Research on Form-focused Instruction in Korean Language Education: A Critical Review

Sunhee Choi[1], Dae-hee Kim[2*]

[1]Department of English Language Education, Jeonju University
[2]Department of Korean Language Education, Wonkwang University

한국어교육에서의 형태초점교수법 연구: 비판적 검토

최선희[1], 김대희[2*]

[1]전주대학교 영어교육과, [2]원광대학교 국어교육과

Abstract   The purpose of this study is to review empirical research on Form-focused instruction (FFI) in Korean language education from a critical perspective to better understand the effectiveness of FFI. To achieve this goal, several databases were searched to locate relevant experimental and quasi experimental studies published in peer-reviewed journals. Out of 66 studies collected, 12 studies met the inclusion criteria. The studies were then analyzed in terms of subjects, target grammar, treatment, measurement, and the learning outcomes of different techniques. In general, several types of FFI techniques had positive effects on helping learners acquire Korean as a second or foreign language. The results of the study will provide a conceptual framework which identifies the major factors affecting the effectiveness of FFI. The results will also be able to inform future meta-analytical research of existing studies.

• Key Words : Form-focused instruction, Korean language education, convergence and analysis of empirical data, grammar teaching, focus on form

요 약   본 연구의 목적은 한국어 교육에서의 형태초점교수법의 효과를 검증하기 위하여 지금까지 행해진 실증적 연구를 비판적 시각으로 검토하는 것이다. 이 목적을 달성하기 위해 다수의 논문 데이터베이스를 검색하여 총 66개의 논문을 찾았으며, 이중 실증적 자료를 제시한 12개의 논문을 연구대상으로 채택하였다. 채택된 논문들을 연구참여자, 목표 문법, 처치, 측정, 효과성을 기준으로 분석하였다. 전반적으로 형태초점교수법에 속하는 다양한 교수 전략들은 한국어를 제2언어로 가르치는데 효과가 있는 것으로 나타났다. 본 연구의 결과는 형태초점 교수법에 영향을 미치는 요인을 파악하는 데 필요한 체계를 제공할 것이며, 또한 선행 연구의 메타 분석에 필요한 정보를 제공할 것이다.

• 주제어 : 형태초점교수법, 한국어 교육, 실증적 자료의 융합과 분석, 문법 교육, 형태 중심

1. Introduction

Over the last two decades, the field of Korean language education has experienced a substantial growth both in quantity and quality thanks to Korea's increased global influences and a massive influx of

foreigners who want to learn its language as well as culture [1]. Second and foreign language teaching methodologies have also gone through major shifts from the teacher-centered grammar translation method to the student-centered communicative language teaching approach (henceforth referred to as CLT) [2]. The major principle of the CLT is that language teaching should focus not on teaching the target language rules, but on promoting learners' ability to use the language for spontaneous communication [3]. Krashen, one of the strong advocates of the CLT, insists that one's communicative competence in a second language(L2)[1) is acquired through the naturalistic exposure to large amounts of L2 input rather than explicit learning of rules [4]. Accordingly, in the CLT classrooms, learning activities are organized around meaning-focused communications which resemble those in real life, and teaching form or grammar is generally regarded as harmful for learners' language development [5].

No one denies that meaning-oriented activities are crucial for L2 learning, but a significant number of L2 studies including those on Canadian immersion programs have shown that when an L2 instruction is primarily meaning-focused, learners may not be able to develop a high level of L2 proficiency [6]. Based on the results of these studies, L2 scholars argue that it may be necessary for learners to focus on form as well as meaning to advance their language abilities. With this claim widely supported by many Korean language educators and scholars, a number of empirical studies have been conducted to survey the effectiveness of various types of form-focused instruction (FFI) targeting several different grammatical items.

As the name itself suggests, FFI means any pedagogical interventions which draw learners' attention to forms in L2 learning. Form in FFI refers not only to grammatical forms, but it can also refer to lexical and pragmalinguistic features of a language [7].

