Comparing Focus on Form and Focus on FormS in Second-Language Vocabulary Learning

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Comparing Focus on Form and Focus on FormS in Second-Language Vocabulary Learning

Batia Laufer

Abstract: The study compares the effectiveness of Focus on Form (FonF) and Focus on FormS (FonFs) approaches in learning new L2 words by 158 high-school learners of English as L2. In phase 1 of the study, the FonF group read a text containing the target words, discussed it in small groups, and answered comprehension questions. The FonFs group studied the target words as discrete items with their meanings and examples of usage. In phase 2 of the study, all learners received the target words with their meanings and studied them for 15 minutes for a quiz. They were tested immediately after each phase, and two weeks later.

Results revealed significantly higher scores for FonFs group after phase 1, but the difference disappeared after phase 2. As learners cannot be expected to study all vocabulary for tests, form-focused instruction – and particularly FonFs – is claimed to be indispensable for L2 vocabulary learning.

Résumé : L'efficacité des approches centrées sur la forme (CF) a été comparée à celle des approches centrées sur les formeS (CFS) pour l'apprentissage de nouveaux mots dans une langue seconde, au cours d'une étude comptant 158 étudiants de niveau secondaire apprenant l'anglais comme langue seconde. Pour la phase 1, le groupe CF a lu un texte contenant les mots ciblés, en a discuté en petits groupes et a répondu à des questions de compréhension. Le groupe CFS a étudié les mots ciblés en tant qu'éléments distincts avec leurs significations et des exemples d'usage. Pour la phase 2, tous les apprenants ont reçu les mots ciblés et leurs significations, et ils les ont étudiés pendant 15 minutes pour un examen. Ils ont été évalués immédiatement après chaque phase, puis deux semaines plus tard. Les résultats ont révélé des scores notablement plus élevés dans le groupe CFS après la phase 1, mais cette différence avait disparu après la phase 2. Comme on ne peut s'attendre à ce que les apprenants étudient tout le vocabulaire pour les examens, une approche centrée sur la forme, en particulier CFS, serait indispensable aux personnes qui apprennent le vocabulaire d'une langue seconde.

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Background

The realization of applied linguists that second language learners cannot achieve high levels of grammatical competence from entirely meaning-centred instruction has led them to propose that learners can benefit from form-focused instruction (FFI). Two major types of FFI have been discussed in the literature: Focus on Form (FonF) and Focus on FormS (FonFs). Focus on Form attends to linguistic elements during a communicative activity (DeKeyser, 1998; Ellis, 2001; Long, 1991; Norris & Ortega, 2000). The term *form* includes the function that a particular form performs. For example, attention to the 'form' *-ed* subsumes the realization that *-ed* signals an action performed in the past. Originally, Long defined FonF as incidental, that is, employed only when a learner need arises, and implicit so as not to interfere with interaction. Later, however, these requirements were modified to include (a) planned FonF designed to elicit specific linguistic forms during a communicative activity (Ellis, Basturkmen, & Loewen, 2002), and (b) a range of techniques, from implicit (e.g., recasts, input enhancement) to more explicit (e.g., indication that an error has been made, or stating a rule (Doughty and Varela, 1998)). According to the proponents of FonF, all FonF tasks are expected to occur within a communicative task environment.

Focus on Form has been contrasted with Focus on FormS (FonFs), teaching discrete linguistic structures in separate lessons in a sequence determined by syllabus writers. The distinction between the two, according to Ellis (2001), has to do with how students view themselves and the language: In a FonFs approach, students view themselves as learners of a language and the language as the object of study; in FonF, on the other hand, learners view themselves as language users and language is viewed as a tool for communication.

The distinction between FonF and FonFs has been related to the teaching of grammar. But the two instructional approaches can be adapted easily to vocabulary learning and teaching. FonF attends to lexical items (single words and multi-word units) within a communicative task environment, since these lexical items are necessary for the completion of a communicative or an authentic language task. FonFs, on the other hand, teaches and practises discrete lexical items in non-communicative, non-authentic language tasks. Similar to Ellis's (2001) view of grammar, the FonF approach to vocabulary views the words attended to as tools for task completion, and the FonFs approach treats the words attended to as the objects of study.

