Instruction and SLA

A. A Summary of Ellis, 1994 Chapter 14

1. Introduction: defining instruction

2. Language-centred instruction

2.1. Does formal instruction affect second language acquisition?
   a. effects of formal instruction on general learning proficiency
      -- summary of findings:
      -- limitations:
   b. effects of formal instruction on production accuracy
      -- summary of findings:
   c. formal instruction and sequence of acquisition
      -- summary of findings (p. 635)
      -- limitations:
   d. durability of formal instruction
      -- summary of findings: mixed results; some factors may affect durability such as a) accompanying input and communicative needs and activities, b) type of structures, and c) perceived importance of structures.

2.2. What kind of formal instruction affect SLA?
   e. focus on form vs. focus on forms
      -- the distinction:
      -- summary of findings: mixed results
   f. implicit vs. explicit instruction
      -- the distinction: inductive vs. deductive
      -- summary of findings:
   g. practice vs. consciousness-raising
      -- “[Activities] that will seek to get a learner to understand a particular grammatical feature, how it works, what it consists of, and so on, but not require that learner to actually produce sentences manifesting that particular structure. And that’s what I mean by consciousness raising.” Ellis (1993: 5-6)
   h. interpretation vs. practice

2.3. Summary and conclusion pp. 646-647

3. Learner-instruction matching

4. Role of instruction: theoretical positions

   a. The “zero option” and the non-interface position
   b. Instruction as facilitation
      -- The interface hypothesis
      -- The variability hypothesis
      -- The teachability hypothesis
      -- The selective attention hypothesis

5. Conclusion

B. Defining Research Questions

1. The general question: Does instruction facilitate second language acquisition?

2. What instruction?
   a. Formal instruction
   b. Communication (CI)
   c. Focus on form

3. The acquisition of what?
   a. Explicit and formal knowledge
   b. Implicit and automatic competence
C. Views and Positions
1. The Non-Interface Position (e.g., Krashen; VanPatten)
   Explicit knowledge obtained through formal instruction cannot become a part of one’s implicit and
   automatic competence. Spontaneous linguistic competence can only be acquired implicitly.
2. The Interface Position (e.g., Sharwood Smith)
   Explicit knowledge can be turned into implicit and automatic knowledge through practice and
   meaning-focused use.
3. The Teachability Hypothesis (Pienemann) & The Weak Interface Position (R. Ellis): The
   learning of some, but not all, structures may be developmentally constrained. Learners can
   benefit from formal instruction on a developmentally constrained structure only when they are
   developmentally ready to learn that structure.

D. Some Research Findings
1. Long (1983): 11 studies reviewed, 6 positive, 3 negative, 2 ambiguous. Overall Conclusion:
   “There is considerable evidence to indicate that SL instruction does make a difference.”
2. Ellis (1994):
   a. A focus-on-form approach that encourages learners to pay attention to the formal properties of
      language in the context of trying to communicate—either by means of meaning negotiation or by
      corrective feedback—may facilitate acquisition.
   b. If a focus-on-forms approach is adopted, this is more likely to succeed if:
      -- rules are presented explicitly and supported by examples,
      -- the instruction is aimed at developing explicit knowledge through consciousness-raising
         activities,
      -- the instruction is directed at enabling learners to establish form-meaning connections during
         comprehension.
   c. In contrast, there is a growing consensus that instruction directed at promoting growth of
      learners’ interlanguage systems (i.e. their implicit knowledge) through production-training is
      problematic.

E. Sample Studies
1. Robinson (1997)
2. VanPatten & Cadierno (1993)