The background of the entire page is a repeating pattern of small, teal-colored stars or snowflakes on a light cream or off-white background. The pattern is dense and covers the entire surface.

FORM-FOCUSED INSTRUCTION AND SECOND LANGUAGE LEARNING

Rod Ellis, Editor

The Best of *Language Learning* Series

Series editor: Alister H. Cumming

This new series presents the findings of recent work in applied linguistics, psycholinguistics, cognitive sciences, ethnography, ethnomethodology, sociolinguistics, sociology, semiotics, educational inquiry, and cultural or historical studies to address fundamental issues in language learning, such as bilingualism, language acquisition, second and foreign language education, literacy, culture, cognition, pragmatics, and intergroup relations.

In this series:

Bilingual Performance in Reading and Writing

edited by Alister H. Cumming

Lexical Issues in Language Learning

edited by Birgit Harley

Phonological Issues in Language Learning

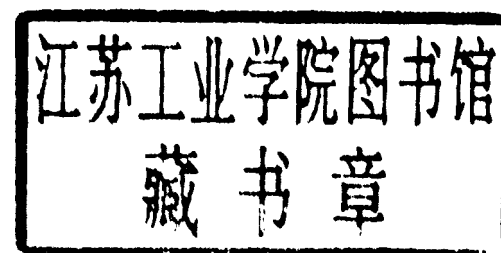
edited by Jonathan Leather

Form-Focused Instruction and Second Language Learning

edited by Rod Ellis

FORM-FOCUSED INSTRUCTION AND SECOND LANGUAGE LEARNING

Rod Ellis, Editor



©2001 Language Learning Research Club, University of Michigan

Blackwell Publishers
350 Main Street
Malden, MA 02148 USA

Blackwell Publishers, Ltd.
108 Cowley Road
Oxford OX4 1JF
United Kingdom

All rights reserved. Except for the quotation of short passages for the purpose of criticism and review, no part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior permission of the publisher.

1218586
0631-16202-X

A CIP catalog record for this book is available
from the Library of Congress

Contents

Part 1 Introduction

Rod Ellis

Investigating Form-Focused Instruction 1-46

Part 2 Experimental Studies

Elaine M. Day and Stan M. Shapson

Integrating Formal and Functional Approaches
to Language Teaching in French Immersion: An
Experimental Study 47-80

Robert M. DeKeyser and Karl J. Sokalski

The Differential Role of Comprehension and
Production Practice 81-112

Ronald P. Leow

Attention, Awareness and Foreign Language
Behavior 113-155

John M. Norris and Lourdes Ortega

Does Type of Instruction Make a Difference?
Substantive Findings From a Meta-analytic
Review 157-213

Part 3 Interpretative Classroom Studies

Kathleen Bardovi-Harlig

Another Piece of the Puzzle: The Emergence
of the Present Perfect 215-264

Roy Lyster

Negotiation of Form, Recasts, and Explicit Correction
in Relation to Error Types and Learner Repair
in Immersion Classrooms 265-301

| | |
|--|---------|
| <i>Jessica Williams</i> | |
| Learner-Generated Attention to Form | 303–346 |
| <i>Paul Seedhouse</i> | |
| The Case of the Missing “No”: The Relationship Between Pedagogy and Interaction | 347–385 |
| Index | 387–391 |

Introduction: Investigating Form-Focused Instruction

Rod Ellis
University of Auckland, New Zealand

The Introduction has three main aims. First, it provides a historical sketch of form-focused instruction research, documenting the origins of this branch of second language acquisition, the research questions that have been addressed, and current trends. Second, it seeks to define and conceptualize what is meant by “form-focused instruction” by distinguishing it from “meaning-focused instruction” and by describing three types of form-focused instruction in terms of whether the primary focus is on form or meaning and whether the instructional attention to target forms is intensive or extensive. Various instructional options relating to each type are also described. Third, the Introduction offers a discussion of the main research methods that have been used to investigate form-focused instruction in terms of a broad distinction between confirmatory and interpretative research. Methods of measuring “acquisition” in form-focused instruction research are also considered.

In this Introduction, the term “form-focused instruction” (FFI) is used to refer to any planned or incidental instructional activity that is intended to induce language learners to pay

Rod Ellis, Department of Applied Language Studies and Linguistics.

I am grateful to one anonymous reviewer, Alister Cumming, and Jessica Williams for helpful comments on a draft version of this Introduction.

Correspondence concerning this article may be sent to Rod Ellis, University of Auckland, Private Bag 92019, Auckland, New Zealand. Internet: r.ellis@auckland.ac.nz

attention to linguistic form. It serves, therefore, as a cover term for a variety of other terms that figure in the current literature—"analytic teaching" (Stern, 1990), "focus-on-form," and "focus-on-forms" (Long, 1991), corrective feedback/error correction, and "negotiation of form" (Lyster & Ranta, 1997). Thus, FFI includes both traditional approaches to teaching forms based on structural syllabi and more communicative approaches, where attention to form arises out of activities that are primarily meaning-focused.¹ The term "form" is intended to include phonological, lexical, grammatical, and pragmalinguistic aspects of language. Different types of FFI are considered later in this Introduction.

FFI is an area of enquiry of interest to both researchers and language teachers. Researchers have investigated FFI in order to develop and test theories of second language (L2) acquisition. For example, a number of recent studies (e.g., Allen, 2000; Cadierno, 1995; DeKeyser & Sokalski, 1996, and this volume; Salaberry, 1997; VanPatten & Cadierno, 1993) have sought to test the rival theoretical claims of skill-building and input-processing models² of L2 acquisition by examining the relative effectiveness of production-based and input-based grammar instruction. Other studies have focused on issues that are widely discussed in handbooks for language teachers, such as error correction (see Seedhouse, 1997a, and Truscott, 1996, for recent reviews of this research). Here the goal has been to try to identify what constitutes effective pedagogic practice. FFI constitutes an area of inquiry, then, where the concerns of researchers and teachers can be brought together. It is perhaps for this reason that this area has attracted considerable attention over the last 30 years.

