

淡江大學八十九學年度碩士班招生考試試題

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科目：英文作文

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Attached is an excerpt from an article entitled "Learner-Generated Attention to Form" by Jessica Williams published in *Language Learning* (49:4, pp 583-625). Read the excerpt and write an essay in which you do the following:

- (1) Choose some major aspect of Williams's excerpt that you find relevant to EFL education in Taiwan. Accurately summarize this aspect of the Williams excerpt and the background which Williams provides for it. Analyze its relevance to EFL learning or teaching in Taiwan. Be as specific as possible in your discussion. That is, narrow your consideration to some particular aspect of the Williams excerpt AND its relevance to some specific group of learners or educational setting in Taiwan (e.g., high school English, university English classes, or whatever).

Note: Assume the reader has NOT read the Williams article. Carefully attribute the information in your essay to the appropriate source. Your summary and any other use of material from the Williams source must be in your own words (paraphrase or summarize) or appropriately quoted.

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Language Learning 49:4, December 1999, pp. 583-625

Learner-Generated Attention to Form

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Recent studies have suggested that the incorporation of some attention to form into meaning-centered instruction can lead to improved performance in processing input and increased accuracy in production. Most have examined attention to form delivered by instructors or instructional materials. This study examines the production of 8 classroom learners at 4 levels of proficiency to determine the extent to which learners can and do spontaneously attend to form in their interaction with other learners. Results suggest that the degree and type of learner-generated attention to form is related to proficiency level and the nature of the activity in which the learners are engaged. They also indicate that learners overwhelmingly choose to focus on lexical rather than grammatical issues.

Findings of a wide range of immersion and naturalistic acquisition studies suggest that when second language learning is solely experiential and focussed on communicative success, some linguistic features do not develop to targetlike accuracy (see

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e.g., Harley, 1992; Harley & Swain, 1984; Spada & Lightbown, 1989). This occurs in spite of years of meaningful, comprehensible input and opportunities for interaction. Recent studies point to the inclusion of some degree of *focus on form* (Long, 1991; Long & Robinson, 1998), in classes that are primarily focussed on meaning and communication, as particularly helpful in promoting accuracy in second language acquisition (see Doughty & Williams, 1998; Spada, 1997, for reviews). Long (1996) took the view that instruction that includes focus on form has at least two advantages over purely meaning-focussed instruction: It can increase the salience of positive evidence, and it can provide often essential negative evidence, in the form of direct or indirect negative feedback. There is converging support for this position from both laboratory research (e.g., de Graaff, 1997; DeKeyser, 1995; N. Ellis, 1993; Mackey & Philp, 1998; Robinson, 1996, 1997) and classroom-based studies (e.g., Doughty & Varela, 1998; Jourdenais, Ota, Stauffer, Boyson, & Doughty, 1995; Leeman, Arteagoitia, Fridman, & Doughty, 1995; Long, Inagaki, & Ortega, 1998; Lyster & Ranta, 1997; Muranoi, 1996; Spada & Lightbown, 1993; Swain & Lapkin, 1998; L. White, 1991; Williams & Evans, 1998).

Alongside a growing concern for formal accuracy, emphasis has also recently been on increasing learner autonomy in the learning process and on learner-centered approaches to both learning and teaching. The terms *cooperative* and *collaborative learning* are variously used and understood (see Adams & Hamm, 1996; Johnson & Johnson, 1991; Slavin, 1983, 1987; and McGroarty, 1993; Oxford, 1997, for specific applications to L2 learning and instruction), but the primary features on which most will agree is that such approaches entail learners' taking responsibility for their own learning by working together to achieve both individual and common goals. This moves classroom interaction beyond mere group work in which learners work in physical proximity but may not consistently derive the greatest benefit from working together. By involving learners actively in their own learning in a supportive environment, proponents of collaborative learning believe that educational outcomes can be improved.

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There appears to be empirical support for both collaborative learning activities and for some degree of focus on form, yet it is not clear how the goals of increasing learner participation, cooperation, and autonomy might be meshed with the integration of an increased attention to language form within a communicative second language curriculum. Leow (1998) claimed there is greater facilitation of intake and improved accuracy with what he called "learner-centered exposure" to grammatical form—which he defined as "learners' participation in a problem-solving task that is carefully constructed to promote noticing the form or structure in the L2" (p. 51)—than when the teacher directs and controls the attention to form. He found that learners who were exposed to verbs with irregular morphological changes by means of a crossword puzzle performed better on a variety of subsequent productive and receptive tasks than did those who had a more traditional teacher-fronted presentation of the same material. Successful completion of the crossword required that participants figure out the irregular morphology. The greater gains demonstrated by the learner-centered group on recognition as well as production tests were sustained for 3½ months after initial exposure.