Here are some examples of FonF and FonFs in vocabulary. Learners may need to understand 10 unknown words when they read a text or

engage in a group discussion. In this case, looking the words up in a dictionary is Focus on Form, since these words are attended to in order to complete a communicative/authentic language task. However, the same 10 words may be presented with their L1 translations in a decontextualized list and supplemented by two vocabulary exercises: (a) match each word in column A to its definition in column B, (b) fill in the words in 10 sentences, one word in each sentence. In these two tasks, attending to the words is not connected with performing a communicative or authentic language activity. Here the words are the objects of study and not the tools of language use.

Theoretically, Focus on Form can be related to the following hypotheses: noticing (Schmidt, 1990, 1994), limited processing capacity (VanPatten, 1990), and 'pushed output' (Swain, 1985; Swain & Lapkin, 1995). According to these perspectives, learners should consciously notice forms and the meanings that these forms realize so that some of the input can be converted into intake. Since learners have a limited capacity for simultaneously processing L2 meaning and form, they will naturally attend to meaning rather than to form while communicating, and it is up to the teacher to draw their attention to form. Moreover, when learners are 'pushed' to stretch their linguistic resources, they are forced into using a more syntactic processing mode than they would in comprehension; they notice elements in the L2 and modify their output. On the other hand, FonFs can be justified theoretically in terms of skill acquisition with its three stages. The first one is declarative – or factual – knowledge. The second stage entails proceduralized knowledge, which is responsible for knowing what is to be done with language data. The third stage is automatization of procedural knowledge – using language according to rules without thinking about them (Anderson, 1982; Bley-Vroman, 1988; DeKeyser, 1998).

In spite of the justifications of both types of FFI above, the FonFs approach has been criticized by most proponents of FonF as old fashioned, synthetic, unnecessary, and generally ineffective. For example, Doughty and Varela (1998) and Ellis et al. (2002) object to the notion of FonFs and claim that even planned FFI activities should be elicited in the context of meaning-centred language use. These claims, which have been made regarding grammatical structures, have been criticized by Sheen (1996, 2005). In his studies comparing FonF and FonFs instruction of selected structures, the latter yielded better results. He admits that one study cannot demonstrate the superiority of FonFs; nevertheless, he states that it shows that FonFs should not be dismissed.

Form-focused instruction has not received much attention in vocabulary research. One reason may lie in the persisting belief of some

educationists in the 'default hypothesis' in vocabulary learning – the notion that most vocabulary in L2 is acquired from input, mainly reading input. Researchers who clearly believe in skill acquisition and who support FonFs (e.g., DeKeyser, 1998) still claim that vocabulary is acquired mainly through meaning-centred instruction. 'It is rather uncontroversial that pronunciation is relatively immune to all but the most intensive forms-focused treatment, whereas large amounts of vocabulary can be acquired with very little focus on form' (DeKeyser, 1998, p. 43).

I have argued that there is a fundamental fault in the default hypothesis (Laufer, 2003, 2005a, 2005b), and showed that none of the assumptions that underlie this position can be taken for granted. Learners do not necessarily notice unfamiliar words in the input. When they do, guessing is not always possible. If it is possible, it does not necessarily lead to the retention of the guessed word, and, finally, a necessary condition for 'picking up' words is massive exposure to the foreign language, which is hardly realistic in the classroom learning context. This position is supported by empirical studies showing that only a small number of L2 words can be 'picked up' from exposure to texts without any subsequent vocabulary practice (Day, Omura, & Hiramatsu, 1991; Horst, Cobb, & Meara, 1998; Hulstijn, 1992; Waring 2003; Zahar, Cobb & Spada, 2001). Since meaning-focused learning does not necessarily lead to a satisfactory vocabulary development, vocabulary instruction should also incorporate an FFI component.

