

中国小学英语教材 语法可学性评估

Learnability of Grammar:
A Processability Perspective of
Textbook Evaluation in English
as A Foreign Language Settings

唐晓菲 著



武汉理工大学出版社
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内 容 提 要

本书运用当今国际第二语言习得研究领域具有重要影响力的理论——语言可加工性理论(Processing Theory)对中国国内小学英语教材的语法教学内容进行了较为系统地评估与分析,为教材的评估研究领域提供了以第二语言习得规律为基础的创新性方法,同时也对当前小学英语教材语法教学内容存在的局限性进行了较为系统地探讨,最后提出了一系列具有实际教学法意义的改进建议。本书既为我国小学英语教学及教材编写提供了科学理论依据,又将语言可加工性理论的应用进行了延伸,是一本兼具理论入门与实际应用作用的指导性学术专著。

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前言

本研究基于第二语言(简称二语)习得规律对中国小学英语规定教材进行系统性评估。该评估旨在调查英语教材中的语法教学与目前国际二语习得领域重要理论之一的语言可加工性理论(Pienemann, 1998, 2005)所提出的第二语言习得顺序之间所存在的差异程度。

二语习得产生的前提条件是一定数量的语言输入。而在语言教学特别是外语教学的环境中,语言教材被视为学习者获得目的语语言输入的主要渠道。尤其在中国内地,英语学习者缺乏对目的语英语的自然习得环境,因而英语教材作为主要渠道为学习者提供了大量英语语言输入。因此,基于语言习得规律来编写教材显得尤为重要。

当前,主流研究对教材评估的调查分析主要集中在教材的潜在使用价值、教材对使用者的实际作用以及教材中会话文本的真实性或语用信息的充实性等领域。仅有几组研究采用第二语言习得理论来评估教材。因此,本研究试图从二语习得理论的角度对四套国内英语教材进行分析,并着重评估其中英语语素与关键句法结构所出现的顺序。

本研究首先对被调查的英语教材中被规定为教学目标的重点语素与句法结构进行系统性记录,其次依据语言加工性理论所提出的英语习得层级对相关教学目标进行科学分类,之后将分类后的教学目标与语言处理层级进行对比分析。研究结果显示:被调查的英语教材中所出现的语法教学目标的顺序与语言可加工性理论所提出的二语习得顺序存在部分一致。整体而言,位于习得层级初级阶段的语法结构在教材中出现的顺序符合其在语言可加工性理论中的科学假定。但是,位于中高级阶段的部分语法结构未按照其在语言加工性理论中的科学假定在教材中依次呈现。

研究者在对教材的进一步分析后发现:部分语法结构在教材中的过早出现可能与教材编写中所采用的以主题(话题)为基础的教学法相关。教材编写者更倾向于对语法结构在特定语境中有效性的考量,而非其在二语习得规律中的真实情况,即该语法结构对于现阶段学习者是否可学。对此,本研究基于语言输入、学习者二语发展规律以及二语教学课堂的差异性等方面对教材中的语法大纲编写以及教学法提出了一系列建议。

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Introduction: Research Statement and Chapter Outline

1.1 Research statement: Aim, question, and motivations

This study aims to conduct an acquisition-based evaluation of four primary-school English textbook series including a total of 28 volumes. They are: *New Standard English* (Chen & Ellis, 2012; 8 volumes), *People's Education Press English* (Wu, 2012; 8 volumes), *Super Kids* (Liu, Krause, & Cossu, 2012; 4 volumes), and *Join in* (Zhang, 2014; 8 volumes). All are used on a nationwide scale in China. The textbook evaluation seeks to answer the research question: whether or not the sequencing of key grammatical structures introduced as the teaching objectives in the four textbook series is compatible with the sequenced development that the learners go through in acquiring English as a second language (L2) as stipulated in Processability Theory (Pienemann, 1998, 2005). The theoretical approach employed in this evaluation—Processability Theory—is a psycholinguistically-based second language acquisition (SLA) theory, developed by Manfred Pienemann (1998, 2005) to describe and explain a universal L2 developmental sequence from a language processing perspective.

