

Chapter 3

Results

The present chapter describes the results generated by the various instruments used in the study. The information gathered from the SAC activities over the four-week period was used to determine what type of activity the group, the classroom sections, and individual students preferred to do in the SAC. Data from the other instruments such as the language history questionnaire, student journals, teacher journal, and post interview were used to help explain why subjects had certain preferences.

SAC Activities

In this section, data of the choices subjects made in the SAC are presented. These data are used to illustrate trends that appeared over the four-week period for the group as a whole, between classroom sections and within subjects. To indicate which type of activity the group and the classroom sections preferred, their choices have been written numerically as percentages. Individual subjects were placed into preference categories according to their choices over the four-week period.

Out of a possible 104 choices the group of 26 subjects chose the meaning-focused activities 65% $N= (68/104)$ of the time as opposed to 35% $N= (36/104)$ for the focus on form exercises. Thus, there was an apparent preference for the meaning-focused exercises by the group as a whole over the entire four-week period. There was variance between the three classroom sections. Section one chose meaning-focused 57% $N= (16/28)$ and form-focused 43% $N= (12/28)$ of the time, section two chose meaning-focused 65% $N= (26/40)$ and form-focused 35% $N= (14/40)$ of the time, and section three chose meaning-focused 72% $N= (26/36)$ and form-focused 28% $N= (10/36)$ of the time.

Individual subjects were categorized according to their choices over the four-week period for easier reference. The preference categories that the researcher designated based on the data gathered were:

M4x- chose meaning four times

M3x- chose meaning three times

F3x- chose form three times

F Last- chose form only on the last week

Mix- chose form and meaning equally

There is no F4x category because none of the subjects chose focus on form all four weeks. To illustrate how many subjects fell into each preference category Table 1 is presented below. These data show that there existed a fairly equal distribution of the different categories within the group.

Table 1

Distribution of Preference Categories for the Group

<u>Category</u>	<u># of Subjects</u>
M4x	4
M3x	7
F3x	5
F Last	6
Mix	4
Total	26

Since the present study took place over a four-week period it was useful to examine not only the subjects' general preference but also their preference from week-to-week to indicate possible shifts in preference. Table 2 below shows the preferences the group had from week-to-week did vary.

Table 2

SAC Choices for the Group Week-to-Week

<u>Week</u>	<u>Meaning</u>	<u>Form</u>
1	73%	27%
2	81%	19%
3	65%	35%
4	42%	58%

The percentages in Table 2 illustrate that the group favored the meaning focused exercises all three weeks except for the last with a gradual decrease in number of students preferring meaning starting in week three. The following table (Table 3) also illustrates preferences from week-to-week but for each classroom section. It shows that each classroom section differed in their choices over the four-week period.

Table 3

SAC Choices from Week-to-Week for Each Class Section

Week	<u>Section 1</u>		<u>Section 2</u>		<u>Section 3</u>	
	<u>M</u>	<u>F</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>F</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>F</u>
1	57%	43%	90%	10%	67%	33%
2	100%	0%	70%	30%	78%	22%
3	57%	43%	60%	40%	78%	22%
4	14%	86%	40%	60%	67%	33%

Note. M equals meaning focused activity. F equals form focused activity.

Section one showed the most inconsistent preference by choosing equally between meaning and form week one and three but heavily favoring meaning week two and heavily favoring form week four. Section two shows a more consistent trend because there is a gradual movement away from a preference for meaning towards a preference for form. Section three differs from the other two sections in that a consistent preference for meaning is maintained throughout the four weeks.

The results of the SAC data show that in general the group preferred the meaning-focused exercises. Nevertheless, when the data are examined on a weekly basis there is a movement away from a preference for meaning towards a preference for form. Overall, a shift towards form is evident in the final week. Out of the four weeks of data collection this was the only week that form-focused exercises were favored by the group. Furthermore, classroom sections showed different trends over the four-week period. Finally, it was possible to place individual subjects into preference categories based on their choices. Thus, there was variance between subjects and it appears that certain individuals did have a marked preference for meaning or form. Nevertheless, there was

an equal distribution of the preference categories within the group. Data from the language history questionnaire, student journals, teacher journal, and post interview were collected in order to help explain why subjects exhibited these trends. These data will now be summarized and discussed.