However, only grammatical forms will be addressed in this review. FFI could be divided into two different approaches or instructional procedures: Focus on Form and Focus on Forms. Focus on Form attempts to incorporate attention to form or form-meaning mapping in meaning-focused communication and involves reactive use of various instructional procedures to attract learners' attention to linguistic problems arising while learners are engaged in communicative exchange [8]. On the other hand, Focus on Forms refers to the teaching of grammatical items based on a structured syllabus and involves explicit presentation and controlled practice of discrete linguistic points isolated from communicative contexts [9]. Interestingly, most of the papers reviewed here seem to use FFI and Focus on Form interchangeably.

There has been considerable theoretical and pedagogical interest in FFI in the field of Korean language education. This has been evidenced by an increasing number of both published and unpublished studies investigating the effects of FFI. Nevertheless, there is some confusion regarding its effectiveness for teaching Korean, which should be cleared up soon for further advancement of the field. One way to do so is to converge and analyze the results of existing FFI studies from a critical perspective. The purposes of this study is to analyze the effectiveness of FFI for teaching Korean as a second (KSL) or foreign language (KFL) and to uncover patterns across studies. The results of the study will provide a conceptual framework which identifies the major factors affecting the effectiveness of FFI. The results will also be able to inform future meta-analytical research of existing studies.

2. Method

2.1 Data Selection

The present study reviews empirical studies that have been published in peer-reviewed journals since 2000. Fugitive studies such as unpublished doctoral

---

1) An L2 is in general referred to as any language which people acquire after they learn their mother tongue.

dissertations or conference presentations have been excluded since the major goal of the study is to understand the current state of knowledge based on accessible published literature. An extensive literature search was conducted by surveying several online databases (e.g., KISS, RISS, etc.). The reference sections as well as footnotes of relevant articles were also examined to achieve a more thorough picture of the FFI research in Korean language education. The following key words and their combinations were used in the search process: Korean language education, form-focused instruction, focus-on-form, focus-on-forms, grammar instruction, input enhancement, input flood, processing instruction, dictogloss, consciousness raising, garden path, and recast.

An initial search gathered a total of 66 studies which were thoroughly read by the researchers, but only 12 experimental and quasi experimental studies were included for the review. All the studies included are marked with an asterisk (∗) in the reference section. Several position papers which discussed theoretical aspects of FFI only or made suggestions for adopting certain instructional procedures without empirical data were excluded. Additionally, it was decided to leave out a number of studies which examined teachers' or learners' perceptions of FFI and observational studies which lacked any empirical measurements of learning outcomes.

2.2 Framework for Critical Review

The studies were first summarized and described in terms of participants, target grammar, treatment, and measurement (see the Appendix). Such detailed descriptions were used to detect the patterns over how FFI research is conducted and to analyze strengths and weaknesses of the research practice. Next, the effectiveness of FFI was analyzed in terms of the FFI techniques. Different scholars provide different taxonomies for these techniques, but the present study employs the one based on obtrusiveness [6], because it is the most commonly used taxonomy through which

Korean language educators and researchers identify their instructional treatments. The taxonomy presented in [Table 1] demonstrate how tasks and techniques can be arranged according to the extent to which instruction explicitly interrupts the flow of communication. It should be noted, however, that [Table 1] does not include any Focus on Forms tasks that present grammatical items in isolation. Detailed explanations about the FFI techniques adopted most by Korean educators will be provided in the following paragraphs.

First of all, input flood, the most implicit technique, provides learners with a text which includes numerous examples of a target grammar without explicit introduction of the form. Input enhancement is similar to input flood in that it supplies data related to a target feature implicitly [6]. Yet, it is different in the sense that it is a little more explicit in directing learners' attention to the form by manipulating the form typographically by hightailing, underlining, or italicizing [9]. Several studies included in this review adopted this technique. Using recasts the teacher implicitly reformulates all or part of the student's utterance when there is an error in the student's output [10]. For dictogloss, the students are required to reconstruct the text read by the teacher, and during the process they are encouraged to use, talk, and understand the target form rather explicitly [11]. Consciousness-raising tasks are also explicit in that it involves the learners in discovering the grammar rules by having directly communicating about them [12]. Processing instruction aims to change the inefficient processing strategies that the learners use in comprehending the input by having them work on a series of structured input activities [13]. It is categorized as the second most obtrusive since it provides metalinguistic information relating to the form and the strategy used to process it.

