Háskóli Íslands

Hugvísindasvið

Enskukennsla

Focus on Form: Deductive versus inductive techniques in teaching English

Ritgerð til MA-prófs í enskukennslu

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Abstract

Icelandic secondary school students are generally at an advanced level of informal, colloquial English but are not as proficient in the skills necessary for academic or professional use in a country where English language proficiency is presupposed in tertiary education and business. More formal registers demand higher levels of precision and accuracy in language use. Advancing the acquisition of certain linguistic forms is thus needed to reach target proficiency. Deductive and inductive teaching techniques can fall under the Focus on Form approach which has been shown to be beneficial for accuracy development among mature and advanced students. The purpose of the study is to ascertain if formal instruction in Icelandic secondary schools is beneficial by exploring two problematic linguistic features, *there*-homophones and the possessive *s*. Firstly, the study explores whether, on the one hand, the inductive or the deductive technique is more advantageous, and on the other hand, whether one or both are more effective as compared to a purely communicative approach of noticing only. Secondly, the rate of improvement in the use of the two forms under F*on*F instruction is compared to determine if either form is better suited to formal instruction. The study conducted included two treatment groups and a noticing only group for control purposes. These groups were tested pre-treatment and the two treatment groups were retested post-treatment. Finally, students' essays were analyzed for form usage two to three weeks post-treatment. Both features proved inadequately mastered in pre-tests. The deductive treatment showed a slight advantage over the inductive one, although the difference was not statistically significant. Both treatment groups improved more than the control group indicating that Focus on Form is more beneficial than noticing by itself, although the difference was not statistically significant. *There*-homophones seemed better suited to accuracy instruction than the possessive *s*.

Ágrip

Íslenskir framhaldsskólanemar eru almennt vel að sér í óformlegu ensku talmáli en sýna ekki sömu getu þegar kemur að formlegri akademískri ensku sem verður æ mikilvægari í alþjóðasamfélagi vísinda og viðskipta. Eitt aðaleinkenni formlegs máls er nákvæmni í málnotkun. Til að ná nauðsynlegri markfærni er mikilvægt að kenna nokkur algeng málfræðiatriði og stafsetningu sem nemendum hefur reynst erfitt að tileinka sér án sérstakrar kennslu. Aðleiðslu- og afleiðsluaðferðir geta fallið undir þá nálgun málfræðikennslu sem kölluð er *Fókus á form* og mætti útskýra sem tækifærismiðaða áherslu á málatriði í samskiptamiðaðri kennslu. Sú nálgun hefur í rannsóknum sýnt yfirburði umfram aðrar meðal eldi nemenda sem eru lengra komnir í tileinkunnarferlinu. Tilgangur rannsóknarinnar er að bera saman aðleiðslu- og afleiðslutækni í kennslu ofangreindra atriða og bera saman við við hreina samskiptamiðaða kennslu þar sem nám er stutt með eftirtektarverkefnum (e. noticing). Í öðru lagi er markmið rannsóknarinnar að kanna skilvirkni formlegrar kennslu tveggja málatriða í ensku, *there/their/they're*-samhljóma orða og eignarfalls s meðal framhaldsskólanema og athuga hvort annað formið reynist henta betur til kennslu. Rannsóknin var gerð meðal tveggja hópa sem kennt var til skiptis með aðleiðslu- og afleiðslutækni og þriðja hópnum sem til samanburðar fékk einungis eftirtektarverkefni. Hóparnir voru allir forprófaðir, rannsóknarhóparnir voru endurprófaðir eftir kennslu og tveimur til þremur vikum eftir kennslu var ritun allra nemenda skoðuð með tilliti til notkunar málatriðanna. Forpróf undirstrikaði að nemendur höfðu ekki náð valdi á þeim atriðum sem prófuð voru. Afleiðsluaðferðin sýndi heldur jákvæðari svörun en aðleiðsla en munurinn var ekki tölfræðilega marktækur. Báðar aðferðir sýndu betri svörun en samanburðarhópurinn, þó að munurinn hafi ekki reynst marktækur. *There*-samhljóma orð hentuðu betur fyrir Fókus á form en eignarfalls *s*.

1   Introduction

The topic of what forms can best be taught, how to teach them and when it is most beneficial to do so has been widely discussed and studied among Second Language Acquisition (SLA) researchers and teachers. Concrete solutions may not necessarily be found through the prevailing holistic methods. The techniques that benefit one student group may not be applicable to another. Researchers and teachers alike have increasingly moved from single method to an eclectic approach. There are various factors, both internal and external, that influence the learners' abilities to grasp any given linguistic form. The optimal instructional technique varies accordingly. Given the benefits of an eclectic approach to choosing instructional techniques, these need to be studied in varied circumstances to establish their relevance to each SLA situation. This is why research is needed in an Icelandic context on how best to introduce a linguistic structure and whether and to what extent, different techniques affect intake. Few studies exist to date on modern approaches to SLA grammar instruction in Iceland and none concerning the inductive and deductive techniques specifically.

1.1   Background of the study

My initial thoughts on the subject of formal teaching approaches were of a purely practical nature. As a teacher of English at an Icelandic secondary school, I would like to think that my time and the time of my students is well spent and my teaching effective. My students are generally at an advanced level of ESL and most linguistic structures are mastered already. I want to ensure that the few remaining forms that are important and salient in the language are presented in such a way as to maximize my students' chances of learning and retention. Aiming for target accuracy is not simply a matter of a pedantic teaching philosophy but has relevant consequences for my students.

According to Hinkel, "L2 fluency without accuracy may limit learners' opportunities for sociocultural adjustment and, possibly, socioeconomic advancement" (Hinkel, 1999, p. 18).

The nature of Icelandic secondary school students' proficiency is affected by generous input from outside the classroom from an early age (Krisjánsdóttir et al. 2006). This English exposure tends to be "colloquial and contextual" (Arnbjörnsdóttir, 2007, p. 54) and is usually supported by visual aids. The effects on Icelandic students' language skills are that despite their fairly advanced level of proficiency, they may "develop passive (or receptive) language skills and may overestimate their actual language proficiency" (Arnbjörnsdóttir, 2007 p. 54). While most young Icelanders site television and computers as their main source of English input, many also recognize the role of formal schooling in teaching writing, correct grammar and formal register (Jeeves, 2013). At the same time they express doubts on the usefulness of English classes in general (Jeeves, 2013).

1.2   Focus of this study

The aim of the following review is to examine major methods of second language teaching, specifically the research on accuracy training. Instruction that includes Focus on Form will be explored, as well as hypotheses that have influenced its development and variables that affect its practical application. Deductive and inductive teaching methods are reviewed in some detail.

The research conducted for this thesis examines two different teaching techniques of the Focus on Form approach, deductive- and inductive procedures. The goal of the study is to answer whether an initial presentation of a rule and its variations followed by practice benefit Icelandic students of advanced level more than presenting texts and other language material first and facilitate the negotiation of structural rules based on this input afterwards. The research done to date in the field of comparing the deductive and the inductive techniques have produced disparate

results and they have primarily included participants who differ in age and language situation from Icelandic secondary school learners. It is therefore pertinent to study the deductive and inductive procedures in an Icelandic context. Furthermore, the study examines whether one technique is more likely than the other to lead to a retained aptitude in the usage of the structures taught. It is relevant to include this time factor in the study because of the importance of durability of acquisition. Finally, the study seeks to reveal if specific form choice has an effect on acquisition. Researchers have previously established that some forms seem better suited to formal instruction and the deciding factor seems to be the number of variants within a specific form with fewer variations connected to an increase in acquisition. The two forms tested were *there-their-they're* homophones and the possessive *s*. The choice between the three *there*-homophones is of an orthographical nature rather than a grammatical one. Conversely, students are not only faced with orthographic variations when using the possessive *s* in writing but also their understanding of the grammatical nature of the s-ending is tested. They need to be aware of whether a possessive *s* is indeed in order along with an apostrophe or if the *s* is a plural marker without any apostrophe. Contraction with apostrophe and *s* further confuses the matter (i.e. *John's (=John is) saying he can't go*). The students are generally skilled in using the plural *s* and the possessive *s* but leaving out the apostrophe or incorrectly adding it to the plural is a prevalent problem. Neither of the forms tested have been studied in relation to deductive or inductive teaching techniques to my knowledge. It is therefore interesting to see if this difference in nature of the forms has an effect on acquisition.

While the lack of accuracy in the two forms among Icelandic secondary school students is not of a purely grammatical nature, they have proven problematic and need to be taught. Helping students to master these can best be achieved through Focus on Form. Traditionally, F*on*F has

been applied primarily to grammatical forms but its ideas can be adapted to teach other linguistic constructs.

The comparison of treatment groups who received focus-based instruction to a control group whose instruction in the forms was meaning based gives an indication of which method leads to more accuracy in usage. The benefits of focused-based instruction to achieve target accuracy of form has already been fairly well established in previous studies (Norris & Ortega, 2000) but no such studies exist in an Icelandic context.

1.3   Research questions

Following are the four fundamental research questions of the study and means to answer them.

1.   Do Icelandic secondary schools benefit from form-focused instruction?

     I conferred with colleagues to answer this in an informal qualitative manner and compared our experiences with theory and research. The outcome of the pre-tests was also used for statistical support in this regard.

2.   Does focusing on form improve students' retention to a greater extent than for those students who only received noticing opportunities?

     This will be answered by looking at the rate of incorrect usage in the students' writing and by conducting a two tailed t-test to show significance of difference.

3.   When comparing inductive and deductive teaching methods within a F*on*F based classroom, which has a greater effect on students' short term ability to use said form correctly?

     This will be answered by looking at post-test scores and conducting a two tailed t-test and also by comparing the gain scores between pretest and posttest.

4.   Which of the two forms being taught (*there*, *they're, their* homophones or the possessive *s*) seem better suited to F*on*F instruction. A two-tailed t-test will be conducted on the

essay data to examine if the expected drop in incorrect usage after formal instruction is of significant variance between the two forms.

1.4   Assumptions

My assumption is that the two forms chosen for the study will prove not to have been mastered by a substantial portion of the student group and should therefore be taught through F*on*F instruction. I expect that treatment students will significantly improve their skills after formal instruction. I presume that focusing on form will give an advantage in using the forms tested over noticing only. The deductive treatment will presumably show prevalence over the inductive treatment because of the age and proficiency of the participants. Finally, due to the nature of the form, *there*-homophones will probably prove better suited to F*on*F instruction than the possessive *s*.

1.5   Definition of terms

The term *form* appears in two umbrella terms used to categorize different approaches to teaching, Focus on Form and Focus on FormS. *Form* is often used synonymously with the terms *grammatical structure* and *linguistic features* (Doughty & Williams, 1998a). R. Ellis's definition of these terms is a comprehensive one: "The term form is intended to include phonological, lexical, grammatical, and pragmalinguistic aspects of language" (2001, p.2). The phrase *formal instruction* generally indicates second language instruction which incorporates the teaching of grammatical features. Form is therefore a comprehensive term, including even more aspects of language than the term *grammar* traditionally has.

Doughty & Williams (1998a), suggest using Long's (1991) terms *Focus on Form* to describe momentary shift of attention to linguistic features within a meaning-based setting and *Focus on FormS* to denote a classroom environment where instruction is grammar based. They

propose using the acronym F*on*F, as I will do, as in F*on*F *instruction* and then also *formS-focused instruction*. They stress that the two terms, form and formS, are not in polar opposition to each other. Rather "Focus on Form *entails* a Focus on Formal elements of language, whereas Focus on Forms is *limited* to such a focus and focus on meaning *excludes* it" (Doughty & Williams, 1998a, p. 4).

I will follow Edward Anthony's definition of the terms *approach, method* and *technique*. He maintains that they are hierarchical in describing the philosophy of language teaching and procedures that fulfil it. "The organizational key is that techniques carry out a method which is consistent with an approach" (Anthony, 1963, p.63). At the level of approach, fundamental values about language teaching and beliefs about the nature of language are expressed. A method is an articulation of these beliefs, theories put into action through curriculum choices. Technique translates into individual classroom procedures.

The terms *inductive/deductive* on one hand and *explicit/implicit* on the other are bound to cause some confusion. Explicit learning indicates that the student is fully conscious of the structure being taught while implicit awareness indicates that the student has less direct intent to learn a particular structure or awareness of it (Schmidt, 1990) although some awareness is necessary to some degree, according to the Noticing Hypothesis. The terms explicit and implicit fall under theories of learning while the inductive and deductive techniques have to do with theories of instruction. "...*inductive* and *deductive* refer to processing strategies in learning and instruction, whereas *implicit* and *explicit* refer to the levels of fostering awareness" (Takimoto, 2008). The definition of the inductive/deductive continuum will later be analyzed in more detail.

2 Literature review

In the following section I will present the theoretical framework for the study by reviewing research conducted on the position of English in Iceland and how that has affected the subject matter of this thesis. I will examine the historical and theoretical context of the three approaches of accuracy instruction; Focus on FormS, Focus on Meaning and Focus on Form. I will describe Focus on Form based approaches including their theoretical foundations and instructional techniques. Lastly, research on the inductive and deductive techniques will be presented and analyzed in the context of this study.

2.1 English in Iceland

The position of English in Iceland is interesting and in some ways unique. Proficient comprehension abilities are widespread and good informal oral communication skills are to be found among the general public. English is a language that children encounter from an early age through various media, lending it a "biased positive and "fun-related" aura" (Jeeves, 2013, p. 29). The reason for this is most likely the generous amount of entertainment in English available to Icelandic youth. As an example of this exposure, the material broadcast in English on Icelandic TV stations was 73% during a week-long survey in 2011 (Ortega, 2011). One can assume that with the advent of streaming services where material is predominantly in English, the exposure is not decreasing. When 5th graders were asked from where they thought they acquired English outside the classroom, 73% said from TV or film, 63% mentioned music, and 50% said they learnt English from gaming (Torfadóttir, et al., 2006). English has become a lingua franca between Icelanders and the rest of the world and some knowledge of it is expected and required in a professional capacity. Indeed, the proficiency levels of young Icelanders at certain registers of the language, namely spoken, informal and colloquial English, seem to suggest that its status has gone

beyond being simply a foreign language, yet not quite reaching second language status (Arnbjörnsdóttir, 2007).

A quantitative study (Arnbjörnsdóttir, 2011) among the general public in Iceland revealed that over 86% heard English on a daily basis while 43% of respondents answered that they read English daily. However, productive encounters proved much less frequent with 41% who spoke English once a month or less and 50% who wrote English once a month or less.

