Title of Project:
The Effects of Form-Focused Practice and Corrective
Feedback on Proceduralizing Simple and Complex
L2 Grammar during EFL Task-Based Interaction

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Final Report

Motivation for the Research
Since a new 2013 "course of study" (CoS) for senior high school English education has been introduced in the national curriculum, the primary purpose of second language education was to shift the predominant focus from gramma drills and translation methods to a greater emphasis on communicative activities and the teaching of critical thinking skills (Taihira, 2012). In many second language (L2) classrooms in Japan, meaning-oriented methods, such as communicative language teaching (CLT) and task-based language teaching (TBLT), have been gaining in popularity. However, these types of methods seem to have fallen short of ensuring high levels of L2 proficiency and accurate use of the L2. In other words, in many educational contexts, second language (L2) grammar seems not taught effectively in communicative contexts. L2 teachers tend to teach grammar in decontextualized ways, such as adopting grammar drills, or merely implement meaning-focused communicative activities in which L2 learners are expected to learn grammar incidentally. For these teachers, L2 grammar and communicative activities are considered as a dichotomy, rather than a harmonious merger.

SLA researchers (e.g., Swain, 1985, Lyster, 1994, 2007) have argued that mere exposure to free communicative tasks does not necessarily lead to incidental learning and that more systematic, form-focused intervention can succeed in drawing learners' attention to the target form to facilitate L2 development. Although positive effects of both proactive and reactive form-focused instruction (FFI) have been reported (e.g., Spada & Lightbown, 1993; Yang & Luster, 2010), little research has examined the effects of repetitive communicative practice of target structures in L2 classrooms. In many previous studies, numerous practice activities with explicit grammar presentation/explanation consist of consciousness-raising activities (i.e., refection on

metalinguistic rules) within a short period. Furthermore, most empirical studies investigating the effects of deliberate and repetitive practice on the automatization of L2 grammar were conducted in laboratory settings, and practice tended to be designed as decontextualized mechanical grammar exercises.

Therefore, the purpose of the present study is to investigate the effects of repetitive communicative practice on learners' L2 development in EFL classrooms. More specifically, this study aims to examine whether proactive FFI techniques (e.g., form-focused practice) with and without reactive FFI (e.g., corrective feedback [CF]) are effective for the acquisition of the English past tense verb forms and past tense questions by Japanese first-year high school students (aged 15-16). The study was conducted at a public high school in Japan during the second semester for about five months. Furthermore, this study sheds light on whether the complexity of linguistic structures (simple and complex) and the modality of tests (written and oral versions) measuring different types of L2 knowledge affect the effectiveness of the instruction.

Research Questions
The following four research questions (RQs) are addressed:

RQ 1:
Do learners who are exposed to form-focused practice activities and communicative tasks benefit more than those who are exposed to form-unfocused practice activities and communicative tasks?

RQ 2:
Do learners who are exposed to form-focused practice activities with CF benefit more than those who are exposed to form-focused practice activities without CF?

RQ 3:
Do learners who are exposed to form-unfocused practice activities and communicative tasks benefit more than those who are exposed to regular L2 lessons?

RQ 4:
To what extent is the effectiveness of the instructional interventions affected by simple and complex grammatical structures?

Research Methodology
The study was conducted at a public high school in Japan for about five months during the second semester of the school year. Participating students were first-year high school students ($N = 159$, aged 15-16). The students were beginner or lower intermediate level learners of English. Four Japanese English teachers and three ALTs were in charge of each class (group). They were selected based on their willingness to participate in the study. In each group, one Japanese English teacher took the role of primary instructor and the researcher and the research assistant helped the teacher to perform the treatment activities during the treatment sessions. The two different types of linguistic features selected in the present study were simple past tense verb forms (morphosyntactic structure) and past tense questions (syntactic structure). The simple past tense form draws heavily on morphology and requires learners to process the grammatical

coding of the semantic meaning of the past. With respect to question forms, they are multi-word structures. In other words, producing the questions requires the control of multiple syntactic movements as well as morphosyntactic competence involving the use and marking of auxiliaries (Adams, 2007).

As presented in Figure 1, four intact classes were randomly assigned to three experimental groups and one control group. During an eight-week treatment session, prior to engaging in meaning-oriented communicative tasks (e.g., Celebrity Interview; The Alibi Game), two experimental groups engaged in various FFP activities in pairs and groups (e.g., Find Someone Who), which ask learners to use the target forms extensively in communicative contexts (also called communicative drills). The other experimental group participated in form-unfocused practice (FUP), which requires learners to use various types of grammatical structures in the similar communicative contexts, followed by the same meaning-focused communicative tasks. The students in the FFP groups and the FUP group were video recorded and audio recorded for the observational analysis while engaged in the communicative activities. A test control group participated in its regular L2 lessons (e.g., reading comprehension activities and grammar drills), in which they were not engaging in communicative activities.

