Review: Doughty, C., & Williams, J. (1998). Focus on form in classroom second language acquisition. New York: Cambridge University Press.
Takeshi Matsuzaki
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1. Introduction

This volume, building on relevant theoretical claims and research findings, discusses in depth the efficacy and ways of implementing focus on form (FonF)[1], namely, drawing learner attention to some particular linguistic features during primarily communicative second language activities. The motivation for such discussion derives, in part, from the disappointing findings of immersion and naturalistic SLA studies that suggest that when classroom second language learning is entirely experiential and meaning-focused, proficiency in some linguistic features does not ultimately develop to targetlike levels (Doughty & Williams, chapter 1). At the theoretical level also, there are two fundamental rationales behind implementing a focus on form which are suggested by the contributors of this volume. First, it may be necessary for learners to be invited to focus on some linguistic features for the purpose of pushing themselves beyond their current IL (interlanguage) competence that is sufficient for successful communication toward the one that is more targetlike. Second, even if such a focus may not be absolutely necessary, it may provide a more effective and efficient language learning experience in that it can accelerate the speed of natural processes in SLA. In this paper, I would like to review three areas of the implications provided by the contributors in this volume which are essential to designing a FonF approach. These three are: 1) *the choice of linguistic form* to focus on; 2) *the optimal degree of explicitness* of FonF intervention; and 3) the appropriate timing of focus on form (particularly with respect to the choice between *reactive versus proactive* stances, and the one between *sequential versus integrative* stances). After the review, some concluding remarks will be given.

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[1] Long and Robinson (chapter 2) define focus on form as: "focus on form 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 (p. 23)." What should be unambiguously noticed about this terminology is the crucial distinction of focus-on-form from focus-on-formS and focus-on-meaning; that is, whereas focus on form "entails" a focus on formal elements of language, focus on formS "is limited to" such a focus and focus on meaning "excludes" it (Doughty & Williams, chapter 1, p. 4).

2. Choice of linguistic form

Four different sets of either linguistically or psychologically developed criteria for the determination of which linguistic form to choose to focus on seem to be discussed most in this volume. These criteria are: 1) learners' developmental readiness; 2) relevance of typological universal; 3) inherent difficulty of rules; and 4) reliability and scope of rules. For any sort of FonF intervention to be effective, however, the explicit claim is made that whatever criterion is taken into account, when one form is in focus others must not be (Doughty & Varela, chapter 6; Doughty & Williams, chapter 10).

To begin with, *learners' developmental readiness*, which has to do with the staged acquisition of a system (e.g., English negation), can be one of the crucial criteria for the choice of form to focus on. DeKeyser (chapter 3), Doughty and Williams (chapter 10), Lightbown (chapter 9), Long and Robinson (chapter 2), and Williams and Evance (chapter 7) address this issue, drawing on Pienemann's (1989) teachability hypothesis which states that, within developmental sequences, it is not possible for learners to acquire, and therefore, it is not possible to teach, structures that are far beyond the learners' current stage of development. Doughty and Williams, at least, regard Pienemann's accounts as appealing in the sense that they provide an independent explanation of learner data, from which predictions of learner performance can be made. Long's advocacy for Pienemann's hypothesis is stronger; he insists that teachers should not intend any instructional intervention which is too far beyond the developmental stage of the learners.

Lightbown, however, warns against being obsequious to Pienemann's claim in the classroom context. She proposes several convincing arguments against teaching only to the next phase of any developmental sequence. First of all, such applications are impractical in most classrooms, given the wide range of learner abilities. Second, learners do internalize advanced language, and this can eventually become auto-input for restructuring it in their ILs in some future. Third, learners, in the main, acquire some knowledge of any feature first and then gain control over that knowledge. Finally, she argues that focus on form causes later noticing in the input that facilitates the internalization of the input. In accordance with these Ligtbown's claims, Doughty and Williams also cite studies (Spada & Lightbown, 1993; Weinert, 1994; Zobl, 1983) that show counterevidence against Pienemann's teachability hypothesis. Lightbown's suggestion, then, is that a pedagogical focus on advanced forms can have some long-term, if not immediately

noticeable effects. Equally notable as these arguments, the inventory of documented developmental sequences remains small and insufficient for designing effective pedagogical strategies (Lightbown, chapter 9; Williams & Evance, chapter 7).

