

A Comparative Analysis of Corrective Feedback Received Under Planned vs. Incidental Focus on Form Instruction

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Abstract

The paradigm of methodologies for teaching grammar at tertiary level is often shifted between traditional, deductive 'focus on forms' instruction and the less traditional, inductive 'focus on form' instruction. This research aims at finding out if the two methodological principles of Task Based Language Teaching (TBLT), the 'Planned Focus on Form (PFF: attention to language forms that occurs under planned circumstances)' and 'Incidental Focus on Form (IFF: attention to language forms that occurs under unplanned circumstances)', can be used to reinforce the previously studied grammatical areas through communicative activities and help learners acquire the grammar of the language.

The target group of this research was a convenient sample of two groups of second year students (36 students in each) in the Faculty of Applied Sciences, Wayamba University of Sri Lanka who were placed into nine groups of four based on the marks received at the pre-test to represent the three group compositions of 'homogeneous high proficiency', 'homogeneous low proficiency', and 'heterogeneous' structures. Out of the nine groups, a random sample of three groups was selected to represent each group composition.

The study involved a comparative analysis of the two methodologies of PFF and IFF in relation to the Language Related Episodes (LREs: dialogue where students question their language use, or self-correct their language production) produced. The number of utterances in the LREs produced was used to measure to what extent each group composition under each methodological instruction focused on form. The LREs were further analyzed to identify the type of corrective feedback. The TBLT lesson for both PFF and IFF groups was composed of Pre Task, During Task and the Post task stages. On day 01, in the 'during task phase', an opinion exchange task was given to express the participants' views on a given topic and to write a report based on their findings. At the post task stage, only the PFF group received the Grammar Consciousness Raising (GCR: Activities which require the participants to study a given grammatical structure and identify the rules of it on their own) activities while the IFF group received a task reporting time. The GCR activities were

designed targeting some specific forms which were perceived as essential for expressing opinions and report writing. The rationale for using GCR was that by focusing on specific forms the first day, the learners would be able to produce more accurate expressions or reports during the second day. The student interactions of 'during task phase' were recorded on both days and only those of day 02 were used for the analysis. The recordings were transcribed for the six groups of the random sample and the LREs were identified.

A simple statistical analysis of the LREs calculated as a percentage that focus on form ($\text{Percent of LREs} = \text{LREs} / \text{Total No. of Episodes} \times 100$), reveals that those who received the PFF instruction have recorded comparatively higher percentage of LREs over their counterparts. Further, the homogeneous low proficiency groups of both instructions have recorded comparatively higher percentage of LREs over the homogeneous high proficiency and heterogeneous groups. Moreover, the interactions of the PFF category record a higher total number of episodes. So, it can be assumed that the GCR has motivated them to talk more or discuss facts and language while writing. The data on LREs was also analyzed by considering the number of LREs produced by each group per minute ($\text{Amount of LREs produced per minute} = \text{Number of LREs} / \text{Recording time by minutes}$) which revealed that the PFF instructions had recorded overwhelmingly higher figures over their counterparts. When PFF groups display highly positive figures like 1.22, 1.16 and 1.44, the IFF groups record very low figures such as 0.07, 0.17 and 0.58. Finally, a general analysis on the corrective feedback types revealed that recasts had accounted for 37.5% of the total feedback while elicitation accounted for 30% and 22.5% respectively. The other corrective feedback types were meta-linguistic explanation (7.5%), repetition (2.5%) and confirmation check (2.5%).

The analysis of data reveals that undergraduates of Wayamba University focus on form to a considerable average rate of 15.51% during collaborative tasks. Moreover, the GCR activities under PFF structure have been effective in promoting the student interactions that focus on form. Since 90% of the total interaction occurred in English without switching into mother-tongue, the Wayamba undergraduates' language choice has proven to be productive.

Collaborative tasks of PFF task structure should be introduced into the curriculum to uplift the grammatical competency of the students.

Keywords : Planned focus on form; Incidental focus on form; Language related episodes