THE EFFECTIVENESS OF FOCUS ON FORM INSTRUCTION ON THE PRODUCTION OF ENGLISH DEFINITE AND INDEFINITE ARTICLES IN WRITING AMONG IRANIAN EFL LEARNERS

SOROOR SOLTANINEJAD

UNIVERSITI SAINS MALAYSIA

2015

THE EFFECTIVENESS OF FOCUS ON FORM INSTRUCTION ON THE PRODUCTION OF ENGISH DEFINITE AND INDEFINITE ARTICLES IN WRITING AMONG IRANIAN EFL LEARNERS

by

SOROOR SOLTANINEJAD

Thesis Submitted in Fulfilment
of the Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Arts

April 2015

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First and foremost, I would like to thank my supervisor, Professor Ambigapathy Pandian, for his guidance, suggestions, assistance and patience throughout the progress of this thesis. His wide knowledge and way of thinking has been of great value for me. This thesis would not have been possible without his understanding, encouraging, and guidance.

I also wish to thank Mr. Yazdanshenas for the assistance provided with the organization of the data collection stage of this research.

My thanks are also extended to Mr. Alavi and other postgraduate colleagues who have given me suggestions, discussed my problems or simply been good friends.

The biggest recognition goes to my beloved husband, Arad, and my family in Iran, who have always stood by my side and supported the choices involved in such an important overtaking. I extent my special loving thanks to my deceased young brother, Salar, whom I lost while studying in Malaysia. May his soul rest in peace. I also wish to thank my lovely mother, Parvin, whose caring words and encouragement have been extremely helpful in getting me through this arduous but fulfilling journey so that I was about to complete my research project successfully.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

LIST OF FIGURES

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CLT---Communicative Language Teaching

ESL--- English as a Second Language

EFL--- English as a Foreign Language

FonF---Focus on Form

FonFs---Focus on Forms

GTM---Grammar Translation Method

EFEKTIVITAS FOCUS ON FORM INSTRUKSI PADA PRODUKSI ENGLISH ARTIKEL MANTAP DAN DITENTUKAN DALAM MENULIS ANTARA PELAJAR IRAN EFL

ABSTRAK

Konteks pengajaran bahasa komunikatif semasa di Iran telah menyebabkan kurangnya penggunaan tatabahasa atau nahu yang betul dalam kalangan pelajar EFL di Iran. Di samping itu, satu daripada ciri tatabahasa yang bermasalah dalam kalangan pelajar ini adalah penghasilan artikel yang pasti dan tidak pasti. Kajian ini bermatlamat menelusuri kesan dan ketahanan tumpuan terhadap arahan bentuk dalam penghasilan artikel yang pasti dan tidak pasti dalam bentuk tulisan, dalam kalangan pelajar EFL di sebuah sekolah bahasa swastadi Iran. Kajian kaedah bercampur dijalankan, dan seramai 34 orang pelajar EFL peringkat pertengahan di dua buah kelas di Sekolah Bahasa Swasta Safir ikut seerta dalam kajian ini. Tiga ujian dijalankan, iaitu praujian, pasca ujian dan pasca ujian tertunda. Data daripada ujian penentuan tatabahasa dan tulisan bebas, yang memberi tumpuan terhadap penghasilan artikel yang pasti dan tidak pasti dalam bentuk tulisan dianalisis untuk menentukan keberkesanan arahan FonF. Soal selidik soalan-terbuka dikumpul dan dianalisis bagi menentukan pengalaman para peserta terhadap arahan FonF.

Dapatan kajian menunjukkan bahawa secara amnya, arahan FonF lebih berkesan daripada arahan bukan FonF terhadap penghasilan artikel yang pasti dan tidak pasti dalam bentuk tulisan. Dapatan juga menunjukkan bahawa arahan FonF

mempunyai kesan ketahanan terhadap penghasilan ciri yang disasarkan dalam bentuk

tulisan dalam kalangan pelajar EFL di Iran.

THE EFFECTIVENESS OF FOCUS ON FORM INSTRUCTION ON THE PRODUCTION OF ENGLISH DEFINITE AND INDEFINITE ARTICLES IN WRITING AMONG IRANIAN EFL LEARNERS

ABSTRACT

The current communicative language teaching context in Iran has led to Iranian EFL learners' lack of grammatical accuracy. Moreover, one of the Iranian EFL learners' problematic grammatical features is the production of definite and indefinite articles. The current study aimed at exploring the effects and durability of Focus on Form instruction on accurate production of definite and indefinite articles in written form among Iranian EFL learners in a private language school. Vanpatten's (2002) input processing model and Sharwood Smith's (1991) theory of Input enhancement were employed as theories of this study.

