

Developing Readers' Research Literacy

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Norris and Ortega's (2000) meta-analysis of second language teaching pedagogies is impressive in its scope. More meta-analyses such as this would be highly beneficial to the field of SLA. This research revealed two interesting points. The first concerns flaws in experimental and quasi-experimental studies in SLA. Many papers do not provide enough statistical data for others to re-examine the reliability and/or validity of a given study, or to replicate it in another setting. As Norris and Ortega mentioned, many studies do not report the descriptive statistics because of the page limits for submission to journals. However, the sample size of an investigation and pre-experimental values, among other statistics, are important data for readers to evaluate. Stated significant differences might be meaningless if compared groups started at different proficiency levels, or if sample sizes were too small. Despite limited publishing space, it is still important to include some mention of descriptive statistics.

A second important issue addressed by Norris and Ortega relates to the effectiveness of L2 instruction. It is gratifying to see researchers assert that instruction does have an effect on learning. However, one caveat is that even this kind of exhaustive meta-analysis can generate a biased conclusion. For example, studies on Processing Instruction (PI; VanPatten, 2002) were conducted with only four target languages, and the generalizability of PI effectiveness is still an empirical question. Moreover, PI studies would be categorized in the Norris and Ortega (2000) analysis as Focus on Form explicit instruction, but PI might be effective because it involves both implicit and explicit elements in the instruction. Therefore, even after this exhaustive analysis, we might hesitate to interpret the results that explicit Focus on Form instruction is better than explicit Focus on FormS instruction, which is supposed to be more effective than implicit Focus on Form instruction.

Although Norris and Ortega offer some answers to the question of which instructional approach is the most effective, we still cannot conclude that all L2 learners ought to be taught via explicit Focus on Form. Readers must be educated in their reading and interpretation of a study that employs a technique of meta-analysis. This type of research, however, reminds us of the need to be critical about research findings, and the need to reexamine the basis of our current knowledge.

REFERENCES

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