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obtained in the Iranian EFL context, the extensive review of the related literature revealed that grammar cannot be discarded from foreign language pedagogy and form and meaning do not have to be mutually excluded. Adopting a FonF approach as a modification of communicative language teaching which is in line with the learners' needs to communicate meaningfully and effectively is being accepted as the preferred option by many ELT scholars.

In sum, the treatment of grammar with a one-size-fits-all methodology instead of utilizing a balanced perspective based on the needs and context of the learners is not expected to yield the desired results in any language teaching context.

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Very few students (3.2%) thought they could benefit from a FonM instructional method. The students believed that a lack of explicit grammar teaching left them feel insecure. The students' reluctance to have a FonM instruction was also attributed to the difficulty of transferring their grammatical knowledge into communicative language use.

Conclusion

The findings indicate that a return to some type of formal instruction along with incorporating a limited number of translation activities is favored by more than two thirds of the students. However, in line with Ellis (1995), the inconclusive results of L2 acquisition studies with regard to the best way to teach grammar suggest that it is premature to reach any firm conclusion regarding what type of formal instruction works best. The fact that EFL/ESL methodologists have not offered consistent advice to teachers about the role of grammar in language teaching has frustrated teachers who cannot decide between many conflicting positions in the methodological literature. On the one

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hand, it is now believed that a grammarless approach whether comprehension-based or communicative-based can lead to the development of a broken, ungrammatical, pidginized form of the target language. On the other hand, the debate regarding how to teach grammar presents a dilemma for many teachers.

In the Iranian context, this concern over finding the most valid, reliable and trustworthy grammar teaching method has remained a controversial issue. In the first place, in the Iranian EFL context, FonFs instructional approach is favored over a FonF approach which emphasizes focus on meaning with attention to form and FonM approach which emphasizes comprehensible input and meaning-oriented tasks as necessary and sufficient for language acquisition. This kind of language learning perspective is in line with the Iranian contextual considerations such as the requirements of the class syllabus and final exams, shortage of time allotted to language classes, the failure to have meaningful communication outside the language classes, and the kind of teacher training programmes in Iran.

Moreover, in the Iranian context, English language classes have long been teacher-fronted ones with teacher authorities serving as the sole decision makers in classes. Obviously, FonFs suits this role of the teachers more than any other approach. A FonF approach is completely student-centered as the students control which forms to be taught and when.

In spite of the results of this study

in Persian was given to the participants. The questionnaire included a number of statements to which the respondents were supposed to show their agreement or disagreement (see Table 1).

Results

Of the 128 respondents, 116 (90%) reported that they preferred FonFs instructional method. The results also revealed that more than 95% of the participants believed that the contextual

considerations such as, the requirements of the class syllabus and final exams, shortage of time allotted to language classes and their inability to communicate in English and the need to incorporate L1 into instruction were responsible for their choice of FonFs. The students agreed on the need for conscious knowledge of grammar in order to improve their accuracy in the use of language.

Only 16 (12%) favored a FonF approach. These students valued both natural exposure to language and formal instruction.

Table1
Learners' opinion about different grammar instructional methods

	Questions	Agree	Percent	Disagree	Percent
(FonFs) Focus on Forms	Focus on forms lead to the acquisition of a significantly larger number of grammatical points.	116	90.6	12	9.3
	Planned, explicit, and discrete-point metalinguistic explanations is more effective.	118	92.1	10	7.8
(FonF) Focus on Form	Focus on form lead to the acquisition of a significantly larger number of grammatical points.	16	12.2	114	89
	Incorporating grammatical explanation into a communicative lesson make a significant difference in acquiring new grammatical points	18	14	110	85
(FonM) Focus on Meaning	Focus on meaning lead to the acquisition of a significantly larger number of grammatical points.	3	2.3	125	97.6
	I implicit, unplanned, and incidental reference to form is effective.	5	3.9	123	96
Others	Incorporating translation activities make a significant difference in acquiring new grammatical points.	120	93	8	6.2
	The limitation of the class time is responsible for the choice of the preferred instructional grammar method.	122	95	6	4.6
	Problems in speaking and listening are responsible for the choice of the preferred grammar instructional method?	117	91	11	8.5
	The requirements of the syllabus and final exam are responsible for the choice of grammar instructional method.	125	97.6	2	1.5

pragmatic functions. In other words, language instruction should be content-based, meaningful, contextualized, and discourse-based (rather than sentence-based). Among the proponents of this approach, there is some debate regarding the nature, extent and type of grammar instruction.