⟨Table 1⟩ A Taxonomy of Focus on Form [6], p. 258

FFI Techniques	Unobtrusive ⟨---⟩ Obtrusive			
Input Flood	x			
Task-Essential Language	x	x		
Input Enhancement		x		
Negotiation			x	
Recast			x	
Output Enhancement				x
Interaction Enhancement				x
Dictogloss					x
Consciousness-Raising Tasks					x
Processing Instruction						x
Garden Path							x

3. Results

3.1 Participants, Target Grammar, Treatment, and Measurement

Every study included in the current review targeted adult learners who learn Korean at universities or language institutes as shown in Appendix. Among them, only one [14] was conducted in the KFL context, China, while all the others were carried out in the KSL situation. The KSL participants were from all over the world, but the proportion of Chinese speakers was higher than that of any other ethnicities. Given that the field of Korean language education is still at the infant stage, it is not surprising that there is not much variety in terms of participants' ages and proficiency levels. Nonetheless, in order for the field to accumulate the in-depth knowledge of the Korean language acquisition process, it is crucial to involve more diverse learner populations. One more are for improvement is the number of subjects participating in each study. The average is 33.41 people which is hardly sufficient for an empirical study whose goal is to make inferences about a population from a sample. Future studies should, thus, pay a special attention to the sample size in order to produce more meaningful results.

Various grammatical features were included as the target of instruction although case markers and modifier endings were more popular. The target forms were usually selected based on researchers' own teaching experiences or intuition in some studies [15,16], while other studies made choices based on existing or their own error analysis studies [14,17,18]. Using intuition or experiences is practical, but there could be a mismatch between what the teacher thinks is difficult and what the students feel is difficult. For a more scientific approach to selecting a target, it is necessary to conduct studies which could clarify the acquisition order of Korean language. One commonality of the included studies regarding the target structure is that they usually taught several grammatical items with similar meanings and functions at the same time. This instructional practice could help learners compare and contrast them, but it could also confuse and deter them from learning any of them since it takes a great amount of exposure and practices to acquire one structure. Considering that the most studies were conducted only for one or two class periods, it might have affected the results negatively.

When it comes to measuring learning outcomes, the majority of the studies assessed the learners both on receptive and productive knowledge of target structures. As for the receptive knowledge, various tests were used although they usually asked the learners to make judgment regarding the grammaticality of given sentences. On the other hand, the productive knowledge was assessed through the use of picture description, interview, error correction, and sentence combining tasks. It is promising that the studies adopted both receptive and productive knowledge tests, which could generates more comprehensive measures of learning outcome. However, it is also unfortunate that they did not distinguish between implicit and explicit knowledge. The two types of L2 knowledge are different from each other and play very distinctive roles. The former is the knowledge that can be explained and used for monitoring or evaluating language use when learners have time for planning. On the contrary, the latter is the knowledge that may not be verbalized or explained, and it is usually employed for spontaneous language

use such as participating in a conversation [19]. In future studies, therefore, it is essential for Korean language educators to engage in discussions about what it means to acquire the language and what type of knowledge their instructional treatments aim to develop in learners.

3.2 Effectiveness of Form-focused Instruction

Several methodological options for FFI have been developed to draw learners' attention on form. They are different from one another in terms of the amount of emphasis they place on input, interaction, output, or attentional sources. Despite the variety, the basic premise of all these methods is the same: an instructional treatment should attract learners' focal attention to a target L2 form within a meaningful context so that the form is more likely to be noticed, processed, and acquired [3]. As stated above, this review adopts the unobtrusive-obtrusive continuum in order to converge and analyze the effects of different FFI techniques.

