

From Second to Heritage Languages: Validating Form-Focused Instruction for Arabic Heritage Learners

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Abstract—Previous research shows that in heritage language development, accuracy lags fluency. This has prompted calls for the use of Form Focused Instruction in heritage language classrooms. This paper offers empirical evidence in support of Form Focused Instruction in Arabic as a heritage language addressing the questions (1) Is Form Focused Instruction more effective than Meaning-based instruction for heritage language learners of Arabic? (2) Is Isolated Form Focused Instruction specifically more effective than Meaning-based instruction in teaching adjective-noun agreement to heritage language learners? (3) Are there parallels between the development of the heritage language pedagogy and the established second language pedagogy? The methodology includes the development of a lesson plan incorporating Form Focused Instruction to teach noun-adjective agreement in Arabic as a heritage language and piloting it with 10 heritage high intermediate learners of Arabic. Findings show that (1) statistically significant accuracy gains are made when Form Focused Instruction is used instead of Meaning-based instruction, (2) Isolated Form Focused Instruction is especially more effective than Meaning-based instruction in teaching adjective-noun agreement in Arabic as a heritage language, (3) significant parallels between the emerging heritage language pedagogy and second language pedagogy are revealed. Key pedagogical implications are (1) both heritage language learners and second language learners progress in their fluency but struggle in their accuracy, (2) Form Focused Instruction is especially effective in teaching morphosyntactic features that are resistant to acquisition, and (3) Form Focused Instruction in second language research can significantly inform and advance heritage language pedagogy.

Index Terms—communicative language teaching, heritage language pedagogy, timing of Form Focused Instruction

I. INTRODUCTION

The goal of this paper is to contribute to the pedagogy of teaching a group of language learners known as Heritage Language Learners (HLLs). Following Montrul (2008, p. 490) and Kisselev et al. (2020, p. 2), we refer to an HLL as a language learner, who attempts to develop their heritage language (HL), a language of a linguistic minority, in a formal context of an HL classroom. A second language learner (L2L) is defined here as an adult learner, who attempts to acquire an additional language through formal instruction after their first language has already been acquired. When describing these two groups of learners, we refer to their learning experiences as instructed language learning.

The significance of research involving HLLs lies in the fact that these learners are different from monolinguals who acquire the language of their community, and they are also different from L2Ls who acquire an additional language after having fully acquired their first language. HLLs differ from monolinguals in that the language they are exposed to is a minority language rather than the dominant language of the speech community in which the learner grows. They are also unlike L2Ls who acquire a majority language, and who have not been exposed in childhood to the additional language they attempt to acquire later in life. Being distinct from monolinguals and L2Ls makes HLLs and the process of HL learning a very promising area of research in linguistics and pedagogy.

Following Montrul (2008, 2010, 2016), Au (2008), and Benmamoun (2021), we assume that there are aspects of language learning that remain equally problematic for HLLs and L2Ls despite the differences between these two distinct groups of language learners.

Recent studies of HL classrooms (e.g., Kisselev et al., 2020) have concluded that HLLs enrolled in classes where the Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approach is used may progress to a high level of language fluency. However, their language accuracy remains problematic. This conclusion drove HL scholars (e.g., Kisselev et al., 2020) to advocate for the use of Form Focused Instruction (FFI) in such classes. Although this is not specified in the HL literature, it is important to note that the literature on FFI in L2 describes two types of FFI. In the first type of FFI,

learners' attention to language forms is drawn pre-emptively by isolating the forms needed for a communicative activity. This type of FFI is referred to as Isolated (ISO) FFI. The second type of FFI involves drawing the learners' attention to language forms spontaneously within the context of a communicative activity. This type of FFI is referred to as Integrated (INT) FFI (Spada et al., 2017).

Against this backdrop, the present study is an attempt to test the validity of claims advocating for the use of FFI in HL classes by seeking to answer the following three major research questions.

(1) Is there any empirical evidence to support the claim that FFI is a more effective methodological option than Meaning-based instruction for HLLs?

(2) Is ISO FFI specifically more effective than Meaning-based instruction in teaching adjective-noun agreement to HLLs of Standard Arabic?

