DOES FORM-FOCUSED INSTRUCTION AFFECT L$_2$ LEARNERS PERFORMANCE? : FOCUS ON GRAMMATICALLY JUDGMENTS

Hosni M. El-dali∗

ABSTRACT

It is one of the goals of research in applied linguistics to gain insight into the process and mechanisms of second language acquisition. The cornerstone and the single most fundamental change in perspective on the nature of language and language learning is, perhaps, the focus on learners as active creators in their learning process, not as passive recipients. The present study has two goals. First, it aims at investigating advanced students' metalinguistic ability in solving multidimensional grammatical problems. Second, it is, also, an attempt to highlight the role of focus on form instructions in shaping L$_2$ learners' performance.

The subjects of the present study were forty Egyptian students who were in their fourth year of academic study in the Department of English and Literature, Faculty of Arts, Menufia University, Egypt. The instrument of this study consisted of (1) pre-test; (2) post-test; and (3) individual interviews. Two tasks were used: (1) "Sentence Completion" task, and (2) "Error Recognition and Correction" task. In the first task, a list of 15 incomplete sentences was given to the subjects who were asked to choose the word or phrase to complete the sentence. The focus, in this task, was on the meaning of the sentence rather than the form, although accurate understanding of the formal properties of language is a must. In the second task, students were asked to detect the word or phrase that must be changed in order for the sentence to be correct. A list of 25 sentences was given to the subjects who worked on this task twice. In the pre-test, no word or phrase was underlined; it is an example of the unfocused correction type. In the post-test, the same sentences were given to the subjects, with four words underlined, and marked (A), (B), (C) and (D). It is an example of the focused correction type. Finally, students were interviewed to explain and comment on their performance in the previous tasks. The data were analyzed both quantitatively and qualitatively. Results were obtained and conclusions were made.

∗ Associate Professor of Linguistics, General Linguistics Programme, United Arab Emirates University, P.O. Box: 17771, Al- Ain, UAE. E-mail: hasan.mostafa@uaeu.ac.ae

It is one of the goals of research in applied linguistics to gain insight into the process and mechanisms of second language acquisition. A correct understanding of these processes and mechanisms is a prerequisite for an adequate didactic approach. Relatedly, Morley (1987) points out that during the last twenty years ideas about language learning and language teaching have been changing in some very fundamental ways. Significant developments in perspectives on the nature of second language learning processes have had a marked effect on language pedagogy

The cornerstone and the single most fundamental change in perspectives on the nature of language and language learning in recent years is, perhaps, the focus on learners as active creators in their learning process, not as passive recipients. Accordingly, the focus of second language study has shifted from a prominence of contrastive analysis in the 1940s and 1950s and error analysis in the 60s and 70s to interlanguage analysis in the 70s and 80s. Interlanguage analysis is marked today by "a variety of investigations looking at diverse aspects of learner language" (Morley, 1987: 16). In this connection, Gass (1983: 273) points out that "it is widely accepted that the language of second language learners, what Selinker (1972 has called 'interlanguage' or what (Gass, 1983) has called 'Learner-language' is a system in its own right." To understand such a system, we should focus on discovering how second language (L$_2$) learners evaluate and correct their own or other people's utterances, an issue that will be explored in the present study. In other words, the major point of interest here is L$_2$ learners' linguistic intuitions and the role of focus on form instruction in making grammaticality judgments.

THE PURPOSE

This study aims at investigating advanced students' metalinguistic ability in solving "Multidimensional Grammatical Problems (MGP)." It is, also, an attempt to highlight the role of focus on form instructions in shaping L$_2$ learners' performance. Forty Egyptian students participated in this study. They were students in the fourth year of their academic study in the department of English and literature; Faculty of Arts, Menufia University, Egypt. They were all males. The instrument of this study consisted of (1) pre-test; (2) post-test, and (3) interviews. Two tasks were performed by the subjects; the first was 'Sentence Completion' (SC), in which students had to choose the one word or phrase that best completes incomplete sentences. The focus, in this task, was on the meaning of the sentence rather than the form, although accurate understanding of the formal properties of language is a must. This task can be considered an example of communicative tasks, in which the subjects must draw upon the structural, rhetorical, and instrumental aspects of language to use Bialystok's words (1981). The second task was "Error Recognition and Correction"), in which students were to detect the word or phrase that must be changed in order for the sentence to be correct.

In addition, students were asked to correct the erroneous items. This task relies primarily on knowledge of the formal features of language. A list of twenty five sentences was prepared. In the pre-test, no word or phrase was underlined (unfocused correction task); however, in the post-test, the same sentences were given to the subjects, with four words underlined, and marked (A), (B), (C) and (D). The subjects were asked to identify the one underlined word or phrase that should be corrected (See Appendix 1). Finally, students were interviewed. Every subject was asked questions regarding his performance in the previous tasks. The students were asked to explain and comment on their performance.

The first task (sentence Completion) was analyzed quantitatively. Each sentence was worth one point; so, the total score of this task was 15 points. Students' attention was drawn through giving them four alternatives to choose from. The subjects' performance in the first task was used as an indication of their accumulative linguistic progress. The rationale, here, is that students' metalinguistic performance is said to be interrelated to their linguistic progress or level in a language. Students were given clear instructions regarding the necessity of focusing on form, and choosing from four alternatives. The subject' performance in the second task was analyzed both quantitatively and qualitatively (See Appendix 2).

RATIONAL FOR STUDYING GRAMMATICALITY JUDGMENTS

It is a widespread practice of both linguistics and L_2 acquisition researchers to rely on grammaticality judgments to support their theoretical claims. In both cases, the object of investigation is linguistic competence: the steady state of knowledge of the native speaker (NS), on the one hand, and the evolving interlangue (IL) knowledge of the nonnative Speaker (NNS), on the other. Relatedly, Birdsong (1987: 71) maintains that "a conceptual cornerstone of modern linguistic theory is the distinction between tacit knowledge of language, or competence, and language use, or performance. However, three observations must be considered. First, "given the other whelming reliance on grammaticality judgments within theoretical linguistics, it seems somewhat surprising that the L_2 acquisition literature is so rarely based on data obtained from this method"(Gass, 1983: 274). In addition, Sorace (1996: 375) points out that: "there has been a growing awareness of the fact that very little is known about the psychological nature of linguistic institutions." On the other hand, as Bever (1970: 343) claims, there is no reason to believe that linguistic intuitions are direct behavioral reflections of linguistic knowledge'. This claim was supported by some researchers: "judgments of syntactic corrections and the setting right of incorrect sentences, will not, I think, prove to be a royal road to… knowledge (or linguistic competence but simply another performance (Brown, 1973: 413). Second, we can make inferences from L_2 learners' responses about the nature

of their target language (TL) grammar. In this regard, Carroll, Bever, and Pollack (1981: 380) argue that: "linguistic intuitions have a dual systematic nature. On the one hand, they can be basic and primitive manifestations of the grammatical knowledge speakers share, but on the other hand, they are complex behavioral performance that can be properly understood and adequately interpreted only by a comprehensive analysis." Relatedly, Gass (1983: 275) argued that linguistic intuitions of L$_2$ learners are important not only for the information they reflect about learners' grammatical knowledge, but also because of the information they can provide about L$_2$ development and the ways in which language knowledge is organized. Moreover, there is an additional aspect to be considered. The ability to think about language has sometimes been called metalinguistic awareness, an ability related to a greater facility with language. Third, while Selinker (1972) was cautious about the appropriateness of using learners' judgments to validate interlanguage (IL) grammars, Corder (1973) advocated that normal L$_2$ learners should be very good informants about their interlanguage. However, Scachter, Tyson and Diffley (1976) argue that Selinker's and Corder's points of view are reconcilable if one realizes that learners will have reliable judgments about the more developed parts of their IL systems, but not about the 'indeterminate' fringes.

GRAMMATICALITY JUDGMENTS: DEFINITION

Judgments of grammaticality refer to a speaker's intuition concerning the nature of a particular utterance. The basic question, then, is whether or not a given utterance (usually a sentence) is well-formed Nunnally (1978) suggests that it is appropriate to distinguish 'judgments from sentiments', whereby we take judgments to mean any response to a stimulus for which there is (in principle, at least) a correct response, some veridical comparison for the subject's response, and it is possible to determine whether each response is correct or incorrect. Sentiments would refer, then, to attitude, opinions, preferences, for which there is no one arguably correct response; it is a matter of personal taste. There is no standard or independent criterion with which to evaluate the sentiment. With this distinction in mind, Gass (1983:277) maintained that for L$_2$ learners the ability to think and talk about language might involve abstract analyses of a number of different types. For example, it might include 1) analysis of their own language; 2) a comparison between their native language (NL) and the target language; 3) a comparison between their native language and other languages previously learned, or even 4) a comparison between the target language and other languages previously learned. Moreover, in producing acceptability judgments speakers may unconsciously shift towards the norm they believe they should follow, and away from the norm actually governing their internalized grammar (Coppieters, 1987). Therefore, "investigation of a learner's ability to judge

grammaticality is essential to an understanding of learner's development." (Gass, 1983: 277).