There have been a number of comprehensive surveys of FFI research (e.g., Larsen-Freeman & Long, 1991; R. Ellis, 1994, 1998; N. Ellis, 1995; Spada, 1997; Norris & Ortega, 2000 and this volume). This Introduction will not seek to add to these surveys. Rather it will provide a brief historical account of FFI and then address two key aspects of current research—the constructs on which the research has been based and the methods of research that have been employed.

Form-Focused Instruction: A Historical Sketch of the Research

Early FFI Research

Early research into form-focused instruction (FFI) was "method" oriented; that is, it consisted of global comparisons of language teaching methods that differed in their conceptualizations of how to teach language. At the time these studies took place (in the 1960s and 1970s), language pedagogy assumed that the teaching of language necessarily and essentially involved focusing on form (primarily grammatical form), and the principal debate concerned how form should best be taught. Thus, methods were distinguished in terms of whether form was to be taught explicitly (as in the grammar-translation method) or implicitly (as in the audiolingual method). Large-scale research projects were undertaken to resolve what Diller (1978) called the "language teaching controversy." However, these studies (e.g., Scherer & Wertheimer, 1964; Smith, 1970) were largely inconclusive, failing to demonstrate the superiority of either method (Allwright, 1988).

At around the same time as the global method studies, second language acquisition (SLA) researchers, drawing on the findings and methods of first language acquisition research, began to investigate how learners acquired an L2 in naturalistic settings (i.e., when exposed to the use of the L2 in nonpedagogic contexts). This research was in part pedagogically motivated. That is, researchers such as Hatch (1978) sought to examine how learners acquired language naturally, so that copies of their successful experiences could be incorporated into the classroom. These studies indicated that learners tended to follow a natural order of acquisition and also manifested fairly well-defined sequences in the acquisition of specific target structures. Furthermore, the order and sequences appeared to a large extent universal, relatively impervious to such factors as the learner's L1 or age³ (Larsen-Freeman & Long, 1991). These findings led to a questioning of whether FFI was necessary for acquisition. The research

that ensued addressed the general question “Does form-focused instruction work?” in two main ways. First, a number of studies (reviewed by Long, 1983) compared the ultimate level of achievement and rate of learning of groups of learners who had received instruction (which was assumed to consist of FFI) with groups who had not. Second, comparative and experimental studies were carried out to investigate whether learners who had received FFI manifested the same order and sequence of acquisition as naturalistic learners (e.g., Ellis, 1984a; Pica, 1983; Pienemann, 1984; Turner, 1979). The findings of these studies appeared to be contradictory. Thus, while the majority of the studies indicated that instructed learners generally learned more rapidly and achieved higher levels of proficiency than noninstructed learners (suggesting that FFI assisted acquisition), other studies indicated that instructed learners followed the same order and sequence of acquisition as noninstructed learners (suggesting that the process of acquisition was not influenced by instruction). This apparent paradox has had a major impact on theoretical thinking about the relationship between FFI and acquisition, leading to claims, clearly evident in current research, that FFI only works by promoting the processes involved in natural language acquisition, not by changing them.

Classroom Process Research

The demise of the comparative method studies also resulted in another strand of research—classroom process research. This was directed at obtaining accurate and detailed information about how instruction was accomplished through the observation and description of teaching–learning events. In the case of FFI, researchers focused initially on error treatment, developing taxonomies of the various treatment options (e.g., Allwright, 1975; Long, 1977; Chaudron, 1977). Later, researchers (e.g., Ellis, 1994b; VanLier, 1988) widened the scope of their enquiry by addressing more broadly the kinds of interactions that occurred in language classrooms. These studies resulted in general

frameworks of language use and ethnographic accounts of particular aspects of classroom language such as turn-taking and repair. Toward the end of the 1980s, process-product studies began to appear. These attempted to relate features of classroom language use to learning outcomes. For example, using a classroom interaction scheme called the Communicative Orientation to Language Teaching (COLT), Allen, Swain, Harley, and Cummins (1990) examined the relationship between various experiential and analytic classroom activities⁴ and learning outcomes, measured by a battery of tests based on a model of communicative competence. Correlational analyses revealed that both meaning-focused and form-focused aspects of classroom interaction were positively related to learning, leading to the conclusion that “the analytic and the experiential focus may be complementary” (p. 62).

Does Form-Focused Instruction Work?

The late 1980s and early 1990s saw a plethora of experimental studies that all addressed the same question: “Does form-focused instruction work?” The studies investigated whether learners learned the specific forms they were taught. “Learned” was typically operationalized as statistically significant gains in the accurate production of the targeted structures. Like the earlier research, this research was motivated by both theoretical and pedagogic considerations. On a theoretical level, the studies sought to test the claims advanced by Krashen (1981) and later Schwartz (1993) that grammar can only be acquired unconsciously from comprehensible input and that teaching grammar or correcting learner errors has no effect on the learner’s “acquired” system (interlanguage). On the pedagogic level, the studies explored whether FFI could help learners to acquire those grammatical structures they had failed to acquire even after years of exposure to comprehensible input or those structures that were known to be difficult to acquire from studies of naturalistic learners. Harley (1989), for example, investigated French imparfait and preterit. Day and Shapson (1991 and this volume)

examined French conditional forms in hypothetical situations and polite requests. The choice of these target features was motivated by research showing that immersion learners often fail to acquire these forms, even after years of content instruction. The studies produced mixed results. Day and Shapson, for example, found that gains in accuracy were evident only in a cloze test and written interview, not in an oral interview. Studies by White, Spada, Lightbown, and Ranta (1991) and White (1991) indicated that whereas instruction resulted in clear gains in WH questions, which were sustained over time, it resulted only in temporary, impermanent gains in the case of adverbial positioning. In general, however, these experimental studies did show that grammatical form was amenable to instruction, especially if the learners were developmentally ready to acquire the targeted structure, and also that these effects were often durable.