(3) Are there any parallels between the historical development of the emerging HL pedagogy and that of L2 pedagogy?

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

CLT is considered to be a leading approach to teaching and learning in today's L2 classroom. As an approach, CLT is based on the concept of communicative competence originally defined by Hymes (Canale & Swain, 1980, p. 16) as the language user's knowledge of rules of language and the ability to use them in context. When applied to L2 learning, communicative competence refers to a language ability "to understand and communicate effectively and appropriately in a given community" (Center for Canadian Language Benchmarks [CCLB], 2012, p. 207). Over the years, multiple attempts have been made to operationalize the concept, thus giving rise to many theoretical models of communicative competence. These theoretical models explain how the concept of communicative competence can be applied to the field of L2 teaching (see e.g., Canale & Swain, 1980; Celce-Murcia, 2007; CCLB, 2012, 2013; Common European Framework of Reference for Languages [CEFR], 2025). The overarching goal of these models is to theoretically inform CLT as a pedagogical practice that prioritizes meaning over manipulation of language forms (for an overview of this approach, see e.g., CCLB, 2013). In these models, linguistic or grammatical competence, which comprises the knowledge of sounds and sound patterns, word structures, content words, functional words, as well as the knowledge of how the words are combined in phrases and sentences, is an integral part of the communicative competence. The models that theoretically inform CLT emphasize the importance of linguistic competence in the development of L2Ls' communicative abilities; therefore, CLT should not be viewed as a meaning (or function)-driven approach only, as focus on language forms, and the development of L2Ls' communicative abilities are not mutually exclusive (Center for Canadian Language Benchmarks, 2013).

Research conducted by Elgün-Gündüz et al. (2012) and Spada et al. (2014) provides empirical evidence to support the claim that focus on language forms while learning how to communicate meaning assists L2Ls in noticing and acquiring L2 features that may otherwise go unnoticed. This leads to the development of the communicative abilities of L2 learners.

One type of instruction that advocates for the integration of language forms in communicative activities is known as FFI. Research on FFI has been conducted since 1997 (Spada, 1997). Spada and Lightbown (2008, p. 199) define FFI as a type of instruction that draws learners' attention to language forms and structures within communicative interaction. This may be done by giving metalinguistic information, highlighting the form in question or by providing corrective feedback.

Similar types of instruction that highlight the importance of attention to grammatical forms, understanding grammatical concepts and developing metalinguistic awareness have been advocated for HLLs by Kisselev et al. (2020). Since the claim has been made about the importance of FFI for HLLs, the field of HL pedagogy can benefit from the findings of the theoretical and empirical research on FFI in L2 classroom. In what follows, we discuss how FFI has been operationalized and empirically studied in the L2 classroom so that the findings of this research can inform the HL pedagogy.

With the pedagogical shift in the seventies of the last century from instruction that is primarily based on teaching different aspects of the L2 grammar (see Long, 1991, **Focus on Forms**) to one where emphasis in the classroom was instead placed on teaching learners to comprehend and produce L2 for the purpose of achieving communicative competence, it has later been observed (see e.g., Lightbown & Spada, 1990) that both adolescent and adult L2Ls enrolled in classes where the focus of instruction is on meaning, and no attention is paid to language forms at all, develop a high level of fluency; yet, their accuracy lags behind. This fact led scholars in the field (Lightbown & Spada, 1990; Swain, 1991) to call for integrating FFI into communicative-based L2 classes, as the latter option has been found to help learners develop better accuracy with at least some if not all aspects of the L2 grammar. In fact, some of the earliest calls for the incorporation of FFI in communicative-based L2 classrooms can be traced to Long (1991). Since 1991, the call for integrating FFI into L2 classes that are based on the CLT approach has been reiterated in later scholarly work. Thus, in Spada and Lightbown (2008, p. 181), we find the following statement: "[t]here is increasing consensus that form-focused instruction helps learners in communicative or content-based instruction to learn features of the target language that they may not acquire without guidance".