The majority of input being of phonological nature has effects on orthographic accuracy (Nelson et al., 2005). This is likely a deciding factor in the prevalence of errors in *there*-homophones tested in this study. These errors in there-homophones are of orthographical nature and this is also true to a certain extent about the possessive *s.*

Three different strategies for spelling among adult learners have been identified in the literature: spelling via i) the phonemic route, ii) the visual route and iii) through metalinguistic knowledge (James et al., 1994). Learners utilize all of these at different times and occasions. The phonemic route entails the sounding out of the word to be spelled, either through phonemic segmentation (i.e. breaking down words into individual sounds), phoneme to grapheme (i.e. relating sounds to letters) or, in case of ambiguity, by selecting a suitable grapheme in accordance with spelling traditions (James et al., 1994). This phonemic route is an important strategy in spelling but it is also the source of errors, especially due to a "reasonable" phonetic variation in the correct version of the word as reported by Downing et al. (1984) Learners substitute one grapheme for another which has the same sound value in a different word, i.e. homophones like *there-their-they´re*. Poor spellers may not develop beyond the phonemic route (Perin, 1983). Using the phonemic route is a necessary, but not sufficient, means for accuracy. Secondly, for accuracy in *there*-homophones learners need to utilize the visual route where they access visual

memory from reading to differentiate between the forms. Good readers are also good spellers according to Olson et al. (1988) and Waters et al. (1988) and are more successful at retrieving orthographical information from visual memory. Lastly, learners may utilize metalinguistic information when choosing between spellings of different *there*-homophones, analyzing the function of the intended form. Amoroso (1985) reports an increased linguistic awareness among children who are good spellers. However, such metalinguistic knowledge tends not to be fully automised without practice being provided in applying rule knowledge (James et al., 1994).

With plenty of authentic input, the relative linguistic closeness of English to Icelandic and positive social reinforcement, it is no surprise that Icelandic children show proficiency beyond formal classroom schooling. Formal instruction of English in the Icelandic school system begins no later than grade 5, or at age 10. Many schools opt to start their English instruction as early as the first grade, even if an early start has not been shown to enhance students' fourth grade scores (Jóhannsdóttir, 2010). A study among beginner English learners in the 4th and 5th grade showed them giving correct answers in 70% of cases on a test intended for students with 100-175 hours of lessons. They were regarded as having greater listening and speaking skills than what could be expected from the few formal lessons they had already received (Torfadóttir et al, 2006).

Icelandic students may not be fully aware of the role that English will play in their academic or professional futures (Jeeves, 2013). When I asked my students how they see themselves using English in the future only a few of them mentioned that their English skills would be of use at university. These were 16 year olds in their first year of MH, a traditional secondary school which aims at preparing students for further education. Over 90% of course material in Icelandic universities is in English and over 70% of graduates from Icelandic secondary schools will study at university level (Arnbjörnsdóttir, 2009). More students, however,

realized the usefulness of English in situations such as in online communication, assisting foreign

visitors etc. These situations call for a more informal register and less academic vocabulary than

studies would at the tertiary level. As mentioned before, it is in this spoken and informal English

that these students are already quite proficient *(*Arnbjörnsdóttir*, 2007).*

While the ample informal input available to Icelandic youth may reinforce overall fluency,

such input has not shown to assist students in developing accuracy (Ellis, 1994). There are

indications that youth in Iceland overestimate their English language abilities (Kristjánsdóttir et

al., 2006). Indeed, secondary school students find their English classes enjoyable but not very

useful (Jeeves, 2013). In light of this, it is interesting that almost a third of university students in

Iceland report that they do not feel prepared enough to study in English at the tertiary level

(Arnbjörnsdóttir & Ingvarsdóttir, 2010). The discrepancy between the reports at these two levels

indicates a need for communicating the significance of academic English. Lack of academic

English skills is a hindrance for many students at tertiary level (Arnbjörnsdóttir & Ingvarsdóttir,

2010). This sets up an extra barrier in acquisition of the actual subject matter, even causing

students to drop out. The language difficulties at tertiary level underline the importance of

emphasizing the teaching of ESL in the formal, academic register needed for university course

work while the students are still at the secondary level. Some secondary schools have adapted

their curriculums to include academic word lists and are actively preparing students for tertiary

level demands in writing. Yet, a recent study indicates that instruction at the secondary level is

generally not adequate for these purposes. Too much emphasis is put on conversational skills and

literary texts and insufficient time spent on writing formal texts and the study of academic

vocabulary (Jeeves, 2013). Students report more satisfaction with reading novels than studying

grammar (Jeeves, 2013). Naturally, teachers are concerned with maintaining their students'

enjoyment as it is an obvious motivator in the learning process. But, teachers are also lacking the

tools to approach enhancing the academic English of the curriculum. Dissatisfaction with the material available has been established (Ingvarsdóttir, 2004). Arnbjörnsdóttir (2007) points out that this may be due to the fact that these books are being written for students of English as a foreign language and therefore are not suited to the unique Icelandic situation.

A recent project shows that professionals are reacting to the dissonance between students' needs and abilities by creating material targeted at Icelandic students. The English Department at the University of Iceland has developed three writing courses aimed at preparing students for meeting the University's standards of proficiency in English. The goal was also to "unlock the code of the academic genre by making the key structural features (architecture) and stylistic elements (art) of academic writing transparent for the students" (Arnbjörnsdóttir & Prinz, 2013, p.4). One of the courses was considered appropriate for secondary schools and, after a pilot study, 70% of secondary level students reported realizing the usefulness of such a course. While the secondary school students who participated were aware of the improbability of learning formal English from the media, they did not recognize the importance of proficiency in formal registers for future academic work. Consciousness of these factors increased in students at the tertiary level.

2.2   The effects of age in language acquisition

Age is a key factor in a human's ability to learn languages. Some notable research on the age factor reveal that even though the general ability to reach native like proficiency declines with age, adult L2 learners benefit more than children from F*on*F instruction.

Many theorists and researchers talk about a critical period (Penfield & Roberts, 1959) for L1 acquisition that ends before or around puberty, but theories vary greatly on this point (Unsworth, 2005). It is widely believed that in L1 learners "earlier is better" when the goal is native like proficiency (DeKayser, 2013). Lenneberg's (1967) definition of the critical period was

articulated as the ability for ''automatic acquisition from mere exposure" (p. 176). As the effects

of the critical period lessen, the innate ability to absorb linguistic structures from communication

is reduced (Lenneberg, 1967). After that, reaching L1 native proficiency is all but lost as post

adolescent L2 learners seem to lose their full accessibility to Universal Grammar (Dinsmore,

2006). The reasons why are not clear but in their review, DeKayser & Larson-Hall (2005) say that

the causes likely lie in a qualitative change in language learning capacities between early

childhood and early adulthood.

However, this observation of younger being better applies primarily to naturalistic

language situations, which may be impossible to replicate in the classroom (DeKayser & Larson-

Hall, 2005). There are strong indications that L2 students who are beyond the critical period in

language learning benefit from accuracy instruction more so than young children (Munoz, 2006).

DeKeyser (2000) and Harley and Hart (1997) showed that children depend more on memory in

their L2 progress while adults are more likely to use analytical skills. This may be why post-

pubescent learners of L2 seem to acquire more readily through F*on*F instructions than their

younger counterparts. This is reflected in a study by Munoz (2006) who documented that in a

relatively F*on*F oriented classroom, a learner from the age of 11 performed better on a number of

different tests than a learner under the age of 8 after the same number of hours in an English as a

foreign language classroom. Connected to this, is a study by Von Elek and Oskarsson (1973) that

demonstrated that with an implicit method, children learned better than adults while explicit

instruction suited the adults better. In the L2 classroom's formal setting, the adult learners show

acquisition beyond that of children in the beginning but the younger ones catch up and eventually

outperform (Birdsong, 2006). For the foreign language classroom, the adults' advantage remains

constant through time (Munoz, 2006). Schmidt (1990) states that F*on*F is beneficial at all levels of

SLA. Children tend to outperform adults on phonological forms (Long, 1990) but older students

are known to respond more favorably to F*on*F than younger ones when the focus involves

metalinguistic F*on*F that relies on the transmission of abstract rules (Harley, 1998).

Experience in learning a language has also shown to be an important indicator for SLA

success. Nation & McLaughlin's (1986) study compared expert and novice learners and found

that those who were multilingual reacted equally well to explicit and implicit instruction.

2.3   Noticing

The question of whether noticing a feature of language is a prerequisite to learning is an important

one. According to Schmidt (1990a) the difference between unconscious learning and implicit

learning, or learning without understanding, rests on the level of awareness involved. Schmidt

uses the term noticing "to mean registering the simple occurrence of some event, whereas

understanding implies recognition of a general principle, rule, or pattern" (Schmidt,1990a, p.

218). Form focused instruction generally assumes that learning processes in SLA are conscious to

some degree. This is in opposition to many within the meaning focused school of thought who

consider acquisition as fundamentally unconscious. Certainly, L1 learners are capable of

unconscious acquisition through purely communicative means but here lies the difference between

children and adults. Schmidt, who put forth the Noticing Hypothesis (1990b, 1993), suggests that

adult second language learners cannot begin to acquire a language feature until they have become

aware of it in the input through noticing. Schmidt defines noticing as a step above perceiving but

not reaching the level of understanding, underlining the importance of differentiating between

noticing and learning. However, the conscious cognitive effort of noticing is "a necessary and

sufficient condition for the conversion of input to intake" (1990b, p.1) in second language.

acquisition. Therefore, according to Schmidt, noticing is pivotal in SLA and, in recent years,

researchers have tried to discern how or if promoting it is possible.

Schmidt affirms his opinion that consciousness in noticing does not mean that every language feature acquired is done so with intent. He differentiates between *incidental* and *intentional* noticing. He takes vocabulary learning as an example of acquisition which is often the result of incidental learning, where the goal was, for example, to read a book, rather than to increase vocabulary (Schmidt, 2010). Schmidt also recognizes a dichotomy in the level of awareness. He distinguishes between *noticing* on one hand "as a technical term limited to the conscious registration of attended specific instances of language", and *understanding*, "a higher level of awareness that includes generalizations across instances" (Schmidt, 2010, p. 5). Thus, Schmidt considers explicit knowledge of rules and other metalinguistic awareness to be part of this higher level of understanding that is "facilitative but not required" (Schmidt, 2010, p.5).

Noticing theories have a practical impact on SLA teaching as one component of F*on*F is providing noticing opportunities. On the more meaning-centered end of the F*on*F spectrum, a teacher may include a form in input even if focusing on that particular form is not the explicit intention of the lesson. So, noticing opportunities may be provided within communicative settings without teacher initiated focus. But in order for uptake to occur organically, the learner should be provided with plenty of meaningful input through authentic L2 material. Providing opportunities for noticing is believed to be particularly important when salience of form is low (Terrell, 1991). Prompting noticing opportunities can be a much more intentional process. An explicit form of noticing instructional techniques might include pointing specific forms out when supplying input that contains them or reaction to incorrect output through recasts.

After noticing has occurred, intentionally or incidentally, the learner's attention can be retained on the form in question through teacher mediation, if not automatically (Schmidt, 1990). It is in this secondary step that acquisition is possible and can be reinforced for example through

repetitions of the same form, cloze exercises or explicit stating of rules to which the form abides. The nature of consciousness and its role within SLA is still a topic of much debate. However, there is gathering evidence in support of the noticing hypothesis (Leow, 2000).

Noticing opportunities play a role in the quasi-experiment conducted for this thesis. The research included a pre-test for all groups and a post-test for the treatment groups. The treatment groups were taught problematic forms in a deductive and inductive manner respectively while the treatment group was given a cloze exercise with the relevant forms included. First, one may classify the pre-test as a means to implicitly point the learner's attention to the forms studied, even if that was not its primary purpose. A more intentional use of noticing can be seen in the first instructional periods of the treatment groups for the *there*-homophones and possessive *s* respectively. In the lessons, the learners received short and focused input containing the forms in a written text format. Subsequent lessons included further noticing opportunities imbedded in cloze-exercises and explicit rule statement. Similarly, the control group was initially presented with textual input that included all types of the forms in question. These were, however, not pointed out specifically, nor were they followed up with any further input or output prompts.

2.4   Retention

One aspect of the study pertains to durability of acquisition; whether one instructional technique is more conductive to retention than another. For even if new skills seem to have been learned, the new knowledge may be temporary.

Shortly after instruction, one expects to see a marked increase in levels of accuracy but the new knowledge or skill may atrophy as time passes. This has been shown by e.g. Lightbown & Malcolm (1980) who found that students' scores dwindle to approximately halfway between those of the immediate post-test and a second post-test six months later. The durability of instruction

varies depending on a multitude of factors. Pienemann (1984) found that one particular learner lost his previously gained skill in using the copula in only one week. White (1991) observed that gains after instruction of the correct positioning of adverbs had largely disappeared five months after a period of F*on*F instruction.

But not all studies attest to limited retention. Studying the same learners as before but in a different study, White et al. (1991) instructed them in question formation. They were given corrective feedback and were instructed in a largely communicative setting and opposite to what happened with the adverbs, the learners did not slide back to pre-instruction levels and were still improving six months later. Lightbown (1991), one of the researchers in White et al. (1991) makes an interesting observation about possible reasons for the opposing results. She notes that the students had ample opportunities to hear and test question formation in class after the initial instruction period. This was not so with adverbs. She suggests that only short-term effects remain when form-focused instruction was separated from the communicative needs of the students. By which I believe she is referring to the inevitable recurrence of linguistic forms in varied context such as may be experienced in a natural SLA environment. Learners need multiple subsequent encounters with the form being studied for long term retrieval.

Another study which shows that F*on*F has a lasting effect on the performance of learners who have attended to form was conducted by Lightbown & Spada (1990). They looked at the long term effects of explicit instruction of question forming. After a two week period of instruction and corrective feedback, a post-test showed significant gains in accuracy which was maintained in another post-test after another five weeks. Participants then entered into regular content classes with no ESL instruction but had still increased their accuracy after 5 months. No control group

comparison was possible, but the study indicates that the benefits of F*on*F can hold long term to

some extent.

3   Three approaches in language instruction

The idea that grammar and other linguistic features should not take central place in language teaching and learning is fairly recent. Although a few theorists and teachers had suggested different approaches and methods before, it was only in the twentieth century that alternative approaches to Focus on FormS became widespread (Richards & Rodgers, 2001). These were based on what students could do with the language, i.e. read, write, listen and speak as a means to a communicative end as opposed to being taught about the language. (Purpura, 2004) The novel idea was that "grammar should never be taught as an end in itself but always with reference to meaning, social factors, or discourse - or a combination of these factors" (Celce-Murcia, 1991, pp. 466-7). Celce-Murcia and Larsen-Freeman view communicative teaching as consisting of three interrelated factors of "form, meaning, and use." In linguists' terms, these three dimensions refer to "(morpho)syntax, semantics, and pragmatics" (Celce-Murcia & Larson-Freeman, 1999, p. 4).

While grammatical competence remained an important part of effective language acquisition, the late 20th century saw SLA syllabi with less emphasis on the independent study of grammar as it became increasingly accepted that it had little inherent value in authentic language settings (Purpura, 2004). Later controversies in language pedagogy centered on what role, if any, grammar should play in language classrooms and what technique of teaching grammar best translates into acquisition. These questions have instigated some noteworthy research in the last few decades, which I will review.