L2 acquisition cannot take place without language input, and textbooks serve as one main form of language input for learners especially in a foreign language (FL) context. Textbooks provide instructional input that contains different components of the target language, such as grammatical rules, vocabulary, functions or notions, pronunciation, spelling, socio-cultural information, etc.

In FL settings such as those that prevail in China, learners of English have little or no opportunities to access the target language through natural exposure. Formal instruction in schools is the dominant environment where learners receive linguistic input. Indeed, textbooks are used as the main source of linguistic exposure to English and provide different modalities of language use (e. g. , speaking, writing, listening, and reading) for the students. They also supplement and facilitate the teacher's instruction, by providing organized lesson plans and information on what kinds of teaching practice can be utilized in the classroom. As the use of textbooks in language classrooms is an almost inevitable component of formal instruction in EFL (English as a foreign language) settings (Hutchinson & Torres, 1994), an evaluation of textbooks for the purpose of more efficient teaching and effective learning is a worthwhile

undertaking.

A review of existing research on textbook evaluation reveals that the majority of studies have been looking at the potential effectiveness of textbooks (e. g. , McDonough & Show, 1993; Mukundan, Hajimohammadi, & Nimehchisalem, 2011), the actual effects of textbooks on users (e. g. , Lan & Meng, 2009; Shi & Ji, 2011), and the pragmatic information and the authenticity of textbook contexts (e. g. , Petraki & Bayes, 2013; Wong, 2007). Only a handful of SLA-based studies (Lenzing, 2004, 2008; Zipser, 2012) have paid attention to the key issue concerning L2 learning, i. e. , how, in fact, L2 learners learn grammatical structures step-by-step. These studies take into account the developmental sequences of L2 grammar learning and explicate why, from a psycholinguistic perspective, some structures are more complex than others. They examine whether grammar instruction in the textbooks they assess is presented in a way that is learnable for L2 students.

To the best of my knowledge, the latter approach is not found in English textbooks compiled in mainland China. The present study therefore follows the line of SLA-based textbook studies to investigate whether the sequencing of grammar in English textbooks currently used in China conforms to a staged L2 development. It is guided by Processability Theory (PT), a psycholinguistic theory of SLA. Based on the psychological mechanisms underlying language information processing and spontaneous speech production, PT describes, explains and predicts the developmental sequence of L2 grammar. The plausibility of PT has been extensively tested and generally confirmed by a range of empirical studies on typologically diverse languages, such as German, English, Swedish, Chinese, Japanese, and Arabic (Jansen, 2008; Kawaguchi, 2005a; Mansouri, 2005; Pienemann, 1998; Zhang, 2005). Within its universal schedule of L2 development, PT describes and explains the sequence in which a certain range of grammatical structures is acquired in an ESL (English as a second language) setting.

In 2011, the Ministry of Education of China stipulated that the study of English was a compulsory subject in six-year primary-school education, starting at Grade Three (children aged eight or nine), as well as in three-year junior-secondary-school education. Among the most widely used L2 English learning materials in Chinese primary schools are the four textbook series *New Standard English*, *People's Education Press English*, *Super Kids*, and *Join in*. They were selected over a number of other publications, based on their authority and popularity in China. They are officially approved by the Chinese Ministry of Education for the teaching of English in primary schools from Grade 3 to Grade 6. They are published by two of the largest educational publishing companies in China, namely, the People's Education Press and the Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press. These textbook series are published in large numbers.

In this textbook analysis, the grammatical items that are introduced as teaching objectives will be documented and categorized according to the processability hierarchy as stipulated in Processability Theory. Their orderings throughout the textbook series will then be compared

with the sequence of L2 English acquisition as outlined in the processability hierarchy. The cross-check of the degree of correspondence between the two sequences (in the textbooks and in the processability hierarchy) contributes to depicting whether learnability of grammatical structures has been considered in the language textbooks under investigation.

