Effects of formal instruction on second language acquisition

Abstract:

This article attempts to put light on the potential effects of grammar instruction on Second / Foreign Language Acquisition. In the last decades, some well-known researchers have cast doubt on the utility of formal instruction for speaking and writing correctly. We will examine recent theoretical and empirical research literature in order to find out the dominant stand amongst researchers regarding the real effects of any focus on form on subsequent language acquisition.

Dr. MOUMENE Ahmed
Département des langues
Université Mentouri
Constantine (Algérie)

ملخص

يقترح هذا المقال نموذجا رياضيا لحلّ المشكلات التي تطرحها قضية اختيار الدوريات العلمية في المكتبات الجامعية ومكتبات البحث.

إنّ الطريقة التي يعتمدها هذا النموذج تجمع بين أسس مبدئية مختلفة تستخدم في اختيار الدوريات العلمية. وهي تأخذ عددا من عناوينها من قوائم ببليوغرافية مختلفة، بنيت على خصائص محدّدة، وهذه القوائم تستعمل في اختيار الدوريات العلمية.

This paper presents a review of recent theoretical and empirical research studies which investigate the effects of formal instruction on Second Language Acquisition (SLA). It is worth mentioning that the terms 'second language' and 'foreign language' are used here interchangeably, as they are used by researchers in SLA studies. The aim is to examine whether or not formal instruction makes a difference on improving language acquisition in second or foreign language environments. Firstly, we will investigate the main theoretical positions of the effects of formal instruction on SLA. Secondly, we will highlight the empirical findings of the effects of formal instruction on fluency, accuracy, the route of development, the rate of development, the ultimate attainment, and the durability of formal instruction. Thirdly, we will examine whether any particular type of formal instruction is more beneficial than others for teaching some forms of language. This review will certainly help us to gain well-informed decisions about the appropriate way for teaching grammar and the status that it should occupy in language teaching.

In the last decades, the teaching of grammar witnessed violent attacks from many corners of the world. A compelling body of evidence has accumulated recently supporting the view that grammar on its own is not enough for promoting accuracy. The role that grammar had enjoyed for twenty five centuries has become very precarious. Some researchers such as Krashen (1987) and Prabhu (1987) among others cast doubt on the utility of any type of formal instruction for language acquisition. Some comparative studies came to the conclusion that formal instruction is neither necessary nor sufficient for developing learners' speaking and writing skills. They allege that all what learners need is mere exposure to communication.

Many questions were raised in the eighties showing uncertainty about the relevance of grammar. Suffice it here to cite the following: 'Should we teach children syntax?' (Dulay and Burt, 1973), 'Can syntax be taught?'(Ellis, 1984a), 'Under what circumstances, if any, should formal grammar instruction take place?' (Krashen, 1992), 'Does second language instruction make a difference?' (Long, 1983), 'Is language teachable?' (Pienemann, 1989), and 'The grammar question' (Terry, 1999). So, it is the researchers' increasing doubt about the efficacy of formal instruction that spawns too much superfluity of theorising in SLA research. It must be recalled that the prevailing approach to language teaching in the eighties was Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) which encouraged communication, motivation, needs, and exposure to the target language. This approach discourages any form of grammar instruction and error correction on the assumption that they would interfere with the natural route of acquisition which is followed by different learners, irrespective of their age and their linguistic background. The idea of a universal order of acquisition came as a result of the 'morpheme order studies' (Dulay, H. and Burt, M. 1974). This type of research has led a number of language methodologists to adopt the strong version of CLT where focus is put exclusively on meaning and fluency and where form and accuracy are totally eschewed. This position is referred to by Johnson (1982) as the 'separationist' view of CLT. Other applied linguists such as Widdowson (1978) and Littlewood (1981) seek to reconcile form and meaning and bring about a more balanced view for foreign language teaching. However, in spite of the various attempts to combine form and meaning the strong version of the Communicative Approach remains prevalent and produces fluent but inaccurate communicators in its own abode. This stand results in a real turmoil amongst teachers who seem to lose none of their faith in the usefulness of formal instruction, but who are quite exasperated by the alarming falling standards amongst second / foreign language learners worldwide.

