

University of Groningen

## Effectiveness of explicit vs. implicit L2 instruction

Rousse-Malpat, Audrey

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## Summary in English

In the field of second language acquisition within applied linguistics, researchers have been committed to finding the most effective way to improve L2 performance in the classroom. The debate has focused especially on whether explicit instruction, which focuses on communicative skills with explicit explanation of linguistic rules, or implicit instruction, which focuses on communicative skills with lots of frequent, authentic input with no focus on rules is more effective.

This dissertation takes a Dynamic usage-Based perspective on language teaching and seeks to address the question of the effectiveness of explicitness versus implicitness again taking a longitudinal classroom-based approach. We compared two teaching programs: one predominantly explicit (using the course books *Grandes Lignes* and *D'accord*) and one predominantly implicit (using the AIM method). Rather than using a laboratory setting, this study traced the development of 229 learners over the course of three years in their actual L2 French classes. The learners are compared on both spoken and written data, collected in (semi) free response tasks. Basing ourselves on Dynamic usage-based theory and principles, we explained the processes involved in language learning with a high-input implicit method.

We carried out three related studies to answer our research questions. The first study analyzed the entire data set ( $n=229$ ) and used two mixed effects models to determine which program was more effective. The second study analyzed the oral data of a subset of participants matched in scholastic level and amount of L2 exposure ( $n=41$ ) to compare the effects of each program on measures of fluency, grammar and vocabulary. The third study analyzed the written data of the same subset ( $n=43$ ) to compare the effects of each program on measures of complexity.

The first study showed that a predominantly implicit form-focused program was more effective in the development of L2 oral and written skills after one, two and three years of instruction than a predominantly explicit form-focused program. It concluded that the program that focused most on oral skills at the beginning (the implicit program) and had the most amount of L2 exposure helped develop better oral as well as written skills within one year of acquisition and maintained this difference during the following two years.

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The second study was a detailed analysis of the oral data of a sub-set of our participants (n=41), comparable in terms of amount of L2 exposure and scholastic level. It showed that the implicitly-taught participants showed higher levels regarding speech rate, grammatical complexity and L2 use. The programs were found to have the same effects on filled pauses use, grammatical accuracy and vocabulary. The programs also had the same effects on grammatical measures (except for the use of present tense, which was used more correctly by the implicit group), vocabulary and filled pauses.

The third study looked at the same subgroup of participants, but this time studied the written productions of the learners. The analysis revealed that the implicit group was more advanced than the explicit group on most measures of complexity. Lexical complexity measures, lexical diversification (Guiraud) and lexical sophistication (average word length), were an exception to this pattern as the groups scored the same. In sum, explicit instruction did not necessarily lead to more complexity as measured in our study.

The general conclusion of this dissertation is that a predominantly implicit program such as AIM, which provides enough L2 exposure, routines and opportunities for L2 use from the beginning of the acquisition process, is more effective in improving L2 proficiency.