LECTURE 10

The Durability of FFI Effects: Focus- on- Form vs. Focus- on- Forms

10.1. Input-based Instruction: Focus-on-Form and Focus-on-Forms

Input-based instruction is directed at enabling learners to (1) notice the presence of a specific feature in the input, (2) comprehend the meaning of the feature, and (3) rehearse the feature in short-term memory. One of the assumptions of input-based FFI is that it is psycholinguistically easier to manipulate the processes involved in intake than it is to induce learners to restructure their interlanguage systems. Input-based FFI can be distinguished in terms of whether it involves 'enriched input' or processing instruction.

Enriched Input

Studies that have investigated enriched input options have drawn on Schmidt's Noticing Hypothesis and the Frequency Hypothesis. Enriched input can take the form of oral or written texts that learners simply listen to or read (i.e., input flooding) or texts where the target structure has been highlighted in some way (as through underlining or bold print). Three groups of enriched input studies can be identified: (1) studies designed to investigate whether the forms targeted un the enriched input are noticed by learners, (2) studies designed to investigate whether enriched input promotes acquisition, and (3) studies comparing the effects of enriched input with some other instructional option.

There is some evidence that enriched input involving either highlighting or orienting learners to attend to form induces noticing of target features. However, little is yet known about which approach to enrichment works best. There is fairly convincing evidence that enriched input can help L2 learners acquire some new grammatical features and use partially learnt features more consistently, although it may not enable learners to eradicate erroneous rules from their interlanguage. Also, clear positive effects may only be evident when the treatment provides learners with extensive exposure to the target features and is relatively prolonged (Ellis, 2008).

Input Processing Instruction

Processing instruction makes use of structured input but cannot be equated with it. Structured input differs from enriched input in that it presents learners with input in a context that requires them to demonstrate that they have correctly processed the target structure for meaning. The demonstration takes the form of a learner response to an input stimulus, with the response being either non-verbal

(as choosing the picture that matches the stimulus) or minimally verbal (as indicating whether they agree/ disagree with some statement). This is achieved by means of 'interpretation tasks' (Ellis, 1995). The following are a set of guidelines for designing interpretation tasks:

1. An interpretation task consists of a stimulus to which learners must make some kind of response.
2. The stimulus can take the form of spoken or written input.
3. The response can take various forms (as indicate true/false, check a box, select the correct picture, draw a diagram, perform an action) but in each case the response will be completely nonverbal or minimally verbal.
4. The activities in the task can be sequenced to require first attention to meaning, then noticing the form and function of the grammatical structure, and finally error identification.
5. Learners should have the opportunity to make some kind of personal response (i.e., relate the input to their own lives).

10.2. Implicit vs. Explicit Instruction

DeKeyser (2003) drew a distinction between explicit/ implicit instruction and deductive/ indictive instruction. Explicit FFI involves 'some sort of rule being thought about during the learning process' (ibid). That is, learners are encouraged to develop metalinguistic awareness of the rule. This can be achieved deductively and inductively. Implicit instruction is directed at enabling learners to infer rules without awareness. Thus it contrasts with explicit instruction in that there is an absence of externally-prompted awareness of what is being learnt.

Table: Implicit and Explicit FFI (Housen and Pierrard, 2006, p. 10)

Implicit FFI	Explicit FFI
1. Attracts attention to target form.	1. Directs attention to target form.
2. Is delivered spontaneously (as in an otherwise communication-oriented activity).	2. Is predetermined and planned (as the main focus and goal of a teaching activity).
3. Is unobtrusive (minimal interruption of communication of meaning).	3. Is obtrusive (interruption of communicative meaning).
4. Presents target forms in context.	4. Presents target forms in isolation.
5. Makes no use of metalanguage.	5. Uses metalinguistic terminology (as rule explanation).
6. Encourages free use of the target form.	6. Involves controlled practice of target form.

Incidental Learning vs. Paying Attention

'Noticing' is important and available in language learning (Schmidt, 1990). Schmidt claimed that natural orders and acquisition sequences may constrain selective attention but not eliminate its role. Formal linguistic considerations, such as expectations, frequency, perceptual salience, skill level, task demands and the others, may explain the close relationship between 'noticing' and stages of L2 development (Jin, 2011).

Expectations

  Schmidt proposed that instruction may play an important role in priming LLS to notice features by establishing expectations about language. Skehan (1998) stated that instruction provides structured input supporting for noticing by focusing attention on and enhancing awareness of language features. Ellis (1997) argued that instruction can draw learners' attention on items that they do not expect and as a result they may not notice.