A mixed methods study was conducted, and 34 intermediate Iranian EFL learners in two classes in Safir private language school participated. Three tests: pretest, posttest, and delayed posttest were administrated. The data from grammatically judgment tests and free writing, focusing on production of definite and indefinite articles in written form were analyzed to examine the effectiveness of FonF instruction. A questionnaire of open-ended questions was also gathered and analyzed defining the participants' experience regarding FonF instruction.

It was concluded that in general, FonF instruction is more effective than non-fonF instruction on accurate production of definite and indefinite articles in written form. According to the results of the study, Iranian EFL learners tend to use more

accurate indefinite articles rather than definite article. Furthermore, it was found that

FonF instruction has durable effects on accurate production of the targeted feature in

written form among Iranian EFL learners.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

"Grammar is basic to language and there exists no language without grammar" (Nassaji & Fotos, 2011, p.1). However, teaching grammar is an argumentative subject in language teaching. Furthermore, according to Nassaji and Fotos (2011), the primary argument in language pedagogy field is whether to teach grammar explicitly or implicitly. According to Kelly (1969), this argument has been existed since the beginning of language pedagogy. Nonetheless, the decision we make regarding grammar instruction, "is bound to be influenced by the recent history of grammar teaching" (Stern, 1992, p.140). Therefore, it is essential to provide a background of grammar teaching and also a brief history of English language teaching (ELT) in Iran.

1.1.1 Historical Development of English Language Teaching

"Approaches to grammar teaching have undergone many changes" (Nassaji & Fotos, 2011, p.1). These changes can be considered in terms of three instructional theories: theories with a focus on grammar, theories with a focus on communication, and theories with a focus on both grammar and communication (Chin-chin Lin, 2011).

Brown (2007) pointed out the progress of language teaching beginning from Grammar Translation Method (GTM), the series Method, the Direct Method,

Cognitive Code Learning, and the "designer" methods, to Communicative Language Teaching (CLT). Some methods highlighted formal language aspects such as GTM; others restrained the formal instruction of language forms such as Natural Approach; and others emphasized meaning debate for communication such as CLT. In CLT method, some researchers advocated no consideration to linguistic forms (Richard & Rodgers, 2001) whereas others advocated embedding FonF instruction into CLT (Celce-Murcia, Dornyei, & Thurrell, 1997; Nassaji & Fotos, 2007, 2011). The focus of most of the language teaching theories has shifted to focus on form instruction and the importance of focus on form instruction in language communication emerged to be agreed upon (Brown, 2007).

1.1.2 English Language Teaching in Iran

After the British and American Imperialism, English language was determined as a subject in Iranian schools and universities curricula. Teaching English as a foreign language (EFL) was institutionalized by the US Technical Cooperative Mission after World Wide II in addition to the support of Iran's government (Tajadini, 2002).

Alongside schools and universities, English is also taught in private language schools in Iran. According to Yarmohhamadi (1995), private language schools play a significant role in EFL in Iran as the focus of the curricula in these schools is on all four skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing). In addition, Saniazar (2012) stated that there exist several programs for various age groups in private language schools. Furthermore, the teaching methodologies being employed and the course books being taught in these schools are more contemporary.

1.2 The Importance of Focus on Form Instruction

CLT has attained a broader acceptance than GTM in English language pedagogy (Richard & Rodgers, 2001). Nonetheless, different scholars such as Celce-Murcia, Dornyei, and Thurrell (1997), and Nassaji and Fotos (2007, 2011) have criticized CLT in some aspects. Nassaji and Fotos (2007, 2011), pointed out that purely communicative approaches are not adequate to develop learners' high level of proficiency. Moreover, Celce-Murcia, et al., (1997) suggested including focus on linguistic form instruction.

To compensate the problems presented by traditional instructions to the teaching of grammar and also the dissatisfaction and problems with communicative approach, language acquisition researchers such as Long (1991), Long and Robinson (1998), and Doughty and William (1998a) have proposed Focus on Form (FonF) instruction in language pedagogy. They asserted that students' attention can be infrequently shifted to the grammar when they experience difficulties in communication such as comprehension and production.

