

Focus on Form: A Holistic Review of EFL Pedagogy

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Recent studies suggest that focus on form has a positive effect on the second language acquisition process. The significance of this instruction is acknowledged by most practitioners and researchers. However, only few studies have investigated which kinds of forms optimize learner's acquisition when implementing focus on form. This critical investigation attempts to identify the forms which are amenable to focus on form and more importantly, what factors should be taken into account when deciding which forms should be chosen for focus on form strategy. Moreover, by reviewing several empirical studies, this paper discusses past developments of metalanguage use when teaching selected forms and what role metalanguage plays in a communicative classroom to elucidate the above mentioned issue. Finally, this study suggests that the combination of the most effective elements of each type of instruction is precisely what paves the way for a productive pedagogy.

[focus on form/grammar teaching/metalanguage/
형식에 초점을 맞춘 교수/문법교육/매개언어]

I. INTRODUCTION

In the past three decades, methodologies of second language (L2) instruction in classrooms have evolved significantly. Within distinct time periods, the hub of instruction has shifted in

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response to the 'dominant' approach at the given time. One of the greatest shifts seen has occurred in teaching grammar. Grammar comprised the heart of language teaching in the 1960s and 1970s, as seen in approaches such as Audiolingual approach. During that time period, focus on form, otherwise known as what Wilkins (1976) coined the Synthetic approach, was prevalent. Focus on form refers to the traditional teaching of discrete points of grammar in separate lessons. Under this particular approach, language teaching involved the pre-selection and adaptation of individual language elements (e.g., forms such as agreement features) based on "synthetic syllabi" (Long & Robinson, 1998, p.15) and the intensive and systematic instruction of these aspects. Later research on focus on form (Alanen, 1995; Burgess & Etherington, 2002; Dekeyser, 1995; Ellis, 2006; Ellis, 2008; Gass & Selinker, 2008; Hatch, 1983; S. Park, 2008; Williams, 2005) began to show that teaching decontextualized and discrete grammatical points was inefficient regardless of whether the learners had innate abilities or classroom acquirers.

With the intent of disregarding focus on form instruction, language teaching next shifted to focus on meaning, which Wilkins (1976) termed the Analytic approach. Adopting this method, some teachers and researchers believed that all language learners, regardless of age, would better learn a language if they become exposed to the language as a method of communication and less as an object of study. As with the case of focus on form instruction, there were also several problems with focus-on-meaning instruction as well. Experiencing how language works itself was inefficient. Some studies (Ellis, 2008; Leiser, 2004; Loewen, 2003; Long, 1983; S. Park, 2010; Williams, 2001) showed that students who received some kind of formal instruction were more knowledgeable in the target language than students whose study was purely meaning-based. In addition, occasions arose when the learners chose or were required to focus on form in addition to the focus on meaning. Focus on form instruction has been, and continues to be, an area of ongoing debate among researchers. This has led to the emergence of a new option for language teachers, mainly focus on form as opposed to Focus on form instruction or meaning-focused instruction. This new era began with Long's (1991) seminal article in which he established 'Focus on Form,' differentiating it from focus on form instruction. According to Long (1991), "focus on form...overtly draws a student's attention to linguistic elements as they arise incidentally in lessons whose overriding focus is on meaning or communication" (p.45-46). Focus on form is, in this way is more explicit and manageable to the learner. In this teaching style, linguistic features are emphasized as they become part and parcel of any communicative transaction. necessary to communication. As described by Ellis, Bastukmen and Loewen (2002), a typical focus on form in a communicative setting would

focus students' attention primarily on meaning. As a result, they would be unaware of the fact that a given form is being targeted and students optimally function as communicators rather than language learners.

Among various aspects of focus on form, this paper primarily concentrates on which kinds of forms have the ability to optimize learner's acquisition, and perhaps more importantly, what factors should be taken into account when deciding which forms are more amenable to instruction. In addition, this paper will examine past developments of metalanguage use when teaching selected forms and what role metalanguage plays in a communicative classroom. Several empirical studies will be used to elucidate these issues.