We can find empirical evidence for the superiority of FonF over comprehension-focused learning in the following studies: De la Fuente (2002), Ellis and He (1999), Ellis, Tanaka, and Yamazaki (1994), Knight (1994), Luppesku and Day (1993), Newton (1993), and Watanabe (1997). The evidence is indirect, since these studies were not designed to specifically contrast FonF and non-FonF conditions, but to research other issues in vocabulary learning. However, in each study there was a comprehension-based condition compared with a condition that required some kind of FonF, such as dictionary work, negotiation of word meaning in the input, or output, or attention to marginal glosses. In each study, more words were gained in the FonF condition. All the studies above investigated incidental learning of vocabulary, since the participants attended to words without being aware of the forthcoming vocabulary test.

To my knowledge, no studies have been conducted to *specifically* examine FonFs in vocabulary learning. However, some studies report on learning words in isolation (Mondria & Wiersma, 2004; Prince, 1996; Qian, 1996), or with minimal context (Groot, 2000). These all had at least

one condition where learning was focused on the words as isolated items, without any related communicative activity. Results of the immediate post-tests showed that the percentage of correctly remembered target words was 67%–99% (recognition or recall of meaning), and 32%–79% (recognition or recall of the word form). On the delayed tests, the scores (in studies that provided such results) were 36%–76% and 13%–61% respectively.[1] Most of these studies adopted an intentional learning design in which participants were told in advance that their recall of new vocabulary would be tested afterwards. Vocabulary practice and learning in a computer-assisted environment can be considered a particular case of FonFs. Horst, Cobb, and Nicolae (2005) investigated vocabulary learning through the use of word banks, online dictionaries, concordances, cloze exercises, hypertexts, and self-quizzes. They found that many of the practised words were learnt both receptively and productively. The participants in the studies mentioned above were high-school learners, as well as both weak and strong university students. The results suggest that most learners could benefit from FonFs, contrary to what many proponents of communicative language teaching believe.

I am not familiar with any vocabulary studies designed to compare the effectiveness of FonF and FonFs tasks for learning new L2 words, incidentally or intentionally. In two of my papers, such comparison is indirect. In the first (Laufer 2003), the aim was to check how much vocabulary was gained from reading with marginal glosses compared with a sentence writing activity. The second (Hill & Laufer, 2003) compared the effect of reading aided by an electronic dictionary and the effect of word-selection tasks on incidental L2 vocabulary learning, task-induced amount of dictionary activity, and time on task. In both studies, the FonFs condition (sentence writing and word selection, respectively) yielded higher word-retention scores on an unexpected test of meaning recall.

The study in the present paper was designed to compare FonF and FonFs in incidental and intentional learning of new words.

The study

Aim

The aim of the study was to compare the effectiveness of FonF and FonFs tasks for learning new L2 words. Such a comparison tests whether learners benefit from attention to form only when it occurs within a communicative task environment (FonF), or whether they can benefit equally from focusing on decontextualized items (FonFs).

Research questions

The specific research questions were:

1. Will there be a significant difference between FonF and FonFs conditions in the number of unfamiliar words acquired incidentally?
2. Will a subsequent intentional learning stage of the unfamiliar words affect the difference found between the two conditions in the incidental learning stage?

Type of knowledge examined

Many researchers define lexical knowledge as the sum of interrelated 'sub-knowledges' – knowledge of a word's pronunciation and spelling, morphological knowledge, knowledge of word meaning, collocational and grammatical knowledge, connotative and associational knowledge, and the knowledge of social or other constraints to be observed in the use of the word (Nation, 1990, 2001; Richards, 1976; Ringbom, 1987). The perfect test of vocabulary knowledge should test all the above 'sub-knowledges.' However, I am not aware of any vocabulary studies that use such tests. First, administering such tests is impractical. Besides, a complete knowledge of a word develops incrementally over time. It is unlikely that after one or several exposures to a word in an experiment, learners will master all the aspects of knowledge. Finally, since words are the first and foremost units of meaning, most vocabulary tests focus on the link between word form and word meaning. They may test the recall or recognition of the meaning of a given word. Alternatively, they may test the recall or recognition of a word form for a given meaning. (For a detailed discussion of word knowledge and vocabulary tests, see Laufer & Goldstein, 2004). For these reasons, the vocabulary tests in this study focused on the form-meaning link. Acquisition has been operationalized by two tests. In one test, students were asked to provide the target word forms for their meaning in L1, and in another, to provide the meaning of the target words.