1.3 Statement of the Problem

The current language instruction in Iran is communicative language teaching (Farrokhi & Chehrazad, 2012). However, this method of teaching, which according to Richards and Rodgers (2001) have attained a broader acceptance than grammar translation method in English language pedagogy, helps Iranian EFL learners become more fluent than accurate in English (Farrokhi & Cheharazad, 2012). In other words, Iranian EFL learners are not competent in producing grammatical features in the targeted language.

One of the grammatical accuracy problems that Iranian EFL learners have is the production of definite and indefinite articles which are problematic issues for them to acquire (Soori, et al., 2011; Dabaghi & Talebi, 2009; Jamshidian, 2006; Ansarian, 2001; Faghih, 1997).

Soori, et al., (2011) presented that English articles are generally problematic for non-native speakers of English to master and Iranian EFL learners are no exception. The acquisition of articles will constitute a problem for the Iranian students. Iranian EFL learners usually tend to the omission of the definite article "the" or indefinite articles "a" or "an", article insertion or redundant use of articles, and wrong use of articles in writing.

Based on a study conducted by Dabaghi and Talebi (2009) Iranian EFL learners' inaccuracy in producing articles is due to the differences between definite and indefinite article systems in different languages. Iranian EFL learners may not be familiar with the English article system due to the fact that in Persian, there exist different systems for the production of articles.

Jamshidian (2006) presented that Iranian EFL learners are not accurate in the production of definite and indefinite English articles in writing. This problem is due to the differences between Persian and English article systems. Furthermore, according to Ansarian (2001), one of the most difficult subjects in English language is the acquisition of definite article system. Specifically, this grammatical feature has been difficult for Iranian EFL learners whose first language does not consist of article systems. As a result, the production of English articles is one of the problematic areas of foreign language learning for Iranian EFL learners.

Works on the Modern standard Written Persian language have generally defined "marefe" (definite) as a noun that is known both to the speaker and the addressee, definitely and specifically. The category of "definite" and the contrastive analysis reveals that the Standard Written Persian does not have a single word corresponding to English definite article "the", which would solely be used to denote a particular member of a homogenous class (Faghih, 1997). For example, "medad" would mean either "pencil" or "the pencil" based on the context. Faghih (1997) speculated that the acquisition of "the" is difficult for Iranian students.

With respect to the current language teaching instruction in Iran which has led Iranian EFL learners to have fluency and also their lack of accuracy in producing English articles, it is apparent that there is a need to seek better teaching approaches such as Focus on Form instruction for pedagogical implementation in EFL context of Iran. Consequently, the investigation of the effectiveness of Focus on Form instruction seems to be necessary in order to help Iranian EFL learners have both the fluency and accuracy in English.

1.4   Objectives of the Study

Based on the problem stated above, it becomes evident that Iranian EFL learners' lack of grammatical accuracy in terms of accurate production of definite and indefinite English Articles. Therefore, in order to acquaint Iranian EFL learners with the grammar structures of English Articles, the present study strives to fulfill the following objectives.

1. To examine the effects of Focus on Form instruction on accurate production of definite English Article in written form among intermediate Iranian EFL learners in a private language school.

2. To examine the effects of Focus on Form instruction on accurate production of indefinite English Articles in written form among intermediate Iranian EFL learners in a private language school.

3. To examine the durability of the effects of Focus on Form instruction on accurate production of definite and indefinite English Article in written form among intermediate Iranian EFL learners in a private language school.

1.5   Research Questions

To investigate the effectiveness of Focus on Form instruction in using English articles among Iranian EFL learners, the research questions are formulated as follows:

1. What are the effects of Focus on Form instruction on accurate production of definite English Article in written form among intermediate Iranian EFL learners in a private language school?

2. What are the effects of Focus on Form instruction on accurate production of indefinite English Articles in written form among intermediate Iranian EFL learners in a private language school?

3. How does Focus on Form instruction affect the durability of the presented instructions on accurate production of definite and indefinite English Articles in written form among intermediate Iranian EFL learners in a private school?

1.6 Significance of the Study

The findings of this study can yield insights into pedagogy and curriculum development in EFL context of Iran. Pedagogically, it can help Iranian EFL learners to have both fluency and accuracy in English by drawing the students' attention to the grammatical features while their main focus is on meaning.

When there is positive evidence to support the effectiveness of Focus on Form instruction, informative suggestions such as Focus on Form approach to pedagogical implementation for EFL courses could be made to the teaching practice by familiarizing students with the English grammar structures in a communicative context.

Furthermore, Iranian English teachers can benefit from the findings of this study in the explicit teaching of grammar. Accordingly, they can employ a systematic framework to direct students' attention to the meaning as well as form by using Focus on Form instruction in classroom.

