A Comparative Study of Two Focus-on-Form Approaches in Learning Past Tense by Iranian Learners of French as a Foreign Language*

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THE shift of attention from communicative approach to form focused instruction (FFI) led to two different approaches to teaching grammar, that is, focus on form (FonF) and focus on forms (FonFs). FonFs focuses on deductive teaching of grammar based on the presentation-practice-production technique, very similar to traditional approaches of language teaching. Based on this approach, teachers should explicitly teach the grammar points and then provide the opportunities for the students to practice these forms and then have them use the target forms in real-life examples. FonF, on the other hand, recommends a meaning-based approach to teaching grammar through an inductive approach. Based on this approach, there is not explicit focus on L2 forms. These forms are presented through contextualized examples without the teacher providing any explicit reference to the target forms. In fact, the idea is that the students themselves will learn the forms when they are provided with meaningful examples. Although there are studies that have investigated the efficacy of any one of these two approaches, there are, however, only a few studies that have compared these two approaches to teaching grammar. The present study aimed at comparing (FonFs) and (FonF) on the acquisition of French *passé composé* and *imparfait* by Iranian learners of French as a foreign language.

To this end, data was collected from 50 Iranian lower-intermediate learners of French. These learners participated in two intact French classes at a language institute. The two classes were randomly assigned to two groups. One group was taught through FonF approach and the other group through FonFs approach. The FonF class was taught through input-flood technique and the FonFs through traditional presentation-practice-production technique. In order to measure the entry level and how much progress the students made after the treatment, three parallel forms of a recognition and a writing production test were used. The recognition test consisted of 20 sentences in which the two target structures (*passé composé* and *imparfait*) had been used. The second test was a picture story which required the students to write a story in the past, where they had to use the two target structures. The aim for this test was to see if the participants were able to use these two structures in their written production. As mentioned, three parallel forms of this test were made and were given to the participants at the beginning of the experiment (pre-test), at the end of the experiment (posttest), and with a delay of one month after the treatment (delayed posttest). The study was conducted during 10 weeks. In the first week, both groups received the pre-test, both the recognition and the production tests. From the second week to the fifth week, the teachers of both groups taught the two structures. The teacher in the FonF group used the input-flood technique through which she provided a large number of contextualized examples in which the two forms had been used. The teacher in FonFs class, on the other hand, taught the two structures deductively and through the presentation-practice-production technique. In the sixth week, the two groups received the posttest to see if they have made any improvement in their recognition and use of the two forms. The students did not receive any instructions on these two forms from week six to week 10. In week 10, they took similar tests in order to see the long-term effect of the two instruction methods. The results of the study showed no significant difference between the two groups on the two tests at the beginning of the experiment. However, FonFs group turned out to have a better performance on the recognition test than FonF group, while no significant difference was found between these two groups on the recognition test in the delayed posttest. As for the production test, no difference was observed between the two groups on the posttest. Nonetheless, FonF significantly outperformed FonFs on the production delayed posttest. Hence, the results showed that deductive teaching of grammar is more helpful in the short run and when the recognition of the target forms is concerned. However, inductive and meaning-based instruction of the forms is more effective when the long-term acquisition of the target forms are concerned. An important implication of the present study is that if we want to help L2 learners acquire and internalize L2 forms, we must focus on the function and meaning of the grammatical structures rather than exclusively focus on the forms.

However, it all depends on the complexity of the target forms. In fact, it might be the case that FonF and FonFs should be used for different purposes and for teaching different types of structures.