The nexus between form and meaning is not a nebulous one. In general, the former refers to prominent linguistic aspects of teaching a particular language whereas the latter focuses on semantic values attached to lexical items. Both are however interrelated in meaning making. The point we are driving at here is that from a pedagogical perspective, focus on form may yield more benefits to the learner.

II. FOCUS ON FORM

1. Historical Perspectives

In the early 90s, SLA researchers (Lightbown & Spada, 1990; Long, 1991) proposed that L2 instruction which draws attention to form, but is not isolated from communication, could be more effective than other methods. However, as noted by Williams and Evans (1998), it gradually became obvious that not all forms were equally good candidates for focus on form (Herron & Tomasello, 1992; Zhou, 1992). According to Harley (1993), certain criteria suggest form amenability to focus on form. These criteria state that forms are:

- 1) not distinctly different from L1,
- 2) irregular or not frequently used,
- 3) not absolutely essential for communication,
- 4) likely to be misinterpreted by the learner.

It should be noted that Harley's factors implicitly suggest that forms with these qualities would be neglected in regular communicative-based teaching. Harley's paper emphasized what

forms are best taught — not which forms are best learned under focus on form. In other words, even when a form is suited to focus on form, several factors still remain which affect how successfully these forms will be learned by students. Doughty and Williams (1998) offered the following considerations to take into account when teaching an appropriate form: individual learner qualities, developmental sequences, complexity of the form, differences between the L1 and L2, and finally, the type and quality of the input.

An attempt to offer some preliminary findings on the choice of forms for focus on form was put forth by Williams and Evans' (1998) empirical study. The researchers discuss two specific grammatical forms: English participial adjectives of emotive verb forms (e.g. *She is interesting* vs. *She is interested*) and English passive verb forms. The subjects of this study were intermediate adult ESL students enrolled in university writing classes who came from a variety of L1 backgrounds. Subjects of the study showed some level of understanding participial adjectives by actively using them in speech and writing, though the forms used were often employed incorrectly. However, subjects rarely used passive verb forms in either oral or written language production. The first experimental group (Group F) received a flood of the form-in-focus via the teacher. The second experimental group (Group I) received the same increase of the form in focus, but with explicit instruction and feedback, which included brief presentations of rules with direct emphasis on meaning and use. The control group worked with the same materials with no treatment via the instructor. Ultimately, the control group learners presented very minor improvements without any kind of focus on form. For participial adjectives, Group F showed a significant increase above the control, but not up to the level of Group I. As for the passive forms Groups F and I showed equally small improvements as compared to the control group.

As Williams and Evans (1998) observe the improvement seen in Group I with regard to the participle adjectives was clearly due to the focus on form activities within a meaning-based context. According to Harley (1993), participial adjectives are amenable to focus on form. This is because they are easily misinterpreted by the learner. Perhaps of greater interest, however, was the equal and only minor improvement in Groups F and I with regard to the passive form. If focus on form within meaning-based instruction proved so successful with participial adjectives, why was it less effective with passives? Given Harley's stipulations, it would appear that passives would be a good candidate for focus on form, as they are not very frequent, especially in the case of these particular students' L2 exposure. However, that did not prove to be the case.

2. Prior Knowledge

Very often, students with some form of focus on form instruction may perform well in EFL classes. Williams and Evans (1998) themselves reported that the students who made the greatest improvements were “those who already had partial mastery of the form” (p. 151). In addition to the developmental constraints posed by the passive structure, the issue of learnability was also raised. Passive form, as admitted by Williams and Evans (1998), is a rather complex form. Form complexity is an issue that Harley (1998) made no distinction of in his categories. Although a form may be easily misinterpreted, that does not necessarily imply that it is difficult to learn. Doughty and Williams (1998) include complexity as an issue to take into consideration when teaching a particular structure. In other words, the fundamental ease or difficulty of the form needs to be taken into account by teachers. This factor is particularly pertinent to the stated issue of learnability. Although determining whether a form is easy or hard can be complex, it does seem that some rules are more easily acquired than others. Williams and Evans (1998) concluded that focus on form may be “more suited to more transparent forms” (p. 152). For example, participial adjectives are relatively easy because they follow what Pica (1985) would have classified to be a fairly clear “form-function association” (p. 225). That is, the rule involves correct use of either *-ed* or *-ing* in a consistent manner.