Effects of Instruction on the Order and Sequence of Acquisition

Running parallel to research that examined whether FFI worked were studies that addressed the related research question, "What effect does form-focused instruction have on the order and sequence of acquisition?" These studies were both comparative and experimental in nature. Comparative studies such as those of Pavesi (1986) and Ellis (1989) compared groups of noninstructed and instructed learners, examining the sequence of acquisition of English relative clauses and German word-order rules respectively. They provided additional support for the claim that instructed learners followed the same order and sequences of acquisition as naturalistic learners but that they proceeded further and more rapidly. Experimental studies also indicated that instruction is powerless to change the order/sequence of acquisition. However, studies by Pienemann and associates (summarized by Pienemann, 1989) indicated that instruction directed at structures that were next in line to be acquired according to a well-defined developmental sequence was effective in moving learners along the sequence. In contrast, instruction directed at structures

that were too developmentally advanced for the learners proved ineffective. On the basis of these findings, Pienemann (1985) advanced the teachability hypothesis, according to which "instruction can only promote language acquisition if the interlanguage is close to the point when the structure to be taught is acquired in a natural setting" (p. 37). Another group of experimental studies, however, produced very different results. These "projection studies" drew on linguistic accounts of implicational universals. They tested the hypothesis that teaching learners a marked structure in a hierarchy would enable them to acquire not only this structure but also the implicated less marked structures, but that the converse was not true (i.e., teaching a less marked structure would not enable learners to acquire the more marked structures). Gass (1982) and Eckman, Bell, and Nelson (1988), drawing on the Accessibility Hierarchy for relative clauses, conducted studies that supported this hypothesis. On the face of it, these studies refute the claim that FFI does not enable learners to "beat" a natural sequence, because learners receiving instruction in a marked structure appear able to acquire it concurrently with unmarked structures that are acquired first in natural settings. However, much depends on what is meant by "acquired," a point that will be taken up later. Also, a later study by Hamilton (1994) did not support the projection hypothesis (i.e., learners were able to generalize when they received instruction in an unmarked relative clause structure).

Theory-Driven FFI Research

The early 1990s were characterized by developments in L2 acquisition theory and by a concomitant change in the questions FFI researchers were interested in. SLA began to draw extensively on theories of information processing and skill learning drawn from cognitive psychology. Schmidt (1990, 1994, 1995a) advanced what has become known as the "noticing hypothesis." This claims that for acquisition to take place, learners must consciously notice forms (and the meanings these forms realize) in the input.

Noticing, however, is not seen as guaranteeing acquisition. It is only “the necessary and sufficient condition for the conversion of input to intake for learning” (Schmidt, 1994, p. 17). That is, noticing enables learners to process forms in short-term memory but does not guarantee they will be incorporated into their developing interlanguage. The noticing hypothesis contradicts Krashen’s (1981) claim that the process of acquisition is unconscious. It is compatible with the claim that FFI can aid acquisition by drawing learners’ attention to forms in the input that otherwise they might not notice and thus fail to intake. However, Schmidt’s hypothesis, while widely accepted by SLA researchers, remains controversial (see Tomlin & Villa, 1994, and Truscott, 1998, for a different view of the role of attention in language acquisition).

VanPatten (1990, 1996) has also drawn on information processing theory to suggest that learners, especially beginner learners, experience difficulty in concurrently attending to meaning and to form and thus often prioritize one at the expense of the other. He argues that learners will only be able to attend to form when the input is easy to understand and that when learners are primarily concerned with processing meaning, they will rely on “default strategies” that prevent them from attending to forms in the target language that do not conform to these strategies.⁵ Other SLA researchers (e.g., DeKeyser, 1998; Johnson, 1996) have drawn on skill building theory (Anderson, 1993) to suggest that FFI can enable learners to proceduralize declarative knowledge through practice, especially if this is accompanied by negative feedback on learners’ attempts to produce a target structure under “real operating conditions” (i.e., when trying to communicate). The importance of negative evidence for L2 acquisition has also been emphasized by some researchers who base their research on a theory of Universal Grammar (e.g., White, 1989).

This theorizing about the role of consciousness, attention, and negative evidence in the process of L2 acquisition has led to several new questions in FFI research in the 1990s: “Do some types of form-focused instruction work better than others?”; “In what ways can input (positive evidence) be enhanced to promote

noticing?”; and “What kinds of feedback (negative evidence) promote acquisition?” There has been a plethora of experimental studies, both classroom-based and laboratory, investigating the effects of different instructional approaches on learning. VanPatten, in a series of studies (VanPatten & Cadierno, 1993; VanPatten & Oikennon, 1996; VanPatten & Sanz, 1995), compared the relative effects of input processing and production-based instruction on comprehension and production, finding that the former resulted in larger gains in comprehension and equivalent gains in production. However, this finding has subsequently been challenged by other studies (including DeKeyser & Sokalski, 1996 and this volume; Allen, 2000). Other experimental studies have examined the difference between explicit and implicit instructional approaches (e.g., DeKeyser 1994, 1995; de Graaff, 1997; Robinson, 1996), generally finding in favor of explicit learning (see the conclusion reached by Norris and Ortega [2000 and this volume] in a meta-analysis of FFI experimental studies). Yet other studies (e.g., Fotos & Ellis, 1991; Fotos, 1994) have explored which type of explicit instruction—traditional, teacher-centered, or consciousness-raising (CR) tasks—works best, finding no difference. Other studies have examined the effects of “enhanced input” (Sharwood Smith, 1993) on “noticing” and on acquisition. Alanen (1995) and Jourdenais, Ota, Stauffer, Boyson, and Doughty (1995) provide evidence to suggest that highlighting forms in the input increases the likelihood of their being noticed and subsequently used. However, Trahey and White (1993) found that positive evidence in the form of an “input flood” failed to enable learners to discover the ungrammaticality of placing an adverbial between the verb and the direct object in English. A number of studies have explored the effects of negative feedback on acquisition. Tomosello and Herron (1988, 1989) found that inducing learners to make errors and then correcting them worked better than traditional grammar instruction involving production practice. Carroll, Swain, and Roberge (1992) and Carroll and Swain (1993) examined the difference between explicit and implicit feedback, finding the former more effective. More recently, however, a

