Research Article

Focus on Form Approach in English Foreign Language Teaching

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Abstract

Numerous second language acquisition scholars assert that mere exposure to language is insufficient. They claim that activities that are only focused on message development are insufficient for developing a correct grasp of the language and urge a more form-centered approach to language instruction. 'Focus on form' (FonF) is a fundamental concept in task-based language teaching, originally introduced by Michael Long. It involves directing learners' attention to the structures of language while they are actively engaged in tasks, as opposed to a structure-based approach called 'focus on forms' (FonFs), which focuses on explicit instruction of specific language forms. It maintains the significance of communicative language teaching principles, such as genuine communication and a student-centered approach. Understanding of this concept in second language acquisition (SLA) has experienced notable conversions. This article explores the evolution of Long's original definition and reasons for reevaluation of teaching grammar. Then it presents a classification of different focus on form.

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1. Introduction

The foreign/second language education system has taken contrasting approaches when it comes to teaching grammar. On the one hand, grammar was deemed critical in the selection of instructional materials. Methods such as Grammar-Translation and Audiolingual focus on uncontextualized drills, translation exercises, and teaching based on grammatical structures. Language is regarded as a compilation of separate components like phonemes, morphemes, words, phrases, etc., and each component is introduced individually in a sequence determined by intuition. Wilkins (1976) refers to grammar-based techniques as "synthetic syllabi" since learners must synthesize these parts in order to communicate. As Doughty and Long (2003) assert, synthetic syllabi are accompanied by explicit grammar instruction, repetition, dialogue memorization, and transformation exercises. As a result, they develop classes with focus on forms, which pupils master one at a time. On the other hand, the communicative approach of the 1980s aimed at meaningful communication. Students engage in active communication in English rather than simply producing its structures when they choose a communicative method. Themes, objectives, concepts, and functions guide the organization of instruction. Because fluency was prioritized above correctness, formal grammatical teaching was minimized. However, in the 1990s, theoretical ideas about language teaching and learning shifted. An alternative to both extremes has evolved in the form of "focus on form" (FonF).

2. Reasons Reasons for Reevaluating Grammar Teaching

Recent research in the field of second language acquisition (SLA) has prompted a rethinking of the role of grammar in English as a second language (ESL) classroom. There are at least four reasons to reconsider grammar as an important part of learning a new language.

First, the notion that language could be learned formally without consciousness seems conceptually dubious. Schmidt (2001) stressed the importance of conscious attention, arguing that noticing or paying conscious attention to form is necessary for language acquisition. The findings indicated that language learners are incapable of concurrently processing target language information for meaning and form (Skehan, 2018). Thus, learners must pay attention to grammatical forms; otherwise, they will comprehend meaning but not the associated grammatical forms.

Another reason to reconsider grammar as an essential aspect of language teaching is the evidence that ESL students show improvement through successive sequences. Pienemann (1998) argues that some developmental sequences are predetermined and cannot be altered through grammar instruction, while other structures can benefit from instruction at any stage. According to this idea, grammar may be taught when learners are ready to advance to the next developmental level of language skill. These issues are taken into account in classrooms where English is taught communicatively (Ellis, 2018).

A further rationale for grammar instruction is that a substantial amount of research has been conducted highlighting the shortcomings of approaches in which the emphasis is mostly on communication and grammar is deemed irrelevant. Swain's research on French immersion programs revealed that despite extensive long-term exposure to significant material, learners were unable to achieve correctness in particular grammatical forms (Swain & Lapkin, 1998). The research suggests that learners need to focus on specific grammatical structures to attain a high level of accuracy in the target language. Therefore, teaching only communicative language is inadequate, as emphasized by Ellis (2002).

The fourth rationale for re-examining grammar instruction in the ESL setting is the favorable outcomes associated with such instruction. This assertion is supported by a significant body of research papers and comprehensive reviews conducted over the past two decades (Ellis, 2018). For instance, Cadierno (1995) investigated the effects of instruction on the acquisition of particular target language structures and the impact of corrective feedback on learner

errors. Their findings indicate that grammar instruction has a considerable influence on achieving accuracy in language learning.