L_2 STUDIES ON GRAMMATICALITY JUDGMENTS

L_2 studies have focused principally on judgments of grammaticality and on the location of errors in test items. The standards of correctness have again tended to be the experiments' own judgments, but the degree of abnormality in the sentences has usually been limited to plausible L_2 errors or slightly difficult L_2 grammar points. For example, Mc Neil (1966) had native and nonnative speakers (NS / NNS) judge 'proximity to well-formedness' using a paired comparison measure. Both groups of subjects were able to match the actual developmental trend in the data (From Roger Brown's child language corpus) at the 80% level or better. Cohen and Robbins (1976) reported the technique of having learners evaluate their own written errors, locating and correcting them if possible, and although their procedure could not test subjects' discriminatory abilities since the fact of an error was given, it did reveal the diversity of grammatical awareness even among three subjects (Chaudron, 1983: 356).

Schachter *et al* (1976) presented L_1-based relative clause errors and correct sentences to subjects of five L_1 backgrounds. They found two groups tending to accept their own L_1 –type errors, while all groups performed randomly on other groups' error types but identified L_2 correct strings well. They took this to mean that the errors not based on each one's L_1 were in the indeterminate range of the subjects' IL system. White (1977) presented learners with a version of their own oral errors and analyzed judgments according to an error analysis classification. No differences in success of judgment for type of error or level of learner were found, while 47% of the errors were corrected and another 10% were indicated, without appropriate correction. This suggests that the additional time available when learners are allowed to inspect their oral production permits better access to explicit or implicit rules. Lightbown and Barkman (1978) had younger ESL learners judge 'correctness' of various '-S- grammar points (plurals, possessives, third person singular) known to be problems for the L_1-French students. Their interest was in whether the subjects would improve in judgment (and ability to correct errors) following several days of instruction on these points. The learners were in fact able to do so, in most cases, with absolute percentage improvement four times greater than for control groups with no instruction. Gass (1983) presented subjects with their own (but also others) written errors, requiring, first, grammaticality judgments and then location and correction of errors. All subjects recognized grammaticality at about 70% correctness; but the more advanced learners were better able to judge other learners' errors than the intermediate level learners. They were also better at rectifying error.

The above-mentioned studies tell us that metalinguistic judgments appear to be derived from linguistic development. That is, as learners develop towards target language proficiency, their ability to match the experimenter's 'objective' norms improves. In contrasting students at two proficiency levels, d'Anglejan (1975) notes that only the more advanced students produced non-random judgments of the deviance of test sentences. She concludes that less advanced students "were not able to discriminate between normal and deviant sentences" (P. 59). Her results suggest that a comparison of judgments made by learners at different stages in their mastery of a second language can reveal changes in developing competence. Moreover, such a comparison provides a view of some areas of transitional competence that in a typical error analysis are obscured by avoidance strategies.

Arthur (1980) claims that learner's judgments of acceptability are in part a reflection of that learner's competence in the target language. In other words, he assumes that one important reason why learners judge a sequence to be acceptable is that such a sequence is in accordance with their internalized knowledge of the target language structure. He, further, claims that as learners advance in their knowledge of the target language, their judgments will become closer to those of a native speaker. Although learners can judge certain sequences as acceptable or unacceptable in the target language, they may be unable to decide whether some other sequences are acceptable or not. In this regard, Schachter, Tyson, and Diffley (1976) claim that as second language acquisition progresses, the number of such indeterminate sequences decreases. Moreover keeping Krashen's (1977, 1978) distinction between learned and acquired L$_2$ behaviors in mind, investigators have recognized that learners' judgments will not only be affected by how much of the target language grammar the learners can approximate correctly, but by the nature of their knowledge base, whether it is principally acquired, or controlled by explicit knowledge of learned rules.

The distinction between types of knowledge and control over it has been most fully detailed by Bialystok (1978, 1979), 1981, 1982). She has proposed that language proficiency involves a number of disparate skills which can best be investigated by considering the amount of control that a learner has over target language knowledge. Different information is required for different aspects of language use. Language information can be viewed along two dimensions: one is the explicit/implicit dimension, reflecting the learners' ability to view the language information as an abstract entity; the second is the automatic / analyzed dimension, reflecting the leaner's ability to access the language information fluently and automatically (as opposed to with difficulty and deliberation). Bialystock further stated that simple grammaticality judgment tasks reflect information about implicit knowledge, but that additional tasks, such as correction of errors, reflect explicit analyzed knowledge.

Bialystok and Ryan (1985: 230) have argued that metalinguistic awareness is not a unique linguistic ability or 'a specific mental accomplishment' but should rather be applied to "a set of problems which share certain features." They further claimed that there are two underlying skill components: the analysis of linguistic knowledge and the control of linguistic processes. The analysis of linguistic knowledge is the ability to construct conscious representations of linguistic knowledge. It is responsible for accessing knowledge from its initial 'implicit' stage through its second stage of 'unconscious explicitness' into its final stage of 'explicit' mental representation. In the course of language acquisition the learner undergoes a gradual progress along the analysis component from low-levels analysis as in letter-to-sound correspondence to high-levels analysis as detecting ungrammatical sentences and correcting them. The control of linguistic process is the ability to select and apply linguistic knowledge to successfully arrive at a solution. Control requires attention to focus on just enough clues to reach a successful solution.

It is a common experience that decisions concerning the grammatical acceptability of a sentence in a given language can be accurately made without any recourse to the formal basis of that decision. Sentences 'sound right' for reasons that may be completely obscure, and in these cases justifications for the decisions can rarely be provided (Bialystak, 1981). According to Arthur (1980: 178), the judgments made by language learners frequently do not match the judgments by native speakers:

> Paradoxically, the 'errors' made by second language learners are, from the learner's own perspective, not errors at all, and second language learners may reject constructions that form a native speaker's perspective are acceptable.

To close up this section, it may be pertinent to make a very quick reference to the most recent studies in the field. Murphy (1997) investigated whether adult learners of a second language would judge grammaticality differently in visual and aural judgment tasks. Four groups were tested: English first-language, French first-language, English second-language, and French second-language. Results indicate that judgments were slower and less accurate in the aural condition, particularly among second – language learners. Moreover, Kubota (1996) investigated what types of instruction feedback combinations may contribute to the learning of English grammar for 120 Japanese university students. Students were given tests on grammaticality judgment and correction, using English ergative verbs in three trials of a post-instruction test. Subjects were divided into six groups according to type of instruction and feedback they received. Overall findings indicate that students with output instruction plus explicit metalinguistic information outperformed post-test 1 over those with output instruction and

no feedback. In the grammaticality judgment test, the effect of input instruction held over 1 week (post-test 2), but output instruction had only an immediate (post-test 1) influence on the formulations of grammatical knowledge. Finally, input instruction combined with either explicit metalinguistic information or positive evidence was not found to have significantly more gains in grammatical knowledge that an output instruction. Educators should keep in mind that providing explicit metalinguistic information is a very effective way of altering grammatical knowledge of learners when they are engaged in output and that the effect of treatment may continue longer for; input instruction than for output instruction. The test is appended. Similarly, Winitz (1996) investigated whether the methodologies to explicit and implicit language instruction account for differences in the identification of grammaticality well – formed sentences for college students of Spanish. Results showed that students receiving implicit instruction scored significantly higher in a grammaticality judgment test than those receiving explicit instruction. Finally, Balcom (1979) compared the use of passive morphology with unaccusative verbs by 38 adult Chinese learners of English as a second language with that of native English Speakers. On a grammaticality judgment task and a controlled production (cloze) task, the Chinese subjects both used passive morphology and judged it as grammatically inappropriate with all unaccusative verbs, as predicted.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE ON "FOCUS ON FORM INSTRUCTION

In the 1970s, a new pedagogy of communicative language teaching (CLT) and a new theoretical view of second language acquisition (SLA) emphasized the importance of language development that takes place while learners are engaged in meaning-focused activities. Teachers and methodologists developed language classroom activities that featured interaction among learners, opportunities to use language in seeking and exchanging information, and less attention to learning metalinguistic rules or memorizing dialogues and practicing patterns (Brumfit, 1984; Howatt, 1984). One type of CLT that has become especially widespread is content-based instruction (CBI) in which the new language is a vehicle for learning subject matter that is of interest and value to the learner. It has been hypothesized that in CBI "language learning may even become incidental to learning about the content" (Snow, Met & Genesee, 1992: 28). However, some researchers have observed that good content teaching may not always be good language teaching (Swain, 1988), and since the introduction of CLT and CBI, debates have continued about whether and if so, how attention to language form should be included in approaches to language instruction that are primarily meaning-focused.