Focus on Form (FonF)

Focus on form' is the result of attempts to find a middle-way between form-focused and meaning-focused instruction, both of which have been deemed by many to be short of the goals of language acquisition (Ellis, 2001, 2003, 2006; Davies, 2006; Fotos, 1994; Saraceni, 2007).

Focus on Form is described by Long (1985) as the incidental attention that teachers and L2 learners pay to form in the context of meaning-focused instruction. According to Ellis, Baskurkmen and Loewen(2001), focus on form occurs in: discourse that is predominantly meaning-focused ; is observable (i.e., occurs intentionally); is extensive (i.e., several different forms may be attended to in the context of a single lesson); is transitory (i.e., occasional so as not to interfere too much with meaning (pp. 411-412)

Attention to form according to Ellis et al (2001) can be proactive (i.e., planned) and intensive or reactive (i.e. incidental) and extensive. FonF can also be preemptive (i.e. addressing an actual or perceived gap in the students' knowledge).

FonF is often contrasted with FonM exemplified by Krashen. However, Long's and Krashen's approaches have some

similarities. They are both types of implicit language instruction in which the main focus is on meaning, with no rules given and no overt directions to attend to any given form. A major difference is that in Long's FonF students' attention is diverted to specific forms that arise incidentally when a communication breakdown occurs in the context of meaning communication. While the term form is often taken to refer exclusively to grammar, Laufer (2005) maintains that FonF can be directed at phonology, vocabulary, grammar, and discourse.

Method

Taking the above concerns into account, the study reported in the present article was designed to gain information and insights with regard to learners' preferences for the best grammar instructional method in the Iranian context. Since the information already available in this area is limited, a closed-response yes-no questionnaire was administered to a group of 128 high school students from four high schools in Isfahan Province, Falavarjan.

After explaining the three instructional methods thoroughly, the questionnaire which was administered and responded to

It requires the classroom participants to treat language as a tool for achieving some nonlinguistic goal rather than as an object to be studied for the purpose of learning the language. Second, it requires the participants to function as users rather than as learners.

psychologists like Miller (1973). Language learning was viewed as hypothesis formation and rule acquisition rather than habit formation.

In this approach, grammar was considered important, and rules were presented either deductively or inductively. Errors were viewed as inevitable by-products of language learning. Campbell (1970) also argues for acquiring a native-like competence which would enable a learner to produce and interpret infinite number of sentences by utilizing a finite number of rules. Martine (1978) put forward the concept of spiraling, a systematic revisiting of the same material with increasingly broader and deeper explanations and practice. Grammar-based methodologies favored a teacher-fronted language lesson based on presentation-practice-production (P-P-P) format. In general in this methodology the grammar of a new language is considered fundamental to the development of competence in that language.

Sheen (2003, 2004) believes that a 'focus on forms' is being stigmatized as unworthy of consideration unfairly. FonFs is perceived as being incompatible with currently-accepted theories by a number of applied linguists who according to sheen (2003) have provided reliable and supportive empirical evidence for their claim. In spite of these claims Sheen (2006) makes the observation that countless number of successful learners owe their success in part to GT and criticizes Ellis's proscription of traditional grammar teaching.

Meaning-Focused Instruction (FonM)

Meaning-Focused Instruction, according to Ellis et al (2001), has two essential elements. First, it requires the classroom participants to treat language as a tool for achieving some nonlinguistic goal rather than as an object to be studied for the purpose of learning the language. Second, it requires the participants to function as users rather than as learners. This instructional approach can be manifested in comprehension and communicative approaches.