Since FFI is based on the premise that drawing learners' attention to language forms in communicative contexts can facilitate L2 acquisition, the next logical question that can be asked here is about the timing of introducing language forms to L2Ls in a sequence of activities included in a communicative lesson plan. According to Spada et al. (2017), learners' attention to language forms can be drawn either pre-emptively by isolating the forms for a communicative activity, or spontaneously within the context of a communicative activity. The former type of FFI is referred to as Isolated ISO FFI, and the latter, as INT FFI.

When two types of FFI were first conceptualized by Spada and her colleagues (Spada et al., 2014, 2017), they were conceived as complementary rather than mutually exclusive. Thus, it was stated that both ISO and INT FFIs have their pros and cons. One of the advantages of ISO FFI is that it allows for the initial isolation of a grammatical form from its communicative context. This results in reducing the cognitive load of L2Ls when attempts are made to simultaneously focus on form and meaning, especially for beginner L2Ls. One of the advantages of INT FFI is that L2Ls benefit from the instruction when it is most needed, which leads to a stronger form/ meaning relationship.

Spada et al. (2014) designed a quasi-experimental study to investigate the effectiveness of ISO and INT FFI with 109 L2Ls enrolled in a non-credit language program in Canada; the targeted grammatical form for L2 acquisition was the English passive. In the study, L2Ls are separated into two groups that received an equal amount of ISO and INT FFI. The results of the study show that both types of instruction contribute positively to the development of L2Ls' knowledge of the English passive. The difference is in the type of knowledge targeted by each type of FFI. The tentative conclusion is that ISO FFI taps into explicit knowledge, while INT FFI taps into implicit knowledge. Crucially, the findings of the study show that attention to form in communicative contexts can facilitate L2 language development.

Spada and Lima (2015) also investigated the preferences of L2 teachers and their learners for INT and ISO FFI in two teaching contexts, Canada and Brazil. The findings show preference for INT FFI. However, the results also demonstrate that L2 teachers and learners value ISO FFI, particularly in the context where L2Ls have access to the target language outside of the classroom (e.g., English as a Second Language (ESL)). This is because in the ESL context, L2Ls have multiple opportunities to use language communicatively. Thus, one of their goals of attending language classes is to improve accuracy, which can be achieved by ISO FFI. L2Ls, whose exposure to the target language is limited to the classroom (e.g., English as a Foreign Language (EFL)), value INT FFI. This is because they lack the opportunities to develop the communicative abilities of using language outside of the classroom. A partial replication of this study was conducted by Lenchuk et al. (2025) in the context of the Omani EFL classroom. The results of the replicated study show that Omani EFL learners show statistically significant preference for INT FFI. Two variables are shown to affect L2Ls' preferences for ISO and INT FFI, namely gender and proficiency level. In the study, male advanced learners show preference for ISO FFI, whereas female beginner learners show preference for INT FFI. Crucially, all participants highlight the importance of learning grammar as a communicative resource.

The field of applied linguistics has provided empirical evidence that supports FFI for L2 language development. The concept of FFI has been further developed into ISO and INT FFI. Moreover, the studies that investigate the preference of L2Ls for FFI have shown that L2Ls value FFI in a communicative classroom; however, their preference for one type of instruction over the other is determined by variables, such as gender, level of language proficiency, complexity of the targeted grammatical structure. We believe that the pedagogy of HL teaching can greatly benefit from research on FFI and on the construct of communicative competence. The next section of this paper presents a communicative lesson plan for HLLs of Arabic that has been developed by taking into consideration the major findings of FFI research and the major principles of CLT taken from the fields of applied linguistics and second language education.

The literature on teaching Arabic as an HL has tackled, among others, issues such as (a) the complex di/multiglossic nature of Arabic (see e.g., Albirini, 2022; Said, 2024), (b) comparing HLLs of Arabic to L2Ls (see e.g., Albirini, 2022), (c) exploring the attitudes of HLLs of Arabic towards learning a second Arabic dialect (see e.g., Rahmouni & Issa, 2024), or (d) integrating both dialectal Arabic and SA into the curriculum (see e.g., Al-Batal, 2018). To the best of the authors' knowledge, there have been no studies that explored the effectiveness of using FFI as a methodological option in teaching Arabic as an HL. The present study is therefore an attempt to address this gap in the literature.