Participants

The participants were 158 high-school learners in Israel. At the time of the experiment they were Grade 11 students and had studied English for seven years. Some were native speakers of Hebrew, some of Arabic. They studied in six intact classes; all followed the same curriculum

provided by the Israeli Ministry of Education. The curriculum, which emphasizes communicative language teaching, does not provide a definite lexical syllabus. New words are encountered in texts and in tasks. Some of them are practised in exercises that appear in the textbook. There is no separate lexical component on the final test taken by high-school learners. Three classes were assigned to the FonF condition and three to FonFs. In each condition there were 79 participants; each contained speakers of Hebrew and Arabic. Though the classes were from different schools and had different teachers, they can be considered identical in the curriculum they followed (since the curriculum is geared towards a common exam set by the government). All were '5-point stream' students in municipal schools – students who had been placed in the advanced program of English language. Therefore, at the time of the experiment, all participants were similar in overall proficiency, which had been achieved through similar classroom instruction. Moreover, each class was assigned randomly to one of the two conditions. Hence no differences in learning ability were expected between students in the two conditions.

Target words

Twelve target words were selected for investigation: four nouns, four adjectives, and four verbs, which were unlikely to be familiar to the subjects. This unfamiliarity was verified in a pilot test in which 20 students of similar English proficiency who did not participate in the experiment were asked to read the text to be used in the study and underline any words whose meaning they did not know. The 12 target words were the only words that were underlined by all students. They were *indigenous* (adj.), *arduous* (adj.), *affability* (n.), *itinerary* (n.), *saunter* (v.), *boisterous* (adj.), *squander* (v.), *weave* (v.), *stunning* (adj.), *remuneration* (n.), *dusk* (n.), and *toil* (v.).

Phase 1: Incidental learning

Phase 1 of the study was designed to answer research question 1 about the effectiveness of FonF and FonFs conditions for incidental learning of vocabulary. The definitions of incidental and intentional learning are adopted from Hulstijn (2001) and Hulstijn and Laufer (2001).

> An incidental learning situation, in contrast to an intentional learning situation, is a situation in which individuals process new information without the intention to commit this information to memory … It is important to note that

> incidental learning does not mean unattended learning. Intentional vocabulary learning, on the other hand, refers to an activity aimed at committing lexical information to memory (Laufer & Hulstijn, pp. 10–11).[2]

For an extensive treatment of incidental and intentional learning, see Hulstijn, 2001.

In phase 1 of the study, participants were not told that the purpose of the experiment was vocabulary learning and that they would be tested on vocabulary. Therefore any vocabulary that was acquired during the tasks was incidental, whether learners attended to the target words or not in the tasks they performed.

Focus on Form condition

Participants in the FonF condition were exposed to the target words during a reading task. The words appeared in a text of 165 words that was written for and used in the study by Hill and Laufer (2003). The text included 93% of words that were familiar to most learners, as verified in the pilot test in which the target words were selected. Hu and Nation (2000) suggest that the learner may reach an adequate comprehension level of a text at a density of 98% familiar vocabulary, but that in intensive reading of short passages, less than 95% coverage may be suitable for developing language and the use of reading strategies. Hence, 7% of unknown vocabulary was regarded as sufficiently challenging for learners to use the dictionary. The dictionary used was a bilingualized English-English-Hebrew or English-English-Arabic dictionary recommended by the Ministry of Education. A bilingualized dictionary provides a definition of a word in English, examples of the word in use, and a translation of its meaning into the learners' L1. The participants read the text and answered five comprehension questions on it. Even though they were given the option to answer in their L1, or in English, all of them answered the questions in their L1. Answering these questions required comprehension of the target words. Here is an extract from the passage and two comprehension questions that require understanding of five target words: *indigenous*, *affability*, *remote*, *arduous*, and *itinerary*.