particular type of implicit feedback, “recasts” (i.e., reformulations of deviant learner utterances), has been examined (Doughty & Varela, 1998; Mackey & Philp, 1998; Long, Inagaki, & Ortega, 1998), with results suggesting that these can have a positive effect on acquisition. Still other recent experimental studies (e.g., Robinson, 1996; Rosa & O'Neill, 1999) have attempted to explore the effect of different instructional treatments on learners' level of awareness of form in the input as they perform some task and to relate these levels to acquisitional gains. This research makes use of learner self-reports, concurrent or retrospective, in the attempt to examine what “noticing” has taken place.

There is another strand of theorizing that has had a major impact on current form-focused research. Long (1988, 1991) draws on research showing that instruction appears to facilitate learning but only if it supports the natural processes of acquisition. He has argued that attention to form will work most effectively for acquisition if it occurs in the context of meaning-focused communication rather than in instruction that is specifically directed at linguistic forms. According to Long's revised Interaction Hypothesis (Long, 1996), attention to form in meaning-focused communication occurs when learners have the opportunity to negotiate for meaning following a breakdown in understanding. Such negotiation serves to highlight linguistic forms that are problematic to them. It helps them to “notice the gap” (Schmidt & Frota, 1986) between the input and their own interlanguage and gives them opportunities for “pushed output” (i.e., to improve linguistic accuracy by reformulating utterances that were initially misunderstood). A number of experimental-type studies have examined the effects of meaning negotiation on acquisition (e.g., Nobuyoshi & Ellis, 1993; Mackey, 1999) indicating that opportunities to participate in meaning negotiation centered (without the learners' knowledge) on specific grammatical forms results in acquisitional gains.

Descriptive Studies of FFI and Teacher Cognitions About FFI

The 1990s, then, have seen a rapid growth in experimental-type research directed at testing a variety of hypotheses drawn from SLA theory. This research has been very much theory driven and, as such, has to some extent sacrificed pedagogic relevance. Some researchers have (quite legitimately) been more concerned with addressing theoretical claims in carefully controlled laboratory studies than in investigating what constitutes effective instructional practices in real classrooms. As a result, something of a gap has grown between theory-driven and pedagogically motivated research. In the view of Borg (1999a), the results of the theory-driven research have been “largely inconclusive” (p. 20), with no consensus having been reached on how best to teach grammar. Borg also argues that an essential element in FFI—the teacher—has been ignored entirely. This is a justifiable criticism insofar as researchers wish to claim pedagogic relevancy. However, a number of recent studies have focused more closely on the teacher and on teaching behaviors. Drawing on teacher-cognition research, Borg's own research (Borg, 1998, 1999b) has used qualitative research methods (e.g., observation and interviews) to gain an understanding of teachers' beliefs about grammar teaching and of their actual practices. There have also been a number of detailed descriptive studies (in the tradition of process research mentioned above) of how teachers handle form in actual classrooms. Lyster and Ranta (1997) examined teachers' corrective feedback in immersion classrooms (where the primary focus is on content and meaning rather than on form). Lyster (1998a, 1998b) subsequently carried out fine-grained analyses of teachers' corrective feedback in relation to error types and uptake (i.e., the students' response to feedback). Ellis, Basturkmen and Loewen (in press) have carried out a similar descriptive study looking at two teachers' handling of form in communicative ESL lessons.

Some Retrospective Comments

Looking back over some 30 years of research into FFI, what conclusions can be reached? One pleasing observation is that the range of languages under study has broadened considerably. Whereas early research was directed at the effects of FFI on learning English and, to a lesser extent, German, the later research has examined a number of different languages, including Chinese, French, Italian, Japanese, and Spanish. The studies included in this volume address English, French, and Spanish. Regarding the actual research findings, however, there are few certainties. Researchers have employed very different methods and, as Norris and Ortega (2000) point out, there have been few replications. A large number of variables have an impact on whether FFI is effective—the learners' developmental stage, the structure being taught, the instructional context, and the instructional materials. It is, therefore, not entirely surprising that different findings emerge from different studies. Two findings are pervasive, however: (1) FFI, especially of the more explicit kind, is effective in promoting language learning, and (2) FFI does not alter the natural processes of acquisition.⁵ The key question is how these two findings can best be reconciled. The next section will examine the conceptual framework that informs current FFI research.

Conceptualizing Form-Focused Instruction

The last 30 years of FFI research have seen progressive changes in the way in which the phenomenon has been investigated. Initially, as already noted, FFI was conceptualized in relation to method, a little later as a type of exposure distinct from natural exposure, a little later still as a set of classroom processes, and, increasingly, as a set of psycholinguistically motivated pedagogic options. This section will explore two of these conceptualizations—pedagogic options and classroom processes. The first is “external” in the sense that the options have been derived from

theory, in particular theories of L2 acquisition, and this has informed the construction of form-based syllabi. The latter is “internal” in the sense that the constructs have been derived from observing and describing classroom discourse; it affords an account of FFI as teaching.

