

The Differential Effect of Form-Focused, Meaning-Focused and Combination of Form and Meaning-Focused Instructions on Developing Speaking Skills of English Learners

Behnam Mirzaee¹, Iraj Khoshnevis²(Corresponding author), Mehran Davaribina³

¹ Department of English, Science and Research Branch, Islamic Azad University, Ardabil, Iran

² Department of English, Science and Research Branch, Islamic Azad University, Ardabil, Iran

³ Department of English, Science and Research Branch, Islamic Azad University, Ardabil, Iran

iraj.khoshnevis@gmail.com

Abstract: This study attempts to investigate the effectiveness of three kinds of teaching instruction. To this end, 48 Iranian male adult students learning English at different institutes in Parsabad were chosen. Michigan English Test was used to ensure the homogeneity of the groups at the beginning of treatment, and a test of speaking ability according to TOEIC was adopted and used. The results showed that there is a significant difference between the scores at the end of the teaching course in each class at the probability level of 0.01. The comparison of mean scores of the three classes showed that maximum difference was between the scores of Combination Method as 78.5, and for Form-Focused and Meaning-Focused methods, as 59.81 and 35.87 respectively. Combination method represented an increase of 44 percent in the mean scores which indicates the efficiency of this method compared to the two other methods.

[Behnam Mirzaee, Iraj Khoshnevis. **The Differential Effect of Form-Focused, Meaning-Focused and Combination of Form and Meaning-Focused Instructions on Developing Speaking Skills of English Learners.** *N Y Sci J* 2014;7(1):60-65]. (ISSN: 1554-0200). <http://www.sciencepub.net/newyork>. 8

Keywords: Form-Focused, Meaning-Focused, Speaking Skills, English Learners

1. Introduction

In the field of teaching, we can see a gradual but significant change during the different eras from pre-scientific to post-method era, and many researches have been conducted in order to find the method which best matches with the students current status and language learning principles. Instruction methodology plays a crucial role in how a second language is acquired, and whether the language learner acquires adequate skills to communicate effectively in the second language, both orally and in writing.

The first group refers to purely communicative instruction, or what they call focus on meaning instruction. According to Stern (1992), implicit teaching techniques “encourage the learner to approach the new language globally and intuitively rather than through a process of conscious reflection and problem solving”, the rationale being that language is too complex to be fully described and that conscious knowledge cannot provide a sufficient basis for efficient learning.

Ellis (2001) argued that in focus on form instruction any planned or incidental instructional activity that is intended to induce language learners to pay attention to linguistic form.

There are clear advantages and disadvantages to an extreme focus in either instruction. According to Van Lier (1988), the traditional grammatical pedagogy is out-of-date and teaching grammatical

forms in isolation does not lead to successful development in using forms communicatively. “The middle way, covering both form and meaning, accuracy and fluency, would seem to be the most sensible way to proceed, and indeed there currently appears to be a general consensus that it is unwise to neglect either area” (p. 276). Fotos (1998) therefore proposed a new syllabus; communicative language instruction itself is important, but grammatical instruction should be implemented in context. Lightbown and Spada (1990) also mentioned that a higher level of grammatical accuracy in oral production is expected in combination of form-focused and meaning-focused teaching. According to early communicative approaches to foreign language teaching, such instruction can be conducted in two main ways. The first one is based on the fact that “learners should be able to notice, then process, linguistic structures which have been introduced to them within purely communicative contexts” (Fotos, 1998, p. 302). In other words, FL learners should attend to the target language structures by exposure to numerous examples of communicative input. This is called implicit grammatical instruction (Nishimura, 2000). The other approach is called explicit grammatical instruction in conjunction with communicative activities.

The study aims at drawing the teachers’ attention to the fact that there can be alternative ways to form-focused and meaning-focused learning. To

evaluate the effectiveness of focus on form instruction in comparison with meaning based instruction and combination of them. Research questions to the present study were as follow:

- Does combination of meaning-focused and form-focused instruction develop speaking skills of adult English learners in language institutes more than the individual use of them?