Focus on form instruction makes up an important part of the literature on second language acquisition research. However, as Poole (2005) points out,

few work have both summarized and critically evaluated focus on form instruction. In reviewing the literature on this issue, I have two goals in mind: (1) to highlight the central aspects of focus on form instruction, and (2) to review some of the major research studies examining focus on form instruction.

CENTRAL ASPECTS OF FOCUS ON FORM INSTRUCTION

Some individuals, especially those who begin learning as young children, acquire high levels of second language ability without form-focused instruction (FFI). This outcome supports the hypothesis that FFI is not necessary for SLA. However, it is rare for students in second or foreign language classes to reach such high levels. Some claim that this failure to master a new language is due to physiological changes that occur with age. Others point to the limitations inherent in classroom contexts. Whatever the reason, learners who begin learning when they are beyond early childhood, especially those whose exposure to the target language occurs primarily or exclusively in classrooms where other students share the same L_1, appear to benefit from FFI that helps them make more efficient use of their limited exposure to the sounds, words, and sentences of the language they are learning (Lightbown & Spada, 2006a, b). One thing is certain: Language acquisition is not an event that occurs in an instant or as a result of exposure to a language form, a language lesson, or corrective feedback. It is an evolving and dynamic phenomenon that is perhaps better characterized by the word 'development' (suggesting ongoing change) than by the word 'acquisition' (if this is taken to mean that the language user has complete and irrevocable possession of some linguistic knowledge or behavior (Spada & Lightbown, 2008).

Focus on form instruction is a type of instruction that, on the one hand, holds up the importance of communicative language teaching principles such as authentic communication and student – centeredness, and, on the other hand, mains the value of the occasional and overt study of problematic L_2 grammatical forms, which is more reminiscent of non communicative teaching (Long, 1991).

Long (1991) and Long and Robinson (1998) claim that formal L_2 instruction should give most of its attention to exposing students to oral and written discourse that mirrors real-life, nonetheless, when it is observed that learners are experiencing difficulties in the comprehension and/or production of certain L_2 grammatical forms, teachers and their peers are obligated to assist them notice their erroneous use and/or comprehension of these forms and supply them with the proper explanations and models of them. Moreover, teachers can help their students and learners can help their peers notice the forms that they currently lack, yet should know in order to further their overall L_2 grammatical development. This means that, according to Long and

Robinson (1998), the responsibility of helping learners attend to and understand problematic L$_2$ grammatical forms falls not only on their teachers, but also on their peers. They assert that teachers are not to focus instruction on the teaching / learning of specific L$_2$ grammatical items. They, instead, should aim to help students learn how to use language in a way that emulates realistic communicative scenarios. The majority of class time should be devoted to teacher-student/student interaction via both oral and written modes. Relatedly, evaluation should centre on students' abilities to actively engage in authentic communication, using the forms they have learned during interaction. This type of instruction is different from those modes of instruction that, in general, are aimed at teaching specific L$_2$ grammatical forms rather than presenting language as a mechanism for communication. Those modes of instruction are generally non-communicative in the sense that they do not foster L$_2$ development that enables learners to engage in real-life communication. Also, such methods focus on the prescribed L$_2$ grammatical forms that the teacher can transmit to his/her students. In this sense, they are teacher-centered. In contrast, focus on form instruction is learner-centered due to its aim of responding to learners' perceived needs in a spontaneous manner.

Long (1991) and Long and Robinson (1998) argue that focus on form instruction is different from the purely communicative instruction, or what they call "focus on meaning instruction." For them, focus on meaning instruction is paramount to spending little or no time on the discrete parts of language; instead, the interest is on the use of language in real-life situations. Such a mode of instruction is apparent in the Natural Approach (Terrell and Krashen, 1983), which, in theory, prohibits direct grammar teaching. In contrast, Long (1991) and Long and Robinson (1998) assert that the occasional focus on the discrete forms of the L$_2$ via correction, negative feedback, direct explanation, recast, etc., can help students become aware of, understand, and ultimately acquire difficult forms.

FORM AND MEANING: ISOLATION OR INTEGRATION

Johnson (1982) made a distinction between what he called the unificationist and separationist positions on the teaching of language use and language structure. He described the separationist position as one with "structure being taught first (through a structural syllabus) followed by a second communicative stage at which use is taught and where structures are 'activated' or 'recycled'. According to Johnson, the separationist position implies "a divorce between the teaching of forms and uses, though other kinds of related separation are often also being implied as between knowledge and its 'activation', between correctness and fluency" (p. 129). In contrast, from the unificationist perspective, "the divorce of form and use is seen as undesirable and probably also untenable on linguistic and psycholinguistic

grounds. The position argues for a communicative framework from the very beginning" (p. 129).

Other writers have used different labels to distinguish different types of FFI. Long (1991) has made a distinction between focus on forms and focus on form. Focus on forms refers to lessons in which language features are taught or practiced according to a structural syllabus that specifies which features are to be taught and in which sequence. Focus on forms might involve teaching approaches as varied as mimicry and memorization or grammar translation, but all are based on the assumption that language features should be taught systematically, one at a time. In contrast, Long's focus on form refers to instruction in which the main emphasis remains on communicative activities or tasks but in which a teacher intervenes to help students use language more accurately when the need arises. Originally, Long (1991) defined focus on form as reactive and incidental. Spada & Lightbown (2008) have chosen to use the terms "isolated" and "integrated" to describe two approaches to drawing learners' attention to language form in L_2 instruction. Isolated FFI is provided in activities that are separate from the communicative use of language, but it occurs as part of a program that also includes CLT and/or CBI. Isolated FFI may be taught in preparation for a communicative activity or after an activity in which students have experienced difficulty with a particular language feature. In isolated FFI, the focus on language form is separated from the communicative or content-based activity.

In addition, they argue that making a choice between integrated and isolated FFI is not necessary (or advisable). Rather, the challenge is to discover the conditions under which isolated and integrated FFI respectively are most appropriate. These conditions are likely to involve a number of factors, including the nature of the language feature (e.g., its complexity, and its frequency and salience in the input), learners' developmental levels in the acquisition of the feature, and the relationship between comparable features in the learners' L_1 and the L_2. Other important factors include teachers' and learners' preferences for how to teach/learn about form, learners' literacy and metalinguistic sophistication (especially in their L_1), and, their age and overall L_2 proficiency.

The value of FFI within instruction that is primarily meaning-focused has been demonstrated by research conducted in CLT and CBI programs over the past 20 years. In addition, teachers who have experience with the strong version of CLT – an exclusive focus on meaning with no attention to language form (Howatt, 1984; Spada, 2006a) have observed that, without FFI, some language features never emerge in learners' language, and some nontarget forms persist for years. Experience with CLT and CBI shows that meaning-based exposure to the language allows L_2 learners to develop comprehension skills, oral fluency, self-confidence, and communicative abilities, but that they continue to have difficulties with pronunciation as well as with

morphological, syntactic, and pragmatic features of the L$_2$ (Lyster & Mori, 2006; Lyster, 1987). Research in CLT and CBI classrooms shows that the introduction of FFI has contributed to changes in learners' knowledge and use of certain language features (Lyster, 2004; Sheen, 2005). Advocates of CBI have increasingly emphasized the importance of planning lessons that have both content objectives and linguistic objectives (Echevarria, Vogt & Short, 2004; Schleppergrell, Achugar & Oteíza, 2004). Thus, both research and teaching experience have led to a growing consensus that instruction is most effective when it includes attention to both form and meaning. As a result, the most engaging questions and debates in L$_2$ pedagogy are no longer about whether CLT should include FFI but rather how and when it is most effective.

Some of the empirical work investigating the kind of knowledge that is acquired durin form-focused instruction has shown that FFI can play a role in helping classroom learners in CLT and CBI use their L$_2$ with greater fluency and accuracy (Mangubhai, 2006; Lyster, 2004) and to use language forms that represent more advanced developmental levels (Doughty & Varela, 1998). Skill acquisition theorists hypothesize that language learned first as metalinguistic knowledge can, through repeated meaningful practice, eventually become so well incorporated and automatized that the language user learned it in the first place (DeKeyser, 2003).