Still related to developmental orders of acquisition of a system in choosing target form is consideration of *the relevance of typological universal*. Doughty and Williams (chapter 10) address this issue. According to typological accounts of SLA, whereas structures that are rare across languages are de facto likely to be acquired late, those that are relatively common will be acquired early without necessarily offering an explanation of why this should be the case. An interesting pedagogical implication they suggest is that when forms are implicationally related, it may be possible, and even more efficient, to teach the more difficult forms first. For example, Doughty (1991, cited by Doughty and Williams, chapter 10) found that when the learners in her study were taught the more difficult forms in the implicational order (less accessible relative clauses in the Noun Phrase Accessibility Hierarchy), but not the less difficult ones, they improved not only on the difficult forms that they had been taught but also on the easier ones that they had not been taught. Nonetheless, Doughty and Williams also caution that a call to teach all late-acquired structures first would be overly general and probably ill-advised for the time being; this advice awaits more empirical supports.

Another type of criteria for the choice of linguistic form is *the inherent difficulty of rules* per se. While Williams and Evans (chapter 7) suggest that it is the acquisition of formally-functionally simple, and thus, easy rules that benefit most from instruction, some researchers such as Hulstijn and DeGraaff (1994, cited by DeKeyser, chapter 3, and Doughty & Williams, chapter 10), do not agree that such simple rules are the best candidates for instruction, because they assume that the easier rules are precisely the ones that students can discover for themselves. Hulstijn and DeGraaff's claim does not imply easy rules should not be the subject of focus on form, however; the point, DeKeyser states, is that, instead of giving up on more difficult rules, teachers may have to put the most emphasis on them. According to DeKeyser, the ultimate answer to this question is likely to depend on the nature of the student population; that is, although an academic population may indeed fit the pattern described by Hulstijn and De Graaff, average learners may not, because they are probably unlikely to induce explicitly any rules at all, and unlikely to induce implicitly any but the most semantically transparent and formally simple

rules. However, the very crucial question, the answer of which remains controversial, is exactly whether or not a given form is formally and/or functionally complex, the point that both DeKeyser and Doughty and Williams acknowledge.

Finally, Doughty and Williams (chapter 10) discuss the consideration of *reliability and scope of rules*. Drawing on the fact that certainly rules with broad scope are the most useful ones, and Hulstijn and De Graaff's (1994) argument that instruction is especially useful for rules with high reliability and wide scope, Doughty and Williams suggest selecting those rules prior to selecting rules with narrow scope in any syllabus design.

3. Optimal degree of explicitness of focus on form

Some of the contributors (Doughty & Varela, chapter 6; Harley, chapter 8; Williams and Evans, chapter 7; J. White, chapter 5) have carried out empirical studies on the effects of FonF intervention with varying degrees of explicitness. Some others (DeKeyser, chapter 3; Doughty and Williams chapter 10; Swain, chapter 4) review FonF tasks/techniques from the most implicit to the most explicit in terms of their effectiveness.

At the most unobtrusive, implicit end of the continuum of the degree of FonF intervention obtrusiveness are *input flooding* (see J. White, chapter 5, for detail) and *task-essentialness* (see p. 209 for detail). For the former, the results of J. White's study show that input flooding alone may not be particularly effective first of all. For the latter, Doughty and Williams, citing Loschky and Bley-Vroman (1993), point out that, even though task-essentialness would be most useful for the purposes of focus on form in that the communicative task cannot be successfully completed without the target structure being used, such a task is difficult to conceive of, first of all, and certainly cannot be devised for linguistic features that are optional.