Frequency

  Schmidt claimed that items used more frequently are more likely to be noticed. If a language feature appears more frequently in the input, because of repeating instruction, the item will be more likely to be noticed and integrated into the interlanguage system (Jin, 2011). As Skehan (1998) suggested, a form may not be noticed at times when learners' intentional resources are stretched. Therefore, the more frequent an item is repeated, the more learners notice it.

Skill Level

  Schmidt (1990) suggested that acquisition of new features requires the routization of previously learned skills. This is concerned with learners' processing ability of noticing new forms in the input, and an individual's ability to attend to both form and meaning in L2 processing. No one has the same noticing ability. As Skehan (1998) described, some learners are better 'input processors', as they have a larger working memory capacity or they can process analytically and quickly within working memory.

Task Demands

  According to Schmidt (1990), task demands refer to how an instructional task causes learners to notice particular features in order to carry out that task. Ellis (1997) suggested that some particular language features may be made intentionally prominent or the task may be designed to activate learners to process

the language. The level of processing may determine the level of noticing. If the task demand, such as the exchange of familiar information, is slow, the level of noticing decreases, whereas if the task demand, such as the imagination decision-making, is high, the level of noticing increases (Skehan, 1998). Schmidt suggested that incidental learning without 'paying attention' is possible, if task demands focus attention on what is to be learned. Schmidt claims that learners learn most if they notice most, and learners who pay attention most may notice most.

Schmidt argued that both intentional and incidental learning involve conscious attention to features in the input. Schmidt further claimed that intentional learning refers to attention to input, which is of importance for explicit learning and may be necessary for implicit learning. Intentional learning also involves attention to form and test, which is important in "some kinds of artificial grammar learning and probably for some features of natural language learning, but not others" (1994, p. 198-99). "Incidental learning takes place along a continuum of conscious awareness. The degree of consciousness awareness of one's learning plays an important role in the clarity of learning" (Marsick & Watkins, 1990, p. 13). Ellis (1997) praised the distinction made by Schmidt as important and helpful, which recognizes that incidental learning is different from learning without conscious attention.

Marsick & Watkins (1990) argued that incidental learning, as a by-product of some other activities, is never ontentional and seldom explicit. van Pattern argued that "it should be clear that attention is not a product as are the referents for explicit knowledge and implicit knowledge" (1994, p. 28). That is to say, attention tied to processes is a resource, not a product, which is used as a continuum between explicit knowledge and implicit konowledge. Ellis (2001) claimed that intentional learning has been proved to be more effective than incidental learning for both vocabulary and grammar. However, arguments for incidental learning are still advanced: it is impossible to learn a complete language intentionally, because there is too much to learn, intentional learning will influence learners' proficiency because it is more likely to lead to explicit than implicit knowledge (Jin, 2011).

10.3. Effects of Instruction on L2 Pragmatics

Whereas the majority of FFI studies have addressed L2 grammatical development, there has been a growing interest in the effects of instruction on L2 pragmatic development. There are studies that shed light on speech acts (like requests), compliments but have also addressed other areas of pragmatics as socio-pragmatic aspects of politeness and implicature. However, the research investigating the effects of FFI on L2 pragmatics is limited in a number of respects. First, there are still few studies. Second, the research suffers from a failure to operationalise FFI

in precise and systematic ways, reflecting perhaps the pedagogical as opposed to theoretical orientation of many of the studies. Third, there are a number of other design problems – as, insufficient attention to ensuring the reliability and validity of measurements of learning outcomes and a general failure to include delayed post-tests. Thus, the only clear finding to date is that FFI can lead to improvements in pragmatic ability at least in the short term. It is not yet possible to conclude with confidence which type of instruction is more effective or whether the instruction is more effective or whether the instruction results in gains in implicit or explicit knowledge or both.

Ellis (2008) claimed that the studies investigated the effects of FFI on pragmalinguistic features have been primarily concerned with learners' use of linguistic realisation devices rather than with sociopragmatic aspects of L2 use. The pragmalinguistic features investigated include both formulaic devices associated with early L2 development and more complex devices likely to be found in more advanced learners. The studies were conducted mainly in foreign language classroom contexts, a notable exception being Lyster's (1994) study of address forms in an immersion context. A possible reason for the absence of studies in second language contexts is that instruction is seen less important when learners have exposure to communicative language use outside the classroom. However, Schmidt's (1993) assertion that simple exposure to the target language does not suffice, as pragmatic features are often not salient to learners, suggests that instruction is needed in second as well as foreign language contexts.