser, 1998). But it appears that learners often approach these exercises as problems to be solved rather than as opportunities for meaningful use. This is demonstrated nicely in a study by Hosenfeld (1976) who asked American high school students in a French class to think aloud when completing gap-fill exercises. She found that learners used a range of task-completion strategies such as simplifying the task by always responding affirmatively or translating to arrive at the answer or avoiding thinking about the meaning if meaning was not required.

For practice activities to be effective, they need to be qualitatively and quantitatively different from traditional grammar exercises. Gatbonton and Segalowitz (1988) argued that what is needed are genuinely communicative activities that are inherently repetitive. An illustration of such a practice activity is the widely used “Find Someone Who” activity in which students try to find a classmate who has a certain characteristic listed on a worksheet. When students find, for example, “someone who was born at home”, they write that person’s name on their checklist of paper and move on to the next person to see whether he/she has one of the other characteristics on the worksheet. The goal of the task is to talk to as many students as possible within the time-limit in order to associate at least one name with each of the characteristics. In terms of language learning, the task involves both repetition and information-sharing. If the list of characteristics is properly constructed, it will allow for multiple repetitions of a particular structure. For example, a “Find Someone Who” checklist that asks students to identify a classmate who has, for example, met a famous person, climbed

a mountain, or seen a shark, will be practising the present perfect tense-aspect form (i.e. “have you ever met a famous person?”). This type of activity has the potential to promote transfer-appropriate processing of the target forms by means of spontaneous and contextualized practice. However, as yet there is little research that has specifically investigated the immediate and long-term effects of this type of production practice or addressed practical questions such as how much practice is optimal, how to sequence practice activities, etc.

Another neglected area related to practice is the use of listening as a grammar practice technique. This is the case despite the fact that the role of input-based approaches to grammar instruction has been discussed in the FFI literature since the early 1990s (see review in Ellis, 1999). Richards (2005) provides an informative discussion about the difference between teaching listening for comprehension and listening for acquisition. His ideas have not been tested directly, as far as we know, but of relevance are the findings from the many studies investigating the effects of Processing Instruction, which includes both written and aural structured input activities (for an overview of Processing Instruction, see VanPatten, 2004, and a recent meta-analysis by Shintani, 2014). For example, in Qin (2008), the Processing Instruction group listened to a story and had to answer questions that required processing of the passive in order to answer correctly. Note that this type of listening activity differs from listening-to-notice activities classified above as an input enhancement technique in that the learner is forced to pay attention to a targeted form and process its meaning in order to respond to the task requirements.

Reactive FFI

Corrective Feedback

Designing activities that are meaning-oriented yet create propitious opportunities for noticing and manipulating target forms as well as obligatory contexts for using them in meaningful ways is a challenging undertaking for L2 teachers. Outside of such activities, therefore, teachers can focus on language during interaction about substantive themes by means of different types of corrective feedback. As Lightbown argued:

Work on improving output is better done in the context of more interactive activities, in which the main focus is on communication, but in which the accuracy or sophistication can be improved via focus on form via feedback and learners' self-corrections.

Lightbown, 1998: 194

Reactive FFI delivered in this way thus parallels Long's (1991, 1996) notion of focus on form insofar as it includes the provision of corrective feedback in relatively unplanned and spontaneous ways. However, unlike focus on form, reactive FFI also includes feedback provided in preplanned ways and through more overt means than only recasting and negotiation for meaning.

Among various ways of classifying corrective feedback, one well-known taxonomy is Lyster and Ranta's (1997) identification of six types of corrective feedback, which was based on a detailed analysis of teacher-student interaction in French immersion classrooms. Ranta and Lyster (2007) later suggested that each of the six feedback types

could be classified as either a *reformulation* or a *prompt*. On the one hand, reformulations include recasts and explicit correction because both these moves supply learners with target reformulations of their non-target output. On the other hand, prompts are signals that push learners to self-repair without supplying the correct form, including elicitations, clarification requests, repetitions of learner error, metalinguistic clues or explanations, and paralinguistic signals.

Results of quasi-experimental research comparing the effects of different types of corrective feedback can be summarized as follows. First, oral corrective feedback is significantly more effective than no corrective feedback (e.g. Doughty and Varela, 1998; Saito and Lyster, 2012). Second, there is a tendency for classroom learners receiving explicit correction to demonstrate greater gains than learners receiving recasts (e.g. Ellis, Loewen and Erlam, 2006; Sheen, 2007). Third, there is a tendency for classroom learners receiving prompts to demonstrate more gains on some measures than learners receiving recasts. For example, in the case of young immersion students, recasts and prompts were equally effective in oral production measures, but prompts were more effective in written production measures (Lyster, 2004). Recasts and prompts were equally effective for young ESL learners with high pretest scores, but prompts were more effective for learners with low pretest scores (Ammar and Spada, 2006). Adult EFL students in China benefitted equally from recasts and prompts in improving accuracy of irregular past tense forms, but prompts were more effective than recasts in improving their accurate use of regular forms (Yang and Lyster, 2010).