A little less unobtrusive FonF techniques are those of *input enhancement* (visual versions such as highlighting, color-coding, and font manipulation, and auditory versions such as intonational focus on learner errors). However, as Sharwood Smith (1991, 1993, cited by Doughty & Williams, chapter 10) has cautioned, it is inappropriate to assume that external manipulation of the input is the only mechanism that will increase learners' attention. He also alleges that artificially induced noticing might not result in the target forms being analyzed and incorporated into the developing IL. In his words, "forms may be noticed perceptually, but not

linguistically" (p. 237). Notwithstanding, from J. White's study that failed to elicit the expected advantage by those children who had received input enhancement, and the study by Jourdenais et al. (1995) that does indicate such advantage by enhanced adult learners, Doughty and Williams suggest that input enhancement can be an effective implicit FonF technique for adult learners, not to say for children, whose attentional capacity may be overloaded by such enhancement (see also Harley, chapter 8, for a related discussion about children).

Regarded as less obtrusive as input enhancement, but theoretically better supported than that are *negotiation-for-meaning* tasks. The theoretical rationale for deploying negotiation tasks can be attributable to Lightbown's (1993) proposal which states the need for drawing learner attention to the fact that what they mean to say differs from what they are actually saying in order to express their intention. More specifically, as Swain (see chapter 4) points out, there is a question whether input, though clearly essential, is sufficient to elicit this kind of cognitive comparison, suggesting the importance of the role of output in SLA[2]. Since negotiation-for-meaning tasks probably, albeit not always, engage learners in pushed output (in the form of restructuring the preceding output) in order to respond to feedback from a peer interlocutor which signals comprehension difficulty (e.g., clarification requests), it is expected that such cognitive comparison will actually occur. However, as Doughty and Williams point out, no empirical study thus far has successfully established the connection between negotiation and SLA.

Finally, as more explicit ways of getting learners to pay attention to form, Doughty and Williams discuss the effectiveness of three such techniques: *consciousness-raising* tasks (see pp. 17-18 and 239-40 for detail), *input processing* instruction (see pp. 194 and 240 for detail), and the *garden path* feedback techniques (see pp. 208-9 for detail). Doughty and Williams caution the possibility of these techniques to cross over the limit into focus on formS. As a solution to such possible crossover, they propose the efficacy of combining several techniques (explicit and

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[2] More specifically, Swain (1995, p. 126; see also chapter 4) suggests that being pushed to produce output has three learning functions: 1) a noticing function in which learners may notice a gap between what they want to say and what they can say, leading them to notice what they do not know at all, or what they know only partially; 2) a hypothesis-testing function in which output may test a hypothesis that may attract feedback that can then lead learners to "reprocess"; and 3) a metalinguistic (conscious reflection) function: "[a]s learners reflect upon their own target language use, their output serves a metalinguistic function, enabling them to control and internalize linguistic knowledge."

implicit ones, for example), illustrating some of successful classroom studies on such combinations (e.g., *interaction enhancement* studied by Muranoi, 1996, see pp. 241-43 for detail).

In the discussion about the optimal degree of explicitness in FonF intervention, Doughty and Williams (chapter 10) rightly point out that the prohibition against teaching linguistic forms in isolation in recent communicative language teaching practice has been an excessive reaction to one particular approach to the explicit expression of linguistic elements, that is, metalinguistic rule presentation. Of significant importance of their claim is that the prohibition has furthermore, but perhaps unjustifiably, been broadly interpreted as one against any form of explicit language teaching (see pp. 230-32 about the dual definition of explicit/implicit learning and teaching), leaving learners to induce the rules of language on their own account. They rightly emphasize the unproductive nature of these kinds of all-or-nothing choices between the implicit and the explicit, which result in inflexible approaches to language teaching. It strikes them as an odd idea to expect that all language learning problems can be resolved in the same way. Recognizing the synergistic and dynamic possibilities based on the interventionist view that knowledge can be gained and represented *either* implicitly *or* explicitly (see pp. 202-3 for detail), they believe that instructional intervention designed by the teacher may be either implicit or explicit -- or even can be some combination of both types as mentioned -- and that the choice for instructional tasks/techniques depends ultimately upon many other considerations[3].

