

# L'innovation dans la recherche sur les effets de cadre. L'enseignement axé sur l'acquisition des langues secondaires

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**Résumé :** Dans le contexte de la mondialisation la recherche des méthodes et des techniques pédagogiques innovantes devient pertinente. L'approche pédagogique traditionnelle où la formation est précédée par des règles de présentation (explication + pratique mécanique sous forme orientée) ne satisfait pas aux exigences de l'évolution constante du processus du langage. Cet article décrit les perspectives cognitives actuelles portant sur l'acquisition de la langue secondaire. L'apprentissage des langues vise l'acquisition des instructions-cadre ou des instructions

d'entrée (explication + activités structurées d'entrée). Ce système se révèle être rationnel car il conduit à une réflexion optimale de l'utilisation des langues et donne aux apprenants les moyens de penser consciemment selon une sorte de règle afin de travailler sur le sens. L'instruction basée sur des cadres comprend des activités qui demandent aux apprenants de répondre en choisissant la forme de langue de communication appropriée.

**Mots-clés :** innovation, apprentissage, cadre, cognitif

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## *Innovation in Researching the Effects of Frame – Focused Instruction on Second Language Acquisition*

**Abstract:** In the context of globalization the research of innovative teaching methods and

techniques becomes relevant. The traditional teaching approach where the training of practice material is

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preceded by rule-presentation (explanation + mechanical form-oriented practice) doesn't meet the requirements of constantly developing rational language processing. Contemporary studies are considering the ways how to allow second language learners to be rational in the sense that their mental models of language functioning are the most optimal. This paper outlines current cognitive perspectives on second language acquisition. Language learning involves the acquisition of frame instructions or input-processing instructions (explanation + structured-input activities). Competence and performance both emerge from the dynamic system of frequently used memorized constructions. Frames are dynamic contextualized activation of stereotyped situations. This system proves to be rational since it aims at optimal reflection of prior first

language usage and induces learners to think consciously about some sort of rule in order to work out the meaning. The frame-based instruction consists of activities which present learners with a stimulus and require them to respond choosing the appropriate language form for communication. The targeted feature of such communicative tasks has two aims: 1). to stimulate communicative language use and 2). to target the use of a particular predetermined linguistic feature. The empirical research shows that frame-focused tasks direct learners attention to the meaning realized by the target form. Methodological basis includes some theoretical propositions from recent Relevance theory and cognitive linguistics.

**Keywords:** innovation, instruction, frame, cognitive

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## **Introduction**

It is generally accepted that motivation plays a vital role in academic learning in general and this is particularly true of the process of mastering a second language. Second language motivation has been conceptualized as a construct that comprises a number of more general, more situation specific components that direct learning behaviour. One of the main components is instruction which predetermines successful educational process. The purpose of this article is to set out a framework for conducting innovative studies that investigate the effects of instruction on second language acquisition. The framework will examine constructs related to

three key areas of this research domain : 1) the type of instruction, 2) the target of instruction, 3) the measurement of « language acquisition ».

*Types of instructions and their target features*

There are two known instructional conditions : 1) explicit (traditional rule explanation) and 2) implicit (remembering situations). The last one involves a so-called rule-search condition, inductive rule-discovery tasks and practice activities based on both fluency and analysis tasks. Innovation approaches in mastering foreign languages are mainly based on meaning-centered and identifying rules tasks when a student is involved in cognitive process of analysing the communicative situations and formulating rules instead of mechanical memorizing them. Ellis (2002) distinguished three broad types of instruction based on 1) whether the primary focus of it is on form or meaning and 2) how the instruction is distributed (whether it aims at intensive attention to a single form or extensive attention to a variety of different forms). Traditional instruction is directed solely at formal accuracy by means of traditional, controlled exercises where focus is on the formal elements of the language while innovation instruction is directed at establishing form-meaning mappings where attention is drawn to the linguistic apparatus needed to get the meaning across. It's crucially important to distinguish the context in which attention to form (for example grammatical) takes place. Make clear for the learners that the essential purpose of the activities they are engaging is to focus on the processing (use) of some specific linguistic feature (for example, Common/Continuous forms in English).

Speaking about target features of different types of instructions it should be mentioned that traditional instructions are explicit which means deductive (the target feature is explained to the learners), innovation instructions are inductive (the learners are instructed to infer rules for themselves). The latter should provide learners with input data containing the target structure without any awareness of what the target structure is. For example, the teacher can flood learners with input containing situations in context with durative and non-durative (common) grammatical forms. The task is to work out their meanings. What is more important it is not preceded by rule-presentation but directs learner's conscious attention to the target feature in the practice material. Further we'll give the example of such innovative task based on frames as stereotyped communicative situations.

*Frames as input processing innovative instructions*

Faced with a choice of a linguistic form to express an idea, the speaker subconsciously takes into account a broad context (scenario or frame), against

which the selected language expression will be interpreted. Thus, it is possible to define frame not only statically as a fixed framework or scheme but also dynamically as the combination of pragmatic features modeling this situation.

Frame can be referred to focused (communicative) tasks aimed at inducing processing of some specific linguistic feature in production and illustrated by a scenario represented according to the structure, suggested by T. van Dijk (1997), which can be possibly applied to any communicative situation:

I. *Frame*: The search for umbrella.

Martin looked round the hall, rather shabby and sad in daylight.

-I wonder, did I leave my umbrella here? I put it over there, I think, or maybe not, I was sitting near the back, I...

-It can't have been stolen, though.

-I *wasn't suggesting* it had...<sup>1</sup>.