In sum, both focus on form and focus on meaning instruction are valuable, according to Long (1991) and Long and Robinson (1998), and should compliment rather than exclude each other. In their view, focus on form instruction maintains a balance between the two by calling on teachers and learners to attend to form when necessary, yet within a communicative classroom environment. It is worth-mentioning, however, that Long (1991) and Long and Robinson (1998) do not guarantee that focus on form instruction will lead to a specific level of L$_2$ grammatical development within a certain time frame, presumable "because of factors related to "quality of instruction, intensity of instruction, and the stages of morphosyntactic development through which L$_2$ learners must pass" (Lightbown - Spada, 1999: 8).

'FOCUS ON FORM' RESEARCH

Actual research on focus on form, over the past 20 years, has yielded mixed results with respect to their efficacy. The following is a review of some of the research studies on "focus on form" instruction.

Leeman *et al* (1995) compared focused on form instruction and focus on meaning instruction. They found that those students who received focus on form instruction were more accurate in their production of Spanish verbs than were those who received focused on meaning instruction. Van Patten (1996) investigated the effects of processing instruction on a group of secondary students studying Spanish at the intermediate level. Processing instruction

involves an explicit explanation of a certain grammatical rule, followed by contextualized practice activities. Participants were divided into three groups, one which received explicit explanation of rules, one which received contextualized practice activities, and one which received both explicit explanations of rules and contextualized practice activities. It was found that those who only received explicit explanations retain the fewest grammatical rules; the other two groups, on the other hand, achieved significantly higher scores on post treatment tests.

Doughty and Verela (1998) found that those students who received corrective recasts performed significantly better on post-test than did those who received teacher led instruction. Williams and Evans (1998) studied the precision with which intermediate-level ESL leaner's used the passive voice and adjectival participles. Two groups were established, one which received input flooding, and one which acted as a control group. The results demonstrated that the experimental group showed more accurate use of the passive than did the control group, yet no significant differences were seen between the groups in terms of their use of adjectival participles.

In a study made by Williams (1999) eight students of various proficiency levels studying in an intensive English institute in the United States were tape-recorded daily during 45-minute class period for eight weeks. During this time, they were involved in group activities. Williams sought out to describe the types of forms that they attended to. Overall, the results revealed that, among other things, students infrequently attended to grammar (20%) in favor of vocabulary (80%). In another study, Poole (2003), replicated Wlliams' (1999) study using 19 ESL students in an advanced writing class in a large US University. Students were tape-recorded for 10 weeks for a total of nine hours, during which time they were engaged in a variety of communicative group activities. As in Williams' (1999) study, the majority of students attended to vocabulary (89.8%) instead of grammar (10.2%).

Norris and Ortega (2000) examined the effectiveness of L_2 instruction by conducting a meta-analysis of experimental and quasi-experimental studies. Their study provided some positive evidence for the superiority of explicit instruction over implicit instruction and evidence for the durability of L_2 instruction. However, it also indicated that, "a focus on form and a focus on forms are equally effective" (P. 501). This finding is surprising, given that other researchers have suggested that Focus on Form (FonF) fosters L_2 learning in comparison with the traditional Focus on Forms (FonFS) instruction. Ellis and Loewen (2001) investigated preemptive focus on form (i.e., occasions when either the teacher or a student chose to make a specific form the topic of the discourse), The study found that in 12 hours of meaning focused instruction, there were as many preemptive focus-on-form episodes (FFEs) as reactive FFEs. The majority of the preemptive FFEs were initiated by students rather than the teacher and dealt with vocabulary. Students were more likely to uptake a form (i.e., incorporate it into an utterance of their

own) if the FFE was student initiated. The preemptive FFEs were typically direct, that is, they dealt with form explicitly rather than implicitly. Despite this, they did not appear to interfere unduly with the communicative flow of the teaching. The study concludes by arguing that preemptive focus on form deserves more attention from classroom researchers than it has received to date. Basturkmen, Loeulen and Ellis (2004) investigated the relationship between three teachers' stated beliefs about and practices of focus on form in intermediate level ESL communicative lessons. Focus on form was defined and studied in terms of incidental time-outs taken by students and teachers to deal with issues on linguistic form during communicative lessons. The teachers' statements of belief about focus on form were compared to their management of focus on form during lessons in which all teachers used the same communicative task. Results showed some inconsistencies in the teachers' stated beliefs, in particular in relation to when it is legitimate to take time out from a communicative activity to focus on issues of form, and preferred error correction technique. While some statistically significant differences in the teachers' practice were reflected in differences in their stated beliefs, others were not. These results indicated a somewhat tenuous relationship between the teachers' practice and stated beliefs regarding focus on form. It is argued that future investigations of teachers' beliefs, especially of unplanned elements of teaching such as focus on form, need to be based on both stated beliefs and observed behaviors. Moreover, the results of a study by Saeidi and Chong (2006) indicate that focus on form provides learners with an understanding of the interdependence between grammar and communication. In other words, learners, while learning grammar, focus on three primary aspects of grammar: form, meaning, and use.

Particular studies that failed to establish the efficacy of focus on form interventions include Izumi (2002), Leow (1997) and Overstreet (1998). In this regard, Han (2005) and Han, Park, and Combs (2005) provided a comprehensive critique of 16 focus on from research studies on second-language learning conducted over the past 15 years. Han et al (2005) ascertained that many previous studies that failed to show the efficacy of focus-on-form instruction had flaws in their theoretical assumptions or in their research designs. In contrast, the studies that demonstrated the efficacy of focus on form possessed arguably positive design characteristics. Among these characteristics are the following: (1) the studies were long-term rather than short-term studies, (2) they targeted "ready learners", (3) the interventions provided participants the opportunity to "act upon" noticed input, and (4) the interventions allowed participants to process the target input for meaning before processing it for them.

While many studies and others (Byrnes, 2000; Lee, 2000) provide insight into the efficacy of focus on form instruction, they all have taken place in settings that appear to be well-funded, adequately supplied with teaching and learning materials, and generally free of classroom discipline problems

(Poole, 2005). In addition, most studies of focus on form instruction have taken place in a few countries, notably the United States, New Zealand, and Japan (Poole and Sheorey, 2002). "No single empirical study can be found that took place in a setting in which classes were overcrowded, up-to-date materials were generally not available, and teachers received less than adequate training in language skills and pedagogy" (Poole, 2005: 52). This observation was, also, made by Klinger and Vaughn (2000); Mora (2000), and Baker and Markhan (2002). Likewise; no study supporting focus on form instruction appears to have taken place in a developing country, where the socioeconomic, political, and pedagogical realities may differ significantly from those in more developed countries.

ATTENTION, AWARENESS, AND FOCUS ON FORM: THE NOTICING HYPOTHESIS

Over the past two decades, researchers in the field of second language acquisition (SLA) have become increasingly interested in concepts traditionally associated with cognitive psychology. N. Ellis (2002: 299) points out, "We are now at a stage at which there are important connections between SLA theory and the neuroscience of learning and memory". The concept of attention has become especially important because of its crucial role in so many aspects of SLA theory such as input, processing, development, variation, and instruction. In this regard, R. Ellis (1994: 10) points out that "Schmidt is one of the few linguists who have adopted the conceptual and experimental rigours of experimental psychology in answering questions concerning the role of consciousness in L_2 acquisition". Much of Schmidt's work (1990a,b; 1992; 1993 a,b; 1994 a,b; 1995 a,b; 2001) ties findings from cognitive psychology into SLA theory. Reviewing the psychological literature on consciousness has led Schmidt to propose the *Noticing Hypothesis*, which states that "noticing is the necessary and sufficient condition for converting input into intake" (1990: 129). Since then, a considerable amount of research has addressed the issue of noticing in SLA.

Based on reviews of relevant L_1 literature and L_2 work, Schmidt (1990a, 1990b) argues that forms that are not noticed in the first, lower level sense (i.e., not consciously perceived), do not contribute to learning. That is, there is no such thing as subliminal language learning. He accepts that implicit language learning probably occurs (i.e., learning by noticing forms without understanding the rule or principle involved) but thinks that understanding those rules is highly facilitative in cases where straightforward ones can be formulated. Similar views on the importance of attention, noticing, and 'mental effort' in L2 acquisition are expressed in Gass, 1988; Hulstijn, 1989; Schmidt, 1993, 1994; and Watanabe, 1992.