Moreover, in the development of teaching materials for EFL students, curriculum experts can benefit from the findings of this study in highlighting the effectiveness of Focus on Form instruction. The curriculum developers can also advise materials that meet the requirements of the students in terms of fluency and accuracy depending on the student's level of education.

1.7 Definition of Key Terms

Focus on Form:

In this study, this term refers to the latest English language teaching methodology that scholars such as Long (1991), Long and Robinson (1998), and Doughty and Williams (1998a) have proposed in response to the problems presented by traditional approaches to the teaching of grammar and also dissatisfaction with purely communicative approach. FonF draws learners' attention to the grammatical features while their main focus is on meaning.

Focus on meaning:

To enhance the interpretation, expression, and negotiation of meaning in communication (Savignon, 2001).

Input enhancement:

The deliberate manipulation of the input learners are exposed to in order to induce learning (Sharwoodsmith, 1991).

Accuracy:

The ability to produce English language features accurately. Accuracy focuses more on grammar rather than meaning (Asadi, 2011).

Fluency:

The ability to produce English language fluently. Fluency focuses more on meaning rather than grammar (Asadi, 2011).

Academic:

Saniazar (2012) employed this term which relates to government education. In this research, this adjective describes students, settings, etc. in upper secondary schools or university, which are part of formal education in Iran.

Private:

In this study, this adjective describes students, settings in independent non-governmentally funded language schools. This term were used by Saniazar (2012) which relates to nongovernment education.

English as a Foreign Language:

The operational definition of English as a foreign language (EFL) employed in the present study refers to English language learning taking place in a non-native English environment where the country's native language is spoken and used in any occasion outside of the classroom (Richards & Schmidt, 2002).

1.8 Limitations of the Study

Although there are aspects concerning the investigation of the Focus on Form approach such as Focus on Form pedagogy in different contexts, learners' proficiency level and age factor, along with the principles and practice of pedagogical implementation of Focus on Form, the current study primarily aims to investigate the effectiveness and durability of the effects of the Focus on Form approach in terms of accurate production of definite and indefinite English articles.

Owing to the fact that the current study was conducted in Iran to meet the research aims, intact classes were the best available options for this study. As a result, quasi-experimental design in collection of quantitative data was adopted. One aspects of using intact classes that may have influenced the study is the absence of some students during the treatment. The sample size of the present study is constituted by 40 participants, representing the total number of Safir Language School's participating to a 30 hour English programme in Iran. Furthermore, during the data collection procedure, 4 out of 19 students in control group and 2 out of 21 students in experimental group were absent from one or more sessions. Therefore, students' absence during the treatment might have affected the results found.

1.9 Summary

The introductory chapter first presents the background of the problem that currently being used method in language teaching is not successful in helping the English learners' performance as in the case of Iran. Second, research questions are accordingly raised whether Focus on Form is more effective than the CLT method in terms of accurate production of definite and indefinite English articles in written form and also whether these effects are durable. Then, the objectives of the study, hypotheses and significance of the study are stated. Next, the scope and limitation of the study and then the definition of key terms are discussed.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

Teaching methodologies had been changed over time, from teaching language learners about the language, to teaching language learners to use the language (Celce-Murcia, 2001). Teaching a second/foreign language synthetically may lead to the students' inability to communicate fluently. Moreover, teaching a second/foreign language in a pure communicative method without any attention to the grammatical features may lead to the students' inaccuracy in the targeted language (Chin-Chin Lin, 2011). Furthermore, as Nassaji and Fotos (2007, 2011) state, teaching a language in a purely communicative method is inadequate for learners' proficiency in language.

This chapter first describes briefly the historical development of English teaching in general and then a brief introduction of ELT in Iran. Next, the background and definition of FonF instruction, the empirical evidence of FonF instruction, and practice of the FonF instruction in ESL and EFL contexts for pedagogical implementation, particularly in Iran are discussed. Then, the theories and theoretical framework of this study are mentioned. Finally this chapter takes into account two factors of implementation Focus on Form that is linguistic features and durability of the effects of FonF instruction.