Different approaches to the teaching of accuracy can be put in to one of three categories. I will briefly discuss two of these presently as they have historical significance and their legacies remain important but the third and most relevant for my experiment is *Focus on Form*, which will be examined in more detail. First, a brief definition is in order. *Focus on Form* incorporates teaching techniques, which are primarily communicative but it "often consists of an occasional

shift of attention to linguistic code features – by the teacher and /or one or more students –

triggered by perceived problems with comprehension or production" (Long & Robinson, 1998, p.

23). It is contrasted with *Focus on FormS* (the final S is often capitalized to underline that a

different idea is being conveyed, despite the similarity in terminology), which describes the

structural approach of centering attention in language learning on language features. The third

category is *focus on meaning,* which is the foundation of communicative language teaching or

CLT, refers to the purely communicative approach of teaching language solely through meaning

with no overt teaching of linguistic constructs.

Some theorists do not distinguish between F*on*F and communicative language teaching in

a decisive way, perhaps because the theoretical and practical differences have been diminishing in

recent years. Howatt (1984) considers F*on*F as a component of the weak form of CLT while

purely communicative language teaching is a strong form of it. He claims that the weak stand

incorporates the idea that components of communicative competence can be identified and

studied. A strong position assumes that linguistic structures are learnt only through and after

communication (Howatt, 1984). Without doubt, it is useful in practice to look at the distinction

between F*on*F and CLT as a spectrum rather than a dichotomy. But for the sake of simplification,

I will make a clear distinction between the two in this essay, assuming that a communicative

approach contains no formal grammar instruction.

3.1   Grammar-based teaching - Focus on FormS

Focus on FormS is a term used to describe the teaching techniques of traditional instructional

methods, the most typical of which is the Grammar Translation Method. Focus on FormS, the

Grammar-Translation Method and its legacies will be briefly discussed presently.

The act of focusing on formS is much older than the term, attributed to Michael Long (1991). It is characterized by having "as their primary organizing principal for course design the accumulation of individual language elements (e.g., forms such as verb endings or agreement features, or even functions such as greetings or apologies)" (Doughty & Williams, 1998a, p.3). For centuries, formal language instruction was focused primarily on the teaching of Latin and the teaching concerned itself mostly with reading, comprehension and written production rather than developing skills for oral communication (Richards & Rodgers, 2001). These practices continued as the spectrum of languages taught broadened. 19th century textbooks still consisted of abstract grammar rules, translation exercises and vocabulary lists. These methods became known as the Grammar-Translation Method or, in the US, the Prussian Method as its proponents were primarily German, i.e. Seidenstücker, Plötz, Ollendorf and Meidinger (Richards & Rodgers, 2001, p. 6).

The principal goal of the Grammar-Translation Approach is the ability to read the literature of the language and master the intellectual and mental discipline associated with focusing on the formal aspects of language learning to this effect (Richards & Rodgers, 1986). The initial step to acquiring a form is to read detailed analysis of grammar rules followed by the application of this knowledge in the translation of sentences from and into the target language. The primary role of the teacher is to lead grammatical metatalk and provide corrective feedback. The L1 remains the medium of instruction and is "maintained as the reference system in the acquisition of the second language" (Stern, 1983, p. 455). Traditionally, speaking and listening play a small role, while reading and writing take center stage. Vocabulary is most often presented in bilingual wordlists and is selected from reading texts. Accuracy in written production is of the utmost importance in Grammar-Translation and is the primary component in evaluation (Richards & Rodgers, 1986). Of particular interest, as it pertains to the experiment conducted here is that in Grammar Translation grammar is taught deductively (Richards & Rodgers, 1986).

FormS focused methods were practiced widely in the 20th century and aside from a very few notable exceptions, remained the principal foreign language instruction method up until the middle of the century. While formS focused instruction continues to be used, there are few, if any, that advocate for its practice in its most traditional form. There is no evident theory behind it and little current research to support it (Richards & Rodgers, 1986). Reasons for the continued use of Focus on FormS have been suggested (Assalahi, 2013; Cortazzi and Jin, 2011). Some teachers may adhere to the method as it is familiar and the very same they themselves were taught by (Assalahi, 2013). It may also be in wider use among those teachers whose oral skills in the target language are limited because the approach does not make rigorous demands on such abilities. Grammar-Translation and other formS-focused approaches are still prevalent in many developing countries and as Cortazzi and Jin (2011) point out there may be social and economic reasons behind their continuance such as limited educational resources and slower advances in teacher training.

Research from 2009 indicates that teacher centered instruction is still widely practiced among primary school teachers of English in Iceland with heavy use of translation and focusing on form. (Lefever, 2009) Despite recommendations by the National Curriculum to incorporate communicative language teaching approaches, researchers found clear signs of textbook-bound instruction with few opportunities for interaction. Traditional assessment using written tests was widespread. Lack of education in SLA teaching may also be a reason why communicative teaching techniques have not gained ground among Icelandic primary school teachers, as 46% of English teachers in the top three forms had no training in English at the tertiary level as reported by a survey in 2006 (Menntamálaráðuneytið, 2006) and there are indication that this has not changed considerably since then.

While the formS-focused approach seems to be held in low regard these days, in theory at least, some of its techniques remain prevalent. Translation in some form may not be altogether without merit. Some studies show that connecting the target language with the student's native language helps in the recall of word meaning. Switching between the Target language (TL) and the first language (L1) can be an effective teaching strategy when L1 is used consciously as a reference point and to enhance uptake in the TL (Coste et al., 1997). The use of an L1 is advisable along with the TL when "the cost of the TL is too great" (Cook, 2001, p. 418) and students need to grasp important concepts quickly. Swain & Lapkin (2000) also show that using two languages can have a beneficial effect in the second language classroom. They give three primary reasons for students using L1 during collaborative tasks: increasing efficiency, focusing attention, and aiding target language conversation (Swain & Lapkin, 2000). While Grammar-Translation may use the L1 as a rule rather than a possible tool for reference, it is still a worthy legacy in many ways. But in the great pendulum swing that occurred in the late 20th century, when many abandoned formS-focused teaching techniques, it seems that a number of educators and theorists tried to distance themselves and their methods as much as possible from the old ones. The result was a collection of methods under a new approach that later came to be known as the *Communicative approach*, which focused on meaning rather than form.

3.1.1   Focus on meaning

In reaction to new ideas about language learning and instruction that appeared in the late 20th century, new theories and teaching methods were developed. Many of them may be categorized as communicative and the methods used within them are here referred to as *Focus on meaning*. Focus on meaning takes a stand of non-intervention when it comes to grammar and in its strongest

forms abandons formal instruction altogether (Ellis, 1994). Meaning-focused instruction is in many ways seeking inspiration from the circumstances of first language acquisition of children where there is no explicit grammar instruction and input is abundant and authentic. Meaning focused instruction promotes that successful second or foreign language acquisition occurs from sufficient exposure to the target language.

3.1.2   The Interaction Hypothesis

One important hypothesis in meaning-based instruction is Long's *Interaction Hypothesis* (1981). According to it, an important factor in language development is the negotiation of meaning that takes place in interaction between the learner and other speakers, especially more proficient ones, and between learners and certain types of written texts, particularly advanced texts. Long (1983) identifies two variations of the hypothesis. The weak position is that any language interaction can lead to a gain in important linguistic information and the eliciting of helpful negative feedback but that it depends on each learner as to whether they make productive use of it. The strong position within the hypothesis claims that the interaction itself enhances language skills. It becomes the learning process through which linguistic development is the direct outcome of communication, with or without intent or consciousness from the learner (Long, 1983). However, some level of consciousness is necessary in order to experience a mismatch between input and output. Consciousness, a weak position within the Interaction Hypothesis, is a prerequisite for focusing on form (Long & Robinson, 1998).

Stephen J. Krashen has been the most prolific theorist of the meaning-focused movement. Krashen's most salient theories of language acquisition have had an impact on communicative teaching methods. From the standpoint of theorists within the F*on*F school of thought however, these theories apply primarily to children but less so to adult language learning (DeKayser, 2000). In his *Input Hypothesis* Krashen claims that "if input is understood, and there is enough of it, the

necessary grammar is automatically provided" (Krashen, 1985, p. 2). Meaning-focused

approaches therefore emphasize communication above all else and rely on implicit learning of

linguistic structures. The *Input Hypothesis* concerns itself with the process of moving from the

current level of language competence (*i*) to the next (i + 1) and claims that "a necessary (but not

sufficient) condition to move from stage i to stage i + 1 is that the acquirer understand input that

contains i + 1, where "understand" means that the acquirer is focused on the meaning and not the

form of the message" (Krashen, 1982, p. 22). This view is controversial and difficult to support

empirically (Larsen-Freeman et al., 1991).

In a recent panel discussion of Krashen's, he partially acknowledges the benefits of

focusing on form for some students:

A few students insist on transparency. These may be students with a deep

interest in grammar or students with a need for "certainty" who do not fully trust

natural acquisition (or are not aware of it). There are several solutions for this and

I think we should take advantage of both: (1) include some grammar, as popup

grammar. […](2) Share at least some aspects of the theory with the students, so

they realize that transparency is not necessary for language acquisition. (3) Make

the input as compelling as possible (2015, p.2).

This shows that even though there is a marked difference between ideas of non-intervention

theorists and focusing on form, the gap may become less distinct.

3.2   Support for a meaning-focused approach

Supporters of meaning-focused methods have employed research on learning orders (Dulay and

Burt, 1973) to lend weight to a purely communicative approach. Some SLA research found that

learners did not necessarily show progress in grammar after having been instructed in specific

structures. Indeed, learners seemed inevitably to acquire some target structures before others and

in a near fixed order, (Ellis, 1994) regardless of whether they were in instructed or authentic

situations. Brown (1973) was among the first to note that children acquiring English as their first

language tended to acquire certain forms sooner than others. For example, the progressive marker

/-ing/ and the plural marker /s/ are usually acquired early in the process, while the third person

singular marker /s/ and the possessive /s/ are generally acquired at a later stage. A similar process

occurs in second language acquisition, even among adults. Krashen et al. (1977) also showed that

ESL students regularly learnt certain forms in a specific order and he categorized these forms into

four stages. Incidentally, he believed that the possessive *s* belonged to the fourth and last stage

acquired by fairly advanced students. However, no comprehensive list of forms and their

supposed place in the order exists and questions have been raised whether the theory holds true

across languages.

A closely-related factor that may lend further support to non-intervention is the sequence

in which a specific language feature is gradually learnt and this sequence seems fairly impervious

to instruction. *Order* and *sequence* are subsumed in the term *developmental pattern* (Ellis, 1994).

There are indications that mastering a single grammatical form is an incremental progress or what

Ellis (1994) called a *fixed developmental sequence*. Krashen used the term *natural order* for the

same phenomenon (Krashen, 1985). These sequences do not appear to be modifiable by

instruction (Pica, 1983). Williams & Evans (1998) note that learners with partial mastery of a

form on a pre-test showed the greatest gain from F*on*F in the subsequent post-test. In contrast,

those with very low initial scores generally made very little progress. A partial mastery of a form may indicate developmental readiness for uptake. The findings of a fairly predictable order in which forms are acquired and a fixed sequence in the learning continuum of a particular form led some SLA researchers to conclude that L2, like L1 learners had an internal syllabus for acquiring grammar, a part of Universal Grammar as articulated by Chomsky. Studies invariably refer to the implicit knowledge of grammar and there is no research that shows that the same rules of order and sequence apply to explicit knowledge of grammar rules (Ellis, 1994). Indeed other researchers emphasize that the choice to Focus on Form should depend on whether learners have reached the stage of development necessary to be able to remedy the mistake being made (Long & Robinson, 1998).

Pienemann (1987) studied the effects of introducing structures to second language learners before they were considered developmentally ready. Interestingly, he found that doing so caused avoidance behavior among adult learners of German who were prematurely introduced to the present perfect. Pienemann put forth his *Teachability/Learnability hypothesis* (1985) based on his research on developmental readiness. It claims that "instruction can only promote language acquisition if the interlanguage is close to the point when the structure to be taught is acquired in the natural setting" (1985, p.37). Pienemann later put forth a complementary *processing theory* where he claims that;

> Structural options that may be formally possible will be produced by the language
> learner only if the necessary processing resources are available that are needed to
> carry out, within the given minimal time frame, those computations required for
> the processing of the structure in question. Once we can spell out the sequence in
> which language processing routines develop in the learner, we can delineate those

grammars that are processable at different points of development (Pienemann, 2005).

Pienemann does not associate his theory with specific teaching methods. In fact, although his theory lines up with those in support of a meaning focused approach, he believes that grammatical structures should be taught, having been carefully chosen to match the developmental readiness of the learner.

Although theories and research on fixed order of acquisition of grammar forms can be helpful when making curriculum choices, there are many variables and other factors to consider that may weigh against a purely meaning-focused approach, especially with adult students. Firstly, teaching specific structures may not alter the sequence of learning but it has been shown to accelerate the rate of learning (Long, 1983). R. Ellis (1989) found that formally instructed adult students progressed faster through the sequences than learners who acquire a language in a naturalistic manner. Also, the learning process may be affected through explicit instruction so that there is an increase in long term accuracy (Pica, 1983). Further evidence that seem to counter a meaning based approach for adults are indications that older learners no longer have the same capacity as children to attain native like accuracy (Hyltenstam & Abrahamsson, 2000) and therefore adult learners need to be compensated if they are to reach advanced proficiency.

One legacy of the meaning-focused SLA is the idea of learner centeredness. With the onset of the new approach came notions that different learners require different teaching techniques in order to learn and also that the content of the material should reflect varying communicative requirements (Nunan, 1999). Alongside this, came an ideological shift from teacher and textbook to the learner and individual needs. This does not assume that learners arrive to the classroom with a sophisticated understanding of the learning process or are able to make informed choices

between teaching techniques. Rather that teachers train their students to make such choices and also that teachers become increasingly aware of their students' needs and wants when it comes to the curriculum and adjust their material and methods accordingly. The curriculum becomes a joint effort between teacher and student and according to Nunan even "…places the burden for all aspects of curriculum development on the teacher" (Nunan, 1988, p. 2) instead of educational institutions or governmental bodies.

3.3   Challenging a purely communicative or meaning-based approach

Purely meaning-focused approaches have been challenged by numerous studies that claim the benefits of some formal instruction. Long (1983) provided one of the first reviews of the literature on F*on*F instruction in SLA. He compared the results of eleven studies that examined whether students' linguistic abilities improved or not after receiving instruction with varying amounts of F*on*F. Six of these studies were considered to lend support to formal instruction. Three studies concluded that F*on*F instruction did not help while one study showed that exposure without F*on*F instruction was preferable. Other studies were considered ambiguous. Long concluded that F*on*F instruction did further learners and bring them closer to target-like language performance than purely meaning-focused teaching did. He maintained that this held true for both children or adults, intermediate and advanced learners, regardless of amount of immersion outside the classroom or whether they were tested through means of authentic language situations or in discrete-point tests.

Spada (1986) looked at the relationship between exposure to authentic communication and type of instruction among 48 adult intermediate ESL learners. Overall, she found that instruction played a more significant role in the improvement of grammar and writing than exposure did. The students who had access to both formal instruction of grammar and were exposed to English in a meaning-focused manner showed the greatest gains in language aptitude, more so than students who had access to only meaning-focused instruction or purely formS-focused instruction.