Grammar has been hotly debated, but it still remains a constant controversial issue in search of sound pedagogical solutions. Perceptions of students' grammatical inaccuracy throughout the world have triggered some revival in grammar. However, the precarious return to formal instruction has led many researchers to carry out many laboratory and classroom experimental studies in order to investigate the real effects of grammar teaching on second language development. The term 'formal instruction' is used to mean the teaching of grammar as used in Traditional Grammar as well in SLA research in recent years. 'Form-focused instruction' is also another term that indicates any pedagogical effort used by teachers to draw learners' attention to language forms and structures in an implicit or explicit way.

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1 Effects of Formal Instruction: Theoretical Positions

A survey of recent literature shows that there are three main theoretical positions to the role of formal instruction on SLA: the non-interface position, the interface position, and the variability position.

1.1 The Non-Interface Position

The fervent advocate of the non-interface position is Krashen (1987). In his Monitor Theory, Krashen argues that there are two different systems through which learners can develop their linguistic competence: 'learned knowledge' and 'acquired knowledge'. While the former is regarded as a conscious process resulting from formal instruction, the latter is considered as an unconscious process internalised through natural communication where focus is on meaning and where there is comprehensible input. According to Krashen, these two types of knowledge are not only separate, but quite unrelated, and learning does not become acquisition (Krashen, 1987: 83). This position is referred to as the strong non-interface position. For Krashen, grammar can only be used for monitoring. The Monitor Hypothesis states that "acquisition 'initiates' our utterances in L2, and is responsible for our fluency. Learning has only one function, and that is as a monitor, or editor. Learning comes into play only to make changes in the form of our utterance, after it has been produced by the acquired system. This can happen before we speak or write, or after (self correction)" (1987: 15). So, it is the acquired system which produces utterances, and it is the learned system which checks or corrects errors before or after final production.

It is worth mentioning that Krashen is not the only one who argues for the non-interface position, others such as Newmark (1970) and Prabhu (1987) also allege that language learning will be more effective if it is focused on meaning and directed towards natural communication. Newmark (1970: 217) goes as far as to conclude that:

Systematic attention to the grammatical form of utterances is neither a necessary condition nor a sufficient one for successful language learning. That it is not necessary is demonstrated by the native learner's success without it. That it is not sufficient is demonstrated by the typical classroom student's lack of success with it. (Newmark, 1970: 217)

In the same spirit, Prabhu's project lies in the fact that "the development of competence in an L2 [second language] requires not systematization of language inputs or maximization of planned practice, but rather the creation of conditions in which learners engage in an effort to cope with communication" (Prabhu, 1987: 1). The basic assumption of his approach is that language form is best learned when students are concentrating on meaning rather than form. In broad-brush terms, the non-interface position calls for the abandonment of explicit grammar instruction at all levels.

The question that may be raised here is what makes some researchers and educationalists adopt the non-interface position. The origin of this idea stems, in fact, from the morpheme order studies which provide substantial evidence that learners, irrespective of their first language and culture, go along a natural route in the development of their interlanguage. Many cross-sectional and longitudinal studies strongly confirm that formal instruction does not alter the order of acquisition (Long, 1988). The problem with the non-interface hypothesis is that it is counter-intuitive and contrary to the assumption made by millions of foreign language teachers and students

who do not cease to believe in the importance of formal instruction. In fact, this position does not take into account the majority of successful language learners who consciously analyse and internalise the different forms and structures of language in order to acquire it. Eventually, the zero position or the non-interface position has been challenged in recent years.

1.2 The Interface Position

The main proponents of the interface position are Seliger (1979), Stevick (1980) and Sharwood-Smith (1981). This alternative position holds that learning can turn into acquisition. Put otherwise, explicit knowledge turns via practice into implicit knowledge and hence into automaticity.