Form-Focused Versus Meaning-Focused Instruction

FFI contrasts with meaning-focused instruction (MFI). The former describes instruction where there is some attempt to draw learners' attention to linguistic form—Stern's (1990) “analytic strategy.” The latter refers to instruction that requires learners to attend only to the content of what they want to communicate—Stern's “experiential strategy” (see note 4). Widdowson (1998) has criticized this distinction, arguing that so-called form-focused instruction has always required learners to attend to meaning as well as form (e.g., the semantic meanings realized by different verb forms), whereas meaning-focused activities still require learners to process forms in order to decode and encode messages. For Widdowson, the key difference lies in the kind of meaning learners must attend to—whether it is semantic meaning, as in the case of language exercises, or pragmatic meaning, as in the case of communicative tasks. Widdowson's point is well taken, but arguably, it is nothing new. SLA researchers have always used the term “form” to refer not just to form (e.g., *-ed* in the regular past tense in English) but also to the semantic meaning(s) a form realizes in use (e.g., completed action in the past). Ellis (2000) has argued that the essential difference between form-focused and meaning-focused instruction lies in how language is viewed (as an object as opposed to a tool) and the role the learner is invited to play (student as opposed to user). In this respect, it should be noted that attention to lexical forms and the meanings they realize, where words are treated as objects to be learned, constitutes form-focused instruction.⁷ As noted at the beginning of this Introduction, “form” involves more than grammar.

Of course, many interactions that occur inside the classroom will be neither entirely form-focused nor meaning-focused but a combination of both, although achieving a dual focus is not easy (Seedhouse, 1997b). In effect, then, it is possible to distinguish types of FFI according to whether attention to form is primary or secondary, as when it is integrated into MFI.

Three Types of Form-Focused Instruction

There have been a number of recent attempts to develop taxonomies of pedagogic options in FFI (e.g., Ellis, 1997; Doughty & Williams, 1998b). These have centered on a binary distinction between what Long (1988, 1991), somewhat confusingly, calls *focus-on-form* and *focus-on-forms* and what Ellis (1997), perhaps no more helpfully, labels *focused-communication* and *feature-focused* instruction. Long's terms have become widely used (see, for example, Doughty & Williams, 1998a) and so will be the ones used here. It should be noted that FFI can be distinguished by means of other binary distinctions of potential importance to L2 acquisition (e.g., proactive versus incidental FFI and intensive versus extensive FFI). However, given the importance attached to the focus-on-form/forms distinction, this will inform the discussion that follows. I will argue below, however, that it may be more helpful to conceptualize FFI as involving three rather than two broad types.

Focus-on-forms is evident in the traditional approach to grammar teaching, based on a synthetic syllabus. The underlying assumption is that language learning is a process of accumulating distinct entities. In such an approach, learners are required to treat language primarily as an "object" to be studied and practiced bit by bit and to function as students rather than as users of the language. In contrast, focus-on-form overtly draws students' attention to linguistic elements as they arise incidentally in lessons whose overriding focus is on meaning or communication (Long, 1991, pp. 45–46). Such an approach, according to Long and Robinson (1998), is to be distinguished not only from focus-on-forms but

also from focus-on-meaning (as in Krashen and Terrell's [1983] Natural Approach), where there is no attempt to attend to linguistic form at all.

In fact, the focus-on-form construct has been stretched to cover a type of FFI that it was initially intended to exclude. Long's definition above identifies two essential characteristics of focus-on-form: (1) Attention to form occurs in lessons where the overriding focus is meaning or communication, and (2) attention to form arises incidentally in response to communicative need. Researchers such as Doughty and Varela (1998), Long et al. (1998), and Williams and Evans (1998) have latched onto the first of these characteristics to design experimental studies in which a pre-selected form has been taught using various communicative devices (e.g., providing feedback by means of recasts). They have ignored the second defining characteristic of focus-on-form, namely, that it should be incidental. Indeed, Long himself now appears to overlook this. Long and Robinson (1998) give three examples of focus-on-form. The first involves "seeding" a text with ergative verbs (e.g., *increased*, *deteriorated*). The second involves the teacher taking time out from a communicative activity to briefly draw attention to a linguistic problem the students are experiencing. The third consists of using the recasts in the context of task-based conversation, as has been found to occur in conversations children experience during first language acquisition. While the second and third of these satisfy Long's earlier definition of focus-on-form as incidental, the first does not, because "seeding" a text necessarily requires preselecting a specific form for treatment. This reconceptualization of focus-on-form is clearly evident in the definition provided by Doughty and Williams (1998c). This mentions three definitional features: (1) the need for learner engagement with meaning to precede attention to the code; (2) the importance of analyzing learners' linguistic needs to identify the forms that require treatment; and (3) the need for the treatment to be brief and unobtrusive. While (1) and (3) are compatible with Long's initial definition, (2) is not, for again, it assumes a planned rather than incidental approach to form and, thereby, constitutes

a synthetic approach to teaching, albeit a remedial one.⁸ The motivation for this shift in the way in which focus-on-form is conceptualized is probably the desire of researchers to conduct experimental studies. Such studies are not possible unless the incidental aspect of focus-on-form is abandoned, for they require the selection of a specific linguistic feature for treatment.

It might be argued, of course, that this shift in definition is unimportant—on the grounds, perhaps, that what is essential in focus-on-form instruction is that attention to form arises naturally out of communicative activity and that whether such attention is planned or incidental is irrelevant. However, planned and incidental focus-on-form instruction are likely to differ in one major respect. In the case of planned focus-on-form, the instruction will be *intensive*, in the sense that learners will have the opportunity to attend to a single, preselected form many times. In the case of incidental focus-on-form, the instruction will be *extensive*, because a range of linguistic forms (grammatical, lexical, phonological, pragmatic) are likely to arise as candidates for attention (see studies by Williams [1999], Oliver [2000]; Ellis, Basturkmen, & Loewen [in press]. This difference is important both theoretically and pedagogically, because it raises the question as to whether language learning benefits most from focusing on a few problematic linguistic forms intensively or from a scatter-gun approach, where multitudinous problematic forms are treated randomly and cursorily and where the treatment may or may not be repeated.

Perhaps, then, FFI needs to be conceptualized in terms of three rather than two types, according to (a) where the primary focus of attention is to be placed and (b) how attention to form is distributed in the instruction. Thus, as shown in Table 1, focus-on-forms (Type 1) is characterized by a primary focus on form and intensive treatment of preselected forms. Planned focus-on-form (Type 2) differs from focus-on-forms with respect to where the primary focus of attention lies (on meaning rather than form), but like Type 1 involves intensive attention to preselected forms. Incidental focus-on-form (Type 3) also involves primary attention to meaning but differs from both focus-on-forms and planned

focus-on-form in distributing attention to a wide range of forms that have not been preselected. It should be noted that whereas Types 1 and 2 can be investigated experimentally, Type 3 can only be examined by means of interpretative studies.