Long's (1983) review argues that grammar instruction has a significant impact on language acquisition. In another assessment, Ellis (2002) suggests that although explicit language instruction may not affect the order of acquisition, it does enhance the speed and quality of second language acquisition. Additionally, a meta-analysis of 49 studies on the effectiveness of second language education conducted by Norris and Ortega (2000) concluded that explicit grammar instruction helps learners acquire target structures more rapidly.

3. Implicit and Explicit Grammar Teaching

Although numerous studies illustrate the benefits of grammar instruction, there is still a debate about the significance of explicit grammar instruction. This is due to the complex relationship between teaching and learning, as well as the fact that the way something is taught may not always align with the way it is learned.

Certain scholars have dismissed the importance of any grammatical teaching explicitly. For example, Krashen (1993) diminishes the importance of grammar instruction, considering it to be "peripheral and fragile" (p.725). He suggests that knowledge of grammar and its application may never be internalized as implicit knowledge, which forms the foundation for unconscious language comprehension and production. He claims that education can only help to develop consciously acquired competence, which is consistent with Krashen's (1999) Monitor hypothesis. Additionally, Truscott (1998) contends that explicit grammar training is only effective in the short term and that grammar instruction alone may not build "true mastery of language" (p.120).

Other researchers have adopted a more cautious stance, questioning the need for explicit grammar instruction, but not necessarily rejecting it altogether. They instead challenge the conventional approach to grammar instruction, in which teachers typically teach grammar structures in an isolated and clear manner.

The traditional assumption holds that manipulating forms and consciously presenting grammar to pupils through drills and repetition will assist students in acquiring the information necessary for communication. Skehan (2018), on the other hand, asserts that current research does not support this paradigm of conventional presenting practices. He contends that concentrating on a single form results in learning and automation.... There is little trust left in linguistics or psychology. Even scholars who support explicit grammar instruction acknowledge that this approach does not equate to direct instruction (Ellis, 2003; Ellis, Basturkmen, & Loewen, 2002). Ellis et al. (2002), for example, argue:

> "While there is substantial evidence that focus-on-forms instruction results in learning as measured by discrete-point language tests (e.g., the grammar test in the TOEFL), there is much less evidence to show that it leads to the kind of learning that enables learners to perform the targeted form in free oral production (e.g., in a communicative task)" (p.421).

Ellis (2002) accepts the need for explicit instruction but asserts that language acquisition and the acquisition of grammar and its regularities are both implicit processes. This talent requires hours of practice and cannot be replaced by the provision of declarative guidelines. Other researchers, particularly those who study cognitive processes, concur with Ellis' notion (Dekeyser, 2001; Doughty, 2001; Robinson, 2001). This does not diminish the need for grammatical instructions, though. Students should be allowed to comprehend and use taught forms in their numerous form-meaning exchanges in order for the forms to become ingrained in their interlanguage behavior (Larsen-Freeman, 2011).

Spada (1997) claims that when students get formal training in grammatical forms used in communication, their understanding of these forms becomes more enduring. This improves

the precision with which tricky forms, such as English articles, are used. According to Ellis (2003), recent research demonstrates a compelling case for providing communication opportunities that include forms of grammar and combine meaningful communication with form-based instruction.

4. Focus on Form

Attitudes towards language teaching and learning have changed in recent years. According to researchers studying second language acquisition, exposure to a language alone is inadequate. many researchers, including Doughty, Lightbown, and Robinson, claim that emphasizing meaning alone in language training is insufficient for the development of proper language knowledge. As a result, some form-focused activities must be added to the communicative classroom setting to make up for this shortfall.