2.2 A Brief History of English Language Teaching Methodologies

Various studies and articles regarding the history of English language pedagogy have chronicled a sequence of teaching methodologies (Brown, 2007; Celce-Murcia, 2001; Howat, 2004; Larsen-freeman, 2000; Richards & Rodgers, 2001). The grammar translation method (GTM), the direct Method, The Reading Approach, Audiolingualism, The Cognitive Approach, The Affective-Humanistic Approach, The Comprehension-based Approach, and Communicative Approaches are the most frequently discussed methods in this subject. GTM is considered to be the primary language teaching approach before and in the early nineteenth century. Nonetheless, as Richards and Rodgers (2001) stated, GTM is an approach with no theoretical basis; the instruction in GTM is mostly in learners' native language. Furthermore, the main focus of GTM is on grammatical features, translation sentences and dealing with difficult texts (Celce-Murcia, 2001; Richards & Rodgers, 2001).

As a response to the GTM, the Direct Method emerged in English language pedagogy. This method was based on the language learning assumptions of a direct link between meaning and linguistic forms (Frank, 1884 as cited in Richard & Rodgers, 2001). In this method, the main focus was on learners' use of language, communication and use of demonstrations, graphs and pictures (Celce-Murcia, 2001; Richards & Rodgers, 2001). Later, the Reading Method arose to compensate the Direct Method shortcomings such as the fact that not all people had the opportunity to travel overseas to use the language in the target environment and also English teachers could not use English well enough to teach it in the Direct Method (Celce-Murcia, 2001). The Reading Method considers reading as the most helpful skill to

acquire. In this method, the main focus was on reading, vocabulary, grammar related to the readings, and translation (Celce-Murcia, 2001).

Audiolingual Method arose during the period from mid 1940s to 1960s in responses to the reading Method shortcomings such as the lack of speaking and listening skills. During that time, Audiolingual was a significant method in English language pedagogy (Celce-Murcia, 2001; Larsen-Freeman, 2000). The primary skills in Audiolingual Method was listening and speaking. This method followed the assumption in which language is a formation of habit. Based on this assumption, Audiolingual Method used mimicry and memorization techniques. In addition, the learners' errors were prevented from the beginning of the process. Also, writing and reading in this method was emphasized after listening and speaking. Materials in this method included dialogues and structural patterns with no attention to the meaning (Celce-Murcia, 2001; Larsen-freeman, 2000).

In the late twentieth century, numerous innovative language teaching methodologies arose with the influence of Chomsky's linguistic theories, humanistic aspects of linguistic and cognitive psychology on the language teaching (Celce-Murcia, 2001; Lasren-Freeman, 2000; Richards & Rodgers, 2001). These methodologies and approaches include Community Language Learning, the Silent Way, Suggestipedia, the Lexical Approach, Content-Based Instruction, and Task-Based Instruction. The first four methods count as humanistic methods in language pedagogy (Stevick, 1990 as cited in Howatt, 2004; Kumaravadivelu, 2006). However, Kumaravadivelu, (2006), stated that these methods are "designer nonmethods" as he points out "because none of them… deserves the status of method" (p.94). These methods (Community Language Learning, the Silent Way, Suggestopedia, and the Lexical Approach) are no more count as the language

teaching methods but the other two methods (Content-Based Instruction and Task-based Instruction) are still count as language teaching methods under the umbrella of CLT.

Four theories of CLT were summarized by Richards and Rodgers (2001). Communicative competence theory by Hymes (1972) which was described as what second/foreign language learners require to know to be a competent language user. Halliday's (1975) theory of the function of language use, which regards to the study of the speech acts which focuses on all the functions and components of language. Widdowson's (1978) view of the linguistic systems which concerns with communicative values of language, specifically the ability to communicate in language. Last, Canale and Swain's (1980) application of communicative competence to language pedagogy which consists of grammatical competence, sociolinguistic competence, discourse competence, and strategic competence. Furthermore, Howatt (1984) explained the difference between the strong and weak versions of CLT in language pedagogy. The weak version regards to create opportunities for language learners to communicate in English which was described as learning to use English and the strong version of CLT refers to acquiring English language through communication which was described as using English to learn it.

In CLT Method, language learners work in pair groups, negotiate meaning, and do role play and games in classroom. CLT classrooms often provide the real-situation and the four language skills are usually assimilated from the beginning of the course (Celce-Murcia, 2001; Larsen-Freeman, 2000).

Wilson (2008) breaks down the development of language pedagogy into three eras: pre-communicative era, communicative era, and post-communicative era. The

pre-communicative era contains methods such as GTM, the Direct Method, and Audiolingualism. The communicative era includes the Natural Approach, the Functional National Approach, Total Physical response Suggestopedia, The silent Way, and CLT. The post-communicative era contains methods such as Natural Approach and Content-Based instruction.

