

Thoughts on Norris and Ortega (2000)

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I believe that L2 instruction is capable of affecting learning, even though, to some, it merely provides the learning of explicit knowledge and not the acquisition of implicit knowledge. This belief of mine may be rooted in my own experience of language learning in an EFL setting. In an EFL setting, input normally falls short of learners' expectations, and learners' exposure to English is severely restricted. Teachers seek alternatives to overcome the negative effects of limited time and insufficient input; they seek a variety of instructional approaches in order to impart a maximum of efficiency with a minimum of effort. My conviction remains unchanged, regardless of Krashen's (1981, 1982, 1993) consistent argument that the effects of Form-Focused Instruction (FFI) are peripheral. To that end, the Norris and Ortega (2000) article, which investigates and supports FFI, asserts that FFI makes a considerable difference with regard to language learning.

As Norris and Ortega (2000) note, investigations in the field of instructed SLA have evolved from studies of simple comparisons of instructional differences in treatment to more complicated ones that focus on the effectiveness of certain types of instruction. That is, in the past, the researchers only focused on whether instruction was effective or not. Now, however, the researchers attempt to discover what form of instruction, among the many forms that are available, would facilitate L2 learning. Based on this evolution, Norris and Ortega introduce their own six foci for investigating the 49 studies they selected for the meta-analysis of SLA studies. In this regard, the most interesting question they posed related to the durability of instructional effects. The authors were able to conclude that instructional effects are indeed long-lasting.

Yet another interesting point raised by the authors relates to the definitions of Focus on Form (FonF) and Focus on FormS (FonFS) instruction, since the same treatment can be classified differently depending on a wide range of possible characteristics.

It is notable that Norris and Ortega (2000) single out only 49 studies from the many that they have screened. In fact, only 16% of the total vetted investigations were included in Norris and Ortega's meta-analysis. Why is this so? Is it because studies were hardly comparable in terms of their design and methodologies? Is it about how definitions were operationalized? Thus, while I still believe in the effectiveness of L2 pedagogy, the lack of comprehensive analysis conducted by Norris and Ortega limits the conclusions that one can derive from their meta-analysis on the effects of L2 instruction.

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