Language History Questionnaire

The linguistic background, history, and attitudes the group or individuals have of the second language may have had a bearing upon their preference. The language history questionnaire was used to determine if there might have been a factor other than preference that contributed to determining choice of form or meaning in the SAC. Most subjects in the group began to learn English before the age of 13. Of these subjects 58 % N= (15/26) began between the age of 5 to 12 and 27% N= (7/26) began between the age of 0 and 4 years. The remaining 15 % N= (4/26) began learning between 13 and 18 years old. Few of the subjects in the group had a Spanish/English bilingual parent (four subjects had a bilingual mother and two subjects had a bilingual father). Some subjects had a parent who had learned English as a second language (30.7 % N= (8/26) mother 23 % N= (6/26) father). The majority of subjects had a monolingual parent (53.8 % N= (14/26) monolingual mother 57.6 % N= (15/26) monolingual father). Also, 76.9 % N= (20/26) of subjects had spent only 0-6 months in an English speaking country with another 15.3 % N= (4/26) between 6 months and 1 year. The group claimed to have learned English by focusing on the form and the meaning of the L2 with equal frequency (4.96 on a likert scale of 9). The group rated school the highest, as opposed to other areas such as work and from friends (3.26 out of a possible 4) as the place where they learned their English. They also rated their daily use of English at 2.96 on a likert scale with 9 representing English use all the time. They also indicated that English was used primarily for travel purposes and school. The majority of subjects had no experience with a third language (73 % N= (19/26). On a likert scale from 1 to 5 (5 being native

speaker proficiency) subjects rated their overall level of English at 3.2. Many subjects 83.3% N= (22/26) preferred to do grammar exercises in a classroom context as opposed to other contexts such as in the SAC or on their own. Furthermore, 25% N= (6/26) found doing grammar exercises on their own to be of some interest, but not a lot while 50% N= (13/26) found this to be interesting and 25% N= (6/26) thought it to be boring. Item 19 on the questionnaire showed that 66.6 % N= (17/26) preferred to concentrate on the meaning of the language and not the rules. When asked what they prefer to do to learn grammar, referring to a grammar book was done by 61.5 % N= (16/26) of subjects, 38.4 % N= (10/26) of subjects asked native speakers to correct them and asked native speakers questions about grammar while 34.6 % N= (9/26) discussed grammar with friends or classmates. Only 11.5 % N= (3/26) did grammar exercises in their free time and 15.3 % N= (4/26) chose a grammar topic to learn every week or month. An overwhelming majority (96.1% N= 25/26) reported that it was necessary to know grammatical terms such as past progressive, etc. to learn English grammar. Item 22 on the questionnaire asked subjects how useful they thought the SAC was. There were 50% N= (13/26) who found it to be useful, 34.6 % N= (9/26) indicated it was useful, but not very much while 11.5 % N= (3/26) claimed it was not useful and a small percentage (3.8 % N= 1/26) thought it was very useful.

There was some variance in preference between classroom sections and it was possible to place subjects into preference categories (M4x, M3x, F3x, F Last, and Mix) according to the choices they made in the SAC. The language history questionnaire data might help to explain why certain class sections and individuals made the choices they did and identify intervening variables in the study.

Data from the language history questionnaire were analyzed for each classroom section and preference category. The results showed that there were not significant differences in language learning history or attitudes between the classroom sections or

preference categories. On the contrary, subjects' responses served more to illustrate how similar they were. The only possibly noticeable difference that appeared between the sections was that section one had a higher percentage of students that had had exposure to a third language (57 % N= (4/7). Section two had only 20% N= (2/10) while section three had 11 % N= (1/9) of students with exposure to a third language. The subjects in section one that had exposure to a third language indicated that they began to study this language between the ages of 13 and 18 and that they did not have a high proficiency in the language (2.0 on a 5 point likert scale). It is not likely that this difference was due to age difference since the average age for section one was 18.7, section two 19 years, and section three 18.7 years old.

Item 19 on the questionnaire explicitly asked students if they prefer to learn by concentrating on the form or the meaning of the L2. It is worthwhile to examine this item because it can be compared with the actual choices that subjects made in the SAC. If their actual choices in the SAC match their response to item 19 it is easier to conclude that their choices in the SAC were the result of a preference for form or meaning. If there is discrepancy between item 19 and their choices in the SAC it is possible that subjects were choosing the activities because of some other factor than preference for form or meaning. As previously mentioned in the description of subjects section, the group as a whole (66.6 %) indicated on item 19 that they preferred to concentrate on the meaning of the language and not the form. Actual choices in the SAC favored meaning focused activities 65% of the time. Table 4 presents the results from item 19 of the questionnaire for each classroom section and compares this with their actual choices in the SAC as well. Table 5 does the same but for each preference category.