However, Spada does not control for the extra time spent on language learning among the students with increased exposure. Also, individual differences must be taken into account. Learners in classrooms where there is no Focus on Form have been known to vary in skills acquired to a greater extent than learners who have received F*on*F instruction. This may indicate that some are better equipped at learning in a non-formal environment than others and that the variance is more significant than in a F*on*F classroom.

Purely communicative approaches did not prove to be the final answer that many had hoped it would be. Larsen-Freeman (1991, p. 280) noted:

> We claim that linguistic accuracy is as much a part of communicative competence as being able to get one's meaning across or to communicate in a socio-linguistically appropriate manner. Thus, a more satisfactory characterization of teaching grammar, harmonious with the above assumptions, is that teaching grammar means enabling language students to use linguistic forms accurately, meaningfully and appropriately.

Robert Schmidt's diary entries on his progress of learning Portuguese over several months are revealing in this sense (Schmidt & Frota, 1986). He does receive some formal instruction, but depends mostly on communication with natives and other speakers of Portuguese for input and sporadic corrective feedback. They come to the conclusion that instruction, while not necessary nor sufficient, "was of great help, in providing comprehensible input that was not available in the wider environment, in providing resources and grammatical forms that could be immediately put to use in conversation outside the classroom, and in efficiently providing interpretations that could be derived only with difficulty through interaction alone" (Schmidt & Frota, 1986, p.306). Perhaps as an educated linguist with extensive linguistic metaknowledge, Schmidt is particularly

amenable to formal instruction. Yet, the researchers stress the greater role that interaction played

in allowing him to achieve some degree of fluency. Indeed, the legacy of methods that focus on

meaning is perhaps the importance of imbedding language learning in authentic and

communicative language situations. Focus on meaning was a pendulum swing from traditional

grammar-focused methods and F*on*F can be viewed as the middle of the road, which blends the

two together.

3.4   Comparing teaching methods

Research on instruction in the past three decades has gone through a paradigm shift and moved

from method to technique. Early studies on foreign language learning focused on comparing the

efficiency of various teaching methods but were inconclusive. Purpura (2004) points out that the

majority of studies done on teaching methods fail to give conclusive evidence of the superiority of

one SLA teaching method over another. Obviously, students do better on the tests that actually

assess what they have been taught rather than those testing less familiar skills. Emphasizing

grammar leads to better understanding of it while those students who are required to converse

regularly in the target language show an improvement over those who do not. Purpura (2004)

emphasizes that "SLA involves far too many interacting dimensions for researchers to seek simple

answers […]SLA is too complex to attribute L2 learning uniquely to method" (p.29-30). These

are variables such as age of the students, which I have already addressed. This complexity factor

has been acknowledged in the literature and alternative models suggested. Focus has therefore

largely shifted from propositional models of teaching language (structural and functional

approaches) to the procedural models (task-based and process approaches). Today the emphasis is

on studying "pedagogical techniques" (Doughty, 2002 in Purpura 2004) or "pedagogic tasks"

(Long, 1991) as a more accurate basis for SL/ L2 instruction. I take this to mean that there is some

consensus on the unlikelihood of a single complete instructional approach that will prove its

superiority and answer all SLA needs. Indeed, Long is adamant that "it is clear that "method" is

an unverifiable and irrelevant construct when attempting to improve classroom FL instruction.

Worse, it may actually do harm by distracting teachers from genuinely important issues" (Long,

1991, p.40). It seems likely that the *correct* approach in SLA varies depending on complex

variables which has led to a focus on more readily defined techniques that better lend themselves

to measurement.

3.5   Striking the right balance between form and meaning

The current situation in the world of second language theory has been described as the *postmethod*

condition (Kumaravadivelu, 1994) where many researchers and teachers have ceased looking for a

single correct comprehensive method, as research has not found clear evidence of the superiority

of one instructional method over another. In its place, there is increased attention given to eclectic

techniques chosen specifically for each classroom situation.

There is considerable evidence that entirely meaning-focused instruction does not bring the

majority of older students to target level on some linguistic features (Harley & Swain 1984,

Genesee 1987, Swain 1991) despite receiving meaningful input over several years. Further

support to this claim is adult immigrants who never reach native-like proficiency, despite years of

constant immersion. This has motivated researchers and teachers alike to find out whether formal

instruction truly improves target language accuracy and can partially, or wholly, compensate for

the loss of whatever inherent linguistic devices naturally render children to native speakers. As

Celce-Murcia et al. (1997) point out, the communicative language teaching methods that had

surged in the 1970s and 80s were increasingly criticized in the 90s. Much of the critique was aimed at the lack of a direct approach to teaching structure.

Kumaravadivelu (1994) has named this current phase the *postmethod condition* and emphasizes principled pragmatism as a key factor. He claims that previous methods have, in differing ways, transplanted artificial techniques into the classroom and wants to rectify that; "if the conventional concept of method entitles theorizers to construct knowledge-oriented theories of pedagogy, the postmethod condition empowers practitioners to construct classroom-oriented theories of practice" (p. 29). Secondly, Kumaravadivelu believes that this new non-method condition "recognizes the teachers' potential to know not only how to teach but also know how to act autonomously within the academic and administrative constraints imposed by institutions, curricula, and textbooks" (p.30). Notably, Kumaravadivelu warns against a type of eclecticism where teachers randomly choose techniques to use in the classroom and claims that such practices will invariably become unprofessional, unsystematic and lack criticism. Instead teachers should strive for principled pragmatism which "focuses on how classroom learning can be shaped and managed by teachers as a result of informed teaching and critical appraisal" (p. 31). This principled pragmatism on behalf of teachers "should, without denying the value of individual autonomy, provide adequate conceptual underpinnings based on current theoretical, empirical, and pedagogic insights so that their teaching act may come about in a principled fashion"(p. 31).

3.6   Focus on Form

An interest in a technically eclectic way of approaching second language pedagogy has led to an increased emphasis on researching which procedures suit different circumstances. Many of these procedures, and the primary focus of my research, deal with attention to form. In this section I

will introduce how *Focus on Form* has been defined by some prominent researchers in the field. Some differing opinions concerning incidentality of FonF will be discussed. I will present notable research in favor of FonF approaches and what forms are best suited to FonF.

FonF is a collective phrase used for the techniques which direct the student's attention momentarily to structures in the target language, grammatical, lexical, phonological or otherwise. The focusing process should ideally take place only after meaning is adequately conveyed. The current articulation of FonF is generally accredited to Michael Long who defines it so:

> Whereas the content of the lesson with a focus on *forms* is the *forms* themselves, a syllabus with a focus on *form* teaches something else –biology, mathematics, workshop practice, automobile repair, the geography of a country where the foreign language is spoken, the cultures of its speakers, and so on –and overtly draws students' attention to linguistic elements as they arise incidentally in lessons whose overriding focus is the meaning or communication (Long, 1991, pp. 45-46).

The emphasis is on communication calling for clarification of a linguistic feature and Long is quite adamant that a form should be specifically addressed only if the occasion arises incidentally within a meaning-focused lesson. Doughty & Williams (1998b) have a slightly less stringent demand of incidentality and they see FonF as a moment when "the learner's attention is drawn precisely to a linguistic feature as necessitated by communicative demand" (p. 3).

A definition that details how FonF should function in the classroom is given by Norris and Ortega (2001, p.161) who consider instruction to be FonF-centered if it meets the following criteria: (i) that learners engage with the meaning of a structure before giving attention to its form, through tasks involving the target form that require successful completion; (ii) that instruction of a

form occurs as a result of the analysis of learner needs; and (iii) that learners' attention should be focused on a form briefly but noticeably, "thus achieving a difficult balance between unobtrusiveness and salience" (Norris & Ortega, 2001, p.161). This definition is even more forgiving of attention being given to form without it arising spontaneously than Long's. Perhaps it is less pure theoretically but definitely more practical for teachers who want to, or must, cover certain forms for several groups in a single semester.

There are strong indications that attention to form has positive effects on target language accuracy when embedded in activities that are primarily communicative. Alanen (1995) compared F*on*F-based instruction with purely meaning-based instruction in a laboratory setting among adult beginning language learners. The F*on*F group showed progress over those who received meaning-based instruction. This holds true in studies where the effects of instruction have been controlled for (Doughty, 1991). Doughty & Williams (1998b) claim that there is strong evidence for the necessity of Focus on Form "to push learners beyond communicatively effective language toward target-like second language abilities" and a slightly weaker claim that "even if such focus may not be absolutely necessary, it may be part of a more efficient language learning experience in that it can speed up natural acquisition processes" (p. 2). Interestingly, Harley (1989) found that effects of F*on*F were significant immediately after instruction but that the advantage disappeared when retested three months later. However, her method might be too formS focused to be classified as F*on*F.

A seminal meta-analysis of teaching methods by Norris & Ortega (2000) compared 49 studies and experiments performed over an 18 year period. Many of these were conducted among adult learners. They found that explicit F*on*F in a meaning-focused setting was more effective than instruction with implicit-only grammar instruction. Focusing solely on form produced the worst results. In fact "focused instructional treatments of whatever sort far surpass non- or

minimally-focused exposure to the L2" (Norris and Ortega, 2000, p.463). It is important to note though that this, and other meta-analyses, have concluded that meaningful interactions along with sufficient input appear to contribute to the acquisition of grammar within and without a classroom setting. However, focusing solely on meaning presents limitations on what can be learnt and does not bring adult students to target ability in a timely and efficient manner. Most of the studies reviewed in Norris and Ortega use constrained constructed performances (i.e. gap fill-in, sentence transformation etc.) and these may create a bias toward F*on*F- and formS-focused instruction. Free constructed response studies (i.e. with communicative tasks) showed more mixed results.

As seen in Spada & Lightbown (1990) increased F*on*F in a classroom setting will result in higher levels of accuracy. In their study, four classrooms were analyzed for amount of F*on*F instruction. The students whose teacher spent the most time (29% of classroom time) on F*on*F activities showed more precision in several English structures than others. The accuracy fell on a sliding scale as the F*on*F lessened. However, the students with the least amount of F*on*F (11%) displayed equal or better comprehension compared to the other groups, highlighting the importance of a communicative setting for F*on*F tasks.

The premise that some focusing on form in a primarily meaning-focused setting is beneficial to students caused varied reactions among teachers. Some, who subscribed to a communicative approach, rejected the notion forthright. Others saw it as an opportunity to "return to explicit, discrete-point grammar instruction and as a proof of what they have "known all along" was the correct path" (Doughty & Williams, 1998a, p. 2). The debate is, in part, due to different understandings of how F*on*F should be carried out in the classroom. The nature of Focus on Form will be discussed below.

3.6.1 Which form to focus on?

The question of which form to focus on is relevant to this study because when the effects of teaching different forms through the same methods have been compared, the results are disparate (Herron & Tomasello, 1992) which indicates that forms are differently suited for F*on*F. This may be due to the relative complexity of the form, distance from the L1, frequency in input or its importance to the conveyance of meaning. The two forms chosen for the study will now be considered according to these factors and their categorical difference discussed.

Williams & Evans (1998) note that when studying the effect of F*on*F in the teaching of two forms, the passive (*I was touched*) and participle adjectives (*the song is touching*), the improvement in the usage of the latter was somewhat greater. The researchers regarded the passive of greater complexity and believe that to be the reason for a worse outcome. DeKayser (1995, 1998) found that the simpler, categorical rule of a single uniform plural marker on nouns better lent itself to F*on*F than the complex prototypical rule of two possible morphemes to denote plurality of verbs where the verb stem gives probabilistic indication of which allomorph to choose. The difference between the acquisition rate of the two structures was insignificant under implicit instructional techniques.

Krashen (1982) made a distinction between rules that were easy to learn but hard to acquire and those that were hard to learn but easy to acquire. That is, that complexity can lie in form as well as in functionality. The division has become well known but leaves one with the same problem of defining the level of difficulty. For example, Krashen considers the third person –s to be simple in form but complex in function. He maintains that lack of formal complexity (easy to learn, hard to acquire) is conductive to learnability. This is reflected in a study by

Lightbown et al. (1980). Some of the grammatical forms used in the study were of high frequency in input. (-s morphemes, copula -be, etc.) Yet the students did not reach target proficiency in the long run. Lightbown (1991) suggest that the nature of the form itself plays a part depending on whether it is developmental or variational. Developmental forms are acquired in the same order by learners while variational forms are not acquired in a fixed sequence and can be acquired at any point in the learner's language development. The copula is an example of a variational form according to Meisel et al. (1981). Developmental forms are less amenable to instruction but more durable once acquired. Variational forms are more likely to atrophy but may be more teachable.

Ellis is skeptical about choosing to teach marked rather than unmarked forms. By *marked* he is referring to a grammatical structure that is "infrequent, unnatural, and deviant from a regular pattern" (R. Ellis, 2006, p. 89). He feels that the term marked is too vague to be used as selection criteria for syllabus.

Ellis also questions basing choice of form on whether said form differs from the learners' first language (L1) as Harley (1993) suggests. He points to problems arising in a classroom where students have different first languages but primarily he feels that there is simply not sufficient evidence on "when difference does and does not translate into learning difficulty, and in some cases, learning difficulty arises even where there is no difference" (R. Ellis, 2006, p. 89).

 Overall, there is no comprehensive list or widely accepted definitions of forms well suited to F*on*F. Lack of research is an obvious cause which may be due to the lack of consensus about the definitions and nature of the different forms and numerous factors like students' age, level of proficiency, amount of input and linguistic background. Teachers may often find themselves choosing to focus, preemptively or reactively, on specific forms that correspond to gaps in their students' grammatical knowledge. In an attempt to utilize the existing theory while also taking the

characteristics of my student group into consideration when deciding which forms to include in my study, I referred to Harley's criteria as well as trusting in my personal experience and that of experienced colleagues.

Harley (1993) has specified four likely candidates for successful F*on*F.

i)   When there is a non-obvious difference between the L1 and L2/FL in a specific form.

ii)   When the form is rarely encountered in input by learners.

iii)   When the form is not vital for successful conveyance of meaning.

iv)   When forms are likely to be misinterpreted by learners.

The forms chosen for this study were the possessive *s* and *there/their/they're* homophones. They were chosen because of their frequency in my students writing and because they have shown themselves to be among the most problematic in achieving accuracy for learners' whose L1 is Icelandic. Therefore, finding out if either or both suit formal instruction has practical purposes and affects my syllabus decisions. The forms are of categorical difference as *there/their/they're* homophones are content morphemes and an aspect of written language and memory. The possessive *s* is an inflectional morpheme and its accurate usage is bound in grammaticality. The inclusion of two forms that are different in nature is interesting as they may produce differing results in the study.

The possessive *s* and *there/ they're/their* homophones can both be said to fulfill category iii of Harley's list. That is, they typically do not have a critical effect on meaning; mistakenly using one expression of the forms for another will not affect meaning. Neither of the forms go against N. Ellis's definition of forms that are too complex for F*on*F, i.e. *there/their/they're homophones* and the possessive *s* both have categorical rules, the former without any exceptions

and the latter with overwhelming reliability. Therefore, they also fall under Krashen's definition of formal simplicity, which according to him is conducive to learnability.