III. METHODOLOGY

A. A Communicative Lesson Plan for HLL of Arabic

In this lesson plan, which was developed by the authors of this study, the target form is the Standard Arabic (SA) noun-adjective concord (i.e., agreement at the noun phrase level). The choice of this form is motivated by findings of recent studies, particularly Benmamoun et al. (2013) and Albirini et al. (2012). Two major findings of these two studies are: (a) Arabic HLLs have more difficulty learning nominal morpho-syntactic features (e.g., case and noun-adjective agreement) than verbal morphosyntactic features (e.g., tense, aspect, mood, modality, and voice), and (b) HLLs' accuracy lags fluency. Therefore, the proposed lesson plan is an attempt to address the challenges that HLLs encounter with acquiring nominal morphosyntactic features.

The decision to prepare a lesson plan using ISO FFI is based on the fact that the target form of the lesson plan, namely the SA noun-adjective agreement in the nominal domain can be described as follows: (1) it is not a syntactically complex form, (2) it is a form that can be easily explained to the learners, and (3) the equivalent form in the dominant

language of the learners, which is English in the case of Arabic HL learners living in Canada, is more general than the target form. Adjectives in English do not copy the features of gender, definiteness, case, number and humanness from their head nouns in the noun phrase. For example, the Standard Arabic equivalent of the English noun phrase 'Egyptian singer' could be 'مغني مصري', 'مغنية مصرية', 'المغني المصري', 'المغنية المصرية', 'مغنية مصرية', 'مغنية مصرية', 'مغنية مصرية', 'مغنية مصرية', 'مغنيات مصرية', 'مغنيات مصرية' depending on the number, gender, definiteness, and case of the noun phrase.

B. Structure of the Lesson Plan

TABLE 1
STRUCTURE OF THE LESSON PLAN

<p>Introducing the target form to the learners</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teacher gives a handout to the learners • Teacher asks the learners to study a number of sentences. Teacher points out that (*) before the sentence means that the sentence is ungrammatical in SA • Teacher asks the learners to fill in some gaps using the sentences given before as a guide. • Teacher asks the learners to induce the grammatical rule of the target form by filling out a table • Teacher asks the learners to share their findings with their peers to ensure that everyone has arrived at the same conclusion • Teacher asks the learners to do an exercise as a way of practising the target form. Teacher asks every learner to check their answers with their peers
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To help the learners comprehend the reading text 1, Teacher asks the learners to complete a matching exercise in order to familiarize the learners with some of the vocabulary items included in the reading text and which might be unfamiliar to the learners at this level of proficiency. In this exercise, the learners will be able to understand the meaning of an underlined word in the text by matching it to an easier synonym.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teacher asks the learners to read a text on Umm Kulthum (أم كلثوم), the legendary Egyptian singer. The reading text has many tokens of the target structure (adjective-noun agreement).
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teacher asks the learners to do an exercise, which targets the learners' knowledge of some of the adjective-noun collocations included in the reading text.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teacher asks the learners to read the reading text for a second time before answering some comprehension questions.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In another exercise, Teacher asks the learners to read a second reading text, which is much shorter than the first on the life of <i>Asmahan</i> (أسماهان), a contemporary singer of <i>Umm Kulthum</i>. The text is adapted from Alshareef's (2000) article titled <i>Asmahan</i> published in the Arabic Encyclopedia. • Following the reading, the learners have to fill out a table, where they list the similarities and differences between the two singers, <i>Umm Kulthum</i> and <i>Asmahan</i>. The goal of this exercise is to foster the knowledge acquired from the first reading by incorporating it into new knowledge acquired from the second reading.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In another exercise, the learners listen for a few minutes to a podcast prepared by Aljazeera about <i>Umm Kulthum</i> and answer listening comprehension questions.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In another exercise, the learners are asked to divide themselves into two discussion groups, each is made up of 5 learners. The groups are required to discuss two questions. The goal of this exercise is (a) to offer the learners an opportunity to use the collocations, vocabulary items and the target form in their discussions, and (b) to allow the learners to discuss a current phenomenon relevant to the topic of the two reading texts.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teacher asks the learners to write a summary passage about <i>Umm Kulthum</i>.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • As a final activity, Teacher asks the learners to self-assess their learning by filling out 2 blanks. Knowledge of the newly acquired target form is to be tested in a future class.

