CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

2.0 Introduction

This chapter reviews the empirical studies on form-focused instruction that forms the basis for this study.

2.1 Related studies

Over the past twenty years, many research has been carried out to empirically test the effect of instruction on second language acquisition. Some theorists (e.g. Krashen, 1982) claim that grammatical instruction has no or little effects on second language acquisition. However, positive effect has been found by a number of researchers (Long 1983, Pica 1983, Paves 1984 and Doughty 1992) and research by Pienemann (1987, 1989) also suggest that it is effective.

In addition, recent research in Canada (Lightbown 1983, Lightbown and Spada 1990, Spada and Lightbown 1993, White et al 1991) found that form-focused instruction and corrective feedback were effective in promoting the acquisition of interrogatives and some lexical choices. These Canadian researchers, in particular, have conducted wide-ranging experimental work aimed at

clarifying the roles of form-focused instruction and comprehensible input in second language acquisition.

Lightbown and Spada (1989) conducted a study on the developing oral English of about 100 L2 learners in Quebec, Canada whereby the learners were native speakers of French (aged 10-12 years) who had received a 5-month intensive ESL course in either grade 5 or grade 6 elementary schools. The results showed substantial between-class differences were found in the accuracy with which students used English structures such as progressive -ing and adjective noun order in noun phrases. There was some evidence that these differences were due to differences in teachers' form-focused instruction. The results of their research provide further support for the hypothesis that form-focused instruction within a communicative context contributes to higher levels of linguistic knowledge and performance. The findings of the study suggest that ' accuracy, fluency, and overall communicative skills are probably best developed through instruction that is primarily meaning-based but in which guidance is provided through timely form-focused activities and correction in context.'

Krashen (1982) had raised question onto the previously undisputed central role of study of discrete grammar points in language instruction. Terrall, who is well-known for the formulation of the Natural Approach in language instruction, had started to re-examine the reduced role for grammar that was recommended in the Natural Approach. He had theorised that there might be a new, as yet

undefined role for explicit grammar instruction. Explicit grammar instruction is defined by Terrall as "the use of instruction strategies to draw the students' attention to, or focus on, form and / or structure" (1991: 53, as cited in Manley and Calk, 1997).

There is also more support for providing advanced language learners with explicit grammar knowledge than beginning learners. Terrell states that explicit grammar instruction may benefit students learning to read and write (1991: 56).

According to Adair-Hauck, Bonnie et al (1994)'s Whole Language and Guided Participation Approach, grammatical structures will become internalised only if they are used for communicative purposes. The approach is based on the premise that formal classroom instruction is beneficial to the learners if it is situated in context and in connected discourse.

Those who claim that linguistic competence in a second language is acquired implicitly also argue that the same knowledge, once acquired, is drawn on for both production and comprehension, making practice in production unnecessary (Krashen, 1985; VanPatten and Cadierno, 1993a, 1993b).

DeKeyser (1997) made the hypothesis that once second language grammar rules have been explicitly assimilated, practice will lead to gradual automatization, as measured by reduced reaction time, reduced error rate, and decreased

interference from simultaneous tasks. In his study, all subjects were taught the same rules explicitly and then received the same amount of practice and exposure for each rule. Overall, the data lead strong support to the hypothesis that form-focused instruction followed by practice has a skill-specific effect in the sense that students' performance in writing has improved significantly. This is contrary to what Krashen, 1985; VanPatten and Cadierno, 1993a, 1993b have said. It does imply that ' the sequence of explicit rule learning, followed by a short period of activities focused on using explicit knowledge during performance of the target skills, and finally by a long period of repeated opportunities to use that knowledge, is likely to yield knowledge that is highly automatized ' (DeKeyser, 1997: 215).

A similar study was also done by Peter Robinson (1997). His experimental study examined the extent to which 60 adult Japanese ESL learners were able to acquire a rule regulating the argument structure frames of novel verbs of English after exposure to grammatical examples of sentences containing the verbs. Training took place under conditions with no focus on form (implicit and incidental conditions) and with focus on form (enhanced and instructed con-ditions). Results show instructed learners were clearly superior to learners in other conditions in their ability to generalise the knowledge developed during training to novel transfer set sentences.

Ellis (1990) affirms that in some cases, depending on the nature of the target structure, instruction can work directly in natural communication, but in other cases, instruction contributes to explicit declarative knowledge rather than implicit procedural knowledge.

Foto and Ellis (1991) investigated the relative advantages of direct and indirect consciousness-raising. They found that both options resulted in statistically significant gains in understanding the rule for dative alternation in two groups of college-level Japanese students. In one group, direct explicit instruction resulted in higher scores on a grammaticality judgment test, but in the other the consciousness-raising task proved equally effective.