Table 4

Item 19 Compared with Actual SAC Choices for Class Sections

	<u>Section 1</u>		<u>Section 2</u>		<u>Section 3</u>	
	<u>M</u>	<u>F</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>F</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>F</u>
Item 19	67%	33%	50%	50%	72%	28%
SAC Choices	57%	43%	65%	35%	72%	28%

Note. M equals meaning focused. F equals form focused.

Table 4 illustrates that there generally was agreement between what subjects indicated they preferred in the language history questionnaire and their actual choices in the SAC. The most obvious consistency of course was section three that produced the exact same percentages for actual SAC choices and item 19. Table 5, however, indicates some discrepancy but between the different preference categories.

Table 5

Item 19 Compared with Preference Categories

<u>Preference Category</u>	<u>Chose Meaning on Item 19</u>	<u>Chose Form on Item 19</u>
M4x	25%	75%
M3x	57%	43%
F3x	40%	60%
F Last	17%	83%
Mix	100%	0%

The M4x category in Table 5 is made up of individuals that chose the meaning focused activities all four weeks which would constitute a complete preference for focus on meaning. Yet, 75% N= (3/4) of these individuals indicated on the questionnaire that they actually prefer concentrating on form. Nevertheless, the data for both the group and the classroom sections seem to indicate that there was congruency between what subjects said they preferred and what they actually preferred in the SAC.

Student Journals

After completing the SAC exercises each week, subjects answered journal questions. It was hoped that their responses would help to explain why they had chosen one activity over the other. Nevertheless, it became evident that many students did not respond fully enough to allow for a complete understanding of why they had chosen the form or meaning exercise.

The first journal question was “Explain why you chose this exercise and not the other? “. This question, for example, was directly aimed at determining why they had chosen the exercise, but it did not produce rich data. Many times subjects simply responded that they had chosen the exercise because they thought it was “easier”. Out of the 104 journal entries made by the group as a whole this response was given 49 times. Generally they did not explain why one or the other was easier.

Some subjects made their choice not because the exercise seemed easier but rather because it seemed more difficult:

I chose this exercise because is the one with I have more trouble. For me is (sic) difficult to understand identifying and non-identifying.

I thought that this exercise is more difficult that the other one.

It's still the ones are more difficult for me.

I chose it because it was about identifying and that is difficult for me.

There were other interesting reasons given. Some subjects wrote that they chose a particular exercise for the sake of variety:

The other was similar as the exercise we did in class so I wanted to do the different one.

I chose this one because it was about right and wrong sentences and identify which one is ok or not and the one before I picked up the opposite.

The last CAL exercise that I chose wasn't identifying and non-identifying adjective clauses.

For a fast view I liked more and last time I do exercise one am I want to see differences.

I hadn't done this kind (incorrect/correct clauses) of exercises.

The last class I chose the one correct or incorrect.

Last times I chose identifying and non-identifying clauses.

I always chose the exercise that has identify and not identify adjectives clauses and not those that are correct or incorrect.

It appears that some were choosing a form-focused exercise, for example, because they had chosen a meaning-focused exercise the previous week or vice versa. It was also evident that several students said they had chosen the meaning-focused activity because it was more closely related to what they were seeing in class:

Last lesson we practiced with this kind of exercises identifying and not identifying clauses.

I knew that I had to do this one for continue practicing grammar and the skills we see in class.

I wanted to review the I and NI adjective clauses.

I know this exercise and I practice in my class.

Although there were several instances where students claimed they chose an activity because it was similar to the class material, only one indicated he chose it because it was different from what he had done in class, "The other was similar as the exercise we did in class so I wanted to do the different one". Finally, we can see that some subjects chose one or the other on a completely random basis:

I just took this one by luck.

I don't know, I just chose one and that's all.

I only took the first one.

Really I didn't see before chose it I just ask for exercise one.

In this case, I chose this exercise because I saw it first.

It doesn't matter I just wanted to practice the adjective clauses.

For me is the same.