The comprehension approach represents attempts by a number of language methodologists during the 1970s and 1980s to recreate the first language acquisition experience for the second/foreign language learner. Their assumption was that comprehension is primary and should precede any production. Based on this assumption, they proposed that a semantically based syllabus be followed and all grammar instruction be excluded from the classroom and the focus of activities be placed solely on meaning (Krashen & Terrel, 1983). Proponents of this philosophy also believe that error correction is unnecessary or even counterproductive.

The communicative approach originates in the work of anthropological linguists in the US (Hymes, 1972) and functional linguists in Britain (Haliday, 1973) all of whom view language as a vehicle for communication. The syllabus of a language course based on this approach should not be organized around grammar but around subject matter, tasks/projects or semantic notions and/or

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as grammar to help L2 learners acquire it, have become more important.

The range of approaches to form can be placed in a long continuum. On one side, are the planned, deductive, explicit, intensive, and discrete-point metalinguistic explanations, and on the other end of the continuum are the implicit, inductive, unplanned, incidental references to form through noticing and grammar consciousness raising.

In this article, different approaches to grammar teaching during the last four decades are reviewed and their application in the EFL context in general, and in the Iranian context in particular is examined on the basis of the results of a qualitative study.

Focus on Forms (FonFs)

Focus on forms (FonFs) is an approach equated with the traditional method of language teaching which entails teaching discrete linguistic structures in separate lessons in a sequence determined by the syllabus (Laufer and Girsai, 2008). According to Ellis (2001), in a FonFs approach, students view themselves as learners of a language and the language as the object of study. The underlying

assumption behind traditional grammar teaching is that having learners produce the structures correctly and repeatedly helps them learn grammar. During the past 40 years, the methodological approaches which have given central importance to grammar teaching are: Audio-lingual Approach and Cognitive Code Approach.

During the 1950s and 1960s, Audiolingualism as a reaction to the Grammar Translation Approach and its lack of emphasis on aural-oral skills emerged. Those following the Grammar Translation Method hoped that through explicit and deductive grammar teaching, students would become familiar with the grammar of their native language and learn about the target language.

The Audio-lingual Approach (Fries, 1945; Lado, 1964) represents the first attempt by the U.S Structural Linguists to influence the teaching of modern foreign languages. For them, grammar was as the starting point of language learning. Therefore grammatical structures were very carefully sequenced from basic to more complex. Adopting a behaviorist psychology, they believed that learning is a matter of habit formation. Thus mimicry of forms and memorization of certain sentence patterns were used extensively. A variety of manipulative drill types was practiced with the aim of minimizing learners' errors.

The Cognitive Code Approach, largely a reaction to the behaviorist features of audiolingualism, was influenced by the work of linguists like Chomsky (1959) and

Abstract

The fact that second languages(L2) learners need to learn grammar is now a well- established fact. What has remained controversial is the way grammar should be taught to help the acquisition process. Analysis of responses to a questionnaire administered to randomly selected 128 students in four high schools in Isfahan, Falavarjan, revealed that the students preferred the 'focus on forms (FonFs) instructional method. The results also demonstrated that the majority of participants favored a teacher-fronted classroom with an emphasis on explicit grammar instruction. This might be in part due to the social, educational, and cultural context of the Iranian students. However, The comprehensive review of the related literature in grammar teaching approaches reveals that 'focus on form' (FonF) as a middle-way between the two extremes of FonFs and 'focus on meaning (FonM)' from the CLT approach has emerged. The overall results suggest that the treatment of grammar with a one-size -fits- all methodology instead of utilizing a balanced perspective based on the needs and context of the learners is not expected to yield the desired results. Nevertheless, the use of FonFs instructional approach and L1 does not necessarily mean that we should abandon the communicative classroom and return to the grammar translation method, nor does it mean that we should teach grammar at the expense of the ability to function in a foreign language. Implications can be drawn from the results of the present study for the choice of the most effective instructional approaches in teaching grammar in both ESL and EFL contexts and in particular in the Iranian EFL context.