FonF is a reaction against both communicative approaches that solely focus on meaning and classical methods which focus on forms (e.g., Prabhu, 1987). FonF teaching refers to the instructors' and students' intermittent, provisional, and explicit oral focus on problematic grammatical and lexical issues during communicative interaction (Long, 1991, cited in Poole, 2005). When used appropriately, grammar and vocabulary can aid the learner in completing more complicated "closing" assignments. This allowed for certain form-focused activities in the ESL classroom. This does not entail a return to the conventional method of teaching isolated grammatical forms. Rather than that, FonF aims to raise students' awareness of grammatical forms through meaningful assignments. FonF is necessary for learners to gain both accuracy and fluency.

Long (1991) argues that focus on form instruction can align with communicative language teaching principles, such as student-centered and real-world communication while minimizing the importance of incidental grammatical forms, which are more associated with non-communicative instruction.

Long and Robinson (1998, cited in Poole, 2005) distinguish focus on form instruction from teaching methods that prioritize teaching specific linguistic forms over language as a tool for communication. Additionally, Long and Robinson differentiate form-focused instruction from purely communicative instruction, which they refer to as "focus on meaning" instruction.

Both a focus on forms and a focus on meaning are useful and should be used in conjunction rather than in opposition to one another. According to Robinson (2001), a concentration on form teaching strikes a balance between the two by encouraging both instructors and students to emphasize form within a communicative framework.

According to Ellis (2001), form-focused instruction can be classified into three different approaches depending on the primary focus of learners' attention and the distribution of their attention between form and meaning. The first approach is "focus on forms" where learners' primary focus is on specific forms, and attention is distributed to those forms. The second approach is "planned focus on form" where the primary focus of attention is on meaning, but there is intensive distribution of attention to specific forms. The third approach is "incidental focus on form" where the major focus of attention is on meaning, but there is a wide dispersion of attention to a range of forms. In contrast, meaning-focused teaching concentrates on tasks and activities that focus on message exchange. (Richards & Rodgers, 2017; Seyyedi et al., 2014).

In second and foreign language classrooms, focus on form is viewed as a method for integrating meaning- and form-centered activities (Ellis, 2001; Seyyedi et al., 2012). Recent studies (Ellis, Basturkmen, & Lowen, 2002) examined the prevalence of inadvertent focus on form. However, the studies were predominantly descriptive in character and included any instructional attempt to expressly or implicitly draw learners' attention to language (Spada, 1997, p.73).

5. Reactive versus Proactive Focus on Form

A critical curricular choice in FonF is whether to emphasize form proactively or reactively. While a proactive strategy requires the instructor to choose one aspect of the target to focus on in advance, a reactive approach requires the teacher to be aware of and prepared to address numerous learning challenges as they arise (Doughty & Williams, 1998). In other words, a proactive focus on form involves the teacher drawing the learners' attention to a particular language feature before any problems or errors arise, whereas a reactive focus on form involves the teacher addressing errors or issues with language use as they occur. Both approaches have their benefits, and the choice of which to use depends on the classroom context and the needs of the learners. Incidental attention to form might be reactive or purposeful. Due to the possibility that a learner's attention will be drawn to another topic if communication breaks down, negotiation for meaning is considered an unintentional concentration on the form (Long, 1991; Seyyedi et al., 2013).

6. Conclusion

In summary, focus on form instruction emphasizes the importance of communicative language teaching principles, such as authentic communication and student-centered approaches, while also recognizing the value of explicitly addressing problematic grammatical forms, which falls under non-communicative teaching. This approach differs from classical methods that primarily aim to teach specific grammatical forms without emphasizing communication. The term "focus on form" is commonly used to describe any pedagogical technique, whether proactive or reactive, implicit or explicit, that directs students' attention to language form. On the other hand, "focus on forms" refers specifically to planned activities that address form, whereas "focus on meaning" excludes such explicit focus. It is important to note that focus on form and focus on meaning are not opposing concepts, but rather, focus on form encompasses attention to formal elements of language, while focus on forms limits itself to this aspect, and focus on meaning disregards it.