3.2.1 Unobtrusive techniques

Unobtrusive techniques are used to direct learners' attention to form while trying not to interrupt the flow of communication. In other words, they are more implicit in drawing learners' attention to the target form and less disruptive to meaning-oriented activities. Among the several techniques belonging to this group, input enhancement is the most studied technique, but the picture is not so clear-cut regarding its effects.

Out of 12 studies reviewed, four of them either investigated the effect of input enhancement independently or compared it with that of other more explicit techniques. For example, Jung examined whether input enhancement could help learners reduce repeated errors in using four different modifier endings [20]. The results show that the learners with typographically enhanced reading texts were able to correct more errors in two post-tests than those with regular reading texts. However, this effect was

available for only one type of modifier ending. In the studies in which input enhancement was compared with more explicit techniques such as consciousness raising tasks [15,17] and output enhancement [14], no statistically significant difference was found except for [14]. However, it should be noted that in the aforementioned experiment, all the learners were given explicit grammar explanation about different types of honorifics before the treatment, which together with the small sample size (10 per group) makes the effect of the unobtrusive technique less clear. One study that investigated the effect of providing recast when students make errors during oral communication showed that conversational recasts were helpful for acquiring case markers and verb endings [18].

3.2.2 Obtrusive techniques

The techniques in this group are more direct and explicit in getting learners to notice forms in the input or to notice the gap between their own knowledge and the target forms [6]. Among the several techniques listed in Table 1, processing instruction and dictogloss received a greater amount of attention from Korean language educators, and thus produced more studies [20,21,22,23,24,25]. In general, processing instruction turned out to be more effective than traditional methods which usually consist of the explicit provision of grammar without context and controlled practices [21,24]. However, no significant difference was found between processing instruction and dictogloss although processing instruction appeared to be more effective for comprehending input, but not for producing output [21].

One thing noticeable regarding these studies is that the instructional treatments used in processing instruction were often times similar to those used in outcome measuring tasks, which renders the findings favorite for processing instruction less credible. Moreover, most of the studies which hypothesized positive effect of processing instruction did not have sound theoretical foundations. Processing instruction is based on the assumption that one of the reasons why

learners have difficulty making connections between form and meaning is that they use unsuitable processing strategies which prevent them from focusing on form [22]. As a result, one of the major components of the technique is helping learners learn necessary strategies to process target forms. Yet, only [22] examined inefficient strategies used by learners before taking on the instructional procedures utilizing the technique.

4. Conclusion

FFI is a broader term with several categories of instructional procedures and techniques which attempt to draw learners' attention to language structures. A number of studies have been conducted to identify the effects of specific types of FFI on the acquisition of Korean as a second or foreign language. The goal of the present study was to critically review not only whether FFI is effective for teaching Korean as an L2, but also how the FFI studies were conducted. To do so, several databases were surveyed to locate relevant experimental and quasi experimental studies published in peer-reviewed journals. Out of 66 studies collected, 12 studies met the inclusion criteria. These studies were first summarized and analyzed in terms of subjects, target grammar, treatment, measurement, and the learning outcomes of different techniques. In general, both unobtrusive and obtrusive FFI techniques were found to have positive effects on helping learners acquire Korean as a second or foreign language. However, it is necessary to exercise caution when interpreting such findings since various factors could have influenced the relative validity of these findings.

One thing noticeable about the studies included in this review is that many of them included isolated explicit rule presentation in the beginning as part of FFI procedures and did not have meaning-oriented activities although they claimed to employ the 'Focus on Form' approach. As mentioned earlier, the approach is reactive and does not require learners to pay'

conscious attention to target forms. This shows that there is still some misunderstanding of FFI and related second language acquisition theories. Another issue is related to the ways these studies were designed and carried out. The majority of the studies included a relatively small number of subjects, short treatments, and used measuring tools without reporting their reliability and validity. Given that FFI is a new topic of research in the field of Korean language education, it is early to be too critical about the results. Yet, it is not so early either to put concerted efforts into discussing related theories and planning more sound future studies.