On the other hand, Doughty and Williams (1998) hypothesized that rules with a “high reliability and broad scope” (p. 224) are easier and, therefore, learned earlier. Such rules occur frequently in the same pattern across many forms. Although participial adjectives are difficult in that they are very similar phonologically, they do follow a clear pattern. Passives, on the other hand, are within a category of rules that Doughty and Williams (1998) listed as being difficult to explain in clear terms. Indeed, the flood of passive form appeared equally effective (which is to say, barely effective) for both Groups F and I, despite the explicit instruction given in Group I. Williams and Evans (1998) proposed that successful learner uptake in focus on form were more likely to occur in the case of “easier” or more transparent forms. Additionally, difficult forms can be hard to learn, but they can also be comparatively hard to teach. Thus a form which is frequently misinterpreted by learners, but easily explained by the teacher, makes a better candidate for focus on form treatment.

K. H. Yeo (2002) conducted a similar research to Doughty and Williams (1998) with a group of Korean university students who were taking a conversational English class. The author attempted to compare the acquisition of two grammatical forms under two different instructional treatments. Participial adjectives and the passive form of English were studied

with two different focus on form tasks being used. The two tasks included in the experiment were input processing instruction and dictogloss task. The subjects were divided into three separate groups: an input processing instruction group, a dictogloss task group, and a control group.

In general, the results for implementing the two chosen focus on form showed that both techniques were effective in students' learning of English participial adjectives and passive form. Both the input processing and dictogloss groups were positively influenced by the treatments. However, the control group showed very little progress in learning the given forms. When learning comparatively simple and transparent participial adjectives, the students showed more progress when they were treated with dictogloss task which was considered to be relatively less obtrusive than input processing instruction. On the other hand, input processing instruction was more effective in learning the passive form which was thought to be relatively complex. The findings of this research conformed to previous research completed in this area (Ellis, 2001; Lightbown, 1998). The results of this study showed that the relative complexity of linguistic structure may affect the degree to which focus on form tasks are successfully utilized. Therefore, it can be deduced how important it is for teachers to be aware of his or her own students' readiness for the particular linguistic forms they are about to teach.

3. Linguistic Bias

It would also be worthwhile to consider how the levels of the certain linguistic forms are perceived by students in terms of their difficulty or easiness. Sadly, delineating levels of "difficulty" or "easiness" of each particular form may be an exhausting exercise. Pienemann (1989) suggested that forms which "involve little manipulation of the elements or little demand on short-term memory" were acquired earlier (p. 215). Dyson (2002) later affirmed that both implicit and explicit instruction were often ineffectual in teaching complex rules. In turn, this caused Han (2004) to question whether or not complex rules could ever be acquired by non-native language students. Krashen (1982) expressed the opinion that simple rules were better suited to explicit instruction and that complex rules could only be learned with time and exposure. Although gradients of ease and difficulty would be nearly impossible to determine, the scope of such rules would be more objective. Doughty and Williams (1998) suggested that rules which can be applied across many forms are inherently more useful and could safely be taught earlier on a syllabus. It should be noted that this recommendation was tempered by limitations of developmental readiness in the students being taught.

In another of Harley's (1998) studies, indicators of candidacy for focus on form centered on the differences between L1 and L2 learners. He theorized that subtle differences in language rules between first and second languages were better learned through explicit instruction. Doughty and Williams (1998) also included L1 and L2 as a factor affecting the teachability of a form. White's (1991) study also specifically addressed a form that was not obviously distinct in L2. The structural aspect of this particular study was adverb placement, which is often a problem area in French-English teaching because of L1 and L2 differences. In French, the placement of adverbs is fairly free. In fact, an adverb may interrupt a verb and its direct object. However, in English, although several variations on adverb placement exist, an adverb may never interrupt the verb and its direct object.