2.3 English Language Teaching in Iran

English is taught as a foreign language in Iran (Asadi, 2011). After the British and American Imperialism, English language was determined as a subject in Iranian schools and universities curricula. As a matter of fact, teaching English as a foreign language (EFL) was institutionalized by the US Technical Cooperative Mission after World Wide II and the support of Iran's government (Tajadini, 2002). Nonetheless, a movement generally referred to as "book purging" created by post-revolutionary reactions to EFL in Iran targeted at de-culturalisation of school and university English course textbooks led to a limited use of English in Iran (Talebinezahad & Sadeghi Benis, 2005).

Nowadays, English is taught in Iranian schools and universities from middle school and continues to high school, pre-university and university. However, the objectives and duration of English courses differ in different stages of education in Iran. English is taught three hours a week for language learners in schools. The academic year for school learners begin from September to May. One specific textbook is taught and the aim is to provide learners with basic instruction and knowledge of English (Asadi, 2011).

Regarding the higher education, all university students should acquire English to use technical and scientific knowledge to publish scientific articles in English publications in order to obtain national self-efficiency in technology and science. The other objective of English teaching for university students is to use English for cultural exchanges (Saffarzadeh, 1988 as cited in Fatemi, 2005). To fulfill the above objectives, all university students are offered two forms of English courses: English for academic purposes (EAP) and English for specific purposes (ESP). Eslami and Eslami (2007) pointed out that a firm position in university curricula is EAP. This course includes a two-credit course which is assigned as Basic English and a three-credit course which is referred to as General English. In addition, there exists another course for university students in which the main focus is on their majors' through the medium of English. They receive two two-credit courses of ESP in which according to Amirian and Tavakoli (2009), the objective of this course is to specify the students' needs and objectives for language learning.

English language studies (ELS) is divided into three majors for university students: Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL), English Translation (ET), and English Language and Literature (ELL). Students majoring in ELS are offered different subject matters according to their area of specialization (Asadi, 2011).

According to Iausep (2009), the curriculum for TEFL in universities was approved by the Iran Council of Higher Education Development in 1990, 2007, and 2008. This curriculum includes four kinds of courses which are basic course, main courses, specialized courses, and general and educational courses. Basic courses include reading comprehension in pre-intermediate, intermediate, upper-intermediate, and advanced levels, grammar in elementary, intermediate, and advanced levels, sentence structure, and writing I, II, and III, conversation I, II, III,

16

and IV, and study skills. Main courses include linguistics I and II, prose I and II, simple and advanced poetry, translation I and II, reading journalistic texts, idiomatic expressions and phrases. Specialized courses includes English literature, novels, English literary schools, language testing and assessment, teaching methods and techniques, appraisal of middle and high school English textbooks, syllabus design, curriculum development, second and foreign language skills, theories of translation, error analysis, and contrastive linguistics. General and educational courses include Persian, Islamic ethics, educational psychology, physical education, and educational planning. All general and instructional courses are conducted in Persian language (Iausep, 2009).

EFL is taught both in form of formal education (schools and universities) and informal education (private language schools) in Iran. Alongside schools and universities, English is also taught in private language schools in Iran. According to Yarmohhamadi (1995), private language schools play a more significant role in EFL in Iran as the focus of the curricula in these schools is on all four skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing). In addition, Saniazar (2012) stated that there are several programs for various age groups in private language schools. Also, the teaching methodologies being employed and the course books being taught in these schools are more contemporary. According to Talebinezhad and Sadeghi Benis (2005), most of private language schools' teachers have been educated in private language schools in which the quality of learning is higher than government schools and/or in a native speaking country where the medium of language is English.

2.4 Focus on Form

The main argument among English language researchers is the formal instruction in language pedagogy (Ellis, 2001). According to Wilkins (1976), there are two options in language pedagogy: traditional grammar-based instruction and meaning-focused communicative language teaching. Based on the assumption that language acquisition is a step by step acquisition of parts until one can acquire English language, the second/foreign language is taught in separate items (Wilkins, 1976). The aim of this assumption is for learners to combine these discrete items and use them in communication. This approach is called Synthetic Approach (Wilkins, 1976) which is affected by behaviorism and structural linguistics in 1950s and 1960s. Synthetic Approach believes that "practice makes perfect". In other words, language learning is a process of habit formation and pattern drilling. Furthermore, language learners do not learn English from natural language use. Instead, teachers help the learners acquire it. The most important principle for the traditional grammar-based instruction is to choose the best language learning approach in teaching grammar (Hinkel & Fotos, 2002).