There are those that say that the formally simple structures are the very ones students can acquire on their own and therefore should not be taught (Hulstijn & De Graaff, 1994) in the classroom. But, the two forms chosen for testing here are of high frequency in the language and are certainly not being introduced for the first time to the students. As I will cover in the pre-diagnosis chapter, the reason behind the high occurrence of mistakes in these forms among Icelandic secondary school students may be found in the lack of written input. The lack of accuracy lies primarily in orthography and memory. The two forms are not purely grammar features, yet meet the criteria for aspects of language that benefit from formal instruction.

3.6.2   Instructional techniques within the F*on*F approach

As mentioned before, the focus of SLA research has shifted somewhat from complete systems of teaching methods to more defined instructional techniques. F*on*F is an approach that encompasses some variants that may be used in different degrees depending on teacher preferences or the design of student groups. DeKeyser's (1998) conclusion 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" (p. 42) underlines this. Following is a presentation of the two most salient and researched variations within the F*on*F approach: proactive vs reactive techniques and deductive vs inductive techniques. The latter will receive the bulk of the coverage as it is the focus of my study.

3.6.3   Proactive vs reactive F*on*F

Several theorists have deliberated on the point at which focus should take place in the learning process. Appropriate timing of F*on*F can refer to both the suitable stage of developmental readiness (proposals made by Pienemann and his order of acquisition (1985)) when the learner is able to incorporate any corrective instruction from the teacher and adjust future output accordingly. This is discussed in section 2.4 above. But timing also refers to the more immediate matter of choosing the most favorable moment for drawing the point into focus. This can be both student and teacher led.

F*on*F can either occur proactively, i.e. before output takes place, or reactively as corrective feedback. Doughty & Williams (1998b) state that:

> Proactive Focus on Form is where the teacher chooses a form in advance to present to students in order to help them complete a communicative task. This can be done explicitly through formal instruction, while a less explicit focus might involve asking students to alter or manipulate a text that contains a target form. This differs from traditional grammar instruction as the grammar focus is not centered on a set of language structures imposed by the syllabus. Instead the choice of form is determined by the communicative needs of the learners (p. 198).

Reactive F*on*F, also known as corrective feedback, requires output on behalf of the learners and consists of a response to errors in this output. Doughty & Williams (1998b) say that reactive F*on*F "involves developing the ability to notice pervasive errors and have techniques for drawing learner's attention to them." (p. 211) Willis & Willis (2007) claim that reactive teaching is preferable as the focus is on correcting each learner's mistakes

rather than trying to anticipate which errors will be made in the future. Willis & Willis (2007) present three major benefits of reactive F*on*F. They claim that it helps to prevent fossilization as the students are made aware of the gaps in their language proficiency. This may motivate learners if used sparingly. Also, Willis & Willis assert that most language learners expect and want correction and assume it as a part of the teacher's role. Lastly, it provides useful negative feedback which may be the most efficient way of putting learners on the right track.

The question of whether attention to form would be more useful to learners proactively or reactively was examined by Tomasello & Herron (1988). They studied American SLA students of French in a fairly traditional FormS approach-based college program. The treatment was that half the group received information about a particular structure, while others were led to make foreseeable errors that the structure regularly entails (also known as the "garden path" treatment). They received corrective feedback when they had actually made the error. On both immediate and delayed post-tests, the corrective feedback learners performed better on the structures presented. This suggests that the timing of the F*on*F is of relevant importance.

However, Bakshiri & Mohammadi (2014) compared grammatical proactive and reactive F*on*F among 25 Iranian EFL learners at upper-intermediate level of language proficiency with an age range of 17 to 27. The treatment involved dividing the group in two and teaching either proactively or reactively. At the end of the course, students were asked to write compositions. This was then repeated four months later. The results indicated that learners who received proactive F*on*F outperformed those who received reactive F*on*F in both immediate and delayed productions. Similar results were produced when 88 Iranian students of two different proficiency levels both showed more progress with progressive teaching techniques (Bakshiri & Keyvanfar,

2011). The authors suggest that the difference in outcome between their experiment and others dealing with timing can be explained with the foreign language status that English has in Iran as opposed to that of a second language. "A reactive explicit FOF is obviously supported and consolidated by the abundance of exposure available in ESL settings" (Bakshiri & Keyvandar, 2011, p.34-35). This underlines the importance of considering exposure as a major factor in the choice of instructional techniques.

Closely related to the proactive/reactive division is the discussion of focus being teacher or student led. While proactive measures are often seen as teacher-led (Doughty & Williams, 1998b), Ellis, Basturkmen, & Loewen (2002) give an example of preemptive F*on*F that is student initiated. A student is asking for assistance to remember the word *translation* for a vocabulary exercise she is working on. The teacher arrives at the word after some negotiation, preventing a possible gap or error in the student's work. So, the focus becomes proactive but not prescriptive. Long & Robinson (1998) point out that by taking the stance of student led F*on*F, teachers can avoid the difficult task of selecting learner errors which are frequent, systematic, and remediable at a given stage of the learning process.

3.6.4   Deductive and inductive instructional techniques while focusing on form

Deductive and inductive instructional techniques refer to two different modes of F*on*F instruction. I will first define the terms, and then present research on their application.

A deductive approach provides the learner with a general rule, which is subsequently applied to specific input. The student tries to employ the form correctly while tackling exercises, writing sentences, correcting errors etc. Practicing the usage of the rule aims to solidify the form and ready the student for using it in authentic language situations. Deductive approaches require

the students to study grammatical rules and variances. The explicit transmission of information required is usually provided by the teacher or textbook (Thornbury, 1999). An example would be a teacher starting her lesson with an explicit introduction of rules governing present conditional verbs and following up with examples and exercises.

On the other hand, the inductive technique requires the teacher to present examples of usage of the target form as the initial input for the lesson. It is then expected of the students that they detect underlying principles of grammar and are subsequently able to employ rules based on their findings (Thornbury, 1999). The teacher may choose to clarify or validate any grammatical principles subsequent to the student detection of rules through textual analysis (Purpura, 2004). In practice, when the inductive approach is used in textbooks or course material, it is often scaffolded in a way that leads the learner effortlessly to the rules of the form being presented. An example of an inductive approach is the teacher providing input that includes some instances of present conditional verbs and subsequently asking the students to identify these and form their version of the rules governing the tense.

The main element which this study is concerned with is whether certain linguistic grammar forms are best learnt through deductive or inductive teaching techniques within an explicit F*on*F approach. Some researchers (see, DeKeyser, 1995) would associate inductive techniques with an implicit or non-F*on*F approach when the purpose is not to develop an explicit rule, but only to expect students to infer the rule without awareness. Norris & Ortega (2000) however, regard inductive and deductive techniques as two ends of a continuum with deductive being more explicit and inductive less so. I will also consider both the inductive and the deductive techniques as explicit approaches, as rule is eventually overtly expressed in the way the former is used in this study, which naturally renders it explicit in nature.

A combination of the two, the inductive and deductive methods, was proposed amongst others by G. Mouly in 1978. He says that the interrelationship between them is:

> a back-and-forth movement in which the investigator first operates inductively
>
> from observations to hypotheses, and then deductively from these hypotheses to
>
> their implications, in order to check their validity from the standpoint of
>
> compatibility with accepted knowledge. After revision, where necessary, these
>
> hypotheses are submitted to further test through the collection of data specifically
>
> (p.178).

Indeed, this was echoed by Haight, Heron, & Cole (2007) in the context specific to language when they maintained that the most effective teaching of form included some deductive and inductive characteristics.

There are some indications that students prefer deductive approaches to grammar or structural aspects of language. A study by Jean and Simard (2013) examined junior high school students who were asked to evaluate inductive and deductive teaching approaches and their relationship to possible learning gains. The majority of students expressed a preference for deductive methods but considered both to be effective. There was no statistical difference between the gains made from pre-test to post-test through the two approaches. The authors speculate that the reasons might be that less is required of students in the deductive process, there is no hypothesizing or speculation involved. Vogel et al. (2011) support the lack of connection between preference of teaching technique and gains but found that a scaffolded inductive approach showed significantly greater gains.

A number of studies have examined the relative effectiveness of these two approaches to teaching linguistic features explicitly but their results have been mixed. A study by Shaffer (1989) was conducted among a large group of high school students. It found no significant difference

between the approaches but a trend towards inductive techniques. Herron & Tomasello (1992) showed a clear advantage for inductive instruction, but Robinson (1996) found that a deductive approach was more effective as did Erlam (2003) and Takimoto (2008). Rosa & O'Neill (1999) found no significant difference in effectiveness.

As pointed out by Erlam (2003), not all studies define deductive and inductive instructional techniques in the same manner. The inductive technique particularly seems to be expressed in a variety of ways. In both Robinson (1996) and Rosa & O'Neill (1999), students were instructed to identify the rule on their own following the lesson without teacher assistance. In Schaffer (1989) the learners' supposed rules were not verified by the instructor. Other studies employed variations of the inductive technique wherein the students were presented with target structures embedded in input without explicit presentation of rule by teacher nor were they required to look for a formal pattern themselves (i.e. Erlam (2003), and Herron & Tomasello (1992)). Therefore, the inductive technique tested in these studies was an implicit one. Due to these conflicting results and variations in treatment, there seem to be no grounds for definitively deciding for or against either approach, especially if a consensus has not been reached on what they entail.

Rod Ellis has voiced his belief that the suitability of the technique is in each case dependent upon the individual learner and form; its complexity, salience, markedness, frequency, scope, etc. He remarks "Perhaps the main lesson to be learned from the research to date is the need for a differentiated approach to both researching and teaching explicit knowledge" (Ellis 2006, p.98). This underlines the importance of research on individual forms and their suitability to F*on*F and learner preferences in an Icelandic context.

Decoo (1996) points out that the deductive versus inductive approach is not a simple dichotomy and identifies five modalities of deduction/induction but recognized the possibility of others and that they may function together in varying proportions;

Modality A - *Actual deduction* where the rule is stated at the beginning of lesson and then practiced in exercises that follow.

Modality B - *Conscious induction* as guided discovery. After having been presented with examples in text or sentences, the students are guided to conscious discovery of the form and rules governing it, often through key questions from the teacher. More examples follow, along with practice.

Modality C - *Induction leading to an explicit "summary of behavior."* A lesson based on this module would begin with intense practicing of a form which is thus internalized. The teacher would later summarize the rule or behavior, but this would not play a central role in the process.

Modality D - *Subconscious induction on structured material* includes no explicit formulation of rule or form being studied. This is left to the student after sufficient presentation of structured material, i.e. texts that are chosen specifically with the instruction of a form in mind.

Modality E - *Subconscious induction* on unstructured material replicates natural acquisition processes. The student internalizes forms through intense exposure to authentic material. No explicit presentation of form (Synopsis of Decoo, 1996, p.2-3).

The use of Decoo's model does not seem to be in wide use but other such definitions are hard to find or much less systematic. Of course these modalities can be associated with different teaching methods. While modality A lines up with the Grammar-Translation Approach, modality E would be practiced in the Natural Approach. But sequestering the different modalities in teaching methods is unnecessary. For the purpose of my study, I will be focusing on modalities A

and B and using the terms deductive for what corresponds to modality A and inductive for modality B. These two are not polar opposites and choosing between them requires more than merely the consideration of method.

3.6.4.1   Suitability of forms to inductive/deductive techniques and learner characteristics

Studies have shown that the benefits of the deductive technique over the inductive, or vice versa, are governed partly by the age of the student but also by the complexity of form.

According to Rivers, (1975) the deductive technique suits mature and motivated students better while inductive techniques are more appropriate for the younger students. But the connection between age and difference in suitability of technique to F*on*F has received very little attention in the literature.

DeKayser (1995) studied the effects of rule complexity on the outcome of implicit-inductive and explicit-deductive teaching techniques through the teaching of an artificial language, *Implexan*. The two groups tested showed that deductive learning had a more advantageous affect in simpler rules but there was no marked difference between the two techniques when more complex rules were being tested. He considered the rules simpler because they were of categorical nature, i.e. the plural noun marking of *Implexan* is always *–on*. Other rules were prototypical in nature, probabilistic in nature. For example, the plural morpheme ending of verbs is either *–at* or *–it*. The use of each is determined by the verb stem; those ending in *-ust* always take *–at* as their plural. Should the verb stem differ by one letter (*-usk*) there is but 80% chance of the *–at* ending and if it differs by two letters (*-ufg*) the chances drop to 60%. Although more systematic in their irregularities than authentic languages, this artificial language none the less makes it impossible to reduce certain forms into economical rule statements, increasing their level of complexity. However, Sun & Wang (2003) report the opposite of

DeKayser. They looked at the study of collocations in English FLA classes in Taiwan. The high school students had studied English for four years. They found that easier collocation patterns were more suited to the inductive approach than the more complex ones. So, determining the teaching technique dependent on complexity of form remains an elusive task.

3.7   Summary of chapter 3

The following summarizes the research presented in chapter three and recapitulates how these findings provide grounds for my study.

Icelandic learners of English receive plenty of input, especially extramurally from different types of entertainment and media, enough so that English comes close to being classified as a second language in Iceland. Opportunities for practicing productive skills and developing linguistic accuracy are not as prevalent but become increasingly important when entering tertiary education and various professional sectors. Secondary schools should provide training for the level of accuracy required under such circumstances. Focusing on form in a meaning-based classroom has shown to be most beneficial for adult language learners when the goal is linguistic accuracy. While F*on*F is defined as a momentary direction of students' attention to linguistic features, different techniques can be used in the articulation of F*on*F instruction. The choice between deductive or inductive instructional techniques is one of the decisions that need consideration in a F*on*F classroom. Studies on the choice of technique have provided disparate results and further research is needed. Specific techniques within F*on*F have not been studied in an Icelandic context and doing so will provide valuable information as the choice of technique may be in part dependent on learner characteristics. The nature of the form in focus may also affect the choice of instructional technique and therefore two categorically different forms have been included. Usage of the possessive *s* depends on grammatical metaknowledge while the *there-they're-their* homophones confusion is bound in spelling. The following research questions were

formed in order to shed some light on effects of F*on*F and in particular deductive vs inductive techniques in an Icelandic context and whether forms learned through FonF are retained over time. Furthermore, to establish whether there is any difference between uptake of *there-their-they're* homophones and the possessive *s*, suggesting that one is better suited to F*on*F in an Icelandic context. The research questions are:

1. Do Icelandic secondary schools benefit from form-focused instruction?

2. Does focusing on form improve students' retention to a greater extent than for those students who only received noticing opportunities?

3. When comparing inductive and deductive teaching techniques within a F*on*F-based classroom, which has a greater effect on students' short-term ability to use said form correctly?

4. Do either of the two forms being taught *(there,-they're,-their* homophones or the possessive *s)* seem better suited to F*on*F instruction?