1.2 Chapter outline

The later content is organized as follows. It begins with a discussion of the key issues related to the motivations behind and the significance of the present study, including the role of language input, grammar learning, grammar teaching, and sequence of grammatical structures (Chapter 2).

Chapter 3 provides a critical review of research on textbook evaluation. Four prominent approaches are reviewed: predictive evaluation, retrospective evaluation, Conversation Analysis/Discourse Analysis-based evaluation, and SLA-based evaluation. The review focuses more on SLA-based evaluation as it is directly relevant to the present study.

Chapter 4 gives an overview of the SLA theoretical approach adopted in the textbook analysis undertaken in this study—Processability Theory. It starts with a review of the theoretical background of L2 acquisition, focusing on L2 developmental sequences, as this forms a basis for the description of Processability Theory. A discussion of the general principles of Processability Theory is followed by an outline of the theory's hypothesized processability hierarchy for ESL morpho-syntactic development.

The research methods and the selected textbooks of the study are presented in Chapter 5, including a description of the analyses of the four ESL textbook series. The results act as the basis for the discussion in Chapter 6 of a series of issues related to the present study, such as the discrepancy between the textbook grading and the developmental path of L2 English acquisition as outlined in Processability Theory, the deviant introduction of grammatical items in the textbooks, the intentions or considerations of textbook writers, etc. Chapter 6 also proposes suggestions for developing an acquisition-based grammatical introduction in ESL textbooks, as well as pedagogical implications for textbook design and L2 teaching.

Chapter 7 concludes with a summary of the major findings from the textbook analysis, focusing on the compatibility between the grading of grammatical items in textbooks and the sequence of ESL acquisition. It also summarizes the key aspects and implications of proposed suggestions for developing a learnable grammatical introduction in ESL textbooks. It ends with a discussion of the limitations of the study. Possible future improvements include a further investigation into the actual effect of the proposed grammatical instruction on L2 learning and teaching.

Why Do We Need to Consider Learnability of Grammar?

This chapter discusses the key issues that are crucial to shaping the rationale for the motivations of this study—Why is it necessary to take into account the learnability of grammatical structures in the textbook development? The discussion will provide an understanding of several issues: Why does L2 learning need input? Why do we need to learn grammar? Do we need to teach grammar? If so, how should we teach it?

2.1 The role of input in language learning

Early conceptualizations or theories of how language learning occurred highlighted the importance of the input provided to the learner. This was particularly the case within the behaviourist period of language research between the 1940s and the 1970s (Gass, 2003). Behaviourism aimed to explain animal and human behaviour without reference to internal processes (VanPatten & Williams, 2007). It claimed that learning relied heavily on the external environment—the so-called ‘input’, ‘experience’ or ‘stimulus’ the learner was exposed to when achieving learning (Skinner, 1968, pp. 6-7). Language acquisition was regarded as a stimulus-response process and the formation of new habits. Behaviourist theory (e. g. , Bloomfield, 1933; Skinner, 1957) asserted that the process of language acquisition could be controlled by presenting learners with right-sized doses of input and then reinforcing the learners’ attempts to practice them to form a set of habits.

Later studies on language acquisition have not diminished the role of input, however they have concentrated on how individuals process the input and how the input interacts with other key constructs of language learning, such as output and interaction (Gass, 2003, p. 229). The importance of input has been variably characterized depending on different approaches to language acquisition, such as Universal Grammar and Krashen’s theory on comprehensible input.