Key Words: grammar teaching; context; focus on form, focus on meaning

Introduction

Over the centuries, second language educators have alternated between two types of approaches to language teaching, i.e., those who focus on analyzing the language and those who focus on using the language. As approaches in language teaching have changed, methodologies of teaching language skills and elements have undergone modifications. Among all skills and elements, modifications in grammar teaching have held and continue to hold a central place (Canale & Swain, 1980; Campbell, 1970; Celce-Murcia, 1991; Davies, 2006; Ellis, 2006; Fotos, 1994;

Long, 1985; Sheen, 2003).

In the last forty years the role of grammar has gone through three main stages: absolute prominence, exclusion, and re-introduction with caution. These three stages have been associated with three different approaches to instruction namely, 'focus on forms (FonFs)', 'focus on meaning (FonM)', and 'focus on form (FonF)'. As the focus of classroom instruction has shifted over the past few decades from an emphasis on language forms to attention to functional language use, the place of grammar instruction i.e., how to teach grammar and what to teach

Controversies in Teaching Grammar



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چکیده

این حقیقت که فراگیرندگان زبان دوم نیازمند یادگیری دستور زبان هستند، یک واقعیت به اثبات رسیده است. مبحثی که هنوز به صورت بحث برانگیز باقی مانده این است که دستور زبان را چگونه آموزش دهیم تا به فراگیرندگان زبان دوم و خارجی در جهت یادگیری آن کمک کرده باشیم. به منظور یافتن پاسخ این سؤال، ۱۲۸ دانش آموز دبیرستانی به صورت تصادفی از بین چهار دبیرستان در استان اصفهان، منطقه فلاورجان انتخاب شدند. پرسشنامه‌ای میان ایشان توزیع شد. تجزیه و تحلیل پاسخهای آنها مشخص کرد که روش مورد علاقه آنان تأکید بر نکات دستوری به صورت مجزا است. نتایج همچنین نشان می‌دهد که بیش از دو سوم زبان آموزان به روش معلم محور با تأکید بر آموزش نکات دستوری به صورت مجزا علاقه‌مند هستند. این امر می‌تواند تا حدی نشان‌دهنده تأثیر نظام آموزشی، و شرایط فرهنگی و اجتماعی دانش آموزان ایرانی باشد. با وجود این، بررسی گسترده مطالب مرتبط با پیشینه تحقیق مشخص می‌کند که «تأکید بر مکالمه و توضیح نکات دستوری در خلال آن» که به دنبال روش تدریس فعالیت محور و به‌عنوان روشی متعادل بین دو روش افراطی «تأکید بر نکات دستوری به صورت مجزا» و «تأکید بر انتقال پیام و معنا بدون هیچ توضیح دستوری» ظاهر شده است، بیشترین محبوبیت را بین محققین دارد. نتایج تحقیق نشان می‌دهند که برخورد با مسئله آموزش دستور زبان به صورت روشی از قبل تعیین شده، به‌جای استفاده از روشی متعادل برحسب شرایط و نیاز زبان آموزان، نتایج مساعدی در پی نخواهد داشت. با وجود این، استفاده از روش «تأکید بر نکات دستوری به صورت مجزا» و زبان مادری در تدریس دستور زبان، ضرورتاً به این معنا نیست که معلمان آموزش زبان، روش مکالمه و گفت‌وگو را کاملاً کنار بگذارند و آموزش دستور زبان به «روش سنتی ترجمه و توضیح» را جای‌گزین توانایی استفاده از زبان کنند. از کاربردهای این تحقیق می‌توان به انتخاب مؤثرترین روش آموزش دستور زبان در شرایط متفاوت آموزش انگلیسی به عنوان زبان دوم و یا زبان خارجی و خصوصاً در شرایط متفاوت یادگیری زبان توسط فراگیرندگان ایرانی اشاره کرد.

کلیدواژه‌ها: آموزش دستور زبان، تأکید بر نکات دستوری به صورت مجزا، تأکید بر مکالمه و توضیح نکات دستوری در خلال آن، تأکید بر انتقال پیام بدون هیچ توضیح دستوری