-Is there a difference on the achievement of the participants' learning in post-tests among Fon F group, Fon M group and Combination of Form-Focus and Meaning-Focused Instruction?

Definition of Some Key Terms

Focus on Form : Focus on form: Focus on Form "consists of an occasional shift of attention to linguistic code features—by the teacher and/or one or more students—triggered by perceived problems with comprehension or production"(Long & Robinson, 1998, p. 23).

Focus on Meaning: in the case of meaning focused instruction, learners were engaged in communication where the primary effort involved the exchange of the meaning and where there was no conscious effort to achieve grammatical correctness. (Trosborg, 1994)

Combination of meaning-focused and form-focused instruction: The middle way, covering form and meaning, accuracy and fluency, would seem to be the most sensible way to proceed, and indeed there currently appears to be a general consensus that it is unwise to neglect either area. In Iran or other Asian countries, English is a foreign language, so students have few opportunities for communicative use outside the classroom. It is therefore nearly impossible to get implicit exposure for communicative input. Fotos (1998) suggested that "if focus-on-form approaches are modified to permit formal instruction before the communicative activity and feedback afterwards, they offer considerable promise". Now it is an important issue to find out how grammatical rules can be explicitly taught in communicative activities. It is, however, a big challenge to focus on accuracy and fluency, on form and meaning simultaneously.

2. Review of Literature

The immersion studies indicated that an entirely meaning-focused instruction does not provide all that is required for developing the target-like proficiency and enhancing the accuracy of the target-language production (Swain, 1985). In fact, these studies suggested that a meaning-only environment is not the only requirement for the development of target-like proficiency, and simply exposing learners to meaningful input and involving them in understanding and/or conveying message content are not sufficient, though necessary, for promoting

formal accuracy at least in some area of language (Lightbown,1992; Long, 1991). Although few researchers would currently deny the importance of meaning-focused instruction, many now recognize the need to complement meaning-focused instruction with form-focused instruction of some kind to address this problem(Basturkmen, Loewen, &Ellis, 2002: 1; Ellis, Basturkmen, Loewen, 2001: 408, Macdonough, 2004; sheen, 2004).

Abdolmanafi (2012) investigated the acts of the three types of treatment (i.e., Focus on Forms, Focus on Meaning, and Focus on Form) on the learning of English relativization. The results of his two tests suggested that learners' attention to detailed analysis of form facilitates the learning of relative clauses in this context show improvement of all three groups; the focus on form treatment group outperformed the other two on both tests, however. This study also suggests that learners' attention to detailed analysis of form facilitates the learning of relative clauses in this context.

Rahimpour, Salimi&Farrokhi (2012) investigated the effects of intensive and extensive focus on form instructions on EFL learners' written accuracy and found that significant differences between the performances of two groups in terms of the accuracy in focused written production task.

Mokhberi (2011) investigated three groups of EFL learners who completed the same task and compared the two types of approaches to focus on form (F on F) that is 'reactive focus on form' and 'preemptive focus on form'. His results showed that reactive F on F in comparison with preemptive F on F furnishes an excellent means for developing the ability to use the grammatical knowledge of the target structure in context. Nakata (2008) argued comparing collection learning through meaning-focused and form-focused instruction activities and aimed to determine how form-focused and meaning-focused activities help development in collocation knowledge and whether congruent and non-congruent collocation benefit differently from the two types of activities. His finding showed that although no significant difference existed between the two conditions, the form focused condition led to significantly to higher posttest scores rather than meaning condition.

Seedhouse (1997) in a study titled "Combining form and meaning" concluded it is possible, for teachers to keep a dual focus on form and meaning, accuracy and fluency. This can be by giving opportunities for learners to talk about topics which are personally meaningful to them: it is for teachers and learners to debate which topics can be meaningful to the learners, allowing the learners to control the interaction themselves. He did not think

of using that this is the only way of achieving a dual focus, but it was the only way for which he was able to find clear evidence in the data.