> The Nanu region is famous for its wonderful scenery, ancient temples and, above all, the indigenous people of Sofa. In their remote village, reached after an arduous and dusty drive, live the Sofans, with their welcoming smiles and warm affability. Few visitors, however, make this trip as it is not on the normal itinerary of most tour groups.

1. What kind of people are the Sofans?
2. What do we know about the village where the Sofans live?

Learners were advised to use the dictionary whenever they felt the need for it, but no record was made of which words they looked up, since the task was kept as authentic as possible. On completion of the task, students checked the answers with the teacher. Whenever questions were asked about individual words in the text, the teacher provided a brief explanation.

Focus on FormS condition

The FonFs group did not read the text, but received a list of the 12 target words with their translations and explanations in English. The teacher went over the list and provided any additional information she or the learners wanted. Then students worked on two word-focused exercises. During the exercises they had the word list with them and could refer to it. One exercise required them to choose the correct meaning of the word from four options, as in the following example:

indigenous

a. quiet	b. dependent on
c. originating in	d. shy

The other exercise consisted of 12 gapped sentences. Participants were required to complete each sentence with one word from the list of the target words, as in the following example:

The Indian people are _____ inhabitants of America.

Scoring

On completion of the task, class and teacher checked the answers, and clarifications were provided when students required them. Time on task was kept identical in the two conditions. At the end of the respective tasks, all materials were collected, and an unexpected test was given to the group. Learners were required to provide the meaning for the 12 target words in English or in their L1. Each correct translation/explanation received two points, an incorrect translation or a blank was given no points, and a semantically approximate explanation/translation received one point. An example of an approximate answer for *weave* is *to make cloth*, while the explanation provided on the list of the target words was *to make threads into material … to twist or bind.* Individual

word scores were added up for each student. The maximum score was 24, which meant that a student who received 24 would have provided the precise meanings for all 12 target words.

Results of incidental acquisition study

Table 1 presents the results which answer research question one about the difference between FonF and FonFs conditions when new words are acquired incidentally. As can be seen from Table 1, the FonFs group outperformed FonF group, and the difference as measured by a *t* test for independent samples was significant (t [156] = 7.02, $p < 0.0001$).

TABLE 1
Incidental acquisition scores (maximum = 24)

	N	*M*	*SD*
Reading + dictionary use (FonF)	79	11.2 (46.62%)	4.95
List + word-focused tasks (FonFs)	79	17.2 (71.63%)	5.75
Difference		6 (25%)***	

*** $p < 0.0001$

Phase 2: Intentional acquisition

The aim of part 2 of the study was to examine how a subsequent intentional learning stage of the unfamiliar words would affect the difference found between the two conditions in the incidental learning stage. Following phase 1, all participants (in FonF and FonFs conditions) received a list of the 12 target words with definitions of meaning, examples, and translations. The two phases of the study were carried out in a double lesson of 90 minutes, hence intentional learning followed incidental learning immediately. Participants were asked to spend 15 minutes on memorizing the words and their meanings for an upcoming test. After students had completed memorization, the lists were collected and the participants received the first test. In this test, L1 translations of the target words were presented and the learners had to provide the target L2 words, hence this was a test of active knowledge in which the word forms had to be recalled. When the test was completed, test sheets were collected and a second test was administered. This test was identical to the test in phase 1. It was a test of passive knowledge in which the L2 target words had to be translated into L1 or explained in English.

The scoring of the L1–L2 test (active knowledge) was as follows: Two points were given for a completely correct form, one point for the correct

word with a spelling error that did not interfere with the recognition of the word (e.g., *indiginous* for *indigenous*), and no points for a blank or an incorrect word. The scoring of L2–L1 test was the same as in phase 1 of the study. Each correct translation/explanation received two points, incorrect translation or a blank was given no points, and a semantically approximate explanation/translation received one point. The same two tests were repeated two weeks later.