However, it may not be necessary or even possible for researchers to identify the single most effective type of feedback (Ellis, 2012; Lyster, Saito and Sato, 2013). Instead, teachers may be well advised to orchestrate a range of feedback types. To do so, teachers need to make choices in accordance with a host of factors including linguistic targets, interactional contexts, students' age and proficiency, and curricular objectives (Lyster et al., 2013). Use of only one type of corrective feedback could never cover all these bases, because, as Ammar and Spada (2006) concluded, "one size does not fit all" (p. 566).

Integration of FFI in Content-Based Lessons

The effects of various FFI options have often been tested by researchers implementing a single type of FFI – such as input enhancement, consciousness-raising tasks, output practice, or corrective feedback – and comparing the results of the treatment group with those of a control group not receiving the specific FFI treatment. Although such comparisons hold theoretical value, a more promising FFI intervention from a practitioner's perspective is likely to incorporate a variety of FFI options. In this vein, we illustrate here an instructional sequence comprising noticing and awareness activities followed by opportunities for both guided and autonomous practice, as proposed by Lyster (2007, 2016) specifically for content-based classrooms (see Figure 3.2).

The noticing phase establishes a meaningful context related to content, usually by means of a text in which target features have been contrived to appear more salient (i.e. typographical enhancement such as bolding and underlining) or more frequent (i.e. input flood). The awareness phase then encourages the students to reflect on and manipulate the target forms in a way that helps them to develop or restructure their explicit knowledge representations, usually by means of rule-discovery tasks, metalinguistic exercises, and opportunities for pattern detection. The guided practice phase

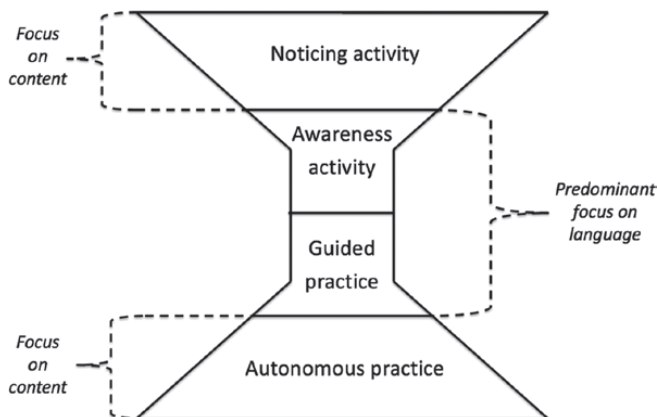


Figure 3.2. Instructional sequence integrating language and content in CBLT.
Source: Adapted from Lyster, 2016: 58.

further engages students’ metalinguistic awareness by pushing them to use the target features in a meaningful yet controlled context in order to develop automaticity and accuracy. The sequence then comes full circle at the autonomous practice phase by returning to the content area that served as the starting point. Similar to guided practice, autonomous practice requires the use of the target language features but in a disciplinary or thematic context with fewer constraints, in order to encourage more autonomous use of the target language.

To illustrate the implementation of this instructional sequence, an example is provided here from Lyster’s (2015) description of a classroom intervention with immersion students in Grade 5 (10–11 years old). FFI activities targeting grammatical gender in French were embedded in the children’s regular curriculum materials, which integrated language arts, history and science. The research team created a student workbook that contained modified versions of texts found in the regular curriculum materials, in which noticing activities drew students’ attention to noun endings as predictors of grammatical gender. For example, in the context of learning about the founding of Quebec City in 17th-century New France, endings of target nouns and their determiners had been highlighted in bold. Target words and related patterns were key to the content of the lessons. For example, *la fourrure* (“fur”) was a key noun phrase because of the pivotal role of the fur trade in New France, and so was the noun phrase *la nourriture* (“food”) because of the lack of food in the colony that led to a serious outbreak of scurvy. The ensuing awareness activities required students then to detect the patterns by classifying the target nouns according to their endings and indicating whether nouns with these endings were masculine or feminine. In the case of *la fourrure* and *la nourriture*, students were expected to identify them both as feminine nouns because of their common ending *-ure*.

Then for guided practice in attributing the right gender marker to target nouns, a set of riddles was used to review the challenges experienced by settlers in New France while eliciting target nouns from students. For example, the riddle (provided in French), “*I am what covers certain mammals and can be made into warm coats*”, was intended to elicit the noun phrase *la fourrure* but, to stay in the game, a student needed to say the right gender-specific determiner, which is no small feat for young

learners of French for whom grammatical gender markers, despite their frequency, are notoriously difficult.

Finally, in the autonomous practice phase, teachers returned to an emphasis on content objectives by asking students to reflect on some of the differences between life in the 17th century and life today, especially with respect to social values. For example, students were asked to compare the attitudes of people in New France with those of people today concerning the fashionability of fur. Even though the subject-matter goal was to have students question and compare different social realities, teachers maintained a secondary focus on language by ensuring correct use of gender markers at least with key topic words such as *la fourrure*.