However, researches on both language acquisition and psycholinguistics have shown that language teaching is not a process of accumulating entities (Long, 1991). Language learning rarely happens with bits of language being learnt separately in an addictive fashion. In addition, teachers cannot predict and determine what students are going to learn at any given stage (Willis, 1996). Traditional grammar-based instruction ignored the language learning developmental processes through which language learners normally pass, and the fact that progress is not necessarily unidirectional (Ellis, 2008; Long & Robinson, 1998). Furthermore, as for the authenticity of the input, Widdowson (1989) stated that as fabricated by teachers, the

classroom interactions and the practiced language forms will not necessarily transfer to actual language use in real-life situation. As a result, traditional grammar teaching has failed to prepare learners for spontaneous, contextualized language use. As Skehan (1996) stated, "The belief that a precise focus in a particular form leads to learning and automatization no longer carries much credibility in linguistics or psychology" (Skehan, 1996, p. 18).

Recognizing that treating the language purely as an object of study cannot develop the expected level of interlanguage proficiency, some researchers attempted to abandon grammar-based instruction in favor of more communicative-oriented language teaching which focused on language use (Nassaji & Fotos, 2004). They argued that formal language exercises and lessons help declarative language of grammar developed. However, learners would not be able to use these forms correctly in communication (Dekeyser, 2001; Ellis, 2001, 2002). As such, they see formal instruction as unnecessary for interlanguage development.

Acquisition is an implicit, subconscious process which occurs as a result of engaging in natural communication where the focus is on meaning. By contrast, language learning is an explicit, conscious process which derives from formal instruction where the primary focus is on grammar and practice (Krashen, 1985). He claims that learned or explicit knowledge which results from language learning cannot turn into an acquired or implicit knowledge. According to Krashen (1985), most of L2 cannot be taught; it must be acquired.

Proponents of communicative teaching claim that all learners may learn English language better while using it in communication. The main part of CLT is the learners' participating in communication which would help them develop their

communicative competence. People of all ages learn language best by experiencing them as a medium of communication. The essence of communicative language teaching is the engagement of learners in communication to allow them to develop their communicative competence (Long & Robinson, 1998; Widdowson, 1989; Savignon, 2005). Another tenet of communicative teaching is that exposing learners to large quantities of positive input that is comprehensible and meaningful is sufficient for language acquisition to occur. Grammar is acquired implicitly or incidentally (Krashen, 1985). This communicative language teaching approach underlies a variety of English language classrooms, including those implementing Prabhu's (1987) procedural syllabus, Krashen's (1985) Natural approach, some content-based English language instruction (immersion education), and task-based instruction.

However, research on the variations within communicative language teaching reveals at least the following problems (Long & Robinson, 1998): first, learning English through experiencing its use is possible, but it is inefficient. Learners who receive formal instruction of various kinds show higher levels of language proficiency than those who only use the language (Doughty, 2003; Ellis, 2001, 2002, 2008; Lightbown, 2000; Norris & Ortega, 2000; Spada, 2005). In other words, the focus of communicative teaching on language use may have a ceiling effect on the acquisition of grammar; secondly, due to the maturational constraints on language learning and the adoption of communicative strategies instead of taking risks for more advanced language in communication, adult learners may become fluent, but not native like speakers, despite plenty of learning opportunities. Moreover, a pure communicative language teaching may lead to fossilization of language acquisition (Skehan, 1998).

As such, the importance of attending to form becomes clear to both English language researchers and teachers. Given that communicative language teaching by itself has been found to be inadequate (Ellis, 1997, 2002: Nassaji & Fotos, 2004), pedagogical interventions need to be interwoven into primarily communicative activities so as to overcome the limitations of both traditional grammar instruction and communicative language teaching (Doughty & Williams, 1998a).

Researchers find it necessary to look for an alternative approach, rather than to foster a single-sided teaching approach to promote both linguistic and communicative competence. Focus on Form was proposed in an attempt to capture the strengths of the meaning-focus communicative approach while dealing with its limitations (Long & Robinson, 1998). In the Interaction Hypothesis, interaction learners and other speakers, especially more proficient speakers, is of crucial importance for language development. Negotiation of meaning occurring in interaction produces negative feedback (recast, a corrective reformulation of learners' utterance) to draw learners' attention to mismatches between input and output, thus induce them to notice the forms which are not only comprehensible, but also meaningful (Long & Robinson, 1998). As such, negative feedback during negotiation of meaning may facilitate language development (Long, 1996). Motivated by the role of negotiation of meaning during interaction, Long (1991) proposed the option of Focus on Form to be cooperated in meaning-based communicative language teaching as an alternative to either traditional grammar instruction or pure communicative language teaching.