REFERENCES

[1] B. Noh, "Error Analysis of Chinese Learners of Korean Language: Focus on Analysis of Vocabulary", J. of the Korean Convergence Society, Vol. 6, No. 5, pp. 131-142, 2015.

[2] J. Park, "An Analysis of Previous Research on Korean Grammar Education", The Language and Culture, V. 9, No. 1, pp. 129-152, 2013.

[3] P. Skehan, "Task-based Instruction", Language Teaching, V. 36, pp. 1-14, 2003.

[4] S. Krashen, The Input Hypothesis: Issues and Implications, Longman, 1985.

[5] S. Choi, & R. E. Clark, "Cognitive and Affective Benefits of an Animated Pedagogical Agent for Learning English as a Second Language", J. Educational Computing Research, Vol. 34, No. 4, pp. 441-466.

[6] C. Doughty, & J. Williams, Focus on Form in Classroom Second Language Acquisition, Cambridge University Press, 1998.

[7] R. Ellis, "Focus on Form: A Critical Review", Language Teaching Research, Vol. 20, No. 3, pp. 405-428, 2016.

[8] R. Ellis, "Researching the Effects of Form-Focussed Instruction on L2 Acquisition", AILA Review, Vol.

19, pp. 18-41, 2006.

[9] H. Nassaji, & S. Fotos, Teaching Grammar in Second Language Classrooms: Integrating Form-Focused Instruction in Communicative Context, Routledge, 2011.

[10] R. Lyster, & H. Mori, "Interactional Feedback and Instructional Counterbalance", Studies in Second Language Acquisition, Vol. 28, No. 2, pp. 269-300.

[11] J. Jacobs, & J. Small, "Combining Dictogloss and Cooperative Learning to Promote Language Learning", The Reading Matrix, Vol. 3, No. 1, pp. 117-126, 2003.

[12] R. Ellis, "Methodological Options in Grammar Teaching Materials", In Hinkel and Fotos (Eds.), New Perspective on Grammar Teaching in Second Language Classrooms, pp. 155-180, Mahwa, 2002.

[13] B. VanPatten, "Processing Matters", In T. Piske & M. Young-Scholten (Eds.), Input Matters, pp. 47-61, Multilingual Matters, 2008.

[14] L. Sun, & Y. Kim, "A Study on the Korean Honorific Education for Chinese Learners Based on Form-Focused Instruction", Korean Language Education Research, 2012.

[15] Y. Jeong, & M. Lee, "A Study on the Focus-on-Form Approach on Learning Connective Ending '-neurago' in Korean", Foreign Language Education, Vol. 1, No. 2, pp. 295-320.

[16] S-J. Kwak, & Y. Kim, "A Study on the Form-Focused Sentence Structure Instruction for Korean Language Learners", Linguistic Reality and Perspectives, Vol. 28, pp. 109-137.

[17] M-Y. Noh, "A Study on Teaching Method of Reason Expressions for Intermediate Learners", Grammar Education, Vol. 12, pp. 204-227, 2010.

[18] S. Lim, "Effects of Recasts on the Morphological Acquisition by Learners of Korean as a Second Language", Korean Journal of Applied Linguistics, Vol. 24, No. 1, pp. 271-292, 2008.

[19] J. C. Richards, Key Issues in Language Teaching, Cambridge University Press, 2015.

[20] D. Jung, "The Effects of Textual Enhancement on L2 Learners' Acquisition of Korean Modifier Endings", Discourse and Cognition, Vol. 15, No. 3, pp. 103-126, 2008.

[21] C. Kim, "Instruction on Korean Relative Clauses and Markedness Generalizability", J. of Korean Language Education, Vol. 22, No. 2, pp. 75-111, 2011.

[22] C. Kim, "The Effects of Processing Instruction on the Acquisition of Past-tense Marker in Korean", J. of North-east Asian Cultures, Vol. 31, pp. 5-25, 2012.

[23] J. Sung, "A Study on the Application of Input-based and Output-based Techniques of Focus on Form for Teaching Grammar Items of Nominal Clauses, Korean Linguistics, Vol. 62, pp. 293-314, 2014.