4   The Study

Following is a description of the quasi-experiment's design. Firstly, participants in the test groups will be described. Next, a timeline of treatment is presented. Then the testing instruments will be described, these include a pre-test, a post-test and student essays. The forms used for testing as well as instructional material used for the two treatments will be discussed. Finally, the gathered data is presented and its implications discussed.

The grouping of test participants was not fully randomized as these are classes previously established by the secondary school in which the experiment was conducted. As a result of the lack of random allocation to group, the study is a quasi-experiment.

Permission for conducting the study was sought and gained from administrators of Menntaskólinn við Hamrahlíð on the assurance that should one treatment show considerable lack of acquisition; the students would be compensated after the treatment period with lesson time using the preferred teaching technique. Neither the inductive- nor the deductive technique resulted in a lack of mastery that would require this.

4.1   Participants

The participants of the study were 111 non-native speakers between the ages of 16 and 18 who were registered students at Menntaskólinn við Hamrahlíð, a secondary school in Reykjavik, Iceland in the years 2014-2015. These were Icelandic native speakers with at least 7 years of EFL lesson experience. The English course within which the participants were sourced is the second in a sequence of 3 to 5 English courses required for graduation, depending on each student's chosen program of study. According to the Icelandic curriculum, these students are placed at competence level two, which includes B1 and B2 levels of proficiency as described by the Common European Framework of Reference (Council of Europe, p. 29). The main focus is on academic language

acquisition; vocabulary building, reading advanced texts and essay writing. MH is a competitive secondary school, which admits students with a higher primary school matriculation grade compared to the national average.

Half of the participants were enrolled in one of two classes of an accelerated English course, ENSK2BH05, requiring a higher entry grade, where they receive 2 hours and 20 min of instruction per week for 14 weeks. The other half, enrolled in class ENSK2BB05, received an extra hour of instruction every week, covering the same material but at a regular pace. Both classes are categorized at the same level of proficiency. There are reasons to believe that the participants in each group are a good cross-section of the school's population. Each group in the experiment consisted of one accelerated course and one regular course classes. A pre-test was administered to participants, 134 in total but 23 of these did not complete other components or were IB students (International Baccalaureate) with a varied English language background and were therefore excluded from the data. Data from 111 students was included in the study. The students were divided into the three following groups according to the treatment.

Group A: 34 students belonged to group A. They first received deductive teaching techniques for the possessive *s* and then inductive methods for *there*-homophones.

Group B: 38 students were in this treatment group. This group received inductive teaching techniques for the possessive *s* and deductive for *there*-homophones.

Group C: 39 students belonged to this control group. They received no F*on*F instruction on the forms in question but were provided with noticing opportunities beyond their regular course of study. This was the only group of students that I did not instruct myself. I worked with the two instructors to develop the noticing exercise presented to them and was allowed some time in class to administer the pre-test in person.

The conditions were rotated to limit the experimental effect of variations between the two treatment groups. So, both instructional techniques were tested on the two groups, group A and group B, subjecting them to both treatments, but with different forms respectively. First the possessive *s* was taught deductively to group B and inductively to group A. Then there-homophones were taught inductively to group B but deductively to group A.

4.2   Timeline of treatment and testing

The following is a timeline of tests and treatment by week. Not all groups were taught on the same days of the week but treatments and tests were kept as close together as possible considering class schedules.

Week 1: pretest administered to all groups

Weeks 2-3: possessive *s* forms taught (deductively to A, inductively to B)

Week 4: there-homophones taught (inductively to A, deductively to B)

Week 5: post-test in groups A and B. A noticing exercise for control group C.

Week 6: essay writing in groups A and B

Week 7: essay writing for control group

4.3   Treatments and forms

The criteria for choosing the forms were that they were problematic forms, relevant to the learners in the study, had frequent natural occurrence and were of varied complexity and nature.

Firstly, I wanted to choose forms that were relevant to the courses' syllabus because of frequent errors made by this particular student group. I conferred with my experienced colleagues

in the field to establish this. In an informal discussion, we put together a short list of forms that our students repeatedly make mistakes on. The students would, as a result of participating in the study, have the opportunity to acquire new knowledge and display improvement when using the forms.

Another requirement that I wanted the forms to fulfill was that they needed to occur frequently in texts written by the students so that they would likely appear in their essays without being called for explicitly. A spontaneous correct usage might indicate a thorough acquisition of the forms. I looked at a few examples of essays by previous students of the same course to verify that the forms chosen were valid choices for the sake of occurrence. *There*-homophones seem to appear with fair frequency in students' writing while the possessive *s* almost always appears, especially in the type of writing required in the essays used for the study.

A third prerequisite was that the forms used in the experiment be of varying complexity, as it has been established that the effect of F*on*F is dependent amongst other things, on the number of variables to the form (Herron & Tomasello, 1992). However, the exact definition of what constitutes a form of too many variables remains elusive. Three forms were initially chosen for pre-testing and included *to-too* homophones, but only two were used for analysis, the possessive *s* and *there*-homophones.

One of the specifications that Harley (1993) makes for likely candidates for successful F*on*F is that they are rarely encountered in input by learners. Of course, the possessive *s* and *there*-homophones abound in all manner of spoken and written language. However, they are both forms that cannot be learnt from auditory input alone. It is the differences in spelling for the *there*-homophones and the placement of the apostrophe in possessive *s* that cannot be identified in spoken language, which cause difficulties for the learners. And, as Icelandic students are exposed to English through auditory means more than textual, it is possible that the forms tested in the

experiment do indeed fall under Harley's specification, despite their common occurrence in the language.

4.3.1   There-their-they're homophones

The spelling of *there*, and its homophones *they're* and *their*, is a common source of mistakes for my students. Not only do they write one form when they are thinking of another, but they also misspell the forms. *They're* is quite often misspelled, forgetting the *e* at the end or writing an *i* in place of the *y*. Likewise, *their* may have a *y* in place of the *i*. *There*-homophone confusion does not hinder conveyance of meaning in spoken English and only rarely in writing. So, despite it not being a form of grammatical nature, *there*-homophones make for likely candidates for F*on*F as described by Harley (1993).

4.3.2   The possessive *s*

As a form with more variables and exceptions and therefore somewhat more complex for students, I chose to include the possessive *s* in my study. My students tend to have good instincts as to when to add an *s* to a word for the sake of implying ownership or to indicate plural. However, they need to determine for what purpose specifically they are doing so before deciding whether or not to add an apostrophe in case of possession and where that apostrophe should be placed. The usage of *s*-endings and apostrophes to indicate possessions has several variants, depending on the number of the noun that takes ownership, and whether the noun has irregular plural or ends with an *s* in its singular form. On top of that, there are variants in usage, as some native speakers will add an apostrophe and an *s* (*'s*) where others would leave out the extra *s* for words ending in *s* in the singular. Students are also confused by the plural *s* ending and, at times, add an apostrophe where none should be found. This is why the pre-test includes that form, to test if they can differentiate between the two. It has been pointed out that forms with many variables may not suit

explicit instruction as they are formally complex. Whether the possessive *s* falls under this definition is unclear but using two forms in this research with a different amount of variables should shed some light on differences in suitability between the two.

4.4   Instruments for data gathering

The following section includes a description of the instruments used in the study. Data was gathered through the following instruments: A) a pre-test administered to all participants, B) a post-test administered to the two groups that received F*on*F instruction and C) an essay that all students wrote in class on a novel that they had read as part of the course. After the pre-tests, the students were divided into three groups. Two groups received F*on*F instruction, alternating between deductive and inductive techniques and the third was a control group that did not receive F*on*F instruction but were provided noticing opportunities.

4.4.1   Pre-test

The purpose of the pre-test was to measure the students' abilities to use the possessive *s* versus the plural *s,* and *there-their-they're*-homophones. Also included on the test were *to-too*-homophones but these were not analyzed for the study. The test was constructed so that the students could show their ability in using the forms in question, albeit in a structured and measurable manner, without presenting them with instances of their use. These tests require students to differentiate between the spellings and/or apostrophe usage of the forms and to choose the correct one depending on the context in which each one is presented.

The test is presented in the form of a cloze exercise where an incomplete text is presented to the students on paper. An instructor dictates the story of *Goldilocks* to the students and they are

required to fill in the missing words. Words containing the plural, the singular- and plural possessive forms of *bear (bears, bear's and bears')* are missing. The gap for the plural *s* usage was included as some students confuse the possessive *s* ending with plural *s* and insert an apostrophe in the latter. Three gaps in the cloze pertain to the usage of an *s*-ending, with or without an apostrophe. One gap calls for a plural *s* (bears), another calls for the possessive *s* in a singular word (bear's) and finally, there is one that requires the possessive *s* ending to a plural word, requiring an apostrophe in the end of the word (bears') Also, the homophones *there*, *their* and *they're* are left out of the text. The use of each is required twice, with six gaps in all appearing in the test for this form.

4.5   Pre-test administration

The pre-test (appendix 8.1 and 8.2) administration was conducted in the following manner.

The instructor presented the students with the assignment and gave instructions on its completion, without mentioning what was being tested or that the missing words would sound the same but differentiate in their spelling depending on what was being referred to. Students were asked to write in the missing word as it was read. The instructor paused as needed in the diction and repeated gapped sentences. Sentences were also reread when prompted by students. The dictation took around 3 minutes with pauses for writing. No comprehension questions arose during testing.

The pre-test and post-test were not a part of the formal curriculum of the course and their outcomes did not affect the students' grades.

4.6   Post-test

The purpose of the post-test was to evaluate the effects of the inductive/deductive treatments on

the two treatment groups by looking at the development of form usage. The control group did not

complete the post-test but their essays served the purpose of providing data on any change in

target form usage during the study's period. The post-test is identical to the pre-test and

administered to the students four weeks after the pre-test and in the same manner as the pre-test.

No comprehension questions arose during the testing.

After the post-test had been collected from the students they were shown the correct forms

for each gap of the test. Some rules governing the form usage were reviewed when questions

arose.

4.7   Student essays

The purpose of the essays was to analyze students' writing for use of the forms in question to

determine rate of long-term retention of F*on*F compared to the control group.

Each student wrote a 300-400 word literary essay as part of the course's curriculum. No

instructions were given to use the forms so natural occurrence varied. The essays were written on

topics that had been chosen and discussed in the days before. The topics were derived from a

novel that the students had read in the weeks leading up to the writing and required them to

discuss the characters of the novel. Writing about characters provides abundant opportunities for

usage of the possessive *s,* as it is a fairly well established convention to use it to denote something

belonging to a person, instead of the pronoun *of*, used more for inanimate objects.

The students wrote the essay by hand in a 90 minute class period. They were allowed

English-English dictionaries and a copy of the novel on which they were writing. They were

instructed to use formal language, sans contractions, so the form *they're* should not appear. The

use of the non-contracted form, *they are*, was not analyzed. This could not be avoided due to the school curriculum's emphasis on formal register in essay writing.

The use of the essays as a spontaneous and relatively autonomous output to determine retention of the forms tested is meant to show implicit acquisition of the forms. Of course, the situation is not a completely naturally occurring language environment as the students are in a classroom where they have been given specific instructions for language usage, register and content. Some theorists consider any contrived testing situation as inadequate and therefore question the validity of results from such testing situations. However, these students are being prepared for very similar language situations as the ones used to attain the essay, i.e. for the writing of English in a formal and academic setting. So, the circumstances may be considered practical and authentic in the specific context.

4.8   Treatments material

After the pre-test had been administered, the instruction of the forms commenced, starting with the possessive *s* followed by *there*-homophones.

Group A began by receiving the deductive treatment and was initially presented with a slide that contained rules governing the possessive *s* followed by some examples of usage. (See 8.8 in appendix) The instructor read though the information and answered questions if they arose. The students were then asked to complete an exercise (appendix 8.9) that practices rewriting sentences to contain the possessive *s*. The second half of the exercise required them to identify some instances of either possessive *s* or contraction *s* (i.e. *John's saying he can't go).*

Group B, who received the inductive treatment for the possessive *s*, was shown a short text on a slide, which was read to them. The text contained several instances of the possessive *s*; singular and plural nouns, irregular plural and a name ending in s. They were then each given a

sheet of paper with other examples of usage of the possessive *s* and some blank lines underneath. They were asked to peruse the text on the slide and study the examples on their page and then write down their own theories of the rules governing the use of the possessive *s*. It is assumed that many of them have at some point received instruction on these forms before. They were therefore encouraged orally by the instructor to draw upon previous knowledge and lessons they might have had in the past on the subject. Furthermore, they were instructed to note if any of the examples on the slide went against the general rule. This was the case in one instance. The students had about 10 minutes to ponder the input and come up with their own version of the rule. They were allowed to collaborate with one another during that time and the instructor provided helpful hints as scaffolding if prompted. After the time given, the students were asked to volunteer examples of answers on what they had come up with. Many showed explicit knowledge of the rules, in part or whole. Some were able to identify the example of the exception to the rule but were unable to articulate the reason behind it. Only a few seemed altogether unable to identify any part of the rule, whether because of lack of motivation or knowledge. The instructor added and briefly discussed what information was missing and finally, the students were instructed to add that extra information to their own articulation of the rule.

A week later the treatments were reversed when *there*-homophones were taught. Group A was presented with the forms inductively, beginning with form-containing input, followed by a call for them to write up their own version of the rules behind the usage of different *there*-homophones (appendix 8.6). With the guidance of the instructor, the rules were then articulated on the whiteboard and the students´ questions answered. Most, if not all, of the students were able to identify the difference and correct usage of the three homophones. Group B was taught the rules governing *there*-homophones in a deductive manner and shown the very same text as group A

(appendix 8.4). Again, they were given a short exercise of choosing between the three homophones in the context of some short sentences (appendix 8.5).

A noticing exercise was prepared for the control group (appendix 8.10). They had previously read the novel and were preparing to write the essay connected to it that was used for data gathering. I put together an open answer cloze to encourage a broad use of adjectives. The cloze also required a thorough understanding of the novel in order to complete it in a meaningful manner. Embedded in the sentences of the exercise were several instances of the possessive *s* and *there*-homophones. Forms that the students were most likely to use in the essay were included for noticing purposes, i.e. names of the novel's main characters were shown in the possessive form (i.e. *Christopher's mother*). Students were not instructed to take note of the forms nor were they given explicit information about them. The instructor helped the students when prompted in completing the cloze and students read some sentences aloud at the end of the period to give examples of how they completed it. The exercise required thorough reading of the form-containing sentences, optimizing the chances of noticing.

4.9   Data analysis

In this section I will discuss how the test instruments were analyzed for data. Data from students who did not complete both the pre- and post-tests and the essay was discarded.