However, in a more elaborate follow-up study, Foto (1994) found that indirect instruction worked as well as direct instruction in teaching explicit knowledge of three different structures (adverb placement, dative alternation, and relative clauses) to 160 Japanese university students.

Keiko Hayashi (1995) demonstrated that explicit instruction or explanation of grammars and meanings is more effective than non-grammar teaching and suggests that both a natural environment for communicative input and a formal environment for form-focused instruction should be given, depending on the learner's level of L2 attainment. She concluded that ' as the frequency of input

becomes a familiar and automatic process, explicit knowledge becomes implicit knowledge through practice in natural communication.'

McCathy (1991) proposes that tenses need to be taught in contexts. Similarly, Lock Graham (1996) argues that L2 teaching must address grammar as a means of creating meaning, rather than as a set of rules to be mastered. Also, in VanPatten and Oikkenon (1996)'s research article, they say that there is evidence that the effects of explicit information are negligible and then claim that perhaps the best focus on form for supplementing comprehensible input is structured input.

In Schulz Renate A. (1997)'s research article, the author recommended that ' in order to establish pedagogical credibility and increase their students' commitment to and involvement in learning, teachers make an effort to explore students' beliefs about language learning and to establish a fit between their own and their students' expectations.'

A similar study was carried out by Manley and Calk (1997). They conducted a study to find out if students perceive grammar as useful for writing skills. In their study, students' questionnaires indicated that a majority perceived the grammar instruction they received as beneficial to their writing skills. A statistical comparison of the grammar errors in their compositions supported this view.

I agree wholeheartedly with what Geoff Barton (1998) says in his research article entitled *Grammar Without Shame*. He says ' we sometimes underestimate the powerful effect of grammar in helping us to make judgments about students' work.' He quotes from Tomlinson (1994) that researchers are mistaken in saying that grammar teaching has absolutely no effect on developing writing skills.

Barton also makes it clear that he does not support teaching grammar solely in context as he thinks the problem with this approach ' makes grammar into a dangerously haphazard affair. Some children learn this; others learn that. None gains an overview or spots a system. ' He concludes that every English lesson should be about more than mere content and every encounter with every text ought to be inviting students to comment on the writer's use of language. This is because he is of the opinion that if all we talk about is content, and do not draw attention to structure, then students will not gain sufficient experience of the way language is being used in different contexts. Since sentence variety is the key to successful writing, a more formal approach of teaching grammar is important as it has made a real impact on the students he has taught.

Chiang and Costello (1983) have pointed out that first and second language acquisition are not essentially the same process. Therefore they do not support the claims made by Newmark and Reibel (1968) that there is no necessity to present a systematic organization of the language to the learner. They also disagree with

Newmark and Reibel's claim that it is sufficient to just present the learner with language material in contexts "which exemplify their meaning and use".

After reading Chiang and Costello's research article, I felt that language teachers should isolate more complex or difficult structures (such as verb tense) and deal with them explicitly in class. This is a logical suggestion in the light of Chiang and Costello's findings. Besides, based on empirical research, adolescents and adults seem to be able to learn rules, make generalizations or memorize syntactic patterns better than children. Therefore, I think much organization of grammatical forms is necessary before the second language learner can learn to internalize them. In other words, form-focused instruction does have its role even in communicative language teaching such as our Malaysian context because it is proven to be effective by many researchers.

Dyson's study (1996) has proven that form-focused instruction was indeed effective in improving the rate of acquisition of her three adult migrant ESL students. The study supports the claim that form-focused instruction can make a difference. It also lends weight to Pienemann's claim (1989) that the effectiveness of instruction depends on whether a structure is learnable for an individual learner. The study shows that form-focused instruction can provide an innovative linguistic focus to communicative language teaching and give important assistance with the second language acquisition of the learners.

2.2 Conclusion

All the research findings reviewed above have led me to venture into the small research that I am about to discuss. Some of the researchers that I mentioned in this review were mere classroom teachers like myself but they were serious ESL teachers who sincerely wanted to help their students to learn and master the language, so they embarked on their own investigations and saw that their ideas are successfully "disseminated".

Apart from Chiang and Costello (1983) and Barton (1998), I was also very encouraged by Brindley who wrote *Some Current Issues in Second Language Teaching* (1985). In his article, he encourages teachers to become action researchers, collect their own data on what happens in the classroom, document objectives, activities and outcomes and decide for themselves on the basis of the results what works in their own particular situation and what does not, rather than waiting for the solution to fall down from the sky. It was after reading his article and many other journal articles and books on action research that I decided to do this small research.