[24] W-W. Lee, "The Effects of Input Procesing on Learning Korean Grammar", Korean Language and Culture Education, Vol. 15, No. 1, pp. 81-107, 2011.

[25] D. Jung, "A Study of the Effects of Processing Instruction on Sentence Comprehension", Field Research of Uru-mal Education, Vol.9, No. 2, pp. 137-164, 2015.

저자소개

최 선 희(Sunhee Choi)   [정회원]

· August, 2000 : MS in TESL, University of Southern California
· August, 2005 : PhD in Education, University of Southern California
· March, 2007 ~ Present : Faculty of English Language Education, Jeonju University

<Area of Interest> : English language education, Teacher education, Focus on Form, Scale development

김 대 희(Dae-hee Kim)   [정회원]

· February, 1999 : MA in Korean Language Education, Seoul National University of Education

· February, 2007 : PhD in Korean Language Education, Korea University

· April, 2009 ~ Present : Faculty of Korean Language Education, Wonkwang University

<Area of Interest> : Korean language education, Media Literacy, Reading education, Writing education, Korean Language Education as a Foreign Language, Multi-cultural Education

APPENDIX A List of Reviewed FFI Studies

Study	Participants	Target Structure	Instructional Treatment	Measure of Acquisition
Sujin Lim (2008)	20 intermediate level learners adult	subject, topic, & object markers; state verb endings	Conversational recasts provided during a picture description task vs. control group	a picture description test and a grammar test (pre & post); error correction rates
Dehyun Jung (2008)	55 intermediate level adult learners	modifier endings	Input enhancement vs. control group	error correction tasks (pre-, immediate post-, delayed post-tests)
Dehyun Jung (2009)	24 intermediate level adult learners	modifier endings; grammatical morphemes for providing an alternative; perfect aspect	Teacher modeling of metatalk about form using metalinguistic terminology vs. control group	Tailor-made dyad-specific test developed based on the analysis of learners' language-related episodes
Mi-yeon Noh (2010)	17 intermediate level adult learners	grammatical morphemes for expressing reasons	Explicit teaching of target grammar + gardent path + recast	Pre- and Post-test of grammar knowledge (fill-in-the-blank items);
Soo-Jin Kwak & Youngjoo Kim (2011)	16 beginning level adult learners	Correspondence between verbs and case markers	Input enhancement vs. consciousness-raising vs. control group	Receptive and productive post- tests on the correspondence between verbs and markers
Changoo Kim (2011)	34 beginning level adult learners	Relative clauses	Processing instruction vs. meaning-focused output instruction vs. traditional instruction	Pre-, immediate post-, & delayed post-tests: both receptive and productive tests
Won-Woo Lee (2011)	49 beginning level adult learners	Tenses (verb endings for past, present, and tense)	Processing instruction vs. traditional grammar teaching	Receptive and Productive tests (pre-, immediate post-, & 2 delayed tests)
Changoo Kim (2012)	27 beginning level learners	Grammatical morphemes for past tense	Processing instruction vs. traditional grammar teaching	Pre-, post-, and delayed post- tests; receptive & productive test
Linru Sun & Youngjoo Kim (2012)	40 intermediate level adult learners	Grammatical morphemes (various honorific markers)	Input enhancement vs. output enhancement vs. consciousness-raising vs. control group	Discourse completion, translation, & error correction tests (pre-, post-, and delayed post-tests)
Jiyeon Sung (2014)	23 intermediate level adult learners	nominal clause	Processing instruction vs. dictogloss	pre- and post-test
Yoonjeong Jeong & Mihye Lee (2014)	20 intermediate level adult learners	connective endings for expressing purposes or reasons	Input enhancement vs. consciousness raising tasks	Pre- and post-tests (grammatical knowledge tests)
Dehyun Jung (2015)	80 intermediate level adult learners	modifier endings	Processing instruction + input enhancement vs. Meaning-oriented output instruction (dictogloss) vs. traditional instruction	Pre-, immediate post-, and 3 delayed post-tests