Universal Grammar (UG) (e. g. , Chomsky, 1981a, 1981b; Cook, 1991; Cook & Newson, 1996; Haegeman, 1991) was developed as a powerful solution to the issue of L1 acquisition—‘how languages are acquired’. It was primarily based on the observations of the mismatch between the input that a child (L1 learner) accesses and the linguistic knowledge he or she finally attains (i. e. , the output). According to UG, input is seen as the “primary linguistic

data" (Chomsky, 1965, p. 47) or "raw linguistic data" (Cook & Newson, 2007, p. 115) that learners are exposed to. UG advocates argued that language input acts as a necessary 'trigger' for the learner's internal language processor (the innate UG-based learning mechanism) to be activated (Cook & Newson, 2007; White, 1989). The input provides evidence for learners to determine the values of structures which are left unspecified by UG, namely, what is possible in the target language (Cook, 1991; White, 1989). There are two types of evidence that can potentially function as input: positive evidence and negative evidence (White, 1989, p. 141). Positive evidence shows what is possible in the target language, such as grammatically correct forms and complete utterances. Negative evidence indicates what is incorrect in a language; it is usually provided by instruction. Although input needs to be given as a necessary component for language acquisition, it does not need to be sufficient because the learner's internal language processor (present in the human being's mind) supplements the knowledge that we cannot get from the input. More specifically, for SLA, the effect of instruction (concerning negative evidence) is extremely restricted to the instances where positive evidence is not sufficient and informative on its own. L2 instruction may assist the learner to master certain properties of L2 which are not appropriate for L1 but its effect does not retain over a long time (White, 1991).

In contrast to UG, SLA scholar Stephen Krashen (1977, 1981, 1982, 1985) emphasized that not just any input but only abundant 'comprehensible input' can result in language acquisition. 'Comprehensible input' is defined as the input that can be understood by recipients (learners) (Krashen, 1982). Krashen (1982) claimed that 'comprehensible input' is a fundamental and necessary requirement for L2 acquisition and that we are not able to acquire language without receiving 'comprehensible input'. It should be noted that Krashen hold the similar position on the role of instructional input as with UG's SLA accounts, namely, the effect of L2 instruction is fairly limited. According to Krashen (1985, pp. 33-34), the only need for L2 instruction is to provide 'comprehensible input' that may not be accessible in the informal environment; compared to L2 classrooms, the informal settings supply more 'comprehensible input' and thus the learner is able to understand more of the target language and to progress.

Krashen took a strong stance on the necessity of exposure to 'comprehensible input' in the L2 acquisition process. He drew our attention to the importance of input and the extent to which acquisition relies on the learner (White, 1987). However, while acknowledging that, without input, the learner is unable to make connections between forms and meaning, Swain (1985) argued that Krashen's work overvalued the role of 'comprehensible input' and neglected output in L2 acquisition. For example, in the Canadian immersion programs, Swain (1985, 1988) provided evidence that exclusive reliance on 'comprehensible input' without forcing and correcting production did not result in full acquisition of the L2 system, including grammatical accuracy. Swain (1985) argued that comprehensible input was greatly necessary but was not sufficient to L2 acquisition. L2 learners need to be 'pushed' to produce the utterances that can more precisely deliver their intended meaning. During this process, a specific kind of L2

instruction, namely, corrective feedback (e. g., explicit correction, confirmation checks, clarification checks) is utilized by teachers as a necessary aid to guide students to repair the errors of their or other peers' output; thus it contributes to actively engaging students in L2 learning within immersion classes (cf. Brook & Swain, 2009; Lapkin & Swain, 1996; Lightbown, 1998; Lyster, 2001; Lyster & Ranta, 1997; Swain, 2000; Swain & Lapkin, 1998).

While there is a little consensus on specific characteristic of input such as what types of input benefit acquisition, the necessity of exposure to the target language has been commonly accepted, namely, L2 acquisition cannot occur without input.

2.2 The role of grammar in L2 learning

Language learning necessitates exposure to the target language, such as its sounds or written forms. To infer a meaning from these forms, the learners must build up grammatical representations of the speech they are hearing or reading (Carroll, 2001, p. 2). A knowledge of grammar is considered as a fundamental aspect of language learning, since it can assist learners with the construction of connections between form and meaning (VanPatten, Williams, Rott, & Overstreet, 2004).