White's (1991) study subjects were French-speaking 5th and 6th grade learners of English. They were beginners with little outside L2 exposure. All participating groups received instruction within the communicative-based context, one group of which represented the control. The first experimental group received explicit instruction on adverb placement with specific feedback on where the adverb may not be placed. The second group received no instruction in adverb placement, but did learn about question-formation, which was intended to level the playing field for testing. This group also received positive evidence on adverb placement. White hypothesized that positive evidence would improve participants' adverb placement above the control. However, in one sense, she was grossly incorrect.

White (1991) discovered that with this group correct adverb order was possible, but that incorrect adverb placement was also still an issue. This supported her hypothesis that "positive evidence alone would be insufficient...in both the short and long term (p. 158)." This also raised another issue which became significant in the study. The first experimental group, which showed improvement in the short term, failed to retain that knowledge over a longer period of time.

As Harley (1993) points out adverb placement was amenable to focus on form due to the fact that it only subtly differs from the L1 structure (in this case French). In addition, because adverb placement has a minor affect on communication, it was well suited to explicit instruction (which concurred with item 3 on Harley's list). Furthermore, adverb placement is an area which was likely, and continues to be, misinterpreted by the learners (item 4 of Harley's list). Indeed, White's study gave tremendous support to focus on form for adverb placement. Only the group that received explicit focus on form mastered L2 English adverb placement. However, the study questioned whether such instruction had affected the students' underlying understanding over all. In delayed post-tests a year later, the instruction "did not in

fact result in significant changes in the learner's underlying competence" (p. 158). Though it is possible other issues may have been a factor.

4. Long Term Effects

Previously, some scholars have referred to the long term effects of focus on form instruction. For example, White concluded that because the instruction was 'parachuted in' (i.e., there was no continuous feedback instruction), the focus on form was ineffective in the long term. The students were beginners who had little exposure to the form-in-focus afterwards. Moreover, positive feedback was not sufficient to teach this particular form. Without negative feedback, the students were unable to determine which placements were impossible. This study correlated directly with Doughty and Williams' (1998) discussion of input availability being a significant factor when learning a form. Without continual treatment, less common forms would be easily lost. Had the students in White's (1991) study had more experience with L2 English outside of the classroom, perhaps L2 adverb placement rules would have been reinforced by exposure.

Furthermore, although White (1991) has not discussed it comprehensively this study may have been limited by its duration. Only one post-test was conducted a year later, so it is not entirely clear whether the focus on form of adverb placement truly failed in the long run. The subjects were 5th and 6th grade beginners of English who had little opportunity to employ their new language skills outside of the classroom, and perhaps had less use for the form at their current level of proficiency. Doughty and Williams (1998) once discussed the Spada and Lightbown (1993) study which evidenced that focus on form can have "some long-term, if not immediately noticeable, effects" (p. 216). It is possible that if a post-test had been conducted years later, there may have been a difference in the performance of these two experimental groups exposed to it. Williams (2001) discussed this effect in her article, "Learner-Generated Attention to Form". Williams argued that beginners may only be in the initial stages of development and, therefore, may benefit less from focus on form. Gass (1997) summarized this sentiment in an earlier paper writing that, "some input is utilized for (comprehension of) meaning and other input will be utilized for further grammatical development" (p. 311). Thus the knowledge may lay dormant until it becomes communicatively necessary for it to be employed.

5. Development Aspects

As mentioned above, focus on form can be used to lay a foundation of knowledge for learners to build upon at a later time. Similarly, deciding which forms to teach can be guided by the intent to preempt common difficulties, thereby laying groundwork before a problem arises. Although most language studies focus on grammatical principles, focus on form can also be used in other contexts. One notable study focused on the use of focus on form to prevent common listening and writing errors by L2 students. Morris and Tremblay (2002) examined the issue of misspelled, unstressed words. A large number of students misspelled frequently seen words, such as 'I', 'as', and 'how'. In natural speech, these function words are usually unstressed. Morris and Tremblay attributed these errors to a lapse of attention, as the students were more successful in spelling more complicated lexical items. Morris and Tremblay (2002) compared two groups of about 60 students in several classes. One group received focus on form that emphasized the spelling of unstressed words while the control group did not. All the students fell in the high-beginner/low-intermediate level. The results were considered significant in favor of focus on form for this particular form.