Results of intentional acquisition study

Tables 2, 3, and 4 present the results that answer research question two about the effect of a subsequent intentional learning stage on the difference between the number of words acquired in FonF and FonFs conditions. Table 2 presents the results of the immediate post-tests. The difference between the two conditions in the L2–L1 test was not significant (t [156] = -0.27, p = 0.78), nor was it significant in the L1–L2 test (t [156] = 1.89, p = 0.06).

Table 3 presents the results of the delayed post-tests. The difference between the two conditions in the L2–L1 test was not significant (t [156] = -0.23, p = 0.82), nor was it significant in the L1–L2 test (t [156] = 0.73, p = 0.47).

TABLE 2
Intentional learning scores, immediate post-tests (maximum = 24)

	N	L1 > L2 *M*	*SD*	L2 > L1 *M*	*SD*
Reading + dictionary use FonF	79	14.3 (59.58%)	6.3	21.15 (88.13%)	5.2
List + word-focused tasks FonFs	79	16.2 (67.5 %)	6.3	20.96 (87.3 %)	4.5
Difference		1.9 (8%)		0.2 (0.8%)	

TABLE 3
Intentional learning scores, delayed post-tests (maximum = 24)

	N	L1 > L2 *M*	*SD*	L2 > L1 *M*	*SD*
Reading + dictionary use FonF	79	**12.3 (51.3%)**	6.8	**14.98 (62.4%)**	7.6
List + word-focused tasks FonFs	79	**11.3 (47 %)**	6.7	**14.69 (61.2 %)**	8.5
Difference		1 (4%)		0.3 (1.2%)	

TABLE 4
Incidental and intentional acquisition (L2–L1 tests) (maximum = 24)

	Reading + dictionary FonF	List + word-focused tasks FonFs	Difference
Incidental learning	11.2 (46.62%)	17. 2 (71.63%)	6 (25%) ***
Intentional learning, immediate test	21.15 (88.13%)	20.96 (87.3%)	0.19 (1.1%)
Delayed test	14.98 (62.4%)	14.69 (61.2%)	0.29 (1.2%)

*** $p < 0.0001$

Table 3 shows that the learners remembered about 50% of the target vocabulary actively and about 60% passively even two weeks after the intentional learning stage.

Table 4 compares FonF and FonFs on the scores of three L2–L1 tests: the incidental acquisition test, the immediate test of intentional acquisition, and the delayed test. Since in the incidental condition we measured passive knowledge only, no similar comparison can be provided for L1–L2 test results.

Figures in Table 4 show the increase in passive vocabulary knowledge from the incidental to the intentional part of the study. The increase is more evident in the FonF condition because of the lower initial learning score after the incidental phase of the study.

Discussion and conclusion

The first part of the study (an experiment in incidental acquisition) demonstrated that the FonF condition yielded moderate learning results, as measured by an immediate test of recall of word meaning: translating L2 words into L1. Learners could recall the meaning of 47% of the target words. These results corroborate evidence from FonF studies that investigated grammatical structures. Loewen (2005) found that learners exposed to linguistic structures in form-focused episodes could recall, correctly or partially correctly, 50% of those structures two weeks after the exposure. This finding was particularly true if learners incorporated them in their own production. Lyster (2004) found that form-focused instruction was particularly beneficial when the teacher used prompts, as opposed to recasts or no feedback at all. In my study, the Focus on FormS condition yielded significantly higher results than Focus on Form: 72% as opposed to 47% of the word meanings were retained. However, after the second part of the study (an experiment in intentional acquisition), differences between the two conditions (FonFs and