Immediate post-tests and delayed post-tests four weeks later were administered. Learners' L2 development (explicit knowledge and automatized explicit knowledge) was measured by error correction tests and oral and written production tests (e.g., picture-cued story telling test and conversation completion test). The delayed post-tests were administered four weeks after the immediate post-tests. Learners' responses to a post-instructional questionnaire were analyzed to assess their perceptions regarding the communicative activities and instruction.

Summary of Findings

In the written tests, except for the error correction test, only the FFP groups significantly improved their performance over time in their use of past tense forms and past tense questions. In addition, the FFP groups significantly outperformed the FUP group and the TC group on all post-tests. However, there was no significant difference between the FFP groups and no significant difference between the FUP group and the TC group.

In the oral tests, only the three groups that participated in the communicative activities (the FFP groups and the FUP group) significantly improved their performance over time in their use of past tense forms and past tense questions. Although there were no significant differences between the FFP groups on either the immediate or delayed post-tests, only the FFP without CF group significantly outperformed the FUP group and the TC group on all post-tests, indicating that it maintained its learning gains after the immediate post-tests. Meanwhile, the FFP with CF group did not maintain its gains in the use of past tense forms. Also, this group did not outperform the FUP group on either the immediate or delayed post-tests in the use of past tense questions. Finally, no significant differences were found between the FUP group and the TC group.

The results of the exit questionnaire data indicated that a majority of students thought the activities and tests were practicing listening and speaking skills, grammar, and writing skill, as the participants took written tests and repeatedly practiced specific grammatical structures. It was reported that most participants actively participated in the communicative activities while being aware of using the target grammatical structures. Although the FFP without CF group showed the highest satisfaction with the activities, several students (21%) in the FFP with CF group were not satisfied with the activities. Surprisingly, not only the FFP with CF group but also about 70%

of the FFP without CF group perceived that they received CF during the activities. Because students in the FFP without CF group were willing to communicate with their classmates and their teachers, it seemed that the students learned from other peers during the activities. Finally, most participants demonstrated overall satisfaction with and appreciation of the activities. They considered the activities "interesting," "useful," "invaluable," and "effective" to enhance their English proficiency. They also thought that they developed not only English skills but also communicative skills and willingness to communicate with their peers.

The overall results revealed that the FFP groups scored significantly higher on written and oral post-tests than the other two groups, claiming that repetitive FFP may improve their accuracy on L2 production. Moreover, results of the questionnaire revealed that a majority of students engaging in the communicative practice activities considered these activities useful and invaluable to enhance not only their accuracy but also their communication skills and their attitudes toward peer interaction.

Implications

As was the case with the empirical findings in the previous studies (e.g., Day & Shapson, 1991; Lyster, 1994; Spada & Lightbown, 1993; de la Fuente, 2006), the present study revealed that form-focused intervention techniques in communicative activities were effective in developing learners' accurate use of the target grammatical features. Furthermore, by extending the laboratory studies on automatization of L2 grammar (e.g., DeKeyser, 1997; Robinson, 1997; Rodgers, 2011), the findings in this study lend support to the claim that repetitive communicative practice in L2 classrooms may enable learners to pay attention to form during communicative tasks, and to improve their accuracy in written and oral L2 production. The investigation of repetitive practice within the FFI framework has been called for in classroom settings, as well as laboratory settings. This study may be the first empirical study to implement extensive content-embedded practice in addition to communicative tasks in the EFL classrooms and revealed evidence that form-focused practice had significant effects on proceduralizing L2 grammatical knowledge. Hence, as the study was conducted in a high school's L2 classrooms over a sufficiently long duration, the study revealed empirical evidence of practice effects with high ecological validity.

This study also has pedagogical implications for L2 teaching in L2 classrooms. First, it is recommended that form-focused practice ("enabling grammar activities" or "guided practice") should be included in L2 lessons in conjunction with free communicative tasks. Although some researchers (e.g., Long & Robinson, 1998) have supported the claim that language acquisition should occur naturally by means of task-based interaction, communicative activities for school-age learners must be "meaningful" and "purposeful" to empower students and achieve educational goals, such as developing problem-solving skills (Williams & Burden, 1997; Lyster, 2007; also see Lightbown, 1998). Second, L2 teachers must take particular care to create ideal learning environments, called "communities of learners" (Hall, 2001), in L2 classrooms. In order to maximize students' performance in communicative activities and to ensure the development of their L2 knowledge, teachers are required to provide deliberate, adequate opportunities for students to interact with each other in pairs or in groups. Hence, implementing form-focused practice activities may be effective for building peer relationships in a communicative way. Finally, L2 teachers need to consider learners' affective factors in order to create a "safe learning environment" in classrooms (Van den Branden, 2007). Teachers need to increase learners' self-

confidence and decrease their anxiety by creating a supportive atmosphere, such as giving positive feedback and appraisal, and allowing students to make errors.