On this account, failure to learn is due either to insufficient exposure or to failure to notice the items in question, even if exposure occurred and the

learner was attending. A learner could attend carefully to a lecture in an L$_2$ and still fail to notice a particular linguistic item in it. This is the opposite position to that taken by Krashen (e.g., 1985, 1989), VanPatten (1988), and others, who have denied there is any evidence of beneficial effects of a focus on form, at least in the early stages of language learning. Krashen has claimed that adults can best learn an L$_2$ like children learn an L$_1$, subconsciously (i.e., incidentally, without intention, while doing something else) and implicitly (via subconscious abstraction of patterns from input data), while attending to something else (meaning). Attention to (and understanding or awareness of) linguistic forms is supposedly neither necessary nor beneficial.

Schmidt's claim about the necessity of noticing does not refer to higher level understanding or awareness of language:

> I use noticing to mean registering the simple occurrence of some event, whereas understanding implies recognition of a general principle, rule, or pattern. For example, a second language learner might simply notice that a native speaker used a particular form of address on a particular occasion, or at a deeper level the learner might understand the significance of such a form, realizing that the form used was appropriate because of status differences between speaker and hearer. Noticing is crucially related to the question of what linguistic material is stored in memory ….. understanding relates to questions concerning how that material is organized into a linguistic system (Schmidt, 1991, p. 218).

According to Schmidt (1994: 179) noticing refers to the "registration [detection] of the occurrence of a stimulus event in conscious awareness and subsequent storage in long term memory...". Schmidt is careful to distinguish noticing from *understanding,* which he defines as "recognition of a general principle, rule or pattern" (1995: 29). Understanding represents a deeper level of awareness than noticing which is limited to "elements of the surface structure of utterances in the input" rather than underlying rules (Schmidt, 2001: 5).

Tomlin and Villa (1994) suggest that there are four conceptions of attention in SLA. One is that of attention as a limited capacity system. The idea being that the brain may be presented (through the sensory system) with an overwhelming number of stimuli at any given time, and it seems impossible to process them all. The limitations of attention refer not only to the amount (or duration) of attention that may be given to a single stimulus but also to the number of stimuli that may be attended to simultaneously. This leads to a second conception of attention, namely that it constitutes a process of selection. The overwhelming amounts of incoming stimuli force the attentional system to be selective. The third conception of attention, involves

controlled rather than automatic processing of information. The underlying assumption here is that some tasks require more processing effort, and hence a higher degree of attention, than others. A person may therefore perform two tasks at the same time, especially if one requires automatic processing (low attention). By the same token, it is more difficult to perform two tasks if both require controlled processing (high attention). The fact that controlled processing of two simultaneous tasks *is* sometimes possible led researchers to develop a fourth conception of attention, which is that it must involve a process of coordination among competing stimuli and responses. In this process, attention must be established, maintained, discontinued, and redirected in order to perform different actions.

Some support for Schmidt's position lies in Bardovi-Harlig's (1987) finding that the typologically marked preposition-stranding construction in English is acquired earlier than unmarked pied-piping, even by learners whose L_1 only allows pied-piping. Bardovi-Harlig suggests that the frequency of preposition-stranding in English makes it salient and draws learners' attention to it. Also consistent are the results of experimental studies comparing learning of new L_2 vocabulary and morpho-syntax by learners whose attention is partly manipulated by the researcher onto or away from the target items. In general (but not always), superior learning is seen in subjects whose attention researchers attempt to focus on the items during performance of a task using such devices as prior instructions to attend to both form and meaning (Hulstijn, 1989), showing them rules applied to examples in order to structure the input (N. Ellis, 1993), multiple choice margin glosses (Husltijn, 1992; Watanabe, 1992), highlighting and capitalization (Doughty, 1991), and other forms of what is referred to as "input enhancement" (Sharwood-Smith, 1991, 1993). Finally, especially relevant is a study by Alanen (1992) which although failing to find an advantage for input enhancement, nevertheless produced strongly supportive evidence for the claimed importance of noticing. Alanen compared the learning through reading of locative suffixes and a phonological phenomenon, consonant gradation, in Finnish by 36 English speakers under one of four conditions: input enhancement (italicization), rule, rule and enhance, and control. Subjects described their thoughts as they went along in a taped think-aloud procedure. Across all four groups, the think-aloud protocols showed that subjects' performance on subsequent unexpected tests of the target items was greatly influenced by attentional focus and reported noticing during the two learning tasks, with learners who reported that they paid attention to the target forms generally having acquired them, regardless of the treatment they had received, and no learners having acquired the targets without having noticed them (Ritchie & Bhatia, 1996).

One of the most influential attentional studies in SLA was conducted by VanPatten (1990), who investigated the notion of attention as a limited resource. More specifically, the study examined whether learners were able to consciously attend to both form and meaning when processing input.

Results showed that the 'content only and lexical groups' significantly outperformed 'the form and morphology groups'. This led VanPatten to conclude that it was difficult, especially for beginners, to notice content and form at the same time. Moreover, he postulated that learners would notice meaning before form, since their primary objective is to understand the prepositional content of utterances. VanPatten's findings have led SLA researchers to try and find ways to help learners focus on both form and meaning. One such way is input enhancement, which refers to the manipulation of certain aspects of the input (e.g., form) to make them more salient and thereby more noticeable to learners (Sharwood Smith, 1993).

Stronger evidence for the facilitative role of noticing comes from a study by Jourdenais, et al. (1995). Results showed that the Enhanced group used the target structure more often than the Unenhanced group on both the think-aloud protocols and the written production task, suggesting that input enhancement made the target forms more noticeable. Moreover, subsequent production by the Enhanced group was more target-like than the Unenhanced group, suggesting that noticing facilitated acquisition. A more innovative experimental design by Leow (1997, 2000, 2001) provides further evidence for the facilitative role of awareness in SLA. Leow (1997) used a crossword puzzle task as input that was designed to initially induce learner error. Eventual clues in the puzzle provided learners with the correct form, thereby increasing their chances of noticing the mismatch. Similar results were found in a subsequent study (Leow 2000). Results showed that participants who displayed evidence of awareness performed better on the post-exposure tasks than those classified as unaware. In a similar experimental design, Rosa and O'Neill (1999) investigated the role of awareness in acquiring syntactic structures. Among other things, the study found that awareness seemed to increase learners' ability to recognize the syntactic structures on the post-test. There was also a strong correlation between awareness and intake.

Leow's explanation seems to support VanPatten's (1990) findings that attention to both form and meaning is difficult. However, the modality of the input in this case (written) differed front that in VanPatten's study (aural). The question, then, would be "could modality differentially affect attention to meaning and form?". Wong (2004) tried to address this question with a partial replication of VanPatten (1990). His variations included the addition of a written mode of input and using English (instead of Spanish). Findings for the aural input mirrored those of VanPatten, since there was a significant decrease in performance when participants had to attend to both content and form. However, no significant difference was found when the input was written (which incidentally took less time to read than the aural input). Moreover, when processing both form and meaning, the listening task proved more difficult than the written task, suggesting once again that different modalities may impose different attentional demands.

To conclude, the noticing hypothesis has served to generate important theoretical and empirical debates in SLA. It has also provided an opportunity to integrate useful concepts from cognitive psychology into SLA theory.

RESULTS / DISCUSSION

Analyzing the subjects' performance in both tasks shows that almost all subjects performed at high level in the first task. This can be taken as an indication of high level of linguistic ability. One may expect, then, that these subjects will demonstrate the same high level of performance in the second task. This expectation can be true if their performance is systemic and stable across various language tasks. However, this is not the case in the present study. Comparing the subjects' performances in the two tasks clearly shows that these advanced students' metalinguistic ability is not a unitary construct. Also, comparing their performance in the unfocused correction version of the error recognition task to their performance in the focused correction version of the same task shows that their performance in the latter version is a lot better than their performance in the former one. This indicates that drawing their attention and focusing their space of thinking on certain grammatical forms affected their performance positively. That is, regardless of being classified as advanced students, their performance varies from one language task to another,. It all depends on three factors: (1) the nature of the language task / grammatical problem: whether it is simple or complex: whether it requires straightforward application of a rule, or thinking strategically; (2) the type of knowledge required by the task itself, and (3) the accessibility of such knowledge. These factors will be, discussed next.