The researchers of this study concluded that focus on form was effective because instruction forced the students to actively notice the spelling of these particular words. Morris and Tremblay additionally attributed the success to the intensity of the instruction. The students received regular and copious instruction over an extended period of time, something lacking in previous focus on form studies. Morris and Tremblay (2002) also mentioned that the students were developmentally ready to learn this form. It is interesting to note that function words such as 'I', 'as' and 'how' are extremely frequent in language use. Furthermore, the misspelling of these words had nothing to do with similarity to the L1. In fact, given Harley's (1993) factors, this issue would appear to be an unlikely candidate for focus on form. Harley's (1993) categories specifically listed forms that are not salient due to infrequency or rarity. Then what made Morris and Tremblay's study so successful? In this case, though it may seem simplistic, focus on form was effective because it responded directly to a problem. Robinson (1996) noted problem areas can also be used when deciding which forms to focus on. And, as Doughty and Williams (1998) noted, learner errors are quickly and easily addressed by teachers, who are closely connected to instructional decisions. This method often addressed naturally and without comment in any type of instruction: teachers note a pervasive problem and then move to focus on it.

In the study done by Morris and Tremblay (2002), the researchers preemptively applied

focus on form in an aggressive and uniform way directly compensating for a specific problem area. The errors that were occurring happened on a purely orthographic level. This type of error could have easily been overlooked at this point or never been addressed at all. In purely meaning-based instruction, there is little doubt that a pervasive spelling problem would ever have been included in the curriculum. Doughty and Williams (1998) also concluded that simple error correction is not necessarily the most effective way of dealing with a global problem. The authors of this study, however, predicted that the misspelling of L2 function words also contributed to misunderstandings on the level of L2 morphosyntax and believed that it could be remedied with organized focus on form. The authors' hypotheses were confirmed by their research results. With the complexity and depth of research on focus on form, it should be emphasized that need assessments, however simplistic, should not be wholly discounted.

III. METALANGUAGE USE

In a study by Basturkmen, Loewen and Ellis (2002) concerning metalanguage they delved into the merging of focus on form instruction and focus on form. As trends in instruction methods have moved towards extremes, this study was of particular interest as it advocated compromise. Studies have shown that straightforward grammar instruction is still considered extremely important by teachers and students alike, despite the trend towards decontextualized grammar instruction (Burgess & Etherington, 2002). The purpose of this particular study was to examine how often metalanguage was used in an L2 classroom and how it contributed to the learners' uptake. Metalanguage was defined by the authors as "language used to describe or analyze language," and "uptake" was understood to be an attempt by students to use what they had specifically been taught. Metalanguage constituted either technical or non-technical language descriptions.

Basturkmen et al.'s (2002) study was purely observational. The researchers used microphones to record the teacher-student interactions in 10 classes of intermediate and pre-intermediate learners of English. The classes were mainly meaning-based, with occasional side sequences of rule and grammar conversations often called "take a break" sequences. What the study uncovered was that there was no association between metalanguage and uptake in teacher-initiated or reactive focus on form episodes. However, it exposed a significant relationship between metalanguage and uptake in student-initiated focus on form episodes. These authors theorized that this relationship could be explained by individual learner aptitude.

In other words, a student would be more likely to use metalanguage that resulted in more uptake if s/he had a greater language aptitude. That aside, the next explanation was that the use of metalanguage made the form-in-focus more explicit, and that learner initiated attention aided instruction to the point of uptake.