Seliger (1979) argues for a weak interface position claiming that knowledge is twofold: 'learnt' knowledge and 'acquired' knowledge. It is believed that learning grammatical rules facilitates acquisition and activates memory. Customarily, learners are found to internalise different representations of the same taught rules which do not reflect the internal knowledge called upon in spontaneous communication. Stevick (1980) develops his own SLA model labelled the 'Levertov Machine' where 'learning' is perceived to turn into acquisition via extensive 'use'. He proposes that 'learning' is stored in 'secondary memory' and 'acquisition' in 'tertiary memory'. In the former, the material is said to be lost if it is not used; but in the latter, the material is held to be kept even if it is not used at all. Sharwood-Smith (1981) argues for fostering 'consciousness-raising' to help learners gain explicit knowledge that needs to be practised until it becomes automatized. He also criticizes Krashen's non-interface hypothesis, and regards formal information as an attractive short-cut. He believes that information may be transferred from explicit to implicit knowledge through practice, but if this transfer does not occur for longer periods of time, fossilization may take place instead.

Although there are many models of the interface position, all of them suppose the existence of one dichotomy of knowledge and the availability of some kind of seepage from one type of knowledge to another via certain processes. This position seems to be more reasonable to adhere than the non-interface position in as much as it acknowledges that explicit knowledge can be converted into implicit knowledge. However, the interface position has been criticized on the ground that knowledge is dichotomised into 'learning' and 'acquisition' and that acquisition is of paramount importance with regard to learning. This entails that explicit grammar instruction may be beneficial if and only if it is transformed from the conscious to the unconscious end.

1. 3 The Variability Position

Some SLA researchers do not seem to be satisfied with the interface and the non-interface positions because they represent dual-competence models, and go as far as to suggest the variable-competence model.

The main protagonists of the variability hypothesis are Bialystok (1981, 1982), Tarone (1983), and Ellis (1984b, 1985). The general idea is that the learner's knowledge and performance are variable. Depending on the type of situation, the learner uses different strategies stretching from the extreme conscious end to the extreme unconscious end. Bialystok (1981) distinguishes language tasks not in terms of dichotomies or trichotomies, but in terms of a continuum from 'structural to instructional demands' or from 'analysed' to 'automatic' knowledge. She shows that

"the language tasks and forms of knowledge are related by proposing the specific linguistic demands made by tasks at various points along the continuum" (*ibid*. 31). Bialystok (1982) advances two continua involving an analysed factor and a control factor. She also makes clear that these factors are not dichotomies but real continua involving different degrees of analycity and automaticity. Tarone (1983) claims that there is an interlanguage continuum which extends from the 'careful style' to the 'vernacular style'. The learner's choice of interlanguage forms depends on situational and linguistic contexts. Learners are likely to use a 'careful style' in 'planned discourse' and a 'vernacular style' in 'unplanned discourse'. Tarone considers the vernacular style as basic or primary because it is natural, stable, systematic and automatic. She also finds that formal instruction affects the 'careful style', and it has only an indirect effect on the 'vernacular style'. Ellis (1984b: 167) develops a variable competence model of language development which considers "language use and language development as two sides of the same coin". Ellis (1985: 241) also sees that the variability position differs from the interface and the non-interface positions in the fact that it recognizes different styles that call on various types of knowledge in terms of analycity and automaticity.

The variability hypothesis conceives of formal instruction as a good facilitator of learning: it is supposed to develop not only analycity which is used in careful styles but also automaticity used in vernacular styles. What is really important is that this position does not fail to take into account learners' needs, and calls for readjusting instruction according to what the learners want to do with language.

These three theoretical versions provide explanations for the results of various empirical studies dealing with the effects of formal grammar teaching on second language development. In general, formal grammar instruction is found to facilitate second language learning. The non-interface hypothesis propounded in the main by Krashen has been largely challenged in recent years. Nevertheless, there is an overall consensus among theorists and practitioners on the relevance of the interface position which postulates that explicit knowledge precedes any spontaneous use of language and that fluency in communicative speech will not arise unless there is sufficient meaningful practice. Contrary to beginners, intermediate or advanced foreign learners may draw on a variable knowledge according to the requirements of linguistic and social situations.