1. THE NATURE OF THE LANGUAGE TASKS / GRAMMATICAL PROBLEMS:

A convenient means for dichotomizing language tasks is to consider their relative emphasis on code – related features of the language or communicative use of the language. This distinction has been expressed by the terms "Formal" and "Functional" language respectively (Bialystok, 1981). According to her interpretation, when a fluent speaker uses language he draws upon three aspects of language: a structural aspect, which is concerned with the formal features of language including pronunciation, grammatical rules and vocabulary; a rhetorical aspect, which is concerned with the development of generalized rules of spoken and written rules of spoken and written discourse; and an instrumental aspect, which involves the ability of the speaker to interpret or express the conceptual meaning which is appropriate to a given context. In this regard, Bialystok (1981: 33) rightly points out that "the application of this tricomponential model to the description of language

tasks concerns the extend to which the purpose of the task is to focus the learner's attention on the formal, the rhetorical, or the instrumental aspects of language aspects of language A grammar task, for example, relies primarily on knowledge of the formal features of language, while a communication task can incorporate formal, rhetorical and instrumental aspects in various degrees".

With the above – discussion in mind, one can argue that the first task (Sentence Completion) is an example of communicative tasks, in which the subjects draw upon the structural rhetorical and instrumental aspects, previously discussed. On the other hand, the second task (Error Recognition) relies primarily on knowledge of the formal features of language. As previously stated, the subjects of the study performed at a remarkably high level in the first task. This is why we can argue that these subjects are quite aware of the structural, rhetorical and instrumental aspects of English as a foreign language. Unfortunately, this argument turns out not to be necessarily true. Their performance in detecting the error; correcting it, and providing accurate rationalizations for their detection and correction of the error, was not at the same high level of excellence. To put it simply, some grammatical problems were very easy for the subjects to solve correctly, and some other problems were extremely difficult to handle. In other words, some problems were easy because they require simple and straightforward application of certain rules. As Skemp (1978) points out, such problems require what he calls "instrumental understanding". Other grammatical problems require what he calls "relational understanding" because of its complexity; and therefore, students had to think strategically to solve the problem.

This implies that drawing students' attention and making them focus on certain forms to choose from may be helpful in solving simple and straightforward grammatical problems, but it is not of the same value when the problem is complex. The issue, then, is not whether L$_2$ learner's focus of attention on the form or not, but rather, whether the task itself is simple; that is, it requires a straightforward application of a certain grammatical rule, or complex, that is, it requires a high a degree of strategic thinking.

The following tables show subjects' performance in both types of tasks. My classification of the nature of the task (being simple or complex) has been made based on the subjects' performance. The major criterion in making such a classification is students' success or failure in accomplishing three requirements successfully: (1) detecting the error; (2) providing the correct form, and (3) providing correct rationalization. In some cases, as the table shows, some subjects tended not to make any response or change. During the interview, these subjects reported that they "thought the sentence is correct and nothing wrong"; therefore, they kept the sentence as it is although they had been told that each of these sentences contains one grammatical error.

Table (1): Subjects' Performance in 'Difficult' grammatical Problems.

#of Problem	+Detection +Correction +Rationalization	Failure to detect the error	Detection without correction	No Response	No correct Rationalization	Total # of Subj.
9	Zero/subjects	12	23	5	----	40
11	1/subject	15	19	5	----	40
24	1/subject	14	17	8	----	40
21	5/subjects	10	15	8	2	40
13	5	25	4	2	4	40
2	5	13	16	3	3	40
8	8	4	22	----	6	40

In addition to the nature of the grammatical problem (being simple or complex; requires instrumental or relational understanding) as a factor in shaping foreign language learner's metalinguistic ability, the type of the knowledge required by the task is another factor.

2. THE TYPE OF KNOWLEDGE REQUIRED BY THE TASK:

In thinking about foreign language learners' performance as an object of study, the essence of the underlying knowledge that accounts for their performance must be examined. This examination of the learner underlying knowledge will in turn uncover the basis for the strategies they use in solving language problems. In this regard, Gass (1983: 277) suggests that for foreign language learners the ability to think and talk about language might involve abstract analysis of a number of different types. It might include, for

Table (2): Subjects' Performance in 'Easy' Grammatical Problems

#of Problem	+Detection +Correction +Rationalization	Failure to detect the error	Detection without correction	No Response	No correct Rationalization	Total # of Subj.
1	37/subjects	---	3	---	---	40
3	34	2	4	---	---	40
7	32	5	---	---	3	40
14	31	4	2	3	---	40
15	31	4	4	1	---	40
19	29	4	---	2	5	40
18	28	2	---	2	8	40
20	22	1	---	2	15	40
5	20	11	2	---	7	40
16	19	14	---	1	6	40
10	17	5	7	---	11	40

example, analyses of a number of different types. It might include, for example, analyses of their own language, a comparison between their native

language and the target language, a comparison between their native language and other languages previously learned, or even a comparison between the target language and other languages previously learned. And, as Johnson (1988) maintains, when learning a language is viewed as learning skills, the process appears to be usefully broken into two or three phases. The first is the development of declarative knowledge; however, "declarative linguistic knowledge cannot be employed immediately but only through procedures activating relevant parts of declarative knowledge in speech reception and production" (Farcand Kasper, 1985: 51). In the second or associative phase, the skill is performed. In the third phase, the skill is continually practiced, and becomes automatic and faster.

With the above background in mind, one can argue that deficiency in the subjects' declarative knowledge may result in (1) failure to detect the erroneous item that must be corrected for the sentence to be correct; (2) failure to decide whether the sentence is correct or incorrect; and, in most cases, the sentence seems grammatically correct although it violates a certain "invisible" grammatical rule. The data provide us with many examples that sustain the above argument. 13 subjects were not able to detect the erroneous item in grammatical problem (2). Also (16) failed to correct the error they previously identified. They also failed to provide any rationalizations for their seemingly successful detection of the error.

In addition, because there was not a link between declarative and procedural knowledge, many subjects (males and females) failed to correct the item they identified as erroneous, or provide accurate rationalizations for their performance. Therefore, examining the relationships between declarative and procedural knowledge is a worthwhile pursuit since students often fail to recognize or construct these relationship, and, sometimes are able to reach correct answers for problems they do not really understand.

In his discussion of this issue, Carpenter (1986) points out that three different models have been proposed to describe the relationship between conceptual and procedural knowledge. The first model hypothesizes that advances in procedural knowledge are driven by broad advance in conceptual knowledge. The second purpose that advances in conceptual knowledge are neither necessary nor sufficient to account for all advances in procedural knowledge. The third model concurs with the first that advances in procedural skills are linked to conceptual knowledge but purposes that the connections are more limited than those suggested by the first model.

It seems that the best way for effective classroom instruction and for improving our students' performance is to link conceptual with procedural. Heiber and Lefever (1986) maintain that linking conceptual and procedural knowledge has many advantages for acquiring and using procedural knowledge. These advantages are (A) Enhancing problem representations and simplifying procedural demands. (B) Monitoring procedure selection and

execution. (C) Promoting transfer and reducing the number of procedures required.

Moreover, linking conceptual knowledge and procedural knowledge has some benefits for conceptual knowledge. According to Anderson (1983), problems for which no routine procedures are available are solved initially by applying facts and concepts in an effortful and laborious way. As similar problems are solved repeatedly, conceptual knowledge is gradually transformed in to set routines (condition-action pairs) (for solving the problem. The condition- action pairs constitute the basic elements of the procedural system. Thus knowledge that is initially conceptual can be converted to knowledge that is procedural. In addition, procedures can facilitate the application of conceptual knowledge because highly routinized procedures can reduce the mental effort required in solving a problem and thereby make possible the solution of complex tasks. Case (1985) explains this phenomenon by pointing out that efficient procedures require less of one's limited cognitive processing capability. In this regard, Gelman and Meck (1986: 30) point out that "Knowledge of the correct principles does not guarantee correct performance. Principles specify characteristics that a correct performance must possess, but they do not provide recipes for generating a plan for correct performances. Nor do they guarantee correct execution of plan".

3. ACCESS TO KNOWLEDGE:

The results of this study show that the existence of knowledge for a learner is not sufficient to distinguish skilled or fluent performance from less skilled. Through practice and experience the learner must gain easy access as "automatic" or "not automatic" or "controlled". In other words, foreign language learners may appear to have the necessary knowledge to make correct responses; however, they are unable to display this knowledge in multi-dimensional tasks such as "Error Correction" task used in the present study. In such a task, learners are required to do more than one thing simultaneously. This argument is compatible with the principle of the attention theory.

This study shows that although 'noticing' or 'conscious awareness' may have some positive effect on L$_2$ learners' performance; this effect, however, is constrained by two important factors: (1) learners' overall linguistic competence, and (2) the nature of the task; that is whether it requires controlled or automatic processing of information. These two factors determine the amount of attention and degree of coordination on the part of L$_2$ learners. In this sense, this study does not exclusively support Schmidt's Noticing Hypothesis (1990; 1993a, b; 1992, 1994 a, b; 1995 a, b, 2001). Rather, it supports the claim that Noticing is necessary but not sufficient condition for convening input into intake. As a whole, this study supports the

claim that L_2 learners have difficulty in attending to both form and content in the input. This is why conscious awareness or 'Noticing' is not sufficient condition for converting input into intake.