3. Methodology:

3.1. Participants

This study was conducted with 48 Iranian male adult students in the language institutes in Parsabad. Random sampling was used for choosing participants.

3.2. Instruments

In this study, Michigan Test was used to determine the learner's level of proficiency and homogenize the students in terms of English language proficiency. This test has three sections: cloze tests, structure, and vocabulary. In addition, in this work, researcher-made test of speaking ability according speaking part of TOEIC was developed and used as post-test. This test is a kind of speaking ability test. It contains 11 questions that measure different aspects of students' speaking ability. The speaking test includes six different task types (pretest and post test). The first four task types (Questions 1–9) are rated on a scale of 0 to 3 and the last two task types (Questions 10–11) are rated on a scale of 0 to 5. The sum of all ratings is converted to a scaled score of 0 to 200.

3.3. procedure

This study required homogeneous learners who also had familiarity with L2. At first, Michigan English language test was used to assure that learners were at the same proficiency level. In the next step, learners were divided into three different groups receiving different instructions: Form-Focused Instruction, Meaning-Focused Instruction, and combination of meaning-focused and form-focused instruction.

Focus on form instruction method was operationalized by Headway book 1, a textbook written by Liz and John Soars. The book enhances communicative skills by giving listening, Grammar and Reading input to the students. Grammatical explanations were discussed by teacher and practiced in the exercise book. Students were exposed to the language by listening and reading exercises in the textbook and practice the language with the help of the exercise book. The book is organized in topics such as 'greeting', 'travelling', 'work', or 'food' in which the corresponding vocabulary and grammar is given. Input is in the form of listening or reading texts about the topic. Students were asked to learn the vocabulary by heart and practice the grammar that is given in each chapter. Most of the time, oral skills were practiced in exercises that students prepared to Focus on vocabulary and grammatical accuracy. They

interacted with each other by reading their answers to the exercises.

In Focus on Meaning instruction class Headway book1 was also used. At First, the teacher talked about the subject so as to awaken learners' background knowledge. Then, teacher wanted students to read a text and talked about the main idea of each paragraph. Upon the completion of the text, learners received communicative, pair/ group discussion tasks.

Students were surrounded by the L2 and were not allowed to use their L1. Second, students were only introduced to oral communication, that is to say listening and speaking. Communication was made possible by the use of signs: one gesture corresponds to one word or to one grammatical structure such as word order. Students were used to talking spontaneously without focusing on accuracy. They were asked to repeat the sentences told by the teacher and to answer questions orally about teacher's questions.

In the third group teacher used combination of form and meaning focused instruction. He talked about the topic in order to awaken learners' background knowledge. Then, he asked students to read a text and stated the main idea of each paragraph. Upon the completion of the text, learners received communicative, pair/ group discussion task. Communication is made possible by the use of questions and answered in accurate grammatical form. They did not receive any explicit grammar rules but were stimulated to reuse chunks or prefabricated constructions from the text. Students were asked to focus on accuracy and fluency. Then they were asked to ask question with each other and participating in class. In the end, each group was administrated a post test.

3.4. Data Collection

48 male adult learners from all Language institutes in Parsabad answered Michigan Test of English Language Proficiency. The result of this test was used as pretest. The result from post test obtained using a version of TOEIC.

3.5. Scoring

To calculate the participants' proficiency scores, one point was assigned to each correct answer and the correct responses were added up. There was no negative point for the wrong responses. Thus the possible range was 200, but the actual range in our test was 71- 195.

For each participant the score for each task was calculated by adding up the values of the responses to items in that particular task. A total score was calculated for all tasks. By this procedure one proficiency score, six scores related to the six tasks,

and one total score for all speaking tasks were obtained for each respondent.

3.6. Data Analysis

In this study, the difference between the instructional method in three levels of Fon F, Fon M, and Combination of Form-Focus and Meaning-Focused Instruction were investigated in terms of their output in speaking abilities. The design to carry out this study was experimental. One-way ANOVA and post hoc analysis were used to analyze the collected data.