4. Appropriate timing of focus on form

In the discussion of the timing of focus on form, this volume addresses two significant issues; whether to take a reactive or proactive stance, and whether to intervene sequentially or integratively. To begin with, as to the preference between reactive versus proactive stances, Long and Robinson (chapter 2) view the reactive stance as most congruent with the general aims of communicative language teaching (see note 1). Doughty and Williams (chapter 10) also point out the slightly reduced burden of choosing which form to focus on as one of the additional

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[3] For instance, this volume refers to two particular cases in which rather explicit FonF approach appears effective. First, regarding the relevance of Universal Grammar (UG) in SLA, if the parameter setting for a principle (of UG) in the TL is different from that in learners' L1 (their core grammar), some explicit FonF with negative feedback is required for its successful acquisition (DeKeyser, chapter 2; Doughty & Williams, chapter 10; J. White, chapter 5; L. White, 1991). Second, in having learners notice the gap between the TL and their IL (i.e., they have already shown some evidence of the initial stages of acquisition), it is probably insufficient just to employ such implicit techniques as input flooding and enhancement (Doughty and Williams, chapter 10).

advantages to adopting the reactive stance. The main concern of the teacher who takes a reactive stance, then, is to resist the temptation of attending to errors that may not be amenable to focus on form (Long & Robinson, chapter 2). That is, in the reactive stance, the choice of form to focus on should be restricted to those classroom learner errors that are "pervasive," "systematic," and and known to be "remediable" for learners at this stage of development (although, again, see Lightbown's claim against clinging too much onto developmental readiness in 2. Choice of linguistic form).

However, as Doughty and Williams (chapter 10) illustrate, reactive focus on form may be difficult in practice. For, first of all, reactive focus on form, by its very "on-demand" nature, places considerable requirements on the teacher's "on-line" capacity to notice and assess the need for the intervention, and instantly to devise consistent FonF interventions for learner errors, while he or she also has to attend to other pedagogical problems, with the result being that the teacher must be highly experienced. Even if this demand is met, a reactive stance would be still inappropriate when there are learners of different L1s, of differing abilities, or of such high ability that errors proceed unnoticed by the teacher or other learners, since the message is successfully delivered. Finally, a testament to the difficulty of an entirely reactive focus on form is perhaps the very fact that there are few classroom studies that have investigated the effectiveness of such a completely unplanned instructional intervention.

Accordingly, in the majority of language classroom settings, a more proactive FonF approach is likely to be feasible. The teacher may want to make an informed prediction as well. However, Doughty and Williams do not miss pointing out that the proactive stance is not yet without its inherent problems either. One of the greatest problems of taking the proactive stance is to elicit the learning difficulty to be happening in the classroom discourse in such a way that it can be subsequently brought into focus. In other words, teachers must develop a task during which learners are guided to comprehend or produce messages involving the learning difficulty.

At the present time, as Doughty and Williams (chapter 10) point out, there is no definitive research upon which to base a choice of one over the other between reactive versus proactive stances; rather, it seems likely that both stances are effective, depending upon the classroom circumstances. Whether taking a reactive or proactive stance, what is to be kept in mind is that, whereas reactive FonF involves developing the sensitivity to notice pervasive and remediable

errors and opt for appropriate techniques for drawing learners' attention to the erroneous parts accordingly, proactive FonF emphasizes the designing of tasks that ensure that opportunities to use problematic forms while communicating a message will indeed arise.

The other significant timing issue considered is whether to focus on form sequentially or integratively. As its starting point, there is no disagreement with respect to the primary objective of focus on form, i.e., drawing learner attention to form, and it follows that focus on form almost includes some sort of explicit segmentation of language features. Assuming that restructuring primarily consists of establishing new form-meaning mappings, Doughty and Williams (chapter 10) suggest that the degree of effectiveness (especially over the long term) of focus on form ultimately depends on the level of integration of the learner's attention to all three aspects of form, meaning, and function in the TL. In this sense they believe that inducing learner attention to form within a meaningful context is the most efficacious kind of focus on form.