The subjects' performance in the "Error Recognition" task (ER) can be analyzed in the light of what "Divided attention" phenomenon maintains. Research on this phenomenon shows that, at certain times, the attentional system must coordinate a search for the simultaneous presence of two or more features. To put it simply, the attentional system must perform two or more discrete tasks at the same time. In such a case, "the speed and accuracy of simultaneous performance of two activities was quite poor" (Spleke, Hirst, and Neisser, 1976). Relatedly, it was, also hypothesized that the performance of multiple tasks was based on skill (due to practice), not on special cognitive mechanisms (Neisser and Bechlen, 1975).

In "divided attention" tasks, the subjects are asked to spread attention over as many stimuli, as possible. In this regard, Shiffrin (1988: 34) points out that, as a general rule, subjects find it extremely difficult to divide attention. When there are more tasks to be carried out more stimuli to be attended…. Performance is reduced." Many studies show that subjects' exhibit reduced performance when they try to accomplish simultaneously an increased number of tasks or to attend simultaneously to an increased number of stimuli. There are studies of divided attention deficits. Also, much research in attention assumes that there is a limited pool of attentional resources or capacity that can be distributed across tasks. For example, according to simple capacity models, if the subjects has 100 units of capacity and required to perform two tasks each requiring 75 units, performance should decline when shifting from performing the tasks individually to performing them simultaneously.

Subjects' performance in the (ER) task reflects what "Selective Attention" phenomenon maintains. In these tasks, subjects relatively attend to a certain "stimuli" or aspects of stimuli, in preference to others. As Kahneman (1973) and Schneider *et al*. (1984) points out, this concept presuppose that there is some capacity limitation, or some bottleneck in the processing system; however, subjects have the ability to pass through this bottleneck and at the expense of other stimuli, by giving performance to certain stimuli. What is worth mentioning, here, is that some students were able to correct only some of the errors, but not all errors. And, the number of the corrected errors differed from one subject to another. In this regard, it can be argued that selectively is the result of capacity limits of the subjects' information-processing system; and these limits are relative, and they depended on the type of activity itself. This can be explained in the light of the four varieties of "selective attention": (1) detection; (2) filtering; (3) search and (4) resource attention.

First, as a result of "selective attention", the subjects' ability to detect the errors increased. That is, their ability to notice what is missing or incorrect in

the sentence has been improved. It must be emphasized, however, that this ability depends on the observer's sensitivity and his ability to respond. Second, the subjects' ability of 'filtering' has been improved; that is, they were able to select, analyze deeply, and concentrate on a particular item and exclude others. Third, as a result of noticing, deep analysis and concentration, the subjects' search mechanisms have become automatic. In this regard, Cave and Wolfe's (1990) theory of 'guided search' seems to be quite pertinent. The guided – search model suggests that search involves two consecutive stages: (1) Parallel stage, in which the individual simultaneously activates a mental representation of all the potential targets, and (2) Serial stage, in which the individual sequentially evaluate each of the activated elements, according to the degree of activation, and then chooses the true targets from the activated elements.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Although 'focus on form' instructions may have some positive effects on L$_2$ learners' performance in multidimensional tasks such as (ER) tasks, this effect is constrained by some factors, as previously explained. There are, however, some problems concerned the application of "FonF instruction' approach.   First, in many secondary and university language programs, teachers are obligated to teach certain form in a specific order by using government-mandated materials. Relatedly, in many countries, teachers have little say in designing the curriculum, choosing the materials and text books, or developing assessment techniques. In this regard, Poole (2005) points out that even if teachers can find the means to occasionally incorporate focus on form instruction, they may feel pressure not to do so for two reasons: (1) they may be risking their own job security by not following the mandated curriculum. (2) the pre-packed classroom textbooks and materials will most likely form the basis for important evaluations such as entrance / exit exams, which teachers frequently have very little, if any, influence.   Therefore, teachers will most likely feel obliged to spend the majority of their time helping students prepare for exams. Unfortunately, such exams focus on discrete grammatical points and minimize real life communicative abilities.

Another problem with focus on form instruction is practical; that is, it involves class size. The views expressed by Long (1991) and Long and Robinson (1998) seem optimally suited to classrooms that are small enough to enable teachers to verbally address their students' problematic forms.   In many settings, however, classes are large and individual attention and student-student interaction is not possible. In addition, in many countries, there is a lack of funds to hire qualified teachers: "they [teachers] are kicking our doors down, they want to come in. We have the space, but we can not hire the teachers - we have just do not have the money" (Bernstein, 2004: 7). Relatedly, many English language teachers lack a high level of L$_2$ oral

proficiency and do not have opportunities for developing it. The problem is that Long (1991) and Long and Robinson's (1998) conception of focus on form instruction obliges teachers to have native – like or near native – like competence fluency, particularly in oral situations. Accordingly, teaching English through the native language is common place in a many settings not because of any objections against using English, but simply because of low L_2 proficiency on the part of teachers (Poole, 2005).

Another problem with focus on form instruction is that, in many settings, the students and the teachers often share a common language and culture. Accordingly, they can easily code-switch in order to overcome communicative difficulties or fill communicative gaps. If problematic grammatical forms can be addressed using another language, then, focus on form instruction could be seen by teachers and learners as either unnecessary or impractical.

A final problem with focus on form instruction is cultural; that is, 'focus on form is highly individualistic in that errors are frequently addressed on an individual basis' (Poole, 2005: 53). Contrary to individualistic societies which tend to produce more individualistic teaching approaches, collectivist societies, which tend to focus more on the general good of all students, may find focus on form at odds with their cultural values.

Regardless of these barriers, focusing on teaching grammar is well-justified. First of all, many of our students seem to want more grammar expansion. They always ask for more discussion of the rules underlying the structures they are learning. They want to seem to need to know more about how the language is put together. This does not deny the fact that some to need to know more about how the language in put together. This does not deny the fact that some leaner's rely on natural processing mechanism. However, the desire of at least some of our students to have more rule explanation may indicate something about differenced in learning strategies. Some learners may learn more effectively through deductive strategies, requiring understanding of general principle prior to their application in language activities and exercises, and through, carefully constructed grammar explanations would seem to benefit this type of learners. Furthermore, during the course of a typical grammar lesson our students are assaulted with a great deal of oral language. Seeing the structures under consideration within the context of the grammar explanation provides for some learning to take place through the visual modality, a fact which is of particular advantage to our visual learners.

Second, to ignore what students typically expect, and what they consider to be important or necessary regardless of our point of view, is to invite resistance, either overt to covert to our teaching. Therefore, it seems more reasonably to try to expand and broaden their expectation than to try to change them. This does not mean that teachers should follow students' wishes all the way. Rather, they should keep their students needs in mind

when they design language lessons. An observant ESL teacher does not need to be told that students learn in different ways.

This suggests that learner variables such as age can be very important in helping the ESL teacher decide whether or not it will be of any use to focus on form. In addition, proficiency level can be another factor. If ESL students are beginners, there is little point in focusing on form regardless of their age. However, if they are at the intermediate or advanced level, it may well be necessary for the teacher to do some correction.

From another perspective, the educational background of ESL students is another noteworthy factor. If they are preliterate with little formal education, then it is waste of time and effort to focus on form. On the other hand, if they are literate and well educated, they may become frustrated and annoyed if teachers do not provide adequate opportunity for them to focus on the formal aspects of English.

From a theoretical point of view, the cognitive code-learning theory posits that 'competence precedes performance'. In this case, competence is not the tacit knowledge of the native speaker, as originally defined by Chomsky (1965), but is conscious knowledge. This theory assumes the "learning a language is a process of acquiring conscious control of the phonological, grammatical, and lexical patterns of a second language, largely through study and analysis of these patterns as a body of knowledge" (Carroll, 1965: 278). This theory attaches more importance to the learners understanding of the structure of the foreign language than to his facility in using that structure, since it is believed that, provided the student has a proper degree of cognitive control over the structures of the language, facility will develop automatically with use of the language in meaningful situations. In this regard, Camphell (1970: 37) noted that "the ability of our students to speak and understand a foreign language must, impart, depend upon our ability as teachers to provide them with the opportunity to acquire native –speaker competence, that is, to provide them with the rules that will permit them to produce and interpret an infinite number of grammatical sentences they have never seen or heard in our classrooms or in the text books they use".