Beyond the general statement that some degree of focus on form appears to have a facilitating effect on second language learning (though see Krashen, 1992, 1993, 1994, for a recent version of the opposite view) and the broadly converging evidence from the studies cited above, there is no clear agreement on definitions and procedures. For instance, it is not yet clear whether focus on form is *necessary* to push learners toward targetlike second language levels, or if such a focus is not absolutely necessary, but rather part of a more *efficient* approach to language learning in that it can accelerate natural acquisition processes (Doughty & Williams, 1998). Indeed, even definitions of focus on form vary. It was defined narrowly by Long and Robinson (1998) as involving "an occasional shift in attention to linguistic code features—by the teacher and/or one or more students—triggered by perceived problems with comprehension or production" (p. 23). This is generally interpreted as meaning a reactive, or unplanned,

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approach to drawing the learners' attention to form (Spada, 1997), though a planned focus is not explicitly excluded. Other researchers and practitioners have embraced a broader definition of the concept, allowing for advanced planning in attracting learner attention to form, the provision of explicit positive and negative evidence, including the use of metalinguistic explanations, and some separation of meaning-oriented and form-oriented instruction (e.g., DeKeyser, 1998; Harley, 1998; Lightbown, 1998; Swain & Lapkin, 1998). Spada (1997) used the cover term *form-focussed instruction* to describe "any pedagogical effort to draw the learners' attention to form, either implicitly or explicitly" (p. 73). Thus, the optimal degree of explicitness of attention to form has yet to be determined (see Doughty & Williams, 1998; Spada, 1997, for further discussion).

Learners' Role in Drawing Attention to Form

Terms such as *form-focussed instruction* and *focus on form* are generally based on the assumption that the degree of attention given to form is controlled by the teacher or instructional materials, albeit presumably in response to learner needs. For example, the teacher might realize that students are making systematic errors on a given form and respond accordingly, perhaps with a recast, perhaps with a brief explanation. Or, the teacher might surmise that the learners are grasping for a form or word they do not know and provide it at the appropriate juncture. In a more proactive approach, exposure to and use of forms would be determined in advance, for instance, with the use of structured or enhanced input. If, however, the most effective instances of focus on form arise out of learner need, as Long (1996) claimed, it may be useful or even crucial to examine ways the learners themselves focus on questions about language.

The present study is based on the assumption that some degree of focus on form facilitates the development of targetlike use and addresses one question in the attention-to-form debate: What role might learners play in fostering an increased awareness

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of form and accuracy? Indeed, can they play a role, or does the responsibility for orchestrating attention to form rest primarily, or even solely, with the instructor? This is a particularly important question in classrooms where learners are given major responsibility in the learning process and the teacher takes a more facilitating role. In particular, are there episodes during which learners' attention is drawn to form, other than those that are initiated by the instructor in the form of direct instruction, feedback, modeling, and so forth? A longer-term research question might be whether second language acquisition is actually enhanced when learners take an active part in drawing attention to form, rather than relying on the instructor to do so (Swain, in press; Swain & Lapkin, 1998; Williams, 1997), and indeed this study builds in that direction. However, such a question would be premature. First, the more basic issue must be investigated, namely, whether or not learners initiate episodes involving attention to form.

An active role for the learner in the learning process has been shown to be important in particular in research done within the interactionist approach to second language learning. Long and Porter (1985), in an early study, touted the numerous advantages of group work, one of which being that in taking some control, learners are able to tailor class material to their current needs. These findings on input are echoed in a number of studies examining interaction done since then by Pica and her colleagues. Pica (1994) argued for a powerful role for negotiation in the learning process. Based on a review of her own work as well as that of others, she concluded that learner participation in negotiated interaction can not only facilitate comprehension, but also assist in the segmentation and analysis of input; make certain, often problematic items in the input more salient; and trigger the provision of important negative feedback from interlocutors.

Learner participation can also have an important effect on output. Pica, Holliday, Lewis, and Morgenthaler (1989), in an experimental study examining the effects of interaction on output, found that non-native speaker (NNS) modification of output was greater when learners were pushed to make their own contributions clearer