Grammar is perceived as the set of rules governing form and meaning and their relation, or—in Chomsky's words—"the rules that specify the well-formed strings of minimal syntactically functioning units (*formatives*) and assign structural information of various kinds both to these strings and to strings that deviate from well-formedness in certain respects" (Chomsky, 1965, p. 3). To understand meaning conveyed from input and express meaning appropriately, learners must rely on their knowledge of grammar to recognize and produce well-formed phrases and sentences in accordance with those rules. Grammar plays a significant role in language learning.

A number of SLA scholars also highlight the role of grammar in L2 learning. Larsen-Freeman (2003, 2015) defines grammar in discourse as the tool allowing learners to understand which of two or more grammatical features conveying a similar or identical semantic meaning they should use. Larsen-Freeman (2003) explains the five specific effects of grammar on texts. Grammar contributes to the cohesion, coherence, texture, formation of discourse patterns, and discourse functions of a text (Larsen-Freeman, 2003, pp. 67-68). From the perspective of discourse, the role of grammar is regarded as a rich resource for making contextualized meanings in a cultural and language-specific way. It is not simply the meaning-making capacity of language through the use of correct grammatical forms, but it is also a key part of the skill to make appropriate meaning in interaction with others (Larsen-Freeman, 2015; Liarkina & Ryshina-Pankova, 2012).

2.3 Do we need to teach grammar?

While the majority of SLA research has highlighted that grammar is a compulsory part of L2 learning (e. g. , Carroll, 2001; Ellis, 2008; Larsen-Freeman, 2003, 2005, 2015; Liamkina & Ryshina-Pankova, 2012; Nassaji & Fotos, 2011; White, 1990, 1996), whether grammar should be taught through formal instruction has long been debated. Generally speaking, there are three mainstream positions on the role of grammar teaching among the established SLA studies: the ‘zero-impact’ position, the modest-impact position, and the potentially-beneficial position.

2.3.1 The ‘zero-impact’ position.

The starting point of the ‘zero-impact’ position was Krashen’s (1981, 1982, 1985) research in the early 1980s, which hypothesized that teaching grammar was not necessary at all. He asserted that language should be acquired through natural exposure to abundant ‘comprehensible input’. Krashen’s claim was based on Corder’s (1967) hypothesis and SLA empirical studies that were known as ‘morpheme order studies’ (see Krashen, 1985).

Corder (1967) emphasized that L2 learners’ ‘built-in syllabuses’ might determine the order in which L2 grammar is acquired. This order is predictable—“the learner is using a definite system of language at every point in his development” (Corder, 1967, p. 166). That is, some grammatical rules are acquired early and others are acquired late. Subsequent studies between the early 1970s and the early 1980s were conducted to investigate the order of the acquisition of English morpho-syntactic structures by L2 learners of diverse L1 backgrounds (e. g. , Bailey, Madden, & Krashen, 1974; Dulay & Burt, 1973, 1974; Ellis, 1984; Hakuta, 1974; Krashen, Butler, Birnbaum, & Robertson, 1978; Rosansky, 1976). These cross-sectional and longitudinal studies offered empirical evidence for the existence of a natural acquisition order in which L2 learners acquire certain grammatical morphemes and syntactic structures. Based on an extensive review of such studies, Krashen (1977) proposed a ‘natural order’ for L2 acquisition (Figure 2.1).

Krashen (1982) pointed out that, given the existence of the natural order, L2 learners can progress from their current stage to the next one by understanding input that contains structures at the next stage. Krashen (1985) further stressed that:

If input is understood, and there is enough of it, the necessary grammar is automatically provided. The language teacher need not attempt deliberately to teach the next structure along the natural order—it will be provided in just the right quantities and automatically reviewed if the student receives a sufficient amount of comprehensible input. (Krashen, 1985, p. 2)

According to Krashen (1982, p. 59), the value of L2 classrooms did not rely on grammar instruction, but instead on providing comprehensible input such as teacher talk that focuses on meaning rather than forms. A number of SLA researchers subsequently advocated Krashen’s

claim that L2 learners only need to be exposed to naturalistic input in meaning-focused communication and do not require explicit grammar instruction (e. g. , Prabhu, 1987; Schwartz, 1993).