2. Effects of Formal Instruction: Empirical Findings

The studies on the effects of formal instruction on first and SLA are fivefold: those that examine the effects on (1) fluency and accuracy, (2) the route of development, (3) the rate of development, (4) the ultimate attainment, and finally (5) the durability of formal instruction.

2.1 Fluency and Accuracy

A number of studies examine whether formal instruction improves fluency and accuracy, but yield contradictory results. They all agree on the fact that grammar teaching does not lead up to fluency and accuracy in communication, especially in the short run. Pica (1983) finds that grammar instruction increases gains in accuracy, but induces learners to over-generalise morphological marking. In a similar vein, Kadia (1988: 513) reports that: "formal instruction seemed to have had very little effect on

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spontaneous production, but it was beneficial for controlled performance". Furthermore, after surveying a range of empirical studies, Ellis (1990: 151) concludes that:

… spontaneous speech production may be impervious to instruction … [and] that instruction can improve accuracy in careful planned speech production. However, this improvement may disappear over time, as more 'natural' processes take over.

On his part, Terrell reviews the research literature on the roe of grammar instruction, and comes to the conclusion that "the preliminary findings do not support a direct link between EGI [Explicit Grammar Instruction] and the ability to use grammatical structures accurately in meaningful and spontaneous speech" (Terrell, 1991: 55-56). He also adds that there is an overwhelming proof that "the ability to demonstrate grammatical knowledge on a discrete-point grammar exam does not guarantee the ability to use that knowledge in ordinary conversation, be it spontaneous or monitored" (Terrell, *ibid.* 54). According to this stand, formal instruction seems to have an influence, especially on monitored written works in the short-run, whereas oral communication seems to be the last language aspect that benefits from such forms of explicit grammar instruction.

Ellis (1994) investigates sixteen empirical studies about the effects of formal instruction on production accuracy, and finds contradictory results. Different terms are used by the authors of these studies to depict the general effects of formal instruction such as –positive, negative, supportive, beneficial, delayed, deleterious, distorting, and encouraging. The general picture that he makes from the different studies is that:

Instruction may lead to more accurate use of grammatical structures in communication providing a learner is able to process them …. If formal instruction is to be successful, it has to work in accordance with the internal processes that govern why some structures are acquired before others. (Ellis, 1994: 627)

2.2 The Route of Development

Many SLA researchers investigate whether formal instruction has real effects on the route of second language development. A great deal of empirical studies related to this issue provide strong evidence for the existence of a natural order of acquisition of the English morphemes and a regular sequence of English transitional constructions irrespective of factors such as age, first language, background, and instructed or naturalistic environments.

Many research studies related to this issue appear to corroborate Krashen's Monitor Theory that formal instruction is not the main factor in the order of acquisition of grammatical morphemes and structures. If in some cases, however, a different order may result; it can be due to over-learning, but it will not have durable effects. The view that the route of acquisition of grammatical forms and structures cannot be affected by formal instruction has also been reported by other researchers. Pienemann (1984) finds that formal instruction does not alter the order of acquisition of German grammatical forms as manifested in the spontaneous speech of 100 Italian children. VanPatten (1986) also finds that second language learners, irrespective of their first language, go through the same transitional sequences in building up their grammatical competence and that the order of acquisition is scarcely affected by explicit grammar instruction. Long (1988) reviews research literature on instructed interlanguage development and

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comes to the point that the sequence of acquisition is impervious to grammar instruction, temporary and possibly even harmful (*ibid*. 125). Ellis (1997: 64) investigates such a problem, and comes to the following conclusion: "Form-focused instruction may prove powerless to alter the natural sequence of acquisition of developmental structures". In spite of the results of SLA studies on the negative effects of formal instruction on the route of development, we think that it is premature to dispose of grammar instruction before further long-term-effects research works are conducted.