There is a problem of perspective in all this. The typology of types of instruction is based on the participants' orientation to the instruction they are experiencing (i.e., whether they give precedence to form or meaning). In part, this may be evident in the discourse they construct, but ideally it requires entering the minds of the participants, as it were, by collecting retrospective self-report data. A general weakness of FFI research, especially experimental research, is that such data have rarely been collected.

Type 1: Focus-on-Forms

Focus-on-forms implies that the teacher and students are aware that the primary purpose of the activity is to learn a preselected form and that learners are required to focus their attention on some specific form intensively in order to learn it. There are various options for achieving this. The options considered below have been selected because they are of psycholinguistic interest and because they have figured widely in studies of instructed L2 acquisition. There are, of course, a number of other options widely recognized in language pedagogy (e.g., different types of controlled practice).

Explicit vs. implicit focus-on-forms. Explicit focus-on-forms is instruction that involves "some sort of rule being thought about

Table 1

Types of Form-Focused Instruction

| Type of FFI | Primary Focus | Distribution |
|-----------------------------|---------------|--------------|
| 1. Focus-on-forms | Form | Intensive |
| 2. Planned focus-on-form | Meaning | Intensive |
| 3. Incidental focus-on-form | Meaning | Extensive |

during the learning process" (DeKeyser, 1995). The rule can be addressed deductively or inductively. A deductive presentation occurs when the rule is presented to the learners. An inductive treatment involves learners attempting to arrive at a rule themselves by analyzing data containing exemplars of the feature in question. Another way of referring to these two types of explicit instruction is as "didactic" and "discovery." Robinson (1996) operationalized this distinction in treatments that asked learners to (1) read through written accounts of rules and (2) identify the rules illustrated by a set of sentences.

According to DeKeyser (1995), implicit learning involves learners memorizing instances or inferring rules without awareness, or both. Thus implicit learning contrasts with explicit learning with regard to the absence of awareness of what is being learned. In both cases, learners may construct rules to represent the form they are studying, but whereas explicit instruction is directed at helping learners make the rules explicit, implicit instruction is geared to helping learners acquire implicit rules. Implicit instruction is typically operationalized by researchers in terms of instructions for learners to memorize a set of sentences that model a specific feature (DeKeyser, 1995; Robinson, 1996). The idea here is that learners' attention will be focused on form, as this is essential for memorization, but that they will not become aware of what specific feature has been targeted. It should be noted that, in this respect, the experimental treatments differ somewhat from pedagogic practices that are often labeled "implicit" (Stern, 1983). These latter involve drilling students in the production of the target form and correcting errors. Such instruction is likely to result in learners becoming aware of the target structure and, perhaps, in their attempting to construct a conscious rule.

Structured input vs. production practice. The second distinction draws directly on the computational model of L2 acquisition that informs mainstream SLA. This model posits three types of processes: (1) intake (i.e., noticing forms in the input and storing them in short-term memory), (2) acquisition (i.e., the incorporation

of new forms in long-term memory and the restructuring of the interlanguage system), and (3) language production (i.e., the use of stored forms in speech or writing). Instruction can be directed at (1) or (3); instruction directed at (2) is not viable, because the complex processes of accommodation and restructuring that are involved in interlanguage development are not amenable to environmental control. Traditional focus-on-forms instruction is directed at (3). That is, opportunities are created for learners to practice producing the target structure. However, an alternative instructional approach involves presenting learners with structured input (i.e., input specially designed to provide plentiful examples of the target structure) and asking them to perform some task designed to make them notice the form in question and to process its meaning. In structured input, "the learner is pushed to attend to particular feature of language while listening or reading" (VanPatten, 1996, p. 6).

Structured input should be viewed as a focus-on-forms option, because it is designed to enable learners to give primary attention to form rather than meaning⁹ and because it is designed to focus learners' attention repeatedly on a specific, preselected linguistic feature. The structured-input option, in fact, is simply another way of teaching a structural syllabus. Thus, structured input differs from an input flood, which also exposes learners to input rich in some specific linguistic feature but which requires them to process this input primarily for meaning. An input flood, therefore, constitutes an example of incidental instruction of Type 2 FFI, planned focus-on-form, and is discussed below.

Traditional production practice involves both mechanical and contextualized activities. VanPatten and Cadierno (1993), for example, operationalized this instructional option by means of oral and written transformation and substitution drills and more open-ended communicative practice. Structured input entails the provision of oral or written data containing exemplars of the target feature together with some task requiring learners to interpret (but not produce) the input. VanPatten and Cadierno operationalized this through tasks that required learners to select drawings

that best represented what they heard or read or to respond to sentences by checking "agree" or "disagree."

Functional language practice. This involves the development of instructional materials that provide learners with the opportunity to practice producing the target structure in some kind of situational context. Such kinds of activities were previously referred to as "situational/contextual language exercises" but are now more commonly referred to as "functional." Good examples of such materials can be found in the work of Day and Shapson (1991 and this volume), Harley (1989), Nunan (1998), and Widdowson (1986). It is important to note that such materials lie within the realm of focus-on-forms instruction, because despite the apparent concern for meaning, the primary focus remains on form rather than meaning, and learners are aware that the purpose is to master accurate use through repeated use of the target feature.

Type 2: Planned Focus-on-Form

Studies of planned focus-on-form have also drawn extensively on the computational model of L2 acquisition. The options to be considered here relate to (1) input and (2) production.