C. Piloting the Proposed Lesson Plan

The proposed lesson plan laid out in section III was piloted to answer the first two research questions of the present study. The following is a detailed description of the procedure used in the piloting process.

The proposed lesson plan was piloted in one of the Canadian university programs that offer Arabic for HLs. The program offers intermediate Arabic for HLs of Arabic who have already completed two courses in Standard Arabic. Learners enrolled in the course are HLs of dialectal Arabic (Egyptian Arabic, Syrian Arabic and Iraqi Arabic).

Ten Arabic as an HL B2 learners participated in the study. Based on the results of a written placement test, the students were identified as B2 level students according to the CEFR scale. A learner in this level is globally described as:

Can understand the main ideas of complex text on both concrete and abstract topics, including technical discussions in his/her field of specialisation.

Can interact with a degree of fluency and spontaneity that makes regular interaction with native speakers quite possible without strain for either party. Can produce clear, detailed text on a wide range of subjects and explain a viewpoint on a topical issue giving the advantages and disadvantages of various options. (CEFR Global Scale, 2021)

The age of the participants ranges between 18 and 20. Six of the participants have been self-identified as female students and 4 as male. All the participants were informed that the researchers were conducting a study on Arabic as an HL; however, the main focus of the study was not shared with them.

The following procedure was followed during the piloting stage of the proposed lesson plan.

(a) The B2 level teacher developed a lesson plan of their own on the theme of *Umm Kulthum*. This lesson plan was executed first during week 1 of the pilot study. The lesson plan was communicative; however, it was not conceptualized as an FFI informed lesson plan.

(b) The authors of the present study developed a second lesson plan on the theme of *Umm Kulthum* using the methodological option ISO FFI. This lesson plan was delivered and executed by the B2 level teacher during week 2 of the pilot study.

(c) One exercise of the proposed plan was incorporated both in the first lesson plan developed by the B2 level teacher and in the second lesson plan developed by the authors of the present study. This particular exercise of the proposed lesson plan is an oral discussion activity, where the participants are divided into two groups. Their task is to discuss the following two questions for 5 minutes.

Question 1. Summarize what you have learnt about *Umm Kulthum*.

Question 2. What do you think explains the fact that ever since the time of *Umm Kulthum*, no other Arab singer has managed to be as famous as she was despite the fact that today's singers have access to media that were non-existent at the time of *Umm Kulthum*?

(d) Participants' performance on the oral activity was recorded on three different times. The first recording took place in week 1 of the pilot study. The second recording took place in week 2 of the pilot study, and the third recording took place in week 3 of the pilot study.

(e) The target structural feature of the intervention is adjective-noun agreement in Standard Arabic. Cases of adjective-noun agreement found in all three recorded sessions were coded as either 'grammatically correct' or 'grammatically incorrect'. Any answers that involved deviation from standard agreement between the adjective and the noun in the features of case, definiteness, humanness, number and gender were coded as 'grammatically incorrect'. Grammatically correct and incorrect answers that were repeated more than once by the same participant were not part of the tallying process. The data collected from the first recorded session serve as 'the Meaning-based pre-intervention test'. The data collected from the second recorded session serve as 'the ISO FFI post-intervention test', and the data collected from the third recorded session serve as 'the ISO FFI delayed post-intervention test'.

(f) To determine whether the intervention was impactful or not, a comparison of the mean scores of the participants on the three tests is run using a repeated-measures ANOVA. To determine whether any gains in accuracy found in the ISO FFI post-intervention test were retained a week after the second test, the mean scores of the participants on the ISO FFI post-intervention test and their mean scores on the ISO FFI delayed post-intervention test are compared using a paired two sample t-test for means.