Because the instructional sequence was designed to shift students' attention between language and content, it exemplifies a counterbalanced approach that gives language and content objectives complementary status (Lyster, 2007). As illustrated in Figure 3.2, the sequence begins with a primary focus on content during the noticing phase then zooms in on language during the awareness phase and guided practice phase. During the autonomous practice phase, the primary instructional focus is once again on the content that served as the starting point. The emphasis during the noticing and autonomous practice phases is thus on content, first on the hardships (famine, disease, conflict) experienced by the settlers in New France, and then later on comparisons of different social realities then and now. The emphasis is more on language during the awareness and guided practice phases, first with a focus on detecting rules for grammatical gender attribution in the history texts, followed by oral practice in using target nouns with correct determiners while reviewing the history content. Interwoven throughout the instructional sequence is a reactive approach to FFI that serves as on-going scaffolding, including corrective feedback and requests for elaboration that support students' use of the L2 while helping to move their L2 development forward.

FFI and Language Awareness

Although scholars in SLA and LA share an interest in FFI, there are important differences in their respective orientations. According to the website of the Association for Language Awareness, LA “can be defined as explicit knowledge about language, and conscious perception and sensitivity in language learning, language teaching, and language use”. Not surprisingly, LA work dealing with explicit knowledge and language learning draws heavily upon SLA for theoretical concepts, research methods and empirical evidence. A large proportion of this evidence is conceptualized within a cognitivist theoretical view. However, given an interest in language teaching and teacher education, scholars working within a LA perspective have highlighted characteristics of LA pedagogy, some of which come from SLA while others are general educational principles (Wright and Bolitho, 1993; Borg, 1994; Svalberg, 2007). These characteristics are succinctly summarized by Svalberg (2007) as “description (not prescription), exploration, languaging, engagement and reflection” (p. 292).

The first two principles are clearly related to the types of FFI that have been investigated by SLA research. The principle of using a descriptive rather than a prescriptive approach is a foundational value from linguistics that informs SLA research; it specifically comes to the fore in FFI research that deals with sociolinguistic variants (e.g. French and Beaulieu, 2016). Exploration and languaging are features of inductive CR tasks, especially data-driven learning tasks. Engagement and reflection

are terms that Svalberg (2007) uses to refer to the view expressed by Borg (1994) that LA instruction should not only develop learners' linguistic knowledge but also their language learning skills, thereby nurturing learners' autonomy, while engaging their emotions as well as their cognition. Svalberg (2009) further elaborates on these ideas by proposing a framework for engagement with language in terms of cognitive, affective and social dimensions.

Finally, Svalberg (2007) notes that one branch of the LA scholarly community argues that the exploratory element of language engagement should not be limited to the linguistic but rather also include a critical dimension in which the implicit power relationships and ideologies constructed in discourses are revealed (e.g. Fairclough, 1999). For example, Morgan (2004) describes a grammar lesson in a Canadian ESL class for immigrants where a focus on modal verbs was embedded within a broader discussion of the ramifications of a future political event (i.e. the 1995 referendum on Quebec sovereignty in Canada). This allowed issues of identity and citizenship to be negotiated and problematized. It should be emphasized that critical language awareness is just as important, if not more so, in the L1 classroom. From this brief description of the LA perspective, we conclude that the conferences and journal of the Association for Language Awareness provide a venue and an audience where SLA-oriented, pedagogical and critical approaches to FFI can flourish.

Concluding Comments

In this chapter, we have been selective in our choice of topics and references to the SLA literature in order to provide a coherent account of FFI. We have not dwelt on theoretical arguments from SLA as to whether syntax is teachable (e.g. VanPatten, 2011), nor on the findings from studies of teacher cognition relating to the practitioner's view of grammar teaching (e.g. Borg, 2003). Rather, we have chosen to focus on the pedagogically relevant, since, from our own personal experiences, this is especially needed by busy educators and graduate students who typically find the FFI literature to be vast and bewildering, full of contradictory findings and overlapping terminology. We have provided basic sketches of some pedagogical tools for teachers to try, and have portrayed these proactive and reactive FFI techniques as being complementary rather than in competition, targeting different aspects of the learning process. We have presented these FFI techniques "as a set of psycholinguistically motivated pedagogic options" (Ellis, 2001: 12), but conclude that optimal effectiveness is likely to result from combining these options into an integrated instructional sequence driven by meaningful and motivating content.

Related Topics

Second language teaching; focus on form; content-based language teaching; task-based language teaching

Note

- 1 White and Ranta (2002) do not actually call their FFI treatment a CR task, but it does meet the requirements of a deductive CR task. The learners were given a "rule of thumb" for deciding between his and her and then collaboratively completed a cloze passage, stating in each case why they thought it should be one or the other.

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