Enriched input. Instruction involving a planned focus-on-form frequently makes use of enriched input. Like structured input, enriched input consists of input that has been specially contrived or modified to present learners with plentiful exemplars of the target structure. In the case of enriched input, however, learners are invited to focus primarily on meaning. Thus the tasks that accompany the enriched input are all communicative in nature, requiring learners to respond to the content of the input. In effect, then, enriched input is designed to cater to incidental rather than intentional language acquisition (see Schmidt, 1994, for a discussion of this key distinction). The aim of enriched input is to induce noticing of the target form in the context of meaning-focused activity.

Various options exist for enriching input. *Input flood* consists of input that has been enriched by including plentiful exemplars

of the target feature without any device to draw attention to the feature. For example, Trahey and White (1993) and Trahey (1996) developed materials consisting of stories, games, and exercises with the aim of simply exposing learners to adverbs. The rationale for such an option is that acquisition occurs as a result of frequent exposure to a target feature (see N. Ellis, 1996). *Input enhancement* (Sharwood Smith, 1993) involves some attempt to highlight the target feature, thus drawing learners' attention to it. For example, Leeman et al. (1995) enhanced input by highlighting instances of Spanish preterit and imperfect verb forms in the written texts used in content-based instruction. Enriched input can function entirely by itself (e.g., learners can simply be asked to listen to or read texts that have been enriched) or can be accompanied by some kind of meaning-focused activity that incidentally assists learners to focus their attention on the target feature (e.g., comprehension questions that can only be answered correctly if the learners process the target feature).

Focused communicative tasks. These are tasks that are designed to elicit production of a specific target feature in the context of performing a communicative task. Such tasks have all the characteristics of communicative tasks. That is, meaning is primary, there is a goal that needs to be worked toward, the activity is outcome-evaluated, and there is real-world relationship (Skehan, 1998). However, in contrast to communicative tasks in general, focused communicative tasks are intended to result in learners' employing some feature that has been specifically targeted. Such tasks differ from functional materials, because they require the primary focus to be on meaning rather than on form. Thus, in focused communicative tasks, any acquisition of the target feature that takes place is incidental, whereas with functional materials, it is intentional. However, the difference between functional and focused communicative tasks is a slender one and is not acknowledged by some researchers or teachers. It is dependent ultimately on the learners' perspective (i.e., whether learners treat the instruction as requiring

them to view language as an object or tool and to function as students or as users).

As Loschky and Bley-Vroman (1993) have noted, focused communicative tasks can be designed so that the production of the target feature is useful, natural, or essential to the performance of the task. Ideally, it needs to be essential, but this is difficult to achieve, because learners cannot use features they have not yet acquired and also are adept at avoiding using those features they find difficult to process (Schachter, 1974). Samuda (2000) provides an example of a focused communicative task and also illustrates the problem of avoidance. However, as Samuda's study shows, this problem can be overcome methodologically; the teacher in her study introduced a brief explicit focus in the context of the learners' performing the task. In effect, this amounted to supplementing Type 2 FFI (planned focus-on-form) with Type 3 FFI (incidental focus-on-form).

Type 3: Incidental Focus-on-Form

Whereas the previous options reflect constructs that have been derived from theories of language acquisition or language pedagogy, the options that will be considered now have been derived from studies of classroom processes—that is, they reflect what actually transpires during FFI. The options relate to two kinds of incidental focus-on-form: pre-emptive and reactive. Both kinds of focus-on-form can arise either because there is a problem of communication (i.e., the interactants have not understood each other) or because there is a problem of form (i.e., the interactants have understood each other but nevertheless wish to focus on some form that has arisen in the course of communicative activity).

*Pre-emptive focus-on-form.*¹⁰ In pre-emptive focus-on-form, the teacher or a learner takes time out from a communicative activity to initiate attention to a form that is perceived to be problematic even though no production error in the use of the form or difficulty with message comprehension has arisen. Such time-outs involve the teacher and learner briefly switching from

viewing language as a tool and functioning as a user to viewing language as an object and functioning as a student. Below is an example:

T: What's an alibi?

(4.0)

T: S has an alibi.

(3.0)

T: Another name for girlfriend?

(laughter)

(4.5)

T: An alibi is a reason you have for not being at the bank robbery (.) Okay (.) Not being at the bank robbery.

Here the teacher and students are about to perform a communicative activity that involves the students concocting alibis for a crime. The teacher pre-empts by briefly checking that the students understand the meaning of the word "alibi" and supplying a definition. She then proceeds with the communicative activity.

Pre-emptive focus-on-form has been little studied to date, and thus the extent to which it occurs during FFI is uncertain. Williams (1999) looked at the ways in which learners initiate attention to form in learner-learner interactions, reporting that this occurred most frequently when learners requested assistance from the teacher. Ellis, Basturkmen, and Loewen (in press) examined teacher- and learner-initiated attention to form in communicative ESL lessons, finding that this occurred as frequently as reactive focus-on-form. However, little is known about the kinds of options teachers and learners select from during pre-emptive focus-on-form, and even less about whether it facilitates acquisition.

Reactive focus-on-form. Reactive focus-on-form has received much more attention. It consists of the negative feedback teachers provide in response to learners' actual or perceived errors. This feedback occurs in all types of FFI and involves the same set of options, although there may be differences in frequency of choice of specific options according to FFI type. The options entail various

ways of providing implicit and explicit negative feedback.¹¹ This distinction is perhaps best viewed as a continuum with options being more or less implicit/explicit. The distinction is considered important because it potentially affects noticing and has been shown to influence whether learners notice corrected forms and uptake them (see Lyster, 1998a; Oliver, 2000; Ellis et al., in press).