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Lyster and Ranta (1997) found similar results when they examined the differential effect of various types of feedback in the classroom. Those types of feedback, such as elicitation and clarification requests, which again required learners to modify their own output rather than simply accept the teacher's version, were more likely to lead to uptake in the following turn, where uptake was defined as a reactive response to the teacher's feedback. Swain (1995, in press; Kowal & Swain, 1997; Swain & Lapkin, 1995) also saw a major role for output, in part because it forces learners to reflect on their own knowledge and take an active part in refining it. More specifically, she saw a benefit for dialogic activity in furthering acquisition. She cited the work of Donato, which documents how learners pool their knowledge to solve problems. In his study, Donato (1994) showed that when learners used the collective resources of the group, they could further the knowledge of the individuals within the group through *collective scaffolding*, in which each contribution builds on the previous one. In one instance, he noted that although no single individual in the group held the key to solving the problems posed by the task, and that although "marked individual linguistic differences exist at the onset of the interaction, the co-construction of the collective scaffold progressively reduces the distance between the task and individual abilities" (p. 46). With similar emphasis on the value of collaborative activity, in a study of two learners of French, Swain and Lapkin (1998) demonstrated how two learners used their own output to generate and test hypotheses and to apply their current interlanguage (IL) knowledge of both lexicon and grammar to new contexts. They found that when the learners collaborated on a task that required them to focus on issues of accuracy, they were more likely to remember and use accurately those structures and words that were the focus of language-oriented discussions than those that were used during the task but were not the focus of such discussion. Kowal and Swain (1994) pointed to collaborative writing tasks in particular as helpful in directing learners' awareness to morphosyntactic features that may not be salient in the course of communication. It is important to note, however, that

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placing the learning task solely in the hands of the learner may not be ideal either. Pica, Lincoln-Porter, Paninos, and Linnell (1996) clearly demonstrated that NNS interactants do not meet the input and feedback needs of NNSs as well as native speaker (NS) interactants do.

These studies illustrate the variety of roles that learners can take in the learning process. First, learners can make choices about what they want or need to focus on. It may be that in doing so, they signal that they are ready to acquire the feature. It may be possible to integrate this signalling of readiness into an instructional approach that is more sensitive to acquisitional processes. Lightbown (1992) suggested that instruction on form is likely to be effective "at the moment when learners *know* what they want to say, indeed are trying to say something, and the means to say it more correctly is offered to them" (p. 192, emphasis in original), in effect, when learners are allowed to make their own choices about what they need to learn. Second, learners can search their own knowledge, allowing them to perceive "holes" in their IL (Swain, 1998), which Swain (1995) defined as "a gap between what they *want* to say and what they *can* say, leading them to recognize what they don't know" (p. 126, emphasis in original). And finally, learners can make changes in their output, perhaps leading to or reflecting IL development, as suggested in studies such as Pica et al. (1989) and Mackey and Philip (1998). This study will examine the first two steps in this process.

So far, this discussion has addressed learners as if they were all alike. In the studies cited, little attention was paid to differences among learners. Learners may differ in any number of ways: their age, gender, background, goals, and learning styles. One of the most basic differences among learners is proficiency level. It is not at all clear how the results of studies examining feedback, pushed output, negotiation, and so on might be related to the proficiency of the participants in the study. There is ample evidence in the literature of the importance of developmental readiness in the acquisition of grammatical features. This is implicitly or explicitly acknowledged in many focus-on-form studies (e.g.,

Mackey & Philip, 1998; Spada & Lightbown, 1993; Williams & Evans, 1998) insofar as the choice of structure examined in these studies is concerned. It is plausible that developmental readiness may be a factor in the effectiveness of drawing learner attention to form. This suggestion is certainly not a new one. VanPatten (1990, 1994, 1996) made this argument, situating his claim within models of attention and language processing. He stated that learners "are driven to process referential meaning before anything else when involved in communicative exchanges" (1994, p. 32) and that it is only when they are able to do so with little cost in terms of attention that they are able to allot attention to analysis of formal features. Gass (1997) made similar claims for the need to process meaning first, arguing that

some input is utilized for (comprehension of) meaning and other input will be utilized for further grammatical development. The former precedes the latter: semantic comprehension is a prerequisite for syntactic comprehension, and syntactic comprehension is a prerequisite to acquisition. None guarantees the following step. (p. 137)

Beginning learners may be in the initial stages of this process and thus less able to benefit from focus on form than more advanced learners. Proficiency is clearly a factor that needs to be investigated further as it relates to the effectiveness of focus on form.

Research Questions

This is a small-scale descriptive study of four communicative, learner-centered ESL classrooms. Because it is a descriptive study, it must be viewed as a preliminary investigation of the degree of attention to form found in such classrooms, and its results cannot necessarily be generalized. It is also important to note that it does not address the effectiveness of focus on form or any other aspect of instruction in facilitating the development of accuracy. Rather, the study addresses the following specific research questions:

1. Do learners in learner-centered, communicative classrooms spontaneously attend to form?
2. Is proficiency level related to the extent to which they do so?
3. How do learners draw attention to form?
4. When do learners draw attention to form, that is, during what types of activities?
5. What kinds of forms do they attend to?