The choice of an open-ended oral discussion activity to test the effectiveness of the intervention is based on the consensus in the literature on L2 acquisition that such activities tap into the procedural knowledge (i.e., implicit knowledge) rather than the declarative knowledge (i.e., explicit knowledge) of the learner. The idea is that in such activities, learners are engaged in real-time processing of language; hence, it is highly unlikely for their performance to be attributed to any sort of meta-linguistic awareness the learners might be in possession of at the time of being tested (for more discussion on the type of knowledge accessed during oral and written activities, see Ellis, 2005; Spada & Lightbown, 2008).

IV. RESULTS

The mean scores of accuracy obtained from the Meaning-based pre-intervention, ISO FFI post-intervention and ISO FFI delayed post-intervention are provided in Table 2 below.

TABLE 2
ACCURACY SCORES (IN PERCENTAGES) ON THE MEANING-BASED PRE-TEST, ISO FFI POST-TEST AND ISO FFI DELAYED POST-TEST

Participant	Meaning-based	ISO FFI Post-intervention accuracy scores (%)	ISO FFI Delayed post-intervention accuracy scores (%)
1	50	66.66	66.66
2	33.33	66.66	66.66
3	33.33	50	50
4	33.33	50	33.33
5	66.66	100	100
6	66.66	100	100
7	33.33	66.66	33.33
8	33.33	50	50
9	50	66.66	66.66
10	33.33	66.66	33.33
Mean accuracy scores	43.33%	68.33%	59.99%

Two significant findings can be gleaned from the data in Table 2. The first significant finding is that by and large, the participants' performance on the ISO FFI post-intervention test is significantly higher than their performance on the Meaning-based pre-intervention test. We take this finding as an indication that an ISO FFI is more effective than

Meaning-based instruction in HL contexts. The second significant finding is that the accuracy gains observed on the ISO FFI post-intervention test seem to be, by and large, robust given their retention for most participants.

The results of the repeated-measures ANOVA are offered in Table 3.

TABLE 3
RESULTS OF THE REPEATED-MEASURES ANOVA

ANOVA source of variation	SS	df	MS	F	p-value	F-crit
Rows (participants)	5940.74	9	660.08	5.14	0.0012	2.456
Columns (Times of tests)	1555.56	2	777.78	6.06	0.0097	3.555
Error	2311.11	18	128.40			
Total	9807.41	29				

Considering the results of the R-M ANOVA test given in Table 3, the most important finding is the one that concerns the p-value for the columns (i.e., the different times of the test). The p-value of 0.0097 is less than the standard alpha level ($p = 0.05$). This means that the null hypothesis ($H_0: \mu_1 = \mu_2 = \mu_3$) is rejected. In other words, the results show a statistically significant difference between the scores of the participants on the three tests of the same task. Such a statistically significant difference indicates that the ISO FFI proposed in the present study has been more effective than the Meaning-based instruction.

What remains to be tested is whether the accuracy gains reported in the ISO FFI post-intervention test have been retained in the ISO FFI delayed post-intervention test. For that, a paired sample t-test is run.

The significance level was adjusted to $p < .0167$ using a Bonferroni correction to account for multiple comparisons (Meaning-based pre-intervention, ISO FFI post-intervention, ISO FFI delayed post-test). The results of the paired t-test are presented in Table 4.

TABLE 4
T-TEST: PAIRED TWO SAMPLE FOR MEANS

	Variable 1	Variable 2
Mean	68.33	59.997
Variance	336.4321111	629.6592678
Observations	10	10
Pearson Correlation	0.831603848	
Hypothesized Mean Difference	0	
df	9	
t Stat	1.860589709	
P(T<=t) one-tail	0.047861718	
t Critical one-tail	1.833112933	
P(T<=t) two-tail	0.095723435	
t Critical two-tail	2.262157163	

The results show that the mean accuracy on the ISO FFI post-intervention (68.332) was 8.335 points higher than mean accuracy on the ISO FFI delayed post-intervention (59.997). Given that we expected to see a drop in means from the ISO FFI post-intervention to the ISO FFI delayed post-intervention, we calculate the results of a one-tail t-test. Since $p = 0.04$ is much greater than the Bonferroni-adjusted alpha of 0.0167, we fail to reject the null hypothesis ($H_0: \mu_1 = \mu_2$). In other words, the accuracy gains reported on the ISO FFI post-intervention are not significantly different from the ones observed on the ISO FFI delayed post-intervention. This finding is another indication in support of the effectiveness of the ISO FFI, compared to the Meaning-based instruction in HL contexts.

V. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Three major research questions are raised in the present study, and these are repeated below.

(1) Is there any empirical evidence to support the claim that FFI is a more effective methodological option than Meaning-based instruction for HLLs?

(2) Is ISO FFI a more effective methodological option than Meaning-based instruction in teaching the grammatical feature of adjective-noun agreement to HLLs of Standard Arabic?

(3) Are there any parallels between the historical development of the emerging HL pedagogy and that of L2 pedagogy?

The findings of the pilot study reported in the present study provide empirical evidence to support the claim that FFI is a more effective methodological option than Meaning-based instruction for HLLs.

The findings of the present study also provide empirical evidence to show that in the case of the problematic feature of adjective-noun agreement in Arabic as an HL, ISO FFI is found to be more effective in improving the accuracy of HLLs than Meaning-based instruction. This finding is consistent with previous research in L2 acquisition (Spada & Tomita, 2010). Whether INT FFI is equally more effective in teaching adjective-noun agreement in Arabic as an HL than Meaning-based instruction remains to be empirically investigated.

Regarding the research question raised in (3) above, there are significant parallels that can be drawn between the historical development of the emerging HL pedagogy and that of the well-established L2 pedagogy. A key parallel is that scholars in both fields have concluded that while learners (HLLs and L2Ls) can attain fluency, their linguistic accuracy, especially in the area of morphosyntax, often varies significantly or lags behind their fluency (see Au, 2008; Benmamoun, 2021; Lightbown & Spada, 1990; Long, 1991; Kisselev et al., 2020, p. 3; Montrul, 2008, 2010, 2016; Swain, 1991).

The second parallel is that in both HL and L2 contexts, the observed divergence between learners' fluency and low or variable accuracy in meaning-focused classrooms prompted scholars to advocate for integrating FFI within a communicative framework to address this gap (see for HL pedagogy: Kisselev et al., 2020, p. 5; for L2 pedagogy: Lightbown & Spada, 1990; Long, 1988, 1991; Spada et al., 2014; Spada & Lightbown, 2008; Spada & Lima, 2015).

Significant pedagogical implications can be drawn out of the present study. One such implication is that HLLs share with L2Ls the fact that their accuracy is either variable or lower than their fluency. The results obtained from the present study thus validate the recent call made in the HL pedagogy (see Kisselev et al., 2020) for the adoption of FFI in HL classrooms, as the results offer preliminary empirical evidence in support of FFI compared to Meaning-based instruction.

The results of the present study can also be placed within the larger context of debate on the effectiveness of implicit and explicit instruction of grammar in CLT-informed classrooms (see Spada & Tomito, 2010 for details). Evidence from both L2 and HL classrooms indicates that certain features of target language morphosyntax are more resistant to acquisition than others. ISO and INT FFI are particularly well-suited for addressing these persistent features.

The findings underscore a significant pedagogical implication: the extensive body of research on FFI in L2 acquisition can be productively applied to the developing field of HL instruction.

A number of limitations can be pointed out regarding the present study. One of the major limitations of the present study is that the size of the population of learners involved in the pilot study is very small. We fully acknowledge the fact that the results of this study may thus not be generalizable now. It is hoped that such limitation may be overcome in a future study, where FFI is applied to the teaching of Arabic or any other HL using a much larger population size.

A second limitation of the present study is that the effectiveness of ISO FFI is tested against a specific morphosyntactic feature of Arabic as an HL. It is hoped that the robustness of this particular type of FFI might be further investigated in a future study against other grammatical features where this type of FFI is also recommended.

A third limitation of the present study is that the piloted lesson plan was conducted in a specific locality, a university in Canada. It is therefore hoped that future studies might test the robustness of the findings in other educational settings where HLs are taught in formal classroom settings.

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