Implicit negative feedback. As Seedhouse (1997a) has noted, teachers display a general preference for implicit negative feedback in what he calls "form and accuracy contexts" (p. 552), that is, in Type 1 FFI. He comments, "When learners supply a linguistically incorrect response in reply to a teacher initiation . . . the teacher tends to avoid direct, explicit, overt negative evaluation" (p. 554). The same appears to be true in meaning-focused contexts (i.e., Type 3 FFI). Lyster and Ranta (1997) show that teachers in immersion classrooms rely extensively on recasts (i.e., reformulations of all or part of the learner's deviant utterance). Some researchers (e.g., Oliver, 2000) distinguish recasts and negotiation of meaning, with recasts defined as reformulations that negotiate form and negotiation of meaning as involving confirmation checks used to clarify understanding. Such a distinction is an uncomfortable one, because it necessitates interpreting the intention of the teacher, which is not easily achieved by simply inspecting a transcript of what was said. As noted earlier, a number of studies have examined recasts (e.g., Long et al., 1998; Mackey & Philp, 1998), suggesting that they assist acquisition. Other implicit options are available to teachers—e.g., requests for clarification and repetitions¹² (often with the learner's error highlighted by intonation). Lyster's 1998a study of negative feedback in immersion classrooms found that uptake is more likely to occur after requests for clarification than after recasts, thus supporting the findings of earlier laboratory studies (e.g., Pica, Holliday, Lewis, & Morgenthaler, 1989). Experimental type studies of clarification requests involving Type 2 FFI (Ellis & Takashima, 1999; Noboyoshi & Ellis, 1993) have also provided evidence of long-term effects on acquisition.

Explicit negative feedback. Explicit negative feedback is dispreferred in all types of FFI. That it should occur infrequently in Type 2 and Type 3 FFI is not surprising, because explicit negative feedback is clearly more obtrusive than implicit. However, its relative scarcity in Type 1 FFI is more puzzling, especially because teachers these days are advised to view errors positively, as the means by which learners can test hypotheses about the language. Most likely, it reflects a sociolinguistic need on the part of teachers to protect the face of their students.

Lyster and Ranta (1997) identify a number of explicit options. "Explicit correction" occurs when a teacher clearly indicates that the learner has said something wrong and provides the correct form. "Metalinguistic feedback" consists of "comments, information, or questions related to the well-formedness of the student's utterance" (p. 47). "Elicitation" constitutes an attempt to directly elicit the correct form from students. Samuda (in press), in the study referred to earlier, found that explicit feedback involving metalinguistic comments and elicitations was necessary to prompt students into using the feature targeted in her focused communication activity.

Instructional Options in Research and Pedagogy

Describing the various types of FFI and the options available within each is of potential value to both researchers and teachers. For both groups, it affords a basis for making systematic selections of what to investigate or to teach. However, the different requirements of research and pedagogy point to very different approaches. Researchers are encouraged to isolate specific options (variables) in order to test theory. That this has not always happened is seen as cause for criticism. Norris and Ortega (2000), for example, argue that the inconclusive findings of much of the FFI research to date is the result of a failure to investigate particular subtypes of instruction (i.e., to examine the effect of discrete instructional options). They also lament the fact that researchers have inconsistently operationalized instructional approaches. In

contrast, teachers can be expected to respond in a very different way. They are likely to construct lessons that make use of a number of different options, both because this may enhance the effectiveness of the instruction and because they need to provide variety in a single lesson. Furthermore, they are likely to vary their instructional approach from lesson to lesson.

Finally, it is necessary to reiterate the point made at the beginning of this account of the various options: conceptualizing FFI in terms of types and options is not unproblematic. The three types of FFI rest on the distinction between focus on form and focus on meaning. The question arises as to how this focus is to be determined. Whose perspective should be considered? Is the focus to be determined in terms of the researcher's or teacher's *intention* or in terms of particular learners' *response* to instruction? It certainly does not follow, for example, that instruction intended to focus learners' primary attention on meaning will always achieve this. Classroom learners may or may not respond in the way intended. Ideally, therefore, researchers (and, perhaps, teachers too) need to investigate learners' responses to different treatments to ensure that these are in line with expectations.

Research Methods in FFI Research

FFI research, like classroom research in general, reflects two broad traditions: confirmatory and interpretative research (Anderson & Burns, 1989). The former tradition is evident in correlational and experimental studies that involve manipulation of the learning context and quantitative analyses. The latter tradition is evident in descriptive and ethnographic studies of contextualized practice in real classrooms and, more recently, in studies of teachers' cognitions about FFI; it emphasizes qualitative analyses. While Tarone (1994) is probably right in asserting that "researchers typically agree, in theory, that both qualitative and quantitative methodologies are essential," there is also evidence of tension and opposition between advocates of these two approaches. This is reflected in the tendency of researchers to try

to make a case for their chosen approach. Hulstijn (1997), for example, argues the case for laboratory-based research, noting the difficulty of keeping variables constant in natural learning environments. Borg (1998), on the other hand, presents the case for an exploratory-interpretative approach to FFI in order "to understand the inner perspectives on the meanings of the actions being studied" (p. 11). This tension is also reflected in the obvious bias toward confirmatory research in the journals that publish FFI research (i.e., *Language Learning*, *Modern Language Journal*, *Studies in Second Language Acquisition*, and *TESOL Quarterly*). Lazaraton (2000) reports the results of a study of data-based articles in these journals over a 7-year period. She found that 88% of the articles were quantitative, 10% were qualitative, and 2% were partially qualitative. Researchers with a preference for working in the confirmatory tradition have a vested interest in protecting their privileged position in the key journals; interpretative researchers will have an understandable desire to challenge it.

Confirmatory Studies of FFI

Two main types of confirmatory research are evident in FFI research: comparative and experimental studies. As noted in the historical sketch of FFI research, there has been a gradual shift from comparative to experimental research. In fact, there have been no comparative studies published in recent years. Comparative studies (e.g., Ellis, 1989; Pavesi, 1986; Pica, 1983) compare groups of naturalistic and instructed learners to investigate whether there are differences in the order or sequence of acquisition of grammatical features. There is an inherent problem with such an approach. An assumption is made that might not be justified—namely, that the instructed learners have indeed received FFI (as opposed to some other kind of instruction) and that the naturalistic learners have not engaged in any FFI (e.g., through consulting a grammar reference book or receiving explicit negative feedback). Indeed, classifying learners as instructed or naturalistic on the basis of the setting in which they are learning