2. 3 The Rate of Development

A substantial body of research has been carried out to gauge the effects of formal instruction on the rate of development; that is, the speed at which learning takes place. Long (1983) investigates twelve studies on the effects of grammar teaching, and sums up that formal instruction does make a difference on linguistic proficiency, and that six of these studies demonstrate that instruction speeds up the rate of development among children and adults (*ibid*. 374). Larsen-Freeman and Long (1991: 321) find that instruction has "clearly positive effects on the *rate* at which learners acquire the language", but they raise their doubt regarding its influence on the success of development, and think that it has "probably beneficial effects on their *ultimate level of attainment*." They support their conclusions by the positive findings of many researchers.

Likewise, Ellis (1997: 65) believes that "Form-focused instruction can be effective in enabling learners to progress along the natural sequence more rapidly."

Another argument in favour of formal instruction is that given learners' necessity to devote a lot of time to pick up the structures of the language from mere exposure, some researchers prefer to draw learners' attention to grammatical features in a systematic manner so as to speed up their learning. One famous forerunner foretells:

It may be 'naturalistic' to learn languages in a purely intuitive manner, but how long will it take to amass a sufficient amount of implicit knowledge and the appropriate skills for using it? It may even be rewarding to discover formal regularities in a more or less conscious manner on one's own, without the aid of the teacher or textbook….The short-cut, a ready-made *a priori* explanation (partial or otherwise), is attractive; at the very least it provides an insight into the task and means of labelling and specifying the problem. (Sharwood-Smith, 1981: 151)

In the light of what has been presented, we can say that almost all SLA researchers agree that formal instruction speeds up the rate of acquisition for both first and second language learners. It can be understood from this posture that research begins to shift from the unconscious approaches to learning towards the approaches that lay heavy emphasis on consciousness and code-focused instruction.

2. 4 The Ultimate Attainment

Of particular concern to SLA researchers is the query into the effects of formal instruction on the ultimate second language attainment; that is, the overall proficiency level achieved by learners. A prolific figure in this domain is Long (1983), who in his review of research on whether second language instruction makes a difference on linguistic proficiency or not, comes to the conclusion that in general instruction helps learners to achieve higher proficiency. In a more recent work, Long (1988) reviews

research-literature on the effects of instruction on the long-term gains, and concludes that instructed learners reach higher levels of second language attainment (*ibid*.131). Ellis (1985: 226) examines some studies regarding success and ultimate attainment among learners, and comes to the point that "instruction is a better predictor of proficiency level than exposure". Ellis (1994: 616) also states that there is strong support for the claim that formal instruction helps learners to develop greater second language proficiency. After reviewing some recent literature on the effects of instruction on acquisition processes, Larsen-Freeman and Long (1991: 321) find that instruction has "clearly positive effects on the *rate* at which learners acquire the language" and has "beneficial effects on their ultimate level of attainment". They warn teachers against indulging in any form of speculation for dismissing grammar, and conclude that it is premature to abandon conventional instruction before further long-term effects works are accomplished (*ibid.*). On balance, most SLA studies hold that formal instruction has an influence on ultimate attainment.

Other SLA researchers, however, are more in favour of providing learners with formal instruction. Green and Hecht (1992: 169) strongly argue that "Formal grammar teaching and learning perhaps satisfy a human drive to impose order on the apparent chaos of natural language". More importantly, DeKeyser (1998) dissipates all doubts about the relevance of formal instruction to general language development in stating that:

Although the applied linguistics literature of the 1980s was characterized by a debate over whether or not second language instruction should make students attend to form … the vast majority of publications since the early 1990s support the idea that some kind of focus on form is useful to some extent, for some forms, for some students, at some point in the learning process….Beyond that basic, tentative agreement, however, uncertainty looms large. (DeKeyser, 1998: 42)

2. 5 The Durability of Formal Instruction

Fewer SLA studies have investigated the durability of formal instruction over time. Experience has shown time and again that even if learners may immediately internalise the grammatical forms and structures that teachers deliberately teach them, they will not retain this knowledge for a long time, and they will make the same mistakes depicted before the provision of grammar instruction. At any rate, it can be noticed that the empirical studies on the durability of formal instruction present incongruous findings. In general, three hypotheses have been put forward in line with this claiming that grammar instruction may he temporary, durable or delayed.