4.9.1   The pre-test and post-test analysis

Incorrect answers on the pre- and post-tests were noted and counted. The reason why the number of incorrect answers was chosen as a marker of mastery rather than correct ones was that they show more accurately the actual mastery of the forms. Each form only has a limited number of possible correct expressions in output. *There*-homophones have three expressions

(there/their/they're) and the s-ending nouns also has three expressions (apostrophe before or after the *s* in the possessive and no apostrophe in the plural). A student that has not reached target accuracy of the form is therefore quite likely to happen upon a correct usage. In contrast, incorrect use is a more reliable sign of lack of mastery. The pre- and post-test contained four gaps for missing possessive *s* and plural *s* forms. One form was left out of the scoring process due to an error in recital. One gap required the students to use the singular possessive *s*, another the plural possessive *s* and the third gap was a simple plural with no apostrophe needed. Each student was given a score of incorrect answers out of three. There were six instances of *there/their/they're* forms missing in the test's text, two for each word. Each student received a score of incorrect answers out of six.

Data from pre-test and post-test was used to answer research question 1 which pertained to whether Icelandic secondary school students benefited from form-focused instruction. The pre-test is meant to establish that teaching linguistic features is indeed necessary among Icelandic secondary school students of English by showing that the two forms have not been mastered at the level of accuracy required for academic and professional purposes. Moreover, it provides data for pre-treatment analysis, necessary to establish a baseline before discussing question 2 on whether F*on*F improved students' retention to a greater extent than those students who only received noticing opportunities.

The data from the post-test was used to answer research question 3; *when comparing inductive and deductive teaching methods within a FonF-based classroom, which has a greater effect on students' short term ability to use said form correctly?* This will be answered by looking at post-test scores and conducting a two tailed t-test on the difference of mastery of the two forms between treatment group A and B.

4.9.2 Essay data analysis

The texts of the student essays were examined for the use of the forms in question. Each incident of usage was noted and whether or not the correct form of the word was chosen.

The essays' main purpose was to answer research question 2*; does focusing on form improve students' retention to a greater extent than for those students who only received noticing opportunities?* This will be answered by looking at the rate of incorrect usage in the students' writing and by conducting a two tailed t-test to show significance of difference between the treatment groups and the control group.

To answer research question 4 on which of the two forms being taught seem better suited to F*on*F instruction, the essay data will be used. A two-tailed t-test will be conducted to examine if there is a difference in the expected drop in incorrect usage between the two forms after formal instruction and a 2-4 week interval.

5   Results

In this section I will present results of statistical analysis from the pre-test, post-test and the

students' essays and reveal the outcome of tests for statistical significance.

The purpose of the pre-test was to establish a baseline of proficiency of *there*-homophones

and the possessive *s*. For *there*-homophones the results of the pre-test show that 46,8% of the

students who completed the pre-test made no mistakes and 53,2% made at least one mistake,

indicating around half have not reached target accuracy for *there-their-they're* homophones. No

students completed all six gaps of *there*-homophone in the test incorrectly.

Table 1.1 Mistakes on *there*-homophones on pre-test

Group	0 mistakes	1 mistake	2 mistakes	3 mistakes	4 mistakes	5 mistakes	6 mistakes
A (34)	22	4	3	2	3	0	0
B (38)	14	7	12	1	3	1	0
Control (39)	16	6	7	3	7	0	0

The results for the possessive *s*/plural form showed that 14,4% of all students made no

mistakes on the three possessive *s*/plural gaps of the pre-test. 85,6% made at least one mistake on

the possessive *s*/plural part of the pre-test. 4,5% of students answered all gaps incorrectly.
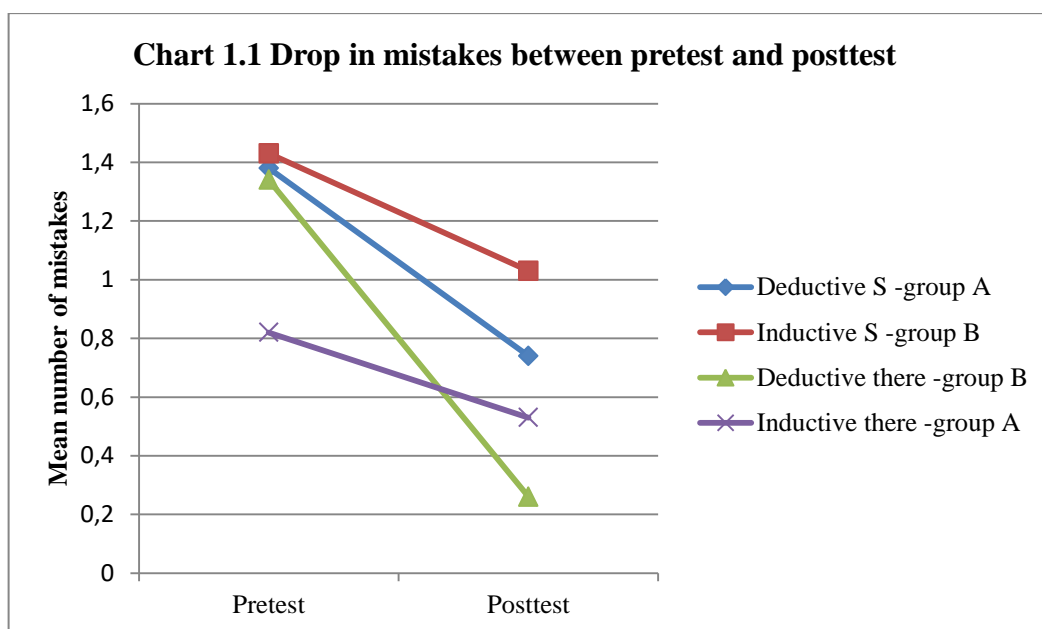
Table 1.2 Mistakes on the possessive *s* and plural *s* on pre-test

Group	0 mistakes	1 mistake	2 mistakes	3 mistakes
A	5	13	14	2
B	5	13	18	2
C (control)	6	13	19	1

In order to answer research question 1 on whether Icelandic secondary schools benefit from F*on*F instruction, the pre-test and the post-test scores of the combined treatment groups were compared. There was a significant drop in mistakes made between the two tests for both forms. For the possessive *s*, the t-value is 3.8. The p-value is .000214. The result is significant at p < .05. For the there-homophones the t-value is 3.67966. The p-value is .000331. The result is significant at p < .05.

Table 1.3 Average incorrect answers per group, instrument and treatment

		Pretest	Post-test	Essay (natural occurrence of mistakes)
Possessive *s*	Group A deductive	1,38	0,74	0,96
Incorrect answers out of 3	Group B inductive	1,45	1,03	1,16
	Group C control	1,46	X	1,56
There-homophones	Group A inductive	0,82	0,53	0
Incorrect answers out of 6	Group B deductive	1,34	0,26	0
	Group C control	1,46	X	0,07

Chart 1.1 Drop in mistakes between pretest and posttest

Research question 2, on whether focusing on form improved students' retention to a greater extent than those students who only received noticing opportunities, was answered by conducting a two-tailed t-test on the essay data. The number of naturally occurring mistakes of the combined treatment groups was compared to those of the control group for each form. The two treatment groups made on average 1,28 errors when using the possessive *s* in their essays while the control group made 1,56. Although the treatment groups made fewer possessive *s* mistakes on their essays, the difference was not statistically significant on a t-test at $p < .05$. The t-value was -0.72973. The p-value was .467065. For *there*-homophones, the treatment groups made zero mistakes on their essays but the control group made 0,07 mistakes. The t-value was -1.7581. The p-value was .081438. The result is not significant at $p < .05$.

To answer research question 3, on whether deductive or inductive teaching techniques proved more conducive to increase form accuracy short term, post-test scores of treatment groups A and B were compared via a two-tailed t-test. When post-test scores of groups A and B on the possessive *s* were compared, where group A was taught through a deductive teaching technique

and B was taught through the inductive technique, group A showed a greater reduction in mistakes. On a two tailed t-test the result was not significant at $p < .05$. The t-value was -1.43599. The p-value was .15546. For *there*-homophones, where group A was taught inductively and group B deductively the number of mistakes also decreased more under the deductive treatment. The result was also not significant at $p < .05$. The t-value is 1.26282. The p-value is .210845.

To answer research question 4 on which of the two forms taught (*there, they're, their* homophones or the possessive *s*) seemed better suited to F*on*F instruction, data from the essay was analyzed. A two-tailed t-test was conducted to examine if the expected drop in incorrect usage after formal instruction is of significant variance between the two forms. The results were that the incorrect use of *there*-homophones dropped significantly more than the incorrect use of the possessive *s*. On the t-test the t-value was 5.49474. The p-value was $< .00001$. The result is significant at $p < .05$.

The purpose of gathering data from the test instruments was to answer the research questions. The results were that 1) F*on*F is a conducive way in improving accuracy. 2) F*on*F instruction, while resulting in a more accurate usage of form, did not prove significantly superior to noticing only after a period of 2-4 weeks from instruction. 3) Deductive teaching techniques showed a greater drop in errors than inductive techniques, but the difference was not statistically significant for either form. 4) *There*-homophones showed a statistically greater drop in error over the treatment period than the possessive *s*/plural *s* forms which indicated that they may be better suited to F*on*F instruction.

6   Discussion

The data suggests that F*on*F is a productive approach to increase accuracy. Students who received

F*on*F instruction had an advantage over the control group in achieving target form accuracy, but

the difference was not statistically significant. The data does not seem to decisively favor

deductive teaching techniques over inductive ones. *There*-homophones seem better suited to F*on*F

than the possessive *s*. These findings will be presented in more detail in the following paragraphs.

The statistics from the pre-test indicate that the participants have not mastered the two

forms completely and that there is, indeed, a need for teaching them in Icelandic secondary

schools. 86% of the study's participants made at least one possessive *s* mistake on their pre-test,

54,2% made at least one mistake on *there*-homophones.

Research question 1 sought to find whether Focus on Form is a good approach to improve

correct usage of the studied forms short term. The data reveals that both the deductive and

inductive treatment groups showed a very sharp decline in mistakes between tests. This indicates

that F*on*F is beneficial short term to reach target accuracy of form. The reduction in incorrect

answers between the pre-test and the post-test was statistically significant.

The second research question sought to answer whether focusing on form improves the

students' retention to a greater extent than students who only received noticing opportunities.

Although the treatment group made fewer mistakes than the control group on their essays on both

forms, the difference was not statistically significant. However, both forms came very close to

producing statistical significance on the superiority of F*on*F over noticing. The essays were

written some weeks after the original input which should give some indication that for a form

well-suited to F*on*F, like *there*-homophones seems to be, the deductive and inductive techniques

both have positive long term effects on acquisition. No post-test was administered to the control group as measuring the effects of noticing was considered outside the scope of the study. But in retrospect it would have been interesting to see if the noticing opportunity only treatment had any effect short term. The incident of occurrence in an authentic language situation such as the essay is perhaps too low, especially for *there*-homophones, to render conclusive data. The conclusion that can be drawn from the essay data is that the two F*on*F treatments are both slightly more advantageous to noticing only in advancing form skills in the long run. However, the lack of incident of the forms in the essays may have resulted in unclear results. The essays would have had to be somewhat longer to raise the number of naturally occurring forms to obtain clearer and hopefully statistically significant results.

Research question 3 involved comparing the inductive and deductive techniques to see if one proved more effective. The deductive approach was not shown to be significantly more effective than the inductive approach on the post-test of *there*-homophones when the post-test scores were compared. The reason for this lack of significance is most likely the low number of tokens in the pre- and post-test used for data analysis. For each student, only three tokens on the tests were analyzed for the possessive *s* and six for *there*-homophones. The deficient number of tokens and high proficiency lead to a low incident of error which makes it problematic to produce significant results. This is a major weakness of the study. However, when mean number of mistakes on the pre-test are compared with those of the post-test, we can see that the deductive technique shows a much sharper reduction in mistakes. For the possessive *s*/plural *s*, errors go from an average of 1.38 out of 3 tokens on the pre-test but drop to 0,74, on the post-test, a 0,64 decrease, while the inductively taught group made 1,45 mistakes on average but 1,03 on the post-test, an average of 0,42 decrease. This tendency is clearer for *there*-homophones. The deductive technique saw a drop in error from 1,34 errors out of six tokens to 0,26, which is a 1,08 decrease.

Meanwhile the inductive technique led to a decrease in average errors per test from 0,82 out of three 0,53, a 0,29 drop. So, while the gain scores of participants taught by the deductive treatment are considerably higher on both forms to those of the inductively taught group while the end results do not reveal a significant difference.

Results suggest that these students benefit slightly more from the deductive teaching technique than the inductive one. This may be caused by the assumed fact that the deductive technique is traditionally more common in Icelandic schools and that the students are simply more used to and therefore better apt at learning through this approach.

In research question 4 I asked if one of the forms, *there*-homophones or the possessive *s* proved a better F*on*F candidate than the other. The post-test scores indicate that this is the case for *there*-homophones. The reasons behind the significant improvement of *there*-homophones usage over the possessive *s* is likely due to it being a form with fewer variants and that it is bound in meaning and orthography and not explicit grammatical knowledge, rather like the apostrophe placement in the possessive *s*. One may assume with some confidence that the majority of students do not have comprehension difficulties in dealing with the three *there*-homophones. The rule is simple, the comprehension is there and what remains is remembering the form and matching the correct form to the appropriate meaning. The significant improvement between pre-test and post-test and also the near absence of mistakes in the essay suggest that the form is particularly well suited to F*on*F instruction as the students have increasingly committed it to memory during the study.

However, 37,5% of students did not use any of the three *there*-homophones in their essays, regardless of whether they contained errors or not. The control group used more of them. They used 1.21 of *there*-homophones on average, while the treatment groups used 0.76 (group A) and 1.18 (group B). Not a single treatment group student used *there*-homophones incorrectly in their

essays and only two students in the control group. Therefore, there may be difficulties in drawing

definitive conclusions from the data. The difference in the incident of incorrect usage was not

statistically significant. The frequency of occurrence is very low and a more sizable sample of

authentic output may be needed to realistically evaluate the effects of treatment. While one can

say with some confidence, and with evidence from the post-test, that *there*-homophones are well

suited to F*on*F, the lack of occurrence in the essays leads to a less assertive claim that they may be

superior F*on*F candidates over the possessive *s* in the long run.

An interesting find was that the treatment groups were significantly less likely to use the

possessive *s* in their essay writing than the control group, regardless of form accuracy. Treatment

groups A and B had 19,4% of its members avoid the usage of the possessive *s* altogether while not

a single student in the control group refrained from using it. It might be that after a focused study

period, the treatment group members are more aware of the potential pitfalls of the form and avoid

it so as not to make mistakes. Indeed, it may be acceptable to opt for the possessive *of* and thus

avoid the form entirely. One must question whether this is an example of when teaching a form

can become a hindrance in the learning process if the learners are not ready to acquire it or, as is

most likely the case here, are at a stage where they are aware of the issue but have not mastered

the form. The students are conscious of pitfalls and avoid falling in to them by bypassing the form

altogether. Such avoidance strategies among SLA learners have previously been documented.

Schachter (1974) studied the use of relative clauses of some native speakers of Japanese, Chinese,

Arabian and Persian who were learners of English as a foreign language. The greater problems in

using the forms among Japanese and Chinese speakers manifested not in errors but in fewer

relative clauses produced. The study concludes that a learner may avoid producing a construction

if s/he has difficulties understanding it. It is possible that this may be applied to the students of the

current study. A study by Laufer and Eliasson (1993) which was carried out among advanced

Swedish learners of English shows that avoidance behavior is seen in learners of higher

proficiency.