The first question in the students' journals illustrated that they were choosing one or the other exercise to a large extent on the basis of ease. It also became evident that there were several different reasons why subjects made the choice they did which had

little to do with a focus on form or meaning. None of the subjects indicated directly in their journal that they chose an exercise because one was more focused on meaning and the other more focused on form. Nevertheless, this does not mean that they did not indirectly state in their journal entries a preference for form or meaning as a motive for their choice. The subsequent questions in their journal took the first question one step further by asking subjects for more specific information about their choice of activity. There was some evidence to suggest that subjects were aware of the intended fundamental difference between the two types of exercises.

Teacher Journal

The instructor also maintained a journal for all three sections throughout the course of the study. This measure was taken to capture possible factors that could have had an affect on what choices subjects made in the SAC. The journal helped the researcher to be aware of possible intervening variables that stemmed from in class interaction. Analysis of the journal revealed some relevant data.

Since students from three different sections participated in the study, it was important to know what, if any, differences existed between class lessons. The instructor's general approach involved a wide variety of activities that covered all four skills. One evident characteristic that she demonstrated was the tendency to give a lot of feedback to students on their work. Based on her journal it seemed that she was fairly consistent among groups in terms of the material and methods that were used in class. The instructor taught all three sections in consecutive hours on the same days and indicated in her journal that the same lesson plan was followed for each group.

Although the instructor's procedure may have been consistent between groups it was quite evident that her attitude towards each group was not. Several comments were made in the journal in reference to section one and their apparent lack of motivation

which was sharply contrasted by a more positive relationship with sections two and three. For example, for section three the instructor wrote, “This group really got into the topics on page 102. There were many different points of view presented plus a few good discussions among students, it was fun! “. In contrast, in reference to section one the instructor wrote, "This group is not very communicative. They do not challenge me much and seem to take my word for it”.

There were a couple of variables that may have had an affect on the results. The teaching of adjective clauses in class involved the identification and formation of “identifying and non-identifying clauses” but did not concentrate on “correct and incorrect adjective clauses”. This may be significant because the focus on meaning SAC exercises practiced “identifying and non-identifying” clauses while the focus on form exercises focused on “correct and incorrect” adjective clauses. Also, in the third week of the study the instructor commented to all three groups that the focus on form exercise had been easier. This comment was made just prior to the week in which the group as a whole exhibited a marked shift towards a preference for the focus on form SAC grammar exercise. Finally, one of the journal questions asked the teacher to estimate how focused on form or meaning each lesson was according to the definitions established for this study. The average was calculated for the four week period and resulted in a score of 3.8 on a scale of 9. Nine represented a completely form-focused lesson.

Interview of Students

As mentioned above, student journal responses did not fully explain preference for one type of SAC activity or the other. For this reason, a post interview was conducted with subjects from a single section that contained a representative mixture of the various preference categories. In the interview the researcher concentrated on important issues and topics that came to rise out of the data gathered in the SAC, student journals, and teacher journal. The researcher wanted to determine if subjects were aware of the

difference between the two types of exercises. Were they aware that one concentrated on meaning while the other on form? The results of the post interview indicated that they were able to understand the fundamental difference between the two. One student commented that the form-focused exercises focused on “estructura gramatical” while another said, “Los de identifying y non-identifying no fijaron en la gramatica pero en el sentido de la oracion, de lo que significa “.

The researcher also probed into what students meant when they said one exercise was “easier” than the other. When asked what they meant by “easier” one student from the F3x category said that the form-focused was easier because “Para mi es mas facil ver si esta bien grammaticamente y la estructura”. Another student said, “En general nos cuesta mas trabajo las reglas gramaticales”. A subject that was in the FLast category pointed out that he chose the meaning exercises most of the time because they only required that he think in the meaning whereas the form-focused required that he think in both the meaning and the grammar.

The possibility that what went on in class influenced students’ choices in the SAC was supported by one M4x subject that said he chose the meaning-focused exercises because in class and the course text they weren’t taught “si estaba bien o mal”. He went on to say that he had “los bases de lo que era con el libro “. All of these comments in the post-interview helped to define more clearly what subjects meant when they had written in their journals that they had chosen one type of exercise or the other because it was “easier”.

Finally, it was interesting to notice that many subjects felt the SAC was not useful because they could do what they were asked to do anywhere and not just in the SAC: "No me hace necesario el CAL porque podemos hacerlo en cualquier lado". As well, they were not happy that they were being forced to go to the SAC, "El CAL debe ser un centro de informacion donde llevas material y no venir a la fuerza". One subject suggested "circuitos de conversacion" as a worthwhile activity in the SAC.