Harley (1989: 354) finds that there are some immediate benefits to the students who are exposed to the functional approach on grammar teaching, but these benefits disappear in the long run. However, he states that if there are no gains in the long run, it should not be construed that Krashen's comprehensible input is all that is needed; more traditional approaches of grammar can bring about good results for matured students (*ibid*. 355). White (1991) finds that the students' correct use of adverb placement disappears one year after the teaching sessions. This shows that formal instruction has only temporary effects on learners.

Day and Shapson (1991) design an experimental study to assess the effects of an integrated formal, analytic and functional approach to second language teaching. The results show that the experimental group which follows such instruction perform

significantly higher in writing in the post and follow-up testing (*ibid*. 26). This is an indication that that grammar instruction may have durable effects. White, Spada, Lightbown and Ranta (1991) investigate the effects of form-focused instruction on Francophone ESL learners in the acquisition of the formation of questions, and find that formal instruction has not only "an immediate impact on syntactic accuracy" but also "lasted for a longer period" (*ibid*. 428). Similarly, Lightbown and Pienemann (1993: 718) report that "form-focused instruction had a lasting effect on interrogative structures".

The position that instruction may have a delayed effect seems to have gained strong support among teachers and researchers alike, especially when the immediate effect instruction view has fallen into decline. Undoubtedly, this view seems to be plausible as far as declarative knowledge is said to precede procedural knowledge. This shift of knowledge takes time, and makes the effects appear only after a certain period of instruction. A fervent defender of this view is Ellis (1992: 232) who explicitly states that "My principal contention is that formal grammar teaching has a delayed rather than instant effect". In the same perspective, Ellis (1994) examines many empirical studies on this issue and comes up with 'the delayed effect hypothesis' that he regards as compatible with the general finding that formal instruction speeds up the rate of learning and improves general linguistic proficiency (*ibid*. 621).

Indeed, it is a very remarkable fact that even if the students manage to answer correctly on discrete grammar-tests immediately after instruction and in-depth revision, this ability may be worn out in the long run if the targeted structures are not revisited and recycled once again. However, the grammatical knowledge which is internalised will be activated at a later stage of linguistic development through gradual restructuring and automatization.

Generally speaking, the experimental studies on the effects of formal grammar instruction on second language learners yield controversial results. The general picture that emerges is that formal instruction may have relative effects on accuracy, on the rate of development and on the ultimate attainment, but it does not have any effect on fluency and on the route of development. These two aspects need more time and recycling in order to emerge in subsequent communication.

3 Impacts of different Types of formal instruction
Since SLA studies on the effects of formal grammar instruction have yielded mixed results, SLA researchers come to realise that there are some underlying variables which lead to real confusion, and thus start asking other questions related to the type of instruction which may be useful for teaching some forms of language. So, are particular types of formal instruction more beneficial than others?

The previous theoretical and experimental research studies have dealt with the effects of general grammar instruction on second language development. These studies do not provide a clear-cut definition of the term 'formal instruction', but view it in general terms as any focus on the formal properties of discrete grammatical points and corrective feedback. As Spada (1997: 75) says "instruction was viewed globally and monolithically." This inconsistency in the definition of terms has yielded conflicting results and led researchers to cast light on some specific questions.