However, Lightbown (chapter 9) also rightly points out the probable situations in which learners are already expending all their attentional resources for such aspects as language comprehension, production, or learning, and consequently sustaining little attentional capacity left to a new targeted form. In such cases, she asserts, little effectiveness of focusing on that form will be guaranteed. This would presumably hold true for complex linguistic features, because their abstraction requires undivided attention and a human has only a limited amount of attentional capacity at a time (Schmidt, 1995, cited by Doughty & Williams, chapter 10). Another point made by Lightbown that appears equally critical is that if teachers are to attract learner attention only briefly during the course of communicative tasks, learners must have already had some knowledge about the targeted form, and maybe a vocabulary of that knowledge, on which to draw.

Taking into account all these points of view as to integrative and sequential approaches, Lightbown (chapter 9) suggests teaching learners, first, explicitly yet briefly the form to which the teacher will draw their attention whenever difficulties in using the form during communicative tasks emerge. She also proposes to employ unobtrusive signalings to arising problems such as hand signals, raised eyebrows, and intonational focus. By doing so, it is expected that the learner will not be distracted from negotiating with the meaning of the message.

DeKeyser's (chapter 3) recommendation of the FormS-then-FonF instructional sequence, which echoes the proposals of Lightbown, seems practically valid as well. Based on cognitive skill acquisition theory, DeKeyser argues for the sequential roles of explicit teaching of linguistic features (leading to *declarative knowledge*) first, then controlled practice (*proceduralizing*), and finally frequent opportunities to apply declarative knowledge during communicative activities (for *automatization*). The cognitive aim of this approach is to convert conscious, declarative knowledge into more automatically accessible knowledge. DeKeyser explains that this is not a new approach to instruction; however, he makes it clear that it has not been adequately implemented in the classroom. Based on the cognitive research to date, then, he suggests that rules that are easy to learn (declaratively) but hard to acquire (without instruction) are prime candidates for the declarative-to-procedural-to-automatic sequencing. Finally, as an interesting note, DeKeyser speculates that the degree of the acquisition of declarative knowledge and that of its proceduralization interact with the learners' ability level, and that, accordingly, as learners advance, it should be possible to increase the difficulty of the declarative knowledge and the target behaviors.

However, Doughty and Williams (chapter 10) caution that, because of the absolute separation between explicit provision of rules and communicative use, DeKeyser's model diverges in key ways from the proposal of focus on form (see note 1). They also point out that the research basis for these claims involves the learning of miniature artificial grammars and thus such findings cannot yet be generalized to the actual language classroom setting; his model awaits classroom testing. Nevertheless, given the above-mentioned task constraints that are required if simultaneous integration is to be ensured, the optimal level of focus on form suggested by Doughty and Williams may not always be practical. If sequential attention to form and meaning is all that is possible, Doughty and Williams maintain, determining the optimal duration of the time interval between attention to form, meaning, and function becomes an urgent issue. In any event, however, "the crossover limit must be borne in mind" (Doughty & Williams, chapter 10, p. 250)

5. Concluding remarks

To sum, the most important conclusion drawn in this volume is that neither formS-based nor meaning-based instruction alone can result in complete SLA. The arguments are made that some degree of FonF will be helpful for most of learning difficulties, and that it makes little sense to leave learners, particularly adults, to discover form-function relationships and the complexities of a new linguistic system solely on their own account.

This volume certainly has accomplished an impressive work for second/foreign language teachers and their students. It may be argued that the volume fails to make it clear the theoretical assumptions about (instructed) second language acquisition held by the contributors. On the contrary, as stated in the opening chapter, their views toward focus on form vary as well; to me, it reflects the inconsistencies of the theoretical claims that they have on SLA. From the theoretical point of view, thus, the content of the volume may not be intriguing. But, from the practical point of view, it does seem to provide insights into effective and efficient second language instruction. To say the least, the readers must be encouraged to recognize that some degree of focus on some form at some point facilitates learning. Finally, although it appears that this volume is mainly devoted to second language contexts, it still does seem eminently reasonable to apply this new approach to foreign language classrooms as well.

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