In future research, the collaboration of L2 teachers and researchers is necessary to investigate the effectiveness of different types of form-focused practices and CF in relation to learners' cognitive abilities (e.g., analytical ability and working memory) and other factors (e.g., motivation, engagement, student- teacher relationships, peer relationships, and classroom culture) in various educational contexts. Furthermore, it will also be crucial to measure the development of the varying levels of complexity of grammatical structures for learners of different ages, proficiency levels, and social backgrounds.
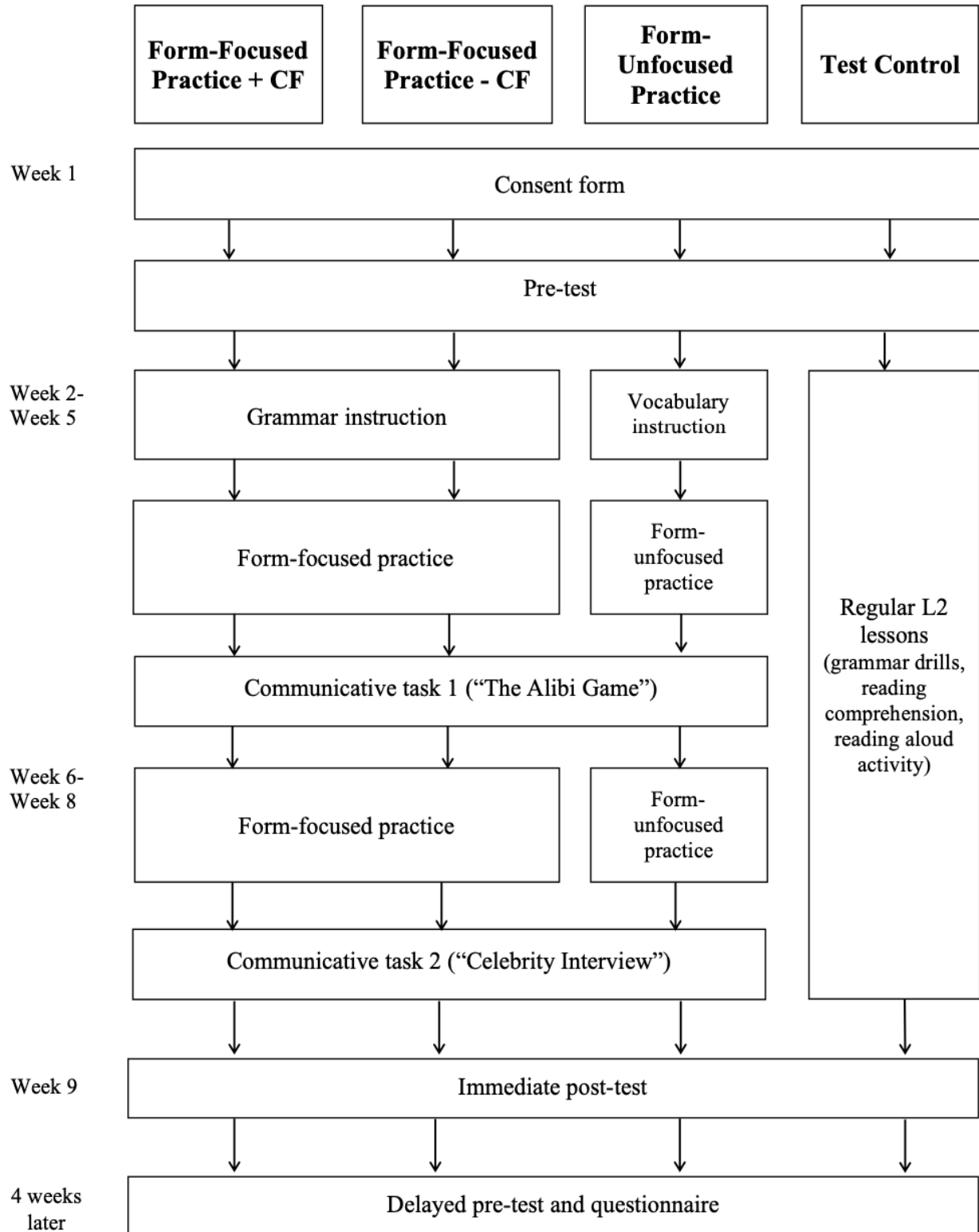
Form-Focused Practice + CF	Form-Focused Practice - CF	Form-Unfocused Practice	Test Control

Week 1	Consent form
	Pre-test

	Grammar instruction	Vocabulary instruction	Regular L2 lessons (grammar drills, reading comprehension, reading aloud activity)
Week 2-Week 5	Form-focused practice	Form-unfocused practice	
	Communicative task 1 ("The Alibi Game")		
Week 6-Week 8	Form-focused practice	Form-unfocused practice	
	Communicative task 2 ("Celebrity Interview")		
Week 9	Immediate post-test		
4 weeks later	Delayed pre-test and questionnaire		

Figure 1 The procedure of quasi-experimental design

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