It is highly likely that the success of form in F*on*F instruction is not only dependent on the

complexity of said form but also length of instructional period. The fact that many students are

still showing incorrect usage of the possessive *s* on the essays may suggest that the short period of

instruction does not provide adequate scaffolding for the acquisition of the form. It may be

advantageous to see how students would fare if the treatment period was extended and more

exercises and noticing opportunities provided.

A possible limitation in the treatment is the added exercises in the deductive treatments

and not the inductive ones. The reason for adding these was to make certain that both groups spent

equal amounts of time in class dealing with the forms as parsing out rules inductively takes more

time than simple presentation by the instructor. Also, practicing a form through exercises is

traditionally a part of the deductive approach, but is not exclusive to it. Indeed, Dacoo's modality

B (2006), discussed earlier, assumes the inclusion of exercise in the inductive approach. Explicit

use of a form is likely a conductive means to help solidify it in acquisition. Providing such to one

group and not the other may create bias irrelevant to treatment. However, Craik and Lockhart

(1972) hypothesize that an increase in retention is achieved in correspondence to the depth of

which the information is processed. Teacher-led rule presentation can perhaps be considered of

less depth of processing than learners' negotiation of rule and rule transcription. So, the follow-up

exercise for the deductive group hopefully provides a deepening of processing and creates a more

equal platform for the two treatments.

The main weakness of the study is the number of tokens in the pre- and post-tests used for

data analysis. Adding to the gaps in the cloze tests would have increased the amount of data and

might have given more reliable scores as the effect of proposed typographical errors would likely

have lessened. This increased amount of data would perhaps have contributed to more statistically relevant results.

Despite the fact that some of the study's findings lack statistical relevance there are interesting points revealed by it. Firstly, focus on form works well for the student group in question, native Icelandic advanced learners of English. Secondly, there is a stronger tendency for avoidance among the F*on*F taught group than the control group. Lastly, *there*-homophones seem particularly well suited to F*on*F, more so than the possessive *s*.

6.1   Suggestions for further research and implementation of F*on*F

The matter of focus on form is under-researched in Iceland and there are several areas within it that deserve attention. Of particular interest would be to see a study of the amount of F*on*F practiced in Icelandic secondary schools and how specifically it is articulated in terms of techniques used. It would also be interesting to see other error forms that seem to persist in the fluent English usage of Icelandic students tested for F*on*F suitability. I would suggest that further research in the area of form suitability might include conditional verb tenses, *were*-homophones and the use of alternatives, such as the passive, to first person singular usage.

I believe that Icelandic secondary school teachers may benefit from internal support to achieve a more F*on*F-orientated classroom imbedded in a meaning based approach. Lack of appropriate materials is a known factor in this matter. Iceland is and will remain a small market and teachers, at times, make do with adapting foreign textbooks and material to meet their students' needs. A common, teacher led database with academic texts, vocabulary and comprehension exercises and material for focusing on form may be a feasible option.

7   Conclusion

In this study I have explored techniques to convey problematic linguistic forms to Icelandic secondary school students. I have looked at the historical and theoretical context of different approaches and reviewed studies connected to them. Focusing on form within a primarily communicative setting has gathered significant support through research. Different procedures within F*on*F include the inductive and deductive teaching techniques, which have previously not been researched in an Icelandic context. I selected to study the deductive and inductive techniques and compare the results of using the different procedures in my teaching in hopes of advancing the platform on which I and my colleagues make our curriculum choices.

My recommendation to secondary level teachers of English in Iceland is to teach a few carefully chosen and relevant forms through explicit, F*on*F instruction. There are indications that doing so through deductive techniques is slightly more advantageous than inductively, but both approaches are conductive to increased acquisition and the difference is not statistically relevant. The more formal simplicity of the constructs and fewer variations, the better it seems suited to F*on*F instruction. Both treatment groups showed improvement beyond that of the control group, which should strengthen previous conclusions on the superiority of F*on*F over a purely meaning-focused approach.

Icelandic students receive considerable English input from an early age outside of the classroom. This English is informal in nature and young Icelanders are quite proficient in everyday English used in entertainment and the media, especially in receptive, context-based language abilities. While English fluency is common, the vocabulary and linguistic accuracy of formal, academic English is lacking. This is supported with studies on language problems faced by tertiary students at Icelandic universities. Within this gap in knowledge and skill lies the greatest opportunity of the secondary school's English classroom, to advance the target accuracy

of formal English in written language. While Icelandic students have been able to master many forms before reaching secondary level of schooling, and perhaps most of them through communicative means, there are a handful of forms that they have not succeeded in attaining despite plentiful input from within and outside of the classroom. Much of the extramural input is aural. This may cause a few forms which variants can only be seen in transcription, to stubbornly remain outside target accuracy. Focus on Form is therefore a useful approach in bridging the gap of linguistic features.

According to research, in some ways, an environment like the Icelandic secondary school provides promising circumstances for the occasional Focus on Form. The students are mature, their proficiency advanced and they have received plenty of authentic input that ensures comprehension of forms. However, there are indications that Icelandic teachers have yet to adopt a broadly communicative approach. This is a field that needs more research and funding as supportive material, relevant to the Icelandic context, is scarce.

A few weeks ago I watched as a former student of mine presented the results of the Icelandic jury in front of 200 million viewers at the Eurovision Song Contest. He did so in English, flawlessly of course, for which I take no credit. But it led me to think about the topic of credibility and how I am continually trying to help my students avoid situations where they could make awkward mistakes during important moments. Such lack of skill may be linguistically inconsequential. But for better or worse, their professional and academic image and success will rely partly on their English proficiency. This motivates me to assist my students in advancing their receptive and productive academic vocabulary, increase written and oral fluency and to tackle a few illusive grammatical forms. I believe this is, and will increasingly be, a fundamental life skill for my students.

8 Appendix

8.1   Text for recitation of cloze test

Goldilocks
Once upon a time, there were three bears who lived together in a pretty house in the woods. One day their porridge was too hot to eat so they went for a walk while it cooled. While they were away a little girl called Goldilocks went for a walk in the forest. Soon, she came upon the bears' home. She knocked and when no one answered, she walked right in. She wondered where the inhabitants were. "They're probably off to work" she thought.

On the table in the kitchen, there were three bowls of porridge. Goldilocks was hungry. She tasted the porridge from the first bowl.
"This porridge is too hot!" she exclaimed.
So, she tasted the porridge from the second bowl.
"This porridge is too cold," she said
So, she tasted the last bowl of porridge.
"Ahhh, this porridge is just right," she said happily and she ate it all up.
After she'd eaten the three bears' breakfasts she decided she was feeling a little tired. So, she walked into the living room where she saw three chairs. Goldilocks first sat in Papa bear's chair to rest her feet.
"This chair is too big!" she exclaimed.
So she sat in the second chair.
"This chair is too big, too!" she whined.
So she tried the last and smallest chair.
"Ahhh, this chair is just right," she sighed. But just as she settled down into the chair to rest, it broke into pieces!
Goldilocks then went upstairs to the bedroom. She lay down in the first bed, but it was too hard. The second bed was too soft. Then she lay down in Baby bear's bed and it was just right.

As she was sleeping, the three bears came home.
"Someone's been eating my porridge," growled the Papa bear.
"Someone's been eating my porridge," said the Mama bear.
"Someone's been eating my porridge and they ate it all up!" cried the Baby bear.
"Someone's been sitting in my chair," growled the Papa bear.
"Someone's been sitting in my chair," said the Mama bear.
"Someone's been sitting in my chair and they've broken it all to pieces," cried the Baby bear.

When they got upstairs to their bedroom, Papa bear growled, "Someone's been sleeping in my bed,"
"Someone's been sleeping in my bed, too" said the Mama bear
"Someone's been sleeping in my bed and they're still there!" exclaimed Baby bear.

Just then, Goldilocks woke up and saw the three bears. Goldilocks hurried down the stairs, opened the door, and ran away into the forest. She never dared to go walking there again.

8.2   Cloze test

Name:_____

Fill in the missing words while you listen to the story being read

Once upon a time, _____ were three bears who lived together in a pretty house in the woods. One day _____ porridge was _____ hot to eat so they went for a walk while it cooled. While they were away a little girl called Goldilocks came upon the _____home. She knocked and, when no one answered, she walked right in. She wondered where the inhabitants were thinking "_____ probably off _____ work."

On the table in the kitchen, there were three bowls of porridge. Goldilocks was hungry. She tasted the porridge from the first bowl.
"This porridge is _____ hot!" she exclaimed.
So, she tasted the porridge from the second bowl.
"This porridge is too cold," she said
Then, she tasted the last bowl of porridge and found it just right so she ate it all up.
After she'd eaten the three _____ breakfasts she decided she was feeling a little tired. So, she walked into the living room where she saw three chairs. Goldilocks first sat in Papa _____ chair to rest her feet.
"This chair is too big!" she exclaimed.
"This chair is too big, _____!" she whined about the second chair.
So she tried the last and smallest chair.
"Ahhh, this chair is just right," she sighed. But just as she settled down into the chair _____ rest, it broke into pieces!
Goldilocks then went upstairs to the bedroom. She lay down in the first bed, but it was too hard. The second bed was too soft. Then she lay down in Baby bear's bed and it was just right.

As she was sleeping, the three bears came home.
"Someone's been eating my porridge," growled the Papa bear.
"Someone's been eating my porridge," said the Mama bear.
"Someone's been eating my porridge and they ate it all up!" cried the Baby bear.
"Someone's been sitting in my chair," growled the Papa bear.
"Someone's been sitting in my chair," said the Mama bear.
"Someone's been sitting in my chair and they've broken it all _____ pieces," cried the Baby bear.

When they got upstairs to _____ bedroom, Papa bear growled, "Someone's been sleeping in my bed."
"Someone's been sleeping in my bed, _____" said the Mama bear
"Someone's been sleeping in my bed and _____ still there!" exclaimed Baby bear.

Just then, Goldilocks woke up and saw the three _____. Goldilocks hurried down the stairs, opened the door, and ran away into the forest. She never dared to go walking _____ again.

8.3   Inductive there introduction

Sound the same but are different!

Their love of music means that they're always going to concerts. There are many artists that they want to see live. Yesterday they went to pick up their Justin Timberlake tickets at the post office. But they weren't there yet. They're hoping to find them later.

Write your own rule for when to use their, they're or there:

Their is used to talk about _____

_____

They're is used _____

_____

There is used to talk about _____

_____

8.4 Deductive there introduction

Sound the same but are different!

They're = They + are (Informal! No contractions in formal English)

Their = belonging to or owned by two or more

There = to talk about a place or location

Their love of music means that they're always going to concerts. There are many artists that they want to see live. Yesterday they went to pick up their Justin Timberlake tickets at the post office. But they weren't there yet. They're hoping to find them later.

8.5   There exercise

Choose a, b or c

1. My friends are worried about ??? dog.
   A) their   B) there   C) they're

2. We'll worry about it when we get ???
   A) their   B) there   C) they're

3. Were ??? any cookies left?
   A) their   B) there   C) they're

4. ??? coming home this afternoon.
   A) Their   B) There   C) They're

5. I borrowed ??? house for a few weeks.
   A) their   B) there   C) they're

8.6 Inductive possessive *s* introduction

Notice where we put a comma and/or an s to show ownership

Kevin had always been fascinated with drag queens.

He had seen a drag queen's shoes as a young boy and loved how outrageously big and colourful they were.

Once, he had been back stage at his friend Ellis's theatre and tried on some drag queens' dresses.

Marlow came in as Kevin was zipping up a wonderfully pink drag queen's dress and looked confused:

"What in Jesus' name are you playing at man? A man should wear men's clothes!" Marlow said.

But Kevin laughed it off and told his friend not to worry. "What you wear doesn't change who you are inside," he said.

8.7 Inductive possessive *s* rule formation

Come up with **your own rule** for the possessive S

Examples of usage:
My neighbour's rat
My neighbour's rats
My neighbours' rat
My neighbours' rats

When do we put a comma before the s?

When do we put the comma after the s?

Exceptions to the rule!

When do we add a comma to a name but no s?

What other exceptions are there?

Possessive 's

When we want to show that something belongs to somebody or something, we usually add **'s** to a singular noun and an apostrophe **'** to a plural noun, for example:

- **the queen's show** (one queen)

- **the queens' show** (two or more queens)

Notice that the number of shows does not matter. The structure is influenced by the possessor and not the possessed.

	one show	**more than one show**
one queen	the queen's show	the queen's shows
more than one queen	the queens' show	the queens' shows

The structure can be used for a whole phrase:

- **the man next door's** dead rat (the dead rat of *the man next door*)
- **the Queen of England's** poodles (the poodles of *the Queen of England*)

Possessive **'s** with names:

- Who took Klara's pen?
- I have never been inside Pálmi's office
- The Earth's circumference

When a name ends in **s**, we usually treat it like any other singular noun, and add **'s**:

- Ásdís's class

But it is possible (especially with older, classical names) to just add the apostrophe **'**:

- Who was Jesus' father?

Irregular Plurals

Some nouns have irregular plural forms without **s** (man > men). To show possession, we usually add **'s** to the plural form of these nouns:

singular noun	plural noun
my child's dog	my children's dog
the woman's work	the women's work
the mouse's cage	the mice's cage
a person's rights	people's rights

8.9   Possessive *s* exercise

The Possessive

Rewrite the sentences and include the possessive s ('s, s' or ') in each:

The shirt of Elly.

_____

The people of Moses.

_____

The sisters of Angela.

_____

The car of the family.

_____

The table of Lisa.

_____

The numbers of the winners.

_____

The books of the men.

_____

The bikes of the women.

_____

The food of the mice.

_____

Write *P* if *'s* = Possession.
Write *is* if *'s* = *is*.

1) Peter's an engineer. _____

2) George's wife is forty-six.

_____

3) My mother's house is very

beautiful. _____

4) It's very hot today. _____

5) My father's in America at the

moment. _____

8.10 Noticing exercise

The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-time

Siobhan has been asked to write a report on the Boone family and their relationship, please help her find appropriate adjectives to describe them to fill in the blanks.

Do not use the words "good" "better" "very" or "bad."

Do not use the same word twice.

The Boon family has been going through some _____ times lately and they're still not out of the woods.

Ed is a _____ man. He is a _____ parent but there are things that he could improve on in how he deals with his son. Their relationship is quite _____.

Christopher's mother is a rather_____ person which makes her a _____ mother. Like so many parents she is still struggling with this _____ role.

On the plus side, Christopher's character is _____. But he has _____ communication skills, which causes difficulties in making friends. He is still unsure of his parents' capability of being _____ people.

His teachers' assessment of his abilities indicate that he will likely be _____ in his adult life. They're not worried about his academic career as he is _____.

There will likely be difficulties in the Boone family's _____ future but I am confident that Christopher and his parents will be _____ if they keep working towards their goals as they seem to be doing now.

Ms Siobhan

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