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Appendix 1 (A): Structure and Written Expression.

Directions: Questions 1-15 are incomplete sentences. Beneath each sentence you will see four words or phrases, marked (A), (B), (C), and (D). Choose the one word or phrase that best completes the sentence.

1. ----is helping to break new ground in drug research.
    A. computers are being used more if
    B. the increasing use of the computer
    C. if an increase in the use of the computer
    D. computers are being used more

2. An elephant----vigorously when it is overheated
    A. flapping its ears
    B. its ears flap
    C. flaps its ears
    D. ears flap it

3. Broadway musical comedy has been called-----of the United States to modern theatre.
    A. the major contribution that
    B. what is the major contribution
    C. the major contribution
    D. to the major contribution

4. -----in 1968 as a nonprofit agency to finance the growth of noncommercial radio and television in the United States.
    A. the Corporation for Public Broadcasting established
    B. the Corporation for Public Broadcasting was established
    C. when the Corporation for Public Broadcasting was established
    D. even though the Corporation for Public Broadcasting was established.

5. Cold temperatures, short growing seasons, and heavy snows prevent….at high elevations.
    A. grow trees
    B. the growth of trees
    C. trees are growing
    D. and growth of trees

6. Usually, the more skilled an athlete----the more effortless the athlete's movement appear to be
    A. what is
    B. that is
    C. that it is
    D. is

7. Trilobites, a group of spineless animals, flourished in the oceans for several hundred million years ---some 200 million years ago.
    A. until they became extinct
    B. and their extinction
    C. that were extinct
    D. because their extinction

8. Recent engineering developments have made----to recycle plastic soda bottles into polyester fabric.
    A. possible, and
    B. it is possible
    C. the possible
    D. it possible

9. ----bottle-nosed dolphins become talented performers at many aquariums.
    A. when to train
    B. are training
    C. when trained
    D. to train them

10. The art of the 1970's was characterized by diversity and by the independence of artist-------- main affinities were more often sociopolitical than stylistic.
    A. whose
    B. that
    C. they have
    D. of which

11. Flower oils are –of the ingredients used in making perfume.
    A. among expensive
    B. among the most expensive

      C. being most expensive
      D. expensive

12. A quite that looks ordinary--- may become a work of abstract art when it is hung on a white wall.
      A. lying on a bed
      B. lies on a bed
      C. to be lying on a bed
      D. to lie on a bed

13. ----the hummingbird gets its name from the sound that is wings make during flight.
      A. has a brilliant color
      B. the brilliant color
      C. which is brilliantly colored
      D. brilliantly colored

14. Except for the sun, all stars are too far from the Earth for their distance----in miles or kilometers
      A. to be conveniently measured
      B. which conveniently measured
      C. to measure conveniently
      D. conveniently measured

15. Many technological innovations, such as the telephone, ---the result of sudden burst of inspiration in fact were preceded by many inconclusive efforts.
      A. whose appearance
      B. the appear to be
      C. and appear to be
      D. are appearing

APPENDIX 1 (B): ERROR CORRECTION TASK

Directions: In questions 1-25 each sentence has four underlined words or phrases. The four underlined parts of the sentence are marked (A), (B), (C) and (D). Identify the one underlined word or phrases that must be changed in order for the sentence to be correct.

16. Small animals can <u>survival</u> the desert heat by <u>finding</u> shade <u>during</u> the <u>daytime.</u>

17. Motoring authorities <u>credit</u> mandatory seat-Belt laws for <u>the</u> <u>reduces</u> in traffic <u>fatalities</u>.

18. Vancouver, British Columbia, <u>was named</u> <u>after</u> the man <u>which</u> explored <u>the area</u> in 1792

19. Belgian chocolates is <u>considered</u> by <u>many</u> to be <u>more</u> finer than any <u>other</u> in the world.

20. The dream of <u>building</u> a <u>permanently</u> staffed space station <u>it</u> may soon become a <u>reality</u>.

21. It is <u>well-known</u> fact <u>that</u> Camels can <u>go</u> for extend periods <u>without</u> water.

22. Several <u>expedition</u> have attempted to <u>find</u> the <u>remains</u> of Noah's ark <u>on</u> the slopes of
23. Mount Ararat.

24. Scientists worry <u>what</u> the <u>continued</u> use of certain <u>pollutants</u> may damage <u>the</u> earth's ozone layer.

25. The artists John Constable and Thomas Gainsborough <u>were</u> <u>born</u> <u>at a few</u> miles of each <u>other</u>.

26. Starches <u>provide</u> people <u>with</u> important nutrients <u>which</u> they need <u>them</u>.

Sunlight <u>can be used</u> to generate electricity by means of cells <u>containing</u> substances <u>that</u> emit electrons that bombard <u>with</u> photons.

Norma Jean Baker <u>was</u> the <u>real</u> name of the <u>famous</u> Hollywood actress known <u>such</u> as Marilyn Monroe.

1. <u>The capital</u> of Yemen <u>is</u> <u>situating</u> 2.190 meters <u>above</u> sea level.

2. Bleak house is in <u>many</u> ways the <u>most</u> controversial of the <u>novel</u> <u>that</u> Charles Dickens wrote.

3. The Aswan High Dam <u>has protected</u> Egypt <u>from</u> the <u>famines</u> of <u>their</u> neighboring countries.

4.   <u>Some</u> 2.300 years <u>ago</u>, Greek philosophers <u>gave</u> the name 'atom' to the <u>smaller</u> particle of matter in nature.

5.   A budget is a plan <u>that</u> estimate how much <u>money</u> will be spent, <u>what</u> it will be spent on, and how much money <u>is</u> left over.

6.   <u>When</u> Lake Victoria was <u>discovered</u> by John Speke in 1858, <u>he</u> was believed to be the source of the <u>Nile</u>.

7.   <u>With</u> the discovery of Pluto's moon, Charon, astronomers <u>now</u> think Pluto is <u>smallest</u> planet in <u>our</u> solar system.

8.   <u>The</u> psychological school <u>of</u> behaviorism <u>it</u> was <u>founded</u> by J. B. Watson.

9.   The <u>first</u> Wagon train <u>on the </u>Oregon Trail <u>setting</u> out <u>from</u> independence, Missouri, in 1941.

10.   The <u>discovery</u> <u>of</u> gold in 1849 <u>brought</u> California nationwide <u>attentive</u>.

11.   The Kerma <u>civilization</u> was <u>some</u> of the <u>earliest</u> indigenous African <u>tribal</u> groups.

12.   Human beings <u>who</u> live <u>longer</u> than one hundred years <u>are</u> a <u>rare</u>.

13.   Scientists <u>have</u> identified several hundred subatomic <u>particle</u> <u>held</u> together <u>by</u> a nuclear force.

APPENDIX 2 (A): SUBJECTS' RAW SCORES IN THE SENTENCE COMPLETION TASK

S.	Males' scores T.S. = 15	S.	Males' scores T.S. = 15
1	14	21	10
2	14	22	10
3	13	23	10
4	13	24	10
5	13	25	10
6	13	26	10
7	12	27	09
8	12	28	09
9	12	29	09
10	12	30	09
11	12	31	09
12	12	32	09
13	12	33	09
14	11	34	08
15	11	35	07
16	11	37	07
17	11	37	07
18	11	38	07
19	10	39	06
20	10	40	
	Total Score		410

Means and standard deviation of Subjects' performance in the sentence completion task

	Number	Means	Standard Deviation	t
	40	15.25	2.15	0.75

Appendix 2 (B): Summary of the subjects' performance in the Error Correction Task.

#of Problem	Gender	(+)Detection (+)Correction (+)Ration	(+)Detection (+)Correction (+)Ration	(+)Detection (-)Correction (+)Ration	No Response	(-)detection
1	M	37	3	---	--	--
2	M	5	3	16	3	13
3	M	34	---	4	--	2
4	M	20	2	3	1	14
5	M	20	7	2	---	11
6	M	10	13	3	2	12
7	M	32	3	2	---	5
8	M	8	6	22	--	4
9	M	---	---	23	5	12
10	M	17	11	7	---	5
11	M	01	---	19	5	15
12	M	20	12	---	2	6
13	M	5	4	4	2	25
14	M	31	---	2	3	4
15	M	31	---	4	1	4
16	M	19	6	---	1	14
17	M	13	4	5	5	13
18	M	28	8	---	2	2
19	M	29	5	---	2	4
20	M	22	15	---	2	01
21	M	5	2	15	8	10
22	M	13	4	10	5	8
23	M	22	11	01	01	5
24	M	01	---	17	08	14
25	M	20	02	---	9	9