A substantial body of classroom and laboratory research has investigated the efficiency of different language methodologies such as the Grammar-Translation Method, the Audiolingual Approach, the Oral Approach, the Direct Method, the Communicative Approach …etc. In their research for the best way to improve students' linguistic proficiency and to reduce their grammatical errors, some researchers have conducted a variety of experimental studies to test the efficiency of one kind of grammar over another. At the outset, traditional, structural, transformational and functional grammars are the main types used in such studies. However, other studies have also compared formal with incidental grammar instruction or with no grammar instruction at all. The general results reveal no significant improvement in the posttests delivered to learners receiving different types of grammar. In this respect, Neman (1980: 233) reviews a great deal of literature on the different types of instruction, and reports that teaching traditional grammars or linguistic grammars is useless for the improvement of students' writing.   The results of method comparison studies are found to be inconclusive because as Littlewood (1984: 60-61) says "no single methodology is intrinsically 'better' than others in all situations", and other factors may influence the learning process such as personality, motivation, time, resources … etc. In accordance with this, Doughty (1991: 434) posits that "The difficulty in obtaining conclusive results based on a comparison of methods has led many method evaluators to conclude that methodology may not be the critical variable in successful language learning." With respect to the comparative effectiveness of methods on SLA, Ellis (1994: 642) concludes that "a number of comparative method studies…sought to establish which approach was most effective. The results were generally inconclusive". In the same perspective, Spada (1997: 75) reports that some researchers have drawn some method comparison studies between the Audiolingual Approach and Grammar-Translation instruction, but they fail to find differences in learning outcomes. Last but not least, we can say that the net effect of these types of studies is that methodology is not all that is important.

Another issue related to grammar instruction is the choice between methods which emphasise the production or the comprehension of language such as traditional instruction and processing instruction. The former involves explanation and output practice, whereas the latter involves explanation and processing input data. VanPatten and Cadierno (1993) compare traditional form-focused instruction and processing instruction. They find that subjects who experience processing instruction show significant gains in both comprehension and production and those who experience traditional instruction reach gains in production only. Once again, Cadierno (1995) extends previous research (VanPatten and Cadierno, 1993) which involves traditional instruction and processing instruction and applies it to the acquisition of Spanish past tense verb morphology. The results reveal significant gains in both comprehension and production for subjects in processing instruction, while subjects in traditional instruction have significant gains only in production (*ibid*.179). Other SLA researchers direct their heed towards establishing an integrated approach which combines both the negotiation of form and the negotiation of meaning. Fotos (1994) compares communicative grammar-based tasks and grammar consciousness-raising tasks and shows that the latter are more effective than the former for promoting learners' accuracy and fluency if tasks are well designed with close links between form and

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meaning. The combination of explicit grammar instruction and communicative language use enables learners to communicate accurately in the target language.

In the light of these results, the question that may be raised is: Do we need to teach grammar at all? Given that formal instruction may have good effects on SLA, we think that it is necessary to teach grammar to second or foreign language learners, especially those who live in acquisition-poor environments where English is generally heard and practised only in the classroom. We think that formal instruction is a short-cut to learning the second / foreign language in an implicit way which requires a very long time of natural exposure. We are also in favour of providing learners with formal instruction because grammar instruction satisfies an inherent human drive to draw regularities from the apparent linguistic chaos. Teachers on their part need to teach grammar to clarify the structures that students do not understand. Only some knowledge of grammar can help them do the task adequately and discuss the functioning of the target language system with the students. This knowledge is also necessary to analyse the students' interlanguage, to correct their errors and to provide them with remedial feedback. We think that the learning outcomes are disappointing because current language syllabuses have been based on pragmatic communicative goals. To day, there is a revived interest in explicit grammar pedagogy in order to improve the pervasive falling standards. Students, by and large, ask teachers to teach them grammar. Teachers, in their turn, also think that it is beneficial to teach grammar to foreign or second language learners. All these factors provide a strong bias to the teaching of grammar, especially at the intermediate and advanced levels.

In conclusion, we can say that there are some sound arguments in favour of formal instruction. The theoretical interface position stipulates that learning can convert into acquisition. This stand may encourage teachers to teach the intricacies of the language and to expect subsequent achievement on the part of learners. In addition, the empirical position proves ample evidence that formal instruction has beneficial effects on SLA. These two stands which are widely accepted by most SLA researchers provide strong support for the fact that grammar instruction has a role to play in our schools and universities. What is worth noting is that even though there are mixed findings produced by SLA researchers on the limited utility of grammar teaching, methodologists should not hasten to call for the abandonment of any form of formal instruction. It should not also   be inferred that teachers would return to teaching Traditional Grammar. Rather, more recent learning-centred methods and techniques have been elaborated to meet this objective.

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