

Pedagogical Appreciation from a Theoretical Perspective

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Norris and Ortega (2000) assert that "in general, focused L2 instruction results in large gains over the course of an intervention ... [and t]he effects of L2 instruction seem durable" (p. 500). This quote encompasses what pedagogical practitioners have always wanted to hear from a researcher's perspective—that what is being taught in the classroom does indeed have a definite effect on the acquisition of a language. The Norris and Ortega article emphasizes three focal points that speak to the work of second language teachers: (1) the effectiveness of some instructional methodologies with respect to L2 acquisition, (2) methodological shortcomings of a number of SLA studies, and (3) the importance of bridging the gap between research and practice.

Teaching methodologies in language instruction have gone through numerous changes over the years, and the debates over whether explicit versus implicit teaching and Focus on FormS versus Focus on Form should be utilized has caused strife among many camps in the field of L2 theory and pedagogy. Based on the studies that Norris and Ortega (2000) analyzed, it is not surprising to see that explicit learning was a more effective treatment. As many in the teaching profession realize, explicit language teaching is favored in many language classrooms around the world. However, when teachers utilize this explicit form of teaching, they are not only trying to get students to become more comfortable with the content material, but are also testing learners' memory strategies to know and use certain grammatical forms. Some students are better at memorization than others and explicit teaching might provide a biased advantage. There are other students who are better using more analytic learning strategies and may need to investigate patterns in language in order to understand forms and meanings.

Naturally, any particular teaching method will favor one student's general cognitive strategies over another. This needs to be taken into account when analyzing teaching methodologies and is a consideration indeed recognized by Norris and Ortega (2000). With regard to Focus on Form and Focus on FormS, it was surprising to see in the authors' analysis that there were no significant differences in the outcomes. However, being able to specifically define the possible differences between these two instructional approaches, and additionally comparing Focus on Form with Focus on Meaning, can be a complex task. It would be desirable to see more studies that might better explain the operational definitions of these three terms, or perhaps even change the definitions to make them more reader and practitioner friendly.

From a researcher's perspective, it was surprising to see how incomplete the analyzed studies were and, more interestingly, that they were even accepted for publication. For example, numerous studies analyzed by Norris and Ortega (2000) stated that the findings were statistically significant; however, the authors often failed to explain the procedures used to obtain these results. Along these lines, it appears that too often journal editors are biased toward submissions with results that are statistically significant resulting in a biased review process. The Norris and Ortega study confirms this idea. Furthermore, numerous studies did not implement control groups, a fact that calls into question the interpretations of the changes in L2 learners' rate of

acquisition. These persistent problems have prompted me to ask the following: What is desired by various publications in our field to make a study publishable?

Finally, a divide among professionals needs to be acknowledged. Many practitioners claim that researchers are too theoretically oriented and do not understand the daily life of the classroom. Conversely, researchers may question pedagogical techniques if they contradict findings based on prior studies. The Norris and Ortega (2000) article demonstrates that research findings can indeed be useful for teachers of language. How those findings are presented, though, is another matter.

REFERENCES

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

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