Basturkmen, et al.'s (2002) study represents an impressive compromise in the battle between focus on form and focus on form instruction. The nature of metalanguage seems inherently predisposed to focus on form instruction as it is composed of the naming and explicit examination of language rules. On the other hand, this study was conducted in a deliberately communicative setting. Most importantly, Bastrukmen et al.'s study (2002) found that metalanguage was significantly effective in producing uptake when the focus on form episodes were student-initiated. This supported theories regarding developmental sequences and the comparative importance of reactive focus on form. Students who use metalanguage in their output concerning forms demonstrate successful uptake. In turn, this suggests that the students were developmentally ready to learn a specific form and which teachers ought to pay attention to those forms.

The authors further noted that their results may have indicated that more advanced learners were naturally predisposed to engage in 'metatalk'. Williams (2001) also described how more advanced students demonstrated a "greater willingness or ability to talk about language" (p. 326). Perhaps more advanced learners have increased their proficiency precisely through means such as metatalk and not the other way around (i.e. they used metatalk because they were advanced). In any case, that caveat should be thought to lower the significance of this study's results on the effectiveness of metalanguage.

As noted by Basturkmen, et al. (2002), one of the most fundamental benefits of the use of metalanguage was that it drew the learner's attention to the form- in-focus. Schmidt (2001) wrote extensively on the benefits of what he called the "Noticing Hypothesis". He wrote, "There is no doubt that attended learning is far superior, and for all practical purposes, attention is necessary for all aspects of L2 learning" (p. 3). Putting a label on a form makes it distinct in the mind of the learner and, in turn, helps the form enter into the consciousness (Schmidt, 2001). This can further be proved since Harley's (1998) study on the gender of nouns revealed that focus on form did not help learners generalize their knowledge. Instead, it appeared that these students absorbed the information in what Dyson (2002) would call "formulaic chunks," or conceptualized pieces that could not be globally applied (i.e., to nouns that the students had not learned). This discovery is applicable to metalanguage in the sense that naming a form emphasizes the existence of rules which are inherently 'global'. The benefits of categorization

were another issue discussed in studies of metalanguage use. Language is a system and the ability to label it facilitates the creation of categories inside the mind. It is a way of organizing a complex system. For more advanced learners, categorizing is a way of making forms more comprehensible. This is an issue which teachers should take into account when choosing forms to teach, whether alone or in combination with other forms.

As mentioned previously, metalanguage is often associated with focus on form instruction and by modifying metalanguage to be less technical and more casual, metalanguage becomes more applicable in focus on form. For example, it would be difficult for a teacher to transition from a communicatively-based instruction to a discussion of “present-progressives”. However, if a teacher were to mention that, “Here you want to use the –ing form, ‘walking,’” the communicative discourse would be less disrupted. This would help students function more like language users than language learners (Ellis et al., 2002).

In a study done by Berry (2000), he examined the use of what he termed “user-friendly” metatalk. Berry’s (2000) findings did suggest that user-friendly metalanguage in lexicography was more effective. However, while one of his experimental groups found the user-friendly text to be easier to understand, but their uptake was minimal. Berry (2000) suggested that although these students “found the text easier to read and more appropriate, they relaxed and failed to pay sufficient attention to it” (p. 205). Schmidt (2001) also demonstrated how lapses of attention are detrimental to learning. This raises questions about how non-technical metalanguage should be. Nevertheless, metalanguage will surely make a smoother transition into focus on form if it is more casual in nature. Furthermore, returning to Basturkmen, et al.’s (2002) study, it again becomes significant that the student-initiated metatalk resulted in the greatest successful uptake. Therefore, if metalanguage is more user-friendly and non-technical, then students are more likely to use it themselves, and will display a more successful uptake. Thus, the benefits of non-technical metatalk outweigh the danger of metalanguage becoming less salient.