4. Result

At first, a One-Way ANOVA based on the participants' scores on the Michigan Test (as pre-test) was utilized to establish the homogeneity of the three groups exposed to Fon F, Fon M, and Combination of Form-Focus and Meaning-Focused Instruction methods. The results confirmed that the three groups were homogeneous with respect to their language proficiency levels.

Table 1. *One-Way ANOVA Results for Michigan Test (as pre-test) Scores in Three Groups*

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	1082.271	2	120.252	0.629	.745
Within Groups	1146.667	45	191.111		
Total	2228.938	47			

As seen, there is not any significant difference between Michigan Test results (see Table1). This shows that selected participants have the same ability to learn English. Also shows that selection and grouping were down properly.

After the treatment and administering the post-test, again one-way ANOVA was conducted to see whether three groups were significantly different. The results of ANOVA analyses revealed a significant difference between the three groups (see

Table 2), but to identify which instructional approaches produced the significant results further post-hoc analyses were conducted(see Table 3). Tukey method of post-hoc analysis was used for this purpose. The findings showed that learners' scores in combination of F on F and F on M group were significantly better than those of F on F group, and both of them achieved better scores than F on M group.

Table 2. *One-Way ANOVA Results for Posttest Scores in Three Groups*

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	14565.875	2	7282.938	10.319	.000
Within Groups	31759.938	45	705.776		
Total	46325.813	47			

Table 3. *Tukey HSD Test Multiple Comparisons*

(I)method	(J)method	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig	95% Confidence Interval	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
1 59.0767	2	36.31250 *	9.39266	.001	13.5483	
	3	-1.25000	9.39266	.990	-24.5142	
2 13.5483	1	-36.31250*	9.39266	.001	59.0767	-
	3	-37.56250*	9.39266	.001	60.3267	-
3 24.0142	1	1.25000	9.39266	.990	-21.5142	
	2	37.56250*	9.39266	.001	-21.5142	60.3267

*. The mean difference is significant at the .05 level.

5. Discussion

This study investigated the effectiveness of three kinds of instruction: Focus on Form, Focus on Meaning, and Combination of Focus on Form and Focus on Meaning. The results of this research indicated that learners in Combination of focus on Form and Focus on Meaning group achieved significantly higher scores than those in Focus on Form, and Focus on Meaning. Also, learners' scores in F on F group were significantly higher than F on M group.

The results of current study confirmed that both Focus on Form and Focus on Meaning instructions are valuable, and should complement rather than exclude each other. This view, maintains a balance between the two by calling on teachers and learners to attend to form when necessary, yet within a communicative classroom environment.

These findings are consistent with Saeidi, Zaferanieh&Shatery (2012) who found that learners in F on F group achieved significantly higher scores than those in F on M. Also it can be aligned with the findings of Rouse (2012) who compared the oral fluency of two groups of high school students after one year and after two years of instruction. One group was taught French with a F on F method and the other with a F on M method. The free speech data of the two groups were scored for oral proficiency and analyzed for grammatical accuracy on three target items (Negation, Present tense and Gender). It showed that the F on M group was better in general oral proficiency in 2010 and 2011, that the F on F group was better at Gender after one year, but that the groups were equally good at grammar after two years of instruction and the F on M group seemed to use more creative constructions than the F on F group.

The present study also confirmed the higher efficacy of F on F instruction in comparison with F on M instruction as Pishghadam (2011) in a study titled "The Effect of Form versus Meaning-Focused Tasks on the Development" revealed the fact that F on F instruction group significantly outperformed the other two groups on the collocation.

Conclusion

To compare the effect of Focus on Form, Focus on Meaning and Combination of Focus on Form, and Focus on Meaning on the speaking ability of adult learners of English, an experimental research was conducted in Parsabad. Results showed that F on M group was significantly less proficient than the F on F group. The F on F group was thought more out to second language accuracy than the F on M group. The F on M group was more able to express the fact that they did not understand the question in second language and fluency. The F on F group tends to use

more prefabricated chunks learned in the classroom, whereas the F on M group is more creative and produced many new sentences from these constructions. But the combination of F on M and F on F Method was more effective than F on M and F on F, because participants had higher proficiency scores and had a better ability to communicate and interact in the target language.