However, the hypothesis that grammar instruction is not necessary was shown to be problematic when it was put to the test. A number of SLA empirical studies provided evidence that learners who were involved in a meaning-focused communicative environment without any grammar teaching always had problems in grammatical accuracy, namely, they could not use specific grammatical features accurately, despite the fact that they might develop a high level of comprehension skills and fluency (e. g. , Harley & Swain, 1984; Lightbown & Spada, 1990; Lapkin, Hart & Swain, 1991; Swain, 1985, 1988).

For example, in the Canadian French immersion programs, the students of L1 English learned French through being exposed to an abundance of French-speaking input rather than being taught French grammar directly (Swain, 1985, 1988). The outcomes of the programs showed that the students became highly fluent and idiomatic in all skills, but their production did not have a high degree of grammatical accuracy even after six or seven years of meaning-focused communication (i. e. , provision of ‘comprehensible input’ in French). Some students made constant errors in the use of even simple grammatical forms. Research on the Canadian French immersion programs shows, therefore, that exclusive reliance on ‘comprehensible input’ does not typically result in a high level of grammatical accuracy.

A similar finding was reported by Lightbown and Spada (1990) in their investigation of the spoken English of L2 learners taking intensive classes in a long-term project. The experimental group included 100 students enrolled in four intensive classes. The comparison group consisted of 200 students enrolled in regular classes. All students were native speakers of French aged 10-12 in either Grade 5 or 6 in elementary schools in Quebec, Canada. The learners in the intensive classes received meaning-focused communicative instruction with abundant ‘comprehensible input’, and they received little or no error correction from the teachers (Lightbown & Spada, 1990, p. 434). The results indicated that, after 5 months, students in the intensive classes achieved higher levels of comprehension ability, fluency and communicative confidence in L2 use than students in the regular classes. However, a further analysis of the intensive classes revealed that the meaning-focused approach without explicit grammar instruction did not lead to error-free English in the learners, even in simple structures. For instance, compared to the students in regular classes, students in the intensive classes merely achieved 37%-59% accuracy in their use of the morpheme *plural -s* and only 5%-28% accuracy in the case of *progressive -ing*.

Lightbown and Spada (1990) concluded that meaning-based communication contributes to

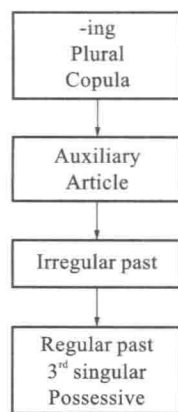


Figure 2. 1: Krashen's (1977) proposed 'natural order' for SLA

the development of certain aspects of communicative skills such as fluency and communicative confidence in the use of a second language. However, this approach does not appear to increase the grammatical accuracy of learner production. Lightbown and Spada (1990) suggested that form-focused instruction should also be considered a necessary component within a meaning-based communicative context.

2.3.2 The modest-impact position

Later research in SLA has led to a reassessment of the role of grammar instruction in communicative language teaching, mostly asserting that grammar teaching has a modest impact on L2 learning within a classroom setting that primarily relies on communication (Larsen-Freeman, 2015). This position was derived from the question proposed in Long (1983), namely, whether or not L2 instruction makes a difference.

Long (1983) reviewed and analysed a number of established SLA empirical studies which investigated L2 acquisition with or without instruction (e. g. , Fathman, 1975; Hale & Budar, 1970; Krashen & Seliger, 1976; Mason, 1971; Upshur, 1968). In general, those established studies were found to report on the comparison between natural exposure and L2 instruction from five aspects; first, the relative utility of the same amounts of exposure and instruction; second, the relative utility of varying amounts of exposure and instruction; third, the effect of differing amounts of instruction with the same amount of exposure; fourth, the effect of varying amounts of exposure with the same amount of instruction; fifth, independent effects of differing amounts of both exposure and instruction (cf. Long, 1983, pp. 116-119).