IV. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The aim of this paper was to interpret the research regarding focus on form in Second Language Acquisition classrooms with a specific goal of identifying whether some forms are more amenable to focus on form than others. This literature review was driven by the assumption that not every form is an equal candidate for focus on form. Harley’s (1993) criteria

on which forms are amenable to focus on form are not necessarily reflective of the whole story. Doughty and Williams (1998) emphasized other factors which affect how readily a form will be learned. It seems clear that developmental sequences cannot be ignored and that special attention must be paid to the relative ease or difficulty of a form. The practical scope for learners' use of that form should also be broad. In other words, a rare form may be best suited for focus on form, but such forms are generally less practical for use by beginners. It remains fundamentally important for teachers to remember that more common forms will have a greater real-world application and are of a greater importance (and interest) to their students. Finally, although research in developmental sequences and learnability is extremely important in creating guidelines for teachers to follow in choosing forms, teachers should keep in mind that sometimes attention to evidence is the most efficient way of deciding which form to use.

Future research needs to concentrate on the impact of L1 systems in determining which forms in the target language are more learnable and teachable. In other words it is futile to generalize concepts relating to focus on form being heavily anchored in a selected L1. Languages are different from one another and so are the forms related to them. Hence, a productive approach needs to take cognizance of the individual differences in language systems before making glib generalizations that often border on stereotyping language learning sequences.

It is also important to recognize the extent to which local and cultural context can affect the learner in appreciating the significance of focus on form language learning. There are some perceptions among different cultures that language learning is something that should occur naturally. In some cultures even at the primary school level rote learning is an integral part of language learning. In other words, memorizing lexis and structures and learning how to repeat them is still considered as a natural mode of learning in some parts of the world. When students are first exposed to focus on form there is often a period of disruption where students have to adapt to the new methods being used in class. When this happens students can become demoralized and focus on form can be seen as a hindrance rather than a help. To prevent, or at least reduce this disruption, instructors can maintain the motivation of students by introducing focus on form on a gradual basis.

Pedagogic desire can also play an important role in focus on form instruction. First of all, instructors should be genuinely interested in introducing this strategy in their EFL programs to ensure only healthy interaction between the instructors and the students takes place. When instructors are not intrinsically prepared for this type of instruction, then students can be greatly disadvantaged. Focus on form does not mean only teaching the grammar of a language but

rather it means teaching the relationships between grammar and meaning. In other words, teaching focus on form in isolation may not prove to be effective.

Focus on form exists near the center of the debate between focus on form instruction and focus-on-meaning instruction. As the pendulum swings from one extreme to the other, research has moved closer to validating focus on form (B. J. Kim, 2009; Linnell, 2010; S. Park, 2010; Shak & Gardner, 2008). The evidence so far demonstrates that specific focus on forms within a meaning-based setting aids learners in developing fluency as well as accuracy. However, some lingering negativity remains towards focus on form instruction especially as focus on form has gained popularity. It should also be emphasized that methods which seem traditional or overly grammatical (e.g., metalanguage) deserve another look. This includes even the most rudimentary impulse of teachers to focus on problematic forms. Thus the impulse to ‘jump on the bandwagon’ should be suppressed, at least until further research has delineated the extent and limitations of one type of instruction over the other. Likewise, though rare or uncommon forms can be easily taught, resources might be better allocated on focusing on the most useful forms.

Although a great deal of research has been done on how focus on form should be implemented, less attention has been given to which forms should be focused on. Hopefully, future research will be aimed at discovering not only which forms are best suited for use with focus on form, but also which forms are more commonly used in both language and classroom settings. The fundamental lesson as uncovered by this review, is that when choosing such forms teachers must remain open-minded. It is easy to become swept up in popular new instruction styles and cite research solely focused on modern trends. However, instruction methods do not need to be all-or-nothing. Combining the most effective elements of each type of instruction is precisely what resulted in the creation of focus on form. A deeper examination of methods like focus on form needs to be carried out to create a new tool for language instructors to utilize.

In conclusion, regardless of the methodology a particular instructor is accustomed to in EFL pedagogy, if students do not know something, then the instructor has to encourage them to learn. Accordingly, the instructor should make a determined effort to take steps to integrate focus on form instruction in to the classroom environment without adversely affecting other fundamental techniques and methods of EFL teaching for the benefit of students. These may seem like small changes within the system as a whole but even these small steps in the right direction will lead us closer to our eventual goal.

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Examples in: English**Applicable Languages: English****Applicable levels: secondary/tertiary**

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