In sum, when we investigated the effectiveness of combination of F on F, and F on M method, the operationalization of effectiveness appears to be very important. Looking at the general oral proficiency results, we concluded that the combination of F on M and F on M method was more effective than the F on F and F on M method. Further studies are needed to be done in different settings to confirm the results of this study.

References

1. Abdolmanafi, S. J. (2012). Effects of Form-Focused Instruction on the Learning of Relative Clauses. *The Journal of Language and Linguistic Studies* Vol. 8, No. 1.
2. Ellis, R. 2001. Investigating form-focused instruction. *Language Learning* 51, Supplement 1:1-46.
3. Fotos, S. (1998). Shifting the focus from forms to form in the EFL classroom. *ELT Journal*, 52(4), 605-628.
4. Krashen, S., & Terrel, T. (1983). *The Natural Approach: Language Acquisition in the Classroom*. Oxford: Pergamon Press.
5. Long, M. H. (1991). Focus on form: A design feature in language teaching methodology. In K. de Bot, D. Coste, R. Ginsberg, and C. Kramsch (Eds), *foreign language research in cross-cultural perspectives* (pp. 39-52). Amsterdam, The Netherlands: John Benjamins.
6. Long, M., & Robinson, P. (1998). Focus on form: Theory, Research and Practice. In Doughty, C., & Williams, J. (Eds.). *Focus on Form in Classroom Second Language Acquisition* (pp. 15-41). Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press .
7. Mokhberi, M. (2011). The Effect of Focus on Form Instruction on Intermediate EFL Learners' Grammar Learning in Task-Based Language Teaching. *American Journal of Scientific Research* (pp.95-105).
8. Nishimura, K. (2000). Effective ways of communicative instruction in the Japanese EFL classroom : Balancing fluency and accuracy. Retrieved March 20, 2006, from the ERIC database.
9. Nakata, T. (2008). English collocation learning through meaning-focused and form-focused

- activities: Interaction of activity types and L1-L2 congruent.
10. Pishghadam, R. (2011). The Effect of Form versus Meaning-Focused Tasks on the Development of Collocations among Iranian Intermediate EFL Learners. *English Language Teaching*, Vol. 4, No. 2.
 11. Rahimpour, M., Salimi, A., & Farrokhi, F. (2012). The Effect of Intensive and Extensive Focus on Form on EFL Learners' Written Accuracy. *Theory and Practice in Language Studies*, Vol. 2, No. 11, pp. 2277-2283.
 12. Rouse, A. (2012). Effectiveness of Focus on Form versus Focus on Meaning (Master thesis). *Aim Language Learning* magazine. University of Groningen.
 13. Seedhouse, P. (1997). Combining form and meaning. *ELT Journal*, 51(4), 336-344.
 14. Sheen, Y. (2004). Corrective feedback and learner uptake in communicative classrooms across instructional settings. *Language Teaching Research*, 8 (3), 263-300.
 15. Spada, N. Lightbown, M. (1993) Instruction and development of question, in *L2 Classrooms. Studies in Second Language Acquisition* 205-221.
 16. Spada, N. (1997). Form-focused instruction and second language acquisition: A review of classroom and laboratory research. *Language Teaching*, 30(1), 73-87.
 17. Stern, H. H. (1992). *Issues and Options in Language Teaching*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
 18. Swain, M. (1985). Communicative competence: some roles of comprehensible input and comprehensible output in its development. In S. Gass & C. Madden (Eds.), *Input in the second language acquisition* (pp.235-253). Rowley, MA: Newbury House.
 19. Trosbog, A. (1994). *Interlanguage pragmatic: request, complaints and apologies*: New York: Mouton Du Gruyter.
 20. Van Lier, L. (1988). What's wrong with classroom talk? *Prospect*, 3(3), 267-283.

1/3/2014