*Frame structure*:

a) Setting: hall

b) Functions: X: guest Martin  
Y: host

c) Properties: Perhaps, X is tired and can't remember where he put his umbrella, he is not sure whether it was stolen or not.

d) Position: Y is helping X.

*Frame conventions*:

1. If X doesn't remember the events of the previous day, his statements can't sound categorical.

2. If X had agreed with Y that his umbrella couldn't have been stolen, he would have used *Common* to describe the situation and confirm his confidence, however he is confused.

3. The choice of the durative form in this context may be explained by X's uncertainty, doubt.

Thus, we can assume that the choice of grammatical form is determined by the speaker's uncertainty and his correlation of the described situation with the reality/unreality (his inferior or semi-conscious state). The access to this assumption is provided, in its turn, by the grammatical form of the utterance.

II. *Social context*: formal, official

*Frame*: Lawyers' conversation

"How are we going to deal with our client's confusing account of what the photographs *were doing* in his brief case?"<sup>2</sup>.

*Frame structure*:

a) Functions: X: advocate-speaker/interpreter  
Y: lawyer

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<sup>1</sup> Modern English Stories, 1985: 48.

<sup>2</sup> Kay & Fillmore, 1999: 24.

b) Properties: The photographs, mentioned in the speech, didn't have to be found in the suspect's brief case. X asks for Y advice of how to make the jury believe that there was nothing extraordinary about this fact.

*Frame conventions:*

1. If X and Y had no intention of hiding the incongruity of the fact that the photographs were in the brief case it would not be necessary to discuss it.

2. If X induces Y to discuss this problem he considers this state of affairs incongruous.

3. For the description of usual situation X will use *Common*.

Thus, incongruity of the described situation is derived from this scenario.

The choice of grammatical form is predetermined here by background knowledge (the speaker only implies this incongruity by using *Progressive*) and reference (he correlates the described situation with the proper state of affairs in the search for relevance). Thus, the task is to work out certain rules and conditions under which the speaker or the writer should use durative (*Progressive*) form. Second language acquisition is better in this case because frames involve learners into communication itself, assisting them to answer the question "Why do I chose this form in this particular situation?" themselves without applying to boring grammar rules in textbooks.

Thus, the target feature of a frame is to invite learners to communicate about language, to stimulate communication and grammatical sensitivity.

## **Experimental data**

### *Measurement of language acquisition*

The efficiency of the frame was supported by the experiment with 129 second-year university intermediate-level learners of English as a second language. The two groups were tested parallelly, one having higher academic score than the other. However, the experiment at the beginning revealed the low level of all respondents' knowledge of the English grammar.

Both groups were educated under different instructional conditions: 1) explicit (rule explanation); 2) implicit (exposure only). The first group was provided with traditional instruction (mechanical form-oriented practice) and the other one with input-processing instructions based on frames (structured-input activities). After five months a control experiment was held. The procedure was as follows: the students were required to pass a written test which included the choice of the tense and aspect forms in the English discourse. Moreover, they were suggested to substantiate their choice. The average score was figured according to the following criteria: the language competence in choosing the right verb form in a given

situation, the ability to give reasons for the choice:

**Table 1 :** *Experimental conditions*

<b>Participants</b>	<b>Instructional treatment</b>	<b>Target structure</b>	<b>Testing instruments</b>
129 second-year university learners of L2 English	Two instructional conditions: 1) traditional instruction (explanation+mechanical form-oriented practice); 2) input-processing instruction (explanation+structured-input activities)	Progressive and Common grammatical forms	1) preference tasks, 2) written production tests

The tasks	The average test score % (average/max-100%)	
	1 <sup>st</sup> group (control)	2 <sup>nd</sup> group (experimental)
1. aspect choice	60%	93,3%
2. tense choice	23%	87%
3. explanation	3,7%	74,3%
Number of respondents	64	65

**Figure 1 :** *Experimental results*

Thus, the majority of the students of the control group failed to produce the right choice. What is more, when they were asked to express the given idea in English the results proved to be in favor of teaching by frames. The students of the control group had evident difficulty in formulating their ideas. They used graphic signs (arrows) to show dependence, applied transliteration when they failed to find a suitable word, some honestly confessed that this task was too difficult for them.

The fact is a frame can form a mental structure (a framework, a proposition) in the head of a student. So it facilitates his ability to create sentences or even text fragments in the foreign language. He can make grammar mistakes but the ability to express himself is undoubtful.

We suggest that the number of frames, which presuppose the language means choice, can be unlimited. Frame can be interpreted as a system of choice of different linguistic forms, which is based on the speaker's interpretive perception of the observed situation. At the final advanced stage a student can be encouraged to build his own frames while working with lexical, grammatical and even

audiomaterial in English. The usage of elements of cognitive linguistics while teaching foreign language especially on the advanced level should be used in one way or another since it is sure to contribute to the students' better understanding of the mechanism of the selection of language means, which is significant for the competent language speaker. What is more, frame approach contributes not only to extending the students' knowledge on the advanced level but is also helpful while working with those students, who don't make a satisfactory progress. The reason is that frame develops the ability to build mental logical chains of concepts which allows the student to express himself, even if he does it on the primitive level. So, teaching through situations helps to reveal the cognitive environment of the native speakers.

Frame as innovative instruction is a consciousness-raising task which constitutes a device for assisting learners to develop explicit knowledge of a specific feature. It also serves as a device for stimulating communication with language as a topic.

We also hope that the proposed method of grammatical description will eventually lead to the development of the complex research methodology, capable of providing an account of the formal concept of interdependency of parameters, which characterize the components of the structures with grammatical forms as well as pragmatic factors which are involved in the process of language means selection, reflecting the result of natural processing of linguistic and non-linguistic data in the process of discourse production and interpretation.

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