The idea of FonF instruction in language teaching has been advocated in literature. However, due to its popularity among researchers and teachers, the term 'focus on form' has been used and interpreted differently by various researchers. At

the outset, it is necessary to clarify the construct of FonF prior to its application to the present study.

2.4.1   Focus on Form: Definitions and Features

Long (1991) has proposed FonF instruction in response to the problems presented by purely communicative and traditional approaches. Long distinguished a *focus on form* from *a focus on forms* (FonFs) and *a focus on meaning*. FonFs is the traditional approach which represents an analytic syllabus, and is based on the assumption that language consists of a series of grammatical forms that can be acquired sequentially and additively. Focus on meaning is synthetic and is based on the assumption that learners are able to analyze language inductively and arrive at its underlying grammar. Thus, it emphasizes pure meaning-based activities with no attention to form. FonF, conversely, is a kind of instruction that draw's the learner's attention to linguistic forms in the context of meaningful communication.

Long and Robinson (1998) claimed that a FonF approach is more effective than both FonFs and focus on meaning and captures "the strength of an analytic approach while dealing with its limitations" (Long & Robinson, 1998, p. 22). Long (2000) argued that FonFs is problematic because it leads to lessons which are dry and consist of teaching linguistic forms with little concern with communicative use. Besides, Focus on meaning is also a problematic method because it does not lead to desired levels of grammatical development, is not based on learners' needs, and has been found inadequate by studies based on meaning-based programs (Harely & Swain, 1984; Swain, 1985). FonF, on the other hand, meets the conditions most

considered optimal. In other words, this is learner-centered and happens when the learners have a communicative problem.

Long (1991) characterized FonF mainly as a reaction to linguistic problems that occur during communicative activities. He stated that FonF "overtly draws students' attention to linguistic elements as they arise incidentally in lessons whose overriding focus is on meaning or communication" (Long, 1991, pp. 45-46). He noted that "a syllabus with a focus on form teaches something else-biology, mathematic, workshop practice, automobile repair, the geography of the country where the foreign language is spoken, the cultures of its speakers, and so on" (pp. 45-46). Thus, he excluded drawing learner's attention to form in any predetermined manner. Long believed that learners can acquire most of the grammar of a language incidentally, while their attention is on meaning (Long, 2000). Thus, he assumed that if there is a FonF, it should be brief and occasional.

However, later researchers such as Doughty and Williams (1998a), Nassaji and Fotos (2004, 2007), Spada (1997), and Williams (1998a) expanded the concept of FonF to include both incidental and preplanned, and have also noted that FonF can take place on a broader scale depending on how and when it is administered. Doughty and Williams (1998a) suggested that FonF instruction can occur both reactively and proactively: reactively by responding to errors and proactively by predicting the target language problems before they occur. Moreover, both reactively and proactively FonF are effective depending on context. Doughty and Williams (1998a) also argued that "some focus on form is applicable to the majority of the linguistic code features that learners must master" and that "leaving the learners to their own devices is not the best plan" (Doughty & Williams, 1998a, p. 197).

Ellis (2001) divided FonF instruction into planned and incidental FonF. According to him, both planned and incidental FonF occur when the learner's attention is on meaning. Nonetheless, the two forms are different as the planned FonF involves drawing the learner's attention to pre-selected forms and incidental FonF involves no pre-selected forms. Furthermore in incidental FonF, attention to form can occur either reactively, in response to errors during communicative activities, or preemptively, by addressing language forms anticipated to be problematic.

2.4.2 Factors to Consider in Implementing Focus on Form

Internal and external factors of language learning such as linguistic features to focus and the durability of the pedagogical effects of FonF instruction are considered respectively as follows:

2.4.2.1 Linguistic Features

Linguistic features are one of the factors to be considered in implementing FonF instruction. According to Ellis (1997), there is an accuracy order of acquisition regardless of learners' mother tongues, age, and language learning environment (natural or instructional); therefore, most of the learners generally acquire progressive –ing, auxiliary be, and plural –s first; articles and irregular past tense next; and regular past tense and third person –s later due to the difficulty of the structures. Moreover, in accordance with the Learnability/Teachability Hypothesis (Pienemann, 1984, 1985, 1989), the current stage of development of the target participants for the effects of language instruction, that is, the learners' readiness for