

Questions for Pedagogy and Research

Shaoyan Qi

Teachers College, Columbia University

Norris and Ortega's (2000) article provides both a useful perspective on SLA-informed investigations of L2 instruction and reflection on the gaps in this body of literature. Regarding the field's contribution to our current understanding of the effectiveness of L2 instruction, Norris and Ortega's summary highlights four main points: (1) L2 instruction is more effective than mere exposure to the L2; (2) Focus on FormS and Focus on Form instruction are equally effective; (3) explicit instruction is more effective than implicit instruction; and (4) L2 instructional effectiveness is durable.

Most of the above findings are not surprising, except perhaps that Focus on FormS instruction is equally effective as Focus on Form. Focus on FormS is in line with traditional grammar-based instruction and seems to be out of favor in comparison with more recently developed Focus on Form techniques. The latter conceptualizes grammar teaching within a framework of meaningful communication. This surprising finding of equal effectiveness may be explained by the coding system Norris and Ortega (2000) used to group the instructional approaches of the studies under investigation. For example, some teaching methods classified as Focus on Form in their article may otherwise be identified as Focus on FormS in other investigations.

According to Norris and Ortega (2000), there are four major problems with existing SLA research: (1) research design is surprisingly more complicated than necessary; (2) there is a lack of true control in experimental conditions; (3) there is a lack of consistency in defining instructional variables; (4) there is a lack of proper measurement and a lack of valid analysis of interference from other variables that are not instruction-related. This part of the Norris and Ortega argument not only provides a means for critically reviewing primary research literature, but also offers insights for directions in second language acquisition.

REFERENCES

Norris, J. M., & Ortega, L. (2000). Effectiveness of L2 instruction: A research synthesis and quantitative meta-analysis. *Language Learning*, 50, 417-528.

Shaoyan Qi is an EdM student of International Educational Development at Teachers College, Columbia University. Her research interests include error analysis and learner language. She is also an instructor of Chinese in the Department of East Asian Languages and Cultures at Columbia University.