FonF) disappeared and similar results emerged in the two groups: means were 68% and 60% on the test of immediate recall of word form (translation of L1 words into L2); 87% and 88% on immediate recall of word meaning (translation into L1); 47% and 51% on delayed recall of word forms; and 61% and 62% on delayed recall of word meaning. In view of the higher scores of FonFs in phase 1 of the study, the results of phase 2 are not surprising. Intentional learning is, by definition, a Focus on FormS activity. The words to be learnt are decontextualized and become the object of study rather than tools for communication. Therefore, in phase 2 of the study, all learners performed an FonFs task, which in turn resulted in higher learning scores than after phase 1. The other factor that must have contributed to the good results in phase 2 is the effort invested in conscious memorizing of the words that learners had to study for an upcoming test. Table 4 suggests that, by comparison with FonF, FonFs can bring about an increase of 25% (71.62%–46.63%) in numbers of words acquired incidentally. A subsequent memorization stage can increase the number of learnt words by 15% (87.30%–71.63%). The benefits of intentional learning found in this study corroborate other results of deliberate memorization of words (Mondria, 2003; Qian, 1996). For a survey of earlier studies on intentional learning of vocabulary, see Nation (1982).

How do these figures compare with learning vocabulary without form-focused instruction? No doubt some vocabulary is learnt, at least partially, from exposure to input or during communicative activities without focus on vocabulary. But studies on incidental vocabulary learning from reading report very small gains of about one to five words per text (Day et al., 1991; Horst et al., 1998; Hulstijn, 1992; Knight, 1994; Paribakht & Wesche, 1997; Pitts, White, & Krashen, 1989; Waring, 2003; Zahar et al., 2001). There is also no doubt that vocabulary learning is an incremental process contingent upon recurrent exposure to large quantities of input. Yet for the cumulative effect to take place, a new word has to be seen about 10 times or more (Coady, 1997; Hirsh & Nation, 1992), and each encounter should occur before the word is forgotten. To ensure frequent repeated exposures, Nation and Wang Ming-tzu (1999) claim that reading needs to be done at an intensive rate of around one or two books per week. The question is whether such a flood of reading can be implemented in a classroom context with two, three, or even five hours of instruction per week. If not, then learning 2,000 words from reading alone would take learners an estimated 29 years (Zahar et al.). Since learners need to learn a foreign language in much less time, there is no escape from supplementing oral and written input with form-focused instruction.

Nation (2001) suggests that a balanced language course should consist of four major strands: comprehensible meaning-focused input, form-focused instruction, meaning-focused output, and fluency development. He also mentions that research stretching back to the late nineteenth century showed that direct vocabulary study contributes to the cumulative process of learning a word. Swan (2005) has argued convincingly that lack of proactive syllabus design and of 'traditional' classroom practice, which is associated with Focus on FormS, may be ineffective for the systematic teaching of new language, especially where time is limited and out-of-class exposure unavailable. The present paper examined and compared the contributions of each of the two types of form-focused instruction: Focus on Form and Focus on FormS. Both proved beneficial. But contrary to what many proponents of communicative language teaching believe, results of the study provided empirical support for the effectiveness of Focus on FormS. Elsewhere (Laufer, 2005a) I defended Focus on FormS on theoretical grounds and argued that the nature of lexical competence makes FonFs indispensable to vocabulary instruction. I defined *lexical competence* as 'a combination of different aspects of vocabulary knowledge, together with vocabulary use, speed of access, and strategic competence,' and showed why FonFs is necessary for developing depth of knowledge, increasing vocabulary size, improving the use of sophisticated vocabulary, increasing the speed of access to words, and developing strategic competence – the ability to infer words' meaning from context and to use dictionaries effectively. I do not claim that form-focused instruction should replace opportunities to learn words from input. I do believe, however, that it has a major importance in any learning context that cannot recreate the input conditions of first-language acquisition.

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Notes

1 Each study reported the results differently, either by means, raw scores, or percentages. When raw scores were presented, I calculated the percentage of the acquired words out of the total number of target words, in order to present a uniform picture of the results.

2 The distinction between incidental and intentional learning should not be confused with the distinction between implicit and explicit learning. Implicit learning can be incidental only (i.e., without learners' awareness of an upcoming retention test, or without learners' deliberate decision to commit information to memory). Explicit learning, however, can occur both intentionally and incidentally (Hulstijn & Laufer, 2001).

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