Based on a review of those research findings, Long (1983) concluded that despite no overwhelming evidence for the advantages of instruction over exposure, there was considerable empirical support for the benefits of instruction on L2 acquisition. Long (1983) revealed the varying effects of L2 instruction based on the different aspects above (the third aspect above was inconclusive due to the research results were ambiguous). Specifically, when the classroom was the only source of L2 input, instruction was effective. Under the circumstances of varying amounts of instruction with the same amount of exposure, more L2 instruction either benefited L2 acquisition or compensated for limited exposure. When differing amounts of exposure were added on to the same amount of instruction, more instruction could take more positive effects on L2 acquisition. Under the circumstances of varying amounts of both instruction and exposure, there was positive despite limited evidence that more instruction contributed to L2 acquisition.

While Long (1983) does not take a strong position on the advantages of L2 instruction over exposure, his review of previous empirical studies highlights the potential effects of instruction on L2 acquisition, namely, L2 instruction does make a difference. Noteworthy, Long (1983) emphasized the review and categorization of research findings related to 'the effect of instruction' but he did not critically assess the research methodology of those studies with regards to some important issues that might influence on the results, such as what types of instruction provided in

those studies, what specific SLA processes involved, and no investigation of control groups, etc. Nevertheless, Long (1983) draws our attention to reconsider the role of L2 instruction and to explore its implications for language teaching.

Later, Long (1991) went further in an investigation of effects of L2 instruction, focusing on grammar instruction in communicative classrooms. Long (1991) made a distinction between ‘focus-on-form’ (*FonF*) and ‘focus-on-forms’ (*FonFs*), and subsequently provided a detailed overview of the concept of *FonF* (Long & Robinson, 1998). Long (1991) defined *FonFs* as the traditional structural approach to language instruction, in which linguistic features such as grammar and vocabulary is presented to L2 learners without any communicative contexts. *FonF* was regarded as instruction that aimed to draw learner attention to grammatical forms once they made an error in meaning-focused communication. Long (1991) proposed a *FonF* approach to meaning-based communication—i. e. , to use less formal intervention on grammar and more ‘comprehensible input’ by means of interactional modifications, such as comprehension checks (e. g. , *do you understand what I mean?*), and by means of unnoticeable feedback, such as the case where teachers correctly recast or restructure learners’ ungrammatical production (Larsen-Freeman, 2015).

The proposal by Long (1991) and Long and Robinson (1998) for *FonF* instruction has inspired a number of researchers to examine the effects of incidentally drawing learner attention to form during communicative activities. Some studies found that *FonF* instruction could facilitate learner comprehension and output (e. g. , Gass & Varonis, 1994) and that such an effect could be maintained for some time (e. g. , Mackey & Goo, 2007). Other studies have attempted to expand the impact of *FonF* instruction by integrating a pre-planned instead of incidental treatment of grammatical form into meaning-based communication (e. g. , Nassaji, 1999; Nassaji & Fotos, 2010; Williams, 2005). For instance, *FonF* instruction can be used proactively in a predetermined way through a variety of input, output and consciousness raising tasks to help learners notice specific target structures (Keßler & Plessner, 2011; Nassaji & Fotos, 2010; Schmidt, 1990). Grammar instruction has been considered not only a reaction to grammatical problems, but also a pre-planned instructional strategy in meaningful language use (Ellis, Basturkmen, & Loewen, 2001; Larsen-Freeman, 2015; Nassaji, 2016).

2.3.3 The potentially-beneficial position

Over the past 30 years, growing empirical evidence from a large number of classroom and laboratory-based studies has showed a stronger position on the role of L2 grammar instruction (e. g. , Akakura, 2012; Ellis, 2002, 2006; Housen, Pierrard, & Van Daele, 2005; Li, 2010; Liamkina & Ryshina-Pankova, 2012; Loewen, Li, Fei, Thompson, Nakatsukasa, Ahn, & Chen 2009; Norris & Ortega, 2000, 2001; Nassaji & Fotos, 2010). These studies not only have confirmed the necessity of grammar teaching, but also have suggested that explicit grammar instruction is potentially beneficial if it is provided appropriately.