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سەرنج خستنه سەر فۆرم له فێرکردنی زمانی ئینگلیزی

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پوخته

ژمارەیەکی زۆر له زانایانی فێرکردنی زمانی دووەم پێداگری لەوه دەکەنەوه که تەنیا بەرکەوتن به زمان بەس نییه. ئەوان دەڵێن ئەو چالاکییانەی که تەنها تیشک دەخەنه سەر پەرەپێدانی پەیامەکان بەس نین بۆ پەرەپێدانی تێگەیشتنێکی دروستی زمان و هاندانی ڕێگایەکی وردتر بۆ فێرکردنی زمان. "سەرنج خستنه سەر فۆرم"چەمکێکی بنچینەییه له فێرکردنی زمان لەسەر بنەمای ئەرک، که له بنەڕەتدا لەلایەن مایکڵ لۆنگ پێشکەش کرا .ئەمه بریتییه له ئاراستەکردنی سەرنجی فێرخوازان بۆ پێکهاتەکانی زمان لەو کاتەی که چالاکانه له ئەرکەکاندا، به پێچەوانەی ڕێگایەک که لەسەر بنەمای پێکهاتەیه پێی دەوترێت "سەرنج لەسەر فۆرمەکان" که جەخت لەسەر فێرکردنی ئاشکرای شێوەکانی زمان دەکاتەوه. ئەمه بریتییه لەگرنگ بنەماکانی فێرکردنی زمانی پەیوەندیدار، وەک پەیوەندیکردنی ڕاستەقینه و ڕێبازێکی ناوەندی خوێندکار. تێگەیشتن لەم چەمکه له بەدەستهێنانی زمانی دووەمدا گۆڕانکارییەکی بەرچاوی بەخۆوه بینیوه. ئەم وتاره باس له پەرەسەندنی پێناسه ڕەسەنەکەی لۆنگ و هۆکارەکانی دووباره هەڵسەنگاندنەوەی ڕێزمانی دەکات. پاشان باس له چەند جۆرێک له سەرنج خستنه لەسەر فۆرم دەکات، هەروەها لێکۆڵینەوەی پەیوەندیدار بەم رێبازانه.

وشه سەرەکییەکان: سەرنج خستن لەسەر فۆرم، فێرکردنی ڕێزمانی ڕوون؛ فێرکردنی ڕێزمانی ناڕاستەوخۆ؛ فۆکۆسی بەرێتکەوت لەسەر فۆرم؛ فۆکۆسی کاردانەوه لەسەر فۆرم؛ فۆکەسی چالاکانه لەسەر فۆرم

التركيز على الصيغة في تدريس اللغة الإنجليزية الأجنبية

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ملخص

يؤكد العديد من علماء اكتساب اللغة الثانية أن مجرد التعرض للغة غير كاف. يزعمون أن الأنشطة التي تركز فقط على تطوير الرسائل غير كافية لتطوير فهم صحيح للغة ويحثون على اتباع نهج أكثر تركيزا على الصيغة لتعليم اللغة. "التركيز على الصيغة" (FonF) هو مفهوم أساسي في تدريس اللغة القائم على المهام ، قدمه في الأصل مايكل لونك. وهو ينطوي على توجيه انتباه المتعلمين إلى هياكل اللغة أثناء مشاركتهم بنشاط في المهام ، على عكس النهج القائم على البنية المسمى "التركيز على الصيغ" (FonFs) ، والذي يركز على التعليم الصريح لأشكال لغوية محددة. يحافظ على أهمية مبادئ تدريس اللغة التواصلية ، مثل التواصل الحقيقي والنهج الذي يركز على الطالب. شهد فهم هذا المفهوم في اكتساب اللغة الثانية (SLA) تحولات ملحوظة. تستكشف هذه المقالة تطور تعريف لونك الأصلي وأسباب إعادة تقييم تدريس القواعد. ثم يقدم تصنيفا للتركيز على الصيغ المختلف.

الكلمات المفتاحية: التركيز على الصيغة؛ التركيز العرضي على الصيغة ؛ التركيز التفاعلي على الصيغة ؛ التركيز الاستباقي على الصيغة